Katutura kids
what tugs
from underneath the grey blanket of cold and smog
Katutura kids at last
writhe out of the
smothering
and toyi-toyi march
up the street
Ben Ulenga

Preface
We always leave Namibia feeling that we have attended a school of life which helps us in addressing our own problems.
Nelson Mandela, 1991
Last Steps to Uhuru is an eye-witness account of life and events before, during and after Namibia's independence in March 1990. As Nelson Mandela suggests, Namibia's transition to independence holds many lessons for an emerging democratic, non-racial South Africa. I attempt to illustrate some of these lessons in this book. For example: how racial segregation and discrimination thrive long after the abolition of apartheid legislation; the tactics the white minority adopts to maintain economic and political power having committed itself - in theory - to democratisation; the difficulties a liberation movement has returning home and transforming itself into a political party, and then an elected government; and how the black majority reacts to these changes after so many years of struggle. Just as
it did with many of its past policies of oppression, the South African government used Namibia as a testing ground to find its own formula for change - dirty tricks and all.

But there is more to this book than just making Namibia a case study for South Africa. For too long, Namibia has been overshadowed by events in her southern neighbour. While most people know about the South African liberation struggle and the reasons for it, few know about Namibia's equally momentous fight to rid itself of an equally unjust minority regime. Western journalists who bothered to venture outside the cosy confines of central Windhoek were always amazed at the scale of the South African occupation, the ferocity of the war, and the extent of the poverty endured by black Namibians in the country's segregated townships and tribal homelands. And yet it took the carnage of April 1990 - the start of the process which was supposed to deliver Namibia to peace and independence - to put Namibia onto the world's front pages and television screens, and then only for as long as the smell of newsworthy bloodshed lingered in the air.

What happened before, after and even during the more publicised moments of Namibia's transition to independence still remains a mystery to many. Last Steps to Uhuru is an eyewitness account of the Namibian independence process by someone who was privileged enough to be there throughout. It is not a chronological history, but rather an account of how Namibians responded to the events and political decisions which hopefully their own historians will document in future. Working for The Namibian newspaper as I did between 1988 and 1991, I was thrown into the thick of the unique happenings of those three years. As a result, this is quite a personalised account, but one which I believe carries the hallmark of credibility earned by the newspaper I served on.

This book is intended as a modest tribute to all my former colleagues at The Namibian, as well as to the people they represent. I hope you enjoy it.

Acknowledgment

There might be one name on the cover, but this book is the result of hard work, patience, faith and understanding by many; those who spent countless hours editing, and proof-reading the manuscript and offering invaluable advice, New Namibia Books, the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, my former colleagues at The Namibian, and my family and friends, both in Namibia and Britain. To all of you: "Kulupa nomeho, mayego ndiku taasinine." ("Grow old with your eyes and don't worry about your teeth because I can chew your food for you.")

David Lush
Windhoek, January 1993

Map 1 Namibia in Africa

ZAM I I A
ANGOLA
Introduction

"Namibia? Where the hell is that?" I was asked on countless occasions as I informed friends and relatives of my imminent departure from a steady job as a reporter in sleepy Hastings on the south coast of Britain. I was off to join The Namibian newspaper in strife-torn southern Africa.

It had taken me some time to find out where Namibia was as my atlas referred to this huge land - three and a half times the size of Britain, sandwiched between the Namib and Kalahari deserts - as "South West Africa".

"Namibia's to the left of Botswana and up a bit from South Africa," I eventually was able to tell people, and their faces would then show recognition.

"Ah, we know where South Africa is," they would say. "But as for Namb...Namba ...what did you say the place was called?"

Further research was hampered by the lack of material written about Namibia; I could find few books in the local library which even mentioned the place, and reports from the country seldom appeared in the newspapers, although I knew there was a war going on there.

I was 23 years old and had dreams of scaling the peaks of journalism by means more glamorous than grafting away on provincial publications in rain-soaked Britain. I also had a burning desire to travel, so I decided to kill two birds with one stone and started applying for newspaper jobs in South Africa. South Africa attracted me because it was hot, it was regularly in the news, and overflowed with good music. But I was out of luck. The rejections dribbled through my letter box, one in particular standing out.

"Why you wish to travel half-way across the globe to work in a country where journalists are persecuted and vilified is beyond me," wrote the co-editor of the Johannesburg Weekly Mail, Anton Harber. "But I wish you luck in your attempts to be persecuted and vilified."

Then I heard about The Namibian in Windhoek, and wrote to the Editor Gwen Lister. After all, I thought, if Namibia was a South African colony, which I had by then discovered it was, then surely there must be some action there worth writing about. After much pestering, Gwen eventually agreed to take me on as a volunteer in the paper's training department, but by the time I left Britain, I still knew little about the country to which I was going.

Britain's ignorance of Namibia is staggering considering the part British governments and companies have played in the country's tortured evolution. The British started exploiting Namibia's bountiful natural
resources as early as the 1840s, stripping some of Namibia’s off-shore islands of valuable guano deposits before annexing the natural deep water harbour of Walvis Bay in 1878. But the British government held back from incorporating the country’s interior into its expanding empire, and instead the Germans explored and then occupied much of the country. However, Britain did manage to seize control of the diamond fields discovered in south-western Namibia towards the end of the century, and the British have continued to reap huge profits from Namibia’s rich mineral deposits ever since.

Namibia acquired its modern boundaries in 1884/1885 when the European emperors divided Africa amongst themselves at the Berlin Conference. The bulk of Namibia went to the Germans and was given the name German South West Africa, but Britain held on to the tiny enclave of Walvis Bay and its off-shore islands which were administered as part of the Cape Colony, 1 200 km to the south.

Needless to say, indigenous Namibians were not consulted about the colonial take-over, and between 1904 and 1907 the Herero and Nama people rose up against the Germans. The latter responded with genocide, German troops driving the Nama rebels deep into the southern Namib desert and the Hereros from their fertile farm land in the centre of the country to barren wastes on the edge of the Kalahari Desert in the east.

An estimated 80 000 Namibians - more than half the population of the central and southern regions - were killed in battle, executed, died in concentration camps, and perished along with their cattle in the deserts. Settlers then seized all viable land for themselves and set the black population to work as semi-slaves on their farms and in the mines.

The Germans’ rule was short lived and in 1915, after the outbreak of the First World War, the South African army invaded Namibia and took control of the colony on behalf of the anti-German alliance.

With the declaration of peace in 1918, South Africa was rewarded for its efforts by being granted a League of Nations mandate to administer "South West Africa" on the condition that it promoted the "material and moral well-being and social progress" of Namibia’s indigenous inhabitants.

Britain and other leading League of Nations states then turned their backs as the South Africans continued where the Germans had left off, using war planes to bomb the Bondelswarts of south-eastern Namibia off their land, and encouraging more white settlers to take over everything of value. Far from having their lives uplifted as the mandate required, black Namibians were robbed of their land and denied citizenship in their own country.

Namibia was then all but forgotten until after the Second World War when the United Nations took over responsibility for all League of Nations mandates which, the world body then decided, should be guided towards independence. Any plans the UN might have had for Namibia’s self-determination
were thwarted by the rise to power in 1948 of the Nationalist Party in South Africa, which instead made moves to incorporate Namibia into South Africa as a fifth province.

One of the world's biggest gemstone diamond deposits, large quantities of copper, zinc, uranium and salt, not to mention vast tracts of land ideal for cattle farming, sea waters laden with fish, and a pool of cheap migrant labour, made Namibia too valuable an asset to let go of. Not that the South Africans had that much direct control over Namibia's mineral wealth as this mostly lay in the hands of overseas companies. Instead, the Nationalists contented themselves with administering Namibia, and imposing its policies of apartheid throughout the country.

Black people not employed in the mines, farms and factories were forced to go and live in segregated tribal "reserves" where they were left to eke out a living from impoverished, second-rate land, while the whites reserved the best land for themselves. All this made Namibia fertile soil for the seeds of African nationalism propagated throughout the continent after World War Two, and in the mid-1950s, a group of Namibian contract workers based in Cape Town founded what was later to become the liberation movement Swapo.

At the time, these Swapo members worked closely with their compatriots belonging to another Namibian liberation movement, Swanu, and popular support for these fledgling organisations rapidly grew, leading to the first significant wave of black resistance to white minority rule since the Herero and Nama uprisings of 1904-7. The South Africans responded with force, firing on unarmed demonstrators in Windhoek in December 1959, killing 12 people and injuring many others, before hounding the protest organisers into exile.

Here the young freedom fighters tried to bring the plight of the Namibian people and their demands for independence to the attention of the United Nations. For several years they continued to petition the world body, asking it to force South Africa to relinquish control of Namibia. The UN, still dominated by Western countries, listened and called on South Africa to withdraw, but took no concrete action to back up this demand. Liberia and Ethiopia took Namibia's case to the International Court of Justice in the Hague, asking the world court to decide who had the right to run Namibia. But after four years of deliberation, the court dismissed the case in 1966, saying that Ethiopia and Liberia had no right to bring the case on Namibia's behalf.

Frustrated by the apathy of the international community, and no longer able to tolerate Pretoria's continued use of brute force to suppress the Namibian population, Swapo - which had become the most prominent of the two liberation movements - launched the armed struggle in a bid to forcibly remove South Africa from Namibia. Swapo leader Andimba Toivo ya Toivo explained the decision to take up arms when he and 36 other Namibians stood trial in South Africa for "terrorism" in 1967.

"Is it surprising that, in such times, my countrymen have taken up arms? Violence is truly fearsome, but who would not defend his property and himself against a robber? And we believe that South Africa has robbed us of our country." Ya
Toivo was sentenced to 20 years in prison, much of which he served with Nelson Mandela on Robben Island.

The first clash between members of Swapo's armed wing, the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (Plan) and the South African security forces took place deep in the bush of far northern Namibia near the village of Ongulumbashe on August 26, 1966. But with Angola still ruled by a Portuguese regime sympathetic to the white minority South African government, Plan was forced to operate from bases in newly independent Zambia, infiltrating into Namibia through the narrow Caprivi Strip.

It was not until 1975, when Angola achieved independence after a coup in Portugal, that the incoming MPLA government allowed Swapo to move its headquarters to Luanda.

Plan was then able to operate from bases in southern Angola which afforded the guerrillas far better access to Namibia. The coming to power of the left-wing MPLA in Angola and its sister organisation Frelimo in Mozambique - Portugal's other colony in southern Africa - threw the region into turmoil. Angola was plunged into civil war as rival groups the FNLA and Unita tried to overthrow the MPLA, while in Mozambique, the rebel movement Renamo tried to dislodge Frelimo.

Fearing the inspiration independence in Angola and Mozambique might give the black majority in Namibia and South Africa, and paranoid about socialist governments taking power so close to home, South Africa immediately sided with Unita and Renamo in a bid to crush the MPLA and Frelimo respectively. Pretoria also sensed that Swapo and the ANC would establish military bases in the newly independent countries. No sooner had the MPLA come to power than tens of thousands of South African troops joined Unita in an offensive which took them to the outskirts of the Angolan capital Luanda before they were repelled by an MPLA army reinforced with Cuban troops. Although South Africa staged several withdrawals from Angola over the years, its troops never really left, Pretoria remaining - along with the United States - a consistent backer of Unita. By now the South Africans were not just waging a war against Swapo, but they were on what they believed to be a crusade against communism.

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and Namibia was the front line. Meanwhile diplomatic efforts continued to try and secure Namibia's independence. In 1971, the International Court of Justice reconsidered Namibia's case and ruled that South Africa's continued occupation of the territory was illegal. The gradual arrival at the UN of many newly independent countries from the developing world began to radicalise the world body, and in 1976 the UN General Assembly declared Swapo as the "sole and authentic representative of the Namibian people". That same year, the UN passed Resolution 385 which called for democratic elections to be held in Namibia (which included Walvis Bay) under the control of the UN, but South Africa refused to comply. In a bid to break the deadlock, five countries with strong colonial ties with Namibia and influence in South Africa -
Britain, France, USA, West Germany and Canada - formed the Western "Contact Group" to negotiate new terms for Namibian independence with Pretoria. After months of discussion, the "gang of five" came up with a plan acceptable to both Swapo and South Africa, and this was formulated into UN Security Council Resolution 435 which was passed in September 1978. But South Africa reneged on its earlier agreement and refused to implement the plan, deciding instead to hold its own elections in Namibia which, under highly dubious conditions and without the participation of Swapo, saw an internal "government" - dominated by the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA) - elected to "administer" the territory. By the time the UN formally passed Resolution 435, South Africa had already made its real intentions clear. On May 4, nine days after then-Prime Minister in Pretoria John Vorster had accepted the Contact Group's Namibian independence plan, South African troops attacked Swapo refugee camps inside Angola. The main attack was on the camp at Cassinga, 200 km from the Namibian border, and here more than 600 refugees, mostly women and children, were slaughtered. Hundreds of other Swapo exiles, the majority unarmed refugees, were also butchered at Swapo's Vietnam camp just inside Angola, not far from Ruacana. After the tragic events of 1978, the liberation war intensified, and yet more South African troops were sent to "the border" to fight in Namibia and Angola. The South Africans tried to camouflage its continued occupation by forming administrations made up of both white and black politicians compliant to South African manipulation - and also by changing the look of the security forces. Tens of thousands of Namibians, both black and white, were drafted into the newly formed South West African Territorial Force (SWATF) and Swapol (South West African Police), while the civil service and state broadcasting corporation became nominally independent.

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of their South African overlords. However, in reality all remained in the control of South Africans. Meanwhile the port of Walvis Bay, by now of vital importance to the Namibian economy, was reintegrated into South Africa on the pretext that it had once been part of Britain's Cape Colony. As a compromise to the South Africans, Resolution 435 - unlike the earlier Resolution 385 - had not insisted that Walvis Bay be included as part of Namibia. However, Security Council Resolution 432 confirmed that Walvis Bay is an integral part of Namibia and called for its early reintegration into the country. Both in 1981 and 1984, South Africa returned to the negotiating table to discuss the implementation of Resolution 435, but Pretoria used Ronald Reagan's insistence that Namibian independence should be linked with the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola as an excuse to eventually scupper the talks. With the prospects of Namibian independence again fading, Gwen Lister and a handful of like-minded colleagues started The Namibian, with the aim of campaigning for the implementation of Resolution 435, and exposing human rights abuses which were, on the whole, ignored by the rest of the country's media.
In August 1985, the first edition of the paper hit the streets, and quickly established itself amongst the black community, who at last had a medium sympathetic to their views and aspirations. But in so doing, The Namibian angered the authorities, and the latter set out to silence the paper and its staff: phones were tapped; post intercepted; staff were harassed, beaten and sometimes jailed; and the paper's offices were the target of teargas and sniper attacks. However, all this only strengthened the staff's resolve to continue with their task of highlighting the abuses of the colonial regime - in particular the atrocities committed by the South African security forces in the war zone - and thus provide the other side to the Namibian story, a side largely ignored by the Namibian media, not to mention the rest of the world.

By the time I left for Namibia in February 1988, life for the majority of Namibians had steadily deteriorated since the British and Germans, in the name of civilisation, first took an interest in Namibia more than a century beforehand. Of the small population of 1.5 million people, six per cent were white, 94 per cent were black. Seventy per cent of the black population lived in the countryside, and yet 77 per cent of fertile farming land was taken up by white-owned farms. Almost all those black people not working on the land worked as migrant labourers in the mines, factories and homes of white people, many hundreds of kilometres away from their families whom they would seldom see more than once a year.

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The Gross Domestic Product of whites was R5,800 per person while that of black people was R330. The Gross National Product was 20-30 per cent below the GDP, indicating that a huge amount of the wealth created in Namibia was sent abroad, usually in the form of profits for multi-national companies. And still Namibians were not citizens of their own country, but were only entitled to South African passports. It was perhaps a good thing that I had been unable to find out much about Namibia before I went there as I would have been baffled by what I would have learnt. I was heading for a place where you made a political statement simply by the name you chose to call the country by; "South West Africa or SWA" for white conservatives, "Deutsch-Siidwestafrika" for remaining hard-line German nationalists still caught in their turn-of-the-century time warp, "South West Africa/ Namibia" for the South African authorities, and "Namibia" for everyone else.

As I travelled to London's Heathrow Airport on a bleak winter's afternoon, news came over the car radio that more than 20 people had been killed in a horrific bomb blast at a bank in the northern Namibian town of Oshakati. My parents looked at me and I looked at them. None of us said a word.

Welkom in Suidwes
"We abolished apartheid here ten years ago," the Afrikaner bureaucrat told me as we started our descent into Windhoek's JG Strijdom Airport two hours after taking off from Johannesburg. "You will find South West is not like South Africa
at all. I have a black man living next door to me, the Minister of Health. He is a very pleasant man, we get on very well.”

As a naive, young British tourist, I listened with some surprise as my neighbour explained that the Group Areas Act, which made it illegal for black people to live in the same area as white people and vice-versa, had been scrapped in South African-occupied Namibia in 1978, although this and other apartheid legislation was still enforced in South Africa itself.

My knowledge of Namibia was scant, but I knew that, for more than a century, black Namibians had been fighting to rid their country first of German occupation and then of South Africa’s "apartheid colonial rule". As a passive supporter of the anti-apartheid movement, I knew too that the liberation movement Swapo had been waging a 21-year war against South Africa's unrelenting and racist rule of this, "Africa’s last colony”. I had read about horrifying examples of the white minority's brutal oppression of the black majority, and the former's unchecked rape of Namibia's natural resources.

Now, as I was about to set foot in Namibia for the first time to see the situation for myself, I was being told in all sincerity that apartheid no longer existed. I was confused, so I sat and listened quietly as my neighbour continued to explain why “South West” was not the same segregated military state as South Africa, while the South African Airways jet headed into the brilliant February sunset. The sun reached out and embraced us as it was sucked over the horizon, the dying rays slicing through the evening clouds and reflecting off the plane's silver wings to shed a golden glow a goodnight kiss - across our faces. Thousands of metres below stretched the African savanna, given a deep, healthy, matt green colour by the recent rains, but still wrinkled by dry riverbeds unable to hold the life-giving moisture which raced along their arteries in the flash floods so common at this time of year.

Speckled thorn trees cast tired shadows across the face of this ancient landscape. In places the old but strangely supple skin of the earth was stretched over up-welling mountains, benign cancerous growths caused from suckling so many species over so many millenium. Mother Africa, so old and yet still so beautiful, and we, up there in the borderless sky, were the only humans in sight. In such a setting, the bureaucrat's talk of a non-apartheid Namibia seemed perfectly credible. Perhaps I would arrive to find the situation had changed overnight; that the war had stopped and both blacks and whites were now living in harmony. Or perhaps everything I had read and heard about the country was simply exaggerated propaganda?

Three days staying in the white suburbs of Johannesburg had already taught me that apartheid was more subtle than I had expected. I had arrived thinking I would see riots, burning barricades and armed police at every street corner, but found instead peace and tranquillity in the few parts of the City of Gold I had visited. Instead of riot police, there were black newspaper vendors on every street corner of the leafy though unpretentious suburb of Westdene where I had stayed with a
friend of friends. The radio did not belch propaganda and reports of war and unrest, but rather played the latest British and American pop releases. When I had gone into the city centre, the heart of South African business and commerce, I had found the place bustling with black faces, and had learnt that the majority of shops in the central business district (CBD) were in fact run by black entrepreneurs. I had wandered through the district of Hillbrow - not far from the CBD and Johannesburg's equivalent to the old Soho of London - and found that most of the tenants of the apartment blocks in this supposedly whites-only area where in fact black.

In a desperate bid to disassociate myself from the evils I perceived were associated with my bleached white skin, I had smiled at every black person I made eye contact with ...and had been propositioned by two prostitutes - one male and one female - and offered dagga by a laid-back dude in Joubert Park as a result.

But throughout my stay, I had not met any black people socially, nor for that matter any Afrikaners, and it was not until I had boarded the plane for Windhoek that I came across the latter - "my eerste Boere"!

I felt as if I was gatecrashing a members-only social night at an exclusive sports club; almost everyone on the plane seemed to know each other. The sound of laughter, the cracking of beer can ring-pulls and the rattle of Afrikaans - the harsh g's and rolled r's - crescendoed as the plane began to fill. Elderly men with craggy, red faces and silver hair dressed in beige safari suits or thick checked shirts, long shorts, knee-length thick woolen socks and sturdy brogues chatted together, while middle-aged men with well-groomed, flowing hair, bristling moustaches and wearing brightly coloured casual shirts and long trousers which highlighted their deeply tanned skins swigged Windhoek Export and exchanged hearty greetings. Their women, the "tannies" (aunties) - invariably dumpy, ugly women dressed either in faded cotton print dresses or, for the more adventurous younger generation, pale pink, green or grey slacks and blouses - sat silently next to their husbands, or gaggled together in earnest conversation.

Young soldiers, some barely out of school and dressed in their khaki uniforms and smart, turquoise or black berets, also joined the flight, while dotted around the plane like full-stops in the middle of sentences were a handful of besuited black men who, in between fleeting glances at the festivities going on around them, stared blankly out of the window or at the drab inflight magazine.

Once we were airborne, the air hostesses started marching up and down the aisle serving meals and refreshments. The passengers around me joked with the women, but I received very brusque service when I confessed to the well-built, peroxide-blonde stewardess that I did not speak Afrikaans.

The meal over, the babble of voices rose once again and passengers started passing plastic cutlery down the plane to the front of the aircraft where a squat old woman was collecting the utensils into her handbag while her husband, a wizened, grey-haired man who owned a farm a few hours out of Windhoek,
gabbled away to his neighbours who laughed heartily with him. I asked the bureaucrat what was happening as the latter enthusiastically collected together a handful of forks and passed them to a man two rows in front of us, who in turn handed the cutlery to the farmer's wife.

"Aggh, the blacks which work on the old man's farm still eat with their fingers," my neighbour explained, "so the farmer and his wife want to teach them to be civilised and use knives and forks. They thought they could use these. See, I told you South West was a lot different than the Republic!" He burst out laughing and proceeded to tell all those around what he had just told "hierie Engelsman". I was the only one who seemed not to understand the joke.

Anyone in Britain with a basic knowledge of South Africa had heard of Soweto but, if I was anyone to go by, most probably thought this was the region's sole and authentic "black township". It was with some surprise, therefore, that on my second day in Windhoek the Namibian's freelance photographer John Liebenberg stumbled into the newspaper's office in the centre of Windhoek and announced that he was taking me to Katutura, the city's own black township. Drive north from Windhoek's well-groomed, almost sanitised central business district, with its stylish mixture of old German architecture - including steep-sloping roofs designed to keep the snow off - and modest, modern but tasteful multi-storey office blocks, and you are soon on a six lane highway which bisects a conglomeration of sturdy, spacious but practical single-storey houses which made up the suburb of Windhoek North; built in the 1930s to house working class Afrikaner railway employees and their families.

Rising above the red-painted, corrugated zinc roofs and neat backyards was Windhoek State ("white") Hospital, a ten-storey concrete structure, mirrored across a two kilometre stretch of uninhabited scrubland by the "black" Katutura Hospital; gateway to the township. Here, at a set of traffic lights, the highway split in various directions with the offshoots leading to different parts of the township. Opposite the hospital, and strategically placed at the city-road intersection, was the police station. Beyond this, clinging to a crumbling, rock-strewn landscape of small hills bisected by dry river beds, were thousands and thousands of small, breezeblock and corrugated iron shacks. Above the rusting roofs towered floodlight pylons which peered down on the township like mutant metal giraffes with many heads.

The whites-only Windhoek City Council (municipality) which was responsible for Katutura said the spotlights were installed to provide those living in the township with light, but the residents believed that the glaring beacons, erected one for every half square kilometre, were there for the benefit of the police in times of civil unrest.

Over the road from the police station was the old compound, built by the municipality to house migrant workers coming to the city to work in the factories and homes of the white business people. The original compound was made up of single-storey shacks built around a large square. At one end of the square was the
only entrance through which the workers could enter and leave. All the inmates were supposed to spend the night at the compound, and it was a criminal offence to sleep elsewhere, yet visitors were not allowed into the place day or night. A more modern, two-storey, red-brick compound hostel - which looked more like a cross between a factory and a multi-storey car park than a place for people to live - had been built later on a large site adjoining the old compound. The movement of compound residents, like all black people, was severely restricted by a system of pass laws. Black migrants could only stay in the city - and other towns around the country - if they had work. Those allowed to stay were issued with passes which restricted their movement to the areas of the city in which they worked during the day and where they lived during the night. But as urban migration increased during the '70s and early '80s, this system of influx control collapsed under the weight of its own bureaucracy, and the old compound became an overcrowded, squalid cesspit of humanity.

Welcome to Suidwes

Unable to control the crime and near anarchy which flourished there, the authorities dynamited the modern hostel. Inhabitants of the hostel were moved to one-roomed hovels built on hilly wasteland at Hakahana on the furthest-flung outskirts of Katutura, leaving a few remaining red-brick outbuildings and the whole of the older compound to be taken over by small businesses and community groups. It was renamed the Katutura Community Centre and became the home for the country's fledgling trade union movement and church and community-run projects such as the "People's" Primary School.

Beyond the old compound stretched row upon row of township shacks which ran along the contours of a gentle slope before disappearing over the brow of the hill and down the other side...on and on as far as the eye could see. These houses had been identical when built by the municipality back from the late 1950s; cheap concrete bricks and a sheet of corrugated iron stuck on top to make a roof. A small outhouse in the back yard served as the toilet and shower room, outside which was a tap, the only source of water for the household. Over the years, some of the houses had been upgraded and extended by their owners and now bore little resemblance to the original structure after the addition of new rooms, better roofs, electricity, indoor running water and garages. A few, belonging to wealthy businesspeople, were now veritable palaces surrounded by high walls or fences and looked totally incongruous in their impoverished surroundings. For most of the area's residents, the money needed to perform such miraculous transformations was not available and their houses remained the same four-roomed matchboxes as they were when first built, save for some fresh paint - even colourful murals - both inside and out. Almost without exception, these ramshackle hovels were kept immaculately neat and clean despite the rapidly decaying fabric of the houses, and the omnipresent dust and piles of uncollected garbage in the streets outside. It was not uncommon for twelve or more people to share the four rooms, and many families were left with little choice but to use the roof as a storage space for everything from firewood to bed frames. Makeshift, back yard shelters - "squats" - were nowhere to be
seen, not because there was no need for extra, low-cost rooms, but because the municipality pursued a ruthless anti-squatting policy, demolishing anything which looked as if it might be used as extra accommodation. As a result, those unable to find space inside a house used to sleep in broken-down cars, chicken runs or even out in the open under the stars.

Katutura is Otjiherero for "the place we do not want to settle" and got its name because the original residents were forced to move there from what was called the Old Location and other similar settlements which

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black people had built within reach of the centre of Windhoek. As the city and its white population had grown, these black locations became too close to the white suburbs for the comfort of the white elite, so the authorities bulldozed the shanty towns and only much later built luxury suburbs there instead.

Black resistance to the forced removals, mobilised by the then recently-formed liberation movements Swapo and Swanu, culminated in the Windhoek uprising of 10 December 1959 when police fired on a crowd of demonstrators, killing 12 and injuring many others. This historic event became a landmark in the liberation struggle, just as the Sharpeville massacre three months later was to trigger an escalation in black South Africans' fight against apartheid.

Districts comprising the original Katutura houses - ironically now referred to as the "old location" - formed the core of the township. Along the main thoroughfare PA de Wet Street, just up from the police station, was a cluster of red-brick buildings, euphemistically called the Katutura Shopping Centre by the authorities who built it. The place looked more like a large public toilet. Here were situated ten or so black-owned businesses, including supermarkets, a bottle store, hairdresser and fish and chip takeaways.

The late 1970s had seen not only the scrapping of the Group Areas Act, but also the repeal of legislation which prevented black people from owning property and businesses. Until then, shops in the township had been owned by whites or the municipality. With the abolition of the laws, the 1980s saw an upsurge in the number of black-run businesses in the township, which coincided with a steady influx of people from the rural areas triggered by the abolition of influx control. The emergent new breed of black businesspeople profited quickly, as the size and elegance of their township mansions went to show.

Sprawling out from the old location were the newer districts of Katutura - Soweto, Murula, Golgotha and Dollem - made up of thousands more basic, all-expense-spared houses of only slightly better design (built to include electricity, running water and indoor toilets) than the original Katutura homes, and crammed together along a grid pattern of dirt roads.

During the 1950s, the South African authorities had divided Namibia into tribal homelands. Black people were forced to live and farm in these impoverished "reserves" unless they had permits to work in the towns, mines or on white-owned commercial farms. But those who were allowed to live in the towns were still forced to live in segregated sections of the townships according to each person's ethnic group.
Like influx control, the system eventually became unworkable and was abandoned, but many township homes still bore the original numbering with a letter indicating which ethnic group the occupants belonged to - D for Damara, N for Nama, 0 for Owambo, H for Herero and G for Gemengde (Afrikaans meaning mixed). However, the colonial regime continued to encourage people to think in terms of tribe, so many of the township districts still maintained their ethnic identity and continued to be mini tribal homelands. Despite being the middle of the rainy season, a pall of dust hung over the township, stirred into life by the pounding of tens of thousands of feet and thousands of vehicle wheels. People watched us suspiciously as we John, reporter Da'oud Vries and myself - crawled through the streets in John's dirty red Golf. Some of the people we passed, recognizing my two colleagues, grinned and gave furtive clenched-fist power salutes, although their expression soon changed when they saw me, with my short military hair cut, sitting in the back of the car. I had always worn my hair short, and before I had left Britain, thinking in terms of the African heat I was about to encounter, I had asked my barber for a particularly severe crop, unaware of the implications this would have in Namibia. Music wafted from the houses in the warm breeze; everything from South African "bubblegum" pop to droning church music mingled with the babble of voices, shrieks of children and the barking of dogs. A radio played in almost every house, each one tuned into the various ethnic stations of the SWABC (South West African Broadcasting Corporation), depending on which part of the township we were in at any one time. There were eight channels in all, broadcasting in eight separate languages, but all spouting out establishment propaganda, further entrenching tribal identity in the process. Barefooted small children dressed in grubby, ill-fitting clothes sprinted in and out of the yards, while others played football in the streets, scuttling after a small ball made from plastic shopping bags moulded together over a wood fire. Other groups raced along the untarred streets pushing toy cars ingeniously made out of scrap wire and empty beer cans, or old car tyres which the youngsters deftly guided along using two short sticks. As lunchtime drew near, older children wearing an assortment of mismatching uniforms started to flood out of the township schools; collections of single-storey buildings with invariably more broken than glass-filled windows, few if no recreational facilities and surrounded by gleaming chain linked fences topped with rolls of razor wire. With some estimates putting adult unemployment in Namibia at around 40 per cent, there were plenty of men to be seen around the township during the day. Some sat passively in their back yards while women and young girls -babies strapped to their backs -busied themselves preparing food and doing the housework. Older women too shared in the household chores, in particular the responsibility of looking after the children,
while their menfolk could be found at a nearby shebeen unlicensed drinking place - sipping on cheap traditional beer and whiling away the hours chatting with their unemployed friends and neighbours.

Rounding a corner, we came across regimented lines of long, single-tier buildings made of concrete and wood, arranged side by side like military barracks, separated by narrow muddy alleyways. Scattered higgledy-piggledy in front, between and behind the buildings were makeshift market stalls around which hundreds of people swarmed like bees attracted to sweet-scented flowers. As we drove closer, a foul stench swamped my senses, causing my brain to go numb. We bumped down the rutted thoroughfare, splashing through rivers of raw sewage which flowed from broken drains leading from the ablution blocks of this, Katutura's Single Quarters. Everywhere I looked, people were buying or selling everything from clothes to firewood, shoe polish to watches, meat to washing powder, rotting fruit to hair combs, all of which were displayed on top of wooden crates or a dirty blanket laid out on the dusty ground. Stall owners chatted with their neighbours and haggled with their customers, or else sat quietly watching the non-stop activity around them.

Behind the stalls, people spilled from the shabby buildings which contained numerous rooms, divided into sleeping compartments with sheets or sacking suspended from the ceiling. The Single Quarters was built by the municipality to house single men, but as the shortage of housing became more and more acute during the 1980s, wives, girlfriends, relatives and children had also moved in, and the already poor living conditions had deteriorated as a result of the chronic overcrowding. This, coupled with the lack of proper sanitation, enabled diseases, in particular tuberculosis, to flourish. Outside, smouldering wood fires helped cleanse the aroma of stinking sewage mingled with the smell of raw meat which hung from many of the market stalls and around which flies danced in the dusty haze.

In the middle of the Single Quarters- surrounded by a high, barbed-wire covered wall, spotlights and loudspeakers - was a police station. The South African flag flew from a pole inside a seemingly impenetrable iron gate. Suddenly this gate swung open and out roared an armoured police Casspir which then lumbered down the road, spraying market stalls and bystanders with sewage, garbage and exhaust smoke.

The police station was the living quarters for black "special constables" attached to the South West African Police's (SWAPOL) riot squad. Naturally, the white squad commanders lived several kilometres away in the posh suburbs of "White City" Windhoek, while the black rank and file were billeted here in the most run-down part of the township; a staunchly Swapo supporting area which meant the special constables often came face to face with their neighbours when sent to break up Swapo meetings and demonstrations. No wonder the wall around the police station was high!

The Single Quarters was situated on the southern perimeter of Katutura. Half a kilometre away across a valley criss-crossed with footpaths through litter-strewn,
thorn bushveld was the so-called "coloured" township of Khomasdal. Although Khomasdal was also separated from the main city of Windhoek, housing here was on the whole, of better quality than in Katutura, a sign of the higher social status afforded by the whites to this half-caste community.

While black people were generally assigned menial manual work, people of mixed race tended to start higher up the job ladder and dominated the ranks of clerks and low-grade civil servants, the better pay - although still meagre compared with the incomes of white people - allowing them to consolidate their higher class status. Afrikaans was the language of Khomasdal.

Here the older municipality houses were of a similar design to the more recently built Katutura homes, and included running water, electricity and indoor toilets.

The modern districts of Khomasdal, those furthest from Katutura, were made up of many fine, big, privately owned houses which rivalled many homes found in the more posh suburbs of White City Windhoek a few kilometres away. Even after the repeal of the Group Areas Act, Khomasdal and Katutura remained distinctly separate places, despite the fact that, with the expansion of both townships, in places only 100 metres of veld separated the two. More recently, a handful of Khomasdal people had taken advantage of cheaper Katutura land prices and crossed the divide to build or buy themselves better homes than they could have afforded in up-market Khomasdal.

Some of the more radical Khomasdalers had also moved to Katutura to escape the political apathy which reigned in Khomasdal, while a few others had been unable to afford the higher rents of Khomasdal. But as a rule, most Khomasdalers tended to look down on Katuturans and clung to their perceived superiority. It was not uncommon for Khomasdalers to refer to their black brothers and sisters as "kaffirs", and many complained of the "unclean" and "lazy" lifestyles of the latter.

Taxis, the most common form of transport in both townships, did not travel the short distance between the two townships except when the drivers were lured by a fare five times the standard R1 charge. In fact it was cheaper to pay a Rand for a Katutura taxi to take you the 5km into the city and then another R1 for the 4km journey out to Khomasdal, than it was to

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persuade reluctant drivers to ferry you across the short divide between the two townships.

John, Da'oud and I had gone to Katutura to investigate a tip-off from a student activist that a security force agent was trying to recruit spies from the ranks of the progressive student union Nanso. The activist had arranged to meet the agent in the township and we were going to photograph the rendezvous. We drew up outside a house in an old location backstreet and climbed out of the car. My mind was still reeling from all I had seen in my guided tour of the townships, and before I knew it, John and Da'oud had darted off, leaving me standing in the front yard of the house of a total stranger. For fear of ruining my colleague's stake-out, I stayed put, scanning the rows of township houses around me.
The extent of the poverty was beginning to sink in; I had seen similar scenes on television and in books and magazines, but the first-hand reality had still come as a huge shock. I noticed that the street had gone unusually quiet. A radio played inside the house, but no one stirred. I was sure children had been scampering in and out of the nearby river-bed when we arrived, but now they had vanished.
An ancient Ford pick-up truck limped down the street. As it neared, it suddenly accelerated, the two occupants giving me a furtive sideways glance as they shot past me and disappeared in a cloud of dust. John raced around the corner of the house with Da'oud ambling along a few metres behind.
"Let's go man!" John hissed as he leapt into the car.
I fumbled with the door handle and fell into the back seat just as the car began to pull away. The mission had been successful, John informed me as he wound on the film in his camera and removed the finished spool while steering the car with his knees. His eyes darted left and right, and then ahead as he mumbled excitedly about the pictures he had taken. Da'oud sat in the front passenger seat, laughing at John's crazy account, lolling against the door with his left arm hanging out of the open window, casually playing with the wing mirror and giving the occasional nonchalant wave to passers by.
My two colleagues could not have been more opposite in character. John was hyperactive, always on the move, his train of thought continually changing which resulted in him never finishing sentences, let alone a topic of conversation. With his straggly brown hair, a matted, unkempt beard and manic blue eyes, he looked like the archetypal news photographer who stopped at nothing to get the photograph he wanted.
Da'oud on the other hand always tried to play it cool, although his fiery temper sometimes got the better of him. There was but a few months
difference in our ages and, at 23, we were the youngsters of the newsroom. University educated in Cape Town, Da'oud was full of theory and radical ideals, although he too possessed a reckless streak. We pulled up at a crossroads and into the car jumped the student activist who had just met with the spy recruiter. A look of panic shot across his face as he slumped into the back seat and saw me sitting there next to him. He said something to Da'oud in quick-fire, staccato Nama clicks, and the latter let out a hearty laugh, causing ash from his cigarette to fall onto his neatly pressed jeans.

"He thinks you are the police!" Da'oud told me, before explaining to the student who I was.

"I think you had better do something about your haircut pretty soon," Da'oud then told me.

I turned to the student and smiled apologetically and he replied with a still slightly disbelieving grin. He then returned to John and Da'oud and began to tell them - in Afrikaans - what had happened during the rendezvous.

The agent had indeed tried to persuade the student to spy on his Nanso colleagues in return for a handsome monthly allowance which would have paid for his education, new clothes and more besides. Although he had no intention of betraying his comrades, the student had left the agent hanging in the air, saying he needed more time to think about the proposal.

"I think he will withdraw the offer once he sees these pictures in the paper," John said sarcastically, patting the spool of film in his shirt pocket, and he and Da'oud roared with laughter.

We were soon back onto the tar road and heading towards town. Once on the highway, I noticed groups of young black men sitting or standing at street corners and looking hopefully at passing cars, while others sheltered in the minuscule shade offered by nearby thorn bushes or road signs. This was a daily ritual for hundreds of unemployed black people throughout the capital who hoped to pick up casual work from white "baases" who trawled the pick-up spots in their four-wheel-drive "bakkies" every time they were short of labourers. With the large pool of unemployed labour, wages paid to these casual workers were usually even more of a pittance than those paid to full-time labourers, and employment never involved a contract, so the same despondent faces were soon back at the same street corner once they had served their purpose. After the township, the ordered, clean, tarred streets, luxury cars, posh shops, modern buildings and overall affluence of the city centre seemed surreal. But the cosseted opulence in which white Windhoekers cocooned themselves at home in their exclusive suburbs was even more mind-blowing.

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One of the few clear views of Katutura you could find in the city was from the a la carte restaurant at the top of one of the capital's most expensive hotels, the Kalahari Sands. Hills and strategically placed foliage obscured the township from most of the city's sumptuous white suburbs, which formed a verdant sprawl to the south and east of the city centre.
Desperate for somewhere to stay after my arrival in Windhoek, I took the first accommodation which came my way, a bedsit in the basement of a big house on what was known as Luxury Hill. Da'oud and the paper's reporter for the northern war zone, Chris Shipanga -a well-built, soft-spoken man a couple of years our elder - helped me move in.

It was early evening when we climbed the steps and knocked on the door to the owner's apartment - the top half of the house, which had a panoramic view of most of the city, although some tall evergreens planted in front of a well-furnished verandah meant the northern suburbs and townships were kept out of sight. A bespectacled man in his late 50s, dressed in baggy beige shorts, black ankle socks, grey slippers and a string vest came to the door. He clutched a tumbler of brandy piled high with ice which he balanced on his protruding belly which leered at us through a gap between his vest and the top of his shorts.

The owner eyed us suspiciously for several seconds, squinting through his spectacles, first at me and then at my colleagues. "Kan ek help?" he snorted, his eyes fixed firmly on Chris and Da'oud. They both smiled sweetly at him as I started my introduction.

"My name is David, I'm renting the room downstairs. These are my friends Chris Shipanga and Da'oud Vries." My colleagues held out their hands and the owner shook them reluctantly.

"I'll get you your key," he said, and went back inside the house, returning a few seconds later and, without saying a word, led us down the steps, along a garden path around to the back of the house, and down a narrow alleyway.

"There it is," he said handing me the key and pointing at a wood-worm riddled door in the wall.

"Now I don't want any noise out of you. If I get one complaint from my good friends next door, you will be out."

"Don't worry about me," I said cheerily. "I'm as quiet as a mouse."

"You don't look as if you are," he replied, glaring at Chris and Da'oud, before stomping off back down the alley.

Although once a downstairs bedroom in what was otherwise a luxurious house, the bedsit was horrible. The drains which ran outside the door stank. My section of the house was only separated from the next door flat by an ill-fitting cupboard jammed into what had been the corridor.

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The electricity supply was a single extension cable draped over the top of the cupboard through a half-metre gap with the ceiling. This space made sound-proofing non-existent; while straining away on the toilet the following morning, I was able to hear every word the couple living next door was saying while they ate their breakfast, and presumably they could hear everything I was doing too!

Chris and Da'oud stared at the place in disbelief. The carpets were threadbare and torn, the door separating the bedroom and the bathroom did not close properly, there was no stove, and when I turned on the bath tap, water came out shit-brown in colour.

"I thought this was Luxury Hill!" Chris chuckled.
"Well this flat is amongst the cheapest the city can offer," I said. At R300 a month, this was less expensive than anything else I had seen for rent in the white suburbs, but it was still more than three times what Chris paid the municipality for his five-roomed township "house".

Once we had carried my bags into the house, I thanked my friends for their help and saw them to the car. It was now dusk and as we said our goodbyes, a young white woman drove up outside the house and sat watching us until my two friends had driven away. I turned and started walking back towards the house. The woman got out of the car and came across to me.

"Can I help you," she asked nervously. "It's OK thank you," I replied. "I have just moved into the room downstairs in this house. My name is David."

She immediately relaxed and shook my outstretched hand warmly, introducing herself as the daughter of my new landlord who, as she explained with some embarrassment, had made his millions selling imported toilet rolls to the colonial government.

"I'm sorry if I appeared a little apprehensive," she said as we walked up the front drive of the house, "but you cannot be too careful these days, particularly when there are blacks around."

At this, she said goodnight and disappeared up the steps to her parents' apartment. I did not stay long at Luxury Hill. In the three weeks I was there, I did not see or speak to any of the people living in the house, let alone the neighbours, not even to say "hello". During the week, I would get up, wash and walk to work, meeting the tide of black domestic workers and garden "boys" heading in the opposite direction, some of whom had walked ten kilometres or more from Katutura in order to spend another day toiling in the gardens and kitchens of their white bosses. I would greet the workers and always received a warm though slightly curious "goeie môre baas" ("good morning boss") in reply.

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As for the white residents of the area, all I saw of them was their silhouetted outlines through the tinted glass of their huge Mercedes and BMWs as they whizzed along the streets, showering us pedestrians with dust as we sought refuge in the verge. The residents of Luxury Hill never seemed to leave the sanctuary of their mansions ringed with barbed wire unless it was in the air-conditioned comfort of their expensive cars - they certainly did not walk anywhere!

Behind the fence or high garden wall of each house, ferocious dogs barked at anyone who walked by, flinging themselves against the fence or trying to scale the wall in a rabid, snarling frenzy. Their barks would then alert the dogs next door, and they too would then race to try and get at you, and so on until the whole neighbourhood was echoing to the deafening sound of howling hounds. I soon grew tired of having to run this gauntlet twice a day and often took diversions of several kilometres just to avoid some of the more vicious dogs. Each night I would lie in bed for hours hearing nothing but the barking dogs, which drowned out even the incessant chirping of crickets in the trees and bushes outside my window.
At weekends, Windhoek closed down on Saturday at 13h00 precisely. Black people returned to the townships and the whites retreated to their sports clubs or behind their high fences to drink, braai and swim with their families and friends. From Saturday afternoon until Sunday evening, the smell of frying meat engulfed Luxury Hill and the other white suburbs.

As I sat in the shade of the alleyway reading or listening to the whisper of music playing on my pocket tape recorder, I would hear voices, the clinking of glasses and the occasional loud splash coming from the pool area above me, but not once was I invited to join the party.

To alleviate the boredom, I used to swallow my fear of the dogs and go for long walks around the white suburbs. Black ministers in the South African-appointed interim government also lived in the posh suburbs. You could tell which were their houses because, as well as the obligatory dogs and barbed wire, they had armed guards on patrol 24 hours a day, while spotlights lit up every corner of the house and grounds at night.

Below Luxury Hill to the west and south stretched the slightly less affluent white suburbs of Pioneers Park, Hochland Park, Suiderhof and Windhoek West where most but not quite all the houses had swimming pools and the buildings were of a slightly less extravagant, more uniform design. Beyond, on the lower slopes of the hills which ringed the city and, more than a century before provided ideal natural battlements for the embryonic settlement, rose the verdant, concrete splendour of Klein Windhoek, Academia and Olympia.

In overgrown wasteland between Hochland and Pioneers Parks, now home to civil servants and reasonably well-to-do businesspeople, were the only visible remains of the Old Location; a church and the former township's communal graveyard which, for the sake of the authorities' warped Christian conscience, had been spared by the bulldozers.

If it was redemption the whites were wanting, they need not have bothered. The graveyard, in particular, was a sorry sight. Overgrown and long-neglected by the Windhoek Municipality, the graveyard was now a hang-out for white teenagers who drank, smoked dagga and rode their motorbikes on and around the crumbling tombstones.

As a result, many of the headstones had collapsed, while those which remained intact had disappeared under the encroaching bushveld. Bundles of withered flowers lay on top of a few still recognisable graves, most notably the mass grave of the 12 victims of the 1959 uprising which a group of concerned Katuturans had maintained as best they could over the years. Nonetheless, in between their visits, the grave was once again littered with empty beer bottles and bore the scars of motorbike tyre tracks.

Even on the most calm of days, an eerie wind rustled the tall veld grass which hid this monument to the liberation struggle from the mock-Tudor thatched houses and expansive modern bungalows which overlooked it. Not 100 metres away, sheltering behind a row of thick, tall fir trees, lay the "white" cemetery, a spacious resting place for the deceased of White City Windhoek. Elegant marble graves...
stood in neat rows between raked gravel pathways. Pruned trees and flowering shrubs sheltered the polished headstones from both sun and wind. The graves and the immaculately kept gardens which surrounded them were tended by an army of black labourers, some of whom had once lived in the Old Location. The tranquil silence was broken only by the sweet songs of birds in the trees; the spirits of those buried here were very much at rest.

Each district of White City was well-endowed with schools; modem, well-built multi-storey buildings with grass playing fields, indoor sports halls, computers, well-equipped science laboratories, libraries - you name it, most of them had it - and not a broken window to be seen. Each morning, children at some of these white schools marched into class to the accompaniment of the school band, which pounded out its military beat as the pupils saluted the South African flag. Every street in the suburbs, no matter how minor, was tarred and each house seemed to have at least two cars parked outside. Without exception, white suburban homes had small out-houses either attached to the garage or built separately at the bottom of the garden. These were the servants' quarters, which comprised a cramped living room/bedroom and an adjoining toilet cum shower room (cold water only). Here lived the maid,

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on-call 24 hours a day, far enough away from the house to be out of sight when her masters and mistresses did not want to see her, but in easy shouting distance should her services be required.

The interiors of most servants quarters were pitiful when compared with the sumptuous comfort found a few metres up the garden path. Hot like ovens in summer and cold as fridges during the winter, the living rooms were barely big enough for a single bed - usually the only piece of furniture to be found. To make extra space, the "live-in domestics" would prop up the standard-issue rusting, creaky bed frame with empty paint tins so that shoes, boxes containing withered vegetables and other leftover food passed on by the " miesies" for the maid to take home for her children (it was rare for employers to allow their servants' families to visit), suitcases containing clothes and other odds and ends could be stored underneath.

Nothing more than a scrap of old carpet would be provided for the concrete floor, and even this was difficult to keep clean as rain and dust had no problem entering the room under the ill-fitting wooden door. As a rule, a single, often cracked window was the only form of ventilation (except for the door - whether opened or closed) and source of daylight in these dingy hovels, which sometimes were without electricity. While the main houses were usually ablaze with electric light at night, often only the pathetic flicker of a candle could be seen in the window at the bottom of the garden.

The city's Portuguese community, many of whom had fled to Namibia from Angola at around the time of independence in 1974, had recognized a gaping hole in the commercial market and opened up early morning-late night convenience stores throughout the white suburbs. Set either on strategic street intersections or alongside a bottle store, video hire shop, and 24-hour-garage in small suburban
shopping centres, the "Portugueses" did a roaring trade despite the hefty price mark-ups. As long as it was within walking distance for the maid, or driving distance should it be the maid's monthly night off, cost did not seem to matter to White City Windhoekers. After all, this was the lap of luxury. "We abolished apartheid here ten years ago." The words of the bureaucrat I had met on the plane to Windhoek haunted me as I explored the capital and discovered the chasm which existed between the living standards of the all-powerful white minority and the virtually powerless black, working class majority. The bureaucrat had not been trying to deceive me; he was convinced that what he was telling me was true. His misconception perhaps stemmed from the fact that most white people never visited the townships, so they had no idea of the conditions black people were living in. Nor did they try or want to find out, and the establishment media which most whites subscribed to certainly was not going to tell them about the plight of black people. Secondly, the bureaucrat obviously thought that by abolishing the Group Areas Act and other laws enforcing the segregation of whites and blacks, apartheid would be buried for ever. In reality, the mentality cultivated by these laws, and the legislation which replaced them, ensured that a far more subtle but equally effective form of apartheid continued and continues to haunt Namibia. Take the example of the two graveyards. There was no longer a law which prevented black people from being buried in the same place as white people, and yet it would have been impossible for a black family to lay a relative to rest in the "white" cemetery, no matter how much money they offered the authorities. For a start, the cemetery was run by the Administration for Whites, therefore only people who fell under the jurisdiction of this administration could be buried there. As the authority dealt solely with the affairs of white people, the graveyard remained a whites-only burial place. Even if, for the sake of argument, those in authority had decided to sell burial plots to anyone willing to pay, regardless of colour, opposition from within the white community would have been so great that the administration would have been forced to change its mind. For the same reasons, black people and white people continued to live so close, and yet worlds apart. The small class of affluent black people - the new black elite - could certainly afford to buy houses in the city's white suburbs, but most chose instead to remain amongst their fellow Africans in the townships for reasons of prestige, but also because it was here that they felt at home. If the white suburbs were hostile places for white strangers, goodness knows what they would be like for those born with a black skin. The in-bred racism of most whites had not dissolved in the ten years which had elapsed since the abolition of the Group Areas Act. If anything it had become even more entrenched in the minds of many who, without the protective comfort of apartheid laws, feared losing their perceived superiority and privileges. Added to which, the social etiquette of Africans, with their large extended families and
an open door hospitality clashed with the introverted aloofness of the whites, thus causing further friction between the two races. However, for most black Namibians, harsh economic realities ensured that racial segregation long outlived legal apartheid. The low wages paid to black workers barred them from affording the rents charged "in town". Even those black people who had overcome the barriers of apartheid education and earned themselves good qualifications were invariably paid less than their white counterparts - even if they were lucky enough in

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the first place to find a white employer who was "enlightened" enough to give them a post to suit their qualifications. Most bosses continued to judge job applicants on the colour of their skin, and echelons of middle to top management remained a white domain. As a result, even the children of black professionals not lucky enough to find a place in the handful of non-racial, church-run private schools, had to attend state schools in the townships. Black state schools received far less funding than white state schools which - coupled with the totally Eurocentric curriculum - meant black pupils received a far inferior, less relevant education than whites. And so the cycle continued; black schools remained understaffed with under-qualified teachers who were forced to do their job with few or no books and facilities, which in turn lead to high failure and drop-out rates amongst pupils who were then lucky if they found work at all. If they did, their wages as unskilled or semi-skilled labourers were such that they could only afford to live in the townships. With unemployment so high amongst the black community, and there being no social security system worth speaking of, those who did have jobs had to divide their meagre earnings amongst an army of out-of-work relatives and dependents.

The cornerstone of this subtle form of neo-apartheid was the system of ethnic governments, set up in place of direct rule from South Africa under what was known as Proclamation AG8 of 1978. Under AG8, the country's tribal homelands ("reserves") became "self-governing", each with its own administration - most of which were headed by tribal leaders sympathetic or subservient to Pretoria's continued occupation of Namibia - responsible for running services such as schools and clinics. The authorities' funding came from taxes levied on those living in the homelands. As black people earned far less than whites, the Owambo, Kavango, Kaoko, Herero, Damara, Nama, Baster, Caprivi, Tswana and Coloured administrations were able to generate far less income than the Administration for Whites could. Therefore, black "second tier" authorities had less to spend on schools and other services than the white administration, and so the socio-economic divide remained...and widened, as black people fell further and further behind. In 1987, the income of the Administration for Whites, which represented seven per cent of the population, was more than double the income of the other ten black authorities put together.

AG8 was an ingenious way of maintaining the poverty trap into which black Namibians fell the day they were born, and it was made even more effective by
the system's confusingly top-heavy bureaucracy which swallowed up a large slice of each authority's funding before it could even think of providing services for its people. All but the white and "coloured" administrations had their headquarters outside Windhoek. Each

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administration had its own departments for health, education, housing, agriculture etc. which did identical work, only for people from different ethnic groups. Each administration would have sub-offices in towns and villages where there were concentrations of its people, so that some places had four or more administration sub-offices catering for people living side by side but who were treated separately...because they belonged to different ethnic groups. To make matters even more confusing, the so-called first tier interim or "transitional" government-supposedly appointed to have overall control of the country - also had departments responsible for health, housing, education, agriculture etc. While the division of first and second tier services remained relatively straightforward in the homelands, chaos reigned in the major towns, where the different departments and administrations provided separate services for people thrown together and mixed about in an urbanisation process which ignored ethnicity. In Katutura, for example, there were schools run by the Department of National Education as well as those under the control of several other tribal administrations, all with different curricula and teaching children who came not just from the township but from all over the country, and whose tribal credentials did not necessarily match those of the authorities running the schools!
The confusion did not stop there. The townships themselves - in particular services such as water, electricity, housing, sewerage, and refuse collection - came under the jurisdiction of the third tier municipalities. The only say black people had in these whites-only town councils was via unelected "township advisory boards" which comprised "respectable" black citizens appointed by the white councillors to advise them (but certainly not to vote) on matters concerning the townships. Needless to say, most advisory board members were chosen on the grounds that they would not oppose their white overlords, and few township residents knew who their supposed representatives were, nor did they care.
With the introduction of AG8, ethnicity became an even greater force dividing Namibians still further. During the days of old apartheid, black people were oppressed and imprisoned together as one, and as a result, more were ready to rally around the "one nation, one Namibia" banner of the nationalist liberation movements Swapo and Swanu.
AG8 divided black people up into separate cattle pens, no longer according to their colour but to their tribe. Once separated, the people were encouraged by leaders sympathetic to the South Africans to think in terms of tribe rather than nation. Each cattle pen was then given its own radio station which broadcast in respective ethnic languages. With each pen concentrating on its own affairs and its own ethnic culture, each group lost touch with those in the other pens, so when leaders and the radio spread
bad rumours about people in other pens, each group accepted this as the truth. A classic case of divide and rule.
However, this was not the version the South Africans would have you believe. Pretoria and its apologists claimed AG8 and the subsequent formation of transitional/interim governments were intended to make Namibians autonomous. This theory looked fine on paper when read through rose-tinted glasses. Elections were held and everyone - black and white - was allowed to vote. The catch was that, once elected, members of these first and second tier authorities had to swear an oath of allegiance to the South African government. Added to which, any bills passed by the interim government had first to be approved by the South African governor, the Administrator-General, and thus his or her bosses in Pretoria, before it became law.
The South African government also reserved the right to impose its will in Namibia when it liked, even to the extent of dissolving the supposedly "autonomous" authorities so democratically elected by the Namibian masses. Oh, and there was also the small matter of the tens of thousands of South African troops which continued to occupy Namibia and wage war against the Angolan government from Namibian soil.
Consequently, the Namibian liberation movements refused to have anything to do with this sham democracy and the parties and their supporters - at the time Swapo was considered by the United Nations to be the "sole and authentic representative of the Namibian people" - boycotted the elections, further undermining the credibility of the ethnic government system, which became dominated by the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA).
In rural areas unaffected by war, AG8 had its desired effect, and support for the liberation movements waned as people were herded into their homeland cattle pens where they began to over-graze the infertile land, drawn to the cattle post by their ethnicity only to find the promise of boundless drinking water was a mirage. However, the rural population of the far north - caught in the crossfire of the liberation war and reminded daily by the occupying South African troops of Pretoria's true identity - remained solidly behind Swapo in its attempts to bring about real independence in Namibia. Perhaps deluded by its own concepts of ethnicity, the South Africans believed they could contain this support to within the region and the Oshiwambo speaking people. They were wrong.

2

Township Shirumbu
"Soweto please," I said climbing into a township taxi at the downtown Windhoek taxi rank. I had been working late and was relieved to find the taxis still running. "Soweto Katutura?" asked the taxi driver, looking somewhat bemused over his shoulder at me as I squeezed into the back seat alongside three other passengers who obligingly shifted up to make space. The two people - a young man and his girlfriend - sitting on top of each other in the front passenger seat also looked at me, then at each other and sniggered.
"Yes, that's right, Soweto Katutura - I live there!" I said, struggling to close the car door without shattering my hip bone or crushing my leg. The taxi driver's mouth dropped open but he said nothing, only turned around and, once I was safely on board, drove off, glancing at me every few seconds in the rear-view mirror as his battered green Chevrolet rattled along the highway towards the township.

This was one of hundreds of privately run taxis which operated in Katutura, ferrying people to and from work each day. In the mornings, the taxi drivers would drive around and around the township filling up with as many passengers as possible before driving into the city. Then they would wait at the rank until they had enough passengers on board to make the return journey worthwhile. In the early evening, particularly on Fridays and at the end of the month when everyone was busy spending their wages on shopping, the taxis had barely to stop at the rank before the car was full of people who ran, pushed, and shoved to squeeze into a taxi to take them home. You had to be quick, otherwise you could be standing at the rank for hours, such was the demand.

There was often a long wait late at night too because few people from the township wanted to come into the city at that time, so the taxis had no reason to make the journey. This evening I was lucky to have found a lift home so quickly. With taxis always being so full, it was rare that you found yourself taking the most direct route home. On approaching Katutura hospital, the taxi driver would ask everyone for their destination and then work out the most convenient roundabout route to drop everyone off.

The cost, R1, was the same whichever way you went, so you just sat tight and enjoyed the ride. Because of the length of the journeys and also

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because of the physical intimacy of being squashed together like canned pilchards, taxi rides were always sociable. Passengers would chat together, exchanging the latest news, inquiring about each others' friends and families or just passing the time of day with a stranger. But the passengers in this particular taxi sat in stony silence, not knowing quite what to make of this white person who had just squeezed on board and who was heading for the township... where he supposedly lived.

My fellow travellers gave me surreptitious sideways glances, quickly looking away each time their eyes and mine met. For the rest of the time, they stared out of the window into the fluorescent orange night, tapping their fingers nervously in time to the beat of the bubblegum pop which played on the car's cassette machine.

"So you live in Katutura?" the driver said once we had left Windhoek North behind us and were about to take the turn off towards the township. He was still convinced I did not know where I was going and that I in fact wanted to be taken to one of the white suburbs back in town.

"Yes," I replied. "I am living with a friend. We work together."

"Oh." Still he was not convinced. The cassette played on, half-drowning an unhealthy thumping noise which came from underneath the car's bonnet.
Circles of bright orange light appeared in the sky up ahead - the floodlight pylons. Soon the old location, bathed in dazzling light and dark shadows, came into view and we began our circular trek through the township's still streets, stopping every now and then to let a passenger off, until we eventually arrived in Soweto. I bid the driver and one remaining passenger goodnight and walked wearily up a dusty side street opposite where I had been dropped off, around a corner and into Elim Street. Dogs skulked around in the shadows, sniffing around overflowing dustbins looking for something to eat.

A young woman hurried past me and disappeared into a nearby house. "Naand - good evening," she said to me nervously as she passed. "Naand," I replied. "Howzit?" She was gone.

Dim lights burned in the curtained windows of the matchbox houses, while the faint sound of music and conversation wafted through the cracks in the doors. Some doorways remained open to allow the cool night air inside where, seated around sparsely furnished living rooms, families and friends chatted, read or enjoyed a drink before going to bed.

The flicker of a blowtorch darted like a firefly from the back yard of a house in the next block. Here a mechanic, working late into the night to supplement wages earned during the day as a garage assistant, was busy repairing a township customer's car in a makeshift garage made of sheets of corrugated iron and illuminated by a 100 watt lightbulb which dangled from an electric flex strung between a rusty nail and the kitchen light socket inside the house.

The light in Mbatji's living room still shone. I climbed over the broken fence which separated the street from his front yard, turned my key in the front door lock and pushed hard. The door to the house was untreated, so during the rains the wood expanded, jamming it tight into the door frame. After a third big push, the door gave way and I stumbled into the living room where Mbatji sat alone, shrouded in cigarette smoke, watching the late night South African news on television.

When Mbatjiua ("Mbatji"), my colleague at The Namibian, had offered to rent me a room in his Katutura home, I had jumped at the chance to move out of the depressing white suburb. What made Mbatji's offer even more attractive was that the rent he was charging was infinitely less than what I was paying Mr Toilet Roll for his smelly basement bedsit. So I had said "yes" to Mbatji and moved in almost immediately.

I was not the first white person to have lived in the township, but you could count my predecessors on the fingers of one hand, and my living in Katutura was a novelty which even some of my close friends were still growing used to years later.

Naturally I was apprehensive about the move; not only was I a stranger in Namibia, I was now going to live in a place where white people - except for a few priests and a handful of well-known anti-apartheid activists - only ventured when in large groups, usually in the protective confines of a police van or armoured car.
Now, at a time when the colour of your skin was still seen as a political statement, I was going to live as the only white person in a township inhabited by more than 80 000 black people. Saying that I would be the odd one out was an understatement!

There was also the perceived danger of living in the township. The pictures I had seen overseas of burning barricades, rampaging security forces, stone-throwing youths, and the gangsters of South African townships were still fresh in my mind. I had visited Katutura several times and found the place to be nothing like I had at first thought, but those were only visits and I had always been in the company of my black friends and work colleagues. Now I was going to live, drink, eat, sleep, shop and walk the streets on my own there.

However, hell would have been better than to continue living in the inhospitable isolation of Luxury Hill, so I packed my bags with a smile, threw the keys through Mr Toilet Roll's letter box, and headed for Katutura with a whistle on my lips, looking forward to the challenge as well as the change of scene.

Mbatji lived in Katutura's Soweto district, a location on the north-western outskirts of the township. Built in the mid-seventies, Soweto's houses were some of the last erected by the municipality to rent, and had running water (cold only) and indoor toilets.

Mbatji's five room home (two bedrooms, a living room, kitchen and bathroom) differed little in design to the other thousands of houses which were crammed together over the gently sloping, rocky hillside. None of the streets were tarred and the only street lighting came from the powerful spotlights mounted on top of huge poles which towered over the cowering houses.

Son of a former Swanu activist turned academic who had later become chairperson of the uranium mining corporation, Rössing, Dr Zedekia Ngavirue, Mbatji had spent most of his childhood and teenage years living in exile, first in Sweden, then Britain and later Papua New Guinea, before returning to Namibia with his parents in 1978. He had worked with Gwen Lister on the Windhoek Observer newspaper but resigned along with several others when Lister was sacked because of her politics, and consequently had become one of the founding members of The Namibian.

Tall and gaunt, Mbatji's fresh face made him look far younger than his true age, 34. His parents were Herero-speaking, but Mbatji had forgotten his mother tongue whilst living abroad where English had become his first language. This had caused him much embarrassment when he finally returned to Namibia and, ten years on, he was still ridiculed by his compatriots for not being able to speak Otjiherero. However he more than made up for this by his natural intelligence and his fluency in English which made him one of the most able newspaper writers in Namibia. He also won admiration for being so principled, continuing as he did to live in the township despite his father's wealth and sumptuous house in Windhoek's white suburbs.

I moved to his Soweto house on a Friday afternoon, and by early that same evening, Mbatji's living-room was already full of people wanting to show me
around the weekend's hot-spots. By 19h00 a group of about ten "jorlers" were assembled, already well-oiled with beer and ready to rave. But before going anywhere, Mbatji insisted that I should first be introduced at the nearby shebeen. Every street in Katutura had at least one shebeen where you could go to buy and drink alcohol. In days not so long past, it had been illegal for black people to buy and sell alcohol, so people had secretly brewed their own traditional beers and sold it to fellow township dwellers. The white authorities had then woken up to the fact that money could be made from selling alcohol to black people, so the prohibition laws were relaxed and the municipalities opened beer halls in the townships. But it had remained illegal for black people to buy and sell booze anywhere other than the beer halls, so the home-based shebeens continued to operate in secret, with many households becoming dependent on the money they made from this illegal trade. It was, however, a risky business as shebeens were frequently raided by the police who would seize all the beer and money from the sales. By the end of the ’70s, the liquor laws were relaxed further and black people were able to obtain licenses to run bottle stores. But these licenses were hard to come by, and bottle store opening hours were restricted, so the demand for open-all-hours shebeens continued, and even increased, as the shebeens now also stocked commercial brands of liquor, beer and wine purchased in bulk from the bottle stores and wholesalers. Shebeens had provided a far more relaxed, homely atmosphere in which to drink than the impersonal beer halls. Being so close to people's homes, shebeens were convenient too. At first, the police raids continued, but as time went on these became less and less frequent as the authorities realised their cause was lost, and white-owned breweries and liquor wholesalers profited from shebeen trade. By 1988, Katutura's municipal beer hall had closed and shebeens in the township operated almost openly, although drink stocks were still kept well out of sight and new customers were vetted before being served. Elim Street had two shebeens, the nearest - and our destination - being two houses away from where we lived. The looks on the faces of those drinking in the lounge when I walked in suggested they thought the old days had returned and the place was about to be raided. No one said a word but just stared, agog, taking in first my short, military-style haircut and bleached white skin, then my collared shirt, suede shoes and beige slacks; conventional security police costume. The "shebeen queen", a young, shy, short but well-built woman called Nangolo, appeared in the doorway which led to the kitchen and stopped dead still for a couple of seconds before retreating quickly, without noticing the rest of our posse which had started pushing in through the congested doorway. I smiled politely and hoped someone would say something. The clients still did not move, some frozen in mid-swig, their glasses poised on the edge of their lips, the beer about to trickle over the brim into the opened mouth.
"Nangolo!" Mbatji shouted from outside in the yard as he tried to shove his way into the house.

"Nangolo, there is someone here I want you to meet." Hearing Mbatji's voice, Nangolo reappeared from the kitchen and waited for him to squeeze past me into the centre of the room.

"Nangolo, my dear friend and comrade Nangolo," Mbatji started. Beer was starting to encourage my friend out of the shell of a perfect gentleman he inhabited when sober.

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"I would like to introduce you to this Englishman David who has just moved into my house." Mbatji lifted my arm and Nangolo warily shook my hand before looking back at my colleague with incomprehension written across her puzzled face.

"Hy bly nou by my plek" - ("He is staying at my house.") Mbatji explained in Afrikaans.

"Sy naam is Dawid, hy is 'n Engelsman. Ons werk saam by Die Namibian" - ("His name is David, he's an Englishman. We are working together at The Namibian.")

"Hy bly hier in Katutura?" - ("He is living here in Katutura?") Nangolo asked, her face still covered with confusion. Mbatji nodded. "Jy lieg you're lying!" Nangolo said with a disbelieving laugh.

"Ek lieg nie," Mbatji said waving his left arm expressively, almost knocking a glass from the hand of one of the shebeen punters about to take a sip of beer. "Die wit man wil met ons 'kaffirs' bly!" ("The whitey wants to live with us 'kaffirs'!")

"Ohhh!" Nangolo exclaimed as the furrows disappeared from her brow and the corners of her mouth rose to form a big smile, her sternly sealed lips parting to reveal a row of glistening white, though slightly irregular teeth.

"You stay here now in Katutura, in the house of Mbatjiua?" she said turning to me. I nodded, a gesture which released everyone in the room from the spell which had frozen them solid the moment I had walked into the house.

"Welcome, welcome!" Nangolo enthused, coming over to me and taking me by the arm.

"Please, sit down. What will you drink?" she asked, ushering me towards a threadbare settee, gesturing to those seated on it to move up and make room for the honoured guest.

"Hailwa esi ota kala moKatutura peumbo laMbatjiua," she explained to some of the older Oshiwambo-speaking clients who were still looking bemused and asking each other what the hell was going on.

"Would you like beer?" Nangolo asked me as I sank unceremoniously into the seat which had lost most of its springs during its many years of dedicated shebeen service.

"Yes please, that would be very nice," I replied.

Mbatji forced his bum into the small gap on the settee between me and my neighbour as the rest of our party found themselves places to sit or stand.
elsewhere. There were now about 20 people crammed into the minuscule living room which measured no more than six metres by four. Apart from the settee, the room was furnished with an assortment of wooden benches and armchairs arranged around the pale blue, Township Shirumbu 27 paint-chipped walls. At the end of the room furthest from the door, a calena spoingtx ar x & &k world hung lopsidedly from a nail which had been banged into the wall, cracking the plaster around. In the middle of the room, invisible under the mass of bottles, filled and semi-filled glasses was a low table coffee table, the altar in this township temple. A dense cloud of cigarette smoke shrouded a glowing, unshaded light bulb attached to a flex which dangled from one of the wooden beams supporting the tarnished, corrugated iron roof.

A pair of orange curtains drawn across the open windows billowed in the warm, late-summer evening breeze which jabbed at and chased smoke around the room. Nangolo reappeared with two quart bottles of beer and a couple of glasses which she set before Mbatji and me. As I fumbled in my pocket for my wallet, Mbatji discreetly handed Nangolo a purple five Rand note which she took, giving a little curtsey and folding the money into the palm of her hand, before taking orders from the other customers.

The room was now alive with conversation. Some people spoke in Oshiwambo, others in Nama-Damara, but most conversed in Afrikaans, while Mbatji and I chatted in English. Every now and then, someone would shout across the room in English at either me or Mbatji, others then chipping into what became a heated political debate.

Many questions - starting with "how are you finding Namibia?" progressing to the more testing "what do you think about the things the South Africans are doing in our country?" - were aimed at me as people sounded out my political views. But the atmosphere never became heavy. How could it have? This was the weekend, the time when enjoying yourself took top priority and everyday problems were abandoned until the following Monday.

Those seated around the room were almost all men. Women came and went but tended not to stay. Rather they walked through to the kitchen where they unloaded plastic bags containing their empty returned bottles, stocked up with fresh supplies and left again, returning to their homes to drink. Nangolo and her sister Selma, not more than 14 or 15 years old but already a buxom young woman with a languid walk and infectious laugh, busied themselves taking orders, clearing bottles, replacing dirty glasses, collecting money and bringing change. Handling several orders at a time as they did, it was a wonder they never forgot how much change was owed to whom. But each time, often a quarter of an hour after taking your money, they would come back to you with the correct change.

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As with paying taxi fares - some people handing the money over at the start of the journey or at a convenient moment half-way along the route, while others paid when they got out at their destination - payment for drinks was determined by trust. Some people seemed to be buying on credit, their empty bottles being replaced with full ones apparently without the clients even having to ask, while others handed over money each time their fresh orders arrived.

The whole process was dignified and unrushed, as if to make sure that the unsavoury aspect of money did not interfere with people's enjoyment. We stayed at Nangolo's for several hours and left quite drunk. After a short debate, it was decided we should make a turn at a braai in the old location. Braais were a regular weekend feature, particularly at the very end and very beginning of each month when people had just been paid, and were a means by which households raised extra income. People would open up their houses to friends and strangers alike, who would come to buy alcohol and food, and join in the merrymaking, dancing and conversation.

It was customary for friends to support each other's braais, bringing with them as many of their friends and friends of friends as possible, and the partying would continue from Friday - sometimes Thursday - evening until Sunday night. By early 1988, there were only two night clubs in Katutura, one of which had only just opened, so braais - along with football - were one of the few forms of entertainment. At month's end, every district would have at least six or seven braais going on at the same time, in addition to the regular business at the shebeens.

Our first destination that evening was to be a braai at the house of another founding member of The Namibian, Rajah Munamava, and his girlfriend Sewa. The festivities were already in full swing when our convoy pulled up outside Sewa's modernised house in the middle of the old location. We entered to find a large group of people gathered in the middle of the living room, embroiled in an angry debate about the merits of Swapo and the DTA.

In one corner of the dimly lit room, a couple danced half-heartedly in competition with the argumentative crowd which drowned out the music coming from the large hi-fi speakers. Tall and elegant with a neatly trimmed beard, Rajah stood imperiously in the middle of the throng listening to both sides of the debate, interjecting from time to time with one counter-argument or another which both sides listened to respectfully before starting up again where they had left off. Rajah spotted us and waded through the crowd to greet us.

"Welcome, welcome, come and sit down and have something to drink," he said ushering Mlbati, me and a few others in our group past the crowd and into a back room reserved for the more select clientele.

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We took our seats on a bed, which had been pushed back against the wall to make extra seating, while Rajah called to a young girl standing in the doorway to bring some beer and glasses. After the row going on outside, the bedroom was almost too quiet.
Those who sat around the room were either middle-aged or elderly people. The women wore long, billowing traditional Herero dresses of brightly coloured materials with matching headgear made of the same material as the dresses, folded in such a way that it stuck out to both sides and looked like up-turned aeroplane propellers.

While most of the middle-aged men were fat, talked a lot and dressed in pressed trousers and short-sleeved shirts opened almost to the midriff to expose gold chains and plenty of flab, their male elders wore well-worn but nonetheless well-pressed suits over their gaunt, stooping frames, and sat in regal silence, reflecting on the scene while - like their spouses sucking on clay pipes in between sips of beer.

Before sitting down, we introduced ourselves, going around the room shaking everyone's hand in turn, before settling down to our beer. After half an hour or so of polite conversation with our distinguished company, Mbatji and I wandered back to the living room where the political argument was beginning to die down. Mbatji introduced me to some of his friends and the conversation continued to bubble until new supplies of vodka and brandy were brought from the kitchen. After a brief silence, during which alcohol was flung down dry throats, the argument flared up once more.

The reluctant dancers were still doing their best to stake a claim to what should have been the dance floor, but once the argument started to rage again, the couple gave up and left. A woman dressed in the red, blue and green of Swapo broke into freedom songs, to be joined immediately by the whole pro-Swapo faction while the DTA supporters shook their heads and returned to their seats at the far end of the room, alienated but still united in their political beliefs.

Long after midnight, some of our party suggested we should "check out" another braai over in Marula section. Mbatji sat, wedged between two very large women, but he seemed quite happy so we left him in their care and departed.

A row of parked cars and the pounding beat of mbaqanga made it impossible to miss our next destination. The living room of the tiny fourroomed house was crammed full of forty or more jiving bodies. We pushed our way through to the kitchen, ordered more drink and then stood pinned against the wall, swigging from our bottles whilst watching the dancing.

The night was no longer young, and the men in our party were now on the look-out for some "good looking chicks" with whom to spend the rest of the night. Those on the dancefloor eyed me warily, and newcomers to the braai all stopped and looked twice when they saw me standing there, before advancing cautiously through the crowd. However their looks were more of amazement than hostility. Some wandered up to my companions and asked who I was. Apparently satisfied with the answer, they then returned to the dancefloor or their drinks.

With my friends' attention now fixed firmly on members of the opposite sex, I began to feel isolated and started trying to figure out how I was going to find my way home to Mbatji's house.
All of a sudden I felt someone tapping on my shoulder. I turned to find standing next to me an attractive young woman dressed in loose-fitting maroon slacks, a silk-like white blouse, matching high-heeled shoes and with maroon ribbons tied loosely in her wispy, permed hair.
"Come and dance," she said with a broad smile and pulled me gently into the thick of the gyrating mass of bodies. I had no time to consider her offer and clung to my beer bottle as we danced, my awkward, jerky movements - conditioned by years of listening to Western punk and post-punk rock - jarring with the smooth, pelvic gyrations of my partner and those around us.
Beyond introducing ourselves and my apologising for my appalling dancing, the young woman and I did not say much, and after a couple of dances she thanked me and returned to her friends with - I thought - a look of triumphant satisfaction on her face. No sooner had she gone than I was swallowed up by another crowd of dancers, amongst them some of our original party who, having found a "cherry", were ready to impress. I eventually collapsed into my bed a little before 05h00.
After much more dancing and a good many more beers, I had been offered a lift home by another Elim Street resident who seemed to know all about me but whom I had never met before. Although there was still some time to go until sunrise, it was like daytime in my bedroom. The beam of the nearby spotlight tower flooded through the thin turquoise curtains and filled almost the entire room with bright orange light. The braai next door was still in full swing and the incessant thud thud thud of queen of South African "bubblegum", Brenda Fassie and the Big Dudes, pounded distortedly into the night. The beat was obviously infectious as very soon my head started to keep painful time with the music.
Drunken voices rose in discordant competition to the crooning Brenda, who at the best of times sounded like a throttled meercat. I so desperately wanted to sleep, but for what seemed like an eternity, all I could do was listen as my head spun round and round like the record which the neighbours played over, and over, and over again. Just as I felt myself starting to doze off, a cockerel began to crow right outside my window.
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"Cockadooooodaldoooooooooooooooooo." The weekend had only just begun.
The intoxicating combination of alcohol, hunger (braais only served meat to eat as we vegetarians were unheard of on the township social circuit) and fatigue eventually overpowered the forces of music, light and cockadoodaloo, and I sank into a brief but deep sleep. I woke with a start and groped for my watch.
Sunshine now filtered through the curtains giving the room and everything in it a turquoise glow. The breeze ruffled the curtains and the faint sound of voices and distant radios wafted in and out with each breath of air like the ripples of water on a lake shore.
It was 09h00 and there was no Brenda and the Big Dudes to be heard. I rolled out of bed and staggered into the kitchen. Legions of little cockroaches scuttled across
the floor, table and draining board and disappeared into hide-outs made in the numerous cracks and crannies under the sink and in the walls.

I wiped a layer of dust from the table, took a saucepan from the cupboard, filled it with water and set it to boil on the antiquated electric stove. Almost every window in the house was broken in varying degrees, so it was impossible to keep the dust (or the cockroaches) out of the house, even during the relatively wind-free summer months. You would not notice the dust when you first entered the house because everything, from crockery to clothes to furniture, was covered by an even, thin layer of the diaphanous dust, giving the whole house the same brown tint.

In late winter the dust problem was ten times worse because then strong winds whipped up the dry, brittle earth and sand into blinding whirlwinds of dust and garbage which raced along the untarred streets, through yards and down back alleys the length and breadth of the township, coating everything in its path with a grimy stain.

The dust even found its way into pipes and water came out of the taps a murky brown colour; a sandy sediment was always left behind in the sink and bath after the water had been drained. When you washed your clothes and hung them up outside to dry, they were again impregnated with the mica dye by the time you brought them in again a few hours later. But at least the house was dry. The pan of water bubbled quietly on the stove as I searched the cupboard for something to clear my hangover. Then it started again.

Brenda and the Big Dudes split the calm, slicing straight through my throbbing head in the process. The braai-goers next door had awoken and were setting about clearing their hangovers with more alcohol and music, rather than more conventional treatment taught to me by my mother, that of soluble aspirin.

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I poured the boiling water into my cup, added a spoon of instant coffee powder, picked up the steaming brew and a copy of the previous day's newspaper, and went and sat on the front "stoep" - on the opposite side of the house from the next door's braai.

The noise the neighbours were making melted into the background as the soothing rays of the morning sun embalmed my aching limbs, though not for long as the heat soon began to scorch my pale skin, forcing me to move into the shade of the open doorway. In the street a steady flow of people moved slowly up and down, some dressed in fine, colourful outfits and heading for the city to do their shopping, others not so well turned out and carrying empty crates to the shebeens to be refilled so people could continue the previous evening's drinking.

Children, too, fetched refills for their thirsty elders, while other youngsters, temporarily relieved of household duties, played in the street. Two teams of tattily dressed, barefooted boys chased a small plastic football between two goals made from discarded bricks and Coke cans set up in the middle of the rocky roadway. Each time a car came along, one of the boys would pick up the ball and the players would part to allow the vehicle through before carrying on where they left off.
Further down the street from the soccer game, young boys and girls took it in turns to run down the gradient trying to get airborne a kite they had made from two sticks, a plastic shopping bag, and some old string and boot laces knotted together. Almost all the toys Katutura children played with they made themselves out of junk scavenged from the township's many rubbish tips as the exorbitant prices charged in the city's toyshops put commercially made playthings well beyond the reach of most black households.

A young boy, his dusty head seemingly a third of the size of his entire body, baggy shorts almost falling around his knees and his belly protruding from beneath a torn T-shirt he had long outgrown, jogged past the house steering an old car tyre with two sticks.

He spotted me out of the corner of his eye, looked up at where I was sitting, stopped running and stared in disbelief. Then, realising his tyre was running away down the hill out of control, he scampered after it, glancing back at me as he went. A minute or two later he returned minus the tyre but accompanied by six other children who peeped at me from behind a bush growing in the front of next door's yard.

I looked up and the youngsters fled laughing and shrieking "Shirumbu! Shirumbu!" - ("Whitey! Whitey!"). They were soon back, only this time there were more of them and they came closer. Again I looked up and again they fled. The game continued,

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each time the size of the group and its collective audacity growing until as many as 15 children were peering at me through the dilapidated fence in front of Mbatji's house as if I was an exhibit in a zoo.

"Howzit?" came a familiar voice from the street. It was Da'oud.

"Got any beer?" he asked, striding through the front gate and across the yard clutching a packet of cigarettes in one hand and his belly in the other. His eyes were bloodshot, his hair matted and his clothes - brightly coloured Bermuda shorts and surfing T-shirt - dishevelled.

"You look as if you have been enjoying yourself too," I said, rising to greet him. "Yes, I haven't slept. It's month-end, and you can't sleep when it is month-end, there's too much going on." We went into the living room and Da'oud sank into the springless settee, knocking over an empty half-jack of whisky - evidence that Mbatji had made it home after the braai - in the process.

"Mbatji still sleeping?" Da'oud asked.

"I guess so," I replied, pointing at the empty bottle lying at his feet. He laughed.

"What are you drinking?" he asked, taking the enamel cup from my hand and swigging down the dregs of my black coffee before I had a chance to answer. "Bahhhhhhhhh!" he spluttered, spraying me and the furniture with coffee.

"Coffee??!!"

He looked at me with disgust.

"Haven't you got anything proper to drink in this house?" I went into the kitchen and came back with two quarts of beer from the fridge. I gave one to my friend
and looked around for a bottle opener, but he had already removed the top with his teeth. "Could I have a glass?" he asked impatiently having spat out the bottle top into the ashtray. I obediently returned to the kitchen and brought back two coffee mugs, the only clean drinking vessels left on the shelf.
Da'oud poured his beer into one of the mugs and gulped his drink down in one go as I continued hunting for the bottle opener, which I eventually found under the settee. Da'oud was on his third cup by the time I was taking my first cautious sip. I winced as the sweet, cool taste of the beer clashed with the residue of bitter coffee still in my mouth. All day drinking was something I was going to have to get used to. Two quarts later, Da'oud obviously felt much refreshed and left for his brother's house.
I spent the rest of the day entertaining callers, most of whom had come to see Mbatji, but also a few people from the neighbourhood who were curious to meet the township whitey. Despite the coming and going of visitors, Mbatji continued to sleep, not even stirring when I knocked on his door or put on music in the livingroom. Shortly before 1h00 I decided to

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walk to the local shop to buy bread and milk. Everyone and everything stopped and stared as I made my way through the dusty streets to Shop Elago two blocks away.
Acutely aware that I was the centre of attention, I greeted people I met walking in the opposite direction. Most replied, although in somewhat surprised tones, stopping and turning to watch me continue on my way up the street. Adults drinking on the stoops and in the yards of their houses momentarily forgot what they were doing and gawked as if I had been completely naked.
A few, fortified by their alcohol, plucked up courage to greet me with a sarcastic "Hoe gaan dit baas?") - ("How's it boss?") which I returned with an equally sarcastic smile. Children who saw me coming rushed ahead shouting "Shirumbu, shirumbu" which then brought other children in the neighbourhood out onto the street. I entered the shop and felt hundreds of pairs of eyes home in on me as I made my way along the aisles in between the shelves.
Other shoppers steered well clear of me as I searched high and low for the bread and milk, while the shop assistants gathered in a group near the refrigerators and whispered to each other as they watched my every move. Eventually I found what I wanted and queued at the checkout. When my turn came to pay, the girl at the till glanced up at me quickly and then looked down again, not taking her eyes off the goods and the till, even when taking my money and handing me the change.
A crowd of shoppers, shouting orders and pushing to be served, spilled across the doorway from the sweet and cigarette counter. As I made to leave, the crowd parted in the middle to let me through and then turned and watched my every step through the door and back out into the street. While feeling incredibly exposed, not once was I made to feel threatened. People were not aggressive towards me, only surprised and dumbfounded to see me there.
As I passed Nangolo's house, Selma came to the door and waved to me. I returned the wave with a big smile, thankful for the friendly recognition. Back home I found Mbatji was up and running a bath. He emerged from the bathroom with just a towel wrapped around his waist and greeted me drowsily. We recapped the events of the previous night before deciding to spend the coming evening at the township's newest and brightest nightspot, Club Thriller. We pulled up in Mbatji's beige Chevrolet outside the club, an oasis of flashing neon, tall shrubs and splashing fountains set in the middle of one of the poorest areas of the old location. On the way we had collected The Namibian's layout artist Gollo Auxumub, a short, stocky young man a little older than I was, with lively, laughing eyes and a thin moustache which was invariably curled over an impish grin. We joined the queue at the gate and once we had undergone a body search for weapons, made our way to the box office where we bought our tickets, had our wrists stamped to show we had paid, and walked through to the main dance-floor. It was just after 22h00 and being month end, the club was already packed. The complex had four bars, a restaurant - the only one in the township - and a disco spread throughout the modern twostorey building. Everywhere I looked, people were dressed in sensational clothes, and one would have been forgiven for thinking this was a fashion show rather than an ordinary Saturday night out. Everyone looked as if they were models with their hair cut, gelled or braided in unique styles which further highlighted the clothes they were wearing. The dance floor was already crowded, bodies moving smoothly and rhythmically to the American and South African music pounding from the speakers, while spectators seated at the bar and at tables around the room looked on appreciatively. Stroboscopes and spotlights zoomed around in a frenetic dance of their own while DJ Thabo, dressed in a white suit and matching Panama hat, conducted the dazzling spectacle from his pulpit overlooking the dance floor. We wove our way around the edge of the dance floor and through a door on the opposite side of the room into a floodlit outdoor patio area surrounded by a high, whitewashed wall and with tables and chairs set out under chic reed umbrellas, interspersed with shrubs and pot plants. The sound of sizzling fat and smell of frying meat drifted from a take-away stall at the far end of the patio, at which staff dressed in black trousers, white shirts and black bow ties served the hungry throng in front of them with hamburgers and hot dogs. At the opposite end of the patio area, nearest the dance-hall, the bar was also doing a brisk trade. Meanwhile, at the tables in between, men and women - young and middle-aged sat around laughing, drinking and chatting. They were all dressed to impress and impressed I was. The whole scene was far more glitzy than any I had come across in my admittedly limited experience of provincial clubs in the UK. And yet Club Thriller was set in one of the poorest places I had ever seen. Almost all those there enjoying themselves that night were residents of that very same ghetto. But this was not necessarily a show of wealth, rather
determination to prove that anything those in White City could do, Katuturans could do better... with or without the cash. Gollo tugged my arm and beckoned me to follow him.

