Thinking and writing liberation politics — a review article of:
Hans Beukes, *Long Road to Liberation. An Exiled Namibian Activist’s Perspective*

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Abstract
Thinking and Writing Liberation Politics is a review article of: Hans Beukes, Long Road to Liberation. An Exiled Namibian Activist’s Perspective; with an introduction by Professor Mburumba Kerina, Johannesburg, Porcupine Press, 2014. 376 pages, appendices, photographs, index of names. ISBN: 978-1-920609-71-9. The article argues that Long Road to Liberation, being a rich, diverse, uneven memoir of an exiled Namibian activist, offers a sobering and critical account of the limits of liberation politics, of the legacies of a protracted struggle to bring Namibia to independence and of the imprint the struggle left on the political terrain of the independent state. But, it remains the perspective of an individual activist, who on account of his personal experiences and long absence from the country of his birth, at times, paints a fairly superficial picture of many internal events in the country.

The protracted diplomatic-, political- and liberation struggle that culminated in the independence of Namibia in March 1990, has attracted a crop of publications written from different perspectives. This has produced many competing narratives. It would be fair to say that many of the books published over the last decade or so, differ in their range, quality and usefulness to researchers and the reading public at large. This observation also holds for memoirs, a genre of writing that is most demanding, for it requires brutal honesty, the ability to truthfully recall and engage with events that can traverse several decades.¹ In the case of Namibia, the ‘road to liberation’ was indeed transnational, long and twisted as this brave, and in parts controversial, account attests.

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Registers and periods

*Long Road to Liberation* is structured around several registers and could be broken down into specific periods to make any review more meaningful and focused. The memoir starts, with the author’s early childhood and school education in South West Africa. The background is that of apartheid, inequality and discrimination. In this context the author became politically conscious together with a father and mother who were activists and principled intellectuals in their own right.

The second register is that of the writer’s university education in Cape Town, South Africa and his further political socialization and exposure to diverse intellectual and ideological traditions. He left for exile in 1959 and this ushered in a third period in his life, within which New York and the United Nations (UN) featured prominently, at least at the start of his long exile. After his return from New York, he spent most of his life in Oslo, Norway, and travelled extensively to many countries and regions including Sweden, Denmark, North Africa, Ghana, Botswana, Zambia and the United Kingdom. Later after Namibia gained its independence, he visited the country of his birth.

From Oslo, initially as a student activist, the author engaged deeply with SWAPO, its diplomacy and political leadership, while he maintained contact with his family in Namibia and with other Namibian politicians and parties. His many travels and engagements with a wide range of people, ideas and ideologies also those at work in the World Lutheran Federation (WLF) and the local Namibian churches, enabled him to develop a fairly unique perspective and understanding of the diplomacy practiced by state- and non-state actors.

The last five chapters, in particular, mine the rich seams of politics, economics, diplomacy, political culture and psychology of the exile experience, mostly in southern Africa, in commendable detail, even if some of the portraits of individual personae are drawn rather impressionistically. The time that he and his wife, Edel, an intellectual and academic from Norway, spent in Lusaka, Zambia, in the mid-1970s, exposed them to the power struggles, patronage and authoritarian culture of some of SWAPO’s exile leaders. This was a time of crisis, caused by the so-called ‘Shipanga rebellion’ that resulted in the incarceration of many SWAPO fighters and supporters and a Zambian police raid on him, his wife and close friends. Perhaps, it is largely because of these and subsequent events, that the author began writing his own measured requiem for the Namibian dream. It is also one of the explanations why he and his family still reside in Norway. That country not only gave him a wife, but also safety and livelihood. This review broadly follows the key registers as outlined above.

Childhood

The author’s father was a cobbler of note, a political activist, in the language of the period a ‘radical’, which meant that he was opposed to apartheid and ethnic politics. His mother Elisabeth Matilda van Wyk was related to the legendary Baster *Kaptein,*
Hermanus van Wyk. Born on the farm Narabes (Nama for ‘the place where the goat rejected its lamb’, in more ways than one symbolic of the author’s own fate and life in exile) in the district of Rehoboth in the former South West Africa. The author was the first born of 10 siblings. Like his parents, Hans Beukes was a member of the Methodist congregation in Rehoboth. Later when the family moved to Rehoboth, where his father Hermanus Beukes, employed up to two dozen men in his business when times were good, but competition from mass-produced shoes from South Africa greatly reduced his output of and income from shoes. The author writes (p. 17):

Father’s independence of mind made the very thought of working as an employee repugnant to him Later, his father also worked as a cobbler in Windhoek, ironically along the then main street of the City, named Kaiser Strasse (now Independence Avenue), where I had my own shoes repaired!

University of Cape Town

This very same ‘independence of mind’ was further ignited and moulded, initially by Methodist education, followed by his secondary education at the Dr. Lemmer Secondary School, in Rehoboth, his education at the University of Cape Town (UCT) in South Africa, where he read Law and his encounter with vibrant literary and intellectual influences, among these the works of Franz Kafka and the expressionist art of Edvard Munch, above all his iconic The Scream. It was in Cape Town that his path crossed that of the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) which was protesting against the Separate Universities Bill which was in the process of becoming law. At UCT he had a bright roommate of Indian descent, Ballo Naido, and was able to cut his teeth both intellectually and politically, with eminent scholars such as the historians Leonard Thompson and Rodney Davenport, and young free-thinking students such as Neville Rubin, then president of NUSAS.

The passing of the Separate Universities Bill deepened his misgivings about apartheid and his ongoing education in South Africa. At UCT, half-way through his studies, with the support of prominent academics, he was offered a scholarship to read Economics at the University of Oslo in Norway. Before he took leave of his family and country, he met with several prominent South African writers and intellectuals, among them the Afrikaans writer and poet Jan Rabie, the eminent historian Adrian Leftwich, Ronald Seagal the publisher of Africa South, a quarterly magazine on African affairs, Chief Albert John Luthuli President of the African National Congress (ANC) and the gifted poet Dennis Brutus.

What should have been a straight-forward journey from South Africa to Oslo, Norway, turned into a nightmare for the author when he was interrogated by the South African Police lead by Major Heiberg. It was Dennis Brutus who assisted him to return to Cape

Town, while Neville Rubin and Adrian Left which met him at the airport, when he returned from Port Elizabeth. Financial support came from the noted human rights activist and lawyer, Allard Lowenstein, past president of the American National Students Association (USNSA) who provided the money for an air ticket to Norway. Over the years, Lowenstein had built up a long relationship with Namibia, both as a writer and activist.

Hans Beukes had his South African passport withdrawn and this unprecedented development necessitated him to approach the ANC in assisting him to leave South Africa for Palapye, a siding and connecting point for Serowe in Bechuanaland on the Cape to Rhodesia railway. To his deep disappointment, the ANC did not offer much in terms of financial or political support. It fell upon Allard (Al) Lowenstein and his friends to drive the author across the Limpopo River to Palapye where they all slept and the following day onto Serowe, the capital of the Bamangwato chiefdom.

