



ISSN 2336-3274 (Print) ISSN 2570-7558 (Online)

<https://edu.uhk.cz/africa>

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Author:

Kateřina Mildnerová – Palacký University Olomouc, The Czech Republic

Recommended citation:

Mildnerová, K. (2018). “I Feel Like Two In One”: Complex Belongings Among Namibian Czechs. *Modern Africa: Politics, History and Society*, 6(2), 55–93. <https://doi.org/10.26806/modafr.v6i2.249>



University of Hradec Králové
Philosophical Faculty

“I FEEL LIKE TWO IN ONE”: COMPLEX BELONGINGS AMONG NAMIBIAN CZECHS¹

Kateřina Mildnerov

Abstract: This paper, based on the analysis of archival documents, biographical interviews and participant observation, focuses on the social and narrative construction of collective cultural identity of so-called Namibian Czechs living in Namibia. These represent a group of originally fifty-six Namibian child war refugees who received asylum and were educated in Czechoslovakia between 1985 and 1991. In order to understand their complex identity special attention has been paid to the dual education of the children in Czechoslovakia, to the role of the Czech language and the symbolical narratives in the construction of their collective cultural identity and to diverse discursive and social practices through which they shape, maintain, and reproduce their Czechness – both situationally in social interactions and narratively in a form of communicative memory.

Keywords: *Language, Education, Culture, Memory, Namibian Czechs, Czechoslovakia, Identity*

Introduction

This paper presents the results of two years’ research on a specific group of migrants who call themselves “Namibian Czechs” or “Black Czechs.” This group originally consisted of fifty-six Namibian child war refugees who were taken to Czechoslovakia in 1985 from different liberation movement camps² in Zambia and Angola during the Namibian national liberation struggle. As part of an international

1 The research was funded from the research project (FPVC2017/10) called “Namibian Czechs, their identity and perception of home” (2017-2019) by the Fund for scientific research of the Faculty of Art of the Palacky University Olomouc.

2 A liberation movement camp differs from most refugee camps in the role of a liberation movement governing them. Whereas refugee camps are administered by the host nation or a transnational humanitarian agency, liberation movements camps were governed by exiles affiliated with the SWAPO liberation movement (Williams 2017: 21)

solidarity project, hundreds of Namibian child refugees were also sent to the German Democratic Republic, Cuba and Vietnam. Czechoslovakia received 56 children in 1985³ and another 64 in 1989.⁴ In 1991 all Namibian children from Czechoslovakia were repatriated.

With the exception of two articles dedicated to Namibian Czechs, written by Tomáš Machalík (2007; 2008), the topic of Namibian Czechs has not yet been systematically elaborated by historians or social scientists in the Czech Republic. This academic vacuum sharply contrasts to the oversaturation of a similar topic – that of the GDR children of Namibia – which has been examined primarily by scholars from Germany and the United States in the last ten years (Owens 1998; 2008; Kenna 1999; Kraus 2009; Schmitt and Witte 2014a; 2014b; 2018; Polat 2014 etc.).

My research is based on an analysis of biographies and archival documents and mainly focuses on the life histories of so-called Namibian Czechs. In order to understand the construction of their collective identity special attention was paid to three main identifiers: (1) a commonly shared memory of the experience of growing up together in two culturally diverse locations that led to their awareness of distinctiveness in both social environments, (2) the commonly shared traumatic experience of displacement representing the most significant narrative rupture in personal biographies interpreted as an “unjust fate” or the “expulsion from paradise” and finally, (3) the adoption and use of the Czech language and culture as a key tool for socialisation and enculturation during the constitutive years of their childhood.

In this article I focus primarily on the last aspect, i.e. the adoption and use of the Czech language and culture within the group of Namibian Czechs in the past and today and its role in the construction of their collective identity within their life trajectories. After providing a methodological and theoretical background, I discuss teaching conditions at the primary school in Bartošovice, the role of Czech and Oshivambo as well as the influence of political ideology in the

3 The first group of 56 children, mainly offspring of prominent SWAPO/PLAN commandants, stayed in Bartošovice from November 1985 to September 1988 and in Prachatice from September 1988 to June 1991.

4 A second group of 64 children stayed in Považská Bystrica in Slovakia between September 1989 and June 1991.

education of Namibian children in Czechoslovakia. The following section outlines the "identity crisis" of Namibian Czech children after their return to Namibia in 1991. This is followed by an analysis of the sense of belonging among Namibian Czechs by drawing from examples such as identity statements in biographical narratives, the use of symbolical narratives (in particular Czech fairy tales), and the singing of the Czech national hymn in the negotiation of their identity. In this main section, I also outline various discursive and social practices of today's Namibian Czechs shaping and maintaining their Czech belongings. The next section, which is followed by the conclusion, focuses on the uneasy sense of belonging among Namibian Czechs with regard to their bi-cultural and multiple identities.

Methodology

The long-term fieldwork was carried out in the Czech Republic and Namibia between 2017 and 2018. The research combines biographical, ethnographic and historical designs by using different research technics such as biographical interviews, semi-structured interviews and participant observation, analysis of archival material, personal documents, period photography and media outputs. During our research, we⁵ carried out a total of 65 interviews with different respondents including Namibian Czechs (36),⁶ caregivers (10), directors of boarding schools (2), pediatrician (1), Czech adoptive families (2), Namibians relatives (7), school inspectors (2) and Czech and Namibian government representatives (5). We also collected 200 archival documents from state district archives (Prachatice, Nov Jiin), national archives (Prague, Windhoek), the Archive of the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs, personal letters (15), class book reports (5), personal chronicles (2) and dozens of printed articles from *Pravda*, *Rozkvt*, *The Namibian* and the *Windhoek Observer*.

5 The research in Namibia was carried out together with a Ph.D. student of anthropology, Pavel Miskařik.

6 Of the 43 Namibian Czechs (at the age of 38-43 in 2018) living in Namibia, 7 of them are missing, 6 of them passed away, 4 of them live in Europe (but only 1 in the Czech Republic). About 80% of the Namibian Czechs maintain good relations with each other, half of them live in Windhoek (capital of Namibia), one third live in Ovamboland (the north of Namibia), the rest is scattered throughout Namibia (Walvis Bay 2, Otjiwarongo 1, Grootfontein 1, Luderitz 1).

For the purpose of this article I mainly use the archival material of the Pedagogical Research Institute that supervised the boarding school of Namibian children in Bartošovice and biographical interviews with Namibian Czechs. I also analysed personal letters that the children sent to their Czech adoptive parents and caregivers from Namibia in the years 1991-1993, which provide evidence of the level of knowledge of Czech in the period directly after their repatriation. Other personal documents such as diaries of Czech caregivers were also an important source of information about the children's cognitive and social development. Finally, I have followed online chatting groups within the social network WhatsApp and personal accounts on Facebook in order to pursue the current problems, opinions, attitudes and language behaviour of members of the given group.

In this context, I would like to stress that throughout the research I decided to analyse not only personal narratives, but also everyday practices by means of participant observation in order to identify discrepancies between what respondents say and how they actually behave. The discrepancy between self-reported data and actual behaviour has long been acknowledged in identity research. As a note on self-reflection, I am aware that the childhood memories of the respondents might have been projected onto the researcher who comes from the same culture the respondents identify with and that this might influence data production in a certain way – for example in their proclaimed idealisation of Czech culture and Czech language.

Theoretical Approaches

This article is anchored within the discipline of cultural anthropology while a few theoretical concepts are drawn from sociolinguistics. As the paper deals mainly with the complex trajectory of belonging of Namibian Czechs, the notion of identity or belongings should be defined first. Since the 1970s a complex of approaches has been asserted in socio-cultural anthropology to overcome the presumption of ethnic, cultural and linguistic rootedness of our identity. It represented “categorical oppositions and essentialist ideological movements – particularly ethnicity and nationalism” (May 2008: 38–39). An identity is not an entity inherently possessed from birth, but rather a process of becoming and belonging. Identity as a fluctuating,

flexible and unstable phenomenon, is seen as socially⁷ and narratively constructed and negotiated. The linkage between social interactions, language and narratives was highlighted by Bruner (1991), who argued that the field of social interactions is linked to a narrative construction of reality, as every narrative is an interpretative structure that is actively present in every social interaction.