We returned to the dancehall and climbed a steep circular staircase in one corner which led to a gallery overlooking the dance floor. Here we found Mbatji and scores of other men, surveying the action below.

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"Just checking out the cherries," Gollo bellowed in my ear.
"There are some beauties here tonight," and he took his place at the railings next to Mbatji and watched, mesmerised by the pulsating bodies below.

All along the balcony rails, other men were doing exactly the same; the majority of those dancing below were women. After a while some of the men upstairs peeled off and appeared minutes later on the dancefloor where they set about making proposals to the women they had had their eyes on. Little time was wasted and after a few dances and a couple of drinks the burning issue of sex was dealt with.

You could tell who had been successful with their proposals and who had not. The former would still be with the girlfriends at two in the morning while the latter would return to the balcony to start over again. After half an hour and several beers, Mbatji felt the time had come to make a move and he led the way to the dancefloor and a group of women he had spied from above. At around 02h30, Mbatji, Gollo, a friend, four girls and I piled into Mbatji's Chev and we drove back to Soweto. Once home, booze was bought from Nangolo's, the furniture cleared to the side of the living room and the music turned up full. By now I was beginning to wilt and started making my way to bed. Realising my intention, Mbatji seized me by the arm and pulled me into the kitchen.
"You can't go now," he hissed. "We have a house full of beautiful chicks and the guy says he is going to bed... alone! Man, you Englishmen are all crazy." He began to sway a little from side to side as he spoke, and put his hand against the wall to steady himself.
"Look, one of these chicks fancies you, you can't leave now." I laughed, told him he was lying simply to make me stay and drink some more.
"How could any of those girls fancy me?" I thought to myself as I got undressed and climbed into bed.
"I've barely said more than hello to any of them all evening. Besides, I'm white. They wouldn't fancy a shirumbu!"

I woke with a start a few hours later. The silhouette of a woman was sitting on the bed, leaning over me and stroking my forehead. I froze.
"It's OK, it's only me." She was one of the girls from the club, the prettiest of the group - short, slim though not skinny, she had beautifully curved breasts, big, dreamy eyes set upon cushions formed by her high cheek bones, suspended between a sculptured, curved nose and above a delicate mouth which seemed to be set in a constant smile, revealing a set of pearly teeth. I had spent much of the evening admiring the woman, but I had never plucked up enough courage to talk to her at any length.
"Are you sick?" she asked. 
"Why did you go to bed so early?"

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"No, I was just tired," I gulped, trying to sit up.
"Oh... I suppose you are not used to our Namibian ways," she said disappointedly.
"You must take us back home. Your friends are in no condition to drive."
I agreed and she went back into the living room as I quickly pulled on some clothes. The needle of the record player in the living room was stuck in the middle of a very scratched Donna Summer album, but everyone was too tired to be bothered by the irritating clicking sound it made every other second. Mbatji was slumped on the settee, while the others were staggering around the room getting ready to leave.
The goddess who had woken me up was busy collecting the empty bottles which lay around the floor, and putting them neatly under the sink in the kitchen, ready to be returned to Nangolo the next time we needed refills. It took what seemed like 20 minutes for everyone to climb into the car and another half hour for them to remember the way to their homes.
The first flecks of daylight were visible over the hills to the east when I stopped outside the house of the last passenger - my dream girl. Through my sleepy haze I noticed again how pretty she was, even at this hour of the morning; her lipstick and skin still looked fresh, her hair and clothes unruffled despite the rigours of the night just gone. She sat there for several minutes not saying a word, just staring calmly ahead of her.
"Is this where you live?" I asked, trying to break the silence.
"Yes," she said abruptly, flashing her deep brown eyes at me irritably before returning her gaze to nothing in particular in front of her. "Oh," I said and there was another long silence.
I fiddled with the keys in the ignition and I too then started staring aimlessly ahead, my tongue tied by a mixture of fatigue and shyness. "Well, you know where I live," she said eventually.
"Come and visit me whenever you want." Another pause. "We black girls are OK you know," she added, and at this she opened the car door, jumped out, slammed the door behind her and stomped into the house. I waved politely, but she did not look back.
Once she was safely inside the house, I started the car and then tried to retrace my tracks back home. To a newcomer, the streets, the districts, in fact the whole of Katutura all looked the same, and I was concentrating so hard on spotting familiar landmarks that I completely forgot to make a mental note of the name of the street in which the woman lived, let alone the number of her house. As for her name... I had never heard it properly above the noise of the music when she introduced herself at the club.
After several wrong turns, I found the road to Soweto and was soon parking the car alongside Mbatji's house. The door was still wide open, the

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lights on, and the Donna Summer record continued to spin around the turntable, hiccoughing repeatedly. Mbatji had not moved from his seat where he sat hunched, as motionless as a statue.
I locked the front door and put a blanket over my friend's shoulders and went back to bed. As I turned off the light, his earlier words flashed through my mind. I thought for a few seconds, but then dismissed his advice for a second time. "How could any of the girls fancy me, a 'shirumbu'," I said to myself as I snuggled up under the blanket.
"I barely said more than hello to any of them the whole evening. But what had the woman meant when she said that 'we black girls are OK'?" It was almost daylight outside and the orange glare of the spotlight was fading fast, no match to the rapidly gathering daylight.
The cockerel crowed its first crow and, almost immediately, next door's hi-fi burst into life, a dawn chorus of Brenda squawking 'Weekend Special'. I was asleep in seconds.
There were a lot of sore heads in the back of the company bakkie as we went to work the following Monday morning. As on every week day, the paper's distribution manager Herman Petrus drove around Katutura collecting staff members living in the township, and drove us to the office in town. Mbatji and I climbed stiffly over the bakkie's tail gate and found ourselves a space to sit in between old editions of the newspaper which lay on the floor.
The passenger seats in the front drivers cab were already occupied by the women, receptionist Anna Ujaha and Oshiwambo writer Sarah Johannes. Those of us in the back were soon joined by Da'oud, who also lived in Elim Street, distribution assistant Ritchie Louw, Gollo, Rajah and Chris Shipanga. Each of us in turn complained how sick we felt before describing in graphic detail just how much we had drunk over the weekend. Knowing every inch of Katutura as well as he did, Herman tended to take short cuts down some of the worst roads and through several river beds, which made the suffering of those of us in the back even more acute as we bounced around, banging our heads on the glass fibre canopy, each bump being met with louder and louder protests.
"I wonder if I will live to see the day when these streets are tarred," Mbatji said ruefully as we ploughed through another, particularly rocky river bed.
The sun was now peeping over the tops of the mountains and throwing golden darts of light across the tin roofs of the location. The streets were alive. Long queues of domestic workers waited for buses to ferry them to the city and then on to the affluent white suburbs - buses to and from town only ran frequently at the very beginning and very end of the working day.
Once everyone had been collected, Herman headed for the city. The main highway was jammed with vehicles of every description; battered taxis with their exhaust pipes almost touching the ground because they were so full of passengers, lorries with the back loaders full of workers standing shoulder to shoulder in their grimy overalls, buses filled to capacity, private cars, motorbikes, bicycles, and bakkies such as ours.

Today there seemed to be more traffic than usual, and it was moving slowly too. We soon discovered why. Ever keen to fine motorists coming from the townships, in particular the taxi drivers, the traffic police were carrying out one of their random vehicle checks. But today the brown-uniformed "traffics" were accompanied by members of the "flying squad", distinguishable by their camouflage outfits and automatic rifles, which suggested there was more to this road-block than simply checking for out of date tax disks and dodgy tyres.

Our vehicle was ordered off the road and no sooner had Herman brought the bakkie to a standstill than a flying squad constable had flung open the back door and was ordering us at gunpoint to get out and stand in a line on the roadside. One by one the constable searched my colleagues and their hand luggage.

When it came to my turn, the black constable gave me a long hard look as if to say "what the hell are you doing coming from the township at this time in the morning?" and then moved on to the next person without even asking for identity papers. In this policeman's rule book, the searching of white people by black officers was obviously neither expected nor permitted!

The search complete - nothing suspicious was found - we were allowed to continue on our journey. As we pulled away, we saw that others being searched were receiving far rougher treatment than we had experienced. One taxi driver was being forced to lie spread-eagled across the bonnet of his car as he was searched, while his passengers were ordered out at gunpoint and then made to unpack every box and bag they had with them as the policemen barked threats and orders.

We sped along the highway and soon the city centre was in view, the multi-storey buildings rising almost asymmetrically from the hill on which the central business district was built. The sun glinted off the smoked glass of the futuristic 12-storey CDM Building, administrative

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sorting centre of the diamond mining giant, now the highest building in the city. The centres of finance, mining and commerce seemed to gloat down on the shallow valley below - Tal Street - where black people spewed from the taxis and buses, and streamed towards their workplaces. We crossed the railway bridge and came to a halt at the Tal Street intersection where traffic from the townships and some of the white suburbs merged. Gleaming Mercedes and BMWs stood side by side, bumper to bumper with dented taxis and dusty second-hand cars. Drivers of the former stared straight ahead, tapping the steering wheel impatiently, waiting for the lights to turn green.

They looked ill at ease - under threat or embarrassed - at being surrounded by black people, perhaps because they felt they might be attacked, or perhaps
because they were unused to being so close to people from the township in a situation which left them without any power over the blacks. Or maybe it was because the whites felt guilty that their cars were far more expensive than those around them, although I somehow doubt this was the case. Sensing this vulnerability, some passengers travelling in the taxis made fun of the white people, while others just stared misty-eyed at the gleaming luxury cars. Realising they were being laughed at, occupants of the Mercedeses and BMWs became even more agitated, so that when the lights turned green, they raced away with tyres screeching and leaving a trail of acrid exhaust smoke behind them. Minutes later we were climbing out of the bakkie which was now parked in front of The Namibian's offices occupying the ground floor of an elegant two-story colonial style building - once the home of a well-to-do German family befronted by tall, lanky palm trees.

The day's work over, we piled back into the bakkie and joined the exodus returning to the townships; onto the highway, through Windhoek North and out towards Katutura Hospital. A pall of dust, enveloped the matchbox houses. On winter evenings, condensation in the chill, still air sucked up this dust and the smoke of wood fires burning in almost every yard and on every street corner to form a thick blanket lying just above the tin roofs. But in these warmer autumn evenings, the dust clouds were like a dry, choking steam or mist.

As the sun dropped behind the purple hills, its defiant last rays became entangled in the dust particles, casting a golden orange glow through the mist and over everything and everyone trapped within it. From a distance, the township appeared like a lake of molten lava, heaving and falling in the human convection currents coming from beneath. Only the floodlight pylons and the twin chimneys of the Van Eck power station, which also belched clouds of smoke, pierced the lava flow, serving as marker posts to Township Shirumbu 41 anyone searching for the writhing mass of human beings hidden below.

That morning most people had trudged in silence from their houses to the roadsides on their way to work. Now they returned, holding their heads high and smiling at the end of another day. The overalled labourers, again pressed together in the back of the lorries, now sang and waved to passers by, glad to return to Africa after having spent the daylight hours in Europe at the beck and call of the white baas, and glad that the first few gulps of tombo (traditional beer) were now only a few minutes away. Deep down, however, there was resentment too, certainly amongst my colleagues. Resentment that the system still forced them to turn around at the day's end and return to the place where they - like their parents - did not want to go. Having spent their working hours in the cosy, pristine splendour of the white person's city, they had to then return to the shit, the dust and the degradation of the township at night, as if they were only sight-seeing visitors to the town.

What made this humiliating trek even more galling for ghetto dwellers was the fact that the white person's affluence would not exist if it was not for the black person's labour, and yet they - the black people - were barred from having even a
share of the fruits of their own sweat and toil. For my colleagues, frustration was heightened by the fact that, through their work, they were highlighting the injustices of the system and ways for it to be changed. Yet still they could not escape. Come the end of the day, they had to jump onto the one-way conveyer belt back to the township. Once there, they still had to put up with security police surveillance, police harassment and the worry that the following day they might take the bakkie back into town and find the office in ruins, the editor in jail or the police waiting, not for errant taxi drivers, but for them. And when that happened, my colleagues knew they could expect to be given more than a brusque body search and a R100 fine.

Another country
"You know what life's all about when you come down from that place (the Namibian war zone), how absolutely fucking worthless life is."
Sergeant Geoff MacMaster of the Swapol counter-insurgency unit Koevoet.

Life was cheap in the Namibian war zone. Law and order dangled from a thin thread, half submerged in a blaze of anarchy and chaos. Yet inhabitants of what was officially referred to as the "operational area" continued from day to day as best they could, appearing outwardly at ease, stoically soaking up the punishment of war. And, unlike sponges which can take so much before becoming saturated, the people of the north continued to absorb the pain, the bitterness and the agony; only occasionally, like the contents of a pot on the fire, did their emotions bubble up and boil over, causing the flames beneath to hiss, spit and flare up.

It was from the far north of Namibia that South Africa waged its war against the armed wing of Swapo, Plan (People's Liberation Army of Namibia), a war which started in August 1966 when guerrillas clashed with the security forces for the first time, outside the village of Ongulumbashe not far from the Angolan border. In the early years of the war, Plan had its camps in Zambia and infiltrated Namibia via the narrow Eastern Caprivi Strip. At the time Angola was run by a Portuguese colonial regime still sympathetic to Pretoria, but after the advent of Angolan independence, Swapo was able to relocate its headquarters to Luanda in 1978, a move which gave Plan access to the more expansive Namibian/Angolan border. Thus the emphasis of the liberation war shifted to Namibia's north and north-western regions.

Angolan independence and the rise to power of the left-wing MPLA added another dimension to the war. Ever fearful of socialism taking root in the region, South Africa teamed up with Angolan rebel leader Jonas Savimbi and poured vast numbers of troops and weapons into an armed assault by Savimbi's Unita on the MPLA government. The far north of Namibia became the forward base for what amounted to a South African invasion of Angola. By the early 1980s and up until the Namibian...
independence process got under way in 1989, Pretoria had an estimated 100 000 troops stationed in Namibia at any one time, giving the country with its population of around 1.5 million - one of the highest soldier to civilian ratios in the world (one soldier to every 15 Namibians).

To counter the Unita/South African onslaught, which in 1975 reached the outskirts of Luanda itself (more than 1 000km from the Namibian border), Cuba sent troops to Angola to fight alongside the MPLA's Fapla army. This dual "communist threat" caused South Africa to commit even more troops and resources to what was supposed to be a civil war. America followed suit, giving millions of dollars worth of military and financial backing to Unita, particularly once Ronald Reagan set up shop in the White House.

Meanwhile, Plan continued to launch its guerrilla attacks into Namibia, but many of its cadres - which totalled around 15 000 by the mid-eighties - joined ranks with the Cuban/Fapla forces to repulse major offensives by Unita and the South Africans. With the South African Defence Force (SADF) preoccupied with the war in Angola, the police was left to contend with most of Plan's guerrilla raids into Namibia.

As these raids became more and more frequent, the South Africans had to look for an alternative means of countering the incursions. In 1979, fresh from active service with the Rhodesian defence force in its war against the Zimbabwean liberation armies, South African Police Major, Hans Dreyer, was given the job of setting up a counter-insurgency unit to take on Swapo's guerrillas. He came up with Koevoet. Originally based on the notorious Rhodesian Selous Scouts, Dreyer's counter-insurgency unit recruited Namibians mainly born and bred in the war zone, and put them under the command of white South African soldiers and police officers.

The locals' in-depth knowledge of the area, its languages and its customs was a vital ingredient in the unit's unique brand of low intensity warfare. Dreyer's force, made up of a handful of men and a second-hand, four-wheel-drive bakkie, first took to the bush in 1980. The unit quickly grew and was soon known to everyone by its nickname Koevoet (Afrikaans meaning crowbar), the word and those associated with it becoming a symbol of dread and loathing both within Namibia as well as internationally, but in particular amongst those living in the far north who were confronted daily by Koevoet and its work.

By 1988, Dreyer had between 3 000 and 4 000 people under his command. Officially part of the South West African Police force (SWAPOL), Koevoet's specialist role allowed Dreyer and his men a great deal of autonomy, the unit being accountable really only to the defence minister and military high command in Pretoria. Koevoet dispensed with conventional military conduct and tactics as these were irrelevant to the

Another country 44 kind of war the unit was fighting. While conventional soldiers drilled and went on regimented operations, Koevoet patrols roamed the bush in their specially adapted Casspir armoured vehicles, sometimes for weeks on end, tracking and hunting
their prey. Standard khaki battle dress was supplemented with T-shirts, shorts and assorted headgear, many Koevoets preferring to track and fight bare chested. Most black Koevoet members were uneducated, employed either because of their knowledge of the war zone or because of their previous fighting experience. Many of the locals joined the unit for the money (wages were good compared with the incomes of most black people living in the rural far north). Others were captured Plan combatants who were “reorientated” to fight their former colleagues, while a few were mercenaries coming from wars elsewhere in the region. All, after a few months in the unit, were united in their utter hatred for Swapo "communists", sentiments reciprocated by the liberation movement's members and supporters.

Debased by their way of life - by being both hunters and the hunted in a vicious guerrilla war - and by living only by the law of the wild savanna in which they worked, Koevoet members started committing atrocious acts of assault, torture, theft, rape and murder whilst in pursuit of their enemy. To civilians, Koevoet became the epitome of evil, the name being used instead of that of the devil. If anything went wrong, people would automatically blame Koevoet. Black Koevoet members, already at best looked down upon as traitors by the majority of their fellow Namibians, became more and more isolated from their own communities. Their behaviour deteriorated still further until there was nothing left in life for them to do except fight Swapo, many vowing that they would remain in the bush and continue fighting rather than live under a government run by the liberation movement.

Most Plan incursions took place between December and May when the seasonal rains provided combatants walking through the bush with both water for refreshment and rejuvenated undergrowth for cover. The first few months of 1988 had been no exception, although the number of guerrillas infiltrating the country was lower than usual because - as was later discovered - many had been sent to south-eastern Angola to fight back the latest South African/Unita offensive. Nonetheless, there was still plenty of activity to report on in northern Namibia, so in early March - less than three weeks after my arrival in the country - I accompanied Chris Shipanga on an assignment to the war zone.

Dubbed The Namibian's "chief atrocities reporter", Chris made regular trips to the far north, his reports bringing home the harsh realities of the war to readers living outside the operational area. As a result, Chris was well known by both residents of the area and also the security forces. A former"Another country 45
miner at TCL's Tsumeb copper mine, Chris joined The Namibian as a trainee reporter when the paper was formed in August 1985. He had regularly written letters to the Windhoek Observer where Gwen Lister had previously worked, highlighting racism and labour practices at TCL. His "subversive" correspondence eventually earned him the sack from the mine, but made him an ideal recruit for The Namibian. Two and a half years later, 28-year-old, Chris - like all the paper's founder members showed the physical signs of wear and tear which resulted from campaigning against South Africa's illegal
occupation of Namibia. Gone was the well-built, fit, fresh-looking young man photographed with his youthful, bright-eyed colleagues standing proudly in front of TheNamibian's Windhoek offices on the paper's first day of publication. Like everyone else in the picture, Chris's face was now creased, his eyes glazed and bloodshot, and a scraggy beard half-hid his sunken cheeks. Nonetheless, in common with his colleagues, Chris had clung to his sense of humour, and his infectious, throaty, chuckle was one of his hallmarks.

We left Windhoek on the Thursday evening soon after that week's paper had been put to bed, over-nighting in Tsumeb's Nomtsoub township at the home of Simon Nakuta, a friend and former TCL workmate of Chris's, before continuing our journey north the following morning.

The main reason for the trip was to cover the funeral on Saturday of Anna Dumeni, daughter of the Lutheran bishop for the north, Kleophas Dumeni. Young Anna had passed away the previous Tuesday, the 27th person to die as a result of a massive bomb which exploded at the First National Bank in Oshakati three weeks before.

Elsewhere in Namibia, people referred to "the north" as if it was a different country. It might as well have been. While you could cross from South Africa into Namibia without even stopping the car, let alone presenting documents to border officials, those entering and leaving the war zone had to undergo a rigorous search at army checkpoints on all main roads. Identity documents had to be produced by everyone passing through the checkpoints, the police or army officials taking down the registration number of every car passing through, the name, address and ID number of every driver, as well as their destination. In addition to this, every black person had to go through a "terrorist" check, parading in front of a two-way mirror behind which sat captured Plan combatants whose job it was to point out to their captors any Swapo guerrillas who might be trying to sneak through the checkpoint in civilian dress.

"Whatever you do, don't take your eyes off your luggage when they search the car," Chris was telling me as we approached the Oshivelo checkpoint on the B1 highway between Tsumeb and Ondangwa.

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Two black soldiers, standing in front of a big "stop" sign pinned to a red and white barrier which straddled the left hand side of the road, waved down our car, pointing their guns at us as we drew to a halt in front of them. The soldiers were members of the South West African Territorial Force (SWATF), an offshoot of the SADF made up of about 30 000 indigenous Namibian troops. Formed in 1981, the SWATF was Pretoria's response to the need to recruit more soldiers for the war, and - as a supposedly independent army- was also part of the pretence that "South West Africa/ Namibia" was in fact "self-governing".

By law, all Namibians were required to do two years military service in the SWATF but in practice, those from the operational area - Owambo, the Kavango and the Caprivi - were never called up. The authorities' reasoning was never officially explained, but it is likely that forced conscription in these regions would have triggered a further exodus of young Namibians into exile. Added to which
It was historically, Swapo had its roots in the far north and, thinking as they did in sweeping terms of race and tribe, the authorities tended to believe that "Owambos are Swapos". Nonetheless, the SWATF was quite prepared to recruit northerners who, for reasons similar to those of people who joined Koevoet, volunteered to serve in the security forces.

Therefore, Namibians living in the central and southern regions bore the brunt of forced conscription, and many young people from these areas fled into exile rather than fight against those they saw as Namibia's liberators, while others carried out their national service with reluctance. In battle, SWATF divisions often served as front line cannon fodder, the deaths of many black infantry troops never being recorded as the South Africans apparently only counted the number of white casualties. Nonetheless, by the later stages of the war, sections of the SWATF had earned themselves a reputation comparable with that of Koevoet.

The checkpoint guards lowered their rifles and sauntered towards the car, one to the passenger side and the other to where I sat in the driver's seat. We wound down our windows and Chris started chatting to the two men in Oshiwambo as I sat frozen to my seat, pretending desperately that I understood what was going on. After several minutes, Chris reached down underneath his seat and pulled out two copies of the previous week's The Namibian which he discreetly passed through the window to the soldier nearest him who took the newspapers and quickly stuffed them up his shirt. The soldier on my side then ordered me to drive around the barrier and into what looked like a makeshift service station by the side of the road. There, underneath a big camouflage net, waited a group of about ten white soldiers and a couple of plainclothed security policemen.

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The soldiers wore an assortment of khaki and camouflage uniforms, and some were stripped to the waist in an attempt to keep cool in the already searing heat. As we pulled into the lay-by, the soldiers surrounded the car and a young, fair-haired officer wearing a pair of gold-rimmed sun glasses with reflecting lenses ordered us to get out and open the boot.
"Watch your luggage!" Chris hissed urgently as the soldiers started rummaging through our belongings in the back of the car. I had already forgotten his earlier warning and was looking idly around, taking in the hustle and bustle of the checkpoint, which swarmed with soldiers and military vehicles going to and from the nearby military base.
Chris had every reason to be anxious. A year before, while passing through the same control point, Chris had been distracted and the soldiers, knowing he was a reporter for The Namibian, had planted mandrax in his camera bag. He was arrested, imprisoned for several hours and then charged with the possession of illegal drugs. In court the frame-up was exposed for what it was after some sharp cross-questioning of the soldiers by Chris's attorney Bryan O'Linn, and the case was dismissed.
But once bitten, twice shy and Chris was not prepared to let the same thing happen again. The search complete, Chris was ordered into a nearby hut for the "terrorist check", leaving me to wait at the car.
"Waar gaan julle?" I had not heard the plainclothed security policemen approaching and I jumped with surprise when he spoke.
"Sorry?" I stammered.
"God, 'n fokking Engelsman," the policeman muttered.
"Where are you going to in the car?" he asked once more.
"I'm not sure," I replied whilst at the same time trying to keep an eye on one of his colleagues who was walking around the car, peering through the windows and looking under the chassis.
"What do you mean you don't know where you're going?" the first man snapped.
I bit my lip as I realised how stupid my answer must have sounded. But it was true, I did not know where we were going. Chris had fired a few place names at me, but they were all foreign names to me and I had been unable to remember them.
"All these places sound the same to me," I replied, trying to redeem myself by putting on my poshest, most naive English accent.
"I'm only the driver. Chris, the other chappie, just points me in the right direction. You had better ask him." The second officer had come over from the car and was now staring at me, his expression a mixture of mild confusion and anger.
"Are you in the army?" he asked glancing at my short-cropped hair, his face muscles relaxing slightly as he spoke.
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For a second I thought about saying "yes" in the hope that they might think I was on a special undercover mission for the SADF, or a mercenary on my way to Angola. But then I realised that this might stimulate their interest in me still further, and that was the last thing I wanted.
"No, I'm not in the army," I replied. The two security policemen looked at each other, then turned and walked back to rejoin their colleagues in a game of cards in the shade of the camouflage net. Chris reappeared from the hut and we climbed back into the car and continued with our journey north.
"What did they want to know?" Chris asked once we were out of sight of the gate. I repeated what had been said and he gave one of his throaty laughs.
"That was a bit cheeky," he said. "You musn't mess with the Boers, they don't tolerate any cheek, particularly up here." I took his warning to heart and vowed to be more on my guard in future.
An hour and a half and two army road-blocks later, we pulled up outside the Lutheran church guesthouse in the village of Oniipa, not far from Ondangwa, set on a dusty plain dotted with small settlements; traditional wood and thatch homesteads surrounded by green mahangu fields, with the occasional cluster of palm trees breaking up the flat, monotonous landscape. The single-storey guest house, built of brick with a corrugated iron roof and glass windows, was dwarfed by the nearby church painted a bright brown/orange colour and set in a big open field of light grey sand with the occasional clump of coarse grass. A big metal gong hung from the crossbeam of a purpose-built shelter, with the thick iron beating rod hanging from a nail driven into one of the uprights. Washing was draped over the fence enclosing the church yard, just out
of reach of a herd of goats which nosed through the grass looking for tastier tidbits.

To the left of the guesthouse was a cluster of long, single storied buildings similar in design to the guest house. A hand-painted sign above the gate announced that this was the church-run Onandjokwe hospital, the only hospital between Oshakati, 45km to the north-west, and Tsumeb, 270km to the south.

On the other side of the main road lay a few more brick houses and a grocery shop/bottle store with more traditional houses built around and in between. It was midday and the sun was beating down mercilessly as we stepped from the relatively, air-conditioned cool of the car. A group of schoolchildren, aged between five and 16, were lolling in the shade of the guest house veranda sipping cool drink, eyeing us suspiciously as we stretched our limbs. When we turned and walked towards them, two of the youngest children fled and hid behind a wall in the yard of the guest house.

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The remainder sauntered down the steps and away towards the road, furtively looking back at us as they went. Seeing they were being abandoned, the two youngsters darted from their hiding place and caught up with the others, grabbing hold of the eldest girl's skirt for security.


"They're no doubt wondering what I am doing with a Boer. They probably think you're a Koevoet with that haircut of yours!" The guesthouse seemed at first to be deserted, but we eventually made our way to the back of the building where we found six buxom, middle-aged women at work in the kitchen.

Some of the women wore traditional Owambo dresses which hung from the shoulders and were not brought in at the waist, and made the wearers look as if they were eight months pregnant. The others wore skirts made of similar, richly coloured, patterned materials to the dresses as well as T-shirts which commemorated festivals or anniversaries linked to the liberation struggle and emblazoned with revolutionary slogans expounding the virtues of Swapo. All had on colourful cotton head scarves, standard dress for women from the region.

Noticing we had arrived, the women stopped their work and, wiping their hands on aprons and towels, came out into the yard to meet us. Chris greeted the women respectfully in Oshiwambo before shaking each by the hand, repeating the greeting as he went. I followed his example, saying to each "good morning, pleased to meet you", to which they replied in Afrikaans, some curtseying and calling me "baas" while others stood up straight and looked at me suspiciously, barely whispering their greeting. The handshakes complete - Chris being welcomed like a long lost brother

- my colleague introduced me formally and explained who I was.

The women appeared to relax and smiles replaced the frowns of most, though a couple still appeared a bit uneasy about my being there. Having caught up with all their news, Chris broached the delicate issue of that evening's meal, trying to explain as best he could that I was a vegetarian.
" Doesn't eat meat?! " the women exclaimed as one in their mother tongue. Chris nodded, trying hard to keep a straight face. The women burst into hysterics, slapping each other and asking Chris to repeat what he had said in case they had not heard him right.

Each time he obliged, their laughter erupted once more, while I stood there smiling feebly, oblivious to what they found so funny. Eventually the laughter died down enough for one of the six to offer to show us to our room, while the rest returned to the kitchen. Here the women were soon repeating what Chris had said and the echo of their laughter followed us down the corridor. Once in the room, Chris explained that it was unheard

Another country 50 of in the far north for someone not to eat meat. As in the rest of Namibia, meat was hugely popular and not to eat it when it was available was tantamount to sacrilege. . . in a light-hearted sort of way. First my Koevoet haircut and now my peculiar eating habits - I could tell I was going to get along fine with the locals!

Washed and changed, Chris suggested we took a drive to the Angolan border, 65km away at Oshikango. We drove back to the main road and were soon passing through the region's second biggest town, Ondangwa, a sprawling collection of shacks, township houses and shops clustered around major army installations. Shops, some no more than one-roomed corrugated iron huts with no electricity or running water, others more substantial brick buildings - hugged the dusty roadside which was strewn with broken bottles and discarded tin cans.

Most of the shops - called Cuca stores after the Angolan brand of beer which was the main commercial brew sold in the north before the Angolan civil war led to the closure of the border with Namibia - sold alcohol, groceries and a few household goods. Invariably daubed with the motifs of multi-national drink or cigarette companies, Cuca stores had sprung up and thrived in response to the influx of South African troops into the region, many northerners abandoning their traditional farming practices to cash in on this boom.

Even in the most rural of areas you would find a small makeshift stall selling booze, while in Ondangwa, every other building seemed to be a Cuca store with witty, grandiose titles such as California Love Inn, Kentucky Bargain Store and Love Paradise.

There were also bigger shopping complexes owned by the area's entrepreneurial millionaires; a supermarket, bottle store, bar, disco, guesthouse, furniture store and garage all together in one fenced-in compound. Then, in the midst of this urban sprawl, the occasional traditional kraal still stood in defiance of the modern chaos, the inhabitants continuing to grow their mahangu on land fast disintegrating into dust and garbage.

As we drove on, we passed the Ondangwa market place with its rickety wooden stalls selling meat, meat and meat; whole carcasses, freshly skinned and still dripping blood hung from the cross beams, flies competing with shoppers for the best pieces. On the ground next to some of the stalls lay slaughtered goats, donkeys and the occasional cow waiting to be skinned and chopped up by the axe-
wielding stall owner who was busy quartering the meat while customers pointed out the lumps of flesh they wanted.

Being Friday, there were more people than usual cramming the dusty market place, a hive of activity even on weekdays. Most people carried

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packages under their arms or on their heads. Those who were not busy buying, chatted to others, or simply watched the stream of traffic going up and down the road. Cyclists dodged in and out of the crowds before wobbling precariously onto the tarmac. Suddenly three military Casspis thundered by in the opposite direction, showering those nearest the road with dust. But everyone seemed not to notice and carried on with their business.

Up ahead on a patch of dusty wasteland which served as the taxi rank/ bus terminal, hundreds more people buzzed around a seemingly neverending cavalcade of kombis’, looking for vehicles to take them to the surrounding towns and villages, or on longer journeys to the south as far as Windhoek. Having found the right Kombi, the travellers loaded up their goods onto luggage racks already piled up to a height equivalent to that of the van itself before squeezing in to the back along with at least 15 other passengers. These privately owned kombis made up for the region’s almost non-existent bus service, and were an essential means of transport to anyone who needed to travel but could not afford a car.

The only cheaper alternative to the kombis was the handful of big diesel bus transporters which made weekly journeys to the deep south and west, primarily ferrying migrant workers to and from the country’s mines and factories which were as far away as the Oranjemund diamond mine, 1400km to the south on the border with South Africa.

Once their vehicles were loaded beyond capacity, the Kombi drivers revved their engines and veered out into the road, seldom stopping to see if any other traffic was coming their way. It was no wonder so many of these mini-buses bore the scars of countless collisions with other vehicles.

My senses were swamped as I tried to take in the scene; the smells, the hustle and bustle, the babble of voices, the honking of horns, the vibrant colours midst the dust and squalor. All so chaotic and yet all so laid-back. My concentration was broken as another five Casspis thundered past, our car shaking in the jet stream while the roar of the Casspis’ huge turbocharged engines and the haunting whine of the massive wheels on the tarmac caused my stomach muscles to tighten. I turned in my seat and watched like a kid out train spotting as the green beasts disappeared into the distance. Chris’s response was only to glance casually at the Casspis in the rear-view mirror.

Just as I was turning back to face the front, Chris braked suddenly. A couple of scrawny cows with huge horns and lumps in the middle of their backs wandered slowly into the road, paused, looked at us with contempt and then ambled off to the other side of the road to explore a pile of refuse.

Behind the marketplace and taxi rank now stretched rows of conventional matchbox township houses. Oluno township, with its schools
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and municipal houses dating back to the late ’60s and early ’70s, was the only real attempt made by the authorities to cater for the urbanisation triggered by the military occupation. In the middle of the township stood an army base, home to the SWATF’s dreaded 101 Battalion. A double-thickness, 12 metre high barbed wire fence, which started from the back yards of the adjoining houses, encircled the base, stretching between a series of gun towers, each with its mounted machine gun sticking out from piles of sandbags. Soldiers lolled over the sides of the towers, stroking the barrels of their weapons while watching the melee of people and traffic below. Directly outside the base’s main entrance stood a Shell petrol station, its pristine concrete forecourt and gleaming red and yellow sign standing out against the shabby township and menacing military camp.

We left the market behind, soon to see another change in architecture. To our right and within the confines of another military base was a largish complex of modern single-storey buildings with gleaming roofs and light grey plastered exteriors; Ondangwa police station and jail, and the headquarters of the Owambo Administration. Above the entrance gate fluttered the South African flag while below soldiers checked every car and the credentials of occupants entering and leaving the premises.

Soon afterwards, the main road divided. We took a right turn, continuing on the Bi due north to Oshikango while the other limb curved to the West and was signposted Oshakati. We passed another military convoy, twenty or so armoured vehicles and troop carriers parked on the side of the road, the commanders crowded around a map smoothed out on the bonnet of the leading vehicle. Their subordinates, unshaven men with short-cropped hair, lounged around amongst the machine guns and cannons which sprouted in all directions from their armour-plated war machines, the latter resembling some kind of moon craft thanks to their landmine-resistant design.

A few kilometres further on and we had left Ondangwa behind us and were now driving at speed through the veld. Apart from roadside Cuca stores every few kilometres, the landscape was again one of traditional homesteads surrounded by mahangu fields cleared and planted midst the stubby bushes, brown gracs and clumps of tall green trees of the savanna plain. But still there was always something to remind you of the war, be it the relentless traffic of military convoys, the odd gun tower sticking up above the tree line marking a rural police station or army camp, the bomb craters, the odd derelict building.. .and the wrecked cars. The twisted remains of cars, bakkies and Kombis, stripped of their parts, littered the side of the road. "Landmines," Chris said pointing to an upturned wreck, "or else the cars are smashed in accidents caused as the drivers rush to get home before curfew. Often they crash into army vehicles...and you've seen

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how big they are. But all the time there is the threat of landmines, particularly on the dirt roads. You won't get me driving off the tar road unless I have to," Chris added in his usual calm but serious way.
"What about that?" I asked, pointing at the bloody, mangled remains of a cow lying at the side of the road. Stray dogs, scared off by the sound of the car, were skulking in the nearby veld ready to continue feasting on the carcass once we had gone.

"That often happens," Chris explained, not a bit put off by the gory sight. "The cattle are always wandering onto the road. The army vehicles sometimes don't bother stopping to let the animals pass and instead drive straight into them. I think the Boers think it is a fun thing to do." Chris's sarcasm was always under-played, but there was now a hint of bitterness in his voice.

"But isn't that cow part of someone's livelihood?" I asked.

"Yes, but what do the soldiers care?"

Although now a long way from the town, we still came across many pedestrians - women carrying loads on their heads and children either tending to cattle or on their way home from school - and cyclists by the roadside. Many of those on foot were looking for a lift.

"You must be careful who you give lifts to," Chris said, continuing with his lecture on the dos and don'ts in the war zone.

"You might be picking up South African informers, or else they could be Plan combatants, in which case we could well be stopped at a road block and then we would be in trouble. But these people look OK," he added, taking his foot off the accelerator and bringing the car to a halt just ahead of a group of four teenage schoolgirls.

The students were wearing school uniforms but were already young women in their own right. Having gratefully accepted our offer of a lift, they were at first wary of us and sat quietly in the back seat as we continued on our way. One of the girls then recognized Chris and, having confirmed that we were both working for The Namibian, was soon chatting away to Chris in Oshiwambo.

The students were attending Ponhofi Secondary School at Ohangwena, about 12km from the border. They were angry that Koevoet had continued to maintain a base next to their school, despite a campaign by the students, parents and teachers for the base to be moved elsewhere. The year before, two Ponhofi students were killed when Plan combatants attacked the base. According to the school's principal, half an hour after the attack, mortars were fired from the Koevoet base, several of which landed on the school hostel killing two students.

This was just one in a series of such incidents which had driven those at the school to demand the base be relocated elsewhere. Whenever the base was attacked, the school was inevitably caught in the crossfire. This was not all. The girls went on to explain that when Koevoet members stationed at the base wanted sex, they often broke into the school hostels at night and raped students; two girls were recently beaten to death when they refused to satisfy the Koevoet intruders. But still the powers-that-be ignored demands that the base be moved. Now, the girls said, the students had had enough and were planning to hold a meeting within the next week to decide what further action should be taken.
"The Koevoet built their base next to the school deliberately," Chris explained as we continued towards the border having dropped the girls at the turn-off to their village.

"They say they are there to protect the school, but in actual fact they are using it as a shield. Koevoet and the army have built bases next to other schools, hospitals too, using the same excuse. They hope it will stop Plan guerrillas from attacking. But Plan has to attack as these are strategic military bases, yet when they do, it's the innocent who get hurt - usually in South African rather than Swapo gunfire."

Just as he finished his sentence, Chris jerked the steering wheel to the right, causing the car to veer over to the other side of the road before he turned the wheel the other way and brought the car back on course. I looked back and saw that a Coke can lying in the road had been the cause of our evasive action.

"What did you do that for?" I asked, a little shaken. Chris was still ice cool. "Even Coke cans can blow up," he said matter of factly.

"Two American visitors were killed last year when they drove over a beer can packed with explosives which was lying at the entrance of a garage in Oshakati." A gun tower surrounded by a high bank of sandbags and rolls of razor wire came into view. As we drew closer, a soldier scuttled from a bunker into the middle of the road and took aim at us with his assault rifle. We pulled up about five metres in front of him and, once we had come to a halt, he lowered his gun and walked briskly around to the driver's side of the car. Chris wound down his window and greeted the soldier in Afrikaans.

"Where are you going to, what are you doing here?" demanded the soldier. "Can't we go any further?" Chris replied benignly.

"Of course you can't, this is the border with Angola. If you go any further you will be shot."

"Oh," said Chris, half turning to me and winking. "We must be lost. Can't we just go over there and have a quick look from that building?" Chris continued, pointing at a derelict, shell-blasted building 100 metres away, the former customs house from the time when the border had still been officially open.

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"You can if you want, but you'll be shot," said the soldier gesturing at the gun tower where one of his colleagues swivelled on a mounted machine gun.

"Oh," said Chris, pretending to sound shocked.

"We had better go back then. Thank you." Chris turned the car around and we headed back the way we had come. "Well that was the border," my colleague informed me as we left the gun tower behind us.

"The South African government recently boasted that the war in Angola was going so well that motorists would soon be able to drive from Cape Town to Cairo via Angola. I think we have just proved them wrong!"

Twelve kilometres further down the road and we came to the turn off to Ohangwena.

"We might as well go and see what those Ponhofi girls were talking about," Chris said, turning left onto a bumpy dirt road which led towards a collection of tatty buildings several hundred metres away. I remembered what my colleague had
said about the danger of landmines and I scoured the road ahead looking for any possible sign of explosive devices, not that I had the first idea what I should be looking for. Chris gingerly steered the car through deep ruts in the surface made by armoured vehicles when the recent rains had turned roads such as this one into pools of mud.

The buildings turned out to be a row of dilapidated shops in front of which, under a tall tree in the middle of a dusty village square, a market was taking place. A few rotten vegetables and some skinny carcasses of meat were laid out on some crude wooden stalls around which were gathered a hundred or so villagers who chatted with the store keepers and inspected their wares. Amongst the crowd wandered a group of about ten black men in mismatched khaki uniforms, guns slung over their shoulders as they slouched along, sampling food and arguing over prices as they went.

The villagers eyed the rabble suspiciously and gave them a wide berth. Some of the men wore loose-fitting combat jackets, others T-shirts. All were unshaven, some shading their heads with standard issue khaki sunhats while the rest walked bare-headed, their short-cropped hair matching in length the stubble on their chins. Even the guns they carried were not all the same; some wielded South African-made R-5 assault rifles while others had the Soviet AK-47s favoured by Plan guerrillas.

All the soldiers appeared highly strung, frequently touching their weapons as if afraid they might lose them, particularly when arguing over the price of goods at one of the market stalls. Most of the men appeared drunk, perhaps punch-drunk, slopping along as if their boots were too big for their feet.

"Koevoet," Chris muttered, nodding in the direction of the soldiers before driving on. We turned the corner and came across a tall, barbed wire Another country 56 fence with gun towers built along it at regular intervals. Six metres in from the first fence was another about half the height along which were attached signs warning: "Gevaar, myne" - ("Beware, mines"). This was the Koevoet base the girls had talked about, and sure enough, about 50 metres away from the perimeter fence was Ponhofi Secondary School.

The school was now closed for the weekend and the students had already left for their homes in the outlying villages. The classrooms and hostels stood deserted; few windows still contained unbroken glass and several walls were pocked with bullet and shell holes. Fresh footprints in the dusty yard and a new, gleaming chain-linked fence topped with razor wire, were the only indications that the school was still in use.

The school blended in with the impoverished surroundings - the shops with their crumbling brickwork and peeling paint; the bar bulging with raucous men, drunks tottering into the street to piss before returning inside once more to continue drinking; women running their market stalls; young children in torn, dust-encrusted clothes chasing after each other, collecting discarded beer cans and bottles which they returned to the bottle store owner in exchange for a couple of
cents; older children running errands for their mothers; scrawny dogs sniffing 
around piles of garbage; goats grazing on a few tufts of grass which grew in the 
dust and hard-baked mud.
All this in the shadow of the gun towers of the Koevoet base from which guards 
could see everything and everyone in the village. The atmosphere of the village 
made even Chris feel uneasy, and we were soon driving back past the marketplace 
on our way to the main road. The Koevoet gang now sat gnawing on hunks of 
meat under the big tree, watched at a distance by a group of satchel-carrying 
students.
"Let's go and see Oswald," Chris said, and he accelerated away, steering us safely 
back onto the tar road.
Oswald Shivute stirred up a hornet's nest when, at the trial of South African 
conscientious objector Ivan Tomms, he testified about the atrocities committed by 
security force members in the Namibian war zone. As Secretary of the Öwambo 
Administration, it had become Shivute's job to act as a go-between for the people 
of the far north and the security forces, hearing the complaints of atrocity victims 
and presenting their cases to the police for investigation.
When he appeared in the dock in February 1988 as a defence witness (Tomms 
was being tried for refusing to do compulsory military service in Namibia), 
Shivute told the Cape Town court that, in six years as administration secretary, he 
had received 690 complaints from civilians about their treatment at the hands of 
the occupying security forces. The most common complaints were of theft, 
looting, mutilation, arson, rape

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and murder. Statements were taken and the evidence submitted to the police, but 
so far not one complaint had resulted in a prosecution.
As an example of the kind of atrocities carried out by the security forces, Shivute 
recounted the cases of an Ondangwa woman who, when nine months pregnant, 
was dragged from her home by three soldiers, raped by each, then raped again 
when she tried to escape, and was eventually stabbed when she refused to kiss the 
penis of one of the soldiers.
Shivute also described how teenagers Portious Blasius and Titus Paulus were 
tortured by security force members trying to extract information about the 
whereabouts of Plan insurgents. Seventeen-year-old Blasius had his face burnt 
beyond all recognition when soldiers pressed it against the exhaust pipe of an 
idling army truck, while Paulus, aged 13 at the time, was beaten, kicked in the 
genitals, burnt with cigarette lighters and then roasted over an open fire when he 
said he did not have information the soldiers were looking for. All these cases, 
like the 687 others Shivute had drawn to the police's attention, had never reached 
the courts.
After Shivute's evidence at the trial received widespread media attention both 
within Namibia and South Africa, and also overseas, the South African authorities 
branded him as "an infamous liar with malicious intentions to make cheap 
propaganda".
Oswald was a short, dapper man in his mid-thirties. Chris and I found him in his office at the Owambo Administration interviewing that afternoon's intake of civilian complainants. When we walked into the room, Oswald jumped up from behind his large wooden desk - piled high with files and statements - and came to greet us. He was wearing an immaculately pressed pin-striped suit, striped shirt, light blue tie and wellpolished leather shoes which sparkled even in the shuttered semi-gloom of the room. His hair was neatly cut, his face clean-shaven, and a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles gave him an appearance of the archetypal city professional. But his razor-sharp image belied the genuinely rustic, highly religious northern Namibian which lay beneath his polished veneer.

For several years Oswald had been one of Chris's major contacts in the region, the former - as a well-known and respected member of the community - providing a useful source of information, particularly when it came to exposing the abuses of human rights by the security forces. The two had formed a close relationship, apparent by the way they hugged and greeted each other with much back slapping and laughter. Their reunion complete, Chris introduced me to his friend who warmly shook me by the hand, asking me in perfectly reasonable English how I was enjoying my visit to the north. The other eight or so people in the office waited patiently, impassively watching the reunion and introduction, though it was clear from the way they kept glancing at me that they were suspicious of why I was there.

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I was there. Two rows of chairs were arranged in front of Oswald's desk. An elderly couple, who had been talking when we came in, sat in the front row with a middle-aged man and a young women on either side. Behind them sat three youngish men and a young woman who was nursing a child.

While Oswald arranged two seats for us to sit on, Chris went and shook hands with everyone else in the room. I followed his example, the elderly couple giving me an almost grovelling greeting, calling me both "baas" and "meneer", while the younger men and woman were quick to withdraw their hands from mine. We then took our seats while Oswald busily set up the electric fan so that it blew cool air in our direction, before returning to behind his desk.

"I'm sorry about my haircut, it's a bit short isn't it?" I said apologetically to Oswald, but he only laughed.

"No, no, not at all, feel at home," he said before recounting - in English for my benefit - the story as told so far by the elderly couple. The previous evening, a group of patrolling Koevoets came to the couple's homestead and raided their meagre livestock, stealing two chickens and a goat. They then forced their way into the house, ripped open a locked suitcase and made off with the couple's life savings which had been hidden in the suitcase lining. As evidence, the couple had brought with them the tattered suitcase and a khaki military sunhat which the raiders had left behind as if it was a kind of calling card.

Oswald's resume complete, the couple continued their story, speaking in Oshiwambo, the words bobbing and gurgling off the tongue with the lilting rhythm of a mountain stream. Chris and Oswald took notes, both interjecting from
time to time with questions. I sat lapping up the cool air which eventually reduced to a trickle the rivers of sweat which had been flowing down my forehead, neck and back since we had left Oniipa.

Once the old woman had finished her story, she and her husband agreed to Chris's request for a photograph of them with the broken suitcase and discarded hat. Then the couple left, shaking hands with everyone as they went. Oswald saw them to the door and promised he would do all he could to persuade the police to investigate the case, but warned that the authorities were reluctant to look into matters such as these. The woman said they understood the problem and was thankful that their plight would at least receive some publicity in "the people's newspaper".

One after another, the remaining complainants gave details of how they too had suffered at the hands of the security forces. One told how his son had been shot by soldiers having refused to "volunteer" for the SWATF. A woman said a Casspir had run over and killed her family's only cow. All spoke in a calm, matter-of-fact way, their faces placid and emotionless but their eyes showing hints of despair. For this was just another day for the

people of the war zone. Oswald said later that, on average, he now took statements from between 20 and 30 people a day. Some of the victims travelled for a day or more from outlying rural areas to reach his office, although most came from the area around Ondangwa and Oshakati.

After spending almost two hours listening to the testimonies, Chris and I excused ourselves, arranging to meet Oswald at the funeral of Anna Dumeni the following day. Having spent so long in the cool of Oswald's office, the mid-afternoon heat came as a shock to the system as we walked back to the car, so we decided we had no choice but to head for one of Chris's favourite drinking places.

Most things in Namibia revolved around drink, and newspaper work was no exception. We were soon ensconced in the bar of an Ongwediva service station owned by Chris Nunes, one of the north's millionaire businesspeople who had a penchant for racing cars. We gulped uncontrollably at our first ice cold beer, and before too long had others lined up as news of our whereabouts spread and one after another of Chris's contacts arrived on the scene to tell him about all the latest happenings. Every few minutes army convoys would rumble past. I was growing used to the sound made by the armoured vehicles and after a while, as the beer began to go to my head, I stopped looking outside each time I heard a convoy approaching.

None of those who came to visit us stayed for very long, though no one appeared to be in any hurry to leave. At one stage we were joined by the region's highest ranking black member of the security police. No one took much notice when the policeman, a fat man dressed in a dark grey suit with white shoes, a burgundy shirt, grey tie and dark sunglasses, strolled into the bar. He gave a curt greeting to the handful of people gathered there at the time, walked down to a space at the bar next to me and ordered a double whisky. Chris greeted him coolly but politely and the policeman, obviously aware of who Chris was, returned the greeting and
asked him who I was. Chris cordially introduced me, though only by my Christian name, referring to me simply as a "friend".
Oblivious to who the man was, I offered him my seat, almost falling off the stool as I did so, and struggling hard to stay upright as the alcohol rushed to my feet. He gave a dry smile and, thanking me in hesitant English for my offer, said he would rather stand. He did not stay long and appeared ill at ease throughout the time he was there, studying the bottles behind the bar as he played with his glass in between sizeable swigs of spirit. Those at the other end of the bar tried to continue a bland conversation about the rains, but even this was tinged with awkwardness, so there was a universal though silent sigh of relief when the policeman walked stiffly out five minutes later, calling out a cursory farewell as he went.

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Late afternoon came and went, and it was with some alarm that Chris looked at his watch to discover it was nearly 19h00, and that the sun was already a huge golden ball sinking low into the sky to the west. The dusk to dawn curfew could start any minute and we still had a 35km drive ahead of us back to Oniipa, a journey which took us past Ondangwa airbase, the South Africans' biggest front line aerodrome and a strictly no-go zone after curfew.
It was illegal for anyone other than soldiers to be out between the time the sun set and the time it rose again the following morning. The security forces were under orders to shoot on sight anyone discovered breaking the curfew. Guards at the airbase were renowned for having a flexible interpretation of when the curfew started, and reportedly several people had been shot as they passed the base while it was still daylight.
We quickly said our goodbyes and staggered out to the car. The nearby taxi rank was like an ant hill which had just been knocked over; people were running everywhere trying to flag down taxis or hitch a lift. Kombis raced in all directions, screeching to a halt to set down passengers and pick up others before accelerating away in clouds of dust, turned a burning orange colour by the dying rays of the sun. It might have been chaos at the Ondangwa market that morning, but there everyone was cool and time was unimportant. Now time was of the essence, and it was as if everyone had abandoned all composure in the desperate bid to get home before the last shadows melted into the dusk. Cars, bakkies and vans sped along the main road between Ondangwa and Oshakati, drivers hunched over the steering wheels, glancing first at the road and then at the setting sun. Chris wasted no time once we were on the main road and the speedometer was soon topping 150km an hour as both of us scanned the road ahead for animals and other hazards. Chris braked and the car veered onto the dusty embankment as a bakkie coming in the opposite direction overtook a lorry on a blind corner.
"Now you can see why there are so many wrecks at the side of the road," Chris said changing down a gear and bringing our car back onto the road.
"Not a week goes by without someone getting killed in road accidents at this time of the day. People are so afraid of not making it home before curfew that they lose all reasoning and drive like devils."

"How long has the curfew existed?" I asked through gritted teeth as I gripped the seat for added security.

"About eleven years," my colleague replied.

Every day for so many years, people had been going through this nightmare ritual before having to hide in their homes after dark, knowing that even there they were not safe from the soldiers who marauded through the region apparently free of the constraints of even the South African legal system. A whole generation of children had grown up knowing no other lifestyle.

We shot past the carcass of a mutilated donkey lying mangled in a fresh pool of blood and surrounded by shattered glass. Stray dogs were already attending to the carcass, no longer scared off by the passing cars. Daylight was the only flimsy protection civilians had; when night fell, the harsh law of the bushveld took over. The gun towers of the air base came into view and we strained our eyes to see if the guards were already in their positions. They were, lounging by their loaded machine guns which were fitted with infra-red sights. Chris eased his foot down still further on the accelerator as I continued to watch the soldiers for the first sign that they were taking aim. Chris now had his sights set firmly on the road ahead but I was transfixed by the gun towers.

Past one, past two, the guard in the third seemed to be making a move for the trigger. .No, he was lighting a cigarette. We sped past the fourth and final gun tower, waited a few seconds and then let go of our baited breath. We were to go through this for the next four evenings we spent in the war zone, each time setting out on our mad dash home a few minutes later than the previous evening as if playing a bizarre form of Russian roulette.

"Do these people have no respect?" muttered the elderly woman as she climbed down from the back of the lorry, one of about 70 vehicles in the funeral cortege which set out the following morning.

The procession had started in style, with school children, standing shoulder to shoulder on the backs of large lorries, singing in rousing harmony as hundreds of mourners left Bishop Dumeni's Oniipa home and headed for the cemetery 20km away at Ongwediva Teacher Training College.

The singing continued as the procession of bakkies, cars, buses, battered Kombis, taxis, lorries, farm vehicles and people on foot jogging alongside snaked onto the main road and started heading north through Ondangwa. Everyone was dressed in their best clothes, and the cortege was an impressive and - despite the majority wearing black - colourful sight as it processed at a stately pace towards Ongwediva.

But 10 km away the army stood in wait. Troops had thrown up a roadblock across the main Ondangwa/Oshakati road and, when the funeral procession reached the checkpoint, vehicles were forced off the road and the occupants ordered out as the
soldiers checked identification papers and searched the vehicles as well as every piece of luggage they found inside. A soldier directed us into a space on the roadside and told Chris to get out of the car and to open up the boot.

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"Did you know about the funeral?" Chris asked the soldier as the latter slammed close the door to the empty boot and started looking underneath the car. "What funeral?" the soldier snapped back unconvincingly.

Next to us a bus load of mourners from Windhoek had disembarked and two soldiers were walking through the coach, looking under the seats and in the hand luggage racks. Their search inside complete, they then ordered the driver to take down all the bags and suitcases which were piled high on top of the roof so that they could be inspected. Elsewhere, drivers of other buses in the procession were being made to do the same.

Chris irritably paced up and down next to the car, waiting for the soldier to finish his search. The latter reappeared from under the car, glanced at Chris's ID card and went off to check another car without even bothering to ask me for my papers. Chris snatched his notebook and camera bag from the back seat of the car and stalked off to see what was happening elsewhere in the confusion.

The military had underestimated the size of the cortege and soon ran out of space for the vehicles, as well as soldiers to search them. After half an hour, in which time only half the vehicles were searched and nothing suspicious or illegal found, the soldiers gave up and allowed the procession to continue on its way.

Spontaneously the singing started up again, only this time it was twice as loud with several choirs launching into a rousing rendition of Onward Christian Soldiers.

Another 500 or so mourners were already gathered at the graveyard when the procession eventually arrived. The service was to be held out of doors, and lines of chairs and wooden pews had been arranged under the shade of an awning strung between some tall evergreens growing in the churchyard. The pews and chairs quickly filled and the remainder of the crowd formed an arc around them, mourners taking up every piece of available shade; it was OhOO and the sun was already sending its scorching rays slicing through every gap in the trees.

Tribal chiefs and village headman from all over the region were gathered, dressed in suits, ties and obligatory trilby hats. They stood nobly, apart from the rest of the crowd and received greetings from members of the congregation who came up to them one by one to shake their hands and say a few respectful words before moving on. In another corner of the churchyard had gathered a group of about 50 students dressed in T-shirts on the backs of which was printed the slogan "Education not bullets", while on the front was a picture of a book out of which came two clenched fists which had broken the shackles binding them.

Many nurses were there too, their gleaming white uniforms making them easily recognisable in the throng. Anna Dumeni had been a nurse at...
the black Oshakati State Hospital and, like many of her colleagues from the hospital, had been in the town's First National Bank cashing her monthly pay check when the bomb went off that Friday lunchtime. Many of the nurses now in the congregation had been on duty when the first casualties were brought into the hospital, their friends and colleagues amongst them. Some of the nurses gathered in the churchyard wore bandages and plaster casts, having themselves been caught up in the blast. Most of the mourners had been in the same churchyard two weeks before paying their last respects to 16 other bomb victims. Now they were back again, this time to bury Anna, the 27th person to lose her life as a result of the blast.

A wave of silence washed through the crowd as the coffin was carried to the front of the congregation and set on two trestles, followed by the dead woman's father Bishop Kleophas Dumeni, and the rest of the immediate family.

The Bishop was head of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in northern Namibia, a member church of the Namibian Council of Churches which was outspokenly opposed to apartheid and the South African occupation of Namibia. Anna was the third member of the Dumeni family to have been killed within the space of a year. The Bishop's brother was shot when he accidentally wandered into a South African ambush just inside Angola whilst out looking for stray cattle. And four months later, the Dumeni's third son died in a mysterious car accident.

The family took their places in the front pew and the service got under way with a song sung by one of the local choirs. Chris left me at the outer edge of the congregation and went to the front to take photographs. I looked around for some shade, but it had all been taken. Many people stood under big, brightly coloured golf umbrellas, while others jealously guarded their patches of shade under the trees. Oswald bustled up to me and shook me vigorously by the hand.

"Welcome, welcome," he said in a loud whisper. "How are you today? I hope you had a pleasant night. Please feel free to take some photographs. Take as many as you like, feel free." I thanked him and he strode off to the other side of the crowd, stopping every five metres or so to greet others he knew. The suspicion I had encountered since arriving in the north had made me reluctant to take photographs. I never liked standing out in a place where I was not known, and I was particularly self-conscious here because of my appearance. I again scanned the congregation, this time to see how many white people were there. I counted less than ten, and all of these seemed to be well-known judging by the number of people who stopped to speak with them. As for me, I was alone and unknown, the only person another country 64
dumb enough not to have found some shade and standing out like a sore thumb with my pale skin, short-cropped hair, camera around my neck and notebook stuffed into the pocket of my beige trousers; I must have looked like the stereotypical undercover South African security cop. And here I was at the funeral of a much-loved, well-known local girl who was blown up by a bomb which, as far as everyone in the congregation was concerned, had been planted by the South Africans.
The service continued; more singing interspersed by readings from the Bible and speeches made by church people of different denominations. Most of the service was conducted in Oshiwambo and after a couple of hours I was becoming restless, desperate for a drink and some shade. My nose, always susceptible to sunburn, was throbbing and my head began to swim. I finally plucked up courage to go and take some photographs. After all, I was there as a journalist and had a job to do. I was amazed by the openness and informality of everyone there. Almost everyone carried a camera and, one by one, they would walk up to the front of the congregation and take pictures.

The entire service was punctuated with the click of camera shutters, but no one seemed to mind; it was as if this was part of the ritual. Many others held aloft cassette players and recorded the entire service. Whenever I lifted my camera to take a picture, those who noticed me hid their faces for fear that I was a spy. But most were too absorbed in the service to notice, either lost in thought or overcome by grief. Nurses, supported by their colleagues, sobbed unashamedly as a choir of young schoolgirls sung a particularly moving lament written especially for the occasion. Yet those who grieved looked comfortable and in control as if their tears were a catharsis.

Bishop Dumeni stood up to deliver the main address. At the same lectern two weeks before he had said the deaths of the bomb victims were caused by South Africa "denying Namibians free and peaceful elections" to bring about their independence. He was now speaking at the funeral of his very own daughter who had died in the same horrendous way as the others, yet his tone had mellowed.

"My dear people, you must remain united, even in times of difficulties," he said in a firm but tired voice.

"The Lord is on our side, and you must know that those who are on our side number more than those on the other side." Deep down, however, the congregation was bitter and angry. For half an hour messages of condolence were read out. Many of the messages accused South African agents of planting the bomb which made Oshakati "a second Cassinga". To these words the congregation listened quietly, a few people nodding in silent agreement. But messages from the South African governor of Namibia, the

Another country 65 commander of Oshakati military base and the head of the SWATF were greeted by loud murmurs of disapproval as members of the congregation shook their heads in disgust.

"Shame on them," an elderly woman standing next to me hissed.

After three and a half hours the service drew to a close and the coffin was carried to a grave dug next to the mass grave of the 16 bomb victims buried two weeks previously. The large coffin made of thick, finely polished wood with gleaming brass handles was lowered into the freshly dug hole before members of the family filed past, each throwing a handful of earth into the grave before being led away through the crowd which had gathered around the grave side.

Choristers hummed "We Shall Overcome" as those carrying wreaths threw them into the grave, while others sent handfuls of earth clattering onto the coffin lid.
Then the grave diggers moved in, the chink-whooof-thud of the workmen's spades shovelling earth into the hole drowning out the tune. The congregation began to drift away, stopping to greet and chat with friends and acquaintances as they went. It was as if a blessed calm had shrouded the graveyard, allowing those there a few minutes of isolated peace before leaving to continue their lives in the war zone.

Oswald and his family lived at Ongwediva in an area built exclusively for civil servants working for the Owambo Administration. Like all the other houses there, Oswald's home was modern, spacious, well-built and came complete with hot and cold running water, and electricity - a stark contrast to the traditional homesteads, ramshackle squats and matchbox township houses which were home for the majority of people living in the region. Such were the material benefits of working for a "puppet" local government, although, unlike Namibia's other ethnic authorities, the Owambo Administration often acted in defiance of Pretoria and enjoyed a degree of unofficial autonomy.

The administration's chairperson Peter Kalangula had repeatedly called for the withdrawal of the occupational army - even to State President PW Botha's face, much to the annoyance of the latter. And yet Kalangula lived in a spacious house within the guarded confines of an SADF base in Ondangwa. Oswald, too, publicly criticised the colonial security forces, as his job required, and yet worked for an authority sponsored by the South African government. All the same, Oswald had earned the respect of the majority of the predominantly Swapo-supporting population in the far north.

Chris and I arrived at Oswald's house on Sunday morning to find him in earnest conversation with headman Johannes Andjamba. Still dressed in his suit and just having come from church, Oswald was taking notes as the headman spoke sitting hunched up on the edge of the sofa, wringing his hands and trying hard to hold back his tears. The two men interrupted their business to greet us and we sat down and listened as Andjamba continued with his story. He said his son, aged 25 and serving in the SWATF, had been shot by a Koevoet man on Friday during a quarrel. From what Andjamba had gathered from witnesses, the argument was about the headman's opposition to the security forces. Despite being a member of the security forces, the son had defended his father and so the Koevoet, who was apparently drunk at the time, shot him. The interview complete, Andjamba rose to leave, Oswald promising to do everything he could to help bring the case before the courts. Once the distraught headman had gone, and we had discussed the previous day's funeral over a cool beer, Oswald suggested we take a drive up to the Ombalantu region to the north of Oshakati so we could meet an atrocity victim living in the village of Onawa. It was my turn to drive and, as our journey took us through Oshakati, we decided to make a turn at the scene of the recent explosion. Situated at the end of a parade of shops in a side street just off the main road to Ruacana, the First National Bank was now little more than a pile of rubble.
The thick concrete walls and roof at the front of the building - formerly the banking hall where the bomb was planted - had been completely blown away. The rest of the building was nothing more than a windowless, roofless, burnt-out shell. Propped up against a semi-derelict wall was the door to the bank's safe, now a charred lump of iron about 50cm thick and measuring three metres by two, which had been ripped from its hinges by the force of the blast. Within two hours of the bomb going off, the SADF in Pretoria had organised a plane to carry the South African and international press corps to the scene. Here, while soldiers sniggered at the sight of the dead and wounded being carried out of the ruins, army spokesmen blamed Swapo for the bombing. Hours later South African fighter bombers were blitzing Swapo camps in Angola in what Pretoria termed "retaliatory strikes". The whole incident was perhaps a diversion for the bloody slaughter going on around the south-eastern Angolan town of Cuito Cuanavale where the new offensive by South African and Unita forces had been repulsed by Fapla and its allies. By the end of February, and while Pretoria continued to deny to the outside world that its soldiers were still deployed in Angola, thousands of fresh SADF troops, tanks, cannons, armoured vehicles, and supplies were streaming from South Africa up through Namibia, into the war zone and then on to Angola. For the week following the Oshakati bombing, the SADF convoys had jammed the Namibian highways, the soldiers riding high in the turrets of their armoured vehicles and waving to passers-by as if they were conquering heros. They were to return a few months later, this time battered, depleted and almost defeated. Back in the car, we drove out of Oshakati and headed north along the tar road to Ruacana, site of a massive dam and hydro-electric scheme on the Kunene River, which forms the border between Namibia and Angola. The road followed the northern edge of the Etosha Pan, a salty alluvial plain which was originally the bed of a now dried-up lake. During and after the rains, small depressions in the plain filled with water brought from the Kunene through an underground network of streams. "The water is low this year," Oswald said, gazing out over the plain, which stretched as far as the eye could see. The bleached, sandy soil was blotched with large pools of water known as oshonas, in between which grew clumps of green grass and the odd cluster of gangling palm trees. Here herds of cattle grazed, watched over by small children carrying out their obligatory herding duties. Other children and young adults stood knee-deep in some of the pools, their clothes rolled up around their thighs, wielding large baskets shaped like funnels which were used for catching fish. All colours in this landscape were light and soft, and mirages shimmered in the distance making it difficult to distinguish what was real and imaginary water. There was a loud clunk from beneath the car and Chris and Oswald recoiled as I drove over a piece of metal lying in the middle of the road. I had seen it too late and covered my face with my arms and waited for the explosion. Nothing. I
quickly returned my hands to the steering wheel and straightened the car. My
colleagues settled back in their seats, Oswald straightening his already straight tie
while Chris cleared his throat with a nervous cough.
"You must be careful of those kind of things," Oswald said as politely as he
could, though the strain was clear in his voice.
"Yes I know. I'm sorry, I didn't see it in time," I replied meekly.
I felt several large beads of sweat form on my forehead and two streams of
perspiration started to trickle down my temples.
We came to a crossroads and Oswald told me to take a right turn down a wide,
graded dirt road. This was all I needed. Chris was asleep in the back, so it was my
turn to play dodge the landmines. After a few kilometres, the road petered out and
Oswald told me to follow a cattle track which headed off into the bush. My grip
tightened on the steering wheel as we slid along the sandy path. I tried desperately
to drive along fresh tyre tracks made by other vehicles which had travelled that
way, but these had the habit of suddenly disappearing or going in the direction
opposite to the one Oswald pointed me in. Deeper and deeper into the veld we
went.

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There was not a person or a house in sight, though the odd crumpled car wreck
provided an unwelcome reminder of the hazards of driving in this area. Chris
stirred in the back seat, sat up and looked out of the window.
"Mind the landmines," he said casually, and went back to sleep. "Turn off here,"
Oswald said a few minutes later, pointing to the right. Now there was not even a
footpath and we were driving over open grassland, weaving in and out of thorn
bushes until we were confronted by a tall, impenetrable thicket.
"We can stop here," Oswald said.
"Where?" I asked, as if I was expecting there to be a convenient gap in a line of
parked cars to pull into.
"Here, just here, this will do."
I did as I was told and switched off the engine. The back of my shirt was soaked
with sweat and clung to my back, while my hands, now away from the wheel,
trembled uncontrollably. We appeared to be in the middle of nowhere and there
was not a soul, animal or building in sight. I climbed stiffly from the car and
looked around.
"Angola's about 15km away over there," Chris said nodding casually in the
direction of what must have been north as he yawned and stretched, refreshed
after his sleep. Then, as if by magic, a woman appeared from behind some trees
carrying an earthenware jar on her head. She was followed by a young boy and,
on seeing us from a distance, they both stopped and stared.
"Ah, this is the woman we want to see," Oswald said, and we strolled over to
where the woman stood.
Oswald introduced us to the woman who smiled and gave a little curtsy as we
shook her by the hand. Chris then greeted the boy, and the latter returned the
greeting confidently, looking both Chris and I straight in the eye as he spoke.
The woman, Monica Kamulungu, looked 50 but was little more than 30 years old. Her face bore deep wrinkles at the corners of her eyes and to the side of her mouth, and her cheeks were sunken beneath high cheek bones. Tall and gaunt, she walked with a pronounced limp and leant heavily on an umbrella which she used as a walking stick. She listened patiently as Chris explained who we were, and then began to speak in a quiet, calm, deep voice in reply to Chris's questions about her ordeal.

A year before, Mrs Kamulungu - eight months' pregnant at the time had been in her kraal washing clothes while her three children played nearby. She then heard the rumble of approaching armoured vehicles, a few gunshots and the shouts of soldiers. Suddenly a strange man wearing civilian clothes sprinted into the kraal and bolted into one of the huts. Mrs Kamulungu picked up her two-year-old daughter Marcelina, who was sitting on the ground next to her, and was about to flee when two Casspirs burst through the kraal's high fence and ploughed into the huts, driving over the woman and girl as they went. Both the strange man and baby Marcelina were crushed to death under the wheels of the Casspirs and Mrs Kamulungu was left for dead.

"I heard about the incident and came to the scene as soon as I could," Oswald told me. "The house was destroyed and the bodies of the man, child and this woman were lying on the ground. The Casspirs had long since gone."

"I got Mrs Kamulungu to hospital at Oshakati. She had a crushed pelvis and later she had a miscarriage of her unborn baby. I telephoned the police and asked them to come and collect the bodies of the child and man, as they were supposed to do. But the police refused and told me that Swapos had to bury their own Swapos. You see, as far as Koevoet and the army are concerned, all Owambo people are Swapos, even women and children."

The police claimed the strange man was a Plan fighter, although this was never proved; he was unarmed and his identity remained a mystery. Oswald drew up statements and presented them to the police. The police did nothing and it was only when details of the incident were published by The Namibian, along with a photograph of the mutilated corpse of baby Marcelina, that the case was referred to the South African-appointed Attorney-General.

After more than a year of deliberation, the Attorney-General judged that members of the Koevoet patrol had been acting "in accordance with their duties" and no charges were brought against them.

"Why do you continue your job when the authorities just ignore you?" I asked Oswald when he had finished speaking. He thought for a moment.

"Yes, it is frustrating, but I must carry on, we must all carry on highlighting the atrocities in the hope that one day someone, somewhere will do something about the situation. But it is true, the police are like snakes. The snake bites you, then you have to go to the snake for justice."

Mrs Kamulungu showed no bitterness, no emotion when she told her story. Not so her eight-year-old son Gideon who had watched as the Casspirs drove over his
mother and young sister before reversing and driving away, leaving the broken bodies behind. At first he refused to speak about what had happened, but after some gentle questioning, he whispered:
"We run when Koevoet come. I hate Koevoet. They kill and beat the people."
We could now hear wailing coming from behind some trees in the distance. Mrs Kamulungu explained that an elderly villager had died, so she and her son were going to pay their respects and comfort the relatives.

Another country
We said goodbye and followed our tracks back to Oshakati. Chris was anxious to visit survivors of the bank bombing who were still recovering in hospital. We drove back through the town and then took the turn for what was known as "White Oshakati", a fortified area of the town inhabited by white members of the security forces, local white businesspeople, and their families. Here, behind the high barbed wire fences and sandbag defences, were large, modern houses complete with all mod cons, including bomb shelters built at the bottom of the well-nurtured gardens.

White Oshakati had its own shops, sport and social clubs, hotel, bars, school and clinic, so the inhabitants seldom had to venture into the black people's world outside. Security was paramount; white children went to school not in a bus but in a Casspir. And the only entrance to this garrison was via a heavily guarded gate through which black people were not allowed to pass without a special permit. Near to the gate, but outside the defensive cordon, was Oshakati State Hospital. As the white community had its own health care facilities inside the white township (anyone with a serious illness was airlifted straight to Windhoek or else on to Pretoria), the state hospital was only used by black people. We pulled into the car park and followed Oswald into one of the long single-storey buildings which housed the wards.

As we passed through the door we were hit by the sterile smell of antiseptic typical of most hospitals. Our footsteps echoed on the concrete floor of the dark, windowless corridor which was beautifully cool but eerily silent. Oswald peered around the door of the second cubical on the right and entered. Chris and I followed. Inside there were two beds. On the one nearest the door lay Oswald's 24-year-old sister Stelly, while in the bed nearest the window was another women who looked slightly older, though it was difficult to tell for sure as much of her head and face was heavily bandaged. Her lips were cracked and the part of her face which was visible was covered in cuts and scars. She had only one eye; a wad of cotton wool held in place with Elastoplasts filled the socket where her second had once been. The upper half of her body was bare except for a small flannel which half-covered her breasts - she was in too much pain to wear any clothing.

Hardly any of her naturally deep, dark brown skin remained intact. Instead her torso was a mass of raw, pink blotches. Chunks of flesh were missing from her arms while swathes of bandages covered what must have been even worse wounds. A box, covered by a sheet, hid what was left of the lower half of her body; she had lost both her legs. I wanted to be sick.
Oswald's sister, Stelly, was in a slightly better condition. Her face and arms were also a badly burnt patchwork of pink and brown. Her left leg was broken and encased in plaster, the other had been badly cut by flying debris. It was her birthday and she was surrounded by cards and flowers. Oswald introduced me to the two women and I said "hello", smiling awkwardly at them from where I stood at the foot of Stelly's bed.

I turned to Stelly and wished her a happy birthday. She thanked me and asked whether I was enjoying my visit to Namibia. The small talk continued for a few minutes, but all the time I was aware that I was being watched by the other woman who Chris was talking to on the other side of the bed. The conversation with Stelly dried up and Oswald took over. I could not bring myself to look at her room-mate, so I pretended to read Stelly's birthday cards which were arranged on a table near the door. I heard the room-mate speak to Chris, yet I sensed she was still staring at me as she spoke in a low voice choked with anger.

"Oshilumbu osho olye?" - ("Who is the white guy?") the woman asked. Chris explained I was "a comrade" working at The Namibian, but she seemed not to be listening. I looked over and she was just staring, staring, staring at me, tears welling up in her eye before trickling down her cheek. She winced as a tear dropped into one of her cuts, but she carried on staring.

Chris was now patting her gently on the chest, trying to reassure her, but her tears began to flow faster and faster. I again looked at the birthday cards, then at the wall, and then the washbasin. I caught my reflection in the mirror. I saw my throbbing sunburnt nose, dark pink standing out against my white, white skin and short, fair hair.

"I'll see you outside," I stammered to Chris and Oswald, then feebly said goodbye to the two women as I retreated to the door.

"Don't you want to take any photographs?" Oswald said as I turned to go. I did not stop to reply.

Outside in the corridor, I leant against the wall and breathed deeply. Narrow shafts of sunlight streamed through chinks in the cubical doors and bounced off the polished corridor floor. Only the occasional cough or creak of a bed spring broke the silence. In each cubicle were more victims of the bomb blast, men down one side, women the other. I caught a glimpse of a man lying in a bed in the cubicle opposite. A blood-stained bandage was wrapped around the stump of what had been his right arm. His face and chest were covered in pink blisters and one eye was sewn shut. He watched me through his other eye, so I raised my eyebrows in sympathetic greeting and then looked away.

"If these are the survivors," I thought, "God knows what the dead looked like." Chris and Oswald emerged ten minutes later and we walked in silence to the car.

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"Let's make a turn at the Koevoet location before we go home," Chris said as we drove out of the hospital gates, breaking the awkward silence. While white Koevoet officers lived in the closeted comfort of White Oshakati, many of their
black subordinates had to make do with a squatter camp built next to a mosquito-infested swamp on the outskirts of the town. As we drove through rutted, muddy alleyways barely wide enough for the car to fit through, music blared out from shacks built of corrugated iron, scraps of wood, plastic sheeting and crushed beer cans. Almost every shack seemed to sell alcohol of some kind or other, and drunken men - off duty Koevoets, some dressed in fashionable casual clothes, others in their uniforms - lurched from one hovel to another, most still clutching their rifles. 

Dogs and pigs scavenged through the piles of garbage dumped at random along the alleys, while barefooted children dressed in filthy rags ran through the streets or skulked outside their squalid homes. Women, with babies on their backs or at their breasts, sat cooking, crouched over open fires in front of their houses. Few women bothered looking up as we passed, but those who did glared at us blankly before returning to their pots or conversations with the people they were sitting with.

The whole camp stank of wood smoke, excrement and decay. We turned one corner and were confronted by the skull of an antelope stuck on the top of a pole, leering down at us with a manic grin and two beer cans balanced on its huge horns. I yelped and reversed the car back the way we had come.

Children were the only ones to react to us as we crawled through the squatter camp. We came across a group of youngsters playing on a patch of wasteland and, as we approached, we were spotted by one small girl who shouted a warning to her friends, and they all fled into the location, screaming as they went.

"They treat every stranger with suspicion," Chris said. "We had better do what we have come to do and get out quickly before word gets around that we are here and one of the children's fathers decides he wants some target practice."

The squatter camp was built opposite a Koevoet base and vehicle repair yard. In a large compound the size of two football pitches were parked hundreds of battered Casspis, troop carriers, lorries and jeeps, a sign that, contrary to security force propaganda, the war was taking its toll on the occupational forces. Chris, who was sitting in the back, slowly reached down and picked up his camera. I then drove the car as close to the perimeter fence of the base as was possible and, inbetween the gun towers, Chris brought up the camera and quickly photographed the wrecked vehicles before hiding it again as we came in view of the guards. Having reached the end of the fence, we drove on a little way and then turned and passed a second time, Chris again taking several candid shots of the vehicle graveyard.

"Do you want us to pass again or do you have enough pictures?" I asked when we reached the other end of the fence. "I think we have enough," he replied. "Let's go and have a drink."

At Chris Nunes's bar, we found our colleagues Herman Petrus and Raymond Morris, who were in the north canvassing for advertisements and hounding shopkeepers with outstanding accounts. Herman and Raymond made an intriguing
double act. Herman was young and energetic, always busy, always organising. If you needed something arranged, be it cheap car repairs or a blind date, then Herman was the person to do it. Still only in his late 20s, he prided himself on getting things done, and in the few months he had been with The Namibian, he had revolutionised the paper's distribution network.

Raymond on the other hand was a very laid-back part-time male model from Johannesburg who had come to Namibia to escape his compulsory military call-up. Also still in his 20s, Raymond looked totally out of place as he trawled the Cuca stores with his dyed blonde hair, dressed in his designer clothes and Rayban sunglasses selling advertising space. Nonetheless, he was remarkably successful in his work.

Having caught up with each other's news, we toasted Herman and Raymond's achievements with several rounds of cold beer before realising, once again, that the sun was dangerously low in the sky and the curfew would begin at any minute. Chris announced he was going to stay over at Oswald's house that night, so it was agreed I should go with Herman and Raymond and spend the night at the ABC guesthouse in Ondangwa. I jumped at the idea. The church guest house at Oniipa was comfortable, but there was little to do after dark other than read and swat mosquitoes. ABC on the other hand, with its disco and bar, was - as Herman described it - the hottest "five star" place for post-curfew entertainment in the area. Added to which, the team of Oniipa cooks had not really grasped the concept of vegetarianism and, after three consecutive meals consisting of boiled cabbage and macaroni, I felt I needed a change of diet.

My colleagues appeared unperturbed about the rapidly descending dusk, and we cruised past Ondangwa air base in Raymond's Alpha Romeo with the speedometer edging towards the 170kph mark and Gracelands blasting from the hi-fi. "Mississippi delta shining like a Nashville guitar...." Minutes later we touched down in the ABC car park and were greeted by Leah, a friend of Herman's who worked in the guest house kitchen. I was introduced midst much joking and backslapping, and Leah then broached

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the subject of what we would like to eat that evening. Now for the big test of Herman's smooth-talking capabilities. I had told him about what Chris termed my "food problem" and he had promised to see what he could arrange for me at ABC. Having placed his and Raymond's order for mega beefburgers and chips, Herman explained to Leah that I did not eat meat. Leah's face dissolved into a big grin and she was soon seized by a fit of laughter as she clutched her sides, rocking backwards and forwards. Looking at my colleagues and seeing that they too were wracked by hysterics, there was little left for me to do other than to laugh along. When Leah eventually recovered her composure, she said she would do her best to cook something without meat especially for me. Showered and changed, the three of us sat at a table in the restaurant, playing with our bottles of beer and glancing expectantly towards the kitchen which was alive with the sound of chopping, steaming, muffled conversation and raucous laughter.
After what seemed like hours, Leah appeared clutching two plates adorned with sizzling beefburgers, mountains of chips and a couple of wilted lettuce leaves which she set before my colleagues. My heart sank. Minutes later, Leah reappeared and presented me with my meal before stepping back to wait for my reaction. The plate was aglow with a golden cheese omelette, deep green lettuce, some succulent tomatoes, beetroot and a healthy portion of chips.

"Meme yandje!" I shrieked and, seizing the knife and fork, attacked the food, thanking Leah profusely in disjointed Afrikaans for each satisfying mouthful. That evening we celebrated; we celebrated the first proper recognition of vegetarianism in far northern Namibia (in future advertisements placed in The Namibian, ABC made a point of mentioning that it served a "vegetarian platter"); we celebrated Herman and Raymond's canvassing successes; and we celebrated the safe passing of another day in the war zone. After dinner, we retired to the bar where the DJ played South African township bubblegum pop music at full volume as young locals danced and we drank our way through a bottle of Southern Comfort.

Being within easy walking distance of Oluno, the bar was a popular nightspot for people from the township who risked the short journey after dark (officially, all were guests staying at the guesthouse). It was also a regular haunt for off-duty members of the security forces. At around 22h00, a surly man dressed in a khaki uniform staggered into the bar and plonked himself down on a bar stool next to where we were sitting. He was extremely drunk, but still spoke coherently enough to be understood. It turned out that he was in Koevoet.

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He had just returned from a week's patrol in the bush and bragged how his unit had killed 10 "Swapo terrorists" during a series of "contacts". Raymond and I listened as Herman led the man deeper into the conversation.
"You people must go through a lot of intensive training?" Herman asked.
"It's true, the training is very tough," replied the Koevoet, gulping down another tot of neat brandy.
"When we joined Koevoet, they took us away for perhaps two to three months and showed us how to use the weapons and told us who we should use the weapons against. During that time we did not see anyone outside the camp where we were doing the training. They filled our heads with information about Swapo, and I tell you, when I came out of that training, if you had told me my mother was a Swapo, I would have killed her without hesitation."

By midnight our bottle was empty, so we said goodnight to Leah, who was still at work in the restaurant, and went to bed. In the distance there was an explosion and the rattle of machinegun fire, a sound which, over the years, had replaced the call of wild animals at night in the region. Just as I was sinking into a deep sleep, I was woken by someone tapping on my window.
"David, David, wake up!" It was Chris. I sat up, pulled back the curtain and saw the outline of my friend silhouetted against the car park spotlight.
"I thought you were in Ongwediva?" I said drowsily through the open window. "How did you get here?" "I drove," came the slightly slurred reply. He too had obviously been celebrating that night. "What about the curfew?" I said urgently, suddenly realising where I was. Chris did not answer my question. "A couple of women have been raped by soldiers," Chris continued. "Apparently they were being taken to Onandjokwe hospital for treatment, so I went there to try and find them, but they had not been admitted by the time I got there. We can follow it up in the morning, so I'm now going back to Ongwediva." "Don't you want to stay here the night? What about the airbase, won't they shoot you?"

He paused and wobbled slightly before answering. "No, I'll be OK. I'll come and pick you up at about nine."

At this he turned and tottered off back to the car. I listened as Chris started up the car and drove off. For several minutes I lay awake listening to the silence before drifting back to sleep.

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I woke again with a start at the sound of gunfire. There was another burst. I sat up in bed and pulled back the curtain in time to see a blinding yellow flare light up the sky in the direction of the airbase.

Herman, Raymond and I sat on the steps of the ABC supermarket and watched the road for any sign of Chris. It was now 10h30, an hour and a half after the time he said he would come and collect me. "We'll give him five more minutes and then we had better go and look for him," Raymond suggested. Five minutes later we were in Raymond's car and heading in the direction of the airbase. We scoured the sides of the road looking for clues, half-expecting to see the bullet-riddled wreck of the beige hire car Chris had been driving. We found nothing so we continued past the airbase and on to Oswald's house where Chris had been spending the night. Here we found Mrs Shivute sitting on the front stoop with their youngest child. "Are you looking for Chris," she called to us. We nodded. "He's been arrested and taken to Ondangwa jail. They are holding him under AG9. Oswald has gone to the jail to see if he can speak with him."

Security legislation AG9 gave the security forces power to detain people indefinitely without charge. At no time did an AG9 prisoner have the right to see relatives or consult a lawyer. Our hearts sank, but there was nothing we could do other than carry on with our own work as best we could, so we left Mrs Shivute and drove to Oshakati.

The previous evening Chris had heard about the rape of the two women and decided to investigate. He drove towards Ondangwa at a snail's pace, hazard lights flashing and headlights on. He was flagged down by soldiers outside the airbase but, for some inexplicable reason, was allowed to continue when he told them that his sister had been taken seriously ill and he had to go and see if she was all right.
However, guards at the airbase changed over at midnight and Chris had a far more unfriendly reception when he returned that way having spoken to me at the guest house. As he approached the airbase, he was greeted by a hail of bullets which skimmed the top of the car, followed by the flare. Guards rushed from their trenches, hauled Chris out of the car, flattening him against the bonnet before searching him thoroughly. The guard commander took no notice of the sick relative story and, realising who they had caught, threw Chris into jail. He was allowed one phone call, so Chris contacted his fiancée Bernadette in Katutura, told her what had happened and asked her to inform Gwen Lister first thing in the morning.

Minutes later, the phone rang at Gwen's Windhoek home. But the call was not from Bernadette, rather it was from one of Chris's uncles who told the editor what had happened to his nephew. As it turned out, the uncle had been tipped off by his brother-in-law who had been phoned by an another country operator at the Ondangwa exchange who had listened in to Chris's call to Bernadette and, knowing who Chris was, raised the alarm.

Meanwhile in Ondangwa jail, Chris found himself locked up in a jail along with nine black members of Koevoet. The men had obviously been in jail for several months as they had thick beards, their uniforms were torn and filthy, and they all stank. Chris had watched in amazement as his nine cell mates sung Swapo freedom songs and then recapped on how they had killed two "witches" by tying rocks to the women's arms and legs, before hurling the still conscious bodies into the Kunene River to drown. They had done this, the Koevoets said, because the women had killed the brother of one of the men with a poisonous love potion.

(Eight months later, five of the nine - still convinced that what they had done was within their rights - stood trial and were sentenced to a total of 100 years in prison having pleaded guilty to the murders. This was one of only a few known case of security force members being convicted for such atrocities.)

Chris sat in the corner of the cell and listened, praying that the Koevoet men would not find out that he worked for The Namibian. At about 09h00, Chris was taken to the interrogation room where he was told by two security policemen from Oshakati that he was being detained under AG9. They then fingerprinted Chris for a second time, and searched his car for a fourth, before locking the hapless reporter in another cell, this time with four Swapo activists. They too were being held under AG9 and had already been in detention for two months, during which time no word had been sent to their relatives explaining their whereabouts.

