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# Remembering St. Therese:

*A Namibian Mission School and the Possibilities for its Students*

by

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**A dissertation submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of Master of Arts.**

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Declaration:

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

SIGNATURE

DATE

Signed by candidate

07/09/2002

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## *Abstract*

Scholars have often analyzed missions that seem to have taken advantage of indigenous people or that demonstrate ‘the two-edged sword consensus’, that the missionized used the mission to assert their interests in spite of missionaries’ intentions. Likewise, studies of apartheid education tend to focus on how it maintained the status quo or led students to rebel against it. There are mission schools, however, that have created an environment that enabled students to pursue their own goals through the institution itself.

St. Therese, a mission school in southern Namibia, was such a place for students who attended it between 1973 and 1976. Through a review of government and school records and interviews with former students, teachers and missionaries, I show that many students who attended St. Therese during the mid-1970s have lived professional lives that differ markedly from most of their families and contemporaries, who struggled to meet their basic needs. I use ethnographic and historical detail to argue that the school enabled students to break from the status quo and achieve “success” as they and many others from their background have perceived it. I focus the latter part of the study on students who became politically active while attending St. Therese and explain how the school created conditions in which some students identified with the “struggle”, led a strike at the school in 1976 and joined SWAPO’s national liberation movement in exile.

Performance is the guiding metaphor of this ethnography, used to contextualise the ‘roles’ that St. Therese students played with the social ‘scripts’ in their possession. The limitations of and possibilities for former students’ performance of their memories in the present are also considered.

## *Acknowledgements*

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I also acknowledge the assistance of individuals with whom I have discussed my dissertation. Particularly, I thank Regan Bullers, my Peace Corps accomplice in Tses, with whom I shared so many Namibian teaching and research experiences and who offered her keen editorial eye to a draft of this text. Similarly, I thank Dr. Sally Frankental and Dr. Fiona Ross of the University of Cape Town's Social Anthropology Department for their close readings, challenging questions and repeated encouragement of my work.

Finally, I dedicate this text to the students of St. Therese. May they succeed in leading lives that are fulfilling for them and for others.

# Map 1: Contemporary Namibia and Southern Africa

Source: National Geographic Society, Washington D.C., 1998

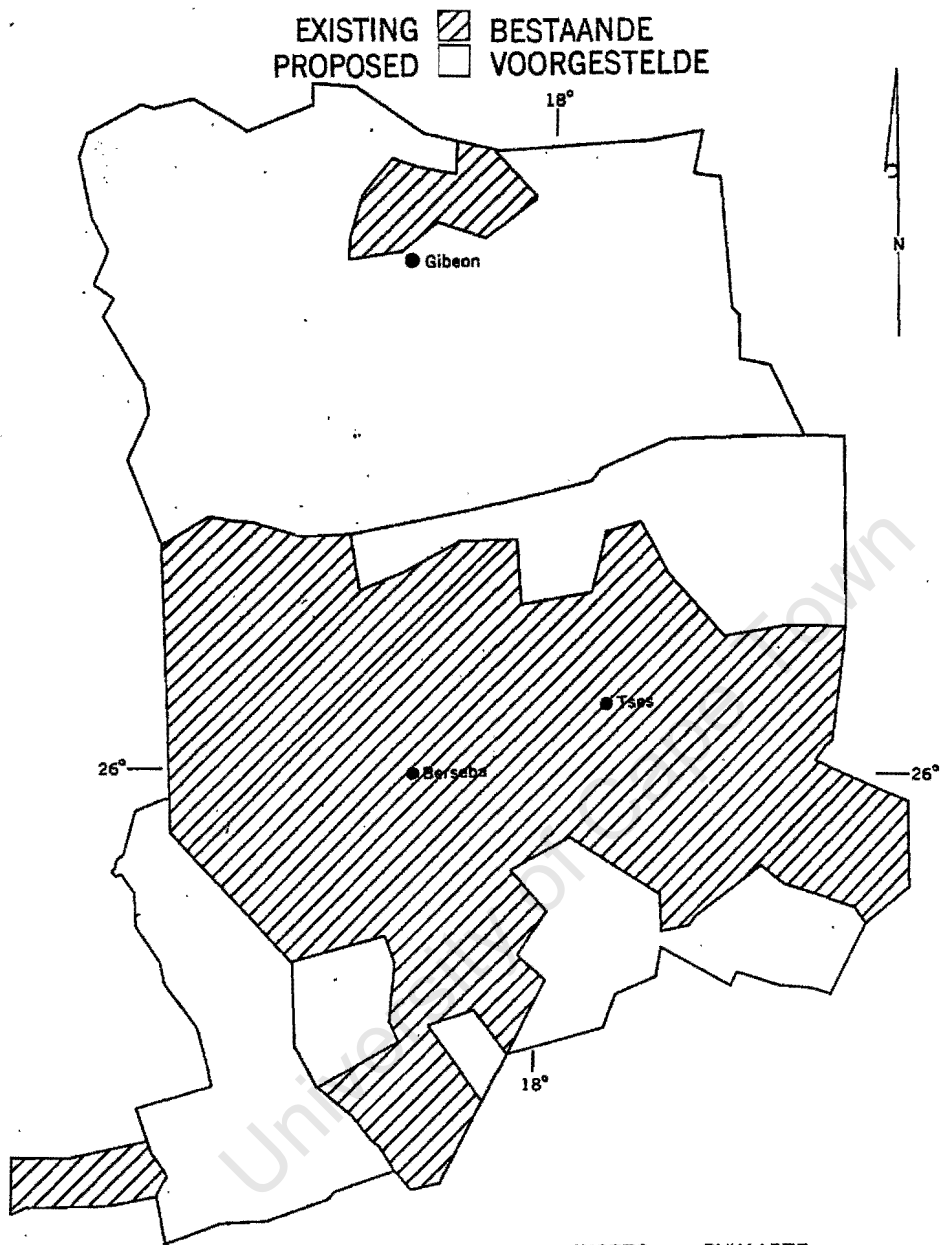




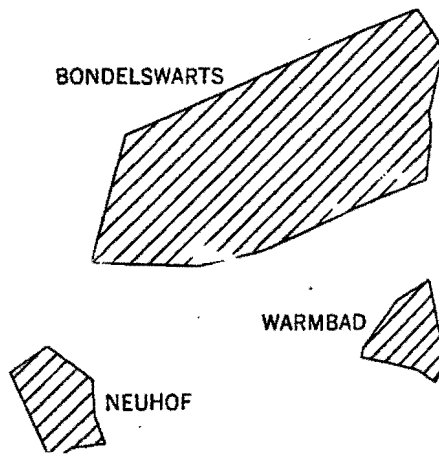


# Map 4: Namaland and the Preexisting Reserves

Source: Odendaal Plan 1964- Figure 26



INSETS    BYKAARTE



**Appendix 1: St. Therese Students (1973 to 1976) in Exile**

\* = Died in exile

# 'CLASS' refers to the year in which the student completed Standard X or was projected to complete Standard X.

^ 'Frontline' refers to military service in or near combat.

NAME	CLASS#	INTO		POSTS BEFORE AND IN EXILE	CURRENT POST (2002)
		EXILE	IN PRISON		
Boys, Ben	1972	1978	1984-1989	St. Therese teacher (1976) SWAPO Administration SWAPO Representative to Zambia Principal at Hosea Kutako, Cuba (1983)	Namibian Institute for for Educational Development
*Goraseb, Elias	1973	1982	1982-1983/4	Lecturer at Fort Hare University Teacher at Martin Luther High School	
*Stephanus, Lukas	1973	1978	1984-killed	Deputy Secretary of Education	
Isaack, Jafet	1974	1978	1984-1989	UNIN, MA in Politics in India Diplomacy course in Kenya	Foreign Ministry
Gawanas, Bience	1974	1978	1988-1989	UNIN, taught refugees Principal at Hendrik Witbooi, Cuba LLB in U.K. Leader in Anti-Apartheid Movement in U.K.	Ombudsman
Basson, Andries	1975	1978	1983-1989	PLAN intelligence and military officer	Security business Commercial farmer
Basson, Theresia	1976	1976	1985-1989	Field nurse Studied medicine in Zambia	CEO of Hardap Regional Council
Katuamba, Jacob	1976	1979	not arrested	UNIN, studied in France	Economic attache to Malaysia
*Katzao, Josef 'B'	1976	1979	1982-?		
*Katzao, Josef 'M'	1976	1982	1982-1983	Political course in Bulgaria	
Konjore, Johannes	1976	1980	1984-1989	SWAPO leadership in Namibia Political course in Eastern bloc PLAN frontline^	Died of illness in 1993
Meyer, Willem	1976	1976	1985-1989	PLAN frontline Studied language and law in Bulgaria	Sales Manager for Cola-Cola in the South
Motinga, Josef	1976	1976	1984-1989	Taught refugees Portuguese translator Studied journalism in Romania	Chief Information Officer of National Assembly
Motinga, Stephanus	1976	1976	1986-1989	UNIN Studied public enterprises in Yugoslavia MA in Econometrics in U.K.	Ministry of Trade and Industry
Stephanus, Joseph	1976	1976	1985-1989	UNIN, SWAPO Youth League	CEO of Karas Regional Council
Swartbooi, Stefanus	1976	1976	1983-1989	UNIN, taught refugees Principal at Hosea Kutako, Cuba (1982)	Namibia Development Trust COD Coordinator for Karas
Khabes, Sarah	1977	1979	1984-1989	Studied in Denmark Taught in Cuba	Teacher in Hoachanas
*Basson, Nico	1978	1976	1984/5-?	PLAN intelligence officer	
*Biwa, Richard	1978?	1976	not arrested	Radio in Angola and Zambia Died of malaria in Tanzania	
Copper, Solomon	1978	1976	1986-1989	UNIN, Agricultural Studies in USA	Research Institute in Kavango
Gooieman, Fred	1978	1976	1984/5-1989	UNIN, PLAN frontline	journalist for Die Republiken
*Hange, Joseph	1978?	1978	1984-?	PLAN frontline-Typhoon unit	
Humphries, Harry	1978?	1980/81	not arrested	Taught refugees Studied in Britain, PLAN frontline	Ministry of Labour for Karas
Kahuika, Saul	1978	1976	1985-1989	UNIN, BA and postgraduate in U.K.	Namibian Public Research Unit
Kamungu, Sebastian	1978?	1980/81	not arrested	Taught refugees Studied in U.K.	SWAPO Party Official
Motinga, Ben	1978	1976	1985-1989	PLAN frontline Officer training in Tanzania Zambia Broadcasting	unemployed
Stephanus, Damianus	1978?	1978	1984-1989	PLAN frontline-Typhoon unit	Died in a car accident

Appendix 2: Other St. Therese Professionals

NAME	CLASS	CURRENT POST
Apollus, Jacobus	1973	Principal at Mariental Primary School
Kapere, Aser	1973	Member of Parliament- Erongo Region (St. Therese teacher: 1974)
Katzao, Johannes	1973	Professor of Education at UNAM
Kisting, Martin	1973	Ministry of Finance
Konjore, Josef	1973	Principal of St. Therese Junior Secondary School
Koopan, Johannes	1973	Principal of Don Bosco Primary School in Keetmanshoop (St. Therese teacher and principal: 1977-1989)
Pieters, Josef	1973	Principal at Dawib Junior Secondary School in Maltahöhe
Kapere (Helu), Maria	1975	Ministry of Environment and Tourism
Cohlman, Johannes	1976	Agricultural Officer for Karas
Kanases, Paulina	1976	Councilor in Keetmanshoop, Former Deputy Mayor
April, Sophia	1977	Principal at S.C. Vries Primary School in Snyfontein
Hansen, Efraim	1977	Manager at Shell Company
Jacobs, Simon	1977	Manager at Ostrich Production Namibia
Jossop, Fritz	1977	Ministry of Justice, Councilor in Karasburg
McKay, Joseph	1977	NAMCOL (Adult Learning)- Coordinator for the Southern Region
Swartbooi, Josef	1977	Principal at Nowak Primary School

NOTABLE ST. THERESE FIGURES FROM OTHER YEARS

Konjore, Willem	1965	Deputy Speaker of Parliament
!Goraseb, Mattheus	1966	Subject Advisor for Khoi-khoi for Karas (St. Therese teacher and principal: 1971-1983)
Goliath, Stephanus	n/a	Governor of the Karas Region (St. Therese teacher and principal: 1972-1977, 1982-1986)

## Preface

The following pages present the story of students who attended St. Therese, a Namibian mission school, between 1973 and 1976. These dates coincide with the period when St. Therese was the only secondary school for blacks<sup>1</sup> south of Windhoek (1964 to 1974) and the only school offering Standards IX and X for blacks in the same region (1973 to 1978). The pages also describe students' professional lives subsequent to their time at the school. The latter part of the account focuses on a subset of these students, those who became politically active while attending St. Therese and who joined the Namibian liberation movement in exile following a strike that they led at the school in 1976.

Many students who attended St. Therese in the mid-1970s have lived lives that differ markedly from those of others from a similar background. My interviews with former St. Therese students, teachers and mission workers in conjunction with government and school records clearly demonstrate this point. Former St. Therese students have become teachers and nurses, civil servants and managers in the private sector, some holding positions of regional and national leadership. Students who traveled into exile had incomparable educational opportunities, were in most cases arrested as so-called "spies"<sup>2</sup> and occupy some of the most influential government posts in contemporary Namibia. These lives differ markedly from those of most blacks in the South<sup>3</sup> during the same years. The latter have struggled to meet their

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term 'black' to refer to the indigenous peoples of Africa, in contrast to 'coloureds' and 'whites'. As I will demonstrate, there was and continues to be a large difference in how these groups have accessed resources in Namibia and South Africa. The use of these terms in this research is complicated, however, by the various ways in which the South African government classified the St. Therese students during the apartheid years. St. Therese was founded as a 'Nama school' shortly after South Africa established its program of Bantu Education in Namibia in 1962. Originally, the school followed the dictates of Bantu education, despite the fact that Namas, as people with Khoi origins, speak a Khoi-San, not a Bantu, language. In 1969 when the South African government reshuffled its education department to gain more central control over Namibia, they transferred jurisdiction over the Namas from the Department of Bantu Education to the Department of Coloured Relations and Rehoboth Affairs. The latter department served as an umbrella for Coloureds, Rehoboth Basters and Namas but had a separate dispensation for the Namas, whose educational opportunities were similar to those educated under Bantu Education. As I argue in Chapter III, the coloureds generally had more education, held more professional positions and received higher salaries than did those classified as Nama and Bantu-speakers. Thus, Namas had much in common with Bantu-speakers even though Namas and Bantu-speakers were not part of the same government department after 1969. More to the point, former St. Therese students often refer to themselves as "black" and clearly identify with Bantu-speakers in the context of the struggle. Therefore, I refer to Bantu and Khoi-San groups as black.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this dissertation I use double quotes to mark others' words or a textual excerpt and single quotes to indicate my own quotation marks. In some cases, like the use of the term 'spies' to indicate individuals detained by SWAPO during the liberation struggle, both uses of quotes apply.

<sup>3</sup> In Namibia (See Map 1) there are two areas commonly referred to as "the South." The first is the area south of the Red Line, a border which the Germans established in 1896 to separate livestock to the

basic needs through a combination of subsistence farming, government pensions and contributions from family members working on commercial farms or in the mines or towns of southern Namibia.

Explanations for why and how children raised by uneducated goat herders and homemakers became teachers or traveled hundreds of kilometers to join a liberation struggle led by strangers from a different ethnic group, are much more difficult to establish. There is, however, no doubt that people with whom students spent their time influenced students' actions and their break from the status quo. Family, neighbors, friends, church members, classmates, teachers and missionaries are among the people with whom St. Therese students interacted most consistently, the people who socialized them. Through these encounters former students learned to identify with racial, ethnic, regional, gender, religious, school and political groups. All of these people and identities could have influenced students' decisions. Nonetheless, I argue that St. Therese, the people at the school, students' identification with the school and 'the culture of success' that developed there, impacted significantly on the lives that many students have lived. I use both ethnographic and historical detail to demonstrate how many students' lives changed through their experiences at St. Therese.

The fact that a string of people socialized St. Therese students indicates that St. Therese was not 'the reason' why students became professionals or joined the liberation movement in exile. Nor is it useful to describe St. Therese or any other element as the 'main reason' for students' actions. In fact, St. Therese was so influential on the lives of its students in the mid-1970s because of how the ideas and people that came together in that space resonated with students' previous experiences. Without those who influenced St. Therese students outside the school, the school itself would have had a different effect on students. With those people and influences, the school *enabled* students to live lives radically different from those of others from a similar background. Likewise, St. Therese created conditions in which it was *possible* for students to identify with national politics and actively support the South

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south from a rinderpest outbreak to the north. This line has subsequently separated white-owned commercial farmland with pockets of black settlement to the south from black-owned communal land to the north (See Map 2). I refer to the land south of the Red Line as the 'Police Zone' (as it is often called in Namibian literature) or as 'southern and central Namibia.' The other use of the term South in Namibia refers to land extending south of Rehoboth, the contemporary Hardap and Karas Regions. It is this region which I refer to as 'the South' in this text. Later, I refer to the area north of the Red Line as 'the North.'

West African People's Organization (SWAPO)<sup>4</sup> that was leading the armed struggle to liberate Namibia.

Clearly, a purely structural argument would be inadequate, even misleading, for analyzing St. Therese. St. Therese students were not a 'product' of certain 'conditions.' Many became professionals despite the 'poverty circle' of their social-economy and asserted themselves in "the struggle" despite growing up with families in which little was known about national politics. Even St. Therese, a society in and of itself, did not 'produce' identical alumni/alumnae.<sup>5</sup> People from the same social background, even siblings of the same gender, responded to their education differently such that, for example, one returned to the reserve to live with family and the other traveled into exile and studied in Europe. Still, a post-structural analysis of St. Therese could be equally misleading. Students at the school did not have boundless choices and opportunities. On the contrary, blacks in southern Namibia lived, and still live, lives in which their options are limited by a harsh geography, social-economy and history. And, of course, St. Therese students, like all people, have learned to cope with their world from the limited range of others with whom they have spent their time.

In order to explain the possibilities for action that St. Therese opened to students without reverting to simplistic humanist explanations, I employ performance as a metaphor for students' actions. Performance provides a language for discussing the relationship between structure and individual agency, between limitations and possibilities. Moreover, the value of performance does not end with my analysis of St. Therese history; it applies equally to how students 'performed' their memories during my fieldwork and how additional memory 'performances' may benefit former students and the current school. Furthermore, musical and theatrical performance are arts in which I am personally interested and central to the work that I did at St. Therese before I had any intentions of conducting anthropological research there. By remembering performance at St. Therese, I contextualise my personal relationship to the school, and, in turn, explain how I use performance in this analysis.

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<sup>4</sup> SWAPO is the political party which led Namibia's armed liberation struggle beginning in 1966. It has been the ruling party of the country since its independence from South Africa in 1990.

<sup>5</sup> Henceforth I use alumni as a gender-neutral term to refer to former students at St. Therese.

## I. Prologue: Performance at St. Therese

On Saturday, October 13, 2001 in the Namibian town of Keetmanshoop, St. Therese Junior Secondary School performed a musical drama, *||Awab tsi Hurib*.<sup>6</sup> The performance was the climactic event of the year for the school's drama group. For me the evening was also the culmination of two years of teaching in Tses, the Namibian reserve, village and mission station<sup>7</sup> where I had served as a WorldTeach volunteer.<sup>8</sup>

There are many factors that led to the creation of *||Awab tsi Hurib* and the final Keetmanshoop performance. Since the drama was my pet project, I should begin by describing why and how I became involved in Namibian school dramas. As part of my academic exploration as an undergraduate at Yale University in the United States, I took an anthropology class that focused on Africa. This class, in conjunction with memories of movies I had seen, stories I had read and music I had heard from the continent previously, riveted my attention. I was already considering serving as a foreign volunteer after graduating from college, an opportunity to use some of the knowledge and skills that I had gained through years in school to help someone else while allowing me the chance to explore another part of the world and focus my long term academic interests and professional plans. As my interest in Africa grew, so did my wish to volunteer there. When I discovered the WorldTeach Namibia program, it seemed to fit my designs perfectly: a one-year commitment to teach in a needy community in Namibia, a fascinating country by all accounts. I applied to the program, was accepted and in January 2000 departed for Windhoek, the capital, where I trained for three weeks with other volunteer teachers before traveling south to my post in Tses.

Upon arrival in Tses, I discovered that I was to be the grade 8 and grade 10 English teacher at St. Therese Junior Secondary School (grades 8, 9 & 10), one of two schools on the Tses Mission.<sup>9</sup> In addition to this work, ostensibly the reason why the

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<sup>6</sup> *||Awab tsi Hurib* literally means 'the string and the sea.' It is the name of a proverb used by some Nama-speakers that explains the danger of foregoing one's cultural roots. According to the proverb, if we begin to pull a string from our culture, then our cultural clothes may unravel completely, leading to the chaos of the sea. Brother Ignatius (See footnote 15) and I selected the title because the proverb represents the difficulties of negotiating inherited culture and cultural changes and because it comes from the local idiom. Interestingly, most current St. Therese learners are not familiar with the proverb.

<sup>7</sup> I use the name 'Tses' in this text to refer to the village and the mission station which sits next to it. If I wish to isolate the mission or discuss the reserve in which the village and mission lie, I refer to the 'Tses Mission' and the 'Tses Reserve' respectively.

<sup>8</sup> WorldTeach is a development agency for teachers run through the Harvard Institute for International Development.

<sup>9</sup> Nowak Primary School, the other school on the Tses Mission, serves grades 1 to 7.

Namibian government and the school needed my assistance, the local community had other expectations of me. These varied from formal positions at St. Therese such as teaching Religious and Moral Education, directing the school's choir and leading its debate team, to informal ones such as taking photographs for anyone and everyone in the village, allowing certain people to clean the house to make extra money, etc. During those first months in Tses, I struggled to live up to, and in some cases remake, others' expectations of me, not to mention taking control of classroom discipline and dealing with culture shock.

Therefore, in March when Mr. Konjore, the principal of St. Therese, recommended that I start a drama program at the school, I had reservations. Soon, however, I became enamored with the idea. I love musical theatre, which Mr. Konjore had noted in my CV and which had prompted his suggestion. Naturally, I liked the thought of beginning an activity which I enjoyed at the school, and I believed the students would also enjoy musical theatre, considering the rich choral tradition and interest in cultural performance<sup>10</sup> that I observed during my first weeks in Tses. Moreover, as I considered why learners<sup>11</sup> were often not academically successful in school and consequently why I struggled to teach them, drama seemed very well suited to confront these impediments to their education.

Certainly drama had the potential to improve students' English skills. English has been a very important language in Namibia ever since the country's independence from South Africa in 1990 when the new government declared it the national language. The administration decided to implement English as a lingua franca for Namibia's different ethnic groups and hoped that the language would also link the country into the international community. In addition to its significance in Namibia's scheme for nation building, English is also the medium of instruction for all students from grade 3 onwards<sup>12</sup> and is a necessary skill for many jobs. Still, Afrikaans is more commonly used as a lingua franca in central and southern Namibia, and many people, particularly those educated before 1990<sup>13</sup> living in the rural regions, speak

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<sup>10</sup> I use the term cultural performance to distinguish from social performance, which I discuss later in this chapter. Victor Turner also makes this distinction in *The Anthropology of Performance* (Turner 1986: 81).

<sup>11</sup> I often refer to contemporary St. Therese students as 'learners' since they are referred to as such in post-independence Namibia. The term was not used, however, in the 1970s.

<sup>12</sup> Although English medium instruction is national policy, it is often not local practice. English is used in the classroom at St. Therese, but many learners have limited instruction before arriving there.

<sup>13</sup> Before independence English had been a school subject but not usually the medium of instruction. At St. Therese the medium of instruction had been Afrikaans.

little or no English. Not surprisingly, learners in Tses tend not to use English outside of the classroom<sup>14</sup> aside from their conversations with the volunteers and the Christian Brothers<sup>15</sup> on the mission.

Drama rehearsals could provide another context in which students would use English. I conducted rehearsals and wrote scripts primarily in English. The cast needed to become intimately familiar with their lines so that they could act and react accordingly on stage. I also used the drama as a resource for teaching English in class. I incorporated cassette tapes of the St. Therese dramas in my English classes for listening comprehension exercises and as material for discussing elements of a story. The dramas proved helpful both because all of the students were familiar with them and seemed to enjoy the stories by the time I used them in the classroom and because the school's literature resources are limited.

More than just an English exercise, I also thought that drama could address a more fundamental problem that afflicts learners in Tses, namely, that most students do not connect their efforts and discipline in school with success in life. Students, like teachers and other community members, speak ad nauseam about how they need education "to make a success" of their lives. They seem quite fervently to believe that there is a connection between their schooling and their ability to receive a desirable job, support their families and achieve a respected social status. And yet, many students put little or no effort into their schoolwork. Why?

The roots of the problem lie in the discrepancy between the South's social-economy and the academic/professional goals of many St. Therese students (See Chapter III and Chapter VIII). With respect to individual St. Therese learners today, it seems that many have rarely or never experienced 'success' through consistent, hard work. In the rural South a few men watch after goats while women take care of household chores, but there are no crops to till and few make commodities to sell. Rather, many people derive a meager income from their livestock and must rely on money from relatives on far away farms, mines and towns or on the pensions received by Namibians over 60 years of age. Entire families and communities live from such

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<sup>14</sup> In Tses most people speak Afrikaans and Nama, a Khoi-khoi language that descends from this indigenous group to southern Africa. Nama is also a common ethnic identity for people living in Tses today.

<sup>15</sup> The Christian Brothers, a teaching order of the Catholic Church, moved to Tses in 1998. They provide extramural services to the school and community but are not involved in formally running the mission. There are currently three Brothers living in Tses including Brother Ignatius, who has done much of the musical work for the dramas.

contributions. People, in turn, become dependent on the work of others and do not easily develop the drive to try and provide for themselves and their families. Rampant alcohol abuse, a symptom of seemingly hopeless dependency, further impairs people's ability to work effectively. St. Therese learners, therefore, grow up with few examples of the work they must do to pursue common models for success in their society.

Other activities in which people find meaning, such as cultural performances, tend to reflect the same approach to work. For example, there is an abundance of choirs in Tses but most do not meet regularly and few 'members' attend rehearsals consistently. Although the choir of which I was a member would rehearse new songs, we usually performed old familiar hymns which members could pull out at the last moment for a church service or function deemed particularly important. The same observation holds true for annual performances at the school such as the Mr. and Miss St. Therese Pageant and the Cultural Festival, both of which rely heavily on acts that have been done in the past and for which preparations are made almost exclusively in the week, if not the day, before the event. There is no doubt that people enjoy performing old songs and acts, but performers involved in all of these activities regularly discuss how they "must" polish old numbers and prepare new routines that garner the attention and respect of others. They are often frustrated with others' non-attendance at rehearsals and believe that they could perform better if others were only "more committed."

There are certainly reasons why people prepare for performances at the last moment. Tses residents have unpredictable social commitments that are part and parcel of their efforts to make ends meet. Choir members may miss rehearsal because they are earning an extra income washing someone's clothes, are needed to take care of a child or are stranded elsewhere without transport or money to return to Tses. Nonetheless, there are few examples in preparations for performances, or any other context, of people working consistently towards long-term goals. It seems, therefore, that the approach to work precipitated through blacks' position in the South's economy has developed a momentum of its own and influences the way in which people live all aspects of their lives.

Although I had not fully developed this understanding of my learners' background by March 2000, it seemed to me then, as now, that musical drama was well suited to develop students' work ethic and boost their pride. If students could

create a successful show, a polished product that could garner the attention of the larger community, then they would see their success, that they were and are capable of creating something of which they can be proud. In order to put together a musical, not to mention a polished performance, they would also have to work consistently for months to prepare for it. If they could persevere, they would have recognized that commitment and diligence were necessary to make the drama successful. Perhaps through musical theatre I could coax some students into working hard and consistently to create a quality production. In turn, I hoped that students would apply a similar ethic as they pursued their dreams for their own lives and communities.

The rest, as they say, 'is history.' After quite a struggle to gather a committed cast, in September 2000 St. Therese performed *Oliver!*, our version of the popular musical based on the Charles Dickens novel *Oliver Twist*. The school, community and invited guests received the show very well. Following the initial performance, students expressed great interest in becoming involved in "the Oliver group" and many people who saw the first performance asked us to perform "the Oliver drama" again. So in March 2001 we put together a reprieve of *Oliver!* before beginning work on a new drama that combined songs, dances and plot from *Fiddler on the Roof*, *Ipi Tombi* and the local community. We performed the product, *||Awab tsi Hurib*, in September 2001 and were subsequently invited by members of the regional government to take the show to Keetmanshoop where we performed at Suiderlig High School on October 13. Since then, the Namibian Broadcasting Corporation has covered the St. Therese drama program on its television show "Tutaleni", and a new volunteer with a background in drama education has traveled to Tses to replace me while I have moved south to Cape Town where I write this dissertation, remembering St. Therese.

Although I remember many St. Therese drama rehearsals and the performances fondly, I find the October 13 performance of *||Awab tsi Hurib* in Keetmanshoop particularly gratifying. The cast and script remained exactly as they had in every previous rehearsal and performance that September and October; the show was not the same, however. The stage was physically different from the one on which we had rehearsed in Tses, and actors had to adapt to the new setting. The learners' actions were qualitatively different that night as well. Actors 'rose to the occasion', performing their parts with a sensitivity and panache that exceeded other performances. As one successful act followed another and the audience of strangers

laughed and applauded, I could feel myself and others on stage becoming increasingly confident that we could play our parts exceptionally in that moment. In this way the performance took on a life of its own.

The Keetmanshoop performance has also taken on a significance for me that I cannot recount with a description of what occurred on stage or a video of the show. The event encapsulates what I find most meaningful in my Tses experiences. It represents the culmination of my English teaching and learners' English achievements at St. Therese. It also symbolizes the work ethic and pride that some learners developed in the course of their involvement with drama. At the least, learners enjoyed acting, singing and dancing, recognized that the show was popular and appreciated the positive feedback of many peers, teachers and leaders in the larger society. At the most, they were proud that "such a small place (i.e. St. Therese and Tses) brought up such a big thing (i.e. the drama)" (Charles Christiaans: October 13, 2001). Hopefully, Charles and others will not soon forget their performance experience, and the work ethic and pride which they developed will continue to guide their actions in the future.

This ability to create something original with a particular resonance for those involved is the *potential* inherent to performance whether staged in a literal theatre in Keetmanshoop or in the setting of our daily lives. In a sense, we are all 'actors' who inherit social 'scripts' written by family, neighbours, friends, colleagues, congregants, comrades and the larger society, that give guidelines for what we should do and who we should be. We refer to these scripts when we act. Each one of us holds multiple scripts, however, and the scripts are not identical. The 'stage directions' often do not fit 'the stage' on which we 'perform' our daily lives. Sometimes we 'rise to the occasion' in our performances, whereas other times we find our acting less appropriate, beneficial or inspired. Nonetheless, performance always *enables* us to act in our own way and holds particular meanings for those involved.

It is with these qualities of performance in mind and my experiences in Tses as a reference point, that I turn to a series of social dramas<sup>16</sup> performed by students who attended St. Therese during the mid-1970s.

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<sup>16</sup> I use 'social drama' metaphorically to describe what Victor Turner calls "social performance" (Turner 1986: 81-84). Turner uses "social drama" in a narrower sense (Turner 1986: 33-46).

### *St. Therese as Social Drama*

During my first twenty months in Namibia, I learned that St. Therese had graduated a number of students who had since become local and national leaders in education, government and the private sector. This point struck me as interesting for a number of reasons. First, I was startled by the number of leaders who had apparently attended St. Therese. Second, those I met surprised me with their knowledge of national and international issues, their ability to express themselves and their command of English. These characteristics stood in marked contrast with both my expectations for the educational opportunities that would have been available to them during the apartheid era and with the educational standards as I perceived them at St. Therese when I was teaching there. Third, I was surprised that St. Therese teachers rarely mentioned the school's alumni and soon discovered that they knew very little about the school's history from before 1996. Many had heard that the school once had Standard IX and X classes (it no longer has grades 11 and 12)<sup>17</sup>, but they did not know the events surrounding the closing of these standards. Mr. Konjore was the exception, for he had graduated in St. Therese's first matriculation class in 1973 and referred to 'the old days' at St. Therese in his talks with learners and teachers, but even he seemed to have limited knowledge of the school's history between 1973 and his return to St. Therese as principal in 1996. Fourth, I found it unusual how little involvement most former graduates had in the contemporary workings of the school. The more former graduates I met, the more surprising this fact became, for many of them seemed to take great pride in the fact that they had been educated at St. Therese.

There are personal reasons why I found this separation of the school from its history so surprising. As a child, I attended The Haverford School, a boys' preparatory school on the Main Line outside of Philadelphia. During my thirteen years there, teachers and administrators talked often about the school's history and graduates. Former students returned regularly to campus for sporting competitions, cultural events and lectures. Employees at the school's Development Office worked to encourage alumni support for Haverford, and students, including myself, were often enlisted to advertise school events and solicit donations. In all, the school cultivated a sense of institutional memory, such that I felt part of the Haverford

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<sup>17</sup> The "Standards" were used to distinguish the level of school students in Namibia until it became an independent nation in 1990. A standard equates to two levels lower than a grade in contemporary Namibia and South Africa such that Standard X is grade 12, the final year of secondary school.

legacy that began in 1884 and believed that the campus held, in the words of the school's song, "hallowed halls." My experiences at Yale only enhanced my respect for the institution to which I belonged. I felt proud to associate with the university and many of its graduates and held my experience there with a certain reverence, even as I appreciated how irreverent people could be in challenging old modes of thinking and doing.

Not surprisingly, St. Therese's lack of institutional memory caught my immediate attention. As I learned more about the school's alumni, I became very interested in their experiences and in August 2001 submitted a research proposal to the University of Cape Town's Social Anthropology Department which focused on the question of how the school affected former students' lives. In November I began actively to seek out former students of St. Therese and to learn about their backgrounds, their experiences at the school and their subsequent life stories. Likewise, I sought former teachers and missionaries at St. Therese and asked them similar questions. What I learned is recorded in the following chapters.

There are many ways that I could describe and analyse the actions of former St. Therese students while they attended the school and subsequently. Theory, narrative and metaphor each present innumerable possibilities for "making the flux of experience comprehensible" (Mink 1987: 185; quoted in Donham 1999: 8-9). In the following presentation I focus on performance as a metaphor for the actions of St. Therese students.

As I have explained, performance has an experiential resonance for me; I am inclined to think about my life in Tses and elsewhere in these terms. My decision to use performance in this dissertation is more, however, than an act of self-indulgence. As mentioned in the Preface, the lives of St. Therese students do not fit neatly into a structural analysis but are easily misconstrued by a post-structural one. If we think of students as 'actors' who 'perform' roles, then we may see how they negotiate between structures that confine their lives. On the one hand, students draw from the social 'scripts' of those whom they encounter and 'perform' on a geographical, social, economic and political 'stage' at a point in time. Thus, people's performances are not "open-ended" but confined by a particular "socio-economic location" (Robins 1997: 39). On the other hand, students are capable of performing in different ways, choosing between interpretations of scripts and adapting to stage conditions in the

moment. As a result, performance “is not merely enactment of a preexisting script; it is making, fashioning, creating” (Fabian 1990: 13).

