

# SWAPO's Struggle Children and Exile Home-Making: the Refugee Biography of Mawazo Nakadhilu

Christian A. Williams 

**Abstract:** Mawazo Nakadhilu is a former refugee born to a Namibian father and a Tanzanian mother near Kongwa, Tanzania, in 1972. Her biography illuminates how people have made homes in Southern African exile and post-exile contexts. Williams traces Mawazo's story from her Tanzanian childhood through her forced removal to SWAPO's Nyango camp to her "repatriation" to Namibia. In so doing, he highlights tensions that have not previously been addressed between exiled liberation movements and their members over family situations. Moreover, he stresses the value of biographical work focused on aspects of refugees' lives that tend to be overlooked in nationalist discourse.

**Résumé:** Mawazo Nakadhilu est un ancien réfugié né d'un père namibien et d'une mère tanzanienne près de Kongwa, en Tanzanie, en 1972. Sa biographie met en lumière la façon dont les gens ont fait leurs résidences dans des contextes d'exil et post-exil en Afrique australe. Williams retrace l'histoire de Mawazo depuis son enfance tanzanienne à travers son renvoi forcé au camp de Nyango de la SWAPO jusqu'à son « rapatriement » en Namibie. Ce faisant, il met en évidence les tensions qui n'ont pas encore été abordées entre les mouvements de libération en exil et leurs membres sur les situations familiales. En outre, il souligne la valeur du travail biographique axé sur des aspects de la vie des réfugiés qui ont tendance à être négligés dans le discours nationaliste.

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**Resumo:** Mawazo Nakadhilu é uma antiga refugiada, nascida em 1972 perto de Kongwa, Tânzânia, filha de pai namibiano e de mãe tanzaniana. A sua biografia ilustra o modo como as pessoas criaram os seus lares em contextos de exílio e pós-exílio na África do Sul. Williams acompanha a história de Mawazo desde a sua infância na Tanzânia até ao “repatriamento” para a Namíbia, passando pela deslocação forçada para o campo de refugiados Nyango, sob a alçada da SWAPO. Deste modo, coloca a ênfase nas tensões, nunca antes abordadas, que se verificam entre os movimentos de libertação no exílio e os seus membros em torno de situações relacionadas com a família. Além disso, Williams sublinha o valor do trabalho biográfico centrado nos aspetos da vida dos refugiados que são tendencialmente descurados pelo discurso nacionalista.

**Keywords:** exile; refugees; biography; SWAPO; liberation movements; children; family; home; Namibia; Tanzania

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## Introduction

Since late 2008, thousands of people born to members of the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) during its three decades in exile have appealed to Namibia's SWAPO-led government for jobs and other benefits.<sup>1</sup> Mobilizing under the banner “children of the liberation struggle,” the group has presented itself to SWAPO as sons and daughters to whom the liberation movement/government bears an ongoing parental responsibility. In so doing, the “struggle children” or “struggle kids” draw from a powerful discourse in postcolonial Namibia, shaped heavily by the exile camps where many of these children were raised. There, notions of family were used to unite a nation around a moral order, wherein SWAPO was responsible for caring for its “children” who, in turn, were to obey SWAPO's “founding father” and “elders,” heeding their benevolent commands.<sup>2</sup>

This article engages critically with the nationalist exile discourse surrounding SWAPO's struggle children through a biography of one Namibian refugee, Mawazo Nakadhilu. In many respects, Mawazo's biography reflects the way that the struggle children have presented themselves collectively to the Namibian public. Born to a Namibian freedom fighter in a frontline state, Mawazo lived for years in a SWAPO camp where the liberation movement's officials looked after her education, health, and other basic needs. During the prelude to Namibian independence in March 1990, she was returned to Namibia, where she struggled to incorporate herself into her biological father's family and experienced abandonment by SWAPO, whose leadership no longer concerned itself with her well-being.

At the same time, there are important differences between how the struggle children present themselves to the Namibian government as a collective and the experiences of individuals born to Namibians in exile, including Mawazo. Importantly, Mawazo was not born to two Namibian exile

parents, but rather to a Namibian father and a Tanzanian mother, whose family raised her for her first eleven years. Then, one day Mawazo's father returned and, with the assistance of SWAPO officials and Tanzanian police, removed her from her mother's family and sent her via a SWAPO-owned house in Dar es Salaam to a SWAPO-administered camp in Zambia. Several years later, Mawazo was "repatriated" to Namibia, where she has struggled, due in no small part to contestations over her transnational parentage. In turn, she has repeatedly attempted to visit her Tanzanian family and believes that this family desires her to return "home." The geographical terrain and political gatekeepers separating Tanzania and Namibia have remained impenetrable, however.

By tracing Mawazo's life experiences, this article sheds new light on SWAPO's struggle children, Southern Africa's exile past, and refugee history more broadly. Although often presented as a united, national family, SWAPO in exile consisted of many families, whose interests in contacting and associating with biological children and other family members often competed with the interests of their liberation movement. These competing interests were further accentuated for exiles who parented children with local hosts, who were often not invested in SWAPO's nation-building project. Such perspectives are largely omitted from Southern Africa's exile historiography and broader refugee literature. Nevertheless, they may be explored through biographical work focused on how displaced people have made homes in exile and its aftermath.

To develop these points, this article presents Mawazo's biography in several parts. After briefly reviewing scholarship on exile, refugees, and biography in Southern Africa, the article introduces Mawazo's early life, tracing the context in which she was born and raised near SWAPO's Kongwa camp in Tanzania. Thereafter, it turns to Mawazo's experiences with SWAPO in exile, illuminating how, during the mid-1980s, SWAPO officials asserted control over children born to Namibian exile parents and tracing Mawazo's particular trajectory. Then, it moves to the "repatriation" of Mawazo and other children to Namibia, highlighting the struggles that Mawazo has experienced with family members and SWAPO officials, which collectively have undermined her capacity to make a home in either Namibia or Tanzania. Finally, the article reflects further on the biographies of Mawazo and other refugees, suggesting their value for comprehending SWAPO's struggle children and Southern African exile and post-exile families.

