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Paper, pixels, or plane tickets? Multi-archival perspectives on the decolonisation of Namibia

Tycho van der Hoog* and Bernard C. Moore**

Abstract

Namibia was one of the final African states to gain independence, a political transformation which was the outcome of a decades-long liberation struggle. The global dimension of the struggle has been duly recognised by generations of historians. As a result, archival materials related to this era - as well as the colonial ones preceding it – are to be found all over the world. Through a discussion of relevant archival collections pertaining to Namibian history - though located outside the boundaries of the Republic of Namibia – this article considers the global archival paper trail of Namibian colonisation and decolonisation. We shed light on the origins of various collections located in South Africa, Europe, North America, and beyond in order to reveal the ways in which the utilisation of such global archivalia can shape our understanding of Namibian decolonisation. This applies to government archives, private collections, institutional solidarity collections, as well as those of international organisations. We then delve into some of the promises and pitfalls of the digitisation of archival records, noting issues of ethics and methodology. Ultimately, we hold that historians must balance both internal and external Namibiana archivalia in crafting our arguments about the past, and we must balance both the merits and demerits of the digital turn in historical research.

Introduction

When Namibia became independent in 1990, it was one of the last African countries to become an autonomous nation state.¹ This political transformation was the result of decades of opposition to foreign rule, and the prolonged liberation struggle had a distinctly international character. The main opposition movement and current ruling party, the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO), operated largely in exile, and the

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¹ The authors of this paper were aided through extensive conversations with Werner Hillebrecht in Windhoek, Dag Henrichsen in Basel, Peter Limb in East Lansing, Henning Melber in Uppsala, and Chris Saunders in Cape Town. We wish to thank the two anonymous peer reviewers for their useful feedback. All errors are naturally our own.

course of the liberation struggle was heavily influenced by international diplomacy and ties to solidarity movements across the globe. The involvement of external actors led to Namibian archival sources being scattered across the globe, which is indicative of the international character of Namibian history.²

Historians of Africa often rely on 'transnational archives', such as records from foreign governments, humanitarian groups, and non-governmental organisations from outside their country of reference.³ Historians of Namibia face similar challenges. For over 100 years Namibia had been ruled by external powers, whose governmental centres were located abroad. Namibia was controlled from or influenced by several formal and informal foreign metropolises over the course of the past 200 years (such as Berlin, Pretoria, London, Dar es Salaam, and Geneva).⁴

The study of Namibian decolonisation demands a multi-archival approach. Scholarship cannot rely on the state archives in Windhoek alone; it is often necessary to consult the repositories of international organisations, personal papers, foundations and other sorts of archives.⁵ The SWAPO archives in Namibia remain largely closed to the public, resulting in a situation where some have claimed that "the collections of their western advocates tell the most fully documented story".⁶ The dependence on non-Namibian repositories raises important questions about access and representation.

Now that over 30 years have passed since the achievement of independence, it is an opportune moment to assess the global scattering of sources that was an unintended side-effect of the internationalised liberation struggle. Through a discussion of relevant international archival collections pertaining to Namibian history – though located outside the boundaries of the Republic of Namibia – this article considers the global archival paper trail of Namibian colonisation and decolonisation. We intend to achieve two goals: First, to provide a comprehensive overview of sources on the decolonisation of Namibia. This overview will be necessarily descriptive, but we hope that those interested in Namibian history will find the numerous references to repositories around the world useful. Second, we seek to assess *what this means* for historians tackling this period of Namibian history. Our reflections in the conclusion will hopefully contribute to ongoing debates about Namibian historiography.

² Werner Hillebrecht, "Archives, Ethics, Salaries, and the Struggle: A View from Namibia", *Innovation*, 24, 2002: 25-31 (29f.).

³ Samuel Fury Childs Daly, "Archival Research in Africa", *African Affairs*, 116-463, 2017: 311-320 (318).

⁴ Richard Dale, "Reconfiguring White Ethnic Power in Colonial Africa: The German Community in Namibia, 1923-50", *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, 7 (2), 2001: 75-94 (88).

⁵ In this regard we are influenced by Matthew Connelly, "Taking Off the Cold War Lens: Visions of North-South Conflict during the Algerian War for Independence", *The American Historical Review*, 105 (3), 2000: 739-769 (765). See also Stephen Ellis, "Writing Histories of Contemporary Africa", *Journal of African History*, 43 (1), 2002: 1-26 (14).

⁶ Lydia Walker, "Decolonization in the 1960s: On Legitimate and Illegitimate Nationalist Claims-Making", *Past & Present*, 242 (1), 2019: 227-264 (230).

Historians usually either share tips on obscure archivalia through informal networks or stumble upon them by luck – this article seeks to bring many such tips together in a comprehensive and structured way. Throughout the writing process we were surprised by how widely Namibian sources are dispersed around the globe. This is not a traditional research article, nor is it a simple, repetitive listing of archival sources. We instead aim to find middle ground by discussing various groups of repositories, to ultimately ponder the question: what does the international scattering of Namibian archivalia mean for the writing of Namibian history?

For the sake of clarity, the selection of archives covered in this article is restricted in terms of time and geography. In terms of time, we exclude German (colonial) archives as they have been extensively used in key studies in Namibian history.⁷ As the availability of post-colonial historical material is largely restricted through embargo periods and other practical hurdles, the coverage of archives in this article falls broadly within the second half of the twentieth century and is thus useful for the study of Namibian decolonisation. Geographically, we exclude archives within Namibia because they have been described elsewhere in detail.⁸ We should note that Namibian archives are naturally the starting point for any research project on Namibian history, including those dealing with the liberation struggle. For example, the National Archives of Namibia curates the Archives of Anti-Colonial Resistance and Liberation Struggle (AACRLS) project, a truly great collection of primary sources and oral histories.⁹ The current article also excludes missionary records and German colonial archives, in part because these sources have already been the subject of intense scrutiny by Namibian(ist) historians. We also omit diplomatic archives from third countries that have shaped the road to independence through negotiations and aid.¹⁰ Such repositories are easier to find than the wide variety of smaller Western solidarity archives we do discuss.¹¹ We make one brief exception for the National Archives

⁷ See for example Jan-Bart Gewald, *Herero Heroes: A Socio-Political History of the Herero of Namibia, 1890-1923*, Oxford, Currey, 1991: 294-295; Thorsten Kern, *West Germany and Namibia's Path to Independence, 1969-1990: Foreign Policy and Rivalry with East Germany*, Basel, Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2019: 5-8. For an excellent discussion of pre-colonial and German colonial records related to German South West Africa, see Ellen Ndeshi Namhila and Werner Hillebrecht, "Archival Entanglements: Colonial Rule and Records in Namibia", in: James Lowry, (ed.), *Disputed Archival Heritage*, London, Routledge, 2022: 192-210 (193-196).

⁸ Tycho van der Hoog, "A New Chapter in Namibian History: Reflections on Archival Research", *History in Africa*, 2022: 1-26; Namhila and Hillebrecht, "Archival Entanglements": 192-210.

⁹ Ellen Ndeshi Namhila, "Archives of Anti-Colonial Resistance and the Liberation Struggle (AACRLS): An integrated programme to fill the colonial gaps in the archival record of Namibia", *Journal for Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2015: 168-178.

¹⁰ For the archives of the Nordic countries see Tor Sellström, *Sweden and National Liberation in Southern Africa: Volume II: Solidarity and Assistance 1970-1994*, Uppsala, Nordic Africa Institute, 2002: 884-886. Recently, the archives of the Czech Republic have been utilized in a historical study and it can be expected that other Eastern European countries hold relevant material as well. See Katerina Mildnerová, *Namibian Czechs: History and Identity of the Namibian Children Raised in Czechoslovakia*, Münster, LIT, 2020: 3.

¹¹ Of note, significant quantities of United States Government internal correspondence concerning Namibia in the 1970s was leaked into the so-called "Kissinger Cables" of *WikiLeaks*.

of the United Kingdom in London, as it provides a case study for our reflections on digitisation.¹²

Instead, this article covers five categories of archives relevant to the study of Namibian decolonisation. The first category is colonial archival records in South Africa. South Africa's colonial and apartheid occupation of Namibia for seventy-five years ensured that a rich array of Namibia-related resources filled the shelves of their stackrooms, and while efforts have been made to repatriate certain collections in physical or microfilm forms, a large quantity of these holdings remain in South Africa. For these reasons, it is imperative for historians to consult these records in addition to those at the National Archives of Namibia in Windhoek (which is certainly the larger and more detailed collection about the South African period), as they concern both internal developments in the territory over the twentieth century, as well as more global issues relating to decolonisation and the Cold War. A complete survey of Namibiana resources in South Africa would fill a large bibliographic volume, so for the purposes of this article only a brief overview is possible. We can analytically subdivide these South African holdings into different tranches: documentation pertaining to local administration of Namibia (then South West Africa) and private donations/accessions to archives by politicians, activists, and/or private citizens and organisations.

