Introduction

Un-national Soldiers in Southern Africa during and after Decolonization

By the time he turned twenty in 1976, Paulo Kalonga had been swept up in a dizzying set of events: he had been conscripted in Zaire, today's Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and had fought as a nationalist guerrilla in Angola before fleeing the country and being recruited in the military of apartheid South Africa in Namibia.[1] Originally from Angola, Kalonga grew up in Zaire after his family had fled there during anticolonial uprisings in northern Angola in the early 1960s. As a teenager, he was forcibly recruited into one of the Angolan liberation movements, the Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola (National Front for the Liberation of Angola; FNLA), and returned to Angola to fight against the Portuguese colonial regime. In 1975, as Angola's anticolonial struggle turned into a postindependence civil war, Kalonga was forcibly displaced before being recruited into the South African military and brought to northern Namibia.[2] For the next fourteen years, he fought against the new Angolan government forces and the Namibian liberation movement. At the dawn of Namibian independence in 1989, the South African military withdrew from Namibia and took Kalonga to South Africa. With South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy, Kalonga was then integrated into the postapartheid military in 1994 before he resigned to work for various private security companies. By then, Kalonga had covered thousands of kilometers across central and southern Africa and repeatedly crossed boundaries of geography, political affiliation, and military organizations.

Kalonga's trajectory appears extraordinary and somewhat perplexing, but it is not unique: in all the wars of decolonization across Africa, tens of thousands of African soldiers fought in the security forces of the settler and colonial regimes. They often made up the bulk of these forces and, in some

contexts, even far outnumbered those who fought in the armed wings of the liberation movements.[3] Despite their significant impact on Africa's military and political history, little is known about these soldiers. Official nationalist narratives have either ignored them or disparaged them as "sellouts." Scholars, in turn, have remained largely silent on their histories—not least because of the continued political sensitivity and associated secrecy surrounding the topic. But how do we make sense of the histories of soldiers such as Paulo Kalonga, which clash with the widespread understanding of southern Africa's wars of decolonization as struggles of "national liberation"?

Drawing on oral histories and archival sources, this book examines the history of Black soldiers from Namibia and Angola who served in apartheid South Africa's security forces from 1975 until 1989. During that time, these soldiers fought primarily against the Namibian liberation movement, the South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO), in two closely linked wars: the anticolonial struggle in Namibia and the postindependence civil war in Angola. These wars were two of the most prolonged military engagements of the period and intertwined with the liberation struggles in Zimbabwe and South Africa as well as the postindependence civil war in Mozambique. Later, in the early 1990s, many of these former soldiers left the security forces and joined private military companies for work in Sierra Leone, Afghanistan, and Iraq while others sought military deployment in their countries of origin.

This book's central argument is that these soldiers' trajectories and experiences profoundly challenge the dominant framing of southern Africa's wars of decolonization as national liberation struggles fought by and for Africans against settler and colonial state militaries. The history of these soldiers is incomprehensible within both popular and scholarly narratives of national liberation, or indeed of repression by a bounded colonial nation-state. Instead, it draws attention to the transnational and un-national dynamics that shaped the wars of decolonization across southern Africa. By un-national dynamics, I mean connections and processes that cannot be labeled as national or transnational without costing them their specific histories.[4]

This history focuses on three all-male units that consisted predominantly of Black troops but were commanded by White officers: 32 "Buffalo" Battalion of the South African Defence Force (SADF); the "indigenous" battalions of the South West African Territory Force (SWATF), in particular 101

Battalion; and the paramilitary police unit, Koevoet.[5] I concentrate on these units for two main reasons. First, 32 Battalion, SWATF, and Koevoet formed an essential part of apartheid South Africa's wars in Namibia and Angola. Not only did they come to constitute the majority of South Africa's troops in Namibia and Angola, but they also bore the brunt of the war as they formed the spearhead of the security forces. Second, both during and after the war, many members of these units repeatedly crossed boundaries between countries, liberation movements, and military organizations. Their remarkable mobility further calls into question uniform notions of national liberation and is central to this book's history.

Throughout, I explore two main questions: First, how and why did Black soldiers from Namibia and Angola get involved in South Africa's security forces? Second, what have been the legacies of that involvement, in particular for the individual soldiers and their families? The first question aims to investigate Black soldiers' reasons for joining the security forces and their experiences of military service.[6] Here it is important to note that, with the exception of chapter 5, I do not consider the history of Black soldiers from central and southern Namibia who were conscripted into SWATF—their history also merits attention but is beyond the scope of this book. The second question seeks to address the impact of the soldiers' military involvement on their postwar political engagement and questions of citizenship and belonging, both in independent Namibia and postapartheid South Africa. These questions also informed my oral history approach discussed further below.

