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MAPPING SOCIALIST SOLIDARITIES:

SWAPO, THE NAMIBIAN LIBERATION STRUGGLE,

AND THE GLOBAL COLD WAR

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Abstract

This thesis addresses the entanglements between the Namibian liberation struggle and the global Cold War, focusing on the socialist support provided to the South West African People Organization (SWAPO), the liberation movement that fought for the independence of the country from the South African regime. During the liberation war, in fact, SWAPO was able to build a network of international relationships, especially with socialist states and communist parties, which provided aid on the basis of a proclaimed solidarity in the framework of the global struggle against racism, anti-imperialism, colonialism, and neocolonialism.

This thesis aims at analyzing three socialist models of solidarity with the SWAPO's struggle that developed especially from the late 1970s. Combining archival sources and biographical accounts, it examines the politics of solidarity with SWAPO implemented by East Germany, a Warsaw Pact country born out of the separation from its Western counterpart; Cuba, a revolutionary country of the "Global South"; and the Italian Communist Party, one of the largest communist parties in the West. The interest lies in understanding how solidarity was declined and received by internal promoters and external addressees. Thus, I explore how these three actors constructed their concept of solidarity with SWAPO according to their national and ideological contexts and how this was received by the SWAPO members who experienced it in various ways. Each socialist actor promoted solidarity with SWAPO by using varying narratives, pursuing their own objectives, and employing diverse instruments, thus carrying out different and sometimes competing visions of socialism and solidarity. On its side, SWAPO was able to take advantage from such visions, as each of them could serve its different needs in diverse ways.

In providing a general overview of these three solidarity policies, this thesis has the objective of highlighting the internal pluralization of the "socialist solidarity regime" while at the same time contributing to the debate on the extent of SWAPO's commitment to socialism during the Namibian liberation struggle. It argues that, while pragmatism has always guided SWAPO during the liberation struggle and the post-independence period, and non-alignment has always been its international stance, socialism has to some extent been a model for the revolution in Namibia, to the point that it is still influencing the SWAPO party today.

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List of Abbreviations

AAPSO	Afro-Asian People Solidarity Organization
ANC	African National Congress
BRD	Bundesrepublik Deutschland
CMEA	Council for Mutual Economic Assistance
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
DC	Democrazia Cristiana
DDR	Deutsche Demokratische Republik
DTA	Democratic Turnhalle Alliance
EEC	European Economic Community
FAPLA	Forças Armadas Populares de Libertação de Angola
FDGB	Freier Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund
FDJ	Freie Deutsche Jugend
FLN	Front de Libération Nationale
FMC	Federación de Mujeres Cubanas
FNLA	Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola
FRELIMO	Frente de Libertaçao de Moçambique
FRG	Federal Republic of Germany
G77	Group of 77
GDR	German Democratic Republic
ICJ	International Court of Justice
ILO	Institut für Leitung und Organisation der Volksbildungswesens
ISHR	International Society for Human Rights
M-26-7	Movimiento 26 de Julio
MPLA	Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola
NAM	Non-Aligned Movement
NHEC	Namibia Health and Education Center
NUNW	National Union of Namibian Workers
OAS	Organization of American States
OAU	Organization of African Unity
OPC	Ovamboland People's Congress

OPO	Ovamboland People's Organization
PAIGC	Partido Africano para a Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde
PCC	Partido Comunista de Cuba
PCI	Partito Comunista Italiano
PLAN	People's Liberation Army of Namibia
PSI	Partito Socialista Italiano
PSP	Partido Socialista Popular
SACP	South African Communist Party
SADF	South African Defence Force
SED	Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands
SWANU	South West Africa National Union
SWAPO	South West African People Organization
SYL	SWAPO Youth League
UNITA	União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola
UNTAG	United Nations Transition Assistance Group
VDJ	Verband der Deutschen Journalisten
WCG	Western Contact Group
ZANU	Zimbabwe African National Union
ZAPU	Zimbabwe African People's Union

Archives:

AACRLS	Archives of Anti-Colonial Resistance and the Liberation Struggle
ACC	Archives of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party
APCI	Archivio del Partito Comunista Italiano
ASG	Archivio Soncini-Ganapini
BAB	Basler Afrika Bibliographien
BArch	Bundesarchiv
CF	Archive of the Cuban Armed Forces
HAPP Digital Archive	History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive
NAN	National Archives of Namibia
SAPMO	Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR

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This thesis was possible thanks to the support of many people who helped me in various ways during these three years of PhD. First of all, I wish to thank my supervisor, Professor Karin Pallaver, who has always been present to guide me, by answering to my many doubts, providing me with her scrupulous revisions, understanding my difficulties, and encouraging me to overcome them. Her precious advice has definitely improved this work.

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My gratitude also goes to the many archivists who helped me conduct my research. In particular, I am grateful to Carmelo De Luca, archivist of the Soncini-Ganapini Archive in Reggio Emilia, who has always been kind and patient in responding to my requests, and Dag Henrichsen, historian and archivist based at the Basler Afrika Bibliographien in Basel, who has always provided me not only with archival material, but also thoughts and articles, as well as contacts with people who could help me—everything I might need to carry out my research.

I wish to thank artist Laura Horelli for putting me in contact with many Namibians to interview and for sharing her interesting work on solidarities with the Namibian liberation struggle with me. Thanks to her kind help, my research has been able to recount the story of many of the Namibians who lived socialist solidarity.

I owe much also to Professors Bruno Venditto and Christian Nekare, who were my guides during my research-period in Windhoek. In particular, I wish to thank Chris Nekare for his constant support, for the pleasant conversations and outings, and for introducing me to the Namibian culture.

The contributions of the interviewees to this thesis are especially valuable. My thanks go to all of them for sharing their knowledge and life stories with me and for supporting my research by connecting me with other people to interview.

Last but not least, I also owe a lot to the people who encouraged me during this journey: my family, who always believed in me, my colleagues, who shared with me the anxieties, the joys, and the difficulties of the PhD, my friends, who always gave me moments of fun and relax, and my Ahmed, who supported—and even put up with—me, always with immense love. All these people helped me to overcome my insecurities and complete this work.

Introduction

Historiography and focus of the thesis

The history of the second half of the twentieth century was dominated by the not-so-cold struggle that opposed two blocs vying for ideological supremacy. The competition between the capitalist and the communist camps, and thus between the two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, with their respective allies, went beyond the East-West divide and projected itself globally, intersecting with another process that was redefining international geopolitics: the decline of European colonial empires. During the same period, in fact, the anti-colonial struggles, the decolonization, and the rise of the Third World[1] brought into place new political entities, eager to finally control their own destiny after decades of foreign rule. The African continent was at the core of this process, as from the late 1950s African countries started to massively embark on the path of independence.

The overlapping of the Cold War and African decolonization gave rise to new migration trajectories and new international relations, modulated on the one hand by the attempts of both blocs to grab adherents within their ranks and on the other by African movements' and countries' search for aid to pursue their political agendas.

The Cold War has long been studied through a Eurocentric lens, which was ultimately unable to overcome the bipolar logic and go beyond the European setting, or, even when it did, to treat the Third World other than as an entity at the mercy of the superpowers' politics. In the last three decades, as a consequence of the Cold War's end and the subsequent greater accessibility of sources, an innovative historiographical line has taken shape—innovative as it looks at the Cold War as a global and multipolar context, recognizing the extent of the Third World's role. Pioneer of this historiographical perspective, Odd Arne Westad coined the expression "Global Cold War" to emphasize the transnationality of the conflict, as well as the role of Third World actors.[2] This is the center of the investigation of the 2013 collective volume edited by Robert J. McMahon, *The Cold War in the Third World*, which not only highlights the impact of the Cold War on Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America, but also analyzes the influence that the movements and governments of these continents and regions played on the course of the global conflict, pointing out how they "labored quite consciously to harness the dominant international reality of their age."[3] In fact, as

[1] The term "Third World," as well as "Global South," will be explained further on in this introduction.
[2] Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
[3] Robert J. McMahon, "Introduction," in Idem (ed.), *The Cold War in the Third World*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 9.

Melvyn Leffler and David Painter argue, the Cold War shaped the "political, economic, and social conditions of other nations," while it was also used by "classes, factions, ethnic groups, and revolutionary nationalist movements of other countries […] to further their own interests and manipulate the great powers."[4] Decolonization and local power struggles in the Third World offered the superpowers a new area in which to spread their ideologies and gain potential allies. International rivalries, on the other side, were exploited by Third World revolutionaries as they could offer potential leverage, as Matthew Connelly shows for the case of the Algerians.[5] The Cold War offered liberation movements, postcolonial governments, and rival nationalist groups opportunities to obtain cooperation from one bloc or the other, as well as from both blocs, which started to fight over the development aid as it could represent an important tool of soft power. This perspective, which portrays the development aid as a diplomatic instrument to orient Third World's politics, is central in Sara Lorenzini's study *Global Development*[6] and can be summarized with the expression "global humanitarian regime," coined by Young-sun Hong.[7]

In this context, the communist camp promoted its idea of cooperation, based on the tradition of proletarian internationalism and on the refusal of the Western concept of aid, considered a paternalistic and neocolonial device, proclaiming rather the concept of solidarity. Especially starting from the end of the 1950s, on the wave of the Soviet opening toward the Third World, internationalist solidarity became the watchword of socialists within the three worlds, to the point that it is possible to talk about a "socialist solidarity regime."[8] With this expression, I refer to the heterogeneous system of development aid promoted by communist actors of the three worlds through independent ideas of solidarity. Internal plurality, rather than homogeneity, characterized in fact the international communist movement, with subjects often proposing conflicting solidarity visions and policies.

Various contributions have recently brought attention to the role of the socialist world in promoting an alternative model of cooperation. Among these, *Alternative Globalizations*, edited by James Mark, Artemy M. Kalinovsky, and Steffi Marung, and *Socialism Goes Global*, edited by James Mark and Paul Betts, insert the history of communist internationalism into the history of globalization,

[4] Melvyn P. Leffler, David S. Painter, "Introduction: The International System and the Origins of the Cold War," in Iidem (eds.), *Origins of the Cold War: An International History*, London and New York: Routledge, 2005, pp. 1-2 [first ed. 1994].

[5] Matthew Connelly, "Rethinking the Cold War and Decolonization: The Grand Strategy of the Algerian War for Independence," in *International Journal of Middle East Studies,* Vol. 33, No. 2, 2021.

[6] Sara Lorenzini, *Global Development: A Cold War History*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019.

[7] Young-sun Hong, *Cold War Germany, The Third World, and the Global Humanitarian Regime*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015. This expression will be explained in section 1.1.1.

[8] See section 1.1.2.

highlighting the exchanges between the Second and the Third World, their reciprocal influence, and the heterogeneity of the socialist bloc.[9]

This thesis builds upon this historiographical trend focusing on the Namibian liberation struggle and the support it received from different actors of the international communist movement. Namibia only gained independence in 1990. A German colony until 1915, it was subsequently subjected to the rule of the South African regime, which, after having been granted mandate power by the League of Nations, occupied the territory and progressively introduced the apartheid system. Especially from the mid-1970s, the Namibian liberation struggle intertwined with the regional conflicts of southern Africa and the global Cold War. The independence struggle in Namibia, as well as in Rhodesia, the fight against apartheid in South Africa, and the civil war in Angola and Mozambique, in fact, constituted the scenario in which the power play between the two opposing blocs was played out during the last two decades of the Cold War. On the other side, the Cold War provided parties and liberation movements in southern Africa with the chance to obtain the aid needed to carry on their causes, resulting in prolonged, harsh, and internationalized conflicts.

The internationalization of southern African struggles, as well as the solidarity that came from socialist actors, has recently received increasing scholarly attention. In this sense, the collective volumes *The Cold War in Southern Africa,* edited by Sue Onslow, *Southern African liberation struggles*, edited by Hilary Sapire and Chris Saunders, *Southern African Liberation Movements and the Global Cold War 'East*,' edited by Lena Dallywater, Chris Saunders, and Helder Adegar Fonseca, as well as Piero Gleijeses's *Visions of Freedom*, deserve praise for their ability to analyze the conflicts by taking into account the local, regional, and global context, the external influence of the Cold War—and especially, in some cases, the contribution of socialist solidarity—and the agency of the liberation movements.[10]

The focus of this thesis is socialist solidarities with the Namibian liberation struggle, which was conducted since 1966 by the South West African People Organization (SWAPO) and lasted until

[9] James Mark, Artemy M. Kalinovsky, Steffi Marung (eds.), *Alternative Globalizations*: *Eastern Europe and the Postcolonial World*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020; James Mark, Paul Betts (eds.), *Socialism Goes Global: The Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in the Age of Decolonization*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2022.

[10] Sue Onslow (ed.), *Cold War in Southern Africa: White power, black liberation*, Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2009; Hilary Sapire, Chris Saunders (eds.), *Southern African Liberation Struggles: New Local, Regional and Global perspectives*, Claremont: UCT Press, 2013; Lena Dallywater, Chris Saunders, Helder Adegar Fonseca (eds.), *Southern African Liberation Movements and the Global Cold War 'East.' Transnational Activism 1960-1990*, Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2019; Piero Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom: Havana, Washington, Pretoria, and the Struggle for Southern Africa, 1976–1991*, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013.

1990, tightly connecting with the course of the Cold War. During the struggle for independence, SWAPO was able to build a network of relationships on an international scale, through links secured especially, but not only, with socialist actors, which were engaged in the global struggle against racism, anti-imperialism, colonialism, and neocolonialism.

Through these links, SWAPO obtained support in various fields and raised awareness on the Namibian cause around the world. From these links, exchanges of ideas, people, and goods started to flow, creating new opportunities, encounters, and imaginaries that shaped the parties involved.

This thesis aims at analyzing three socialist models of solidarity with the SWAPO's struggle that developed especially from the late 1970s. Starting from the assumption of the increasing internal diversity of the international communist movement, it provides a picture of the different visions that populated the "socialist solidarity regime." Although looking to various degrees at the Soviet model of cooperation with the Third World, in fact, socialist countries and communist parties launched solidarity programs employing different narratives and rhetoric, using various instruments, and pursuing their own objectives.

This study examines the politics of solidarity with SWAPO as pursued by three actors coming from different socialist contexts: the Deutsche Demokratische Republik, or DDR (German Democratic Republic, GDR), a Warsaw Pact country born out of a separation from its Western counterpart; Cuba, a revolutionary country of the "Global South"; and the Partito Comunista Italiano, or PCI (Italian Communist Party), one of the largest communist parties in the West. Thus, it explores how the three actors constructed the concept of solidarity with SWAPO according to their national and ideological contexts, highlighting the peculiarities in their solidarity rhetoric, rationales, objectives, and programs. In addition to understanding how solidarity was declined by these three socialist supporters, my work also seeks to discern how this was employed and received by the addressees, namely the SWAPO members who experienced this solidarity in various ways.

Aware that each aspect of the cooperation between SWAPO and the three actors under exam can be considerably deepened in separate works, this thesis proposes a general overview of three solidarity policies with the aim of highlighting the internal pluralization of the socialist solidarity regime while at the same time contributing to the debate on the extent of SWAPO's commitment to socialism during the Namibian liberation struggle. At the 1976 Nampundwe Conference, in fact, SWAPO adopted a political program envisioning a future independent Namibia based on the precepts of scientific socialism. However, during the liberation struggle, in an understandable attempt to obtain as much assistance as possible, SWAPO took aid from both camps and, after independence, it did not embark on the socialist path of development. Scholars such as Lauren Dobell and Jakob Zollmann

have pondered on the authenticity of SWAPO's socialism, asking whether it was a real ideological commitment or was rather serving the need to reinforce alliances with the communist bloc.[11] By providing an analysis of SWAPO's relationship with socialist actors and testimonies of some Namibians, this thesis wants to contribute to this debate.

This research took place during the COVID pandemic, which, among other things, ordered the closure of many archives, libraries, and research institutions, and limited enormously the possibility to travel. At the end of my first year of PhD, I had to reformulate the object of my research project, which had been initially conceived differently. In fact, the initial concept was aimed at researching the history of socialist solidarity in Staßfurt, a small industrial town in former East Germany, which during the 1980s hosted students coming from Namibia, Mozambique, Cuba, and Vietnam.[12] The research was thus restricted to East German educational solidarity and to a local hub of transnational encounters and exchanges born under the sign of socialist internationalism. However, the closure and then the long waiting list to enter the Bundesarchiv (Federal Archives) in Berlin, as well as the impossibility to go abroad at an early stage of the research in order to collect interviews, forced me to abandon this project and reformulate it according to the new circumstances. I decided to focus on the socialist solidarity with SWAPO's liberation struggle, which had started to catch my interest already during my Master's Degree. During the second year of the PhD, given the impossibility to go abroad, I did my research in archives in Italy, which were sometimes accessible and sometimes not depending on the development of the pandemic. This is how the last chapter of this thesis took shape, in which I examined the role of the Italian communists in the anti-apartheid struggle. Yet, as I wanted to also focus on the solidarity politics of socialist states, which was the initial object of the thesis, I conducted research on the DDR-SWAPO relationship in the Bundesarchiv as soon as it was possible, during my last year of PhD. Also during my last PhD year, my stay in Namibia allowed me the opportunity to connect with Namibians who knew about Italian solidarity, as well as those who migrated to socialist countries such as East Germany and Cuba during the liberation struggle. As I discovered the large number of Namibians who studied in Cuba and interviewed some of them, thus gathering material to

[11] Jakob Zollmann, "On SWAPO's Socialism: Socialist Ideology and Practice during the Namibian Struggle for Independence, 1960-1989," in Maria-Benedita Basto, Françoise Blum, Pierre Guidi, Héloïse Kiriakou, Martin Mourre, Céline Pauthier, Ophélie Rillon, Alexis Roy, Elena Vezzadini (eds.), *Socialismes en Afrique. Socialisms in Africa*, Paris: Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, 2021; Lauren Dobell, "SWAPO in Office," in Colin Leys, John S. Saul (eds.), *Namibia's Liberation Struggle: The Two-Edged Sword*, London: James Currey, 1995; Lauren Dobell, *SWAPO's Struggle for Namibia: 1960-1991. War by Others Means*, Basel: P. Schlettwein Publishers, 2000 [first ed. 1998]. See section 1.2.3.

[12] The history of the Namibian students in Staßfurt is discussed in section 2.2.7.1.

understand the functioning of socialist solidarity in Cuba, I decided to dedicate a chapter to Cuban solidarity with SWAPO.

Although it is the result of a complex situation that affected us all in various ways, this thesis has provided me with significant insights on the relationship between SWAPO and socialist actors, which I hope to further develop in my future research. In exploring different models of socialist solidarity, this dissertation might have the shortcoming of not delving into some particular aspects of solidarity that would have been interesting to explore more in depth; however, it has the strength of exploring the internal diversity of the international communist movement in the relationship with SWAPO and, more in general, with the Third World.

Sources and methodology[13]

This dissertation draws mostly upon archival documents and biographical accounts, with the aim of providing a comprehensive picture of the three models of socialist solidarities with SWAPO, as well as of their reception by SWAPO.

Archival research has been conducted at the Bundesarchiv in Berlin-Lichterfelde, where East German documents have been largely consulted. Some copies of these are also held at the National Archives of Namibia in Windhoek. Here, in 2001, a project has been launched with the aim to "fill the colonial gaps in the archival record of Namibia," by retrieving, collecting, and disseminating archival materials on Namibian history, particularly the history of anti-colonial struggles—that is, material that was ignored by archival processes during the colonial period.[14] As a result of this project, at the National Archives of Namibia it is now possible to consult the Archives of Anti-Colonial Resistance and the Liberation Struggle, which includes also copies of documents of the Bundesarchiv. In the Bundesarchiv, as well as at the National Archives of Namibia, it has been possible to consult a broad selection of documents that date back to the DDR period and shed light on the relationship with SWAPO, such as correspondence, minutes of meetings and solidarity activities, action plans and measures to be taken to provide aid to SWAPO. Such wide archival material allowed me to retrace in detail the DDR-SWAPO relationship, to discern the rationales behind East German solidarity, and to reflect on SWAPO's attitude toward socialism. However, in portraying SWAPO as a movement

[13] While a general overview of the sources used for this thesis is provided here, the introduction of the chapters 2, 3, and 4 will provide more detailed information on the sources used for each case under exam.

[14] Ellen N. Namhila, "Archives of Anti-Colonial Resistance and the Liberation Struggle (AACRLS): An integrated programme to fill the colonial gaps in the archival record of Namibia," in *Journal for Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences,* Vol. 4, Nos. 1-2, 2015.

willing to build socialism after independence, East German documents provided an interpretation that might be distorted because of the DDR functionaries' ambitions for a socialist SWAPO.

When focusing on the Cuban relationship with SWAPO, this thesis refers to online documents published in the History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive of the Wilson Center. As the introduction of chapter 3 will explain, in fact, the Cuban Archives for the post-1959 period are closed and the only foreign scholar who has been allowed to enter them is Italian-American historian Piero Gleijeses, who has been granted the permission to publish some selected documents in the collection "Cuba and Southern Africa" of the Wilson Center Digital Archive.[15] In this collection, reports of conversations between SWAPO's President Sam Nujoma and Cuban officials like Jorge Risquet and Raúl Castro has been consulted, as they point to the matters of concern of Cuba's solidarity and Nujoma's requests and attitude.

In Italy, archival documentation has been collected in the Archive of the Italian Communist Party at the Gramsci Foundation in Rome, in order to understand the first contacts the party developed with SWAPO and its role within the Italian anti-apartheid movement. Furthermore, the Panizzi Library in Reggio Emilia, a former PCI-administered municipality that was at the forefront of the Italian solidarity movement with the southern African liberation struggles, holds the papers and material collected by Giuseppe Soncini, a protagonist of the season of Italian solidarity against apartheid, and rearranged by his wife Bruna Ganapini. The Africa Fund of the Soncini-Ganapini Archive contains rich documentations on the organization of the anti-apartheid activities by the National Committee of Solidarity with the peoples of southern Africa, headquartered in Reggio Emilia, shedding light on its contribution to the SWAPO's struggle, its rhetoric of solidarity, and the role of Italian communists in supporting the Namibian cause.

The research conducted in these archives contributed to the understanding of the functioning, the rhetoric, and the goals of the three supporters' solidarity models, providing their perspective within their relationship with SWAPO.

For this dissertation, research has also been carried out at the archive and library of the Basler Afrika Bibliographien in Basel, an important center of documentation on Namibia and southern Africa,[16] and at the library of the Ibero-Amerikanisches Institut in Berlin, which holds significant literature on Cuba's history.

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[15] See https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/topics/cuba-and-southern-africa (accessed on 9 December 2022).

[16] Cristiana Fiamingo, "BASLER AFRIKA BIBLIOGRAPHIEN: un punto di incontro per la ricerca storica sull'Africa sub-sahariana," in *Africa: Rivista trimestrale di studi e documentazione dell'Istituto italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente*, Anno 52, No. 4, 1997.

Unfortunately, it has not been possible to obtain the authorization to enter the semi-closed SWAPO Archives in Windhoek. I started asking the SWAPO party for permission to conduct my research at its archives some time before my arrival in Windhoek, and continued to solicit a response throughout my two-month stay there, with frequent calls and visits to the SWAPO headquarters, without success. Even the efforts of the Namibian professors who helped me were vain. A longer period of permanence in Windhoek could have yielded positive results, yet the circumstances related to the COVID pandemic, as I explained above, forced me to delay my departure and shorten my stay. However, to my knowledge, most foreign scholars have had the same difficulty and have not been granted permission to visit SWAPO Archives. The impossibility to access SWAPO documents has unfortunately deprived this study of the important perspective of the SWAPO leadership on the relationship it established with socialist actors to seek support for the liberation struggle.

In addition to archival documents, this dissertation is also based on articles in newspapers of the time, such as the Italian *l'Unità* and *Rinascita*, the Italian version of *Sechaba*, the East German *Neues Deutschland,* the Namibian *Namibia Today*, and others.

Life stories and biographical accounts have also been extremely valuable, as they provide important information on the solidarity programs between SWAPO and socialist actors, give space to lived experiences of solidarity, and reveal new perspectives, partially filling the gap deriving from the non-accessibility to certain sources. Therefore, this thesis also made use of the biographical and autobiographical accounts of the people involved in various ways in the history of friendship between SWAPO and its supporters. Furthermore, I conducted 22 semi-structured interviews (with eighteen Namibians, three Cubans, and one Italian) in order to complement written sources, by adding a subjective perspective to this story of political cooperation. The interviewees were chosen as people involved in programs of socialist solidarity or people informed about it. Most Namibians who were interviewed had experienced socialist solidarity through a period of study or training in Cuba or East Germany, and their accounts are therefore able to add a Namibian perspective to the analysis based on archival documents. Furthermore, a former Cuban liaison officer to SWAPO and a Cuban soldier who operated in Angola, as well as a Cuban scholar who studied Cuba's solidarity with SWAPO were interviewed. In Italy, the already mentioned Bruna Ganapini, Soncini's wife, was interviewed about Reggio Emilia's history of friendship with the anti-apartheid struggle. The interviewees were contacted thanks to a network of contacts established during the course of my PhD and were asked whether they were available and willing to respond to my questions on socialist solidarity with SWAPO in order to contribute to my dissertation. One took place before my PhD with the goal of contributing to my Master's thesis.

Except for two online interviews and four written ones, the interviews took place mostly in person, two in Berlin, one in Reggio Emilia, and the remaining in Windhoek. Conversations were held in English, except in the case of two written interviews held mostly in Spanish. The oral interviews have been recorded after having obtained the prior consent of the interviewees. The recording and the transcription of the interviews are stored in an external hard drive and, when requested, transcriptions were also sent to the interviewees.

For my oral interviews, online or in person, I had prepared an open-ended list of general questions, so that I could improvise additional specific questions to elaborate on the interviewees' answers. Similarly, written interviews—which took place when meeting in person was not possible, when the connection for online interviews was not stable, or to facilitate communication in a language other than English—were conducted via e-mail or Whatsapp by sending a list of general questions, followed by more specific questions after responses were received.

In addition to questions more focused on clarifying the functioning of solidarity with SWAPO and on shedding light on major solidarity events, most questions, especially those directed to the Namibian interviewees, also address the personal experience of received solidarity, in order to investigate how political agreements were lived on the ground, how state solidarity materialized in everyday encounters, and its eventual implications in the lives of the people involved.

Preliminary notes on the usage of terms

This section provides a brief explanation of the genealogy of terms such as "Third World" and "Global South," which are largely employed in this thesis, and the controversies surrounding their usage, with the aim to problematize them and explain their use in this dissertation.

"Third World" represents a controversial concept since over the years it assumed different and sometimes negative connotations. The expression "Third World" is a product of the Cold War: it was coined by the French demographer Alfred Sauvy in 1952 to refer to that bloc of actors who were not part of either the capitalist bloc (the First World) or the socialist bloc (the Second World) and it explicitly alluded to Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès's concept of "Tiers État" (Third Estate), which indicates those who, in pre-revolutionary France, were not members of either the clergy or the nobility.[17]

In its original meaning, "Third World" thus implied a past condition of colonial rule and an international positioning of non-alignment in the Cold War politics. As Joseph Love points out, it

[17] Alfred Sauvy, "*Trois mondes, une planète*," in *L'Observateur*, No. 118, 14 August 1952.

expresses the idea of "neglect, exploitation, and revolutionary potential,"[18] as well as—Leslie Wolf-Philipps highlights—a political sense of non-alignment, which was "used by African leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah when they called for the establishment of a bloc of uncommitted nations as a 'non-nuclear Third Force' which was to serve as a positive instrument for peace and reconciliation between the East-West confrontation of the Cold War period."[19]

During the 1960s, the lessening of the Cold War tensions and the progressive prominence of development issues, as well as the sharpening of the North-South confrontation, gradually moved this meaning of non-alignment to the background. Instead, the term "Third World" became increasingly linked to the concept of development, or rather underdevelopment, as a common characteristic that united Third World countries in the face of the economic gap they experienced with industrialized countries of the First and Second World. The emphasis of the concept has thus moved from a political to an economic connotation.[20] In many academic writings, as well as in the popular usage and in the media, expressions such as "developing," "less developed," and "underdeveloped" countries has been employed interchangeably to indicate the Third World.[21] In this economic connotation, "Third World" refers to countries of Africa, Asia, and Latin America "which were neither industrialised or free market economies (the First World), nor the socialist and centrally planned economies (the Second World), but those which were still groping in order to evolve a viable system of, and approach to, economic development."[22] The political connotation of non-alignment and the economic one of underdevelopment overlap as a consequence of their past of colonial domination. As Peter Worsley notes, thus, "what the Third World originally was, then, is clear: it was the non-aligned world. It was also a world of poor countries. Their poverty was the outcome of a more fundamental identity: that they had all been colonized."[23]

As the quotations of the aforementioned scholars—authors of contributions within the well-known journal *Third World Quarterly*—show, the concept of "Third World" was and still is at the core of academic debates that seek to define it and to reflect on the implications that its usage entails.[24] The heterogeneity within the Third World, as well as the decline of the Third World as a political project

[18] Joseph L. Love, "'Third World': a Response to Professor Worsley," in *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 1980, p. 316.
[19] Leslie Wolf-Phillips, "Why Third World?," in *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1979, p. 106.
[20] Wolf-Phillips, "Why Third World?," p. 106; S. D. Muni, "The Third World: Concept and Controversy," in *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1979, p. 123.
[21] See examples in Leslie Wolf-Phillips, "Why 'Third World'?: Origin, Definition and Usage," in *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 9, No. 4, 1987, pp. 1315-1319.
[22] Muni, "The Third World," p. 123.
[23] Peter Worsley, "How Many Worlds?," in *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 1979, p. 102.
[24] Tullio Ottolini, *Dal soutien alla cooperazione. Il terzomondismo in Italia fra il Centro di Documentazione "Frantz Fanon" e il Movimento Liberazione e Sviluppo* [PhD dissertation], Bologna: University of Bologna, 2018, pp. 12-21.

and subsequently the demise of the Cold War, in fact, have undermined the efficacy of the term. Moreover, as a Western product, it may also be critical as it could be linked to the idea of "otherness" and "backwardness."

Between the late 1980s and the early 1990s, the birth of the postcolonial critique has triggered the debate on this term, pointing out its inadequacy within a world dominated by the globalization process and by new global relationships. Postcolonial critics repudiate the notion of the three worlds as it "flattens heterogeneities, masks contradictions, and elides differences,"[25] as Ella Shohat argues. "The realization that the wretched of the earth are not unanimously revolutionary (nor necessarily allies to one another)"[26]—she explains—along with the failures of the Tricontinental revolution and the collapse of the Soviet Union made the notion problematic. In this context, the term "Third World," which is effective in evoking a commonality of struggles as based on a shared history of colonialism, neocolonialism, and racism, is inadequate as it fails to address the "differently modulated politics in the realm of culture."[27] As also Arif Dirlik emphasizes, postcolonial critics consider the notion to be "vague in encompassing within one uniform category vastly heterogeneous historical circumstances and in locking in fixed positions, structurally if not geographically, societies and populations that shifted with changing global relationships."[28] As a consequence of these changed global relationships, resulting from the emergence of global capitalism, it is necessary to abolish "binarisms" such as "colonizer/colonized," "First World/Third World," and the "West and the Rest"—which, according to him, are a product of a colonialist way of thinking—and to "reveal societies globally in their complex heterogeneity and contingency."[29]

Although the ambiguity in employing "Third World" as category has been long pointed out by various scholars, it did not disappear from either the academic discourse or the popular usage, and its definition continues to animate discussions. In the special issue "After the Third World?," published in 2004 in the pages of *Third World Quarterly*, scholars continue the debate, asking whether the notion should be dismissed and whether it makes sense to speak of a Third World in the twenty-first century.[30] The subdivision of the special issue into two sections, "Reinventing the Third World" and "Ending with the Third World," reveals the existence of different approaches to this notion that, while for some has never had the consistency that was attributed to it, for others needs to be recovered

[25] Ella Shohat, "Notes on the 'Post-Colonial'," in *Social Text*, Nos. 31-32, 1992, p. 101.
[26] *Ivi*, p. 100.
[27] *Ivi*, p. 111.
[28] Arif Dirlik, "The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism," in *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 20, No. 2, 1994, p. 332.
[29] *Ivi*, p. 329.
[30] *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No. 1, 2004, special issue "After the Third World?." It was also later published as a book: Mark T. Berger (ed.), *After the Third World?*, London: Routledge, 2009.

according to contemporary practices. However, most contributors suggest to reflect on the genealogy and use of "Third World" as a category and reorganize its meaning as fitting within the contemporary global order.

Acknowledging the criticalness of the term and the need to avoid generalizations, this dissertation employs the term "Third World" in a non-anachronistic manner, referring firstly to its original meaning of political non-alignment during the Cold War, as well as the implicit economic conditions of underdevelopment stemming from the history of colonialism and neocolonialism.

The concept of "Global South" could be considered the successor of the term "Third World." The "South" as a geopolitical entity emerged in the 1970s within the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and within discourses launched by the Group of 77 (G77), which projected a development plan based on the cooperation between economically disadvantaged countries.[31] As retraced by Dirlik, the concept of "South" was popularized during the 1980s by the Brandt reports—compiled by a Commission chaired by the West German social-democrat Willy Brandt and established to review international development issues—which pointed out the economic gap between the wealthy countries of the North and the poor countries of the South, and advocated a transfer of resources to the latter.[32] During the 1970s, the East-West divide had started to coexist with (or even to give way to) the North-South divide, when the development aid lent by the two blocs did nothing but exacerbate the tensions between developed and underdeveloped countries.[33] In its original meaning, thus, "Global South"—with the adjective "global" being attached to "South" on the wave of the developmentalist discourses that followed the decline of the socialist bloc and the economic policies launched by the Washington Consensus[34]—has a territorial connotation as it refers to the economic power relationship between a geographical North and South during and after the Cold War.[35] The designation of a developed North and an underdeveloped South represents a simplistic categorization and, as Dirlik warns, its geography "is much more complicated […] and subject to change over time."[36]

Especially after the end of the Cold War, the concept has gained new meanings and connotations, which have also in this case been the subject of vivid debates and objects of continuous problematization. As Anne Mahler points out, and as it emerges from works of scholars such as Jean

[31] Anne Garland Mahler, *From the Tricontinental to the Global South: Race, Radicalism, and Transnational Solidarity*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2018, p. 252, note 34.
[32] Arif Dirlik, "Global South: Predicament and Promise," in *The Global South*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2007, p. 13.
[33] Lorenzini, *Global Development*, pp. 142-143.
[34] Dirlik, "Global South," pp. 13-14.
[35] Mahler, *From the Tricontinental to the Global South*, p. 32.
[36] Dirlik, "Global South," p. 13.

and John L. Comaroff and Raewyn Connell,[37] since the 1990s the expression started to be used in fluid terms to indicate those "spaces and peoples negatively impacted by globalization, including within the borders of wealthier countries, such that there are Souths in the geographic North and Norths in the geographic South."[38] In this usage, Mahler explains, Global South "does not refer simplistically to the geography of the Southern Hemisphere but rather to a geographically flexible, sociospatial mapping of the so-called externalities of capitalist accumulation."[39]

Beyond this sociospatial definition, Mahler argues, it also came to refer to "an emergent political imagination undergirding contemporary social movements that results from the recognition by the world's Souths of a shared experience of the negative effects of neoliberal globalization."[40]

Thus, while it was born to indicate those countries whose development was negatively affected by European colonialism and subsequently the Cold War regime of development aid, the term "Global South" then assumed new connotations in the post-Cold War era, referring to worldwide subalterns that shared a marginalized position within the neoliberal world of globalization.

The concept of "Global South" has been questioned and criticized as an analytical category for itself. In a 2018 conversation with Nikita Dhawan, Angela Davis and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak urge caution against terms that purport to champion struggles for justice while actually are the result of a mechanism that Spivak calls "legitimation by reversal," namely a process that fills a concept that had previously been judged negatively with positive meaning, without modifying the very structures wherein the negative judgement was constructed.[41] In this sense, Spivak considers "Global South" to be "a reverse racist term," being a term filled with good sentiments and revolutionary rhetoric, without a problematization of its very conditions of existence.[42]

The current widespread use of the term "Global South," Sandro Mezzadra warns, exacerbates the border between the Global South and the Global North, as it could embody a rigid binary distinction that "does not allow grasping crucial aspects of the contemporary planetary turmoil […] while it obscures the proliferating transits and entanglements among different areas at the global level."[43]

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[37] Jean Comaroff, John. L. Comaroff, *Theory from the South: or, How Euro-America Is Evolving toward Africa*, Boulder, CO: Paradigm, 2012; Raewyn Connell, *Southern Theory: The Global Dynamics of Knowledge in Social Science*, Cambridge: Polity, 2007.

[38] Mahler, *From the Tricontinental to the Global South*, p. 32.

[39] *Ivi*, p. 33.

[40] *Ibidem*.

[41] Angela Davis, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Nikita Dhawan, "Planetary Utopias," in *Radical Philosophy* 2.05, 2019, pp. 68-69.

[42] *Ivi*, p. 69.

[43] Sandro Mezzadra, "Challenging Borders. The legacy of Postcolonial Critique in the Present Conjuncture," in *Soft Power. Revista euro-americana de teoría e historia de la política y del derecho,* Vol. 7, No. 2, 2020, p. 41.

Aware of these debates and controversies, as well as of the need to problematize them, this thesis employs the terms "Third World" and "Global South" in their Cold War usage, using them quite interchangeably to indicate those countries of Africa, Asia, and Latin America united by a common history and legacy of colonialism. While, in my view, the concept of "Third World" more strongly detains the political connotation of non-alignment, the concept of "Global South" refers to the economic power relationship and inequalities between former colonizer and colonized countries.
Also the "Three Continents" category, which dates back to the times of the Tricontinental, could be useful to indicate the countries belonging to the Third World/Global South. However, this thesis makes use of the dichotomy "Global North-Global South" to emphasize the gap that distinguished them economically and politically, as well as the shift from the East-West confrontation to the North-South divide during the Cold War period.
It is difficult and non-preferable to categorize countries, each with their own history and peculiarities, within a system dividing the world into two or three blocs. Cuba, for example, could be placed both within the Second and the Third World, and, in this thesis, is more easily classified as a country of the Global South (socialist South). Conscious of the limitation of such a categorization, this dissertation employs these concepts as metaphors of economic inequality and independentist stance, without the presumption to ascribe members to each category.

Structure of the thesis

This thesis is divided into four chapters. The first chapter outlines the historical context in which the Namibian liberation war took place: a context given by the intertwining of local, regional, and global dynamics, in which the final phase of the Cold War was played out. The more general context of decolonization and the Cold War is considered, with the aim of showing the reciprocal influence of these two entangled processes that dominated the second half of the twentieth century. Through the "global humanitarian regime," the two blocs entered into the Third World with the goal of addressing the ongoing decolonization and postcolonial processes toward their specific models of development. The chapter especially focuses on the system of aid developed by the socialist camp, pointing out when and how solidarity became central within the international communist movement and how this was internally diversified in its approach with the Third World. On the other side, the chapter also draws attention to the ways in which the Third World countries and movements navigated the global Cold War and the socialist solidarity regime, by searching to gain as much assistance as possible, and in more favorable terms, in order to fulfill their political agenda. Once this general framework is provided, the second part of the chapter focuses on the southern African context, analyzing the

development of the Namibian liberation struggle within its regional and international setting, as well as the role that SWAPO played in leading the struggle. In the attempt to shed light on SWAPO proclaimed commitment to the socialist ideology, SWAPO's ability to gain as much assistance as possible is highlighted, and a general framework of the main relationships it established with communist actors is provided.

Given the historical context, the other chapters proceed to analyze the three models of socialist solidarity with SWAPO that are the object of this thesis. As they focus on different case studies, with their own primary sources and secondary literature, each of these three chapters opens with an introduction which includes the state of research on the respective chapters' focus, as well as the sources employed.

In the second chapter, the history of socialist friendship between SWAPO and East Germany is retraced, not before providing a general overview of the DDR solidarity with Africa and the Third World. Every aspect of the DDR solidarity with SWAPO is thoroughly examined, from the political and diplomatic support to the military one, from the educational assistance to the medical one, in the attempt to shed light on the rationales behind the DDR solidarity and the implications that such cooperation relation had on the lives of the Namibians who experienced it first-hand, while reflecting on SWAPO's adoption of socialism as it emerges from East German documents.

The third chapter focuses on the solidarity politics provided by Cuba, a country that had itself suffered colonialism and external influence, and whose revolution became a model for Third World countries and movements. Starting by pointing out the history of revolution in Cuba, the chapter then analyzes its tradition of anti-imperialism and internationalism and its involvement in the African continent, before focusing on the relationship it established with SWAPO. This is examined especially through salient moments of Cuban solidarity, namely its military involvement in Cassinga—where the South African regime launched the most brutal attack against a Namibian camp—and in the final battles of Cuito Cuanavale, its large efforts of educational solidarity, and its diplomatic support during the negotiations that led Namibia to independence. Through this analysis, Cuba's rhetoric and objectives of solidarity, as well as its reception by the Namibian side, are illustrated.

The last chapter considers the solidarity work carried out in support of the anti-apartheid struggle by Italian communists in a context of collaboration with the democratic forces of the country. It opens with an overview of the PCI's internationalism, pointing out how it developed over time both at theoretical and practical levels, and outlining the party's involvement in Africa and in the anti-apartheid struggle. The central role of Reggio Emilia is also considered as it led the anti-apartheid movement in Italy, uniting different actors in the effort to contribute to raise awareness of the South

African regime's brutality. Thus, even in this case, the salient events of Italian solidarity, which took the form of material and diplomatic support, are examined in order to highlight the Italian communists' rhetoric and objectives in pursuing solidarity toward SWAPO, as well as their difficulties.

After having provided such a picture, the thesis concludes with a final section that outlines the different visions of solidarity promoted by the three socialist actors, each pursued according to their national and ideological contexts, with different goals and narratives and through different means. Through the biographical accounts and the archival documents collected, the conclusion illuminates also on how SWAPO received socialist solidarity and how Namibians who migrated to these socialist countries experienced the solidarity on the ground. Furthermore, once the relationships SWAPO developed with the three socialist supporters are discussed, an attempt is made to shed light on SWAPO's adherence to socialist ideology during the liberation struggle, as well as the influence that socialism exerted on SWAPO to some extent, shaping its rhetoric then and triggering reflection on socialism among the leadership still today.

Chapter 1
The Cold War in southern Africa: the Namibian liberation struggle and the socialist solidarity regime

Introduction

Interweaving with the bipolar context of the Cold War, the waves of decolonization that swept across the African continent starting from the late 1950s opened up a new chapter in the global history of the second half of the twentieth century. Indeed, the two processes of decolonization and the Cold War proceeded in parallel, deeply influencing each other. Competing for global ideological hegemony, both the capitalist and the communist blocs were eager to build links with African liberation movements and postcolonial governments, in order to somehow orient the direction of their nation-building process. On the other side, African actors sought to take advantage of the bipolar competition to fulfill their political agendas. Within this context, socialists presented their own system of aid by distancing themselves from the Western approach—portrayed as a form of unilateral assistance with neocolonial interests—and launching rather relationships of cooperation with the Third World that claimed to be based on solidarity and mutual benefit. They constituted what I call the "socialist solidarity regime," a heterogeneous system of development aid in which socialist and communist actors enacted different visions of solidarity within the three worlds.

Cold War competition and the internal dynamics of decolonization together dictated the development of the events within the southern African region and the transition to independence of Namibia, which was struggling against the illegal occupation of the South African regime of apartheid since 1966. The Cold War shaped the armed struggles in the region, with each bloc supporting the local actors because of a combination of vested interests and ideological beliefs, and with the local actors taking advantage of that massive support to fight for their cause. At the end of the 1980s, superpower détente, together with internal and regional dynamics, contributed to a negotiated settlement for the independence of Namibia and, shortly after, for the end of apartheid in South Africa. The collapse of apartheid and the end of the Cold War were, therefore, "inextricably linked."[1] Despite this strong link, however, the fate of apartheid cannot be defined as entirely dependent on the Cold War competition and its demise, as decolonization was "the principal process of change in the sub-continent."[2]

[1] Chris Saunders, Sue Onslow, "The Cold War in Southern Africa, 1976-1990," in Melvyn P. Leffler, Odd Arne Westad (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, Vol. 3: *Endings*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 241.
[2] Sue Onslow, "The Cold War in Southern Africa: White power, black nationalism and external intervention," in Eadem (ed.), *Cold War in Southern Africa*, p. 18.

This chapter provides a historical framework of the Namibian liberation struggle, taking into account the broader context of decolonization, the Cold War, and the superpower involvement in the southern African region, with a particular focus on socialist aid. The first part of the chapter portrays the entangled context of decolonization and the Cold War, marked by the superpowers' scramble to win Third World allies through humanitarian and development aid and by the Third World's use of the bipolar competition to its advantage. The chapter then proceeds to examine how socialist aid was given to liberation movements and Third World countries, analyzing the birth and the development of the "socialist solidarity regime," its internal heterogenous formation, and its reception. The second part investigates how these dynamics materialized in the context of the Namibian liberation struggle, first introducing the historical context of the South African occupation of Namibia and of SWAPO's liberation struggle, and then focusing on SWAPO's connection with communist actors, debating on its alleged adherence to the socialist ideology.

1.1 Global entanglements: decolonization and the Cold War

1.1.1 The Third World and the "global humanitarian regime"

The global history of the second half of the twentieth century was profoundly shaped by two historical phenomena strictly intertwined with each other: the Cold War and the rise of the so-called Third World. As mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, the historiography on the Cold War now agrees on acknowledging its global dimension, which is apparent when looking at its reverberating effects and disruptive consequences on the international level.[3] The bipolar conflict for world dominance, in fact, affected the ongoing decolonization and the postcolonial processes within Third World countries. Getting involved in Third World regional conflicts for their own purposes, the two superpowers and their allies significantly influenced their development, "either by offering opportunities to, or setting limits on, local actors; by intensifying, prolonging, internationalizing, or foreshortening conflicts after they commenced; or by facilitating diplomatic settlements."[4] However, as Jeffrey James Byrne writes, "even as the Cold War shaped decolonization and the postcolonial order, decolonization also changed the nature of the Cold War,"[5] turning it into a multipolar conflict. The rise of the Non-Aligned Movement, born at the 1955 Bandung Conference and officially constituted at the 1961 Belgrade Conference, further altered the dynamics of the global Cold War,

[3] See e. g. Westad, *The Global Cold War*; McMahon (ed.), *The Cold War in the Third World*; Bernd Greiner, Christian Th. Müller, Dierk Walter (eds.), *Heiße Kriege im Kalten Krieg,* Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2006.
[4] McMahon, "Introduction," p. 7.
[5] Jeffrey James Byrne, *Mecca of Revolution: Algeria, Decolonization, and the Third World Order*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2016, p. 294.

putting in play a third bloc of actors who refused a formal commitment to either the First or the Second World.

In this context, development aid became the main instrument used by the two superpowers to win the hearts and minds of Third World actors.[6] Both blocs used decolonization to build what Young-sun Hong calls "the global humanitarian regime," that is, a body of humanitarian, development, and medical aid programs through which the Global North reshaped its relationship with the Global South.[7] Theoretically intended as a means to "meliorate the human costs of decolonization and national liberation struggles,"[8] the "global humanitarian regime" was actually a politicized project launched by the two superpowers to influence the postcolonial state-building processes of decolonized or decolonizing countries and to prove the global applicability of their versions of modernity. Development aid became then, using Sara Lorenzini's words, a "diplomacy's favored way to keep the emerging countries that Alfred Sauvy named the Third World, which could model themselves on either the West and the East, from following the wrong trajectory."[9]

The humanitarian regime built up by the two blocs relied on narratives that morally justified the Global North's influence on the Global South, portraying such assistance "as a manifestation of either an elemental human solidarity with the less fortunate or, in the East, of anti-imperialist solidarity with the exploited peasantry."[10] However, as Young-sun Hong argues, by "rearticulating older notions of colonial difference across the postcolonial divide," both parts ended up reproducing asymmetric and neocolonial relations with the Global South.[11] Yet, as Odd Arne Westad points out, unlike European colonial powers' expansionist policies, whose objectives were of exploitation and subjection, Moscow and Washington's purposes were of control and improvement on the ideological level.[12] Despite their anti-colonial rhetoric, both blocs thus used development aid to enforce their influence and serve their needs. By considering the humanitarian crises in the Global South as security problems, Western powers used the humanitarian regime as an instrument to contain communism. On the other side, as the next section will discuss, socialist aid sought to integrate the recipient countries within a socialist world system alternative to the capitalist one. In the end, also socialists often ended up reproducing a representation of the "Other" based on conceptions of racial and civilizational difference, thus failing to differentiate themselves from their capitalist counterpart.

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[6] Lorenzini, *Global Development*.
[7] Hong, *Cold War Germany,* p. 3.
[8] *Ibidem*.
[9] Lorenzini, *Global Development*, p. 3.
[10] Hong, *Cold War Germany,* p. 114.
[11] *Ivi,* p. 13.
[12] Westad, *The Global Cold War*, p. 5.

However, if on the one hand the superpowers could intervene in the anti-colonial struggles and address the process of decolonization and the development of the postcolonial countries, on the other hand local actors managed to carve out room for maneuver, and used the Cold War to their advantage. From their part, in fact, Third World actors were not passive recipients of the Cold War aid system. Many tried to harness the Cold War dynamics "to maximize potential benefits, or at least to minimize potential damages."[13] Many contested "both the asymmetries of the postwar humanitarian regime and the discourses on which it rested,"[14] claiming their autonomy in lining up with one bloc or the other, or none. They systematically threatened to align themselves with the other side and played off the superpowers against each other in order to receive as much assistance as possible, and on more favorable terms. They decided how to engage in relations with both the First and the Second Worlds in order to increase their bargaining power.

Moreover, they themselves implemented an alternative development strategy through programs of South-South Cooperation. At the first United Nations Conference on Trade and Development held in Geneva in 1964, 77 developing countries founded the G77, a pressure group within the UN system, which, driven by non-aligned principles, strove for "a new world order that would give more power to developing countries to regulate and control economic activities in their own territories."[15] It achieved the important result of the declaration of a "New International Economic Order" in 1974 by the United Nations General Assembly, "a demand for structural change in global power relations and […] for self-reliance among developing countries,"[16] which however never had concrete outcomes.

Through mobility programs aimed at medical, military, educational, and professional training, the global humanitarian regime generated significant migrations and transfers of knowledge, materializing in social and cultural encounters that produced transnational spaces in which to negotiate the terms of the aid projects. People from Africa, Asia, and Latin America migrated both to capitalist and communist countries, where they were supposed to acquire the professional skills needed to rebuild their home countries after decades of European colonialism. From their side, experts from the two blocs were sent to Third World countries to work on urban and architectural projects, to provide assistance in the medical sector, or to train workers and cadres. At the same time, transnational migrations during the Cold War had the potential to influence and shape the framework of international politics that dictated such exchanges. As Eric Burton pointed out talking about educational migrations,

[13] McMahon, "Introduction," p. 9.
[14] Hong, *Cold War Germany,* p. 5.
[15] Peter Kragelund, *South-South Development*, Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2019, p. 38.
[16] *Ivi*, p. 39.

> The co-construction and multi-directionality evident in such exchanges leaves little room for dichotomous and ultimately flawed understandings of "providers" and "receivers" of education. In the same vein, assumptions that there was a diffusionist mechanism that made the benefits of education flow from benevolent super-powers and other states to underprivileged areas neglects the entangled, often reciprocal dimensions of educational mobilities.[17]

The encounters that resulted from the entanglements between decolonization and the Cold War contributed to adjusting the bipolar aid system according to the migrants' needs, which were often met for fear of jeopardizing the bilateral relationships between donor and recipient countries and therefore losing potential allies. Furthermore, the migration of Third World students during the 1950s and the 1960s contributed to spreading the anti-colonial culture in Europe and to fostering anti-imperialism within student movements. As Quinn Slobodian points out, African and Asian students brought the Bandung spirit within the postwar context of a divided Germany, posing new challenges to both republics, which used similar strategies to manage migrants' political activism.[18]
Therefore, the internationalization of the Cold War and the launching of the global humanitarian regime by the two blocs gave birth to transnational exchanges that fostered the globalization of the non-alignment and the decolonization of the superpowers' aid policies, namely their adjustment to the requests of Third World countries.

1.1.2 The socialist solidarity regime: development, visions, and responses

Transnational connections within the Second World and between the Second and the Third Worlds were striking, especially before and after the Stalinist epoch. Internationalism, defined by Akira Iriye as "an idea, a movement, or an institution that seeks to reformulate the nature of relations among nations through cross-national cooperation and interchange,"[19] was indeed a significant component of the communist culture and politics. In the *Communist Manifesto* of 1848, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels advocated the principle of "proletarian internationalism," by calling the working classes around the world to unite and carry on the class struggle together. Marxism-Leninism thus linked internationalism to the class struggle, highlighting the common interests of the working classes all over the world and the need for them to collaborate to fight the bourgeois class rule and the capitalist system and therefore gain political influence. As the leader of the Russian revolution Vladmir Lenin

[17] Eric Burton, "Introduction: Journeys of education and struggle: African mobility in times of decolonization and the Cold War," in Idem (ed), *Journeys of education and struggle: African mobility in times of decolonization and the Cold War*, special issue of *Stichproben. Wiener Zeitschrift für kritische Afrikastudien*, Vol. 18, No. 34, 2018, p. 4.
[18] Quinn Slobodian, "Bandung in Divided Germany: Managing Non-Aligned Politics in East and West, 1955-63," in *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol. 41, No. 4, 2013.
[19] Akira Iriye, *Cultural Internationalism and World Order*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997, p. 3.

explained, "[c]apitalist domination is international. That is why the worker's struggle in all countries for their emancipation is only successful if the workers fight jointly against international capital."[20]
Beginning with his pamphlet *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, written shortly before the 1917 revolution, Lenin slightly altered the Marxist analyses—which depicted imperialism also as an agent of progress and regarded capitalist economic development as a necessary stage to be reached for the success of the revolution—by arguing that some stages of development could be brief and conferring new significance to the anti-imperialist struggles of the Third World.[21]
The Third International (Comintern), founded in Moscow in 1919, embraced "the doctrine of Communist internationalism inspired by Leninist analysis that perceived the Russian Revolution as the first blow of a 'World Revolution' that would transform international society root and branch."[22] The Comintern championed the right to self-determination of the colonial world, believing in the natural alliance between the European proletariat, the colonized people, and the Bolshevik revolution. Since the 1920s, the Bolsheviks launched unconditional support for the anti-colonial struggles and started to strive to export Soviet expertise and prepare the ground for the forthcoming revolutions around the world.[23] However, the internationalist spirit that characterized the first stage of Soviet communism under Lenin was slowed down during the 1930s and 1940s by Joseph Stalin, who was mostly committed to the construction of communism at home and not particularly interested in its exportation to Africa, Asia, and Latin America, which were believed to have not "any short-term potential for socialism, because the historical conditions for the creation of proletarian communist parties did not yet exist there."[24] In the immediate postwar period, preoccupied with the implications of the division of the world order, Stalin was mainly concerned with the creation of a security belt in Europe that would protect the Soviet borders. The circumspection with which he approached the communists in China and North Korea during this period showed both Stalin's persisting skepticism in the potential of the socialist revolution within the Third World and his strategic cautiousness during the early stage of the Cold War.[25]
Decolonization, during the second half of the 1950s, together with Stalin's death in 1953, provided a change of scenario. During the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union

[20] Vladimir Lenin, "Draft and Explanation of Programme for the Social-Democratic Party," in *V. I. Lenin Collected Works*, Vol. 2, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972, p. 109 [first ed. 1960].
[21] Westad, *The Global Cold War*, pp. 49-50.
[22] R. Craig Nation, "Internationalism," in Silvio Pons, Robert Service (eds.), *A Dictionary of 20th-Century Communism*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010, p. 423 [or. ed. 2006].
[23] Lorenzini, *Global development*, pp. 34-35.
[24] Westad, *The Global Cold War*, p. 55.
[25] Westad, *The Global Cold War*, pp. 64-66; Silvio Pons, *La rivoluzione globale: Storia del comunismo internazionale, 1917-1991*, Torino: Einaudi, 2012, pp. 225-236.

(CPSU), in February 1956, the well-known Secret Speech pronounced by Nikita Khrushchev prepared the ground for a new epoch of thaw and international openness. He denounced Stalin's crimes and policies, launched the destalinization campaign,[26] and restored the notion of "peaceful coexistence," which reshaped the relationship with the Western bloc, theoretically renouncing the war for resolving controversial issues. Furthermore, Khrushchev resumed the concept of "proletarian internationalism," which claimed unity between the international communist parties at power, and "socialist internationalism," aiming at the cooperation between the Second and the Third Worlds in the struggle against capitalist and imperialist exploitation. In decolonization, he saw the opportunity to broaden the Soviet influence and to get new allies.

Under Khrushchev, the Soviet Union started to commit to supporting the liberation movements and the postcolonial states in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, theoretically acknowledging the prospect of different paths to socialism. Believing in "the possibility to combine the interests of the 'socialist camp' with those of the anti-imperialist revolution under the sign of socialist modernization,"[27] the Soviet Union started to provide economic, technical, and military support to non-communist countries, or rather, to the so-called "national democratic states," namely postcolonial countries that were pursuing a non-capitalist path of development.

With the Soviet opening to the Third World launched by Nikita Khrushchev, internationalism became a central element of the socialist doctrine, which aimed at transnational cooperation based on the concept of fraternal solidarity. Unlike the Westerners, in fact, the socialists presented their approach toward the Third World not as a unilateral "aid" but as a form of "cooperation" based on solidarity, equality, and mutual benefit. Solidarity became the concept at the core of socialist development aid. For this reason, I here employ the expression "socialist solidarity regime" to refer to the system of socialist cooperation with the Third World, the language of assistance it employed, the narratives it built up, and the forms and modes through which the aid was delivered.

The Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA or Comecon) was the main "laboratory for ideas on how to promote socialist modernity,"[28] with the Permanent Commission for Foreign Trade and the Commission for Technical Assistance coordinating the relations with underdeveloped countries. However, it was social organizations such as trade unions, youth and women's associations,

[26] Jörg Baberowski, "Nikita Khrushchev and De-Stalinization in the Soviet Union, 1953-1964," in Norman Naimark, Silvio Pons, Sophie Quinn-Judge (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Communism*, Vol. 2: *The Socialist Camp and the World Power 1941-1960s*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.
[27] Pons, *La rivoluzione globale*, pp. 297-298.
[28] Sara Lorenzini, "The Socialist Camp and Economic Modernization in the Third World," in Naimark, Pons, Quinn-Judge (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Communism*, Vol. 2, pp. 342-343.

and solidarity institutions that were committed to staging socialist modernity in developing countries.[29]

The socialist solidarity regime rejected Western narratives of aid, which were seen as neocolonial practices perpetuating the idea of "the white man burden," and considered underdevelopment in the Third World as a consequence of colonialist and capitalist policies. It regarded Western aid as an economic and political burden, since it provided higher interest rates and required to side with the imperialists.[30] In contrast, the Soviet Union provided aid by claiming "to grant equality in entitlement (*ravnopravie*) and reciprocal advantage (*vzaimnaya vigoda*)."[31]

The countries belonging to the Comecon engaged with the Third World primarily through trade and technical aid. They offered long-term credits with low-interest rates and demanded repayments through goods, raw materials or local currency. In this way, socialist aid would benefit both donor and recipient countries, helping to "both reduce Third World debt obligations and improve consumption and living standard within the socialist bloc."[32] Socialist countries exported machinery and industrial plants, granting the ownership of the enterprise to the recipient country, which would repay in quotas of production.[33] The outcomes of socialist solidarity under Khrushchev were however disappointing on both sides. From the recipient side, Third World countries were often disappointed by the poor quality of socialist aid, often delivered with incompetence and delays.[34] From the socialist side, the aid delivered turned out to be expensive and not fruitful, with the indebted Third World progressively becoming a burden and the prospects of socialism in the South increasingly pessimistic.[35] The fact that none of the pro-Soviet nationalist regimes in Africa and Asia had come to an actual transition toward socialism, in fact, made the Soviets question their own approach toward the Third World.[36] Moreover, local communists in allegedly pro-socialist nationalist regimes such as Egypt often found themselves to be marginalized or persecuted. Hence, after a first phase of enthusiasm, during the second half of the 1960s, the declining unity of the socialist bloc, with the ongoing Sino-Soviet split, and the fall of pro-Soviet nationalist leaders, such as Ahmed Ben Bella in Algeria and Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana, led to a period of skepticism regarding the project of communist expansion and the utility of the socialist solidarity regime.

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[29] *Ivi*, p. 348.
[30] Lorenzini, *Global Development*, p. 46.
[31] *Ibidem*.
[32] Hong, *Cold War Germany*, pp. 42-43.
[33] Lorenzini, *Global Development*, p. 45.
[34] Lorenzini, "The Socialist Camp and Economic Modernization in the Third World," p. 350.
[35] *Ivi*, pp. 348-351.
[36] Andreas Hilger, "Communism, Decolonization and the Third World," in Naimark, Pons, Quinn-Judge (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Communism*, Vol. 2, p. 327.

Under Leonid Brezhnev, the Soviet bloc shifted from an ideal vision of solidarity to a pragmatic concept of cooperation.[37] Economic considerations forced a re-articulation of the forms and addressees of socialist aid. The relationships with Third World countries became mostly oriented toward "economic rationality, and mutual advantage became the new catchphrase. […] Trade became crucial, and the Eastern bloc became obsessed with importing strategic raw materials."[38] Moreover, the Soviet aid would now turn mainly to Marxist and communist regimes and movements, which were "seen as reliable partners, suitable to support the modernizing mission that continued to inspire the action of the USSR."[39] Therefore, as Anna Calori, Anne-Kristin Hartmetz, Bence Kocsev, and Jan Zofka point out, the line between solidarity and profitability was blurred,[40] and, as a result, often also socialist aid projects "remained anchored in North-South dependencies, as European socialist countries did not want to sacrifice their economic interests for any kind of solidarity."[41] Soon, cooperation became an instrument to support the unstable economies of the socialist states.

The faith in the socialist expansion was then revived during the second half of the 1970s, in the wake of significant socialist victories within the Third World, such as the Vietnam war and the coming to power of socialist regimes in the Horn of Africa, in the former Portuguese colonies, and in Central America.[42]

Besides commercial relationships and technical cooperation, socialist solidarity was delivered through other instruments, such as political and diplomatic support, material aid, support in propaganda actions, military cooperation through military training and arm supplies, medical assistance, educational and professional training. Solidarity programs, therefore, led to transnational exchanges of goods, ideas, and people that circulated on behalf of socialist internationalism. Educational aid represented a peaceful weapon in the bipolar conflict over the Third World, and it was used by the two blocs to impart their concepts of world order.[43] It constituted a significant part in the socialist support to the national liberation movements and postcolonial states and it was

[37] Lorenzini, *Global Development*, pp. 107-108.
[38] Lorenzini, "The Socialist Camp and Economic Modernization in the Third World," p. 351.
[39] Pons, *La rivoluzione globale*, p. 351. All translations are mine unless otherwise stated.
[40] Anna Calori, Anne-Kristin Hartmetz, Bence Kocsev, Jan Zofka, "Alternative Globalization? Spaces of Economic Interaction between the 'Socialist Camp' and the 'Global South'," in Anna Calori, Anne-Kristin Hartmetz, Bence Kocsev, James Mark, Jan Zofka, (eds.), *Between East and South: Spaces of Interaction in the Globalizing Economy of the Cold War*, Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2019, p. 16.
[41] *Ivi*, p. 25.
[42] Marilyn B. Young, Sophie Quinn-Judge, "The Vietnam War as a World Event" and Piero Gleijeses, "Marxist Revolutions and Regimes in Latin America and Africa in the 1970s," in Juliane Fürst, Silvio Pons, Mark Selden (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Communism*, Vol. 3: *Endgames? Late Communism in Global Perspective, 1968 to the Present*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.
[43] See Corinna R. Unger, "The United States, Decolonization, and the Education of Third World Elites" and Andreas Hilger, "Building a Socialist Elite? Khrushchev's Soviet Union and Elite Formation in India," in Jost Dülffer, Marc Frey (eds.)*, Elites and Decolonization in the Twentieth Century,* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

delivered through the creation of schools in Third World countries, the dispatch of advisors, experts, and teachers, and the training of Third World students in schools of primary, secondary, and higher education in socialist countries.[44] In fact, schools designated to Third World students were created in the socialist East and South, such as the Patrice Lumumba People's Friendship University in Moscow, the University of the 17th November in Prague, the School of Friendship in Staßfurt, East Germany, the Institute of Bulgarian language "Gamal Abdel Nasser" at Sofia University, and the international schools in Cuba. The main aim of these educational and professional programs was to train the future elite which would hold key positions in their home countries and therefore create a socialist intelligentsia in the postcolonial world.[45] Besides educational training, socialist countries provided also political and military training to cadres, military officers, and trade unionists, who were trained in special schools, but political education was often also a significant part of the programs addressed to school students.

Although projected, launched, and overseen by Moscow, the socialist solidarity regime was not a monolithic system directed by the Soviet Union and imposed on its junior members and allies. Indeed, archival research has recently recovered information and evidence on the agency exerted by the Warsaw Pact countries in relation to foreign policy, showing to what extent they took advantage of the opening to the Third World to pursue their own agendas.[46] The establishment of the Warsaw Pact in 1955 envisioned in fact more independent roles to be played by Eastern European countries in foreign policy, with the consequence that Moscow was not always willing—or able—to control the policies of its satellites.[47] Moreover, after the Soviet Union itself encouraged its junior allies to search for suppliers of raw materials beyond Moscow, the Warsaw Pact countries exploited their relations with developing countries, by relying on them to stock up on raw materials at a time of economic crisis within the Eastern bloc.[48] In some cases, as the volume *Socialism Goes Global* argues, Eastern

[44] Ingrid Miethe, Jane Weiss (eds.), *Socialist Educational Cooperation and the Global South*, Berlin: Peter Lang, 2020.
[45] See e.g. Constantin Katsakioris, "Creating a Socialist Intelligentsia: Soviet Educational Aid and its Impact on Africa (1960–1991)," in *Cahiers d'études africaines*, Vol. 57, Cahier 226 (2), 2017; Constantin Katsakioris, "The Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and Africa in the Cold War: The Educational Ties," Working Paper Series des SFB des SFB 1199 an der Universität Leipzig, No. 16, 2019.
[46] See e. g. Philip E. Muehlenbeck, Natalia Telepneva (eds.), *Warsaw Pact Intervention in the Third World: Aid and Influence in the Cold War*, London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2018; James G. Hershberg, "Peace Probes and the Bombing Pause: Hungarian and Polish Diplomacy during the Vietnam War, December 1965-January 1966," in *Journal of Cold War Studies,* Vol. 5, No. 2, 2003; Zoltán Szoke, "Delusion or Reality? Secret Hungarian Diplomacy during the Vietnam War," in *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 4, 2010; Philip E. Muehlenbeck, *Czechoslovakia in Africa, 1945-1968*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.
[47] Philip E. Muehlenbeck, Natalia Telepneva, "Introduction," in Iidem (eds.), *Warsaw Pact Intervention in the Third World*, p. 4.
[48] Muehlenbeck, Telepneva, "Introduction," p. 16; Calori et al., "Alternative Globalization?," pp. 23-24; Lorenzini, "The Socialist Camp and Economic Modernization in the Third World," pp. 351-352.

European countries developed non-Western and anti-imperialist relationships in order to escape economic dependence on Moscow, overcome their marginality, and defend their own sovereignty.[49] Furthermore, apart from the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact countries, there were other actors that participated in the socialist solidarity regime providing new models of solidarity and building their intervention upon their own narratives. The socialist camp encompassed a variety of actors, both from the Global North and South, with different ideas of socialism and solidarity and different foreign agendas. Many—if not most—of them acted simultaneously as aid recipients and donors. Actors such as Yugoslavia and China promoted autonomous foreign strategies that openly challenged Soviet leadership. Expelled from the Cominform in 1948 for alleged accusations of deviation from Marxism-Leninism and among the founders of the NAM, Josip Broz Tito's Yugoslavia portrayed its approach toward the Third World as outside of the bipolar and hegemonic logic of aid, presenting itself as part of the Global South, stressing its past of underdeveloped and semi-colonized country and promoting a vision of solidarity politics that claimed to be based on self-managed socialism, non-alignment, and non-hierarchical relations.[50] Strongly criticizing Khrushchev's "peaceful coexistence" and distancing itself from the Soviet Union—branded as revisionist—up to the rift in the late 1960s, China claimed the role of revolutionary and exclusive leader of the non-Western world and started to embody an alternative within the socialist solidarity regime. It promoted "a policy of aid on concessional terms, lending at a zero interest rate,"[51] at least until the 1970s, when economic rationales started to gain the upper hand.[52]

Moreover, communists and revolutionaries in less developed countries such as Cuba, Vietnam, Mongolia, and North Korea also had an active role in supporting the Third World's revolutions, embodying symbolical models of anti-imperialist and anti-colonial struggles themselves. Proclaiming themselves affiliated with the socialist camp, they at various extents entered the CMEA bringing in their autonomous Third-Worldist visions of solidarity. For example, Cuba often pursued autonomous and sometimes adventuristic foreign strategies, presenting itself as the vanguard of the global revolution and causing the annoyance of the Soviet allies, who were often not even consulted before taking action.

[49] Mark, Betts (eds.), *Socialism Goes Global*.
[50] Ljubica Spaskovska, James Mark, Florian Bieber, "Introduction: Internationalism in Times of Nationalism: Yugoslavia, Nonalignment, and the Cold War," in *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 49, No. 3, 2021.
[51] Lorenzini, *Global Development*, p. 114.
[52] Lorenzini, *Global Development*, pp. 113-116; Chen Jian, "China, The Third World, and The Cold War," in McMahon (ed.), *The Cold War in the Third World*; Jeremy Friedman, *Shadow Cold War: the Sino-Soviet Competition for the Third World*, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015; Sergey Radchenko, "The Rise and Fall of the Sino-Soviet Alliance 1949-1989," in Naimark, Pons, Quinn-Judge (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Communism*, Vol. 2; Hilger, "Communism, Decolonization and the Third World," pp. 331-333.

African socialist countries also participated in the socialist solidarity regime by contributing to the creation of a network of mutual aid and providing base and support to movements struggling for freedom. Newly independent African countries that embraced some version of socialism actively strove to end colonialism across the continent and throughout the Third World. Cities like Dar es Salaam and Accra, as well as the "mecca of revolution" Algiers, became real "hubs of decolonization," meeting places for revolutionaries that were vital to mobilize international support.[53] Since the 1960s, for example, Dar es Salaam hosted numerous foreign embassies and representative offices of southern African liberation movements, as well as being the base for the Liberation Committee of the Organization of African Unity (OUA). Under the charismatic leadership of Julius K. Nyerere, in fact, Tanganyika/Tanzania became a model of transnational solidarity based on Pan-Africanism, non-alignment, and African socialism (*ujamaa*), defying the idea of a pure and monolithic socialism and of a Cold War order shaped by the East-West division, arguing rather that the main divide was between the Global North and South and placing the total liberation of the African continent at the top of the government's agenda.[54]

Besides the socialist East and South, also Western communist parties contributed in varying degrees to providing cooperation and aid to Third World movements and countries. Their collocation, as parties ideologically linked with the socialist bloc and culturally rooted in the capitalist one, allowed them to play the important role of mediators between African leaders and socialist countries, and sometimes to conciliate the anti-fascist paradigm with the anti-colonial one.[55] Their assistance to Third World movements and states was more political and diplomatic rather than military, but they also sometimes contributed with educational and training support,[56] as well as medical assistance.

The socialist solidarity regime was therefore a heterogeneous system of development aid directed toward sustaining the international struggles against racism, imperialism, colonialism, and neocolonialism, developed through different visions and instruments of solidarity by socialist actors within the three worlds. This thesis intends to corroborate the idea according to which a plurality of visions of solidarities and their competing practices co-existed within the international communist

[53] Byrne, *Mecca of Revolution*; Eric Burton, "Hubs of Decolonization. African Liberation Movements and 'Eastern' Connections in Cairo, Accra, and Dar es Salaam," in Dallywater, Saunders, Fonseca (eds.), *Southern African Liberation Movements and the Global Cold War 'East.'*

[54] George Roberts, *Revolutionary State-Making in Dar es Salaam. African Liberation and the Global Cold War, 1961-1974*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021.

[55] Françoise Blum, Marco Di Maggio, Gabriele Siracusano, Serge Wolikow (eds.), *Les partis communists occidentaux et l'Afrique: Una histoire mineure?*, Paris: Hémisphères Éditions, 2021.

[56] Gabriele Siracusano, "Trade union education in former French Africa (1959-1965): ideological transmission and the role of French and Italian Communists," in *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 42, No. 3, 2021.

movement. Depending on their peculiar contexts, different communist and socialist actors constructed the concept of solidarity in their own fashion while pursuing their own agendas.

On their side, the receiving counterparts showed an active role in these relations. As mentioned above, "Third World clients shaped Soviet foreign-policy decisions through persistence, manipulation, and pleading"[57] and forced the Soviet leadership to respond to their demands, even if they were divergent from its interests. Often, even if they professed to be socialists, Third World countries refused any formal affiliation with the socialist bloc, thus maintaining room for maneuver within the global humanitarian regime. Moreover, not only did they put the superpowers against each other in order to secure assistance in more favorable terms, but they also stirred competition within the socialist world by simultaneously conducting relations with multiple competing socialist partners.[58] Therefore, pragmatism, rather than ideology, often drove Third World policies when navigating the global humanitarian regime and the socialist aid system. During the twentieth century, socialism acted as a globalizing force as planned economy resulted attractive to decolonizing states that were eager to build their economic sovereignty. However, if on one hand various forms of socialism spread throughout the Third Word during the Cold War, on the other, the encounters between the Third and the Second Worlds resulting from socialist internationalism contributed to a transformation in beliefs about socialism and eventually to its decline.[59]

As southern Africa turned into one of the main hot spot of the Cold War during its last decades, the main liberation movement of Namibia, SWAPO, became a significant recipient of the aid delivered by the socialist solidarity regime. In different ways, communist actors provided support to the Namibian cause, contributing to the radicalization and internationalization of the liberation struggle. As the next sections will discuss, in fact, the liberation struggle in Namibia became embroiled into the bipolar tensions of the Cold War, and SWAPO was able to use these tensions to gain assistance and international recognition.

1.2 Namibia and southern Africa in the East-West conflict

1.2.1 South African rule and Namibian opposition movements

In 1990, Namibia gained independence after decades of struggle against the South African regime, which, as a British dominion, had invaded South West Africa/Namibia during the First World War, marking the end of the German colonial rule in the country. Ruled by the military under martial law

[57] David C. Engerman, "The Second World's Third World," in *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 2011, p. 184.
[58] Calori et al. (eds.), *Between East and South*.
[59] James Mark, Paul Betts "Introduction," in Iidem (eds.), *Socialism Goes Global*, p. 19.

since 1915, in 1920 Namibia was formally entrusted to South African administration under a "C mandate" of the League of Nations. Under that mandate, South Africa was entrusted with the duty of preparing the territory for self-determination and promoting "to the utmost the material and moral well-being and the social progress of the inhabitants."[60] However, since the beginning, instead of fulfilling its duties, South Africa proceeded to implement informal segregationist policies inspired by those already in force in South Africa itself. From the 1940s, the South African government openly disavowed the terms of the mandate, promoting policies of dispossession and repression and officially initiating a process of annexation of the Namibian territory. In 1946, the General Assembly of the United Nations, which had replaced the League of Nations, rejected South Africa's request to incorporate Namibia as its fifth province and, in response, South Africa declared that it would no longer submit its annual reports on Namibia. It then proceeded to progressively enforce the apartheid system, which, after the coming to power of the National Party in South Africa in 1948, had officially become the ruling system of the South African society—a violent system based on the separation of the races and the claimed ethnic superiority of the Afrikaners.[61] Despite the fact that not all apartheid legislation was applied in Namibia, the imposition of these laws during the 1950s and 1960s "provided the basis for an aggressive and fairly well defined 'native policy' in Namibia […], which attempted to implement a new level of control over the African population."[62]

Meanwhile, strands from different social backgrounds had given birth to movements of opposition to the South African rule.[63] Among them, in 1958 a group of contract workers, mainly from the northern region of Ovambo, established the Ovamboland People's Congress (OPC) in Cape Town, with Herman Andimba Toivo Ja Toivo as one of the founding members.[64] A significant role in the emergence of Namibian nationalism was played by the anti-apartheid movements and organizations within South Africa, such as the African National Congress (ANC) and the South African Communist Party (SACP), which had strong connections with Namibian workers and students. OPC later developed into the Ovamboland People's Organization (OPO), founded in 1959 in Windhoek by Sam Nujoma and Jacob Kuhangua with the aim of creating a national organization that would fight against

[60] Marion Wallace with John Kinahan, *A History of Namibia: From the Beginning to 1990*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2011, p. 217.
[61] Mario Zamponi, *Breve storia del Sudafrica: Dalla segregazione alla democrazia*, Roma: Carocci, 2009, pp. 73-122; Robert C. Cottrell, *South Africa: a State of Apartheid*, Philadelphia: Chelsea house publisher, 2005, pp. 82-94.
[62] Wallace, *A History of Namibia*, p. 252.
[63] Peter H. Katjavivi, *A History of Resistance in Namibia*, London: J. Currey, Addis Ababa: OAU Inter-African cultural fund, Paris: UNESCO press, 1988, pp. 41-46; Ronald Dreyer, *Namibia and Southern Africa: Regional Dynamics of Decolonization 1945-1990*, London and New York: Kegan Paul International, 1994, pp. 25-31.
[64] Bernard Ben Mulongeni, Victor L. Tronchi, "Namibia and the Liberation Struggle in Southern Africa," in Arnold J. Temu, Joel das Neves Tembe (eds.), *Southern African Liberation Struggles: Contemporaneous Documents 1960-1994*, Vol. 3, Dar es Salaam: Mkuki na Nyota Publishers, 2014, pp. 21-28.

the South African regime and demand better conditions for workers. In 1959, the South West Africa National Union (SWANU)—which was conceived as an umbrella organization that brought together different actors of anti-colonial resistance—was also launched.[65] It brought in other opposition movements such as OPO, but it failed to create an umbrella nationalist movement due to a dispute with a small opposition organization called Herero Chief's Council, which withdrew its support for SWANU. After that, OPO decided to take the reins and become a broader national movement: in June 1960 it was officially reconstituted as the South West Africa People's Organization, which, with Sam Nujoma as the President, was to become the main liberation movement of Namibia.

During the early 1960s, attempts were made to forge a united front between SWAPO and SWANU, yet the distance between the two organizations, which was exacerbated by the SWANU-Chief's Council split, made them vain. As noted by Tony Emmett, in fact, SWAPO and SWANU had developed different interests and political styles: "while SWANU aimed for ideological purity and was virulent in its attacks on 'imperialists' and other enemies, SWAPO's approach was characterized by a distinctive pragmatism and flexibility."[66] Having broken with the Herero Chief's Council and embraced a clear anti-Western stance, SWANU had alienated both domestic and international support, while SWAPO was trying to maintain contacts with the Western bloc and to use the UN to unlock a political change.

Moreover, the ongoing Sino-Soviet rivalry also had an impact on the relationship between SWAPO and SWANU, as the latter developed close ties with China while the former started to be backed by the Soviet Union. In fact, while during the early 1960s the Soviets were initially closer to SWANU as a strong and nationalist organization, they subsequently changed their approach after SWANU sided more effectively with China in late 1963.[67] SWANU's affiliation with China, along with its emphasis on self-reliance and anti-imperialism, led to its isolation, its ultimate split from SWAPO, and eventually its decline. On the other side, SWAPO proved to be capable of navigating the international environment by deciding not to be selective about any potential source of aid and to capitalize on the global humanitarian regime. Furthermore, despite its regional origin and its initial focus on workers' rights, it was able to broaden its composition and to gain popular and cross-ethnic support, presenting itself as the main symbol of protest against South African rule.

Meanwhile, the South African illegal occupation of Namibia had drawn international attention. Between the late 1950s and early 1960s, various actors demanded major attention to the Namibian

[65] Katjavivi, *A History of Resistance in Namibia,* pp. 42-44.
[66] Tony Emmett, *Popular Resistance and the Roots of Nationalism in Namibia, 1915-1966*, Basel: P. Schlettwein Publishing, 1999, p. 329.
[67] Vladimir Shubin, *The Hot "Cold War": The USSR in Southern Africa*, London: Pluto Press, Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2008, p. 197.

issue, but the UN seemed initially unable to take any concrete measure against the occupation. In 1960, Ethiopia and Liberia brought the case against South Africa to the International Court of Justice (ICJ), but in 1966 the court controversially refused to judge the case. The initial immobility of the United Nations fostered the birth of opposition movements and, as we shall see below, the launch of the armed struggle by SWAPO. On 27 October 1966, the UN General Assembly finally terminated the C mandate and placed South West Africa under the direct responsibility of the UN. In 1969, the UN Security Council endorsed the resolution and in 1971 the ICJ condemned the South African occupation as illegal and ordered the immediate withdrawal of its administration from Namibia.

South Africa had in the meantime strengthened its control over Namibia and exacerbated its segregationist policies, enforcing the system of Bantustans (homelands), which formalized the already ongoing forced removals and racial separation practices. Introduced in Namibia as a result of the Odendaal Plan, the Bantustan policy was implemented in 1968-1969 with the "Development of Self-Government for Native Nations in South West Africa Act" and "The South West Africa Affairs Act."[68] Namibians were divided in groups along racial lines and the black groups, except for the coloreds, were segregated within specific areas, called Bantustans, which were only theoretically autonomous entities.[69] The black population was forced to settle in arid reserves and overpopulated areas, while the area reserved for whites included the best farmland, mine and diamond areas and towns, and covered two-thirds of Namibia's total land area.

The persisting illegal occupation of South Africa, together with its growing violence and the initial immobility of international forums, contributed to trigger the launch of the armed struggle by SWAPO in 1966. This was soon followed by the arrest under the "Suppression of Communism Act" of many SWAPO leaders and fighters, among whom was Andimba Toivo Ja Toivo, who were then charged under the "Terrorism Act," which was introduced in 1967 but was made retroactive to cover SWAPO's earlier activities. On the contrary, SWANU refused to embark on an armed struggle and, as a result, it lost the support of the OAU, which instead recognized SWAPO as the official liberation movement of Namibia. Founded in 1963, in fact, the OAU and its Liberation Committee accepted and promoted all means necessary to achieve the goal of independence of African countries and in the mid-1960s began to provide financial, material, and moral assistance exclusively to SWAPO, as the only Namibian movement that had presented a plan to wage an armed struggle. As Chris Saunders points out, the OUA's recognition of SWAPO as the only legitimate liberation movement in Namibia was a significant moment that allowed SWAPO to get international credibility, legitimacy, and

[68] Wallace, *A History of Namibia*, pp. 261-267.
[69] *Ivi*, p. 263.

support.[70] SWAPO was also admitted in the place of SWANU into the Afro-Asian People Solidarity Organization (AAPSO), founded at the Cairo Conference in 1957, and it later obtained recognition from the UN General Assembly, as the next section will explain.

SWAPO had been planning to establish a military wing since 1962, when it started to send its cadres to get military training in African and communist countries sympathetic to the Namibian cause. In 1964, it eventually established its military wing, the South West African Liberation Army, which was renamed People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN) at the Tanga Congress in December 1969.[71] The liberation struggle officially began on 26 August 1966, with the South African attack against the SWAPO base in Omugulu gwOmbashe—the first clash of an independence war that was going to last until 1990.[72]

1.2.2 The Namibian liberation struggle in Cold War southern Africa

The liberation struggle in Namibia was shaped by internal, regional, and international dynamics and was conducted on both military and diplomatic levels. The regional conflicts of southern Africa and the bipolar confrontation of the Cold War contributed in fact to internationalizing the struggle, bringing in regional and international actors that populated the context of southern Africa's decolonization and its struggle against the white minority regimes. Angolan independence and the subsequent civil war, which involved Cuba, South Africa, and the two superpowers, provided the backdrop for the internationalization of the Namibian liberation struggle. In 1975, the same year of the proclamation of independence from Portugal, in fact, a civil war erupted in Angola with three rival movements vying for power: União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola (UNITA), the Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola (FNLA), and the Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (MPLA). In October 1975, intervening to assist UNITA and the FNLA, South Africa—under Balthazar Johannes Vorster's government and backed by the United States—invaded Angola in order to prevent the coming to power of the socialist MPLA, which in turn appealed to Cuba for assistance. Without consulting the Soviets, who would have been reluctant to do anything that might endanger the détente, Cuban military forces intervened in support of the MPLA and halted the South African invasion.[73] Soviets were confronted with a fait accompli and only intervened at a later stage

[70] Chris Saunders, "SWAPO, Namibia's Liberation Struggle and the Organisation of African Unity's Liberation Committee," in *South African Historical Journal*, Vol. 70, No. 1, 2018.
[71] Oswin O. Namakalu, *Armed Liberation struggle: Some accounts of PLAN's combat operation*, Windhoek: Gamsberg Macmillan, 2004, pp. 1-2.
[72] *Ivi*, pp. 5-10.
[73] Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa (1959-1976)*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002, pp. 300-346.

supporting the transport of Cuban troops to Angola and providing weapons and military equipment.[74] After the drawing back of the US, and the subsequent South Africa's complete withdrawal in March 1976, the Cuban troops remained in the Angolan territory for more than a decade to help the MPLA regime resist against South Africans' incursions.

