

**North Korean monuments in southern Africa**  
Legitimizing party rule through the National Heroes' Acres in  
Zimbabwe and Namibia

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# Contents

Acknowledgments	3
Abbreviations	3
List of figures	3
Map of southern Africa	5
The heroes of history	6
<i>Forgotten history</i>	8
<i>Liberating history</i>	13
CHAPTER I:	
The National Heroes' Acre in a broader context	18
<i>Namibia</i>	19
<i>Zimbabwe</i>	22
<i>Pyongyang</i>	23
CHAPTER II:	
Unravelling North Korea's role in southern Africa	27
<i>The historical context</i>	27
<i>Liberation movements</i>	31
<i>Hard foreign currency</i>	38
CHAPTER III:	
Public history in a political culture of violence	44
<i>Back to the beginning</i>	44
<i>Shared characteristics</i>	47
<i>The DPRK example</i>	52
Between liberators and oppressors	54
Bibliography	56
Appendix: the National Heroes' Acres in photos	59

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## **Abbreviations**

ANC	African National Congress
DPRK	Democratic People's Republic of Korea
KOMID	Korea Mining and Development Trading Cooperation
MDC	Movement for Democratic Change
NAN	National Archives of Namibia
NHC	National Heritage Council of Namibia
NLM	National liberation movement
NLN	National Library of Namibia
NSS	Namibia Scientific Society
PLAN	People's Liberation Army of Namibia
POE	Panel of Experts
SIB	SWAPO Information Bulletin
SWAPO	South West Africa People's Organisation
UDI	Unilateral Declaration of Independence
UN	United Nations
UNAM	University of Namibia
UNIN	United Nations Institute for Namibia
ZANU-PF	Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front
ZAPU	Zimbabwe African People's Union

## **List of figures**

Figure 1: Map of southern Africa, courtesy of Afrizim.com

- Figure 2: Sam Nujoma meets female North Korean soldiers in Pyongyang in 1983, NAN, 13927.
- Figure 3: Namibian and North Korean officials are watching a military display in Pyongyang in 1983, NAN, 13930.
- Figure 4: Namibian and North Korean officials on a visit to Pyongyang in 1986, NAN, 13944.
- Figure 5: Sam Nujoma and Kim Jong Il in Pyongyang in 1989, NAN, 13955.
- Figure 6: Sam Nujoma meets with the leaders of the frontline states in Lusaka, Zambia, from left, Sam Nujoma, Samora Machel (Mozambique) Kenneth Kaunda (Zambia) and Robert Mugabe (Zimbabwe), NAN, 13938.

## Map of southern Africa

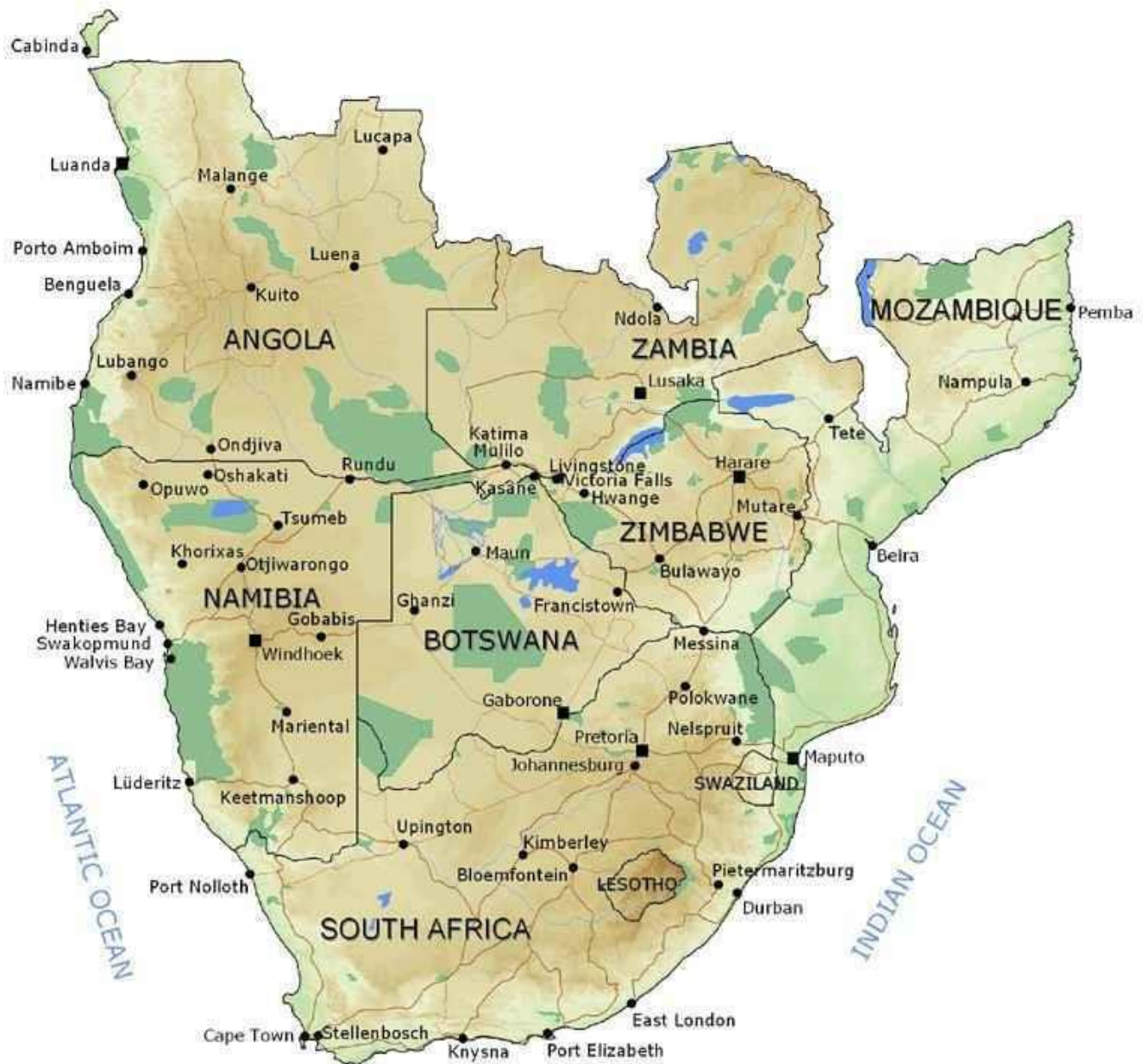


Figure 1: Map of southern Africa, courtesy of Afrizim.com.

## **The heroes of history**

Comfortably nestled in the mountains surrounding Windhoek, the capital of Namibia, and shimmering in the ever so bright sunlight of the desert-like area, a massive monument celebrates the fallen heroes and heroines of the recently freed African nation. With an ability to easily host 5000 visitors, the National Heroes' Acre consists of more than 170 black granite graves, a huge white obelisk, a bronze unknown soldier, an eternal fire and murals representing the history of the country. But it is not merely the sheer size of the monument that catches the spectator's eyes – it is the unusual North Korean social realism style in which it is built. 1500 kilometers north-eastwards, a similar National Heroes' Acre is to be found in the hills near Harare, the capital of Zimbabwe. Roughly including the same elements as its Namibian counterpart, this monument has the shape of two AK-47's when viewed from the sky and celebrates the heroes of the Zimbabwean independence. Both monuments are in fact visual copies of the Revolutionary Martyrs' Cemetery near Pyongyang, in North Korea, a memorial site that honors the North Korean soldiers who fought for independence.

These similarities are not a coincidence: scattered across the whole of southern Africa, impressive North Korean monuments celebrate the rise of young, independent nations. Freed from the shackles of colonialism or white settler rule, these newly founded African states are loyal customers of the North Korean state-owned enterprise Mansudae Art Studio, a firm that originally designed buildings for the reigning Kim dynasty but whose services can be hired all over the world. All over the southern African region, Mansudae constructs extravagant memorial sites, statues of political figures and government buildings. In an extraordinary fashion, these constructions merge typical North Korean socialist realism with African nationalism. The message of each and every one of these places is evident: the liberators of the respective African nations are presented as the unquestionable heroes of history.

The research question of this thesis is why the regimes of Namibia and Zimbabwe use the services of a North Korean firm to construct their National Heroes' Acres. The use of North Korean monuments is often misunderstood as a simple post-colonial phenomenon in which corrupt African leaders order monuments from a catalogue to promote nothing more than themselves. The involvement of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) is hence explained through a lack of African knowledge to develop such large and specific projects, the attractive cheap prices Mansudae has to offer or the visual spectacle of the socialist realist style that appeals to African leaders. This thesis, in contrast, argues that none

of them are true. Instead, the existence of such monuments can only be satisfactorily explained through the historical connections that existed between the southern African liberation movements and the DPRK which have been fostered since the 1960s. The DPRK funded southern African liberation movements during their struggle for independence and thereby strengthened their ideas on post-colonial history writing.

Based on a careful reading of the available literature and archival research in Namibia and Zimbabwe between May-June 2017, this thesis highlights a largely forgotten part of southern African history by using new evidence. This study is the first to compare the Heroes' Acres of Namibia and Zimbabwe and offers an explanation for the existence of the North Korean monuments which differs considerably from dominant popular perceptions. Besides an addition to the growing historiography of liberation movements, this argument offers an insight to the worrisome practices on how the strongly cordoned North Korean state makes money. Heavily sanctioned as a result of human rights atrocities and ongoing nuclear tests, the DPRK has little abilities to earn the hard foreign currency it so desperately needs to continue its reign. The construction of monuments in southern Africa is a way of the regime to circumvent these tight international restrictions and earn millions of dollars.

The first chapter describes the National Heroes' Acres in Namibia, Zimbabwe and Pyongyang and discusses possible explanations for their striking resemblances. The second chapter deals with the deep historical roots of the relationship between the DPRK and the national liberation movements of Namibia (former South West Africa) and Zimbabwe (former Rhodesia). Following the division between North and South Korea in 1945, the DPRK sought new international and found suitable alliances with the freedom fighters of southern Africa, which went through the process of decolonization at that time. After independence, the liberation movements transformed themselves into political parties and continue to rule today. The third chapter explores the meaning of the Heroes' Acres through an examination of the prevailing political culture. Finally it is argued that the Heroes' Acres can be understood as potent symbols of nationalist history, used to legitimize the rule of the former liberation movements.

## Forgotten history

### *Methodology and concepts*

As a qualitative historical study, this thesis is mainly based on literature research and fieldwork in Namibia and Zimbabwe. The unit of analysis in this study are the liberation movements who are aligned to the boundaries of their respective nation states. The South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) in South West Africa (modern Namibia) and the Zimbabwe African National Union – People's Front (ZANU-PF) in Rhodesia (modern Zimbabwe) appeared during the liberation struggle as the main protagonist for an independent nation. After independence in 1980 (Zimbabwe) and 1990 (Namibia), these movements transformed into political parties and dominate all levels of government until today. Reinhart Kössler argues that both countries had two divergent trajectories in their pre-colonial background, their experience of colonialism, and the liberation struggle.<sup>1</sup> Both countries are however remarkably similar in the development of public liberation history, which is so aptly symbolized by their National Heroes' Acres. In short, this thesis aims to demonstrate a similar outcome despite different starting points.

The majority of the studies on liberation movements in southern Africa opt for a single historical case study. In contrast, this thesis utilizes comparative history to highlight the clear similarities in the political culture that exists in the region during the transition from colonialism to independence. Most of Africa was enjoying the fruits in independence around the 1960s, but much of southern Africa was still waiting for liberation. The colonial and white settler regimes resisted by and large black majority rule, prompting the liberation movements to wage an armed struggle.<sup>2</sup> In this thesis, a universalizing comparison is used to demonstrate similarities between the two cases. As Stefan Berger points out, comparison is often used by historians to show the construction of identities and this methodological tool is thus fitting for the research question in this thesis.<sup>3</sup>

Subsequently, the concept of political transfer is used to study the influence of North Korean use of history on the African movements. Political transfer, as defined by Henk te Velde, is “the migration of political practices across national borders and their use of

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<sup>1</sup> R. Kössler, 'Images of History and the Nation: Namibia and Zimbabwe Compared', *South African Historical Journal*, 62:1 (2010), 31.

<sup>2</sup> S. Ellis, 'Africa's wars of liberation: some historiographical reflections', in: P. J. J. Konings, W. M. J. van Binsbergen and G. Hesselning (eds.), *Trajectoires de liberation en Africque contemporaine* (Leiden, 2000), 77-78.

<sup>3</sup> S. Berger, 'Comparative history', in: S. Berger, H. Feldner, K. Passmore, *Writing History: Theory & Practice* (London, 2003), 162-164.



examples.” Nationalist political history has traditionally ignored foreign examples.<sup>4</sup> In the nationalist historiography that has been put forward by the independent states of Namibia and Zimbabwe, the many international connections that played a vital role during the struggle has been ignored. Recent innovations in the field have not contributed to the weakening of the “national bias” in political history, an example being the buzz concept *lieu de mémoire* of Pierre Nora. A *lieu de mémoire* is an entity which became a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of a community, for instance a site of memory.<sup>5</sup> These places have almost solely been studied in a national context.<sup>6</sup>

Political transfer thereby touches upon but slightly differs from the notion of the ‘invention of tradition’, a path breaking idea which inspired generations of historians. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger argue that many traditions might appear to be old, but are in fact often recent in origin and include a degree of invention.<sup>7</sup> The Heroes’ Acres are a fine example of a newly constructed memorial places, with corresponding rituals, that appear to be old and established. The monumental introductory text on the invention of traditions does however not deal with transfers between different countries. Te Velde argues that an amended version of this idea, which takes the concept of transfer on board, can be beneficial to historians. Te Velde stresses that political transfer “draws attention to a neglected aspect of national politics” and “opens up a new vista for political history.”<sup>8</sup> A limitation of the introductory text by the author is that the concept exclusively focuses on nineteenth-century European history. Arguably, transfer is a global phenomenon and is particularly suited to study how liberation movements in Africa made foreign practices into their own.

Comparative historians and historians of transfer have traditionally been at odds. Comparative historians have been accused by the latter of singling out “artificial units of comparison”, while contrasting them without taking the concept of transfer into account. Historians of transfer have in turn been criticized that they do not analyse similarities and differences. Berger is wary of these tensions and writes that both methodological concepts in fact strengthen each other. The author paraphrases Marc Bloch, one of the founding fathers of comparative history, as he argues that transfer is indispensable for any comparison, since it

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<sup>4</sup> H. te Velde, ‘Political Transfer: An Introduction’, *European Review of History*, 12:2 (2005), 205.