The second category is African liberation archives and explores the transnational ties of the exiled national liberation movements in Namibia. The third category is Western solidarity archives, which often include material from and about Namibian anticolonial movements. A special place is reserved for the Basler Afrika Bibliographien (BAB), because of the special place this institution occupies in the field of Namibian Studies – it is therefore a fourth category on its own.¹³ The fifth category is the archives of intergovernmental organisations which influenced the course of Namibian history, such as the United Nations. Finally, our paper reflects upon issues of representation and access, and explores the ways in which the digital turn has affected the historian's craft. We highlight some of the successes which digitisation has brought about as it relates to researching Namibian history and illuminate some of the ethical concerns which come about from this technological transformation, particularly as it relates to paywalls. We then illustrate some of the methodological considerations which historians must observe when consulting digitised sources, relating both to how they guide our line of questioning as well as how they shape the processes we write about.

¹² For a study which heavily uses UK (and Botswana) archives in reconstructing Namibian history, see Johann Alexander Müller, *The Inevitable Pipeline into Exile: Botswana's Role in Namibia's Liberation Struggle*, Basel, Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2012.

¹³ We choose not to systematically include practical data such as opening times and contact information because this can change over time and is difficult to determine because of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

1. Colonial archival records in South Africa

National Archives & Records Service (NARS), Pretoria

The NARS is the primary archival repository for the Republic of South Africa, which primarily holds records from the former Transvaal Archive Bureau [Buro: TAB] – representing the pre-Union Transvaal province – and from the Central Archive Bureau [Buro: SAB], including post-1910 materials relating to central government activities. SAB contains a large amount of documentation pertaining to Namibia, mostly from the 1910s-1960s. These materials range from verbatim legislation to correspondence concerning issues relating to statistical surveys. Most of the material prior to early 1950s are in English (with some in Dutch in the 1920s), while in the later years are nearly all documents are written in Afrikaans. This is more or less the pattern in the holdings of the National Archives of Namibia, where research concerning the 1950s and onwards necessitates extensive engagement with Afrikaans sources.¹⁴

In rough chronological order, some of the more extensive holdings in the SAB concerning Namibia include the following (archival codes will be listed for each in italicised [*brackets*]). Within the correspondence from the Office of the Prime Minister [*PM*], there is a large amount of material which concerns central aspects of government and administration of Namibia from the South West Africa campaign in the First World War up until roughly the late-1960s. In this way, the material roughly mirrors the topics and time period of the National Archives of Namibia's [*ADM*] and [*SWAA*] collections. With the [*PM*] holdings, there are large quantities of files concerning WWI, the martial law period, administration of so-called 'native reserves', economic policy, formalisation of boundaries, and 'unrest' within the territory (such as the Bondelswarts Uprising of 1922). From the 1950s, the language of this extensive collection is Afrikaans, covering (in slightly lesser depth) transformations in 'native affairs' policy, the emergence of the Odendaal Plan, and the Kunene Hydroelectric Scheme.

As much legislation pertaining to Namibia during the 1920s-1960s originated in South Africa, there are a number of collections which pertain to these issues. While certain aspects of administration were delegated to Windhoek, most issues which could be deemed to be foreign affairs – such as those concerning boundaries, interprovincial trade, naturalisation and citizenship, war, and diplomacy – were all handled by Pretoria (though normally in consultation with Windhoek). This means that legislation regarding these aspects and correspondence concerning their implementation fill extensive holdings in the SAB Buro (some of the full-text legislation and related correspondence are held in collections [*JUS*] and [*URU*]).

¹⁴ Our survey of the Pretoria and Cape Town holdings includes material which pre-dates what is traditionally considered Namibia's decolonisation period (i.e. post-1960). We do this not only to aid scholars pursuing projects which transcend this somewhat arbitrary chronology, but also because understanding and researching Namibian decolonisation necessitates understanding the organisation of the colonial state itself. After all, SWAPO post-independence inherited the former colonial state, rather than the governance which the movement built in Zambia and Angola in exile.

The holdings of the Secretary of Foreign Affairs [*BTS*] contain great volumes of information relating to Namibia's international situation re: the United Nations, the International Court of Justice, and foreign nations' views on the situation. It also includes documents pertaining to trade, boundary issues, and the incorporation of Namibia into South Africa in the late-1940s and early-1950s. Concerning earlier periods, the SAB Buro also holds some records [*BLO* and *GG*] pertaining to the League of Nations and the Permanent Mandates Commission. While [*PM*] and [*GG*] hold extensive records pertaining to the First World War and the South West Africa Campaign of 1914-1915, the holdings [*CES*] and [*BVE*] contain files regarding management of enemy subjects in Namibia and the disposal of enemy property in the First and Second World Wars, respectively. Materials on naturalisation and/or repatriation of German-Namibians and other foreigners in South West Africa are held in collection [*BNS*]. Some of the records of the South African Police's [*SAP*] activities in Namibia during the 1940s-1950s are present as well.

Certain industries which were deemed to be trans-boundary or of particular concern to the South African government are represented heavily in the SAB Buro. This is particularly the case with the South African Railways [*SAS*], which was officially extended into Namibia during the South West Africa campaign. The [*SAS*] collection pertaining to Namibia is massive, containing records on management, extension of services, collection of fees and maintenance, as well as extensive correspondence pertaining to planned additional railways (which were often never built). Along similar lines, records for the Public Works Division [*PWD*] and the Inspector for Mines [*MNM*] are also held in the archives, and the latter is particularly focused on the Lüderitz-area diamond mines during the late-German and early South African periods. Finally, some activities of the Division of Water Affairs [*WM*] which were deemed to be trans-boundary, particularly those relating to the Kunene Scheme are held here as well.

In 1955, the Department of Native Affairs [*NAS*] was transferred from Windhoek to Pretoria, later being renamed the Department of Bantu Affairs and Development [*BAO*]. After the Turnhalle Constitutional Conference and late-1970s reorganisation of administrative duties regarding Namibia, much of these were transferred back to Namibia. Nevertheless, this means that archival records concerning a 15-20 year period of so-called 'native affairs' policy and implementation – crucially including some of the implementation of the homeland schemes as laid out in the Odendaal Plan – are split between the National Archives of Namibia and the SAB Buro in Pretoria. Any research into this period must inevitably consult both holdings. At the SAB, the records of the Department of Native Affairs [*NAS*] contain significant information about labour recruitment polities as well as municipal/location/township records regarding urban segregation; this collection runs roughly until the late-1950s, when most of its duties were transferred to the newly-formed Department of Bantu Affairs and Development [*BAO*]. The [*BAO*] collection's files on Namibia are extensive, and they concern overwhelmingly the Odendaal Plan, homeland implementation and policy (including files on forced removals), development of non-white areas, as well as some concerns regarding the UN and the international community. While the [*NAS*] collection contains material in both Afrikaans and English, [*BAO*] material is almost completely in Afrikaans. Finally, one can find

additional information concerning legislation and correspondence/debates during the period within the [ASU] collection, which has many files on Odendaal and the homelands schemes, and in the treasury files [TES], which provide information about budgetary appropriations for these development schemes. [TES] also covers economic affairs relating to the period prior to the 1960s, concerning such areas mining, agriculture, and railways and harbours.

On the whole, the NARS contains a rich collection of archival sources concerning a wide array of topics in Namibian history. While it cannot replace working in the National Archives of Namibia, the NARS's files fill in a number of crucial gaps in the historical records, especially concerning the internal developments in the 1960s, the First World War, foreign relations, and legislative affairs. It is clear, also, that far more research needs to be done in South African ministerial archives, particularly the South African Department of Defence archives, which hold substantial materials about Namibia from the 1960s onwards. While the large-scale destruction of security-related archival records did take place in South Africa in the early 1990s,¹⁵ this primarily targeted materials relating to security policy, rather than the military. As it relates to Namibia, few records remain regarding the counterinsurgency branch of the SAP, Koevoet, but ample records about the integrated South West Africa Territorial Forces (SWATF) remain, archived by battalion. As De Visser notes,¹⁶ accessing military records is a cumbersome, time-consuming, and expensive exercise; as each page must be reviewed by retired military personnel in order to be redacted and declassified by hand: one page at a time. Most of the censorship is of larger political issues, rather than specific localised operations, however.¹⁷ Historians are still waiting for scholarship that makes systematic use of Pretoria's diplomatic and military archives to achieve a deeper understanding of Namibian history.

¹⁵ See Verne Harris, "They Should Have Destroyed More: The Destruction of Public Records by the South African State in the Final Years of Apartheid, 1990-1994", Paper presented at the Wits History Workshop (The TRC: Commissioning the Past), 11-14 June, 1999.

¹⁶ Personal Communication: Lienneke Eloff de Visser (12 March 2021). De Visser has researched the SADF and SWATF in Caprivi during the late apartheid years, and has spent significant amounts of time in the DoD Archives working in Namibia-related documents. As we have not had the opportunity to personally visit this collection, we are grateful to Lienneke for sharing with us her expertise. See Lienneke Eloff de Visser, "Winning Hearts and Minds in the Namibian Border War", *Scientia Militaria: South African Journal of Military Studies*, 39 (1), 2011: 85-100. For another use of SADF records for understanding Namibian history, see Robert J. Gordon, *Ethnologists in Camouflage: Introducing Apartheid to Namibia*, Windhoek, University of Namibia Press, 2022. A significant amount of records from the SWA Veiligheidskomitee are also archived within the Charles T. Truebody collection at the Namibia Scientific Society in Windhoek.