Then at 11 h0, the security policemen returned to the cell and told Chris he was free to go. The fact that the first shift of airbase guards had let Chris continue with his journey to the hospital the previous evening had opened up a one in a million loophole in AG9 which allowed Chris off the hook.

Herman, Raymond and I returned to Oswald's house soon after midday to find Chris sitting in the lounge, clapping a glass of cool beer and grinning from ear to ear whilst talking to Gwen on the telephone. "No I won't go out after curfew
again, I promise," Chris said, raising his eyes to the ceiling and holding the receiver away from his ear as Gwen continued to chide him for his foolhardy behaviour.

"Anyway, the others have just arrived," Chris continued, "so we will make plans to return to Windhoek. We will see you later this evening." Chris put down the receiver and we all embraced him before joining him in some beer as he recounted his adventure.

"Man I was lucky," he said with a relieved laugh.

"Had the guards not been so slack and allowed me through, I would have been seeing the inside of that cell for a lot longer than I did." Herman agreed with him.

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"And think of all those hundreds of people who suffered more than detention when they were caught on the wrong side of the curfew."

The beer finished, we collected our things together and started on our journey south. We had not got beyond Ondangwa when a friend of Chris's flagged us down and told us that the home of Immanuel Kauluma Elifas, King of the Ndonga-speaking people, had been razed to the ground in what appeared to be an attack by the security forces. The King's kraal was a 20 minute drive to the west of Ondangwa, along a sandy dirt road well used by military vehicles.

When we arrived at the homestead, we found a large crowd gathered inside, some standing by and inspecting the damage, others sifting through still-smouldering ash and cinders which covered an area of about 400 square metres - all that remained of the King's traditional homestead. Several hundred metres away across the open veld were the barbed wired fence and gun towers which marked the site of a local SWATF base. Surrounded by a fence of long, sturdy poles, the King's kraal had comprised of ten or more traditional huts arranged around a modern brick building.

King Elifas explained that he had been sitting inside the brick house when, all of a sudden, there was a "whoosh" followed by a loud explosion. He rushed outside to find members of his family evacuating the traditional huts, the roofs of which were already ablaze. People rushed to the village tap to fill buckets with water to douse the flames, but the water supply had been mysteriously cut off. The tap was working again a few hours later, but by then the traditional houses had been burnt to the ground.

"Those who were outside at the time said the explosives came from the direction of the military camp," the King continued, as villagers started off-loading crates of cooldrink - bought by the chief to replenish the thirsts of those helping to clear up the damage- from the back of a bakkie.

"They (the soldiers) know I oppose their occupation of Namibia and they often come around here to try and make me change my mind. I will never be able to prove it, but I am sure they are the ones responsible for destroying my home."

We photographed the destruction and then returned to the car. Across the veld, about 100 metres from the homestead, were now parked two Casspirs, on top of which soldiers sat watching the scenes at the kraal like vultures waiting to feed off the body off a hunted animal.
A great weight seemed to be lifted from my shoulders when we drove away from the Oshivelvo checkpoint and sped southwards towards Tsumeb on our journey back to Windhoek. I wound down the window and turned up the volume on the cassette player which was playing some amazing Zairean rhumba. I no longer had to strain my eyes looking for objects in the road ahead. The roads were now clear with no other vehicles to been seen

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for kilometres at a time. Gone was the incessant whine and roar of the Casspirs, and the ever-present fear of death or mutilation. Now the bleached, denuded, sandy plains of the far north had given way to endless tracts of verdant savanna, land fenced off and owned by white commercial beef farmers. My brain felt as if it had just been used in a tug of war, and I thought my jaw was about to droop to my chest as the muscles around my mouth were at last able to relax again. In just four days, I felt that my mind had been stretched to breaking point by the constant dangers, worries and hassles - real and perceived - which were part and parcel of every day life in the war zone. If I was feeling like this after four days, how did all the hundreds and thousands of Namibians living in the far north feel after what had been 21 years of war?

Uprising: the class of '88

News of the Ponhofi Secondary School boycott broke two days after Chris and I returned from the war zone. The students had met and decided that they were no longer going to attend classes until the Koevoet base was removed from beside the school. The day the boycott started, the security forces arrived at the school in Casspirs and ordered the students to go back to classes. The students refused and Koevoet then set about the striking pupils gathered outside the school gates with whips and teargas, before hunting down the student leaders who had instigated the boycott.

Within weeks, schools throughout the far north were brought to a standstill as almost all the region's students boycotted classes in solidarity with their Ponhofi comrades. Then, in June, the dam wall burst and the wave of student discontent flooded south until almost every town and village in the country was affected by the boycott. The students' mass action served as inspiration to their elders and helped hammer the final nails into the coffin of the South African occupation of Namibia which diplomats and politicians had started to negotiate away in talks aimed at bringing an end to the war in Angola and implementing United Nations (UN) Security Council Resolution 435 - the Namibian independence plan.

As the Ponhofi students started their defiance campaign, the first moves towards peace talks were getting under way in the basement of a discreet London hotel. The gathering of military top brass and diplomats from the three countries involved in the war in Angola - Cuba, Angola and South Africa - as well as the Soviet Union and United States, was barely given a second thought in Namibia. A report of the meeting took up no more than a few paragraphs on an inside page in that week's The Namibian. When the report came over the news wire, it did however arouse some attention in The Namibian's office.
"Hey look at this," Rajah called out from the far corner of the newsroom where he sat hunched over the unravelled telex rolls, marooned in the ocean of paper around his chair.
"Talks about 435 are taking place in London. The Boers are talking with the Cubans, Angolans and Russians!"
Staff members left what they were doing and peered over Rajah's shoulder to read and re-read the report. First reactions were dismissive.

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"Here we go again," said one.
"What are the Boers scheming this time?" said another.
Then in turn, each member of staff took the report away and read it again, hoping to find something new and significant about the meeting. But only the paper's cartoonist Dudley Viall remained optimistic.
"I think this is it," he said seriously, reaching instinctively for his packet of Camel Filters in the breast pocket of his open-neck shirt. He drew out a cigarette, put it thoughtfully between his lips and lit it, inhaling long and hard, then wincing as the strong tobacco flavour flooded his taste buds.
"I really think this time the talks are for real, that the South Africans are serious." No one else could agree. They had seen it all before. The South Africans had come to the negotiating table in 1978, 1981 and 1984, and all three times had done a U-turn and gone back on their word just as they were about to agree to Namibian independence. Why should this time prove to be any different? Besides, events inside the country far from suggested that South Africa was about to pack up and withdraw south of the Orange River. If anything, the reverse was happening. South African reinforcements were pouring north through Namibia to the war zone and beyond into Angola. Political events, too, suggested Pretoria was tightening its grip on Namibia rather than letting go. As the school boycott in the north began to unfold, and in the wake of the banning of 18 anti-apartheid organisations and the arrest of hundreds of political activists in South Africa, State President PW Botha made an official visit to Namibia. Such visits were rare, and usually coincided with major policy statements by the South African government on the territory.
Botha's agenda included dinner with leading white politicians followed the next day by an address to members of the interim government and leaders of the ethnic administrations. The roar of the presidential jet boomed across the city, heralding Botha's arrival at Windhoek's Eros Airport on the evening of Thursday April 7. Dressed in a dark grey suit, a grotesquely coloured large kipper tie and bowler hat, Botha descended the steps of the plane to the tarmac, followed by Foreign Minister Pik Botha, Defence Minister Magnus Malan and other high-ranking government members. They were greeted by Administrator-General (AG) Louis Pienaar - a lean, silver-haired man dressed similarly to, though a hundred times more stylishly than his boss - who shook each member of the delegation warmly by the hand before leading the way to a fleet of waiting Mercedes.
Before ducking into the back of his car, PW Botha stopped to wave at a group of demonstrators gathered at the airport gate. Demonstrators? Wave? A group of fifty or so "South Westers" - not a black face amongst them - held aloft banners calling on the State President to "smash Swapo". He had just that in mind.

There was an air of expectancy in The Namibian's offices as we gathered for work on the following morning. Being Friday, the place was in its usual state of post-deadline chaos. The make-up area was strewn with scraps of sticky-backed bromide paper, discarded the previous evening as the last stories were stuck into place and the finished pages whisked away to the printing works, a signal for layout artist Gollo to collapse exhausted into a chair and light-up a long-yearned for cigarette.

In the middle of the room, computers now stood idle, their screens blank and the keyboards buried under piles of telexes and press releases. Reporters, who a few hours before had been frantically keying in stories, now lounged back in their seats, critically scanning the end result of their labours. Piles of that week's paper filled the reception area as the distribution team bundled them up ready for posting to all comers of the country and globe.

Rajah, Gwen, her husband Mark and I looked out through the office's front windows at the police activity outside. Ironically, although perhaps symbolically, The Namibian was situated directly opposite Pienaar's official residence South West Africa House where Botha and his delegation were staying. Police patrols had blocked off the surrounding streets and were allowing only motorists with official passes through the cordons. John Liebenberg's red Golf shot into The Namibian's car park and screeched to a halt as the fiery photographer leapt from the driver's seat, slammed shut the door and stalked into the office foyer.

"Where the hell is the demonstration?" John roared without even stopping to greet anyone.

"Why is no one demonstrating? Botha is in town and no one is demonstrating. The Boers managed it yesterday, why the hell can't anyone else?"

"Relax man," Rajah said from behind his newspaper, still absorbed in the story he was reading.

John swung round and began firing his questions at Rajah. "Raj, what's the matter with everyone? Have they all gone soft? Where are the unions, where is the (Swapo) youth league? Why is no one protesting?"

Having finished reading the story and now ready for a debate, Rajah put down his paper, stood up, adjusted his trousers and walked over to where John had come to a momentary standstill after racing around the foyer, bouncing from one person to another like a hyper-active atom.

"John, demonstrating is not everything." Rajah said calmly, smiling, laying his hands on his friend's shoulders and looking him in the eye.

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"The people are making an invisible protest, in silence." Rajah always enjoyed a political argument and often came up with some wonderfully obscure notions just to provoke his sparring partner.

If the truth were to be known, the progressive organisations had been caught unawares by Botha's visit, so no protests had been arranged in time. But admitting this would have ruined the argument, so Rajah followed a more philosophical tack. John swallowed the bait and the debate began. They were still arguing half an hour later when Gwen, Mark and I left the office and strolled up the road to attend the press conference at which Botha was due to reveal what his government had planned for Namibia.

To look at, Gwen and Mark made an incongruous couple. Measuring more than two metres tall, with flowing blonde hair and a loping walk, Mark - a former basketball player, Durban windsurfer cum junior tennis ace - dwarfed Gwen, a 1.5 metre tall, slinky fireball with long blonde hair and a hyperactive mind, which was reflected in the speed at which she walked, talked and typed. Gwen was a teetotalling workaholic, Mark a self-styled "artiste" who had a far more laid-back approach to life. Gwen was a stylish dresser while Mark's idea of looking posh was to wear a collared shirt (though heaven forbid, never a tie!). They argued constantly, but were inseparable because they loved each other more than anyone could ever understand.

We reached the gates of South West Africa House and walked straight through a cordon of armed guards and security police who did not even ask to see our identification. We continued up the driveway, past a gushing fountain, along a path across a lush green lawn with ornate flowering borders, and into the reception hall of this expansive villa.

Inside a gaggle of about thirty journalists and a television film crew were gathered underneath the huge crystal chandelier which hung from the centre of the ceiling. The room was furnished with ornately carved chairs with leather seats, cabinets brimming with cut glass and bone china, while oil portraits of former South African prime ministers and governors hung on walls tastefully painted in duck egg blue with gold and white coving. Through a set of French windows opposite the entrance could be seen with tables piled high with lobster, venison, squid, vegetables, fruit, exotic deserts, exquisite-looking side dishes and bottles of the finest South African wine.

More tables laid with silver cutlery and cut glass goblets lined the length of the verandah, ready for a feast laid on for the ethnic leaders, who would be in need of refreshment having taken a new set of orders from their South African overlords. Back in the reception hall, plainclothed security cops stood around the walls and mingled with the nattering journalists, watching the latters' every move.

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The doors leading into the AG's drawing room swung open and in marched PW Botha flanked by Pik Botha, Malan, followed by Pienaar and the rest of the posse. Cameras whirred and flash guns exploded as the State President stepped up to the microphone and his subordinates fell in behind him. Not a moment was wasted. PW cleared his throat and rattled off a prepared statement. Then, after fielding a
few questions from tame journalists, he closed the proceedings, thanked everyone for attending, turned on his heel and marched back out of the room with his entourage tailing behind.

Mark and I packed away our camera equipment and waited for Gwen to finish a conversation with Ovambo Administration leader Peter Kalangula, who was there event to deliver another condemnation of South Africa's continued military presence in the far north to the South African president.

The interview over, Gwen rejoined us and we stepped back outside into the bright midday sun. The editor was agitated. In his address, Botha had said he was giving the AG extra powers to clamp down on political parties and media which promoted "subversion and terrorism". By the former he was effectively referring to Swapo and organisations sympathetic to the liberation movement, while the latter was an indirect reference to The Namibian.

As we walked down the garden path there was a flash and sound of a camera's motor drive from a jacaranda tree to our right. We swung around in time to see a besuited security policeman skulking off into the trees clutching a camera.

"Perhaps you would like us to pose," Mark shouted after him, resisting the urge to hurl a barrage of expletives at the sneaky mustachioed snooper. We were walking down the road towards the office when John's car raced up the hill towards us with the photographer behind the wheel and Da'oud beside him in the passenger seat.

"The students are holding a demonstration at the 'Sands'," John shouted as he whizzed past us in the direction of the city's exclusive hotel. So he had got his demonstration after all!

Back at the office, remaining staff gathered around, anxious to hear the details of Botha's speech. Copies of his statement were quickly made and these were read in silence, everyone churning through the high Afrikaans doublespeak as the sound of Peter Tosh wafted from a cassette player in the next room.

"One thing is certain," Gwen said after a while.

"Botha wants Swapo and The Namibian banned, and these new powers he has given the AG are the means by which he's going to do it."

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Botha's visit coincided with, and in many respects was overshadowed by the tour of Namibia by another leading South African figure, Archbishop Desmond Tutu. While Botha was sneaking into the country watched only by a handful of placard-waving whites, Tutu was travelling through the war zone meeting with and preaching to the region's devoutly religious black population.

Once Botha had jetted out of Windhoek, Tutu arrived in the capital to rouse the faithful here with his ardent rhetoric. The coincidence of the two's visits to Namibia was made even more interesting by the fact that, with the South African churches having taken up the vanguard of the anti-apartheid struggle after the banning two months previously of 17 leading anti-apartheid organisations, Botha had accused Tutu of being an agent of communism. The spotlight was now on Tutu to respond.
Archbishop Tutu was due to address an ecumenical church service in Katutura's Holy Redeemer Catholic Church. While in the far north, the Archbishop had blasted the South African government for continuing its "brutal war against innocent and defenceless people", and had demanded the immediate implementation of Resolution 435.

Botha's announcements on Friday gave Tutu even more ammunition with which to bombard the Pretoria regime by the time he came to speak in Katutura the following Sunday.

Set in the middle of the old location's "Nama" section, the Holy Redeemer church was a large but simple building. The bell tower rose above the sea of rusting tin roofs and maze of dusty streets like an arm reaching out towards the sky. As soon as you stepped inside the church's solid wooden doors, the babble of outdoors melted away in the clean, cool interior of the church.

Four rows of windows - two at different heights down each side of the church - with coloured panes of glass soothing the angry sunlight which now cast pale yellow, blue, purple and green shadows across the whitewashed walls. Row upon row of simple wooden pews were arranged in front of a low stone stage in the middle of which stood a plain wooden lectern and unpretentious altar above which hung a huge cross. It was more than an hour before the service was due to start but people had already begun to arrive.

By the time Tutu and his entourage began to proceed down the aisle, about 1000 people, all dressed in their finest and most colourful clothes, crammed into the pews, while hundreds of others stood in every available space at the back, along the sides and in the aisles.

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perched firmly on the end of his nose, women started ululating and the church filled with cheers which would have matched the roar of a football crowd on cup final day.

The conga of church people snaked down the aisle in between camera crews and members of the congregation, Archbishop Tutu bringing up the rear, beaming from ear to ear as he acknowledged his deafening reception. Having reached the altar, the Reverends, Right Reverends and Bishops fanned out along the stage and applauded Tutu as he picked his way between the children on the steps and turned to hush the crowd. But still the cheers and ululating continued and it took several minutes of unflustered arm waving for the Archbishop to silence the throng.

Once he could be heard, Tutu thanked everyone for his welcome, and said that he and his delegation were there to show solidarity with Namibians inl 988, the tenth anniversary of Resolution 435 and the massacre by South African troops of more than 600 Namibian refugees - most of them women and children - at Swapo's Cassinga refugee camp in southern Angola.

Tutu then retreated behind the altar and the service got underway with a rousing hymn. When the time came for the Archbishop to deliver his address, he strode up to the lectern, which almost hid the diminutive churchman from view. Here he
had to stand for another four minutes, silenced by the renewed cheering of the congregation. Once the cheers had subsided, Tutu launched his verbal attack on the South African government, and in particular the Old Crocodile PW Botha. Botha, Tutu said, had effectively declared a state of emergency in Namibia by giving the AG extra powers to clamp down on organisations and media supposedly promoting terrorism and subversion. In particular, the threatened media restrictions were just as harsh as those being used to silence the progressive South African media, the Archbishop continued. "I don't know whether you have such newspapers here in Namibia," he said with a knowing chuckle, before adding seriously, "but if there are any such newspapers they must know that they will not be allowed to operate anymore." Turning to Botha's earlier allegations, Tutu said he was no more a communist than the State President himself. "We don't want communism in South Africa or in Namibia, but the best defence against communism is a free, independent and contented people. The political, economic and social injustice of oppression makes fertile soil for the growth of communism."

Each of the Archbishop's points was greeted with loud murmurs sometimes even cheers - of approval reminiscent of the "hallelujahs" which accompanied speeches made by the likes of Martin Luther King. Tutu, however, was just as prone to make his audience laugh with volleys of barbed humour.

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"We are very touched by the concern of the South African State President for the rights of minorities," he continued with a wicked grin, seizing one of Botha's pet terms and ridiculing it by applying it to the nationalist doctrine of the liberation movements.

"But I thought that in Namibia there were no minorities, that this was one nation. At least, that is what the people say they want. You can't have a minority if there is one nation, as you all belong to the majority!"

Despite the dynamism and the humour, Archbishop Tutu closed on a sombre note, a note which the congregation was all too familiar with; a reality which - despite years of hope, prayer and optimism - remained as true in April 1988 as it had in April 1978.

"There will be more suffering before Namibia wins independence. Some more of your brothers and sisters must die. Freedom is not cheap. You pay a heavy price for your freedom, but the end result will be 'lekker'!"

Tutu might have received an enthusiastic welcome during his visit, but all in all the morale of most Namibians was low. Hopes of independence had been raised and dashed so many times before that people paid little attention to American Under-Secretary of State Chester Crocker's attempts to get South Africa, Cuba and Angola to agree to peace and thus enable the regime of US President Ronald Reagan to claim undeserved credit for its policy of "constructive engagement" in Southern Africa before Reagan stood down at the end of 1988.

As far as those inside Namibia were concerned, the outcome of the new peace talks would be no different from 1978, 1981 and 1984 when Pretoria pulled the plug on attempts to implement Resolution 435. Tutu was right; the struggle would
have to continue, certainly into the foreseeable future, many more people would lose their lives, more would be forced to flee into exile, friends and relatives already in exile would not be able to return home, while those who remained in Namibia would have to continue to suffer the relentless injustices of apartheid and the consequences of opposing the evil system.

People were tired and fed-up of nothing ever changing. In the far north, student discontent was again bubbling as 2 000 students from three schools followed the example of their 700 contemporaries at Ponhofi and started an indefinite boycott, saying that they would not return to their studies until military bases were removed from next to their and other schools. The boycott at Ombalantu Secondary School was triggered when the school buildings were hit by mortars when South African soldiers responded to an attack by Plan combatants on an army base near the school.

Meanwhile pupils at Eengedjo School in Omungwelume walked out indefinitely after 30 students and two teachers were allegedly abducted from the school hostels by a group of South African security force members posing as Plan fighters. The captives were taken to just inside Angola where the abductors, who students said spoke in Afrikaans, abandoned their quarry, the aim being - so the students believed - to discredit Plan combatants, discourage pupils from going into exile, and to give the South Africans an excuse to keep their bases next to schools on the pretext that they were "protecting" the students.

However, to those living in regions other than the far north, the spreading boycott was seen as a problem of the war zone with little bearing on events in the rest of the country. May Day came and went with rallies, organised by the NUNW, held in most industrial towns outside the war zone for the third successive year. Here too, enthusiasm seemed to be waning. The crowd of 5 000 which gathered on a football pitch next to the old compound in Katutura that Sunday afternoon was smaller than those of previous years when workers had risked dismissal in order to attend these meetings. This year many activists chose instead to spend the Sunday either at home or watching soccer.

Those who did stand for six hours under the still hot autumn sun seemed more subdued than usual, reacting with only muted enthusiasm to well-worn speeches urging workers to continue the struggle for independence and to "unite for a living wage". It was as if the fire within them was dying out and needed a spark to set it ablaze once more.

That spark came three days later when thousands of Katutura school children stayed away from classes and staged one of the biggest student marches in Namibian history to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the Cassinga massacre. Having not woken up in time for Herman's early morning round, Mbatji and I caught a taxi to work that day, but soon realised that the office was the last place we needed to be. The taxi drove from Soweto along PA de Wet Street towards the city, but soon had to slow to a crawling pace as we caught up with a wall of young people marching, dancing and toyi-toying down the road in the same direction as we...
were travelling. The taxi driver was weaving his vehicle in and out of the throng, but no sooner had a stretch of tarmac opened up in front of us than it was filled by another surge of bodies. Crowds of students came from all directions dressed in the T-shirts of Nanso, Swapo, the unions and that year's Cassinga commemoration issue. They held aloft banners and placards re-telling the horrors of the massacre and pledging that Namibian students would never forget what the South African forces had done to their friends, relatives and country people ten years before. For more than a kilometre, the road and off-road areas were chock-a-block with marchers. The atmosphere was electric. Thousands upon thousands of pounding feet, marching as one. Arms simultaneously shot skywards in clenched-fist power salutes as the students chanted, sang and cheered. Most of the students smiled as they sang, pleased to be part of such an impressive show of strength. Adrenalin was pumping both in the students and also in us as we looked on. "Jeeeesus!" Mbatji exclaimed as we reached the brow of another hill and saw the crowd still stretching out before us, past the central shops and towards the community centre. "Man, and I've left my camera at home." There was no need to worry. I spotted Da'oud and Rajah parked up ahead in the company bakkie, Rajah leaning out of the passenger window clicking away with his camera. Information about the march was not announced publicly, but our colleagues had picked up word of what was planned in the township the previous evening as student leaders informed their cadres about the march. The police had obviously been caught unawares as only a few vans containing rather worried looking officers, radios stuck permanently to the sides of their faces, scuttled up and down the endless ranks of marchers. At the front of the march, students toyi-toyied on the spot, singing freedom songs whilst waiting for their colleagues to catch up. Then, once all the groups of marchers had formed into one huge, long column, they set off around the township. At each school they passed, more students flooded out of the classrooms and joined the demonstration. Having circled Katutura, the marchers who now numbered more than 5000 students - headed for Augustineum College on the outskirts of Khomasdal, before returning to Katutura. All this time the police monitored the march but took no action. But as the demonstrators swarmed once more up PA de Wet Street towards the hospital, they were confronted by lines of riot police blocking the highway into town. It had been the students' intention to march to the higher education Academy in Windhoek West, but it seemed the police wanted them to go nowhere near White City. As the demonstrators drew nearer, the riot police shouldered arms and opened fire with rubber bullets and tear gas. Pandemonium followed as the students at the front of the march scattered, pursued by the police who continued firing off their teargas and rubber bullets. Unaware of what was happening up ahead, the marchers further back continued forward.
The impact of the police’s first volley of fire sent shock waves along the human river, causing it to burst its banks and flood away down every available sidestreet and back alleyway. By now the police had climbed into their vans and Casspirs and were chasing after the fleeing students, firing teargas and rubber bullets indiscriminately into groups of youngsters.

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Retaliatory stones began to fly towards the police vehicles, provoking further bursts of fire and charges by riot police wielding whips, batons and sjamboks. Caught up in the mayhem was DTA leader and Paramount Chief of the Hereros, Kuaima Riruako, whose gleaming Mercedes also became a target of the stone throwers. As the first brick clattered down on the car's polished paintwork, Riruako's bodyguards leapt from the vehicle, drew their pistols and fired live rounds into a group of students gathered on a street corner nearby. A teenager fell to the ground as a bullet ripped into his leg. In a split second, the other students had picked up their wounded colleague, carried him to a nearby car and then rushed him to hospital.

At the central shops, 13-year-old Gerson Kooper was sheltering in a doorway watching the riot when a police van drew up and three cops leapt out, seized the bewildered youngster and bundled him into the van. Here the officers started to kick and beat the teenager, accusing him of having stoned their vehicle. The beating complete, the police left Kooper writhing in agony on the floor of the van, got out, threw a teargas canister into the van and closed the door.

Seven hundred kilometres away in Oshakati, the South Africans were also holding a march to commemorate Cassinga. To “celebrate” the 10th anniversary of what they referred to as Operation Reindeer, the "successful attack" on "Swapo's military camp" at Cassinga, the army held a parade of troops and war machines. The brass bands played and the crowd of military top brass and their families - all dressed in their finest clothes applauded as the soldiers, tanks and aeroplanes thundered past. Midst the pomp and self-congratulation, SADF Cassinga veterans - complete with their handlebar moustaches and chests laden with medals - recounted their version of events at Cassinga to attentive journalists at a braai held in the former's honour.

The chaos in Katutura lasted until around midday. Back at The Namibian's offices, the reporters began to return, the adrenalin still flowing as they compared notes on what they had seen, eyes still damp from the effects of teargas. By mid-afternoon, every chair in the newsroom was taken up by students, many bearing the scars of the morning's battle, who described what had happened. All were convinced that the reason they had been stopped from marching into town was that the police did not want the white community to become aware of their (the students') grievances and the reality of what had happened at Cassinga. Despite their injuries, the students were burning; they were angry at the way they had been treated but at the same time proud that they had been
part of such an impressive show of strength against the "forces of oppression". John Liebenberg went as far as to compare the mood of rebellion amongst the students that day with that of South African students during the uprising of 1976. The fire was alight once more. There was a new feeling of defiance too amongst the 800 or so people who squeezed into the Katutura community hall that evening for a meeting held to commemorate Cassinga. The size of a small gymnasium, Katutura community hall was situated at one end of the old compound, across the big, open square from the union offices. There was little more to the hall other than its thin, brick walls and tin roof. The inside consisted of an open hall with a stage at the far end, off which was built a small side room. During the day, the hall served as a school, although the bleak, vacuous concrete and brick structure could hardly have been conducive to studies. Still, it was better than nothing, the pupils and staff argued. A large crowd was gathered around the double doorway when I arrived. Conversation was flowing thick and fast, emotions were running high, as I picked my way through the throng. Talk was of one thing - that morning's march. Suspicious eyes followed me into the hall where lines of plastic chairs and rickety benches were already filled with people. A single fluorescent strip light, suspended by string from a metal roof support, flickered at one end of the hall, struggling to shed light throughout the room. I started to make my way towards the light. Faces blended into the gloom, the flash of teeth and darting eyes shining out like sparks of static. Someone tapped me on the shoulder.

"Howzit brou?" came a vaguely familiar voice. I turned and smiled back, trying hard to recognize the speaker, but all I could make out were two rows of wonky teeth and a Cassinga Day T-shirt.

"Everything's sharp. Yourself?" I replied.

"Just fine. Everything's cool."

The nearer I got to the front, the more difficult it was to push past the bodies standing and sitting squashed together, jostling for a good view of the stage. When I was ten metres from the front, I realised that I was unlikely to get much further, so I found a niche by the wall and waited for the meeting to start. The hundreds of voices echoed around the hall. It was like being in a large chicken coop, and as more and more people arrived, the noise became deafening. Nama/Damara, Afrikaans, Otjiherero, Oshiwambo, Silozi and English rose to an indistinguishable crescendo. Someone in one comer started to sing freedom songs and soon everyone was joining in. After three songs, people returned to their conversations until someone else started to sing, and again almost the entire crowd joined in. All the hall's windows had been boarded up, leaving the open door as the only source of fresh air. The heat generated by the hundreds of bodies crammed together became stifling, and streams of sweat started trickling down my face and back. Noticing the boarded windows, and remembering the events of the morning, I began to feel incredibly vulnerable.
"What if the police fire teargas into the hall?" I wondered with alarm, imagining the panic as everyone rushed for the only exit, where the police would be waiting to club people like seals before bundling them into the back of a prison van. The light went out.

"This is it!" I thought and braced myself for the stampede. But everyone around me just cheered and started singing "We Shall Overcome". Within minutes, the meeting's organisers had arrived with lighted paraffin lamps which they hung from the roof supports and stage while one man in a May Day T-shirt climbed onto a colleague's shoulders and set about fixing the electric light. The light repaired, the evening's speakers gathered on the stage and the meeting was called to order.

Top of the bill was Pineas Aluteni. A slim, mild-mannered man with a thin moustache, flat face and narrow eyes, Aluteni was at Cassinga when the South Africans attacked on May 4, 1978. He had survived the slaughter but, along with others - including his future wife Francina - was captured, taken back to Namibia and held in detention without trial for six years, first at Oshakati and then in a specially built prison camp at Keikanachab, just outside Mariental.

Here the prisoners were tortured and forced to do hard labour whilst given only one meal a day, consisting of boiled potatoes and a dollop of tinned beef. At first there were no buildings at the camp and each captive had just a blanket to protect them from the chill night air of the desert. Eventually the detainees were able to build communal huts, and were given mattresses on which to sleep. For several years no one knew about the camp and those held there, and it was not until one prisoner escaped that Namibia and the outside world became aware of the captives' plight.

The International Red Cross visited the camp and some improvements were made to conditions there. Meanwhile, church and anti-apartheid groups both inside and outside Namibia campaigned for the prisoners' release. But it was not until 1984 that Aluteni and his fellow detainees were set free, still without being charged and without any kind of compensation for their suffering.

To meet Aluteni at home or in the street, he was a quiet, introspective person who spoke only when it was necessary. Although wary of strangers, he was not hostile towards them, and time and familiarity revealed a relaxed and good-humoured soul. But deep down I detected

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anger and resentment, and this surfaced when he took up the microphone on the platform at public meetings.

"I can still clearly hear the screaming of women and babies at Cassinga as they begged for mercy from the racist troops who suddenly appeared from out of nearby bushes shouting, bayoneting and kicking them to death."

As Aluteni spoke, his voice became choked with anger. He clenched his teeth and spat the words "racist troops", "shooting", "bayoneting" and "kicking them to death".
"There was first the roaring of Mirages and Buccaneer planes, followed by the heavy bombing of the meeting place, a clinic, and the kitchen. My comrade Willy Amutenya was standing next to me, and the next minute he was lying on the ground with his arm ripped off. Racist troops moved in to complete their work by killing many of the badly wounded Namibians. The rest of us who took shelter in the trenches were ordered out and loaded into trucks leaving for Oshakati.

On the way, one comrade was thrown off the truck. I do not know whether he was already dead. On our arrival at Oshakati, we were abused and tortured by black makakunyas (soldiers) and kept for a long period in detention without trial. There we left more comrades dead."

So he continued, describing the conditions at Keikanachab and their eventual release.

Crowds at rallies in Namibia tended to be passive and seldom reflected the mood of the speakers they were listening to, but at this meeting, perhaps because of events the previous morning, Aluteni's anger stirred similar emotions in his captivated audience.

"The enemy may win a lot of battles in the operational area," Aluteni concluded, "but they will never win the actual war."

"A luta continua - the struggle continues!" the crowd roared. "Vitória 6 certa - Victory is certain!"

By the end of May, initiatives to bring an end to the Angolan war and independence to Namibia were beginning to snowball. Soviet and American diplomats had met and agreed upon the principle of Cuban and South African troop withdrawal from Angola, and a tentative September 29 settlement date had been put forward for the warring factions to consider.

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Namibians, however, remained unimpressed, although by now these developments were at least demanding some attention in the media. In an opinion poll carried out by The Namibian, interim government minister Fanuel Kozonguizi said the talks might succeed in getting South Africa out of Angola, but he could not see Pretoria's troops leaving Namibia. Cassinga survivor and Director of the Roman Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, Willy Amutenya, reflected popular cynicism saying that there had been many such talks in the past which had only turned out to be a waste of time and money, while Swanu General Secretary Vekuii Rukoro believed the talks were a public relations exercise by the South Africans to coincide with the sanctions debate going on in the American Congress at the time. UN Resolution 435 had been completely derailed, said Rukoro, so those who were serious about Namibian independence had to look to other means of bringing about the country's freedom. Swapo's internal Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Nico Bessinger, was equally dismissive, saying South Africa would treat any peace accord with the same disrespect it had shown the Nkomati agreement it had signed with Mozambique in 1984.
Besides, there were developments within Namibia itself and on its northern borders which commanded the immediate attention of those living in the country. By now, 35 schools in the far north had been brought to a standstill with almost all their 20,000 students boycotting classes and demanding the removal of military bases from next to schools and hospitals. And, as a picture of heavy fighting at Cuito Cuanevale in south eastern Angola began to develop, reports of Swapo and Cuban forces massing on Angola's south western border with Namibia also began to filter through to Windhoek from the war zone. Mbatji and I were sent to investigate.

We arrived at Oshivelo a little after 16h00 on the Friday, together with Herman and Gollo, who came to collect more outstanding payments from shopkeepers and advertisers in the region. We thought we would still have plenty of time to make it through Oshivelo and on to Ondangwa before curfew, but the soldiers at the gate refused to allow us through.

"The gate closes at 16h00," the officer in charge told us. We protested that we still had plenty of time to make it to Ondangwa before nightfall, but the soldier was having nothing of it.

"They can go, but you must stay," the soldier told me, gesturing to Mbatji, Herman and Gollo. "What?!!" I exclaimed. "But we are together."

"Look, there are terrorists in the area. No whites can go through here after 16h00, it's too risky."

My colleagues were finding it hard to contain their disbelief and Gollo was already sniggering uncontrollably in the back of the car.

"But I am quite prepared to take the risk," I pleaded.

"I'm sorry but I am under orders. You are quite welcome to stay at the guesthouse here," he said pointing at Oshivelo police station.

"My friends as well?" I asked.

He hesitated. "Well...they can find somewhere to stay in the nearby location." My friends snorted with disgust.

"Look," Herman said, sticking his head out of the back passenger window to speak with the soldier.

"My aunt runs the service station just the other side of the gate. We can stay the night there."

"You and your pals can go wherever you like," the guard replied. "But you sir," he turned back to me, "must stay overnight at the guesthouse."

"I think we had better discuss this over a beer," Mbatji suggested, so we turned the car around and drove over to the nearby cafe. We were served by a large Afrikaans speaking woman, wife of one of the soldiers who - like many security force officers - ran lucrative businesses in the region.

"Is there anywhere around here to stay the night?" Herman asked as the woman slammed four cans of lager down on the counter, took the money and almost threw the change back at him. She looked at him for a moment.

"Nee" - ("No," ) she said and then returned to the back of the shop.
"We will just have to go back to Tsumeb and return here first thing in the morning," Mbatji said as we sipped our beer on the verandah.
"But that would be pointless. Why don't you stay with Herman's aunt and I'll sleep at the police station. It would save a lot of hassle," I said.
"No way, we're not having you staying in that police station on your own," Mbatji protested.
"They'll torture you." I saw his point; a police station in the middle of nowhere was the last place I would want to spend the night on my own. So we made the 45 minute drive back to Tsumeb and spent the night in Nomtsoub township, before driving back to Oshivelvo first thing the following morning. Having checked in at Ondangwa's ABC guesthouse, we drove on to Oshakati; the annual Far North Soccer Association was staging its annual tournament at Oshakati stadium and, as acting sports editor at the time, I needed to attend.
On the way we called in at Oswald's house in Ongwediva. The family was seated outside on the stoep drinking beer. In the middle of the group, seated on a chair against which were propped two wooden crutches, was Oswald's sister Stelly, whom I had last seen in the hospital almost three months earlier. Her left leg was now encased in plaster up to her hip and her arms, face and other leg were still a patchwork of different skin colours, although the burns had regained some of the skin's natural brown.

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She greeted me warmly and we chatted for some time as I gradually overcame the embarrassment I still felt from our previous meeting. Although she was still in much pain, Stelly's eyes now sparkled as she spoke, and laughed heartily when Herman told her to watch out as I would soon be knocking on her door to take her out on a date.
After a while, Oswald emerged from the house. He had been sleeping, but still wore his suit and tie. He greeted us enthusiastically and ushered us into the living room, called to one of the girls outside to fetch beer and cooldrink, and then began to tell us excitedly about the reports of Swapo and Cuban troops massing on the border to the east and west of Ruacana.
"More and more Swapo insurgents have been coming across the border in recent weeks, and they have been telling villagers that they are preparing for a big invasion," Oswald said, gesturing wildly.
"They attacked this location with mortars only the other day, and one bomb landed just across the street from my home. We have even seen MiGs (Soviet-made Angolan jet fighters) flying over Oshakati!"
The main road from Ondangwa to Ruacana was evidence enough of this build-up. One South African military convoy after another processed northwards; tanks, supply vehicles and cannons streamed along the highway. The South Africans, already heavily committed in south-eastern Angola, were now having to push all their remaining resources to the north-west to try and block any threatened invasion. There was a new look to the security forces; they appeared on edge, hungry for the fight they anticipated was not far off.
The difference was particularly noticeable in Koevoet. While those Chris and I had come across patrolling in March had lolled casually on their vehicles, those we saw now were alert, their guns rather than beer cans at the ready. Many Koevoets had tied red cloths around their shaven heads giving them a frightening appearance similar to soldiers of the Khmer Rouge I had seen in films and books about Cambodia.

We pulled off the road near Oshakati market in order to take candid photographs of some of the convoys. After a while, four Koevoet Casspirs pulled up at a roadside food stall some 15 metres from where we were parked, and some of the soldiers disembarked.

The Koevoets strode around the stalls, their automatic rifles in one hand whilst pointing with the other at the food they wanted, thrusting money into the hands of the stall keeper before taking their food and rejoining their colleagues. Throughout the ten minute stopover, several Koevoets remained on guard, perched on top of the Casspirs with guns cocked. The radio operator was also kept busy in his seat above the driver's compartment, carrying out a constant conversation with headquarters and other vehicles in the patrol.

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When the rest of the Casspirs in the group arrived, there was a roar of the leading vehicles' turbo engines and the convoy set off, heading north in a cloud of dust, the Koevoets - red headbands streaming out behind sitting on top, scouring the roadside and poised for action.

There was a heightened sense of expectancy at Oshakati Stadium too, and it was not just because of the soccer tournament. We arrived to find two troop carriers full of uniformed soldiers parked outside the gate. They had come to support their team Celtic, which was made up of players serving in the army. Many of the "fans" still carried their weapons.

We parked our car alongside others at the edge of the pitch - little more than an oblong area of bleached sand through which peeped an occasional blade of grass - and watched the game which was already in process. In the grandstand on the opposite side of the pitch, spectators stood up and moved to the back row as the soldiers began to file into the front seats.

Celtic were due to play next, a tie which turned out to be a bruising affair against the local team Teenagers, during which players of both sides landed as many kicks on their opponents as they did on the ball. A 2-1 win in the bag, Teenagers then played rival giants Golden Bigs in the final. The match started late and the sun was already sinking in the west when, with the teams tied 1-1 after normal time, the game went into extra time. We continued to watch the game with one eye on the sun. Mbatji became restless.

"We had better go," he kept saying every few minutes.

"Yes, yes, it won't be long now, it will soon be over," I replied like a parrot, not wanting to leave without the crucial result.

The sun had all but disappeared behind the stadium wall when, with the game still in progress, we raced away from the ground and sped towards Ondangwa. Military convoys still thundered northwards in the opposite direction. The gun
towers of Ondangwa airbase loomed out of the purple-pink dusky gloom, and we held our breaths. Perhaps fortunately for us, we were sandwiched between two army supply trucks as we passed the base, and we returned to the guesthouse - and a much-longed for vegetarian platter - intact.
The following Monday, government education officials met with parents and committee members from the boycotting schools to try and resolve the ongoing crisis. The boycott at schools not directly affected by the presence of military bases had been spontaneous and uncoordinated, often arising out of additional grievances ranging from bad food to security force intimidation.
The response from the security forces, however, had been standard with Koevoet and police seeking out boycotting students, arresting their leaders and beating and teargassing groups of demonstrators. Sensing the

Uprising: the class of '88 98 boycott lacked direction, the authorities started broadcasting reports over the state-run SWABC saying the stayaway had ended, so when we arrived at Ongwediva Teacher Training College on the Monday to cover the meeting between education officials and school committee representatives, a handful of students had started drifting back to classes, only to find there were no teachers there to teach them.

Ongwediva Teacher Training College was the Owambo Administration's pride and joy - a symbol of everything it claimed to be doing for its people. It was a modern, spacious complex in the centre of which was the meeting hall; a space-aged Zigarat painted in dazzling hieroglyphics and which looked totally incongruous in its bushveld setting. Barred from attending the meeting, Mbatji and I sat outside for several hours until the talks broke up. As we waited, we were paid discreet visits by a few Nanso leaders, as well as teachers from nearby schools. Nanso was busy trying to co-ordinate the boycott and persuade doubting pupils not to go back to classes, while the majority of teachers, said our contacts, were fully behind the students, although the threat of instant dismissal prevented teachers taking an active part in the stayaway.

Past midday and delegates - most of whom were middle-aged and elderly men, amongst them tribal leaders and church people - spilled out of the Zigarat and after socialising on the steps, began to disperse back to their villages with the news that no agreement had been reached with the authorities. The administration had proposed that Pohnhoi students would be moved to other schools in the area, away from the threat of military crossfire. The school committee delegates had agreed to put the proposals to the students, and the region's Director of Education, Dennis Nandi, left the meeting confident that the pupils would listen to the advice of their elders, accept the plan and return to their studies.

As he spoke, events 280 km south in Tsumeb were undermining any chance of a settlement. In Nomtsoub's Otjikoto Secondary School, pupils had boycotted classes on the Monday morning both in solidarity with the students in the far north, and also to protest at the racism and poor teaching standards of white staff members at the school.
The school's principal had called the police who baton-charged the demonstrators, firing teargas and rubber bullets as they went. Stones were then thrown at both the police and the cars of white teachers who sided with the riot squad and threatened their pupils with loaded pistols. In the running battle which followed, at least three students and an adult bystander were injured, and five student leaders were arrested.

We arrived in Tsumeb by mid-afternoon. Nomtsoub's distinctive red-dust streets in between row upon row of identical matchbox houses with their immaculately tidy yards brimming with lush green hedges and shrubs - were unusually quiet. Few children were out on the streets, only women carrying bundles and packages on their heads, and men dressed in dirt-covered overalls and pit hats returning from day shift at the copper mine.

Otjikoto school was deserted. Stones and spent teargas cartridges were scattered around the yard where a few paper banners demanding an end to racism in the classroom dangled from the tall, chain-linked fence, jerking awkwardly in the breeze. Many windows in the school's buildings had been smashed, and the glass of several broken car windscreens lay in jagged, glinting pools on the staff car park. A young boy aged about 12, barefooted and wearing a faded light blue cotton shirt and red shorts, appeared from a side street and jogged over to us. "Some people want to see you. Please follow me," he told us.

We did as we were asked and followed the boy down several alleyways and into a house. Here we were greeted by four Otjikoto teachers. They introduced themselves, we did the same, we shook hands with them and they asked us to sit down in the living room while one fetched beer from the fridge. Net curtains hung across the window, through which one of the teachers kept checking the street outside. We sat in comfortable settees arranged around the walls of the cramped room. Plants spilled from pots arranged on the sideboards and in each corner, and a framed poster of Swapo President Sam Nujoma hung on the wall.

The teacher returned from the kitchen and laid beers and glasses down on a low, hand-carved coffee table set in the middle of a thick woollen carpet which covered the centre of the polished concrete floor. The teachers gave their version of the morning's events and outlined the grievances students had presented in a letter to the principal.

For starters, the students were tired of being called "kaffirs" and "baboons" by white staff members. The students wanted racism to end in the staff room too. "We black teachers have to sit in a separate part of the staff room away from the whites," one of the teachers told us.

"The whites won't even drink from the same cups as us, and they carry their guns into lessons with them."

Finally the teachers said the students were complaining about the lack of books, both set texts and literature for the library, as well as the poor quality of other facilities at the school.

The authorities were unlikely to meet these demands, said the teachers, and after the treatment they received that morning, the students were unlikely to return to
their classes in a hurry. We said goodbye to the teachers as the sun was beginning
to set, and we started our long journey back to Windhoek, stopping off to buy fish
and chips in Tsumeb on the

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way. As we drove through the night, the significance of the Otjikoto stayaway
began to dawn on us. This was the first school outside the war zone to join the
boycott. The dam wall had broken, a flood was to follow.
The following Monday, I woke with a start, sat bolt upright and listened. I
shivered as a blast of cold air whooshed through the broken window panes.
The blinding orange glare of the floodlights streamed into the room. I squinted
and turned my head away. There it was again; thud, thud, thud in the distance. I
went to the window and looked out. Dawn had just broken but the streets were
unusually quiet for a Monday morning. More dull thuds in quick succession,
followed by an explosion, then a sharp knock on the door.
"Mbatji, David, wake up!" It was Da'oud. I went to the door and let him in. He
was slightly out of breath having run from his house further up the street.
"They're shooting at the students again," he said with just a hint of tension in his
voice.
"I know, the shots woke me," I replied, trying hard to imitate my friend's
coolness. "I'll quickly get dressed. The bakkie's outside. We can go in that."
We had half expected there to be trouble. The previous Friday, the schools'
boycott had spread to Katutura when students at two of the township's biggest
schools walked out of classes and picketed the school gates. More and more
students had arrived and joined the protesters, who toyi-toyied in the streets while
waving placards demanding that military bases be removed from schools in the
north.
The police had arrived in their Kombis and Casspirs and had opened fire,
scattering the students with rubber bullets and tear gas. As the students fled for
cover, they were chased by whip-wielding policemen who then locked the school
gates, trapping some of the youngsters in the school compound. Those inside had
tried to hide in the hostels and classrooms, but the police tracked them down and
began beating the youngsters - some as young as nine years old - with whips and
batons. Students outside the school regrouped and again broke into song. More
rubber bullets and tear gas, more beatings.
The running battle continued for about three hours before the police finally left. A
hard core of students had then regrouped to give one final show of defiance,
singing before heading home to dress their and their colleagues' wounds.
An uneasy calm had descended on the township that weekend. The annual Corpus
Christi procession had attracted several thousand marchers

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on the Sunday, but, through fear of further police action, the organisers had made
sure political banners were left at home and singing was kept strictly to church
hymns. Police were out in force on the streets throughout the weekend, but
township dwellers kept their distance and continued to celebrate the weekend as only Namibians knew how. Yet underneath the surface, the township simmered. The shebeens and braais buzzed with talk of the school boycott, Friday's unrest and plans to hold a big meeting of students and parents to discuss the situation. By Sunday evening, the word had got around to almost every household that the meeting was to be held first thing the next morning at the Shifidi Secondary School. The Namibian's receptionist Anna and her friend Marianna, who worked at the trade union offices, had called by at our house on the Sunday evening. There was talk, they said, of the women forming a human barricade in the road to stop the police from attacking students. Both women wanted to do all they could to stop the police shooting at the children, but had their doubts about lying down in the path of Casspirs driven by crazed members of the riot squad. "Those bastards wouldn't stop!" Anna said with a nervous laugh. Anna tended to laugh even when she was anxious, but this was a faint chuckle compared with the earthquake of a back-slapping guffaw she let out when happy. However, after a few quarts of Windhoek Lager, the guts had returned to Anna's hilarity and the two women left almost convinced they would not have to become martyrs the following morning.

I put on my jeans and boots, and pulled a sweater over a T-shirt extolling the virtues of the British punk band The Neurotics. I grabbed the car keys and my camera, and joined Da'oud in the street. We drove to the nearby Shipena School, scene of some of the most brutal police attacks three days before. At first it seemed as if nothing unusual was going on. Scores of people walked along the roadsides as taxis cruised up and down looking for customers. Then, 100 metres from the school, we passed a group of teenagers who peered suspiciously into the bakkie. They recognised us, gave a whoop and then triumphant power salutes as we drove by. I felt as if we were the Seventh Cavalry riding into battle, but the sensation was short lived. Another 50 metres on and a crowd of children streaked across the road. A teargas canister exploded behind them as a police van, crammed full of riot squad officers pointing rubber bullet guns at the fleeing students, sped around the corner. I made a sharp left turn and we disappeared down a side street. Here more children peered from gates and doorways, watching for the now-familiar speeding white Kombis, buff bakkies and khaki Casspirs.

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We parked the bakkie, checked our cameras for film and, hiding the cameras up our jumpers, walked back up the street. There were very few adults around but every house and backyard seemed full of children and teenagers, many pretending to loiter while scanning the road for police. As we reached the junction with the main road, two Kombis raced past with black and white policemen hanging from the side door. They gave us a quick stare and then fixed their sites on a crowd of about 20 students standing by the school gates. Bang, bang bang. The crowd scattered as one youngster fell to the ground. Two boys ran across the road, pulled their injured colleague to his feet and led him to a
nearby house before the police had a chance to turn and swoop on their wounded prey.

There was the rumble of a Casspir behind us. Da'oud grabbed my arm and we ducked back down the side street and into a doorway. As we emerged, a gleaming, metallic blue Cadillac bounced down the street towards us, photographer John Liebenberg - several cameras dangling from his neck - leaning from the back window, looking up and down the street for something worth picturing. The Namibian's darkroom assistant John Walenga was driving, one hand on the wheel and leaning casually back into the head-rest, while Ritchie Louw of the distribution department, wearing sunglasses and a leopard skin fez, shouted at us from the front passenger side window.

"Waar's die bakkie?" ("Where's the bakkie?") - "Waar's die bakkie?" Ritchie squawked, flinging open the door and jumping out before John Walenga had a chance to bring his gleam machine to a standstill. I fumbled in my pocket and tossed Ritchie the keys. The two Johns had now joined us.

"Man there's some serious shit going down at Shifidi," John Liebenberg said, his eyes darting up and down the street.

"Quick, we must get down there in the bakkie." Ritchie was already revving the bakkie's engine, so we asked no questions and made for the company van, John Liebenberg and I climbing in the back while Da'oud jumped in the front seat and John Walenga went back to his own car. Tyres skidded in the dirt and we roared away down the street.

Squatting in the back of the bakkie, John L. flung open the back of one camera and reloaded with a fresh spool of film. His eyes were bulging and he mumbled as we whizzed through the dusty streets towards the other side of the township.

"Wild man, wild!" he said half to me, half to himself. "Man this is serious shit." He looked up ahead, then behind, then to the left and to the right.

"This is serious shit. The cops have gone wild, absolutely wild." His thick wiry beard stood on end as if bristling with static.

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Up front, Da'oud slouched in the passenger seat, one arm dangling from the open window, giving the occasional nonchalant wave to passersby. Ritchie on the other hand was hunched over the steering wheel and leant on the horn the moment anything or anyone looked as if they might pull out in front of us. Those who did were immediately overtaken regardless of the traffic coming in the opposite direction, Ritchie shaking his fist at them out of the window and shouting abuse as we went.

We were now near to Shifidi Secondary School. A plume of smoke crept above the roofs of surrounding shacks. Hundreds of women and children milled around the street corners. We screeched to a halt half a block away from the school gates and clambered out of the bakkie. John was away, focusing on the school then clicking at groups of spluttering and dazed young boys and girls. The rest of us walked up to the school where we found the gates wide open and a barricade of burning rubbish across the entrance.
On the opposite side of the road, students huddled in doorways while a few adults staggered across the street now strewn with rubble. Anna appeared as if from nowhere, clutching her right shoulder. She was a big woman with three young children and a heart of gold. She was almost in tears. She explained that the meeting of parents and students had gone ahead as planned, but soon after it had started, police had burst into the hall wielding whips and batons, and proceeded to lay into everyone there. A lone policeman had driven an open-back Mercedes truck towards the school while his armed colleagues lay flat on the floor at the back. When the truck drew level with the school, the police leapt from their hiding place and charged into the school hall before any warning could be given to those inside. As Anna spoke, women and children wandered past, clutching bleeding and bruised limbs. "There was no warning, they just burst in and started beating us," Anna repeated, dazed and shaking her head in disbelief. "The hall was full and many people could not escape in time."

Teargas drifted across a nearby street and the barricade continued to burn, but there were now no police to be seen, so students started to regroup nervously around the school, but close enough to quickly accessible hiding places. John L. darted out from a side street and ran over to us. "Anna you alright?" he asked, taking Anna gently by the arm. "Hell those 'okes... wild man, wild!" Anna gave him a faint smile. "Da'oud," John continued, "you and I had better go with Ritchie back to Shipena. Apparently the police are getting heavy over there too. Dave, my brou, you stay here and cover this end."

At this they raced over to the bakkie and had soon disappeared in a shower of dust. I turned to Anna, but she had gone too. I looked around. Still no sign of the police. Suddenly a young man dressed in a jacket and tie was at my side, a friend called Robert Isaaks who I had met at a braai a few weeks before and who worked for the Catholic church newsletter. "We had better find some cover," he suggested calmly, "the 'quines' will be back soon."

We went from house to house, looking for a suitable hiding place with a good view of the school and street but also in a yard with low fences over which we could easily escape if needs be. "Here come the police!" someone shouted, and the street emptied as youths darted to the nearest cover. Robert beckoned me to follow him into a nearby yard where we cowered behind a wall. Two police vans shot past, policemen hanging out of the back, guns in hand, helmet visors tipped back, scouring the houses for likely targets. Just as they disappeared from our view, there was a series of shots followed by high-pitched screams. I peered around the wall to see a group of students fleeing from a house a few doors down. A young woman was lying in the road, clutching her head. One police van did a skid U-turn, raced back along the street and stopped by the woman. She tried to get to her feet and run, but two policemen grabbed her before
she could move, struck her several times around the face and bundled her into the back of the van.

As the vehicle roared off, there was another loud bang as a teargas canister exploded in the backyard of the house next door. Students, covering their mouths with their shirts, staggered from the yard, spluttering, tears streaming down their faces.

Robert grabbed me by the arm and we made off down a side street. A cloud of teargas wafted across our path. The white, gliding smoke crept towards us and suddenly had us surrounded. I began to choke as if being throttled by an invisible pair of hands. The gas then hit my lungs and I started to cough a dry, rasping cough. Tears welled up in my eyes and started flowing down my cheeks. In front of me I could just make out the blurred figure of my friend clutching a handkerchief to his face. I fumbled in my pocket, pulled out a dirty rag and covered my nose and mouth.

"This way," Robert spluttered, pointing at a ramshackle house.

"The cops are making another turn!"

Panic. Without looking behind me, I vaulted a fence and sprinted into the shack's backyard, hot on the heels of my companion. There, to my surprise, we found four students huddled beside the rickety outhouse. A middle-aged woman in a threadbare dress stood outside the backdoor, hurriedly drying her hands on a torn apron. She came over and ushered Robert and me into the house. We entered the dingy living room cum kitchen where small, broken windows let in more cold than light. An oil lamp hung from the roof and

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a solitary tap jutted from the wall from which water dripped into a chipped basin below. Five children, none older than six-years-old, barefoot and dressed in ill-fitting old shorts, T-shirts and faded dresses sat quietly in the corner away from the window, only the whites of their terrified eyes clearly visible, peering at us in the darkness. Robert said a few quick words of greeting to the woman and then turned to me.

"You can get some pictures from the window," he said. "Quick, you will catch them as they pass."

The last thing I had in mind was taking photographs of the rampaging security forces, but faced with this ultimatum and the expectation that, as a journalist, I should be making a record of the mayhem, I took a deep breath and sneaked up to the window overlooking the street. Robert carefully drew back the piece of ripped, diaphanous cloth which passed as a curtain and I nervously raised my head above the sill and peered out. One of the bottom window panes was conveniently missing and I poked the camera lens through the hole, just as a police Kombi screamed to a halt in front of the house. Barrels of rubber bullet guns bristled from the windows. I pressed the shutter, wound on the film and took another picture before ducking out of view. I held my breath. Surely one of the cops would have seen the glint of the camera body or the rustling of the curtain. I popped my head up again, just enough to see out. A policeman was scanning the house through the metal grill of one of the Kombi's open windows, his gun trained
directly at us. Silence. Then the commander in the Kombi barked an order in Afrikaans. I ducked. Nothing, only the revving of the engine. I looked up in time to see the van lurch forward, do a quick skid-turn before charging off back the way it had come. It disappeared from view and there was another salvo of gunfire, a few screams and shouts, then silence. We retreated from the window and my friend asked the woman for a drink of water. She filled an enamel cup from the tap and handed it to my friend who took a few gulps and handed it to me. I had not realised how dry my throat had become and was grateful for the drink. We shook the woman's hand and thanked her profusely for the shelter, then slid out of the back door, through the yard and out into the street. The teargas had cleared but the dust churned up by the speeding Kombi still hung in the air. Trying to look as composed and inconspicuous as possible - difficult considering I had a camera hidden up the front of my jumper - we stumbled across the road and down an alley which brought us back out onto the main road next to the school. Two more barricades had been built, this time across the road itself, the wood, tyres and rubbish now well alight, sending a pall of dense black smoke into the sky. We rounded another street corner just in time to see a police van screech to a halt a block ahead. Thirty metres from the van stood a group of children.

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aged between nine and fifteen. Two policemen leapt out of the back of the van, took aim and sent a volley of rubber bullets into the group. The children screamed in terror and sprinted off in all directions; over fences, into houses and down the street. The policemen jumped back into the van and sped off down the road, firing indiscriminately at the fleeing children. I pulled my camera out from under my jumper and closed the shutter, wound on, closed the shutter, wound on, before hiding the camera again.

We walked on, but no sooner had the dust started to settle than another police van turned the corner and made straight for us. We carried on walking, the camera now hidden behind my back, and the van zoomed past. Bang, bang, bang bang. They were shooting at another group of students gathered near the Catholic church.

"I think we had better find somewhere to take cover," Robert advised. We tried the church gates but they were locked. Then we looked around for a suitable backyard, but all had high fences and were clearly visible from the road. So we walked back the way we had come, trying to look as casual and passer-by-ish as we could. Around another street corner and we had not gone 20 metres when we were aware of two police vans roaring up the street behind us. I shoved the camera up the front of my jumper as we carried on walking. One of the vans slowed down and crawled up behind us. Someone from the van yelled to us in Afrikaans to stand still, so we stopped walking and turned to see a white police Lieutenant glaring at us through a pair of goldrimmed sunglasses from the passenger seat of a large four-wheel-drive police van. He opened the door and jumped down.
Five black policemen wearing khaki camouflage jump-suits and large Star Wars-like helmets, the toughened perspex visors pushed back, climbed out of the back of the van and came to have a look at us. By now the second van had also pulled up and two young white policemen with short-cropped blonde hair ran up and joined the reception committee.

Ignoring Robert, Lieutenant Sunglasses asked me in Afrikaans who I was. I looked blank and said I was terribly sorry but I did not speak Afrikaans.

"Who are you and what are you doing here?" the Lieutenant asked again, this time in English.

"I'm a tourist," I replied.

"What is that you are holding?" he said pointing his baton at my left arm which was now concealing the camera behind my left buttock. I slowly brought the camera into view.

"What are you doing with that?" snapped the Lieutenant.

"Taking photographs," I answered. One of the young blonde policemen stepped forward and lifted up the front of my pullover to read what was written on my T-shirt. The ins and outs of Harlow punk culture were obviously lost on him and, as my T-shirt did not have written on it the words or colours of Swapo or any other "communist" organisations, he let the jumper drop and stepped back into line, scratching his head and muttering "Die Neurotics, die Neurotics?" to himself.

"Why are you taking photographs?" the Lieutenant continued patiently.

"Because tourists take photographs."

"But what will you do with those photographs?"

"I will show them to my friends back home."

"And what will you tell the people back home."

"That this is life in Namibia."

"This isn't Namibia, this is South West. You've got the name wrong."

"Where abouts in Katutura do you live?"

The fact that I had suggested, simply through a name, that we were not in part of the South African empire struck a raw nerve with the Lieutenant. But he was a professional and quickly regained his composure.

"Where are you staying? Why have you come to the township?" he persisted.

"I live here."

The young T-shirt inspector freaked.

"Die fokken' moegoe bly met die fokken' kaffirs! Jy's 'n fokken'peliëtjie jou fokken'Engelsman!" he snarled, turning bright red in the face as the arteries in his neck swelled up. Lieutenant Sunglasses remained calm.

"Where abouts in Katutura do you live?"

"Soweto district..." I winced as three of the black policemen opened fire on a small group of children who had gathered further down the street.

"Do you have any identification on you?"

"No, it's at home."

"Get into the van. I want to see your papers. We'll go to your house."

I glanced at Robert and was then ushered into the back of the van. Two cops sat either side of me, two others sat opposite and a fifth sat in the open doorway,
slouched back, one leg dangling out and nursing his hefty gun in his lap. A box of teargas canisters lay on the floor, next to a similarly half-empty container of rubber bullets. Spent cartridges covered the floor.

As we drove through the streets towards Soweto, my guards kept catching the eyes of people beside the road, and when they did jerked at their guns as if they were intending to shoot, causing the on-lookers to duck or scatter. Each time this happened, the policemen grinned sardonically at each other, pleased with the effect their little joke was having. Meanwhile, I tried to shrink out of sight of people in the street for fear that they might think I was an informer or member of the security forces.

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The police van pulled up outside the house and the guards signalled for me to climb down. I did as I was told and went inside the house. The T-shirt inspector followed me into my bedroom where I was rummaging through the wardrobe, trying to find my passport. He walked over to the window, turned and looked around the room.

My heart stopped as I remembered what I had left lying around the room. Cassinga and May Day T-shirts were draped over the back of the chair while a record of freedom songs lay on the table, along with "alternative" newspapers such as The Namibian, New Nation and the Weekly Mail. Underneath these, I remembered with alarm, were copies of the Plan publication The Combatant which had been handed to me at a rally. I had the uneasy feeling these - like most editions of The Combatant - had been banned; being caught in possession of banned material was a criminal offence and if found out, I would be lucky to get away with deportation.

I continued my desperate search for my passport as the policeman continued looking around the room. The curtains were still drawn and he was having difficulty adjusting his eyes to the subdued turquoise glow. The other policemen were now gathered in the living room. Their colleague started peering at the T-shirts and then at the newspapers.

"Found it!" I shouted, snatching my passport and getting up to face the policeman. "After you," I said, showing him the door. He looked at me suspiciously but, to my amazement, walked out into the living room. I followed and handed my passport to the Lieutenant who took it and started slowly turning the pages, brushing his thick moustache thoughtfully while scanning the various stamps which covered several pages of the document.

He then came to the pages containing my visas for "South West Africa". My original visitor's permit had expired but the Department of Civic Affairs had since granted me a one month extension which took the form of a large red stamp with the words "holiday only" written in bold capital letters across it.

"This has expired," the Lieutenant said pointing at the first visa. "Yes, but it has been extended," I said pointing to the big red stamp on the opposite page.

"But this one is no longer valid," he said returning to the previous page.

"Yes I know, but this big red stamp here allows me to stay in the country for another month, doesn't it?" I continued patronizingly. I bit my tongue and looked
at the policeman apologetically, but he was still puzzling over the meaning of the visas, as if he had never seen such a passport stamp before.
He pulled out his radio and spoke to his headquarters in Afrikaans. "Name is Lush, DJW. British passport. Do you have anything on him?"

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Mbatji emerged from his bedroom, dressed only in his trousers, wiping sleepy dust from his eyes. He stopped and looked at the camouflaged ensemble.
"Good morning," Mbatji said drowsily to the policemen and strolled into the kitchen.
The radio crackled back into life.
"Lush, yes, he's on file," came the voice at the security police headquarters. "He's the guy who has been working for The Namibian. Is his work permit in order?"
"Oh no!" I thought, looking at the words "holiday only" looming up from the page of my passport.
"Yes, it's valid until the end of the month," the Lieutenant replied. He then switched off the handset and returned the passport.
"Thank you for your time, Mr Lush. Now, we don't want to see you around the schools again, is that understood? Goodbye."
The policemen stomped out of the house, climbed back into their vans and drove off. Mbatji re-emerged from the kitchen holding a cup of steaming coffee.
"What did they want?" he asked. I explained what had happened and what the police had asked me.
"I think you had better prepare yourself for having to leave the country at very short notice," Mbatji said, blowing on his coffee and then returning to his bedroom.
I entered the kitchen and poured myself a bowl of cornflakes and a mug of fruit juice, almost putting the fruit juice onto the cornflakes and the milk into the mug. Halfway through my breakfast and there was loud bang on the front door. I choked on my mouthful, splattering the table with half-munched cornflakes.
The door opened and footsteps approached through the living room. Around the corner appeared Da'oud, closely followed by Mark.
"Oh very nice," Mark said with a sarcastic laugh.
"There was us expecting to find you half way to Robben Island and here you are scoffing cornflakes. So they let you go? What happened?" I wiped my face of cornflake fallout and smiled meekly at my two friends.
"How did you know?..." I spluttered. "I know the grapevine works fast, but I didn't realise it worked that fast...."
"We're going to see what's happening at the schools," Mark said when I had finished my resume. "The editor's in the car, are you coming?"
I nodded and followed him out of the front door, running back inside to hide my camera and the copies of The Combatant, just in case the police returned.

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"So here you are," Gwen said with a smile as I climbed into the back of the company Golf. "I was just about to contact everyone from the British Ambassador to a lawyer to get you out, but thought we had better check to see if you were here first! Where's it all happening?"
"Shifidi," I replied.
Smoke still hung over the houses and school, although it was thicker than when I was there less than an hour before. We drove past the school, weaving in and out of the barricades, avoiding the debris which littered the tarmac. Few people were out on the streets now, and we all scanned the area for the first sign of police.
"The F2 is under your seat," Gwen said referring to one of the company cameras. "We'll make a turn and you try and get some shots of the barricades."
"Shit, more photography!" I thought, reaching under the seat and pulling out the camera which I held gingerly below window level, praying that we would not bump into Lieutenant Sunglasses and his motley crew.
As we approached the Katutura shopping centre, two police vans and a Kombi zoomed around the corner. I ducked behind Gwen's headrest as they passed. We then turned into the main street and saw a line of six Casspirs, all crawling with cops, lined up beside the road next to Namutoni school. We headed towards the Casspirs as a "people's car" - vehicle belonging to the local Swapo branch - cruised by in the opposite direction, activists surveying the scene from the relative safety of the car.
Once around the block and we again approached Shifidi school and the burning barricades. I wound down the window, looked back and forwards to check for police, leant out and snapped a few frames before ducking back inside the car.
"Quick! Get a shot of that," Mark yelled, pointing at a new plume of smoke rising above the houses on the opposite side of the road from the school. I pointed the camera out of the window once more and clicked away.
"Cops!!!" Da'oud hissed. I fell back from the window and pushed the camera under the seat as a Kombi whizzed past.
A little further along the road we passed a big prison lorry full of captives, their faces obscured by thick wire mesh over the small windows. It was decided we would make one more turn past the school, so we headed off around the block for the final time. As we reached the roundabout opposite the police station, a police Kombi was approaching from the slip road to the left.
Gwen accelerated just as the Kombi was reaching the junction. A burly white police officer perched in the front passenger seat suddenly recognised Gwen and we saw him bellow to his driver.
"It's Lister, get them!" he shouted as he jabbed a chubby index finger in our direction. But the driver had already changed down to courteously let us pass. Realising his mistake, he slammed his foot on the accelerator and the Kombi jerked onto the roundabout. We were too quick and sped through the robots next to the hospital just as the lights were changing to red. Da'oud and I looked back to see the Kombi stranded at the intersection, pinned down by the stop signal and a stream of cars crossing in front.
For a while we took cover beside Hakahana Service Station and watched the police vans and Casspirs race around the deserted streets as if doing a lap of honour at the end of a Grand Prix race, gun-toting riot squaddies swaying around in the back, the look of proud victors on their faces.

From our hiding place we drove for the final time past the school where the barricades now smouldered, fanned by the breeze. One gate to the school hung drunkenly on a single hinge, the other, ripped from its mountings, lay 30 metres away in the middle of the school yard. Doors to the main school hall were wide open, a few broken banners and hundreds of leaflets strewn across the floor - memorials to the panic of the crowd as the police moved in during that morning's meeting. Now no one could be seen.

Leaving Katutura behind us, we headed back into the city. Into the plush suburbs where garden "boys" methodically raked flower beds and maids hung washing on lines. Into the city centre where shoppers strolled up and down the pavements while besuited businesspeople lounged behind the steering wheels of their Mercedes and BMWs. Traffic cops stood idly on street corners while newspaper vendors handed out that morning's news.

"Schools soon back to normal," said the headlines. "Boycott has little effect."

Back at the newspaper's offices, the telex machine chattered away to itself in a near-empty newsroom. Most reporting staff were still out in the township. I made some coffee, sat down at a computer and tried to turn my attention to the stories for that week's sports pages. But all I could think about, see and hear was the bang, bang, bang of the guns, the choking teargas, the screams of the fleeing children and the sneering grins of the riot police in the back of their vans.

Gradually the office started to come to life as reporters returned and victims of the police action arrived to tell their stories. Forty-three people had been arrested - including John Liebenberg - and were being held in the cells at Katutura police station under AG9. Ten students and bystanders had been taken to Katutura Hospital - one young man was admitted to intensive care having been shot in the head with a rubber bullet. Many with

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less serious injuries did not dare go to the hospital fearing that the police would be waiting there to arrest them as suspected trouble makers. Youngsters with bleeding gashes on their arms, legs and faces inflicted by police sjamboks spoke to reporters throughout the afternoon, the foyer at times resembling a clinic as staff members used the office first aid kit to patch up some of the wounds of those waiting to be interviewed.

At about 16h00 Liebenberg burst in through the front door, announcing he had just been released along with 37 of the other detainees. The remaining five - Swapo youth organiser Jason Angula, Chief Ankama, Nanso General Secretary Ignatius Shihuameni, Ignatius Dempers and Immanuel Tjivikua - remained behind bars, charged with breaking security laws and one with assault of a policeman. Others carrying cameras had also been targeted by the police. One photographer working for the trade unions was whipped around the head and then arrested as he photographed a policeman assaulting a student. A crowd of policemen then
gathered around the photographer, beat him with their fists, grabbed his camera and smashed it on the ground before dragging him off to a waiting prison van. Another union employee, Chief Ankama, had been taking photographs outside the offices of the NUNW when three van loads of policemen pulled up. According to eye witnesses, the officer in charge ordered his men to seize Ankama who was then whipped, thrown to the ground and kicked before being bundled into a van and driven away. I counted my blessings for having got off so lightly myself. Come 17h30, the offices emptied and Mbatji and I decided to call it a day and wandered down to the taxi rank, saying little but thinking lots. We flagged down a battered Datsun and squeezed in alongside the four other passengers. The usual taxi banter was particularly subdued, and we rattled along the freeway towards Katutura in silence. The sun was melting behind the rich purple mountains, the dying rays sending out deep orange shafts of light which bathed the streets, houses and cars in a flame-coloured glow in the chill evening air. The barricades outside the schools had been cleared and the burnt remains lay at the side of the road. Casspirs patrolled the streets which were now filled with crowds of workers returning home, many already aware of the morning's violence and anxious to see if their children had been injured or arrested. There were few young people on the streets, and certainly no sign of the games of football children usually played in the back streets and alleyways throughout the township at that time of day. As we wandered up Elim Street, Mbatji called to a young boy, the child of a neighbour, who was skulking in the shadows. He was no older than eight and trotted over to us.

"Were you at school today?" Mbatji asked the youngster. "Of course not," came the reply, the boy looking left, then right, but never at us. "We have joined the boycott. And now we are hiding from Koevoet. I hate Koevoet." He spat violently at the ground and then looked me in the eye. "They took you in, didn't they?"

I shuffled my feet awkwardly and nodded. He unfixed his stare and looked anxiously at an approaching car. "We thought perhaps you were with them, that you were one of Koevoet." He chuckled and I relaxed, joining in the laughter. He then turned and disappeared back into the shadows. "Mind how you go," Mbatji shouted after him. He half turned and gave a furtive power salute accompanied by a big grin. And then he was gone. Mbatji and I stepped over the broken fence in the front of the house, crossed the yard, barged open the front door and went in. My friend turned on the television and we settled down to watch the news. "The student boycott which has been affecting some schools in SWA/Namibia is now over," read the announcer before giving scant details of the morning's "disturbances" in Katutura which had been caused by "stone-throwing student agitators".

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"Well I suppose you've got to expect this rubbish from the SWABC," Mbatji said with resigned disgust. "I'm surprised they mentioned the unrest at all."

The interim government's education minister Andrew Matjila then appeared on screen and said the schools would be back to normal in the morning and that he would be meeting with "bona fide" parents and teachers to discuss the schools situation. He concluded by saying that, after "complaints about police behaviour in Katutura today", the security forces in future would not be allowed to take action in the townships without the interim government's prior permission. That was it.

The next item on the news was about Karakul farming. No one explained what the police had been accused of doing, or why the police were still in the township. There were no pictures of the violence, and the grievances of the students were not even mentioned.

Mbatji shook his head and laughed, his laughter breaking into a coughing fit which forced him to collapse onto his bed where he wheezed on and off for the rest of the night. He had not been well for a while and it was feared he might have tuberculosis, a very likely diagnosis considering how rife the disease was in the township. I too had started to feel sick with aching limbs, headaches and was forever feeling tired. The cockroaches which scurried playfully through the kitchen now appeared an ugly threat. The dust lay thick on the kitchen table, in the cutlery and along the draining board. Now there was also the cold to contend with.

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That night the temperature plunged within a few degrees of freezing and I cocooned myself in my blankets desperately trying to escape the bitter chill which seeped through the broken windows. As Mbatji coughed and spluttered in the next room, I could not help listening to every sound outside. Footsteps. A car pulling up. What was that? An explosion?

Silence.

5

State of emergency

"We are the architects of our own future. We know what we are doing and no one is going to stand in our way."

Student leader addressing a meeting of parents and community leaders in Katutura on June 8, 1988.

Through their heavy-handed approach in dealing with the student boycott, the police unwittingly provoked yet more protest, and a week after the Katutura battles, more than 40 000 pupils from every region of the country had joined the stayaway. School buildings were set ablaze, exams interrupted and schools brought to a standstill as the police tried to bully protesting pupils back to classes with teargas and detentions.

The police tactics did not just arouse the pupils' anger, they also hit a nerve deep down in the heart of the black community, and in doing so, mobilised one of the country's most powerful social forces - the family. When parents returned home to
find their children battered, bruised or in prison, they were outraged and they too threw their weight behind the boycott.

On Wednesday June 8, 2,000 parents and community leaders met in Katutura's Holy Redeemer Church and resolved that the students should only go back to classes if and when military bases were removed from schools in the far north. The following weekend, trade union members from all over the country came together in Windhoek and agreed on three demands which were then put to the interim government.

The demands were that:
All military bases built next to schools in the far north be removed by the following Friday, June 17.
All those detained during the boycott be released by the same date.
The security forces should leave the townships and stop their violent crackdown on student protest.
If these demands were not met, the meeting resolved, then the unions would call a general strike for the Monday and Tuesday after the deadline,

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June 20 and 21. As Mineworkers' Union General Secretary Ben Ulenga explained after the meeting, these demands were the response of concerned parents to the way that their children were being abused by the authorities.
"Some workers are still looking for their children, who disappeared when police moved in with rubber bullets and teargas," said Ulenga. "The vast majority of migrant workers have children in schools in the north, and the presence of the SADF and the location of its bases are a constant threat to the lives of their children. What affects their children affects the workers too."

Ulenga went on to say that the strike call also showed how opposed workers were to South Africa's continued occupation of Namibia. Employers and the authorities had never listened to what black workers had to say about this and other issues, so the time for negotiation was over.
"A general strike will serve as an example of how the patience of workers has worn out over the years."
The shock waves of the boycott and strike call also shook the foundations of the Union Buildings in Pretoria, and P.W. Botha ordered the interim government to deal immediately with the "subversive organisations" behind the revolt. Soon Swapol had drawn up proposals for imposing what amounted to a state of emergency in Namibia.
These "top secret" plans were contained in a draft parliamentary bill, a copy of which fell into the hands of The Namibian. The legislation effectively put the chief of police in charge of the country and allowed for far-reaching restrictions on freedom of movement, the closure without warning or right to appeal of any business or organisation, the banning of meetings and "affected persons", and indemnity for police officers, soldiers and civil servants enforcing these measures.
Anyone found guilty of breaking the law would be liable to ten years' imprisonment or a R20 000 fine.

Staff members at The Namibian read the leaked document with disbelief. "I told you they were out to get us," editor Gwen said pacing up and down the newsroom, puffing furiously on a cigarette. "We must publish this document, but what is the best way to go about it?"

The paper's co-director, human rights lawyer Dave Smuts was consulted and he reckoned that publication would inevitably result in Gwen's detention (in her capacity as editor), as well as possible prosecution under the Official Secrets Act, and the banning of the paper.

"But even if we don't publish, they are going to ban us anyway," it was argued, "Botha made that clear back in April."

For days, the issue was discussed in the office, although the ultimate decision lay with Gwen as she was the one who would carry the can. Her State of emergency 117 decision was made all the more difficult by the fact that, unbeknown to the rest of us, she had just discovered she was pregnant.

Time was not on her side. The day after we received the document, interim government chairperson Andrew Matjila warned that the "orchestrated destabilisation campaign" launched by "leftist organisations" to coincide with the "Cuban-led military build-up" in southern Angola could force the South African government to declare a "state of emergency" in Namibia.

Before any decision could be taken about publication, copies of the leaked document had to be made in case the authorities found out that it was in our possession. Making copies was not as easy as it might at first seem. The police apparently had the know-how to locate the machines on which photocopies were made, therefore copying had to be done somewhere unconnected with either the paper or the source of the original document. The only place we could think of was a shop in town which did commercial photocopying as a sideline, and I was dispatched with the leaked document stuffed in between the pages of Business Day to carry out the deed.

I walked the short distance from the office to the city centre, which appeared more busy than usual. Besuited white business people driving their large cars queued at the traffic lights as shoppers of all shades crossed the street before them on their way to and from work, to lunch or to continue browsing at the winter fashions which were now on display in boutique windows. Hawkers and newspaper vendors were busy trying to attract the attention of passers-by, while tourists sat back in the pavement cafes and sipped their coffee while soaking up the warm autumn sunshine.

Acutely aware of the precious and incriminating papers in my possession, I felt that everyone was looking at me in a way that suggested they knew exactly what I was up to. I suspected everyone I passed of being a security cop, and I half-expected to be seized from behind and bundled into a car at any minute, before being whisked off to the police headquarters for interrogation. My grip tightened on the newspaper as I then imagined the document being blown out of my hand.
by a sudden gust of wind and the pieces of paper, each a stick of political
dynamite, being deposited at the feet of an unsuspecting police officer or off-duty
soldier.
By the time I reached the shop, the palms of my hands were damp with sweat and
my fingers were grey with smudged newspaper ink.
"Damn," I thought to myself. "Now if I am not careful, I will put my fingerprints
all over the document."
I pushed open the door to the shop and a bell jangled above me as I entered. The
shop was all but empty, and three sales assistants standing idly behind the counter
turned and stared at me. I took a deep breath and

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walked up to the counter where I waited for the three women to decide which one
of them would serve me.
"Kan ek help?" ("Can I help you?") the woman nearest to me said eventually.
"Yes please, I would like to make some photocopies," I replied.
Without another word, the bulky, middle-aged woman, who was dressed in a blue
and white overall, walked out from behind the counter and flounced off to the far
end of the shop where the photocopier stood next to the magazine rack. I
followed, and waited as she checked the machine for paper. Having rammed the
paper tray back into its socket, she held out her hand, expecting me to give her the
material I wanted copied. I hesitated.
"Um, actually I need to make the copies myself if you don't mind," I said quickly.
"It's 10 cents a sheet, how many copies do you want to make?" the woman asked
irritably. I tried to remember how many pages the document contained, but could
not, so I carefully unfolded the newspaper and counted the sheets hidden inside,
keeping the pages close to my chest like a gambler about to play an important
card.
The shop assistant looked at me suspiciously, moving closer to me to try and see
what I was hiding from her.
"There are six pages and I want to make three copies of each page," I said,
quickly folding the newspaper once more.
"Go ahead then, and pay when you finish," the woman said, and stomped back
down the shop to rejoin her colleagues who were now discussing in audible
whispers about who was sleeping with who in Khomasdal. I again removed the
document from the newspaper, laid it face down on the glass of the photocopier
and set the machine in motion.
No sooner had I started than three white men walked into the shop and headed in
my direction. I gulped as I noticed that the copies were coming out of the machine
face up, so I quickly turned the sheets over and tried to stop the machine. I
couldn't. The men started browsing along the shelves behind me, and I watched
them out of the corner of my eye as I continued to catch and turn the copies as the
machine spat them out at me.
The copying complete, I hurriedly bundled the copies together, folded the
newspaper around them, turned and walked towards the counter, only to realise
half-way down the shop that I had left the original document lying in the
photocopier. So I scurried back to the machine, snatched the document from under the lid and made my way back to the counter. Here I waited for several minutes while the women continued gossiping. Reluctantly, the bulky woman broke away from the conversation and asked me if I had finished.

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"Yes thank you," I said, handing her a five Rand note. She ignored the money and just looked at me. I was aware that the three white men were now moving back down the shop in my direction. "I need to check how many copies you have made," she said curtly. "Oh yes, of course," I stammered, fumbling with the newspaper and drawing out the copies which I then laid one by one face down on top of the counter. Apparently satisfied, she picked up the money and moved to the till, leaving me to gather up the copies and return them to their make-shift folder. Before I knew what was happening, one of the three men - a stocky, blonde-haired brute with a clipped moustache, blotchy dark red skin and bulbous blue eyes - was at my side, glancing down at the pieces of paper I was awkwardly shuffling together in a way so as not to leave my inky finger prints all over the crisp, white pages. The shop assistant returned and threw the change on top of my photocopies. I thanked her, put the money in my pocked, picked up my package of paper and scurried out of the shop, quickly glancing at the man standing next to me as I went. He looked familiar, but it was not until I was out of the shop that I realised that he resembled the policeman who had inspected my Neurotics T-shirt in Katutura during the unrest the week before. I did not dare to look back to check and see if the man was who I thought he was, but continued on my way, weaving in and out of the pedestrians and traffic, avoiding anyone who looked remotely like an undercover cop.

I turned the corner by the post office and strode up Goring Street, back towards SWA House. Here a meeting of the interim government’s cabinet was breaking up and several ministerial Mercedes swept out of the gates and passed me by. I smiled to myself, smug in the knowledge that they did not know that, tucked under my arm, were the very secrets they had probably just been discussing. For a moment I felt incredibly powerful, but then I considered the consequences of being found out, and realised how vulnerable my colleagues and I were having acquired such power.

Many interim government ministers were reluctant to impose a state of emergency as they feared such a step would make them even more unpopular amongst their own people than they already were. But the pressure from their paymasters in Pretoria was intense, and if the cabinet did not act, then it was more than likely that the Administrator-General would, using the powers given to him by President Botha two months before.

There was certainly no way the interim government would agree to the demands of the union workers, so the general strike and a continuation of the school boycott was inevitable, thus giving the AG and the police further

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reasons to introduce emergency regulations. One way to steal their thunder was to expose their plans in the hope that this would embarrass them into at least watering down the measures they had in mind. Therefore, the decision was taken to publish details of the police's draft law in the next edition of The Namibian, which was due to hit the streets on the Friday the unions' ultimatum to the interim government expired.

The story had been written and was about to be laid out on the front page when, shortly after midday on the Thursday, two plainclothed security policemen arrived at the office wanting to speak with the editor. Gwen was at her desk at the back of the building when Anna phoned through from reception to tell her about the two unexpected visitors. Then, out of sight of the two policemen who waited patiently in the foyer, there was a frantic debate between those of us in the newsroom as to what should be done about the one copy of the document which remained in the office (the others had been distributed elsewhere for safekeeping).

After several minutes of confusion, Gwen pulled from her drawer a brown envelope containing the document and thrust it into my hands. "Quick! Go and hide it somewhere out back. Hurry!" the editor hissed, before getting up and walking out to the reception area, leaving me once more clutching the top secret papers.

I looked across the newsroom to Chris, who had positioned himself by the telex from where he could see what was happening in the foyer. After a couple of seconds, he nodded to tell me that the attention of the two policemen had been taken up by Gwen, and I shot along the corridor, out of the back door and up the steep flight of steps which led to a car park situated at the rear of the building. Once in the car park, I quickly looked around for a hiding place and, seeing nothing more suitable, gingerly placed the envelope underneath the large, spiky leaves of a flowering cactus. Then, having checked to see I was not being watched, I walked back down the steps and into the office.

The police had gone and Gwen was busy telling everyone that the cops had told her they had information that the paper had received a "confidential" document which they now wanted to see. When Gwen had refused to comment, the police then said they wanted to search the building, but as the officers did not have a search warrant, Gwen turned down their request and asked them to leave, which they did, promising to return later with a warrant. After a staff discussion, it was decided that, if the police returned, there was no harm giving them a copy of the document as long as the details of its contents were still published as planned. True to their word, the security cops returned four hours later and told Gwen that if she refused to hand over the document, they would arrest her.

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So Gwen reluctantly gave the police the copy of the document, all identifiable markings on which had been removed in the complicated photocopying process, and the officers again departed. Once they had gone, the lead story was re-written to include details of the police raid, and the final pages were laid out and sent to the printers.
As The Namibian began to roll off the presses, Herman and I watched the road to
the printing works for any sign of the police, as it was feared that the authorities
might still try to ban that week's edition. But the print run was completed without
a hitch, and by 22h00 The Namibian, bearing the front page headline "Police
Seize Document", was being bought from news stands throughout the capital.
Grubby and weary from our distribution duties, Herman and I called by at Gwen's
house to tell her the paper was out. Our mission had been accomplished and, over
cold beers, we started to wonder what the response of the authorities to the exposé
would be. We had only to wait until the following afternoon in order to find out.
Shortly after lunch, a white Ford Sierra pulled up outside the office and two
senior security policemen climbed out and walked into the foyer where Herman
and his team were busy packaging papers to be sent out in the evening post. As
the two police officers entered through the glass doors, the distribution workers
stopped what they were doing and stared at the newcomers.
"We would like to speak with Miss Lister," the taller of the two men told Anna,
who was seated behind her desk next to the switchboard. Anna lifted the phone
and dialled Gwen's extension, eying the two men nervously as she waited for the
editor to answer. Gwen already knew that the cops had arrived. She had been
looking out of the newsroom window when their car had pulled up outside and,
seeing who the vehicles' occupants were, Gwen had walked briskly over to her
desk, taken a cigarette from a packet which lay by her computer keyboard, and
waited for the phone to ring.
"OK, I'll be there right now," Gwen told Anna before she replaced the receiver,
put her cigarette between her lips, took a deep drag, and strode through the
newsroom and out into the foyer. As if from nowhere, almost the paper's entire
staff had gathered and formed an arc around the police officers. Gwen walked up
to the two men who, feeling ill at ease under the glare of so many eyes, asked her
to step outside.
Once out on the office steps, the taller of the two pulled out a piece of paper from
the breast pocket of his grey jacket and handed it to Gwen. It was a warrant for
her arrest in terms of AG9. Gwen read the warrant, handed it back to the
policeman and said she wanted to collect her

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"They're taking me in under AG9," Gwen said as she was surrounded by her
anxious staff. On hearing "AG9", reporters started rushing around the newsroom
looking for a camera while Mark, now beside himself with worry, followed his
wife to her desk, trying to find out what the cops had said and where they were
going to take her.
"Give me your cigarettes," Gwen ordered her husband. There was a tremble in her
voice. "I might be in for a long time." She took the crumpled packet which Mark
produced from the pocket of his jeans, picked up her shoulder bag and marched
back out to the foyer where the two policemen were waiting to escort her out to
their car.
The staff swarmed after them, Chris clicking away with a camera as the rest shouted words of encouragement to the editor.