<sup>5</sup> P. Nora, ‘Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire’, *Representations* 26 (1989), 7-24.

<sup>6</sup> Te Velde, ‘Political Transfer’, 205.

<sup>7</sup> E. Hobsbawm, ‘Introduction: Inventing Traditions’, in: E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (London, 1983), 1-14.

<sup>8</sup> Te Velde, ‘Political Transfer’, 206.

would sharpen the understanding of similarities and differences.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, Te Velde downplays these tensions, as “the history of transfer will automatically entail a certain element of comparison.”<sup>10</sup>

Lastly, the concept of time should be discussed. In an illuminating article, Stephen Ellis shows how “the first generation of professional Africanist historians created a basic chronological division of Africa’s past into pre-colonial, colonial and independent periods.” This trinity reflected the conventional European ideas about ancient, medieval and modern history. As a result, the in reality short colonial period “became the fulcrum around which African history turned, with time stretching backwards and forwards from that point into the infinite ‘pre’ and ‘post’ ages, both defined by reference to colonialism.”<sup>11</sup> The post-colonial history of southern Africa exists in historiography almost as a separate entity while in fact developments were much more fluid and interrelated. In this thesis, the aim is to break through the traditional trinity of time and conceptualize African politics as an ongoing process from the 1960s until now. This time span is defined by liberation movements who continue the way they were organized in the liberation struggle after independence, but only in the new form of the national state.

### *The struggle for sources*

The library of the African Studies Centre Leiden and the Asia Library of Leiden University hold an impressive body of literature which formed the starting point of this research. Soon it became clear that a literature study alone did not contain the possibilities to substantiate the claims of the research project. This involvement of the DPRK in the liberation struggle in southern Africa is a largely forgotten if not distorted part of history. Following independence, the new nation states that emerged out of the liberation struggle persistently created and nurtured a nationalist history which was characterized by a certain linearity and uniformity. The liberation movements that transformed into governments were the main protagonist of this form of history and many other facets of the struggle were left out, including, among many other things, the role of North Korea.

Furthermore, the Asian state has become a pariah of the international community following its gross human atrocities and aggressive nuclear weapons program. Only recently a new dimension has come to the forefront, containing the fact that the DPRK exports forced

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<sup>9</sup> S. Berger, ‘Comparative history’, 171.

<sup>10</sup> Te Velde, ‘Political Transfer’, 208.

<sup>11</sup> S. Ellis, ‘Writing histories of contemporary Africa’, *The Journal of African History*, 43:1 (2002), 5-6.

laborers to work in other countries. North Korean forced laborers are working under disgraceful circumstances while the vast majority of their salaries flow to the dictatorial regime. In this respect, this project benefited hugely from the Slaves to the System research group of the Leiden Asia Centre, which put this issue on the agenda. These practices also occur in southern Africa. It is not hard to imagine that it is not opportune to showcase any (historical) friendly relations between the African states and the DPRK in such turbulent times. As a result, information on the link between North Korea and information is hard to come by.

Hence, fieldwork was an absolute necessity to fill the gaps. Between May and June 2017, Namibia and Zimbabwe were visited to conduct archival research. The nature of the research project made it a challenge to conduct a scrutinizing inquiry, especially since 2016, when the United Nations (UN) warned African countries for their violations of the international sanctions against the DPRK.<sup>12</sup> Roughly a year ago, two Japanese journalists in Namibia were deported (and their equipment was confiscated) after investigating a local ammunitions factory built by North Korea.<sup>13</sup> This incident clearly indicates the current political atmosphere. Nonetheless, in general Namibia is very accessible for researchers, without the need to apply for special visa requirements to use the excellent archival facilities.

The situation in Zimbabwe is different. Conducting fieldwork has become increasingly difficult as a result of the crippled economy and the utterly suppressing regime of Robert Mugabe and ZANU-PF. Especially with the impending general elections of 2018 the circumstances for fieldwork have deteriorated, for example through selective outbursts of political violence. Research can only be conducted through obtaining a study permit at the Research Council of Zimbabwe, a government organ. Given the sensitive character and limited time span of the research project it was not possible to obtain such a visa, thus access to archives was not possible. This does however not mean that fieldwork is altogether impossible: archives are not the only containers of information and it was worthwhile to study the National Heroes' Acre in Harare in close detail.

### *Fieldwork*

In light of the present conditions in the field two third of the research was carried out in Namibia and one third was done in Zimbabwe. It is difficult to fully grasp the complexity of

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<sup>12</sup> United Nations, Final report of the Panel of Experts submitted pursuant to resolution 2276 (2016), S/2017/150, 27-02-2017.

<sup>13</sup> Japanese journalists questioned, deported, *The Namibian*, 20-04-2016.

this particular topic as an outsider. Therefore, this project has benefitted immensely from talks with various people, including a former head of a national archive, two employees of a knowledge institute, a former editor in chief of a national Namibian newspaper, an independent researcher and a lecturer at the University of Namibia. They were able to confirm or disconfirm certain ideas and point towards possible sources and their help is gratefully acknowledged. Because of the political sensitivity of this research, they remain anonymous.

Naturally, the National Heroes' Acres in Windhoek and Harare were visited and studied in detail. Bookshops were visited in both countries in order to acquire (auto)biographies of members of the liberation movements. In Namibia, archival research formed the core of the work. It is exemplary that the National Archives of Namibia (NAN) has zero accessible files on the DPRK, while two promising files had restricted access.<sup>14</sup> Through a meticulous search, other, perhaps more odd documents were found that could shine a light on this forgotten history. North Korean brochures which were translated into Afrikaans are an example, just as old black and white photos of SWAPO officials who were visiting Pyongyang before independence. The National Library of Namibia (NLN) was also consulted.

The Namibia Scientific Society (NSS) similarly had no files on this matter, but again, via other ways information was retrieved. The NSS recently acquired a private Namibiana collection of 10.000 books.<sup>15</sup> The collection is yet to be catalogued, a process which will take around four years, but the librarians were very kind to give special permission to use the collection. Part of it was a unique assemblage of party literature of SWAPO, including the SWAPO Information Bulletin (SIB) and *The Combatant*, two publications that appeared several times a year before independence. Because SWAPO literature was banned in Namibia, it is in general easier to find such documents outside of the country than inside.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, the excellent University of Namibia (UNAM) Archives were consulted. The archive holds the personal collections of Peter Katjavivi and Mose Penaani Tjitendero, two high officials of SWAPO, and André du Pisani, a Windhoek-born professor who writes extensively on Namibian politics. These personal collections contain numerous letters, North Korean books and SWAPO literature that was not included in the Namibia Scientific Society

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<sup>14</sup> NAN, MFA 031, PE/082, Bilateral relations with Korea democratic people republic. (two volumes)

<sup>15</sup> Funding need to keep rare books in Namibia, *The Namibian*, 07-22-2016.

<sup>16</sup> C. Saunders, 'Liberation and Democracy: A Critical Reading of Sam Nujoma's 'Autobiography'', in: H. Melber (ed.), *Re-examining Liberation in Namibia: Political Culture since Independence* (Uppsala, 2003), 87-98; W. Heuwa, 'Voices in the Liberation Struggle: Discourse and Ideology in the SWAPO Exile Media', in: H. Melber (ed.), *Re-examining Liberation in Namibia: Political Culture since Independence* (Uppsala, 2003), 25-33.

repository, such as Ombuze YaNamibia and Information & Comments, two other official SWAPO organs during the war for liberation. Consequently, the bulk of the primary sources on which this thesis is based consists of Namibian material instead of Zimbabwean documents. Fortunately, literature on the Zimbabwean liberation movements is much richer than its Namibian counterpart. Therefore, it is hoped that both balance each other out.

Utilizing scattered pieces of information, sometimes found in unexpected places, it becomes possible to roughly sketch the history behind the monuments. This thesis does not claim to paint the full picture. For this to achieve, it is essential to utilize two other sources. The first is party archives, because the liberation movements (who transformed into political parties after independence) were the prime actors connected to the DPRK regime, instead of the formal state. Unfortunately the SWAPO archive is not accessible to any person while the ZANU-PF archive could not be approached due to missing permission. The second source is oral history. With an apparent lack of written documents, the memories of member of SWAPO and ZANU-PF could fill in the gaps. North Korea not only funded and supplied the liberation movements, high ranking officials also visited the Asian country and North Korean military instructors were active in the exile camps in Africa, where they trained guerrilla soldiers. Restricted by time limits this project was not able to formally interview any ‘freedom fighters’. Further research could however profit from such endeavors.

## **Liberating history**

The birth of African history as an academic discipline coincided with the advent of sovereign states in Africa, in the so-called golden age of Africa’s independence between 1945 and the 1970s.<sup>17</sup> Earlier written texts of the continent existed as early as the seventeenth century and included documents such as chronicles, memoirs and travels guides, but these works were incomparable to the modern way of professional history writing.<sup>18</sup> Africans themselves relied on oral histories for centuries while there were little incentives for foreigners to produce historical research.<sup>19</sup> When the first colonial administrations were established, it was thought that Africa was a timeliness place, a region without history.<sup>20</sup> Although Africa is an “ancient

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<sup>17</sup> Ellis, ‘Africa’s wars’, 73.

<sup>18</sup> Ellis, ‘Writing histories’, 5; Ellis, ‘Africa’s wars’, 70.

<sup>19</sup> Ellis, ‘Africa’s wars’, 70-71.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, 73.

continent,” as Ellis puts it, “the writing of history is a strikingly recent enterprise.”<sup>21</sup> The first university post in African history was created in 1948, at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London. A small elite of academics, both in and outside Africa, created the outlines of a new research field.<sup>22</sup>

Since the inception of modern African studies in the 1960s, resistance has been a paramount concept in the historiography. Resistance, quoting Klaas van Walraven and Jon Abbink, “became the historical dimension of African nationalism.”<sup>23</sup> Below, an attempt is made to give a broad overview of the liberation war historiography of the past sixty years. The benefit of this exercise is threefold. It enhances an understanding of how academics have studied liberation wars, it prompts us to reflect upon the (political) use of history and helps to situate the current research project in a wider field of studies. The overview is admittedly broad and incomplete. The focus is on academic studies on liberation heritage from the inception of professional Africanist history writing until today. Where possible, examples are given from Namibia and Zimbabwe. With the concept of ‘wave’ a highpoint in the amount of studies is meant. Naturally, nationalist histories appeared long after the ‘first wave’ ended, while critical appraisals of NLM’s are not limited to the ‘second wave’. Nonetheless, the format gives a comprehensible overview of the most important trends that occurred in the past decades.

### *The first wave*

The first wave consists of nationalist studies and reached its peak between the 1950s - 1980s. Truly nationalist histories appeared for every country that formally entered the international area of nation states. In this regard, scholarship echoed the emergence of professional history writing in Europe of the nineteenth century. History as an academic discipline coincided with the rise of European nation states and hence fulfilled a function to give these new entities meaning and legitimation. Stefan Berger wrote a beautiful book on how historians and politics were intermingled in these formative years.<sup>24</sup> A similar trend occurred in southern Africa, only a century later. Some of the most influential European scholars were active supporters of the independence movements, while works by others featured heavily in party publications as

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<sup>21</sup> Ibidem, 70.

<sup>22</sup> Ibidem, 71.

<sup>23</sup> J. Abbink and K. van Walraven, ‘Rethinking resistance in African history: An introduction’, in: J. Abbink, M. de Bruijn and K. van Walraven (eds.), *Rethinking Resistance: Revolt and Violence in African History* (Leiden, 2003), 2.

<sup>24</sup> S. Berger, *The Past as History: National Identity and Historical Consciousness in Modern Europe* (London, 2015).

means of legitimizing the war. Ellis argues that historians were on a “misguided search for uniformity”, writing a single history for each country whereas multiple histories would have been more fitting. The existing mantra was that “new states required new historical charters.”<sup>25</sup> Many western academics were eager to write the newly independent nation states into history, in “a spirit of deliberate political engagement.”<sup>26</sup>

Henning Melber for instance, was an influential historian and supporter of SWAPO who received an entry ban to South West Africa from 1975 to 1990. Terence Ranger is a famous case for Zimbabwe. Ranger’s book *Revolt in Southern Rhodesia* (published in 1967) influenced the development of nationalism of ZANU-PF and the government restricted his movement.<sup>27</sup> Other examples also exist. But it was not only western academics that jumped on the bandwagon. At the same time, African members of the NLM’s lived in exile and were able to enjoy an education at some of the most renowned European universities. Many of them earned a doctorate in history and, using their knowledge of European history, wrote historical books eulogizing the new nations. The first independent cabinets of Namibia and Zimbabwe included many historians, schooled in European centers.

Peter Katjavivi for instance was a prominent SWAPO officer as head of SWAPO’s overseas offices in London. He obtained a doctorate at Oxford University and published the book *A History of Resistance in Namibia*, which linked the ongoing liberation struggle with resistance against Europeans from centuries ago.<sup>28</sup> For SWAPO, he authored the book *To Be Born A Nation*, a fascinating attempt by the movement to write its first own history of the country.<sup>29</sup> After independence, the part scholar, part politician held office at educational institutes (including the University of Namibia, the Namibia Economic Policy Research Unit and the National Heritage Council of Namibia) and the Parliament. Katjavivi is the current Speaker of Parliament, which is dominated by SWAPO. His personal collection in the UNAM Archives is frequently consulted in this thesis. A Zimbabwean example is Aeneas Chigwedere, a prominent ZANU-PF man who enrolled at the University of London in 1962. Chigwedere wrote numerous books on Zimbabwean history and his work stands out for its

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<sup>25</sup> Ellis, ‘Writing histories’, 5, paraphrasing Arnold Temu.

<sup>26</sup> Ellis, ‘Africa’s wars’, 73. Ellis discusses the case of Basil Davidson, who “probably did more than any other individual to popularize in the English-speaking world a heroic view of the African past strongly colored by his nationalist sympathies.”

<sup>27</sup> T. Ranger, *Revolt in Southern Rhodesia, 1896-97* (London, 1967).

<sup>28</sup> P. H. Katjavivi, *A History of Resistance in Namibia* (Paris, 1988).

