

PART I

CAMP, NATION, HISTORY





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# Liberation Movement Camps and the Past of the Present in Southern Africa

For students of Southern Africa, 1960 marks a turning point in a distinct regional past. In that year, as African nations to the north prepared for or celebrated their independence from colonial rule, Portugal, Southern Rhodesia, and South Africa retained direct control over their racially oppressed subjects, responding to the latter's aspirations for democracy and equality with violence. In turn, people began to flee their countries of origin and organize new forms of resistance from exile. There, representatives of national liberation movements were granted resources from far-flung allies to prepare guerrilla armies and to care for their fellow nationals. A regional war ensued that not only pitted the liberation movements against their respective governments, but also drew in neighboring "frontline states," which hosted the great majority of exiles, and the Cold War powers, whose geopolitical interests escalated the violence, especially from the mid-1970s in Angola. And violence erupted within the exiled liberation movements, whose own members vied for influence and protected interests within emerging national communities.

By 1990, following democratic elections in Namibia and the unbanning of the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa, Southern Africa as a whole was finally moving into a postcolonial, postapartheid era. Nevertheless, the region's late colonial past remains a powerful presence. Angola, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Namibia, and South Africa are now each governed by former liberation movements whose legitimacy is based on histories of liberating their respective nations from white minority regimes. In this context, like others across the postcolonial world, historical representation has come to reflect and reproduce social divisions generated during the colonial

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Throughout this text, *postcolonial* is often used as a shorthand for *postcolonial* and *postapartheid* despite the fact that, strictly speaking, apartheid South Africa was not a colony.



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era – especially divisions that emerged within anticolonial movements and that directly threaten the moral authority of current national elites.

This book explores relationships between Southern Africa's recent past and present through histories of camps administered in exile by the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO).<sup>2</sup> Founded in 1957 as the Ovamboland People's Congress (OPC) by Namibians living in Cape Town, SWAPO assumed its current name in 1960 shortly after several of its leaders fled political repression by apartheid South Africa in Namibia.<sup>3</sup> Over its three decades in exile, SWAPO was responsible for the welfare of roughly sixty thousand Namibians (about 4 percent of the Namibian population at independence), most of whom lived in camps administered directly by the liberation movement.<sup>4</sup> SWAPO's first camp was located at Kongwa in central Tanzania, where the Tanzanian government and Organization of African Unity (OAU) granted military training facilities to several liberation movements from 1964. In the early 1970s, SWAPO's center of gravity shifted to Zambia, where it established several camps for guerrillas near the Namibian border and a camp outside Lusaka, where health and educational services were provided by SWAPO to noncombatants for the first time. In 1974, when the collapse of the Portuguese empire opened the Angolan border to Namibians, the number of exiles increased greatly with thousands migrating through Angola to SWAPO camps in Zambia. By the late 1970s, SWAPO had established a network of makeshift bases in southern Angola, inhabited by the flow of people infiltrating and fleeing Namibia, and larger, semipermanent settlements deeper in Angola and Zambia, all of which I refer to here as "camps," At the time when Namibian exiles repatriated in

- <sup>2</sup> After Namibian independence "SWAPO" renamed itself "SWAPO Party" (or "Swapo Party" in some references). Given its focus on exile camps, this book refers to "SWAPO" unless a clear distinction between the preindependence liberation movement and postindependence political party are intended.
- <sup>3</sup> The OPC was renamed the Ovamboland People's Organisation (OPO) when it was founded in Windhoek on April 19, 1959. In June 1960 its name was changed again to SWAPO. See Peter Katjavivi, *A History of Resistance in Namibia* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1988), 45; Marion Wallace, *A History of Namibia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 246–50.
- <sup>4</sup> According to a report issued by the Namibian Institute for Social and Economic Research (NISER), nearly fifty thousand Namibians had returned to Namibia by the end of 1991 (Rosemary Preston et al., *The Integration of Returned Exiles, Former Combatants and Other War-Affected Namibians* [Windhoek: NISER, 1993], 5–21). While this number is less than the seventy thousand to one hundred thousand exiles that SWAPO claimed to be administering in its camps in various reports submitted to donors in the 1980s, it exceeds the forty-three thousand that repatriated to Namibia prior to democratic elections (5–21) and suggests that closer to sixty thousand Namibians lived in exile. The latter estimate includes not only those who had repatriated by 1991, but also the 7,792 people whose deaths are recorded in SWAPO's official record (SWAPO Party, *Their Blood Waters Our Freedom* [Windhoek: SWAPO Party, 1996]) and others who never repatriated to Namibia or whose "disappearance" in exile has not been officially recorded. The "missing persons" and their estimated numbers are discussed later in this text, especially in Chapter 6.
- <sup>5</sup> SWAPO also administered a college, the UN Institute for Namibia (UNIN), in Lusaka from 1976, primary and secondary schools on the Isle of Youth in Cuba from 1978, and a technical