"If you lay a finger on her, you will regret it for the rest of your lives," Mark snarled at the police officers as they ushered his wife into the back seat of the Sierra. Once Gwen was inside the car, the policemen locked the door behind her, climbed into the front and drove off.

As the car pulled away, Gwen gave a regal wave through the window and several staff members replied with clenched fist power salutes. Then she was gone, and we turned and walked dejectedly back into the office.

Inside, pandemonium broke out as everyone started talking excitedly at once, and it was half an hour or more later before a plan of action was sorted out. A list of media, diplomatic and other influential contacts was drawn up and then we started working the telephones, spreading news of Gwen's arrest and the reasons for it as far and as wide as possible.

Gwen was taken to the security police headquarters in downtown Windhoek where she was interrogated by security police chief, Colonel Nel. In what was an almost casual interview, he asked her to reveal the name of the person who leaked the secret document to The Namibian.

"All we want is the name, and you can go," Nel told her.

The editor refused to tell him anything, so she was locked up alone in a cell which measured little more than four metres square and contained just a rusty bed to sit and sleep on, a mattress, a single blanket and a badly blocked toilet. Here she remained throughout the weekend and into the following week without access to lawyers or visitors.

On the Monday, these spartan conditions were improved suddenly by a large box of fruit which was delivered to the cell by courtesy of Inspector Nel. However, the reason for this apparent privilege was soon clear as, a few hours later, a doctor, who by law had to examine all long-term prisoners, visited Gwen in her cell.

"They seem to be looking after you all right," the doctor remarked on seeing the fruit. Disgusted by the police's deception, Gwen later handed the fruit back to the guard.

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Surprisingly, Gwen was allowed to receive containers of tea and packets of cigarettes which Mark delivered to the police station twice a day. For the first day or so, the two communicated via notes wrapped in plastic bags and concealed in the tea containers. But the police then discovered the trick and intercepted the messages, including one written by Gwen on the Sunday informing her husband that she was going on hunger strike. Believing that the world had been told about her intention, Gwen duly refused to take food, and it was not until her daily interrogation session on the Tuesday that she found out her protest was in vain.

"I hope you are not serious about this," Colonel Nel said with a smirk, producing Gwen's tea-stained note to Mark.

"Now tell me...who gave you the document?"

Friday also saw the NUNW's deadline to the interim government expire without the latter agreeing to the workers' demands. So that night, trade union officials
drove to all comers of the country to urge union members to join the two day stayaway which would start on the Monday. Meanwhile, the authorities readied themselves to meet the strike head on. Hundreds of Koevoets were redeployed from the war zone to towns where the strike call was likely to be best received. On the Saturday evening, a convoy of 20 to 30 Koevoet Casspirs set up base at a picnic site on the northern outskirts of Windhoek, and the following morning, fully armed squads of the counter-insurgency unit moved into Katutura and went from house to house looking for strike organisers and warning people that if they did not go to work the following day, they (Koevoet) "will be back". Pre-empting the clampdown, trade unionists had gone into hiding on the Friday, lying low at safe houses away from the township. Shebeens and supermarkets in Katutura did a brisk trade over the weekend as word of the strike spread and households stocked up with food and drink to last the two days of stayaway. A general strike was something of a novelty in Namibia, the only previous one having taken place in 1972 when up to 20 000 mine and factory workers had spearheaded a stayaway called in protest against the continuing slave-like conditions of the contract labour system. Therefore no one could be quite sure what the response to this latest strike would be. The union movement had all but collapsed after the 1972 stayaway, and this was going to be the first real test of the NUNW's power and its ability to challenge the authorities. The presence of Koevoet in the township meant that people went to bed extremely anxious about what would happen the following morning. I was woken shortly after 04h00 by the sound of a police loudspeaker van which was touring the streets of Katutura, urging people to ignore the strike call and go to work as usual. As the first streaks of light appeared above the tips of the mountains, pushing aside the dark, star-studded night sky, Mbatji and I left the house and set out in one of the company cars to observe how effective the strike call had been. The grey-purple mist of dust and wood smoke rose slowly above the tin roofs to reveal streets - usually bustling with traffic and people at that time - which were all but deserted. There was hardly a taxi to be seen and even fewer people around to travel in them. Only the occasional drunkard and numerous stray dogs roamed the roadsides. Municipal buses, usually packed with workers, were today not more than a quarter full; the long, winding queues of people at the bus stops were now nothing more than small clusters of strike breakers who shuffled their feet awkwardly as they stood waiting for their bus under the watchful eye of armed police and soldiers. Members of the security forces also stood at street corners as Koevoet units started to go once more from door to door as they had promised they would do the previous day. Casspirs and police vans, bristling with weaponry and men dressed for a riot, drove up and down the streets. The vast majority of Katuturans had answered the call to stay away from work, but so as not to provoke police action, had decided to stay at home where they drank, played cards and chatted with their friends and
neighbours in their backyards, while the women set about washing clothes and preparing food.
Children of school-going age were conspicuous by their absence, not daring to move outside their rooms for fear of being spotted by the police. Almost every shop and business remained shuttered and closed, while not even hawkers could be seen in their usual market places near bus stops and major road intersections. Every school we passed was closed, the playgrounds and classrooms empty, the gates padlocked shut.
We had forgotten to fill the car with petrol the previous evening, so we went in search of fuel. Pulling into the forecourt of Soweto Service Station, we found no sign of either pump jockeys or cars. Mbatji sounded the horn and, after the fourth impatient blast, a dishevelled man emerged from the office and shambled over to where we were parked.
"Can't you see we are closed?" the man said angrily. "There's a strike on. Go home. No one should be working today."
"But we are journalists reporting on the strike," Mbatji protested. "We have to work today otherwise no one will know about the stay-away."
"That's bad luck," the man replied with a chuckle. "You'll have to walk instead."
He then went back to the office, locking the door behind him and putting up the closed sign before returning to his bed. Mbatji tapped the car's fuel gauge.
'We should have enough to be getting on with," he said peering at the dial. "Let's see what is happening at the Single Quarters".

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Rounding the corner, we were confronted by a line of about 30 Koevoets standing behind a row of mounted machine guns, their own semi-automatic rifles also at hand. The soldiers and their firepower were positioned across one end of the wasteland opposite the Single Quarters, which served as the terminal for taxis going to and from the north. The Koevoets' guns were trained on the Single Quarters itself, 30 metres away, where thousands of striking workers were milling around outside their living quarters.
The workers were carrying on as if nothing was happening, sitting in groups playing cards, sipping tombo, frying meat or lounging against the walls of the squalid compound buildings and soaking up the sun. Although appearing outwardly at ease, everyone kept at least one eye on the soldiers, and the atmosphere was tense.
The strikers had no intention to stage a march or demonstration; that would have been asking for trouble. Instead they were content to sit and do nothing, but they could not count on the soldiers doing the same. The Koevoets were on edge. The man in charge of the unit, a fat Oshiwambo-speaking sergeant, marched up and down in front of his men, waving his arms and giving orders. But the soldiers seemed at a loss as to what to do, as if unsure about what they could get away with in such unfamiliar surroundings, outside the confines of the lawless war zone.
Mbatji parked the car on the side of the road and climbed out, making sure his long-lensed camera was kept well out of sight of the Koevoets positioned a short distance away on the opposite side of the road.
"I'm just going to take a photo from one of these houses," he told me, and ambled off around the back of a nearby shack.
Two months before, Mbatji had been taking pictures of a student demonstration at the Academy when he was seized by riot police, beaten, bundled into the back of a police van and driven away. The police had then ripped the film from the camera and, before letting him go, had ordered Mbatji to stay well away from demonstrations in future. After this experience, Mbatji was not going to take any unnecessary risks, particularly when there were machine-gun toting Koevoets around.
A few minutes later, Mbatji emerged from the house and returned to the car, stopping on the way to chat with a group of striking workers standing in front of the house. Once he was back in the car, we decided to make a final tour of the township, and we found the streets were still clear except for the constant movement of Casspirs and police vans. With there being no sign of trouble, we left Katutura and headed into the city to see what effect the strike was having there.
Kaiser Street was by no means empty, but there were very few black faces to be seen amongst the shoppers and businesspeople who walked along the pavements. On the roads, gleaming Mercedes and BMWs had the streets to themselves as there was hardly a delivery truck or company van - usually driven by black workers - to be seen. Although it was business as usual in the smaller shops, the larger stores and supermarkets had been hit hard by the strike. Here white managers and members of their families packed shelves and staffed the checkout tills. The only people buying were also white, black shoppers - the economic lifeblood of the chain stores having stayed at home, so that by lunchtime, business people were saying that trade was down by around 75 per cent. Meanwhile, the Windhoek Municipality and several government departments were forced to close down completely as almost the entire black work force had stayed away, making it impossible for any work to be done.
Back at The Namibian's office, reports started to come in of how the general strike was paralysing the country's major industries. Mineworkers at all but one of the country's pits had struck en masse, bringing the Rössing Uranium and CDM diamond mines to a complete standstill. Only at TCL's mines had production continued, unionists claiming that management had threatened to sack anyone who took part in the stayaway. In all, major employers countrywide reported that between 70-80 per cent of their workforces had gone on strike.
The stayaway was not the only thing The Namibian had on its agenda. Our editor was in jail where she was likely to remain for a long time unless concerted pressure was brought upon the interim government to release her. So we continued to lobby diplomats and overseas contacts, as well as feeding international media with news updates on both the general strike and Gwen's
detention. Editor or no editor, the paper still had to come out the following Friday, so a staff meeting was called and an agenda drawn up for that week's edition. No one slept well that night. As darkness fell, people retreated into their houses and locked the doors while the security forces continued to prowl the streets. Popular feeling of fear and anticipation were, however, mixed with suppressed jubilation at the success the strike had been so far.

Once again, shortly after 04h00 the following morning, the police loud speaker vans started touring the streets urging people to go back to work. Some people did return to their jobs as rumours of employers sacking all striking workers circulated around Katutura. But the majority of people were undeterred and continued with the stayaway for the second and final day. Still the security forces patrolled the township, still strikers sat tight.

By mid-afternoon, the first pages of that week's The Namibian were beginning to come together, though the strain of being without an editor - for the first time in the newspaper's history - was beginning to tell. It was a little after 15h00 when Anna let out a scream from reception. Mark looked up from where he sat hunched over the telex machine, and

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an expression of amazement shot across his face. In a split second he had leapt over his desk and was running towards the foyer in hot pursuit of reporter Sarah Johannes who was flinging her arms around the neck of a rather dazed looking Gwen.

Faced with mounting diplomatic pressure from overseas, which was fuelled by extensive media coverage, Gwen's continued detention had become an embarrassment to the South Africans. With Gwen showing no sign of cracking under the pressure of detention and revealing the name of the source of the leaked police document, the order was given to release her. An impromptu welcome home party was thrown in the office to celebrate the editor's return, before everyone again turned their attention to the last few hours of the general strike. The final strike showdown came at the Katutura Single Quarters. Mbatji and I arrived there shortly before sunset to find a line of Casspirs positioned on the wasteland where the soldiers and their machine guns had been stationed the day before. Across the wasteland, residents of the Single Quarters swarmed like ants in and around the long, narrow buildings. After two days of constant surveillance and intimidation, the strikers' patience was nearing its limit.

In the minds of the strikers, the arrival of the Casspirs signalled only one thing - that Koevoet was not going to leave without a fight. People spilled out of the living quarters and down the narrow alleyways in anticipation of an assault. All eyes were turned towards the Casspirs and the soldiers who sat on top of the armoured vehicles, their rifles at the ready. We parked the car next to a dilapidated building not far from the crowd and waited.

All of a sudden there was a wail of sirens coming from down one of the alleyways behind us. The crowd scattered, people diving for cover inside and underneath the compound buildings as two Casspirs raced along the narrow passageway. The vehicles then shot out of the alley like rats out of a drain pipe, and sped across the
wasteland to rejoin the line of stationary Casspirs. The alleyway filled once more with people, some of whom now held stones and clubs. Then, as the sun sank behind the mountains, there was a roar of giant turbo-charged engines, and the air was filled with an intoxicating cloud of diesel fumes as the Casspirs turned and drove away, out of the township, onto the B1 highway and back to the war zone. On the face of it, the general strike might not have appeared to be the success it undoubtedly was. Military bases were not removed from the vicinity of schools in the far north, and while some of the student detainees were released at the same time as Gwen, others remained behind bars. Added to which, hundreds of workers returning to work after the strike were immediately sacked for taking part in the stay-away.

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The interim government also went ahead with passing its stringent security legislation, although the so-called Bill for the Protection of Fundamental Rights - passed in July and which, amongst other things, made it illegal to call a school boycott or labour strike - was by far a less draconian version of the state of emergency the police had outlined in their draft bill. However, the defiance campaign by the workers and students was a triumph for "people's power" in Namibia. Around 100 000 people had stood up and challenged the colonial rulers, the biggest peaceful uprising in the country's history. It was the first time, too, that such action had been truly country-wide, thus proving that opposition to South African rule was not restricted to certain regions and "tribes". Being so widespread, the June protests turned the whole of Namibia into a massive front on which the security forces - already over-stretched by the Fapla/Cuban/Plan advance in Angola - had to fight. The focus of the liberation struggle had been shifted from the confines of the war zone to the heart of colonial rule - Windhoek and other industrial areas, and in the process, the Class of '88 had hammered another nail into the coffin of the South African occupation. The lid was finally sealed weeks later in Angola.

It was rare for a white South African soldier to be reported killed in action. White troops were, on the whole, protected from enemy fire by black infantry, while those whites who were killed were usually spirited away from the war zone and given discreet family burials back in South Africa while the mainstream press dutifully repeated false casualty figures and the military's propaganda reports about how well the war was going. Imagine then the psychological impact on sanction-weary white South Africans when the death of 12 white troops, killed in an Angolan air strike on the Calueque Dam on the Angolan-Namibian border in July, hit the headlines. Not only were 12 precious white lives lost, it also confirmed what many had suspected for a long time; the South Africans and Unita were on the retreat in Angola.

In mid-1987, the South Africans, carrying Unita on their backs, had launched a renewed military push into south eastern Angola, but had been repelled by the Angolans and their Cuban and Plan allies. In early 1988, the two sides became bogged down around the strategic town of Cuito Cuanavale, and a bloody battle ensued.
Despite pouring thousands of fresh troops into the frontline and bombarding the enemy with heavy artillery for months, the South Africans failed to make significant headway, giving the Cubans a chance to dispatch more troops and weaponry to Angola to be used in a counter-attack, which by July had the South Africans and Unita all but surrounded.

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To continue the Cuito campaign, Pretoria's generals had to call up thousands of white conscripts who were shipped to the battle zone in the first months of 1988. Inevitably, more and more white soldiers began returning back to South Africa in body bags or on stretchers, to the anguish of their relatives and friends who began to see through the propaganda and to ask publicly whether the war and bloodshed in Angola was necessary.

The generals felt that, with so many Cuban troops by now in Angola, the "communist threat" was greater than ever. The politicians, however, saw things differently. If the losses continued, they faced the threat of being voted out of power by their constituents, who, as taxpayers, were also tired of footing the bill for the war in Angola (put at around R1 million a day), not to mention the continued occupation of Namibia (the South African government subsidised the interim government by R35 million in 1988). In short, the South African economy, starved of foreign investment by world-wide sanctions, could no longer afford to sustain the war in Angola and the occupation of Namibia. The Calueque attack and the carnage at Cuito Cuanavale were the straws which finally broke the camel's back. The peace talks, which had dragged on since March without taking any real direction, suddenly started making headway, with the South Africans agreeing to a ceasefire and subsequent troop withdrawal in return for guarantees about the return home of the 50 000 Cuban troops which were also stationed in Angola. The terms were agreed at Geneva in mid-August, thus opening the way for further talks on the implementation of Resolution 435.

In a final bid to save face, the South Africans tried to make the return of their troops across the Okavango River back into Namibia as triumphant as possible. Journalists were flown to Rundu to photograph the smiling soldiers crossing the pontoon bridge back onto Namibian soil under the banner "welkom wenners" - ("welcome winners"), while military top brass dismissed as "crude propaganda" reports that their troops had been trapped at Cuito Cuanavale. Deep down, however, the South African military was furious.

As the SADF survivors pulled out of Angola, fresh convoys of troops were rumbling up through Namibia to be stationed in the far north; no one would explain why, but it seemed that Pretoria's generals did not share their politicians' hopes for peace. Defence Minister Magnus Malan hinted at this discontent when he told the South African parliament that the fight against communism was worth both "the difficulty and the expense", and went on to voice his fear of seeing "the red flag" flying in Windhoek.

"Our presence and our involvement in South West Africa therefore revolves around protecting and helping the pro-democratic and freedomminded people," said the Defence Minister.
"And for that reason, it is inappropriate to now speculate over a possible Swapo government in SWA."

Malan's vision took on apocalyptic dimensions for many of the "pro-democratic and freedom-minded" whites Malan was talking about, and following the signing of the Geneva "Protocol", Namibia entered a period of craziness which left even the most rational of people questioning their sanity.

Photographer John Liebenberg was taking pictures of a student demonstration outside the Windhoek Magistrates Court when a white man - a complete stranger and in full view of everyone - rushed from a nearby bar and started hitting Liebenberg about the head before running back into the bar to continue with his drink. Unprovoked attacks on black people by whites escalated. One victim was beaten over the head with a pick handle by a white man whom he approached for a lift.

The political developments in Brazzaville and Geneva seemed to inject an added ruthless zeal into the way the security forces beat, harassed and detained people under the protection of the new Bill of Fundamental Rights. Boycotting students, who continued their stay-aways into the new term, were attacked and arrested at random, the police abandoning all restraint and concern for the consequences their actions might have had on the unfolding peace process.

On September 29, several hundred students marched to SWA House to mark the tenth anniversary of the implementation of Resolution 435. As the students sang freedom songs and chanted slogans calling for the immediate implementation of the independence plan, riot police rushed onto the scene and, without warning, waded into the crowd with whips and batons. People fled in all directions, but not quickly enough to escape the marauding cops, whose indiscriminate beatings left journalists and passers-by, as well as marchers, bearing the bloody scars of the attack.

During the chaos, a white civilian climbed out of his Mercedes clutching a pistol and aimed it at some of the fleeing students. Bystanders saw him and shouted a warning, causing the man to duck back inside the car and drive off without firing a shot. Policemen, alerted by the shouts, had turned to see the man, but they did nothing to apprehend him. Those who had given the warning ran up to the police to urge them to do something about the gunman, but the police's only response was to chase the bystanders away with a flurry of cracking whips.

The police's response was perhaps hardly surprising as they too carried guns primed with live ammunition, and live rounds were found amongst the debris of broken banners and ripped clothing which were strewn across the road after the onslaught. Those of us who managed to escape unscathed returned to the office, and started cleaning the wounds and bandaging up those who were not so lucky. The Namibian again became a temporary clinic and the company vehicles makeshift ambulances as we abandoned all thoughts of our looming deadline and helped to take the injured to hospital.
That week's front page lead story had happened on our doorstep, the headline spoke for itself: "A decade of 435 - nothing changes". Indeed, nothing had changed; in fact things seemed just to be getting worse. Only a few weeks before, a bomb had wrecked the Continental Hotel in the heart of Windhoek, and minutes later, a second explosion - caused by a limpet mine - had damaged the main railway to the south. Two people died in the Continental Hotel blast; a black night watchman, and an Australian anthropologist who had checked into the hotel hours before his death.

Bomb attacks in the capital were nothing new, but these two came less than two months after an explosion had destroyed a butchery in the suburb of Klein Windhoek, and Swapo guerillas had thrown hand grenades into an army truck in Katutura, killing one soldier and injuring twenty others. This spate of explosions pushed white paranoia to the brink of hysteria, creating an atmosphere within the country which was the complete opposite to that of optimism and hope for future peace being portrayed by participants in the peace talks.

Swapo was blamed by the authorities for all the explosions, but the liberation movement denied responsibility for all but the attack on the army truck. The hotel and railway bombings of September 1 were particularly significant as they gave the first indications that shadowy forces - probably somewhere in the area of white right wing in the political spectrum - were going to stop at nothing to derail the independence process. September 1 was the day Swapo and the South Africans had agreed to stop all hostilities in order to smooth the way for the implementation of Resolution 435, the terms for which were still being negotiated by South Africa, Cuba, and Angola under the guidance of the US and Soviet Union.

It was also deadline day for The Namibian. At about 19h00, Herman and I were at the printers loading the last bundles of that week's edition into the back of the company bakkie when the Continental bomb went off two blocks away. The explosion, a thunderous dull boom, shook the ground we stood on and echoed around the nearby buildings, rattling the windows.

The noise lasted several seconds and was accompanied by the sound of shattering glass. Then there was silence, no screams, nothing. I looked at Herman, as usual relying on him for guidance. I thought it was a bomb, but was not one hundred per cent sure. My colleague paused for a few seconds before deciding our next move.

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"We've got no time for chasing bombs, we have work to do," he said decisively, then threw the last bundle of newspapers into the back of the van, locked the door and threw me the keys.
"Let's go," he ordered.
"We have five minutes to get to the transport company."

We sped towards the southern industrial area, in the opposite direction to the blast. The streets were deserted, as if frozen in an eerie time warp by the explosion. Then the silence was shattered by the wail of sirens as the first fire engines rushed passed us heading towards the city centre.
Half an hour later we were doing the rounds of the suburbs, delivering newspapers to all the late night stores. There was a television on at one Portuguese-owned market in Klein Windhoek and we stopped to watch the SWABC's live broadcast from the scene of the bombing. In the seven months I had been in Namibia, I had never seen a live broadcast on television. As a rule, the SWABC needed two days to prepare transmission of even hallowed Currie Cup rugby matches, even those played in Windhoek. But here we had startling live footage of victims of the blast covered in blood and being carried, either screaming or motionless as if dead, to waiting ambulances while fire crews tackled the inferno which raged in the mangled ruins of the hotel. Administrator-General Louis Pienaar then appeared on the scene and immediately pronounced to captivated and mostly white, peak-time viewers that Swapo was undoubtedly responsible for this dastardly deed.

Herman and I finished our distribution work in the suburbs and returned to the city centre. Here a thick pall of smoke reeking of cordite hung over the streets and buildings. A large crowd had gathered in Kaiser Street to view the bomb damage and the emergency services' continuing struggle to douse the flames. The mood of the crowd - made up almost entirely of white people - was ugly, with people openly cursing Swapo and "die fokken' kommuniste" for planting the bomb. We decided to leave quickly in case we were recognized, making a turn at Gwen and Mark's house to find out more about what was happening. Here we watched the late night news and were told that the SWABC had received phone calls from someone confessing to be a member of Plan who claimed that Swapo was responsible for the Continental bomb and the mine which had been planted on the railway.

The following day, the right wing press laid the blame squarely on Swapo and, with the bombings conveniently occurring just after The Namibian had gone to press, it was not until the following Friday - eight days after the bomb blasts - that Swapo's categorical denial that its cadres had caused the explosions received media coverage inside Namibia. The reason the police came up with for Swapo having targeted the hotel was the State of emergency 133 fact that the bar where the bomb was planted was frequented by off-duty soldiers. However, the police seemed to be the only people aware of this fact, and there were certainly no soldiers drinking in the bar when the bomb went off; the bar was deserted except for the unfortunate Australian and night watchman. While typical of the "blame Swapo for everything" approach employed by the South African regime, the way the AG accused Swapo of the bombing before the SWABC had even received its supposed calls from the purported Plan combatant - let alone before any forensic evidence had been gathered - was cavalier even by his standards. The whole incident, coinciding as it did with the first day of the ceasefire, stank of a plot to discredit Swapo, and the authorities were quick to claim the bombings showed that the liberation movement was not serious about Resolution 435 and a peaceful transition to independence.
In fact the bombings bore none of the hallmarks of a Swapo attack. It was Swapo policy that, as in the case of the hand grenade assault on the army truck in Katutura, all Plan operations were commented on by the movement’s external leadership. Responsibility would never be claimed by a combatant telephoning a broadcasting corporation as this would only give the police a chance to track down the guerrillas responsible.

Despite several calls apparently being made to the broadcasting corporation by the combatant responsible for the September 1 bombings, no one was ever arrested. Besides, as Swapo Information and Publicity Secretary Hidipo Hamutenya later pointed out, Swapo had no reason whatsoever for jeopardising the peace talks by carrying out such bomb attacks, and all Plan fighters were under "strict instructions" not to carry out any military actions "pending a formal ceasefire agreement between Swapo and South Africa".

So who was responsible? Perhaps members of the South African military who were venting their anger at their politicians' decision to withdraw from Angola, or who were trying to make sure that, as General Malan vowed, the red flag would not fly over Windhoek? Or perhaps right wing extremists carried out the bombings? After all, the Afrikaner resistance movement the AWB declared afterwards that, as a result of the bomb attacks, it would redouble its efforts to procure a white state in Namibia. No one knew the answer for sure, but the terrorist attacks of September 1 were not to be a one-off event.

On October 11, staff of The Namibian arrived at work to find that their office had been gutted by a fire bomb which caused an estimated R1 00 000 worth of damage to the building and equipment. The shady right wing terror group the Wit Wolve (White Wolves), which had claimed responsibility for several similar attacks on progressive organisations in South Africa, said it had carried out the bombing. AG Louis Pienaar, who was so quick to condemn the Continental and other such bombings, remained silent about the attack on The Namibian, as did all but one member of the interim government. Nonetheless, determined not to be beaten by the right-wingers, staff and supporters made sure The Namibian was out on the streets the following Friday, and not a single edition of the paper was missed.

The fire bombing coincided with a meeting at Kabwe in Zambia between the exiled Swapo leadership and a delegation of 195 people from inside Namibia - traditional leaders, church people and white business people amongst them - called to discuss the liberation movement's policies. For many of the whites present, this was the first time they had met those they had been brought up to believe were "terrorists", and came away impressed with the Swapo leadership's moderation, competence, and grasp of the issues at stake.

The Kabwe meeting was a small but significant step towards defusing the myths about Swapo, created through decades of South African propaganda, and preparing the way for Namibia's transition to independence. As the bombing of The Namibian alone proved, there were also those hell-bent on preventing this process from taking place. With their tactics of terror, the right-wingers inevitably
created the greatest impression inside Namibia, and even when, on December 22, South Africa put its signature to the New York Accord, which gave the go-ahead to the implementation of Resolution 435, the majority of Namibians remained sceptical.
"There are those who believe the South Africans are serious this time, and that independence will go ahead as planned."
So ran The Namibian's last editorial of 1988, which appeared a few days before the signing of the New York Accord under the headline "Independence in 1990?".
"There are others who believe that it is in the interests of that (South African) government to sign (the New York Accord)...but who are not too sure that it means 435 will necessarily follow. And there are those who believe the South Africans are playing for time, and that even agreements that have been signed, sealed and delivered may fall by the wayside if it suits our occupying power...
While we hope that South Africa will allow the implementation of 435 to go ahead unhindered and unhampered, we still find it difficult to believe that a government which has been so opposed to State of emergency 135
free and fair elections and the possibility of a Swapo government in Namibia could have suddenly accommodated itself to this prospect...
If the South Africans are serious, then Namibians will be able to exercise their self-determination in the coming months, which would culminate in independence for the country in 1990. If the South Africans are not serious, then we shudder to think of what the future will bring."

April fools
New Year's Eve; dusk was falling and pregnant rain clouds billowed up on the horizon as the mud-splattered Kombi limped off the B1 highway at the Katutura turn-off and crawled towards the township at the end of a gruelling 10 hour journey from Ondangwa. Amongst those squashed inside were four elderly women making their first ever journey to the capital. In fact, this was the first time they had ever left their village in a remote part of far northern Namibia. It was now two days since they had departed from their homesteads clutching food and a few belongings wrapped in pieces of cloth, and set out to greet the United Nations (UN) peacekeeping force which the women had heard was due to arrive in Windhoek on January 1 to oversee the process which would finally bring independence to their country.
The following day, the women walked apprehensively up Windhoek's main Kaiser Street, marvelling at the tall buildings and the expensive goods they saw in the shop windows. But where were the crowds? It was a public holiday and the city centre was almost deserted. Yet the women had expected to find the streets packed with people who, like themselves, wanted to welcome the UN troops. They stopped and asked a man sitting in the shade of a palm tree at the Zoo Park. No, he had heard nothing about the arrival of the peacekeeping force. The women, too, found themselves some shade on the grass and waited...and waited.
None of the Oshiwambo-speaking people that passed by knew anything about the UN's arrival until hours later - the women happened to speak with a worker with the Council of Churches who, remembering that January 1 had at one time been a date earmarked for the start of the independence process, explained that, because the international politicians could not agree on certain issues, the January 1 deadline for the implementation of Resolution 435 had been cancelled and a new date still had to be set. The women returned to their village wondering whether the talk of freedom was just another cruel hoax.

The accord clearing the way, for Namibian independence and an end to the war in Angola had actually been signed by South Africa, Angola and Cuba in New York on December 22. It was now up to the UN Security Council to set a date for Resolution 435 to get underway. Throughout

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January, UN member states argued about how much money and how many personnel they should give to the UN peacekeeping force Untag (United Nations Transitional Assistance Group) to carry out its year-long mission in Namibia. The Security Council - with its permanent members being Britain, the United States, France, China and the Soviet Union - was in favour of cutting the number of Untag personnel laid down in Resolution 435 (7 500 soldiers and 2 000 civilians) by a third in order to save money. This was possible, argued Security Council members, because the signing of the New York Accord had made for "an atmosphere of peace" in the region of southwestern Africa. However, with the South Africans going ahead with the annual call-up of thousands of Namibian conscripts into the SWATF, and security force atrocities still regularly taking place in the war zone, the majority of Namibians felt there was a need to increase rather than reduce the size of the UN force. The fact that the US and Britain were the main advocates for the cuts further fuelled suspicion amongst Namibians that some dirty deals were being struck behind closed doors in the corridors of power. Britain was a long-term friend of the South African government, while the US - arguably the richest UN member state and yet the one most in arrears with its subscription payments to the world body - still managed to pour millions of dollars of "aid" into Unita. The hypocrisy stank. Swapo and the 102 member nations of the Non-Alligned Movement protested against the cuts, but the Security Council had its way and the size of Untag was reduced by a third, while April 1 was set as the date on which the independence process would start.

Suspicion of the Security Council's motives lingered on as the head of Untag's military contingent, General Dewan Prem Chand, touched down at Windhoek airport on February 26 to what was, nonetheless, a tumultuous welcome. At the airport to meet the silver-haired military veteran as he stepped onto the tarmac dressed in a pin-striped suit and tie, was a crowd of several thousand people sporting the red, blue and green colours of Swapo, who had managed to find transport to take them the 40km to the out-of-town aerodrome.
The crowd cheered and sang as Prem Chand was whisked away midst rigid security to Windhoek's Kalahari Sands Hotel where he was to set up his provisional headquarters. On the way into the city, the General's motorcade met hundreds more Swapo supporters who, unable to get a lift, had started jogging to the airport. Seeing that the General had already arrived, the joggers did an about-turn and headed for the city centre where they too sang and danced outside the hotel along with the thousands of comrades who joined them from the airport.

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The police looked on, skulking in shop doorways with their whips at the ready. Five months beforehand, the same police had gleefully attacked an infinitely smaller crowd outside SWA House during a march to mark the 10th anniversary of Resolution 435. This time the demonstrators escaped unscathed, the police simply standing by and watching as if Prem Chand had tethered them with invisible leashes. This gave the crowd even more reason to celebrate and people left with the impression that perhaps things were about to change after all. In the wake of Prem Chand came the UN troops under his command. Soon the streets of Windhoek were dotted with the light blue berets of the Untag soldiers, and Namibians of all races and all political persuasions confronted for the first time with tangible proof that the independence process was indeed about to happen - began to digest what this meant to them. The Untags meanwhile began to settle into their new surroundings in a manner not too dissimilar to a horde of holiday-makers.

The clubs, bars and restaurants were soon swamped with shavenheaded squaddies from all corners of the globe wielding wads of pink fifty Rand notes and consuming vast quantities of alcohol. Prices soared and the locals brawled with the newcomers, either because they (the locals) saw Untag as a bunch of communists about to hand their country over to the "kaffirs", or else because the macho strangers had turned the heads of the local women. However, Untag mania was very much a Windhoek phenomenon. Elsewhere in the country the peacekeeping force had barely put in an appearance by March 31, the eve of Resolution 435 taking effect and the day the UN's Special Representative for Namibia, Martti Ahtisaari, the man responsible for coordinating the independence process and the ultimate judge as to whether the process was "free and fair", arrived in Windhoek.

This time it was the turn of supporters of Swapo's main election challenger the DTA to form the reception committee. Swapo had also planned to hold a rally at the airport to greet Ahtisaari, but this had to be called off at the last minute for fear that there would be violence when the two rival groups of supporters came together. For the DTA, never short of money to splash out on such occasions, was arranging to transport its supporters from throughout the country to Windhoek Airport for Ahtisaari's arrival on the Friday morning. Trains were chartered, buses hired and lorries, cars and bakkies bought to bring those loyal to the DTA from as far away as Kaokoland, the far north, the Caprivi, Karasburg, Luderitz, Rietfontein and Swakopmund to the capital in a bid to impress upon the UN special representative that Namibia was "DTA country".
It was barely light as Chris, Rajah, Da'oud, Mark and I set out for the airport on the Friday morning. It was rare for any of us to be up so early on a Friday, but my Namibian friends, in their own laid-back way, were nervous with anticipation as the independence they had campaigned and longed for so long was finally about to get underway. As we drove out along Gobabis Road we noticed every lamp post had attached to it a DTA placard facing in the direction of traffic coming from the airport. Then, as we left the city and wound our way up the twisting road through the hills, they started; every few kilometres, slogans had been painted in big letters across the highway, again legible to traffic coming from the airport. "DTA welcomes Ahtisaari", "Viva DTA", "Down with Swapo" and others cropped up at regular intervals along the route, while every telegraph pole between Windhoek and the turn off to the airport had nailed to it a poster showing the DTA's two finger salute. "Phew, these people have been busy," Mark exclaimed as we drove over yet another slogan. "But how were they able to do it?" Rajah asked. "Surely this is illegal? How could the cops not have noticed this was going on?"

How indeed. This had been a massive operation involving hundreds of people working throughout the night defacing the main highway east. Security precautions for Ahtisaari's arrival alone would have required the police to regularly patrol along the road during the night, but still the DTA got away with their publicity stunt without anyone lifting a finger to stop them. It was an early indication that many members of the police and civil service - which were to remain in post throughout the run-up to November's independence elections and to be only monitored by Untag - would be actively siding with the DTA in the election campaign.

The anti-Swapo bias of the parastatal SWABC had already been seen in the corporation's coverage of the arrival of Prem Chand. While television viewers world-wide saw pictures of the enthusiastic crowd which greeted the General, any shots of the very same jubilant Swapo masses were edited out of the SWABC's bulletins leaving those watching in Namibia with the impression that Prem Chand had arrived at an airport deserted save for a few dignitaries and a pack of jostling journalists.

The first of the sun's startling rays were sweeping across the lush savanna plain as we reached the brow of a hill and started our descent to the airport. Objects glinted in the distance which, as we drew closer, we saw were hundreds of vehicles of every shape and size parked in the veld around the slip road to the airport. Here thousands of the DTA's supporters had camped overnight in their vehicles and a huge marquee painted in the red, blue and white colours of the party. Several trains were parked blocking the main rail route to Gobabes as if this single, sidingless track belonged to the DTA. Bodies
stirred stiffly in the buses and backs of lorries as people began to rise and swarm like ants over the camp site, picking their way in between discarded beer and bully beef cans, and empty spirit bottles, much of which had been provided free of charge by the party.

Hundreds of Ovahimba people, who had travelled all the way from Opuwo and beyond, sat huddled around camp fires, the men staring into the flames, swigging on bottles of Red Label whisky while the bare-breasted women fed their babies or went about covering their skin in traditional red ochre which gave their bodies the appearance of smooth, baked earth. Amongst the other DTA supporters were many women resplendent in traditional Herero dress, while others opted for less conventional DTA T-shirts which party organisers were busy handing out along with placards and paper flags.

It was easy to see why Swapo had cancelled its own rally; most male DTA followers gathered at the airport were carrying some kind of weapon - mostly traditional knobkerries and knives, while some had rifles and pistols, although this did not seem to bother the police patrols which bustled up and down the highway and airport slip road.

As the time of Ahtisaari's arrival drew near, the crowd started to gather along the roadside and members of the DTA's own party militia, dressed in matching khaki uniforms, black boots and berets, marched up and down the highway.

We made our way to the airport arrival lounge to find there was no less of a squash here than there had been at the roadside, as hundreds of journalists, diplomats, film crews and sound engineers waited nervously, checking first their watches, then the clear blue sky outside, and then their colleagues for any clues as to what was happening.

Rajah took up his position on the balcony overlooking the runway and pulled his camera from his bag, complete with its standard 35mm lens - the only one he had. He was soon surrounded by photographers, each with at least six cameras slung over each shoulder, who busily set about erecting tripods on which they mounted the latest in photographic wizardry, including zoom lenses the length of a person's arm.

At first Rajah took no notice, but as more and more of the international hot shots crowded in on him, he coyly stuck his camera under his rain coat, picked up his bag and joined us at the bar, suggesting that it was best if we left the pictures to Liebenberg. John was in his element, darting in and out of the mêlée looking for the exclusive angle, barging in between even the most sophisticated and prestigious of opponents.

Ahtisaari arrived and was greeted on the tarmac by his counterpart during the independence process, the Administrator-General Louis Pienaar, who - with the dismantling of the interim government weeks before - had effectively become the ruler of the territory until the new government was elected. What Ahtisaari thought of the DTA's efforts to impress him as he whizzed towards town in his motorcade, he never said; he did not have much time to think.
about it. His first job was to check everything was in order, ready for the independence process to get under way the following day. As far as Untag was concerned, the situation was not ideal. For a start, the peacekeeping force had no headquarters and Ahtisaari and his team were having to operate from the Kalahari Sands Hotel. Added to which, less than a quarter of the 4,650 Untag troops finally allocated to the operation were in Namibia by March 31, and most of those who had arrived were still in Windhoek waiting to be posted countrywide.

On paper, this should not have mattered as Swapo and the South Africans had already agreed to a ceasefire which was due to come into effect at 02h00 the following morning, April 1. Added to which, all South African and SWATF troops had been confined to base, as was required under Resolution 435. However, no sooner had Ahtisaari put his feet under the desk in his hotel room office than South African Foreign Minister Pik Botha came to him with some troubling news. Botha was in Windhoek for the visit of British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher who, apparently at short notice, had decided to include a short stopover in Namibia on April 1 as part of the southern African tour she was on at the time. As it was, Thatcher's visit was going to be a public relations exercise for the benefit of a South African government desperate for international recognition, and a distraction to Untag's attempts to assert its authority from the outset of the independence process.

The celebrations in Katutura that night were like New Year's Eve ten times over. I spent the first part of the evening at a birthday party thrown at the comfortable though small house of Kaurie Kephas, my new landlady, in Katutura's Wanaheda section (I left Mbatji's house because he needed the room for his sister Notemba when she returned from University in Johannesburg). The party started out as a very sedate affair to which only family and close friends of the birthday host Tanietjie were invited. The guests sat around, drank and chatted, and the historical significance of the day seemed lost until suddenly T angeni, the amiable and boisterous boyfriend of Tanietjie's sister Martha, rushed into the living room looking at his watch and clutching a bottle of sparkling wine.

"Listen everyone, listen! There is only half a minute to go," he shouted, and then started shaking the bottle furiously.

"Twenty, nineteen, eighteen...." the countdown started as all the partygoers abandoned their conversations, grabbed the nearest bottle or glass and gathered in the middle of the living room.
"...three, two, one, freeeeeeedom!" The music was turned up full and everyone lost any inhibitions they might have had, and danced around the room hugging and kissing each other. Corks ricocheted off the ceiling, women ululated wildly before everyone broke into raucous freedom songs.

Meanwhile at Club Thriller, DJ Thabo, dressed in his white suit and panama, led the crowd in a similar countdown to midnight before playing one freedom song after another, something which had never happened before in any of the township's nightclubs. The audience sung along, dancing and power saluting uncontrollably. As if from nowhere, everyone produced hats and scarves in the colours of Swapo which they put on and waved unashamedly.

While Club Thriller had the reputation of being "the Swapo club", it was also a favourite hang out for many off-duty soldiers and police officers, so clients had always been wary about showing their political allegiances. But at midnight on March 31, their fear and caution evaporated. People believed that their lives had now changed, that the colonial era was over and that they were really about to taste freedom... freedom to be what they liked when they liked without the threat of being beaten up and killed for it. Their emotions were so beautifully pure.

Sadly, never again were these feelings to be repeated in quite the same way and with quite the same euphoria.

Few people slept that night, and by dawn what must have numbered around ten thousand people had gathered at the Katutura Community Centre ready for a march into town. The march was arranged by the NUNW as a protest against the AG's plans to privatise public services, a move which the unions believed was an attempt by the outgoing South African regime to sabotage the economy before an independent government could take over.

Happening when it did, however, the demonstration also became the people's first opportunity to show their collective joy at freedom from South African rule, and a chance to do something they had never been able to do before - march into White City Windhoek.

The thousands of marchers dressed in red, blue and green, and holding aloft banners welcoming Untag and condemning privatisation, sang and

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toyi-toyied out of the Community Centre and onto the main highway into the city. The marchers filled all three lanes of the left hand carriageway, and as the last members of the crowd were leaving the Community Centre, their comrades at the front were already turning into Okahandja Road more than a kilometre away. Their ultimate destination was SWA House, the home of the AG. But they never got there.

The marchers were at the outskirts of Windhoek North when their way was blocked by an all too familiar line of helmeted riot cops who stood three deep across the road, rubber bullet guns and teargas grenades at the ready.

"Go any further and we will shoot," the officer in charge barked through a megaphone.

Constitution swept through the ranks of the marchers as those in the middle and at the back of the procession concertinaed into those at the front, pushing the latter
closer and closer towards the police line where dogs strained at their leads while
the cops stood their ground, glaring at the crowd, stroking the triggers of their
guns and chewing vigorously on gum. For half an hour union officials tried to
negotiate with the police chief, but he refused to allow the march go on, saying
that the demonstration was illegal and that if the people did not turn around and
go home, he would order his men to open fire.
The organisers were left with no choice but to lead the people back to Katutura.
Some of the marchers were in tears, others were angry, although a few -
determined not to allow the police to dampen their spirits - sang freedom songs as
they trudged back along the highway.
"How can the police do this?" people asked. "We thought today was our first day
of freedom. We thought that today all this repression was supposed to end."
Bitterness was then directed at Untag which, apart from a lone bluebereted police
monitor who stood helplessly by as the riot squad carried out its usual
confrontational tactics, was conspicuous by its absence.
"Where is Ahtisaari, is he also a puppet of the Boers? We thought the UN were
here to protect us from the Boers."
The symbolic significance of being stopped on the outskirts of White City was not
lost on the marchers either; it was now clear that, Untag or no Untag, the whites
were going to do their utmost to hold on to power and the old apartheid system.
Instead of returning quietly to their houses as the police might have hoped,
however the marchers remained as a group and proceeded around Katutura
whipping up support and enthusiasm for the mass rally Swapo had planned for the
afternoon.
Elsewhere in the township, the DTA's supporters began to come together and they
too started to march around the streets in preparation for their rally which was
also to be staged in the township that afternoon.

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By midday tempers were on a short fuse as rumours that some white men had
been seen "planting something suspicious" on the wasteland where Swapo was
due to hold its meeting spread around the now tired and hung over crowd of
Swapo supporters. The start of their rally was delayed as the land was swept for
explosives. Nothing was found but it added to the frustration which turned to
violence in the early evening when factions returning from their respective rallies
became involved in sporadic street fights in the township which carried on late
into the night.
I left the marchers, then still in a buoyant mood, at around 11 hO and went to the
office to start work on the following Monday's paper, which was going to be a
bumper edition to mark the start of the independence process and commencement
of daily publication of The Namibian.
I had not been at work for more than half an hour when a newsflash caught my
eye on the telex.
"South African security forces in northern Namibia have clashed with
unidentified, heavily armed guerrillas entering the territory from neighbouring
Angola," started the three paragraph story which went on to give scant details
about serious fighting near the Angolan border. "More information to follow when available," the piece concluded.
I tore off the story and handed it to Gwen. Her face dropped as she read it. "I knew it, I just knew something like this would happen." she muttered as the details sank in.
"Who do you think they are, Unita?" I asked, referring to the "unidentified" guerrillas. Since the signing of the New York accord, members of Koevoet had reportedly left the country to join Jonas Savimbi's rebel army in south-eastern Angola, vowing to carry on fighting rather than to live in a country governed by Swapo.
Gwen shrugged her shoulders.
"I don't know David, but I have had bad vibes about the peace process since the day the South Africans sat down at the negotiating table. Haven't we said all along that everyone should not get carried away, that the South Africans could not be trusted? Now look."
She threw the paper onto a pile of other telex stories and picked up her mug of tea which she sipped at angrily as she gazed into space. The telephone rang and I answered. It was the AG's office telling us that Mrs Thatcher was due to arrive at Eros Airport in half an hour's time. Mark and I were dispatched to cover her arrival.
An expatriate British family clutching an unfurled Union Jack sat on top of a wall overlooking the runway; they were the only people who made up Thatcher's unofficial reception committee. The official reception committee - Pik Botha and AG Louis Pienaar - sat behind the tinted glass of their

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Mercedes parked out of sight next to a fleet of propeller-driven Cessnas, while a posse of accredited journalists were gathered on the tarmac itself. Looking for a way onto the runway, Mark and I picked our way through the half-built new terminal building which was befronted by a dazzling green lawn, flower beds, a row of tall palm trees and a flag pole from which fluttered the South African tricolour - the Union Jack and emblems of the Boer republics emplanted in the middle of the white horizontal band serving as a timely reminder of Britain's historical union with apartheid.
We walked through the glassless swing doors marked "arrivals" but were prevented from going any further by a burly white policeman who, despite being shown our press cards, refused to allow us to join the other journalists on the runway. So we watched from a distance, using Mark's zoom lens as a telescope, as Thatcher's jet landed and the South African motorcade swooped onto the tarmac ready for Pretoria's besuited envoys to greet the British Prime Minister as she descended the aircraft steps.
It was smiles all round as she shook hands warmly with Messrs Botha and Pienaar. She was escorted quickly to her car and, minutes later, the motorcade swept out of the airport gates towards the city with a bus full of Western journalists, looking like bewildered holiday makers, following obediently behind - another day, another country.
Botha lost no time in briefing Thatcher on what was happening in the far north. More than a thousand fully armed Plan combatants had come across into Namibia from Angola in the early hours of that morning - from Kaokoland in the west to near Rundu in the east - and had been engaged by armed police units.

Botha apparently went on to point out that the infiltration was in breach of the ceasefire agreed to by Swapo and the South Africans, and he asked Thatcher for her support in persuading UN Special Representative Ahtisaari to allow South African soldiers to be released from their bases in order to fight back the Plan fighters' advance. If what he was telling her was true, Thatcher replied, she would certainly back his request for SADF and SWATF units to be released from their bases to tackle the Swapo incursion.

Francina Naunyanga and her family sang and clapped for joy when they heard shots ring out from the bushveld near their homestead at Ondeshifilwa in the Ombalantu district of far northern Namibia. They thought the gunfire came from Plan fighters letting off their weapons into the air to announce their passage to Oshakati, where they were to give themselves up to Untag and be confined to base during the independence process.

The villagers’ celebrations were short-lived. All of a sudden, several Koevoet Casspirs roared past the homestead and ploughed, machine guns blazing, into the surrounding mahangu fields, flattening the ripe crop which was tall and healthy for the first time after several years of poor rainfall. Then a helicopter gunship swooped low over the trees, firing off rockets and machine guns. Mrs Naunyanga grabbed her baby and dived for cover as several rockets hit the mud huts of the homestead, setting fire to the straw roofs.

In a clearing nearby, a group of 21 Plan combatants had been resting and eating their food rations when the Koevoet unit struck. Most of the guerrillas were gunned down or crushed under the wheels of the Casspirs as they fled for cover, while the remaining few managed to take up positions in the trees and bushes until they too were eventually killed in a shoot-out which lasted several hours. The battle over, the Koevoets tied the bodies of the dead combatants to the Casspirs and dragged the corpses to within 30 metres of Mrs Naunyanga's kraal and dumped them there; no burial, nothing. The bodies of the fighters were badly mutilated, skin and bone being no match to the high velocity bullets of the Casspir and helicopter machineguns.

The corpses were twisted and mangled, and there were tortured expressions on the faces of those with faces left. The power of the Koevoet bullets had shattered bones like small twigs, while blood and internal organs spewed through camouflage uniforms ripped to shreds by enemy fire and the undergrowth as the bodies were dragged to their resting place. Some resting place. Having stripped the dead fighters of weapons, documents and anything of value, the Koevoets went, leaving the corpses in the open to fester in the baking sunshine.

Meanwhile Mrs Thatcher sipped tea at the British-owned Rössing Uranium mine 600 km away near Swakopmund before jetting back to London, boasting that she had helped avert chaos in Namibia.
After three days, the stench of the bodies became too much for the villagers of Ondeshifilwa to bear any longer and they took it upon themselves to bury the dead fighters in a mass grave which took most of the day, under the burning sun and next to reeking corpses, to dig.

While the villagers dug, journalists and film crews from the international press pack - on a rare unaccompanied excursion into the bush from the safety and comfort of their base in White Oshakati - descended on the scene to record the gory spectacle for the benefit of their viewers thousands of kilometres away.

Once the bodies were buried and the film crews had gone, Mrs Naunyanga and her fellow villagers returned to their homesteads to continue trying to repair the damage wrought during the battle.

"We trusted the international statesmen and those who were responsible for peace," Mrs Naunyanga told me.

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"But now there is no change. It has brought us much suffering and many problems."

The Ondeshifilwa shoot-out was typical of the scores of battles which took place in the far northern border region in the first week of April. Botha and Thatcher got their way, pressurising Ahtisaari into agreeing to the redeployment of South African troops to help "the police" with "apprehending" the estimated 1 800 Plan "intruders" who crossed into Namibia "illegally".

Not that the police needed much help. Koevoet, despite assurances by the South African government that the counter-insurgency unit would be disbanded as part of the independence process, still numbered around 1 200 men by April 1, and they spearheaded the attack on the incoming Plan combatants.

Technically part of Swapol anyway, the remaining 1 800 or more men who previously made up Koevoet's full fighting force of 3 000 plus excluding those who had joined Unita or returned to South Africa - had been redeployed into the ranks of the conventional police force. Once put back onto a war footing, these redeployed "police officers" quickly reverted to their old counter-insurgency role, and there was no telling them apart from Koevoet as they too rode into battle on top of Casspirs, stripped to the waste in their khaki uniforms, their heavy firepower at the ready.

The introduction of SADF and SWATF into the fray simply guaranteed the annihilation which followed. By April 5, more than 260 Plan combatants and 30 security force members had died in what was some of the heaviest, most brutal fighting of the entire 23 year guerrilla war. Only a handful of Plan combatants were taken prisoner, prompting human rights organisations to accuse the security forces of executing surrendering guerrillas rather than taking them into custody.

On April 7, British journalist Simon O'Dwyer-Russell and a couple of colleagues scaled the wall of Oshakati mortuary and found there hidden away the corpses of 18 combatants which, unlike most of those on public view elsewhere, had not been mutilated by heavy machine gun fire. Instead these fighters appeared to have been shot from behind through the head at close range with small calibre weapons.
"I asked the police tracker if the Swapo guerrillas had been killed after surrendering," the journalist reported. "'What does it matter,' he replied, 'They are Swapo and they are dead. That is all that matters.'"

Once the fighting was underway, both sides had fought to the death, the combatants believing the South Africans were trying to deny them the right to return to their motherland to enjoy the fruits of independence.

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while the security forces were convinced Swapo was trying to seize the country by storm instead of taking part in the prescribed elections. Pressure from church and human rights organisations, via the UN, forced the reluctant South Africans to carry out post-mortems on the dead fighters and then to give the bodies a proper burial. That was the theory, but Untag never managed to get it together enough to make sure this actually happened. The Oshakati mortuary was soon full to capacity as police and army trucks trundled in from the bush and unloaded the decaying corpses of dead fighters. With all slabs inside full, the remaining bodies - except for those of the 18 guerrillas who appeared to have been executed - were laid out in the mortuary yard, again under the blistering sun and in full view of the main road and houses nearby. Once rudimentary autopsies had been carried out, the stinking corpses were loaded back onto the open trucks and taken to be "buried" in a mass "grave" on the outskirts of Oshakati township. White police officers sat by and watched as their black orderlies slung the mutilated and decomposed remains of the fighters into a large pit dug by a mechanical earth remover. Once the last of the bodies had been unceremoniously dumped in the hole, the earth remover was then used to shovel the soil over the corpses. Amen. Arms and legs still protruded through the lumps of grey earth when the burial team finally left the scene on Friday evening, and packs of stray dogs were soon feasting on these and other limbs they exhumed from the pit.

Oswald and I returned to the site the following morning. The grave was located in the middle of a bare, infertile field littered with empty beer bottles, tin cans and piles of household refuse. To reach the field, we had to drive through a collection of makeshift tin shacks, one of the many squatter camps which had grown up around Oshakati township, this one home to black members of Koevoet and SWATF.

A sombre silence hung over the squalid scene as our car splashed along the muddy paths between the houses. Ragged children fled as they saw us coming while their elders, drinking tombo, barely looked up from where they sat hunched over open fires, half-heartedly stirring mealie pap which bubbled and spluttered in pots over the flames.

Black flags, some no more than a few strands of ripped shirt or dress, were pinned to several of the huts indicating that the family was in mourning - for relatives killed in the fighting.

The only casualty figures had been provided by the South Africans, so it was suspected that more than the 30 security force members admitted to by the police
and army had in fact died during the past week. Inevitably, those not accounted for would have been black, and it was even said by several separate sources in Oshakati that the bodies of black Koevoets had been slung into the mass grave nearby along with their Plan adversaries, while coffins containing the remains of white security force members killed in battle had been flown back to South Africa for ceremonial burial with full military honours.

An unusual stench permeated the woodsmoke and shit aroma of the squatter camp, and this grew stronger as we approached the wasteland. Little lived in that desolate field. Even the crickets had gone, and brown wisps of grass swayed pathetically in the breeze which moaned its one-note requiem through the discarded cans and bottles, which could not even manage the faintest of sparkles in the hazy sunshine.

By the time we reached the burial pit we were having to hold our handkerchiefs over our faces; the smell of death was overpowering. Human bones gnawed clean of flesh lay strewn around, the left-overs from the stray dogs' feast the previous night. A skull, a boot with its severed foot still inside, scraps of uniform, and more gleaming white bones jutted from the mounds of earth which constituted the South Africans' idea of a decent Christian burial for blacks and terrorists. We left quicker than we had come, our heads swimming, winding down the car windows only once we were back in the main township where we were relieved to breathe the aroma of shit and woodsmoke once more.

Next we headed for Ondeshifiilwa. The evening before, AG Pienaar had announced that his government was threatening to call off the independence process, and he issued an ultimatum to the Plan combatants that they had until midday to surrender or leave Namibia, after which more SADF and SWATF units would be released from base with the instructions to hunt down the remaining insurgents.

The deadline had already expired as we drove through the bush in the direction of Angola, the trees and veld grass aglow with green life brought on by the rains. Yet there were few herds of livestock around to enjoy the fresh pastures, and we passed many deserted homesteads as we meandered through the countryside, families having fled to Oshakati and other major settlements to escape the renewed fighting.

Francina Naunyanga and the other Ondeshifiilwa villagers had decided to stay put, although their lives still lay in ruins around them. Live and spent ammunition littered the flattened mahangu fields. In the clearing where the Plan combatants had been resting, tins of half-eaten food remained where they had been dropped in the panic which followed the first sounds of the roaring Casspirs and the beating of the gunship's rotoblades. Elsewhere, bandages and ointments lay around a large pool of dried blood, and splintered, bullet-riddled tree trunks marked where combatants had made their last stands.

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From all these places led the heavy triangular tracks of Casspir tyres followed by a less distinctive spoor which left a wide, shallow trail in the white, sandy soil. All the tracks eventually converged on a long, asymmetrical mound of earth - the mass grave dug by the villagers where the 21 combatants still lay buried. I was relieved that the bodies had not been exhumed for post-mortem examination. At least these insurgents, unlike most of their comrades, had been given a proper burial at which the villagers had said prayers and paid last respects to their freedom fighters. A bright red, empty Coke can lay next to the grave where perhaps it had been chucked by a thirsty newshound three days previously.

Another day, another war.

Mrs Naunyanga's kraal was still derelict, although an attempt had been made to rebuild the perimeter fence smashed by a reversing Casspir; she would have to wait until the dry winter months until the materials needed to re-build the huts were available.

"We had put food and clothes here ready for when our friends and relatives returned from exile," Mrs Naunyanga said as she picked up the charred remains of a pair of shoes from the cinders inside one hut which had received a direct hit by a missile.

"Now the exiles will be afraid to return because they know the United Nations will not protect them from the makakunyas. And even if they do return, there is now nothing for us to give them."

"We are old now, and peace might not come in our time," said Ondeshifilwa's 98-year-old headman Jonathan Naunyanga, who reckoned the fighting of April 1 was the fiercest he had witnessed throughout the 23-year-war.

"But whatever happens, peace must come for our children."

We sat for a while and chatted as Mrs Naunyanga's two children played with an old toy American army jeep, imitating the noise of gun and rocket fire.

In passing, Mrs Naunyanga mentioned that someone from Untag had been to visit the site of the battle the day before, but as far as she was concerned, the visit had been a waste of time as the blue-bereted soldier had come without a translator so none of the villagers were able to explain what happened on the fateful day of the battle.

The villagers of Ondeshifilwa were already resigned to the fact that yet another attempt by the international community to see Namibia to its independence had failed miserably.

We said goodbye to the villagers and continued our journey, this time east towards Engela, driving roughly parallel to the border with Angola, never more than 12km from the cutline. The bush became more dense, and there seemed to be even fewer people around. It was hard to believe, looking at the tranquil scene, that there was a bloody war going on, but all the time there was that nagging feeling that something was not right - everything was too quiet.
around. As we drove into the clearing, the boy jumped to his feet and shouted at us as we passed.

"Pas op! Pas op!"("Look out!" "Look out!") he screamed.

"Stop the car, quick, quick, stop, stop!" Oswald said grabbing hold of the steering wheel. I braked and the car glided to a halt on the sandy track. We looked back, but the boy had gone. Even the goats were running for cover, bleating a warning to us as they skipped into the undergrowth. Oswald looked quickly around. He was unusually agitated.

"Turn the car around," he ordered.

"There's something not so good up ahead. We will go this way," he said pointing to the far side of the clearing, not far from the way we had come. I quickly turned the car around and we sped off in the opposite direction. Once we were out of the clearing, Oswald relaxed a bit.

"The boy was warning us," he explained. "There was either an ambush, or landmines had been laid on the track ahead. We must be careful." The tranquillity of the bush was no longer beautiful now I had been reminded that no one could claim civilian immunity in the war zone. Landmines or soldiers with itchy trigger fingers do not wait to check your press card.

Reaching the well-used Ombalantu-Engela road was not the relief it should have been. Casspirs travelling along the road during the rains had churned up the dirt surface to such an extent that in places it was impassable, particularly as the mud had now set hard. We were travelling in a conventional Golf and I was seldom able to change beyond second gear, the engine forever overheating as we picked our way through the deep ruts, the bottom of the car scraping the ground with agonizing regularity. But at least there were now more people around, walking along the road in both directions with packages on their heads.

Other traffic was also more frequent; mostly traders, driving pick-ups loaded with food and drink supplies and heading for their outlying shops, showing that life had to carry on in spite of the fighting. Besides, people here were well used to the war. It was just a shame that everyone had so little time in which to relax and enjoy the peace; a nervous urgency had returned to the outwardly casual way people went about their daily lives.

The causeway across one particularly wide oshana had been blown up in the middle, so we were left with no choice but to drive around the edge of the water. Young men and women fished thigh-deep in the water while

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"We should be able to drive through here," Oswald said indicating a supposedly shallow stretch of water. "I hope you are right," I said with a rueful grin and, revving the engine furiously, turned the car and accelerated towards the oshana. We almost squelched to a standstill in the middle of the water, but a frantic gear change and a conveniently placed rock helped us through, and we crawled up onto the opposite bank having lost only the front bumper in the process. It was dusk when we reached the tarred highway between Oshikango and Ondangwa. The curfew still had not been re-introduced, but we felt an urgency to reach home before it was dark. As we sped southwards, convoy upon convoy of Casspirs, tanks and troop transporters thundered in the opposite direction. The roadside, too, was crammed with military vehicles swarming with soldiers; SADF and SWATF units which had that afternoon been released from base and were now preparing to do battle with the old enemy.

There was no mistaking the soldiers' eagerness, and as we drove we saw several patrols already disappearing into the thorn bushes along wellknown routes to their old hunting grounds. That night I had little sleep. The disco at ABC finished early and, as I lay in my bed, all I could hear were the crickets, the rumble of military patrols and the burst of gunfire. It was business as usual in the war zone.

The next morning Keto Segwai, a journalist with Botswana's Mmegi newspaper, and I went to the White Oshakati guest house in search of Brou Liebenberg. In the car park were the Mercedes and BMW hire cars of the international press pack, some bearing the scars of their trip to Ondeshifilwa several days earlier. Amongst these nonetheless impressive beasts was a white Golf with the letters UN painted in black on the doors. Someone had sprayed over the motif and much of the bodywork with yellow aerosol paint before urinating on the windscreen.

In the reception area, journalists queued at the only phone in the guest house, in turn giving irritated instructions about collect calls to New York or Stockholm to an apparently bewildered operator at the local exchange before eventually being connected, and then bellowing their stories down the line to copytakers thousands of kilometres away. In the queue behind, rival journalists listened in, taking note of any details they did not have in their own stories.

Keto and I stepped over bulky camera equipment which lay around the foyer floor and entered the dining room where waiters and waitresses raced between crowded tables. In between those tables occupied by packs of newshounds guzzling large breakfasts, sat the families of South African soldiers "on border duty". The families, straight from the white middle class suburbs of Bloemfontein, Port Elizabeth and the like appeared put out by the chaos the journalists had brought to their quiet white haven in "Owambo", and muttered to each other over their boerewors, throwing daggered glares at the hacks each time the latter erupted into raucous laughter or spoke in audible English.

A rotund army officer wearing a T-shirt, shorts and with a pistol strapped to his waist, wandered around the tables placating the families and fielding complaints.
from the journalists about the air conditioning not working or the poor quality of
room service.
"I lost my liver in Oshakati," read the officer's T-shirt; it was not referring to
being wounded in combat.
Having been ignored by the restaurant staff for almost half an hour (we did not
carry foreign currency), and there being no sign of Liebenberg, Keto and I left the
guest house, and spent the rest of the morning roaming the area for new stories
and photos. The roads were still full of military convoys, the night patrols
returning to base, the day patrols on their way out. We heard the occasional burst
of gunfire, but most of the fighting was taking place deep in the bush, far out of
the reach of even our intrepid Golf where only Casspirs, insurgents and villagers
could reach.
We drove through Ohangwena where a dog sniffing its way around the market
square was the only sign of life. Ponhofi Secondary School was overgrown and
deserted, the students having never returned since the start of the boycott a year
before. Returning south we came to an army road block. A young white South
African conscript flagged us down, took our registration and ID details before
informing us that the curfew would be re-introduced from sunset that evening. I
asked why.
"Because there are terrorists active in the area," he said earnestly as if reciting
something he had just learnt from a school text book.
"There is a war going on, it's not safe for civilians to be out after dark." The law
of the jungle had returned to the far north.
"So much for the peacemakers of the world," I thought as we continued towards
Ondangwa.
Our mission complete, Keto and I set out on our journey back to Windhoek. On
the way up, we had found Oshivelo abandoned, the
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barriers open, allowing traffic to drive straight through without stopping. But now
the checkpoint was again operative, scores of soldiers and police searching every
vehicle, and ordering all black travellers to pass through the reinstated "terrorist
check".
Back in Windhoek city centre, it was as if the party atmosphere of April 1 had
continued unabated. The streets were crowded with people dressed in their smart
clothes and the colours of their political party, which had now become the latest
fashion. The supporters of Swapo and the DTA brushed shoulders in the shops,
while members of the smaller parties wore T-shirts bearing their own motifs and
messages with equal conviction, all of which had been rare prior to April 1. In the
bars, the Untags continued to fall off their stools and brawl with the locals. In fact,
everywhere you turned there seemed to be someone in uniform wearing a blue
beret. Throughout the 2 000km I travelled during my trip to the war zone, I saw
just three Untags; one at Oshivelo and two in a Kombi turning into Ondangwa
airbase. So much for the peacemakers...
The presence of the UN was also low key at Mount Etjo game reserve near
Otjiwarongo where diplomats and politicians from the countries involved in the
1988 peace talks - Angola, South Africa, Cuba, the US and Soviet Union (now collectively called the Joint Military Monitoring Commission) - met on Saturday and Sunday April 8-9 to "renegotiate Resolution 435". As they sat down to talk in the palatial game lodge, additional SADF and SWATF units were being released from their bases to hunt down Plan fighters 500 km away in the war zone.

By now, Pik Botha and his delegation were basking in new-found credibility, with the international community perceiving South Africa as the side which had been wronged in the April 1 fiasco. As a result, Botha was in a strong bargaining position and came away from the talks with favourable terms for keeping Resolution 435 alive; Swapo was given initially until April 15 to pull its combatants out of Namibia and confine them to bases north of the 16th parallel line of latitude in Angola, the Angolans agreeing to make sure Swapo complied. Only when all Swapo forces were beyond the 16th parallel, as verified by both Untag and the South Africans, would Resolution 435 once more get under way. It was also agreed that the UN should set up 18 checkpoints near the Angolan border to which Plan combatants could report and be given asylum, medical attention and a safe passage back to Angola.

However, under the Mount Etjo accord, no restraint was put on the 4 000 or so South African soldiers who were left to continue hunting down those insurgents still inside the country. The UN checkpoints were set up, but within spitting distance of the UN flag, SA and SWATF security force members in armoured Casspirs kept a 24 hour vigil, ready to seize and interrogate any surrendering guerrillas. Not surprisingly, the Swapo fighters stayed well away.

As the Untag troops at the check points sat in deck chairs waiting for the intended influx of Plan combatants, Koevoet and South African troops roamed the surrounding bush hunting down the guerrillas; bloody skirmishes continued throughout the weeks which followed the Mount Etjo summit, although on nothing like the scale of the battles fought during the first days of April. Some of these contacts took place within a few kilometres of the UN safe havens, but the Untag troops were powerless to intervene. As the weeks dragged on, there was little evidence that the Plan insurgents were returning to Angola in any numbers. The terms of the Mount Etjo agreement were broadcast time and again over the SWABC's Oshiwambo service, but the SWABC was not trusted by the majority of the population which saw the service as a mouthpiece for South African propaganda, so no one took any notice of the call for Plan fighters to withdraw.

Being cut off from their headquarters in Angola, the combatants were not receiving the message to withdraw from their commanders either. With the help of local sympathisers, several injured fighters ran the gauntlet through the Koevoet patrols and made it to the UN checkpoints, while other guerrillas managed to reach hospitals or safe houses undetected. In the latter cases, Untag came to collect the asylum seekers, although it was often a race between Untag and the security forces to get to the Plan fighters first.
South African troops even tried to force their way into some of the checkpoints, demanding the right to question the combatants. During several tense confrontations, the Untag soldiers - under strict instructions not to allow the South Africans near the Plan fighters - stood their ground, and for the first time since April I the peacekeeping force was seen to stand up to Pretoria's bullying tactics. Once in Untag's hands, the insurgents were fed, clothed and given medical treatment before being provided with safe passage back to Angola midst tight security while South African troops looked on at a distance with disgust.

Eventually, the same measures were afforded to 31 combatants taken prisoner by the South Africans during and also before the April incursion. After prolonged negotiations, the South Africans agreed to hand the prisoners over to Untag to be returned to bases north of the 16th parallel. Crowds lined the roads to give the fighters, by then safely on board a convoy of UN landcruisers, a heroes' send-off. The cheers and ululating might have been for the Plan combatants, but the fact that Untag was giving the fighters safe passage under the noses of the security forces helped to restore a modicum of public confidence in the peacekeeping force. After the April I debacle, the deployment of Untag personnel was speeded up so that, by the end of the month, several thousand blue berets were stationed in the far north. But these were unable to prevent the sporadic fighting which continued as the security forces tracked down and killed remaining insurgents.

At the Joint Commission's meeting at Ruacana on April 20, it was reported that significant numbers of Plan fighters were still inside Namibia, and so the re-implementation of Resolution 435 was again put on hold. However, pointing out that continued security force patrols had made it difficult for the guerrillas to leave Namibia, Ahtisaari - persuaded the South Africans to agree to confine its troops to base for 60 hours as from 10h00 on April 26 to allow remaining combatants the chance to return to Angola unhindered. Once the 60 hours were up, it was agreed, Untag and the South Africans would then verify by May 15 that all insurgents had in fact withdrawn.

In a bid to relay news of the 60 hour troop confinement to Plan combatants in the bush, a recorded message delivered by Plan Chief of Staff Dimo Amaambo, explaining the situation and ordering his soldiers back to Angola, was then broadcast on both SWABC and Swapo's Voice of Namibia. Once it was clear Untag was in fact keeping the South Africans at bay, hundreds of remaining Plan fighters came out of hiding, donned their camouflage uniforms, recovered their weapons and headed for the border. Not all of them made it to safety. As soon as the 60 hours was up, the security forces streamed out of their bases and headed back into the bush in their Casspirs, or on foot with armour-piercing missiles fixed to their rifles, searching for remaining enemy with a renewed, bloodthirsty zeal.

"The hunting season is open again," remarked one Koevoet member as his patrol eagerly made ready to leave the unit's headquarters near Oshakati. The combatants found by the security forces were killed - such was the South
African's idea of the "verification process" agreed on at Ruacana. All Ahtisaari could do was say that he was "concerned and saddened" at the renewed fighting, and he called on the security forces to "exercise maximum restraint" and allow those combatants left behind "safe passage" back to Angola. Most Plan fighters had managed to slip out of the country during their 60 hours of grace, but when the time came for the Joint Commission's verification meeting at Ruacana on May 15, Pretoria was still not happy. It was only after more exhaustive talks six days later at Cahama air base in southern Angola that the Joint Commission finally agreed that all of Swapo's armed forces were in bases north of the 16th parallel and that, as

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a result, South African troops would again be confined to base ready for their withdrawal from Namibia under the terms of Resolution 435. However, before the Cuban cigars were handed round and the delegates tucked into a sumptuous buffet dinner in one of the Cahama bunkers, South Africa had negotiated the right to again send in the SADF and SWATF if Swapo repeated the incursion of April 1. After a disastrous start, Ahtisaari and his Untag team had redeemed themselves enough to bring them back to the stage where, once again, they could try and convince the still dazed Namibian public that they (Untag) were in fact in Namibia to keep the peace and guide the country towards independence. It had been a costly process. South African figures put the number of Plan fighters killed during April at 316, while at least 30 members of the security forces had also died in action; unprecedented combat casualty figures (over such a short time span) for the entire liberation war. Ironically, the events of April proved that South Africa was now serious about Namibian independence. On previous occasions, Pretoria had used talks about independence to buy time when its wars in the region or events in South Africa were not going well for the Nationalist Government, only to reneg on any agreements and carry on where it had left off. In the past, the Plan incursion of April I would have been more than enough of an excuse for the South Africans to once more pull the plug on 435. Perhaps thinking his government was still using the same old tactics, AG Louis Pienaar had, on April 7, all but declared the independence process dead on arrival, only to be severely though privately reprimanded by Pik Botha who then rushed to Mount Etjo with a life-support machine. Free of the restraining influence of PW Botha - who had been sidelined by a stroke and who was on the verge of being ousted from power - and with the support of an all-powerful South African business community tired of disinvestment and international isolation, Pik Botha and his political allies in the government now felt the time had come to challenge Swapo - and ultimately the ANC - through the ballot box. Events which marked the run-up to the implementation of Resolution 435 combined with the after-effects of April 1, enabled Pretoria to bluff, negotiate and shoot itself into a position of strength, ably assisted by Mrs Thatcher, the
international media, Swapo's own naivety, and the inherent weaknesses of UN Resolution 435.

It is more than likely Pik Botha arranged for Thatcher to make a turn in Namibia on April 1 when he visited the British premier in early March. Even the briefest of visits was going to give Pretoria favourable publicity.

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as it would focus world attention on concrete evidence that, by allowing Namibian independence to go ahead, the South African government was serious about changing its ways. For her part, Thatcher, with long-term allegiances to Pretoria and British business interests in Namibia at stake, was all too happy to oblige. But favourable publicity was all Pik Botha could have hoped to have achieved from the visit until South African military intelligence (apparently with the aid of US spy satellite pictures) picked up information towards the end of March that hundreds of Swapo guerrillas were crossing into Namibia while others were making ready to do so.

This presented the South Africans with an ideal opportunity to damage Swapo's credibility and take valuable points from the liberation movement early in the election campaign. The ceasefire between Swapo and South African security forces came into effect at 02h00 April 1. Until then the Plan infiltration was not a breach of any agreement, so the South Africans kept quiet and the security forces did nothing. But as soon as 02h00 struck on the 1st, the Swapo incursion would become a breach of the ceasefire and the South Africans would be able to accuse Swapo of everything from cheating to trying to take the country by force, with one of the world's most influential leaders on hand to back Pretoria up and the world's media there to publish and broadcast the message around the globe.

Then, having dealt a heavy propaganda blow to Swapo, Pik Botha would be able to consolidate his government's new good-guy image by allowing Resolution 435 still to go ahead, securing concessions at the expense of the liberation movement in the process.

The scheme worked perfectly, although even Pik Botha was probably surprised at the number of Swapo fighters which continued to flood across the border after the ceasefire had come into effect. Pik ran to Thatcher who demanded that Ahtisaari should allow the South African security forces to be released from base to deal with the Swapo incursion.

Consequently Koevoet, the SADF and SWATF embarked on what one diplomat described as a "licensed turkey shoot", wiping out several hundred valuable Swapo personnel, and effectively setting back the party's election campaign by at least three months.

Worldwide the media condemned Swapo for jeopardising the very independence the liberation movement had been fighting for, and wasting the lives of so many young Namibians on the threshold of their freedom. Overnight, Swapo lost friends, support and sympathy. Wittingly or unwittingly, the international media lived up to Pik Botha's expectations with its gut-reaction response to the totally unexpected events of the first week in April.

The hundreds of journalists who descended on Windhoek at the end of
March did so thinking they were there to write a few colourful lines on the first symbolic steps towards the end of colonialism in Africa and to have a relaxing time on expenses in between press conferences. All of a sudden they were thrown into the middle of a war, charging north into the unknown in their hire cars and chartered planes, totally unprepared for what lay ahead. Their first priority was accommodation and, being creatures of comfort, most of the journalists opted for the only hotel which came anywhere near the standards they were used to - the White Oshakati military guest house, which meant they were immediately vulnerable to subtle South African propaganda. Their next priority was to feed their hungry news desks back home with any scraps of information available. As most of the journalists had little or no knowledge of the area, and there being no one on hand to give alternative views on what was happening, the hacks were heavily reliant on the well-oiled South African military PR machine for their stories.

The newshounds' days were take up with South African press briefings and trips with the SADF into the battle zone, while the only people they could find to have off-the-record chats with in the bar at night were South Africans. No wonder Swapo and the UN received a bad press! All Untag could do was to try and keep pace with events by holding daily press briefings in Windhoek, 750km away. Inevitably, the journalists were left with a very one-sided view of what was happening, as illustrated by one relatively "liberal" British correspondent who Mark Verbaan went to visit at the Kalahari Sands a week or so after the fighting had broken out.

The journalist had just returned from the war zone and Mark decided to pay a courtesy call, only to beat a hasty retreat, pursued down the corridor by the journalist who, fresh from a shower and dressed only in a bath towel, bellowed after him:

"I've backed some liberation movements in my time but Swapo is the biggest bunch of ******** I've come across. They are not fit to breathe, let alone govern this country!"

On the face of it, he had a point. To send heavily armed combatants across into Namibia both before, but particularly after the cease-fire had come into effect was a suicidal move, even if, as the evidence suggests, the intention had been to report to Untag and be confined by them to base. The most simple of reconnaissance would have told Swapo's strategists that the UN monitors were not in place in northern Namibia and that Koevoet was still armed, on the loose and ready to pounce. The Plan commanders must have been able to see they were sending their combatants into a likely bloodbath which, politically, would play right into Pretoria's hands, damaging Swapo's hard-earned credibility in the process. I say Plan commanders because some well-placed observers believe Swapo's military wing and its allies in the party leadership were acting without the knowledge or consent
of the movement's governing politburo as a whole; it is thought that perhaps even Swapo President Sam Nujoma was not informed of what was planned, as his
cnfused initial response to news of the incursion further suggested.
It was not until late on April 2 that Swapo - through Information Secretary Hidipo Hamutenya - released its first comment on the carnage, saying the Plan fighters
had been inside Namibia since September "avoiding armed contacts", and it was
only after being pursued relentlessly by the South Africans on April 1 that they
had stood and fought. The liberation movement then spent the rest of the week
scrambling for excuses to justify the incursion, but these came too late; the
damage had already been done.
Swapo's internal leadership, which had just returned from weeks of extensive
meetings with their exiled comrades were genuinely as stunned as everyone else
inside Namibia at the events in the far north, and could only shrug their shoulders,
disappear into their homes and take their phones off the hook when besieged by
those wanting to know what their party was playing at.
If Swapo's military leaders were acting autonomously, it is thought their
motivation was either to gain kudos for the move, or to secure extra power within
the party. If this was the case, it would not have been the first time Swapo's
military wing had acted on its own in such a way, as the detainee issue was to
prove. (see chapter 8).
Nonetheless, there was some method in the apparent madness of the April
incursion. Understandably, after years of fighting against and suffering under the
South Africans, Swapo and its cadres were far less willing than the West to accept
that Pretoria's sudden commitment to Resolution 435 was genuine. A snake might
shed its skin, but it is still a snake.
Rightly suspecting that the South Africans would use every trick it knew to
prevent it from winning the election, Swapo wanted to establish a firm foothold in
Namibia as soon after the implementation of Resolution 435 as possible. This
included having Plan based inside the country in case South African-sponsored
rebels tried to seize power the way they had in Angola, Swapo's home for those
past 12 years. With Koevoet and the SWATF still armed and highly mobilised,
such a scenario was frighteningly real.
There was a loophole in Resolution 435 which could have justified the Plan
incursion had Swapo handled the situation with the same cunning that Pik Botha
then used to turn it to South Africa's advantage. The UN plan said that Swapo
combatants and South African troops should be "confined

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to base" during the independence process, but it did not say where these bases
should have been. In a letter to the UN Secretary General in 1979, PW Botha
himself said that "'restriction to base'...does not make sense unless 'bases' also
refers to bases inside Namibia". Earlier, in a report to the UN Security Council,
the UN Secretary General had said that any Swapo forces in Namibia at the time
of a cease-fire would be "restricted to base at designated locations inside
Namibia".
However, by the time it came to sign the New York Accord, Pretoria had apparently changed its mind, and the 1988 agreement called on Angola to use its "good offices" to keep Swapo forces north of the 16th parallel during the independence process. But Swapo did not sign the New York Accord; the organisation which the UN declared - rightly or wrongly - as "the sole and authentic representative of the Namibian people" was at no stage party to the talks which determined how and when the Namibian independence plan would be carried out. As far as Pretoria was concerned, the New York Accord overrode any previous agreements, while Swapo stuck to the terms it had agreed to in Resolution 435.

Despite this discrepancy, no one tried to clarify what proved to be a fatal flaw in the peace process. In their haste to off-load the problems of south-western Africa from their new political agenda, and score a few relatively insignificant points in international diplomacy, the US and Soviet Union had by-passed representatives (and I do not mean just Swapo) of the very people whose future was at stake. South Africa was the only signatory of the New York Accord (and later the Mount Etjo agreement and Cahama "cease-fire") with a direct interest in the Namibian independence process, so it was South Africa - the very power Resolution 435 was supposed to remove from Namibia - which, out of all the interested parties, was the one able to have the greatest say. Deprived of the right to speak on behalf of the Namibian people, and with its enemy gaining such advantage, it is little wonder Swapo resorted to "invading" its own country! This was done in a desperate bid to assert its authority on an independence process the liberation movement had almost single-handedly campaigned and fought for for almost three decades.

All in the name of democracy

Just because the South Africans were committed to allowing Namibian independence to go ahead, this did not mean they would sit back and let Resolution 435 take its course. From the outset, few people doubted that Pretoria would do its utmost to make sure Swapo lost the election, the only question was how exactly the South African government would try to achieve this aim. Many people expected the South Africans to continue resorting to violent means to prevent the liberation movement from taking power. For this reason, the fatal decision to send Plan fighters into Namibia on April 1 was not seriously questioned by the majority of Swapo supporters at the time; instead the entire blame for the fighting was put on the South Africans who, it was believed, were deliberately trying to bring the independence process to a halt. However, the South African government had far more subtle plans for corrupting the independence process and undermining Swapo's supposedly straightforward passage to power.

During 1988, the number of political parties in Namibia had risen to more than forty, which was not bad for a country with a population of around only 1.5 million. As the Angolan peace talks gathered pace, rumours had surfaced in Namibia as to who would unite with whom in the advent of constitutional elections. The vast majority of parties, and certainly those which had served in the
interim government, were united in their hatred for Swapo. But the number of fronts, parties and alliances which merged and emerged by May 1989 gave the impression at least that voters would have more than a simple pro or anti-Swapo choice to make at the polls.

Most of the parties which had participated in ethnic government fell into line behind the DTA, which was chaired by former National Party stalwart Dirk Mudge and which had as President Paramount Chief of the Hereros, Kuaima Riruako, whose title was questioned by many.

Having dominated the interim government, and having a sizeable, multi-racial membership, the DTA remained the biggest opponent to Swapo. Its capitalist programme and proven leanings towards Pretoria also made the DTA the party most likely to receive South African backing. But there were other organisations preparing to contest the election which were equally opposed to Swapo. Moses Katjiuongua - whose Swanu-MPC

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party, a breakaway faction from Swanu, was another major participant in the interim government - headed the new National Patriotic Front (NPF), while one-time leading Swapo official Andreas Shipanga - detained by the liberation movement in exile on charges of leading a rebellion against the leadership and who later returned to Namibia to join the interim government - had his own Swapo-D (D for Democrats) party.

Another famous former Swapo big figure, Mburumba Kerina, had joined ranks with the head of the Rehoboth Basters, Hans Diergaardt, to form the Federal Convention of Namibia (FCN). Meanwhile, the ACN (Action Christian National), comprising mostly of members of the SWA National Party, reluctantly accepted that independence was inevitable and closed ranks to fight for the protection of white minority rights. Yet another one-time Swapo turned interim government member, Paul Helmuth, led the small and isolated Namibia National Democratic Party (NNDP).

An alliance of the Labour Party and Damara Council- both participants in ethnic government but both outspoken opponents of South African rule (the Damara Council having been allied with Swapo from until shortly before the implementation of Resolution 435) - came together under the banner of the United Democratic Front (UDF) to hold the "non-aligned" middle ground along with the Christian Democratic Alliance (CDA) of Ówambo Administration Chairperson Peter Kalangula.

Swapo and the NNF (Namibia National Front), an alliance between the remaining rump of Swanu and other small left-wing groups, completed the list of parties which managed to raise the R10 000 and 2 000 registered voters needed to be allowed to contest the election. But of these ten registered parties, only Swapo and the NNF could claim to have played no part in the various colonial structures. As in any election campaign, funding was going to have a crucial bearing on how each party fared at the polls.
In this respect, Swapo suffered setbacks even before the independence process got under way with some of the liberation movement's major donors announcing that they were either cutting or - as in the case of the Soviet Union - completely withdrawing funding as from the implementation of Resolution 435. With the UN also stopping any financial support to the party after April I (apart from the refugee repatriation programme and other ongoing welfare schemes), Swapo was left relying on the goodwill of hard-up African states and a few dedicated benefactors from elsewhere in the world. However, much of the money the liberation movement was able to raise was used up before the election campaign got under way. A consequence of running its struggle from exile was that Swapo possessed next to nothing inside Namibia. Being the heads of what was - at best - a semi-legal organisation, Swapo's internal leadership had done most of their work "underground", always on the move and seldom out in the open for fear of attack. Even if enough money could have been smuggled into the country for them to buy offices and equipment, it would have been pointless doing so as these would have been sabotaged by the South Africans and their agents. So, come the beginning of 1989, all Swapo had to its name inside Namibia was a small "office" in the Katutura Community Centre and a handful of "peoples' cars.

With the implementation of Resolution 435, Swapo had but a few months in which to rent or buy offices, houses, vehicles, office equipment and furniture for every town and village in the country in order to accommodate party workers - in particular the organisation's external operation which was being uprooted and brought to Namibia from centres around the world - needed to fight the campaign. So, in early 1989, Swapo Properties Pty swung into action, and by May the party had secured most of the property and equipment it needed, including a multi-storey office block in central Windhoek to be used as the party's headquarters. But it had been an expensive exercise, not helped by the fact that Namibian property prices had remained buoyant despite the slump in the economy. To purchase the party headquarters alone cost in excess of R1 million, and by the time the election campaign eventually got under way, Swapo's coffers were already looking decidedly empty. The DTA, on the other hand, appeared to be awash with cash. Despite accumulating a significant amount of real estate and equipment during its 12 years of open existence inside Namibia, the DTA still embarked on a buying spree which made Swapo's attempt to make up for lost time look like a trip to the corner shop for a few groceries. Prime site offices were opened in the centre of almost every town, village and settlement, while the DTA's spacious headquarters in what had been the Grand Hotel in Windhoek was equipped with all the latest technology, in particular the party's media unit which was filled with computer and hi-tech video machinery. A cool R4.5 million went on buying the party its own jet plane, while one exasperated car buyer was told he would have to wait for his new bakkie as the DTA had bought up the supplier's entire stock of more than 200 four-wheel-drive vehicles which each cost in the region of R40 000. From late 1988 right up until
the day the election result was announced, a torrent of good quality publicity material - posters, T-shirts, videos, badges, hats, tea sets, flags etc. - flooded out of the party's "Grand Sentrum" and were given away free to party supporters, as well as impoverished families who welcomed the T-shirts as an extra layer of clothing.

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The tens of thousands of Rands thought to have been paid out by the party to transport its supporters from all comers of the country to Windhoek Airport for the arrival of Martti Ahtisaari was not a one-off expenditure, but was repeated for every major rally held by the Alliance.
Those attending these rallies would gather under the party's massive red, blue and white marquee, and receive free food and drink to supplement the diet of political rhetoric. While the extent of the DTA's blank-cheque spending was clear, not so apparent was the source of the money which made it all possible. It was suspected that the South African government was a major contributor to DTA funds, but no one could prove it, with the party saying only that its cash came from "business sources" both inside and outside Namibia.
It was an open secret that many of the country's major business people poured large sums of money into the DTA in the hope that the Alliance would beat Swapo and thus avert the implementation of socialist policies which they perceived would happen under a Swaop government. South African business concerns, too, were a significant source of DTA funding, as they were keen that the Namibian economy be kept out of the hands of a Swaop government which would try to reduce dependency on the South African market, as well as one which would encourage socialist-inspired black liberation south of the Orange River. Meanwhile, the United States and Germany were the two biggest sources of overseas funding for the DTA.
Here powerful right-wing politicians made sure their friends in big business realised the need for a government in Namibia which would be sympathetic to the continued exploitation of the country's resources by multi-national companies, not to mention foreign landowners. The DTA was not the only anti-Swaop party to benefit from the invisible money well. Mysterious "foundations", all with worthy-sounding" constitutions but dubious connections, sprang up to quench the funding thirsts of many smaller parties, which were then able to create impressions of importance inversely proportional to the minuscule crowds which attended their meetings. Yet more newspapers started publishing, three in June alone boosting the total of newspapers in Namibia at the time to 11; of these, only two were at all sympathetic to Swaop.
One new arrival on the publishing scene to make a noticeable impact was a newspaper produced by the Academy Students Organisation (ASO), a small but highly organised group of vehemently anti-Swaop students based at the Windhoek Academy.
The ASO newspaper was put together using sophisticated desk-top computer publishing, printed on expensive, glossy paper and distributed free of charge to students at the Academy. ASO, too, would not reveal
where its funding came from, but the organisation's newspaper bore the hallmarks of an organ of the DTA.

