

**ENDURING SUFFERING: THE CASSINGA MASSACRE OF
NAMIBIAN EXILES IN 1978 AND THE CONFLICTS BETWEEN
SURVIVORS' MEMORIES AND TESTIMONIES**

BY

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ABSTRACT

During the peak of apartheid, the South African Defence Force (SADF) killed close to a thousand Namibian exiles at Cassinga in southern Angola. This happened on May 4 1978. In recent years, Namibia commemorates this day, nationwide, in remembrance of those killed and disappeared following the Cassinga attack. During each Cassinga anniversary, survivors are modelled into 'living testimonies' of the Cassinga massacre. Customarily, at every occasion marking this event, a survivor is delegated to unpack, on behalf of other survivors, 'memories of Cassinga' so that the inexperienced audience understands what happened on that day. Besides survivors' testimonies, edited video footage showing, among others, wrecks in the camp, wounded victims laying in hospital beds, an open mass grave with dead bodies, SADF paratroopers purportedly marching in Cassinga is also screened for the audience to *witness* the *agony* of that day. Interestingly, the way such presentations are constructed draw challenging questions. For example, how can the visual and oral presentations of the Cassinga violence epitomize actual memories of the Cassinga massacre? How is it possible that such presentations can generate a sense of remembrance against forgetfulness of those who did not experience that traumatic event? When I interviewed a number of survivors (2007 - 2010), they saw no analogy between testimony (visual or oral) and memory. They argued that memory unlike testimony is personal (solid, inexplicable and indescribable). Memory is a "true picture" of experiencing the Cassinga massacre and enduring pain and suffering over the years. In considering survivors' challenge to the visually and orally obscured realities of the Cassinga massacre, this study will use a more lateral and alternative approach. This is a method of attempting to interrogate, among other issues of this study, the understanding of Cassinga beyond the inexperienced economies of this event production. The study also explores the different agencies, mainly political, that fuel and exacerbate the victims' unending pathos. These invasive miseries are anchored, according to survivors, in the "disrupted expectations" or forsaken human dignity of survivors and families of the missing victims, especially following Namibia's independence in 1990.

DECLARATION

I declare that “Enduring Suffering: the Cassinga massacre of Namibian exiles in 1978 and the conflicts between survivors’ memories and testimonies” is my own work and has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

Vilho Amukwaya Shigwedha

20 December 2011

Signed.....

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ABBREVIATIONS

ANC	African National Congress (of South Africa)
FAPLA	Forças Armadas Popular da Libertação de Angola (People's Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola)
MPLA	Movimento Popular da Libertação de Angola (People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola)
NAPLA	Namibian People's Liberation Army
PLAN	People's Liberation Army of Namibia
SADF	South African Defence Force
SWALA	South West Africa Liberation Army
SWAPO	South West Africa People's Organisation
SWAPOL	South West African Police
SWATF	South West Africa Territorial Force
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa
UNITA	União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola)

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Overture

The war for the independence of Namibia (1966 - 1989) gained new impetus and a “road map” following Angola’s independence in November 1975.¹ During the peak of the armed liberation struggle, the South West Africa People’s Organization (SWAPO) which fought a protracted war against South Africa’s colonial occupation of Namibia (mainly from outside Namibia) also administered a cluster of camps hosting Namibian civilian exiles who escaped violence in the war zones.² Most of these camps were located in southern Angola. Cassinga³ was one of such camps.

¹ Robert S. Jaster, *South Africa in Namibia: the Botha strategy* (Lanham, New York and London: University Press of America, 1985), pp. 20-23.

² Namibian civilian population groups endured untold painful experiences during South African colonial and military repression, particularly in Owamboland, with forced displacement of people from their places of birth into exile in search of protection, educational opportunities and quite a number joined the People’s Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN). See International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa (IDAF), *Namibia: the facts* (London: IDAF publications Ltd., 1989), pp. 57 - 77.

³ According to Tor Sellstrom, “in the early 1976 the MPLA government allocated various sites - including the abandoned mining centre at Kassinga - to SWAPO in the southern Huila and Cunene provinces, where the organization could set up reception centres for refugees pouring out of Namibia, as well as military bases.” Tor Sellström, *Sweden and national liberation in Southern Africa: solidarity and assistance 1970 – 1994, Vol. 11* (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2002), pp. 350 - 352. So, before the attack, Cassinga was SWAPO’s largest reception centre for exiled Namibians. In northern Namibia, the name Cassinga (situated some 260km from Namibia’s north central border with Angola) is famous as it is historically, long before Angola’s war for independence, linked to crude methods of mining iron ore which was a practice of artisans in certain communities in north central Namibia. Blacksmiths from the Oukwanyama communities frequented Cassinga for iron ore extraction. This happened before the Portuguese appropriated and developed Cassinga into a modern mining site. Oral history gives no clue about the exact period when local artisans frequented Cassinga for iron-ore extraction. Nonetheless, it appears that following the collapse of Portugal colonial rule in Angola, the mine at Cassinga was no longer productive. At the start of the Angolan Civil War (1975-2002), according to my interview with Paavo Max, a few abandoned buildings at Cassinga were temporarily occupied by the Cuban soldiers before they relocated to a permanent base at Oshamutete (this local name is often spelled Techamutete). Sometime in 1976, SWAPO settled a population of civilians escaping armed violence in northern Namibia at Cassinga. SWAPO named the settlement at Cassinga “Moscow.” The naming of this settlement after the capital city of the former Soviet Union emphasized the importance of the Soviet Union in providing political and military support to SWAPO during the liberation struggle. According to the SADF planning of the attack, Cassinga is code named “Alpha” camp.

The People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN)⁴ guerilla combat units infiltrated northern Namibia from SWAPO military fronts⁵ in southern Angola. In many instances, civilians crossing the Namibian northern border into Angola were escorted by armed PLAN fighters on foot. In most cases, civilians were first taken to FAPLA camps,⁶ closest to the Namibian border, for rest, food, medication, logistics and would wait there for transportation to SWAPO camps. Once they did, PLAN fighters who escorted them returned to their operational areas in northern Namibia.

A distance of 10km, on both sides of the border, was uninhabited due to forced removal of people who lived there before the war. The South African Defence Force (SADF) had removed all vegetation and proclaimed the desolated space a no-go area. The distance along the border was fenced with steel wires. Nonetheless, SWAPO fighters demolished the fence regularly, at particular points, to allow access and exit into both countries. So, although the SADF had a strong presence of combat troops along Namibia's north western and north central border with Angola, which resulted in unaccounted-for loss of civilian lives, the long border between the two countries was nevertheless porous. It was not always possible to maintain security presence at every point of the border, especially at night. This is how many people fled from Namibia into southern Angola, into SWAPO camps, as refugees.

In response to the unstoppable exodus of civilians crossing the border to seek refuge in Angola, the SADF army and air force frequented Namibian exiles' camps in neighbouring countries with deadly attacks from the air and land. On 4 May 1978 Cassinga, also known as "Moscow," suffered the heaviest single day loss of innocent civilian lives during the entire period of the Namibian armed liberation struggle. The camp hosted a population of 4,098 civilians⁷ on the date of the attack. The massacre at Cassinga started with the SADF Air force bombardment of the camp. This was followed by a drop into Cassinga of SADF paratroopers. According to available

⁴ Prior to 1966, PLAN was named South West Africa Liberation Army (SWALA). This army was again renamed the Namibian People's Liberation Army (NAPLA) and subsequently, the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN). At independence, members of PLAN joined the new Namibian Defence Force comprising of former erstwhile fighters.

⁵ SWAPO had three military Fronts or Regions. These were: the North Western Front, Northern Front and the Eastern Front.

⁶ FAPLA stands for Forças Armadas Populares de Libertação de Angola / People's Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola (English translation).

⁷ International Defence & Aid Fund, "Remember Cassinga and other papers on political prisoners and detainees in Namibia." *Fact Papers on Southern Africa*, No. 9 (London: Canon Collins House, 1981), pp. 30 - 31.

records, “370 combat troops” jumped into the settlement.⁸ This number (370 paratroopers) contradicts other sources. Edward Alexander reports that on the evening before the Cassinga massacre, 498 paratroopers were transported by eight large transport aircraft: four C-130 Hercules and four C-160 Transalls from Bloemspruit in South Africa to the SADF’s large operational rear-area logistics base at Grootfontein in northern Namibia.⁹ According to SWAPO, “a combat force of 1500 South African troops was involved” in the attack.¹⁰ It is however not reported how SWAPO obtained its figures. Nonetheless, the precise number of paratroopers involved in the Cassinga attack does not concern this study as much as the level of unacceptable killing of unarmed civilians that the paratroopers are accused of effecting in Cassinga.

Survivors told me that the explosives from the aerial bombardment wounded more people than they killed: the greater number of people was killed by the paratroopers on the ground. However, the precise number of people killed and missing in Cassinga fluctuates. It varies significantly from written report to written report and from one oral account to the other. In *To be Born a Nation: the liberation struggle for Namibia*, it is reported that “out of 3000 (which contradicts the other figure given above) people living there, 867 were killed and 464 wounded and over 200 taken prisoner and hauled off to prison camps in Namibia.”¹¹ However, according to survivors, the SADF took no captives from Cassinga: except in ‘Vietnam’ or Osheetekela (commonly spelled as Chetequera)¹² where over 200 Namibians were rounded up by the SADF and

⁸ Jan Breytenbach, *Eagle Strike: the story of the controversial airborne assault on Cassinga 1978* (Sandton: Manie Grove Publishing, 2008), pp. 152 & 242.

⁹ Edward Alexander, “The Cassinga raid” (UNISA: unpublished MA Thesis, July 2003), p. 117.

¹⁰ International Defence & Aid Fund, “Remember Cassinga and other papers on political prisoners and detainees in Namibia.” *Fact papers on Southern Africa, No. 9* (London: Canon Collins House, 1982), p. 31.

¹¹ Department of Information and Publicity (SWAPO of Namibia), *To be Born a Nation* (London: Zed Press, 1981), p. 242.

¹² Chetequera is perhaps the Portuguese way of writing the name which the South Africans appropriated in their planning documents for the Cassinga attack. Osheetekela or “Vietnam” was situated in the area of Oshikango shaPopawa, about 2km from Namibia’s north western border with Angola. This is where the headquarters of PLAN’s north western front which at the time of the attack was commanded by Wilbard “Nakada” Tashiya was located. The attack of ‘Vietnam,’ was launched by land and air on the noon of May 4, 1978. The commander of the raid was Frank Bestbier. Nonetheless, in spite of being a military camp, “Vietnam” also served as a transit camp for civilians escaping from Namibia before they were transported to Cassinga. As such, the majority of the people captured in “Vietnam” were civilians, en-route to the Cassinga refugee camp. For a summary of the Vietnam attack see Appendix E: the author’s interview with Rev. Samwel Mateus Shiininge, a survivor of the Vietnam attack (interviewed at Etunda, 2008); also available in the interview with Rev. Andreas Shomawe, survivor of the Vietnam attack (interviewed at Okahao, 2009).

transported overland to prisons in Namibia.¹³ The report by Peter Katjavivi breaks down the figures as follows:

612 Namibian refugees killed (147 men, 167 women and 298 children); 12 Angolan soldiers and 3 Angolan citizens killed. 611 Namibian refugees wounded; 63 Angolan soldiers and 15 Angolan civilians wounded.¹⁴

Mvula ya Nangolo and Tor Sellstrom replicate the figures provided by Katjavivi. They reported “612 dead.” Of this number, “298 were children, 167 women and 147 men. Another 611 ... were physically wounded, while many more were affected by gas and most of the Cassinga survivors ... were mentally traumatized by the gruesome events they had witnessed.”¹⁵ Survivors (those I have interviewed) feel that the number of the people killed in Cassinga is much higher than the published figures. Some written reports corroborate survivors’ position. According to Nangolo and Sellstrom, “the precise number of those killed at Cassinga might never be known as some of the wounded who died in foreign hospitals were not recorded as Cassinga victims and others disappeared during the attack.”¹⁶ Much like the exact death toll of civilians which remains unknown, the exact number of the missing is also unknown. The general perception in northern Namibia, *Owamboland*, where most of the Cassinga victims came from, is that each family has lost a family member(s), relative(s) or neighbour(s) in Cassinga.

The plan for the Cassinga massacre was conceived at a secret meeting held on the Thursday of December 29, 1977. On this date, “five key people met with B. J. Vorster, South African Prime Minister. They were the Minister of Defence (P. W. Botha), the Minister of Foreign Affairs (R. F. ‘Pik’ Botha), the Chief of the South African Defence Force (General Magnus Malan), the Secretary of Foreign Affairs (Brand Fourie), and the Chief of the South African Army (Constand Viljoen).”¹⁷ The subject of their secret meeting was the negotiations around South West Africa (Namibia) and specifically how to ensure that South Africa’s supported Democratic Turnhalle

¹³ Department of Information and Publicity, *To be Born a Nation*, p. 242.

¹⁴ Peter Katjavivi, *A history of resistance in Namibia* (London and Paris: James Currey, UNESCO Press, 1988), pp. 110. Cited in the People’s Republic of Angola “White papers (presented at the UN General Assembly session in 1983) on acts of aggression by the racist South African regime against the People’s Republic of Angola, 1975 - 1982 (Luanda, 1983), p. 15.

¹⁵ Mvula ya Nangolo & Tor Sellstrom, *Kassinga a story untold* (Windhoek: Namibia Book Development Council, 1995), p. 36; Tor Sellström, *Sweden and national liberation in Southern Africa*, pp. 352-357.

¹⁶ Annemarie Heywood, *The Cassinga event* (Windhoek: National Archives of Namibia, 1994), pp. 36-37; Mvula ya Nangolo & Tor Sellstrom, *Kassinga a story untold*, p. 36.

¹⁷ Edward Alexander, “The Cassinga raid,” pp. 80-91.

Alliance (DTA) could win the UN supervised elections planned for Namibia in 1978. During this meeting, Alexander argues that P. W. Botha reasoned as follows:

To win the political battle in Owamboland (the most populous part of Namibia and SWAPO's stronghold since the liberation struggle) the Ovambo people would need to be convinced of which side was the strongest. Political success in Owamboland therefore depended on military success. Botha felt that SWAPO needed to be dealt a blow and that the SADF should be given the right to go into Angola effectively and to sort out SWAPO bases once and for all (... *om effektief in te gaan en klaar te speel met basisse*).¹⁸

According to one military report, "On 27 February 1978, Magnus Malan submitted a request to the Minister of Defence (P.W. Botha) to launch an attack on five SWAPO bases in southern Angola ... Four of these bases were between 8 and 39km from the Angolan/ Namibian border."¹⁹ The fifth, Cassinga, was further north as indicated above. The other four bases within the 40km radius were Eheke, Mulemba, Dombondola and Chetequera complexes.²⁰ However, Malan's request only received approval to attack four SWAPO bases, "Cassinga was turned down."²¹ This exclusion was based on the reason that there was "less enthusiasm from the ranks of ... political bosses" to attack a civilian camp.²² Hence, the political front found it quite challenging and a dangerous undertaking to attack and annihilate the SWAPO civilian camp at Cassinga. Edward Alexander writes the following:

It had been very difficult to get Balthazar Johannes (John) Vorster (the South African Prime Minister at the time of the Cassinga massacre) and his Cabinet to agree to the raid ... and even the Minister of Defence, P. W. Botha was unhappy with the plan."²³

It is also reported that B. J. Vorster, himself, "had (very fresh) painful memories of how the political failure of Operation Savannah had destroyed years of covert effort ... (for South Africa) to reach a form of détente with neighboring states."²⁴

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 80.

¹⁹ Chief of the South African Defence Force. "SWAPO ontplooiing in suid - Angola ten noorde van Owambo" (Top Secret). Ref. No. AANH A by H / LeeR/ OPS/ 301/2 DD, Feb 78. Source: SANDF Archive, Pretoria.

²⁰ Chief of the South African Defence Force. "Military politieke situasie in Suidwes-Afrika" (Top Secret). Ref. No. HS OPS/301/2, February 1978. Source: SANDF Archive, Pretoria.

²¹ Edward Alexander, "The Cassinga raid," p. 82.

²² Ibid, p. 80.

²³ Ibid, p. 92.

²⁴ Edward Alexander, "The Cassinga raid," p. 80. 'Operation Savannah' was a name given to the South African Defence Force's 1975-1976 covert intervention in the Angolan civil war. The intention of this operation was to

In fact, post-1976 South Africa had embarked on an all-out effort to sway world opinion in its favour. Vorster was central to what became known as the “Information Scandal.” It relates to the use of the apartheid government funds for pro-South African propaganda. “This became particularly evident in investigations ... of the late 1970s, when it was disclosed that the government was funding groups such as the Right wing Christian groups. These groups, among others, espoused extreme conservative politics and justified them with Christian symbols ... The most obvious example of a faith community propagating state theology was the Dutch Reformed Church.”²⁵ Vorster was therefore anxious that attacking Cassinga “would provoke an international outcry and place great diplomatic and political pressure on South Africa.”²⁶

Vorster’s initial advice to the SADF not to “carry on” an attack on Cassinga vindicates the argument that the SADF went to Cassinga with the knowledge and authority to kill civilians. In a tussle between the SADF and its political front, Constand Viljoen, the Chief of the South African Army, was reported to have threatened to abort the whole operation into Angola if Cassinga were to be excluded from the SADF planned attacks on the SWAPO military positions.²⁷ Some SADF sources stated that Viljoen “aggressively lobbied” against the decision regarding the exclusion of Cassinga from the list of the SWAPO bases listed for the attacks. He, and perhaps other generals, is reported to “have persuaded” the South African Minister of Defence, P.W. Botha, who in turn “persuaded the Prime Minister, B. J. Vorster for the inclusion of Cassinga in the list of the SWAPO bases to be destroyed.”²⁸

On the Wednesday of 8 March 1978, Constand Viljoen sent a memorandum to his immediate senior, Magnus Malan (the Chief of the SADF). The memorandum heading reads: “*Die rol van*

overthrow the MPLA (supported by the former Soviet Union and her allies) government in favour of installing a UNITA (supported by the west since the start of the Angolan civil war, 1975 - 2000) led government in Luanda.

²⁵ *The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report presented to President Nelson Mandela on 29 October 1998. Volume Four, Chapter Three: “Institutional hearing: the Faith Community.”* p. 59 - 93.

²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 82.

²⁷ By late March 1978, the SADF planned to attack six SWAPO forward operational bases forming the complex at Chetequera / Vietnam. This was code named ‘Operation Bruilof’ (an Afrikaans word for a wedding). It was to be the first SADF military offensive into Angola since Operation Savannah, but targeting SWAPO military bases in southern Angola only. Operation Bruilof, however, did not materialize. One reason for its cancellation was that any attack on SWAPO bases, without targeting Cassinga [which the SADF considered the ‘backbone’ of SWAPO] as the primary target would not give a devastating blow to SWAPO.

²⁸ Edward Alexander, “The Cassinga raid,” pp. 82 - 84.

Cassinga in the Militeê re aanslag teen Suidwes - Afrika” (“The role of Cassinga in the military onslaught against South West Africa”).²⁹ The memorandum contained twenty-two items implicating Cassinga as a military camp. Viljoen argued rigorously for the inclusion of Cassinga, in fact as the principal target, for the SADF planned destruction of SWAPO bases in southern Angola. Amongst other reasons why Viljoen insisted that Cassinga should be destroyed included his argument that “the Commander of PLAN, Dimo Hamaambo, had his headquarters at Cassinga, from where he planned and coordinated the execution of all operations against South West Africa (Namibia).”³⁰ Viljoen also alleged that Cassinga provided a space for activities such as the planning, control and coordination of all SWAPO military operations against SWA. He further argued that Cassinga’s role also included the intelligence aspect; the logistical planning and physical provisioning of SWAPO bases in the eastern Cunene province of Angola; the planning and provision of supplies, weapons and ammunition to insurgents operating inside central and eastern Owamboland; and that infantry and mine-laying refresher courses were presented at Cassinga.³¹

The items listed in Viljoen’s memorandum to Magnus Malan dominated “the top secret military appreciation on the destruction of Cassinga.”³² The top-secret military document on the destruction of Cassinga was finally “drawn up by the Chief of Staff Operations and submitted to the Chief of the SADF on 1 April 1978.”³³ Items highlighted in that document included the following: “the role of Cassinga regarding SWAPO; location and weakness of Cassinga; occupants of Cassinga; Cuban and MPLA interference; enemy capabilities.”³⁴

Although the Cassinga attack was initiated and planned in Pretoria, the SADF wished to act as if the plan for the attack was unknown to them. Ironically, according to the SADF planning of the

²⁹ “Memorandum from Chief of the South African Army to the Chief of the SADF” (Top Secret), Ref. No. H Leer/309/1, 8 March 1978. Source: SANDF Archive, Pretoria.

³⁰ “Memorandum from Chief of the South African Army to the Chief of the SADF” (Top Secret). Reference, H Leer/309/1, 8 March 1978. Source: SANDF Archives, Pretoria.

³¹ “Memorandum from Chief of the South African Army to the Chief of the SADF” (Top Secret). Ref. No. H Leer/309/1, 8 March 1978. Source: SANDF Archive, Pretoria.

³² Edward Alexander, “The Cassinga raid,” pp. 52-54.

³³ Chief of the South African Defence Force. “Vernietiging van SWAPO basisse.” Ref. No. HS OPS/310/4/KOSTUUM (Top Secret). Source: SANDF Archive, Pretoria.

³⁴ Chief of the South African Defence Force. “Vernietiging van SWAPO basisse” (Top Secret). Ref. No. HS OPS/310/4/KOSTUUM. Source: SANDF Archive, Pretoria.

attack, “the AG (Administrator General of SWA who represented the South African colonial government in Namibia) and the GOC (General Officer Commanding South African troops in SWA) would issue a joint or separate statement³⁵ to the media explaining why SWA attacked the Cassinga camp [see Appendices A, B and C].³⁶ Such statements should be followed by a statement by an RSA Government spokesman, with a preference for the Minister of Defence to avoid the appearance of over-reaction.”³⁷

The SADF mission for Cassinga was code named ‘Operation Reindeer’ replacing the aborted “Operation *Bruilof* [wedding].” The Citizen Force soldiers reported to camp in mid-April 1978 for training. The training ground was outside Bloemfontein, the capital city of what was then called the Orange Free State (Free State Province in post-Apartheid South Africa).

Colonel Jan Breytenbach and Brigadier Mike du Plessis were responsible for the training of the paratroopers. Breytenbach arrived in the camp on April 17, 1978 and commenced with the training immediately.³⁸ The timeline for the training was very short, as the D - day for the attack ... was initially scheduled to take place on May 1, 1978.³⁹ On the morning of 3 May 1978, according to McGill Alexander, General Constand Viljoen issued the order to “execute Operation Reindeer. D – Day 4 May 1978.” On the night of May 3, the paratroopers boarded aircrafts at Bloemspruit near Bloemfontein. Under the cover of dark, they flew to Grootfontein in northern Namibia. In the early hours of the morning of 4 May 1978, the SADF paratroopers took off from Grootfontein to Cassinga.

³⁵ The ‘AG’ and ‘GOC’ were the highest ranking political appointees of the South African apartheid government in South West Africa (SWA, now Namibia). They were the authority of apartheid-colonial administration and Military operations in Namibia. At the time of Cassinga massacre, Jan Geldenhuys was the General Officer Commanding South West Africa Military. The administrator-general of South West Africa was Marthinus Theunis Steyn (1977 - 79).

³⁶ Chief of the SADF, “Guidelines for statement by GOC SWA: Appendix A& B to PSYAC planning directive No. 3 / 78: suggested approach for statement by the Minister of Defence” (Top Secret). Source: SANDF archives, Pretoria.

³⁷ Chief of the SADF. “PSYAC Planning Directive No. 3 \ 78: Operation Reindeer. Phase Three (D- Day to D plus approx 4)” (Top Secret). Also see, Appendices A, B and C of this thesis (AG and GOC statements following the Cassinga attack). Source: SANDF Archive, Pretoria.

³⁸ Jan Breytenbach, *Eagle Strike*, p. 168.

³⁹ “Memorandum from Chief of Staff Operations to the Chief of the SADF” (Top Secret). Ref. No. HS OPS/310/4/Reindeer, 21 April 1978.

Methodology

When I began this research in July 2006, I originally relied on “conventional methods” of conducting social science research. In fact, this study research proposal outlines that one of the objectives of this study is to ‘disclose’ survivors’ untold memories of the Cassinga massacre. I was naïve when I initially went into the field hoping that a substantial collection of archival and survivors’ oral testimonies would facilitate an objective writing of survivors’ experiences of the Cassinga events, now and then. I assumed that if I collect a substantial body of visual archival data, it would aid memories or oral narratives of my research participants, especially survivors, to remember and narrate the experience of the Cassinga event more accurately. In retrospect, I knew little about the dynamics, complexities and challenges of unpacking the different experiences of the Cassinga violence through visual and oral testimonies.

Following the submission and acceptance of my research proposal by the University of the Western Cape in Cape Town, the initial move of collecting data for this research started with my visit to institutional archives in Pretoria, South Africa. I went there expecting to mine the archives for written and visual ‘evidence’ (as I believed at the time) of the Cassinga massacre. While in Pretoria, during the first trip, I also visited the National Archives and Records Service (NARS) of South Africa and the South African Police Museum and Archives, both located in Pretoria. In Cape Town, where I studied, I visited the Western Cape Provincial Archives and Records Service and the Mayibuye Centre which is hosted by the University of the Western Cape. In Namibia, I visited the SWAPO Party Archive and Research Centre (SPARC) and the National Archives of Namibia in Windhoek.

The second approach was to conduct interviews with the war victims, in particular survivors of the Cassinga massacre across Namibia’s thirteen political Regions. However, I concentrated mainly in the four northern Regions (Omusati, Oshana, Ohangwena and Oshikoto). This is where most survivors of the Cassinga massacre were born and continue to live. I went to visit survivors with photographs and other documents that I collected from the institutional archives which I had visited in Namibia and South Africa. Disappointingly, survivors were not particularly impressed

by the Cassinga photographs. They argued that the photographs I presented to them were simple, unsophisticated realities of the Cassinga massacre. According to survivors, such photographs obscure complex realities of the Cassinga episode. Interestingly, while survivors deplored what they called the sheer absence of the tangible experiences of the Cassinga brutal massacre in what photographs show, survivors own testimonies of the Cassinga episode also failed to disclose practical and complicated memories of that episode.

In retrospect, things did not work out the way they were originally understood and outlined in the research proposal preceding my experience in the field. In particular, unexpected things unfolded during interviews with survivors of the Cassinga massacre, and when I visited institutional archives where I expected to find written and visual documentary evidence of the Cassinga massacre.

In this connection, dialogues and analysis presented in this thesis are particularly shaped by the ambivalence and the silence which visual, oral and written testimonies produce to obscure what the victims of that heinous event want the inexperienced ‘other’ to see and understand.

In Namibia however, the massacre of May 4, 1978 is the most commemorated day of the lives lost during Namibia’s war for liberation: in every sense it stands as the saddest, most horrendous act of violence. Regrettably though, loss of lives, trauma and suffering experienced by the victims of the Cassinga massacre are far beyond the reach of visual and oral testimonies that attempt to disclose the personal experience of the attack and subsequent suffering. In view of this challenge, the central task of this thesis is to examine how the actual and divergent experiences of violence on the ground are at variance with the Cassinga survivors’ desire and longing to unveil the experience of violence and ongoing suffering through visual and oral techniques. This will be done by way of using testimonies of the survivors of the Cassinga massacre as a method of attempting to interrogate and explore the existing traditional or conventional ways of presenting Cassinga in public discourse.

In pursuit of this objective, the study uses a ‘lateral thinking’ approach, a method of attempting to ‘deconstruct’ the current public presentation of the Cassinga massacre through photographs

and survivors' oral testimonies. This approach is intended to help create a new way of thinking and seeing the economy of violence beyond the confines of the conventional oral and visual representations of the Cassinga event. In exploring the impossibility of unpacking violence through oral, visual or written exchange, this study relies mainly on interviews conducted with a number of survivors, archival photographs and, to some extent, individual perpetrators' written accounts of the attack.

Interviews with survivors and the collection of the archival data were conducted between 2007 and 2010. From the interviews with some thirty Cassinga survivors I gathered a body of oral accounts some of which I transcribed, translated (from *Oshiwambo* into English) and edited for the purpose of this work. From the archival collection, mainly from the former SADF archive in Pretoria, I assembled a collection of photographs and certain documents of the SADF planning and execution of the Cassinga raid. Some photographs of the Cassinga massacre were also collected from the SWAPO Party archive in Windhoek (Namibia).

When I visited survivors for the interviews, I carried an album exhibiting some of the photographic images of the camp at Cassinga after the SADF attack, for the perusal of survivors. Individual survivors' testimonies of the Cassinga massacre as well as each survivor's reaction to the photographs I presented to them provided me with important indications and insights about how survivors' oral testimonies and the Cassinga photographic images relate to, or do not authenticate, different survivors' actual experience of the attack and its pervasiveness in the contemporary life of survivors and affected families who are still in the dark about what happened to their loved ones.

In fact, it transpired that both the visual and the oral representation of the Cassinga massacre construct an undesirable hollowness. This hollowness, the lack of visual, oral, political and historical accounts to support the tangible Cassinga means that the actual experience of violence does not resonate with the way Cassinga is narrated, remembered and commemorated through different techniques that attempt to represent the Cassinga violence. In fact, to paraphrase Cathy Caruth on trauma and its role in literary texts, the experience of the Cassinga massacre lies not in what can be disclosed or concealed through different techniques of narrating and attempting to

show the experience of the Cassinga massacre. But the experience of that event lies in the “inherent latency within the experience itself”⁴⁰ that can no longer be displayed to others who did not experience it.

Theoretical and conceptual issues

The relationship between visual and oral testimonies of the Cassinga massacre is contradictory. Although both reveal nothing tangible for the inexperienced viewer⁴¹ or listener, tension features predominantly between them. This relates to how each of them attempts to relate the actual experience of Cassinga’s multiple brutal events. In the interviews, some survivors noted with unhappiness how visual images of Cassinga, such as the photograph of the Cassinga open mass grave, take precedence over survivors’ suffering and personal stories of the Cassinga events. In the interviews, survivors indicated that when remembering and commemorating Cassinga, precedence should be given to the practical things that visual and oral testimonies of the Cassinga massacre evade or obscure, such as the unresolved humanitarian issues (or the victims’ ‘disrupted expectations’ as discussed in Chapter 7) which continue to anger and traumatize the victims (dead and alive) since the Cassinga attack.

In spite of the conflict between visual and oral testimonies of the Cassinga massacre, I will nevertheless use them interchangeably in the whole of this study. In other words, I will problematize the Cassinga visual and oral testimonies as conceptual metaphors. I theorize them as such because they both undermine the victims’ wish to disclose the practicality and pervasiveness of the brutality and suffering of Cassinga. In fact, according to this study, their sense of abstractness infers that they are both conceptual metaphors.

To put things into perspective, since Namibia’s independence in 1990, SWAPO has fashioned conceptual metaphors as ways of picturing suffering and loss of innocent lives during the period of the armed liberation struggle. For example, during each Cassinga anniversary, survivors are

⁴⁰ Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed experience: trauma, narrative and history* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. 17.