### **Exile, Refugees, and Biography in Southern Africa**

In the introduction to their recent volume *Africans in Exile* (2018), Nathan Carpenter and Benjamin Lawrance compare dominant discourses on exile with the experiences of African exiles. As they maintain, drawing from a wide range of contexts and literatures, exile (understood here as political exile) is

widely associated with elite individuals, displaced and isolated from a homeland due to their opposition to a ruling government. Nevertheless, many exiles have not been elites, especially in Africa, where forced removal has been a widespread and often defining experience. Moreover, exile has been generative, producing “unintended and unanticipated consequences,” including new political movements and social identities (7–8, 21–23).<sup>3</sup> It follows that critically examining exile requires engaging an exile archive that extends to categories of people and forms of experience excluded from most government-sponsored archival repositories. Moreover, in Southern Africa, it demands understanding a regional context, wherein exiled liberation movements that have become ruling parties are deeply invested in repeating exile histories that legitimate their rule and in obscuring historical knowledge which may challenge or complicate these histories (Williams 2009, 2015).

On the surface, biography may appear a strange choice for scholars seeking to move beyond nationalist discourse on exile. Indeed, since its genesis as a genre in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, biography has been integral to the project of solidifying national communities through stories of the political leaders who shaped them. Exile, moreover, has often figured prominently in such biographical projects, presenting an entire nation’s history in terms of one or a few individuals expelled from it.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, biography also offers another possibility when it draws attention to exiles at the margins of national communities and/or to the processes through which exiles’ varying, personal experiences are packaged into a national narrative.<sup>5</sup>

Although these points have been largely overlooked in Southern African exile historiography, they are well reflected in anthropological scholarship on refugees.<sup>6</sup> As Liisa Malkki first argued in her foundational work, refugees do not share “a singular experience” but rather are shaped by diverse histories which may be studied through listening to individual refugees’ stories (Malkki 1995b, 1996).<sup>7</sup> Seen from this angle, refugee biography has a significant, subversive potential, for it exposes the limits of any representation that reduces complex, personal experiences of transnational displacement into a homogenizing, nationalist discourse. As such, it is well positioned to critique not only enduring international humanitarian discourse (the focus of Malkki’s work), but also a historically distinct frontline state discourse, which presents Africans with varying ties to exiled liberation movements and their ideologies as “freedom fighter refugees.”<sup>8</sup>

It is from such a biographical perspective that this article explores Southern Africa’s exile history, especially the social dynamics surrounding the exile family. While historical scholarship on family relations among Southern Africans in exile does exist, it is nationalist in its orientation. Indeed, if there is one theme that unites this literature across different national historiographies, it is the recurring focus on the gender struggles *within* national liberation movements. This is not to say that there are no

international or transnational themes that emerge from the literature. Indeed, in writing on SWAPO, the African National Congress (ANC), and the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) in exile, authors repeatedly note men's concern with women dating or marrying foreign men and the different standards applied to men and women with regard to marrying outside one's national community (Akawa 2014; Amathila 2012; Hassim 2006; Morrow, Maaba & Pulumani 2004; Munguambe 2017; Namhila 1997; Nhongo-Simbanegavi 2000). The issue, however, is discussed almost entirely in terms of the unequal gender relations within a given nation, not in terms of the transnational dimensions of these relations and their legacy today.<sup>9</sup>

Also, the exile family literature is curiously silent on recurring tensions among families, liberation movements, and host governments over children. To highlight the case most relevant to this study, Namibian historiography on exile and family has emphasized the opportunities which SWAPO camps offered to women through child care, enabling them to pursue studies and leadership roles within the liberation movement that would have been closed to them if they had been required to look after a baby or perform other domestic chores (Akawa 2014:60, 120, 149–50; Silvester, Akawa & Shiweda 2014:182). It ignores, however, the many instances in which Namibian women and men sought to locate family members without success and disputed the liberation movement's capacity to parent and control "their" children. Emerging historiography on the frontline states has also not yet engaged these issues, presenting children born to exile-host couples as part of a host nation's contribution to Southern Africa's liberation, and overlooking conflicts between exiles and hosts over family (see, e.g., Tarimo & Reuben 2013; Temu, Reuben & Seme 2015).

By contrast, anthropological literature on refugees has addressed such concerns in other settings, highlighting how people make homes in contexts of transnational displacement and the tensions that emerge as refugee communities, nation-states, and humanitarian agencies define where, and with whom, refugees belong (see e.g., Malkki 1995a; Englund 2002; Lubke-mann 2008; Jansen & Löfving 2009). Nevertheless, in the Southern African exile context, wherein home-making occurred in relation to national liberation movements, these topics remain unexplored. Indeed, as I have discussed elsewhere, anthropologists studying refugees have confined themselves almost exclusively to research in refugee communities which they have accessed through participant-observation fieldwork since the 1980s (Williams 2014). As a result, this work mirrors the shallow historical foundation of scholarship on refugees generally, especially in Africa, where refugee seeking is only now emerging as a field of historical study (Shadle 2019).<sup>10</sup> Thus, while anthropology offers compelling questions and methods for historians to consider—not least, the call to examine individual refugees' lives—it has focused on contexts that differ considerably from the late-twentieth-century Southern African context addressed here.



routinely classified as “refugees” by the Tanzanian government.<sup>11</sup> By the middle of 1965, more than one thousand people affiliated with SWAPO, ANC, FRELIMO, MPLA, and ZAPU were living at Kongwa camp, including nearly three hundred SWAPO members, by far the largest concentration of Namibians in exile at this time. All but one of these Namibians living at Kongwa camp were men (Williams 2015:68–72).

Until recently, Kongwa has been presented in historical literature as a place that guerrillas passed through for military training en route to somewhere else. Nevertheless, in the cases of SWAPO and the ANC, the liberation movements struggled to infiltrate cadres into their countries of origin, suffering further setbacks during the late 1960s, which compelled them to accommodate many of their cohort at Kongwa for years. Indeed, with the exception of a period of months in 1969 when the Tanzanian government closed Kongwa camp and sent its inhabitants to the Soviet Union, SWAPO retained cadres at Kongwa continuously from 1964 through 1971.<sup>12</sup> Also, although training routines were quite regimented during the early years at Kongwa, with cadres only permitted to leave the camp at certain times during weekends or with special permission, these routines softened across the years as hierarchies in the camp broke down and as Namibian and South African men sought to create lives for themselves across the camp's increasingly porous borders (Williams 2014; Williams 2015:76–93).