Until 1975, SWAPO itself maintained a good relationship with UNITA, which ended after the South African invasion of Angola in 1975–1976, when SWAPO realigned itself completely with MPLA, which was already one of its political allies.[75]

International and regional alliances and competitions characterized therefore the Namibian transition to independence, which took place "within the context of a complex and much broader interplay of regional and interregional forces involving Angola, its own internal conflicts, the Cuban and the Soviet presence there and Western responses to that presence."[76] In this context, as the Soviets and their allies were supporting black liberation movements, South Africa, obsessed by the red menace, was able to present itself "as the upholder of the free world faced with communist expansion in the region,"[77] and to maintain the occupation of Namibia, which, after Angolan independence, represented an important buffer zone protecting South Africa against socialist and nationalist forces. Angolan independence and MPLA's victory marked a crucial step in the Namibian liberation struggle, since it provided new military bases and political headquarters to SWAPO. In 1976, SWAPO moved its base from Lusaka, Zambia, to Luanda in Angola. However, Angolan independence also led to the increasing militarization of South African forces and the intensification of the war on the Angolan-Namibian border, with frequent South African incursions into the Angolan territory. Meanwhile, due to growing internal and international pressure, Vorster had also launched a reformulated policy toward Namibia, abandoning the project of annexation and trying to promote an "internal solution," namely a plan for the establishment of a Namibian government that would have been just nominally independent, and practically governed along racial lines by puppet parties. His plan aimed at avoiding the coming to power of SWAPO, which was branded as a terrorist and communist group. In September 1975, the South African government convened the Turnhalle Constitutional Conference, which took place in Windhoek between 1975 and 1977 with the participation of around 150 delegates from the ethnic groups of Namibia, mostly nominated by South Africans.[78] The delegates laid the framework for Namibian independence—with 31 December 1978

[74] *Ivi*, pp. 365-372.
[75] Dreyer, *Namibia and Southern Africa*, pp. 100-104.
[76] Lionel Cliffe with Ray Bush, Jenny Lindsay, Brian Mokopakgosi, Donna Pankhurst, Balefi Tsie, *The Transition to Independence in Namibia*, Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner, 1994, p. 40.
[77] *Ivi*, p. 44.
[78] Katjavivi, *A History of Resistance in Namibia*, pp. 94-99; Wallace, *A History of Namibia*, pp. 286-287.

as the proposed date—by developing a draft of the Constitution and a bill of rights, which essentially perpetuated the ethnic divisions and reasserted the power of the white minority. As a result of the Conference, which was opposed by SWAPO and other political parties, most of the Turhnalle's members united in giving birth to the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA), a multi-racial but still white-dominated party that continued to support the South African plan for a Namibian independence along ethnic lines.

Meanwhile, with the adoption of Resolution 385 in 1976, the UN Security Council further condemned the South African illegal occupation of Namibia and promoted free elections under the UN supervision. Still in 1976, SWAPO was conferred by the UN General Assembly with the title of "the sole and authentic representative of the Namibian people," an acknowledgement that portrayed it as the principal actor in the struggle for independence.[79]

1976 was also the year of the crisis that erupted within the SWAPO's ranks in exile in Zambia.[80] This is labeled by the official narrative of SWAPO leadership as "the Shipanga crisis," named after the SWAPO Secretary for Information Andreas Shipanga, due to his alleged central role in the events.[81] The crisis arose from internal protests coming from leaders of the SWAPO Youth League (SYL) and other SWAPO members such as Shipanga, who denounced the incompetence and the corruption of the SWAPO leadership and called for a congress. These demands were seen by the SWAPO leadership as an attempt to seize power. Accused of fomenting the subsequent rebellion of a group of PLAN's fighters, who revolted against the inefficiencies and shortages in which they were operating, in 1976 Shipanga and others suspected to be involved in the events were detained in Zambia and Tanzania, and released two years later under the pressure of a campaign led internationally by those who, while supporting the Namibian cause, were critical of SWAPO's policies. Then, in 1978 Shipanga founded the SWAPO-Democrats, a political organization that claimed to be "true to the original and traditional principles and policies of SWAPO,"[82] but that however never managed to obtain a large following.

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[79] Already in 1973 the UN General Assembly recognized SWAPO as "the authentic representative of the Namibian people." In 1976, it granted SWAPO the title of "sole and authentic representative." (Wallace, *A History of Namibia*, p. 278, p. 382 note 19).

[80] Christian A. Williams, *National Liberation in Postcolonial Southern Africa: A Historical Ethnography of SWAPO's Exile Camps*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. 94-122; Colin Leys, John S. Saul, "Liberation without Democracy? The SWAPO Crisis of 1976," in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 1, 1994; Katjavivi, *A History of Resistance in Namibia,* pp. 105-108.

[81] For the account of the "Shipanga Rebellion" as seen through Shipanga's eyes see Mulongeni, Tronchi, "Namibia and the Liberation Struggle in Southern Africa," pp. 76-80, and the personal story of Andreas Shipanga in Temu, Tembe (eds.), *Southern African Liberation Struggles*, Vol. 3, pp. 491-498.

[82] SWAPO-Democrats, "Basic Documents," quoted in Katjavivi, *A History of Resistance in Namibia,* p. 108.

In contrast with the official narrative, which considers the crisis as a power play, and wrongly attributes to Shipanga a central role, Colin Leys and John Saul suggest renaming it as "the Democratic Crisis," as it campaigned "for the realisation of more democratic procedures and for a far greater measure both of leadership accountability and of membership participation within Swapo."[83] The main claims, brought forward by PLAN's combatants and SYL leadership, called for a better administration and the convening of a congress in which to address inefficiencies. Although sharing the same demands, the soldiers' rebellion acted independently from the SYL. During the crisis, an important role was played by the Zambian army, which actively backed the SWAPO leadership in the arrest of 2,000 alleged dissidents, some of whom were then rehabilitated, others illegally transferred to Tanzania, and others killed.[84] The 1976 crisis enforced the authoritarian line of the movement and provided the backdrop for a "spy drama" within SWAPO, which culminated in the 1980s, when SWAPO arrested and imprisoned hundreds of its members, accusing them to be South African spies.[85] The alleged dissidents were arrested, taken to Lubango, in southern Angola, where they were beaten, tortured, forced to "confess" basically all that the captors wanted to hear, and detained in dungeons, in particularly bad conditions, in some cases resulting in their death. To this day, nothing is known about many hundreds of the alleged spies detained in Lubango who never returned. The spy issue was a symptom of the paranoia and authoritarianism of the SWAPO leadership, contributing to disseminating a widespread fear within the movement and amounting to an event that risked weakening SWAPO during the 1989 elections, as we shall see. Eventually, information regarding Namibians who had been reached to be arrested even during their sojourns abroad started circulating, so that the "spy drama" had a great impact also on the exile movement, in which the fear of being unjustly detained had spread.[86] This aspect will be explored in this dissertation when recounting the story of a Namibian who was undergoing a training in East Germany.[87] Moreover, analyzing the solidarity politics toward SWAPO, this thesis will also highlight how the "spy drama" was dealt with by socialist countries like the DDR, as the cooperation relationship sometimes led the supporting country to turn a blind eye to (or even to be in some degree involved in) this facet of SWAPO's history.

[83] Leys, Saul, "Liberation without democracy?," p. 124.
[84] *Ibidem*.
[85] Williams, *National Liberation in Postcolonial Southern Africa,* pp. 123-146; John S. Saul, Colin Leys, "SWAPO: The Politics of Exile," in Leys, Saul (eds), *Namibia's Liberation Struggle*, pp. 53-58; Christian Williams, "'The Spy' and the Camp: SWAPO in Lubango, 1980-1989," in Sapire, Saunders (eds.), *Southern African Liberation Struggles*.
[86] As some life stories of exiles show. See e. g. Colin Leys, Susan Brown (eds.), *Histories of Namibia: Living through the Liberation Struggle*, London: The Merlin Press, 2005.
[87] See section 2.2.7.8.

Meanwhile, international diplomatic efforts to find a solution to the Namibian question continued. During the second half of the 1970s, UN attempts to end the South African occupation of Namibia were in some way proceeding, although Western powers (US, UK, and France) were vetoing UN resolutions against South Africa, by opposing the policy of sanctions because of their economic and strategic interests in the area. After the Cuban intervention in Angola in 1975 and the subsequent South African retreat, they however started to seek to negotiate a solution for Namibian independence that would also safeguard their interests. In 1977, United States, Canada, West Germany, Britain, and France—all members of the UN Security Council—formed the Western Contact Group (WCG), which refused to embrace the confrontational line of sanctions, seeking instead an acceptable compromised solution among the stakeholders.[88] In 1977-1978, the Western powers conducted negotiations with South Africa and SWAPO and devised a plan for the Namibian transition to independence through free UN-supervised elections. During the negotiations, and probably with the intent to derail them, South Africa continued to carry out increasingly violent military actions, which reached their apex with the Cassinga massacre, the most brutal attack inflicted by South Africa during its illegal occupation of Namibia. On 4 May 1978, South Africa launched the Operation Reindeer, which consisted of a dual offensive military action, including both air and ground attack against SWAPO bases in Angola. The main target was a camp called "Moscow" in Cassinga, the largest Namibian refugee camp in southern Angola, 260 kilometers from the Namibian border. The attack of the South African Defence Force (SADF) in Cassinga started with air force bombardments and continued with shootings at the hands of paratroopers, resulting in the destruction of the camp and the death of around six hundred people, including women and children. The "Vietnam" camp in Chetequera was also attacked, and the survivors were detained even for years, interrogated and tortured.[89] Conflicting narratives and bitter debates on the Cassinga event followed, with the South African government claiming that Cassinga was a SWAPO military training base and therefore a legitimate target and SWAPO asserting that it was a refugee camp. Evidences confirmed that it was a transit camp for Namibian refugees, administered by SWAPO and guarded by a small SWAPO military force.[90]

[88] Henning Melber, Christopher Saunders, "Conflict Mediation in Decolonisation: Namibia's Transition to Independence," in *Africa Spectrum*, Vol. 42, No. 1, 2007, pp. 78-79.
[89] Annemarie Heywood, *The Cassinga Event: An Investigation of the Records*, Windhoek: National Archives of Namibia, 1996, pp. 58-64 [first ed. 1994].
[90] For accounts of the Cassinga massacre, its representations, and conflicting narratives see: Vilho Amukwaya Shigwedha, *The Aftermath of the Cassinga Massacre: Survivors, Deniers and Injustices*, Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2017; Mvula ya Nangolo, Tor Sellström, *Kassinga: A Story Untold*, Windhoek: Namibian Book Development Council, 1995; Heywood, *The Cassinga Event*; Gary Baines, *The Battle for Cassinga: Conflicting Narratives and Contested Meanings*, Basel: Basel Afrika Bibliographien, 2007.

In times of negotiations, the attack on Cassinga "seems clearly to have been an attempt by South Africa to get SWAPO to reject the proposals or delay in responding them."[91] Despite Cassinga, however, SWAPO accepted the proposals, which resulted in Resolution 435, adopted by the UN Security Council in September 1978. Resolution 435 proclaimed UN-supervised elections in Namibia, allowing however the South African government to maintain power and to run the elections through an Administrator-General.[92] This figure was to be appointed by South Africa and was to work with a Special Representative for Namibia, appointed by the UN Secretary-General. The UN would secure its presence through the United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG), which would support the Special Representative for Namibia. Perceiving the Resolution as an imperialist conspiracy by Western powers eager to expand influence in the region, China and the Soviet Union responded with abstention. South Africa reacted to the Resolution announcing internal elections—a decision that was condemned by the UN Security Council but not by the ministries of the WCG, which had a meeting with the new South African Prime Minister Pieter Willem Botha to persuade him to adhere to the UN plan, without however succeeding. On the contrary, the meeting highlighted the WCG's inability to act for a concrete Namibian independence. Elections, held in Namibia in December 1978 without the UN supervision, took place in a climate of intimidation and saw the victory of the DTA, which was recognized only by South Africa.[93] Essentially, the South African regime was trying to keep its options open: on one side, with Turhnalle, it sought to promote internal settlement, on the other, it was engaging with the UN, "allowing elections leading to Namibia's independence as a nation-state, but with the hope of manipulating the process in order to achieve an independent Namibia compliant with South Africa's interests."[94]

While South Africa was continuing to delay the implementation of Resolution 435, SWAPO increased the guerrilla warfare. To counter what South Africans called the "total onslaught," namely the alleged plan, orchestrated by Moscow, to seize power in southern Africa through the black liberation movements, Botha launched the "total strategy," which intended to deploy all the instruments in order to crush the opposition.[95] On 18 April 1980, the independence of Rhodesia/Zimbabwe and the electoral victory of the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), a radical Marxist-oriented liberation movement led by Robert Mugabe, contributed to fostering South African obsession with the communist expansion in the region and to convincing Botha of the

[91] Katjavivi, *A History of Resistance in Namibia*, p. 119.
[92] Cliffe et al., *The Transition to Independence in Namibia*, p. 67.
[93] Timoteus Mashuna, "The 1978 Election in Namibia," in Jeremy Silvester (ed.), *Re-viewing Resistance in Namibian History*, Windhoek: University of Namibia Press, 2015.
[94] Wallace, *A History of Namibia*, p. 291.
[95] Irina Filatova, Apollon Davidson, *The Hidden Thread: Russia and South Africa in the Soviet Era*, Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2013, ch. 8.

possibility that SWAPO would also win the elections in Namibia, leading him to oppose to Resolution 435 more forcefully and to launch a counter-insurgency strategy. In 1981, the election of Ronald Reagan as President of the United States contributed to further delay the process of implementing Resolution 435. Within the context of resumed international bipolar tensions, in fact, Reagan adopted a policy of "constructive engagement," promoting dialogue with South Africa rather than economic pressure as the best approach to end apartheid, and introduced the principle of "linkage," which made the South African withdrawal from Namibia dependent on the Cuban withdrawal from Angola. Therefore, in the first half of 1980s, the regional conflicts within southern Africa were dictated by Botha's total strategy, Reagan's policy of linkage, and the ongoing destabilization of Angola by the joint action of South Africans and UNITA.

From the mid-1980s, however, the situation was changing, as the progressive East-West rapprochement, favored by Mikhail Gorbachev's "new political thinking," together with the military stalemate and the increasing international pressure, led the actors involved to negotiate a solution to end conflicts in the area.[96] Gorbachev, who in 1985 became the CPSU's Secretary-General, initiated a policy of democratic reform of the Soviet regime, summarized in his watchwords "glasnost" (transparency) and "perestroika" (restructuring). With his coming to power, Soviet Union's priority became its disengagement from Third World conflicts, in order to focus its attention on dealing with the growing domestic economic and political problems. Even if it did not stop providing support to MPLA in Angola, SWAPO in Namibia, and ANC in South Africa, the USSR started to work to find a negotiated settlement that would end its involvement in the region without damaging its prestige. However, "before a settlement was reached a major crisis brought the region to the brink of war and threatened to drag in the superpowers."[97] Military confrontations between UNITA—supported by SADF—and the Angolan army Forças Armadas Populares de Libertação de Angola (FAPLA)—supported by Cuba—peaked in 1987-1988 when, after the failed attempt by the FAPLA army to seize UNITA's main logistical base in Mavinga, SADF cornered the Angolan stronghold of Cuito Cuanavale with the likely intention of reasserting its hegemony and placing UNITA in charge of the region. The arrival of Cuban reinforcements, which intervened once again without consulting the Soviets, helped the FAPLA to defend the town and to prevent SADF's victory.[98] Subsequently, when Cuban forces, flanked by Angolan and Namibian troops, advanced to the Namibian border, the area

[96] Kathrin O'Neill, Barry Munslow, "Ending the Cold War in Southern Africa," in *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 12, Nos. 3-4, 1990; Piero Gleijeses, "From Cassinga to New York: The struggle for the independence of Namibia," in Onslow (ed.), *Cold War in Southern Africa*; Chris Saunders, "The Angola/Namibia crisis of 1988 and its Resolution," in Onslow (ed.), *Cold War in Southern Africa*.

[97] Saunders, "The Angola/Namibia crisis of 1988," p. 231.

[98] See section 3.3.3, where the conflicts of 1987-1988, as well as the negotiations, are further analyzed by focusing on the role played by Cuba.

was thrown on the brink of an international conflict, with Cuba that could have entered Namibia and placed SWAPO in power with military force.[99] Within this context of escalating tensions, quadripartite talks between Cuba, South Africa, Angola, and the United States opened in London in May and continued in Cairo in June, which meant that a negotiated solution was being looked for. Between 26 and 27 June, some skirmishes between Cuba and SADF took place, leading to deaths on both sides and resulting substantially in a military deadlock and in the South African decision to retreat. In the end, the battle of Cuito Cuanavale and the subsequent conflicts were for the most part inconclusive, with both sides claiming victory, and resulting in a dispute that still divides scholars today. Ending with the South African retreat, the battle has been described by Cuban authorities and some historians, like Piero Gleijeses, as a Cuban victory that contributed to leading Namibia to independence.[100] On the other side, South Africans claimed that they never intended to seize the city, but just to halt the enemy, prevent a major attack, and then tactically retreat. Historians like Fred Bridgland, Jan Breytenbach, and Helmoed-Römer Heitman "reject the claim that the South Africans were defeated and say that political considerations blocked the military efforts that would have been necessary to wipe out the Angolan-Cuban force which held on at Cuito Cuanavale."[101] Similarly, Edward George has drawn attention to what he sees as the construction of the Cuban myth of Cuito Cuanavale.[102]

Whatever the interpretation of the outcomes, the battle of Cuito Cuanavale nevertheless played a central role in further prompting the two superpowers to pressure their allies in the attempt to seek a negotiated settlement. The negotiations continued and, in August 1988, the Geneva meeting produced the first results, with the drafting of the Geneva Protocols, which were followed by other negotiation attempts and, on 22 December 1988, by the signing of the New York agreements, which established the implementation of Resolution 435, the retreat of South African forces from Namibia within three months, the end of South African assistance to UNITA, and Cuba's withdrawal from Angola within 27 months. Eventually, the escalating economic, political, and human cost of the Cuban presence in Angola, as well as of Pretoria's policies in southern Africa, concurred to convince both actors that a victory was hardly achievable and that a negotiated settlement was needed. In addition to this,

[99] Saunders, "The Angola/Namibia crisis of 1988," p. 232.
[100] Gleijeses, "From Cassinga to New York"; Idem, *Visions of Freedom*; Idem, "Cuba and the Independence of Namibia," in *Cold War History*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 2007.
[101] William Minter, "Glimpses of the War in Angola: Three South African Accounts... A Review Article," in *Africa Today* Vol. 39, No. 1/2, 1992, p. 133. See Jan Breytenbach, *They Live by the Sword: 32 'Buffalo' Battalion: South Africa's Foreign Legion*, Alberton: Lemur Books, 1990; Fred Bridgland, *The War for Africa: Twelve Months That Transformed a Continent*, Gibraltar: Ashanti, 1991; Helmoed-Römer Heitman, *War in Angola: The Final South African Phase*, Gibraltar: Ashanti, 1990.
[102] Edward George, *The Cuban Intervention in Angola, 1965–1991: From Che Guevara to Cuito Cuanavale*, London: Frank Cass, 2005, pp. 234-235.

Gorbachev's new thinking and the subsequent superpower's détente led the US and the South African regime to abandon their obsession with the red menace and the belief that ANC and SWAPO were manipulated by communists and that, once in power, would create pro-Soviet governments. Therefore, both internal and international developments contributed to negotiating the independence of Namibia.

In view of the transition, the United Nations were working to stipulate the preconditions for ensuring free and democratic elections and to establish arrangements for holding them. In order to help "usher in Namibia's Independence," the UN set up the UNTAG, with the function of monitoring the cessation of hostilities, the South African administration of the transition, and the elections process.[103] However, the transition did not proceed smoothly and without tensions. Due to gaps and imprecisions within the UN provisions included in the Geneva Protocols, the ceasefire, scheduled for 1 April 1989, was aborted when a final bloody conflict between SADF and PLAN erupted. Ambiguities over demobilization arrangements of SWAPO inside Angola led to a new outbreak of hostilities when the crossing of the Angolan-Namibian border by a group of PLAN's fighters was perceived by SADF as an invasion, since it violated the agreements of the Geneva Protocols, which specified that SWAPO forces should have withdrawn some 150 kilometers north of the Angolan/Namibian border. For its parts, SWAPO claimed to have acted under Resolution 435, which had established SWAPO's right to retire its forces inside Namibia.[104] The conflict continued for days, causing hundreds of deaths and destabilizing the transition process, and the atmosphere remained extremely tense until the declaration of independence.

During the election campaign, the issue of the detention of alleged Namibian spies in Lubango became widely known. Groups and movements were challenging the official narrative of exile presented by SWAPO, which tried to cover up the extent of the detentions and to justify them by portraying the spy issue as a real threat.[105] In the second half of the 1980s, the relatives of the Namibian exiles who went missing—later known as the "Committee of Parents," led by Erica Beukers—started to communicate with people abroad, criticizing SWAPO's violation of human rights and campaigning for an investigation in the camps.[106] Then, in mid-1989, the release of the Lubango detainees, imposed by the provisions of Resolution 435, shed further light on the living

[103] Cliffe et al., *The Transition to Independence in Namibia*, pp. 134-135.
[104] Cliffe et al., *The Transition to Independence in Namibia*, pp. 84-86; Dreyer, *Namibia and Southern Africa,* pp. 188-189.
[105] Williams, *National Liberation in Postcolonial Southern Africa*, pp. 149-184.
[106] See e.g. BAB, SWAPO collection, AA.3 87aSPb 3, "A report on SWAPO leadership's abuses," issued by the Committee of Parents, Windhoek, April 1987; AA.3 87aSPR 8, Report on the activities of the Namibian Committee of Parents together with a call to sign a petition asking SWAPO to inform about missed people, in *Christen in Not*, September 1987; AA.3 89aSPb 6, "Sam! Free our children! We want justice!," The Parent's Committee of Namibia, 1989.

conditions in Lubango dungeons.[107] The ex-detainees, who claimed to be innocent of any charges, denounced the unfairness of their imprisonment, the harassment and the torture they suffered for years, and the killing and the disappearance of hundreds of comrades. The circulation of reports denouncing the violation of human rights probably contributed to weakening the image of SWAPO, which won the elections held between 7 and 9 November, but did not obtain the two-thirds majority that would have ensured the full control of the Assembly. The DTA resulted as the second-largest party, obtaining 21 seats.[108]

After decades of struggle and negotiations, independence was finally proclaimed on 21 March 1990, with Sam Nujoma as the first President. During the election campaign, SWAPO was able to present itself as an authentic national movement, representative of the Namibian people, and after independence adopted a policy of national reconciliation which aimed at overcoming past resentments and conflicts, thus practically preventing any dialogue on the violation of human rights within SWAPO ranks during the struggle.[109] The issue arose again in 1995 with the publication of the book written by the German pastor Siegfried Groth, *Namibia, The Wall of Silence*,[110] which incited the formation of the "Breaking the Wall of Silence Movement," a human rights organization committed to addressing the detainees issue and to promoting the principle of national reconciliation.[111]

1.2.3 SWAPO, socialists, and socialism

During the liberation struggle, SWAPO was able to mobilize international support from many governments and organizations around the world, which sustained the Namibian cause for different reasons and through different means. SWAPO's diplomatic activity, directed at increasing political awareness and at appealing for solidarity and support, was therefore strong since its inception and enabled the movement to gain international recognition. The leader of the movement himself, Sam Nujoma, was deeply committed to widening SWAPO's support base through participation in international conferences and meetings, and building relationships with anyone willing to support the

[107] See BAB, SWAPO collection, AA.3 89aSPb 11, "Rückkehr in die Unfreiheit? – Zur Situation der SWAPO Verschwundenen und der namibischen Flüchtlinge im Unabhängigkeitsprozess Namibias," Internationale Gesellschaft für Menschenrechte, Frankfurt, 1989.
[108] For the results of the elections see Cliffe et al., *The Transition to Independence in Namibia,* pp. 183-195.
[109] For a discussion on the policy of national reconciliation and its social consequences see Williams, *National Liberation in Postcolonial Southern Africa*, pp. 185-214; John S. Saul, Colin Leys, "Truth, Reconciliation, Amnesia. The 'ex-Detainees' Fight for Justice" and Reinhart Kössler, "Public Memory, Reconciliation and the Aftermath of War. A Preliminary Framework with Special Reference to Namibia," in Henning Melber (ed.), *Re-examining Liberation in Namibia: Political Culture Since Independence*, Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2003.
[110] Siegfried Groth, *Namibia, The Wall of Silence: The Dark Days of the Liberation Struggle*, Wuppertal: Peter Hammer, 1995 [or. ed. in German language: *Namibische Passion: Tragik und Grösse der namibischen Befreiungsbewegung*].
[111] Williams, *National Liberation in Postcolonial Southern Africa,* pp. 175-184.

Namibian struggle, whether in the capitalist or communist camp. SWAPO's external support was therefore coming from a broad spectrum of international actors, ranging from anti-apartheid groups and civil society movements in the West, international organizations including UN's organs, non-governmental organizations such as the Namibia Support Committee, the Front Line States, the OAU, the NAM, governments and solidarity movements in neutral countries such as Sweden, and, last but not least, socialist countries such as the Soviet Union, DDR, and Cuba.[112] In the Cold War's scramble for humanitarian and development aid, international actors constituting what I call the "socialist solidarity regime" were in fact at the forefront in supporting the Namibian liberation struggle against the South African regime. As Chris Saunders has observed, the Soviet Union was engaged in supporting the liberation struggle in Namibia as a result of both Cold War competition with the United States, which was linked with Pretoria by economic and political interests, and a deep-rooted creed in the world anti-imperialist struggle, which led communist actors to truly believe in the righteousness of SWAPO's cause.[113] Initially more closely linked with SWANU, during the 1970s the Soviet Union progressively strengthened its relationship with SWAPO, which had then increased its international prestige, and to provide assistance through diplomatic support, material shipments, medical treatment, education and training for cadres, and, above all, military hardware and expertise.[114] Besides the Soviet Union, most of the external assistance provided to the Namibian struggle came from the DDR and Cuba, the extent of which will be thoroughly analyzed in chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis. For the time being, it should be mentioned the fact that, unlike the DDR and the Soviet Union, Cuba sent its troops to fight alongside SWAPO in Angola. However, it has been pointed out that some of the Soviet advisers were involved in fighting, especially in the battle of Cuito Cuanavale.[115] Among the other socialist countries that supported SWAPO, although to a lesser extent, China and North Korea should be mentioned, too. Despite their commitment to the Namibian struggle being not consistent, Chris Saunders has noted that the strength of the present-day relations between Namibia and those countries is rooted in the contacts they established during the pre-independence period.[116] The first contacts with China were in the 1960s, when SWAPO cadres were sent there for military training, and continued during the 1970s and 1980s, despite Chinese support for UNITA. In the

[112] Chris Saunders, "Anti-apartheid, Decolonization and Transnational Solidarity: The Namibian Case," in Anna Konieczna, Rob Skinner (eds.), *A Global History of Anti-apartheid: "Forward to Freedom" in South Africa*, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.
[113] Chris Saunders, "SWAPO's 'Eastern' Connection, 1966-1989," in Dallywater, Saunders, Fonseca (eds.), *Southern African Liberation Movements and the Global Cold War 'East,'* p. 75.
[114] Shubin, *The Hot "Cold War,"* pp. 195-235.
[115] Gennady Shubin, Igor Zhdarkin, Vyacheslav Barabulya, Alexandra Kuznetsova-Timonova (eds.), *Cuito Cuanavale: Frontline Accounts by Soviet Soldiers*, Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2014.
[116] Saunders, "SWAPO's 'Eastern' Connection, 1966-1989," pp. 58-60.

context of the Sino-Soviet competition, having to choose between the two Namibian rival movements, China initially backed SWANU instead of the pro-Soviet SWAPO but, after SWANU's decline in the early 1970s, it started to move closer to SWAPO, which supported mostly with rhetorical pronouncements, held back in solidarity by the SWAPO's closeness to the Soviet Union.[117] In this sense, as Ian Taylor pointed out, the struggle for independence in Namibia was not shaped by the Sino-Soviet dispute to the same extent it was elsewhere in southern Africa's liberation struggles.[118] For its part, SWAPO tried not to get involved in the Sino-Soviet competition and to maintain friendly relations with both the Soviet Union and China, seeking to obtain as much assistance as possible from both sides.[119]

African socialist countries such as Angola and Tanzania—which were part of the coalition of the Front Line States—also actively backed the Namibian liberation struggle, especially by providing SWAPO with operational headquarters, military camps for training freedom fighters, and settlements for refugees, as well as material and diplomatic support.[120]

Also other minor socialist countries, such as Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, contributed to assisting SWAPO. Some early contacts between Tito and Nujoma in the 1960s and the subsequent Yugoslav support in terms of scholarships and military aid for Namibians have been highlighted in Nujoma's autobiography,[121] while Milorad Lazic also mentioned Yugoslav monetary and material support to SWAPO during the 1980s.[122] With regard to Czech assistance to SWAPO, as the studies by Kateřina Mildnerová show, between 1985 and 1991, a group of Namibian children from refugee camps was received and educated in Czechoslovakia.[123] After the Cassinga massacre, in fact, Czechoslovakia, like Cuba and DDR, decided to offer shelter and provide education to the young Namibians in the refugee camps. Education, which was denied to blacks in Namibia, was indeed at the core of

[117] Ian Taylor, "China and Swapo. The role of the people's republic in Namibia's liberation and post-independence relations," in *South African Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 1997.
[118] *Ibidem*.
[119] Shubin, *The Hot "Cold War,"* p. 209.
[120] For Tanzania's role in the southern African liberation struggle see Arnold J. Temu, Neville Z. Reuben, Sarah N. Seme, "Tanzania and the Liberation Struggle of Southern Africa, 1964 to 1994," in Arnold J. Temu, Joel das Neves Tembe (eds.), *Southern African Liberation Struggles: Contemporaneous Documents 1960-1994*, Vol. 6, Dar es Salaam: Mkuki na Nyota Publishers, 2014. The role of Angola is frequently mentioned throughout this thesis. For a detailed study of life in SWAPO camps in Angola (Cassinga, Lubango) and Tanzania (Kongwa) see Williams, *National Liberation in Postcolonial Southern Africa*.
[121] Sam Nujoma, *Where Others Wavered: The Autobiography of Sam Nujoma*, London: Panaf Books, 2001, p. 115.
[122] Milorad Lazic, "Arsenal of the Global South: Yugoslavia's Military aid to Nonaligned Countries and Liberation Movements," in *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 49, No. 3, 2021, p. 439.
[123] Kateřina Mildnerová, *Namibian Czechs: History and Identity of the Namibian children raised in Czechoslovakia*, Zürich: Lit, 2020; Eadem, "'I Feel Like Two In One': Complex Belongings Among Namibian Czechs," in *Modern Africa: Politics, History and Society*, Vol. 6, No. 2, 2018.

SWAPO's agenda.[124] While many of the SWAPO young men and women were militarily trained in order to be able to fight in the battlefield, SWAPO thought it was also important to prepare Namibians to take over the administration once the country achieved independence. Consequently, it selected those with basic school background to send them abroad to receive an education and vocational training in various fields. People selected to go to study abroad probably did not have much choice regarding the field of study or destination, but generally the selection alone was seen as an opportunity and the commitment to study to help build an independent Namibia was taken seriously.[125] Many Namibians went in exile to receive education through direct scholarships or UN agencies. They went where opportunities arose: in socialist countries, as well as in capitalist ones, in African countries or others around the world. Given their stance toward SWAPO, Western countries did not provide scholarships to Namibians through their governments but through UN agencies or other kind of non-statal agreements.

As mentioned above, Western anti-apartheid groups also played a central role in raising awareness on the violent system of the South African regime and its illegal occupation of Namibia. On the frontline of these Western solidarity movements, the communist parties, deeply rooted in the political culture of internationalism, were committed to the anti-apartheid struggle of the southern African liberation movements. As we shall see in the case of the communist party in Italy, they mostly provided diplomatic, political, and material assistance, and tried to put pressure on their governments for a concrete stance against the South African regime. Therefore, direct support to the armed struggle remained one of the priorities of the socialist states, since in the West those who were supporting the Namibian cause were not governments, but parties, organizations, and grassroots movements.

As Sue Onslow argues, socialism in southern Africa appeared to offer both "a unifying political creed that could transcend ethnic rivalries, inherited hierarchical structures and tensions" and a "solution to the flawed economic legacies of colonialism."[126] For many African nationalist leaders, the socialist model of development offered a valid alternative to the capitalist one, and detained moral superiority. Some adopted socialism as a political program, many combined the socialist creed with nationalist ideology or tried to establish an African "version" of socialism. In the case of the southern African liberation movements, the Marxist rhetoric of nationalist leaders "continued to cloud perceptions of their nationalist credentials, and strengthened misconceptions that they were Soviet stooges and the product of meddling by external hostile forces,"[127] influencing Western policies in the area.

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[124] Nghidi Ndilula, "Namibian education and culture," in Brian Wood (ed.), *Namibia 1884-1984: Readings on Namibia's history and society*, London: Namibia Support Committee, Lusaka: United Nations Institute for Namibia, 1988.
[125] Interview with Thsoombe Ndadi, Windhoek, 9 February 2022.
[126] Onslow, "The Cold War in Southern Africa," pp. 19-20.
[127] *Ivi*, p. 20.

At the 1976 Nampundwe Conference near Lusaka, SWAPO adopted a radical political program which, using a Soviet-style lexicon, was committed to fight against racial discrimination and tribalism for the political and social liberation of Namibia, with the aim to build "a classless, non-exploitative society based on the ideals and principle of scientific socialism."[128] Debates among scholars have concerned whether the embracing of socialism by SWAPO reflected a real ideological commitment or rather the intention to reinforce alliances with the communist bloc.[129] What is surprising, in fact, is the total and sudden abandonment of socialism by SWAPO during the negotiations to draft the Constitution of independent Namibia, which instead adopted most of the elements characterizing the Western liberal democratic states.[130]

While the earlier influences exerted by the SACP and the employment of socialist and anti-imperialist rhetoric of the struggle seem to suggest that socialism was SWAPO's natural path, it is also noteworthy that the movement always tried to maintain a non-aligned status and continued to seek support from the West.[131] Many scholars have portrayed SWAPO as a nationalist and pragmatically oriented movement whose cornerstone's strategy was independence from South Africa. As Elena Torreguitar points out, "in SWAPO, the approach to politics was always sensible, pragmatic. There was never a long debate over ideology because it was not central to their objectives. The rationale that drove them into this struggle was independence, nothing more and nothing less. Everything else could be negotiated."[132] The Namibian Constitution was indeed negotiated by SWAPO with DTA and other political forces and, while it made no reference to socialist ideology, it adopted an economic order based on mixed economy, which combined the free-market principles of private contracting with socialist principles of state ownership and planning (Article 98).[133]

Pragmatism is highlighted also by Lauren Dobell, who considers SWAPO's transformation as a predictable consequence of its externally-oriented diplomatic strategy during the liberation struggle. She defines the 1976 political program as the final touch of a strategic maneuver to obtain a reconciliation with MPLA and a renewed diplomatic recognition during a time in which socialism was gaining momentum in Africa, rather than as a statement of political belief.[134] Given its consistent reliance on external support, SWAPO's development thinking inevitably reflected "more

[128] SWAPO, "Political program," p. 6, quoted in Dobell, *SWAPO's Struggle for Namibia*, p. 57.
[129] Zollmann, "On SWAPO's Socialism"; Dobell, "SWAPO in Office."
[130] Christian Tomuschat, "Die Verfassung Namibias," in *Vereinte Nationen: German Review on the United Nations*, Vol. 38, No. 3, 1990, p. 95.
[131] Zollmann, "On SWAPO's Socialism," pp. 597-601.
[132] Elena Torreguitar, *National Liberation Movements in Office: Forging Democracy with African Adjectives in Namibia*, Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2009, p. 146.
[133] See 1991 Namibian Constitution, as amended in 1998, 2010, and 2014, in Namibian Constitution (lac.org.na) (accessed on 15 January 2023).
[134] Dobell, "SWAPO in Office," p. 174.

emphatically the preferences and expectations of its diverse foreign sponsors,"[135] with the result that, while mastering "the many 'languages' of foreign diplomacy necessary to survive within a constantly changing international environment," SWAPO leadership "did not develop a coherent—let alone socialist—vision of a radically transformed society in an independent Namibia consistent with its claim to be a national liberation party with a scientific socialist programme for the reconstruction and development of a liberated Namibia."[136]

With independence and political power as its primary concerns and aspirations, SWAPO was able to adapt to the international context of the Cold War, taking advantage of the global humanitarian regime in order to carry out its struggle, both politically and militarily. In an interview I had with Thsoombe Ndadi, a former member of the SYL who defines himself as a "product of SWAPO," socialism appears both as a pragmatic choice to obtain military support and as a natural path resulting from ideological affinities, given SWAPO's belief in social justice, and the reality of the Cold War alliances, since Western powers were supporting the South African regime. The subsequent abandonment of socialism is portrayed as the result of changing international dynamics, and the consequent SWAPO's strategical move to adjust to them:

> And so therefore for us it was very ideal to adopt socialist ideology because it allowed for a fair and equal treatment of all citizens and do away with the apartheid and discriminatory ideals that promoted one race against the other. […] And so for us it was very important to adopt that approach, but at the same time, as we continued to learn and to observe what is going around the world and we continued to progress alongside the world political order during the Cold War, you begin to see what trends were happening, and how things were changing very rapidly. More specifically, the collapse of the mains of the Warsaw Pact and subsequently that of the Soviet Union had a very major influence on how SWAPO and other African socialist countries needed to re-adjust their political programs in order to remain relevant. […] And so therefore, as we moved towards the settlement for a peaceful transfer of power in Namibia and the adoption of, the implementation of Resolution 435, yes, SWAPO needed to make certain concessions, you know, because as human being you are not in a static world and you need to be tactical and to ensure that you continue to remain relevant. And so we are just…the way we moved…and for us it was also very important that we aligned ourselves with socialist ideology because that was how we could obtain our unrelenting support[137].

The strategy behind the formulation of the 1976 political program has also been highlighted by retired Namibian General Martin Shalli, who held important leading positions within PLAN. During the interview, he explained that:

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[135] Dobell, *SWAPO's Struggle for Namibia,* p. 139.
[136] *Ivi*, p. 140.
[137] Interview with Thsoombe Ndadi, Windhoek, 9 February 2022.

> These guys [Eastern bloc countries] were committed…we needed weapon, we needed equipment to fight the South Africans. We could only get them from those countries. And they were not black like us. They were just whites like Italians and English and Americans. But the others [the capitalist countries] were not ready to do the same, were not granting us independence. They were not ready to support us. We had no choice. Yes, 1976, it was just a declaration we made. […] We were not fighting to build a socialist country here. In the way socialism is described in those books. […] As defined in the Marxism Leninism theory. But we wanted…I mean, Namibian government, up to now, to some degree, is a socialist state. Because of the services that we provide to our people. Because socialism was about eradicating poverty, make all people equal, each one according to his abilities. […] That is, to a certain extent, what makes our government a socialist country. But we are not building socialism. Our is based on peace, freedom, and solidarity. We want peace, we want freedom, that's why freedom is enshrined in our Constitution, and solidarity, that you support each other. It is not easy things to achieve. But that is the thing we are talking about. So it is not that you want to build socialism, and later communism according to Marxist Leninist teachings, no. But we had to impress our friends, we had to support them in everything they were doing. I can be giving you weapons, I can be giving you, I can be accommodating with you, but if you don't agree with me, you don't support me. You have to go to get your friend somewhere. It's natural. If you are not strong you have to be smart, it's simple. Those were tactics we were playing as well.[138]

The debate on the existence of an actual ideological commitment to socialism remains open and guides the writing of this thesis. If on the one side SWAPO's pragmatism can hardly be questioned, on the other this does not necessarily exclude that socialism had significant influences on its outlook, as it will be further discussed in the conclusion of this dissertation.

[138] Interview with Martin Shalli, Windhoek, 22 February 2022.

Chapter 2
Strengthening socialism through solidarity: East German cooperation with SWAPO

Introduction

From its foundation, on 7 October 1949, the DDR included in its Constitution articles conveying embryonic ideas of solidarity, proclaiming "the maintenance and the ensuring of friendly relations with all the peoples" as a "responsibility of the government" and condemning racial hatred and militaristic propaganda as crimes.[1] In the new Constitution, drafted in 1968 and amended in 1974, anti-imperialist solidarity became a central pillar in East German foreign policy, with Article 6 declaring the support for "the states and peoples fighting against imperialism and its colonial regime, for national freedom and independence, in their struggle for social progress."[2]

Under the motto "Afrika den Afrikaner" (Africa to the Africans), used in the wake of the first wave of African decolonization by Walter Ulbricht, Secretary of the Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (SED, Socialist Unity Party of Germany) from 1950 to 1971 and head of the state from 1960 to 1973, the DDR launched a policy toward Africa based on solidarity with the struggle for political and economic freedom. With Erich Honecker, Secretary of the SED from 1971 to 1989 and head of the state from 1976 to 1989, the DDR African policy was further reinvigorated through a number of cooperation agreements with African states and liberation movements. Especially since the second half of the 1970s, solidarity with the South African and Namibian struggle against apartheid represented one of the main priorities of the DDR foreign policy agenda. Southern Africa was also the main scenery for the intra-German competition, and the area in which East Germany most vigorously pursued its campaign to discredit its Western neighbor.[3] The DDR sought to present itself internationally as different from West Germany, as an anti-fascist country without a Nazi and colonial past. The relations of the Bundesrepublik Deutschland, or BRD (Federal Republic of Germany, FRG), with the South African regime, its reluctant attitude toward sanctions against Pretoria and its role within the Western Contact Group, where it tried to devise a compromise solution for Namibia, made it easy for the DDR to portray its rival as a neoimperialist power with neocolonial ambitions in the region.

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[1] Achim Reichardt, *Nie vergessen: Solidarität üben! Über die Geschichte des Solikomitees der DDR*, Berlin: Kai Homilius, 2006, pp. 39-40.

[2] Article 6, paragraph 3, DDR Constitution of 6 April 1968 as amended on 7 October 1974, in http://www.documentarchiv.de/ddr/verfddr.html (accessed on 16 January 2023). The Article 6 of the amended version of 1974 gives further emphasis on the concept of international solidarity, already mentioned in the 1968 version.

[3] Thorsten Kern, *West Germany and Namibia's Path to Independence, 1969-1990: Foreign Policy and Rivalry with East Germany*, Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2020 [first ed. 2019].

As this chapter shows, the DDR signed a series of agreements with SWAPO, launching solidarity programs in many fields. The literature on the topic, as well as on DDR foreign policy in general, is quite prolific. Especially since 1990, a large number of scholarly works examining DDR African policy has flourished. The first comprehensive account of East German policy toward Africa since the early 1950s to the late 1980s is written by Gareth Winrow who, relying on official East German texts and statistics, reconstructed the developments of the DDR relationship with African countries and movements, highlighting the DDR policy of affiliation (that is not subordination) with the Soviet Union and the features of the intra-German competition on the continent.[4] The latter has been broadly discussed by scholars such as Ulf Engel and Hans-Georg Schleicher, who provided an overall picture of the rivalry between the two German states in Africa, as well as Brigitte Schulz, who critically compared the East and West German relations with sub-Saharan Africa between 1960 and 1985, showing how they were both subordinated to economic and geopolitical interests, and Sara Lorenzini, who also compared the two German development aid policies in Africa until 1970, pointing out their expectations and failures.[5] Moreover, Thorsten Kern provided an in-depth study on the intra-German competition in the context of the Namibian liberation struggle.[6] An earlier study by Hans-Joachim Spanger and Lothar Brock had also considered the conflict of the two German states in the Third World, examining the objectives and ideological underpinnings of their development aid, especially those of the DDR.[7] Along similar lines, the already mentioned and more recent volume written by Young-sun Hong sheds light on the approach of the two Germanies within what she calls the "global humanitarian regime," including case studies of their cooperation with Third World countries and movements.[8]

Many scholars, such as Benno-Eide Siebs, Ingrid Muth, and Joachim Scholtyseck have scrutinized East German foreign policy, by focusing on its development, internal decision-making structure (as well as the external forces that influenced such policy), and the goals and strategies that characterized it over time.[9] Other authors such as Achim Reichardt, a former member of the DDR Ministry for

[4] Gareth M. Winrow, *The Foreign Policy of the GDR in Africa*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009 [first ed. 1990].
[5] Ulf Engel, Hans-Georg Schleicher, *Die beiden deutschen Staaten in Afrika: Zwischen Konkurrenz und Koexistenz 1949-1990*, Hamburg: Institut für Afrika-Kunde, 1998; Brigitte Schulz, *Development Policy in the Cold War Era: The two Germanies and Sub-Saharian Africa, 1960-1985*, Münster: Lit, 1995; Sara Lorenzini, *Due Germanie in Africa: La cooperazione allo sviluppo e la competizione per i mercati di materie prime e tecnologia*, Firenze: Polistampa, 2003.
[6] Kern, *West Germany and Namibia's Path to Independence.*
[7] Hans-Joachim Spanger, Lothar Brock, *Die beiden deutschen Staaten in der Dritten Welt: Die Entwicklungspolitik der DDR—eine Herausforderung für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland?*, Opladen: Westdeuscher Verlag, 1987.
[8] Hong, *Cold War Germany.* The concept of the "global humanitarian regime" has been mentioned in section 1.1.1.
[9] Benno-Eide Siebs, *Die Außenpolitik der DDR 1976-1989: Strategien und Grenzen,* Padeborn: Schöningh, 1999; Ingrid Muth, *Die DDR-Außenpolitik 1949-1972: Inhalte, Strukturen, Mechanismen*, Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2001 [first ed. 2000]; Joachim Scholtyseck, *Die Außenpolitik der DDR*, München: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 2003.

Foreign Affairs and Secretary-General of the Solidarity Committee, and the political scientist Jude Howell, have focused on the organizational aspects of DDR solidarity and its decline after the reunification of Germany.[10]

Others have focused on specific fields of DDR solidarity, such as the military in Klaus Storkmann's study, the economic and commercial in Sara Lorenzini's contributions, and the educational in Sara Pugach's *African Students in East Germany* and in many of the contributions collected in the volume *Socialist Educational Cooperation and the Global South*, edited by Ingrid Miethe and Jane Weiss.[11] Still others have focused on solidarity as translated in everyday encounters and practices. Among these, two collective volumes should be mentioned for their ability to detail the reality of everyday solidarity: *Comrades of Color*, edited by Quinn Slobodian, and *Navigating Socialist Encounters*, edited by Eric Burton, Anne Dietrich, Immanuel R. Harisch, and Marcia C. Schenck.[12] Any other scholarly works that have not been mentioned here, such as those concerning specific case studies or programs of DDR solidarity, will be given appropriately reference throughout the chapter.

Given the importance that southern African struggles played in DDR solidarity especially starting from the 1970s, the East German support for the liberation movements in southern Africa has been the subject of several contributions. Worth of special mention are the works of the German historians like the already mentioned Hans-Georg Schleicher, a former DDR diplomat, Ilona Schleicher, and Ulrich van der Heyden, who published a number of contributions on DDR solidarity with Africa, especially focusing on its relationship with liberation movements and postcolonial countries in southern Africa.[13] Some of these studies also focused on the East German solidarity with the

[10] Reichardt, *Nie vergessen*; Jude Howell, "The End of an Era: The Rise and Fall of G.D.R. Aid," in *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 2, 1994.

[11] Klaus Storkmann, *Geheime Solidarität: Militärbeziehungen und Militärhilfen der DDR in die "Dritte Welt"*, Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2012; Sara Lorenzini, "East-South relations in the 1970s and the GDR involvement in Africa: Between bloc loyalty and self-interest," in Max Guderzo, Bruna Bagnato (eds.), *The Globalization of the Cold War: Diplomacy and Confrontation, 1975-1985*, London and New York: Routledge, 2010; Sara Lorenzini, "The Dilemmas of Solidarity: East German Policies in Africa in the Age of Modernization," in Berthold Unfried, Eva Himmelstoss (eds.), *Die eine Welt schaffen: Praktiken von "internationaler Solidarität" und "Internationaler Entwicklung". Create One World: Practices of "International Solidarity" and "International Development"*, Leipzig: Akademische Verlagsanstalt, 2012; Sara Pugach, *African Students in East Germany, 1949-1975*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2022; Miethe, Weiss (eds.), *Socialist Educational Cooperation and the Global South.*

[12] Quinn Slobodian (ed.), *Comrades of Color: East Germany in the Cold War*, New York: Berghahn Books, 2015; Eric Burton, Anne Dietrich, Immanuel R. Harisch, Marcia C. Schenck (eds.), *Navigating Socialist Encounters: Moorings and (Dis)Entanglements between Africa and East Germany during the Cold War*, Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter/Oldenbourg, 2021.

[13] Ulrich van der Heyden, Ilona Schleicher, Hans-Georg Schleicher (eds.), *Die DDR und Afrika: Zwischen Klassenkampf und neuem Denken,* Münster and Hamburg: Lit, 1993; Ulrich van der Heyden, Ilona Schleicher, Hans-Georg Schleicher (eds.), *Engagiert für Afrika: Die DDR und Afrika II,* Münster and Hamburg: Lit, 1994; Ulrich van der Heyden, *GDR International Development Policy Involvement: Doctrine and Strategies between Illusions and Reality 1960-1990. The example (South) Africa*, Berlin: Lit, 2013; Hans-Georg Schleicher, Ilona Schleicher, *Die DDR im südlichen Afrika: Solidarität und Kalter Krieg*, Hamburg: Institut für Afrika-Kunde, 1997; Hans-Georg Schleicher, Ilona Schleicher, *Special flights: The GDR and liberation movements in Southern Africa*, Harare: SAPES Books, 1998; Ilona Schleicher, *DDR-Solidarität im südlichen Afrika: Auseinandersetzung mit einem ambivalenten Erbe*, Berlin: Solidaritätsdienst-

Namibian liberation struggle in various fields. Moreover, Toni Weis analyzed the relationship between the DDR and SWAPO to examine the notion of DDR "solidarity" in its rhetorical and political dimension, as well as its practical implementation, and its interactions with SWAPO.[14] East German solidarity is defined by Weis as a "politics machine," that is, a politicized discourse that was instrumentalized by both sides through a "working misunderstanding." With this expression, Toni Weis means that the rhetoric of solidarity remained essentially vague enough to accommodate different contents and be used by both the DDR and SWAPO for different purposes. On the one hand, SWAPO used it to gain international legitimacy and support, which the DDR granted, while remaining silent in the face of SWAPO's handling of the internal crisis. On the other hand, the DDR used it to create a positive image of East Germany, distant from its Western counterpart, and to encourage a type of political activism prescribed by state directives.

The DDR relationship with SWAPO is also analyzed by many scholars through the analysis of the educational program that brought to the DDR more than four hundred Namibian children, today known as the "DDR-Kinder von Namibia" (GDR children of Namibia).[15]

Besides drawing upon on this extensive secondary literature, this chapter employs archival and interview materials gathered mainly in Berlin and Windhoek. Given the impossibility to access the

international, 1999; Hans-Georg Schleicher, "GDR Solidarity: The German Democratic Republic and the South African Liberation Struggle," in SADET (ed.), *The Road to Democracy in South Africa*, Vol. 3: *International Solidarity,* Pretoria: University of South Africa Press, 2008; Hans-Georg Schleicher, "Die Afrikapolitik der DDR: Versuch einer Nachbetrachtung" in Institut für Afrika-Kunde, Rolf Hofmeier (ed.), *Afrika Jahrbuch 1990: Politik, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft in Afrika südlich der Sahara*, Opladen: Leske und Budrich, 1990; Hans-Georg Schleicher, "The German Democratic Republic (GDR) in the Liberation Struggle of Southern Africa," in Arnold J. Temu, Joel das N. Tembe (eds.), *Southern African Liberation Struggle*: *Contemporaneous Documents 1960-1994*, Vol. 8, Dar es Salaam: Mkuki na Nyota Publishers, 2014.

[14] Toni Weis, "The Politics Machine: On the Concept of 'Solidarity' in East German Support for SWAPO," in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 2, 2011.

[15] Constance Kenna (ed.), *Homecoming: The GDR Kids of Namibia*, Windhoek: New Namibia Books, 1999; Uta Rüchel, "*Wir hatten noch nie einen Schwarzen gesehen.*" *Das Zusammenleben von Deutschen und Namibiern rund um das SWAPO-Kinderheim Bellin 1979-1990*, Schwerin: Landesbeauftragte für Mecklenburg-Vorpommern für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen DDR, 2001; Jürgen Krause, *Das DDR-Namibia-Solidaritätsprojekt* "*Schule der Freundschaft*"*: Möglichkeiten und Grenzen interkultureller Erziehung*, Oldenburg: BIS-Verlag, 2009; Jürgen Krause, Besse Kaplan, *Children in Exile: A pictorial record. Kinder im Exil: Eine Bilddokumentation*, Windhoek: Kuiseb Verlag, 2017; Jason Owens, *Changing Constructions of Germanness in Namibia: the "GDR Kids"* [PhD Dissertation], Washington DC, Georgetown University, 2001; Jason Owens, Sarala Krishnamurthy, "The forgotten child of Namibia: An analysis of Misheke Matongo's autobiography," in Sarala Krishnamurthy, Helen Vale (eds.), *Writing Namibia*: *Literature in Transition*, Windhoek: University of Namibia Press, 2018; Jason Owens, "Namibia's 'GDR Kids': Multiple Displacement, Identity and Assimilation in a Post-Apartheid State," in *Bookbird*, Vol. 37, No. 2, 1999; Katrin Berndt, "Shared Paradoxes in Namibian and German History. Lucia Engombe's *Kind. Nr. 95*," in Elisabeth Bekers, Sissy Helff, Daniela Merolla (eds.), *Transcultural Modernities: Narrating Africa in Europe*, Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2009; Caroline Schmitt, Matthias D. Witte, "'You are special': othering in biographies of 'GDR children of Namibia'," in *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 7, 2018; Karin Müller, Yvonne Niekrenz, Caroline Schmitt, Sarala Krishnamurthy, Matthias D. Witte, "An analysis of metaphors in the biographies of the 'GDR children of Namibia'", in *African Studies*, Vol. 79, No. 2, 2020; Susanne Timm, "The Collaboration between the Namibian SWAPO and the East German Socialist Party as Case for Non-Touching Educational Concepts," in Miethe, Weiss (eds.), *Socialist Educational Cooperation and the Global South*.

SWAPO party Archive in Windhoek,[16] the archival documents that have been gathered are mostly documents from the East German administration, therefore providing an East German perspective on the solidarity with SWAPO. Archival research has been conducted in Berlin-Lichterfelde at the Bundesarchiv, Abteilung DDR (BArch, Federal Archives, section GDR), which includes the collection Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR (SAPMO, Foundation Archive of Parties and Mass Organizations of the GDR). Moreover, in the Archives of Anti-Colonial Resistance and the Liberation Struggle (AACRLS) at the National Archives of Namibia (NAN) in Windhoek, additional material, mostly of East German provenance, has been collected, such as copies of documents whose originals are held in the Bundesarchiv. These documents were selected and photocopied by Hans-Georg Schleicher, thus contributing to the corpus of the AACRLS series. However, these materials are cataloged with the Bundesarchiv's older accession number and, therefore, the documents here are referenced and quoted by using that accession number, which is the one that identifies them also in the NAN. Archival and visual materials collected at the Basler Afrika Bibliographien (BAB) in Basel have also been employed.

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first one, mostly based on secondary literature, provides a general overview of DDR solidarity, by highlighting its rationales, instruments, and developments, the actors involved in its organization and implementation, the relations with the African countries and movements that grew out of it, and finally its translation into propaganda representations and everyday encounters. The second section focuses specifically on the DDR relationship with SWAPO, drawing upon the archival materials and the interviews collected, as well as some insights given by the secondary literature, especially the works of Hans-Georg and Ilona Schleicher. Although much has already been said on the topic, the chapter attempts to provide an original analysis by focusing mainly on little-covered aspects, including the coldness of SWAPO-DDR relations in the early years and the DDR insistence on influencing SWAPO politically and ideologically. The chapter also reflects on how SWAPO's adoption of socialism was regarded by the DDR. Moreover, a significant contribution to the topic is provided through the first-person accounts of Namibians who, during the Namibian liberation war, came to the DDR for educational and vocational training, as well as medical assistance. These were gathered through interviews and autobiographical books. A large part of the chapter is devoted to the DDR educational cooperation with SWAPO and the experiences of young Namibians who lived and studied in East Germany, with the goal of shedding light on the strengths and the shortcomings of educational solidarity as lived by its addressees during their everyday life.

[16] For the reasons see the Introduction.

2.1 DDR solidarity: a brief overview

2.1.1 Instruments, rationales, and patterns

During its existence, the German Democratic Republic participated within the socialist solidarity regime as one of the most active actors in supporting liberation movements and postcolonial countries. The targets of its solidarity were mainly selected according to the ideological and political affinity with socialism. Following the guidelines of the Soviet Union, this guiding principle became stronger from the end of the 1960s, when East Germany increasingly focused its aid on Schwerpunktländer (priority countries) with a socialist orientation.

While the role of the DDR in the Third World has been portrayed by most of Western contemporary scholars as completely subordinated to Soviet interests, it has been progressively recognized that such idea of the DDR as a "surrogate" or "proxy" of the Soviet Union does not truly reflect the reality of the East German-Soviet relationship in international politics. Rather, as Gareth M. Winrow points out, the DDR has to be referred to as an "affiliate" of the Soviet Union, as a "faithful ally," which pursued its national needs while at the same time supporting Soviet plans, resulting in a relationship in which the interests of both parties were often shared or agreed through mutual accommodation.[17] Even if it is not possible to talk about an equal relationship, the DDR was not pushed by the USSR in pursuing a particular African policy.[18] The Soviet Union was a source of inspiration and a point of reference for East Germany, which relied on its guidelines for international cooperation and targeted its assistance toward the Soviet spheres of influence. The aim to broaden Soviet-oriented socialism internationally was a common interest of both countries. Within the Sino-Soviet split and its repercussions on the Third World, the DDR had the task of ensuring Soviet orthodoxy and containing Chinese influence. Consultations and coordination with the Soviet Union and the other countries of the Eastern bloc in the field of development aid were maintained with varying degrees of success, although in the end, everyone acted autonomously. The DDR was active within Comecon, often managing to dictate guidelines in some fields, and always trying to pursue its own interests.[19]

The instruments employed by the DDR to provide assistance to postcolonial countries and national liberation movements were the traditional ones of the socialist solidarity regime: trade relations, technical aid, political and diplomatic support, material aid, military cooperation, medical assistance, educational and vocational cooperation. In particular, the educational field constituted a crucial aspect of the socialist idea of developmentalism, and education had indeed a significant role in the DDR

[17] Winrow, *The Foreign Policy of the GDR in Africa*.
[18] H.G. Schleicher, "Afrika in der Außenpolitik der DDR," in van der Heyden, H. G. Schleicher, I. Schleicher (eds.), *Die DDR und Afrika*, p. 22.
[19] Lorenzini, *Due Germanie in Africa*, pp. 144-145.

solidarity. Educational cooperation was delivered through the dispatching of experts to Third World countries and through educational and vocational training in the DDR, as well as the training of party and cadres. As Berthold Unfried underlines, the educational paradigm developed by the DDR both at home and abroad was aimed at the creation of an "allseitig entwickelten sozialistischen Menschen" (integrally developed socialist man), namely at the development of an all-sided socialist personality (through an "all-sided education"), which had to work on self-enhancement within the collective.[20] The solidarity missions of the DDR experts sent abroad had a twofold educational purpose as they were directed both to the recipient pupils and to the socialist cooperants ("education of the educators"), who were supposed to be educated in internationalism and underwent constant evaluation.[21] On the other side, the "all-sided education" of the Third World students who temporarily migrated to the DDR addressed also what were considered civilizational issues and encompassed political education, as it promoted work discipline and new progressive gender roles and tried to establish a common world-view through the language of Marxism-Leninism—however often without success.[22]

Regarding military cooperation, it should be noted that the DDR leadership preferred to not get involved in external conflicts with the deployment of its military personnel and rather committed itself promptly delivering arms and military equipment, offering military training both at home and abroad, and sending advisory groups.[23] Most of the DDR military support was kept under wraps because of the little international tolerance toward German military activities after 1945.[24] Therefore, it is difficult to determine the extent and nature of the DDR military involvement in the Third World. As Winrow points out, some conflicting and hardly reliable sources have referred to the deployment of combat units of the DDR's Nationale Volksarmee (National People's Army) in Africa after 1971.[25] However, although the signing of military agreements arises some doubts, there is no hard evidence to confirm their presence in Africa. Moreover, it appears difficult to differentiate the deployment of DDR combat units from the presence of military/security advisers, technicians, and training units, who were more likely to be found in the African continent.[26]

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[20] Berthold Unfried, "Education as a Paradigm and as a Part of Institutionalized 'International Solidarity' of the German Democratic Republic," in Miethe, Weiss (eds.), *Socialist Educational Cooperation and the Global South*, p. 71.
[21] *Ivi*, pp. 77-79.
[22] Berthold Unfried's contribution within the International Workshop "Migration, Education, Development, Labour and the State," Wien, 1 March 2022 – 1 April 2022. See Arianna Pasqualini, Dora Tot, Report of the International Workshop "Migration, Education, Development, Labour and the State," Wien, 1 March 2022 – 1 April 2022, in H/Soz/Kult, 31 May 2022.
[23] Storkmann, *Geheime Solidarität*.
[24] Kern, *West Germany and Namibia's Path to Independence,* p. 73.
[25] Winrow, *The Foreign Policy of the GDR in Africa*, pp. 121-151.
[26] *Ibidem*.

East German commitment to the Third World cannot be described solely as driven by ideological principles, nor by political demands or economic interests. It was a combination of these three components that formed the basis of the DDR assistance.[27] Ideologically, East Germany was eager to contribute to the Soviet plan of construction of a socialist new international order, trying to spread socialism through solidarity. Proletarian internationalism and anti-imperialist solidarity guided DDR foreign policy, which believed in the union of working classes, postcolonial countries, and national liberation movements as a powerful counterforce to Western imperialism and capitalist expansion. The "historical mission of the working class," which, through the "world revolutionary process," was supposed to lead humanity toward socialism, found a common battleground with the national liberation movements struggling against imperialism.[28] Solidarity was, therefore, the natural tool to pursue common interests, with the result that Third World struggles were instrumentalized as part of the international class struggle.

DDR antifascism served as the basic legitimation for the existence of the East German state. Its experience of having been forced to rely on someone else—especially on the Soviet Union—to progress into statehood led the DDR to portray its solidarity policy as a natural consequence of its history, which is presented as sharing similarities with the African liberation movements.[29]

Besides ideological beliefs, also political and economic interests laid behind DDR solidarity. From a political point of view, DDR assistance embodied a means to propagate a positive image both at home and abroad. At home, the commitment of the DDR to the anti-colonialist, anti-imperialist, and anti-racist causes should have contributed to instilling a positive image of the DDR among the population, especially after the construction of the Berlin Wall.[30] Abroad, it was an important instrument to secure the international recognition that the country needed, especially during the first period of its existence. On the other side of the Iron Curtain, in fact, the Federal Republic of Germany tried to impede such recognition through the policy of Alleinvertretungsanspruch (sole right of representation), launched in 1949 by the BRD Chancellor Konrad Adenauer to declare West Germany as the sole legitimate representative of German interests, and the Hallstein Doctrine. Promulgated in December 1955 through a series of official statements, the Hallstein Doctrine regarded the recognition of the DDR by a third state that had diplomatic relations with West Germany as an "unfriendly act" that could have led to reconsider the nature of such relations.[31] From its birth, and especially after the Twentieth

[27] Howell, "The End of an Era."
[28] H. G. Schleicher, "Afrika in der Außenpolitik der DDR," p. 12.
[29] Kern, *West Germany and Namibia's Path to Independence*, pp. 18-19.
[30] *Ivi*, p. 17.
[31] Spanger, Brock, *Die beiden deutschen Staaten in der Dritten Welt*, pp. 286-287; Engel, H. G. Schleicher, *Die beiden deutschen Staaten in Afrika*, pp. 149-151.

Congress of CPSU in 1956, which officially launched socialist solidarity with the Third World, the DDR was eager to establish relations with any state that would recognize its legitimacy. Yet the Hallstein Doctrine severely hindered its attempts to gain diplomatic recognition by African states, since they did not want to jeopardize either their economic relations with West Germany or their non-aligned position. Nonetheless, because of the vague formulation of the Hallstein Doctrine, during the 1950s and the 1960s, East Germany managed to build relationships with Third World states at various levels, by launching educational, development, and medical programs, establishing trade missions, developing relations through meetings, exchange visits, inter-party contacts, and delivering solidarity gifts. Resulting in a de facto recognition, these contacts "stripped the Hallstein Doctrine of much of its substance even before Social Democratic Ostpolitik definitively deprived it of its *raison d'être*."[32] On their side, the beneficiary countries refused a de jure recognition of East Germany,[33] maintaining their relationships with West Germany while at the same time accepting aid from its socialist counterpart. African leaders did not want to get involved in the German question and maintained a neutral position, in order not to be instrumentalized. Some exploited inter-German rivalry "through conveying the impression that a recognition of the DDR might be imminent,"[34] in order to negotiate better terms for their relationship with both states.

Already poorly effective at the end of the 1960s, the Hallstein Doctrine was definitively abandoned at the beginning of the 1970s, with the launch of the West German Ostpolitik by the newly elected Chancellor Willy Brandt and the signing of the Grundlagenvertrag (Basic Treaty) in 1972, which set off the mutual recognition of the two German states. Despite that, however, the inter-German rivalry continued to dictate the extent and patterns of the role of the two Germanies in Africa (and the Third World), as it was particularly evident in southern African liberation struggles.[35]

In 1973, both West and East Germany were admitted to membership in the United Nations. With their admission, "it was East Germany that was in a more favorable situation because on matters of principle it was already on the side of the Afro-Asian countries and consequently it was easy for it to present itself as the better Germany."[36] Even before its admission, in fact, through communications with the UN, the DDR had gained sympathy in the Third World for its declarations against racism and imperialism and its support to resolutions concerning the Portuguese colonies, Rhodesia, South Africa, Namibia, and the Middle East. Once admitted, it continued to exploit the channel of the UN

[32] Hong, *Cold War Germany*, p. 249.
[33] Except temporally Zanzibar, as we shall see.
[34] Winrow, *The Foreign Policy of the GDR in Africa*, p. 76.
[35] Engel, H. G. Schleicher, *Die beiden deutschen Staaten in Afrika*, pp. 119-121. Also Winrow underlines the persisting inter-German competition in Africa (Winrow, *The Foreign Policy of the GDR in Africa*). For the inter-German competition in Namibia see Kern, *West Germany and Namibia's Path to Independence.*
[36] Lorenzini, *Due Germanie in Africa*, p. 125.

to present itself as an anti-colonial and anti-racist actor while continuing to condemn the activities of the imperialist West.[37] The East German propaganda campaign against the West and, in particular, the BRD always occupied an important place in the DDR's attempts to attract African partners. East Germany always dissociated itself from the German colonial and Nazi past, portraying itself as "a truly anti-fascist state that had eradicated the remnants of Nazi Germany within its own rank and file while Bonn was still held hostage by the shadows of the past."[38] In Namibia, East German authorities distanced themselves from the actions conducted by German colonialists and drew a parallel between the Herero and Nama Genocide and the BRD's neocolonialist practices, trying to exploit Namibia's antipathy toward the former German colonial rule. The East German history was re-invented by the specialists in the DDR in a positive light, and the history of the relationship with Africa was traced back to the nineteenth century and the interwar period, when the German labor movement and Ernst Thalmann's German Communist Party declared their solidarity with Third World movements.[39] However, as argued by Christiane Bürger, despite its ideologically motivated and politically driven anti-colonialism, East Germany was not able to completely break with colonial conventions of representation and to develop new significative historiographical narratives about German colonial history in Namibia and the Herero and Nama Genocide.[40]

In its campaign against the West, the DDR condemned the BRD for its military support to Portugal in the Angolan liberation struggle and its relationships with the racist regimes of South Africa and Rhodesia. It differentiated its assistance from the development aid policy of the Western bloc, explaining the underdevelopment of the Third World as a consequence of Western colonialism and neocolonialism and arguing that, while DDR relationships were based on solidarity, equality, and mutual benefit, and were free from political and economic conditions, the Western aid program served to achieve neocolonial goals. However, DDR solidarity was inextricably linked to the purpose to strengthen international communism, by politically influencing newly independent states, especially those which were already socialist-oriented. In the wake of the enthusiasm following the achievements of socialism in Africa and Asia in the second half of the 1970s, a briefing note stated that "the aim of the DDR's support for the young states with a socialist orientation is to promote

[37] Winrow, *The Foreign Policy of the GDR in Africa,* p. 93.
[38] Kern, *West Germany and Namibia's Path to Independence*, p. 18.
[39] Winrow, *The Foreign Policy of the GDR in Africa,* p. 35.
[40] Christiane Bürger*, Deutsche Kolonialgeschichte(n). Der Genozid in Namibia und die Geschichtsschreibung der DDR und BRD*, Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2017.

progressive development processes, to further push back the influence of imperialism and to bind these states more firmly to the socialist community."[41]

Moreover, concerning commercial and economic links, the East German approach bore a certain resemblance to that of its Western rival. As already mentioned, economic interests too played a significant role in the DDR assistance to the Third World, especially during the post-recognition period, when pragmatism and economic acceptability became more and more important within DDR foreign policy. Building trade links with Third World countries, the DDR ensured for itself strategic raw materials and primary goods for consumption—which were received in exchange for industrial plants, machinery, and technologies—as well as export markets for its products. Through these trade arrangements, the DDR aimed at saving convertible currency, of which it was lacking.[42]

In the end, both in East and West Germany, commercial relationships with Third World countries were subordinated to the donors' economic interests and geopolitical plans.[43] In the case of East Germany, this is especially true during the 1980s, as the internal crisis spread. The shift toward a more pragmatic and economy-oriented Third World policy also affected the programs of labor migration in East Germany, which gradually turned from a practice of socialist assistance, which aimed to train the future workforce of the sending countries, into a venture serving self-interests, with the (cheaper) foreign workers being increasingly recruited to mitigate labor shortages and to extract surplus value.[44]

Therefore, the DDR acted within the socialist solidarity system as a junior partner of the Soviet Union, pursuing its political and economic interests within the context of the competition with its Western counterpart. The attachment to ideology and militant internationalism, however, remained always a central and constant feature of its activities in the Third World,[45] even when the socialist internationalist spirit was softened by Gorbachev's new thinking. Within the context of Soviet reduced involvement in the Third World, East Germany continued to list "anti-imperialist solidarity"

[41] SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/100711, "Information über die Unterstützung der DDR für die nationalbefreiten Staaten des afro-asiatischen und lateinamerikanischen Raums auf den Gebieten der Entsendung von Beratern und Experten in diese Länder sowie der Aus- und Weiterbildung von Kadern aus diesen Ländern in der DDR," p. 1.
[42] Lorenzini, *Due Germanie in Africa*, pp. 126-137.
[43] Schulz, *Development Policy in the Cold War Era*; Lorenzini, *Due Germanie in Africa*; Lorenzini, "The Dilemmas of Solidarity."
[44] Alena K. Alamgir, Christina Schwenkel, "From Socialist Assistance to National Self-Interest: Vietnamese Labor Migration into CMEA Countries," in Mark, Kalinovsky, Marung (eds.), *Alternative Globalizations*.
[45] Massimiliano Trentin, "Socialist Development and East Germany in the Arab Middle East," in Mark, Kalinovsky, Marung (eds.), *Alternative Globalizations*, p. 127.

as a priority of its foreign policy,[46] showing some disagreements with Gorbachev's perestroika and increasingly developing greater independence.[47]

2.1.2 Socialist solidarity actors: institutions, organizations, individuals

Various actors in the DDR contributed to the functioning of the socialist solidarity system, organizing, coordinating, and implementing activities that supported Third World countries and liberation movements. East Germany did not have a ministry responsible for development aid and cooperation, which could be related both to economic problems and ideological reasons. Besides the willingness to avoid additional administrative costs that the state and party leadership did not want and could not afford, the centrality of the concept of "solidarity" had an impact, too, in this regard.[48] In fact, according to the DDR propaganda, since East Germany played no role in European colonialism, it was under no moral obligation to provide development aid. Rather, it voluntarily provided "solidarity."

Achim Reichardt distinguishes three forms of solidarity and development aid: state solidarity—active especially in the realization of industrial projects, granting of loans, and cultural exchanges—social organizations' solidarity, and the solidarity realized through committees.[49] State solidarity involved the Council of Ministers and the central organs of the state, such as the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the Ministry for Foreign and Domestic Trade, the Commission for Economic Planning, other ministries such as those for Culture, National Education, Health Care, and the State Secretariat for Higher and Technical Education. It relied on the control of the ruling party, the SED, which dictated the guidelines of DDR foreign policy. Within the party apparatus, key functions were played by the Department for International Relations of the Central Committee and the Politburo of the Central Committee, which the final decision rested with.[50] In the foreign policy decision-making process, particular relevance was played by the personal influence of some actors, such as Erich Honecker, head of state and General Secretary of the SED from 1971 to 1989.[51] Already crucial in the decision-making as the Secretary for Security during the secretariat of its predecessor Walter Ulbricht,

[46] Winrow, *The Foreign Policy of the GDR in Africa,* p. 208. Winrow states that, despite the skepticism toward Gorbachev's perestroika, the DDR continued to maintain its strategy of affiliation with the Soviet Union.
[47] Siebs, *Die Außenpolitik der DDR 1976-1989*, pp. 320-356. Storkmann also underlines that in 1988/1989 the DDR leadership distanced itself from the new Soviet policy and continued (in some cases even increased) its military cooperation for example with Nicaragua and Ethiopia (See Storkmann, *Geheime Solidarität,* p. 593).
[48] Siebs, *Die Außenpolitik der DDR 1976-1989*, pp. 101-102.
[49] Reichardt, *Nie vergessen*, p. 36.
[50] Muth, *Die DDR-Außenpolitik 1949-1972*, pp. 54-86.
[51] Siebs, *Die Außenpolitik der DDR 1976-1989*, pp. 61-74.

Honecker later almost regarded foreign policy as a personal area of influence, where his decisions always had the ultimate say.[52]

Besides state and party organs, also social organizations and solidarity committees played a central role in programming solidarity activities, which had to be discussed with and approved by the apparatuses of the SED. Among the most significant organizations which contributed to DDR solidarity, the Freier Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund (FDGB, Free German Workers' Union) and the Verband der Deutschen Journalisten (VDJ, German Journalist Union) established close connections respectively with trade and journalists unions in Africa, developing also training programs through the foundation of institutions, such as the FDGB Gewerkschaftshochschule (Trade Union College) "Fritz Heckert" in Bernau[53] and the VDJ Schüle der Solidarität (College of Solidarity) within the Werner Lamberz Institute.[54] Also the Freie Deutsche Jugend (FDJ, Free German Youth Organization) was an important player in the field of training and know-how transfer, in particular with its Freundschaftsbrigaden (Friendship Brigades), collectives of young DDR citizens who were sent to the postcolonial world to practice international solidarity by providing training and support in various field.[55] Furthermore, the FDJ Jugendhochschule (Youth High School) "Wilhelm Pieck" at Bogensee, fifteen kilometers north of Berlin, trained young people, both local and international, in Marxism and communism.[56]

During the years, various committees were also founded to proclaim and implement solidarity with the peoples of Korea, Vietnam, Algeria, Egypt, Cuba, and Chile.[57] On 22 July 1960, the Komitee der DDR für Solidarität mit den Völkern Afrikas (GDR Committee for Solidarity with the peoples of Africa) was constituted, then renamed Afro-Asiatisches Solidaritätskomitee der DDR (Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee of the GDR) in 1963, and finally Solidaritätskomitee der DDR (GDR Solidarity

[52] Storkmann, *Geheime Solidarität*, pp. 70-72.

[53] Immanuel R. Harisch, "'Mit gewerkschaftlichem Gruß!' Afrikanische Gewerkschafterinnen an der FDGB-Gewerkschaftshochschule Fritz Heckert in der DDR," in Burton (ed.), *Journeys of education and struggle*. See also Eric Angermann, "Agency and Its Limits: African Unionists as Africa's 'Vanguard' at the FDGB College in Bernau," in Burton et al. (eds.), *Navigating Socialist Encounters*.

[54] See Schulz, *Development Policy in the Cold War Era,* p. 87; Adina Hammoud, "Von der 'Schule der Solidarität' zum Internationalen Institut für Journalistik," in van der Heyden, H. G. Schleicher, I. Schleicher (eds.), *Die DDR und Afrika*. For the experience of a SWAPO member at the VDJ Schüle der Solidarität see section 2.2.7.5.

[55] See Ulrich van der Heyden, "FDJ-Brigaden der Freundschaft aus der DDR – die Peace Corps des Ostens?," in Unfried, Himmelstoss (eds.), *Die eine Welt schaffen*; Immanuel R. Harisch, Eric Burton, "Sozialistische Globalisierung: Tagebücher der DDR-Freundschaftsbrigaden in Afrika, Asien und Lateinamerika," in *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History*, Jg. 17, H. 3, 2020; Paul Sprute, "Diaries of Solidarity in the Global Cold War: The East German Friendship Brigades and their Experience in 'Modernizing' Angola," in Burton et al. (eds.), *Navigating Socialist Encounters*.

[56] SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/100711, "Information über die Unterstützung der DDR für die nationalbefreiten Staaten des afro-asiatischen und lateinamerikanischen Raums auf den Gebieten der Entsendung von Beratern und Experten in diese Länder sowie der Aus- und Weiterbildung von Kadern aus diesen Ländern in der DDR," p. 5.

[57] Reichardt, *Nie vergessen*, p. 41.

Committee) in 1973, to extend its scope and encompass the regional committees responsible for Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The Solidaritätskomitee coordinated the solidarity activities of the many actors of the DDR, it was funded by donations from various strata of the society and it provided support to friendly countries and liberation movements of the Third World. It organized solidarity events and collections, it handed out humanitarian aid, such as medicines, medical equipment, food, clothing, and emergency shelter, developmental support, for example financing the construction of cultural, social, medical, vocational, and repair centers, and material anti-imperialist solidarity, through the financing of medical care for the wounded in the DDR and publications of periodicals and propaganda materials of the liberation movements. It also supplied school materials and scholarships.[58] Furthermore, it seems that in some cases it also co-financed aid in the so-called "non-civil" field, i.e., military.[59]

Dependent on the responsible institutions in the party and state administration, the main task of the Solidarity Committee was to "raise rather than use financial resources to support friendly political forces in the Third World."[60] Although it cannot be denied that there was a widespread feeling of solidarity among the workers and citizens of the DDR, it must also be recognized that it was largely fueled by pressures from above to donate. In this way, solidarity donations also became a "moral barometer" for the DDR citizens, a tool to "educate the donors" and "help the recipients."[61]

2.1.3 Solidarity with Africa: targets and tools

From the 1950s and increasingly through the 1960s, the anti-colonial struggles and the decolonization process in Africa aroused the interest of the DDR, which saw in the continent a chance to practice its principle of anti-imperialist solidarity while searching for contacts to break its international isolation. Already in 1951, the first African students (eleven Nigerian trade unionists) arrived in the DDR.[62] During this period, relations were initiated with independent states that were following a non-capitalist path of development and were well-disposed toward the Soviet Union. This was the case

[58] For a general overview of the Solidarity Committee see Spanger, Brock, *Die beiden deutschen Staaten in der Dritten Welt*, pp. 215-218.
[59] Storkmann, *Geheime Solidarität*, pp. 150-155.
[60] Spanger, Brock, *Die beiden deutschen Staaten in der Dritten Welt*, p. 218.
[61] Gregory Witkowski, "Between Fighter and Beggars: Socialist Philanthropy and the Imagery of Solidarity in East Germany," in Slobodian (ed.), *Comrades of Color*, pp. 74-76.
[62] Sara Pugach, "Eleven Nigerian Students in Cold War East Germany: Visions of Science, Modernity, and Decolonization," in *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 54, No. 3, 2019; Eadem, *African Students in East Germany*, ch. 1.

for example for Egypt, Guinea, Sudan, Modibo Keïta's Mali, and Kwame Nkrumah's Ghana.[63] In 1953, the first trade and payment agreement with a non-socialist government was signed with an African country, Egypt. Although for the moment Gamal Abdel Nasser did not officially recognize the DDR, the visit of Ulbricht to Egypt in 1965 soured the already strained relations between Egypt and the BRD. The BRD in turn established diplomatic relations with Israel, which contributed to the DDR earning the sympathy of the Arab world.[64] With Guinea, the DDR signed a trade and cultural agreement in 1958, the year of independence, and in 1960 was faced with the possibility to establish diplomatic relations, which was however foiled after West Germany threatened to curtail its relations with the African country. Unwilling to lose out on Western economic aid, Guinean President Sekou Touré retreated and renounced temporarily to give DDR diplomatic recognition.[65] As mentioned, during the pre-recognition period, African countries were hardly willing to recognize the DDR. The only exception was the revolutionary People's Republic of Zanzibar, which, after its foundation in 1964, granted full diplomatic recognition to East Germany, which in turn provided assistance in various fields to the newborn state. This was however not meant to last. After the union between Tanganyika and Zanzibar and the proclamation of the United Republic of Tanzania a few months later, diplomatic recognition was pulled back and the East German embassy in Zanzibar was closed. However, a consulate-general in Dar es Salaam and a consulate in Zanzibar were officially opened by the DDR in 1965.[66] Only from 1969 onwards, with the détente emerging and the Hallstein Doctrine declining, many African states—Sudan and Egypt first—started to recognize DDR through diplomatic relations.

In addition to striving to establish relations with African countries in order to secure recognition, during the 1950s and the 1960s, the DDR also took side in the political disputes in Africa and the Middle East, declaring its distance from the Western bloc's positions in conflicts such as the Suez crisis[67] (1956) and later the Six-Day War (1967), the liberation wars in Algeria (1954-1962) and in the Portuguese colonies (1961-1974), and the events in Congo (1960-1961).[68] In particular, the DDR politically and materially supported the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) in Algeria during the anti-colonial struggle against the French and provided prostheses, medical treatment, and vocational

[63] The visit of Nkrumah in East Berlin in 1961 was the first visit of an African leader to the DDR. However, after the coup that deposed Nkrumah in 1966, trade relationships between the two countries ceased (Winrow, *The Foreign Policy of the GDR in Africa*, p. 56).
[64] *Ivi*, pp. 67-70.
[65] *Ivi*, pp. 62-64. Touré will grant recognition to the DDR in 1970, probably also as a consequence of tensions with West Germany (Winrow, *The Foreign Policy of the GDR in Africa* p. 81).
[66] *Ivi*, pp. 64-66.
[67] Lorena De Vita, "Ulbricht, Nasser and Khrushchev: The GDR's Search for Diplomatic Recognition and the Suez Crisis, 1956," in Muehlenbeck, Telepneva (eds.), *Warsaw Pact Intervention in the Third World*.
[68] H. G. Schleicher, "Afrika in der Außenpolitik der DDR," p. 14.

training to the wounded freedom fighters, distinguishing itself from the ambiguous and cautious attitude of the BRD, which intervened only at a later stage offering humanitarian aid.[69] During the 1960s and increasingly from the end of the decade, the DDR supported the anti-colonial struggles against Portuguese colonialism, siding with the MPLA in Angola, the Frente de Libertaçao de Moçambique (FRELIMO) in Mozambique, and the Partido Africano para a Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde (PAIGC) in Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde. During the same period, it also backed the struggles against the racist regimes in southern Africa, establishing close relations with the ANC in South Africa—which it supported through solidarity with political prisoners, cooperation in propaganda, military aid and, at a later stage, also trade boycott against South Africa[70]—and the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), to which it provided paramilitary supplies, political, and material aid.[71] Furthermore, as we shall see in detail, it started to build links also with SWAPO in Namibia.

The liberation struggles in southern Africa and the Portuguese colonies started to become the priority for DDR solidarity, and the assistance to the liberation movements was maintained and even increased during the 1970s.[72] The choice to support certain movements rather than others depended largely on their position within the Sino-Soviet competition in Africa. While the liberation movements mentioned above relied on USSR aid, in fact, their rival movements—namely UNITA in Angola, the Comite Revolucionario de Mozambique in Mozambique, the Pan-Africanist Congress of South Africa in South Africa, and ZANU in Rhodesia—fell within the Chinese sphere of influence. However, while at some point the Soviets were backing both ZAPU and ZANU, during Rhodesia/Zimbabwe's liberation struggle East Germany focused its assistance exclusively on ZAPU and established relations with ZANU only after the independence in 1980, when the party took power and its leader Robert Mugabe became President.[73] This is one of the instances showing how the DDR enjoyed a certain degree of independence from the Soviet Union.

During the 1970s, as the new General Secretary, Honecker launched a more active Afrikapolitik, deepening the already existent relationships and initiating others with new actors. It concluded several official agreements of cooperation with ruling parties, national fronts, and liberation movements.[74]

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[69] Hong, *Cold War Germany*, pp. 140-155.
[70] See section 2.2.1.
[71] H. G. Schleicher, I. Schleicher, *Special flights*; H. G. Schleicher, I. Schleicher, *Die DDR im südlichen Afrika*.
[72] For military cooperation with southern African movements see H. G. Schleicher, I. Schleicher, "Waffen für den Süden Afrikas: Die DDR und der bewaffnete Befreiungskampf," in van der Heyden, I. Schleicher, H. G. Schleicher (eds.), *Engagiert für Afrika*; Ulrich van der Heyden, Anja Schade, "GDR Solidarity with the ANC of South Africa," in Dallywater, Saunders, Fonseca (eds.), *Southern African Liberation Movements and the Global Cold War 'East.'*
[73] H. G. Schleicher, I. Schleicher, *Special flights*, pp. 79-145; Winrow, *The foreign policy of the GDR in Africa*, pp. 192-194.
[74] Winrow, *The foreign policy of the GDR in Africa*, pp. 88-89.

After the Ethiopian revolution in 1974 and the independence of the Portuguese colonies in 1974-1975—two events that ignited the hopes for a socialist development in the continent—Angola, Mozambique, and Ethiopia became the major recipients of the DDR assistance. A number of cooperation agreements were signed with these countries, and commercial relationships, development projects, military aid, educational migrations, and exchanges flourished as result. In Ethiopia, the DDR struck up close links with the socialist-oriented regime led by Hailé Mariàm Mengistu, providing assistance through trade relations—in particular, for a period, exchanging coffee for arms, trucks, and military equipment—infrastructural projects, health, educational and military aid.[75] However, the close relationship with Mengistu arose problematic questions in regard to the Eritrean liberation movements, which were struggling against Ethiopia since the time of the former rule of Emperor Hailé Selassié, and the socialist regime of Siad Barre in Somalia, which aspired to seize the Ogaden region. Within the context of the Eritrean liberation struggle against Ethiopia, the DDR policy focused on searching for a peace settlement on behalf of the socialist bloc, without success.[76] Concerning the Ogaden conflict between Somalia and Ethiopia (1977-1978), the DDR stance was not so clear, since it seems that it supported Mengistu while maintaining relations with Siad Barre. Winrow highlights the autonomous position of the DDR, which maintained cordial relations with Barre even if the Soviets did not,[77] but also mentions the DDR support of Ethiopia in the Ogaden war.[78] Moreover, Unfried underlines the use of East German equipment in support to Mengistu and the role of Werner Lamberz, a SED politician, in soliciting a Cuban intervention in the Ogaden War.[79] Although, given the lack of sources on DDR military cooperation, it is difficult to establish with certainty the entity of the East German role in the conflicts of the Horn of Africa, there was likely a more active military support to Ethiopia, both against Somalia and the Eritrean resistance.[80]

With independent Angola and Mozambique, both ravaged by civil wars, the DDR cultivated the relations it had already established with the liberation movements MPLA and FRELIMO, now leading parties in their governments, promoting aid plans in most solidarity fields.[81] This resulted in

[75] Berthold Unfried, "Friendship and Education, Coffee and Weapons: Exchanges between Socialist Ethiopia and the German Democratic Republic," in *Northeast African Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 1, 2016. For military cooperation with Ethiopia see Storkmann, *Gehaime Solidarität*, pp. 302-380.
[76] Winrow, *The foreign policy of the GDR in Africa*, p. 100.
[77] *Ibidem*.
[78] *Ivi*, p. 131.
[79] Unfried, "Friendship and Education," p. 17.
[80] Winrow also states: "In addition to providing military training programmes, East German advisers and technicians have apparently performed a key role in the planning, organisation and logistical coordination of Ethiopian offensives in the Ogaden and Eritrea" (*The foreign policy of the GDR in Africa,* p. 143). He also speaks of sources according to which the East Germans actively participated in the wars against Somalia and the Eritrean liberation movements supporting Mengistu (p. 136).
[81] Hannelore Butters, "Zur wirtschaftlichen Zusammenarbeit der DDR mit Mosambik," in van der Heyden, H. G. Schleicher, I. Schleicher (eds.), *Die DDR und Afrika*; Bettina Husemann, Annette Neumann, "DDR-VR Angola: Fakten

large migration flows of Angolan and Mozambican students and workers to the DDR.[82] Particular mention should be made of the educational cooperation project between the DDR and Mozambique that was implemented in the Schule der Freundschaft (School of Friendship). The Schule der Freundschaft was opened in Staßfurt, in Magdeburg's East Germany (today Saxony-Anhalt), with the plan to provide Mozambican students with a socialist-inspired education that would train them to become "new men," prepared to build a strong economy in independent Mozambique.[83] From 1982 to 1988, around nine hundred young Mozambicans attended the Schule der Freundschaft, where, as we shall see, also almost three hundred Namibian pupils were accommodated from 1985.