<sup>29</sup> SWAPO, *To Be Born A Nation* (London, 1981).

nationalist paradigm. He became the Minister of Education and was one of the driving forces behind 'patriotic history', which will be described in chapter three in more detail.<sup>30</sup>

The new histories of the new states served as legitimation for the new regimes and were characterized by a uniform and teleological model. The sovereign state was the culmination of history and the NLM's embodied the spirits of awakened nations. A clear relation existed between a sense of history and the moral justification for the violence against foreign rule.<sup>31</sup> In short, "Africa's history was beginning anew with the proclamations of independence."<sup>32</sup> The times when new states were on the brink of becoming members of the international family of sovereign states were times of idealism and hope. "The historiographical and political elements were connected."<sup>33</sup>

### *The second wave*

The second wave saw a proliferation of re-interpretations of nationalist uprisings between the 1980s - 2000s.<sup>34</sup> By then, several countries had achieved independence and other liberation movements were fully established. The actions of these organizations were in some ways a disillusionment after the hopeful ideals that accompanied the promise of a free nation. "The shortcoming of revolutionary movements could no longer be ignored", writes Henning Melber.<sup>35</sup> Western academics who used to be in full support of the liberation movements became critical of SWAPO and ZANU-PF. Academia turned its attention to a sharp re-interpretation of the nationalist uprisings which were so often hailed in studies and international fora as being 'on the right side of history'.

The re-interpretation of resistance history pointed at the struggle within the struggle: the many factions and dissidents inside the movements that branded itself as unified.<sup>36</sup> Another dimension was the tension between ethnicity and nationalism. The liberation movements were considered to be national movements by the international community. It

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<sup>30</sup> T. Ranger, 'Nationalist History, Patriotic History and the History of the Nation: the Struggle over the past in Zimbabwe', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 30:2 (2004), 224-225.

<sup>31</sup> Ellis, 'Africa's wars' 78, Abbink and Van Walraven, 'Rethinking resistance', 1.

<sup>32</sup> Ellis, 'Writing histories', 5, paraphrasing Basil Davidson.

<sup>33</sup> Ellis, 'Africa's wars', 73.

<sup>34</sup> For a critical view on a distinction between 'nationalist' historians ('good') and 'historians of nationalism' ('bad') see I. Phimister, 'Narratives of progress: Zimbabwean historiography at the end of history', *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 30:1 (2012), 27-34.

<sup>35</sup> H. Melber, 'Southern African Liberation Movements as Governments and the Limits to Liberation', *Review of African Political Economy*, 36:121 (2009), 451; for Zimbabwe, see B. Raftopoulos, 'Problematising Nationalism in Zimbabwe: A Historiographical Review', *Zambezia*, 16:2 (1999), 115-134.

<sup>36</sup> N. Kriger, 'The Politics of Creating National heroes: The Search for Political Legitimacy and National Identity', in: N. Bhebe and T. Ranger, *Soldiers in Zimbabwe's Liberation War* (1995, London), 137-156.



could however be argued that SWAPO is dominated by the Oshivambo-speaking of Namibia, while ZANU-PF is dominated by the Shona-people of Zimbabwe. Furthermore, scholars pointed at the fierce human rights violations that were committed by the organizations during the struggle for independence (see chapter three for a short discussion).

### *The third wave*

The third wave is concerned with the appropriation of history by the national liberation movements (NLM's) and developed from the 2000s onwards. It is widely acknowledged that the governments of southern Africa molded history into a usable model for legitimization of power and nation building. It seeks, in this sense, to 'liberate history' from the shackles of its political use as legitimization of existing authorities.<sup>37</sup> The third chapter, 'Public history in a culture of violence' deals extensively with a contents of such discourse. This thesis situates itself in the third wave by exploring how the NLM's of Namibia and Zimbabwe legitimate their party rule. The unique contribution to a growing research field is the incorporation of North Korea into the analysis, a factor which was hardly acknowledged in the existing historiography. The concept of political transfer allows the inclusion of foreign examples into the analysis of how young African governments wield power.

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<sup>37</sup> The term 'liberating history' is borrowed from the historian Jeremy Silvester: J. Silvester, 'Introduction: Re-Viewing Resistance, Liberating History', in: J. Silvester (ed.), *Re-Viewing Resistance in Namibian History* (Windhoek, 2015), 1-21.

## The National Heroes' Acre in a broader context

A winding road brings visitors from the hustling Windhoek center to the secluded Auas mountains on the outskirts of town, while the distinctive white obelisk stands tall and is visible from far away. The socialist realist architecture forms a sharp contrast to the dry desert-like landscape and could easily be disregarded as an insignificant government project. In fact, it is quite the opposite. To start with, it is paramount to see the National Heroes' Acre of Namibia in a broader context. Viewed from this perspective, the war memorial forms part of a string of similar monuments built by the DPRK. The Acre in Windhoek was built in 2002 and a mere copy of the Acre in Harare, built twenty years earlier in 1982. The Acre in Harare was in turn inspired by the Acre in Pyongyang, built in 1975. All three constructions share remarkable parallels and the current chapter aims to offer an explanation.

Such a comparative perspective is unprecedented since the memorials are only mentioned in individual case studies. In general there is surprisingly little scholarship on the Mansudae monuments of 'the old continent'. Reasons for this could be the difficulties to find and access sources and the fairly recent completion of most constructions. The Namibian memorial has been covered by a pioneering chapter of Meghan Kirkwood, an art historian who uses the North Korean architecture in Namibia as means to show that Eurocentric cultures do not constitute the only source of modernity for African nations.<sup>38</sup> Others, like Kössler, Elke Zuern, Heicke Becker and Jan-Bart Gewald have used the monument as an example of state-centered memory making.<sup>39</sup> Its Zimbabwean counterpart has been used by

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<sup>38</sup> M. L. E. Kirkwood, 'Postindependence Architecture through North Korean Modes: Namibian Commissions of the Mansudae Overseas Project', in: G. Salami and M. B. Visonà (eds.), *A Companion to Modern African Art* (Oxford, 2013), 548-571.

<sup>39</sup> . Kössler, 'Facing a Fragmented Past: Memory, Culture and Politics in Namibia', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 33:2 (2007), 369-372; E. Zuern, 'Memorial Politics: Challenging the Dominant Party's Narrative in Namibia', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 50:3 (2012), 493-516; J.-B. Gewald, 'Herero Genocide in the Twentieth Century: Politics and Memory', in: J. Abbink, M. de Bruijn and K. van Walraven (eds.), *Rethinking*

various authors to discuss the politics of heroism. Ngonidzashe Marongwe and Blessed Magadzike critique the lack of female war heroes<sup>40</sup>, while Fidelis Duri describes the Acre as a party monument, used to glorify ZANU-PF.<sup>41</sup> On the other hand, media have frequently mentioned the Heroes' Acres but lacked any in-depth analysis.

In the first chapter, the stage is set by a careful description of the three monuments, the ways of becoming a hero and a discussion of the actual use of the sites. Subsequently the possible reasons for African regimes to hire Mansudae Overseas Projects is discussed. It will be argued that only by taking the historical dimension of south-south cooperation into account, these practices can be properly understood. Thereby, the stage is set for the second chapter, which will delve into the past to discover how it all began.

## **Namibia**

The remembrance site is accessible through a grand black and grey gate, decorated with a golden national coat of arms and on the flanks two kneeling women. In the distance the obelisk is visible but the majority of the monument is obscured by a hill. A granite road leads to the complex, where visitors can rest on a tribune with 5000 seats. Opposite the tribune, an eternal flame and war medal, resting on a large black granite wall, are installed. A wide and long stairway takes the spectators uphill towards an enormous bronze statue of the unknown soldier. The eight meter high soldier is dressed in a military uniform and closely resembles the 'father of the nation' Sam Nujoma, president of SWAPO and the first president of Namibia. In his right hand he carries a gun, while his left arm is swinging in the air, ready to throw a grenade. Below the statue a text in the handwriting of Nujoma reads "Glory to the fallen heroes and heroines of the Motherland Namibia! Sam Nujoma, 26 August 2002."

The 172 gravesites are situated stepwise located in the left and right from the straight stairway. The occupied tombs are made from sober black granite and depict a picture and name of the buried person. The undisputed center of the whole complex is the commanding

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*Resistance: Revolt and Violence in African History* (Leiden, 2003), 279-304; H. Becker, 'Commemorating heroes in Windhoek and Eenhana: memory, culture and nationalism in Namibia, 1990-2010', *Windhoek/International African Institute*, 81:4 (2011), 519-543.

<sup>40</sup> N. Marongwe and B. Magadzike, 'The Challenges of Honouring Female Liberation War Icons in Zimbabwe: Some Discourses about the National Heroes Acre', in: M. Mawere and T. R. Mubaya (eds.), *Colonial Heritage, Memory and Sustainability in Africa: Challenges, Opportunities and Prospects* (Mankon, 2016), 139-168.

<sup>41</sup> F. P. T. Duri, 'Synergy and Dissonance between History and Heritage: Problematising Heroism and the National Heroes' Acre in the Context of Zimbabwe's Liberation War', in: M. Mawere and T. R. Mubaya (eds.), *Colonial Heritage, Memory and Sustainability in Africa: Challenges, Opportunities and Prospects* (Mankon, 2016), 313-338.

statue, placed centrally in a small square. Right behind it, the aforementioned thirty-five meter long white obelisk can be observed. Visitors can walk around it, where a large mural in the form of a half turn depicts the history of Namibia. First, we see enslaved black Namibians, some are shackled and on their knees, while some desperately try to fight the enemy with old-fashioned weapons like bows and arrows and spears. The following scene depicts a group of proud Namibians who are working for independence. On the left, people stand behind a globe, symbolizing the United Nations and the efforts made in the international diplomatic arena. On the right, a group of soldiers stand proud and tall. The mural continues with a fighting scene. The Namibians are not fighting with primitive weaponry – instead, they wield modern guns, shooting a helicopter from the air. In the final scene, women, men and children are marching towards independence. They are led by a proud Sam Nujoma, who holds a large flag and smiles. Left and right from the mural are two small North Korean-styled houses without a clear purpose. It is not possible to enter them. A final long stairway takes the visitor all up to the hill, where they can enjoy a magnificent view of the area, including a beautiful sight of Windhoek.

The monument was inaugurated on Heroes' Day, 26 August 2002.<sup>42</sup> The National Heritage Council of Namibia (NHC) administers the site. According to the NHC, the Acre is meant to “foster (...) a spirit of patriotism and nationalism, and to pass on the legacy to the future generations of Namibia.”<sup>43</sup> Namibia is not a unique, isolated case. Observers familiar with former German and South African protectorate will easily see the connections with developments that occurred before or at the same time in the neighboring Zimbabwe. Kössler already addressed in a footnote from 2007 the commonalities between the two Acres in Namibia and Zimbabwe, stating that “many observations regarding Harare's Heroes' Acre also apply to Windhoek.” He noted that it would be “worthwhile to investigate the background and imagery of North Korean constructed memorials in Africa.”<sup>44</sup> According to the official brochure that was made for the inauguration of the Acre in Windhoek, Sam Nujoma conceived the idea for the construction while attending an Organization of African Unity (OAU) Summit in Harare. The Namibian government then

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<sup>42</sup> Kirkwood, 'Postindependence Architecture', 554.

<sup>43</sup> NSS, Heroes Acre Committee, *The Unknown Soldier: Inauguration of Heroes' Acre 26 August 2002* (Windhoek, 2002).

<sup>44</sup> Kössler, 'Facing a Fragmented Past', page 369, footnote 38.

approached the DPRK through its Embassy in Zimbabwe and later that year a team of Koreans visited Namibia to draw up a plan for the site.<sup>45</sup>

Nine heroes and heroines were symbolically reburied at the site and presented as the first graves: Kahimemua Nguvauva (1850-1896), Nehale Lya Mpingana (died 1908), Samuel Maharero (1856-1923), Hendrik Witbooi (1830-1905), Jacob Morenga (1875-1907), Mandume Ya Ndemufayo (1894-1917), Ipumbu Ya Tshilongo (19875-1959), Hosea Kutako (1870-1970) and Anna Mungunda (19100s-1959), the only woman.<sup>46</sup> The third chapter will discuss the meaning of this particular selection. In a speech of Sam Nujoma during the official opening, the President made some interesting remarks on history:

“The Namibian people have always declared and proclaimed in unison that the history of our country must be written by Namibians themselves. The yoke of colonial oppression and subjugation vilified our heroes and heroines and trampled upon our human dignity. (...) Compatriots, this monument was built as our token of honour to our fallen heroes and heroines. It was built in the true African tradition of bestowing honour to our forefathers and mothers. (...) With the inauguration of this Heroes’ Acre we, the Namibian people, are writing the history of Namibia, the history of victory, the history of unity, the history of dedication, indeed, the history of nationhood. Fellow Namibians, we are writing the history of our country from our own perspective and through our own suffering and sacrifices. The time when colonisers distorted our history is now gone forever.”<sup>47</sup>

Nujoma clearly presents the monument as a means to write Namibia’s own history. Since the Acre was initiated by SWAPO-politicians and prepared by a SWAPO-dominated government, it is not a surprise that the discourse is severely influenced by the party. The decision to first bury nine heroes and heroines of the ‘old uprising’ strengthens the idea of SWAPO as the vanguard of Namibian peace and independence. Much public discussion in media has however revolved around the fact that the population was not consulted about the burial ground. Decision making about its installation and design was carried out by SWAPO-officials and fell completely out of public debate.

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<sup>45</sup> NSS, Heroes Acre Committee, *The Unknown Soldier: Inauguration of Heroes’ Acre 26 August 2002* (Windhoek, 2002)

<sup>46</sup> NSS, Heroes Acre Committee, *The Unknown Soldier: Inauguration of Heroes’ Acre 26 August 2002* (Windhoek, 2002).

<sup>47</sup> NAN, AACRLS.023, Heroes Acre.

## Zimbabwe

National Heroes' Acre of Zimbabwe was completed in 1982, two years after independence. Situated a few kilometers out of town in the hills of Harare, the burial ground can be entered through an imposing four-posted, black granite gate with the Zimbabwean flag on top. From there, a car ride brings the visitor to the actual memorial site. A stone tribune overlooks the site and can house around 5000 people. The complex is framed by two large murals, standing left and right from the cemetery. Around it, lush green bush embraces the complex while baboons are swinging around. The murals recount the history of Zimbabwe in a visual way, connecting the Chimurenga (the early resistance against foreigners) with the Rhodesian Bush war and independence. We see Zimbabwean men and women, carrying babies, brutally repressed by British forces, shot while running away and bitten by fierce dogs. Indigenous forces are preparing for battle, Kalashnikovs and bombs at the ready. Then, the battle commences while brave men are fighting and women carry goods (presumably the harvest of the rich soil). A father with a gun strapped on his shoulder embraces a young boy while fighters celebrate the victory. In the final scene, the liberated Zimbabwean nation marches towards independence, carrying an enormous flag. A young Robert Mugabe fatherly floats above them, looking towards the future. On top of each mural sits a golden Zimbabwe bird, an official emblem of the nation.