⁴¹ The notion of ‘the inexperienced viewer’ refers to the public’s inexperience of the Cassinga massacre physically and emotionally. In particular, this notion evokes the general public lack of awareness that the suffering of the victims of the Cassinga massacre has been exacerbated over the years. This is further discussed in Chapter 7.

modeled into living testimonies or *metaphors* of untold human suffering and loss of lives during the Cassinga attack. Customarily, at every occasion marking this event, a survivor is delegated to unpack, on behalf of other survivors, ‘memories’ of Cassinga so that the inexperienced audience who has not experienced these events understands what happened on that day. Besides survivors’ testimonies, edited video footage showing, among other things, wrecks in the camp, wounded victims lying in hospital beds, an open mass grave with dead bodies, SADF paratroopers apparently marching in the camp following its fall, is also screened for the audience to *witness* the *agony* of that day. Interestingly, such political metaphors are conceptualized as epitomizing Cassinga memories and generating a sense of remembrance against forgetfulness.

The central place of war metaphors in the everyday narrating of war experience and suffering, such as during official commemorations of the Cassinga massacre, deserve closer examination in this project. Specific types of metaphors that are used in Namibia to describe violence and loss of lives in Cassinga and elsewhere in Namibia and outside its borders include, amongst others, phrases such as ‘*bloody*’ liberation struggle and ‘*their blood waters our freedom.*’ In particular, Cassinga is singled out as the *bloodiest* single day massacre in the history of the Namibian liberation struggle from South African colonial occupation and apartheid rule.

Here, one becomes inquisitive about exploring the presence of ‘bloodshed’ and loss of lives or suffering inside or outside such metaphoric statements. However such explorations always end in disappointment. This is despite the fact that such conceptual metaphors relate to the untold but tangible loss of lives, and the blood of innocent Namibians spilled or shed during the liberation struggle. Interestingly, as war rhetoric supposedly depicting death and loss of innocent lives, these phrases instead unleash problematic relations with the unambiguous, vivid tangible reality of brutal death and suffering of innocent people. The problem is that metaphors disclose nothing: they reveal no ‘bloodshed’ nor the grief that they lament. Instead, political metaphors as conceptual statements break relations with the tangible reality of the suffering, pain, anguish, rage, trauma and agony experienced by the dead and the survivors of apartheid’s brutal violence.

In this context, the rhetoric of war, in the form of political metaphor or testimony of any kind, reveals the sheer absence of the *truth* that each of the witnesses (survivors and perpetrators) of

the Cassinga massacre wish to disclose to the inexperienced world. As a result, metaphors invoke “verbal dispute”⁴² between perpetrators and the victims of the Cassinga massacre. Verbal dispute, a term coined by James Howe, refers to testimony’s incapacity to present each side’s argument as tangible evidence. In other words, testimonies or metaphors suggest that violence is beyond language, description or any art of attempting to picture it beyond the confines and frontiers of the self or the restricted personal memories of the witnesses.

In this relation, this study argues that the figurative framing of the Cassinga massacre invokes a number of problematic trajectories because metaphors or testimonies of war and trauma manifest themselves across a range of conflicts and contestations with the Cassinga witnesses’ memoryscape. While memory, according to survivors, embodies the victims’ endless suffering (which is implicitly self-evident) and the struggle with the presence of violence’s unyielding dynamics, testimony on the other hand (be it in the form of visual, oral, printed media or political metaphors) translates into the obvious conceptual statements or metaphysical representation of Cassinga’s physical violence. Conceptual or metaphysical statements are a “form of an empirical hypothesis, but in fact immune from empirical testing and therefore literally meaningless,”⁴³ as they cannot be proven by tangible or concrete evidence of the object that testimony claims to represent.

In fact, testimony as metaphor, of any kind, obscures the experience of the Cassinga violence for the inexperienced other. In this relation, while memory is ever inundated with the reinvention of the continuing and unstoppable sufferings of the wounded body and the wounded emotions of the victims, the former, testimony, deconstructs any tangible act of violence. As a practice of reporting, testimony is embedded in the practical experience of the violence on the ground. Regrettably, testimony works against the physicality of the violence and the victims’ wish to display ‘the shame’ of the apartheid state-sponsored violence. For this reason, testimony, in relation to the Cassinga memory, is profane. It corrupts material evidence of the violence. In the succeeding pages, I will attempt to explore how various methods of testimony or testimony as

⁴² James Howe, “Argument is argument: an essay on conceptual metaphor and verbal dispute,” *Metaphor and symbol*, Vol. 23/1 (2007), p. 1.

⁴³ This is according to logical positivism, accessed from <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/metaphysical>.

metaphor may facilitate or impede survivors' attempts to tell the world about their difficult experiences in Cassinga and its impact on their lives ever since.

Language (written or verbal) as metaphor

The experience of violence is self-evident. That is, physical violence is in the knowing of the individual victims of the Cassinga massacre, not in language or discourse about violence (and I shall return to language in Chapter 5). In this regard, Thomas M. Hawley observes that "language is not a transparent tool to be used in representing a pre-given reality but is instead opaque (dense). Hence, the process of ascribing words to things is ... viewed as productions of meaning rather than reflections of reality..."⁴⁴ Here, I argue that if language discloses nothing tangible other than ascribing "words to things," then it is obvious that language (words) translates into conceptual metaphors which conceal, thus making physical violence abstract and ambiguous. In the interviews, survivors invoked this scenario by lamenting the way that the use of oral and visual techniques as methods of attempting to elicit violence for the experience of others pushed them into insurmountable difficulties. In fact, any attempt to describe the complexities of survivors' actual experience of brutal violence and suffering during the Cassinga attack and afterwards produces dissonance and ruptures. This is because the complexity of the actual violence and suffering since the Cassinga massacre is beyond what language can articulate and authenticate.

Counting on the difficulties he confronted in attempting to present his experience of the Nazi concentration camps, Ellie Wiesel tells us that language or words "destroy what they aim to describe, they alter what they try to emphasize. By altering the *truth*, words end up taking its place, resulting in the displacement of facts and truths altogether."⁴⁵ Certainly, the moment the process of documenting (through the visual, oral or printed forms) commences, tangible violence

⁴⁴ Thomas M. Hawley, *The remains of war: bodies, politics, and the search for American soldiers unaccounted for in Southeast Asia* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2005), p. 7.

⁴⁵ Elie Wiesel, cited in James Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: narrative and the consequences of interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 22.

which such techniques intend making public begin to “fall apart” and disintegrate. “Analogies fall woefully short; definitions seem impossible [and] explanations are simply inconceivable.”⁴⁶

In *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, Dominick LaCapra adds the following: in writing about violence, “loss goes with writing ... absence and loss become palpable through discoursing ... ‘It is here that events ... are omitted from the language of the writing but are made present in the absence of writing.’”⁴⁷ LaCapra’s scenario, when applied to this study, infers that language does not only roast evidence, but it completely burns into ashes the original face of a thing that is the subject of the storyline. Remarkably so, the disintegration and dissolution of residues of memory, somewhat contained in survivors’ oral narratives, increases the more testimony is transformed from the original voice of the victim into the text. As such, there is a considerable loss of residues of evidence of the Cassinga massacre in the transcribed and translated interviews than in the original recorded voice of survivors. That is to say, the act of writing down things or making text from voice produces even more absences when describing the Cassinga massacre than those first layers of practical things that survivors’ oral accounts obliterate earlier.

Des Pres argues suggestively that this shortcoming, the absence of the actual traumatic world in the text, is imbedded in “displacement,” because the goal of any text is, according Terence Des Pres, to “usurp the real world with a world that is imagined”⁴⁸ or make-believe. Putting it differently, tangible violence falls outside the disciplinary effects of testimony (printed or oral). For this reason, the more testimony attempts to recreate or reconstruct the real traumatic world, the more damage is done and the more violence disintegrates and falls flat in the text. This was particularly my experience when I processed the interviews with survivors of the Cassinga massacre into transcripts. In fact, the disintegration and dissolution of residues of survivors’ memories somewhat contained in survivors oral narratives, increased the more oral testimonies were reconfigured and transformed from the voice of the victims into printed testimonies.

⁴⁶ Peter N. Goggin and Maureen Daly Goggin, “Presence in absence: discourses and teaching (in, on, about) Trauma.” Cited in Shane Borrowman (ed.), *Trauma and the teaching of writing* (Albany: State University of New York, 2006), p. 36.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 34 - 35.

⁴⁸ Terence Des Pres, cited in Kali Tal, *The world of hurt: reading the literature of trauma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 137.

Photographs as metaphoric testimonies

Some key theorists of photography like Roland Barthes, Walter Benjamin, Susan Sontag, Siegfried Kracauer and John Tagg have explored the relationship between photography and reality from analyzing photographs as “certificates of presence” or *truth*, to doubting the truthfulness or usefulness of photographs as sources of historical evidence.⁴⁹ In this connection, my study argues that the ‘discipline’ of attempting to detain scenes of violence and, belatedly, to present them to an intended audience through the medium or art of photography does significant damage to the authenticity of the violence that survivors wish to present in its original form and space. Photographs jam, flatten, blur, obscure and are visibly oblivious to the multiple realities that individual survivors experienced. By contrast, some studies theorize photographs as embedded in the discourse of “authenticating” events or, to follow Caroline Brothers, disclosing the “exact physiognomy”⁵⁰ or actual pictures of the events shown in photographs. How exactly photographic images validate and relate violence to the actual life of the things they aspire to represent, however, appears very problematic.

Part of my study is to engage particular photographic images of the Cassinga massacre as a way of attempting to explore and challenge the metaphoric assumption that images do convey the actual life of the object. I base my theory on survivors’ responses to the various images of the Cassinga massacre that I presented to them during the interviews for perusal, comments and interpretations. Individual survivors were disappointed by the subtleness of the Cassinga images, because the outer surface of photographs, to follow Caroline Brothers’ argument, in a different context, “provides minimal information about what they (photographs) literally depict.”⁵¹

⁴⁹ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on photography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981); John Tagg, *The burden of representation: essays on photographs and histories* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); Roland Barthes, “Shock-photos.” In *The Eiffel Tower and other mythologies* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1977); Susan Sontag, “In Plato’s Cave.” In *On photography* (New York: 1977); Walter Benjamin, “The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction.” In Philip Simpson, Andrew Utterson, and K. J. Sheperdson (eds.). *Film theory: critical concepts in media and cultural studies*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2004).

⁵⁰ Caroline Brothers, *War and photography: a cultural history* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 5.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 2.

Rather than using images (photographs and video) “to produce knowledge,”⁵² Martin Lister and Liz Wells “focus on the analysis of images and the contexts in which they become meaningful ... by formulating what they call a Visual Cultural Studies ... (which) ... allow the analyst to attend to the many moments within the cycle of production, circulation and consumption of the image through which meanings accumulate, slip and shift.”⁵³ Lister’s and Wells’ analysis relates to my own investigation of the ‘production,’ ‘circulation,’ travel and consumption of photographs of the Cassinga attack. One of the central arguments in this regard relates to the photojournalistic shot of the Cassinga open mass grave which, in the immediate aftermath of the massacre, the media constructed into the ‘iconic photograph’ showing the Cassinga massacre.⁵⁴

As ‘iconic,’ this figurative image became the most widely published, circulated and exhibited in newspapers and other publications with the intent, ironically, to give the feel and taste of the merciless killings of unarmed Namibian refugees. In this respect, my study challenges the tendency among the public audience (framed by the media and political statements or discourses) to perceive visual images of the Cassinga attack as indisputable documents of historical evidence. The central working theory, in this regard, would be that photographs – like words and language – are metaphors, as they circumvent and contradict the dynamics of the physical or tangible violence they claim to represent. Hence, photographic images of the Cassinga attack are never evidence of history. Instead they create an enabling space for public dialogues, and they also encourage social research investigations into the missing historical evidence or efforts to interrogate the contradictory dynamics between the actual violence and testimonies which such images produce.

Lastly, this study will also use oral methodologies to explore and theorize the contemporary issues that affect the victims of the Cassinga massacre in the long aftermath of that traumatic episode. In fact, the way Cassinga is remembered and narrated through the medium of visual and

⁵² Helen Thomas, “Dancing: representation and difference.” In Sarah Pink, *Doing ethnography: images, media and representation in research* (London: Sage, 2001), p. 15.

⁵³ Martin Lister and Liz Wells, “Seeing beyond belief: cultural studies as an approach to analyzing the visual.” In Sarah Pink, *Doing ethnography*, p. 15; Theo Van Leeuwen and Carey Jewitt (eds.), *The handbook of visual analysis*, (London: Sage, 2001), p. 15.

⁵⁴ Nadja Borer, “Images of the Cassinga massacre - contested visualities.” In Giorgio Miescher, Lorena Rizzo & Jeremy Silvester, *Posters in action: visibility in the making of an African nation* (Basel & Windhoek: Basler Afrika Bibliographien & National Archive of Namibia, 2009), pp. 140 – 150.

oral representations does not address the victims' uninterrupted emotional and physical sufferings which have been ignored and exacerbated over the years. In spite of considerable limitations of visual and oral testimonies, in attempting to represent the experience of the brutal Cassinga massacre, such techniques still receive preponderant precedence. In the public narration of the Cassinga massacre, the victims' ongoing suffering is gravely attenuated by the rhetoric of institutional visibility: a situation which the victims and their families consider less acknowledging of their ongoing sufferings.

Existing Literature

Cassinga is described as the worst single day of loss of Namibian exiles lives in the anti-colonial struggle against South African rule since the launch of the Namibian armed liberation struggle in 1966.⁵⁵ Yet, this event has not received much academic attention over the years. In particular, no existing written work on Cassinga, to the knowledge of this study, has explored the suffering that the victims of this episode have endured over the years. Equally so, no existing books, academic theses and articles with a particular focus on the Cassinga massacre have attempted to explore and examine how testimony, photographic images and other means of representing Cassinga unveil or obscure the way survivors witnessed ruthless violence in Cassinga.

⁵⁵ On August 26, 1966 the first battle between SWAPO fighters and the South African security forces took place at Ongulumbashe in Uukwaluudhi, in what is today Omusati Region, north western Owamboland. This is where about a dozen of SWAPO guerilla fighters (combatants of the South West Africa Liberation Army, SWALA) who received military training in Algeria, Tanzania, Ghana, Egypt and China returned to northern Namibia to carry out political mobilization and train locals in guerilla warfare. A secret training base, in guerilla warfare, was established at Ongulumbashe (also spelled Omugulugwoombashe). This place is located 25km in the west of Otshandi, the major developing town at the centre of Uukwaluudhi District and its Capital city. After discovering the Ongulumbashe training base, the South African spies and security forces launched a surprise attack on August 26, 1966. This battle marked the beginning of military confrontation between SWAPO fighters and the South African security forces. This battle also marked the birth of intimidation, torture, warrant arrests, killings and disappearance of civilians as the South African security forces started hunting for the SWAPO guerrilla fighters who escaped from the Ongulumbashe battle. Violence heightened following the independence of Angola from Portugal in November 1975 and it lasted until the first months of 1989 prior to Namibia's first democratic elections, which was held in November 1989, under the auspices of the United Nations Transitional Assistance Group (UNTAG). Published books about the Ongulumbashe battle include, Paul Els, *Ongulumbashe: Where the Bushwar began* (Reach Publishers, 2007).

And, most importantly, no available literature on Cassinga has explored the Cassinga massacre in the context of its long and uninterrupted traumatic aftermath in the lives of survivors and affected families of missing victims. Instead, some existing literature on Cassinga had been written with the intent to unveil “the truth about the Cassinga event” through “careful” or good research work. In explaining the aim of her book, *the Cassinga Event*, Annemarie Heywood writes that:

When a group of us originally embarked on a book about the massacre at Cassinga, our aim was to search out, among the fragments of personal memories and the too-coherent existing narratives, the truth about the event. We assumed that a catastrophic event ... must possess an objective reality which careful research could uncover and record. We envisaged that the trauma of Cassinga, which we as a nation publicly commemorate each year, could be ... documented.⁵⁶

In spite of asserting that the Cassinga “plain truth has been more difficult to uncover than we foresaw,”⁵⁷ Heywood has attributed this challenge to the absence of “survivors’ voice” in her work. She also claims that the SADF refusal to release images that they filmed and photographed during the ‘entire operation’ as another reason for the failure of her work to “uncover ... truth ... trauma ... and sufferings ...”⁵⁸ experienced in Cassinga.

Heywood’s claim that oral and visual representations stand a chance to reproduce that very violence for the other to experience is problematic, but it does open a space for new kinds of thinking and exploration. That is, to challenge the visual and the oral representations of the Cassinga massacre in view of their limitations in trying to represent the Cassinga brutal massacre and the suffering of the victims that has exacerbated over the years. My study will explore such techniques and methods (visual and oral) as ultimately unyielding when it comes to Cassinga victims’ and historians’ efforts to reclaim the Cassinga violence. This study will also challenge the claims that careful social research (to paraphrase Heywood) could uncover and record an “objective history” or “truth” of the Cassinga massacre.⁵⁹ The reasoning here is that the sufferings and needs, in particular, of the victims of the Cassinga massacre are so diverse, different from one victim to the other, and materially not obtainable or accessible by the other.

⁵⁶ Annemarie Heywood, *The Cassinga Event*, p. 5.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. 6.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p. 9.

⁵⁹ Annemarie Heywood, *The Cassinga Event*, p. 5.

Kassinga a story untold, by Mvula ya Nangolo & Tor Sellstrom with a foreword by Sam Nuuyoma, presents 17 ‘voices’ from seventeen survivors,⁶⁰ sixteen of them women. At the time of the attack, they were all below the age of eighteen. The voices of the interviewees are translated from *Oshiwambo* into English, transcribed, and the text then edited. I would argue that these transformations raise some serious concerns. The way the original voice is transformed and reconfigured brings into question how much chance the text has to capture, contain and communicate violence as represented in the original voice of the victims. In fact, the text eliminates the voice, its rich content and crucial details of the particles of violence articulated by the victim’s actual voice, in relation to the crucially informative residues of violence that the victims’ body may recognize and acknowledge in the presence of the interviewer.

Paradoxically, the authors of *Kassinga a story untold* tell us that this work makes available the voices of survivors to the reader. This is problematic, because the content of the voice of survivors reaches the audience in such a way that the original voice is completely compromised by text which taints and obscures it.

I am not suggesting that there is concrete evidence of the violence in survivors’ different voices of narrating the Cassinga experience. But, notwithstanding the fact that violence transcends the reach of survivors’ voices (which attempts to bring violence back to life), my work argues that the *Kassinga a story untold* is further problematic. This is in the way it claims to use survivors’ voice to elicit experiences of that brutal and traumatic event. When such voices are transcribed into a text, considerable damage is done to the original content of the voice. For example, the text obscures all emotional sentiments which would have been evident when the victims narrated their stories in the interviews. I do not claim that my work is an exception here, but it differs

⁶⁰ This age category and gender classification, as per my own interviews with a number of survivors, suggest that the majority of those who lived in Cassinga were not only children but predominantly female. In “The massacre of Cassinga,” Piero Gleijeses indicated that children accounted for the highest number in Cassinga. He reported that soon “after the massacre, the first group of Namibian children, six hundred strong, most of whom were survivors of Cassinga (and predominantly females according to my interviews) arrived in Cuba to study [primary and secondary schooling] and grow up far from the South African bombs.” In Gleijeses Piero, “The massacre of Cassinga,” online at [http://amadlandawonye.wikispaces.com/The+ Massacre+of+Cassinga,+Piero+Glejeses](http://amadlandawonye.wikispaces.com/The+Massacre+of+Cassinga,+Piero+Glejeses). Accessed on 10 October 2008.

from the existing literatures. This is in the way it challenges and interrogates the relationship between the actual Cassinga experiences and the different storylines of its telling or refashioning. In so doing, I expect my work to unlock the barriers that disconnect and separate the conceptual representation of Cassinga from the tangible experience of violence on the ground.

Eagle Strike: The Story of the controversial airborne assault on Cassinga 1978, written by Jan Breytenbach, the field commander of the SADF paratroopers who attacked and killed Namibian exiles at Cassinga, is in many respects a contradictory publication. The book contains, alongside its sizeable text, a number of photographs shot in Cassinga during the attack. Nonetheless, the photographs reveal no dead bodies of women and children during the SADF indiscriminate shooting of civilians as survivors claimed in their testimonies. The absence of civilians' dead bodies corroborates the author's argument that the SADF paratroopers did not kill civilians in Cassinga. Hence, the photographs he exhibits in his publication are "disclosures of truth" about the SADF attack of Cassinga. Yet, how the 'truth' of the Cassinga attack (SADF version) or massacre (survivors' version) can "appear ... outside ellipsis and hyperbole,"⁶¹ or how "truth" is made visible and tangible through photographs and texts, is problematic. My study will argue that the SADF photographs of the Cassinga massacre were constructed with the purpose to obscure the Cassinga traumatic scenes which would associate the SADF with the brutal killings of innocent Namibians, particularly women and children. For this reason, the SADF visual testimonies of the Cassinga massacre are particularly in conflict with survivors' experience and testimonies of what happened in Cassinga

An article on Cassinga by the Namibian-born South African military historian, Prof. Leo Barnard, raises issues pertinent to my exploration of exacerbating survivors' ongoing sufferings as raised in Section Two (Chapters 6 and 7) of this thesis.⁶² Barnard uses problematic terminology such as "the Cassinga battle," and alludes to the population in the camp as "elements of SWAPO." Maybe these representations do not disclose an aura of extreme dislike

⁶¹ Pamela Marie Hoffer, *Reflets reciproques: a prismatic reading of Stephane Mallarme and Helene Cixous* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2006), p. 173.

⁶² Leo Barnard, "The Battle of Cassinga, 4 May 1978: a historical reassessment Part 1: the course of the battle and ensuing controversy." *Journal for contemporary history*, Vol.31/3 (December 2006), pp. 131-146; Leo Barnard, "The Battle of Cassinga, 4 May 1978: a historical reassessment, Part 2: the course of the battle and ensuing controversy." *Journal for the contemporary history*, Vol. 31/3 (December 2006), pp. 147-160.

and intolerance for others' political views but they are, most importantly, one of the factors which regenerate survivors' ongoing suffering. Because reconfiguring the Cassinga massacre into a 'battle' suspends survivors' chance of recovery as victims, most of them, who were actually children and non-combatants when Cassinga was attacked, consider such statements as pestering and re-wounding their unhealed emotional wounds. Survivors also consider such statements as disclosing a disrespect for the violated human dignity and integrity of the innocent victims of the Cassinga event.

Two scholarly studies about the history of the Namibian exiled communities during the South African occupation of Namibia have been completed recently. These are Christian A. Williams' doctoral thesis, "Exile history: An ethnography of the SWAPO camps and the Namibian Nation."⁶³ The other study was carried out by Martha Akawa in a doctoral thesis that examines "Sexual politics of the Namibian liberation struggle."⁶⁴

Interestingly, Williams' chapter about the Cassinga camp and the attack that annihilated it, as well as his subsequent article on "Remember Cassinga?"⁶⁵ raise a number of problematic issues. One of such problems emerges from the photograph of the Cassinga open mass grave which as Williams notes:

became the most enduring symbol of Cassinga. Taken from the grave's edge, the mass grave photos are close enough to the corpses for individual bodies, and in some cases the clothing, wounds and flies covering them, to be discernible. The photos demand a visceral reaction. In the weeks following the attack and for years to follow, SWAPO and solidarity organisations published texts alongside the photos that directed this reaction by imputing meaning to the bodies in the grave. Texts drew attention to the 'civilian' qualities of the bodies, the suffering of Namibians under colonialism, and the violence committed against oppressed people in other settings. In so doing, they associated the mass grave at Cassinga with the history of the refugee camp.⁶⁶

⁶³ Christian A. Williams, "Exile History: an ethnography of the SWAPO camps and the Namibian nation" (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Michigan, 2009).

⁶⁴ Martha Akawa, "The sexual politics of the Namibian liberation struggle." (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Basel, 2010).

⁶⁵ Christian A. Williams, "National history in Southern Africa: reflections on the 'remember Cassinga?' exhibition." *Kronos: Southern African histories*, Vol. 36 (November 2010), pp. 207-250.

⁶⁶ Christian A. Williams, "Exile history," p. 74.

As Williams put it, the photograph of the Cassinga open mass grave is an enduring symbol of Cassinga's violence. But this assumption is only meaningful when one takes into account the context of this photograph as the most widely published and disseminated of all the Cassinga attack photographs. Likewise, it is problematic to suggest, as Williams did, that the publication of "texts alongside the photo" of the Cassinga open mass grave is a way of "imputing meaning to the bodies in the grave." My study contests this argument. The central argument is that the photograph of the Cassinga open mass grave does not, in any way possible, draw "attention to the 'civilian' qualities of the bodies in the mass grave (the same as the use of text along the photograph of the open mass grave), the suffering of Namibians under colonialism, and the violence committed against oppressed people in other settings" as Williams argues. Instead, the use of visual and other techniques of documenting the Cassinga massacre should be understood as ways through which violence and its dynamics are deconstructed. Photographs collapse and taint acts of violence with a near absence of factual evidence. The 'near absence of factual evidence,' which the photograph of the Cassinga open mass grave exhibits, obscures the traumatic experience and suffering of those who survived the massacre as they narrate it.

In attempts to make available a different understanding about how photographs of the Cassinga attack are connected to or contradict the actual life experience of the Cassinga massacre, this work will problematize the photograph of the Cassinga open mass grave as completely at variance with the epistemological truth of Cassinga, because violence in this photograph, if any, is challenged by the mainstream testimonies of survivors of this episode. This is not to say that survivors' testimonies (which manifests through verbal or other forms) represent the Cassinga experience objectively. But it suggests that the violence which survivors experienced in Cassinga, according to their testimonies, is not represented in the photograph of the Cassinga open mass grave, nor can the use of text alongside this photograph elicit the untold violence of Cassinga, let alone describe each survivor's way of seeing and surviving the Cassinga massacre.

To the extent of what this study can establish about survivors, the majority of the victims of the Cassinga massacre were women. Moreover, the largest number of people physically maimed at Cassinga and who live today in dire need of medical and other assistance consists of women. In a brief description of the Cassinga massacre and contestations that followed it, Akawa's doctoral

thesis makes the significant point that Cassinga symbolizes “one of the incidents in which women were hailed as victims and heroines at the same time: ... women shared in death, defiance and victory.” As things turned out in post-war Namibia, “promises and pronouncements about equality have not been kept: twenty years after the end of the war, women’s bodies remain battlefields.”⁶⁷

Whilst Akawa’s argument encompasses the suffering and the “bravery” of all Namibian women who participated in and contributed to the liberation struggle, particularly in exile, she has not addressed particular problems concerning survivors of the Cassinga massacre. My study attempts to explore the category of women survivors of the Cassinga massacre in independent Namibia, with particular reference to the long-term after-effects and ongoing repudiation of the victims’ human integrity.

The woman’s body as a “battlefield” is a crucial metaphor. In my study, I problematize the women’s physically damaged bodies, resulting from the Cassinga attack, to emphasize women’s endurance of the physical and emotional suffering since the attack. In particular, my study introduces the concept of internal violence. That is, the pervasive state of the endless suffering of the Cassinga victims, most of whom are women, and which is not external or explicit to others. Therefore, although many survivors’ bodies show terrible or visually unbelievable protrusions or damage, such sites (which I refer to in Chapter 4 as *closed gates* through which violence made physical penetration into the victim’s body) should not be perceived as showing us survivors’ actual endurance of suffering. Instead, the physically harrowing scars of the damaged body should be understood as concealing the actual sentient agony of the individual body that is not only damaged, but is also beyond repair.

Structure of the Study

As the reader looks ahead to the rest of this work, it is crucial to explain the style of this thesis. This work flows in an ‘accumulative’ or ‘incremental’ sequence. This mode of expression or

⁶⁷ Martha Akawa, “The sexual politics of the Namibian liberation struggle,” pp. 117-118.

formation emphasizes the amassing or increasing multiple layers of traumatic ordeals which the victims of the Cassinga massacre are enduring since that episode. In other words, the style of this thesis is intended to orient the reader along the path of the disturbing emotional issues of the Cassinga massacre which are getting nastier and thornier for the victims every day. Consequently, the flow of this thesis begins with the survivors' shorter lived traumatic experience of violence in Cassinga and ends with their never-ending and inescapable emotional and psychological damage which, instead of healing, have been accumulating much pain and suffering over the years.

In grappling with the conflict between diverse testimonies and memories of the Cassinga attack, as well as the immense suffering and its complexities embedded in the pervasiveness of the violence which still pierces survivors' lives since the Cassinga event, this work is appropriately divided into two distinct sections. The first section, Chapters 2 to 5, interrogates and critiques how the visual and oral presentations of the Cassinga massacre do, or do not, authenticate survivors' actual experience of violence on the ground. The last section of this study, Chapters 6 and 7, is concerned with the exploration of survivors' ongoing emotional disturbance and rage due to the victims' 'disrupted expectations' in the name of 'reconciliation without justice.'

Chapter 2 critiques the way the photograph of the Cassinga open mass grave is incorrectly interpreted⁶⁸ as an 'iconic' visual image supposedly exposing the SADF's brutal massacre of defenceless women and children in Cassinga. One argument in this chapter is that the misery of the Cassinga massacre is not elicitable or "transferable to others" through photographic practices. Put differently, the actual experience of the Cassinga massacre on the ground, which many survivors described as constituting multiple scenes of panic and horror, was far more brutal and complex than what this image has constructed and framed or fixed.

Critically therefore, this visual image produces the absence of the physical violence as tangibly experienced by those who survived the humanitarian disaster on the ground. In view of this scenario, the central focus of this chapter is to problematize the ambiguity of the photograph of

⁶⁸ For example, the narrow and skewed meaning given to this image such as during national commemorations of the Cassinga massacre in Namibia.

the Cassinga open mass grave in relation to its “iconicity.” The chapter argues that this image constructs a monolithic and rudimentary picture in relation to the heterogeneity and complex materiality of the situation on the ground. This argument interrogates, to follow Sarah Pink’s point, “the problematic assumption that reality is visible, observable and recordable in video or photographs.”⁶⁹ To this end, the “iconic photograph” of the Cassinga massacre is not a “dominant source of knowledge and (re)presentation” of the exactness of the brutal experience of the Cassinga massacre. Instead, this image transmits an implicit and subtle face of the Cassinga violence.

Chapter 3 examines images photographed by SADF paratroopers during the fall of the Cassinga camp. In particular, this chapter focuses on the picture of Brigadier Mike Du Plessis and Colonel Jan Breytenbach, the two top field commanders for the Cassinga attack who were photographed in Cassinga during the operation. The chapter argues that, in creating this photograph, the eye of the SADF camera appeared tilted in such a way that the background and foreground of the photograph have been eliminated. This is, perhaps, to forestall the disturbing realities of what actually happened to the victims of the Cassinga massacre. In view of this representation, the chapter argues that this image silences violence and constructs another reality for public consumption.⁷⁰ The deliberate obscuring of the violence that this image was apparently created for, as opposed to the supposed explosiveness of brutal violence that the “iconic photograph” of the Cassinga open mass grave intended showing the world, creates a dichotomy between the story of this photograph and that of the victims of the massacre.

In this relation above, the chapter argues that since this photograph was staged in such a way that the perpetrators appear divorced from the brutal violence that they are accused of having committed against civilians, then the sort of ‘truth’ that the immaculate photograph (as I will refer to the main photograph in this chapter) attempts to disseminate is metaphoric or symbolic. That is, the meaning that this photograph is anticipated to propagate is a superficial thing: concealing the violent environment it purports to represent and in which it exists. Hence, the

⁶⁹ Sarah Pink, *Doing ethnography: images, media and representation in research*, (London: Sage, 2001), p. 31.