¹⁷ For scans of this sort of documentation, see Jamie Miller, "Apartheid South Africa and the Collapse of the Portuguese Empire", *Cold War International History Project*, eDossier series no. 76 (November 2016) <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/apartheid-south-africa-and-the-collapse-the-portuguese-empire> See also Brooks Marmon, "Research Notes: Negotiating South African Ministerial Archives (Defence & Foreign Affairs)", *Cold War History*, 2022: 1-4.

Western Cape Archives & Records Service, Cape Town

In Cape Town, the WCARS holds the collections of two archival bureaus (originally stationed in separate facilities): the Cape Town Archives Repository [Buro: KAB] and the Cape Town Records Centre [Buro: TBK 'Tussen Bewaar Plek']. Both of these bureaus have materials relating to Namibia, albeit of a very different nature and context.

The KAB Buro's records pertaining to Namibia largely date from the pre-Union era Cape Colony administration (pre-1910), at which stage, most of the administrative duties and archival evidence thereof moved to Pretoria (now housed in the SAB Buro). Apart from some holdings relating to statistics, trade, boundary demarcation, and veterinary affairs (see [CVS]) during the period, some of the richest archival files pertain to the German genocide of the Nama and the Herero (as the Cape Colony boundary bordered Great Namaqualand, more of the sources pertain to the Nama of Southern Namibia). Colonial Office [CO] records detail general observations about German colonialism, some details of trade, as well as correspondence concerning the war with the Nama. There is more substantial material on the war and genocide in the collections [PMO], [GH], and [AG], which detail military operations, gun-running to the Nama, as well as documentation concerning Nama and Herero refugees fleeing South West Africa across the Orange River or to the Walvis Bay enclave. These Cape Colony observations can surely be of use for any scholar working on the genocide and can complement the rich documentation present in Windhoek and in Germany. The majority of the files in these collections are in English. Beyond the Cape Colony era, the KAB Buro also possesses some documentation [ACL7] concerning the Orange River boundary with South West Africa, covering the farms in the area, local ecology, and administration up to the 1950s and early 1960s.¹⁸

The TBK Buro (an interim locale, 'Tussen Bewaar Plek') – the second within the WCARS – contains one key collection pertaining to Namibia. Throughout the apartheid era, the Coloured, Baster, and Nama populations of Namibia and South Africa were not administered through the Department of Bantu Administration and Development (BAO), but rather through the Department of Coloured, Rehoboth, and Nama Relations (officially, Departement van Kleurling-, Rehoboth-, en Namabetrekkinge: KRNb), which was headquartered in Cape Town with regional offices in Keetmanshoop and Windhoek. With the administrative changes arising out of the Odendaal Commission Report, all Namibian Coloureds, Basters, and Nama would now be governed via KRNb and its local representatives. The TBK Buro's [KUS] collection holds several hundred files pertaining to South West Africa and the implementation of apartheid among the Nama, Coloured, and Baster people. This includes urban affairs, location/township governance in Khomasdal and other coloured townships, health and educational services, the so-called Kleurlingraad van Suidwes-Afrika, as well as general economic and labour policy. Furthermore, the collection covers the creation and governance of Namaland, the only apartheid-era homeland in southern Africa not

¹⁸ For use of the ACLT collections, see Bernard C. Moore, "Swimming Upstream: From 'Poor-Whites' to 'Coloureds' along South Africa's Lower Orange River", in Luregn Lenggenhager et. al., (eds.), *The Lower /Garib/Orange River: A Southern African Border Region (18th to 21st Century)*, Bielefeld, Transcript, forthcoming 2023.

administered through BAO.¹⁹ This collection is particularly rich, and while some records dealing with KRNb are housed in the National Archives of Namibia's [CRN] collection, the holdings in Cape Town are much more detailed and extensive. They are uniformly in Afrikaans and run from the 1950s until the late-1970s, when responsibility for issues pertaining to Namibia was returned to Windhoek.

While the Namibiana collections housed in Cape Town's WCARS are less extensive and varied in topic than those in Pretoria's NARS, a visit to these archives is for researchers working on Namibian history nevertheless very worthwhile, especially if the topic relates to the German era or Coloured, Baster, or Nama history. We will now turn from administration of Namibia to archival holdings pertaining to foreign relations and military affairs.

Private donations and accessions

The third and final category of Namibiana records located in South Africa involves private donations and accessions of documents to archival repositories. These were usually donated by prominent individuals who often worked for the colonial/apartheid regime, and the majority reflect broad political issues relating to twentieth century Namibian history. Because of the diffuse nature of these records, they are often scattered across repositories throughout South Africa, but for the purpose of this article, we will briefly consider two of the larger holdings: the Archive for Contemporary Affairs (ACA) in Bloemfontein, and the Historical Papers Research Archive (HPRA) at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. The fire that destroyed much of the African Studies Library of the University of Cape Town in 2021 proved to be "a disaster for Namibian Studies", as it is feared that considerable parts of Namibiana were lost.²⁰ Work on salvaging the collection is still ongoing. There are signs that the Jack and Ray Simons Collection, which contains valuable data about SWAPO, survived.²¹

The Archive for Contemporary Affairs (ACA) was founded at the University of the Free State in Bloemfontein in 1970 – then termed the Instituut vir Eietydse Geskiedenis – and up to South African independence in 1994, the archive functioned primarily as a repository for private papers and memoranda from National Party politicians. It has since been

¹⁹ For the history of Namaland, consult Bernard C. Moore, "Smuggled Sheep, Smuggled Shepherds: Farm Labour Transformations in Namibia and the Question of Southern Angola, 1933-1975", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 47 (1), 2021: 93-125; also Bernard C. Moore, "Protecting the Flock: Capitalism and Apartheid in Southern Namibia", (PhD Dissertation, Michigan State University, forthcoming, 2023), which uses this collection extensively.

²⁰ Chris Saunders, "A Disaster for Namibian Studies", *Journal of Namibian Studies*, 29, 2021: 135-136.

²¹ Sarah Sadie Wilcox compiled an extensive finding aid of SWAPO material in the Western Cape in 2004. The finding aid is accessible online. In addition to a description of the Jack and Ray Simons Collection, Wilcox also covered relevant sources in the Amy Thornton Collection (from the Manuscripts and Archives Department of the University of Cape Town) and the Brian Bunting Collection (from the University of the Western Cape – Robben Island Mayibuye Archives). See Sarah Sadie Wilcox, "The South West Africa People's Organisation 1961-1991", https://webcms.uct.ac.za/sites/default/files/image_tool/images/25/SWAP0%20Guide.pdf

transformed into a more multifaceted institution, although much of its holdings are still National Party-related.

Crucially, the ACA holds accessions of numerous National Party politicians from Namibia, as well as other important apartheid-era figures relevant to Namibian history. Some of the more prominent collections include the following. J.W.F. (Kosie) Pretorius [accession *PV660*] – Chairman of the National Party of SWA from 1981 and Chairman of the Executive Committee for the Administration for Whites (1981-1989).²² Dirk F. Mudge [*PV218*] – Member of the Executive Committee for SWA (1965-1977), Chairman of the Turnhalle Constitutional Conference, Founding Chairman of the Republican Party of SWA and the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA) party.²³ J.G.H. van der Wath [*PV67*] – Member of the Executive for SWA (1950-1959), Deputy Minister for SWA Affairs (1961-1968), and Administrator for SWA (1968-1971). D.T. du P. Viljoen [*PV205*] – Administrator for SWA (1953-1963). W.C. du Plessis [*PV188*] – Administrator for SWA (1963-1968) and head of the SA Delegation to the Conference of the International Atomic Energy Agency (1956).

In addition to high-ranking NP officials who worked in Namibia, the ACA also holds records of local Namibian officials of lesser importance, such as Johannes von Moltke [*PV371*], W.G.P. Kirsten [*PV374*], J.F. Barnard [*PV276*], and A.C. Conrad [*PV820*]. Interestingly, the ACA also holds a large collection from J.P. (Johannes) van S. Bruwer [*PV123*], who was one of the main apartheid-era volkekundiges, using 'ethnological' methods to justify apartheid segregation in Namibia. The majority of the ACA holdings pertaining to Namibia contain speeches, memoranda, and correspondence concerning mid-twentieth century political relations between Namibia, South Africa, and the international community, as well as local issues. The language of the collections is almost uniformly Afrikaans.

The second major repository where accessions and private depositions concerning Namibia are held is the Historical Papers Research Archive (HPRA) at the University of the Witwatersrand. These collections are quite expansive for South African history, and while Namibia-related holdings are much smaller, there are a few important collections. The first of those relate to the Anglican Diocese of Damaraland, 1924-1976. This includes extensive documentation from the diaries, photographs, and mission reports of Bishop G.W.R. Tobias - the church representative for St. Mary's, Ovamboland [*AB857*]. These documents include Oshikwanyama-language catechism books. Additional documents from the diocese include sermons, finances, staff and clergy appointments, general correspondence (1945-1975, and some earlier), as well as photographic negatives [*AB1625*]. Crucially, the collection [*AB1625*] also contains some correspondence and reports concerning the role of the SADF and SWAPO in Ovamboland. Finally, the HPRA also holds

²² The majority of Pretorius' papers are still housed in Windhoek, at the Erfdeel Argief en Kultuursentrum in Windhoek West. See Van der Hoog, "A New Chapter", 18-20.