During the 1970s, the support for the southern African liberation movements continued and strengthened, and in 1978 ZAPU, ANC, and SWAPO opened their representative offices in East Berlin. In 1979, Honecker visited Africa on two diplomatic trips which "marked the culmination of the most successful phase of East Berlin's *Afrikapolitik* in the post-recognition period."[84] On these occasions, he had the chance to strengthen relationships with socialist-oriented states such as Mozambique, Angola, and Ethiopia, to expand contacts with non-socialist states such as Libya and Zambia, and to obtain statements of disapproval of the Chinese invasion of Vietnam by a number of African leaders.

During the 1980s, the growing economic crisis within the DDR, together with the disillusionment with the political developments in African states such as Mozambique and Angola, which were gradually abandoning the socialist path due to domestic crises, led to the formulation of a new African policy. In this context, DDR foreign policy started to became more European-centered, to focus more on international security, peace, and disarmament, and to increasingly serve DDR economic

zur bildungspolitischen Zusammenarbeit von 1975 bis 1989" and I. Schleicher, "Berufsbildung und Wirtschaftsbeziehungen DDR-Mosambik," in van der Heyden, I. Schleicher, H. G. Schleicher (eds.), *Engagiert für Afrika*. For military cooperation with Mozambique see Storkmann, *Gehaime Solidarität*, pp. 243-302.

[82] Marcia C. Schenck, "Negotiating the German Democratic Republic: Angolan Student Migration during the Cold War 1976-90," in *Africa*, Vol. 89, Supplement 1, 2019; Eadem, "From Luanda and Maputo to Berlin: Uncovering Angolan and Mozambican Migrants' Motives to Move to the German Democratic Republic (1979-90)," in *African Economic History*, Vol. 44, 2016; Eadem, *Remembering African Labor Migration to the Second World: Socialist Mobilities between Angola, Mozambique, and East Germany*, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023.

[83] Annette Scheunpflug, Jürgen Krause, *Die Schule der Freundschaft: Ein Bildungsexperiment in der DDR*, Hamburg: Universität der Bundeswehr Hamburg, 2000; Tanja R. Müller, *Legacies of Socialist Solidarity: East Germany in Mozambique*, Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014; Marcia C. Schenck, "Small Strangers at the School of Friendship: Memories of Mozambican School Students of the German Democratic Republic," in *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute Washington DC,* Supplement 15, 2020; Jane Weiss, "On an Attempt to Shape the New Mozambican: the 'School of Friendship' in Staßfurt (GDR)," in Miethe, Weiss (eds.), *Socialist Educational Cooperation and the Global South*; Jason Verber, "True to the Politics of Frelimo? Teaching Socialism at the *Schule der Freundschaft*, 1981-1990," in Slobodian (ed.), *Comrade of Color*; Uta Kruse, "Die 'Schule der Freeundschaft' in Staßfurt," in van der Heyden, I. Schleicher, H. G. Schleicher (eds.), *Engagiert für Afrika*.

[84] Winrow, *The foreign policy of the GDR in Africa,* p. 87.

interests.[85] Solidarity was consequently subordinated to these new priorities, and "Africa was no longer seen primarily as a theater of system confrontation, as a testing ground for socialist-oriented developments, but rather as a potential ally for supporting DDR peace initiatives."[86] The DDR reduced its commitment in Africa in certain areas, limiting the solidarity to what was economically feasible. Yet in southern Africa, the support for the liberation movements SWAPO and ANC remained strong and increased even. Despite continuing to provide assistance for their struggles, however, the DDR also supported the negotiations for a political solution for the end of the conflicts and the independence of Namibia.[87]

The revision of its positions in foreign policy led the DDR to theoretically "dismantle confrontational ways of thinking and simplistic socioeconomic models for Africa and to assign greater importance to system-wide solutions to global problems."[88] This process was influenced by Gorbachev's new thinking, which, however, was not well received by many areas of the party apparatus. Concretely, in fact, as we shall see, while support for the peace process in southern Africa was provided, the propaganda apparatus continued to dictate the same old style of class struggle.[89]

Throughout its existence, the DDR forged diplomatic relations at various degrees with all African countries, except for Malawi, Swaziland, and South Africa. However, it also suffered several setbacks, which led to the reduction or suspension, often temporary, of the relationships. These could depend on various factors, such as the internal development of the African states—as with the shifts in Ghana after the fall of Kwame Nkrumah in 1966, in Mali after the fall of Modibo Keïta in 1968, and in Egypt after Nasser's death in 1970—the inefficiency of the DDR aid—as in the case of Zanzibar in 1970[90] and the Central African Republic in 1971—and the DDR strategy of affiliation with the Soviet Union. Relations with African countries and leaders were at times suspended, at times cooled, and at times resumed according to the shifting balance of the bipolar conflict and the policies pursued by all the actors involved, both in the First, Second, and Third Worlds. "Many exchanges

[85] H. G. Schleicher, "GDR solidarity," p. 1145; Siebs, *Die Außenpolitik der DDR 1976-1989*, pp. 306-311; H. G. Schleicher, "Die Afrikapolitik der DDR", pp. 37-39.
[86] H. G. Schleicher, "Die Afrikapolitik der DDR," p. 37.
[87] See section 2.2.2.
[88] H. G. Schleicher, "Die Afrikapolitik der DDR," p. 38.
[89] *Ivi*, p. 39.
[90] For the relationship between East Germany and Zanzibar see also G. Thomas Burgess, "The Rise and Fall of a Socialist Future: Ambivalent Encounters Between Zanzibar and East Germany in the Cold War," in Burton et al. (eds.), *Navigating Socialist Encounters*.

ended promptly and can therefore be aptly described as 'temporary friendships' which passed from high hopes and enthusiasm to mutual disillusionment."[91]

The DDR strategy of affiliation with the USSR proved to be once positive and once counter-productive for the DDR policy in Africa. In fact, while sometimes it allowed the DDR to attract African countries and movements sympathetic to the USSR, in other cases it alienated potential partners. Close association with USSR was detrimental to the DDR image in Africa on occasions such as the invasions of Czechoslovakia (1968) and Afghanistan (1979), which arose protests in the Third World.[92] As mentioned, also the Sino-Soviet competition had a great impact on the East German Afrikapolitik, since, for a certain period, it prevented the DDR to develop closer ties with pro-Chinese actors such as Tanzania.[93]

Following the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 and the reunification of Germany in October 1990, the DDR socialist solidarity institutions and programs were disbanded and only the projects that were in line with the development principles of the unified Germany, whose form of government and juridical system were inherited by the former West Germany, were to be continued.[94]

2.1.4 Solidarity in theory vs solidarity in praxis: representations and encounters

Migrations of Third World students, workers, and cadres to the DDR and the sending of DDR experts abroad tested the solidarity regime through actual East-South encounters, which showed the limits and flaws of the socialist internationalist discourse, and highlighted the gap between proclaimed solidarity and solidarity in praxis. The principle of equal solidarity as elaborated by the state often turned out to be only rhetorical: the presence of a civilizational intent within the training programs contradicted the myth of equal solidarity, as they were aimed at exporting a specific form of socialism. Eastern European state socialism, in fact,

> did not reject the [colonial] idea of the civilizing mission but rather built a variant on it; built out of the belief that it was possible to recover a humane version of European Enlightenment civilization and take it to less developed countries as a paternalistic project of white European anti-colonial 'missionaries'. In this sense, it was a revival of an older claim that Eastern Europeans, given the chance, would be able to redeem a colonial project that Western Europeans had betrayed—now retooled for a world of anti-colonialism and equality.[95]

[91] Marcia C. Schenck, Immanuel R. Harisch, Anne Dietrich, Eric Burton, "Introduction: Moorings and (Dis)Entanglements between Africa and East Germany during the Cold War," in Iidem (eds.), *Navigating Socialist Encounters,* p. 6.
[92] Winrow, *The foreign policy of the GDR in Africa,* p. 187.
[93] *Ivi*, p. 82.
[94] Howell, "The End of an Era," pp. 320-325.
[95] James Mark, "Race," in Mark, Betts (eds.), *Socialism Goes Global*, p. 233.

Figure 1. *Poster from 1951 World Festival of Youth and Students in East Berlin.*
Source: Quinn Slobodian, "Socialist Chromatism: Race, Racism, and the Racial Rainbow in East Germany," in Idem (ed.), *Comrades of Color*, p. 24

Despite the official rhetoric of solidarity being based on the principle of equality, the socialist solidarity regime often ended up reproducing hierarchical power relations and paternalistic narratives both in its iconography and in practice, with the consequences that hierarchies often "limited the possible impact of these encounters."[96] In the propaganda, the principle of solidarity and equal comradeship was represented through a white perspective that often reproduced hierarchies and highlighted differences. In fact, the visual representation of races, as Quinn Slobodian points out when analyzing the East German iconography of internationalism, although willing to depict an image of a unified and non-hierarchical humanity, ended up portraying the white man as the first among equals, "granting him a symbolic vanguard position that undercut the message of racial horizontality."[97] This is clear from Figure 1, which is a DDR poster from a World Festival of Youth and Students, where the white man is represented in a foreground position in respect to the others. Moreover, a language of civilizational difference was often used to portray the "Other," who was represented as racially marked through "exaggerated and even offensive stereotypical depictions"[98] and was exoticized and infantilized rather than treated as an equal comrade.[99] The visual repertoire of socialist solidarity in the Soviet world was therefore contradictory and complex. Figure 2 shows a Soviet propaganda poster depicting three men—one from Africa, one from Asia, and one from Latin America—as highly stereotyped figures who, together with the white Russian man, walk united against a background echoing

Figure 2. *Avenir Iosifovich Chernomordik, Moscow Tours, 1957, in Wayland Rudd Collection.*
Source: Yevgeniy Fiks, in Nash (ed.), *Red Africa*, p. 24.

[96] Schenck et al., "Introduction: Moorings and (Dis)Entanglements," p. 7.
[97] Quinn Slobodian, "Socialist Chromatism," p. 23.
[98] *Ivi*, p. 33.
[99] Hong, *Cold War Germany*, pp. 127-128.

the grandeur of communism. This shows how the representation of races in the Soviet Union (and in most European socialist countries like the DDR) staged a mixture of "internationalism, solidarity, humanism, communist ideals as well as exoticization, otherness, stereotyping and hypocrisy."[100] This kind of representation was to some extent challenged, for example by African students who, during their time in the DDR, criticized the racialized and exoticized portrayal of Africans in the media and called for a truer representation of Africa.[101]

As a result of the state management of socialist solidarity, which reproduced this kind of propaganda and imposed the norms regulating the East-South encounters from above, Third World migrants were often seen by East Germans as "moral constructs," as icons rather than individuals.[102]

However, solidarity as prescribed by the state did not fully dictate solidarity on the ground. Everyday reality showed a complex and multifaceted picture of East-South encounters, which, as Eric Burton, Anne Dietrich, Immanuel R. Harisch, and Marcia C. Schenck point out, "were negotiated and navigated by a multitude of actors, who were pursuing a wide variety of interests."[103] The lived experiences resulting from such encounters were mixed, ranging from positive relations of comradeship to situations of conflict. For example, it should be noted that, in case of conflicts between DDR cooperants and Africans, it was the DDR personnel who tended to be sanctioned, in order to avoid problems with the other party.[104] For fear of jeopardizing relations with its Third World partner, in fact, the DDR often met its demands for better terms for foreign students and workers in the DDR. On their part, the migrants themselves were able to express their needs and act as "agents of dissent," using their organizations to challenge both the DDR and their country of origin.[105]

Educational projects developed by the DDR in agreement with its partners, despite providing opportunities for education to an extent that could hardly be feasible in war situations, proved in some cases to be ineffective in the long term. In addition to fueling the migrants' alienation from their home countries, which in turn reinforced the desire to remain permanently in the DDR, they often caused a discordance between what the migrants had learned and what was suitable for the environment in their home countries.[106] The efficiency of the results also depended on the shifting political situations

[100] Yevgeniy Fiks, in Mark Nash (ed.), *Red Africa: Affective Communities and the Cold War*, London: Black Dog Publishing, 2016, p. 22.
[101] Christian Alvarado, "'In the Spirit of Harambee!' Kenyan Student Unions in the German Democratic Republic and Yugoslavia, 1964–68," in Burton et al. (eds), *Navigating Socialist Encounters*; Angermann, "Agency and Its Limits."
[102] Weis, "The Politics Machine," p. 366; Slobodian, "Socialist Chromatism," pp. 31-32.
[103] Schenck et al., "Introduction: Moorings and (Dis)Entanglements," p. 5.
[104] Unfried, "Education as a Paradigm," pp. 77-79.
[105] Sara Pugach, "Agents of Dissent: African Student Organizations in the German Democratic Republic," in *Africa*, Vol. 89, Supplement 1, 2019; Eadem, *African Students in East Germany*, ch. 4.
[106] Birgit Fröhlich, "Gedanken zur Entwicklungszusammenarbeit der DDR mit Afrika," in van der Heyden, I. Schleicher, H. G. Schleicher, *Die DDR und Afrika*, p. 152.

of the recipient countries. In the case of the Schüle der Freundschaft for Mozambicans in the DDR, for example, Mozambique's transition to a free market and multiparty democracy in the 1980s revealed the precariousness of the aims of educational projects of that kind and the side effects of the socialist solidarity regime on the lives of migrants. After having been trained to lead the country toward socialist development, in fact, the Mozambican government failed to re-integrate them into the changed environment of their home country.[107]

In addition to being present in DDR iconography, racist stereotypes also permeated the everyday lives of East-South encounters in the DDR, whose "socialism of difference"—as Peggy Piesche calls it—was based on the assumption that blacks were "exotic, foreign, and different."[108] Some foreign students and workers happened to be racialized, assaulted, and treated with suspicion and resentment.[109] These episodes of everyday racism experienced by Africans—but also Asians and Latin Americans—in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union conflicted with the professed anti-colonial and anti-racist dogma of the socialist states and revealed a "cultural legacy of an attitude of superiority vis-à-vis Africa."[110] The anti-racism professed by the Eastern European socialist states was instrumental in gaining them status in the international arena and allowed them to portray themselves as morally superior white Europeans by virtue of their solidarity with the anti-colonial struggle.[111] The contradictions of socialist states that had embraced the global struggle against racism without addressing their own legacies of racism inevitably led foreign students and workers to experience incidents of discrimination and racism.

However, despite the problems and the obstacles encountered by migrants in socialist European countries, the lived experiences of internationalism produced also genuine relationships of solidarity, which gave birth to "affective communities" and generated sentiments of "Eastalgia."[112] Beyond the state internationalist rhetoric and propaganda that imposed the human values and practices of solidarity and socialism, ethics of solidarity were more often than not genuinely internalized and performed by socialist citizens who engaged in works of solidarity. Despite the DDR solidarity being a machine coordinated from above, which often limited grassroots initiatives, for most DDR citizens

[107] Schenck, "Small Strangers at the School of Friendship," pp. 53-55.
[108] Peggy Piesche, "Making African Diasporic Pasts Possible: A Retrospective View of the GDR and Its Black (Step-) Children," in Sara Lennox (ed.), *Remapping Black Germany: New perspectives on Afro-German History, Politics, and Culture*, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2016, p. 229.
[109] Jonathan R. Zatlin, "Scarcity and Resentment: Economic Sources of Xenophobia in the GDR, 1971–1989," in *Central European History,* Vol. 40, No. 4, 2007; Irene Runge, *Ausland DDR: Fremdenhass*, Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1990; Pugach, *African Students in East Germany*.
[110] Schenck et al., "Introduction: Moorings and (Dis)Entanglements," p. 8.
[111] Mark, "Race."
[112] Nash (ed.), *Red Africa*; Christina Schwenkel, "Affective Solidarities and East German Reconstruction of Postwar Vietnam," in Slobodian (ed.), *Comrades of Color*; Marcia C. Schenck, "A chronology of nostalgia: memories of former Angolan and Mozambican worker trainees to East Germany," in *Labor History*, Vol. 59, No. 3, 2018.

it was also a "matter of the heart."[113] Solidarity was part of education since kindergarten and was cultivated with many activities during the life of each citizen. Therefore, while, on one hand, socialist solidarity was a significant battleground for political and ideological influence in the bipolar conflict, intended to win the hearts and minds of Third World's people, on the other hand, it also enabled what Christina Schwenkel calls "affective solidarities," namely practices of solidarity based on human bonds and deeply rooted in anti-imperialist sentiments.[114]

Foreigners in the DDR were in most cases "ghettoized," as they were accommodated in separated housing areas with respect to local citizens. Relations between Third World migrants and local citizens were strictly monitored and close interactions were often discouraged and even forbidden.[115] The solidarity projects that brought these people to the DDR did not envisage either amenities that could distract them from their education or long-term relationships that could endanger their homecoming (or that could cause the departure of East German citizens from the DDR). Similarly, East German solidarity workers in Africa were prevented from engaging in personal contacts beyond work. For this reason, paradoxically but perhaps not surprisingly, state solidarity can be said to have hindered the emergence of genuine relationships of solidarity and friendship. Nevertheless, everyday contacts based on comradeship and interdependence took place, as well as romantic relationships. Therefore, the socialist solidarity regime, with its limits and flaws, produced transnational "affective communities" born out of subjective forms of affective experiences based on ideological identification, which created cross-cultural friendships and collaborations between the Third World and the anti-colonialist cultures within the Second (and the First).[116]

Moreover, positive remembrances are often common in later accounts of the migrants. Experiences of socialist internationalism were often recalled in terms of nostalgia by those who returned to their home countries after having lived in socialist countries for a period. What Marcia C. Schenck calls "Eastalgia"—that is, the nostalgic longing for the life in socialist countries as lived by the returnees—is an emotional act of remembrance that has to be read as a reaction to the migrants' background experiences in the home country, which could include memories of wartimes prior the departure and negative repatriation experiences after their return.[117] These nostalgic accounts should not be dismissed when studying the migrants' experience, since they provide the emotional dimension of migration and show the many sides of socialist solidarity.

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[113] H. G. Schleicher, "GDR solidarity," pp. 1097-1102.
[114] Schwenkel, "Affective Solidarities."
[115] See Sara Pugach, "African Students and the Politics of Race and Gender in the German Democratic Republic," in Slobodian (ed.), *Comrades of Color.*
[116] Nash (ed.), *Red Africa*.
[117] Schenck, "A chronology of nostalgia."

The many shades that the experiences of solidarity had on the ground, as well as their consequences on the migrants' lives after their homecoming, will be further analyzed from the perspective of the DDR-SWAPO cooperation in relation to the educational training of Namibians in the DDR.

2.2 DDR and SWAPO: history of a (socialist) friendship

2.2.1 From skepticism to solidarity (1962-1979)

The DDR started to support the national liberation struggle of Namibia at an early stage, during the 1960s, demanding an end to the illegal South African occupation at the UN, adopting sanctions against Pretoria, and establishing contacts with the liberation movements. However, the boycott against Pretoria was not instant. Due to economic advantages in maintaining trade relations with South Africa, in fact, the DDR did not respond immediately to the call of the international boycott movement. Instead, it joined the trade boycott of South Africa only in 1963, after discussions, debates, and criticism by ANC and SACP, as well as Western press reports.[118]

In the early 1960s, links were established both with SWANU and SWAPO, through contacts developed with East German solidarity actors such as the VDJ, the FDGB, and the Solidarity Committee.[119] Meetings were held with delegations from SWANU and SWAPO, and material shipments and educational scholarships were provided to both organizations, which sent a limited number of their members to the DDR. First contacts between the DDR Solidaritätskomitee and SWAPO arose in 1961, when SWAPO established an office in Cairo.[120] In 1962, Sam Nujoma visited the DDR for the first time. However, he did not make a good impression on the Solidarity Committee officials he had talks with. In fact, according to the reports on the meeting, the officials regarded him as "ignorant," "inexperienced in fighting," "nationalist," even "antisemite," and politically immature.[121] His answers to the questions, especially those concerning the SWAPO relation with the United States and SWANU, were regarded as vague and evasive and the SWAPO program appeared not enough structured. As a result of the meeting, minor solidarity measures were launched and, even though the development of further cooperation with SWAPO was envisaged, a cautious attitude was

[118] See H. G. Schleicher, I. Schleicher, *Special flights*, pp. 10-27; H. G. Schleicher, "GDR solidarity," pp. 1105-1110; Ilona Schleicher, "Prinzipen, Zwänge, Kalter Krieg: die DDR und Sanktionen gegen Südafrika zu Beginn der 60er Jahre," in van der Heyden, I. Schleicher, H. G. Schleicher (eds.), *Die DDR und Afrika*.

[119] For the first contacts with SWAPO see BArch, DZ 8/167 and NAN, AACRLS.008.

[120] BArch, DZ 8/552, "Einschätzung des Solidaritätsleistungen gegenüber der SWAPO-Namibia," Solidaritätskomitee der DDR, Berlin, 23 January 1984, p. 1.

[121] NAN, AACRLS.008 (BArch, DZ 8/7306), "Abschlußbericht über den Besuch des Präsidenten der South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO)," Berlin, 17 January 1962; BArch, DZ 8/167, "Bericht über den Besuch von Sam Nujoma, Süd West Afrika," Berlin, 20 January 1962.

recommended.[122] On this occasion, Nujoma's political orientation was considered to be insufficiently committed to the socialist side.[123] SWAPO was said to want to establish contacts with socialist countries because it was aware that "if it wants to live after independence, it needs socialism."[124] During the talks, however, although Nujoma "said that socialism was the only possible system after the liberation of his country, he quickly clarified by speaking of 'a kind of economic socialism'."[125] Therefore, skepticism characterized the first contacts between Sam Nujoma and East Germany. The DDR followed the development of the two Namibian organizations, trying to discern their respective goals, their relations with trade unions, their chances of success, and sounding out the possibility of an eventual unity of action between the two.[126] Possibly, as a consequence of a change in the balance between the two, with SWAPO gaining more and more prestige, and of the fear of a Chinese rapprochement with SWAPO, the Solidarity Committee started to lean more toward it. In fact, in 1965 Heinrich Eggebrecht, Secretary of the Solidarity Committee, solicited a prompt response to SWAPO requests and endorsed a visit of a SWAPO delegation to the DDR, warning that the Chinese were trying everything to get SWAPO on their side.[127] During this early phase, the DDR responded to SWAPO's requests with shipments of solidarity goods, provision of scholarships, support for propaganda, explicit political solidarity at the UN, and also worked for the release of Toivo Ja Toivo and other Namibian political prisoners who were sentenced to long-term imprisonment in the second half of the 1960s. However, the relationship between SWAPO and the DDR remained quite cold until the mid-1970s. Nujoma visited the DDR again in 1969 and 1975.[128] The report compiled by Eggebrecht on his visit in May 1975 underlines that, despite several invitations, he visited more often Western countries than the DDR, and that, when speaking of the developments in Angola, he did not spend a word on President of UNITA Jonas Savimbi, probably as not to draw attention on his connection with him.[129] As mentioned in chapter 1, in fact, until 1975, SWAPO had a good relationship with UNITA.

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[122] NAN, AACRLS.008 (BArch, DZ 8/7306), "Abschlußbericht über den Besuch des Präsidenten der South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO)," Berlin, 17 January 1962, p. 2.
[123] *Ivi*, p. 1.
[124] NAN, AACRLS.008 (BArch, DZ 8/7306), "Aktenvermerk über eine Aussprache mit dem Präsidenten der SWAPO, Sam Nujoma, im Komitee für Solidarität mit den Völkern Afrikas am 10.1.1962," Berlin, 17 January 1962, p. 1.
[125] BArch, DZ 8/167, "Bericht über den Besuch von Sam Nujoma, Süd West Afrika," Berlin, 20 January 1962, p. 1.
[126] NAN, AACRLS.008 (SAPMO-BArch, DY 34/3550), Message H. Franke to W. Beyreuther, 29 September 1965.
[127] NAN, AACRLS.008 (BArch, DZ 8/7306), Letter Heinrich Eggebrecht to Heinz, Cairo, 27 January 1965; NAN, AACRLS.008 (SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/IV A2/20/112), "Bericht über ein Gespräch des Gen. H. Eggebrecht mit Shipanga, Vertreter der SWAPO in Cairo, am 21.1.1965."
[128] BArch, DZ 8/167, "SWAPO," Solidaritätskomitee der DDR, Berlin, 26 May 1975; BArch, DZ 8/167, "Bericht über eine Aussprache mit der SWAPO Delegation am 26.5.1975," Solidaritätskomitee der DDR, Berlin, 2 July 1975.
[129] BArch, DZ 8/167, "Bericht über eine Aussprache mit der SWAPO Delegation am 26.5.1975," Solidaritätskomitee der DDR, Berlin, 2 July 1975.

The relationship between SWAPO and DDR improved greatly after independence was achieved by Angola and SWAPO sided more actively with MPLA and launched a socialist political program in 1976, and after Resolution 385 was adopted by the UN in 1976, when Western countries started striving for a compromise solution for the Namibian question. Through contacts secured especially with FDGB, a solidarity relationship with the National Union of Namibian Workers (NUNW)—the Namibian trade union organization founded in the first half of the 1970s—also started to develop.[130] The key moment for the strengthening of the relationship with SWAPO was the visit of Sam Nujoma to the DDR from 16 to 20 December 1977. Shortly before that, on 8 November 1977 in East Berlin, Nujoma met the President of the Solidarity Committee, Kurt Seibt, with whom he had an exchange of information on the current problems of the fight.[131] On this occasion, the SWAPO's leader expressed his satisfaction with the results achieved by the Namibians trained in the DDR, and made requests for further assistance, particularly in the fields of education and health care. In the information note on the meeting, it is reported that SWAPO would rely especially on the DDR for cadre training, because many SWAPO members "already speak German or would learn it more easily due to other language requirements."[132] During his official long-term visit in December, Nujoma was accompanied by Ndjoze Unanivi, an executive member, his wife, and three members of SWAPO Central Committee: Kapuka Nauyala, Secretary for the President's Office, Iyambo Indongo, Secretary for Health and Social Affairs, and Linekela Kalenga, Secretary for Education and Culture. He was received by Honecker for a detailed exchange of views, had talks with a SED delegation led by Hermann Axen, Politburo member and Secretary of the Central Committee, and further meetings with other top officials such as Seibt, Oskar Fischer, Foreign Minister, and Günther Jahn, first Secretary of the Potsdam District Executive. As a result of the visit, a joint communiqué was agreed and a cooperation agreement was signed between SED and SWAPO for the years 1978 and 1979.[133] During the meeting with Honecker, on 19 December in the premises of the SED's Central Committee, great declarations of mutual friendship and hopes for further cooperation were expressed—reflecting the change of course in the relationship between the two after the events of 1975 and the development of SWAPO. Honecker showed solidarity with the Namibian liberation war and talked about the

[130] See NAN, AACRLS.063, (BArch DZ 34/14152), FDGB solidarity with Namibia.
[131] SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/98436, "Information 156/1977 für das Politbüro: Gespräch des Genossen Kurt Seibt, Vorsitzender der Zentralen Revisionskommission der SED und Präsident der Solidaritätskomitees der DDR mit Genossen Sam Nujoma, Präsident der Südwestafrikanischen Volksorganisation (SWAPO) von Namibia," Abteilung Internationale Verbindungen, Berlin, 28 November 1977, p. 2.
[132] *Ivi*, p. 5.
[133] SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/46234, "Vorlage für das Politbüro des ZK – Anlage 1: Bericht über den Besuch einer Delegation der Südwestafrikanischen Volksorganisation (SWAPO) von Namibia unter Leitung ihres Präsidenten, Sam Nujoma, in der DDR vom 16. bis 20.12.1977," Abteilung Internationale Verbindungen, Berlin, 3 January 1978.

positive developments of the anti-imperialist struggle and the advancements of socialism around the world. Nujoma expressed appreciation of the DDR's solidarity with SWAPO and reported on the situation of the fight, pointing out that Western countries were supporting the South African regime through arms supplies and were interfering with the development of the events in Namibia.[134] He underlined the priority of South Africa's withdrawal from Namibian territory. At this time, Nujoma was no longer described as a politically immature, disorganized, and insecure leader; he was now described as someone really committed to socialism:

> The talks with the delegation and the joint communiqué reveal Sam Nujoma's unequivocally positive attitude toward the Great October Socialist Revolution, the role of the USSR and the socialist community of states. Sam Nujoma repeatedly stressed the exemplary impact of socialism and left no doubt that SWAPO, once in power, intends to adopt a socialist orientation. He emphasized that the ideological basis can only be Marxism-Leninism.[135]

Requests for further assistance were pointed out by Nujoma to Seibt and Axen and were endorsed by the Politburo. Special interest was placed by SWAPO in education and training, where solidarity was increased by sending five DDR instructors to SWAPO camps in Angola and by admitting two hundred SWAPO members to the DDR for industrial training and university studies. Measures of material solidarity and medical assistance were also agreed upon, the latter one through the medical treatment of the wounded in the DDR and the dispatching of physicians and surgeons to SWAPO hospitals.[136] The cooperation agreement signed the establishment of direct party relations and marked an important step in the DDR solidarity with SWAPO. Bilateral relations were then to be maintained and expanded through the sending of delegations from both sides, consultations on international issues, coordination of their politics, participation in conferences and party congresses, and regular exchanges of information.[137]

On 13 October 1978, the SWAPO office in East Berlin was opened, and Obed Emvula was accredited as SWAPO's first representative in the DDR. With the opening of the office, which was a de facto

[134] SAPMO-BArch DY 30/46234, "Vorlage für das Politbüro des ZK – Anlage 2: Vermerk über ein Gespräch zwischen dem Generalsekretär des ZK der SED, Erich Honecker, und dem Präsidenten der Südwestafrikanischen Volksorganisation (SWAPO) von Namibia, Sam Nujoma, am 19.12.1977 im Hause des ZK der SED," Abteilung Internationale Verbindungen, Berlin, 3 January 1978, pp. 4-7.

[135] SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/46234, "Vorlage für das Politbüro des ZK – Anlage 1: Bericht über den Besuch einer Delegation der Südwestafrikanischen Volksorganisation (SWAPO) von Namibia unter Leitung ihres Präsidenten, Sam Nujoma, in der DDR vom 16. bis 20.12.1977," Abteilung Internationale Verbindungen, Berlin, 3 January 1978, p. 4.

[136] SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/84846, "Vorlage für das Politbüro des ZK: Bericht über den Besuch einer Delegation der Südwestafrikanischen Volksorganisation (SWAPO) von Namibia unter Leitung ihres Präsidenten, Sam Nujoma, in der DDR vom 16. bis 20.12.1977," Abteilung Internationale Verbindungen, Berlin, 3 January 1978.

[137] SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/43678, "Entwurf. Vereinbarung zwischen der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands und der Südafrikanischen Volksorganisation Namibias über die Zusammenarbeit in den Jahren 1978 und 1979."

embassy, SWAPO was granted politic-diplomatic recognition by the DDR. On that occasion, also Nujoma was in the DDR, to attend the inauguration of the SWAPO office, hold political talks, and receive medical treatment.[138] During the talks, there were discussions regarding the developments of the Namibian question and the attitude of Western powers, and requests of further solidarity for SWAPO were advanced, including the doubling of military supplies.[139] Moreover, the role of the European social-democracies in Africa and the policies of the People's Republic of China were also topics of discussion. Nujoma mentioned SWAPO's strong link with the Swedish social-democracy, which in the report on the meeting was acknowledged as having among its ranks some true friends of the Namibian liberation struggle.[140] The report goes on stating that SWAPO will accept material aid from Sweden, while "considering the political doctrines of social democracy as imperialistic and refusing them."[141] It is debatable whether SWAPO's stance on socialism and social-democracy as portrayed in the East German archives is the result of an interpretation by DDR functionaries based on their ambitions for a socialist SWAPO or on their impression of a real SWAPO's commitment to socialism. In the latter case, it would then have to be verified whether, from SWAPO's side, the predicated commitment was merely rhetorical or not. Unfortunately, due to the impossibility to visit SWAPO Archives, this remains open for further discussion.

As for China, Nujoma stated that people in Africa were shocked by its politics, and in the report it is specified that SWAPO rejected Chinese attempts to establish links with it.[142] However, as mentioned in the first chapter, SWAPO actually had some kind of connection with China, albeit minimal.[143] On the occasion of his trip to Africa in 1979 and his meeting with Nujoma in Luanda, Honecker obtained the condemnation of the Chinese aggression against Vietnam from the SWAPO's leader, in a joint declaration. However, concerned that a SWAPO statement against China might influence the Chinese position in the UN Security Council at the expense of SWAPO, Nujoma suggested that the tone of the accusation should be slightly lightened, replacing the phrase "SED and SWAPO condemn..." with "SED and SWAPO express their deep concern about China's aggression."[144] Although it was a minor

[138] SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/63318, "Bericht über den Besuch des Präsidenten der Südwestafrikanischen Volksorganisation (SWAPO), Genossen Sam Nujoma, vom 13.10. – 5.1.1978 in der DDR," Abteilung Internationale Verbindungen, Berlin, 27 November 1978.
[139] *Ibidem*.
[140] *Ivi*, p. 6.
[141] *Ivi*, pp. 6-7.
[142] *Ivi*, p. 7.
[143] See section 1.2.3.
[144] NAN, AACRLS.063 (SAPMO-BArch, DY30/J IV 21201/1337/1), "Vermerk über die Begegnung des Generalsekretär der SED und Vorsitzenden des Staatsrates der DDR, Erich Honecker, mit dem Präsidenten der SWAPO, Sam Nujoma, am 18.2.1979 in Luanda," p. 10. See also SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/43739, "Treffen des Generalsekretars des ZK der SED und Vorsitzenden des Staatsrates der DDR, Erich Honecker, mit dem Präsidenten der Südwestafrikanischen Volksorganisation (SWAPO) Namibias, Sam Nujoma, am 18.2.1979 in Luanda," p. 2.

modification, this change is indicative of SWAPO's desire not to upset potential allies and not to create more enemies.

As seen from this brief excursus on SWAPO's relations with the DDR from 1962 to 1979, the initial skepticism toward Nujoma was progressively overcome, very likely owing to SWAPO's gradual rise and its clearer stance within the Cold War bloc politics, despite always being open toward all those who were willing to help. The visit that Nujoma paid to the DDR in 1977 boosted DDR solidarity with SWAPO, which grew significantly during the years to come. As a result of the contacts developed between 1977 and 1979, measures of DDR assistance to SWAPO were taken and solidarity in the political, material, educational, medical, and military spheres flourished.

2.2.2 Political solidarity, diplomatic activities, agitation and propaganda

DDR cooperation with SWAPO developed through mutual visits, consultations, and follow-up diplomatic activities. Meetings were regularly held to provide exchanges of information and make arrangements for the provision of DDR assistance. Between 1977 and 1988, Nujoma visited the DDR on twelve occasions.[145] Travel tickets for SWAPO delegations were usually covered by the Solidarity Committee, as well as the costs of the maintenance of the SWAPO representative office in East Berlin. Talks also took place in Angola and southern Africa when DDR delegations paid visits.

Statements of support and messages of protests were frequently delivered by DDR politicians, and solidarity events were regularly organized to remember key moments of the liberation struggles of the ANC and SWAPO and raise awareness among the East German population.[146] National activities such as solidarity weeks and days, exhibitions, and documentary films were for example organized by an appointed commission during the UN-proclaimed International Anti-Apartheid Year, starting from March 1978.[147]

Representatives of the DDR Solidarity Committee also used to attend national and international conferences for the independence of Namibia and against apartheid, such as those in Lisbon in

[145] Winrow, *The foreign policy of the GDR in Africa*, table 4, pp. 91-92.

[146] See e. g. BArch, DZ 8/299, "Übersicht über die solidarische Unterstützung des Solidaritätskomitees für den ANC von Südafrika, die SWAPO von Namibia und die afrikanischen Frontstaaten von November 1987 bis Oktober 1988," Solidaritätskomitee der DDR, Berlin, 10 October 1988.

[147] NAN, AACRLS.148, "Documentation on the visit of SWAPO president Sam Nujoma to the German Democratic Republic in December 1977 and its implication on the relations between the GDR and SWAPO as well as on the role of SWAPO in the ongoing negotiation process on the Namibia question," Hans-Georg Schleicher, 2006, p. 3.

1977,[148] Paris in 1980, 1983, and 1986,[149] and Brussels in 1986,[150] where they ensured the East German solidarity with the Namibian struggle.

The DDR also provided broad support to SWAPO in the field of agitation and propaganda, through the production of brochures, pamphlets, posters, books, films, and other propaganda materials. Between 1980 and 1985, *Namibia Today*, SWAPO's official press organ, was printed by the printing house Druckerei Fortschritt in Erfurt in the DDR.[151] The printing and distribution of liberation movements' journals, including ANC's *Sechaba* and ZAPU's *Zimbabwe Review*, was an important pillar of cooperation with southern African liberation movements, as it contributed to the worldwide dissemination of their anti-apartheid, anti-racist, and anti-colonial struggle. The publication of *Namibia*, a volume reporting on the Namibian history of oppression and struggle written by the members of the DDR Solidaritätskomitee Alfred Babing and Hans Dieter Bräuer, published in German in 1979 and English in 1981, is also indicative of the DDR solidarity efforts in propaganda.[152] The production of informative materials like *Namibia* was important for a "steadily information of the DDR people about the situation in Namibia as well as about the history of colonial oppression of the Namibian people."[153]

As mentioned, DDR solidarity was expressed at a great extent within the UN, where the DDR supported the Namibian cause, attacked Western diplomatic attempts of negotiation, described as neocolonialist maneuvers, and called for a comprehensive and international use of sanctions and an arm embargo against Pretoria. In 1976, it supported Resolution 385 while expressing concerns about eventual compromises in its implementation. The creation of the Western Contact Group in 1977 further fueled such concerns. When the Western negotiations resulted in Resolution 435, adopted by the Security Council in September 1978, the DDR accepted the UN independence plan while expressing its reservations about the continued presence of the South African administration and armed forces in the territory and urging for South Africa's immediate withdrawal.[154] At this time, confidence in the liberation struggle was high and a politically negotiated settlement for Namibia was

[148] BArch, DZ 8/40, Documents on the World Conference against apartheid, colonialism, and racism in southern Africa, Lisbon, 1977.
[149] BArch, DZ 8/552, "Einschätzung des Solidaritätsleistungen gegenüber der SWAPO-Namibia," Solidaritätskomitee der DDR, Berlin, 23 January 1984, p. 3.
[150] BArch, DZ 8/838, "Bericht über die Teilnahme einer Delegation des Solidaritätskomitees der DDR an der 2. Internationalen Namibiakonferenz vom 5. – 7. Mai 1986 in Brüssel," Solidaritätskomitee der DDR.
[151] Laura Horelli, *Namibia Today*, AV-arkki and Arsenal Institut für Film und Videokunst e.V., 2018.
[152] BArch, DZ 8/552, "Einschätzung des Solidaritätsleistungen gegenüber der SWAPO-Namibia," Solidaritätskomitee der DDR, Berlin, 23 January 1984, p. 2; SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/58809, "Anlage Nr. 4 zum Protokoll Nr. 12 vom 30.1.1981: Solidaritätsleistungen gegenüber der Südwestafrikanischen Volksorganisation (SWAPO) Namibias," p. 3.
[153] BAB, SWAPO collection, AA.3 83aSVa 1, Paper titled "In solidarity with the struggle of the Namibian people," no author, no place, no date [probably 1983 or later], p. 2.
[154] H. G. Schleicher, I. Schleicher, *Special flights*, pp. 171-174.

hardly in the plans of the socialist countries. Yet during the 1980s, given the changed international context, the DDR and Eastern countries withdrew their reservations toward the UN Resolution 435, regarded as "the only acceptable basis for a peaceful settlement of the Namibian issue,"[155] and increasingly demanded its implementation. In the face of the Reagan's policy of constructive engagement, and in conformity with the DDR's policy of peace and with its limited economic capabilities, East Germany modified its engagement in southern Africa, by deciding to promote peace and stabilization in the region while continuing to assist the liberation movements.[156] In an evaluation of the situation in southern Africa, the DDR Foreign Ministry observed that it "continued to hold an important place in the class struggle between socialism and imperialism," while emphasizing the need for peace in the region.[157] The DDR supported the UN independence plan for Namibia by suppling personnel for the civil component of the UNTAG,[158] while continuing to provide aid to SWAPO. As head of the DDR's diplomatic observer mission to Namibia, Hans-Georg Schleicher well-documented this phase of DDR support for Namibian independence.[159]

2.2.3 Planning economic cooperation with a free Namibia

From the late 1970s, the DDR was eager to establish economic cooperation with Namibia once it achieved independence, in order to strengthen its declining economy by gaining access to key mineral and agricultural commodities and exporting industrial plants, machineries, vehicles, and other goods.[160] An initial plan for a political and economic cooperation with Namibia was discussed in October 1978 by the Politbüros des ZK der SED zur Koordinierung der ökonomischen, kulturellen und wissenschaftlich-technischen Beziehungen der DDR zu Ländern Asiens, Afrikas und des arabischen Raumes (Politburo of the Central Committee of the SED for coordination of the GDR's economic, cultural and techno-scientific relations with countries in Asia, Africa, and the Arab

[155] *Ivi*, p. 175.
[156] *Ivi*, pp. 221-226.
[157] *Ivi*, p. 223.
[158] SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/64948, "Vorlage für das Sekretariat des ZK der SED: Teilnahme der DDR an der Gruppe der Wahlbeobachter im Rahmen der zivilen Komponente der UN-Gruppe zur Unterstützung des Überganges Namibias in die Unabhängigkeit (UNTAG) im Zeitraum Oktober – November 1989," Abteilung Internationale Verbindungen, Berlin, 22 August 1989; SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/47339, "Vorlage für das Politbüro des ZK der SED: Teilnahme der DDR an der UN-Polizeibeobachtereinheit im Rahmen der zivilen Komponenten der Gruppe der Vereinten Nationen zur Unterstützung des Übergangs Namibias in die Unabhängigkeit (UNTAG)," Abteilung Internationale Verbindungen, Berlin, 8 September 1989.
[159] H. G. Schleicher, I. Schleicher, *Special flights*, pp. 226-233; H. G. Schleicher, I. Schleicher, *Die DDR im südlichen Afrika*, pp. 221-229.
[160] H. G. Schleicher, I. Schleicher, *Special flights*, p. 180.

region)[161] and approved by the Central Committee Secretariat of the SED on 3 January 1979.[162] Aiming at developing political relations with independent Namibia and creating conditions for mutually advantageous economic relations, the measures proposed by the Central Committee of the SED consisted in planning the opening of a DDR mission in Namibia, concluding agreements on trade, techno-scientific and cultural cooperation, navigation services, and consular affairs, providing expertise to SWAPO in the field of constitutional law, economic planning, and management, and training SWAPO cadres.[163] Upon SWAPO's requests, in the following years, the DDR dispatched advisors to Angola and trained SWAPO cadres in economic planning and management, as a way to assist SWAPO in developing economic concepts for independent Namibia and preparing cadres to work as economists, as we shall discuss later on.[164]

In 1988, in view of an increasingly close Namibian independence, and with the goal of "safeguarding DDR's political and economic interests in a future independent Namibia,"[165] further measures of economic cooperation were proposed on the same line of those approved in 1979. During those years, thus, due to the increasing domestic crisis, the DDR was keenly interested in close economic cooperation with Namibia and SWAPO.[166] East Germany was preparing to open an embassy in Windhoek—which it did on the day of Namibian independence—and was especially looking forward to the conclusion of a cooperation agreement in the fisheries sector that could guarantee the DDR access to the two hundred-nautical-mile fishing zone off Namibia's coast for deep-sea fishing. This agreement had strategic significance as the fish resource base off the coast of Namibia was one of the most productive in the world, and the DDR was eager to have access to that fishing area also because it feared that other fishing areas, such as the United States and Mauritania, would soon be no longer available due to changes in fishing policies.[167] Therefore, key economic interests were also underlying the DDR policy of solidarity, especially in its final decade, when the relationship developed with SWAPO could result in commercial and economic agreements with an independent country.

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[161] SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/63331, "Vorlage für das Politbüro des ZK der SED – Vorschläge zur politischen und ökonomischen Zusammenarbeit mit Namibia," Berlin, 21 December 1978.
[162] H. G. Schleicher, I. Schleicher, *Special flights*, p. 180.
[163] SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/63331, "Vorlage für das Politbüro des ZK der SED – Vorschläge zur politischen und ökonomischen Zusammenarbeit mit Namibia," Berlin, 21 December 1978, pp. 3-4.
[164] See section 2.2.7.3.
[165] SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/47283, "Vorlage für das Politbüro des ZK der SED – Maßnahmen zur Entwicklung der politischen und ökonomischen Zusammenarbeit mit Namibia," Berlin, 7 December 1988, p. 4.
[166] BArch, DC 20-I/4/6444, "Beschluß des Ministerrates vom 5 April 1989: Beschluß über Vorschläge für eine künftige Entwicklung ökonomischer, wissenschaftlich-technischer und kultureller Beziehungen der DDR zu Namibia nach Erringung der Unabhängigkeit des Landes."
[167] SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/64948, "Beschluß über den Entwurf eines Abkommens zwischen der Regierung der DDR und der Regierung Namibias über die Zusammenarbeit auf dem Gebiet der Fischwirtschaft vom 18 August 1989," Präsidium des Ministerrates.

2.2.4 Undisclosed solidarity: military, intelligence, and security cooperation with SWAPO

The DDR strongly supported the right of peoples to embark on an armed struggle against imperialism, colonialism, and racism. Cooperation between the DDR and SWAPO in the military field is difficult to scrutinize due to the scarcity of archival records on the subject. However, it is possible to state that assistance to various degrees in the so-called "non-civilian" field was provided to African liberation movements and postcolonial countries.

There is some evidence of supplies furnished by the DDR to SWAPO to support the armed struggle, such as paramilitary equipment, arms, ammunitions, and vehicles. Paramilitary equipment for SWAPO fighters was provided by the DDR since the launch of the armed struggle in 1966. Supplies such as medicine, food, blankets, military clothing, airbeds, and camp beds, in fact, were delivered during this first stage of the struggle.[168] With the improvement of the relationship between SWAPO and the DDR, marked by the 1977 visit of Nujoma to the DDR, military assistance increased, and also arms, ammunitions, and vehicles started to be shipped.[169] On the occasion of his visit to Luanda in 1979, Honecker delivered trucks and promised supplies of uniforms.[170] Furthermore, in one official document is reported that equipment in non-civil areas worth 1.6 million marks was made available to SWAPO in 1981.[171]

In the military field, East Germans provided aid especially by dispatching military and security advisers and experts and training SWAPO cadres, both in African states and in the DDR.[172] From the end of the 1970s, the DDR trained PLAN fighters in military intelligence—"which the GDR had chosen as a priority area in assisting friendly liberation movements in southern Africa"[173]—and in other fields such as technology and service as bodyguards. The Ministry of State Security, known as the Stasi, possibly played a role in this field. However, the military, security, and intelligence training of liberation movements' cadres was arranged in absolute secrecy, and the files in the Stasi Record Archive containing information about SWAPO training in the DDR are said to be not accessible for research.[174] Many scholars assume that, given the DDR's extensive counter-espionage apparatus and

[168] H. G. Schleicher, I. Schleicher, *Special flights*, pp. 211-212.
[169] *Ivi*, pp. 212-213.
[170] NAN, AACRLS.063 (SAPMO-BArch DY30/ J IV 21201/1337/1), "Vermerk über die Begegnung des Generalsekretär der SED und Vorsitzenden des Staatsrates der DDR, Erich Honecker, mit dem Präsidenten der SWAPO, Sam Nujoma, am 18.2.1979 in Luanda," pp. 8-9.
[171] SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/58809, "Anlage Nr. 4 zum Protokoll Nr. 12 vom 30.1.1981: Solidaritätsleistungen gegenüber der Südwestafrikanischen Volksorganisation (SWAPO) Namibias," p. 1.
[172] Winrow, *The Foreign Policy of the GDR in Africa*, p. 143.
[173] H. G. Schleicher, I. Schleicher, *Special flights*, p. 214. See also Jeremy Silvester, Martha Akawa, Napandulwe Shiweda, "The Namibian Liberation Struggle," in Temu, Tembe (eds.), *Southern African Liberation Struggles,* Vol. 3, p. 183.
[174] Kern, *West Germany and Namibia's Path to Independence*, p. 5. Ulrich van der Heyden explains that "files containing material affecting the interests of intelligence agencies active in the world today, will not be made available for scientific analysis" (van der Heyden, *GDR International Development Policy Involvement*, p. 34). A preliminary search in the

the assistance provided by the DDR in this field, the Stasi could have trained SWAPO to create a security apparatus capable of identifying subversive activities and weed out spies.[175] Phil ya Nangoloh, President of the Namibian Society for Human Rights, declares this with absolute certainty.[176] Considering the "spy drama" that affected SWAPO during the 1980s,[177] the possibility that the torture and interrogation methods used in Angola were learned from the Stasi is a matter of speculation and discussion. However, this has not been confirmed by any source so far. The few sources that can support this hypothesis come from former West Germany. One is a letter written in March 1990 by Reinhardt Gnauck, doctor and politician in West Germany, co-founder of the International Society for Human Rights (ISHR), to Hans Modrow, Prime Minister of the DDR from November 1989 to April 1990.[178] The ISHR was engaged in helping Namibian refugees, particularly those who had been detained and tortured by SWAPO in Angola, and "was one of the very few voices (and a rather isolated voice) trying to draw attention to human rights violations by SWAPO."[179] About this, Reinhardt Gnauck wrote: "it is likely that the responsible state authorities in the DDR are better informed about these crimes than we are, because according to the unanimous statements of many SWAPO members and former prisoners, the training of SWAPO personnel responsible for these crimes was very often carried out by DDR instructors."[180] The other source is a radio program of the West German radio, Deutschlandfunk, in which the journalist Henning von Löwis reported the testimony of a former SWAPO functionary, Zakina Mutenia, who stated that SWAPO learned how to persecute alleged dissidents from the Soviet Union and the DDR.[181]
However, it would be helpful to have access to the Stasi archival records and to have testimonials of people directly involved in the events in order to verify these inevitably partisan accounts.

2.2.5 Material solidarity and aid to SWAPO refugee camps

After official relations with SWAPO were established in 1977, material solidarity—understood in the strict sense of goods supply—became a staple. The DDR Solidaritätskomitee was in charge of the

database of the Stasi Archive produced no significant results, and the COVID-related restrictions further complicated the already long procedure to visit the Stasi Archive.
[175] Colin Leys, Susan Brown, "Introduction," in Iidem (eds.), *Histories of Namibia*, p. 9; Saunders, "SWAPO's 'Eastern' Connection, 1966-1989," pp. 70-71; Kern, *West Germany and Namibia's Path to Independence*, pp. 75-76.
[176] See BAB, Allgemeine Archive Varia, FAA.20 3:2, Thomas Simmon, *Report Bayern über SWAPO Kinder*, Erstes Deutsches Fernsehen, 1995.
[177] See section 1.2.2.
[178] BArch, DZ 8/825, Letter Reinhardt Gnauck to Hans Modrow, Frankfurt am Main, 1 March 1990.
[179] Mail exchange with Jörn Ziegler, former worker for the ISHR, 13 August 2022.
[180] BArch, DZ 8/825, Letter Reinhardt Gnauck to Hans Modrow, Frankfurt am Main, 1 March 1990.
[181] BArch, DR 2/13853, "Namibische Kinder in der DDR," by Henning von Löwis, Staatliches Komitee für Rundfunk, Redaktion Monitor, DLF, 13 March 1986.

funding, procurement, and transport. Funds were collected through donations by trade union members, which were regularly made under the guidelines dictated by the SED's leadership, and fundraising campaigns among the population.[182] Domestic economic shortages often caused difficulties in the provision of goods for solidarity purposes, with the consequence that the volume of material aid was generally reduced in the 1980s.[183] However, this did not affect the liberation movements, which continued to receive material assistance as agreed, especially during emergency situations. The value of the material goods supplied by the DDR Solidaritätskomitee to SWAPO remained steady during the 1980s, with a peak in 1982, when the material aid provided was worth 10.5 million marks. Overall, the supplies provided to SWAPO from 1975 to 1989 amount to a value of over 73 million marks.[184]

The DDR provided SWAPO refugee camps with substantial supplies, such as food, clothing, tents, mattresses, blankets, medicine, medical tools, school materials, agricultural implements and products, means of transport, sewing machines and equipment, fabrics, and materials.[185] Through the solidarity campaign of the children and pupils of the DDR, initiated by the children's magazine BUMMI, one million items of clothing and toys were donated to Namibian children in 1983.[186] Shipments of solidarity goods were regularly delivered to SWAPO refugee camps located in the territories of the Front Line States to remedy their deficiencies and meliorate their daily life. Significant solidarity projects were implemented to support the refugee camp situated in Kwanza Sul, in southern Angola, about four hundred kilometers from Luanda, which was provided to SWAPO by the Angolan government after the Cassinga massacre. As one of the largest SWAPO bases, it housed thousands of people, mainly children, young women, elderly, sick, and convalescents.[187] The living conditions within the camp were extremely difficult, with problems concerning food and water supply, hygiene, medical care, and infant mortality.[188] Over the years, measures were taken by SWAPO to improve the living conditions in the camp, promote self-sufficiency, and provide medical care. SWAPO provided for the construction of schools, hospitals, laboratories for the production of goods such as

[182] H. G. Schleicher, I. Schleicher, *Special flights*, pp. 183-184.
[183] *Ivi*, pp. 189-190.
[184] *Ivi*, table 2, p. 187.
[185] For a survey of the material solidarity with SWAPO during the 1980s see BArch, DZ 8/552. Here, besides costs for material solidarity in the narrower sense (supply of goods mainly for refugee camps), accounts are also given of costs incurred for education services, medical treatment, and political solidarity.
[186] BArch, DZ 8/552, "Einschätzung des Solidaritätsleistungen gegenüber der SWAPO-Namibia," Solidaritätskomitee der DDR, Berlin, 23 January 1984, p. 7.
[187] SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/5758, "Information zum SWAPO-Lager Kwanza Sul," p. 1. Here it is said that the SWAPO camp in Kwanza Sul housed between 25,000 and 30,000 people. Elsewhere it is stated that more than 45,000 Namibians lived there (DZ 8/296, "Solidaritätsprojekt des Schriftstellerverbandes der DDR 'Freizeitarbeit im Flüchtlingscamp der SWAPO Cuanza-Sul Volksrepublik Angola'"; NAN, AACRLS.241, Namibia Health and Education Centre Kwanza Sul, Worker Brigades, 1983-1984).
[188] SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/5758, "Information zum SWAPO-Lager Kwanza Sul," p. 2.

clothing, and other infrastructures for the community.[189] In this, it was significantly supported by socialist countries such as the DDR, but also by Scandinavian countries. In a joint solidarity venture together with the Finnish Committee for Africa, the DDR contributed to the construction of a children's village in the Namibia Health and Education Center (NHEC) in Kwanza Sul. The children's village was officially consigned on 11 January 1985 in the presence of Toivo Ja Toivo, who had been released from prison almost a year earlier.[190] It consisted of a nursery school for almost 450 children and a permanent home to house from sixty to seventy small children whose parents were fighting, were abroad, or had passed away.[191] The DDR Solidarity Committee provided the cement and steel and paid for the transportation of six prefabricated houses, which were financed by donations collected by the Finnish Committee.[192] The worker brigades of the camp, supported and instructed by members of the FDJ Freundschaftsbrigaden, worked to erect the foundations while Finnish specialists took charge of the assembly of the prefabricated houses.[193] The East German solidarity worker and technical instructor Jürgen Leskien was the project leader during that time (see Figure 3). Together with the journalist Gudrun Ott, he documented the lives of the women and men in the workers brigades during the construction of the nursing school.[194]

Figure 3. *Jürgen Leskien in the construction site of the nursing school in SWAPO camp in Kwanza Sul, 1983, Photo by Gudrun Ott.*
Source: https://www.bpb.de/themen/deutschlandarchiv/314391/deutschland-namibia-beziehung-der-ungenutzten-chancen/ (accessed on 11 January 2023).

The DDR also took further measures to make the children's

[189] SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/5845, "Information über die Ergebnisse der Verhandlungen mit der Südwestafrikanischen Volksorganisation (SWAPO) von Namibia zur Erneuerung der Arbeitsvereinbarung der Zusammenarbeit auf dem Gebiet der Volksbildung für die Jahre 1987/1988 – Anlage 3: Information zur Lage der SWAPO im Kampf um die Unabhängigkeit Namibias," Abteilung Volksbildung des ZK der SED, pp. 5-6.
[190] BArch, DZ 8/296, "Bericht über den Aufenthalt einer Delegation des Solidaritätskomitees der DDR in Angola vom 8 bis 17 Januar 1985," Solidaritätskomitee der DDR, Berlin, 21 January 1985.
[191] Hans Quaas, "Kinderdorf - Symbol der Solidarität mit Namibia," in *Neues Deutschland*, 15 January 1985 (in BArch, DZ 8/296).
[192] BArch, DZ 8/296, "Bericht über den Aufenthalt einer Delegation des Solidaritätskomitees der DDR in Angola vom 8 bis 17 Januar 1985," Solidaritätskomitee der DDR, Berlin, 21 January 1985, p. 8; Hans Quaas, "Kinderdorf - Symbol der Solidarität mit Namibia," in *Neues Deutschland*, 15 January 1985.
[193] BArch, DZ 8/296, "Solidaritätsprojekt des Schriftstellerverbandes der DDR 'Freizeitarbeit im Flüchtlingscamp der SWAPO Cuanza-Sul (NHEC) Volksrepublik Angola'," p. 2.
[194] NAN, AACRLS.241, Namibia Health and Education Centre Kwanza Sul, Worker Brigades, 1983-1984.

village in Kwanza Sul efficient, for example by supplying additional cement to remedy structural problems in the prefabricated houses, sending educational materials and other goods, and providing DDR personnel, as well as SWAPO cadres trained in the DDR as kindergarten teachers.[195] The Schriftstellerverband der DDR (GDR Writers' Union) proposed a solidarity project to turn one of the six prefabricated houses into a leisure center, to which they would send a writer twice a year for a period of six weeks to work with children and young people.[196] Among their duties, the DDR writers, together with the DDR teachers on site, should have encouraged the formation of political opinions among children. The project was approved and the DDR Solidaritätskomitee took on the task of supporting the Writers' Union in an advisory capacity and providing the needed material solidarity in accordance with the funds made available by the association. Under SWAPO's advice, other cooperation projects in Kwanza Sul were proposed in the cultural field,[197] as well as in other fields, in the knowledge that Sweden and Finland were making political progress in their support for SWAPO and that politically visible and effective solidarity actions were to be implemented, as the DDR counselor of embassy for SWAPO in Angola Johannes Pilz wrote to Achim Reichardt.[198]

2.2.6 Dispatching DDR experts to SWAPO

As part of its solidarity politics, especially during the 1980s, the DDR dispatched experts to support SWAPO in various fields. Since counseling work for SWAPO was considered important, in 1982, the DDR planned to send two East German economists "to assist SWAPO in formulating a concept for the development and management of the economy after Namibia's independence."[199] Through consultations with SWAPO representatives in the DDR and with SWAPO cadres trained in the DDR, the two economists were supposed to deepen their knowledge of the political and socio-economic situation of Namibia and examine the problems that could emerge in future Namibia, in order then to be able to elaborate an initial concept together with SWAPO delegates in Luanda. No records about the development of this project are found, yet it can be inferred that, in 1986, one of these economists was the already mentioned Johannes Pilz, as his was among the names proposed.[200] He was employed

[195] BArch, DZ 8/296, "Bericht über den Aufenthalt einer Delegation des Solidaritätskomitees der DDR in Angola vom 8 bis 17 Januar 1985," Solidaritätskomitee der DDR, Berlin, 21 January 1985, pp. 8-10. For the employment of DDR experts in Kwanza Sul see the next section. For the training of SWAPO cadres as kindergarten teachers see section 2.2.7.2.
[196] BArch, DZ 8/296, "Solidaritätsprojekt des Schriftstellerverbandes der DDR 'Freizeitarbeit im Flüchtlingscamp der SWAPO Cuanza-Sul (NHEC) Volksrepublik Angola'," pp. 3-5.
[197] BArch, DZ 8/296, Letter to Hermann Kant (no sender), Berlin, 15 February 1985.
[198] BArch DZ 8/545, Letter Johannes Pilz to Achim Reichardt, Luanda, 27 July 1987.
[199] SAPMO-DY 30/100760, "Vorschlag zur Realisierung des Beschlusses zur Unterstützung der SWAPO," Zentralinstitut für sozialistische Wirtschaftsführung beim ZK der SED, Berlin, 17 February 1982, p. 1.
[200] *Ibidem*.

to work in the DDR embassy in Angola as an "adviser on the issues of cooperation between the SED and SWAPO and the assessment of social processes in Namibia."[201] Ilona and Hans-Georg Schleicher wrote that in his tasks to prepare DDR's future relationship with independent Namibia and to lead open discussions with SWAPO, Pilz stimulated SWAPO to develop its own idea of an independent Namibia, which was not to necessarily follow a socialist path.[202] On the contrary—they wrote—during the 1980s, socialist development was thought not to fit Namibia, as the experiences of declined socialism in Angola and Mozambique warned. As we shall further discuss, however, this assessment does not seem to match with the DDR efforts to ideologically influence SWAPO—efforts that were carried out until the end of the 1980s.

Besides counseling work in the embassy, DDR experts were sent on missions in SWAPO refugee camps in Angola and Zambia. The employment of East German personnel in Kwanza Sul, such as the members of the Schriftstellerverband der DDR for the cultural and literary work in the camp, and the solidarity workers of the FDJ Freundschaftsbrigaden who built the foundations for the children's village in the NHEC has been mentioned above. Moreover, increasingly during the 1980s, the DDR also sent medical cadres (doctors, surgeons, nurses), teachers, and advisers in Angola to help SWAPO to create health and education infrastructures in the camps.[203] Whenever possible, DDR experts went on these missions accompanied by their partners, who were in turn employed in the service of SWAPO in their field of specialization, as nurses, teachers or physicians. Generally, the period of the employment of DDR experts on site could vary from a few months to one or two years. As specified in a note by Otto Kirchner, a DDR teacher working in Kwanza Sul, the period on site theoretically should not exceed two consecutive years, and "a long and repeated use of an East German family in the camp should be well tested."[204] However, it seems that in case of need, some were employed for a longer period.[205] In the end, experiences of three-years-employment were found to be better as a result of the strengthened relationship of trust with SWAPO and better knowledge of the situation by DDR experts.[206]

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[201] SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/59604, "Vorlage an das Sekretariat des Zentralkomitees der SED: Einsatz eines Beraters für die Fragen der Zusammenarbeit zwischen der SED und der SWAPO und der Einschätzung der gesellschaftlichen Prozesse in Namibia an der Botschaft der DDR in der VR Angola," Abteilung Internationale Verbindungen, Berlin, 8 May 1986, p. 1.

[202] H. G. Schleicher, I. Schleicher, *Special flights*, pp. 219-221.

[203] See archival documents on the employment of DDR citizens in the service of SWAPO in SAPMO-BArch: DY 30/58891, DY 30/64158, DY 30/64707, DY 30/63954, DY 30/64176, DY 30/59354, DY 30/59393, DY 30/64362, DY 30/64379, DY 30/64426, DY 30/64478, DY 30/64504, DY 30/64618, DY 30/59832, DY 30/64735, DY 30/64758, DY 30/64782, DY 30/64820, DY 30/64859.

[204] BArch, DR 2/13853, "Orientierungen zur weiteren Zusammenarbeit im Bereich der Volksbildung zwischen der SED und SWAPO," Lehrergruppe bei der SWAPO in Kwanza Sul, Luanda, 27 July 1988, p. 1.

[205] BArch, DR 2/13853, "Jahresberichterstattung 1987/1988," Lehrergruppe bei der SWAPO in Kwanza Sul, Kwanza Sul, 5 May 1988, pp. 5-6.

[206] *Ivi*, p. 9.

The employment relationship of East German cadres in the DDR remained in effect for the duration of their assignment abroad. It often happened that someone was employed more than once, especially when their work had produced good results. Frequent were also cases in which the mission was terminated before the end of the term, mainly for health reasons.[207] Some, in fact, became ill with malaria and had to come back for medical treatment.

DDR experts were selected according to their professional qualifications, but also their attitude within the work environment and the DDR social and political life. The resolution to employ a medical cadre, a teacher, or an adviser abroad was often accompanied by a short biography, which contained all the details about the candidate's professional, private, and political life, and by an evaluation letter from the employer in East Germany.[208] The brief biographies provided information about their social background, family situation, type of affiliation with parties and organizations, political and professional training, any participation in party school, language skills, any service in the armed forces, any awards, and whether or not they participated in the anti-fascist struggle. Interestingly, political affiliations of parents (before and after 1945) and family members were also reported, as well as the existence of relatives living in Western countries, and, in this case, the extent of the relationships with them. Loyalty to the party and dedication to socialism thus were basic requirements for them to be dispatched abroad. As the evaluation letters reveal, other qualities that could positively influence the assessment were calmness, prudence, balance, responsibility, sense of duty, self-criticism, adaptability, and the ability to work comradely in a team. Their personalities were evaluated for their socialist orientation, and special appreciation was shown to those who actively participated in party life, represented the party's point of view, and disseminated knowledge about the real socialism of the DDR abroad.

To work on site, the selection of DDR cadres needed to be long and careful. As Otto Kirchner wrote, "increased availability at work, physical and mental resilience, and language skills"[209] were expected by all the DDR cadres employed in SWAPO refugee camps, including the wives. Records show that most of them were dispatched to the Kwanza Sul refugee camp, where their security and protection were guaranteed by SWAPO. Here, a group of around six DDR experts consisting of a couple of doctors and four or five teachers, the latter intended also as advisers in the educational field, worked during the 1980s. The teachers' wives were mostly employed as kindergarten teachers.

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[207] In the case of DDR experts working for SWAPO, I did not find accounts reporting early termination of their mission for misconduct. In general, as far as missions of East German experts abroad are concerned, such cases occurred, though rarely (see Unfried, "Education as a Paradigm," pp. 77-79).

[208] Most of the archival documents quoted in the note 203 include short biographies and evaluation letters.

[209] BArch, DR 2/13853, "Orientierungen zur weiteren Zusammenarbeit im Bereich der Volksbildung zwischen der SED und SWAPO," Lehrergruppe bei der SWAPO in Kwanza Sul, Luanda, 27 July 1988, p. 1.

Archival records reveal in particular the role played by the group of DDR teachers in Kwanza Sul.[210] Their duties consisted mainly of "advisory activities on key issues of SWAPO's educational strategy," "support for the Secretary of Education and Culture, the Education Office of SWAPO and the management of the school center in planning and leading the educational work in SWAPO school camps," "the teaching of selected subjects and the preparation of the necessary teaching programs and methodological guidelines, as well as the transfer of experience within the framework of professional circles."[211] Special emphasis was placed on specialized support and advice in the educational field, which, as will be discussed in the following section, was central for SWAPO. Therefore, DDR teachers had also to train SWAPO members in management, planning, and teaching. The DDR teachers in Kwanza Sul, as well as the doctors, also performed important tasks regarding ideological work, as they could influence SWAPO ideologically. These teachers, in fact, were also responsible for political education, stimulating the development of the "conceptual perspective thinking in the direction of shaping future free Namibia" and establishing contacts with the leadership cadres.[212] The political and ideological work was carried out through political discussions and seminars in the camp, and other activities such as film broadcasting.

As the working plan for the school year 1987/1988 stated, Marxist-Leninist theory was to be the basis of the discussions and the SWAPO's struggle for independence was to be properly classified on the basis of Resolution 435 within the contemporary political fundamental questions.[213] Emphasis was placed on its correct placement within the global struggle for peace and progress.

Contacts were also developed with the trade union school of the camp, where DDR

Figure 4. *DDR teacher Herbert Zinke with three Namibian teachers and their class in Kwanza Sul.*
Source: Krause, Kaplan, *Children in Exile*, p. 33.

[210] See e.g. BArch, DR 2/13853, reports of the DDR teachers' group working for SWAPO.
[211] SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/5758, "Information zum SWAPO-Lager Kwanza Sul," pp. 3-4.
[212] SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/5756, "Bericht über die Realisierung des Beschlusses des Sekretariats des ZK der SED vom 13.7.1981 über die Erweiterung der Aufnahmekapazität des Kinderheimes Bellin für namibische Kinder in der DDR (Beschluß der Sekretariat des ZK vom 28.1.1982) – Anlage 2: Information über die Gespräch mit dem Botschafter und anderen leitenden Genossen der Botschaft," p. 2.
[213] BArch, DR 2/13853, "Arbeitsplan für das Schuljahr 1988/1989," Lehrergruppe bei der SWAPO in Kwanza Sul, Kwanza Sul, 15 October 1988, p. 3.

teachers cooperated to increment the school's efficiency.[214] It was noted that with time the interest in political education and discussions in the camp declined, and the political and ideological work led by DDR teachers often encountered significant difficulties.[215] Those were at times found in the lack of interest in the world political situation by the camp officials, who focused unilaterally on southern Africa, and their difficulty in classifying SWAPO's struggle into the global struggle for peace and disarmament accordingly to the DDR world vision.[216] Many DDR suggestions were accepted by SWAPO officials in charge, but not implemented. Based on these accounts, it is therefore far-fetched to claim that the political and ideological work of DDR teachers in Kwanza Sul had an immediate and significant effect on SWAPO members.

Often, the duties of the DDR teachers also consisted in selecting and preparing those who were to go to the DDR for study and work,[217] and training Namibian aspirant teachers on the fundamental issues of pedagogy, psychology, and educational methodology, with the support of experienced Namibian teachers.[218] Coordination between DDR teachers and doctors in the selection and preparation of Namibian cadres to be sent to the DDR[219] and in the advanced training of Namibian teachers in the field of hygienics[220] proved to be efficient.

Extra-curricular activities (excursions, sport matches, celebrations, film events, and working group activities), particularly important for the life of the camp, were also developed with the contribution of DDR teachers.

The life and work in the Kwanza Sul refugee camp were harsh and some coexistence tensions within a group of DDR teachers were reported in 1982, but the entity of such problems was not specified. Discussions were held to overcome them, for everyone to "refrain from doing anything that endangers effective, unified action."[221] Most of the time, however, informative notes reported a harmonious and cooperative atmosphere among the DDR collective, as well as the ability to cope with difficult situations. Educational efforts were in fact made difficult by issues such as shortage of teachers and

[214] BArch, DR 2/13853, "Jahresberichterstattung 1987/1988," Lehrergruppe bei der SWAPO in Kwanza Sul, Kwanza Sul, 5 May 1988, pp. 8-9.
[215] *Ivi*, p. 7.
[216] *Ivi*, p. 8.
[217] BArch, DR 2/13853, "Informationsbericht April 1989," Lehrergruppe bei der SWAPO in der VR Angola, Kwanza Sul, 20 April 1989, pp. 4-5.
[218] BArch, DR 2/13853, "Jahresberichterstattung 1987/1988," Lehrergruppe bei der SWAPO in Kwanza Sul, Kwanza Sul, 5 May 1988, pp. 10-11. See also BArch, DR 2/13853, "Informationsbericht Oktober 1988," Lehrergruppe bei der SWAPO in der VR Angola, Kwanza Sul, 27 October 1988, where a training course for kindergarten teachers is mentioned.
[219] BArch, DR 2/13853, "Informationsbericht April 1989," Lehrergruppe bei der SWAPO in der VR Angola, Kwanza Sul, 20 April 1989, p. 5.
[220] BArch, DR 2/13853, "Jahresberichterstattung 1987/1988," Lehrergruppe bei der SWAPO in Kwanza Sul, Kwanza Sul, 5 May 1988, p. 20.
[221] SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/5756, "Bericht über die Realisierung des Beschlusses des Sekretariats des ZK der SED vom 13.7.1981 über die Erweiterung der Aufnahmekapazität des Kinderheimes Bellin für namibische Kinder in der DDR (Beschluß der Sekretariat des ZK vom 28.1.1982) – Anlage 3."

teaching materials, problems regarding classrooms and housing, and the continuous change of SWAPO cadres.

During their employment, DDR teachers also discussed the situation and the problems of the refugee camp, the progress of the struggle, and made predictions in view of the Namibian independence. As the election approached, they expected that SWAPO would have won, although doubts remained as to whether it would achieve the 2/3 majority. However, they also thought that SWAPO needed "to mobilize the people in the camp more concretely and lead the campaign in Namibia."[222] SWAPO's leadership was judged as less and less successful in mobilizing the masses, bringing new and stimulant ideas, and orienting them politically. Furthermore, social differences between the ruling cadres and the masses in the camp were highlighted as increasingly evident, with existing privileges in the construction of houses and the providing of goods and services.[223]

Relying solely on East German accounts, it is difficult to assert whether or not the work of DDR experts in Kwanza Sul was judged favorably by SWAPO members. In one case, an information report compiled by Kirchner said that dissatisfactions were expressed by the school principal, who blamed some DDR teachers for negligence.[224] The reports continued by stating that, in this case, "disciplined colleagues with good results were unfortunately not mentioned."[225] Beyond the school director's judgment on that occasion, however, in general, the DDR accounts reported SWAPO's appreciation for the work of the DDR experts and its hope for continued support.[226] In the annual report written by the group of teachers for the year 1987/1988, the job of their wives as kindergarten teachers is also said to have been recognized and greatly appreciated by the kindergarten management.[227]

Education was a significant part of SWAPO efforts to create a new Namibia and the DDR was one of its main providers of educational support, both by dispatching teachers and educational advisers to SWAPO camps and by welcoming Namibians in the DDR to carry on their studies.

[222] BArch, DR 2/13853, "Informationsbericht Februar 1989," Lehrergruppe bei der SWAPO in Kwanza Sul, Kwanza Sul, 26 February 1989, p. 5.
[223] BArch, DR 2/13853, "Jahresberichterstattung 1987/1988," Lehrergruppe bei der SWAPO in Kwanza Sul, Kwanza Sul, 5 May 1988, pp. 16-17.
[224] BArch, DR 2/13853, "Informationsbericht Monat Juli 1988," Lehrergruppe bei der SWAPO in Kwanza Sul, Kwanza Sul 27 July 1988, p. 2.
[225] *Ibidem*.
[226] BArch, DR 2/13853, "Informationsbericht Dezember 1989," Kwanza Sul, Lehrergruppe bei der SWAPO in Kwanza Sul, 4 January 1989, p. 1.
[227] BArch, DR 2/13853, "Jahresberichterstattung 1987/1988," Lehrergruppe bei der SWAPO in Kwanza Sul, Kwanza Sul, 5 May 1988, pp. 15-16.

2.2.7 SWAPO educational migrants in the DDR

Given the importance of education for SWAPO—which wanted to make sure to have trained people ready to build an independent Namibia—migration of SWAPO members to socialist countries that were providing scholarships was quite common. In this field of solidarity, the DDR was one of the most important partners to SWAPO. Educational and vocational training was a powerful instrument of soft power, potentially able to influence the Namibian students in a socialist way and to increment DDR reputation all over the world. Especially from the late 1970s, the DDR offered shelter, education, and training to hundreds of SWAPO members at various levels, from kindergarten to university and technical studies, vocational training, and party and union school courses. In the years between 1981 and 1985 alone, DDR planned to offer nearly nine hundred training places,[228] while in the years between 1986 and 1990, it did provide 209 of them.[229] From the archival records, we know that within 1985, six hundred SWAPO cadres had concluded their vocational training in 61 fields in the DDR[230] and that between 1981 and 1989, they were a total of 937.[231] The number of Namibians trained in the DDR from the beginning cannot be determined with accuracy, as these figures did not include people who were attending other levels of education, such as the more than four hundred children and teenagers who attended kindergarten, primary and secondary school, and probably also those who did university studies. However, they give an idea of the broad number of Namibians educated in the DDR, which can be estimated to amount to more than 1,500.[232]

The scope and the form of the training were stipulated by a series of agreements between the DDR and SWAPO, following consultations with SWAPO functionaries, especially with the Secretary for Education and Culture, first Linekela Kalenga and then Nahas Angula.

Working together with the appropriate governmental agencies, especially with the Ministry of National Education and the State Secretariat for Vocational Training/Ministry of Education and Science, which coordinated the training and were responsible for its content,[233] the Solidarity Committee was the contractual partner of SWAPO regarding the educational field, and it financed the living and the training of Namibians through public donations. In addition to the Solidarity

[228] SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/100712, "Möglichkeiten zur Berufsausbildung von Angehörigen der SWAPO," Letter Janson to Winkelmann, 16 October 1980, p. 2.
[229] BArch, DQ 4/5433, "SWAPO/Namibia," Sektor Berufliche Aus- und Weiterbildung von Ausländern, p. 1.
[230] BArch, DQ 4/5336, "Vermerk über das Gespräch des Generalsekretärs des Solidaritätskomitees, Gen. Achim Reichardt, mit dem Sekretär der SWAPO, Gen. Nahas Angula, am 19.2.1985," Solidaritätskomitee der DDR, March 1985, p. 1.
[231] BArch, DZ 8/825, "Abschluß der Berufausbildung," July 1981 – July 1989.
[232] H. G. Schleicher wrote that from 1978 to 1990 around 1,400 Namibians received vocational training in the DDR ("The German Democratic Republic (GDR) in the Liberation Struggle of Southern Africa," p. 489).
[233] BArch, DQ 4/5433, "SWAPO/Namibia," Sektor Berufliche Aus- und Weiterbildung von Ausländern, p. 1.

Committee, also DDR organizations such as the FDJ, FDGB, and VDJ contributed to supporting the training of Namibians through educational programs within their training centers.

There is not a clear understanding of how Namibians were selected to be sent to the DDR. Upon SWAPO requests, each year the DDR made a number of places available in different areas and levels of education. Ideally, those with basic school knowledge were picked.[234] However, the pre-existing education levels of the Namibian students were often very different from each other, resulting in sometimes difficult teaching. In particular, little or no knowledge of science subjects and mathematics was often observed. Poor English proficiency was also sometimes an additional obstacle to teaching and learning. The selection was made by SWAPO under the instruction and suggestion of East German authorities and experts. East German doctors and teachers in Kwanza Sul, as it has already been mentioned, helped to select and prepare the Namibians to be sent to the DDR. While SWAPO often tried to send to the DDR problematic medical cases,[235] from East Berlin, the directive often came to send only healthy people, probably to ensure a smoother training without too many interruptions or problems. However, when health problems were present, they were treated in East German hospitals. Moreover, some Namibians who arrived in the DDR for medical treatment were also given the opportunity to stay for an educational and training program.[236] At some point, DDR authorities asked for a higher level of selection and preparation of SWAPO cadres, but many problems, regarding age, health, and degree of education attained in Namibia, complicated the procedures.[237]

Especially following the strengthening of the relationship with SWAPO in 1977, as well as the tragic happenings in Cassinga in 1978, and upon SWAPO requests, the DDR increasingly took in Namibians who arrived individually or in groups of various sizes and stayed for a time that could range from a few months to many years. Their migration was always intended to be temporary, as it was assumed that they would return to Namibia as a skilled labor force able to contribute to the reconstruction of the country after decades of oppression. Except in the case of short courses that

[234] Interview with Thsoombe Ndadi, Windhoek, 9 February 2022; Written interview with Peingeondjabi Titus Shipoh, 6 March 2022.

[235] SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/5845, "Information über die Ergebnisse der Verhandlungen mit SWAPO über Maßnahmen zur Unterstützung auf dem Gebiet des Bildungswesens im Jahr 1989," Abteilung Volksbildung des ZK der SED, Berlin, 3 May 1989, p. 5.

[236] See section 2.2.8.1 on medical assistance.

[237] BArch, DQ 4/5336, "Vermerk über das Gespräch des Generalsekretärs des Solidaritätskomitees, Gen. Achim Reichardt, mit dem Sekretär der SWAPO, Gen. Nahas Angula, am 19.2.1985," Solidaritätskomitee der DDR, March 1985. See also BArch DQ 4/5336, "Bericht über die Ergebnisse der planmäßigen Inspektion der Ausbildung ausländischer Praktikanten im VEB Erdöl-Erdgas Grimmen," Rat des Bezirkes Rostock, Abt. Berufsbildung und Berufsberatung, Rostock, 8 January 1986, pp. 2-3, where a case of a biology training course attended by fifteen Namibians in 1986 is reported. The numerous difficulties that were encountered due to their low level of initial education and poor language skills did not allow the course to be completed on time. This was blamed on the selection and preparation process, which allegedly did not take into account the requirements in force in the DDR.

were taught in English, the proper schooling or vocational training in the DDR was preceded by an intensive German language course of varying length (usually six months), which was held in various schools scattered around the country. The results obtained from this course were often unsatisfactory, mainly due to organizational problems on the East German side and the difficulties given by the low starting knowledge of English and thus the lack of an intermediate language with which to communicate.[238] Measures were taken accordingly to try to improve the quality of courses, such as limiting the training to a few larger centers and improving the organization of teaching and the selection of teachers.

Educational and training programs brought Namibians of various ages to the DDR, from newborns to adults. Hundreds of children and adolescents spent years in the DDR attending pre-school, primary, and secondary education. Between 1979 and 1990, around 430 Namibian children arrived in East Germany to receive a socialist education that was supposed to prepare them to play the role of the future elite of free Namibia. Today known as the "DDR-Kinder von Namibia," they have received a lot of scholarly attention, as well as media coverage, so much that many of them are now reluctant to talk about their experience.[239] One of them, Lucia Engombe, published an autobiography on her experience in the DDR, while another, Misheke Matongo, wrote a manuscript that has not been published.[240] In this section, I will also provide a brief overview of the life of the DDR-Kinder in East Germany, based on archival materials and biographical accounts, as well as on secondary literature.[241] In doing this, I aim to contribute to a broader comprehension of the dynamics at play behind such an educational program, while also shedding further light on the debate regarding the assumption that many of the DDR-Kinder were children of alleged SWAPO dissidents.

In addition to Namibian children, the DDR also housed a number of youth and adults who were sent by SWAPO to attend studies and internships that were supposed to qualify them for skilled jobs in various occupations thought to be useful for a future independent Namibia. Firstly, as already pointed out when analyzing the role of the DDR teachers in Kwanza Sul, training in the educational sector was of primary importance. In fact, as SWAPO feared that independent Namibia would end up with

[238] BArch, DQ 4/5336, "Information über die Durchführung von Deutschlehrgängen für Angehörige der SWAPO zur Vorbereitung auf die Berufsausbildung."

[239] Academic works have been mentioned in the introduction of this chapter (see note 15). Many documentaries and journal articles on the experience of the DDR-Kinder also flourished after their homecoming. Many articles are collected in BAB, Press Archives and Ephemera (AA.1), Karton 29, Mappe 7. See also the following documentaries, held in BAB, Allgemeine Archive Varia: Marion Mayer-Hohdahl, Walter Eggenberger, *Namibia: Kinder aus Deutschland zurück in der Heimat – Heimatlosigkeit*, Argus der Presse, Schweizer Fernsehen, 1993 (in FAA.20 3:1); Simmon, *Report Bayern über Swapo Kinder* (in FAA.20 3:2); Wolfgang Wegner, *Die Ossis von Windhoek*, Erstes Deutsches Fernsehen, Arte, Mitteldeutsche Rundfunk, 1997 (in FAA.20 6:3).

[240] Lucia Engombe, *Kind Nr. 95: Meine deutsch-afrikanische Odyssee*, Berlin: Ullstein, 2004 (an English edition was also released in 2014). The manuscript written by Misheke Matongo in German language is held in NAN, AACRLS.205.

[241] See the next section.

an uneducated people due to the limited educational opportunities given to blacks in Namibia, the training of personnel in the field of teaching, as well as school administration, was considered important for the development of the Namibian educational system. The DDR supported SWAPO in its efforts to build "an educational system that meets the development requirements of a new society in Namibia,"[242] providing scholarships in the field of pedagogy, methodology, educational planning, and management. From the East German perspective, it was important "to make the course very practical and to give SWAPO cadres the opportunity to gather experience at the various levels of popular education in the DDR through concrete observation."[243] A SWAPO delegation led by Kalenga paid a visit to the DDR in 1979 intending to "learn about the SED's experience in building and developing the DDR's educational system," with a focus on the construction of the new school after the defeat of fascism.[244] The delegation visited schools, kindergartens, and political educational institutions, gathering new insights on the reconstruction of the educational system, the transformation of the curriculum, the selection, training, and duties of the teachers, the role of the organizations in the schools, and the features of a Marxist-Leninist education.