The implications of such an approach to social analysis are far reaching. In the past, intellectuals have often analyzed human action according to humanist and determinist extremes, and anthropology’s structural-functionalists descend from the Western philosophical tradition, which has tended to relegate people to “pre-determined orderings” (Turner 1986: 84). But as Victor Turner points out “extreme individualism only understands a part of man; extreme collectivism only understands man as a part” (Turner 1986: 84). In *The Anthropology of Performance*, Turner charts a different theoretical course. He describes history as “the process of striving towards and resistance against the fulfillment of the natural law of *communitas*.”<sup>18</sup> (Turner 1986: 84). If we accept that people identify themselves with some groups and distinguish themselves from ‘others’, Turner’s assertion of a dialectical impulse between which mankind struggles, it becomes difficult to explain human activity in terms of predetermined categories. Instead, we need to conceive of social theories that account for the process by which individual and corporate actors *manage* the various structures that affect their lives. Turner believes that drama should be the unit of historical and anthropological analysis, precisely because it accounts for this process by which people act in the world, even when they are fixing, framing or following structure (Turner 1986: 78, 84). He concludes that “performances, particularly, dramatic performances, are the manifestations par excellence of human social process” (Turner 1986: 84).

Performance, as Turner describes it, makes elusive theory. By its very nature performance defies “orderings” and defines social process in terms of process. It does, however, provide a theoretical orientation for analyzing how people relate to their world that complements its metaphorical use. Given the broad expanse of social life to which performance could apply, it is ironic that anthropologists who write about it focus primarily on cultural performances themselves, such as song, theatre and poetry (Boonzaier and Sharp 1994; Coplan 1994; Fabian 1990; Robins 1997; Vail and White 1991), or a narrow definition of social drama (Turner 1986: 33-46). In this thesis, I use performance more broadly to conceptualize all human interactions as

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<sup>18</sup> Turner defines *communitas* as “the implicit law of wholeness arising out of the relations between totalities”(Turner 84). The term implies the paradox of human identity since individuals must not identify with ‘other’ totalities in order to identify with a totality.

a dynamic process between, rather than as a categorical imperative of, the individual and the structural. In turn, I attempt to better understand and explain the limits of and possibilities for human action.

What, then, are the limits and possibilities for the performance of those former St. Therese students described in the following pages? On the one hand, students have primarily performed on the physical 'stage' of southern Namibia (although a number went on to perform elsewhere in the world), and the conditions of that stage allowed students a particular range of 'motion.' Students received social 'scripts' from their family, neighbors, friends, church members, classmates, teachers and missionaries. These 'lines' and 'stage directions' informed students of how they should act and react to others and relate to the poverty and social inequality which they inherited in their society. On the other hand, each person receives many different scripts. Students had to manage their different roles; they could not possibly follow them all to the same extent. Furthermore, each person's collection of social scripts always differs somewhat from the next person's. People are continually in the process of adopting others' scripts, learning to play other roles, seeing possibilities for actions that they did not know or seemed impossible before but now seem possible or beneficial. On the 'stage' of St. Therese (a portion of southern Namibia's larger stage), students had opportunities to see different ways in which they could live their lives. There many became 'understudies' for new parts as professionals and exiles. It was in this context that some students began to perform roles that differed markedly from the scripts they had inherited from 'directors' and 'mentors' at home even as the parts they played were informed by these people.

There were also performances elsewhere that influenced the trajectories of St. Therese students' lives. Although students spent time with only a limited number of other 'characters', there were simultaneously other people performing 'off stage.' These performances influenced the people with whom students interacted and in turn students themselves, providing them with alternatives for how they should lead their lives. One of the greatly influential performances occurring off the St. Therese stage in 1973 was the Namibian liberation struggle. Just as "ordinary soldiers began to see themselves as political actors with a certain script" in the Ethiopian Revolution of 1974 (Donham 1999: 18), so did ordinary students at St. Therese begin to see themselves as political actors with a certain script in the Namibian liberation struggle. But once again, there were multiple versions of this script. Students saw the struggle

drama very much in the terms of those characters with whom they spent their time. It is they, from their myriad perspectives, who influenced how students should relate to the political aspect of their lives, whether they should identify with SWAPO, become active in national politics and join the struggle in exile. In turn, as students performed their politics, their actions imbued political events elsewhere with new meanings and led students into dramas that took on a life of their own. These dramas very often did not follow the script which their actors had in mind, a point illustrated most tragically in the torture and imprisonment of St. Therese exiles by their own liberation movement. Most of these students survived, however, and perform their social dramas in the present, dramas forever influenced by St. Therese.

Such is the performance I describe and analyze. As should be evident by now, the drama of St. Therese students, like all non-fiction, is full of dramas within dramas ad infinitum. Although I try to incorporate all of the information that I have gathered into my analysis, I necessarily highlight certain items over others since some relate more directly to my thesis. My thesis, in turn, is a product of my interests, and although these interests do not change the facts, they may change the way that I tell the tale of former St. Therese students a great deal.

For these reasons, one might view my presentation of St. Therese students' stories as a performance in and of itself. As Johannes Fabian has observed, anthropologists also perform when they write ethnography, for they must decide what knowledge to tell about a given culture and how to tell it even if the anthropologist does inherit common forms of expression (Fabian 1990: 19). The same point holds true for anyone who tells a story. As Turner writes in describing social dramas that he observed while living among the Ndembu of Zambia, when the drama has finished it is taken over by a storyteller who would "relate the humdrum village events to some pantribal cultural root paradigm or heroic legend [and] would so transmogrify the actual deeds, would so drench them with 'meaning' that I for one would rub my eyes and wonder whether the dry record of my field notes was the true illusion, not the 'marvellous tale' it had become" (Turner 1986: 40). I make no claims to story-telling brilliance, and I believe that I have material that necessitates a tale which is far from "humdrum." I am, nonetheless, a storyteller, and I will try to "drench" my tale in the meanings that I think are significant even as I follow the facts and certain anthropological norms for telling the story.

And what do I hope to accomplish in narrating this drama? First, I hope that it will prove of some benefit to scholarly literature. Although, like most ethnography, this study is limited in scope, its content applies to much larger social relationships. Anthropology, as a comparative social science, stands on the premise that from a micro-example like the study of former students of a particular mission and their lives at certain times and places, we can learn about macro-structures like missionization, education and memory and specific historical trajectories like the work of the church in Namibia, the results of and responses to apartheid education and the use of memories of the struggle in contemporary Namibia. This study draws from and contributes to all of these topics.

It is also my wish that my research will contribute to establishing an institutional memory at St. Therese. Certainly, the school has many well-known alumni. This text will outline from whence they came and how they arrived at their current positions. I hope that current staff and students at St. Therese and the larger community will be proud to learn or remember what these former St. Therese students and the school have accomplished. Also, St. Therese and its graduates from the mid-1970s have a remarkable history. As I shall demonstrate, the school enabled students to change their lives and become leaders. I hope, therefore, that St. Therese teachers and other public servants will revel in this story of the past and consider how they may use it to make education better in the present. St. Therese and other disadvantaged schools can ill-afford to ignore the resources that they have. The history of an institution and its alumni is one such resource, and a potentially powerful one at St. Therese.

Finally, I hope that this text, like many performances, leads you, the reader, to reflect. As Victor Turner writes, in performance man “reveals himself to himself.” He continues on to argue that “the actor may come to know himself better through acting or enactment; or one set of human beings may come to know themselves better through observing and/or participating in performances generated and presented by another set of human beings” (Turner 1986: 81). I know that my ‘rehearsals’ for this textual performance have helped me work through my experiences in Namibia from the past, have revealed a way that I can assist St. Therese in the present and guide me as I consider the life I may lead in the future. I hope that you will find the finished text similarly helpful, whatever your reflections may be.

## **II. Playbill: Review of Literature, Methods and Thesis**

The scholarship from which I draw in this analysis may be reduced to three categories: 'Missions and the Missionized', 'Education and Social Change' and 'Memory and Methods.' In the following literature reviews I indicate where my research fits in with other work done in these fields. Although I am indebted to these scholars and their paradigms, aspects of my work are uncommon, and I point out these distinctive elements below.

### *Missions and the Missionized*

Missions function as more than mediators of particular beliefs and rituals that fit a narrow definition of 'religion' or 'Christianity.' Rather, missions have historically served as a node, and in many cases the primary node, of exchange between Western and non-Western communities. Mission exchanges therefore have had a significant impact on the worldview and subsequent actions of those involved. Generally, missionaries have controlled the exchange and how they have done so has had serious ramifications for the missionized even as these people have reacted and asserted their own wills. In some cases missionaries have intentionally or unintentionally taken advantage of indigenous people, infringing upon their well-being or autonomy. In others, missionaries' interests have coincided with those of the indigenous people, or they have exposed locals to outside forces which serve their needs or strengthen their ability to determine their own futures. Most missions did not simply play one of these roles or have one of these effects since they were a mix of divergent interests. Some places and times have been dominated by one interest and one result more than others.

Nonetheless, there are tendencies for authors from certain backgrounds to present missions in particular ways. As one would expect, missionaries have often defended the good purpose and results of their life efforts for the church and for local populations. Scholars, often the defenders of liberal causes, have tended to emphasise ways in which missionaries, and other forces connected with colonialism, have asserted their own self-interests and subverted local will. Other groups have had different perspectives, which, in turn, have influenced missionaries and scholars. For example, politicians have defended the work of missionaries or criticized it depending

on politicians' visions for national development (See below).<sup>19</sup> Struggle activists have presented missionaries alternately as hand-maidens of colonialism and helpful allies in the struggle, the latter a particularly strong impulse in Namibia (See Chapter III).

Anthropologists, like other scholars, have often focused on the negative impact of missionary work, but their relationship with missionaries is particularly complex, given that anthropological fieldwork, like missionary evangelism and service, requires active participation with indigenous communities. On the one hand, missionaries were some of the early 'anthropologists' in that they had collected and printed a great deal of information about indigenous populations through their participation with these communities. Particularly in Africa, missionaries created orthographies for the indigenous languages of 'tribes' which anthropologists then adopted as ethnic categories for their own studies. Conversely, as anthropologists became more actively involved in the field in the twentieth century and mission priorities evolved, missionaries have used anthropologists' work in their efforts to Africanise the gospel (Etherington 1996: 208-9). Anthropologists' writing also affected colonial policies on communities where missionaries were working, sometimes pitting the two groups against one another. Notable in this regard were politicians' use of anthropology in attempts to secularise South African schools beginning in the 1930s. In this instance leaders called on anthropology's 'expert knowledge' to provide a 'scientific approach' to teaching for a particular people's 'culture.' Missionary education, the predominant mode of black South African education at the time, was, by inference, not considering the local culture in its teaching methods and was seen as a "disrupter of political stability" (Krige 1997: 494-495).

There continue to be differences in the ways in which many 'religious' and 'secular' authors approach their analysis of mission work although often along different lines than previously mentioned since the 1970s. Today many "religious"<sup>20</sup> authors are highly critical of links which they believe exist between missions and imperialism (Etherington 1996: 211). In his article "The Historiography of Christianity in Southern Africa", Norman Etherington attributes this tendency to associate previous mission work with imperialism to the increased popularity today of

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<sup>19</sup> I write 'See below' to indicate material that I discuss later in the same chapter.

<sup>20</sup> Etherington uses this term to describe individuals who are church and mission employed or part of a department of religious studies or theology.

Black Theology and Liberation Theology as well as the church's more recent roles in the anti-apartheid movement and alignment with struggle activists.

Some 'secular'<sup>21</sup> authors also focus their analyses on the links between missions and imperialism although they are more likely to root their arguments in Marxist rather than Christian terms. For example, in *Education and Politics in Namibia*, Elizabeth Amukugo applies a Marxist analysis to the interaction between missionaries and Namibia's indigenous people. Amukugo represents missionary education in Namibia as "in the service of imperialism", resulting from tensions in the development of capitalism in Germany and the country's ensuing need for colonies (Amukugo 1995: 38-40). She claims that missionaries acted with "the political motivation to convince Africans of the need for state protection", suggesting that German missionaries and the colonial government had exactly the same worldview and intentions (Amukugo 1995: 40). Likewise, she presents all missionary education of Africans as suppression of the people resulting in resistance, without considering any possible benefits for the indigenous people derived because of, or in spite of, the missionaries or why Africans joined churches in the first place. When she turns to the Namibian struggle for liberation, she explains how the church could "no longer separate itself from the oppressed" and changed its allegiance from the colonial state to the colonized (Amukugo 1995: 112). She attributes this shift to the pressure of the peasantry and working class via "the growing African membership in churches and the establishment of African churches in the place of former mission churches" (Amukugo 1995: 112). Amukugo neglects to mention, however, that most Namibian churches had had majority black congregations since their arrival in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, that most Namibians belonged to former mission churches which supported the liberation struggle by the 1970s and that churches like the Catholic Church had an almost exclusively white clergy until well after the denomination had become an outspoken supporter of Namibian liberation (Steenkamp 1995: 98-99; See Chapter III). Clearly there are cultural and historical factors that affected the relationship between missions and the missionized in Namibia that extend beyond the pale of Amukugo's analysis and other simplified explanations of imperialism and capitalist exploitation, such as those written by SWAPO during the struggle (Department of Information and Publicity, SWAPO of Namibia 1981: 12-13).

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<sup>21</sup> I use this term to distinguish those scholars who do not fall under Etherington's use of "religious."

In contrast, secular historians have come to what amounts to a two-edged sword consensus (Etherington 1996: 209). These scholars recognize that missions sought to civilize African cultures, moulding them in ways that conformed to missionaries' values and interests. At the same time, the missions provided an effective language for contesting European domination. Terrence Ranger, Leroy Vail and Landeg White are historians who have pioneered this analysis, emphasizing how missionaries' "invention" of African tradition has served missionary, colonial government and different Africans' interests in turns (Ranger 1983; Ranger 1989; Vail and White 1989). John and Jean Comaroff have conducted anthropological research that supports the two-edged nature of the mission encounter. In their two-volume work *Of Revelation and Revolution* (1991, 1997), the Comaroffs examine the dialectics of exchange between the London Missionary Society and the Tshidi-Rolong, a Tswana chiefdom. Their research emphasizes the ability of the Tshidi-Rolong to express themselves culturally on the mission, even influencing the missionaries and thereby the coloniser at home, despite the fact that such expression worked against the missionaries' modernist agenda.

Brigitte Lau's *Namibia in Jonker Afrikaner's Time* provides an example of this kind of analysis related to the economic, political and social history of central and southern Namibia during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. On the one hand, Lau contends that the indigenous people often contested missionary efforts because they saw them as connected to the colonial expansion from the Cape, "a movement they were determined to resist" (Lau 1987: 82). On the other hand, Lau documents the many ways in which the South's indigenous people used the missionaries to their advantage. These advantages included the use of the mission station as a military centre, a secure settlement with access to Western medicine, a node for the maintenance of trade with the Cape, and a platform for political control over their own people. All of these elements were essential to the politics of 19<sup>th</sup> century southern Namibia, so much so that Nama polities only existed if "a missionary came, a church was built, or both" (Lau 1987: 76).

Clearly indigenous people have used missions to their advantage. Are there not missions, however, which have pursued interests aligned with those of the indigenous people? This position seems uncommon in scholars' analyses of mission encounters. One exception is the work of the West African theologian Lamin Sanneh. In *Translating the Message* Sanneh argues that missions are the logical opposite of

colonialism given that their means and methods should encourage “a vernacular destiny for the cause” (Sanneh 1989: 105). Sanneh bases his thesis on the centrality of translation for Christian missionary work, arguing that in translating the gospel for Africans, the West was not foisting Christianity onto them but enabling Africans to gain a richer appreciation for, as well as a means of protecting, their own heritage. Sanneh does acknowledge that certain missionaries had motives to support colonialism, but he sees these motives as distinct from the common missionizing impulse and its benefits. Among these benefits Sanneh notes that the translated gospel served as its own critique of the missions such that people could use it as a weapon against those whose motives were counter to true missionary work (Sanneh 1989: 190).

It is also uncommon for scholars to trace the ways that missions have affected individuals. There are a few authors, such as Paul Landau (1991, 1995) and Michael West (1992), who trace individuals’ lives following their time on particular missions and explain how these persons subsequently referred back to and used their mission experiences. Most studies, however, focus on the mission exchange itself or the general social changes that resulted from missionaries’ presence in a certain area. Perhaps one can attribute this observation to the fact that relatively few scholars are studying 20<sup>th</sup> century missions, for it is difficult to follow the lives of 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> century mission school students outside a few individuals who became leaders and might therefore be traceable in the historical record. The question remains, however, why more academics are not considering missions and life histories in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Perhaps scholars have chosen more general analyses of mission exchanges in the past because they assume that such studies will uncover further ranging effects of missionary work. Approaches that do not focus on people’s experiences easily fall prey to flawed generalizations, however, such as those that I identify in Amukugo’s rigidly structural analysis of mission work in Namibia. Anthropology, with its methodological focus on fieldwork and ethnographic detail, seems well suited to address this shortcoming in mission analysis.

In her article “Identity and Political Consciousness in Southern Mozambique, 1930-1974: Two Presbyterian Biographies Contextualised”, Teresa Cruz E Silva combines both of the largely overlooked perspectives on missions that I have highlighted. She argues that Swiss Presbyterian Missions exposed students to a new worldview, and particularly a national, political consciousness, resulting in an

educated, national leadership in Mozambique (Cruz E Silva 1998: 226, 230). To evaluate this claim, Cruz E Silva examines two former students' lives in the context of national developments in Mozambique. She demonstrates how these individuals referred back to their school experiences as they reshaped their identity and political consciousness and contends that missions were partially responsible for creating these and other members of an educated elite.

Like Cruz E Silva, I have studied a mission school which enabled students to change their lives. I demonstrate that students' exposure to a new worldview via the people at St. Therese made it possible for them to become politically active and educated, national leaders in Namibia. I have also traced former students' lives to evaluate this claim, and these students also refer back to their school experiences as they make their lives in the present. My portrayal of how a mission school enabled students to lead lives which they coveted and how former students' experiences on the mission continue to influence them provides another perspective on the multi-faceted mission encounter.

### *Education and Social Change*

Schools are institutions that teach skills, develop habits and impart values to their students. The skills, habits and values that students develop ostensibly integrate them into society such that they become functioning and 'successful' members. School leaders, therefore, tend to express schools' roles in terms of empowerment: how the institution enables students to live lives that they could not have lived without the school. Schools, however, also have the role of allocating limited resources to members of a society. They are often organized, either implicitly or explicitly, so that students access the same resources as others from their family, gender, ethnicity, race<sup>22</sup> or class have in the past. Thus, schools are embedded in social inequalities which their leaders claim they can transcend.

It is not surprising, therefore, that when scholars theorize about education they tend to emphasize either schools' tendency to maintain or ability to change the status quo. At the one extreme is Emile Durkheim, who summarized his position with the claim that education is "only the image and reflection of society. It imitates the latter in abbreviated forms: it does not create it" (Durkheim 1897: 427; quoted in Walford

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<sup>22</sup> I use the term race in this text not to suggest that there are any inherent 'races' but to acknowledge that people perceive racial differences, and therefore, race is an influential social construct.

and Walford 1998: 4). This sentiment has born sociological theories like “Allocation Theory” and “Institutional Theory” which assert that the school and the larger society, respectively, associate educational attainment with status and benefits (Pallas 2000: 500). They emphasize the value that society puts on education at the expense of a student’s ability to transcend social structure. “Reproduction Theory”, articulated first by Althusser (1971) and later by Bowles and Gintis (1976), shifts the emphasis to a reading of political-economy. These authors argue that in a capitalist society, the dominant class moulds school policy in order to reproduce the social division of labour, thereby providing itself with needed workers. Again, the emphasis rests on education as a structure which controls social outcomes. Similarly, in *Learning to Labour* Paul Willis explains how working class “counter-school culture”, itself a reaction to capitalist economy, tends to reproduce the working class (Willis 1977).

On the other side of the spectrum are theories that suggest how education may transcend structural boundaries. For example, “Socialization Theory” maintains that schools provide individuals with knowledge about the world and tools to manipulate this knowledge (Pallas 2000: 500). This model suggests that students do acquire skills and that they may use them to change their conditions. Paulo Freire deploys a struggle discourse with its “oppressor” and “oppressed” to explain how educators may be agents of social change. Freire stresses that education can liberate individuals from social structure through “conscientization”, or “learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of the society” (Freire 1972: 15). He contrasts this ideal to “banking education”, depositing, storing and withdrawing information, which indoctrinates individuals “to adapt to the world of oppression” (Freire 1972: 52). bell hooks makes a similar distinction in her book *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, arguing that there is a critical difference between “education as the practice of freedom and education that merely strives to reinforce domination” (hooks 1994: 4). Although Freire and hooks bemoan how social and teaching norms often determine the results of education, they argue that good pedagogy can transcend this condition and in their works set out to define and implement such practices.

Clearly, schools’ relationship with students and the larger society cannot be explained entirely by one social theory; each one emphasises a different aspect of the process. The former set of theories focuses on the power of social structures, the school and society itself, for dictating certain skills, habits and values to students. The

latter set of theories focuses on the potential for agency in any performance in order to emphasize how the individual develops certain skills, habits and values at school. Although the relationship between individual education and the larger educational systems has both of these qualities, some theories will better describe the conditions of a particular school in a particular time and place.

Much of the literature around schools and social change in southern Africa, and particularly apartheid education, has focused on the ways in which the structures of the system have maintained the status quo. This emphasis is not surprising given Dr. H. F. Verwoerd's vision for education as exhibited in his defence of the Bantu Education Act of 1953:

Bantu Education must train and teach people in accordance with their opportunities in life according to the sphere in which they live (Cohen 1994: 82)... There is no place for the native in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour... Until now he has been subjected to a school system which drew him away from his own community and misled him by showing him the green pastures of European society in which he was not allowed to graze... When I have control of native education, I will reform it so that the natives will be taught from childhood to realise that equality with Europeans is not for them (Melber 1979: 68).

Verwoerd and the Nationalist Party established Bantu Education in South Africa in 1955 and in South Africa's colony of South West Africa in 1962.<sup>23</sup> They attempted to achieve their goals by establishing "a four-year primary education aimed at literacy and a utilitarian knowledge of English 'to be used in contacts with the European sector of the population'" (Ellis 1984: 23).<sup>24</sup> The remainder of the syllabus was tailored to "the black way of life" which meant instruction in black languages, tribal heritage, agriculture, religion and hygiene (Christie and Collins 1984: 161; Ellis 1984: 23). The only "academic subjects" were introduced in the senior secondary phase of education (Standards IX and X) which few reached and which were extremely difficult to pass for students who had no previous exposure to them (Amukugo 1995: 63-4). There were also extreme differences in the resources available to students from different backgrounds. For example, the ratio of state

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<sup>23</sup> South West Africa was the name of present-day Namibia in South African records until the South African protectorate became independent in 1990. The history of education in Namibia generally parallels that of South Africa, and therefore I consider scholarship on South African education to relate to Namibian education as well. I cover Namibian history more specifically in Chapter III and Chapter VI.

<sup>24</sup> This education was not mandatory. Education only became mandatory for South African and Namibian blacks at intervals after 1976.

expenditure on the education of white children to black children in South Africa in 1970 was eighteen to one (Hyslop 1999: 169). Percentages were similar in Namibia and pupil/teacher ratios considerably higher for coloureds and blacks than whites (Cohen 1994: 130, 133).

Certainly this system, designed to maintain the status quo, did so to a large extent, particularly before the 1970s when political activism heightened and outside factors forced changes both in South Africa and Namibia<sup>25</sup> (See Chapter VI). Very few black students gained access to secondary school education, let alone tertiary institutions, during these years. The argument might be made, however, that students' lack of participation in education was as much responsible for this maintenance of the status quo as their participation. In 1955 only 10% of South Africa's black population had attended school (Hyslop 1999: 151), and in Namibia in 1958 at least 70% of black children of "school-going age" were not in school (Cohen 1994: 98). Although these numbers increased rapidly in primary schools following the introduction of Bantu Education in South Africa and Namibia, it was only after 1972 that large numbers of South African students began to attend secondary school in conjunction with an expanding urban youth and state education reforms (Hyslop 1999: 150-151, 167). Between 1970 and 1975 the number of South African secondary school students tripled (Hyslop 1999:167). As more black students entered school, protests ensued that reinvigorated the liberation movement and shook the South African government to its core (Hyslop 1999: 166). Student organizations and protests in Namibia during the mid-1970s also polarised Namibian politics and strengthened SWAPO's position (See Chapter VI).

Of course, there is a paradoxical nature to this analysis. The very fact that students resisted Bantu Education because it maintained a status quo they did not like proves that schools did not entirely maintain the status quo. Therefore, we must also apply theories that incorporate social change in our study of the effects of apartheid education. As Jonathan Hyslop documents in *The Classroom Struggle: Policy and Resistance in South Africa 1940-1990*, Bantu Education engendered one of the strongest forms of resistance against itself. School conditions, such as the increase in

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<sup>25</sup> Supporters of liberation from South Africa contested the name South West Africa and proposed Namibia as an alternative long before the country officially adopted this name at independence in 1990. Therefore, one cannot easily identify 'Namibia' with a particular historical period. Henceforth, I refer to the land of contemporary Namibia as 'Namibia' unless I am specifying the political entity before 1990.

the student population in 1972, school curriculum changes, such as the administration's decision to enforce Afrikaans instruction, and intellectual currents among the students and older activists, such as members of the Black Consciousness movement, all played a role in the student protests that erupted in the 1970s and occurred at intervals until South Africa's government change in 1994 (Hyslop 1999: 150).

It seems that mission schools, in particular, played a significant role in the school protests that developed in southern Africa in the 1970s. Hyslop contends that the strikes of the 1970s stemmed from "a subculture of acting certain ways around certain issues" that had evolved at southern African mission schools as early as the 1940s (Hyslop 1986: 2). Other authors have studied the role of mission schools in political developments in Zimbabwe. In particular, Carol Summers and Michael West use their respective research to make a claim similar to Hyslop's, namely, that strikes at mission schools over matters ranging from dissatisfaction with food to perceived institutional racism became an enduring feature of African education and its political struggles (Summers 1994; West 1992). Summers also examines the efficacy of several strikes from 1920 to 1934, arguing that strikes enjoyed some success in achieving their aims and "trained" students for political activism better than they could have through any formal parts of the curriculum (Summers 1994: 25).

There is also evidence to suggest that not only strikes against but also participation in mission schools could threaten the status quo. After all, school strikes were uncommon in most regions, including Namibia, until the 1970s. And yet the Department of Bantu Education actively sought to alter and/or eradicate mission schools as part of their educational agenda so much so that there were 101 mission schools in Namibia in 1966, serving most blacks attending school, and as few as thirty by 1976, serving fewer blacks than the state schools (Cohen 1994: 105). These facts support the common thesis that the South African government disapproved of the missions' approach, were sceptical about whether mission teachers would carry out the Bantu Education syllabus, or both (Krige 1997: 494-5; Cohen 1994: 96-97; Christie and Collins 1984: 161; Ellis 1984: 25).

Cruz E Silva's article about education in Mozambique further supports the notion that schools may challenge the status quo, even against the grain of state education systems constructed to keep certain people 'in their place.' Following the Colonial Act of 1930, Portugal endeavoured to integrate the 'natives' in its colonies

through the media of Portuguese language, education and Catholicism (Cruz E Silva 1998: 225). In the 1940s the Mozambican state institutionalised the already existing separation between primary education for ‘citizens’ and ‘natives’, and blacks’ schools ostensibly led “the primitive native towards the civilised status of being Portuguese and of service to society” (Cruz E Silva 1998: 226). In this context, Protestant missions and their schools came into direct conflict with the state. Apparently, students educated at Swiss Presbyterian mission schools developed a variety of skills, habits and values that distinguished them from students educated elsewhere, including exposure to different Mozambican cultures, critical thinking skills, a broadened worldview and “capacity development” (Cruz E Silva 1998: 225-6). Cruz E Silva argues that these abilities served students well as adults since they could resist Portuguese and the Catholic church’s attempts to “integrate natives”, even as they were better prepared to see Mozambique as a nation independent of Portuguese rule. As a result, many former students became politically conscious, involved in the struggle for Mozambican independence, and leaders in re-imagining ethnic identity and the construction of nationalism in Mozambique (Cruz E Silva 1998: 236). Cruz E Silva’s thesis bears a marked resemblance to my own, suggesting that there are students in Mozambique, Namibia and elsewhere who were able to express themselves politically because of mission schools and not just through protests against them and other schools which administered oppressive systems of education.

Research like Cruz E Silva’s should not come as a surprise given what we have established about schools and missions. Schools aim ostensibly to change students and open their lives to opportunities. Missions often expose indigenous people to a larger worldview and thereby to new possibilities for how to act in the world. What, then, leads one school to confirm the status quo and another school to challenge it?

Group identification with the school, its people and its aims, is central to the socialising affect that the institution has on its students. In *Learning to Labour*, Paul Willis develops several concepts that are helpful for understanding the dynamic of group cultures in schools. As Willis writes, the “informal group” is “the smallest discreet unit which acts as the basis for cultural penetration” (Willis 1977: 123). By “penetration” Willis refers to human “impulses” to change conditions versus “limitation”, the “blocks, diversions and ideological effects” which keep people from changing (Willis 1977: 119). As Willis demonstrates ethnographically, there are clear

reasons why working class children often do not identify school with success in life, and instead put their energies towards creating a “counter-school culture” which provides their lives with some meaning and “laffs” (Willis 1977: 22-23, 29). Of course, it is possible that an individual will see education as a way to a better life and transcend social-economic barriers. Cultures, however, do not stem from isolated individuals but from “informal groups.” If the group sees itself as low-class manual labourers without any way of changing this condition, then it will develop a culture around this reality. This culture then takes on a life of its own, perpetuating “counter-school culture” and other expressions of resistance that momentarily allow people to transcend their condition even as these expressions ensure that they will be working class (Willis 1977: 120).

Willis’s thesis sheds as much light on how schools may change the status quo as on how they often maintain it. If informal groups identify a school with an opportunity to live a good life, then they are likely to put their energies into it. In such cases the outcomes of education are more likely to approximate the goals that schools claim to have, of developing students’ skills, habits and values in ways that will make them successful. Furthermore, “informal groups” are always “more than the sum of [their] individual parts” (Willis 1977: 123). Just as they may recreate a “counter-school culture” and the working class, they may also perpetuate a ‘culture of success’ that in conjunction with opportunities available in the larger society and its economy, enables people to find the jobs and live the lives which they desire.

Cruz E Silva’s study portrays schools which seem to have nurtured such ‘cultures of success.’ It appears that many informal groups affiliated with the school also identified with the institution. As she claims, the Protestant missions became “the proponents of the social interests for the majority African population” (Cruz E Silva 1998: 229). If students and their communities sensed that Protestant missions played this role and that the missions might help them realize their economic and political aspirations, then they would have tended to embrace the school and its milieu. In turn, if former students realized economic and political aspirations and new students identified with alumni, then the schools are likely to have become more successful still. Such is the model operational at St. Therese during the mid-1970s, where groups of students and school leaders shared a vision for how education could make students successful, and successful teachers and senior students became role-

models for new students. The ensuing successes took on a momentum of their own, such that St. Therese developed a reputation for being a good school.

Of course, one cannot determine how a school may affect its students without evaluating other socializing influences. One of the strengths of Willis's argument is the way that he ties the "counter-school culture" in the school he studies to a broader analysis of working class culture, demonstrating how the two work hand in glove. In the case of social change, one must show how the school worked across the grain of cultural norms. Two aspects of the school's relationship with the rest of the world are, therefore, of vital importance: the extent to which students' experiences are limited to the school and the extent to which the school is permeable to outside people and influences.

Of all schools, boarding schools are most likely to keep other socializing institutions to the margins of children's development. They may approximate "total institutions" as conceptualised by Erving Goffman because they have the basic necessities for life within their boundaries and control the limits of their members' behaviour (Goffman 1961). During the mid-1970s St. Therese bore similarities to a total institution for most of its students most of the time as they usually lived in the school hostel and usually did not return home until the quarterly holidays. Total institutions also keep the rest of the world on the outside. Once again, St. Therese resembles such an institution since Tses was fairly isolated from other communities and the Tses Mission was private property on which church leaders only permitted certain people.

One might expect a total institution to remain uninfluenced by events outside of that society's confines and to enforce social stasis, and a theoretical total institution would, no doubt, exhibit these qualities. Nonetheless, an institution that is slightly less than total, such as St. Therese during the mid-1970s, may adopt outside ideas and be particularly conducive to social change. St. Therese, like other boarding schools affiliated with powerful churches (Lambert 1975: 49), was able to remain fairly isolated from government education policies and maintain its own distinct course. Most students, many of whom hailed from isolated rural regions, had little exposure to academically and professionally successful blacks and national politics before attending school in Tses. On the mission, however, there were 'successful' students, teachers and missionaries some of whom were following the liberation struggle. These 'seeds' landed on the fertile soil of the South's social- and political-economy

(See Chapter III). There were few other ideas and leaders competing for ‘nutrition’ in this space. In its enclosed environment, St. Therese became a ‘hothouse’ that nurtured lives differing greatly from those of other blacks in the South. And when some St. Therese students ‘bloomed’ to become politically active, mission leaders asserted the school’s impermeable walls, keeping students safe from direct government intervention.

Although one can discuss any school in terms of how it has maintained the status quo or changed it, St. Therese of the mid-1970s lends itself to the latter analysis. St. Therese, therefore, demonstrates some of the factors that may make a school a vehicle for social change.

### *Methods and Memory*

It is one thing to assert that a school on the Tses Mission significantly influenced the trajectory of its students’ lives but quite another to prove it. To this end, I have gathered as much information about students who attended St. Therese as possible. St. Therese classroom registers were used to tabulate the number of students who attended the school between 1973 and 1976 combined, in each separate year and the gender breakdown of students (See Chapter IV). Alumni reviewed lists of pupils taken from the registers and provided biographical statistics about their classmates at St. Therese. These ‘biographies’ include information about students’ backgrounds, the education that they received at St. Therese and subsequently, and their current place of residence and job. Although I have not been able to gather data for every student who passed through the school between 1973 and 1976, I have collected partial biographies for 185 students and full biographies for 120 students, accounting for approximately 29% and 19% of St. Therese pupils from the mid-1970s, respectively.<sup>26</sup> The data indicate that as many as 50% of students have continued to tertiary education and professional jobs since their attendance at St. Therese (See Chapter V).

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<sup>26</sup> I have calculated that 635 students attended St. Therese between 1973 and 1976, but there are several complications in collecting the precise number. In every year there are new students who entered the school. One can estimate the new students in any year by adding in the incoming Standard VI class and tracing new names that appear in the register from those in a particular class from the previous year. Because students often repeated grades, individuals often did not follow the class with which they entered the school. The fact that there are a few common names and inconsistent spelling of names make it difficult to ascertain whether a student was part of a certain class the previous year or whether the student is new. Generally, after Standard VII the number of students who repeated a class

Unfortunately, these statistics are inconclusive for determining exactly what percentage of St. Therese students received tertiary education and professional jobs after attending the school. There are gaps in the records because those who completed the forms do not remember all of their classmates nor know what many of their St. Therese peers are doing now. Moreover, my sources are more likely to remember educated professionals than other alumni since some of the professionals are well known Namibian leaders and because my sources are professionals themselves. The biographical statistics are not intended to quantify the effect that St. Therese had on its students, however, but rather to give a general idea of the proportion of former pupils whose lives contrast with the status quo for black people in southern Namibia. I have also highlighted aspects of some individual biographies in the appendices for interest and reference purposes.

Other data compiled in this research originate from Namibian census material of 1970, 1981, 1991 and 2001 and are used to outline social characteristics of southern Namibia. These statistics highlight the jobs held and education obtained by blacks who originate from the home regions of most former St. Therese students. By comparing the higher education and employment statistics of former students with the census figures, I indicate that students' lives differed from others of their background in their generation as well as the previous one and gauge the degree of difference.

