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## Emotion and forced migration. A biographical and metaphor analysis of the 'GDR children from Namibia'

Caroline Schmitt\* and Matthias D. Witte\*\*

### *Abstract*

*Forced migration is a complex process fraught with emotion. Biographical interviews offer limited scope for translating this process into narratives, yet it is nevertheless reflected in the material in various ways, such as through metaphors. We used interviews and observational material from a qualitative, empirical research project on the "GDR children from Namibia" to explore an analytical procedure that links the reconstruction of narrated and lived biographies (in German: erzählte and erlebte Lebensgeschichte) with reconstructive metaphor analysis. This allowed us to capture the actor's emotional experience via metaphors without losing sight of the complexity of biographical reconstruction.*

### Introduction

In this paper, we seek to identify a methodological approach to research that captures the emotional experience of forced migrants without losing sight of the complexity of biographical reconstruction. We take forced migration to be an emotional process. Translation of this process into narratives is possible only to a limited extent in biographical interviews, yet it is nevertheless reflected in the material in various ways. We use a multi-stage combination of methodologies for capturing emotional experience, combining the analysis methods of biographical case reconstruction and reconstructive metaphor analysis.<sup>1</sup> Our suggested methodology is embedded in a research project on the biographies of the "GDR children from Namibia". We begin with an overview of the history of these children before presenting the current state of research on the theoretical and empirical recording of emotions. Subsequently, we consider how emotions can be reconstructed

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<sup>1</sup> Gabriele Rosenthal, "Die erzählte Lebensgeschichte als historisch-soziale Realität: methodologische Implikationen für die Analyse biographischer Texte, in: Heike Diekwisch, (ed.), *Alltagskultur, Subjektivität und Geschichte: zur Theorie und Praxis von Alltagsgeschichte*, Münster, Westfälisches Dampfboot, 1994: 125-138; Rudolf Schmitt, *Systematische Metaphernanalyse als Methode der qualitativen Sozialforschung*, Wiesbaden, Springer VS, 2017.

using metaphorical approaches, and we set out a combined methodological procedure for analysing biographical materials. The presentation of our results forms the heart of the paper. The case study focuses on a biographical, narrative interview<sup>2</sup> with an 'ex-GDR child' as well as field notes about the interview situation. The paper concludes with a summary of the findings and a perspective on future research.

## The GDR children from Namibia: The research project

The GDR children from Namibia are a group of approximately 430 people who, as children, were brought to East Germany between 1979 and 1990 in the course of a German-Namibian solidarity project between the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) and the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED). They grew up in a children's home in Bellin and attended elementary school in the neighbouring municipality of Zehna. The aim was to form them into the elite of a future independent state of Namibia. This cooperation between the GDR and SWAPO is rooted in the German occupation of what is today Namibia as well as the GDR leadership's search for allies.<sup>3</sup> The territory of modern Namibia was occupied by German colonial forces from 1884 to 1915. German forces oppressed the population and committed genocide against the Herero and Nama people. In 1919, the territory was made a League of Nations mandate of the Union of South Africa, which was to govern it with the participation of the Namibian population. South Africa imposed apartheid laws against the resistance of the Black population. The freedom movement SWAPO was formed in 1960 with Sam Nujoma at its head. SWAPO's military arm waged armed resistance against the South African occupation and received the support of the UN General Assembly. The South African mandate was declared void in 1966. Ten years later, the UN General Assembly's Resolution 31/146 acknowledged SWAPO as "the sole and authentic representative of the Namibian people". South Africa responded to the expansion of SWAPO by increasingly persecuting, arresting, and murdering its adherents. Over 600 people died in the attack on the Kassinga Namibian refugee camp in Angola in 1978. Sam Nujoma requested support from East Germany and received relief supplies and weapons. In June 1979, he asked East Germany to take in children and tutors from the SWAPO refugee camps in order to protect them from further brutality and to give them an education in East Germany.<sup>4</sup> On 12 September 1979, the SED Central Committee agreed to accept an initial group of 80 pre-school children and 15 tutors.<sup>5</sup> Between December 1979 and 1989, a total of approximately 430 children were taken to East Germany. In 1990, the reunification of Germany and Namibian independence brought the

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<sup>2</sup> Fritz Schütze, "Biographieforschung und narratives Interview", *Neue Praxis*, 3, 1983: 283-293.

<sup>3</sup> Hans-Günther Schleicher, "Die Haltung der DDR zu Befreiungsbewegungen am Beispiel der SWAPO Namibias", in: Siegfried Bock, Ingrid Muth and Hermann Schwiesau, (eds.), *Alternative deutsche Außenpolitik? DDR-Außenpolitik im Rückspiegel (II)*, Berlin, LIT, 2006: 116-135.

<sup>4</sup> Bundesarchiv Berlin (BArch), DR2/50600: Request from Sam Nujoma to the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED). Copy from 27.06.1979.

<sup>5</sup> BArch, DY30/IV/2/3/2960: Minutes No. 108 of the meeting of the Central Committee Secretariat on September, 12, 1979.

solidarity project to an end. The children and adolescents were returned to Namibia without preparation.

The GDR children from Namibia have been the subject of various research studies. Susanne Timm, Uta Rüchel and Karin Müller focused on the conditions under which they grew up in the SWAPO home in Bellin.<sup>6</sup> Case studies on the “School of Friendship” were presented by Lutz Reuter and Annette Scheunpflug and Jürgen Krause.<sup>7</sup> Ute Sikora and Jason Owens studied the children’s and adolescents’ life situations after their repatriation to Namibia.<sup>8</sup> The interview studies focused on the impact of socialisation in a socialist country on their later lives, on the construction of being German in Namibia, and on experiences of racism. Marianne Zappen-Thompson and Bruno Arich-Gerz dealt with the linguistic hybrid of “Oshi-German”, a language developed by the children themselves that combines elements of Oshivambo and German.<sup>9</sup> Children from Namibian refugee camps were relocated not only to East Germany, but also to former Czechoslovakia. The experiences of some of these children, which were similar to those of the GDR children, were the focus of a biographical study by Katerina Mildnerová.<sup>10</sup>