²³ The Majority of Mudge's papers are held in the Archives of the University of South Africa (UNISA) in Pretoria. The ACA holdings related to Mudge are fairly small, though important, detailing the 1972 visit of Dr. A. Escher, assistant to UN Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim, to Namibia. See, Government Archives Service of South Africa, *Gids op die Privaatversamelings van die Instituut vir Etydse Geskiedenis, Bloemfontein*, Pretoria, Staatsargiefdiens, 1987: 106f.

records from the Diocese of Damaraland regarding Bishop Colin O. Winter's criticism of South African policy, as well as material concerning the Ovambo Workers' Strike of 1971/72 [AB966]. On the whole, this documentation is crucial for understanding church-state relations during the apartheid and pre-apartheid periods of Namibian history. The majority of the records are in English.

Other collections at the HPRA include the papers of journalist and activist Ruth First (on microfilm) [A3279]. While the majority of First's professional activities dealt with apartheid in South Africa, she authored one of the earliest anti-South African accounts of Namibia, *South West Africa*, in 1963.²⁴ The collection contains news clippings, correspondence, official SWAPO statements, UN reports, and additional background material which First used to write her book. This includes biographical material on Andimba Toivo ya Toivo and other political leaders. Finally, the HPRA also has a general 'Namibia' collection with miscellaneous reports, news clippings, and analysis of miscellaneous apartheid-era development schemes in the country [A1654]. Most of the documents originate from church-related NGO schemes which were operating in Namibia during the late-1970s and early-1980s, which makes this large collection quite unique, as it provides direct observation of economic and social conditions in the homelands – with particular focus on Namaland (Gibeon area) and Damaraland (Khorixas area).

2. African liberation archives

While Namibia's prolonged liberation struggle has had a profound and lingering influence on the country, historians have only few archival sources from the national liberation movements (NLMs) at their disposal.²⁵ The SWAPO Archives and Resource Centre briefly opened its doors in 2007 but is now closed to the public, its future uncertain.²⁶ Yet the undeniably transnational nature of southern Africa's liberation struggles may offer unforeseen opportunities.²⁷ SWAPO, SWANU and other nationalist parties operated for a large part in exile and cooperated or competed with other African liberation movements. We could read the archives of the latter against the grain to search for information about Namibian liberation movements, with a notable warning that this would only offer an 'outsider' perspective.

Another problem with this approach is that southern African liberation sources, in the words of Christopher Saunders, are "widely dispersed and often difficult to find, even if

²⁴ Ruth First, *South West Africa*, New York, Penguin, 1963. Also the later work, Ruth First and Ronald Segal, (eds.), *South West Africa: Travesty of Trust*, London, Deutsch, 1966.

²⁵ Historians have sought other means to study this era, most notably through oral histories. See for instance Christian Williams, *National Liberation in Postcolonial Southern Africa: A Historical Ethnography of SWAPO's Exile Camps*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2015.

²⁶ Martha Akawa, *The Gender Politics of the Namibian Liberation Struggle*, Basel, Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2014: 9.

²⁷ Jocelyn Alexander, JoAnn McGregor, and Blessing-Miles Tendi, "The Transnational Histories of Southern African Liberation Movements: An Introduction", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 43 (1), 2017: 1-12.

access is possible.”²⁸ This is true for most NLMs in the region, with a few positive exceptions. The archives of the United National Independence Party of Zambia, which ruled Zambia from 1964 to 1991, are accessible and contain various files from SWAPO. Zambia, as one of the Frontline States, harboured many liberation movements during the tumultuous decolonisation of southern Africa.²⁹ SWAPO also maintained contact with the African National Congress of South Africa, whose archives are deposited at the University of Fort Hare.³⁰ The fact that over time several national liberation movements have developed into postcolonial governments makes it difficult to access most ‘liberation archives’, because such organisations tend to be sensitive about their own past.³¹ It can be expected that references to SWAPO in particular will be featured in the National Liberation Movements Heritage Programme that is being developed by the UNESCO Regional Office for Southern Africa, in partnership with the Southern African Research and Documentation Centre. The status of this project is, however, unclear and the data that will be made available will have been curated.³²

In addition to NLM organisational archives researchers may find Namibiana in more general repositories of the liberation struggles.³³ The Bureau of African Affairs, a key element of Kwame Nkrumah’s foreign policy, to name one example, hosted liberation movements in Ghana between 1966 and 1975. Their archive which was rediscovered in the 1980s and is now accessible in Accra, also contains information about South West

²⁸ Chris Saunders, “Issues in Writing on Liberation Struggles in Southern Africa”, in: Chris Saunders, (ed.), *Documenting Liberation Struggles in Southern Africa*, Uppsala, Nordic Africa Institute, 2010: 59-65 (62)

²⁹ The UNIP Archives are based in Lusaka and were digitised through the Endangered Archives Programme. Digitised copies are deposited at the National Archives of Zambia and the British Library, but are also accessible online. For an example of SWAPO papers, see EAP121/2/5/4/11 “South Western Peoples Organisation, Papers [1963]” (1963) or EAP121/2/5/4/24 “South Western African Peoples Organisation, Papers [1964-1966]” (1964-1966). For more information on the archives, see Hyden Munene, “Mining the Past: A Report of Four Archival Repositories in Zambia”, *History in Africa*, 47, 2020: 359-373, and Mwelwa Musambachime, “The Archives of Zambia’s United National Independence Party”, *History in Africa*, 18, 1991: 291-296. One thoughtful reviewer suggested that there might also be files related to Namibia in the National Archives of Zambia, but this was difficult to check in the absence of openly accessible finding aids. Nevertheless, it can be expected that researchers will find useful materials in this repository as well.

³⁰ Mosoabuli Maamoe, “An Overview of the African National Congress Archives at the University of Fort Hare”, *History in Africa*, 25, 1998: 413-422.

³¹ See the work of Henning Melber, for example “Southern African Liberation Movements as Governments and the Limits to Liberation”, *Review of African Political Economy*, 36 (121), 2009: 451-459.

³² See “Development of liberation heritage materials kick starts”, <https://en.unesco.org/news/development-liberation-heritage-materials-kick-starts>

³³ In the case of South Africa see for instance the Pan-Africanist Congress archives, the Mayibuye Centre at the University of the Western Cape, the Historical Papers and the South African History Archive, both at the University of the Witwatersrand. See Bavusile Maaba, “Liberation Archives in South Africa: An Overview”, in: Chris Saunders, (ed.), *Documenting Liberation Struggles in Southern Africa*, Uppsala, Nordic Africa Institute, 2010: 66-71.

Africa.³⁴ It must be acknowledged, however, that this approach to research is labour-intensive, relatively expensive, and unlikely to yield large quantities of documents that are specifically related to Namibia.

3. Western solidarity archives

The Namibian liberation struggle had a clear internationalist link as many exiled Namibians found a temporary home in Western countries for studies, foreign missions, and other engagements. This has resulted in Namibiana being stored across the world. We will review a number of Western repositories that are useful and, in many cases, underutilised. Håkan Thörn has written about how the anti-apartheid movement evolved within the framework of so-called 'new social movements', where mobilisation was framed more along lines of *solidarity* and *internationalism* than the more traditional church and/or labour movements. For Thörn, the political culture of anti-apartheid was tied to a 'globalisation' of politics emerging through new forms of media, increasing transnational movement of individuals and ideas, and the consolidation of global organisation, such as the United Nations and to a lesser extent the IDAF.³⁵ For these reasons, the global anti-apartheid movement was the inevitable late-capitalism successor of earlier internationalisms tied to church, labour, and scholarship.³⁶

For two decades, millions of well-intentioned individuals from around the world participated in solidarity protests, boycotts, divestment programmes, educational initiatives, as well as the mundane office labour necessary to run regional anti-apartheid activist organisations. For these reasons, the global anti-apartheid movement left paper trails all across the world, and these collections provide researchers with a lens through which Namibian and South African decolonisation can be viewed. Anti-apartheid activists were routinely involved in research and outreach in order to inform relevant stakeholders of the truth of what was happening in Southern Africa – and to counter opposing viewpoints from far-right and Pretoria-funded pro-apartheid advocacy agendas. This often involved accumulating large amounts of documentation, photographs, books, film, and other media and ephemera relevant to the anti-apartheid struggle. Anti-apartheid movements routinely worked with existing 'traditional' advocacy networks such as churches and trade unions to facilitate scholarships for Namibian students; not only was this a just charitable initiative,

³⁴ See for example the file GH/PRAAD/.17/2/175 South West Africa. For more information on the Bureau of African Affairs Collection, see Matteo Grilli, "Nkrumah, Nationalism, and Pan-Africanism: The Bureau of African Affairs Collection", *History in Africa*, 44, 2017: 295-307.

³⁵ Håkan Thörn, *Anti-Apartheid and the Emergence of a Global Civil Society*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2006: 11-20.