Within months of the paper's publication, ASO had overturned the majority held by the Swapo-supporting students' union Nanso on the Academy's student council. But such is politics. Money talks, and Swapo was beginning to pay for the delayed start to its election campaign caused by the bloody fighting of the April incursion. There was nothing wrong with the opposition parties receiving so much money; limits on party spending were not laid down in Resolution 435 or any subsequent election laws. However, proof that money was coming from the South African government would have dented the recipients' credibility and caused major international embarrassment for Pretoria which had pledged to be impartial during the independence process. But the South Africans were well used to that, and until the unlikely event of someone producing hard evidence, one could only speculate. Besides, money alone was not going to defeat Swapo, so what other strategies had Pretoria secretly designed to pull the carpet from under the liberation movement’s feet?

The clue was right there in Resolution 435, which stipulated that the colonial regime would continue to govern Namibia - under the watchful eye of Untag - until independence. The same police and civil service which had enforced South Africa's apartheid rule would remain in place, under the direct control of the South African Administrator-General, who would assume overall administrative powers although this would be balanced by those of the UN Special Representative.

This part of Resolution 435 was a watering down of the earlier UNSC Resolution 385 which demanded that Untag should take over administration of the country during the independence process. On the insistence of the South Africans, Resolution 435 had then given the peacekeeping force the role of observers. Of course, the South African government swore solemnly that its representative, the AG, and the police and civil service under his command would put the past behind them and act in a completely impartial manner.

Even under South African law - in theory at least - an accused person is innocent until proven guilty, and until evidence to the contrary was produced, the South Africans had to be given the benefit of the doubt. In this case, however, proof of Pretoria's devious designs was uncovered, contained in a document which came into the possession of The Namibian in May. We arrived at work one morning in late May to find an unmarked brown envelope pushed under the front door to the office. Inside was a photocopy of minutes of a meeting of the "SWA Security Council" held on September 7, 1988 at the army headquarters in Windhoek.

Chairing the meeting was DTA Chairperson Dirk Mudge, who was then interim government Minister of Governmental Affairs. Also present were other prominent members of the colonial regime, including the now-NPF President Moses Katjiuonua, ACN leader Kosie Pretorius and the DTA's Andrew Matjila, while
apologies were received from Swapo-D President Andreas Shipanga and the DTA's Fanuel Kozonguizi. Joining the politicians around the conference table were civil service heads of all the interim government departments, as well as Major General Willie Meyer (head of the SWATF) and other representatives of both the Namibian and the South African security establishment. Absent with leave was Swapol commissioner General Dolf Gouws and Andries Visser, then head of Mudge's government department and now the recently appointed Chief Electoral Officer for the November election. The subject of this and other NSC meetings: how to prevent Swapo from winning an independence election. There was no doubting the common purpose shared by the members of the NSC. "They (civil service chiefs) feel that the department heads and Cabinet must work together as a team to give urgent attention to an overall strategy (to stop Swapo)."

The idea was to "present South Africa with a long-term plan" and for the latter to come up with money to fund it. The DTA's Andrew Matjila said: "It is important that it must now be worked out how to mobilise the people and discredit Swapo while boosting the internal parties." His party chairperson echoed this point by saying that he had no greater wish than to have "all political parties stand together in the fight against Swapo". Moses Katjiuongua was in agreement too. "The perception that only Swapo can do something for this country must be eliminated," he said.

"Therefore everyone around this table should get together as soon as possible to discuss these matters in depth." As for South Africa's role, Mudge said Pretoria had two options: either to go back to war or the "democratic" option, Mudge advising the latter.

A Brigadier Gert van Niekerk agreed and said the South African government wanted "SWA" to become independent "as soon as possible", but added that Pretoria wanted a "friendly" government to be elected. Giving an indication as to what the nature of such a "friendly" government would be, chairperson Mudge (a likely contender for President should the DTA win the election) complained during the meeting that the SWABC had broadcast Swapo's denial of the Continental Hotel bomb blast, and wanted to make sure Swapo was denied such media attention in the future.

Mudge then went on to suggest that a "propaganda strategy" be drawn up for use during the independence process. Prior to the September 7 meeting, NSC members had met with General Charles Lloyd, former head of SWATF and now the Secretary of the South African State Security Council (the shady body of advisers which, together with State President P W Botha, effectively ran South Africa), in order to "establish what could be done to beat Swapo in an election". Once the SWA NSC had drawn up a plan, funding could be sought from Pretoria, Lloyd had told delegates. Although those at the NSC meeting seemed united in their aims, there were signs that it might be difficult to keep some of the more headstrong politicians from breaking rank. Matjila felt that if the "internal parties" lost the 435 elections then
the "whites" would be to blame, while SWA Nationalist Party chief Pretorius seemed more concerned with the financial implications of the implementation of Resolution 435 and an anti-Swapo campaign. Katjiuongua, meanwhile, wanted a Namibian constitution to be drawn up before elections were held as this would cause a "climate of change which could make things very difficult for Swapo". (The whole point of elections under Resolution 435 was to democratically elect an assembly which would then draw up a constitution.) It was perhaps these kinds of differences of opinion which made Mudge remark that there were many "hard-headed leaders" who would want to go their own way, and thus split a united anti-Swapo front.

Not only did the NSC minutes implicate the entire civil service and police in a plot to rig the independence elections, and thus put into question their supposed impartiality, it also cast a huge question mark over the integrity of the AG and the man he had appointed to run the election, Electoral Officer Andries Visser. Although Visser was not present at the September 7 meeting, he would probably have attended some of the others; ten had already taken place prior to the meeting held on September 7, and more had followed. Even if Visser did not attend NSC meetings in person, he would have received the minutes - as did everyone who was reported absent. Added to which, as Mudge's head of department at the time, he could hardly have remained uninvolved in the strategy being planned.

As for the AG, his name did not appear on the minutes, but he could hardly have been ignorant of what was going on as the interim government could not sneeze without his knowing about it - every piece of interim government legislation had to receive his approval. The NSC minutes were proof of what The Namibian had maintained all along - that South Africa would try to undermine the independence process. As with the document received by the newspaper outlining police plans to impose a state of emergency almost exactly a year before, the problem was now when and how best to publish the information.

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Once again, publication carried the risk of the office being raided, the edition being banned, Gwen being detained and the paper being prosecuted. Although equally determined to publish, Gwen was slightly unsure about the consequences. Her and Mark's child was now five months old, and she could not bear the thought of having to take the baby to jail with her, or even worse, being separated for what could be months in solitary confinement. Particularly in the light of the April I fiasco, Untag was not considered strong enough to keep the South African authorities in check, so it was decided to delay publication a few days until the old security laws were scrapped, as the AG was required to do under the peace plan. For days we waited, but the AG's announcement did not come. We began to suspect that perhaps the authorities had discovered we had possession of the document and were daring us to publish while the old security laws still existed. Finally, after more than a week's delay, the AG passed the decree abolishing all security and racist legislation. Having checked down the list of scrapped laws (AG8 of 1978 was, ironically, scrapped by declaration AG8 of 1989) and seen that AG9 was included, the NSC story appeared on the front page the following
morning under the headline: "Exposed - Plan to stop Swapo at all costs". In an editorial run alongside the story, The Namibian demanded that the AG come clean about the NSC, asked whether both the AG and his Chief Electoral Officer should remain in office, and queried the implications of the NSC's plan to "stop Swapo" on the holding of a free and fair election. The story apparently caused consternation at SWA House, the Grand Sentrum and throughout every government department.

The AG, Louis Pienaar, called an urgent press conference and, flanked by an anxious looking Visser, "completely disassociated" himself from the NSC and expressed his fullest confidence in the "ability, integrity and loyalty" of his Chief Electoral Officer and the civil service. While admitting he had attended two meetings of the NSC to sort out "disagreements" between the interim government and the South African government, Pienaar said he had never been a member of the NSC nor was he involved in an anti-Swapo campaign.

The AG said the dealings of the NSC in no way compromised the impartiality of his administration as the security council had been formed by the interim government and had been dissolved along with the old regime. Civil servants simply served the government of the day, he added, and took no part in political decision making. Pienaar's faith in the civil service was not shared by some civil servants themselves. "All this talk about government servants' neutrality is bullshit," one government department head told The Namibian the following day.

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"The central government is basically sympathetic to the DTA." The top level of the civil service, he said, was full of "DTA ideologists" who, having taken part in negotiations with Untag on subjects such as the repatriation of exiles, would then report back to the DTA which would then come up with a strategy to block the plans.

"It is a fact that there are civil service heads of department who are embroiled in such issues (as the NSC)," another top civil servant told The Namibian.

"One or two are heavily involved in the political dimension in both the central government and the second tier."

According to The Namibian's sources, the security council had met until March, three months after the signing of the New York Accord and days before Untag military commander Dewan Prem Chand arrived in Namibia. Two days after The Namibian published the NSC exposé, security police arrived at our office and confiscated the document, but that was the last we heard of the case. None of the civil servants implicated in the NSC lost their jobs and the AG continued to run the country. Pienaar and Visser survived an investigation by the independent Commission into Election Malpractice which judged that, since the NSC had been dissolved prior to the start of the independence process, the case was out of the commission's jurisdiction.

What publication of the NSC minutes did achieve, however, was to make people aware of how widespread and deep-rooted anti-Swapo bias was in the establishment, and that plans had obviously been made to rig the elections. Although powerless to root out this corruption, Untag was at least forewarned
about how carefully it had to watch the authorities along every step of the
independence process.
This did not deter the South Africans - via the AG's regime - from continuing to
do its utmost to put as many obstacles as possible in the way of Swapo. As the
person running Namibia during the independence process, the AG was
responsible for passing laws governing the election. These were only passed after
having met the approval of the UN Special Representative, but the original drafts
drawn up by the AG showed either considerable ignorance about election
procedure or, as is more likely, a determination to leave this procedure open to
abuse. A prime example was the draft law governing the registration of voters
which was drawn up by the AG's office and released on April 24, a time when the
AG perhaps hoped people would be too absorbed by attempts to put the peace
process back on the tracks to take much notice of electoral legislation. What the
AG published was almost identical to the registration law used for the first interim
government elections back in 1978. It was little wonder the 1978 poll was such a
sham.

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The 1989 draft:
Made no rules about what political parties could or could not
do during the registration process.
Treated the 435 election as "just another election", as one group
of American civil rights lawyers pointed out in a lengthy
critique of the draft. "There is no evidence that consideration
has been given to the unusual importance of the election,
which will determine the nature of the future state of Namibia,"
said the lawyers.
Included no provision that registration officials - appointees
of Chief Electoral Officer Visser - should act impartially.
Allowed the South Africans to run the entire election without
any participation from Untag.
Laid down no guidelines for ensuring that people living in
isolated rural areas had the chance to register, nor for the use of interpreters to
explain registration rules to those unable to speak Afrikaans or English. Instead
the draft left it up to the
registration officers to decide where and who to register.
Made magistrates appointed by the colonial regime responsible for judging
appeals against fraudulent voter registration. One significant addition to the 1989
draft was a clause allowing for the "natural" children of anyone born in the
"territory of South
West Africa" to register to vote in the election.
This opened the way for thousands of white South Africans - the children of
former settlers, soldiers or civil servants, some of whom might not even have
visited Namibia - to vote, and yet barred participation by further thousands of
black Namibians born in Walvis Bay, which was excluded from the elections. At
one stage, the AG had suggested he would fix the voting age at 21, thus denying a
large chunk of the predominantly pro-Swapo youth the right to vote, but in the
draft the age was lowered to 18. However, people needed only to have lived in "the territory" for four years to
qualify to vote, which again embraced South Africans who had been sent to
Namibia for a standard posting in the civil service, army or police.
Meanwhile, regulations about what evidence was needed to prove that those who
registered were entitled to vote was left incredibly vague, the draft saying only
that people had to prove their eligibility by means of an "identity card" or
"otherwise, to the satisfaction of the registration officer". With no guidelines for checking voter eligibility provided, the registration

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officers - who were, remember, appointees of Mr Visser - could use their own
criteria to choose who could and could not vote. Of course, being honest and
impartial civil servants - as all the people under his command were, according to
the AG - corruption would not even enter the minds of these registration officers!
Oh yes, and speaking of Mr Visser, the draft registration law talked about the
appointment of a Chief Electoral Officer, but by the time the draft was published,
Mr Visser already had the job. The public was given 17 days to comment on the draft before negotiations
between the AG and the UN Special Representative got under way to hammer out
the final wording of the law. This chance to have a say in the law-making process
was completely alien to Namibians, and was an entitlement under the
independence plan of which few people were aware. Coinciding as it did with the
confusion in the war zone, it was a miracle that anyone managed to read the draft
law, let alone comment on it, but several organisations - notably the NUNW, the
progressive Legal Assistance Centre, the CCN and the American civil rights
lawyers - did submit their damning comments before the deadline. Nonetheless,
Louis Pienaar and his team entered the negotiations with Untag confident that
they could bluff many of their terms into the final registration law. The fact that Ahtisaari had apparently been steamrollered into allowing the
deployment of South African troops after the events of April 1, seemed to give the
South Africans confidence that they could get their way with the registration law.

Negotiations on the registration law lasted for more than a month and many of the
areas open to abuse were ironed out. The wording of the law was tightened up,
provisions made for every stage of the registration process to be monitored by
Untag officials, and many of the discrepancies over who could and could not
register removed. However, the clauses allowing children of people born in
Namibia and/or anyone who had lived in the country for four consecutive years to
register remained.

While this ensured that the children of exiles would be able to vote, it also meant
that thousands of South Africans with no intention of living in Namibia after
independence could also take part in the poll. Once voter registration started in
Namibia, full-page advertisements, placed by the South African government's
Bureau of Information, appeared in the South African press informing readers as
to who was eligible to vote in the Namibian election and where they could
register. A travel company then organised weekend coach trips to registration points in the south-east of Namibia to enable eligible South Africans to go and register.

The company, which was rumoured to have received government subsidies for its "Project Namibia", also offered cheap-rate flights on planes chartered to take people to Windhoek to register, returning to South Africa the same day. These trips - in particular the coach excursions which involved travelling in a bus for up to 15 hours in order to stand in a long queue to sign their name, spend a night in a dingy hotel, and then make the long return trip back home again - certainly did not make for a relaxing weekend break. All the same, thousands of South Africans paid their money and made the gruelling trek to register. Most saw it as their duty, doing their bit to try and prevent "South West" from falling into the hands of "the communists"; those who were prepared to be interviewed made it clear they would not be voting for Swapo when the time came to make the journey once again and cast their vote in the November election.

On a typical weekend, 60-70 per cent of people reporting to registration points in the south-eastern border region were South African. Untag dispatched 20 000 registration cards to Ariamsvlei and Noordoewer alone, deep in the sparsely populated rural south of Namibia, although an Untag official did admit these were "well in excess" of the number of cards he expected to be used.

Ironically, almost all the South Africans who registered to vote in the Namibia independence election were also entitled to take part in the South African general election which was to be held in September. Officially, slightly more than 10 000 South Africans registered to vote under the terms set out in the election law, far less than the 100 000 predicted by Swapo.

However, this figure represented those who were legally entitled to vote. It is believed many thousands more non-Namibians sneaked onto the electoral register illegally. Under the registration law, a SWA Identity Card - carried by every Namibian resident, and containing a picture and the personal details such as height, address and "population group" of the holder - was proof enough of someone's eligibility to vote. Before as well as during the independence process, soldiers serving in the South African security forces were able to obtain ID cards, even if they were not Namibian citizens.

In a circular to his troops prior to their disbandment, the commander of the army's 91 Brigade urged the soldiers, whether they were Namibian or South African, to make sure they registered to vote in the election, informing them that Namibian residency documents were "easily obtainable" from the Department of Civic Affair and Manpower.

"Even if you live in South Africa, remember that blood is thicker than water," said the commander.

"South West was good to us. South West ought to be able to depend on our support." Ominously, the commander went on to say that, should the brigade be reactivated after independence, all its force members would return to ranks.
Then, returning to the subject of the election, the commander urged his troops to work together to make sure Namibia was put in the hands of a "Christian and democratic government". If all members of the South African security forces were given the same orders, it means the 10 000 legally registered South African voters were but a fraction of the number of foreigners who made it on to the electoral register. An estimated 80 000 soldiers based in Namibia were non-Namibians, not to mention foreigners serving in the police and civil service who no doubt had the same access to ID cards as the soldiers. There were also reports of Unita members crossing from Angola into north-eastern Namibia in order to register, having been issued with ID cards by members of the South African security forces or civil servants. None of these foreigners were likely to vote for Swapo, so with an estimated 9 000 votes being needed to gain one seat in the 72-seat Constituent Assembly - the opposition parties could have been guaranteed as many as ten seats before voting even took place. All the same, this was not enough to ensure the defeat of Swapo in the polls, so the anti-Swapo alliance had also to win over the hearts and minds of the Namibian people if its plans were to succeed.

While Untag was at least empowered to keep a check on what the civil and security services were up to, it was far more difficult for the peacekeeping force to control the behaviour of the media. Sixty per cent of newspapers were either owned by or sympathetic to parties opposed to Swapo, while the fears expressed by Dirk Mudge in the NSC about the SWABC's fidelity to the opposition's campaign proved to be unfounded. Although nominally an autonomous parastatal organisation, the SWABC was nothing more than an arm of the civil service. Every influential position within the corporation, from news editors to the Director-General, was filled by people who had actively supported South Africa's colonial regime - it was a prerequisite for being appointed in the first place. As a result, the SWABC, which had a monopoly on broadcasting in Namibia, rallied to the anti-Swapo campaign, and the Namibian public was fed with suitable propaganda from the time they woke up to the time they went to bed. The leading items in news programmes were invariably statements by either the AG or one of the main opposition parties, a privilege seldom afforded to Swapo. A more subtle form of brainwashing continued in the form of films and soap operas portraying glamorous white lifestyles in Western nations, an antithesis of the reality of life experienced by most black Namibians, and contrary to the message of African nationalism being preached by Swapo. The effect this diet of media junk food had on the Namibian population was visibly displayed up when hundreds of young Katuturans attending a play about the Windhoek Massacre of December 1959 spent their time staring at the star of an Afrikaans television soap opera - who happened by chance to be in the audience - and paid not the slightest bit of attention to the re-enactment of a crucial event in the liberation struggle which was taking place on stage.
If simply seeing and listening to what the SWABC broadcast was not enough to convince you of its bias, then the liberal pro-independence lobby group NPP-435 produced statistical proof. In three reports compiled on results gained from monitoring more than 300 television and radio news broadcasts, NPP-435 found that the SWABC gave most favourable coverage to the AG and, to a lesser extent, the opposition parties, while SWAPO received a "huge share of negative publicity". "Our findings are not inconsistent with the effects of a concerted plan to discredit the (independence) settlement process and polarise the Namibian population with a view to the destabilisation of a future independent Namibia," said the report.

This was hardly surprising, the report continued, considering that the SWABC had been created out of the Windhoek office of the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), and those in charge were the same people who had supported the South African occupation, and who continued to "have the interests of the status quo at heart".

"For these SWABC decision-makers, the mere fact that Swapo had to be accommodated as just another party (in the election campaign) must have been a hard concession to make. This they did, as we have pointed out, in the most minimal way possible."

Concessions made by the SWABC chiefs included the setting up a liaison committee through which the political parties could air their grievances about the corporation, and the granting of a daily slot on all SWABC channels for Untag to give a step-by-step guide to the independence process. Meanwhile, each party in turn was given five minutes of television air time just after the main evening news to make party political broadcasts, although there was nothing as audacious as live debates between party leaders.

To cynics hardened to years of treating the SWABC with the contempt it deserved, the fact that Swapo was mentioned in broadcasts without "terrorist" being used in the same breath was seen as evidence that the SWABC was becoming less reactionary! However, these were cosmetic changes and were only brought about after heavy criticism of the SWABC from both within and outside the country, notably in the UN General Assembly. The problem was not just one of bias, but also that, after years of what NPP-435 termed as the "passive reporting of official news", staff at the SWABC did not know how to act as impartial broadcasters.

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They were state mouthpieces guided by a SWABC policy statement which long pre-dated the start of the independence process, and stated that "officials must ask themselves whether a programme or news bulletin is in the best interests of the territory and its constituent population groups". The aim of the SWABC, the policy code concluded, was to "promote the Christian faith and the Western way of life".

Every aspect of the Namibian establishment was controlled by those opposed to Swapo, even the very machinery set up to administer the elections. Fortunately Untag was there to act as an independent umpire, although the peacekeeping
force's power to enforce its judgements was limited thanks to the compromises made over the years by the Security Council. (I shudder to think what further skulduggery the South African government will be capable of in its own country, where there is no such referee to preside over the transition to democracy.) The opposition alliance also did everything it could to undermine Untag's credibility. Opposition parties, in particular the DTA, played on the UN's past support for Swapo, and every attempt was made to suggest that Untag was siding with Swapo during the independence process, although proof was distinctly lacking. For example: Kenyan Untag soldiers were said to be Plan combatants in disguise (this was disproved); the UN was accused of continuing to fund Swapo after April 1 (this also turned out to be a lie); even the fact that Untag personnel were issued with red, blue and green condoms was used as evidence of an Untag-Swapo conspiracy!

It took some time for Untag to become accustomed to the devious way in which the South Africans and its favoured opposition parties operated. The AG and his team employed the same tactics of intransigence used during the negotiations on the voter registration law at every stage of the independence process. It took almost three months for the AG and Untag to agree on the law which laid down rules for how the election and the Constituent Assembly would be run. The draft of the Constituent Assembly law even had the audacity to grant the AG the power to veto anything passed by the elected assembly, including a declaration of independence, and even the constitution itself! In the months of negotiations which followed, the talks regularly stalled, and a top legal adviser along with an African Deputy Special Representative, Botswana's Ambassador to the UN Joseph Legwaila, were sent from UN headquarters to give support to Martti Ahtisaari. The strengthened Untag team managed to win the upper hand in the end, but it took time. Similar stubborness on the part of the AG delayed the passing of the all-important amnesty needed to allow Namibia's 41 000 plus exiles to return home for the elections. This delay was a further set-back to Swapo's election

All in the name of democracy 177 campaign. As an organisation coming from exile, Swapo needed as much time as possible to return to Namibia, settle down, rediscover the country and set its campaign in motion. The fighting of April 1 had already caused one major set-back to these plans, and the agony of returning exiles was further prolonged by the drawn out negotiations on the amnesty and other legislation needed to clear the "returnees" passage home. When, in early June, the amnesty was finally declared, along with the abolition of all apartheid and security legislation, problems of Swapo's own creation were to make the election campaign an even greater uphill struggle for the liberation movement. (see chapter 8).

Postscript

As time went on, further evidence of the South African government's hidden agenda for the Namibian independence process, began to emerge (and will no doubt continueto do so). In late October 1989, shortly before the election was due
to take place, Sue Dobson, an employee of the South African government's Bureau of Information, seconded to the AG's office in Windhoek, fled to Britain claiming that she was an ANC agent. She said she had been sent to Namibia by the South African government as part of a secret "contingent" with the aim of undermining Swapo, promoting the AG and DTA, and discrediting Untag. The contingent of seven, including SADF and South African intelligence officers, was given a budget of R3.5 million and a R1 00 000 entertainment allowance with which to spread disinformation during the election campaign. One of her more specific tasks, Dobson said, was to feed information to the national and international media which contradicted the impression that a Swapo victory was inevitable, and portrayed Koevoet as a "group of ordinary, decent people...doing a great job for Swapol".

Then, more than a year after Namibia's independence, a South African agent turned "Soldier for Peace" shed further light on what the South African government had done to try and prevent Swapo taking power. Nico Basson first surfaced in Namibia at the beginning of 1989 and, as Resolution 435 got under way, he opened a media centre called the Africa Communications Project in Windhoek's Kalahari Sands Hotel. The centre - one of many to open during the independence process - provided journalists and organisations with media and conference facilities, as well as acting as an agency for disseminating and collecting information. From the outset, the project was suspected of having South African links, but Basson's centre was nonetheless used by Untag, the AG and many overseas journalists in the early days of the independence process.

Basson later joined the DTA and headed the Alliance's information department for much of the election campaign, before falling out with the party and returning to South Africa. He ventured back to Namibia in May 1991 to reveal the real nature of his work during the 435 election. In an exclusive interview, Basson told The Namibian that he had been a main component in the SADF's multi-billion Rand "Operation Agree" which aimed to ensure that the "democratic parties" - those opposed to Swapo won 70 per cent of votes in the election. The Africa Communications Project had been just part of this operation which, with a R1 million budget, was set up to feed information to, and manipulate the national and international press, while also providing the military with covert support. Basson said Operation Agree was launched at the beginning of 1989 after the South African cabinet had taken the decision to support the "democratic parties" and make sure Swapo did not win the election; virtually every party opposed to Swapo received funding from the South African government, said Basson. Sympathetic newspaper editors were recruited to a "Military Media Sub-committee" in January 1989 to co-ordinate propaganda via the printed and electronic media. In the same month, SADF chief General Jannie Geldenhuys travelled to Windhoek and, attempting to boost morale after their drubbing at Cuito
Cuanavale, told senior soldiers that "the military had won the war against Swapo and it must do everything possible to also win the political war".

The Swapo incursion of April 1, Basson said, gave the military the chance to avenge its defeat in Angola and repair its damaged image, Basson admitting to having been in the forefront of "one of the most successful information actions against Swapo".

The SADF, Basson continued, spread its tentacles into almost every aspect of the independence process: the DTA was so heavily infiltrated by members of the military "that it could have been likened to a (South African) parastatal." He said that South African agents were operating within Untag, and even one of Martti Ahtisaari's secretaries was supplying the military with information; a death list containing prominent Swapo and anti-apartheid activists was drawn up and acted upon (see Chapter 9). According to Basson, the anti-Swapo campaign during the independence process was just the "first phase" of a long-term programme of the South African government to take support away from Swapo.

"Over a period of a few years, I became aware of communication structures inside and outside the military which aimed to steer the political process in southern Africa in a certain one-sided direction," Basson said.

"These structures still exist and are maintained daily." Operation

Agree, he added, was a "dress rehearsal" for South Africa's own supposed transition to democracy.

"The state propagandists are a well-organised third force with unlimited sources of help and finance to radically change the political process in this country (South Africa). The concerns of Mandela and the ANC about the motives of the South African Government are not unjustified." Basson's reasons for going public, he said, were that in Namibia he had seen "the other side" of the "total onslaught" of communist-inspired black liberation he had been brought up to believe in, and this had given him a much more balanced perspective. As a result, he had become disillusioned with his work and opposed to the SADF's radical departure from its basic task of defending the country's borders.

"It (the SADF) turned into a propaganda monster which controlled the lives of millions through political propaganda," he said.

Basson and Dobson confirmed people's suspicions, but, because of who they were, a question mark still hung over their evidence and their motives; agents and double agents could always be triple, quadruple or quintuple agents.

However, in July 1991, at the height of South Africa's "Inkathagate" controversy, confirmation of Pretoria's involvement in the anti-Swapo alliance came from none other than South Africa's Foreign Minister Pik Botha. In a television interview, Botha admitted that his government had paid more than R100 million to parties opposed to Swapo during the Namibian independence process. (Informed sources later told The Namibian that at least R65 million of the DTA's R72 million budget for the year April 1989 to March 1990 had come directly from South African state coffers). Botha justified the funding by saying that his government was "against Swapo" as "at times we were at war with Swapo". Trying to conceal the acute
embarrassment the revelations caused his party, DTA Chairperson Dirk Mudge argued that Swapo, too, had received funding from foreign governments during the independence process, adding that the Swapo government had itself, once elected, donated money to an external party, when it gave R1 million to the ANC. What Mudge failed to mention, and as Namibian Prime Minister Hage Geingob later pointed out, was that South Africa had been put in charge of Namibia's independence elections on the understanding that it would remain impartial throughout.

The "Inkathagate" scandal which erupted when it was revealed that the South African government had secretly funded the ANC's major opponent Inkatha - was an early indication that the Pretoria regime would do its utmost to undermine the liberation movements in South Africa's transition to democracy, just as it did in Namibia.

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In response to the Inkathagate revelations, President FW de Klerk solemnly promised that his government would not use such devious tactics in future, and he demoted two prominent members of his cabinet Defence Minister Magnus Malan and Law and Order Minister Adriaan Vlok - for their part in the funding of Inkatha. But it must not be forgotten that the South African government carried out its dirty tricks campaign during the Namibian independence process in spite of signing agreements - reiterated in public time and time again in which it promised not to interfere in the 435 election. A snake might shed its skin, but it is still a snake.

Welcome home comrades

For such a vast country, Namibia was an incredibly insular place; few Namibians living inside the country had an idea of what lay beyond all but their most southern border. Yet during the liberation struggle, tens of thousands of Namibians had fled into this outside world and, in the eyes of those who stayed behind, disappeared into the unknown.

The implementation of Resolution 435 was now going to bring these exiles back home again, some for the first time in almost 30 years. Namibia's border with Angola was the most intriguing of all its boundaries. Up until Angola's liberation from Portuguese colonial rule in 1974, this border had been almost as open as that between Namibia and its colonial occupier South Africa. The Namibian-Angolan border was a false one, imposed by European emperors in 1884 and which split indigenous tribes and families in two. As a result, few northern Namibians or southern Angolans took much notice of the boundary, and wandered at will between the two countries.

Traders, too, came and went, notably Angolans who brought with them exotic food and their infamous Cuca beer which they sold to a captive northern Namibian market. Then, all of a sudden, there was the coup in Portugal in 1974 and the country's colonies were granted their independence, the Portuguese withdrawing en masse from Angola, leaving the MPLA to take power.
Portuguese settlers and Angolans flooded south into Namibia with the outbreak of civil war, and the border was then sealed as the South Africans began to wage war against the left-wing Angolan government, causing official traffic between the countries to cease.

In Kwanyama tradition, the southern Angolan region of Evale was the place where the rains are said to come from. Whereas prior to 1975, Namibians could visit this source of their life-giving rains, after 1975 the place became as inaccessible as the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow spoken about in English folklore. Now an ever-increasing tide of soldiers flowed like the flood waters across the border; the South Africans from Namibia and Swapo guerrillas from southern Angola, where the liberation movement had been allowed by the sympathetic MPLA regime to set up military bases. Civilians continuing their natural passage across the border did so at their own peril, and peasants were frequently killed or maimed in crossfire or by landmines, thus deterring others from making similar journeys.

Angola's liberation encouraged Namibians to step up their own campaign to rid their country of its colonial power, the South Africans responding in typically brutal fashion. As a result of the authorities' clampdown, thousands of Namibians - in particular the youth which, as in South Africa, spearheaded the protests - fled the country, the majority crossing into Angola to join Swapo in exile. Many of those who fled made transient returns as guerrillas, while others remained in refugee camps, or were despatched around the world to study and promote the cause of the liberation movement.

Except for inhabitants of the far north who harboured Plan guerrillas, the families and friends of those who fled heard little or no news about their loved ones, and even less about the places in which they now lived. Exiles were wary about writing home as letters were invariably intercepted and relatives persecuted, while news censorship gave Namibians a very one-sided view of the outside world, and prevented them from hearing much about what Swapo was doing or saying in exile.

Even the concerted effort made by The Namibian to fill this information void was hampered by non-existent telephone and telex links with most other African countries, and the extreme cost of making contact elsewhere in the world. So the paper, too, had to rely on South African agencies for foreign news coverage. All this made it easy for the South Africans to spread rumours about what was happening to those in exile, and some Namibians genuinely believed that those who fled the country became baby-eating cannibals or horrific monsters. For most people living in Namibia, the real world stopped at the Angolan border, and what lay beyond had become a figment of speculation and imagination.

With the signing of the New York Accord and the start of the independence process came anticipation of the exiles' return. Hopes of seeing long-lost sons, daughters, friends and relatives were raised higher than perhaps ever before, and preparations were made for their homecoming; food and clothes were made or
bought, spaces cleared in homes, and photographs taken from albums once more and proudly passed around. Discussions about exiled loved ones also raised numerous unanswered questions; what would so and so look like? How rich had they become whilst living "outside"? Did they now have children?

It was also a time when old wounds were re-opened for those who suspected or knew that exiled relatives had died during the struggle. The expectation and uncertainty became agony when the fighting of April

Welcome home comrades 183 looked set to scupper the exiles' homecoming, and parents were left wondering whether their children were amongst the hundreds of Plan combatants gunned down on the threshold of liberation. Although the derailed independence process was set back on the tracks in early May, the tortuous waiting game continued as Untag and the Administrator-General haggled over the amnesty and abolition of discriminatory laws which would make it possible for exiles to return to an apartheid-free country without fear of arrest.

The AG, Louis Pienaar, refused to abolish AG8 of 1978, arguing that the "political component", the homeland governments, could be removed without dismantling the administrations and sacking all the South African-appointed civil servants. Untag, on the other hand, argued that AG8 was "based entirely on racially discriminatory principles" and so should be completely scrapped before the first exiles were repatriated. Nor could the two sides agree about the extent of an amnesty for exiles, most of whom by simply leaving the country without official clearance had committed a crime under existing laws, not to mention supposed crimes of "terrorism" and "communism" carried out before or after fleeing the country.

The weeks dragged on as Untag and the AG failed to come to an agreement as to what constituted a political crime, Pienaar insisting that some "crimes" carried out for political reasons were not pardonable.

A security force backlash following the April fighting also made it unsafe for the exiles to return home at this time. The agreement reached between South Africa, Angola and Cuba at Mount Etjo on April 9 made no provision for the immediate return to base of members of the South African security forces released to counter the April 1 incursion of Swapo guerrillas. Once all Plan combatants were judged to have returned to their bases north of the 16th parallel in Angola, the demobilisation of SADF and SWATF units in Namibia did get under way, but with one important exception Koevoet.

Resolution 435, which was drawn up before Koevoet was founded, called for the disbandment of all "ethnic and paramilitary" units during the independence process, but the South Africans argued that Koevoet was part of the Swapol, so need not be demobilized. Members of the counterinsurgency force continued to wreak havoc in the far north (see chapter 9), making conditions far from suitable for the return of exiles who had fled the country to escape the rampaging security forces in the first place.
The repatriation of exiles was due to get under way at the end of May, but with Koevoet carrying on as they had left off during the war, and with no amnesty agreed upon, the repatriation process had to be postponed.

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Inside Namibia, people grew more and more agitated as each day passed without news of when the exiles would return. In its editorial of June 2, The Namibian pointed out that the "incessant delays" were causing a "feeling of virtual hopelessness" amongst Namibians about the independence process. Further postponement of the exiles' repatriation would result in the postponement of the independence election itself - which was then scheduled to take place during the first week of November - and this might cause Namibians to relapse into "the state of negative apathy and pessimism which characterised the decade since the adoption of the settlement plan".

Apathy, however, was not a word which appeared in the dictionary of most Namibian youths, and students in the far north, who were bearing the brunt of Koevoet's continued existence, resorted to tactics which had proved so effective the year before. At the end of May, students at Ongwediva Teacher Training College started boycotting classes, and were quickly followed by tens of thousands of pupils from schools throughout the region. The students' union Nanso told the authorities that their members would only return to their studies once all ex-Koevoets had been removed from police units in the far north. The AG responded by giving the students until May 26 to re-register at their schools; those who failed to do so would be suspended for the rest of the school year. Pienaar's ultimatum was ignored, and by May 30, almost all the region's 518 schools and colleges had been affected by the boycott, which received the backing of both parents and teachers.

To add to the AG's problems, almost every black teacher in the Kavango went on strike in the first week of June to protest at the suspension of seven colleagues for supposedly taking part in "political (i.e. pro-Swapo) activities". In Angola, exiles were becoming increasingly apprehensive about returning home. A delegation of officials from six Swapo refugee camps had visited Namibia at the beginning of May to finalise arrangements for the repatriation programme, and they painted a far from rosy picture when they reported back to their fellow exiles several weeks later. During their visit, the six delegates had not dared to venture from their hotel unless in the presence of UN officials, and had refused to pay a courtesy call on the AG. The issues the six had raised with Untag reflected exiles' fear at returning to a country still controlled by the South Africans, the delegation demanding that at no stage should members of the AG's staff be involved in the repatriation process, which was to be administered by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Namibian Council of Churches (CCN). Addressing exiles at the Viana Transit Centre in Angola on their return from Namibia, the delegation still seemed to be uneasy about the arrangements, even though they assured their audience that Untag and
CCN personnel would keep a round-the-clock guard on all reception centres in Namibia once the repatriation process got under way.

There was a loud murmur of disapproval when it was revealed that one of the three reception centres was at the SADF's Grootfontein base which the returning exiles would have to share with South African soldiers and the latter's war machines. Having fled into the unknown of neighbouring countries for sanctuary during the liberation struggle, exiles were now faced with having to return into an equally daunting unknown - their own motherland.

When it came to having relatives and friends in exile, those working at The Namibian were no exception. Like hundreds and thousands of their compatriots, they too were waiting for the exiles to return so that they could at least find out about - but hopefully be re-united with - brothers, sisters, cousins and friends who had left the country, some as many as fifteen years beforehand, and from whom they had heard little or nothing since.

Towards the end of May, the newspaper received a telex from Swapo headquarters in London asking that a reporter and photographer be sent to Luanda to cover a series of "important" events. For fear of alerting the South Africans to what was planned, more details could not be provided, but Rajah and John Liebenberg made the 24 hour trip, flying to Angola via Johannesburg and Harare together with a handful of internalSwapo officials.

A few days later, reporter Sarah Johannes was looking through photographs the two had sent back from Angola when she suddenly gave a shriek, jumped up from her desk and started running around the office. "It's him! It's him!" Sarah shouted, waving in the air a photograph of Plan fighters parading at a camp near the southern Angolan town of Lubango. "We thought he was dead, but here he is. Oh this is such good news!" Sarah was besieged by curious colleagues as she pointed excitedly to one of the combatants pictured lined up and singing freedom songs.

"It's him, I'm sure it's him," Sarah repeated, each time stopping to re-examine the photograph as if she could not believe her eyes.

The young fighter she had recognised was a dear friend with whom she had grown up and been to school with in her village in the far north. He had gone into exile in 1980, but no one had heard from him, and he had long since been presumed dead. Now here he was, alive and well, singing songs of liberation in Angola, ready to return home as soon as the word was given.

Other members of staff started sorting through the pictures, looking anxiously for any sign of their friends or relatives and desperately hoping for Sarah's good fortune. Some people recognised familiar faces, others were not so lucky and returned to their work, inquiring expectantly when the next batch of John's photo's were due to arrive.

Gollo, my colleague in the layout department, spent a long time sifting slowly through the photographs as if trying hard to keep his hopes from rising to high. He dwelt reflectively on one photograph in particular, a picture of women combatants lined up alongside their male comrades. "Perhaps my sister is amongst this lot," Gollo murmured, half to himself, half to me as I peered over his shoulder. His
sister had gone into exile in the early’70s. She had studied in East Germany and then the United States, after which the family had lost contact with her as if she had dropped off the face of the earth. "Perhaps she will come back with the returning exiles once the amnesty is passed?" I suggested. My friend paused and thought for a few seconds. Obviously he was not convinced. "Yes, maybe," he sighed. "But somehow I don't think so."

On June 5 came the news everyone had been waiting for; finally the AG and UN Special Representative had agreed on an amnesty, and had drawn up a list of security and discriminatory laws to be abolished or changed. In all, 36 laws were scrapped and a further 10 amended. One noticeable omission was AG8, which allowed for the ethnic government system. (This was partly abolished later after further negotiations between Untag and the AG, although civil servants kept their jobs as the ethnic administrations became amorphous local authorities, which were not fully dismantled until after independence.) But the list did bring an end to detention without trial, compulsory national service in the SWATF, dusk to dawn curfew in the former war zone, the banning in Namibia of publications etc. outlawed by the South African censors, as well as the Terrorism Act, Unlawful Organisations Act, AG9 and other similarly draconian security laws. This in turn made way for the start of what was billed as the biggest airlift and repatriation of refugees in the history of Africa and the UN respectively. In all, slightly more than 41,000 exiles were to be returned to Namibia from 41 countries around the world aboard 452 UN-chartered planes in time to register to vote in the election.

The first plane carrying "returnees" arrived at Windhoek airport at noon on Monday June 12. Despite a call by the UNHCR for people not to go to the airport, a crowd of several thousand people had gathered outside the gates of the aerodrome by the time the Zambian Airways DC-10 jet liner touched down. Most of the crowd was dressed in the red, blue and green of Swapo, but some DTA supporters were there too, the opposing groups brought together by the prospect of catching a glimpse of relatives and friends they hoped would be aboard the flight. Strict security kept the crowd outside the gate while only a few officials and accredited journalists were allowed anywhere near the runway. As the first jet touched down, onlooking airport workers dressed in their oily blue overalls punched the sky with clenched fist power salutes. Everyone then held their breath as the plane taxied off the runway and came to a halt in front of the terminal building.

The aircraft's door opened and the gangway steps were wheeled into position. There was a pause, then Swapo central committee member Dr Nickey Jymambo emerged dressed in flowing African robes and raised his arms triumphantly high above his head before descending the steps onto Namibian soil for the first time in 26 years. He was followed by a stream of women, children and men clutching their bags and looking around them apprehensively at what were, to many, completely strange surroundings. As they walked across the tarmac towards the
terminal building, the arrivals responded to the cheers and applause from the airport workers and waiting Swapo officials with power salutes, nervously at first but growing with confidence with each step they took. Stern-faced policemen looked on at a distance.

UN High Commissioner for Refugees Nicholas Bwakira, a large, jovial looking man, his light grey suit and sunglasses glinting in the sun, ambled across to the new arrivals, took the first child he came to by the hand and led her into the terminal building. As the returnees waited here patiently to register and collect their luggage, they were surrounded by journalists shooting questions and flash guns at them in rapid-fire succession. After so much speculation and secrecy surrounding the exiles, everyone was curious to see what these people were actually like. The word "refugee" immediately conjured up images of starving, ragged destitutes, yet these Namibian refugees looked incredibly healthy. One of the more patronising descriptions offered in the international media was made by the correspondent of the New York Times who remarked that, "unlike many of Africa's refugees, the first 150 in Namibia looked well-fed and clothed...some even carried shiny stereo cassette recorders"!

Faced with the media barrage, many of the returnees were too taken aback to say anything, but others spoke of their mixed feelings at being home. Reihalde Nepando, who was returning having gained a Masters degree in education, said she was encouraged by the "big welcome" she and her fellow exiles had been given. Since leaving her village in the far north in 1974 and going into exile, Nepando had never been in touch with her family, and she thought she would have difficulty locating her parents. Muhao Geoffrey was also unsure whether or not he would find his relatives still alive. He had left his village in the Caprivi in 1968 at the age of 12. Only his mother had been alive at that time, but he had not been in touch with her since leaving.

Many of the adult returnees expressed anxiety not only about finding their relatives and somewhere to live, but also the prospects of getting work, even though most came back having acquired at least one qualification or skill. For all the children who arrived aboard the flight, this was their first time "home", having been born and brought up in exile. Once they had boarded waiting buses and were being driven from the airport through the dry Namibian countryside towards the reception centre, the youngsters' gazed wide-eyed out of the window as they took in the sights which now coloured the images of Namibia they had been given by their parents.

As the convoy of buses drove through the airport gates, the crowd waiting outside surged forward and swamped the vehicles as people shouted and sung greetings, waved placards and stretched to see if they recognised any of the returnees. Many did and were beside themselves with excitement, screaming and dancing as tears of joy streamed down their faces.
Dobra reception centre was built in the grounds of a Roman Catholic mission school just outside Windhoek, nestling under the rocky hills which stretched away to the north of the capital, a few kilometres off the main highway to Okahandja. The school's dusty playing field had disappeared under row after row of dark green tents, makeshift ablution blocks, and a large water tower, all surrounded by a wire security fence. From early in the morning of the 12th, students at the school had been preparing to welcome the returnees.

Around mid-afternoon, a cloud of dust was seen rising from the next valley and minutes later a white UN Land Cruiser flying the blue and white UN flag sped over the brow of the hill, followed by three coaches which raced along the winding dust road towards the school. Pupils rushed to the roadside and shouted and cheered, holding aloft banners welcoming their "brothers and sisters", power saluting in time to a chorus of freedom songs.

Smiles appeared on the weary faces of the returnees who gave tired clenched-fist salutes as they disembarked from the buses and formed another orderly queue, this time to register at the camp office. Those who had followed the convoy from the airport were prevented by Untag officials from getting close to the reception centre, and had to wait at the Dobra turn-off on the highway alongside a red, blue and white tent displaying DTA posters and the message: "The DTA welcomes you". Here DTA officials remained on a 24-hour vigil throughout the repatriation period, serving as an early reminder to the returnees that Swapo was not the only party fighting the election.

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Arriving at Dobra had added significance for Swapo's Dr Iyambo, who had been a pupil at the school before going into exile. But like all those returning, Iyambo's nostalgia covered deep-seated fears about what lay beyond the protective surrounds of the reception centre. Unless Koevoet was disbanded and Untag kept a closer eye on Swapol, the forthcoming election would be a mockery, Dr Iyambo told reporters. Even as he spoke, Koevoet was continuing with its old "search and destroy" tactics, he said. "No one can convince me that the commanders of these murderous gangs will change overnight," he added.

The area of the country Dr Iyambo particularly had in mind was his home region Owambo, and it was here, shortly after 14h00 on June 12, that another plane load of returnees touched down, this time at the former South African military air base at Ondangwa.

From the early hours of the morning, people had begun to gather outside the airbase and along the road leading to the reception centre 20 or so kilometres away at Ongwediva. By the time the UN-chartered cargo plane carrying 95 exiles touched down, the crowd had swelled to several thousand, and shouts of "Viva Swapo! Viva Namibia!" filled the air. Young children dressed in red, blue and green danced alongside their elders, while women ululated and cheered. Then the noise subsided and a tense hush hung over the throng as everyone waited for the first sign of those who had just arrived. Hidden from the crowd's view behind the airbase's earth and wire
defences, the door of the plane swung open and out came the returnees, each one waving a small Swapo pennant as they filed across the runway behind a woman who held aloft a portrait of Swapo President Sam Nujoma.

On the tarmac to greet them was a small group of priests, nuns, nurses and other church workers involved in the repatriation programme, some of whom wept openly with joy at seeing the exiles safely return. Groups of policemen dressed in their distinctive grey Swapol uniforms stood watching in the background, with disgust written across their scowling faces.

Having disembarked, the returnees were led into an aircraft hangar, which until recently had housed South African fighter jets, where they registered and climbed aboard coaches ready to be taken to the reception centre. As the buses drove out of the airbase gates, the waiting crowd erupted into cheers, songs and power salutes once more. All along the highway, people emerged from their cuca shops, huts and mahangu fields to greet the returnees with shouts of "mweya keumbo oohailwa" ("welcome home comrades!").

Another huge crowd was gathered at the reception centre and people in their thousands pressed against the perimeter fence to watch the returnees climb down from the buses. Having registered, some of the new arrivals came to the fence looking for people they knew. There were emotional scenes as people hugged each other through the wire, laughing and crying at the same time, barely able to believe that they were together again. Members of the security forces kept a low profile during the first day of repatriation in the far north. But once the camera crews and journalists had gone, members of Koevoet and Swapol came out from their bases and maintained a menacing presence around the reception centre and airbase as more planeloads of returnees arrived.

Casspirs roared up and down the road in front of the crowds which continued to gather each day, while army helicopters swooped overhead and plain-clothed security police in discreet vantage points trained their long-lens cameras on those inside the reception centre.

Meanwhile, less than 100 km away on the Namibian-Angolan border, at Beacon 16 to the west of Oshikango, a group of very different refugees had started arriving in Namibia. By June 12, an estimated 1 500 Angolans had already crossed the border seeking safety, food and shelter having fled the increasingly fierce fighting between Fapla and Unita, and more were arriving each day. Many of these refugees were malnourished and were suffering from malaria, eye infections and other illnesses.

Officials of the Owambo Administration had provided the fleeing Angolans with maize meal and tents, and had asked the UNHCR to take responsibility for the refugees, but the South African authorities made it clear that they would not be allowed to remain in Namibia for long. The plight of the Angolan refugees passed virtually unnoticed in Namibia, where everyone was absorbed by the return of the country's own refugees.
In the weeks and months which followed the first arrivals, emotional reunions were daily occurrences throughout the country. Day after day, people flocked to the reception centres to seek their relatives amongst each new batch of returnees; many were rewarded for their efforts, others left disappointed, to return again the next day in the hope that their luck would change. The Namibian, too, facilitated its fair share of reunions, returnees coming to the office in the hope that someone there might know of the whereabouts of their relatives.

"What do you mean 'what am I doing in Windhoek?'", one returnee told her startled sister over the phone one afternoon. "I've come home!" The two chatted in a mixture of English and Oshiwambo, the latter - the returnee's mother tongue - proving to be a little rusty at first. She had not been in touch with her family since going into exile in 1974, but the conversation with her sister was as if they had seen each other just a few weeks beforehand.

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The returnee carried a sleeping baby, not strapped to her back as most African women carried small children, but in a sling on her chest. Her straightened hair and western clothes also betrayed her returnee status, as did the way she behaved; she was tense, she appeared unsure about what to do, and was wary about what she said and to whom she said it. The woman asked about her mother, to be told that she was ill and in hospital. The returnee was quiet for a moment as the horrible thought of the mother dying before she had a chance to see her flashed across the woman's mind.

"Get the family organised to come down here, but I must come and see my mother. Tell her I will come to see her soon... with her grandchild."

In early August, Sarah Johannes received a message that she should go to Dobra reception centre as her brother was returning home that day. After months of waiting, Sarah and her family had given up hope of ever seeing the brother again. He had gone into exile shortly before the South Africans raided Cassinga, and the family believed he had been killed in the massacre. Nonetheless, Sarah and her family went to Dobra and were directed to the tent where the brother was supposed to be staying.

"I am looking for my brother," Sarah asked the man she found sitting inside the tent.

"Who's asking?" the man replied. Sarah gave her name, and for a moment the man just stared at her. Slowly he rose to his feet and stepped outside the tent, not taking his eyes off the 25-year-old woman standing in front of him.

"But I thought you were still 13!" the man said shaking his head in disbelief. It was only then that Sarah realised the man she had been speaking with was none other than her brother. He was no longer the gangly youth she remembered, but rather a strapping man, matured by years of military service in Plan and time spent studying for a degree in law. Sarah's brother was by no means the first combatant to return; former guerrillas had been amongst the first arrivals, demobbed and coming home as civilians. At first the ex-fighters were discreet about their identity, not knowing how the South African authorities and opposition parties would react to their presence so soon
after the April incursion. But word soon spread around the townships as the former combatants, settling into their new surroundings, became the toast of shebeens and township bars across the country.

Having received confirmation of the fighters’ return, The Namibian gave the news front page coverage with a bright red headline "Plan is back". On seeing in a Windhoek shop what he presumed to be news that Plan fighters had once again crossed from Angola into Namibia, something

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which would have probably put an end to the independence process, one burly red-necked white man seized a copy of the newspaper in question and started reading avidly.

His look of delight soon changed to one of outrage when he realised that the guerrillas had come home legitimately as civilians, and the man threw the paper down in disgust before stomping out of the shop. The South Africans had expected the returning ex-Plan fighters to immediately regroup in the far north, put on their old camouflage battle dress and parade around the region in a bid to bolster support for Swapo.

They could not have been more wrong. Those former combatants who went straight home did so quietly and modestly like other returnees, and quickly became involved in conventional electioneering, using words rather than a show of strength to try and persuade people to vote for Swapo.

Many ex-combatants did not go to their home areas at all, but went to serve in Swapo campaign teams elsewhere in the country. There was nothing jingoistic about the homecoming of one ex-combatant I gave a lift to when, in August, I made a trip to the far north, my first since the fighting of April.

As we approached Oshivelo gate, I became instinctively tense. The last time I had been there, the place was crawling with soldiers. But now it was deserted except for a couple of Department of Agriculture officials who were carrying out routine checks on livestock. It was bizarre to think that, a few months before, we would have been thrown in jail had the identity of my passenger been discovered. Then he was a "terrorist", now he was a straightforward Namibian like everyone else.

The combatant could not speak a word of English, only his native Oshikwanyama and some Portuguese he had picked up in Angola. He stared out of the window as we drove northwards, transfixed by the flat countryside: the villages, a mish-mash of traditional huts and iron shacks; the villagers, men, women and children teeming around the cuca stores or returning from the fields with firewood and other bundles balanced on their heads; the recently harvested mahangu fields, remaining dry stalks lying in the sandy soil ready to be collected and used as building material; the old military camps, with their abandoned gun towers and sandbag defences still intact; and the vehicles on the road.

As we approached Ondangwa, we met Casspirs thundering along the road, the occupants dressed in grey Swapol uniforms rather than Koevoet's khaki combat gear, their heavy weapons now tucked out of view. As each Casspir approached, my passenger shrank back in his seat as if he was still in the bush and trying to
merge with the undergrowth. Even without the guns, the Casspirs and those aboard were a frightening sight, the roar of the

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turbo engine and the whine of the huge wheels on the tarmac being enough to conjure up all the memories of Koevoet and the war. Yet so much, too, had changed. Swapo flags now flew from almost every tree, whilst children gave power salutes to each and every car which passed them by.
The police were still likely to beat you up for being a Swapo supporter, but now at least the people of the far north had time and the law on their side. With the return of exiles, northerners had at last sensed that independence was in sight, and this in turn had led to a new spirit of open defiance amongst the people, which was no doubt enhanced by the fact that the remaining security forces no longer had the curfew, security legislation and their heavy weaponry to hide behind.
I dropped the ex-combatant at the turning to Oshikango from where he was to hitch a lift to his village not far from the Angolan border. It was clear that, even after travelling together for seven hours, he still did not trust me. Nonetheless, the freedom fighter gave me a wave as I drove away, leaving him at the side of the road, clutching a small suitcase which contained all his worldly belongings.
"Welcome home comrade," I thought as he disappeared from my rear view mirror.
Whilst loaded with political significance, the first few days of the repatriation programme belonged to the families which were reunited. Politics, however, quickly regained centre stage when the exiled Swapo leaders selected to head the party's election campaign arrived home on Sunday June 18, six days after the first returnees.
Although President Sam Nujoma was not amongst them, the group contained many prominent names, including Hage Geingob, who was returning after 27 years in exile to be Swapo Election Director, Theo-Ben Gurirab, the party's Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Libertine Amathila, the Secretary for Health and one of the few women members of the party's ruling politburo, and the oft-quoted Hidipo Hamutenya, Secretary for Information and Publicity.
All had been out of the country for 20 years or more, and although almost every Namibian knew their names and their faces, very few had ever seen them in the flesh.
Thousands took the first opportunity they had and converged on Windhoek airport in order to greet their returning leaders. Police and Untag officials were out in force as the chanting and singing crowd gathered outside the airport gates and looked expectantly into the clear blue sky, watching for the first sign of an approaching plane. Speakers addressed the crowd from a stage erected near the gate, and musicians added to the festive mood.

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It was obvious the police were in no mood for partying, though, and they remained stern-faced and brusque throughout. The leaders were due to arrive at
around 15h00, but as the afternoon dragged on, there was still no sign of them, and the crowd began to grow impatient.

Angry groans received an announcement that the plane from Zambia had been delayed by several hours, and a rumour shot around the crowd that the South Africans were not allowing the plane to land. As the sun began to set, there was still no sign of the leadership and the rally organisers began to fear that, should the crowd return home after dark, they could be attacked on the way. (Earlier in the day, a bus carrying Swapo supporters to the airport had been shot at by a group of whites).

Shortly after 08h00, with the light rapidly fading and still no word of the plane's arrival, the crowd was urged to go home. Thousands reluctantly did as they were asked, but a few hundred remained, and were able to catch a glimpse of the leadership after the Zambian Airways jet finally touched down about an hour later. Hage Geingob was the first to descend the aircraft steps, and as he reached the bottom, he knelt down and kissed the tarmac amidst a storm of photographers' flash lights. Geingob and his colleagues were then driven to Windhoek in a cavalcade of cars and bakkies, complete with police and Untag escort.

The leaders' first port of call was the Kalahari Sands Hotel where they were to give a press conference. A Swapo press conference in itself was a novelty to those Namibian journalists used to the undercover tactics which the liberation movement's internal leadership had needed to use in the past, and the luxury hotel's conference room was a far cry from the township living rooms where most of us were used to gaining information from the organisation. This was not the only irony of the evening.

Hotel guests and Windhoek's white elite - brought up to believe Swapo's exiled leaders were a bunch of gun-toting, baby-eating, hairy heathens - barely looked up from their cocktails as the returning leaders swept through the hotel foyer, dressed in their three-piece suits, designer shoes and clutching patent leather attaché cases.

Black hotel staff stopped cooking and serving guests, and sneaked into the back of the conference room to catch a glimpse of their leaders.

"It's good to be back home," Geingob told his audience with a huge grin. "But seeing the South African policemen at the airport, I realise that many things are still the same as when we left!"

Geingob went on to emphasise that Swapo was now committed to the principle of Namibia having a mixed economy with no wholesale nationalisation of industry and agriculture. The aim was to make the whites stay on in Namibia and not leave, as they had done when other African countries had gained independence.

Welcome home comrades 195 taking with them their money and their skills. Swapo wanted everyone to put the past behind them and concentrate instead on reconciliation and forgiveness. The press conference over, the leadership disappeared into various suburbs of the city to enjoy their first night back home in surroundings they would not have dreamt of when they had left, leaving people to ponder over what they had just
seen and heard. Everyone, regardless of their politics, had found the Swapo leadership to be not quite what they expected. During the next few days, the leadership dined at various restaurants and houses around the capital, being reunited with old friends and family, and meeting with people of influence. A courtesy call was made to SWA House where the Swapo chiefs met the AG, posing for photographs on the way in, the shots of these sophisticated figures standing in front of the colonial mansion no doubt raising a few eyebrows in the white suburbs and plenty of wry smiles in the townships.

In between engagements, the leadership was taken on a guided tour of Katutura, chauffeured around by trade union officials in Swapo's newly purchased fleet of German cars. Seeing the convoy of white vehicles and the besuited occupants, most Katuturans thought this was yet another UN delegation, so ignored them. In the meantime, the new Swapo headquarters was being fitted out ready for use. Metal detectors were installed at the entrance, the building was surrounded by a tall chain-linked fence topped with razor wire, and former Plan fighters guarded the gates.

At the time, the top two floors of the building were still being occupied by various accountancy and insurance firms, and there was a near riot when these companies' white members of staff realised who they were sharing the building with; Afrikaner secretaries and clerks were not happy about having their handbags searched by former guerrillas each time they entered the building, and used the stairs rather than chance having to share the lift with "terrorists"!

After months of near dormancy, the Swapo election campaign began to swing into action, the party making its first concerted challenge to the DTA, which had been staging regular meetings since the beginning of the year. Swapo's inaugural rally was held in Oshakati, the liberation movement's first public meeting in the far north in 11 years.

Here a crowd of about 20 000 people gathered in the town's market place to listen to returned central committee members Mzee Kaukungua and Nahas Angula make concerted calls for those who had fought each other during the liberation war to reconcile.

"We have seen enough destruction, bloodshed and the plundering of the environment," Kaukungua told the meeting.

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"We want peace now, so let us be reconciled and build a new united nation of Namibians."

A few kilometres away at Ongwediva, DTA leader Dirk Mudge was addressing a crowd of about 2 000 people, telling them that a "terrorist" Swapo government would bring poverty to Namibia.

"See what happened in all those countries like Zambia, Zimbabwe, Angola and Mozambique where the people elected terrorist governments," Mudge said. "Foreign investors would not take their money into those countries and now there is hardship and suffering there."
Meanwhile, there were incredible scenes of jubilation in Katima Mulilo on the arrival of Swapo's election team for the Caprivi as the locals had been led to believe that many of those who had gone into exile had been killed. Hundreds of people drove to the Kongolo bridge more than 100 km from Katima to greet the Swapo party coming from Windhoek, and tears flowed as fast as the alcohol at the celebrations which followed their arrival in Katima, where parents were reunited with the children they had previously mourned for. However, there was little time for reunions as the election campaign officially got under way on July 2.

Swapo marked the day with its first major rally, held in the Katutura community centre, at which it launched its election manifesto. By Friday evening, thousands of people were already streaming to the township from all over the country to attend the following Sunday's meeting.

A massive braai was held at the community centre on the Friday and Saturday nights, and by midday Sunday, a sea of people dressed in red, blue and green swamped the old compound, the throng stretching away into the distance from the big, purpose-built stage - complete with a powerful, imported sound system, and backed by a mammoth red, blue and green banner on which was painted the beaming face of Sam Nujoma. This was not like the old days when speakers at Swapo rallies stood on beer crates or planks laid across oil drums. The size of the crowd was also something of a novelty, the 20 000 - 30 000 people who attended being the biggest turn-out at a Namibian political rally most people could remember.

Once there was no space left on the rocky open ground in front of the old compound buildings, people climbed up onto surrounding walls and roofs in order to see and hear. It was a colourful spectacle, bathed in the kindly winter sun and with the familiar craggy Windhoek hills in the background.

Swapo cultural group Ndilimani (meaning dynamite) provided the entertainment, performing for the first time back home its novel blend of traditional Namibian and contemporary African rhythms to an audience indoctrinated by Western and South African pop.

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Ndilimani was given a mixed reception, but not so the Swapo leadership, loud cheers and shouts of "viva!" going up as every member of the party's leadership inside the country at the time took their seats on the stage.

The meeting was opened, like every rally which was to follow, with a prayer, before Geingob began to unveil his party's manifesto. Shortly after the election director had started speaking, there was an explosion near the stage and the crowd was enveloped in a cloud of smoke. People ran in all directions, believing instinctively that the security forces were firing teargas and rubber bullets.

Several people were trampled underfoot during the stampede, including a pregnant mother who later lost her unborn child. As it turned out, the explosion was caused by an electrical fault in the public address system, but it took some time before order was restored and Geingob was able to continue speaking.
Swapo's plan for the future, the election director eventually went on to say, was based on the ideals of solidarity, freedom and justice. "Our struggle has not only been to liberate the black majority from colonial domination, but also to emancipate the whites from the narrow and dehumanising confines of race and class privileges," he said.
Swapo believed in the "moral superiority" of socialism over capitalism, but there would be "no full-scale nationalisation" of land and industry. "The major objective is to achieve a measure of national control over the country's resources and achieve a balance between economic returns for the Namibian people and reasonable profits for foreign and local private capital."

By increasing the taxation on profits reaped by multi-national enterprise from Namibian raw materials, and by taking control of Namibia's rich fishing grounds, a Swapo government would endeavour to reduce the gap between the country's rich minority and its impoverished majority.

The rally lasted for more than five hours, the bulk of which was taken up with Geingob's manifesto speech, every word of the English text being translated into Afrikaans, Oshiwambo, Otjiherero and Nama / Damara. So much was said that it became of limited significance at the time, and the manifesto would only be properly digested when people saw or heard the text for themselves, or had it explained to them at subsequent meetings. It was the symbolism of the meeting - once outlawed leaders from exile joining their internal comrades on a public platform for the first time, and launching the party's long-awaited election manifesto - which counted.

Besides, most people in the crowd already had their own, deep-rooted idea of what Swapo was about - liberation from South African rule, an end to apartheid, well-paid jobs, decent houses and land reform.

It was Geingob's task to make enough rhetorical noises to fit these perceptions as well as to slip in more finely worded policy statements to

Welcome home comrades 198 signal to the whites that Swapo had made major shifts away from its old socialist ideals towards a more convenient policy of socio-capitalism. However, actions speak much louder than words, and it was what Swapo had done in the past rather than what it planned to do in the future which was to dominate the election campaign agenda.

Swapo's detainees; most people in Namibia were aware that the liberation movement had imprisoned people in exile- party members who apparently had been caught spying for the South Africans. It was a fact of life and few people thought any more about it. After all, the reasoning went, there had been a war on, and in war there were always going to be spies.

The most notorious detainee had been Andreas Shipanga, a founding member of Swapo who, together with the likes of Sam Nujoma, had established the liberation movement in exile, placing the issue of Namibian independence on the international agenda and launching the armed struggle against South African occupation. In the late 70s, Shipanga, along with other exiles, had been imprisoned by his fellow leaders in Swapo.
He had spent five years in detention, first in Zambia and then Tanzania, before the publicity surrounding his case became too much of an embarrassment to Swapo and he was released. At first there had been some doubt within Namibia about Shipanga's detention, but when he returned to the country and joined the interim government, many people took this as evidence of his collaboration with South Africa, and other detainees were then seen in a similar light. After the Shipanga incident had died down, the question of detainees was seldom - if ever - raised amongst Swapo supporters inside Namibia. The issue was pushed to the back of the nation's mind and disappeared into the subconscious, to be re-awakened shortly before the return of the first exiles.

As the AG and UN Special Representative continued to thrash out terms for an amnesty, a group called the Parents Committee seized the headlines with a renewed call for the release of the "several hundred perhaps thousands" of Swapo detainees held in exile. For some time, the Parents' Committee, which claimed to represent the relatives of people detained by Swapo, had been actively campaigning inside Namibia.

Because the organisation was representing alleged spies - known as the "Swapo 100" because an estimated 100 people were said to have been detained by the liberation movement - and because it came out with vehemently anti-Swapo statements, the Parents Committee was dismissed by most as a front organisation for the South Africans (South African agent Nico Basson - see chapter 7 - later claimed that the Parents' Committee did receive funding from Pretoria). Days later, however, the Parents' Committee's demands for the release of the 100 seemed to be met.

The Namibian received a story from Rajah, who was in Angola with John Liebenberg at the time, detailing an announcement made by the Swapo Central Committee in Luanda that it had released and pardoned all those who had been "misguided" by the South Africans during the war. These "misguided elements", the statement continued, had been detained in order to "protect the struggle for national liberation". Following up the statement, Swapo President Nujoma said his organisation had treated the former detainees as fellow countrymen who had been misled by the enemy, and that most had taken up the offer to rejoin the liberation movement.

This seemed to seal the detainee issue, that was until John and Rajah returned from Angola a few days later with more information and photographs. After the Central Committee's announcement, Rajah, John and other journalists had been flown by Swapo to the southern Angolan town of Lubango where, in the presence of Swapo Secretary General Andimba Toivo ya Toivo and Administrative Secretary Moses Garoeb, they had been allowed to interview some of the detainees.

First they met with a group of about 100 women who told the journalists that they had never spied for the South Africans and that they had been imprisoned without reason. Bitter and angry, the women said they had been physically and psychologically tortured during interrogations.
Some of the former detainees carried babies, and during the interview session, one child apparently wandered over to Toivo ya Toivo, tugged his sleeve and asked: "Did you kill my father?"

Another women pointed to the infant she held in her arm and said the baby had been conceived when she was raped by a prison guard.

Next the journalists were taken to a another camp a few kilometres away where they were allowed to talk with a group of male former detainees. A spokesperson for the group said they had been forced to admit that they were South African agents and to accuse others of being the same.

"Hundreds" had been killed, maimed or had gone missing whilst being held in "dungeons" - pits dug in the ground - where they had been starved and tortured.

Some of the men then displayed the wounds caused, they said, by the torture - deep scars and lash marks on their backs, buttocks and legs.

"We were given two options," said the spokesperson. "Either to agree to imposed re-integration into Swapo, or to be handed over to South Africa, which would prove our collaboration with the South African regime. We rejected that option, and we agreed to be re-integrated into Swapo. Both

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these options are unacceptable to us. We want to be released from those who call us South African spies."

Not once did the Swapo leaders present try to intervene. Afterwards Gar6eb said his party wanted the truth to be known. He admitted that "mistakes" had been made, "but Swapo has been fighting a war of survival" during which information provided by agents had been used by the South Africans to raid Swapo camps and pre-empt Plan operations, information which cost "many innocent lives".

All the detainees had confessed to being spies and had implicated others, Gar6eb said.

"If these people have suffered, it is nothing in comparison to what has been happening to our people in SADF camps."

Although the former detainees' revelations were horrifyingly graphic, Gar6eb's argument sounded perfectly plausible...until people saw the pictures accompanying the story.

Like the pictures taken of the Plan fighters earlier, the photographs of the former detainees were passed around the office and members of staff began to recognise friends and relatives whom they had not heard from for years.

"Hey this is my cousin," one staff member said in amazement, pointing to one of the photographs.

He moved from his seat and held the picture up to the light.

"Yes, it's surely him. But what is he doing amongst the spies? I don't understand it. He was a serious comrade, he suffered for the struggle, that's why he went into exile."

The cousin had been active in the Swapo Youth League, and was regularly detained and beaten up by the police as a result, so he had fled into exile in 1983 where he received military training and fought in Plan. The last the family had heard of him, he had been teaching in one of Swapo's refugee camps in Angola.
Now here he was, branded as a spy and amongst those who alleged they had been tortured by Swapo.
The detainee issue suddenly began to take a personal dimension as more and more staff members recognised people in the photographs from Lubango. There was a lengthy debate as to whether or not the detainees' allegations should be published, not for fear of the damage publication would do Swapo - it was Swapo, after all, which had initiated the trip to Lubango - but because of the impact it was felt the revelations would have on the credibility of The Namibian amongst its readers.
"A lot of people will not believe this," Gollo said as we laid out the story early the following morning, hours before the paper hit the streets.
"They will think it is propaganda against Swapo. They will think we have sold out to the South Africans."

Welcome home comrades 201 have sold out to the South Africans."
Our dilemma was that, to its supporters inside Namibia, Swapo could do no wrong. Anti-Swapo propaganda was so heavy that people had come to dismiss as disinformation anything had said about the liberation movement. Sure enough, many people at first did not believe The Namibian's reports from Lubango, and some accused us of falling into the hands of South African propagandists. The return of the first exiles a few days later temporarily diverted attention from the detainee issue, until it was the turn of the former detainees themselves to return to their motherland, bringing with them more home truths of what had happened at the "University" the dungeons of Lubango.
The first 153 former detainees flew into Windhoek airport on July 5 from where they were taken not to Dobra but to a separate reception centre on the site of a former SADF base at Oseri Kari. Waiting for them there were anxious relatives, the media, and the opposition parties which were preparing to make every bit of political capital they could out of the detainee issue. Just as at other reception centres around the country, there were emotional reunions as friends and relatives hugged through the perimeter fence, relieved to find each other still alive.
There were distressing scenes too, as mothers broke down having been told by those who had returned that their children had died in the detention camps. There were more first-hand accounts of the kind of torture carried out on suspected spies; some told of how they were hung upside down before being beaten, kicked and burnt, while others said they were buried alive until they confessed to being South African agents.
Many had died in the camps, the new arrivals confirmed, some of whom said they had themselves carried bodies out of the prison pits to be buried. More were still missing. No one could give exact figures, not even the UNHCR, but the number of those who had been detained was rising fast.
By July 5, the Swapo 100 had officially become the Swapo 201, and later increased to more than 300. Meanwhile, the former detainees spoke of 800 or more people being detained, and the Parents' Committee pushed the figure beyond the 1 000 mark. On their return, a minority of the former detainees jumped onto the political bandwagon, denouncing Swapo, and displaying their slashed and
battered bodies to the international media at specially convened press conferences. They then formed themselves into a political party and a "pressure group" - called the Patriotic Unity Movement (PUM) and Political Consultative Group respectively - in order to contest the election. In its manifesto, PUM condemned both Swapo and the DTA as being unfit to govern the country, and pledged itself to the "genuine economic and political" independence for Namibia. Knowing or not, these former detainees played straight into the hands of the anti-Swapo alliance by giving the latter the opportunity to turn the detainee issue into a club with which to batter the liberation movement during the election campaign. Meanwhile, strapped for the necessary cash and the 2 000 registered voters needed to register as a party in the election, PUM allied with the UDF, a move which caused some of the organisation's most prominent members to leave and rejoin Swapo as the UDF's main source of funding, the Namib Foundation, was suspected of having links with the South African government. More significant than this high-profile minority was the silent majority of former detainees which, during July and August, quietly returned to their homes and communities in the hope of putting the past behind them and starting a new life in a free Namibia. But their very return was to have more of an impact than probably all the news stories and propaganda spewed out about them. By the weekend following the return of the 153, Katutura was buzzing with talk about the detainees and what had happened to them in exile. At the shebeens little else was talked about, while in thousands of homes, people were finding out first hand what their liberation movement had apparently done to loved ones and friends. My new landlady Kaurie and her close friend Martha were shocked to find out that many of their old friends had been detained. The week before, the two women had been unquestioning Swapo supporters, now they were not sure what to think. Their friends came to visit Kaurie at her home, a reunion after more than thirteen years. The beer flowed but the conversation rarely got off the subject of what had happened to the friends while they were in exile. All had been fervent Swapo activists in Kaurie and Martha's home town of Luderitz, and had gone into exile to escape the security force clampdown which followed the Angolan liberation and the youth uprising in Namibia in the early 1970s. All had taken active part in the struggle in exile, serving in Plan, broadcasting and teaching in the camps, but had then become caught up in Swapo's own security clampdown and were imprisoned as suspected spies. One of the group had been detained in 1984, only to be released in order to return to Namibia as part of the repatriation process. Once in detention, he said he had been beaten until he confessed that he was a South African agent; he said he had only made his confession when he felt he was about to die. All he wanted now, was for Swapo to
apologise so that he could clear his name, settle down and build a new life in the independent

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Namibia he had fought for. Meanwhile, a couple, who had met whilst in detention, said they had plans to marry and start a family, but felt they could only put the past behind them once it had been made known they were not spies. After the way Swapo had rewarded them for their dedication to the struggle, only one or two of the friends felt they could bring themselves to vote for the liberation movement. But there was no way the others would campaign or vote for any other party either; they simply would not vote.

Kaurie and Martha were obviously deeply troubled by what their friends had told them, and this left them in a quandary. For the first time ever, the two women had reason to question Swapo, an organisation which they had trusted and believed in for most of their lives.

Yet these former detainees were their friends and they had obviously been wronged by Swapo; naturally both women's sympathies remained with their friends who, they were convinced, were not spies. But at the same time Kaurie and Martha could not give up their support for Swapo, as they believed Swapo was the only party which was likely to bring any kind of meaningful independence to Namibia.

Later that weekend, I met a friend in the street. He was an active member of the Swapo Youth League and Nanso, and he told me that two of his brothers had just returned to the country; they, too, were former detainees. A third brother had also been detained, but he had not returned - he was still missing, presumed dead.

My friend was stunned. His brothers had all been hardened Swapo activists and, having completed rigorous military training, they had served in Plan's crack "Typhoon" brigade which carried out some of the liberation movements' most daring operations during the war.

Having been sent on several seemingly suicidal missions, the brothers were detained and accused of being spies. My friend and I went for a drink and were joined at the shebeen by several of his Youth League comrades.

The conversation soon turned to the detainees. Of course the former detainees were spies, the three comrades said, otherwise they would not have been arrested in the first place. How could events like the Cassinga massacre have happened if it was not for spies? The spies had got what they deserved and must be thankful that they were treated so humanely. My friend tried to defend his brothers' honour, but his comrades would not listen, and the conversation became heated, tears welling up in my friends' eyes as he responded to the three's venomous put-downs.

"But what if your brother had come back amongst the detainees rather than with all the other returnees, would you still be saying the same things then?" my friend asked one of the three.

"Of course!" she replied. "If Swapo had said that he was a spy, he must
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have been a spy. People should forgive and forget - the detainees must forgive
Swapo for what has happened."
A few days later, I met with a woman who had been the secretary to a leading
Swapo office bearer, but who had also been detained. Her crime? Writing a letter
to a friend who, unbeknown to her, so happened to be under suspicion of spying.
The letter had been intercepted by Swapo security and, without her boss knowing,
the secretary was taken to Lubango where she was beaten until she provided her
interrogators with the names of other "agents".
"I just made up the names for the sake of it. I was made to confess. If I had not
confessed, I would have been among the other 73 bodies they carried out from the
camp while I was there."
Those who had attended the "University" gave disturbing first-hand accounts
indicating a power struggle within Swapo in which the party's security branch had
assumed a frightening amount of autonomy. They claimed that the security chiefs
had acted in league with several hard-line members of the political leadership, but
the majority of politburo members
- the Swapo President included - were apparently ignorant of the extent and
brutality of the spy purge.
The detainee saga also smacked of both intellectualism and tribalism with most of
the supposed spies being bright and well educated and/or southern Namibians,
while those doing the detaining tended to be Kwanyama-speaking northerners.
Hardly a family in the south was untouched by the detainee issue, and bitterness
and anger against Swapo ran high in the region.
At Gibeon, the house of Swapo Vice-President Hendrik Witbooi was besieged by
his townspeople who demanded answers to their questions about what had
happened to their relatives.
"You said that they were in exile studying," the crowd chanted, "but in reality
they were in Lubango."
Swapo posters were torn down around the town and people removed Swapo flags
from their houses. Deep cracks had opened up overnight in the bedrock of
Swapo's support, and these were then subjected to a heavy pounding by
opposition parties.
The DTA and the Parents' Committee launched a propaganda barrage, the latter
likening Swapo's security wing to - amongst other things "Hitler's Gestapo", while
the DTA offered a R10 000 reward for information which led to the uncovering of
Swapo camps where Namibians were still being detained. The Parents' Committee
later presented UN Special Representative Martti Ahtisaari with a list of about
1100 names of people who, it alleged, remained in Swapo detention.
Swapo's response to this onslaught was ambivalent. Theo-Ben Gurirab promised
at a rally in Rehoboth on July 8 that Swapo members responsible
for torturing detainees would be "brought to justice". Yet there was no such
pledge made in a statement released by the election directorate a day later which
maintained that all detainees were South African spies, and that if they had been tortured, it was because of the "extreme conditions of a brutal war". Overseas too, Swapo began to lose friends as the detainees' revelations were broadcast and published across the world. In August, the German Green Party, which had actively supported the liberation movement, publicly rebuked Swapo for its human rights violations, and called for an independent investigation into the detainee issue.

"The violations of human rights which have been committed in Swapo camps against presumed or actual spies... pale by comparison with the human rights violations for which the South African regime is responsible... But a liberation movement which is fighting for respect for human rights in its own country must never lose sight of this aim in dealing with its own 'dissidents'."

Later that month, Swapo succumbed to this and other demands for an independent investigation, and on September 2, a UN mission - armed with the Parents' Committee's list of 1100 names - went first to Angola and then to Zambia in order to try and discover the whereabouts of those people who, it was said, were still being detained. By the end of its month-long investigation, the UN mission was able to account for all but 315 of the people listed by the Parents' Committee. The rest of the names were either duplications, or were those of people who had already been released, who had died or who could not be traced owing to insufficient information provided in the first place.

Although the mission's findings showed that the Parents' Committee's allegations were exaggerated, a question mark still hung over the 315 people who had been unaccounted for, which meant the detainee controversy was still far from closed. "I assure you that, for my part, the search is not over," Ahtisaari said, promising that the case would remain open and the UN mission into detainees would continue to investigate. Swapo also had to decide whether or not it would punish those who had carried out the atrocities in the camps, or apologise to those who had been abused and/or wrongly detained.

South Africa's infiltration of Swapo was extensive. Cassinga survivors recount how, for example, South African agents - in the guise of a foreign film crew - had unprecedented access to Cassinga and other key Swapo camps in the months preceding the cold-blooded slaughter of May 1978.

Or what other reason could there have been for the South Africans' uncanny ability to intercept crucial Plan operations, often before the Welcome home comrades 206 combatants involved had even reached Namibia? In particular, the betrayals leading to the Cassinga massacre triggered a purge within Swapo which developed into spy paranoia. During the clampdown, the movement's security wing was invested with sweeping powers which, in the isolated and war-torn bush of southern Angola, became almost absolute, and was inevitably abused. Anyone even associated with an alleged or proven "spy" was rounded up and forced to "confess", to the extent that refugees who just happened to cross into exile in the same group as a "South African agent" were detained on the premise that they too had been sent by South Africa. Jealousy and political ambition were also motives
for some to concoct spy allegations which ensured rivals were sent to the "University".
As a result, hundreds of innocent people - some of Swapo's most able freedom fighters amongst them - were detained and tortured, sometimes, it is believed, on the orders of actual South African agents. The tentacles of the detainee issue are so interwoven, it will take years, perhaps decades to untangle them - if, that is, any attempt is made to unravel them at all.

Welcome to Suidwes Katutura by moonlight.
Top right: Author David Lush (The Namibian)
Independence Avenue, Windhoek, 1992

Overcrowding in Katutura results in makeshift shelters.
Katutura Single Quarters - market place.

I .ami*Ti
id Lush (in glasses) with Editor Gwen Lister in The Namibian news room. : Da'oud Vries - another colleague at The Namibian.
Founding members of The Namibian with Dudley Viall (second row, left), Chris Shipanga front row, left), Gwen Lister (front row, 3rd from left), Rajah Munamava (behind Gwen Lister), and Mbatjia Ngavirue, (front row right).

South African troops seem to find something amusing about the ruins of the Oshakati First National Bank after the bomb blast. Inset: A survivor of the blast.
(The Namibian)
Villagers at Endola, Owambo, survey the damage to their homestead after heavy fighting in the area.

avute inspects the scene of a contact between Plan combatants and members h African Defence forces. On the ground in front of him lies the severed foot boot- of a dead Plan combatant. Inset: An SADF member preparing for battle.
!m Landscape - the once thriving ancestral home of the Bondelswarts, bad, in the deep south.

Uprising: class of '88 - One of the biggest student marches in Namibian history.
Solidarity March by Academy students and staff after a week of police action on the campus. Inset: Riot police get to grips with a student protester in Katutura, 1988. (Chris Shipanga - The Namibian)

-armoured vehicles withdrawing from Angola.

United Nations Special Representative to Namibia, Martti Ahtisaari and So African Administrator-General Louis Pienaar.
Former SADF troop carrier converted for use by UnTag monitors.

The bodies of Plan combatants killed during the April 1989 incursion being dumped into a mass grave outside Oshakati.

South African troops returning from a swim whilst rotting bodies of Plan combatants killed during the April 1989 incursion are exhumed and taken to the mortuary for an autopsy.

Journalists on the frontline: Dudley Viall (2nd from left) and John Liebenberg (2nd from right) with Plan combatants on their way to Angola after April 1, 1989. The combatant on the left died just a month before Namibia became independent.

Ira kids: UnTag election T-shirts became all the fashion during 1989. military monitor buys some refreshments from a Cuca store in Owambo.

Ovahimba women at an NPF rally, 1989.
Happy Reunion: Swapo Secretary-General Andimba Toivo Ya Toivo returns to Namibia from exile. He was imprisoned for 16 years on Robben Island.

Dn time!
4ews of Swano's election victorv hits thp strpets of Windhoek.

Preamble
"Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is indispensable for freedom, justice and peace;

Whereas the said rights include the right of the individual to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, regardless of race, colour, ethnic origin, sex, religion, creed or social or economic status;

Whereas the said rights are most effectively maintained and protected in a democratic society, where the government is responsible to freely elected representatives of the people, operating under a sovereign constitution and a free and independent judiciary;

Whereas these rights have for so long been denied to the people of Namibia by colonialism, racism and apartheid;

Whereas we the people of Namibia have finally emerged victorious in our struggle against colonialism, racism and apartheid;

are determined to adopt a Constitution which expresses for ourselves and our children our resolve to cherish and to protect the gains of our long struggle;

desire to promote amongst all of us the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the Namibian nation among and in association with the nations of the world;
will strive to achieve national reconciliation and to foster peace, unity and a common loyalty to a single state;

committed to these principles, have resolved to constitute the Republic of Namibia as a sovereign, secular, democratic and unitary State securing to all our citizens justice, liberty, equality and fraternity,

*Now therefore, we the people of Namibia accept and adopt this Constitution, as the fundamental law of our Sovereign and Independent Republic.

From the Namibian Constitution.

Women fought alongside men during the liberation struggle. Maria (right) was not among the lucky few who obtained employment with the Namibian Defence Force.
Prime Minister Hage Geingob
Anton Luboswki - His political beliefs cost him his life.
Dirk Mudge - Chairperson of DTA

Welcome to Namibia - Ex-Plan combatants, one with a flower and the other with a pistol in hand return to Namibia from southern Angola just after independence. Spades and hoes replace guns and pistols. Ex-Plan combatants in one of the Development Brigades set up after independence.

Life's a riot
Katutura was no longer the happy-go-lucky place it used to be. By August 1989, the dramatic political changes taking place within Namibia were beginning to have a knock-on effect on the country's social equilibrium, and Katutura was the place this was having greatest impact. From the beginning of the year, black Namibians had flooded into the capital from the rural areas looking for work. The cycle of rural poverty was nothing new. In the tribal homelands, the infertile soil had long since been overgrazed or overcultivated, and in the commercial farming areas, white landowners had gradually cut back on labour during the '80s.
But the implementation of Resolution 435 brought new hope for particularly the younger generations of rural black Namibians who perceived that independence meant that work and a better lifestyle awaited them in the city. They started flocking to Windhoek in their thousands, only to find things were not as they had imagined.
While the arrival of Unita and overseas diplomatic missions had triggered a minor boom in the economy, there were nothing like enough new jobs created to absorb the capital's existing unemployed, let alone the new immigrants. The influx of Unita money and the inflation-wrecked South African economy was also making Windhoek an increasingly expensive place to live, while the growing glut of unskilled labour meant the wages of those lucky enough to find work remained static.
From June on, these problems were exacerbated by the arrival home of the 41,000 exiles, many of whom settled in Windhoek; few could afford White City house prices and rents, so the majority had no choice but to look for housing in the townships. By August, it was estimated that around 20,000 people had come to live in Katutura since the beginning of the year.

Houses were scarce before, and no permanent provision had been made for the new arrivals, so years of township mismanagement suddenly began to tell as the township's decrepit infrastructure all but collapsed. For more than a decade, municipalities around the country had stopped building township houses for rent. Instead, the state's responsibility for providing new houses was passed to the parastatal National Building and Investment Corporation (NBIC, known by its Afrikaans abbreviation Nasboukor) which was set up to build supposedly low-cost township housing not for rent but to be bought.

Life's a riot

with low-interest loans offered by the corporation. The aim was to offer black people the chance to buy their own homes, but in reality, only those earning above a certain income qualified for a Nasboukor loan, a threshold which was beyond the reach of the majority of unskilled labourers and domestic workers who made up a large part of the township populations.

Nasboukor housing catered mainly for the emergent black middle class made up of civil servants and professionals, while hundreds of thousands of unskilled urban black people had no choice but to continue renting ageing, poorly built, municipal houses.

No more municipality matchboxes had been built after 1980, but the number of low income people relying on these houses for accommodation continued to grow. Up until 1989, this mounting pressure had somehow been absorbed, although the municipalities' ruthless anti-squatting policies - particularly in Windhoek - meant this was only possible because of massive overcrowding.

Meanwhile, those unable to squeeze into a house, had to live outside in disguised squats such as old cars or chicken runs. But as long as there were no unsightly shacks littering the landscape, the municipalities were happy. Come the massive influx of people to the townships during the first eight months of 1989, however, this situation changed.

The new arrivals certainly could not afford to buy Nasboukor houses, and even if they did have the money, they had to wait a year or so before a corporation house became available. So the newcomers had no choice but to look for rented accommodation.

Existing municipality tenants and the owners of Nasboukor homes quickly realised the demand, and every space in already over-crowded township homes was rented out to those desperately looking for a place to live. Once the inside of houses were full to overflowing, the landlords began renting out space in their back yards where squats made of any available materials - usually scraps of wood, metal and plastic sheeting sprang up like weeds after rain.
At first the municipalities continued to enforce its no squatting rule and demanded that these shelters be taken down, sending in municipal workers with sledge hammers to carry out the demolition job if the residents refused to co-operate. But soon the municipality officials could not keep pace with the growth of backyard squats and eventually gave up trying to enforce the law.