In our research project, we conducted 25 biographical, narrative interviews with the former “GDR children” between 2013 and 2021. The biographies were analysed from a transnational perspective in order to reconstruct cross-border practices of action and belonging, the experience and processing of binational socialisation, and the ideological and political framing by SWAPO and the GDR. This transnational approach has previously been linked with perspectives of border studies, discourse analysis, postcolonialism, racism

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<sup>6</sup> Susanne Timm, *Parteiliche Bildungszusammenarbeit: Das Kinderheim Bellin für namibische Flüchtlingskinder in der DDR*, Münster, LIT, 2007; Uta Rüchel, „Wir hatten noch nie einen Schwarzen gesehen«. *Das Zusammenleben von Deutschen und Namibiern rund um das SWAPO-Kinderheim Bellin 1979-1990*, Schwerin, Landesbeauftragter für Mecklenburg-Vorpommern für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der Ehemaligen DDR, 2001; Karin Müller, *Die ‚DDR-Kinder aus Namibia‘ – Eine Metaphernanalyse im Feld der historischen Fluchtforschung*, unpubl. dissertation, Mainz, 2021.

<sup>7</sup> Lutz R. Reuter and Annette Scheunpflug, *Die Schule der Freundschaft. Eine Fallstudie zur Bildungszusammenarbeit zwischen der DDR und Mosambik*, Münster, Waxmann, 2006; Jürgen Krause, *Das DDR-Namibia-Solidaritätsprojekt “Schule der Freundschaft”*, Oldenburg, BIS, 2009.

<sup>8</sup> Ute Sikora, „Die Oshi-Deutschen“. *Namibische Jugendliche aus der ehemaligen DDR als Mittel der Politik*, unpubl. diploma thesis, Bremen, 1995; Jason Owens, “Blood Ties and Tongue Ties: The Role of Children in Shifting the Boundaries of Namibia’s German-Speaking Community”, *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*, 1 (2), 2008: 232-249.

<sup>9</sup> Marianne Zappen-Thomson, “‘Also nye ihr seid sehr cool’. Lucia Engombe über sich und die, die einst DDR-Kinder genannt wurden”, *eDUSA. The e-journal of the Association for German Studies in Southern Africa (SAGV)*, 2010: 33-42; [http://www.sagv.org.za/eDUSA/eDUSA\\_5-10-1/eDUSA\\_5-10-1\\_Gesamtausgabe.pdf](http://www.sagv.org.za/eDUSA/eDUSA_5-10-1/eDUSA_5-10-1_Gesamtausgabe.pdf); Bruno Arich-Gerz, Bruno, “‘Migratsprache’ Oshideutsch: Eine namibisch-deutsche Varietät zwischen Generatielekt, ‘invertiertem Pidgin’ und postkoloniallinguistischer Theoriebildung”, in: Birte Kellermeier-Rehbein, Matthias Schulz and Doris Stolberg, (eds.), *Sprache und (Post)Kolonialismus: Linguistische und interdisziplinäre Aspekte*, eds., Berlin, de Gruyter, 2018: 161-175.

<sup>10</sup> Katerina Mildnerová, *Namibian Czechs. History and identity of the Namibian Children raised in Czechoslovakia*, Münster, LIT, 2020.

theory, and intergenerational and vulnerability theory. This paper approaches the topic from the perspective of metaphor and emotion theory.

## Emotions. Theoretical and empirical perspectives

Emotions are the subject of interdisciplinary research.<sup>11</sup> In psychological terms, emotions are construed primarily as “reactions to an internal or external stimulus”.<sup>12</sup> The intensity with which they are experienced is described as a feeling that can be reflected in thoughts and actions. From the perspectives of educational science, anthropology, and cultural studies, emotions are socio-culturally embedded, materialised, performative acts that emphasise a “tripolar structure between objective body, subjective body, and consciousness”.<sup>13</sup> The New Phenomenology situates emotions in the interpersonal sphere.<sup>14</sup> They are both the expression and the product of social conditions and are simultaneously always embedded in social power and inequality structures.

The empirical study of emotions did not gain traction until recent decades.<sup>15</sup> One of the challenges faced by the field is the development of a research methodology for recording emotions. Interactive approaches favour an ethnographic procedure with sensitivity for implicit forms of expression of affect.<sup>16</sup> If the emotional turn is to be expressed in the various research fields with adequate empirical underpinnings, further exploration of methodological approaches is needed. The merging of emotion research and forced migration research for this purpose is slowly gaining more attention at present. Initial studies have focused on emotions in the relationships between volunteers and forced migrants;<sup>17</sup> the expression of emotions in forms of participative theatre;<sup>18</sup> the significance

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<sup>11</sup> Christoph Wulf, “Emotion”, in: Christoph Wulf and Jörg Zirfas, (eds.), *Handbuch Pädagogische Anthropologie*, Wiesbaden, Springer VS, 2014: 113-123.

<sup>12</sup> Hede Helfrich, , *Kulturvergleichende Psychologie, Basiswissen Psychologie*, Berlin, Springer, 2019: 108.

<sup>13</sup> Rainer Schützeichel, “Emotion”, in: Robert Gugutzer, Gabriele Klein and Michael Meuse, (eds.), *Handbuch Körpersoziologie, Band 1, Grundbegriffe und theoretische Perspektiven*, Wiesbaden, Springer VS, 2017: 21-26 (22).

<sup>14</sup> Robert Gugutzer, “Hermann Schmitz: Der Gefühlsraum”, in: Konstanze Senge and Rainer Schützeichel, (eds.), *Hauptwerke der Emotionssoziologie*, Wiesbaden, Springer VS, 2013: 304-310 (304).

<sup>15</sup> Robin Kurilla, “Emotion und Interaktion”, in: Robin Kurilla, Karin Kolb-Albers, Hannes Krämer, and Karola Pitsch, (eds.), *Sine ira et studio. Disziplinenübergreifende Annäherungen an die zwischenmenschliche Kommunikation*, Wiesbaden, Springer VS, 2020: 117-139.

