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United Nations Oral History Project

David Lush
20 March 1990

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Yale–UN Oral History Project
David Lush
Jean Krasno, Interviewer
March 20, 1999
Namibia

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Yale – UN Oral History

David Lush

Interviewed by: Jean Krasno

March 20, 1999

Namibia

Jean Krasno: This is an interview with David Lush in Windhoek, Namibia on March 20th, 1999, and I first wanted to say thank you so much for letting me come and do this, and wanted to mention your book, the title of which is Last Steps to Uhuru. And the publisher is New Namibian Books, so if people want to try to get it they could try there. So to begin with, could you just tell us a little bit about your background and where you were born and educated and then when you arrived in Namibia?

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David Lush: I'm a freelance journalist. I was born and grew up and studied in the U.K., came to Namibia in the beginning of 1988, to work as volunteer for *The Namibian* newspaper, which at the time was really sort of the only media organization within Namibia which took a pro-independence stance. I came purely out of curiosity, as I said, just as a volunteer to see what was going on in Namibia, and eleven years later I'm still here, having obviously arrived at an incredibly momentous time. And working for *The Namibian* newspaper, was lucky enough to have this front-row seat of the independence process, as it unfolded. And so, obviously, the developments happening as they were, was the reason I stayed to see it through and then after independence, settled down here, and as I say, I'm still here. Having been lucky enough to witness the

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independence process, the birth of a new nation, which very few people do have the chance to do, I thought it was important to at least get my own impressions down on paper so I could write this book, which was published.

JK: What is the year of publication?

DL: It was published in '93, so it just deals with sort of the period '88 to '92, the transition to independence, and focuses largely on the days before independence, the last days of South African rule, the independence process, the U.N.-monitored elections, and then the very early days of independence.

JK: Okay, okay. Actually, describe to me a little bit about the newspaper, *The Namibian*, because I was surprised to see that it was allowed to exist to a certain extent during that period of time, because as you say, it was pro-independence, and yet much of the media, including radio – South West African Broadcast Corporation – was really controlled by the government here. So how was it that *The Namibian* was really allowed to exist?

DL: Well, 'cause there were no laws preventing it. Yes, I suppose it – if you look at that was the nature of the South African regime, I mean it was the same in South Africa. You had a private sector. The media was not necessarily state-controlled. Now largely the private media was – you had the business interests aligned with the South African regime, the minority regime in South Africa and similarly in Namibia. But there was

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nothing preventing other people from setting up. Now having said that, an attempt was made, when *The Namibian* tried to register as a company, usually it was a formality for any media organization to register, and you paid a fairly small fee. I the authorities suddenly slapped on a 20 grand registration fee, which would have bankrupted the newspaper from day one. This is back in 1985, when 20 grand was a hell of a lot of money. So obviously there was an attempt to stop it, there, and *the Namibian* challenged that decision and won, and so the paper was allowed to register.

JK: That's very interesting, that in a certain sense there was a kind of rule of law that wasn't controlled by the state.

DL: Yeah, as I say, it was sort of one of those, I think – because you didn't have de facto – it was a dictatorship. It was an undemocratic regime, but it was still – the whole nature of the law – there was still sort of scope within the law, and this -- I think this was why probably the South African regime in Namibia, and certainly the nationalist party in South Africa, was actually fighting a losing battle, 'cause it hadn't established – it inherited infrastructure (legal infrastructure, social infrastructure, whatever) which again itself was a bit of a mish-mash of different periods of history. And so it didn't establish a system, therefore it didn't inherit an authoritarian regime per se. So it was always trying to damn up the holes, and again I'm sure after *The Namibian* appealed --well maybe not in this case -- but it was always having to apply legislation, and then when there was a gap found in it had to damn it up. And in the end resulted in South Africa to a state of emergency and tried to do it in Namibia, but there was always these gaps, and as long as

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you had sort of a courageous alternative media, courageous alternative lawyers who were prepared to challenge that system and you had the funds -- mobilize the funds to do it, these people you could sometimes make your way through.

JK: Well was it because there were a number of South African white and German whites and so forth that wanted a system of law, a rule of law here in Namibia, that in fact the government had to maintain some kind of semblance of the rule of law? Is that a possible interpretation?

DL: Apartheid was a legal regime. Apartheid was based on legislation, so in that respect it was pretty disgraceful legislation, but it was legislation nonetheless. So there was – yes, there was that fundamental belief in the rule of law, be it perverse law or be it whatever --

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JK: Democratic law.

DL: Democratic law. There was this belief in it. So there was a belief in the legal system. And therefore it was only when that – out of desperation – that's why I think it was known – Apartheid regime was probably always onto a loser. At the very end it resorted to extra-judicial means, but for a long time it was trying to peg its – this repression on a system of law. Now of course, in a war situation that system of law broke down largely, and that's what you had the case in the North of the country. Battles were

fought in court. So as long as you had the people to challenge the law, no matter how oppressive it was, there was quite often a loophole.

JK: That's really fascinating. But I wanted to ask one more question about the newspaper itself, because I was reading an account, actually today, that during that time that there were death threats against the editor of *The Namibian.* Do you know anything about that?

DL: I know – again, this is sort of the – I think, as you say, as we sort of found out, there was this sort of extra-judicial element to the Apartheid regime, particularly – well, obviously in South Africa itself – but in Namibia, sort of being the frontier, and these covert activities. So you had this very murky – it was obviously – a lot of it was state-sponsored or certainly done in the name of the state, by the security forces, but again, not overtly done so. So you never quite knew who these people were. Death threats? Yes, particularly as the independence – from my own experience – particularly as the independence process got underway, it became very heavy, and *The Namibian* was an obvious target for those opposed to the independence settlement. The offices were blown up in October '88.

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JK: Really? They were?

DL: They were firebombed.

JK: Here, in Windhoek?

DL: Yes, this was at the time where the shady, rightwing movement called the Whit Wolwes was sort of operative in South Africa and Namibia. Prior to that, ever since *The Namibian* started in '85, obviously things like mail were intercepted. Telephones were tapped. You were followed. Wherever you went on jobs often you were watched by the police. If there was a demonstration you were coming -- covering demonstrations or whatever, you as journalists became targets for police as they clamped down on activities. So it was – yeah, and then there were death threats which came in different forms, be it -- being you stopped in, whatever, somewhere – so you were a target, and the staff of *The Namibian* were constantly a target of either surveillance, as we say, but also sometimes very hostile attacks.

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JK: Where you personally targeted?

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DL: Was I personally targeted? No, because I wasn't sort of a significant enough person. I was in the respect that I was working at the newspaper, so we were all targeted. My mail was intercepted. I'm sure my telephone was tapped. As far as personally being threatened, occasionally, you were somewhere and people knew who you were, yes, then you would get a pretty rough ride. People could be pretty unpleasant. I think it was – but as long as you were working in *The Namibian*, in that environment, everybody was a target. And so for example, yeah when the offices get blown up, I mean obviously it's the whole people affected.

JK: Were there any people in the office when it was blown up?

DL: No, it was empty at the time. It was done at night.

JK: Oh, wow.

DL: But later on, when at that stage newspaper was only weekly, so we closed down at night. But later on, particularly during the independence process, we used to work at night, 'cause it became a daily newspaper, and I was working on the nightshift, and we constantly felt very very vulnerable. At times, at two o'clock in the morning when you're going home you're being followed home, you kind of – there's always this sense that somehow you're sitting there in this illuminated office, like a goldfish behind a goldfish bowl, and there was people out there. So it was – there was this constant sense where you'd go and start the car and you never knew whether maybe today it was the time for the car to blow up or whatever. There was that kind of cycle – always that constant pressure, but Gwen, in particular, she was –

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JK: Now this is the editor, Gwen Lister.