⁷⁰ A “cropping of the same” image appears in Willem Steenkamp’s *Borderstrike: South Africa into Angola*, plate 13 of the photographs of the Cassinga attack and other SADF operations. This photograph appears to be the only black and white image of the Cassinga attack that I found in the former SADF archives in Pretoria.

genre of *truth* that this picture shows exists only within the limits of the SADF official discourse of the Cassinga attack.

Chapter 4 deals with issues of individual survivors' bodily damage as metaphors: Here, two cases of survivors with disabled or amputated body parts as a result of the Cassinga attack are the central focus. The chapter argues that the terrible memories embedded in such sites of violence (scars on the victims' bodies) are far beyond the reach, explanations and understandings of the inexperienced viewers. I will refer to such sites or scars of the victims' damaged bodies as *closed gates*, because such scars symbolize violent spaces through which violence made forced entrance into the victims' bodies. The victims, bearers of such sites of violence, describe such damaged spaces as *frontiers*: because they obscure the inexperienced viewer from witnessing violence beyond the surface of the damaged body. In this relation, two concepts, *implicit* and *explicit memories* become crucial to explore as I attempt to trace the picture of the experienced violence and its endurance beyond the surface of the amputated or damaged body.

Implicit memory is problematized as an acidic substance that does not virtually exist as tangible evidence on the surface of the scars of the wounded victims' bodies. Instead, it resides below the surface of the scars, therefore, obscured from others' experience and understanding. The chapter further argues that although implicit memory is so violent inside the body of the beholder, it is not elicitable for the other people to see and offer assistance to the sufferer. Equally so, the victims whose bodies are maimed and showing disturbing sites of violence do not have a proper language to express their suffering and unending pain other than telling us stories or metaphors about the atrocious Cassinga massacre and its excruciating aftermath. Hence, other than perceiving them as metaphors, it is problematic to embrace the victims' damaged bodies as authenticating the dynamic of the actual experience and endurance of the Cassinga violence.

Chapter 5 discusses, among other issues, how testimony relates to memory. By memory, I refer to the way the experience of the violence is framed and concealed inside the victim's body and emotions and which cannot be passed on to the other as tangible evidence. In this relation, I shall argue that testimony is no substitute for memory. Instead, testimony should be embraced as a metaphor or shadowy figure of memory. This is based on the fact that every testimonial narrative

of the Cassinga attack breaks ties with the facticity or materiality of that event. Testimony authenticates the Cassinga massacre insufficiently. One reason to explain this anomaly is the fact that testimony articulates language. It conveys to us stories about the Cassinga massacre, rather than articulating the violence that it aspires to unearth and unravel to the inexperienced other.

In view of this conflict, I will attempt to explore how testimony or metaphors, as a technique that aspires to show Cassinga the way it was practically experienced on the ground, eclipse the physical violence. Yet, testimony or metaphors, as I have indicated earlier, still receive preponderant precedence, in the public narration of the Cassinga massacre, over the victims' ongoing sufferings. This is contrary to survivors intentions to disclose the violence before the inexperienced world. As a result, considerable contradictions arise between the vibrant dynamics of the actual traumatic world and the conceptual representation of the Cassinga massacre through testimonies.

Chapter 6 argues that as a result of the gruesomeness and the "political outrage" of the Cassinga massacre, the majority of South African paratroopers who took part in the attack have remained mute about what happened in Cassinga in 1978. This is particularly so of a few prominent figures, especially the top military echelons in the planning and commanding role of the Cassinga massacre, who have remained obdurate that Cassinga was a legitimate military target. The central argument in this chapter is that the perpetrators' silence or denial of the mass killings of civilians in Cassinga illustrates the divisions among them. To put it slightly differently, not all paratroopers agree with the SADF official version of the Cassinga attack. This is primarily noticeable in the differences between the former senior commanders of the Cassinga attack and some of their former junior officers, some of whom have publicly challenged the SADF version by refuting its claims that Cassinga was not a refugee camp. Three distinctive categories of the Cassinga paratroopers will be explored according to the following classifications: *Disclaimers*, *Polemicists* and *Introverts* as I call them.

As Cassinga enters into the distant future with layers of unresolved issues piling on top of each other, the victims' suffering exacerbates. In this relation, Chapter 7 argues that the victims' unending suffering and anger are exacerbated due to the unacceptable ways of dealing with the

aftermath of the Cassinga massacre, especially following Namibia independence. These issues include, among others, the victims' *disrupted expectations*, the 'biased' Namibian policy of reconciliation (which is given greater constitutional power than the suffering of the victims of colonialism and apartheid in Namibia), the lack of recognition for the victims' loss of human dignity, loss of loved ones, the right to know what happened to missing loved ones, the perpetrators' denial and disrespect for the sufferings of the victims, and the absence of social justice to deal with issues of integrity of the victims and the dead since Namibia's independence.

On a concluding note, it is important to state what this thesis does not do. One major feature of this study is the deliberate exclusion of the survivors' voice and body language as I have observed during different conversations with interviewees. This study also does not rely on the complete and direct transcriptions of how interviewees narrated what happened at Cassinga and the succeeding aftermath. Only a small number of the survivors I have interviewed have been quoted in this work as the nature of the work, scope and space could not allow me to do what individual survivors expected this work to produce. And indeed, as I began writing this work, a considerable amount of interviewees' transcripts used in this thesis were heavily reduced into excerpts, which in turn were edited and somewhat reshaped to suit the emerging theoretical argument and constraints of the academic framework required here.

Given these considerations, I would characterize this work as a "metadiscourse." That is, it is a scholarly approach that does not attempt to reproduce survivors' narratives of witnessing the massacre and the traumatic aftermath. But it also does not reject the way Cassinga is understood in the domain of survivors' remembering and understanding the SADF mass killing and maiming of Namibian exiles at Cassinga. This combines with and is exacerbated by the victims' endurance of suffering in silence, the incapacity of testimony to tangibly disclose the victims' damaged lives and, regrettably, the failure of post-colonial Namibia to deal with perpetrators of brutal violence and past gross human rights violations.

CHAPTER TWO

VIOLENCE AND THE “ICONIC PHOTOGRAPH”



Figure 1. The “iconic photograph” of one of the Cassinga open mass graves, 1978. According to Tor Sellstrom, who was in the UN team (UNHCR and WHO) that came to Cassinga a week after the massacre, this photograph was captured between May 5 and 6 by Gaetano Pagano, an Italian cameraman. At the time of the Cassinga massacre, Pagano was shooting a documentary film on Angola for a Swedish Television (SVT).

There is more than meets the eye in the photograph you see above. Primarily, the image you see challenges material evidence or historical actuality of the untold experience of Cassinga. Yet, the visual picture of the Cassinga open mass grave remains the “most important means through which the experience” of the brutal violence at Cassinga is narrated and shared in the public space. This is the entry point of this chapter which, among other things, explores the trajectory of

reconfiguring and framing loss of lives, bloodshed and the suffering of the victims of this traumatic episode through this photographic representation. In particular, this chapter examines how Cassinga is (re)constructed through the medium of this image in relation to different witnesses - survivors, perpetrators and photographers who visited and saw one of the two open mass graves at Cassinga - of the Cassinga massacre.

The anniversary of the Cassinga massacre is commemorated in Namibia each year, on May 4, ever since the attack happened. A number of times when such national events take place, the photograph of the Cassinga open mass grave is printed and distributed to ‘show’ the audience the suffering and agony of the brutal massacre of innocent Namibians at Cassinga. Interestingly, speakers at such national gatherings tell people that the photograph of the Cassinga open mass grave preserves memories of the brutal Cassinga massacre against forgetfulness.⁷¹ Nonetheless, analytically, this “iconic photograph” transmits a packaged, framed and conceptual genre of reality. For instance, the way this photograph is selective in showing only a particular scene of violence allows survivors of the Cassinga massacre to identify its obliviousness to multiple other terrible and, indeed, tangible realities of the Cassinga experience.

How this photograph can actually represent the untold and ongoing traumatic suffering of the victims of the Cassinga massacre, in particular the dead and the muted in the mass grave, is problematic. One immediate reason is that the ‘iconic’ photograph is a symbolic image. As such, the subject of the violence that this photograph was projected to expose is compromised by the dynamic of the impenetrable silhouette (or shadow) that this photograph elicits. The appearance of the “shadowy figure” that is insulating and homogenizing the dead bodies in the mass graves, making it difficult for the viewers to recognize and identify individual bodies of their loved ones, is crucial. This translates into survivors’ claims that most of the dead bodies were violently mutilated by the attackers. Moreover, the dead bodies were spoiled as they were left unattended to for more than a day (see Paavo Max’s account in this chapter) before the mass burials.

In fact, the people affected by the Cassinga massacre see the “iconic photograph” as producing multiple shadows of darkness in the lives of the bereaved families. The ‘shadow of darkness’

⁷¹ “Cassinga remembered,” *The Namibian* (May 5, 2009).

relates to the way this image suggests the brutal massacre of the innocent Namibians. Yet, affected families find no explanation; nothing in this photograph that can console and help them find solace in the loss of their loved ones. In essence, this image suggests that the ‘truer’ or tangible disastrous human carnage and individual identities of the Cassinga victims is something that nobody will ever recover and explain through the visual images of Cassinga.

If this image is a silhouette or shadow of the actual traumatic experience of those innocent Namibians buried in the mass grave, then this photograph should not be perceived as disclosing any ‘truth’ that reveals the tangible loathsomeness of that despicable episode. Instead, it should be treated as a piece of the historical record, not evidence of the Cassinga events. This suggests that as a ‘historical record’ or testimony of the mass killings of innocent Namibians, this photograph does not produce the exactitude of that event. This means that historical records of the Cassinga massacre (unlike the actual experience of the event) are “constructed in human consciousness” or intelligence under distinct limitations. To paraphrase Allen Johnson in a different context, whether the aim of historical records (such as the case of the iconic photograph) is to tell how it really was or how it really came to be, such records can never reach mathematical certainty or a high degree of probability or explain the dynamics of the violence as experienced in actual life.⁷²

In the above context, the iconic photograph, as a document of the Cassinga massacre’s historical record, is less complex and less truthful than the actual dynamic of the violence. The grim picture that this image shows is disembodied / removed from the mesh of multiple complex realities of violence and human suffering (physical and emotional) as a result of the Cassinga massacre. This image rather presents a single reality, albeit abstract, by way of constructing an impenetrable wall. The wall or the frontier between the viewer and the dead bodies conceals multiple undisclosed and unimaginable suffering experienced by the dead. The impassable frontier of separation or the exclusions that this image constructs generates collusion between violence, death and impunity. These three subjects - violence, death and impunity - all of which represent conceptual meaning in this study act together by way of cementing the obscurity

⁷² Allen Johnson, *The historian and historical evidence* (New York: Charles Scribner’s sons, 1926), p. 141.

between the dead bodies and those of us who intend to communicate with the dead people about their untold bitter experiences.

So, since this image breaks ties with the tangible atrociousness of the massacre, it raises a number of exploratory questions and interrogations about how this picture authenticates the version of *truth* regarding the indiscriminate mass killing, maiming, disappearance and suffering of innocent Namibian refugees. In this relation, Scott McQuire argues that, although in a different context, “the ambiguity of the meaning of images not only questions the modern notion of truth,” but it also destabilizes the basic premises of modernity and the reality that the camera, “as an agent of change that overturns the realist paradigm,” frames and constructs.⁷³ Here, the notion of “destabilization” also relates to the way this photograph frames violence in such a way that it presents the viewer with multiple categories of concealed and unnamed traumatic experiences. The exclusion of despicable violence and its dynamics stimulates witnesses of the Cassinga attack to narrate individual experiences of some of the terrible things that the “iconic” photograph conceals. Let me attempt to explore this scenario under the following subheading.

Tracing other realities beyond the ‘iconic’ frame: the eyewitnesses’ account

Around noon, May 4, 1978 John Kawaalala⁷⁴ left Lubango with two companies of PLAN combatants or Omakoma. Most of the combatants were new intakes at the Tobias Hainyeko Training Centre⁷⁵ near Lubango, a distance of 278km North West of Cassinga. Their attempt to reach Cassinga on the day of the massacre was unsuccessful. Their convoy was bombed by the South African Air Force (SAAF) and forced to retreat back to Lubango. On the night of May 4, they regrouped and successfully arrived in Cassinga on the morning of May 5 under the command of Uushona alias Komanda yeeKomanda. As soon as they arrived, they started collecting the dead bodies for mass burial. Paavo Max who provided me with this account said that Dimo Hamaambo⁷⁶ delegated the task of counting the dead bodies to him as they were

⁷³ Scott McQuire, “Visions of modernity: representation, memory, time and space in the age of the camera.” In Sarah Pink, *Doing ethnography*, p. 16.

⁷⁴ John Kawaalala is a Lieutenant in the Namibian Defense Force

⁷⁵ The SWAPO Guerrillas Training Centre near Lubango in operation between 1976 - 1989.

⁷⁶ The late Jerobeam Dimo Hamaambo (1932 - 2002) who was in Cassinga at the time of the attack was the Commander of the People’s Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN) until its integration into the new Namibia Defence Force, comprising members from former erstwhile forces, in 1989. After independence, Hamaambo served

interred in the mass graves. The following brief excerpt provides a glimpse of Max's experience of the making of the Cassinga mass graves and the counting of the dead bodies. "We started with the smaller trench. One hundred and forty four [144] bodies were buried in that hole. The badly mutilated and spoiled bodies," Paavo said,

were collected first and taken to the nearest burial site. This site was at the centre of the camp, near the clinic ... It was easily accessible than the bigger trench that was at the far end of the camp ... where many civilians were killed. The smaller trench was very deep, but very narrow. This is why we buried the badly damaged bodies and other bisected human pieces inside that narrower trench. This could also be the reason why the photograph of that mass grave appears not to exist. The second trench was much larger as it was meant for storage purposes⁷⁷ ... we were planning to build a storage depot at that site.⁷⁸ That one, the main mass grave lays in the west of the camp closer to the maize field - a few meters away- on the left side of the pathway from the centre of the camp to the river side ... in the western direction of the camp. I counted five hundred and eighty three (583) bodies buried in the main mass grave. The total number of the bodies buried in the two mass graves is seven hundred and twenty seven (727). This is the number I counted and submitted to the late Tate Uushona.⁷⁹

The following excerpt taken from the interview with Ndarius "Mbolondondo" Shikongo who also participated in the mass burials of the Cassinga victims corroborates Max's account:

The bodies in this mass grave (in the photograph above) are buried in layers. But, I must admit that most of the bodies were not handled with the respect they deserved. Many of them were in very bad shape, especially those buried in the smaller mass grave and underneath the bigger mass grave: they were badly mutilated. The top layer that appears in this photograph contains the less mutilated bodies ... what is at the bottom of this photograph is horrible ... you cannot see it but – believe what I tell you! ... Pieces and parts of human flesh ... our soldiers from Lubango, who piled up the bodies and buried them, were instructed to lay the bodies accordingly, in accordance with our customs and rituals. For example, the heads of the dead facing the West ... we detached shoes from their feet and removed the belts, as it is a custom that one cannot bury a dead body, *oshimhu*, wearing a belt or shoes. Regrettably, the task of collecting the

as Namibia's first chief of the Namibian Defence Force (NDF) until his retirement in 2000. He died in September 2002.

⁷⁷ According to my interviews with Max and Shikongo, the two trenches that became the mass graves were already dug before the massacre (see details later in this chapter).

⁷⁸ According to some other survivors, there were also other trenches in Cassinga at the sites of the adobe bricklaying projects.

⁷⁹ The author's interview with Paavo Max, Efindi, 2007.

bodies was enormous and quite challenging. The stench was unbearable and we had no special equipment and tools other than using bare hands and wooden sticks to carry the bodies ... The enemy abandoned some stretchers in the camp, but they were not enough. We cut wooden sticks to carry the bodies across the length and breadth of the camp ... and you know there were close to eight hundred dead bodies, not counting parts and pieces of human flesh. We tried the best we could, but it became too difficult to properly manage and control the distressful situation. It became almost impossible to bury the dead, procedurally and accordingly. It was a miserable moment ... We were confronted with uneasiness to do things accordingly. The unprecedented number of mutilated bodies ... the unpleasant stench of human blood and flesh made us drowsy, nauseous and very much uncomfortable. However, we managed to speed up that difficult and challenging task. We hurried to cover the mass graves to reduce the stench of the decomposing bodies. We had the urge to finish, at once, and move away from the horrible smell, away from the qualms of the unpleasant pictures of human misery and total destruction to the camp and property. Unfortunately, after we have closed the mass graves, we received instructions to display the bodies for journalists to view and document the massacre. People stepped on the bodies, removed sand and prepared the bodies for the journalists viewing and photographing. The mass graves were left open ... we covered the top of the open tombs with branches of Eucalyptus trees until the arrival of journalists from Luanda. It was a horrible experience, very difficult and emotional moment to remember: people dead with their grieving eyes and mouths widely open and fixed on you, which is customarily incorrect!⁸⁰

The bizarre and challenging task of re-opening the Cassinga mass graves was not about conducting forensic assessments or establishing the DNA examinations to determine individual identities of unidentified bodies buried in the Cassinga mass graves which remain shrouded in the mystery of unknown persons. The largest mass grave at Cassinga was reopened for a different purpose. That is, the camera was expected to witness the unacceptable level of brutal murder of defenceless women and children, and, in return, report the level of unacceptable violence to the concerned public. Ironically, it turned out that instead of capturing the reality of the violence that the bodies in the mass graves experienced, for the public knowledge and understanding of it, the camera packaged the dead bodies into objects which conceal violence.

What is interesting, and particularly gruesome, is that the camera can actually literally not penetrate the top layer of the dead bodies to reveal the terrible evidence below and therefore it

⁸⁰ The author's interview with Darius 'Mbolondondo' Shikongo, Ondangwa, 2007.

disallows the public viewing and understanding of violence through the visual. So, while the photograph of the Cassinga open mass grave may bring to our sight some prearranged images of blurred dead bodies, whose identities are difficult to recognize even with the assistance of survivors' interviews, this photograph cannot unpack traumatic memories and the suffering of the dead: the victims' struggle with their terminally wounded bodies and their appalling experience of brutal death under the care of no one.

In considering this scenario, the politics of the camera as "an eye of history," one that is associated with "realism" as Brady is quoted to have said, and therefore invested with the absolute power to reveal "unpleasant, hard facts,"⁸¹ is challenged. This is the position of Susan Sontag who contends that "many of the canonical images of early war photography turn out to have been staged, or to have their subjects tampered with."⁸² This trend in photography resonates with the way photography constructed, framed and packaged the photograph of the Cassinga open mass grave for the consumption of public audience. As a consequence, there are conflicting statements between individual survivors' (those few who attended the burials) experience of the scene of the mass grave prior to the re-opening, and what the camera saw and showed to the public after the mass grave was unsealed. Let us consider more closely this part of the interview with Paavo Max:

My sister, Anna Max, was killed in the attack ... I was fortunate to discover her dead body and assessed how she was killed. She had two bullet wounds in the back of her head through her forehead. My analysis is that she was shot point-blank from behind while hiding from the enemy in the defensive trenches. I, myself buried her in this mass grave ... her body was laid on the top layer of the mass grave, but it is difficult to recognize and identify it in the photograph. But, for sure her body is there.⁸³

If the Cassinga largest mass grave was re-opened (first, the earth was shoveled out to expose the bodies, then people stepped on the bodies to remove non-human particles) to reveal the dead bodies for the camera's two-dimensional eye, then it suggests that what we see in the photograph was reconstructed, recreated and remade in a number of ways. Such possible repackaging would have compromised the original arrangement of the bodies in the mass grave. In other words, it is

⁸¹ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the pain of others* (New York: Picador, 2003), p. 46.

⁸² *Ibid*, pp. 46 - 48.

⁸³ The author's interview with Darius 'Mbolondondo' Shikongo, Ondangwa, 2007.

possible that the top layer of the bodies in the larger mass grave at Cassinga was rearranged or restaged in a particular way for the camera gaze. To give one example, Paavo Max told me that the mutilated body of his sister, Anna Max, was originally visible among the bodies forming the top layer of the mass grave, but invisible in the “iconic” photograph.

Therefore, the fact that this photograph packages, mysteriously, the recognizable dead bodies into unknown persons generates a particular trajectory of conflicting truths. In fact, the genre of truth documented in this photograph drifts away from the individual survivors’ realities. This pertains to the witnesses’ personal encounter with the physical recognition and emotional presence of the dead people during the burial process, not only mutilated but decomposing and issuing a terrible smell, with maggots and flies, all of which cannot be verified in the photograph of the Cassinga open mass grave.

Authorship, circulation and intention of the ‘iconic photograph’

Gary Baines provides hints about early publication and circulation of this photograph:

The “iconic photograph” of the Cassinga open mass grave, in black and white was widely syndicated and published by newspapers such as *Basler Zeitung* under the caption ‘Ein Dokument des Grauens,’ which translates into English as, ‘a document of horror.’ In June [1978] SWAPO issued its eponymous bulletin with the same image appearing on the cover with the byline (‘Massacre at Kassinga: climax of Pretoria’s all-out campaign against the Namibian resistance’). The picture was included in the Kassinga File, a collection of images compiled by Pagano and Swedish filmmaker Sven Asberg.⁸⁴ The file circulated through a network of agencies and organizations affiliated to the international anti-apartheid movements. These organizations distributed and displayed the images of the mass grave at public exhibitions and in publications. The shot became emblematic of the Cassinga massacre. It was also reproduced on a number of posters commemorating Kassinga [or Cassinga] Day produced by solidarity organizations such as the International University Exchange Fund (IUEF) and SWAPO’s own Department of

⁸⁴ Sven Asberg appears to have visited Cassinga in the company of Gaetano Pagano. He is often quoted as Pagano’s co – author of some of the photographs of the Cassinga massacre photographed by the journalists who visited Cassinga after the attack.

Information and Publicity poster entitled ‘Massacre at Kassinga’ which must have been produced fairly soon after the event.⁸⁵

The exact date when this image was shot is ambiguous. Tor Sellstrom⁸⁶ who was in the UN team (UNHCR and WHO) that came to Cassinga a week after the massacre told me the following:

The photo [of the Cassinga open mass grave] was captured between May 5 and 6 by Gaetano Pagano an Italian. He was at the time shooting a documentary film on Angola for a Swedish Television (SVT). We / the UN team (UNHCR and WHO) and two journalists from the GDR only arrived in Cassinga a week or so after the attack. By then all the mass graves were already covered.⁸⁷

Per Sanden who arrived in Cassinga before Tor Sellstrom told me that he is not the author of the Cassinga open mass grave photograph:

I cannot, of course, answer for all the other photographers who visited Cassinga after the massacre. In my own case, I did not develop my photographs (most of which were shot in Cassinga a few days before the attack) until I arrived in Stockholm (Sweden), about a month later. When it comes to the film rolls they were all processed in London, a couple of days later, since I sent them there for processing and dissemination, owing to the fact that South Africa claimed they had attacked a military installation and not a refugee settlement. BBC in London processed the 16 mm films and used them together with my other material taken in Cassinga before the attack. This was fast considering the availability of laboratories, flights to Europe, etcetera, when there were no portable professional video equipment that time and no linking of 16 mm film material directly to various stations around the world, which is the case today.⁸⁸

The authorship of the photograph of the Cassinga open mass grave is not an issue for this study, nor are the individual intentions behind the foreign photographers’ visit to Cassinga. Political, ideological, humanitarian and commercial interests could be some of the factors that drew foreign photographers’ generally to visit Cassinga. In considering the specific scope of this study, it is unfortunate that these factors cannot be explored in depth. However, based on the

⁸⁵ Source: BAB, A.A3, SWAPO Collection, 78aSPR2, 16 May 1978. Also in Gary Baines, “The Battle for Cassinga: Conflicting Narratives and Contested Meanings,” 2007. Visit: http://eprints.ru.ac.za/946/1/baines_Cassinga.pdf

⁸⁶ Tor Sellstrom, a Swedish citizen, “coordinated official Swedish support to the Patriotic Fronts (ZANU/ ZAPU) of Zimbabwe, SWAPO and to the ANC of South Africa.” SIDA provided crucial humanitarian support (such as education and health facilities) to SWAPO civilian centres of exiled Namibians during the liberation struggle.

⁸⁷ The author’s email interview with Tor Sellstrom, 2009.

⁸⁸ The author’s face to face interview with Per Sanden, Windhoek, 2009.

interviews with some of the photographers who visited Cassinga after the massacre, it stands out emphatically that individual photographers came to Cassinga with a purpose, based on the perception that the camera can capture violence (see Per Sanden's account below). There was a belief that it could generate sympathy and stir public response to stall or condemn political violence in Namibia and in neighbouring countries which hosted exiled Namibians. Susan Sontag writes, in a different context, "the Vietnam war was mobilized by images (and) the feelings that something had to be done about the war in Bosnia was built from the attentions of journalists ... who brought images of Sarajevo under siege" into the public domain.⁸⁹

In the context of the Cassinga scenario, the perception that photographs of war and violence can stimulate the public "repudiation of war" appears erroneous. In view of the public impact that the dissemination of the photograph of the Cassinga massacre was expected to create, I argue that the circulation of this image was (and it remains so until today) less effective in unpacking the Cassinga violence to the intended audience. Of course, "the camera can see more than is supposed."⁹⁰ But, what the camera sees is self-contained and self-actualized. Because, although the camera can see violence and experience it in real life, nothing reaches the audience in the same way violence was experienced on the ground by different agents of witnessing and telling it. In fact, visual images dilute violence. As Liisa Malkki writes, in a different context, "photographs and other visual representations ... speed up the evaporation of history and narrativity."⁹¹ This implies that "to photograph is to frame and to frame is to exclude,"⁹² conceal and damage evidence. This is exactly what the photograph of the Cassinga open mass grave does. This scenario is further explored, below, in the interview with one of the photographers who visited Cassinga after the massacre.

Per Sanden's camera and exclusions

⁸⁹ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the pain of others*, p. 93.

⁹⁰ John Liebenberg & Patricia Hayes, *Bush of ghosts: life and war in Namibia 1986 - 1990* (Cape Town : Umuzi, 2010), front page.

⁹¹ Liisa Malkki H., "Speechless emissaries: refugees humanitarianism, and dehistoricization." In Hinton Alexander Laban (ed.), *Genocide: an anthropological reader* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002) p. 353.

⁹² Susan Sontag, *Regarding the pain of others*, p. 41.

Per Sanden,⁹³ a Swede by birth who currently lives in Windhoek, Namibia, was possibly the first photographer to arrive in Cassinga after the massacre. Prior to the Cassinga attack, Per Sanden had spent time in Cassinga documenting the everyday life of refugees in the camp. He was there until May 3, 1978. Cassinga was attacked a few hours after he had left. He was prompted to go back to Cassinga to document the massacre. Unfortunately due to logistics and security concerns, he only arrived in Cassinga on May 6 with SWAPO combatants. Per Sanden was perhaps the first international photographer to witness the Cassinga open mass grave. The following extract, taken from my interview with him, about his experience of the live picture of the dead bodies in the open mass grave and how he, as both a witness and photographer at the same time, responded to the deplorable scene of violence is crucial for the discussions to follow:

I arrived back in Cassinga on 6 May 1978 together with units of PLAN from Jamba, a mine town southeast of Cassinga, where we arrived in the evening of the 3rd of May, 1978 from Cassinga. Traveling back to Cassinga in a heavily armed convoy of Volvo jeeps, Land Rovers and trucks with plenty of PLAN soldiers we all speculated about what was going to meet us there. ... We drove up and offloaded at the big parade ground in Cassinga where I had delivered a short speech, during my first visit to Cassinga, in front of hundreds of women and children who gathered at the parade.⁹⁴ I had seen dead people before, during the years from 1973, when I first crossed into Namibia with PLAN combatants, and onwards. Nevertheless, this was more devastating than anything else I had experienced before. The smell was evident; it lay across the place as a fog. I knew I came back with a purpose. I went into action without hesitating. The Aaton camera was prepared like I always used to do, cleaned the lens, checked the battery level and extra cassettes, placed it in its special belt around the waist, extra batteries in the jacket pocket, off I went [to the mass graves]. PLAN soldiers had removed the huge branches that had covered the pitches, which were all full with bodies. There it stopped for me. I got the camera up to the right eye, I watched through the ocular the horrific sight of war fought with terror. People I had met just three days earlier! I could not do the normal shots, close ups, wider pictures with perhaps a panoration (sic), as any other camera operator could have done, I suppose. I did not even zoom in to set focus and then zoom out. I felt like

⁹³ Per Sanden had worked as a photographer, predominately alongside SWAPO combatants at the war fronts and inside Namibia since the mid-70s and later worked with a SWAPO “contingent” that provided protection for Namibian refugees in Angola from attacks by UNITA and South African troops who at the time operated from bases inside Angola and occupied Namibia. Prior to the Cassinga attack, Per Sanden spent weeks in Cassinga to document the everyday lives of civilians in the camp. He arrived back in Cassinga on May 6 to photograph scenes of the Cassinga massacre. Source: the author’s email and face to face interviews with Per Sanden, 2008 and 2009.

⁹⁴ Parade or *Okapale*, in the Oshiwambo language, is where daily roll calls were made prior to resuming daily activities in and around the Cassinga camp. The *Okapale* was the main target of the first wave of the surprise air bombardments that hit directly on crowds of people assembled at the morning parade.

I intruded a space with its own rules. Here hundreds of people were laying, they could receive recognition, perhaps of their mothers and their fathers and their children, who could feel offended by my zooming down into their misery. I took a few wide shots of the two pitches (sic), well describing the magnitude of this crime. [Well], it turned out that my wide shots were not so common among all the other camera operators flown there from Luanda. We moved away from the pitches (sic) that became the graves of Cassinga.⁹⁵

The experience of the Cassinga open mass grave, as Per Sanden suggests, depends upon personal experience. This involves the physical and emotional engagement with the inconceivable reality of human suffering and agony which is impossible to transmit to others through visual or oral techniques. Practically therefore, what happened in Cassinga, in terms of human loss and suffering, is beyond the reach of any photographic narration. That is, no photograph can explain anything regarding the human suffering and misery which the dead bodies in the Cassinga open mass grave endured.

In the face of the dilemma between the impossibility of photographing violence and his professional work, as a photographer, Per Sanden was quick to discover that his *Aaton* Camera was ineffective in capturing, recording and documenting brutal violence. In fact, specifically, Per Sanden's statement above (as evidenced by his refusal to "zoom in" the lens of his camera, and "out" to set the focus on the dead bodies) infers that his Aaton camera is a *useless weapon*. The notion of a *useless weapon* is a powerful metaphor. It translates into Per Sanden's understanding of the photographs of the Cassinga brutal open mass grave as part of the taxonomy of *weapons* of violence, human misery and despair. Because, a photograph like that of the Cassinga traumatic open mass grave, showing unidentifiable dead bodies, would not help the affected families find solace and accept the loss of their loved ones. But it wounds and exacerbates the suffering and pain of the families whose loved ones disappeared during the Cassinga attack.