With there being such a demand for places to live, private rents rocketed so that the going rate for a mattress on a Katutura kitchen floor was in the region of R100 a month while a garage cost around R150 a month, compared with the R90 - R100 charged by the Windhoek municipality for an entire two bedroom house with indoor toilet and bathroom.

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As the year went on, the scenes in Katutura's older locations became more and more pathetic. Every other house in the Nama and Gemengde sections of Katutura had at least one backyard squat. Mothers and their children were sleeping on the ground under plastic sheeting, or in converted chicken runs and rickety death-traps made of loose bricks and metal sheeting, while in the same yard single men slept in old wood sheds or under cars.

Invariably the most vulnerable were most affected, in particular single mothers abandoned by their partners when the struggle to feed hungry children or the lure of other women became too much.

The only work most of these single mothers could find was part-time cleaning jobs for white families in town, and this brought in barely enough money to buy food, let alone pay for rent.

The women became dependent on the new breed of money-grabbing landlords for a place to live, and often had to trade sexual favours in return for the postponement of rent payment, thus adding to their already acute sense of insecurity. But if the women did not agree with the landlord's terms, there were many more people looking for a place to live who would.

Meanwhile, those without any jobs or families to support them were totally reliant on their neighbours and twice-weekly church-run soup kitchens for food.

Crime grew along with the influx of immigrants. At first the Untags and their bulging wallets were the targets of a small number of established criminals, but these rich pickings attracted more and more disillusioned and bored youngsters to the township gangs.

Up until 1989, Katutura had remained a large village in the way that everyone considered each other as a neighbour, and everybody seemed to know everybody else. There were gangs, but their crime remained mostly petty, kept in check by Katutura's strong sense of community. The sudden growth in the township's population, and the resultant competition for space and resources, began to erode these bonds. More people meant there was less to go round. It also meant there were more unfamiliar faces and therefore less trust. Self-preservation became a priority, particularly amongst members of the black middle class who felt they had most to lose. Districts stopped being neighbourhoods and the criminals were allowed the chance to prey upon their own people, stealing and even killing for anything of value.
Violent crime, most notably rape, escalated, and the police, whose job in the township had seldom extended beyond breaking up demonstrations and raiding shebeens, were unable to cope. Having been the "enemy" for so long, the police were the last people crime victims felt like turning to for help.

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During my first year living in Katutura, shootings - except by the security forces - were almost unheard of. By mid-1989, seldom a night went by without my hearing gunfire coming from somewhere in the township. During one particular week, two people were shot dead within a few hundred metres of the house where I stayed in what was a relatively quiet, up-market district!

The valley which separated our street from the main body of Wanaheda became the scene of regular muggings and rapes; there were no street lights and the valley's undergrowth provided cover for criminals waiting to attack pedestrians walking along the road after dark.

One night I went to the nearby Club Pamodzi with a friend. Outside the club, my companion met the girlfriend of a college mate, who asked him to walk her to her home nearby. My friend agreed and I waited for him to return. They were walking along the darkened road which crossed the head of the valley when several youths appeared from the shadows, seized the girl and, holding a knife to my friend's throat, ordered him to run away.

He rushed back to the club to fetch me, and together we raced to the scene to look for the girl. We searched high and low but could not find her, so we went home, praying that the girl had made it home safely (my friend did not know where she lived). At daybreak, the girl was found lying unconscious in the riverbed. She had been gang-raped.

My friend and I went to the hospital where we found the girl's mother and sisters waiting in the casualty unit. Wringing her hands and fighting to hold back her tears, the mother told us her daughter was in a state of shock and had been sedated.

We were all then asked to go to the police station to give statements about what had happened. We were shown to an office and told to wait. There were no chairs to sit on and certainly no comfort on hand for the distraught mother. We were kept waiting for about an hour before a police officer came to take the statements, barely offering a word of greeting, let alone sympathy to the mother or my shaken friend. He took the mother first and then my friend into an office across the passage, but did not bother closing the door, so the whole corridor could hear what was being said.

As the officer fired questions at the mother as if she was a suspect he had just arrested, station staff wandered in and out of the room, stopping to listen and then interrupting to deliver trivial messages to the detective.

It was a sickening experience which showed up the police's total inability to cope with the rising tide of "conventional" crime. As in most of Katutura's rape cases, the culprits were never caught, which was hardly surprising considering that, as the head of Katutura police station told one of my colleagues a few weeks later, the police reckoned that "most rape victims asked for what they got".
Some members of the police compounded the force's inability to tackle township crime by taking an active part in the lawlessness. Visiting one of Katutura's larger shebeens one night, a friend and I found a drunk man lying in the road outside, his face covered in blood. The drunk had been singing and pestering customers, so the shebeen owner had called the police.

Two white officers promptly arrived, beat the drunk to a pulp and then left, taking with them a couple of bottles of brandy provided by the grateful shebeen owner. It was still technically illegal to sell alcohol without a license, so to operate such a sizeable (and profitable) shebeen, the owner had to persuade the police to turn a blind eye, and no doubt guarantee police protection in the process.

What was more alarming, though, was that those of us going to the shebeen after the police had left, bought our booze and went, ignoring the groans of the battered drunk. It was only when we were driving back to our party that it occurred to me what we had done. I suggested to my friend that we return to the shebeen and take the injured man to hospital, but my friend looked horrified and told me it was best not to get involved.

We too had succumbed to making self-preservation a priority. The once amicable, all-embracing township was becoming a jungle. Katutura's buoyant social life also suffered the effects of the breakdown in the community. For years, those living in the township had socialised together at each other's braais, which were then the only form of evening entertainment available to most Katuturans. By mid-1989, however, Katutura and neighbouring Khomasdal had, between them, six night clubs which lured particularly the younger generations away from the braai tradition, thus depriving them of the chance to mix and socialise with people of all age groups and social backgrounds.

The clubs also robbed those who held braais of much-needed extra income which instead went into the pockets of a few already wealthy businesspeople who owned the clubs. Each club started to attract a certain class of clientele, determined partly by ethnicity, but more importantly by the amount of money punters were able to spend. Invariably those who were least well-off were left behind.

In the poorer township locations, people tried to compete with the clubs by continuing to hold braais, but they did not have the same pulling power as the bright lights and pounding music, and fewer people attended, while those who did had less to spend. Added to which, there was now the constant threat that the braai would be raided by "botsotosos" - the members of township gangs - who operated in the area.

At one braai I attended in the old location, I was sitting with friends in the back room when the head of the household entered and whispered...
Soon after, shouts came from outside and rocks clattered down on the corrugated tin roof of the house. I went outside and found the women, brandishing everything from rolling pins to carving knives, chasing a gang of youths up the street, the batsotsos retaliating with rocks and a stream of abuse as they retreated. The women returned home triumphant, their eyes burning with defiance as they stuffed their weapons down the fronts of their dresses and carried on with the party. However, the gang returned a few hours later, this time with reinforcements, and managed to seize the braai takings as well as several crates of drink in their raid.

That was the last braai held by this particular household, several members of which resorted to dating Untag "sugar daddies" as a means of raising income instead.

The township was disintegrating, the community being slowly prised apart along ever deepening fault lines of class by the sudden social and political pressures brought about by the implementation of Resolution 435. These profound social changes passed almost unnoticed as the election campaign took off. The political parties were too busy devising strategies to win the election to notice the fragmentation of the township communities, while those of us in the media were too engrossed in fighting an increasingly bitter propaganda war to heed the creaks and groans coming from our own environment.

We, like many, looked for political significance in every story we covered. Everything else was not considered newsworthy and was put off until after the election was over. The politicians argued about what they had done in the past and what they promised to do in the future, but failed to focus on the present and the significance it had on both the past and the future.

Few township gangsters had any real interest in politics and used the political smokescreen to carry out their crime undetected, while those they trampled on suffered in silence, putting all their faith in the party which they believed would - when elected to power - provide them with food, work and a decent house to live in.

Few people thought the election campaign would be free of violence, particularly as right-wing extremists had vowed to take up arms to prevent independence taking place. After a century of bloody struggle for power, violence had become an accepted part of life, but the extent to which various factions went to achieve their aims during the independence process still came as a shock.

Life's a riot

White right-wing terrorist attacks started as early as April 3 when, in Tsumeb, two whites in an unmarked Mercedes fired on a bakkie carrying Swapo supporters returning to the far north following the April 1 celebrations in Windhoek. Several people were wounded in the attack, one fatally, and two Oshakati policemen were later charged with the killing. Nothing came of the case.

A few weeks later, photographer John Liebenberg received an anonymous phone call at his home, the Afrikaans-speaking caller telling him that there had been a bomb blast in Katutura.
As John drove along the highway towards the township, a speeding car pulled up alongside and several shots were fired, the bullets missing Liebenberg and his passenger by centimetres. The phone call had been a hoax; there was no bomb explosion and, having examined the photographer's bullet-riddled car, the police were left with little choice but to open an investigation into attempted murder. No one was ever charged.

A similar attack was carried out on the day Swapo's exiled election leaders returned home, when one of the many buses ferrying Swapo supporters to the airport was fired on in broad daylight by whites travelling by car in the opposite direction. The bullets just missed the bus driver and no one was injured, but nor was anyone arrested or charged for what could have resulted in the death of many people.

These shootings sounded early alarm bells at the country's progressive organisations, The Namibian newspaper included. I was one of three members of the paper's production department who worked night shifts, the three of us alone in the brightly lit office, our backs to the uncovered windows, blind to what was happening outside in the shrubbery and thick, inky darkness. Once a gust of wind caused an open window to slam shut, the resultant loud bang causing all three of us to instinctively throw ourselves flat on the floor beneath our desks.

As we drove home along the usually deserted highway to Katutura, a car would occasionally appear in the rear-view mirror and seem to stalk us. If it began to gain on us, we would sink down in our seats and allow the car to pass while whichever one of us was driving prepared to take evasive action at the first sign of a gun.

Although alarming, the attacks by white extremists which did take place during the first few months of the independence process appeared to be isolated incidents and not part of any concerted terror campaign. What was of more concern at the time was the level of politically motivated intimidation carried out in the far north by members of the South African security forces, in particular Koevoet. Although it was not widely known at the time, prior to April 1,1800 or so former Koevoet members were transferred into the conventional ranks of Swapol where they remained once the independence process got under way. Meanwhile, the Koevoet force of 1 200 fighters activated during the April incursion also remained intact after the peace plan resumed in May. Therefore, despite Pretoria's promise the previous January to disband the counter-insurgency unit, Koevoet remained in business, its members supposedly doing routine police work, but effectively carrying on as they had during the war.

Almost all these Koevoets, former and otherwise, remained stationed in the far north - where their founder and former commander Hans Dreyer had been appointed regional head of Swapol - and received little or no training in conventional law enforcement duties.

As the commander of Koevoet training told a commission of inquiry into election malpractice held in July 1989, recruits had needed no academic qualifications to join Koevoet, and only about 15 per cent of the unit's members could read and...
write. The commander, who had to be asked to remove his pistol which he wore in the court room, left those presiding over the hearing in little doubt that Koevoet fighters were hardly suited to Swapol's supposedly impartial policing role in the independence process. "They (Koevoets) are specifically trained to combat Plan insurgents, although the ordinary Koevoet cannot differentiate between the armed insurgent and the local Swapo supporter," said the training officer.

It was little wonder that the intimidation of Swapo supporters by former security force members continued on almost a daily basis throughout May, June, July and August. Koevoet squads continued to patrol in their dreaded Casspirs and, although supposedly stripped of all weapons except for pistols, the "police officers" often stashed automatic rifles and heavy weaponry inside the armoured vehicles.

Untag police monitors were supposed to accompany every police patrol, but the Swapol Koevoets, who made few attempts to hide their contempt for the blue berets, would deliberately go out without informing the monitors, or would drive where the Untags - who at first had no mine-resistant vehicles at their disposal - dared not follow.

There were certainly no Untag monitors present on June 4 at Okatope when a Swapol unit containing former Koevoets went to deal with a riot caused when a DTA mob armed with clubs, bows and arrows attacked a rally attended by unarmed Swapo supporters.

The police waded into the m16e and - surprise, surprise - not one DTA supporter was arrested while thirteen Swapo members were detained and many others injured. Koevoet intimidation increased still further once demobilised Plan fighters started returning home as civilians under the UN repatriation programme. All returning exiles were apprehensive about coming back to a country still run by the very South African regime they had fled from. The refugee

Life's a riot 215 reception centres, at which returnees were supposed to stay for not more than a week while they traced their relatives, became overcrowded because people were too scared to leave. Ex-Plan combatants, in particular, had reason to be concerned, as those who had been programmed to obliterate them in the bush still roamed the former war zone. Koevoets went from homestead to homestead looking for returnees and hounding former fighters, no doubt in an attempt to intimidate them into not taking part in the election campaign.

One night around 70 Swapol/Koevoets, who eyewitnesses said were "heavily armed", surrounded and then ransacked the homestead of Senior Headman Oswin Mukulu in the belief that he was harbouring former Plan combatants. Then, on August 2, Swapol/Koevoet officers shot dead former Plan fighter Joseph Paulus during a raid on his Rundu cuca shop.

Paulus, who was captured by Koevoet in 1981 and - like many captured guerrillas-became a member of the counter-insurgency unit, had just resigned in order to rejoin Swapo for the election. Police claimed they found explosives in the
cuca shop and only shot at Paulus when the latter drew a pistol, but eyewitness accounts suggested that the former Plan man was murdered.

Koevoet members had been searching for Paulus for several days prior to the killing, and police investigators prevented Untag monitors from inspecting the corpse at the scene of the shooting. The sight of Koevoet was enough to terrify many, as happened with a crowd of several hundred people attending a funeral at Eunda which stampeded out of fear when a Casspir arrived on the scene.

This was the Koevoet "psychosis" which UN Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar referred to when he made a two-day trip to Namibia in July to assess the independence process. Perez de Cuellar said Koevoet was a "ghost" which terrorised the people of the north, and he appealed to the Administrator-General to "eliminate any shadow of Koevoet from Swapol". De Cuellar carried his message to the UN where the General Assembly and member states stepped up international pressure on the South Africans to have Koevoet completely disbanded.

At first Pretoria stubbornly refused, arguing that Koevoet was part of the police and therefore was exempt from the clause of Resolution 435 which demanded that all "ethnic" military and paramilitary units be disbanded. Attempts were made to justify the maintenance of Koevoet, including repeated allegations that Plan fighters were preparing for another incursion from Angola.

To illustrate this, Swapol suddenly started "finding" caches of Soviet-made weapons in the far north, and there was even a mortar bomb attack on Etale police station. But it was well-known that the South Africans had built up an arsenal of captured Soviet weaponry during the war, and as not one of the Etale mortars fell within a hundred metres of the police station, such evidence was dismissed as set-up jobs by the security forces.

There were several reasons why the South Africans were so desperate to keep Koevoet mobilised. Pretoria was convinced (and the events of April 1 had enhanced this belief) that Swapo would try to seize power by force, particularly if the liberation movement did not win the election. As South Africa was doing its utmost to make sure Swapo did indeed lose the ballot, Pretoria wanted its troops ready to meet the envisaged Plan onslaught.

Administrator-General Louis Pienaar was also concerned that the removal of all former Koevoets from the police force would leave him with too few police officers. During its occupation, the South African regime had become so reliant on the use of force for its survival, and the police force had become so militarised, that the AG felt he would be unable to cope if all the soldiers and para-militaries were taken away, leaving him with only a rump of conventional officers to police the country.

Pienaar and his bosses in Pretoria might also have been afraid of what demobilised Koevoets might do if they were returned to society as civilians. Having created the Koevoet monster, the South Africans did not know how to get rid of it without the possibility of putting the independence process, and thus Pretoria's new found credibility, in jeopardy.
After a month of intense pressure from both within and outside Namibia, Pretoria gave some ground and Pienaar announced on August 16 that the 1 200 men still in Koevoet would be confined to bases outside the far north "to undergo re-orientation and retraining to equip them for roles which are to be redefined in the light of changed circumstances".

Pienaar effectively reserved the right to remobilise the Koevoet unit "if the situation should in any way deteriorate in Owambo", and further insisted that Koevoet's founder Hans Dreyer would continue as the chief of police in the far north.

Pienaar's statement, worded in such a way to suggest that all Koevoets and former Koevoets within the police force were being confined to base, momentarily silenced his critics. However, those with some knowledge of Koevoet soon realised that at least 1 800 members of the unit's pre-435 fighting force of 3 000 plus remained within the ranks of Swapol. The ghost of Koevoet was still far from being laid to rest.

For a while, the Koevoet controversy overshadowed the other spectre of terror haunting the independence process, but white right-wing extremists then struck back with a vengeance a week after the killing of Joseph Petrus in Rundu.

On the evening of August 10, a gang of three to four men launched an attack on the Untag headquarters in the conservative farming town of Life's a riot 217

*utjo, killing a black Namibian security guard as they wrecked the building with grenades and machine gun fire. The gang then fled in a white car with crudely made false Untag number plates and insignia. As soon as news of the attack broke, police set up road-blocks, throughout the Outjo area, and the gang was actually stopped at one of these road-blocks but was allowed to continue on its way by the policemen who supposedly believed that the men were members of Untag.

The white supremacist movement the Wit Wolwe (White Wolves), which had claimed responsibility for the fire bombing of The Namibian's offices and other similar attacks in South Africa during 1988, later said it had carried out the Outjo raid.

This was the first time Untag had been directly targeted by terrorists since its arrival in Namibia, and security was stepped up at every Untag installation, some of which became mini-fortresses overnight.

The UN also assigned its own investigation team to the case to "assist" Swapol with its pursuit of the perpetrators. A feeling of insecurity was spreading throughout Namibia, enhanced by the realisation that no one could be trusted to uphold law and order. The police had proved to be incompetent, biased and even the instigators of lawlessness, while Untag was powerless to do anything other than observe, take notes and file reports. This feeling of unease increased when Untag watched as police opened fire on striking brewery workers on September 4. The workers, employees of Namibia's largest brewery company South West Breweries (SWB), had downed tools when their work colleague and vice-
president of the Namibian Food and Allied Workers Union (Nafau) was sacked in a thinly veiled attempt to stop him organising workers at the plant.

Almost the entire black manual workforce came out on strike and picketed the factory, thus cutting off the brewery's supplies and forcing white management and office workers to try to load and distribute orders themselves. Early in the morning of the third day of the strike, The Namibian received a call from the strikers to say that riot police had arrived in force at the brewery.

New recruit Stanley Katzao and I went to the brewery's premises in Windhoek's northern industrial area and found an estimated 40 pickets standing beside the brewery gates while four van loads of police waited on wasteland across the road from where the strikers stood. Under a tree, 20 metres or so from the police, two Untag police monitors waited next to their car, one speaking to his headquarters over the radio while the other stood with pen and note book poised, ready to observe what was happening. While Stanley and I interviewed the strikers, the head of the police unit came over and told the workers they had to move away from the gates as

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they were "trespassing". The workers obliged and took up position on the wasteland opposite the brewery entrance.

After a while, the police drove away and, thinking that the problem had been resolved, we too left, only to arrive back at the office to be told that the strikers had just phoned to say they were being attacked by the police. We raced back to the brewery to find the strikers in disarray, scattered round the wasteland, a few lying motionless and bleeding on the ground.

The police - wearing gas masks and standing with guns in hand - were across the wasteland next to their vans which had been drawn up into a defensive line. The Untag monitors were still under the tree, the one now speaking frantically over the radio while the other stood bemused, staring at the scene, cap in hand and scratching his head with his pen. A cloud of teargas hung over the area and dazed workers, tears rolling down their cheeks, staggered around coughing and clutching their shirts to their faces.

No sooner had Stan and I gone, we were told, than the police had returned and, having given the strikers a minute to disperse, had opened fire with teargas, rubber bullets and buckshot, injuring fifteen workers, two seriously - one received a direct hit from a rubber bullet just above the eye. The Untags had seen everything but had done nothing; they could not.

They were only empowered to monitor Swapol and report any misconduct to the relevant authorities who, after often prolonged negotiations, would perhaps give offenders a verbal slap on the wrist. Added to which, the maintenance of old labour laws during the independence process meant it was still all but illegal for workers to strike, while legislation governing the holding of public meetings - made more draconian by the Administrator-General after April 1 - meant the strikers were not allowed to picket in the way they had done. News of the authorities' handling of the brewery strike was met with outrage throughout most of the black community.
Untag was again accused of collaborating with the South Africans, while Swapol, whose credibility was already non-existent, was condemned as being nothing more than a tool of the white minority employed to maintain the latter's power. This racial undercurrent rose to the surface when SWB management then sacked the 200 or more strikers, all of whom were black. The trade union movement responded by calling nation-wide boycott of SWB products, which was heeded by the majority of black people but ignored by most whites. Katutura's shebeen owners met and agreed to stop stocking SWB's labels, which included the highly popular Windhoek Lager brews, and influential black business people in the far north, who together held a near monopoly on liquor distribution to the region's thousands of cuca stores, followed suit.

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Within a week, these shebeens and bars had changed over to selling South African beer, most of which was brewed by South African Breweries (SAB). (Ironically, South African trade unions had launched a boycott of SAB products at about the same time, so black South Africans were buying SWB beer while black Namibians were buying SAB's brews!)

Racial tension mounted still further when, on September 10, a young white policeman looking for a thief in Otjiwarongo's impoverished single quarters fired live rounds at a crowd of black residents who had surrounded him. One person was killed and five others injured in the shooting which caused the incensed crowd to stone the policeman to death. The racial hypertension which resulted in Otjiwarongo, already a typically segregated rural town, spread like wild-fire throughout the rest of the country, fanned by news of the arrest a day later of three whites who were charged with the attack on the Outjo Untag headquarters.

At first the names of the accused were kept secret by the police, giving rise to accusations that Swapol was trying to protect the right-wingers. Meanwhile unidentified white assailants shot at Swapo's Windhoek election office, a second such attack in the space of a week. UN Special Representative Martti Ahtisaari was starting to feel the situation was slipping out of control. Namibia had become a tinder box which, given a spark, was ready to explode. Swapo President Sam Nujoma was due to return to Namibia on the Thursday, September 14, after almost 30 years in exile, and Ahtisaari feared the worst.

For a moment the UN Special Representative seemed to seize back the initiative when, on the afternoon of September 12, nine of the ten parties contesting the election - the DTA and Swapo included - signed a code of conduct in which they promised to desist from any kind of intimidation and to keep control of their respective supporters.

The code included a clause in which the parties agreed to instruct their supporters not to carry any kind of weapons, including "traditional weapons", to meetings or rallies. But then, three hours after Ahtisaari had chaired the signing ceremony, and less than 48 hours before Nujoma's return, prominent Swapo activist Anton Lubowski was gunned down outside his home in Windhoek.
Lubowski, a key member of Swapo's election directorate, had returned to his Luxury Hill home in the evening in order to change before going to dinner with election director Hage Geingob. As Lubowski fiddled with the electric combination lock on the gates to his driveway, a car parked further up the road rolled silently down the hill, its lights dimmed. When the car pulled level with Lubowski, the assassin leant out of the window and let loose a lethal volley of automatic gunfire.

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The car, with the assassin onboard, then sped away, leaving Lubowski's crumpled body lying face down in a pool of blood. He had died instantly from one of the bullets which went through his head. I was watching the SWABC television news when Lubowski's murder was announced. The news reader, a young white woman who spoke with a thick Afrikaans accent, was visibly stunned as she read the news flash which, with typical SWABC logic, said that a spokesperson for the DTA had confirmed that Lubowski had been shot dead.
I finished my supper, waiting for the end of the news to see if any more details were to be announced, and then drove to the office. Here people - with the exception of the editor - were running around like chickens without their heads, trying to contain their panic and glean further information about the killing.
Gwen sat ashen-faced in front of her terminal, putting together the new front page lead story. She looked at me in the way she had on April 1 when I had handed her the first report of the incursion, only this time there was fear rather than dismay in her eyes.
We now knew for sure that the extremists were not playing, and that it was likely that she was the next person they would try to kill. Since the attempt on John Liebenberg's life back in May, it had gradually become apparent that the right-wingers were out to get prominent white anti-apartheid activists who the former believed had betrayed the white "volk" with their support of black liberation. One morning Gwen had found leaflets scattered around her driveway containing details of a hit-list which, the leaflets, claimed had been drawn up by the Wit Wolwe. Gwen Lister was top of the list, Lubowski was second, followed by human rights lawyer Dave Smuts and then John Liebenberg. At first, no one took the leaflet particularly seriously as threats like these were nothing new; Gwen had been the target of such smear campaigns ever since The Namibian had started publishing. But during the months which followed, the threats were repeated and evidence came to light that there was a right-wing terror group in existence with the purpose of derailing the independence process.
Even the police started to take the threats seriously, although their efforts to investigate were hampered by the fact that, as one police officer privately admitted, policemen were amongst the extremists. Lubowski's assassination showed that the time for bluffing was over.
The 'phone calls started the following morning. An Afrikaans-speaking man rang The Namibian and asked for Gwen. When Anna said the editor was out, the caller left a message.
"Tell Gwen that she and those of you at The Namibian are next."

These anonymous calls continued throughout the day, and when

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Gwen returned home that evening, the callers phoned there with their death threats and mindless abuse.
The calls continued during the night, and every night in the weeks that followed; a call was made at least every hour. The police offered Gwen police protection, but she turned it down.

"Am I supposed to sleep at night knowing that the people guarding the house are probably the ones who will pull the trigger?" she explained.

Friends then offered her and the family "safe houses" at which to stay, but again she refused the offers.

"No, that would be running away," she said adamantly. "If I ran away, that would give these bastards pleasure. Besides, if they are going to get me, then they are going to get me. There is nothing I can do about it."

Instead, private security guards were hired to watch her house and the office, although this arrangement turned out to be a farce. There had been a huge demand for private security guards since the start of the independence process, most being taken up by Untag and the scores of diplomatic missions which had set up shop in Windhoek.

So we were assigned recently recruited, untrained youths, many with daytime jobs, who then kept watch for would-be hit squads during the night. These young black men were not armed, and the only weapons they were given by their company to ward off intruders was a wooden baton and "panic switch" which, when pressed, would summon a motorised support unit. The support unit comprised of militaristic white men, most of whom had served in the South African security forces. These mustachioed ex-soldiers did, in fact carry guns. The black guards were convinced their white bosses were trying to get them killed, particularly when they found out who they were guarding and why, so they spent most of the nights either hiding in the bushes or asleep in a chair in the office foyer.

One of the guards, who turned out to be a former South African agent, spent most of his time up a tree. One night he jumped out at Gwen's husband Mark, who was returning from a trip to the local shop. When Mark had recovered from a near heart-attack, the guard asked to come inside the house for a cup of tea, and then spent the rest of the evening dancing in the living room to Mark's records, pressing his panic button in time to the music, beaming from ear to ear and assuring his hosts that the alarm was not working.

With hindsight, these chaotic security arrangements could have been an effective deterrent to the undoubtedly methodical terrorists.

Twice guards stumbled across armed white men in Gwen's garden. The guards' reaction was to scream and run into the house, waking the whole neighbourhood in the process and causing the intruders to flee.

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However amusing, the behaviour of the guards did nothing to alleviate tension at The Namibian. With all the threatening calls, the antics of the guards, and two children to look after, Gwen and Mark were lucky if they managed a couple of hours' sleep each night.

This inevitably affected the rest of us at the paper, as did the deep-down thought that, although Gwen was the right-wingers' number one target, they might also choose to take the rest of us out with her. Visions of the bomb-shattered body of Albie Sachs (the ANC activist who was the victim of a car bomb blast in Maputo in 1988) flashed through my mind every time I went to open the door of one of the company cars, and I would turn my head away and grit my teeth each time I started the engine, fearing that the ignition was wired to explosives.

Nights spent alone at the office again became nerve-wracking experiences for the production department. As we worked into the early hours of the morning, we would stop and listen each time we heard a car pull up or footsteps outside, straining to hear above the snores of the security guard in the foyer.

In the wake of Lubowski's assassination, Untag sensed that the extremists were preparing for an attempt on the life of Sam Nujoma, something which Special Representative Ahtisaari realistically believed would plunge Namibia into turmoil. The writing was on the wall - literally. The morning after Lubowski was murdered, graffiti daubed on the wall of a car park in Windhoek city centre read: "We are waiting for murderer Nujoma." Ahtisaari warned his top officials that, if there were any more assassinations or widespread violence, he would suspend the independence process.

Swapo's Hage Geingob was equally uncompromising. "If anything happens to the President," he said, "there will be no election; the whole process will stop."

Death threats or no death threats, Nujoma's return was going to be a triumphant celebration for the hundreds and thousands of Namibians who saw the Swapo President as the father and hero of their revolution. September 14, the day of Nujoma's arrival, was a Thursday and an ordinary work day, but this was not going to stop many people from attending the rally organised to welcome the president at the airport.

- Geingob appealed to employers to treat the day as an unofficial public holiday and give their workers the day off. Although this call was hardly likely to be heeded by the majority of employers, thousands of people nonetheless risked being given the sack and stayed away from work on the Thursday morning, trekking out to the airport to greet Nujoma instead.

Thursdays were also the busiest day of the week for The Namibian as it was deadline day for the bumper weekend edition of the paper. However, come this particular Thursday morning, the office was deserted.

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The previous day, Gwen had tried to get everyone to agree to assignments for the following day, some of which involved working in the office. There had been vociferous protests from those assigned to home base, but these unfortunate people had eventually agreed to come in to the office.
And they kept their word .... only to leave with the first available lift to the airport. In her heart of hearts, Gwen had expected everyone to ignore her plans, and all she could say was "I thought as much" when she arrived for work to find computer terminals still covered with their dust jackets, and hardly a soul to be seen.

"I'll check you in a few hours' time," I mumbled to my editor, quickly passing her in the foyer and rushing out into the car park to a waiting car.

"So it's just me and you then?" Gwen said, turning to the gangly youth who sat next to the switchboard clutching a baton and panic switch in the chair usually occupied by Anna's more dominant frame. The young guard smiled sheepishly, his right eye twitching uncontrollably as he realised he was being left alone to look after the Wit Wolwe's number one target.

From a distance we could see the massive crowd gathered as we sped along the last ten kilometre stretch of highway to the airport. The sun, already high in the cloudless blue sky, reflected off the windscreen and roofs of thousands of vehicles crammed into the fields either side of the airport approach road, the length of which was lined with people standing six to ten deep alongside the half-kilometre stretch of tarmac.

Everything and everyone was draped in the red, blue and green of Swapo, and Nujoma's smiling face beamed down at you wherever you looked. Men and women wore suits and dresses made out of cloth bearing the Swapo President's portrait, children carried posters designed in his image and proclaiming him "supreme hero of the Namibian revolution", while babies strapped to their mothers' backs had Nujoma flags stuck into the red, blue and green bobble hats which covered their tiny heads.

More than half the estimated 5 000 or so people gathered outside the airport gates were probably not even born when their hero fled into exile in 1960, almost 30 years beforehand. There were also a few people in the crowd old enough to be Nujoma's parents, but childlike excitement showed on these sage, wrinkled faces as much as it did in the glinting eyes of their grandchildren and great-grandchildren next to them.

The buzz of expectant chatter filled the air, while every now and then the excitement peaked and the crowd burst into song, joining together in rousing anthems of the liberation struggle. The mood was so contagious that some of the black policemen patrolling up and down the roadway started singing too. Even a few of their white officers smiled and spoke cheerily with the crowd, although a group of Swapol reinforcements sitting

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on top of an armoured transporter behind the high airport perimeter fence looked on sulkily, passing sarcastic comments as each in turn pointed with their guns to something in the crowd which had caught their attention.

Inside the airport building, hundreds of journalists had gathered along with diplomats and members of the Swapo leadership. Politicians and diplomats shuffled in and out of the throng, greeting each other with warm embraces, while others sat in the airport lounge staring reflectively out onto the runway. Swapo
security guards were also out in force, looking extremely uncomfortable in their suits and watching everyone's every move.

Shortly after 11h00, a large jet came into view and circled in the sky above the airport. Thinking this was the plane carrying Nujoma, the crowd outside the gates became ecstatic, jumping up and down, people hugging each other while women ululated and the others cheered. As the jubilation died down, the crowd watched the locked airport gates expectantly, waiting for Nujoma's motorcade to appear. They were to be disappointed. Their celebration had been premature as the jet was a cargo plane carrying, amongst other things, the Swapo President's car, a specially prepared bullet-proofed Mercedes. However, an hour or so later, an Ethiopian Airlines jet, flown by two Namibian exiles and carrying Nujoma, came into land and, assured that this time they would not be disappointed, the crowd again went wild. The plane came to a halt in front of the terminal building and there was what seemed like an interminable wait as arrangements for Nujoma's disembarkation were sorted out.

The Swapo President wanted the press on the tarmac to photograph his first steps back onto Namibian soil, the security men wanted photographers nowhere near him. Nujoma got his way and there was a stampede as the photographers raced from the viewing balcony, through the terminal building and out onto the tarmac where they pushed and shoved each other for the best view.

With the photographers and camera crews jostling below, Nujoma stepped out of the plane and descended the steps, stooping to kiss the ground when he reached the tarmac. Here Nujoma's mother, a frail, ancient woman, blinded and bent double by old age and years of maltreatment at the hands of the South Africans, stood waiting. Realising her son had arrived, she seemed to summon up all her strength and ululated triumphantly before being led forward to embrace him. After this reunion with his mother, Nujoma went along the line of Swapo central committee members waiting to greet him, embracing each in turn before walking into the airport building to embrace and talk with friends there as well.

He eventually made his way to his car and was whisked away out of the airport and towards Windhoek. The crowd gathered outside the gates barely caught a glimpse of the silver Mercedes as it shot past them in the middle of a speeding motorcade complete with police motorcycle out-riders. The crowd surged forward, there was a cheer, and Nujoma was gone. But that was enough. People swarmed onto the roadway and danced after the motorcade, singing as they went, while others rushed to their vehicles in order to follow Nujoma back to Windhoek.

At first police tried to control the traffic, but they soon gave up, overwhelmed by the flood of vehicles which took every conceivable route onto the highway. By the time the first vehicles were reaching Windhoek, others were still standing bumper to bumper trying to leave the airport and join the end of a 40km long moving traffic jam of hooting vehicles, out of which spilled waving, cheering and jubilant people.
As Nujoma's motorcade drove through the city centre, workers in the shops and on the building sites stopped what they were doing and ran into the street cheering their leader on his way.

Along Kaiser Street the motorcade went with sirens wailing, and then off towards Katutura, where the Swapo President had ordered his driver to take him. Here ten thousand or more people lined the streets ready to greet Nujoma. Catching a glimpse of his distinctive white beard through the tinted glass of his car, the crowds rushed forward and almost engulfed the Mercedes, much to the alarm of the security guards who ran alongside trying to keep the roadway clear.

The motorcade was reduced to crawling speed as the thousands of people tried to catch a glimpse of the man they had all been talking about for so many years.

Having made it safely through the adulatory throng, the motorcade drove to Wanaheda where Nujoma had been loaned a large house belonging to one of the township's doctors, just across the valley from where I was staying with my landlady Kaurie.

Unlike most of the Swapo leaders on their return from exile, Nujoma chose not to live in the white suburbs but rather amongst his people in the township. It was a gesture those living in Katutura had expected of all the leaders, and was one which affirmed their respect for the Swapo President.

Once he had arrived, you could not mistake which was his home. Set on the side of a hill, the house dwarfed all others around it, and a large Swapo flag fluttered from a tall pole attached to the roof.

A constant flurry of visitors came and went from the day he moved in, the traffic augmented by numerous sightseers who wandered past day and night in the hope they might catch a glimpse of the president.

Those living in what was a comfortably modest area, inhabited mostly by hospital staff and civil servants, were chuffed to have such a famous neighbour, but carried on life much the same as usual, although their partying became suddenly more subdued.

There was no high security fence around Nujoma's house, unlike the walls of razor wire which surrounded other "Swapo houses", even those occupied by the party's clerical staff.

There was probably no need for such visible security measures in Nujoma's case, as anyone carrying anything which looked like a weapon within two kilometres of the house would have been spotted and reported immediately by those living in the area, particularly if the intruders were white. Besides, a legion of Swapo security guards stationed inconspicuously around the district kept tabs on everything and everyone that moved, as I found out when I went jogging one evening soon after Nujoma's arrival.

As I left home and made my way along the footpath through the nearby valley, I was aware of movement up on the opposite bank where besuited security guards scurried from their hidden vantage points in order to head me off had I gone anywhere near the Swapo President's house.
I took the hint and steered well clear. Later that evening, one of these men paid us a visit and asked Kaurie all about me. He seemed to be satisfied with what Kaurie told him, but my future jogging expeditions were still closely monitored. It was ironic that Nujoma should have returned to Namibia during a beer boycott, as he had fled the country in early 1960 having instigated a boycott of the municipal township beer halls as part of the protest against the forced removals from the Old Location to Katutura.

As a contract labourer working on the South African railways, Nujoma had risen to political prominence through his trade union activities. Then, when the South African authorities had started evicting people from the Old Location, Nujoma had been at the forefront of the resistance campaign, surviving the Windhoek uprising of December 10, 1959, before fleeing into exile the following year as police harassment made it too difficult for him to stay.

Twenty-nine years on, he was still a marked man, but he remained philosophical about the danger he was in. "On December 10, 1959, the South African security forces were deployed to shoot me," Nujoma told Gwen in the first interview to be given after his return. "They did not succeed. My task now is not to think about death. My task now is to see to it that the Namibian people are united and join Swapo to promote peace. I was born once and I will die once."

On returning home, Nujoma's first priority was to register to vote in the election, and this he did the morning after his arrival. The following day, a Saturday, he attended the memorial service for Anton Lubowski, held in Katutura's Lutheran church, a few hundred metres from the Catholic Church where, just over a year before, Archbishop Desmond Tutu had warned of the sacrifices which still had to be made before Namibia became independent. Since openly declaring his membership of Swapo in 1984, Lubowski had been detested by the majority of whites who had tried to cripple his law business, and a good number of whom had vowed - anonymously - to kill him.

Lubowski's ego, wealth and ambition to become a leading member of Swapo, not to mention a future government, meant he had not always seen eye to eye with his fellow white anti-apartheid activists either. But his death left no doubt as to how much he was respected in the black community for having rejected his political heritage and joined the black person's struggle.

Long before the memorial service began, the church was full to capacity. While several thousand people from all walks of life and of all shades of skin - diplomats, businesspeople, trade unionists and workers filled the pews and aisles, hundreds more gathered outside in the yard where the service was relayed through loudspeakers.

Lubowski's coffin, draped in the Swapo colours and covered with wreaths, was carried into the church by friends and members of the Swapo election directorate, and set before the congregation, which then sang rousing hymns and listened to moving tributes to the dead man. People wept openly throughout. In the midst of the thousands of mourners, most of whom wore Swapo colours, sat Lubowski's...
relatives - his mother, father and sister, as well as his estranged wife and their two children - who were flanked by Nujoma and other Swapo leaders.
Lubowski had been alienated from his parents for his involvement with Swapo. The parents were second generation "South Wester" settlers - the father of German-Polish descent, the mother a thoroughbred Afrikaner - who had built up a prosperous family business in Luderitz where the family had become an integral part of the rugged, conservative white community which lived there in isolation from the rest of Namibia, sandwiched between the Namib Desert and the wild Atlantic ocean.

Outside the Lutheran church, Lubowski senior, a broad, giant of a man of whom Anton was the spitting image, had stood upright and firm, his teeth gritted, while his wife wept quietly at his side as they waited for their son's coffin to arrive. But during the service, the great man had started to tremble, tears welling up in his eyes as the congregation around him - a sea of black and white faces - had sung the African anthem Nkosi Sikelel'i Afrika with arms outstretched in the clenched fist black power salute.

Perhaps it was then that the meaning of his son's break with convention began to dawn on the father, for as he drove away with his wife after the Life's a riot 228 service, Lubowski senior wound down the window of his Mercedes and punched the air with a power salute worthy of an ardent freedom fighter.

Mr Lubowski might have seen the light, but there were still fanatics running around loose who believed his son got what he deserved; the independence process hovered perilously close to the precipice of chaos. For his part, Nujoma immediately started preaching the message of "peace and brotherhood" in a bid to diffuse the tension. At times his speeches sounded more like sermons as he called on Namibians to go into the elections as "brothers and sisters irrespective of colour and race".

"Accusations and counter-accusations will help nobody," he would say. "Only hatred and an ugly situation will result from this. I appeal for national reconciliation and peace. I will talk to anybody to solve this problem once and for all."

These were hardly the sentiments you would expect in an election campaign, and these words of peace often fitted awkwardly in between more hard-hitting rhetoric designed at catching votes. Nonetheless, Nujoma continued with his crusade for reconciliation, and his message was, on the whole, heeded by his own supporters. However, the same did not go for their opponents. Right-wing extremists were never likely to do anything Nujoma suggested, but in the run-up to the election, the white fanatics were overtaken by the DTA in the violence league.

Soon after Nujoma's return, a thousand or more DTA supporters marched on the Swapo President's house where for half an hour they shouted abuse and anti-Swapo slogans before processing back through the township.
As they went, the marchers hurled rocks at any house they thought belonged to Swapo supporters. Da'oud, my colleague at The Namibian, had to dive for cover under his bed when a rock shattered his bedroom window, followed by another
projectile and then another. There was nothing in or on the house to suggest affiliation to the liberation movement, unlike neighbouring houses which flew Swapo flags, but this did not stop the mob smashing almost every window in Da'oud's home, their rocks wrecking several pieces of furniture into the bargain. Hardly any of the fifty or so houses in Da'oud's street escaped unscathed in what was a completely unprovoked attack. More was to come less than a week later. Katutura was enveloped in its distinctive flaming orange shroud of dust as the sun set on September 26. I was returning home in a taxi and, on approaching the Namalambo location, we found the road was blocked by a crowd of several thousand DTA supporters, which was advancing down the main road towards us. Every member of the crowd wore a white T-shirt emblazoned with the DTA insignia, and the majority carried clubs, pangas and knobkierries.

"The marchers were jogging in semi-formation, hemmed in together by a convoy of numerous unmarked vehicles full of more DTA supporters, and shouting anti-Swapo slogans while waving their weapons in the air. The march was illegal as the organisers had not given the police the statutory 48 hours notice, but still a couple of police vans accompanied the procession without making any attempt to break it up. There was certainly no sign of the riot police which had fired on the "illegal" brewery strikers a few weeks beforehand. The procession had been winding its way around Katutura throughout the afternoon, but now, as people were returning home from work, it was in the heart of "Swapo territory". Red, blue and green flags fluttered from almost every house, and the mob jeered residents standing in their doorways or making their way home from the bus stops and taxi ranks. A line of cars brought to a standstill by the march, our taxi included, was soon surrounded by the marchers who beat on the car windows and showed the DTA's two-finger salute to the occupants. If people did not respond with the same gesture, or if there was anything in the car to suggest support for Swapo, the mob rocked the vehicle, beat their fists and clubs on the body work and taunted the people inside. As darkness fell, the police disappeared but the DTA crowd continued with its march, returning the way it had come. Anti-Swapo abuse increased and some of the Swapo-supporting bystanders began to retaliate verbally. When they did, members of the crowd started attacking the location's residents and their houses. Rocks and bottles rained down and members of the mob then set about smashing cars and windows with their weapons and anything else which came to hand. Shots rang out, apparently from the direction of the crowd, and people started running for cover. Terrified families, children screaming in terror, cowered for safety in their homes as rocks smashed through the windows, showering the occupants with glass. A two-year-old boy had his skull cracked open when he was hit on the head with a rock as he hid in the doorway of his home. A 36-year-old man was knocked unconscious by another missile and was in hospital in a critical condition for several weeks afterwards. The other 20 or so
people injured during the violence arrived at Katutura Hospital casualty unit with clothes covered in the blood which gushed from open wounds. As the violence raged, calls were made to the police, but the police never came. Meanwhile, Untag monitors could only look on before fleeing the scene for fear that they too might become targets of DTA projectiles. The Life's a riot

rampage continued for several hours, but it was not until the daybreak that the full extent of the damage was realised. Hardly a house along the kilometre stretch of main road through the location was left unscathed. Many homes had not a single pane of glass left intact, while the pummelled remains of cars lay in yards and on the side of the road.

Rocks were strewn across the roadway, and residents surveyed the scene with a mixture of anger and bewilderment. "So much for the DTA's signature on the code of conduct," one resident muttered as he swept glass from his front steps. "It really looks as if the DTA is looking for an all-out war." Swapo's supporters in the township were wanting to avenge these attacks, so the liberation movement hurriedly called meetings of its street committees to urge its members to remain calm and continue to turn the other cheek. After much persuading, the 30 or so Swapo supporters - the members of one such committee - who squeezed into Kaurie's living room one evening agreed, but it was clear their patience was wearing thin.

Meanwhile, the Koevoet controversy had flared up once more. Following UN Secretary-General Perez de Cuellar's report, the issue was debated by the UN General Assembly and the UN Security Council then passed a resolution (Resolution 640) demanding that Koevoet and its command structure be dismantled.

The confinement to base ordered by Administrator-General Pienaar in August had failed to prevent Koevoet from continuing to intimidate and harass people in the far north. Contrary to the promises made by the AG in August, the Koevoets had remained in their bases in the far north and had undergone little or no "re-training". They had swapped their grey Swapol uniforms for their old khaki combat dress and had only been confined to base during the day, which left them free to roam where they liked during the night, threatening and attacking their opponents.

Although technically disarmed, the Koevoets and other already demobilised members of SWATF had held onto large quantities of weapons, some of which they had been allowed to buy off the army. Former Plan fighters had also made sure they had their own arms hidden away, ready for use in an emergency. By September, the former war zone was awash with weapons, and the political war of words began to look as if it could become an armed conflict once more. UNSC Resolution 640 gave the AG until September 30 to disband Koevoet, and on Friday September 29, Pienaar announced that the 1200 Koevoets based in Oshakati would be demobilised the following day, a Saturday. However, still no mention was made of the 1 800 or more former Koevoets who were transferred into the police before April 1, nor of the
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future of Hans Dreyer who was still in charge of the police in the far north, Jut who had gon on lea ve" and could not be traced.
With hindsight, demobilising Koevoet and turning its members loose into the community was bound to cause more problems than it would solve. At least while still together in a unit and wearing uniforms, the Koevoets could be monitored. But taking them out of uniform and sending them back to their homes would sever any control the authorities might have over them.
Both Koevoet and SWATF command structures remained intact on the premise that the officers had to oversee the winding down of operations, and the ex-soldiers still came together at their former headquarters once a month in order to receive their pay, which they were to receive until independence day. At these monthly meetings, the former security force members received not only their salaries, but also their latest instructions. Given the command, these units could have re-grouped within 48 hours.
After all, as one ex-Koevoet revealed, before being transferred into Swapol, Koevoets had been told that "just because we were no longer Koevoet, it did not mean that we were not still going to make war". The demobilisation of the 1 200 Koevoets on September 30 was like pouring petrol onto a smouldering fire. The demobilisation parade was a fiasco. The Untag police monitors responsible for overseeing the process arrived at Koevoet's Oshakati headquarters with their bulky transcript of orders, but at first were prevented by a group of Koevoets from even getting past the gates.
Having eventually negotiated their way inside, the Untag monitors found that the people supposedly being demobilised all wore civilian clothes, and none carried any documents to prove that they were in fact members of Koevoet. A head count then revealed that only 930 of the 1200 troops were actually present; the others had "already been disbanded".
When the monitors asked to inspect weapon and uniform stores, they were told that they could not as the person with the key was "on holiday" and would not be back for several weeks. By late afternoon, the parade had broken up in chaos, the Koevoets dismissing themselves before heading off to the cuca stores to spend their pay.
That night, at the village of Onepandaulo about 10 km from Oshakati, five men dressed in DTA T-shirts and thought to be demobilised Koevoets, hurled grenades into a cuca shop packed with Swapo supporters. The grenades did not go off and those drinking at the bar chased after the five men, catching one who was then beaten to death.
The following morning, a crowd of about 250 DTA supporters from Amunghabya, a Koevoet squatter camp on the outskirts of Oshakati and home of the murdered DTA supporter, marched into Oshakati and started attacking Swapo supporters and their property with clubs, stones, bows and arrows.
Untag monitors arrived on the scene, but they too were stoned and had to summon help from the police. A Swapol riot squad eventually arrived and the crowd dispersed, heading back to Amunghabya where they set up a road block at which all vehicles bearing Swapo colours were stopped and the occupants attacked. After a while, the mob returned to Oshakati and continued on their rampage, turning on a television film crew which fled into an Untag police station. Ten or so DTA supporters chased the camera crew inside and started to beat up the photographers. When Untag police officers tried to intervene, one of the attackers pulled out a pistol, another a knife, and ordered that the camera be handed over. When the assailants had left with the camera, the Untags went across the road to the Swapol station to lodge a complaint, only to find the attackers and the camera. After much arguing, the camera was returned minus the film - and the two men with the knife and pistol arrested. They were later released. The DTA crowd then marched through Oshakati township, throwing stones and bottles at Swapo supporters and their property, pulling down Swapo flags, smashing and setting light to cars, Untag again becoming targets when they tried to intervene.

As the day wore on, the violence began to spread to the area around Oshakati. Some friends and I were having a quiet drink at a cuca shop at the Ongwediva township of Mukwanambwa when we noticed a group of men chasing each other across the open veld nearby. The men could hardly stand up they were so drunk and the sight of them trying to punch each other was at first comical to watch. But then more and more people arrived to join in the fight and before we knew it, nearby homesteads were burning as former security force members set about ransacking the homes of known Swapo supporters. Soon shots and explosions could be heard throughout the area, and as night fell, the mayhem continued. The friends I was staying with insisted that the whole household sleep together in one room for safety, just as they had done during the war. Once again the ghost of Koevoet stalked the north, wreaking havoc in its path. Hundreds of thousands of Rands worth of damage was caused during the rampage, and more than 30 people were injured, many seriously wounded by bullets and shrapnel.

Although Swapol and Untag eventually managed to dampen down the rioting - assisted by the onset of hangovers - sporadic, violent outbursts continued throughout the week. Not all the fighting was politically inspired, some people taking the opportunity to settle old scores, but the use of weapons and explosives was common. Martti Ahtisaari insisted that, after the debacle disbandment of Saturday, Koevoet would again have to be demobilised, adding yet more confusion to the situation. These were hardly the ideal circumstances for Nujoma to make his long-awaited return to the far north, but he went ahead with his visit nonetheless, addressing a rally attended by an estimated 70 000 people - the largest rally known in Namibian history - at a sports ground not far from Oshakati. Security surrounding the Swapo President was also unprecedented, Swapol officers and former Plan fighters joining forces to form an impenetrable web of security.
The sight of white police officers and black former combatants, who had faced each other in the bush as sworn enemies just six months before, working and chatting together like long-time partners was bizarre to say the least. But it showed the commitment of both the South African government and Swapo to ensure that the independence process went ahead. Besides, the police and Swapo security men obviously made a good team as the rally passed peacefully, and it was only afterwards, as the Swapo supporters returned home, that the violence flared up once more.

Again former security force members, wearing DTA colours and returning from the funeral of the former Koevoet man killed at Onepandaulo, attacked Swapo members and the latter began to retaliate, resulting in even bloodier rioting than had been experienced the weekend before. Untag patrols came under fire, a school was attacked with grenades thrown by former security force members while students were beaten as they fled, and there were countless other incidents involving guns and explosives.

By the Monday, two people had died and hundreds had been injured. Once more, Untag warned that if the violence continued, there was no way the election - now less than a month away - could go ahead.

For its part, the DTA, while admitting that most demobilised Koevoet and other former security force members were members of the party and its campaign team, refused to take responsibility for these people's violent conduct. DTA Chairperson Dirk Mudge said the former soldiers were behaving as they were because, having been disbanded, they were being "left to the mercy" of Swapo.

Below the surface, however, sections of the DTA, in particular the powerful white caucus, were embarrassed by the behaviour of their supporters in the far north, while others in the alliance encouraged the violence, believing that this "macho" approach was a vote winner.

The mindless violence of September and October could, in a large part, be put down to frustration and anger by ex-security force members;

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Koevoets, who were finally re-disbanded just a week before voting started, blamed Swapo and Untag for taking away their jobs. After all, these soldiers had been programmed to kill Swapo and anyone associated with the liberation movement, so how could they be expected to be "de-programmed" overnight? Plan combatants were instilled with a similar psychology towards members of the South African security forces, in particular Koevoet, but they at least were better disciplined, remained within the established framework of their party, and seemed to have more control over their actions and emotions.

Evidence of a more sinister relationship between the DTA and former soldiers began to emerge as the date of the election drew near. Under the guise of a supposed welfare organisation the Ombili (Oshiwambo meaning peace) Foundation, the alliance was helping to maintain former SWATF members - who were possibly still armed - in isolated camps not far from the Angolan border. Funded by "overseas organisations" - in particular those based in Germany and South Africa - and administered by a handful of white businesspeople and civil
servants, the Ombili Foundation claimed to be an apolitical organisation helping demobbed security force members to return to civilian life. It operated from former SADF and SWATF bases in the far north, and in September I visited two of the foundation's camps in north-eastern Owambo, where I found more than a hint of politics at both.

The first camp I visited, the Ombili Foundation's supposed education centre, was in the former SADF base at Omauni, about 80 kms from Okongo. The Foundation was there on the pretext that it was helping to provide villagers, in particular those who had served in the security forces, with schooling and water. A school had been set up inside the base and several boreholes sunk, but there was a precondition that only those swearing allegiance to the DTA could use the facilities.

The village itself was made up of two distinct and divided groups; the one, original Oshiwambo-speaking villagers, the other former soldiers and their families who lived in homesteads around the base. From the camp's water tower flew a large DTA flag, while the former soldiers, their wives and children - all indigenous San "Bushmen" - had DTA posters pinned to their huts and wore DTA T-shirts provided by the party free of charge. Nothing more than slightly underhand electioneering perhaps, but there was more to the Ombili Foundation's Omaune base.

The camp was run by a Zairean and an Angolan who, between them, spoke only French and Portuguese, while the latter claimed to be the brother of Unita leader Jonas Savimbi (until he found out I was a journalist, when he said he was only joking!). People living in the area confirmed that armed Unita soldiers - former Koevoets amongst them - regularly visited the camp from where they picked up supplies before returning back across the Angolan border less than 20 km away.

Even closer to Angola was another Ombili Foundation settlement near the isolated village of Ombongola, situated deep in dense and sparsely inhabited bush. Ombongola was only 40 km north-east of Omaune, but it took more than two hours to make the journey, our four-wheel-drive vehicle struggling along the sandy, narrow and winding track which at times was little more than a footpath. Here we found a collection of recently built wood and grass huts clustered together within the confines of a large log kraal, home to 30 or more former members of the SADF's Bushman Battalion and their families - a couple of hundred people in all. Again the DTA's colours were everywhere; a DTA flag flew high above the camp from the branches of a tree, the ex-soldiers and their children wore DTA T-shirts, while the women washed up DTA tea sets. The inhabitants appeared shocked to see us, but they reluctantly answered our questions, telling us that they had been based in Omaune but were moved to Ombongola because of the lack of water at their former camp. They had no work and spent their time digging for water. Their food was brought to them by a man known as "Mr Spectacles", who they said worked for the DTA. The ex-soldiers and their wives had registered to vote, but Mr Spectacles - a white, Afrikaans-
speaking man - had kept the registration cards. Asked if they were armed, the former fighters first said they did have guns but then changed their minds and said they were unarmed. However, the local headman, who lived close to the camp, later confirmed that the former soldiers were heavily armed, the weapons being stored at a second "training camp" nearby. We found the second camp deserted except for an old man dressed in an ill-fitting army uniform whom we found asleep in one of several huts. We noticed boxes stacked in another hut, and we were about to ask the old man about these when the former soldiers we had spoken to earlier rushed onto the scene and demanded that we leave immediately. They were extremely annoyed with us, so we did what we were told and left.

Untag too, I found out later, was suspicious about the motives and activities of the Ombili Foundation, and had started investigating the organisation's camps in the far north. The plight of former members of the SWATF and their families was genuine enough, in particular that of the San conscripts, whose traditional lifestyle had been gradually destroyed since the arrival of the South African army. San men were recruited into the security forces en masse, and once these previously nomadic people started receiving wages, they abandoned their traditional way of life in favour of the fruits of Western consumerism - especially hard liquor - and became dependent on the army for their livelihood.

When the SWATF was dismantled under Resolution 435, the San soldiers were left with nowhere to turn. This made them ideal recruits for a rebel army which could again wage war against Swapo should the liberation movement gain unchecked control of the country. All the evidence suggests that such a rebel force did exist, and much of the evidence - as well as the experience of other southern African countries points to the South African military as being responsible for its formation, although this was not conclusively proved. Nor was it clear whether or not it was DTA policy to back the formation of this rebel army, but there were certainly people within the Alliance who knew what was happening and who took an active part.

It is also conceivable that the South African military was acting without the blessing of the Pretoria government, but again it is likely that some high-ranking politicians gave the generals the go-ahead. The military had been furious with the government for pulling out of Angola and agreeing to Namibian independence. Having spent 23 years fighting Swapo and then the MPLA to prevent socialism from taking hold in south-western Africa (not to mention SADF campaigns in Zambia, Botswana, Mozambique and Zimbabwe), they were not going to stand back and let Swapo take over Namibia without a fight.

The involvement of South African security force members in the assassination of Anton Lubowski (as revealed shortly after the November election during the Civil Co-operation Bureau "hit-squad" controversy) confirmed this. However, further destabilisation would depend on whether or not Swapo gained a two-thirds
majority in the election, thus allowing the liberation movement - so the generals believed - to introduce one-party socialism unopposed.

The thinking of the South African military might have belonged to the Cold War era, but it was further frozen in this time warp by the fear that Swapo would try to take over Namibia by force, either before or after the election. Just as the April incursion had been a reason for the South Africans wanting to keep Koevoet intact, it further convinced those wanting to set up a rebel army that Swapo was not necessarily going to rely on seizing power through the ballot box.

This psychosis was infectious; by the beginning of November, the civil guard - a whites-only part-time militia set up by the colonial regime for times of crisis - had taken its weapons out of store and was preparing for civil war. Many read this as an aggressive rather than a defensive move yet another attempt by the whites to prevent independence from going ahead. But there was more to this Plan paranoia than met the eye. In rare, unguarded moments, usually after a day spent at the shebeen, some former Plan combatants revealed that they were, indeed, going to take up arms again if "we don't get the election result we want". With certain satisfaction, the ex-Plan men went on to say that the South Africans had miscalculated by preventing them and their fighting colleagues from being confined to bases within Namibia at the start of the independence process.

Having returned as civilians, said the former combatants, they had been free to learn the whereabouts of, and survey every military base, police station and strategic site within the country. They could, the combatants boasted, leave Namibia and re-group in Angola ready to fight within 24 hours. Meanwhile, the core of a Plan fighting force remained in bases north of the 16th parallel, looking after the liberation movement's weapons and heavy armour.

Just as the South African military was not prepared to waste years of battlefield investment by handing Namibia over to a socialist government, so too were many members of Swapo's military wing, as well as ordinary party cadres, unable to contemplate losing everything they had fought for in an election which the South Africans had done their utmost to rig in favour of the DTA and the other opposition parties. Everything now hung upon the final voting, and whether or not Martti Ahtisaari declared the ballot to be "free and fair".

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The nightmare scenario started to unfold on Wednesday November 1 when, less than a week before voting in the Namibian election was due to start, Pik Botha suddenly flew to Windhoek and announced to the world that Plan fighters were grouping in Angola ready for another incursion.

For a few nervous hours, it seemed that, once more, Resolution 435 was about to tumble into the abyss. Botha, accompanied by Defence Minister Magnus Malan and army chief General Jannie Geldenhys, jetted into the Namibian capital clutching copies of what he thought were Untag radio messages intercepted by
South African military intelligence giving details of a build-up of Plan fighters on the Namibian-Angolan border. If the reports were true, they gave Pretoria the pretext on which to suspend the independence plan, again release its troops from base, and send them back into the Namibian bush. Untag headquarters, where in recent weeks staff had been driven to the point of boredom by a countrywide return to relative calm, was thrown into pandemonium as the source of the supposed Untag radio messages was investigated.

The Swapo leadership, too, made hurried calls to Angola to check Botha's allegations, while SADF troops at Grootfontein, Oshivel and Walvis Bay were put on red alert. By late evening, UN Special Representative Martti Ahtisaari had met with Botha and told him that the communiques were not from Untag sources, and Swapo had dismissed the Foreign Minister's allegations as "naive and childish lies". Indeed, the messages were a big hoax; Botha returned to Pretoria with egg on his face, and spent the following weeks fighting for his political survival.

Similar false alarms had been raised in previous months when, acting on information again supplied by South African military intelligence, Administrator-General Louis Pienaar had also claimed that Plan cadres were regrouping south of the 16th parallel. Pienaar's allegations caused minor disquiet, but the November 1 call to panic stations, coming as it did from the South African Foreign Minister only six days before the elections got underway, was a malicious attempt to derail the independence process. Both hoaxes were probably the work of elements within the South African military unhappy with the way they perceived they had been sold out by the politicians over the signing of the New York Accord. Botha, being one of the primary architects of the accord, had become the target of his own military. Botha survived this attempted political assassination, and thanks to Untag's speed at verifying the hoax, Namibia's independence remained on the tracks. But the incident demonstrated the power establishment rightwingers wielded, and the devious means they were prepared to use in order to achieve their own political aims. Prior to the implementation of Resolution 435, it had been unthinkable that Swapo would not win the two-thirds majority in the election which it needed to have a free hand in writing the new constitution.

Nationally and internationally, the liberation movement had been perceived as the "sole and authentic representative" of black Namibians at least. However, by the end of September 1989, even members of the Swapo leadership were secretly doubting whether their party would achieve the two-thirds majority they thought was rightly theirs.

Reports reaching the election directorate from the party's regional offices were not good. For a start, voter education revealed that Swapo was likely to lose many votes through their own supporters mistakenly voting for other parties. On the ballot paper itself, the ten parties contesting the election were distinguished by motifs and their initials. For the purposes of the election campaign, Swapo had introduced a new motif, the silhouette of a person giving a power salute.
Two opposing parties - the UDF and SWAPO-D - had adopted symbols previously associated with the liberation movement, the clenched fist and the flaming torch respectively. In the few months Swapo had had to campaign, many of its supporters seemed not to have grasped the change, and in voting exercises organised by Swapo branch offices put their crosses next to other parties thinking they were in fact voting for Swapo.

In several such trial runs carried out amongst mostly literate and educated Swapo supporters in Windhoek, as many as 30 per cent of mock ballot papers were either spoilt or registered votes for opponents. Campaign officers shuddered at the thought of what would happen in the rural areas where a large proportion of the population was illiterate.

In Kaokoland, the DTA seemed to have a simple solution to this problem. Here voters were taught parrot-fashion to count three spaces down on the ballot paper and then to put a cross in the box opposite the DTA, all of which was done in time to a drum beat until the rhythm was fixed in the voters' heads! Meanwhile, in other rural areas, white farmers prevented Swapo fieldworkers - sometimes at gunpoint - from canvassing labourers. There were reports, too, of farmers threatening to withhold wages unless their employees voted for the party of the farmers' choice. With little or no access to voter education, many farm labourers were unaware that their votes would be secret, and come polling day, black farm employees were seen being driven by their bosses to the polls dressed even in the colours of the whites-only ACN party!

Complaining about these malpractices was a time-consuming and often frustrating business; distances between farms and urban areas were huge, and even when party fieldworkers returned to problem farms with Untag monitors, the farmers often remained just as hostile as before. When it came to publicity, Swapo was no match for the DTA. The Alliance had a media unit run by a large, full-time staff using all the latest equipment to produce high-quality videos, posters and leaflets. The DTA also had two established daily newspapers at its disposal for blanket coverage of its campaign.

Swapo was unable to get its own party paper, Namibia Today, up and running until August, and even when operational, the bi-weekly publication had to contend with all the problems of breaking into an already saturated market with printing and distribution in the control of politically hostile private monopolies. Despite having access to sophisticated equipment, the liberation movement's attempts at video and other publicity bore all the traits of the producers' predominantly Eastern European training, and came across as drab and uninspirational to Namibians brainwashed by Western values having been fed a TV diet of glitzy American soap operas and B-movies. Swapo did not have the money, nor its leaders the showbiz charisma, to come across well using these modern media.

Yet, outside the far-north of the country, Swapo relied heavily on these media to put its message across, and seemed reluctant, if not unable, to tap into grassroot
communication networks established during years of underground operation prior to the implementation of Resolution 435.

After years of Swapo operating underground, township Namibians were used to receiving political information through the grapevine. But the very people who had built up this grassroot communication network - the old internal Swapo leadership - were pushed to one side by the returning exiled leaders who headed the election campaign. The internal leaders, popular figureheads who for years had been living, breathing and drinking with the people, carrying the party's message to the masses at great risk to themselves, became obsolete overnight.

They were replaced by relative strangers who wore designer suits and lived out of touch in the white suburbs. The only time those living in the townships got to see members of the Swapo Election Directorate was either on the rally platform, or on the television. Besides which, the electronic media, run by the SWABC, was still mistrusted by most who considered it a South African propaganda mouthpiece.

The result was that - apart from the north, and in Windhoek in particular - Swapo's campaign became aloof and sanitised, and appeared to be tailor-made for wooing the whites whilst ignoring the liberation movement's natural constituency in the townships.

Many black Namibians began to feel that their allegiance to Swapo was being taken for granted. The DTA, on the other hand, had fieldworkers wherever you turned, driving around the townships in broadcast vans day and night, going door to door with the party's message, and flooding the streets with posters and pamphlets. Having fought elections before, the ITA was well versed in electioneering.

It was a different story in the north where the Swapo campaign team, which included hundreds of former Plan combatants working as fieldworkers, was able to quickly reactivate communication networks and propaganda techniques well established during the war. But to win a two-thirds majority, Swapo could not rely totally on its traditional image as a heroic liberation movement, nor upon its established northern power base.

It had to earn credibility countrywide as a political party fit to run the country on behalf of all Namibians. Swapo's task was made all the more difficult by the detainee issue, which continued to haunt the party throughout the campaign. The opposition parties seized upon it and kept it alive through the media so that the issue superceded all others, eclipsing anything to do with manifestos and future policies.

Most of the shouting on the detainee issue was done by the Parents' Committee which, having grabbed the limelight both at home and overseas with an incredibly effective publicity campaign, took Swapo to court. The committee's October application to the Windhoek High Court - demanding that Swapo release all remaining detainees in order that they (the detainees) could vote in the elections - came as an untimely embarrassment for Swapo after the findings of the Untag
mission to Angola and Zambia had seemingly poured cold water on the detainee issue. The October application, which named Sam Nujoma, Theo-Ben Gurirab, Andimba Toivo ya Toivo, security chief Soloman "Jesus" Hawala, Hidipo Hamutenya and Moses Gar6eb as respondents, was eventually dismissed, but it ensured that the detainee question remained at the top of the agenda right up until polling began. Swapo's response was to keep quiet and to try to absorb the bruising bodyblows, seemingly paralysed by an opinion-split in the leadership as to what should be done to try and defuse the detainee legacy. The party's official line was to claim that the detainee question was not an election issue but rather one that would be dealt with after independence.

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Behind closed doors, however, moderates within the Swapo leadership wanted the party to publicly apologise to all those who had been tortured and wrongly detained, while hardliners - particularly those responsible for the spy purge - remained unrepentant and refused to apologise to anyone for what had happened. The rift ran right through the party to its supporters; those who had been detained, or who had friends or relatives who had been rounded up, shared the view of the moderates, while those who had remained untainted - by no means a large majority - continued to condemn the detainees as South African agents.

The appearance of "Jesus" Hawala, Swapo's security chief and the man named as being directly responsible for the detentions and torture, on the platform at Nujoma's welcome home rally in Windhoek did not help matters. Hawala was on stage in his capacity as a member of the Swapo Central Committee, members of which were introduced to the crowd one by one, in turn standing to salute the applause.

When the time came to introduce Hawala, master of ceremonies Hage Geingob stumbled and then sheepishly announced "Comrade Hawala" before moving quickly on to the next person. There was an awkward silence in the auditorium which swallowed up the few muffled cheers. Everyone strained to catch a glimpse of the notorious "Butcher of Lubango", but Hawala remained seated, hidden in the sea of faces on the platform.

His very presence was enough to enrage many of those at the rally, let alone the fact that Hawala had been introduced, along with his other central committee comrades, as a "hero". "How can they do this!" one Swapo campaign official told the British Guardian newspaper.

"Have they no feelings for those relatives who still don't know where their loved ones are? They promised to bring to book those responsible for taking things too far in the camps. Well he is the Butcher of Lubango and prime candidate, but they still introduce him as a hero returned."

Only a minority of detainees had jumped on the political bandwagon and campaigned against Swapo. But with no public apology forthcoming, a silent majority became increasingly disillusioned with the liberation movement, some vowing not to vote in the election at all.
"How can I vote while my brother is still missing?" one former Swapo Youth League radical told me bitterly.

"No, come the election, I will not be giving my vote to anyone out of respect for my brother."

For some, the detainee issue put a question mark against Swapo's ability to govern, and no doubt persuaded apolitical and more moderate voters to side with one of the opposition parties come election day. With its campaign proving largely ineffective outside the far north, Swapo was left relying heavily on the personal pulling power of its president who, 

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having returned home, embarked on a series of "star rallies" at major centres throughout the country.

These started out well with tens of thousands of people first packing into the Windhoek athletics stadium and then swamping the sports field arena outside Oshakati. However these rallies, taking place as they did in Swapo strongholds soon after Nujoma's homecoming, were always going to attract large crowds. The rallies which followed - in Keetmanshoop, Rundu, Swakopmund, Katima Mulilo and Gobabis - gave a clearer indication as to the depth of Swapo's support countrywide, particularly as the DTA tended to organise coincidental meetings to compete with those being addressed by the Swapo President.

The media was the last place to look in order to find out how many people attended these key rallies, as the figures quoted were always exaggerated or played down, depending on where each news organisation's sympathies lay. This aspect of what was, anyway, a savage propaganda war became a meaningless tit-for-tat of random numbers.

The underlying trend, however, showed that Swapo was not attracting the crowds it might have hoped for in many of these outlying areas; the turn-outs at the Nujoma rallies were seldom disappointing, nonetheless they showed that the DTA could expect to win a significant slab of the vote come the election. Nujoma rounded off his campaigning in the eastern town of Gobabis on Sunday November 5, two days before the polls opened. Around 1 000 people turned up at the Gobabis Showground to hear the Swapo President speak, an attendance which might have seemed small but nonetheless pleased the local Swapo organisers. "If we had held this rally in June," said one party official, "the President would have been talking to the cows!" At that time Gobabis was a one-party state belonging to the DTA.

The Gobabis region, with its large commercial ranches merging into the tribal homelands which then stretched to the Botswana border, was prime DTA territory. The homelands were run by the staunchly pro-DTA Herero and Tswana administrations, while some of the country's most notorious right-wing white farmers controlled the rest. Black people were still prevented from drinking at Gobabis's only hotel bar, and few whites would allow Swapo campaign workers near their workers, particularly on the farms.

Meanwhile, local administration property such as vehicles and school halls were openly used for DTA electioneering (despite the laws prohibiting this), but state-
employed teachers were threatened with the sack if they did campaign work for Swapo during their school holidays. It was not surprising, therefore, that Swapo was pleased to have drummed up the support it had in a region which was typical of many of the country's rural areas.

Admittedly, most of Swapo's following came from the Gobabis township of Epako, but even here the DTA had the advantage of having run local politics almost unchallenged since 1978. The night before Nujoma's rally, a usually dormant Epako swung into life as people of all ages and from every section of the still ethnically segregated township converged on the run-down community hall to dance and drink the night away at a Swapo braai.

There was little sleep to be had, people rising early to wash, put on their best clothes and process to the small out-of-town aerodrome to greet Nujoma, who arrived in a jet loaned to him by a Windhoek millionaire businessman for free use during the campaign. Fired with enthusiasm, the crowd then returned to the town and made their way to the Showground which was situated on the far side of town.

Nujoma was not scheduled to speak until 15h00, but by midday the thousand or so rally-goers had gathered in front of the Showground grandstand and waited patiently in the sultry heat for the proceedings to begin. Cultural songs and dances kept the crowd amused as Nujoma's besuited security guards, who seemed to number almost as many as the spectators, looked on apprehensively, making sure that at least 30 metres separated the people from the stage. Threat of assassination still loomed large over the Swapo President, and no one was going to take any chances, not even in this ostensibly docile "dorp".

Parts of Nujoma's speech, stressing that Swapo would not carry out wholesale nationalisation and redistribution of Namibian-owned commercial farm land, were targeted specifically at his Gobabis audience, in particular the 30 or so whites who listened to him from beyond the perimeter fence on the far side of the Showground, about half a kilometre from the stage. They had arrived in their bakkies and watched the proceedings from afar through binoculars whilst listening carefully to the Afrikaans translations of Nujoma's words which boomed across the fields from the powerful public address system.

The arrival of this posse of farmers and their families had caused a stir amongst the Swapo security men, several of whom were dispatched to investigate what the whites were doing. But after an hour or so of staring at each other through binoculars, both parties realised neither meant any harm, and left each other alone. Had Nujoma come to Gobabis in April or before, these very same whites might have been waiting for him with their shotguns, so it was a miracle that they were now prepared to even listen to what he had to say, although they still refused to trust the Swapo President.

"I don't think I can believe what he is saying," said one woman as she prepared sandwiches for the menfolk who sat swigging beer on the car bonnet, dressed in
their shorts, knee-length socks, heavy boots and sunhats, "but I'm not afraid of Swapo winning the election."
I could not believe what I was hearing. These were people from a right-wing heartland, third, fourth or fifth generation settlers who had been brought up to believe that white was right, blacks were only fit to serve, and anyone who thought differently was a communist. "Look, we are very tolerant people," one of the farmers told me.
"What other people would stand by and let 7 000 Untags come into their country and take it over? And look here," he said gesturing towards the Showground, "we are allowing Swapo to hold its rally in our town while former terrorists walk around keeping an eye on us as if they own the place."
But there were some things this small group of convivial "boere" were not going to stand for.
"There is no way I will give up any of my land if a Swapo government asks me to do so," said the owner of three Gobabis farms, commenting on Swapo's election pledges to take over farms owned by foreign landlords and to restrict farmers to owning not more than one farm each.
"You can't do that. I have worked for that land. I have a lot of people working for me, a lot of people depend on me for jobs. I can't see Swapo coming and taking it away from me. I don't think any democratic country will allow it. How can they take away land and redistribute it to the poor?"
The idea that Swapo might restart the war if it lost the election was also high on the whites' list of concerns. "We are tired of fighting, we want to see this (independence) process through. South West is our home, we live here, we want to carry on living here. But if they (Swapo) go back into the bush to fight, then we are also prepared to go back to war."
Dawn broke on Tuesday November 11 giving light to some of the most incredible scenes of the entire independence process. From the early hours of the morning, voters lined up outside polling stations across the country, and by the time the polls opened at 07h00, queues of up to a kilometre long had formed outside voting centres from Karasburg to Katima Mulilo, Gobabis to Swakopmund. Having waited so long to elect a government of their choice, black Namibians were no longer desperate to vote. Katutura was no exception. I had heard Nujoma was going to cast his ballot at Katutura Community Centre as soon as the polls opened at 07h00, so, to give myself plenty of time, I left the house at 06h00 and waited beside the road for a taxi. Forty minutes later I was still waiting.

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Plenty of taxis had passed, but they were all filled to capacity with people heading not to work but to the polling stations. As the minutes ticked past, I kept looking across the valley towards Nujoma's house, expecting to see his car pull out of the driveway at any minute and speed off, my story disappearing before my very eyes. I was saved by our next door neighbour who was driving into town and offered to give me a lift as far as the community centre.
As we came over the hill at Soweto and headed along PA de Wet Street, I began to see why I had been unable to find space in a taxi. There was a line of people...
stretching for as far as the eye could see from the gates of Soweto's Career Training Centre, around the perimeter fence and down towards the Murula location.

I was dropped at the community centre only to find no queues here at all, but a quick look around told me that the polling station was in fact at the nearby St Barnabas School where the queue of voters was already beginning to wrap itself around the perimeter fence for a second time. It was a wonder that anyone knew where any of the polling stations were. I certainly did not.

The previous day, the lists of where the country's polling stations were to be situated still had not been released by the Administrator-General. The latter had promised that the lists would be given to the media during the previous weekend at the latest, but they did not materialise until the early aours of Monday, too late for the morning newspapers.

The radio broadcast the lists throughout the day, but by the evening, many people were still in the dark as to where they could go to vote the following morning. The grapevine eventually made up for the AG's shortcomings, and by early Tuesday, tens of thousands of Katuturans knew exactly where they were going, while anyone still in any doubt just had to go into the street and follow the crowds which streamed towards the polling stations. Because St Barnabas was the nearest polling station to the Katutura Community Centre, I and what seemed like the entire press corps assumed that this was where Nujoma would be casting his ballot. Half-expecting a repeat of the bloodshed they witnessed in April, the international media had returned to Namibia in force over the weekend, but had to be content with cruising the streets of Katutura like tourists on safari, photographing various species of Namibian doing what they did every weekend - drink, sleep and watch soccer.

By Tuesday, the journalists were baying for some action, and the leader of the Namibian revolution casting his vote was top of the news hounds' agenda. Again they were going to be disappointed. Swapo's information office, in typically cryptic fashion, had said that Nujoma would be voting at "the community centre in Katutura".

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We had all taken this to mean Katutura Community Centre in the old location, but the PR people had in fact been referring to a semi-derelict building on the far flung outskirts of Katutura near Hakahana which at one time during its undistinguished history had been used by the local community for braais and meetings. We had missed the Swapo President and so had to make do with the first person in the queue at St Barnabas instead - a young Swapo supporter by the name of Karl Mbaha who had queued since the early hours of the morning having been "too excited about voting to sleep". Mbaha, clutching a small Swapo flag and bedecked in red, blue and green, was pounced upon by forty or more journalists brandishing notebooks, microphones and cameras, and was asked forty or more times how he felt about being the first person to vote in the elections. Shortly after 07h0, the doors of the classroom housing the voting booths swung open and Mbaha leapt forward, eager to escape the journalists and exercise his
new, hard-earned democratic right. "You are not coming in here with that," a burly Afrikaner election official snarled, blocking the young Swapo supporter's path to the ballot box and pointing a sausage-like index finger at the flag which was attached to a scrawny twig.

Mbaha sighed the kind of sigh which suggests a beautiful daydream has just been spoilt by a crash-landing return to reality, gave the election official a defiant stare, handed over the flag and marched into the voting hall. Minutes later, he emerged through the back door, but his look of relief and satisfaction quickly changed to one of horror when he saw that the pack of journalists was there waiting for him. Obviously a quick learner, Mbaha stood his ground at the top of the steps and conducted an impromptu press conference, signalling in turn to those of us gathered at the bottom of the steps for our questions. "Did you shit yourself?" one journalist asked originally after several of us had again inquired how the voter felt. Mbaha looked at the questioner with disbelief, shook his head and strode off towards the school gates, ignoring the cluster of hacks which pursued him across the yard.

Outside the gates I met up with my colleague John Walenga who was photographing the queue, which by now was well into its second lap of the fence. As he had managed to capture one of the company cars, we decided to team up and make a tour of the city's polling stations.

In Katutura the story was the same everywhere we went; massive snake-like coils of people disappearing into the distance, up hills, down valleys, round and round and round. It was often difficult to tell where the front and back of the queues were, but in their familiar, stoical way, the people stood patiently in the ever-increasing heat, reflecting calmly on the long wait ahead of them and showing no sign of the momentous excitement

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which had brought them out to vote in such numbers. Most were dressed in their best clothes, some took refuge from the sun under umbrellas, others sought refreshment from the ice cream sellers who pushed their carts along the queues. The mood was one of solemnity as if everyone was about to take holy communion for the first time- it was a moment of deep, spiritual significance, of which the perseverance of having to wait what was obviously going to be a long time in the uncomfortable heat was all part. Many Katutura businesses had closed down for the day, and the Single Quarters market place - always alive with activity at that time of day - was now completely deserted, as both customers and traders considered voting to be more important than even the buying and selling of food. With the queues in Katutura being so long, many voters had gone to polling stations elsewhere in the city, only to find the same situation there. What must have been close to a thousand people were already waiting outside the Tal Park polling station in the city centre when the doors opened at 07h00, and the queue was soon spilling out into the railway station car park before doubling back along the approach road, up Bahnhof Street, past the TransNamib building, turning left at the traffic lights and then disappearing down Kaiser Street past the police station, and back towards Katutura.
Thousands of voters from the townships also converged on the polling stations in the white suburbs, ferried to and from this alien territory in some of the hundreds of South African taxis hired and brought to Namibia by the South African trade union organisation Cosatu to help Swapo with transporting supporters.

During the ethnic and whites-only elections held during the colonial era, voting in the suburbs had been an exclusive and leisurely affair. Now black and white stood together in long, slow-moving queues under the ferocious summer sun, the whites looking extremely annoyed and uncomfortable at both the wait and the township invasion. By midday, the queue at the Olympia polling station had formed a massive, mutant figure of eight over what was a school playground.

Swapo Election Director Hage Geingob - dressed in an immaculate suit and tie, and flanked by advisers and security guards - arrived on the scene and spent several minutes marvelling at the queue. He was quietly amused to see so many black faces there and said he was sure those queuing would have little difficulty enduring the long, hot wait that lay ahead of them.

"Our people are fighters and are strong, they stand all day at rallies without water, so they should be alright here." He was, of course, referring to those who attended Swapo rallies, at which speeches were translated

into all the country's major languages and so lasted much of the day. Geingob's remark did not go down well with an elderly white man standing nearby who, with sweat pouring down his bright red face, snorted in disgust; he, like most of the whites queuing, obviously was not a hardened Swapo rally-goer, and relied on refreshments brought to him by his black servants to survive the long wait at the polling station.

Here and at all of the capital's polling stations, people queued for, on average, 10 hours before being able to vote, while some were turned away having not voted when election officials eventually shut the doors at 23h00 - four hours after the polls were scheduled to close.

Equally staggering scenes were to be found throughout the country, in particular in the rural areas where people walked or rode for several hours to reach some polling stations, only then to wait all day to vote. Many hundreds had to be turned away from rural stations in the far north, which quickly ran out of everything from ballot papers to ink, such was the demand. In the remote village of Etashinga, ballot papers ran out by 16h00 on the first day. The election officials radioed time and again for more, but come 09h00 the following morning, the papers still had not arrived and the officials resorted to playing bowls to keep the queue of 300 or more voters amused.

Most of these rural areas had no electricity, so voting could only be conducted during the daylight hours. Those who missed out on the first day were back in the queue before dawn the following day, ready for another day of waiting in the shadeless heat. In the far north, an estimated 40 per cent of registered voters cast their ballots on the first day, while countrywide, Untag estimated that a third of the electorate had turned out to vote.
"I felt that this has been my right, that my dream has been fulfilled," the Reverend Liborius Ndumbu, a Roman Catholic Priest at Anamulenge in the far north told the New York Times.

"It is the fact that we feel like human beings, we have got rights, we are voting for the future of this country. It is very exciting for us."

This satisfaction was soured for black voters at the Windhoek Airport polling station where hundreds of white South Africans arrived throughout the week in specially chartered planes in order to vote before flying straight home again. On the first day of voting, these whites - a fraction of the 10 000 South Africans who qualified to vote by virtue of the fact that they or one of their parents were born in "South West" - insisted that they be allowed to form their own queue separate from other (black) voters. Despite protests from Untag monitors, airport election officials agreed to the separate queuing system which continued until the second day, when press exposure forced the officials to stop the practice.

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After the second day of voting, the queues began to evaporate, which was hardly surprising considering more than 80 per cent of people had voted countrywide by day three. By the time the polls closed on the Saturday evening, the torrent of people arriving at the polling stations had become a trickle.

In all, a staggering 97 per cent of the country's 623 000 registered voters had gone to the polls, and UN Special Representative Martti Ahtisaari declared the voting stage of the election to have been free and fair. As Ahtisaari's endorsement of the process suggests, the five days of voting had been surprisingly peaceful, although they did not pass entirely without incident.

The propaganda war continued unabated, despite strict laws regulating what parties could and could not say and do during the voting period. On the Wednesday morning, people living in Windhoek and the far northern district of Ongandjera woke to find the ground covered with leaflets. These were made to look like a secret Swapo memo outlining plans Sam Nujoma supposedly had to give former combatants from his home area of Ongandjera a special payment for their allegiance during the war.

The tens of thousands of leaflets, which were dropped from an aeroplane in the early hours of the morning, were intended to cause rivalry amongst former Plan fighters. Designed in the exact same style used by Swapo's publicity department for press releases, and claiming to have been produced by the non-existent though authentic-sounding "Swapo News Service", the leaflets, nonetheless, had little impact on both Katuturans and those living in the far north, who were used to spotting South-African inspired propaganda.

Many people refused to pick up the leaflets for fear that they were impregnated with the ultra-violet dye used at the polling stations to mark the fingers of people once they had voted, while in Ongandjera, information contained in the leaflets was digested only by goats which munched their way through the white carpet of paper.
Those responsible for this illegal and costly propaganda stunt were exposed a few days later when Untag officials apprehended DTA party workers loading more of the same leaflets into a plane at Oshakati airport.

There were also cases of workers being sacked for taking time off work to go and vote, although far fewer than the trades unions had expected. Those sacked were invariably black Swapo-supporting workers who, like so many other Namibians, were keen to vote as soon as the polls opened and were therefore caught up for most of the day in the long queues at the polling stations. In some cases, the employers claimed that they had allotted times for their employees to go and vote, but these tended to be at the end of the week, and the workers were either afraid their bosses would

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renge on this agreement and the polls would then close before they could vote, or else they were unable to contain their eagerness long enough. Those who were sacked suffered because of their desire to vote as there was no law to protect them from such dismissals, and few were reinstated.

The Namibian - the only daily newspaper in the country at all sympathetic to Swapo - was also subjected to subtle sabotage throughout the week of voting which left the majority of people with no paper to read other than DTA-owned publications. Despite never once failing to meet the printers' deadlines, The Namibian was nonetheless late off the presses every day, and missed the early morning flights to the far north, where the majority of the paper's readers lived. Even in Windhoek, the paper failed to make the news-stands outside the city centre thanks to unexplained "technical hitches" at the distribution company, the head of which mysteriously disappeared for the entire week in question.

All in all, however, the voting process was incredibly peaceful, although, unable to compete in newsworthiness with the momentous events in Eastern Europe as the Berlin wall was broken down, Namibia's final, triumphant steps to self-determination barely received more than a mention in the international media.

Once the polls had closed on the Saturday night, the nervous wait then started as the ballot boxes were transported to 23 regional centres ready for the count to commence on the Monday morning. Katutura was unnervingly quiet on the Sunday.

I could not remember the last time there had not been a political rally of some kind in the township, and the murmur of music and voices which drifted in through my open bedroom window seemed incomplete without the head-splitting whine of loudspeaker vans churning out their standard Sunday menu of "mieliepap" propaganda.

It was as if everybody was holding their breath. Even after several quarts of beer, shebeen-goers remained on edge, trying hard to avoid talking about "the result", but eventually succumbing to the urge to speculate at the outcome of the election like children who, on finding a gift-wrapped package in the house days before their birthday, can think and talk of nothing else despite being powerless to find out what is beneath the wrapping paper. On the Monday, those with jobs went to
work as usual while those without remained at home, always within range of the
radio and in constant anticipation of news about the count.
The first results were not expected until the Monday evening at the earliest, so it
came as a surprise when the bell on the telex machine at The Namibian's office
rang at around midday and the result for the southern district of Bethanie was
rattled off. "It's a result!" someone shouted, and people rushed from all corners of
the office to look.