Through this approach to the study of African soldiers in settler and colonial state security forces during decolonization, this book situates itself at the intersection of debates on the vast and uneven "middle ground" of colonialism, and the transnational and un-national dynamics of wars of decolonization.[7] From there, it also contributes to debates on the development of military culture and the politics of citizenship and belonging in postliberation contexts.

ALLIES, MIDDLE FIGURES, OR INTERMEDIARIES?

The motives of African colonial allies and intermediaries—those who aided and abetted the expansion of colonial states—have been the subject of considerable debate.[8] At least until the 1960s, scholars had tended to portray, if not celebrate, colonial intermediaries as "innovators" and "modernizers."

Emerging from the anticolonial struggles after the Second World War, however, a new generation of nationalist historians challenged such portrayals and instead emphasized African resistance to colonial rule. They hailed those opposed to colonialism as "heroes" and denounced colonial allies as "traitors to a larger nationalist or pan-Africanist cause."[9] Such nationalist narratives persist to this day, particularly with regard to African colonial soldiers who fought in the wars of decolonization. This book draws on important scholarship that has sought to complicate these narratives.

In the 1970s, scholars began to question the depiction of resistance as the "normal" response to colonialism, arguing that it distorted Africans' varied responses to colonialism.[10] Other scholars, like A. Adu Boahen, denounced the term "collaborator" not only as "derogatory and Eurocentric" but, more importantly, as denying Africans' agency in pursuing their own interests and objectives.[11] Since then, there have been many attempts to articulate the middle ground of colonialism—from the "colonial middles" or "middle figures" to the above-mentioned intermediaries or even "violent intermediaries."[12] What these different articulations have in common is that they question the binary categories of "colonizer" and "colonized" by emphasizing the messy processes of negotiation, mediation, and translation—rather than imposition—in the establishment and continuation of colonial rule.[13] While remaining conscious of the unequal power relations in these processes, I extend these arguments to the wars of decolonization in southern Africa by illustrating how people's relationship to these conflicts varied and influenced their decisions on "choosing sides"—of which there were rarely ever two.[14]

I refer to the individuals featured in this book as soldiers, troops, or members of 32 Battalion/SWATF/Koevoet. I reject the term "collaborator" not just because of its loaded and pejorative connotation. For the same reason, I have decided against using the local Oshiwambo word, *omakakunya,* which literally translates to "creatures which gnaw at bones" or "bone pickers" and was used to refer to Black members of South Africa's security forces.[15] More importantly, the term presumes a clear-cut conflict between two distinct, largely uniform sides, and thus obscures people's varied understandings of conflict and multiple strategies to control their own lives.[16] A central assumption in the term's most common definition—a person who willingly cooperates with the enemy—is also left uninterrogated, namely, assuming that there is one clear enemy.

In the case of apartheid Namibia, far from all people understood the war of decolonization as a struggle for national liberation led by SWAPO. Particularly in regions where the movement's political and military activities were more limited, many people perceived SWAPO as a foreign force—a perception that South Africa's propaganda efforts sought to further exploit. And in response to SWAPO guerrillas' violence, some people made a strategic decision to join South Africa's security forces in order to protect themselves and their families.

The following story of one of these soldiers, Johannes Hafeni, vividly illustrates some of the difficulties and dilemmas that many people faced during the war and that cannot be easily framed in an either-or way. Hafeni was born in 1962 in the Owambo region, still often referred to by its apartheid-era name Ovamboland, in northern Namibia. He was the last-born of five siblings, two sisters and three brothers. As in the case of many other families, he and his siblings ended up on different sides of the war. Three of his siblings joined SWAPO without first informing their parents: "You wouldn't tell your parents that you are going to join the war. . . . They would see by your disappearance that you were no longer living there." As Hafeni explained, the inhabitants of Ovamboland found themselves "caught in the middle" between SWAPO guerrillas and the security forces. Fearing retribution by either side, people did not want to put their families at risk by telling them they were joining the conflict. As for himself, Hafeni said he initially saw no "purpose" in joining either SWAPO or the security forces, but that many young men enlisted in SWATF or Koevoet "for money." Hafeni claimed that later, while in high school, he considered crossing the border into Angola to join SWAPO, but changed his mind in 1977 when most of his classmates stopped showing up at school within the span of just three days. According to his teachers, they had left the country, possibly after having been abducted by members of SWAPO's armed wing, the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN). A year later, in 1978, PLAN guerrillas allegedly killed his sister because of rumors that she supported a South African–backed coalition of political parties opposed to SWAPO, called the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA). Hafeni explained that he felt "very angry" because he realized that "SWAPO kills innocent people." Once he turned eighteen, he enlisted in Koevoet.[17] In order to understand why people like Hafeni decided to side with the security forces, it is essential to listen to how they understood the conflict and its reasons.[18]