It is in this context that Mawazo Nakadhilu's parents met. Mawazo's father, Nicodemus Tapopi Nakadhilu, departed from his family's home near Oshigambo in Ovamboland for exile in 1966.<sup>13</sup> Although Mawazo does not know the exact circumstances that compelled her father to leave Namibia, it is likely that he was drawn to possibilities open to Southern Africans in independent Tanzania, including the possibility to study. Like most Southern Africans who did not receive scholarships, however, Nakadhilu was sent to Kongwa camp (Williams 2017a). Known by the combat name “John,” Nakadhilu lived in the camp for several years.<sup>14</sup> At the time when Nakadhilu arrived in Tanzania, Mawazo's mother, Esther Mkasanga, was living with her family in Ibwaga, a village of peasant farmers located five to six kilometers from Kongwa. According to Madeleine and Saul Kongawadodo, the sister of Mawazo's mother and her husband, the relationship began like many other romantic encounters between exiled “freedom fighters” and Tanzanian hosts, around the “pombe shops” where people went for beer. By 1968 Esther Mkasanga had given birth to Eva, her first child with Nakadhilu, and by 1972, she had given birth to a second child, Mawazo. Although the couple did not marry, it was well known to the family that they were together. Apparently, Nakadhilu stayed with the family at Ibwaga sometimes on weekends before SWAPO sent him on assignment away from Tanzania (Saul and Madeleine Kongawadodo, Interview, Ibwaga, June 15, 2013).<sup>15</sup>

Although much of Mawazo's family remained at Ibwaga, she was not raised there, but rather at the home of Maragarete Mkasanga, one of her mother's sisters. Mawazo can no longer remember the name of her aunt's home, but apparently it was a small village near Dodoma. Mawazo knew that

she had family in Ibwaga and remembers them from visits at family gatherings, including Eva, who lived with their mother there. For the most part, however, Mawazo was raised separately from her biological mother and sister, not to mention her Namibian family. Indeed, Mawazo has no memory of her father for the first eleven years of life, and apparently she was, during these years, entirely unaware of her father's identity.<sup>16</sup>

Such family circumstances were not unusual for Namibians born in exile at that time and place. Although numbers are difficult to determine, oral histories with former exiles and hosts alike suggest that many Namibian men fathered children with Tanzanian women during their time at Kongwa. None of the fathers married the mothers of these children, and none of the children were raised in the camp. Although some fathers were actively involved in raising their children and interacted with the children's Tanzanian families, few remained at Kongwa after 1971. From the middle of 1974, the demographics of the Namibian exile community changed significantly, as thousands of Namibians, including many women and some children, departed from their country of origin via Angola for SWAPO's headquarters and camps, which by then were located in Zambia.<sup>17</sup> Within a few years, SWAPO had drawn up an official "Family Act" (1977), encouraging marriage and child-bearing among exiled Namibians (Akawa 2014:141–42). Moreover, SWAPO had established a new system of camps, several of which focused on offering health and educational services to Namibians in Zambia and Angola and whose inhabitants were presented to the international community as a distinct "refugee" population. Nevertheless, children of Namibian exile parents continued to live outside the SWAPO camps, including Mawazo and others residing in rural central Tanzania.

### With SWAPO in Exile

For Mawazo, all this changed one day in 1983. At some point in that year, Nicodemus Nakadhilu traveled to Tanzania. There, he made his way to Ibwaga in search of his two daughters, whom he sought to take with him to the camps which SWAPO was administering for Namibian refugees. Apparently, he located Eva at Esther Mkasanga's Ibwaga home, but he struggled to find Mawazo. What follows is Mawazo's version of this struggle as shared with me in an interview:

Mawazo: When my father met my mum, she just...he just ask my mum "where are my two kids?" And my mum told him that "no, you don't have two kids; you only have one kid." And my father said to my mum that "no, me myself I'm having two kids...they are all female." And my mum said that... the other one...she's died already. Because my mum she has been told by my grandfather ... that she cannot give all those kids because those child[ren] ... are going to be killed... Then from there my father told my mother that "if my child is passed away, can you take me there at the grave." Then they went there. When they went there, they didn't find [my] name at the grave... Then my father asked my mum "where is the grave?" ... And my mum said



that “in that grave we didn’t put any name because there was no anything which we can indicate so that maybe later we know that it is this one. We just put only that sands and that sands when the rain came I think that it has been growing then now I cannot recognize where we buried your, your daughter.” Then my father said that “ok, if it is like that I’m going to the police.” Then my mum said that “you can just go because I know that your, your daughter is already dead.” Then my father went... [to the] Tanzanian police. Then those Tanzanian police they took my father...they bring my father to my mum... then they start questioning my mum. And they said that if [she’s] a liar, they are going to put her in prison...that maybe she made a [n] abortion... Then my father said that “no she didn’t make abortion because I meet already that child already alive.”

Author: So your father had seen you?

Mawazo: Mmh. [He] had seen me when I was young... From there the police they took a step. [They asked] “where are your sisters?” They asking my mum. And my mum said that “no I’m [only] having one sister.” “Where is she?”... When the police went there, ...it was the day time. When they went home in that house they didn’t reach anyone because we were out... with the sister of my mum... When we came [home], my father just tell the police that “this is my daughter.” And the sister of my mum said “no it’s not your daughter. This one is my daughter, is the last born for my kids”.... Then they tell my sister’s mother that “okay, if it is like that, we can go to the police station.” Then... the sister of my mum refused. Then her husband came... They asked [him]... “who [gave birth to] this child?” Then, because... the husband didn’t know why the police... were asking..., [he] said that that child [was born to the] sister to my wife... Then, from there... [I] went together with my father and the police... [Eva and I] were kept by the police there at Kongwa. Then my father went. Then Mzee Kaukungwa come and took us to Dar es Salaam, me and my sister. (Interview, Windhoek, April 15, 2017)

Several points from Mawazo’s story resonate with accounts of other Namibian struggle children who were taken from their families in Tanzania and moved to SWAPO camps during the mid-1980s. First, the father figure, in this case Nicodemus Nakadhilu, entered Ibwaga with the expectation that he would be able to take “his” children from the family of the children’s mother without this family’s consent. Second, he was supported in this pursuit both by SWAPO officials and Tanzanian police, who helped to remove the children from their homes. Third, the Tanzanian families resisted efforts to take the children, including by attempting to hide them from their biological father, SWAPO officials, and Tanzanian police.<sup>18</sup>