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1989, most were living in camps, and almost all, including SWAPO officials and students based overseas, had spent time in one or another camp during their years abroad. The camps were, in short, the focal point for a Namibian exile community.

More than twenty-five years after the war's end and Namibians' repatriation, the SWAPO camps remain central to Namibian life. Some, like Cassinga, the target of a South African Defence Force (SADF) attack in May 1978, figure prominently in a dominant history of atrocities perpetrated on Namibians and of SWAPO's ultimate triumph over the apartheid regime. Others, such as the sites where people accused of spying for South Africa were detained and "disappeared" near Lubango during the 1980s, are central to a counternarrative through which Namibians stigmatized by SWAPO in exile challenge an official history. In these and other cases across the Southern African region, liberation movement camps are presented in a manner that credits certain people for a nation's liberation, blames others for betraying it, and effaces a more complex reality.6 Even scholarly work tends to present camps in terms of this stark dichotomy.

Nevertheless, liberation movement camps also have a unique capacity to open new perspectives on Southern Africa's recent past and its legacy. As noted, camps were sites of everyday life for most Namibians, and many other Southern Africans, during their years in exile. They are, therefore, focal points for rich personal narratives that evade highly politicized, competing accounts of a national liberation struggle. Moreover, as we shall see, camps illuminate the very processes through which exiled nations have formed and histories of exile have been constructed, shaping how citizens relate to one another today. By highlighting the ties that bind camp, nation, and history in Namibia, this book traces legacies of national liberation that are crucial for understanding postcolonial Southern Africa and that have barely been considered.

#### Critical Exile Historiography and Limits to Liberation

To date, two bodies of scholarship have emerged that trace connections between Southern Africa's liberation struggle past and postliberation present, challenging discourses that mark the end of colonialism and apartheid as if they were

school at Loudima, Congo-Brazzaville in collaboration with the Norwegian government from 1986. SWAPO had some autonomy in governing these sites. They were designed, however, for Namibian students and rarely accommodated SWAPO guerrillas or others who were not directly involved in running schools. Moreover, although research participants were not entirely consistent in how they used the label "camp," they did not apply it to UNIN, the Isle of Youth, or Loudima. These sites are, therefore, outside the scope of "the SWAPO camps" as defined here.

<sup>6</sup> This dichotomy, it should be noted, shapes a far broader field of social interaction than camps or liberation struggles. For discussion of the dynamics shaping "credit" and "blame," see Charles Tilley, Credit and Blame (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).



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"the end of history." The first body focuses on histories of exile, examining conflicts that emerged within exiled liberation movements and suggesting how they bear on the nation-states that several of these movements now govern. The second focuses on government in Southern Africa today, considering how its liberating potential has been impaired by the process of resisting white minority regimes and highlighting the significance of liberation history as a medium through which a new political elite wields power. Both literatures refer to liberation movements' camps as sites of internal conflict and contested memory within national communities. And yet, camps remain at the fringes of these literatures' discussions, with camps' powerful agency and paradoxical qualities left largely unexplored.

### Critical Exile Historiography

For decades, and increasingly in recent years, scholarly texts have been published about Southern Africans' experiences in exile, a crucial dimension of the region's liberation struggles. Although some of this writing acknowledges that conflicts occurred within a given exiled liberation movement, the literature tends to belittle these conflicts or to present them as if they were exceptional – outside a liberation movement's norms and ideals. Nevertheless, there is a growing body of scholarship that focuses on liberation movements' internal conflicts, presenting them as significant, recurring events that should be understood in terms of specific contexts in which these movements operated in exile.