The murals flank the center of the site, where large steps lead to the tomb of the unknown soldier, accompanied by a bronze trio of soldiers. On top, a stern looking soldier holds a large flag, with an AK-47 strapped on his back. Shortly below him, a woman and man, both dressed in army outfit, hold respectively a similar gun and a bazooka. The statue sits in a small open area, surrounded by two national flags (again featuring the bird) and the national coat of arms (again featuring, among other things, the AK-47). Behind the statues, a long and steep staircase leads to a fierce black obelisk, pointing at the cloudless blue sky. An eternal flame sits on top of the tower. The long climb is rewarding as it gives the visitor an unsurpassed view of the surrounding area, including the city of Harare and the international airport. On opposite sides of the staircase, divided in an east and a west wing, rows of graves complete the site. Viewed from the top, the site reflects the shape of two AK-47, with the graves displayed as bullet magazines. References to the iconic gun are a recurring theme. The black, shining tombs are engraved with the names, date of birth and death and a photo. Some graves have a description of the life of the buried person, some have been decorated with

flowers by their families. Attached to the site is a small museum that chronicles the rise of African nationalism.

Becoming a national hero is the highest honor in contemporary Zimbabwe. Hence, the politics of heroism are far-reaching in society.<sup>48</sup> To understand the dynamics concerning heroism, the issue of veterans is important. Norma Kriger explains that Mugabe heavily relies on war veterans for the continuation of his rule. The state distinguishes between military veterans (those who belonged to one of the liberation movements and often stayed in exile) and political veterans (African nationalists who got detained by the Rhodesian government). Their place in the national epic of the independence struggle is linked to the government's heroes' policy. ZANU-PF introduced a system whereby veterans and other people can be named as a national, provincial and district hero. In this pyramid of heroism, every level can claim a certain amount of financial compensation through pensions, state funerals, benefits for their family and symbolic honors. In effect, different veterans receive different treatments, resulting in different contested interpretations of history. The government, effectively the ZANU-PF regime, determines the criteria for heroism through laws, which are heavily debated in Parliament. Every year on the second Monday of August, national celebrations burst out during Heroes' Day.<sup>49</sup> At the moment, around 120 graves are in use.

## **Pyongyang**

The Revolutionary Martyrs Cemetery is situated on Mt. Taesong, a few kilometers from Pyongyang, the capital of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Inaugurated in 1975, the cemetery is a means to honor the "martyrs who bravely fought for the liberation of the homeland." A decade later, in 1985, it was enlarged. Visitors enter the site through a large gate and will find the actual memorial place following a short road. On both sides of the site stand memorial pillars. 300 steps of 40 meters wide form a grand stairway that leads to a granite sculptural group of eighteen meters long and almost six meters high. The sculptural groups showcase the battle of the revolutionary fighters. Next, a monument is inscribed by the first President Kim Il Sung. The sign reads: "The noble revolutionary spirit displayed by the

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<sup>48</sup> J. Fontein, 'The Politics of the Dead: Living Heritage, Bones and Commemorations in Zimbabwe', [www.theasa.org](http://www.theasa.org) (2009).

<sup>49</sup> N. Kriger, 'From Patriotic Memories to 'Patriotic History' in Zimbabwe, 1990-205', *Third World Quarterly*, 27:6 (2006), 1151-1169; S. Mpofu, 'Toxification of national holidays and national identity in Zimbabwe's post-2000 nationalism', *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 28:1 (2016), 28;43.

anti-Japanese revolutionary martyrs will dwell forever in the hearts of our Party and our people. October 10, 1985. Kim Il Sung,” in his own handwriting.

Behind the inscription, a long stairway leads to the end of the cemetery, which contains a large red flag made from granite. The 170 gravesites are situated on either side of the stairs. Each grave depicts the name and date of birth and death, and is topped by a bronze bust of the buried person.<sup>50</sup> Another monument inscribed with a paean, a lyric poem used to express triumph. In addition, a large medal of the Hero of the DPRK can be seen, flanked by a group of bronze sculptures of five mourners. Unfortunately it is not certain how often the cemetery is used for ceremonies or visited by North Koreans or foreign tourists. Government propaganda boldly states how “the entire Korean people” visits the monument to “renew their resolve to be infinitely faithful to the Party and the leader.”<sup>51</sup> In reality, it cannot be checked to what extent the Revolutionary Martyrs Cemetery plays a role in Korean life.

The physical parallels between the three highlighted burial grounds are evident, as they roughly share the same design. The sites are located in secluded mountains or hills, a few kilometers away from the center of the capital. The entrance through a gate ensures the feeling that one is entering a sacred place. The amphitheaters can house thousands of people for public ceremonies. Bronze murals display the history of the country, told through the narrow lens of the liberation struggle. Statues of the unknown soldier, eternal fires and large medals remember the fallen soldiers and victory. Two of the three monuments have an inscription of the first president in his own handwriting. Obelisks stand tall in the skies. Sober black granite gravesites contain the heroes that are chosen by the regime. Each and every element is designed in the characteristic socialist realist style. But more importantly, besides physical features, the sites share the same goal: the politicization of history in a specific way, legitimizing the prevailing regime. The Namibian monument honors the fight for independence against South African rule. The Zimbabwean monument commemorates the fight for independence against British rule. The Korean monument hails the fight for independence against Japanese rule. The victors of each of these fights continue to rule the liberated countries and are basing their legitimacy on the independence struggles. SWAPO in Namibia, ZANU-PF in Zimbabwe and the Workers’ Party in North Korea are all born out of violent revolutions.

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<sup>50</sup> UNAM Archives, PA3/5/3/273, Pyongyang review. – Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1988, 68-69.

<sup>51</sup> UNAM Archives, PA3/5/3/273, Pyongyang review. – Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1988, 68-69.



The North Korean monuments in southern Africa are built by Mansudae Overseas Projects, a subdivision of Mansudae Art Studio, a government-controlled company in Pyongyang. The studio is responsible for almost all official monuments and government buildings in Pyongyang and is tremendously important for the design of the personality cult of the Kim dynasty. Mansudae was founded in 1959 and employs 3700 employees. Its work can be characterized as commemorations of Korean resistance against the Japanese colonization. In the words of Kirkwood: “The prominence of the Mansudae Art Studio cannot be overstated; indeed, its plethora of works within Pyongyang makes it effectively synonymous with North Korean visual culture.”<sup>52</sup> The company produced almost the entire memorial landscape of Pyongyang, including the Mansu Hill, the Tower of the Juche Idea the Arch of Triumph.<sup>53</sup>

Mansudae is not only responsible for the sites in the two African countries that are discussed above. On the contrary, the company leaves its marks all over the continent. Angola, Botswana, Benin, Ethiopia, Equatorial Guinea, Senegal, Congo, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Chad, Mali, Mozambique, Madagascar and Togo are other African states that use the services of the art studio.<sup>54</sup> This topic thus subverts the image of North Korea as ‘the hermit kingdom’, being the most isolationist state in the world. On the contrary, the grandiose export of monuments, statues and government buildings show far-reaching connections over the globe. North Korea has extensive international relations that go back decades.

Mansudae is largely responsible for the visual culture of North Korea, which is often described as socialist realist.<sup>55</sup> Kirkwood notes that the socialist realism of North Korea is different from the versions of China and the Soviet Union. This is caused by the near total destruction of Pyongyang during the Korean War (1950-1953). Effectively, the almost complete destruction of the city meant a *tabula rasa* for city planners. The visual culture that was adopted after the war is characterized by a high degree of central control.<sup>56</sup>

The pressing question that flows from observing this trend is: how can we explain the proliferation of North Korean monuments in southern Africa? So far, three explanations have been circulating. In the first place, an explanation can be found in the fact that African countries do not possess the expertise to develop the desired war memorials. There is simply

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<sup>52</sup> Kirkwood, ‘Postindependence Architecture’, 550-551.

<sup>53</sup> UNAM Archives, PA3/5/3/273, Pyongyang review. – Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1988, 118.

<sup>54</sup> United Nations, Final report, 44; Kirkwood, ‘Postindependence Architecture’, 549.

<sup>55</sup> P. Petrov, ‘The Industry of Truign: Socialist Realism, Reality, Realization’, *Slavic Review*, 70:4 (2011), 873-892.

<sup>56</sup> Kirkwood, ‘Postindependence Architecture’, 551.

not sufficient knowledge and experience to build it. Hence, the North Korean architects are required. This explanation is for example used by the Namibian government after discussion erupted because Mansudae was awarded the project without a proper and open tendering process. However, the Namibian Institute of Architects protested, noting that in fact they do obtain the required skills.<sup>57</sup>

In the second place, it has been argued that the monuments are cheap. Mansudae offers attractive prices that cannot be beaten by other competitors.<sup>58</sup> However, each project is awarded in a closed tender process and proves every time to be much more expensive than originally thought. In the third place, the case has been made that African leaders might feel attracted to the spectacular style of the communist socialist realism. The North Korean regime develops impressive constructions that glorify their leaders and leave spectators in awe. Kirkwood developed this thesis, writing in the case of Namibia that the regime interprets the “bold, dynamic, and monumental works characteristic of the Mansudae Overseas Project as a decisive, modern, and authoritative means of asserting their nationalist self.”<sup>59</sup> While there is a great amount of truth in this thought, this idea alone cannot wholly explain why African leaders are so fond of socialist realist architecture. In contrast to the three common ideas, this thesis argues that none of the three explanations can fully solve the riddle why these monuments exists. Instead, a satisfying answer can only be found in the historical roots of the liberation movements and their international relations with the recently liberated North Korea.

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<sup>57</sup> Ibidem, 549.

<sup>58</sup> Ibidem, 549.

<sup>59</sup> Kirkwood, ‘Postindependence Architecture’, 549.

## Unravelling North Korea's role in southern Africa

North Korea is often seen as an “exotic rarity” and many aspects of the totalitarian Stalinist country remain shrouded in mystery.<sup>60</sup> Maintaining a clear isolated position in the international arena of states, it might be surprising that the DPRK fosters warm ties with several African regimes. Namibia and Zimbabwe are just two of them and form part of an understudied aspect of south-south cooperation. As already discussed in the methodological section, the problems concerning sources may be one of the attributing reasons for this apparent lack of scholarship. In many ways, the fieldwork in both southern African nations had the character of a scavenger hunt. Vague hints of information lead from one place to another, resulting in a seemingly odd and uneven array of primary material: promotional books from Pyongyang, photos and party literature are examples. This chapter provides a preliminary sketch of the relationship between North Korea on the one hand and Namibia and Zimbabwe on the other hand. In a chronological order, the effects of the Second World War and the Cold War on international relations in Asia will shortly be discussed, after which the opportunity that the liberation movements of Africa provided will be examined. Finally, the recent developments after UN investigations are highlighted.

### The historical context

The historical roots of the Mansudae monuments can be found in the Second World War, the decolonization of Africa and the Cold War. In 1910 Korea became part of the Empire of Japan. During this time, Kim Il Sung was a man who spend years of his life in exile, just like many of the African leaders he befriended later in his life. Kim joined several anti-Japanese

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<sup>60</sup> M. Boonen, K. Boonstra, R. Breuker, C. Chung, I. van Gardingen, K. Kwang-cheol, O. Kyuwook, A. van der Veere, *North Korean Forced Labour in the EU, the Polish Case: How the Supply of a Captive DPRK Workforce Fits Our Demand for Cheap Labour* (Leiden, 2016) 9.

guerrilla groups and fought the Japanese army on several occasions. After the end of the Second World War in 1945, Japan surrendered and the United States and the Soviet Union divided Korea into two zones along the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. It proved impossible to reunify both parts of the peninsula and in 1948 two different governments were formed. In the south, the Republic of Korea (with Seoul as the capitol) was supported by the west, in the north, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (with Pyongyang as the capitol) was supported by the east.

After spending 26 years in exile, Kim Il Sung returned to (northern) Korea and became the leader with help from the Soviet Union. From 1950-1953 he led an invasion of North Korea to South Korea, called the Korean War. The Korean Armistice Agreement was signed in 1953, providing a technical ceasefire, not a formal peace. The ceasefire confirmed the situation of the two separate entities.<sup>61</sup> In terms of international relations, it is interesting to see what kind of actions the newly founded states undertook. North Korea was a young state, venturing into the world while looking for international alliances. At roughly the same time, and also set in motion after the end of the Second World War, came the decolonization of Africa. Rapidly, dozens of new states saw the light of day – which could also mean, dozens of new allies. Deon Geldenhuys writes that “Africa’s numerous wars provided another fertile region for North Korean involvement in the shape of military supplies and training to sympathetic government or leftist revolutionaries fighting incumbent rulers.”<sup>62</sup> It is an idea that has been articulated in other publications as well, but has not yet been substantiated in any historical studies. First, it is worthwhile to examine the official relations between North Korea and Africa. Although the focus is on southern Africa, information is scarce and therefore examples from other parts of the continent will be taken into account as well.

North Korea made it clear from its foundation in 1948 onwards that it would seek friendly relations with all anti-imperialist forces in the world. Between 1948 and 1960 it only held diplomatic relations with communist countries, but after 1960 it established contacts with the so-called ‘third world’. After President Richard Nixon from the United States visited China in 1972, North Korea “launched a massive diplomatic offensive in the third world,” to quote Sang-Seek Park.<sup>63</sup> At the end of 1974 Africa consisted of 36 recognized states. Nine

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<sup>61</sup> For an introduction, see S.-Y. Kang, ‘Historical perspectives on North Korea: a brief introduction and bibliography’, *Journal of Comparative Social Welfare*, 28:3 (2012), 235-240.

<sup>62</sup> D. Geldenhuys, ‘Pretoria and Pyongyang: supping with sinners’, *South African Journal of International Affairs*, 12:2 (2005), 149-150.

<sup>63</sup> S.-S. Park, ‘African and two Koreas: a study of African non-alignment’, *African Studies Review*, 21:1 (1978), 73-88, 77.

countries maintained only diplomatic relations with South Korea, eleven states only with North Korea and fourteen states with both. Two countries, Ghana and Nigeria, had no diplomatic relations with either of the two Korea's. Most of southern Africa was still under colonial or white settler rule. Zambia had been independent for a decade and played a major part by hosting freedom fighters from several liberation movements of neighbouring countries. Zambia had solely diplomatic relations with North Korea at this time.<sup>64</sup>

North Korea developed an "invitation diplomacy," meaning that more goodwill missions from Africa to North Korea existed than the other way around. The North Korean state however took the initiative. Furthermore, the diplomatic style was characterized cultural diplomacy instead of trade diplomacy. The competition between North and South Korea for friendly relations in Africa had become "extremely severe" after 1972. Park attributes this to political reasons: the two countries were competing for African votes in the General Assembly of the United Nations. In 1971 Nationalist China was replaced by Communist China in the United Nations. North Korea saw an improvement of its chances for success in the international organization and realized that the UN would be an effective forum to execute its foreign policy.<sup>65</sup> With a steadily increasing number of independent states in Africa, who obtained voting rights in the UN, it became politically interesting to invest in the relationship with these countries.