Training liberation movement members and Third World citizens as teachers was a priority for the DDR, as it allowed for the creation of personnel capable of teaching and running schools and training centers in refugee camps or newly independent countries.[245] As we shall see, together with the DDR-Kinder von Namibia, also Namibian women arrived in the DDR, with the duties of taking care of them while being trained to become kindergarten teachers.[246] Furthermore, upon requests by SWAPO, during the 1980s the DDR offered study positions at the Institut für Leitung und Organisation der Volksbildungswesens (Institute for Management and Organization of National Education System, also called ILO) in Potsdam.[247] At least five such courses took place in Potsdam,

[242] SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/84846, "Vermerk über ein Gespräch des Ministers für Volksbildung, Margot Honecker, mit dem Sekretar für Bildung und Kultur der SWAPO, Genossen Kalenga am 22.11.79," p. 3.
[243] *Ibidem*.
[244] SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/84846, "Abschlussbericht über den Aufenthalt einer Delegation der SWAPO zum Studium der Arbeit der SED im Bereich der Volksbildung," Abteilung Volksbildung, Berlin, 5 December 1979, p. 1.
[245] SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/100712, "Zur Erfüllung der Konzeption und der Maßnahmen zur Entwicklung der Beziehungen der DDR mit Entwicklungsländern auf dem Gebiet der Berufsausbildung," Abteilung Sozialistische Wirtschaftsführung, Berlin, 10 January 1980.
[246] See section 2.2.7.2.
[247] SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/5756, "Bericht über die Realisierung des Beschlusses des Sekretariats des ZK der SED vom 13.7.1981 über die Erweiterung der Aufnahmekapazität des Kinderheimes Bellin für namibische Kinder in der DDR (Beschluß der Sekretariat des ZK vom 28.1.1982) – Anlage 1: Information über die Gespräche mit der Sekretär für Bildung und Kultur der SWAPO, Gen. Angula," pp. 1-2; SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/59047, "Anlage Nr. 2 zum Protokoll Nr. 96 vom 17. Aug. 1982: Maßnahmen zur weiteren Unterstützung der Südwestafrikanischen Volksorganisation (SWAPO) Namibias auf dem Gebiet des Bildungswesens," p. 2; SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/5758, "Arbeitsvereinbarung zur Weiterführung der Zusammenarbeit im Bereich der Volksbildung," Luanda, 17 January 1984, p. 4; BArch, DR 2/13853, "Information zum Stand der Beziehungen zwischen der SED und der SWAPO im Bereich Volksbildung," pp. 5-6.

training about ten people per course.[248] In 1985, SWAPO representative Emvula concluded a course in pedagogy at the ILO in Potsdam.[249] A number of other courses of this kind took place in East Germany during that time, training SWAPO cadres as educators, teachers, vocational instructors, and school managers.

In addition to the field of education, the qualifications that SWAPO members obtained in the DDR included many other fields, such as mechanics, telecommunications, welding, foundry, transportation, engineering, agriculture, business, and public administration, to name just a few. Vocational training was generally a combination of theoretical courses and practical instruction, which often took place in cooperation with DDR enterprises. In addition to learning skills and knowledge, Namibians were also prompted to understand how they could use what they were learning in the Namibian context once back.[250]

Generally, the training and educational courses in the DDR were seen by Namibians as a good opportunity to get a qualification that they could not otherwise obtain in their home country because of the war. Some pointed out deficits in qualifications, as the training was not always oriented to the concrete conditions in Namibia and it was hardly useful to work in SWAPO camps during the liberation struggle.[251] However, education in the DDR generally contributed to positively shaping their professional life in independent Namibia, where they were better qualified to obtain job positions. Sometimes, on the other hand, a long experience in the DDR could make it difficult to adapt to Namibia, and cause problems fitting into the social and work environment. This is especially true when the period spent in the DDR coincided with childhood and adolescence, crucial stages for personality development. As we shall see, in fact, some of the DDR-Kinder had to face numerous challenges after their homecoming.

Political and ideological education was significantly included in all training programs. In addition to theoretical lessons on Marxism-Leninism, Namibian pupils in the DDR were also exposed to the socialist life and culture through visits and excursions. As mentioned above, education in the DDR was all-encompassing in that it aimed at the development of a socialist personality and covered all spheres of life, individual and collective. Even in everyday life, Namibian students and trainees were taught to be clean, orderly, and disciplined, to participate actively in the life of the collective, and to engage in social and recreational activities in their free time. Assessments were administered to evaluate both their achievements in theorical and practical training and their behavior in the daily life,

[248] BArch, DR 2/13853, "Information zum Stand der Beziehungen zwischen der SED und der SWAPO im Bereich Volksbildung," p. 5.
[249] *Ivi*, p. 6.
[250] Interview with Thsoombe Ndadi, Windhoek, 9 February 2022.
[251] H. G. Schleicher, I. Schleicher, *Special flights*, pp. 198-199.

such as their relationship with others and participation in social activities.[252] Generally, East German evaluations regarded Namibians as having the discipline and a sense of duty and sometimes acknowledging a low concentration ability and lack of learning methods, which were blamed on the poor prior education attained in Namibia or the refugee camps. Disciplinary problems were found in the excessive consumption of alcohol by some.[253]

During education and training, Namibians were usually accommodated in hostels. For any problems, they could report to the SWAPO representative in the DDR, first Obed Emvula and then Haindongo Shikwetepo. The DDR gave them a certain amount of money for the purchase of basic necessities, which East German records noted was handled with difficulty, as it was often spent within a few days to buy high-quality consumer goods, such as items of clothing.[254]

The extent and the modes of the coexistence with East Germans, as well as international students or trainees, depended on the nature of the program of study. Usually, Namibians were trained and housed separately from the locals and people from other countries. This was particularly true in the case of the DDR-Kinder von Namibia in Bellin.[255] However, this was not the norm. In the case of university studies, Namibians were more integrated into DDR life, living and studying with East German citizens, as well as students from all over the world.[256] In other cases, such as the training of journalists in the VDJ college at the Werner Lamberz Institute[257] and the photography course at Foto DEWAG in East Berlin,[258] Namibians found themselves in an international environment, as the courses were addressed mostly toward Third World citizens and cadres.

The relationships with the locals were generally considered good. In an interview with Toni Weis, Obed Emvula stated that very few Namibians had bad experiences in the DDR.[259] Friendships and relationships arose between Namibians and East German citizens, even though they were not really encouraged by either the DDR or SWAPO. Cross-cultural relationships, in fact, collided with their interest because they could compromise the educational project that was designed for Namibians in East Germany, jeopardizing both the return of Namibians to their homeland and the permanence of

[252] See for example the evaluations in BArch, DQ 4/5336, "Berichterstattung über die Ergebnisse und Erfahrungen bei der Ausbildung namibischer Bürger an der Betriebsschule 'Makarenko', VEB Lederwerke Weida zu Facharbeitern für Lederherstellung," Dufke, Direktor BS, Weida, 15 May 1985.

[253] BArch, DQ 4/5336, "Information über den Stand der Berufsausbildung von Angehörigen der afrikanischen Befreiungsbewegung SWAPO in Betrieben und Einrichtungen der DDR," p. 4.

[254] BArch, DQ 4/5336, "Einschätzung zur Berufsausbildung von Bürgern der SWAPO/Namibia in der DDR," Abteilung Ausländerausbildung, 9 February 1982, p. 6; DQ 4/5336, "Information über den Stand der Berufsausbildung von Angehörigen der afrikanischen Befreiungsbewegung SWAPO in Betrieben und Einrichtungen der DDR," p. 4.

[255] Rüchel, *"Wir hatten noch nie einen Schwarzen gesehen."* See also section 2.2.7.1.

[256] See section 2.2.7.6.

[257] See section 2.2.7.5.

[258] See section 2.2.7.8.

[259] Weis, "The Politics Machine," p. 365.

East Germans in the DDR, which was already suffering from the mass flight of its citizens. As Toni Weis highlights, on a personal level, solidarity was "a potential nuisance"[260] as it could undermine political solidarity. The Namibian Thsombee Ndadi, who during his period of study in the DDR had an East German girlfriend with whom he had a son, expressed himself on the subject in this way:

> I don't think there was an explicit policy that was established, just that they would not encourage such relationships. But from the description of the programs that were designed for Namibians to go to training and then come back, it was very clear that your mission was to go and come back, because as freedom fighters it was not SWAPO's aim to distribute thousands of refugees across the globe that would be assigned to go to a particular program and then they abandon it and pursue their own individual followings, but to try and maintain the objective and the purpose for which you were assigned […]. Aim number one is to attain knowledge to become proficient and articulate in that field so that you can come back and use it in the pursuance of the liberation program. If we were encouraged openly that you could do that, we would probably have lost quite a lot of people that would want to settle just anywhere, and then we would not have the kind of man power to continue with our course.[261]

Therefore, according to Ndadi, it was necessary to discourage the emergence of romantic relationships, in order to keep Namibian students and trainees focused on the objectives of the struggle. In general, he said, most of the Namibians in East Germany were aware of their missions and came back home as expected by SWAPO. He too went back to Namibia, and his son is at the moment staying with him. According to his words, because of the duty that many felt to contribute to the nation-building of Namibia, just a few Namibians decided to stay and get married:

> If there were not thousands of hundreds who decided to stay, it is because of the commitment to the cause of liberating Namibia. We had always stayed in touch with the leadership, with the network of comrades studying elsewhere, and we communicated that our desire was founded on the aspiration to free Namibia and the conviction that this opportunity that I have gotten to go and study is to put it to maximum use and to attain the skills and knowledge, go back home and apply it to the process of nation building. So it was a very dedicated development, commitment to Namibia, other than focusing on our own interests.[262]

Some relations with East Germans born in the DDR, like those between Namibian pupils and East German teachers, were maintained during the years, even after their departure. East Germans were often seen by Namibians as truly devoted to solidarity and East Germany was considered to be a good environment of solidarity and comradeship, especially when compared to the context of war, racism,

[260] *Ibidem*.
[261] Interview with Thsoombe Ndadi, Windhoek, 9 February 2022.
[262] Interview with Thsoombe Ndadi, Windhoek, 9 February 2022.

and persecution they experienced in Namibia. It appeared as a place of abundance and comfort, when compared to the poor conditions of the SWAPO refugee camps in Angola and Zambia. Positive accounts must therefore be read against this background. Accounts then also vary according to the second term of comparison. In fact, depending on how many scholarships were made available and by whom, after completing a course in one country, Namibians might have been sent to another country to continue their studies and training. While some like Peingeondjabi Titus Shipoh remained in the DDR for more than ten years, others like Thsoombe Ndadi and Charles Mubita continued their education in Western countries.[263] When confronted with life in Western countries, East Germany appeared as a friendlier environment.[264] While in the DDR there was broad support for the Namibian cause, the position of the government in Britain, for example, was never supportive. In Britain, Namibians were free to engage in activities aimed at mobilizing people, but it was more a private choice, never supported by the government. As Ndadi said,

> because England is a "free world," human rights and all these things…you could always going there as long as you do not cause any threat to their state and everything. You are free to be there and to promote your ideologies, freedom of expression etc. That's you could do, and we worked very much through the anti-apartheid movement, as well as the Namibia Support Committee, where we mobilized public support for amenities such as medicines, clothing, school materials etc. […] But however, to their commitment, yes in England, yes is a free market economy where you are not confined to anything, so you could do whatever you like, as long as that does not constitute a security risk. But the political position of the government was never supportive of our liberation movement. No, the government did not support us. They were on the other side.[265]

Support in Western countries came from grassroots organizations, while solidarity pervaded every sphere of life in the DDR. It was dictated by the government and it was very present also in the social setting. From the account of Ndadi, as well as that of Mubita, it can be inferred that state socialism in the DDR generally had a resonance in the local population, which believed in the cause and contributed concretely through solidarity donations.[266]

Yet when DDR solidarity is compared for example with the Cuban context, the narrative became different. Cecilia Muzile went to East Germany in 1987 to study Medicine at the University in Greiswaldt, in Rostock district, after completing secondary school in Cuba. According to her, while

[263] Interview with Thsoombe Ndadi, Windhoek, 9 February 2022; Written interview with Peingeondjabi Titus Shipoh, 6 March 2022; Interview with Charles Mubita, Windhoek, 7 February 2022.
[264] Interview with Thsoombe Ndadi, Windhoek, 9 February 2022; Interview with Charles Mubita, Windhoek, 7 February 2022.
[265] Interview with Thsoombe Ndadi, Windhoek, 9 February 2022.
[266] Interview with Thsoombe Ndadi, Windhoek, 9 February 2022; Interview with Charles Mubita, Windhoek, 7 February 2022.

one can see differences between West and East Germany in their approach toward the Namibian cause, the condition and the treatment the Namibians received in Cuba have no equals.[267] Even if she did not experience any problem in East Germany, she felt a hugely different approach compared to the Cuban one: "socially, you could see the difference. Even the treatment, there is a very very big difference. But in Cuba, we even forgot to think that we were in a foreign land. The way how we were received, the way how we were treated."[268] While Cubans are described as caring, East Germans, in the words of Muzile "mind their own business."[269] Compared to Cuba, in East Germany, she felt more like a foreigner.

Despite acknowledging the existence of good relationships with East Germans, some interviewees speak of cultural clashes and misunderstandings,[270] or initial skepticism on the side of East Germans, which were overcome by working side by side with them.[271] Some Namibians, especially when the "Wende"[272] was approaching and after it, experienced episodes of racism and discrimination. In the DDR, institutionalized anti-fascism invested every sphere of citizens' lives, banning and silencing racism, which manifested itself in different and less direct forms. Solidarity, both at the state and grassroots levels, began to dissolve as the Berlin Wall crumbled. At the state level, it meant that solidarity financing was interrupted even before the conclusion of the study or training, as in the case of Cecilia Muzile, who came back to Namibia in 1989 for the elections and could never return to the DDR to conclude her studies, or many DDR-Kinder. At the grassroots level, it also meant an outburst of xenophobia, fostered also by the political, economic, and moral changes, and the social anxieties which resulted in the following.[273] In this changed context, foreigners were seen as competitors for jobs and housing. Xenophobic violence started to spread throughout dying East Germany, challenging the extent to which solidarity was internalized by citizens. DDR solidarity, with its limits and contradictions, while favoring the spreading of solidarity among its people, transmitted an idea of Africa and Africans that was based on exoticization and iconification.[274] Without wishing to belittle the genuineness of certain relationships that arose between East Germans and Namibians, it can therefore be argued that solidarity as a state-imposed duty sometimes contributed negatively to shaping the people's views toward Namibians and Africans. It is difficult to determine precisely and without generalizations what the East German citizens' conception of solidarity was and what form

[267] Interview with Cecilia Muzile, Windhoek, 2 March 2022.
[268] Interview with Cecilia Muzile, Windhoek, 2 March 2022.
[269] Interview with Cecilia Muzile, Windhoek, 2 March 2022.
[270] Interview with Charles Mubita, Windhoek, 7 February 2022.
[271] Interview with Thsoombe Ndadi, Windhoek, 9 February 2022.
[272] "Die Wende", which literally means "the turning point," is the German word to refer to the fall of the Berlin Wall.
[273] H. G. Schleicher, I. Schleicher, *Special flights*, pp. 204-205.
[274] See section 2.1.4.

the relations between Namibians and Germans took. It would require a larger number of interviews, which could not be conducted so far because of the slowdowns that my research has suffered due to the global COVID emergency.

In the following sections, some educational experiences of Namibians in the DDR are examined, based on the archival material collected and biographical accounts, including the interviews I conducted. Depending on the sources that have been collected, the account will be told from the East German or Namibian perspective. The analysis conducted will contribute to a better understanding of the organization of such educational programs and the concrete experiences of some Namibian students and trainees in East Germany. However, this study does not claim to be representative of all the Namibians who studied in the DDR. Furthermore, due to the lack of archival documents and oral sources, unfortunately, this section could not take into consideration the training of SWAPO cadres in party and trade union schools.

2.2.7.1 The future elite: Namibian children in Bellin and Staßfurt

The events of May 1978 in Cassinga showed that refugee camps were not protected from South African attacks. For this reason, in 1979, Nujoma asked the DDR to house two hundred preschool Namibian children aged between four to six and twenty Namibian women. Through these measures, "the children should be brought out of the reach of the constant bombardment by the racist regime of South Africa while familiarizing with the achievements of a socialist state at an early stage of their development."[275] A good political attitude had to be instilled in the children, as Linekela Kalenga pointed out during a meeting with Margot Honecker, DDR Minister for Education and wife of Erich Honecker.[276] Namibian women who would go to the DDR with the children, in addition to taking care of them, would have to take training courses to qualify as kindergarten teachers and be able to plan and implement SWAPO's kindergarten programs once back.

Since East Germany had no experience in running programs involving African children, it accepted to house a smaller number of Namibian children. In the decision of the SED Central Committee Secretariat on 12 September 1979, the DDR agreed to take in eighty children and fifteen women for a duration of two years and to house them in the former party's school in Bellin, a small village in the district of Schwerin, in the northern DDR (now province of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern), which

[275] SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/84846, "Vorlage für das Sekretariat des ZK der SED: Errichtung eines Kinderheimes für namibische Vorschulkinder in der DDR," Abteilung Volksbildung, Berlin, p. 5.
[276] SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/84846, "Vermerk über ein Gespräch des Ministers für Volksbildung, Margot Honecker, mit dem Sekretar für Bildung und Kultur der SWAPO, Genossen Kalenga am 22.11.79," p. 3.

had to be converted into a home for the SWAPO children.[277] Given the lack of experience, the SED leadership asked SWAPO for "comradely cooperation," which had to be actualized especially through its representative in the DDR.[278]

The selected children, aged possibly between three to seven,[279] came from SWAPO refugee camps, mainly in Kwanza Sul (Angola) and Nyango (Zambia), where they suffered hunger, deprivations, and fear. Most of them were of Ovambo origin and Oshivambo-speaking. Some were survivors of the Cassinga massacre. Mainly, they were orphans, half orphans, or temporarily separated from their parents because of the war. Some were children of SWAPO officials who were fighting in the field. They left Luanda with the Interflug, the East German airline company, and landed in Berlin, before being taken to Bellin, where they arrived on 18 December 1979. The eighty children who arrived with the first group in 1979 and spent eleven years in East Germany are still known as the "79ers." Many accounts tell of their excitement on their day of arrival, and their amazement at discovering snow, which they mistook for sugar falling from the sky[280] (see Figure 5, showing one of their first contact with their new and cold German home). Under the care and supervision of East German and Namibian personnel, they were gradually introduced to the new living conditions, habits, and culture, including German language, and constantly monitored medically.

Figure 5. *Namibian children in Bellin.*
Source*:* Rüchel, "*Wir hatten noch nie einen Schwarzen gesehen*," cover.

[277] SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/84846, "Vorlage für das Sekretariat des ZK der SED: Errichtung eines Kinderheimes für namibische Vorschulkinder in der DDR," Abteilung Volksbildung, Berlin.
[278] SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/84846, "Vermerk über ein Gespräch des Ministers für Volksbildung, Margot Honecker, mit dem Sekretar für Bildung und Kultur der SWAPO, Genossen Kalenga am 22.11.79," p. 3.
[279] While archival materials state that they were aged between four and six (SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/84846, "Information zum Stand der Verwirklichung des Beschlusses des Sekretariats des ZK der SED vom 12.9.1979 über die Errichtung eines Kinderheimes für Namibische Volkshulkinder in der DDR," p. 1, in a letter from Abteilung Volksbildung to Hager, 13 May 1980), other sources testify otherwise. Lucia Engombe was seven years old when she arrived in Bellin (Engombe, *Kind Nr. 95*), while the youngest are said to have been two (Krause, Kaplan, *Children in Exile*, pp. 44) or three-four years old (Constance Kenna, "Homecoming: The GDR Kids of Namibia," in Kenna (ed.), *Homecoming*, p. 18).
[280] Engombe, *Kind Nr. 95*, p. 47; Interview with Martin Kaputu, Windhoek, 28 January 2022; Hangula Werner, "Sugar," in Kenna (ed), *Homecoming*; Nangula Hishoono, "Wieder in Deutschland," p. 390 (in BAB, AA.1, Karton 29, Mappe 7).

The program initially envisioned their stay for a duration of two years, during which the DDR provided them with care, clothing, medical assistance, and preschool education. Given the continuation of the Namibian struggle and the growing request by SWAPO to house other children, the DDR revised its program, expanding the admission capacity of the children's home in Bellin and providing schooling for those who had reached school age.[281] As previously mentioned, the DDR experts in Kwanza Sul helped in selecting and preparing the children who had to leave for East Germany.[282]

The eighty children who arrived in 1979 were thus soon joined by others: in 1982 another 25 arrived, and during 1983 still more, individually or in small groups. By 1984, a total of 111 children between four and eleven years old were living in the DDR. Fifty more were added in 1985, and between 1986 and 1988 approximately sixty more arrived. Finally, in 1989, the last two large groups, of about one hundred children each, arrived.[283] A total of about 430 Namibian children of various ages, from newborns to teenagers, lived in East Germany between 1979 and 1990.[284] The children of Namibian women who had to be trained as kindergarten teachers were also included in the group going to East Germany.[285] Of the 430 children, one, Dimo Indongo, died in 1985 in the Rostock hospital after a long illness, probably leukemia,[286] while one girl, Mekondjo Nuukuawo, left the group in 1981 to reunite with her family, which had found refuge in Sweden.

The children were divided into groups according to their age—groups that remained nearly the same until the end, so much that to this day they can identify themselves according to the group they belonged to. In September 1981, the first group of children who had reached or passed school age started to go to school in Zehna, near Bellin, at the Polytechnische Oberschule "Dr. Salvador Allende" (see Figure 6).

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[281] SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/5756, "Bericht über die Realisierung des Beschlusses des Sekretariats des ZK der SED vom 13.7.1981 über die Erweiterung der Aufnahmekapazität des Kinderheimes Bellin für namibische Kinder in der DDR (Beschluß des Sekretariat des ZK vom 28.1.1982)"; SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/5756, "Information zum Stand der Realisierung des Beschlüsse des Sekretariats des ZK zur Weiterführung der Arbeit des SWAPO-Kinderheims Bellin."

[282] SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/5756, "Bericht über die Realisierung des Beschlusses des Sekretariats des ZK der SED vom 13.7.1981 über die Erweiterung der Aufnahmekapazität des Kinderheimes Bellin für namibische Kinder in der DDR (Beschluß des Sekretariat des ZK vom 28.1.1982)," p. 2.

[283] SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/5845, "Protokoll über die Gespräche zwischen Delegation des ZK der SED und der SWAPO über Maßnahmen auf dem Gebiet der Volksbildung zur Unterstützung des Unabhängigkeitsprozess Namibias," Luanda, 25 April 1989, pp. 1-2.

[284] For the number of children who arrived in the DDR during the years see also Kenna, "Homecoming," pp. 24-25, 27-28.

[285] SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/5845, "Protokoll über die Gespräche zwischen Delegation des ZK der SED und der SWAPO über Maßnahmen auf dem Gebiet der Volksbildung zur Unterstützung des Unabhängigkeitsprozess Namibias," Luanda, 25 April 1989, "Anlage 1 zu Punkt 2 des Protokolls," p. 1, "Anlage 1 zu Punkt 2 des Protokolls," p. 1.

[286] Herbert Zinke, "Dimo – a Memorial for the Children from Kassinga," in Kenna (ed.), *Homecoming*.

Figure 6. *Namibian children at the Salvador Allende Oberschule.*
Source: Krause, Kaplan, *Children in Exile,* p. 48.

Furthermore, given the increasing number of Namibian children in the DDR and the limited capacity of the facility in Bellin, a solution was worked out to house more and more of them. Starting from 1985, the oldest children were accommodated in the aforementioned Schule der Freundschaft in Staßfurt (see Figure 7), where nine hundred Mozambicans had been living and studying since 1982, while Bellin gradually became the house for the preschool children. Significantly, the road where the Schule der Freundschaft was located was named Strasse der Volkerfreundschaft (street of friendship between people), which Staßfurt residents called "the longest street in the DDR," "because it ranged from the Caribbean to Asia [passing] across Africa."[287] In fact, in addition to Namibians and Mozambicans, who resided in the school, Cubans and Vietnamese were also housed on the same street. Due to the lack of classrooms, the Namibian children who were housed in the Schule der Freundschaft went to school in nearby Löderburg, at the Polytechnische Oberschule "Willy Wallstab." After Mozambicans left in 1988, the Schule der Freundschaft became both their hostel and their school.

[287] Engombe, *Kind Nr. 95*, p. 164.

Figure 7. *Namibian students at roll call in Staßfurt.*
Source: Krause, Kaplan, *Children in Exile,* p. 63.

Namibian children were taught by East German teachers but in separate classes from their East German peers. At some point also Herbert and Sabine Zinke, who had worked for two years in Kwanza Sul, were called to teach Namibian children.[288] The experience they gained in the refugee camp was then reused in the DDR as well, where they contributed to developing the educational programs for SWAPO children. The standard DDR curriculum, in fact, was slightly revised to fit the aims of the solidarity programs. Namibians started English lessons earlier, in the third grade, and the programs of some subjects like history, geography, and biology were modified to include also knowledge concerning their own land. Moreover, they also took classes in Heimatkunde (local history) and kulturelle Erziehung (cultural education), which were taught by Namibian teachers.[289] According to the information I was able to collect, these classes might have taken place outside the school, in the evening, once a week, during the so-called "cultural hours," during which Namibian teachers used to speak to them in Oshivambo, talk about Namibia, and read African books.[290] The children also used to practice traditional dance and songs. At the core of the solidarity program, in fact, there was the "education of aware SWAPO fighters whose connection to their African homeland

[288] Kenna, "Homecoming," pp. 21-22; Krause, Kaplan, *Children in Exile*, p. 49. In section 2.2.6, Figure 4 portrays Herbert Zinke in Kwanza Sul.
[289] SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/5758, "Arbeitsvereinbarung zur Weiterführung der Zusammenarbeit im Bereich der Volksbildung," Luanda, 17 January 1984, p. 1.
[290] Interview with Martin Kaputu, Windhoek, 28 January 2022.

is maintained and deepened and who are willing and able to use their knowledge and skills for a free Namibia."[291]

Thus, the educational work, both inside and outside the classroom, was conformed to the purpose of preparing them to play the role of the elite in future independent Namibia, shaping their personalities in a socialist fashion while keeping the bonds with their home country alive. In the everyday life, they were expected to be disciplined, well-behaved, neat, and clean. On Sunday mornings, they were in a sense being paramilitarily trained. On these occasions, they were taught to march, make the salute, behave like soldiers, and listened to political and war speeches. As Lucia Engombe writes commenting Figure 8, "with a clenched fist in salute, at the roll call we shouted 'Viva SWAPO!' and 'Viva Nujoma!' to celebrate the party and our President. Even as children, we learned how to use guns. Because we should get used to the idea of sacrificing our lives in the battle against the South African occupiers of our homeland Namibia."[292]

Figure 8. *Namibian children during their training in the DDR.*
Source: Engombe, *Kind Nr. 95,* no page.

Strict exercises aimed at training the children both physically and psychologically also were part of their education.[293]

During their years in East Germany, Namibian children were invested as "Ernst Thälmann Pioneers" like the DDR schoolchildren. They also became "SWAPO Pioneers of April 19" (the day commemorating the birth of SWAPO) and "of August 26" (the day commemorating the beginning of the armed struggle). They often received visits from eminent guests, including Sam Nujoma, who were welcomed with grand ceremonies during which the children performed songs and national

[291] SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/5758, "Arbeitsvereinbarung zur Weiterführung der Zusammenarbeit im Bereich der Volksbildung," Luanda, 17 January 1984, p. 2.
[292] Engombe, *Kind Nr. 95*, no page.
[293] Hishoono, "Wieder in Deutschland," p. 391.

anthems. PLAN cadres who were doing their training in Rostock, 150 kilometers from Bellin, also used to pay visits to the Namibian children, to whom they told their deeds in fighting the South African enemy.[294]

In the late 1980s, some children like Misheke Matongo were also sent a couple of weeks to Kwanza Sul during the summer so that they could have a first-hand experience of the liberation process.[295] Here, pride in their excellent education and hopes for their future as cadres were expressed.[296] Here, the children started "to realize the extent of their assimilation to East Germany or their estrangement from the culture of their birth."[297]

In addition to these experiences designed to maintain their connection with the homeland, deepen their knowledge of Namibia, and instill loyalty to SWAPO, activities to acquaint them with the culture of the DDR were also promoted.[298] In Löderburg, each class was assigned a Patenbrigade, a group of workers who introduced them to the work in the DDR. Trips and excursions were also organized to learn about the DDR and its culture. Despite being quite separated from East German citizens, there were also opportunities to meet local people and be integrated into the social and cultural life of the area. These were for example sport competitions between schools, as well as outings to the cinema or disco, however never without the appropriate permission of their supervisors.[299] Summer and winter camps were also special opportunities to meet many other children from European (mostly socialist) countries, such as East Germany, Russia, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and so on. In the interview, Martin Kaputu, one of the former DDR-Kinder, recalled these camps as one of the things he enjoyed most during his time in the DDR.[300] Children often also built strong emotional bonds with East German teachers and their families, which they could visit on weekends and during summer vacations. Martin Kaputu referred to a DDR teacher as his mother and to her family as his East German family, with whom he has maintained a relationship even after his return to Namibia.[301]

The homecoming of the children, many of them now teenagers, occurred more than a decade after the first group arrived in the DDR. The achievement of independence finally made Namibia the safe place to which they could return. Simultaneously, the fall of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989, in the same week as the first free election in Namibia, led to the incorporation of the DDR within the

[294] Engombe, *Kind Nr. 95*, pp. 68-69.
[295] Owens, Krishnamurthy, "The forgotten child of Namibia," pp. 98-102.
[296] BArch, DR 2/13853, "Informationsbericht Monat August 88," Lehrergruppe bei der SWAPO in Kwanza Sul, Kwanza Sul, 25 August 1988, p. 3.
[297] Owens, Krishnamurthy, "The forgotten child of Namibia," p. 101.
[298] Kenna, "Homecoming," pp. 29-30.
[299] Interview with Martin Kaputu, Windhoek, 28 January 2022.
[300] Interview with Martin Kaputu, Windhoek, 28 January 2022.
[301] Interview with Martin Kaputu, Windhoek, 28 January 2022.

Federal Republic of Germany and, consequently, the dissolution of the solidarity programs and institutions. As mentioned, as a consequence of the Wende, the Namibian children started to suffer acts of racism that they had not experienced before.

The historic coincidence of that week of November was about to change their lives once again. They returned to Namibia in late August 1990. From Windhoek, they were taken to the Reception Centre, at the People's Primary School in Katutura, where they were housed until the arrival of their families. One by one, the children were fetched by relatives and taken to their homes in Windhoek or, mostly, in northern Namibia. For those who had no one to pick them up, because they were orphans or because news of repatriation had not reached their families, dormitory accommodations were arranged.[302] Members of the German-speaking community also volunteered to take care of some of them or to provide them with whatever support they needed to cope with their return.[303]

After having become acquainted with East German life and culture, for many of them the return represented a cultural shock. The country they had long imagined did not coincide with the idea they had formed during the time in East Germany, an idea shaped by the European representation of Africa and by the SWAPO propaganda. After years of education and training, they were faced with a reality for which they were not prepared. In a world that had abandoned socialism, those who were supposed to be the new elite struggled to be reintegrated into their culture of birth and faced marginalization.[304] They were seen as outsiders by parents, siblings, peers, and the community in general.[305] Contributing to this was the deterioration or loss of their native language, which for most of them was Oshivambo, and the internalization of a different (socialist) culture, that of the former DDR. Returning to Namibia thus presented the DDR-Kinder with new challenges, such as finding a school that would accept them, given their limited knowledge of English, which became the official language after independence. Not all DDR-Kinder continued their studies. Some, however, managed to enroll in the few German schools in the country, in Windhoek or Swakopmund. Some came back to reunified Germany,[306] because, using the words of Kaputu, "they didn't identify themselves too much with Namibia."[307] Some got married in Germany and decided to stay there.

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[302] For the arrival procedures see Kenna, "Homecoming," pp. 42-43; Owens, Krishnamurthy, "The forgotten child of Namibia," pp. 106-108.

[303] Martin Kaputu stayed with a German-speaking family, who also offered to take him for a longer period, until he finished school (Interview with Martin Kaputu, Windhoek, 28 January 2022).

[304] Hallo Hopf, "Integration der 'Ex-DDR-Kinder' in Namibia," in *Africa '98*, Brandes & Apsel Verlag, pp. 203-207 (in BAB, AA.1, Karton 29, Mappe 7).

[305] Schmitt, Witte, "'You are special'."

[306] Hishoono, "Wieder in Deutschland," pp. 393-394.

[307] Interview with Martin Kaputu, Windhoek, 28 January 2022.

If on one hand, their stay in East Germany was the cause of what Jason Owens calls "deracination," namely "the loss of 'racial' or ethnic identity in the face of the host country's enveloping culture,"[308] on the other, it also provided a tool that the DDR-Kinder used to cope with the marginalization which followed the repatriation: a sense of belonging to a group. Indeed, the DDR education fostered the strengthening of a sense of comradeship, which was consolidated through the performance of group activities aimed to demonstrate the value of the group over the importance of the individual.[309] What Owens terms "Socialistization," namely the assimilation into socialist socialization,[310] combined with SWAPO principles and with the common goal of training the future elite, therefore, led the DDR-Kinder to feel increasingly like a group. During the German years, they also developed their own language, the Oshi-Deutsch, a combination of Oshivambo and German, to which they added elements borrowed from English and Afrikaans after returning to Namibia. In Namibia, group cohesion served as a strategy to cope with the experience of marginalization. The DDR-Kinder von Namibia carved out new spaces and sought environments in which they could express their hybrid and transcultural identity and recall their transnational experience. The most obvious expression of this was the birth of the Ossi Club,[311] founded by social worker Hallo Hopf in Windhoek in 1995 and sponsored by two non-governmental organizations.[312] While the initial goal was to open a living space that could provide a stable shelter for the DDR-Kinder, who were often in conflict situations with their families, it ended up being a youth club, where they could meet, promote activities, and recall common memories of the DDR. A few years later, the DDR-Kinder themselves founded the association Freundeskreis der Ossis (Friendship Circle of the Easterners), which from the interview with Martin Kaputu seems to be a Whatsapp group.[313] These platforms, where they perform feelings of nostalgia, significantly show the impact that such solidarity program had on their lives. However, some preferred not to take part in such platforms so as not to remain too anchored in the past: "As much as I loved growing up there, I just feel that at one stage you need to let go. I mean, one thing is to organize a sort of like a reunion, that they do sometimes… meet here and there… but I don't need to belong to a club. That's my view. Others feel different, but it's just not me. There is however nothing wrong with it."[314]

The story of the DDR-Kinder was an experience deeply shaped by global historical upheavals, such as the southern African conflicts and the rise and decline of European socialism. It was a story of

[308] Owens, "Namibia's 'GDR kids'," pp. 26-27.
[309] Owens, Krishnamurthy, "The forgotten child of Namibia," p. 96.
[310] Owens, "Namibia's 'GDR kids'," pp. 25-26; Owens, Krishnamurthy, "The forgotten child of Namibia," pp. 94-96.
[311] "Ossi" (Easterners) is the name used by Germans to refer to former East German citizens, often in stereotypical manner.
[312] Hopf, "Integration der 'Ex-DDR-Kinder' in Namibia," pp. 205-206.
[313] Interview with Martin Kaputu, Windhoek, 28 January 2022.
[314] Interview with Martin Kaputu, Windhoek, 28 January 2022.

double migration and uprootedness. From the first-person accounts, some aspects of their experience in East Germany can be outlined. Generally, it can be said that the period in East Germany was a positive experience for most of them, as it gave them the opportunity to live and receive an education far from the Namibian struggle. Moreover, as children living in a fairly separate environment from the locals, they were not aware of the "dark sides" of the DDR. As Martin Kaputu recounted:

> we only found out actually when we were here in Namibia that the East German government was controlling many people. The East German government also affected some of the teachers that were teaching us. I did not know about the existence of Stasi. [From] what I heard then from my family, my German family in Germany, the directors used to be… because we had a director that was in charge…they used to be actually big shots in the Stasi.[315]

However, as the manuscript of Matongo reveals, the Namibian children were in some way affected by the paranoia of the DDR system, obsessed with Western infiltration. Eventually, a certain way to act and think vigilantly was at various degrees internalized by some of them.[316]

Yet from the perspective of children who grew up in refugee camps, East Germany mostly appeared as a dream place, a place where snow is mistaken for sugar, as Lucia Engombe wrote: "This must be sugar, I thought, and I was not the only one. It never crossed my mind that it could be salt. Because in the place I was now, only sweet things could exist."[317] In East Germany, they felt safe and protected, although the sadness of not being with their loved ones often assailed them. At some point, however, the sense of protection started to be seen as confinement by some like Lucia Engombe.[318] As the years passed, she began to feel more and more trapped in a system that had full control over her life. In her autobiography, SWAPO emerges as an overwhelming and negative presence. Engombe tells of how teenage crushes were kept hidden and, if discovered, were punished. One girl, Sandy, found in the residence reserved for Mozambican boys, had her hair shaved off as punishment for lack of discipline. A pregnant girl, Gloria, was pressured to have an abortion. Girls were constantly urged to discipline and threatened with being sent back to Africa if they were deemed disrespectful to the opportunity they were given in the DDR. The presence of SWAPO is depicted as extremely overwhelming in Engombe's autobiography,[319] while this does not shine through in the conversation

[315] Interview with Martin Kaputu, Windhoek, 28 January 2022.
[316] Owens, Krishnamurthy, "The forgotten child of Namibia," p. 96; NAN, AACRLS, 205, Misheke Matongo's manuscript, pp. 23-24.
[317] Engombe, *Kind Nr. 95*, p. 47.
[318] The fine line between protection and confinement is also pointed out by Owens and Krishnamurthy when they analyze the autobiographical manuscript of Matongo (Owens, Krishnamurthy, "The forgotten child of Namibia," p. 93).
[319] Engombe, *Kind Nr. 95*.

I had with Kaputu, for example.[320] This is probably due to Engombe's personal experience. His father, Immanuel Engombe, was part of that group within SWAPO whose members, after accusing the leadership of corruption, treason, and embezzlement in 1976, had been expelled, arrested, detained, and tortured in Zambia and then Tanzania.[321] After his release, in 1978, he founded the movement called SWAPO-Democrats together with Shipanga and others. During her time in the DDR, Lucia was first told that her father was a traitor, then that he was dead. No further explanation was provided to her, not even by her mother, who instead decided to cooperate with SWAPO for her children's sake. Only once back in Namibia did Lucia discover the truth about her father, who, found alive, told her his story and accused SWAPO of brainwashing her and the other DDR-Kinder.[322] When rumors began to spread accusing SWAPO of imprisoning and torturing many members considered dissidents, in fact, speculations were made also on the Namibian children in the DDR, who were thought to be children of dissidents imprisoned by SWAPO.[323] According to this version, SWAPO allegedly sent these children to the DDR without parental consent to hold them hostage and subject them to full-fledged indoctrination. Apparently, some were children of dissidents detained by SWAPO. In addition to Lucia Engombe, so was, for example, the aforementioned Mekondjo Nuukuawo, who left the group in 1981 to join her family in Sweden. Her parents, Andrew and Frieda, who had been persecuted by SWAPO, after many efforts were able to get back their children, Deo and Mecky, the former in Angola and the latter in the DDR. The family's story is told in Groth's book, *Namibia, The Wall of Silence*.[324] The aforementioned West German journalist Henning von Löwis reported that women in refugee camps "were treated as breeding animals so that SWAPO would have children"[325] to be sent to communist countries for training without the mothers' consent:

> SWAPO considers these children its property and sees them as future guerrilla fighters. […] In communist Germany they receive a communist education for a future communist Namibia. This is the perspective of the SED and SWAPO. What the people concerned think, it is not matter for discussion. Children are too young to decide for themselves, and parents are often not even consulted.[326]

[320] Interview with Martin Kaputu, Windhoek, 28 January 2022.
[321] As explained in section 1.2.2.
[322] Engombe, *Kind Nr. 95*, pp. 355-363.
[323] Simmon, *Report Bayern über SWAPO Kinder*.
[324] Groth, *Namibia, The Wall of Silence*, pp. 46-54.
[325] BArch, DR 2/13853, "Namibische Kinder in der DDR," by Henning von Löwis, Staatliches Komitee für Rundfunk, Redaktion Monitor, DLF, 13 March 1986.
[326] *Ibidem*.

Separation of families and removal of children from parents without consent at the hands of SWAPO also appears to be confirmed by the first-hand experience of Amu Karlowsky, who reported of having been taken by SWAPO to Kwanza Sul when his parents were absent, and the account of Erika Beukes, of the Parents' Committee.[327] Furthermore, Jörn Ziegler, former worker for the already mentioned International Society for Human Rights, told me:

> I remember that at ISHR we had registered a number of missing children who had disappeared from SWAPO locations or Namibian refugee camps in Angola and who–according to rumours and unconfirmed information–had been brought to GDR and were living in GDR. The community of SWAPO refugees who had returned from Angola to Namibia was quite aware of such cases. The parents or other family members of these missing kids did not get any information from SWAPO about the whereabouts of their children.[328]

Ziegler also recounted his visit to Staßfurt in 1989, where he was looking for a boy who was taken away by SWAPO without the permission of his father, a Lutheran pastor who had lost his wife in a South African military raid in Angola.[329] Although Ziegler was not allowed to meet the boy as he had not SWAPO's permission, the guard of the hostel "did not deny however that the boy was living in that place."[330]

In a 1989 *Namibia Today* article, the DTA election campaign was criticized for using the issue of Namibian children in the DDR to weaken SWAPO's image. Here, it is acknowledged that some of them were children of former dissidents, saying, however, that there is nothing improper in this: "SWAPO, in offering them the opportunity for a caring educational environment, did not consider them as children of prisoners, but as Namibian children for whom SWAPO had a responsibility to care, regardless of their parentage."[331] While it is true, therefore, that some of them were children of dissidents, it seems, however, that there was no plan to remove them from their parents and indoctrinate them. According to Western propaganda, which said that the claim was based on testimonies of former SWAPO members, however, this plan existed and started with the exploitation of the bodies of mothers, who were encouraged to have children so SWAPO could have more followers to mold. Possible speculations were silenced by a delegation from the Council of Churches in Namibia that in May 1990 visited Bellin and Staßfurt to investigate the matter, and which invited to drop allegations for the sake of national reconciliation. The press statement, in fact, declared:

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[327]Simmon, *Report Bayern über SWAPO Kinder*.
[328] Mail exchange with Jörn Ziegler, 13 August 2022.
[329] The pastor could be Hellao Jambeulu Hellao, who will be mentioned in section 2.2.8.1. However, Ziegler could not confirm this as he did not remember the name of the man.
[330] Mail exchange with Jörn Ziegler, 13 August 2022.
[331] S. Kashimupenga, "Some people never learn," in *Namibia Today*, 14 October 1989 (in BArch, DZ 8/828).

> As far as we could establish, we could not find any evidence whatsoever which is indicating that the children have come here to be hidden or are children of former SWAPO detainees. We found some orphans whose parents died during the liberations struggle (ex. Cassinga massacre) and also whose parents are still alive, including some in the leadership of SWAPO. It will not serve in the best interest of the Namibian people for anyone whether inside or outside Namibia to try to open the old wounds of the war.[332]

2.2.7.2 Building the educational system in Namibia: training educators in Bellin/Schwerin

While the story of the DDR-Kinder had received a great amount of attention, the experience of the Namibian women who accompanied them has not been addressed yet, and it has only been mentioned by a few scholars such as Kenna and Ilona and Hans-Georg Schleicher.[333] This section thus provides a more accurate picture of their education in the DDR based on archival sources as a way to contribute to an understanding of the functioning of the DDR training in the educational sector.

About fifteen or sixteen Namibian women arrived in the DDR on 18 December 1979 together with eighty Namibian children. Their duties consisted in supporting the children while receiving formal training as preprimary teachers. In July 1981, they completed their training course and obtained their certificate as kindergarten teachers. Four of them remained in the DDR for a few more months to receive further qualifications in the area of preschool education management and planning and to facilitate the training of the second group, while the others returned to Angola.[334] Once back, they worked as kindergarten teachers or managers in SWAPO refugee camps in Angola or Zambia. The second group of fifteen women arrived in the DDR in late 1981 and attended a training course lasting about one year and a half, which was refined on the basis of the experience of the first group. Other groups probably continued to arrive in the following years, reaching a total of about sixty Namibian women who were trained as kindergarten teachers from 1979 to 1989.[335] The program was organized

[332] BArch, DZ 8/825, Press Statement "CCN delegation to the Namibian Children in the GDR," 7 May 1990.
[333] Kenna, "Homecoming," p. 19; H. G. Schleicher, I. Schleicher, *Special flights*, pp. 205-207.
[334] BArch, DR 2/11382, "Information zum Stand der Arbeit im SWAPO-Kinderheim Bellin," Berlin, 4 May 1981, p. 4.
[335] Archival documents in BArch, DR 2/11382 focus on the training of the first two groups. A training course for Namibian women concluded in 1987 is mentioned in SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/5845, "Information über die Ergebnisse der Verhandlungen mit der Südwestafrikanischen Volksorganisation (SWAPO) von Namibia zur Erneuerung der Arbeitsvereinbarung der Zusammenarbeit auf dem Gebiet der Volksbildung für die Jahre 1987/1988 – Anlage 2: Aktennotiz über Absprachen mit Genossen N. Angula, Sekretär für Bildung der SWAPO, und Genossen Mbumba, stellv. Sekretär für Bildung der SWAPO, über den weiteren Einsatz und die Arbeit mit den namibischen Erziehern in Bellin und Staßfurt," November 1986. With the conclusion of the course in August 1987, fifty Namibian women were trained as kindergarten teachers, and twelve were to start in September 1987 (see BArch, DR 2/13853, "Information zum Stand der Beziehungen zwischen der SED und der SWAPO in Bereich Volksbildung," p. 5). A training course for a fourth group of Namibian women at the pedagogical school in Schwerin, starting in 1987, is mentioned in SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/64603, "Vorlage für das Sekretariat des Zentralkomitees: Maßnahmen zur Weiterführung der Zusammenarbeit zwischen der SED und der Südwestafrikanischen Volksorganisation (SWAPO) Namibias im Bereich der Volksbildung," Abteilung Volksbildung, Berlin, p. 1. Kenna also reports a total number of sixty women ("Homecoming," p. 19). Ilona

through the cooperation between the personnel of the children's home in Bellin and the educational college in Schwerin, which from late 1981 took overall responsibility for the training of the Namibian women in Bellin.

The goal of the training was to prepare them "to work in their country as kindergarten teachers or kindergarten managers and, what is more, to contribute to the establishment of kindergartens and the training of kindergarten teachers."[336] They would then have to be able to contribute to the development of the national education system in a free Namibia, learning how to plan and manage the preschool educational system (in a socialist way) and how to train other teachers. Indeed, the socialist education system in the DDR was taken as a model, since it aimed at the development of the personality as understood from a Marxist-Leninist perspective.[337]

The training consisted of lectures, self-study, internships, excursions to DDR educational institutions, and practical training with the Namibian children in Bellin. It is unclear whether the Namibian educators employed in Bellin and Staßfurt were the students who were attending the training course or Namibians who were already qualified (in the DDR or elsewhere) as teachers and educators. The group probably consisted of both, including also some students who were employed in Bellin and Staßfurt after completing the training. While it was said that Namibian students were active in the "patriotic education" of the children,[338] in fact, on a couple of occasions there was also mention of hiring Namibian teachers to support the educational and extra-curricular activities and to teach the subjects of political and cultural education.[339]

In the first few weeks, the educational program consisted in familiarizing the women with the life and conditions of the home in Bellin and introducing them to the German language. After that, theoretical and practical training could gradually start.[340]

Methodological and practical training was pursued by East German mentors through various activities such as exercises and apprenticeships and was supposed to enable the students to lead the pedagogical process with the goal of an "allseitige Persönlichkeitsentwicklung" (all-sided development of the

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and Hans-Georg Schleicher, relying on a number reported in *Neues Deutschland*, 2 January 1990, state that 64 women received training by 1989 (*Special flights*, p. 207).

[336] BArch, DR 2/11382, "Konzeption für die Qualifizierung der namibischen Frauen in Bellin, Kreis Güstrow," Hauptabteilung Lehrerbildung, Abt. Päd./Psych. und Fachschulen, 13 November 1979, p. 1.

[337] *Ivi*, p. 5.

[338] BArch, DR 2/11382, "Zwischenbericht über die Arbeit zur Ausbildung von namibischen Studentinnen in Bellin," Dr. R. Baartz, Pädagogische Schule, Schwerin, 16 April 1982, p. 3.

[339] BArch, DR 2/11382, "Maßnahmenplan zur Realisierung des Beschlusses des Sekretariats des ZK der SED vom 13.7.1981," p. 2; BArch, DR 2/11382, "Information zum Stand der Arbeit im SWAPO-Kinderheim Bellin," Berlin, 4 May 1981, p. 2; SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/5758, "Arbeitsvereinbarung zur Weiterführung der Zusammenarbeit im Bereich der Volksbildung," Luanda, 17 January 1984, p. 1.

[340] BArch, DR 2/11382, "Konzeption für die Qualifizierung der namibischen Frauen in Bellin, Kreis Güstrow," Hauptabteilung Lehrerbildung, Abt. Päd./Psych. und Fachschulen, 13 November 1979, pp. 3-4.

personality).[341] The mentors were selected among the group of DDR educators working with the children in the house in Bellin and had several duties to guarantee the training and the well-being of the Namibian trainees in the DDR.[342] Furthermore, also mediators were employed to facilitate the communication.

Theoretical lessons were carried out by the teachers of the educational college in Schwerin. Strict coordination between mentors, teachers, and the personnel in charge of the training at the pedagogical school contributed to the effective planning of the educational program and the connection between theory and practice. Theoretical lessons included subjects such as Marxism-Leninism, psychology, pedagogy, methodology, health education, and later on also additional subjects such as physical education, art education, and knowledge of social life and nature. Also in this case, political and ideological education was a significant component of the training. It was designed to connect the national liberation movements to the world revolutionary process. By highlighting the achievements of real socialism in Europe, the path of popular democratic revolution with socialist orientation in the young African nation-states was presented to the Namibian students as the right path.[343] Furthermore, "the basic questions of socialist school policy and the role of women in the revolutionary struggle and in the construction of socialism are presented as specific aspects in the context of society as a whole."[344] The specific situation of Namibia was said to be taken into account in the subjects taught, and political-ideological education was a responsibility of all the DDR teachers. Based on the already mentioned book *Namibia*, written by Babing and Bräuer, "a Marxist-Leninist assessment of the emergence of the colonial system in oppressed countries and Namibia"[345] was presented.

In evaluating the second group of Namibian students, their poor background knowledge of the history of both their own country and relevant world events, as well as a poor understanding of the development of the classes and the dynamics of class struggle, were noted.[346] Significantly, their difficulties in not seeing the whites as enemies of Africans, and in taking the class question as a starting point—which they were encouraged to do—were also reported. Here the limitation of using the Western lens of Marxism-Leninism emerges, which downplays the problem of racism by not

[341] BArch, DR 2/11382, "Aktenvermerk zur Weiterführung der methodisch-praktischen Ausbildung der namibischen Kader in Kinderheim Bellin – September 1980," Hauptabteilung Lehrerbildung, Abt. Päd./Psych. und Fachschulen, 2 October 1980, pp. 1-2.
[342] BArch, DR 2/11382, "Entwurf – Funktionsbestimmung der Mentorin zur Ausbildung namibischer Kader im Bereich der Vorschulerziehung in der DDR," Bellin, 26 June 1982.
[343] BArch, DR 2/11382, "Konzeption für die Qualifizierung der namibischen Frauen in Bellin, Kreis Güstrow," Hauptabteilung Lehrerbildung, Abt. Päd./Psych. und Fachschulen, 13 November 1979, p. 5.
[344] *Ibidem*.
[345] BArch, DR 2/11382, "Einschätzung des Unterrichts, der Ergebnisse und Erfahrungen mit dem namibischen Studentinnen nach dem 1. Studienjahr 1981/1982 im Kinderheim Bellin, Kr. Güstrow," Güstrow, 27 July 1982, p. 2.
[346] *Ivi*, p. 1.

considering it as the first condition of oppression of racialized people and placing it within the context of class struggle. In fact, communist elites in Eastern Europe "sought to close down 'excessive' race talk which undermined a politics of class-based proletarian revolution."[347] Moreover, they rejected racial hierarchy based on eugenic ideas, but did not discard the concept of race as defined by biological differences.[348] This is confirmed by the fact that, during a conference, Namibian students were given an overview of Marxist-Leninist views on "the origin and development of people, the commonalities and peculiarities, and specific characteristics of people on different continents."[349] Internationalism and anti-imperialist solidarity in the DDR, thus, relied on the Western tradition of Marxism-Leninism, which imposed a Western lecture of white colonialism and did not shy away from classifying peoples by their racial characteristics.

According to the evaluation, however, the experience of oppression lived by the Namibian students under the apartheid regime helped them to familiarize with the theoretical foundations of Marxism-Leninism, whose study was regarded by most of them as necessary to practice the profession of educators and be able to disseminate socialism *à la* DDR once back home.[350]

In general, the training courses had been evaluated as effective by the reports compiled by the East Germans in charge of the program. Difficulties were experienced due to the diversification of the initial levels of education of the students, the lack of basic knowledge of some of them, the linguistic challenges, and the lack of teaching materials in English. With few exceptions, the Namibian students were evaluated as attentive, hardworking, diligent, disciplined, and cooperative. Their attitude toward the Namibian children, however, was often considered rude. In an evaluation, it was in fact reported that "the tone to the children by some students needs to become friendlier. […] The students should also be instructed once again not to use any violence against the children."[351] Differences between the East German and the Namibian personnel in the educational approach toward the children have in fact also been noted by Constance Kenna.[352]

2.2.7.3 Building the national economy in independent Namibia: training socialist economists

Between late 1981 and early 1982, through consultations between SED and SWAPO, a course was designed to train SWAPO cadres who would hold management positions in the economy in an

[347] Mark, "Race," p. 222.
[348] *Ivi*, p. 228.
[349] BArch, DR 2/11382, "Einschätzung des Unterrichts, der Ergebnisse und Erfahrungen mit dem namibischen Studentinnen nach dem 1. Studienjahr 1981/1982 im Kinderheim Bellin, Kr. Güstrow," Güstrow, 27 July 1982, p. 3.
[350] *Ivi*, p. 2.
[351] BArch, DR 2/11382, "Auswertung des päd.-psych. Praktikums vom 8.2. – 20.2.1982," Bellin, 9 March 1982, p. 2.
[352] Kenna, "Homecoming," p. 19.

independent Namibia. The training course, supervised by the Zentralinstitut für Sozialistische Wirtschaftsführung (Central Institute for Socialist Economic Management) at the Central Committee of the SED and addressed to fifteen senior SWAPO officials, took place from 13 May to 4 July 1983 at the Karl Liebknecht party school in Kleinmachnow, in the district of Potsdam.[353] Its implementation was managed by the district leadership of Potsdam, the comrades of the Karl Liebknecht party school, the leadership of party organizations, and the directors of the factories which the course participants visited. English language mediators were also made available for the duration of the course.[354]

The course was designed to train SWAPO cadres to address the problems of managing and planning the national economy of independent Namibia, based on the experience of the DDR and the fundamentals of the Marxist-Leninist political economy. Issues specific to Namibia's political and economic development were being analyzed on the basis of experiences in the DDR, with the consequence that it was hardly possible to draw conclusions that could be applied to Namibia, as reported by an information note of the Zentralinstitut in charge[355]—however, the document continues by saying that the course provided food for thought.

The starting point of the course was the DDR experience in building a socialist society and economy from a capitalist system—a starting point that would allow reasoning about how SWAPO could transform itself from a liberation movement into a Marxist-Leninist party after independence. During the course, a number of issues were lively discussed, such as how SWAPO, once at the helm of Namibia, could ensure national unity, develop the country's working class, launch a policy of nationalization, implement land reform to ensure food self-sufficiency, and gradually decouple Namibia's economy from that of South Africa to create a Namibia free from dependence and exploitation.[356] Obviously, the DDR's efforts in economic management and planning were presented as successful. In addition to seminars and lectures, other activities were organized, such as excursions to companies, in order to understand how the economic strategy was concretely implemented, and

[353] SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/59152, "Anlage Nr. 1 zum Protokoll Nr. 52 vom 12.5.1983: Durchführung eines achtwöchigen Lehrgangs in der DDR zur Qualifizierung von ca. 15. Leitungskadern der SWAPO Namibias für die Wirtschaft im II. Quartal 1983"; SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/100760, "Information über die Durchführung des Seminars mit leitenden Kadern der SWAPO Namibias zur Leitung und Planung der Volkswirtschaft," Zentralinstitut für Sozialistische Wirtschaftsführung beim ZK der SED, Berlin, 7 July 1983.

[354] SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/59152, "Anlage Nr. 1 zum Protokoll Nr. 52 vom 12.5.1983: Durchführung eines achtwöchigen Lehrgangs in der DDR zur Qualifizierung von ca. 15. Leitungskadern der SWAPO Namibias für die Wirtschaft im II. Quartal 1983."

[355] SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/100760, "Information über die Durchführung des Seminars mit leitenden Kadern der SWAPO Namibias zur Leitung und Planung der Volkswirtschaft," Zentralinstitut für Sozialistische Wirtschaftsführung beim ZK der SED, Berlin, 7 July 1983, p. 2.

[356] *Ibidem*.

visits to memorials, in order to give insights into the difficult legacy left behind by German fascism and to show the conditions from which the DDR started to build a new society.[357]
As the DDR report states, in agreement with the SWAPO delegation, the goal of the course was said to be achieved. Fourteen Namibian cadres were granted certificates of participation, while one had to return earlier due to her advanced pregnancy.

2.2.7.4 Becoming public administrators: vocational training in Demmin/Leipzig/Weimer

A group of six Namibians aged around thirty years spent five years in the DDR, between 1984 and 1989, to undergo vocational training in the field of administration and public management. I met and interviewed one of them, Mathilde Nanyemba Shinana, who at the time of the training had only recently lost her husband, Peter Nanyemba, commander of the PLAN and SWAPO Secretary of Defence. The course participants in the DDR were SWAPO members who had already been trained in exile in the previous years. Before leaving for East Germany, Mathilde Shinana worked in the SWAPO office of the Department of Defence based in Lusaka and was later trained in secretarial and office administration in Jamaica for eighteen months. After that, she came back to Lusaka and then went to Angola, where she continued to work as an executive secretary in the office of the Secretary of Defence, her then-husband Peter Nanyemba.[358] After his death, in August 1984 SWAPO sent her to the DDR together with other five Namibian fellows. They stayed for a few months in Demmin, a small rural district town in Mecklenburg-Westpommern, to study office administration, supported by a Namibian girl who served as an interpreter. Here, the four-month course was supposed to provide training in typewriting and office administration.[359] However, most of the Namibian students had already been trained in these subjects before and found the course to be basically just a repetition. Consequently, they informed SWAPO, which contacted the DDR government to agree on a training program that would best suit the needs of the students.[360] This shows that the communication between Namibian students and SWAPO and between SWAPO and the DDR was effective and that it could lead to the reformulation of solidarity programs based on the students' prerequisites and SWAPO needs.

[357] *Ivi*, pp. 3-4.
[358] Interview with Mathilde Nanyemba Shinana, Windhoek, 24 February 2022.
[359] "Herzlicher Abschied und liebevolle Begrüßung," in *"FE"*, 30 August 1984, in NAN, AACRLS.178, Frenzke Papers.
[360] Interview with Mathilde Nanyemba Shinana, Windhoek, 24 February 2022.

Figure 9. *Mathilde Nanyemba Shinana* (the first from the right, in the front) *and the other Namibian fellows in Demmin, 1984-1985.*
Source: NAN, AACRLS.118, Frenzke Papers.

After having completed the course in December 1984 and having obtained their vocational qualification, the group was sent to Leipzig to study German at the Herder Institute (part of Karl Marx University) for one year. In this period, as well as in the subsequent years, they remained in close contact with Joachim Frenzke, a teacher in Demmin. The correspondence between the students and the East German teacher Frenzke, collected in the Frenzke Papers, held both in the Bundesarchiv and in the National Archives of Namibia, testifies of the good relationship they built during their stay in Demmin and the good time they spent there.[361] Joachim Frenzke and his wife were often addressed by the Namibian students as "Eltern" (parents), and "Familie" (family), as they were encouraged to do. "It was not so easy to leave friends like you, this is why tears were secretly falling from our eyes"—wrote Fenni Nauyala, one of the girls of the group, after having arrived in Leipzig in January 1985.[362] Separation was thus not easy and, initially, they mostly preferred the small Demmin to the city of Leipzig. In a letter from Tiranus Tshishome, the only boy of the group, to Joachim Frenzke, Tiranus recalled "the wholeheartedly help" the teacher gave to the group during their stay in Demmin: "you with your wife distinguished yourselves in all the comradely and brotherly assistance you gave us—Thus we the Namibian people regard you as a great and important person in our Revolutionary

[361] NAN, AACRLS.178, Frenzke Papers.
[362] NAN, AACRLS.178, Frenzke Papers, Letter Fenni Nauyala to Joachim Frenzke, Leipzig, 29 January 1985.

struggle. […] We shall remember you always."[363] These words and, in general, the letters written by the Namibian trainees are relevant documents as they show the personal engagement of some East Germans in their solidarity work with SWAPO as it was perceived by its members studying abroad, thus demonstrating that solidarity was present also at the grassroots level. In the letter, Tiranus also expressed his desire to study Marxism-Leninism at the university in the future, in order to one day become the director of the party school in Namibia.

After one year in Leipzig, the group was transferred to Weimer, where they studied public management at the Edwin Hoernle Fachschule für Staatswissenschaft (Technical College of Political Science) for three years. As the cover letter for the certificate of graduation stated, the training would qualify "the graduates to manage, plan and organize local processes. It is aimed at educating supervisors to work in the local government bodies."[364] After that, the graduates would be able "to serve as a mayor, deputy mayor and secretary of the town and community councils (for electoral positions), as well as to serve as an officer or head in charge of community services in the district, town and municipal councils."[365]

The Namibians attended the college in the same classes as the East Germans, and they were accommodated in a hostel together with people from the DDR and other nationalities, despite not sharing the same dormitory rooms with them.[366] Political education was also included, as the curriculum was the same that the one addressed to DDR students. However, in Mathilde Shinana's view, rather than socialist studies, they did "the democratic studies," "that means thing which in that government, it's meant for all the people, not like capitalists."[367] The relationships with the East Germans were said to be good: people from the DDR were described by Mathilde Shinana as friendly, and the group did not face any problems. "The solidarity was there"—she said.[368] The Namibian students were assigned families, with whom they could spend weekends and holidays. This was described by Mathilde Shinana as positive, as allowed them to relax and enjoy the environment outside the hostel.[369] During the period in the DDR, they also experienced the tensions of German politics, and Mathilde Shinana recalls that even some foreign students, but not Namibians of her acquaintance, tried to climb the wall to go to the other side.[370] This hints at how, despite the much-

[363] NAN, AACRLS.178, Frenzke Papers, Letter Tiranus Tshishome to Joachim Frenzke, Leipzig, 22 January 1985.
[364] Covering letter for the Certificate "Zeugnis über den Fachschulabschluß" for foreign graduates, Fachschule für Staatswissenschaft "Edwin Hoernle" Weimar, courtesy of Mathilde Shinana.
[365] *Ibidem*.
[366] Interview with Mathilde Nanyemba Shinana, Windhoek, 24 February 2022.
[367] Interview with Mathilde Nanyemba Shinana, Windhoek, 24 February 2022.
[368] Interview with Mathilde Nanyemba Shinana, Windhoek, 24 February 2022.
[369] Interview with Mathilde Nanyemba Shinana, Windhoek, 24 February 2022.
[370] Interview with Mathilde Nanyemba Shinana, Windhoek, 24 February 2022.

acclaimed solidarity, some people did not feel comfortable in the DDR, for what might be various and different reasons.

After the three-year vocational course, the group came back to Namibia in June 1989, before the elections. Once back, Mathilde Shinana worked as Deputy Administrator at the election office in Oshakati and, after independence, she was called to work as Deputy Director of the State House, the house of the newly elected President Sam Nujoma, where she was able to put into practice the skills she had learned in the DDR.[371] Thus, her East German experience is recalled in positive terms, since in the DDR she found a welcoming environment of solidarity that helped her to undertake a skilled job position in independent Namibia.

2.2.7.5 Training Third World journalists: the Werner Lamberz Institute

As mentioned before, the East German union of journalists, the Verband der Deutschen Journalisten, provided training courses at the Schule der Solidarität, Internationales Institut für Journalistik "Werner Lamberz" (College of Solidarity, International Institute of Journalism). The institute was founded in 1963 with the name "Schule der Solidarität" under the direction of the VDJ, which was already training journalists from the Third World since the beginning of the 1960s.[372] The College of Solidarity was designed to impart journalistic knowledge and skills to Third World students so that they would be qualified to work in the media in their home countries. It also dispatched some of its personnel to Third World countries. In addition to providing basic journalistic knowledge, the institute also aimed to train Third World students with a political-ideological education and upbringing, through theoretical lessons, excursions, and stages. After the unification of Germany, it was accused from different actors of having ideologically indoctrinated course participants.[373] Following the Wende, the institute started to partially redesign its programs, by including topics that were previously considered taboo, such as freedom of the press and of speech,[374] and broadening its target. In a letter dated February 1990 to Hans-Georg Schleicher, then head of the diplomatic observer mission of the DDR in Namibia, Hans Treffkorn, then Director of the Institute, invited twelve journalists from Namibia to attend a training course at the institute, stressing that the composition of the participants should cover a broad political spectrum, in accordance with the new image of the

[371] Interview with Mathilde Nanyemba Shinana, Windhoek, 24 February 2022.
[372] Hammoud, "Von der 'Schule der Solidarität' zum Internationalen Institut für Journalistik"; Marc Castillon, *Das Internationale Institut für Journalistik Berlin – „Schule der Solidarität" 1963-1989/1990*, Norderstedt: GRIN Verlag, 2010.
[373] Hammoud, "Von der 'Schule der Solidarität' zum Internationalen Institut für Journalistik," p. 241.
[374] *Ivi*, p. 243.

VDJ and of the institute.[375] Even after the reunification and the dissolution of the VDJ, in fact, the institute continued to exist as a non-profit institution with the name "International Institute of Journalism," and continued to train young journalists coming from developing countries.

When it was the "College of Solidarity" in DDR Berlin, it was attended by many participants from southern Africa, including SWAPO members. In 1985, at about the age of twenty, SWAPO member Charles Mubita took part in the 44th training course of the school in East Berlin. At the time, he was working in Addis Ababa as the supervisor of the "Voice of Namibia," the SWAPO radio station that was broadcasting about the liberation struggle, operating from many African countries. As he told me, most of the personnel of the "Voice of Namibia" was trained in the DDR or in other friendly countries.[376] In 1985, SWAPO sent him and Kandindima Nehova, the then SWAPO Deputy Secretary for Information, to East Berlin for a six-month training in radio production. As Charles Mubita reported, the college hosted a vibrant international community, with people coming from different countries all over the world, like Zimbabwe, Zambia, Mozambique, Angola, Ghana, South Africa, Egypt, as well as Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Iraq, India, Syria, and South Yemen.[377] East German students and people from Eastern Europe were present too, although to a lesser extent. The international environment of the school was particularly appreciated as it offered the chance to share the different experiences of each liberation struggle and of the challenges that each country had to face after independence.[378] The accommodation was at the campus of the college, together with all the other students. The training course in radio/television journalism was held in English by East German instructors who worked for the radio station in the DDR. The radio station where they were trained had all the necessary equipment, from pre-production to post-production, and they learned to master almost all the aspects of radio production. In addition to that, they also had the chance to become acquainted with the DDR life and system through excursions and other on-site experiences. As Charles Mubita told me:

> we learned a lot, not only about radio. Yes, we mastered radio production, we did. Almost all the aspects of radio production. But we were also exposed to a number of other things in terms of life style in the GDR, in terms of the system itself. Because we had the opportunity to interview some ministers, some leaders of the political party in the GDR at that time. We had the opportunity to visit towns, like Leipzig, Magdeburg, and all the others. Visit those towns to interact with people, having an understanding how their system worked, how we can improved that system when we get independence.[379]

[375] BArch, DZ 8/825, Letter Hans Treffkorn to Hans-Georg Schleicher, Berlin, 12 February 1990.
[376] Interview with Charles Mubita, Windhoek, 7 February 2022.
[377] Interview with Charles Mubita, Windhoek, 7 February 2022.
[378] Interview with Charles Mubita, Windhoek, 7 February 2022.
[379] Interview with Charles Mubita, Windhoek, 7 February 2022.

The experience in the DDR was regarded by Mubita as positive. The solidarity of the people was perceived as strong, despite some misunderstandings due to cultural differences. Among the things he recalled during the interview was that in the DDR he saw homosexual people for the first time and that, at the time, he was not used to them. This was probably indicative for him of a society that enjoyed freedom and lack of discrimination, compared to Namibia during apartheid. He personally did not experience episodes of racism and discrimination. "It was basically like you are sitting with your own comrades, you know. A very open society"—he recounted.[380] Compared to the training he received in the UK at the BBC, he pointed out the difference in treatment he experienced in the DDR: "So the treatment cannot be equated to what was happening in the GDR. In the GDR we felt more at home. We were just simply more at home. Sometimes you forget, since Namibia is independent now. It was really a comradeship, a kind of spirit that prevailed at that time."[381]

Charles Mubita also told me that in the DDR they were also able to listen to the British and US radio stations in West Berlin, whose broadcasts were mostly addressed to the people in East Germany to encourage them to abandon the socialist system and join the capitalist side. Mubita recalled that many people, including international students, were persuaded by those messages and were tempted to go to West Berlin. Some of them actually did it. As a propagandist knowing the tricks of the trade, he personally was not influenced by Western propaganda and he was, and maybe still is, convinced of the benefits of socialism, such as lower costs of living and absence of unemployment. "I think the socialist system was something which appealed to us and we thought that it would be better when we get independence we employ this particular system but unfortunately we came here and we employed something else"—he said.[382] Listening to the "Voice of America" broadcasting from West Germany was for him useful to try to understand the expertise that the Westerners were using for propaganda, so to use them once back to the SWAPO radio station.

Thanks to the training he received in the DDR, Charles Mubita said he improved his skills in propaganda and understood "how to relate a message to the audience, how to ask questions."[383] After the six-month training, he continued to work for the "Voice of Namibia" radio stations in different African countries. After independence, he became the first black television editor in Namibia. He contributed to reforming the television, recruiting black people, and training them.[384] In 2004, he was the speechwriter and policy analyst for the second President of Namibia, Hifikepunye Pohamba,

[380] Interview with Charles Mubita, Windhoek, 7 February 2022.
[381] Interview with Charles Mubita, Windhoek, 7 February 2022.
[382] Interview with Charles Mubita, Windhoek, 7 February 2022.
[383] Interview with Charles Mubita, Windhoek, 7 February 2022.
[384] Interview with Charles Mubita, Windhoek, 7 February 2022.

during the election campaign and after his election, until he joined the Southern African Development Cooperation in Botswana at the end of 2006, for ten years. At the moment, he is based in Windhoek, where he is a part-time lecturer at the International University of Management and the University of Namibia and coordinator of the SWAPO party school.

2.2.7.6 University studies in the DDR: the story of Dr. Shipoh

The DDR also offered SWAPO scholarships to enable its members to pursue university studies. Peingeondjabi Titus Shipoh spent more than ten years in the DDR, where he received university education up to his doctorate.[385] After completing secondary school in Nigeria, at the age of almost 22, he was sent to East Germany by SWAPO in October 1978, where he first attended a language orientation program at the Herder Institute in Leipzig for two years. After that, an A-Level program lasting one year prepared him to continue his studies at the university level. He specialized in the field of Volkswirtschaft (national economy), with a focus on transport economy/engineering economy, studying at the Hochschule für Verkehrswesen (University of Transportation) in Dresden from 1981 to 1989 for both his Master's degree (four years) and doctorate (three years). During his first year of Master, he was also given an introduction to dialectic materialism, studying the basics of socialism, and the thought of Marx, Engels, and Lenin. He regarded the choice of SWAPO to embrace socialism as an obvious choice dictated by Namibia's experience of oppression and Cold War divisions and acknowledged the positive aspects of living in a socialist environment, as well as the negative ones:

> Obviously, with the experience of Apartheid in Namibia, the practice of Capitalism in Western countries, we were to embrace Socialism as an ideology for an independent Namibia. In the Socialist countries we saw equal distribution of resources among the citizens, no unemployment, no beggars on the streets, the cost of living was lowest, free education, free medical services, cheap or affordable transport fairs in busses and trains etc. Of course one could see shortcomings when it came to central planning especially distribution of food items in all the retail shops or availability of luxury items like TV, and electronic sets.[386]

He regarded himself as not having been influenced by socialism while saying that "practice left an impression on me that whispered to all of us that socialism was a better option for us in an independent Namibia in order to ensure an equitable socioeconomic development of our country."[387]

[385] Written interview with Peingeondjabi Titus Shipoh, 6 March 2022.
[386] Written interview with Peingeondjabi Titus Shipoh, 6 March 2022.
[387] Written interview with Peingeondjabi Titus Shipoh, 6 March 2022.

The environment of the university probably allowed SWAPO students, as well as other international students, to experience the life of the DDR and mingle with the locals. Foreign students were allocated an East German student as a roommate in the hostel in order to enable them to practice German. The relationships with the locals were defined by Shipoh as excellent: solidarity was present also on a grassroots level, despite acknowledging the presence of some "rotten Apples."[388] They used to spend holidays with East German families, such as the families of their roommates. Shipoh did not encounter any particular problem in the DDR, although he acknowledged the existence of travel restrictions and difficulties, which however he did not regard as a crucial issue. Coming from an environment of strong racial discrimination, Shipoh felt that in the DDR they were "for the first time treated like human beings with equal intelligence and opportunities."[389]

He fulfilled his mission in the DDR with a strong sense of duty "to be a good Ambassador of my country and SWAPO, behave well and study hard to complete the task of being ready to take over the government of a liberated Namibia."[390] From September 1988, he was also temporarily appointed to work in the SWAPO representative office in Berlin as an Education Attaché, dealing with matters pertaining to students' affairs.[391]

Shipoh went back to Namibia in September 1989, after having discussed his doctoral dissertation on transport economy in an independent Namibia in August. Once back, he organized transport for voters to go to the pooling stations for the elections in 1989 and subsequently held important positions. He worked hard for the development of transport infrastructure in Namibia and became the first Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Works and Transport. He also worked for other ministries, like Youth, Sport and Culture, and Justice, and as the Ambassador of Namibia to several countries. Sadly, he passed away in April 2022, shortly after sharing his story with me. He is a well-known and beloved figure in Namibia. His account contributes to understanding the organization of university studies for Namibians in East Germany, and constitutes a success story, as he successfully completed his studies and the mission entrusted to him by SWAPO and went on to hold a number of important positions in independent Namibia.

[388] Written interview with Peingeondjabi Titus Shipoh, 6 March 2022.
[389] Written interview with Peingeondjabi Titus Shipoh, 6 March 2022.
[390] Written interview with Peingeondjabi Titus Shipoh, 6 March 2022.
[391] BArch, DZ 8/825, Letter Haindongo Shikwetepo to Achim Reichardt, Berlin, 26 September 1988.

2.2.7.7 Industrial training at the seaport in Rostock: an East German evaluation

Figure 10. *The group of fifteen Namibians in Rostock, with the East German tutor, probably Kurt Andreas Lentzner.*
Source: DQ 4/5336, "Abschlußbericht über Aufenthalt, Ausbildungsziel, -weg und Ergebnisse sowie gesellschaftliche Tätigkeiten von 15 namibischen Bürger in der DDR, Februar 1981 bis Februar 1984," Kombinat Seeverkehr/Hafenwirtschaft VEB Seehafen Rostock, Betriebsschule 'Willi Schröder'," 29 February 1984, p. 27.

A group of fifteen Namibian men aged between twenty and thirty-six years old, coming from the SWAPO refugee camps in southern Angola, spent three years in the DDR for vocational training in maritime transport and port management. The Bundesarchiv holds the final report on the students' training, written by Kurt Andreas Lentzner, head of the pedagogic group which supervised them.[392] This report provides a broad picture of their education, training, and life in the DDR, as seen from an East German perspective.

From February to August 1981, the group of Namibians attended an intensive German language course at the Ingenieurschule für Verkehrstechnik (School of Engineering for Traffic Engineering) in Dresden, before starting the vocational training. Here, the report points out the difficulty in learning or lack of motivation during the language training on the part of some of them. Indeed, there were

[392] BArch, DQ 4/ 5336, "Abschlußbericht über Aufenthalt, Ausbildungsziel, -weg und Ergebnisse sowie gesellschaftliche Tätigkeiten von 15 namibischen Bürger in der DDR (Februar 1981 bis Februar 1984)," Kombinat Seeverkehr/Hafenwirtschaft VEB Seehafen Rostock, Betriebsschule 'Willi Schröder'," 29 February 1984. This vocational training program has also been analyzed in H. G. Schleicher, I. Schleicher, *Special flights*, pp. 198-205.

valid reasons why not everyone felt a strong motivation for learning German: since the languages used in Namibia were Afrikaans and English, *Namibia Today* was published in English, and some compatriots were at the same time receiving instruction in English in the DDR, many were disappointed not to receive instruction in English in that training program, as they were eager to improve their English skills, which were often insufficient.[393] However, the students' resistance was overcome over time, and knowledge of German gradually improved. After completing the intensive German course, the group moved to Rostock, a port city on the Baltic coast, where they began a two-and-a-half-year vocational training program to become skilled port workers. They were accommodated in a worker's hostel, where they lived together in five three-bedded rooms. While the hostel was praised by Kurt Andreas Lentzner as a perfect environment for their studies,[394] it has to be mentioned that the living conditions for the Namibians in the DDR were not always optimal. In fact, in the case of another training course addressed to Namibians and others, like Mozambicans and Cubans, the apprentices' dormitory of the company school "Albert Funk" was judged by an East German inspection to be not functional and to not meet the standard requirements.[395]

Theoretical and practical vocational training took place at the Betriebschule (company school) "Willi Schröder" of the enterprise of the Rostock seaport. Three days a week were reserved for theoretical training, and two for practical training.

Despite the initial difficulties, the trend shows a gradual improvement in the learning skills. The difficulties depended on various factors, such as the sometimes problematic adaptation to a new and cold environment, homesickness for relatives as well as the friends met in Dresden, health problems, which slowed down the apprenticeship process, and the lack of a systematic learning method, due to the poor and discontinuous education they had previously received under wartime conditions.[396] In addition, the report notices some skepticism toward white people, which is attributed to the harsh persecution experiences they had undergone as children or youth at the hands of South Africans.[397] Reporting the East German official perspective, Kurt Andreas Lentzner wrote that such difficulties were overcome by the ability of mentors and teachers to develop a long-lasting relationship of trust. The work of the East German pedagogic group was guided by a so-called Marxist-Leninist vision of

[393] *Ivi*, pp. 5-6.
[394] *Ivi*, pp. 2-3.
[395] BArch, DQ 4/ 5336, "Bericht über die Ergebnisse der planmäßigen Inspektion der Ausbildung ausländischer Praktikanten im VEB Erdöl- Erdgas Grimmen," Rat des Bezirkes Rostock, Abt. Berufsbildung und Berufsberatung, Rostock, 8 January 1986, p. 3.
[396] BArch, DQ 4/ 5336, "Abschlußbericht über Aufenthalt, Ausbildungsziel, -weg und Ergebnisse sowie gesellschaftliche Tätigkeiten von 15 namibischen Bürger in der DDR (Februar 1981 bis Februar 1984)," Kombinat Seeverkehr/Hafenwirtschaft VEB Seehafen Rostock, Betriebsschule 'Willi Schröder'," 29 February 1984, pp. 5-6.
[397] *Ivi*, p. 6.

psychology, which among other things employed a strategy of praising and recognizing "every performance effort and the smallest growth in performance in a meaningful and due manner."[398] To secure an anti-imperialist education, the East German pedagogic group, in close contact with SWAPO representation in East Berlin, made sure that the Namibian trainees were well informed about world developments, as well as about SWAPO's political program and the Namibian struggle, through Namibian and East German media, discussions, and participation in SWAPO conferences in the DDR.[399] Namibian national events celebrating SWAPO or other holidays such as Women's Day were also annually organized.

Important was also that Namibian trainees were introduced and integrated into the social and cultural life of the DDR. They were invited to visit their teachers to increase their trust relationship with them, as well as to practice their German. They were also invited to solidarity events and included in consultations between teachers and educators so that they could relate on their activities and observations. Moreover, they actively participated in cultural and sports activities, as well as "community works," voluntarily helping two farm cooperatives in their free time. They even formed a singing and dancing group named "Singe- und Tanzgruppe Vivat Namibia," which performed traditional dances and songs, as well as German songs, while also including political songs, so much so that it could be defined as an Agit-prop group.[400] Over time, they obtained increasingly public interest and performed on numerous occasions, such as during the Rostock Summer Festival in 1983, where they won an award. Visits, excursions, cultural, and sports activities, in the words of Kurt Andreas Lentzner, contributed "to awakening their cultural and sporting needs, to experiencing the possibilities of a socialist state, the DDR, and to recognizing the values of a society worthy of defense. It helped manifest their political-ideological positions."[401]

According to the report, the group of Namibian trainees was well integrated into the collective of the Betriebschule "Willi Schröder." The relationships with local apprentices were said to be good. Overall, the Namibians were evaluated as motivated, punctual, and open-minded. Disciplinary problems were found in only one case, when one of the Namibian trainees missed some classes, an event attributable to excessive alcohol consumption and lack of willpower. No mention is made of how this behavior, which was judged deplorable, was addressed by East German supervisors.

The evaluations of the training made by the Namibian trainees were also generally positive. In the words of Kurt Andreas Lentzner, the training in the DDR, including the excursions, the visits, and

[398] *Ivi*, p. 8.
[399] *Ivi*, pp. 17-18.
[400] *Ivi*, pp. 19.
[401] *Ivi*, p. 22.

the relationships with the locals, led them to the conclusion that "real socialism in the DDR is an excellent thing and, according to them, will sooner or later triumph in the whole world."[402] This optimistic assessment, as well as the whole report, is obviously to be considered partial as it provides the (often paternalistic) perspective of an East German tutor.[403]

2.2.7.8 Escaping East Germany: the story of Philemon Sheya Kaluwapa

Training to SWAPO members was provided in very different fields. Philemon Sheya Kaluwapa was trained at the company Foto DEWAG in East Berlin, where he did an internship in photo technique together with two Namibian mates and many others from different countries around the world.[404] He left Angola for East Germany as a 24 year-old man in September 1980, after having completed secondary school in Nigeria. After a six-month language course in Wernigerode, a small town in Saxony-Anhalt, Kaluwapa started his training at Foto DEWAG in East Berlin, while he was accommodated in an apartment together with a Namibian friend nicknamed "Haufiku," who was doing the same internship in photo technique. In their spare time, usually on weekends, the two of them also worked on proofreading SWAPO's official press organ *Namibia Today*: they would receive the material in English and correct it before sending it to the board to be translated into German or other languages.

The language course in Wernigerode and the training at Foto DEWAG altogether lasted two years and a half, a period that Kaluwapa recalls in positive terms. He established good relationships with East German families, as well as with foreign students, and experienced an international and culturally stimulating environment. As he said, in fact, "the cultural aspect was also included in the education. We could go to Potsdam for example. See some cities. We could go to the Opera. All those things. Music concerts. So all these cultural activities were also included. It was not boring. So lively."[405]

On the ground, he regarded German citizens as committed to solidarity and, when being chosen to speak about Namibia in schools, he found that German children were very eager to know more about southern Africa and Namibia. This confirmed that solidarity was well rooted in the East German education since the first grades.

However, from Kaluwapa's story, a more ambiguous and undisclosed side of DDR solidarity emerges, too. Firstly, he acknowledged the existence of hidden racism, masked by a well-meaning

[402] *Ivi*, p. 26
[403] Also in H. G. Schleicher, I. Schleicher, *Special flights*, p. 201, the authors note the paternalistic tone of the report.
[404] Interview with Philemon Sheya Kaluwapa, Berlin, 26 October 2022.
[405] Interview with Philemon Sheya Kaluwapa, Berlin, 26 October 2022.

rhetoric, by recounting that he was sometimes not admitted to the discotheque with the excuse that the club was full:

> That is why it [racism] is hidden. You can't really have a clear picture, what is? Racism or the place is full? They keep very nice explanations, you know. And then you don't notice that these people are racist, like in the West. In the West, it was rough, they can tell you "get *raus*," they don't want you. But there, they were diplomatic. Hidden, secretly, in a polite way, but you see that there is something wrong.[406]

This testimony highlights the less overt forms that racism took in a country where it was banned and excluded from the public debate, resulting in the explosion of xenophobic violence after the Wende. Philemon Kaluwapa's story also reveals other dark sides of East German solidarity with SWAPO, namely the DDR surveillance over the population and the negative implications resulting from the complicit DDR attitude toward the "spy drama," which SWAPO members in exile had learned about. Kalupawa recounted feeling observed by the Stasi and reported an incident in which someone broke into his and Haufiku's apartment and stole the stereo from which they listened to Western broadcasters—which was forbidden in East Germany.[407] To this day he still does not know who did it, but he suspects that the Stasi may be involved and is waiting for permission to check the Stasi files on him and find the truth. In addition to that, Kaluwapa did not feel safe to stay in East Germany after he received the notification from SWAPO to return to Angola. Being aware of the internal persecution of alleged spies, who were even being recalled from abroad to be interrogated and then detained in Lubango, he feared that being ordered to come back would mean having to face such a charge and, thus, punishment in Angola.[408] In fact, he and Haufiku had reasons to think they were in the crosshairs of SWAPO leadership, since they had complained about the workload resulting from their duties as editors of *Namibia Today*, which did not allow them to focus on their studies, and had asked to be exempted. Following this request, which could have been seen by the SWAPO leadership as disobedience, both of them were called back to Angola. In East Berlin, Kaluwapa was also the Secretary of Culture of the Namibian student organization, and he always tried to address the students' needs and make them heard by the SWAPO leadership. For this reason, he could also be regarded by SWAPO as a stubborn person with leadership ambitions.

The tensions of the political situation within SWAPO, which was persecuting its own members, were perceived even beyond the southern African region. In 1983, Kaluwapa and Haufiku decided to

[406] Interview with Philemon Sheya Kaluwapa, Berlin, 26 October 2022.
[407] Interview with Philemon Sheya Kaluwapa, Berlin, 26 October 2022.
[408] Interview with Philemon Sheya Kaluwapa, Berlin, 26 October 2022.

escape from East Germany and go to West Germany because of SWAPO's internal political situation. They crossed the border to West Berlin in order to avoid coming back to Angola. Kaluwapa acknowledged that the DDR knew about the "spy drama" and remained silent because of its close cooperation with SWAPO.[409] He also thought of going to Nigeria through Libya, but did not do so because Mu'ammar Qaddafi was also a close ally of SWAPO. Thus, he ended up in West Berlin, thinking that there he would have a better chance of escaping SWAPO persecution, but knowing that they could have reached him anywhere if they wanted to. Consulting Stasi documents would enable him to discover whether the Stasi, in cooperation with SWAPO, was actually trying to find him.