Some of the first work on exile presented from this critical standpoint was written in the field of political science during the late 1970s and 1980s as the region's liberation struggles were still unfolding. As John Marcum then theorized, drawing from his seminal work on Angola, "the politics of exile" were pushing liberation movements to focus their energies more on garnering external assistance than on mobilizing grassroots support. In turn, these politics were concentrating power in the hands of the liberation movement elites who successfully lobbied powerful donors, drawing members into repetitions of doctrine and petty rivalries and away from open discussion of shared concerns.<sup>9</sup> For years Marcum's thesis remained the benchmark for political

- <sup>7</sup> This phrase, widely associated with Francis Fukuyama's pronouncement about humanity's sociocultural evolution at the end of the Cold War (*The End of History and the Last Man* [New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992]), has also been used to critique official histories of Southern Africa's postliberation nations. See, e.g., Wallace, *A History of Namibia*, 315.
- For recent overviews of literature pertaining to Southern Africa's liberation struggles, see Hillary Sapire, "Liberation Movements, Exile and International Solidarity: An Introduction," Special Issue on Liberation Movements, Exile and International Solidarity, Journal of Southern African Studies 35, no. 2 (2009): 271–86; Christopher Saunders, "Liberation Struggles in Southern Africa: New Perspectives," South African Historical Journal 62, no. 1 (2010): 1–6; Hugh Macmillan, The Lusaka Years: The ANC in Exile in Zambia, 1963 to 1994 (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2013), 1–12; Chris Saunders, "The ANC in the Historiography of the National Liberation Struggle in South Africa," in Kwandiwe Kondlo, Chris Saunders, and Siphamandla Zondi, eds., Treading the Waters of History: Perspectives on the ANC (Pretoria: Africa Institute of South Africa, 2014), 11–22.
- <sup>9</sup> John Marcum, *The Angolan Revolution*, *Volume 2: Exile Politics and Guerrilla Warfare* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1978); "The Exile Condition and Revolutionary



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scientists doing comparative work on exile in Southern Africa, including those who questioned its usefulness for understanding the trajectory of particular liberation movements, notably Tom Lodge in his writings on the ANC.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, early critical scholarship on SWAPO by Franz Ansprenger and Lauren Dobell works from the premise that exile tends to become dysfunctional, concentrating power with external forces, generating tensions between rank and file and elites, and (in Dobell's formulation) undermining ideological commitments beyond national liberation, narrowly conceived.<sup>11</sup>

As Southern African countries transitioned to postcolonial rule, more detailed and better documented narratives of conflicts within these countries' respective liberation movements also began to surface. In 1979, Masipule Sithole completed his provocative book about "struggles within the struggle," highlighting how education, ideology, generation, and other differences combined to generate conflicts within and between Zimbabwe's liberation movements. <sup>12</sup> From 1990 to 1993, Paul Trewhela published several essays in *Searchlight South Africa*, a small-circulation journal that he and fellow exile Baruch Hirson coedited in London, exposing violence that the ANC and SWAPO had perpetrated on their own members in exile. <sup>13</sup> In 1992 Stephen Ellis and Tsepo Sechaba (the pen name of Ellis's coauthor) published *Comrades against Apartheid*, which attributed authoritarian and violent practices within the exiled ANC to the