DL: Yes, Gwen Lister. She was obviously the sort of number one target, being the editor, being the founder of the newspaper, being the person who writes the editorials and whatever. And as time got on, she was very much – became very much a target. And

during the independence process, when there was the assassination of Anton Lubowski, and there was -- I think it's been established there was a hit list of prominent people who were ready for assassination, and she was one of them. And attempts came out – through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission] – attempts were – her assassination was planned, and someone was sent to carry it out.

JK: Now, you're talking about the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission?

DL: So yes, she was a target, and they somehow didn't manage to get her, but they tried. So yes, it was – she was very much a target, yes. The newspaper as a whole and the staff as a whole were just sort of on this constant threat of – yeah, intimidation.

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JK: Well, now, of course I'm interviewing about the U.N., so I wanted to ask you: when the U.N. did finally arrive and in enough presence, did that help your security situation at all? Did it seem as though there were fewer threats against you because the U.N. was here observing, or did that not seem to change?

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DL: No.

JK: It didn't change.

DL: It increased.

JK: It increased?

DL: Well during the independence process –

JK: Oh, because it was getting closer to the independence.

DL: Well, as I say, right up to the end and afterwards. You had Lubowski's assassination in September, two months before the elections. Certainly at that time it was probably the most intense, and that was the time when the U.N. had established itself and was functioning at

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JK: Yeah, at full force.

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DL: But the U.N. was functioning largely at a political level. The people it was dealing with was the political parties and the establishment, and *The Namibian* was not part of that, and in that respect, yeah, you still had the South African police force running the show. Okay, the U.N. was sort of monitoring the police force but – I think it was more everybody had so much to do at that stage that you didn't – it wasn't like something would happen and you would run to the U.N and say "Hey, please, teacher, teacher."

JK: Yeah, okay.

DL: It wasn't like that. It was – the U.N. did not have that – I think perhaps largely because of what happened in April, when the peace process first started, the U.N. didn't have that sense, wasn't perceived to have that role. It was a peacekeeping mission, yes, but it was more, as I say, at a political level. It was overseeing the system of government, the transition. It was dealing with the parties. We were not part of that. We were in the middle. We were sort of – the media was out there on its own. It was the private media, so the U.N. also didn't have any jurisdiction over us. It didn't have any involvement in us, whereas it did in some respects with the official state media, the Broadcasting Corporation in particular. Somehow it wasn't – the U.N. was also, the U.N. was a target and was targeted several times.

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JK: The U.N. itself was targeted?

DL: Yeah, the U.N. offices in Outjo were blown up.

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JK: In what town?

DL: Outjo. It was similar, in some respects there was something in common with the U.N. *The Namibian* was a target and the U.N. was a target for those opposed to the independence process.

JK: Okay, Outjo, which is up in the north, not all the way up, but –

DL: The U.N. certainly didn't wield that sort of authority. It was basically making sure the independence process went through, but it didn't really have the influence to --

JK: To really provide security, or deter it through observation or monitoring. Well, you mentioned Anton Lubowski, and as long as you did mention that, maybe we'll go to that point, because I wanted to ask you about that assassination. Who was he, and where was he assassinated, and what significance did that have for the process?

DL: He was born and bred in Namibia. He became a lawyer.

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JK: Is he white?

DL: Yes, he's a white guy. And he sort of, as I understand it, gradually sort of rejected what he was obviously brought up in -- sort of the white, privileged environment -- but gradually came to reject the South African rule, came to rather be pro-independence and then migrated to SWAPO and became a SWAPO member. He was a very sort of flamboyant character, very – quite charismatic, and started taking on human rights work. And so gradually he built up this reputation as a sort of a white liberal opposed to South African rule. Therefore, having come from the country itself, and having been born in Namibia and born in the establishment, he was a real traitor as far as that establishment was concerned, so more and more became involved in trade union

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work, as well as human rights work, and then gradually sort of because of that sort of became acquainted with certain SWAPO leadership within the country.

JK: But he stayed in Namibia. He did not go into exile as the other SWAPO leaders had done.

DL: No, he became a SWAPO member, and he was -- gradually as he became more involved in the struggle within the country obviously won favor with SWAPO and then was co-opted into SWAPO's election organization when they came back, and was very much involved, and therefore was considered part of the SWAPO leadership, and probably was heading towards a political post, maybe a minister or a deputy minister or something within post-independence at the time. He'd reached that sort of level of influence once – at the time of his assassination. But as I say, because he was – he himself became a bit like Gwen, became a sort of a – stood out from the crowd and therefore was a – became a target as far as – symbolic in many respects. He was not crucial to SWAPO leadership. He was not a key member of SWAPO leadership, but he was symbolic of your sort of white liberal who had abandoned the establishment and therefore was very symbolic. And so he was then assassinated. I think it was September the 10th?

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JK: Well I have it September 12th.

DL: 12th, September 12th.

JK: Yes, I have it.

DL: Which was the day – two days before Sam Nujoma was due to arrive back in the country.

JK: Yeah, Nujoma arrived on September 14th.

DL: So, his assassination was, I think – obviously meant as a sort of a warning to Nujoma.

JK: I was wondering, if there was a connection.

DL: Warning – the whole "We ain't taking this thing lying down. Nujoma, you're next" sort of thing. That was graffiti that was actually sprayed on the wall Katutura the next day. We found that the next day: "Nujoma, you're next" sort of thing, or "watch out," something like that. So it was all part of this psychological warfare, and --

JK: So he was assassinated in Windhoek. Did he live in – he didn't live in Katutura?

DL: No, no, he lived in one of the poshest parts of town.

JK: Oh, okay. Where was he assassinated then?

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DL: Outside his house. Yeah, he was driving. He just drove home. He was supposed to meet now Prime Minister, then head of the elections – SWAPO's election --

JK: Hage –

DL: Hage Geingob.

JK: Geingob.

DL: For dinner that evening. So I think he'd gone home to get changed. He'd got out of his car to open the gate and he was shot.

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JK: He was shot, wow.... Well, now, I guess I'll just – I wanted to cover that because you had brought it up, and then I'll backtrack a little bit. When you arrived in 1988, what month was it that you arrived?

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DL: February, beginning of February.

JK: Beginning of February, 1988. So what did you discover, what were your impressions when you arrived in Namibia at that time?

DL: I came with – incredibly naïve, so all the impressions which were made were very strong. I didn't have a clue of where I was going, what I was coming to. So initial impressions: very strong was the sense of occupation of Namibia. Obviously that was much stronger in the far north but even within Windhoek, the military occupation was very strong. The segregation – I arrived, one of the first people I met on the airplane was this, I think he was an Afrikaaner businessman or something, who sort of proudly announced that Apartheid had been abolished in Namibia in 1978, ten years before. I spent a few days in South Africa, where you had not only a state emergency, but you had illegal Apartheid still enforced, largely. I arrived in Namibia to be told, no Apartheid had been abolished ten years ago, and I came- I'd heard of Suwaito, but for some reason I somehow thought this was the only township in the entire Southern Africa, and of course you arrive and you find that no every little farm, every little – obviously Windhoek had its townships – but every little small town, every little farm had this segregation, visible segregation still existing. So that was a very strong impression, that everywhere you went there was segregation, even though legally segregation had been abolished. So you still had this massive divide of society.

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JK: And in Windhoek itself, you had Katutura, right, which was for only blacks, or how was Windhoek divided?

DL: Well again, it was, physically, this physical segregation. You had white Windhoek which had black people living in it, your more affluent black people who could afford -- particularly politicians from the South African regime, from this sort of

semi-autonomous government which had black people in it. So you had very few black people living in town, then sort of physically divided by roads or open space, whatever. You had, your townships of Katutura, Khomasdal -- Khomasdal being the so-called "colored township."

JK: And how do you say that word, Khomasdal?

DL: Khomasdal.

JK: Okay.

DL: And then segregated – and then Katutura, although Katutura and Khomasdal were together, next to each other – again there was segregation. There was open land. It was like a no-man's-land between the two townships, and to the extent that taxis didn't even drive between the two, because the two communities were totally separate.