The primary data used to support my thesis is qualitative. During my fieldwork I interviewed fifteen former students, eleven former teachers and three former mission workers. My first sources were people who I knew through experiences as a St. Therese teacher, and these sources led me to others such that I interviewed a 'snowball sample' of people who had spent time at St. Therese. Most of these individuals associated with the school during the mid-1970s, my period of focus, but I also spoke with others.<sup>27</sup> I returned to some sources for a second, third, fourth or fifth interview as I narrowed my research interests and sought out particular information. Intermittently, I read a variety of social analyses and historical accounts that seemed to apply to my research.

Naturally those I interviewed, and a few scholars, cannot speak for the whole history and significance of St. Therese from 1973 to 1976. Nevertheless, these

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approximates the number of new students who came to the school and therefore the figures for Standard VIII, IX and X are taken at face value.

<sup>27</sup> Three informants, Josef Konjore, Pauline Kruse and Deacon Fritz !Goraseb, are also affiliated with the school today.

sources tell some of the stories behind the statistics. Most importantly, students' memories of St. Therese indicate what students find most important about their experiences at the school, suggesting why they have performed as they have and how they will perform in the future. The nature of memory, therefore, is central to the ways in which I analyse the actions of former students of St. Therese.

Certainly memories cannot be taken at face value. People's memories are a product of their personal experiences, and since every individual experiences events differently, each one will present the past differently. Furthermore, memory is not simply a camera that captures everything that the eye sees. It is selective in what it records and what it accesses at particular times.

There is a body of literature on memory that considers some of the factors that affect what memory records and accesses and the related pitfalls and potential for using memory in social analysis. In "The Past Imperfect" Paul Lambeck argues that we cannot see memory simply as entirely "subjective" or "objective", as something that we possess or something that conforms or does not conform to "the facts". In contrast, he argues that memory must be viewed in terms such as "subtle", "tactful", "reasonable", "justified" and "unjustified", not "complete or incomplete", "accurate or inaccurate" (Lambeck 1996: 237-238). In this manner, Lambeck sets the groundwork for theorizing memory as performative, a capacity that can only be understood as people relate it to other people and apply it to particular contexts. Consequently, "remembering and forgetting may be claims, motivated acts of some sort" and as such have pragmatic and moral implications (Lambeck 1996: 239-240). Lambeck is not alone in emphasizing that memory is practice. For example, Maurice Bloch also considers the "moral purposes" behind memory that psychologists tend to neglect in their theories (Bloch 1996: 217). Sean Field applies this understanding of memory to art forms such as "performances" (Field 2001: 117), thereby literally linking memory to the central metaphor of my analysis.

Since a person performs memory, we must consider how people refer to the past to orient their actions in the present, and conversely, how the present informs the ways in which people view the past. As Antze and Lambeck write, "memories are produced out of experience and, in turn, reshape it" (Antze and Lambeck 1996: xii), and, as Bloch adds, individuals' memories connect to a larger culture and history that transcends their life span (Bloch 1996: 217). Therefore, to view 'the person in

history', we must determine how individuals tie into and remember histories beyond their own personal experience.

One context in which people link individual memories with larger group histories is the "symbolic space" (Field 2001: 118-119). These spaces are marked in people's memories by personal developments, social relationships or important events that occurred there. Individuals may not return to the physical place where they had these experiences, but the places often retain a symbolic significance for people such that they return there mentally according to stimuli in their present lives. And although people's memories of these spaces are personal, they often bear similarity to the memories of others who were there such that "memories cluster" (Field 2001: 118). St. Therese is a symbolic space for students who attended the school in the mid-1970s. Individuals have intensely personal memories of St. Therese, but memories also cluster around common aspects of students' experiences conditioned by both the school and the formative age of adolescence. The way that students remember this symbolic space is, in turn, highly dependent on their personal experiences since attending the school (See Chapter V). In the end, students 'remember' more than their personal experiences at St. Therese, an entity with a history and significance beyond any one person's experience.

The layers that exist between what an individual presents as his or her memory of an experience and how he or she actually experienced that moment complicate matters for the researcher who wants to use memories as part of an analysis. These layers are not entirely unlike what a scholar cuts through in analysing a text, however. An individual who writes a text can perform his or her relationship to a certain history in a variety of ways, such that the researcher must consider the particular background and motivations of the author in hopes of understanding what is described. Interviews and memory work add another variable to this exercise since the memory is recreated in relationship to the researcher, increasing the layers of background and motivation which the scholar must peel back and consider.

The act of writing about people's memories tends to add yet another challenge for the researcher. Oftentimes, those voices recorded through memory are not part of the historical record and are interviewed for the express reason that they reside outside of epistemologies of knowledge. As a result, the ordinary voices often do not fit into the dominant narrative of history and therefore become part of a "dramatic monologue" rather than a "conversational narrative" (Minkley and Rassool 1998: 94,

99). This tendency is central to a debate surrounding Charles Van Onselen's text *The Seed is Mine*, the biography of Kas Maine, a sharecropper from the western Transvaal. In his introduction Van Onselen asserts that although Maine "never was" according to the historical record, his memories can stand for the collective memories of others who lived a similar history (Van Onselen 1996: 3, 8-10). The historian must be diligent to consider which memories apply to the collective and which only to Kas Maine and his family. Although *The Seed is Mine* has been widely praised for filling in "holes" of the historical record, Minkley and Rassool assert that Van Onselen was not as successful as he might have been. Kas Maine, they argue, was not left to speak for himself, but rather became the fodder for Van Onselen and other social historians' canons (Minkley and Rassool 1998: 99).

Minkley and Rassool may overextend themselves in their critique of the *The Seed is Mine*. After all, it is not the role of the historian or social scientist merely to record events and perspectives; he or she must analyse them and consider their broader significance. Nonetheless, one must be aware of the way that history informs the categories of an informant's memories and our own when we analyse our data. To this end, the preceding reviews of literature consider the types of discourses which inform the analysis presented here. But what kind of discourses may those described in this social drama use to narrate their histories? Sarah Nuttall considers a variety of ways that the struggle seems to have affected the memories of those involved, observations that have parallels in the memories of St. Therese exiles. Nuttall observes how the struggle defines the way that Nelson Mandela presents his life in his autobiography, *The Long Walk to Freedom* (1994), as well as the ways in which people present their lives in relation to Mandela and other figures and events in the struggle (Nuttall 1998: 77-79). My interpretation of students' memories of St. Therese confirms this trend. Former students who travelled into exile tend to present their experiences at St. Therese in the terms of struggle politics and in relation to its events. Their descriptions contrast with the less political descriptions of those individuals who were not as involved in national politics at St. Therese and did not travel into exile (See Chapter V).

Nuttall's suggestion that South African leaders "free memory" in order to move beyond the struggle seems just as important for St. Therese learners who were active in the struggle. As Nuttall argues, struggle activists in South Africa have experienced considerable trauma because their lives have become entirely inseparable

from national politics (Nuttall 1998: 81). In her opinion these leaders ought to write autobiographies that are in service of “the cause” for struggle but not a product of all of the events of “the struggle” itself (Nuttall 1998: 79). St. Therese students may also have this need to separate “the cause” from “the struggle.” If anything, St. Therese exiles have experienced more anxiety on account of their struggle activist identity since with few exceptions they were interrogated, tortured, labelled spies and imprisoned by members of SWAPO, the very movement they gave their lives to support (See Chapter VII). These experiences taint their memories of the struggle. At the same time, some individuals who are sceptical of SWAPO and events during the struggle fondly remember “the cause” for struggle, ideas which they developed while students at St. Therese. By remembering St. Therese, perhaps some St. Therese students do and can, as Nuttall suggests, renew their service for “the cause” in spite of distaste for some events during “the struggle.”

Memory also provides hope for how contemporary St. Therese may be able to use the history of the school. Peter Gay writes “history... is unfinished in the sense that the future always uses the past in new ways” (Antze and Lambeck 1996: xi). Memory is that place where history and the individual actor meet, and the way that people conceptualise history relies on this meeting. In the past people have often used memory as a justification for selfish agendas that have led to hostile conflict and war, but memory may just as well be a tool used for positive ends. For one, it may connect those people who have undergone a positive experience with those who have not. In this connection lies the potential of memory for St. Therese and other institutions (See Chapter VIII).

### *Thesis and Argument*

The following pages tell my version of the history of students who attended St. Therese between 1973 and 1976, about their lives at the school and subsequently. I contend that St. Therese had a large impact on its students, such that many pupils who left the school in the mid-‘70s lived lives that differed significantly from the status quo for blacks from southern Namibia. The school affected the students in this way for three primary reasons. First, the missionaries, teachers and students that assembled at St. Therese exposed students to a world outside of their largely isolated upbringing. The material covered in classes, the diverse backgrounds and experiences of those at the school and the political views that some people shared inevitably had

this effect. Second, students identified with St. Therese's people and aims. Students and others from their communities believed that missions could provide them with the education necessary to pursue professional careers, which they coveted. There were people at the school who came from a similar background to many students and represented their communities' models for success. Some students also identified closely with the struggle and SWAPO, seeing in them other options for their lives and alternatives for the society in which they lived. Third, St. Therese became a community that was conducive to its members' version of success. This 'culture of success' picked up a momentum of its own that became greater than the sum of its parts. When this culture developed in ways that threatened South African authority, the state could not easily intervene because the school was isolated from the centres of government influence and sponsored by the powerful Roman Catholic Church. St. Therese, therefore, could create its own milieu in spite of the limitations of South African government policies.

Through students' exposure to 'the outside world', their identification with this world through the school and the culture of success which developed, St. Therese tended to heighten, rather than undermine, students' agency; they had an increased ability to choose the roles that they performed in the unfolding dramas of their lives. The students' new worldview, combined with the skills, habits and confidence that they developed at St. Therese, enabled them to find jobs which they and their peers coveted. Many students were also exposed to, developed their sensibilities for, and became active in national politics during their time at St. Therese. Some of these individuals travelled into exile where they accessed education and training that would not have been open to them in Namibia at that time and have subsequently become leaders in the new nation. Individuals could not easily direct the turns of the liberation struggle, and, paradoxically, many former St. Therese students became victims of SWAPO's internal conflicts, roles that were definitely not of their choosing. In spite of these experiences, St. Therese students in exile, like other former students, tend to see the school as central to their own "success." This fact, more than any other, indicates the role of St. Therese in former students' construction of who they have been and who they are becoming.

I develop this thesis in the form of a prolonged social drama. A mission school, like any social body, presents regular social dramas that feature settings, characters, plots, resolutions and epilogues. Characters receive scripts for how they

are supposed to act in certain situations. There are many scripts, however, and they are not identical. Often social scripts do not match the exact situation in which one finds oneself. In other cases a person's scripts may be in direct conflict with each other. Characters must make choices and perform. Only by understanding the lines and stage directions that characters receive, the context of their actions, can one begin to understand why they performed as they did. Only by considering how characters remember their old dramas, can we begin to comprehend what significance their previous performances have in their own mind and thus how subsequent dramas may be affected.

I continue this dissertation by placing St. Therese students' performance in context. In Chapter III, "Setting: Background of St. Therese Students", I consider the natural, social and economic conditions of southern Namibia in the mid-1970s as well as the history of how people there had related to these conditions. The chapter describes the way indigenous people interfaced with migrants from the Cape in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and began to value settlements and Western products. Nevertheless, most blacks in the South remained financially poor, and after German colonization they were increasingly isolated from opportunities to alter their living conditions and get the jobs which they coveted. They were particularly marginalized by South African government policies which limited black and coloured Namibians' educational opportunities and allowed them no direct political voice. The churches, which had been integral to southern Namibian society since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, were one institution in a position to help people. Mission schools, and particularly St. Therese, could meet people's needs, thereby setting the stage for a drama in which students and the school would usually act as allies.

In Chapter IV, "Characters: Life at St. Therese from 1973 to 1976" I introduce the students at the school during these years and examine how they interacted with others on the mission. The diversity of the students, teachers and missionaries who came together expanded students' worldviews and generated role-models. The curriculum, its implementation and extracurricular school life offered people on the mission an opportunity to influence one another while leaving people outside the mission at the margins of students' experiences. Both the people at the school and the way they spent their time foreshadow how the school influenced its students, preparing them to pursue different livelihoods than were common among their families and communities.

In Chapter V, “Plot and Resolutions: Student Performances”, I assess how St. Therese students performed at and since attending the school and how the school influenced these performances. The quantitative analysis indicates that many St. Therese students received additional education and professional jobs following their attendance at the school, results that contrast with many others from their background during the same years. I then consider former students’ memories of their alma mater, both critiquing and supporting their arguments that a ‘culture of success’ developed at the school during these years. In particular, I consider what effect students’ subsequent experiences have had on their memories, pointing out that their positive memories of the school may be attributed to many factors, including the success that they have enjoyed in their professional lives. Experiences with national politics seem also to account for some differences in the way that St. Therese students remember their alma mater.

In Chapter VI, “Sub-Plot: Politics at St. Therese from 1973 to 1976”, I consider why St. Therese students involved themselves in national politics and how their involvement impacted on St. Therese. I contextualise politics at St. Therese by reviewing developments in Namibia’s liberation struggle. Although blacks in the South were aware, at least implicitly, of the political-economy in which they lived, they were less aware of the national struggle than some other Namibians in the mid-1970s. At the same time, South African policies politicised a widening circle of southerners, making them more aware of politics and causing some leaders to turn to SWAPO for support. St. Therese students, teachers and missionaries are among those who were politicised in the 1970s. The school, by collecting these individuals and keeping them relatively free from government harassment, enabled an environment wherein increasing numbers of students became aware of and supported the liberation movement. In turn, a ‘sub-culture of political activism’ developed among some students at the school, leading them to join SWAPO and affiliated political groups, campaign in southern Namibian communities, lead a solidarity strike at St. Therese and, in some cases, travel into exile.

In Chapter VII, “Resolutions: St. Therese Students In and After Exile” I consider how the students who became political activists at St. Therese and travelled into exile performed in the subsequent dramas of their lives. Their St. Therese education, and the roles they accepted and adopted there, enabled students to access further educational opportunities and professional experiences through SWAPO and

the United Nations. I also suggest how this background tied students into SWAPO's internal politics and the so-called "spy drama", resulting in former students' imprisonment and, in several cases, deaths. Finally, I will consider how survivors have readjusted to Namibia and the positions that they have taken in the independent nation.

In Chapter VIII, "Epilogue: St. Therese and the Continuing Struggle" I relate the experience of former St. Therese students to those in the present. The school, like its former students, has been affected by students' performances in the 1970s. St. Therese, however, has not retained its ties with its former students nor the students their ties with their alma mater. By referring back to the social drama presented in these pages, I will suggest ways in which the contemporary school and former students could reconstruct their history, creating an institutional memory that benefits the dramas of the present.

### **III. Setting: Background of St. Therese Students**

All performances are set in a particular context. Physical conditions limit the ways in which actors perform since there are only certain possibilities in their physical world, a subset of the possibilities in the world at large. Social conditions help us predict how actors will perform since they have inherited certain conflicts and ways of thinking and acting around these conflicts. The geographies and social-economy of southern Namibia as well as the histories of southern Namibia, its mission schools and St. Therese, all of which I describe in this chapter, are the contours of the stage on which St. Therese students performed. They indicate why students might covet the education that a mission secondary school could provide and define professional work as an aspect of their personal success. How characters performed at St. Therese, not to mention the school's existence and students' attendance, were not inevitable, however. The setting simply provides a framework for students and their actions.

#### *Geography of Southern Namibia*

The great majority of students who attended St. Therese between 1973 and 1976 came from southern Namibia. Of the students whose biographies I collected, 89% grew up primarily in the South. Together the land and the way people have used it shed light on why many individuals from the South would have benefited from a mission secondary school.

Johann Seidenfaden, one of the first missionaries to work in southern Namibia, describes Great Namaqualand<sup>28</sup> in the following way:

This country is very extensive but the worst, the most barren and sterile of the whole southern part of Africa... The country has no regular succession of seasons, nor can we depend upon a rainy season every year, as in other parts of the Cape colony; but it is by thunderstorms that the country is watered occasionally... It is mountainous, the valleys are full of rocky parts, and thus very unproductive. It is thinly peopled and badly provided with water. There is not a single fresh water fountain, they are old and bracken, and wherever you find a piece of arable land, it is also very brackish and nothing will grow upon it. This country may well have the name 'the wild, barren and unfruitful desert.' (Dedering 1997: 25).

It seems that the geography of southern Namibia has remained generally the same since Seidenfaden wrote this description. The land is very arid with most areas averaging between 2 and 4 inches (c. 50 to 100mm) of rainfall annually (Horrell

1967: 9). Rainfall is limited almost exclusively to the summer rainy season from November to March, and even during this period, rainfall is quite sporadic and unpredictable. There are no perennial rivers in the region outside of the Orange River in the deep South which serves as the border between South Africa and Namibia. The Fish River, which cuts north to south through the center of the region, can run or remain dry for most of the year depending on the previous season's rains. Other 'rivers' are dry riverbeds that fill up during occasional thunderstorms during the summer months.

The land is also very rocky. Most of the South rests between the Namib Desert along the Atlantic Ocean and the Kalahari Desert of the southern African interior. The middle area is known as the Central Plateau. In the South the Plateau and the area immediately surrounding it support a sub-desert environment characterized by uneven *veld* ('open field') with *koppies* ('rocky outcroppings') and nutrient poor soil. Water and soil support decreasing quantities of scrub vegetation as one moves south from Rehoboth with only occasional camel thorn and acacia trees at the banks of dry riverbeds.

Naturally, these factors dictate how people have used the land. The South does not support any agriculture. Livestock farming is common although cattle are uncommon due to the paucity of water and the land's limited carrying capacity. Goats and sheep, on the other hand, can live in this environment and are consumed and marketed for their meat and, in the case of sheep, for their wool and pelts. Not surprisingly, these two have become the ubiquitous farm animals of the region with goats most common on subsistence farms and sheep on commercial farms. Other common domestic animals in the region include horses, mules and donkeys, which are used for transport as well as meat.

Livestock farming, then, is central to the lives of many people in the South. Agricultural products, however, made up only 17% of the Gross-Domestic Product of Namibia in 1967 (Horrel 1967: 61) and even less today (SADC 2001: 242). There are other ways in which the country, and the people of the South in particular, have marketed and derived wealth from their land and water resources. The largest sector is the mining industry, and diamond mines in the South produce the country's most valuable minerals. Namibian mineral products made up 47% of the GDP in 1967

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<sup>28</sup> In 1811, when Seidenfaden wrote, missionaries and travellers commonly referred to the southern Namibia as Great Namaqualand or *Groot Namakwaland*.

(Horrel 1967: 61). Fishing is another important national industry, which made up 3% of the GDP in 1967 (Horrel 1967: 61), and Lüderitz is the South's coastal town which contributes to this sector. These industries, in conjunction with tourism, are central to the Namibian economy today as well. The South attracts travelers interested in such natural wonders as the sand dunes at Sossusvlei and the Fish River Canyon, and people from the South work in tourism as well as the mining and fishing industries.

Considering the nature of the land and the type of industries which have developed there, it is not surprising that southern Namibia is very sparsely populated. The South is 241 867 km<sup>2</sup> in size, but only 78 454 people lived there in 1970, a population density of 0.32 people per km<sup>2</sup> (Population Census 1970). By 2001 the population in this area had risen to 137 675, a population density of 0.60 people per km<sup>2</sup> (Population Census 2001: Preliminary Census Report). Sparse population makes the communities of the South relatively isolated from one another although a tar road cuts through the region north to south, two other tar roads east and west and a web of dirt roads connect the other farms and settlements. Many people do not have access to vehicles to traverse these roads and rely on donkey carts to travel between locations such that some individuals and communities live far more isolated from other regions than do others.

Tses shares most of the general characteristics attributed to the South. Tses lies on an arid, rocky piece of land to the east of the Central Plateau. The Tses River, an offshoot of the Fish River, runs by the village but remains dry for most of the year even in years of good rains. Tses relies on its bore-holes for water, and goat herds are the means of subsistence for much of the population. Tses inhabitants cannot live on their water and goats alone, however, and some work in the South's industries for part of the year. According to teachers and administrators who lived on the Tses Mission during the 1970s, few people from the village worked elsewhere during these years although South African Railways employed a number of men who lived in Tses (Deacon Fritz !Goraseb: April 8, 2002). It has been more common for Tses residents to receive financial support from family members living elsewhere or from government pensions.

The population of Tses and the surrounding reserve has never exceeded a few thousand. There were 1226 people living on the reserve in 1960 (Odendaal 1964: 41); by 1981 there were 3107 on the reserve and 1123 in the village (Population Census 1981). Although no more recent census has recorded the population of Tses as such,

most people guess that there are between 1500 and 2000 people living in the village today, and I gauge the former figure more realistic when school is not in session, the latter when school is. Tses is located on communal land, and therefore there are scattered homes in all directions. Some of the closest settlements are |Asab to the north (50 km), Vaalgras to the east (35 km), Berseba to the west (42 km) and Keetmanshoop to the south (80 km).

Tses's geography differs from many small settlements in the South in that it is less isolated than others. The village lies just 2 km from the tar road that extends from Cape Town to Windhoek and on to the Angolan border. There is also a train line that runs through Tses and extends south to Keetmanshoop and South Africa, west to Lüderitz and the Atlantic Ocean and north to Windhoek and as far as Tsumeb. If one has a car or money to hitch hike or buy a train ticket, one can easily leave Tses and travel to other towns in Namibia and beyond. Outsiders can also visit Tses with relative ease, and therefore the village remains only moderately isolated from the rest of the country. In contrast, most settlements on the southern Namibian reserves are not located so near to the tar road or the train line.

Keetmanshoop is one place where many people from Tses converge with others from the South and the outside world. "Keetmans" is the closest town to the village, is accessible by train and the tar road, and its central location, resources and population, 10 381 in 1970 (Population Census 1970) and 14 945 in 2001 (Population Census 2001: Preliminary Census Report), have earned it the popular distinction of "the capital of the South." People from Tses and the other villages and farms spread throughout southern Namibia come to Keetmanshoop to gather supplies and sell goods. Many people from the region also have family living in Keetmans, and some send their children to school here. Truck drivers and tourists invariably stop in Keetmanshoop for petrol and other supplies, an oasis on southern Namibia's otherwise barren roads. Mariental and Karasburg are southern towns that are similar to Keetmanshoop, catering to regions north and south of Keetmans respectively, but they are smaller in size.

### *Social Economy of Southern Namibia*

In southern Namibia, there was and continues to be a marked difference in the way that particular groups access the resources of the land. As in other parts of southern Africa and places where European settler colonies developed, these

differences mirror racial classifications. In order to understand St. Therese's influence on students from 1973 to 1976 and why it benefited many of them, one must understand students and their communities' access to resources, how this access compared to others in the South from different races and what instruments St. Therese students and their communities had, or did not have, to change their conditions during these years.

My statistics are taken from the five administrative regions from which most St. Therese students hailed, namely Bethanie, Karasburg, Keetmanshoop, Maltahöhe and Mariental (See Map 2), as they are recorded in the South West African Population Census of 1970.<sup>29</sup> Groups of people living in these areas had widely different access to resources, and therefore it is necessary to differentiate between these groups statistically. Unfortunately, it is not possible to link students from St. Therese with individuals living on particular plots of land<sup>30</sup> because the census statistics for 1970 do not separate out the black reserves or the "locations"<sup>31</sup> in the South. Therefore, I must rely on the South African government's classifications for Namibian races and ethnicities, which, although reflective of differences between groups, present the problem of how the census takers classified people.

The 1970 Population Census for South West Africa divides the population into the following categories: Bushman, Coloured, Damara, East Caprivian, Herero, Koakolander, Kavango, Nama, Owambo, Rehoboth Baster, Tswana, White and Other. St. Therese drew from students who fell under several of these categories. For example, the South African administration labelled St. Therese annually as a "Nama school" (Department of Coloured Relations and Rehoboth Affairs 1969-1973; Department of Coloured, Rehoboth and Nama Relations 1974-1976) and most of its students came from Namaland (See Maps 3 & 4), a consolidated reserve which the Odendaal Plan<sup>32</sup> created explicitly for "Namas" (Odendaal Plan 1964: 101-107). The census category "Nama", therefore, should account for the background of many who attended St. Therese. The mission, however, accepted students from other

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<sup>29</sup> I leave out one of the southern districts, Lüderitz, since none of the 185 students for whom I gathered information came from this district. It is unlikely that many St. Therese students would have come from Lüderitz since there were no black reserves there.

<sup>30</sup> During the apartheid era there was often a very strict separation between white, coloured and black communities, and consequently distinct income brackets according to place of residence.

<sup>31</sup> "Location" is the common Namibian term for 'township' or a place where coloureds or blacks were confined to live in towns.

<sup>32</sup> The Odendaal Plan was South Africa's attempt to establish the apartheid state in Namibia. One of its chief aims was to establish "homelands" for the different Namibian "tribes" (See below).

backgrounds. In particular, there are many people who attended St. Therese who the census takers may have classified “Damara” based on their dark skin colour and other characteristics that corresponded with the Odendaal Plan’s description of this “tribe” (Odendaal 1964: 31) rather than on any identity that these “Damara” selected for themselves. Similarly, 49% of the people living in Tses were “Hereros” according to the Odendaal Plan (Odendaal Plan 1964: 41), and therefore I assume that the 1970 census also classified these individuals who were attending St. Therese as Herero despite the fact that many no longer spoke Otjiherero and some whom I have interviewed prefer to identify themselves as Nama or “Oorlam.”<sup>33</sup> In fact, blacks in the South had similar occupations, income levels and educational opportunities, and therefore I consider them to be generally representative of the background of St. Therese students. Since the overwhelming majority of St. Therese students must have been labelled Nama, Damara or Herero, however, I take my statistics for blacks in the South according to those classified under these headings.<sup>34</sup>

My statistics distinguish the South’s blacks (i.e. Namas, Damaras and Hereros) from those labelled “Coloured”/ “Baster”<sup>35</sup> and “White.” The coloured distinction is problematic since there are “Coloured” students who attended St. Therese after 1969 when both groups fell under the Department of Coloured Relations and Rehoboth Affairs. Students who filled out biographies for their classmates labelled 4% of their fellow students as coloured. These numbers suggest that relatively few coloureds attended St. Therese as one might expect since Suiderlig High School in Keetmanshoop and Dr. Lemmer High School in Rehoboth both provided senior secondary training for coloureds by 1973 (Department of Coloured Relations and Rehoboth Affairs 1973-1974: 14). Although coloureds lacked resources like their black counterparts, they were often better off financially and tended to work different jobs than Namas and other blacks, a point which other scholars have noted (Ellis 1984: 43). Therefore, my statistics would not reflect the resources and opportunities open to the families of most St. Therese students if coloureds’ statistics were included. There were no white students who attended St. Therese and the contrast between their social-economy and that of blacks is marked.

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<sup>33</sup> These “Oorlams” should not be confused with those 19<sup>th</sup> century migrants from the Cape commonly cited in history texts (See below).

<sup>34</sup> In the case of land ownership statistics, I count all blacks into my tally.

<sup>35</sup> My statistics do not distinguish between “Coloureds” and “Basters.” My informants and many contemporary Namibians refer to the latter as a subset of the former.

For example, blacks made up 60% of the South's population and their reserves made up 6% of the land. In contrast, whites and coloureds were only 40% of the population and owned 94% of the land, the vast majority of this land owned by white farmers.<sup>36</sup> National statistics from 1965 reveal how access to livestock varied similarly along racial lines. For example, people who lived on "non-white reserves"<sup>37</sup> within the Southern Sector" owned 7% of the cattle south of the Red Line, whites owned 92%. Similarly blacks owned 2% of Karakul sheep and 3% of other sheep while whites owned 97% and 96% respectively. The reserves only approached the white farms in their number of goats and ungulates (i.e. horses, mules, donkeys). Still whites owned more than three times as many as lived on the reserves (Horrell 1967: 48).

The inequity of access to agricultural resources is greater still when one considers the number of farmers. Whereas approximately 29% of the white population of working age farmed, 40% of the black population farmed.<sup>38</sup> Even these statistics do not adequately represent the inequity of access to land resources since they represent "economically active" farmers, presumably those who lived or had lived and worked on white-owned farms for a wage. Thus, the statistic neglects many blacks living on the reserves who were not economically active in that they received no wage for services provided, but were involved in farming as a means of subsistence.

Blacks also tended to have few job opportunities in higher paying professions and to receive lower incomes than did coloureds or whites. For example, only 1% of working age members of the black community had jobs that the census defined as "professional." In contrast, 5% of working age coloureds and 8% of working age whites had such jobs. Not surprisingly, 84% of employed blacks earned a salary of less than 400 Rand per year in contrast with a mere 6% of employed whites. Likewise, only 3% of employed blacks received an annual salary which exceeded 2000 Rand in comparison with 46% of working age whites. Income often varied

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<sup>36</sup> The reserve land changed when the Namas resettled in Namaland, but this resettlement was still occurring at the time of the census, which is presumably why Namaland does not stand as a region in the census statistics like the other reserves do. If the measures outlined in the Odendaal Plan were followed, then the black land would have approximately doubled, but they were not followed exactly (Kössler 2000: 458-461).

<sup>37</sup> "Non-white" refers to all groups not classified as white, but in this case it includes coloureds and blacks but not Bastards whose livestock fell in a separate category. Also, few coloureds lived on the reserves so in this case it seems that the term applies to blacks almost exclusively.

between groups even for the same job or pension rates for the same need according to race and ethnicity. Nama and coloured pension schemes provide an example of this difference since they were administered by the same ministry after 1969, but the two groups received pensions for different conditions and in different amounts. For example, Namas received pensions ranging from 1.75 R to 5 R per month per person for old age, blindness and disabilities. Coloureds, on the other hand, received pensions ranging from 0.50 R to 16 R per month per person for conditions that included all those that applied to Namas as well as if individuals served as foster parents or required “maintenance” (Department of Coloured Relations and Rehoboth Affairs, 1970-1971: 6).

Clearly blacks, like those who attended St. Therese from 1973 to 1976, had less access to land and cash than did other segments of the Namibian population. Just as striking are the inequalities of opportunity to change these conditions. Conventional politics were not a viable option (See below). Education provided few blacks with training required for higher-income work. For example, 58% of blacks had received no or unspecified education, versus 41% of coloureds and 18% of whites. Of greatest significance to this study, only 3% of the South’s blacks had received any secondary education at all versus 11% of coloureds and 57% of whites. Of those blacks with secondary education only 21, or less than 0.1%, had followed that education up to Standard X level. Teaching certificates and other diplomas often required some secondary training and were therefore rare in black communities; only 67 or 0.2% had these qualifications. Not a single black in southern Namibia had a BA in 1970.

Given these statistics, it is not surprising that former students, teachers and missionaries refer to students at St. Therese in the mid-1970s as “poor”, “impoverished”, “disadvantaged” and “oppressed.” Clearly they fit these characteristics in comparison with others living in the same region. Many people exhibited poverty in absolute terms as well since they lived in want of basic human needs. One student remembers that he moved to the Tses Mission originally because he had no food at home. Others recall struggling to get family members to buy clothes for school. The houses surrounding Tses were “iron shacks”, and many

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<sup>38</sup> For the purposes of this statistic, I considered all individuals between the ages of 20 and 60 as “working age.”

former St. Therese students lived in similar corrugated iron shelters when not on the Tses Mission.

Blacks' exclusion from material resources in the 1970s is also reflected in the lives of people in Tses and other southern Namibian communities today. Most Tses residents generate wealth from a combination of livestock, family members' salaries and senior citizens' pensions. Naturally, this economy affects who does and does not live in Tses and other rural communities in the South. Few young men live in Tses. They are not required to care for sparse goat populations but are desperately needed to earn incomes, and therefore men who have the necessary skills usually move out of the reserve to find work at farms or mines or in town. Women with the necessary skills are often encouraged to leave Tses and earn an income as well, but relatively few find work. Many young women in Tses raise children and are not supported by the men who fathered these children. Older men, women and children predominate in Tses and other rural communities. The elderly care for children and their pensions are often the main source of a family's income although they amount to N\$240 (or less than US\$30) a month. There are often many children staying with senior citizens, for it is not uncommon for one mother to bear five or more offspring.

Not surprisingly, many contemporary St. Therese students insist that "Tses is not good." There are few job opportunities in the village, and those who "make a success" of their lives leave Tses, procure a higher education and a well paying job elsewhere and usually don't return to the village for more than a visit. Still, learners have seen enough of southern Namibia to know that many blacks in the region live in poverty. In both rural and urban communities the majority reside in corrugated metal shacks. These shelters are brutally hot on summer afternoons, which can exceed 40° C, often fail to keep out summer rains, and provide limited protection from winter nights, which may approach the freezing point. Most people have access to running water at community taps, which draw from state sponsored bore-holes, and share community out-houses, but few have electricity. Blacks in the South rely on *mealie-pap*, a porridge made from corn, as their staple diet because it is accessible, filling and inexpensive. People are regularly "longing for meat", the preferred diet, but it is only eaten on special occasions because there are few goats, and goats are an important financial resource. Towards the end of the month before workers receive their salaries and pensioners their monthly checks, there are families which run out of food. Some people are malnourished due to a limited and inconsistent diet.

At the end of the month, many people turn to drinking. At night the bottle stores and unlicensed shebeens are full, and the next morning the surrounding area is filled with broken glass, the glare from which is a permanent feature of the Tses landscape. Glass is not the only 'litter' left by rampant alcohol abuse; it leaves a trail of social debris that is legion. Alcoholism in the South contributes to most cases of child abuse and other crimes, the presence of "street kids", a high rate of teenage pregnancy and the neglect of children's basic food and clothing needs, effects that others have also observed (Eiseb and Pomuti 1990: 10-12).

The result of this social-economy is a 'circle of poverty.' Most children are born into families with limited means to support a child. Many are raised without a consistent set of guardians, and some are malnourished. Children have only limited exposure to careers they might pursue and few role-models that direct them in how to reach their goals. Schools do offer one means for children to pursue another life, and families recognize that students who succeed can receive jobs that pay well and are respected such as posts as teachers, nurses, in business and the civil service. Families are often unable to create a home environment conducive to academic success, however. In many cases no one at home has had much schooling, and family members may not understand the time and conditions required for their child to succeed. Often crowded households lack the space and quiet for students to do homework, and financial constraints make it impossible for some families to buy candles so that children can study at night.<sup>39</sup> Alcoholism, and the ensuing neglect and domestic violence, often exacerbates these problems. If students do not succeed in school, they may be unable to find work or lack the will to look.<sup>40</sup> Others who are more academically successful leave school before grade 12 or tertiary education because they can find work to support their families, but they are unable to return to school and pursue other jobs because families become reliant on their salaries. Women are particularly likely to leave school at an early age due to domestic roles that they play at home, teenage pregnancy and some families' cultural expectations for the amount of education that is appropriate for a woman. They are more likely to rely on a man or family for income. Many young men, like young women, are

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<sup>39</sup> Families in Tses will often place their children in the school boarding hostels if they can afford them because they believe that their children will be better fed and better able to conduct their studies there.

<sup>40</sup> Students who drop out of school may resume classes at the Namibian College of Higher Learning (NAMCOL).

unemployed, however. When they do have children, often unplanned, the circle of poverty continues.

Of course, the poverty of southern Namibia's black inhabitants did not develop in a vacuum. It, like all social-economy, is a product of a larger historical process that defined who has had access to what resources and therefore what economic and social possibilities. This history indicates how blacks became the 'have-nots' of southern Namibia and through what channels they could contest their conditions.