- Effectiveness: Southern African Liberation Movements," in Christian Potholm and Richard Dale, eds., Southern Africa in Perspective (New York: Free Press, 1979), 262–75.
- Tom Lodge, "Revolutionary Exile Politics, 1960–1975," in Black Politics in South Africa since 1945 (London: Longman Group Ltd., 1983), 295–320; "State of Exile: The ANC of South Africa, 1976–1986," in P. Frankel, N. Pines, and M. Swilling, eds., State, Resistance and Change in South Africa (Johannesburg: Southern Book Publishers, 1988), 229–58.
- <sup>11</sup> Franz Ansprenger, *Die SWAPO: Profil einer afrikanischen Befreiungsbewegung* (Mainz: Matthias-Grunewald Verlag, 1984); Lauren Dobell, *Swapo's Struggle for Namibia*, 1960–1991: *War by Other Means* (Basel: P. Schlettwein Publishing, 1991). Ansprenger and Dobell's depictions of SWAPO in exile contrast with those of Peter Katjavivi, whose research was conducted within the very different paradigm of resistance historiography. See Peter Katjavivi, "The Rise of Nationalism in Namibia and Its International Dimensions," PhD diss., St. Anthony's College, Oxford, 1986; Katjavivi, *A History of Resistance*.
- <sup>12</sup> Masipula Sithole, *Zimbabwe: Struggles within the Struggle* (Harare: Rujeko Publishers, 1979, repr., 1999). See also David Moore, "Democracy, Violence and Identity in the Zimbabwean War of National Liberation: Reflections from the Realms of Dissent," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 29, no. 3 (1995): 375–402.
- <sup>13</sup> Paul Trewhela, "A Namibian Horror: Swapo's Prisons in Angola," Searchlight South Africa 1, no. 4 (February 1990): 78–94; "Inside Quadro" and "A Miscarriage of Democracy," Searchlight South Africa 2, no. 1 (July 1990): 30–68; "The Kissinger-Vorster-Kaunda Détente: Genesis of the SWAPO 'Spy Drama,' Part I," Searchlight South Africa 2, no. 1 (July 1990): 69–86; "A Death in South Africa: The Killing of Sipho Phungulwa," Searchlight South Africa 2, no. 2 (January 1991): 11–24; "The Kissinger-Vorster-Kaunda Détente: Genesis of the SWAPO 'Spy Drama,' Part II," Searchlight South Africa 2, no. 2 (January 1991): 42–58; "Swapo and the Churches: An International Scandal," Searchlight South Africa 2, no. 3 (July 1991): 65–88; "The ANC Prison Camps: An Audit of Three Years, 1990–1993," Searchlight South Africa 3, no. 2 (April 1993): 8–30; "The Dilemma of Albie Sachs: ANC Constitutionalism and the Death of Thami Zulu," Searchlight South Africa 3, no. 11 (October 1993): 34–52.

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relationship between the ANC, the South African Communist Party, and the latter's Soviet Union allies. <sup>14</sup> In 1993 the ANC made public its internal investigations of abuses perpetrated by its guerrilla army, Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), in exile, a topic later taken up by South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). <sup>15</sup> And, in 1995, Colin Leys and John Saul published their landmark volume on *Namibia's Liberation Struggle*, highlighting this struggle's "two-edged sword" and analyzing how, while leading a war from exile, SWAPO became increasingly paranoid and violent toward its own members – to the point of threatening to destroy the organization. <sup>16</sup>

Finally, within the past few years, new critical histories of exile have appeared, fueled, at least in part, by the availability of fresh source materials and efforts to understand the shortcomings of postcolonial governments. <sup>17</sup> In 2009 Paul Trewhela published *Inside Quatro* (named after the infamous ANC camp and apartheid government prison), which reproduces some of his prior articles in *Searchlight South Africa* alongside more recent essays linking the ANC's exile conflicts with contemporary South African politics. <sup>18</sup> In 2012 Stephen Ellis completed *External Mission*, using new sources to elaborate on his previous book's thesis and to suggest how the ANC's transformation into a liberation movement in exile impacts on South Africa today. <sup>19</sup> In 2013 Hugh Macmillan published *The Lusaka Years*, the first scholarly monograph to focus on a liberation movement in one host country. <sup>20</sup> Although written explicitly in opposition to Stephen Ellis's work, which he criticizes for equating "the culture