³⁶ On earlier advocacy programmes, see Lydia Walker, "States in Waiting: Nationalism, Internationalism, Decolonization", unpublished PhD dissertation, Harvard University, 2018.

but it also enabled them to gather 'first hand' testimonies about the situations inside the country, where research and data collection was difficult to impossible.³⁷

The decentralised and local nature of anti-apartheid movements means that, for the most part, their archival legacies are dispersed across the globe. This makes in-depth study of these holdings quite difficult, if not impossible, and the air travel to perform even a semi-comprehensive approach would leave quite a carbon footprint. For these reasons, the majority of scholarship using the archives of anti-apartheid movements deals with the histories and impact of specific organisations – or else studies of several nationally-bound movements. Chris Saunders has used the archives of the British Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM) – housed at the Bodleian Library, Oxford – to examine the emergence of the movements Namibia-specific organisations: Friends of Namibia and the Namibia Support Committee.³⁸ Toni Weis has done likewise, though with specific reference to East Germany, drawing from documents in the Federal Archive in Berlin, as well as special collections in the "Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR" relevant to anti-apartheid committees.³⁹

It is beyond the scope of this article to comprehensively list and survey these varied collections scattered across the globe, however, it is useful to provide a brief introduction to two slightly more centralised collections. First, we have the African Activist Archive (AAA), hosted by Michigan State University Libraries in East Lansing, USA. This project evolved out of the efforts of US anti-apartheid activists, including inter alia: Richard Knight (of the American Committee on Africa), Christine Root (of the Washington Office on Africa and D.C. Divest), and David Wiley (Director of MSU's African Studies Center).⁴⁰ With funding from various universities, governmental institutions, churches, unions, and private donations, the AAA accumulates the private and institutional archives of various anti-apartheid activists and organisations, many of which are now defunct. While the majority of the accessions are from North America, the AAA website also catalogues and organises some digitised materials from Europe, Africa, Asia, and Australasia.⁴¹ However, more than sixty of these accessions are physically housed in the special collections at Michigan State University Libraries.

Many of these collections are not specific to Namibia, but rather to the anti-apartheid movement as a whole. For example, the Miloanne Hecathorn papers [*MSS 651*] provide extensive detail of the US American and international movements to divest from South(ern) Africa. Hecathorn was responsible for the divestment scheme for the city of

³⁷ See, concerning activities in Finland: Iina Soiri and Pekka Peltola, *Finland and National Liberation in Southern Africa*, Uppsala, Nordic Africa Institute, 1999: 112-118.

³⁸ Chris Saunders, "Namibian Solidarity: British Support for Namibian Independence", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 35 (2), 2009: 437-454.

³⁹ Toni Weis, "The Politics Machine: On the Concept of 'Solidarity' in East German Support for SWAPO", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 37 (2), 2011: 351-367.

⁴⁰ For more information on the project and other relevant personalities, consult "Biographies of Staff and Advisory Committee members", <https://africanactivist.msu.edu/biographies.php>

⁴¹ A full list of collections are available at "Archives List", <https://africanactivist.msu.edu/archives.php>

Oakland, California, and over the years she became an expert on implementing municipal and pension divestment programmes across the country. Her collection contains a large amount of reports and investigations into foreign investment in South Africa and Namibia. As it pertains to Namibia specifically, Hecathorn was also contacted in 1991 by the Namibian Embassy in Washington, where a staff member had been employed to contact municipal governments around the world to request that Namibia be removed from existing divestment schemes and sanctions, on grounds that the country was now independent.⁴² Other collections are even more local, such as the Vincent Klinger Papers [MSS 647], which details the decision of his Philadelphia branch of the International Longshoremen's Association to refuse to unload cargo from South Africa, SWA/Namibia, and Rhodesia.

The most Namibia-specific collection of the AAA consists of the papers of Sean Gervasi [MSS 464], who was employed during the 1970s as a full-time consultant to the United Nations Commissioner for Namibia, Sean MacBride. Gervasi's collection (spread across more than fifteen boxes) contains press reports, news clippings, confidential telexes, as well as correspondence concerning the increasingly fragile international status of Namibia during the 1970s. Gervasi's notes and correspondence with Sean MacBride reveal the deep quandaries which the UN (and SWAPO) faced regarding the Namibia question. While MacBride enjoyed fairly strong support amongst African nations and the Non-Aligned Movement, most Western nations wanted a much more conservative candidate as UN Commissioner for Namibia, and the increasingly militarised position of the East-bloc wanted a Commissioner who was more accepting of intensified armed struggle.⁴³ Gervasi's papers also hold extensive materials about the Turnhalle Constitutional Convention, as well as Clemens Kapuuo's hiring of lawyer Stuart Schwartz and the marketing firm Psychographic Communications, Ltd to assist him and the DTA.⁴⁴ There is also fascinating correspondence about boxer Mohammed Ali's financial support for Kapuuo and the DTA as well.

Across the Atlantic, it is worth researchers' while to consult our second case, the agglomerated database of the UK Archives Hub.⁴⁵ This website is a collaboration between various university, museum, and institutional archives across the United Kingdom, and while it does not provide large amounts of digitised materials, it does collate finding aids of smaller collections across the country. Like the AAA, most of these collections are small – either private papers of key individuals, or else anti-apartheid movement organisations – and they are often more-focused on South Africa than Namibia. Some of the larger collections catalogued in UK Archives Hub include that of the Wales Anti-Apartheid

⁴² MSU Special Collections Archives (MSU-SCA) MSS 651 Box 8 Folder 9: Charge d'Affaires, Namibian Embassy, Washington to M. Hecathorn, Oakland Office of Finance – 18 April 1991.

⁴³ MSU-SCA MSS 464 Box 11 Folder 8: S. Gervasi to S. MacBride – 8 July 1974.

⁴⁴ MSU-SCA MSS 464 Box 13 Folder 8: J. Summers (Psycomm) to R. Walker – 12 November 1976.

⁴⁵ See "Archives Hub", <https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/search>

Movement,⁴⁶ the Anti-Apartheid Movement Scottish Committee,⁴⁷ as well as that of the pressure group Lawyers Against Apartheid, who advocated on behalf of South African and Namibian political prisoners.⁴⁸

Some of the more Namibia-centric collections catalogued within UK Archives Hub include the papers of Conservative MP Sir Patrick Wall,⁴⁹ which holds reports of his visits to SWA/Namibia during the 1970s & 1980s. The collection also holds correspondence and minutes of meetings with Andreas Shipanga of SWAPO-Democrats, as well as with Billy Marais. The Institute of Commonwealth Studies in London holds 95 boxes of papers of the well-known journalist Ruth First,⁵⁰ which contains abundant material about her research for her book *South West Africa*,⁵¹ as well as various materials about the formation of SWAPO, the 1967 Terrorist Trial, and the Odendaal Plan. The majority of materials date from the mid-1960s, though some extend into the 1970s as well. Finally, one can also find the personal papers of Freda Levson (née Troup),⁵² which contain her documentation, notes, and drafts of her book *In Face of Fear* on Rev. Michael Scott's activism in Namibia.⁵³ The majority of the collection deals with the broader anti-apartheid movement however, as Levson was formerly involved with the ANC's defiance campaign, as well as the formation in later years of the International Defence & Aid Fund (IDAF). A brief search of the UK Archives Hub will reveal small collections concerning Namibia spread across the United Kingdom. Many are local branches of anti-apartheid movements, many collections are personal papers, and some deal with government and/or missionary connections.

The Nordic countries were a principal supporter of southern African liberation movements and offered humanitarian aid, practical assistance and exile to several nationalist organisations, including SWAPO.⁵⁴ Over the years, a large collection of ephemera, party publications and grey literature has therefore accumulated at the Nordic Africa Institute in Uppsala, Sweden. Containing nearly 600 boxes, the so-called Pamphlet Collection contains

⁴⁶ Housed at the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth: Ref. Code GB 0210 WAAM: "Wales Anti-Apartheid Movement Papers", <https://archives.library.wales/index.php/wales-anti-apartheid-movement-papers>

⁴⁷ Housed at Glasgow Caledonian University Archives: Ref. Code 1847 AAMS: "Records of Anti Apartheid Movement Scottish Committee, pressure group, Glasgow, Scotland", <https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/data/gb1847-aams>

⁴⁸ Glasgow Caledonian Univ. Archives: Ref. Code GB 1847 GHJARC/LA: "Records of Lawyers Against Apartheid, pressure group, London, England", <https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/data/gb1847-ghjarc/la>

⁴⁹ Housed at Hull University Archives: Ref. Code GB 50 U DPW: "Papers of Sir Patrick Wall MP", <https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/data/gb50-udpw>

⁵⁰ ICS Archives: Ref. Code GB 101 ICS 117: "FIRST, (Heloise) Ruth (1925-1982)", <https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/data/gb101-ics117>

⁵¹ First, *South West Africa*, 1963.

⁵² Aberdeenshire Museums Service: Ref. Code GB 3298 2008.030.2: "Correspondence [sic] of Freda Levson (1911-2004)", <https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/data/gb3298-2008.030.2>

⁵³ Freda Troup, *In Face of Fear: Michael Scott's Challenge to South Africa*, London, Faber and Faber, 1950.

⁵⁴ Tycho van der Hoog, "Research Note: The Nordic Africa Institute (NAI) Pamphlet Collection", *Cold War History*, 22 (3), 2022: 363-368.

a wealth of primary source materials (spanning the period from 1960 to 1980), including over twenty boxes specifically related to Namibia. The topics include agriculture, statistics, history, politics (including SWAPO and SWANU literature), law, fisheries, trade unions, development projects, health and labour, natural resources, and more. The entire collection is searchable per item via the online catalogue of the Nordic Africa Institute.

