

5 Conclusions: Post-revolutionary Spaces in Search of Approval

What are we to make of the exile biographies portrayed in the foregoing thesis? One answer can be found in a discussion between the Black East German scholar Peggy Piesche and the Black South African artist Thabo Thindi, held on one of the rare occasions when the anticolonial policy of the GDR was publicly debated in the formerly Western part of Germany.³³⁸ The discussion was about Thindi's biographical interview documentary *Exile Faces*, which includes interviews with Eric Singh, Jeannette Selby and Asaph Mohlala, ANC members who lived in exile in the GDR and whom I have featured to varying degrees in this study. Arguing that the majority of South Africa's Black people still faced the same kind of structural poverty and oppression as during apartheid—poignantly adding that most of them would always be “slaves to muscle”—Thindi asked when Western nations would stop extracting minerals from African countries for almost nothing except “this crazy thing that they call *Entwicklungshilfe* or *Entwicklungszusammenarbeit*” (development aid or development cooperation).³³⁹ Piesche, a trained literary scholar and cultural scientist, hesitated a moment before responding to Thindi's rhetorical question by proposing that, in his biographical interviews, all conducted in Germany more than two decades after reunification, “a post-revolutionary space unfolds that is seeking approval from a world which actually held it back to achieve this moment.”³⁴⁰

The world Piesche is speaking of here is the postsocialist world that emerged after the Soviet Union's collapse and the triumph of global capitalism or—more precisely narrowed down to the setting of my study—the newly re-formed FRG, a Western capitalist state that incorporated its Eastern state socialist counterpart, the self-dissolving GDR, through democratic elections. Put differently, these exiles, triggered by the negative effects of Western colonialism and attracted by international communism, passed from the so-called Third World through a geopolitical sphere called the Second World, intended as a corrective to the capitalist and racialized political economy that the West or the First World's colonial expansion had created. With the GDR's dissolution and German reunification, however, all of these

338 Artist Talk: Thabo Thindi in conversation with Peggy Piesche: “Exile Faces” – South Africa and the GDR. Part of the programme of the exhibition *Things Fall Apart*, Iwalewahaus, University Bayreuth, 26 May 2016, Evening Session, 7–10 pm (see p. 2, n. 1).

339 Artist Talk: Thabo Thindi in conversation with Peggy Piesche, 01:07:45–1:09:43 (own transcription).

340 Artist Talk: Thabo Thindi in conversation with Peggy Piesche, 01:09:45–01:10:13.

exiles ended up in the FRG, one of the core countries of that very same political-economic system, thereby creating the post-revolutionary space in search of approval that Piesche is speaking of. This remains an exilic space, for the dominant part of the world in which it unfolds has done everything possible to thwart any serious effort to rid the global economy of its colonial and racist legacy. Curiously, the exile experience of the Malawian Mahoma Mwaungulu, whose life story has acted as the empirical core of this study, already anticipates this space in 1982, when he was expelled to the FRG, which had supported the anti-communist dictatorship of Hastings Banda in Malawi that had forced Mwaungulu into exile, while the GDR, breaking off its relations with a Malawian exile movement but continuing its support for the South African ANC and the Namibian SWAPO, still existed.

Piesche's response also foreshadows another finding of my analysis of Mwaungulu's life story: even in his particular case—that of an African exile who was expelled to the West, i.e. the old FRG—the prevailing picture of the GDR appears to be more that of a decolonial space of possibilities than that of a racist space of limitations, which the GDR of course also was, as Mwaungulu's experiences confirm as well. The fragmentary picture of the GDR as a decolonial space of possibilities, however, is strengthened by Asaph Mohlala's account, even though Mwaungulu's account is more critical of the GDR than Mohlala's. After all, Mwaungulu—and the example of his home country of Malawi, which went from being a vanguard African state to a reactionary one, seems to support this—had his reasons for believing that decolonization, if it was to have more than symbolic meaning, was an endeavor necessarily directed against the political economy of the West. How could the FRG, this “radically economic state” whose very root “is precisely economic” and in which “continuous economic growth will take over from a malfunctioning history” (Foucault 2008: 86), approve the struggles of these exiles without denying its very own *raison d'être*?³⁴¹ Possibly only insofar as those struggles have remained incomplete: Malawi continues to make it to the top of Western rankings of extreme poverty, while South Africa, despite its much higher degree of industrialization, continues to struggle with extreme levels of poverty and social inequality, still along racial lines. From this perspective, it even makes sense that the GDR's expulsion of Mwaungulu and the latter's claim for asylum in the FRG turned Mwaungulu into one of Paul Tabori's hardcore exiles: “the men and women who