- <sup>14</sup> Stephen Ellis and Tsepo Sechaba, Comrades against Apartheid: The ANC and the South African Communist Party in Exile (London: James Currey, 1992). See also Stephen Ellis, "Mbokodo: Security in ANC Camps," African Affairs 93, no. 371 (1994): 279–98.
- The ANC's Montsuenyane Commission Report (1993) followed up two prior ANC internal commissions of inquiry: the Stuart Commission (1984) and the Skweyiya Commission (1992). South Africa's TRC reported in 1998 on human rights violations committed in exile by the ANC (TRC Report, Volume 2, 348–73). For a critical history of these commissions, see Todd Cleveland, "'We still want the truth': The ANC's Angolan Detention Camps and Post-Apartheid Memory," Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East 25, no. 1 (2005): 63–78.
- <sup>16</sup> Colin Leys and John S. Saul, *Namibia's Liberation Struggle: The Two Edged Sword* (London: James Currey, 1995). See esp. Leys and Saul's chapter "SWAPO: The Politics of Exile," 40–65.
- <sup>17</sup> Hillary Sapire and Chris Saunders, eds., Southern African Liberation Struggles: New Local, Regional and Global Perspectives (Cape Town: UCT Press, 2013), 2.
- 18 Paul Trewhela, Inside Quatro: Uncovering the Exile History of the ANC and SWAPO (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2009).
- <sup>19</sup> Stephen Ellis, External Mission: The ANC in Exile, 1960–1990 (Johannesburg and Cape Town: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2012).
- <sup>20</sup> Macmillan, *The Lusaka Years*. See also Hugh Macmillan, "The African National Congress of South Africa in Zambia: The Culture of Exile and the Changing Relationship with Home, 1964–1990," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 35, no. 2 (2009): 303–29; "Morogoro and After: The Continuing Crisis in the African National Congress (of South Africa) in Zambia," in Hillary Sapire and Chris Saunders, eds., *Southern African Liberation Struggles: New Local, Regional and Global Perspectives* (Cape Town: UCT Press, 2013), 76–95.



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of exile" with violence that the ANC perpetrated on its members in camps in Angola, 21 Macmillan also contextualizes the ANC's internal conflicts, drawing from historical research and personal experiences living in Lusaka. Outside the specifically South African literature, Jocelyn Alexander and JoAnne McGregor identify the battlefield and exile as contexts in which similar internal divisions and forms of discipline emerged across the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), and other liberation movements.<sup>22</sup> Lara Pawson examines the events of May 27, 1977 in Angola, tracing how mass violence perpetrated by the Movimento Popular para Libertação de Angola (MPLA) after returning from exile and assuming state power continues to define national belonging.<sup>23</sup> And a new generation of scholars has emerged whose doctoral theses offer critical perspectives on exiled liberation movements from across the region and some of whose insights have been collected in Chris Saunders and Hilary Sapire's volume Southern African Liberation Struggles and in special issues of the Journal of Southern African Studies and Social Dynamics.<sup>24</sup>

- <sup>21</sup> Macmillan, The Lusaka Years, 6, 8, 10.
- <sup>22</sup> Jocelyn Alexander, JoAnne McGregor, and Terrence Ranger, Violence and Memory: One Hundred Years in the Dark Forests of "Matabeleland" (Oxford: James Currey, 2000); Jocelyn Alexander and JoAnne McGregor, "War Stories: Guerrilla Narratives of Zimbabwe's Liberation War," History Workshop Journal 57 (2004): 79–100; Jocelyn Alexander and Gary Kynoch, "Introduction: Histories and Legacies of Punishment in Southern Africa," Journal of Southern African Studies 37, no. 3 (2011): 395–413. Alexander and Kynoch's observations about ZANU in exile draw significantly from Gerald Mazarire, "Discipline and Punishment in ZANLA, 1964–1979," Journal of Southern African Studies 37, no. 3 (2011): 571–91. See also Luise White, The Assassination of Herbert Chitepo: Texts and Politics in Zimbabwe (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 17–40.
- <sup>23</sup> Lara Pawson, *In the Name of the People: Angola's Forgotten Massacre* (New York: Palgrave, 2014). As Pawson notes, the events of May 27, 1977 were also refracted through the MPLA's exile experience (95, 117).
- <sup>24</sup> Sapire and Saunders, eds., Southern African Liberation Struggles; Hillary Sapire, ed., Special Issue on Liberation Movements, Exile and International Solidarity, Journal of Southern African Studies 35, no. 2 (2009); Christian A. Williams, ed., Special Section on Camps and Liberation in Southern Africa, Social Dynamics 39, no. 1 (2013); Luise White and Miles Larmer, eds., Part Special Issue on "Mobile Soldiers and the Un-National Liberation of Southern Africa," Journal of Southern African Studies 40, no. 6 (2014). For recent doctoral theses specifically on SWAPO in exile, see Justine Hunter, "Die Politik der Erinnerung und des Vergessens in Namibia seit der staatlichen Unabhängigkeit" (Unviersität Freiburg, 2005), modified and published under the title Die Politik der Erinnerung und des Vergessens in Namibia: Umgang mit schweren Menschenrechtsverletzungen der Ära des bewaffneten Befreiungskampfes, 1966 bis 1989 (Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang, 2008); Christian A. Williams, "Exile History: An Ethnography of the SWAPO Camps and the Namibian Nation" (University of Michigan, 2009); Martha Akawa, "The Sexual Politics of the Namibian Liberation Struggle" (University of Basel, 2010), modified and published under the title The Gender Politics of the Namibian Liberation Struggle (Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2014); Vilho Amukwaya Shigwedha, "Enduring Suffering: The Cassinga Massacre of Namibian Exiles in 1978 and the Conflicts between Survivors' Memories and Testimonies" (University of the Western Cape, 2011).