<sup>16</sup> Sara-Friederike Blumenthal, “Ethnographisches Forschen zu Affekten. Eine methodische Annäherung an Scham”, in: Matthias Huber and Sabine Krause, (eds.), *Bildung und Emotion*, Wiesbaden, Springer VS, 2018: 397-412 (401).

<sup>17</sup> Serhat Karakayali, “Feeling the Scope of Solidarity: The Role of Emotions for Volunteers Supporting Refugees in Germany”, *Social Inclusion*, 5 (3), 2017: 7-16.

<sup>18</sup> Ruba Totah and Krystel Khoury, “Theater against Borders: Miunikh–Damaskus. A Case Study in Solidarity”, *Arts*, 7 (4), 2018: 90.

of empathy and sensitivity in interviews with forced migrants;<sup>19</sup> and emotions as occasions of experience for transformative educational processes.<sup>20</sup> Gabriele Rosenthal, who showed that emotions affect the formation of experience during forced migration, also discusses the challenges of trauma-aware research.<sup>21</sup>

Further development of data analysis methods is needed for the methodological reconstruction of emotions. In this paper, we suggest an approach to emotions using a methodological combination of biographical and metaphor reconstruction.

## Biography and metaphor analysis. Methodology

We take metaphors to be “culturally disseminated, socially situated, and individually produced patterns of speech, thought, feeling, and action through which subjects construct and perceive their world”.<sup>22</sup> Metaphors pervade our patterns of thought and action and are expressions of the way in which we interpret and process biographical experiences.<sup>23</sup> For the purposes of biographical research, they can be taken as modes of interpretive representation of biographical experiences which, as condensed acts of speech, reveal complex structures of meaning.<sup>24</sup> Metaphor analysis also facilitates specific access to the level of emotional experience, since humans evidently have difficulties with speaking about internal, subjective phenomena like emotions. However, the detour via metaphor makes it possible to express abstract phenomena that are difficult to grasp.<sup>25</sup> Experiences that were (previously) vague and abstract can be structured and thus made rationally available by means of metaphors in order to express in a few words what was thought to be inexpressible.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Robel Afeworki Abay and Kenan Engin, “Partizipative Forschung: Machbarkeit und Grenzen – Eine Reflexion am Beispiel der MiBeH-Studie”, in: Birgit Behrens and Manuela Westphal, (eds.), *Fluchtmigrationsforschung im Aufbruch*, Wiesbaden, Springer VS, 2019: 379-396 (391).

<sup>20</sup> Wassilios Baros, “Zorn und Migration – Emotionen als Feld erziehungswissenschaftlicher Migrationsforschung”, *Vierteljahrsschrift für wissenschaftliche Pädagogik*, 93 (1), 2017: 28-42.

<sup>21</sup> Gabriele Rosenthal, “Biographisch-narrative Gesprächsführung: zu den Bedingungen heilsamen Erzählens im Forschungs- und Beratungskontext”, *Psychotherapie und Sozialwissenschaft*, 4 (3), 2002: 204-227.

<sup>22</sup> Schmitt, *Metaphernanalyse*: 453.

<sup>23</sup> George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Leben in Metaphern. Konstruktion und Gebrauch von Sprachbildern*, 8th edition, Heidelberg, Auer, 2014: 11.

<sup>24</sup> Jürgen Straub and Ralf Sichler, “Metaphorische Sprechweisen als Modi der interpretativen Repräsentation biografischer Erfahrungen”, in: Peter Alheit and Erika M. Hoerning, (eds.), *Biographisches Wissen. Beiträge zu einer Theorie lebensgeschichtlicher Erfahrung*, Frankfurt am Main, Campus, 1989: 221-237; Müller, *DDR-Kinder*.

<sup>25</sup> Hanah Bergerová, “Emotionen im Spiegel bildlicher Sprache. Fallbeispiel »Ärger«”, *Acta Facultatis Philosophicae Universitatis Ostraviensis / Studia Germanistica*, 2011: 5-20 (9), <http://publikationen.ub.uni-frankfurt.de/opus4/frontdoor/index/index/docId/33968>

<sup>26</sup> Christa Baldauf, *Metapher und Kognition: Grundlagen einer neuen Theorie der Alltagsmetapher*, Frankfurt am Main, Lang, 1997: 248.

According to George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's cognitive metaphor theory, a concept is categorised as metaphorical when the meaning of a figure of speech or a scenic narration in the strict sense goes beyond the literal in the context relevant to its utterance and when a source and target domain is present.<sup>27</sup> A verbalisation is transferred from a domain significant to the speaker (source domain) to another, abstract domain (target domain). We speak of such a metaphor when a concept is used in a transferred sense and patterns of perception and thought are transferred from older experiences to new contexts.<sup>28</sup>

The present multi-method case analysis is based on a narrative/biographical interview<sup>29</sup> with Jakob, one of the now-adult 'GDR children from Namibia', as well as our field notes on the interview situation and minutes of informal meetings with him during our five field research trips to Namibia between 2013 and 2019. We selected this particular interview because of its conspicuous density of metaphors. Our analysis also includes field notes on the interview situation, since these record the narrator's physical reaction to emotionalised situational descriptions and provide further indications of how emotions were expressed nonverbally. The interview was translated from German into English for this article.

The analysis begins with a compilation of the biographical details of the case in the chronology of the biographer's narrated history (German: *erzählte Geschichte*). Here we examine the order in which he tells his life story. We then reconstruct the biographer's experienced history (German: *erlebte Geschichte*). We analyse the history in its overall context as well as the significance of the events for the narrator's life as it is revealed in the present narrative situation. This stage of the analysis studies the narrator's biography in the temporal interplay of past, present, and future and in its biographical development as well as its transformation.<sup>30</sup> The next stage involves a metaphor analysis of the data after Rudolf Schmitt.<sup>31</sup> Here we focus on specific passages in the transcript in which experiences are identified through metaphors, but not embedded in detailed narratives. This step in the analysis facilitates access to emotionally significant patterns of biographical experiences that would otherwise remain hidden. Such metaphorical sequences are first studied without context and then in conjunction with information from our field notes about the interview situation and the narrator's overall biographical formation. They are dissected into their metaphorical components in a word-for-word analysis,<sup>32</sup> interpreted in a detailed analysis, and grouped according to their structural similarities and differences into metaphorical concepts that condense meaning.