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JK: Really?

DL: If you wanted to go from Katutura to Khomasdal, you could look, I mean literally the two townships were divided by 500 meters of land, maybe less in places, which in itself did not divide, but simply because the social divide was such that if you were going to visit someone in Khomasdal you'd get a taxi from Katutura into Windhoek – into town

– and then get a Khomasdal taxi out to Khomasdal. It was that sort of segregation. I went and lived in Katutura. I lived in Katutura.

JK: Oh, you did?

DL: So there was nothing illegal about that.

JK: Okay.

DL: But it was weird.

JK: There wouldn't too many white people, blond with blue eyes, as yourself, living in Katutura.

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DL: Well I was one of 80,000. I was one white person in 80,000 black people at that time. I was not the first person to live there. You had crazy volunteers like myself who would come, who didn't have any money. The main reason was: it was so lonely living in town, because if you weren't part of the scene you were very excluded, and I felt very lonely there, whereas all the people I worked with lived in Katutura. The people I knew lived in Katutura, so it made sense to go and live there, but also I didn't have any money so it was cheaper to live there.

JK: It was cheaper to live there. Okay.

DL: So there was nothing stopping me as a white person going and living in Katutura, but generally, it was not done, and so there was this social segregation. But yes, so those were the two main impressions that really hit when you arrived – and it was all pervading. The nature of segregation influenced every aspect of life, were it the way you related to people, the way you physically lived, where you went to school, where you whatever, although it wasn't entrenched by law anymore. And then this sense of occupation, this military occupation, and this was really strong in the north, and you literally when you crossed what was called "the red line," which was where the commercial farms ended and your, what was called "Owambo land" which was the communal area for the majority of the population of Oshivambo, and it was also the war zone where the liberation guerrilla war -- the liberation struggle -- was being waged – at least the military conflict was being waged. There it was like going into a different country. You went from a very sort of regimented rest of the country into - and once you crossed into the war-zone you knew – this whole thing of law and order. Whereas in Windhoek, in the south, it was – you kind of knew where you stood. There was a certain degree of law and order. You went into the war zone and you knew that went out the window, because it was a military – it was a war zone, and the tension, you're constantly aware of the military presence – heavy, heavy, heavy military presence.

JK: So visually how did that present itself? Were there armored vehicles?

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DL: Yes, constantly armored vehicles, convoys up and down, up and down, so which was a very oppressive presence anyway, physically. And these were sort of mean – war machinery was mean looking. There was a curfew, and you could get shot. Basically that was the law. If you were out of the curfew, you could be shot, which of course had massive psychological as well as physical implication for people living in the far north, and people were shot. Often the pretext for killing people, when people were killed, was that they were violating the curfew, and there was a lot of extra-judicial shootings, if that's the right word. So you had that – that manifested itself as well. Literally, as far as where you were driving, where you were going, you – always had this constant sense of danger in that, if you were even driving on the main roads maybe there were land mines. Maybe driving past military bases -- there was always gun towers. You know, what's to stop somebody? It was psychological, a lot of it, but – because you went there knowing that people had got killed. You went there knowing that people had gotten blown up by landmines. You went there knowing that, in the middle of the bush -- if you'd get caught in the crossfire or whatever. There was a war going on.

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JK: Now I can't remember if you told me this earlier, but if you did then I want to get it on the tape, that there was somebody walking – and it was before the curfew – but he was shot and killed because the people knew where he lived and knew that he wouldn't be able to get home before the curfew was over. Did you tell me that?

DL: No, I didn't. Yeah, that's – this was the sort of the work which *The Namibian* was doing, was actually reporting these sort of incidences, and for the first time the media

was covering this sort of thing, because the first time there was media focusing on the far north, on the war zone. And yes, you go back through the pages of *The Namibian*, week-in week-out, there were stories like this: "So and so got killed" or "So and so was in hospital. They were shot presumably because of curfew violation," or "So and so was – the soldiers came to their homestead, and they were suspected of being SWAPO supporters or suspected of harboring SWAPO guerrillas or something, got beaten up." They're horrific torture stories – peoples' faces being put on car exhausts, the story you told me about the person being hung from a helicopter and flown over a village.

JK: They would take their head off and put it on the exhaust pipe?

DL: No, no, no, the face pressed on it– so, obviously the security forces had their mission, which was to fight SWAPO, and so when they were looking in the bush, they were looking for SWAPO guerrillas, they would come across a homestead, they think that maybe the people had information, they ask people "Have you seen SWAPO?" And if they felt they weren't getting the information, often then torture would resume. They would then try to torture people to get information out of them. And so you have cases. That's one that stands out, because this young guy, the security forces suspected that he knew where some SWAPO guerrillas were. He wouldn't tell them, so they grabbed him, and the military vehicle, it was – the engine was still going, so the exhaust pipe was very, very hot, and they pushed his face against the exhaust pipe to try and make him talk.

JK: Oh, the hot exhaust pipe, to burn his face.

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DL: Yeah, yeah. It was – oh it was horribly mutilated, and just to try and get information out of him. When there was fighting going on, people would – often the SWAPO guerrillas would take cover in maybe a homestead. The security forces would drive into the homestead, literally, with their armored vehicles. If you were in the way, tough luck. I covered one story that a little baby was – a guerrilla ran into the homestead, trying to get away from the security forces who were chasing him, and next thing the mother knew the baby was out crawling in the homestead. In came this armored vehicle, crashed through the wooden fence, and drove over the baby – killed it. And so the homestead was flattened. The baby was killed – crushed. This total – it was like this obsession that somehow you gotta' get the guerrillas, and whatever is in the way gets it regardless.

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JK: Now, I was up in the north, when I saw the homesteads. So just to describe it, generally they're a couple hundred yards square or rectangular, with wooden poles put in the ground as a kind of high fence that covers it. So that would, I guess, be the homestead.

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DL: Yes.

JK: And then there were the round stick huts with the thatched roofs. Then there could be several within that.

DL: Yes, clusters of huts.

JK: Okay, so the tank would just, or the armored vehicle would just drive right through the fence – just crush that and go right in.

DL: Yes.

JK: Okay.

DL: Then if there's shooting going on and you get in the way and you get killed, well tough luck.

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JK: So now, I think I asked you this before, you covered the north and Windhoek, a bit, right? You covered mostly Windhoek, but sometimes you would go to the north?

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DL: Yeah.

JK: And when you would go to the north then you would take another person with you? Somebody named Chris?

DL: Yes, well Chris was *The Namibian*'s chief atrocity reporter. He was from the –

JK: Oh, okay, what was his full name?

DL: Chris Shipanga.

JK: Shipanga.

DL: Yes.

JK: Okay.

DL: He was Oshivambo speaking. He was from the north, originally. He – therefore his beat tended to be the far north of the country, and often we went together to cover stories up in the north, yeah.

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JK: Okay. Well, now, in your book – which I had an opportunity to read a little bit, before I lost it – you described, in 1988, that there was a student boycott, or uprising, or I don't know how you would exactly describe it, that started in the north. When about did that take place, and what were the circumstances that started that?

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DL: It started, I think it was around February, March, at a school called Ponhofi Secondary School, which was very near the boarder of Angola.

JK: Okay.