Other aspects of Mawazo’s story are more ambiguous. First, why did Nicodemus Nakadhilu travel to Tanzania to pick up Eva and Mawazo at this time? As previously noted, during the mid-1970s, SWAPO had established a new system of camps in Zambia and Angola, some of which focused primarily on providing health care and education to “Namibian refugees.” Moreover, by the mid-1980s, international support for this system had expanded further and become increasingly focused on projects aimed at improving primary and secondary school education for Namibian refugee children (Sellström

2002:373–77). In this context, children were a key resource through which SWAPO made claims to humanitarian aid and asserted its legitimacy as the future government of Namibia.<sup>19</sup> The role of Simon “Mzee” Kaukungwa, one of SWAPO’s founders, who represented the liberation movement during much of the 1980s at its Dar es Salaam office, further suggests SWAPO’s central role in removing youth from their Tanzanian families. Indeed, as Kaukungwa maintained in an interview shortly before his death, he had collected “the Namibians” living in Tanzania and moved them to SWAPO camps because “the party instructed” him to “look after... its children.” (Interview, Windhoek, November 5, 2013).

Nevertheless, the timing and manner in which Kaukungwa collected the Namibian children at Kongwa raises questions about how exactly the process evolved and about the role of various father figures in shaping it. Importantly, the children were picked up in three separate groups between 1983 and 1985, long after SWAPO had approved its Family Act and established its “refugee camps” in the mid-1970s. In the first two cases, the biological fathers were directly involved in picking up their children. In the last case, Kaukungwa picked up the children on behalf of their deceased fathers, a task that he was well prepared to do given his experience at Kongwa over time, including as a former guerrilla commander who had lived with the fathers in the camp during the 1960s. The three trips resulted in only eleven children being transferred to SWAPO, a small number if seen in relation to the effort required for SWAPO members to track them down in rural central Tanzania, but not if viewed from the perspective of fathers claiming “their” children.

This excerpt from Mawazo’s story also prompts another significant question, namely, to what extent did her family and other families anticipate SWAPO’s return, and how did they respond to this possibility? Generally, the narratives rendered by Tanzanian families of Namibian struggle children’s displacement revolve around the unexpected arrival of SWAPO members at their homes after years in which the families raised the children without any interaction with their biological fathers or with their liberation movement. Nevertheless, one detail in Mawazo’s story points to a more complex picture, namely, that the grandfather had told her mother that “she cannot give all those kids because those child[ren]... are going to be killed.” As Mawazo elaborated at other moments during our interviews, the rationale for her to grow up with her aunt was motivated by her Tanzanian family’s long-standing concern that the father or another SWAPO member might return to collect the children and that the family should, therefore, hide the youngest (and therefore least easily identified) child. Apparently, Mawazo’s mother’s father had been most vocal in advancing this position, echoing a broader discourse at Kongwa: that the guerrillas “cooked” people, drawing special powers from preparing and eating human flesh (Interview, Nakadhilu, Windhoek, September 3, 2014).<sup>20</sup> Beyond the response of Mawazo’s family, there are also other families whose children were never collected by SWAPO.<sup>21</sup> To what extent these families actively tried to prevent SWAPO from finding their children and to what extent geographical factors made it difficult for SWAPO

to locate children in the rural locations where they lived is unclear.<sup>22</sup> But the fact that some families were aware of the possibility of SWAPO's return for the children and sought to avoid this scenario is beyond question.

Finally, the excerpted story does not, in fact, tell us much directly about Mawazo's experience. How did she feel about leaving her mother's family to be with her father and SWAPO? In the memories of members of the mother's family in Ibwaga, Mawazo "cried a lot" before she was taken away, which they explained by saying that Mawazo wanted to be with "her mother." They also contrast Mawazo's reaction to that of Eva, who, apparently, wanted to be with her father, whom she remembered from her early childhood (Interview, Kongawadodos, Ibwaga, June 15, 2013). Mawazo remembers how she cried at the time she left with her father but offers a different explanation for her tears; she claims that she had not recognized until that moment who her "real mother" was (Interview, Nakadhilu, Windhoek, April 15, 2017). Clearly, her narration of what happened that day is significantly influenced by her father, who first shared what had unfolded during the encounter at the family's Ibwaga home and at the graveyard while staying with her at the Kongwa police station. Nevertheless, how she felt about her father's claim to custody at the time or the new world to which he introduced her with SWAPO is not entirely clear.

Following several days living at the Kongwa prison, Mawazo and Eva traveled to Dar es Salaam, accompanied by Mzee Kaukungwa and Maxton Joseph, another prominent 1960s generation exile and SWAPO leader. In Dar they were met by their father and his new Namibian "wife."<sup>23</sup> After a relatively short period staying with his father's new exile family at a home in Dar es Salaam, Nicodemus Nakadhilu was sent back to the front in Angola, and arrangements were made for the children to move to the home of the Kaukungwa family and Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, SWAPO's Chief Representative in East Africa at the time. According to Mawazo, she remained at this home for a long period, perhaps a year. Apparently, her stay was longer than anticipated because SWAPO was awaiting the arrival of the liberation movement's other children from Kongwa in Dar es Salaam before arranging to escort them together to the SWAPO camps. Also, at some point during that year, Eva traveled with SWAPO officials for schooling at SWAPO's Kwanza Sul camp in Angola, leaving Mawazo on her own. The most memorable event for Mawazo during this entire period appears to be the occasion when she visited Ibwaga, a trip arranged by Johanna Kaukungwa, Mzee Kaukungwa's wife. Mawazo recalls her grandfather's suspicion about her sister's absence, but her aunt, "the mother who loved her," was encouraging, praising Mawazo for the English that she had learned while living in Dar es Salaam and suggesting that Mawazo "go and study... and then come back... and get a job this side" (Interview, Nakadhilu, Windhoek, April 15, 2017).