With respect to the period of decolonization, studies of colonial soldiers such as Paulo Kalonga and Johannes Hafeni are, however, rare. In the literature on African colonial contexts, the Kikuyu "loyalists" during the Mau Mau rebellion in Kenya and the *harkis*—Algerians who fought on the side of the French colonial military during the Algerian war of independence—have received the most scholarly attention.[19] In the context of decolonization and liberation in southern Africa, there are only a handful of substantial studies.[20] Regarding apartheid South Africa, historian Jacob Dlamini has done ground-breaking work on the *askaris,* so-called "turned" former guerrillas who were coerced into working for the apartheid state, often through torture. According to Dlamini, the askaris' stories not only blur the boundaries between victims and victimizers but also complicate how we think about the apartheid system and its legacies, in particular the nature of the postapartheid political settlement.[21] As Dlamini points out, even more than two decades after the end of apartheid "virtually nothing is known" about Black members of the apartheid security forces—despite South Africa's long history of conflict and the centrality of these actors to this history.[22] This observation also holds true for the wars of decolonization in Namibia and Angola and the African colonial soldiers who fought in them—men who were often recruited and frequently moved across national boundaries.

TRANSNATIONAL AND UN-NATIONAL DYNAMICS OF DECOLONIZATION

Since the early 1990s, there has been an exponential growth of scholarship on transnational history—with the term "transnational" often being understood quite differently. In the broadest sense, transnational history involves the study of the movement and interaction of people, ideas, organizations, institutions, and processes across national boundaries. In a narrower sense, it is understood as multi-sited historiography, such as the comparison of metropolitan and colonial archives.[23] While, as I argue below, there are important limitations to the transnational approach, I draw on two key insights from this literature.[24]

First, transnational scholarship has cautioned against presuming a shared sense of loyalty or political solidarity among people living within the same colonial borders or within contemporary nation-states.[25] As anthropologist and historian J. Lorand Matory points out, "territorial jurisdictions [including nation-states] have never monopolized the loyalty of the citizens and

subjects that they claim."[26] In this regard, Frederick Cooper's transnational work on citizenship in French West Africa following the Second World War is particularly instructive. Cooper shows how in the postwar years French West Africans used the idea of imperial citizenship, rather than citizenship of a nation-state, to make claims on the French state and its associated resources.[27]

Second, a growing literature on southern Africa has begun to investigate the transnational and un-national dynamics of the region's anticolonial struggles.[28] This work not only challenges the dominant nationalist narratives adopted by the region's postcolonial and postapartheid states but the analytical framework of national liberation itself. This framework, as historians Luise White and Miles Larmer argue, has "restricted the development of a more open-ended, fragmented and inclusive set of conflict histories" by obscuring how many people "were motivated by—among other things—broader ideological notions of change, ethno-regional allegiances [and] personal advancement."[29]

The bulk of this literature on southern Africa, however, has been concerned with the liberation movements and their hosts and allies. In contrast, the histories of the settler and colonial security forces "is a topic on which scholarship is almost entirely silent."[30] A very important exception is the work by historian Nicky Rousseau, who shows—through the lens of a South African security police unit whose members moved across the region—how the "wars in [the region] were fought by a diverse group of men, often crossing boundaries of race, nation and affiliation."[31] As Rousseau notes and as I demonstrate in the following chapters, this unit was not unique: the members of 32 Battalion, Koevoet, and SWATF similarly moved across boundaries of geography, affiliation, and institutions in the region—in ways that cannot be captured through a national frame.

The members of 32 Battalion and of its predecessor Bravo Group, for example, came from an almost implausibly wide range of backgrounds: Black ex-guerrillas from all three Angolan nationalist movements; White SADF officers from South Africa; demobilized members of the Portuguese security forces and intelligence service; a former Portuguese paratrooper originally from the Cape Verde Islands and an ex-commander of Portuguese irregular forces in Mozambique; members of a right-wing White Portuguese militia called Exército de Libertação de Portugal; White mercenaries from Rhodesia (today's Zimbabwe), the UK, Australia, New Zealand, Belgium, France,

and the United States; turned SWAPO guerrillas from Namibia; refugees who fled from the postindependence civil war in Angola to northern Namibia; and the children and other family members of 32 Battalion soldiers. To complicate matters even further, many soldiers who ended up being recruited into 32 Battalion had previously changed affiliation from one Angolan nationalist movement to another. Others had been demobilized from the Portuguese colonial army and subsequently integrated into one of the nationalist movements. Lastly, the group of Angolan migrant laborers, who were recruited into 32 Battalion after having worked in the mines in South Africa, demonstrates the longer history of people's movements and connections across southern Africa that began long before the 1960s—movements and connections that were, in a sense, activated during the conflicts in the region. In short, by tracing the trajectories of 32 Battalion's members, the story that emerges makes little sense if conceived through national or, as I argue, even transnational frameworks.