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There was silence followed by more silence as the tallies were read and absorbed.
The DTA had trounced Swapo by 1314 votes to 461. Although quickly dismissed
by Swapo supporters in the office as a "one-off" failure, the result dealt a blow to
their self-assured over-confidence which had built up through weeks, months,
years and decades of believing that Swapo had an almost divine right to win.
More results quickly followed, again announced by more rings on the telex and a
morse code bleep over the radio, which had now been turned up in Liz's office.
The radio was always first with the results, and everyone immediately stopped
what they were doing and rushed into the manager's room whenever the bleep
sounded like a siren through the office.
More DTA successes followed, interspersed with only the occasional Swapo
victory, these being mostly in the urban areas. By the time the day shift went
home, the office was like a mortuary; although it was the total vote countrywide
which counted in the end, no one needed a calculator to work out that Swapo was
trailing the Alliance by far. People were beginning to think the unthinkable -
"What if Swapo lost?"
It was as if a dark cloud hung over the downtown taxi rank where workers and
shoppers stood in clusters, dissecting and double-checking the results as they
waited for a ride back to the townships. In the taxi I squeezed into, no one spoke
as we listened not to tapes of Brenda Fassie but instead the radio, anxiously
awaiting the next morse code bleep to signal another result.
By sunset, the streets of Katutura were already deserted, residents remaining
indoors within earshot of their radios, which played in every house and communal
yard throughout the township. Conversation at Kaurie's house was at first subdued
as we all paid attention to the SWABC Oshiwambo service. Kaurie's nine-year-
old daughter and two young friends had made a chart listing the districts and the
parties which they filled in as the results were broadcast. Each time we heard the
morse code bleep, we all rushed from our respective bedrooms and converged on
the living room where we huddled around the radio, the girls with pens poised
ready to fill in the relevant blanks on their chart.
Being unable to count beyond ten in Oshiwambo, I peered over the youngsters'
shoulders waiting for them to translate into figures what was being said on the
radio. Each time the announcer mentioned "DTA", Kaurie and the children gave a
small groan before holding their breath to hear how many votes the party had
tallied.
When it came to Swapo's turn, my housemates gave a little cheer before again falling silent. If Swapo won the district, the children did a little dance around the room, while Kaurie clapped her hands and recited a few of the liberation's movement's slogans before ordering silence as we all doublechecked the result against the announcer's repeat reading.

These celebrations were few and far between, however, and as the evening wore on, Kaurie became more and more despondent in her post-result analysis. Having started out as optimistic "just you wait and see...", by late evening this analysis had become a tirade of allegations against the DTA and all the other "puppets" taking part in the election. She began to theorise as to how "South African agents" could have rigged the result, and spent more and more time on the phone to her friends seeking a consensus on these theories. By now only a few results remained outstanding and dreary light pop music filled the broadcasting void in between the delivery of these last tallies.

Shortly after midnight, only the "big three" regions - Windhoek, Kavango and Owambo - were unaccounted for. Windhoek and Owambo were expected to register clear Swapo wins while Kavango was thought to be going the way of the DTA.

But with Swapo trailing the Alliance by so much, the margins between each party's tally would be crucial. I was making coffee in the kitchen while Kaurie and the children were dozing on the living room sofa when the music faded and the still night air was split by the morse code bleep, sending us - and no doubt the entire country - into a frenzy. The children hurriedly searched for their chart and a pen, Kaurie woke up with a start and struggled to sit upright, and I wrenched the kettle's plug from its socket and scurried into the living room just as the announcer was clearing his throat ready to read.

"Mpaka ota palandula iizemo ya Venduka" - ("Now here is the result for Windhoek," the announcer said in a slow, deliberate voice. As I watched the daughter's pen strokes, I tried to make out from the announcer's intonation how the count had turned out, but the man behind the microphone gave nothing away.

ACN 4 749; CDA 279; DTA (deep breath - no groan from Kaurie and the children) 30 475...
"Jeeezz, that's high!" I exclaimed.
"Shyyyyy," the others hissed.
FCN 1 458; NNNDP 77 (snigger); NNF 1 853; NPF 1 777; Swapo-D 350; Swapo ...the youngest child spluttered as she tried to stifle a cough.
"Hey, now I have missed that result. Did anyone hear it?" said the daughter.
"Shhhhh!" Kaurie and I exclaimed, but it was too late, so we had to wait for the announcer to repeat the tallies to find out that Swapo had gained 39 060 votes, only 8 585 more than the Alliance in a district where the liberation movement was counting on gaining a large majority of votes.

The bland pop music started up once more on the radio and the shock of the Windhoek result began to register. A two-thirds Swapo majority
was now out of the question, but with the liberation movement having only 30 per cent of the votes compared with the DTA's 47 per cent, it seemed as if the chances of a simple Swapo victory were also fading.

The voting had already been declared "free and fair" which meant only a drastic mistake in the counting, or the discovery of widespread fraud could prevent the election result from being valid. I stepped out into the yard for some fresh air. Only the crickets interrupted the stillness, yet all around lights burnt in usually darkened windows, notably at the big house over the river valley where the large Swapo standard hung limply from its pole on the roof above Nujoma's living room. The whole of Katutura appeared to be wide awake but stunned into silence.

I woke early the next morning to find Kaurie snoring quietly on the sofa and the children huddled together on cushions on the floor, still fast asleep where I had left them a few hours before. The radio droned on, one anaemic song after another without interruption; I imagined the radio announcer and studio engineer slumped over the mixing desk while Bles Bridges' Golden Greats glided around the turntable set on automatic replay.

The phone rang, startling my house mates out of their slumber. It was Anna ringing from the office to tell me that Gwen had left a message to say that I must go and photograph Nujoma at his house at 08h00.

"Have there been any more results?" I asked Anna.

"No. The Kavango and Owambo are the only ones outstanding." I put the phone down and greeted Kaurie and the children who yawned and stretched their stiff limbs. Drowsily Kaurie informed me that the last news she had heard over the radio before going to sleep was that a power failure had delayed the count.

I made breakfast, washed, dressed, polished my shoes, picked up my camera bag and walked out of the front door, leaving the children tidying up the house while Kaurie sulked at the kitchen table. A bakkie covered in red, blue and white streamers and crammed full of cheering people giving the DTA's two-finger salute cruised past the front gate and disappeared around the corner, its horn blaring.

Then everything was quiet again, the street deserted except for a few isolated figures waiting for taxis beside the road, and a couple of stray dogs which sniffed around for something to eat. A crumpled Swapo election poster lay on the tarmac, flailing in the faint breeze like an animal which had just been run down. Suddenly a gust of wind swept across the road, lifting the poster high into the air midst a funnel of dust, and carried it away over the roof tops like a departing spirit.

As I picked my way along one of the many little footpaths which criss-crossed the rocky riverbed, I wondered whether Nujoma would be in any mood to have his picture taken. The photo call, supposedly to photograph the Swapo leader on the threshold of victory, had been arranged the previous day before most of the results had come through, putting a completely different perspective on an otherwise beautiful summer's morning. The road past Nujoma's house - usually a
constant stream of traffic - was empty. The security guards appeared bored and agitated; two lounged against the small iron gate at the foot of the path leading to the house, five or so paced up and down next to the garage, and yet more were sitting in the porch of the main door situated at the side of the building. Each group was listening to small, pocket-sized transistor radios tuned to the SWABC, which now played funereal classical music as if creating the mood for announcing the death of a head of state. I emerged from the valley, slightly out of breath and with small beads of sweat forming on my forehead, and walked up the road towards Nujoma's house. As I drew near, one of the guards by the gate, a stocky, muscular man dressed in a blue three-piece pin-striped suit, stood up straight and sauntered towards me.

We met several metres from the driveway and I greeted him. He gave a curt greeting in reply, and I told him why I had come. For a moment he stared at me, his eyes hidden behind a pair of extremely dark sunglasses. His left hand was jammed into his jacket pocket and the other hovered around his left lapel. He told me to wait, then turned and walked slowly up the drive to the garage where he conferred with his colleagues before picking up a twoway radio which lay on the ground and, half-turning his back on me, began to talk into the handset. His conversation over, the guard signalled to me to come up the drive.

I reached the garage and was ordered inside. Here another guard carefully searched me and my bag, politely asking me to open each container and to shoot off a couple of frames to ensure my camera was not loaded with anything other than film. The search over, I was led to the porch where Nujoma's chief of security showed me to the sitting room. Here he asked me to take a seat and wait. Twenty minutes later, the security chief returned and told me to go with him, and together we walked along a dark corridor and stopped in front of the door at the end. He knocked on the door and waited for a voice on the other side to invite us in.

Nujoma sat at a small desk reading the morning newspapers. He looked busy but relaxed, dressed in a perfectly ironed white shirt with cuffs buttoned down with chunky gold cufflinks, dark-grey suit trousers and a maroon tie which disappeared into his suit waistcoat made complete by a gold watch chain. His suit jacket hung on a coat stand in the corner of the box-like, sparsely furnished room which was obviously intended as nothing more than a temporary office.

The sunlight filtered through still-drawn, opaque beige curtains, a desk lamp brightening what would otherwise have been semi-gloom. Nujoma rose and shook my hand warmly, giving us both a cheery greeting before asking me to sit down in one of two office chairs arranged in front of the desk. He finished reading the front page article in The Namibian and then folded the paper neatly, placed it on top of the two other morning dailies and looked at me over the top of his half-moon glasses.

"I saw your lights were burning late into the night," I ventured, "I don't suppose you have had much sleep?"
Nujoma laughed. "No, none of us could sleep because of the excitement. But they have kept us waiting with these last two results."
"You must be a little disappointed with the way the results have gone so far. Do you think Swapo will win?"
"Of course Swapo will win," he said firmly though still with good humour.
"You don't really think the great Namibian people will put colonial puppets into power do you?" and he laughed.
This was no bravado. He believed what he said. He seemed totally confident that in a few hours' time his party would be declared election victors. I felt ashamed for having doubted him. I took my photos and returned to my seat as Nujoma asked me about the mood of people in the township. I told him that, if my landlady was anyone to go by, Swapo's supporters were despondent.
"No, they must have confidence. They will see; Swapo will still win." Nujoma picked up the newspaper once more and started reading, while I waited for my cue to leave. This came from the security chief who coughed deliberately, so I made to stand up, but my host wanted to talk some more.
"And what about this here...." he said, continuing to read out a point made in another of the paper's articles.
We discussed it briefly, and he then continued to read. Again the bodyguard coughed, again I prepared to leave, but again Nujoma entered into conversation. Here he was at the make-or-break point of his political career, on the brink of either the crowning glory or a humiliating end to what had been a life time of dedicated struggle to liberate his country, and he was happy to chat with me, a red-nosed "shirumbu" nobody from across the valley.
I was flattered, as well as amazed at his composure. I eventually emerged from the house an hour after I had entered, made my way through the valley and caught a taxi into town. I arrived at the office, to find my colleagues in a state of high excitement.

While I was en route, the Kavango result had come through and Swapo had scored an unexpected victory, taking 27 256 votes to the DTA's 22 046. The liberation movement still trailed in the overall poll, but the result of the biggest electoral district, Owambo, was still to come.
An hour later, the music on the radio faded and the morse code bleep stopped everyone in their tracks, frozen as if by magic as they listened to what the announcer had to say. I was in the newsroom and could not hear the announcer properly, but I did not dare move, and instead waited for the response of those in Liz's office to tell me the outcome.
Silence. Still silence. Then came a thunderous cheer. Swapo 197100 votes, the DTA 9 200. My colleagues ran out of Liz's office, some hugging each other whilst whooping with delight, others searching frantically for a calculator to see whether the landslide victory in Owambo was enough to sweep Swapo to an overall majority. It was.
The wake had suddenly become the baptism feast, the celebrations were about to begin. Even before the radio had confirmed that Swapo's majority was
guaranteed, and despite the fact that 96 000 tendered ballots still had to be
counted, people seemed to know instinctively that Swapo had won the election.
News of the result in Owambo spread like a veldfire through the city centre,
where shoppers, office and counter staff, and building site workers abandoned
what they were doing and rushed into the streets where they started to sing and
dance. Within minutes, a crowd several thousand strong had gathered and the
jubilant throng swarmed up Kaiser Street, power saluting and toyi-toying to the
chant of "Viva Swapo, viva!". As if from nowhere, people produced Swapo posters, hats and scarves which they
waved in the air. Labourers perched on scaffolding high above the city, apparently
oblivious to their precarious position, stood waving at and saluting the procession
below.
Strangers embraced each other like long lost brothers and sisters while whites
looked on like uninvited strangers, muttering to each other before flouncing off to
continue with their shopping.
Those whites taking a mid-morning break in the city centre cafes sat impassively,
sipping their coffee and continuing with their hushed conversations, pretending
that nothing was happening as the world exploded around them.
Their ability to shut themselves off, close their minds to reality and live in their
own exclusive dream world had enabled them to cling to colonial and apartheid
rule for so long. But even these blinkered dinosaurs could not help but feel the
tremors of relief, jubilation and ecstasy which were now shaking the capital.

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The pent-up emotions of a nation, kept boiling beneath the surface for so many
years, had finally erupted like a volcano which spewed out a lava flow of tears,
cheers and joy. This emotional up-welling lacked the naivety of April 1; the events
of April and the election campaign had destroyed that. Those celebrating now
were pouring out their huge sense of relief that, at last, it was all over and that
their liberation had finally been won.
A motorbike ridden by a young white man roared down Kaiser Street like a
charging bull towards the oncoming crowd. Realising that the crowd was not
going to part and let him through as he had intended, the young man braked,
sending his machine into a skid. Both rider and bike ended up on the ground in
front of the advancing crowd, but all the marchers did was to pick the young man
up, dust him down, and put him back on his bike with a smile and a cheer. Tears
of rage and humiliation came into the white boy’s eyes as he pushed his machine
to the side of the road and watched the crowd continue up the street.
Reactions to the elections result were equally spontaneous in Katutura. One
minute DTA loudspeaker vans were touring the township, the next they were
replaced by thousands upon thousands of cheering Swapo supporters who poured
into the streets with their red, blue and green flags and banners.
The toyi-toying crowds were followed by lines of cars and bakkies with horns
blaring non-stop while the passengers leant out of the windows shouting and
throwing power salutes. Taxi-drivers forgot all about business and joined the
mortorcades which cruised the main roads with paying passengers still on board.
Shebeens, which had been all but dormant the previous evening, were all of a sudden overflowing with customers.

Having photographed some of the street scenes, I called by at Nangolo's house, the shebeen across from Mbatji's home, to find the usually quiet and reserved Nangolo, quart bottle in hand and dancing around the living room with her neighbours.

For a while it was free drinks all round until the word spread and the house became jam-packed full of people, the majority of whom had skipped work in order to join the celebrations. Who cared?? Life's troubles had been erased by the proclamation of three words: Swapo had won. By early afternoon, the city centre throng had diminished as groups broke away and returned to the townships or began to process around the more accessible white suburbs. One group of about 500 people came running up Leutwein Street on a tour of colonial monuments; SWA House, the Tintenpalast, the Alte Feste, and the old German Lutheran Church set on the hill overlooking the city centre. But not once was any attempt made to invade or attack any of these relics, despite the size of the crowd and the lack of a police presence.

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I stood by the Alte Feste as the crowd advanced up the street, expecting that some of the marchers would at least try to pull down the statue of General von Trotha, the man who had led the German genocide of the Hereros and Namas. But the procession swept past, ignoring the huge, arrogant bronze figure seated upon his horse, and I had to ask one of the marchers bringing up the rear to pose with his Swapo flag in front of the statue so I could get the symbolic photo I was looking for. Earlier, another group of around a thousand people had swamped the steps of the Tintenpalast to greet Nujoma who went to this seat of colonial government to be congratulated by a surprisingly relaxed-looking Louis Pienaar.

As Nujoma, flanked by his fellow revolutionaries, stepped onto the balcony to salute the rapturous followers, you could feel the corpses of all the former persecutors of the Namibian people, from Von Trotha to Verwoerd, turning in their graves.

By late afternoon, the city centre had become relatively silent once more, prompting a BBC journalist to describe Swapo's victory as the "lunch-time revolution". The journalist could not have been in Katutura - or any other Namibian township - that night, nor the following night, nor the entire weekend, as people drank and danced to their hearts' content.

In the euphoria of Thursday afternoon, we all seemed to forget that Martti Ahtisaari still had to declare the result "free and fair". Nor did we stop to think whether or not the result would satisfy the right-wing extremists, the South African military and its rebel army, or the leaders of Swapo's armed wing. Ahtisaari delivered his verdict on the Thursday evening once the tendered ballots had been counted and the number of seats in the Constituent Assembly gained by each party had been worked out.
"Its youngest democracy has given the whole world a shining lesson in democracy," Ahtisaari told reporters and VIPs gathered in front of the Unita headquarters in Windhoek.

"Accordingly, in this election there have been no losers - the whole people of Namibia have been victorious, united in their dedication for peace, reconciliation and the future."

He then added to those standing next to him: "Now I think we deserve to celebrate."

It was the first time I could remember seeing him smile since April 1. Swapo had won 41 seats in the 72-seat assembly, while the DTA had ended up with 21 seats, the UDF four, the ACN three, and the NNF, FCN and NPF one each. It is debatable whether Ahtisaari would have been so poetical with his praise a few weeks beforehand when the death toll in the far north was rising and the country had teetered on the brink of anarchy.

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But now he had reason to be happy; the election had produced the result he could only have dreamed of, one which would please almost everybody. Swapo's politicians breathed a sigh of relief and accepted the result as "free but not fair", while the DTA, which had achieved its aim of preventing Swapo from gaining a two-thirds majority, felt confident it had enough seats to prevent the future Swapo government "from acting at random where the interests of the country are at stake".

This, in turn, seemed to satisfy South Africa's Generals who realised that, through the DTA and by the retention of Walvis Bay (a crucial asset to the Namibian economy and a South African military stronghold), Pretoria had adequate influence to ensure the Swapo regime remained "friendly". Swapo's military was also prepared to accept the outcome of the election, and allegations by AG Pienaar - made the day after the results were announced - that former Plan combatants were leaving Namibia for Angola in order to regroup and rearm were laughed out of court.

Violence in the far north flared as soon as the results were known, with Swapo and DTA supporters - mostly former Plan or South African fighters - settling old scores in numerous brawls and armed attacks which claimed several lives. After one such attack, a squad of white South African policemen, said to have been under the command of the elusive king of Koevoet, Hans Dreyer, raided the home of pro-Swapo businessman Eliakim Namundjebo who the police assaulted in the process, along with other prominent Swapo members including the party's acting internal President, Nathaniel Maxuilili.

But as the months passed, the violence died down. Some former members of Koevoet and the SWATF did cross into Angola, often returning as part of Unita bands which raided border settlements for food and livestock. Armed criminal gangs - motivated by joblessness, the lack of an effective police force, and a feeling that independence meant you could do what you liked - also roamed the region, stealing, looting and intimidating the population. But the full-scale rebellion feared by so many never materialised.
Once the election had been declared free, fair and democratic by the UN Special Representative, who - despite everything - managed to earn credibility as an impartial judge, no one had a justifiable cause for contesting the result. Overseas governments were robbed of the excuse for backing a "democratic" insurrection against the elected government, and even the United States would have been unable to justify supplying even "humanitarian aid" to a rebel movement in Namibia, as it continued to do in Angola. Southern African right-wingers, however, were a law unto themselves.

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Before the celebrations were even over, Namibia braced itself for the right-wing retaliation many expected would follow a Swapo victory. The Police, in the process of an emergency recruitment drive in order to fill its depleted ranks in the wake of the Koevoet demobilisation, remained on full alert. Security guards were retained at The Namibian's office and at Gwen's home, every parcel which arrived in the newspaper's post was treated as a potential bomb, while the night shift continued to react with alarm to every unusual sound. But the attacks never came, and by Christmas we had started to relax, looking forward to the chance to unwind during the long vacation.

The election result did create problems for the new government-in-waiting. Swapo, as the ruling party, still carried the stigma of the detainee issue, which, had probably cost it the two-thirds majority election victory it had expected, and which would be used against it in the future unless the issue was addressed quickly and openly.

Swapo also had to contend with the fact that, geographically, two-thirds of the country was "held" by the DTA, thus leaving the government-in-waiting open to the Alliance's oft-favoured criticism that Swapo was "the party of the Owambos". But, as The Namibian's columnist Doctor Gonzo put it in his emotional election end-piece, Swapo's landslide victory in the far north was not a tribal vote. "It was a vote from three generations of Namibians who faced being shot if they left their homesteads at night. Three generations who lived with the roar of Casspirs, and machine guns spitting death. Three generations who risked a sniper's bullet in the mahangu fields. Nobody else in the country had to go through this."

Boerestroika and Uhuru
Our neighbour Alexandrina sat on the steps of her Katutura home as the rays of the late-evening sun sucked up the puddles left after that afternoon's downpour. A sun-bleached, rain-spattered poster declaring Swapo President Sam Nujoma "supreme hero of the Namibian revolution" clung to the front door behind her. It was early January 1990 and Alexandrina - like many of her fellow Katuturans - was feeling subdued, lethargic but restless, as if the rigours of Christmas and the New Year festivities had finally caught up with her. But there was more to Alexandrina's sullen mood than just a hangover.
Across the valley, security guards swarmed like ants around the home of the Swapo President; up and down the sloping driveway and out into the street where a long line of cars stood waiting. Inside the cars sat newly appointed members of the Cabinet-to-be, waiting to accompany Nujoma to yet another diplomatic function, the likes of which had become daily events in and around the capital's more sumptuous suburbs.

Alexandrina watched this now familiar scene with the casual interest of an uninvited bystander chancing upon a wedding procession. There was little other activity competing for her attention that sultry summer's evening, so her gaze lingered on the spectacle. However, her thoughts seemed to be elsewhere.

A nurse at Katutura hospital for the past 10 or so years, Alexandrina had been a Swapo supporter all her life. She was no political activist, but she was a loyal supporter of the party, which she had never doubted would one day liberate her country. Over the years she had made a modest but relatively comfortable living working for the state. She had unwittingly become a member of the emergent black middle class, owning her own home which was furnished with the consumer durables now affordable - on credit - to a person of her income bracket. However this in itself was not enough, and like many thousands of other middle class black people like her, she had still longed to see her country free of colonial rule. Now the moment she had been dreaming of for so many years was just a few months, maybe weeks away, yet Alexandrina was hardly brimming over with joy. As if from nowhere, a squadron of Swapol policemen astride powerful motorbikes, followed by a posse of patrol cars, swooped into position around the vehicles loitering outside Nujoma's house. Engines roared as -262-

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security guards dived into the nearest car midst a salvo of slamming doors. The siren of the lead police car gave a startled yelp as the vehicle pulled away, sending a jerky chain reaction down the line as, one by one, the other cars and motorbikes surged forward. Just then a sleek black Mercedes sprang out of the garage adjoining Nujoma's house, shot down the driveway and swerved into a gap which had opened up in the line of vehicles. Seconds later, the motorcade was charging down the road on our side of the valley with sirens now in full cry and the lights of every vehicle flashing in crazy syncopation. The outlines of the President and other members of the Swapo leadership, recognisable from the posters on Alexandrina's living room wall, were vaguely visible through the tinted glass as they swept past on their way to town. The next moment they were gone. As the wail of the sirens faded into the distance, the barking of hundreds of dogs - triggered by the motorcade's dramatic departure - now rang around the neighbourhood. Alexandrina sighed, shook her head, and then chuckled as she poured herself another glass of beer.

"The people are very disappointed that they don't see more of the President," she said, taking a pensive sip from her glass which she held delicately between the tips of her chubby fingers. Hunched forward with shoulders rounded, Alexandrina sat with her elbows resting on her knees, while her feet were planted firmly apart
a few steps below where she had settled on her sizeable backside. Her pink overall, which she always wore around the house, had ridden up her thighs, revealing the bottom of a black petticoat. On her feet, she wore a tired pair of sandals, and her curlered hair was wrapped in a green, orange and purple paisley scarf.

Whilst continuing to stare straight ahead, Alexandrina recalled a visit Nujoma had paid to the hospital at Christmas. She had been on duty at the time, but she and her colleagues’ hopes of meeting their President had been dashed when he apparently chose to speak only with a handful of patients, management and senior staff, whilst ignoring the nurses and orderlies who had lined up to greet him.

"We are the ones working with the patients and we are the ones who know what’s going on in the hospital, not management," Alexandrina explained irritably. "If the President wants to know what’s going on in Namibia he must speak with the people, and the same goes for the other leaders who will be in the Cabinet."

Her mild outburst over, Alexandrina then sulked for a while, sipping her beer as she gazed aimlessly out over the valley towards the magenta sun which was now being gobbled up by a bank of fresh rain clouds.

"But the President is still tip-top, mos," she said suddenly, knocking back the last drops of her beer before rising stiffly to her feet.

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"As long as those around Nujoma advise him properly, he will make a good President of the Namibia Republic." At which Alexandrina turned and disappeared inside the house, humming the refrain of a freedom song as she went. Throughout most of Namibia, the bitterness and mud-slinging of the election campaign had by now, quite remarkably, given way to reconciliation and mutual understanding. At first, no one was quite sure how arch political enemies for all these years could possibly sit down together and thrash out a Constitution. But the big test came just days after the election result was declared when the newly elected Constituent Assembly met for the first time in the Tintenpalast, seat of the former interim government.

Once the pomp and ceremony was over, those of us in the press gallery settled back for what we expected to be months of acrimonious debate. Swapo, however, had other plans, and immediately made a move which arguably altered the course of Namibian politics.

Back in 1982, parties involved in the Namibian issue had agreed to a set of internationally approved guidelines which came to be known as the 1982 Principles. These were effectively amendments to UN Resolution 435, and laid down conditions for a multi-party democracy which the parties agreed should form the framework of the constitution for an independent Namibia. Amongst other things, the 1982 Principles also stated that property could not be repossessed by a post-independence government, civil servants working for the colonial regime would not lose their jobs, and that the final Constitution had to be agreed to by a two-thirds majority of the Constituent Assembly, rather than by a simple majority as previously agreed.
The 1982 Principles - in particular the references to property and job security for civil servants - were a major though little-publicised election issue. The DTA insisted that the guidelines be written into a new Constitution, and challenged Swapo to make a similar commitment. However, Swapo refused to do so, giving rise to fears - particularly amongst Namibia's white landowners, and the tens of thousands of existing civil servants - that the party would abandon the 1982 Principles should it win the election. It came as a complete surprise, therefore, when Swapo's Foreign Secretary Theo-Ben Gurirab rose at the end of the first day's sitting of the Constituent Assembly and proposed that the house should accept the 1982 Principles for inclusion in the Constitution. For a moment there was stunned silence, then members on all sides of the house erupted into a round of applause, and the motion was carried unanimously.

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Swapo's acceptance of the 1982 Principles set a precedent for the rest of the Constitutional process. From then on, points under discussion in the Assembly were passed by consensus rather than a vote, which meant disagreements had to be settled through give-and-take negotiations instead of a simple show of hands. Acceptance of the 1982 Principles also helped diffuse the feeling of mistrust both inside and outside the Tintenpalast, and served as the launch pad for Swapo's policy of National Reconciliation.
Admittedly Swapo had little choice but to bring about reconciliation. To avoid a collapse of the economy, the white minority had to be persuaded to stay in the country and not to flee with their much-needed skills and money, as had happened elsewhere on the continent. Added to which, Swapo's exiled leadership knew all too well from living in Angola how civil war could destroy a newly independent country, and they realised that the spectre of armed conflict still haunting Namibia had to be exorcised as quickly as possible.
Nonetheless, the response of many whites to Swapo's outstretched hand was amazing, and gave rise to the term "Boerestroika" to describe how the once-entrenched attitudes of whites seemed to change almost overnight.
Business people, no doubt realising which side their bread was now buttered, were soon courting the new rulers-to-be. Days after Swapo's election victory, Werner List - a millionaire renowned for his anti-Swapo sentiments - paid a much-publicised visit to Nujoma's Katutura home. Over tea, List sounded out the Swapo President's views on free-market economics, while the latter suggested that it would be nice if the hundreds of Brewery workers List had sacked two months previously were reinstated.
Other business people quickly followed in List's footsteps to Wanaheda, and the following February, a delegation made up of some of the godfathers of Namibian industry and commerce flew to "Marxist" Angola on a fact-finding trip personally organised by Nujoma. They returned with the sound of cash tills ringing in their ears having discovered the "great potential" for trade with Namibia's northern neighbour.
Even quicker off the mark was the SWABC, which changed its tune from the moment the Owambo election result was announced. That night's TV news gave unprecedented coverage to Swapo's once blacklisted leadership, and continued to do so during the months which followed. SWABC staff quietly admitted their motive for performing such an editorial back-flip was to save their jobs. Many SWABC personnel were born in the country and felt they had nowhere else to go. Besides which, some argued, they were civil servants who simply took orders from those who were in power.

In a sickeningly hypocritical "statement of intent" released in February 1990, SWABC management - which had stubbornly refused to recognise, Boerestroika and Uhuru 266 let alone cater for, the needs and wishes of the majority for so many years - said that it supported "the ideals and aspirations of the people", and concluded: "We therefore declare our loyalty...to all the people of the country."

Convincing white farmers about the future was not quite so easy. As the Swapo election chief for Gobabis, it was Kaire Mbuende's task to meet with the region's notoriously reactionary farmers to try and persuade them that their fears about Swapo were unfounded.

A tall, dapper, soft-spoken and highly articulate man, Dr Mbuende must have been the antithesis of the farmers' idea of a Swapo commissar, a perception betrayed by the questions he was asked at the meetings he addressed.

On one such occasion, Mbuende arrived at a farm to find the area's farmers and their families seated in the kitchen. The group merely grunted when the Swapo man was introduced by the host. Having said a few words of his own, Mbuende opened the floor to the farmers to ask about Swapo's plans for governing the country. Did the Doctor believe in God, one farmer asked, and would Swapo allow them to keep their guns after independence, queried another?

The discussion then turned to workers' pay, before moving on to the thorny issue of land. Would Swapo force them off their land, and give it to the poor, they asked? Patiently Mbuende tackled the questions one by one, carefully explaining the Government-to-be's policies on each and every issue raised.

Many hours, later the meeting adjourned, and the farmers - looking more relaxed than when the meeting had started - shook Mbuende's hand and thanked him for coming. While not always agreeing with Mbuende's views, the politics-weary farmers seemed prepared to give the new Government a chance.

"After all," said one, "South West is our home. We've got nowhere to run to."

The decision of the majority of whites to stay in Namibia was cemented by the willingness of the opposition parties to take up the cause of reconciliation, and get on with building Namibia's new multi-party democracy. The extent of this was reflected by DTA Chairperson Dirk Mudge, who turned to The Namibian's Afrikaans writer Pius Dunaitski one evening and said: "In 17 years of dealing with black leaders, I have never respected any of them more than I do the Swapo people I have been working with in the Constituent Assembly." A compliment indeed coming from someone so bitterly opposed to Swapo in the past.
However, while Swapo was busy wooing its former enemies, cracks began to appear in the bedrock of the party's support, and not just because

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people like Alexandrina felt neglected by their leaders. Prior to the elections, trade unionists had been forced to swallow Swapo's abandonment of nationalisation. Now they were faced with a wave of labour disputes arguably caused by Swapo's policy of national reconciliation. Many of the white bosses Swapo was trying to reconcile with were still treating their workers in the same appalling way they had done all those years before.

By early 1990, the Namibian Food and Allied Workers Union (Nafau) was reporting that an average of eight people a day were coming to its offices having been sacked for reasons ranging from asking for more pay to being members of the union. It was this continued attitude of "baasklaas" amongst employers that caused some unionists to start questioning the wisdom of reconciliation.

"With all this talk of mixed economy and national reconciliation, the employers think they have the right to carry on as they used to," said one union leader.

Although another, NUNW President John Shaetonhodi, remained confident that workers' interests were still best represented by a Swapo government, he went on record saying that the exploitation of workers would only end "in a socialist dispensation where the means of production belong to the people".

It appeared to many that only whites were benefiting from reconciliation, for there was very little of it around in the former war zone, where violence continued unabated. By now the region was awash with weapons as both former security force members and Swapo supporters unearthed their arms caches and prepared for a post-election showdown.

Meanwhile, cross-border raids by Unita soldiers - former security force members amongst them - added a more sinister dimension to a daily round of bar-room shoot-outs. The armed and uniformed raiders made regular sorties across the border, plundering farmers and entire villages of food, livestock and money. Reports of villagers being raped or beaten in the process were not unusual, and combined Swapol and Untag patrols seemed unable to stop the cross-border incursions. Fear of an armed rebellion by former security force members still loomed large, and it was thought the raiders were coming from bases Unita had built deep in isolated bush on the Angolan border - one at Oshindombe and the other at Onanghwe. Besides which, former security force members inside Namibia remained in regular contact with their old commanders as they were still collecting their pay each month.

There was no shortage of weaponry in Katutura either. As midnight struck to herald in the year in which Namibia would finally get its independence, the township erupted with one of the most terrifying sounds I have heard. Earlier that evening, I visited Nangolo to take a quiet drink and to wish my favourite shebeen owner a happy New Year. I left

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shortly before eleven, and as we parted, she warned me not to be on the streets at
midnight. For some reason I did not feel like partying, so I returned home to bed,
and was dozing off when the clocks struck midnight. All of a sudden I was awake,
diving for cover under my bed as the air filled with gunfire. I remained in my
hiding place for more than 15 minutes as residents the length and breadth of the
township fired off their guns; everything from pistols to machine guns, thousands
of them, were being shot into the air, leaving me with no doubt that almost every
location household must have possessed a firearm of some kind.
But it was not the threat of violence which was the problem for people in
Katutura, rather the rift which was developing between the returnees and their
stay-at-home compatriots. The rousing homecoming the latter had given the
returning exiles had soured to a feeling of resentment between the two groups.
"The returnees think they were the only ones in the struggle," Alexandrina would
bitch in a way typical of many stay-at-homes. "But we were also in the struggle.
We were the ones who suffered under the apartheid government while they
studied in countries with governments which were friendly towards them."
From being home-coming heroes, returnees had become a kind of threat to the
stay-at-homes, with whom they now competed for scarce jobs and houses. There
was also mild resentment amongst some stay-at-homes at the way returnees had
seemingly taken over, first by running the election campaign, and now by
grabbing most of the top jobs in the new government. Besides which, returnees
were different to the stay-at-homes: they had lived in other countries and had
adopted aspects of these countries' cultures which were still alien to insulated
stay-at-homes; they looked different too, and you could spot a returnee in the
street by their hairstyles and the way they dressed, as well as by the things they
spoke about; the majority of returnees were far more Africanised, both in thinking
and in appearance, than those who had remained exposed only to the South
African and Western cultures which dominated life in Namibia; and most
returnees had received training and schooling overseas, which caused some stay-
at-homes, exposed only to "apartheid education", to develop a sense of inferiority.
Returnees also had reasons to feel resentful about the stay-at-homes. The former
returned to find an affluence amongst black Namibians which never existed when
most of them had gone into exile. Then everyone lived in matching township
hovels or rural kraals, and few could afford a car. But they came home to find that
townships now had luxury mansions built amongst the old shacks, while the dusty
streets were filled with everything from battered Chevrolets to gleaming BMWs.

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Many stay-at-homes now owned houses, cars and furniture, while most exiles
came home with their only belongings packed in their suitcases. Had they given
up everything, gone into exile and risked their lives just so that those at home
could grow fat on the proceeds of the apartheid regime? Besides which, the stay-
at-home friends and relatives of many returnees were now strangers, and with
such a bond having developed amongst those who had been in exile, it was only
natural for returnees to stick together once they came back to Namibia. But this
further alienated them from their stay-at-home compatriots.
Against this backdrop came into focus the extent of Namibia's apartheid legacy, and the enormity of the task which lay ahead for the Government-in-waiting. January saw the release of the previous year's Standard Eight exam results (Standard Eight was the first externally set exam sat by Namibian and South African school pupils) in which a horrifying 81 per cent of students failed, 66 per cent of these because - so the authorities claimed - their poor command of English - Namibia's new official language. Education Minister-designate Nahas Angula warned that the results could exacerbate an already high school drop-out rate, and he declared the worst-affected schools "disaster areas of learning".

Student leaders suspected the results had been rigged by the colonial regime's Department of National Education which, the students believed, wanted to discredit the choice of English as the official language. National Education, on the other hand, blamed the ethnic authorities responsible for education in the communal areas. Whatever the case, the results reflected the appalling state Namibia's education system was in, and the spotlight was now on the country's newly elected leaders to do something about it.

The results had no doubt been as bad - if not worse - in the past, only no one had taken any notice. Now there were experts from every aid agency and international organisation imaginable carrying out research into the damage caused by a century of colonial misrule to every aspect of Namibian life. In one such survey, experts from Unicef concluded it would take 10 to 15 years just to correct the imbalance between schools caused by past policies of racial segregation. Yet the majority of Namibians, including educated professionals such as teachers, expected the new Government once it was in power - to bring about these and other changes overnight. A tall order for a Government which would inherit a R500 million national debt run up by the interim government, 40 per cent adult unemployment, hundreds and thousands of people living in non-existent and sub-standard housing, and 12,500 teachers only 10 per cent of whom were properly qualified.

To make matters worse, the rains were late, and by December the threat of famine appeared on the cloudless horizon. In the Herero reserves, the Boerestroika and Uhuru 270 lack of rain was blamed on the fact that "the Owambos had taken over power". When the rains eventually did come at the end of December, it was too late for many subsistence farmers to plant their crops, and Sam Nujoma had to appeal to the international community for drought relief.

The steps the Government-in-waiting could take to tackle these problems were, however, limited, as Administrator-General Louis Pienaar still ran the country, and would do so until independence. Several events further added to people's frustration and fuelled suspicions that the South Africans were making the most of their last days in charge. After much Untag pressure, Swapol had arrested three right-wingers in connection with the attack on the Untag office at Outjo in August, during which a Namibian security guard died. However, in early December, the three escaped from police custody as they were being taken from Otjiwarongo to Windhoek. One policeman was killed during their escape, the
prisoners having got hold of a gun, apparently from the toilet in the Otjiwarongo
court-house where they were standing trial.
The escape came as Pienaar granted an amnesty to two former Koevoet men
accused of murdering civilians during the later stages of the war, and the
Koevoets were allowed to return home to South Africa unpunished. A month or
so later, another ex-Koevoet man walked free from a South African jail having
served only a week of his ten year sentence for clubbing a villager to death in the
Namibian war zone back in 1985.
Meanwhile, a group of Afrikaans and German church organisations tried to take
over 16 whites-only schools in a bid to provide their children with a continued
"Christian-based mother-tongue education". Pienaar gave the churches his
blessing, but was forced to change his mind when a motion condemning the move
was passed by an overwhelming majority in the Constituent Assembly. Another
such symbolic victory over the old order was scored by Local Government and
Housing Minister-designate Libertine Amathila, who used her unique powers of
persuasion to convince the Windhoek Municipality that it should not celebrate the
city's supposed centenary during 1990. The planned centenary caused great
offence to the majority of Namibians because, in doing so, the Municipality
conveniently ignored historical evidence that Windhoek had been inhabited long
before the Germans settlers "officially" founded the city in 1890.
Dramatic developments in South Africa also had an impact in Namibia. Firstly
there was President FW de Klerk's announcement at the beginning of February
1990 of his plans to release Nelson Mandela and to take significant steps towards
scraping apartheid. The outcome of the Namibian peace process, and the
manipulative role the South Africans were able to

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play, had given the de Klerk regime courage to take on the black majority at home
in a similar way.
Further news from the South African parliament a few weeks later was not so
good. Revelations about South African security force hit squads had implications
for Namibia, particularly when it was alleged that Anton Lubowski might have
been assassinated by members of the shadowy Civil Co-operation Bureau (CCB).
South African Defence Minister Magnus Malan, who was accused of sanctioning
the hit squads, retaliated by claiming - behind the shield of parliamentary
privilege - that Lubowski had been a South African agent.
Malan's allegations sparked a barrage of condemnation as everyone from
Lubowski's family to his former colleagues spoke out in defence of the dead
activist. However, the controversy took the heat off Malan, who was fighting for
his political survival. It also added another dimension to the mystery surrounding
Lubowski's murder. After all, he had served as a Lieutenant in the SADF before
being dishonourably discharged after joining Swapo in 1984. Added to which,
some fairly dodgy characters had been included in his circle of friends, and
various unexplained bank accounts also gave rise to suspicion. However, behind
the scenes of a news story which had developed into every journalist's dream,
those who had been close to Lubowski felt he did not have the ability to be a
double agent. Lubowski could not lie to save his life, close acquaintances argued, and his big weakness was that he wanted to be everybody's friend - his open-house hospitality making him easy prey for hangers-on of every description.
"Anton might have been many things," one close friend explained. "But he wasn't a South African spy."
With so much ill feeling and uncertainty filling the void left in life after the elections, it came as a huge relief when word came from the Tintenpalast that the Constituent Assembly had almost finished drawing up the Constitution, and a date for independence could now be set.
Spontaneous cheers filled the parliament chamber when it was unanimously agreed that March 21 should be the day Namibia became an independent nation.
Journalists poured through reference books to see what other memorable occasions had taken place on March 21. The most obvious was the Sharpeville Massacre of 1960, while the day was also appropriately earmarked as International Day for the Elimination of Apartheid.
The announcement of the date for Independence Day, however, only added to the atmosphere of speculation and rumour as the country admittedly stirred up by the media - started guessing what form the independence celebrations would take, and who would be invited. Matters were made worse by the fact that various committees set up to arrange

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the celebrations shrouded themselves in as much secrecy as the Constituent Assembly, which had held most of its deliberations behind closed doors. According to omnipresent "informed sources" - who, on the whole, turned out to be rather uniformed, but were the only people prepared to comment on anything at the time - everyone from Stevie Wonder to Tracy Chapman were due to appear at an all-day, free music concert on or around March 21. Meanwhile, NPF leader Moses Katjiuongua was apparently wanting to invite Unita leader Jonas Savimbi to the celebrations, which caused the Angolan Government to vow that it would boycott the festivities should Savimbi set foot in Windhoek. Two names on the guest list which could be confirmed from an early stage were those of FW de Klerk and Nelson Mandela... should the ANC leader be out of jail in time. This in turn prompted speculation that the two would hold their first talks on the future of South Africa in Windhoek, which was ironic considering that so much of Namibia's history had been determined by talks held in South Africa!
The announcement of the date for Independence Day came as a brief respite from the main business of the Constituent Assembly that week - the debate on the final draft of the Constitution. This final draft - the first one open to public scrutiny - was the product of more than two months of secret discussions by various working committees made up of assembly members, and advised by three South African legal experts. When the final draft finally made it into the open, most of the points had been agreed upon, and it took just five days for the Assembly to endorse a final version. The only real sticking point at this stage was Article 11, which provided for detention without trial. Both Swapo and the DTA were in favour of what was euphemistically termed "preventative detention", with Swapo
arguing that the instability of the region meant the Government needed such measures to "defend" the Constitution. The DTA supported its opponents, saying that detention without trial had only been wrong in the past because it was used by an illegal regime; when used to defend the elected government of an independent state, detention without trial was perfectly permissible. Opposition to Article 11 came from the minority parties, including the NNF, whose President Vekuii Rukoro said the clause was a "black spot on an otherwise impeccable document".

"We cannot encourage people to forget the past if we write it into our constitution," he told the Assembly during an emotional debate. Despite the majority's support of Article 11, the minority parties' public stand against it was enough to force the Assembly to refer the matter back to the relevant committee. The following day, the committee declared it had decided the Assembly should "give humankind and human rights a fair chance", and that the detention clause should be scrapped. The decision was greeted with another round of applause throughout the chamber, and

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a sigh of relief from the public. Under the amended Constitution, detention without trial would still be possible, but only in the event of a state of emergency, and even then it would have to be agreed to by a majority in Parliament. The outcome of the "preventative detention" debate was proof that Namibia's embryonic multi-party democracy did actually work, and that the smaller parties could flex some political muscle. Article 11 was effectively blocked by the NNF, NPF and UDF, which between them held only six seats in the 72-member Assembly. Prior to the debate, discreet international pressure had been put on Swapo to drop Article 11, but the party decided to press ahead with the clause. However, once arguments against Article 11 were raised in the open session of the Assembly, Swapo could not defend the clause without losing credibility and support as, at the time, reflex public opinion was to reject almost everything associated with colonial rule. With the Article 11 issue settled, the rest of the debate was relatively uneventful, and by the end of the week Namibia had one of the most liberal constitutions in the whole of Africa, not to say the world. The death penalty was abolished, free speech was guaranteed, and discrimination of any kind was made illegal. No president could serve for more than two consecutive five-year terms of office, and the requirement for regular and democratic elections to local regional as well as national government was clear. For the UN, the Constitution capped what must have been one of the world body's most successful missions, while for the majority of Namibians, its passing gave the signal that their long-awaited independence celebrations were about to begin.

As the final agenda for the celebrations took shape, one vital ingredient seemed to be missing—mass participation. Organisers seemed pre-occupied with the arranging of two sumptuous banquets, one to be held on March 20 by the outgoing Administrator-General, and the other on March 21 by the now newly elected President, Sam Nujoma. Between them, these two banquets would
consume most of the R10 million of donations raised to pay for the celebrations. Everything appeared to be centred on Windhoek, and not just on Windhoek, but the city itself - events in Katutura and Khomasdal hardly featured on the elaborate schedule. In fact, with the exception of a "people's braai" - free "pap 'n vleis" which was to be dished up at the Katutura Community Centre for those who wanted it - and the music concert which would be held across town in the athletics stadium, almost every other event seemed to be planned primarily for the benefit of the VIP guests who were due to jet in from around the world for the celebrations. It seemed the Namibian people were to be little more than spectators at their own baptism.

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What made matters worse were the names of those locals who appeared on the banquet guest lists, and who qualified for VIP seats at the various other grand occasions. Reactionary business people and obscure nonentities would be rubbing shoulders with revolutionary heroes, one of the main criteria for an invitation apparently being money. Many of those who had dedicated their lives to the cause of Namibian independence, in particular those who had remained inside the country, were left out.

For some, the disheartening feeling of being overlooked was compounded by the way some notorious servants of the colonial regime had been embraced by Government-in-waiting. Some of the people responsible for detaining and torturing activists were now seen amongst Nujoma's security entourage, while former South African soldiers responsible for atrocities, including the Cassinga massacre, were being enlisted into the new Namibian Defence Force. Of course, it was better to have these people working for you than against you, but this argument was of little comfort to those who had been their victims in the past. This aspect of reconciliation was later to be used by the new Government to justify the inclusion in the defence force of some of SWAPO's own members accused of human rights abuses. Solomon "Jesus" Hawala was to be appointed second in command of the army, which angered former detainees and human rights groups across the political spectrum. When Hawala was appointed, Amnesty International commented that no one responsible for human rights violations, whichever side of the war they were on, should hold positions of power which might allow them to repeat their past actions.

One day in early March, Gwen was doing her shopping in a Windhoek supermarket when she bumped into the wife of a Windhoek professional, a man whose contribution to the struggle would not have made a single impression on a blank piece of paper.

"Isn't it all so exciting," twittered the wife as Gwen searched for an economy chicken braai pack. "What are you going to wear, my dear?"

"What do you mean?" Gwen asked, temporarily abandoning her search through the freezer.

"Have you bought your dress yet ...to wear at the state banquet?" the wife continued. "You are going, aren't you?"
"No," came the frosty reply as Gwen returned her attention to the packets of frozen food. "I haven't been invited."

Gwen did her best to hide her disappointment at not having received an invitation to any of the official functions. "Not that I would have accepted," she said one evening with unconvincing bravado. "But it would be nice to be asked."

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Other long-serving members of The Namibian's staff were also disappointed, not necessarily at the prospect of missing out on the banquet, but more because of the way their contribution to the independence struggle had been swept aside. Again, no one would say it aloud, but deep down they felt sad and slightly bitter that they had received no recognition from those now about to take over the reins of power. Instead, some of the latter - or at least their henchmen - were treating The Namibian's reporters like pariahs.

As if to rub salt into the wound, organisers of the independence celebrations announced that only a hand-picked pool of local journalists would receive accreditation to attend the March 21 festivities. In effect this meant that no more than one member of The Namibian's staff would be allowed to attend the most significant news story of the paper's history, and they would instead have to rely on arch rivals for stories and pictures of the main events. This was because, officials explained to exasperated local reporters, all other accreditation had been taken up by the foreign media. The Namibian's journalists were furious. With a few exceptions, the foreign media had done next-to-nothing to further Namibian's quest for independence. Now they were being given ringside seats so that their organisations back home could carry, at most, a few lines or the odd picture. The accreditation controversy was eventually solved when local newspaper editors threatened to boycott the celebrations unless all local reporters were allowed to attend. But the damage had already been done, and again it appeared as if Namibians were being sidelined at the biggest event of their lives.

To give the celebrations' organisers their due, they had a mammoth task on their hands, not least in finding suitable accommodation for all the thousands of visiting VIPs, journalists and other guests. Every hotel room in and around the capital was taken up, but these were still not enough to accommodate all the top guests, and an appeal went out to Windhoek's wealthy to act as hosts for the remainder. Many people responded to the appeal, agreeing to look after a VIP or two...as long as they were not allocated Muammar-Al-Gaddafi or Fidel Castro! Journalists and others ranking lower down the protocol scale were to be allocated commandeered railway coaches. As for the tens of thousands of Namibians who were getting ready to flock to Windhoek for the celebrations, not to mention the many thousands of South Africans planning to come and celebrate with their newly liberated neighbours, they were going to have to make do with sleeping on floors or out in the open.

The week of independence arrived, and central Windhoek was turned into a virtual no-go zone to ensure the safety of the many foreign heads of state.
and other dignitaries attending the celebrations. Day and night, the suburbs rang with the squeal of police sirens as visiting VIPs were whisked to their hotels or embassies in fleets of luxury cars brought in from South Africa for the occasion. Police helicopters buzzed over the capital looking for the first sign of trouble. But they need not have worried, as most people were either at home or at work. Those lucky enough to make it out to the airport were able to watch at a distance - the colourful spectacle laid on for each arriving dignitary; VIPs were greeted by their Namibian counterparts before being ushered along the red carpet to inspect the guard of honour as a brass band played the relevant national anthem, and cultural groups in full traditional costume danced and sang to their hearts' content.

Many of the visitors paid dutiful attention to those giving the displays by stopping to watch and applaud. But some others, like US Secretary of State James Baker, seemed not the least bit interested. No sooner had Baker descended the steps of his plane, than he was bundled into a limousine by his bodyguards, and driven at top speed across the red carpet, past the guard of honour, and out of the airport.

By the time we were putting together the last pages of The Namibian's bumper independence edition, most of us were resigned to the fact that we were going to see little of the festivities taking place in Windhoek. But rather than spending independence day in the shebeens of Katutura, Oshiwambo Focus reporter Tyappa Namutewa and I decided we wanted to head north, and volunteered to cover the celebrations in the Oshakati and Ondangwa region. Shortly after midday on a hot and overcast March 20, we drove out of Windhoek in the company bakkie, which was piled high with special editions, leaving the annoying sound of the police helicopter and the incessant wail of sirens behind us. It was dark by the time we passed through the now deserted Oshiveló gate, and forked lightning plunged into the Etosha Pan to the west as we sped towards Ondangwa. Usually great care had to be taken along this stretch of the road as cattle and game had the habit of wandering into the middle of the highway. We watched out for the sign of smoke wafting across our path, an indicator that cattle herders and their animals were camped nearby. But there was nothing, not even the occasional warthog, so I gradually pressed my foot harder on the accelerator. Spurred on by the flashes of lightning which darted from the billowing night sky, the speedometer crept up to the 160km/hour mark. Tyappa sat in the passenger seat, his bottle of sweet wine held firmly between his knees. By this time on previous journeys we had made to the north together, he was usually fast asleep. But tonight he was wide awake. The bakkie's cassette player had packed up shortly after Tsumeb, so for a while we had driven in silence.

Boerestroika and Uhuru 277 both of us wrestling with fatigue and reflecting on the historic moment which was now only a few hours away. As the wine began to work its way around Tyappa's rotund frame, he started humming freedom songs. Recognising the tunes, I began to sing along, and soon we were roaring the familiar refrains at the tops of our voices, drowning out the crash of distant thunder and the squeal of the straining engine as we dashed towards our destination.
A hundred or so kilometres from Ondangwa, we started passing groups of people walking briskly along the side of the road in the opposite direction to which we were going; men and women, both young and old, together with children and babies, all dressed in their best, most colourful clothes. "The people are on their way to church, to give thanks to the Lord for our independence," Tyappa informed me. I looked at the dashboard clock. It was shortly after nine. We had to be at the Oshakati soccer stadium by midnight to witness the lowering of the South African flag, and the raising of the new Namibian one. No doubt the celebrations had already begun, so I pushed the accelerator down the final few centimetres to the floor, and kept my eyes fixed firmly on the road ahead.

We arrived in Oshakati around 22h00 and called in at Oswald Shivute's house to greet his family and arrange beds for the night. Oswald had gone to Windhoek, and his family were content watching - live on the newly named NBC (Namibian Broadcasting Corporation) TV - the celebrations in the capital, so Tyappa and I left them and made our way to Oshakati Stadium. Here too, people were watching TV, but this time on a huge video screen which had been erected towards the back of the grandstand. A crowd of about 2 000 people stood and sat with their backs to the pitch, glued to the pictures of the Windhoek celebrations which were being relayed to Oshakati live via satellite. On the opposite side of the dusty field, half-hidden in the shadows cast by the stadium's spotlights, was a makeshift podium. Here sat 40 or so solemn-faced VIPs - the local Swapo hierarchy, chiefs, headmen, and South African officials and their wives - watching an exuberant display given by young dancers and a band of marimba players.

We were surprised to find so few people at the stadium. The crowd comprised mostly of elderly men, women and children, the majority of younger men apparently having gone to Windhoek to attend the celebrations there. Having drooled over the sight of various heads of state tucking into roast ostrich at the AG’s state banquet, Tyappa and I left the big screen and wandered over to take a few pictures of the cultural troupe. Youthful limbs and traditional reed skirts darted in all directions in time to the beat pounded out on hollowed-out logs, while the VIPs looked on impassively; SADF and Swapol officers sitting bolt upright in their ceremonial uniforms, Boerestroika and Uhuru 278 complete with gold braid and the odd well-polished medal; the frontier civil servant intermittently mopping his bald, sunburnt head with a crumpled handkerchief which he pulled from the breast pocket of his dusty, pin-striped suit; their wives, dumpy, puffy-faced women who had given up buying new frocks years ago, squirming in their seats, trying hard to stifle their yawns; the chiefs and the headmen in their battered suits and trilby hats looking on proudly, savouring the entertainment and exchanging the occasional comment with each other; and Swapo's regional co-ordinator Mzee Kaukungua, dressed in a dark blue collarless suit - the type made famous by the likes of Kenneth Kaunda and Julius Nyerere - together with a red, blue and green scarf wrapped around his neck, surveying the
scene through his thick, horn-rimmed spectacles, his snow-white hair making him instantly recognisable in the gloom.

As midnight drew near, the cultural group stopped performing, and Kaukungua rose from his seat and stood in front of a microphone stand placed at the centre of the podium. On the opposite side of the football pitch, in front of the grandstand, was a flagpole, at the top of which the South African flag flapped furiously in the strong breeze. Kaukungua coughed into the microphone and waited for the crowd's attention. However, most people were too busy watching the video screen, now displaying pictures of the various heads of state arriving at the Windhoek athletics stadium, and took no notice the Swapo chief.

"Please turn that thing off!" Kaukungua barked over the public address system. "It is time we began."

Those in the grandstand reluctantly swivelled round in their seats like children being sent to bed in the middle of their favourite movie, while someone somewhere threw a switch, and the pictures from Windhoek shrank into a small white blob in the middle of the screen.

There was a moment's silence as everyone wondered what would happen next. This was broken by the stomp of boots and the shout of commands as eight or so angry-looking policemen, dressed in grey Swapol uniforms and carrying automatic rifles, appeared from one end of the grandstand, marched along the shale running track, and came to attention in front of the flagpole. Their arrival was greeted with loud cat-whistles from the crowd, and Kaukungua once again called for order. The stadium fell silent, except for the occasional snigger which echoed around the hushed arena as the leading policeman marched up to the flagpole and started untying the rope. Once the rope was released, he paused, and at the order, his colleagues presented arms, the metallic rattle of their guns sending a shiver down my spine. Another pause, and then the leading policeman looked to

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the top of the flagpole and started lowering the South African flag. More cat-whistles followed by an excited murmur swept through the crowd.

Having untied the flag, the policeman folded it carefully, did an about turn and marched back to his squad, whereupon he handed his assistant the flag, who in return gave him the Namibian flag wrapped in a tight bundle. The leader did another about face and returned to the flagpole where he unravelled the new red, blue, green and white diagonally striped Namibian flag, with its distinctive yellow sun in the top left hand corner.

The crowd grew impatient as the policeman took what seemed like an eternity to tie the flag to the rope. He finally succeeded, and on the stroke of midnight, hoisted the Namibian standard into the night sky. Screams and cheers shattered the silence, and the crowd then broke into a spontaneous rendition of the African anthem Nkosi Sikele i’Afrika. As the last notes faded, people rushed onto the pitch, and with tears rolling down the faces of many, ran around hugging each other, jumping, screaming and punching the air with power salutes while church bells rang out across the town.
For a moment I was paralysed. I looked at Tyappa and he looked at me as if to say "what do we do now?". He was on the brink of tears and my body was covered in goose pimples. All of a sudden we embraced, holding each other firmly by the arms and shaking ourselves as if to make sure this was really true. We were both choked and could say nothing. Then Tyappa broke away, shook my hand, and ran off into the crowd, his fist raised high. I gathered myself together and started taking pictures of the mêlée without really thinking about what I was doing. Looking around me, I spotted the policemen marching back towards their vehicles, heads slightly bowed, their leader clutching the rolled-up South African flag firmly in his hand as the crowd of jubilant Namibians swirled around them. Once the noise and confusion had died down, Kaukungua - still rock-solid in front of the microphone and seemingly untouched by emotion - delivered a short, grandfatherly speech.

"Today Namibia is free," he boomed above the excited chatter of his audience. "The flag which you see is your own flag, the one you have voted for. Go and sleep well, as this is the first night that you can sleep in a free country."

Many took Kaukungua at his word and returned home to bed, while others headed for the few bars which were still open to toast the health of their new nation. We followed a crowd into the nearby Moby Jack club where we watched the Windhoek flag-raising ceremony on a TV set up on a beer crate in the backyard. It took a few moments before we realised that something was wrong; here we were, coming from the Oshakati ceremony in time to watch the Windhoek ceremony - live on TV. In fact, when we

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arrived at the Moby Jack, UN Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar was still giving his speech, and the flag-raising only followed a few minutes later. As it turned out, Namibia officially became independent a quarter of an hour late, African time defying months of meticulous planning. VIP guests had left the state banquet later than expected, and were still filing into the Windhoek athletics stadium as Perez de Cuellar started to make his speech. When the UN Secretary-General's opening words were heard around the packed stadium, there was a desperate scram as heads of state and other dignitaries raced for the nearest available seats. Some were too slow and could not get to a seat in time; South African Foreign Minister Pik Botha, his wife and their anxious-looking bodyguard ended up having to sit on the grandstand steps, much to their obvious disgust.

As it was, Perez de Cuellar did not finish his address until fifteen minutes past midnight, by which time church bells throughout the city were already ringing out, saluting Namibia's independence...which officially still had not happened. With the Secretary-General having finally completed his speech, he then swore in Namibia's first President, Sam Nujoma, who had been unanimously elected by the Constituent Assembly a few weeks before. As Nujoma completed the oath, the crowd of about 20 000 people rose to their feet and roared with approval. But the biggest cheer was still to come with the lowering of the South African flag, and the raising in its place of the Namibian one. Protocol was again abandoned as
some Namibian cabinet ministers-to-be joined the crowd in chanting "down! down!" while FW de Klerk stood to attention, hand on heart, and watched his country's flag disappear into the swamp of photographers which surrounded the flag-pole.

"He's crying! He's crying!" a member of the captivated Moby Jack audience shouted, causing everyone huddled around the TV to burst out laughing.

Seconds later, the Namibian standard appeared on the flag-pole, and was greeted by a cheer which completely drowned out the police brass band's rendition of Nkosi Sikele i’Afrika. Those of us at the Moby Jack cheered too as pictures of a beaming Sam Nujoma, ecstatic members of the crowd, and a magnificent fireworks display flashed across the screen.

Not far from the Moby Jack, nature's own firework display ripped through the night sky, bathing in momentary, blinding light a piece of deserted wasteland and its unmarked mound of earth - the mass grave of hundreds of combatants killed during and after the April 1 incursion less than a year before.

As daylight dawned on the world's youngest nation, thousands of children clutching paper Namibian flags toyi-toyied from Ohangwena to Boerestroika and Uhuru 281 the Oshikango border post twelve kilometres away. Here the children flooded through the rickety, makeshift gate and Stop sign erected across the road, and continued to the Angolan side, a bombed-out shell of a building, where they were met by a group of rather startled Fapla soldiers. The border guards' anxious looks soon turned to smiles as the children presented them with paper flags, which the soldiers stuck in their hats and the barrels of their guns.

Villagers all along the Oshikango road, as throughout the far north, had not slept that night. They had squeezed into the region's churches and welcomed their independence with songs of praise, the likes of which had never been heard before, and had some hardened Untag police and military observers fighting back their tears. Once the church services were over, the people returned to their villages, and the parties began. Cattle were slaughtered as the people started to drink, sing and dance.

By the time Tyappa and I arrived at Ohangwena at around midday, the festivities were in full swing. The crowd was gathered in the market-place where two years previously I had caught my first glimpse of Koevoet when Chris and I had visited Ponhofi Secondary School. Then the people had been suspicious and scared, today the children danced and the crowd clapped and ululated. Amongst the trees between the school and the now-deserted Koevoet base, men hacked at cattle carcasses, removing everything edible and handing the meat and intestines to the women to stew in huge cauldrons bubbling and hissing on open fires. The celebrations continued throughout the day and night...and the following day, and the following night. In fact, the people of Ohangwena did not rest until the following Sunday, March 25.

Unlike their rural compatriots, most of the residents of Oshakati and Ondangwa enjoyed a hard-earned lie-in on the morning of March 21. The streets and the market-place at Oluno, usually bustling with people and vehicles at this time of
day, were deserted except for the occasional stray dog scavenging amongst the piles of rubbish. Outside the Ondangwa police station, the Namibian flag hung limply from a pole, while the sound of prisoners singing freedom songs in the jail wafted through the breathless, damp dawn air. By 1O0O the town was beginning slowly to come to life. Those with televisions watched the highlights of the previous evening's events in Windhoek, while a handful of children, dressed in traditional costumes, made their way to the sports field where the day's celebrations were to be held.

Shortly before midday, the trickle of people heading for the sports field had become a steady flow. A group of several hundred students dressed in Swapo colours blocked the Ondangwa-Oshakati highway as they Boerestroika and Uhuru 282 toyi-toyi-ed to the offices of the former Owambo Administration. Here they sang and danced before they too headed for the sports field. A few months before, such a demonstration would inevitably have been broken up by the security forces - today the students were able to stretch their limbs like young birds released from a cage and free to fly for the first time.

During the build-up to independence, police and Untag monitors in the border region had been kept on full alert because it was rumoured that Unita and former security force members might launch attacks into Namibia. But by the night of March 21, there had been only one reported incident, from the border village of Onanhama, where 10 unidentified raiders attacked a kraal, beat up the residents and made-off with 25 goats and R100 cash.

The following morning, March 22, I accompanied a joint Untag and Namibian police (Nampol) patrol of the border region to the west of Oshikango. In recent months, an estimated 3 000 Angolan refugees had crossed into Namibia to escape the vicious fighting between Fapla and Unita taking place north of the Namibian border. The refugees had settled just inside Namibia, along a 10 km border strip between Beacons 15 and 16, sandwiched between war and Namibian locals none too pleased to see them.

The aim of the patrol was to go and assess the need of the refugees, and bring their plight, not to mention their existence, to the attention of the rest of the country. It was also the last patrol of an amiable Irish Untag police monitor called John who, having spent six months stationed in the border region, was about to return back home to Ireland. During his six months he had grown to love the place and the people, and this patrol was an opportunity for him to say goodbye to all the friends and acquaintances he had made in the area.

We set out from Ohangwena in a white UN Landcruiser at around 1O0O on a hot and overcast morning. Rain had again fallen the night before, and steam was beginning to rise from the road. Just before we reached the Oshikango border post, we left the tar road and headed west into the bush. John was driving, and next to him in the front passenger seat sat Nampol officer Mattheus, a former Plan combatant whose intricate knowledge of the area was essential to guide John along the winding tracks which criss-crossed the bush.
"After six months of patrolling this region, I still don't know where the hell I'm going," John said as he carefully followed Mattheus's instructions. The endlessly flat plain, thick with stubby trees and flooded oshanas, looked all the same, and the tracks had a habit of doubling back on each other. So big were many of the oshanas that we had no choice but to drive through them, and one wrong move would have resulted in us being bogged down for the rest of the day. I sat in the back, together with Mattheus's Nampol colleague, Lazarus, an ex-Swatf 101 Battalion man, and John's Canadian commander. Unlike Mattheus, who was happy to talk and appeared very much at ease and in charge, Lazarus sat quietly in the back and gazed out of the window. While Mattheus could speak good English, Lazarus could only communicate in Oshiwambo and Afrikaans. It was one of his first patrols since joining Nampol, and he appeared to be apprehensive, never looking me in the eye when I spoke to him, and reluctantly tagging along whenever we stopped to talk with villagers. It was hard work to get Lazarus to say anything, and he immediately clammed up the moment I tried to ask him about his past. Both Mattheus and Lazarus were from the area, and knew it like the backs of their hands. But Lazarus gave the impression he still felt he was the enemy, and acted more like an outsider. The Namibian police's new uniforms had not yet arrived, so the two Nampol men were dressed in grey Swapol uniforms. However, both wore bright red berets to show that they were no longer Swapol, and these seemed to have the desired effect. Every time we passed through a village, the people would stop what they were doing and wave to us, which was a significant change to the response most people gave the Swapol Casspir patrols of old. John, meanwhile, was making the most of his last patrol. Every now and again we would stop at a village where he would jump from the car and stride over to the villagers shouting "Walalapo" (meaning "good morning") in a thick Irish accent. The villagers laughed as John continued with his "walalapo", the only Oshiwambo word he knew, and greeted everyone with the famous African handshake. Then, via Mattheus, John would ask the villagers whether there were any problems to report. If there was anything, John whipped out his note book and started scribbling down the details. Once business had been dealt with, John would rattle off a joke or two, which even Mattheus could not understand, let alone translate. Nonetheless, everyone laughed along with him. Then we would say our goodbyes and continue our journey, with John hooting the car horn and shouting "walalapo" as we drove off into the bush. After a three hour drive, we finally reached our destination, a settlement of about 300 Angolan refugees near the village of Oshindobe, just inside Namibia. To look at, the Oshindobe refugee settlement, built by the refugees themselves, looked like an ordinary village, with its traditional kraals surrounded by small plots planted with mahangu. The refugees were Kwanyama-speaking Angolans, and shared the same culture as the Namibians whose area they had fled to. But the Namibians in the area were hostile towards their Angolan neighbours, the
refugees complaining that they had been harassed by the Namibian villagers. When the fighting in their home area had become too fierce to bear any longer, the refugees had fled, leaving behind most of their animals and food stocks. Once settled inside Namibia, they had planted crops using seed they had brought with them or begged off the local headman. But the crops would not be ready to harvest for several months, and even then it was unlikely there would be enough food to feed all the refugees. In the meantime they had next to nothing left to eat, and some of the children were beginning to show the first signs of malnutrition. Nonetheless, locals physically prevented the refugees from going further into Namibia to buy food and to take the sick children to a clinic.

I was shocked by the attitude of the Namibians. After all, many thousands of Namibians had relied upon Angolans for refuge during the liberation struggle. Yet now Namibia was free, Angolans were being turned away when they came to Namibia for help. The problem was that the refugees came from a Unita-held area. They were almost all elderly men, women and children, and while most refused to say where the younger menfolk were, a few women admitted that their husbands were away fighting for Unita. Most were open about their hatred for Angola's MPLA government.

"Our crops were stolen or burnt by the MPLA, who sometimes took our people away," said an elderly spokesman for the group. "Unita didn't hurt us when they came to our village, but when the MPLA came, we were hurt and our food stocks were taken away."

As the conversation continued, however, the spokesman became less partisan. "Whether it was Unita or the MPLA, the only people we knew had guns." To the local Namibians, the refugees were a threat, and were treated with contempt.

"They (the refugees) have been under the control of Unita for many years, so they must have the attitude of bandits," explained Oshindobe headman Migel Shakungu, who had angered his villagers by giving the refugees seeds and permission to settle on his land.

"My people don't trust them. My people know that the refugees are Unita supporters, and my people living on the border have suffered at the hands of Unita."

The war might have ended in Namibia, but war still raged just a few hundred metres away across the cutline, and continued to make life treacherous for Namibians living near the border. You could hear the thud and crack of heavy artillery fire coming from the battlefield just a few kilometres away. Plumes of thick, black smoke were visible in the distance,

Boerestroika and Uhuru

and as we returned to Ohangwena, we passed a kraal on the Namibian side of the border which had recently been hit by shells fired from inside Angola. Relics of the Namibian war also continued to intrude on people's lives. Bullet and shell-
pocked buildings, the rusting remains of vehicles destroyed by landmines, and deep Casspir tracks which made many of the dirt roads almost impassable. On one flooded section of the Ombalantu-Engela road, we came across a bakkie loaded with provisions which had sunk into one such rut. John stopped the Landcruiser and we all got out to see if we could help the stranded bakkie owner. As John hitched up a tow rope, Mattheus and Lazarus waded into the muddy water and put rocks underneath the bakkie's back wheels. Then, once the rope was attached, John climbed back behind the wheel, put the Landcruiser in reverse, and dragged the bakkie out of the mire while the two policemen, now covered in mud, pushed from the rear. Once his vehicle had been freed, the bakkie owner thanked us profusely, and continued on his way. The two policemen were pleased with themselves, too, having done their good deed for the day. "In the past, the police did not help the people," Mattheus said as we climbed back into the Landcruiser. "We were all at war, and the police were considered to be enemies. But now it is our job to help our people, and give them the protection they did not have before. Isn't that so?" Mattheus asked his colleague, translating what he had just told me. "Yes, that's true," Lazarus replied with a shy smile, looking reasonably happy for the first time that day. "That is what we must do now."

Back in Windhoek, UN Special Representative Martti Ahtisaari was performing one of his last official functions as referee in the Namibian independence process; seeing Administrator-General Louis Pienaar safely onto a plane back to South Africa. Ahtisaari was joined on the tarmac at Eros Airport by President Sam Nujoma, together with newly sworn in Prime Minister Hage Geingob and Foreign Affairs Minister Theo-Ben Gurirab. "Thank you for making it possible for me to carry out an impossible mission," Ahtisaari told Pienaar as they shook hands next to the plane. The AG said he was leaving with mixed memories of his time in Namibia, but warm feelings for the people of the country. Pienaar then turned to Nujoma, and told the Namibian President that the future of Namibia lay in the hands of the new Government. "Continue to work for the good of Namibia," he said, before adding with a wry grin, "otherwise I will be back." At which he turned and boarded the jet with his wife Isobel. Once the door was closed behind them, the plane taxied onto the runway, and with a roar of the engines, climbed into the sky, signalling South Africa's departure from the country it had occupied for more than 70 years.

Two women
Johanna
I was washing, getting ready to go to the office, when Kaurie banged on the bathroom door. 'She had just returned from working night shift at the hospital. "David!" she shouted. She sounded out of breath. "David! Johanna is at the hospital, she is in the casualty unit. Something is very wrong.'"
I dried my face, pulled the plug in the wash basin and went from the bathroom to the kitchen where Kaurie was sitting at the small, yellow table, her large frame
swamping the fragile metal chair on which she rested, squeezed in between the table and the cupboard behind.

She was still dressed in her gleaming white nurse's uniform, her gelled, permed hair glistening in the early morning light which poured in through the window beside her.

Kaurie explained that she had come off duty and was on her way out of the hospital when she had heard a commotion in the casualty department. She went to investigate and found several nurses crowded around my girlfriend Johanna.

"There is something very wrong, very wrong indeed," Kaurie kept repeating, staring into her coffee cup.

"There didn't seem to be anything wrong with her when she left here yesterday morning, though come to think of it..." I left my landlady muttering to herself in the kitchen and went to my bedroom where I quickly dressed, picked up the things I needed for work, and left the house.

The taxi dropped me next to the market stalls on the patch of dusty wasteland between Katutura Hospital and the police station. Stall holders were wearily laying out tired-looking food ready for another day's trading, whilst the morning rush-hour traffic raced past them.

I hurried across the road, dodging in and out of the cars queuing at the highway intersection, walked briskly up the tarred driveway leading to the hospital and entered the tall, concrete monolith through the swing doors in the basement which lead to the Casualty and Out Patient departments. It was only 08h00 but the Casualty Department was already crowded, mostly with people suffering from nothing more than hangovers but who nonetheless still insisted on seeing a doctor, even if it was only to be prescribed some aspirin. Decades of inadequate health care provision had turned most black Namibians into pill junkies. There had been precious few attempts to spread the message of preventative medicine in the past, so the people had become reliant on either traditional healers or doctors practising "white" medicine to tell them what was wrong with them, even to the extent of curing a headache caused by excessive drinking.

I scoured the rows of seats filled with hunched, self-pitying wretches, but I could not find Johanna.

"David, are you looking for Johanna?" came a familiar voice from behind me. It was Martha, my landlady's close friend, who was in charge of the casualty unit. I greeted her and told her that, yes, I was looking for Johanna.

"She's over in Out Patients. Come, I will take you there." Martha led the way across the large basement reception area with its dim, fluorescent lights reflecting off the polished lino floor, past more queues of patients, through another set of glass swing doors and into Out Patients.

"She is somewhere in here waiting to be seen by a doctor. Namene will be able to tell you more." I thanked Martha for her help and went into the Out Patients
waiting room. Hundreds more invalids sat along rows of benches arranged like church pews in the middle of the room, waiting to be seen by medics in treatment rooms situated through doors around three sides of the hall. 

"Psst! Psst!" Someone was trying to attract my attention. I looked around and saw Johanna's step-father and the landlord of the house they lived in sitting on the bench nearest the door. I went over, shook both by the hand and greeted them. They were drunk, their eyes bloodshot and blurred, and their breath stank of toombo. 

"Young man, it is a very grave and serious situation," the balding, grey-haired landlord said in slurred but nonetheless dignified English which he had learnt at mission school in the far north of the country more than 50 years before. 

"Your lady's predicament is bad. I fear she is very, very sick indeed." 

"Meneer, wat kan ons doen?" - ("Sir, what can we do?") asked the step-father grabbing my arm and pulling me down to his level so he could whisper in my ear. "Jou meisie is baie siek, baie, baie siek" - ("Your girlfriend is very, sick indeed.") I recoiled as the smell of beer and bad breath hit my central nervous system, and I smiled feebly as the landlord now grabbed my other arm and, between them, the two men started telling me what had happened simultaneously in drunken English and Afrikaans.

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I looked around in desperation. We were becoming the centre of attention. I then spotted Namene, Kaurie's buxom friend and workmate who stayed in the same house as I did. She saw me too and walked over to where I was standing. It was then I heard her; Johanna's voice boomed out above the natter and clatter of the waiting room. 

"David is on the right side." Johanna shouted as she emerged from a treatment cubicle on the far side of the room. She looked as if she was in a trance, staring ahead of her and bellowing again and again, 

"David is on the right side". Johanna looked as if she had aged 40 years overnight. Her hair, which she had cut short only a few days before, was matted and dirty. Her face was drawn, her eyes wild and bloodshot, the rims flaming red as if she had not slept for a couple of days. Her tall, slim body stooped - shoulders dropped, back arched as if she carried a huge weight in her favourite black leather bag which she clutched in her right hand. 

She wore the same black blouse and cream-coloured dress she had been wearing when she left the house the previous morning after we had spent the weekend together. But now she wore tatty slippers instead of the smart black high-heeled court shoes I had last seen her in as we had parted outside the front gate. She had seemed alright then; although perhaps quiet and tense. 

Johanna turned slowly like a robot and looked towards me, but not an inkling of recognition registered on her face, which remained expressionless like that of a zombie. She then shuffled towards me, spouting nonsense in the tone of a soap box preacher as she came closer. 

I sensed the entire waiting room was now watching us; the room had gone quiet and people were whispering urgently to each other behind me. "Shall I speak with
her?" I asked Namene, trying hard to suppress my alarm. The nurse shrugged her shoulders. I took a deep breath and began to walk across the room towards my girlfriend.

Johanna and I had met on Christmas Eve 1989. A handful of friends and I who had remained, in Katutura after the pre-Christmas dash to the coast and far north were drowning the festive season blues at one house when Johanna and her sister had arrived. Johanna and I had started chatting, and later we had gone together to a party. She stood out from the crowd with her laughing eyes, constant smile and distinctive hairstyle - her long black hair arranged in a large quiff which curled back across the top of her head and joined the rest of her hair brushed back and down her thin neck. She was shy but seemed to warm to me, and soon chatted freely and intelligently about a wide range of subjects - everything from drink to her life in exile. Aged 15, she had fled the country in 1978 and had been at Cassinga refugee camp only a few weeks when the South Africans carried out their bloody raid. Johanna had escaped from the massacre by running into the bush, where she hid for three days, not daring to move, until she and others there were discovered by aid workers who came to the scene when reports of the killings had reached Luanda. Later she worked for Swapo in Luanda before moving to East Germany and then on to Zambia to study. She returned to Namibia in July 1989 with her young son and since then had not found work. It was her search for a job that brought Johanna to Windhoek, where she stayed with her brother in Katutura. The brother was not best pleased when he discovered Johanna had a white boyfriend, and he had kicked her out of the house. Faced with no alternative, Johanna went to live with her mother in Katutura's old location. Johanna's father was an extremely wealthy businessman, but her mother lived in abject poverty. When the mother had been pregnant with Johanna, the father had chosen to marry another of his girlfriends instead, leaving Johanna's mother to fend for herself and her young daughter. But such was the way things happened in this male-dominated society, and the mother had coped as best she could with the life fate had intended for her, eventually marrying Johanna's step-father. But the R90 a week the latter earned as a garage assistant was minimal for life in the expensive city, and they and their own children could only afford the most basic of township accommodation. When Johanna was forced to go and live with them, their four-room shack was already overcrowded, and Johanna had to sleep on a mattress in the kitchen. The house was rented from the municipality by the old and slightly crazy landlord, who was also unemployed, and relied on sub-tenants for income. Johanna's mother, step-father and four young children Johanna's son included - occupied the second bedroom, while sleeping space was sub-let to four other people in the living room. This was not all. In the backyard, the chicken run had been converted into another room using scrap wood and polythene sheeting, and this was rented
at R50 a month to a young couple with two children - one a new-born baby. The chickens were evicted to the yard, but still returned to their original roost whenever the rickety, makeshift door was left open. The kitchen inside the house was bare save for a mattress and a tap which jutted from the crumbling brick wall. Cooking was done over an open fire in the backyard, and all 16 occupants shared the outside toilet and shower. The mother and step-father spent their evenings at a nearby shebeen where they squandered most of what was left of their income after rent on tombo. The children were lucky if they saw more than one meal a day; and then the food was always the same - mealie pap. When she had

Two women first returned to the country, Johanna's father had taken her in, providing her with food and shelter in return for labour in one of his many shops. But when she returned to her mother, the father's charity came to an end; he had long since stopped giving the mother payment for the trouble of bearing his child. After she was ejected from her brother's house, Johanna and I lost touch for several days. Oblivious to what had happened, I had gone to the brother's house only to be told by the neighbours that Johanna had left the previous morning with her suitcase. We had only known each other three days and I assumed she had had second thoughts about the relationship, so I was quite surprised, though pleased, when she telephoned to say she was still in Katutura. She could not describe how to get to her mother's house, so we arranged to meet at a well-known landmark nearby. I spotted her a long way off as she picked her way across the rocky wasteland, dressed in a loose, emerald green dress, her long wavy hair now untied - flowing back in the breeze, her gleaming teeth flashing between her parted lips every step of the way. We returned the way she had come, pausing to allow one of the local lads to tee off from a mound of rubbish at one end of the wasteland with a nine iron golf club and ball he had found at the city's garbage tip. "Four!" he shouted as the golf ball skidded across the barren terrain. Then, seeing us together, he whistled and called to Johanna.

"Ouna oshilumbu? Oshiwanawa noonkondo! Kala nelago" - ("You have found, yourself a white guy? You have done well! You are lucky!") Children from throughout the neighbourhood gathered when they saw us coming, following us up the street, and soon everyone had heard about the "shirumbu" Johanna had brought into the old man's home. The old man himself had welcomed the chance to speak English, pontificating in between snorts of snuff about the injustices of colonial history in his grandiose manner, before putting on his striped boating blazer, picking up a small battered "briefcase" and disappearing off "to do some business", which later I learnt was his way of saying he was going to the shebeen. Johanna's mother and step-father looked bewildered when they met me, although they managed a worried smile when Johanna explained in their mother tongue that yes, I was the boyfriend she had told them about.
The mother ordered her daughter to fetch a bottle of beer - a luxury in that household - from the shebeen, then sat on the cushionless settee in the living room and we drank to each other's health, laughing as we repeatedly greeted each other in her language -as this was the only Oshiwambo I knew, and she could speak neither English nor Afrikaans.

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When Johanna and I had later left to go to the nightclub, heads had turned in all the neighbouring backyards and we were followed to the street by the sound of both good-natured cat whistles and Ongry tutting: feelings in the old location were mixed about the idea of the mixing of races, but Johanna had just laughed it off with a quick-witted putdown of her neighbours.

However, Johanna's smiles and her mother's laughs began to wear thin when, a month later, Johanna still had not found a job, despite her reasonable qualifications and having old friends amongst the leaders of the new government-in-waiting. Most white bosses refused to recognise qualifications and certificates gained outside South Africa, in particular those from Eastern European countries, which the bosses said were not worth the paper they were written on.

As for Johanna's old contacts, they were now out of reach behind the seemingly impenetrable walls of security and bureaucracy which went with their new jobs. Besides, many friendships were soon forgotten in the euphoria of the election and the comfort of old revolutionaries' new wealth and power.

The old man, too, was soon tired of having Johanna as a non-paying lodger, and rented the kitchen to a homeless couple instead. So Johanna tended to spend more and more time staying with me, as she found it awkward sharing such a small room with her parents and the four children. Her mother liked it even less, and often, when drunk, chased her daughter out of the house.

The frustration of not being able to find work and the insecurity of having nowhere to live began to grow inside Johanna. She longed for the times she had spent in exile when she and her fellow refugees at least had a roof over their heads and food on their plates.

Many of her friends from exile were in a similar position to Johanna, and when they met they spoke wistfully about their time spent "outside".

"If we had known that this was what independence was all about, we wouldn't have come back," Johanna would say with a deep sigh, before adding bitterly. "They, promised us jobs and they promised us houses when we came back. So where are those things?"

Nonetheless, Johanna did not pester me for money and only took what I could offer when she was desperate for cash. The money she did take home with her was intended for food for the children, but was often found by the mother who then spent it on tombo. Realising, however, that her daughter was not going out with a white sugar daddy, the mother became more and more annoyed with Johanna and threatened to banish her from the house if she did not bring money home each time she saw me. Johanna became more and more depressed, and the unhappiness she encountered...
at home spread like a cancer into our relationship. It came as a relief when Johanna announced on the first weekend of February that she had decided to return to her father's house and to work for him once more while she waited for prospective employers in Windhoek to process her job applications. We spent what we thought was our last weekend together and I left her on the Monday morning having given her money for transport back to her father's town, she promising to contact me to say goodbye before she left. Throughout the weekend Johanna had appeared subdued, and we had found it increasingly hard to communicate as she seemed to be having difficulty with her English. But there was nothing to suggest she was about to have a nervous breakdown.

I walked across the waiting room towards Johanna, who was shuffling towards me as if she had severe rheumatism. Two metres from her, I came to an abrupt halt as the smell of her breath hit me. She did not wait for me to greet her but launched into a nonsensical diatribe. She stared manically at me, her lips cracked and her mouth ringed with dried froth and saliva.

I had worked with mentally ill people in Britain, many of whom looked like Johanna did now. But this was different; I was no longer dealing with a "client", and a stranger. This was my girlfriend, and for a moment I did not know how to react.

A crowd of nurses and patients was beginning to gather around us, gawping and sniggering at Johanna's behaviour, so I took her by the arm, led her into a vacant treatment room and closed the door. A nurse followed us in and asked Johanna a few questions, but, getting no coherent answers, left saying she was going to try and call a doctor.

For half an hour Johanna continued her rapid-fire conversation, jumping from subject to subject without hardly taking a breath, seldom looking at me as she spoke. I listened, occasionally interjecting with a "yes" or a "no" when appropriate while trying to stay out of range of her breath. Groups of nurses kept peering around the cubical door, tittering and shaking their heads, but not once offering treatment or even help of any kind. During her non-stop chatter, Johanna gave clues as to what had happened the previous day which, when put together, painted a vague picture of how she had ended up in hospital. She had left our house, but instead of taking the taxi back to her mother's house, she had walked, getting hopelessly lost on the way and she had not arrived in the old location until mid-afternoon. By this time she was highly confused and, according to her step-father, was talking incoherently. When her condition had not improved by late evening, the mother and step-father had taken Johanna to the inyanga (traditional healer) who gave her "something to

sniff", which Johanna said made her feel sick. The inyanga then told the parents there was nothing more he could do and advised them to take Johanna to the hospital. Instead, they returned home to drink, but when Johanna's nonsensical jabbering continued into the early hours of the morning, the hospital became the only option for the drunk and equally confused parents.
By now Johanna was entering a state of acute psychosis, yet little help had been available at the hospital where the nurses had kept their distance as if Johanna had been suffering from a highly contagious disease. Eventually one of the medical staff summoned an ambulance to take Johanna to the psychiatric hospital. She was led away and I took my leave to go to work, apprehensively returning in the evening in order to find out how she was.

Katutura psychiatric hospital was situated in the middle of the open veld between the township, Khomasdal and Windhoek North, next to the highway which bisected this no-man's land, but hidden from view by clumps of tall trees. Technically this was no longer the "black" mental asylum, rather the place where those unable to afford treatment at the State Hospital were sent. Inevitably, all the patients were black.

I took the taxi from work to Katutura hospital and then had to walk the two kilometres from the main complex to the psychiatric wing along a road which connected the State and township hospitals. The psychiatric unit was made up of two long, single storey buildings which resembled the kind of structures you found at small, old-fashioned aerodromes. It was surrounded by a tall, chain-linked fence topped with barbed wire, although the gates were open and unattended, so I walked in unchallenged and looked for the way in.

Despite its location next to the highway, the place was surprisingly peaceful, made all the more so by the thick, lush green and well-tended trees and bushes which grew around the buildings. I eventually found an open door and entered the reception area.

A television blared from behind a door marked "recreation room" and the shouts of patients demanding to be let out of their rooms echoed along a door-lined corridor running the length of the building. I waited a few minutes before a nurse appeared from one of the rooms and, noticing me standing there, asked if she could help.

I asked to see Johanna, at which she told me to wait and went back to the room she had just come from, returning seconds later clutching a large set of keys. Locking the door behind her, she then turned and walked to the end of the corridor where she knocked on another door, unlocked it and disappeared inside.

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The sound of the jangling keys provoked loud banging and renewed shouting from within the other rooms. The nurse re-emerged from the room with Johanna, whom she led gently down the corridor towards me. Johanna was heavily sedated and was having great difficulty standing upright.

Twice she paused and had to hold onto the wall for support before carrying on, barely able to hold her head upright. She was wearing a thick, well-washed denim nightshirt with the letters PH (psigiatriese hospitaal) sewn into the collar. Johanna's glazed eyes registered no recognition when she reached me. I kissed her; her lips were dry and barely flickered in response.

"You can go to the sitting room if you want," the nurse said pointing along a covered walkway which joined the two buildings.
I took Johanna’s arm and led her through the door, along the walkway and into the other building where an odd assortment of tatty chairs were arranged around a wooden coffee table. I helped her into one of the chairs and sat in the seat next to her.

The SWABC’s Nama/Damara service played softly from an old wooden-cased loudspeaker fixed to one of the walls which, like the rest of the interior, was painted a mixture of cloakroom yellow and green. A flickering light bulb hung from the ceiling, encased in a grubby lampshade.

The place reeked of disinfectant, and faceless voices echoed like spirits around the building. Nonetheless, the whole hospital had a peculiar tranquillity about it, created as if to deaden, or perhaps even soothe, the minds of those sent there.