Into exile

In Serowe, Hans was lodged with Seretse Khama, his wife Ruth Khama, their three small children and a female house assistant. He spent several weeks there, and upon the advice of his trusted friend, Al Lowenstein, who had in the meantime returned to London, sent a telegram to the United Nation’s South West Africa Committee. This was the beginning of greater things to come and a long engagement, together with other friends notably, Fanuel Jariretundu Kozonguizi of the South West African National Union (SWANU) and Mburumba Kerina, with the United Nations (UN).

He briefly returned to Palapye where he knocked on the door of the local police station and was advised to travel to Southern Rhodesia, with the knowledge and agreement of the British Foreign Office, rather than risk proceeding onward without legal documents. It was in Palapye that he obtained a copy of Dale Carnegie’s book How to Stop Worrying and Start Living. The book inspired him deeply. He writes: “Carnegie presented the argument thus: If one could remove the cause of one’s worries, why not do so and save oneself the anxiety? If there was nothing one could do to remove the cause, what was the point of worrying?” (p. 77).

Boarding a goods train at Palapye, the author left for Salisbury. There he was met by local Quakers: Margaret and Stanley Moore who helped him obtain a travel visa from the local US Council to enable him to travel to Europe and America by plane. The ticket was paid for by Allard Lowenstein. Before leaving for London, he met with the influential and enlightened historian, Terence Ranger and his colleagues at the University of Rhodesia, who were working on a project: the rediscovery of African history. Under a grey sky, he landed in London the next morning, where he was met by Doris, the Reverend Michael Scott’s secretary, who assisted him through customs with immigration officials satisfied with: “the only identification that I could show, the American visa attached to a sheet of paper with my picture clipped onto it” (p. 83).

In London he again met with Kozonguizi whom he had first met when he was a student at Fort Hare University in South Africa and the author was attending high school in
Rehoboth. Kozonguizi was one of the early petitioners to the United Nations (UN). In August 1954, when he was a student at Fort Hare, he addressed a petition to the UN complaining of the oppression of the African inhabitants of South West Africa by the Union government and protested against the alleged intention of the South African Government to annex or incorporate the territory. In October 1957, Kozonguizi applied for a passport to attend the UN General Assembly as a petitioner. In 1959 he was one of the founding members of SWANU and in the same year, with the support of Herero Chief Hosea Kutako and the Herero Chiefs Council, he spoke at the 14th session of the UN General Assembly. Over the following two decades Kozonguizi played an important role in mobilizing international opposition to South Africa’s policies and presence in South West Africa. He also greatly influenced the political thinking of the author.

London was home to the Reverend Michael Scott, who petitioned the UN on behalf of many parties and interests in South West Africa. The author describes him as follows: “The figure before me was gaunt and reserved. [Adding that] Perhaps I had expected a sign of approbation, but none was forthcoming” (p. 87). Notwithstanding this rather bland description, the author and the Reverend Michael Scott were to enjoy a long, meaningful friendship. From London, he flew to Oslo, Norway, in September 1959, accompanied by the Reverend Scott, where they were warmly received by the Student Representative Council of the University of Oslo, local journalists and where they subsequently met with influential Norwegians, among these Hans Engen, Deputy Foreign Minister, Gunnar Jahn, the Chairman of the Norwegian Nobel Committee; Finn Moe, the Chairman of the Storting’s (Parliament) Foreign Affairs Committee, and Konrad Nordahl, the Chairman of the Norwegian Federation of Trade Unions.

**New York and the United Nations (UN)**

Once in Oslo, he was able to visit the UN in New York, which he did in September 1959, accompanied by the Reverend Michael Scott. At the time the UN and New York was the fulcrum for many Namibians that enabled them to discuss and strategize on the future of their country. With the generous assistance of Allard Lowenstein (who met him upon his arrival at the airport in New York) and others, Mburumba Kerina, who had an apartment in New York, Kozonguizi and Hans Beukes, regularly met, became close friends, lobbied influential persons in the United States (such as the venerable Eleanor Roosevelt and Senator John F. Kennedy) and, strategized on the future of their country and weaved the threads of a sophisticated form of liberation diplomacy in exile. In New York and at the UN, they built a network of influence and support that sustained international concern, engagement and interest in the fate of Namibians, also in the Commonwealth.

One of the most valuable parts of the book deals with the diplomacy and politics of exile in New York and examines not only attempts at building new political alliances between those in exile and those inside Namibia, but also the personal rivalry that came to characterize exile politics and the seemingly inevitable drift towards personalized power. Soon the rivalry between Kozonguizi and Kerina was to undermine efforts to develop a common platform against apartheid South Africa and to sustain a relationship with
internal opposition leaders in South West Africa, such as Herman Toivo ya Toivo of SWAPO.

While petitions to the United Nations were an important string in the bow of resistance, these were not widely covered in the mainstream US media, nor did the author regard them as particularly meaningful in “discussing the issues of common concern to all of us” (p. 130). One such issue was the naming of the country: “South West Africa”, which was little more than a geographic expression. Kerina is widely credited with coining the name Namibia, which he first used in a lecture delivered at the University of Jakarta in Indonesia, where he was awarded an honorary doctorate.

The other matters concerned the December 1959 uprising that took place in the Old Location in Windhoek and the forced removal of Blacks from the centre of Walvis Bay to the sand dunes of the interior where ‘Coloureds’ and other Blacks were resettled in separate ethnic townships. The use of brute force by the South African authorities and the loss of 12 lives in the Old Location uprising of residents against their removal, promptly named Katutura — which literally means ‘a place where we do not stay’ — not only galvanized internal resistance inside the country, but also elevated the campaign in the UN Trusteeship Council.

The events of December 1959 and their aftermath sharpened the rivalry between Kerina and Kozonguizi, at the time president of SWANU, with Kerina initiating a new alliance with the likes of Sam Nujoma and the South West African People’s Organization (SWAPO) which was reconstituted in April 1960 from the earlier Ovamboland People’s Congress (OPC) and the Ovamboland People’s Organisation (OPO) of 1957-58. The political reconfiguration happened at the suggestion of Kerina, and this unwittingly helped to undermine Kozonguizi and SWANU’s project inside the country and internationally. The author writes (pp. 133f.):

> It was with the knowledge that my two countrymen had become engaged in a tug of war for ‘national’ leadership, a conflict that boded ill for our common future. To me it was clear that Ovambo tribesmen entering politics would coalesce into SWAPO, while the Herero and some other groupings would attach themselves to SWANU.

**From student activist to diplomat, expanding the anti-apartheid alliance**

Hans Beukes then returned, with a heavy heart, to Norway in 1960, the year of the Sharpeville massacre in South Africa, to take up a scholarship to read for an advanced qualification in Economics at the University of Oslo. His stature as a student activist grew significantly and from Norway he also visited both Sweden and Denmark. International student conferences followed in Tunis, Algeria and Accra, Ghana. The Accra Africa Youth Conference was overshadowed by the unfolding crisis in the Congo. At the time, the author first experienced attempts by mostly white students from South Africa affiliated to NUSAS to deny him the opportunity to speak at a conference supported by the National
Union of Students of Norway and held at the Swiss Alpine resort at Klosters. The Danish chairperson did allow him to speak, but all speeches were limited to a few minutes only! The experiences in Norway and in the Nordic countries further primed the author’s political activism and consciousness, particularly when Zulu Chief Albert Luthuli journeyed to Oslo to receive the Nobel Peace Prize. He writes (p. 164):

Oslo received Luthuli as if he were a Head of State. In leopard skin headgear at formal occasions, and exuding dignity as befits a leader, he looked the part. Chief Luthuli’s presence in Oslo briefly turned the Norwegian capital into the Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM) abroad.