³⁴¹ While discussing the West German project of nation building and national identity, Nitzan Shoshan (2016: 14) uses this quote from Michel Foucault's 1979 lecture on neoliberal capitalism in his ethnography on right-wing extremism in East Berlin after German reunification. On the fundamental opposition of various white neoliberal thinkers to international projects that sought to reshape the global economy in favor of the global South, such as the New International Economic Order, and on the explicit racism of some of these thinkers, see Slobodian (2018).

remain at the bottom of the ladder,” where they are “legally, economically, and psychologically” (1972: 29) set apart during the arduous process of whether or not to be granted asylum. The underlying lesson is that the political economy of the West must not be touched.

I began this study with a longish chapter titled “Exiles,” wherein I reflected on the figure of the exile, which always invokes that of the refugee too. I discussed exile as a key anthropological figure of mobility, as proposed by Andreas Hackl, moved on to exile in its African manifestation as well as referencing reflections on exile from African intellectuals, and performed a close reading of the German post-reunification literature on the South African exile community in the GDR, the most prominent case of African exile there. My principal findings are that anthropologists tend to use exile in a highly metaphorical sense, whereas political scientists hold on to stricter definitions that focus on exiles who remain actively engaged with the politics of their homelands. The figure of the African exile in Eastern bloc countries, almost unheard of in the West but spotlighted throughout this dissertation, stands in utmost contrast to a figure through which the West promoted its own moral superiority and which played a formative role for the Western understanding of the refugee during much of the Cold War: that of the white Eastern European dissident who fled communist repression and sought asylum in the democratic, white-dominated West. Beginning in the 1980s, this refugee figure was replaced in the Western imagination by that of the Third World refugee, a figure depicted in the form of a dark and anonymous collective desperately seeking entrance to the world’s most prosperous areas. This genealogy makes it all the more difficult in Western thinking to imagine Africans living in exile in the Eastern bloc; for the latter had never been able to keep pace with the more sophisticated and resource-intensive lifestyles of the Western world and would, therefore, not be considered as attractive for those seeking not only political freedom but also a better life in exile.

German exile studies, a marginal but inspiring research field still looking for a way to enter into dialogue with migration studies, has focused almost exclusively on Jewish and German exile during the era of National Socialism, thus narrowly determining the concept of exile in German academia to a certain extent. I am reminded of this exile by the observation made by the East German diplomatic couple Ilona and Hans-Georg Schleicher that returnees—mostly former members of the anti-fascist, communist resistance against National Socialism, among them also Jews—played important roles in the GDR’s Africa and solidarity policies. In Western humanities more generally, but particularly in literary and cultural studies, the so-called mobility turn, together with a rather selective reading of Edward Said’s writings on exile, have facilitated an aestheticization and depoliticization of exile, while Western studies on the African diaspora, with its strong focus on the Black

Atlantic, have only paid little attention to the Second World as another promising site of inquiry. Christopher J. Lee's reissuing of Alex la Guma's propagandistic travel account *A Soviet Journey*, a lesser known work by this communist South African writer and ANC member, offers some new perspectives here. Studies on exiled Southern African liberation movements, on the other hand, often invoke the Eastern bloc as a space closely linked to social advancement, where members of these movements were able to study at universities or take advantage of other forms of higher education that would otherwise have been nearly impossible for them to achieve in their countries of origin. Suggesting a rather positive image of African exile in the Cold War's East, the case of the South African ANC is particularly revealing, for the close alliance between the ANC and the South African Communist Party as well as the generous support offered by the Soviet Union and its allies, intimately links one of the most important struggles for Black liberation in the twentieth century to international communism.