DL: It was in a very small place called Ohangwena, and there was basically school, a few shops, a few houses, and a military base. Now there was this running controversy about South African military bases being built next to hospitals and schools. The South Africans claim they put them there to protect this social infrastructure. People, a lot of people from the areas complained that they were actually there as – that this hospital was there to provide protection, to try and deter attack of the military base. At this actual secondary school there was -- had been a lot of – several incidents over the years. Firstly, when the military base was attacked by SWAPO guerrillas, often the school got hit as well. Now, again, the soldiers said it was SWAPO who hit the school. The people at the school said no, it was this military – but anyway, it got caught in the crossfire. Then there were incidences – soldiers came from the base, went into the school and raped students in the hostels. And I think it was basically one of these incidents – I think it was a rape – somehow that was the final straw after these several incidences along the way. The students said enough was enough, and they boycotted the school, saying they're not going back to the school until the military base moves. And, as I say, there was sort of – often, throughout the region there were schools, schools next to military bases. As I say, it'd been an ongoing issue, but now this became the focal point, and it spread like wildfire, very quickly, so from this one school to another school to another school. And it became suddenly that the students were very well – the student organization, nationally, was very well organized, and it became a protest issue.

JK: Okay.

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DL: What started at this one school – a boycott, a student walked out – it became – then spread very quickly to the whole of the north then to the rest of the country. And the mobilizing issue was troops away from the bases. Obviously it was all wrapped around opposing South African rule and whatever, but the focal issue was this dismantle military bases from the school, added to which there was there was issue with conscription as well, but this was the focal point.

JK: So it started in the north and then spread throughout all of Namibia?

DL: Well most throughout the whole of the country, yes.

JK: So it was also going on here, in Windhoek?

DL: Yes, as I said, the Ponhofi boycott started in, it was early March, and by May, that was when a nationwide boycott was called. It became a nationwide boycott, and it was then followed by a general strike. So it became the rallying point for resistance within the country, which at the time it was very noticeable, people were getting very tired, very despondent as far as the whole independence process. And somehow there was this despondency, but at the same time still widespread opposition to South African rule – despondency that, ten years after Resolution 435, still nothing had happened. And it was as if nothing's gonna' happen. At that stage, the first peace talks started outside the country in March, April I think, but within the country it was: "It's just more talks."

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JK: Oh, okay, so they were just considered more talks.

DL: More talks.

JK: Yes.

DL: And – but so the focus within the country was not the talks going outside the country but the student boycott, which became a nationwide boycott, which became a really sort of galvanized protest to South African occupation and was the focus right through until September – everybody's focus. And these peace talks that were going on – the cease-fire in Angola – was fairly incidental to events actually going on in the country. The student boycott was met, and then the general strike was met with a pretty harsh response from the South African authorities within the country.

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JK: Okay, so was there a kind of crackdown.

DL: There was a real crackdown; there was an attempt to declare a state of emergency. So it was a very, very tense time and very, I mean very exciting times in the respect that suddenly this opposition again had become galvanized. There was, nationwide, probably the most concerted opposition from within the country to South African rule, a demonstration against it. I think obviously people were aware of the peace talks and that maybe things were actually gaining momentum outside the country. So you had this reaction to that, as well as that. So, I think the South African regime partly realized it

was in its death throws now, and that maybe this time it was happening. So it was kind of a savage reaction to that, as well as a civil protest.

JK: Okay, so it wasn't completely separated. They weren't completely independent channels. There was some awareness or overlap.

DL: I think so, yes, and obviously as the peace talks got going and I think it was – when was the South African withdrawal from Angola, I mean, where you physically saw it, the South African troops pulling out. Again it was: "But this has happened before."

JK: Yes.

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DL: So again, it was: "Well we'll believe it when we see it." "The South Africans are just buying time, because they've been getting a bit of hammering in Cuito Cuanavale, in Angola." So things weren't going – it was a pattern, and that was the way it was read: "This has happened before. Don't believe it." Meanwhile, it's business as usual within Namibia, i.e. clampdown, protests, repression. The struggle continues. So there was certainly not this obeyance. The student boycott was very significant in that perhaps it was the last nail in the coffin for the South Africans, because militarily they were under pressure. At home they were under pressure – economically as well as socially: "Why are we still fighting this war?"

JK: Okay.

DL: Then, within Namibia, you suddenly have this nationwide boycott, you have this very vociferous nationwide opposition. It obviously contributed to the South Africans finally signing.

JK: That's really fascinating. Now, in February of 1988, there was a bank that was blown up in the north. Where did that take place? I don't know the town where that took place?

DL: It's a place called Oshakati.

JK: Oshakati? Okay.

DL: Which is the main town in the far north, but it was also the main military garrison for the South Africans.

JK: Was it in connection with the student boycott, or was it a different event?

DL: No, it was before.

JK: Oh it was before, okay.

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DL: It happened before, and again it could well have been part of the chain reaction. It must have been part of the chain reaction.

JK: Okay.

DL: It was a horrific event. In the end 18, 19 people got killed, all of them civilians. A bomb was planted in the bank, on payday. It was when all the nurses and teachers were getting their pay, their paychecks, and they were in the bank cashing their paychecks. So it was the middle of the day, the bank was full of people cashing their paychecks, and so you got horrific injuries and a lot of people injured and a lot of people killed.

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JK: So, did they ever find out who did it?

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DL: Well, yes, in the respect that, a few months later this guy was arrested and charged. The guy was claimed to be a SWAPO guerrilla, and that he was on a mission, and therefore he was doing this on behalf of SWAPO. Nobody quite knows. At the time people believed he had been put up. This was just a propaganda thing.

End of Tape 1, Side 1

JK: Okay, so we've just turned the tape over.

DL: I think at the time people, a lot of SWAPO supporters, didn't want to believe, and didn't believe it that it was necessarily a Plan fighter, a SWAPO fighter who did this. It was propaganda by the South Africans. Nobody knows, to this day. The guy's still around. I suppose maybe a few people might know. He certainly knows quite who's orders he was operating on, if he was operating on anyone's orders at all, but at the time, it was that South Africans blamed it on SWAPO, SWAPO supporters. The majority of people blamed it on the South Africans. Certainly South Africans used it as a pretext to launch attacks on SWAPO bases in Angola. Within hours of that bomb going off the South Africans had launched air attacks on SWAPO bases in Angola.

JK: But, strategically, who would it benefit? What would be the purpose of blowing it up?

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DL: Well this is why – I don't know. Nobody knows. Nobody knew. Those opinions being so polarized, you drew your own conclusions. It seemed as if it was a fairly callous – I mean, at the time, from the perspective – I'd just arrived in the country – so from a perspective, from where I was coming from, the people I was with, the people I was talking with, it appeared that it was a very callous propaganda stance by the South Africans. As I say, within hours they'd launched attacks on SWAPO bases in Angola, and then were trying to shift the blame – were shifting the blame on SWAPO very quickly. The South African propaganda machine was putting the blame on SWAPO. Obviously, as time goes on and they produce this guy who claims to be a Plan fighter, a SWAPO fighter, getting caught a few months later, you say, "Oh hang on, this isn't -" but

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"Ah, it's propaganda." As time goes on, you don't know. Namibia in some respects needs a Truth and Reconciliation to delve into these things. Who gave those orders or who could get this guy up and say: "Well whose orders were you acting on?" But today, you don't know. We still don't know, but at the time it seemed like a very callous act. And the blame was put on the South Africans.

JK: Did SWAPO do that kind of thing, though? Could it be plausible that SWAPO would've done that? Did they blow up other kinds of things that had civilians in them?

DL: As the years went on, it seems that the differentiation between military targets and soft targets – military targets and civilian targets – became a bit blurred. Again, one theory is this guy was just acting on his own, and somehow was a loose canon. I don't know, I mean, civilian targets were hit in Windhoek. A carpark in the center of town, a hotel carpark got blown up, and SWAPO claimed responsibility. I don't know. I vaguely remember the justification being that it was a place where military people went. Perhaps, I don't know. Later that year, a hotel got blown up. Civilians got killed. It had no military significance whatsoever, but again SWAPO denied they did it. By that stage everything was so confused. South Africans would blame SWAPO, SWAPO denied they did it, and then the perception was largely, by the majority that this was a very callous propaganda stunt, and civilians got killed; and it certainly contributed to this chain reaction which followed the student boycott – the nationwide boycott – and contributed to this whole heightened tension, this whole heightened sense of outrage at the continued South African occupation.