The joyous occasion was attended by the ANC-in-exile, headed by Oliver Tambo. Canon John Collins of St Paul’s Cathedral in London represented the British Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM). From the USA, Al Lowenstein attended.

The author’s presence in Oslo took another turn in August 1963 when he learned that his father, Hermanus Beukes, together with three companions, had been abducted by South African agents from Botswana and returned to South West Africa in order to halt their planned flight to the UN in New York. The three companions were, Paul Smit, Andreas Shipanga and Kenneth Abrahams, an acquaintance from UCT, who married a fellow student, Otillie Schimming, originally from Rehoboth. At the time, the author’s deep friendships with a fellow countryperson, Jaritundu (Fanuel) Kozonguizi of the South West African National Union (SWANU), the oldest surviving political party in the country, and once he went into exile, with Mburumba Kerina and the Anglican Priest Reverend Michael Scott, all of whom played a significant role in the history and politics of the country, apart from being early petitioners at the United Nations (UN), grew and gave meaning to his journey into exile.

The real concern was not his father’s abduction from Botswana, but for Dr. Kenny Abrahams, a general practitioner at Rehoboth, who as a student at UCT, became involved in the National Liberation Front (NLF) alongside the philosopher and linguist, Neville Alexander. The District Commissioner in Francistown, Bechuanaland, informed the author’s father that Dr. Abrahams was suspected by the South African authorities of “concerning acts of sabotage that had either been perpetrated or planned” (p. 167). The three Namibians spent three weeks in a refugee camp in Bechuanaland, and were forced to abandon their plan to travel to the UN to petition against South Africa. The unfortunate outcome of these events was that the author’s father was unjustly accused of betraying their mission to the Bechuanaland and South African authorities. He writes (p. 168):

Unaware of all of the above, in distant Oslo I received a letter from Otillie Schimming, writing from Dar es Salaam, in which she spouted gall about ‘the betrayal of his people’ that my father had perpetrated. Adding [that]: The people would never forgive ‘Enemies of the Revolution’ like him she let me know.

This event was yet another illustration of the rivalry that often characterized ego-driven exile politics. Much more pervasive forms of this behaviour were to manifest in Zambia and later in Angola, where SWAPO had a sizeable political and military presence.
Before the author and his wife, Edel, travelled to Lusaka, Zambia, where they spent some time, Hans Beukes was instrumental in setting up a Crisis Fund for victims of apartheid in South Africa. The first money transfer from the fund was made in 1964 in support of the Rivonia trial of nine leaders of the ANC. The accused were Walter Sisulu, Nelson Mandela, Govan Mbeki, Lionel Bernstein, Ahmed Kathrada, Raymond Mhlaba, Dennis Goldberg, Elias Motsoaledi and Andrew Mlangeni. Their defending counsel was Bram Fischer.

The request for support from the Crisis Fund had come from Canon John Collins of St Paul’s Cathedral in London who was the chairperson of the British Defence and Aid Fund (BDAF).

At the end of 1964, the author wrote that (p. 180):

The South West Africa campaign had thus both reinvigorated public interest in southern Africa, and established a platform from where the work of building up public opinion could be done – with Norwegians carrying the major burden: a development I found deeply gratifying.

This was despite the temporary setbacks that came about as a result of the SWA Cases (1960-66) at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) that gave South Africa breathing space in the country until 1971 when the same ICJ finally ruled that South Africa’s presence was illegal in terms of International Law.

While in Oslo, Hans Beukes was one of the founding members of the National Union of South West African Students (NUSWAS) at a conference in Uppsala, Sweden. The founding conference was opened by Olof Palme, then Sweden’s Minister of Education. Present, too, was Zedekia Ngavirue, Kozonguizi’s successor as leader of SWANU with other members, as well as from SWAPO, Sam Nujoma, Andreas Shipanga and Solomon Mifima. NUSWAS, however, was short-lived and soon became a victim of the logic of the Cold War and of SWAPO’s desire not to allow it to become more prominent in the wider liberation movement. The demise of NUSWAS was a precursor to intensified rivalry between SWANU and SWAPO for international recognition and support from a wide range of state- and non-state actors.

**African visits**

After completing his university education at the University of Oslo, the author visited several African countries with the view to deepening his understanding of the escalating conflict over Namibia. He writes, with a healthy dose of scepticism, that he “never shared the illusions that a guerrilla war could possibly succeed against South Africa’s Defence Force whose foundations had been laid by the modern world’s premier guerrilla warriors” (p. 195). This was but one difference of opinion that he had with the exile leadership of SWAPO. Other differences were over the near-absence of internal democracy in the party, as exemplified by calls for a long-overdue congress and reported abuses of human rights.

Early in 1970, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Oslo granted him a stipend to travel through East Africa, with stopovers in Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, and then into Southern
Africa to visit Zambia and Botswana. For the purpose of these visits, he was granted Norwegian citizenship.

In Dar es Salaam, where SWAPO in exile had established its headquarters, he met with Andreas Shipanga and Solomon Mifima who introduced him to Peter Nanyemba, then the most senior military commander of SWAPO. By then, SWAPO had been accorded the status of the ‘sole and authentic representative of the people of Namibia’, first by the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), then by the UN General Assembly.

The overlay of the Cold War was much in evidence. Politics at the time, however, was more than an East/West divide there was also considerable competition between the Soviet Union and China in the realms of diplomatic and military support to the different liberation movements. Both the Soviet Union and China accepted SWAPO cadres for military training. The foreign policy of SWAPO was one of ‘non-alignment’ — a tenet that persists to this day — without declaring allegiance to either.

In Lusaka, the penultimate stop on his travels, he met with Emil Appolus and Moses Garoeb, (Secretary-General of SWAPO) the only Namibians from the southern part of the country among SWAPO’s senior membership. Emil had been a journalist before leaving the country in 1960 and later continued to be active in politics and journalism after his return from exile. Many liberation movements were based at the Liberation Centre in Lusaka. According to the author, Moses Garoeb “confidently expected Namibia to become independent by 1974” (p. 200).

In Lusaka, a memorable family reunion took place. Political discussions took pride of place, and the author indicated to members of his family that SWAPO was winning the battle for international recognition, mostly at the expense of SWANU. His overall impression of the SWAPO cadres that he had met, was that they were dedicated and worthy of support.

On his way back to Norway, when he stopped over in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, he was met by Ben Amathila, who was soon to take up an appointment in Stockholm as the SWAPO representative in Scandinavia, with an office very close to that country’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Ben Amathila persuaded the author to become a member of SWAPO, which he duly did. Joining SWAPO or any other political party (up till then he was not a member of any political party) was not an easy matter. The author writes (p. 203):

> In time I would learn that decision-making power was the monopoly of a triumvirate comprising Sam Nujoma, Peter Mueshihange and Peter Nanyemba — all Ovambos — with the Caprivian Mishake Muyongo as Sam’s nominal deputy president.