Given their backgrounds and trajectories, I suggest that these soldiers were not so much transnational as un-national, to use the term coined by Luise White and Miles Larmer. As they emphasize, the term aims to highlight "how much of national liberation took place in and from spaces that were categorically different from the national frame," or, for that matter, the transnational frame.[32] Particularly in the case of the former 32 Battalion and Koevoet members, it is their remarkable mobility across various boundaries, spaces, and occupations—first as migrant laborers or guerrillas, then as members of apartheid South Africa's security forces, and later as employees of private military companies—that gives them their historical and political significance in southern Africa and beyond. Put differently, these former soldiers crossed more than national boundaries. Over the course of their lives, they also changed political affiliation, military organizations, and employers. To this extent, the description "transnational" captures only one dimension of, and therefore does not do full justice to, their specific histories.

The history of these mobile soldiers also complicates the literature on "(new) mercenaries" that began to mushroom at the end of the 1990s.[33] First of all, it underscores that their later employment by private military companies is part of a much longer history of transnational and un-national dynamics of military recruitment.[34] More importantly, their history demonstrates the need to interrogate the categories of belonging and nationality

that underpin the most common definition of mercenary: a soldier who serves in a foreign military for financial gain. Particularly in regard to a period of emerging nation-states and violent conflicts over "the nation," it is crucial to understand who and what people understood as "foreign," rather than presuming a shared sense of nationalist (or racial) solidarity. During Namibia's anticolonial struggle, for instance, people in regions that had been less directly incorporated into the migrant labor system and apartheid rule considered both the security forces and SWAPO as "foreign." With regard to the Black former members of 32 Battalion and Koevoet who joined private military companies in the early 1990s, scholars have also argued that these men were primarily motivated by private gain, a sense of pride in their military skills, or even "an open commitment to war as a professional way of life."[35] As I discuss in chapter 6, such portrayals fail to fully comprehend their postwar trajectories in postapartheid South Africa. The formation and composition of units such as 32 Battalion also raise the question: How did the South African security forces form relatively cohesive units out of such a diverse mix of soldiers? Part of the answer, I suggest, lies in the construction of distinct military cultures.

MILITARY CULTURE

To date, many studies of military culture have relied on definitions similar to those given by Don Snider and James Burk. Snider, a political scientist, conceptualizes military culture as a sort of "glue" that holds units together by creating "a distinctive source of identity and experience."[36] Similarly, Burk, a military sociologist, defines it as "the particular beliefs, values and other symbolic productions that organize and sustain military organization." Burk further identifies military culture as composed of four elements: discipline, professional ethos, ceremonies and etiquette, and esprit de corps and cohesion.[37] What is conspicuously absent in these definitions is the role played by gender, particularly masculinity, in the construction of military cultures.[38]

Similar to Snider, I understand military culture as the "source" of institutional identities, practices, and experiences. In addition, I also consider some of the elements mentioned by Burk, namely discipline and cohesion. This study therefore presents not so much a critique of the above definitions but of three central "cultural assumptions" underlying them.[39] These assumptions are: the understanding of militaries as "nations (united) in arms"; the

implicit adherence to militarized versions of masculinity; and a top-down preoccupation, particularly with the role of officers.

Historically, the two disciplines most concerned with the study of military culture have been military history and sociology. As historian Tarak Barkawi notes, these disciplines have remained largely Eurocentric, in the sense that they have derived their categories and assumptions from European histories, particularly the French Revolution's idea of the military as a "nation in arms."[40] As a result, debates over military culture have focused primarily on "Western" armies, namely those of the United States and Germany.[41] This book develops and goes beyond this existing literature by examining the specific development of the military cultures of 32 Battalion, SWATF, and Koevoet.

Colonial armies were not united by a supposed national identity but marked by sharp social, religious, "ethnic," and racial divisions that had been fostered and maintained by colonial rule.[42] The recruitment of colonial armies therefore necessitated "different methods . . . than those employed for national defence" and "profoundly altered the social basis of colonial armies" from that of their European counterparts. Because of this, colonial military cultures were rife with tension and characterized by contradictions regarding hierarchies, objectives, and tactics.[43] These broad generalizations are, however, backed up by little evidence from colonial soldiers themselves. As a result, historian Douglas Wheeler's remark in 1976 about African soldiers in Portugal's colonial armies applies to former colonial troops in southern Africa more generally: "little is known about [their] morale, esprit de corps, promotion, discipline, and racial attitudes and conflicts among groups."[44]

In the case of South Africa, scholars have focused on the historical influence of White Afrikaner culture on the SADF's military culture and the legacy of racial (and gender) discrimination in its successor, the South African National Defence Force (SANDF).[45] Political scientist Alon Peled, for example, observes how the SADF's military culture—more narrowly understood in terms of racial segregation and discrimination—changed as a result of "ethnic integration," leading to the gradual abolishment of formal inequalities and petty discriminations from the late 1970s onward.[46] While I discuss racial hierarchies, I also deal with how they were closely linked with other elements, such as training and discipline, in order to better understand both the development and the legacies of military culture.