In West Berlin, Kaluwapa was one of the founding members of the AWA-Finnaba[410]—an African Writer Association that gathered exiled African artists—and was active to raise awareness about the Namibian cause, as well as about African history. In 1984, the Association organized a cultural event at the Hebbel Theatre on the occasion of the centenary of the Berlin Conference, which marked the beginning of the scramble for Africa. After the reunification of Germany, Kaluwapa remained in Berlin, where he also co-founded the Lukopane-Namibia Culture Association, a non-profit organization that aims to contribute to the achievements of Namibia's national development plans through a Namibian-German network.[411] Together with the visual artist and filmmaker Laura Horelli, he has recently developed a film titled *Philemon's Photographs or Through an African Lens*, where he speaks of the photo techniques learned in the DDR and recounts about his diaspora experience during the Cold War and his decision to flee to West Berlin.[412]

Kaluwapa's story is significant to this thesis in that it brings out the implications that DDR-SWAPO solidarity had on the lives of Namibians who studied in East Germany and it allows to grasp the silence of DDR in dealing with SWAPO's human rights violation. Staying in the DDR for Kaluwapa would have meant risking being punished by SWAPO in Angola for his demands, which could be regarded as acts of disobedience and, therefore, raise suspicion that he was a spy. It is uncertain what would have happened had he stayed and gone to Angola, and research at the Stasi Archive would probably shed light on any Stasi involvement in the matter. It can however be stated that he did not feel secure by staying in East Germany, and decided to escape to the Western side to avoid an eventual unjust incarceration by SWAPO. Ultimately, his story is an example of how the close cooperation

[409] Interview with Philemon Sheya Kaluwapa, Berlin, 26 October 2022.
[410] As explained by Kaluwapa, Finnaba is an African bird. When it is flying, its head always looks behind (Interview with Philemon Sheya Kaluwapa, Berlin, 26 October 2022).
[411] Interview with Philemon Sheya Kaluwapa, Berlin, 26 October 2022.
[412] Laura Horelli, Philemon Sheya Kaluwapa, *Philemon's Photographs or Through an African Lens*, 2022. See information on the exhibition *Philemon's Photographs or Through an African Lens,* Photographic Gallery Hippolyte, Helsinki, 2022, in https://hippolyte.fi/en/nayttely/laura-horelli-philemon-sheya-kaluwapa/ (accessed on 7 December 2022).

between SWAPO and DDR prevented the latter from protecting Namibians from any unfair treatment by the former.

2.2.8 Medical assistance in the DDR

2.2.8.1 A clinic for Namibian wounded: the Jacob Morenga ward

In addition to dispatching medical cadres on site and delivering medicines and medical equipment to SWAPO refugee camps, the DDR provided support to SWAPO in the health sector within the DDR itself. Increasingly from the mid-1970s, it admitted hundreds of Namibians for medical treatment. Many institutions helped provide solidarity in this area, especially the Solidarity Committee, which mediated the hospitalization of most of the patients and financed transportation, accommodation, and medical care through donations from the population.[413] To a lesser extent, also the Ministry of Health, the Central Committee of SED, and the FDGB organized the admission of Namibian patients in the DDR.[414] Furthermore, other associations and organizations contributed to support them financially and morally through social events and excursions.[415]

During the years, members of the SWAPO leadership, among which Sam Nujoma himself, came to DDR hospitals and health centers, especially the Government Hospital in Berlin, for medical examinations and treatments. Furthermore, also wounded civilians from refugee camps and PLAN fighters who could not receive adequate medical care on site were sent to DDR clinics to be treated. The DDR doctors in Angola selected the most seriously wounded to be transferred to the DDR for a more advanced and longer treatment. Coordination between the DDR doctors in Angola and those in the DDR gradually improved over time, although at the beginning the selection was quite chaotic.[416] The first Namibian patients arrived in the DDR hospitals of Bad Düben, Schwedt, and Rostock.[417] DDR medical assistance significantly increased after the Cassinga massacre, which killed and wounded hundreds of civilians. After that, in the summer of 1978, a ward was opened in the second geriatrics clinic in the Berlin-Buch Hospital. It was first identified as ward 306B and then as 303A, also called "SWAPO Station" or "Solidaritätstation" (solidarity ward), renamed "Jacob Morenga ward" in 1988 in honor of a leader of the anti-colonial Herero-Nama resistance against German colonialism.[418] In the beginning, the clinic only received Namibian patients. As Doctor Christian

[413] Interview Hans-Georg and Ilona Schleicher with Dr. Christian Zippel, Berlin, 13 March 1996 (in NAN, AACRLS.177, Buch Collection).
[414] *Ibidem*.
[415] H. G. Schleicher, I. Schleicher, *Special flights*, p. 196.
[416] Interview Hans-Georg and Ilona Schleicher with Dr. Erich Kwiatkowski, Berlin, 18 February 1996 (in NAN, AACRLS.177, Buch Collection).
[417] *Ibidem*.
[418] Interview Hans-Georg and Ilona Schleicher with Dr. Christian Zippel, Berlin, 13 March 1996.

Zippel said, more than two hundred Namibians were treated here, possibly also three hundred.[419] At a later time, they started to accept also patients from other liberation movements, such as ZAPU, ANC, and the Palestine Liberation Organization, and independent countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Europe, up to a total of eight hundred patients from 33 countries,[420] so that the Buch Hospital gained more and more international reputation. Solidarity work at Berlin-Buch received extensive media coverage in the DDR, with the publication of many newspaper articles reporting the stories of Namibian patients and soliciting further donations, and even the shooting of a documentary film.[421]

Seriously wounded Namibians arrived at the Jacob Morenga station, where they underwent surgical procedures, physiotherapy, and rehabilitation until full recovery, in order to regain autonomy in their everyday activities. In some cases, after medical treatment, some patients were given the chance to stay in the DDR for education and training, so that they could integrate within the work environment once back home. As many had physical disabilities, it was not always possible to train them in fields that required much manual work, but training in the DDR allowed them to acquire some skills and techniques that made them feel socially useful once back home.[422] Following their medical treatment, for example, Nyati Angula was trained as a medical laboratory assistant in Bad Berka and Berlin-Buch, and Monika Shikwambe was employed as a kindergarten teacher in Bellin and Staßfurt.[423] In the ward itself, some basic education was imparted by the few literate Namibian patients, for example, Reverend Hellao Jambeulu Hellao, a former evangelical Lutheran pastor. He was wounded in his left arm during the bombing of the Cassinga camp, where he lost his wife and one daughter. As one of the very few educated Namibian men in Berlin-Buch, and with knowledge of the German language, he facilitated the communication between Namibian patients and medical personnel and taught Namibian patients to read and write, as well as the rudiments of geography and political history.[424] After his recovery, he went to Leipzig to study international law. In 1985, he came back to Angola, where he was unjustly accused of espionage on behalf of South Africa and was arrested by SWAPO security services.[425]

The East German Doctor Erich Kwiatkowski was the director of the solidarity ward since its inception. He was called "Doctor Jesus" by his Namibian patients—which well exemplifies the gratitude and affection Namibians felt for him. Relationships with East German doctors and nurses,

[419] *Ibidem*.
[420] *Ibidem*.
[421] For the articles and the film agreement see NAN, AACRLS.177, Buch Collection.
[422] Interview Hans-Georg and Ilona Schleicher with Dr. Erich Kwiatkowski, Berlin, 18 February 1996.
[423] Christian Zippel, "Wiedersehen in Namibia," in *Wochenpost*, 1990 (in NAN, AACRLS.177, Buch Collection).
[424] Erich Kwiatkowski, "Mein Patient, mein Freund Hellao," in *NBI*, 13/1979 (in NAN, AACRLS.177, Buch Collection).
[425] Zippel, "Wiedersehen in Namibia," in *Wochenpost*, 1990.

in fact, were very friendly and close, to the point that invitations to visit them at their house were usual. Moreover, the patients who had a certain autonomy also participated actively in social activities of the DDR. The climate in the ward was based on friendship and comradeship. No racist or negative attitudes were detected within the hospital but, as Doctor Zippel said, "certainly in the neighborhood here and there."[426] The friendly environment and close relations with the East German medical staff are also testified by the letters Namibian patients wrote after their discharge, in which they updated the doctors on their training and health condition, and possibly asked for further assistance, regarding for instance the shipping of certain medications.[427]

Some members of the population also visited the ward and offered to help by taking Namibian patients home temporarily.[428] The story of Stefanie Lahya Aukongo, who, as we shall see, was an exception in the DDR medical solidarity, recounts the physical and psychological consequences of the Cassinga drama and reports an example of grassroots solidarity by an East German family.

2.2.8.2 "How the DDR saved my life": the story of Stefanie Lahya Aukongo

Stefanie Lahya Aukongo's story is relevant for this thesis as it provides the perspective of a woman of Namibian origin who experienced East German solidarity in an exceptional way that had not been envisioned by the DDR state solidarity. Her autobiography, *Kalungas Kind: Meine unglaubliche Reise ins Leben*,[429] as well as the interview I had with her, allow us to look at DDR solidarity from the perspective of an indirect victim of Cassinga who was treated in East Berlin, adopted by an East German family, and then continued to live in Germany after its reunification, eventually realizing the decline of solidarity among the German population.

Her mother Clementine Aukongo, a pregnant seventeen-year-old girl, was among the first twenty Cassinga's wounded who arrived in the DDR. Seriously injured in her hip, she was immediately operated on at the Berlin-Buch Hospital. Four months after the massacre, on 13 September 1978, she gave birth to her daughter, who she named Stefanie after a German nurse. Had a son been born—Stefanie Aukongo writes in her autobiography—Clementine would have named him Erich after Doctor Erich Kwiatkowski: "Today I have to laugh about it if I imagine it: Erich Aukongo. Then I would probably have to explain that I was born in the DDR, but that I do not owe my name to Erich Honecker. But to a man who was 'Doctor Jesus' for everyone."[430] The birth of a Namibian child in

[426] Interview Hans-Georg and Ilona Schleicher with Dr. Christian Zippel, Berlin, 13 March 1996.
[427] See the correspondence held in NAN, AACRLS.177, Buch Collection.
[428] Interview Hans-Georg and Ilona Schleicher with Dr. Christian Zippel, Berlin, 13 March 1996.
[429] Stefanie Lahya Aukongo, *Kalungas Kind: Meine unglaubliche Reise ins Leben*, brainstorm-berlin, 2014 [first ed. 2009].
[430] *Ivi*, p. 14.

East Berlin contributed to strengthening the DDR's propaganda apparatus and depicting an image of a DDR sympathetic to Third World peoples. That year, the issue 15 of the DDR women's magazine *Für Dich* featured a photo of Clementine and Stefanie on its cover, which read: "Birthplace: Berlin. Stefanie in her mother's arms, removed from the motherland, Namibia" (see Figure 11).

Figure 11. *Cover of the East German magazine Für Dich, 15/1979.*
Source: NAN, AACRLS 177, Buch Collection.

Also Sam Nujoma paid a visit to Clementine at the hospital in Berlin-Buch (see Figure 12).

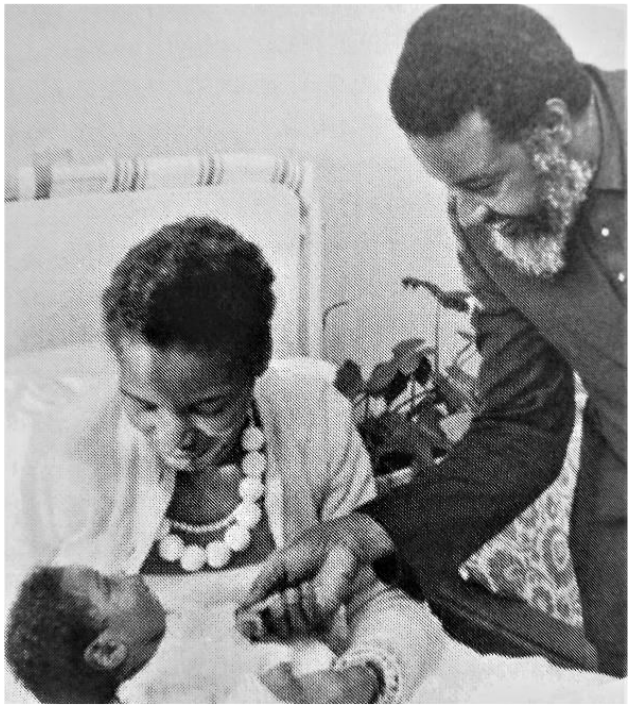

Figure 12. *Sam Nujoma's visit to Clementine and Stefanie Aukongo at the Buch Hospital solidarity ward.*
Source: Aukongo, *Kalungas Kind,* p. 24.

After Stefanie's birth, Clementine, still badly injured in her hip and further weakened by childbirth, remained hospitalized pending further operations. Petra Schmieder, a young girl who worked as a nurse's aide, convinced her family to take care of little Stefanie until her return to Africa with her mother. As Stefanie comments: "Solidarity was such a value in the GDR. When Rudi Schmieder heard his daughter talking about a little girl staying in the infant ward without her mother, solidarity was not just a word to him, but something that had to be put into practice."[431]

Pediatricians soon noticed that something was wrong with Stefanie's motor system. Because of her mother's injuries, the child had been born with spastic cerebral hemiparesis, a partial paralysis that involved her right eye muscles and the left half of her body. As an adult, Stefanie investigated the causes of her hemiparesis by appealing to the doctors who treated her and her mother in the DDR: Dr. Kwiatkowski and Dr. Zippel.[432] The causes were attributable to the type of weapons used by the South Africans in Cassinga, a type of ammunition that exploded on impact, releasing small darts that would spread throughout the victim's body. These tiny darts, undetectable on X-rays, had damaged some areas of Stefanie's brain. Stefanie also discovered that her mother refused the option of abortion, recommended by East German doctors because of her critical health.

Despite Stefanie's condition, the Schmieder family agreed to welcome her, thus embodying a great example of socialist solidarity. Although it was not usual for Namibian children to be taken into German families, given the special conditions of her case, an exception was allowed. As soon as her mother recovered, however, they both would have to return to Africa, since, as Stefanie explains, "The patients of the solidarity ward were only allowed to stay in the GDR until they had recovered. After that, they had to return home. This was an iron rule that had to be valid, regardless of whether the civil war was still raging in the African homeland or not."[433]

[431] *Ivi*, p. 18.
[432] *Ivi*, pp. 227-232.
[433] *Ivi*, p. 19.

Stefanie spent the first year of her life surrounded by the love of her step-family. Born under critical circumstances, she found herself with "four mothers": Clementine Aukongo, her birth mother, Waltraud Schmieder, the official step-mother, who Stefanie called "Omi" (grandmother), and her two daughters, Petra, a nurse's aide and medical student, and Ines, who worked as a hostess for Interflug. Her step-father Rudy Schmieder, called "Omi" (grandfather), was the coach of the national ice-skating team, and thus held a respected position in the DDR. In her autobiography, Stefanie tells how the Schmieders supported her, helping her physical development with physiotherapy exercises and encouraging her to never give up. Stefanie was a quiet and peaceful child. There were times, however, during the night, when she would often scream in terror, worrying the family, which initially could not understand what was that afflicted her. Stefanie reveals that she has suffered from nightmares reminiscent of the Cassinga massacre since she was a child. "Already in the womb, I witnessed what happened to my mother"—Stefanie says— "She unconsciously transferred her fear and pain to me."[434] Her mother's trauma, which is also her own trauma, runs throughout the narrative of her autobiography.

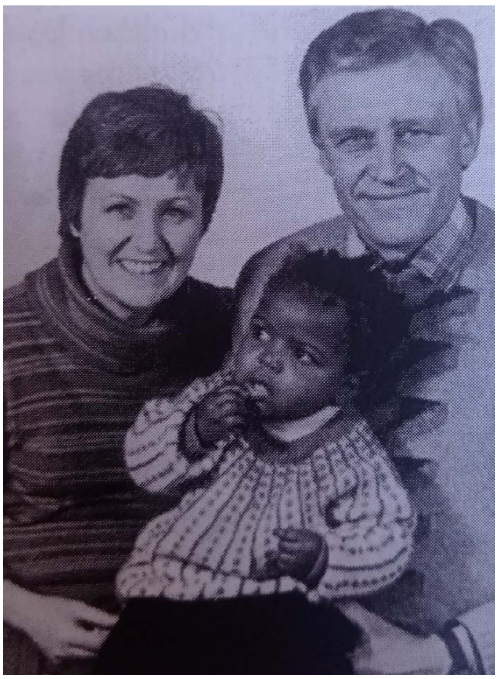

Figure 13. *Stefanie with Waltraud and Rudy Schmieder.*
Source: Aukongo, *Kalungas Kind*, p. 40.

After about a year, the Solidarity Committee ordered the return of Clementine and Stefanie to Angola. Although they knew that Stefanie would only be with them for a short time, the Schmieders, and Clementine Aukongo herself, opposed this decision, believing that Stefanie's condition was still not good enough for her to survive in a refugee camp in Angola. Despite their efforts, Stefanie had to leave the DDR in early 1980:

> The sad situation was considered from its objective side: the state had saved my life, but from the beginning it was clearly stated that help for me would be temporarily limited. But my foster family had done more than fulfill its mission—it loved me. Its humanity seemed to have failed because of the rules of the GDR state.[435]

Once they learned of the presence of Namibian children in Bellin and the deterioration of Stefanie's health in Angola, the Schmieders did everything they could to bring her back to Germany. Rudi

[434] *Ivi*, p. 28.
[435] *Ivi*, p. 40.

Schmieder regularly sent letters to the Luanda offices, the Solidarity Committee, and even Sam Nujoma himself, appealing to the solidarity between the two countries to urge Stefanie's return to the DDR. Ines, working as a hostess for Inteflug, had the opportunity to see Stefanie in Angola and realized that her life was in danger in the refugee camp. She also asked for help to Margot Honecker, who was involved in the DDR-Kinder program.

After almost a year, Stefanie was finally allowed to return to the DDR. However, her stay in East Germany remained a temporary solution. Stefanie returned as a dramatic case for treatment: she suffered from a worm infestation due to malnutrition, bore scars on her arms, was deaf in one ear due to an eardrum burst, and the muscles in her left leg were extremely weak. The misalignment of her right eye had also worsened. Stefanie comments: "I was probably a unique construction site! [...] If solidarity had been employed not only as a political means, but also as act of humanity, all the loved ones, who in the following years sacrificed themselves for me, would have been spared a great deal of work."[436]

Slowly, after months in the hospital, Stefanie regained her strength and returned to the Schmieders' home. The Ministry of Education had stated that at some point Stefanie would have to grow up with Namibian children in Bellin to keep the connection with her home country alive, but then she was deemed unfit to be part of the future elite because of her disabilities. This confirmed that the selection was made following the DDR directive to send only healthy children. In order to keep the contacts with Africa alive, she was to spend only short vacation periods with the DDR-Kinder. About this situation, she writes:

> Of the 430 Namibian children living in Bellin and Staßfurt between 1979 and 1989, not one of them was disabled. Which is surprising when you realize that the war, particularly the Cassinga massacre, maimed many children. SWAPO sent exclusively boys and girls to the DDR, who, later, as they said, were to form the elite of a Namibia liberated from the South Africans. A frightened and disabled girl with a slightly paralyzed hand and many other problems did not seem at all suitable for the liberation movement. My inadequacies deceived the official plan of integration with SWAPO children. I was sent home.[437]

Stefanie spent her childhood in the protection and love of her family, struggling with the small daily challenges of school. Despite the everyday difficulties, her childhood passed in accordance with the

[436] *Ivi*, p. 62.
[437] *Ivi*, pp. 73-74.

life of all the East German children in the DDR, with the exception that instead of learning Russian, she had to learn English.

In the winter of 1988, Clementine Aukongo spent time in the DDR to take a training course. This was the first time Stefanie got to know her birth mother better, just to realize the coldness and estrangement of their relationship.

When 1989 arrived, Stefanie learned about what was happening in Germany from television. In *Kalungas Kind*, Stefanie Lahya Aukongo, who was ten years old at the time, recounts the episode when she and Jenny, Ines' daughter, whom Stefanie called "sister," mourned Honecker's resignation:

> Jenny and I were completely shocked. That was "our Erich!," who belonged to the GDR as the closet belonged to our living room. Very few people probably shed a tear for Erich Honecker, but the two of us shed more than one! Jenny immediately drew a picture, on which the eight-year-old girl, wrote, "Erich, we love you, you can't leave."[438]

The irony of the scene of two little girls raised in the DDR mourning Honecker's resignation was soon succeeded by a new fear: the Schmieders soon realized that the political changes that would lead to the dissolution of the DDR could prove dangerous for Stefanie, who began to wonder worriedly: "what was to become of a little girl like me if there was no longer the system that had tacitly tolerated me?"[439] Moreover, Namibian independence made Stefanie's homecoming an increasingly real scenario—a scenario that unsettled Stefanie, who had become accustomed to living in the serene atmosphere of her German home. Eventually, because Stefanie expressed the desire to stay in Germany and because Clementine Aukongo did not claim her return, the Schmieders decided that she would stay at least as long as it was necessary to finish her studies. Panduleni, the contact the family had at SWAPO and Clementine Aukongo's half-sister, agreed to this decision. Stefanie was thus allowed to stay in Germany, but for an undefined period of time: she would have to renew her residence permit regularly, facing the possibility of having to return to Namibia, until she finally got her passport.

As a teenager and, later, as an adult, Stefanie continued to live in Berlin, occasionally going to Namibia, searching for answers that could shed light on her and her family's history, and that could help her find her own identity. Her autobiography is a journey of self-discovery, in which the author seeks to make sense of her history and find a sense of belonging. As a teenager, she wrote in her diary: "I am neither German nor Namibian. I am so torn between the two. I do not belong to the

[438] *Ivi*, p. 99.
[439] *Ivi*, p. 100.

people here and to Africa even less."[440] If at one point she regretfully described herself as "black on the outside and white on the inside,"[441] she gradually became able to positively turn that inner laceration and proudly note that she belonged to two cultures that were not mutually exclusive: "Their beliefs and convictions, as well as mine, were both valid. We did not exist side by side, but together. This was the answer to all my questions,"[442] Stefanie writes referring to the Ovambo culture.

In East Germany, she grew up with a white and stereotypical image of Africa, which she combined with her own experience of violence, fear, and trauma.[443] Having internalized racist pictures of Africa, her first encounter with Namibia and Ovamboland at fourteen years old was a challenge.[444] However, over the years and with other travels to Namibia, she gradually started to understand and love her birth culture. In Namibia, she meet her *meekelu* (grandmother in Oshivambo)—who brought her closer to faith in Kalunga, the god of the Ovambos—her family, and her roots. She found her middle name, Lahya, the name of her father's sister, the woman after whom her father would have liked to call her. Stefanie saw in that name a key piece in reconstructing her history, her past, and her identity. The difficult relationship with her mother, who is described as a cold and distant figure, almost as an embodiment of what Namibia represented for her at the beginning, is often mentioned throughout the autobiography. In Namibia, she met her father, Erasmus Nhinda, and became aware of his story.[445] On 4 May 1978, he was in "Vietnam," the Namibian camp in Angola that was also attacked by South Africans that same day, where he was captured by the South Africans and imprisoned in a detention camp for six years, sentenced to torture and hard labor, with no news of Clementine and Stefanie. Clementine, who previously was also staying in the "Vietnam" camp with him, had been transferred to Cassinga because it was deemed to be safer for pregnant women. The war had separated them and caused them physical and psychological trauma.

Looking into her own story, Stefanie came to learn about the history of Namibia—a history that the Western narrative had confined at the margins, and of which her father, mother, and herself had been the victims. In opposition to all forms of oppression, Stefanie found in writing and art her way to bring to the surface a shelved memory, the memory of ordinary people who were victims of colonialism and oppression.[446] She currently resides in Berlin, where she is an artist active in the fight against racism and discrimination, bringing messages of intersectional feminism and body positivity. Through autobiographical writing, poetry, photography, theater, and song, she expresses her polemic

[440] *Ivi*, p. 152.
[441] *Ivi*, p. 159.
[442] *Ivi*, p. 224.
[443] Interview with Stefanie Lahya Aukongo, Berlin, 14 January 2019.
[444] Aukongo, *Kalungas Kind*, ch. 14-16; Interview with Stefanie Lahya Aukongo, Berlin, 14 January 2019.
[445] Aukongo, *Kalungas Kind*, pp. 233-239.
[446] Interview with Stefanie Lahya Aukongo, Berlin, 14 January 2019.

against all systems of discrimination and oppression and offers an alternative subaltern vision to the dominant Western narrative.

Her story reports an exceptional case in the history of solidarity between SWAPO and the DDR. The DDR state solidarity provided the medical care that saved her and her mother's life. Solidarity from below then enabled her to continue living a childhood away from the war, in an environment where appropriate care made it possible for her health condition to improve. She grew up in a family particularly devoted to the DDR and the principles of solidarity, a family that worked to overcome the shortcomings of state solidarity and enable the child's return and adoption. Rudi Schmieder's statement in a 1999 interview encapsulates the value that characterized the former DDR: "we belong to a generation for whom yes means yes, with all the associated consequences."[447] Regarding this sentence, Stefanie comments: "I think it is a beautiful description of a solidarity that has nothing to do with politics but only with humanity. Without politics, however, the relief effort for me could never have been realized. Because the official responsibility for me lay with the DDR Solidarity Committee and SWAPO."[448]

For Stefanie, solidarity, both personal and political, is what saved her life. The title under which the first edition was published further underscores her gratitude to the DDR: *Kalungas Kind: Wie die DDR mein Leben rettete* (Kalungas Kind: How the GDR saved my life). In this context, it was natural for her to love the state that saved her: "I took to heart the 'Ten Commandments of the Young Pioneers'—the first three said: 'We Young Pioneers love our German Democratic Republic. We Young Pioneers love our parents. We Young Pioneers love peace.' I owed my parents and the GDR a happy life, it was easy to love them."[449] As an adult with radical black awareness of racism and white supremacy, however, she rejected the narrative of the "white savior" that was in some way underlying DDR solidarity.[450]

While being raised in that specific white society had given her a distorted idea of her African country, in parallel, the socialist and anti-fascist environment of the DDR, with its struggle against oppression and capitalism, allowed Stefanie to grow up surrounded by solidarity. Growing in solidarity would lead her to think that the whole world worked that way. However, the contradictions of a system in which racist stereotypes coexisted with a type of institutionalized solidarity emerged as the DDR anti-racism dissolved together with the dissolution of the state. Starting in the 1990s, more and more news of racist incidents, ambushes against foreigners, and burning dormitories were heard. The sudden

[447] Aukongo, *Kalungas Kind*, p. 21.
[448] *Ibidem*.
[449] *Ivi*, p. 86.
[450] Interview with Stefanie Lahya Aukongo, Berlin, 14 January 2019.

change shocked Stefanie, who, although had already noticed a certain attitude toward her on the part of the whites, had never known racism before and could not understand why there was such an explosion of violence: "We had never talked about racism, I think we didn't even know that word. I myself had never been mobbed. Snide looks, little contact with the others—that yes. But no open hostility."[451] Racism in the DDR had never manifested itself directly. Racist violence in the DDR did not act explicitly: racist sentiments were silenced as not conforming to the state's ideology: "'Maybe there were people in the GDR who were xenophobic,' my friend Synke guesses. 'But they didn't dare to openly show it. We were raised to be in solidarity'."[452]

Stefanie herself was a victim of racist violence, especially when she had to take the bus to the university. In the total indifference of the passengers, she was repeatedly insulted, mistreated, and jostled. Since then, Stefanie writes, "I have never used public transportation again. What is the real problem has not been solved. Because I wonder, what went wrong after the 'Wende': the GDR had brought me to Germany before I was born. Solidarity had been such an important concept. Why don't people know it anymore?"[453]

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the solidarity politics implemented by the DDR to support SWAPO and its struggle for independence. While during the early stages of the struggle skepticism characterized the DDR attitude toward SWAPO, which was considered politically immature and ambiguous in its positioning within Cold War alignments, a strong relationship of cooperation emerged in the second half of the 1970s, after SWAPO embraced socialism in its political program and gained more and more international recognition at the expense of SWANU. Especially starting from Nujoma's visit to the DDR in 1977 and the signing of the cooperation agreement between SED and SWAPO, the DDR became one of the main supporters of SWAPO, launching several solidarity programs in various fields, especially in the educational one.

Based on the analysis conducted in this chapter, I argue that the DDR solidarity with SWAPO was a field where political and ideological rationales prevailed until the end of the 1980s. It has been pointed out that, especially after the swift in the international balance in favor of socialism in the second half of the 1970s, the DDR supported young states intending to further push back the imperialistic forces and strengthen word socialism by influencing the receiving countries. For example, aid was granted

[451] Aukongo, *Kalungas Kind*, p. 109.
[452] *Ivi*, p. 110.
[453] *Ivi*, pp. 184-185.

to Somalia as long as it pursued a socialist-oriented development path.[454] During the 1980s, despite widespread disillusionment following the decline of socialism in Angola and Mozambique and the adoption of a policy of peace in foreign policy, the political-ideological component remained a preponderant element of DDR solidarity in its relationship with SWAPO. This was especially true in the context of the DDR's support for building an education system for an independent Namibia. By dispatching teachers and educational advisors to SWAPO refugee camps and by granting scholarships to SWAPO members for schooling, education, and training in the DDR, East Germany aimed also to politically influence Namibians and to steer future Namibia toward socialism. Political and ideological education was, in fact, a significant part of all the DDR educational programs, from those aimed at children to those aimed at adults. These flourished in particular during the 1980s, despite the gradual abandonment of the project of socialist expansion by the Soviet bloc. Economic interests were also present in the DDR foreign policy during the 1980s, as it is demonstrated by the attempts to plan cooperation with future independent Namibia in the economic and technical sectors. However, the scale of the DDR aid to SWAPO might unveil the existence of deep-rooted faith in the revolutionary world process. Solidarity was thus the tool to support the Namibian liberation struggle as part of this revolutionary process while helping to improve the image of the DDR both at home and abroad. The DDR strongly supported SWAPO until the end believing in the right cause of the anti-apartheid struggle as part of the international class struggle that united working classes, postcolonial countries, and national liberation movements. As part of its solidarity politics with SWAPO, the DDR combined its policy of peace, which it had embraced during the 1980s, with the persisting insistence on anti-imperialist class struggle and socialist paths of development. It supported the negotiating process that led to a political solution for the independence of Namibia while continuing to seek to influence SWAPO in a socialist way. It paternalistically imparted the teachings of socialism based on its own lived experiences and its own Marxist-Leninist reading of the world, demonstrating its narrowness in failing to consider other initial conditions and possible paths.

How this goal was perceived and received by Namibians on the ground is difficult to establish without consulting the SWAPO Archive and collecting a greater number of interviews. As it emerged from the documents collected at the Bundesarchiv, at that time the SWAPO's leadership seemed eager to build socialism after independence. Probably, it believed in socialism as a valid alternative to the colonial, capitalist, and neocolonial system, as an ideology that predicated social justice, equality, and national and economic freedom. SWAPO then accepted and even requested political education

[454] SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/100711, "Information über die Unterstützung der DDR für die nationalbefreiten Staaten des afro-asiatischen und lateinamerikanischen Raums auf den Gebieten der Entsendung von Beratern und Experten in diese Länder sowie der Aus- und Weiterbildung von Kadern aus diesen Ländern in der DDR," p. 2.

for its members in order to secure a growing assistance from its East German ally while providing some kind of training to its cadres. However, socialist education seems not to have taken root so much. As Obed Emvula stressed in an interview with Toni Weis, SWAPO remained autonomous from its hosts: "[W]e cannot blame the foreign countries in which we lived that they had brainwashed us. [...] We are not just things, like bottles and glasses to be poured in – we are people who can choose what we want."[455] From the interviews I conducted with some Namibians who studied in the DDR, it emerges how, although they acknowledge the presence of political education, they nevertheless seem to downplay it, saying that it was normal to have it because it was part of the DDR's educational program and because SWAPO had close relations with East Germany. Nevertheless, it seems that this kind of education had no particular influence on them. Studying in the DDR placed them in a context of solidarity, where the righteousness of their struggle was recognized and supported. Some were probably genuinely convinced that socialism was the right path for independent Namibia, but they also thought that to abandon it after the changes in the international balance following the end of the Cold War was the right choice.

On the ground, the experiences of Namibians in the DDR were mostly positive, because of the widespread sentiments of solidarity among the population and the accomplishments they achieved through education. As it has been pointed out, however, DDR state solidarity failed to create normal conditions for personal solidarity and to openly address the problem of racism, which broke out at the end of the 1980s and increasingly during the 1990s. Moreover, it remained silent in the face of SWAPO's human rights violation or possibly was even complicit by training SWAPO cadres in counterintelligence and not securing protection from SWAPO for Namibians in the DDR.

[455] Weis, "The Politics Machine," p. 362.

Chapter 3
Shared genealogy, common struggle: Cuba and the independence of Namibia

Introduction

Within the panorama of the socialist solidarity regime, Cuba launched a type of cooperation with the Third World that predicated mutual aid and non-interference. It did so by virtue of its colonial past, which forced the island to centuries of exploitation and suffering, and of its revolutionary fervor, which in 1959 succeeded in ending the dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista and US influence. In this way, Cuba was able to differentiate its solidarity from that of the Warsaw Pact countries and to portray itself as the legitimate ally of the movements and countries struggling against colonialism, neocolonialism, imperialism, and racism. At the same time, though, it remained embroiled in Cold War dynamics when its relationship with the Soviet Union jeopardized its non-alignment. Nevertheless, Cuba's foreign policy always maintained a certain degree of autonomy, pursuing its own idea of solidarity and often forcing the Soviet Union to intervene when it would have rather not do it. On the strength of its revolutionary experience, Cuba was eager to see Latin American, Asian, and African countries free from external domination and dictatorial regimes and, especially during the 1960s, worked to foment revolutions modeled after the Cuban one. Even after the abandonment of this more pronounced adventurist line, it remained faithful to the world revolutionary cause, understood as the fight against inequalities between the North and the South, despite clashing at times with the implications given by its membership in the socialist bloc. Cuba's solidarity politics during the Cold War was shaped by the figure of the Líder Máximo Fidel Castro, who led Cuba as Prime Minister from 1959 to 1976 and President of the Council of State and the Council of Ministers from 1976 to 2008. With his strong charisma, he launched the principle of proletarian internationalism and fraternal aid—a principle that was included in the 1976 Constitution and that is maintained in the present Cuban Constitution[1]—and dictated Cuba's foreign policy for a long period, building the narrative of a natural solidarity with Africa on the basis of Cuba's history of slavery. In 1975, he decided to intervene in Angola against the invasion of the South African regime, starting its struggle against apartheid and for the independence of Namibia, for which Cuba worked strenuously by providing various types of support to SWAPO, as this chapter shall analyze.

[1] See the Preamble in 1976 Cuba's Constitution with Amendments through 2002 in https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Cuba_2002.pdf (accessed on 20 January 2023) and 2019 Cuba's Constitution in https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Cuba_2019.pdf (accessed on 20 January 2023).

The literature on Cuba's policy toward Africa and the Third World suffers from the non-accessibility to the documents of the Cuban Archives for the post-1959 period. Nevertheless, in the 1980s, a time of massive Cuban involvement in the African continent, various studies on Cuban foreign policy started to flourish. The first notable attempts to delve into the subject came from the University of Pittsburgh Center for Latin American Studies, which published *Cuba in the World*, edited by Cole Blasier and Carmelo Mesa-Lago.[2] This collective volume offers an overview of the political and economic role of Cuba in world affairs, analyzing some aspects of Cuba's international relationships and concluding by rejecting the thesis of Cuba as a Soviet puppet. This latter aspect is indeed discussed and acknowledged to varying degrees by international scholars. Independence from the Soviet Union in Cuban foreign policy is ascertained, while the influence played by the Soviet patron is in some cases recognized. For example, in *Cuba in Africa*, edited by Carmelo Mesa-Lago and June Belkin, also published by the University of Pittsburgh, most of the authors argue that the Cuban involvement in Ethiopia was in some way dictated by Soviet interests.[3] The volume, together with others like those written by Latin American Studies scholars such as William LeoGrande and Wolf Grabendorff, provides significant insights into the relationship between Cuba and Africa.[4] The three books, all published between the late 1970s and early 1980s, shed light on the relationship between Cuba and the Soviet Union, the objectives and the driving forces behind Cuba's policy toward Africa, and the implications of such intervention. A special focus on Cuban internationalism in sub-Saharan Africa is provided in the volume edited by Sergio Díaz-Briquets, which—published shortly after the signing of the New York agreements—analyzes political, military, and civilian aspects of the Cuban involvement, as well as its domestic and international ramifications.[5]

With his book *Cuba's International Relations*, Michael Erisman has also contributed to the studies on Cuba's foreign policy and international relationships, pointing out its motivations, particularly the neglected dimension of nationalism, and always analyzing the matter in the background of its relationship with the Soviet Union and the United States and its role within the Third World.[6] In another of his works, Erisman underlines the importance of counterdependency considerations within Cuban foreign policy, namely Cuba's efforts to reduce its vulnerability to external control, which

[2] Cole Blasier, Carmelo Mesa-Lago (eds.), *Cuba in the World*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1979.
[3] Carmelo Mesa-Lago, June S. Belkin (eds.), *Cuba in Africa*, Pittsburgh: Center for Latin American Studies, University Center for International Studies, University of Pittsburgh, 1982.
[4] William M. LeoGrande, *Cuba's Policy in Africa, 1959–1980,* Berkeley: Institute of International Studies, University of California, 1980; Wolf Grabendorff, *Kubas Engagement in Afrika*, Ebenhausen: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, 1978.
[5] Sergio Díaz-Briquets (ed.), *Cuban Internationalism in Sub-Saharan Africa*, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1989.
[6] H. Michael Erisman, *Cuba's International Relations: The Anatomy of a Nationalistic Foreign Policy*, New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2018 [first ed. 1985].

could come from the US as well as the Soviet Union.[7] Cuba secured protection from US hostility through the CMEA membership, while enhancing its position vis-à-vis the Soviet Union by trying to assert its leadership within the Third World—pursuing what Erisman calls "Cold War dual tracking" policy, which has been highlighted also by Grabendorff.[8]

Volumes and articles on specific aspects of Cuban solidarity, such as the military and the civilian, will be referenced throughout the chapter. Here, it suffices to mention that several contributions have been published on the massive medical cooperation that Cuba delivered and continues to deliver around the world[9] and on the broad program of educational solidarity that Cuba developed both at home, especially in the Isla de la Juventud, and abroad.[10]

Because of the broad and prolonged support to the MPLA provided by Cuba, whose civilian and military personnel remained in Angola from 1975 to 1991, the Cuban involvement in Angola has been the subject of several contributions. In addition to being examined by most of the abovementioned works, it has been the focus of the research conducted by German historian Christine Hatzky, who has analyzed the civilian cooperation between Cuba and MPLA and, in particular, the role played by the thousands of Cuban cooperants who worked in the educational field in Angola.[11] Relying on archives and on a great number of interviews, Hatzky investigates the grassroots level of educational cooperation and the implications of the everyday encounters between Cubans and Angolans.

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[7] H. Michael Erisman, *Cuba's Foreign Relations in a Post-Soviet World*, Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000.

[8] Erisman, *Cuba's Foreign Relations in a Post-Soviet World*, pp. 79-82; Wolf Grabendorff, "Cuba's Involvement in Africa: An Interpretation of Objectives, Reactions, and Limitations," in *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, Vol. 22, No. 1, 1980, p. 24.

[9] See, for example, John M. Kirk, *Healthcare without Borders: Understanding Cuban Medical Internationalism*, Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2015; John M. Kirk, H. Michael Erisman, *Cuban Medical Internationalism: Origins, Evolution, and Goals*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009; Don Fitz, *Cuban Health Care: The Ongoing Revolution*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 2020; Julie Feinsilver, *Healing the Masses: Cuban Health Politics at Home and Abroad*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993; Hedelberto López Blanch, *Historias Secretas de Médicos Cubanos*, Havana: Ediciones La Memoria, Centro Cultural Pablo de la Corriente Brau, 2005.

[10] See, for instance, Anne Hickling-Hudson, Jorge Corona González, Rosemary Preston (eds.), *The Capacity to Share: A Study of Cuba's International Cooperation in Educational Development*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012; Dayana Murguia, "Socialist Education and International Cooperation: An Introduction to the School Program on the *Isla de la Juventud* in Cuba," in Miethe, Weiss (eds.), *Socialist Educational Cooperation*; Mariem Núñez Más, Rafael M. Calvo González, *África en una isla cubana: Designios ancestrales e internacionalidad*, Havana: Editorial Pueblo y Educación, 1997; Hauke Dorsch, "Black or Red Atlantic? Mozambican Students in Cuba and their Reintegration at Home," in *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, Bd. 136, H. 2, 2011; Hauke Dorsch, "Studierende und Schüler aus dem südlichen Afrika in Kuba – Navigieren zwischen Rotem und Schwarzem Atlantik," in *EthnoScripts*, Jg. 10, Heft 1, 2008.

[11] Christine Hatzky, *Cubans in Angola: South-South Cooperation and Transfer of Knowledge, 1976-1991*, Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2015 [or. ed. 2012]; Christine Hatzky, "Cuba's Concept of 'Internationalist Solidarity': Political Discourse, South-South Cooperation with Angola, and the Molding of Transnational Identities," in Jessica Stites Mor (ed.), *Human Rights and Transnational Solidarity in Cold War Latin America*, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2013; Christine Hatzky, "'Os Bons Colonizadores': Cuba's Educational Mission in Angola, 1976-1991," in *Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 2008.

The work of British historian Edward George—based on newspapers, interviews, and new material from libraries and private sources—focuses instead on the military involvement of Cuba in Angola, trying to find out the motivations behind the decision to intervene and concluding by dispelling the myths of Cuban internationalism and the victory in Cuito Cuanavale.[12]

When it comes to the history of the Cuban role in Africa, particularly in Angola and southern Africa, the studies of Italian-American scholar Piero Gleijeses are possibly the most comprehensive and documented. Gleijeses, in fact, is the only foreign scholar who has been given the permission to conduct research on the Cuban Archives for the post-1959 period.[13] His first research resulted in the book *Conflicting Missions*, which retraces the history of the Cuban involvement in the African continent from the beginning to the intervention in Angola in 1975-1976, always considering the Cuban relationship with Washington.[14] A larger sample of Cuban archival documents has been consulted for his book *Visions of Freedom*, which continues chronologically *Conflicting Missions* by analyzing the Cuban involvement in southern Africa from the arrival in Angola to its withdrawn, following the New York agreements and the independence of Namibia.[15] In addition to the Cuban closed archives,[16] *Visions of Freedom* also relies on documents from US and South African archives, as well as additional documents from archives in Europe, Canada, and Africa, and some interviews, providing in this way a comprehensive study of the history of the Cuban involvement in southern African conflicts.

After years of work in the Cuban Archives, Gleijeses was able to negotiate the permission to publish selected documents in the collection "Cuba and Southern Africa" in the History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive (HAPP Digital Archive), which are currently available on the website of the Wilson Centre.[17]

Gleijeses also wrote on the role played by Cuba in the process leading to Namibian independence, focusing especially on the last conflicts in southern Angola in 1988, without going into the details of the Cuba-SWAPO relationship and solidarity programs.[18]

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[12] George, *The Cuban Intervention in Angola.*

[13] See Piero Gleijeses, "Inside the Closed Cuban Archives," 31 July 2017, in the Wilson Center website https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/inside-the-closed-cuban-archives (accessed on 20 January 2023).

[14] Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*.

[15] Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*.

[16] The Cuban Archives consulted for *Visions of Freedom*, all based in Havana, are: Centro de Información de las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias [Center of Information of the Armed Forces]; Comité Central del Partido Comunista de Cuba [Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba]; Consejo de Estado [Council of State]; Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores [Ministry of Foreign Affairs]; Ministerio para la Inversión Extranjera y la Colaboración Económica [Ministry of Foreign Investment and Economic Cooperation]; Oficina Secreta 2do Sec CC PCC [Secret Bureau of the 2nd Secretary of the Communist Party of Cuba], Havana Private collections.

[17] See https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/topics/cuba-and-southern-africa (accessed on 9 December 2022).

[18] Gleijeses, "Cuba and the Independence of Namibia"; Idem, "From Cassinga to New York."

A further notable contribution to the topic is provided by Cuban journalist Hedelberto López Blanch in *Cuba: Pequeño Gigante Contra el Apartheid* and, especially, *SWAPO: A Lion Against Apartheid*, which contains first-hand accounts of Namibians recounting the liberation struggle and of Cubans reporting their experiences on the battlefield.[19] However, there is currently no comprehensive study on the relationship between Cuba and SWAPO and on Cuban solidarity in the military, diplomatic, educational, and medical fields.

This chapter aims to provide a first glimpse of the Cuba-SWAPO cooperation, which will be further developed once the archives of both sides are accessible. It retraces the history of the Cuban involvement in and support to the Namibian liberation struggle, from the first contacts with SWAPO to the achievement of independence, providing a general picture while focusing especially on its major aspects. The chapter is based on the few Cuban documents held at the Wilson Center Digital Archive and on first-hand accounts, written and oral, of Cubans and Namibians who were in some way involved in such history of friendship. Unfortunately, the documents from the Cuban Archives on the Cuba-SWAPO relationship have not been granted permission to be published in the Wilson Center Digital Archive. Considering this fact and the difficulties in accessing SWAPO Archives, this chapter relies mostly on accounts of personal experiences from books, biographies, television programs, documentaries, and interviews. In Windhoek, I have conducted interviews with Namibians who spent study periods in Cuba, on the Isla de la Juventud as well as on the main island. Furthermore, I had the opportunity to conduct long-distance interviews with Ángel Dalmau Fernández, the first Cuban Ambassador to Namibia, who at the time was working as a diplomatic liaison with the southern African liberation movements and, under the form of a written interview, with Dr. Yeniska Martínez Díaz, who conducted research, not yet published, on the history of the Cassinga massacre with the aim to correct the distorted version narrated by the South Africans and provide a truthful version, sustained by the testimonies of Cubans and Namibians. A written interview was also conducted with Pascual Corbea Jiménez, a Cuban soldier who participated in the military operation aimed to intervene in Cassinga to halt the South African attack of 4 May 1978. The answers to this interview have been elaborated by Corbea in collaboration with Rafael Estévez Concepción, Hector Martinez Cobo, and Fernando Hernández, Cuban soldiers who were also present that day in the Cassinga area, and who helped him to reconstruct the events. Thanks to these accounts, it is possible to draw an initial sketch of the history of the friendship between Cuba and SWAPO, with the prospect that more

[19] Hedelberto López Blanch, *Cuba: Pequeño Gigante Contra el Apartheid*, Barcelona: Ediciones Wanáfrica, 2017 [first ed. 2008]; Hedelberto López Blanch, *SWAPO: A Lion Against Apartheid*, Havana: Casa Editora Abril, 2015.

interviews, together with the possibility of accessing the archives, may provide a more comprehensive analysis in the future.

The chapter opens with an overview of the principles underlying Cuban solidarity, highlighting Cuba's history of external domination and revolution, its tradition of anti-imperialism and internationalism, its relationship with the Soviet Union, and the developments of its foreign policy. In doing so, it frames the debate over the motivations behind Cuban internationalism. The chapter proceeds by providing an overall picture of Cuban involvement in Africa, focusing on the major military and civilian missions and on the narrative that was constructed to support them. Once this general framework, based on secondary literature, is provided, the chapter analyzes the relationship between Cuba and SWAPO and the Cuban support to the Namibian liberation struggle, focusing in particular on the events in which Cuba was most involved: in Cassinga in 1978, in the welcoming of thousands of Namibian students in Cuba from 1978 to 1991, in Cuito Cuanavale and the southernmost area of Angola in 1988, when Cubans fought alongside with SWAPO soldiers, and, finally, in the negotiations that led to the Namibian independence.

3.1 The Cuban revolution and solidarity

The Cuban model of internationalism and anti-imperialist solidarity must be read through the lens of the history of Cuba's own oppression and subjugation at the hands of external powers, which ended with the 1959 revolution. A colony of the Spanish empire since the arrival of the conquistadores led by Diego Velásquez in 1511, for centuries Cuba suffered the massacre and exploitation of its people and heavy repression of any attempts at resistance and rebellion.[20] A high number of enslaved Africans landed on the island, mainly to be forced to work in the sugar plantations, until the definitive abolition of slavery in 1886.[21] After various rebellions and independence wars, Cuba became independent in 1898 only to be subjected to the influence of the United States, which, after intervening in the conflict to help repel the Spanish, felt entitled first to occupy and then to continue to exert some form of control on the island on the basis of the Platt Amendment. Proclaimed in 1902, the Republic (or "pseudo-republic"[22]) of Cuba was plagued by crisis and corruption and was largely dominated by the figure of the dictator Fulgencio Batista, de facto leader from 1933 to 1940 and President from 1940 to 1944 and again, after a military coup, from 1952 to 1959. The revolutionary war against

[20] Richard Gott, *Cuba: A New History*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004.
[21] Laird W. Bergad, Fe Iglesias García, María del Carmen Barcia, *The Cuban Slave Market 1790-1880*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
[22] Cubans refer to the period between 1902 and 1959 as the "pseudo-republic" period "to indicate the compromised nature of the country's independence." See Aviva Chomsky, *A History of the Cuban Revolution*, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015, p. 20 [first ed. 2011].

Batista began with the (unsuccessful) attack on the Moncada Barracks on 26 July 1953 by a group of young revolutionaries that later took the name of "Movimiento 26 de Julio" (M-26-7, 26 July Movement) from that action.[23] The M-26-7, led by Fidel Castro and whose members included his brother Raúl Castro and Argentinian physician Ernesto "Che" Guevara, carried out guerrilla warfare on the Sierra Maestra mountains while organizing the urban militia. Other opposition groups to Batista, which often did not share the strategies and political agenda of Castro's rebels, also carried out destabilization actions against the regime.[24] The Cuban communists of the Partido Socialista Popular (PSP)—hostile to the methods of armed actions, sabotage, and subversion led by the M-26-7, and seen with suspicion by the young generations of revolutionaries because of their former ambivalent attitude toward Batista—did not play a significant role. They joined the struggle supporting Castro only in the summer of 1958, when victory was in the offing. This came on 1 January 1959. The revolution finally put an end to the history of colonial and neocolonial domination in Cuba, opened a new chapter of the history of the Caribbean country, as well as of the Cold War history, and became a source of inspiration for the entire Third World, which at that time was experiencing significative achievements in the struggle for self-determination.

During its first years, the new revolutionary government, under the charismatic leadership of Fidel Castro, sought to redistribute wealth, reduce inequalities, and break the dependency on the US, launching a number of significant changes, such as the agrarian reform, the literacy campaign, the reform of the health system, and the nationalization of US companies and private businesses.[25] Revolutionary Cuba was not born as a socialist state, and the Soviet Union had not paid particular attention to Castro's guerrilla movement against Batista, being rather heedless and ignorant of the developments in Latin America. The first direct link between the Soviets and the new Cuban government was established with the visit of Alexander Alexiev, a KGB official, to Havana in October 1959 and the drafting of a commercial agreement on the occasion of the visit of Vice Prime Minister Anastas Mikoyan to Havana in February 1960. Diplomatic relations were established in May 1960. In fact, while the tensions with the US grew, as evidenced by the US embargo proclaimed in 1960, Cuba gradually began to gravitate toward the communist orbit and, internally, to find a point of agreement with the PSP. Castro declared for the first time the socialist character of the revolution on the eve of the US-backed invasion of Cuban exiles at the Bay of Pigs (Playa Girón), which started

[23] Gott, *Cuba*, pp. 147-154; Chomsky, *A History of the Cuban Revolution*, pp. 30-31.
[24] Gott, *Cuba,* pp. 157-160.
[25] Chomsky, *A History of the Cuban Revolution*, pp. 40-45; Louis A. Pérez, *Cuba between Reform and Revolution*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2006, pp. 242-248 [first ed. 1988].

on 17 April 1961 and aimed at overthrowing Castro's government.[26] The operation, which turned out to be a failure, further contributed to bringing Cuba closer to the Soviet Union, as it embodied a valuable ally ready to defend the island from the United States' imperialist ambitions. On 1 May 1961, Castro proclaimed Cuba a "socialist republic" and, at the end of the year, he declared himself a Marxist-Leninist. On the ashes of the Organizaciones Revolucionarias Integradas (Integrated Revolutionary Organizations), which was born out of the union between the Movimiento 26 de Julio, the Directorio Revolucionario 13 de Marzo (March 13 Revolutionary Directory, a former anti-Batista organization), and the PSP, a new Communist Party was constituted in 1962: the Partido Unido de la Revolución Socialista de Cuba (United Party of the Socialist Revolution of Cuba), which in 1965 was renamed as Partido Comunista de Cuba (PCC, Communist Party of Cuba).

Therefore, the strengthening of the communist party in Cuba, which was to become the central decision-making force, and the adoption of a socialist system were not immediate. They came as a result of pragmatic internal reflections on the basis of international developments. The relationship with the Soviet Union was established because of the growing Cuban isolation wanted by the US and was bound to have up and downs during the entire Cold War period.[27] It arose after initial skepticism on both sides. In a time of escalating ideological tensions between China and the Soviet Union, the closeness of Castro's revolutionary rhetoric—which insisted on the importance of guerrilla warfare and the peasant revolution—with the Maoist line, arose some doubts in Moscow regarding the reliability of the Cuban partners.[28] The Cuban support for the armed struggle in Latin America in the following years represented a source of discord between the two partners, with the Soviets fearing that Castro's strategy of the armed path complicated their policy of peaceful coexistence with the US and the Cubans resenting such caution.[29]

A major crisis between Havana and Moscow broke out in 1962 with the Missile Crisis, when the Soviets, after having installed missiles on the Cuban territory causing an immediate US reaction, decided to remove them without consulting Castro—an event that damaged his trust in the Soviet Union.[30] A partial reconciliation between the Cuban leaders and the CPSU occurred after Castro's trip to the Soviet Union in April-May 1963.[31] The Soviets, eager to have a strong ally to the

[26] See Fidel Castro, "What the Imperialist Cannot Forgive," in José Bell Lara, Tania Caram León, Delia Luisa López García (eds.), *Fidel in the Cuban Socialist Revolution: Understanding the Cuban Revolution (1959-1961)*, Leiden: Brill, 2020, pp. 226-240.
[27] William M. LeoGrande, "Cuban-Soviet Relations and Cuban Policy in Africa," in Mesa-Lago, Belkin (eds.), *Cuba in Africa*, pp. 16-18; LeoGrande, *Cuba's Policy in Africa*, pp. 3-8.
[28] Gott, *Cuba*, p. 198.
[29] Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, p. 21.
[30] Gott, *Cuba*, pp. 195-209.
[31] *Ivi*, pp. 210-211.

disadvantage of the Chinese, offered Cuba all the support they could, and the Cubans, who needed it, aligned themselves more closely with the Soviet Union and repudiated Chinese positions. A major Cuban alignment with Soviet positions occurred in the early 1970s—after Che Guevara's death in Bolivia in 1967 and the failure of the revolutions in Latin America, which brought realism to Havana—and culminated with the Cuban admission into Comecon in 1972. However, as we shall see, throughout the Cold War period, Castro always maintained a certain degree of autonomy from the Soviet Union, often voicing his criticism of Soviet theories and methods, proposing different strategies, and taking independent foreign policy initiatives. Contrary to what Washington propagated, in fact, Cuba was hardly the Soviet surrogate in its internationalist strategy.[32]

In 1961, as a significative move to declare its independence from the Soviet Union, Cuba joined the Non-Aligned Movement, where at that time it was the only member of the Western hemisphere. At the Tricontinental Conference held in Havana in January 1966—where delegates of liberation movements and governments of Africa, Asia, and the Americas met—Cuba presented itself as a reference point for the Third World movements, underlined its distance from the Chinese as well as its autonomy from the Soviets, since it exalted the inevitability of the armed struggle.[33]

The principles of internationalism and friendship with all the people struggling for self-determination were incorporated into Cuba's foreign policy soon after the triumph of the revolution. One example was the historic speech pronounced by Fidel Castro on 2 September 1960 before a huge crowd of Cubans gathered in the Civic Plaza (today Plaza de la Revolución), presenting what would later became known as the First Declaration of Havana. Drafted in response to the Declaration of San José—which was issued by the US-led Organization of American States (OAS), condemning the intervention of extracontinental powers (read Sino-Soviet powers) in the affairs of the American states and, implicitly, the Cuban revolution—the First Declaration of Havana disapproved US imperialism and the preservation of the Monroe Doctrine,[34] justified the Soviet aid to Cuba as an act of solidarity and, more importantly, launched a policy of friendship with socialist countries and the oppressed peoples claiming "the duty of each people to solidarity with all the oppressed, colonized, exploited, and attacked peoples of the world, regardless of where they are and the geographical distance from them."[35] Consequently, the Second Declaration of Havana, presented by Fidel Castro on 4 February 1962 following the expulsion of Cuba from the OAS, condemned the US worldwide

[32] Erisman, *Cuba's International Relations*, pp. 3-7.
[33] Pons, *La rivoluzione globale*, p. 321; Pérez, *Cuba between Reform and Revolution*, p. 287.
[34] The Monroe Doctrine (elaborate by US President James Monroe in 1823) claimed the Western hemisphere as the United States' sphere of interests and warned European powers not to intervene in its internal affairs. It gave the US the right to intervene in the countries of the Western hemisphere.
[35] Fidel Castro, "Declaration of Havana," in Bell Lara, Caram León, López García (eds.), *Fidel in the Cuban Socialist Revolution*, p. 172.

imperialist exploitation more vigorously and prefigured a wave of revolutions led by the exploited masses of Latin America, to which Cuba granted its support.[36]

Cuban internationalism dates back to the struggle against the Spanish empire and, as Pablo Arco Pino argues, has to be inserted in the long tradition of Latin American solidarity, practiced by the countries of the subcontinent that participated in the anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles of their neighbors.[37] Yet Cuba had participated also in the struggles beyond the Latin American region: during the 1930s, Cubans fought in Spain during the Civil War.

Cuban internationalism is shaped by Cuban and Latin American political figures, as well as figures from the socialist world. The Cuban revolutionaries of the M-26-7, as well as the Cuban leadership of the revolutionary regime that was born out of its insurrection, were strongly inspired by the anti-imperialist thought of José Martí (1853-1895), revolutionary intellectual, political theorist for Cuban independence, and a strong opponent of the annexation to the United States. As Hatzky points out, "it was Martí's thought that united nationalism with a vision of a nation that encompassed the whole continent of Latin America, in opposition to the imperial ambitions of the United States."[38] His famous statement "I have lived inside the Monster, and I know its guts; and my sling is the sling of David,"[39] contained in his last letter, was pronounced against the US, where he spent many years in exile. These words were meant to warn against the dangers embodied by the Western superpower and were quoted by Fidel Castro on the occasion of the Second Havana Declaration.[40] Moreover, the Cuban revolutionaries of the M-26-7 who attempted the attack on the Moncada Barracks in 1953 called themselves the "centenary generation," in reference to the year of Martí's birth and "on the basis of Martí's ideas—which were not founded on a Marxist analysis of society—they declared all the 'poor' and the 'colonized' to be the subjects of the revolution."[41]

Another figure that influenced and inspired Cuban internationalism was Simón Bolívar (1783-1830), the Venezuelan liberator who also contributed to the independence of Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia. The idea of sparking a continental revolution, to which Cuban revolutionaries were devoted during the 1960s, was influenced by Martí's thought, Bolívar's feats, as well as Trotsky's concept of "permanent revolution," which, among other things, maintained that a new socialist state would not

[36] Fidel Castro, "The Duty of a Revolutionary is to Make the Revolution: The Second Declaration of Havana," in Martin Kenner, James Petras (eds.), *Fidel Castro Speaks,* New York: Grove Press, 1969, pp. 93-117.
[37] Pablo Arco Pino, "La presencia cubana en África (1963-1989)," in Alessandra Lorini, Duccio Basosi (eds.), *Cuba in the World, the World in Cuba: Essays on Cuban History, Politics and Culture*, Firenze: Firenze University Press, 2009.
[38] Hatzky, "Cuba's Concept of 'Internationalist Solidarity'," p. 148.
[39] José Martí wrote this sentence in a letter to his friend Manuel Mercado the day before being assassinated in a Spanish ambush at Dos Ríos.
[40] Castro, "The Duty of a Revolutionary is to Make the Revolution," p. 93.
[41] Hatzky, "Cuba's Concept of 'Internationalist Solidarity'," pp. 148-149.

have been able to survive unless the socialist revolution developed rapidly in other countries. Similarly, the Castros, Che Guevara, and other Cuban revolutionary leaders "believed that the survival of the regime and the success of Cuba's socialist revolution depended upon the success of similar revolutions and anti-imperialist struggles in Latin America and the rest of the world."[42] The example of the Chinese revolution led by Mao Zedong, with its emphasis on the role of the peasants, also provided a model for Cuban internationalism.[43]

Since 1959, Cuba carried on the idea of exporting the revolution in Latin America and, later, in the Third World. Contrary to the Soviet idea of a peaceful path to socialism, which was part of the USSR's policy of peaceful coexistence, during the 1960s, Cuba instigated and supported Latin American guerilla movements to overthrow dictatorial and reactionary regimes, convinced that the only acceptable strategy was the armed struggle and that small groups of men could defeat entire armies. It was especially Che Guevara who elaborated this idea on the basis of the experience of the Cuban revolution: his "foco theory" asserted that, even without the objective conditions for an insurrection, small guerrilla actions launched by a group of revolutionaries could serve as the "foco" (focus) necessary to the rapid growth of a general uprising that could lead to victory.[44]

To the revolutionary and anti-imperialist ideologies of the past, therefore, Cuban internationalism added its tradition of armed rebellion, already introduced by Julio Antonio Mella (1903-1929), co-founder of the first Cuban communist party.[45] In April 1967, from Bolivia, Che Guevara launched his last message, known under the title "Create two, three, many Vietnams," which is an ode to internationalism, to fight, and eventually gloriously die under the flag of other countries, and a call for the oppressed to take arms and create "many Vietnams."[46] As mentioned above, this approach, which caused frictions with the Soviet Union, was softened during the 1970s after Guevara's death, when Cuba started to question the invincibility of the armed struggle, ceased to aid insurgent movements, began to search for a normalization of the relationship with Latin American governments, and to increasingly focus on Africa. Yet, as Nelson Valdés points out, "the trend away from adventuristic guerilla plots did not signify a reversal of principles. […] Internationalist solidarity continued, but now it was founded on those movements that were already in power, or could succeed

[42] Richard L. Harris, "Cuban Internationalism, Che Guevara, and the Survival of Cuba's Socialist Regime," in *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol. 36, No. 3, 2009, p. 32.
[43] Hatzky, "Cuba's Concept of 'Internationalist Solidarity'," p. 148.
[44] Its theorization was put into writing by the radical French writer Régis Debray in *Revolution dans la revolution?*, translated in many languages (see Régis Debray, *Revolution dans la revolution? Lutte armèe et lutte politique en Amerique Latine,* Paris: Maspero, 1967).
[45] Hatzky, "Cuba's Concept of 'Internationalist Solidarity'," p. 148.
[46] Ernesto Che Guevara, "Creare due, tre, molti Vietnam…Questa è la parola d'ordine," in David Deutschmann (ed.), *Leggere Che Guevara: scritti su politica e rivoluzione*, Milano: Feltrinelli, 2005, pp. 395-408 [or. ed. 1997].

in taking power over a short period of time,"[47] and on movements that were struggling for freedom and independence. Some scholars acknowledge that Cuba's foreign policy after the 1970s was guided by a growing pragmatism, which nevertheless did not prevent it from embarking on massive military missions.[48]

The figure of Che Guevara, who embodied the highest example of a revolutionary prepared to give his life for the cause of the oppressed peoples of the world, continued to arouse a mythical fascination around which Cuban internationalism has been shaped.[49]

By joining the socialist bloc, Cuba combined its old and new anti-imperialist and revolutionary traditions within the framework of the socialist solidarity regime. However, Cuba always tried to maintain a specificity in its solidarity rhetoric and practice. Contrary to the Soviet orthodox conception of solidarity, Cuban solidarity "was based on the assumption of a common opposition to imperialism," rather than on a common class awareness only.[50] North-South inequalities, therefore, have figured significantly in the Cuban foreign policy agenda. Cuba sought to portray itself as a legitimate champion of the Third World by virtue of its colonial and revolutionary past. It was convinced to represent a more suitable ally for the revolutions in the Third World, more than the Soviet Union and its European allies, which were white and rich, and the Chinese, which "suffered from great-power hubris and were unable to adapt to African and Latin American culture."[51] Cuba, by contrast, "was nonwhite, poor, threatened by a powerful enemy, and culturally Latin American and African. It was […] a socialist country with a Third World sensitivity in a world that, according to Castro, was dominated by the 'conflict between privileged and underprivileged, humanity against imperialism',"[52] and by the "faultline […] between developed and underdeveloped countries."[53] On these assumptions, Cuba tried to impose its leadership within the Non-Aligned Movement, temporarily managing to do it at the time of the Sixth NAM Summit in Havana in September 1979, which marked the beginning of Castro's chairmanship of the movement (1979-1983).[54] It tried to radicalize the Non-Aligned Movement, believing in the justness of its anti-blocism, but at the same time encouraging the Third World to cooperate with the Second, portrayed through the pro-Soviet

[47] Nelson P. Valdés, "Revolutionary Solidarity in Angola," in Blasier, Mesa-Lago (eds.), *Cuba in the World*, p. 89.
[48] Olga Nazario, Juan F. Benemelis, "Cuba's Relations with Africa: an Overview" and William Ratliff, "Cuban Military Policy in Sub-Saharan Africa," in Díaz-Briquets (ed.), *Cuban Internationalism in Sub-Saharan Africa.*
[49] Harris, "Cuban Internationalism," p. 29.
[50] Hatzky, "Cuba's Concept of 'Internationalist Solidarity'," p. 148.
[51] Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, p. 377.
[52] *Ibidem*.
[53] Piero Gleijeses, "Moscow's Proxy? Cuba and Africa 1975-1988," in *Journal of Cold War Studies,* Vol. 8, No. 4, 2006, p. 48.
[54] Erisman, *Cuba's International Relations*, pp. 8-9.

notion of the "natural ally."[55] According to this view, Cuba was therefore the perfect partner, the link between the socialist bloc and the Third World. However, Cuban relationships with the Soviet Union and its alignment with it on occasions such as the invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 damaged the Cuban claim of non-alignment. Cuban foreign policy, therefore, was based on the instable and difficult balance between Soviet alignment, the claim of autonomous stance, and its non-aligned positioning.
But in what forms did Cuba provide aid to the countries and movements of Africa, Asia, and Latin America? Firstly, Cuba provided them with diplomatic support in the context of the United Nations. More significantly, it provided military aid in support to anti-colonial and guerrilla movements and revolutionary and progressive governments in form of weapons, military training, and by dispatching combat troops on several occasions, as we shall see in the next section. Yet, in addition to soldiers and military advisers, Cuba also sent civilian personnel, such as teachers, doctors, nurses, technicians, construction workers, engineers, and agronomists. The high number of civilians and military deployed abroad is impressive for a small and relatively poor country[56] and is indicative of the huge personal commitment of the Cubans who decided to go abroad, away from their families, often in dangerous situations of war-torn countries. Unlike East German cooperants, the Cubans were usually sent on internationalist missions without their partners in tow.[57] According to Christine Hatzky's study, family separation was used by the Cuban government "as a means of preventing people from escaping when they are sent abroad."[58]
Cuban citizens decided to embark on internationalist missions on a voluntary basis, mobilized by the Cuban government which launched large propaganda appealing to the revolutionary and internationalist duty of every man and woman. Yet, as Hatzky points out with regards to the experience of the Cuban educational advisors and teachers in Angola, there were cases in which the decision to ignore such appeal caused significative disadvantages, especially when it was taken by those belonging to the PCC, as well as episodes of persuasion exercised to convince people to volunteer, although their extent is unclear.[59] Piero Gleijeses also highlights the social pressure to participate in internationalist missions, and the costs implied for those who were not willing to go: "if a leader or an activist in the Communist Youth refused to go, his career in the party was over. If a professional soldier refused to go, he would be dismissed from the armed forces. If a recruit resisted,

[55] Erisman, *Cuba's International Relations*, pp. 45-49; Rozita Levi, "Cuba and the Nonaligned Movement," in Blasier, Mesa-Lago (eds.), *Cuba in the Word*, pp. 149-151.
[56] See Pérez, *Cuba between Reform and Revolution*, pp. 288-289.
[57] Berthold Unfried, Claudia Martínez, "El Internacionalismo, la Solidaridad y el interés mutuo: encuentros entre cubanos, africanos, y alemanes de la RDA," in *Estudos Históricos*, Vol. 30, No. 61, 2017, p. 437.
[58] Hatzky, *Cubans in Angola,* p. 98.
[59] *Ivi*, pp. 108-111.

he would do his military service in Cuba, but he was likely to be confined to a separate camp for several months."[60]

With time, civilian aid developed to a large extent. As the revolution unfolded, bringing in significant developments in the areas of education and health, Cuba began to make its newly acquired skills available and developed medical and educational solidarity programs with Third World countries and movements.[61] It dispatched teachers and professors abroad and offered scholarships for foreign students to study in Cuba.[62] As Hauke Dorsch reported using the official numbers of the Cuban Ministerio de Educación Superior, "nearly 43 000 foreign students finished their studies in Cuba on a secondary or university level between 1961 and 2004, of which nearly 30 000 came from sub-Saharan Africa. Of those, 8 053 came from Angola, the largest single national group, and yet another 3 764 from Mozambique."[63] The symbol of the Cuban educational solidarity was the Isla de la Juventud (Isle of Youth), the former Isla de Pinos (Isle of Pines), which during the time of the "pseudo-republic" of Cuba was famous for being the site of detention for political prisoners.[64] After the revolution, the island underwent significant transformations thanks to the work of the young Cubans who collaborated to its development and, since the late 1970s, it became a destination for students from all over the world, especially Africa, but also Latin America and, to a lesser extent, Asia.[65] In 1977, schools for Angolans and Mozambicans were opened on the Isla de la Juventud and, in the following years, international schools for foreign students—Namibians included, as we shall see—spread throughout the island. In most cases, schools were designed to accommodate students according to their nationality. The small island became a great example of socialist educational solidarity to the point that delegations from East Germany visited its international schools "in order to integrate these experiences into their secondary education experiment Schule der Freundschaft ("Friendship School") for Namibian and Mozambican pupils."[66] The island's educational programs will be discussed in greater detail when referring to the experiences of SWAPO students.[67]

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[60] Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, p. 215.

[61] Anne Hickling-Hudson, Jorge Corona González, Sabine Lehr, Marina Majoli Viani, "The Cuban Revolution and Internationalism: Structuring Education and Health," in Hickling-Hudson, Corona González, Preston (eds.), *The Capacity to Share*; Sergio Díaz-Briquets, Jorge Pérez-López, "Internationalist Civilian Assistance: The Cuban Presence in Sub-Saharan Africa," in Díaz-Briquets (ed.), *Cuban Internationalism in Sub-Saharan Africa*.

[62] Hickling-Hudson, Corona González, Preston (eds.), *The Capacity to Share*.

[63] Dorsch, "Black or Red Atlantic?," p. 295.

[64] The island took the name of Isla de la Juventud in 1978 on the occasion of the eleventh Youth and Student Festival and also as an homage for the thousands of young Cubans who worked on the island for its requalification after the Cuban revolution.

[65] Murguia, "Socialist Education and International Cooperation"; Jane McManus, *La Isla cubana de ensueño: Voces de la Isla de Pinos y de la Juventud*, Havana: Ediciones La Memoria, Centro Cultural Pablo de la Torriente Brau, 2005; Núñez Más, Calvo González, *África en una isla cubana.*

[66] Unfried, "Education as a Paradigm," p. 84.

[67] See section 3.3.2.

Another preponderant aspect of Cuban solidarity was medical assistance, which was developed starting from the 1960s, and increasingly during the 1970s and 1980s, as in Cuba itself the revolutionary government had launched medical reforms with the main aim to provide health care to as many people as possible, included those in the neglected rural areas. The provision of medical aid became "a fundamental principle of the Cuban revolution from the very beginning, a principle that has flowed from the conviction that medicine should not be perceived as a business, but rather as a right of the citizens and a duty for physicians, regardless of the ability of the patient to pay."[68] Many medical cadres were sent abroad to provide primary care to wounded and sick soldiers and civilians. Furthermore, doctors from Third World countries were trained in Cuba and several medical faculties were also established abroad.[69] As Julie Feinsilver reports, Cuba sent so many doctors abroad that proportionately exceeded those sent by superpowers such as the United States, Soviet Union, and China.[70]

Both Castro and Che Guevara had opportunities to criticize the Soviet Union and the socialist countries for the inadequate and poor aid provided to Third World countries and movements. Castro complained about the inadequacy of the Soviet support for North Vietnam at the time of the war[71] and was disappointed by the East German aid because it "was not as committed to a revolutionary programme as Cuba was."[72] Che Guevara was even more critical of the foreign policy of the Soviets, who in turn considered him dangerous and pro-Chinese. At the AAPSO Second Economic Seminar, held in Algiers in 1965, he defined the socialist countries as "accomplices of imperial exploitation" because of the unequal terms of the trade agreements they made with underdeveloped countries.[73]

On the contrary, as Anne Hickling-Hudson, Jorge Corona González, and Sabine Lehr assert, the underlying principle of the Cuban model of internationalism was (and is) solidarity, and "even though economic considerations also play a role, they have never been the driving force behind the Cuban approach."[74] The Cuban model of South-South cooperation, they write, is based on the respect of national sovereignty, the refraining from conditionalities, and the providing of assistance on the basis of mutual support rather than market norms. Aid, in fact, was provided free of charge to the countries who could not afford it and to the national liberation movements, while, as the requests for assistance

[68] Kirk, Erisman, *Cuban Medical Internationalism*, p. 20.
[69] Kirk, *Healthcare without Borders*, p. 27.
[70] Feinsilver, *Healing the Masses*, pp. 157–58, 160.
[71] Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, p. 21.
[72] Lorenzini, "East-South relations," p. 107.
[73] Che Guevara's speech at the Afro-Asian Conference in Algeria (24 February 1965), in Deutschmann (ed.), *Leggere Che Guevara,* p. 386.
[74] Jorge Corona González, Anne Hickling-Hudson, Sabine Lehr, "Challenging Educational Underdevelopment: The Cuban Solidarity Approach as a Mode of South-South Cooperation," in Hickling-Hudson, Corona González, Preston (eds.), *The Capacity to Share,* p. 42.

grew exceeding Cuban capabilities, less poor countries would pay according to their financial possibilities. "The conditions of Cuba's technical assistance," as Piero Gleijeses points out, "had varied over time," according to the scope of the demands and the financial capabilities of both Cuba and the recipient actors: "The level of compensation varied according to the country—Algeria, Libya, and Iraq paid more than Angola and Mozambique. For the other countries the aid was free. For the poorest countries and the national liberation movements, Cuba assumed all the expenses. In all other cases board, lodging, and transportation were the responsibility of the host government."[75]

Solidarity as the guiding force leading Cuban assistance is mentioned by several other scholars. David Gonzales speaks of the "altruistic nature of Cuba's relationship with Africa," which arose in the absence of material interests and political and economic conditionalities.[76] He argues that Cuba's policy for Africa was based on moral principles and that it sometimes resulted costly since it endangered Cuban relationships with European powers, as it happened with France at the moment of the Cuban support for the Algerian liberation struggle. Furthermore, it promoted self-sufficiency, providing a great deal of training within its programs of military and civilian cooperation, and it did not aim to influence the recipient countries to adopt a particular political and economic model.[77] John M. Kirk contends that medical support was not provided by Cuba as an instrument of soft power, but it came on the basis of humanitarianism, in that the willingness to help people in need outweighed geopolitical strategies.[78] This was especially true when medical aid was delivered to countries hostile to the Cuban revolution, such as Chile in 1960 and Nicaragua in 1972, when they were hit by major earthquakes.

According to the analysis of Piero Gleijeses, revolutionary idealism was the main motivation behind Cuban activism in the Third World. During the 1960s, this was coupled with a need for self-defense, when supporting the Third World was also an instrument to weaken the US influence, which was threatening Cuba's security.[79] But the foundation of Cuban foreign policy was Castro's "commitment to a revolutionary cause in which he deeply believed."[80] For him, fighting imperialism did not (or not only) mean going against the US, but fighting against poverty and oppression in the Third World—a struggle which Cuba felt entitled to lead. Alongside revolutionary idealism, Gleijeses identifies also a pragmatic component,[81] which, as Nelson Valdés points out, is an integral part of the revolutionary

[75] Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, p. 327.
[76] David Gonzales, "Cuban-African Relations: Nationalist Roots of an Internationalist Policy," in *Review of African Political Economy*, Vol. 27, No. 84, 2000, p. 318.
[77] *Ivi*, pp. 319-320.
[78] Kirk, *Healthcare without Borders*, pp. 6-7.
[79] Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, pp. 375-376.
[80] Gleijeses, "Moscow's Proxy?," p. 48.
[81] Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, p. 377.

foreign policy: "a revolutionary is an opportunist with principles. A revolutionary foreign policy, by implication, is an assessment of international situations in order to discern the most appropriate moment when specific circumstances (opportunities) can be fully exploited so as to make revolutionary principles and interests a reality."[82] Solidarity, therefore, is a principle of revolutionary idealism, which is itself imbued by political interests and considerations.

Christine Hatzky provides a detailed picture of the Cuban engagement in Angola, listing the less covered aspect of economic pragmatism among its characteristics[83]—which is justifiable considering the Cuban economic and financial difficulties—and pointing out that, despite the fact that mutual respect and reciprocity were the base of the Cuban-Angola relationship, some asymmetries aroused at the planning and implementation levels, at the disadvantage of the Angolans.[84] As Sergio Roca remarks, economic benefits—like increased leverage with the Soviet Union, potential supply of petroleum, diversification of foreign trade markets, exportation of surplus labor, and service charge earnings—were implied in the Cuban involvement in Africa, yet also significant economic costs occurred, such as the postponement of normalization of relationship with the US, domestic opportunity costs, and the loss of financial aid from Western countries.[85]

A critical opinion about Cuban involvement in Angola is provided by Edward George, who calls Cuban presence in Angola "occupation." He warns about the risk of considering the Cuban intervention in Angola as a heroic gesture of international solidarity, which he considers instead a "last-ditch gamble to avert military disaster,"[86] and describes the Cuban model of internationalism as "a powerful ideology to policising a generation of Cubans," which "enabled Havana to project its influence on a scale unprecedented in its history."[87]

One may conclude by saying that Cuban foreign policy was motivated by many and various elements, listed by Michael Erisman as follows: "its quest for military and economic security; ideological considerations; its aspirations for Third World leadership; its sense of mission; and nationalism."[88] These elements occasionally overlap, and "their importance will vary as strategic shifts of emphasis occur."[89]

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[82] Valdés, "Revolutionary Solidarity in Angola," p. 110.
[83] Cuba signed a number of trade and commercial agreements with Angola and, at some point, it received compensation by the Angolan government for its educational aid, because of the large deployment of Cuban teachers (See Hatzky, *Cubans in Angola*, pp. 81-83, 181-188).
[84] Hatzky, *Cubans in Angola*, pp. 188-192; Hatzky, "'Os Bons Colonizadores'," pp. 63-64.
[85] Sergio Roca, "Economic Aspects of Cuban involvement in Africa," in Mesa-Lago, Belkin (eds.), *Cuba in Africa*.
[86] George, *The Cuban Intervention in Angola,* p. 3.
[87] *Ivi*, p. 274.
[88] Erisman, *Cuba's International Relations*, p. 7.
[89] *Ibidem*.

However, ideological considerations played a major role during the Cold War period, as Cuba devoted itself to the cause of supporting Third World countries, spending many resources, especially human. Of course Cuban solidarity had the effect to legitimize the new government and boost its prestige at home and abroad. And of course, in the situation of isolation in which it found itself, especially in the early period of the revolutionary government, Cuba needed political and economic allies, which could be easily found through its solidarity programs. Still, the impressive extent of international engagement for a country with limited resources seems to confirm the primacy of solidarity and revolutionary idealism, the former being a principle of the latter. Political and economic pragmatism also played a role, since Cuba itself needed political and economic support. Furthermore, as noted above, political considerations are themselves inseparable from the principle of socialist solidarity. However, being a socialist country of the Global South, more than socialism, Cuba aimed to export the revolution, intended as the fight against imperialism and the North's supremacy. The need to have a strong ally as the Soviet Union—necessary to survive in a time of political and economic isolation—on one side allowed Cuba to provide such cooperation, while on the other jeopardized its reputation as a non-aligned country devoted to the cause of the Third World. If its revolutionary fervour decreased over time, especially after the political changes of the 1990s, its solidarity toward the people in need did not vanish. In fact, although Cuban internationalism has been endangered by the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991—which for Cuba meant the termination of the Soviet bloc trade and aid and consequently economic crisis, known as the "Special Period in the Time of Peace"—international cooperation continued to be provided around the world, albeit to a lesser extent. After 1991, Cuba no longer supported revolutionary groups and progressive governments as it had done before. Yet development assistance missions continued to be carried out around the globe. For example, some of the international schools at the Isla de la Juventud continued to run, at least until 2012,[90] and educational cooperation continued to be delivered.[91] The assistance to the victims of the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear accident continued, aid to the Latin American peoples hit by natural disasters kept being provided, and the Escuela Latinoamericana de Medicina (Latin American School of Medicine) was established in 1999 with the purpose of training international students to become doctors.[92]

[90] Murguia, "Socialist Education and International Cooperation," p. 126.
[91] Hickling-Hudson, Corona González, Preston (eds.), *The Capacity to Share.*
[92] Fitz, *Cuban Health Care*, pp. 145-164; Kirk, *Healthcare without Borders,* pp. 42-67.

3.2 Cuban solidarity with anti-colonial and postcolonial Africa

At the time of the triumph of the Cuban revolution, the African continent was experiencing the first wave of decolonization. The developments in Africa immediately interested the new Cuban revolutionary regime and, conversely, African countries and movements were looking at the Cuban revolution as a source of inspiration. With Cuba's growing isolation in the Western hemisphere, African progressive states "provided political ties for Cuba outside the socialist bloc, while the liberation movements provided an outlet for Cuba's revolutionary dynamism."[93] Therefore, solidarity relationships between the Cuban government and African countries and movements started to flourish.

In its rhetoric of solidarity with Africa, Cuba often referred to its "Latin-African" heritage resulting from the history of the transatlantic slave trade, which brought many enslaved Africans to the Cuban coasts. The presence of a large black population of African descent in Cuba contributed to the creation of a narrative based on the blood relationship between Cubans and Africans and on the special link that the two shared. The participation of enslaved Africans and their descendants in the Cuban revolutionary war against the Spaniards formed the basis, in Cuba, of the common history of Cubans and Africans and further strengthened this link. As Castro said addressing the audience at a rally in Pinar del Rio on 26 July 1976: "after all, who were our people, our nation? Who but Africans, to a great extent, constituted our nation? And who but the old African slaves—or their descendants—fought in great numbers in our wars of independence in 1868 and 1895?"[94]

Therefore, solidarity with Africa has been fomented by Castro by virtue of Cuba's "duty of compensation" to Africans,[95] resulting from the injustices they suffered when enslaved in Cuba, the prosperity that Cuba achieved through the exploitation of African slave labor, and the role the Africans played in the revolutionary history of the country. In this sense, in order to justify Cuba's engagement in Africa, to portray it as a historical mission, and to claim its autonomy from the Soviet interests in Africa, Castro created a narrative based on the memory of slavery. In addition to the blood ties between Cuba and Africa, he built solidarity propaganda on the common experience of oppression and revolution, drawing a continuum between the history of slave rebellions and the contemporary Third World struggle against Western neocolonialism and imperialism, between capitalism and slavery, capitalism and apartheid.[96] The struggle to export revolution, therefore, would be the

[93] William J. Durch, "The Cuban Military in Africa and the Middle East: From Algeria to Angola," in *Studies in Comparative Communism*, Vol. 11, Nos. 1 & 2, 1978, p. 43.
[94] Fidel Castro, "We are united by blood," in David Deutschmann (ed.), *Changing the history of Africa: Angola and Namibia*, Melbourne: Ocean Press, 1989, p. 78.
[95] Gonzales, "Cuban-African Relations," p. 318.
[96] Myra Ann Houser, "Avenging Carlota in Africa: Angola and the memory of Cuban slavery," in *Atlantic Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 2015.

continuation of the enslaved people's struggle for freedom. Cuban interventions in Africa, and the creation of such a narrative, ultimately served to gain support at home and abroad, to include African descendants in the national narrative, and, above all, to win "Afro-Cubans over to the revolutionary project during a time of lagging interest and even discontent."[97] In fact, while Cuba's revolutionary government officially portrayed Cuba as a nation built on "mestizaje" (mixed descendance), and legally eliminated inequalities between whites and blacks, the road toward racial equality was still to be completed: while white Cubans maintained leadership positions, the black population still struggled to advance socially and to be integrated culturally, racial discriminations and prejudices still persisted, and black associations and clubs were suppressed in the name of a color-blind revolutionary society.[98] The rhetoric of shared ideology and common struggle, as we shall see, was particularly strong in the Cuban engagement against apartheid in Angola.

As soon as the revolutionary government took power in Cuba and African countries were starting to achieve independence, cordial relationships were established with progressive countries like Egypt, Guinea, Mali, and Ghana. Yet, above all, in Gleijeses's words, "Cuba's first love in Africa"[99] was Algeria, which was struggling for independence from France. In 1961, Cuba started to send weapons to FLN—a provision that represented the first Cuban military aid sent to Africa.[100] The Cuban ship carrying the arms delivery returned to Havana with Algerian wounded fighters and children from the refugee camps, mostly war orphans, who would remain in Cuba to study. This laid the foundation for the establishment of a strong friendship relationship with the Algerian government, which achieved independence in 1962, and its Prime Minister Ahmed Ben Bella, who visited Havana shortly thereafter. In 1963, Cuba engaged in solidarity activities with Algeria by dispatching a medical mission, the first of a number of missions, and providing military support on the occasion of the border conflict with Morocco, which claimed a broad strip of Algeria. Doctors, nurses, dentists, and medical technicians were sent to Algeria,[101] starting Cuban technical assistance abroad. Tanks and weapons were also delivered and, given the lack of Algerian trained personnel, Cuba decided to deploy combat units to train the Algerian troops and fight along with them against the threat posed by Morocco. It was the first Cuban military presence in Africa. However, since a cease-fire was signed at an early stage of the dispute, the Cuban troops never joined the fight. Cuban solidarity to

[97] *Ivi*, p. 51.
[98] For an analysis of race and racism in postcolonial Cuba see Alejandro de la Fuente, *A Nation for All: Race, Inequality, and Politics in Twentieth Century Cuba*, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001.
[99] Piero Gleijeses, "Cuba's First Venture in Africa: Algeria, 1961-1965," in *Journal of Latin American Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 1, 1996, p. 159.
[100] *Ivi*, p. 160.
[101] Hebelberto López Blanch revealed for the first time the details of the mission *in Historias Secretas de Médicos Cubanos*, a collection of oral histories of Cuban doctors who worked in Africa during the 1960s and 1970s.