Shortly thereafter, Mawazo's studies with SWAPO began in earnest. Following the arrival of the third group of SWAPO's Tanzanian children in Dar es Salaam, Mawazo traveled with the others by plane to Lusaka. After some days there, arrangements were made to send most or all of the children

to Nyango, a camp located in a remote area of Zambia's Western District, more than 500 kilometers away.<sup>24</sup> Established by SWAPO in 1976 to provide health and education services for the rapidly expanding Namibian exile population, Nyango was, by the mid-1980s, the liberation movement's second-largest camp, accommodating several thousand people.<sup>25</sup> With the exception of guerrillas assigned to protect the camp from enemy attack, most camp inhabitants would have been involved in education, health, and other essential services. Moreover, the majority would have been youth enrolled in the camp's primary or secondary school, where Mawazo was also soon enrolled.

In some respects, Mawazo was clearly an outsider in this new world, a "Tanzanian" misfit in a camp set aside for "Namibians." Mawazo's strongest early memories of life at Nyango involve struggles to communicate in Namibian languages. As she recalls, at the time when she arrived there, she spoke Kigogo and Kiswahili, her mother tongue and Tanzania's national language respectively. English, the language which SWAPO promoted for an independent Namibia and taught in its schools, was still largely unfamiliar to her, and Oshiwambo, the dominant language of camp everyday life, was unknown.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, Mawazo learned these languages and adjusted. At Nyango her material needs were consistently met, and she was looked after by several matrons in the girls' hostel. Indeed, in her relationship to the matrons, she was not an outsider or an exception. Most children at Nyango lived in the hostel and had limited contact with their families, who were scattered across an array of locations where Namibian exiles lived, often with little control over their movement and with their capacity to communicate with their children curtailed. So, like many others at Nyango, Mawazo spent her early teenage years with parental figures who were not from her biological family—that is, until shortly before her "repatriation."

### **"Repatriation" to Namibia**

At some point in 1988, Nicodemus Nakadhilu suffered a serious injury. According to Mawazo, his unit had been involved in a military operation near the Namibian-Angolan border when it hit a land mine. He was evacuated to one of SWAPO's rear camps, where doctors operated on both his legs and added splints. From there he was transported to Lusaka, where arrangements were made for him to meet Mawazo. This was the first time that Mawazo had met or even communicated with her father since they parted in Dar es Salaam five years earlier.

According to Mawazo, at the time she and her father were reunited, Namibian exiles were preparing to repatriate—a process that unfolded between the signing of the Geneva Accord in December 1988 and the middle of 1989. Beyond the transition from life in exile to life at home for which everyone was then preparing, Mawazo and her father were also "in transition" in other respects. Nicodemus Nakadhilu was transitioning from the life of a guerrilla soldier to the life of a civilian cripple; Mawazo was transitioning from

childhood to motherhood. Mawazo had conceived a child in 1988, altering SWAPO's plans to send her to Nigeria for high school.<sup>27</sup> Nicodemus's struggles to adjust to his new condition and to his daughter's pregnancy both figure prominently in Mawazo's story, as highlighted in the following excerpt:

Mawazo: No, you see that the time that my father came and the times [after] he was injured the head it wasn't...the mind I think that it was somehow not on the place. Because he was talking many many many things, and I can remember when he heard that... I was supposed to go to Nigeria for a school [and had not gone because of the pregnancy] then [he] took a gun [and] shoot at me. Then apparently it wasn't his luck. He didn't shoot me; I just run away... Then [the people with whom we were staying in Lusaka] they hid me. (Interview, Windhoek, April 15, 2017)

If there was not some uncertainty about where and with whom to send Mawazo prior to this encounter with her father, then there certainly should have been thereafter. Indeed, although Mawazo had been socialized for several years in a SWAPO camp, learning Namibian languages and cultural practices and developing a Namibian social network, she had met only one Namibian member of her biological family, her father, and he demonstrably was not well. Nevertheless, at no point in her story does Mawazo suggest that she or anyone else considered an alternative. People in the camps were told that they "must go back to Namibia," a point that appears to have been made to all children born to Tanzanian mothers at Kongwa.<sup>28</sup> Mawazo also indicates that she was hopeful about moving to Namibia with her father. As she put it: "I'm going with my father; my father is my family... What will happen?" (Interview, Nakadhilu, Windhoek, September 3, 2014).

In June of 1989, Mawazo traveled to Namibia with both her father and her newborn son, but not with Eva, who was still in Angola and who was repatriated to Namibia with her father's half-brother. Mawazo remembers the flight from Lusaka to Grootfontein, one of the primary reception points for Namibians returning from exile, and waiting for her father's family to pick them up and take them to her father's old home near Oshigambo. What they encountered there was far from "home," however. At some point after his departure for Tanzania, Nicodemus Nakadhilu's Namibian wife had remarried, and she had moved to the home of her new husband. Although there were other family members who may have remained at Nakadhilu's homestead thereafter, the social dynamics of the war eventually pushed them all to leave. As Mawazo noted in one of our interviews, none of Nakadhilu's five children with this wife lived near Oshigambo, due to the fact that they had been threatened by the South African security forces on account of their alleged links with the SWAPO guerrillas.<sup>29</sup> Thereafter, the home and adjoining land had been passed on to strangers with no links to the family.

To address Nicodemus and Eva Nakadhilu's immediate need for a place to live, one of Nakadhilu's granddaughters offered that they could stay with her and her family at her home in Onankali, roughly 100 kilometers south of

Oshigambo. This arrangement, however, only worked for some months. As Mawazo emphasized, even after repatriation, her father lived his nights in fear that “the Boers... are coming” and insisted that she and her son join him in the bush lest they be the targets of a South African raid. This behavior eventually wore on her granddaughter’s husband, who insisted that they leave his home. From there, Mawazo moved with her father to the homes of other family members until, finally, they procured a small plot of land where she, Eva, and her father attempted to farm, drawing from her father’s small pension. It’s unclear how long the family tried to live like this, but clearly, from Mawazo’s perspective, it did not go well, and one day she set out looking for other parental figures from her time in exile: Mzee and Johanna Kaukungwa. Mawazo had developed a relationship with the Kaukungwas during her time living together with them in Dar es Salaam, and she is likely to have been in touch with other Tanzanian-Namibian children for whom the Kaukungwas had acted as surrogate parents at the time of repatriation and as a source of some assistance in the years immediately following independence.<sup>30</sup> Mawazo found Johanna Kaukungwa in Oniipa, a peri-urban area approximately 40 kilometers from Oshigambo. After explaining the circumstances in which she and her father were living and her father’s ongoing struggles to cope with wartime experiences, Mawazo was invited to move in with the Kaukungwas.

