

# ***14 The Liberation Struggle Inside Namibia 1966-1989: A Regional Perspective from the Kavango Regions***

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## **Introduction**

The armed nationalist struggle for independence in Namibia lasted over 20 years, leaving Namibians with a broad awareness of prominent historical landmarks and battles associated with the war, which are marked by national monuments or commemorative events. It is in this way that states manage memory. However, this chapter seeks to provide an alternative perspective by focusing on the changing impact of the conflict over time on one geographically defined community. The Kavango regions are located in the northeastern part of Namibia, but this chapter will focus particularly on the traditional territory of uKwangali, situated in the Kavango West Region in the Mpungu and Nkurenkuru constituencies.

The emphasis on the western part of the Kavango regions is because the district shares a regional border with the former ‘Homeland’ of ‘Ovamboland’ in the west of the district, which was the main theatre of war during the period under discussion.<sup>1</sup> It is argued here that the Kavango was another important area of conflict, but that the events that took place there are less well known to the Namibian public. Documenting and collecting the living memories of the inhabitants of the Kavango regions fills a gap in the national historiography of Namibia, so as to include the previously unexplored micro-politics, experiences and contributions of the people of this area during the Namibian armed struggle for independence.

The military archives of both sides that might document the conflict in the region are inaccessible, so this paper will draw heavily on oral history provided by informants who live in the region and in the area of study in particular. The chapter explores the political interaction between SWAPO and civilians, the effects of the militarisation of the Kavango and the impact that South African militarisation had in uKwangali. The complexity of the Namibian armed liberation struggle is twofold in the sense that the struggle was fought in two ways. The first was the military action of those individuals who left the country for exile and later came back as guerilla fighters. The second involved those people who did not leave, but fought the struggle inside the country by supporting the PLAN fighters and employing various forms of passive resistance.

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1 J. B. Diescho (1983) ‘A critical evaluation of the Odendaal commission of enquiry into South West Africa affairs 1962-63’ (MA dissertation, University of Fort Hare), p. 12.