During 1971-2, Namibian politics entered a new phase of resistance with the protracted strike by Namibian workers and the increasing engagement of youth in the struggle, following the founding of the SWAPO Youth League (SYL) in Tanga, Tanzania, in December 1969-January 1970.\(^3\) The military campaign, too, gathered momentum with

SWAPO incursions into the Caprivi Strip. Collectively these events were to ignite the author’s desire and resolve to become much more actively involved in the struggle for the country’s independence. His wife, Edel, applied for a vacancy on a Norwegian Development Agency (NORAD)-funded programme to supply Zambian schools with qualified teachers, while he would work freelance for Norwegian media.

At Easter in 1975 the author made a trip to London to be updated on the situation in Zambia. Peter Katjavivi, SWAPO’s representative to the United Kingdom, Theo-Ben Gurirab and Hage Geingob, respectively SWAPO’s representatives in New York and at the United Nations, as well as Ben Amathila from Stockholm were all there, as was the SWAPO representative from Algiers.

The meeting of the six lasted all but two full days. The author claims that the meeting agreed with his idea that the long-overdue SWAPO Party Congress, one of the key reasons for the ‘Shipanga rebellion’, had to take place in Lusaka, Zambia, which was very close to the political epicentre, following the unravelling of the Portuguese empire in Angola and Mozambique. He was urged to draft a letter, which he duly did, to SWAPO headquarters then located in Lusaka, setting out the proposal for such a congress (p. 207). No representatives from the SWAPO Youth League (SYL) were invited to attend the meeting.

Apparently the letter reached Andreas Shipanga in Lusaka, against the backdrop of political developments inside Namibia. First, there was the ill-fated National Convention (NC) founded in November 1970 in Rehoboth, in which the author’s father played a leading role, in an attempt to bring together a wider trans-party and trans-ethnic alliance as an internal opposition to South Africa. At its inception, the National Convention (NC), had representatives from: the National Unity Democratic Organisation (NUDO), led by Herero Chief, Clemens Kapuuo; SWANU, led by Gerson Veii; SWAPO represented by Johnny Ya Otto; the Damara Tribal Council, represented by Max Haraseb, and the Volksparty, led by his father. There were also some Nama participants, notably Kaptein Samuel Witbooi of Gibeon.

The National Convention (NC) mirrored the political divisions inside the country. For example, the two Herero formations led by Kapuuo and Veii respectively, refused to sit under the same roof. On the advice of the author’s father, the next gathering of the
Convention, took place in Gibeon, with a view to securing the fullest participation of the Nama population.

Kapuuo soon became the leading personality in the Convention, and late in 1974 he travelled to London and New York, accompanied by Johannes Karuaihe, his counsellor. In London they were to consult with Peter Katjavivi, SWAPO’s representative, about joining forces. The author writes: “Katjavivi poured cold water on their expectations: the UN, he informed them, had designated SWAPO as ‘the sole and authentic representatives of the Namibian people’” (p. 208).

Kapuuo, however, was not deterred. He then proceeded to New York, where he was well received at the UN. From New York, he flew to Kingston in Jamaica, where the Commonwealth of Nations had its annual meeting. From the author’s account it is clear that the SWAPO leadership in exile did not look kindly upon Kapuuo and the National Convention’s claim that they represented the majority of people inside the country (p. 209).

The second political event, was the South African-sponsored and initiated Turnhalle Conference that ran from September 1975 to 1977. Clemens Kapuuo joined the Conference, through which he hoped to gain national stature – again in opposition to SWAPO. His quest was cut short by an assassin’s bullets on 23 March 1978. The author writes, speculatively: “In the belief that SWAPO was responsible for his death, Herero tribesmen set upon and killed a number of Ovambo workers” (p. 211).

The crisis within SWAPO – Lusaka and beyond

To its credit, the book covers in 98 pages the events that gave rise to the crisis within SWAPO and its aftermath in late 1975 to the mid-1980s, shortly before the independence of Namibia. This almost amounts to a book in its own right and together with a few other published sources gives a fairly comprehensive, if contested, account of these dramatic and tumultuous events.4

After the arrival of the family in Lusaka in August 1975 — by then they had two sons — the author met with Andreas Shipanga and Solomon Mifima, the secretary of labour for

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4 In his autobiography Where Others Wavered, published in 2001, Sam Nujoma asserts that Shipanga had “been bribed by pro-South African financiers in West Germany. When the struggle demanded bloodshed and sacrifices, Shipanga turned traitor and went back to Namibia to join other South African surrogates in the service of the Boers” (p. 242). The book compiled and issued by the Department of Information and Publicity of SWAPO of Namibia, titled To Be Born A Nation-The Liberation Struggle for Namibia (London: Zed Press, 1981), offers a sanitized version of Shipanga and 10 other SWAPO members’ demands for a national conference to be held. To all intent and purposes, the events of the mid-1970s do not feature at all in this publication. Dr. Ngarikutuke Tjiriange, in his recently-published memoir, titled To Hell and Back my Experience under difficult Colonial Rule, too, sees the genesis of the ‘Andreas Shipanga rebellion’ in the apartheid South African regime’s efforts to weaken and destroy SWAPO outside and inside Namibia by infiltrating its spies and trouble makers into our liberation movement to gain information which could be used against our party. Tjiriange writes: “Shipanga and some of these people were also going to embassies of different countries spreading all sorts of anti-SWAPO propaganda” (p. 73)
SWAPO. He also met with Jack Simons and his wife Ray Alexander, of the South African Communist Party, who had been forced into exile, from South Africa. Edel, his wife, worked for NORAD as an education/development expert. From its inception, the author was critical of the UN Institute for Namibia (UNIN) which was being formed at the time. He expresses his reservations as follows: “It was a microcosm of the UN’s hierarchy, complete with assistants to assistants and functionaries in subordinate positions, all at UN scales of remuneration” (p. 213). UNIN provided a space for various members of the SWAPO exile leadership to struggle for pre-eminence and mastery. While some were persons of moderate desires and enjoyments, and of substantial worth, others had less gentle dispositions and less moderate tastes.

In Lusaka, the author and his wife attended the commemoration of the Battle at Ongulumashe (1966) on 26 August 1975. The battle is still commemorated as the start of the protracted liberation war in the country. They also visited ‘The Old Farm’, located in the bush some 40 kilometres outside Lusaka. Once an agricultural property, the farm had been acquired to house a growing stream of refugees from Namibia. At ‘The Old Farm’, the author and his family, met with Peter Mueshiange and Peter Nanyemba, two senior and influential military leaders of the People’s Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN), and with Sam Nujoma, diplomats from Sweden, in the company of the Reverend Salatiel Ailonga and Anita, his missionary wife.

On that occasion, two spokespersons of the Swapo Youth League (SYL) spoke out against the ‘old guard’ leadership of SWAPO. The two were Taaiti Ithindi, a woman, and Keshii Pelao Nathanael, President of the SYL. The latter, Keshii Pelao Nathanael, later published his own account of events, in a book titled: A Journey to Exile: The Story of a Namibian Freedom Fighter, published in 2012 and re-published in 2017. The author writes that “Nujoma and his lieutenants” responded with “discomfort” to being thus addressed by a new generation of young Namibians, adding that this reminded him of “the colonial administration in Windhoek, whose violent response had driven the youngsters into exile” (p. 216).