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JK: Okay, now what I wanted to ask you was that there were a number of arms of the South West African security system, so you had the South African military forces, but you had also security forces and then a special group called the Koevoet. So could you kind of describe how these different arms of the security would operate?

DL: You had your conventional soldiers – your professional soldiers – in the South African Defense Force [SADF]. You also had a lot of conscripts from South Africa in the South African Defense Force [SADF], and now they were in Namibia primarily fighting in Angola. They were fighting the more conventional war in Angola, and – depending on what perspective you take – defending the boarders but also obviously fighting within Angola, fighting the combined forces; and that was made up of conscripts and professional soldiers. You then had the South West Africa Territorial Force [SWATF], which again, was largely conscripts from Namibia, again, run by a few professional soldiers.

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JK: Okay, so they were drafted into that force. They had to go.

DL: Yes, and as within South Africa, you had compulsory conscription. So that was your conventional fighting force, which was based all over the country but concentrated within the north of the country, largely waging war in Angola. Then you had your police unit called Koevoet, which was part of the police force; it was a counterinsurgency force; It was a paramilitary force, but they came under the police; And they were doing police

operations, supposedly, but basically were the front line of the fight against SWAPO guerrillas. So they were maintaining the law, doing police work which was killing guerrillas. And they, well they were set up late 70s, early 80s as this paramilitary force, and because they weren't under your military command, they were under the police command, and they were fairly autonomous. They didn't really fall under your conventional police command. They were in law unto themselves, and they had a very specific mission, which was to kill SWAPO guerrillas; And they went about that in their own way; They didn't have your conventional military discipline; They were all full time people – paid. It was their job -- was to go out and fight – and highly motivated people who did not let a lot get in the way of their mission, which was to fight SWAPO on a guerrilla warfare basis.

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JK: Right, they had the reputation of being extraordinarily brutal. Did you ever come across any people who were in Koevoet? Did you ever have the chance to interview or talk to them?

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DL: Working where we were working, obviously we stayed well clear of them, because we were perceived as part of the enemy, in some respects, but occasionally you'd meet these guys in bars and whatever; And certainly on a couple occasions, I remember – when we were working up there in the north – we'd bump into people – Koevoet people – off duty, and so, not revealing who we were, sort of get chatting with them and yes, so very occasionally. Otherwise, if you were out reporting or whatever, and you would

come across these people face to face – they were on duty or whatever – but obviously it was at arm's length in those circumstances.

JK: So I think you had described to me an incident where you were talking and they were speaking somewhat about the training that they had gone through.

DL: Yes, the bulk of Koevoet or a lot of Koevoet members were people from Owambo land, Oshivambo speakers, who were recruited, either just because it was a job, because somehow maybe they were opposed to SWAPO, or else there were occasions where captured SWAPO guerrillas were then turned and drafted into Koevoet. And one day we were in a bar with one off duty Koevoet guy – the local guy – and he was talking about how, when he'd been drafted into Koevoet, he went through very rigorous indoctrination – as far as political indoctrination, as far as what the job was and about what SWAPO was; And actually he said to us that, after that process, that indoctrination, that if he'd been told his mother was a SWAPO he would have killed her. So it was heavy. It was heavy psychological whatever. And it showed from their point of view, the Koevoets were at the very sharp end of the South African's fight against SWAPO, and were really vulnerable – particularly the Oshiwambo speaking members of Koevoet – not only were they fighting for a regime which was hated and detested by their own people, but they were doing it within their own communities; And they were often usually pitted against members of their own communities; so that sort of alienation was very very strong – that sense of alienation. Then you had very highly motivated South Africans – largely white South Africans – running Koevoet units, who were on a mission. They were there to save

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white civilization, Christianity, blah, blah, blah. The Koevoet units would pray every day, before they went into battle. They would line up and pray. So there was this really strong motivation – strong psychological motivation – towards a very brutal regime, you're out there in the bush, and you're a target, and SWAPO guerrillas similarly were motivated. Really, this was where the battle was at most. Everybody was at each other's prey. You were literally prey. And so very little emotion was shown.

JK: Well, they seem to have had a policy of basically shoot-to-kill, take no prisoners.

DL: Yes, the conflict where the shooting and took place, it was a battle situation. It was an ambush situation. Now, Koevoet were ambushing, got to know where guerrillas were and were attacking them, so it was defense attack, or else Koevoets were ambushed by SWAPO guerrillas; And so everybody was fighting for their lives. What the other approach was to track guerrillas, and that was largely what Koevoet's prime aim was – to track down, and obviously it was in their interest in some respects to take prisoners to get information. A lot of captured Plan fighters were then turned and made to fight for Koevoet. So they didn't kill everybody, no, because it wasn't in their interest. It was just as much in their interest to capture some SWAPO guerrillas, but whenever there was fighting, you make sure you're the one who gets out alive, whichever side you're on. But Koevoet's techniques for – as we described earlier – of getting information out of local people – again, this was not a conventional war, this was guerrilla warfare, therefore every civilian you saw could be a SWAPO guerrilla, and in that respect – the Koevoets were in uniform, at least; SWAPO guerrillas weren't necessary in uniform – it was a

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guerrilla warfare. You had a very pro-SWAPO community population, and therefore, to find out who was the guerrillas and therefore who was your enemy, they employed pretty heavy-handed interrogation techniques to get their information; And when they were actually chasing SWAPO guerrillas, very little got in their way.

JK: Now, you had mentioned before that the tension was incredible – the stress – when you would go up to the north to try to cover a story, so what was the feeling of that?

DL: I think it was the constant sense of military, of war, the fact that it was a guerrilla war, therefore at any moment the road you were driving on could be landmined, could blow up; The bridge you were about to drive over could blow up; The road you're driving on in the middle of the bush – maybe there's an ambush or you're just about to drive into a fight or something like that, plus the curfew, the fact that you knew that if you were out after dark or even -- as I say it was sunset to sunrise curfew -- now, depending on which time of the year and what the weather was like – depending when the sun went down. So you could be out – and sunrise and sunset does not happen at a certain time-- so it was open to interpretation. So you would be driving past military bases, when the sun was going down, always thinking: "Well, now, am I out? Am I a target?" So, if you're having to live under that sort of circumstance – the constant threat that any moment you might be in the wrong place at the wrong time, when suddenly security forces are chasing guerrillas or guerrillas are looking for sanctuary, or whatever, and you're just in the wrong place at the wrong time, and you get caught. This was constant, constant,

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constant, and you knew there was no recourse. I mean, it was no point saying, "Excuse me, I'm a journalist," or "Excuse me, you're just about to shoot me. This is illegal. I want my lawyer." Forget it, this was a war zone. So yeah, it was constant tension, and all of that, when you're living in that sort of environment, people are tense as well, and so constant suspicion: "Who are you? What are you? Where are you from? What are you doing?" So it all combined to this incredibly tense atmosphere – environment -- which, the moment you drove out, back into the south of the country, out of the war zone – the official war zone – it was like this huge weight would lift off your shoulders, because at least you were returning to a place where you knew roughly where you stood. It was not so likely that the place was land-mined. If you see soldiers, they're there on their way to somewhere, or they're part of – you knew where you stood.

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JK: Well, I wanted to talk to you about the events surrounding April first. The U.N. operation was scheduled to begin on April first, 1989, and the Special Representative of the Secretary General, Martti Ahtisaari, arrived in Windhoek on that day. So, were you covering the events here in Windhoek at that time?

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DL: Yes, I was in Windhoek at the time. The night before was a night of massive celebration – certainly in Katutura. It was: "Independence has come. It's happening. Today is the day," and midnight, it was New Year's Eve two hundred times over. People were out and about, and then people just didn't sleep that night; And then the next morning there was a march, because, again, it was perceived that: "Hey, freedom! We can go wherever we like. We do what we like," and there was this big, big, big march.