In this context above, one argues that Per Sanden's apprehensiveness not to shoot accurately or 'zoom in to set focus' and shoot at the bodies (similar to the gun shots at close range) derives from the notion that to do so would be akin to the SADF shooting, wounding and killing a massive number of innocent people at point-blank range. To him, it feels like another way of

⁹⁵ The author's interview with Per Sanden, Windhoek, 2009.

exacerbating the misery of the already dead and mutilated bodies. This scenario resonates with claims by survivors of the Cassinga massacre that the majority of the victims buried in the mass graves were shot at point-blank range by the pitiless SADF paratroopers.

In rethinking the emotional suffering and damage that the zoomed-in, close camera shots would inflict on the already damaged bodies and to those who would see the photographs, Per Sanden (re)considered the act of aiming and shooting accurately at the bodies in the mass graves. He deliberately shot wider with the intent not to pass on the “misery” protruding from the bodies in the mass graves (making the terrible injuries evident in the photographs) to the intended public audience and the affected family members in particular. To put it differently, Per Sanden weighed the damage potentially done by close-up shots against the damage done by obscuring identities through distance and therefore rendering the bodies unidentifiable by the families.

In essence, this means that the mutilation and the decomposition of the bodies were so gruesome that even a close-up shot would not have helped anyone to successfully identify the bodies. “They [the mutilated bodies] could receive no recognition” as Per Sanden put it in the interview above. In this context, Per Sanden anticipated that, since most of the bodies were in bad shape, mutilated and already decomposing, taking closer aim and shooting at such catastrophic scenes of human ruin would cause further damage. This is because affected family members would want to recognize their lost family members in this photograph, but when it would turn out to be impossible to recognize or identify the missing loved ones in this photograph, it would cause further emotional damage to the affected individual families.

This logic raises another important point. It implies that to photograph scenes of brutal violence is not a way of revealing the victims’ identities or showing evidence of what actually happened on the ground. Instead, it is a way of disconnecting brutal violence from its natural niche or life, and renders it intangible and practically inexplicable. That is, to photograph the Cassinga open mass grave is a way of capturing brutal violence belatedly, figuratively and in a packaged and staged format, missing the most fundamental picture of how violence unfolded: unstaged, visceral and immediate. Hence, rendering the photograph of the Cassinga open mass grave as ‘iconic’ is fraught with considerable omissions, inexactitude and negation, removed from the

originality of the emotionally and physically appalling picture of the open mass graves as suggested by the experience of photographers, journalists and a few survivors who stayed in the camp to bury the dead.

As a consequence, this “iconic” image does not convey the unadulterated experiences of violence to the intended recipient. In fact, it should be noted that the scale of damage and exclusion due to the camera’s close or distant shots - those positions that Per Sanden had trouble with as he tried to photograph this scene in such a way that its physical and emotional realities were presented to the viewer through photographs - is high and carries negative implications. This is because the closer the camera lens moves to focus on a specific area, the more things are excluded. Likewise, the further the camera lens moves from the target of shooting, the more violence is given a chance to elude and disappear. Because the image detail gets blurred, detail becomes secondary to the whole.

Since all the photographs of the Cassinga massacre can be perceived as embedded in the elusiveness of the actual experiences of the dead and their untold stories, such images should be understood as unpacking shadows of darkness or disclosing the shocking absence of the deplorable referent. This argument is unequivocally demonstrated in the photograph of the Cassinga open mass grave which is completely oblivious to the physicality of the brutal violence that gave it life. In the place of tangible and live experiences of the violence, we see the speechless shadows of human remains. The victims’ voice of trauma and suffering are completely muted, their faces badly twisted and completely disfigured to the point of being no longer recognizable as human beings, but as shadows of human shock and vileness. The victims’ vitality and attractiveness is eroded by brutal death, the personal agony of dying prematurely, away from their parents and families and disconnected from receiving immediate humanitarian assistance from their comrades.

These agonies underlie Per Sanden’s hesitation to “zoom closer” into the shadows of shock and vileness in the mass graves, because zooming in (the same as aiming and shooting) on the already damaged and significantly lost human traits is destructive. When such images are shown to the affected people, they might possibly stir up bad blood, discontentment and restlessness.

They could possibly shut the doors on any closure or serenity of the families whose loved ones went missing following the Cassinga massacre. This is exactly the case when the “iconic” photograph is shown to the people closely touched by the Cassinga massacre.

The other factor underpinning Per Sanden’s apprehensiveness about shooting at the tainted bodies in the mass graves relates to the fact that people do not, to follow Edmund Burke, enjoy or “like to look at images of suffering.”⁹⁶ In addition, as William Hazlitt puts it, “love of mischief, love of cruelty is as natural to human beings as sympathy.”⁹⁷ These statements imply that people look at disturbing images of violence with an aspiration to identify and name things in them, not to find that they hold nothing and then stay haunted by the ambivalence and the complete absence of answers they expect to find in photographs, answers that would help to explain unresolved difficult questions. If photographs were able to name and identify the missing victims of the Cassinga massacre, affected families could accept the loss of their loved ones and possibly find some sort of tangible closure.

The camera as the architect of brutal violence

The camera is the inventor of the Cassinga violence. In fact, the camera is ambidextrous– a double-faced agent. As much as it could aim, shoot, destroy and damage the physical identities of individual bodies in the open mass grave, the camera was equally the mastermind behind the initiation of the nauseating Cassinga violence, the key agent in informing the military think-tank behind the Cassinga massacre in its discovery, mapping, and surveying of the position of the Cassinga camp, as well as in its precision bombing and dropping of paratroopers on the “enemy target.”

To be precise, the Cassinga massacre was a construct of the camera shots from the air which preceded the aerial bombardments and the drop of paratroopers into Cassinga. The camera introduced the geographical space or location of Cassinga into the maps of the SADF regional aggression. Without the use of camera technology to map out Cassinga’s position in Angola, the

⁹⁶ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical enquiry into the origin of our ideas of the sublime and beautiful*, 1757. Cited in Susan Sontag, *Regarding the pain of others*, p. 87.

⁹⁷ William Hazlitt, cited in Susan Sontag, *Regarding the pain of others*, p. 87.

planning of the Cassinga attack from the air would have been extremely difficult (even unthinkable) and the unprecedented loss of human lives in the long and bitter history of the Namibian liberation struggle could have been avoided.

In this context, relying on the camera to record and document the “misery” that it (the camera) helped to create was a situation that generated some anxiety and apprehensiveness among sympathetic photographers. Closely connected to this line of thought is that Per Sanden perceived the association between the camera and its operator as producing a sense of betrayal, mistrust and the transgression of love for the other. Moreover, since the dead bodies (most of which lay underneath and beyond the reach of the camera’s eye or lens) in the mass grave were reduced to rubble and disfigured, photographic images from that scene could be flatly manipulated by the other side or opposition. Such photographs could inadvertently help create a fertile ground for the perpetrators to advance defensive claims, in desperate attempts to repair their damaged reputation.

Such is the case regarding the existing claims by certain perpetrators involved in the Cassinga massacre who argue that this photograph provides no evidence to authenticate SWAPO’s version of the event, namely that those killed in Cassinga or buried in the mass graves are beyond any doubt civilians, in particular, women and children. Consider the following scenario:

In my opinion, however, these photographs prove conclusively that there was no massacre of the innocents as alleged by Alexander in his thesis, that accusation was a propaganda ploy on the part of SWAPO and its sympathizers and that Alexander, if he was an unbiased investigator, should have arrived at the same conclusion. The relatively few female casualties found in the photograph(s) most certainly included the unfortunate ones ... used as human shields during the fighting in the trenches. Where is the mass grave filled with the bodies of well over a thousand ‘refugees’, mostly women and children? Alexander carefully avoided this thorny question but still made the accusation in his thesis that the majority of the people ‘massacred’ in Cassinga were civilian refugees. Photographs to prove this shameful accusation are strangely ‘not available.’⁹⁸

Closely linked to this statement, Jan Breytenbach who commanded the Cassinga massacre on the ground also claimed that:

⁹⁸ Jan Breytenbach, *Eagle strike*, p. 563.

SWAPO mutilated the bodies of its own people deliberately ... to underline the horror of the moment ... a deliberate ploy to claim that Cassinga was a refugee camp and not a most important military target. They wanted to hide the fact that they had suffered a huge military defeat by trying to turn it into a 'massacre.'⁹⁹

Scott McQuire proposes that “the uncertainty of meaning implied by the camera questions the idea that there can be an ultimate goal of a single, pure or untouched meaning and this entrains a profound epistemological shift in which the meaning of meaning has itself been irreversibly transformed.”¹⁰⁰ Responding to the perpetrators’ claims, survivors argue that using this photograph as a technique to claim the absence of the bodies of civilians in the photograph of the open mass grave at Cassinga suggests that this photograph is an anonymous image. As such, it does not provide any meaning, but people insert or attach meanings into it. In essence, the failure of this image to provide indisputable evidence regarding the massacre of innocent civilians in Cassinga empowers the perpetrators to overwrite the odor of their incorrectness and wrong-doing in Cassinga with the aura of correctness and blamelessness.

In this context, Per Sanden might have reasoned that in the same way as the SADF used the camera to plot the destruction and annihilation of hundreds of innocent lives in Cassinga, images produced by his camera would not necessarily do the opposite. Instead, such images would provide ingredients for the perpetrators’ version of the story. Furthermore, the shadows of death that obscure possible recognition and identification of civilian casualties or identification of the bodies of women and children in the mass graves also exacerbate the misery of those affected by the Cassinga massacre. Indeed, and ironically, the identification of the dead bodies of civilians in the mass grave would have been fundamental to challenge the perpetrators’ denial of the Cassinga massacre.

Since the bodies in the mass grave have become constructs of the shadow of the darkness, this photograph generates a friction or collision between the viewer’s gaze and the masking of the different realities that different viewers look for in this image. Christopher Pinney, in his study of

⁹⁹ Ibid, pp. 543 & 564.

¹⁰⁰ Sarah Pink, *Doing ethnography*, p. 16; Also in Scott McQuire, *Visions of modernity: representation, memory, time and space in the age of the camera* (London: SAGE publications Ltd., 1998).

cultural production through images in India, problematized the “space that photography occupies as ... a place where faces can easily become masks and where photography is translated as a complex theatrical idiom capable of representing persons with endlessly diverse exteriors, situated in equally diverse places.”¹⁰¹ It is this “masking,” the eclipsing or absence of the familiar human features which unleashes the “nothingness” or variance between the witness and the ruined, unrecognizable human features in this photograph that I will now explore below.

Survivors, Iconicity and Nothingness

Apa kape na sha apa!! The shock and disbelief in this exclamation indicates Martha Mwatilifange’s response when I interviewed her about the photograph of the Cassinga open mass grave. When translated from the Oshiwambo, this phrase means that there is nothing here (see excerpt below). The “nothingness” she proclaimed relates, as she implicitly told me, to the considerable exclusion of emotional and physical suffering which (among others) the victims in the mass grave endured and took to the grave with them, but to which the testimony of the “iconic” photograph is shockingly oblivious.

The fact that the photograph of the Cassinga open mass grave reveals the substantial absence of multiple other gruesome images (stories and tangible realities) pertaining to the dead victims’ brutal experience of violence and death, is one of the factors that generate arguments between survivors and what is retained in the “iconic” photographic memory. In fact, survivors feel that memories and stories of the dead victims are under risk of suffering permanent damage and loss. Because, as the terminally injured bodies succumb to violent death, the victims’ memories and testimonies of experiencing lethal violence also dwindle away, decay, decompose and gradually disappear in a similar manner to the dead bodies fading away.

In this regard, survivors aspire to conscientize viewers to rationally think about the scale of the hidden, unknown or untold physical and emotional dynamics of the Cassinga massacre outside the rectangle of the Cassinga ‘iconic’ photograph. In particular, beyond the simplicity or the peripheral vision of the Cassinga open mass grave as Martha Mwatilifange explains:

¹⁰¹ Christopher Pinney, *Camera Indica: The social life of Indian photographs* (London: Reaktion books, 1997), pp. 8-15.

I cannot comment anything about the content of this photograph ... suffice it saying that besides the reality that this photograph attempts to represent, there are multiple unknown graves of the victims of the Cassinga massacre. Survivors who escaped from the camp tell different stories of comrades who were badly injured, lost blood profusely and left to die alone in the bush. The bodies of such victims were never recovered, but there are also reports that some of our people's remains were discovered by Angolans and given pauper burials. But, I want to stress that what you see in this photograph is nothing –*Apa kape na sha apa!* This image has no resonance with the practical dynamics of the brutal violence on the ground: the memory pictures of the critically wounded comrades who succumbed to pain and loss of blood as others watched on, the screaming and anguished voices of despair of the wounded victims trapped in the burning thatched dwellings and in the trenches where the bayoneting and shooting at close range of civilians unfolded predominantly. People suffered deplorable damage: physically, emotionally and psychologically. I have a friend of mine, Angelina Angula, a survivor of the Cassinga massacre and currently a teacher at the Mweshipandeka Senior Secondary School in Ongwediva. I would advise that you visit and interview her. She survived the massacre inside the trenches, covered by dead bodies - these terrible things remain vivid and troublesome. I personally remain in the shock of the horrific picture of mutilated bodies of women and children bayoneted to death inside the trenches ... as well as roasted bodies of women and children burned inside vehicles where they sought protection. This I saw when I was rescued and walked, with rescuers, across the camp to the survivors' assembling point. My memory of such unbearable picture, of those innocent Namibians slaughtered cold-bloodedly, is infinitely and permanently wounding me with no end in sight to it!¹⁰²

The implicit memory picture that Martha decries resonates with what Siegfried Kracauer calls the “monogram.” Rosalind Morris explains “monogram” as a “memory image,” the last recalled image of a person whose lived history and relation to others generate a sense of his or her “truth.” Anything which does not signify something in terms of that truth - what is often called the essence of a person or personality - is generally omitted from these images.¹⁰³ In this relation, the “nothingness” or the obvious contradiction between individual survivors and the Cassinga iconic photograph points to this image's alienation or disconnectedness from survivors' “monograms,” the dynamics of those things which survivors count as tangibly traumatic,

¹⁰² The author's interview with Martha Mwatilifange, Oshakati, 2007.

¹⁰³ Rosalind C. Morris, *Photographies East: the camera and its histories in East and Southeast Asia* (Duke: Duke University Press, 2009), pp. 3-4; Siegfried Kracauer, “Photography.” In *The mass ornament: Weimar essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 51.

unacceptable and permanently present in the everyday memories of the victims of the Cassinga massacre.

Moreover, the “nothingness” of the photograph of the Cassinga open mass grave also signifies or carries a concern about the way the camera reinforces the separation of the dead bodies from personal traumatic memories of the victims buried in the Cassinga mass graves. Nonetheless, it is also important to recognize that although many survivors failed to relate their excruciating personal experiences to this image, they were nevertheless encouraged to conquer the photograph’s obtrusive silences. That is, each individual survivor eagerly explored and interrogated deplorable things that the photograph missed, obscured or failed to disclose and explain to the inexperienced viewer. Survivors for instance, interrogated the ambivalence and the exclusiveness of the photograph of the Cassinga open mass grave, considering the way this image covers up the identities of the bodies in the mass grave. In essence, this image produces dissonance and rupture between the divergent, disturbing practical realities in testimonies of individual survivors and the considerable exclusion of brutal violence demonstrated in the photograph.

A “mnemonic” and sole device against forgetfulness?

In considering the different testimonies from different witnesses of the Cassinga massacre, the iconicity of the photograph of the Cassinga open mass grave is challenged. To represent this “document of horror”¹⁰⁴ as “iconic” is to ignore the silences and exclusions embedded in what it has singled out. Paradoxically, this document has for long been perceived by the outside world as authenticating the viciousness of the SADF mass killings of Namibian refugees in Cassinga. This image is also often interpreted as “mnemonic” during official commemorations of the Cassinga massacre since Namibia independence.

Such a scenario contends with the notion that the photograph of the Cassinga open mass grave eludes the tangible horrendousness and complexities of the Cassinga massacre. I find this

¹⁰⁴ Gary Baines, “The battle for Cassinga: conflicting narratives and contested meanings,” 2007. Visit: http://eprints.ru.ac.za/946/1/baines_Cassinga.pdf

contradiction problematic, because in view of survivors' comments on this photograph, tangible violence makes heavy concessions to photography. In considering such important discoveries, it is naïve to perceive the iconic photograph as a "mnemonic" of the brutal experiences of Cassinga. What if there is no connection or corroboration between photographs of the Cassinga attack and the victims' personal memories of Cassinga or other brutal violence in the everyday experience of political killings and disappearances of innocent people prior to Namibian independence? Does this mean that when there are no photographs to act as an aid to such experiences, or when the victims' personal experiences of the violence are different from the experiences of photographs, that such bitter memories are forgotten or cannot be remembered?

Of course, the photograph of the Cassinga open mass grave unleashes uncomfortable emotions and anger deriving from the absolute absence of the practical realities that different viewers look for in this photograph. But this is not to accept that this image is "mnemonic" to memory. For this photograph depicts bodies of the dead people whose memories are personal, buried - deep down - with them and beyond the reach of the camera. Hence what the camera has photographed is the silhouette that eclipses our understanding of the memories of the dead. The opacity of this photograph, which is shrouded by mysterious dark shadows which conceal the economy of dreadful memories of the dead people in the mass grave, echoes Susan Sontag who writes, in a different context, that people do not "remember through photographs ... photographs eclipse other forms of understanding."¹⁰⁵

Sontag's view is applicable to the issues I have grappled with above and to what is to follow. But, let me say again that when one looks at photographs of the things we have not experienced, it is difficult to see beyond the surface of such images and locate the undisclosed memories in their interior or exterior. Therefore, to look at the Cassinga iconic photograph is to search for the silences and the absences of the bigger picture of the unspeakable atrocities that the camera missed. In this relation, the labeling of the photograph of the Cassinga open mass grave as iconic or mnemonic makes considerable compromises with the practicality of incommunicable humanitarian disasters, across the length and breadth of the camp, as experienced and reported by individual survivors and other witnesses of the massacre.

¹⁰⁵ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the pain of others*, p. 79.

In this continuum, it merits noting that the symbolic worthiness that the public attaches to the iconicity of the photograph of the Cassinga open mass grave does not mirror the veracity of the brutal violence and violent death of the victims described as women and children. Indeed, as pointed out earlier, to perceive this photograph as iconic is to retreat from the supremely unacceptable scenes of the violence as reported by survivors and of what the camera missed recording.

The dilemma outlined here undermines the existence of other multiple landscapes of violence which the photographers who arrived in Cassinga too late (to witness and photograph) missed photographing. Perhaps, multiple images of the Cassinga massacre would have presented the public with numerous challenging complexities beyond the existing linear representation of the violence so that they could see and debate things from the point of view of realities different from the extant visual representation of the Cassinga massacre.

It is helpful at this stage to put into perspective why the Cassinga event is represented by the presence of a solitary photograph when the event is actually suffused with multiple experiences of brutal atrocities. Why was there no release of other photographs from different angles of seeing things in Cassinga, as evident in survivors' testimonies? This anomaly is explored below.

According to two informants,¹⁰⁶ a crew of Angolan photographers and journalists who arrived in Cassinga a few hours following the SADF withdrawal was denied access into the camp. They also claimed that Dimo Hamaambo had personally refused the Angolan television crew access to the camp. His decision landed him in trouble with the FAPLA. He and Greenwell Matongo (the chief political commissar of PLAN) were "summarily arrested" by the "irate FAPLA and detained at the headquarters of the 5th Military Region in Lubango on the order of Ivadi (according to Richard Kabajani), the irate FAPLA commander."¹⁰⁷ The arrest of Hamaambo and Matongo almost immediately following the Cassinga massacre is not surprising considering the following political squabbles.

¹⁰⁶ The author's interviews with Paavo Max, Ogwendiva, 2007; Darius "Mbolondondo" Shikongo, Ondangwa, 2007.

¹⁰⁷ Annemarie Heywood, *The Cassinga event*, pp. 54 - 55.

In the late seventies, political wrangles bedeviled the relationship between FAPLA and SWAPO over PLAN's forward operational bases in southern Angola. This trouble was anchored in FAPLA's suspiciousness around SWAPO's long-standing collaboration and comradeship with UNITA¹⁰⁸ prior to the independence of Angola. In many instances, according to General Reports of the Cassinga camp committee,¹⁰⁹ FAPLA had made serious accusations that the SWAPO civilian camp at Cassinga was harboring UNITA civilians and supplying them with provisions, mainly food and medicine. SWAPO soldiers at the forward military bases close to the Namibian border, from where they launched operations into Namibia, also experienced regular harassment from the Angolan forces. In one such instance, FAPLA was reported to have arrested and disarmed PLAN "representatives" [members] at Cuangari, and then taken them to Pereirade Eça. This arrest followed the alleged clash between FAPLA and PLAN fighters at Oshitumbe on 9 June 1976 on allegations that UNITA members were seen ferried in a PLAN lorry. According to the Cubans in Angola, FAPLA detained fifty-eight other PLAN fighters en route to the front for the same reason.¹¹⁰

The General Reports of the Cassinga camp committee blamed the "enemy" for such incidents. They note that "enemies were trying hard to bring about friction and subsequently open conflict

¹⁰⁸ SWAPO was closely connected to UNITA whose support base was firmly rooted in the rural masses. This type of support base was akin to SWAPO's traditional base or political stronghold which had been, since the days of the liberation struggle, among the Aawambo, the largest population group of Namibia and who predominantly live in the rural areas of north central Namibia. In a similar way, UNITA's solid support came from the rural population of Angola, predominantly among the Mbundu, the largest ethnic group in the country. UNITA's political programme was also analogous to SWAPO's political programme of uplifting the lives of the rural poor and the exploited working class. This historical closeness between SWAPO and UNITA is explicable given that the mestiço-dominated, urban-based MPLA had its core of support in the intelligentsia of the capital city, Luanda, and Ovimbundu-speaking areas in north – west Angola. UNITA presented itself as the messiah for the oppressed peasants. Its constitution proclaimed that the movement would strive for a government proportionally representative of all ethnic groups, clans, and classes, and it "concentrated on raising the political consciousness of the peasants, most of whom were illiterate and widely dispersed". See Robin Hallett, "The CIA in Angola", *African affairs*, Vol. 78 / 313 (October 1978), pp. 559 – 562; Christian A. Williams, "Exile history: an ethnography of the SWAPO camps and the Namibian nation" (Doctoral Dissertation, University of Michigan, 2009).

¹⁰⁹ These handwritten reports are contained in the "Cassinga General Reports," Available at the Basler Afrika Bibliographien (BAB) in Basel, Switzerland. Authors of the notes include Golden Uhuru and Mocks Shivute (the camp secretary and deputy secretary respectively). According to the archivist, these are some of the SWAPO documents that the SADF captured in Cassinga.

¹¹⁰ BAB AA3 (SWAPO Collection), additional documents: "General reports" by SWAPO 1976-1978. Source: BAB SWAPO Archive, Basel, Switzerland.

between the two progressive armed forces.”¹¹¹ Also, in the Cassinga camp General Reports of 5 May 1976, Commissar Ndafogwe Nopoundjuu reported the following: “when I met Shimbalinga, the head of the information Department in Lubango,¹¹² at Cenjanca (sic) ... he almost burst out in rage; accusing us [SWAPO] of being obstinate in regard to orders given by the government ... he accused us of collaborating with UNITA. [He said] a senior UNITA commander was found at Cassinga and in the past [SWAPO] refused to hand over Nangonja.”¹¹³ In a similar report of the minutes of the Cassinga camp committee meeting held on 26 November, 1976, the meeting reported that “the FAPLA comrades will not trust us [SWAPO] easily. They are now somehow convinced that SWAPO is not sincere about cooperating with them. Of late, the FAPLA at Canjanla (sic) recognized a former UNITA member called Hamala. He was in a group of sick people who were to receive treatment at Cassinga. According to FAPLA, the man worked with a former UNITA commander, Hamupunda. They (FAPLA) therefore do not understand why these criminals are in our ranks. The man has been taken away.”¹¹⁴

Also in the minutes of the Cassinga camp committee meeting of 26 November 1976, it was brought to the attention of the committee that Major Zulu was forced by FAPLA to hand over “four girls [allegedly] former UNITA members, two from Namibia and two from within Angola.”¹¹⁵ During that meeting, Major Zulu admitted and expressed fear that FAPLA was

¹¹¹ BAB AA3 (SWAPO Collection), additional documents: "General reports" by SWAPO 1976-1978. Source: BAB SWAPO Archive, Basel, Switzerland.

¹¹² BAB AA3 (SWAPO Collection), additional documents: "General reports" by SWAPO 1976-1978. Source: BAB SWAPO Archive, Basel, Switzerland.

¹¹³ Statement by Cde. Shimbalinga (sic), head of the information department in Lubango, at Cenjanca before Commissar Ndafogwe Nopoundjuu on 3. 12. 1976, in the BAB AA3 (SWAPO Collection), additional documents: "General Reports" by SWAPO 1976-1978. Source: BAB SWAPO Archives, Basel, Switzerland. Godfrey Nangonya was liaison officer between SWAPO and UNITA, See Nangonya interviews with Patricia Hayes (personal communication, Patricia Hayes, 2009).

¹¹⁴ BAB AA3 (SWAPO Collection), additional documents: "General Reports" by SWAPO 1976-1978. Source: BAB SWAPO Archive, Basel, Switzerland.

¹¹⁵ It is important to note that SWAPO, MPLA and UNITA all consisted of members from the Oshikwanyama ethnic group. Moreover, there had been incidents where former FAPLA soldiers and UNITA members (especially the Oshikwanyama speaking individuals) switched sides to join SWAPO based on the shared cultural bond and historical oneness before the colonial border divided the two countries. According to Hangula, “an agreement fixing the boundary between Namibia and Angola was reached, and a boundary convention was signed on 22 June 1922 in Cape Town ... between the Union of South Africa and the government of the Republic of Portugal.” Lazarus Hangula. *International boundary of Namibia (1993)*, p. 41. See also Randolph Vigne, “The moveable frontier: the Namibia - Angola boundary demarcation.” In Patricia Hayes, et al. (eds.), *Namibia under South African Rule: mobility & containment 1915 - 1946* (Oxford: James Currey, 1998), pp. 289 - 304. The agreement that fixed the

preparing to make inroads into SWAPO bases for identification of former UNITA members.”¹¹⁶ These developments might help to explain why Hamaambo refused to issue permission to the alleged crew of Angolan journalists. Such unpleasant incidents may also explain why FAPLA dealt with Hamaambo and other commanders in a disrespectful manner, arresting him and his juniors for ambiguous reasons. Nonetheless, several other theories arise in the attempt to explain and understand why Hamaambo refused to allow the Angolans access to photograph and document the fresh scene of the Cassinga massacre. It is telling that Mbolondondo thinks that Hamaambo “was paranoid to have taken that decision.”

Hamaambo’s apprehensiveness is however better understood through the following circumstances: The atrocities committed by the SADF in Cassinga were so gruesome and raised concerns about the impact such images would create especially among SWAPO supporters at home. In the seventies, before combat clashes intensified between the SADF and SWAPO guerrillas, SWAPO fighters were, locally, associated with combat myths and supernatural power in fighting the colonialist army. This suggests that prior to joining SWAPO in exile, many civilians reasoned that once in SWAPO camps, it was no longer possible for the enemy to hunt them down and kill them.

In this context, Hamaambo would have thought that the picture of the gruesome Cassinga massacre would result in the decline of the number joining SWAPO in exile and at home. The second reason could be that Hamaambo would have denied Angolan photographers’ access to Cassinga on the ground of being suspicious and mistrustful of the media and what their intentions were, or what they intended doing with the images they would have captured. The issue of security was another important factor. SWAPO was an armed revolutionary movement

boundary between Namibia and Angola bisected the Oshikwanyama speaking people into two halves, allocating a portion of it on either side of the border but with the largest group of the Oshikwanyama-speaking people located on the Angolan side of the border. Many Oshiwambo-speaking people (which includes the Oshikwanyama-speaking groups) also fell into the hands of UNITA while trying to reach SWAPO bases in Angola. This means that many of them were waiting to defect to SWAPO when opportunity existed. Likewise, FAPLA also experienced cases where their soldiers, especially those who spoke Oshikwanyama, defected to SWAPO. One instance is the case of the “heroic” PLAN commander, Matias Ndakolo Mbulunganga, who defected from FAPLA in the 1960s and became a prominent PLAN commander. Online at <http://allafrica.com/stories/201008250672.html>. “Namibia: Heroic battles of Matias Mbulunganga.” Also in the *New Era*, 25 August, 2010.

¹¹⁶ BAB AA3 (SWAPO Collection), additional documents: "General reports" by SWAPO 1976-1978. Source: BAB SWAPO Archive, Basel, Switzerland.

very suspicious and sensitive to possible enemy espionage. In this context, it could have been particularly difficult for Hamaambo and Matongo to verify the identity of the Angolan media crew as actually representing the MPLA government. It was believed that UNITA or its allies could disguise themselves as if they were government agents. FAPLA was also not to be trusted in view of the problematic relationships with SWAPO as presented above.

The other problem was communication. The SADF disabled Cassinga's link with other places such as Luanda and Lubango. This suggests that Hamaambo and Matongo acted on their individual initiatives. However, Hamaambo's decision not to permit Angolans access into the camp also suggests that he was possibly angry in considering that Angolans did not respond militarily to help Namibians against the attackers. Had FAPLA responded militarily, many lives would have been saved. Moreover, Hamaambo's decision also underpins an ethos of strictly following combat norms. PLAN had strict combat ethics regarding the protection of identities of fallen fighters, especially senior commanders, for example those senior SWAPO commanders who were among the bodies of civilians, such as Commander Jonas Haiduwa,¹¹⁷ the Deputy Commander of PLAN, and Nalikonkole, the chief administrator of the camp.

Finally, Hamaambo's alleged refusal to allow the Angolan journalist crew entrance into Cassinga should not only be viewed through the lens of the issues illustrated above. Issues pertaining to the social and cultural rites of the Namibian exiled community should also be considered. Notably, photographing the dead bodies for public exhibiting and viewing may have been politically acceptable but was in fact culturally unacceptable.

In the few remaining pages of this chapter, it is important to return to the concept of "nothingness" which Martha Mwatilifange coined earlier. This is in order to try and explore and perhaps understand some of the discrepancies between the visual and the different eye-witness experiences of the untold scenes of violence left undisclosed by the iconic photograph.

¹¹⁷ Haiduwa was appointed Deputy Commander of PLAN at the 8th meeting of the SWAPO Military Council, held on 04/ 01/ 1977, contained in the "Minutes of the SWAPO Military Council meeting, held on 4 January 1977, Mongolia (Angola)" in the SADF Chief of Staff Operations, Operation Reindeer (*Top Secret*): *H Reer / 309/1 DD MRT 78*, in file HS OPS/ 301/ 2. Source: SANDF Archive, Pretoria.

Analytically, by claiming that the iconic photograph is nothing, Martha is not dismissive of the experiences and storyline of this image. Rather, her discontent raises a number of scenarios. The first scenario can be translated as follows: that the actuality of the Cassinga massacre as experienced and lived by survivors since then is immensely deplorable and tangible and exceeds the visual and oral techniques of documenting it. Hence, the notion of the nothingness of this photograph does not suggest that this image shuts the window that ventilates general feelings of pain and sympathy for the victims of the Cassinga massacre. Instead, this scenario challenges individual survivors' "mental picture." It suggests that the "ravage and destruction" which this image is oblivious to are "eloquent testimony of the violence which preceded the unfolding of the picture."¹¹⁸

A second scenario is that the friction and disconnectedness between survivors' memory and the implicit memory of the iconic photograph are being exposed. Although this photograph is embedded in the camera's experience of a particular scene of violence, it is regrettable that those divergent traumatic memories of the photographed scene are framed and deeply concealed beyond the reach of our senses.