The narrative constructivism paradigm (Ricoeur 1991; Hamar 2008; Bruner 1991) understands identity as constructed in narrated biography. By narrating one reflects, interprets and gives meaning and values to different time and content levels of his or her experiences and knowledge. The act of narrating a life story implicates a narrator's positionality (to self and to the others). The narrator "spins fibers" of his present and past experience into a meaningful and coherent life story that is comprehensible, both for him and his listener.⁸ The concept of narrative identity sees the dynamics of identities in flux. A subject is situated within social (and power) relations that change in time and space. The act of narrating is seen as a synthesis of changing positions of a subject in the course of his or her life trajectory - the positions that one pursues ("ipse" identity) and a position that others ascribe him or her ("idem" identity).⁹

If we accept the fact that identities are socially and narratively constructed, the question arises: how does this process take place?

7 Since the 1960s, anthropologists have approached social reality as constructed in social interactions. As Berger and Luckman state in their famous book *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966): "Language is capable of becoming the objective repository of vast accumulations of meanings and experience, which it can then preserve in time and transmit to following generations (...) language also typifies experiences, allowing me to subsume them under broad categories in terms of which they have meaning not only to myself but also to my fellowmen" (Berger and Luckman 1966: 35-39).

8 Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic approach presupposes that comprehension between a narrator and a listener is enabled by priori understandings.

9 In a book "Oneself as Another" (1992) Paul Ricoeur distinguishes between two fundamental aspects of personal identity. *Ipse* is an identity understood as selfhood, close to our individuality that marks us as what we really feel to be. *Idem* on the other hand is an identity understood as Me in opposition to OTHER. If *Ipse* identity loses its base in *Idem* identity, then one loses its embedding in the material and social world. This situation is expressed by a "decomposition of narrative order." The serious conflict between *ipse* and *idem* can lead to the refusal of one's own identity and a re-telling of one's own life story or to the formation of dual, hybrid or multiple identities (Hamar 2008: 99).

Key to the construction of an identity are the complementary notions of Self and the Other, or “sameness and difference” (Bucholtz and Hall 2004: 369). Here, I consider it to be important to distinguish between personal and collective identity. The personal identity relates to the notion of personality-self and centers around the sense of sameness and continuity that persists across time and space. It takes into account the self-consciousness and self-awareness assuring “the fact that a person is oneself and not someone else” (Edwards 2009: 19). When the Self is linked to the individual then everyone else is identified as the Other.

The sameness and otherness as interconnected and complementary processes are connected to the construction of collective identity. Accordingly, “‘social grouping’ is a process not merely of discovering or acknowledging a similarity that precedes and establishes identity but, more fundamentally, of inventing similarity by downplaying difference [...] The perception of shared identity often requires as its foil a sense of alterity, of an Other who can be positioned against those socially constituted as the same” (Bucholtz and Hall 2004: 371). In other words, concepts of sameness and difference are relatively fluid and can be manipulated in the service of a sense of groupness. The key mechanism of the construction of collective identity is thus a negotiation between WE and THEM, i. e. refers to a sense of group cohesiveness whereby one aligns oneself with specific other individuals based on certain shared characteristics, while simultaneously distinguishing oneself from others who do not share these traits. As Fredrik Barth showed in his famous study *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (1969), these boundaries are continuously negotiated in social interactions. The boundaries are defined by the processes of inclusion (in-group) and exclusion (out-group) whereas the existence of an in-group must be confirmed (socially and ideologically) by an out-group who accepts its cultural difference.

The understandings of identity make it necessary to clarify the concept of positioning which is linked to discursive practices from the point of view of current sociolinguists. Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004) showed that identities are negotiated through the process of the positioning of Self and the positioning of Others. According to them, it is important “to underscore that often instances of reflective positioning are contested by others and many individuals find

themselves in a perpetual tension between self-chosen identities and others' attempts to position them differently" (Pavlenko and Blackledge 2004: 249). The negotiation of identities is thus understood as the interplay between "reflective positioning" and "interactive positioning," whereby others attempt to "reposition" particular individuals or groups.

These ideas resonate to a certain extent with the notion of "othering" defined by Jensen as a "multidimensional process that touches upon several different forms of social differentiation... the subordinate people are offered, and at the same time relegated to subject positions as others in discourse" (Jensen 2011: 65). The process of othering is intrinsically linked to the labeling of those Others as different by means of various discursive practices such as stereotypisation, exotisation, racialisation or ethnicisation, which can finally lead to social exclusion or to foreignisation of individuals or groups.

When analysing the concept of collective identity from the narrative point of view we have to take into account the praxis of producing, sharing, and reproducing the "collective biographical narratives" within an in-group. As Ricoeur (1990) showed, the relationship between community and its narratives is always cyclic. The narratives produced by the members of a community in fact legitimises the in-group's *raison d'etre* and helps to create and maintain the collective memories of a group. This largely corresponds to the findings of Young and Saver (2001) who pointed out that the making of memory is reliant on story making. This means that story telling creates the memory structure that allows us to retrieve memories.

Assmann and Czaplicka (1995: 126–127) further argue that the collective identity of a group is constantly reconstructed within a so-called "communicative memory" which is produced in living biographical memories of a certain generation in the recent past and which is maintained in everyday communication.¹⁰

A reproduction of collective memories (such as common childhood memories or experience of displacement in our case) helps to assert an individual belonging to a certain group of people by sharing the

10 In this theory, the communicative memory is different from a more fixed, formal and institutionalized "cultural memory" which is transmitted mainly through written texts in the process of education.

same memory. The collective identity is thus narratively and also socially constructed through the collectively shared memories, which are conceived as sort of “common properties” – the richer they are, the more intense, the inner social solidarity of a group is.

Having explained the nature of socially and narratively constructed individual and collective identities in current social theories, I return to the linkage between language, culture and identity. The argument that language and culture are mutually constitutive, has received much critical examination by postmodern and critical anthropologists (such as Rabinow 1986; Clifford 1988; Gupta and Ferguson 1992, etc.) as well as French post-structuralists (Foucault 1985; Bourdieu 1990). Since the 1980s the linkage between language and culture has been understood as more complex taking into account mobility, globalisation and multilingualism. Culture is no longer conceived as an integrated, coherent, static and stable “total” entity with fixed inheritance of shared meanings but rather as a dialogical, discursive process or a flow in which power relationships and structures play an important role (Marcus 1995; Clifford and Marcus 1996). According to postmodern understandings, the nature of a culture is multiple, dynamic, and flexible. From the point of view of postmodern sociolinguistics, a culture is understood as a “verb” (Street 1993), i.e., as an active process of meaning making on what people do and how they do it through discursive practices. But culture is not only constructed, reconstructed, negotiated, by social actors in their social and linguistic interactions or narrative praxis (agency level) but also represents a hegemonic structure that constraint one’s individual agency (structural level).

Invisible discourse practices of symbolic domination mediated by the state, or other hegemonic institutions (with a consent of polity) also significantly shape our identity. It “irritates” our agency and leads to various forms of “symbolical resistance” to these structures of power. As shown by Jensen in the context of othering, the agency of “subordinated,” “marginal” or those who are being positioned as “others” can lead not only to the refusal of being the other, but also to “symbolical capitalizing” on thus ascribed statuses. In this context, the concept of othering (Jensen) is well suited for understanding the meaning-making process that conditions identity formation in terms of agency.

Current socio- and applied linguists also deal with the complexities of the relationship between language and identity in the multilingual, globalised and transnational world (Killer 1985, Weedon 1987, Pavlenko Blackledge 2004, Blommaert 2010, Duff 2015). Language is seen as a site of identity construction, which means that people do not only "express" their identity by means of language, but rather "construct and negotiate" their multiple identities through language in an interactional context. The construction of identities is thus seen as a reflexive process in which self-image is constructed and communicated by individuals within a culture and in particular in everyday interactions (Pavlenko-Blackledge 2004).