Whereas South Korea aimed at separating politics from economics, North Korea linked both issues. Park comes to some interesting conclusions for the international diplomacy during the 1970s. In most cases, the Koreas took the initiative to establish diplomatic relations, not the African countries. Africa was also not cohesive in the United Nations concerning the Korean question. Some countries opted for relations with the South, others for the North, some for both. Furthermore, African states separated politics from economics, much more than the contemporary eastern or western part of the world. Finally, the foreign policy of the average African country is far less predictable than for instance their European counterparts, while they became increasingly pro-eastern in regard of the Korean question.<sup>66</sup>

Another venue for cooperation, besides diplomatic ties, is development aid. South-south cooperation became an important theme in the last half of the twentieth century. Organizations like the United Nations, the Non-Aligned Movements and the Economic

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<sup>64</sup> Park, 'African and two Koreas', 74-75.

<sup>65</sup> Ibidem, 79.

<sup>66</sup> Ibidem, 86.

Commission for Africa have called for this kind of cooperation.<sup>67</sup> North Korea also participated in this old school kind of development aid and sponsored projects in Ghana and Equatorial Guinea. The state provided grants, interest-free loans and technical co-operation.<sup>68</sup> Whether other nations also received aid is not certain, but is certainly a possibility. The Aveyime Rice Project in Ghana as an example was not very successful. In the 1980s, a team of North Korean agricultural experts arrived in Ghana to provide technical assistance in the cultivation of rice, vegetable and maize. However, the equipment (including four “Choelima” tractors<sup>69</sup>) that the North Koreans brought in malfunctioned, the local peasants did not trust the foreign experts and the yield of test fields was disappointing. In short, the project was not satisfying at all.<sup>70</sup>

An example from South Africa highlights the ambiguous correlation between help during colonial times and support during independent times. Jacob Zuma, the current President of South Africa, hosted North Korean Vice President Yang Hyong Sop in 2005 and spoke highly of the support the African National Congress (ANC) received from North Korea during the struggle against apartheid. The ANC dominates the state since the end of apartheid in 1994 and advocated stronger bilateral relations with North Korea. Geldenhuys’ explanation revolves partly around the idea that “the ANC has political debts to repay following North Korea’s support for the ANC (..).”<sup>71</sup> It would be interesting to see if the same counts for other regimes as well. Several parties that now form governments in southern Africa received support from North Korea when they were trying to gain power. Is there are certain reciprocity involved? In any case, South Africa voted against a resolution in the Human Rights Commission of the United Nations that was meant to condemn North Korea’s human rights violations, an act that may seem odd.<sup>72</sup> Perhaps a historical perspective can place such behavior in a new light. It is therefore critical to take a look at the ‘unofficial’ relations that existed during the troubled times of Africa’s independence wars.

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<sup>67</sup> D. Bobiash, *South-South aid: how developing countries help each other* (New York, 1992), 84.

<sup>68</sup> Bobiash, *South-South aid*, 19.

<sup>69</sup> Chollima is the name of a mythical winged horse that is a highly important symbol in North Korea and features prominently in state propaganda.

<sup>70</sup> Bobiash, *South-South aid*, 86-88.

<sup>71</sup> Geldenhuys, ‘Pretoria and Pyongyang’, 151-152.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibidem*, 153.

## **Liberation movements**

### *Namibia*

In 1984 the area that is modern Namibia was declared a German protectorate under the name German South West Africa. The German colonizers established effective rule through the first genocide of the twentieth century. From 1904-1908, roughly eighty percent of the Herero and sixty percent of the Nama were exterminated. Following the First World War, South Africa invaded the territory in 1915 and installed military rule. In 1920 the area was awarded by the League of Nations as a mandate territory and was named South West Africa. South Africa introduced apartheid policy and divided the country up into Bantustans, specific homelands for each ethnic group. The South West African People's Organization (SWAPO) commenced the liberation war in 1966. After twenty-three years of fighting, Namibia became independent in 1990.<sup>73</sup>

South West Africa was considered as a fifth province of South Africa by the regime from Pretoria. The apartheid government took a stance against North Korea. Correspondence from 1948, the year the Democratic People's Republic of Korea was founded, shows how the Secretary for the Interior instructs the Secretary for South West Africa in Windhoek to not affix visas to passports issued by the government of the "self-styled 'Korean people's Democratic Republic.'" Visas for passports affixed by the government seated in Seoul were allowed.<sup>74</sup>

Diplomatic visits between officials of the two nations happened regularly. Four old black and white photos give a bit of an insight on how these unofficial visits looked like. The photos are dated at 1983, 1986 and 1989, showing that Sam Nujoma and other SWAPO-officials regularly visited Pyongyang before independence. In the oldest photo, from 1983, we see Sam Nujoma who visits female soldiers in North Korea (figure 2). The president is wearing a trench coat and is shaking the hand of cheerful female soldiers while an unidentified Korean man is standing next to him. Dated in the same year, another photo shows Nujoma while is looking at a military display (figure 3). The caption on the photo says that Nujoma is "supported by the world community in exile." This time, Nujoma is standing in the background, surrounded by a group of male Korean and (presumably, but unidentified)

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<sup>73</sup> Kössler, 'Images of History', 31-33.

<sup>74</sup> NAN, SWAA 1957, A406/6/62, PASSPORTS. KOREA: Ernest Bevin, Secretary for Interior, 06-10-1948, to the Secretary for South West Africa in Windhoek.

Namibian men. On the foreground, a female soldier is blowing a whistle and raising her left hand. Perhaps she is giving instructions to the military display the men are watching.

Three years later, in 1986, Nujoma is seen with Kim Il Sung in Pyongyang in a formal group picture (figure 4). The SWAPO President and Korean President are standing next to each other in the middle of the group and are surrounded by several Korean and Namibian men and two women. The picture has a formal character. The men are wearing suits and everyone looks serious. Behind them is a large mural of nature, displaying mountains. The other persons in the photo are not identified. It shows that Nujoma was not the only one to visit Pyongyang. Several other Namibians also got the chance. Lastly, one year before independence, a photo shows Sam Nujoma and Kim Il Sung after the first received a medal (figure 5). The two men stand next to each other, before the mural that was also depicted in figure 4. Nujoma is wearing the medal he had just received, the Order of Freedom and Independence, first class, hailed in SWAPO literature as “Korea’s highest award.” After receiving the award, Nujoma gave a speech in which he said that: “Even when I, Sam Nujoma, are there no more, the future generation of our people will remember that there were people in Asia who stood firm and supported the cause for the independence of their country.”<sup>75</sup>



Figure 2: Sam Nujoma meets female North Korean soldiers in Pyongyang in 1983, NAN, 13927.

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<sup>75</sup> NSS, Swapo Information Bulletin, June 1986.





Figure 3: Namibian and North Korean officials are watching a military display in Pyongyang in 1983, NAN, 13930.



Figure 4: Namibian and North Korean officials on a visit to Pyongyang in 1986, NAN, 13944.



Figure 5: Sam Nujoma and Kim Jong Il in Pyongyang in 1989, NAN, 13955.

One visit is described in the SWAPO Information Bulletin of June 1986. From 9 June to 13 June Nujoma and a number of fellow SWAPO-officials toured North Korea. A state banquet was held in honor of the visit. Kim Il Sung said in a speech at the banquet:

“Comrade Sam Nujoma is widely known among our people since a long time ago. You are an intimate friend of our people (sic). You have pioneered and developed the history of friendship between Korea and Namibia through your visits to our country. I believe that this visit will be important in consolidating the friendship and solidarity between our Party and the South West Africa People’s Organisation, between the peoples of Korea and Namibia and in contributing to the anti-imperialist common cause of the people throughout the world.”

The ‘Great Leader’ Kim Il Sung mentioned multiple visits of Nujoma, indicating a relationship that already existed for a longer period of time. He assured his guests that SWAPO could count on the support of the Workers’ Party in the future as well: “Our Party and people will firmly stand by you in the future too, and support and encourage the just liberation struggle of the Namibian people.” In response, Nujoma gave a speech and made a reference to the material support SWAPO received from North Korea during their guerrilla war against South African forces. Nujoma thanked the North Korean leaders for:

“(…) the practical material assistance, political and diplomatic support which your country has rendered to the cause of the struggling Namibian people. With your material assistance we are able to maintain the banner of the struggle higher and inflict casualties on the South African racist troops of occupation in Namibia.”

On that occasion, Nujoma also received the medal that is portrayed in figure 5. Godwin Kornes suggests that North Korean instructors were active in SWAPO's exile camps to train the cadres of the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN), the armed wing of SWAPO.<sup>76</sup> It is unfortunate that the other Namibians who accompanied their President are not identified. Chances are that they are still alive and have numerous stories on their visits to Pyongyang. A clue can be found in the private collections of Mose Penaani Tjitendero, who left South West Africa in exile for the SWAPO office in Tanzania. He was awarded a scholarship in the United States, where he studied history, political science and education. In 1976 he started working as a senior lecturer at the United Nations Institute for Namibia (UNIN) in Lusaka, Zambia. UNIN was an important training center for SWAPO cadres. Tjitendero even became the head of teacher training and assistant director, before he became director of the United Nations Vocational and Training Centre in Luanda, Angola. He became the first speaker of the National Assembly in an independent Namibia and helped drafting the constitution. When he died in 2006, Tjitendero was buried at the National Heroes' Acre.

Clearly, Tjitendero was one of the highest ranking officials in the liberation movement. It is therefore telling that his private collections of documents contain dozens of North Korean documents. Some publications go as far back as 1977, more than a decade before independence. Several books contain socialist texts by Kim Jong Il on a wide array of topics, with titles ranging from 'Enhancing the role of the popular masses is the guarantee for victory in the cause of independence' or 'On the fundamentals of revolutionary party building'.<sup>77</sup> Another item that stands out is some sort of city guide to Pyongyang from 1988,

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<sup>76</sup> G. Kornes, 'Gedenkstätten und Waffen. Nordkorea und Namibia blicken auf enge Beziehungen zurück', iz3w (2016).

<sup>77</sup> UNAM Archives, PA3/5/3/217, Tasks of the people's Government in modelling the whole of society on the Juche Idea / Kim Il Sung. – Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1982; UNAM Archives, PA3/5/3/228, Juche Idea: the current of thought in the present time. – Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1977; UNAM Archives, PA3/5/3/229, Juche: the banner of independence. – Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1977; UNAM Archives, PA3/6/117, Study of the Juche Idea. – Tokyo: International Institute of the Juche Idea, 1982; UNAM Archives, PA3/5/3/211, Young men and women, be the vanguard unfailingly loyal to the party and the leader / Kim Jong IL - Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1991; UNAM Archives, PA3/5/3/212, On the fundamentals of revolutionary party building / Kim Jong IL. - Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1992; UNAM Archives, PA3/5/3/213, On training the younger generation into the heirs to the revolution / Kim Jong IL. - Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1992; UNAM Archives, PA3/5/3/214, On enhancing the party's leading role / Kim Jong IL. - Pyongyang:

containing detailed descriptions of all important monuments and other highlights of the city. The booklet contains a folded map, but it is not clear if the two belong together.<sup>78</sup> Equally interesting is the magazine *Korea today*, published in 1992. The magazine is a colorful document with playful articles about all facets of North Korea: the architecture, leadership, industries, nature, the army, etc.<sup>79</sup> The exact meaning of this curious collection remains uncertain, but on the other hand it is interesting that such a high-ranking SWAPO-man would have such an extensive range of North Korean documents. It might be the case that Tjitendero was one of the SWAPO-officials who visited Pyongyang.

The DPRK opened an embassy in Windhoek after independence. The existence of the embassy is not recorded in any written texts but has been mentioned during several talks. After a long search, the National Library of Namibia appeared to contain a newsletter from the Embassy of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, containing a speech of Kim Jong Il about socialism and the Juche idea (a philosophy of self-reliance) from 1991. The front page of the newsletter displayed the flags of Namibia and the DPRK and it seemed that the newsletter appeared regularly, this edition was number eight. The embassy was located on Jenner Street.<sup>80</sup> What happened with the embassy is unsure. During various talks it was recalled that the diplomatic mission opened right after independence in 1990 but only maintained an embassy for two or three years. Rumor has it that the embassy was not able to pay its bills and was closed.

The Tjitendero Collection of UNAM contains dozens of statements that are released by the embassy in 1991, 1992 and 1993. They include mostly news from North Korea and countless speeches by Kim Il Sung on socialism. One statement from 21 December 1992 describes the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Kim Jong Suk, "an indomitable revolutionary fighter." The document describes how many people visited the Revolutionary Martyrs

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Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1992; UNAM Archives, PA3/5/3/215, Magnolia Sieboldii-Korea's National Flower / Kim IL Sung. - Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1992; UNAM Archives, PA3/5/3/216, Enhancing the role of the popular masses is the guarantee for victory in the cause of independence / Kim II Sung. - Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1992; UNAM Archives, PA3/5/3/263, On the further improvement of the health service / Kim Jong II. - Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1992; UNAM Archives, PA3/5/3/193, Reminiscences with the century 1 / Kim II Sung. - Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1992; UNAM Archives, PA3/5/3/266, The law of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea on the nursing and upbringing of children. - Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1992.

<sup>78</sup> UNAM Archives, PA3/5/3/273, Pyongyang review. – Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1988.

<sup>79</sup> UNAM Archives, PA3/6/67, *Korea today*. – Pyongyang: The Foreign Language Magazines, 1992.

<sup>80</sup> NLN, F001-T00/0026, *Korea is one* / Embassy of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. The newsletter was dated on 10 June 1991 and contained a summary of a speech of Kim Jong Il of 5 May 1991. The address was No. 2 Jenner Street, Windhoek, Namibia, Tel: (061) 221505, Tlx: 098-631 KT WK, P.O. Box 22927.

Cemetery on Mt. Taesong near Pyongyang, a predecessor of the Heroes' Acre in Windhoek.<sup>81</sup> As far as is known, this is only one of the two times the burial ground was mentioned in the available North Korean documents. The other was in a city guide, also founded in the collection of Tjitendero.