The very next day, Zambian President Kenneth Kaunda met with South African Prime Minister, John Vorster, who pioneered his policy of ‘détente’, essentially to secure a cordon sanitaire, with the support of Kaunda, around minority-ruled Rhodesia that earlier unilaterally declared its independence from the United Kingdom. On the analysis of the author, the outcome of this bilateral summit “would prove fateful for the hopes of young Namibian revolutionaries” (p. 217). Kaunda was coerced into giving orders for SWAPO military personnel in Zambia to be disarmed and confined to their bases. The news that SWAPO guerrillas had been disarmed in Zambia caused uproar among the solidarity movement abroad.

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5 Nathanael writes about the “SWAPO’s power struggle” and “corruption in Zambia” and includes a document, titled: Appeal for the release of over 1000 Namibians in detention in Zambia and Tanzania (27.04.1977); Confirmed list of names of detainees murdered by SWAPO; and a detailed list of the names of SWAPO War Criminals who have tortured and killed innocent Namibians on behalf of the SWAPO leadership in Angola, see: pp. 166-170.
According to the author, the Secretary General of SWAPO, Moses Garoeb, informed him that the Zambian Ministry of Defence was indeed responsible for the pressure on SWAPO; [adding that] Nujoma’s denial at the UN, was nothing more than ‘a diplomatic move’, and that a right-wing *coup-d’état*, would spell the end of Zambian support for liberation movements in the region. At the same time misgivings within the SWAPO leadership were growing about Andreas Shipanga, who had met the German Foreign Minister, Hans-Dietrich Genscher, while the latter was on a visit to Lusaka. The meeting took place against the wishes of the SWAPO leadership. Alienation between him and the SWAPO leadership deepened, when he made an unscheduled trip abroad without informing the SWAPO leadership (pp. 218f.). Shipanga was then suspected of being an ‘unreliable figure’ and the leadership decided to isolate him.

The author writes about a letter that he wrote to Lucas Pohamba, then in charge of the finances of SWAPO, and his general unease about the lack of information amongst the rank-and-file about what was going on. He and his wife stuck up a friendship with Peter Nanyemba, whom they both liked, and after polishing off a bottle of Black and White scotch, the latter confided “to us that he and others had been inspired by my flight from South Africa to fight our case abroad”. The author writes somewhat immodestly, “[that] “[t]his was the finest expression of our common purpose that I have ever heard from my compatriots” (p. 221). The author further writes (ibid.):

> During our conversation Nanyemba admitted to sins of omission by the party’s top leadership. He revealed that he was responsible for 3 000 guerrilla soldiers of which half were well trained, and that 500 newly trained ones are in Tanzania on their way to be trained by Chinese instructors.

After the informative meeting with Peter Nanyemba, he met with Cedric Thornberry, an international lawyer from Belfast in Ireland, who subsequently became Chief Aide to Martti Ahtisaari, the UN’s Special Representative, in the UN-supervised transition to independence of Namibia. Thornberry seemingly had a special interest in the military capabilities of SWAPO. The author writes that he felt a considerable degree of discomfort about Thornberry’s interest in the internal affairs of SWAPO. After that, his relationship with Peter Nanyemba cooled, perhaps on account of the author’s meeting with Thornberry, he surmises.

The author writes about one of the lesser known aspects of the relations between SWAPO and SWANU. Zedekia Ngavirue, who was then the leader of SWANU, visited him and his family in their home in Lusaka. He writes (p. 224):

> The reason for Zed’s unexpected visit turned out to be extraordinary. It would make us privy to what could have been the last attempt to bridge the gap between SWANU and SWAPO. In Botswana, Zed informed us, there were a hundred Herero youths, SWANU members, in detention for having entered that country illegally. As their leader, he had been summoned to assist them. On his return from Francistown, Zed now revealed to us that his charges had left

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Namibia with the sole purpose of joining the guerrilla army under SWAPO’s
command. Because of SWAPO and SWANU’s rivalry, he was unsure what
SWAPO’s response would be. In Nujoma’s absence, Moses Garoeb had invited
him to a formal meeting.

For two days Ngavirue tried unsuccessfully to make contact with the SWAPO leadership
in Lusaka. He then had to return empty handed to Papua New Guinea where he lectured
history.

On account of the increase in the number of refugees from Namibia and for security
reasons, SWAPO established a new refugee camp some 500 kilometres west of Lusaka.
Transported by Andreas Shipanga and accompanied by the Reverend Salatiel Ailonga,
the author visited the new camp. There he met with Dr. Libertine Appolus, a trained
medical doctor, married to Ben Amathila, as well as with Linsekela Kalenga. He writes
about the lack of food in the camp, noting that (p. 228):

Food was evidently a major problem. Tea was served at 6 am. From 12.30 to
13.00 they had maize porridge with small dried fish with beans – when
available. The same dish was served at 18.00. The food was cooked in big
ironware pots in a communal ‘kitchen’ – merely a corralled space.

After the author’s return from the refugee camp to Lusaka, Andreas Shipanga and
Solomon Mifima informed him of the difficulties they were experiencing at the Liberation
Centre. Both had returned from visits to find their offices emptied of typewriters and
telephones. Having received reports that some of the guerrilla bases lacked basic
supplies, they were worried about the situation of the PLAN fighters. At one of the
bases, Nujoma and his associates were said to have been physically threatened by the
fighters. The Zambian Army intervened to prevent things from going very wrong, and
from their nearby base, they kept a watch on what was happening in the Namibian base
(p. 237). At the time, there were also reports of raids by the Zambian Police on Peter
Mueshihange and Nanyemba’s home, where “a lot of weapons” were found. Nanyemba
was rumoured to be supplying SWAPO weapons to UNITA (pp. 237f.).

By then, relations between SWAPO leaders had become inflamed and the politics of fear
started to take effect. Quoting directly from his wife’s notes, the author writes (pp.
240f.):

Mueshinange has been sent to Angola to fetch Peter Nanyemba and Sam
Nujoma. The Zambians had taken Moses Garoeb to the eastern front for a
confrontation with fifteen military personnel – who had signed a letter. The
Zambians had taken along a medical doctor. The men were in bad shape for
lack of food. A safe with money for Nanyemba’s use had been dug up. It was
always guarded on shift by eight men. The weapons were buried on 19
December – and unarmed men sent out to meet the enemy. The decision had
been taken by Hidipo, Sam, Peter Nanyemba, Mueshinange and Moses.
Andreas has recently had a talk with MacBride about all of this. He had been
very bitter, especially because some of the men at the Namibia Institute had
been among the compromised.