### *History of Southern Namibia*

Archaeologists and historians believe that the first people entered southern Namibian more than 2000 years ago, migrating west along the Orange River. At some point these people split into two groups with some following the Orange River further west to the Atlantic Ocean and others moving south into the Cape (Lau 1987: 2). They were semi-nomadic pastoralists, herding sheep, goats and cattle (Lau 1987: 8; Dederling 1997: 26). Therefore, they did not settle in specific territories although various groups and sub-groups did claim rights to particular water holes and pastures (Lau 1987:7; Dederling 1997: 41). Collectively, these people are often referred to as Khoi-khoi and those who remained north and south of the Orange River as Nama.<sup>41</sup>

Through the late eighteenth century Namas north of the Orange River had not had sustained contact with Europeans or those immediately affected by them. This condition changed, however, at the turn of the nineteenth century with the arrival of Western missionaries and migrants from the Cape. The London Missionary Society and the Wesleyans first established themselves in Namibia in 1802, the Rheinische Mission in 1842 (Katjavivi 1988: 6; Dederling 1997: 17). Concurrently, groups of "Oorlams" migrated north of the Orange River. These societies had developed in the context of 18<sup>th</sup> century Boer farmers' migrations away from the Cape Colony and their subjugation of the Khoisan populations (Lau 1987: 19).<sup>42</sup> Although many indigenous people became slaves and servants to farmers, some successfully resisted

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<sup>41</sup> Westerners have also often referred to the Khoi-khoi as "Hottentots" although this terminology is sometimes seen as derogatory and is therefore out of favour in academic circles. Nama-speakers were also previously referred to as "Namaquas" although scholars refer to them now as "the Nama" or "Namas" and many people in Southern Namibia today refer to themselves as "Namas."

<sup>42</sup> 'Boer' refers to white settlers to southern Africa, primarily of Dutch and Huguenot origin, and 'Khoisan' refers to the indigenous people of southern Africa, including Khoi (a.k.a. "Hottentot") and San (a.k.a. "Bushman") groups.

these roles. A collection of runaway slaves, dispossessed Khoi retainers and people of mixed European and Khoi descent were able to gather fire-arms, gun powder and horses and joined together in military oligarchies (Lau 1987: 19-20). Together they lived off of the spoils of hunting, raiding and trading (Lau 1987: 20). It is these Oorlam “commandos” that migrated into Namibia at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Lau 1987: 23).

By the 1840s southern Namibian society had changed drastically. The commandos replaced kinship groups as the primary political unit and although people continued to herd livestock, communities needed commandos to protect their herds and used them to plunder others’ (Lau 1987: 65, 74). In turn, trade with the Cape was essential for sustaining these commandos. Although historians bicker about the relative impact of the missionaries and Oorlams on social change in southern Namibia, it is clear that they were intertwined in the social- and political-economy that developed.<sup>43</sup> At first, missionaries struggled to establish mission stations in the South. The Nama economy required a large degree of mobility and a low population density near water sources to meet geographical demands, and these constraints poorly suited the people for mission settlement (Dederling 1997: 28). In contrast, the Oorlams, who arrived with their guns, gun-powder and horses, forced the Namas to adapt their social-economy to the commando. Although initial relations between Namas and Oorlams were relatively peaceful, conflicts soon developed as increasing numbers of Oorlams pushed across the Orange River, demanding water and grazing rights and, in some instances, raiding Nama communities (Lau 1987: 23-28). Namas, in turn, became increasingly dependent on the Oorlams since they traded with them to acquire the guns, gun-powder and horses necessary to defend themselves. Nevertheless, the missionaries were essential to underpinning Oorlam society. The Oorlams relied on missionaries to facilitate the Cape trade (Lau 1987: 78). Mission settlements also fit the needs of emerging commando communities since they provided a relatively safe haven from raids, particularly when the commando left to hunt, raid and trade in the surrounding countryside (Lau 1987: 70).

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<sup>43</sup> For a review of this debate see Chapter I of Tilman Dederling’s *Hate the Old Follow the New* (1997). To defend his thesis that the missionaries played the central role in transforming southern Namibian society, Dederling argues that Oorlam groups only originated “within the network of relations that emerged when European missionaries and Africans exchanged goods, congregated in prayer and occasionally fought each other” (Dederling 1997: 16).

By the time Jonker Afrikaner, an Oorlam leader, formally established himself as sovereign over southern and central Namibia around 1830, the new social- and political-economy and inter-marriage had made Oorlams and Namas largely indistinguishable (Lau 1987: 28, 31). By the 1850s all distinctions in the historical record between Oorlams and Namas cease to exist (Lau 1987: 147), and blacks in the South today use the term “Oorlam” to refer to an entirely different group of people.<sup>44</sup> The commando and the mission station had become central structures in southern Namibia, allowing people some access to resources and some measure of security in their unstable society. Nor did the usefulness of these structures die out once Afrikaner established his ‘sovereignty’ and Namas and Oorlams joined in ‘cultural union.’ Southern and central Namibia continued to be a stage for armed conflict over land, livestock and watering rights as increasing numbers of people moved into these regions.

Historians often present the fighting that took place in central and southern Namibia during the mid- and late 19<sup>th</sup> century as a prolonged war between two groups, the Namas and the Hereros, Bantu-speakers living in central Namibia (Vedder 1934; Katjavivi 1988: 2-4).<sup>45</sup> This analysis, however, simplifies the situation considerably since some people from central and southern Namibia had already mixed in the nineteenth century, blurring ethnic distinctions between people in these regions (Silvester 2000: 481-482). There were also conflicts between the different Nama communities and general instability in southern and central Namibia that led to perpetual fighting between many groups (Lau 1987: 119-120). Although there was a lull in the fighting after peace was made between Afrikaner and paramount Herero chief Kamaharero in 1870 (Lau 1987: 140-141), conflict intensified in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as Germans began to settle their new colony *Südwest Afrika* (‘South West Africa’). After ‘claiming’ the land that is contemporary Namibia at the Conference of Berlin in 1884, the Germans signed a series of treaties with indigenous leaders, which allocated ill-defined areas for European settlement in return for German protection (Katjavivi 1988: 7-8). The Germans, in turn, expropriated vast tracts of land and cattle, and when Africans resisted they were subdued and more land was taken (Katjavivi 1988: 7-8).

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<sup>44</sup> People of Herero origin who live in the South and have adopted the Nama language often refer to themselves as “Oorlams.” Vaalgras is an example of a community in which many people embrace an Oorlam identity.

<sup>45</sup> See Brigitte Lau’s critique of common representations of this history (Lau 1987: 119-120).

In 1904 Hereros, led by Samuel Maherero, and Namas, led by Hendrik Witbooi, recognised the Germans as a common enemy and rose up against them. The resulting war was fought between 1904 and 1907 and most settlements in the South took part. The Hereros and Namas lost and both suffered tremendous casualties. Many were taken as prisoners of war and compelled to work for the Germans in mines or on the railways; others fled from the region (Katjavivi 1988: 9-11). In the South only Berseba emerged with all of its land and institutions intact because its leaders had elected not to break a treaty they had made with the Germans in the 1890s (Kössler 2000: 448). Only a few other communities retained any hold on their ancestral lands. The German government took possession of the remainder of the land and made it available to German settlers. By 1911 the best land in the South was white-owned (Katjavivi 1988: 11).

During the First World War South African forces invaded and defeated the German army in Namibia. Following the Allied victory, the League of Nations handed Namibia over to South Africa as a League of Nations Mandate. Although leaders in southern Namibia were optimistic that the change in government would bring land restitution, it further separated people from their ancestral land. As the South African authorities themselves recorded, “native policy” in Namibia was “synonymous with the labour question” (Kössler 2000: 448) Therefore, very little land was set aside as reserves for blacks in the South, severely limiting the mobility required for the pastoral economy (Kössler 2002: 450). This condition combined with “grazing fees” made it very difficult for people to support themselves on the land, thereby pressuring men to seek employment outside of the reserves (Kössler 2000: 449). Furthermore, the indigenous people had essentially no formal political voice under the South Africans. The South African administration argued that “unbroken tribes” no longer existed in the Police Zone and established a system of direct rule with a Native Commissioner and reserve superintendents (Kössler 2000: 451-452). In this system, ‘headmen’ were appointed by the superintendent and seem to have been conceived as the superintendent’s “lowly helper” (Kössler 2000: 452).

The electoral victory of the National Party in South Africa in 1948 and its apartheid policies also affected the distribution of the South’s land and resources. Apartheid in Namibia, like South Africa, focused on the ‘separate development’ of its population along racial and ethnic lines. To this end, the South African government sought to concentrate the different indigenous ‘tribes’ into ‘homelands.’ The

Odendaal Plan, the blue-print for Namibian 'homelands' published in 1964, outlined the creation of Namaland, a territory between Mariental and Keetmanshoop to be governed by a new Nama Legislative Council (See Maps 3 & 4). Although the plan claimed that it would increase the reserves by 62 hectares per capita, approximately doubling the size (Odendaal 1964: 105), and increase the power of local government with "a gradual development towards political independence" (Odendaal 1964: 107), it had considerable drawbacks for the South's indigenous people. It required the complete removal of those living in three reserves, Bondels, Warmbad and Neuhof, and their replacement into Namaland's contiguous reserve as well as the migration of some unemployed blacks living in towns to their prescribed homeland (Odendaal 1964: 117,119). Not only did the Odendaal Plan's implementation uproot people from their homes, but it also led to political conflict. Traditional leaders disputed the position of Gibeon's leader, Witbooi, who the Odendaal Plan supported as a paramount *Kaptein*<sup>46</sup> in the Nama Legislative Council, and people fought over the jurisdiction of Kapteins whose right to rule was in question now that they did not live on their ancestral land (Kössler 2000: 457-458). Furthermore, the Nama Legislative Council, finally established in 1976, remained subordinate to the Minister of Coloured Affairs and had no representation in South African Parliament in contrast to the white population's direct representation. In the end, the government was unable to move a large number of people and the plan could not deliver on its promises, further disrupting the societies in southern Namibia (Kössler 2000: 459, 461).

The history of Tses mirrors trends in the redistribution of the South's land during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. During the German colonial years, Tses was part of the Berseba Reserve. Therefore Tses did not exist as such until 1903 when a German soldier, August Klukowski, rented 5000 hectares of land along the Tses River from Berseba's Kaptein, Johann Goliath. Later, Klukowski built a house and the government built a police station on the property when the train line was built there in 1909 (Namibian National Archives-Tses: 1). Previously, a group of Nama-speakers of Herero origins had settled in Vaalgras, and they signed an agreement with the Germans, receiving rights to this land in 1908 (Silvester 2000: 484). In 1923, as part of the South African government's attempts to cover a "'tribal' debt", the South Africans bought 229 925 hectares of Berseba's territory east of the train line (Kössler

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<sup>46</sup> *Kaptein* is the Afrikaans term which many communities in southern Namibia use for their 'chief' or 'headman.'

2000: 449; Namibian National Archives-Tses: 2). In turn, the authorities opened this land for communal settlement such that Tses, Vaalgras and the surrounding area became the newly proclaimed Tses Reserve. In 1935 the South African government added the farm Blau-West to the Tses Reserve, expanding its size to 254 587 hectares as it stands today (Namibian National Archives-Tses: 2-3).

Tses, then, was part of the South African government's land restitution plan for the South, which although it redistributed land and provided a place to live for some who had been displaced by the various wars in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, actually added very little new land for blacks in southern Namibia. The government tried to concentrate Hereros from the surrounding district into Tses even before they created the reserve in 1923 (Silvester 2000: 485). A Nama-speaking group, known as the ||*Hobaben* or *Veldschoendragers*<sup>47</sup>, were also settled there after the war followed by economically inactive and therefore "undesirable" blacks from Keetmanshoop, who were moved to Blau-West in 1938 (Silvester 2000: 485). Tses continued to be a dumping ground for South African land reform policies after the National Party took over, beginning with the forced removal of members of the Nama community in Hoachanas to Tses in 1959 (Katjavivi 1988: 47). In the 1970s more "undesirables" from Keetmanshoop were forcibly moved to Tses as part of the government's efforts to implement the Odendaal Plan (Deacon Fritz !Goraseb: April 8, 2002).

Clearly Tses, and the range of people and communities from which its students came, had been pushed to the margins of history. The Oorlams, the Germans, the South African 'restitution' and the South African Odendaal Plan had taken land from people indigenous to southern Namibia, forced them to move from their land, or both. With the exception of the Oorlams, who integrated with the Namas, these groups and policies had excluded the indigenous people from access to resources on the basis of perceived racial differences. The results are the relative poverty in which many lived, reflected in the aforementioned statistics: that blacks in the South dwelled on a small portion of poor land, had few professional opportunities and low incomes, and did not receive the same salaries or pensions as others doing similar work or living in a similar condition because, as 'natives', they were presumed to have different needs.

Many blacks in the South, like Africans and colonized peoples elsewhere, were not satisfied with the conditions in which they lived. They were no longer able

to subsist on the land and were aware of the wealth and opportunities open to others but closed to them. According to my black informants, people in their communities desired to become teachers and nurses as these jobs were most respected and offered good salaries.<sup>48</sup> Despite these career preferences, very few black teachers and nurses existed by 1970. People also resisted the government although this political dissent did not begin to connect with a national movement until the 1970s (See Chapter VI). A lack of educational opportunities and political leverage gave blacks little opportunity to find jobs they desired and alleviate their poverty.

Nonetheless, St. Therese was an institution with the potential to help blacks meet their needs and aspirations. A review of a subset of southern Namibian history, that of Namibian mission schools, indicates the role that St. Therese could play.

### *The Role of Mission Schools*

As I have mentioned, missions became integral to the South's emerging polities in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. On the one hand, early missionaries had hastened the trade with the Cape and been part of a larger process which undermined the indigenous people's previous way of life. On the other hand, the church met the needs of the indigenous people in the society that evolved in southern Namibia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century so much so that Brigitte Lau asserts that Nama polities only existed if "a missionary came, a church was built, or both" (Lau 1987: 76). Although not the original impetus for blacks to settle around missions, mission schools became central to many blacks' mission experience and attempts to reach their goals and assert their interests.

Missionaries established schools in southern Namibia shortly after their arrival in 1802. Following 1842, the Rheinische Mission, a German society associated with the Lutheran church, predominated in southern and central Namibia and established most of the schools in these regions (Odendaal 1964: 219). These schools focused their education on skills and practices directly related to Christian worship such that reading, praying and singing took precedence over other kinds of learning (Beris 1996: 81). As Germans began to settle their colony, a demand grew for education. Therefore, the state provided education for whites and made it compulsory in 1906 (Beris 1996: 121). Education for blacks, however, remained in

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<sup>47</sup> *Veldschoen* refers to a kind of sandal once worn by people from this group (Hoernle 1985: 43).

<sup>48</sup> A few people whom I interviewed also mentioned pastoral work as desirable. Many communities did not have black clergy at this time, however.

the hands of the missionaries and expanded greatly during the German colonial period and into the 1920s such that by 1915 there were 115 mission schools and by 1922 there were 211 (Beris 1996: 121-122; Cohen 1994: 105). Most mission schools educated blacks, and they provided the great majority of black education until the 1960s.

The Catholic Church did not enter Namibia until 1896. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the church met resistance from the governments and settlers of South Africa and Namibia and from indigenous people in southern Namibia who were concerned that two religious denominations would cause division among the people (Beris 1996: 22). By the end of the German colonial period, however, the Catholic Church had established a number of mission stations, schools and hospitals of which six stations and five schools were in the South in the so-called Apostolic Prefecture of Great Namaqualand (Beris 2001: 229). By 1970, twenty-four of the forty-eight mission schools serving the Nama, Coloured and Baster communities were affiliated with the Catholic Church, and thus Catholics had become the largest mission provider of education for these communities (Department of Coloured Relations and Rehoboth Affairs 1970-1971: 9). Most of the mission stations and the people who spent time on them were located in southern Namibia.

The Catholics' move from fringe missionaries to the main missionary providers in the South, as well as the role of mission education in Namibia in the 1970s, can only be understood in relation to education policies in the 1950s and '60s. Following the Bantu Education Act of 1953, the Department of Native Affairs in South Africa took responsibility for 'native' education in an effort to provide schooling for more blacks and thereby "reproduce" needed labourers and train leaders for the planned homelands (Christie and Collins 1984: 174). South Africa implemented Bantu Education in Namibia in 1962, at which point missions could not "establish, continue or maintain a school without registering with the Department of Education" (Cohen 1994: 105). Mission schools received state aid only if they complied and did not criticize the department's policies. Missions could register their schools as private institutions without state-aid, but even then they were subject to official inspections and were tested according to the state syllabus (Cohen 1994: 96-97).

Due to disapproval of government policy and a lack of funds, many missions folded. Whereas 101 mission schools had existed in Namibia in 1966, only thirty

remained by 1976 (Cohen 1994: 105). Unlike some other denominations in South Africa and Namibia, however, the Catholic Church attempted to keep its schools open, and initially replaced government subsidies with its School Fund for African Schools (Beris 1996: 618). Still, it also suffered from financial constraints and by 1969 all Catholic schools serving Namas were state-aided and therefore followed the Department of Education's policies, at least ostensibly (Department of Coloured Relations and Rehoboth Affairs 1969-1970: 32). Meanwhile, the number of state schools increased. For example, in 1970 there were twenty-seven mission schools for Namas, of which thirteen were sponsored by the Catholic Church, and twenty-one state schools (Department of Coloured Relations and Rehoboth Affairs 1970-1971: 9). Just six years later there were eighteen Nama mission schools, of which nine were Catholic, and twenty-five state schools (Department of Coloured, Rehoboth and Nama Relations 1976-1977: 9-10).

Not surprisingly, South Africa's education policy greatly politicised Namibia's churches, forcing them to take a stand on apartheid politics. These policies divided the members of Namibia's different denominations. In particular between the 1960s and 1970s, the Catholic Church's policy was fought between its conservative senior leadership focused on protecting church institutions and a small group of liberal priests who had the popular support of predominantly black congregations (Steenkamp 1995: 98). Bishop Aula's "open letter" proved a turning point in the different churches' responses to South African rule and apartheid. In 1971 Aula, a bishop in the Evangelical Lutheran-Okavango Church (ELOC), and Moderator Gowaseb of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELC)<sup>49</sup> wrote a letter to South African Prime Minister Vorster in which they condemned human rights abuses of the South African regime and called for justice and Namibia's independence. The Anglican Church and Catholic Church also published their support for the letter. The result was the first open and unified stand by Namibia's largest denominations, representing 75% percent of the Namibian population, against South African rule and apartheid (Steenkamp 1995: 95; Beris 1996: 643). As the 1970s progressed, the Catholic Church and most other denominations came increasingly to support Namibia's

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<sup>49</sup> These different Lutheran denominations reflect the different backgrounds of those trained by Finnish Lutheran missionaries north of the Red Line (ELOC) and those trained by the German Rheinische Mission to the south (ELC).

liberation struggle and SWAPO.<sup>50</sup> In 1978 they formed the Council of Churches in Namibia (CCN), an ecumenical body which openly opposed the South African government and its apartheid policies (Leys and Saul 1995: 11; Steenkamp 1995: 95). The churches' role became increasingly significant as Security Forces effectively repressed black opposition in the country and as increasing numbers of Namibians fled into exile such that the CCN became the primary voice of opposition south of the Red Line (Steenkamp 1995: 99).

Regardless of the churches' increasingly active role in Namibia's liberation struggle, the South African government could not easily remove this thorn from their side. If the government wanted to increase the number of blacks who received a basic education, then mission schools helped to provide educational access for a larger number of people than state schools could provide alone. According to a South African report written in 1980, 50% more classrooms would still have been necessary to reduce the pupil-teacher ratio to thirty to one, and secondary schools needed to graduate many more blacks teachers to meet this standard (Ellis 1984: 34, 40). Mission schools certainly added to the number of classrooms and trained a large percentage of teachers. The way in which the South African government dealt with missions also had international consequences since the missions were part of international denominations and tied into other international bodies such as the South African Council of Churches (SACC), the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference (SACBC), the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) (Leys and Saul 1995: 96). These bodies could significantly affect international opinion on South African government policies, which could, in turn, have ramifications for South Africa's hold on Namibia as well as the nation's economy and its apartheid system. And, no matter how much the South African government disapproved of church resistance to apartheid policies, many white South Africans tended to see themselves as "defenders of Western civilization and Christianity" in Africa (Steenkamp 1995: 95). If this sentiment affected policy, then the government could hardly close down the church. The church was powerful, therefore, not only because it was politically influential, but because it was institutionally intractable.

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<sup>50</sup> The Evangelical Lutheran Church, however, splintered several times over their response to South African rule and apartheid.

There are limits to the extent to which South Africa could have forced schools to follow its policies under any circumstances. There were usually only a few inspectors who served very large regions. For example, there were six to seven inspectors, as well as a few assistant subject inspectors, who were responsible for the Nama, Baster and coloured schools between 1973 and 1976. These schools ranged in number from seventy-two to seventy-five and had between 15 207 and 20 143 pupils (Department of Coloured Relations and Rehoboth Affairs 1972-1973: 13; 1976-1977: 9). Inspectors were supposed to visit primary schools once a year and secondary schools every second or third year unless circumstances required a more frequent inspection (Department of Coloured Relations and Rehoboth Affairs 1970-1971: 8). Thus, schools could go a long time without inspection and had latitude in how they taught their classes even if they did have to teach to a standard government syllabus in order for students to pass state administered examinations. Most mission schools, like St. Therese, were located in rural reserves, further removing them from the Chief Inspector who lived in Windhoek and the other inspectors who, as whites, would presumably have lived in 'white areas.' Namibian schools were further separated from the centres of power dictating their education policies since, by 1969, the South West African Administration had relinquished its control of Bantu Education to the Department of Native Affairs in Pretoria and Coloured Education to the Department of Coloured Affairs in Cape Town (Cohen 1994: 112). The mission itself added another layer to the distance between educational policy as written and as practiced, and this layer had the potential to be thick, given the churches' increasing opposition to South African rule and apartheid policy during the 1970s.

Certainly there are limits to what blacks had gained through missionary education in the past. Although missions had been the first to provide education, they were unable to provide it to much of the population or at levels that enabled blacks to get jobs that they desired or earn an income on par with whites. Ironically, the inadequacies of mission schools, combined with the requirements of South Africa's industrializing economy, seem to have precipitated Bantu Education (Hyslop 1999: 1-3), a system which clearly did not meet people's needs. The churches also had their own agendas that often conflicted with interests of the people they claimed to serve. Missionaries were part and parcel of the Oorlam migration, which uprooted southern Namibian societies and led to decades of warfare, and Amukugo is correct in asserting that many missionaries supported German colonization and the ensuing

oppression of the indigenous people, even if she does conflate all missionaries' motives to this observation (Amukugo 1995: 111). When the churches disapproved of government policy and legitimacy, as they did with increasing frequency after the implementation of Bantu Education, they were often quiet and did not involve themselves in national politics. Even after Bishop Aula's letter in 1971, some clergy were cautious. The churches were caught between what their leaders believed to be in the best interest of congregants and the government's support, which they required at some level to remain in the country. This tension between the mission as a force driving social change and as one requiring the status quo foreshadows how St. Therese became a victim of its own history.

Nonetheless, a mission secondary school in southern Namibia could provide a service that blacks there would otherwise not have received. As a school, it had the potential to open students to opportunities from which they could benefit personally and which would change the larger society. As a secondary school, it was the only institution in a vast region wherein blacks could have experiences and gain credentials, which could, in turn, enable them to pursue diplomas in teaching and nursing. As part of the church, it belonged to a central institution of all southern Namibian settlements as they had existed since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The church also kept the school somewhat isolated from policies that aimed to maintain the status quo of a social order against which most blacks chafed. Finally, as part of the Roman Catholic Church and the emerging CCN, it tied its students into other Namibians associated with these bodies and to the larger political stands of its leaders, serving as a node of exchange between indigenous communities and the larger society. A mission school, therefore, had the potential to be a vessel for social change in southern Namibia in the 1970s.

### *St. Therese High School*

St. Therese developed in the aforementioned setting. In 1926 two priests from the order of the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales (OSFS) bought a plot of land from the community that had settled on the Tses Reserve. As the inhabitants had only begun to settle in the western part of Tses in 1923 when the South African government had bought the land from Berseba's Kaptein Johann Goliath, there was no mission station in this area, a void which the Catholic Church soon filled. In 1927 Father Nowak and Father Sedel directed the building of a mission station with a school for catechists

(Tses Mission Records) although this school closed by 1937 (Cohen 1994: 115). Some time after the Sacred Heart Sisters (MSC) took over the mission in 1933, the mission created a primary school, and in the 1950s a church and hospital were built (Tses Mission Records). The primary school, later named after Father Nowak, the church and the hospital became the three arms of the Tses Mission, which administered to those living on the Tses Reserve and the village of Tses that grew up next to the mission and train station.

In the 1960s the mission expanded again, this time to build a secondary school. Bishop Slotterback, then the Bishop of the Keetmanshoop Diocese<sup>51</sup>, decided that the Catholic Church should build a secondary school in southern Namibia, and for this purpose founded the Roman Catholic Secondary School in Keetmanshoop in 1960. Apparently the Keetmanshoop school struggled in its early years and as a result, the bishop encouraged Maria Kusch, a school teacher, and Father Minder, the Mission Father in Tses at that time, to found St. Therese Secondary School in 1964 (Maria Kusch: April 2, 2002; St. Therese Records).<sup>52</sup> In her first year Ms. Kusch taught seventeen students, blacks from the region, most of whom were male and had been educated at Catholic primary schools, Nowak or Don Bosco in Keetmanshoop (St. Therese Records; Mattheus !Goraseb: December 19, 2001). It was the only secondary school for blacks in the South at this time.

For the next ten years the students, teachers and mission workers continued to expand in numbers. Likewise, the school expanded its offerings. Whereas St. Therese initially offered Standards VII and VIII in 1964, it added Standard VI in 1970 and Standards IX and X in 1972 and 1973, thereby becoming St. Therese High School. The characters who came together at St. Therese by the mid-1970s, as well as the society which they developed there, demonstrate how the school enabled its students to pursue their interests during those years and in their subsequent lives.

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<sup>51</sup> The diocese covers the South including Rehoboth.

<sup>52</sup> The St. Therese Records and former students from St. Therese's first class claim that the school was founded in 1964 although Ms. Kusch believes the year to have been 1965.

#### **IV. Characters: Life at St. Therese from 1973 to 1976**

The characters who performed at St. Therese from 1973 to 1976 lived in the setting described above. They received scripts influenced by this environment, and we can predict how people performed based on them. Still, it is misleading to suggest that all possessed the same scripts. Although by some measure St. Therese students grew up in the same setting and belonged to the same culture, by other measures they belonged to different settings and cultures since they grew up with different families, hailed from different regions, identified with different ethnicities, church denominations and genders. The same point can be made about the teachers and missionaries in Tses although one stretches further to talk about what these individuals had in common since they differed in race and nationality as well. The different characters who came together at St. Therese and the contexts in which they interacted with one another suggest how individuals learned from one another's scripts and indicate the possibilities for student performances.

##### *The Students*

Between 1973 and 1976 approximately 635 students attended St. Therese High School. In 1973 there were 303 students, in 1974 340, 1975 328 and 1976 316, the largest number and the most regionally and ethnically diverse group of students to attend the school in any four year period before or since.

There are many reasons why students travelled to Tses en masse during these years. When asked why they attended St. Therese, most students explain that St. Therese was "the only secondary school for blacks" or "the only secondary school for Namas." Neither of these statements is technically correct; there were other places where blacks, and those blacks that the government classified as "Nama", could study. For example, Augustineum, located in Windhoek, offered secondary education up to matriculation level for black students as early as 1953 (Melber 1979: 36). Students from the South, including several educated at Nowak, had previously attended Augustineum for secondary schooling as well as teacher training. Martin Luther, a Lutheran mission school northwest of Windhoek in Okambahe, and Döbra, a Catholic mission school 25 km north of Windhoek, are institutions that also provided secondary courses for blacks by the 1960s. In addition to these institutions, there were two mission schools which offered secondary education to blacks north of

the Red Line (Cohen 1994:100; Melber 1979: 36), and several secondary schools opened throughout the country during the 1970s.

These schools, however, were not viable options for many students who attended St. Therese. As Maria Kusch, the first teacher at St. Therese, explained, there were students who wished to attend secondary school “who had been waiting around for years” when the school opened in 1964 (Maria Kusch: April 2, 2002). Many St. Therese students who attended during the 1970s also had no other schooling options. Students recall that they “could not afford to go anywhere else” and that “St. Therese accepted people without money.” Although a small fee was required for living in the boarding hostel, 10 or 20 Rand per pupil per year (Bishop Antonio: June 13, 2002)<sup>53</sup>, it seems that students were not required to pay any school fees. More to the point, no St. Therese student whom I interviewed recalls if he or she had to pay school fees when attending St. Therese despite the fact that students grew up in financially poor families and that bickering over school fees is a common occurrence of which students are highly aware at St. Therese and other Namibian schools today. During the 1970s students and their families who could not pay hostel fees in capital, did so in livestock or by performing some other service for the mission (Bishop Antonio: June 13, 2002). As some stories indicate, students who had nothing were also accommodated. One former student, Stefanus Swartbooi, ran away from home to live on the Tses Mission because “there was often no food at home.” He explains that he was allowed to attend Nowak and St. Therese without paying school fees through Standard X so that he “only needed to care for [himself] during the holidays” (Stefanus Swartbooi: June 14, 2002). Bishop Antonio also confirms that students were not turned away from studying at St. Therese for financial reasons (Bishop Antonio: June 13, 2002).

Clearly, if families of some St. Therese students could not pay the 10 or 20 Rand hostel fee, they would have been unable to afford to send their children to schools like Augustineum, Döbra and Martin Luther. Train or road transport would have been costly, and school and hostel fees at Augustineum and Martin Luther were probably higher than those at St. Therese and Döbra, the two Catholic schools (Bishop Antonio: June 13, 2002; Joseph McKay: June 4, 2002). Even if families could afford to send their children to another school, there were other factors that made it difficult for students to attend these institutions. Their distance from home

was definitely a deterrent. As some students remarked, “my family only knew the reserve” and “people didn’t go to Windhoek in those days.” The only school besides St. Therese that offered secondary education to blacks in the South during the mid-1970s was a state junior secondary school in Gibeon, but it did not open until 1975 and did not offer Standards IX and X (Department of Coloured, Baster and Nama Relations 1974-1975: 12). It is possible that a few Nama-speakers attended Suiderlig High School in Keetmanshoop (Maria Kusch: April 2, 2002), but the school was officially open to “Coloureds” and not “Namas” (Department of Coloured Relations and Rehoboth Affairs 1972-1974; Department of Coloured, Baster and Nama Relations 1974-1977) despite the fact that the two groups fell under the same department and drew from the same syllabus after 1969 (See below). In fact, virtually 100% of “Namas” attending secondary school between 1973 and 1976 were students at St. Therese (St. Therese School Records; Department of Coloured Relations and Rehoboth Affairs 1972-1974; Department of Coloured, Baster and Nama Relations 1974-1977).<sup>54</sup>

Effectively, then, St. Therese was “the only secondary school for blacks” for most living in the South. It explains why students in the South who wanted to attend school went to St. Therese. Why, however, did so many students want to attend St. Therese to begin with, such that the student body ballooned from seventeen in 1964 to 340 in 1974? Furthermore, why did some students attend St. Therese despite growing up nearer to other senior secondary schools?

Certainly there was a great demand for secondary education among Namibian blacks. The discrepancy between the South’s social-economy and the aspirations of many southern Namibian blacks must have led more students to school. Increasing numbers of black pupils in secondary schools throughout the country suggest that other black Namibians, who also lived on the margins of society, had similar hopes for what they could achieve through education. Although no government legislation required blacks to attend school, more and more students entered St. Therese and other Namibian schools during the 1970s.

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<sup>53</sup> The Bishop is not sure if the hostel fee was 10 or 20 Rand in 1976.

<sup>54</sup> There are a few discrepancies between the statistics in the St. Therese Records for student numbers and those recorded in the Annual Reports of the Department of Coloured Relations and Rehoboth Affairs (later the Department of Coloured, Rehoboth and Nama Relations). It appears that students who dropped out of school during the school year can account for these differences, but it is possible that a handful of Nama students were accommodated at another institution for secondary school.

The number of St. Therese students further increased because of how some families and students identified with this particular school. For example, some students attended St. Therese at least partially because they had family living in Tses or attending school on the mission, or because the mission was Catholic. Other students explain that they wanted to attend the school because of the “good reputation” that the school had. Students emphasize academic, athletic and political aspects of this reputation depending on their experiences at the school and subsequently. Those who do not attribute their attendance to reputation still mention it when they tell stories about trips to Keetmanshoop and how people “looked up to them” when they visited the town in their school uniforms. One alumnus summarized that St. Therese was “a place of pride more than any school in Keetmanshoop and Windhoek.” Of course, there are many reasons for students to portray their alma mater in a positive light (See Chapter V) and those I interviewed spoke generally about the reputation of the school and did not discuss how different community members looked at St. Therese. Nonetheless, students support their position that St. Therese generally had a “good reputation” with compelling evidence that students came to St. Therese “from Windhoek, Hereroland and even from South Africa.” These claims are true indeed and suggest that reputation, in addition to an interest in secondary education and a paucity of schooling options, drew together the students of St. Therese from 1973 to 1976.

There are several scales on which one might measure the diversity of the St. Therese student body. Although my statistics from former students do not nearly account for all of those who attended St. Therese during the mid-1970s, they do sketch the diversity of the school during this period. First and foremost, St. Therese students came from a wide range of places. Although 89% of students for whom I have records came from the South, a significant minority came from other places including Windhoek, Rehoboth, Hereroland, Tswanaland and the Northern Cape of South Africa. Although the majority (59%) of the students grew up on the reserves, a sizable minority (41%) grew up at least partially in urban areas. Most of these urban areas were small towns in the South, but 13% of urban students came from Windhoek.

The geographic diversity of St. Therese students resulted in a mix of different ethnicities at the school as well. Students who filled out information about their classmates identified some of them as coloured, Tswana and Ovambo, ethnicities that

are uncommon in the reserve areas of the South. Moreover, these reserves are more ethnically diverse than the term Namaland acknowledges. As previously mentioned (Chapter III), there were people on the reserves who the government may have classified as Damara and Herero and who identified with these ethnicities to greater and lesser degrees. Although Damaras share a common language with Namas<sup>55</sup>, Otjiherero is an entirely different Bantu language, which some Hereros from the South would have spoken.<sup>56</sup> Those blacks who could trace their origins back to the Namas or Oorlams of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, also have different ethnic identifications among themselves, often divided according to fourteen “geo-political tribes” (Malan 1995: 117-118). To varying degrees these groups live on land where they established settlements during the nineteenth century and identify with separate Kapteins and indigenous histories. The diversity of the St. Therese student body also extends to other spheres. Although many students belonged to the Catholic Church, there were students who identified with other denominations as well. Some former students estimate that there were similar numbers of Catholics and Protestants with the ELC and the African Methodists (AME) being the most represented among the Protestant denominations. St. Therese was also co-educational, with 356 (60%) male and 279 (40%) female students attending the school between 1973 and 1976. These figures do not reflect the ratios at different grade levels, however, since the number of women decreases more rapidly. For example, 45% of the Standard VI student population was male and 55% female. By Standard VIII, the percentages changed to 56% male and 44% female, by Standard X, 74% male, 26% female.