In addition to the Pamphlet Collection, the Nordic Africa Institute holds several metres of archivalia with an eclectic mix of governmental publications from an independent Namibia, dating from the 1990s until today. This includes overviews of laws, parliamentary proceedings, Bank of Namibia publications, Chamber of Mines, and other government services, a variety of statistical series (usually with gaps), censuses, and presidential statements. These are available both in the open stacks section of the library and the closed downstairs repository. Lastly, the NAI in Uppsala is home to a wide range of Namibian newspapers and magazines: pre-independence SWAPO publications (including the periodicals *Namibia*, *Namibia News*, *Namibia Today*, *The Combatant* – some of which can also be found in the Pamphlet Collection), access to contemporary newspapers (such as *New Era*, *Windhoek Observer*, *Windhoek Advertiser*, *The Namibian*), and institutional publications (such as *Namibia Bulletin* – from the United Nations – and *Namibia Brief* – from the Namibia Foundation). In most cases only a few editions of each series are available, sometimes physical and sometimes digital.

The International Institute for Social History in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, does not contain specific archives from Namibia but does hold specialised collections about the anti-apartheid struggle in southern Africa which has links to the decolonisation of Namibia. The Institute houses over a 1000 items on or from Namibia, including SWAPO publications and non-textual items such as buttons, photos and posters.

Solidarity archives relating to the anti-apartheid movement, as well as other activist organisations and partnerships provide researchers with a global-facing, outward-looking source base which links the struggles in Namibia and southern Africa to broader political developments across the globe. Scholars seeking to analyse the global footprint of the Namibian situation can benefit from consultation of these sources; however, one must consider issues of representation in these source bases, which will be further expounded upon in our conclusion.

4. Basler Afrika Bibliographien

The Basler Afrika Bibliographien is located in Switzerland and is the largest collection of Namibiana outside Namibia. It was established in 1971 by Carl Schlettwein, who lived for several years in South West Africa during the 1950s-1960s, and came to assemble an extensive private collection of publications. The BAB is a leading publishing house in Namibian Studies and has gained prominence in academic circles because of its annual Namibia Research Day. Few people outside of the field of Namibian Studies would assume that one of the most important collections of Namibiana is located in Switzerland. Yet, the

BAB has drawn visitors from far and wide to its attractive collection of archival material covering Namibia and southern Africa throughout the twentieth century.

The BAB archive, in addition to an excellent library, includes twenty-one general archives and 157 personal archives.⁵⁵ The general archives consist of collections of press articles and ephemera, and collections from various Europe-based organisations with an interest in Namibia such as the Anti-Apartheid Movement of Switzerland. Researchers have also frequently consulted the SWAPO collection, which contains reports, papers, letters and other unpublished material from the liberation movement (unfortunately excluding internal notes or minutes), as well as publications about SWAPO.⁵⁶ The personal archives include private collections from journalists, politicians, and collectors with an interest in or relevance to Namibia. Also included are diaries and correspondence and other material from farmers, travellers, game hunters, soldiers, a colonial official and a merchant.⁵⁷ Of particular interest are the deposited research archives of scholars of Namibian history, for example the papers of Tony Emmett [P448].⁵⁸ This collection includes copies of the extremely rare personal papers of Fanuel Jariretundu Kozonguizi, the first president of the South West African National Union. Namibian(ist) historians will surely benefit from consulting the dozens of larger and smaller sub-collections in Basel.

5. Intergovernmental organisations

In a world that is increasingly being shaped by intergovernmental organisations, the United Nations has been the main multilateral actor in the recent history of Namibia.⁵⁹ Walker has noted that while the mandate status as a former League of Nations territory did not change the reality of apartheid, “the prospect and presence of the UN Committee on South West Africa completely shaped the Namibian independence struggle.”⁶⁰ The UN had terminated the mandate status in 1966 and had boosted SWAPO’s standing in the world by recognising them as the ‘sole and authentic representative’ of the Namibian peoples. Several specialised UN agencies contributed to the liberation struggle: the UN

⁵⁵ Dag Henrichsen and Giorgio Miescher, *Documenting and Researching Southern Africa: Aspects and Perspectives. Essays in Honour of Carl Schlettwein*, Basel, Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2001.

⁵⁶ Giorgio Miescher, (ed.), *Registratur AA.3: Guide to the SWAPO Collection in the Basler Afrika Bibliographien (Enlarged and Revised Edition)*, Basel, Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2006. The catalogue, interestingly, also contains a section called ‘Collections of SWAPO material scattered around the world’, 12-14.

⁵⁷ We should also note the excellent poster collection of the BAB, see Giorgio Miescher, Lorena Rizzo, Jeremy Silvester (eds.), *Posters in Action: Visuality in the Making of an African Nation*, Basel, Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2009.

⁵⁸ Tony Emmett, *Popular Resistance and the Roots of Nationalism in Namibia, 1915-1966*, Basel, Schlettwein, 1999.

⁵⁹ Richard Dale, “The UN and Decolonisation in Namibia”, in: David Forsythe, (ed.), *The United Nations in the World Political Economy: Essays in Honour of Leon Gordenker*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 1989: 165-178.

⁶⁰ Walker, “Decolonization”: 254.

Commissioner for Namibia arranged the establishment of the United Nations Institute for Namibia in Lusaka, Zambia, which trained exiled Namibians for a future independent country, while the United Nations High Commission for Refugees brought back 40,000 exiled Namibians just in time for the elections in 1989, the UNTAG mission was essential for guiding the election process.⁶¹

The United Nations Archives can be accessed online and onsite in New York.⁶² The main obstacle for researchers is the lack of inventories and a proper search engine. The main UN Archives hold an inventory of the UNTAG mission [AG-038], which is accessible online and includes series on the military component, civilian component, the Commission for Namibia Records, the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Subject Files – UNTAG, and cables. Yet for other files related to the many UN bodies researchers are dependent on the archive's imperfect search engine. The UN Digital Library deserves special attention, for it contains a considerable quantity of Namibiana, including files from the UN Fund for Namibia [A/RES/32/9[B]], the UN Council for Namibia, and countless resolutions, reports and programmes. Importantly for Namibia, the Digital Library also contains full scans of the Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim collection [AG-006] which holds abundant materials concerning SWA from the early- and mid-1970s. Occasionally outside overviews can be helpful: for example, the research guide "The UN Security Council and Namibia" as developed by the Dag Hammarskjöld Library. This source provides an overview of all resolutions, vetoed draft resolutions, meeting records, and the reports and letters of the Secretary-General.⁶³

Historians of the liberation struggle will be interested in files from the Organisation of African Unity, the predecessor of the African Union, and primarily those from the Liberation Committee that was established to distribute funds and material support to liberation movements. The Liberation Committee promoted, aided and thereby legitimised SWAPO over other Namibian liberation movements.⁶⁴ Unfortunately the Liberation Committee archive, currently housed in the Tanzanian Army Archives in Dar es Salaam, is inaccessible to the public. Saunders noted recently that one Canadian researcher, Sabine Neidhardt, was able to gain access for a month in 1999 and presented a paper based on the files related to Namibia. This paper has not been published.⁶⁵ The former Executive Secretary of the Liberation Committee, Hashim Mbita, led a SADC-funded project which culminated

⁶¹ Chris Saunders, "The Role of the United Nations in the Independence of Namibia", *History Compass*, 5, 2007: 737-744. The UNIN files are located at the University of Namibia Archives in Windhoek.

⁶² See "UN Archives", <https://archives.un.org/>. Recently the UN has launched a renewed UN iLibrary, see "About UN iLibrary", <https://www.un-ilibrary.org/about>. Noteworthy is also the UN Digital Library, see "United Nations Digital Library", <https://digitallibrary.un.org/>. A number of important UN files are also copied and accessible in the National Archives of Namibia in Windhoek, through the private accessions collections.

⁶³ See "The United Nations Security Council and Namibia", https://www.un.org/Depts/dhl/namibia/by_type.htm

⁶⁴ Chris Saunders, "SWAPO, Namibia's Liberation Struggle and the Organisation of African Unity's Liberation Committee", *South African Historical Journal*, 70 (1), 2018: 152-167..

⁶⁵ Titled "On the Politics of Disempowerment: SWAPO and the OAU Liberation Committee, 1963– 1990", Sabine Neidhardt presented this paper in April 2000 at the University of California in Los Angeles.

in the publication of the nine volume book series *Southern African Liberation Struggles 1960-1994: Contemporaneous Documents* which includes a number of interviews and other data that might be of interest for Namibian scholars.⁶⁶ Even though the archives in Tanzania are closed, researchers can access a range of Liberation Committee files through the digital repository of the African Union, using the search function.⁶⁷

Other repositories which potentially may be of interest to scholars of Namibia are those of the Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Organisation (AAPSO) and the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). The NAM was established in 1961 in Yugoslavia as an alternative to the polarisation of the Cold War. SWAPO became a full member of the organisation, which regularly discussed the Namibian situation. AAPSO was established in 1958, in Egypt, and supported several African liberation movements, including SWAPO. Unfortunately, neither organisation has formal archives that are easily accessible to scholars. Perhaps in the future, new opportunities will become available.