This relocation was the beginning of a more pleasant period for Mawazo. After an extended residency with the Kaukungwas, she married a local man, with whom she lived first in Oniipa and later in Wanaheda, part of Windhoek’s Katutura township. Nevertheless, Mawazo remained especially vulnerable in her Namibian “home,” a point which she illustrated in our interviews through her narrations of two important life events. First, in 2002, Mawazo was diagnosed as HIV positive. Although Mawazo had been in poor health for some time prior to the diagnosis, thereafter her husband began to ignore her, leaving Mawazo home alone with her (by then) two children for extended periods of time. Eventually, Mawazo found help through her father’s granddaughter, who looked after her (and later her children) in Onankali. Despite the caring relationship that Mawazo describes between herself and this woman, it’s clear that Mawazo also felt uncomfortable about being dependent on a member of her father’s family, with whom ties have remained tenuous. And yet, for years this family was Mawazo’s only means of support. From the time when Mawazo moved from Windhoek to Onankali, her husband left and the house was cleared of all her material possessions. Only years later, after her health had begun to stabilize through use of anti-retroviral medication, was Mawazo able to earn a small income from a Namibian non-profit organization and establish a home in Havana, an informal settlement on the outskirts of Katutura.<sup>31</sup>

Then, in 2007, Mawazo’s father died. Although Mawazo had ceased to live with her father from the time when she moved to the Kaukungwas in the early 1990s, she had visited him intermittently and appears to have retained warm feelings for him, as suggested by her willingness to explain his

indiscretions in terms of wartime injuries. Nevertheless, when her father died, Mawazo received no inheritance. According to Mawazo, a few years prior to his death, he held a meeting with a SWAPO official in Windhoek, during which he arranged to transfer the twenty-eight cattle that he had received from the Namibian government as a retired ex-combatant to Francina, the oldest child from his first marriage.<sup>32</sup> Francina, her father assured her, would distribute the cattle among all his children. When the time came to distribute the cattle, however, Francina reported to Mawazo and Eva that they had died because “there was no food, no rain” (Interview, Nakadhilu, Windhoek, April 15, 2017). Distrusting her half-sister’s story, Mawazo and Eva attempted to track down the cattle, leading Mawazo eventually to the office of Frederick Matongo, the man who made the arrangement with her father for the inheritance of his cattle and who knew her father from exile. What follows is Mawazo’s story of their encounter:

Mawazo: Matongo said, “Can you please tell me what you want here?” Then... that woman from the Ministry of Gender [who led me to Matongo] said... “Do you know the name... Nicodemus Nakadhilu?” Then he said, “yes from Tanzania.” [Then] she said, “This child, her mother is from Tanzania and she’s saying that they were born there. They were two... Now they are looking [for] the cow[s] [that belonged to their] father”... Matongo said, “This is a new story again now. I didn’t know anything. The child which we know is only Francina. We don’t know if Nicodemus Nakadhilu is having the kids from outside the country and we don’t know if Nicodemus Nakadhilu is having kids with a Tanzanian woman”... Then [the woman from the Ministry] asked me: “Where is your repatriation form?” I told her that “No, the repatriation form, Francina took it.” “And where is the I.D. of your father?” I [said], “Everything Francina took it. I’m only having [my father’s] death certificate.” Then Matongo told me about the cows: “I think that your sister took them all. We [gave them] to your sister already. And we didn’t know that Nakadhilu is having other kids.” (Interview, Windhoek, April 15, 2017)

As scholars of inheritance in Namibia have maintained, the transfer of property from the deceased to his or her family is a highly fractious issue; stories of family members “robbed” of cattle and other forms of property abound (Gordon 2005).<sup>33</sup> One issue that has not been explored, however, and which is clearly relevant to many Namibian citizens born in exile is the extent to which the circumstances of their exile births have made them vulnerable in inheritance disputes. As this case illustrates, birth to a foreign woman in exile undermined Mawazo’s capacity to access her father’s cattle, for the eldest descendent of her father’s first wife could claim the cattle on behalf of the “legal, Namibian children” without even acknowledging the existence of children from exile.<sup>34</sup> Mawazo might have been able to use her repatriation form to make a counter-claim, and, apparently, she had traveled to Windhoek with the form and other documents in preparation for her father’s initial meeting with the SWAPO official (i.e., Frederick Matongo). But Mawazo was cut out of this meeting, and the repatriation form was lost,

allegedly stolen by Francina. Even Frederick Matongo's experience of exile, and indeed of Kongwa, where he had also trained as a guerilla soldier during the mid-1960s, did not lead to an investigation of Nicodemus Nakadhilu's potential heirs from exile.

Such experiences of being marginalized both by the father's relatives and by the larger SWAPO "family" may, over the years, have intensified Mawazo's desire to reconnect with her family in Tanzania. Indeed, since at least the early 2000s, she has attempted to engage SWAPO officials in conversation about the circumstances in which she is living in Namibia and the possibility of traveling to Tanzania with SWAPO's support. The responses that she has received are slight variations on the refrain of an official at the Ministry of Veteran Affairs a few years ago: "You children of liberation, you don't have respect... SWAPO didn't request anybody to bring his children from exile to Namibia... When you came here, it's because you wanted to come" (Interview, Nakadhilu, Windhoek, November 2, 2013). Such dismissive language, combined with Mawazo's life experiences, make her identify readily with other "children of the liberation struggle," and she has registered with the Namibian government as one of their number in the hope that, through them, she might find regular employment. Nevertheless, Mawazo continues to eke out a living on the outskirts of Katutura with little to secure her well-being beyond her precarious ties to some family and friends.

### The Value of Refugee Biography

Stories such as Mawazo's are all but overlooked today, not because they are so unusual or difficult to find, but rather because they require viewing Southern Africa's exile history from an unconventional perspective. Rather than focusing directly on exiled liberation movements and the nation-states associated with them—the current focal point of public historical debates and regional exile historiographies—we should draw our attention more to individual exiles/refugees whose lives extend beyond the contours of this national frame. Among the persons from whom we can learn is Mawazo Nakadhilu, whose life in Namibia continues to unfold in the shadow of her exile childhood.