These different elements of military culture were, in turn, intimately tied up with ideas about masculinity. Anthropologist Heike Becker has rightly described South African military culture as "paternalistic, authoritarian and autocratic" and as constituting "a very male world."[47] What does that mean more specifically? Building on recent feminist scholarship on gender and militarism in Africa, I analyze how masculinity featured in the construction of military cultures in apartheid South Africa's security forces.[48] Different scholars, such as Jacklyn Cock, Amina Mama, and Margo Okazawa-Rey, have pointed out how armies create militarized versions of masculinity.[49] Enforced during drill and training, this mode of masculinity generally emphasizes physical toughness, endurance, discipline, obedience, and loyalty. With regard to the African continent, Mama and Okazawa-Rey note that militarized masculinities were further shaped by the establishment of locally recruited, all-male armies as part of the "civilizing mission" of colonization.[50] To varying degrees and in different forms, White South African commanders encouraged and often violently enforced a highly militarized form of masculinity in their Black soldiers with the aim of "civilizing" them and forming them into a cohesive fighting unit.

Lastly, much of the existing scholarship on military culture has been limited by a top-down preoccupation with the role of officers and the determinants of combat motivation and military effectiveness.[51] My interest instead lies with the rank-and-file and their experiences of military culture.[52] This shift of perspective helps us better understand how and why individuals internalize or resist different aspects of military culture and its internal contradictions. As historian Michelle Moyd finds with regard to the askari, here Black police and soldiers in German East Africa, they "identified with some aspects of German military culture but simply tolerated others in order to avoid punishment."[53] Based on Black soldiers' own accounts, this book provides new insight into how military cultures develop and how they influence military behavior and loyalties—often well beyond the end of warfare.

POSTLIBERATION POLITICS OF CITIZENSHIP AND BELONGING

Post-conflict contexts often see intense negotiations between governments, former combatants, civil society organizations, and various other interest groups. In postcolonial societies, these negotiations have been closely linked to debates around citizenship and belonging, namely the question of who

qualifies as a full citizen of the new nation.[54] The stakes are high because, as Frederick Cooper points out, this question defines both inclusion and exclusion and therefore individuals' ability to make claims to certain rights and resources.[55] In this book, I follow sociologist Rogers Brubaker's distinction between formal citizenship and substantive citizenship, that is, people's actual access "to substantive rights of citizenship, or their substantive acceptance [i.e., belonging] as full members of a putatively national 'society.'"[56]

In the postliberation countries of southern Africa, citizenship and its associated material and symbolic benefits have often closely hinged on the commitment to the anticolonial struggle and continued loyalty to the former liberation movement, now in control of the state apparatus.[57] In these countries, ex-combatants have become a particular kind of citizen. As anthropologist Lalli Metsola notes, "[They] have been identified as a special group for policy measures . . . with reintegration and veteran policies, associations and ministries institutionalizing the issue."[58] As veterans make claims on the state, they therefore also raise questions about their citizenship and belonging.[59] Such questions are particularly complicated for Black former soldiers who served in the security forces of colonial and settler states and crossed different boundaries of geography and institutions.

Both policy-making and academic research have often fiercely debated who constitutes a "former combatant" or "veteran." With the exception of Namibia, both of these terms are generally understood to exclude former members of the security forces and existing literature has usually referred to their postwar fate only in passing—likely because they fought on the "wrong side." As a result, little is known about the postwar trajectories of former security forces members in southern Africa, again in contrast to the cases of Algeria and Kenya. In Algeria, the harkis were brutally persecuted by the new political regime, forcing many of them to flee to France. In Kenya, in contrast, some former Kikuyu loyalists seized control of the postcolonial state. In southern Africa, many of their counterparts have "disappeared" or "remade" themselves, for instance, as nationalists or antigovernment rebels—with the unique exception of Namibia where, since independence, different groups of former SWATF and Koevoet members have repeatedly mobilized to claim government benefits.[60] In other words, the postwar trajectories of former soldiers and their impact on the postcolonial state have varied significantly across contexts. What accounts for these differences?