Fragments of history, or a fragmented history?

Over the past thirty years historians have sought to capture the history of colonial rule and decolonial struggle in South West Africa, modern Namibia, utilising and questioning historical material from archival hotspots around the world. The fragmentation of sources makes it difficult to attain a comprehensive overview of what primary source material is actually available. We hope that the survey in this article is helpful in identifying promising repositories for the study of Namibian decolonisation. The geographical diversity poses to the historian fundamental questions about access and representation, as well as how this impacts the fundamentals of our craft. Historians usually ask what exactly is contained in the archival memory of an institution, but not so much where the archival memory itself is stored. Yet there is politics in the storage of paper and the international fragmentation of Namibiana reveals much about the turbulent history of this nation.

Utilising a multi-archival perspective is time-consuming and expensive, as it usually involves international travel. The politics of passports comes into play, which highlights troubling disadvantages Namibian scholars face compared to their Western counterparts. Namibian nationals are more likely to experience visa difficulties when trying to access European or American collections, compared to their Western counterparts. The ill-advised southern African travel ban during the COVID-19 pandemic, implemented by the European Union from November 2021 to January 2022, highlighted the far-reaching consequences of unequal restrictions on travel. The aforementioned AACRLS project of the National Archives of Namibia in Windhoek is a welcome development in the process of repatriating or copying Namibian material in foreign archives, to make it accessible in Namibia.

⁶⁶ Francis Garaba, Christine Stilwell, and Patrick Ngulube, "The Microfilm of the New Millenium: The Digitization of the Liberation Struggle Archives Heritage in East and Southern Africa", *Innovation*, 42, 2011: 33-54. See for a review specifically related to Namibian Studies, Chris Saunders, "Namibia's Liberation Struggle: The Mbita Version", *South African Historical Journal*, 70 (1), 2017: 281-290.

⁶⁷ See "AU Common Repository Home", <https://archives.au.int/>

The inter- and transnational paper trail of archives concerning Namibia is extensive, and it potentially enables students of Namibian history to access materials regardless of the country or region in which they are studying. Having said that, not all archives are equal, nor are they all founded for the same purpose. We can broadly divide archives of Namibia into two tranches: *internal* and *external*. Domestic archives within Namibia – as well as colonial/apartheid-era archives in Germany and South Africa – contain material about *internal*/happenings inside the territory. Whether they involve reports about labour relations, agricultural production, ecological change, cultural transformation, etc., the best materials about Namibia are located here. Researchers investigating economic, environmental, and cultural history would ultimately benefit much more from utilising local, internal archives than the international repositories.

However, for those interested in Namibia's place in global politics, especially the Cold War, liberation struggles, and Pan-Africanism, *external*/archives are excellent resources which provide viewpoints and bodies of literature less present (or indeed missing) from internal archives. Archives of anti-apartheid movements and activists, for example, place Namibia's situation within the broader spectrum of African liberation and decolonisation, which enables transnational comparisons and the tracing of key individuals and ideas. Having said that, as a legacy of the lengthy liberation struggle, material in external repositories tends to be strongly partisan towards SWAPO, which as an organisation was extremely effective in positioning itself as the 'sole legitimate representative' of the Namibian people, as the United Nations General Assembly acknowledged in the 1970s.⁶⁸ SWAPO-material can thus be found in repositories across the globe. Furthermore, an overemphasis on external archives could lead researchers to give too much credence to the words and solidarity of foreign activists, forgetting that there was significant activism, agitation, and protest occurring within Namibia itself, which was un(der)reported to the outside world and whose archival paper trail remains primarily in Windhoek.

While SWAPO and the international anti-apartheid movement has undoubtedly been placed on the right side of history – and has won all post-independence elections – it is the profession of Namibian(ist) researchers to investigate and at times challenge inherited narratives about decolonisation and the transition to democracy. External archives provide one key tool in this task, though delving deep into internal archives is necessary as well, lest the history of Namibia become de-territorialised to a global story of morality. A comparative example may be found in Zambia, where the United National Independence Party (UNIP) similarly dominated government for a long time. In the early 2000s, Zambian historiography found itself at a new frontier, when scholars started to question the 'UNIP-centred' scholarship of the past decades, instead presented in more complex picture of history: *One Zambia, Many Histories* became the rallying cry of historians.⁶⁹ Yet, for this to happen in Namibia, historians need to use a broader range of both *internal* and *external*

⁶⁸ Saunders, "The Role": 738. UN Digital Archives: Kurt Waldheim Collection, File no. S-0902-0007-01-00001.

⁶⁹ Jan-Bart Gewald, Marja Hinfelaar, and Giacomo Macola, (eds.), *One Zambia, Many Histories: Towards a History of Post-Colonial Zambia*, Leiden, Brill, 2009.

archives which accurately depict the nuanced nature of the struggle, even if this, at times, decentres SWAPO from the narrative.

Our juxtaposition between internal and external archives – as well as between colonial and anti-colonial archives – shows, however, that the divide is less stark than would initially be expected. In the context of French colonial historiography, most repositories reflecting the metropolitan perspective on West Africa are located either in France itself – or in the former AOF colonial archive in Dakar. Thus one must travel the region to identify alternative voices and viewpoints on its history. Moving the discussion closer to Namibia, what does it mean if an anti-colonial or decolonial archive – founded out of anti-apartheid solidarity – is located in Europe? While this does not mean that decolonial studies of Namibia's past need not traverse Windhoek's archival landscape, it does complicate the situation, as the anti-apartheid movement was broadly a global movement of international solidarity with an equally international paper trail.

The promises and perils of the digital

There is a temptation to view digitisation as the panacea for global inequities in archival access; if students at the University of Namibia or other institutions around the world are able to access materials from foreign archives on the Web, then a lack of research grants and travel funds could theoretically be overcome. Furthermore, it appears that this could bridge the gap between colonial and decolonial archives, as well as between internal and external ones. While there have been rapid developments on this front – digitisation has clearly transformed modern research, often for the better – the digital brings its own set of technological, methodological, financial, and ethical challenges which techno-optimists must confront, as can be illustrated through a case study of the National Archives of the United Kingdom (NAUK) in London.

The NAUK hold extensive documentation regarding British diplomacy with the South African government, the SWA transitional administration, and SWAPO itself.⁷⁰ Through a

⁷⁰ The collections of the NAUK provide insight into the ways in which Western powers sought to criticise South Africa over its rule of Namibia, while at the same time not appearing too critical. The UK was torn over how to phrase their protest of the implementation of homelands through the Development of Self-Government of Native Nations in SWA Bill, 1968 (see NAUK FCO 25/579: F.A Reynolds, Commonwealth Office to Charles L. Booth, Foreign Office – 1 May 1968); they had abstained from the UN Resolution 2145 vote, though they did not approve of South Africa's implementation of long-term apartheid legislation regarding Namibia. While many of these records are somewhat disconnected from incidents at hand – it is often related through consulate reports summarising newspaper articles – they are still useful as external archives. The NAUK holds records on Namibian refugees fleeing into Botswana, such as by Andimba Toivo ya Toivo and Mburumba Kerina (FCO 141/1265 & FO 371/177153). It holds records relating to the Namibian Terrorism Trials (FCO 45/342), the Ovambo Workers' Strike of 1971-72 (FCO 45/1217), reports from the Foreign Office on the current and envisioned post-apartheid economy of Namibia (FCO 45/2548), as well as debates during the early 1970s regarding the scale of South African and Portuguese massacres in Caprivi as filmed by the recently-deceased Per Sanden (FCO 45/1639). There are also documents from the latter years of apartheid regarding SWAPO's detention of alleged spies (FCO 105/3051) and the circumstances surrounding the murder of Anton Lubowski (FCO 105/3415).

partnership with Adam Matthew Digital, a British subsidiary of the huge SAGE Publications Ltd, the NAUK began digitising and organising a collection called *Apartheid South Africa, 1948-1980*, hosted through Adam Matthew's Archives Direct. While most of the collection relates to the Republic of South Africa itself — diplomatic reports, economic surveys, correspondence, etc. — a sizeable proportion concerned Namibia as well. The scans, however, are not publicly accessible, except on the physical computer terminals inside the archives in London; accessing these records from abroad requires institutional subscription, which can be quite expensive. Specific prices are not provided by Adam Matthew, though a recent subscription of a single database of comparable size through Archives Direct cost Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU) US\$39,600 for the fiscal year 2009-2010.⁷¹ While this is cheaper than what MTSU paid for a year of Elsevier's ScienceDirect (US\$474,728), it is still very costly, especially for universities in the Global South, such as the University of Namibia (UNAM). Institutional fees are often negotiated, so one could reason that MTSU's Adam Matthew fees may be higher than that for UNAM, but Adam Matthew Digital has not put forth a similar "Access Initiative" like that of JSTOR, which provides free or reduced-cost subscription to selected journals for African universities.⁷² Digitisation offers certain technological bridges across national borders and oceans, but so long as bridges are paywalled, they do not differ much from the regime of visa applications and airline tickets.