Thirdly, the nothingness of this visual image suggests that the story of the iconic photograph is one thing, whereas the practical reality on the ground was another different reality that no photograph can authenticate. This implies that different viewers can approach this photograph with preconceived perceptions, with different interpretations, meanings and objectives. In this regard, suffice it to say that when different viewers engage with visual images, each viewer sees what he or she believes in, or wants the public to believe in, regardless of its inclusions and exclusions.

In this context, therefore, the Cassinga photograph has become a much fought-over bone of contention between different agencies debating the Cassinga massacre. The following contradictory statements illustrate this problem of a dialogue that would take the viewer or reader nowhere:

¹¹⁸ Alan Trachtenberg, *Reading American photographs: images as history, Mathew Brady to Walker Evans* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2001), p. 72.

The images of corpses, some of whom are women, some young, and some wearing civilian clothing are evident to a cursory examination of the photograph.¹¹⁹

Countering this argument by the academic Gary Baines is Colonel Jan Breytenbach (the field commander of the Cassinga massacre) who argues that:

The so-called mass grave [photograph] shows a great majority of men, all [of] them combatants, with only three women barely recognizable among the lot and, significantly, without any evidence whatsoever of dead or mutilated children.¹²⁰

Analytically, Breytenbach's opinion does not deny the fact that his paratroopers killed and mutilated bodies of innocent women and children at Cassinga. But his statement resonates with the impossibility of the photograph of the Cassinga open mass grave to reveal the physical and emotional torture or suffering that the attackers brutally inflicted on civilians. Therefore, in considering this discourse, the conflict between the different agencies of seeing and commenting on the Cassinga iconic photograph is explained as credibly embedded in the darkness that this image elicits. Put differently, the enduring blackout that this image unleashes evaporates evidence and nourishes inconclusive dialogues between different witnesses, writers and commentators of the Cassinga event. In this connection, it is worth recognizing the "oscillatory ambiguity" of photographs.

Photographs in general are "dubious (images which) destroy mnemonic experience."¹²¹ In the realm of this imperfection and considerable exclusion of things, the inauthenticity of the Cassinga visual image is recognized and challenged, consciously or unconsciously, such as in the way it is (hopefully unconsciously) demonstrated by Colonel Breytenbach in the statement above. This is one reason why Siegfried Kracauer sees photographs as representing an "assembled effigy ... of a nature alienated from meaning (which) promotes the confrontation of consciousness ... with the reality that has slipped away from it."¹²² When applied to the subject

¹¹⁹ Gary Baines, "The Battle of Cassinga: conflicting narratives and contested meanings." Accessed from <http://eprints.ru.ac.za/946/1/baines.Cassinga.pdf>.

¹²⁰ Jan Breytenbach, "Cassinga battle account reveals biased claptrap," *The Sunday Independent*, 3 February 2008, edition 1, p. 6 (Appendix G of this thesis).

¹²¹ Charles Merewether (ed.), *The archive* (London : Whitechapel ; Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2006), p. 122

¹²² Siegfried Kracauer, 'Photography,' p. 58.

of this chapter, this statement implicates the photograph of the Cassinga open mass grave in a tacit and implicit circumvention of violence and a disregard of survivors' experiences of the same event. Therefore, in working against the eclipsing of the vastness of the Cassinga violence that this image boxes, survivors feel and want the viewer to understand that the victims' personal experiences of the Cassinga massacre, across the length and breadth of the camp and outside it, were more diverse and complex than the flat or linear reality that this image supplies.

A fourth scenario, arising from the statement that the photograph of the Cassinga open mass grave is nothing, carries a metaphoric meaning: it expresses the victims' anger, frustration and disappointment about the state of the Cassinga mass graves. In particular, survivors' anger and disappointment revolve around issues of physical and emotional divides between human remains at Cassinga which survivors, families and comrades have not visited since the Cassinga massacre. Survivors are angry and disappointed that "nothing" has been done to maintain or pay solemn respect and tribute to this historic site and honor the dead in a dignified way regardless of Namibia's attainment of independence in 1990 (see Chapter 7).

In getting to the end of this chapter, it is important to note that although survivors' desperate search for things that are unrepresented in this photograph have ended in absolute failure and disappointment, their search for the missing realities was nonetheless significant. One reason is that, although it was almost impossible, for example, to identify individual bodies in the photograph of the Cassinga open mass grave, the blurred content of this photograph displays different things to different viewers. For example, the mysteries, silences and secrecy of the violent deaths concealed in the anonymity of the dead bodies signify a "silence that speaks." As I will discuss in the next chapter, the way the enormity of violence is constricted, obscured and almost reduced to its absence in the photographs that are communicated to survivors in this research process, has encouraged survivors to disclose some of the things that these images exclude or conceal. For instance, oral accounts by Max and Shikongo at the beginning of the chapter pertaining to how the dead bodies were collected, assembled and buried in mass graves present irrefutable testimony for the overall argument I am presenting in this thesis.

The fact that none of the survivors including those who participated in the collection and the burial of the dead bodies such as Max and Shikongo could identify individual bodies in the Cassinga iconic photograph suggests the atrocious nature of the massacre that almost annihilated all life in the camp and left survivors in a state of insurmountable confusion, chaos and uncertainty about their future. Hence, it was extremely difficult for survivors, and those who came to their rescue in the aftermath of the massacre, to do things appropriately. This would include sorting out the dead bodies in a way that could create an enabling environment for possible identification of the individual bodies which would provide some resolution for their families, as is demanded today.

I have also tried to tease out that as an imperfect model of the real and tangible world of the Cassinga massacre, the iconic photograph has become the focus of contestation between survivors' oral testimonies and visual testimonies of the Cassinga massacre. This protestation is embedded in the way this image is packaged, in such a way that the inexperienced viewer is constructed in a particular way and encouraged to see, contemplate and perceive the Cassinga massacre through the lens of the packaged reality of things. This is the main concern of the Cassinga survivors, and from this their protestations arise. That is, the "nothingness" of the iconic photograph excludes the other violence that the camera missed or considered mundane and less important to capture, and situates the inexperienced viewer at the periphery of multiple realities and the central meaning of the Cassinga massacre as understood by survivors whose everyday continues to unfold in excruciating and traumatic memories.

Therefore, since the Cassinga iconic photograph elusively represents the broader picture of the event it aspired to represent, it relinquishes and betrays its claim of authenticating and historically validating the record of Cassinga. To follow Marshall Blonsky, "signs [photographs, in the language of this study] are not related to the things or states of world they appear to designate, but they stand in front"¹²³ of the situations they intend to designate. In this continuum, since the sign or the photograph of the Cassinga open mass grave is not identical to divergent experiences of brutal violence as experienced by the dead and survivors, then any theory that perceivesthe photograph of the Cassinga open mass grave as bringing realities to life or as

¹²³ Blonsky Marshall (ed.), *On signs* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), p. viii.

authentic demonstration of the totality of what happened in Cassinga are to be contested. For example, theorizing the historical photograph as “universally effective revelatory, reflecting the truth of that which it represents,”¹²⁴ and the camera as a mechanical form of reproduction that provides a “source of factual knowledge” and “objective evidence,” can be challenged.

Nonetheless, it should be finally noted in this chapter that the image of the Cassinga open mass grave offers a flashpoint. In relation to this, that image can best be described as an indicator or a “sign” of the missing realities of the undisclosed actual violence. Hence, the representation and dissemination of different categories of photographs of the Cassinga massacre should not be perceived as disclosing the exactness of what happened in Cassinga, but should be understood as occupying a space that conceals and silences violence.

Of course, photographs of the Cassinga massacre should be recognized as significant historical records. However, such records and documentation of history are inertly fixed in a “mono – dimensional illustration” of the world they aspire to authenticate. In spite of such weaknesses, when perused by survivors, photographs of the Cassinga massacre can promote critical debates about significant exclusions and explanations of the missing categories of the Cassinga brutal violence as the following chapter will explore.

¹²⁴ Charles Merewether (ed.), *The Archive*, p. 122.

CHAPTER THREE

THE “IMMACULATE PHOTOGRAPH” OF THE COMMANDERS OF THE CASSINGA MASSACRE

The interaction between survivors and the visual images of the Cassinga massacre is very complex and entails a variety of interpretations. As I have pointed out in the previous chapter, the notion that the “iconic photograph” of the Cassinga open mass grave is “nothing” does not dispute what the camera spotted and aspired to “authenticate.” The survivors’ concern is that the “iconic photograph” obliterates many other multiple scenes and numerous survivors’ accounts of experiencing the Cassinga mass killings alive. In fact, the different responses and comments from survivors about the different photographs of the Cassinga massacre varied from survivor to survivor.

In reading and analyzing different viewers’ comments about photographs of the Okiek people of Kenya, Corinne Kratz contends that photographs were “mnemonic that prompted people to talk about events ... beyond what is shown...”¹²⁵ The context of Kratz’s analysis is not based on visual images of war and violence, unlike mine, and her view that photographs are “mnemonic that prompted people to talk about events ...” is something that cannot be left as unproblematised. But her analysis of how people relate to photographs, or how photographs relate to people in a social practice of things, is reflective of my experience of how photographs of violence relate to the Cassinga victims’ experiences, as well as how the victims relate or locate their experiences of the violence inside or outside the photographs I presented to them.

My analysis of the Cassinga survivors’ response to the photographs presented to them during the interviews demonstrated how visual images gave survivors a momentum to explore the hidden realities beyond the surface of the visual representation of the Cassinga massacre. In other words, survivors used visual images, not as a “mnemonic” device to assist memory or to cause them to remember things. Instead, the use of photographs in the interviews proved essentially important in evoking survivors to challenge visual images’ claims to “authenticate” the brutality of the Cassinga massacre.

¹²⁵ Corinne A. Kratz, *The ones that are wanted: communication and the politics of representation in a photographic exhibition* (California: University of California Press, 2002), p. 148 - 149.

In this relation, this chapter explores the effectiveness of survivors' use of visual images as compass devices, not necessarily to "look through" photographs but to explore violence beyond the confines or peripheries of the frames of the visual images. This chapter will give a particular focus to a photograph of the Cassinga commanding officers, or the "immaculate photograph" as I sometimes refer to it in this chapter. Ahead of this central discursive issue, it is important to provide some background about where and how I obtained the photograph of the two commanding officers of the Cassinga massacre on the ground.

The SADF archive and the visual records of Cassinga

This project is in possession of particular photographs, maps and charts of the Cassinga camp, taken prior to and during the Cassinga massacre. I obtained these images from the Department of Defence Archives in Pretoria. This institution was established as the SA Defence Force (SADF) archive in 1968, following the approval by the Minister of Education for a separate military archive. It specializes in military history and houses the official records of the Department of Defence, as well as a collection of unique publications, unit history files, photographs, maps and charts pertaining to the Department of Defence and its predecessors dating from 1912. Accessibility to the archival documents is in accordance with the National Archives of South Africa Act (Act No. 43 of 1996) and in the case of classified documentation, accessibility is subject to approval of the Chief of Defence Intelligence of the Department of Defence.¹²⁶ This indicates that the now South African National Defence Force (SANDF) archive is highly bureaucratized as all documents (including photographs) must go through a process of declassification before they are made available to researchers. Documents already declassified also have to be re-scrutinized before researchers access them.

In my case, most of the archival materials, already declassified, that I have requested from the archives have not been released to me by the end of this study. I have no intention to dwell on the politics of the colonial-apartheid archive in this study. But as in Premesh Lalu's analysis of the colonial archive, it is pertinent to understand the colonial archive in the context of an institution that the "discipline of history generally approaches ... with a measure of suspicion because of its supposedly inherent 'biases.'..."

¹²⁶ Visit: http://www.national.archives.gov.za/dir_entries_pg3.htm.

Indeed, the colonial archive translates into an institution that is embedded in “covering up the traces of complicity in violence...”¹²⁷

The SADF photographs of the Cassinga massacre, at least those which I accessed, are shrouded in dubiously clean hands. This pertains to both the SADF and this archive. It is this sheer look of unblameworthiness, or the immaculateness of such images, that I will explore later in this chapter. My numerous visits to the former SADF archive in Pretoria revealed that even after the collapse of institutionalized apartheid and violence, the colonial archive still validates and preserves the apartheid culture of constructing frontiers of obscurity around the histories which disclose apartheid – colonial “acts of violence” against its vulnerable subjects. In the same way as the colonial archive pacifies the specific histories surrounding the killing of Hintsa (to paraphrase Premesh Lalu), my “efforts” to dig up specific detailed histories in the former SADF archive about the killings of Namibian refugees at Cassinga in ways which depart from the SADF construction and justification of the colonial massacre were significantly constrained by the intransigence and pervasiveness of the “discourse of the colonial archive.”¹²⁸

The visual images unveiled to me for research, possibly in selective ways, consisted mainly of aerial photographs. Predominantly, these were images recorded by the South African Air Force (SAAF) Joint Air Reconnaissance Intelligence Centre (JARIC) before the Cassinga massacre. According to Edward Alexander, Canberra photo-reconnaissance aircrafts¹²⁹ carried out several reconnaissance missions over Cassinga prior to the attack. Ideally, these images corroborate survivors’ oral accounts that a few weeks leading up to the Cassinga massacre, suspicious planes were noticed orbiting the aerial space around Cassinga. Such movements were noticed mainly in the early hours of the morning or at noon.

Thus, there were very few traces of the photographs and no video footage of the SADF coverage of the Cassinga operation. This is despite the fact that the SADF mission for the Cassinga massacre was equipped with cameras and video equipment. According to Edward McGill Alexander who has conducted a substantial number of interviews with the Cassinga paratroopers, “one paratrooper who was

¹²⁷ Premesh Lalu, *The deaths of Hintsa: postapartheid South Africa and the shape of recurring pasts*(Cape Town: Human Sciences Research Council, 2009), p. 41.

¹²⁸ Premesh Lalu, *The deaths of Hintsa*, pp. 41- 45.

¹²⁹ Edward Alexander, “The Cassinga raid,” p. 115.

a photographer was given a 16mm cine camera and a still camera to take with him when he jumped into Cassinga. He received orders to record images of what took place. The man appointed to carry out this task, Mike McWilliams, claimed during an interview conducted with him, ‘to have used the opportunity to take along an additional still camera of his own ...’ McWilliams claims that he handed the official cameras and films back to the military authorities at the end of the operation.”¹³⁰ There are also claims that individual paratroopers used personal cameras during the Cassinga massacre. Brigadier Mike Du Plessis is quoted as telling Sgt. Major Fougstedt in an interview that “Morne Coetzer of the SABC recorded some video footage, while many of us took photos with ordinary cameras. Many photos came out, but we weren’t as successful as we had hoped to be.”¹³¹ Moreover, according to other sources, paratroopers recalled having been shown “a 16mm film footage [of the Cassinga attack] at a paratroopers’ reunion some months after the raid and the film was, according to official minutes, shown at a debriefing conference ... However, the 16mm film footage could not be traced, nor could all the photographs.”¹³² In this regard, there is also a concern about the whereabouts of the documents that the paratroopers captured from Cassinga. The SADF official reports concerning the things captured in Cassinga state that the paratroopers “brought from Cassinga four trunks full of documents.”¹³³

According to the head of the photographic section at the former SADF archive in Pretoria, Mr. Gerald Prinsloo, the archive never entered any record of SADF-produced video footage of the Cassinga massacre. He also told me that many of the Cassinga photographs available in the archive were deposited by individuals and not by the SADF as an institution. This is particularly so of the colour photographs that Mr. Prinsloo told me were donated to the archives in 2009 by one of the former Cassinga paratroopers who now lives in Europe (see Appendix D for some of these Cassinga attack photographs). Nevertheless, I considered it fortunate to have found a few essential photographs, relevant to the theme of my study. These photographs show the SADF paratroopers in Cassinga during its fall. Surprisingly, these images do not show the paratroopers’ involvement in the indiscriminate shooting of civilians in the camp. These exclusions are crucial in attempting to explore the SADF construction of the Cassinga massacre through visual images. The other concern is that most of the photographs do not contain crucial information such as the authors/photographers of the images. In the case of the

¹³⁰ Edward Alexander, “The Cassinga raid,” p. 21.

¹³¹ Jan Breytenbach, *Eagle strike*, p. 494.

¹³² Edward Alexander, “The Cassinga raid,” pp. 21- 22.

¹³³ *Ibid*, pp. 61- 62.

photograph that I will discuss in this chapter, the only archival information it contained is a caption that reads: “Col J. Breytenbach (with radio) and Brig. Du Plessis at Cassinga.” When I started drafting this chapter - focusing on this photograph - I sent an email to Mr. Gerald Prinsloo, inquiring about the author of the photograph and how the archive accessed it. Prinsloo’s reply reads:

It can be assumed that the photo was one of a group of official photos regarding Cassinga donated by the Defence Force to the archive. The film would have been developed and printed in the archive's own darkroom (now defunct). Unfortunately, we have no further specific information on the photo or photographer. Except for the following information: Indexed into the archive: 1980.¹³⁴

Arguably, the failure to release documents of horror for public seeing in this case dilutes the SADF version of events that Cassinga was a sophisticated military base and the Headquarters for the SWAPO guerillas in Angola. Moreover, the possibility that the SADF never deposited sensitive materials of the Cassinga attack in the SADF archives or removed them during the process of South Africa’s transition to democracy suggests that the perpetrators’ version of the Cassinga story is politically and defensively orchestrated. It is important to explore why the SADF visual images of the Cassinga attack, unlike the SWAPO photograph of the open mass grave that blames the SADF for the merciless massacre of defenseless civilians, are constructed or staged in such a way that the assailants appear irreproachable in terms of killing innocent women and children. This is demonstrated by the photograph below of the two top field commanders of the Cassinga massacre, who are now waging a fight about which of them was the actual commanding officer of the Cassinga massacre.¹³⁵

The immaculate photograph

¹³⁴ Author’s email interview with G. W. Prinsloo, September 30, 2009.

¹³⁵ Jan Breytenbach, *Eagle Strike*, pp. 546 - 7; Edward Alexander, “The Cassinga raid,” p. 113.



Figure 2. The commanders of the Cassinga massacre: Col. J. Breytenbach (with bandaged wrist. For clues about the bandage, see, Jan Breytenbach, *The Eagle Strike*, p. 384 - 387) and Brig. Mike Du Plessis at Cassinga. Source: the SADF archive, Pretoria. Date obtained: 2007, photographer: unknown.

During the preparations for the attacks on Cassinga (also known as Moscow by SWAPO and code named Alpha by the SADF) and Vietnam (code named Bravo),¹³⁶ the SADF was given clear

¹³⁶ Vietnam\ Osheetekela was a SWAPO military camp, less than 30km from the Namibian north western border with Angola. The Vietnam base was attacked on the same date as Cassinga, alias Moscow. Unlike the Cassinga attack, Vietnam was mainly a land invasion. Although Vietnam was actually a SWAPO military base, many civilians escaping from Namibia to Angola could spend days in Vietnam waiting for transport to Cassinga and other arrangements. When the camp was attacked hundreds of civilians were found in the camp. It is estimated that over three hundred civilians died in the attack. Two hundred and sixty were captured and taken back to Namibia. The prisoners were detained at Mariental, 260 kilometers South of Windhoek and remained incommunicado for about eight years before most of them were released at the end of 1986. See Appendix E of this Thesis: Rev. Samwel Mateus Shiininge's account of the Vietnam attack.

instructions to make sure that photographic “coverage” of the operations, “especially Alpha camp,” took place. A SADF planning document for the Cassinga massacre reports that “credible coverage and immediate release is essential to counter claims of SADF mass killings of civilians, especially women and children.”¹³⁷ In general terms, it is without a shred of doubt that the SADF was well prepared and equipped to photograph and video tape the Cassinga operation in a manner that portrays it as a military camp. In essence, according to this document, the SADF photographers were expected to use the camera as a tool to deconstruct, reconfigure and obscure things on the ground for political gains. Hence, the SADF camera is seen here as a tool of political manipulation. This is the context for the SADF guidelines for the Cassinga attack which (in spite of the fact that the population in Cassinga was civilian and unarmed) were clearly spelled out as follows: photo coverage must show military features for example weapons, ammunition, communications, headquarter buildings; any dead must have weapons alongside them; any photograph of civilians must reflect humane treatment, for instance being provided with food; and documents captured must feature prominently to add credibility to subsequent disclosures.¹³⁸

Regarding the above, the photograph showing the two senior commanders of the Cassinga massacre, Brigadier Du Plessis and Col. Jan Breytenbach,¹³⁹ is not the photographic genre that the SADF desired

¹³⁷ Chief of the SADF, “PSYAC Planning Directive No. 3 \ 78, Operation Reindeer (top secret): Phase Three (Media coverage).” Source: SANDF Archives, Pretoria.

¹³⁸ Chief of the SADF, “PSYAC Planning Directive No. 3 \ 78, Operation Reindeer (top secret): Phase Three (Media coverage).” Source: SANDF Archives, Pretoria.

¹³⁹ A scuffle is simmering among the Cassinga paratroopers about who actually commanded the Cassinga attack. At the centre of this disputation are Colonel Jan Breytenbach and Brigadier Mike du Plessis. At the time of the Cassinga massacre, Mike Du Plessis had just been named first commander of the brand new 44 Parachute Brigade, comprising 1, 2 and 3 Parachute Battalions (see Breytenbach, *Eagle Strike*, p. 545). The account provided by Willem Steenkamp informs us that Brigadier Mike du Plessis was one of the two senior officers (the second one was Brigadier Hannes Botha, Director of Operations of the South African Army) who went to Cassinga without official permission. Du Plessis and Hannes Botha allegedly forced their way into the aircraft that flew Breytenbach to Cassinga. Because of their presence in Cassinga, it is not clear, today, who really was in overall command of the Cassinga massacre. Steenkamp reports that according to Du Plessis, “Breytenbach was in command only of the two assault companies (Alpha and Bravo), while him, Du Plessis, exercised overall tactical on the ground However ... there can be no doubt that Breytenbach was the commander of the whole battalion and that he appointed his second - in - command to control the assault companies ... Du Plessis himself admitted that the chief of the Army had expected him to exercise his command from an airborne command post. It is not clear why he did not do so.” (In Willem Steenkamp, *Borderstrike*, p. 137). Mike McWilliams who was officiated to photograph and video record the Cassinga operation tells us that Jan Breytenbach, “the most respected, decorated and loved military leader in the South African (apartheid) airborne environment,” was officiated to lead and command the Cassinga operation. A brief insight into Breytenbach’s historical background of his career as a professional soldier: loyalty and the respect he earned, within the SADF inner circle, during many years of unreserved service and commitment to the course of the SADF becomes crucial in understanding his role as the SADF kingpin in executing violence. (See Appendix J of this thesis for Colonel Jan Breytenbach’s role in the region and beyond). Nevertheless, the presence of Brigadier Du

and had instructed its camera operators to capture during the unfolding of the Cassinga operation and make public afterwards. Why was this image then taken? Perhaps the answer lies partly in observing that this photograph was deliberately framed, its background and foreground considerably purged and selected to exclude the appalling scenes of violence against weaponless people (which do not comply with the SADF public discourse of the attack). Therefore, this photograph suggests that the perpetrators had nothing to show as supportive evidence for its version of attacking Cassinga. As I have presented above, it is not possible to find Cassinga represented as a comprehensive military camp in any of the SADF photographs that were made available to me during my frequent visit to the former SADF archive in Pretoria or accessed through other sources. In the same vein, photographs showing scenes of bloodshed and mass killings of civilians in Cassinga could not be traced in the former SADF archives.

Nonetheless, in practice, those who perpetuate violence against unarmed civilians are notorious for hiding from the public view any visual images that portray senseless torture and brutal killing of innocent people. Perhaps I should refer to a general scenario of the recent war in Iraq and Afghanistan. In these two countries, photographic images and video footage showing unacceptable violence against civilians by the American-led forces are not accessible to the public, except when such images are disclosed to the public through independent sources. This is the case of the leaked photographs

Plessis, Colonel Jan Breytenbach's immediate senior (in rank) in Cassinga, created much annoyance for Breytenbach who accused Du Plessis of doing things in Cassinga disrespectfully and unprofessionally. In his words, "the water spider," as Du Plessis was nicknamed: following his accidental landing into the Cubango River during the Cassinga parachute drop where he almost got drowned, "was just a passenger" with no role assigned to him to play in Cassinga. He was unauthorized to go to Cassinga - "both Du Plessis and Hannes Botha jumped into Cassinga against Genl. Gleeson's will" - Gleeson was the Chief of the Army Staff Operations. (In Breytenbach, *Eagle Strike*, p. 547). According to Brigadier General McGill Alexander, Major General Ian Gleeson, the overall commander of the operation, was "emphatic that Du Plessis and Hannes Botha should never have been there [in Cassinga]." This was because, according to Gleeson, the two "wanted to go on a partridge shoot." In this respect, Breytenbach argued that Du Plessis' presence in Cassinga made "the operation a ... bloody nuisance." (In Edward Alexander, "The Cassinga Raid," pp. 100 - 102). Breytenbach did not explain how Brigadier du Plessis made the "Cassinga operation a bloody nuisance" except to emphasize that du Plessis' conduct in Cassinga was highly "unprofessional." This statement could suggest that du Plessis' individual conduct in Cassinga was extremely brutal as alleged by Lazarus Cornelius later in this Chapter. Edward Alexander contends with Mike McWilliams and other sources that "the officer appointed to command it (Cassinga) was the most experienced and successful combat soldier in the SADF, Colonel Jan Breytenbach. Nevertheless, there was a long - standing sentiment of animosity between him and his immediate superior, Brigadier M. J. Du Plessis, the brigade commander. This led to differences of opinions and a clash of wills." (In Edward Alexander, "The Cassinga Raid," p. 113). Breytenbach, himself, tells us that, in Cassinga, Du Plessis demonstrated a "total lack of discipline ... (who) interfere(d) in my command ..." (In Jan Breytenbach, *Eagle Strike*, pp. 546 - 7). Breytenbach continued to testify that "I was given the command over several hundred paratroopers for the Cassinga battle by General Viljoen [Lieutenant General Constand Viljoen, chief of the SA Army]. Monty Brett, Lew Gerber, Johan Blaauw and Piet Nel with their troops came under my command. I prepared them for battle and I led them in the Cassinga Operation, which made me, and me only, responsible for the acts of every single one of the officers and men under my command at that time. After the battle I stepped back and they reverted to their previous commanders." (In Jan Breytenbach, *Eagle Strike*, p. 553).

depicting the US soldiers' torturing of Iraqis, civilian or "insurgents," at the Abu Ghraib prison which stunned and shocked the world in 2004. This argument follows Eliot Weinberger's observation, in the Cultural Magazine *OCTOBER 123*, of the Iraq violence when he wrote that:

The Cheney–Bush 11 era has not produced a single poem, song, novel, or art that has caught the popular imagination as a condemnation or an epitome of the times. The only enduring image is a product of journalism: the hooded figure in Abu Ghraib photographs.¹⁴⁰

As I have pointed out earlier, the Peter W. Botha government (1978-1989) which succeeded the John Vorster government (1966-1978) was determined to obscure and deny the public access to viewing photographs which could incriminate the SADF in acts of systematic brutal violence against refugees. In fact, and this is ironic, the SADF hated being branded a "deadly force against" civilians. Consider the following:

Irremediable damage had already been done ... to the paratroopers ... how do we rectify ... the perception that we acted like a bunch of blood thirsty murderers and rapists?¹⁴¹

In this relation therefore, the absence of the photographs showing acts of unmerited violence against civilians, as overwhelmingly conveyed in every interview with survivors, explains the SADF deliberate attempts to silence and distance themselves from the wrongs and possible crimes against humanity.¹⁴² This refers to the SADF paratroopers' indiscriminate killing and maiming of innocent civilians during the Cassinga attack. In this instance, the immaculate photograph, the central focus of this chapter, creates numerous workable spaces for individual survivors to interrogate and challenge the SADF telling of the Cassinga event. That is, when the Cassinga photographic images are deliberately staged to obscure and silence the practicality of the violence on the ground, survivors find it unacceptable. The nonviolent staging of the paratroopers' photographs incite disbelief and provoke individual survivors to

¹⁴⁰ Eliot Weinberger, "Comment," in Mahmood Mamdani, *Saviours and Survivors: Darfur, politics, and the war on terror* (Cape Town: Human Sciences Research Council Press, 2009), p. 61. Also see: Kari Andén-Papadopoulos, "The Abu Ghraib torture photographs: news frames, visual culture, and the power of images" (University of Stockholm, 2008). Online at <http://jou.sagepub.com/content/9/1/5>.

¹⁴¹ Jan Breytenbach, *The eagle strike*, p. 544.

¹⁴² The International Covenant on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid declares that apartheid was / is a crime against humanity and that inhuman acts resulting from the policies and practices of apartheid and similar policies and practices of racial segregation and discrimination, as defined in article II of the Convention, are crimes violating the principles of international law, in particular the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, and constituting a serious threat to international peace and security. In Article 1 of the "International Covenant on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid" (18 July 1976).

give voice to the unacceptable violent practices that the SADF visual images hide from the public view. There is a disconnectedness between the photograph of the two commanding officers of the Cassinga massacre, and the actual practice of their killings of civilians in the camp, as I shall elaborate in the scenarios below.

A preconceived visual

The immaculate photograph was, most probably, shot shortly before the paratroopers' departure from Cassinga. As I have pointed out earlier, the SADF "media representatives (who)... accompanied the forces"¹⁴³ to Cassinga were instructed to avoid, by all means, taking snapshots that in the post-Cassinga operation might implicate the paratroopers in the indiscriminate mass killing and maiming of civilians in Cassinga, especially women and children.¹⁴⁴ Arguably, this image is one of the SADF's frontlines to counter the popular narratives that implicate the paratroopers in the indiscriminate mass killing of civilians. In this relation, the way the immaculate photograph is constructed, or its look, veils the dirty actions that the paratroopers committed against innocent civilians in Cassinga. According to interviews with survivors of the Cassinga massacre, this photograph defies the excruciating experiences of sheer human carnage and suffering as witnessed by survivors and partially seen by independent sources who visited Cassinga in the immediate aftermath of the massacre. In a more general approach to photographs, John Tagg compares the contradictory relationship between photography and historical events to the qualities of a "chameleon." The "chameleon-like" relationship is applicable to my analysis of why the unfolding of the Cassinga massacre means one thing to survivors and other observers (including individual perpetrators of the massacre) of the Cassinga massacre, and a different thing in the way Cassinga is represented in the various photographic images that the perpetrators captured and released for the public viewing.

In this context, the exclusion of the foreground and background in the photograph above becomes crucial. The unclaimed space of the catastrophic civilian casualties that this photograph deliberately

¹⁴³ Chief of the SADF. "PSYAC Planning Directive No. 3 \ 78, Operation Reindeer (Top Secret). Phase Three (Media coverage), 25 April 1978." Source: The SANDF Archive, Pretoria.