In tackling this question in the southern African context, I explore the postwar politics of citizenship and belonging of Black former 32 Battalion, SWATF, and Koevoet members in Namibia and South Africa. In the case of Namibia, I examine why former SWATF and Koevoet members have been able to politically mobilize and how they have sought to contest SWAPO's conceptions of citizen and veteran. I show that associations of former soldiers have formed significant alliances with opposition parties and civil society organizations in an attempt to challenge SWAPO's official narrative and idea of "the nation."[61] In the case of postapartheid South Africa, I discuss how former 32 Battalion and Koevoet members have found themselves "stranded": while many of them have found employment in the private security industry, they feel that they do not truly belong to South Africa. At the same time, they and often their families have found it difficult, if not impossible, to return to Angola or Namibia due to various bureaucratic, legal, and economic issues with both their formal and substantive citizenship status.

For many former soldiers, including Paulo Kalonga, the relocation from Namibia to South Africa was not to be their last move. In the early 1990s, they would return to civil war–torn Angola—this time as soldiers hired by the private military company Executive Outcomes. From there, many were later airlifted straight to Sierra Leone in order to support the country's military junta in its fight against antigovernment rebels. Following the United States' invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq in the early 2000s, many former soldiers were employed as "security guards" by private security companies. In the mid-2000s, two different groups of former soldiers were involved in alleged coup attempts against the presidents of Equatorial Guinea and the DRC, respectively. More recently, in early 2015 the Nigerian government hired several hundred former soldiers for its fight against the Islamist insurgency Boko Haram. In short, the un-national trajectory of many former soldiers that began in the 1970s has continued until today.

In sum, this book examines how the postwar lives of these soldiers have been shaped by their involvement in apartheid South Africa's security forces, the un-national dynamics of the wars they fought in, and the military cultures of which they were a part. It does so by using both written sources and oral histories. Through the latter, I explore topics that institutional archives often do not record, such as the rank-and-file's experiences of military culture or their post-conflict claims of citizenship and belonging.

METHODS AND SOURCES

Some scholars might consider people's historical memories of southern Africa's wars of decolonization as too polarized to be relied on as oral sources.[62] However, this book uses oral sources by necessity as much as by design. First, as far as I know, there are virtually no accounts by Black former soldiers recorded at the time. One exception is a short interview with José Ricardo Belmundo, a Black Angolan soldier who deserted 32 Battalion in January 1980, published by the *Guardian* newspaper in early 1981. Since the war, only one book has been published by a Black former soldier, Sisingi Kamongo's *Shadows in the Sand,* cowritten with Leon Bezuidenhout.[63] In addition, access to the SADF's and SWATF's archival records at the South African Department of Defence Archive in Pretoria is notoriously difficult and has become even more so in recent years. The two main issues are the close-to-impenetrable organization of the archival groups, and the tedious declassification process under the Promotion of Access to Information Act (PAIA).[64] With regard to Koevoet, an unknown number of records, if not the vast majority, appear to have been destroyed or "disappeared" in the late 1980s and early 1990s.[65] As a result, I used other written sources from several archives in Namibia and South Africa, Hansards of the Namibian parliament, and personal accounts written by White former commanders of 32 Battalion.[66]

Between 2014 and 2016, I conducted 148 interviews with Black former soldiers and White former officers of 32 Battalion, Koevoet, and SWATF as well as family members, government ministers, politicians, former guerrilla commanders, and civil society representatives, both in Namibia and South Africa. In addition, I consulted transcripts of interviews with former soldiers and family members from the Missing Voices collection in the Historical Papers Research Archive at the University of the Witwatersrand.

Interviewing former soldiers "on the losing side" about their past actions is a tricky affair, especially in highly politicized contexts. I found it essential to get to know former soldiers through people whom they knew and trusted. In Namibia, the help of Jabulani Ndeunyema and Lazarus "Tate Mbwila" Petrus, who took a personal interest in my research and became good friends, was invaluable. Both Ndeunyema and Petrus served in SWATF's 101 Battalion and have been leaders of the Namibia War Veterans Trust (NAMVET), the most prominent association of former SWATF and Koevoet members.

They arranged all interviews with former soldiers, but I was never under the impression that they selected interviewees or attempted to influence their answers in order to advance a personal agenda. In fact, Ndeunyema repeatedly put me in contact not only with ex-members of NAMVET, who had left due to disagreements over the organization's functioning and political strategy, but also rival associations. In 2016, Ndeunyema also introduced me to former SWATF and Koevoet members in South Africa who had never been part of NAMVET but helped me with my research. Through these initial contacts, I also met my research colleagues and ad hoc interpreters.

In Namibia, the interpreters were all former soldiers. In South Africa, the interpreters were young family members of former soldiers: Naftali "Simmy" João for interviews in Portuguese, Chokwe, and Ngangela in the case of former 32 Battalion members; and Cecilia Paulus for interviews in Oshiwambo in the case of former SWATF and Koevoet members. Their work was essential not only regarding translation but in establishing a sense of mutual comfort, trust, and respect. They usually knew the interviewee personally, introduced me, and helped explain my research project. Through our conversations beyond the interviews, they also helped me to better understand the context of my research, and the people we were speaking to. Professional translators later transcribed and translated certain tape-recorded interviews.