My analysis of African writings on exile, exemplified through essays by Paul Zeleza and Es'kia Mphahlele, has revealed that many of the contradictions and paradoxes in the concept of exile characteristic of the Western discourse also exist within its African branch. Moreover, the significance that the nation state has for the modern understanding of exile, be it in its European or postcolonial African forms, can hardly be overestimated. Interestingly, despite the fact that Zeleza mentions Alex La Guma or that Mphahlele delineates an African discourse of exile that becomes more economic the further it penetrates the south of the continent, even in these writings of two outstanding African intellectuals the exile of Africans in Eastern bloc countries is mentioned only in passing. This points to the implicit Western focus that underlies a good part of international knowledge production. Through my close reading of German post-reunification literature on the South African exile community in the GDR and a brief sketch of how a migrant artist's project on this topic came to be, I have in turn analyzed why this type of exile has not gained greater attention in academia and the German public sphere at large. In doing so, I have tried to raise awareness about the subtle logics that influence German scholarship on the GDR to this day, such as the striking underrepresentation of East Germans in the academy, the difficulty of finding funding when a research project on the GDR does not focus on its dictatorial aspects, and an implicit Eurocentrism, methodological nationalism and anti-communist bias towards the GDR that easily motivates scholars and students alike to interpret any relations between the GDR and Africa in predominantly negative terms. The scarcity of literature and art projects that have emerged until now on the South African exile in the GDR—the scholarly work of Anja Schade and Thindi's *Exile Faces* stand out in this context—point towards an outsider discourse initiated by white and Black East Germans, predominantly Black South Africans and Black West

Germans, with me as a white West German being an exception to this rule. In this vein, the historian Patrice G. Poutrus has rightly noted a conspicuous reluctance on the part of German scholars after 1990 to research the relatively small group of exiles (or political emigrants) who lived in the GDR, regardless of the country or continent from which these exiles came, because studies on this group might provide a more positive or at least different picture of the much-maligned state-socialist East Germany than studies on larger and less-privileged groups of foreigners who lived there, such as African and Asian labor migrants, usually do.

Following this mixture of outlining the discursive setting and examining the current state of research came the extensive empirical chapter “Mahoma Mwaungulu: ethnography of an intra-German expulsion.” Mwaungulu, the first African exile from the GDR whom I had personally met, inspired in me a great interest in the topic that eventually became the focus of the years of research that have culminated in the present thesis. At the beginning of the chapter, I used an ethnographic vignette of my fieldwork, juxtaposing two audiovisual testimonies of Mwaungulu’s life in the divided Germany—a documentary from West Berlin by the African-American cultural worker and community activist Donald M. Griffith and a TV movie from the GDR based on a short story by the Jewish returnee and communist author Hedda Zinner. I underlined the posthumous character of my biographical research on Mwaungulu as well as my live encounter with him in 2002 in Berlin: Mwaungulu passed away in 2004, while I only commenced my research in 2007. Hence, whereas biographical research in anthropology typically builds on close interaction between the researcher and the researched individual and highlights the collaborative process of the life story interview—often at the expense of the global-historical structure—my approach differs in that I never conducted such an interview with Mwaungulu. Instead, I found several life story interviews that others had conducted with him, while I only personally interviewed some of his family members and friends.

Mwaungulu was born in 1932 of Malawian parents in Tanzania during the colonial era. He then lived in Malawi and Uganda before crossing the African continent in 1953 to Ghana, from where he departed to the GDR in 1960. Later on, having returned to independent Malawi in 1964 only to be forced into Tanzanian exile, he spent half a year in Cuba before returning in 1967 from Tanzania to the GDR. In 1982, the GDR authorities expelled him to West Berlin, where the two of us met three decades later. Such a global setting makes posthumous biographical research a true challenge. First, I collected a variety of archival sources that I found on Mwaungulu and his political party, the exiled opposition movement The Socialist League of Malawi (Lesoma), in German and Russian archives. Second, I supplemented these sources with movies, newspaper articles, book extracts, liter-

ature discussions and the various interviews that I conducted with Mwaungulu's friends and East German family members as well as interviews that former Lesoma members in Malawi had conducted with each other. In addition, I attended as many public events that dealt with the life of Africans and other People of Color in the GDR as I could find, or—as in the case of the discussion between Piesche and Thindi mentioned at the beginning, which I could not attend in person—asked the organizers to record the event and provide me with audio files. My principal idea was to create a thick and multivocal ethnographic account of Mwaungulu's life and transnational network as well as the particular setting he was living in as an African exile, based on such a variety of sources that a multitude of different narrative levels and perspectives would emerge. The original life story interviews, all structured chronologically, served me as a thread for my writing, while the heterogeneous body of literature that I researched gave me an idea of the unknown places and past events Mwaungulu had talked about in his interviews. Given that I neither traveled to Malawi nor any other African country for my research, this method sometimes made me feel like an odd armchair anthropologist. Nevertheless, it seems to have worked quite well, although it required a quite a lot of research effort—and a bit of luck, too.