Although St. Therese students did not explicitly mention the rapid drop-out rate of female students towards the higher grades, some of their stories and comments about gender roles shed light on this phenomenon. One former student, Christina Basson, explained how her family pulled her out of St. Therese after Standard VI because her mother did not believe that any more education was “necessary for a girl” (Christina Basson: November 20, 2001). Theresia Basson, another alumna, elaborates in a published account of her experiences in exile that she “came from a background

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<sup>55</sup> Today people in central Namibia who identify with Damara ethnicity often claim that they speak the “Damara language.” In fact, Nama and Damara are almost identical to one another; ‘Damara speakers’ have taught me a few “Damara words”, but they readily admit that there are few differences between the Nama and Damara languages. In Namibian schools Nama and Damara are taught as one language, “Nama/Damara”, and national news broadcasts are also provided in this language.

<sup>56</sup> All students probably would have been able to speak Afrikaans as it is the lingua franca south of the Red Line.

where women normally have their place in the kitchen or cannot decide what they want to do or where there is even the parents' traditional belief that as a girl you should not go to school until matriculation" (Melber 1983: 145). Male students told stories about girls who were dismissed because they became pregnant at school, but none mentioned a similar fate for the responsible boy. It seems, then, that there are aspects of the larger culture and the school itself which led to unequal gender ratios, but St. Therese did have a significant number of female students, some of whom, such as Theresia Basson, were among the top academic performers through Standard X (St. Therese Records).

Regardless of how students identified themselves regionally, ethnically, religiously and sexually, St. Therese exposed students to 'others', people whom they would have regarded as different from themselves. Former students made comments about "different people" coming to St. Therese "from everywhere." This diversity probably made a particularly strong impression on the majority of St. Therese students who had grown up in rural areas and not been exposed to many other communities.

Nonetheless, there are several core characteristics which St. Therese students had in common. First, students came from financially poor families. Naturally their means and the geography of southern Namibia limited what most of these students had seen of the country. Some students whom I interviewed had never travelled outside of their reserve before they attended St. Therese; those in the towns had often travelled just between their town and one reserve where much of their family lived. As a "Nama school" there were relatively few coloured students at St. Therese and definitely no whites. Perhaps these similarities are responsible for the solidarity that former St. Therese students express when they talk about one another. Mention of peculiar habits of students from a particular region or fights between factions at the school were entirely absent from my interviews with alumni. Rather, they talk about their fellow students as a unit, in which, as one student remarked, there was "no political division." Indeed, students' relationship with national politics may have contributed to their solidarity although students identified with the Namibian liberation struggle to different degrees (See Chapter VI).

This combination of diversity and solidarity sheds light on how St. Therese students learned from their classmates in Tses. Students' backgrounds also clarify

why many students identified closely with the teachers and missionaries on the Tses Mission, becoming 'understudies' for 'new roles.'

### *The Teachers*

Between 1973 and 1976 there were twenty teachers who taught at St. Therese. The number remained stable throughout the period with fourteen teaching at the school in 1973, fifteen in 1974 and probably sixteen in 1975 and 1976.<sup>57</sup> St. Therese teachers, and to a lesser extent St. Therese students, saw the teachers as belonging to three groups, "the Nama teachers", "the coloured teachers" and "the Sisters."

There were nine "Nama teachers" at St. Therese between 1973 and 1976, eight of whom came from the South, one of whom came from Hereroland. These teachers were Mattheus !Goraseb, Oskar !Goraseb, Johannes Isaack, Stephanus Goliath, Erna Apollus<sup>58</sup> (1974-1976), Aser Kapere<sup>59</sup> (1974), Johann Chrisitaan (1975-1976) and Ben Boois (1976). There are similarities between these teachers' backgrounds. First, they came to St. Therese because they had personal contact with people at the school. Four of them had attended school in Tses, three at St. Therese. Mattheus !Goraseb and Willem Konjore, who was active at St. Therese<sup>60</sup>, had entered in the school's first Standard VII class in 1964. The other teachers lived in the South and seem to have had contact with someone at the school.

Second, the majority of these teachers had received less than a Standard X education and a diploma from a tertiary institution. Five had attended school until Standard VI, VII or VIII before joining a two-year course at St. Joseph's Teacher Training at Döbra or Augustineum Training College where they received diplomas in primary school education. These institutions were the most common ones through which black teachers received their training, Augustineum being the state school officially sanctioned for blacks, including "Namas" even after 1969 (Department of Coloured Relations and Rehoboth Affairs 1969-1970: 31). Obviously other teachers found other paths to teacher training. Erna Apollus attended secondary school at

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<sup>57</sup> I speculate at the number of teachers in 1975 and 1976, for there are no listings of teachers for those two years. Through the collective memories of my informants, I know that two new teachers entered St. Therese in 1975 and one in 1976. My sources do not have the same accounts of teachers which left the school or when they left and do not remember the specific number of teachers in a given year.

<sup>58</sup> Erna Apollus, who comes from Vaalgras, might have been labelled 'Herero.'

<sup>59</sup> Aser Kapere, who came from Hereroland, would have been labelled 'Herero.'

<sup>60</sup> Willem Konjore was principal of the Primary School in Kōes at this time, but he participated in some student activities at his nearby alma mater. One should also note that teachers at Nowak sometimes participated in activities at St. Therese as well.

Matjieskloof in South Africa and gained permission to attend a South African teachers' college for coloureds. Aser Kapere and Ben Boois, both of whom attended St. Therese up to Standard X, had studied for some time at the University of the Western Cape (UWC), South Africa's coloured university, which became an option for Namas who passed Standard X after 1969. It is worth noting that teachers remember hearing stories about "political meetings" and "activism" from their colleagues who attended UWC and Döbra. There was also a politically motivated strike at Augustineum as early as 1973, but the school looked upon students' political activities unfavourably and expelled many (Department of Information and Publicity, SWAPO of Namibia 1981: 276).

Stephanus Goliath's path to St. Therese is worthy of special note both because of his academic accomplishments and how St. Therese students remember them (See Chapter V). Goliath grew up in Keetmanshoop and Ganigobes (Berseba Reserve) where he attended primary school and was home schooled by his father, brother of the Kaptein in Berseba. Since there were no secondary schools for blacks in the South when Goliath completed his primary schooling in 1960, Goliath's father arranged for his son to enrol in a correspondence college for Standard VI, and later Goliath attended Augustineum where he eventually completed his matriculation in 1966. When Goliath applied for university, "Namas" were still under Bantu Education, and therefore he attended the University of the North rather than UWC. There he received a teacher's diploma and a B.A. in history, making him the highest qualified teacher at St. Therese when he took a post there in 1972 and probably the most educated black in southern Namibia at this time.<sup>61</sup>

Third, Goliath and the other eight "Nama teachers" were under the government's dispensation for "Namas."<sup>62</sup> According to government stipulations, Nama teachers received a lower salary than did their coloured colleagues, and Namas and coloureds at St. Therese received these different salaries since St. Therese was a state-aided school. Many of the Nama teachers remember their lesser salaries as a source of discontent, and it was a contributing factor in their decision to unite with other Nama teachers in a strike in Gibeon in 1976 (See Chapter VI).

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<sup>61</sup> I base this assertion on the fact that there was no black with a B.A. according to the 1970 census statistics and because none of my sources know any other black who received a B.A. at this time.

<sup>62</sup> Aser Kapere and Erna Apollus probably received the same salaries as the other "Nama teachers" since they were teachers at a "Nama school." No informant recalled that these teachers received different salaries than the others.

The eleven “coloured teachers” at St. Therese were Gert Beukes<sup>63</sup>, L.W. Cloete, Jackie du Toit, Frikkie Haman, M. Williams, Violet Lehanie, A. B. Hammond, Mrs. H. Hammond (1974-1976), W. Phillander (1974), Carl Kisting (1974) and Hope Christiaans (1975-1976). Five of the teachers grew up primarily in southern Namibia and six came from South Africa. Although there is some debate among my sources about whether a few teachers had received teaching diplomas, it is clear that most of them had, receiving their tertiary education at coloured teacher training colleges in South Africa. In many cases, the coloured teachers came to St. Therese to pay off their bursaries from their studies in South Africa. Therefore, some did not have a close personal connection with the school although St. Therese did hire them, not the state (Fritz !Goraseb: April 8, 2002). In this way, some coloured teachers differed from their black colleagues who were more personally connected with the school before being hired. Also the coloured teachers generally had spent more years in school and had higher qualifications because they needed to pass Standard X in order to train as teachers. Also, as coloureds, they received a higher salary from the government.

My interviews with former St. Therese teachers suggest that there was some discontent between the two groups. One of the Nama teachers whom I interviewed explained that the coloured teachers “liked alcohol too much” and had “problems outside of school.” A coloured teacher remarked that the Nama teachers were “jealous of the coloureds.” My sources contend, however, that teachers were usually good role-models in front of the students.

Both sets of teachers agree that they respected the “the Sisters” and assert that they had a strong hold over the running of the school and were inexhaustible, “ready to teach and help day and night.” Between 1973 and 1976 two German Sisters taught at St. Therese: Sister Mara and Sister Servanda. Sister Mara served as principal at St. Therese between 1968 and 1976 and therefore was responsible for the organization and day-to-day running of the school. Sister Servanda taught German and other subjects. Both Sisters had trained with the MSC in Germany before coming to Namibia. As members of a religious order, their commitment to the school was different from the other teachers. They lived in a house with other Sisters working on the mission and were provided with room and board. They were engaged in life long

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<sup>63</sup> Gert Beukes, who came from Rehoboth, would officially have been labelled “Baster.”

service to the church and therefore continued to teach in Tses as long as church leaders decided that they should remain there.

### *The Missionaries*

In addition to the Sisters, several other individuals worked on the mission during the mid-1970s. The Tses Mission had a Father, appointed by the Bishop in Keetmanshoop, who oversaw all work on the mission, including the church, the schools and the hospital. Former students and teachers remember the Father as “the head of the mission.” The Father took chief responsibility for church services, which were held at the mission church for students and the community, as well as other church functions such as marriages, funerals and ministerial work on the nearby reserves. He also supervised the staff that ran the mission school and hospital. These individuals included one Brother and one Sister, who worked as supervisors for the boys’ and girls’ student hostels respectively. Another Sister worked as a cook and cleaner for the mission, and at least two Sisters worked in the hospital at any given time.

There were two Fathers who led the Tses Mission during the mid-1970s. Father Bergkamp served as Father from 1968 to 1975. Raised in Holland, Father Bergkamp arrived in Namibia in 1952 where he served at different posts in the South for sixteen years before becoming Mission Father in Tses at 53 years of age. In 1976 Bishop Slotterback reassigned Father Bergkamp to Mariental and assigned Father Antonio<sup>64</sup> to the Tses Mission. Father Antonio had only left for Namibia from Italy in 1970 and had served in Rehoboth from 1970 to 1975. At 38 years of age when he took the post in Tses, Father Antonio was one of the youngest Catholic Church leaders in Namibia at this time. Father Bergkamp and Father Antonio, therefore, represent two different generations of leadership on the Tses Mission, both with respect to their ages and the length of their service in Namibia.

### *Curriculum*

Between 1973 and 1976, St. Therese students took classes in Afrikaans, English, History, Geography, and Science<sup>65</sup> and could choose between Mathematics,

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<sup>64</sup> Father Antonio is now Bishop Antonio and serves as the Bishop of the Keetmanshoop Diocese.

<sup>65</sup> Biology was synonymous with science at St. Therese during these years; physical science was not offered.

German, Woodwork and Needlework (from 1975) as a final class. The medium of instruction was Afrikaans. This curriculum is ostensibly the same as that offered at St. Therese since 1964 with the exception that Latin was originally offered instead of German, and Woodwork and Needlework were not always available. The official requirements for these classes and who taught them, however, varied with the years.

St. Therese underwent two significant shifts regarding its approach to curriculum between the school's founding in 1964 and the 1970s. In 1964 the Catholic Church founded St. Therese as a private school, not aided by the state. The school was accountable to state inspections and did need to prepare students for tests under Bantu Education, but the state did not pay teachers' salaries and otherwise remained outside the school's affairs. This relationship to the school changed by 1969 when St. Therese became a state-aided mission school. The school retained the right to hire and fire its own teachers and deal with its business internally but now received government aid for teachers' salaries and the upkeep of the school and was fully responsible for following the state syllabi, for state education regulations and for opening the school to state inspectors (Department of Coloured Relations and Rehoboth Affairs 1969-1970: 32; Maria Kusch: April 2, 2002; Deacon Fritz !Goraseb: April 8, 2002). As previously mentioned, the government also reclassified the school under the new Department of Coloured Relations and Rehoboth Affairs in conjunction with the shift of Namias to this department in 1969. The Department served as the Namibian wing of the Administration of Coloured Affairs, administered out of Cape Town (Matters Relating to the Coloured Population Group 1976: 167; Department of Coloured Relations and Rehoboth Affairs 1969-1970: 21). Thereby, St. Therese was responsible for following the Coloured Education curricula, syllabi and examinations.

Although education for coloureds had previously been inseparable from the white provincial education departments in South Africa, in 1964 the Department of Coloured Affairs began prescribing its own separate material (Matters Relating to the Coloured Population Group 1976: 164). It is these curricula, syllabi and examinations that St. Therese inherited in 1969. Coloured Affairs designed this material so as "not to depart basically from the syllabuses, etc. prescribed for White pupils by other education departments" (Matters Relating to the Coloured Population Group 1976:

164). Although it is difficult to measure the truth of this statement<sup>66</sup>, there are at least two facts that suggest that white and coloured, and thereby St. Therese, education in the 1970s were similar on paper. First of all, the preface of many textbooks created in the 1970s claims that the textbook is created for both white and coloured education. Secondly, the Joint Matriculation Board moderated the Standard X exams every year to ensure that a common standard for university matriculation was maintained (Matters Relating to the Coloured Population Group 1976: 164).

It is possible that the nature of the syllabi may have benefited St. Therese students academically since students prepared for their exams with material similar to that used by whites that were also preparing to matriculate. In comparison, the Bantu curriculum may have been crafted specifically to make success in secondary school and matriculation very difficult (Ellis 1984: 25; Amukugo 1995: 63-64). On the other hand, the textbooks often did not relate very closely to St. Therese students' lives and interests. For example, history textbooks designed for white and coloured education during the early and mid-1970s covered very little Namibian history despite the fact that half of every year's history curriculum was devoted to South African history. Textbooks often had sections on "non-whites", but Namibian ethnicities are generally ignored. Some of the texts for Standards IX and X do touch on the struggle in Namibia and other African countries but belie a strong bias towards the South African government's position. For example, one text summarizes SWAPO's status with the sentence: "it is obvious that [SWAPO's] terrorist activity is not supported by the indigenous population" (Van Schoor, et al. 1976: 190).

Regardless of the advantages and disadvantages of the formal curriculum, former St. Therese students remember little about it. Students speak generally about their "Bantu Education", and how the content of their curriculum was "inferior" and "lacked quality." These comments probably indicate more about where St. Therese students perceived their place in the apartheid pecking order than about the content of the government curriculum per se. After all, St. Therese students were not actually the recipients of Bantu Education after 1969, and most students did not have the opportunity to compare aspects of the curriculum at their school with other schools.

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<sup>66</sup> The actual curricula, syllabi and examinations may be lost to the world. The Library of the Department of Education only has records for former white education from this period. Likewise, the records do not seem to exist in the Cape Archives, the Namibian Archives, the South African National Library or at the University of Cape Town. As for the Administration of Coloured Affairs itself, it no longer exists under the post-apartheid government.

Johannes Koopman, who transferred from Suiderlig to St. Therese in 1972 because he could not afford to attend Dr. Lemmer in Rehoboth, the nearest senior secondary school for coloureds at that time, recalls that “the curriculum at St. Therese and Suiderlig were the same” (Johannes Koopman: December 19, 2001).

On the other hand, St. Therese students remember a great deal about different teachers’ presentation of material inside the classroom. Teachers asserted their influence, and some inserted new material when they taught the formal curriculum, flavouring the content through their presentation of lectures, their classroom discussions and their assignments. For example, students fondly recall the stories and jokes that Mr. Hammond told to interest them in his mathematics lessons. Stephanus Goliath related Namibian political events to the required history syllabus such as in his lessons about the French Revolution (Stephanus Goliath: December 19, 2001). In addition, St. Therese had two classes that fell outside the government’s standard fare. The first, catechism class, met once or twice weekly, and offered the Mission Father a platform to cover material that he saw fit to teach for students’ religious instruction. Father Bergkamp based his classes on a catechism textbook created by the church (Father Bergkamp: November 27, 2001), and Father Antonio opened his discussions of Christianity to the context of democracy and social change (Father Antonio: April 11, 2002). The second class, vocational guidance, covered information regarding vocational options open to students as well as assisted students filling in application forms for schools and jobs (Stephanus Goliath: December 19, 2001). Stephanus Goliath led these classes.

Of course, St. Therese teachers were not at liberty to teach whatever they wished. Under the Department of Coloured Affairs and as a state-subsidized school, there were ways in which the administration did check on the content of lessons at St. Therese. An inspector visited St. Therese most years (St. Therese Records). The department created external examinations, and whether students passed or failed depended on the results of these exams (The Department of Coloured Affairs and Baster Relations 1973-1974: 15). At the end of the year, teachers travelled to Keetmanshoop to mark exams, and an inspector moderated them there (Mattheus !Goraseb: December 19, 2001). The Department marked all exams in Afrikaans and English, as well as the Cape Coloured Exam for university matriculation, externally.

Still, yearly inspections and examination check-ups do not account for much of what actually transpired inside the classroom. There, teachers introduced material

as they saw fit, and teachers and students interacted with one another in the environment which they created. Their interaction did not stop in the classroom either. In their daily life, St. Therese students, teachers and mission workers had ample opportunity to influence one another.

### *Attendance and Daily Life*

St. Therese students attended school Monday through Friday during four academic quarters. From 1973 to 1976 almost all students boarded in the mission's hostels because their families lived far away from the school. There were a few students at St. Therese who lived in Tses proper with their families or other families who offered to house them for the school year. Some of these students also participated in the extracurricular activities at the school, but they were not required to do so. For boarders, however, the rules and rhythms of the hostel dominated their daily lives.

There were two hostels on the mission, one for boys and one for girls, each of which held students from Nowak and St. Therese. Students slept in rooms with approximately fifty other students on bunk beds. Rooms were grouped according to standards with Standard VI and VII students rooming together and Standards VIII, IX and X together. Hostel students mixed freely and were required to live in constant contact with their fellow students. Not only did they sleep in the same room, but they worked together, played together, ate together, did their ablutions together, etc. Interaction between boys and girls was more limited as they were not allowed in the others' hostel, but they did participate in some joint hostel activities, and they were never distant from one another as the hostels were located next to each other on the mission grounds.

The daily life of hostel students followed a very regular pattern. Weekdays began at 5 A.M. when the generators came on. Following early morning ablutions, cleaning and breakfast in the hostel dining hall, students walked to the other side of the mission for classes. The school day ran from 7 A.M. to 1 P.M. with short breaks when students moved between classes and a morning break period, much like St. Therese and other Namibian schools operate today. Classes were followed by lunch and a time for sleep during the heat of the day. Most afternoons, students attended a school study, followed by physical chores and supper. In the evening teachers

invigilated a second study, followed by a half-hour to an hour of free time and bed. The generator cut out all electricity by 10 P.M.

This routine ensured that students, teachers and missionaries interacted with one another outside of the classroom. For example, all students participated in daily chores that included cleaning the hostel, collecting firewood, working in the school garden, caring for the mission's pigs and building school classrooms and other mission buildings. These chores were essential for running a mission which received practically no financial contribution from its students. Of course, as state-sponsored and Catholic, St. Therese did receive financial support from these institutions (Bishop Antonio: June 13, 2002) and the school relied on a nearby Catholic Church farm for donkeys and goats (Joseph McKay: June 4, 2002). Still, student labour was required to make the Tses Mission as self-sufficient as possible such that some students felt that they were "running the school themselves." In reality, three missionaries were regularly overseeing students' work, and in some cases missionaries participated with students. For example, many alumni remember working with Father De Sa, a visiting American priest who in 1976 orchestrated the building of the R.C. Hall, used to accommodate the increasing number of students in Tses at school and church functions.

Church was also central to mission life. In addition to school catechism classes, hostel students attended church services every Wednesday and Friday evening and Sunday morning in addition to extra services on Catholic holy days. Often students were segregated by standard for these services due to the limited size of the church, and the Mission Father would conduct different services and adapt his sermons for the primary school students, the standard VI and VII students and the standard VIII, IX and X students (Father Bergkamp: November 27, 2001). These services were mandatory for all hostel students although those affiliated with the ELC and AME were given additional opportunity to receive instruction and worship with branches of their denomination in Tses.

On some weekdays and during weekends, students engaged in extracurricular activities. The most popular sports at St. Therese were soccer and netball, and St. Therese supported school teams as well as clubs within the school itself. The school soccer team was particularly successful; it dominated local schools and club teams and played national clubs. St. Therese teachers and students also founded a number of student clubs and societies during the early and mid-1970s. In 1975 the school elected

its first Student Representative Council (SRC) to serve as student leaders for a variety of school functions. Students also participated in the school choir started by Hope Christiaans and a debate club led by Willem Konjore in which students often discussed political issues (Willem Konjore: December 19, 2001). Several other student organizations developed during the mid-1970s that focused on national politics. Some students began participating in conferences with Döbra and Martin Luther, discussing student issues. By 1975 this group had written a charter and called itself the Namibian Black Students Organization (NABSO). By that time students had also started a chapter of the SWAPO Youth League (SYL) at St. Therese although this activity was not formally school affiliated.

There were also social activities for students during weekends. There were organized events such as school dances and social evenings on the mission ground, overseen by mission workers. The mission staff also planned bazaars for which they received second-hand clothes from contacts in Europe and auctioned them off to the local community. The proceeds were then used to subsidize school expenses and development. Students also tell other anecdotes about socializing with friends and teachers during their free time. Some recall sitting on the hostel *stoep* ('front porch') with classmates and singing while waiting for their bedtime. Others mention how they enjoyed visiting Mr. and Mrs. Hammond where there was often "food at the house" and spending time with Mr. Beukes who attended many student activities and was "at grass roots level with the students."

During the academic year St. Therese students were generally confined to the above-mentioned activities. Usually hostel students remained in Tses until the extended holidays after each quarter. Student life was strictly organized such that, unless a student ran an errand for a teacher, he or she remained on mission grounds during the academic week (Bishop Antonio: June 13, 2002). Students did have free time after doing chores or attending church on Saturday and Sunday although many remained on the mission during this time, playing and watching soccer or netball. Occasionally hostel students received permission to leave the mission grounds and travel elsewhere for the weekend, and there were instances in which students left hostel grounds without permission, particularly as some began to attend political rallies and campaign in southern Namibian communities. Still, all St. Therese students living in the hostel spent the vast majority of their time with their peers,

teachers and the missionaries in a community that approximated a “total institution” (Goffman 1961).

The location of the Tses Mission and the power of the Catholic Church also allowed the Mission Father to maintain a fair degree of control over who came in and out of mission grounds. By 1975 the police were coming to St. Therese to interrogate politically active students, but the Mission Father never allowed them to do so on the premise that the Tses Mission was private church property. Therefore, South African police and soldiers never became part of the attendance and daily life at St. Therese as they did at other Namibian and South African schools during the mid-1970s.

University of Cape Town

## **V. Plot and Resolutions: Student Performances**

By now the central plot of this social drama should be evident. On the one hand, students at St. Therese wanted to receive education, attain professional jobs and, in turn, live 'successful' lives. On the other hand, geography, social economy, history and particularly the contemporary government combined to keep people in 'their place.' In this context missionaries and their schools, like St. Therese, often became allies of blacks, albeit sometimes cautious allies, because they also wanted the indigenous people to receive a better education and achieve 'success.'

One cannot assume that students', teachers' and missionaries' collective and individual interpretations of success were exactly the same. Individuals define success in many contexts based on scripts taken from a range of other characters. In addition to notions of success in a school or work context, former students must have had ideas about 'successful' relationships to family and friends. The Mission Fathers referred to some of these other aspects of success in our interviews. For example, Bishop Antonio suggests that St. Therese was a successful school because students had "a positive experience all around" and now many have "a good family life" (Bishop Antonio: April 11, 2002). Some St. Therese students, teachers and missionaries also mentioned success in the context of social responsibility and citizenship although these ideals led students to both passive and active responses to the Namibian liberation struggle.

Nonetheless, former St. Therese students, teachers and missionaries refer to "success" consistently when discussing school and work.<sup>67</sup> In this context students used "success" as if it were a synonym for high marks, completing Standard X and receiving a professional job. Although some more philosophical St. Therese students suggested that "success" was not in the result or job per se, but in the quality behind the achievement, no interviewee, nor anyone with whom I have spoken in Tses, has praised the skill, nobility, or pleasures of being a 'successful' goat herder. Similarly, Christina Basson is proud of what she has been able to accomplish as a shop clerk and store operator but feels she could have been "more successful" if she had been able to attend longer at St. Therese (Christina Basson: November 20, 2001). Teachers and missionaries have similar assumptions about success in the context of school and

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<sup>67</sup> I recognize that the dynamics of my interviews, most often between a school teacher and a 'successful' professional, may have affected the way in which interviewees used the term "success." I consider these and other likely biases in the information that sources gave me later in this chapter.

work. As Father Bergkamp noted, there were “very successful children [at St. Therese]. Others did not pass” (Father Bergkamp: December 13, 2001).

The fact that both students and school leaders viewed success in similar ways is a significant factor in how St. Therese students could have penetrated the status quo. In direct contrast with the “counter-school culture” that Willis (1977) describes, the St. Therese students and school leaders generally had a common vision for how students could benefit from the school. Consequently, many students at St. Therese identified their success at school with their success in life. Furthermore, students identified with particular leaders at the school. The teachers and mission workers were suited to be role-models because they had achieved professional success, and Stephanus Goliath and other “Nama teachers” were particularly influential because they came from a social background similar to many students. Through their intense interaction with others on the Tses Mission and with few ‘distractions’ from the outside world, students could focus on scripts to which St. Therese exposed them and relate them to their success. If, in turn, students became successful academically or athletically, then they might also associate the institution itself with success such that it becomes *sui generis*, greater than the sum of its parts. Any momentum that St. Therese developed is likely to have been enhanced by the location and organization of the school. Students, teachers and missionaries could form a tight community while remaining fairly isolated from the larger society and the South African government.

This model, based on the setting and characters of St. Therese, indicates the *potential* of the school to effect positive change in the lives of its students. Still, St. Therese students had other scripts for becoming successful, and these scripts must have conflicted with one another. For example, it would have been difficult for a girl to follow both a social script indicating that her work was “in the kitchen” and another propagated by her society, and certainly by the school, that she should strive to become a teacher or a nurse. Likewise, students who saw their responsibility as good citizens to protest against the school system and an unjust government that supported it, would not necessarily have invested any time and effort in their education at St. Therese or subsequently. For the sake of argument, all students who attended St. Therese could have lived lives that mirrored those of their families and home communities. Despite the school’s efforts to encourage students to play parts conducive to academic and professional success, other factors in their lives could

have led them to play other roles. Families may have needed their child to stay home and take care of a family member or make ends meet. If families encouraged students to succeed in school, a lack of natural ability in certain subjects or the fact that everyone from their community lived in poverty may have led students to doubt that they were capable of succeeding in school and leading other lives. And just as the school could have developed a positive momentum of its own, it could also have developed a negative momentum, with one failure leading to another.

Two questions remain, therefore, as we consider the plot resolution. How did the characters at St. Therese actually perform? What is the significance of these performances for the subsequent lives of St. Therese students?

### *Quantitative Results and Analysis*

Of the 635 students who studied at St. Therese between 1973 and 1976, approximately 421 studied at Standard VIII level or higher. Ninety-seven students attended the school at the Standard X level. Seventeen passed their Standard X exams, qualifying them to enter a university.<sup>68</sup>

Following their studies at St. Therese, students received tertiary education at a variety of institutions. They include a training school for nurses in Windhoek, Augustineum Training School and Khomasdal Training School<sup>69</sup> for teachers in Windhoek, the University of the Western Cape and universities around the world attended by students in exile (See Appendix 1). Former St. Therese students are now spread throughout southern and central Namibia. Some live on the reserves in the South, others in towns like Keetmanshoop, Mariental, Karasburg and the capital, Windhoek. They have played a variety of social-economic roles from working as farmhands and communal farmers, like many of their parents, to sales and service workers in the towns, from the unemployed, including housewives and others not seeking work, to high-ranking professionals. Of the former St. Therese pupils for whom I have biographical sketches, 89% live in a town or city now; 53% have received tertiary education; 78% currently work as 'professionals'. Of the professionals, 48% work as teachers, 20% as nurses, 17% as elected government

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<sup>68</sup> No St. Therese students took their exams at the school in 1976 for historical reasons to be discussed in Chapter VI. Many students who travelled into exile had the opportunity to attend a university regardless of whether they passed their Standard X exams (See Appendix 1).

officials or civil servants, 9% in the private sector, 4% as pastors and 2% in NGOs.<sup>70</sup> Some St. Therese students have become regionally and nationally recognized leaders in their professions (See Appendices 1 & 2). And although women are less represented among these leaders, there is remarkable parity between the educational and professional careers men and women have had since attending St. Therese. Of those female students who reached Standard VIII, exactly 48% continued to higher education, 77% to professional jobs.<sup>71</sup> There are also no notable discrepancies between the regional and ethnic background of St. Therese students and the subsequent education and jobs they received.

As explained in the Preface, it is impossible to measure the effect that St. Therese had on its students. Ideas and people at St. Therese resonated with students' previous experiences; one cannot talk about one factor in isolation from others. If there had been another school that served students from similar backgrounds, one could at least compare that school's examination results and the subsequent education and occupations of its graduates with those of St. Therese to gauge the relative influence of the two institutions on their student bodies. There is, however, no school appropriate for comparison, for St. Therese was "the only school for blacks" in the South and therefore one of a kind. Even if one were to compare St. Therese with the other Namibian secondary schools for blacks, these schools would not correlate well. Students at Augustineum, Döbra and Martin Luther followed syllabi and took exams under Bantu Education unlike students at St. Therese, who, as pupils at a "Nama school", followed the syllabi and examinations for coloureds. The very elements that make it difficult to compare St. Therese with other schools, however, prove, in and of themselves, that the school had a unique effect on its students. Unless students could have attended school elsewhere, as many could not, they would not have received a secondary school education.

We can also gauge how St. Therese students performed by comparing different aspects of their lives following their attendance at the school with those of

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<sup>69</sup> Khomasdal Training School was opened in 1976. It replaced Augustineum as the place where Namas were expected to receive their teacher training (Department of Coloured, Baster and Nama Affairs, 1975-1976: 10).

<sup>70</sup> As previously mentioned, it is likely that these percentages, taken from my biographies, are inflated in comparison to all of the students attending St. Therese from 1973 to 1976 (Chapter II).

<sup>71</sup> This parity is more remarkable when one considers that most male students for whom I received biographies attended Standard VIII and higher. No doubt if one included all of the students who dropped out after Standards VI and VII, there would be a larger portion of men than women that

others from a similar background according to the 1970 census statistics. The students who attended St. Therese between 1973 and 1976 make up 67% of all blacks who had attended secondary school in the South up until 1970. The number of blacks in the South with a Standard X education increased nearly fivefold at St. Therese; 21 had reached Standard X by 1970, 97 at St. Therese by 1976. Whereas 67 southern blacks had some tertiary education and 133 qualified as “professionals” by 1970, the biographical sketches alone indicate that at least as many, and probably many more, advanced students and professionals attended St. Therese during four years in the 1970s.

Census statistics from 1991 also indicate that those who attended St. Therese differ from their contemporaries of a similar background. Since 1977 considerably more blacks from the South received secondary education than had previously. By independence, 49% of the Nama/Damara speaking population with some education had attended a secondary school.<sup>72</sup> Nevertheless, teacher training certificates and university study remained rare, and former St. Therese students must make up a large percentage of the 308 Nama/Damara speakers who possessed a teacher certificate and the 145 Nama/Damaras who had had university experience in 1991. Statistics from Namaland also indicate how differently former St. Therese students, as a group, lived from the way people lived on the reserves from which most came. Only 40% of the Namaland population between the ages of 25 and 44 were employed and only 5% of these individuals were “professionals, legislators, senior officials or managers” of whom less than half were women. Proportionally, far more former St. Therese students from the mid-’70s, who would have fallen into the age brackets of 25 to 44 in 1991, had jobs and leadership positions.

The extent of students’ education at St. Therese also suggests that academic progress at the school correlates with life changes. Although the biographies I collected do not include many students who attended Standards VI and VII and then dropped out of school, I identified few St. Therese students who left the school after these Standards and then continued to professional careers. In contrast, many students who attended Standards VIII, IX and X continued to higher education and professions. Interestingly, students who reached Standard VIII differ only slightly in

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continued on to academic and professional ‘success’, but by Standard VIII the difference between the genders and their academic and professional results is negligible.

<sup>72</sup> These percentages may be inflated since they include people who received technical training and did not necessarily receive a secondary education.

their educational experiences and professional work from those who reached Standard X. The explanation rests, at least in part, in the significance of Standard VIII and the Junior Certificate that students could earn if they passed the exams at the end of that year. The Junior Certificate qualified St. Therese students to enter the nurse or teacher training institutions for blacks whereas students who did not pass could be denied entry. Of course, only students who passed Standard X could proceed to university, and most leading St. Therese professionals studied up to Standard X at St. Therese or finished its equivalent in exile (See Appendices 1 & 2; See Chapter VII). Standards IX and X, therefore, did not open schooling and professional opportunities per se, but they undoubtedly opened more educational and career options.

In sum, students who attended St. Therese, and particularly those who performed well academically, have continued to achieve academically and professionally at levels uncommonly 'high' for those from their background. Nonetheless, there are limits inherent to any numerical analysis of the effects that St. Therese education had, or any education has, on its students. They gauge how students performed according to external measures instead of the students' own measures for their lives. Furthermore, they do not reveal how students' measures changed through their education and subsequent experiences. Therefore, let us consider how former St. Therese students remember their experiences at the school and analyse students' impressions of how their education affected them.

### *Student Memories of St. Therese*

Students' memories of their experience at St. Therese from 1973 to 1976 are, on the whole, very positive. Former students express nostalgia for their years at St. Therese and hold an appreciation for the school during the time when they attended it. Alumni whom I interviewed believe that the school was also central in some way to the persons that they have become. There is, furthermore, remarkable parity in the manner in which students describe their fellow students, teachers and missionaries.

There are several adjectives that alumni commonly use to describe their classmates. First, they describe them as "hardworking." Apparently, students were keen to be in school and were determined to be successful there. They studied hard to achieve "good results." Second, students were reportedly very "disciplined." Alumni use this adjective both in the context of describing other students' commitment to their school work over distractions from it and in reference to their behaviour. In

particular, students were disciplined in their interaction with authority figures, whom they respected. Although a few students acknowledge that some of their classmates drank alcohol or smoked on occasion and that there was more than one instance when a St. Therese student became pregnant, they emphasize that such happenings were rare.

Former students attribute the hardworking and disciplined student body to larger qualities inculcated at the school. One quality to which alumni often refer is “pride.” Students emphasize how proud they and their classmates were to be students at St. Therese. In addition to taking pride in their work and conduct, students were proud of the school as a whole. Several alumni explain that they made the school “their own” during these years. Particularly, many students, male and female, took pride in the school’s soccer team, which, by all accounts, was very successful during the mid-1970s. Some students mention how they revered and still revere the St. Therese school motto: “*Si alle id possent cur non ego*”, ‘If others can do it, why can’t I?’. As one student said, “it gave you confidence in yourself...[it] did not matter if you were from a poor house.”