Language during Childhood Years in Czechoslovakia

The group of 56 Namibian children¹¹ in the age of five to nine accompanied by seven Namibian tutors arrived in Bartořovice, a small village in the north-eastern part of the Czech Republic on 14 November 1985. Namibian children were officially admitted by the resolution of the government of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic in October 1985¹² as an act of international solidarity with the SWAPO national liberation movement professing Marxist-communist ideology. The children were accommodated in a boarding school in the castle of Bartořovice. Soon after their arrival the children had to intensively study Czech to be able to communicate with their caregivers and teachers and start attending school. The learning of Czech was perceived to be a precondition for formal and informal educational activities and better integration into local society.

The Research Pedagogical Institute (RPI) supervised the activities of Czech teachers and caregivers at the boarding school during

11 Whereas the official version (according to archival documents and printed media) reports the Namibian children as war orphans, who lost their parents during the struggle for independence of Namibia and who were randomly chosen to come to Czechoslovakia, an unofficial version (according to the children and their parents) shows that these children were offspring of prominent high-ranking soldiers, members of PLAN military council and SWAPO council. The majority of them were in fact half-orphans, having fathers who died in the war and mothers still alive. However, at least 15% of them had both parents alive when coming to Czechoslovakia.

12 National archive Prague, NA, A V KS, f.02/1. P142/85, k inf.3, .9746/23, from 30. 10. 1985.

the first three years. A report from 1985/1986 states that the “fast and good-quality adoption of the Czech language both for children and their Namibian tutors is a necessary precondition for all other pedagogical and educational activities” (RPI 1987). A RPI report from 1986 mentions that “the teaching of Czech as a subject had a special position, it fulfilled the function of educative language, that in normal condition belongs to the mother tongue” (ibid).

The majority of the newly arrived children mastered the basics of Oshivambo,¹³ which was the lingua franca in SWAPO liberation camps in Angola, where children were born and grew up before coming to Czechoslovakia. The language abilities of the children were not limited to Oshivambo, however, some of the children also spoke some English and Portuguese. A few children spoke vernacular languages such as Caprivi, Himba or San.

At the beginning, the communication between the children, their tutors and Czech employees in the boarding school in Bartošovice was not easy. Namibian tutors only spoke Oshivambo and English, which in turn the Czechs did not understand. This problem was resolved by the appointment of one of the Namibian tutors (a nurse) who also spoke Czech as a direct interpreter between Namibians and Czechs. The language barrier was an obstacle that lasted until the children mastered Czech.¹⁴ One of the Czech caregivers recalls initial complications linked to the communication barrier:

“At the beginning it was horrible, the children acted like monkeys, screaming, jumping on beds and other furniture, switching on and off the lights. They had no basic hygiene habits, they did not know toilets, they were used to eat with their hands. The worst thing was that at the beginning, we could not communicate with them, they spoke only Oshivambo and we spoke only Czech. They did not understand what we were saying, so we had to communicate with them in some sort of sign language, by all means. I was so desperate that I started to write a vocabulary in a small notebook with the help of Emilia, she was one of Namibian caregivers who

13 Oshivambo is a local Namibian language, that over half of Namibia’s inhabitants speak, particularly the Ovambo people living in the north of Namibia, near the border to Angola.

14 Communication with I. Z. Czech care-giver in Bartošovice, the same information is in the archival document RPI (1985).

came with them and knew some Czech. Unona umeneni! Children be quite! ...I still remember when I used it for the first time. They were making noise again and when I said unona umeneni! there was such an immediate silence that you could hear a pin drop. From that moment on, I had their respect" (I. Z. November 2018, Prbor).

Within a few months, the children adopted the Czech language, internalised Czech prescribed hygiene habits and cultural behavioural codes, in particular "rules of good manners" such as not eating with one's hands, not talking when eating or after the lights are out, no screaming or talking loudly, no talking back to teachers, asking for permission, use of the magic word "please."¹⁵ From the very beginning the boarding school was a site of "cultural politics" (Pennycook 2000), where Czech education policies, practices and ideology were aimed to assimilate the recently arrived child refugees in as short a time as possible. At the time, Czechoslovakia as a communist and largely monolingual state did not have a systematic method for educating foreigners at its disposal. All foreign students at primary, secondary schools or at universities (including those from Africa) had to first learn the language (within the first year's preparation course) before studying their subject. Czech legislation did not have any prior experience with such a group of primary school children,¹⁶ so the method for teaching Namibian children required a lot of improvisation in the first two years. The Czech Ministry of Education, which was responsible for the program, charged the Research Pedagogical Institute to adjust the teaching plans according to the development of the children's capacity to learn Czech. The package of measures concerning methods of teaching Namibian children was thus a product of mutual negotiation between pedagogical employees of the boarding school and employees of the Pedagogical Institute.

Adjusted methods consisted of using various types of textbooks for the first and second grade of primary school. For example, dictionaries and textbooks for aphasics, illustrated books for pre-school children, etc. A special case was a textbook for the subject Fundamentals of Civic and Natural Science for the first and second grade of primary school which

15 Datat elicited through interviews with Czech teachers and tutors from Bartořovice.

16 Czechoslovakia had only experience with handling and schooling child war refugees from Greece during the 1950s (about 5 1000 children). In the 1950s a different school policy and curriculum was employed.

had to be completely rewritten with the help of translated materials from the GDR. There, a special curriculum combining German and SWAPO educational material was made just for this purpose. Czechoslovakia, inspired by East Germany, made its own version of the textbook used in teaching Namibian children. A special attitude of teachers and caregivers to Namibian children was also stressed in the material of RPI. The RPI advisors recommended teachers “to apply a sensible and individual approach to the adaptation and acculturation of Namibian children” and “to put an emphasis on language and communication skills in particular in the first adaptive-acculturation stages” (RPI 1985/1986).

The importance of learning Czech as a primary language is also mentioned in a document Adjusted Curriculum for Children from Namibia (*ibid.*): “This new language becomes not only a means of communication but also a thinking tool for children. They will use this language in an environment in which they will live for a long time in the same way as their mother tongue. It will serve to express the ideas, needs, opinions, they will use the language for receiving knowledge” (RPI 1985).

As my research disclosed, the majority of Namibian Czechs today still consider Czech their “mother tongue” in the sense in which Joshua Fishman calls it “beloved language” (Fishman 1997: 334). For our interviewees, the Czech language evokes the memories of a happy childhood, the language of Czech female wardens who were considered to have been substitutes for loved relatives. They were commonly called a “meme” (a mother in Oshivambo) or “teta” (an aunt in Czech). Czech wardens represented the Significant others, they made substantial efforts to provide service to these children, including psychological and emotional support. During the first years in Bartošovice Czech female wardens created a strong emotional bond with the children. Apart from their daily duties, the wardens showed an extraordinary personal commitment to these children, conceived as war orphans who suffered in refugee camps in remote inhospitable Africa afflicted by the war. Thanks to their personal diligence the children felt loved, cherished and secure. The wardens made their best effort to ensure that the children enjoyed the full joy of childhood and felt at home in their new environment. At the same time, they attempted to instill

an idea of belongings to Czechoslovakia into children´s minds as the following citation of a Czech caregiver shows:

"We went to every regional event, to every festival with the children. We encouraged them to feel like Bartoshevians, we told them you are not Namibian, you are Czech" (I. Z. November 2018, Přebor).