Algeria was offered during a difficult time for the new revolutionary government. Medical personnel was dispatched in a period in which Cuba was suffering an exodus of doctors and was launching significative reforms to improve the domestic health care system.[102] As Gleijeses observes, "[i]t was an unusual gesture: an underdeveloped country tendering free aid to another in even more dire straits. […] It was an act of solidarity that brought no tangible benefit and came at real material cost."[103] Therefore, this was a case in which Cuban support could be said to have been provided on the basis of solidarity, as it strained the poor resources of Cuba—which in 1963 had also been hit by a hurricane—and endangered the relations it had with France, one of the few allies Cuba still had, and Morocco, which had signed an agreement to purchase Cuban sugar. As Gleijeses further notes, "if Cuba's foreign policy were based solely on *realpolitik*, Cuba would have not helped Algeria."[104] Cuba and Algeria were brought together by the perception of a natural tie due to the similarity of their struggles, and the friendship they built was based on mutual solidarity and collaboration, as well as on the personal affinity between Castro and Ben Bella. The relationship between the two countries went cold after Ben Bella's government was overthrown by a military coup led by Houari Boumédienne in June 1965, which Castro condemned. The relationship was eventually resumed but it never recovered the warmth of the first years. Until late 1964, in fact, Algeria had been the main focus of Cuban aid in Africa.

In December 1964, Che Guevara embarked on a three-month tour in Africa with the aim of hammering out solidarity agreements with African movements and governments.[105] He met the leaders of the MPLA, FRELIMO, and PAIGC and laid the foundation for the collaboration with their anti-colonial struggle. He met with the Simba rebels of Zaire (formerly Belgian Congo, now the Democratic Republic of Congo), who were rising up against the pro-US regime of Moïse Thsombe, and offered them support. In April 1965, convinced of the revolutionary potential of Africa, and of Zaire in particular, Guevara led a group of Cuban internationalists to join the fight of the Simbas, only to withdraw in November after the Simba resistance crumbled under the CIA-backed white mercenaries and Tshombe was dismissed by Joseph Kasavubu—which convinced the Simbas to end the war.[106] After the Cubans left, General Joseph-Désiré Mobutu seized power with a coup and became the President of Zaire. While a Cuban column led by Che Guevara was in Zaire, a Cuban unit led by the Cuban official Jorge Risquet Valdès reached the neighboring Congo-Brazzaville (formerly French Congo, now the Republic of Congo), with the purpose of defending the Congolese

[102] Kirk, *Healthcare without Borders*, pp. 20-21; Fitz, *Cuban Health Care*, pp. 31-34.
[103] Gleijeses, "Cuba's First Venture in Africa," pp. 165-166.
[104] *Ivi*, p. 191.
[105] Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, pp. 78-88.
[106] *Ivi*, pp. 101-144.

government of Alphonse Massamba-Débat against attacks from Zaire, as well as training and assisting the MPLA, which was based there. Cuban military units in Zaire and Congo-Brazzaville (for a total of around four hundred soldiers) were accompanied by a medical contingent that assisted guerrillas and civilians, as was the case in Algeria and in the subsequent internationalist missions.[107] In Congo-Brazzaville, in 1966, the presence of the Cuban army prevented a revolt to develop into a military coup.[108] However, the following year, the Cubans left with some frustration. Contrary to what they expected, in fact, the Cubans did not find a revolutionary government in Congo-Brazzaville, but one divided by personal ambitions and ideological factions. Influenced by Che Guevara's internationalist theories, the Cubans thought they could employ central Africa as the base to spread the revolution. They embarked on the missions with inflated expectations, but with little knowledge of Africa, and were faced with a much more complex reality than they expected. In Zaire, they were shocked by the lack of cooperation from the leader Laurent Kabila, the lack of discipline of the Simbas, their poor fighting skills, and, lastly, their unwillingness to fight.[109] In Congo-Brazzaville, they found a government divided by "different ideas, tribal questions and the personal ambitions,"[110] a government that, had they stayed, they would have had to defend against internal uprisings rather than external aggression as initially planned.[111]

In the late 1960s, the focus of Cuban attention shifted to a more successful movement and reliable partner:[112] the PAIGC, which was fighting against Portuguese colonialism in Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde under the leadership of Amilcar Cabral. Cuba supported the PAIGC, which was based in Conakry (Guinea), providing material aid, weapons, military training, scholarships, doctors, technicians, advisers, and around fifty or sixty soldiers, who secretly participated in the struggle. The relationship between the PAIGC and Cuba was based on mutual appreciation. The Cubans followed the instructions of Amilcar Cabral, who, in turn, established that the Cubans were the only foreigners allowed to join the fight. As Gleijeses explains, "he chose Cuba in part because he felt some cultural and ethnic affinity with the Cubans and, above all, because he respected the Cuban revolution."[113]

After having gradually abandoned the project to spread the revolution in Latin America, thus, Cuba's foreign policy started to focus especially on Africa. Other areas of interest were North Vietnam and

[107] Fitz, *Cuban Health Care,* pp. 54-73.
[108] Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, pp. 169-172.
[109] *Ivi*, p.150.
[110] *Ivi*, p. 173.
[111] For the history of the conflicts in Congo see Giacomo Macola, *Una storia violenta: potere e conflitti nel bacino del Congo (XVIII-XXI secolo)*, Roma: Viella, 2021.
[112] The PAIGC, in fact, was highly regarded around the world because of its strong leadership, its successful political mobilization, and its strategy to establish new political structures in the liberated areas. By 1965, after few years of struggle, it controlled a third of Guinea Bissau (see Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, p. 185).
[113] *Ivi*, p. 199.

the Middle East, where Cuba forcefully condemned Israel and supported Syria, communist South Yemen, and later Iraq.[114] While a considerable Cuban military presence was stationed in Zaire, Congo-Brazzaville, and in Guinea and Guinea Bissau, other smaller military missions were established in Sierra Leone in 1972, Equatorial Guinea in 1973, and Said Barre's Somalia in 1974. Meanwhile, Cuban medical cadres and technicians also worked in the continent, for instance in Congo, Guinea, Tanzania, Mali, and Somalia. A handful of Africans, especially from the war-torn countries of Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Eritrea, South Africa, and Namibia, received military training in Cuba, while others started to go to Cuba as scholarship students—the firsts from Guinea in 1961.[115] The 1970s represented a time of economic growth and relative successes in foreign policy for Cuba. The country increased its assistance abroad, developing diplomatic relations in the Western hemisphere, extending its aid in Asia to Laos, yet still focusing especially on Africa, in particular southern Africa and the Horn of Africa.

The largest Cuban engagement abroad was in Angola, beginning in August 1975, when, at the request of MPLA leader Agostinho Neto, Castro began sending the first instructors to support the MPLA in the civil war that had broken out a few months earlier. Then, when, under pressure from the United States, South African troops invaded Angola in October to crush the MPLA, Cuba intervened by sending combat troops and helping the MPLA to stop the South African advance. In deciding to intervene in Angola, Castro acted autonomously from Moscow, which opposed sending Cuban soldiers, being concerned about endangering détente, and only began providing support to the Cubans after the fait accompli. Moreover, by sending troops to Angola, Cuba was jeopardizing relations with the West, which were improving at the time.[116] Ideology, rather than realpolitik, was thus the main motive for Cuban intervention. After the South African withdrawal from Angola, completed in March 1976, and under pressure from Brezhnev, Havana was preparing to reduce its troops and gradually withdraw. Yet because of the growing external threat in the region—due to the incessant South African incursions, which reached a dramatic climax at Cassinga in May 1978, and, in the same period, the crisis in southern Zaire[117]—at Luanda's request, Cuba decided to stay and send further reinforcements.[118] Altogether, from 1975 to 1991, around 400,000 Cuban soldiers were deployed in Angola to support MPLA against the attacks coming from the South African regime of apartheid and, to a lesser extent, Mobutu's Zaire. According to Havana, in fact, the responsibility of defending the

[114] Durch, "The Cuban Military in Africa and the Middle East," pp. 52-56.
[115] Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, pp. 227-229.
[116] Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, pp. 28-30.
[117] In southern Zaire, French and Belgian troops aboard US aircraft intervened to stop the Katangans, who had invaded the Shaba region to overthrow Mobutu.
[118] Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, pp. 53-64.

area from UNITA attacks was of the FAPLA, while the Cubans were tasked with protecting territorial integrity from external threats.[119] In addition to Cuban soldiers, Havana also sent large contingents of civil aid to support the nation-building process of independent Angola, for a total of around 50,000 civilians. The number of Cubans who lost their lives while in Angola amounts to 2,077, as Gleijeses reports.[120]

As mentioned, the Cuban citizens recruited to go to Angola decided to leave voluntarily, although in some cases the Cuban government exerted some kind of pressure. To legitimize the broadness of the mission in Angola and to motivate the population to volunteer, the Cuban government launched a propaganda campaign based on the shared genealogy between Cuba and Angola. On the basis of the narrative of the blood relationship between Cuba and Africa, in 1975 Castro declared Cuba to be a "Afro-Latin American nation."[121] This narrative was supposed to create the conditions "for the moral duty of all Cubans, regardless of the color of their skin, to support the Angolan independence war as internationalists: every Cuban had the obligation to pay Cuba's historic 'debt towards humanity' by means of personal sacrifice,"[122] every Cuban was "compelled by antiracist principles to help defend Angola's independence against attack from the South African apartheid regime."[123] Significant of how the memory of slavery was used by Castro to shape a narrative based on the shared genealogy between Cuba and Africa and their common struggle is the fact that the Cuban operation in Angola in 1975-1976 was named "Operation Carlota" after an enslaved woman of African origin who led a slave uprising in Cuba's Matanzas province in 1843.[124]

The study conducted by Hatzky on the Cuban teachers in Angola reveals the variety of rationales behind the decision to volunteer to go to Angola, which could depend on a real commitment to revolution, as well as "a sense of duty, humanist principles, the desire for travel and adventure, and the hope of career advancement or material gain."[125] However, as Hatzky points out, the transnational and transcultural identity that Cuba propagated to motivate Cubans to go to Angola did not affect the decision to volunteer.[126] Moreover, as Ann Myra Houser argues, the rhetoric based on the comparison between the slave rebellions of the past and the contemporary anti-imperialist struggle hardly resonated with black Cubans.[127] Regarding the reception of such rhetoric among African students in

[119] Cuba did participate in the struggle against UNITA but in a limited way. Its main mission was to defend Angola from the external threats.
[120] Gleijeses, "Moscow's Proxy?," p. 43.
[121] Hatzky, *Cubans in Angola*, p. 83.
[122] Hatzky, "Cuba's Concept of 'Internationalist Solidarity'," p. 160.
[123] Hatzky, *Cubans in Angola*, p. 83.
[124] Houser, "Avenging Carlota in Africa."
[125] Hatzky, *Cubans in Angola*, p. 96.
[126] *Ivi*, p. 100.
[127] Houser, "Avenging Carlota in Africa," p. 60.

Cuba, Hauke Dorsch writes, "on the one hand African students affirmatively referred to dominant discourses of Cuba as an Afro-Latin nation in order to find a place in its society, but on the other hand some kept apart, emphasizing cultural differences instead, especially as they did not find their cultural peculiarities reflected in Cuban representations of Africa and everyday experiences of racism."[128] Although propaganda supported the link between Africa and Cuba and, internally, efforts were made to eliminate racial inequalities, the reality on the ground was multifaceted, with stereotypes about Africa still persisting and Afro-Cubans not yet covering important positions. While some students described Cuba as a country without racism, where they were not identified as foreigners, others experienced racism in more or less latent forms, revealing that the legacy of racism left long-lasting marks on Cuban society.[129]

The second largest Cuban military mission abroad in the late 1970s was in Ethiopia, where, at the request of Mengistu, in November 1977 Castro started to send Cuban troops to help halt the Somali's invasion of Ogaden. Castro had been impressed by Mengistu and the Ethiopian revolution and, some months earlier, had already agreed to send instructors and medical personnel. Supported or perhaps even prompted by Moscow, which had geostrategic interests in the area, the Cubans intervened in the Ogaden conflict supporting Mengistu, after having unsuccessfully attempted, together with the Soviets, to mediate for a negotiated solution—which they continued to pursue.[130] Beyond Soviet encouragements, Castro himself decided to intervene against Barre's Somalia in the Ogaden conflict because he considered the social and economic reforms adopted by Mengistu to be progressive, because he found the Somalis "more irredentist than socialists," and because the Somali invasion of Ethiopia violated the respect of the borders inherited at the time of independence, a principle considered inviolable by the OAU.[131] The dispatch of many thousands of Cuban soldiers[132] to Ethiopia, who fought with Soviet and East German equipment,[133] prevented the Somali victory in Ogaden, while creating some controversy in regard to the Eritrean liberation movement. In the early 1970s, Cuba had provided assistance to the Eritreans who were fighting for independence from Ethiopia, but after the Derg's shift toward socialism, it interrupted the aid. Moreover, the victory over Somalia in 1978, achieved also thanks to the Cuban intervention, allowed Ethiopia to focus on its fight against the Eritrean movement. Despite pressures coming from Mengistu, Cuba never joined

[128] Dorsch, "Black or Red Atlantic?," p. 301.
[129] Dorsch, "Studierende und Schüler aus dem südlichen Afrika in Kuba," pp. 21-22.
[130] LeoGrande, *Cuba's Policy in Africa*, pp. 37-42.
[131] Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, pp. 45-47.
[132] In "Moscow's Proxy?" Gleijeses stated that they were 16,000 (p. 13) while in his more recent *Visions of Freedom*, he speaks of 12,000 Cuban soldiers (p. 45). 163 Cuban soldiers lost their life in the Ogaden conflict (Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, p. 325).
[133] Unfried, Martínez, "El Internacionalismo," pp. 436-437.

Ethiopia's struggle against the Eritreans, trying instead to mediate for a solution and urging Mengistu to grant them autonomy.[134] Nevertheless, its assistance to Ethiopia—which continued during the 1980s[135] although Mengistu's rule started to become a disappointment for Havana because of its cruelty and ineptitude—did not further the cause of the Eritreans fighting for their freedom. Thus, the Horn of Africa "has proved to be a problem case for Cuba, since the expectations of all involved could not be met."[136] In this case, it could be said that the support for the self-determination of a people struggling for freedom gave way to realpolitik.

While the 1970s had been years of economic growth and political satisfaction with the development abroad, the 1980s presented some obstacles for Cuba. From the mid of the decade, Cuba faced a cooling of the relationship with Gorbachev's Soviet Union, economic difficulties—fueled by the debt crisis and exacerbated by the Soviet cuts of economic aid—and a stalemate on the international stage and, especially, on southern Africa. Nevertheless, during the 1980s, Cuba technical assistance continued to be provided to several African countries, such as Angola, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Libya, Algeria, Guinea Bissau, and São Tomé and Príncipe, and large groups of African students continued to arrive at the Isla de la Juventud and in the main island.

It was especially in Angola where Cuba deployed most of its aid. Here, Cubans also assisted the southern African liberation movements which were based there: ZAPU, ANC, and SWAPO, as we shall discuss further.[137] Here, Havana opposed Reagan's linkage, promising to stay in Angola until it was safe from external aggressions, which meant until the South African regime relinquished its control over Namibia and, eventually, was dismantled. As the Cuban economic and human resources were increasingly overstretched, Cuba was eager to withdraw and at times encouraged the Angolans to lessen their reliance on Cuban assistance and to strengthen the FAPLA. Yet Cuba stayed as long as Angola requested, even after the country abandoned the socialist path and became closer to the West. In Angola, Cubans and Soviets were often in disagreement on the strategy to carry on, and once again, the former intervened in the battle of Cuito Cuanavale without consulting the latter. Cuito Cuanavale was the final chapter of a long saga of regional struggles and Cold War tensions.[138] In line with the rhetoric of shared genealogy and common struggle, it was portrayed by the Cubans as a victory that avenged Carlota and her fellow slave rebels.[139] It led to the final outcome of the

[134] Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, pp. 324-326; LeoGrande, *Cuba's Policy in Africa*, pp. 42-45.
[135] Cuban military presence, as well as civilian support, continued through the 1980s. Moreover, Cuba provided scholarships to about 3,000 Ethiopian students and created a medicine faculty in Jimma and a veterinary school in Debre Zeit (see Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, pp. 325-326).
[136] Grabendorff, "Cuba's Involvement in Africa," p. 7.
[137] Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom,* pp. 86-91.
[138] See section 3.3.3.
[139] Houser, "Avenging Carlota in Africa."

negotiations—to which Cuba participated—which established the independence of Namibia and the withdrawal of Cubans from Angola.

3.3 *La causa más bonita*: Cuba against apartheid, for the independence of Namibia

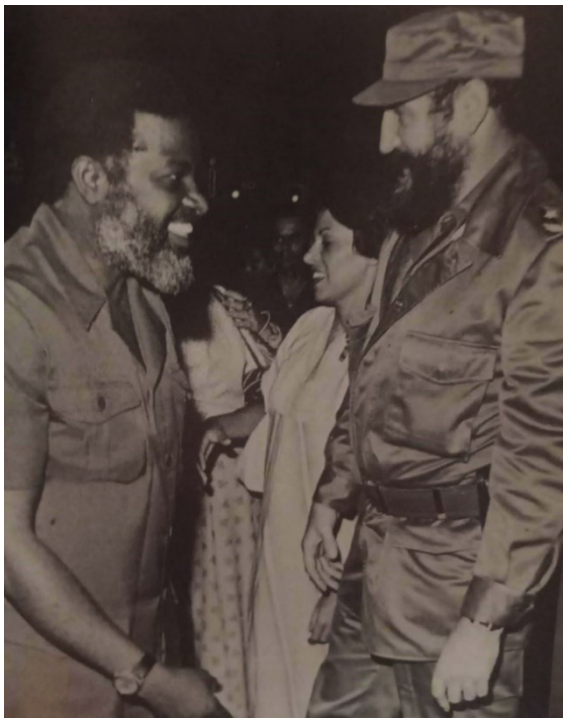

Figure 14. *Sam Nujoma and Fidel Castro in Havana, 1979.*
Source: Deutschmann (ed.), *Changing the history of Africa.*

From 1975 to 1991, Cuba was the only country that deployed such a large number of troops in the struggle against the apartheid regime, a struggle that Castro called the "causa más bonita de la humanidad" (the most beautiful cause of the mankind).[140] But apartheid had been in the Cuban political agenda for some time, since the first years of the revolutionary government, when, at the United Nations General Assembly in September 1959[141] and during the First NAM Summit held in Belgrade in 1961, Cuba condemned South Africa's apartheid system.[142] On 25 March 1964, at the UN Conference on Trade and Development in Geneva, Che Guevara underlined the paradoxes of the conference, which excluded some socialist countries while giving a seat to South Africa, "which violates the Charter of the United Nations by the inhuman and fascist policy of apartheid embodied

[140] Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, passim.
[141] Nazario, Benemelis, "Cuba's Relations with Africa," p. 14.
[142] López Blanch, *Cuba,* pp. 10-13.

in its national laws, and which defies the United Nations by refusing to transmit information on the territories which it holds in trust."[143] In December of the same year, Che Guevara reiterated the condemnation of apartheid and alerted the world to its brutality before the United Nations, highlighting and denouncing the UN's immobility.[144] The denunciation of South Africa's racism run parallel to the domestic reforms that the Cuban revolutionary government began to enact in order to solve the racial discrimination existing in the country. These reforms aimed at ending Cuba's institutional segregation and cultural racism—a legacy of centuries of external and white domination on the island—yet with partial results, as mentioned above.[145]

To the racist regime of apartheid Castro opposed the Cuban revolutionary social system based on mestizaje, portraying Cuba with Martí's notion of a nation "for all and with all," where being Cuban meant being "more than black or white."[146] He connected Cuban and African history, qualifying the Batista regime as a "Cuban apartheid" and insisting on the relevance of the memory of slavery.[147] In the name of its history of slavery and anti-colonial struggle, in the name of its anti-racism and revolutionary idealism, as well as of a shared history with the African people, Cuba portrayed itself as having the duty and the historical mission to help to eliminate apartheid in southern Africa.

Non-racialism, then, as Cuba's pillar in both internal and foreign policy, was the main driving force behind the Cuban decision to deploy a large contingent of soldiers in Angola in 1975 and to stay until the territory was safe from external aggressions—as Adrien Delmas argues.[148] Yet Delmas goes further concluding that "the real target of the Cuban military engagement in Angola between 1975 and 1991 was in fact South Africa—more than the independence of Namibia or support for the MPLA."[149] However, it must be noted that, if the main target was indeed South Africa's apartheid, transversely it was also Namibian independence, where South Africa acted as a colonial power and extended its racist policies. As Raúl Castro said during a meeting with Sam Nujoma in April 1987: "the struggle against Apartheid is the most just struggle on the planet, and the struggle of the Namibian people for their independence is an important link in the fight against Apartheid."[150] In a speech on 29 May 1985 addressed to the Namibian students in Cuba, Fidel Castro declared:

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[143] López Blanch, *Cuba*, p. 16; Che Guevara's speech "Deve finire la filosofia del saccheggio," in Deutschmann (ed.), *Leggere Che Guevara*, p. 347.
[144] López Blanch, *Cuba*, p. 17; Che Guevara's speech at the United Nations, in Deutschmann (ed.), *Leggere Che Guevara*, p. 371.
[145] de la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, pp. 259-316.
[146] Hatzky, *Cubans in Angola*, p. 85.
[147] Adrien Delmas, "Cuba and apartheid," in Konieczna, Skinner (eds.), *A Global History of Anti-Apartheid*, p. 141.
[148] *Ivi*, p. 133.
[149] *Ivi*, p. 137.
[150] HAPP Digital Archive, Archive of the Cuban Armed Forces (CF), "Memorandum of Conversation between Raúl Castro and Sam Nujoma," 10 April 1987, obtained and contributed to CWIHP by Piero Gleijeses and included in CWIHP e-Dossier No. 44, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/118095, p. 41 (accessed on 21 January 2023).

> There will be no solution in southern Africa without Resolution 435 and the independence of Namibia! And as long as Angola agrees—and we have no doubt that this is the Angolan position—as long as UN Resolution 435 is not implemented and as long as Namibia is not independent, or at least as long as there are no concrete and necessary steps taken to implement the resolution and achieve real and meaningful independence, not a single Cuban will leave Angola![151]

The question of Namibian independence was intimately linked to the presence of the Cuban troops in Angola, since the Cubans, in accordance with the Angolans, were willing to withdraw only when South African troops would agree to leave Namibia and, therefore, would no longer be a threat to Angola. In the 1980s, Reagan launched the policy of "linkage," which envisioned the Cuban withdrawal from Angola as a precondition for the South African withdrawal from Namibia. This implied equating the two presences, while in reality the former was required by a legal government for protection from external aggressions and the second was declared illegal by the UN and the ICJ.
Cuba was acknowledged by Sam Nujoma as one of SWAPO's closest allies.[152] The first sporadic contacts between SWAPO and Cuban diplomats took place already during the 1960s in Cairo, where most of the African liberation movements, SWAPO included, had an office at the time. This is reported by Ángel Dalmau Fernández, who between 1967 and 1970 worked at the Cuban embassy in Cairo as an interpreter, meeting also SWAPO representatives, like Sam Nujoma, Andreas Shipanga, and others.[153] William LeoGrande states that, despite the support to the Namibian cause, at this stage Cuba did not provide substantial assistance to SWAPO because of its relationship with UNITA.[154]
The real cooperation between SWAPO and Cuba was established when the Namibian liberation movement sided with the MPLA and moved its base from Lusaka to Luanda, between March and April 1976. In February 1976, Jorge Risquet, who was the head of the Cuban civilian mission in Angola, met Sam Nujoma in Luanda, laying the foundation for a strong relationship between SWAPO and Cuba.[155] Given the difficulties that SWAPO had in training combatants in Tanzania and Zambia, on this occasion Risquet told him that "the best thing that they could do was to come through Angola and fight together with the Angolans and Cubans. That way, they would be in the country, which was going to be their base of operations, and they would also gain ground in the struggle against the South

[151] Fidel Castro, "We will stay until Namibia is independent," in Deutschmann (ed.), *Changing the history of Africa*, p. 103.
[152] Nujoma, *Where Others Wavered*, p. 361.
[153] Online interview with Ángel Dalmau Fernández, 31 August 2022.
[154] LeoGrande, *Cuba's Policy in Africa*, p. 53.
[155] Online interview with Ángel Dalmau Fernández, 31 August 2022; Jorge Risquet Valdés, "My first conversation with Sam Nujoma," in López Blanch, *SWAPO*, p. 230.

Africans."[156] After the South African retreat in late March 1976, Namibian combatants started to arrive in Angola.

In February 1977, Nujoma appointed Helmut Angula as the SWAPO representative to Cuba, Latin America, and the Caribbean—a position that he held until 1986.[157] In March 1977, Angula attended the first meeting between Nujoma and Fidel Castro in Luanda, a meeting whose purpose was "to discuss cooperation between SWAPO and Cuba."[158] Here, as Angula wrote, "Castro undertook to assist the people of Namibia through SWAPO, against the illegal occupation by South Africa. As the leader of the Cuban revolution, Castro possessed the understanding of our just cause for independence."[159] Following the meeting, "an agreement was signed for Cuba's help in military and education matters, among others."[160]

Between 1977 and 1978, strategy and solidarity measures were discussed over the course of several meetings, and the relationship between SWAPO and Cuba grew stronger and stronger. As reflected in the minutes of the meeting between Risquet and Nujoma, held on 12 October 1977 in Dar es Salaam, consultations on the strategy to be used were customary. Nujoma had asked Cuba to provide advice on the ongoing negotiations conducted under the mediation of the WCG's five powers on the prerequisites for the implementation of Resolution 435.[161] During the meeting in Dar er Salaam, in view of Nujoma's trip to New York, where he was supposed to speak at the UN General Assembly and to meet with the five Westerners, Risquet advised him not to make any compromise in regard to two non-negotiable points: the total withdrawal of South African armed forces and the Namibian sovereignty over Walvis Bay,[162] which the South African government claimed to belong to South Africa in conformity with its status as a British enclave.[163] Furthermore, he insisted on the importance of strengthening SWAPO militarily and developing armed struggle inside Namibia, as a way to obtain a better position in the negotiations.[164] These Cuban positions were shared by Nujoma.

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[156] Risquet, "My first conversation with Sam Nujoma," p. 231.

[157] Then, the task of representing SWAPO in Central and South America and the Caribbean was entrusted to Peter Tshirumbu Tsheehama.

[158] Helmut Kangulohi Angula, *A Journey of Journeys: an Autobiographical Essay*, Windhoek: John Meinert Printing, 2017, p. 38.

[159] *Ibidem*.

[160] Helmut Kangulohi Angula, "Opening primary schools in war fronts," in López Blanch, *SWAPO,* p. 217.

[161] Risquet, "My first conversation with Sam Nujoma," p. 232.

[162] HAPP Digital Archive, Archives of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party (ACC), "Memorandum of Conversation between Jorge Risquet and Sam Nujoma," 12 October 1977, obtained and contributed to CWIHP by Piero Gleijeses and included in CWIHP e-Dossier No. 44, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/117930, p. 3 (accessed on 21 January 2023).

[163] Walvis Bay included the only Namibia's deep-water trading port in Namibia and was vital for the connection with the outside world. It was handed over to Namibia in 1994.

[164] HAPP Digital Archive, ACC, "Memorandum of Conversation between Jorge Risquet and Sam Nujoma," 12 October 1977, p. 4.

On a diplomatic level, Cuba supported SWAPO, advancing the cause of Namibian independence at the UN, and participating in the quadripartite talks in 1988. Since the first years, Cuba condemned the apartheid regime on several occasions, called for the adoption of the resolutions, and urged the UN and all the countries of the world to take action, politically and economically, against the South African government.[165] It actively participated in anti-apartheid conferences on sanctions such as those in Paris in 1981 and 1986, criticizing the adoption of soft measures against the apartheid regime,[166] whereas the Cuban attitude toward the South African regime was firm. In the 1982 Joint Declaration of Angola and Cuba, Cuba was announced to be willing to leave Angola only after the implementation of a real solution for Namibia and the total withdrawal of South African troops.

Militarily, Cuba supported SWAPO with provisions, training, and its own soldiers and advisers. From late 1976, thousands of SWAPO fighters were trained in the Tobias Hainyeko Training Center in Lubango, southern Angola, by Soviet and Cuban instructors,[167] with the Soviets taking the lead in the training.[168] SWAPO combatants also received military training in Cuba itself.[169]

The training of SWAPO cadres is also mentioned by the memorandum of the conversation that took place between Risquet and Nujoma on 5 October 1978, when the possibility of selecting and training one hundred men in security and intelligence matters was discussed, but its implementation was at the time still pending and no further information is available on the matter so far.[170]

The Cuban contribution to the SWAPO military struggle is to be regarded as valuable firstly because of the continued military presence in Angola, which allowed Cuba to intervene in a short time to support and defend PLAN units and SWAPO camps. Nujoma acknowledged the importance of the Cuban military presence in Angola, by saying: "with that presence of its troops in the south of this country, for SWAPO it is as if they were fighting alongside PLAN soldiers in Namibia. If the Cuban troops were to withdraw, then our independence would be 50 years away; on the contrary, its presence and strength accelerate our march toward liberation."[171]

Piero Gleijeses and Vladimir Shubin pointed out that the Cuban consideration of SWAPO's military performance was not always high, as it is testified by the fact that weak combat efficiency and low morale were highlighted during conversations with Soviet officials.[172] In particular, Shubin reported

[165] López Blanch, *Cuba*, p. 12.
[166] *Ivi*, p. 125.
[167] Interview with Martin Shalli, Windhoek, 22 February 2022.
[168] Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, p. 90.
[169] Interview with Martin Shalli, Windhoek, 22 February 2022.
[170] HAPP Digital Archive, ACC, "Memorandum of Conversation between Jorge Risquet and Sam Nujoma," 5 October 1978, obtained and contributed to CWIHP by Piero Gleijeses and included in CWIHP e-Dossier No. 44, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/117940, p. 7 (accessed on 21 January 2023).
[171] *Ivi*, p. 3.
[172] Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, p. 209; Shubin, *The Hot "Cold War*," pp. 221-222, 226.

the harsh judgement of SWAPO made by Raúl Castro during a meeting with the Soviets in late 1979[173] and an exchange of opinion between the Soviet General Konstantin Kurochkin and the Cuban General Leopoldo Cintra Frias in 1983.[174] Shubin himself declares that he does not comprehend why the Cubans underestimated PLAN on these occasions, and further documentation is not available to explain it. Furthermore, the accounts made by the Cubans who fought in Angola alongside PLAN in 1988, which highlighted the reciprocal respect between Cuban and Namibian soldiers, provided a different picture, as we shall see.[175] This could lead to the conclusion that those critical judgements were isolated cases or, alternatively, that PLAN's performance improved over time.

Many mixed military units, combining Cubans and SWAPO soldiers, were stationed in Angola.[176] In May 1978, a Cuban unit intervened in Cassinga to help SWAPO repel the South African attack. On the occasion of Cuito Cuanavale's battle, and the subsequent clashes during the first months of 1988, Cubans operated together with PLAN and FAPLA soldiers. Some Cuban soldiers died during these military operations. One, Néstor Martínez de Santelices, kept a war diary before finding the death in southern Angola.[177]

Cuban civilians deployed in Angola—doctors, nurses, teachers, engineers, construction workers and so on—were also a significant support for SWAPO. Doctors and health personnel were stationed in the refugee camps and Cuban bases, and offered medical consultation and emergency aid to Angolans, refugees, SWAPO combatants, MPLA soldiers, and even South African prisoners of war.[178] Testimonies of Cuban doctors in SWAPO camps are few and report about the everyday life of the medical missions and the diseases they encountered, such as malaria and anemia.[179]

Solidarity measures were also taken in the educational field, where Cuba was eager to contribute to the schooling of young Namibians who would help rebuild the nation once independence was achieved. In 1977, a small school for Namibian students was set up in Chibía, in the Huila province in southwestern Angola. The school had Cuban teachers and was to teach Spanish to the Namibians who would go to Cuba for their studies. During our interview, Miriam Nghitotovali, who was among the Namibian students in Chibía, recalled how one Cuban man was particularly "instrumental" in their education.[180] This was Orestes Valdivia López, the Cuban head of administration and logistics,

[173] Shubin, *The Hot "Cold War*," pp. 221-222.
[174] *Ivi*, p. 226.
[175] See section 3.3.3.
[176] Online interview with Ángel Dalmau Fernández, 31 August 2022.
[177] See section 3.3.3.
[178] Written interview with Yeniska Martínez Díaz, 5 October 2022.
[179] Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, pp. 90-91.
[180] Interview with Miriam Nghitotovali, Windhoek, 1 March 2022.

better known as "el Primo" (cousin), whom the many Namibian children of the school regarded as a father because of his great commitment to their education.[181]

When Dalmau arrived in Luanda after the Cassinga massacre in 1978 as a political liaison officer to SWAPO, "the first one hundred Namibian students could already speak a bit of Spanish."[182] Then, as the school was located too close to the Namibian border and was therefore under threat from South African planes, through the efforts of Ángel Dalmau Fernández and Orestes Valdivia López, the school was moved many thousands of kilometers north, to the city of Ndalatando, in the Kwanza Norte province, in an abandoned coffee farm named Ndalagando.[183] The school in Ndalatando, as Dalmau reported, was active until early 1980. Just like Orestes Valdivia López was highly regarded by SWAPO leaders and children, who called him "father," his wife, Lidia de la Lastra, also a teacher in Chibía and Ndalatando, was considered equal to a mother.[184] As we shall see, after being taught Spanish in Chibía/Ndalatando, the group, together with other Namibian children and adolescents, left for Cuba following the Cassinga massacre. Here, thousands of Namibians spent years studying on scholarship.

The relationship between Cuba and SWAPO was regarded as excellent by Helmut Angula.[185] Several meetings between the two delegations were held over the years, although only some of the reports of these meetings received permission for them to be published by Gleijeses in the Wilson Center Digital Archive. These published reports reveal a friendly relationship between Cuba and SWAPO, based on mutual trust and admiration. Topics of the conversations often focused on the strategies to be employed both at the military and diplomatic level, on the need for protection of the refugees in Angola, and on the need to intensify the armed struggle. An element that emerged more than once when the Namibians talk about Cuban solidarity is its non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries. During the interview, Helmut Angula said:

> the Cuban political system, at the party level, and government level, is not interfering in the internal affairs of other countries. So they were very clear that…"you don't have to copy from us, you develop your own system as it fit your own conditions." So…and we were not instructed to copy what they were doing. Maybe your situation would not allow that. So it's up to you to see what good you can get from Cuba, and what might be good for your country. So that was very clear from Fidel.[186]

[181] Online interview with Ángel Dalmau Fernández, 31 August 2022; Written interview with Yeniska Martínez Díaz, 5 October 2022.
[182] Online interview with Ángel Dalmau Fernández, 31 August 2022.
[183] Online interview with Ángel Dalmau Fernández, 31 August 2022; Written interview with Yeniska Martínez Díaz, 5 October 2022.
[184] Written interview with Yeniska Martínez Díaz, 5 October 2022.
[185] Interview with Helmut Angula, Windhoek, 16 February 2022.
[186] Interview with Helmut Angula, Windhoek, 16 February 2022.

Hage Geingob, the third and current President of Namibia, also has fond memories of Cuba. In recalling a meeting between Fidel Castro and Sam Nujoma held in 1978 in Cuba, at the time of the WCG-supervised negotiations, when Nujoma reported on the talks of Resolution 435 and his intention to go for elections, he writes:

> It was difficult to tell those whom you have asked to support the armed struggle and die for the cause that you intended to go for elections and it took Comrade Nujoma almost an hour to explain this to the *Comandante*. What impressed me about this scenario was that during the explanation by Comrade Nujoma, President Castro only listened and did not intervene. I had never seen this before because when one used to explain SWAPO's position to African ambassadors at the UN, you were met with interruptions and lectures. After Comrade Nujoma had finished his explanation, President Castro finally responded by saying that Namibia was our country and that the struggle was ours. He went on to say that Cuba had provided help to Namibia during the armed struggle, because we asked for help in that sense and therefore would support the elections as well. The only thing the *Comandante* wanted to know was whether we were sure we could win the elections. Comrade Nujoma responded to this question by saying that with hard work, victory was certain. The *Comandante* then continued by saying that Cuba had gone to fight in the liberation struggle not to gain anything but only to bring back the dead bodies of her sons and daughters.[187]

Fidel Castro insisted on the selfless nature of Cuban solidarity and the willingness to intervene only when called and not to interfere. In order to measure the potential extent of Cuban interference in SWAPO's affairs, it would be interesting to investigate Cuba's official position in the 1976 SWAPO internal crisis and the subsequent "spy drama." Yet, given the lack of available sources, it is not possible to exactly retrace the extent of Cuba's knowledge and interference, if there was any, in such matter. During the conversation of early October 1978, Risquet asked Nujoma about the "return of the SWAPO's traitor" Andreas Shipanga, and said that: "if he decides to return to Namibia, to make political life it would be good to eliminate him."[188] About the Cuban position in SWAPO's internal crisis, during the interview, Dalmau specified that while they were aware of the ongoing crisis, because SWAPO reported what was happening, Cuba never interfered.[189] However, it is perhaps possible to conclude that, as a close ally of SWAPO, Cuba aligned its position with the official narrative of SWAPO leadership. Yet only archival documents, if and when available, could confirm or deny this.

[187] Hage Geingob, "Namibian is a child of international solidarity," in López Blanch, *SWAPO*, p. 91.
[188] HAPP Digital Archive, ACC, "Memorandum of Conversation between Jorge Risquet and Sam Nujoma," 5 October 1978, p. 4.
[189] Online interview with Ángel Dalmau Fernández, 31 August 2022.

As this section has highlighted so far, Cuba provided political support, in addition to solidarity measures in the militarily, educational, and medical fields. Furthermore, it participated in the negotiations leading to Namibian independence. While a general overview of Cuban solidarity with SWAPO has been provided here, the following sections present a detailed examination of the major events of this friendship.

3.3.1 From Tchamutete to Cassinga

A Cuban tactical group was stationed in a military camp in Tchamutete, fifteen kilometers south of Cassinga. Among this group, Pascual Corbea Jiménez, who left Cuba to embark on a military mission in Angola at the beginning of 1978 and remained for a total of two and a half years, had been assigned the task of overseeing the territory's air security in case of a foreign intervention.[190] As he recalled, the tactical group in Tchamutete comprised different units of various military specialties, and each unit had its own doctor. From there, before the Cassinga massacre, Cuban doctors visited the refugee camp in Cassinga to provide medical assistance.[191]

On 4 May 1978, when the first bombs headed for the Cassinga camp were dropped by the South African air force in the early morning hours, the Cubans in Tchamutete were overwhelmed by the deafening noise of the bombs.[192] Corbea Jiménez recalled that morning with these words:

> As usual we were trying to get through the day like everyone else or the ones before us, which was with the political classes, training and thinking and analyses of issues, but our awakening was as dramatic as that of the Namibian comrades. The deafening noise of the bombs reached us and it was practically the alarm we received directly. The first alarm was that. The noise of the bombs. We realized that they were attacking close to us when we saw the number of paratroopers falling in the Cassinga area.[193]

They knew about the attack before the official alarm, and immediately they prepared for combat. Corbea Jiménez was given the order to position himself on the highest place in the area to detect the presence of the approaching planes, some of which loaded with bombs and others with men.[194]

After having received the order to leave, Cuban soldiers in Tchamutete began to march toward Cassinga, aiming to defend the camp from the South African attack. During the route, landmines and attacks by South African planes killed sixteen Cubans and wounded 76. As Corbea Jiménez recalled

[190] Written interview with Pascual Corbea Jiménez, 5 December 2022.
[191] Written interview with Yeniska Martínez Díaz, 5 October 2022.
[192] Written interview with Pascual Corbea Jiménez, 5 December 2022.
[193] Episode of the Cuban TV Radio Program "Mesa Redonda," "Hace 40 años en Cassinga," 4 May 2018, avaiable on YouTube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OTeDUFVCzUI (accessed on 21 January 2023).
[194] Written interview with Pascual Corbea Jiménez, 5 December 2022.

during the interview, the South African forces had waited for the right moment to attack: they oversaw the area from above with a scout plane and began their attack when the Cuban troops reached a place where it was not possible for them to deploy on the sides of the road due to the swampy terrain.[195] "Clearly they knew that we Cubans would not remain as spectators while they slaughtered without mercy and with bloodlust the Namibian people"–Corbea Jiménez commented.[196] The combat was unequal, as Cuban soldiers did not have adequate weapons: they fought with anti-aircraft machine guns against Mirage planes of the latest generation.[197]

The Cubans continued to fight against the South African air force, which tried to impede their advance, and many eventually arrived in Cassinga. There, the South Africans avoided combat on the ground and fled on helicopters.[198]

Once in Cassinga, the Cubans, together with SWAPO combatants and civilians, went searching for the dead and the wounded, rescuing the survivors, providing them with medical care, and transferring them to the near medical centers.[199] Nujoma asked Risquet whether it was possible to transfer some of the wounded to Cuba for medical treatment. The request was considered yet probably not met because, as Risquet explained, "there are cases of some wounded that it is advisable not to move and as you know, the trip from here to Cuba is long."[200] Cuban medical assistance to the wounded of Cassinga was provided on site in Angola.

The tragic event of the Cassinga massacre represented the first time that "Cubans and Namibians shed their blood together in the fight against South African racists," as stated by Risquet.[201] Cuban courage and heroism were enormously regarded by Namibians, who often recalled the sacrifice of the sixteen Cubans who died in the attempt to reach Cassinga and defend the camp. In the conversation with Risquet, Nujoma expressed "the most sincere condolences for the Cubans who died while coming to the defense of the Namibians, the name of these Cubans […] will be inscribed in the new History of Namibia that will begin to be written after its independence."[202] During our interview, talking about the Cubans who came from Chamutete to Cassinga, General Martin Shalli said that "if it were not for them, the casualties could have been even more high. Though they were high already, they would be

[195] Written interview with Pascual Corbea Jiménez, 5 December 2022.
[196] Written interview with Pascual Corbea Jiménez, 5 December 2022.
[197] HAPP Digital Archive, ACC, "Memorandum of Conversation between Jorge Risquet and Sam Nujoma," 12 May 1978, obtained and contributed to CWIHP by Piero Gleijeses and included in CWIHP e-Dossier No. 44. http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/117936, p. 4 (accessed on 21 January 2023); Written interview with Pascual Corbea Jiménez, 5 December 2022.
[198] López Blanch, *Cuba*, p. 69; Written interview with Pascual Corbea Jiménez, 5 December 2022.
[199] Written interview with Yeniska Martínez Díaz, 5 October 2022.
[200] HAPP Digital Archive, ACC, "Memorandum of Conversation between Jorge Risquet and Sam Nujoma," 12 May 1978, p. 9.
[201] *Ivi*, p. 2.
[202] *Ibidem*.

much higher. It would be probably much worse, we would telling a different story today."[203] Cuban heroism is also acknowledged by the civilians who survived the attack. Cecilia Muzile, for example, who experienced first-hand the attack against Cassinga when she was twelve years old, recalls that Cuban soldiers also died on that day, and that the shared experience of the massacre further consolidated the bond between Cubans and Namibians.[204]

The Cassinga massacre orphaned many Namibian children and adolescents and sparked fears that civilian camps might be hit again. It eventually convinced the Cuban troops of the necessity to stay in Angola.

In the conversation between Nujoma and Risquet of 5 October 1978, Risquet expressed his fear that "from one moment to another, the racists will carry out surprise attacks and massacre children, women and the elderly again."[205] For this reason, he suggested hastening the departure of the Namibian children who were appointed to go to Cuba to study. The plan to send them to Cuba, already established in 1977, was therefore accelerated and extended. As it will be highlighted in the next pages, a large number of Namibian pupils, mostly survivors of the Cassinga massacre, left for Cuba, where they found a safe home and received a solid education.

3.3.2 From SWAPO camps to Cuban schools

SWAPO, with its need to educate its members to one day be ready for the nation-building process, found in Cuba, which even internally had made efforts to promote literacy among all, a valuable ally. At the moment of the triumph of the revolution, in fact, as a consequence of centuries of colonialism, the Cuban population had a low educational level and illiteracy was largely spread, especially in the countryside. The literacy campaign launched in 1961, as well as the following domestic educational reforms, aimed to eradicate illiteracy in Cuba, achieve equality in education, and promote an idea of education grounded on the teachings of Guevara and Martí—an idea centered on the concept of the "new man" and the integral development of the human being.

Since the first years of the Cuban revolutionary government, Cuba started to internationalize its idea of education welcoming foreign students and providing them with scholarships, and, from the late 1970s, it developed an extensive educational cooperation program at the Isla de la Juventud.

The project to host Namibian students in Cuba had already been planned in 1977, when a small Cuban school was established in Chibía, then moved to Ndalatando, to teach Spanish to the first group

[203] Interview with Martin Shalli, Windhoek, 22 February 2022.
[204] Interview with Cecilia Muzile, Windhoek, 2 March 2022.
[205] HAPP Digital Archive, ACC, "Memorandum of Conversation between Jorge Risquet and Sam Nujoma," 5 October 1978, p. 5.

appointed to go to Cuba. The Cassinga massacre, in May 1978, accelerated the preparations for the facility intended for Namibian students on the Isla de la Juventud and expanded the scope of the project.

Selection and preparation for the departure of the first group, consisting of about six hundred children and adolescents, was made by Cuban medical personnel and the Grupo de Atención a los Movimientos de Liberación (Group of Attention to the Liberation Movements)—to which Dalmau was appointed as a leader—according to the educational guidelines of the Cuban Ministry of Education.[206] Despite the guidelines, though, exceptions were allowed because most of the candidates were below Cuban standards in relation to age and respective educational grades and had no school documents. Before the departure, laboratory analyses were run in Chibemba by Cuban health personnel and members of the Grupo de Atención to assert the medical condition of the pupils.[207]

The first group of about six hundred (probably 601) Namibian pupils, aged approximately between eleven to nineteen, arrived in Cuba on several flights from Luanda to Havana between September and December 1978.[208] Some of them (between sixty and one hundred) had previously received preparation in Chibía,[209] while the others were survivors of the Cassinga massacre or coming from other SWAPO refugee camps. Those who had reached the required grade, like Samuel Goagoseb,[210] remained on Cuba's main island to attend either university or technical schools, while the others, who must attend primary or secondary schools until the twelfth grade, went to the Isla de la Juventud.

At their arrival in the Isla de la Juventud, they were housed and schooled at the Hendrik Witbooi school—a school designed specifically for Namibians and named after the Namibian hero who led the Nama rebellion against German colonialism in 1904-1905. As the number of Namibian students grew over time, a second school was inaugurated in 1981, named after Hosea Kutako, chief of the

[206] Online interview with Ángel Dalmau Fernández, 31 August 2022; Written interview with Yeniska Martínez Díaz, 5 October 2022.

[207] Online interview with Ángel Dalmau Fernández, 31 August 2022; Written interview with Yeniska Martínez Díaz, 5 October 2022.

[208] More than one informants reported that the exact number was 601. Dalmau said that it was an error in the tally, as the number should have been six hundred, but one extra bed was added (online interview with Ángel Dalmau Fernández, 31 August 2022). In the interview conducted by Ruth Weiss, one Namibian student stated that the youngest was eleven years old and the oldest was nineteen (BAB, Ruth Weiss, TPA.43 43, Visit of the Isle of Youth and interviews with Namibians in exile, 25 September 1985).

[209] Miriam Nghitotovali, who was part of the group that studied in Chibía, referred that they were sixty (interview with Miriam Nghitotovali, Windhoek, 1 March 2022), while Dalmau (online interview with Ángel Dalmau Fernández, 31 August 2022) and Risquet ("My first conversation with Sam Nujoma," p. 235) speak of one hundred children trained in Chibía.

[210] Samuel Goagoseb, current Namibian Ambassador in Cuba, graduated in Havana as a technician in geodetic measurements, specialized in cartography. His background in topography served him in the struggle, where he fought as a PLAN's soldier (online interview with Samuel Goagoseb, 2 March 2022).

Ovaherero and leader petitioning for Namibian independence.[211] One interviewee referred that in 1988 the Hosea Kutako school was vacated and another school, named Andrei Grechko after a Soviet general and politician, was made available instead.[212] Thus, during most of the 1980s, two schools for Namibians were in operation at the same time at the Isla de la Juventud. There, primary and secondary education for Namibians from fourth to ninth grade took place, while polytechnic and pre-university studies (tenth to twelfth grade) were arranged in other institutions in the Isla de la Juventud, where Namibians studied together with students from other countries, as referred by Roy Kamati, who attended pre-university courses at the Vanguardia de la Habana school, and Anna-Lisa Donnay Levi, who attended the polytechnic in statistic.[213] All the expenses, which included travel, education, accommodation, food, and a monthly allowance for personal use for the students, were covered by the Cuban government. Periodic medical check-ups were provided to the Namibians in Cuba and "medical conducts were established for rehabilitation, pharmacological, psychological and physiatry treatments, according to the needs evaluated for each case."[214] Many of the children and young students needed psychological treatment for post-traumatic stress as a consequence of the events they experienced, especially the Cassinga massacre—a treatment that they received in Cuba.[215] The two schools for Namibians were intended for six hundred students each and large groups arrived almost every year as the oldest students reached the twelfth grade. Among all, the number of Namibians studying in Cuba between

Figure 15. *Namibian students at the Hendrik Witbooi School, Isla de la Juventud.*
Source: Independence Museum, Windhoek.

[211] Angula, *A Journey of Journeys,* p. 48; "Focus on Island of Youth: Paradise Schools For Future Namibian Leaders," in *The Combatant*, Vol. 4, No. 10, May 1983, p. 12 (in BAB, SWAPO collection, AA.3 83fSLuPa4).
[212] Interview with Roy Kamati, Windhoek, 5 March 2022.
[213] Interview with Roy Kamati, Windhoek, 5 March 2022; Interview with Anna-Lisa Leevi, Windhoek, 1 March 2022.
[214] Written interview with Yeniska Martínez Díaz, 5 October 2022.
[215] Written interview with Yeniska Martínez Díaz, 5 October 2022.

1978 and 1991, as reported by most interviewees and by Piero Gleijeses, can be estimated to be around and probably beyond 2,000.[216]

As a first step, Namibian students who had not received Spanish-language training in Angola had to spend the initial period in Cuba, usually six months, studying the language. Some of those who already knew Spanish, because they had learned it in Chibía/Ndalatando or because they had been in Cuba longer, helped the newcomers.[217] The classes, in fact, were held in Spanish by Cuban teachers, who taught the subjects of the standard Cuban curriculum, like geography, mathematics, astronomy, biology, chemistry, physics, and so on. In addition, there were also Namibian teachers who taught English and the history and geography of Namibia and Africa, and helped young Namibians stay in touch with their culture. The aim of the educational program, in fact, was to prepare them to cover important positions in Namibia once it became independent. Political education was provided by Namibian teachers according to SWAPO guidelines. Contacts between the Namibian students and SWAPO were maintained through the presence of the Namibian teachers and the SWAPO representatives in Cuba, first Helmut Angula and then Peter Tshirumbu Tsheehama. As Christian Williams reports, some Namibian teachers at the Isla de la Juventud ended up among the SWAPO's detainees in Lubango. Some, he writes, "disobeyed orders and left SWAPO because they had heard of people disappearing in SWAPO's Angolan camps and wanted to avoid this fate. Many, however, elected to return, citing confidence in their ability to defend themselves against spy accusations and fear that if they did not return that [sic] they would be accused of spying and forced to leave SWAPO to support their actions."[218] No further information is currently available on this issue.

Regarding the presence of socialist teachings in Cuban education, the interviews collected show that Namibian pupils felt no ideological imposition on them, but simply studied Cuban history and, at the university, the basics of Marxist-Leninist philosophy, according to the standard Cuban curriculum. In the words used by Rauna Hanghuwo, a former student of the Isla de la Juventud, in Cuba they "lived a socialist life guided by socialist principles."[219] They could get some ideas of how socialism worked especially through the interaction with Cuban teachers, as Helmut Angula has noted.[220] Elize Hishongwa, also a Namibian former student in Cuba, stated that Cuba did not force any imposition but rather it tried to provide an education able to open the students' minds: "it's not like, we are hammering now this person from Namibia to learn socialism, to go and put socialist government in

[216] Online interview with Ángel Dalmau Fernández, 31 August 2022; López Blanch, "Educating young people," in López Blanch, *SWAPO*, p. 197; Interview with Elize Hishongwa, Windhoek, 28 February 2022; Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, p. 518. Other interviewees reported higher numbers.
[217] Interview with Miriam Nghitotovali, Windhoek, 1 March 2022.
[218] Williams, *National Liberation in Postcolonial Southern Africa,* p. 140.
[219] Written interview with Rauna Hanghuwo, 28 March 2022.
[220] Interview with Helmut Angula, Windhoek, 16 February 2022.

Namibia. It's just to tell you, to open up your mind."[221] The interviews conducted mostly reveal a positive image of socialist Cuba, where services were free for all and discrimination did not exist. By living in Cuba, they learned about equality, the importance of sharing, and solidarity.[222] An element of disagreement with the Cuban system can be found in the approach toward religion, as experienced by Miriam Nghitotovali, who reported that in Cuba she was not "encouraged" to go to church as she would have wanted:

> I hate socialism just because they don't believe in God. But they teach you to be a human being, to respect others, and to also accommodate others and not just to think about me and myself and I. But also to think about others. And because of that, you respect the economy. […] Nobody was going starving. And that was one thing that I appreciated of the system. […] I know that [in Cuba] there is a catholic church, but nobody really encourages you to go to church. And when you are growing, people just tell you that the most important thing is Marxism-Leninism, that is what you take. To the extent that even some of us still today, they don't believe in anything.[223]

Education in Cuba was based on José Martí's precepts, which claimed the educational value of manual work and therefore combined classroom with labor in the plantations. In Cuba, the Escuelas al Campo (secondary schools in the countryside) were established to instill the values of agricultural labor in the urban students.[224] Thus, like for local students, the Cuban educational program envisaged that foreign students also spent some time working in the field: while one group had class in the morning and farm work in the afternoon, the other vice versa. Each school had its own field, where the students cultivated fruits, learning how to water, fertilize, cut, hoe, weed, and harvest. "The produce is sold to the state and the revenue goes to the school," Angula explained during an interview for *The Combatant*, the official PLAN's organ.[225] While—as Dorsch reported in studying the experience of Mozambican students at the Isla de la Juventud—rumors that students were subjected to forced labor in Cuba started to circulate, probably prompted by South African propaganda, the agricultural work is regarded by the students mostly in positive terms.[226] Positive memories emerge also in the testimonies I collected. While some, as Angula reported, would question the reasons for unpaid labor in the fields, they would then mostly internalize the principle that everyone must contribute to local production in order to have a free education system and free food.[227] Most of the

[221] Interview with Elize Hishongwa, Windhoek, 28 February 2022.
[222] Interview with Elize Hishongwa, Windhoek, 28 February 2022; Interview with Cecilia Muzile, Windhoek, 2 March 2022.
[223] Interview with Miriam Nghitotovali, Windhoek, 1 March 2022.
[224] Díaz-Briquets, Pérez-López, "Internationalist Civilian Assistance," pp. 64-65.
[225] "Focus on Island of Youth: Paradise Schools For Future Namibian Leaders," in *The Combatant*, Vol. 4, No. 10, May 1983, p. 13.
[226] Dorsch, "Black and Red Atlantic?," p. 296, 298.
[227] Interview with Helmut Angula, Windhoek, 16 February 2022.

students interviewed underlined the importance of this comprehensive education, describing it as a preparation that allowed the students not to depend only on the books, a "learning process," which took place in the classrooms as well as in the field.[228] A couple of them reported how they made good use of agricultural education once back in Namibia, where many of them, especially in the northern part of the country, still have their own field and grow their own fruits.[229] As reported by a Namibian student named Sebastian, interviewed by anti-apartheid journalist and activist Ruth Weiss at the Isla de la Juventud in 1985, the work in the plantation was "a program of forming a man, educate a man who knows to work. Because if you only know to write, and you are not going in the garden, you have not the experience to lead the country."[230] "The students they are forming," he said, "are men workers, intellectual workers. Otherwise if you don't have this system of working and studying, it means you will end up having a system of parasites, where people depend on the sweat of the peasants. Therefore we want all Namibians, whether peasants or intellectuals, that they have equal rights and level to work for the building of a new society in Namibia."[231]

Similarly to the East German educational program, Cuban education was also focused on discipline, hygiene, and cleanliness. It promoted gender equality and the equal division of domestic labor between males and females.[232] Namibian pupils were expected to keep the dormitory, the school, and the kitchen clean and neat and were prompted by Namibian and Cuban personnel to study and get an education for the sake of their future and the future of their country. The pupils were warned of the importance of education, which was presented as the most valuable tool against neocolonialism.[233] "Work and study combined, cleaning the school and dormitories by the students and even serving the food and washing up our own plates just made all of us useful, clean and organized, hardworking and disciplined members of the society," wrote proudly Rauna Hanghuwo.[234] As Dorsch points out in his study about Mozambican students, discipline was very strict,[235] yet the Namibians I interviewed talked about it in positive terms. It might be that their past experience of apartheid and segregation, together with their high commitment to the Namibian cause of independence, made it easier for them to adapt to this disciplined environment, and in fact they regarded themselves as disciplined. Victoria

[228] Interview with Elize Hishongwa, Windhoek, 28 February 2022.
[229] Interview with Elize Hishongwa, Windhoek, 28 February 2022; Interview with Cecilia Muzile, Windhoek, 2 March 2022.
[230] BAB, Ruth Weiss, TPA.43 43, Visit of the Isle of Youth and interviews with Namibians in exile, 25 September 1985.
[231] BAB, Ruth Weiss, TPA.43 43, Visit of the Isle of Youth and interviews with Namibians in exile, 25 September 1985.
[232] BAB, Ruth Weiss, TPA.43 43, Visit of the Isle of Youth and interviews with Namibians in exile, 25 September 1985.
[233] Interview with Miriam Nghitotovali, Windhoek, 1 March 2022.
[234] Written interview with Rauna Hanghuwo, 28 March 2022.
[235] Dorsch, "Black and Red Atlantic?," p. 298.

Brittain, a British journalist who at that time worked closely with the anti-apartheid movement and visited the Isla de la Juventud, writes:

> In the Cuban school on the Island of Youth the children exude a rare sense of self-discipline and pride. Every child has been imbued with an unyielding sense of common purpose and responsibility: to work for the Namibian liberation struggle and then to build a nation from scratch. […] Their education has taught them not the resignation and individualism Western mission schools offered Africans, but a though pride and high aspirations for the collective advance of their communities and countries. One boy says quietly that he will train as a pilot so that he can kill South Africans. Several girls say they will be teachers so that the next generation will better understand world economics and history, and will know why the West put its weight behind Pretoria, rather than Namibia and justice.[236]

Namibian students were constantly encouraged through competitions to do their best in every field like study, agricultural work, sports, cleanliness, and conduct. Some reported that the Namibians won many awards and were the best in many sectors.[237] Competition, according to their accounts, motivated them to do better, and, as young girls and boys, they enjoyed it.[238] Sports competitions with other international schools were organized, as well as seminars and cultural events, which were good opportunities of interaction between the different national groups studying on the island, as well as between them and the local students. During their free time, they could go out and meet with their peers from other nationalities. During holidays, they could travel around Cuba and visit many places,[239] and the best students could go abroad as an award.[240]

In some cases, there were romantic relationships with other students, foreign or local, which might result in pregnancies. Dorsch points out that sexual relationships, especially when they led to pregnancies, were punished as undisciplined behavior.[241] As was the case for East Germany, in fact, also in Cuba pregnancies represented a problem for the success of the educational program of cooperation. This led to the introduction of sexual education courses in the Isla de la Juventud aimed at preventing pregnancies and sexual diseases.[242] East German sociologist Monika Krause, called also "La reina del condón" (the queen of condom), worked as a sex educator in Cuba, where she developed

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[236] Victoria Brittain, *Hidden Lives, Hidden Deaths: South Africa's Crippling of a Continent*, London: Faber and Faber, 1988, p. 23.
[237] Interview with Roy Kamati, Windhoek, 5 March 2022; Interview with Miriam Nghitotovali, Windhoek, 1 March 2022.
[238] Interview with Miriam Nghitotovali, Windhoek, 1 March 2022; Interview with Cecilia Muzile, Windhoek, 2 March 2022.
[239] Interview with Roy Kamati, Windhoek, 5 March 2022; Interview with Anna-Lisa Leevi, Windhoek, 1 March 2022.
[240] "Focus on Island of Youth: Paradise Schools For Future Namibian Leaders," in *The Combatant*, Vol. 4, No. 10, May 1983, p. 13.
[241] Dorsch, "Studierende und Schüler aus dem südlichen Afrika in Kuba," p. 17.
[242] Murguia, "Socialist Education and International Cooperation," p. 118.

a sex education program that was also directed to the foreign students in the Isla de la Juventud.[243] As Dayana Murguia points out, "at the beginning, Cuba provided for early education and posterior schooling of the very young children born in La Isla; yet the country could not afford to continue this because this would distract from the central objectives of the program."[244] Pregnancies mostly led to the termination of the study period in Cuba. As explained by Risquet and Miriam Nghitotovali, when pregnancies involved Namibian schoolgirls, who could not be sent back to their home country because of the war, the babies were allocated to a small childcare center in La Fè, cared for by Cuban women, while the mothers continued their studies.[245] It remains unclear whether this occurred throughout all the 1980s or only at the beginning, as reported by Murguia for most cases of the Isla.

After having achieved the twelfth grade at the Isla de la Juventud, according to SWAPO's decision, the Namibian students could return to Angola or continue their studies at the university or higher educational institutions in countries where scholarships were provided. They were allocated where scholarship positions were made available: many continued their studies on the main island in Cuba while few of them, like Cecilia Muzile,[246] were sent elsewhere. Higher education in Cuba allowed young Namibians to meet students from all over the world and become more integrated into Cuban life and society, while in the Isla de la Juventud the opportunities to mix with other national groups were fewer, but still existed.

In view of the 1989 election, those who had reached voting age were called back to Namibia by SWAPO to help campaign and vote. In a speech held in January 1989 addressing the Namibian students of the Hendrick Witbooi school, Fidel Castro underlined the importance of the election and the responsibility the Namibian students had regarding the independence of their country.[247] Then, after the election, the majority of them returned to Cuba to complete their education. Unlike most socialist countries, such as the DDR, which were unable to take back Namibian students to complete their studies after the collapse of socialism in Europe, Cuba continued to grant this type of cooperation, despite the growing difficulties of the 1990s. Some, like Roy Kamati, who in 1993 was supposed to finish pre-university studies at the Isla de la Juventud, were called back by SWAPO in Namibia, where he completed his studies. He reported that while those who were attending university studies in Cuba were given the chance to complete their studies there, financed by the Cuban government, some of those who were attending lower grades would have to complete their education

[243] Unfried, "Education as a Paradigm," p. 83.
[244] Murguia, "Socialist Education and International Cooperation," p. 118.
[245] Risquet, "My first conversation with Sam Nujoma," p. 235. In the interview, Miriam Nghitotovali said that the place was in La Fé (interview with Miriam Nghitotovali, Windhoek, 1 March 2022).
[246] She was sent to the DDR, as mentioned in section 2.2.7.
[247] Fidel Castro, "Farewell to the Namibian students," in Deutschmann (ed.), *Changing the history of Africa*, pp. 145-150.

in Namibia.[248] The interviewees who at the moment of independence were studying at Cuban universities, after the elections came back to Cuba to finish their studies.[249] Anna-Lisa Donnay Levi, who was attending polytechnic school at the Isla de la Juventud, was allowed to complete her education.[250] One case is reported where, during the 1990s, a PhD fellowship in Cuba was sponsored by the Namibian government.[251]

After their studies in Cuba, the Namibian students returned to their home country with a solid education. As was the case for Namibians coming back from East Germany, it is reported that the students felt the duty to come back even when they had started romantic relationships with Cubans and children were born from such unions.[252] Some relationships between Namibians and Cubans resulted in marriages and children, but, when demanded that they return, Namibians went back to their independent countries or, before independence, to the SWAPO refugee camps. This once again confirms the high commitment of Namibians to contribute to the cause of Namibian independence and reconstruction.

Hardships in the homecoming were regarded by some interviewees in terms of language difficulties, as Spanish had become their first language, and difficulties in adapting to their birth culture after having spent the formative years abroad.[253] Most of them had spent more time in Cuba than in Namibia during their life. One interviewee, Rauna Hanghuwo, who spent more than twenty years in Cuba, from 1978 to 2000, lamented that "there has not been counseling to allow a smooth re-integration into our families" and that she also had difficulties adjusting to some aspects of Namibian society: "the other thing that I am not used to and can never accept is the open racism in Namibia, the inequalities, ignorance and chronic poverty."[254] This seems to imply that she considers racism and inequalities in independent Namibia, as well as ignorance and poverty, as stronger than in Cuba. As a legacy of the racist regime of the white minority, in fact, contemporary Namibia continues to experience inequalities between blacks and whites in terms of wealth: the post-independence policy of national reconciliation has created a society ostensibly based on mutual acceptance, yet a racial divide persists as resources have not been evenly redistributed.

[248] Interview with Roy Kamati, Windhoek, 5 March 2022.
[249] Interview with Miriam Nghitotovali, Windhoek, 1 March 2022; Interview with Elize Hishongwa, Windhoek, 28 February 2022.
[250] Interview with Anna-Lisa Leevi, Windhoek, 1 March 2022.
[251] Written interview with Rauna Hanghuwo, 28 March 2022.
[252] Interview with Roy Kamati, Windhoek, 5 March 2022; Online interview with Samuel Goagoseb, 2 March 2022; Interview with Elize Hishongwa, Windhoek, 28 February 2022.
[253] Interview with Roy Kamati, Windhoek, 5 March 2022; Written interview with Rauna Hanghuwo, 28 March 2022.
[254] Written interview with Rauna Hanghuwo, 28 March 2022.

All the people interviewed state that education in Cuba had positive consequences on their professional lives, even in a case where the job found did not match the qualification obtained in Cuba. This was the case experienced by Miriam Nghitotovali, who, trained in journalism in Cuba, once back in Namibia found a job firstly in the Chamber of Commerce, then in the Parliament, and lastly in the City of Windhoek, addressing service delivery to the residents of Windhoek. According to her words, the comprehensive education she received in Cuba, which provided a general knowledge of many and various fields, allowed her to fit into another field of work.[255]

After having been educated in Cuba, many Namibians held important positions in independent Namibia. To name just a few, Abraham Iyambo served as the Minister of Education, Sebastian Ndeitunga is currently the Inspector General of the Namibian Police Force, Samuel Goagoseb works as Namibian Ambassador to Cuba, and Claudia Uushona as Namibian Ambassador to Angola.

The interviewees described their experience in Cuba as really positive. They did not experience any problems or incidents of racism from Cubans, unlike some of the other African students, as reported by Dorsch.[256] Obviously, interviewing a larger number of Namibians might have provided a different picture. Yet it is possible to suppose that the experiences of African students in Cuba vary according to the situation of the country of provenance. The Namibians came from a situation of apartheid, war, and discrimination, and therefore Cuba appeared almost like a paradise:

> They treated us so well that, you know for a young child, especially coming from the country that was under colonialism, at that time we had soldiers who used to come in classes and threaten you…your teacher is beaten, soldiers with guns…when you have such a free environment, you have nothing to worry about, and you don't want to go back to that system, that was very hostile. You don't want to think about it. So the environment was so nice…and they fed us with a lot of food. […] In three months we were so huge, so big. And we couldn't fit in our clothes anymore.[257]

> My experience was…coming from a refugee camp… obviously the conditions were, for us at the time, very receptive, very receptive in the sense of… we were coming from a discriminative regime where there was a very clear separation between blacks, whites and the coloreds. It was amazing how [in Cuba] people could work together and be friends. There was no color barrier, that was one of those cultural things that liberated us in terms of accepting the society. […] We were basically, economically and socially, we were at the same level. I think the feeling was that…we would commonly share whatever we have. If they would have something, they would share. And we formed that very very strong bond. They don't even think us as foreigners…I was not feeling this from the Cubans. We were brothers and sisters.[258]

[255] Interview with Miriam Nghitotovali, Windhoek, 1 March 2022.
[256] Dorsch, "Studierende und Schüler aus dem südlichen Afrika in Kuba," pp. 21-22.
[257] Interview with Miriam Nghitotovali, Windhoek, 1 March 2022.
[258] Online interview with Samuel Goagoseb, 2 March 2022.

Moreover, as mentioned in chapter 2, racism in Cuba was non-existing if compared to the study periods in Eastern European countries, [259] where Namibian students felt more discriminated against. This was the case of Cecilia Muzile, who went to university in the DDR after having been in the Isla de la Juventud, and found a colder approach from the people in East Germany than in Cuba, where she did not even feel like a foreigner, but part of an inclusive society.[260] Samuel Goagoseb, who also recalls of having heard rumors about students who went through racial discrimination in other countries, regarded Cuba as "different" in this sense.[261]

The education they received in Cuba was highly appreciated, because it was a comprehensive type of education that formed them as men and women, helped them to acquire competencies in many sectors, and to fit into different situations. Cecilia Muzile emphasized the orientation toward the integral development of the human being that characterized Cuban education by explaining that:

> we were taught how to be ourselves, to love our country, to love our people, and to respect any other people of any race. There were no discriminations in Cuba. So as I told you, we were treated and we felt at home there in Cuba. Our curriculum was exactly the same as a Cuban child. We participated in different activities. In Cuba, we worked. It's study and work, in the field. It really developed us as persons.[262]

Samuel Goagoseb also talked about what he defines the "moral preparation" he received in Cuba: "that moral preparation and readiness to sacrifice, that was one of the elements that we have learned and…the element of justice, and the principles that cannot be negotiated. And…one has to self-sacrifice for the good of all: that was one of those principles that we have been taught in Cuba."[263]

Cuban solidarity was perceived by the interviewees as very strong, both at the state and grassroots levels. Some underlined that Cuban solidarity was provided despite the blockade imposed by the US, showing their appreciation in this regard.[264] Some referred to their Cuban teachers as their family, mothers and fathers who helped them to overcome puberty problems.[265] Elize Hishongwa has fond memories of her stay in Cuba and she describes the Cubans using these words: "Cubans are very good people. They are very good at hearth, they can take everyone. The way they were doing the solidarity, helping, offering themselves in all the world… that's the same way they are even in their own country.

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[259] This is also pointed out by Dorsch, in "Studierende und Schüler aus dem südlichen Afrika in Kuba," p. 23.
[260] Interview with Cecilia Muzile, Windhoek, 2 March 2022.
[261] Online interview with Samuel Goagoseb, 2 March 2022.
[262] Interview with Cecilia Muzile, Windhoek, 2 March 2022.
[263] Online interview with Samuel Goagoseb, 2 March 2022.
[264] Written interview with Rauna Hanghuwo, 28 March 2022; Interview with Cecilia Muzile, Windhoek, 2 March 2022.
[265] Interview with Miriam Nghitotovali, Windhoek, 1 March 2022; Interview with Elize Hishongwa, Windhoek, 28 February 2022.

That solidarity is in their blood. You cannot remove it."[266] Solidarity was there, said also Cecilia Muzile recalling the sixteen Cubans who lost their lives in Cassinga. "And it is a real solidarity, which does not expect anything…Cuba was offering all…and does not expect anything from our country."[267]

The experience in the Isla de la Juventud strongly united the foreign students studying there, who still keep in touch through a Whatsapp group where they chat in Spanish.[268] Events have been organized in the Isla de la Juventud for the anniversaries of the foundation of the first international school, and many former students have returned to Cuba on these occasions to celebrate.[269]

To conclude, it must be mentioned that, in addition to the students attending primary, secondary, university, and technical schools, SWAPO also sent to Cuba some members of its leadership to be trained at the Nico Lopez communist party school and the Federación de Mujeres Cubanas (FMC, Federation of Cuban Women) schools.[270] Ideological training was obviously the main component of this type of educational program. The FMC Fe del Valle school opened in 1975 and provided political, cultural, and ideological training to women from different countries, by giving "classes on philosophy, political economy, history of the women's movement, of the Cuban revolution and basics of socialism" and including visits to "industrial and service centers to learn about the practical aspects of those sectors and the duties of their workers and leaders."[271]

The Nico Lopez party school was attended for example by the SWAPO veteran leader Mathias Kanana Shinoono, who studied political science there for one year in 1978 and again for three years from 1983 to 1986.[272] After that, he was put in charge of the Namibian schools in the Isla de la Juventud. About his years in Cuba, he writes:

> it was wonderful, because the Cuban people are friendly, devoted, austere, selfless and always ready to help anyone who has a problem. They face many difficulties because of the blockade that the United States has imposed for more than fifty years, but I learned there too about the great sacrifices made by the people, and that it is always possible to overcome any problem, no matter how big. In the Namibian schools in Cuba, the students were there all year round. The Cubans showed great friendship, were very organized, and provided a lot of attention to the foreign

[266] Interview with Elize Hishongwa, Windhoek, 28 February 2022.
[267] Interview with Cecilia Muzile, Windhoek, 2 March 2022.
[268] Interview with Cecilia Muzile, Windhoek, 2 March 2022; Interview with Roy Kamati, Windhoek, 5 March 2022.
[269] The fortieth anniversary was celebrated in 2017. See the episode of the Cuban TV Radio Program "Mesa Redonda," "Exbecarios de la Isla, 40 años después," 16 October 2017, avaiable on YouTube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IMhUBXygaC0 (accessed on 22 January 2023).
[270] Angula, *A Journey of Journeys*, p. 50.
[271] López Blanch, *Cuba*, p. 121.
[272] Mathias Kanana Hishoono, "Educating young people in war time," in López Blanch, *SWAPO*, pp. 210-213. See also the interview with Kanana Hishoono, conducted by Bernard Moore and Matthew Ecker, 14 August 2012, Windhoek, available on YouTube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=phypISkBiTs (accessed on 22 January 2023).

students, and there were never any political problems. […] Fidel Castro and all of the Cuban people have hearts bigger than infinity. Cuba helped Namibia like no other country in the world. […] In any part of Namibia, if people hear you speaking Spanish, they will immediately say, "*¿Cómo está?*" ("How are you").[273]

Figure 16. From the right: *Miriam Nghitotovali (Namibian student), Fidel Castro, and Perez De Cuellar (former United Nations Secretary General), 1982, Hendrick Witbooi Secondary school, Isla de la Juventud.*
Courtesy of Miriam Nghitotovali.

3.3.3 From Cuito Cuanavale to the New York agreements

The previous section has analyzed how Cuba supported SWAPO's educational efforts to create a skilled workforce that should have contributed to the nation-building process after independence. In addition to this, as it has already been mentioned, Cuba also provided broad military and diplomatic support to prompt the cause of Namibian independence. In particular, Cuba played a significant role in the final events that preceded Namibian independence, namely the battle of Cuito Cuanavale and the quadripartite negotiations. It all began when, in July 1987, FAPLA launched a major offensive against the UNITA headquarters in Mavinga, in southeastern Angola. The operation was carried out under the Soviet advice, to which the Cubans disagreed. In fact, Havana and Moscow had conflicting military strategies for the war in Angola: while the Cubans advocated counterinsurgency tactics, the Soviets favored conventional warfare and wanted to launch a large-scale operation. As early as 1985, when FAPLA had first attempted an offensive against Mavinga under Soviet advice and failed, the

[273] Mathias Kanana Hishoono, "Educating young people in war time," pp. 212-213.

Cubans had advised against it because they considered it dangerous to attempt an attack where South Africa held air superiority.[274] The 1985 defeat prompted the Cubans to plan a new strategy to force the SADF out of Angola and, thus, they asked that the Soviets help them gain air superiority in southern Angola by supplying aircraft and training Cuban pilots. They wanted to be able to advance to the Namibian border. But Gorbachev, worried that the Cubans would drag them into a second Afghanistan, refused.[275] Sam Nujoma was also eager for the Cubans to go south of the Cuban defensive line, advancing toward Namibia, yet Raúl Castro was forced to deny this request because, without the Soviet support, the Cubans did not detain air superiority.[276]

When, in 1987, FAPLA ventured on the offensive against Mavinga for the second time, the operation failed again. The South Africans, who had come to assist UNITA, crushed the offensive and thought to go further planning to capture Cuito Cuanavale, where FAPLA was retreating.[277] In November 1987, under the pressing requests of the Angolans, Cuba decided to intervene to help defend Cuito, by sending more troops (14,000 soldiers), arms, and equipment (planes, antiaircraft weapons, modern tanks, artillery). Then, it planned to move the conflict to southwestern Angola and advance toward the Namibian border. The decision to intervene was made without the Soviet consent and material support. This time, in fact, the Cubans thought they could take control of the air and expel the SADF from Angola by relying on their own forces. The SADF, in fact, was about to deal a severe blow to the FAPLA, and Cuba could afford to increase its military support to FAPLA even without Soviet weapons because, after the Iran-Contra scandal—which damaged Reagan's reputation and caused changes in the US administration—it did not fear a US attack at home and thus could deploy more resources.[278] The Soviets, irritated at not being consulted, were once again forced to accept the fait accompli and, in January 1988, eventually agreed to send weapons to support the Cubans and the Angolans in Cuito. Castro carefully oversaw and directed the operations from Havana.

The Cubans soon gained air superiority over Cuito Cuanavale and, on the ground, they were able to help defend the town against the South Africans' attacks. By late March 1988, the South African offensive against Cuito Cuanavale could be said to have failed.

Then, in March, the Cuban troops began their advance in the southwest, accompanied by thousands of FAPLA troops, about 2,000 SWAPO freedom fighters and, as Dalmau pointed out, also soldiers of the Umkhonto we Sizwe, the ANC's armed wing.[279] Meanwhile, Cuban construction workers

[274] Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, pp. 343-359.
[275] *Ivi*, pp. 359-366.
[276] HAPP Digital Archive, CF, "Memorandum of Conversation between Raúl Castro and Sam Nujoma," 10 April 1987.
[277] Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, pp. 393-402.
[278] Gleijeses, "Cuba and the Independence of Namibia," p. 292; Idem, *Visions of Freedom*, pp. 406-410.
[279] Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, p. 429; Online interview with Ángel Dalmau Fernández, 31 August 2022.

worked strenuously to build an airstrip near Cahama, in Cunene, as close to the border as possible, since the Soviet Union and the Eastern European countries were not sending the required fuel tanks.[280] Ahead of the columns advancing toward the south, joint SWAPO and Cuban patrols acted as scouts to clear the way. As reported by the Cuban Colonel Máximo Contreras López, the battalion of three companies was composed of a hundred Cubans, 230 SWAPO soldiers, and two groups of reinforcement troops, for a total of about 480 men.[281] The groups were usually led by a Cuban commanding officer and a Namibian as the second in command. As Lieutenant Pedro Ross Fonseca wrote, they usually "operated in patrols of two or three Cubans and seven or eight Namibians from SWAPO."[282] Their main job was conducting exploration to pave the way for the advance.

Some existing accounts written by Cuban soldiers reveal the relationship they had with fellow Namibians during the exploration patrols and combat operations in southern Angola. In these accounts, the SWAPO combatants were described as brave, disciplined, organized, and politicized, and the relationships between them and the Cubans were portrayed as based on mutual trust and solidarity:

> Our relations with the SWAPO troops were very good. When I had to coordinate an exploration, I would call Katangara [the Namibian second in command] and explain what we were going to do and the objective and composition of the group, and he would give his opinion. Our relations were excellent, and we never had a problem; in fact, they protected me more than I deserved. Unlike the Angolans that I knew, many of the Namibians were more educated; their combatants included doctors, engineers, and lawyers who had studied in different European countries. They knew what they were doing. […] The SWAPO troops were our confidence. […] They never got tired, and if a Cuban was tired, they would take his pack and help him. I have the highest opinion of them: they are disciplined, brave, and intelligent.[283]

> I think that the SWAPO soldiers were very good, disciplined, and brave. It was not a disorganized guerrilla force. […] They were intelligent and shrewd, and whenever we were going to conduct an operation or move to different sites, we would always ask them to guide us. And the high quality of their work was evidenced by the fact that we never suffered any incidents or unanticipated attacks by the enemy when they were guiding us.[284]

> The SWAPO combatants were very skilled at what they did, and they were very experienced. In fact some of them had been fighting in the mountains for twenty years. […] They were very brave and showed us an extreme amount of solidarity. We, on the other hand, despite the physical training that we had, […] found that in reality, training is one thing and waging guerrilla warfare

[280] Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, pp. 428-429.
[281] Máximo Contreras López, "The Namibians were brave, brave, brave," in López Blanch, *SWAPO*, p. 236.
[282] Pedro Ross Fonseca, "SWAPO knew the terrain by heart," in López Blanch, *SWAPO*, p. 244.
[283] Máximo Contreras López, "The Namibians were brave, brave, brave," pp. 239-240.
[284] Gustavo Fleitas Ramírez, "The SWAPO soldiers were very good, disciplined and brave," in López Blanch, *SWAPO*, p. 243.

> is another. They had total practice and tremendous endurance. They helped anybody who lagged behind. They were full of conviction and conscious of what they were doing, the reason they were fighting. Because they were familiar with the terrain and with war, they were very careful and took precautions to preserve their own lives and those of their comrades. They were extremely disciplined, and anybody who broke discipline was punished, and their leaders were severe. […] Often we supported and learned from each other. Our experience with the SWAPO combatants was magnificent.[285]

Some Cubans died in battles and skirmishes between April and May 1988. One of them, Néstor Martínez de Santelices, lost his life in an ambush on 21 May 1988 while he was conducting an exploration operation. He left short stories and poems, as well as a diary where he reported the everyday life of the war—a diary which is the proof of the Cuban-Namibian comradeship and brotherhood. His writings are included in the book *Tener que dejarte* (Having to leave you), published in 1990.[286] Here, he described the SWAPO combatants as "tireless walkers," "good comrades," always willing to help when someone was struggling with exhaustion.[287] "They take care of us as if we were their godchildren,"[288] he wrote. Néstor Martínez de Santelices underlined the fact that Namibians were good fighters, although lacking in technical military instruction.[289] Cubans and Namibians had a relationship of mutual teaching and cooperation: while the former taught tactics, topography, and shooting, the latter, knowing the battlefield better, served as the guides on the ground.[290] In a note dated 4 May 1988, Néstor Martínez de Santelices wrote: "I observed the Cubans and reached the conclusion that we had learned a lot, and thought about the classes we had taken about maneuvers in the classroom. In Cuba, we didn't practice in reality the way it should be, and here we did, and that's understandable, because here your life is at stake, as well as completing your mission. Moreover, the SWAPO comrades had taught us, too."[291] He looked with admiration to the "endurance, determination, and faith in victory"[292] of the SWAPO combatants—characteristics that were fueled by strong ideals and by the desire for independence and freedom. And he commented:

[285] Pedro Ross Fonseca, "SWAPO knew the terrain by heart," pp. 246-247.
[286] Néstor Martínez de Santelices, *Tener que dejarte*, Havana: Editorial Capitán San Luis, 2019 [first ed. 1990]. Some passages of the diary are also reported in "Episodes from the campaign diary of Néstor Martínez de Santelices," in López Blanch, *SWAPO*, pp. 249-264, translated in English (translator Rose Ana Berbeo).
[287] Martínez de Santelices, *Tener que dejarte*, p. 49; "Episodes from the campaign diary of Néstor Martínez de Santelices," p. 249 (translation by Rose Ana Berbeo).
[288] Martínez de Santelices, *Tener que dejarte*, p. 49; "Episodes from the campaign diary of Néstor Martínez de Santelices," p. 249 (translation by Rose Ana Berbeo).
[289] Martínez de Santelices, *Tener que dejarte*, p. 50; "Episodes from the campaign diary of Néstor Martínez de Santelices," p. 250 (translation by Rose Ana Berbeo).
[290] Martínez de Santelices, *Tener que dejarte*, pp. 49-50.
[291] Martínez de Santelices, *Tener que dejarte*, p. 75; "Episodes from the campaign diary of Néstor Martínez de Santelices," pp. 260-261 (translation by Rose Ana Berbeo).
[292] Martínez de Santelices, *Tener que dejarte*, p. 54; "Episodes from the campaign diary of Néstor Martínez de Santelices," p. 251 (translation by Rose Ana Berbeo).

"Che must have been like that, and that is how they are."[293] Interestingly, he reported a song that SWAPO fighters used to sing, which, using the words of Néstor Martínez de Santelices, "demonstrates their feeling toward socialism."[294] The song, in fact, went like this:

The Soviet people should be grateful
for having found socialism
under Lenin's leadership.
Power, Power, Nujoma
Power, Erich Honecker
Power, Comrade Gorbachev
Power, Fidel Castro
We are fighters for the friendship
of the southwest African continent
fighting for Namibia.[295]

The song reveals that there was, to some extent, admiration for socialism on the part of SWAPO. Whether there was a real project to build socialism, or whether such socialist figures represented rather mere inspirations for the struggle because of their revolutionary spirit, is another matter, currently difficult to probe given the scarce sources available.