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<sup>27</sup> Lakoff and Johnson, *Leben in Metaphern*; Schmitt, *Metaphernanalyse*: 472.

<sup>28</sup> Schmitt, *Metaphernanalyse*: 473.

<sup>29</sup> Schütze, "Biographieforschung".

<sup>30</sup> Gabriele Rosenthal, *Interpretative Sozialforschung*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, Weinheim/Basel, Beltz Juventa, 2014: 186.

<sup>31</sup> Schmitt, *Metaphernanalyse*.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*: 457.



## Results

Our results section begins with a look at the chronology of Jakob's narrated history followed by a reconstruction of the case, i.e. an analysis of his experienced history. The final step involves a detailed examination of sequences by the method of reconstructive metaphor analysis.

### Changes of place and relationship. Jakob's narrated history

This phase of the analysis reveals a biography with numerous changes of place and relationships. Jakob begins by reporting that he lived in a refugee camp in Angola for two years as a small child, choosing not his date of birth, but the place of his early growing up, as the starting point of his biographical narrative. He tells of a family situation comprising at least four people: two parents, Jakob himself, and his brother. Jakob says that he was taken to the camp by his parents together with his brother when he was two years old. At this crucial point of his development, he experienced an incisive change in his social environment. The year in which this occurred was 1978, suggesting a connection with the Namibian struggle for independence, which was at its peak during this time. It may be assumed that Jakob's family had to flee from Namibia in fear of their lives. Another change of living environment occurred in 1979, when the narrator and his brother were selected by a white woman to be taken to East Germany. From then on, the parents no longer appear as attachment figures. Jakob's narrative thus involves not only a change of country and continent, but also the loss of his parents as everyday persons of reference. The only constant is his brother.

Jakob specifies a time period spanning eleven years, from 1979 to 1990, during which he lived in East Germany. In 1990 he was returned to Windhoek in Namibia, where he initially lived in a children's home with his brother. Here it becomes clear that he spent the bulk of his childhood and youth in East Germany, where he grew up together with his brother, and faced another fundamental change in his living environment at the age of 14. At this young age he had already changed his place of residence and his local relationship networks three times. His parents had vanished as attachment figures. Thus the separation of the brothers in Namibia for placement with different foster parents was another radical incision. The fraternal bond was broken. The data now mentions attendance at a German school called *Deutsche Oberschule* in Windhoek. The school's location suggests that Jakob is now turning to a description of his educational career in Namibia, but this narrative breaks off. Jakob returns to his time in East Germany and reports that he attended elementary school in Zehna. While his time in East Germany was previously excluded from the narrative, it now seems to be a significant point of reference with which the biographer presents himself in the role of a school student. After this flashback, Jakob returns to describing life in Namibia. He reports that he moved to a farm together with his brother, with whom he was reunited after their separation. However, they subsequently left the farm and their life paths diverged again. Jakob studied abroad. A second foster family is mentioned during the self-presentation. With reference to the year 1995, he reports a reunion between people who had lived separately from one another. He tells of

a sister and mentions his mother, who lived in the north of Namibia. The family network, which was previously described as small, is now revealed as being significantly larger, with nine siblings on his mother's side and 32 on his father's side. Uniting this family in a large network could have brought about a turning point in his biography and a new sense of connectedness. However, referring to the year 1992, Jakob tells of the death of his father. This loss overwhelms him, although he had already believed his father to be dead. Jakob's account of this (final) end of the relationship dominates the subsequent biographical narrative, although it is punctuated by the resumption of contact with his mother. In the subsequent biographical data, relationships do not feature prominently. We learn that Jakob completed his schooling and went on a two-year trip to Europe, which can be interpreted as an extended absence from his still-existing relationship structures in Namibia. During this journey, he returns to the places of his childhood and youth in now-reunited Germany. Only then do we learn his date and place of birth in Angola in 1976. The beginning of his own life can only be verbalised through the engagement with his childhood and youth in East Germany. The biographer lingers over this narrative and talks about attending boarding school in Staßfurt during his adolescence. Towards the end of the interview, we learn that he also lived with another foster family in Namibia. The state of Namibia is described increasingly vividly as a space closely associated with changing and ending relationships, but also with the restoration of relationship networks that were severed or believed lost. Changes of place and relationships ultimately culminate in the birth of a son in 2015: Jakob has started a family of his own with a girlfriend who immigrated to Namibia from Europe.

Overall, the narrator presents numerous changes of place and relationships that began in very early childhood. The phase in which he grew up in East Germany is the only extended period of constancy, but this is interrupted and allows renewed changes of place and severed relationships to come to the fore during the narrator's life in Namibia. His brother is conspicuous as a central companion, but his presence fades in the course of the narrator's life. Whether Jakob perceives his eventful biography as hardship and/or opportunity and whether it can be transferred into a coherent self-image will be studied in the second part of the analysis, in which we take the narrator's experienced history into account.

### **Experienced history**

The analysis chapter traces the biographical case structure in the sequentiality of the biographer's experiences embedded in historical context research. It also exposes his emotional involvement in the interview.

#### *"World of war". Early childhood in the refugee camp*

When Jakob was two years old, he was brought to a refugee camp at the Angolan-Namibian border together with his brother and his older sister (interview transcript, lines 31-40; 85-87). The camp had been designated by the SWAPO liberation movement as a

protected zone for “all children” (l. 37) under the age of five and was far away from the “danger zone” (l. 124). The narrator characterises the lifeworld of his early childhood as a “world of war” (l. 32). “War” signifies an armed conflict that determines life or death. “World” denotes something all-encompassing from which there is no escape. For the narrator, a world without war is neither graspable nor conceivable.