¹⁴⁴ Chief of the SADF. "PSYAC Planning Directive No. 3 \ 78 Operation Reindeer (Top Secret). Phase Three (Media coverage), 25 April 1978." Source: The SANDF Department of Defence Documentation Centre, Archive, Pretoria.

obscures is intended to achieve some political leverage. Its purpose is to exert a confusion, create myths and wrest the perpetrators from accountability for the Cassinga massacre. Indeed, it is an attempt to eliminate anything that may put the paratroopers in the picture of “criminal and delinquent behaviours” against innocent civilians. That is, this image intends shunting or pushing away the shocking space, the multiple unpleasant features or landscapes of bloodshed and human carnage. Perhaps the issue of the SADF attempt to disconnect themselves or to escape from violence is also one of the items that Breytenbach is obsessed with in the telephonic conversation, as illustrated in the immaculate photograph above. He is most probably preoccupied with the issue of paratroopers’ “behind schedule” evacuation from Cassinga. Paradoxically, the SADF perceived the paratroopers’ immediate departure from Cassinga as a way of disconnecting, though only physically, from the catastrophic environment of the unprecedented human carnage in the entire history of SADF aggression, colonialism and apartheid rule over Namibians.

The fact that the immaculate photograph obscures the excruciating landscape of human catastrophe places this photograph in opposition to other photographs which intend to disclose appalling scenes of the unnecessary loss of lives and other sufferings incurred by the victims of the Cassinga massacre. For example, the way the immaculate photograph is staged clearly distinguishes itself from the “iconic photograph” of the Cassinga open mass grave (see Chapter 2). The “iconic photograph,” in contrast, carries a message of a humanitarian crisis and appealing for the public to render a sympathetic response to the suffering of Namibian refugees. Therefore, it is obvious that whilst the photograph of the Cassinga open mass grave evokes pathos about the innocent killing of civilians, the central focus of the SADF photographer(s) is to tilt or shift away from the difficult and hard realities evident in the neighbourhood of the camera operators.

Moreover, the way Jan Breytenbach and his accomplice, Du Plessis, are constructed in the immaculate photograph also replicates the customary SADF practice of not acknowledging and taking responsibility for the acts of violence (which no study can verify) it perpetuated against untold numbers of Namibian civilians between 1966 when political violence started, and 1989 when it ended in the unexplained circumstances in which more than 140 PLAN combatants were killed during the process of Namibia's disarmament and demobilization of the former warring

parties carried out under the auspices of the United Nations Transitional Assistance Group (UNTAG).¹⁴⁵

The fact that the two soldiers are photographed without their destructive weapons or laid down beside them is another significant factor in examining the meaning of this photograph. This “handmaiden,” the lack of weaponry of the two soldiers, is like a game that equates to denialism. Put differently, it demonstrates an invention of a “mythological past(s)” using the “powers of darkness.”¹⁴⁶ That is, the absence of weapons in their hands is intended to pacify violence. It is a way of certifying the SADF commanders’ outright denials that their paratroopers did not, ironically, carry weapons: bayonets and other sharp objects used to commit sheer acts of violence against unarmed civilians. Therefore, the frontier created between the two perpetrators of the Cassinga mass killings and the weapons (guns and bayonets) they used to kill civilians in mass numbers is a way of circumventing accusations of SADF ruthlessness. The blameless look of this photograph is therefore intended to win the hearts and minds of the public at large.

Thus, the elusiveness of violence made explicit in this photograph defines apartheid as an institution that not only sent soldiers to kill civilians pitilessly, but also taught its security forces to circumvent the appearance of violence committed by the SADF in the war zones on an everyday basis. In this relation therefore, the immaculate photograph’s representation of the two soldiers as faultless, though in the midst of a landscape covered in a plague of blood, conveys a decorative picture, typical of the SADF attempts to please the eye and deceive the mind. The concept of a decorative picture of violence echoes Caroline Brothers’ citation of Walter Benjamin’s speech, 1934, to the Institute for the Study of Fascism in Paris, when he remarked that “the camera is now incapable of photographing ... a rubbish-heap without transfiguring it. ... In front of (human misery), photography can only say: ‘how beautiful’ ... It has succeeded in turning abject poverty ... into an object of enjoyment.”¹⁴⁷

In the same way, I argue that the SADF manipulated the camera as a tool of assaulting, altering and destroying the landscape of violence in which the SADF had both hands. So, the SADF camera is the

¹⁴⁵ Gwinyayi A. Dzinesa, “Postconflict disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of former combatants in Southern Africa,” *International studies perspectives*, Vol. 8 (2007), pp. 78 - 80.

¹⁴⁶ Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish history and Jewish memory* (Seattle, 1982), p. 116. Cited in, Helena Pohlandt – McCormick, “I saw a nightmare ...?” *History and Theory*, Vol. 39/ 4 (December, 2000), p. 28.

¹⁴⁷ Benjamin Walter, “The author as producer,” reprinted in Victor Burgin (ed.), *Thinking photography*. Cited in Caroline Brothers, *War and photography: a cultural history* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 170.

associate of an acute blindness which instates darkness in the place of violence thereby transfiguring and altering the meaning of things, or the actual world and the real things in them. The concept of “transfiguring” violence does not relate to SADF blindness per se, but introduces the contradiction between the knowability and the unknowability of the SADF. By this I mean the SADF’s deliberate construction of darkness around situations when it is well aware that such circumstances existed. Hence, the concept of transfiguration is used here to decipher the SADF deliberate attempt to cover the violence or its machinery (perpetrators) with the aura of “beauty” or purity.

Metaphorically, the aura of “beauty” denotes the actual “white propaganda,” a “public relations technique” employed by the SADF to keep the public in the dark about the humanitarian atrocities carried out by the agents of the apartheid state and colonial rule in Namibia. Nevertheless, the SADF use of photographs in the context of advancing “white propaganda” intended for public consumption appears ineffective. This goes with Caroline Brothers’ view that “propaganda can only work successfully by resonating with those beliefs already held by the individuals it is meant to persuade.”¹⁴⁸ As I have outlined earlier, if Du Plessis and Breytenbach’s photograph was indeed constructed as a tool of state “white propaganda,” then the spotless appearance of this photograph presents a “tangential relation” to violence. That is, it contradicts or denies survivors’ reports of the paratroopers’ rampage and indiscriminate killing of civilians in Cassinga. Therefore, if this photograph is staged in a manner that the perpetrators appear exonerated from the brutal violence that they were observed committing in Cassinga, then the sort of “truth” that this photograph is attempting to disseminate is “circumscribed”, oblivious to the reality of the violent environment in which it exists, and unacceptable to individual survivors of the Cassinga massacre and many other Namibians at large. Hence, the face of Cassinga that this picture shows exists only within the limits of the SADF official discourse of the Cassinga attack and not the wider international or popular Namibian view of what happened in Cassinga.

Lazarus and Du Plessis

What would the immaculate photograph tell if we interrogate its exclusions in relation to survivors’ experience of the Cassinga massacre? In a more general approach, Corinne Kratz observed that

¹⁴⁸ Caroline Brothers, *War and photography*, p. 35.

“photographs do not ‘speak for themselves’ or provide a transparent ‘universal language.’”¹⁴⁹ But photographs embrace open-ended narratives. This means that the look, content and purpose of a photograph provokes and determines the meaning that an experienced viewer attaches to it. In particular, inasmuch as photographs attempt to decontextualize the Cassinga violence from its actual experience and historicity, photographs also, concurrently, invoke survivors’ opposition to the photographs’ reconfiguration of the paratroopers’ ruthless practice of violence against unarmed civilians on the ground. In this relation, the immaculate photograph produced varied survivors’ responses in view of the content they communicate.

To enter into these dialogues, my interest in writing a chapter about this photograph was aroused by my interview with Lazarus Cornelius. Cornelius came across this photograph (the immaculate picture above) in the album of the Cassinga photographs that I presented to him at the end of interviewing him at his homestead, *Etunda*, in 2008. Cornelius claimed to have recognized one of the men in the photograph, Brig. Mike Du Plessis (according to the SADF archives caption). He claimed that he was alert when he observed Du Plessis indiscriminately shooting to death, at point-blank range, the critically wounded victims with a pistol.

The argument here is that, inasmuch as many of us, the inexperienced, cannot see beyond photographs, especially images which we are not familiar with, some survivors of the Cassinga massacre do see beyond the confines of photographs. Survivors can see and tell stories about hidden realities which do not protrude from the surface of photographs when inexperienced viewers engage them. Individual survivors recorded and filed paratroopers’ (as individuals or as a collective) deliberate killings of defenseless civilians in the camp. Like the disclosers of Wikileaks, survivors reveal undisclosed secrets that the SADF photographs of the Cassinga massacre hide. This is explored in the following dialogues.

“I personally saw him killing wounded civilians!”

¹⁴⁹ Corinne A. Kratz, *The ones that are wanted: communication and the politics of representation in a photographic exhibition* (California: University of California Press, 2002), p. 118.



Figure 3. Lazarus Cornelius, a survivor of the Cassinga massacre. He is showing the interviewer the “Boer” whom he claims to have witnessed killing, deliberately, civilians who were critically wounded in the attack. Photo by the author, 2008.

“Truth” is supposedly self-evident. Albeit, the telling of “truth” here is visibly eclipsed by the shadow that obscures others from seeing it as practical evidence, the essence of its meaning lies in the fact that it is procreated by actual circumstances. However, it is also important to recognize that “truth” becomes immaterial when it does not relate to a practical experience of a thing. In the context of the Namibia political conflict, in the run-up to independence, certain things are regarded as “true” and others as “untrue” regardless of what historical facts they represent. Take a simple scenario: that the SADF carried out a systematic execution of Namibian refugees in Cassinga is undisputable “truth” for many Namibians, just as it is “untrue” for the SADF that it massacred innocent women and children in Cassinga. This is not to deny the fact that in the context of narrating (visually or orally) the Cassinga massacre, “truth” translates into the complete absence of the referent. As such, what is considered “true” by some, is immaterial, “untrue” and contested by others, as a substitute for the obscured and missing actual world.

I am introducing the problematic scenario of “truth” as a way of trying to explore its limits and strengths in the context of the many conflicting “truths” told by different agencies of experiencing and reporting

the Cassinga attack to the inexperienced other. I am referring to what individual survivors observed and witnessed in relation to the experiences and stories of the SADF photographs of the Cassinga attack.

The following dialogues between Lazarus Cornelius and the photograph he holds explore this conflict.

In leading to the dialogues between Lazarus and the perpetrators detained in the image, Caroline Brothers writes in a different context that “by looking [at photographs], the [experienced] viewer is implicated in a highly structured pattern of vision and representation. Meaning inheres not in the photograph itself, but in the relationship between the photograph and the matrix of ... specific beliefs and assumptions to which it refers. The photograph is the site at which these ‘invisible’ beliefs ... manifest, the gaze of the photographer directing the gaze of the viewer, and it is in this constant dialogue between image and society that lays the photograph’s greatest interest for the historian.”¹⁵⁰ In examining the visual representation of the immaculate photograph, the inexperienced viewer’s gaze is packaged in such a way that it encounters impenetrable hindrances. Such blockades withhold the viewer’s chance of seeing the unacceptable things which surround the circumvented border of the photograph. The frontier that this photograph has created between the viewer and the inaccessible space also prohibits the viewers’ chance of seeing the “truth” of the deplorable scenes of damage to human lives and property, presumably, on all sides around where the two commanding officers’ stood.

Interestingly, the violence that this photograph renders us oblivious to is “precisely what is of interest” in this chapter. In this regard, the fact that the immaculate photograph is structured in such a way that it prohibits the inexperienced viewer from seeing violence beyond the confines of the photograph’s parameters, encourages survivors to give testimonies which rise beyond the confines of the photograph’s staged “truth.” As John Tagg put it in a different context, staging a certain genre of constructed “truth” for the public consumption is “infinitely vulnerable to qualification ... by a third variable.”¹⁵¹ In the context of this topic, the constructed “truth” represents the immaculate photograph whereas, the “third variable” is suitably the witness of the Cassinga massacre. In this context, Lazarus in his capacity as a witness and survivor of the Cassinga massacre, his ability to investigate, explore and interpret the immaculate photograph according to his experience of the killings of civilians on the ground qualifies him for the “third variable.” This is demonstrated in the following passage:

¹⁵⁰ Caroline Brothers, *War and photography*, p. 23

¹⁵¹ John Tagg, *The burden of representation*. Cited in Caroline Brothers, *War and photography*, pp. 18 - 19.

This is the wicked Boer, ‘Embulu’, I have spoken about earlier in the interview. He was so ruthless ... I do not know how many wounded people he killed that day, but he killed people pitilessly!! ... I have no doubt about him ... I did not see any other Boer like him ... Let me tell you why I say that it is him: Number one, he was the only Boer I saw carrying this brown shoulder bag. It resembled the Soviet made shoulder bags used by PLAN commissars and when I saw him carrying this brown bag, I immediately thought about Commissar Greenwell Matongo who often carried a similar bag with him - it should had been his - maybe he died and his shoulder bag captured by the enemy - I thought that way, and that is how I became interested in this Boer. Number two, he looked burly physically and I was particularly startled by his appearance. There was a moment when he came too close to me ... he should have seen me ... maybe he thought I was dead ... When they shot and wounded me - from the back - I laid down - flat - flat - flat like dead. I laid flat on my stomach with my clothes soaked in blood. Luckily, I did not experience any loss of memory throughout the attack. I was sentient of every movement, noise, everything around me. I listened carefully and observed everything that unfolded before my eyes ... I carefully observed this matured Boer as he walked alone. He was alone, unaccompanied by anybody! He was only armed with a pistol, but he was very ruthless. I saw him indiscriminately shooting to death people who were critically injured and fighting to stay alive: Tock! Tock! Tock! Tock! ... I can still hear the sound of his pistol in my ears. It was the most shocking experience of the Cassinga massacre and that experience continues to bring much pain and sufferings whenever I remember this thing.¹⁵²

Christopher Pinney tells us that photography “has no identity ... its history has no unity... It is a flickering across a field of institutional spaces. It is this field we must study, not photography as such.”¹⁵³ Somewhere in this chapter, above, I have pointed out that the SADF camera operators acted under political restrictions. They were instructed not to photograph things that disclose deplorable pictures of human carnage in Cassinga. Hence, most of the SADF pictures of the Cassinga massacre, that are available to me, exclude scenes of bloodshed and civilian deaths. Nonetheless, since photographs are open to different viewers’ interpretations, such as in the case demonstrated by Cornelius above, I argue that photographs defy the political and other orders that constructed them. In this way, photographs act indifferently to the rules of the apartheid state which regulated what photographs must show and what they must conceal. By breaking the state’s attempt to control, destroy and silence acts of violence against civilians, the SADF photographs of the Cassinga attack become embedded with the notion of betrayal of those who packaged and staged particular realities before the eye of the camera. In this context, the SADF photographs of the Cassinga massacre can be understood as perfidious agents. This takes cognizance of the fact that individual survivors with experience and

¹⁵² The author’s interview with Lazarus Namutenya Cornelius, Etunda, 2008.

¹⁵³ Christopher Pinney, *Camera Indica*, p. 17.

knowledge pertaining to the people and things appearing in photographs can act as interlocutors. The way Cornelius is able to gather and unpack sensitive things that the immaculate photograph conceals is the obvious demonstration of this scenario.

Certainly and also interestingly, survivors can use photographs as weapons against the perpetrators. That is, the same photographs that the perpetrators shot and staged with the purpose to conceal and keep secret the unacceptable pictures of violence, can also be used by survivors to implicate the perpetrators' unleashing of the indiscriminate and violent killing of civilians as demonstrated by Cornelius above. And so, when survivors can transcend photographs' frontiers and disclose things beyond photographs' parameters, it can help historians and the public at large to, also, acquire new knowledge and new ways of thinking and understanding the previously hidden secrets. Hence, since photographs are social objects without a formula to unlock meaning uniformly, what is "important is the way in which the links between the oral and the visual can counter and mesh with other forms in the contemporary, shifting the balance and allowing ... multiple forms of history transmission to operate."¹⁵⁴

The way Cornelius explored and disclosed the unspeakable things that the photograph of du Plessis and Breytenbach is oblivious to, suggests that the act of staging photographs with the intent to disseminate a certain discourse is not efficient. This is in response to the fact that photographs are "read differently" in response to individual experiences and incurred sufferings since the Cassinga massacre. In this relation, no single photograph can communicate a single or unambiguous reality. Photographs are interpreted according to individual survivors' experiences, sufferings, anger and unaddressed Cassinga issues in the long aftermath of the massacre. These and other distressful factors combine in constructing meanings and effects beyond the limited and ambiguous content that photographs bring to our sense of seeing. The fact that the meaning or interpretation of a photograph is not embedded in the content of a picture, but beyond the frame of it, is demonstrated in the following excerpt:

Whenever that picture [of the alleged Du Plessis executing civilians] appears ... it takes me back to Cassinga and I am grieved repeatedly. I tell you, memories of that pitiless soldier, moving alone and finishing the lives of the critically injured is emotionally and physically hurtful. Whenever I revisit it, I collapse emotionally and remain in my bedroom in fear and insecurity. People were killed indiscriminately, women and children, yet

¹⁵⁴ Elizabeth Edwards, "Photographs and the sound of history," *Visual Anthropology Review*, Vol. 21/ 1 & 2 (Spring / Fall 2005), p. 38.

the perpetrator goes unpunished. How can I forgive a person like this one? ... Not at all, forgiveness is a façade, especially when there is continuing denials of the massacre of innocent civilians ... such unending and deliberate irritability to the wounds, causing our wounds to bleed repeatedly and profusely. Yah, I have forgiven them, at least, in words. However, the grief is deep inside me and I feel that I have not forgiven them, especially that Boer! Is he living a normal life when his hands are red with the blood of so many innocent people? Does he know that he has put many lives in trouble and robbed many families of their loved ones? What he did is very painful and a difficult experience to live with. Yes! It is reconciliation, but I fail to grab the context of this reconciliation. Where is justice? Where is it?¹⁵⁵

As I have indicated earlier in the case of Cassinga, photographs are subjected to a variety of different witnesses' experiences, examinations, interpretations and meanings. I am presenting a point that a single photograph *may* infer different meanings and interpretations from different agencies and forums that give it multiple voices and meanings beyond the restricted way that photographs contain and restrain things. Thus, for the perpetrator, the photograph in this context may interpret a sense of "bravery for the mission well accomplished." For survivors, as demonstrated in the excerpt above, the immaculate photograph is the associate of pervasive trauma: grief, anger and anxiety. In this relation, therefore, it appears problematic to accept that the perpetrators' photographs of the Cassinga operation can hide multiple acts of violence. They cannot hide the anger and bitterness of the victims of that episode: just as it is not possible for the SADF photographs of the Cassinga massacre to honestly disclose the appalling violence of that episode.

Visuality and sensory exploration of the Cassinga violence

Visuality was not used in isolation from other senses when survivors searched for scenes of violence in the different photographs of the Cassinga massacre. Other senses (hearing, seeing, feeling and smell) were collectively used as survivors tried to read photographs with the intent to discover the things they have experienced in Cassinga, detecting and unveiling areas of conflicts between the packaged story of the visual images and the various stories of individual survivors. Indeed, as Elaine Scarry teaches us,

¹⁵⁵ The author's interview with Lazarus Namutenya Cornelius, Etunda, 2008.

“those attributes confirmed by both vision and touch tend to be felt to have a greater reality than those attributes experienced by only one of the two, or by one of the other senses without these two.”¹⁵⁶

Cornelius relied mostly on two senses: sight, the sense of seeing and touch, the sense of feeling as he attempted to trace and discover things inside and outside the boundary - the inclusions and exclusions in the picture of the things he experienced in Cassinga - of the “immaculate photograph.” He predominantly used his fingers or flat palm to name and map out positions in the camp, during the massacre, where he observed multiple scenes of brutality he attributed to Brigadier Du Plessis and others. In most cases, Cornelius pointed to structures or things experienced in Cassinga beyond the boundary of the photograph with which he engaged. Consider the following examples: “I observed him killing the wounded people from this side ... the pit toilet which I avoided and which they later blew up, killing many people inside it was that side ... the river where many people drowned is located that side. The list of the things and experiences through which Cornelius tried to navigate the interviewer, but outside the borders of the photograph, is endless. This representation explains that this photograph conveys considerable exclusions of the things known to and experienced by survivors on that fateful and memorable day.

I construed that as the witness’ finger runs over the photograph, it is a sign of ascertaining and discerning relationships between the photograph and memory. The more Cornelius recognized despicable things that the photograph ignores or excludes, the more he held firmly to the photograph. At this point, his voice often choked - it fell flat, as verbal dialogue became overwhelmed by the anger and rage in response to the fury of what he called the photograph’s “untelling of truth.” The “photograph’s untelling of truth,” that Cornelius bemoaned, points to the conflict between the actual experience of the violence on the ground and the visual misrepresentation and framing of the untainted picture of that violence which unfolded before survivors and witnesses.

In this context therefore, when Lazarus engaged Du Plessis’ photograph for a considerable time, uttering words to the photograph (not to the interviewer), it can be interpreted as a way of interrogating the photograph’s exclusions, and the packaging and framing of the violence. Because to “frame”, as an embedded feature of photographs, is to enforce boundaries, to obscure seeing violence beyond the

¹⁵⁶ Elaine Scarry, *The body in pain: the making and unmaking of the world*(New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 146.

staged realities of the camera. It is a way of impairing other human senses and of denying the inexperienced people a chance to also experience and comprehend deplorable pictures of the Cassinga massacre. Moreover, observing a moment of silence (as I experienced during Cornelius' conversation with the immaculate photograph) by bringing the whole body of the speaker to a state of abrupt motionlessness, also conveys other important meanings. It can be understood as a way of paying solemn respect to each memorable scene of the violence and to the dead comrades.

In this perspective above, the victim's sensory interaction with the visual representation of the Cassinga massacre is capable of tracing and discovering unprecedented exclusions of the numerous things which may appear mundane and ordinary to the assailants but traumatic for the victims of the Cassinga massacre and their families. In fact, the things that the perpetrators consider normal and necessary are the things that considerably concern survivors and exacerbate their sufferings and bitterness.

The search for acknowledgment

As demonstrated in Cornelius' excerpt above, the victims of the Cassinga massacre are time after time reminded that the scourge of the Cassinga violence, which has brought endless suffering and sorrow, requires an intervention of justice which has been long overdue. In this relation, the victims of this episode, dead and alive, can only forgive the perpetrators, if their untold suffering and degree of sorrow were to be recognized politically and economically, as I will later explain, and if justice were to take its course. A moment after Cornelius' dialogue with the immaculate photograph, he asked me if he could keep the immaculate photograph with him. He told me that he needs to show "the killers," *aadhipagi*, to the affected families of the people who went missing in Cassinga in his constituency.¹⁵⁷ Cornelius aspires to use this photograph to interpret its content in relation to the outstanding absence of the victims' sufferings, pain and sorrow associated with this image. The following excerpt summarizes what we might call this "genre":

A person like this one (du Plessis) should come here to face justice. He should come here to answer to questions about his role in Cassinga. His actions were inhuman ... instead of offering assistance to the wounded and helpless, he went amok slaughtering them. This is unacceptable. Can't

¹⁵⁷ The author's interview with Lazarus Namutenya Cornelius, Etunda, 2008. Lazarus is a teacher by profession. He was the SWAPO Party councilor for the Ruacana constituency at the time of interviewing him. He retired at the end of 2010.

they bring him and others here and face justice ... it would be fair enough to bring them here and face us while we are still alive. The public is eager to listen and hear what happened to their loved ones. I should keep this photograph to show it to my constituency when we commemorate the Cassinga massacre next year [2009].¹⁵⁸

In the absence of survivors' justice, the victims find it unacceptable to forgive the perpetrators who remain unapologetic for the deplorable wrongs they committed. Indeed, issues of the victims' justice are the prerequisite for genuine forgiveness and "national reconciliation" and should be seriously kept in place if Namibia were to claim that it is certainly independent and sovereign. Survivors and affected families also raise issues of reparations for the affected victims. Arguably, official acknowledgment or reparations for the victims of the Cassinga massacre may not equal the price of the sufferings and the loss of the innocent lives, nor can they restore the violated human dignity of the victims. But, such approaches can also be argued as the only ways of providing the victims with a sense of recognition for the injustices done to them, as seems to be the case with the Hereros of Namibia against the German government ongoing today.¹⁵⁹

In this context, Cornelius' intent to parade the accused perpetrator's photograph before the local population suggests the victims' aspiration for the long overdue justice. The victims demand a public apology and compensation that we might interpret as perceiving these ideals as fundamental forms of "reparation or recognition"¹⁶⁰ for colonial-apartheid violence against innocent Namibians, and as "preconditions" for reconciliation. It should also be noted that, it is not only the victims of the Cassinga and Vietnam massacres who demand a public apology, but many other Namibians suffered collateral injuries and other human rights abuses in the years of South Africa's ruthless colonialism and apartheid rule in Namibia.

¹⁵⁸ The author's interview with Lazarus Namutenya Cornelius, Etunda, 2008.

¹⁵⁹ Jeremy Sarkin, *Colonial Genocide and reparations claims in the 21st Century: the socio-legal context of claims under international law by the Herero against German for Genocide in Namibia, 1904- 1908* (Wesrport: Praeger Publishers, 2009).

¹⁶⁰ Compensation is argued to be better for the victims of political violence and affected families, rather than conceding simply that things were wrong. In 1992 when F. W. De Klerk attempted to apologize to South Africans for the apartheid wrongs, the ANC called the apology "inadequate," because it failed to acknowledge (in kind to the victims and bereaved families) apartheid wrongs and evils. See, "De Klerk apartheid apology was inadequate, ANC says." Online at <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/252666/De-Klerk-apartheid-apology-was-inadequate-ANC-says.html>.

For me, the scenario laid out by Cornelius introduces a metaphor of parading the enemy (photograph) before survivors and families of the dead in his community. This metaphor discloses the victims' quest for some form of dialogue with the perpetrators. The affected communities want the perpetrators to acknowledge the responsibility for the Cassinga massacre and other violence in the exchange for genuine forgiveness and reconciliation. Hence, Cornelius' drive to keep the perpetrator's photograph with him until such time as it can be shown to the victimized population enlightens us about the victims' desire for justice. The perpetrators of the Cassinga massacre are strongly called upon to answer to the murder charges against them. "Where are they? Where are these men now? Can't they bring them here and face us?"¹⁶¹ These questions also indicate that the perpetrators of the Cassinga massacre have gone underground since their departure from Cassinga: where they left the dead and the critically wounded civilians abandoned, as they unsympathetically returned to their bases in northern Namibia from where most of the victims hailed.

In reaching the end of this chapter, it is worth emphasizing that in confronting the SADF visual images of the Cassinga massacre, the inexperienced viewers' gaze is confined to the pigeonholed realities within the restricted boundary of photographs. For this reason, the inexperienced viewer cannot see deplorable situations of human suffering and carnage beyond the frontiers of such images. On the contrary, survivors of the Cassinga massacre view visual images of the Cassinga massacre differently. This scenario carries two meanings. The first reason is that survivors approach the Cassinga visual images as sources of untold pains and suffering. This is because, when survivors come into contact with such images they are instigated to explore multiple scenes of violence beyond the staged realities or exclusions of the visual, thereby getting irritated and wounded again. The second meaning infers that survivors find greater pain and discomfort in the SADF visual images of the Cassinga massacre than the inexperienced viewers: they find such images undermining the authenticity, multiplicity and deplorability of the Cassinga experience by staging, framing, packaging and obscuring the many realities experienced on the ground by the assailants and by survivors as individuals and as a collective.

Nonetheless, in the same manner as survivors, the SADF as well as individual paratroopers, do not find pleasure and merit in distributing and disseminating horrific photographs of civilian casualties in Cassinga. As such, images of civilian casualties appear not to have formed part of the "group" of

¹⁶¹ The author's interview with Lazarus Namutenya Cornelius, Etunda, 2008.

photographs donated to the SADF archives in Pretoria (as indicated at the beginning of the chapter). In particular, the emerging publications written by Colonel Jan Breytenbach and articles by Mike McWilliams (the official SADF photographer of the Cassinga massacre) appear to deliberately exclude photographs showing civilian casualties. Nevertheless, whilst such exclusion explains that the SADF photographs cannot disclose or authenticate the SADF discourse of what actually happened in Cassinga on the ground, they also convey another important reason explaining why the perpetrator holds back sensitive photographs of the Cassinga massacre: the perpetrator finds no pleasure in such photographs, because they valorize the deep scars which continue to interrogate and haunt them for the innocent lives they destroyed in Cassinga.

In this respect, it is important to note that both survivors and paratroopers emerged from Cassinga traumatized. Therefore, if postcolonial Namibia is interested in helping both victims to recover from shock, trauma, anger and grief, things must be done sensibly and in a human way. Not in the way that “the benefits [given] to the perpetrator ... outweigh the benefits [given] to the victim.”¹⁶² Thus, applauding the perpetrators with a number of privileges at the expense of the weak and the historically vulnerable populations is about maintaining and feeding the old apartheid culture regarding race, class and hierarchies of inferiority. Hence, this melancholic anomaly is not only discriminatory but it is, in essence, a repetition of violence: it exacerbates the sufferings that torture the civilian victims and families of the missing people in Cassinga who appear to bear the greatest burden of the Cassinga massacre for life, in an absolute silence that conforms to the prevailing political order. As long as this ailment remains without a cure, there can be no recovery and healing for all the victims (survivors, bereaved families and perpetrators).

¹⁶² Pius Langa, “Apartheid bomber loses Concourt bid,” Accessed from: <http://www.dispatch.co.za/article.aspx?id=338529>.

CHAPTER FOUR

MEMORY OF THE WOUNDED BODY, ORAL TESTIMONY AND THE OTHER

In the preceding chapters, I have explored how visual testimonies are not fully consonant with the practicality of the Cassinga violence as witnessed on the ground by survivors of the massacre. In the same way, oral testimony fails to elicit the painful memories of the victims' wounded bodies. This is while violence has clearly left very scarred marks, openly evident, on some survivors' bodies. This chapter argues that the terrible memories incised into the victim's body as evident through the physical body scars are far beyond the reach and understandings of the other, as no testimony is capable of transferring such memories.¹⁶³ The "other" here denotes the inexperienced viewers. When I interviewed the victims whose bodies are physically maimed since the Cassinga massacre, they told me that the sites of violence, evident on their disfigured bodies, may appear healed from the outside, but in reality such sites are gates (to which I return later) into profusely bleeding memories. The metaphor of "profusely bleeding" inner memories is analogous to the internally bleeding wounds of the victims since the Cassinga massacre.

The central argument in this chapter is that the pain or memory of the damaged body is not communicable via the protruding scars on the victims' maimed bodies. Quite the alternative, the pain sits beneath, deep inside the veins of the victims. In considering this disturbing revelation, this chapter attempts to explore the inauthenticity of survivors' bodily injuries through survivors' oral testimonies. Notably, every single scar of violence protruding from survivors' bodies is not a lifeless effigy. Such scars or figures of violence, according to survivors, are sensitive areas and full of life because they are connected to the chronic injuries that are properly framed and beyond the reach of others and, most disappointingly, beyond the reach of the victims' own testimony.

Physical scars and invisible memories

¹⁶³ See Chapter 1 for the meaning of memory and testimony in the context of this study.