On a visit to Swaziland and Mozambique, the author learned from a South African
economist, Max Nomvete, that Andreas Shipanga and two others had been arrested on
a charge of espionage (p. 242). Upon his return to Lusaka, he learned from his wife,
Edel, of the arrest and imprisonment of more SWAPO members (eventually 11 SWAPO members were arrested by the Zambian authorities and were subsequently imprisoned in Dodoma, Tanzania). He also learned how a Finnish diplomat, Kari Karanko, (who was to become that country's first ambassador to Namibia after independence) and his Swedish colleague Anders Bjuner, had “dumped” Jimmy Ampala in the care of his wife, the night before. He writes (p. 245):

> To strive for UN top jobs for their diplomats, I had learnt in Oslo, was the way in which Finland sought to gain international visibility, and to sidestep the constraints that its peace treaty of 1939 with the Soviet Union had put on its foreign policy. The only inference we could draw was that both the Finns and the Swedes had made investments in Nujoma that they were not prepared to forfeit by lending succor to any of his opponents. The prize was SWAPO's support for the appointment of the Finnish diplomat Martti Ahtisaari to the UN Council for Namibia.

The author does not provide any credible evidence for coming to this controversial conclusion. Drawing on the diary of his wife, the reader learns that (p. 245):

> On the morning of 21 April Pastor Salatiel Ailonga and Anita (wife), arrived with shattering news; in the dark of night, the Zambian police had arrested Martin Taneni, Rubin (Sheeli) Shangula, Andreas Shipanga and Solomon Mifima. Nobody knew where Jimmy Ampala was. Keshii Pelao Nathaniel and Ndeshimona Uyumba -- who had departed for a course on trade unionism in the Netherlands -- were also being searched for.

The author asserts that the Reverend Salatiel Ailonga and Anita, ‘mentioned those responsible for the arrests as Moses Garoeb, Theo-Ben Gurirab, Mishake Muyongo, George Kalomo, Libertine Appolus Amathila, Hidipo Hamutenya and Peter Sheehama’ (pp. 245f.). Unfortunately, he does not make an attempt to independently verify Ailonga’s claim.

On 29 April 1976, the author penned a lengthy letter to Dr. Kenneth Kaunda, President of Zambia, urging him to address himself to the contents of the letter. In the letter, he raised many issues, notably that of the arrest of Andreas Shipanga and Solomon Mifima, 42 SWAPO guerrillas, and the plight of many young Namibians who received no support and guidance from the leadership abroad, instead they were being branded as ‘rebels’. Most of the content of the letter appears in the book (pp. 247-251), with the exception of the final page which has been lost.

Amidst all the drama, the author’s mother visited the family in Lusaka. He was also visited by the Finnish diplomat Kari Karanko, who informed him about his confrontation with Hidipo Hamutenya, whom he had warned “that Nordic aid could dry up if it became known to what extent corruption had become rife in SWAPO”. Karanko also told him of the dismissal of Zambian Foreign Minister, Rupia Banda by President Kaunda. Moses Garoeb, in response, had lodged a complaint with the Zambians about Finnish interference in an internal SWAPO conflict (pp. 253f.).

Grim news reached the author after the Zambian police raided the house of Pastor Salatiel Ailonga and his wife, Anita, ostensibly the police were searching for weapons and ammunition. While the conflict within SWAPO raged on, several diplomatic initiatives were
launched, mostly aimed at consolidating Nujoma’s position as leader — with more support coming from the Soviets, the Cubans and the Nigerians. These initiatives and Kaunda’s failure to act decisively pushed SWAPO much closer to the sphere of influence of the Soviet Union, claiming, “it landed SWAPO firmly under the control of the Soviet Union” (p. 256).

In May 1976, the Zambian police carried out a midnight raid on their home in Lusaka, and following advice from several friends, the author decided after much hesitation, to leave Zambia for London and eventually for Oslo. This painful departure — his second from Africa — was the prelude to the author’s relationship with SWAPO becoming even more frosty. He writes (p. 262):

Humiliation engulfed me as I boarded the plane for London that evening: humiliation at having to flee from Africa for a second time — this time not from the apartheid regime, but from a ‘liberation movement’ that had become a threat to the very life and liberty of its members.

From the London office of SWAPO, the author was able to phone his wife, Edel. She seemed to sound optimistic about the prospect of coming to a fair and just resolution of the crisis. Her letter, to her husband, informed him of the appointment of the Ya Otto Commission. Ya Otto had been recently released from Robben Island where he had been held as a political prisoner. The Commission comprised of Libertine Appolus, Peter Sheehama, Nahas Angula and Johnny Ya Otto as chairperson. One of the conclusions of the Commission was that the movement “had lost its goal orientation” (p. 265; author’s italics).

When the Zambian High Court finally came to a decision on Shipanga’s Habeas Corpus appeal, it found that there was no evidence to justify his incarceration. It ordered that Shipanga and his eight compatriots be set free. President Julius Nyerere, then sent a military transport aircraft to fly the group to Tanzania, where they were subsequently imprisoned in Dodoma.8

The author subsequently made an appeal to the Norwegian Government, through that country’s foreign minister, to secure the release of those in prison in Dar es Salaam and elsewhere in the country. Further diplomatic efforts followed through the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), print journalists such as Fred Bridgland and the Irishman, Sean MacBride who was appointed UN Commissioner for Namibia in 1973.

Sean MacBride’s association with SWAPO began in 1966, with the imprisonment of Andimba Toivo ya Toivo by the South African authorities. Travelling from Cairo, where he was based at the time, Andreas Shipanga had sought MacBride’s assistance, as co-founder of Amnesty International, to secure lawyers for the defence of his comrade and co-founder of SWAPO. Thanks to MacBride, George Bizos, one of South Africa’s most eminent defence lawyers, was retained for Toivo’s defence.

8 Nathanael, Journey to Exile: 164-170.
Within a year of his appointment as UN Commissioner for Namibia, MacBride issued a decree that nationalised Namibia’s natural resources. The author met MacBride the first time in 1974, at the SWAPO Office in London. The author writes (p. 288):

It turned out that the man who would be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize later that year had a special message for SWAPO. It was to intensify its guerrilla activity so as to underline the seriousness of the situation posed by the refusal of South Africa to abide by UN resolutions about Namibia – before the resumption of the annual debates at the UN.

According to the author, MacBride’s advice must have been music “to the ears of Nujoma and his coterie” (p. 288). The author is harsh in his judgement of the UN Commissioner for Namibia. He writes: “MacBride sought to lend credence to SWAPO’s illusionary diplomatic power and military capabilities” (p. 291).

In the opinion of the author, [in southern Africa], in general, “solidarity movements” operated through a symbiotic relationship with “liberation movements” (p. 295). The only exception was that of the Swiss Anti-Apartheid Movement, who wrote a letter in December 1976 to Sam Nujoma and the SWAPO Central Committee, to protest the treatment of SWAPO members and in particular, of Andreas Shipanga. SWAPO responded in a strongly-worded letter to the Swiss Anti-Apartheid Movement. The Party took exception to both the content and tone of the letter. The missive continued (p. 297):

For your group, the plot which Shipanga and his co-conspirators organised within the movement is probably a matter of academic concern. Your academic and legalistic concern in the matter is made clear by your other demand for the opening of a new inquiry to which you should be invited in order to “testify to the exercise of perfect democracy within SWAPO”. This too, is a reprehensive demand, asking us to divert our attention from the urgent and burning problems of the liberation struggle of our people in order to indulge in legalistic arguments so as to prove to your group the “exercise of perfect democracy within SWAPO.