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Collectively, these texts highlight trends in Southern Africa's liberation movements in exile. As they illustrate, conflicts occurred repeatedly within every major liberation movement during its years abroad. Conflicts revolved around the same kinds of issues, including exiles' differing access to resources and privileges, setbacks in armed struggles, rumors of traitors and spies, and the work of liberation movements' own security apparatuses. Conflicts also reflected the same markers of social difference, including ethnicity, region, generation, gender, and education. Repeatedly, liberation movements used violence to respond to internal division and discipline their own members. And frequently, movements perpetrated this violence with the support of host governments whose leaders sided consistently with liberation movements' established elites.<sup>25</sup>

Despite these common trajectories across the region, however, little has been done to think Southern Africa's exile past within a single frame of analysis. Significantly, the existing literature on exile, critical and otherwise, is organized around distinct national historiographies focused on one or another liberation movement. The great majority of texts and debates, moreover, are focused on South Africa and the ANC.26 In the past few years, scholars have noted this limitation, and a few have drawn writings on different liberation movements into the same volume.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, comparisons between the historical trajectories of liberation movements introduced in these texts remain mostly implicit, and theoretical consideration of what it might mean to develop a transnational perspective on Southern Africa's exile past remains largely unexplored.<sup>28</sup> As noted, "the politics of exile" literature of the 1970s and 1980s was explicitly comparative and theoretical in its framing. This literature has not, however, been taken up by historians since 1990 to develop a genuinely regional discussion about exile. Moreover, this literature's framework is inadequate to address social contexts that have influenced the region's exiled nations in similar ways and that are highlighted in recent historical scholarship.

- <sup>25</sup> Christian A. Williams, "Ordering the Nation: SWAPO in Zambia, 1974–1976," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 37, no. 4 (2011): 712–13. For a similar comparative analysis, see Alexander and Kynoch, "Histories and Legacies of Punishment," 405–8.
- 26 Both Sapire and Saunders note the South African and ANC focus of most literature on Southern Africa's liberation struggles in their review articles ("Liberation Movements, Exile and International Solidarity"; "Liberation Struggles in Southern Africa"). Significantly, there have been no publications outside South Africa comparable to the six volumes published by the South African Democracy and Education Trust (SADET) on South Africa's liberation struggle. Although the Hashim Mbita project of the Southern African Development Community supported research on liberation struggles that was regional in scope, the project's findings remain, to date, unpublished.
- <sup>27</sup> Trewhela, *Inside Quatro*; Alexander and Kynoch, "Histories and Legacies of Punishment"; Sapire and Saunders, *Southern African Liberation Struggles*.
- 28 Alexander and Kynoch's essay on "Histories and Legacies of Punishment in Southern Africa" is an exception here, for it draws research focused on different Southern African countries into a conversation through tracing formative social contexts across the region, including exile camps.