Mawazo's biography speaks to national narratives of exile and their limitations in at least two important respects. First, it illuminates experiences common to many Namibians born in exile which are marginal to Namibia's official exile history and should be carefully considered. Although roughly ten thousand people have successfully registered with the Namibian government as "children of the liberation struggle," struggle kids' calls for government assistance have met resistance from much of the Namibian public, which has argued that these "children" should be treated no differently than other Namibians of their age, many of whom are also unemployed and face similar personal problems.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, people who advance this argument have a point; much of the Namibian population of working-age is unemployed, including 50 percent or more of Namibian youth.<sup>36</sup> Under



the circumstances, unemployed struggle children appear similar to many Africans from across the continent, whose aspirations for social mobility have been blocked and whose lives appear to be caught between childhood and adulthood (Honwana & de Boeck 2005; Fumanti 2007; Metsola 2015:214–23).

Nevertheless, some of the issues which SWAPO's struggle children have faced distinguish them from Namibians who did not live in exile and from Namibians who entered exile only as adults. Here it is crucial to note the significance of “confounded kinship” in Mawazo's biography.<sup>37</sup> Contestations surrounding Mawazo's familial belonging did not end with her exile childhood, but rather have followed her into her adult life in Namibia, undermining her ability to access rights as a Namibian citizen and familial support in a socio-economic system that undercuts her efforts to meet her basic needs. It follows that Mawazo, and other struggle children like her, carry an especially heavy burden in their ongoing efforts to become full adults in Namibia. Their stories, therefore, are worthy of special consideration in Namibia today.

Second, Mawazo's biography draws attention to “home” and home-making among exiled Southern Africans, a topic easily overlooked when the experiences of exiles are channeled into national narratives but clearly visible when tracing the trajectory of an individual exile/refugee's life. For example, Mawazo, by virtue of her father's choice to travel to Tanzania in the 1960s, was born a Namibian refugee, but she could never have claimed Tanzanian refugee status because the organization that forcibly removed her from her and her mother's country of birth was her father's internationally recognized (Namibian) liberation movement. Although Mawazo's story presents a particularly dramatic inversion of categories, such inversions are mirrored in the stories of many former exiles, not least of the struggle children, who did not need to cross any borders to be labeled refugees, but who were often displaced from countries where they lived under the orders of a liberation movement. Repeatedly, these orders were couched in the language of familial obligation, such as when Mzee Kaukungwa described his removal of Mawazo and others from Tanzania as part of SWAPO's efforts to “look after... its children.” In this manner, understandings of children's belonging to a national family and home were asserted among the members of an exile community.

Other features of exile home-making in Mawazo's biography are similarly striking. For Nicodemus Nakadhilu and other Namibians based at the Kongwa camp from the mid-1960s, Kongwa became not only a place of exile, but also a home. This sense of “home-ness” was created through relationships that exiles developed with people in the surrounding community, above all through local women with whom they had sexual relationships and parented children. Although, for a time, political circumstances obliged SWAPO to turn a blind eye to these budding families, the latter were a threat to the liberation movement because they presented the possibility that it would not be able to mobilize these exiles to liberate the homeland, for they might have

begun to feel that they were not “in exile” at all. Once large numbers of Namibian women had entered exile and SWAPO had established its broader system of camps, exile home-making presented new possibilities, allowing SWAPO to promote families as an extension of the nation, with offspring who could be shaped into national subjects in the camp environment. Distinctions between family as liberation movement and family as kin never ceased to exist, however, and tensions over these distinctions repeatedly emerged. Mawazo’s removal from her Tanzanian family highlights these tensions sharply, because those who raised her for her first eleven years were never part of SWAPO’s nation-building project. Nevertheless, it is important to note that Nicodemus Nakadhilu, Mzee Kaukungwa, and Johanna Kaukungwa (among others) were not simply functionaries of their liberation movement, but also individuals with whom Mawazo had interpersonal, parent-child relationships. Since “repatriation,” SWAPO’s significance as family has become diluted. Nevertheless, it remains poignant, shaped not only by expectations of parental care created in the camps, but also by the vulnerability of the struggle children, some of whom have rarely felt at home among families in Namibia.

Such perspectives will remain marginal as long as exile is associated with generic or clichéd figures rather than specific persons who sought refuge and made lives across international borders. Here I have drawn attention especially to Southern African exile historiography, which, despite the increasing input of (auto)biographies, has barely explored how biography as a genre may open up the field and speak to public concerns. The same point also applies to wider refugee scholarship, which, as previously noted, focuses on a historically shallow range of refugee experiences. Mawazo’s contribution to these bodies of literature is to highlight how people created homes in a late-twentieth-century Southern African exile context and the aftermath of this exile home-making. As such, she draws attention not only to histories and historical legacies in Southern Africa, but also to how refugee scholarship may be enriched through engaging this regional African past.

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## Notes

1. Although first mobilized in 2008 under the name "children of the liberation struggle," Namibians born under SWAPO's care in exile have publicly sought jobs and other benefits from the Namibian government since the late 1990s. For discussion of how SWAPO's struggle children figure within the politics of exile "reintegration" in Namibia, see Metsola 2010:583–618 and 2015:102–20.
2. For discussion of the significance of family metaphors for SWAPO members in exile, see also Akawa 2014:120–121 and Metsola 2015:97–101, 132–33.
3. See also Liisa Malkki's seminal work, *Purity and Exile* (1995a) which theorizes exile as a generative, productive space.
4. In the Namibian context, see especially the autobiography of SWAPO's first President and official Founding Father, Sam Nujoma (2001). Namibians born in exile have also written autobiographies, which, to differing extents, present quite exceptional lives in terms of a shared, "exile child" experience. See Nghiwete 2010 and Engombe 2014.
5. For texts advocating similar approaches to biography and "history in person," see Rassool 2004; Holland and Lave 2001.
6. For texts that have critically engaged regional exile historiography through biography, see Hayes 2014; Alexander 2017; Williams 2017b.
7. In addition to Malkki, other anthropologists have advocated approaches to transnational border crossing through attending to the life histories and/or personal narratives of individuals. See Marx 1990; Englund 2002; Barrett 2009.
8. For discussion of the "freedom fighter refugee," including how this figure was constructed and whom it excluded, see Williams 2020a, 2020b.
9. One key exception to this nationalist trend in the exile family literature is Arianna Lissoni and Maria Suriano's "Married to the ANC" (2014). See also discussion of sexual relations between Zimbabweans and Mozambicans in Mungambe 2017.
10. For further references and discussion, see my introduction to this forum on "Refugees and African History."
11. Following its political independence in December 1961, President Julius Nyerere articulated the country's "Open Door" policy, granting displaced people refugee status on a *prima facie*, or "at first sight," basis (Tague 2019:5).
12. SWAPO's Kongwa camp was closed following an uprising that occurred there in February 1971. If Namibians resided in the camp in the years immediately following the uprising (a contested point), they were very small in number.
13. Ovamboland is the name of the territory that was reserved for those classified as Ovambo during the apartheid era. It remains a common colloquial name for this part of Namibia.
14. According to Mawazo, her father received specialized military training in Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union (Interview, Windhoek, April 15, 2017). It's impossible