For the author, this and subsequent developments at the UN, led him to write his own requiem for the Namibian dream. He subsequently decided to travel to New York to confront Theo-Ben Gurirab with the consequences of the coup that he had orchestrated in Lusaka, and to protest the inactivity of the UN diplomats who were rewarded with money and status for exercising the international community’s authority in regard to the people of Namibia (p. 298).

Upon his arrival in New York, SWAPO representative Theo-Ben Gurirab flatly dismissed his concern for Gottlieb Nakaamboh, a father of four who, allegedly, had been forced to dig his own grave before being hacked to death. The author writes that Gurirab responded in a telling comment as follows: “You are lily-livered, Hans. If we had not done what we had, I would not be sitting here and our president wouldn’t be Sam Nujoma any longer” (p. 301).

The author then returned to Oslo and upon his arrival he called Otilie Abrahams in Stockholm, Sweden, where she, and her husband Dr. Kenneth Abrahams, had been granted asylum after fleeing from Namibia in 1963. On the initiative of Andreas Shipanga, and the two Abrahams’, the author became a rather reluctant participant in
the founding of a new political party — SWAPO-D (Democrats) — in Stockholm, Sweden after the detainees were released from prison in Tanzania, and landed in Stockholm. According to the author, the plan hatched by the two Abrahams’ was for SWAPO-D to join forces with the Namibia National Front (NNF) to form a so-called third force in Namibian politics on the reasoning that SWAPO would poll 40 percent in an election, the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA) another 40, which would enable the NNF to decide the composition of the new government in Namibia with its expected 20 percent of the vote.

His analysis of the tragic events in Lusaka, which has, in parts, a conspiratorial ring to it, was firmly located within the bipolar logic of the Cold War. He writes (p. 307):

> With the US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger’s manoeuvres in mind, I expressed the opinion that Shipanga’s arrest and detention had been the result of a CIA-inspired coup in the party, executed by Theo-Ben Gurirab, Hage Geingob, Hidipo Hamutnya and others. The intention had been to eliminate the ‘radicals, the hawks, the Marxists’ etc. before delivering Namibia, like Zimbabwe, to the ‘moderate Blacks’. But the Soviet Union had seen through the scheme and decided to strengthen rather than weaken Sam Nujoma. The price for the Soviet support was that more pro-Soviet cadres were to be given top jobs in the leadership. I pointed out that the days were gone when one could speak of SWAPO as an independent party or political force. At the top there are men who depend for their survival on the commitment to their persons of either the CIA or the KGB.

On account of the author’s differences with SWAPO, and his long-standing friendship with Andreas Shipanga and other critical voices in the party, he writes that he felt that there was a planned strategy by virtually all the well-established ‘solidarity movements’, including the churches, to put distance between them and himself.

Chapter 12 deals with the countdown to “regime change”, with the author portraying Namibia as a “pawn on a big power chess board” (p. 311). The Chapter also deals with UN Security Council Resolutions 385 (1976) and 435 (1978). On his analysis, the SWAPO leadership in exile, as indicated in a letter dated 10 February 1978, expressed willingness to consider, as “a demonstration of goodwill”, the release of the eleven “contra-revolutionaries and enemy agents who had committed criminal acts against the Namibian liberation struggle” Adding that “about the thousand plus in concentration camps in Zambia they made no mention” (p. 314; author’s emphasis).

The Chapter also trawls rather impressionistically and uncritically over the various military operations of the South African Defence Force (SADF) in neighbouring Angola, and credits General Magnus Malan, a graduate from the US Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth in Kansas, rather unfairly as South Africa’s chief ‘strategist’, without making much of the role of diplomats and the former National Intelligence Service (NIS) in the negotiations on Namibia’s independence (pp. 316-320).

This rather uneven Chapter, concludes with the author expressing his dismay and general unhappiness with awarding the Nobel Peace Prize in October 2008, to Finnish diplomat (later President) Martii-Ahtisaari, for his efforts to secure the peaceful transition to independence for Namibia. He expresses similar misgivings about the UN
Commissioner for Namibia, Sean MacBride, when he was earlier awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. He writes (p. 322):

> What still bleeds is the fact that the UN Commissioners MacBride and Ahtisaari had knowingly failed to do anything to protect the lives of Namibians for whom they had legal responsibility: young men and women who had left the comfort of their homes to fight the apartheid regime on the world stage — where it enjoyed a monopoly of opinion — in Allard Lowenstein’s words.

The final chapter deals with the author’s brief homecoming, the imprisonment of a large number of SWAPO ‘dissidents’ in the mid-1980s in southern Angola, the death of Peter Nanyemba, his discussions with fellow Namibians about key challenges facing the people and the country, and his own expectations of and concerns about independence.

The events of the mid-1980s in Southern Angola touched the writer deeply and directly as members of his own family were affected by the imprisonment and disappearance of many Namibians. In 1985, Erika Beukes, who was married to his brother Hewat, formed a ‘Parents’ Committee’ to compel SWAPO to account for the whereabouts of a large number of refugees who were said to have been imprisoned. Regrettably, the author writes that the Committee received no response from the UN agency with responsibility for Namibia. The Namibian Council of Churches (NCC), too, did not support demands from the ‘Parents Committee’ to hold SWAPO leaders accountable for these events.9

The author writes that he was not unmoved on hearing of Peter Nanyemba’s death in southern Angola. Nanyemba was one leg of the triumvirate of SWAPO’s core; the other ‘leg’ — alongside Sam Nujoma — being Peter Mueshihange. Nanyemba ran the guerrilla operation for 10 years — from 1966 to 1976. In Lusaka, the rumour was that “in Moscow Nanyemba was regarded as Savimbi’s man” — consequently the author was not surprised to hear that he had met his death under “mysterious circumstances” (p. 326).

He writes critically on “the SWAPO elite – lords of the land in waiting” and briefly recounts his meetings with Moses Gareob, whom he describes as having “been Sam Nujoma’s brain for some twenty years”, in addition, he met with Hidipo Hamutenya and Peter Katjavivi, the latter, in “a postcard home” in Windhoek (pp. 331f.).

The visit to the country of his birth, which allowed him to register as a citizen, impressed upon the author that perhaps, he had become ‘irrelevant to the struggle’ as the new elites fashioned independent Namibia in their image and the interests of their backers. The book ends, with a number of appendices that contain the texts of various secret, confidential and open documents, pertaining to the ‘Beukes case’. For researchers these documents provide valuable insights into the politics at the time.

**Conclusion**

Having trawled through a rich, diverse, uneven memoir of an exiled Namibian activist, what are the lasting impressions that the book made on this reviewer? *Long Road to* 

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Liberation offers a sobering and critical account of the limits of liberation politics, of the legacies of a protracted struggle to bring Namibia to independence and of the imprint the struggle left on the political terrain of the independent state. But, it remains the perspective of an individual activist, who on account of his personal experiences and long absence from the country of his birth, at times, paints a fairly superficial picture of many internal events in the country. For example, the role of students, lawyers and journalists, as critical and oppositional voices inside the country is hardly ever mentioned.