The National Archives of Namibia contain two booklets of the Workers' Party of Korea, published in 1992 and 1993, right after Namibian independence. The odd thing is that both booklets are translated into Afrikaans and published in Windhoek (by Gamsberg Macmillan Publishers). At that time, Afrikaans was the lingua franca of Namibia and was much more widely spoken than English, German, Oshivambo or other languages. One can only wonder why two (and perhaps more) speeches of Kim Jong Il were translated and published in a non-socialist country, containing topics as "Basiese beginsels van die opbou van die revolusionere party"<sup>82</sup> (Basic principles of the build-up of the party) and "Die historiese les van die opbou van sosialisme en ons party se algeme lyn"<sup>83</sup> (The historical lesson of the development of socialism and the party's general course).

### *Zimbabwe*

The area that is present-day Zimbabwe was long known as Southern Rhodesia and ruled by Great-Britain from 1923 onwards. The aspirations for independence were tunneled through to main organizations, the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) and the Zimbabwe African Nation Union (ZANU). The start of the armed struggle occurred roughly during the same period of time as those of Namibia, South Africa, Angola and Mozambique. In 1965 a white settler regime led by Ian Smith proclaimed the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) and founded the state of Rhodesia. The UDI was not recognized as legal by the rest of the world, including Great-Britain. After more than a decade of white settler rule, a negotiated settlement was reached through the Lancaster House Agreement of 1979. A year later, in 1980, Zimbabwe became independent.<sup>84</sup>

Unfortunately, the corpus of primary source material for this research project exists almost entirely out of Namibian material. The reason for this are the research conditions as

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<sup>81</sup> UNAM Archives, PA3/9/8/1: Korea (Democratic People's Republic): Statements released by the Embassy of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, on various topics. – [s.l.]: Embassy of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, 1991 (21 & 22); 1992 (1-23); 1993 (1).

<sup>82</sup> NAN, F002-AA/0251, Basiese beginsels van die opbou van die revolusionere party : verhandeling geskryf ter geleentheid van die 47ste herdenking van die stigting van die Werkersparty van Korea/Kim Jong Il.

<sup>83</sup> NAN, F002-PA/0805, Die historiese les van die opbou van sosialisme en ons party se algeme lyn : toespraak voor die senior amptenare van die Sentrale Komitee van die Werkersparty van Korea, 3 Januarie 1992 / Kim Jong Il

<sup>84</sup> Kössler, 'Images of History', 33-36.

explained in the methodological part of the introduction. There are however signs that in Zimbabwe similar events occurred as in Namibia. Most notably was the existence of the Fifth Brigade, a special part of the Zimbabwean army. Robert Mugabe signed an agreement with Kim Il Sung in 1980, establishing a military brigade trained by North Korean experts. The so-called Fifth Brigade was not a formal part of the army but was realized as the special forces of the Prime Minister, Robert Mugabe. The brigade was responsible for the Gukurahundi, a military operation that crushed around an estimated 20,000 civilians of the Matabeleland region between 1983 and 1987. The actions repressed opposition of the Ndebele, the main ethnic group living in the area, against the Shona dominated regime of Mugabe. Gukurahundi is a Shona word that roughly translates into “the rain which washes away the chaff before the spring rains” and the military operation bordered to genocide. It was disbanded in 1988, but rumor has it that it was later reformed and still active.<sup>85</sup>

### **Hard foreign currency**

#### *An isolated position*

Since its very inception as a state in 1948, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea has divided the world. Born out of the Cold War, it immediately received a range of supporters and a range of adversaries, divided between the east and the west. It is however the pursuit of weapons of mass destruction that caused worldwide controversy. In the 1950s, Kim Il Sung started a nuclear research institute with the help of the Soviet Union. Gradually the state developed the capability to produce nuclear weapons, while it signed treaties such as the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the declaration for a non-nuclear Korean Peninsula. In the early 1990s the first Korean nuclear crisis erupted after North Korea announced to become the first country to withdraw from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. In 1994 Kim Il Sung died and his son, Kim Jong Il had taken over.<sup>86</sup>

After intensive international diplomacy, the crisis was averted in 1994 with the Agreed Framework, a range of measures which included the replacement of nuclear reactions with light-water reactors, the recommitting to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the allowance of regular nuclear inspections. In 2002 the second nuclear crisis broke out, following accusations of the United States of America that North Korea secretly enriched

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<sup>85</sup> Ibidem, 35.

<sup>86</sup> Geldenhuys, ‘Pretoria and Pyongyang’, 143-145.

uranium. It was estimated that the country had up to eight nuclear weapons. Again, the world opted for diplomacy and several six-party talks were held. In 2005 a breakthrough was produced after the DPRK promised to stop with its nuclear weapons program, in return for energy assistance and economic-co-operation.<sup>87</sup> Again, the agreement did not hold and North Korea went even further in the past years by regularly testing missiles and producing other provocations.

After the first nuclear tests by North Korea since 2006, the United Nations Security Council has adopted several resolutions against the Asian regime. The resolutions included prohibiting export of luxury goods to North Korea, an arms embargo, sanctions on money transfers, the ban on export of valuable materials such as gold, coal and iron, copper and various other resources (resolution 1874, 2087, 2094, 2270 and 2321). Addition, several countries adopted bilateral sanctions against the DPRK. Among them are the European Union, the United States, Japan and South Korea. It became increasingly difficult for North Korea to act in the international financial system. Combined with a weak and failing economy, the revenues for the state began to dry up.

The dynamics in Africa changed drastically since the United Nations adopted the latest sanctions against the DPRK in 2016, following renewed nuclear tests and contravening international sanctions. Gradually, a spotlight was put on the African-North Korean relationship causing media controversy in amongst others Namibia and Zimbabwe. To understand this, the UN resolution 1718 from 2006 is critical. Besides containing sanctions against North Korea, a Committee was established to oversee these sanctions. Subsequent resolutions entrusted new functions to the Committee. The organizational entity is supported by a Panel of Experts (POE), consisting of eight experts who are based in New York. The POE gathers information on non-compliance by North Korea on the sanctions and provides reports to the Security Council.<sup>88</sup>

### *Mansudae Overseas Projects*

The latest report was published on 27 February 2017 and contains exhilarating findings. Marcus Noland stress that “North Korea increasingly relies on countries with weak governance to evade sanctions.” He shows how the DPRK regime is involved in arms

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<sup>87</sup> Ibidem, 145-146.

<sup>88</sup> In so far, the Panel of Experts has published the following reports: S/2010/571 (2010), S/2012/422 (2012), S/2013/337 (2013), S/2014/147 (2014), S/2015/131 (2015), S/2016/157 (2016) and S/2017/150 (2017). For this thesis, only the latest report is consulted due to time restraints.

trafficking and military cooperation all over Africa, how North Korean banks establish operations on the continent and how DPRK-controlled vessels are reflagged. These actions are often executed by North Korean agents who are accredited to embassies, thereby using their rights as diplomats to travel and conduct business.<sup>89</sup> It seems that Africa can function as a loophole for the array of international sanctions that hurt the North Korean regime. Weak governance may well be one of the reasons, but Noland also points at the historical connections with African liberation movements. However, neither he or the POE report elaborates on this idea.

Also the Panel of Experts struggles with finding information. From the 54 African countries, 43 have not submitted the required National Implementation Reports, essential for the contents of the report. To be fair, many other countries did not submit a report either. The POE has done a remarkable job despite a lack of cooperation from UN member states. The largest projects that Mansudae Overseas Projects executed in Namibia are the National Heroes' Acre, the Independence Memorial Museum, the State House and a military museum in Okahandja, which was finished in 2014 but has not yet opened its doors.<sup>90</sup> The illustrious company is entangled with the African country in all sorts of ways. Most notably, Mansudae serves as a front for the Korea Mining and Development Trading Cooperation (KOMID), the primary arms exporting company of North Korea. Both companies were involved in the construction of a munitions factory in Namibia using laborers from North Korea, from 2010 to 2015.

In 2012, a shipment issued from KOMID to the Namibian Defense Force was discovered that included various types of pressure tanks and machinery for military explosives. The shipment was trucked to Oamites military base, indicating that North Korea was indeed arming Namibian forces.<sup>91</sup> In addition, the art studio is involved in a number of other military bases. It is able to withdraw large amounts of United States dollars in cash from a local bank. For instance, in January 2015 the company withdrew \$280,000 in cash and divided it over fourteen individuals who carried it to North Korea.<sup>92</sup> Under the name of MOP Architectural & Technical Services, Mansudae has an office in Windhoek. It is most likely

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<sup>89</sup> M. Noland, 'Africa in the Panel of Experts Report', Peterson Institute for International Economics, [<https://piie.com/blogs/north-korea-witness-transformation/africa-panel-experts-report>], 28-03-2017.

<sup>90</sup> Kirkwood, 'Postindependence Architecture'; POE 44

<sup>91</sup> United Nations, Final report, 43.

<sup>92</sup> Ibidem, 43-44.



that the Namibian government maintains contact with DPRK officials via this office, since the official embassy was closed a number of years ago.<sup>93</sup>

In Zimbabwe, Mansudae is best known for the National Heroes' Acre and a grand statue of Joshua Nkomo in Bulawayo.<sup>94</sup> The Panel of Experts Report is surprisingly quiet on Zimbabwean affairs. The state is one of the countries that did not contribute a National Implementation Report, leaving the Panel with little information. In addition, but this is speculation, Zimbabwe might have been less attractive for earning hard foreign currency for North Korea in the past years. The Zimbabwean economy is in a desperate state of affairs. From 2003 to 2009 the country suffered from hyperinflation, reaching its peak in 2008 with a hyperinflation of 231 million percent. At the moment of fieldwork, Zimbabwe was in a cash crisis, making it virtually impossible to withdraw money from ATM's. The Zimbabwean dollar was abandoned and replaced by the Bond Notes, but in practice people make use of a multi-currency system in which United States Dollars, South African Rand or Botswana Pula are accepted. In short, Zimbabwe might not have any hard foreign currency to offer to North Korea. On the other hand, the involvement of Mansudae in Zimbabwe and historical ties between ZANU-PF and the DPRK indicate some sort of continuing relationship.

#### *Forced laborers*

Another, closely related dimension is the use of forced laborers by the DPRK. The Slaves to the System project from the Leiden Asia Centre in Leiden has recently drawn attention to the fact that North Korea exports forced laborers to more than forty countries. Using forced laborers to work on construction sites and shipyards in foreign countries, North Korea earns the hard foreign currency it so desperately needs to keep the regime afloat. The idea that if the workers are exported, "its monolithic supreme leadership system (...) must necessarily also be exported, has strangely enough never been articulated," writes the multifaceted research team.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> The Panel of Experts report of February 2017 provides the full address of the office of Mansudae Overseas Projects in Namibia, named as MOP Architectural & Technical Services (Pty.) Ltd. The company is located on 34 Herbst Street, Ludwigsdorf, Windhoek, Namibia. Its managing director is Kim Tong-Chol and the P.O. Box is located in Olympia. The Report also includes telephone numbers and an e-mail address. Not mentioned in the report is that the office is located 550 meters from the embassy of the People's Republic of China, North Korea's most loyal ally.

<sup>94</sup> Ibidem, 43-44.

<sup>95</sup> M. Boonen, K. Boonstra, R. Breuker, C. Chung, I. van Gardingen, K. Kwang-cheol, O. Kyuwook, A. van der Veere, *North Korean Forced Labour*, 15-16.

In essence, the state acts as the “prime mover” of workers through state-owned companies.<sup>96</sup> It is not uncommon for laborers to work around twelve hours a day, six days a week while they have to remain almost completely isolated from their host country.<sup>97</sup> A large percentage of their salary, easily around 70 percent, flows into the pockets of the regime. The workers are only selected if they are married and have children, so that these can serve as hostages, to prevent the workers from escaping.<sup>98</sup> The living and working circumstances can be abominable and highly unsafe. Free time is almost non-existent, as the workers are obliged to follow ideological sessions throughout their stay.<sup>99</sup>

The authors of the Leiden Asia Centre report aptly write that “there are no employers and employees, merely the state and its citizens.”<sup>100</sup> This phenomenon entails a wide array of human rights violations and contravention of numerous international treaties and declarations. Similar to the Mansudae issue, forced labor has become increasingly important following the latest sanctions. The income of the state is rapidly declining, causing a direct increase in overseas forced labor.<sup>101</sup> Among the African countries that are often mentioned as hosting North Korean laborers are Algeria, Angola, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Libya and Nigeria.<sup>102</sup> The sources used in this thesis suggest that North Korean workers have also been active in Namibia and Zimbabwe. Adding these countries to the long list of African states that are involved with Mansudae and KOMID shows that North Korea is active in a major part of the continent.

The international crisis situation that is a result from North Korea’s continuous attempts to launch nuclear missiles puts the Heroes’ Acres in perspective. It is tremendously hard for North Korea to make money in any legal way. The state is virtually locked out of the regular international trade system and copes with a seriously malfunctioning economy. How does the totalitarian regime fund their expenses and costly weapons program? Part of the answer is by exporting large-scale monuments and other constructions through state-owned companies and supplying African nations with low-cost forced laborers. As discussed in the first chapter, around fifteen African countries pay large amounts of money for the services of Mansudae Overseas Projects. In Angola, one of the few countries who responded to POE enquiries, Mansudae had undertaken more than 56 construction projects until February 2015.

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<sup>96</sup> Ibidem, 19, 28.

<sup>97</sup> Ibidem, 43, 75.

<sup>98</sup> Ibidem, 44.

<sup>99</sup> Ibidem, 85.

<sup>100</sup> Ibidem, 21.

<sup>101</sup> Ibidem, 93-94.

<sup>102</sup> Ibidem, 18, footnote 9.

The Mansudae-Namibia company owns 90 percent of the shares of the Mansudae-Angola company, which strengthens the idea that Namibia is an important node for North Korea in southern Africa.<sup>103</sup> As far as known, some, and perhaps all, of these constructions involve forced laborers. It is a depressing picture that still remains rather unclear. After extensive media coverage, Namibia terminated the services of Mansudae and KOMID in June 2016 and promised to repatriate all North Korean workers.<sup>104</sup> If this will be the case is uncertain – only time will tell.

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<sup>103</sup> United Nations, Final report, 44.

<sup>104</sup> Ibidem, 43.

# 3

## **Public history in a political culture of violence**

The cemeteries in Windhoek and Harare can be described as pompous and grotesque, large complexes full of statues and murals, impressive for their visitors and full of symbolism. However, just a shallow description of the materials and the shape of each Heroes' Acre would undervalue the construction. While the first chapter showed that a pattern of North Korean monuments in southern Africa is not a mere coincidence, the second chapter explained the historical roots of this phenomenon. The third chapter ought to explore what the meaning behind these burial grounds is. Again, there is more than meets the eye. It is argued that the Heroes' Acres can be understood as potent symbols of the prevalent political culture in Namibia and Zimbabwe, and perhaps in larger parts of southern Africa.

