

Tears of Courage: Five Mothers, Five Stories, One Victory

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Abstract

In the year 2000 the Namibian Government developed a project called “*Archives of Anti-Colonial Resistance and Liberation Struggle*” with the sole purpose of identifying, collecting and repatriating Namibian historical material to the National Archives of Namibia where they would be promoted for research and education and to help the country to cope with its past trauma of colonialism and apartheid. The project is researching, capturing, documenting, promoting and preserving the histories of not only the ‘dominant voices’ among the colonised people of Namibia, but to unveil memories about hidden voices, untold and forgotten stories of the ordinary men and women of our liberation struggle.

This paper focuses on oral history research which was carried out in this context, namely, on the life of five women from Northern Namibia who received, helped, nursed and sheltered freedom fighters during the early period of Namibia’s liberation struggle (1966-1968). The stories of these five women present their experiences of being secretly arrested in Namibia and exiled to prisons in South Africa; the agony of being arrested while pregnant and having to give birth to a child in prison in a foreign country; the humiliation of being arrested in front of their children; the pain of being unable to mourn the death of an unborn baby and the humiliation of being classified as an enemy subject under apartheid and forced into poverty and destitution. They are life histories neglected in the dominant liberation discourse which focuses on “the men with the guns”, whose achievements would not have been possible without the silent resilience of such women.

These stories will be published in August 2009 in a book with the title “*Tears of Courage: Five Mothers, Five Stories, One Victory*”. Through listening, recording and writing “Tears of Courage” I appreciate the past more than ever before as I watched my respondents going through the pain of unloading the stories that were suppressed for years and years, and breaking into tears throughout these interviews and in the end hope that speaking out about the past would help to heal the wounds of the trauma of the brutal past.

The reasons for writing about the stories of these women, the process of writing, selecting these particular five and the challenge of getting them to talk; how these stories would contribute to understanding our past, promoting historical debate, recognition of our local history and appreciation of those who suffered for our freedom and national independence.