The markers of the liberation struggle include but are not limited to, seeing politics largely in symbolic terms, within which the liberation movement enjoys a primary, and for some, near exclusive, position in the pantheon of politics. This was greatly facilitated by SWAPO’s recognition, first by the OAU, then by the UN General Assembly, as ‘the sole and authentic representative of the Namibian people’. The ‘politics of representation’ in turn, fed that of entitlement. Since liberation politics were based on deference to personalities and leaders, all played out on a template of power and patronage, this bred a culture of blind loyalty, as opposed to principled loyalty. It also produced a system that is centrally based on the circulation of elites. Since its founding in 1970, the SWAPO Youth League (SYL) was never allowed entry into the inner-sanctum of the Party. The governing party has never fully come to terms with generational tensions and its younger members’ differing vision for and voices of the future. After the successful national strike of 1971/2, one of the defining events in the contemporary political history of the country, organized labour found its influence increasingly limited, as SWAPO sought to keep control of the struggle for independence. Opposition political parties found it very hard to counter the liberation narrative of SWAPO, and in many cases, failed to construct any meaningful alternative of their own to it. The distinction between those who went into exile and those who opposed South Africa and apartheid inside the country, is a further fault line that has yet to be transcended in the politics of nation-and state-building.

At a deeper level, the book, while recognizing the human agency of those who went into exile and those who fought apartheid and South Africa at home, is a narrative that points to the proclivity of politicians and of politics to succumb to class formation and predatory elite behaviour. In a particular sense, the politics of liberation, notwithstanding its normative and moral concerns, ultimately morphed into politics suspended above the grassroots, the poor, community activism, youth and hope as the post-independent hegemonic block constructed and consolidated their party-state with its Neo-Liberal economic base. Politics then, is largely about illusion and myth-making. Solidarity, too, comes in different forms, serving different purposes and interests.

The book also raises important moral questions. Chief among these is what moral responsibility could mean in the context of human rights abuses, imprisonment and death of SWAPO Party members? This question remains unanswered. Perhaps, it is useful to consider moral responsibility in three different ways. First, moral responsibility as prospective responsibility, whereby those in leadership positions have a moral duty to
care for or attend to the basic needs of those under their tutelage. Second, moral responsibility as retrospective responsibility, which refers to a situation when the actions of a person are judged to be morally wrong, and that person then deserves to be blamed, held accountable or punished for their actions, and thirdly, moral responsibility expressed in terms of degrees of responsibility, both with regard to the sort of prospective responsibilities a person should bear and a person’s liability to blame or penalties.

While one would be able to justify the liberation war on general principles, it is significantly more difficult, but important for the sake of humanity, to deal with human rights abuses at the individual level. For morally, each person carries a piece of that greater humanity in him or her.

As a primer on the more recent attempts to think and construct Namibia and to celebrate the contributions of many Namibians, it is a valuable and welcome addition to a crop of publications on the topic. Like most memoirs, there are also weaknesses. Some of the individual portraits of those who crossed the path of the author are drawn impressionistically. While valuable, the diplomacy of liberation is by-and-large narrowly considered within the corset of the Cold War and its bipolar structure, often at the expense of nuances that can explain the actions and interests of various actors, such as the Frontline States (FLS), and their relations with SWAPO and other liberation movements, more generally, the differences of opinion between the Cubans and the Soviets, and the different levels of engagement on the part of the Western Contact Group (WCG). Towards the end of the book, the author almost denies the agency of SWAPO in the entire process of bringing Namibia to an internationally recognized independence. SWAPO Party President, Sam Nujoma becomes little more than a pawn and caricature in the hands of the superpowers, while his capacity to provide leadership and focus to a protracted struggle at different registers – the diplomatic, the political and the military – is largely ignored. In fact, the author credits the late Moses Garoeb with doing his thinking for all but 20 years. Post-independent politics under Nujoma’s watch as the country’s founding president, however, tells a rather different story. Nujoma is a consummate politician and tactician in the mould of Machiavelli who managed rather well in providing a focus to the politics of accommodation and who managed despite internal fractures in SWAPO to keep the party together.

While we know relatively more about SWAPO in Angola, Tanzania and Zambia, and for compelling reasons, we know much less about the movement’s footprint in Kenya, Nigeria, North Africa and India, for example. This book does little to enlighten the reader on SWAPO’s diplomacy and other activities beyond the political geography of the former

Frontline States (FLS). The diplomacy of the latter, the FLS, too, hardly features except in the case of Angola, and then during the so-called ‘Shipanga Rebellion’ only and Zambia following a brief rapprochement with South Africa in the mid-1970s.\(^{11}\) Also, there is precious little on the relations between SWAPO, ZANU and the ANC in Lusaka.

*Long Road to Liberation. An Exiled Namibian Activist’s Perspective* should ideally be read together with a number of other books that cover part of the same terrain, so as to enable the reader and the scholar a more nuanced understanding, amidst contested narratives, of the terrain that the book covers. While activism and scholarship can coexist, some would say, should coexist, the book should be judged on the quality of its scholarship, even if one were to admire, as this reviewer does, the activism, solidarity and moral stance of the writer. By-and-large, the book does deliver satisfactorily on scholarship — mostly as a counter-hegemonic narrative to some other patriotic accounts, notably that of the founding president, Sam Nujoma — while the personal journey and micro-history of the author inspires.

**Bibliography**


\(^{11}\) The various Communiqués issued by the Summits of the Front Line Heads of State and Government, as well as those by the Ministers of Defence and Security, over the period 1975–1987 offer unique insights into the relations between the FLS and the various Liberation Movements. These documents are in the National Archives in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. The author had access to some documents during a research visit to that country in 1992. For example, the response of the FLS to Henry Kissinger and John Vorster’s meeting in Zurich in September 1976, their response to the Anglo-American proposals on Rhodesia, especially the question of dismantling the Rhodesian army late in August 1977, and their analysis of and response to the liberation struggles relating to Zimbabwe and Namibia, at an FLS meeting held on 3 March 1979 in Luanda, Angola. While liberation movements and their leaders, including Nujoma, were present at many such Summits, there were a number, where no leader of a liberation movement was invited. In mid-1980, at the 2 June meeting of the FLS in Lusaka, Zambia — attended by Nujoma and a representative from Nigeria — it was decided to shift the focus from Zimbabwe to Namibia. In February 1981, again in Lusaka with Nujoma in attendance, the FLS reaffirmed their faith in the Western Contact Group, despite the failure of the July 1980 Geneva Talks. At an FLS Summit meeting held on 22 January 1982, again in Lusaka, in the presence of Nujoma, it was resolved to work out a detailed strategic response to the Namibian independence proposals put forward by the Western Contact Group. At an FLS meeting held on 21 February 1983 in Harare, Zimbabwe, which Nujoma attended, it was resolved to reject the American proposal to link the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola with the independence of Namibia and as late as 25 March 1988 at a meeting in Lusaka, Zambia, condemned linkage and praised the Cuban internationalist forces for aiding the people of Angola and Namibia in their struggle against South African invasion.


Shipanga, Andreas, *The Andreas Shipanga Story (as told to Sue Armstrong)*, Gibraltar, Ashanti, 1989.