Important lessons were learned when I interviewed survivors with amputated body parts and other horrible injuries sustained in Cassinga. According to Rauha Shitangi, “the pain of the wounded body is invisible as it is contained inside the victim’s body or below the surface of the scars of damage on the victim’s body.” The scars, in terms of deciphering the dynamic presence of chronic wounds beneath the physical damage of the body, denote a fundamental metaphor. The essence of chronic injuries or wounds, therefore, infers that the wound appears, falsely, to be healed in the eyes of the external gaze upon such tragic figures. But, internally the wound is open and profusely bleeding. Here, two important structures of the wound emerge. These are the physical and internal structures. The physical structure is visible and may appear healed or recovered from the pain. The internal wound is out of sight of the other as it is inside the victim’s body. It is not the physical structure of the wound or scars, but the severity of the inside or open wound that survivors bemoan and describe as unleashing unhealing bitter memories of the Cassinga massacre and its aftermath. In this connection, Rauha Shitangi told me the following:

The picture of remembering Cassinga is like sustaining an injury on a sensitive area of the body ... Look at this terrible scar ... this deep cut at this sensitive area of my leg, *omuthipa* [which translates as the achilles tendon] ... it appears healed – *hasho* – right? Of course not, because if I touch this area, even with a very soft touch, I can feel the pain deep inside ... the pain is inside ... it is chronic inside, permanent and untreatable.¹⁶⁴

Cassinga is as sensitive as the Achilles tendon injury which when hurt may not mend and heal completely again. Its pain is alive inside, not external, and so painful that it hurts when tampered with. In this relation, the scars, effigies of violence on survivors’ bodies, translate into the shadows of lasting pain and suffering below the surface of these sights or scars. If memory of the wounded victims, to return to Rauha’s affirmation, is akin to the severing or damage of sensitive parts of the body, then wounded memory translates into the body that continues to experience unhealing pain and suffering.

The use of the metaphor, *omuthipa*, a crucial and sensitive part of the body (which Shitangi used in attempts to explain to me the characters of the wounded body), portrays the sensitivity and the resistibility of the wounded body to mend and heal properly. Evasively, the “body in pain”

¹⁶⁴ Author’s interview with Rauha Shitangi, Okadhila, 2007.

appears healed when looking at it externally and seeing the external scars, but it is throbbing inside. And, without communicating their pains and sufferings, survivors might live amidst us and we might unknowingly take it for granted that all is well with them. The point is that survivors are constantly waging a protracted struggle with the implicit emotional memories. This is because the excruciating moments, traumatic experiences and ongoing violence are deeply seated and therefore beyond the other's experience and sensitivity and indeed beyond the survivors' efforts to elicit anything so that others could experience and understand their ongoing suffering.

In recalling emotional memories of the bodies of her comrades roasted to death near the Cassinga garage, Martha Mwatilifange said the following:

That scene near the Cassinga garage sickens me. That place, where some of us reassembled after the massacre ... It is such a horrendous scene, so traumatic that it is beyond my words ... such a shocking horror that no one can describe. ... people roasted to death ... the smell of roasted human flesh was unbearable ... Whenever I remember and recount that horror ... the already open wounds start to bleed profusely ... It was horrible, watching seeing dozens of people roasted and beyond recognition is hurting ... it is something I do not want to remember and talk about it ... it opens the wounds.¹⁶⁵

The concept of the "open wound" is a metaphor for the survivors' endless implicit traumatic memories of the Cassinga massacre. The "open wound" as interpretative metaphor for the unhealing or chronic memory lays emphasis on the endless suffering of the victims. As Shitangi unambiguously put it across, survivors lament the fact that remembering Cassinga is akin to stabbing the open wound. Notably, the remembrance of the Cassinga massacre and its deplorable aftermath is a frequent experience. This means that survivors are repeatedly wounded by the many returns of Cassinga's appalling moments. In fact, the entire body of the victim is wounded, inflamed and sensitive to touch, because any rough touch on the scars awakens the demons. This implies the victim's return to the horrific experience of the Cassinga violence.

To take a closer look at this situation, it should be said that when the body has sustained an injury, a "diffuse area of tenderness" develops around the site of the injury. Therefore, since the

¹⁶⁵ Author's interview with Martha Mwatilifange, *Oshakati*, 2007.

Cassinga traumatic memories represent multiple wounded areas of the victims' body, it implies that every segment of such memories is "hypersensitive" to external "stimuli." These are so sensitive that the pains aroused by the external stimuli of the terrible things experienced in Cassinga, as Martha points out above (or indeed when interviewers question survivors about the Cassinga massacre), it sends shock waves of indescribable pain and suffering all over the victim's body.

The damaged bodies and implicit memory

As illustrated in the photograph below, it is important to note that the Cassinga victims with their bodies severely maimed do not just live with the physical trauma and suffering due to the loss of their vital and irreplaceable limbs and so on. They also live with emotionally charged memories. These memories are completely obscured from the knowledge and awareness of the other.

Meme Hendrina Kiiyala, in the photograph below, was a seventeen year-old school girl when Cassinga was attacked. She sustained serious body injuries and received treatment for her amputated arm and other wounds in the former German Democratic Republic (GDR). She talked, emotionally, about how the inexperienced people, in the broader context of the world community, lack the understanding and recognition of the ongoing excruciating pain and suffering beneath the picture of the physically damaged body. According to her, the internal pain is more traumatic than the pain protruding from the physical scars that the viewer sees. But the skin covering the internal pain has, as Charlotte Delbo would put it, "hardened, it allows nothing to filter out of what it retains"¹⁶⁶ and the victim has "no control" to elicit the damage and trauma retained inside her. The following brief excerpt from my interview with Meme Kiiyala gives the reader a glimpse of her endless suffering:

¹⁶⁶ Charlotte Delbo, *Days and memory*, translated and with a preface by Rosette Lamont (Evanston: Northwest University Press, 2001), p. 1.



Figure 4. Hendrina Kiiyala photographed inside her homestead at Oshiku shaShipya, north central Namibia, 11 June 2009. She opted for her photograph to look this way. Photograph by the author.

I was seventeen when this terrible violence damaged my life. I was a child, separated from my parents by the war and violence inside Namibia. I went into exile hoping to escape violence and receive education for a better future. The unfortunate happened a few months after arriving in Cassinga ... Many people died on that day and survivors were left in very difficult situations, emotionally and physically. In the immediate aftermath of the massacre, I had this thought it was better to have died than surviving the killings. The pain was so unbearable. We did not receive any treatment on the day of the attack. The second day also passed without any treatment ... From Cassinga, those of us who were seriously wounded were transported to the Cuban military clinic at Techamutete, about 25km from Cassinga. The group consisted of Namibians, Cubans and Angolans who needed emergency treatments. Unfortunately, we only received painkiller tablets there. On May 6, a helicopter flew sixteen of us, all Namibians to a hospital in Huambo. Others went to Luanda and so on. We had horrible experiences in Huambo. Each one of us, except one little girl, had a limb amputated ... my arm was surgically removed there, in Huambo. This happened because I did not receive treatment on time. We spent three days without treatment after the massacre. Sometime in June 1978, we arrived in Luanda en-route to East Germany (GDR) for further treatment and to receive artificial limbs. My initial stay in the GDR was discomforting and traumatic. Remember that, it was all whites who did all these bad things to us in Cassinga. Emerging from that terrible experience of racial killings, I could trust no white person, in the immediate aftermath

of that experience. In German, therefore, it took very long to accept that they [Germans] would do no harm to me. How different were they from the Boers who brutalized us for no wrongs? I harbored that anxiety for very long. ... We received treatment at a clinic called Berlin- Buch. There was a nurse called Ellen (sic) who was so friendly to me and treated me like her own child, but I only realized her mother – like approach after some time: the thing was, I lost appetite for most of the period I spent in the hospital. She was concerned about my poor appetite. She frequently told me that she would send me back to Cassinga if I did not eat and finish my food. That was her way of trying to influence me to eat. I did not take it lightly. I took her threat very seriously. The more she mentioned Cassinga, the more I felt a tumble in my stomach and the more I lost appetite for food ... Of course, she was aware of the physical injuries on my body, but she was unaware about the emotional damage such deplorable experience created in me, the heavy load of traumatic memories inside me, mistrust, fear and feelings of insecurity that the terrible Cassinga experience planted inside me. If I had a way of explaining and unpacking the pain, trauma and shock inside me, she would not have made such remarks.¹⁶⁷

In following Lawrence Langer's presentation of Holocaust testimonies, "the body can be maimed in many ways, not only through mutilation,"¹⁶⁸ thereby making it an "active agent" of pain.¹⁶⁹ As an "active agent" of pain, the mutilation that the body incurred and enduring pain are active forms of what Elaine Scarry refers to as "bodily memory."¹⁷⁰ In the context of the Cassinga massacre, the notion of the "bodily memory" implies the active endurance of violence inside the body of the victims, "both alive" and those "buried"¹⁷¹ in the Cassinga mass graves or whose bodies have never been accounted for since the killings.

By looking on the surface of Meme Hendrina's amputated arm and, indeed, her mutilated body as a whole (the emphasis here is on the internal damage rather than the external damage), it is certainly plausible to imagine that the injuries and the pain she sustained and suffered were terrible as she described it in the interview. But, like photographs, scars of violence, which seal violence beneath them, are not anything that survivors can rely on when hoping for their living

¹⁶⁷ Author's interview with Hendrina Kiiyala at Oshikuku(place of work) on 11 June 2009 and at Oshiku shaShipya (homestead), 21 December 2009.

¹⁶⁸ Lawrence Langer L., *Holocaust testimonies: the ruins of memory* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991), p. 101.

¹⁶⁹ Elaine Scarry, *The body in pain*, p. 47.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p. 110.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid*, p. 113.

painful experiences to reach, in the pragmatic nature of the never-healing wounds, the broadest possible public audience.

Therefore, although many survivors' bodies display terrible or visually stupefying, shocking bodily damage as a consequence of the SADF's brutal violence, this damage should not be necessarily be interpreted or perceived as illuminating the pain and suffering of the inner "bodily memories" of the violence that mutilated the body. Of course, there is a relationship between the physical damages of the body and the violent penetration of the pain into the victim's body. But, the physically harrowing scars of the damaged body should, instead, be interpreted and understood as concealing the actual sentient agony which is hidden and self-evident of the injured body that is not only damaged but also beyond repair.

In *The Body in Pain*, Elaine Scarry writes that "physical pain has no voice, but when it last finds a voice, it begins to tell a story, and the story that it tells is about"¹⁷² the physical scars' inability to elicit the innermost pain and suffering of its victim. In this relation, Kiiyala's stump of her amputated arm elucidates the argument I am constructing. It is unambiguous that the physical site of damage on her body is transparent in the photograph, but the pain, disability and sufferings which emanate from it are implicitly and exclusively personal experiences. This is particularly so when the intent to communicate the victims' "pervasive and enduring" distress becomes difficult through the visual or "verbal expressibility."

It is lucid that Kiiyala's picture of the amputated arm reveals a "heartrending site." However external, it emits shocking and hurtful emotions and may situate sensitive viewers in the position of a secondary witness of the violence. Nonetheless, the external pathos that this photograph flashes into view restrains the experience of violence to a particular area of the victim's body. This implies that such external scars on the victim's body are not as damaging as the innermost violence that invasively sits beneath the surface of the protruding scars or amputated body parts.

Nonetheless, the protruding sites of violence on the victim's body should be recognized as entrance points. These spots indicate the area(s) where violence perforated the victim's body.

¹⁷² Ibid, p. 3.

Below these gateways lie multiple conduits, channels leading to the interior dynamics of multiple wounds, pain and suffering of the victims. In this connection, the visual representation of Kiiyala's disabled body introduces the viewer to the surface of the broader but implicit picture of the emotional damage and the multiplicity of the pervasive and enduring pain beneath the protruding physical injuries. Therefore, "beyond the experience of the actual physical violence [or scars of violence] lies a form of discursive, rhetorical violence that continues to do harm in the minds of people ..."¹⁷³ The fact that emotional pain is exclusively personal is problematic for others' recognition. In this connection, Elaine Scarry tells us the following:

When one hears¹⁷⁴ about another person's physical pain, the events happening with the interior of that person's body may seem to have the remote character of some deep subterranean fact, belonging to an invisible geography that, however portentous, has no reality because it has not yet manifested itself on the visible surface of the earth [or body].¹⁷⁵

Elaine's statement is significant when we reframe it in the context of the scars of violence on other people's bodies. Relating this scenario to the photograph of Kiiyala's amputated arm, I would argue that a viewer who is solely connected to this brand of violence through the medium of this photograph is actually a naïve spectator. This is actually in relation to, according to Elaine Scarry, the "unsharability" or the "inexpressibility of physical pain"¹⁷⁶ of the other person which the photograph has "eclipsed from view."¹⁷⁷ In comparison, my physical immediacy to survivors' damaged bodies, during the interviews, and listening to their traumatic stories about how they incurred and nursed their deplorable injuries, were more real and emotionally charging, more than what this photograph shows. This is not to claim that by spending time with survivors during the interviews or personal communication with them, it was possible to understand their implicit memories and suffering. However the tangible presence of the victims' physical injuries and the sufferings embedded in the stories they told me were cutting through my emotions.

The burden of implicit memory and its formation

¹⁷³ Helena Pohlandt - McCormick, "I saw a nightmare ..." pp. 23-24.

¹⁷⁴ I would insert that seeing others' scars of violence in photographs is equivalent to hearing of another's pain.

¹⁷⁵ Elaine Scarry, *The body in pain*, p. 3.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 3 - 4.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p. 64.

My earlier reference to the victims' scars as closed gates through which violence has made a forced entry into the body is fundamental. If wounded memory is located beneath the surface, where the initial violence had initially made a forced entrance into the body and sealed the gate, then it means that memory is deeply an internal mechanism or organ - hidden from the public eye and recognition. The notion of the closed gate implies that violence is detained, framed and boils inside the body. As such, the chance to find an exit to the outside of the body is very narrow. As an alternative, the relentless struggle to find an exit from the wounded body crystallizes into tension. This internal violence causes inside 'explosions' leading to massive internal injuries and bleeding. Regrettably, the invasiveness and restlessness of the internally locked up trouble or internal violence may develop without the notice and awareness of the outside world that could possibly provide some alleviation.

As a consequence of enduring the pervasive suffering in isolation, the victim may become vocally wounded or repressed into "passive victimhood." This implies that there is "collusion" between the body in pain, language and "silence."¹⁷⁸ The "collusion between violence and silence,"¹⁷⁹ may partly explain why the victims of the horrendous Cassinga massacre are enduring so much pain and suffering in silence for so long. This does not mean that the victims do not want to communicate their tremendous miseries. Nor is this failure entirely inherent in the fact that physical violence "resists verbal objectification," or because there is an absence of "language for pain."¹⁸⁰ But its meaning is closer to suggesting that the victims are repressed, and condemned to "contain" and deal with their numerous enduring suffering implicitly, and in silence (as will be explored further in this chapter).

In this relation above, it important to explore implicit traumatic memory in the context of its extremely harsh and unstoppable victimization of the body. Implicit memory depicts the searing pain and suffering which transcend the actual moment and space where, initially, the body came under the spotlight of the SADF systematic violence. In this relation, survivors' boiling memories, pervasive in the internal workings of the Cassinga victims' individual bodies, should not be perceived as akin to the victims' actual experiences of the violence on the ground. Rather,

¹⁷⁸ Helena Pohlandt - McCormick, "I saw a nightmare ..." p. 23.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 23.

¹⁸⁰ Elaine Scarry, *The body in pain*, p. 12.

the emotional endurance of the Cassinga painful memories is much more violent than the actual physical attack. This takes into cognizance the fact that unlike the brief moment of experiencing the physical unfolding of the violence on the ground, implicit memory is continuously violent in such a way that it endlessly causes tremendous damage, injuries and restlessness in the victims' lives.

According to survivors, the formation and crystallization of implicit memory inside the victims' bodies features two crucial moments or stages which are nevertheless jointly connected. The first category is the primary stage. This moment is directly associated with the actual occurrence of the massacre on the ground. Survivors recognize this category as the period when violence entered the body: it involves the actual individual recording and memorization of the painful things experienced (physically and emotionally) as violence unfolded. The second category is the secondary stage. This phase sets in the moment the primary phase is completed. It is the replay of the assault pictures or scenes of violence recorded during the primary stage of witnessing the massacre on the ground. In other words, this moment transcends the actual space of violence. It is specifically associated with the individual victim's endless struggle against the recurring traumatic flashbacks and nightmares. As such, this moment represents the gruesomeness of carrying the burden of the relentless returns of the unhappy moments of the Cassinga massacre, combined with the excruciatingly chronic aftermath.

In this relation, Helena Shixuandu Iiping (photograph below) whose face was shockingly damaged in Cassinga, described the violence as an off and on experience:



Figure 5. Helena Shixuadu - Ipinge. Photograph by the author at Oshakati, 2009.

Sometimes I am disconnected from it, but whenever I see my face like this in the mirror, is like pressing the button that switches on the screen of the Cassinga violence ... In the mirror, my face is invisible ... Instead, I see the bitterness and anger instead ... I am very angry with those who caused this terrible damage, those who stole the beauty of my face ... why did they do it? Why did they cause all these endless pains? Why are they not accountable for all these endless pains and sufferings? How can I forgive them?¹⁸¹

The “on and off” violence that Shixuadu described in the interview indicates what Cathy Caruth, in the context of the Holocaust trauma, identified as “second wounding” or “double wounding.”¹⁸² In the case of the victims of the Cassinga massacre, the “double wounding” calls to mind the understanding that the Cassinga violence finds no resolution within the victims’ mental schema. This is particularly so when society ignores the victims’ ongoing suffering and trauma. Certainly, Shixuadu experiences many returns of very sad moments of the massacre which have left a permanent and unpleasant brand on her face. Looking at her face in the mirror is a way of reflecting on the terrible experience in Cassinga, and connecting it to her bodily and emotional sufferings since that awful day of catastrophe, human suffering and wretchedness. In other words, her damaged face is the agency that generates an “anguished memory” embedded in the irreplaceable beauty stolen from a young girl without compensation: it refers to the victims’

¹⁸¹ Author’s interview with Helena Shixuandu Ipinge, *Oshakati*, 2009.

¹⁸² Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed experience: trauma, narrative and history* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. 8.

anger, sadness and frustration when the perpetrators escape taking responsibility for the Cassinga massacre. This is all under the watchful eye of the justice system which ought to speak for and protect the victims of apartheid-colonial violence against innocent civilians, particularly women and young girls. Shixuadu's expression of shock and anger is therefore also a way of interrogating the unfairness of the justice system since Namibia became a democracy in 1990.

In this connection, the continuity of the unhealing traumatic memories stem from a number of reasons. For example, both Namibia and South Africa did not honour the expectations, prior to democratization, of the victims of colonial and apartheid atrocities. Paradoxically, democracy turned out to benefit the perpetrators at the expense of the victims of political violence under apartheid and colonial rule in Namibia. The victims are also under the state obligation to forgive the perpetrators whom the state shields from prosecution (see Chapter 7). Indeed, in the eyes of the formerly oppressed, democracy (in the political context) has simply added miseries to the victims' experience of the pathos of colonialism. Certainly, the victims of the Cassinga massacre and other related violence in Namibia are unhappy about the execution of such political games, especially the issue of "reconciliation without justice" (which I have explored in Chapter 7) for the victims of apartheid-colonialism in Namibia.

It is apparent that survivors demand justice and nothing else. Survivors feel strongly that the perpetrators of the Cassinga massacre have to apologize, take responsibility and compensate the victims for the damages incurred. In the absence of social justice, the bleak cycle of traumatic violence continues to recharge repeatedly and adds more layers of pain and suffering felt by the victims of the Cassinga massacre, the survivors and affected families. Therefore, it is not surprising that survivors voice a concern that their sufferings, grievances and nightmares have reached a level that is no longer easy to contain, at least emotionally. I am not saying that the initiation of the justice towards the victims can repair and remedy emotional suffering. What I am saying is that it is possible to interrupt and reduce the level or layers of the injurious but "tainted (implicit or obscured) memories," if things were to follow the demands and aspirations of the victims.

The misery of Lonia Vatileni alias “Ndjeimo” expressed in the following excerpt illustrates the arguments I am presenting:

My health has been considerably compromised ... My amputated feet are never healing ... they itch terribly, especially when it is cloudy and wet ... Those who did these terrible things to us are not accountable to our unending sufferings. The Boers are untouchable, if they were approachable and able to listen, we would want to ask them to repair and fix the damage they created. The government preaches national reconciliation. What reconciliation? Who benefit from it? With my physical disabilities, endless emotional pain and suffering, the coercion to forgive the Boers is another nightmare. Forgiving them for what? Have we done them any wrongs? And, how can I forgive them when they have not acknowledged responsibilities for our innocence, permanent disability and endless suffering? They have made my life miserable, yet I must forgive them? Must I condone violence and unhealed wounds? ... I am a cleaner and my wage is not enough to help me deal with my disability-related problems, such as getting proper medical assistance. I am also a single mother, with five children and I do not have a proper house. Two of my children have completed schooling but they are unemployed. Their father was a SWAPO combatant. He was killed in the war. I need support to assist these children, to finish their studies and maybe help me tomorrow.¹⁸³

Never forget! Never forgive! The burden of forgiveness as preached in post-colonial Namibia is in conflict with survivors’ “anguished memories.” More than a thousand people died or disappeared and every survivor suffered untold consequences, physically and emotionally. In view of this distressing situation, it becomes certain that survivors’ actual experience of the Cassinga massacre on the ground and their ongoing sufferings are intertwined. Certainly, Ndjeimo’s statement suggests that the traumatic effect of the actual physical moment of the violence, as such, combines with the traumatic aftermath of the massacre and subscribes to life-long sufferings and fathomless agony. The prolonged survivors’ suffering and disappointment also echo the dominant presence of inequalities in society: race, class, gender and economic differences that characterize a society emerging from apartheid, colonialism and racial rule.

The way survivors chronicle their anguished stories (a reflection of their inner anguished memories) suggests one other crucial issue. That is, survivors’ reflective traumatic memories aim to stir and direct public attention, not to the actual moment of the Cassinga massacre as it is

¹⁸³ Authors’ interview with Lonia “Ndjeimo” Vatileni, *Ongwediva*, 2007.

politically remembered. But the victims do intend taking the public down the memory line of the contemporary problematic issues of humanitarian concerns affecting them since the Cassinga massacre. These are the issues which survivors are particularly concerned with and want addressed if they were to meaningfully accept and forgive their former enemies. Certainly, survivors' despair, hopelessness and disappointment are the direct products of the current political negligence of survivors' emotional and psychological miseries. In this way, the ongoing difficult moments combine with the implicit memories of the victims in such a way that it adds extra layers of pain and suffering to the people already burdened and depressed.

When I paid Meme Sabina Uupindi a visit at her homestead in Ombafi, Ombalantu, it transpired explicitly that the severity of the survivors' suffering (emotionally and physically) is indeed a combination of the actual experience of the massacre exacerbated by individual survivors' socio-economic challenges that they face on a daily basis. Sabina is a single mother who lives with a number of dependent children under her care. I am trying to construct an argument that unlike survivors with access to decent employment, survivors living below the poverty line, in generally poor socio - economic environments, appear more severely affected by the recurring traumatic memories of the Cassinga massacre and the aftermath. Implicit memory as such, is comprehensively the sum total of multiple affective conditions which continuously propel continuous traumatic nightmares and suffering of survivors who are below the poverty line.

It is also important to recognize that the degree of suffering and the enduring severe traumatic memories also relate to a number of other factors. Individual survivors told me that the higher the intensity of the physical and emotional violence the victim experienced and recorded, or the severity of the injuries and disability the victim sustained during the massacre, the more excruciating the physical and emotional suffering. This is the view of Sabina Uupindi who told me the following:

Each survivor accumulated individual experiences of the massacre and of surviving the horror. Some people were lucky to have escaped from the camp before the foot - soldiers moved in. In my case, I was unfortunate to have fallen in the hands of the enemy. My friend, Loide Amwaama and I were found hiding ... both of us were by then wounded ... Our captors did not do any physical harm to us, but they took us to traumatic scenes around the camp, where people were horribly killed in mass numbers. One

shocking experience is when they took us to a dead person body wearing a military uniform ... his body was badly mutilated and his intestines were on the floor ... we were terribly shaken ... but they were pitiless ... they ordered us to sit at the sides of the mutilated body ... placing the corpse between us. Loide sat on the right and I sat on the left side of the corpse. They told us that we must not look away from the corpse ... I had never been that close to a dead person, and worst of all, the body was badly violated ... it was horrible - horrible. From that scene, they took us to other horrible, horrible scenes where we found many other people dead, most of them lying in pools of blood. We were under the escort of four Boers for most of the time ... at the end of it they took us to the clinic where we found another group of our comrades rounded up.¹⁸⁴

Uupindi's preoccupation with the sites of the physical and emotional memories means that violence is rationally dynamic and transferable. It moves or it transcends, as I have indicated earlier, the shared physical space and specific moments into the private and internal space of the victim. The degree of survivors' obsessiveness with violence in the distant present of the Cassinga massacre suggests the degree of the psychological damage that survivors have suffered for a very long time. This detrimental effect becomes a concern, especially in considering that the victims exposed to such traumatic experiences were children. And for most of them, it was their first experience of seeing dead people, pools of human blood and other horrible pictures of human catastrophe. This scenario also takes into cognizance the fact that in some customs, such as those of Aawambo, children were not allowed to view dead bodies. And, should that happen, the victim was to be cleansed, a practice which survivors of the Cassinga massacre side-stepped in the immediate aftermath of the massacre, a way of purifying the victim to manage the shock, distress and nightmares.

Guilt Memory

Guilt Memory is a common, painful experience of every survivor of the Cassinga massacre. The following scenario attempts to explain this excruciating scenario:

Counting on the intensive attacks from the air which lasted for about an hour, I can say that there was no time to attend to the wounded and all those who needed help such as women and children. It was all about saving own life. At first, people were running together in small groups.

¹⁸⁴ Author's interview with Sabina Uupindi, Ombafi, 2007.

But afterwards, people realized that it was risky running in clusters. Women especially sought the company of their male folk. They hoped to receive protection from them, but men were dodging and avoiding them. There was also a sense of avoiding people wearing white or red, target clothes, which the enemy could easily detect. The disoriented and confused children including a number of babies who were in search of their mothers and crying for help were neglected ... It is regrettable and traumatic.¹⁸⁵

In a similar scenario to Amukoto's account, other survivors also raised issues of guilt and regret. They told me that the period of the attack was actually a moment of watching comrades succumb to their injuries unaided. Darius Mbolondondo Shikongo, one of the few rescuers of civilians in Cassinga, told me how he continues to suffer from emotional distress attributable to his failure to rescue the victims who were critically wounded and unable to walk:

In fact, I whisked many children across the river before the Boers came inside the camp. But, it was difficult to help other people who were critically wounded and could not walk. I did not pay attention to them during the rescuing exercise, as it required more than one person to carry each of them to places of safety. Pictures of those distressful moments are pervasive. They keep on returning, seriously wounding me and making closure and healing impossible.¹⁸⁶

In a similar scenario, Rauha Shitangi told me about her emotional blameworthiness as the following excerpt attempts to disclose:

I cannot remember the name of that young girl, but she was one of the students from the St. Mary's Odibo High School.¹⁸⁷ I found her deep in the bush, critically wounded. The place where I found her was relatively safer and I decided to stay there with her. Regrettably, she died, as I watched on. She was a courageous young girl. In spite of the awful pain she experienced, she was very brave to tell me her full name and her address in Namibia ... Regrettably, I have not been able to remember her name and her parents' address when things returned to normal. She died shortly after passing that information to me. I had deep cuts on my leg and buttock and stayed at that spot, rescuers, the Cubans found me there. We left her dead body there ... what happened to it I do not know ... but, it is

¹⁸⁵ Author's interview with Michael Amukoto, Onaniki, 2002.

¹⁸⁶ Author's interview with Darius "Mbolondondo" Shikongo, Ondangwa, 2007.

¹⁸⁷ Odibo is an Anglican Mission school at Odibo, a rural area located about 1km south of the Angolan border. According to Lena Kamati, a former Odibo student and Cassinga survivor, "early in 1978 a group of more than two hundred students left the school for Angola under the escort of SWAPO fighters. Some of them arrived in Cassinga a few days before the attack.

so painful and troublesome ... I feel guilty that I failed to convey her death to her family as she entrusted me to do before she died.¹⁸⁸

“Guilt memories” refers to anxiety embedded in the survivors’ reflection of individual failures to provide needed assistance to those who desperately required particular help at critical moments of grave injuries and death of dear comrades, friends and family members. The frequency of the distressing guilt memories is also anchored in the dishonoured tasks entrusted to survivors by the dead.

The inadvertent dishonouring of assignments which the dead assigned to survivors, such as the missed opportunities to report the death of comrades to respective families as in the case of Shitangi (who feels blameworthy for the deceased families’ uncertainties about the fate of their missing daughter), discharge frequent multiple tensions which barricade survivors’ chances of finding comfort and healing. So, the failure to safeguard others’ lives or convey the deceased’s notes to their families combine with other distressful moments in the aftermath of the Cassinga massacre, as discussed in Chapter 7.

The inability to remember and recall, as in the case of Shitangi, what others inferred or communicated to them in the course of fighting for life and dying a painful death does not mean that survivors’ emotional memories regarding the experience of suffering endured by others is also lost. But the survivors’ inability to remember the things and tasks entrusted to them by the dead suggests that memory is carried away by the shocking experiences the individual is passing through during difficult periods. So when memory is preoccupied with overwhelming brutal violence, ethical issues find no entrance into memory. As such, future events and tasks or obligations are treated as secondary and may not be properly filed and preserved for future reference.

Other factors may also explain this dilemma, such as the concern about one’s own survival. That is, individuals entrusted with future responsibilities to convey messages of death to the deceased families (such as in the case of Shitangi), might themselves be “near death experience” and uncertain of surviving the violent killings. But, even when survivors cannot remember the names

¹⁸⁸ Author’s interview with Rauha Shitangi, Okadhila, 2007.

and places of the deceased family members, the shocking memories of watching others succumb to death in pain and helplessness still hang in the balance and surround the lives of many survivors. Survivors listen to voices and messages from the dead reminding them about what they, the dead, entrusted or expected survivors to do when peace should return to Namibia.

A scenario similar to Shitangi's dilemma was echoed by the late Rev. Michael Amukoto who also narrated that he is continuously haunted by an enduring shadow of guiltiness. This pertains to Amukoto's inability to explain what happened to his family members whom he lost in Cassinga. He tried to explain his ordeal to me as highlighted in the following excerpt:

I lived with my wife and four children in Cassinga. After the massacre, I did not see my wife and my eldest daughter, Nuusiku Lengomwenyo Amukoto. I still do not know what happened to them. The uncertainty about what happened to my people is very hurtful and keeps on returning since the Cassinga massacre ... this situation always demands explanations which I ought to have, but which I do not have and I do not think I will ever find ... such as whether my people are really dead. If they died in Cassinga where are they buried - in the mass graves? These nightmares and those of my other two sons Gabriel and Otto Amukoto, who also died in exile during the successive years of the Namibian liberation struggle and whose remains are unaccounted for, also bring much suffering and endless grief every day. The shadow about what happened to my people is unacceptable.¹⁸⁹

In a different perspective, Jay Winter wrote the following: "the dead serve(d) as the conscience of the living, to terrify them into making a better world"¹⁹⁰ for the dead. Indeed, "only the living," and indeed families of the dead, can "rescue the dead" from political ruins. In this relation, the "silhouette" or "shadow" that Amukoto bemoans is a painful metaphor for the neglected world of the dead or, as Amukoto repeatedly put it in the interview, "my people, *aantu yandje*." When there is an inability to see, know, understand and find answers when situations are shrouded in absolute darkness and silence, such a metaphor translates into Rev. Amukoto's single-handed and directionless search for "answers" and explanations about how his wife and

¹⁸⁹ Author's interview with Michael Amukoto, *Onaniki*, 2002.