- to know from her account when he received this training, but it's likely that he was one of many sent from Kongwa to the Soviet Union in 1969.
15. It is unclear where Nicodemus Nakadhilu was sent after leaving Kongwa, but he is likely to have made his way to southwestern Zambia and southern Angola, where most SWAPO guerrillas were based in the early 1970s and the late 1970s, respectively.
  16. Unless otherwise noted, all references to Mawazo's experience draw from three interviews with her (at Windhoek, November 2, 2013; September 3, 2014; and April 5, 2017).
  17. The immediate impetus for this migration was the April 1974 coup in Portugal, which enabled Namibians living on Namibia's northern border and suffering from apartheid state violence to cross into Angola. For further discussion, see Williams 2015:96–101.
  18. These points are drawn from eleven corroborating interviews, most of them with people who live in or near Kongwa.
  19. For discussion of how SWAPO used "refugees," including "refugee children," to secure aid after the South African attack on SWAPO's camp at Cassinga, Angola, see Williams 2015:30–61.
  20. Discourses on "cooking" or being "cooked" are recurring in interviews with civilians about SWAPO guerrillas.
  21. Beyond the eleven children that SWAPO successfully reclaimed in Tanzania during the mid-1980s, there were some (possibly many) others who never moved to SWAPO camps and live scattered throughout the country.
  22. As White Zuberi Mwanalila emphasized in one of our interviews, places such as Kongwa and Ibwaga were much easier to access than other villages where Tanzanian-Namibian children may have lived (Interview, Kongwa, June 19, 2013). It is also worth noting that other socio-political pressures influenced people's movement in this region of Tanzania at this time, due to the ujamaa policies of Julius Nyerere's government.
  23. It is unclear from Mawazo's testimony if her father and this woman were legally married, but they did have one child.
  24. In addition to Mawazo, Mzee Kaukungwa (interview, Oluno, August 25, 2012) and Nashakale Nghaamwa (interview, Kongwa, August 9, 2012) have also shared accounts of this move. Although there are some discrepancies across accounts, it appears that, with the exception of Eva, all of the Tanzanian-Namibian children collected by Kaukungwa initially traveled to Nyango. Thereafter, some traveled to camps in Angola for particular kinds of training.
  25. Kwanza Sul, SWAPO's camp located in the province of the same name in Angola, was considerably larger than Nyango, accommodating more than 25,000 people.
  26. At one stage, the camp authorities prevented the Tanzanian children from congregating together to ensure that they learned to speak with the Namibian children (Interview, Nakadhilu, Windhoek, November 2, 2013).
  27. Many Namibian youth living in the SWAPO camps were sent to Nigeria and other West African countries to complete their schooling during the 1980s. By the end of 1988, Mawazo had completed ninth grade.
  28. One of the Tanzanian-Namibian children at Nyango, Nashikale Nghaamwa, did not return to Namibia for long. According to her, she repatriated to Namibia and, shortly thereafter, was able to travel to Tanzania, where she returned to live with her Tanzanian mother (Interview, Nghaamwa, Kongwa, August 9, 2012).

Nashikale is the only child whom SWAPO moved from central Tanzania to the SWAPO camps who resides in Tanzania today.

29. It is unclear from my interviews with Mawazo whether this threat resulted from the authorities' knowledge of the activities of Nicodemus Nakadhilu and other family members who had joined SWAPO in exile or from family members' efforts to assist the guerrillas generally.
30. Some of the Tanzanian-Namibian exile children whose fathers died before 1989 adopted the Kaukungwa surname on their repatriation forms. The Kaukungwas supported some of these children after their arrival in Namibia as well. In 2013, when I interviewed the Kaukungwas, they shared some basic information about the children but indicated that they had not spoken to most of them for years (Interview, Kaukungwas, Windhoek, October 30, 2013; November 5, 2013).
31. Mawazo first volunteered for and later earned a small income from Development Aid from People to People (DAPP) Namibia. She worked in the organization's Total and Complete Eradication Program, whose purpose is to end AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria in Namibia.
32. Nicodemus Nakadhilu died prior to the creation of the Namibian Government's Ministry of Veteran Affairs in 2008, when ex-combatants received money and other benefits directly from the government. Nevertheless, the government did provide cattle and other rewards to ex-combatants on an ad-hoc basis prior to this time.
33. Especially in Ovamboland, inheritance problems have often been discussed in terms of matrilineal "property grabbing," in which maternal relatives of the deceased man claim his property upon his death, leaving nothing for his wife and children. Nevertheless, there is fluidity in how inheritance works there in practice.
34. According to Mawazo, John Nakadhilu fathered four children in exile. These include Eva, Mawazo, a child born to a Namibian woman in Tanzania, and a child born to an Angolan woman in Angola. None of these children received any inheritance, and Mawazo has never met the Angolan child.
35. Lalli Metsola reports that by 2012, the Namibian government had registered close to 10,000 struggle children, about 1000 of whom had been offered jobs in the Namibian army (Metsola 2015:118).
36. For discussion of youth unemployment figures in Namibia, see Melber 2014:182, 251. Although most struggle children, including Mawazo, would no longer qualify in these statistics as "youth," at the time of the 2008 protests the vast majority were under thirty-five years of age.
37. I am indebted to an anonymous reviewer for the insightful phrase "confounded kinship."