In his memory, the camp has a circular layout and consists of several “bungalows” (l. 297-298). With its central “kitchen” (l. 299) it is reminiscent of an oversized kraal, a type of familial dwelling that is widespread in the Ovamboland region of Namibia. At this point, it may be assumed that the refugees – predominantly Ovambo people – reproduced their accustomed living arrangements and community organisation in the camp. The “circle” (l. 297) symbolises connectedness. There are no corners or edges and it is possible to look out in all directions from every point. This form of residence and living is not tied to a specific place. It is transferred in the course of the flight and expressed under new conditions of life. The camp denotes a demarcation between interior and exterior; its purpose is to provide an island of safety beyond the danger zone for the companions in fate that reside within it. However, the protection afforded by the interior is subject to constant threat. The danger zone penetrates into the heart of the camp.

The narrator frames the constant danger as a “drama” that perpetually repeats itself: “it was a regular thing in the refugee camp, that there – that there was drama” (l. 313-314). In everyday usage, “drama” denotes extreme emotions and actions, while in acting it signifies the depiction of a conflict. Jakob experienced his early childhood in the refugee camp as something so terrible that this period is verbalised not in detail and within a context, but via isolated experiences.

The routine of the drama he witnessed includes “gunshots everywhere” (l. 301), the presence of “South African soldiers” (l. 305-306), and a “rattling” sound (l. 306) that kept people awake “all night” (l. 306) so that they could find neither rest nor relaxation. Over and over again, the war relentlessly actualises itself within the camp. The term “rattling” verbalises an unpleasant, threatening noise as of weapons or jackhammers and indicates a destructive force and a ubiquitous danger. The flight thus appears to be an incomplete process, and there is no safety. When the firing increases, Jakob, the other children, and the adults flee from the camp into the surrounding “woods” (l. 317). The woods serve as a protective space that is sought out when the camp is under fire.

Jakob vividly recounts how the gunfire traces “flashes” (l. 301) in the sky and makes a loud, threatening noise. The war is experienced with all the senses. During his account, Jakob gesticulates with his hands and arms (field note 3 and note in transcript: 308-310). He describes how the shots left bullet holes in the walls of the kraal. Death was avoided only by everyone lying down on the floor: “shots everywhere, height like this (Jakob gesticulates with hands and arms), babababab (Jakob imitates shots, angles his right forearm and mimics a gun), so-so-so-so-so if we hadn’t done this (Jakob indicates lying down on the ground) I think most of us would have been goners” (l. 308-310).

Even amid the horror of war, the narrator emphasises one escalation that is particularly vivid in his memory. While the children were playing in the woods, they came upon “South

African soldiers" (l. 313). Then "a girl was gone" (l. 313–314). A "black figure [...] grabbed her and stuffed her in a sack and vanished [...] into the woods [...] and that was (name of the girl) in the sack" (l. 313–319). The soldier, described by Jakob as a black figure, stepped out of the shadows and wrenched the child out of her community. The South African opponent exploited his physical superiority and showed the group of refugee children their powerlessness. In the here and now, the narrator is still overcome by the event and summarises: "I'm glad it's gone. [...] Then there was peace, then there was East Germany" (l. 321–324). "It" denotes the entire "world of war" in the camp, which the narrator can no longer put into words and instead contrasts it with the "peace" in "East Germany". The contrasting concept pair of war (misery, danger, death) vs. peace (happiness, safety, life) serves to flag an all-encompassing change in the narrator's lifeworld and a crucial biographical turning point. He is able to leave the refugee camp and is taken to another country. The "rattling" fades and, for the moment, comes to an end.

*From the "truck" to a "strange word". Selection in the refugee camp and arrival in East Germany*

Jakob's memories of exactly how he left the camp are fragmentary. A "white lady" (l. 89) selected children, gave them "sweets" (l. 91), and made a "list" (l. 92): "a few weeks later, all those who had been standing there and yelling "Me!" [...] were sitting in the truck and were off" (l. 92-96). The selection process is shown as a means of differentiation: The list decides whether any child is sent to East Germany or remains in the camp. Jakob describes arriving in East Germany as arriving in a "strange world" (l. 97). This metaphorical language refers to an all-encompassing change in his living environment. "Strange" refers to the demarcation line between own and other: who is his own group in search of protection, and who is the real danger? The enemy stereotype of white people, which for the narrator has hitherto been represented by the figure of the South African soldier ("for us, a white person wasn't the best thing [...] the enemy is white", l. 102-105), is confounded. In East Germany, there were suddenly "so many white people (l. 99-100) looking after the narrator and representing no threat to him. The patterns of interpretation shifted with the change of location. Attachment figures are difficult to categorise: Tutors are white and Black; at first glance, there seems to be no immediate "enemy". Social relationships become more difficult to categorise after abandoning the friend-foe stereotype.

They also become more complex for the narrator in terms of their size. As part of a collective of children, he is confronted with a number of interaction partners: "it was an enormous group" (l. 109). Contact with peers from different SWAPO refugee camps becomes more significant. In retrospect, the narrator affirms this experience: "all together, side by side, it was super" (l. 111). The sequence illustrates the social closeness among the children. "Super" indicates a "good" energy within the group and conditions of contentment.

Although the children manage to form and maintain social and emotional relationships, the peer group cannot replace the intimacy of a family. The context of their growing up has a crucial lacuna at the level of attachment: “What I always miss when I think about it is that it wasn’t a family, but an enormous group” (l. 108-109). The narrator is overcome by sadness as he regrets growing up without a family. The verb “to miss” indicates longings. The possibility of developing from childhood to adulthood within a family and of being cared for by parents is irretrievably lost. Thus the peer group is ambivalent: although it is an expression of closeness and mutual support in the context of relocation to an entirely new living environment, it simultaneously reveals the lack of a family, the absence of which from the narrator’s biography continues to represent a heavy emotional burden. His sole, and therefore important, familial anchor is his brother, who is introduced in the narrative as a significant Other and serves as a permanent biographical companion in the narrator’s early life: “The time I spent in East Germany, eleven years, with my brother” (l. 112). This sequence shows the strong bond between the brothers, which became all the more close because the two were confronted with a lie during their childhood and adolescence: “For eleven years” (l. 762) they were led to believe that their parents had been killed in a bomb strike (l. 762) on Ovamboland by the South African army: “My brother and I were told: Your parents are dead” (l. 112). Only after they reached young adulthood were the brothers told that both their mother and their father were still alive. The supposed loss of their parents was a shock to the brothers as children and (re)produced continual grief that lasted for years. They experienced a situation of being utterly dependent on others and were necessary for each other’s survival. Through the alleged death of their parents, the “world of war” entered their new lives far from the refugee camp. In their experience, therefore, the SWAPO children’s home in East Germany was not wholly protected from the suffering of the struggle for freedom in Namibia.

