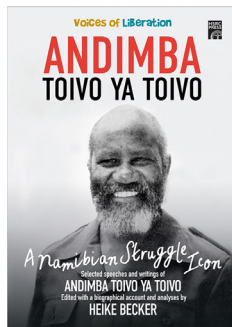


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Andimba Toivo ya Toivo: A Namibian Struggle Icon

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The place of political biographies in the post-liberation dispensation

This volume of the 'Voices of Liberation' series traces the political life of Namibian struggle icon Andimba Toivo ya Toivo. Reading this text in 2026, as the vicious scourge of xenophobic attacks escalates across South Africa and anti-immigrant rhetoric spreads rapidly across the globe, this book's timeliness is undeniable. It serves as a poignant reminder that the contemporary fight for justice and equality on the African continent is firmly rooted in an older pan-Africanist struggle. Moreover, as Heike Becker shows throughout the book, ya Toivo remained dedicated to the realisation of Namibian liberation. Even towards the end of his life, in the post-liberation dispensation, ya Toivo remained a strong advocate for meaningful political and economic freedom. Speaking out against the rise of tribalism and self-enrichment, he remained stubbornly devoted to a vision of a just and equitable society for all Namibians.

With regard to its structure and style, the text is accessible to an audience interested in engaging with the history of Namibia mediated through and alongside the life and legacy of a prominent political figure. Weaving between the medium of biography and the national history of Namibia's colonial, anti-colonial and post-liberation past, Becker moves away from a hagiographic retelling of the life of a political icon. Becker instead mediates ya Toivo's public life with greater nuance, at times featuring ya Toivo in his own words. Becker admits that, while ya Toivo was neither a consistently eloquent orator nor a writer, he made a significant and lasting impact on Namibian society. In the text, Becker contends that ya Toivo's most notable contributions to the Namibian struggle against colonialism and apartheid went beyond his personal devotion to the struggle. Becker depicts ya Toivo's ability to work within and establish networks of support in Namibia and internationally that advanced the nationalist cause.

Considering the relevance of this body of work, it is important to situate the text within broader discourses surrounding the place and purpose of political biographies produced in post-colonial contexts. Becker's sketch of ya Toivo's life tells the story of personal determination deeply invested and embedded within collective struggle. This approach is noteworthy because it foregrounds the transnational connections and personal sacrifices required to bring about liberation. While Becker adopts a conventional approach to biography, she attempts to avoid the pitfalls of the genre which tends to centre on the efforts and agentic power of the singular actor. Becker successfully portrays ya Toivo as a product of his time and the movements he was part of, rather than as a singularly exceptional individual. This perspective offers a more layered understanding of the ties that shape the lives and legacies of political icons. By contextualising ya Toivo in this manner, Becker alludes to the collaborative nature of liberation movements and the collective effort required to attain freedom. This approach challenges traditional biographical narratives that glorify individual heroes by emphasising the importance of organising, community and solidarity in the fight against oppression.

By locating Ya Toivo's biography within a broader narrative, the text also tells a richer story of the Namibian struggle for independence. Going beyond merely providing context for the central narrative, Becker demonstrates how individual lives are shaped by, and in opposition to, socio-political conditions. Moreover, while Becker admits that the national narrative so central to this text has been told many times before, she brings to light more obscure dimensions of Namibian history. In these efforts to provide texture and depth to an already well-documented history, Becker also shows a keen interest in the makings of urban social life in Namibia and the links between everyday lived experiences and political activism. These minutiae of life are often overshadowed by the grand narratives of organised political movements. Constructing the narrative of ya Toivo's life in this way emphasises the importance of recognising the role of emerging black urban culture and mobility in the wake of World War II, ultimately revealing a complex interplay of political struggle.

Across the three parts of this book, the themes of enduring resistance and resilience emerge as central to understanding the intricacies of the fight for Namibian independence. The text is important for this reason, as it demonstrates the similarities and particularities of anti-colonial and anti-apartheid movements across the continent. Considering this throughline, the text has as much to do with the story of a Namibian struggle icon as it does with political resistance across Africa. Ya Toivo's and others of his generation's fight against colonial occupation and apartheid imposition offers a glimpse into the present-day potential of intercontinental solidarity in the face of oppression. The text serves as a reminder of the importance of preserving and learning from histories of resistance movements on the continent. Rather than offering an overly sympathetic and romanticised reflection on these histories, revisiting these pasts allows us to imagine the potential for solidarity on the continent anew.