Thus, during the first months of 1988, Cubans and Namibians operated side by side. SWAPO's morale was high, as they sensed that victory was near, and that, with the Cubans, they "could go anywhere," as the Namibian General Malakia Nakandungile said.[296] In June, Cuban planes began to depart from Cahama and fly over northern Namibia, gaining control of the air space. Meanwhile, the Cuban advance toward the Namibian border proceeded, raising fears for a new international conflict. Although the Cubans did not intend to cross the border into Namibia, worried about an escalation of the conflict, they wanted to keep the Americans and the South Africans on their toes.[297] In this way, Cuba hoped to reverse the balance of force on the ground and gain leverage at the negotiating table. Since May 1988, in fact, quadripartite negotiations about southern Africa had been taking place, discussing the terms for ending the conflict in the region and granting independence to Namibia. Cuba itself was eager to conclude an agreement and withdraw its troops from Angola, after many years of great commitment. As Fidel Castro said during a speech in Havana on the eve of the New York agreements: "no one else is more interested than our country in a solution like the one we've been

[293] Martínez de Santelices, *Tener que dejarte*, p. 54; "Episodes from the campaign diary of Néstor Martínez de Santelices," p. 251 (translation by Rose Ana Berbeo).
[294] Martínez de Santelices, *Tener que dejarte*, p. 53.
[295] *Ibidem*.
[296] Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, p. 457.
[297] *Ivi*, pp. 454-455.

discussing, and no one derives more benefit than our country. Because, with all the energy and sweat we're investing in this effort, with all those valuable, mostly young, men who are over there, our country would have a terrific force to boost our development programs."[298]

Risquet was appointed to lead the Cuban negotiating team. Cuba had requested SWAPO participation in the negotiations, but "Pretoria and Washington had categorically refused, arguing that only representatives of states could participate, and the Angolans had remained silent."[299] Thus the Cubans sought to be the guarantor of SWAPO's rights and kept SWAPO informed by providing full accounts of what was being discussed. At the moment of the first meeting, held in London on 3-4 May 1988, the Cubans, who were detaining the advantage on the ground, demanded the SADF withdrawal from Angola and the implementation of Resolution 435 without any amendments. The discussion was resumed in Cairo on 24-26 June, without reaching an agreement. On 26 June, the South Africans attacked a Cuban patrol in Tchipa, near the Namibian border, causing the death of ten Cubans and, the next day, the Cubans responded with an air strike in Calueque, killing eleven South African soldiers,[300] in an action that some Cubans claimed to have ended the war.[301] No further military clashes followed, yet the atmosphere remained tense. Negotiations resumed on 11 July 1988 in New York, where the South Africans no longer demanded the simultaneous withdrawal of the SADF and the Cuban troops from Angola and the national reconciliation between UNITA and MPLA.[302] In the following meetings, in Sal Island (Cape Verde), Geneva, and Brazzaville between July and August, the agenda for the SADF withdrawal from Angola and the implementation of Resolution 435 was outlined. By August 30, the SADF had left Angola, ending South African aid to UNITA, but not the civil war, which was destined to continue for years. Negotiations were continued during other meetings and on 22 December 1988, at the United Nations in New York, the final agreement was signed, confirming the implementation of Resolution 435 starting from 1 April 1989 and the timetable for the gradual withdrawal of the Cuban troops from Angola, which ended in late May 1991.

In view of the elections in Namibia, in October 1989 Cuba sent an observer mission composed of three men, which included Dalmau, who was then appointed as the first Cuban Ambassador to Namibia.[303]

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[298] Fidel Castro, "Paying our debt to humanity," in Deutschmann (ed.), *Changing the history of Africa*, p. 114.
[299] Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, p. 449.
[300] Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, p. 468; Idem, "Cuba and the Independence of Namibia," p. 295; George, *The Cuban Intervention in Angola*, pp. 243-245.
[301] Pedro Ross Fonseca, "SWAPO knew the terrain by heart," p. 248; Online interview with Ángel Dalmau Fernández, 31 August 2022.
[302] Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, p. 472.
[303] Online interview with Ángel Dalmau Fernández, 31 August 2022.

As discussed in chapter 1, the battle of Cuito Cuanavale has had different readings and interpretations, both among the stakeholders and the historians, who either confer huge significance to the battle and speak of Cuba's decisive victory, or portray the SADF's retreat as a strategic move rather than a defeat.[304] Whatever the outcome of the battle on the ground, which in practice ended in a military stalemate and the South Africans' retreat, it undoubtedly holds symbolic importance. It disproved the myth of white supremacy and invincibility carried by the South African regime, which had not been able to inflict a severe blow to the opposing army composed of Cubans and Africans. "How comes that the superior race army could not take over Cuito Cuanavale?"—Castro asked ironically to the Russians in 1988.[305] "The decisive defeat of the apartheid aggressors broke the myth of the invincibility of the white oppressors!"[306]—Mandela said during his speech at the Matanzas rally in 1991, after his release. Then, on this occasion, he continued by defining Cuito Cuanavale as "a milestone in the history of the struggle for southern African liberation," "a turning point in the struggle to free the continent and our country from the scourge of apartheid."[307] In fact, after Cuito Cuanavale, Namibia achieved independence, the anti-apartheid organizations in South Africa were unbanned, and Nelson Mandela was released after 27 and a half years.

Cuito Cuanavale holds a symbolic significance for Namibian independence. However, in order not to circumscribe Namibian independence to this battle alone, it must be remembered that such independence was also the result of the international developments of the period, namely Gorbachev's reforms and the collapse of socialism, and of the internal radicalization of the struggle, both in South Africa and in Namibia. The combination of these elements, which deeply influenced each other, made Namibia's independence ultimately possible. Both on the battlefield and at the negotiating table, Cuba played a crucial role in this process.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided a general overview of Cuba's solidarity with SWAPO, mostly based on first-hand accounts of Namibians and Cubans who experienced Cuban support for the Namibian cause. Thanks to the interviews and other biographical accounts, it has been possible to reconstruct important facets of the Cuba-SWAPO relationship. This reconstruction has been limited by the lack of access to Cuban and SWAPO archives but, nonetheless, the elements collected still allow to

[304] See section 1.2.2.
[305] Cited by Delmas, "Cuba and apartheid," p. 143.
[306] Nelson Mandela, "We will ensure that the poor and rightless will rule the land of their birth," in Nelson Mandela, Fidel Castro, *How Far We Slaves Have Come! South Africa and Cuba in Today's World*, New York: Pathfinder Press, 1991, p. 20.
[307] *Ibidem.*

provide a first glimpse of this history of friendship, which has not yet been the object of significant studies.

Cuba's engagement in the struggle against apartheid dates back to the first years of the Cuban revolutionary government, when the South African regime was harshly condemned in international fora. Contacts between SWAPO and Cuba started to develop in Cairo during the 1960s, yet a real relationship of cooperation was established only in 1976, when SWAPO moved its base to Angola, where Cuban units were deployed to defend the territory from South African attacks. From that moment, Cuba emerged as one of the most committed actors to plead the cause of Namibian independence and support its armed struggle. It did so by advising SWAPO leadership on the best strategies to be employed both at the diplomatic and military level, by providing medical assistance to SWAPO refugees and combatants in Angola, by launching a broad educational solidarity program in Cuba, and by deploying military advisers and soldiers who fought against the South African army. Moreover, it participated in the 1988 negotiations promoting Namibia's right to independence.

In launching solidarity with the struggle against apartheid, Cuba constructed a narrative that united Cubans and Africans by virtue of their shared genealogy and common struggle. According to this narrative, just as the enslaved Africans and their descendants fought against Spanish colonialism and slavery in Cuba, Cubans, as part of an Afro-Latin nation, had the right and duty to struggle against colonialism, imperialism, and racism in southern Africa. This, combined to the fact that Cuba itself had suffered centuries of colonialism and exploitation, portrayed Cuba as eligible to participate on the front line against the South African regime of apartheid. Apartheid and slavery were equated as exploitative practices used by white, capitalist, and imperialist powers, and the struggles for their abolition are considered part of the same fight. "In what way is apartheid different from the practice in effect for centuries of dragging tens of millions of Africans from their land and bringing them to this hemisphere to enslave them, to exploit them to the last drop of their sweat and blood?"—Fidel asked in his 1991 Matanzas speech.[308]

Although this rhetoric hardly resonated among Cubans and even among African students in Cuba, it has been acknowledged by some African leaders. Addressing the rally in Matanzas, on 26 July 1991, Nelson Mandela declared to be moved by Cuban "affirmation of the historical connection to the continent and people of Africa."[309] He depicted apartheid as part of a long history of racist and white domination, and the tradition of resistance as an inspiration to the contemporary struggle.[310] In

[308] Fidel Castro, "We will never return to the slave barracks," in Mandela, Castro, *How Far We Slaves Have Come!,* p. 32.
[309] Mandela, "We will ensure that the poor and rightless will rule the land of their birth," p. 18.
[310] *Ivi*, pp. 20-21.

highlighting the significance of Cuban assistance, Amilcar Cabral also referred to the blood relationship between Cubans and Africans as a result of the slave trade, by saying: "I don't believe there is life after death […], but if there is, we can be sure that the souls of our forefathers who were taken away to America to be slaves are rejoicing today to see their children reunited and working together to help us be independent and free."[311]

Mandela acknowledged the selfless nature of Cuban solidarity and praised Cuban assistance on various occasions. In Matanzas in 1991, he said: "The Cuban people hold a special place in the hearts of the people of Africa. The Cuban internationalists have made a contribution to African independence, freedom, and justice, unparalleled for its principled and selfless character.[312] […] What other country can point to a record of greater selflessness than Cuba has displayed in its relations with Africa?"[313] At the opening of the Southern Africa-Cuba Solidarity Conference in 1995, he declared:

> Cubans came to our region as doctors, teachers, soldiers, agricultural experts, but never as colonizers. They have shared the same trenches with us in the struggle against colonialism, underdevelopment, and apartheid. Hundreds of Cubans have given their lives, literally, in a struggle that was, first and foremost, not theirs but ours. As Southern Africans we salute them. We vow never to forget this unparalleled example of selfless internationalism.[314]

Cuba acted as a socialist country in the panorama of the Cold War humanitarian regime, yet, above all, as a non-aligned country, an underdeveloped country with a colonial past, which claimed to be eager to support the struggle of Third World countries and movements without any material interests, but only on the basis of South-South solidarity. Its alignment with the Soviet Union jeopardized its leadership role in the NAM on some occasions. Yet in the case of the anti-apartheid struggle in southern Africa, more than once Cuba overstepped the Soviet orders and took the lead, choosing to be the guarantor of the sole interests of the liberation movements and the Angolan government.

Based on the findings presented in this chapter, it might be said that socialist indoctrination was not a central element in Cuban solidarity with SWAPO. Rather, the desire for the end of external domination, white supremacy, and racism in southern Africa—all of which Cuba itself had suffered—was what guided Cuban solidarity and caused Cuban troops to remain in Angola and fight for Namibian independence. Before the proclamation of independence, Sam Nujoma expressed his gratitude toward Cuba, by saying:

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[311] Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, p. 198.
[312] Mandela, "We will ensure that the poor and rightless will rule the land of their birth," pp. 17-18.
[313] *Ivi*, p. 19.
[314] Kirk, *Healthcare without Borders*, p. 24.

> we in the liberation movement in Africa are indeed grateful to the leadership of the Communist party of Cuba, and in particular to compañero Fidel Castro, for concrete material assistance, political and diplomatic support. We wish to pay special tribute to the Cuban Armed Forces who traveled thousands and thousands of kilometers to come to Africa to assist in a practical way those of us who are still languishing in the chains of colonialism, imperialism and foreign domination in this region of southern Africa.[315]

The friendship between Namibia and Cuba continued after independence and continues to this day. On 26 July 1992, the Namibia-Cuba Friendship Association was established by the Namibians who wanted to enhance solidarity with Cuba by virtue of the history of common struggle they shared, to show gratitude to what Cuba did for the Namibian liberation struggle, and to provide support to Cuba during difficult times, promoting the principle of mutual cooperation. The association provides material aid when needed, condemns the blockade against Cuba, and sides with the Cuban government on occasions such as that of the "Cuban Five," when also Namibians campaigned for their release.[316] Cecilia Muzile, who is also the current Secretary-General of the association, points out that this solidarity is based on the experience of common struggle that united Cubans and Namibians against apartheid:

> what attaches Cuba it also attaches us, because our friendship, it is cemented by the blood which we shed in those Angolan forest. Because the SWAPO's PLAN combatants, they fought together with the Cubans. They shared the same trenches, with the Cubans. If you even talk of the Cuito Cuanavale […], and you know that that battle was commanded by the Comandante and chief Fidel Castro. […] So us, we Namibians, we remained really indebted to Cuba. There are a lot of countries that helped us. But not as much as Cuba has done for us. You know, they fought with us, they educated us.[317]

[315] Sam Nujoma, "We are grateful," in Deutschmann (ed.), *Changing the history of Africa*, p. xiii.
[316] They are the five Cuban intelligence agents who were sent to Florida to identify US anti-Cuban operations. They were arrested in the United States in 1998 and later convicted on charges of conspiration and espionage.
[317] Interview with Cecilia Muzile, Windhoek, 2 March 2022. See also the interview with Cecilia Muzile on the Namibian TV show "Good Morning Namibia," 19 April 2022, available on YouTube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7KopBx9OaRg (accessed on 22 January 2023).

Chapter 4
Italian communists in southern Africa: anti-hegemonic solidarity from the West

Introduction

The present chapter focuses on a specific model of socialist solidarity with the anti-apartheid struggle of SWAPO and ANC, which was different in structure and purposes from those promoted by the DDR and Cuba. The solidarity model here analyzed was in fact born thanks to the efforts of one of the largest communist parties in the West, the PCI, in Italy, and developed through the local context of Reggio Emilia, an Italian municipality at the time administered by the PCI. Therefore, this chapter does not refer to solidarity politics implemented by state socialist regimes as it was the case in chapters 2 and 3, but instead, it examines how socialist solidarity with southern African movements was thought and put into practice by Western communists who did not lead the government. The PCI foreign policy toward Africa is nonetheless relevant from a historiographical point of view because of PCI's strong position among Western European communist parties within the international communist movement and its late aspiration—cultivated by Secretary-General Enrico Berlinguer—to act as a bridge between the East and the West. African countries were keen to collaborate with the PCI because of its strong anti-Americanism and its autonomy from the Soviet Union, which it had gradually gained, over the years, without ever reaching a complete detachment. Furthermore, this case study represents an example of decentered solidarity, since it was channeled mainly by the city of Reggio Emilia, which played a central role in the field of Italian international relations, not without obstacles. As a municipality with a strong political culture based on international solidarity, during the 1970s Reggio Emilia was in fact appointed by the national PCI to develop solidarity relationships with FRELIMO and then it took a central role in the coordination of anti-apartheid initiatives through the activity of the National Committee. The success of the first solidarity actions implemented by Reggio Emilia, mainly thanks to the commitment of council member Giuseppe Soncini, led to the overturning of the center-periphery scheme, transforming a communist local entity into an engine of national mobilization for the cause of southern African peoples.

Therefore, the international positioning of the PCI as a communist party of an Atlantic Pact country and the central role played by Reggio Emilia were the elements that characterized the Italian communist model of solidarity with southern African movements as a peculiar case study in the entangled history of decolonization and Cold War but which, however, has not yet been the object of detailed historical studies. Only in the last two decades, scholars such as Paolo Borruso started to be

interested in the Italian involvement in Africa during the postcolonial era.[1] For what concerns the historiography on the PCI, starting from the late 1990s, there were some studies that started to deal with the nexus between the national and international politics of the Italian Communist Party, paving the way for a new historiographical approach that considers the global entanglements of the PCI's history. Volumes such as *L'impossibile egemonia* by Silvio Pons and *Togliatti e Stalin* by Elena Aga Rossi and Victor Zaslavsky reconstructed the early history of the PCI by looking at its close link with Stalinist foreign policy.[2] However, as these two studies show, during the 1990s the literature on PCI was mostly focused on the party's connection with the Soviet Union, often without taking into consideration other international actors. It is only recently that scholars have started to deal with the party's international politics and its relationship with Third World countries. Among these, Paolo Borruso examined the PCI's solidarity with some areas of independent Africa—the Horn of Africa, Algeria, and the former Portuguese colonies—starting from its initial involvement, during the time of the first wave of African decolonization, until its gradual disengagement, following Berlinguer's death and the national and international changes of the 1980s.[3] Onofrio Pappagallo investigated the nature of the relationship developed by the PCI with the Cuban revolutionary government and the Latin American communist parties, while Luca Riccardi analyzed how the Italian government and the PCI engaged with the Israeli state from its foundation in 1948 to the Kippur War in 1973, highlighting the existence of some similarities between the positions of the Italian government and its communist opposition in their relationship with the Middle East.[4] Among the other scholars who focused on the international reach of the PCI, Marco Galeazzi retraced the evolution of Italian communist internationalism in its relationship with the NAM from 1955 to 1975, pointing out the shifts in its forms and contents.[5] Furthermore, the recent works by Gabriele Siracusano have shed light on the engagement of the Italian and the French communist parties with western Africa, highlighting Western communists' perspectives and visions on Africa resulting from such

[1] Paolo Borruso, "L'Italia e la crisi della decolonizzazione," in Agostino Giovagnoli, Silvio Pons (eds.), *L'Italia Repubblicana nella crisi degli anni settanta,* Vol. 1: *Tra guerra fredda e distensione*, Soveria Mannelli: Rubettino, 2003; Paolo Borruso (ed.), *L'Italia in Africa: Le nuove strategie di una politica postcoloniale*, Padova: CEDAM, 2015.
[2] Silvio Pons, *L'impossibile egemonia: L'Urss, il Pci e le origini della guerra fredda (1943-1948)*, Roma: Carocci, 1999; Elena Aga Rossi, Victor Zaslavsky, *Togliatti e Stalin: il PCI e la politica estera staliniana negli archivi di Mosca*, Bologna: Il Mulino, 2007 [first ed. 1997].
[3] Paolo Borruso, *Il PCI e l'Africa indipendente: Apogeo e crisi di un'utopia socialista (1956-1989)*, Firenze: Le Monnier, 2009.
[4] Onofrio Pappagallo, *Il PCI e la rivoluzione cubana: La "via latino-americana al socialismo" tra Mosca e Pechino (1959-1965)*, Roma: Carocci, 2009; Idem, *Verso il nuovo mondo: Il PCI e l'America Latina (1945-1973)*, Milano: Franco Angeli, 2017; Luca Riccardi, *Il "problema Israele": Diplomazia italiana e PCI di fronte allo Stato ebraico (1948-1973)*, Roma: Guerini e Associati, 2006.
[5] Marco Galeazzi, *Il PCI e il movimento dei paesi non allineati 1955-1975*, Milano: Franco Angeli, 2011.

encounters.[6] Lastly, in 2021, Silvio Pons provided a comprehensive study of the international relations of Italian communism, pointing out the evolution of its internationalist visions and the development of its transnational connections at a global level.[7]

This literature provides the tools to frame the analysis of the involvement of the PCI in the struggle for the end of apartheid and the independence of Namibia. Little scholarly attention has in fact been given to the development of solidarity movements supporting southern Africa's struggle against apartheid within Italy. Recent works, such as the collective volume edited by Arianna Lissoni and Antonio Pezzano, as well as the works of Cristiana Fiamingo and Maria Cristina Ercolessi, have made some attempts to fill this gap.[8] A further important contribution has been made by Mario Carmelo Lanzafame and Carlo Podaliri, who are to be praised for revealing the history of solidarity between the city of Reggio Emilia and southern Africa. In addition to their volume on the medical aid provided by Reggio Emilia to Mozambique, they have also published an overview of the role played by communist-led local administrations in the Italian anti-apartheid movement, of which Reggio Emilia was at the forefront.[9]

The present chapter is mostly based on sources gathered from the Archivio del Partito Comunista Italiano (APCI, Archive of the Italian Communist Party), housed at the Gramsci Foundation in Rome, as well as from the Archivio Soncini-Ganapini (ASG, Soncini-Ganapini Archive), held at the Panizzi Library in Reggio Emilia. The consultation of the extensive material from the Soncini-Ganapini Archive, on which also the contributions by Lanzafame e Podaliri relied, allowed to cover some of the gaps and inaccuracies which would otherwise be present if the research were based only on the PCI Archive. In fact, the rich documentary and archival holdings held at Africa Fund of the Soncini-

[6] Gabriele Siracusano, "Il Pci e il processo d'indipendenza dell'Africa nera francese (1958-1961)," in *Studi Storici*, Anno 57, No. 1, 2016; Idem, "Progresso, guerra fredda e vie nazionali al socialismo in Africa: il PCI e la Repubblica di Guinea (1958-1968)," in *Quaderna*, No. 4, 2018; Idem, "Trade union education in former French Africa"; Idem, "Modernisation, progrès et guerre froide: la Guinée et le Mali vus par les partis communistes italien et français (1958-1968)," in *Histoire & Politique*, No. 38, 2019; Idem, "Le PCF, le PCI et l'Union des populations du Cameroun entre lutte politique et lutte armée," in Blum, Di Maggio, Siracusano, Wolikow (eds.), *Les partis communists occidentaux et l'Afrique*; Idem, *"Pronto per la Rivoluzione!": I comunisti italiani e francesi e la decolonizzazione in Africa centro-occidentale (1958-1968)*, Roma: Carocci, 2022.

[7] Silvio Pons, *I comunisti italiani e gli altri: Visioni e legami internazionali nel mondo del Novecento*, Torino: Einaudi, 2021.

[8] Arianna Lissoni, Antonio Pezzano (eds.), *The ANC between Home and Exile*: *Reflections on the Anti-Apartheid Struggle in Italy and Southern Africa*, Napoli: Università degli studi di Napoli L'Orientale, 2015; Cristiana Fiamingo, "Italy: 'Beneficiary' of the Apartheid Regime, and its Internal Opposition," in SADET (ed.), *The Road to Democracy in South Africa:* Vol. 3: *International Solidarity*; Eadem, "Movimenti anti-Apartheid in Italia dalla genesi alla proclamazione del 1978 anno internazionale della lotta contro l'Apartheid. Documenti (e memoria) a rischio," in *Trimestre Storia-Politica-Società*, Vol. 37, Nos. 13-14, 2004; Maria Cristina Ercolessi, "L'Italia e la questione sudafricana: dalla rivolta di Soweto alla liberazione di Mandela," in Borruso (ed.), *L'Italia in Africa*.

[9] Carmelo Mario Lanzafame, Carlo Podaliri, *La stagione della solidarietà sanitaria a Reggio Emilia: Mozambico 1963-1977*, Torino: L'Harmattan Italia, 2004; Iidem, "'Let there be another AMANDA Voyage round Africa'!. The role of left-wing administrations and the relationship with the Italian Communist Party (PCI) in the history of the anti-apartheid movement in Italy," in Blum, Di Maggio, Siracusano, Wolikow (eds.), *Les partis communists occidentaux et l'Afrique*.

Ganapini Archive accurately retraces the solidarity actions led by the National Committee headquartered in Reggio Emilia, which was the main protagonist in the history of the Italian solidarity with southern Africa. Giuseppe Soncini himself planned to write a series of volumes to reconstruct the history of solidarity of Reggio Emilia and its relationship with the countries of southern Africa.[10] The drafts of these volumes, on which he worked during his last years without being able to conclude them, are stored in the section "Appunti per una storia della solidarietà e Appunti per la cronaca" of the Soncini-Ganapini Archive and have been consulted for this chapter.

The sources used for this chapter include also the newspapers of the PCI, *l'Unità* and *Rinascita*, and the Italian edition of the ANC official organ, *Sechaba*.[11] Furthermore, an interview with Bruna Ganapini, Giuseppe Soncini's wife, has been conducted for the writing of this chapter. The interview, during which Bruna Ganapini exchanged impressions and memories, provided a glimpse of the internationalist atmosphere of Reggio Emilia during the 1970s and the 1980s. Furthermore, it offered me new insights, confirmed some of my initial assumptions, and clarified the functioning of Reggio Emilia's system of solidarity. Other interviews conducted in Windhoek with Namibians who are somehow aware of the Italian solidarity with SWAPO have been conducted. Among these, I interviewed Peter Katjavivi, the former SWAPO representative for the United Kingdom and Western Europe and the SWAPO Secretary for Information and Publicity, and the current Government Chief Whip in the Namibian National Assembly.

Thanks to the rich sources consulted, this chapter aims at providing an analysis that is as comprehensive as possible, contributing to enriching the body of literature referred above. It provides a detailed report of the Italian communists' anti-apartheid activities, by understanding the structure of the solidarity system and its positioning within the socialist solidarity regime during the late Cold War period. Through the materials that have been gathered, it has been possible to analyze some of the elements characterizing the reception of the Namibian and South African struggles within the Italian communist circles and the main initiatives of ideological and material support provided to SWAPO and ANC. The chapter is therefore interested in investigating the language, the purposes, the achievements, and the limits of the anti-apartheid solidarity within Italian communist circles, and, when possible, its reception abroad.

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[10] Bruna Ganapini Soncini, in Carmelo Mario Lanzafame, Marzia Morena, Carlo Podaliri (eds.), *Gli archivi di Giuseppe Soncini e Franco Cigarini: Due amici protagonisti di una città generosa e solidale*, Reggio Emilia: Biblioteca Panizzi, 2013, p. 17.

[11] For *l'Unità* see the Digital Archive in https://archivio.unita.news/ (accessed on 23 January 2023); for *Sechaba* see http://digilib.netribe.it/bdr01/Sezione.jsp?idSezione=84 (accessed on 23 January 2023). *Rinascita* can be consulted at the Gramsci Foundation in Rome.

Since the main anti-apartheid initiatives of Italian communists were mostly directed to SWAPO and ANC in conjunction, this chapter will focus on the Italian solidarity with the broader context of anti-apartheid liberation movements of southern Africa, with a particular (but not exclusive) attention to the contacts established with SWAPO, which is the object of this dissertation. The chapter opens by providing a brief overview of the development of the internationalist politics of the PCI in the long term and its involvement in Africa, pointing out the shifts of paradigms both at theoretical and practical levels. Looking at the internationalist politics of the PCI from its early stages makes in fact possible to highlight the peculiarities of the Italian communist solidarity as compared with that of the previous decades. Then, the chapter will focus on the role of the national PCI and the municipality of Reggio Emilia in supporting the anti-apartheid struggle from Italy, and specifically on the main solidarity initiatives against racism and apartheid promoted between 1978 and 1984. In fact, during these years, thanks to the activity of the National Committee, Italy saw a huge upswell in the solidarity with the anti-apartheid struggle, expressed through a series of important initiatives that were made possible by the combined efforts of the Italian democratic parties, the wide participation of movements, organizations, trade unions, and local bodies, and the personal commitment of figures such as Enrico Berlinguer and Giuseppe Soncini. During the second half of the 1980s, the departure of such figures from the political scene, allied with numerous other factors, contributed to a decline in internationalist activity—an issue that will be analyzed in the last section.

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4.1 Shifting paradigms in the Italian communist internationalism

The genealogy of the Italian communist internationalist visions has to be examined in light of both national and international developments, which contributed to producing a theoretical system characterized by novelties and contradictions alike. It was shaped by political figures such as Palmiro Togliatti and Enrico Berlinguer and by the relationship they built with the Soviet Union—a relationship that gradually shifted from (double) loyalty to (prudent) criticism, never reaching a complete detachment. The paradigm of "double loyalty," used by Silvio Pons and borrowed from a concept reformulated and applied to the Italian politics by Franco De Felice,[12] well portrays Togliatti's attitude to elaborate a policy strictly linked to the national-international nexus and

[12] Pons, *L'impossibile egemonia*, p. 38; Franco De Felice, "Doppia lealtà e doppio stato," in *Studi storici*, Anno 30, No. 3, 1989.

therefore split between the communist and the national loyalty. In 1921, the very birth of the Partito Comunista d'Italia[13] took place under the sign of the strict alignment with the Comintern's guidelines, which distinguished it from the Partito Socialista Italiano (PSI, Italian Socialist Party), from which it had broken away. Such alignment shaped its national and international policy especially during the decades between the 1920s and the 1950s and subsequently constituted the main brake on its autonomous evolution. Secretary-General from 1938 to 1964, the figure of Togliatti must be analyzed in connection with the rise of Stalin and subsequently with the decline of Stalinism after his death, which allowed Togliatti to sketch out an autonomous idea of communism. As Elena Aga Rossi, Victor Zaslavsky, and Silvio Pons suggest, Togliatti has to be considered neither as a puppet in Stalin's hands nor as independent from the Soviet influence. In absence of definite Soviet guidelines, he had a certain room for maneuver and could affect in some ways the Soviet partners, but only until the moment in which Stalin would eventually set the agenda for the policy of the communist parties.[14] The double loyalty of the PCI was the distinguishing feature of Togliatti's party. It was its source of legitimation but also a source of contradictions and weakness. Faced with issues such as the detention of Italian prisoners in the USSR,[15] the Trieste issue,[16] and the Marshall Plan,[17] in fact, the party repeatedly found itself in the position where it had to choose between unconditional loyalty to the Soviet Union and the aim to build up a national and democratic identity. The choice to place the international communist interests before the national ones challenged the declared national character of Togliatti's "New Party" and contributed to its isolation within Italy.

Stalin's death allowed Togliatti to launch "a gradual and silent destalinization,"[18] which was accelerated by the impulse of Nikita Khrushchev. After his Secret Speech denouncing Stalin's crimes, with which Togliatti did not fully agree, the PCI started to undertake a reflection process on the socialist system and to elaborate a new line of thinking, putting at the core of its program concepts such as "polycentrism" and "unity within diversity," which stressed the need to welcome different visions of communism while maintaining unity between them. Rather than argue for the existence of a monolithic bloc of socialist states, the PCI reiterated the concept of "different paths to socialism," which, however, did not imply questioning the unity of the international communist movement, nor the Soviet leadership and the socialist superiority in respect to the capitalist system. The development of the party's new ideological outlook started to take shape at a time when the international context

[13] It was renamed "Partito Comunista Italiano" in 1943.
[14] Aga Rossi, Zaslavsky, *Togliatti e Stalin*, pp. 31-32; Pons, *L'impossibile egemonia*, p. 39.
[15] Aga Rossi, Zaslavsky, *Togliatti e Stalin*, pp. 157-178.
[16] Aga Rossi, Zaslavsky, *Togliatti e Stalin,* pp. 138-156; Pons, *L'impossibile egemonia*, pp. 174-181; Pons, *I comunisti italiani e gli altri*, pp. 96-98.
[17] Aga Rossi, Zaslavsky, *Togliatti e Stalin*, pp. 199-209; Pons, *L'impossibile egemonia*, pp. 189-227.
[18] Pons, *I comunisti italiani e gli altri*, p. 141.

was marked by global upheavals such as the Cuban revolution, the first African independences, and the emergence of the Non-Aligned Movement. These events, in conjunction with the Soviet launching of Third World politics carried out by Khrushchev, stimulated the internationalist outburst of the PCI, which could use the new scenario to develop its reflection on the national paths to communism and carve out an innovative role within the transformed international context. The party welcomed with interest Bandung's neutralism, which had initially been "dismissed as unrealistic and politically unacceptable"[19] by Togliatti. Thanks to the notion of polycentrism, it partially reconsidered "the strict Eurocentric vision that Italian communists adopted since the 1920s and that was increased during the Stalinist era,"[20] maintaining however a limited and hierarchical vision with regards to Third World movements and countries, thought as natural allies of the Soviet bloc. As Galeazzi points out, in fact, due to the inadequate knowledge of Third World countries, the PCI was firstly unable to "adapt the traditional Cominternist categories to the reality of countries in which the message of Marxism-Leninism was much less effective than the cultural and religious tradition of Islam and the influence played by Afro-Asianism and Pan-Arabism."[21]

During this period, the Italian Communist Party started to broaden its international commitment, establishing connections with Third World movements and countries. Besides global factors stimulating the PCI engagement in the Third World, the international policy of the party developed also in response to the new neo-Atlantism of the Democrazia Cristiana (DC, Christian Democracy) and, in general, to the Third Worldism within the socialist and the Catholic milieu.[22] Nationally, the PCI aimed at developing a more effective Third World policy, questioning the ambiguous positions of the Italian government and encouraging it to adopt more concrete forms of cooperation with the Global South.

Resuming the anticolonial line it had shown during the fascist invasion of Ethiopia,[23] within the context of the first African wave of decolonization the PCI found the field for experimenting its new ideological insights, which envisioned different forms of socialism. In fact, the absence of a consistent

[19] Galeazzi, *Il PCI e il movimento dei paesi non allineati,* p. 35.
[20] Pons, *I comunisti italiani e gli altri*, p. 166.
[21] Galeazzi, *Il PCI e il movimento dei paesi non allineati*, p. 49.
[22] Paolo Borruso, "L'Italia tra cooperazione e terzomondismo negli anni Sessanta e Settanta," in Luciano Tosi, Lorella Tosone (eds.), *Gli aiuti allo sviluppo nelle relazioni internazionali del secondo dopoguerra: Esperienze a confronto*, Padova: CEDAM, 2006; Idem, "L'Italia e il ruolo 'euro-africano' negli anni Sessanta e Settanta," in Idem (ed.), *L'Italia in Africa*; Luciano Tosi (ed.), *In dialogo: La diplomazia multilaterale italiana negli anni della guerra fredda*, Padova: CEDAM, 2013; Andrea Riccardi, "La Santa Sede fra distensione e guerra fredda: da Paolo VI a Giovanni Paolo II," in Giovagnoli, Pons (eds.), *L'Italia Repubblicana nella crisi degli anni settanta,* Vol. 1; Guido Panvini, "Third Worldism in Italy," in Stefan Berger, Christoph Cornelissen (eds.), *Marxist Historical Cultures and Social Movements during the Cold War*: *Case Studies from Germany, Italy and Other Western European States*, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.
[23] Luigi Candreva, "Le parti communiste d'Italie et la guerre d'Ethiopie. De Adua au Goggiam," in Blum, Di Maggio, Siracusano, Wolikow (eds.), *Les partis communists occidentaux et l'Afrique*.

working class in the African continent presupposed to pursue the communist path outside the traditional Western Marxist-Leninist approach. In Africa, Italian communists provided support to liberation movements and postcolonial governments, "focusing the attention on the question of the state and the need for a political construction as the outlet to national independence."[24] Their solidarity politics was mainly realized on a diplomatic level, through meetings aimed at enhancing the knowledge of the African political realities and consequently at addressing their orientations,[25] but was also implemented through other instruments such as propaganda actions, medical assistance, training of cadres, technical and material aid.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, "Italian communists adopted a syncretic pedagogy aimed at reconciling nationalism and socialism in both the African Arab world and Western sub-Saharan Africa."[26] They started to look with interest at the nationalist trends which developed in Arab countries, such as Nasser's Egypt, despite the repression he carried out toward Egyptian communists, with whom the PCI had established direct connections.[27] Links were created also with movements in francophone western Africa, such as the Parti Démocratique de Guinée, led by Sékou Touré and, until the independence of Cameroun in 1960, the Union des Population du Cameroun.[28] Moreover, in mid-1950s Somalia, the PCI declared its support to the Somali Youth League and, after its break up, to the Great Somali League, to which it provided legal defense in the Mogadishu trial after the disorders preceding the 1959 election.[29] However, the main focus of the PCI's attention during this period was the independence struggle in Algeria, which the PCI started to sustain during its final stages, filling the void left by the incoherence of the French communist party. Admired for its "Italian path to socialism" and for its third position with respect to Cold War alignments, the PCI established close links with Algerian communists and with the FLN, and, after independence was achieved in 1962, it sustained the government led by Ben Bella, as the first experience of African socialism.[30]

Even if the most influent state-building models in Africa—such as Nasser's socialist authoritarianism and Touré's "mass democracy"—did not reflect the Italian idea of a democratic path to communism, the PCI overcame that incongruence in the name of internationalism. Compared to other European communists and the Soviet Union, it showed better comprehension of the new emergent realities and

[24] Borruso, *Il PCI e l'Africa indipendente,* p. 3.
[25] *Ibidem.*
[26] Pons, *I comunisti italiani e gli altri*, p. 170.
[27] Riccardi, *Il "problema Israele,"* pp. 116-133, 144-157; Pons, *I comunisti italiani e gli altri*, pp. 169-170.
[28] Siracusano, "Progresso, guerra fredda e vie nazionali al socialismo in Africa"; Idem, "Il Pci e il processo d'indipendenza dell'Africa nera francese."
[29] Borruso, *Il PCI e l'Africa indipendente*, pp. 37-44.
[30] *Ivi*, pp. 63-95.

did not try to impose the Soviet model of development, envisioning hybrid solutions instead.[31] During these initial stages, the party pursued an internationalist policy addressed to serve both the Soviet aim to broaden the socialist camp and its own purpose of proving and developing the Italian communist paradigm of the national paths to socialism. Post-Stalinist Togliatti elaborated an internationalist politics that showed the residues of the "double loyalty." His attitude was characterized by both doctrinaire conformity and political flexibility, as it supported the Soviet intervention in 1956's Hungary and the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961, while elaborating the notion of polycentrism. Despite the evolution of an autonomous idea of communism, in fact, his vision was anchored to "the conviction that Khrushchev's destalinization presented high risks of destabilization and that it was not a carrier of positive change."[32] The cultural and ideological renewal that he sketched in 1956 was resumed especially during his last years (1961-1964), when he further developed the concept of "unity within diversity" and started to assert an autonomous role of his party, although still inseparable from the Soviet Union.[33] During this period, he came closer to the leader of the NAM, Tito, whose positions converged in acknowledging the existence of a multipolar world and the "need to avoid the creation of a vacuum in […] [the international scenario], destined to be filled by neocolonialism."[34] The Sino-Soviet confrontation made even more urgent Togliatti's considerations on the importance of the unity of the communist movement. Shortly before his death, in 1964 in Yalta, in view of a meeting with Khrushchev, he drafted the Memorial which became his political testament, where he reflected on the Soviet and socialist system, openly admitting for the first time the existence of flaws regarding democratic freedoms and reiterating the need for unity (within diversity) within the international communist movement. Moreover, he highlighted the "need for a common platform not just with the communist parties but with 'all the forces struggling for independence and against imperialism and even, where possible, with progressive governments of neo-independent countries'."[35]

After Togliatti's death, PCI international politics underwent a complex and slow transition. During this phase, although maintaining Togliatti's teachings from the Yalta Memorial as its guidelines, the party was not able to further elaborate its late leader's intuitions on the structural crisis of the Soviet model and to acknowledge the declining unity of the international communist movement.[36] The development of an original internationalism and the research for an autonomous role for the party

[31] Pons, *I comunisti italiani e gli altri*, pp. 171-172.
[32] *Ivi*, p. 156.
[33] Galeazzi, *Il PCI e il movimento dei paesi non allineati*, pp. 73-115.
[34] *Ivi,* p. 105.
[35] *Ivi,* p. 115.
[36] *Ivi,* p. 120.

clashed with the internal contradictions within the PCI, which was incapable of starting an emancipation process from the Soviet Union, since it was certain that "the preferential relationship with the USSR was the *conditio sine qua non* for the bargaining position of the party."[37] The theoretic elaboration of the party line proceeded slowly, especially at the instigation of Enrico Berlinguer, who—together with the Secretary of the party Luigi Longo—sought to reinvigorate Togliatti's idea of polycentrism.

The Prague Spring in 1968 gave a sudden acceleration to the process of reviewing the PCI national and international approaches. Supporting the Czechoslovakian Spring and the idea of "socialism with a human face" carried out by the communist leader Alexander Dubcek, the PCI openly condemned the Soviet repression, marking a key moment in the party's evolution. The Prague Spring reignited the theoretic elaboration inherited from Togliatti and paved the way for a complex reflection process led by Berlinguer, communist deputy from 1968, Vice Secretary from 1969, and Secretary-General between 1972 and 1984. During his secretaryship, the PCI gradually abandoned its anti-NATO position and revised its originally negative opinion of the European Community, embracing the concept of a Europe that was "neither anti-Soviet nor anti-American,"[38] and, as such, capable of playing a key role in the détente process. According to this approach, Western communist parties would be required to act as a glue to bind together Western workers' movements, the Third World, and the socialist bloc. The Eurocommunist project, drafted by Berlinguer along with the secretaries of the French and Spanish communist parties in 1975-76, was intended to give birth to a European communist pole. However, following the swift decline in relations between the three parties and the premature end of the project, it was actually the PCI alone that advanced this reformist vision. As part of this approach, the party appeared to have the ambitious mission of embodying a "third way" between real socialism and social-democracy and to reform Soviet communism, with the aim of triggering a change in both Western and Eastern Europe.[39] The Eurocommunists attempted to promote a vision of Western communism that was based on the values of democratic pluralism and invoked the language of human rights when demanding that Moscow address issues of dissent. Indeed, within this context, human rights were considered by Berlinguer to be a fundamental building block in easing international tensions.[40] They also assumed an important role within the ambit of North-South relations, an area where the PCI continued to place importance on the role of Europe,

[37] *Ivi*, p. 131.
[38] Expression coined by Berlinguer in January 1973, see Silvio Pons, *Berlinguer e la fine del comunismo*, Torino: Einaudi, 2006, p. 23.
[39] Pons, *Berlinguer e la fine del comunismo*.
[40] Mark Philip Bradley, "Human Rights and Communism," in Fürst, Pons, Selden (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Communism*, Vol. 3, p. 162; Pons, *I comunisti italiani e gli altri*, p. 235.

believing that it had the duty to eradicate inequality and guarantee the human rights of peoples in the Global South.[41]

Besides Eurocommunism, which defined the guidelines of his international politics, during the 1970s Berlinguer developed also directives on the national level, launching the "Compromesso Storico" (Historical Compromise), which promoted a politics of collaboration with the other national democratic forces—DC and PSI—with the aim of opening a much needed phase of national solidarity, in order to avoid the creation of a link between the center and right-wing parties. The Historical Compromise was born as a result of the considerations made by Berlinguer on the Chilean experience of the government of Unidad Popular (1970-1973).[42] According to Berlinguer, the processes that started with the national and international events of 1968 could lead to the formation of a reactionary bloc with the mass consensus.[43] The coup by Augusto Pinochet and the failure of Unidad Popular showed the risks that could arise also in other contexts—risks that, according to Berlinguer, could be avoided through an alliance between all the democratic and popular forces.[44]

Berlinguer's international politics aimed at a deep transformation which, however, proved to be impracticable for its conflicting purposes to reform communism and safeguard the communist identity.[45] The aim to reform communism and to overcome the bipolar Cold War logic clashed with the inability to compromise the bond with the USSR, from which the party gradually distanced itself, without ever reaching an absolute detachment nonetheless. The divorce from the Soviet Union, in fact, was always excluded out of fear that it would diminish the role and the identity of Italian communism.

From their side, the Soviets expressed their disappointments toward the new PCI agenda, as it was aiming to embody a Eurocommunist pole that could potentially attract Eastern countries. However, at the moment of the birth of Eurocommunism, as both sides wanted to avoid fractures, they reached a precarious balance consisting in the "tacit agreement to not insist too much on the international policy differences."[46] The objective of Berlinguer was in fact to "differentiate the PCI from the communist movement without causing a split, and play an influential role in the European and Soviet communist world, keeping a relationship that guarantees its identity, without being subjected to direct

[41] Gabriele Siracusano, "From the Rights of Peoples to Individual Rights: The PCI in Africa, Decolonisation and North South Cooperation," in Silvio Pons (ed.), *Gorbachev, Italian Communism and Human Rights*, Roma: Viella, 2022.
[42] Enrico Berlinguer, "Riflessioni sull'Italia dopo i fatti del Cile," in *Rinascita*, Nos. 38-39-40, 1973.
[43] Giuseppe Vacca, *Tra compromesso e solidarietà: La politica del Pci negli anni '70*, Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1987, pp. 55-61.
[44] Berlinguer, "Riflessioni sull'Italia dopo i fatti del Cile," in *Rinascita*, No. 40, 1973.
[45] Pons, *Berlinguer e la fine del comunismo*.
[46] Silvio Pons, "L'Urss e il PCI nel sistema internazionale della guerra fredda," in Roberto Gualtieri (ed.), *Il PCI nell'Italia repubblicana*, *1943-1991*, Roma: Carocci, 2001, p. 32.

conditioning."[47] However, given the different paths pursued by the two parties, the relationship between PCI and CPSU gradually deteriorated up to the point of highest tension, after the PCI's condemnation of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in 1979 and in the Polish crisis in 1980-1981. Following these events, the Soviet Union ended its financial assistance to the PCI.[48]

The PCI's reflection on the socialist system ran parallel with the development of a renovated internationalism based on a new conception of the global world. The international and national scenario of the end of the 1970s, characterized by the détente crisis and the end of the government of national solidarity, further contributed to the development of Berlinguer thinking, which started to address new topics of international politics, such as humanitarian issues and the unequal development between the Global North and the Global South. During his final years (1979-1984), Berlinguer conceived the idea of an interdependent and unified world, an idea that aspired to go beyond the bipolar logic in order to enact a democratic shift in the East and to resolve the issue of inequality between North and South. As part of this conception, he advanced the idea of a world government based on collaboration between states and on the "refusal to delegate the common destiny and various political economic assets to hegemonic powers."[49] Berlinguer's conception of the international system was akin to that carried out by some European social-democrat leaders, such as the West German Willy Brandt, the Swedish Olof Palm, and the French François Mitterand, who he gradually approached without ever politically identifying with them or building stable alliances.[50]

Inspired by the Brandt Report, between 1980 and 1981, Berlinguer wrote the *Carta per la pace e lo sviluppo* (Chart for peace and development), which launched a political program aimed at the establishment of a new international order built on economic, political, and cultural exchange between peoples as well as on a new ethical approach to development.[51] The binominal term "peace-development," as well as the concept of development as a form of interdependence, formed the bedrock of Berlinguer's political vision, thus challenging the existing development aid system, which was entangled within the dynamics of the Cold War, and instead arguing for a system of international relations based on détente and peace. In the Chart for peace and development, Berlinguer denounced the Soviet Union's power politics and its interference in the affairs of the Third World.

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[47] Pons, *Berlinguer e la fine del comunismo*, pp. 87-88.
[48] Valerio Riva, *Oro da Mosca: I finanziamenti sovietici al PCI dalla Rivoluzione d'Ottobre al crollo dell'Urss*, Milano: Mondadori, 1999, pp. 520-524.
[49] Galeazzi, *Il PCI e il movimento dei paesi non allineati*, p. 237.
[50] Pons, *Berlinguer e la fine del comunismo*, pp. 178-179. See also Michele Di Donato, *I comunisti italiani e la sinistra europea: Il PCI e i rapporti con le socialdemocrazie (1964-1984)*, Roma: Carocci, 2015; Fiamma Lussana, "Il confronto con le socialdemocrazie e la ricerca di un nuovo socialismo nell'ultimo Berlinguer," in *Studi Storici*, Anno 45, No. 2, 2004.
[51] Lussana, "Il confronto con le socialdemocrazie," pp. 466-468.

During the 1970s and the 1980s, besides Algeria—where Italian communists provided support to the Boumediène regime (1965-1978) and the government established in 1979 by Bendjeddid Chadli—PCI's African policy was mainly addressed to the Horn of Africa, the Portuguese colonies, which achieved independence in 1974-1975, and southern Africa. In the early 1970s, the party started to consolidate its relations with socialist Somalia led by Siad Barre and promote collaborative projects consisting in the training of cadres, propaganda actions in support of the Somali revolution, and town-twinning arrangements between Italian and Somali cities.[52] During this period, the PCI was also committed to sustaining the Eritrean movements struggling for independence from the Ethiopian empire ruled by Haile Selassie. With the birth of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front and its division from the Eritrean Liberation Front, the PCI declared its support to the former, because of its ideological affinity to Marxism-Leninism, its strict organizational structure, and its political program addressed to the construction of an independent socialist country. However, the Ethiopian revolution in 1974, and the resulting establishment of the socialist Derg led by Mengistu, changed the political scene of the Horn of Africa and subverted the existing system of international alliances. In the face of the Ogaden War between Somalia and Ethiopia and the Eritrean liberation struggle against Ethiopia, the PCI adopted an ambivalent strategy: it declared its support to socialist Ethiopia, continuing however to advance the Eritrean cause, and temporarily distanced itself from Somalia.[53] In line with Berlinguer's politics, during this phase the PCI opted for a "strategic socialism," adopting a pro-peace policy aimed at preserving a mediating role in resolving conflicts and maintaining a position of equidistance both from the USA and USSR, ending up "revealing its ideological inadequacy in the face of certain political developments in the area."[54]

In the 1970s, the PCI also engaged in the fight against Portuguese colonialism, providing support to MPLA in Angola, FRELIMO in Mozambique, and PAIGC in Guinea Bissau, through propaganda actions and material aid. It co-organized two conferences of solidarity with the liberation movements of the Portuguese colonies: the International Conference, held in Rome in 1970, and the National Conference, held three years later in Reggio Emilia, where DC, PSI, and PCI elaborated a common appeal advocating the independence of Portuguese colonies and the end of apartheid in South Africa.[55] After the independence of the Portuguese colonies, the PCI renewed its support to the newborn governments, providing, among other things, assistance in the reconstruction of the parties through the training of cadres. During this period, the main recipient of the Italian communist

[52] Borruso, *Il PCI e l'Africa indipendente*, p. 212.
[53] *Ivi*, pp. 228-258.
[54] *Ivi*, p. 268.
[55] Lanzafame, Podarili, *La stagione della solidarietà sanitaria a Reggio Emilia*, pp. 50-62, 159-165.

solidarity, provided especially through the channel of Reggio Emilia, was Mozambique, which, while declaring itself socialist, rejected the Soviet model and found in Berlinguer's PCI an ideal interlocutor. Then, solicited by FRELIMO, the PCI extended its solidarity actions toward other areas of southern Africa, starting to provide support to the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa and the Namibian liberation struggle, as this chapter shall scrutinize.

Committed to the struggle against colonialism and racism in Africa, the PCI under Berlinguer developed the embryonic idea of polycentrism sketched out by Togliatti and gave birth to an innovative conception of communism and international politics, launching a new approach toward the Third World and emptying the internationalist doctrine of its original socialist aim to broaden Soviet influence. Given the crisis of the socialist bloc and the inability of the Third World to act as a unifying platform, as well as the decline of Eurocommunism, in fact, the foreign policy of the PCI during the 1980s saw a gradual abandonment of the paradigm of communist internationalism: the international communist struggle against imperialism was instead substituted by a greater focus on aid-based intervention, aimed at alleviating hunger throughout the world and defending individual rights. Within this new context, it was believed that Europe should increase its efforts in tackling the problems of underdevelopment, hunger, and poverty in Africa.

However, despite the innovative language against the bipolar system elaborated by Berlinguer, the PCI was not able to concretely dismiss the Cold War heritage: the anti-American and anti-social-democratic biases prevented the PCI to accomplish its criticism toward real socialism. Despite the increasing disillusionment with the Soviet Union, even during the 1980s, the PCI continued to positively judge the Soviet international role as a counterweight to the hostile American imperialism.[56] Berlinguer was not able to acknowledge the historical decline of communism and the changes in global politics after the neoliberal turn in Great Britain and the United States, always believing in the potential of European communism as the catalyst for a change both in the East and in the West. His fear of completely breaking with the Soviet tradition, which had always been central for the party, prefigured what happened a few years later, right after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In fact, after Berlinguer's death in 1984, the renewal process carried out by his successors Alessandro Natta (1984-1988) and Achille Occhetto (1988-1991), under the acceleration of the international events taking place at the end of the 1980s, led to the dissolution of the party in 1991.

[56] Pons, *Berlinguer e la fine del comunismo*, p. 221.

4.2 The PCI and the anti-apartheid struggle in Italy

The first contacts between PCI and the southern African anti-apartheid liberation movements and the first calls to mobilize world public opinion against racist South Africa date back to the first half of the 1970s. In particular, the meetings with SWAPO delegates held in 1974 revealed the Namibians' willingness to intensify its relations with the PCI.[57] In October 1974, as SWAPO chief representative in the United Kingdom and Western Europe, Peter Katjavivi was invited to Italy by the Italian progressive forces, PCI included, to brief on the situation of the Namibian liberation struggle. Here, he solicited support for SWAPO and indicated what was needed for the refugee camps.[58] As the Italian communists Nadia Spano and Remo Salati reported, SWAPO "intended to have an exchange of information with us in order to intensify the contacts and the solidarity," requested under the form of "political aid," through the popularization of the struggle, and "concrete aid," through school and propaganda materials.[59] At that time, given the absence of a SWAPO representative based in Italy, Katjavivi took charge of launching an appeal for broader support—an appeal to which Italian solidarity organizations and actors responded with cash donations and by initiating a number of concrete projects.[60] He recalls that time as a time of vivid solidarity for SWAPO coming from both Western organizations and socialist countries, and he appoints the Italian Communist Party as "one of the most visible and dynamic parties in the country," as a strong party, bigger in comparison with other communist parties in Europe, and therefore at the "forefront of the struggle for self-determination across the world."[61]

Such informal and informative contacts characterized the PCI's relations with SWAPO during the first half of the 1970s, and became thicker at the time of the decolonization of the Portuguese colonies and especially after the Angolan independence, which provided a new ground for South African incursions. In fact, as Katjavivi wrote to Nadia Spano in December 1974, "at a time when the South African regime is expending a great deal of energy on tricks to bemuse the international community, it is vital for us [SWAPO] to maintain relationships of solidarity."[62] In the context of the ongoing decolonization of the Portuguese colonies, and the subsequent South African incursions in Angola, SWAPO and ANC turned to the PCI urging European governments "to make strong representation

[57] APCI, 1974, non cl., Sezione Esteri, Namibia, b. 265, f. 70, Report by Nadia Spano on a meeting with Hidipo Hamutenya, 16 February 1974 and Note by Nadia Spano and Remo Salati on a meeting with Peter Katjavivi, 11 October 1974.
[58] Interview with Peter Katjavivi, Windhoek, 31 January 2022.
[59] APCI, 1974, non cl., Sezione Esteri, Namibia, b. 265, f. 70, Note by Nadia Spano and Remo Salati on a meeting with Peter Katjavivi, 11 October 1974.
[60] Interview with Peter Katjavivi, Windhoek, 31 January 2022.
[61] Interview with Peter Katjavivi, Windhoek, 31 January 2022.
[62] APCI, 1975, non cl., Sezione Esteri, Sud Africa, b. 325, f. 99, Letter Peter Katjavivi to Nadia Spano, 16 December 1974.

to the South African regime for their complete withdrawal"[63] from Namibia and to "demand the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all South African fascist troops and neo-colonialist interventionists from Angola."[64]

After the decolonization of the Portuguese colonies, the Soweto massacre—which brought the horrors of apartheid to public attention and provoked a global initiative demanding its abolition—further triggered the PCI to place apartheid South Africa at the core of its foreign policy. Antonio Rubbi himself, who was among the leaders of the PCI's foreign relations section, has argued that, following the Soweto massacre, the struggle against apartheid became for the PCI "a field of its international activity that it would maintain consistently and tenaciously right up to its final overthrow."[65] On 18 June 1976, the Central Committee of the PCI condemned the violence in Soweto by delivering a letter of protest to the South African embassy in Rome. The embassy responded by justifying the escalation in violence on the pretext that the disorders had been fomented by anti-South African elements, thus attempting to minimize the repressive action of the police.[66]

During this period, the PCI supported the anti-apartheid struggle through the organization of protests against the South African regime, the participation in global conferences against apartheid,[67] and the development and nurturing of links with liberation movements in southern Africa. PCI contacts with SWAPO increased through meetings and talks with SWAPO's delegations, who were committed to obtaining broader contacts, facilitated "by the fact that the left-wing forces in certain European countries are remarkable and manage to involve their governments in dealing with the African reality."[68] During talks with a SWAPO delegation, composed of Homatemi Kaluenja, member of the executive committee, and Sointu Angula, Secretary of the mission in Angola, Antonio Rubbi and Nadia Spano were informed about the military situation of the Namibian liberation struggle and the new strategy adopted by the South African regime, which since 1975 had called the Turnhalle Constitution Conference.[69] The SWAPO delegation also denounced the pressure that South Africa was exerting through the USA and other African countries to obtain approval from SWAPO—which,

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[63] *Ibidem*.

[64] APCI, 1975, non cl., Sezione Esteri, Sud Africa, b. 325, f. 99, Document of the ANC against the invasion of Angola by the South African troops, 31 October 1975.

[65] Antonio Rubbi, *Il Sud Africa di Nelson Mandela*, Milano: Teti, 1998, pp. 57-58.

[66] "La protesta del PCI all'ambasciata del Sudafrica," in *l'Unità*, 25 June 1976; APCI, 1976, Estero, Sudafrica, mf. 241, pp. 1267-1269, Letter from the South African embassy in response to the PCI's protests against the events in Soweto, 26 June 1976.

[67] For example the World Conference against apartheid, racism and colonialism in southern Africa (Lisbon, 16-19 June 1977), see APCI, 1977, cl., Estero, Africa australe, b. 404, f. 149, Report by Dina Forti and Giorgio Bottarelli on the World Conference against apartheid in Lisbon, 28 June 1977.

[68] APCI, 1976, non cl., Sezione Esteri, Namibia, b. 362, f. 77, Report by Nadia Spano on a meeting with a SWAPO's delegation, 28 October 1976.

[69] "Delegazione dello SWAPO ricevuta dal PCI," in *l'Unità*, 28 October 1976; APCI, 1976, non cl., Sezione Esteri, Namibia, b. 362, f. 77, Report by Nadia Spano on a meeting with a SWAPO's delegation, 28 October 1976.

however, radically opposed the Turnhalle proposals, declaring that it would accept nothing less than independence—and described the situation of refugees in Angola, calling for a broader action of solidarity. Moreover, in an interview published in *l'Unità*, Homatemi Kaluenja denounced the attempts by the WCG to negotiate with Pretoria for an independent Namibian government that would meet their neocolonialist military and economic interests.[70] On their side, Rubbi and Spano confirmed "the lively interest with which the PCI, together with all the democratic forces, follows the developments of events in Namibia, Zimbabwe, and South Africa, and its commitment to strengthening solidarity with SWAPO and other liberation movements in southern African countries."[71]

One of the main aims of the PCI's commitment to the anti-apartheid struggle was to exert political pressure on the Italian government, in the hope that it would take a position that was independent from the influence of the United States and NATO. Indeed, conditioned as it was by the alliances that had developed during the Cold War, the policy position of Italian governments in relation to the South African regime was largely based on

> a number of balancing acts: between a national strategy and membership of the Atlantic Alliance and friendship with the US; between national interests and standing and the European consensus; between the pragmatism of the government, the development of a new foreign policy approach by an Italian Communist Party […], and more radical instances from civil society; and between economic interests, norms and values.[72]

During the 1960s and 1970s in particular, moral condemnation of the apartheid system was not accompanied by concrete political action aimed at isolating or putting pressure on the government in Pretoria. On the contrary, Italy maintained strong diplomatic, economic, and commercial links with the racist regime in South Africa,[73] supporting investment by Italian companies in the country and providing it with military technology and weaponry despite having signed up to the arms embargo.[74] In spite of the fact that the Italian government began to focus its attention more closely on the South African question from the end of the 1970s onwards (albeit only in response to growing pressure both nationally and internationally), the PCI continued to note its tendency to align itself with its major

[70] Guido Bimbi, "I padroni della Namibia. Intervista con Homatemi Kaluenja," in *l'Unità*, 30 September 1977.
[71] "Delegazione dello SWAPO ricevuta dal PCI," in *l'Unità*, 28 October 1976.
[72] Maria Cristina Ercolessi, "Italy and Apartheid South Africa," in Lissoni, Pezzano (eds.), *The ANC between Home and Exile*, p. 51.
[73] Ercolessi, "L'Italia e la questione sudafricana," pp. 187-188.
[74] Cristiana Fiamingo, "The Anti-Apartheid Movement in Italy: Processes, Mechanisms and Heritage," in Lissoni, Pezzano (eds.), *The ANC between Home and Exile*, pp. 60-61; Eadem, "Italy: 'Beneficiary' of the Apartheid Regime," pp. 696-701; Rubbi, *Il Sud Africa di Nelson Mandela*, pp. 81-82.

Western partners as well as a certain inertia in isolating the racist regimes in southern Africa.[75] Italian communists, in contrast, strove for "more incisive and credible action by the Italian Government" with the aim of "narrowing the existing gap between the (drafted) official declarations against racism and colonialism in Southern Africa and the (modest) concrete action that has been made in this sector of Italian foreign affairs."[76]

In addition to this, the party endeavored to counterbalance the low levels of attention paid to the South African question in Italy by increasing the dissemination of information relating to the nature of the regime in South Africa and its occupation of Namibia, in order to engender a mass public consciousness that would make it possible to organize strong opposition to apartheid. In this sense, an important role in swaying public opinion in Italy was played by the media outlets of the party, *l'Unità* and *Rinascita*, as well as the "Feste dell'Unità,"[77] which during the 1980s regularly included events dedicated to the situation in Africa.

In supporting the struggle against apartheid, the PCI began to introduce into its language of solidarity the lexicon of human rights, which during those years was gradually gaining an ever more important position in the global political agenda.[78] The South African regime was condemned as an imperialist and colonial power and as a system that institutionalized racial discrimination and systematically violated the human rights of the black majority. "The South African question," according to a piece published in *l'Unità,* was "born out of imperialism itself, and dates back decades,"[79] a period during which the government in Pretoria had gradually put in place a fascist government, based on the hegemony of whites and the occupation of Namibia. Italian communists also harshly criticized the United States and Western countries, since they provided support to the apartheid regime and were open to the dialogue with it due to their political and economic interests in the region. As a consequence, there was also a high degree of anti-Americanism and anti-Westernism within the PCI, which regularly made use of public statements, international conferences, and its media outlets to outline its criticisms of complicit Western governments that, in remaining reticent on sanctions, were contributing to the strengthening of the South African war machine and delaying the end of apartheid

[75] APCI, 1977, cl., Estero, Africa australe, b. 404, f. 149, Report by Dina Forti and Giorgio Bottarelli on the World Conference against apartheid, racism and colonialism in southern Africa, 28 June 1977.
[76] *Ibidem.*
[77] The "Festa dell'Unità" was an annual festival organized by the PCI to publicize and raise funds for its official newspaper, *l'Unità,* and the party itself. In addition to the main national event at which party leaders and invited guests gave speeches, the "Feste dell'Unità" were also organized in many towns and villages by local sections of the party. The festivals included cultural and recreational initiatives and political debates and raised awareness of events around the world.
[78] Arianna Pasqualini, "Solidarity, Anti-Racism and Human Rights: Italian Communists and the Struggle against Apartheid," in Pons (ed.), *Gorbachev, Italian Communism and Human Rights*.
[79] Enzo Santarelli, "Rivolta nella città-prigione," in *l'Unità*, 25 June 1976.

and the independence of Namibia.[80] In the context of the fight against apartheid, the PCI also believed that Europe needed to play a vital role: that of representing "a credible alternative to the logic of spheres of influence," and of establishing more equal forms of collaboration with countries in southern Africa, in order to ensure security in the region.[81]

Consequently, as outlined in a message from the Central Committee of the PCI on the seventieth anniversary of the foundation of the ANC, the struggle of black South Africans was presented in terms of a fight "against racism and colonialism, for the human rights, freedom, and independence of the South African people,"[82] a battle that was "an integral part of our broader struggle for peace, development, liberty, and the independence of peoples."[83] These statements highlight Berlinguer's conception of an interdependent world and its particular focus on peace and development as the fundamental rights of peoples. Within the context of the fight against apartheid, human rights were frequently invoked by Italian communists, for instance in relation to campaigns for the release of political prisoners, which became increasingly frequent during the 1980s. The PCI and, as we shall see, the various actors that constituted the Italian anti-apartheid movement, endeavored to organize campaigns against the death sentences imposed on South African and Namibian fighters, for the liberation of leaders such as Nelson Mandela and Herman Toivo Ja Toivo, as well as all of those who had been unjustly incarcerated in South African prisons. In their media outlets, Italian communists provided ample space for the criticism of conditions in the South African prison of Robben Island, where illegally-held political prisoners were subjected to isolation, freezing conditions, hunger, and hard labor, as well as being denied any contact with their family members and the outside world.[84]

The PCI, therefore, continued to condemn the injustices and persistent human rights violations carried out by the South African regime, calling for more concrete action by the Italian government, which it criticized for its ambiguous position as evidenced by the visit of the South African Prime Minister P. W. Botha to Italy on 12 June 1984. During this visit, the PCI, along with trade unions and other organizations, questioned the government on the motives that had led it to "invite the greatest exponent of a racist government that denies the most elementary civil rights and liberty to over 22 million Africans," as well as to how it intended to "demonstrate its most severe condemnation […] of the hateful system of racial discrimination […] that represents an unacceptable injustice, a threat to

[80] Carlo Presciuttini, "Le armi che difendono l'apartheid," in *Rinascita*, No. 39, 1986; Maurizio Simoncelli, "Siamo grandi fornitori del Terzo Mondo (armi)," in *Rinascita*, No. 46, 1986; Guido Bimbi, "I padroni della Namibia. Intervista con Homatemi Kaluenja," in *l'Unità*, 30 September 1977.
[81] Massimo Micucci, "L'apartheid cambia lingua," in *Rinascita*, No. 13, 1982.
[82] "Da Berlinguer il segretario dell'ANC sud-africano," in *l'Unità*, 21 September 1977.
[83] APCI, 1982, Estero, Namibia, mf. 0512, p. 1913, Message from the Central Committee of the PCI for the seventieth anniversary of the foundation of the ANC, 7 January 1982.
[84] Marcella Emiliani, "L'eroe fa paura a Botha," in *l'Unità*, 20 August 1988.

the stability of the region and a severe obstacle to the peace process that was underway."[85] In his reply, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Giulio Andreotti, insisted that the government maintained a position that was critical of South Africa while remaining open to dialogue. He stressed the fact that the visit was part of "the wider critical debate, marked by dialectical confrontation and frankness" traditionally employed by the Italian government and outlined that during the meeting, a particular emphasis had been placed on the Italian interest "for the release of political prisoners, expressing the desire that the political environment in South Africa would finally develop to fully embrace democratic principles and the fundamental rights of man."[86]

Besides the Italian Communist Party, various Italian actors populated the anti-apartheid panorama in Italy and contributed to addressing the Italian foreign policy toward South Africa and Namibia. Other national parties such as the DC and the PSI and other actors such as the Movimento Liberazione e Sviluppo (Movement for Liberation and Development), the workers' union confederations, and later the Coordinamento Nazionale contro l'Apartheid in Sudafrica (National Coordinating Committee against Apartheid in South Africa) were engaged in mobilizing anti-apartheid consciousness in Italy.[87] The PCI's collaboration with the other progressive political forces in implementing solidarity has to be seen in the light of Berlinguer's politics of Historical Compromise, which found its field of application in the sphere of international relations before that in the national context. Moreover, the PCI's choice to collaborate with other political forces within the field of international solidarity served also to not compromise the Italian government's attitude toward solidarity initiatives and to stimulate a more open Italian policy toward Africa.

Therefore, the Italian solidarity system that was arranged to support the Namibian and the South African liberation movements between the late 1970s and the mid-1980s presented a complex and heterogeneous structure, based on the strict collaboration between the communist, the socialist, and the Christian democratic parties, which worked in contact with other anti-apartheid Italian realities, coordinated mainly by the Committee led by Giuseppe Soncini and headquartered in Reggio Emilia. Italian solidarity politics with Namibia and southern Africa should not be seen as an exclusive field of PCI's policy, but as the result of efforts coming from different realities, which contributed to implementing solidarity initiatives under the guidance of Reggio Emilia.

[85] APCI, 1984, non. cl., Dipartimento per gli affari internazionali, Sezione Esteri, Sud Africa, b. 817, f. 237, Parliamentary inquiry made by Antonio Rubbi to the Chamber of Deputies concerning the visit of P.W. Botha and response from the Minister of Foreign Affairs Giulio Andreotti, Rome, 13 July 1984.
[86] *Ibidem*.
[87] Fiamingo, "The Anti-Apartheid Movement in Italy," pp. 53-77.

4.3 Decentered solidarity: Reggio Emilia and southern Africa

Reggio Emilia's history of socialist solidarity with southern Africa is central to understanding the structure and the functioning of the Italian communist model of solidarity in the period between the late 1970s and the early 1980s. The city's history of solidarity revolves around some key figures, who were able to raise awareness on southern African issues, stimulate the formation of solidarity movements and committees, and carefully structure and implement aid programs. Among them, Giuseppe Soncini was the main driving force behind Reggio Emilia's socialist solidarity toward southern Africa. Anti-fascist partisan in the 145° Garibaldi Brigade in 1944-1945, factory worker at the Officine Reggiane during the second half of the 1940s, and active member of the PCI since 1944, from an early age he had set himself apart thanks to his organizational, communicative, and leadership skills.[88] His political education was forged at the "Frattocchie" school, the Istituto di Studi Comunisti (Institute for Communist Studies) in Rome, and in the post-Stalinist Soviet Union and was influenced by anti-colonial thinkers such as Frantz Fanon. As his wife recalled, he had respect and admiration for the Soviet Union, but he was always driven by a critical thinking which allowed him to recognize its shortcomings and flaws and eventually take distance from it.[89] Among the various positions he had held during his career, Soncini had been a city councilman in Scandiano—a small city in the province of Reggio Emilia—between 1964 and 1970, President of the Santa Maria Nuova Hospital in Reggio Emilia between 1969 and 1975, and a board member of the municipal council of Reggio Emilia from 1975 until his retirement in 1986. As President of the Santa Maria Nuova Hospital and subsequently as head of international relations for Reggio Emilia, he played a fundamental role in building relationships with movements in southern Africa, as it can be seen from the recognition he received ten years after his death, when he was awarded the Silver Medal of the Order of the Companions of Oliver Tambo and the Order Eduardo Mondlane Chivambo.[90]

It was, therefore, thanks to the international endeavors and the tireless dedication of Soncini, as well as the collaboration of mayors such as Renzo Bonazzi and Ugo Benassi and the parasitologist Silvio Pampiglione, that the city of Reggio Emilia became a model of decentralized cooperation and grassroots solidarity. Inspired by the ideas of the former Christian democrat mayor of Florence, Giorgio La Pira, Soncini strongly believed that cooperation represented "an instrument for the

[88] For Soncini's biography see his fact sheet, to be searched in http://archivi.ibc.regione.emilia-romagna.it/ibc-cms/cms.view?pflag=customProduttori&munu_str=0_1_2&numDoc=8 (accessed on 24 January 2023).
[89] Interview with Bruna Ganapini, Reggio Emilia, 2 June 2021.
[90] The Order of the Companions of O.R. Tambo is the highest award that can be conferred by the South African state on a citizen of another country that has worked at promoting the interests and aspirations of South Africa through solidarity and cooperation. The Order of Eduardo Mondlane Chivambo is awarded by the government of Mozambique.

development of friendship between peoples" and, as such, its implementation was "the duty not just of the State, but of all its apparatuses and civil society as a whole."[91]

The history of the friendship between Reggio Emilia and southern Africa dates back to the 1960s, when, after having established sporadic contacts with the liberation movements of the Portuguese colonies, Reggio Emilia started to be involved by the national PCI in the organization of international solidarity initiatives. To implement solidarity programs with liberation movements, the central organization of the PCI had in fact identified a number of communist-led local administrations that had set themselves apart due to their international activity. Reggio Emilia, which had come to the forefront thanks to its solidarity initiatives with the people of Vietnam, was called upon by the PCI to participate in the Conferenza Internazionale di Solidarietà con i popoli delle colonie portoghesi (International Conference of Solidarity with the peoples of the Portuguese colonies), held in Rome from the 27 to the 29 June 1970, as well as to consolidate links with FRELIMO.

Therefore, the involvement of the municipality of Reggio Emilia was achieved through the mechanism of delegation: "informed by FRELIMO on its needs, the PCI engaged the mayor of one of its main bastions, who then appointed directly one of its own administrative functionaries,"[92] namely Giuseppe Soncini.

The first significant step in building solidarity with FRELIMO was the twinning between the Hospital Central of Cabo Delgado in Mozambique and the Reggio Emilia's Hospital Santa Maria Nuova, which was formalized in 1970.[93] The difficult realization of the twinning—which encountered opposition from the Portuguese embassy in Rome, the Italian health department, and the monarchist deputy Alfredo Covelli—and the autonomous struggle carried out by the municipality to assert constitutional provisions demonstrate the central role of local actors in soliciting the Italian government to review its ambiguous position.[94] In fact, since it was maintaining diplomatic links with colonialist Portugal, the government was not keen on solidarity programs that could question these relations. The initial reservations by the Ministry of Health were overcome only after several complaints.[95]

The program of medical aid developed from the twinning between the two hospitals was managed by the Comitato per gli aiuti sanitari al popolo del Mozambico (Committee for medical aid to the people

[91] ASG, Fondo Africa, "Appunti per una storia della solidarietà" e "Appunti per la cronaca" (hereafter Appunti), b. 1, f. 1/06, Speech by Soncini at a Conference on technical cooperation and the role of local authorities and NGOs, 1976, p. 1.
[92] Lanzafame, Podaliri, *La stagione della solidarietà sanitaria a Reggio Emilia*, p. 75.
[93] *Ivi,* pp. 75-95.
[94] ASG, Fondo Africa, Appunti, b. 1, f. 1/06, Speech by Soncini at a Conference on technical cooperation and the role of local authorities and NGOs, 1976, p. 2; Lanzafame, Podaliri, *La stagione della solidarietà sanitaria a Reggio Emilia*, pp. 83-95.
[95] Lanzafame, Podarili, *La stagione della solidarietà sanitaria a Reggio Emilia,* p. 83.

of Mozambique), established on 21 December 1970, and was realized through periodic shipments of sanitary supplies, the deployment of Italian medical personnel in the FRELIMO's health facilities, medical assistance to wounded guerrillas, and the training of Mozambican nurses and orthopedic technicians at the Santa Maria Nuova Hospital. In addition, solidarity included also information and awareness campaigns, through the reproduction of health education pamphlets in Portuguese and the publication of the hospital bulletin, directed by Soncini, which disseminated information sheets on the situation in Mozambique and the Portuguese colonies. As technical cooperation was enlarged in the following years, it provided continuous assistance aimed at certifying the success of medical operations and prosthesis implantation and the professional advancement of the Mozambicans who were trained in Reggio Emilia.[96]

In defining the lines of action of the medical aid programs, a central role was played by the Mozambican delegates, who were able to constantly keep in contact with solidarity movements and report their needs. Strictly connected with FRELIMO and with the national PCI, Reggio Emilia became soon "a national and international reference point for solidarity with Mozambique's struggle"[97] and "a key representative of FRELIMO, at least in Western Europe."[98]

On 24 and 25 March 1973, Reggio Emilia hosted the Conferenza Nazionale di Solidarietà contro il colonialismo e l'imperialismo per la libertà e l'indipendenza della Guinea Bissau, Mozambico e Angola (National Conference of Solidarity against colonialism and imperialism for freedom and independence of Guinea Bissau, Mozambique, and Angola), which led to the constitution of the Comitato Nazionale di Solidarietà con i popoli delle colonie portoghesi (National Committee of Solidarity with people of the Portuguese colonies),[99] bringing together local and national actors and different democratic forces and parties, serving the FRELIMO's needs to have not just leftist parties among its supporters.

After Mozambique's independence, Reggio Emilia confirmed its collaboration with the newly independent country and, at the initiative of the Mozambican leaders, it opened a new phase of solidarity with southern African peoples, assuming a leading role in coordinating the support to the anti-apartheid struggle in Italy. In fact, the independence of the former Portuguese colonies and the end of European colonialism in Africa, as Soncini wrote, changed the previous political and social conditions, making the struggle against racism and apartheid the main priority[100] and opening a new

[96] *Ivi*, p. 190.
[97] *Ivi*, p. 119.
[98] *Ivi*, p. 125.
[99] *Ivi*, pp. 158-165.
[100] ASG, Fondo Africa, Appunti, b. 5, f. 11/01, "Africa australe e solidarietà italiana: appunti per la cronaca 1975-1987," edited by Giuseppe Soncini and Bruna Ganapini.

phase of Italian solidarity with southern Africa against racism and apartheid—"new due to the forces which it mobilized, the ideal contents which it was able to promote and the concreteness of the duties and the goals it set and implemented."[101] At this point, given the end of Soncini's presidency at the Santa Maria Nuova Hospital and his election as city councilman, the control room of Reggio Emilia's international solidarity initiatives started to move from the hospital to the city hall.

On 23 June 1976 the municipal council of Reggio Emilia issued a statement condemning the brutal police repression of the South African regime during the student protests in Soweto, expressing its solidarity with the victims and with the struggle against apartheid and calling on the Italian government to implement initiatives "in defence of the human and civil rights of the black people in South Africa and to bring an end to apartheid and all forms of racial discrimination."[102]

In May 1977, the municipal council of Reggio Emilia formed the Comitato Unitario per l'Amicizia, la Cooperazione e la Solidarietà con i Popoli (Unitary Committee for Friendship, Cooperation and Solidarity between Peoples) and approved a twinning agreement with the ANC, which was signed by mayor Ugo Benassi and ANC leader Oliver Tambo on 26 June 1977.[103] With this agreement, which officially broadened the Committee's outreach to the entire southern African area, Reggio Emilia became "the first city in the world to side with the anti-apartheid movement for the creation of a united and democratic South Africa."[104] The solidarity pact between Reggio Emilia and ANC was welcomed with enthusiasm by African leaders[105] and was described by the UN Special Committee against Apartheid as "an example which deserves to be commended to all cities in the world."[106]

These twinning agreements, which had previously been signed between Reggio and seven other cities,[107] were considered by Soncini as "instruments of direct diplomacy by the cities to establish deep cultural, social, and economic links between peoples, a direct contribution to reciprocal understanding through the comparison of experiences."[108] The agreements were also considered as contributing to the process of détente between the East and the West and as an opportunity to act as

[101] ASG, Fondo Africa, Appunti, b. 5, f. 11/03, "Per una storia della solidarietà italiana con i popoli dell'Africa Australe: Attività, riunioni, documenti, atti fondamentali del 'Comitato Nazionale di solidarietà' con i popoli dell'Africa Australe e della Presidenza, 1978-1986," edited by Soncini, p. 4.
[102] *Ivi*, p. 3.
[103]ASG, Fondo Africa, Appunti, b. 1, f. 2, Documents on the solidarity pact between the ANC and Reggio Emilia.
[104] Mirco Carrattieri, Gianluca Grassi, "Ubuntu. Reggio Emilia and South Africa: History of a Friendship," in Lissoni, Pezzano (eds.), *The ANC between Home and Exile*, p. 202.
[105] ASG, Fondo Africa, Solidarietà con l'Africa australe—Comitato nazionale di solidarietà con i popoli dell'Africa australe—Attività contro l'Apartheid (hereafter Solidarietà), b. 1, f. 1/02, Speeches by Jose' Luis Cabaço and Oliver Tambo, municipal council of Reggio Emilia, 27 June 1977.
[106] ASG, Fondo Africa, Solidarietà, b. 1, f. 1/05, Notes and documents on the pact of solidarity between Reggio Emilia and the ANC, Preface by Leslie O. Harriman, President of the Special Committee against Apartheid.
[107] At this point Reggio Emilia had already developed twinning links with Bydgoszcz (Poland), Dijon (France), Schwerin (DDR), Zadar (Yugoslavia), Quan-Tri (Vietnam), Pemba (Mozambique), and Sestroretsk (USSR).
[108] ASG, Fondo Africa, Solidarietà, b. 1, f. 1/01, Soncini's report during a meeting of the Reggio Emilia city council, 27 May 1977, p. 9.

champions of a specific vision of freedom and society "without interfering in the internal affairs of other countries."[109] It would seem, therefore, that the internationalist vision of Soncini sought to shun paternalistic and patronizing 'modernizing' tones, to promote instead mutual understanding and de-escalation even in cases of differing opinions, while maintaining freedom of expression as an indispensable precondition "for the emergence of any creative energy at the service of the country itself."[110] In a context in which the increasing importance of universal human rights had led to a weakening of the principle of non-intervention, it should be noted that there is a peculiarity (one might say ambiguity) in Soncini's conception of international relations, which was deeply involved in the battle for human rights in South Africa while at the same time promoted a politics of non-interventionism and a very specific vision of freedom and society.

As part of the twinning pact, Reggio Emilia launched a number of political solidarity initiatives. These included the organization of events such as the 1978 National Conference,[111] the delivery of aid materials as requested by ANC,[112] and the willingness to host South Africans sent by ANC, as well as sending its own experts to support the farming sector.[113]

What is more, from 1978 to 1984, under the direction of Soncini, Reggio Emilia published the Italian language edition of the periodical *Sechaba*—an initiative whose goal was, as Soncini wrote to Berlinguer, "to inform public opinion and contribute to its mobilization for the development of a vast campaign of political solidarity and material aid in favor of the cause of independence and sovereignty of the peoples of Zimbabwe, Namibia, and South Africa and for the liquidation of the apartheid system."[114] *Sechaba*, through which, as Oliver Tambo wrote, "ANC hopes to talk directly to the Italian people, democratic political parties, workers and youth movements, and to all those who historically had a determinant role in the struggle against fascist oppression,"[115] became soon a source of information and, at the same time, a useful instrument for coordinating solidarity initiatives, as it also included a section dedicated to Italian anti-apartheid activities.

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[109] *Ivi*, p. 11.
[110] *Ivi*, p. 10.
[111] See section 4.4.1.
[112] ASG, Fondo Africa, Solidarietà, b. 1, f. 1/04, Letter I. T. Nkobi to the Major of Reggio Emilia, Lusaka, 15 October 1977.
[113] ASG, Fondo Africa, Solidarietà, b. 1, f. 1/08, "Programma delle attività di gemellaggio delle iniziative internazionalistiche 1978-1979," transmitted by Soncini to the members of the Unitary Committee, 4 April 1978, pp. 3-4.
[114] APCI, 1978, cl., Estero, Africa australe, b. 464, f. 84, Letter Giuseppe Soncini to Enrico Berlinguer, Reggio Emilia, 10 July 1978.
[115] ASG, Fondo Africa, Appunti, b. 5, f. 11/03, "Per una storia della solidarietà italiana con i popoli dell'Africa Australe: Attività, riunioni, documenti, atti fondamentale del 'Comitato Nazionale di solidarietà' con i popoli dell'Africa Australe e della Presidenza, 1978-1986," edited by Giuseppe Soncini, p. 4.

Therefore, if in the first instance Reggio Emilia's solidarity was "a local response to an external call,"[116] the success of its first solidarity actions in favor of Mozambique led to the overturning of the center-periphery scheme, and transformed a communist local entity into a vanguard driving national mobilization in support of the oppressed peoples of southern Africa. The Comitato Nazionale di Solidarietà con i popoli dell'Africa australe, which, as we shall see, was established in Reggio Emilia in 1979, was the main route through which Italian solidarity with movements in South Africa, Namibia, and Zimbabwe was channeled, leaving the national direction of the PCI to disseminate and build momentum around the initiatives developed by the Comitato in close collaboration with the liberation movements.

4.4 Against racism and apartheid: unity in solidarity (1978 – 1984)

4.4.1 First steps of solidarity: the National Conference

The first major event of Italian solidarity with the anti-apartheid struggle was the Conferenza Nazionale di Solidarietà per l'indipendenza e la sovranità dei popoli dell'Africa australe contro il colonialismo, il razzismo e l'apartheid (National Conference of Solidarity for the independence and the sovereignty of the peoples of southern Africa against colonialism, racism, and apartheid), which was held at the Valli Theatre in Reggio Emilia between 25 and 26 November 1978 (see Figure 17).[117]

Figure 17. *The National Conference of Solidarity for the independence and the sovereignty of the peoples of southern Africa against colonialism, racism, and apartheid, Reggio Emilia, 25-26 November 1978.*
Source: ASG, Fondo Africa-Fotografie, b. 3, f. 6/20.

Organized by the Unitary Committee for Friendship, Cooperation, and Solidarity with Peoples, the conference was promoted by the leaders of the Italian democratic parties, the secretaries of the trade union confederations,

[116] Lanzafame, Podaliri, *La stagione della solidarietà sanitaria a Reggio Emilia*, p. 201.
[117] ASG, Fondo Africa, Solidarietà, b. 1-2; *Sechaba*, No. 3, March 1979, pp. 88-98.

the presidents of the regions Emilia Romagna, Lombardy, and Tuscany, as well as the Major and the President of the province of Reggio Emilia, and was politically supported by the Italian government, which guaranteed the presence of the Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs, Luciano Radi. As the appeal stated, the promotors of the conference, "interpreters of the deepest anti-fascist and anti-racist feelings of the Italian people,"[118] launched the initiative as a contribution by all the Italian democratic forces to the international year against apartheid and to the struggle for independence and sovereignty of the peoples in Namibia, South Africa, and Zimbabwe.

The event was attended by delegations of the liberation movements SWAPO, ANC, and ZANU, led by their respective leaders Sam Nujoma, Oliver Tambo, and Robert Mugabe (see Figure 18), delegations of the Front Line States, such as Mozambique, with Marcelino Dos Santos, Angola, with Petro Alves, and Tanzania, with John Mgaya, and representatives of the OAU and the Organization of African Trade Union Unity.

The conference speeches focused mainly on denouncing South Africa's policy and the attitude of the Western powers, especially France and the BRD, which continued to supply South Africa with weapons. Sam Nujoma denounced the double-track policy carried out by South Africa, pointed out the dramatic situation within Namibia, and asked to send a message to the UN Security Council so that it worked for a solution to the question of Namibian independence.[119]

Figure 18. From the left: *Robert Mugabe, Oliver Tambo, and Sam Nujoma at the National Conference of Solidarity, Reggio Emilia, 25-26 November 1978.*
Source: ASG, Fondo Africa-Fotografie, b. 3, f. 6/19.

The conference received significant support, both on the national and international level,[120] and saw a wide participation from political forces, trade unions, local authorities, associations, and movements of the civil society.

On that occasion, other local initiatives were promoted to involve the world of education and to mobilize the young generations, such as the meeting between the delegations of liberation movements and the students,

[118] APCI, Estero, Africa, 1978, mf. 0398, p. 1957, "Appello," Rome, 3 October 1978.
[119] *Sechaba*, No. 3, March 1979, pp. 92-93. For the speeches of the leaders of the liberation movements see Romano Ledda (ed.), *Indipendenza e sovranità dei popoli dell'Africa australe: Materiale di studio e documentazione tratto dalla Conferenza nazionale di solidarietà con i popoli dell'Africa australe*, Roma: Edizioni delle autonomie, 1979.
[120] As evidenced by the hundreds of messages of support received from various personalities and realities, see ASG, Fondo Africa, Solidarietà, b. 2, f. 2.

teachers, and authorities of Reggio Emilia schools, and the organization of an exhibition in Reggio Emilia on the theme "The Liberation Struggle in Italy and Southern Africa." [121]

The conference ended with a popular demonstration of solidarity in the streets of Reggio Emilia, which spread in the following days in many other cities, such as Brescia, Milan, Modena, Florence, Grosseto, and Naples. In the days following the conference, the delegations of liberation movements met with national party leaders, President of the Republic Sandro Pertini, and Pope Giovanni Paolo II—meetings which well prove the broad unity of political, social, and religious forces in Italy in supporting the peoples of southern Africa.[122]

The National Conference of Solidarity was the first important step in the Italian fight against apartheid as it represented an official stance taken by the Italian democratic forces against the South African regime. As laid out in the final document, this position was embodied in the condemnation of the "colonialist and racist regimes of Rhodesia and South Africa" and the "governments which, through their economic political and military links […] violate the international decisions and strengthen [them]."[123] The document goes on to denounce the apartheid regime "as a crime against humanity" and calls for the "right to economic independence and to the freedom of choosing its political and social regime in full autonomy."[124] As a result of this, it was demanded that the Italian government increase its efforts to:

> assure its support to the initiatives aimed at the implementation of the U.N. resolutions; to act in all international forms [sic] and organizations, in particular in the European Economic Community [EEC] and NATO, to isolate the colonialist and racist regimes of Rhodesia and South Africa; to develop in all possible ways the support to the Liberation Movements of Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa; to control that the embargo on military supplies and the "Code of Conduct" elaborated by the EEC for the European enterprises, which have branches in South Africa, be respected.[125]

Beyond the political support, the conference launched the first concrete Italian solidarity initiative, consisting in the organization of an aid shipment to the people of Zimbabwe, Namibia, and South

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[121] APCI, 1978, cl., Estero, Africa australe, b. 464, f. 84, Letter Soncini to the promoters of the Conference, Reggio Emilia, 23 October 1978; ASG, Fondo Africa, Solidarietà, b. 1, f. 1/71, "Comunicato: Conclusa la Conferenza Nazionale, l'incontro del mondo della scuola con i movimenti di liberazione dell'Africa australe," 27 November 1978; ASG, Fondo Africa, Solidarietà, b. 1, f. 1/72, "Comunicato: Una grande partecipazione di studenti e delle scuole all'incontro con i rappresentanti dei movimenti di liberazione dell'Africa australe al Teatro municipale," 28 November 1978.