In order to teach the children Czech in the most effective way Czech teachers and caregivers employed a range of techniques such as learning Czech through memorising Czech songs and rhymes, putting an emphasis on the spoken word through asking simple questions and simple answers, meta-communication in the form of narrating the film children had watched, or verbal depiction of their daily activities (RPI 1986b). Teachers and tutors were recommended by advisors of the RPI to use illustrative examples such as showing and naming the parts of the body, basic needs, periods of the day, seasons etc. when teaching children a basic vocabulary (ibid). Children learned by listening and imitating the language that Czech caregivers and teachers used to communicate, they acquired basic words and basic phrases, they built their basic vocabulary so that they could understand the most important duties and be able to express their basic needs. Pupils finally acquired the fundamentals of Czech grammar (RPI 1986a).¹⁷

Namibian Czechs often recall the intensive teaching drill they had to bear in Czechoslovakia. They remember that they were forced to memorise texts, rhymes and songs by repeating them several times during the day. This drill was quite difficult for the children to cope with as they were all coming from war refugee´s camps where there had been no emphasis on education. The reason for this educational pressure in Czechoslovakia was the perceived need to teach the children Czech as fast as possible (in one and a half month) so that they could start a regular school year in January. This praxis contrasted to that of the GDR where Namibian children were educated in a "preliminary grade"

¹⁷ The language policy claimed that Oshivambo had a negative impact on the pronunciation of Czech (RPI 1986b). The report further specifies details about linguistic problems such as: a softening of Czech words due to the sibilant consonant in Oshivambo, or difficulties of Namibian children to pronounce Czech consonants: H, CH, Ř, Š. As a result, (and on request of Czech teachers) an optional subject "individual language therapy" was established in the second grade of primary school. The RPI report from the first semester of 1986 claimed that within the first two months of intensive teaching Namibian children managed to adopt 300 words, 100 of which they used actively and 200 passively (RPI 1986).

mainly to learn German for an entire school year before starting the first grade of an elementary school (Kenna 1999).

It was not only language ideological approaches but also a distinct political ideology that was part of the learning. The educational task of Namibian tutors was to familiarise children with SWAPO political ideology, socialist values and ideas, and in particular with the importance of the national liberation movement. The teaching of Oshivambo as a language of national culture played a significant role in this context. The children were thus politically indoctrinated by Namibian tutors who had been well trained in political ideology education in SWAPO camps in Angola. They had a clear mission – to instill the patriotism and the idea of a “national culture” into the children’s minds and to stimulate their will to fight for the freedom of Namibia. In order to achieve this goal, two special subjects were added to the learning plan. The first was “Namibian Traditions” where children learnt the Oshivambo language, Ovambo traditions and the history of the colonial oppression of Namibia (respectively of South-West Africa). Another subject was called “Military Education” and aimed at the preparation of older children (groups 4 and 5) to become soldiers.¹⁸ The Namibian educational practices were, however, minor in comparison to the education of the pupils, which consisted of ten lessons¹⁹ in Czech: Fundamentals of Civics and Natural Science (prvouka) (2 hours), Czech Reading (5 hours) and Czech Writing (3 hours). Additionally, they had five hours of mathematics in Czech (RPI 1985/1986).

The fact that Czech and SWAPO communist ideology dominated the educational activities in the boarding schools of Bartošovice and Prachatice is, however, not generally recognised by our respondents as they – as children – reflected the political ideology only subliminally, if at all. Political ideological education both in Czechoslovakia and Namibia addressed especially the youth and young children. These were considered to be representatives of or the symbolical embodiment of a bright socialist (or communist) future. As Vladimír Macura showed in his book “Happy Age” (*Šťastný věk* 2008), children in communist propaganda were embodied in an idea of the golden age of future

18 They learnt, for example, how to shoot with a gun, to dig a trench, and to understand commands in English.

19 One lesson lasted 45 minutes

utopia (communism) because they naturally looked into the future with a spontaneous joy and hope. A smile and the youths were the main characteristics of paradise's inhabitants (Macura 2008: 27–28). Both the SWAPO and the Czechoslovak communist party accentuated the importance of a "collective spirit" ("WE") in the education of children. The ideas of collectivity, friendship and internationality were asserted within the organisation of so-called Pioneers. Namibian Czechs were engaged in the SWAPO pioneer during their stay in Czechoslovakia and publically parading on diverse occasions.²⁰

Let us now have a look at what this dual logic of education meant in praxis. The children's education was divided between a purely Czech program during the day and a purely Namibian program during evenings and weekends. Both educational programs were separated in time. However, in the minds of children this procedure could not be divided so easily. In order to assure Czech education to the Namibian children, RPI issued a directive soon after the arrival of the children to Bartořovice. The directive of boarding school in Bartořovice read:

"Children will speak only Czech from 8 AM, when they leave the boarding house, up to 8 PM, when the working shift of Czech caregivers are changed with Namibians. The morning formation's announcement will be in Oshivambo and the evening announcement will be in Czech."²¹

However, the following citation supports the fact that those strict politics of binary education was not easily comprehended by the Namibian children:

"In Bartořovice and Prachatice we were under pressure, Namibian caregivers taught us Namibian traditions and informed us about the struggle for independence, about the politics in Namibia. They

20 Such as in International Pioneers holiday camps, on the International Women's Day, the International Labour Day and other Czechoslovak National Public holidays, but also on SWAPO's Foundation Day, the Start of SWAPO's Armed Revolt, the Day of the Namibian Hero, the Massacre of Kassinga, the birthday of Sam Nujoma (J. Socha 1988).

21 This extract is from the archival source of the Minutes of sessions with Namibian workers in the primary boarding school in Bartořovice, 24.2.1988. State district archive Novy Jicin, Fond Primary boarding school for Namibian children in Bartořovice, folder Minutes of the Pedagogical Sessions. (Note: the fond has not been processed.)

told us traditional fairy tales of every tribe in Namibia – these were very intense classes that we did not like to go to. We had to learn to count and to recite rhymes in Oshivambo by heart. When we made a mistake they beat us. At the same time, Czech teachers drilled us in Czech language. We had to repeat many times a day tongue twisters to learn to pronounce the Ř sound, then they hammered Oshivambo in us. How can you pronounce that properly when you are talking only in Czech all day! I was completely confused and I did not know who I was. And what’s more – I forgot my Portuguese because of that” (L. I. January 2018, Windhoek).

In order to cope with the multilingual situation children developed complex translanguaging practices as the following quote indicates:

“We first spoke Oshivambo, then as we were learning Czech and a little bit of English we combined it with Czech words and talking half-half, then we spoke only Czech and combined it with Oshivambo and English words, especially in songs, it was very funny. Even now, when we don’t want people from our tribe to understand us we switch to Czech” (O. P. January 2018, Windhoek).

As interviews with Namibian Czechs disclosed, the Namibian tutors seem to have forced children to use Oshivambo in communication with each other with the threat of physical punishment in case of failure.²² This happened mainly when Czech teachers and tutors were no longer present. This requirement was difficult for the children as they quickly

22 All our respondents depicted Namibian tutors as cruel. According to the interviews, they were beating children regularly. Five out of seven Namibian tutors were interviewed in 2018 but all of them denied that they had traumatised the children. The Czech director of the boarding school in Bartošovice admonished Namibian tutors several times against “excessive corporal punishment.” This admonishment was explicitly mentioned in the minutes of the meeting of teachers and tutors. The possible reasons for such violent behaviour of Namibian tutors might have been: (1) an active reproduction of upbringing cultural codes (corporal punishment was common practice in Namibia at the time), (2) frustration from living in Czechoslovakia (tutors did not speak Czech and thus could not properly socialise there, they had left their own children and husbands in Angola, they did not know how long they had to stay in Czechoslovakia) and (3) frustration from a mission unaccomplished – the leader of SWAPO Sam Nujoma, who came to visit the children in Czechoslovakia several times, emphasized that children should not forget their mother tongue and belongings to their “home country.” This goal was, however, difficult to meet by Namibian tutors as the field of education was monopolised by Czech teachers and Czech tutors.

adopted Czech as a main means of communication. Through this experience many children created an aversion to all that was connected with Namibia while, at the same time, they idealized Czech tutors. The following conversation between anthropologist ("A") and respondent ("G") from the group of Namibian Czechs supports this argument:

G: "Czech tutors, we loved them, they took care of us, washed us, fed us, we felt for the first time that there was also something else than fear and anxiety. They were the first to show us what love was. My most favorite caregiver, Svtlna (...) she was the best, she had long golden hair, she looked like Goldilocks from the fairy tales, she was so kind, I loved her. (...) Namibian caregivers ooh, they just beat us because we were naughty during the day..."

A: "What were the particular reasons for beating you?"

G: "For example, that we spoke Czech after the lights had gone off, they beat some of us for wetting our bed [enuresis nocturne – note of the author] (...) I can clearly remember that once they beat a girl just because she had displayed fear" (L. R. January 2008, Oshakati- Namibia).