Both in Namibia and South Africa, the divisions and fractures of the liberation struggle have remained a politically sensitive topic. Many former soldiers, certainly initially, seemed wary of the possible negative consequences of talking to us. This was especially the case with those who were serving in the postapartheid military and police and now had former members of SWAPO and the African National Congress (ANC), their former enemies, as superiors. In fact, none of these soldiers agreed to an interview. Many of those who did agree sought to mobilize my research project and as such shaped the text that I present here. In constructing the account in this book, I therefore draw on the important insight that oral histories should not be treated as "authentic" or "objective voices" but as personal understandings of the past that require careful interpretation and contextualization.[67]

Given my position as a privileged, White, foreign researcher, many people thought that I would be able to establish connections between them and other researchers, politicians, and/or aid organizations across the world, and hoped that some form of financial or material assistance would result

from my research. In other words, they often addressed and asked for support from a much larger audience beyond just those physically present. As a result, we were careful to explain that I was not affiliated with any political or aid organization, and that I did not want to give anyone false hopes or expectations about my work's ultimate impact. Instead, we emphasized that we wanted to listen to and document their stories for a book focusing on the history of former members of 32 Battalion, SWATF, and Koevoet.

Through open-ended inquiry and active listening, I sought to make the interview into more of a conversation rather than a one-way interrogation.[68] Since we wanted people to feel as free and comfortable as possible, the interviews were conducted in their language of choice and with only them, the interpreter, and myself present in the room. Either at the beginning of the interview, toward the end, or sometimes both, I asked people if they had any questions for me. Trying to remain conscious of my own agenda and biases, I sought to give priority to what my interviewees wished to tell, adjusting or discarding certain questions, while formulating and adding new ones.[69] Since I have had no psychological training, I was also particularly sensitive to people's experiences of traumatic wartime events and never probed into such experiences.[70]

Many former soldiers saw my book as an opportunity to tell their "true" history and to counter official nationalist narratives, which have stigmatized them as "sellouts" and justified their exclusion from veterans' benefits.[71] They often made such hopes very clear, with some asking for the book to inform people in Namibia, South Africa, and beyond. In all interviews, either former soldiers or I brought up the issue of their stigmatization. When I asked an ex-Koevoet member from former Kaokoland in northwestern Namibia how he would respond to people's accusations that he fought against independence or against his own brothers and sisters, he dryly remarked, "That's their viewpoint but I didn't look at it that way. I was fighting the enemy."[72] Referring to the divisions during the war, a former SWATF member and now headman from Namibia's northern Owambo region explained to me, "Why did this happen? Because people were afraid to be killed by SWAPO and they needed protection from the Boers [South Africans]."[73]

Like them, many former soldiers recounted vivid stories about PLAN guerrillas assassinating traditional leaders, abducting school children, or killing family members. (Incidentally, former PLAN commanders also

recounted stories that similarly run counter to SWAPO's official narrative.) To some extent, these stories undoubtedly blamed SWAPO and its armed wing for the war's violence and terror.[74] This does not mean that they should be brushed off simply as exercises in "whataboutism" or self-justification. They are often painful accounts of survival, loss, and incomprehension and underscore that not all people in today's Namibia understood the war as a national liberation struggle. As such, I do not uncritically accept them but do take them seriously as understandings of the past and thus as historical evidence.[75]

In addition to my own unease about asking direct questions about killing and atrocities, my interviewees' aims for this book also explain the relative absence of violence committed by former soldiers themselves, both in their accounts and on the pages that follow. It is possible that former soldiers acting as interpreters during certain interviews had a policing effect, where there was an implicit understanding of what could be said and what could not.[76] However, former soldiers did not volunteer much information about violence in interviews where younger people assisted in the interview either. I want to emphasize that this relative absence should not be understood as an apologia for apartheid South Africa's security forces. For almost two decades, 32 Battalion, Koevoet, and SWATF were part and parcel of the apartheid state's violence, terror, and wars across southern Africa. During this time, the units' members routinely assaulted, tortured, and killed both guerrillas and civilians. In some cases, they assaulted and killed members of their own and other units.[77]

In sum, I do not claim that the oral sources in this study are objective recordings of the past nor representative of all former members of 32 Battalion, Koevoet, and SWATF. However, I argue that they are crucial when broaching topics that archival sources often cannot, such as people's understanding of conflict and its reasons or their experiences of soldiering and military culture. Taken together with written material, these oral accounts shed new light onto southern Africa's anticolonial struggles and the un-national processes that have shaped the region's political and military history to this day.