To understand this, we again need to look into the past. The organization of the national liberation movements is namely essential for the formation of the national independent governments. Despite the fact that Namibia and Zimbabwe had (sometimes very different) historical trajectories, the two countries share a similar post-colonial political culture. An attempt will be made to make an analysis of the characteristics of this specific culture, with a particular focus on public history writing. Lastly, a connection with the DPRK is made to show the parallels between the African and Asian countries. With a little imagination, a certain solidarity could be felt during the early formation of the three states, as they are all shaped by certain historical developments, a sense of belonging that is strengthened by the friendship and strategic partnership of the rulers.

### **Back to the beginning**

The governments of independent southern Africa were formed by the anti-colonial liberation movements. They reorganized themselves as political parties after independence and took

control over the state through the democratic elections.<sup>105</sup> The legitimacy of their rule stems from the violent struggle that they led during the decades before independence. Since the first days of rule, they have been able to strengthen their dominance over the state.<sup>106</sup> The result, Melber writes, is:

“A ruling new political elite operating from commanding heights shaped in and based upon the particular context of the post-Apartheid societies by selective narratives and memories related to the (war(s) of liberation and hence constructing or inventing new traditions to establish an exclusive post-colonial legitimacy under the sole authority of one particular agency of social forces.”<sup>107</sup>

But it would be wrong to see a clear distinction between the organizations that existed before independence as liberation movements and the organizations that existed as governments after independence was reached. A “liberation movement is a prototype of a state within the state” writes Melber.<sup>108</sup> Most importantly, SWAPO and ZANU-PF shared many characteristics of a government long before independence was in sight. It has been argued in many cases that after independence, the boundaries between the movement, the party, the state and the government became blurred.<sup>109</sup> In the spirit of Ellis’ remarks on deconstructing the traditional trident of African history, where time is divided into pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial times (see the part ‘Forgotten history’ for a discussion), this part of the thesis aims to shortly look at how the organizations operated during the struggle. In many ways, their organizational structures were similar to those of governments. This is important because the movements also created a certain culture that was rooted in their fight for independence, a culture that was constantly nurtured and reproduced.<sup>110</sup> This culture did not suddenly disappear after independence, but continues up to today.

SWAPO was founded in 1960 and was an amalgamation of several organizational structures that emerged during the 1950s, located in the northern part of South West Africa.<sup>111</sup> Known as Ovamboland, this region was under the influence of the colonial contract labor system. Half of the population lived in the north. The Oshivambo-speaking people form the

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<sup>105</sup> H. Melber, ‘‘Namibia, land of the brave’’: selective memories on war and violence within nation building’, in: J. Abbink, M. de Bruijn and K. van Walraven (eds.), *Rethinking Resistance: Revolt and Violence in African History* (Leiden, 2003), 307.

<sup>106</sup> H. Melber, ‘From Liberation Movements to Governments: On Political Culture in Southern Africa’, *African Sociological Review*, 6:1 (2002), 2 .

<sup>107</sup> Melber, ‘From Liberation Movements’, 3.

<sup>108</sup> Melber, ‘Southern African’, 453. Paraphrasing Raymond Suttner, a former member of the ANC.

<sup>109</sup> Melber, ‘From Liberation Movements’, 3

<sup>110</sup> Melber, ‘Southern African’, 453.

<sup>111</sup> L. Dobell, *Swapo’s Struggle for Namibia, 1960-1991: War by Other Means* (Basel, 1998).

backbone of SWAPO. As a result, the narrative of the party is strongly influenced by the perspective of the northern part of the country.<sup>112</sup> In the 1970s, SWAPO was designated as the “sole and authentic representative of the Namibian people” by the General Assembly of the United Nations, which also formally equated the party with the people.<sup>113</sup> In many ways it resembled a government: the organization had a President and Vice-President, a Central Committee and Executive Committee, an army, various departments (of defense, women, youth, information, health, education, elders, foreign affair, labor, etc.), it hosted schools and clinics. Foreign missions acted as embassies while a whole bureaucracy existed of middle level and junior officers.<sup>114</sup>

Similar developments also occurred within ZANU-PF.<sup>115</sup> Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni wrote that ZANU-PF “worked tirelessly to claim to be the only authentic force with a sacred historic mission” since its formation in 1963.<sup>116</sup> The organization developed rapidly into a bureaucracy with many dimensions. A last remark in this respect is the many connections that existed between the two liberation movements. SWAPO-literature, published in exile, made constant references to Zimbabwe. ZANU-PF politicians on the other hand supported SWAPO in many ways. The officials met numerous times during visits and conferences. In 1977, for instance, was the ‘International Conference in support of the peoples of Zimbabwe and Namibia’ organized in Maputo, Mozambique.<sup>117</sup> These meetings were not only beneficial for moral support but also addressed relevant issues for the organization of the liberation struggle. In 1982, for example, officials of SWAPO and ZANU-PF met in Lusaka at a seminar on education and culture. M.B. M’Kumbuzi from the Ministry of Education and Culture of Zimbabwe gave a speech about history making in an independent country:

“The Liberation struggle in Zimbabwe, Mr. Chairman was not merely a struggle for political independence. It was also a struggle to free the people of Zimbabwe from the fetters and shackles of

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<sup>112</sup> H. Melber, ‘Namibia’s Past in the Present: Colonial Genocide and Liberation Struggle in Commemorative Narratives’, *South African Historical Journal*, 54:1 (2005), 94.

<sup>113</sup> Melber, ‘Namibia’s Past’, 95. Via United Nations General Assembly Resolution 3111 of 12 December 1973, SWAPO was recognized as “the authentic representative of the Namibian people.” In 1976 this was amended via resolution 31/146 of 20 December 1976 to “sole and authentic.”

<sup>114</sup> Based on roughly sixty SWAPO publications from the Irlich Collection of the NSS and the Katjavivi Collection of UNAM. Unfortunately, due to time constraints there is not a part of the thesis concerned with the media channels of SWAPO and ZANU-PF before and after independence, and the use of history in this respect.

<sup>115</sup> Admittedly, the Zimbabwean struggle for independence consisted of various changing organizations. In this thesis, the name ZANU-PF is constantly used to describe the core around Mugabe.

<sup>116</sup> S. J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, ‘Rethinking ‘Chimurenga’ and ‘Gukurahundi’ in Zimbabwe: a critique of partisan national history’, *African Studies Review*, 55:3 (2012), 1.

<sup>117</sup> UNAM Archives, PA2/9/16, International Conference in support of the peoples of Zimbabwe and Namibia, Maputo, Mozambique. Pamphlet, 16-21 May 1977.

mental colonisation brought about by the tapestries of a colonial system of education. (...)We did not just fight a political war, Mr. Chairman, we also, at the same time, prepared the educational framework and policies which would be in accord with our new dispensation.”<sup>118</sup>

M’Kumbuzi explains how already before independence ZANU-PF started schools and wrote syllabuses. Exactly the same developments occurred within SWAPO. It is therefore paramount to examine in more detail how these organizations evolved over time and how the past was treated before independence.

### **Shared characteristics**

Ndlovu-Gatsheni points out that southern Africa was the last part of the continent to experience decolonization and is still ruled by the political parties that transformed out of the armed movements: besides the two discussed examples above, there is FRELIMO in Mozambique, MPLA in Angola and the ANC in South Africa. The region reveals “in varying degrees, a common political culture of intolerance of opposition.”<sup>119</sup> Melber described this as the “limits to liberation.”<sup>120</sup> A burgeoning literature exists on the political culture of individual liberation movements in southern Africa, with Zimbabwe as a leading case study. In this thesis, an endeavor is made to provide an analysis of how the ‘liberation governments’ of Namibia and Zimbabwe employ public history.

Public history in this sense is differentiated from academic history, produced by professional historians at independent universities. Public history is the story that is promoted by the government and is disseminated through monuments, museums and school curricula. In a ground-breaking study, Ranger described the efforts of the Mugabe regime in this respect as “patriotic history.” The ZANU-PF government developed a public historical narrative that is explicitly antagonistic to academic historiography and celebrates the violent aspects of the liberation struggle. It has been used to justify violent land seizures and deny basic rights to the opposition.<sup>121</sup> The narrative is being propagated through state-owned television, radio, print media and educational institutions. Patriotic history is even taught in special youth militia

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<sup>118</sup> UNAM Archives, PA/3/8/47 Paper on the production of textbooks and teaching materials in Zimbabwe: presented at 1982 SWAPO/Dag Hammarskjöld foundation seminar on education and culture for liberation in Namibia Lusaka, Zambia September 20-25 1982 I.M.B. M’Kumbuzi. – Harare, The Ministry of Education and Culture, 1982.

<sup>119</sup> Ndlovu-Gatsheni, ‘Rethinking’, 2.

<sup>120</sup> H. Melber, ‘Limits to Liberation: An Introduction to Namibia’s Postcolonial Political Culture’, in: H. Melber (ed.), *Re-examining Liberation in Namibia: Political Culture since Independence* (Uppsala, 2003), 9-24.

<sup>121</sup> Kriger, ‘From Patriotic Memories’, 1163.

camps.<sup>122</sup> Ranger's idea proved to be influential in African Studies and the case of Zimbabwe has been subject to academic scrutiny. In the past years, scholars and commentators alike have seen similar developments, although a bit less radical, in Namibia.



Figure 6: Sam Nujoma meets with the leaders of the frontline states in Lusaka, Zambia, from left, Sam Nujoma, Samora Machel (Mozambique) Kenneth Kaunda (Zambia) and Robert Mugabe (Zimbabwe), NAN, 13938.

Armed resistance occurred not only in Zimbabwe but also in Angola, Mozambique, South Africa and Namibia.<sup>123</sup> A significant part of the liberation struggles was executed in exile, causing intimate links between the states of southern Africa. This could explain the “strong sense of camaraderie” that was felt between the first generation of leaders in the post-colonial era, as displayed in figure 6.<sup>124</sup> The historiographies of several neighboring countries, including Namibia, show signs that similar developments occur. From a helicopter point of view, the following six characteristics can be found in both discourses: a binary view on

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<sup>122</sup> T. Ranger, ‘Nationalist History, Patriotic History and the History of the Nation: The Struggle over the Past in Zimbabwe’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 30:2 (2004), 219- 226.

<sup>123</sup> Melber, ‘Southern African’, 451.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibidem*, 454.



history, a connection between primary and secondary resistance, a focus on masculinity and violence, the party is perceived as a family, the party is the bringer of peace and liberation and the discourse is influenced by Marxism.

### 1. *A binary view on history*

The liberation movements adopted a binary view on history where a dichotomy between the good and the bad is essential. Zimbabweans are categorized as ‘patriots’ or ‘sell-outs’ through ZANU-PF history, as explained by Blessing-Miles Tendi. This distinction existed since the 1950s and has been used consistently.<sup>125</sup> The used discourse is divided along the we-they divide. If you are not supporting the liberator then you are a traitor.<sup>126</sup> Also in Namibia, people are categorized as winners or losers, friends or foe.<sup>127</sup> The benchmark for this discourse is in the narrow perception of liberation history. As a result, there is not a legitimate alternative to the hegemony of ZANU-PF and SWAPO, as they are the only ones to ‘understand history’.<sup>128</sup> It is ironic that the binary view on the past reproduces the colonial discourse of the former foreign occupiers, in which the colonial governments divided people between Europeans and Africans.<sup>129</sup>

### 2. *Continuity thesis*

While the liberation movements were founded in the second half of the twentieth century, they constantly make references to early resistance against their colonizers.<sup>130</sup> In Zimbabwe a famous connection was made between the first Chimurenga, which entailed local uprisings of the 1890s against the British South Africa Company, and the second Chimurenga, the liberation war as fought by ZANU-PF.<sup>131</sup> Also in Namibia SWAPO created a historical continuity that went back to the anti-colonial resistance of the nineteenth century.<sup>132</sup> The book *To Be Born A Nation*, published by the

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<sup>125</sup> B.-M. Tendi, *How intellectuals made history in Zimbabwe*, Africa Research Institute, July 2010, 3. For an elaboration, see: B.-M. Tendi, *Making History in Mugabe’s Zimbabwe: Politics, Intellectuals and the Media* (London, 2010).

<sup>126</sup> Melber, ‘From Liberation’, 3.

<sup>127</sup> Melber, ‘Namibia’s Past’, 451.

<sup>128</sup> Ibidem, 454.

<sup>129</sup> S.J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, ‘Re-thinking the Colonial Encounter in the Early Twentieth Century’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 33:1 (2007), 173-191; Melber, ‘From Liberation’, 4.

<sup>130</sup> See for an influential text, Ranger, *Revolt*.

<sup>131</sup> Ndlovu-Gatsheni, ‘Rethinking ‘Chimurenga’.

<sup>132</sup> Melber, ‘Namibia’s Past’, 96.

Department of Information and Publicity of the party in 1981, dates the struggle as far back as 1670.<sup>133</sup> It is a teleological view of the past, where the independence is the ultimate culmination of history. The link between a ‘primary’ resistance and a ‘secondary’ resistance is also anachronistic in a way, because the early resistance was conducted by people with varying motivations, placed in their own time, while it was labelled as nationalist by the propagators of the continuity thesis. A recent development is the possibility of a ‘third resistance’, whereby threatened post-colonial governments see an enduring battle against imperial and neo-colonial forces. In Zimbabwe, signs can be seen about a third Chimurenga, but only time can tell what will happen.<sup>134</sup>

### 3. *Masculinity and violence*

The liberation movements rose to power after gruesome guerrilla wars and were hence marked by military mind-sets. The organizational structures of the movements operated along the lines of command and obedience.<sup>135</sup> These experiences can explain the “aggressive polarization” from former liberation movements that can be recognized in Namibia, Zimbabwe and South Africa.<sup>136</sup> Commemorations of the past are characterized by a glorification of violence. Masculine images are prevalent.

### 4. *Family*

The liberation movements were treated like families. Raymond Suttner writes that in the ANC the ‘personal’ was always suppressed in favor of ‘the collective’. The collective decision-making of the leadership was always more important than individual judgements.<sup>137</sup> As a result, people who step out of the family, like dissidents do, are treated in sometimes horrible ways. Both SWAPO and ZANU-PF have been very harsh to dissidents. On the other side, people who are part of the movement are seen as the sons and daughters of the nation. A special place is reserved for the leaders of the organizations. It is not a surprise that Sam Nujoma is named as

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<sup>133</sup> SWAPO, *To Be Born*.