*“Manoeuvres”, “soldiers”, “army”. The reproduction of the world of war in the children’s home*

Jakob addresses an ambivalence that prevailed during his childhood years: “We weren’t raised just as children, but also army style. [...] We regularly had to do manoeuvres and all that. All of us learned to shoot and shit like that (l. 348-351). “Not just as children” indicates the prevailing conditions under which the children were growing up during this time. At the same time, however, it relativises a normal form of growing up. The educational programme had one specific characteristic: The children had to submit to military training in order to be able to defend an independent Namibia at need (“army style”). The narrator expresses his lack of understanding for and rejection of this programme. He describes his growing up as a “political life” (l. 485). He was instrumentalised for the implementation of a specific concept of the state. The emergency state of war was realistically simulated in regularly practised micro-situations, creating an atmosphere which the narrator knew from the refugee camp: the noises resembled the shots fired by South African aggressors. Guns, too, were already familiar to Jakob, but now he himself learned how to be a soldier together with the other children: “We already had to do back then

what soldiers do" (l. 627). The seeming moratorium in East Germany began to crumble thanks to the military training and target practice. The children, once hunted themselves, were now being raised as fighters in order to actualise the "world of war" themselves when they were older. Although their everyday lives involved medical care, the presence of tutors, and school or boarding school once they were old enough, it also regularly (re)activated the past and the liberation struggle in Namibia. SWAPO politicians had already mapped out the children's future life paths: "It was brainwashing" (l. 666).

*"Ten years into a bag". Repatriation to Namibia*

After the political turnaround in Germany and the independence of Namibia, which was officially proclaimed on 21 March 1990, the narrator was suddenly flown back to Namibia together with the other children. He had a very short period of time to pack "ten years into a bag" (l. 1712-1713). This metaphorical expression which the narrator uses for his emotional reminiscence expresses a challenge in his past that was almost impossible to surmount. Significant biographical experiences, the bulk of his life to date, and everything that was particularly important had to travel in the "bag". But a bag offers limited space. The narrator cannot take everything with him; rather, he is forced to make a selection under pressure of time and to pack only those things that seem particularly important for the future. While the bag allows him to transfer biographical experiences from East Germany to Namibia, it simultaneously expresses loss, since everything that cannot fit into the bag must be left behind. Jakob lacks orientation about what he will need for the imminent journey into the unknown. The packed bag will only prove itself in the future.

After their return to Windhoek, the children lived in a home in Khomasdal. While some of them were collected by parents or relatives, Jakob and his brother were left behind (l. 162-163). They were sent to a boarding home of the *Deutsche Oberschule* Windhoek (DOSW) and spent the weekends and school holidays separately in different foster homes. "I stayed with so many families in my first years here [...] over the holidays or at weekends" (l. 181).

For the narrator, there is no continuity. The changing foster families are not mentioned by name. Life in his new relationship networks remained detached. It served the functional purpose of giving Jakob a roof over his head while the boarding home was closed. There are no narratives about shared activities and no expression of emotional attachment.

"In my first years" refers to the routine of a time frame characterised by discontinuities in relationships. These first years were made more difficult by the fact that Jakob and his brother could meet only within the predefined structures of the school. They were unable to spend time together outside the pedagogical setting, even though doing so would have been particularly important after their repatriation; the peer group in which they had grown up, i.e. the children's collective, had been dissolved, the East German tutors were no longer accessible as contact persons, and the brothers still believed their parents to be dead.

*"The worst trip of my life" and "no feelings". Jakob's reunion with his mother, whom he had believed dead*

In the interview, Jakob highlights a turning point that once again fundamentally changed his life situation. In 1995 he met his sister: "Then I ran into my sister at some point and found out my mother was alive" (l. 767f.). "Ran into" could denote a real encounter in the streets or a metaphor for a sudden, unexpected reunion. Preoccupied with other things in his daily life, Jakob unexpectedly bumps into his sister. In this precipitous encounter, the family network he had presumed lost becomes present again: Jakob learns that his mother is still alive. His longing for a family becomes reality. "I found out" underscores the narrator's open-ended search that has now suddenly come to an end. By suddenly "running into" his sister, Jakob finds what he sought and dreamed of for years. He sets out on a journey of several days to the north of Namibia to see his mother, who lives in Ovamboland (l. 832). The encounter is the peak of a negative trajectory and the climax of the drama of his life: "That was the worst trip of my life, the trip to my mother" (l. 839f.). Jakob has lived through the "world of war" and the time in East Germany as well as the dissolution of the children's collective. But despite all these serious upheavals, the encounter with the mother he had believed dead is the climax of an interlocking series of biographical crises spanning from his earliest childhood to his youth. The bond between mother and child had been broken and believed lost for over fifteen years. The emotional burden and agitation which the narrator expresses during his account of the meeting shows how significant the relationship with his mother is and how much effort coming to terms with it still costs him. The physical proximity he has regained to her is highly ambivalent, triggering chaotic feelings. On the one hand, Jakob is curious, excited, full of joy, and eager to see the mother he has missed so much; on the other hand, the encounter is overwhelming, disappointing, and touched with fear. "Journey" indicates that his mother does not become a new home. The term already implies a return journey in which he leaves his mother once again. Mother and son remain strangers to each other: "There's this woman standing there and telling you: I'm your mother. Zero feelings. I had zero sense that that was my mother," (l. 899f.). The familial bond is blocked. The "mother", initially described with detachment as a "woman", does not trigger the expected emotion of love. Although the narrator cognitively understands the familial bond, although the mother is standing right in front of him, he cannot physically sense a bond. Having "zero feelings" shows that the narrator hoped to be able to develop a close attachment to his mother again and to feel like a member of a family rather than just being one. But this expectation is not fulfilled. Being taken to East Germany caused the emotional bond between child and mother to fade; although the mother is now physically present, she is emotionally absent and leaves the narrator with a feeling of emptiness.