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK

The rest of this book largely follows a chronological order. In chapter 1, I present a historical overview of colonial rule in South West Africa (later

Namibia) and southern Angola from the late 1880s to 1990. The chapter's focus is on the long history of Black soldiers' involvement in different colonial armies, as well as the fractures between and among political groups that were exploited by the German and later South African colonial regimes. I argue that these divisive dynamics are central to understanding the later recruitment of Black soldiers from Namibia and Angola into South Africa's security forces and the postapartheid politics in Namibia. In addition, I highlight the role of migrant labor and differences in political mobilization, primarily along ethno-regional lines.

In the following two chapters, I explore how and why Black soldiers from Namibia and Angola came to fight in South Africa's security forces, questioning the idea that they fought for apartheid. Their accounts show that the idea of "the struggle for the nation" often had limited relevance to their motives and actions.

In chapter 2, I discuss the reasons why Black soldiers in northern Namibia enlisted in SWATF and Koevoet. I argue that understanding their decision requires the examination of noneconomic reasons, largely disregarded in previous research, and the broader social, political, and regional divisions that emerged in the context of the war. More specifically, I discuss three key factors: the role of traditional authorities in military recruitment; the alienation by and search for protection against guerrilla violence; and the influence of South African propaganda. Throughout the chapter, I emphasize how people across different regions of northern Namibia had specific local relationships to and understandings of the war.

In chapter 3, I turn to Angola to examine the origins and formation of the SADF's 32 Battalion, which consisted predominantly of Black ex-guerrillas from Angola but was headed by White South African officers. My argument here is twofold. First, the common depiction of these soldiers as "mercenaries" is not only inaccurate but fails to capture the sheer mobility and contingency of their trajectories from nationalist guerrillas to SADF soldiers. Second, these troops' transfer of allegiance to the SADF must be understood in the context of the fractures of Angolan nationalism and the country's chaotic decolonization process. At the same time, I stress the need to situate these soldiers' trajectories in the genealogies of un-national ties across southern Africa that often long predated the wars of decolonization in the region—such as Angolan migrant laborers working in South Africa or

the personal relationship between the FNLA's president Holden Roberto and Zairian president Mobutu Sese Seko.

In chapter 4, I compare the military cultures of 32 Battalion, Koevoet, and SWATF's 101 Battalion. I show that, contrary to their frequent depiction as one static whole, these units developed distinct institutional practices and mythologies. The units' military cultures differed, often drastically, in terms of the training and enforcement of discipline among troops, the relationship between Black soldiers and White officers, and troops' understanding of their unit's military and political mission. I argue that these aspects and their differences were shaped by the units' original formation and leadership and in turn influenced how they operated during the war. The units' culture and organization also deeply affected their members' postwar trajectories, which I discuss in the following two chapters.

In chapter 5, I examine the postwar politics of associations of former SWATF and Koevoet members in Namibia. Unlike their counterparts in the rest of southern Africa, they have not been persecuted or silenced. In fact, different groups of former soldiers have repeatedly and publicly demonstrated for recognition by the government that has been led by their former enemy, SWAPO, since independence. In doing so, they have sought to contest the party's official history and its conception of citizenship rooted in participation in the liberation struggle. I argue that two main factors explain the former soldiers' particular position: SWAPO's approach toward them, characterized by both reconciliation and disregard; and significant support for the former soldiers' grievances by opposition parties, civil society organizations, and wider parts of the Namibian population, which share the veterans' more widespread narratives of national reconciliation and of ethno-regional discrimination by the SWAPO-led government.

In chapter 6, I turn to the very different postwar trajectory of former 32 Battalion and Koevoet members who moved to South Africa in the late 1980s and early 1990s. After South Africa's transition from apartheid, many of them left the security forces and have since ended up working in private security or military industries in South Africa and around the globe. I argue that the former soldiers' employment in these industries must be understood in the context of their longer un-national history and two wider interrelated legacies of war: the postwar continuation of military networks and power relations among former security force units, and the social and economic

isolation of former soldiers in South Africa. In a sense, the former soldiers and their families have become "strangers everywhere," stranded in a country whose former regime they had fought for but where they felt they did not truly belong.

In the conclusion, I bring together the book's themes and reflect on the nature of the postapartheid political settlements in Namibia and South Africa. In stark contrast to their erstwhile Black colleagues, White former commanders have not only enjoyed greater wealth and opportunities but have often continued to be in charge of them and their families as the owners of private security companies that recruit Black former soldiers and their children. Despite also having been on the "wrong side," many of their Black former leaders in Namibia—military commanders, politicians, and certain traditional authorities—have retained their political and economic power as a result of SWAPO's transition pact with the old apartheid-era elites. The postwar marginalization of the Black former rank-and-file of 32 Battalion, SWATF, and Koevoet therefore points to a broader official silence on the history of nonmilitary connections with the apartheid regime, both in Namibia and South Africa.