Many former pupils also describe the “vision” of St. Therese students. While at St. Therese, students developed professional aspirations to become teachers, nurses and pastors. Some students say that they even began to aspire to careers that were not among those that most blacks believed were open to them or that were outside their typical gender roles. For example, Theresia Basson said that in Standard VII she wanted to be a nurse, but by Standard IX she wanted to be a doctor, a shift that she believes St. Therese influenced (Theresia Basson: December 24, 2001). Although students most often discussed “vision” in the context of reaching personal academic and professional goals, some also applied the term to a sense of social responsibility that they believe they developed at the school. Students who attended St. Therese in 1976 concur that that they and their peers became “politically aware” and this awareness was “an important lesson” that they “learned” at St. Therese. Some saw the national liberation struggle as central to what they wanted to do with their life, to a new society they wished to create (See Chapter VI).

From these descriptions, it is clear that alumni have very positive impressions of who they and their classmates became at St. Therese. There are other aspects of how they describe one another that suggests that students felt personally close to one another as well. For example, students rarely differentiate between their St. Therese

peers from different backgrounds despite the regional, ethnic, religious and gender diversity of the student body. On the contrary, some alumni refer to one another as “brothers” and “sisters” and despite the fact that people in the South often use these terms loosely, they suggest that some students felt a strong bond with their peers. Furthermore, students refer to peers whom they regarded as leaders and whom they admired. Joseph Stephanus, or “Pereb”<sup>73</sup> as he is called by his classmates, is commonly mentioned as “the leader” and “the clever boy at the school.” Stephanus is most commonly remembered for his political activism, but he is mentioned both by students who became active supporters of the Namibian liberation struggle and those who were less active.

St. Therese alumni also tend to praise the teachers at the school. Former students acknowledge that some teachers lacked qualifications, but most emphasize that other qualities made up for these shortcomings. For example, former students explain that their teachers were very “committed.” Apparently, St. Therese teachers took their jobs “seriously” and were very “hard working” and “spirited.” Many describe the teachers as “talented.” In their view the teachers knew their subjects, knew how to teach and taught well. Johannes Koopman painted his teachers’ abilities in a less positive light, pointing out that some did not know their subjects as well as others who taught him at Suiderlig (Johannes Koopman: December 19, 2001). A few students also mentioned that teachers lectured them in class and suggested that classes might have been better if there had been more classroom discussion. In general, however, students believe that St. Therese teachers did their jobs well.

Students mentioned two additional characteristics in reference to certain teachers. Some, they say, were very concerned with “discipline.” A few students used the term to describe teachers who pushed them to achieve in school. Others mentioned it in relation to behavioural discipline and noted teachers who were notorious for their use of corporal punishment. In addition, students describe teachers who were “caring” about the students and their well-being. Sister Mara, the principal of St. Therese, registers as both caring and a disciplinarian. Several students described her as “the mother” of “the St. Therese family.” One portrayed her as “a real mother St. Therese.”

Finally, former St. Therese students describe their former teachers as “*teachers*.” This word choice, though seemingly ambiguous, is expressive in the

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<sup>73</sup> *Pereb* means ‘bread’ in Nama.

context of common expectations for teachers among black communities in Namibia. As I discovered in Tses, community members believe that a teacher should do more than perform a job during the school day. Teachers are expected to be community leaders and role-models; they are often considered bearers of ‘expert knowledge’, and people look to them to answer questions and solve problems. Former St. Therese students held these expectations for their teachers, and in their memories their teachers met them. Apparently, they were not just teachers who worked for a salary, but “charismatic leaders”, “role-models”, “knowledgeable” and “like parents”, in turns. A few students do acknowledge that some of their teachers had “alcohol problems”, but they attest that their teachers were worthy of their respect.

Some alumni pointed out particular teachers with whom they closely identified. Students mentioned Stephanus Goliath several times in this context, and they seem to know a great deal about the specifics of his life: that he “comes from Berseba”, that he studied at the University of the North and was “the only Nama with a B.A.” Of course, the overwhelming majority of St. Therese students spoke Nama, and many came from Berseba and other similar reserves. It seems likely that students identified closely with Goliath as someone from a similar background who had reached their measure for educational and professional success. In addition to remembering individuals like Goliath, students also mentioned that teachers told them stories from their lives and studies at Döbra and Augustineum and in South Africa. Some students claim that these stories gave them ideas about what they wanted to do and how they could “progress in life.”

Many former St. Therese students’ impressions of their teachers apply to missionaries as well although their comments about these leaders often take a different emphasis. For example, alumni describe the mission workers as very “committed” to their jobs. Students remember that they were “well organized” in running all activities on the mission. Students emphasize that their work focused on making students’ lives better and in this sense they were “caring.” They do also recall that mission workers were often “strict”, and some used corporal punishment liberally.

It seems that students regarded the missionaries in a similar way to that in which they regarded “*teachers*”. Workers on the mission, and particularly the Father, were regarded as leaders, people with answers to questions and who could arbitrate disputes. As religious leaders, they also seemed to have additional qualities which

others on the mission did not have. Some former students described the missionaries as “holy people” and admit that they were afraid of them. Most students say that they would not have contradicted the Father although some did behind his back. Despite students’ tendency to treat all mission workers with reverence, they say that some were more approachable than others.

Students credit the mission workers with affecting their lives in a number of ways. Many mention the impression that their work ethic made on them and attribute the hard work and disciplined habits that they developed at St. Therese to the influence of the mission staff. Others mention “the foreign ideas” to which mission leaders exposed them, not to mention the “foreign clothes” purchased at the bazaars. In particular, students remember Father Antonio in relation to his political views although they tend to remember him differently along certain predictable lines (See below). Finally, students respect the Mission Fathers for having “protected” them from the outside world, particularly the police who began visiting the mission to interrogate students by 1975.

As much as the Mission Fathers “protected” students from the outside world, St. Therese pupils did interact with ‘outsiders.’ However, even when alumni describe people outside the school, such as their kin, former students shed light on how they viewed the school and its people. For example, some alumni told stories in which they praised their parents for supporting their education. Theresia Basson remembers how her mother encouraged her to follow her aspirations to become a doctor (Theresia Basson: December 24, 2001). Stefanus Swartbooi describes his grandfather as “wise” when his grandfather told him that “the school is my will to you” (Stefanus Swartbooi: June 14, 2002). When parents did not support their children’s education at St. Therese, as in Christina Basson’s case, the students disapproved. A few students remember an instance when they were anxious to return home to live with family, but as many told tales about how eager they were to leave family to return to St. Therese. One alumna, Paulina Kanases, even recalls that she and her friends always came back early after school holidays so that they could spend more time together (Paulina Kanases: November 15, 2001). It seems, in fact, that people at St. Therese played kin-like roles in students’ lives. Students, many of whom began living in boarding hostels from grade 1, relied on the school for most of the year for meeting their basic physical and psychological needs, and it is therefore not surprising that some describe

their peers as “brothers” and “sisters”, other teachers as “like parents”, Sister Mara as their “mother” and the St. Therese community in general as their “family.”

Overall, these memories paint a rosy picture of how students got along with their peers, teachers and mission workers in the 1970s and how people on the Tses Mission have positively influenced the lives of students. How, however, do we assess the ‘accuracy’ of these memories? We can probably assume that problems at St. Therese in the mid-1970s were glossed over as students remembered their experiences at the school. After all, it is common for people to remember their days of youth as a time of lost innocence when they did not have the same problems that they have in the present and to forget or reduce the significance of the problems of the past. These moments of remembering and forgetting are, as Lambeck points out, “motivated acts” (Lambeck 1996: 239-240).

There are other elements in the subsequent lives of students that motivate their memories, making the impulse to romanticize their experiences at St. Therese stronger still. For one, students still associate with the school to some extent because they attended it. If St. Therese looks good, they look good, and so they are likely to paint the school in a positive light. The fact that I was explicitly interviewing students to write a dissertation about St. Therese would further strengthen students’ incentive to present the history of *their* school as good and noble. The fact that I, the interviewer, was a teacher at the school and would probably want to hear the history of *my* school in a positive light, may have added to the impetus to paint a pretty picture. Of course, students could choose to distance themselves from St. Therese because experiences there or since then have led them to react against the school. Subsequent experiences have tended to make students’ associations with the school stronger, however. Consider that, to some extent, every student whom I interviewed attributes his or her “success” to St. Therese. It is not surprising that students would focus on what is positive about their experiences at the school, for it has become a “symbolic space” (Field 2001: 118-119), central to their own measures of self-worth in the present. Students’ attendance of St. Therese during formative adolescent years would only add to the intensity of their associations with this space.

There are still other developments in Namibian education and the larger society which focus the ways in which former St. Therese students perform their memories in the present. The descriptive terms that former students use to describe others at St. Therese do not simply contrast with an imagined opposite, the

“hardworking” and “disciplined” students of their memories versus an imaginary “lazy” and “undisciplined” ‘other.’ Rather, they tend to contrast their descriptions with living binary opposites that they see in Namibian education now. For example, the students at St. Therese in the 1970s were “hardworking” and “disciplined” in comparison with “lazy” and “undisciplined” Namibian students today. They remember their “pride” as St. Therese students in contrast with students today, who “disinterested” in their schoolwork, their school and their future. They see the “vision” that they had, in contrast with the “ignorance” that students now have about their world and about their futures. They see that teachers are not “committed” to their jobs as they once were, and although they may have better qualifications it is questionable whether they are as talented at teaching the students. At the core of the problem, many say, are teachers’ inability to “discipline” students, in many cases attributed to the fact that they are not allowed to use corporal punishment, and because they “do not care” about students. The result is that most contemporary teachers in Namibia are not actually “*teachers*.” As for the church leaders, former St. Therese students do not contrast them to an opposite in the present probably because there are not many that run mission schools nowadays. Some suggest that the students and teachers would do a better job if they had the “committed”, “disciplinarian” church leaders and administrators like those who “commanded respect” when they attended St. Therese.

I will return to this critique of Namibian education later (See Chapter VIII). For now, it is important to note that perceptions of and the discourse surrounding contemporary education in Namibia inform the way in which St. Therese students view the past and use it in the present. One should not expect that St. Therese students, or anyone, possess memories independent of social factors or that conform to “the facts” (Lambeck 1996: 237-238). There is, nonetheless, reason to believe that people at St. Therese did the things that students say they did and that students saw the qualities in them which they say they saw. Teachers’ and mission workers’ descriptions of the school tend to mirror those of students, suggesting that they are constructive to read with the grain as well as across it. The fact that students’ memories of St. Therese are so similar corroborates their evidence as individuals. And of course, the data suggest that something happened at St. Therese during the mid-1970s that influenced students’ lives. One would expect that only “hardworking” and “disciplined” students together with “committed” and “talented” teachers could

have overcome the weight of the status quo so that some students achieved good academic results and gained qualifications for jobs of their liking. It is understandable that students would take “pride” in a school which provided education at a level which they could not access before, that had a successful soccer team, that had role-models with whom they could identify and be proud. It stands to reason that experiences with people from different backgrounds and cultures, like their fellow students, teachers and mission workers, would have expanded their worldview. This exposure combined with students’ pride in the school might develop into “vision” for who students could *be* in the world, and not just what the world would do to them.

Clearly, then, St. Therese exists in the minds of students as central to their personal development and, in a larger sense, played a major role in this process. There are differences, however, in how St. Therese influenced those who attended the school. Just as we have been able to trace common elements of the experience of St. Therese students both at and since attending the school through their memories, we can also trace their different experiences through memories as well.

#### *Differing Student Memories of St. Therese*

Former students of St. Therese separate quite evenly into two groups based on their memories of the school. One group is characterized by its tendency to discuss St. Therese in terms of politics, the other by the relative absence of politics in their description. Both do refer to national politics in their memories of the school, and there is no way that a student in 1976 could have discussed his or her alma mater and remained aloof from a political statement. Some students, however, explicitly described their experiences at St. Therese in political terms and appear to have been more interested in asserting their political opinions than students in the other group. Furthermore, both groups include pupils from different regional, ethnic, religious and gender backgrounds. Therefore, I call the first group ‘the politically active group’, the second ‘the politically passive group.’

When describing their activities as students at St. Therese, the politically active group tends to focus on the student body’s political organizations and their involvement in them. They discuss NABSO, the SYL and how they became interested and involved in national politics. The politically passive group does not mention much about these activities, but rather focuses on other groups at the school, such as the soccer team, and social events.

The politically active group tends to describe the characters on the Tses Mission in terms of their political involvement. For example, they describe their fellow students, first and foremost, as politically active. They extol their commitment to the struggle and without any prompting tell stories of student resistance to the apartheid regime and the police's reaction. The politically passive group does not describe students primarily in political terms. Although many described students' involvement in the 1976 strike at St. Therese, some only did so on my prompting. The politically active group also evaluates former teachers in 'struggle terms.' One student mentioned how Stephanus Goliath touched on South African politics in history class, another how Willem Konjore used the debate team as a forum in which to discuss politics. Other students from the politically active group gave their teachers more mixed reviews arguing that some were not sympathetic to the struggle and others did not express themselves because they were "scared." In most cases, however, their evaluation of the teachers did not divorce from their political values. In contrast, the politically passive group seldom discussed their teachers in these terms. Those who did decided either that their teachers were "apolitical" or that some teachers were politically involved in the struggle and some were not, in both cases suggesting that it was possible not to take a political stand. They also do not refer directly to national politics in their anecdotes about teachers.

The contrast between the two groups comes most clearly into focus in the way that students from 1975 and 1976 describe the two mission Fathers. The politically active group is unanimously positive in their appraisal of Father Antonio's work in Tses. They praise him for being "open-minded" and "interested in students' opinions." In particular, they remember their conversations with him about politics and that he was openly against the apartheid system although he did not want the mission openly involved in the struggle because he knew that national politics threatened the mission's existence. They respect Father Antonio particularly for the stern stands that he took with the police when they tried to interrogate students on the mission and that he explicitly protected the students' "right" to express themselves. In contrast, they say that Father Bergkamp was "intolerant" of students' opinions and discouraged student political activism. Some mention that Father Bergkamp was probably against the political system of the day, but that he did not express himself openly. In general, they tend to regard Father Bergkamp unfavourably, and some admit that they were afraid of him. The politically passive group, on the other hand,

praises Father Bergkamp for his “strict discipline.” One student refers to Father Bergkamp as “the iron man of St. Therese”, and others associate Father Bergkamp’s discipline with his “love and care.” Some comment that students “took no chances” with Father Bergkamp and go so far as to say that there would have been no strike if Father Bergkamp had been at the school. In turn, some of these students suggest that Father Antonio was one of the causes of the strike because he was “a soft guy.”

These two groups remember their experiences at St. Therese from very different perspectives, and yet there is considerable parity in how members from both sides describe the school, particularly among the politically active group. How should one account for these two paradigms? First, the politically active group is likely to describe St. Therese in political terms because national politics were central to their experience at the school. Even more importantly, the politically active group led a strike at St. Therese against the education system in 1976 and, with only one exception among those I interviewed, travelled into exile to join SWAPO and the struggle for Namibian independence. They did not return to Namibia for thirteen years, devoting their life to the struggle for that time. It is not surprising that they see national politics as central to who they have become and describe the school’s characters in these terms. In contrast, the politically passive group members who attended St. Therese in 1976 participated in the strike but did not lead it; others, who attended St. Therese in earlier years, were not politically involved at all. They have remained in Namibia, mostly in the South, and have been less involved in national politics. Given their more limited political involvement, one would not expect them to describe St. Therese so dominantly in those terms. It also stands to reason that some might not associate as positively with individuals central to the strike, like Father Antonio. They compare St. Therese in the mid-1970s with St. Therese and other Namibian schools today, and they are disappointed in many ways with what they see. In some cases they are probably also disappointed with the results of the struggle itself because some are critical of the contemporary SWAPO government. The politically passive students, who see their political involvement from the perspective of the South, have reason to feel disillusioned with the political aspect of their experience, even to blame it for St. Therese’s slide from prominence. Other students who were tortured and imprisoned by SWAPO officials in exile also have reason to feel disillusioned with the political ideals they developed at St. Therese

although all of them seem to retain some faith that what they did there in 1976 was 'right' despite misfortune that has befallen them since.

Clearly St. Therese students' involvement with national politics constitutes a sub-plot of their experience at the school. If indeed the school played a role in politicising its students, then this role would be one of the school's most significant effects on those who attended it and on independent Namibia, which alumni have helped to create and lead. Therefore, I turn to this sub-plot.

University of Cape Town

## **VI. Sub-Plot: Politics at St. Therese from 1973 to 1976**

Among the knowledge that students encountered at St. Therese in the mid-1970s was information about national politics and perspectives on how students should relate to them. St. Therese was not unique in this respect. The conflict between the South African government and Namibians urging for national independence reached a feverish pitch during these years, and many people were engaged in this 'struggle' in Namibia and similar ones elsewhere in southern Africa. The fact that students at St. Therese were learning about politics, in the sense of power relations, was also not unusual. Any St. Therese student who had ever become more aware of the material inequalities and the unequal access to power in his or her society, had learned about politics. Nor was attendance at St. Therese necessary for a black from southern Namibia to have an implicit awareness of these politics and to resent the political order. Life in the South was and is a lesson in political-economy.

Nonetheless, the politics of St. Therese students during the mid-1970s distinguish themselves from other southerners at that time and St. Therese students of other eras. Whereas many southern Namibian blacks and previous St. Therese students were unaware of or disinterested in national politics, in the mid-1970s students followed a different course. The school attracted some students who were aware of national political events and who, in turn, became involved in and recruited other students to political activism. The teachers and missionaries also heightened students' awareness of national politics and created an environment wherein it was possible to be an activist. In its daily routine and through its connections with other mission schools, the school allowed students to pool their political knowledge and contacts while keeping the government out of the school. As a result, some students evolved into a 'politically active group', which campaigned for SWAPO in the surrounding area, led a strike at the school and, in many cases, travelled into exile.

None of these developments were inevitable. It may have been likely that St. Therese students would become aware of and involved in national politics by 1976. Nonetheless, students would not necessarily have been motivated to outspoken activism. The social scripts that they received from people in their families, communities and churches may have guided some students to dislike the government, but they did not in and of themselves lead students to identify with SWAPO and join them in exile. Therefore, let us consider the politics in Namibia at three levels:

national, regional and St. Therese. Only by examining all three, can we contextualise students' performance of national politics.

### *The Namibian Liberation Struggle*

The struggle stems from the historical conflict that I outlined for southern Namibia (Chapter III). A white minority ruled from outside the country over a black majority. Many blacks struggled to meet basic human needs, and those in southern and central Namibia lived on a small fraction of their ancestral land and remained substantially poorer than their white neighbours. Neither political rights nor decent schools provided a means whereby many people could change their conditions. These conditions were not particular to the South; although the relationship between the South African government and Namibia's indigenous communities varied, they were all similarly affected by South African apartheid rule. There was an impetus, therefore, for blacks to unite across ethnic divides, assert their interests and liberate Namibia from South Africa. Nor were such trends limited to Namibia. Since World War II colonized Africans' resistance to colonialism had been increasingly connected with national and international movements. In southern Africa, national parties developed in Angola, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, South Africa and Namibia, all of which took up arms in an effort to liberate their respective nations from white minority rule. The parties which led these movements summoned support from groups that bridged ethnicities to differing degrees and were aided by international bodies like the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and by the rival nations in the Cold War. The result was a broad based and self-conscious struggle that engulfed the subcontinent for roughly thirty years from 1960 to 1990.

Namibian resistance to colonial rule began to develop a national character in 1946 when the South African government tried to incorporate South West Africa into the Union. In response, Hosea Kutako, Reverend Michael Scott and others sent petitions to the United Nations to the effect that South West Africa should remain separate from South Africa and that the Union's governance of Namibia was highly flawed. These efforts led to a larger campaign to gain independence from South Africa through the United Nations on the premise that South West Africa was no longer a legal mandate to South Africa. By the late 1950s the Herero Chief's Council coordinated these petitions to the UN. Other important elements of the nationalist movement at this time were the Ovamboland People's Organization (OPO), which

had united many contract workers, and the South West Africa Student Body (SWASB) and the South West Africa Progressive Association (SWAPA), the first national student and cultural organization respectively (Katjavivi 1988: 41).

Several organizations and political parties tried to unite the Namibian liberation effort, of which SWAPO<sup>74</sup> became the most powerful. SWAPO began the armed liberation struggle in 1966 and became the most influential voice representing the Namibian liberation movement outside its borders such that by 1973 the United Nations declared SWAPO “the authentic representative of the Namibian people” (UN Resolution 3111, 1973). Even while SWAPO led the liberation struggle from outside Namibia, it also led the popular mobilization of the majority of the Namibians living inside the country. Although there were a number of alliances between nationalist organizations in the early 1970s, these groups increasingly aligned with SWAPO or faded away (Katjavivi 1988: 92). The Turnhalle proposals, debated from September 1975 to March 1977 and implemented later that year, attempted to co-opt SWAPO by appearing to meet some of the liberation movement’s and international community’s demands. Turnhalle provided an alternative for those who favoured this compromise with the South African government (Katjavivi 1988: 94). Those who did not were left with SWAPO or no audible voice.

Student organizations and church support were key elements for increasing popular awareness of the national struggle and bringing the masses of discontented Namibians under the fold of SWAPO. SWAPO developed a plan for mobilizing Namibia’s youth at the Tanga Conference in 1969-1970, forming the SWAPO Youth League. Many of those involved in the SYL had studied in South Africa where they had been influenced by the African National Congress (ANC). Others were part of a new generation of students frustrated with Bantu Education. Therefore, when SWAPO created the Youth League they “corralled a generation that was raring to break out of the starting pens” (Evenson and Herbstein 1989: 22). Between 1971 and 1975, the SYL became the chief leaders in the struggle within Namibia, filling the void of SWAPO leaders in exile or detained by the South African government (Leys and Saul 1995: 71). In particular, they were highly influential in their campaign against homeland policy in Ovamboland, leading a general strike of contract workers in 1971-1972 and a boycott of elections in 1973 (Leys and Saul 1995: 72). Most SYL

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<sup>74</sup> Formerly, SWAPO was the OPO, but its leaders changed the name in 1960 in an effort to make the party into a broader, national movement.

members from the North fled into exile in 1974. Meanwhile, in 1972, students from mission schools in central and southern Namibia started an organization “to promote the unity of all students in Namibia” (Masako 1995: 117). This group officially became the Namibian Black Students Organization in 1975 and promoted Black Consciousness ideas among students (Masako 1995: 117).

The church became increasingly outspoken and unified in its defence of the liberation movement during the 1970s. The denominations first openly united against South African rule and apartheid in their response to Bishop Aula’s “open letter” in 1971. By the time the churches united as the CCN in 1978, they had become the most powerful force in the internal opposition to apartheid and closely linked with SWAPO (Steenkamp 1995: 99). In so doing, the church transformed itself from a conservative institution with a history in Namibia of submitting to secular authority, to a platform that both informed and spoke for the people on political issues.

The petition campaign, the political parties, student organizations and the church were each influential in building popular awareness of the independence movement in Namibia. Petitions to the United Nations were published in Namibia and helped win support for the liberation movement (Katjavivi 1988: 55). The military wing of SWAPO, the People’s Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN), fought the South African Defence Forces (SADF) from 1966 to 1989 along the Angolan and Zambian borders with Namibia. The population in these areas could not avoid the violence as it escalated in the 1970s and into the 1980s. The general workers’ strike in 1971-1972, although initially a reaction by workers to their immediate experience with the contract labour system, led many Namibians to participate in wider political activity. Particularly, the SYL was able to mobilise the strikers and much of the Ovamboland population in the election boycotts of 1973 (Katjavivi 1988: 70-71, 74-75). Bishop Aula’s letter also greatly increased public awareness of the struggle. The letter was read widely from the pulpit and encouraged awareness and demands for justice among the Namibian people (Evenson and Herbstein 1989: 20; Steenkamp 1995: 95). One author even credits Aula’s letter with “the political conscientization of the general black population” (Steenkamp 1995: 95), but this statement neglects to consider the ways in which black people related to the struggle in their respective regions.

## *Political Awareness in Southern Namibia*

Before there was any talk of a national liberation movement, people in the South had their own history of resisting colonial rule. Although the South's indigenous people did not unite again in armed rebellion after 1907, there is ample evidence of people's discontent with the colonial governments in the historical record. After the League of Nations handed South West Africa over to South Africa as a mandate, many traditional leaders petitioned the new regime to restore their ancestral land (Katjavivi 1988: 17). In 1922 the Bondelswarts, a Nama community in the deep South living on the Bondels and Warmbad Reserves, openly rebelled against the South African government which, they believed, had held them hostage to an unfair labour contract and taxed them unduly (Katjavivi 1988: 18-19). In a meeting in Tses in 1946, residents there expressed that they were "burning with fire" because "they did not want to see the country divided into European farms, and resented all the restrictions this involved" (Silvester 2000: 489). In 1948 a delegation of Nama leaders from the AME church requested permission from the government to found a private school unless the government would supply schools "with proper subjects up to standard" (Katjavivi 1988: 28). In 1951 the South African government began to convene "Nama Tribal Meetings" to address concerns of the Nama people.<sup>75</sup> In this context traditional leaders presented grievances to the regime surrounding issues such as low wages, pass laws<sup>76</sup>, education and the administration's insistence on designating them "Bantu" instead of "Nama." Eventually, the administration discontinued these meetings because they came to see them as "dangerous arenas for the spread of protest" (Kössler 2000: 455).

Some of these events do overlap with the period since 1946 during which increasing numbers of Namibians expressed their resistance to South African rule in national terms. Not all Namibians were equally aware of and interested in a national liberation movement, however. Clearly, blacks living in the South were some of the Namibians furthest removed from the national struggle. Most lived in far-flung, rural regions, but even those in urban areas lived in small towns far away from Windhoek. The armed struggle occurred primarily in Ovamboland and southern Angola,

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<sup>75</sup> Kössler argues that the government's motivation for these meetings was to establish a "tribal consciousness" that met the government's political aims (Kössler 2000: 455).

<sup>76</sup> Following the Native Affairs Administration Act of 1954, black Namibian males over eighteen years of age required "passes" to travel outside their reserve areas. With the exception of headmen and other

hundreds of kilometres from southern Namibian communities. Like much of the black population, many had received little or no education and therefore would not have followed politics through the paper even if a paper had been accessible. According to former St. Therese teachers and students, few individuals had radios in the South during these years. And although the churches became increasingly supportive of the liberation struggle during the 1970s, denominations like the ELC and the Catholic Church, both prominent in the South, remained as politically reticent as possible since their leadership was divided over how to respond to Namibia's political situation (Steenkamp 1995: 98; Beris 1996: 638).

Southerners who were aware of the national liberation movement in its early stages may not have identified closely with it or wished to expose others to it. For example, traditional leaders would probably have been some of the first blacks to learn about the struggle since they met with other leaders to discuss interests and plans for their communities. They were likely to be cautious in supporting the liberation movement, however, since its interethnic, interregional political bodies threatened their own bases of power, the communities they ruled. Leaders were careful to discuss political matters in private, viewing politics as the realm of male elders and no others (Stefanus Swartbooi: June 14, 2002). For traditional leaders and others who knew something about the war of liberation, one also questions how closely they would have identified with it. It was led by a political party which, although it had a national constituency, was dominated by Oshivambo-speakers.<sup>77</sup> Although some Ovambos worked in the South, the overwhelming majority lived in Ovamboland north of the Red Line; people from the South may not have identified closely with the Ovambos. Even among those involved in the liberation struggle, there were those who did not identify with SWAPO because they saw it as an Ovambo organization with no relevance to Namibians living in the central and southern parts of the country.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the majority of former St. Therese students from the South that I interviewed claim that they were "unaware of politics" before attending St. Therese. Although students must have been implicitly aware of politics

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leaders, blacks had to apply to the Department of Bantu Administration and Development for their passes (Horrell 1967: 23-25).

<sup>77</sup> 'Oshivambo' refers to seven different dialects spoken by people who commonly identify themselves as "Ovambo." The impression that SWAPO was an "Ovambo party" was likely heightened by the fact

in the sense of the unequal access to power in their region, they may not have been aware of politics in the sense of the national liberation movement. Former teachers and mission workers reiterate that many people in the South were “unaware of national and international political events.” Even southerners cognizant of or who had participated in acts of resistance against the government, may have known little of the petitions to the United Nations, SWAPO, the war, the political mobilization of ‘Namibians’ and other events connected with the broader struggle.

Nonetheless, the Odendaal Plan (1964) and local resistance to its implementation in the early 1970s tied increasing numbers of southerners to one another and other blacks in Namibia. In this context southerners began to associate their local concerns with national politics. These changes directly affected large groups of people and, in many cases, pushed traditional leaders to ally with SWAPO.

Although the Odendaal Plan affected popular settlement and the distribution of power among southern blacks on a wide scale (Chapter III), my informants suggest that four communities were particularly influenced by the plan. Although the circumstances of the communities’ relationship to the Odendaal Plan differ, each exemplifies how the plan politicised southerners and drew them into national politics. For example, the plan proclaimed that the Vaalgras community on the Tses Reserve did not live in its “homeland.” It dictated that Vaalgras residents must move from Namaland, of which the Tses Reserve was now a part, to Hereroland in central Namibia, despite the fact that the ancestors of the Vaalgras community had moved to the South in search of grazing lands as early as the 1830s, had received the rights to Vaalgras from the Germans in 1908, and as early as 1905 the community members spoke Nama and Afrikaans but practically no Otjiherero (Silvester 2000: 477, 482-484). Not surprisingly, when South African officials tried to implement the Odendaal Plan and move people from Vaalgras around 1970<sup>78</sup>, the Vaalgras community resisted. Leaders produced the contract which the Vaalgras community had made with the Germans (Silvester 2000: 491). They also argued that they were “Namas”, for like others settled in Namaland they spoke the Nama language and shared a similar culture (Joseph Stephanus: December 18, 2001). The argument proved effective, and the government granted them permission to remain on the land.

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that Ovambos make up more than half of the Namibian population and therefore were destined to make up the majority of any truly national party.

<sup>78</sup> Joseph Stephanus mentioned that this event took place in 1969 (Joseph Stephanus: December 18, 2001) whereas Stefanus Swartbooi recalls 1970 (Stefanus Swartbooi: June 14, 2002).

However, other groups on the Tses Reserve who the government classified as Herero were removed to Hereroland in the early 1970s (Silvester 2000: 491).

The people of Gainachas, on the Berseba Reserve, found themselves in a similar predicament in 1974. Many of the people's ancestors were Herero prisoners of war from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century who had lived near Berseba and adopted Nama as their first language (Stefanus Swartbooi: June 14, 2002; Silvester 2000: 482). They, unlike the people of Vaalgras, had become highly integrated with the surrounding community, and therefore were not threatened with removal until a political falling out occurred between Kaptein Isaacks of Berseba and the Gainachas community. Isaacks, who had chosen to break an anti-colonial pact which his constituency in Berseba had shared with the Gainachas community and others, decided to hand Gainachas over to the Damaraland authorities since those dwelling in Gainachas met the Odendaal Plan's description of "dark negroid people" who "have no language of their own but speak the tongue of the Nama" (Stefanus Swartbooi: June 14, 2002; Odendaal 1964: 31). The Gainachas community resisted this move and therefore enlisted the help of the other Kaptein in Berseba, Dawid Christiaan Goliath, uncle of Stephanus Goliath, who in turn called on SWAPO for support. This move and its timing proved decisive because it coincided with South Africa's announcement in 1974 that it would convene constitutional talks with the Namibian people (Katjavivi 1988: 94). These talks, which led to the Turnhalle proposals, were aimed at co-opting SWAPO by making concessions so as not to further alienate the United Nations. The South African government, therefore, did not push the issue and the Gainachas community remained on the Berseba Reserve.

People in the Bondels and Warmbad Reserves fit clearly under the government's classification for Namas but had the misfortune of living outside of where the government had created Namaland. Therefore, they too were told that they had to leave their homes despite the fact that the Bondelswarts had lived there for generations (Kössler 2000: 457). The Bondelswarts resisted, but eventually the government coerced some to move to Gibeon. The conditions in Gibeon also led to strife, for the Bondelswart migrants wished to retain their own headman, much to the chagrin of Kaptein Hendrik Witbooi in Gibeon who saw his community's ancestral land as his jurisdiction (Kössler 2000: 457). The resistance of the Bondelswarts in conjunction with the political climate hastened by the Turnhalle proposals led the

government to allow people to remain in Bondels and Warmbad at which point many who had moved to Gibeon returned to their old homes (Kössler 2000: 458).

The Bondelswarts' and others' forced removal to Gibeon presented problems for the community that had been living there as well. Community leaders were already angered by the government's decisions to allow outside communities to live on these lands, part of the government's efforts to secure cheap labour for the surrounding farms (Kössler 2000: 453). The arrival of the Bondelswarts added to the discontent of Kaptein Hendrik Witbooi, who wished to maintain jurisdiction over his community's ancestral lands. In 1971 Witbooi made a formal plea to the secretary of the Department of Coloured Relations and Rehoboth Affairs, claiming that the Bondelswarts' wish to retain their own headman "will mean the breach of our tribal law" and urging that "the government should assist us to preserve the laws of our fathers" (Kössler 2000: 458). The government disregarded Witbooi's requests. Witbooi, in turn, refused to cooperate with the government's plans for the creation of Namaland, rejected the Turnhalle talks in 1975 and turned to SWAPO for support in 1976 (Kössler 2000: 458; Katjavivi 1988: 99).

Although the communities of Vaalgras, Gainachas/Berseba, Bondels/Warmbad and Gibeon often had isolated interests in the past, they now stood before the common threat of the Odendaal Plan. Leaders in these communities tied increasingly into national political organizations to respond. The South West African National Union (SWANU), a national political party founded by the Herero Chief's Council in 1959, campaigned in the South and offered traditional leaders assistance as early as the 1960s (Joseph Stephanus: June 16, 2002). In 1971 the National Convention (NC) was formed in an effort to unify the independence movement, and Nama leaders, including the Council of Nama Chiefs, were among those that made up the Convention (Katjavivi 1988: 92). During the 1970s SWAPO emerged as more nationally and internationally prominent than SWANU and the other NC parties, and it began to campaign in the South to build a truly national constituency. There it found supporters in communities that were resisting the Odendaal Plan. SWAPO offered to help these communities while explaining local problems in terms of the national struggle (Joseph Stephanus: December 18, 2001). By 1976 Goliath in Berseba and the leaders of Gibeon and Vaalgras had turned their allegiances to SWAPO (Katjavivi 1988: 99). By the mid-1970s, then, blacks from the South were

becoming increasingly aware of and interested in political parties and events outside of their region.

### *Political Activism at St. Therese*

St. Therese students were situated in this local and national political context in the mid-1970s. Clearly, one cannot claim that St. Therese made students aware of the resistance to South African rule and apartheid. People in the South and elsewhere had been resisting the colonial governments for decades. One must also qualify any statement about how St. Therese made students aware of the struggle. Although most students claim that they were “unaware of politics” when they entered St. Therese, others, particularly those who grew up in Vaalgras, Berseba/Gainachas, Bondels/Warmbad and Gibeon, are quite certain that they “had heard of SWAPO” and “knew about political events” before attending the school. Nonetheless, the community gathered at St. Therese had the potential to expand students’ political knowledge beyond what they had learned previously and to persuade them to become politically active if students identified with the liberation struggle.