[122] *Sechaba*, No. 3, March 1979, pp. 93-97. For the meeting with Berlinguer see "Da Berlinguer i dirigenti dei movimenti africani," in *l'Unità*, 30 November 1978.

[123] ASG, Fondo Africa, Solidarietà, b. 1, f. 1/68, "Conclusive Document of the National Conference of Solidarity with the people of southern Africa," Reggio Emilia, 26 November 1978 (official translation).

[124] *Ibidem.*

[125] *Ibidem*.

Africa through the solidarity ship. As one of the outcomes of the conference, the Comitato Nazionale di Solidarietà con i popoli dell'Africa australe (National Committee of Solidarity with the peoples of southern Africa) was founded on 18 April 1979 under the leadership of Soncini with its operating base in Reggio Emilia. This body effectively united all of the Italian political, social, and civil bodies involved in the anti-apartheid struggle under one umbrella and, up until 1984, was the main coordinator for the fight against apartheid in Italy. The PCI was represented on the National Committee of Solidarity by Gian Carlo Pajetta and Antonio Rubbi.[126]

Other significant outcomes of the conference were the groundwork laid for a solidarity pact between the cities of Florence and Grosseto and the Patriotic Front in Zimbabwe and the solidarity pact between the city of Brescia and SWAPO,[127] signed at the city council of Brescia on 28 November 1978. On this occasion, DC Major Cesare Trebeschi expressed profound solidarity with the Namibian liberation movement, by recalling the Italian resistance against fascism and linking it to the Namibian struggle for independence.[128] However, this pact of solidarity did not lead to concrete actions of cooperation, as demonstrated by a letter written in 1981 by Soncini to SWAPO's delegate Mzee Kaukungwa, where Soncini wrote that "there are certain difficulties with Brescia as far as building permanent relations is concerned" and encouraged Kaukungwa to write to Major Trebeschi and "solicit initiatives of solidarity in the framework of the relationship initiated in 1978."[129] Even on the occasion of the first solidarity ship, the contribution of Brescia was limited.[130]

The success of the conference and the efforts for its realization were widely recognized and appreciated by the leaders of the movements, as testified by the articles in the Mozambican journal *noticias*[131] and the letter to Giuseppe Soncini written by Sam Nujoma, in which he recalled with emotion "the very pleasing and comradely communion and sharing of anti-imperialist solidarity," and "the warm hospitality and comradely embrace" with which the movements were received by the "revolutionary population of the city and region of Reggio Emilia."[132]

On a national level, an isolated opinion on the conference came from the Partito Comunista d'Italia (marxista-leninista), an anti-revisionist communist party influenced by Maoism, founded in 1966 by

[126]APCI, 1980, non cl., Dipartimento per gli Affari internazionali, Carte Giancarlo Pajetta, Corrispondenza e note su paesi africani, b. 606, f. 211, Notes of Renato Sandri to the foreign relations section and the department of foreign affairs, 8 January 1980.
[127] *Sechaba*, No. 3, March 1979, pp. 81-82.
[128] ASG, Fondo Africa, Appunti, b. 1, f. 3/31, "Consiglio comunale di Brescia: saluto del Sindaco avv. Trebeschi ai Rappresentanti dell'Africa Australe," 1978.
[129] ASG, Fondo Africa, Solidarietà, b. 5, f. 12/08, Letter Giuseppe Soncini to Mzee Kaukungwa, Reggio Emilia, 11 February 1981.
[130] ASG, Fondo Africa, Appunti, b. 2, f. 4/59, "Impegni assunti alla data 29/04/1980," Comitato Regionale di Solidarietà con i Popoli dell'Africa Australe, Cinisello Balsamo.
[131] See ASG, Fondo Africa, Solidarietà, b. 2, f. 3, Foreign press on the first National Conference of Solidarity.
[132] APCI, 1979, cl., Estero, Namibia, b. 523, f. 89, Letter Sam Nujoma to Giuseppe Soncini, Luanda, 24 January 1979.

a group of communists who distanced themselves from the political turn that occurred after the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU. The party criticized the imperialist politics of the Italian government, which maintained commercial relations with South Africa, and judged the National Conference of Solidarity as a demagogic event that will allow the Italian government to "gain credibility in terms of progressivism" and to "more incisively enter the market of the so-called under-developed countries."[133] According to them, "the support to the struggle cannot be solved by sending a ship of solidarity followed by the delivery of one hundred of ships loaded with weapons, technology, economic aid to the regimes against which these peoples are fighting."[134] On his side, during his talk at the conference, the Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs Radi¸ repeating the same answer provided to the UN when accusations were made against Italy, claimed that the Italian government was fully respecting the army embargo against South Africa.[135] In the context of the conference, several representatives of national parties addressed the issue, urging the Italian government for concrete actions.[136] The PCI deputy Gian Carlo Pajetta assured that Italian communists' efforts were dedicated to the implementation of the commitments made by the Italian government and to stimulate a non-neocolonial relationship with the Third World.[137] As underlined by Berlinguer in an interview, in which he once again reaffirmed his opinion on the role of Europe in ensuring the respect of human rights, the conference formed part of a wider approach by Italy and Europe in which communists were actively involved, aimed at encouraging "the development of global collaboration toward disarmament and the safeguarding of peace, in order to transform the current unjust world economic order, which condemns over a third of humanity to underdevelopment, hunger, endemic diseases and illiteracy." [138]

According to Berlinguer, the development of humanity toward peace and justice was only achievable through the equal collaboration between industrialized and developing countries, between capitalist and socialist countries—a cooperation that would be made possible by the contribution of the working class in Western Europe and the non-aligned world. Moreover, in the same interview, Berlinguer highlighted the contradictions within Federal Germany—whose social-democratic party, led by Brandt, was not able to address a coherent solidarity politics toward southern Africa, despite its

[133] ASG, Fondo Africa, Solidarietà, b. 2, f. 2/21, "Appoggiamo la lotta dei popoli contro il fascismo e l'imperialismo," Message by Partito Comunista d'Italia (comunista-leninista), 24 December 1978, cyclostyled at the editorial office of *Nuova Unità*.
[134] *Ibidem*.
[135] Guido Bimbi, "Contro il Sud Africa occorrono atti concreti," in *l'Unità*, 26 November 1978.
[136] *Ibidem*.
[137] Guido Bimbi, "Chiesti alla Conferenza di Reggio Emilia concreti impegni di solidarietà tra l'Italia e i popoli africani," in *l'Unità*, 27 November 1978.
[138] Guido Bimbi, "L'intervista di Enrico Berlinguer sulla Conferenza di Reggio Emilia. La lotta dei popoli dell'Africa australe," in *l'Unità*, 24 November 1978.

internationalist language against the nuclear proliferation and the arm trade—and stated that a more concrete commitment by the Italian government should follow the conference.

4.4.2 From words to action: the solidarity ship

The solidarity ship was conceived in the context of the first National Conference as "a proof of anti-imperialist solidarity" and as "a moment of unity of all Italian democratic forces," which had the task to nurture "the possibility-necessity of peaceful coexistence," and declare their opposition to the climate of the Cold War.[139] As outlined by the document that launched the initiative, "while on the one hand [it was] responding to the need for urgent and concrete acts of solidarity with the peoples of Southern Africa […], it [was] also to be understood as a positive action against the re-emergence of a dangerous situation of cold war in the world."[140] The intention was for the ship to act as a message of peaceful coexistence, in a period in which world peace was being undermined by the interference of the superpowers in the Third World, as evidenced by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.[141] The initiative, which prefigured "new relationships aimed at building a new international economic order and putting in place non-imperialist relationships,"[142] was a symbolical rejection of any association with the superpowers, choosing instead to align with the liberation movements and demonstrating that "it is possible to work together to resolve a crisis that concerns us all,"[143] as outlined by Gian Carlo Pajetta in his speech at the launch of the ship. The language used by Soncini and the National Committee to launch and promote the initiative of the solidarity ship, therefore, was built on the international vision of Berlinguer; in particular, it was meant to support the struggle for human rights, against hunger, underdevelopment, neocolonialism, and racism, and to call for a new world order based on interdependence, cooperation, and peace, free from the bipolar logic of the Cold War. It also invoked the paradigm of antifascism and the imperative for unity, arguing that Italian involvement in the anti-apartheid struggle had "its roots in the long history of Italy, in the antifascist struggle against racial laws, Nazism and antisemitism,"[144] and consequently had to be carried out through the unity of all the democratic forces in the country—a union that continued even after the end of the national era of Historical Compromise, concluded after Aldo Moro's assassination by the Brigate Rosse.

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[139] APCI, 1979, cl., Estero, Africa australe, b. 521, f. 38, Document on the solidarity campaign with the southern African peoples promoted by the National Committee.
[140] APCI, 1980, cl., Estero, Africa australe, b. 569, f. 52, "Appello per la 'nave della solidarietà italiana' per i popoli dell'Africa australe," Rome, 9 January 1980.
[141] ASG, Fondo Africa, Solidarietà, b. 3, f. 5/06, Assembly of the National Committee, Rome, 9 January 1980, p. 2.
[142] Guido Bimbi, "Una nave per i popoli africani," in *l'Unità*, 10 May 1980.
[143] *Ibidem*.
[144] ASG, Fondo Africa, Appunti, b. 2, f. 4/03, "The Ship of Italian Solidarity. A unitarian popular national initiative," Statement by Soncini, no date, p. 2 (official translation).

Concretely, the initiative of the solidarity ship, organized by the National Committee of Solidarity, aimed at collecting material aid (in the form of clothing, food, medicine, school, agricultural and sanitary equipment) for the people of Zimbabwe, which gained independence on 18 April 1980, and the liberation movements and peoples of South Africa and Namibia.

The appeal of the National Committee launched a wide campaign of mobilization to collect material and financial aid. In this regard, Soncini had a pivotal role in informing national and international actors about the initiative and in urging the fulfillment of the commitments made, not without problems and delays. In fact, initially scheduled for 21 March 1980 (the twentieth anniversary of the Sharpeville massacre), the departure of the ship was repeatedly postponed due to "technical reasons related to set-up times"[145] and difficulties to shift "from the formal adhesion to the actual realization of the initiative."[146] To face the problems related to the implementation of the initiative, Soncini turned to the PCI to ask for a public stance on the party's side, in order to stimulate concrete actions.[147]

In the end, the ship *Amanda* set sail from the port of Genoa on 19 May 1980, with 2,800 tons of aid on board, including agricultural machinery and tools, blankets, clothing, emergency medical equipment, ambulances, medicines, equipped prefabricated schools, food goods, and cooking implements.[148] The aid was purchased with the funds collected through the mobilization of trade union organizations, cooperatives, democratic associations, as well as regional and local administrative bodies. The Italian government gave its political support to the project and provided financial support by covering part of the costs for humanitarian aid and its transport.[149]

Before the departure of the ship, celebrations were held on 9 May in Genoa,[150] ending with a popular demonstration at the Ponte dei Mille, with the participation of Oliver Tambo, Laban Oyaka (OUA), Peter Manning (SWAPO), and the Major of Maputo Alberto Massavagnane. On this occasion,

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[145] APCI, 1980, Estero, Zimbabwe, b. 572, f. 134, Message Soncini to the members of the National Committee, Reggio Emilia, 3 March 1980.

[146] APCI, 1980, Estero, Africa, mf. 440, pp. 2251-2253, Letter Giuseppe Soncini to Enrico Berlinguer, Reggio Emilia, 12 February 1980.

[147] APCI, 1980, Estero, Africa, mf. 440, pp. 2251-2253, Letter Giuseppe Soncini to Enrico Berlinguer, Reggio Emilia, 12 February 1980; ASG, Fondo Africa, Appunti, b. 2, f. 4/17, Letter Giuseppe Soncini to Gian Carlo Pajetta, Reggio Emilia, 26 January 1980.

[148] ASG, Fondo Africa, Solidarietà, b. 3, f. 7/14, Loading of aid of the Italian solidarity ship; ASG, Fondo Africa, Solidarietà, b. 3, f. 5/41, "Riunione Comitato Nazionale di Solidarietà: Introduzione del Coordinatore Assessore Giuseppe Soncini," Genoa, 9 May 1980, pp. 3-6.

[149] For the requests made by Soncini to the Italian government see ASG, Fondo Africa, Solidarietà, b. 3, f. 5/07, Letter Giuseppe Soncini to Giuseppe Zamberletti, Reggio Emilia, 16 January 1980; ASG, Fondo Africa, Solidarietà, b. 3, f. 5/08, Letter Giuseppe Soncini to Giovanni Marcora, Reggio Emilia, 17 January 1980; ASG, Fondo Africa, Solidarietà, b. 3, f. 5/17, Reply Giuseppe Zamberletti to Giuseppe Soncini, 12 February 1980; ASG, Fondo Africa, Solidarietà, b. 3, f. 5/31, "Promemoria delle richieste da presentare al governo per la nave della solidarietà italiana con i popoli dell'Africa australe," 12 March 1980.

[150] For the program of the day see ASG, Fondo Africa, Solidarietà, b. 3, f. 7/06; *Sechaba*, Nos. 9-10, June-July 1980, pp. 77-78.

Giuseppe Soncini was awarded the Medal for Peace by the UN in recognition of his solidarity activities toward African peoples.[151]

The journey of the *Amanda* was followed by various collaborators of the National Committee,[152] who had been appointed to make a documentary and collect photographic materials, later collected in the Fund "Africa-Fotografie" at the Soncini-Ganapini Archive.

On 4 June, the *Amanda* docked in the port of Luanda, where it unloaded the aid destined to ANC and SWAPO (see Figures 19 and 20). The accomplishment of the delivery was greeted by celebrations, on 11 June, in the presence of an Italian delegation led by Soncini.[153]

Figure 19. *Italian solidarity ship, unloading of food aid at the port of Luanda, 8 June 1980.*
Source: ASG, Fondo Africa-Fotografie, b. 5, f. 15/53.

[151]ASG, Fondo Africa, Appunti, b. 2, f. 4/66, Letter Ugo Benassi to Giuseppe Soncini, Reggio Emilia, 12 May 1980; Guido Bimbi, "Una nave per i popoli africani," in *l'Unità*, 10 May 1980.

[152] Among them there was Franco Cigarini, who in 1972 had filmed the documentary "Dieci giorni con i guerriglieri del Mozambico libero." The Biblioteca Panizzi also holds the Franco Cigarini Archive, which preserves the activity of Cigarini as camera operator of Reggio Emilia.

[153] *Sechaba*, Nos. 9-10, June-July 1980, pp. 82-85.

Figure 20. *Giuseppe Soncini and Oliver Tambo after the arrival of the Italian solidarity ship in Luanda, 8 June 1980.*
Source: ASG, Fondo Africa-Fotografie, b. 5, f. 15/20.

The solidarity ship then left for the port of Maputo, where it unloaded aid destined for the government of Zimbabwe, greeted by festive ceremonies, defined by Antonio Rubbi of the PCI as "something between a political rally and a popular celebration"[154] (see Figures 21 and 22). The attention dedicated to the arrival of the ship in Mozambique, widely celebrated also in the magazines *noticias* and *The Herald*,[155] was criticized as excessive by the Soviets who, "annoyed by the great clamor with which the thing was presented by the Mozambicans,"[156] complained bitterly to Rubbi, saying: "We do a great deal for this country, but little is said about it. You have come with an aid ship and you have been the center of attention in the country for a week, on the front page of all the newspapers every day and the subject of extensive programs on the radio."[157]

[154] APCI, 1980, non cl., Dipartimento per gli Affari internazionali, Carte Giancarlo Pajetta, Corrispondenze e note sui paesi africani, b. 606, f. 211, "Note sul viaggio in Mozambico e Zimbabwe (22-29 giugno) con la delegazione del Comitato di solidarietà con i popoli dell'Africa Australe," Antonio Rubbi, Rome, 30 June 1980, p. 1.
[155] ASG, Fondo Africa, Solidarietà, b. 4, f. 10, Foreign press on the first solidarity ship.
[156] APCI, 1980, non cl., Dipartimento per gli Affari internazionali, Carte Giancarlo Pajetta, Corrispondenze e note sui paesi africani, b. 606, f. 211, "Note sul viaggio in Mozambico e Zimbabwe (22-29 giugno) con la delegazione del Comitato di solidarietà con i popoli dell'Africa Australe," Antonio Rubbi, Rome, 30 June 1980, p. 2.
[157] *Ibidem*.

Figure 21. *Arrival of the first Italian solidarity ship in Maputo, 23 June 1980.*
Source: ASG, Fondo Africa-Fotografie, b. 5, f. 17/104.

Figure 22. *Giuseppe Soncini and Samora Machel in Maputo, 23 June 1980.*
Source: ASG, Fondo Africa-Fotografie, b. 5, f. 18/112.

Before concluding its journey, the solidarity ship stopped at Dar es Salaam to bring 1,500 tons of rice donated by the Italian government to Tanzania, while the Italian delegation went to Salisbury, the capital of independent Zimbabwe, to meet the ministers of the first government and President Robert Mugabe and renew the support for the reconstruction of the country (see Figure 23).

Figure 23. *Italian delegation with Robert Mugabe, Salisbury, 24 June 1980.*
Source: ASG, Fondo Africa-Fotografie, b. 6, f. 21/21.

4.4.3 For an independent Namibia: the second National Conference

Among the commitments made at the Assembly of the National Committee on 9 May 1980 in Genoa, besides the creation of an Italian fund of solidarity for the people of the southern African subregion, the collection of aid addressed to the people of Namibia and South Africa, and the launching of a political mobilization campaign for the release of political prisoners from South African jails, the Committee set the goal of organizing the second Conferenza Nazionale di Solidarietà con i popoli dell'Africa australe, contro il razzismo e l'apartheid in Sud Africa e per l'indipendenza della Namibia (National Conference of Solidarity with the peoples of southern Africa, against racism and apartheid in South Africa and for the independence of Namibia).[158] Even in this case, Soncini strenuously worked in order to overcome the problems arisen during the organization and ensure the realization of the event. Because of the obstacles derived from both the internal and the international situation, Soncini turned to Sam Nujoma and Oliver Tambo to ask for opinions and evaluations. He also

[158] ASG, Fondo Africa, Solidarietà, b. 3, f. 5/41, "Riunione Comitato Nazionale di Solidarietà: Introduzione del Coordinatore Assessore Giuseppe Soncini," Genoa, 9 May 1980, pp. 9-10.

suggested them to address to the secretaries of the Italian parties and trade union organizations[159] in order to "request them explicitly for the convening of the conference and indicate the reasons for which it is urgent."[160] As Soncini wrote, in fact, the domestic situation in Italy, characterized by the economic crisis, the earthquake, the convocation of the referendum on abortion, and the spreading of terrorism, made "the political encounter and relations between Italian political forces particularly acute, including the relations between the Communist Party and the Socialist Party."[161] This internal situation, worsened by the end of the period of national solidarity, together with the international one, where "the coming into office of the Reagan administration in the USA created a period of waiting and then some noticeable shift in the Italian foreign policy,"[162] risked jeopardizing the implementation of internationalist solidarity initiatives. The solidarity system built up by Soncini, in contact with the leaders of the southern African liberation movements, was capable of remedying the shortcomings of solidarity within Italian politics and of settling tensions between the various parties in order to ensure the successful holding of the event. From their side, the liberation movements were able to maintain constant contact, stimulate concrete actions, and point out their needs. Sam Nujoma wrote to Berlinguer and all the secretaries, pointing out that, at a time when South Africa was intensifying its oppression of the Namibian people and its acts of aggression throughout the broader southern Africa, there was

> a great need to have the world public opinion informed of the situation in Namibia and South Africa; to mobilise for moral, material, political, diplomatic and financial support for the liberation movements; also, a similar campaign in support of the frontline states (Angola, Mozambique, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Botswana and Tanzania) which are the rare-bases of the liberation movements. One of the best, and the most efficient way in SWAPO's view, to achieve these objectives is the convening of the "2nd National Conference" […].[163]

As Soncini itself commented, the political act by the Minister of Foreign Affairs Emilio Colombo, who declared its support to the initiative, served the purpose of unlocking the last resistances for the convocation of the conference.[164]

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[159] ASG, Fondo Africa, Solidarietà, b. 5, f. 12/09, 12/10, Letter Giuseppe Soncini to Sam Nujoma and Oliver Tambo, Reggio Emilia, 12 February 1981.
[160] ASG, Fondo Africa, Solidarietà, b. 5, f. 12/09, Letter Giuseppe Soncini to Sam Nujoma, Reggio Emilia, 12 February 1981, p. 4.
[161] *Ivi*, p. 3.
[162] *Ibidem.*
[163] APCI, 1981, non cl., Dipartimento per gli affari internazionali, Esteri, Namibia, b. 665, f. 295, Letter Sam Nujoma to Enrico Berlinguer, Luanda, 14 April 1981.
[164] ASG, Fondo Africa, Appunti, b. 5, f. 11/03, "Per una storia della solidarietà italiana con i popoli dell'Africa Australe: Attività, riunioni, documenti, atti fondamentali del 'Comitato Nazionale di solidarietà' con i popoli dell'Africa Australe e della Presidenza, 1978-1986," edited by Giuseppe Soncini, p. 35.

Initially scheduled for June 1981, after several postponing, the conference was held in Rome, in the hall of the Groups of the Chamber of Deputies, from 26 to 28 February 1982.[165] Convened by the appeal signed on 24 October 1981 by the six secretaries of the parties and the three confederal secretaries, it launched a broad mobilization for the collection of material aid in view of the second solidarity ship and for the release of political prisoners held in South African jails, including Nelson Mandela and Herman Toivo Ja Toivo.[166] During this period, in fact, the Italian anti-apartheid movement launched campaigns for the liberation of political prisoners, a campaign that culminated in the granting of honorary Roman citizenship to Nelson Mandela, approved by the city council of Rome on 11 November 1982.[167]

Also in this occasion, large delegations actively participated in the event. Besides Italian and European parliamentarians, political parties, trade unions, mass organizations, local and regional authorities, the conference was attended by the leaders of ANC and SWAPO, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Mozambique and Lesotho, the Minister of Labor of Zimbabwe, the ambassadors of the Front Line States, and the representatives of UN and other international organizations.[168] For the Italian government, Raffaele Costa, the Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs, was present.

As highlighted by Massimo Micucci, a member of the foreign relations section of the PCI, the speeches made by the delegations "mainly focused on their great appreciation for the unitary solidarity activities that had taken place, but also on criticism of the western powers for their links with South Africa,"[169] which hindered the enforcement of Security Council Resolution 435. During the conference, the question of the independence of Namibia was addressed with particular attention. As a contribution to the conference, an issue of *Quaderni Internazionali*, edited by Giuseppe Soncini, was dedicated to Namibia and SWAPO's struggle.[170] Moreover, the National Committee was also planning to publish a book with photographs dedicated to the Namibian struggle, entitled "Namibia:

[165] *Sechaba*, Nos. 21-22, March-April 1982, pp. 57-79.
[166] APCI, 1982, non cl., Dipartimento per gli Affari internazionali, II Conferenza Africa Australe '82, b. 709, f. 200, "Appello: contro il razzismo e l'apartheid in Sudafrica, per una Namibia indipendente," Rome, 24 October 1982; ASG, Fondo Africa, Solidarietà, b. 5, f. 12/46, "Appeal: against racism and apartheid in South Africa, and for an independent Namibia," Rome, 24 October 1982.
[167] APCI, 1982, non cl., Dipartimento per gli Affari internazionali, Esteri, Sud Africa, b. 714, f. 288, Resolution approved by the city council of Rome for the conferment of the honorary citizenship to Nelson Mandela, 11 November 1982.
[168] APCI, 1982, non cl., Dipartimento per gli Affari internazionali, II Conferenza Africa Australe '82, b. 709, f. 200, List of the delegations present at the conference; ASG, Fondo Africa, Solidarietà, b. 5, f. 13/49, Statement by Soncini on the second National Conference of Solidarity, Reggio Emilia, 2 April 1982.
[169] APCI, 1982, mf. 8207, p. 197, Note by Massimo Micucci on the second National Conference, 10 March 1982.
[170] Giuseppe Soncini (ed.), "Namibia: una nazione in lotta per l'indipendenza," in *Quaderni Internazionali*, No. 6, 22 February 1982, see *Sechaba*, Nos. 19-20 suppl., February 1982.

one people, a nation against racism for its independence," intended to be distributed all over Italy to stimulate political mobilization in favor of the Namibian cause.[171]

The speech delivered by Sam Nujoma, which was also included in an issue of *Namibia Today*,[172] well portrayed the grave situation within Namibia, where the South African regime carried out "brutal acts of escalated and institutionalized violence, […] aggressive policy of military attacks, destabilization activities and provocations against neighboring independent states," aimed at cowing "these states into stopping their support to ANC and SWAPO" and "perpetrating the regime's colonial and Bantustan schemes," with the support of its "imperialist and NATO allies, especially the US, UK, FRG, Canada, Belgium, France, terrorist Zionist Israel, even regretfully Italy and so forth."[173] Sam Nujoma condemned the efforts by Western countries to have the Constitution of Namibia drawn up by outsiders and to impose an undemocratic electoral system on SWAPO.[174] He denounced Pretoria's policy to use negotiations "in order to buy time to continue to prop up its puppet groups and institutions"[175] and called for a broader support from international actors. He recalled with gratitude the solidarity initiatives implemented by the National Committee and defined Giuseppe Soncini as a "tireless, self-denying fighter and true friend of the oppressed people."[176]

For his part, in the introductory talk, Soncini renewed the support toward the liberation struggles and highlighted the unity of the Italian political forces in their struggle against apartheid, rooted in the anti-fascist paradigm, which united all the forces in the fight for independence, freedom, and self-determination.[177] He questioned the conduct of the Italian government toward South Africa, calling for its commitment to use its position as a member of NATO and EEC to address the issue of Namibian independence.[178]

As part of the conference, on 27 February, Sam Nujoma and Gian Roberto Lovari, President of the province of Rome, signed a preliminary agreement for a solidarity and friendship pact between SWAPO and the province of Rome,[179] which, in the words of Sam Nujoma, represented "a very

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[171] ASG, Fondo Africa, Solidarietà, b. 5, f. 12/08, Letter Giuseppe Soncini to Mzee Kaukungwa, Reggio Emilia, 11 February 1981; ASG, Fondo Africa, Solidarietà, b. 5, f. 12/09, Letter Giuseppe Soncini to Sam Nujoma, Reggio Emilia, 12 February 1981, p.1. No further information about the publication of the volume could be found.

[172] "Address by Cde Sam Nujoma, President of SWAPO, to Italy's Second National Conference of Solidarity with the Peoples of Southern Africa, Rome 26-28 February 1982," in *Namibia Today*, Vol. 6, No. 3, 1982 (in BAB, SWAPO collection, AA.3 82fSLuPa 3).

[173] ASG, Fondo Africa, Solidarietà, b. 6, f. 14/27, "Statement by comrade Sam Nujoma, president of SWAPO at the 2nd National Conference of Solidarity with the Peoples of Southern Africa, Rome, February 26-28, 1982," p. 4.

[174] *Ivi*, pp. 5-6.

[175] *Ivi*, p. 8.

[176] *Ivi,* p. 1.

[177] ASG, Fondo Africa, Solidarietà, b. 6, f. 14/05, "'Contro il razzismo e l'apartheid in Sud Africa per una Namibia indipendente': relazione introduttiva del 'Comitato Nazionale di solidarietà' presentata dal Coordinatore Assessore Giuseppe Soncini," Rome, 26 February 1982.

[178] *Ibidem*.

[179] *Sechaba*, Nos. 21-22, March-April 1982, pp. 76-77.

strong encouragement on both a moral and political level [...] for the SWAPO fighters in their fight for freedom"[180] (see Figure 24).

Figure 24. *Exchange of gifts between Sam Nujoma and Gian Roberto Lovari on the occasion of the signing of the preliminary agreement for the solidarity pact between SWAPO and the province of Rome, Rome, 27 February 1982.*
Source: ASG, Fondo Africa-Fotografie, b. 8, f. 44/141.

The conference concluded with a popular demonstration, taking place on 28 February at the Adriano Theatre, and with political talks. African delegations were once again received by Pertini, the Pope, Minister of Foreign Affairs Emilio Colombo, and the secretaries of various political parties, among which Enrico Berlinguer (see Figure 25).[181]

However, the success of the conference, demonstrated by the great participation and support, did not encounter significant attention by the Italian press and mass media, proving, as Soncini wrote, "how much there is still to do, in our country, to convince everyone that the interest of Italy is served by siding unreservedly with those who fight for the independence of Namibia and against the criminal apartheid regime in South Africa."[182]

[180] *Ivi*, p. 77.
[181] For the meeting with Berlinguer see "Cordiale incontro di Berlinguer con Oliver Tambo e Sam Nujoma," in *l'Unità*, 2 March 1982.
[182] ASG, Fondo Africa, Solidarietà, b. 5, f. 13/49, Statement by Soncini on the second National Conference of Solidarity, Reggio Emilia, 2 April 1982. See also APCI, 1982, mf. 8207, p. 199, Note by Massimo Micucci on the second National Conference of Solidarity, 10 March 1982.

Figure 25. From the left: *Oliver Tambo, Enrico Berlinguer, Claudia Casoni (translator), Sam Nujoma, and Giuseppe Soncini at the second National Conference in Rome, 28 February 1982.*
Source: ASG, Fondo Africa-Fotografie, b. 8, f. 45/151.

The final declaration of the conference recognized the Namibian question as the most urgent problem, and defined the South African illegal occupation of Namibia as "a lack of respect for human rights and for the rights of the peoples," as well as "a threat to peace itself."[183] Italian communists outlined the situation in southern Africa along similar lines, where the struggle against oppression and for the respect of the most fundamental rights was aggravated by the alarm for the threat to world peace posed by South Africa, which possessed nuclear weapons.[184]

Calling for the establishment of a society based on the principles of equality, justice, human dignity, and the independence and self-determination of oppressed peoples, the final declaration of the conference demanded that the Italian government change its official stance toward South Africa and on the question of Namibia, and encouraged civil society, as well as political and trade union groups, to redouble their efforts for future initiatives. These included the campaign for the release of the political detainees held in South African prisons, the creation of the Associazione nazionale di amicizia e cooperazione tra l'Italia e i popoli dell'Africa australe (National Association of Friendship and Cooperation between Italy and the peoples of southern Africa) and the launching of a second solidarity ship.[185] The friendship association between Italy and southern Africa was constituted on 13 March 1983 in Livorno. It proposed to launch "a new phase of friendship, cooperation and solidarity, exchange of experience and technical cooperation" with the peoples and movements of southern Africa, and to embody a permanent national and democratic point of reference, "a tool for stimulating and coordinating the various initiatives aimed at strengthening Italian relations with the countries of Southern Africa."[186]

[183] APCI, 1982, Estero, Africa australe, mf. 512, p. 993, "Dichiarazione finale della 2° Conferenza Nazionale di Solidarietà con i popoli dell'Africa australe," Rome, 27 February 1982.
[184] Guido Bimbi, "L'Italia contro l'apartheid," in *l'Unità*, 27 February 1982.
[185] APCI, 1982, Estero, Africa australe, mf. 512, p. 994, "Dichiarazione finale della 2° Conferenza Nazionale di Solidarietà con i popoli dell'Africa australe," Rome, 27 February 1982.
[186] ASG, Fondo Africa, Solidarietà, b. 7, f. 19/23, "Dichiarazione conclusiva dell'Assemblea Costituente dell'Associazione di Amicizia e Cooperazione tra Italia e i popoli dell'Africa australe," Livorno, 19 March 1983, p. 1.

4.4.4 Sustaining refugee camps: the second solidarity ship

The second solidarity ship, whose preparation was organized by the National Committee of Solidarity, was intended to deliver humanitarian aid to the refugees living in SWAPO and ANC camps based within the territories of the Front Line States. The aid was directed to the ports of Luanda, Maputo, and Dar es Salaam, from which it would then reach the refugee camps of SWAPO and ANC through rail and truck. The materials and the equipment to be sent were decided by the National Committee in agreement with the liberation movements, which issued specific requests in order to avoid resources being wasted. In addition to the general aid program—which included foodstuffs, cooking utensils, clothing, beds, blankets, tents, medicines, sanitary equipment, school materials, means of transport, tools for craft production, and agriculture machineries—a number of targeted aid projects were also developed at the request of the liberation movements.[187] These aid projects were addressed to specific refugee camps, such as Solomon Mahlangu school and its adjoining farm, SO.MA.F.CO, in Mazimbu in Tanzania, the community farm in Lusaka in Zambia, and the SWAPO refugee camp in Kwanza Sul, which was suffering from overcrowding and shortage of foods and materials. Overall, the shipments delivered with the second ship were intended to foster the social, sanitary, and educational self-organization of the refugee camps in addition to providing for their immediate survival. Aside from providing the material that was mainly targeted at the agricultural, healthcare, and educational centers within the camps, as well as aiding in their construction, the projects were also designed to include professional training programs, promoting scholarships for Namibian and South African refugees in the fields of healthcare, agriculture, and engineering. Once again, the endeavor was made possible by a high level of national engagement, harnessed by the charisma of Soncini, and supported both politically and financially by the Italian government, which took charge of the cost of the ship rent, the supply of 2,000 tons of rice, and other expenses, providing overall 3 billion lire. Regions, cities, organizations, and various entities took charge of specific projects.[188] In particular, a significant contribution was provided by the Lega Nazionale delle Cooperative (National League of Cooperatives), which donated most of the materials for the realization of the healthcare center for Namibian refugees in Kwanza Sul, which would be

[187] APCI, 1982, non cl., Dipartimento per gli affari internazionali, II nave di solidarietà Africa australe, b. 710, f. 208, "Progetto per l'organizzazione e l'allestimento della '2ˆ nave della solidarietà italiana' con gli aiuti ai profughi e ai movimenti di liberazione dell'Africa australe in lotta contro l'apartheid e l'indipendenza della Namibia"; ASG, Fondo Africa, Solidarietà, b. 8, f. 21/05, "Programma generale degli aiuti."

[188] ASG, Fondo Africa, Solidarietà, b. 8, f. 21/02, projects of aid for the second Italian solidarity ship.

later equipped under the direction of the architect Maurizio Fornasari, even if in a longer time than initially expected.[189]

The departure of the ship was, also in this case, postponed several times due to technical, financial, and organizational problems.[190] It was preceded by numerous solidarity initiatives,[191] such as the twinning between the province of Rome and SWAPO and between Beira and Livorno. In view of the pact of solidarity with the province of Rome, on 7 February 1984, Sam Nujoma turned to President Lovari to present the urgent needs of SWAPO and ask assistance in the form of material aid and support to the formation of invalid Namibians.[192] "Inspired by its anti-fascist past, by its traditions of struggle to defend freedom and democracy," the province of Rome declared its support to "the heroic fight of the people of Namibia for their freedom" and formalized the pact of solidarity with SWAPO,[193] signed on 8 February 1984, a year that was acknowledged by Sam Nujoma as "a real landmark in the relationship between the Italian and the Namibian people"[194] (see Figure 26). In the following period, in agreement with the administration of the province of Rome and within the framework of the pact, steps for the opening of a representative office of SWAPO in Rome were taken, without however never achieving its realization.[195] During his stay in Italy, on occasion of the departure of the ship, Nujoma

Figure 26. *Signing of the pact of solidarity between SWAPO and the province of Rome, Rome, 8 February 1984.*
Source: ASG, Fondo Africa-Fotografie, b. 14, f. 101/12.

[189] ASG, Fondo Africa, Appunti, b. 4, f. 9/49, Telex Soncini to Ansaloni and Onelio Prandini, Reggio Emilia, 11 November 1985, in which Soncini expressed his concerns on the slow implementation time of the project.
[190] ASG, Fondo Africa, Solidarietà, b. 8, f. 21/46, Letter Soncini to the Presidency of the National Committee, Reggio Emilia, 9 December 1983.
[191] ASG, Fondo Africa, Solidarietà, b. 8, f. 22/16, "Programme of initiatives for the departure, from the port of Livorno, of the '2nd Italian Ship of Solidarity'."
[192] ASG, Fondo Africa, Solidarietà, b. 12, f. 33/01, Letter Sam Nujoma to Gian Roberto Lovari, 7 February 1984. No further information on the realization of such requests could be found.
[193]ASG, Fondo Africa, Solidarietà, b. 12, f. 33/02, "Pact of Friendship and Solidarity between SWAPO of Namibia and Province of Rome," Rome, 8 February 1984.
[194] ASG, Fondo Africa, Solidarietà, b. 12, f. 33/03, Letter Sam Nujoma to Gian Roberto Lovari, Luanda, 28 March 1984, p. 2.
[195] See the next section.

also had meetings with a US envoy, Robert Cabelly, as well as with Pertini and Berlinguer (see Figure 27).[196] During the meeting with Italian President of the Republic Pertini, Nujoma asked him to send a letter to Reagan and to act in all the possible fora for the implementation of the UN Resolution on the independence of Namibia. Contacts with Western countries such as Italy, therefore, were important for Nujoma as these countries could act as mediators between SWAPO and the United States. On 11 February 1984, in Livorno, in the presence of Sam Nujoma and Salim Ahmed Salim, Tanzania's Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Assembly of the National Committee[197] and a popular manifestation celebrated the solidarity ship *Rea Silvia*, which sailed from the port more than one month later, on 16 March, with a cargo of over 5,500 tons. Following a short stopover in Guinea Bissau to deliver urgently needed aid, the ship docked in the port of Luanda, Maputo, and finally Dar es Salaam.[198] At the ports of arrival, the ship was welcomed by representatives of the host countries, the OAU, the liberation movements SWAPO and ANC, and other personalities. Even in this case, the ship was escorted by collaborators of the National Committee, who took charge of the delivery and documented the journey. Delegations of the National Committee went to Angola, Mozambique, and Tanzania for the formal delivery of the aid, celebrated by political rallies, followed by quick operations to transfer the materials to the refugee camps.[199] On the occasion of the ship's journey, Soncini had the chance to meet the Namibian leader Herman Toivo Ja Toivo, who had just been released from Robben Island after sixteen years of detention (see Figure 28). Besides the materials for the refugee camps, the solidarity ship carried aids addressed to the Mozambican people, recently hit by floods,

Figure 27. *Sam Nujoma's visit to Berlinguer, Rome, 9 February 1984.*
Source: ASG, Fondo Africa-Fotografie, b. 14, f. 103/37.

[196] Giorgio Migliardi, "Nujoma incontra inviato USA," in *l'Unità*, 10 February 1984.
[197] ASG, Fondo Africa, Solidarietà, b. 8, f. 22/53, "Riunione Solenne del Comitato Nazionale," Livorno, 11 February 1984.
[198] ASG, Fondo Africa, Solidarietà, b. 9, f. 23/27, Letter Giuseppe Soncini to Giulio Andreotti and Mario Raffaelli, Reggio Emilia, 4 June 1984. For a report on the travel of the ship see also *Sechaba*, Nos. 37-38, June-July 1984, pp. 73-76.
[199] ASG, Fondo Africa, Solidarietà, b. 9, f. 24/06, 24/07, "Delegazione del 'Comitato Nazionale di Solidarietà con i popoli dell'Africa australe' delegata a ricevere la '2ˆ nave della solidarietà italiana' al porto di Luanda"; "Delegazione del 'Comitato Nazionale di Solidarietà' delegata a ricevere la '2ˆ nave della solidarietà italiana' nei porti di Maputo e Dar Es Salaam."

and gifts for the Front Line States Angola, Mozambique, Tanzania, Lesotho, and Zambia.[200]

Figure 28. *Meeting between Giuseppe Soncini and Herman Toivo Ja Toivo, Luanda, 1-9 April 1984.*
Source: ASG, Fondo Africa-Fotografie, b. 9, f. 76/250.

4.5 The anti-apartheid movement and the PCI after 1984: solidarity in decline

Between 1984 and 1985, Italian solidarity with southern Africa suffered a significant decline when compared to its activity in the preceding years. Indeed, after the second solidarity ship, it became increasingly difficult to successfully implement international solidarity initiatives. The collection of signatures for a national petition for the release of illegally incarcerated political prisoners proceeded slowly, without mobilizing a significant part of the population. Other initiatives, such as the official visit to Italy by the Namibian leader Toivo Ja Toivo,[201] simply failed to materialize because of the "difficulties and the uncertainties arising within the Presidency [of the National Committee],"[202] as Soncini wrote. Moreover, the representative office of SWAPO in Rome, toward which the efforts were also addressed, was never opened. As Soncini wrote, "nurturing relations between two cities is an important thing. The missed visit and the very diluted presence of the SWAPO representative for Western Europe based in London […] did not allow to build those solid relations […] useful to overcome the political difficulties that are always many."[203]

[200] ASG, Fondo Africa, Solidarietà, b. 9, f. 24/01, Letters Giuseppe Soncini to Paul Jorge (Angola), Joaquim Chissano (Mozambique), Salim Ahmed Salim (Tanzania), L. Sekhonyane (Lesotho), Lameck Goma (Zambia), Sam Nujoma and Oliver Tambo, Reggio Emilia, 24 March 1984.
[201] ASG, Fondo Africa, Solidarietà, b. 12, f. 35, Corrispondence on the organization of the visit to Italy of Herman Toivo Ja Toivo (1984-1985).
[202] ASG, Fondo Africa, Appunti, b. 5, f. 11/03, "Per una storia della solidarietà italiana con i popoli dell'Africa Australe: Attività, riunioni, documenti, atti fondamentali del 'Comitato Nazionale di solidarietà con i popoli dell'Africa Australe' e della Presidenza (1978-1986)," edited by Soncini, p. 84.
[203] *Ivi*, p. 78.

After 1984, a new reflection on the more suitable instruments of solidarity was needed. Giuseppe Soncini and the National Committee were also discussing how to adjust *Sechaba*, to make it a more flexible and rapid instrument of information.[204] However, 1984 was the last year of its publication in Italian language.

During the interview, Bruna Ganapini recalled 1984 as a difficult year, which changed the ways of doing cooperation.[205] The reasons behind these difficulties can be found in the changed Italian political climate starting from the second half of the 1980s onwards.[206] Among these, the sudden death of Enrico Berlinguer in June 1984 represented the end of a period of national and international openness for the PCI, endangering the dialogue between the various parties and bringing about a decline in the international activity of the party, which increasingly began to adopt a more humanitarian approach. In addition to this, the political events and conflicts that took place during 1985—such as the local administrative elections and the referendum on the automatic pay scale—altered the internal dynamics of the party, with significant implications for its involvement in international cooperation. The election profoundly altered the makeup of the regional, provincial, and city councils, which had played a significant role within the solidarity movement, while the referendum served to exacerbate conflict between political and social groups, undermining the unity that had been key to the success of anti-apartheid initiatives in previous years. The situation was further compounded by the trade unions' decision not to take part in the National Association of Friendship and Cooperation Italy-southern Africa, because they considered its objectives and instruments not to be in line with theirs.[207] As Soncini wrote, each trade union created its own non-governmental organization as an instrument to develop cooperation.[208] The Statute of the National Association of Friendship was modified to meet the needs of the trade unions, which however continued to reclaim their independent path. In providing an overview of the situation, Soncini spoke of "a competition to provide the tools to take part in the cooperation for development," and of "a

[204] *Ivi*, p. 77.
[205] Interview with Bruna Ganapini, Reggio Emilia, 2 June 2021.
[206] ASG, Fondo Africa, Appunti, b. 4, f. 9/55 "Contro l'apartheid," Anonimous note (probably by Soncini) on the Italian situation, January 1986; ASG, Fondo Africa, Appunti, b. 5, f. 11/03, "Per una storia della solidarietà italiana con i popoli dell'Africa Australe: Attività, riunioni, documenti, atti fondamentali del 'Comitato Nazionale di solidarietà con i popoli dell'Africa Australe' e della Presidenza (1978-1986)," edited by Giuseppe Soncini, pp. 82-87.
[207] ASG, Fondo Africa, Solidarietà, b. 7, f. 20/22, Letter Giorgio Benvenuto to Giuseppe Soncini, Rome, 23 February 1983; ASG, Fondo Africa, Solidarietà, b. 8, f. 21/15, Letter Mauro Scarpellini to Giuseppe Soncini, Rome, 25 October 1983.
[208] ASG, Fondo Africa, Appunti, b. 5, f. 11/03, "Per una storia della solidarietà italiana con i popoli dell'Africa Australe: Attività, riunioni, documenti, atti fondamentali del 'Comitato Nazionale di solidarietà con i popoli dell'Africa Australe' e della Presidenza (1978-1986)," edited by Giuseppe Soncini, p. 83.

phase of new political and social relations in which there was an increasing tendency to characterize one's own organization by its involvement in cooperation activities with developing countries."[209]

As a result of the fall in the cooperation between political and social groups, from 1984 onwards the activity of the National Committee gradually declined, eventually coming to an end between 1986 and 1987. The resignation of Soncini himself in 1986 most likely represented an important factor in this outcome. Following the decline of the National Committee, the role of leading the Italian anti-apartheid movement passed to the Coordinamento Nazionale contro l'Apartheid in Sudafrica, which was established in January 1985 out of an amalgamation of organizations, trade unions, political parties, religious associations, and personalities from the world of the arts and culture.[210] Its activity, however, was mainly focused on the organization of solidarity events that aimed to "publicise the boycott of South African goods, to encourage bank disinvestments, to call for the release of Nelson Mandela and to lobby for his being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize."[211] The event that perhaps had the greatest impact was the anti-apartheid rally held in Rome on 21 December 1985, one of the largest rally against racism ever held in Italy.[212]

During this phase, the PCI's anti-apartheid activity was mainly focused on the question of sanctions. Although considered by the party as "an extreme instrument that should not be employed in international relations,"[213] in this case they were seen as necessary, not least because they had been recommended by the United Nations, the European Parliament, and African countries themselves. Consequently, the Secretary of the PCI, Alessandro Natta, was one of the signatories of the proposal put before the Chamber of Deputies on 8 October 1986 for "a detailed plan 'of economic and other forms of sanctions against South Africa,' along with other concurrent measures in support of the Front Line States."[214]

Within the context of the involvement of Italian communists in the fight against apartheid, this period saw ever more emphasis being placed on the language of human rights, at the expense of the anti-imperialist rhetoric that still dominated the later years of Berlinguer. This can be observed, for example, in a message sent to the Coordinamento by Natta, who wrote that "the objective of bringing down a regime that avails itself of the imprisonment and the torture of children constitutes an absolute priority in our program for a foreign relations policy, which corresponds with the ideals of peace, justice and humanity, as inspired by the Constitution of the Italian Republic."[215] Further evidence for

[209] *Ibidem.*
[210] Rubbi, *Il Sud Africa di Nelson Mandela*, p. 98.
[211] Fiamingo, "The Anti-Apartheid Movement in Italy," p. 69.
[212] See Rubbi, *Il Sud Africa di Nelson Mandela*, p. 98.
[213] *Ivi*, p. 86.
[214] APCI, 1987, Sud Africa, b. 942, f. 232, Telex Alessandro Natta to Coordinamento Nazionale, Rome, 21 May 1987.
[215] *Ibidem*.

the increasing interest of Italian communists in the question of human rights can be seen in their frequent correspondences with organizations such as Amnesty International, the Lega italiana per i diritti e la liberazione dei popoli (Italian League for the Rights and Liberation of Oppressed Peoples) and the Fondazione Lelio Basso per i diritti e la liberazione dei popoli (Lelio Basso Foundation for the Rights and Liberation of Oppressed Peoples).[216]

One element that remained central to the anti-apartheid activity of Italian communists was the effort to put pressure on the Italian government and force it to concretely act against Pretoria.

The PCI continued to maintain its contacts with the independence movements and to take part in international conferences—such as the International Solidarity Conference "Against Apartheid for a United and Democratic South Africa" organized by the ANC and held in Arusha[217] from 1 to 4 December 1987 and "South Africa's Future: Europe's Role,"[218] organized by the Association of West European Parliament for Action against Apartheid in Lusaka-Harare from 23 to 31 March 1988—while also participating in anti-apartheid initiatives, albeit without taking a leading role in the Italian anti-apartheid movement. This lack of involvement by Italian communists was, for example, criticized by historian Anna Maria Gentili and *l'Unità* journalist Marcella Emiliani,[219] and even stressed by Micucci himself, who in 1985 noted a certain indifference within the party and called for "a more committed and constant political involvement, even from the central party organization."[220] Nujoma had meetings with PCI delegates in Rome on 30 June 1984, when he also paid homage to Berlinguer's grave, and on 12 December 1988, yet no significant solidarity activities with SWAPO were implemented, other than diplomatic support.[221] As Bruna Ganapini pointed out during my interview, the lack of a SWAPO representative based in Italy could be the main reason for the failure of many solidarity initiatives with SWAPO.[222] In fact, while the presence in Italy of the ANC representatives Thami Sindelo and Benny Nato was effective, the relationship between SWAPO and Italy suffered from the lack of a SWAPO representative based in Italy. Some documents mention the existence of a representative designated for SWAPO in Italy in 1985, Pejavi Muniaro, but no further

[216] APCI, 1986, non cl., Commissione per la politica estera e le relazioni internazionali, Rapporti internazionali del partito, Diritti Umani, b. 903, f. 178, Correspondence with Amnesty International, Lega italiana per i diritti e la liberazione dei popoli, and Fondazione Lelio Basso per i diritti e la liberazione dei popoli.
[217] "In Tanzania contro l'apartheid," in *l'Unità*, 1 December 1987.
[218] APCI, 1988, Estero, Africa australe, mf. 8807, pp. 43-54, Note by Crippa on the Conference "South Africa's Future: Europe's Role."
[219] APCI, Estero, Sudafrica, mf. 579, p. 1150, "Nota su Africa australe—Iniziativa P.C.I.," by Massimo Micucci.
[220] APCI, Estero, Sudafrica, mf. 579, p. 2734, "Note sul problema delle sanzioni al Sud Africa," by Massimo Micucci.
[221] "Sam Nujoma ricevuto al PCI," in *l'Unità*, 30 June 1984; For the meeting in Rome in December 1988 between delegates of the PCI and Sam Nujoma see *l'Unità*, 12 December 1988.
[222] Interview with Bruna Ganapini, Reggio Emilia, 2 June 2021.

information was found about his role and duties.[223] Pejavi Muniaro held important positions within the NUNW and in the early 1980s was SWAPO's Deputy Secretary of Labor. He also took part in the training course for the management and planning of the national economy held in the DDR in 1983.[224] It is likely that in 1984 he was identified as the person for representing SWAPO in Italy, and at the beginning of 1985 he was certainly in Italy,[225] where, according to one relative, worked for mobilizing support for SWAPO, also in contact with the PCI.[226] As it emerged from some interviews, during those years, a number of Namibian workers and trade unionists were trained in the north of Italy, in Turin, under the International Labor Organization.[227] This perhaps was related to the assignment of Muniaro, who was active in the field of labor and trade unionism. However, information on his work in Italy is difficult to be found. Muniaro died in unknown circumstances returning to Angola from Italy before the end of the liberation struggle.[228] He was probably detained by SWAPO security services, which accused him of being a spy, and killed.[229] The silence around his death makes it further difficult to investigate his experience as SWAPO's representative in Italy. It can be inferred that, with the failed opening of a SWAPO office in Rome, his position as a representative lost significance.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the model of solidarity promoted by Italian communists in support of the anti-apartheid struggle in Namibia and South Africa. What emerges from the analysis is an unusual system of solidarity, which differed from its past forms for language and structure. The language used was shaped along the lines of Berlinguer's internationalism, which looked at North-South inequalities outside the bipolar mindset. This season of solidarity differed from the previous one for the abandonment of the aim to enforce Soviet communism, for its anti-fascist and anti-hegemonic

[223] ASG, Fondo Africa, Solidarietà, b. 12, f. 35/01, Letter Giuseppe Soncini, no addressee, no date; ASG, Fondo Africa, Solidarietà, b. 12, f. 35/25, Telex Kapuka to Soncini, 28 January 1985; ASG, Fondo Africa, Appunti, b. 5, f. 11/03, "Per una storia della solidarietà italiana con i popoli dell'Africa Australe: Attività, riunioni, documenti, atti fondamentali del 'Comitato Nazionale di solidarietà con i popoli dell'Africa Australe' e della Presidenza (1978-1986)," edited by Giuseppe Soncini, p. 78.

[224] SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/100760, "Information über die Durchführung des Seminars mit leitenden Kadern der SWAPO Namibias zur Leitung und Planung der Volkswirtschaft – Anlage 1: Teilnehmerliste des SWAPO-Lehrganges," Zentralinstitut für Sozialistische Wirtschaftsführung beim ZK der SED, Berlin, 7 July 1983.

[225] ASG, Fondo Africa, Solidarietà, b. 12, f. 35/25, Telex Kapuka to Soncini, 28 January 1985; ASG, Fondo Africa, Appunti, b. 5, f. 11/03, "Per una storia della solidarietà italiana con i popoli dell'Africa Australe: Attività, riunioni, documenti, atti fondamentali del 'Comitato Nazionale di solidarietà con i popoli dell'Africa Australe' e della Presidenza (1978-1986)," edited by Giuseppe Soncini, p. 78.

[226] Interview with Job Muniaro, Windhoek, 3 February 2022.

[227] Interview with Job Muniaro, Windhoek, 3 February 2022; Interview with Peter Katjavivi, Windhoek, 31 January 2022; Interview with Thsombee Ndadi, Windhoek, 9 February 2022.

[228] Interview with Job Muniaro, Windhoek, 3 February 2022.

[229] Pekka Peltola, *The Lost May Day: Namibian Workers Struggle for Independence*, Jyväskylä: The Finnish Antropological Society in association with the Nordic Africa Institut, 1995, p. 154.

language, and its popular and unitary action. The communist internationalism during Togliatti's era, in fact, while retaining a margin of autonomy, maintained a link with the Soviet interests, thus materializing in actions of solidarity aimed at the expansion of communism, albeit through different paths to socialism. Conversely, solidarity politics with southern Africa during the late 1970s and early 1980s was driven by a critical attitude toward the hegemonic powers—URSS included—and their expansionist intents. The liberation movements themselves were positively disposed toward Italian communists because of such an attitude. Furthermore, Berlinguer's unitary politics, which aimed at the cooperation between the democratic forces both on the national and international levels, shaped profoundly this season of solidarity, which worked until the unity was maintained.

Berlinguer's politics laid the basis for the solidarity model with southern Africa, which was outlined and implemented mainly by Reggio Emilia. Under the leadership of Soncini, Reggio Emilia was able to gather national forces and create a Committee in charge of the solidarity initiatives. Encouraged by both the PCI and the Mozambican leaders, Reggio Emilia took charge of the solidarity initiatives with southern Africa, turning to the PCI for support in campaigning. The national PCI acknowledged Soncini's directives, contributing to the implementation and dissemination of the solidarity initiatives.

Both Berlinguer's internationalist politics—which aimed to overcome the bipolar logic of cooperation—and the decentered character of the Italian solidarity—mainly channeled through the local entity of Reggio Emilia—allowed for the development of an autonomous model of socialist solidarity, expressed through a language which held its own peculiarities within the context of the Cold War. Berlinguer himself, during the well-known interview for the newspaper *Corriere della Sera* in June 1976, stated that the fact that Italy was a member of NATO was a positive factor for an autonomous development of socialism.[230] Parallel reasoning is valid for the development of the discourse of socialist solidarity.

The socialist solidarity discourse in Italy was built upon an anti-Western, anti-American, but also anti-bipolar narrative, as it condemned the interference of Cold War dynamics in the Third World and the heavy-handed interventionist policies adopted by both superpowers. For this, I here define the language of socialist Italian solidarity as "anti-hegemonic." Furthermore, Italian socialist solidarity was built upon a national tradition of anti-fascism, according to which it was essential for democratic forces to put aside their differences and come together in order to put an end to racism and apartheid. This was made possible primarily by the politics of the Historical Compromise adopted

[230] Interview Giampaolo Pansa with Enrico Berlinguer, in *Corriere della Sera*, 15 June 1976.

by Berlinguer as well as the tireless efforts of Soncini, who managed to convince a wide range of political actors to look beyond their disagreements and to unite around a single objective.

Over time, the language of solidarity increasingly incorporated the lexicon of human rights and conferred a greater importance on the role of Europe, which was seen as playing a key role in gaining a global consensus on disarmament, peace, the elimination of bipolar stances, the reduction of inequality, and the respect for human dignity. The struggle against the racist regime in South Africa allowed Italian communists to superimpose on the anti-imperialist and anti-colonial rhetoric, which set them apart from other elements within Italian politics, a language of human rights, which as the 1980s progressed would increasingly become the dominant narrative. Yet the language of solidarity employed by Italian communists in supporting the anti-apartheid struggle rejected the language of compassionate humanitarianism that was commonplace in the West. From a rhetorical perspective at least, it distanced itself from a liberal vision of human rights, instead following along the lines of Berlinguer's idea of an interdependent world, which saw the end of apartheid as an achievement for the whole of humanity, as opposed to a moral obligation toward the less fortunate. This vision prioritized the idea of cooperation between equals, aimed at helping the countries of the Third World "to liberate themselves from the unjust legacy of underdevelopment and dependence, to contribute to building a new economic world order in the mutual interest and in the interest of peace."[231] This element was recognized by the leaders of the African movements themselves, as it is testified by the words of the Minister for Information of Mozambique, José Luis Cabaço, upon the arrival of the first solidarity ship in Maputo, who defined the Italian gesture of solidarity not as "a gift from rich to poor, but rather a contribution to development," and as a sign that "in aiding the development and thus the independence of Southern Africa, the Italian people are aware that what is at stake is also their own development and their own independence."[232] During the same event, Samora Machel also affirmed that solidarity must not be considered as "an act of charity," but rather as "reciprocal support between peoples fighting for the same cause."[233] Nevertheless, it must also be noted that, in spite of the rejection of humanitarian rhetoric, during this phase there was a strong charitable element to the solidarity efforts of Italian communists, which in essence differed very little from the contributions made by other movements working against apartheid in the West.

The main aim of the Italian communist solidarity was to mobilize the Italian government to take a more active stance against the apartheid system. To do that, Italian communists sought broader

[231] ASG, Fondo Africa, Solidarietà, b. 3, f. 5/41, "Riunione Comitato Nazionale di Solidarietà: Introduzione del Coordinatore Assessore Giuseppe Soncini," Genoa, 9 May 1980, p. 7.
[232] Renzo Foa, "Maputo festeggia la nave della solidarietà," in *l'Unità*, 24 June 1980.
[233] *Sechaba*, No. 34, January 1984, p. 3.

collaboration and always tried to involve the government in the solidarity initiatives. The collaboration with governments that had always detained an ambiguous position toward apartheid raised the opposition of communist actors who did not agree with such solidarity politics of compromise and with its distancing from the Soviet Union.[234] Within the PCI itself, Berlinguer's politics often risked causing an internal division by the pro-Soviet wing of the party, although Berlinguer's leadership was never questioned.[235]

Since in this case the solidarity initiatives were not set up within state socialism, but were rather promoted and implemented by communist realities within a Western country, the entity and the reach of the aid were obviously inferior, if compared to the involvement of socialist countries such as Cuba and the DDR. On its side, SWAPO tried to use the Italian solidarity as a mediator to reach the US, to sensibilize the people, and to bring the cause of Namibian independence to the international fora. The anti-apartheid solidarity initiatives promoted within the Italian communist circles, with the cooperation of many other political and social forces, were able to raise the issue of apartheid in Italy, slightly mobilize the Italian government, and contribute to the life improvement in the refugee camps of SWAPO and ANC.

National issues and organizational difficulties often endangered the realization of the initiatives or made their accomplishment impossible. Soncini used all the instruments at his disposal, all his contacts and skills, to overcome the numerous difficulties that arose. The strict collaboration with African leaders made the realization of the initiatives possible. However, when the presence of African representatives or the contacts with African leaders were not so solid, the solidarity initiatives tended to fail. In fact, due to the failed opening of SWAPO office in Rome, the links between SWAPO and the PCI, as well as other solidarity groups, never took the form of a solid and strong relationship, able to launch significant solidarity projects.

Furthermore, Soncini had to face the fact that the municipalities were not always considered suitable to act in the field of international cooperation. The correspondence within the Soncini-Ganapini Archive shows in fact that the so-called "Comitato Regionale di Controllo," an organ that was intended to monitor the acts of the provinces, municipalities, and other local authorities, often annulled the resolutions taken by the provincial administrations to grant contributions for the second solidarity ship.[236] Soncini objected to the attitude of such committees, which was detrimental to the

[234] ASG, Fondo Africa, Solidarietà, b. 2, f. 2/21, "Appoggiamo la lotta dei popoli contro il fascismo e l'imperialismo," Messagge by Partito Comunista d'Italia (comunista-leninista), 24 December 1978, cyclostyled at the editorial office of *Nuova Unità*.

[235] Pons, *Berlinguer e la fine del comunismo*, p. 176, 226-227.

[236] ASG, Fondo Africa, Solidarietà, b. 11, f. 27/04, Cancellations of resolutions for the allocation of contributions for the second ship by the "Comitato di Controllo."

autonomy of the provincial administrations, and urged the provinces to place the issue to their attention and possibly contest their decisions.

Given the peculiar model of solidarity, which was not administered by a state, and neither properly by a political party alone, the cooperation largely depended on the charisma and the commitment of leading figures such as Giuseppe Soncini and Enrico Berlinguer. Without them at the helm, the types of solidarity initiatives that they had overseen became less common in the second half of the 1980s, by which time the leading role had been assumed by the Coordinamento.

Conclusion

On 21 March 1990, Namibia finally gained the freedom and independence it had long struggled for. SWAPO, acknowledged in 1976 by the UN General Assembly as "the sole and authentic representative of the Namibian people," became the first ruling party of independent Namibia, after waging a decades-long liberation fight against the white rule of the South African apartheid regime. During the struggle, SWAPO suffered the Cold War logic while at the same time trying to take advantage of it. The struggle was exacerbated by the bipolar tensions of the period, and the independence of Namibia was delayed because of the South African and Western fears that a socialist SWAPO could take the power and establish a socialist government. During the struggle, SWAPO sought support from all those who were willing to help, which were especially socialist countries.

At that time, in fact, transnational cooperation with the Third World was central within the international communist movement, which distanced itself from the Western rhetoric of aid, proclaiming its natural affinity with the anti-imperialist global struggle and thus promoting support on the basis of solidarity.

This thesis has further corroborated the idea of an internal plurality within the international communist movement, showing how socialist actors coming from different contexts promoted solidarity with SWAPO by using varying narratives, pursuing their own objectives, and employing diverse instruments. Therefore, different and sometimes competing visions of socialism and solidarity coexisted within the socialist solidarity regime during the various stages of the global Cold War. SWAPO was able to take advantage from such visions, as each of them could serve its different needs in diverse ways.

This thesis has analyzed the solidarity politics of three socialist settings, which differed primarily for their geopolitical positioning. These three supporters promoted solidarity politics with SWAPO according to their national and ideological contexts, and their foreign policy was also affected by the relationship they had with the Soviet Union, which represented a source of inspiration, as well as a great power from which they sought to various extent to gain autonomy.

The study of the DDR-SWAPO relationship took up a significant portion of my dissertation, as a large selection of sources was consulted due to the availability of a large amount of archival documents and to the biographical accounts collected. The German Democratic Republic was a Warsaw Pact country in communist Europe, an affiliate rather than a surrogate of the Soviet Union, which established a close relationship with SWAPO especially starting from the second half of the

1970s, when SWAPO begun to gain more credibility, sided more effectively with MPLA, and declared to have embraced socialism. 1977 was a key year for this relationship, as Nujoma's visit to East Berlin in December led to the signing of a cooperation agreement between SED and SWAPO, which was followed by solidarity measures taken in the political, material, educational, medical, and military spheres. In addition to the political and diplomatic support, as well as support in propaganda activities, the DDR provided SWAPO with significant material aid through the provision of goods to SWAPO refugee camps, especially the camp in Kwanza Sul. Supplies were furnished by the DDR to SWAPO also in the "non-civilian" field, to an extent that is not possible to accurately discern because of the scarcity of archival records on this matter. East Germany lent aid to SWAPO in the military field by dispatching military equipment, as well as military and security advisers and experts, and by training SWAPO cadres—which was done in absolute secrecy. The possible involvement of the Stasi in military, security, and intelligence training of SWAPO cadres—who could have used the methods they learned to interrogate and punish alleged internal spies—has been advanced by some testimonies, yet still not confirmed by archival documents.

Increasingly during the 1980s, in fact, SWAPO was obsessed by the threat of the infiltration, and arrested and imprisoned hundreds of its own members on the often unfounded charge of being South African spies. The alleged dissidents suffered tortures and harassments in the detaining camp in Lubango, in southern Angola, where they were imprisoned in dungeons under terrible conditions, leading in some cases to their death. In supporting SWAPO in all respects, East Germany remained silent in the face of this human rights violation, and was possibly even complicit through the training of SWAPO cadres in intelligence and counter-intelligence, as well as by not fully securing the protection of possible persecuted SWAPO members staying in the DDR, as the life story of Philemon Kaluwapa has shown.[1] However, it should be stressed that these assumptions would require further investigation, which would be interesting to develop in a separate work. A search in the archives of the German section of the International Society for Human Rights in Frankfurt, which I have not been able to visit yet, might provide interesting and new undiscovered aspects of this topic.[2]

Educational and medical solidarity in support to SWAPO was also delivered by the DDR to a great extent. East German teachers, educational advisers, doctors, and nurses were sent on internationalist missions to SWAPO refugee camps in Angola and Zambia, where they worked to help SWAPO to create health and education infrastructures, and to train, advise, and treat SWAPO members. This support was especially provided in the DDR itself, where hundreds of Namibians went to study under

[1] See section 2.2.7.8.

[2] I have established contacts with the ISHR Secretariat based in Frankfurt, which confirmed that the archive holds material on the subject.

scholarships and to be treated in East German hospitals. The Cassinga massacre was a major event that prompted the DDR to increase its assistance in the educational and medical sectors. After that, in 1978, the Jacob Morenga ward was opened in the Berlin-Buch Hospital to provide medical assistance to wounded people from Namibia and, at a later stage, other countries. Furthermore, after the Cassinga massacre, an increasing number of Namibian students, children and adults, arrived in the DDR to receive education at various levels and be trained as a skilled workforce capable of contributing to the reconstruction of their homeland.

Although economic rationales were particularly strong at this stage of DDR solidarity, political and ideological rationales prevailed in the solidarity programs addressed to SWAPO. The political-ideological component remained a significant element of the DDR solidarity with SWAPO, which developed especially during the 1980s, when—because of the internal economic crisis and the disillusionment caused by the demise of socialism in Angola and Mozambique—the SED had actually undertaken a more pragmatic and economy-oriented Third World policy, more focused on Europe and on international security, peace, and disarmament. Despite this change in foreign policy, the political-ideological component remained a preponderant element of DDR solidarity in its relationship with SWAPO. This could be proved by the central role played by the political and ideological education in the DDR educational programs, through which East Germany aimed also to politically influence Namibians toward socialism.

Solidarity was the tool employed to support the Namibian liberation struggle as it was considered part of the revolutionary world process—to which the SED deeply believed until the end—and to improve the DDR image both at home and abroad. In its relationship with SWAPO, the DDR's political elite combined the policy of peace it had embraced during the 1980s—by supporting the negotiation that led to a political solution for the independence of Namibia—with the insistence on anti-imperialist class struggle and socialist development, which it never abandoned. It continued to try to influence SWAPO in a socialist way through a political education based on its own experiences and its own Marxist-Leninist reading of the world, ending up embodying a paternalist supporter, unable to consider the different initial conditions of the receiving countries and the possible paths for their future development.

Thus, the solidarity the DDR provided to SWAPO during the Namibian liberation struggle was significant in its scope, as it supplied a great quantity of aid in various fields, ambiguous in its dealing with SWAPO's "spy drama," as it supported SWAPO's leadership even when it violated the human rights within its own ranks, and paternalistic in its purpose, as it aimed to strengthen socialism *à la* DDR abroad.

A different model of socialist solidarity was carried out by Cuba, a country that had suffered centuries of Spanish colonialism and that was, and still is, subjected to the US hegemonic claims. Because of its revolutionary history, Cuba was regarded as a model by the Third World countries that were struggling against colonialism and neocolonialism. It promoted an independent and often adventuristic foreign policy, spending a great deal of resources to support anti-colonial struggles and defend friendly countries from external aggression, especially Angola. As a small and poor country, Cuba mostly relied on Soviet aid, however always trying to purse autonomous strategies in the Third World, often even forcing the Soviet Union to follow its lead. Yet its membership within the socialist bloc and its alignment with the Soviet Union on certain occasions jeopardized its attempts to establish a leadership role within the Non-Aligned Movement.

Cuba supported the Namibian liberation struggle and SWAPO from Angola, where large contingents of Cuban civilian and military personnel were based for more than a decade in order to provide aid to MPLA and defend the Angolan territory from South African attacks. The relationship with SWAPO was established especially after the independence of Angola, when SWAPO sided with the MPLA and moved its headquarters from Lusaka to Luanda.

One aspect that distinguished Cuban solidarity with SWAPO from other models of socialist solidarity was its involvement in the military combats on some occasions. The permanence of Cuban troops in the Angolan territory, in fact, allowed Cuba to promptly intervene in case of need. When the South African regime launched the attack on Cassinga, on 4 May 1978, a Cuban contingent intervened to defend the camp and rescue the survivors. Cuban soldiers shed their blood on the battlefield along with SWAPO soldiers, earning the great respect of Namibians, with whom Cuba still shares a strong bond today.

At the final battles in Cuito Cuanavale and surroundings, the Cubans operated together with SWAPO soldiers, in addition to FAPLA and, to a lesser extent, ANC. Despite the outcome of the battle is still discussed and interpreted differently by scholars today, its symbolic value is undeniable, as it contributed to the result of the negotiations that led Namibia to independence. Cuba played a key role also in the negotiating table, acting as a spokesperson for SWAPO and pressing the South Africans to accept Resolution 435. Thus, it provided a significant support to SWAPO militarily, politically, and diplomatically.

Other than that, it also offered civilian assistance in Angola, such as medical care to SWAPO soldiers and civilians, and elaborated a broad program of educational solidarity, establishing schools of Spanish in Angola, and then opening primary and secondary SWAPO schools at the Isla de la Juventud, where thousands of Namibians accomplished their education. University and college

studies, as well as political training, were imparted to Namibians through scholarships in the main island.

Cuba was one of the closest allies of SWAPO, and it stayed in Angola as much as needed for Namibia to be liberated from South African domination. Because of the scarcity of sources, given by the non-accessibility of the Cuban and the Namibian archives, it has not been possible to outline exactly the scope and the implications of its solidarity. However, based on the secondary literature and, especially, on biographical accounts, this study may represent the beginning of a wider work on the topic. Socialist indoctrination was not central in Cuban solidarity with SWAPO. Rather, Cuba was prompted to support SWAPO by a desire to end external domination, white supremacy, and racism in southern Africa. As also Piero Gleijeses points out, in fact, revolutionary idealism was the main driving force behind Cuban solidarity, as it was aimed to export the revolution, rather than socialism—revolution intended as the fight against North's supremacy. Cuba was a socialist country, but it was also a member of the Non-Aligned Movement, and an underdeveloped country that had suffered colonialism and exploitation, and thus willing to support the liberation struggle of the Third World by virtue of South-South solidarity. Although its socialist membership sometimes diminished its claims of genuine solidarity, in the case of the anti-apartheid struggle in southern Africa, Cuba acted in the interests of the liberation movements, employing large resources, especially human, repeatedly overriding Soviet orders, and taking the lead in the socialist solidarity regime.

The case of the Italian communist solidarity turns out to be particularly relevant for the objectives of this thesis because it provides yet another idea of socialist solidarity, which had an autonomous character within the context of the global Cold War. In fact, during this period, under the leadership of Berlinguer, the PCI assumed a line that differentiated Italian communists from communists both in the East and in the West and influenced the development of its model of solidarity. Compared to the previous decades, this internationalist line moved away from the project of strengthening Soviet-style international communism and launched rather an autonomous vision of communism, based on the values of democratic pluralism and opposed to the logic of blocs. Within this line, Europe, which was to play a key role in the détente process, took on increasing importance. In Berlinguer's thinking, special attention was devoted to the North-South relations, and to the formulation of a new world order based on interdependence and cooperation and on a renewed conception of development that was supposed to redress inequalities and stem the problems of hunger and poverty.

The PCI started to put the anti-apartheid struggle at the core of its foreign policy agenda after the independence of Angola in 1975 and the Soweto massacre in 1976, which raised the world's

awareness of the unjust system of apartheid. It supported the liberation struggle of SWAPO and ANC mostly at a political and diplomatic level, through the organization of protests against the South African regime, the participation in global conferences against apartheid, and the development of contacts with the southern African movements, with the main purpose of triggering a more concrete position of the Italian government. More importantly, it acted along with other Italian progressive parties within a decentered structure of solidarity that was led by the communist municipality of Reggio Emilia. Thanks to the internationalist fervor of the council member Giuseppe Soncini, Reggio Emilia was able to unite national forces and create a committee in charge of the solidarity initiatives with southern Africa, turning to the PCI for support in campaigning. The National Committee of Solidarity with the peoples of southern Africa, founded in 1979 in Reggio Emilia after the first National Conference of Solidarity, was the main Italian actor that coordinated and channeled the political and material aid to SWAPO and ANC until 1984. Between 1978 and 1984, conferences were organized to push the Italian government to condemn South African apartheid and the occupation of Namibia, and material aid was delivered to the refugee camps of SWAPO and ANC through two solidarity ships. The success of these initiatives was made possible by the unity of the Italian political forces, facilitated by Berlinguer's politics of the Historical Compromise and Soncini's dedication. Rather than on a government or a political party alone, in this case solidarity with SWAPO depended mainly on two communist figures, Giuseppe Soncini and Enrico Berlinguer, who shaped the language and the program of the Italian cooperation with southern African struggles. Italian communists promoted a solidarity discourse through an anti-Western, anti-American, but also anti-bipolar and anti-hegemonic language, as it condemned the interference of the hegemonic powers (Soviet Union included) in the Third World, and it launched an international vision based on interdependence.
Communists in the West thus contributed to aid SWAPO in the struggle against South African apartheid, mostly through material and political support. In Italy, they sought to raise awareness on the issue of apartheid among the population, slightly mobilize the government, and contribute to the life improvement of SWAPO and ANC refugees, in strict cooperation with other national actors. However, relationship with SWAPO suffered from the lack of a SWAPO representative based in Italy and therefore of close and constant contacts between Italian communists and the liberation movement. This was further endangered by the declining unity between the various political forces after 1984, which led to a decline in the Italian activities against apartheid.

The three actors examined in this dissertation acted within the socialist solidarity regime by supporting SWAPO through different instruments and for different purposes, which depended on

their geopolitical context and their ideological outlook. Moreover, they promoted solidarity with SWAPO through different narratives, which were set up to furnish a moral justification to their commitment to the liberation struggle of Namibia.

East Germany portrayed itself as a different country in respect to West Germany: a country that had not to be blamed for the German colonial and Nazi past, attributed solely to its Western counterpart, and that had been able to rebuild itself after the defeat of fascism and had taken anti-fascism as its central guiding principle. According to this narrative, the DDR regarded itself as a suitable ally of the Third World.

Regarding the Cuban solidarity with the southern African struggles, Fidel Castro constructed a narrative that promoted the ideas of the blood relationship between Cubans and Africans—which dates back to the transatlantic slave trade—and of the history of common struggle that united them. Like enslaved Africans fought the revolutionary and anti-colonial struggle in Cuba, Cubans had the duty to contribute to liberate Africa. The common experience of oppression and revolution, as well as the declared anti-racism of Cuba, which proudly affirmed to be a nation built on mestizaje, further served to portray the island as having the historical mission to help to eliminate apartheid in southern Africa.

Lastly, Italian communists launched their solidarity by resuming the national history of anti-fascism, as they also worked to liberate their country from a fascist and racist rule. As the struggle against fascism in Italy united democratic forces against one enemy, even in the case of the anti-apartheid struggle, it was essential for Italian communists, socialists, and Christian democrats to overcome their differences and come together in order to put an end to South African racism.

Because of the impossibility to consult the SWAPO Archive and gather a greater number of interviews with Namibians, which could have further brought out the Namibian perspective, it is difficult to precisely establish how these socialist solidarities were received by SWAPO, both the leadership and its members, and to what extent socialism was in SWAPO's plan for an independent Namibia. However, the written and oral biographical accounts collected allow to shed light on the ways in which Namibians experienced the socialist solidarity regime and on the implications solidarity had on the ground.

SWAPO enjoyed the support of these socialist actors and, when possible, sent its members to study and be trained in socialist countries such as Cuba and the DDR. From the sources collected, it can be assumed that Namibians living in East Germany and Cuba mostly took seriously the mission of being trained to help building an independent Namibia and considered the chance to study abroad as a

valuable opportunity. Coming from a context of segregation, racism, war, and deprivation, most of them recall their study period abroad in positive terms. As discussed in this thesis, some accounts have highlighted the differences between the treatment received in socialist countries compared to that in capitalist countries, as well as the differences in treatment within the socialist solidarity regime itself. From the biographical accounts, Cuba and the DDR emerged both as environment of solidarity and comradeship, yet the treatment received in Cuba is regarded as having no equals, as it is stated by Cecilia Muzile, who studied in both countries.[3] The DDR's proclaimed anti-racism was unmasked during the end of the 1980s, when the collapse of the Berlin Wall brought to the surface the xenophobia that had been silenced by the state rhetoric, as the life story of Stefanie Aukongo reveals.[4] Genuine friendship relations between Namibians and East Germans arose, showing the existence of what Christina Schwenkel calls "affective solidarities,"[5] yet state solidarity sometimes limited the growth of grassroot solidarity by discouraging close interactions and transmitting an idea of Africa based on exoticization and iconification.[6]

Cuban solidarity was perceived by the Namibians who studied there as very strong, both at the state and grassroots levels. However, it must be noted that a legacy of racism persisted also in Cuba, which worked to eliminate racial inequalities and cultural racism inherited by centuries of white domination, however not fully succeeding. As Hauke Dorsch points out, in fact, some students from Mozambique and other African countries reported to have experienced racism under more or less latent forms while in Cuba.[7] The positive testimonies of the Namibians I interviewed, who regard Cuba to be a non-racist country, must be read against the backdrop of the racism and war they came from, which may have positively influenced their feelings toward life in Cuba.

Education in socialist countries such as Cuba and East Germany mostly had positive consequences on the professional lives of the interviewees, who also stress the fact of having experienced growth on a personal level. However, long periods abroad, especially during the puberty and adolescence, sometimes led to adaptation problems once back to the home country. Indoctrination to socialist ideology was not reported by the interviewees, who rather acted as active subjects who recognized the implications of being in socialist countries and continued to regard Namibian independence and reconstruction as the only goal of their missions.

Socialist solidarity was mostly appreciated by SWAPO members for its power to raise awareness on the Namibian struggle for independence and lend valuable aid. Cuban promptness to intervene and

[3] Interview with Cecilia Muzile, Windhoek, 2 March 2022.
[4] See section 2.2.8.2.
[5] Schwenkel, "Affective Solidarities."
[6] See section 2.1.4.
[7] Dorsch, "Studierende und Schüler aus dem südlichen Afrika in Kuba," pp. 21-22.

the sacrifice of Cuban lives for the Namibian cause were honorably acknowledged, and the alleged non-interference in SWAPO's internal affairs was particularly well regarded. Regarding the support coming from the Italian communists, what most attracted African countries and movements to establish a relationship with them was Berlinguer's rejection of the bipolar logics and his distancing from the Soviet Union. In the context of the struggle against apartheid, SWAPO's link with the PCI and, in general, with the Italian anti-apartheid movement, represented an important instrument to reach the West, where the Namibian question encountered some resistance due to the interests dictated by the political conditions of the Cold War climate, as well as by economic rationales. Instead, DDR solidarity worked to the advantage of SWAPO's leadership for another reason: it served SWAPO's need to gain international recognition and consolidate its power—which the DDR contributed to do, denying and dismissing any reports about SWAPO's violation of human rights, as also Toni Weis points out.[8]

SWAPO's stance on socialism is debated by scholars, who have wondered the extent to which SWAPO's adoption of socialist ideology was genuine or whether it was rather dictated by geopolitical strategies.

As Lauren Dobell and Elena Torreguitar observe, SWAPO's strategic pragmatism cannot be denied.[9] During the liberation struggle, SWAPO turned to both socialist and capitalist countries for aid, in order to achieve its main scope: the liberation of Namibia. It turned mostly to socialist countries because they were more well-disposed toward the Namibian cause, and in 1976 it likely embraced scientific socialism in order to strengthen the alliance with the communist bloc and receive increasing support. Thus, it can be assumed that SWAPO used socialism to build a narrative that would fit in the Cold War structure while continuing to search aid from the West in order to maintain a non-aligned position and pursuing its scope with as much support as possible.

When asked about the nature of SWAPO's socialist ideology, most interviewees reported that it was a natural choice dictated by the Cold War system, yet they also highlighted that SWAPO sent its cadres to the West as well, pointing out its non-aligned character. Most drew attention to the affinity of thought between the socialist ideology and the Namibian struggle, as both propagated anti-racism, equality, and social justice. Socialism seems to have been embraced by the SWAPO's leadership as a vague concept accommodating the principles behind the liberation struggle, rather than as a clear alignment within the Cold War. Socialism as defined by the European lens of the Marxist-Leninist

[8] Weis, "The Politics Machine," pp. 361-362.
[9] Dobell, *SWAPO's Struggle for Namibia;* Dobell, "SWAPO in Office"; Torreguitar, *National Liberation Movements in Office*, p. 146.

theory, as General Martin Shalli pointed out, was not envisioned by SWAPO for a future independent Namibia.[10] Yet a socialist rhetoric and imaginary were dominant during the liberation struggle and shaped what SWAPO is today.

Even assuming that SWAPO had plans to build a socialist country once independence was achieved, it remains certain that SWAPO's pragmatism prevailed also after independence, when the demise of socialism, coupled with the need to show moderation to facilitate the end of apartheid in South Africa, led SWAPO to refrain from pursuing socialist principles and to negotiate a Constitution without any reference to socialism. Nevertheless, the SWAPO party is a member of the Socialist International and socialist elements continue to be present in SWAPO, for the insistence of its rhetoric on equality, peace, solidarity, and social justice. In some cases, my interviewees pointed out that present-day Namibia has socialist elements because of the importance of social services and its mixed economy. Recently, the SWAPO party has embarked on a debate on socialism and turned its attention to socialist ideology as a possible path for Namibia.

At the Extraordinary Congress held in November 2018 at the Ramatex complex in Windhoek, which was held to discuss outstanding matters from the previous year's Ordinary Congress and to deliberate on amendments of the party's Constitution, SWAPO redefined its political ideology as socialism "with a Namibian character."[11] Even in this case, formulation of socialism remains vague, as it is also pointed out by a critical article appeared on the pages of *The Namibian*, which defined the adoption of socialism as lacking a grass-root nature, as "a publicity stunt that will not pull the wool over the eyes of the working people of Namibia," as a move to impress SWAPO's Chinese friends.[12]

In April 2021, an interactive debate on "socialism with Namibian characteristics" took place in the SWAPO party school.[13] During the debate, President Hage Geingob reiterated his gratitude to the socialist countries for their support during the liberation struggle and took Cuba, China, and the Soviet Union as revolutionary models. Contemporary China, in particular, is praised for its ability to combine socialist principles with market economy, where the private sector has gradually gained importance alongside the public one, and to launch "socialism with Chinese characteristics." President Hage Geingob and Vice President Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah emphasized that, as a result of a negotiated independence and Constitution, which was needed due to the collapse of socialism

[10] Interview with Martin Shalli, Windhoek, 22 February 2022.

[11] Catherine Sasman, "SWAPO is a Lion – Shaningwa," in *Namibian Sun*, 4 December 2018, https://www.namibiansun.com/news/swapo-is-a-lion-shaningwa2018-12-04 (accessed on 25 January 2023).

[12] D. Aluteni, "SWAPO, what is 'Socialism with a Namibian character'?," in *The Namibian*, 7 December 2018, https://www.namibian.com.na/183845/archive-read/Letter-of-the-Week--Swapo-what-is-Socialism-with-a-Namibian-Character (accessed on 25 January 2023).

[13] It can be found on the Facebook page of the SWAPO party of Namibia, https://www.facebook.com/101436674598946/videos/3857536847664788/ (accessed on 25 January 2023).

and thus the decline of support to the struggle, private propriety rights had to be recognized, and foreign companies are currently owning the means of production in Namibia. Socialism in Namibia would allow the community and the government rather than the individuals to own and manage propriety and resources on behalf of all—which SWAPO aims to do. What SWAPO is trying to understand is how it is possible to implement these socialist principles in the multi-party and capitalist system of Namibia, and thus how to develop socialism with Namibian characteristics, just like China has done. SWAPO new amended Constitution launched a socialist ideology that "is underpinned by the principles of social justice, economic inclusion, shared prosperity and responsibility in which the State plays a significant role through the ownership of the means of production."[14] Socialism, most speakers agree, has always been part of SWAPO's history, and must be resumed to address the inequalities in Namibian society. SWAPO, as Uazava Kaumbi points out, is returning to its "ideological home," and is trying to outline how this can be done considering the conditions in Namibia.[15]

Therefore, it can be concluded that while pragmatism has always guided SWAPO during the liberation struggle and the post-independence period, and non-alignment has always been its international stance, socialism has to some extent been a model for the revolution in Namibia, to the point that it is still influencing the SWAPO party today.

[14] Uazava Kaumbi at the interactive debate on "socialism with Namibian characteristics."
[15] Uazava Kaumbi at the interactive debate on "socialism with Namibian characteristics."

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