For instance, when a friend recommended to me a new book on Ghana's foreign policies during the Nkrumah period, I found therein references to two files from the George Padmore Research Library in Ghana that mention Mwaungulu as a candidate for study in the GDR. Mwaungulu had worked in Padmore's Bureau of African Affairs in Accra and said in one of his interviews that he had received his scholarship to study in the GDR precisely through this bureau. These Ghanaian files were, in fact, the missing link I needed to verify a connection between the Caribbean pan-Africanist Padmore and the GDR, something I had searched for in vain in German archives. Mwaungulu's mentioning of Padmore in his life story interviews had already led me to Padmore's political work for the Comintern in Hamburg during the Weimar Republic, hence supporting my argument that the GDR's solidarity policies must be understood in the context of earlier expressions of anticolonial communism in Germany and elsewhere. Likewise, it was rather coincidental that at the time I found funding—thanks largely to my physical disability—and was able to work in earnest on this study, two former members of Lesoma published *Malawi's Lost Years*, a book about the Malawian exile community provoked by the Banda dictatorship and conceived initially to become a book about Lesoma's history. The latter was a task I was similarly working on, after I had found old party documents and letters from party members in Mwaungulu's private estate. When I informed the two authors of *Malawi's Lost Years* about my project, they provided me with several unpublished interviews of former Lesoma members that gave me a Malawian perspective on the political

history that had shaped Mwaungulu's exile. Moreover, the publication of *Malawi's Lost Years*, however marginal its reception, indicated a Malawian interest in the resistance against the Banda dictatorship. I saw this as further confirmation of the relevance of my research on Mwaungulu, just as I saw Thindi's *Exile Faces* as further justification for including exile biographies from South Africa to my study, which add a comparative perspective to Mwaungulu's life story.

This comparative perspective is important for several reasons. First, the histories of Malawi and South Africa are closely linked, due to strong labor migration from Malawi to South Africa and the good relationship between the Banda regime and apartheid South Africa. Second, the much more numerous and prominent exile of South Africans in the GDR superimposed itself on the rather singular case of Mwaungulu, who was sometimes even presented in the GDR as a South African. Third, taken on its own, Mwaungulu's life story is of course not sufficient to understand African exile in the GDR in all its ramifications; nor is the inclusion of South Africans like Asaph Mohlala or Jeannette Selby sufficient to do so. However, one of the aspects that makes Mwaungulu's life story so thought-provoking is his expulsion from the GDR, which blocks any teleological account of socialist solidarity. The latter is a tendency against which at least some approaches that deal exclusively with the exile of South Africans in the GDR may be less immune, as my analysis in the "Exiles" chapter has shown. On the other hand, while Mwaungulu's expulsion may thus be beneficial when (re)considering African exile in the GDR, it can easily be instrumentalized and taken as evidence of the GDR's alleged hypocrisy toward Africa, thereby confirming preconceived notions without bothering to look more closely. Hence the importance of adding alternative narratives such as Mohlala's, which gives testimony regarding what was arguably one of the most important and consistent forms of East German solidarity with an African exile movement.

Correspondingly, Mwaungulu's life story has much more to teach us about the GDR than only the obvious fact that a stateless exile, regardless of whether he was Black and from Africa or not, could simply be expelled at the whim of the socialist regime, despite his ongoing support for the cause of socialism. What makes his story so unique is what we learn about his background and what motivated him to study in the GDR. We learn about his thirst for education, which challenged the British colonial school system and led him to the GDR via Uganda and Ghana, or about his participation in the struggle against the Central African Federation, a key moment in African decolonization. Or that he represented the Malawian independence movement during the heyday of pan-Africanism in Ghana, where he was taught by Kwame Nkrumah and worked with George Padmore, two key figures of decolonization. Or that he came to one of the GDR's internationalist hot spots, Leipzig, with the first wave of African student migration, married an East German and

achieved extraordinary German language skills while graduating in political economy to help build up a non-capitalist economy in Malawi—for he understood very well the crucial role that colonial exploitation has played in Western capitalist development. Or that he experienced Malawi's transformation into a pro-Western dictatorship at first hand, lived in a Tanzanian refugee camp and later returned to the GDR's capital, East Berlin, as a stateless exile. Or that he and his wife had three East German children and that he lived in the GDR for almost two decades, during the first years of which he held a high position in the UASA—the self-organized Union of African Students and Workers in the GDR—and, over the years that followed, socialized with many other Africans in the GDR, among them South African exiles. Or that he worked in such different fields as writing a dissertation at the Hochschule für Ökonomie Bruno Leuschner, the GDR's most prestigious university of economics; acting in the East German film business; teaching Marxism-Leninism at the College of Solidarity; and interpreting for a Christian missionary church at a time when the GDR authorities had already abandoned him and his original political cause: the struggle against the Banda regime. All this adds to the variety of detailed insights into *why* an African freedom fighter would be attracted by international communism and how he came to live in exile in the GDR.