Through 1973 political activism at St. Therese remained a mere possibility. According to former students, there was no “political activity” at the school before 1973, and students insist that they did not “discuss politics” during that year either. This condition persisted despite politicising events that occurred in 1973 such as the United Nation’s decision to recognize SWAPO as the “authentic representative of the Namibian people” (UN Resolution 3111, 1973) and the resistance to the creation of Ovamboland, which climaxed in the election boycott. St. Therese students also lived in marked contrast to other Namibian students. In Ovamboland, students who belonged to the SYL led the election boycott. In conjunction with the election boycott, the SYL launched itself south of the Red Line at a rally in Windhoek with many students in attendance, and for a time students at Augustineum and Martin Luther refused to attend classes (SWAPO of Namibia 1981: 276, 278).

There are several factors which suggest why the St. Therese student body remained unpoliticized during 1973 in contrast to student bodies elsewhere. Pupils at St. Therese, like others in southern Namibia, remained very distant and isolated from political events occurring in Ovamboland and Windhoek. Just like their families spread across the South, St. Therese students were largely unaware of national and international news; although they could read, only in rare cases did students have

money to spend on a magazine or paper. As of yet, they had had limited or no exposure to political parties, and until the end of 1973 they participated in no organizations which united students of different regions such that there were no connections between St. Therese students and those participating in the election boycotts, the Windhoek rally or the Augustineum and Martin Luther strikes.

The leaders at St. Therese seem to have done little to alter students' awareness of national politics in 1973. Father Bergkamp led St. Therese on the principle that "politics and studies should never come together" (Father Bergkamp: December 13, 2001). This position aligned itself with the Catholic Church's older leadership at this time (Steenkamp 1995: 98) and met the school's needs as state-aided. Father Bergkamp also applied his philosophy of education to teachers, who, he believed, "should not officially participate in politics, only privately" (Father Bergkamp: December 13, 2001). Some teachers also mentioned that the South African government was a deterrent to their discussing politics with students at this time. Apparently, the South African Security Police was becoming increasingly vigilant in looking for "agitators" following political unrest elsewhere in the country (Mattheus !Goraseb: December 19, 2001). Other teachers remembered little about national politics in 1973 and may have been disinterested at that time. Therefore, the setting of and the characters at St. Therese in 1973 made the school less receptive to national political developments than some other Namibian secondary schools in the North and Windhoek.

Nonetheless, some St. Therese students from the South knew something about national political parties and events through their family and community members' experiences with the Odendaal Plan. St. Therese students originating from other regions, particularly from Windhoek, may have been aware of SWAPO and SYL activities there. And although most St. Therese students were "unaware of politics", they may have known something about their community's resistance to the South African government and had at least an implicit knowledge of the South's political-economy. Thus, when a few students began to talk about the politics of their region, how SWAPO became involved and what SWAPO was doing in the rest of the country, other students could relate to them. Joseph McKay, who grew up in Keetmanshoop, specifically mentioned learning about national politics when talking with peers from Warmbad; he and several others recall their conversations with Joseph Stephanus from Vaalgras (Joseph McKay: June 13, 2002). As students

discussed these matters with one another, they developed a larger picture of what was happening politically in their country than they ever could have had through their isolated experiences in their home communities.

Students' discussion of national politics would not necessarily have led any to political activism. Students who were "unaware of politics" were not reading from scripts for such political involvement. There are, nonetheless, reasons why black secondary school students in Namibia without any previous exposure to the struggle might have become involved in national politics. Students would have recognized that they had skills required for certain jobs and the capacity to train for others, but that they had few opportunities in their society and that their opportunities were inferior to other people's. In turn, students could become explicitly aware of how they were trapped in the political-economy of their society and feel the need to break out. As Joseph Stephanus explained, he became politically active when he realized "the contradiction of being fairly educated and self-confident and then being treated as a lesser citizen" (Joseph Stephanus: November 16, 2001). Theresia Basson remembers that she had similar thoughts in 1976 when she told her parents "even if I succeed and complete my education, the doors will still not be open. I won't be able to go around and find the job I would like to do, or even get a fair salary for what I am doing" (Melber 1983: 138). SWAPO gave students an alternative to these politics of oppression, infusing students with hope that "a new Namibia" could be born in which such contradictions did not exist. Students most acutely aware of and frustrated with the contradictions of their society were more likely to have identified with SWAPO and become activists for the struggle. Those students less conscious of these contradictions were likely to have concerned themselves less with national politics.

Of course, there were factors that influenced students' political involvement other than their awareness of social contradictions. Many students who were aware of politics before they arrived at St. Therese became politically active while at the school. For example, Joseph Stephanus's great-grandfather was the headman in Vaalgras, and he remembers instances while growing up when elders spoke with him about politics (Joseph Stephanus: December 18, 2001, April 12, 2002). Willem Meyer, a student from Berseba who became politically active at St. Therese, had an older brother who was "politically involved" and recalls hearing "stories" from his older sister who was attending Augustineum in 1973 (Willem Meyer: April 10, 2002). Stefanus Swartbooï remembers first learning about national politics as a young

boy while pretending to sleep at meetings of village elders in Gainachas (Stefanus Swartbooi: June 14, 2002), and he has also become a political leader. Students who identified with teachers who were politically active may also have been more likely to play such roles themselves. As Mattheus !Goraseb remarked “students looked at the teachers with keen eyes”, and he, Stephanus Goliath, and other “Nama teachers” at St. Therese held secret meetings to discuss national politics during the ‘70s (Mattheus !Goraseb: December 19, 2001). Socially sanctioned gender roles must have made men more likely to consider political activism as a viable life option than women. Certainly, women were not included among the traditional leaders who discussed politics, and although Theresia Basson writes that “in SWAPO... there is nothing like discrimination between the sexes” (Melber 1983: 145), there have always been far fewer women in SWAPO leadership roles than men. Some female students did become involved in politics at St. Therese, but there were fewer politically active women than men. For example, former St. Therese students refer to a “core group” of the most politically active students at the school. Although the number of students associated with the core group varies from five to thirteen, there are at the most two women who belonged, Theresia Basson and Maria Helu (Kapere). The smaller versions of the “core group” do not refer to any women at all.

Although students did not identify equally with the struggle nor all envision themselves as political activists, a group of St. Therese students identified very closely and became politically motivated. Through their enthusiasm, political awareness and activism developed a momentum of its own at the school. Concurrently, outside organizations and events fuelled developments at St. Therese, propelling students towards the culminating strike in 1976. The result was a student political culture that became *sui generis*.

There were two larger student organizations that hastened the political activism brewing at St. Therese; they were NABSO and the SYL. St. Therese students attended their first NABSO Conference at the end of 1973. Although this and subsequent meetings were ostensibly religious gatherings, where students from Döbra, Martin Luther and St. Therese worshiped and discussed Christianity and student life together, they increasingly addressed national politics. As former participants remember, they discussed politics because “that’s what students were interested in.” Concurrently, the separation between church and state, the religious and the political, became negligible as mission secondary schools turned into centres

of political activism south of the Red Line. This trend mirrored the church leadership's transition from spectators of political events to leading activists in the CCN.

Between 1973 and 1976 NABSO students met at least once annually at venues in Döbra, Otjimbingwe, Martin Luther and Windhoek. Students recall that conference participants first discussed making the group an explicitly political body in 1974. On September 2, 1975 students adopted a charter and officially became NABSO, adopting Black Consciousness ideas like those held by groups in South Africa opposing apartheid at this time (Maseko 1995: 117). NABSO aligned itself politically with the Namibian National Convention (NNC), an umbrella organization for political parties involved in the struggle.<sup>79</sup> It also passed judgements on the political issues of the time, arguing that “the concept of divided education promot[ed] racism” and that the Turnhalle Conference was a “racist hoax created by SA” (Maseko 1995: 117-118).

There is no doubt that St. Therese students were greatly influenced by their experiences with NABSO. Students at Döbra and Martin Luther lived closer to Windhoek and were “liberal” and “politically active.” St. Therese students recall learning about national political events through their interface with these students. The organization created a network of students interested in issues affecting all blacks and in the struggle for independence, and politically active students testify that they remained in touch with NABSO contacts, thereby perpetuating a ‘struggle dialogue.’ NABSO also invited outside speakers to their meetings who spoke about political developments in their country. Some of the adults at these meetings, particularly teachers at Martin Luther, had connections with activists and student groups in South Africa (Joseph Stephanus: November 16, 2001). St. Therese students used these contacts to smuggle banned literature from South Africa into St. Therese.

Concurrently, SWAPO bolstered political campaigns in the South as part of its attempt to mobilize the population behind the national liberation struggle and gain support for the party. Members of SWAPO and other political groups came to Tses, and although the Mission Fathers did not permit them to campaign on church grounds, students assert that they did and that mission workers sometimes turned a

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<sup>79</sup> The NNC replaced the NC of 1971, which had dissolved over disputes between the parties in February 1975. The NNC included SWAPO and a slightly narrowed field of political parties (Katjavivi 1988: 94).

blind eye to their presence. Students who were now following national and international political developments heard about and from SWAPO on a regular basis. There were other parties campaigning in the South, including SWANU, but most students remember SWAPO as “the main party.” They report that SWAPO was attractive because it appeared to be a serious challenge to the South African regime. Joseph Stephanus also theorizes that the fact that the South African government portrayed SWAPO as “evil” while the clergy supported SWAPO made the movement even more appealing to students. This “mixing of religion and politics” could only have bolstered SWAPO’s appeal in a society in which the church was so central (Joseph Stephanus: April 12, 2002).

Late in 1974, Joseph Stephanus established a chapter of the SYL at St. Therese (Joseph Stephanus: April 12, 2002). Many students were involved in the SYL to varying degrees, but the “core group”, led by Stephanus<sup>80</sup>, made decisions for this organization. Naturally, these students’ links with SWAPO increased thereafter. SWAPO members from Windhoek and Keetmanshoop would meet with students on campus when they were in the area. They advertised party and NNC meetings in Windhoek, which students often attended. They also coordinated several weekend trips out to the surrounding communities where students would campaign for SWAPO as part of the party’s larger attempts to mobilize the populace. The majority of St. Therese SYL activities were not coordinated by outside leaders, however, but by the core group itself. Students listened to foreign radio programs, such as “Voice of Namibia”, SWAPO’s broadcast from Zambia (Joseph Motinga: June 12, 2002). Core group members read banned literature and discussed its contents with fellow students. The St. Therese SYL organized its own trips to conferences and into the community to campaign for SWAPO.

Of course, these activities conflicted with the Catholic Church’s intentions to keep its institutions outside national politics. Students at St. Therese in 1974 and 1975 recall that Father Bergkamp and Sister Mara discouraged students from participating in “political activities” and told them that they would be punished if they were caught doing so. Those who persisted to discuss politics held their meetings in secret, listened to the radio after bedtime and hid banned literature under their bed mattresses

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<sup>80</sup> Students and teachers I interviewed all mentioned “Pereb” as one of the student leaders, or the leader, of the politically active students at St. Therese.

so as not to get into trouble with the school. Those who campaigned in the community often left the Tses Mission without permission.

More generally, the 'sub-culture of political activism' developing at St. Therese did not align with Father Bergkamp, some teachers' and some students' vision for a 'culture of success.' Certainly, students' political involvement contradicted Father Bergkamp's philosophy of education that "politics and studies should never come together." The fact that some former teachers and students do not mention the school's role in raising political awareness and activity among its successes and seem to associate the school's relationship to national politics with its decline, suggest that these individuals did not connect politics with St. Therese's success when they were there in the 1970s as well. As for the common attributes that people at the school had for success, i.e. academic and professional achievement and the qualities of "hard work", "discipline", "pride" and "vision", the politically active students possessed them to differing degrees during their student days. Some politically active students, like Theresia Basson and Willem Meyer, were among the highest achievers at the school (St. Therese Records) and to some degree attribute their motivation to the ideals and visions of the struggle. There are also a number who failed and repeated a grade, including Joseph Stephanus and Stefanus Swartbooi in 1975 and 1976 (St. Therese Records). Apparently, these students were too busy with political matters to become the model pupils that Sister Mara and others would have liked them to be (Joseph Stephanus: April 12, 2002; Stefanus Swartbooi: June 14, 2002).

The Catholic Church and those working on its mission in Tses were by no means united in an effort to stamp out the political activism developing at the school, however. In some cases, teachers and mission leaders encouraged these developments. Willem Konjore says that he discussed politics with students in debate team meetings (Willem Konjore: December 19, 2001), and some students recall these discussions. Stephanus Goliath claims that he spoke often with students about political themes outside of class and that his brother "was expelled in a state school for activities similar to what we were doing at St. Therese" (Stephanus Goliath: December 19, 2001). Certainly, a number of mission policies made it possible for students to remain at the school and continue their political activities. The mission staff allowed students to leave mission grounds on weekend afternoons, on which occasions students could follow their political pursuits. For student events at mission

schools, the Tses staff granted students permission to travel to these schools for the weekend and provided transport for these events even after students had created NABSO. In addition, students claim that the mission staff turned a blind eye to political activists who visited the mission. When the police entered the mission on account of these meetings or with a wish to interrogate St. Therese students, however, Father Bergkamp and Father Antonio alike told the police that the mission was private property and made them leave.

In 1974 and 1975 it seems that school leaders performed a tightrope walk, balancing St. Therese between unwanted state control on the one side and student political activism that could threaten the school on the other. International and national events in 1976 made this tightrope walk untenable. On June 16, students in Soweto, South Africa organised a mass student protest against the use of Afrikaans in schools. The effect of the shootings and ensuing nationwide student revolt spread all over southern Africa and to St. Therese. Students in Soweto called on blacks elsewhere to strike in solidarity and sent a message to this effect to student leaders at Martin Luther (Joseph Stephanus: June 16, 2002). Students at Martin Luther, in turn, contacted some politically active students at St. Therese who then explained the events and brought the Soweto students' call for solidarity to the attention of the entire student body. The announcements had a strong impact on many St. Therese students; some who had not been politically active claim that they first took notice of the struggle with the Soweto Uprising. Thereafter, the core group began to discuss how they would express their support among themselves and discussed plans with people in their now considerable student networks.

At the same time, events in Namibian politics were pushing people to take a stand on issues. Political parties throughout the country were reacting to the Turnhalle Conference, which polarized the political environment, effectively forcing people to accept Turnhalle or reject Turnhalle and ally with SWAPO. In August leaders in Gibeon, Vaalgras, Keetmanshoop and Hoachanas, representing over 80% of the Nama population, turned their allegiance to SWAPO (Katjavivi 1988: 99-100). This shift may have sparked "Nama" teachers in the South to express their dissatisfaction with the unequal dispensation for coloured and Nama teachers despite the fact that they were part of the same department of education. On November 5, 1976, teachers at "Nama schools" applied for one-day leave, and many travelled to Gibeon to petition the Minister of the Department of Coloured Affairs from Cape Town. When

he did not come to meet with them, they remained there waiting to press their demands until January 22, 1977 (Willem Konjore: December 19, 2001).

The Catholic Church also took decisive stands on national politics at this time. On a national level, Bishop Koppman officially opened Catholic institutions to all races in September 1976 (Beris 1996: 651). The context of Bishop Slotterback's decision to transfer Father Bergkamp to Mariental in 1976 and replace him with Father Antonio in Tses suggests that this move may also have been politically motivated. Certainly Father Antonio took a very different approach to politics than did his predecessor. Not only did he address political themes in his sermons and discuss national politics with students in and out of class, but he also explicitly allowed them to express themselves politically on the mission. Students both of 'politically active' and 'politically passive' background remember that Father Antonio told them that they had his blessing to "demonstrate" their politics as long as they remained on the mission and did not destroy church property.

This is essentially what St. Therese students did. The core group decided to act in solidarity with the students from Soweto and called upon their classmates to unite in a strike against the year-end examinations. In the polarized political climate, students agreed to respond with one voice. The core group discussed plans and spread them to students in a series of meetings. They agreed that the strike should not be directed against the school itself, but against the government, and resolved not to damage school property or commit acts of violence.

On the morning of November 11, 1976, the Standard Xs sat to take their first matriculation examination. As the students prepared to take the exam, the Standard VI, VII, VIII and IX students moved outside the examination classroom where they began chanting political slogans. After a speech and prayer offered by a visiting state education inspector<sup>81</sup>, the Standard X students stood up, shouted "Soweto" and began tearing up the question papers. The other students jumped through the windows to join the Standard Xs and some poured water into the classroom. Other students proceeded to the storage room, where Theresia Basson had left the window open, and tore up the remaining exam papers. Other than a few broken windows, the students did no damage to the school nor did they harm the inspector. By the time the police

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<sup>81</sup> Inspectors did not usually come to St. Therese for exams, which suggests that the inspector had heard that the students had planned a strike. Furthermore, some students claim that his briefcase held only one item, a pistol.

arrived on the mission grounds 45 minutes later, students had peacefully returned to the hostel. The police told Father Antonio that they should find out who had damaged his property. Father Antonio answered that no crime had been committed, that he could replace a few broken windows and would handle the matter himself. When they questioned who had instigated the strike and asked to interrogate students, Father Antonio told the police that he did not know and reminded them that they were on private property. Eventually the police left without speaking to any of the students.<sup>82</sup>

Following the student strike, Father Antonio elected to close the school down indefinitely until the Nama teachers' strike had ended. Students were required to leave the mission grounds, examinations were cancelled and the Sisters taken off the mission in solidarity with the teachers' strike (Bishop Antonio: April 10, 2002). Father Antonio did reopen St. Therese in 1977, but only after the state threatened to close the school permanently if he did not open the school for the new academic year (Bishop Antonio: April 10, 2002; SWAPO of Namibia 1981: 280). Even then, St. Therese resumed in a very different fashion than before. None of the Standard IX or X students from the previous year returned to the school. Many class leaders had travelled into exile; others may have feared that South African Security Forces would arrest them if they returned to Tses and that their ability to pursue professional careers would be jeopardized if they were associated with the strike (Mattheus !Goraseb: December 19, 2001). Only twelve students entered the Standard IX class in 1977, compared to 44 Standard IX pupils the previous year, and none entered in Standard X (St. Therese Records). Sister Mara and Sister Servanda retired in 1977, and there were conflicts between Father Antonio and Mr. Hammond, Sister Mara's replacement as principal. For all of these reasons, Father Antonio decided to close Standards IX and X at St. Therese such that the school's last Standard X class completed its exams in 1978 (Bishop Antonio: April 10, 2002).

As for political sentiment at St. Therese, it soon petered out. The SYL leaders at the school did not return in 1977, and NABSO also folded at the beginning of that

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<sup>82</sup> This account of the strike is a summary of those provided by Father Antonio and students and teachers who were in Tses at that time. There are also two accounts of the strike in the secondary literature. One, Theresia Basson's account to Henning Melber in the school history textbook *Our Namibia* (Melber 1983: 136-138), generally aligns itself with those I received. The other, Ben Motinga's account of the strike in *Call Them Spies* (Basson and Motinga 1989: 4), differs in that Motinga depicts the strike far more violently. Motinga describes "the smoke and smell of burning paper and the ear-deafening noise of the breaking of windows, doors and all sorts of furniture" (Basson and Motinga 1989: 4). When I specifically asked St. Therese students and the Bishop to comment on

year due to internal differences and threats from South African Security Forces (Maseko 1995: 118). People in the South continued to be politicised, particularly after the completion of the Turnhalle proposals in 1977, but St. Therese's political leaders were gone. Although younger students led another strike over Afrikaans medium education in 1977, it did not unite all the students and did not have the same impact as the 1976 strike. In Bishop Antonio's opinion, it also lacked "the broader vision for the country" exhibited in the St. Therese "political solidarity strike of 1976" (Bishop Antonio: April 10, 2002). Furthermore, the government had opened a secondary school for Namas in Gibeon in 1975 and opened another in Keetmanshoop in 1977, which later became J.A. Nel High School (Department of Coloured, Rehoboth and Nama Relations 1974-1975: 10-11, 1976-1977: 9). St. Therese, now a junior secondary school, was no longer the only secondary school in the region nor was it the school with the oldest and most accomplished students. St. Therese ceased to be a hub for political activity in the region or to be a particularly accomplished school (See Chapter VIII).

Even as St. Therese and its students moved on, so did students' associations with and memories of the school. The political conflict that resulted in the 1976 strike has continued to affect the trajectories of students' lives. This point is particularly true for those who lived and, in some cases, died for the struggle in exile.

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this account, they explain that Motinga exaggerates and theorize that he was "emotionally charged" or "trying to excuse his own violent actions" when he wrote the account.

## **VII. Resolutions: St. Therese Students in and after Exile**

Many students who attended St. Therese in the mid-1970s, and certainly everyone at the school in 1976, had to react to the political struggle raging in their country and throughout southern Africa. Pupils found different ways of relating to the struggle as politically active and passive students and have continued to 'resolve' how their individual interests relate to national politics since they attended St. Therese. It is possible that some characters actively ignored the struggle because they had bad associations with it, or they felt that it could not positively affect their lives. Others may have lived without actively involving themselves in national politics but maintained an interest and prayed that Namibia might become independent from South Africa and white minority rule. The students with whom I spoke who remained in Namibia tended to portray themselves as supporters of the liberation movement, and some encouraged their colleagues, students, friends and families to contest apartheid or support SWAPO.

Students who fled into exile effectively pledged themselves to a political position, travelling to Zambia and Angola to become a part of the national liberation movement at the expense of their lives at home in Namibia. Some exiles from St. Therese explain that they had utilitarian goals to receive access to a better education and training in exile. Most suggest that they were also giving themselves to a noble cause that transcended local and personal concerns. For example, Theresia Basson writes the following about her decision to leave her sick mother and travel into exile:

But although [my mother] had been in a really bad state of health at that time, I had to leave. I knew that this would be one sacrifice I had to make for a better Namibia. This sacrifice I also had to make for my own family, my brothers and sisters (Melber 1983: 140).

Basson and other St. Therese exiles knew they were making a "sacrifice", but they were not fully aware of that for which they sacrificed themselves. SWAPO did persevere and Namibia has become an independent nation. These students have had the opportunity to play roles that might not have been possible without their decision to travel into exile, their political involvement at St. Therese and their education in Tsas. They studied at institutions around the world and have had opportunities to become leaders in the new Namibian nation. These appear to be the dreams of "a better Namibia" for which exiles were prepared to sacrifice, and some clearly appreciate the jobs that they have and the Namibia in which their families live. On the

other hand, St. Therese exiles also emphasize the unjust sacrifice that they made as SWAPO detainees in the “spy drama.” How former students come to terms with their betrayal is central to how they continue to resolve their political awakening at St. Therese.

### *With SWAPO in Exile*

There were some St. Therese students who considered travelling into exile as early as 1975. By this time Joseph Stephanus had made contact with SWAPO officials in Windhoek who could lead people in southern and central Namibia into exile<sup>83</sup> (Joseph Stephanus: June 16, 2002). Although Joseph Stephanus, Stefanus Swartbooi, Joseph Motinga and Stephanus Motinga<sup>84</sup> were all anxious to leave the country at this point, SWAPO officials encouraged them to remain since they saw their political activism in Namibia as more valuable at that time (Stefanus Swartbooi: June 14, 2002; Joseph Stephanus: June 16, 2002). Following the Soweto Uprising, however, these students and others from the core group decided that they would leave St. Therese together after the school strike. Plans changed when Sister Mara dismissed Joseph Stephanus, Joseph Motinga and Stephanus Motinga from school for their “political activities”, and these three actually travelled to Windhoek in early November and left for exile on November 9, two days before the strike (Stefanus Swartbooi: June 14, 2002; Joseph Stephanus: June 16, 2002). Other students, including Willem Meyer, left immediately following the strike, boarding the train to Windhoek on November 11 and leaving for exile on November 15 (Stefanus Swartbooi: June 14, 2002).<sup>85</sup> Theresia Basson and several others from St. Therese also journeyed into exile in December 1976.

The three groups’ trips into exile seem to have followed the same general pattern. In Windhoek St. Therese students joined with SWAPO officials and other students, most of whom attended Martin Luther and Döbra. Eventually, SWAPO drove students to the Buitepos-Mamuno border with Botswana in groups of ten to fifteen people (Melber 1983: 141; Basson and Motinga 1989: 4). At night the students were dropped off 1 km from the border fence and walked over into Botswana (Basson

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<sup>83</sup> In the North most people travelled into exile by crossing over the border between Namibia and Angola.

<sup>84</sup> Joseph Motinga and Stephanus Motinga were St. Therese students also commonly mentioned as members of “the core group.”

and Motinga 1989: 4). They remained at the border and in Maun for weeks or months until SWAPO trucks transported them to Lusaka where they met with SWAPO officials and were later transported to training camps in southwestern Zambia. There were at least twelve St. Therese students who entered exile at this time in this way, and approximately forty-four other students from southern and central Namibia who travelled with them (Melber 1983: 141). At least twenty-seven former St. Therese students who were affiliated with the school between 1973 and 1976 eventually joined SWAPO in exile (See Appendix 1).

Former St. Therese students remember receiving a warm welcome from SWAPO officials upon their arrival in Zambia. Apparently, the students from St. Therese, Martin Luther and Döbra were the first people from south of the Red Line to join the liberation movement in exile, and thus their arrival marked a political victory for SWAPO as it tried to establish itself as a national movement (Willem Meyer: April 10, 2002). All exiles had to participate in a training program, the duration of which seems to have varied.<sup>86</sup> Military training for guerrilla warfare was central to the process, but former students also remember “political training” in SWAPO policies and goals. Furthermore, at least some of the students took examinations for placement in the United Nations Institute for Namibia (UNIN) in Lusaka during their training (Theresia Basson: April 11, 2002).

UNIN was established on the premise that it would train Namibians for the administration and development of an independent Namibia and conduct problem-oriented research to benefit the new nation (UNIN 1986: 1). Naturally, Namibia was in great need of such research and of individuals with such training, for there were few black professionals outside of the teaching and nursing professions. Since SWAPO existed not only as a liberation army but also as a political body with aspirations to lead an independent Namibia, it had incentive to send its best students to this new institute which offered to train Namibians with scholars from UN represented countries from around the world. Expectations in 1976 that independence was almost at hand may have increased the impetus to train professionals for the new nation (UNIN 1986: 3). The diplomatic circumstances under which UNIN was

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<sup>85</sup> Swartbooi, who travelled into exile on November 15, was actually not at St. Therese for the strike, having left for Windhoek alone on November 10.

<sup>86</sup> Joseph Stephanus and Willem Meyer describe their training as three months in duration (Joseph Stephanus: December 18, 2001; Willem Meyer: April 10, 2002) while Ben Motinga describes his as six months long (Basson and Motinga 1989: 5).

created also made it important to send as many good students to the Institute as possible. By 1976 SWAPO had gained the status of “the sole and authentic representative of the Namibian people” according to the UN (UN Resolution 385, 1976). Naturally, SWAPO needed to send as many qualified individuals to UNIN as possible to strengthen this bond.

There were, however, not many individuals who had the secondary school training required to enter UNIN. Therefore, students who did, like those from St. Therese, had a great advantage in earning entrance. By one estimate, 60-70% of those first exiles from southern and central Namibia attended UNIN (Willem Meyer: April 10, 2001). Furthermore, as SWAPO became internationally recognized with the UN, so did it also with many nations and organizations which provided high levels of financial and technical assistance (Leys and Saul 1995: 54). In the 1970s there were several thousand students studying throughout the world on SWAPO scholarships in Cuba, many African nations, the USSR, Eastern bloc nations, Scandinavian nations, India, Britain and the USA (Leys and Saul 1995: 54). St. Therese students were among a small number who could qualify for tertiary level education on their arrival in exile and therefore were in place to take advantage of these opportunities. In the late 1970s and early 1980s they studied all around the world (See Appendix 1).

Before and after St. Therese students pursued their tertiary studies, SWAPO utilized their educational backgrounds in other ways. Many served stints as teachers in refugee camps in Angola and several established schools for refugees in Cuba. St. Therese students also found positions in radio, journalism and the SYL. A few also served as military officers (See Appendix 1).

One can only assume that a secondary school education played a large role in the study and professional opportunities that these and other former St. Therese students had. Unfortunately, there are no definitive statistics of the number of individuals who went into exile or what people did once they arrived, and thus no way to quantify the positions that former St. Therese students took in SWAPO versus others from other backgrounds. It is worth noting, however, that SWAPO was engaged in armed conflict, and both sides enlisted increasing numbers of soldiers as the war escalated in the 1970s and '80s (Brown 1995: 29-37; Leys and Saul 1995: 54). Nevertheless, only six of the young men who studied at St. Therese from 1973 to 1976 and entered exile ended up on the frontlines in or near combat. Of those, two became members of a special military unit called Typhoon (Joseph Stephanus: June

16, 2002). The rest served at the front for a period before moving on to studies or professional work.

### *The Spy Drama*

In the course of the 1980s, the fates of most St. Therese exiles changed drastically. Between 1982 and 1986 many exiles were arrested and sent to a SWAPO military camp in Lubango, Angola.<sup>87</sup> There they were tortured, forced to ‘confess’ to being South African spies and implicate others, and subsequently imprisoned, remaining in underground dungeons for the duration of the war. Twenty-three of the twenty-seven St. Therese students from the mid-1970s in exile were imprisoned by SWAPO (See Appendix 1).

Research into the so-called “spy drama” demonstrates that the great majority of those whom SWAPO labelled “spies” were nothing of the sort. The Committee of Parents (CP), a group of CCN delegates and parents of SWAPO members in exile, began to research the imprisonment of alleged spies as early as 1984, and three representatives published what they had learned in 1986 in *Namibia- A Struggle Betrayed* (Thiro-Beukes, Beukes and Beukes 1990). *The Namibian*, Namibia’s progressive, and at that point pro-SWAPO newspaper, reported on SWAPO leaders’ abuse of power in their news coverage before the national elections in 1989 (Lush 1993: 200-201). Since then, several scholarly works have documented how SWAPO leadership imprisoned and abused innocent Namibians in exile and analysed why these events occurred. They include accounts by authors in many ways sympathetic to the struggle such as those I have cited from *Namibia’s Liberation Struggle: The Two-Edged Sword* (1995). Also Siegfried Groth, the Lutheran pastor who had served exiled Namibians in Botswana and Zambia since the early 1970s and former staunch SWAPO supporter, writes of SWAPO’s human rights abuses in *Namibia- The Wall of Silence* (1995). Former St. Therese student Ben Motinga has also published a book with Nico Basson<sup>88</sup>, *Call Them Spies: A Documentary Account of the Swapo Spy*

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<sup>87</sup> Four St. Therese exiles were not arrested and one other, Bience Gawanas, was imprisoned at a later date (See Appendix 1).

<sup>88</sup> This Nico Basson is not the same Nico Basson that left St. Therese in 1976 to travel into exile (See Appendix 1).

*Drama* (1989), which provides evidence of how SWAPO leaders used spy accusations at the expense of innocent people.<sup>89</sup>

These texts and other research document that between 1976 and 1989 there were a series of conflicts within SWAPO itself that led to the detention of its own members. In April 1976 SWAPO detained dissidents in the so-called “Shipanga Crisis.” These events occurred before St. Therese students arrived in exile and therefore did not affect them directly. They seem, however, to have set a precedent among SWAPO leadership for how they would deal with those they perceived as a threat to their authority. One aspect of this precedent was that increasingly SWAPO leaders gave “free rein to those who safeguarded [their] ‘security’” (Leys and Saul 1995: 50).

There were conflicts within SWAPO in the 1980s that would have affected whom leadership viewed as a threat. First, there were ethnic tensions within the party. Although St. Therese exiles believed that SWAPO was true to its banner “One Namibia- One Nation” when they were still students at St. Therese, they recall their disappointment upon discovering tribalism in the organization in exile. Many former exiles believe there was conflict among the Oshivambo-speaking groups, particularly a rivalry between those within the larger Kwanyama clan and the other smaller clans (Leys and Saul 1995: 64). There is no doubt, however, that tensions existed between the majority of SWAPO members in exile, who came from the North, and those from the central and southern regions of the country.<sup>90</sup> These tensions probably had an ethnic element behind them, but they cannot simply be ascribed to tribalism (Leys and Saul 1995: 64). Former St. Therese students and researchers alike believe that differences in education were central to the conflict. There were fewer individuals from the North who had had access to secondary school than those South of the Red Line. Also, those individuals in leadership posts were predominantly from SWAPO’s ‘old guard’, all of whom had received little formal education (Leys and Saul 1995: 54, 64). Apparently, they felt threatened by the more educated individuals who were under their command and in response expressed their “contempt for intellectuals...refusing to share information or explain their decisions” (Leys and Saul

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<sup>89</sup> For a full review of the literature pertaining to “the spy drama” see Timothy Dauth’s “Namibia- The Wall of Silence: Review” (1986).

<sup>90</sup> The secondary literature and those whom I interview often refer to prejudice against people from “the South.” In this context it seems that they are referring to “the South” as south of the Red Line, not the ‘the South’ as I have used it in this dissertation (See footnote 3).

1995: 54). Former exiles also argue that the administrative and leadership positions that many exiles from southern and central Namibia received exacerbated tensions between North and South. Furthermore, Namibians from the North may have seen those from southern and central Namibia as more closely linked with South Africa, since these areas had been settled by whites, and as more ideologically divorced from communism (Joseph Stephanus: December 18, 2001). Although SWAPO never fully embraced a communist stance, it operated in Angola with the support of its Marxist MPLA government, received military aid from other communist nations and sent increasing numbers of exiles to the eastern bloc for political courses. Apparently, many of the people who attended these courses were Namibians with little education from the North, who often “blindly accepted Marxist creed without questioning it” (Groth 1995: 135). Southerners in exile, most of whom had received more extensive educations at mission schools that feared communism (Bishop Antonio: April 10, 2002), may have been more inclined to question communist ideology.

Clearly, former St. Therese students fit the description of a ‘threat’ to the predominantly less educated, Ovambo ‘old guard’ of SWAPO leadership. They were ethnic outsiders from the South. They were well-educated and some had positions of authority within SWAPO. Many of them were studying or had studied at UNIN, which functioned as “an important hub for the group of SWAPO intellectuals... who had a modernizing, developmentalist, if not particularly radical, vision for SWAPO” (Leys and Saul 1995: 53). Furthermore, they tended to support SWAPO President Sam Nujoma, in part because he was the hero they followed when they left Namibia and knew little about the other leaders in exile (Theresia Basson: April 11, 2002). If, in fact, there was a plot among the Kwanyama leadership to take power from non-Kwanyamas like Nujoma, then St. Therese students would have found themselves in the middle of it.

There were developments in the war itself which heightened the pre-existing tensions in SWAPO and led to spy accusations. In 1980 South Africa introduced military conscription in the Police Zone resulting in an exodus of individuals into exile. The people in this new wave of exiles were, if anything, more educated than the previous wave between 1974 and 1976 “so that anti-intellectualism became mixed with anti-‘southern’ feeling on the part of those in command” (Leys and Saul 1995: 54-55). SWAPO also suffered repeated military setbacks in the 1980s, which were due in part to South Africa’s knowledge of the movements and intentions of

SWAPO's armed forces (Leys and Saul 1995: 55). Under the circumstances, it is not surprising that PLAN thought that spies were to blame. Although subsequent study suggests that the SADF was able to monitor PLAN radio communications to a far greater extent than PLAN leaders knew, there were undoubtedly spies informing South African intelligence as well (Leys and Saul 1995: 55).