The next testimony of one of our respondents about the practices of Namibian tutors:

"In Bartořovice, in our group, once we made noise and Ms. B. [a Czech caregiver] said: You make noise like a band of monkeys! Then in the evening we were beaten by the Namibians, they told us we were embarrassing our country, our elders. But imagine, we were just kids, five, seven years old and we were many times beaten and insulted" (S. H. January 2008, Windhoek).

Some of the Namibian Czechs have already processed this trauma (see the first citation below), while others still bear it with them and feel the consequences of this trauma until today in the form of their reluctance to use Oshivambo in everyday interactions (see the second citation below).

"Yes, they beat us badly and often... but I have forgiven them, I can see now that they were also under pressure, they had some mission in the Czech Republic and it started to get out of their control.

They were afraid that we would end up forgetting our languages, they always reminded us why we were here, who we are. They were teaching us everything about war, revolutionary songs, the history of Namibia. They helped us not to forget where we came from. But we were not Namibians, we were born in exile” (A.N. January 2018, Windhoek).

“They forced us to speak Oshivambo, because they did not speak Czech, they thought we were speaking about them, so they did not like it. I remember that once I sang a song we learned at school about a kitty who met the rooster, and the song finishes with the words kokodák, kokodák [clucking] and a black care-giver, she heard ‘odak’ which means a male sexual organ, and she beat me badly for that. I can never forget it, it is still with me” (V. Z. January 2018, Windhoek).

As follows from biographical interviews, some Namibian Czechs reflect their schooling from the point of view of “disciplining” in a Foucauldian sense. This “discourse practices of symbolic domination” mediated by institutional education and ideological education “irritated” the children’s agency and led to different forms of “symbolical resistance” (such as singing songs) as is shown by the following citation:

“Our true personality could not come out. Our personality came out only at school or at the playground but for most of the time we were controlled. You don’t go by yourself, you don’t do that by yourself, everything was programmed. Do this! Don’t do that! It is breakfast time, it is lunch time, it is school time, it is play time, it is drawing time, you know, you get me? We had no freedom! In front of the adults, you could not say, I don’t want to do that, I want to wear a red dress. No! You wear a blue one, because she said that. They said: you go to bed now, and you had to force yourself to sleep ... and I was singing Czech songs in bed and I was beaten for that!” (S. H. January 2018, Windhoek).

The following citation also supports the idea of cultivating the collective spirit as mentioned above. This institutional education finally led to the construction of a “syndrome of collective thinking” that still seems to be prevalent among today’s Namibian Czechs. The

stress on collectivism and the physical proximity of these 56 children during seven formative years of their life significantly influenced their construction of a collective identity and their solidarity within the group. Even today, knowledge of the Czech language represents an important sign of this in-group belongings (WE) in contrast to THEM (Namibians speaking only Oshivambo). I would argue that Namibian Czech children learned to identify with Czech culture through the acquisition of the Czech language mediated by their "significant others" (Czech tutors and teachers). The reason why they struggled to some degree to identify with Namibian culture and Oshivambo might be due to their rejection of most Namibian tutors and the education these conveyed to them. The aversion towards "Namibian culture" was strengthened by the fact that when they returned to Namibia their parents used physical punishment to re-educate them. Moreover, they found themselves in the position of "others," "outsiders" in Namibian society for which they blame SWAPO. This, in turn, led them to insist on their Czech cultural identity as a sort of "symbolical resistance."

Czech Language and Culture after Repatriation of the Namibian Children in 1991

In 1991, when Namibia finally achieved independence and Czechoslovakia had overthrown the communist regime (in 1989), the children were, after intensive diplomatic negotiations, repatriated to Namibia. This political decision had a far-reaching effect on their future lives. In the beginning, they experienced a strong cultural shock because of the difficulties adapting to a different language, climate, and eating and lifestyle habits. They experienced feelings of uprooting, despair and solitude resulting not only from their displacement but in particular from the disintegration of their "primary group" composed of their fellows, Czech teachers and wardens. Alienation was even worse when they found themselves in new families composed of their biological mother, a foster father and the siblings. The process of social and cultural adaptation to a new environment was slow and painful. As they were not fluent in the local language Oshivambo, they often suffered from misunderstandings or even bullying by their classmates. In this situation, they did their best to maintain relationships among each other.

Namibian Czechs narratively remember the difficulties to adapt to local culture, language and their own families after their arrival in 1991. The moment of displacement represents the most significant rupture, or crisis in their biographical narratives, as illustrated by the following example:

“I lived in the house of my grand-mother, we worked on the field planting *mahangu* [pearl millet] every day until I got married. It was difficult to live in a hut. In the village there are huts from grass, in Czech Republic there were houses with two or three floors. In the village there is no electricity. I didn’t want to eat *ofishima* [stiff porridge from pearl millet]. I stopped eating when I arrived, I became so weak. We also had to carry water from the well and baskets to collect fire-wood on our head. I hated walking barefoot ... And also the language, it was a problem I knew only a few words in Oshivambo, I was not able to communicate, everybody was laughing at me when I said a word, so I was silent. But more difficult was pounding *mahangu*, I didn’t know how to do that” (V. V. January 2018, Ondangwa).

Another respondent specifies the language barrier in their family and at school at that time:

“I could not understand my own sister when she talked. She spoke Oshinganjera, which is a dialect of Oshivambo, they sound like they sing when they speak. When she said something I broke into a fit of laughter which made her cry, so then I learned that dialect and I communicated with my sister” (L. I. May 2017, Windhoek).

Due to insufficient knowledge of Oshivambo, which has been commonly used as a teaching language at primary school, the children were placed into lower classes than their local age-sakes just after their return to Namibia.

“It was difficult to use Oshivambo when we came to Namibia. When I wanted water, I said only ‘water’, it was difficult to communicate. In school I already knew things, but I was not able to express myself, so they put me in a lower grade. Because I was smart, I suffered more than all other pupils in the class. I was even more clever than our teacher. But the problem was, that I did not speak their language

... English I learned quickly, it was easy, but Oshivambo, I cannot read Oshivambo up to this day” (J. A. January 2018, Windhoek).

The Namibian Czechs, in particularly those who had the opportunity to study at the secondary schools in Namibia, adopted English as a language of everyday communication. Until today, many of them fluently speak English but are unable to read books or newspapers in Oshivambo. According to their parents they have an incorrect syntax and a strong accent when speaking this local language. This fact leads to their foreignisation within the majority of the Namibian population, where Oshivambo is a sort of lingua franca (in particular in the northern parts of the country). This, in turn, strengthens their feelings of being different.

As many of them had few opportunities to practice Czech during the first years after their return to Namibia, they fixated on reading Czech fairy tales or singing Czech songs just for themselves. Few of them had opportunities to meet their mates from Czechoslovakia and to speak Czech. With the passing of time, they contacted each other mostly by coincidence, or by hearsay. With the spread of mobile phones and social media they finally got in touch and created both virtual and real communities. For those twenty Namibian Czechs who had the opportunity to return to the Czech Republic between 1998 and 2000 to pursue university studies, the Czech language remained the main means of communication within the group members. They strongly identify with Czech culture and transmit this knowledge to their children. The language and culture reproduction is the strongest in Czech-Namibian marriages (three cases). For the rest of the group, knowledge of Czech has steadily started to diminish, being less and less used in everyday communication within the group and has been replaced by English or Oshivambo. Also for the group of Namibian Czechs (“non-returned”), they still consider the Czech language as their “mother tongue” in spite of its “language attrition.”²³ They express regret for losing proficiency in the language, as the following citation demonstrates:

23 “Language attrition” (Köpke and Schmid 2004) is the process of losing competencies in ones primary (or mother tongue) language. This process is generally caused by isolations from speakers of the language and by acquisition and use of a second language that has started to play a dominant role in everyday life.

“They [the Czech embassy] should give us books so that we can read. I lost my language, I speak to myself, so that I don’t forget it. It is a language I grew up with, it is my mother tongue. When I see my friends talking in Czech, I feel so bad, I wish I could not forget it ... when they are singing you just sing melody but forget the words. Here, there is nobody from the group, the same for Grootfontein where my brother stays. We told them to print the textbook, photos, bring us magazines” (N. M. January 2018, Otjiwarongo).