The trade unions organized a big march. It was actually on some political thing, as far as "No to denationalization". I think the interim government had planned to sell off state utilities or something. But it was basically everybody saying, "Hey, independence has arrived," and this big march started from Katutura into town; And it was stopped on the outskirts of town by the police, who had tear-gas, and they just formed this cordon across the road and said: "You're not coming into town." So, suddenly, you can imagine this people – having not slept, having drunk a lot, and then this state of euphoria – saying: "We're off into town, where we've never been able to go before with our rallies and marches, because today independence starts, 'cause the U.N. are arriving, and today is April one;" And you were stopped in your tracks by the oppressor who was there in front of you; and the march was turned back, and it was getting very ugly, and it didn't actually break into conflict, but you could see the frustration and basically the police force saying: "No, the U.N. thinks they can change that much? Your march is still against the law." So that was how the day began. And then I went back to the office, and suddenly this report came through the telex – on the wire service – that unidentified insurgents had been intercepted, had come across from Angola, had been intercepted in the far north, and that heavy fighting had now broken out in the far north.

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JK: But now also, just to back up a little bit on that day, there was a demonstration, a rally at the airport, so who was that?

DL: That was largely –.

JK: This was to meet Ahtisaari, to begin, at the airport.

DL: Yes, it was largely DTA [Democratic Turnhalle Alliance] people (the DTA being the main party within the interim government, the pro-South African semi-autonomous regime). And basically the interim government parties shipped their supporters out to the airport to welcome Ahtisaari, but it was meant obviously to create an impression that "Hey, you people have been dealing with SWAPO all this time, but we're here, and we've got big support." The road was actually painted: "Viva DTA!" – had slogans all the way along the road, painted on the road itself.

JK: On the tar of the road!

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DL: On the tar of the road, so you did drive over these slogans. All along the road were DTA – this is a forty-kilometer stretch from airport into town – so about every two or three, four kilometers was one of these slogans on the road, and then there was DTA posters, "Viva DTA!" and whatever. And then a lot of DTA supporters, plus these other interim parties gathered at the airport to welcome him, but to say: "Hey, we're here as well. It's not just SWAPO you're dealing with."

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JK: And then SWAPO was kept from going there?

DL: Well, there was nothing stopping them from going there – were they stopped from going there? I don't know. I don't think they were stopped from going there. No, people were busy celebrating in town. No, the march from Katutura was not –

JK: To the airport. It was to the center of Windhoek.

DL: To the center of town, yes, so it was different strategies. The DTA said, "let's get out to the airport," and they had the resources to get people out to the airport.

JK: Because it was so far – nobody can walk all that way.

DL: No, you had trains. You even had your Himba people, which are your very traditional people from the far north, very subsistence, traditional people who still wandered around bear-breasted and in loin-clothes were brought down and were there, camped outside the airport. They had been brought on trains. All the people had been shipped there, and it was a massive operation. Huge resources were used.

JK: But all done by DTA?

DL: DTA and the interim government parties, to create this impression for Ahtisaari on his arrival. So yes, that was his first impression of Namibia. People there were waving flags and "Welcome!" whatever, whatever, whatever, but it was DTA, DTA, DTA. Meanwhile, in town, this big rally was stopped on the outskirts of town.

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JK: So he couldn't see that.

DL: Didn't see that, no.

JK: So then he went to the hotel, and then he received this information that SWAPO forces had come over the border. So where was that information coming from? Who had access to that information, then?

DL: As far as he was concerned, I don't know. We got it through the wire services, and largely were reliant on the wire services.

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JK: And who controlled the wire services?

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DL: The main wire service was South African Press Agency, which was not a government-controlled news agency, but it was owned by most of the newspaper groups, most of which were pro-establishment, pro-minority rule. It was business interests, conservative business interests that ran the media and therefore owned this agency, but it was not state propaganda. It was journalists – correspondents in the north – finding stories, saying "Hey, what's going on here?" So it was not South African propaganda. It was true fact, in that respect, and this was all we had to go on, as journalists at the time.

JK: So you didn't have any other independent source of information?

DL: Well, as soon as this information started coming through, we tried to phone people in the north, but obviously no one knew what was going on. Nobody knew what was going on. So for the first couple of days, day or so, it was: "Well, this is what the wire agencies are saying. This is what U.N. says. This is what South Africans say. And then Chris Shipanga went up pretty soon after the first reports came through – probably the next day – so he went up for a few days, and then came back with his reports and interviewing of eye-witnesses. So it was a fairly slow process.

JK: Now, when you or Chris would go up, again, how did you get access to the information? I mean, I think you had mentioned to me that it was really the South African military that would have to take you to wherever you're going.

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DL: Well, not us, 'cause we knew where we were going. What you had -- along with Ahtisaari's arrival, you had of course your international press contingent – media core – who arrived basically to record a few press conferences, a few handshakes, and a few color pieces on "This is Namibia on the dawn of this independence, a new country, the process about to start," and all of a sudden, fighting breaks out 700 kilometers to the north – 700 or 800 kilometers to the north, in a place where nobody knew? So your actual press-corps – suddenly you've got your editors in Europe and North America saying: "Hey, get up there. Get the story." Few of them would have known what the hell was going on. The only place to stay was in Oshakati in the military garrison. You got there, you need pictures, you need a story. Who's gonna' provide that? Of course the

South African military. So, as a rule, your international press corps was fairly reliant on the South Africans as sources of information, because there were no other sources of information. And they didn't necessarily know the place. They couldn't, obviously, speak Oshivambo and they had deadlines, but obviously *The Namibian* -- the local media -- knew the area, had its contacts, knew what it was doing, they had people who spoke the language. So we went up and we didn't, out of principle, didn't get information – I mean, you got the South African side of the story from Windhoek – so actually went up there and went to scenes of fighting, into the villages, went to see the bodies, and tried to put together what had happened through these eye-witness interviews. So that was how we went about it, and that was where we were getting our information from.

JK: Okay, so what kind of information did you get? Was the fighting happening in various different places, or was there some centralization to it?

DL: What was obviously happening was that you had these groups of SWAPO fighters coming across, walking – so villagers were telling us – to get themselves up to the U.N., to form bases in Namibia, but they were moving as groups, groups of probably around 10 to 20, which was not usual.

JK: And were they just open? Out in the open, walking?

DL: Well they were initially, that way when there were attacked, they were in a group. They weren't out in the open, but at the same time, some villagers would describe how

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they came singing. They were singing liberation songs as they made their way through the bush. So it was obviously not an undercover operation, but at the same time you were moving through countryside, through dense bush, and they were armed, and they were moving into the war zone. So you sensed, putting together the eyewitness accounts, the sense that these guerrillas, they were at the same time probably wary, but they were not fully alert. They obviously initially believed that the cease-fire was holding, and they were not going to be attacked, but they were.

JK: But they were attacked?

DL: And then word soon spread that they were attacked. When they were attacked, then fighting started, and then people spread.

JK: So when they were attacked, who was attacking them? Was it Koevoet, was it the Security Force?

DL: Initially, it was Koevoet. For the first week it was Koevoet, because Koevoet were police. At that stage, South African forces – SADF [South African Defense Force] and the SWATF (the South West African Territory Force), the conventional armies, had been confined to base – the cease-fire.

JK: Okay, so those groups had been confined to base, but the police – and Koevoet as part of the police – were not confined to base.

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DL: Yes, Koevoet were part of the police force and therefore were not confined to base. And this issue was a contentious issue right up until about two weeks before the elections – which was November – it was not resolved; and it was a constant battle for the U.N., and it was one of the main areas of contention. U.N. said: "Koevoet is military, therefore must be confined to base, de-armed, demobilized." South Africans said: "No, Koevoet are police, therefore they're carrying on," and went on, but they were basically the people who then fought – who obviously heard that the guerrillas were coming across – and attacked. They said: "This is an invasion. These people are entering the country illegally. They are SWAPO. They are armed, and they went in."