There was, therefore, a rationale behind the SWAPO Central Committee's<sup>91</sup> decision to establish the SWAPO Security Organization in the early 1980s.<sup>92</sup> Nanyemba, the Secretary of Defence, may also have encouraged its creation on Soviet advice (Leys and Saul 1995: 55-56). Since PLAN had become effectively autonomous from the remainder of SWAPO by 1980, Solomon Hawala, the Deputy Army Commander appointed to head the SWAPO Security Organization, had almost free reign over how he did his job (Leys and Saul 1995: 56). The Central Committee determined that Hawala would answer only to the President; he was not even accountable to the Secretary of Defence. Furthermore, the Security Organization set its base in Lubango, Angola, separated from other army bases, and only a handful of Central Committee members were allowed to visit there (Leys and Saul 1995: 56). The 250 men recruited to work under Hawala were predominantly PLAN members with little or no formal education, many of whom had trained in security work in the USSR (Leys and Saul 1995: 55-56).

Hawala and his staff, left to their own devices to define and maintain security, seem to have largely, if not entirely, diverged from any concern with PLAN's military security (Leys and Saul 1995: 64-65).<sup>93</sup> Instead, the SWAPO Security Organization attacked individuals whom they must have perceived as a threat to themselves. Most of these people came from south of the Red Line and had been in exile a number of years before their arrest. Many of the prisoners were "well

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<sup>91</sup> The Central Committee consisted of SWAPO's senior leadership, including President Nujoma and other founding members of the OPO.

<sup>92</sup> There is conflicting information in the secondary literature on the year of the Security Organization's establishment. Leys and Saul write that the Central Committee decided to found the SWAPO Security Organization in 1980 or 1981 and that it came into being in 1981 (Leys and Saul 1995: 55-56). Groth records that the Security Organization "was formed" in 1983 (Groth 1995: 100). There is no reference for either entry.

<sup>93</sup> One former St. Therese exile even suggested that some of the SWAPO leadership may have been on the payroll of the South African intelligence. As Leys and Saul report, "it has occurred to many people that if South Africa had wanted to subvert SWAPO they could have not done better than pay someone in SWAPO's highest ranks to engineer the creation of the SWAPO Security Organization (Leys and Saul 1995: 65).

educated” and “young intellectuals” (Brown and Dix 1993: 8.297). St. Therese students from the mid-1970s were, therefore, prime targets.

The SWAPO Security Organization arrested ‘spies’ throughout Angola during the 1980s with arrests climaxing in 1984 and 1985 (Groth 1995: 102). SWAPO recalled students to Luanda from all over the world from where they were sent to Lubango. In some cases students were unaware of the accusations against them or were forced to board planes by the security forces of Eastern bloc countries. Most, however, had received word of spy accusations and ‘disappearing’ comrades. Still, these students usually returned to Angola when recalled on the premise that they could clear their names and that if they did not go, their actions would be seen as an admission of guilt (Leys and Saul 1995: 65). Furthermore, St. Therese exiles point out that they had dedicated their lives to the struggle and SWAPO and that to leave the party would have required them to give up everything.

Former SWAPO detainees tell very similar versions of their experiences as prisoners. When the accused arrived in Lubango, they were told to confess that they were South African spies. When they inevitably denied the accusations, they were beaten until they agreed to ‘confess’ to whatever their captors said they had done and, in many cases, had to provide the names of fellow ‘spies’ or the torture continued. The accused who survived this process were then put into covered underground pits with other prisoners. There they lived for the remainder of the war with little food or medical care (Basson and Motinga 1989: 5-6; Groth 1995: 100-129; Leys and Saul 1995: 53-58).

Since prisoners did not leave Lubango and few outsiders accessed the base, the actual happenings there remained mysterious. As the numbers of ‘spies’ increased, however, people knew more and more people personally who had been taken to Lubango and became increasingly convinced that these individuals were not spies. It seems, however, that it was dangerous for people to protest (Leys and Saul 1995: 56). There is at least one case of someone who broke free from the SWAPO Security Organization and attempted to notify others about SWAPO crimes. Allegedly, Lukas Stefanus, a former St. Therese student and SWAPO’s Deputy Secretary of Education, escaped from detention and spoke with Nujoma himself about what had happened to him and other SWAPO detainees. He was killed shortly thereafter (Stefanus Swartbooi: June 14, 2002). As previously mentioned, word of the spy drama also found its way back into Namibia via the Committee of Parents. Some

of their members first learned about the spy drama as part of a CCN delegation in Europe and thereafter gathered a variety of material documenting SWAPO's human rights abuses, including letters written by victims to their relatives (Groth 1995: 141, 144). They privately and later publicly petitioned SWAPO, the UN and various church bodies and NGOs to intervene in the crisis (Steenkamp 1995: 104-105). At the same time Siegfried Groth also became aware of human rights abuses in Angola and raised the issue with fellow church leaders. The CCN and other church bodies, however, proved unable to question SWAPO activities effectively, having become so closely aligned with the movement by the late 1970s. In some cases they may have even helped to conceal SWAPO's crimes (Steenkamp 1995: 107). Ironically, St. Therese students who learned to confront social injustice through SWAPO while on the Tses Mission became the victims of terrible injustice committed by the same church-supported liberation movement.

There is still disagreement about how many individuals were imprisoned by SWAPO in the 1980s. According to the "Clark Report" written by the UN Mission on Detainees, there were 1100 SWAPO detainees during these years although the numbers were reduced to around 800 when mistakes in the lists were found (Basson and Motinga 1989: 143; Leys and Saul 1995: 64). In contrast, *The Final Report on Missing Persons* published by the International Committee of the Red Cross states that SWAPO is responsible for the enforced disappearance of 2 161 Namibians in exile (Breaking the Wall of Silence Movement 1996: 1). Leys and Saul estimate that SWAPO detained 900 individuals of whom a third may have died (Leys and Saul 1995: 64). A large proportion of exiles from central and southern Namibia were imprisoned with one former prisoner estimating that 50% of the non-Ovambos in exile were detained (Leys and Saul 1995: 64).

Of the twenty-seven St. Therese students who travelled into exile, twenty-three were imprisoned by SWAPO. Seven never returned to Namibia. According to exiles' testimonies, one died of malaria. Three died at the hands of SWAPO through acts of violence or neglect. Three are unaccounted for but probably died in SWAPO dungeons.

### *Independence*

In 1989 SWAPO began to release its prisoners from exile. Their release came in conjunction with the Geneva Peace Accord of April 1989, which established a

ceasefire and began Namibia's transition to independence (Steenkamp 1995: 106). By this time the United Nations had read the *Amnesty International Report for 1987*, which referred to human rights abuses in SWAPO camps in Angola, and had spoken with Nujoma about the matter, putting pressure on SWAPO to open its camps to international scrutiny (Steenkamp 1995: 106). Most prisoners were released by May of 1989 and repatriated to Namibia in July and August of that year (Brown and Dix 1993: 8.327).

Upon their release many SWAPO-detainees sought to expose the public to the SWAPO spy drama. Some established the Political Consultative Committee (PCC) before they left Angola with the twin aims of publicizing their plight and preventing the spy drama from being taken over by South African sponsored political groups (Brown and Dix 1993: 8.335). On July 4, 1989 the first group of 153 SWAPO prisoners returned to Windhoek. On July 6 these ex-detainees, in conjunction with the Parents' Committee, gave a press conference in which they told their stories from Lubango and released to the press a list of 439 others believed still to be held in Angola by SWAPO (Groth 1995: 149). Thereafter, the PCC worked closely with the newly formed Ex-Detainee Support Committee to build awareness of the spy drama and to gather information about missing persons (Groth 1995: 149).

Although some former SWAPO prisoners are still involved in campaigning on behalf of their co-prisoners, ex-detainees have generally reintegrated into Namibian society. Most turned down SWAPO's offer of "rehabilitation" on their release and resigned from the party (Brown and Dix 1993: 8.336). Although some experienced difficulties rejoining families and friends in Namibia who believed them to be spies, exiles from the South were generally met by communities that believed their stories and supported them (Brown and Dix 1993: 8.328). The majority seem to have resettled in Windhoek (Brown and Dix 1993: 8.319). Although some are unemployed, a relatively large number have jobs, particularly in comparison with other groups of exiles who have returned to Namibia (Brown and Dix 1993: 8.371). Some have taken positions in the civil service at senior ranks. Others have become involved in NGOs and private enterprise (Brown and Dix 1993: 8.371).

There seem to be several factors behind the successful employment of ex-SWAPO detainees in independent Namibia. Since Namibia's first independent elections in March 1990, SWAPO has won the majority of votes and Sam Nujoma has held the presidency. Although the government has had no official program for

assisting returned SWAPO prisoners, many had the opportunity to join the civil service “on the recommendation of some Ministers in the post-independence government” (Brown and Dix 1993: 8.345). Apparently Hage Geingob<sup>94</sup>, former director of UNIN and Prime Minister of Namibia, has been particularly influential in helping former detainees receive government posts (Peltola 1995: 155). A number of ex-detainees have rejoined SWAPO to take these posts. Still, as the NISER Report<sup>95</sup> indicates, there are many ex-detainees who remain unemployed (Brown and Dix 1993: 8.371). What, then, is the difference between ex-detainees who have jobs and have become leaders in contemporary Namibia, and those who have not? The NISER Report argues that “untypically high educational qualifications” have made the difference (Brown and Dix 1993: 8.377). Apparently, only one individual with a post-matric degree did not have a job at the time of research, three years after the prisoners’ return (Brown and Dix 1993: 8.390).

Most St. Therese students, of course, had “untypically high educational qualifications” and many had received a post-matric degree while in exile. Therefore, it is not surprising that almost all returned St. Therese exiles are employed. Several have retreated from an openly political life and work in research posts and in the private sector. A few are actively involved in opposition politics, including Stefanus Swartbooi, a founding member of the Congress of Democrats (COD). Others have taken civil service jobs with SWAPO, often at the highest levels regionally and nationally (See Appendix 1).

The resilience of many former St. Therese students is striking. Not only were many able to adapt and excel in the foreign world of SWAPO in exile, but they have recovered from the crimes committed against them to become leaders in the new nation. Still, they bear physical, psychological and social scars (Brown and Dix 1993: 8.363, 8.364, 8.374). Particularly, the NISER Report argues that there is often a stigma attached to these former ‘spies.’ Some families and communities did not accept them. Many SWAPO supporters and officials still believe that “all the [SWAPO] detainees were traitors” (Brown and Dix 1993: 8.321). Former prisoners continue to lobby for an apology from SWAPO and public acknowledgement that they were not spies. They also call on the government for information on the fate of

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<sup>94</sup> Apparently, SWAPO security threatened Geingob himself, and interrogators suggested that “spies” should implicate him as the “master spy” (Leys and Saul 1995: 53, 65).

<sup>95</sup> NISER stands for the Namibian Institute for Social and Economic Research. NISER supported and contributed to Susan Brown and Tove Dix’s research.

their peers who have not returned from exile, and some ask that reparations be given to those imprisoned (Brown and Dix 1993: 8.365-8.370). The Breaking the Wall of Silence Movement (BWS), launched in Windhoek with the release of Groth's book *Namibia- The Wall of Silence*, is the largest contemporary lobby group for SWAPO's ex-detainees.

The Namibian government has not met any of the former prisoners' requests. According to leading SWAPO officials, they go against the party's policy for national reconciliation. When asked why SWAPO had not openly admitted its responsibility in the detainee problem<sup>96</sup>, Hage Geingob responded:

We have the policy of reconciliation... We freed everybody, saying that OK we are going back, those who want to go back to South Africa or go independently they go independently. Those who come back to SWAPO come back. And many people are back. Those who have been arrested now have positions. So we have reconciled, we have made up... We [do not] stop the reconciliation and start the witch-hunt. (Peltola 1995: 161)

It seems, therefore, that SWAPO's notion of national reconciliation is to keep quiet and give its victims jobs when possible. In the case of St. Therese, the ruling party took an added step. Nujoma himself travelled to Tses shortly after independence. He formally thanked community members who had assisted SWAPO and thanked Catholic Church officials for their schools and the roles that they played in the liberation struggle (Bishop Antonio: June 13, 2002). The Bishop suggests that the President was showing his reconciliation with the Tses community because he had gone out of his way to come to Tses specifically. Nujoma did not, however, admit to any SWAPO human rights' abuses (Bishop Antonio: June 13, 2002).

SWAPO leaders continue to follow this tack even when their position requires them publicly to deny that innocent Namibians were detained by their liberation movement. As Siegfried Groth's text became increasingly well known in Namibia, government leaders adamantly denied its claims. President Nujoma made a special address on state television in which he declared Groth's book "a false history" (Dauth 1996: 1). Certainly the government does not wish to address its human rights record openly. After Nujoma's announcement, SWAPO Secretary General, Moses Garoeb, declared war on the "unpatriotic elements" and "foreign remnants of fascism" which had threatened national reconciliation by opening the detainee issue (Dauth 1996:1-

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<sup>96</sup> Apparently, Pekka Peltola, author of *The Last May Day* (1995), framed the question in the context of a comparison between reconciliation policies in South Africa and Namibia.

2). As recently as last year, Foreign Affairs, Information and Broadcasting Minister Theo-Ben Gurirab told BWS that “the government has addressed and continues to address the issue” (Maletsky: August 29, 2001).

Given their experiences and the government’s stances, it is not surprising that many former St. Therese students from exile are disillusioned with SWAPO. When they became SWAPO activists at St. Therese they were “young and idealistic”, but exiles explain that they have since discovered “the other side of SWAPO.” More generally, it seems that St. Therese exiles have experienced a loss of political innocence, and some have neither the faith nor the will to involve themselves in “politics” any longer. One might expect these individuals to be similarly disillusioned with St. Therese where their lives as political activists began. After all, former students’ life experiences have undoubtedly politicised their memories of their school days.

Still, in spite of what befell them in exile and St. Therese’s indirect role in their persecution there, returned exiles praise the school. One mentioned that he was “proud” that he attended St. Therese, another that St. Therese was “a great school”, a third that he had “every reason to feel nostalgia” for St. Therese. Willem Meyer went so far as to say that “St. Therese affected me positively because I don’t know if it had been another school if I would have joined the struggle” (Willem Meyer: April 10, 2002). These words come from a man who was tortured and spent four years imprisoned by the very liberation movement that experiences at St. Therese had led him to support. And yet, he and other former students speak fondly of people at St. Therese who supported the struggle and with pride about the strike which they led in 1976. They believe that St. Therese was ‘good’ and they did something ‘right’ regardless of what they have had to endure in the name of the struggle.

## **VIII. Epilogue: St. Therese and the Continuing Struggle**

The drama which I framed for discussion has concluded. Still, its epilogues continue such that the dramas of yesteryear become the scripts of performances today.

Clearly, St. Therese students from 1973 to 1976 have not forgotten their alma mater. When I contacted former students to request interviews with them about St. Therese, most were more than willing to accommodate. In our conversations alumni spoke enthusiastically about their school experiences and shared much of the information that I have laid out in the preceding chapters. Many were particularly keen on explaining how the school affected their lives. As noted in Chapter V, they believe that they learned habits of “hard work” and “discipline” and developed a sense of “pride” and “vision” at the school, all of which they see as central to who they are today. Overall, former students have strong, positive associations with the school and feel very nostalgic about their days at St. Therese.

One might think, therefore, that St. Therese alumni from the mid-1970s would be involved in the school now. This, however, is not the case. Most former students whom I interviewed know little or nothing about what is happening at St. Therese today although they live in southern Namibia and Windhoek. Many have not visited the school since their student days. A number did return for a St. Therese reunion in 1987, and although those who attended say that they enjoyed it, there has been no reunion since then.<sup>97</sup> Some former students must maintain contact with the Tses Mission because there are forty-two current St. Therese pupils who indicate that one or more of their parents attended the school (St. Therese Learner Survey: April 8, 2002). Many of these parents attended the school after 1976, however, and none are among the professionally successful former students whom I list in Appendices 1 and 2. In fact, most, if not all, of these professionally successful alumni have never sent a child to St. Therese.<sup>98</sup>

The school has also made only limited efforts to unite former students with their alma mater. There is no alumni organization or newsletter. There is no school development fund for which former students are solicited to contribute. Both in 2000

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<sup>97</sup> Many former St. Therese students were in exile at this time and therefore not at the reunion. Apparently, the students decided that they would have another reunion when the exiles returned, but this reunion has not come to pass (Paulina Kanases: November 15, 2001).

<sup>98</sup> Those alumni I interviewed have not sent their children to St. Therese nor mentioned peers who have.

and 2001 Josef Konjore and the teaching staff have invited former students back to speak at the school for its end-of-year achievement awards. These speakers, Willem Meyer and Paulina Kanases, are illustrious former students who have high visibility jobs. They spoke about their experiences at St. Therese and offered financial contributions. Kanases also offered a scholarship to St. Therese's highest scoring student. The school, however, has not taken further action to develop contacts with these or other alumni.

There are, of course, reasons for this lack of involvement. For St. Therese itself, there are limited human and material resources with which to cultivate an alumni network. Furthermore, there is no culture of such networks in Namibian schools outside of those which were previously reserved for whites. The teachers and administrators at St. Therese, therefore, do not expect that such an organization should exist. In the past missions had a built-in network for their schools via church affiliates and donors from around the world. Schools and students benefited from the contributions, but they did not learn how to cultivate these connections. They were just the missionaries' 'presents.'

For St. Therese alumni, the reasons that they have lost touch with the contemporary school are more complicated. Certainly one factor is the migration of many former St. Therese students to towns and the city. Alumni claim that it is "not convenient" to spend time at St. Therese. Some parents also feel that St. Therese is "too far away" to send their children there, and some would prefer to raise their children at home. In independent Namibia there are many other secondary schools, and all state schools are open to students who can afford them and can meet the academic standard.<sup>99</sup> Ironically, St. Therese itself has had some impact on these developments. St. Therese provided the necessary educational training and qualifications for many of the urban jobs which its former students pursued. It also played a major role in former students' decisions to travel to exile. On their return, many resettled in Windhoek although some have come back to places closer to Tses such as Keetmanshoop and Mariental. Furthermore, St. Therese alumni are among those who teach and administer other Namibian secondary schools. Arguably, St. Therese is a victim of its own success, for it has underdeveloped itself and the local

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<sup>99</sup> Namibian law guarantees that all children from seven to sixteen years of age can and must attend school although students' placement depends on demand at particular schools and some schools have entry requirements.

community by influencing talented individuals to travel elsewhere. Former students cannot easily access, and often have little incentive to touch base with, their alma mater and places of origin.

There is a more central issue behind former students' lack of contact with the school, however. St. Therese students from the mid-1970s and earlier perceive that the school is essentially different today from what it used to be. As already stated, most know very little about the school now although some suggest that its students, teachers and administrators today may be like those of other Namibian schools. They do know, however, that St. Therese is no longer the successful school which they remember and therefore believe that the standard, atmosphere and status must have changed drastically. Whereas St. Therese used to stand out academically and athletically, it no longer does. St. Therese used to be a "serious school" and "a spirited institution" alive with political activism, but it does not have this reputation today. Although St. Therese was once "*the* school" to attend, it is now "just a school." One former student comments that "people look down on St. Therese because they know the history [of the school] and they compare." Another concludes that "after the 11<sup>th</sup> of November [1976] it was finished at St. Therese. It will never be the same school again."

How can one evaluate these claims? Certainly St. Therese does not stand out among southern Namibian schools as it once did. Upon independence the Namibian government opened its schools to all citizens. St. Therese is one of 379 schools providing junior secondary education in Namibia, one of twenty-four in the Karas Region (Josef Konjore: June 5, 2002). Most Namibians between the ages of seven and sixteen attend school today. Almost 60% of Namibian fifteen to twenty-nine year-olds had received some secondary education seven years after Independence (The Ministry of Labour 2001: Table 3.5). St. Therese had also ceased to be the premier "Nama school" long before independence. Following the strike, J.A. Nel and other high schools opened for blacks in the South, and St. Therese closed Standards IX and X. There were other paths to a secondary education for blacks in the South and places where they could receive a higher level of education.

There have also been changes in the standard and the atmosphere, which have mirrored, and partially resulted from, St. Therese's changed status. When St. Therese closed down Standards IX and X, it could no longer produce matriculants nor did it have the older students to man its formerly successful soccer team. Naturally, exam

results between 1973 and 1976 do not directly correlate with results since then because one can no longer measure them according to the national exam for matriculants. There have also been changes in the examination system that make a direct comparison difficult. Those who taught at the school during and immediately after this period, however, attest that the scores dropped. Certainly, St. Therese does not stand out for its high scores in the present day. In 2001, 50% of St. Therese's grade 10s passed the exam for admission to senior secondary school, approximating the national average.<sup>100</sup> Although an improvement on recent years, these scores ranked the school 20<sup>th</sup> out of the 24 schools in Karas (Josef Konjore: June 5, 2002).

The atmosphere of the school, and particularly its political activism, could not have helped but change substantially from 1976 to the present. St. Therese's politically active students left after 1976, and aside from demonstrations in 1977 and 1989 there seems to have been little organized political activity at the school. One cannot even compare the political environment in pre- and post-independence Namibia now that the liberation struggle has ended. Based on my own experiences at St. Therese, students seem uninformed about and disinterested in national politics.

There is also reason to believe that the qualities of the students, teachers and administrators have changed. Administratively, St. Therese no longer benefits to the same extent from its church affiliation. The Catholic Church no longer has adequate Brothers, Sisters and Fathers to staff its mission schools in Namibia and elsewhere in the world. Excepting Deacon !Goraseb, the locally raised and Tses-educated leader of the mission, and his influence on the school board, there is no Catholic clergy affiliated with the school or the mission. On the other hand, St. Therese does receive support from the Christian Brothers and two international volunteer teachers, who may play a similar role on the mission.

As for the teachers, they may not have had the same commitment to St. Therese that some had during the mid-'70s. During those years the church was in charge of hiring the teachers of its schools and often employed individuals with whom church leaders had personal contact. Four St. Therese teachers in the mid-1970s were from the Tses Reserve and three had attended the school itself. They had personal connections with people at the school. In contrast, the Ministry of Basic

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<sup>100</sup> The majority of schools do not achieve this 50% pass rate. St. Therese ranked 144 out of 379 schools nationally. These statistics suggest that high exam results are concentrated in relatively few schools.

Education, Sport and Culture now assigns teachers to St. Therese and most other mission schools, which, although still church property, have become government schools. There are undoubtedly advantages to this system for the use of human resources nationally, but there are disadvantages to assigning teachers, many of whom are working off their bursaries for teacher training college, to a school with which they do not closely identify. On the other hand, many of these teachers are academically more qualified than their predecessors in the 1970s, a point which former St. Therese students readily acknowledge.

It is also possible that St. Therese students today are not as motivated as they once were. Ostensibly, the talented students have ceased to be concentrated at St. Therese since secondary school options have expanded in the South although one could argue that the increasing number of schools have cultivated more 'talent' as well. More to the point, education was not compulsory for St. Therese students in the mid-1970s as it is today. Students only attended the school because they wanted to be there, or their families required them to attend, and although most former students acknowledge that family members encouraged their attendance, many explain that they chose to attend St. Therese themselves. Certainly, the loss of the senior standards has also resulted in a less mature student body with fewer accomplished students. Although learners at St. Therese who wish to attend grades 11 and 12 can and do move on to other schools if they pass their junior secondary exams, one may assume that many motivated students intent on attending higher grades enter schools that offer grades 11 and 12 to begin with. There are some students at St. Therese today who appear to have no intention of attending senior secondary school.

St. Therese as a whole has also fallen victim to the changing social-political landscape of post-independence Namibia. Today there is a trend for black parents to send their children to former "coloured" and "white schools" if they can afford them. These schools generally have better resources and achieve higher exam results. Whereas St. Therese was once *the* school to attend, it tends now to be a school one attends if one does not have the means to go elsewhere. Many teachers find former "black schools" less desirable as well since they often lack the resources and the more accomplished student body that some other schools have. When students graduate from teacher training, the Ministry often sends them to 'historically disadvantaged schools', and therefore they do not teach there by choice. Many teachers at these

schools send their own children to other schools for their education.<sup>101</sup> Mission schools, in general, find themselves on the margins of Namibian education. As most mission schools have sought to serve the disadvantaged, they are now less desirable than other schools with better resources.

One cannot simply attribute former St. Therese students' perceptions of their alma mater to changes in the school itself, however. These students too have changed in numerous ways since they completed their education, and these changes affect how they remember in the present. Obviously, they are now older. Therefore, they probably tend to romanticize their experiences at St. Therese and moralize about the school's decline today. For those St. Therese students who continued on to professional careers, their social position has changed in fundamental ways. They view themselves as successful, and they often link the habits and qualities that they developed at St. Therese with this success. They see that St. Therese students more recently have not been as successful and believe that students lack the "hard work", "discipline", "pride" and "vision" which made them successful.

National politics have also greatly affected the lives of former St. Therese students and the way they view Namibian students, like those attending St. Therese, in the present. The politicisation of southern Namibia in the mid-1970s, with the aid of certain peers, teachers, mission leaders and political activists, opened many former students' minds to the struggle. Some travelled into exile, dedicating their lives to the Namibian liberation movement. They lived there for up to thirteen years with others who had made a similar commitment to their country and sacrificed themselves personally in the process. It must be frustrating for them to look at today's students and see that many are not interested in the struggle or in contemporary national politics. It is not surprising that some reduce contemporary students' attitudes to "wanting the easy life."

### *Lessons from St. Therese History*

Clearly there are reasons why St. Therese alumni describe the rising generation as they do. In comparison to St. Therese students and staff during the mid-1970s, students today may be "lazy", "undisciplined", "ignorant" and "disinterested."

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<sup>101</sup> There are, of course, other rationales behind where teachers send their children. Many Namibian educators with whom I have spoken do not wish to send their child to the school where they teach in order to allow the child more space to develop on his or her own.

Perhaps by some measure some teachers are “less committed.” I admit that I empathize with former students’ frustrations. I had similar reactions to St. Therese on my arrival, conditioned by my very different school experiences. The drama program was one way that I tried to address these problems.

One can feel powerless to change the situation, however. The poverty that confronts blacks in the South today resembles that faced by the previous generation. Southern blacks still live on unproductive land and have a small portion of the natural resources while they remain the largest population group. There are still limited job opportunities in the South. Although 71% of Karas and 54% of Hardap rely on wages and salaries as their main source of income, between 25% and 30% of its people over 15 years of age are unemployed<sup>102</sup> (The Ministry of Labour 2001: 35, 44). Naturally, circumstances are most difficult for the ‘historically disadvantaged’ groups in these regions, particularly the blacks. And although the number of black professionals has definitely increased since the 1970s and this group has received salaries on par with coloured and white professionals, the majority of blacks face a tide of social problems that only seems to increase. Prices for *mealie-pap* have risen beyond the inflation rate. Former teachers and mission workers at St. Therese suggest that alcoholism is even worse today than it was in the 1970s. HIV-AIDS affects the most economically productive members of society, and 16.7% of pregnant women in Keetmanshoop were diagnosed with the disease in 2000 (UNAIDS, UNICEF, WHO 2002: 13). Studies of Namibia and southern Africa suggest that infection rates will increase for the foreseeable future.

Education, then, is not a panacea. Despite those who attended St. Therese in the mid-1970s who have become professionals, many blacks in the South still live unhealthy and poverty-stricken lives. Of course, St. Therese was one secondary school that trained students in the midst of an impoverished population, but now that there are many secondary schools and Namibians are required by law to attend them, the South’s social-economy seems much the same as it was in the 1970s. Even the independent Namibian nation, which St. Therese exiles sacrificed so much to create, appears to have provided few benefits for southerners thus far. Not only do economic struggles persist, but also people continue to feel neglected by the government. As

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<sup>102</sup> These statistics use the “broad” definition for unemployment, including individuals who do not have work, are available for work but who are not looking for work per se (The Ministry of Labour 2001: 38).

Christian Keulder documents, Nama-speaking communities in the South want state structures and programs but have been virtually ignored by the state (Keulder 1997: 54). There is a prevalent feeling in these communities that “Namas” are the least influential group in Namibia, while “Ovambos”, who dominate SWAPO, are the most influential (Keulder 1997: 50-53). Of course, even if black communities in southern Namibia were the beneficiaries of more state structures and programs and were more represented in the government, there would be limits to the economy that could be developed and the people who would benefit from it. Even in the most robust capitalist economy, not everyone can become ‘a successful professional.’

Still, St. Therese from 1973 to 1976 offers some lessons for how a school can enable its students to become successful. During the mid-1970s St. Therese introduced students to a new worldview informed by students, teachers and missionaries inside the mission and the liberation struggle occurring outside of it. Students identified with the mission, its people and the ideas introduced there. In the case of the mission, St. Therese students trusted this institution and believed that it could provide an education that would help them achieve their life goals. Pupils identified closely with some people on the mission, particularly some of the teachers, who came from a background similar to many of the students and had achieved educational and professional successes to which students aspired. Some students associated closely with the struggle and SWAPO, which took the problems that students faced at the time, namely the injustices of apartheid and its education system, and countered them with positive goals, the creation of a free and democratic Namibian nation. With time, the St. Therese community developed a momentum of its own. Although the ‘culture of success’ that the school perpetuated came into conflict with the ‘sub-culture of political activism’, leading to the 1976 strike, both motivated students to follow goals and to lead lives that differed markedly from the status quo of southern Namibian blacks. At the least, many St. Therese alumni have had more options in the roles they have played in their lives than they would have without the school. At the most, students have impacted positively on the outcome of dramas for themselves, their families, their communities and their nation because they attended St. Therese.

Contemporary leaders could learn from St. Therese’s successes. If schools can create a similar environment, one in which students’ worldviews expand, students’ identification with the school is strong and a positive momentum builds,

their pupils may also perform roles outside of the status quo. Of course, such an environment is difficult to create, and most schools, including contemporary St. Therese, fall short of this ideal. There are also geographic, social, economic and political factors that limit what St. Therese and its students can accomplish and ensure that Namibian schools, no matter how excellent, will not produce graduates who all find professional jobs and high salaries. Furthermore, research into international development and global capitalism, such as James Ferguson's (1999), suggests that isolated, marginal schools are becoming increasingly impotent to open students to professional opportunities through a 'good education.' Nonetheless, St. Therese provides an example for the possibilities that a school can create, and its students provide a model for how learners from an impoverished and disenfranchised background can perform successful lives. These lives are marked by exceptional academic and professional accomplishments and political inspiration, all of which people are right to admire regardless of whether they can, or care to, become professionally accomplished and politically active themselves. They are also characterized by hard work, discipline, pride and vision, good qualities that people can successfully develop in any economy and without a liberation struggle.

### *A Proposal*

St. Therese should renew its efforts to open meaningful lives for its students by taking advantage of an overlooked resource: its alumni. There are numerous ways that the school might benefit from involving former students in their alma mater. Most immediately, alumni whom I interviewed are interested in establishing a Trust for the school and scholarships for its learners, and the school has other affluent alumni who might well donate if school leaders approached them. Donations would provide St. Therese and its students with needed financial resources, enabling the school to do its work more effectively and more students to afford future education.

Money, however, is only the tip of the alumni iceberg. Underneath lies a mass of human resources from which contemporary St. Therese could benefit if alumni were made accessible to students. At the least, students today should be aware of those who attended their school in the past. There is no doubt that they would feel proud to attend the same school as Namibian leaders such as the Ombudsman and the Deputy Speaker if they were aware of this fact and more so if they understood the roles that these people play in governing their country. And if students met St.

Therese alumni, the benefits could be much greater still. St. Therese learners might identify with leaders who come from a similar background, once lived on the same mission grounds and attended class in the same classrooms. No doubt, alumni could tell anecdotes with which the learners would relate. Then these people who exhibit hard work, discipline, pride and vision would cease to be so distant, and learners might begin to take to heart the St. Therese motto: "*Si alle id possent cur non ego.*"

Such a reunion of former students with current ones would begin to establish an institutional memory at the school. Currently, St. Therese teachers and students know little about the school's history before 1996 when the most senior staff members were hired. If alumni returned to the school and spoke with learners about their experiences there, the event would effectively insert the history that they share into the school. In turn, today's students would become aware of elements of St. Therese's history that can be significant for them in the present. The effect of such a sense of history is impossible to gauge, but inspiring institutional memories can become self-fulfilling prophecies.

One aspect of St. Therese history which might inspire today's students is the role that alumni played in the struggle. Of course, the political climate has changed considerably since the mid-1970s and more so since independence; one could not, and should not, expect contemporary learners to relate to their school or the larger society in the same way that past generations did. I disagree, however, with some individuals' assertions that "students today have nothing to struggle for"; there are more than enough problems and causes for struggle in the world generally and in contemporary Namibia particularly as the nation tries to realize the potential of its independence. Former St. Therese students, as leaders in contemporary Namibia, stand on a prominent platform to articulate and focus the younger generation's attention on new struggles: the struggle against poverty, the struggle against AIDS, the struggle for education, the struggle for human rights, the struggle for reconciliation and peace. Learners today might also learn from the way that St. Therese students conducted their struggle in the past. For example, they might be taught how students led the strike on November 11, 1976, focusing their action against what they isolated as the problem, the government and its education system, without damaging the mission school, which was trying to assist them.<sup>103</sup> The 1976

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<sup>103</sup> Of course, the strike did affect the school's student body and indirectly hurt its reputation in the long term.

students' "vision for the country" impresses Bishop Antonio to this day when he considers how they conducted the strike (Bishop Antonio: April 10, 2002). Perhaps former exiles could also use the spy drama as an illustration. By pointing out how the liberation struggle betrayed them, victims might illustrate how institutions that support a noble cause are also capable of committing terrible crimes.<sup>104</sup> Along these lines, if alumni could influence students to become critically involved with their governments at school, regionally and nationally, they would do their country a great service.

Of course, the notion of alumni briefly returning to St. Therese and reintroducing the idiom of the struggle is idealistic, and unless others at the school and in the community adopted this idiom, it would probably not take hold of the hearts and minds of students. Nonetheless, students long for meaning, something worth living for in an economy which provides few opportunities for, and a society which is not conducive to, 'professional success.' Some learners may also recognize that the money and status that accompany 'professional success' are not fulfilling in and of themselves. The struggle idiom could, through a concerted effort led by struggle veterans, be reintroduced and guide students to meaningful causes to which they might dedicate their lives.

Finally, St. Therese students of yesterday also stand to benefit from a reunion. Former students would, no doubt, enjoy rekindling friendships and sharing memories. If a reunion were well attended, there might be other lingering benefits as well. The event could create a network of former St. Therese students who join with one another for support. This network would include students who have returned from exile and may not have reconnected with their classmates. Also, the reunion might rekindle struggle ideals which students experienced at St. Therese but in which they may have lost faith. The experience of St. Therese exiles illustrates how these individuals lost their political innocence. As suggested in Chapter V, there may be a sense of political let down among other former students as well. Despite uncertainties about what the struggle has actually accomplished for Namibia, alumni are clearly proud of their school and what they did there. By uniting with their former classmates, alumni might recapture ideals of the struggle as experienced at St.

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<sup>104</sup> It is quite possible that alumni imprisoned in the spy drama would not wish to discuss these events with school learners. Not only might they wish to withhold this information for personal reasons, but also it might have unintended effects like causing students to demonise their government instead of engaging critically with it.

Therese and distinguish them from ways in which some leaders have strayed from these ideals.

In the end, a long term reunion of St. Therese with its past could prove to have an effect on students today that resembles that which the school had on its students in the mid-1970s. If today's students identify with the history of their school and its graduates, they will gain new perspectives on how they wish to live their lives and how they can reach these goals. The experience could guide them to paths outside the circle of poverty and the limitations that this circle imposes. Instead, students might discover that they possess some agency, an ability to perform roles of their choosing in the dramas of their lives. Such is the effect that St. Therese had on many of its students in the mid-1970s. Such is also the potential that schools, and particularly mission schools, have to connect students whom they propose to serve to the opportunities of a larger world. Scholars have well documented that such connections can negatively impact on indigenous populations or maintain a vicious status quo. Nonetheless, they also have the potential to empower people.

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