They, however, try to revive it through its passive use (listening to Czech music, watching Czech fairy tales and movies). Few of them never lost the ability to fluently speak Czech, as they maintained everyday contacts with members of the “returned group,” especially in the cities. The chances of meeting Czechs – such as tourists or businessmen – in Namibia are rather small. If it happens, this affects them. They appreciate having a conversation with them, or just listening to them – their Czech, which Namibian Czechs describe as “real Czech” or “pure Czech” – reminds them of their beloved caregivers and teachers, as illustrated by the example below:

“We don’t have a lot of contact with Czech people, we are happy when we see you [the interviewer]! We love to hear Czech but you also bring us many memories. When you speak, we say hey he speaks like Mr. D [who was their favourite teacher in Czechoslovakia], or she speaks like that teacher. So it brings back good memories we have forgotten” (A. N. January 2018, Windhoek).

Czech Belonging among Namibian Czechs

As follows from the previous chapter, most Namibian Czechs (both the ones who returned and those who did not) consider the Czech language their “mother tongue.” They use this language (together with English) as one of the means of communication within their group. Czech also represents an exclusive language that nobody in Namibia understands apart from the members of this group. This exclusivity is particularly beneficial when negotiating with other non-Czechs and Namibians. Czech is thus situationally used as a “secret language.” This, in turn, asserts the function of Czech as a means of strengthening in-group cohesion and solidarity.

As my research indicates, their collective identity is mainly constructed by common memory, which is periodically revived through evoking childhood memories in the form of narratives that circulate mainly within the group, together with the singing of Czech songs. This usually happens during special festive occasions such as Christmas parties, Independence Day, regular meetings organised by themselves or by the Czech Embassy in Pretoria. These acts of remembrance are common even in their joint everyday interactions and in interactions with other members of the Czech community in Namibia.

The sense of belonging to the Czech culture, language and country is situationally revealed in the act of singing the Czech national anthem. The lyrics of the song, such as "Where is my home?" and "Czech land as earthly paradise" resonate deeply with their experience of displacement, and the search for a lost homeland. As Ladislav Holy (1998) has shown, the Czech national anthem is different from many other national anthems in that it does not assert, proclaim or boast the victory over another nation, an enemy or injustice nor as a way to proclaim national identity. The Czech national anthem starts with the question "Where is my home?" proclaiming an uncertainty about our national identity. I agree with Holy who says that the "Czech national hymn tells more about Czechness than any kind of scholarly research can perhaps ever reveal" (Holy 1998:121). Singing Czech hymns evokes and expresses their feelings of love, pride for the country mixed with the feelings of homesickness. Singing the anthem, which happens regularly during the meetings of Namibian Czechs, strengthens their belonging to the Czech country. At the same time, it evokes the memories of their happy childhood conceptualised as paradise. It is worth mentioning that our respondents sing both the Czech and Slovak anthems in one, because at the time when they learned it Czechoslovakia was still one state. The singing of the Czech anthem at the beginning and the end of any collective event reflects their experience of their stay in Czechoslovakia. It is not only the melody that returns Namibian Czechs to the memories of their childhood, when the anthem was sang several times a day as part of the morning and evening formation of so-called "parades" in front of the boarding school, but also, and mainly, the lyrics that refer to their identity ambivalence and home-searching.

Our respondents manifest their Czechness also explicitly in biographical interviews as the following identity statements show:

“When I came back in 1999, I said to myself, oh I am finally home ... For us, *Czechoslovakia is homeland*, Namibia is our second homeland” (V. H. January 2018, Ondangwa).

“I feel in Namibia as in a jail, I met some good people, but still I don’t want to be here, I would be better [off] in Czech ... you know no one from us wanted to leave Czechoslovakia ... It was like going from *paradise* to hell” (N. N. January 2018, Ondangwa).

“Czechoslovakia was a place where I understood what is *love and understanding* for the first time, it was with Ivana (Czech care-giver), she held me and talked to me, I felt save and I realised that there is something else in this world than fear and anxiety” (A. H. January 2018, Oshakati).

“We are *proud of the country* we grew up in, it is our homeland, it is a place where *our personalities were built*” (P. D. September 2017, Windhoek).

“I became a *complete person* there, I am Czech and nobody can take it from me, its *deep in my heart*, I am *talking and thinking in Czech*. I am just worried to lose my language, and my friends in Czech...” (J. E. September 2017, Windhoek).

“Czech Republic, I can never forget my childhood in Czech, it was like in a *fairy tale*, it was something nice to me. I have the best childhood memories, which are always with me, I have *Czech blood circulating in me (...)* I call myself Namibian with Czech blood in me, or *Czech roots* which I don’t want to throw away. I want to keep them with me, they are very *precious* to me” (A. N. January 2018, Windhoek).

The belonging to Czechia as a homeland is proclaimed by the majority of Namibian Czechs. The notions of homeland and home merge and overlap from the respondents’ view. Both are linked to a nostalgic past, and memories from childhood. As follows from the citations above, Namibian Czechs conceptualise home and homeland in an essentialist way. The sense of belonging is expressed by idioms of

language, common blood, roots, love, pride and totality of a person. The homeland becomes a symbolic representation of their childhood and all that is connected to it (such as the appropriation of language, culture, place and social relations). At the same time, the homeland is conceived as an "imagined," "nostalgic place," "lost home where we felt good." This homeland of course exists geographically, they can come back to the spatial location, Bartořovice or Prachatice, where they grew up, but they can never go back in time. The real home thus exists only in their minds, in memories. This finding corresponds to Anderson's idea of an "imagined community" as a "bounded totality beyond the directly apprehended locality and beyond the immediate experience of place" (Anderson 1983: 74). This home or homeland never lost its attraction or familiarity, even if it does not exist anymore in a way our respondents imagine it. It represents nostalgia – a need for something, a missing place (Westin 2000: 42).

Namibian Czechs express their belonging to the Czech nation and culture through various discursive and social practices that can be classified as:

- (1) Regular revitalisations, or ritualisation of memories within the group (narrating stories of their childhood, regarding photos from the period, singing Czech songs and reading and watching fairy tales);
- (2) The active use and maintenance of the Czech language as a means of communication (face-to face and virtual communication);
- (3) Cultural reproduction of Czech customs, traditions and life-style habits;
- (4) The visualization and performance of symbols referring to their "Czechness";
- (5) The act of symbolical domination through the Czech language and culture.

Ad (1) *Ritualisation of memories by means of symbolic language*

The use of the symbolic language of Czech fairy tales and songs plays an important role in the construction of identity among the Namibian Czechs I interviewed. They are all very familiar with Czech fairy tales as they used to listen to and watch them during their stay

in Czechoslovakia. The tales, even after 28 years of living in Namibia, arguably still represent the most important symbolic resource of Czech culture. The importance of fairy tales for the socialisation, enculturation and mental development of children has been stressed by many social scientists. As our research disclosed, the fairy tales are important for our respondents not only because they help them to maintain their Czech but also for their power of symbols, in particular metaphors which enable to switch between different codes in a broader semantic field (da Silva 2018). In a metaphor, a new configuration is produced by the juxtaposition of two frames of reference of which the reader must be simultaneously aware. Arguably, this is a “transaction between contexts” (Richard quoted in Barbour 1974: 120). The symbols in fairy tales endowed with emotional value are powerful (as the citation below illustrates). Fairy tales depicts an ideal state of “being in the world” filled with love, wisdom, the good to win over evil and as a general goal of life. In the face of the insecurities of life (in this case, a life-crisis of Namibian Czechs after forced repatriation), fairy tales contributed to a reduction of anxiety. They are a source of security and a symbolic resolution of conflicts (Barbour 1974). The following citation clearly illustrates the power of symbolical language as mentioned above:

“I still watch Czech fairy tales, we all watch them. I am always happy when watching them ... I watched them the most when I was looking forward to the Czech Republic [after their repatriation in 1991]. We really believed that the fairyland existed parallel to the land of people, that’s why we started to believe in the good. And some of our caregivers looked like those princesses (...) We also believed when coming back to Namibia that Rumburak²⁴ would come to us and cover us with his coat and we would find ourselves in the world of fairy tales, at home. So now that we are adults, I believe that the good exists inside us, that fairy tales are the good and our own world is the evil. And you must strive so those fairy tales still exist in a way you behave good and you ignore the world outside, that someone wants to kill you or beat you...” (K. H. September 2017, Windhoek).