*"I didn't like the village." Social estrangement and loss*

This highly emotional situation is interrupted by the news that his father, too, is still alive, although terminally ill. Jakob manages to meet him, but he dies in hospital shortly afterwards. Conversation is impossible because of his father's physical condition (l. 801-

810). The narrative about his father breaks off during the interview. Jakob is only able to react physically, twice throwing up his hands in despair (l. 809-810; field note: 5) to express his despair and emotional overload. In this situation, he discovers that he has other siblings – a total of 41 – and experiences his family in the context of a village society. Thus an exclusive relationship with his parents proves to be an illusion. Jakob's shock is comprehensive and goes hand in hand with social estrangement: "I didn't like the village, I didn't like the food, how the people sleep, I didn't care for any of it" (l. 918f.).

The village community is characterised by practices that are unfamiliar to the narrator and that confront him with his position as an outsider. His response is to reject them ("didn't like them"). The eating rituals that create intimacy and a sense of community remain closed to him, as do the village's sleeping habits. Under these circumstances, sensuality and connectedness cannot develop. Sleep, the state of rest that is essential for survival, is impossible for him during his sojourn in the village. The narrator is too agitated to find rest.

The habitualised corporeal practices and ways of interacting entrench the difference between Jakob's early childhood socialisation in East Germany and the mores of the village community. His early socialisation makes it impossible for him to become embedded in the social structure of the family and the village: "East Germany did a thorough job, we didn't want that stuff anymore" (l. 1038). His original longing for a family is lost as it becomes impossible for him to live with the family he has just been reunited with. The conditions of his life have given rise to two different worlds not only in Jakob's family, but also in the families of many other former "GDR children" ("we").

### **Metaphor analysis: "Ripples", "extinction", "Ombwiti", and "treasure"**

The biographical case reconstruction has revealed a history of estrangement after Jakob's repatriation to Namibia, and this estrangement is the core theme of his biography. The narrator uses various metaphors to describe his experiences. Conspicuously, the passages of his narrative that exhibit a particularly high metaphor density are those that deal with his life after repatriation and those in which he takes stock in retrospect. Alongside the metaphors we have already analysed in our biographical reconstruction above, these passages also contain metaphors that are less firmly embedded in the narrative, but stand relatively independently. In what follows, we will examine these metaphors against the background of the overall biography and condense them into four metaphorical concepts: The repatriation was a waterfall; the ex-GBR children are becoming extinct; family and narrator are becoming extinct; and the narrator finds a treasure.

#### *The repatriation was a waterfall*

The narrator sums up his precipitous return to Namibia with a metaphor: "The r-r-ripples from that are still going down the river today" (l. 1722-1723). The sequence indicates a process and something that preceded the "ripples", something that is in motion and still has lingering effects. The choice of words evokes images of a river with a source and a



mouth. A river is a body of water that flows in a linear fashion in a bed that defines its route of travel. The river bed – read as the narrator’s biographical path – was shaped by the political elites of SWAPO and the SED. This preordained the biographical direction of flow: The narrator and the other children were destined to form the future elite of a liberated Namibia. But instead of order, the river bed is a source of chaos in the narrator’s lifeworld. The collapse of the GDR, the reunification of Germany, and Namibian independence accelerate the flow and cause the narrator’s precipitous repatriation to Namibia, a country he does not know. These geopolitical events make his fall inevitable. Metaphorically speaking, the narrator is carried along by the current to a waterfall and plunges down it. The waterfall symbolises forces of nature, power, life, and transience. The challenge is to survive this fall, pick himself up afterwards, gain his bearings, and heal not only physical, but also psychological wounds.

#### *The ex-GDR children are becoming extinct*

The narrator experienced his repatriation to Namibia as a force of nature. The injuries sustained in the “fall” manifest themselves in the loss of the children’s collective: the “circle” (l. 1819) of children “is slowly but surely becoming extinct” (l. 1821-1822). The circle symbolises connectedness and infinity – but deep cracks open up inside it. The friendships between the children dwindled as time went on and faded away. This extinction seemed an inescapable fate. “Extinction” is sometimes used to describe the end of a family line or a way of life. Here the process is applied to the peer group and indicates that the flow of their childhood lives is coming to a halt. The image of dying does not refer to the narrator’s physical death here, but to the emotional extinction of his interior life. The attachment figures of his childhood, who were essential for survival in East Germany, recede from view. After falling down the waterfall, the protagonist shrivels and falls into the arid desert – an image the children learned about Namibia while at school in East Germany. To keep from dying of thirst, the narrator needs a new life context and new attachment figures. In this crisis, even his last lifebelt is lost when he and his brother are placed in separate foster families and the daily contact they had for years is severed (l. 162-163).

The ex-GDR children made a last-ditch attempt to halt this extinction process by founding a “GDR Circle” (l. 1818) after their repatriation in order to keep the old relationships alive. But the extinction process proved unavoidable. After a while, there was no going back and the old network of relationships was “certainly extinct” (l. 1822).