JK: Okay, so when the news was coming in that there was fighting in the north, it was between SWAPO and Koevoet, because Koevoet hadn't been confined to base.

DL: Right.

JK: Okay. Well, I guess what I wanted to ask you -- because now we're getting close to the end – when voter registration began to take place, and their was an attempt to develop a code of conduct, Pérez de Cuéllar had come to Windhoek and had brought the parties together to develop some kind of sense of cooperation, what was the reaction? How did the media respond to that?

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DL: When the U.N. arrived, it had nothing or very little in place, certainly as far as information dissemination – media strategy – it was starting from scratch. Now obviously you come, you arrive, and war breaks out, and right from the start, therefore, they were facing a lot of media hostility. They were on the defensive. They had no time to make any kind of contacts with the local media, didn't know anybody, nobody knew them, and all of a sudden you've got this major p.r. job on your hand trying to explain what was going on. So the relationship between the media, all of the media -- from *The Namibian* it was obviously hostility in the respect of "What the hell's going on here?" channeling that sense of disbelief, despondency, outrage from the readership, the majority of the people. It was: "What the hell is going on here? You were supposed to be bringing peace, and war's broken out." Then from the pro-South African, pro-DTA camp, the media was hostile because UNTAG [United Nations Transitional Assistance Group] was coming to sell the country down the river to the communists. So immediately the U.N. was caught between the media. Now, as time went on, they obviously got their p.r., their information operation in place, started using the media, but largely used the media which they could at least have some influence over, which was the Broadcast there.

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JK: The radio.

DL: Yeah, the South West Africa Broadcasting Corporation, which because it was a state organ you could get into it, through the South African Regime. Obviously, the radio was the main way of reaching people, as well, so it was vital – strategically important –

but it was also the medium over which at least the U.N. could have some influence, although it was again a pretty hostile, love-hate relationship because it was the South African mouthpiece as well. It was a similar relationship with the SWABC, which the U.N. had, as it did with the police force, as it did with the army, as it did with the South African authorities, this sort of: "Well, we've gotta' work together, but hell, we hate your guts." Well, maybe that's a bit of a simplification, but whereas the private media – which was largely the newspapers – as time went on, obviously the U.N. information department and people did a lot of work to try and establish relationships with it. And gradually it did, but there was still – as far as coverage was concerned – it was basically trying to get cooperation, the U.N. was trying to get cooperation but obviously couldn't count on it because it was private media. So it was not the main focus of their information, apart from placing adverts and things like that. So, when it actually came to things like election codes and things like that, the media was always asking questions. It was criticizing, analyzing, asking questions about these things, voicing – obviously depending on the constituency – concerns about these things. The election code, there was obviously some people who were unhappy with it. It was a compromise. Would it work? Everyone was still very skeptical. This sort of skepticism remained. Obviously it took a lot of undoing, and it remained right up until the election, based largely, I think, on the experiences of April one and those first few days of the independence process.

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JK: That whole event really soured the whole process.

DL: The U.N., it's a miracle they managed to salvage something out of it, and that by the end it could at least get an election off the ground, going. Two weeks before the elections, there was still – particularly up in the far north – there was violence. People were saying: "Well hell, are these elections gonna' go ahead?" And I think they were ready to call it off. The U.N. was ready to call it off right up until the final day. It was that hit and miss, that touch and go, because they had to create this environment where free and fair elections would take place; And I think that was where the media was important, in that it was always questioning: "Is this environment free and fair?" As I said, right up until two weeks before, Koevoet was not demobilized. "Is this free and fair? Can you really have a fair election when you've got the main SWAPO battering ram wandering around and intimidating." I think the main thrust of the pro-South Africans complaint, "Will these elections be free and fair," was that: "Well the U.N. is biased, anyway," and it was constantly looking to discredit the U.N., and that SWAPO wasn't playing by the rules. So everyone was trying to justify a point, and in the middle was the U.N. trying to make a situation where it was free and fair, where it could go ahead, because obviously that was their mission, but being barraged left, right, and center, being told what is not free and fair.

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JK: Now I wanted to ask you, just briefly, about some things that eventually happened with the South West Africa Broadcasting Corporation, because right around the time of the elections, the control of the Broadcasting Corporation began to disintegrate. Were you aware of any of that, or what was going on with the radio?

DL: What, from the U.N. point of view? They felt that it was disintegrating?

JK: No, I was just reading something that NDI (the National Democratic Institute) had put out a report that a lot of the board of the SWABC resigned.

DL: Okay, did they resign?

JK: Right before the elections.

DL: What stands out, it wasn't necessarily the resignation – they were replaced, weren't they? I think what had happened was that basically the credibility of the SWABC – the SWABC was important as far as voter education, vital – and this was the problem the U.N. was faced with, that it was having to work through the SWABC, but the SWABC was totally biased. And this was established. A group did research on SWABC news coverage and found consistently that it was biased. It was pro-South African, for various reasons, not all of it necessarily propaganda. There was incompetency as far as not being able to analyze – which is a problem that exists today in the media – but basically, news programming was biased in favor of South Africa and the DTA and against SWAPO. And this was, again, a constant battling point for the U.N., because obviously the pressure was from SWAPO to say: "Look, this is unfair. This is not conducive to free, fair elections. You've got propaganda. You've got a biased broadcaster," which the U.N was having to work with as its main conduit for information.

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JK: So the U.N. did not have its own radio broadcasting system it had to work through…

DL: Through SWABC. So I think what happened, eventually, again there was a compromise that all the parties formed. There was an advisory committee that SWABC then had to relate to. Now I don't recall the SWABC board members, but they weren't people you socialized with or took much notice of, anyway. I think maybe they were forced to resign and were replaced by this sort of committee, which the SWABC then had to work with, and this committee was made up of all the parties, because it was largely around the issue of election coverage, now – campaign coverage.

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JK: So it was important that that happened prior to the elections, because it seemed to have happened just a week or so before.

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DL: Again, it was very last minutes and came after months and months of wrangling, of people saying: "SWABC is biased. It's not doing its job. It's not impartial," and somehow the South African authorities saying: "No, it is alright," making sure it was not going to relinquish control of SWABC for as long as possible.

JK: This is almost at the end of the tape, so I think I'm gonna' just stop it and start a few minutes in the next tape, if that's okay with you.

End of Tape 1

JK: Okay, so we were just talking about the election result coming in from the Namibian election.

DL: So, everybody's gathered around the radio, and everybody's focus is now suddenly on the results, but the impression was on who won which constituency, rather than the numbers involved. And as the results came in, all of them were being won – or virtually all of them – were being won by DTA.

JK: Now, was it explained that these were results from the first ballots coming in from the south? Did people understand that?

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DL: Yes as far as geographical area, but as the night went on it was from all over – everywhere. That's why I said the numbers I don't think were registering – political parties had obviously done their math, I would have thought, did their mathematics – but from the point of view, even as journalists, you get a result: "constituency: DTA," -- and no one's necessarily adding up the figures as they go along, because it was more constituencies – so: "How can DTA win that town? Oh, that town is gone." Because it was geographical location and political party. Those were the two main issues. Then, Windhoek, everyone was expecting a SWAPO landslide, and it wasn't. SWAPO won, but – so it gave the impression that it was a constituency-based election, which it wasn't. The important thing were the numbers, but because they were being announced according

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to voting station – polling area – the impression that was being created was as if it was a constituency-based election, and that therefore everywhere was going DTA.

JK: Because it was proportional, but on a national basis.

DL: Yeah, that's right.

JK: Okay, just for the record, I just want to get that on there.

DL: So the last constituencies coming in were the far north – was the Owambo region and Rundu region, and the one before that was Windhoek, so it was the numerically larger constituencies. So Windhoek went SWAPO – this is the impression – Windhoek went SWAPO but not by the size people expected. It wasn't the majority that people expected. So no one had really done their mathematics, so there was just this impression created that DTA won all these seats, or won all these constituencies, therefore probably was – well it was – numerically superior.