Once seated, we began to chat about the day and what had happened to her since we had last met. Johanna had been given a heavy dose of drugs and, at first, conversation was hard work. I handed her a copy of that day’s newspaper but she just stared at the front page, trying hard but failing to take in anything.

Slowly, however, her trance melted slightly and she seemed able to talk more freely. As we spoke, patients and nurses wandered in and out, smiling and greeting us as they went, although everyone’s behaviour appeared to be a little surreal or unusual. Johanna just stared at the passersby as if they were mad. As we talked, her thoughts at first appeared to be quite rational, and certainly more coherent than they had been that morning.

She leant her head on my shoulder, then gently put her arm around me. I tried to respond but my actions were stiff and forced. She said she had seen me on television the night before. It was not unusual for journalists to appear on the news as SWABC camera crews had a fetish for filming other journalists at every event they attended.

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Johanna went on to say that she had seen me on screen with another woman. I tried to think where I had been and who I might have been with. Johanna said the woman and I were kissing and dancing, adding that she had then seen me riding horses and playing football for Liverpool. I told her I could not ride horses and that I supported Arsenal, but she just laughed and assured me that this was what she had seen. Having listened as much as I thought I was able, I left Johanna in the hands of the nurses, who led her back to her room, and I started out on my long walk back to Katutura.

The setting sun was sandwiched between a bank of rain clouds and the mountains to the west, its rays slicing through the gap and catching the top of the highest hill to the east, making it stand out like a shaft of gold amongst the other more solemn, purple-coloured mountains around it.

Frogs and crickets sung to their hearts’ content in the wasteland swamps which were still digesting the rains fed to it in a storm a few hours before. For a moment the tension and pain of the day rose from my shoulders as I breathed the fresh, damp air, and thought with relief that perhaps that night there would be no thunder, lightning and torrential rain to keep me awake as there had been almost every night for the past month or so.
Back home, the tension returned. Kaurie inquired how Johanna was and we discussed whether or not there had been any sign the previous weekend that she was about to have a breakdown. In hindsight there were perhaps a few indications, but nothing which had warranted us taking any notice at the time.

Then, out of the blue, Kaurie suggested that perhaps Johanna had been bewitched. I did not answer at first. She had offered the same explanation when I had fallen ill with food poisoning the previous month. "Perhaps someone has cast a spell on you," she had said at the time, and I had laughed, thinking that she was joking. This time I did not laugh as I realised she was serious; a qualified nurse at a modern hospital talking about witchcraft causing illnesses.

That night there was a terrible storm. The rain hammered against the zinc roof and flimsy windows with such ferocity I thought perhaps the house would be washed away. Unable to sleep, I watched through the kitchen window as the rain swept across the plain and the lightning lit up the sky from east to west, for seconds at a time turning everything from the mountains to the houses into ghostly statues cast in a grey/white stone.

I pictured the psychiatric hospital sheltering underneath the wind-buffeted trees on the side of the highway, and tried to imagine what the storm must sound like inside Johanna's head.

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For the first two weeks Johanna was in the hospital, she appeared to recover quickly. She was on the verge of being discharged when her health began to deteriorate again, until she was almost as ill as she had been when she was first admitted. Conversation, when coherent, was almost always about the past. After a while she too came up with the notion that she had been bewitched, saying that a spell cast by a jealous man she had refused to sleep with had caused her illness. As the weeks went on, this idea began to dominate her thoughts.

Her eyes became more and more haunted, her movements slower and less coordinated (although this also depended a great deal on the quantity of drugs she had been given). Few relatives visited her, seemingly scared off by the superstition which surrounded mental illness, so she began to cling to me in desperation.

Feeling threatened, my reaction was to pull away, visit her less often, for fear of being sucked in with her, and ending up with her totally dependent on me, something I desperately wanted to avoid. But the sight of her, having said goodbye to me in the hospital car park, turning to walk slowly back alone to her locked room in a building full of lunatics - head bowed in a way that suggested that her heart was sobbing rivers of invisible tears - made me return. Johanna and her doctor spoke once on the telephone with the father, who agreed to come and visit his daughter and, when she was better, for her to return to his home to convalesce. But the father never came to visit, although Johanna continued hoping each day that he would suddenly arrive and take her away from the slow, tortuous hell she was going through.
As the weeks dragged on, the more Johanna realised she was not getting any better, the more desperate she became to get out. With there being only one consultant psychiatrist in the whole of Namibia, care for the 30 or so "non-paying" patients at the Katutura psychiatric unit was crude. A handful of semi-trained staff saw each patient once or, if they were lucky, twice a week to assess any progress and review drug dosages. Apart from this, treatment came in the form of the vast quantities of drugs each patient was fed each day; most of the nursing staff appeared to do little other than hand out pills and make sure their charges did not run away.

Psychiatry had never been considered necessary during colonial times. Whites needing psychiatric care were able to pay for treatment in South Africa, or from private consultants in Windhoek, while provision for the black community was ignored. Black people with mental illness - or possessed by spirits as some thought - were looked after but kept at arms length by the extended family network, and every "village idiot" had a place in society. However, urbanisation slowly began to erode traditional structures, including those of the family, creating a need for the state to provide some kind of psychiatric care for the black community.

The state responded in its usual medieval fashion by keeping black psychiatric cases out of sight and out of mind, sling them into the Katutura 'loony bin' and feeding them with drugs in order to shut them up. By 1990, Namibia's mounting though still widely unrecognised need for proper mental health care for the majority of black people was exacerbated by the return of exiles, many of whom were either already suffering, or would soon suffer from trauma and stress caused by war and, as in Johanna's case, by the shattering of dreams as they returned to their motherland to find no opportunities for them to put their educated brains to work.

Johanna spent independence day in hospital. She watched the celebrations on television, followed by a party thrown by the staff and patients. Three days later, her mother came to take her away from the hospital, saying she had arranged for Johanna to stay with her father. However, once discharged, Johanna did not go to her father's house, for the mother had lied simply to get her daughter home. Instead Johanna continued to live with her mother in their old location hovel which had acquired two more lodgers since Johanna had been away.

Distrustful of "white man's medicine", the mother wanted her daughter to be treated by an inyanga. The treatment involved four visits to the local inyanga's den in a conventional township house in the old location, during which Johanna had to take various potions which made her violently sick, supposedly so she could vomit out the badness caused by the spell which had been cast on her. For this the family had to pay R300. So convinced was the mother in the inyanga's power that she somehow scraped together the money from donations made by various relatives and, months later, the treatment was complete.

The inyanga's magic seemed to work. Johanna did not have a relapse, despite not taking the pills she was given when discharged from hospital. She too had become
convinced of the inyanga's ability to cure her, just as she had become convinced that a spell had caused her illness in the first place. However, still she could not find a job, her hunt now made harder as word of her illness spread. The stigma as "one who was possessed" was difficult to lose. Eventually Johanna, like so many of her fellow former exiles, returned to her village to work in the fields. At least here there was food as long as there was rain. Twelve years after going into exile, Johanna was living in an independent Namibia. Twelve years after going into exile, Johanna was in exactly the same position she had been in the day she had fled South African rule. Things could only get better... couldn't they?

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Maria

It came as a shock when I was told Maria had fought in Plan. Small, slim, attractive and quiet, she was the antithesis of the stereotyped picture I had of a female combatant, and I found it difficult to imagine her in combat dress, stalking through the bush with an AK-47 slung across her back. But Maria, like thousands of other Namibian women, had fought on the Angolan frontline against what was reputedly the most powerful army in Africa. In Maria's case, she had done so for five years, and had a bullet wound through her left leg to prove it. As a result of these women's commitment to liberating their country, and as a token of Swapo's policy of promoting equality of the sexes, all women exiles underwent military training and served in Plan for at least a year; only the sick, elderly and those well-connected were exempt. Female combatants did everything their male comrades were expected to do and more, male platoon commanders - resentful of the fact that they had women in their ranks - making life particularly tough for female soldiers. Nonetheless, women such as Maria spurned the opportunity to study in order to continue fighting in Plan once they had completed their one year compulsory service, and needless to say, hundreds lost their lives in the process. Those who survived - like many male combatants - returned home after the war with soldiering as their only qualification and, not surprisingly, they expected to get jobs in the Namibian army once the country became independent. Shortly before independence day, however, a spokesperson for the Namibian Defence Force (NDF) told The Namibian that women would not to be allowed to serve as soldiers in the new army. Women, he said, were not suited to serving in a "proper" army.

What made this decision all the more galling for the women combatants was the fact that the NDF did employ former (male) South African soldiers, including even those who had helped plan and execute atrocities such as the Cassinga massacre. In theory, the NDF high command was in breach of Namibia's new Constitution, which outlawed any kind of discrimination, but the commanders' decision was never challenged, the controversy soon drowning in the euphoria of the independence celebrations which followed.
The handful of female Swapo Members of Parliament, former Plan combatants amongst them, were either too busy or else too restricted by the party line to oppose the decision. Other women were prevented from speaking out by the fear of being branded as counter-revolutionary by Namibian men, the majority of whom shuddered at the thought of women assuming a role as powerful as defending the country.

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Unlike Angola, Namibia was still a fervently patriarchal society where a woman's place was considered to be in the home - a belief in which many male members of Swapo's "revolutionary" leadership also quietly found comfort. Added to which, the physical distance which lay between the homes to which women combatants had now returned made it all but impossible for them to organise themselves in order to effectively challenge their banning from the army.

I met Maria on 25 August 1990, a day before Namibia Day - the 24th anniversary of the start of Swapo's armed struggle against the South African occupation. Being the first Namibia Day to be celebrated after independence, a grand ceremony had been arranged at Ongulumbashe in the far north, the scene of the first battle between Plan and the South African security forces.

Here thousands of people were to make the trek from around the country to see Namibia's President Sam Nujoma take the salute from survivors of that first conflict, and unveil a memorial to those who had died. However, Maria and her husband, the latter also a former combatant, spent the day more than 1500 km away in the southern town of Karasburg, where they were visiting Maria's family. It was now more than a year since the two had returned to Namibia with their two children, but still they had found no work and had been living off the goodwill of relatives and friends in an isolated village in the far north.

With so much time on their hands in which to dwell on the past, Namibia Day had particular significance for Maria and her husband. Both freedom fighters were subdued throughout the weekend, saying little as they sat quietly in the backyard of Maria's mother's run-down township shack, lost in their thoughts and oblivious to the boisterous, incoherent chatter of drunken tombo drinkers around them.

On the Saturday afternoon, I had taken them on a sight-seeing trip to the Orange River. Only a few words were exchanged throughout the hour-long drive through the parched, undulating rocky landscape of the deep south, with its unbroken view of fenced-off semi-desert, a line of telegraph poles disappearing into the horizon, and the occasional weather-beaten sign board written in German or Afrikaans and pointing down yet another seemingly endless dirt road towards an invisible karakul ranch. All this was a far cry from the verdant savanna of southern Angola and northern Namibia in which my companions had lived and then fought.

Eventually the barren plateau gave way to the rugged, volcanic valley through which flowed the perennial Orange, the presence of water giving rise to the shockingly green vegetation which grew on the narrow alluvial
plain either side of the river. We parked the car in front of a bullet-riddled board
announcing that we were at Onseepkaans on the border between Namibia and
South Africa.

Until recently the sign had read "SWA/Namibia", but a lick of fresh paint had set
the record straight, the shiny amendment clashing with the rest of the faded
paintwork. Beyond the sign was a narrow concrete bridge which spanned the half-
kilometre gap between the two countries. There was no border checkpoint on the
Namibian side of the river, only on the South African side, so we wandered to the
middle of the bridge where we leant against the parapet, staring first into the
muddy water below, and then at the two countries to either side of us.

During the liberation struggle, in moments of drunken revolutionary zeal, Swapo
supporters in Katutura's shebeens had sometimes boasted that Plan would one day
push the South Africans back across the Orange River. Yet the deep south of
Namibia was a far cry from the former war zone, and few non-exiled southerners
would have ever seen a Casspir - let alone a Plan guerrilla - unless they had been
conscripted into the SWATF.

I asked Maria and her husband whether, during the war, they and their fellow
combatants had thought about advancing as far south as this, and whether their
aim had been to liberate the south as well as the far north, the latter being the
region which the majority of Plan fighters came from. The two thought for a
while. For sure, their aim had been to liberate the whole of Namibia, the husband
then said, but as for pushing "the Boers" back across the Orange? That was
always likely to have been a task for the politicians once Plan had forced the
South Africans to come to the negotiating table.

The following day, Namibia Day, started like any other Sunday in Karasburg; the
devout went to church and the not so devout continued to drink. By early
afternoon, the voice of the Namibian President was echoing around a now hushed
location as the ceremonies at Ongulumbashe were relayed live over the newly
named Namibia Broadcasting Corporation (NBC).

A radio played in almost every house and yard, but few people were able to
understand what Nujoma was saying as his speech - delivered in English - was
only translated into Oshiwambo. The inhabitants of Karasburg township were
predominantly Nama-speaking who understood only one language other than their
own, that being Afrikaans. Little wonder the DTA's claim that Swapo was the
"party for Owambos" had earned so much credence in this part of the world!
Karasburg's Swapo branch had organised a rally to follow the broadcast of the
President's speech, and by 15h00, a hundred or so mildly enthusiastic people had
gathered on the township playing field around an open-back

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lorry from which local Swapo officials explained the history behind the armed
struggle and the significance of Namibia Day.

Maria stood on the edge of the crowd, dressed in a white and blue polka-dot dress
and sheltering from the sun under a large red, blue and green umbrella on which
was written "Namibia shall be free".
The 28-year-old Plan "veteran" seemed not to be taking in much of what was being said by the speakers; her eyes remained fixed on the ground as her thoughts drifted far away to the battlefields of southern Angola, to the comrades-in-arms she had known and lost there, as well as to previous Namibia Days. It was a novelty for Maria not only to be celebrating this Namibia Day in her independent motherland, but also on the day intended. During the war, the South Africans invariably attacked Swapo camps on August 26 as they knew this was a day of commemoration for the liberation movement. As a result, Plan fighters in the front line had always celebrated Namibia Day on a different date, well hidden from the enemy but still in constant fear of attack. Now Maria was free to celebrate Namibia Day at home with her family - a small but sweet fruit of the liberation she had fought for.

"I can't really believe this," she had said earlier in the day. "Here I am celebrating Namibia Day on Namibia Day!" Nonetheless, Maria's mind was still tuned in to the war. After the rally, we returned to her mother's house and began to talk as we prepared supper in the gathering darkness of the dingy kitchen, Maria's frail silhouette dancing in the dim, orange glow of the gas light. I asked her if she was hurt by the apparent disregard the majority of Karasburg's residents had for Namibia Day, so few having turned up to the rally.

"No, not really," she said quietly. "August 26 is bound to mean more to people living in the north than it does to people living here in the south. The effect of seeing someone dying, as many people in the north did during the years of war, makes a greater impact, so that is perhaps why people in the south do not pay so much attention to this day."

However August 26 was a day all Namibians should remember, Maria added, and not just because of the events at Ongulumba back in 1966.

"A lot of people died on this particular day throughout the war. The meaning of August 26 is the same now Namibia is independent as it was during the war, and if the aims change then we will be betraying those who started the struggle. "As for me, I feel sad today because I am actually thinking about all those I knew who died, those who one minute we were eating together with, and the next the enemy came and they were killed."

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Speaking of betrayal, how did she feel about being denied a job in the army simply because she was a women, I ventured? For a second or two Maria stopped stirring the contents of a pot which was perched on top of the two-ring gas stove and looked straight at me. Perhaps it was the lamplight, but I could have sworn a flicker of mild anger darted across her face as she turned her head to answer.

"We women sacrificed our lives to serve in Plan," she said deliberately. "We gave up the chance of going to school, and now we can't get jobs because we don't have an education. We have military training but now they tell us we can't join the army."

She found this hard to accept when she remembered how women had fought side by side with the men on the front line during the war.
"Women had the same role as men. If we were attacked then we had to shoot. If something had to be done then there were no preferences. Women were just as important as the men. When we were at war, the men respected us... If the men were injured, it was us who had to carry them to safety. They saw us as equals, but this was not the case when we were not at the battle front."

Here, most men had treated the women as inferior, and had scorned them for serving in the army, an attitude which perhaps explained the reason why the commanders had now decided to exclude women from the army. But Maria still had plenty of faith in her government. Swapo had only been in power for a few months, she said, and they could not be expected to work miracles overnight. The government should be given time, and she and her family were prepared to wait. I asked her if she felt the government had gone too far with its policy of national reconciliation, particularly when even those who planned the Cassinga massacre had been employed in the new army while people such as herself had not. Detecting a slight uncertainty in the question, coming as it did from a white person still acutely aware of his skin colour and all which it implied, Maria again turned towards me, and smiled softly.

"I would rather live with my white brothers and sisters instead of fighting. Otherwise the war will never end," she said. By 1992, the Ministry of Defence appeared to have changed its mind on the issue of women serving in the army, and a small number of women - four per cent of the entire force - had joined the ranks of the NDF. Those women recruited were former members of both Plan and SWATF, the highest ranking of whom held the position of Major. A Ministry spokesperson, however, said that, for financial reasons, the NDF was unable to recruit more women. Maria was not among the lucky four per cent, and two-and-a-half years after independence she and her husband were still jobless, living as best as they could with relatives in the Uukwaludhu district of far northern Namibia.

Welcome to Namibia
The departure lounge at Paris's Charles de Gaulle airport was packed with the strangest mix of people I had seen in a long time. We were all waiting to board the huge UTA jetliner destined for Luanda, Windhoek, and Gaborone, which stood outside on the tarmac. I was returning to Namibia after paying a long-overdue visit to my family in Britain. Unlike on my maiden voyage to Namibia, when South African Airways had been the only airline flying to Windhoek, I now had a choice, UTA being just one of seven international airlines flying to and from the Namibian capital.

The people I was travelling with this time were different too. During the two hours I had been in the departure lounge waiting to board the UTA flight, I had not heard a single word of Afrikaans. Instead there was a potjiekos of French, Portuguese and English, interspersed with a few indigenous African languages. Most of the passengers seemed to be either tourists, or English, American and French oil workers heading back for another tour of duty in the Cabinda oilfields of northern Angola. This group were a boisterous, rough-and-ready bunch with
tousled hair, beards and sunburnt faces, and were dressed in either jeans or corduroys with heavy boots.
Gathered a safe distance from the Cabinda mob were isolated groups of impeccably dressed black people, the men in tailor-made suits and carrying leather briefcases, the women in fine, brightly coloured African dresses, while their children wore smart Paris fashions. Proud and seemingly unperturbed by the rabble around them, the black passengers were nonetheless in a minority, even though every destination of our flight was an independent African country.
Once airborne, we were able to settle back and read about exotic corners of Africa in the glossy in-flight magazine, and listen to a compilation of African music on the plane's music channel. Next to me sat a French oil worker, an intelligent-looking, clean-shaven man who made every attempt to disassociate himself from his brusque, rough-and-ready colleagues. After a while he tapped me on the arm. "What are you listening to?" he asked, once I had removed the headphones. "You seem to be enjoying it judging by the way your feet are tapping." I laughed, slightly embarrassed at having been caught out.

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"I'm listening to Tabu Ley and Mbilia Bel," I explained. The names meant nothing to him. "They are musicians from Zaire," I tried to explain. "You must have heard their music before? It is played all the time on Angolan radio." The Frenchman looked perplexed. "We don't listen to the local radio stations on the oil rig where I work," he replied. "My company provides us with newspapers from home, and even arranges for tapes of French and US TV programmes to be flown out to us. The only Angolans we have contact with are those working on the rig, and we hardly ever go outside the compound. From Luanda, they will fly us straight to our work, and when it is time to come home again, they will fly us straight back."
Although Africa's last colony was now independent, Europeans continued to flock to the continent in search of its natural wealth and beauty. Only, instead of guns and bibles, we now came with cameras and cheque books.
Money talks all over the world, and independent Namibia was no exception. The economic power of foreign companies and Namibia's white minority guaranteed that, two years after independence, liberation meant little more than political emancipation for the majority. Majority rule was a major achievement in itself, but most people expected more for their hard-earned freedom.
The first few months of Namibia's independence were a baptism of fire for the new government, as the country's polarised inhabitants grappled with their expectations for the future. The new ruling elite quickly adapted to their new positions. Cabinet Ministers and others at the top of the hierarchy moved into their predecessor's mansions in Windhoek's most sumptuous suburbs, where they retreated behind the high walls initially installed to keep them out. Meanwhile, luxury cars sporting distinctive green Government number plates were everywhere to be seen on the capital's streets.
It was soon time to celebrate May Day and, being the first time May 1st had been officially recognised in Namibia, both the Government and the National Union of Namibian Workers (NUNW) wanted it to be a fitting tribute to the workers' contribution to the liberation struggle. It turned out to be a fiasco. The unions' May Day organising committee - made up of both former exiles and stay-at-home trade unionists - decided to break with tradition and hold the main May Day rally at the Windhoek athletics stadium, 15 km across town from Katutura. The decision was accepted with reluctance by some members of the organising committee, who felt the rally should be staged within easy reach of Katutura, where the majority of the city's workforce lived. Dissent amongst the organisers grew with the Government-inspired proposal to hold a May Day banquet, to which both trade union leaders

and employers would be invited. To make matters worse, the rally was only advertised in English on television, in the newspapers and on billboards few members of the largely illiterate workforce understood English, and not many owned television sets. In previous years, organisers had gone from door-to-door urging Katuturans to attend such rallies, which were always well attended. On May 1, 1990, however, fewer than 3000 people turned up at the 15,000-seat stadium to listen to a keynote address by President Nujoma, much to the embarrassment of both the organisers and the Government. Meanwhile, the banquet went ahead at the five-star Kalahari Sands Hotel, tickets for which cost R100. Needless to say, few workers attended, the rows of empty tables proving that this new style of trade unionism had few takers amongst Namibia's lumpen as well as its not-so-lumpen proletariat.

Expectations amongst the people for immediate change after independence were dangerously high, and could not possibly be satisfied. For a start, the Government inherited an inflated bureaucracy of between 50 - 60,000 people which it was forced to make bigger rather than smaller. The Constitution forbade the sacking of colonial civil servants with Namibian citizenship, and the only way of appointing new people was by creating new posts. By 1991 Namibian taxpayers were paying the salaries of close on 70,000 civil servants. Then, as if getting to grips with and restructuring the civil service was not enough to contend with, the new regime was faced with a statute book which would require many months of tedious alterations before it was possible even to think about making meaningful reforms. But people wanted change immediately, not least in the small market town of Outjo - a renowned bastion of apartheid - where the black community soon decided they had waited long enough.

The Outjo township of Etoshapoort was built on a barren plateau out of sight of the verdant white town a few kilometres away. Most township residents lived in squalid, service-less, municipal shacks with outside toilets consisting of nothing more than a bucket, which were emptied once a week by municipal workers. On July 11, 1990, black municipal workers went on strike, and a crowd of several hundred Etoshapoort residents carrying their overflowing toilet pots marched on the Town Hall. Here they presented the Town Clerk with their demands for proper
toilets, electricity, better sports facilities and an end to racial segregation, before emptying the contents of the toilet pots over the town hall steps and into the mayor's car.

For two days, the protests continued outside the Town Hall, work at which had been brought to standstill by the strike of black staff. At first Local Government Minister Libertine Amathila dismissed the protests as the work of bored students, but soon changed her tune when her representatives - dispatched to Outjo to investigate - reported back. A day

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of negotiations between township residents, Ministry and Town Hall officials followed, at the end of which the Municipality agreed to start immediately on the installation of a proper sewerage system, to upgrade the township's football pitch, and to consult township representatives on all issues affecting the black community.

The Outjo Uprising, as it became known, illustrated an uncomfortable predicament the Government found itself in. At independence, all Municipalities and former second-tier authorities fell under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Local Government and Housing. But until local authority and regional elections could be held, the old whites-only Municipalities would continue to run Namibia's towns, and the day-to-day affairs of the black majority living in them. So when, as in the case of Outjo, there were protests against the Municipalities, people the new Government was supposed to represent were rising up against bodies representing the Government.

A few weeks after the Outjo Uprising, the Town Clerk of Mariental, who did little to hide his right-wing sympathies for the neo Nazi Afrikaner Resistance Movement (AWB), sent in bulldozers to clear a squatter settlement which had sprung up on wasteland just outside the town. When asked by The Namibian why he had evicted the squatters in such a way, the Town Clerk said he was "tidying up the area in preparation for a visit by the Minister (Libertine Amathila)". Whilst deploring the town clerk's actions, Amathila admitted there was little she could do as the official was acting within his authority. She could not even chastise the man for his political views as every civil servant was free to be a member of a political organisation as long as their politics did not interfere with their work.

The threat of armed insurrection also haunted the Government throughout its first year in power. To celebrate the anniversary of their return from exile, Prime Minister Hage Geingob and his fellow Swapo cabinet members threw a champagne cocktail party in the former's spacious wood-panelled office adjoining the Tintenpalast. An NBC television crew was there too, and the party was a major item on that night's news.

In a sparsely furnished Katutura living room, a group of former Plan combatants watched the scenes of their leaders popping corks and swigging champagne with a mixture of disbelief and anger. As with thousands of others like them, these former Plan fighters had not found work since returning from exile the year before. They had not been selected for Nampol or the Namibian Defence Force (NDF), and the only plans the Government seemed to have for these surplus ex-
combatants was to put them into "Development Brigades" - a kind of public works programme whereby participants would be provided with basic accommodation and

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meagre pocket money in return for labour. However, as yet the scheme had come to nothing, and in the meantime thousands of these ex-guerrillas were left to sit around, drink and wait for something to happen, while others turned to crime. The Namibian began receiving letters from "angry former Plan fighters" threatening to stage a coup if the Government did not help them soon. Then, one night in June, unidentified attackers opened fire on the homes of Home Affairs Minister Hifikepunye Pohamba and Defence Minister Peter Mueshihange. A year before, such attacks could only have been carried out by rightwing extremists, but now a possibility existed that it could have been the work of disgruntled ex-combatants.

Three weeks later, a large quantity of arms and ammunition were stolen from a police arsenal near Windhoek, further fuelling fears that a coup was being planned. Then, in the last week of July, The Namibian came into possession of a "top secret" police report detailing a plot to overthrow the Government by a group of men with ties with Unita. The newspaper carried the story, and three days later, on August 2, detectives came to our offices, confiscated the document and warned Gwen that she could be charged under the Protection of Information Act.

In the early hours of the following Sunday, The Namibian's offices were gutted by phosphorous grenades hurled into the building by unknown intruders. As we once again sifted through the smouldering debris, we began to wonder what independence was really all about.

At the time, The Namibian's coup-plot story was dismissed by the paper's critics as a sensational bid to boost sales. However, less than a month later, six young whites were arrested and charged with treason, having been found in possession of enough weapons to equip a small army. Another potential rebellion was snuffed out in Rehoboth a month later, but not before tribal leader, Hans Diergaardt, and his armed supporters barricaded themselves into Diergaardt's state-owned home. Here they demanded that Rehoboth should remain a self-governing homeland, and threatened to defend the house by force if the Government made any attempt to repossess it. After many tense days, during which NDF troops were drafted into the area, Diergaardt finally gave in and vacated the house.

To everyone's relief, 1991 was a far less turbulent year. However, independence had triggered a complex social and economic chain-reaction throughout Namibian society, which further complicated matters for the new regime.

By 1992, Windhoek had completely lost its small-town feel, and was now a sophisticated and cosmopolitan national capital in its own right. In the

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place of Untag had come 50 or so diplomatic missions and numerous aid agencies and non-governmental organisations which had added to the city's international feel. Nationalities from across the globe could be spotted walking through the city centre, the skyline of which had gained several multi-storey office blocks and a couple of shopping centres - the products of pre-independence investment by local business people and several South African financial institutions. The kind of shops found in the new arcades reflected the consumer trends of the diverse population.

The city centre now had four large supermarkets, while stores selling furniture had sprung up to meet the demands of the embassies and a new generation of civil servants with subsidised houses to furnish. Clothes stores also mushroomed, the in-styles being clothes of West African design, while teenagers opted for the latest hip-hop styles coming out of America - brightly coloured, baggy tracksuits, baseball caps and basketball boots. Returning exiles had set a trend with the fashions they brought back with them from other African countries. African shirts and flowing West African robes were now status symbols, particularly amongst members of the new ruling elite. Needless to say, the new styles did not catch on in a big way amongst the white community, older members of which stuck to their safari suits, shorts, knee-length socks and "veldskoene".

The majority of foreign diplomats joined top Government officials in the luxurious suburbs, and brought with them a more relaxed atmosphere, although this was only really noticeable once inside the security fences. All the same, these suburbs remained exclusive oases of affluence which continued to grow into the foothills of Ludwigsdorf and Olympia. Here new mansions with swimming pools, two to three garages and driveways crammed with expensive cars enveloped the veld grass, rocks and thorn bushes of the once wild and craggy hillsides. An army of domestic workers was still required to service these and the older suburbs, and each morning Municipal buses shuttled to and from Katutura, crammed full of black people dressed in overalls on the outward journey, and all but empty on the way back. Windhoek's public transport system remained geared solely to taking black workers between the townships and the city's industrial and residential areas at the beginning and end of each working day. If you did not have a car, and wanted to travel anywhere else, private taxis were the only means of transport, which proved costly to anyone living off the established township taxi routes. Less prestigious suburbs such as Pioneers Park and Academia underwent a rather more dramatic change as Government-owned homes once occupied by hordes of white South African civil servants were taken over by the black people who replaced them. There was a time when the sizzling of braaivleis and the bark of vicious dogs were the only sounds heard above the terrifying silence of these districts. Now indigenous languages and the beat of African music could also be heard wafting through the liberated air.

Another formerly segregated white suburb underwent an even more dramatic change. Only a few white faces could now be spotted in Windhoek North, the
large suburb between the city centre and Katutura, which was once home to white railway workers. The transformation had begun before independence when houses here were allocated to black civil servants, as their white colleagues moved to more up-market suburbs. Shortly before independence, the houses were put up for sale, and most were bought either by civil servants, or black people looking to move out of the townships. As a result, the area became known as "Klein Khomasdal" (Little Khomasdal), and assumed some of the lively characteristics of the townships, with loud music, children playing in the streets, and even a shebeen or two. Each house had been built with a garage and servants’ quarters, but, with rented housing becoming more and more scarce in the capital, these were now rented out by the new owners to people needing somewhere to stay. By 1992 there was hardly a house in the area where the outbuildings did not have tenants, entire families living in windowless garages, and cramped back rooms once occupied by domestic servants.

This was proof that the housing squeeze initially felt in the townships was beginning to spread to the city, as more and more people flocked to the capital from the rural areas. The demand for housing pushed the cost of housing sky high, increasing by up to 400 per cent in some areas between 1989 and 1991. But demand for housing was not the only thing responsible for these crippling price increases. The majority of post-independent civil servants lived and worked in Windhoek, and almost all were entitled to subsidised housing. This created an artificially high demand, and with the availability of money to buy houses assured, those in the property trade were able to charge more for housing. Property prices were equally inflated in the townships. The flood of rural Namibians to Windhoek continued unabated after independence, and Katutura remained the place where most immigrants settled. Katutura continued to expand to the north and west, but again these sprawling developments tended to be the work of private builders and the re-named National Housing Enterprise (NHE - formerly Nasboukor), and were intended for the ever-growing black middle class. As in 1989, housing for the majority of township residents unable to afford housing loans was non-existent, and the only alternative the thousands of newcomers had was to squat.

With most old Municipal houses and their backyards now full to capacity, squatter locations sprang up on wasteland all over the township.

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the biggest being at the Single Quarters. With no space remaining inside the barrack-like buildings, newcomers simply built shacks on surrounding land. Soon the original buildings became invisible behind a swathe of plastic sheeting, corrugated iron and wood. Each week another row of makeshift shacks were added to the previous one, until they reached the road. And once all available space here had been filled, the squatters began occupying the next spare piece of land. With the people came more and more traders, lured to the honeypot of a large, condensed and captive market. These traders, too, set-up makeshift stalls amongst the shacks, and for every stall selling food or clothing, there was one
selling alcohol, the Single Quarters becoming a favourite drinking place for people from throughout the township and beyond. The squatter location was a maze of narrow alleyways turned to mud by the sewerage and dirty water which seeped from blocked and broken drains coming from the Single Quarters ablution blocks - now used by squatters and official tenants alike. Power cables leading from the buildings were strung from shack to shack, kept aloft with poles, or simply left to run along the ground through puddles and crudely-dug trenches. Children shouted and screamed as they played amongst the piles of garbage, while music blared out from all directions, adding to the already deafening sound of thousands of voices raised in competition with each other. The Single Quarters never closed, and the people there never seemed to sleep.

Life throughout the rest of Katutura had become equally fast and furious. Shortly after independence, a programme to tar the township's hundreds of dusty streets got under way - a well-received symbol of the Government's intentions. However, tar alone could not cover up the cracks in Katutura's social fabric, which continued to disintegrate during the years which followed independence. Trade in alcohol became rampant, with shebeens springing up all over the place, some developing into sophisticated entertainment complexes with sit-down bars, pool tables and fast-food services. Alcoholism was now endemic, with surveys estimating that 90 per cent of crimes were alcohol-related. As a result, the police began raiding the bigger shebeens, confiscating tens of thousands of Rand's worth of stock in each swoop. Within days, however, the bars were back in business, with trade just as brisk and open as before.

The police had little control over the township, and acted as a response unit rather than a preventative force. Gangs gained an increasing grip on the neighbourhoods, spreading an aura of fear amongst the residents. There was a time when you could have left your front door unlocked and no one would have stolen from you. Now homes were becoming more and more like fortresses as people desperately tried to defend their property and families. With the police proving to be ineffective, residents sometimes took the law into their own hands, arming themselves, forming neighbourhood protection units and, from time to time, attacking and killing known gang members.

Pressure mounted for the re-introduction of the death penalty, the argument being that, in the past, criminals were too afraid to commit those major crimes now taking place daily. The lawmakers' argument that an eye for an eye should no longer apply fell on many deaf ears amongst communities accustomed to violent death. In the living memory of most Namibians, life had been cheap and far from sacred, and the end of the war unleashed a blood-lust which was sometimes hard for the authorities to contain. In the past, Katutura had been a compact community where the police were villains, and social values maintained law and order. Now the township was a sprawling, amorphous mass where the fittest survived, and social values did not count for much any more.
Strangely enough, the Single Quarters was, in a way, an exception; in spite of being one of the most outwardly impoverished and perhaps most crime-ridden areas, it did at least have a community spirit, which helped the new Government carry out one of its most ambitious projects since independence. The Single Quarters was never a healthy place, but the influx of thousands of squatters had made it a disease time-bomb, and officials feared that a major epidemic such as cholera could explode at any time. Some community activists argued that, as there were no affordable homes being built, squatters should be allowed to live where they liked.

However, the Government felt squatting should be controlled, and it was decided to move all of Katutura's squatters to new, official locations on the outskirts of the township. It was a decision fraught with difficulties for the Government, not least because the memories of similar removals during colonial times were still very much alive.

Ironically, the first squatters "relocated" by the new regime, shortly after independence in 1990, were traders who had built their shacks in town, next to the "whites'" cemetery - on land which had once been part of the Old Location. A year-and-half later, yellow Municipal lorries (the same colour as those used in the Old Location removals) arrived at a squatter camp near Katutura's Club Thriller, and the residents were given just a few hours to pack their things and leave. Those being evicted compared their plight with that of their Old Location predecessors, although in this case the Municipality had acted on complaints received from black residents who felt the squatters were spoiling their neighbourhood. These were both small-scale removals, each involving less than a hundred squatters. At the Single Quarters, many thousands of people had to be relocated, an operation which could have so easily backfired on the Government.

The Single Quarters was a staunchly Swapo-supporting area, and most squatters were immigrants from the far north. Upset them, and the Government could have been dealt a severe blow in any future election campaign, notably local authority and regional elections due to be held at around the time the removals were planned. Few other African governments had tackled the problem of urban squatting, with the result that some of the continent's major cities now faced chronic social and economic upheaval.

Libertine Amathila, the Minister responsible for the removal plans, trod carefully. She and her deputy Jerry Ekandjo held extensive talks with Single Quarters representatives, whom they managed to convince of the need to relocate. Then a committee made up of squatter delegates, and officials from the Ministry and the NHE was established to plan the move. The NHE was to provide the squatters with new plots and basic amenities such as water taps and pit latrines, as well as the option to buy these plots if and when the squatters could afford them. After months of consultation and planning, the relocation plan got under way in September 1992. The squatters were told the date and time they would be moved, and when the yellow Municipal lorries arrived, most were waiting with their
possessions and homes packed and ready to go. Municipal workers helped the squatters load their homes and belongings onto the trucks, before driving them to the new sites. There was no resistance, and the Single Quarters representatives were actively involved in the whole operation.

In just a few weeks, the squatter location around the Single Quarters was completely cleared, the occasional beer can or post being the only reminder of what had been there before. While some squatters seemed happy with their new picturesque surroundings overlooking the Khomas Hills and Goreangab Dam, many others felt they had been cheated into moving. Squatters arrived at some of the new sites to find that the services they were promised - such as water and toilets - had not been installed. Some squatters also complained that they were now too far away from shops, schools, clinics and their former customers. Crime was another major problem; the new sites had no lighting whatsoever, and people were terrified to go out at night for fear of being robbed, raped or killed. Added to which, taxi drivers charged three times the normal fare for passengers going to the new squatter locations because they were so far off the normal routes. All of this left many squatters wondering why they had not been resettled on land nearer town. Had the Government succumbed to the "not in my backyard" syndrome of their predecessors, or were they wanting to protect property prices in the city, some people asked?

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Although the Government's relocation policy had its faults, there was no escaping the fact that these removals passed off peacefully, whereas similar removals in 1959 sparked a revolution. Why the difference? For a start, the Government organising the 1992 removals was a democratically elected one, and most of the squatters had voted for the likes of Libertine Amathila and Jerry Ekandjo. Added to which, these officials spoke the same languages as the squatters, who had a major say in the planning of the removals. Most important of all, however, was the motive for the removals.

"Apartheid had been the motive for removing people from the Old Location," one Single Quarters trader explained to me. "Then the reason was that the kaffirs should not stay amongst the whites. The authorities wanted the people to go to Katutura where they could divide them into ethnic groups - in the Old Location there was no such division."

But, the trader continued, had the new Government tried to move the Single Quarters squatters back to the rural areas they had come from - an idea which did go through some peoples' minds - then things would have been different.

"That would have been very dangerous, perhaps even more dangerous than in 1959," said the trader earnestly. "If the Government had decided to move the squatters back to Karasburg, Owambo, or wherever they came from, then it would have been bloodshed. But because the people were given a chance to stay in Katutura and the chance to own a home, it was no problem."

Like moths around a bright light at night, young, working-aged people men in particular - were flocking to Windhoek in the hope of finding work and a better life, further denuding the rural areas of people to work the land. It seemed
inconceivable that life in a place like the Single Quarters could be attractive to anyone, until you looked at the life immigrants were leaving behind in the rural areas. In Windhoek, water was readily available from the nearest tap, while you did not have to go far to find firewood, and there was at least hope of finding work of some kind or other. In the rural areas - the former tribal homelands where most black Namibians continued to live - people travelled for hours to the nearest water, and the same went for firewood, while prospects of work were nonexistent.

In colonial times, women had become the heads of many households in the far north, as the majority of men either worked on the mines and the commercial farms as contract labourers, or had gone into exile. Come independence, this pattern did not change - if anything the imbalance grew worse. Preliminary findings of the 1991 census showed that men far outnumbered women in industrial centres such as Lideritz and Oranjemund, while in the far north, women were in an abnormal majority.

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This caused problems for women at both ends of the equation. In the Luderitz township of Benguela, for example, where men outnumbered women almost two to one, rape became a regular occurrence, forcing women to form an action group to campaign for better street lighting and more protection from the law. In the far north, on the other hand, more and more women were now having to cope as mothers, farmers and household heads, while the men were away for most of the year trying to earn an income.

During the war years, a thriving cash economy had developed in Owambo around the South African army. But this economy collapsed after the South Africans withdrew, leaving people with little choice but to go elsewhere in search of the money so necessary in an increasingly cash-reliant society.

Not only was the culture changing in favour of Western commercialism, the land - the people's bank in the past - was no longer able to meet the demands put on it by subsistence farming. Rural Namibians living in the far north were reliant on wood for fuel, and for making their traditional homesteads. As the population of the region grew, more and more trees were cut down, and by 1992 the region was fast becoming a desert, with the soil close to exhaustion. When northerners returned from exile, they could not believe how much the landscape had changed; many could not even recognise their own homes as, in less than two decades, once fertile, forested plains had become treeless and dusty.

An environmental catastrophe had slowly gathered momentum during the closing days of the war, at a time when people were too concerned with politics and the fighting to notice or to care. Come independence, more immediate priorities caught the Government's attention, and in 1992, the far north had just a handful of forestry officials whose task it was to clamp down on illegal tree felling, and to convince people throughout the vast region of the need to change centuries of tradition, and preserve the remaining trees.

There was certainly a willingness amongst the people living in the former war zone to put the past behind them and build a new future. Cultural unity, as well as
the solidarity built up during the war years, ensured that people here tackled
development projects with great enthusiasm. However, the region as a whole was
a shadow of its former self; the atmosphere was more subdued and the place
appeared empty. The noise and tension created by the South African war machine
was not missed, but the commercial opportunities it created certainly were. Once
bustling village market-places were now eerie and still, life seemingly sucked
from the few women and children who sat behind their sparsely filled stalls. The
joy and hope which had greeted the dawning of a new era

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had given way to reluctant acceptance of an exhausting day-to-day struggle for
survival. A decade of poor rains - arguably linked to the rapid decline in the
region's trees - was capped in 1992 by the worst drought in living memory, giving
the young and able even more reason to pack their bags and head for the towns
and cities.

It was a similar story in the deep south of the country, Namibia's forgotten
wilderness. Places like Karasburg seemed more a part of South Africa than
Namibia, in terms of both politics and culture. Jutting out of the endless,
windswept, southern plain, Karasburg was the last major stop on the highway and
railway to and from Namibia's southern neighbour. The town, with its population
of several thousand people, serviced the surrounding commercial sheep and cattle
farms - the region's major industry. The town centre, with its handful of shops, a
police station, magistrates court, banks, hotels and predominantly government-
owned houses, hugged the highway - an artery which brought in most of the
town's income.

Behind the shops, across from the railway sidings and over a small hill, stood the
black township: hundreds of Municipal hovels interspersed with tin shacks and
the occasional grey-bricked, zinc-roofed Nasboukor dwelling.
The township had changed little since the day it was built during the days of
grand apartheid to house black migrant workers employed on the railways and in
the homes of the town's white people. Most of the houses still lacked electricity,
although, by 1992, the Municipality - under orders from its Ministry - had started
installing power lines. Proper toilets were something of a novelty too, with most
homes still having outside pot latrines. Unlike in Outjo and other townships to the
north, there were as yet no plans to install a proper sewerage system here.

With the decline of the railways, jobs had become increasingly scarce, and the
majority of township inhabitants were reliant on the incomes of either pensioners
or the few people lucky enough to have work. People were indeed lucky to find a
job in Karasburg, and the employers knew it. With no trade unions active in the
region, exploitation was rife. Rather than take on younger, unemployed people, it
was not uncommon for employers to hire pensioners. These pensioners were
already receiving their state subsidy, but were glad to have this topped up with a
little extra cash, which meant employers could hire pensioners for a fraction of the
wages they would have to give younger workers. As a result, you would see old
men doing a full day’s tough, manual work while the young and jobless sat around
with little hope of jobs coming their way.
Alcohol was the township's major trade and recreation, residents spending most of their free time going from house to house, drinking cheap home-brews at the many shebeens. With so many people unemployed, drinking carried on seven days a week, 52 weeks of the year. It was a pathetic sight seeing scrawny-looking adults dressed in tattered clothes spending every last cent they could find on alcohol. Their equally emaciated and ragged children often went hungry because the parents would sell what food they had in order to get money to buy liquor.

Faced with a life such as this, it was little wonder that most Karasburg youngsters left the town as soon as they could, and migrated northwards in search of either a better education, or work in the towns, the mines or on the commercial farms. Yet Karasburg was relatively prosperous compared with the communal areas situated to the south on land considered too barren for use by commercial farmers. Only the very young and the very old now lived in the village of Warmbad, the once thriving ancestral seat of the Bondelswarts. All that remained was a collection of rusting tin shacks on one side of a dry river, and a few crumbling, Germanic brick houses on the other, these having been long since abandoned by their previous white inhabitants.

As the name suggests, Warmbad was the site of a perennial hot spring and former holiday spa. Although no longer in use, the land on which the spa stood was privately owned and out of bounds to the rest of the village. Inside, holiday bungalows and a swimming pool still full of water stood intact, while the spring itself continued to trickle down a rocky, salt-encrusted gulley before eventually disappearing back into the ground.

Shortly after independence, fellow journalist Stanley Katzao and I visited Warmbad to find that, in spite of the abundance of water at the old spa, the village's 600 or so black residents had only two communal taps for them and their animals to use.

It was mid-afternoon when Stanley and I arrived at the village, and yet no one was around. A stiff winter breeze whistled up the rocky valley side, rattling the shacks as it went, while the sound of a radio wafted from one of the makeshift houses, Bob Marley's "Redemption Song" rising and falling in the wind. A child scuttled from one of the shacks, picked up a battered old pot from the grey embers of a fire and retreated back inside, pausing just for a few seconds to look at us.

Picking our way between the apparently deserted shacks, we headed for the sound of the radio, and eventually came across Lutheran church worker Salfine Tsowases, who was lying sick in bed inside her dilapidated home. Salfine had become the village's social worker responsible for the welfare of its black inhabitants. She told us that most villagers lived off charity provided by her church. The sick and elderly were the major breadwinners as they at least received a monthly pension, but this was not enough to cover the cost of food at the village shop. The only jobs available were at the school, but these usually went to outsiders.
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All the surrounding land was privately owned, so the villagers had nowhere to grow their own food, and with the landlords threatening to shoot anyone found trespassing, residents could not even collect their own firewood. The nearest clinic and hospital were 50 km away in Karasburg, too far for most people to travel, and even in emergencies when transport could be found, patients often died before they reached the hospital.
In the face of such deprivation, Salfine explained, even the children gave up hope for the future.
"Many of the children don't come to the kindergarten regularly," she said, "and by the age of 10, the youngsters have already started drinking and smoking. Things are unlikely to change now the country is independent, no matter what the Government might say. We were lied to so much in the past that now we trust no one. If you tell the people things will come right tomorrow, they will only think you are speaking the same empty promises they heard in the past."
She was right. By 1992, life had changed little for the people of Warmbad, as well as for the people of Karasburg, and those living elsewhere in the deep south. The announcement in 1991 that a mining consortium planned to reactivate a copper mine at Huibmund, 120 km south-west of Karasburg, raised hopes that the region's ills were about to be cured. For the young and able throughout the region, it meant the promise of meaningful, long-term employment, and hundreds registered their names with the company in preparation for the start of recruitment. But in mid-1992, the consortium went bankrupt. News of the bankruptcy quickly disappeared from the headlines of the Windhoek-based media. But in the deep south, the failure of the mine project dealt another crushing blow to the prospects of the region, and the aspirations of its black inhabitants.
Almost everything produced in the Karasburg region was taken to South Africa to be sold, while most things sold in the region's shops were imported from south of the border. Newspapers and magazines were predominantly South African, and those people with television sets could only receive the SABC's TV1, while NBC radio channels reaching the region seldom carried programmes the least bit relevant to the region's black inhabitants.
The hearts of most of Karasburg's all-powerful white minority lay in South Africa, and this further increased the black majority's isolation from the rest of Namibia. Past authorities had considered it too expensive to relay television to Namibia's deep south, with the result that some white farmers and business people installed their own television transmitters. However, these people wanted to watch SABC rather than Namibian television, so the transmitters only relayed South African broadcasts.

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With few other leisure pursuits available, television was - by 1992 becoming increasingly popular amongst Karasburg's township residents. More and more spent their meagre savings on hiring or buying a television set, even if their homes did not have electricity, in which case the television was run off a car battery instead. Aerials began sprouting from brick houses and tin shacks alike,
but all the antennae pointed south, even though the owners paid their license fees to the NBC. Township television viewers did not want to watch SABC, but had no choice because the transmitter was privately owned, further adding to their frustration at being excluded from the country to which they belonged. Like the SABC television signal, South Africa's influence on the deep south had little competition from further north.

"For so long we were living with orders coming from South Africa, and people don't realise what changes have taken place since independence," Karasburg's adult literacy organiser Aaron Simon said one night as we sat watching TV1 on a small portable television in his township living room. It was late, and throughout the evening we had not seen one black person appear on the screen, while only a few of the programmes were in English; even the American movies were dubbed into Afrikaans.

"Some people realise that our Parliament is now in Windhoek," Aaron continued, "but we don't know what Parliament looks like, or what the people in Parliament are doing. We think that, as far as the people in Windhoek are concerned, Namibia stops at Keetmanshoop."

While Karasburg was at least nominally part of Namibia, the port enclave of Walvis Bay was still ruled by South Africa, in spite of several UN Security Council resolutions declaring that the harbour town rightly belonged to Namibia. In order to set the Namibian independence plan rolling, parties involved in the 1988 peace negotiations agreed to leave the issue of Walvis Bay's sovereignty until the rest of Namibia was independent.

The South Africans saw Walvis Bay - Namibia's only deep-water port and a lynch-pin to the country's economy - as a bargaining chip with which it could ensure that the new Namibian Government would not do anything Pretoria did not agree with. After independence, thousands of South African troops remained based in Walvis Bay, and served as an extra warning to Namibia's new rulers to behave themselves. However, in 1991, once the Namibian Government had proved to its sceptical South African counterpart that it was not about to embark on a programme of wholesale Communist expansionism, talks between the two governments about the future of Walvis Bay got under way. In September that year, the two sides agreed in principle to the interim measure of jointly governing the enclave, and a task group was set up to work out exactly what "joint administration"

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would entail. The task group met in secret and released no meaningful information about their discussions whatsoever. None were kept more in the dark than Walvis Bay's estimated 20 000 black people, the majority of whom considered themselves to be Namibians, and wanted nothing less than the immediate return of their town to Namibia.

Before independence, the "border" between Namibia and Walvis Bay had been marked by a minuscule road sign in the middle of the bridge spanning the Swakop River. During the independence process, the South Africans installed a checkpoint amongst the sand dunes on "their" side of the bridge, and come independence, this
became a fully fledged border post. Occasionally, there were reports of border guards harassing people travelling between Swakopmund and Walvis Bay, while the imposition of customs controls - whereby all goods had to be accounted for in quadruplicate - made life even more difficult for traders moving regularly between the two towns. Once through the border post, however, the remaining 40 km drive to Walvis was straightforward, the twisting road hugging the coastline, with the mean, grey Atlantic Ocean - invariably swathed in mist - to the right, and the towering golden-brown dunes of the Namib Desert to the left.

From a distance, Walvis Bay looked so vulnerable, sandwiched between the shifting desert sands and mighty ocean, both of which seemed likely to engulf the town's flimsy-looking, single-storey houses. Except for wind-battered palm trees and the beautifully manicured Municipal gardens, the town was a bland mixture of peeling whites, greys and yellows. All the town's streets, arranged on a rigid grid system, seemed to lead to the docks, which were hidden from view behind warehouses lining the quayside. In fact, once in the town itself, you seldom saw the sea unless you drove south to the beach. Otherwise you could only smell and taste the salt-laden air.

Across the railway line and upwind from the smelly fish-canning factories was Kuisebmond township, with its compact, matchbox houses crammed together in regimented rows like pilchard tins on the factory conveyer belt. The houses' whitewashed walls looked fresh against the grimy, sandy-grey of the township streets, and the coarse yellowy-brown backdrop of the surrounding desert.

At the entrance to the township stood a huge, enclosed compound for migrant workers, made up on all four sides by the men-only hostels. The only entrance to the compound was through a guarded, iron gate, and visitors had to seek permission to enter. Inside, the NBC's Oshiwambo service echoed around an open yard the size of a football pitch. At the far end of the yard stood a dark and forbidding building, the central dining hall where residents were served their food through thick, prison-like bars, before they sat down to eat at long metal tables and benches bolted to the floor. Back in the yard, men in overalls milled around outside the hostel doorways, smoking and chatting in mumbled voices; there was not a woman to be seen. Inside the hostels, inhabitants slept nine to a room on foam mattresses laid across concrete shelves.

The cold concrete-slab walls were decorated with everything from pinups to portraits of the President, while crumpled shirts and underwear dangled from makeshift washing lines strung across the centre of the room. The glare of towering orange spotlights flooded through curtain-less windows out of reach of anyone wishing to look out or in. Older residents assured me that life in the hostels had changed little since the days of the pass laws, when the compound had been built to house male migrant workers shipped in from the tribal homelands to provide manual labour at the docks.

As a result of conditions such as this, and South Africa's continued occupation of the enclave, the politics of resistance were still very much alive in Walvis Bay,
contrary to the rest of Namibia which had lapsed into post-independence political apathy. Swapo flags flew from the roofs of most houses in Kuisebmund, the living rooms of which were invariably decorated with Swapo colours and posters of President Nujoma. Township residents boycotted the South African census in March 1991, and instead staged their own head count to coincide with the census which took place throughout the rest of Namibia later that year. To mark the start of talks between the South African and Namibian governments on the future of Walvis Bay, the residents of Kuisebmund staged a massive demonstration at which their message was clear - "re-integration into Namibia NOW!"

But as time dragged on, and no news came from Windhoek on the state of the negotiations, the people of Kuisebmund began to grow impatient. The prospect of joint administration annoyed them still further.

"There is nothing that will satisfy the people here other than the total re-integration of Walvis Bay into Namibia," said Wilfried Emvula, a young and articulate human rights lawyer in charge of the Kuisebmund Legal Assistance Centre, shortly after the joint administration plan was announced.

"People feel the Namibian Government is not taking their feelings into consideration. No one knows what joint administration will involve, no one is ever informed. The Government has never been here to tell us what is going on, yet South African officials are always here; they definitely inform their people."

All the same, members of the white business community were also opposed to the joint administration plan. One way or the other, they wanted Walvis Bay's sovereignty resolved, said leading business person Stefan Hrywniak, adding that from a purely business point of view - it would be better if the enclave was returned to Namibia. Walvis Bay was one of Southern Africa's most efficient and prosperous ports. Some of Hrywniak's business colleagues feared a collapse of law and order, and a loss of efficiency at the port if the Namibian Government took it over. However, they also realised that the harbour could attract yet more business if the political sting was removed from Walvis, and the enclave was returned to Namibia. During 1992, Zambia started importing maize via Walvis Bay as this was cheaper and more efficient than using East African ports. This Zambian trade alone was ample illustration to the business community that Walvis Bay had the potential to serve central as well as southern Africa.

In short, the only people in favour of joint administration seemed to be the politicians. Understandably, the Namibian Government saw joint administration as a chance to "get a foot in the door" and learn how to run the port effectively. The trouble was, no one from the Government bothered to explain this to the people of Walvis Bay. It was only in September 1992, a year after joint administration had been agreed to in principle, that Foreign Minister Theo-Ben Gurirab held a public rally in Walvis to inform the townspeople about the state of the negotiations on their future. By then, public opinion both in Walvis Bay and throughout the rest of Namibia had mounted, and the Government's policy on the enclave was considered far too weak.
"Solutions can be reached if one pushes hard enough," said Emvula, summing up the feelings of the people of Kuisebmund before Gurirab's visit.

"Independence has taught us that, by pushing hard, goals can be reached." Nothing, he added, not even the abolition of the Group Areas Act and progress towards democracy in South Africa, would alter his people's desire to become officially part of Namibia.

"We are Namibians; 95 per cent of the people in Walvis are Namibians. Apartheid can come and go, something else might come. Even if freedom comes to South Africa, we will still want reintegration with Namibia."

Joint Administration of Walvis Bay eventually started on November 1, 1992, but the event passed without either celebration or ceremony. The subsequent dismantling of the Swakop Bridge border post a few weeks later was greeted with slightly more enthusiasm, although nothing like that with which the people of Kuisebmond went to the polls at the beginning of December to vote in Namibia's regional elections. For this was the first time ever that Walvis Bay was officially considered part of independent Namibia, and the enclave's residents responded by electing Wilfried Emvula, Swapo's candidate, to represent them on the Erongo regional council.

Emvula polled more than 7 000 of the 8 133 votes cast, trouncing the DTA candidate, his only rival, by a majority of 6737. Having finally been given the chance, Walvis Bay's black majority had spoken with a strong and united voice.

The secrecy and lack of consultation which surrounded its policy on Walvis Bay was by no means typical of the way the Namibian Government operated. Eager to live up to its democratic reputation, the Government often bent over backwards to seek public opinion, only what followed did not always live up to expectations created by the consultative process.

Two years on from independence, Namibian society was an incredibly open one. Live radio phone-in programmes, during which listeners could speak their minds on any issue, were broadcast daily. These regularly focused on contemporary issues such as racism, reconciliation and other Government policies; officials often went into the studios to answer the callers' questions directly, and live debates became a regular feature on Namibian television.

Newspapers, the majority of which were owned by or connected to the DTA, were viciously critical of the Government, and spared no one, not even the President. The Namibian was equally outspoken against the Government on issues such as corruption, waste and double standards, causing the paper to lose favour with some of those now in power. Not all those in top government, in particular those who had spent time in countries run by one-party authoritarian regimes, knew how to handle such open and blatant criticism. Critical articles often triggered off what was known in Katutura as "the Lubango factor", with some leaders looking for ways to retaliate or silence their critics. But there was little the Government could do short of introducing press censorship laws, and that it could not afford to do. The aid-donating countries of the West viewed
Namibia as Africa's democratic success story, which they held up as an example for others to follow. Free speech was one of the clearest illustrations of Namibia's democracy at work, and a clampdown on the press would have serious repercussions. What seemed like the Government's genuine attempts to stamp out corruption also impressed the international community. Independent commissions headed by leading judges were set up to investigate corruption, ineptitude and the abuse of state funds within the civil service. These inquiries unearthed some horrendous examples of malpractice past and present - which cost several top civil servants their jobs. Again the Government was setting a precedent, as similar measures had been avoided by many Governments elsewhere in the world. On the other hand, the international community was not so impressed with the Government's pursuit of luxuries the country could not afford. As the worst drought in living memory began to bite hard during 1992, and

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Namibia looked to donor agencies for extra aid, the Government bought a R75 million executive jet for the President. The purchase of the jet sparked an outcry both within the country as well as overseas. The Government's argument that the President, as Head of State, deserved to have a jet of his own to fly him to his many overseas engagements, was unconvincing. Then, to make matters worse, several donor countries announced that they would no longer be sending Namibia drought relief, as a country which could spend R75 million on an aeroplane could obviously afford to assist itself. In the end the Government admitted that its purchase of the jet was "ill timed", but remained convinced of the need to indulge in such luxuries for the benefit of the country's political leaders. Meanwhile, reconciliation, the word on everyone's lips after the 1989 elections, remained a top Government priority after independence, successfully stemming the flight of white skills and capital. Both the President and the Prime Minister set an example with their own personal efforts to bring Swapo and its former enemies together. President Nujoma's historical links with many prominent figures of the interim government helped bridge the gap between the old and new regimes. During the 1950s and 1960s Nujoma had been close to the likes of Fanuel Kozonguizi and Mburumba Kerina, both leading members of the interim government, and Dr Zed Ngavirue, chairperson of Rbssing Uranium. Come independence, Nujoma was able to reach out to these people across the political divide, and brought Dr Ngavirue into the cabinet as Director-General of the National Planning Commission, and later appointed Kozonguizi as Ombudsman. Prime Minister Hage Geingob's charisma and outgoing, affluent lifestyle, as well as his outspoken style and his love for rugby, acted like a magnet to Namibia's rich and powerful, the majority of whom had been ideologically opposed to the new Government. However, while reconciliation and the Government's commitment to a free market economy might have ensured a relatively stable economy, it did little to encourage the redistribution of wealth. A World Bank report released in 1992 highlighted the divide between Namibia's rich and poor. The report showed that
the wealthiest five per cent of the population controlled 70 per cent of the GDP, and the poorest 55 per cent controlled just three per cent. Added to which, two-thirds of the Namibian population was living below the internationally accepted poverty line, and 75 per cent of black people were considered to be "poor". While Namibia's average per-capital income of US$1 200 was well above that of many other sub-Saharan African countries, the health of Namibia's black majority was well below that of neighbouring states such as Zambia, Botswana and Zimbabwe. Namibia, the report concluded, had "extreme degrees of income inequality and widespread absolute poverty".

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The economic reasoning for reconciliation did little to placate the black majority, most of whom found themselves no better off in terms of income, jobs and housing than they were before independence. As the world recession battered the vulnerable Namibian economy, unemployment grew - a situation made even worse by the flood of people to the urban areas. In September 1991, Rössing - faced with a slump in uranium sales - retrenched 750 workers, while at Tsumeb, it was revealed that the copper mine which sustained the town's population of 20 000 plus people would be exhausted within a few years. Then a fall in world diamond prices during 1992 set the stage for the loss of more than 1 000 jobs at CDM's operation in Oranjemund, whose output the previous year had given the Namibian economy a much-needed boost through extra tax revenue.

With the mining industry in obvious decline, Namibians looked to the Atlantic Ocean for economic salvation. Prior to independence, unprotected waters off Namibia's coast had been quietly but devastatingly plundered by foreign - mostly European - fishing companies, which mercilessly trawled the ocean with their massive factory ships. Independence gave Namibia the right to protect its waters, and the Government immediately set about trying to regenerate fish stocks by imposing strict quotas. Within a year, stocks began to pick up again, and the potential wealth which lay off the west coast again became apparent. Established as well as aspiring Namibian entrepreneurs set about looking for a stake in the fishing industry, which the Government undertook to Namibianise. Fishing companies with Namibian-sounding names and Namibian directors rapidly appeared on the scene, but it did not require too much delving into many of these companies' books to find a foreign connection. With thousands of people in Spain alone reliant on Namibian fish for a living, it was hardly surprising that European fishing companies were not prepared to leave Namibian waters just like that.

Back on dry land, the prospects of a booming fishing industry gave little encouragement to the 40-60 per cent of the potential workforce who were without jobs, and most of whom were unskilled or only semi-skilled. There was also a glut of unemployed returnees who had qualifications, but discovered that these counted for nothing in their motherland. In particular, certificates gained in eastern European countries were sneered at by many Namibian employers, who only understood and recognised South African qualifications. Admittedly, some of the training gained by those who had studied in the former Soviet bloc was
either inadequate or unsuited to jobs back home, and few private sector employers were prepared to undertake retraining. Many former exiles expected to be given jobs in Government once they returned home, but the retention of colonial civil servants made this impossible. Devoid of the initiative to find jobs, having had their every

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move in exile determined by the party, thousands of returnees continued waiting in vain "to be called" for jobs in the civil service.
Many of the thousands of unemployed ex-combatants - from both Plan and Koevoet - were drafted into Development Brigades which were established in former military bases around the country. However, the Development Brigades were obviously not considered to be a high priority by the Government, and for months on end, brigade members did not receive tools and the measly allowances they were supposed to be given by the Government. With nothing better to do, Brigade members sat around reminiscing about the past, and gradually resentment grew. Some of the bases housing the brigade members established their own rules, and were accountable to no one.
Elsewhere in the country, naked racism still reared its ugly head from time to time, illustrating that the beliefs which inspired, and were inspired by apartheid lingered on not far below the surface - in spite of the changes which had taken place since the abolition of the Group Areas Act way back in 1978. This further frustrated the tens of thousands of Namibians still having to put up with the economic as well as social status quo, and it was little wonder that reconciliation became a dirty word to many people. Reconciliation as a policy was open to different interpretations. From the outset, the Government said reconciliation was about "forgiving but not forgetting the past". But some of those who had served the colonial regime preferred it to mean "forgiving and forgetting". The continued commemoration of events such as the Cassinga massacre, and even films about the American civil rights movement screened on NBC TV, were considered by many whites to be "against the spirit of reconciliation".
While reconciliation undoubtedly benefited whites by allowing them to maintain their privileged lifestyles, its spirit was sometimes lost in black communities divided during the war. Shortly after independence, hundreds of black former Koevoet members fled to South Africa having been hounded out of their homes and villages in the far north. Those who remained continued to live with the threat of persecution and sometimes death; occasionally former security force members, or people who had collaborated with the South Africans, were murdered by those who could neither forgive nor forget the past.
The situation was further confused by the emergence of another policy which was supposed to run parallel to National Reconciliation. Lying side by side with the 1982 Principles was Article 23 of the Constitution, which made way for affirmative action.
"Nothing," read Article 23, "shall prevent Parliament from enacting legislation providing directly or indirectly for the advancement of persons
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within Namibia who have been socially, economically or educationally disadvantaged by past discriminatory laws or practices..."
However, without such legislation, there was nothing to force the private sector to give career preference to black, female and disabled employees. Yet the Government seemed reluctant to impose affirmative action laws on the business community. Instead, it tried to lead by example, first by reducing the emphasis on experience for civil service job applications, then by weeding out non-essential foreigners and encouraging old-guard whites to accept retirement packages. However, past discrimination had ensured that women, black and disabled people lacked the skills needed for many jobs still filled by whites, many of whom jealously guarded their knowledge. This caused tension within both the state and private sectors, as black people became frustrated with the apparent lack of affirmative action, causing whites to feel threatened and to retreat still further into their shells.
It also triggered a backlash against foreigners, many of whom had been recruited by the Government for their skills which were desperately needed in the fields of development. As a result of this, some development workers broke their contracts and returned home, taking with them stories which would hardly encourage others to take up their now vacant positions.
There was also a lack of consensus amongst leading members of the Government as to how quickly, and to what extent affirmative action should be implemented. Hard-liners wanted change there and then to enable those previously disadvantaged to gain all-important experience, even if it initially meant a drop in standards. The more moderate approach was to correct the imbalances over a much longer time scale through on and off the job training. Meanwhile others saw affirmative action purely in terms of black and white, conveniently forgetting that the concept also applied to women and disabled people.
By 1992, Namibia was still a fervently patriarchal society, and concrete reforms improving the position of women - in particular those who were married - could be counted on the fingers of one hand. Laws which previously taxed married women more than their husbands were amended so that the former could now be taxed separately. In addition, legislation for local authority elections recommended that a certain number of seats on each local authority should be filled by women. Otherwise the fight for women's rights was largely a rhetorical one, a situation exacerbated by women's apparent inability to bury party political differences and campaign on a common platform. It was still difficult for a married woman to open a bank account or buy a house without the written consent of her husband, while in traditional societies, the position of women remained vastly inferior to that of men. In several Namibian traditions, for example, women could not inherit from their husbands. When a man died, his relatives were entitled to everything, and the widow and her children were often left with nothing, sometimes not even a roof over their heads.
With the World Bankestimating that 40 per cent of Namibian households were now headed by women, the question of their traditional role was also central to the contentious issue of land reform. In 1991, the Government, together with leading non-governmental organisations, held the Land Conference, a prime example of Namibian-style participatory democracy. Everyone - from wealthy cattle ranchers, to peasant farmers from impoverished communal areas, and the nomadic San and Himba peoples - came together in Windhoek to discuss what should be done to bring about a more equal distribution of the country's land, the most fertile of which still remained in the hands of the white minority. Chaired by Prime Minister Hage Geingob, who deliberately cut short fellow politicians to allow other delegates the chance to speak, the conference was considered by all to be an outstanding success.

Peasant farmers, in particular, felt that their views had at last been heard, and returned to the communal areas with the genuine feeling that the conference resolutions would be acted upon by the Government. But it then took a year-and-a-half for the Government's working committee to present its report on how land reform should best be carried out. Shortly before the working committee's recommendations were published in December 1992, a group of communal farmers from drought-ravaged Damaraland travelled to the outskirts of Windhoek where they laid claim to their ancestral land. The farmers' parents and grandparents had been forcibly removed from the land - which was now a nature reserve - back in the 1950s. Once encamped next to the road leading to the nature reserve, the farmers demanded that the Government should give them back their land. However, the Government refused, and instead offered the farmers emergency grazing on state farms near Grootfontein.

The Government's position was clear; it would continue to recognise the land boundaries it inherited from the colonial regime at independence, and would not consider claims on ancestral land. Recommendations presented to the cabinet by the land reform working committee were equally compromising. The most radical recommendation was that land owned by foreigners living outside the country should be expropriated and given to those considered to be "in need" - people dispossessed of their land in the past, the San, former combatants, returnees, war victims, disabled people, commercial farm workers, and women who headed households. Foreign companies wanting land for investment purposes should be offered it on a lease basis, the committee proposed.

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Otherwise, the 7.3 million hectares of land identified by the working committee for redistribution comprised of state-owned farms, and abandoned or under-used land, while people owning excessively large farms could also be required to give up some land. However, in keeping with the Constitution, "just compensation" would have to be paid for all land which was to be taken over by the government for redistribution.

The committee also recommended that many of the tax concessions and subsidies given to commercial farmers during the colonial era should be gradually phased
out. Communal land would remain under state control, but Land Boards should be set up to oversee its distribution. The committee also felt that women should be given the right to own and inherit land for cultivation, and all traditional laws discriminating against women should be abolished.

If and when the committees’ recommendations were implemented, it would take many years for them to become effective. The recommendations certainly would not bring about dramatic changes in patterns of land ownership in favour of the black majority, as some people had hoped. However, the Government was in a difficult position.

By taking land from the minority and giving it to the majority, the Government would turn the white community against it, and undo everything reconciliation had set out to achieve. Yet, as the Land Conference illustrated, land reform was one of the top priorities for the black majority, who wanted back the land stolen from their forefathers by the white settlers. The bottom line, however, was that the Government could not afford to redistribute land on any great scale, as it did not have the money to pay landowners “just compensation” (i.e. open market prices) for the land.

A similar predicament faced the Government over reform of the labour laws. It took two-and-a-half years for the Government to introduce a new Labour Code, during which time both workers and employers were left in legislative limbo. Workers cried out for more protection, while employers stuck - sometimes ruthlessly - to what were still their rights under the old colonial labour laws. Labour relations were strained to say the least. In spite of the President’s insistence, the hundreds of Windhoek Brewery workers sacked in September 1989 were never, re-instated, and in March 1992, the sacked workers staged another demonstration outside the Breweries’ headquarters. To everyone’s shock and amazement, plain-clothed police broke up the peaceful protest, attacking the demonstrators with quirts and sjamboks, before bundling those they arrested into a police van, and taking them off to jail.

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This time the violence was captured by an NBC film crew, whose pictures were broadcast on that night’s television news, providing many with a painful reminder of days gone past. A few days later, police seized the NBC's video tapes of the incident, further adding to the embarrassment of the Government, which appeared to have no control over its police force. The Cabinet ordered an inquiry into police handling of the Breweries demonstration, and several police officers were subsequently suspended, only to be reinstated as the investigation faded into oblivion.

Six months later, the manager of an Okahandja furniture factory was beaten to death by workers who felt they had been cheated by the company over a pay increase. This was perhaps the most tragic and most graphic example of the tension which existed between many Namibian employers and their workers, tension which could be traced to the Government's delay in providing both parties with the legal guidelines they so desperately needed. From the Government's point of view, it was faced with having to please two opposing parties; workers
who expected sweeping changes from "its Government", and economically powerful employers who preferred as little change as possible. Two years of negotiations produced a Labour Code which fell well short of workers' expectations; there was no minimum wage, no paid maternity leave, and no reduction in statutory working hours although it did enforce overtime payments almost unknown in the past. Once again, the views of the majority, it seemed, were being heard but not acted upon because the monied minority held the Government to ransom.

Rather than tampering with the economic status quo, the Government chose instead to concentrate on making life better for the black majority in areas such as health and education. One of the first decisions taken by Minister of Health, Nickey Jyambo, was to stop the doubling up of services in once racially segregated hospitals. However, a two-tier health system remained, with superior private care available to those who - regardless of colour - could afford it, and a rudimentary and overstretched service provided by the state for those who could not.

Strapped for the cash needed to improve treatment for non-paying patients, the Government put the emphasis on preventative and primary health care, encouraging people to live healthier lives in a bid to prevent sickness in the first place. A nationwide immunisation campaign was launched soon after independence, and two years later, 70-80 per cent of all Namibian mothers and children had been vaccinated against a host of common diseases.

While it was relatively easy persuading adults to protect their children, they were not so easily convinced when it came to changing the habits of a lifetime, and leading healthier lives themselves. Few Namibian adults

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seemed prepared to give up smoking and drinking, both of which remained endemic national pastimes. Health promotion messages warning people of the dangers of cigarettes and alcohol were no match for the incessant and glitzy adverts of the liquor and tobacco companies supplying two of the country's most lucrative trades. Tradition was another major stumbling block to effective primary health care, particularly when it came to sex. On a large billboard opposite Katutura hospital, on the main highway leading to the city, 1989 election slogans had been replaced by the call to "Crush AIDS". Namibia's first AIDS case had been diagnosed in 1986, but next to nothing was done to make people aware of the disease until after independence. By the time President Nujoma launched Namibia's AIDS control programme in July 1990, the HIV virus was already well established in the country, having had four years headstart on the campaign to prevent its spread.

In 95 per cent of Namibian AIDS cases, HIV was contracted as a result of unprotected, heterosexual sex. Yet talk about sex was traditionally unacceptable in most sections of Namibian society, leaving health workers with the unenviable task of trying to persuade people to practice safe sex without referring directly to condoms or sexual intercourse for fear of upsetting people. To make the health
workers' job even more difficult, many Namibian men considered it an insult to use a condom. As a result, the first two years of the AIDS awareness campaign was spent trying to dismantle the taboos surrounding sex and the use of condoms, by which time 3 000 Namibians had been diagnosed as HIV positive. This figure was simply the tip of the iceberg, representing the number of people who had opted for HIV antibody tests. The actual number of Namibians carrying the AIDS virus was unknown, but was obviously much, much higher... and was doubling every eight months. The vast majority of those infected were economically as well as sexually active adults, giving rise to a genuine fear that, in the long run, AIDS could cripple the nation. Poor diet, inadequate housing, drought, and the isolation of the country's far-flung, rural population further hampered the primary health care crusade. Meanwhile, the lack of money made it impossible for the state to even start trying to provide the poor with the same standard of health care enjoyed by private patients. Donors came up with the funds to build a hospital in the far north, while the opening of new clinics, particularly in the rural areas, brought basic treatment closer to those previously denied it. But on the whole, the Government could only undertake cosmetic surgery on its health facilities. In 1992, Katutura's psychiatric hospital was re-furbished and repainted in a way considered to be more therapeutic for patients.

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However, underneath the new pink gloss, the quality of care remained the same, with nurses continuing to feed the patients with drugs whilst a handful of trained and semi-trained medical personnel did the best they could to unravel their patients' minds in too little time and without proper resources. Education Minister Nahas Angula was also faced with an uphill struggle to correct the chaos left after decades of apartheid education. Strident and often outspoken in his approach, Angula opted for reform shock tactics. A new syllabus and English as the medium for instruction was introduced to Junior Secondary Schools as early as January 1991. At about the same time, a radical code of conduct - laying down rules for the running of schools and the relationship between pupils, parents and teachers - was also introduced. Few Namibian teachers, particularly in the state sector, could communicate well in English, let alone teach in it. Meanwhile, the code of conduct scrapped corporal punishment, thus robbing many teachers of the only means by which they knew how to keep order. School discipline deteriorated as pupils exploited their newfound freedom, and teachers were left without the means to react. Rather than improving, the education system 20 months after independence had slipped further into crisis.

Many of the country's most qualified teachers, disillusioned with low pay and poor working conditions, had left the profession for more lucrative jobs in Government and the private sector. Tens of thousands of pupils were still being turned away from overcrowded schools lacking in facilities as well as teachers. Added to which, school drop-out rates remained alarmingly high, with an average
30 per cent of pupils leaving school at primary level, and 80 per cent quitting before completing their secondary education. Needless to say, these frightening statistics applied mostly to township and rural schools attended by black pupils. On paper, the educational code of conduct was a worthy and revolutionary document which democratised and modernised the education system. The trouble was, people were not ready for it. In the past, parents had been excluded from school affairs, learning had been regimented, and teachers had used force to keep pupils in line. All of a sudden, the code of conduct made parents, teachers and pupils "partners in education"; school committees had to be elected by the parents; and teachers were expected to use modern, non-violent techniques to keep order in the classroom, techniques which the teachers had never been taught. Yet when attempts were made to adapt to the new system, the Education Ministry seemed unable to provide the necessary support. New text books and teaching aids were initially unavailable to those teachers grappling with both a new language of instruction and a new curriculum. Some communities took the initiative and started improving educational facilities for themselves: villagers came together and built their own schools; the people of Katutura's impoverished Hakahana district set up a creche in a run-down community centre; and sections of the San community established mother-tongue "starter-schools" in a bid to encourage their children - 90 per cent of whom dropped out of school after the first year - to at least learn to study in a language they could understand. Yet with these and many other initiatives, all the Government could offer was encouragement.

"The Government has repeatedly said that it is committed to the improvement of education," I was told by one typically frustrated teacher. "We have seen signs that have demonstrated that, but not enough is being done."

Reversing more than a century of colonialism and apartheid was proving to be an expensive, time-consuming and thankless task. As we were constantly reminded by the politicians concerned, life under the first Government of an independent nation was never going to be easy. However, those now in power had only adopted this sobering tone once they were elected, by which time the electorate's expectations had been raised sky-high. While members of the new ruling elite obviously now enjoyed vastly improved lifestyles, the same could not be said for those who put them there. So what did liberation mean for the majority of Namibians?

"The dehumanised have been humanised, and those without a voice have now got a voice," concluded Deputy Minister of Agriculture, Kaire Mbuende, in a TV panel discussion shortly before the local and regional elections held at the end of 1992. Namibians had also enjoyed almost three years of peace and stability, which was remarkable considering the country's history, and the instability which still existed elsewhere in Southern Africa.

"When I hear about or see the problems that other nations are grappling with in their quests for democracy, I feel proud to be a Namibian," said Uazuvara Katjivena, who at the time was in charge of the NBC's programmes department.
Having lived in eight or so countries throughout the world during his 26 years in exile, Katjivena could claim to be speaking from experience. "We have come out of a violent environment, and in such a short time we have made Namibia a relatively peaceful country," Katjivena said. "This is a feat that every Namibian has to be proud of, and Namibians should build on this foundation that they have laid for themselves."

The local and regional elections at the end of 1992 gave Namibians the chance to do just that, and in so doing, pass their own judgement on the Welcome to Namibia 333 Government's performance so far. These elections would complete the democratic process set in motion by the 1989 ballot, as they gave all Namibians the chance to elect the local authorities responsible for governing their day-to-day lives, be it at a regional, city, town or village level. They would also lead to the formation of the National Council - a second parliamentary chamber intended to act as a watchdog of the National Assembly - members of which would be chosen from candidates elected to the new regional councils.

Despite the importance of these elections, the behaviour of the contesting parties during the build-up to the polls was, on the whole, exemplary and wholeheartedly democratic. Hardly a party political slogan was uttered during the voter registration period. Instead, politicians on all sides repeatedly stressed to the public the importance of taking part in the elections, and urged people to register and vote when the time came. President Sam Nujoma was no exception. "I don't mind who you vote for, vote for the opposition if you want. But make sure you vote," the President urged his audience at a Swapo rally held in Rehoboth less than six weeks before voting took place. Naturally, the electioneering became more heated once the registration period was over and the campaigning began for real. But there was little violence, intimidation or dirty tricks, and certainly nothing on the scale of the 1989 campaign.

By the time registration closed on October 26, 1992, 77 per cent of eligible voters had registered - a marked decline from the 98 per cent which signed up for the 1989 elections, but still high compared with the 30-40 per cent turn-outs for similar elections held in the "great democracies" of the west. Ignorance was one reason for the drop in the number of Namibians registering for the 1992 polls; many people, particularly in rural areas, did not understand why they should vote for local and regional authorities having just voted in national elections. Politics was another reason; in Rehoboth, many people still considered themselves to be separate from the rest of the country, while in parts of Kaokoland, people refused to register because their own political leaders were not part of the registration teams. The hassle of finding the necessary proof of citizenship and residency needed to register also deterred some potential voters. But perhaps the most alarming reason of all, not just for the Government but also for those who believed in Namibia's model democracy, was apathy.

Some people, long-standing members of Swapo amongst them, had grown disillusioned with what the existing parties had to offer and, believing there to be no viable alternatives, decided not to take part in the elections at all.
With 23 per cent of eligible voters having already fallen by the wayside,

some commentators expected a low turn-out at the polls when voting got under way on November 30. Although orderly, the parties' campaigns were uninspiring, and dwelt on national issues and the past, instead of the bread-and-butter issues facing the new local and regional authorities. Meanwhile, candidates tended to be selected by the parties' national leadership rather than by grassroot party members in the various constituencies. With the party big guns also hogging the campaign limelight, voters in some constituencies were left wondering why and for whom they should be voting.

Nonetheless, voting was still a new and much-cherished right which, come the crunch, few Namibians were yet prepared to throw away. As in 1989, long queues formed outside polling stations throughout the country, as voters again waited patiently for hours in the sweltering heat to cast their votes. Some people did not know who and what they were voting for, but simply wanted to vote. The final turn-out was above all expectations, and by the time the polls closed on December 3, an average 80 per cent of registered voters had voted.

The outcome of the elections was even more surprising, with Swapo gaining a landslide victory in both the regional and local authority elections. Of the nine parties and organisations standing in the 1992 elections, only three - Swapo, the DTA and the UDF - made any impression. Most seats were a two horse race between Swapo and the DTA, with Swapo making significant gains in areas of the country previously considered to be DTA strongholds. Inevitably, the far north remained staunchly Swapo, with DTA candidates lucky to gain more votes than the number of spoilt ballot papers. However, the swing to Swapo in the south and central regions was remarkable.

In 1989, the DTA had won an overwhelming majority of votes in the south, as well as in the provincial towns and commercial farming areas further north. But in 1992, Swapo candidates came out winners in regional constituencies such as Keetmanshoop, Karasburg, Omaruru, Kamanjab and Gobabis, while other former DTA strongholds such as Outjo, Stampriet, Mariental and Otjiwarongo elected Swapo-controlled local authorities.

However, few of the reasons given for the Swapo's success had to do with what the party had done, and what it offered, but rather revolved around things it had not done. Some Swapo officials argued that 1992 results proved how corrupt those of the 1989 independence election had been, while the DTA said Swapo's gains were due to the southward migration of Oshiwambo-speaking people from the far north. However, some southerners interpreted the swing to Swapo as an attempt by inhabitants of the south to win favour with the ruling party in the hope that their region would also become part of the new Namibia - particularly when it came to the allocation of development aid. Added to which, by giving former detainees prominent jobs in the civil service, Swapo had taken some of the sting out of the detainee issue, which had cost the party so many votes in 1989.
One thing was certain; the DTA had paid the price for its negative campaign tactics. As in 1989, the party had concentrated on running down its opponents rather than on highlighting what it could offer as an alternative. The DTA's smear campaign had worked in the emotional climate of 1989, as Swapo was then an unknown entity. But by 1992, the ruling party had a track record on which it could be judged, and many of the DTA's old arguments were shown up to be blatant lies.

Not all Swapo members, supporters and sympathisers showed the same exuberance about the results as many of their party faithful - in particular the organisation's new following of post-independence groupies. Experienced Swapo campaigners realised that many people had voted for Swapo simply because there was no alternative; the DTA still bore the stigma of the interim government, while all the other parties were considered too small and ineffective to be worth voting for. With no effective opposition, there was the danger of complacency setting in, which would make Swapo vulnerable to any new political force - perhaps one which would come from within the party itself. There was apprehension, too, about the way the far north had become almost a "one-party state" inhabited by a population which still bore many grudges from the war years. The election results also dealt a blow to the policy of affirmative action. Of the 90 or so candidates elected to the country's 14 regional councils, only three were woman.

However, the 1992 elections did prove that Namibia's democracy was still very much alive, and was growing all the time. The losers accepted defeat gracefully, and not once were the results disputed. The parties and policies on offer might have been in need of rejuvenation, but the overwhelming majority of Namibians still had faith in their country's young, multi-party system.

Petrus was one major and worrying exception. Ideals had motivated Petrus during the liberation war, when dreams and promises of a better life had been the reason he had fought, year after year, in the inhospitable bush of northern Namibia and southern Angola. Now his dreams and ideals were shattered. Almost three years after independence and still he had nothing - no job, no house and no land - and still he was reliant on "licking the white man's arse" for the few scraps of casual labour which kept him alive. Petrus was sick and tired of wandering through Windhoek's suburbs, knocking on doors and asking for work, only to be told by some arrogant white person to "go and ask the President if you want a job". What made

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insults such as these even more painful was the fact that Petrus and several hundred other former Plan combatants had already been told by Defence Ministry officials that they were "past history" and that their devoted service during the liberation war now "counted for nothing".

It was little wonder that Petrus did not vote in the 1992 elections. "Who should I vote for?" he asked, adding that he would achieve more by overthrowing the Government in a coup - dangerous sentiments considering how many unemployed ex-combatants, and equally frustrated, jobless young people there were in Namibia.
"Voting won't put food in my stomach," Petrus continued bitterly. "Voting won't pay for my rent. Do you think I can buy clothes, tools, seed and a plot of land with a registration card? No my friend, you can't live on democracy alone."

Glossary
Administrator-General, South Africa's colonial governor of Namibia. Laws passed by the AG.
African National Congress, the biggest liberation movement in South Africa. Council of Churches in Namibia; the umbrella body of most Namibian churches. Opposed to South African occupation. An estimated 86 per cent of Namibians are practising Christians. Consolidated Diamond Mines, one of three major trans-national companies mining in Namibia. Subsidiary of De Beers. Democratic Turnhalle Alliance, the backbone of the South African-backed interim government prior to Namibia's independence, and the major opposition party to Swapo. People's Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola (translated from Portuguese). Army of the ruling MPLA government in Angola. Front for the Liberation of Mozambique - former liberation movement and the party which formed Mozambique's first post-independence government. The party of Zulu homeland chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi in South Africa - rival to the ANC. Various interim governments were set up by the South Africans after 1978 to give Namibia a semblance of independence, but in reality these regimes were controlled by Pretoria. South African counter-insurgency force which spearheaded the war against Swapo guerrillas during the 1980s. Name comes from Afrikaans meaning "crowbar".
Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola. Angolan liberation movement which became the Angolan government after independence. Namibian National Students Organisation. Main student union in Namibia which campaigned vociferously for independence. Many members of Nanso were also members of the Swapo Youth League.

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338 Glossary
NSC:
NUNW: Parents Committee: Plan: R6ssing: SADF: SWA: SWABC: Swanu:
Swapo: Swapol: SWATF: TCL:
People's Liberation Army of Namibia. Swapo's armed wing.
Rossing Uranium Corporation. British-owned company mining uranium in the Namib Desert near Swakopmund. South African Defence Force. South Africa's army, made up of both regular and conscripted soldiers. South West Africa, the old, colonial name for Namibia. Also referred to as "Suidwes", "South West" or even "Deutsch SWA".
South West Africa Broadcasting Corporation, the parastatal television and radio company which became the Namibia Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) after independence.
South West Africa National Union, Namibia's first modem liberation movement which was gradually eclipsed by Swapo.
South West Africa Territorial Force. Army formed in 1980 as part of same process as Swapo. Made up of conscripted Namibians usually under the command of South Africans.
Tsumeb Corporation Limited. Company mining mainly copper and lead in and around the northern town of Tsumeb. Previously British-owned, but now subsidiary of Gold Fields South Africa.

Thatcher, Erstwhile Prime Minister of Britain.
Margaret:
UDF: United Democratic Front. One of the major parties contesting the independence election. Uhuru Swahili meaning for Freedom
UN: United Nations.
Unita: National Union for the Total Independence of Angola.
Jonas Savimbi's rebel movement backed by South Africa and the United States.
UNHCR: United Nations High Commission for Refugees. Responsible for the repatriation of Namibia's 41 000 exiles during the independence process.
Untag: United Nations Transitional Assistance Group. The UN body headed by UN Special Representative for Namibia Martti Ahtisaari, and made up of police and military monitors, legal advisers and other civilian personnel to oversee the independence process inside Namibia.
Financial sums are given in Rands (R) - R4.5=$2=£1 (late 1992), and distances in kilometres (km).

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