That Mwaungulu also served as the representative of Lesoma—a Malawian exile movement whose struggle did not fit into the GDR's solidarity policies due to its hopelessness and, therefore, did not receive official support, although Mwaungulu still managed to organize some support from the GDR's solidarity committee—adds another international level to these engagements, one that most likely sealed his later expulsion. Parallel to the insights accumulated during his everyday life in the GDR, this transnational level of political activism constantly reminds us of what was going on in Southern Africa and Malawi and, thus, of the main reasons for his exile. Hence my decision to break up the structural narrative of his life story by including two relatively long digressions on Lesoma's history as well as on Mwaungulu's almost completed dissertation, *Problems and Perspectives of Malawi's Industrial Development*. Both offer ways to widen the focus of this work and engage seriously with the postcolonial history of a country that was ruled for four decades by a dictatorship, received a considerable amount of West German development aid—including military training—but of whose existence many Germans do not even know. The subchapter on Lesoma reconstructs the previously untold story of a crucial part of the politically organized exile community provoked by this dictatorship, thereby revealing a crucial aspect of Malawi's postcolonial history that is, for instance, missing in Kings M. Phiri's otherwise insightful study of the country's ambiguous role during the liberation struggles in neighboring Mozambique and Zimbabwe. Meanwhile, reconstructing the story of Lesoma through Mwaungulu's exile archive inscribes a larger collective dimension regarding Malawi's then deter-

ritorialized opposition into the broader field of African socialisms and national liberation movements in Southern Africa, a research field from which Malawi has thus far been excluded.

In the subchapter on Mwaungulu's dissertation, in turn, I have argued that some scholarly works written by Africans in the GDR should be read in the context of other radical Black thinkers, such as the Guyanese Walter Rodney, and Western Marxist schools of thought, including dependency theory. These thinkers and schools of thought are heavily marginalized in German scholarship and only rarely considered by German scholars when discussing the GDR's Africa policies. Hence, reading Mwaungulu's dissertation in this context helps to deprovincialize dominant forms of (West) German thinking about the GDR through highlighting the continuing relevance of a "political economic critique in the theorizing of the global Black condition" (Burden-Stelly 2017: 216), meaning especially the theorizing of anti-Black racism. Another important aspect that I have discussed in this subchapter is the ongoing debate in historical science about how to evaluate Malawi's close relationship with apartheid South Africa, a topic to which Mwaungulu devoted several pages in his dissertation.

Mwaungulu's increasing problems with alcoholism and abusive behavior towards his wife, together with exhibiting other symptoms of what some East German officials called the "emigrant disease," prompted me to take a comparative look at the high rate of mental health problems among the most prominent group of exiles in the GDR, namely the Chileans who fled the Pinochet dictatorship. According to Sebastian Koch, the GDR—and Mwaungulu's life story confirms this—did not really find a way to effectively deal with such problems. This is a noteworthy finding if we remember that a good part of the GDR's founders had survived the Nazi regime as political emigrants in the Stalinist Soviet Union and, thus, must have known about the psychological hardships of exile. My reconstruction of Mwaungulu's exile in the GDR ends with his work for a Christian missionary church—his last resort before expulsion to West Berlin—thus evoking the concept of church asylum within a state-socialist German setting. I see therein a rather ironic twist, given the GDR's secular and anticolonial stance as well as Mwaungulu's earlier accounts of how the missionary schools in colonial Malawi tried to curb his political consciousness. In sum, Mwaungulu was an outsider and an insider of GDR society at the same time. His tireless political commitment and activism left their marks and make him traceable almost everywhere, from his early life in Africa to the GDR and beyond. I thus have ended the chapter by reconnecting with its introductory section, which began with my discussion of Griffith's documentary on Mwaungulu, to give a brief overview of how Mwaungulu's life continued in the FRG after the traumatic experience of being expelled from the GDR and separated from his children.