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JK: At that point.

DL: But no one quite realized the number of votes that still had to come in from the Owambo constituency and the Rundu/Kavango constituency, which were two of the biggest constituencies. So throughout the night the counting continued, and you got the Windhoek result, too. The next morning, you woke up, and DTA was poised for victory

numerically, but without realizing quite the number of votes that still had to come in. And so DTA was winning, and DTA supporters were out in the streets celebrating, with just two constituencies left. You didn't know how significant these two constituencies were. I got a phone call very early that morning – I was living in Katutura just across the way from where Sam Nujoma was staying – and I got this call: "Go and interview Nujoma."

JK: You were going to interview Nujoma?

DL: Yeah, "Go and knock him up. He's just had his breakfast. Go and interview him. Ask him how he feels." And so I walked across the valley. I didn't quite know where this call to go and interview him had come from, whether they had initiated it anyway. So I walk in there and sit down, and he's there sitting', cool as a cucumber, reading the newspaper, and so I say "Well, what about it? It looks as if SWAPO's losing." "Ahhh," he says – still very, very cool. So in that respect obviously he was aware of the size of the constituencies which were coming in, but as I say, I went there interviewing him, basically the angle was: "This is interviewing Nujoma, brink of defeat." His impression was: "I'm cool as a cucumber. I know what's happening," but still, I left that interview saying: "I bet SWAPO's about to lose, and what is gonna' happen?" So I went back to the office, and then the Kavango result came in. SWAPO got a very big majority, I think. So suddenly you think: "Hello!" Then peoples' perceptions began to change. And then the Owambo result came in, and this massive, massive, massive landslide, and suddenly, the figures clicked. People said: "Oh! No, SWAPO has won."

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JK: So Nujoma understood that. He must have, because that was why he was so cool.

DL: Obviously. It was their job to do the mathematics. Having said that, had the far north gone – those two constituencies – gone more the way the rest of the constituencies had gone – a SWAPO strong area, but maybe the DTA had got a lot of votes in that area, it was touch and go. The perception was, suddenly you thought SWAPO had lost, and everybody thought SWAPO had lost. Wham-bam, within the space of two hours, no, SWAPO had won, and now all the SWAPO supporters were out on the streets and celebrating. So it was as quickly as that.

JK: Well, as I told you before, I had gone up to the north and interviewed Bishop Dumeni, and Bishop Dumeni – the reason I'm asking you is this, is because he told me that the news over the radio was that DTA was winning. And he said everyone was gathered around whatever radio they had, and he explained to me that sitting in his office, at his desk, he had a radio there and his suitcase and briefcase next to him, because if DTA had won he would just get out of the country.

DL: Yes, well obviously for people like him that was the option, and they thought about it. From our point of view it was totally unknown. Whereas you hadn't even contemplated that DTA would win, suddenly you're faced with this: "What's gonna' happen?" And you knew full-well that it was not going to be pleasant, and that after all this time SWAPO was not going to – after waging this liberation war – was not going to

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accept that sort of defeat. And at the same time, if DTA did win, what did that mean for us? But it was very unknown, and it wasn't necessarily just high people like Bishop Dumeni. SWAPO supporters who had lived in the country and had tolerated the South African regime and opposed it, but opposed it from within the country – conventional people, day-to-day people – were going to leave the country, and you would have probably had this mass exodus from the country. But they were, people were suddenly faced with this thought: "The DTA is gonna' win. We're gonna' have to leave the country. We're off. If they do, we're out of here." So it was that monumental, and to be hanging on -- to that respect -- to what was an announcement over the radio, to determine your fate, as far as whether you're off, out of the country, or whatever. So you can then imagine the exhilaration when suddenly this result – this tidal wave result – comes in from the north, and all of a sudden everybody says: "But no, SWAPO had won." You can imagine also the DTA's point of view, the euphoria that "We've done it! We've done it! We've kept the communists out." I doubt very much they would have realized the implications of a DTA victory, as far as it obviously meant SWAPO was going back to the bush and that the war was going to continue. I don't sense there was that perception – maybe Security Forces – but it was more: "No, we kept them out." It was this sort of vindication: "We've done it! We've done it!" without really necessarily analyzing the consequences. But imagine that heightened expectation and suddenly realizing it's not true after all. So all the DTA supporters disappeared off the streets, and onto the streets poured SWAPO supporters. It was like euphoria. Although, in typical Namibian style, in Windhoek it dissipated – central Windhoek dissipated pretty quickly. This one journalist described it as sort of a lunchtime revolution. Everybody poured onto

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the street, and then by the middle of the afternoon it had gone quiet again. They were sitting there in this café thinking: "Where's everybody gone? This is independence, freedom," whatever. But everybody had gone back to Katutura, forgotten about work, and for days and days and days people were just partying, and celebrating, and whatever, but in town it was much more subdued because suddenly this realization that SWAPO had won, it was a lot for people to swallow.

JK: Well, just to finish up – because now I know we're getting late, and you wanted to get going, too – what, in summary, what were your impressions of the U.N.'s role, and do you have any kind of feeling that the U.N. could have done a better job or in some ways, how the U.N. might improve what it does?

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DL: Obviously they could have done a better job from 1978, but the U.N. is a conglomerate of governments, and that's where you're always going to be compromised. As far as day-to-day basis, I think the U.N. civil servants did a miraculous job considering the constraints that they had. I mean, why did April one happen? April one happened because they didn't have any people on the ground. No one ever thought this through. And Namibia, in that respect – and I think that's the main legacy, even if we see it today – there was a quick-fix solution, as far as the major powers were concerned, and the U.N. had to implement a very quick-fix and poorly thought-out solution to an ongoing, very protracted conflict. And basically the main powers wanted Namibia off the agenda: "Get it settled. Sort it out. The Cold War's over. Namibia's not particularly significant. The big one's South Africa. Get Namibia out of the way. Get it done. Get it

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sorted, but without spending too much money, please." So that was the job which they had to do, and they pulled it off miraculously, to many extents, but yeah, what have you got? Today, nine years down the line, you've got a constitution which, at independence, was heralded as wonderful, decent, supreme law that nine years down the line no one really understands. Because why? It was never debated. Whereas the South African thing went through years and years of debate, and civil society involvement, and rewriting, and real participatory politics, Namibia? You had a month. It was drafted behind closed doors. The only people who had a say in that thing was the political parties, who basically did their trading – political orchestrating – behind closed doors. You had three international drafters, the U.N. trying to hold it together, and it's past. It's gone. So today you've got a constitution which very few people understand. Certainly the democratic principles are still being worked out. What does your fundamental rights mean? Everyone's still working that out, and okay great, the constitution's there as this sort of backstop, at least there as sort of the final thing, but its in a process which is going through after the event, rather than during the drafting process. You've got a whole lot of issues that have been unresolved and carry on, which have never been addressed or resolved because of the speed. Basically Namibia went from war to peace and independence in a space of a year, 12 months. You know, wham-bam thank you ma'am. It's through – done, so very little addressing of issues, very little soul searching. So then you've got a government comes in with national reconciliation. What are we reconciling? These sorts of things haven't been thought through because of the speed in which the process was implemented. But South Africa was the big one as far as the main U.N. powers were concerned. It's where all their political, financial, commercial,

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economic interests were. Namibia was insignificant in that respect, so get it sealed and as cost effectively as possible. But, as I say, considering those constraints, what happened was pretty miraculous. So they did a pretty good job, I suppose.

JK: Well thank you so much. I think that this was really enlightening, and I appreciate your taking the time to do this. Thank you very much.

DL: Pleasure.

End of Interview

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Yale–UN Oral History Project
David Lush
Jean Krasno, Interviewer
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