

REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA



**REMARKS BY AMBASSADOR MARTIN ANDJABA ON THE
OCCASION OF THE OPENING OF THE EXHIBITION
STOLEN MOMENTS – NAMIBIAN MUSIC HISTORY UNTOLD**

11 OCTOBER 2021

19h00

**PROJEKTRAUM KUNSTVEREIN WAGENHALLE,
STUTT GART**

Ms Petra Olschowski, State Secretary,

**Ms Simone Knapp of Ecumenical Service on Southern Africa
(KASA)**

Mr Thorsten Schütte, Artistic Director of the Exhibition,

**Prof. Dr. Andreas Staudacher, Honorary Consul of the Republic of
Namibia,**

Ms Aino Moongo, Curator

Members of the Curator Team,

Mr. Jackson Wahengo and Band, *The Stolen Moments*

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a privilege for me to be saying a few words this evening at the invitation of Ms Simone Knapp, for the opening of the Exhibition “Stolen Moments. Namibian Music History Untold”, for two reasons:

Firstly, I admire the Stolen Moments research team for their hard work and dedication. The several years of commitment and research they have put into this project is highly commendable.

Secondly, the exhibition encapsulates both bitter and sweet, as it chronicles intimate stories, songs and experiences of those who shaped Namibian pop culture during some of Namibia’s darkest,

most repressive years of apartheid, a period that marks some of the harshest years of racial discrimination under the South African apartheid regime that followed German colonialism.

When I first heard about the exhibition, I was attracted by the title, *Stolen Moments*, printed in large letters on the poster advertising this exhibition, which has been travelling wide and far from London, to Basel, via Berlin and now Stuttgart. I have been told that the exhibition will also be viewed in Namibia next year. The title is fitting in that it reflects how “moments were stolen” through the censoring, suppressing and prohibiting of music and cultural expression by the Apartheid regime.

Another thing which struck me on the advertising poster was the photo of the late photojournalist John Liebenberg: “*Waiting for a minibus taxi, the music man in the family is sent home*” –as the photo is called. It shows the seemingly oblivious musician in the midst of his small audience around him and the Casspir in the background – a beast on the look-out, ready to attack instantly.

To develop a feeling for the tense conditions which this photo

induces, you need to understand what the Casspir was, as not all of you may know about this infamous vehicle: it is a mine-resistant ambush protected truck with a crew of two plus an additional 12 fully armed soldiers hiding in the back. Apartheid South Africa equipped its South West African Police (SWAPOL) and their counter-insurgency branch "Koevoet" – a most brutal unit in Northern Namibia– with Casspirs to terrorise, maim and kill the civil population and fight SWAPO in the war of liberation. It was not uncommon for them to hook murdered civilians but also slain PLAN fighters – SWAPO's military wing – on top of the spare wheel and drive around the villages and settlements to exert even more terror.

By looking at the exhibition poster, it becomes clear that the history of Namibian music must be told in the context of a long and protracted struggle for the liberation and self-determination of the Namibian people. Under such conditions, it goes without saying that, also musicians, artists and the arts in general were seriously affected and negatively impacted in their freedoms.

The photo was taken in 1987 at the height of SWAPO's struggle

and resistance against Apartheid South Africa on the military front, but also at the home front waged by the Churches, by the workers who formed several trade unions¹, by the people through consumer boycotts against white-owned businesses, general strikes, student protests and marches, amongst many other forms of resistance. 1987 was also the year when SWAPO founded the Namibia Press Agency (NAMPA), which covered the liberation struggle from offices across four continents to counter the Apartheid propaganda war.

The photographer John Liebenberg, who died in February 2020, and collaborated with NAMPA at the time, left behind impressive photographic testimonies. After his passing on, our President, H.E. Dr. Hage Geingob said that Liebenberg's (and I quote) "brave photojournalism raised awareness about Apartheid brutality at a difficult time. He took risks to depict Apartheid as a scar on the conscience of the world. He is the epitome of the dictum: a picture speaks a thousand words". (End of quote).

I further commend the curators of this exhibition to have chosen

¹ (The Namibia Wholesale and Retail Workers Union, the Namibia Builders Trade Union, and the Metal and Allied Namibian Workers Union)

an image which indeed speaks a thousand words, juxtaposing the beauty of creativity expressed through the musician with the imminent threat and danger to life and limb represented by the Casspir, which was part of black people's daily lives.

For someone who grew up during the Apartheid times and the Struggle for Liberation, "*Stolen Moments*" in the Namibian context implies times of segregation and forced removals, of unspeakable atrocities committed by the South African occupying forces against the Namibian population, the times of war and the absence of peace and quiet. However, "*stolen*" were also those moments in which people came together to sing, listen to Bands, dance, and enjoy their lives in spite of, and despite the harsh times, which were often reflected in the lyrics of the songs—sometimes encoded, sometimes outspoken. The artists of those times often used music and lyrics as a weapon; often with dire consequences for the *cultural workers* themselves, as we used to call them during the struggle times.

We all know that discrimination, destruction and resistance did not start in the 1980s, but goes way back to German colonial times

from 1884 – 1915, instantly followed by the South African occupation until Namibia's independence on 21 March 1990.

Dieter Hinrichs –a German photographer, born in West Germany in 1932, who spent two years in then South West Africa working for a photo studio there– provided some of the photos for this exhibition, too. He captured moments of apparent normality of young people enjoying themselves with live music in dancehalls and at the Coon Carnival between 1959 and 1961, portraying and documenting life in Windhoek's Old Location. These were “stolen moments”, indeed, as the demolition of the Old Location by the Apartheid municipality was imminent.

Already in 1956, the South African colonial administration started planning and building a new settlement area for blacks some 8km further North of the Old Location, as they felt it was too close to the white suburb in Windhoek. The people, however, refused to move to this new place, which they called “Katutura” – an Otjiherero word meaning, a *place where we do not want to live*. On 10 December 1959, following protests and boycott actions by the residents, the police shot and killed 11 people and

wounded 44 others. It took until December 1968 for the Old Location to be completely demolished, and for the former residents to have been violently relocated to Katutura by the occupying Apartheid regime.

The exhibition *Stolen Moments* has made an attempt to bring these conflicting sides together but place the focus on the *Untold History of Namibian Music*.

The late Namibian singer-songwriter and guitarist, Ben ‘Tukumazan’ Molatsi, who also features in this exhibition, described these past times in an interview, and I quote:

“Of course, you felt the pain when people mistreated other people. You had to be aware of the fact that when you bring out a message through music and if you carry it out sharply, then they would stop you from playing music! They would tell you, that man is playing music which we don’t like! And the things which you have developed are destroyed. We felt that we were deprived of our rights. And that is where mostly the valuable music of us, the important music of us, it was wiped out, because of the apartheid system. We had a lot of good quality back then but

many artists never made it because of the system.”

Dear friends,

Ladies and Gentleman,

It is not for me to tell you the story of this great collaborative research project, *Stolen Moments – Namibian Music History Untold*, investigating for the first time ever Namibian popular music under Apartheid, as I have only seen some of its photographs online and still have to explore the previously lost and forgotten music of the times myself.

We are fortunate that Jackson Wahengo and Band, The Stolen Moments, are here with us to perform some of these songs tonight.

I am as curious as you are to discover what was lost but has been found, namely the Untold History of Namibian Music.

With these few words, I have the great pleasure to officially open this exhibition.

Thank you very much.