Subsequently, “Asaph Makote Mohlala: ‘I had to fight my way back,’” the shorter empirical chapter of my study, takes as its point of departure a life story interview that I conducted with a South African in the former eastern part of Berlin. Mohlala, whom I came to know about through *Exile Faces*, belongs to a younger generation of African exiles, many of whom are still living in reunified Germany, particularly in Berlin. Born in 1954 in a South African township, Mohlala is one of the Soweto Kids who fled South Africa in the aftermath of the Soweto uprising in 1976 and joined the ANC’s armed wing, MK. In contrast to Mwaungulu’s life story, I have added no archival sources to Mohlala’s account, relying instead only on support from the literature to clarify or discuss in more detail certain aspects of what Mohlala told me about his life. His exile has encompassed countries like Tanzania, the Crimea in the Soviet Union and, above all, Angola. The latter brings to the fore the war that apartheid South Africa waged against it: an African state that was weakened by internal power struggles following the war of independence against Portugal and serving as a host country and training ground for MK as well as a retreat for Namibian freedom fighters and refugees. Mohlala’s haunting account of how he worked for several years in this war-torn country as a medical assistant in the MK’s exile camps—at some point, Cuba, the Soviet Union and the US all were involved in this internationalized conflict—shows what it could mean to be a Black South African in exile and why quite a few of them have special memories of the GDR. What saved him in early 1990 from being redeployed from Angola to the MK’s new host country, Uganda, was that he had done a four-year medical training course in the GDR before, which tied him to the East German state via a German girlfriend and their common child. Through extreme efforts, he was able to return to the GDR and marry his girlfriend, just a few months before the country dissolved and joined the FRG.

I have paid particular attention to what Mohlala told me about his four years of training as a medical assistant in Quedlinburg, a small town in the rural part of the GDR, far from the urban centers of Leipzig and Berlin. Mohlala’s memories of his life there are exclusively positive, strikingly in contrast with the rather critical examination of this training program by Young-sun Hong, whose research, contrary to mine, is based only on archival sources. This seems to confirm arguments of scholars such as Ulrich van der Heyden and Marcia Schenck, who point out that research on foreigners in the GDR should also include oral history accounts. Compared to Mwaungulu’s more ambiguous experiences with the GDR, however, Mohlala’s first stay in the GDR must be viewed against the backdrop of the strong institutional backup that the ANC, as an established and recognized exile movement, offered its members, for better or worse. While it was at one of the ANC’s official gatherings in the GDR that Mohlala met his future East German wife, it was also the ANC’s military order that forced him to temporarily leave

this woman and their newborn child behind and return to Angola. Against the backdrop of these privations, Mohlala's account depicts the GDR as what its advocates always wanted it to be: a European stronghold of international solidarity and anticolonial commitment that, situated on the borders of Western Europe, offered support and a safe haven to African freedom fighters. Notably, Mohlala's account is almost completely free of any serious ambiguities or contradictions. That my interview with him took place in former East Berlin, where he continues to live with his wife in spite of the racism that became particularly strong there in the first years following reunification, can be interpreted as another confirmation of his memories.

My final chapter or epilogue, "African exiles and the awkward figure of the refugee," reconnects with the introductory chapter, "Exiles," through juxtaposing the popular Western figure of the African refugee with that of the African exile as presented in my study. I have used an excerpt from one of the many inspiring conversations that I had with Jeannette Selby, a South African freedom fighter and former exile of Mwaungulu's generation. Just like Mohlala, Selby is still living in Berlin as I write these words. She traveled to the GDR via London with her small daughter to meet there with her white South African husband, a member of the SACP, in 1961, the year the Berlin Wall was built. Selby and Mwaungulu knew each other, and it was at an early stage of my research on his life that I first heard of her, though we only met later. What struck me about this particular conversation was Selby's critical view on the refugee protests that took place in 2015 in Berlin. Together with an older statement that Mwaungulu made on similar forms of African migrations to Europe, it motivated me to reflect on the self-ascriptions of exiles with regard to their displacement, which must be understood in relation to their everyday lives and the German mainstream discourse on migration as well as with consideration of my own bias when I look at their lives.

To conclude with a personal note, studying these exiles has fundamentally changed my perception of my country's history. That applies to my perception of the GDR, but above all to my understanding of the capitalist basis of the FRG, which today forms the political-economic foundation of the reunified Germany. For me as a white West German, this is uncomfortable knowledge. Given the FRG's widespread anti-communism and close historical ties to South African apartheid and the Malawian Banda regime, not to mention the many mainstream politicians who were (or still are) openly racist and apologists of colonialism, it has been instructive to learn through these exiles just *how* important communism was for African decolonization, in spite of all its shortcomings and dictatorial aspects. The only thing that still puzzles me is that I came to these and other insights through the damaged life of my late neighbor, Mahoma Mwaungulu.