<sup>134</sup> Melber, ‘Southern African’, 452.

<sup>135</sup> Ibidem, 451.

<sup>136</sup> Ibidem, 454.

<sup>137</sup> Ibidem, 456, paraphrasing Raymond Suttner.

the founding father of Namibia and is portrayed as the patriarch who is heading the family.<sup>138</sup> Similar honors are reserved for Robert Mugabe.

5. *Party as the sole actor*

As discussed in the first section of this chapter, SWAPO and ZANU-PF were successful in establishing an international position of being the sole representative of the people. Also in their propaganda, the people and the movement are one. The role of many other actors in the struggle for independence are diminished, such as students, trade unions, women, sexual minorities, certain ethnic groups, international diplomacy and secessionist movements. Melber argues that SWAPO has a bias towards the Oshiwambo-speaking communities, while it brands itself as a national movement.<sup>139</sup> ZANU-PF is often criticized for favoring the Shona-people of Zimbabwe.

6. *Marxist in words*

The discourse of the discussed organizations is strongly influenced by Marxism. The liberation struggle was also seen as a fight against the economic exploitation of western imperialists. Party officials were always named 'comrade' and the organizations made many references to the class struggle. The eastern bloc of the world provided much help during the decades of rebellion. It can be safely said, however, that Namibia and Zimbabwe are not at all socialist countries.

The National Heroes' Acres in Windhoek and Harare are symbol of this specific political culture. While glorifying the liberations struggle, the monuments present in a visual way the division between the winners and the losers of history. The murals make reference to the 'primary resistance' and connect this to the 'secondary resistance' of the twentieth century, presenting one linear view of history. The symbols that are used radiate masculinity and violence. Nujoma and Mugabe are presented as fathers of the sons and daughters of their nations. The Heroes' Acres are frequently criticized for being SWAPO and ZANU-PF temples because other actors of history are not playing a role. Lastly, there are some sparse references to Marxism, especially with the use of 'Comrade' as titles for party officials and the socialist realist architecture.

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<sup>138</sup> Ibidem, 456.

<sup>139</sup> Melber, 'Namibia's Past', 104.

In a way, the discourse of the movements is some sort of 'end of history'. The 'end of history' also include the idea of an unlimited time in office.<sup>140</sup> Indeed, SWAPO and ZANU-PF still rule their respective countries, decades after independence and without any strong alternatives. Often, political alternatives or criticisms were discredited as obstructions against national unity and true independence, or as a disregard of history.<sup>141</sup> In Zimbabwe, the opposition (mainly the Movement for Democratic Change) is represented by the state as non-historical and puppets of imperial regimes. Morgan Tsvangirai, Mugabe's main opponent, is regularly mocked for not understanding history.<sup>142</sup> The mystification of the liberators is essential for the new historical paradigms of Namibia and Zimbabwe.<sup>143</sup> Such a narrow view on the past can and should be critiqued by professional historians. SWAPO's human rights violations have equally been stashed away. The movement imprisoned thousands of its own members in Angola during the 1980s on suspicion of being spies. The prisoners were often brutally tortured without trial.<sup>144</sup> For Zimbabwe, the Gukurahundi massacres are notorious.<sup>145</sup> In practice, Namibia and Zimbabwe remain divided societies.<sup>146</sup>

### **The DPRK example**

Logically the historical trajectories of Namibia, Zimbabwe and North Korea are most often studied in individual cases. But it could be argued that all three states, albeit different in many respects, were shaped by more or less similar grand historical happenings. The end of the Second World War, a devastating event with far-reaching implications all over the world, forced the colonial rulers of all three states to give up their rule. Japan ruled in Korea, Britain in Zimbabwe and South Africa in Namibia, but the end of the Second World War also meant the beginning of the end for their foreign occupations. In the meantime, Kim Il Sung, Robert Mugabe and Sam Nujoma remained in exile for large parts of their lives, having little

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<sup>140</sup> Melber, 'Southern African', 455.

<sup>141</sup> Ibidem, 454.

<sup>142</sup> Ranger, 'Nationalist History', 219- 226; N. Kriger, 'ZANU (PF) Strategies in General Elections, 1980-2000: Discourse and Coercion', *African Affairs* 104:414 (2005).

<sup>143</sup> Melber, 'From Liberation', 4; Melber, 'Namibia's Past', 92; see also R. Werbner, 'Smoke from the Barrel of a Gun: Postwars of the Dead, Memory and Reinscription in Zimbabwe', in: R. Werbner (ed.), *Memory and the Postcolony: African anthropology and the critique of power* (London, 1998), 71-102.

<sup>144</sup> G. Baines and P. Vale (eds.), *Beyond the Border War: New Perspectives on Southern Africa's Late-Cold War Conflicts* (Pretoria, 2008); Melber, 'Southern African', 452.

<sup>145</sup> B.-M. Tendi, *How intellectuals made history in Zimbabwe*, Africa Research Institute, July 2010, 3.

<sup>146</sup> Melber, 'Namibia's Past', 109.

practical connections with their original home country. They spent their time organizing guerrilla wars, executing international diplomacy and developing a party.

In the eyes of Kim, Mugabe and Nujoma, the independence of their home countries was realized through a glorious revolution, where the spirit of the nation was united in either the Workers' Party, ZANU-PF or SWAPO. The three men met regularly, shared a mutual understanding and admiration. However difficult to pin down, it is important to consider the mentalities these men had, formed by their experiences and views on the world. After the independence of each state, the respective parties were transformed into governments. The Workers' Party has ruled North Korea since independence in 1948, the same counts for ZANU-PF since 1980 and SWAPO since 1990. Their governing style is shaped by their experiences of the guerrilla wars. In many ways there is a direct continuation of the movements during colonialism and the governments after independence.

In this sense, the Kim dynasty and North Korea may form an inspiration for Namibia and Zimbabwe, and other countries. The regimes of new-found states like the ones in southern Africa are faced with immediate outside pressure. For decades they were occupied by foreign western powers and after independence they were plunged into a competitive state system. North Korea on the other hand forms a shining example of a state with similar experiences that withstood the ultimate international pressure but still 'survives' while following its own unique course. Namibia, Zimbabwe and North Korea are in a way part of the 'underdogs of world history', small and fairly new states that can feel threatened by former colonizers and major powers.

To legitimate its rule, the DPRK uses the revolutionary fight against the Japanese occupation. It is a continuing theme in the state propaganda. The unrivalled personal cult is not matched anywhere else in the world, but several aspects of how the DPRK treats history is copied in Namibia and Zimbabwe. The Heroes' Acres are prominent examples that embody a specific form of public history writing. To truly speak of a 'DPRK-model' is a bridge too far, but it can be stated with fair certainty that the leaders of Namibia and Zimbabwe were inspired by their friendship with Kim Il Sung and the examples that they have seen during their visits to Pyongyang.

## **Between liberators and oppressors**

The heroes of today are often the villains of tomorrow. Since times eternal, “liberators have often turned into oppressors, victims into perpetrators.”<sup>147</sup> The liberation movements of the freedom-loving peoples of southern Africa were heralded as the true bringers of peace in all its glory. How different is it today, where the SWAPO and ZANU-PF dominated governments of Namibia and Zimbabwe are regularly criticized for human rights violations and undemocratic behavior. The historiography of resistance in southern Africa has developed over the past decades into a research field that is critical of many aspects of the turbulent decades that resulted into independent nation states. One understudied aspect is the relationship between North Korea and the liberation movements that fought a bitter battle for freedom.

It is acknowledged in various scholarly works and organizations such as the Panel of Experts of the United Nations that North Korea and liberation movements had several links that continue up to today. However, a comprehensive overview of this side of history has not yet been written. This thesis is an attempt, setting the stage for further research. The National Heroes’ Acres of Namibia and Zimbabwe form an entry point to study how the relationship between North Korea and southern African states evolved over time. The monuments are known as North Korean constructions but often misunderstood. Their existence is not simply a matter of money, lack of expertise or taste. Instead, the explanation of their construction can be found in the history of the liberation movements.

SWAPO and ZANU-PF were highly successful in achieving the position as the national representation of the Namibian and Zimbabwean nation during their opposition to colonialism and white settler rule. The organizations fought a long guerilla war and actively used the past to legitimate their actions. Throughout it all, the organizations found a loyal partner in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, a state with a history that was in many ways similar. North Korea supplied materials and weapons, trained soldiers and gave diplomatic support.

In return, the isolated country maintained good relations with Namibia and Zimbabwe once they became independent and SWAPO and ZANU-PF rose to rule. For North Korea, southern Africa forms a loophole in the international systems of sanctions against the totalitarian regimes. The export of monuments and forced laborers is a means to earn hard

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<sup>147</sup> Melber, ‘Southern African’, 452.

foreign currency. But that is only the practical side of this issue. Importantly, the National Heroes' Acres also present a specific view on the past which suits the governing elites. In this respect, the combination of North Korean and southern African states is not so odd, since they share a mutual understanding that has been developed since decades.

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## Appendix: the National Heroes' Acres in photos

During the fieldwork in May-June 2017 the two monuments in Windhoek and Harare were visited. All photos are made by the author.



The gate of the National Heroes' Acre in Windhoek.



An overview of the Heroes' Acre in Windhoek. The graves are on the left and right.





One of the graves in the Heroes' Acre in Windhoek.

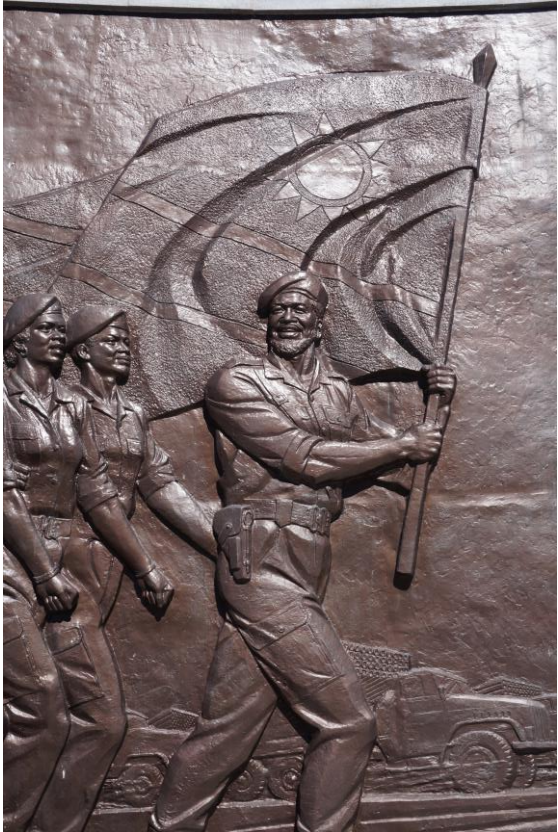


The statue of the unknown soldier with the handwriting of Sam Nujoma, in Windhoek.





Part of the mural of the Heroes' Acre in Windhoek.



Sam Nujoma is carrying the flag of freedom at the Heroes' Acre in Windhoek





The stairs towards the viewing point of the Heroes' Acre in Windhoek.



The monument of Windhoek seen from the highest point.





The entrance of the National Heroes' Acre in Harare.



An overview of the National Heroes' Acre in Harare.



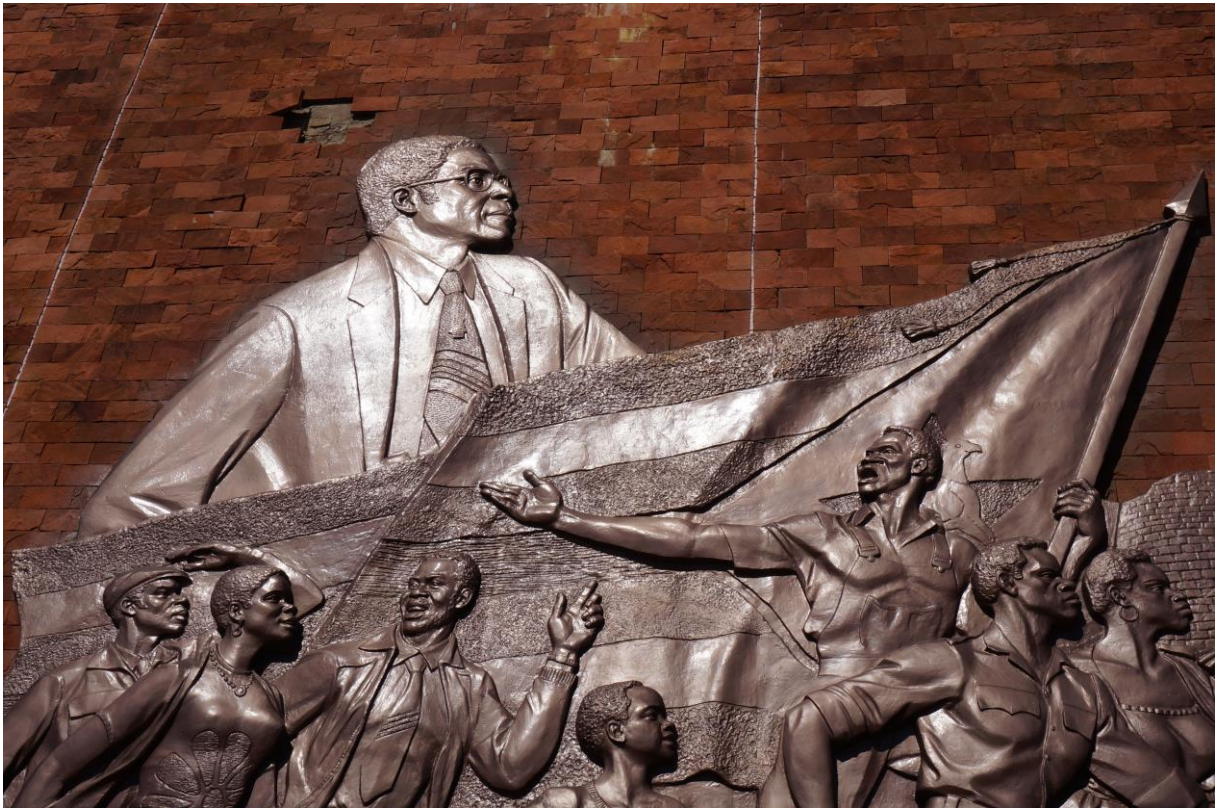


The trio of the unknown soldiers in the National Heroes' Acre in Harare.



Part of a mural in Harare.





Robert Mugabe is watching while the Zimbabweans are marching towards freedom.



One of the graves of the National Heroes' Acre in Harare.





Graves at the ready in Harare.



The basilisk and viewing point of the National Heroes' Acre in Harare.