#### *The family and the narrator become extinct*

From then on, the narrator was on his own. The extinction metaphor is reproduced in all family relationships and is repeated several times during the interview when the narrator speaks of his relationship with his parents and his sister, which lacks intimacy and is ultimately severed entirely. “and then the relationship became extinct” (l. 1394-1395); “and that became extinct” (l. 1414); “then it became extinct” (l. 1420). This bundle of metaphors marks the dramatic climax of the previously articulated “ripples”. The

narrator's socialisation in East Germany resulted in the emotional extinction of the whole family, the members of which have become estranged from one another. The narrator takes stock of the situation and describes himself in terms of the concept of "Ombwiti" (l. 9949) as being lost in the world. "Ombwiti" is used in the language of the Ovambo to describe people whose affiliation to their cultural group has been called into question. The term frequently appears when relationships become brittle because members of a community leave their village to live in the city. The social membership of those who leave is no longer unconditionally accepted by those who stay behind.<sup>33</sup> The narrator uses the word to underscore his aloneness and lack of connectedness to his family and the Ovambo people: neither his family nor the children's collective remain present for him as a port of call. The specific term emphasises Jakob's lack of orientation. Unable to find his place in the world, he takes refuge in drug abuse. This can be read as an attempt to cope with his state of lostness; it is rooted in his longing for a successful life grounded in closeness and security. But even the progressive biographical downward spiral of drugs consumption does not bring the desired results. The narrator experiences himself as lonely and all the more lost in his suffering: "Nobody was there for me until I broke down [...] and almost killed myself" (l. 1665-1666). The emotional extinction is followed by a breakdown. The metaphor shows that the protagonist is threatening to collapse to the ground, as it were, and break into pieces. There is nothing left to hold him together as a whole individual. This crisis, expressed in metaphor, almost resulted in his physical death. His suicide was only barely averted.

#### *The narrator finds a treasure*

The narrator reports that he was able to find his way out of this existential, life-threatening crisis when he found a "treasure" (l. 44). A treasure is a precious object, concealed in a container and difficult to obtain. Treasure hunters often devote years to their search for such an object and are rarely successful. Finding a treasure of some kind is, in a way, something everyone longs for and dreams about in the hope of completely changing their lives for the better and being able to live happily and free of cares ever after. In German, the word for treasure – *Schatz* – has the additional, transferred meaning of a person without whom one's life is no longer conceivable. The narrator describes how he met a European woman who lives in Namibia and had a child with her (l. 2568-2589). In starting a family of his own, he put down new "roots" (l. 1036). The metaphor of the roots indicates that he experienced stability and was able to thrive once again. Now he levels the river bed of his biography in an autonomously chosen direction.

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<sup>33</sup> Romie Vonkie Nghiulikwa, *Re-situating and shifting cultural identity in contemporary Namibia: The experience of rural-urban migrants in Katutura*, Bellville, University of the Western Cape, 2008: 71.

*From the river mouth to the treasure. Metaphors as the lens of the overall biography*

The interplay of metaphorical concepts illustrates a biographical flow that follows the “origin–path–destination” pattern.<sup>34</sup> They reference a biographical point of view and a biographical flow that is set in motion towards a specific destination. The cooperation between SWAPO and the SED led to the narrator’s growing up in East Germany. His life was politically framed and predetermined. The “bag” (l. 1713) he brought with him to Namibia, which symbolises his incorporated experiences in East Germany, brought about his estrangement from his family and, together with the repatriation, caused the “extinction” of his childhood and familial relationship networks, the only exception being his relationship with his brother. His childhood experiences did not fit his new environment and required a biographical reorientation and a diversion of the politically framed flow of his life. It was necessary for him to find his own way.<sup>35</sup> The human need for belonging and for constant reference persons unites the past, present, and future. In this existential crisis, the biographer encounters a “treasure” and is able to develop perspectives for his future life, thus avoiding suicide. The container metaphor of the treasure symbolises a longed-for state of happiness that is attained under extremely difficult circumstances.<sup>36</sup> The treasure represents the new treasure chamber which the narrator has created together with his partner and which he now guards. This treasure chamber is a symbolically separate space of belonging to which only he and his partner have access and from which everyone else is excluded. Rudolf Schmitt points out that it is often abstract phenomena such as love that are described using such substance and container metaphors.<sup>37</sup> It is precisely these metaphors which, in a fine-grained analysis, express the emotion of love after stormy, chaotic and life threatening times of war, politically driven heteronomy, and the resultant social estrangement in the narrator’s life.

## Summary of methodological results and perspective on future research

Our paper suggests a research methodology for reconstructing the emotional experience of flight in biographical interviews and tests a multi-stage analytical process. We combine the reconstruction of narrated and experienced history after Rosenthal with reconstructive metaphor analysis according to Schmitt. We began by focusing on the many changes of place and shifts in social relationships in the narrator’s life. Subsequently, the reconstruction showed how burdensome and critical these shifts were for the narrator. In narrating his experiences, he names the central themes of his life: his steep fall as a result of the repatriation to Namibia and his social estrangement from his relatives and the group of children. Our analysis of the interview offers insights into the narrator’s biographical development with its trajectories and processes of change; these insights are consolidated by means of the metaphor analysis. The narrator described striking emotional situations

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<sup>34</sup> Schmitt, *Metaphernanalyse*: 55.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.: 488.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.: 51.

in terms of images (“pack into a bag”; “extinct” networks; “ripples in the river”; “Ombwiti”) that demanded an additional methodological procedure to decode them. Metaphor analysis provided the lens through which the emotionally charged biographical themes could be reconstructed and rendered palpable. The narrator’s metaphors of motion (like that of the river) and containers (like that of the treasure) offer an especially vivid insight into the experiences of a young person who became a refugee, was displaced and repatriated by political parties and movements, and had to fight for autonomy amid the political tensions between SWAPO and the SED as an adult. The images he uses illustrate breaking relationships and the difficult biographical quest for belonging, peace, and continuity. This search finally comes to fruition in the stability of the treasure, the family which the narrator started.

On the methodological level, the combination of methods presented in this paper made it possible to interpret forced migration as a highly emotional biographical process. The trajectory of biographies is characterised by crisis. In the context of forced migration, they involve changes in relationships and location and not infrequently go hand in hand with emotionally traumatic discontinuities. Our case analysis clearly reveals that experiences of forced migration must culminate in an emotional arrival. To this end, affirming, meaningful, and reliable relationships are necessary for survival. Methodologically, this insight challenges us to examine forced migration in all its complexity. The multi-method analysis we presented here helps us to understand the challenging nature of forced migration histories and the coping strategies the actors are called upon to muster.

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