The field of Namibian history has to date achieved very little with regard to digitisation, and most initiatives are not funded by Namibian entities but rather supported by foreign organisations or private companies, like the NAUK case described above.⁷³ A practical hurdle, similar to physical archives, is the scattered nature of digitisation initiatives that are hosted by a variety of institutions and usually cover relatively small collections. Existing digitisation projects for Namibia seem to focus mostly on the German colonial era and on colonial photographs. One success story is the Digital Namibian Archive (DNA), a cooperative project between the Namibia University of Science and Technology, Utah Valley University and the National Archives of Namibia. The DNA has so far digitised around 13,800 photos, oral history recordings, books, film, the Hendrik Witbooi Collection, and the logbook of photographer Otilie Nitzsche-Reiter.⁷⁴ Another interesting digital endeavour is the Colonial Picture Archive of ilissAfrica, which includes around 24,407 old photographs from Namibia. The material dates from the 19th and early 20th centuries and

⁷¹ Middle Tennessee State University, "Library for Electronic Resources 2009-2010", https://www.mtsu.edu/taf/committee_docs/TAF1183LibraryDatabases.xls

⁷² See JSTOR, "JSTOR Access Initiative", <https://about.jstor.org/librarians/fees/jai>

⁷³ For an interesting analysis of the situation in South Africa, see Keith Breckenridge, "The Politics of the Parallel Archive: Digital Imperialism and the Future of Record-Keeping in the Age of Digital Reproduction", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 40 (3), 2014: 499-519.

⁷⁴ See "Digital Namibian Archives", <http://dna.nust.na/index.html>

emanates from the Frankfurt University Library and the Sam Cohen Library in Swakopmund.⁷⁵

In an effort to “open up the colonial archive”, the University of Basel developed the online platform “Namibia 1953-54” in cooperation with the BAB and the Museums Association of Namibia. This platform seeks to raise awareness of the Dammann collection, which consists of over 750 images and audio recordings compiled by Ernst and Ruth Dammann.⁷⁶ In terms of decolonisation, the most relevant initiative to date is probably the Aluka Project, a platform that seeks to make primary sources available from the liberation struggles in Angola, Botswana, Mozambique, South Africa, Zimbabwe, and also Namibia.⁷⁷ Its *Struggles for Freedom: Southern Africa* online collection contains more than 27,000 objects and 190,000 pages of documents and images, many of which pertain to Namibia.⁷⁸

Besides the ethical quandaries presented above, digitisation also requires historians to consider how new technologies and newly available sources require new methodological considerations. Canadian historian Ian Milligan perhaps laid out the problem of digitisation most starkly. In 1998, Canada produced 67 dissertations in history, referencing the *Toronto Star* newspaper 74 times. In 2010 – after the newspaper was digitised and catalogued – 69 history dissertations cited it 753 times.⁷⁹ Most undigitized Canadian newspapers did not radically change in citation metrics over the same period, and there was not an over-abundance of dissertations specifically about Toronto; the difference was purely that the *Star* was OCR-ed and at the fingertips of researchers. Milligan argues that researchers need to treat digital search engines and digitised sources in the same manner that they would physical ones: to be aware of bias, skewed reference points, and agendas. More foundational than this, even, is that the digital turn risks eliminating the important historical skill of *skimming*. What do we mean by this? Depending on how sources – say, newspapers – are digitised, articles may be inadvertently removed from the *Zeitgeist*. When newspaper articles, such as that from the *Toronto Star* in Milligan’s case above, are transformed into pixels using OCR, it often results in individual articles being turned into individualised HTML pages: one page per article, one article per page.⁸⁰ While this strategy of OCR digitisation allows researchers to search databases with keywords – something quite revolutionary – each individual article found in each search is removed from its

⁷⁵ See “ilissAfrica - General search”, http://www.ilissafrika.de/en/vk/?q=SCB*%20OR%20DSWA%20OR%20Namibia%20OR%20SWA&c=dkq

⁷⁶ See “Namibia 1953-1954”, <https://namibia1953.com>

⁷⁷ Allen Isaacman, Premesh Lalu and Thomas Nygren, “Digitization, History, and the Making of a Postcolonial Archive of Southern African Liberation Struggles: The Aluka Project”, *Africa Today*, 52 (2), 2005: 55-77.

⁷⁸ See “Struggles for Freedom: Southern Africa”, <https://www.jstor.org/site/struggles-for-freedom/southern-africa/>

⁷⁹ Ian Milligan, “Illusionary Order: Online Databases, Optical Character Recognition, and Canadian History, 1997-2010”, *Canadian Historical Review*, 94 (4), 2013: 540-569.

⁸⁰ This is often the case with large research databases, like LexisNexis.

original place in the newspaper (or archival file). We lose the adverts placed nearby, letters to the editor in the issue, sometimes even photographs forming part of the article (these are less likely to be digitised): in short, the context surrounding these events. Skimming physical or microfilmed newspapers (or archival boxes), while not as technologically savvy, affords us this context.

As Lara Putnam reminds us “the new topography of information has systematic blind spots. It opens shortcuts that enable ignorance as well as knowledge”.⁸¹ She frames this alongside the difference between so-called Area Studies approaches – which privilege deep place-based research – and Transnational approaches – which seek out connections of individuals, ideas, and processes. Transnational history as a field only emerged systemically with the increasing sophistication of digital research and digitised sources, as even those at the most well-endowed Western universities found it difficult to conduct the necessary research in so many countries.⁸² The ‘*side-glancing*’ which Putnam describes – quick searches in other repositories across the globe to establish connections and parallels – once took days, weeks, or months to perform; now they require seconds to search and minutes to read. In ways which never existed before, historians can look beyond national borders and reconfigure national projects into transnational and international ones. Digitised resources make this possible.

However, as Putnam points out, this comes at a risk of fetishising the inter- and transnational. She writes: “If suddenly it is much easier for us to see circulating prints, globe-trotting activists, and globe-circling debates, we are likely to start attributing causal impact to those prints, those activists, and those debates.”⁸³ Uncritically accessing digitised sources from across the globe jeopardises one of historians’ most important tools: context. For every advancement we make in *side-glancing*, we lose in our ability to *skim*. Digitisation schemes were originally designed for businesses, legal firms, and governments, not university history departments. Their goal was to eliminate the need to skim and facilitate the location of records about particular individuals, particular events, particular laws without trudging through lever-arch files or archival boxes.⁸⁴

But historians are a different breed; for us, process and historical context is the story we seek. This was what distinguished Social History and Cultural History from their elitist ‘Big Man’ histories of the empiricist era.⁸⁵ History transformed away from a desk discipline to one which required field work: whether to locales to conduct oral history research or else to various archives to systematically research specific topics. *Skimming* for historians

⁸¹ Lara Putnam, “The Transnational and the Text Searchable: Digitized Sources and the Shadows They Cast”, *American Historical Review*, 121 (2), 2016: 377-402 (379).

⁸² Ibid.: 383. Of note, new technology from Google allows for live text translation of documents by using one’s mobile phone camera. It is of mixed efficacy at this stage, though if it improves like OCR technology has, this will also transform research methods significantly.

⁸³ Ibid.: 390f.

⁸⁴ Milligan, “Illusionary Order”.

⁸⁵ See William Sewall Jr., *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2005.

doesn't necessarily mean reading the whole of a newspaper; it's understanding where various archival files fit into certain organisational schemes and regimes of knowledge. Over-reliance on digitised sources risks over-emphasising inter- and transnational connections at the expense of local context, which may muddy the waters of historical causation.⁸⁶

Conclusion

So, what does this mean for the study of 20th century Namibian history? This paper has discussed the wide array of archives available outside the Republic of Namibia which contain substantial documentation related to the long decolonisation process of the Namibian people. There are surely source-bases outside our focus and purview, but we have sought to convey that each of these kinds of collections – South African colonial records, African liberation archives, solidarity archives, the Basler Afrika Bibliographien, and the archives of intergovernmental organisations – has its own merits and demerits as it relates to access and representation. This relates both to the particular structure and source language of specific collections, as well as institutional inequalities which can make it difficult for scholars to travel around the globe to access these.

This paper has also shown that while digitisation holds possibilities to break down these barriers and enable unfettered access to those both from the Global North and the Global South, it brings with it additional ethical and methodological concerns. Digitised collections may be paywalled with subscription fees sufficiently high to warrant buying an airline ticket and travelling to the physical location of the archives. Furthermore, an over-reliance on global digitised sources can decontextualize our research and diminish the value of deep place-based research, over-emphasising inter- and transnational connections above local factors. For Namibia's history, it often means a privileging of the actions, words, and viewpoints of those (mostly SWAPO) leaders who were able to travel across the globe and be present in these various external archives in other countries. We do not wish to diminish the promise which digital research offers, but rather, we argue that it should motivate us to evaluate the sources in the same way we would the physical records. In conclusion, writing the history of Namibian decolonisation requires *both* in-depth, place-based research within particular archives and particular communities *and* evaluation of the global footprint and paper trail which the struggle against colonialism and apartheid has left.

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⁸⁶ For how this premise applies to Namibian economic and labour history, see Bernard C. Moore, Stephanie Quinn, William Blakemore Lyon and Kai F. Herzog, "Balancing the Scales: Re-Centring Labour and Labourers in Namibian History", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 47 (1), 2021: 1-16.

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