24 Rumburak is a Czech fairy tale character of a magician who inhabits both the magic and human world.

As is evident from the quote above, the fairy tales that our respondent watched and read during childhood have strongly influenced his understanding of the world and of social relations. He was not the only one who saw good fairy-tale characters in their Czech caregivers. Even today, our respondents (both male and female), mention fairy-tale characters as having had an emotional effect, including Sleeping Beauty, Cinderella and in particular Goldilocks, which corresponded to the blond caregivers they loved the most. The emotional dynamics of these symbols linked to the transaction of context might be demonstrated by the fact, that Namibian Czechs re-appropriated these symbols during their emotionally negative life crises but also during the biographical ruptures charged with positive emotions such as having their first born child. Four of our respondents gave their first born daughters names of Czech fairy tales characters, in particular princesses such as Cinderella, Goldilocks, Maruřka and Svtлана (the last two are the names of princesses from Czech famous fairy tales).

The majority of Namibian Czechs watch fairy tales regularly on the Internet or on CDs that circulate within the group. Reading or watching Czech fairy tales, similarly as singing Czech songs, helps our respondents to keep up their Czech language skills. At the same time, it represents a sort of psychological therapy that help them to escape from hardship in their lives or homesickness. The following statements testify this:

"When I came to Namibia, I was reading that fairy tale book every day, again and again so that I would not forget my language. One day my parents took it and burnt it. I was very angry" (V. V. January 2018, Ondangwa).

"Everybody got a book of *pohdky* [fairy tales] as a gift from the Czech caregivers before we left. I still have it with me, it is like a Bible for me. I read it when I feel bad" (S. January 2018, Windhoek).

"I've had my favorite book in Prachatice and I keep it until now. I used to read the stories often, I read it when I miss my country" (N. N. January 2018, Walvis-Bay).

"I will never forget Czech songs. I sing them not to forget my language. When I am singing these songs I feel better, I can even

hear the voices of others [children used to sing in a choir and perform in Czechoslovakia] (...) When I came back, I felt the most desperate. I pastured cows alone and I always sang our hymn” (E. A. January 2018, Ondangwa).

As we have seen, the symbols have been used mainly as a tool for managing stress, fear, desperation, isolation and alienation resulting from the cultural distance the children were experiencing after their return to Namibia in 1991. As Czech as a communication tool was not maintained during the first years after their return (the children were separated and scattered all over the country and could not keep in touch), they used Czech in its symbolic forms (fairy tales, songs).

Ad (2) The Czech language of in-group communication

Some Namibian Czechs construct their identity by actively maintaining the Czech language in face-to face interactions, which are regular among those living in the same town, sharing the same lifestyle and habitus or by virtual communication via social media at in-group WhatsApp platforms such as “Naše československo” (Our Czechoslovakia), “Czech and Slovak group” and “ČechSlovak Společnost” (Czech and Slovak Society). The majority of Namibian Czechs maintain the Czech language passively by watching Czech films (in particular fairy tales), listening to Czech music, checking Czech political and cultural news and watching cooking programs on the Internet.

Ad (3) The maintenance of Czech customs, traditions and life-style habits

Namibian Czechs express their belonging to the Czech language and culture through the cultural reproduction of various festive activities such as celebrating Christmas with a Christmas tree, gifts and traditional Czech food dishes; celebrating birthdays and making a cake for their children. They also practice “ordinary” Czech leisure activities such as: going for long walks; going for holiday trips; reading; hiking in the mountains –many of which are seen as “strange” or “European” habits by other Oshiwambo-speaking Namibians. Many of them stick to keeping the social and moral codes they learned in childhood and reproduce them to their offspring. Male respondents still remember and follow the Czech proverb “a man cannot hit a woman even with a flower” and they strictly reject domestic violence. The majority of

Namibian Czechs maintain social behaviour codes they claim to have learnt in Czechoslovakia such as: "washing one's hands before eating" or "not talking and eating at the same time"; "not to be loud"; "not to be late"; "not to be rude" etc. The Namibian Czechs I interviewed, in particular the women, transmit this knowledge to their children:

"I say to my children, I grew up in Europe, you have to have my mentality, not like these villagers! Even if you finish your studies you have to go to Europe ... You know, here people are too loud, they can't behave ... they come and take things without having asked you beforehand, they visit you all the time, they come unexpectedly to your house, I don't like this concept of extended family, they think you suffer alone, but I suffer when they come! (...) Another problem here is that they don't stick to time, here it takes one hour for one to come late, without calling you. You whites you keep time and I like that" (N. M. January 2018, Otjiwarongo).

Ad (4) Visualization and performance of symbols

Namibian Czechs express their "Czechness" also by visualisation and the public performance of various symbols such as the wearing of a cap with a symbol of the Czech flag; choosing a Czech "Skoda" car; using mobile phone ring tones with melodies from classic Czech fairy tales or pre-1989 disco songs; using Czech nicknames when addressing each other and, as mentioned before, using Czech fairy tale names of princesses for their offspring.

Ad (5) Linguistic-symbolic practices

Particularly interesting are the semiotic practices of transmitting Czech expressions for the naming of towns, people, or various things into the Namibian context. By using, for example, Czech denominations for Namibian objects and places, Namibian Czechs endow it with a special symbolic and emotional value that in turn helps them to familiarise with culturally distant (sometimes even hostile) environments. These discursive meaning-makings of Czech Namibians are illustrated best with the following examples:

a) When many Namibian Czechs talk about money (asking for the price of goods, or when they are asking to borrow money) they often

use the expression “koruny,” or “kačky” meaning “crowns,” i.e. Czech currency.

b) Many Namibian Czechs give Czech names to Namibian towns. For example, they call Windhoek (the capital of Namibia) “Praha” (the capital of the Czech Republic) or Walvis Bay “České Budějovice,” the place where the majority of them studied at university. They also use Czech names for Namibian regions, for example Ovamboland is called Morava (Moravia is the eastern part of the Czech Republic which is symbolically linked to stereotypes such as “traditional,” “having plenty of food and wine,” “inhabited by good people with open hearts”). Interesting to note is that no place in Namibia is symbolically linked to the place of their childhood (Bartošovice and Prachatice). This fact might be interpreted as a reluctance to make use of a symbolic transition (as in the case of transfer of the names of princesses to their children), because many Namibian Czechs simply do not conceive of Namibia as home or a homeland but a place where they “stay,” “work,” “dwell,” or “live.”

c) Our respondents add Czech diminutive suffixes to the names of Namibian ethnic groups, such as “Vambíci” (Ovambo), “Kapřící” (Caprivi), etc.

Multiple Identities of Namibian Czechs

The Namibian Czechs investigated are bearers of a double or bi-cultural identity of Namibian and Czech, which the emic term “Namibian Czech” discloses. They like to use the idiom “we are two in one.” This dual identity with prevalent belonging to the Czechness is at the same time ambivalent and problematic. The majority of our respondents feel strangers or outsiders in both countries as the following statement supports:

“I finally realized that I was a stranger everywhere. When I am in Namibia, people watch me and see me as a stranger because I do not master the tribal language Oshivambo as they do, I think differently as they do. And when I come back to the Czech Republic, I have to be a stranger again, because I am black” (L. I. January 2018, Windhoek).

The ambivalent identity of Namibian Czechs has much in common with the identity of exiles, in particular those living in diaspora. Diasporic identities are often defined as symbolically mediated by collectively shared memories of displacement, the sense of a common fate, of shared presence and responsibility. Like diaspora exiles, Namibian Czechs share the experience of displacement. Another commonality is an ambivalent identity and permanent "state of betweenness" which refers to the feeling of non-belonging there or here (Fouron 2003; Al-Ali 2002). Like diaspora exiles our respondents live in two hardly compatible worlds, whereas they are not able to live in either of them happily. As they often say, they feel "as strangers in both countries." This argument is particularly compelling when we take into account their conception of home. Although each of them has an individual home in Namibia, they all have a "collectively shared home" beyond the pale of place they actually reside and beyond the time they actually live. This sort of "imagined home" is situated in Czechoslovakia and lives in their shared memories.

Whereas Czechness is rather inscribed from the inside and they identify with it internally, Namibianess is inscribed from the outside, by their structural belonging to a Namibian state through Namibian citizenship. They are identified as so called "CLS children" (children born during the liberation struggle)²⁵ as the majority of them are offspring of Namibian heroes, who died during the national struggle for independence.

Many of our respondents denied their belonging to Namibian culture, which they conceived as strange and alien. Namibia is conceived as a place where they live and work, a place they are not emotionally tied to and which they are ready to leave without any remorse. Few of our respondents explicitly deny any feeling of belonging to Namibia and even reject the term "Namibian Czech":

"We are not Namibian Czechs, we are Black Czechs, we have nothing to do with Namibia, we were not even born here! We were raised in Czechoslovakia, we speak Czech and we belong there" (S. N. January 2018, Walvis Bay).

25 Synonyms for CLS are struggle kids or SWAPO kids.

Some Namibian Czechs claim to have only become aware of their ethnic origin when they returned to Namibia, but they refuse to consider it significant in their identity construction, as the following statement illustrates:

“When we were in Czechoslovakia, we did not know that we are Ovambos and that one is a bushman, or a Caprivi. For us, we were all the same, and this lasts until now. We just learned it [the existence of different ethnic origins] after our return to Namibia ... it has not been important for us” (G. N. January 2018, Ondangwa).

Those Namibian Czechs who experienced racism both in Namibia and in the Czech Republic after their return in 1991 also refuse to judge people according to their ethnic or racial origin. As follows from the interviews, the feeling of belonging of Namibian Czechs is far from being solely bi-cultural, which holds true particularly for those who are living in large Namibian cities where globalisation and westernisation affects people’s everyday lives. The spread of consumerist Euro-American lifestyles in fashion, food and in other fields in Namibian cities, in fact, resonates to a certain measure with the lifestyle they learnt in Czechoslovakia. This is particularly evident in cases of festive days such as Christmas (Namibian Czechs buy, for instance, Christmas trees and decorate it). Their multiple identities are visible also in the practice of “code switching” between Czech, Oshivambo and English, which is always situationally conditioned.

When they initially returned to Namibia the process of adaptation to another culture was difficult and painful, as the cultural difference between both countries was immeasurably large. This resulted in profound confusion, isolation, alienation and feelings of their own otherness, which led to a sort of “cultural and linguistic ghettoisation” in their minds, i.e., a confirmation of Czech culture and life style in their memories. Many of them isolated themselves socially, and did not make new friends. The only social relations they strived to maintain were those relations with their friends from childhood by direct contact or by correspondence with them, as well as with their Czech caregivers and adoptive families. They have become fully aware of being different in negative ways. The most common public opinion about the Namibian children who grew up in Czechoslovakia they used to hear was:

“you are troublesome exile kids,” “naughty children who do not want to adapt,” “you had your life on a golden platter, you are spoilt!” “go back to Europe, your soul is white” or “you are rebellious and malcontent.”²⁶

However, later on, they developed their own agency and learned how to capitalise on their ascribed otherness. They describe it in terms of attraction, cosmopolitanism and intelligence, as demonstrated by the following three citations:

“I see Namibia with different eyes than the majority of Namibians, because I lived in Czechoslovakia, I was educated there and I came back smart” (A. N. January 2018, Windhoek).

“Oh yes, we feel special, we can never be like Namibians. You know, we are lucky to have had the opportunity to live in both countries. Now we can see how it does not work here, the economy, education, there are many things that have to improve” (V. H. January 2018, Windhoek).

“I feel like two in one, I feel special and unique. When I am in Czech, I attract attention; when I am in Namibia I am also considered to be special because of my language and behaviour” (K. P. January 2018, Windhoek).

Many Namibian Czechs claimed their “specialness,” because they had the opportunity to gain insight into two different worlds during the formative years of their lives and as such they see more than those who stayed only in one. They want to exploit this experience and the skills gained in the public sector. Many of them tend to be engaged in programs aimed at the vulnerable, they are interested in the counseling of socially disadvantaged or sexually abused women. One respondent is trying to introduce a new study program for social rehabilitation, in which he graduated in the Czech Republic, at the university level. Another one is involved in public education concerning the recreational use of marihuana and fights for its legalisation in Namibia.

26 Personal communication with our respondents, their parents and Namibian friends.

Conclusion

The education and upbringing of Namibian children in Czechoslovakia has played a significant role in the construction of socio-cultural identities of Namibian Czechs. Given that most of them spent very formative years in Czechoslovakia and passed through the Czech education system and were warmly received by their Czech educators, this is not surprising. Many found adoptive Czech families that substituted their missing biological families. Czech was the only language of instruction at all levels during their seven-years stay in Czechoslovakia. It became the main tool in the process of socialisation and enculturation of the children. The adoption of the Czech language and culture enabled them to participate in the local community, which strengthened their feelings of belonging to a Czech cultural value system. After their repatriation in 1991, the children came to realise the difference in their linguistic and cultural belonging leading to feelings of alienation and otherness. In this process of othering, the awareness of their own distinctiveness, both from Namibians and Czechs, led to their complicated and complex identities.

One third of them had the opportunity to come back to study at Czech universities between 1998 and 2002. The members of this group of “returned” individuals fluently speak Czech and declare their belonging to Czech culture. They also transmit knowledge of the Czech language and culture to their children. On the other hand, some of the “non-returned” individuals have lost the ability to fluently speak Czech. They, however, continuously practice it through the various symbolic forms – by reading and watching Czech fairy tales or by listening to and singing Czech songs. This praxis is prevalent in both groups and maintains, circulates and reproduces the cultural and communicative memory of Namibian Czechs.

Their collective identity has not only been shaped by intensive politics of “czechisation” and the trauma of displacement, but also by a resistance to Ovambo-SWAPO culture nurtured by their feelings that SWAPO was responsible for their cultural alienation. Our respondents blame politicians of manipulating their lives when sending them back to Namibia without any previous preparation. They also blame them for not having supported them financially and institutionally after their return. As a result, many Namibian Czechs found themselves in

precarious financial situations without possibilities to continue their studies. At least one third of them ended up in remote villages and suffered from poverty. The deeply rooted negative attitude towards Ovambo culture and language cultivated during those seven years in Czechoslovakia and the traumatic memories of aggressive educational methods among some of the Namibian care-takers perhaps explains why the Namibian Czechs we interviewed claim their belonging to Czechness.

However, Namibian Czechs have always been multilingual individuals. Although as children they adopted Czech as their primary language in Czechoslovakia, after their return to Namibia they re-learned Oshivambo and English (and also Afrikaans in certain regions). English, the only official language of Namibia, is commonly used by the majority of Namibian Czechs today. It is, however, interesting to see that although Czech is used minimally as a language of everyday interaction it is still creatively used through various semiotic practices that foster their collective identity. As I have illustrated above, the use of Czech on communicative and symbolical levels enables Namibian Czechs to express their Czechness. Both of these aspects also plays a central role in the strengthening of their in-group solidarity and cohesion.

The identity of Namibian Czechs is dynamic and constantly negotiated. During their stay in Czechoslovakia Czechness was somehow imposed unto them (through the dominating educational policy), but after their return they also internalized these belongings to Czechness in multiple and complex ways. The experiences of otherness both in Namibia and later on in Czechia, led to the construction of bi-cultural ambivalent identities. In the course of time they partially re-integrated into Namibian society and today most of them engage in diverse multilingual and multicultural practices. Multiple semiotic resources are mobilised and, as is the case for many Namibians, code-switching is part of their everyday lives. The maintenance of Czech language and culture continuously leads to a sense of Czech cultural belonging and fosters the in-group cohesiveness of Namibian Czechs. Importantly, none of these belongings is mutually exclusive; on the contrary, they mingle, overlap and capture the complexity of their identities.

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