¹⁹⁰ Jay Winter, *Sites of memory, sites of mourning: the Great War in European cultural history*. In Leonard V. Smith, *The embattled self: French soldiers' testimony of the Great War* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2007), p. 155.

daughter possibly died at Cassinga.¹⁹¹ And, if they were killed, what exactly happened to their bodies? From this deplorable scenario, the aftermath of the Cassinga massacre translates into an impenetrable frontier that disconnects the living from the dead. This barrier is so hostile and impassable in such a way that it prohibits the bereaved families from practicing acceptable norms in line with respective individuals or communities' performances of rituals and rites for the dead. This is one other adversity that propels survivors' sense of guilt and other suffering in the face of the violated and unfulfilled individual clan and societal practices.

In the precinct of this insurmountable quagmire, survivors and affected families of people who are the unconfirmed dead, or whose burial grounds are not yet confirmed, have been trapped in the traumatic moments which never end. In other words, when lethal violence involving the mass killings or disappearance of people is shrouded in the absence of identified human remains or graves, it perforates more injuries. The bitterness for the unconfirmed losses of the loved ones crystallizes into a cycle of relentless traumatic violence that continuously brings around lasting painful processes of ruminations or the recurrence of undiluted violence.¹⁹²

Guilt memory and unsung rescuers

Every survivor whom I have interviewed pays tribute to the brave men, such as "Mbolondondo," "Nakatana," Paavo Max and David Kamakondo (at least to mention individuals whose names were provided in my interviews), who saved many lives in Cassinga. Survivors told me that they would not have survived if it were not for the bravery and humanitarian efforts provided by individual SWAPO combatants who in lieu of escaping through various exits known to them, as trained guerilla fighters, chose to volunteer and save the lives of vulnerable civilians. These men whisked away a number of civilians from the camp, across the brimming Cubango River, before the paratroopers moved into the camp.

¹⁹¹ Two of Amukoto's children died in separate incidents, one presumably in combat, in the years following the Cassinga massacre.

¹⁹² Ruminations is discussed in Chapter 7.

Regrettably, the role played by rescuers in Cassinga appears forgotten. Darius “Mbolondodo” Shikongo, whom most survivors accredit for rescuing and saving many lives in Cassinga told me the following:

I still believe that I am yet to receive recognition like other heroes’ who have received special recognition since independence ... only if my role during the Cassinga massacre is anything to be remembered ... but who is a hero, a politician? I think it is genuine that we all get official recognition and rewards while we are still alive.¹⁹³

Namibia’s lack of recognition of persons, other than prominent politicians, for their bravery and selflessness in saving others’ lives in conflict situations, or other contributions made during the liberation struggle, might well trigger emotional pain, hopelessness and frustration of those people. In this context, the absence of attributing official recognition to individuals known and accredited by oral sources for their selfless roles of saving civilian lives can result in tensions and disappointments. Important to note is that such frustrations and disappointments concern the survivors who were saved by rescuers like “Mbolondodo,” more than it concerns the rescuers themselves. In this way, by registering the unhappiness regarding the unrecognized role one has played in rescuing the lives of others is not, necessarily, about expectations for some sort of material reward, though this is also crucial, but it is primarily a societal norm. In other words, as human beings, we owe recognition to such phenomenal and exceptional men and women of integrity. Nothing dilutes their unique contribution, their bravery, selflessness and exemplary deeds under extreme and difficult circumstances during the trying times of Namibia’s protracted walk to freedom.

Dying memories

The fact that memories of the Cassinga experience are not elicitable and communicable to the inexperienced world is of much concern to the victims of the Cassinga massacre. Survivors are of the opinion that, as an alternative to the inextricable memories, oral testimony can be useful in constructing and framing a history that describes the deplorable picture of the Cassinga massacre. However, survivors are anxious that there is apathy, especially the considerable lack of

¹⁹³ Author’s interview with Darius “Mbolondodo” Shikongo, *Ondangwa*, 2007. Mbolondodo is currently the SWAPO council for the Olukonda constituency, following the 2010 regional and local elections in Namibia.

political commitment to encourage the collection, preservation and documentation of the stories of war and violence that characterized Namibia's long and bitter walk to liberation. This is particularly in view of the natural fact that the number of those who participated in the Namibian liberation struggle is getting fewer and fewer as the Cassinga generation travels into the distant future:

Let me say that the generation that fought against the South African colonial rule is dwindling. Take, for example, our group of 1976. Five hundred of us, including fifty women, left Zambia to Kongwa in Tanzania for military training. But, look at things today. How many of us are still alive? Of course, many of our colleagues died in the war. But, those of us who survived the conflict have tried nothing to document and preserve our important histories.¹⁹⁴

Martha Ndamona Mwatilifange-Uusiku, a history teacher at the Oshakati Senior Secondary School told me the following:

Survivors as the eyewitnesses of the Cassinga massacre are the primary materials and sources of what Cassinga means. If we die with our testimonies, the generations to come will never know and understand. They will never be able to retrieve our stories from the graves ... our generation will be blamed for sitting idle and watching these precious histories die with us. We are still alive today for a purpose. We are the living testimonies of the Cassinga massacre and what happened thereafter.¹⁹⁵

The late Rev. Michael Amukoto added:

It hurts, it is really painful and discomfoting. Our people are not committed to preserving the histories of what Namibians paid for independence. It is so disappointing to watch our valuable heritage disappearing. It is a betrayal to our loved ones whose blood we say "waters our freedom." Our people tend to forget too soon. Imagine, our children are not even taught these things (such as the Cassinga stories) in schools. Namibia has traveled a long and protracted journey to get where we are today.¹⁹⁶

According to Hendrina Kiiyala:

Those of us who went into exile lost many people, not only in Cassinga. We left many people at every place we settled, Lubango, Vietnam,

¹⁹⁴ Author's interview with Paavo Max, Efindi, 2008.

¹⁹⁵ Author's interview with Martha Mwatilifange, Oshakati, 2007.

¹⁹⁶ Author's interview with Michael Amukoto, Onaniki, 2002.

Kwanza-sul, Vienna, Ndalatando, Omatala, in the bush where our soldiers fell fighting the enemy and many other places. We buried so many people and lost many others, whose graves are unknown ... these are some of the histories that we must preserve, teach, explore and research as a nation.¹⁹⁷

In the continuum of living with memories so traumatic, but which the victims cannot elicit, remembering such difficult memories without showing and explaining them properly causes other wounds to open. This failure also throws survivors into a dilemma. On one hand, they face the inner urge to tell the outside world about their horrific experiences and what they want addressed. On the other hand, there is anxiety and concern about the disappointments and anger which can emanate from the inability to empirically disclose violence to others. Hence, survivors are also worried that the inexperienced people are complacent and appear not to take survivors' stories seriously. This is the view expressed in the following extract:

The Cassinga massacre appears like a joke to non-survivors, but to us [the survivors] it is endless suffering. Many times, I have tried to tell what happened and continues to happen to me since then, but none appears to believe me, share with me the painful moments ... no one is interested in offering alternative which could help me deal with my difficult situations. Many could not pay attention because what I tell them appears unreal, but Cassinga left me permanently wounded and continues to incur wounds in the present. This situation becomes worse, especially, when a comrade dies ... it reminds me of those other comrades I lost in Cassinga.¹⁹⁸

Martha Mwatilifange told me a similar scenario:

Whenever I receive a news of death of a Cassinga survivor, it scratches on the wounded part of my memory. And you know, many of them just died like that, without their stories being told, recorded and preserved.¹⁹⁹

Regardless of the Cassinga survivors' aspirations to disclose realities of the massacre to the inexperienced world, it always remains a matter of concern and disconcertedness. No matter how survivors try to tell the world about their wounded memories, there are always insurmountable difficulties. This unwelcome situation prevails, because the tangibly wounded memory remains implicit and hidden from the intended public audience. As a result, it is difficult to recognize as real when survivors communicate their suffering to the inexperienced audience in forms of

¹⁹⁷ Author's interview with Hendrina Kiiyala, Oshikuku, 2007.

¹⁹⁸ Author's interview with Ignatius Vahongaifa Mwanyekange, Windhoek, 2009.

¹⁹⁹ Author's interview with Martha Mwatilifange, *Oshakati*, 2007.

testimony other than disclosing those practical things inside them. When the public shows no interest to listen to survivors' traumatic experiences and emotional sufferings it generates negative consequences that prolong the pain and suffering of the Cassinga victims.

In bringing this chapter to the end, two concepts, of implicit and explicit memories have been employed in attempting to trace "wounded memory" beyond the confines of the visible frontiers. These frontiers translate into the physical scars on the victims' injured and amputated bodies. I have argued that such appalling figures represent gates or passages through which violent incidents made forceful and unwanted entrance into the victims' bodies. In this relation, I have problematized implicit traumatic memory as an acidic substance that does not virtually exist as tangible evidence on the surface of the scars on the wounded victims' bodies, but it resides below the surface of the scars, therefore obscured from others' experience and understanding. I have argued that while implicit memory is empirically tangible and violent inside the body of the beholder, it is not elicitable for the other people to see and offer assistance to the sufferer. In addition, the victims whose bodies are maimed and offer disturbing evidence of violence do not have a language to express their suffering and unending pain other than telling us stories about the atrocious Cassinga massacre and its excruciating aftermath. Regrettably, such testimonial accounts are entangled in the inefficiency of language that conveys the absence of the tangible violence. In this context, it is problematic if survivors' testimonies were to be embraced as authenticating the dynamic of the actual violence as implanted in the survivors' bodies.

As discussed earlier, interviewees with amputated body parts and other terrible scars, most of which are hidden, were enthusiastic to disclose such damage during the interviews. Survivors perceive amputated limbs and other shocking scars on their bodies as crucial visual techniques that disclose personal suffering. Of course, as I have pointed out earlier, the actual pain and suffering that the individual victim experienced are interior mechanisms: very deep and concealed, below the surface of the damaged area of the body and beyond the other's reach and understanding. However, the exterior of the wounded area of the body is still crucial. Such damaged sites unleash traumatic pictures which convey personal stories of the victims, arguably more than the camera photos or the victim's oral testimonies can disclose. In this context therefore, the victims' disclosure of the physical damage on their bodies such as in the case of

Lonia Ndjeimo Vataleni (who showed me the shocking stubs of her amputated feet), Hendrina Kiiyala, Helena Iipingge (discussed here in Chapter 4) and many others, symbolizes survivors' struggle to find appropriate techniques to communicate their sufferings to the public.

It can also be deciphered that, since the victims find no appropriate language to describe their experiences and ongoing sufferings, disclosing such scars for the public seeing may allow the viewer to interpret such damage beyond the confines and limitations of the victims' own language of explaining things. In the final analysis, the concept of body scars not only refers to the physical disabilities that the body incurred. They also portray the survivors' emotional and psychological suffering: the agony of living with irreconcilable loss of limbs, permanent disabilities, deteriorating health and the recurring bitter memories deep inside survivors, or beneath the scars and only understood by the victims' themselves. Nonetheless, the sufferings and trauma of the Cassinga massacre are personal burdens that cannot be shouldered or shared, but need others' understanding and positive responses. This point reinforces the argument I keep returning to, that language (verbal or written), protruding physical damage on the victims' bodies, photographs and other means of conveying testimony to us are subtle and inaccurate techniques of attempting to disclose the exactness of survivors' inner trauma and suffering.

CHAPTER FIVE

TESTIMONY AND ORGANIC VIOLENCE

In the preceding chapter, I have presented arguments that memory signifies the organic print, the actual and tangible picture of the Cassinga massacre and the excruciating aftermath that continuously wounds the victims. Memory is problematized as constituting multifold layers of enduring pain and suffering, yet it is implicitly invasive. Consequently, when the victims wish to communicate their untold suffering to the inexperienced world, testimonial accounts (oral, visual or textual) convey the absence of the tangible violence. In other words, the wall protecting memory is difficult to crack and unpack violence through testimony as the medium. This is the context in which the victims of the Cassinga massacre describe the scars of the Cassinga violence or their mutilated bodies as frontiers which obscure and then alienate the inexperienced viewer from witnessing violence beyond the surface scars where violence incurred damage as it made its forced entrance into the victim's body.

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss, among other issues, how testimony relates to memory. By memory, I refer to the tangible experience as recorded and intrinsically box-filed in individual survivors' different compartments of storing the things experienced in one's life since the Cassinga massacre. In this relation, I will argue that testimony is a figment of memory, because survivors' testimony of the Cassinga massacre breaks ties with the facticity of that episode. Testimony authenticates the Cassinga massacre insufficiently. One reason to explain this anomaly is the fact that testimony is regulated by language, other than being a direct product of the violence that it aspires to unearth and communicate to us.

My task in this chapter, therefore, is not to specifically raise issues about the absence of the empirical violent world or our dismal failures to verify the massacre's facticity in survivors' testimonial accounts. In lieu of this, I will attempt to discuss this problem in a different context. I will explore how testimony, as an aspiring technique of showing Cassinga in the way it was practically experienced on the ground, eclipses the physical violence, contrary to survivors' intentions to disclose the violence before the inexperienced world. Importantly, I intend picking

up the problematic relationship between language and testimony. In this chapter, testimony is explored in relation to survivors' use of verbal techniques as the medium of attempting to elicit and convey the actual realities of the massacre to the inexperienced person(s). However, since language is embedded in speech, and therefore figurative unlike the tangible Cassinga violence, considerable contradictions arise between the vibrant dynamics of the actual traumatic world and the vibrant conceptual representation of the Cassinga massacre via oral testimony.

In pursuing the complexity between testimony and the authentication of the Cassinga massacre as survivors observed it on the ground, I construct this chapter as a twofold approach. The first half of the chapter presents a brief account of survivors' meta-narrative or the dominant discourse of narrating the Cassinga massacre by survivors. This is not to say that survivors' experiences of what happened around Cassinga are comprehensively collective. The Cassinga experience was mostly individual. As such, survivors tell extraordinary and individual stories that are diversely unique from one survivor to another survivor's telling of the same traumatic episode. For instance, the meaning embedded in the loss of comrades and friends, injuries, alleged rapes, amputated limbs, nightmares and traumatic flashbacks are all individual tribulations and vary from person to person in accordance with the degree of exposure to the violence, the type of injuries one sustained, the period of time spent in Cassinga before the massacre, as well as the age and gender categories of survivors. The diversity of such stories poses problems when attempting to combine them as a collective story. The narration of the Cassinga episode also poses a challenge of whose story to include, what items of the story to write and where to start with each story.

Since it proves difficult to use survivors' testimonies collectively or use interviews "making qualitative statements that pertain to all," I decided to use an extract from Paavo Max²⁰⁰ to

²⁰⁰ Paavo Max was born on September 11, 1943 at Rupara, Nkurenkuru in Okavango. His parents were missionaries, sent from Oniipa in Owamboland to Okavango in 1933. His father was Antonious Max Manuel, the founder of the Nkurenkuru, Rupara and Omupini missions in Okavango. In 1964 Paavo was admitted to the Ongwediva Seminary [Teachers Training College]. He barely spent six months at the Seminary when he sat for a placement test to become a post master. He was among the three successful candidates: Boas Mweedeledi, Mateus Nuulimba and Paavo Max who became the first black post masters in *Owamboland*. The three received eight months training in postal service at Ondangwa. After passing the examinations from Bloemfontein, SA, they worked at the post office Head Quarters in Ondangwa. In 1968, following the resignation of the inspector of Post offices in the north, Max became the first black Post Office Inspector in the North Central Namibia. He joined SWAPO in 1960. In 1965, according to his interview, he landed in trouble when it was discovered that he helped facilitate safe passage of censored letters by

present a metanarrative of the Cassinga massacre: not in the way it necessarily speaks to each survivor's experience "scientifically," but in the way it provides detailed information about several issues raised by other survivors of the Cassinga massacre. Max's role as one of the few combatants who rescued a number of women and children from the camp to places of safety is a motivational factor for choosing an extract from his interviews. His operation as a rescuer of many victims from different corners of the camp presented him with a broader exposure to the magnitude of the violence at different localities of the camp. Max's testimony is also extraordinary because, according to his testimony, he participated in the collection of the dead bodies for burial. He also counted all the dead bodies that were buried in the Cassinga mass graves.²⁰¹

In the second half of this chapter, I will attempt to present the analysis of testimony, in the context of how it relates to the telling of the actual physical violence as per the survivors' actual witnessing of it. I will argue that from my experience of engaging survivors in the interviews, testimony should be interpreted as a courier that conveys knowledge, not experience, to the inexperienced people. The following pages carry the shortened transcript of my interviews with Paavo Max, which lasted for six hours, about the survivors' meta-narratives of remembering and narrating the Cassinga experience. But, firstly, it is also important that we learn from Max about the origin of the Cassinga camp.

The birth of the Cassinga camp

In March 1976 while on the hunt for Commander Dimo Hamaambo²⁰² we, a platoon of SWAPO combatants, came to Cassinga. By then, the Cuban soldiers had occupied it, there were no Namibians living there at the time. The mission to find Dimo aborted while we were at Cassinga. From there

Herman Toivo ya Toivo to the outside world and in 1968 he was sacked from the position of Postmaster inspector. In 1974, he joined SWAPO in exile, leaving behind his wife (meme Nangulohi Selma Max whom he married in 1969). Between June 1977 and December 1977, he was part of five hundred PLAN cadres sent to the former Soviet Union for military training. Upon his return from the former USSR, he settled in Cassinga as one of the camp administrators until the massacre in May 1978. Source: author's interviews with Paavo Max, Efindi, 2008.

²⁰¹ See Chapter 2, Paavo's account of counting the dead bodies as they were buried in the Cassinga mass graves.

²⁰² According to oral sources, one of the objectives of Operation Savannah was to capture Dimo Hamaambo. By then Hamaambo stayed at Oshitumba where SWAPO and UNITA operated as allies prior to the 1975 split. When the SADF launched Operation Savannah into Angola (end of 1975) Hamaambo escaped from Oshitumba. He, according to Paavo Max, spent months in hiding in the jungles called the Efitu Lyiiti yaNandjamba, an evil forest, until the situation normalized, that is when the Operation Savannah retreated towards the Namibian border.

we went back to Huambo without any clues about the army Commander. In just over a year, on June 15, 1977, a group of about five hundred of us, men and women, left for the former Soviet Union for advanced military training. We returned on December 4, 1977. A few of us stayed behind, on the real front, the rest of our group members went to the war fronts/SWAPO military regions in southern Angola, closer to the border with Namibia.²⁰³ I was sent to Cassinga for administrative purposes. By that time, the civilian population arriving from Namibia had increased tremendously. They were in thousands and newcomers were arriving from Namibia almost on a weekly basis. Because of Cassinga's geographical position and location, deeper into southern Angola (260km from the Namibian border) we thought it was out of reach of the regular SADF incursions into Southern Angola by land. We thought it was a safer place to settle civilians arriving from home. The massacre happened about a year from the time Cassinga became a SWAPO civilian settlement. Therefore, by the time of the massacre, the camp was in the process of establishing itself fully as a community of displaced Namibians in exile.

The growing community of the exiled civilian population needed support in terms of education, administration, health facilities, shelter, clothing, food and most importantly security and protection from the enemy. Security - wise, we dug long trenches [*omatelendja*] in the camp, because the enemy attacks from the air were expected. What we did not expect was an attack by foot soldiers ... though we did have some concerns about UNITA, but not to the extent of the ruthless power that the Boers used against civilians. Education provision for the young ones and soliciting schooling opportunities in independent countries for the students leaving Namibia was our first priority. As the centre was in the process of developing, classes took place in the open space, under the trees: we needed everything, qualified teachers, books, you mention it. We ran adobe bricks-making project, to build classes, accommodation and other facilities required in the camp. Historically, Cassinga was a sort of a farm area, formerly a Portuguese settlement. As such, there were not enough facilities in terms of building structures. The settlement only had eight buildings, as far as I remember, abandoned by the Portuguese. One of the buildings was converted into the camp clinic, another building was used for the administrative purposes and the largest one was used for storage purposes. However, we erected additional facilities, basic accommodation structures such as the traditional thatched roofs to accommodate the growing number of people. We divided the camp accordingly. For

²⁰³ According to Paavo Max, by 1978 SWAPO had three Military Operational Areas (regions) located closer to Namibia border with Angola. These were: the North Western Region (under the command of Wilbard Tashiya "Nakada"); Northern Region - East of Ondjiva (under the command of "Zulu" Nadenga); and the Eastern Region - Okongo, Eenhana²⁰³ area (under the command of Matias Ndakolo Mbulunganga). Source: author's interviews with Paavo Max, Efindi, 2008.

example, young children stayed at a separate site, away from the centre of the camp. In view of its strategic geographical location between the Tobias Hainyeko Training Centre (SWAPO fighters' training base) and the combat regions, Cassinga was a crucial networking site, particularly in terms of transportation. There was a garage and a "petrol station." All SWAPO vehicles traveling from Lubango to other places or from the fronts were expected to refuel in Cassinga before proceeding to other places. So, PLAN combatants could not avoid traveling through Cassinga, they had to pass there and sometimes, especially when transport was not available or broken, they could spend days and weeks in Cassinga. For example, at the time of the attack a number of combatants from Zambia were on transit in Cassinga. They had just arrived there a few days, unfortunately they had no weapons.

The attack (*Oshiponokela*)

My residence in Cassinga was located next to the garage. On the morning of May 4, 1978, I woke up as usual, at five o'clock. I went for the morning exercise before returning to my room to dress up and prepare for the daily morning parade. Around seven o'clock that morning, I was done and ready for the parade. I had dressed up in full military uniform, *okakonkola*, and as usual, I always carried my gun and four rounds of ammunition with me. I was on my way to the parade / *okapale* when a sudden thundering sound rocks the space above me. When I looked up, I saw four planes. I immediately reckoned that it was an attack and when I looked at my watch, it was seventeen minutes to eight (07: 43). The four planes formed a cross in the air, one in front, another one behind and the other two flew opposite each other. They emerged from the direction of Lubango, north to south direction. In seconds, they descended on the parade - *okapale* where people assembled for the morning devotion. Suddenly there were heavy explosions at the *okapale* followed by thick crowds of dust, smoke, people's screams and confusion at the parade.

When the planes dropped the first bombs, people were commanded to take cover, lay down flat on the parade. As the first wave of the bombings passed, we ordered everyone to retreat to the trenches. I immediately retreated to the guns. We had two anti-aircraft guns. One was a double - barrel and the other one a single barrel, Zek U 2 and Zek U 1 respectively. We also had a lighter British anti-aircraft gun, but that one proved ineffective, it jammed after firing a few shots. The one-barrel anti-aircraft gun was also put out of action immediately. However, the double - barrel anti-aircraft gun was located in a dugout, almost disguised and obscured from the direct enemy view and fire. It stayed intact for much longer. We however wasted a lot of ammunition, including small arms fire by firing at

the planes. We thought the enemy would only attack from the air. We did not expect the drop of paratroopers inside the camp.

When the enemy dropped from the air, the crew at the only remaining anti-aircraft gun concentrated the fire on the advancing ground forces. That gun really caused trouble for them as it delayed the enemy advance into the camp for much longer. The temporary holdup of the enemy was significant in many ways. For instance, it enabled us to rescue some of our people to safety before the enemy moved inside the camp. Unfortunately, the anti-aircraft gun ran out of ammunition and the gunners were shot dead. Following the silence of the anti-aircraft fire, the enemy broke inside the camp and committed gruesome killings of so many innocent people. The enemy marched freely along the trenches shooting civilians inside the trenches at point-blank range and bayoneting them, *taya tsu aantu nomagonga gokoondjembo*. They vandalized every existing structure; they burned everything they came across; the clinic, administrative office, food depots, accommodation facilities, cookery and utterly everything that survived the aerial bombardments was deliberately set on fire.

The rescuing task

A very few number of combatants volunteered to save women and children. It was a risky undertaking. Rescuers exposed themselves to many dangers, but it was important to save the lives of women and children. This tiny blemish you see on my face is a bullet mark! It was fired from a very close distance as I cut my way through the bushes. It was painful but I did not succumb to it. I did not feel the pain immediately. The violence was so unbearable that one became insensitive to injuries on the body. Pain, hunger and thirst were just not there until the violence subsided. People were running with critical injuries and I contemplate about it a lot until today: I find no explanation as to how it was possible for the victims to sustain such deep injuries, lose much blood, yet they sustained a life ... Many of the people we rescued or failed to rescue were in total panic and confusion. The situation in the camp was horrible; dust and smoke oozed everywhere, people could hardly see each other and many people crumbled under chemical emission/gas that made many of them insentient and insensible instantly. Nevertheless, we tried the best we could. I personally rescued four successive groups to the riverside before the Boers/*Eembulu/Oombulu* stormed inside the camp. "Mbolondondo" was another rescuer who played a significant role. He evacuated most of the children from the other side of the camp (where most of the young children were located). He took most of them (the pre-school kids), across the river where we also whisked Dimo Hamaambo.

Hamaambo could have died or been captured in Cassinga. He stubbornly refused initial attempts to escort him to a safer place outside the camp. We

acted in accordance with the ethos of our army that senior commanders must be covered and provided with maximum protection in case of precarious situations that risked their lives or allowed them to fall into the hands of the enemy. We were fighting a war with the mightiest army in the region, maybe in the continent. It has always been our principle that the safety of our leaders was the first priority. In engaging such a powerful enemy, it was imperative that we keep our leaders safe in case of the enemy threat. Their safety was crucial - so that they can guide and lead us through the revolution as they successfully did. We took Hamaambo across the river, to a hidden location, where he stayed with his bodyguard "Nakadila" and others. We ordered the noncombatant civilian population to retreat to the western direction of the camp. That was the only possible route to escape from the camp, provided the escapees avoided the open terrain. There was an open space and a path extending from the centre of the camp towards the riverside. We instructed people to follow the densely vegetated area to the riverside and avoid the open space. Unfortunately, people were scared of escaping through the thick bushes. Instead, many of them ran across the open terrain, *oya matuka mongalangala*, to the riverside. As a result, many of them died as they tried to run across that open terrain. That terrain without bushes became a rich hunting ground for the predator and the prey an easy catch.

The most difficult part of the rescue mission was dealing with many people who refused to leave the trenches. Many of them, despite shouting and urging them to move out of the trenches to safer places, to leave the camp under our escort, did not respond to the command. People were terrified and shocked. They would have reasoned that it was much safer inside the trenches than running across the burning and exploding camp. It was a very tense situation, heavy smoke, deafening bomb blasts and gunshots all over the camp. Some children went into very dangerous hideouts, such as seeking shelter under their beds, inside the pit toilets and other dangerous enclosures. Most of the thatched roofs that served as dormitories were bombed and set ablaze with people inside them. There was another challenge. People were falling asleep while on the run for safety. I think, something was inhaled that made people weak and unconscious. Many people were falling asleep instantly while on the run, but if you slapped that person, he would wake up but in a confused state. When the Boers flooded the camp, it became impossible to continue with the rescue work. I retreated to the western side of the camp. I stayed in the riverbed until the Cubans arrived.

The Cubans (Aakuba)

The Cubans' military base at Oshamutete (often spelled Techamutete) was the nearest military base to Cassinga, about 20km from Cassinga. At the

inception of the ‘paratroopers’ drop at the outskirts of the camp, Uhuru,²⁰⁴ the camp secretary, was dispatched to Techamutete to notify the Cubans about the attack and to request military help. Unfortunately, Uhuru did not return to Cassinga, he was killed when the SADF Airforce attacked the Cuban military convoy on its way to Cassinga. However, the second attempt by the Cubans succeeded. They arrived very late though, around two in the afternoon. The Boers were still in the camp just before the Cubans entered Cassinga. They retreated the moment the Cubans moved inside the camp. After assessing the deplorable situation, the Cubans took some of the wounded people to their clinic at Oshamutete. We did not receive any assistance from Lubango [Angolan help] that day. That late afternoon while we were going around the camp, with the Cubans, collecting the critically wounded, I found the body of Commander Jonas Haiduwa, the deputy Commander of PLAN, pierced with bullets and mutilated. I did not know how he re-entered the camp, because we also whisked him to a place of safety when the enemy started dropping soldiers in Cassinga. Surprisingly, I think, he should have experienced a moral dilemma, surviving at the cost of women and children. I also found the body of my sister, Anna Max, among other bodies in the trenches. We also rescued four girls at the spot where I found my sister’s body. They were like dead: their entire bodies smeared in the blood of their dead comrades: they were very confused and shivered feverishly. A few other people were still alive among the dead bodies inside the trenches as well as at other places around the camp. Survivors were so shocked that they remained silent regardless of our efforts, shouting and appealing to anyone alive to report to us. When darkness came, we could hear multiple sounds of people groaning and some were calling for help. Many of them were wounded and terribly cold: it was very cold at night since it was the beginning of the winter season. We were fortunate, however, to find enough blankets not destroyed by the fire. The ground enemy set all standing structures ablaze, deliberately. Before the nightfall, the Cubans went back to their base to assess their own losses. They left us in a very desperate situation. Some of our comrades (combatants) with whom we were supposed to share responsibilities fled the scene. Some of them went as far as Jamba about 42km from Cassinga. That night almost everybody, except for the seriously wounded and corpses, deserted the camp. People were scared of spending the night in the camp. The number of us left in the camp was about four. There was a concern that UNITA, the most important ally of South Africa in Angola, might sneak into the camp at night and execute survivors. Six of us spent the night inside the camp, just not to leave the dead and critically wounded alone in the camp. The four who made up this number were not soldiers, we just recruited them to help stay on guard of the camp overnight. One of these boys works at the State House - where I also worked before my retirement. We call each other

²⁰⁴ Golden Uhuru, Paavo could not remember Uhuru’s middle name. It also appears that “Uhuru” is not Golden’s surname.

comrades in arms, in the memories and remembrance of that horrible and difficult night of May 4 through to the morning of May 5. It was a long night of much pain, horror and of the horrible stench of death.

The day after

SWAPO soldiers from Lubango called *Omakamufelendja* arrived in Cassinga on the morning of May 5. We were very much relieved when they came. We shared responsibilities in collecting corpses all over the camp and in organizing the mass burials of the dead. By then, the dead bodies had begun to decompose. I received instructions to count the bodies as we buried them. First, we buried One Hundred and Forty Four, 144, bodies inside a trench located near the clinic. This is where we usually dumped the clinic disposals to maintain hygiene in the camp. The site for this mass grave is located between what used to be the clinic and the tailoring workshop managed by Meme Veronica. The other trench was much larger; we planned a storage dugout at that site. Five hundred and eighty three, 583, bodies are buried in that trench. That one is located in the western direction of the camp, at the outskirts of the crop field, between the field and Hamaambo's place. The total number of the bodies buried in the two mass graves, as I counted them, stood at Seven Hundred and Twenty Seven, 727. People have been giving misleading and conflicting reports about the exact number of the bodies buried in the two mass graves. I counted the bodies and recorded the exact figures of the dead in the mass graves. After the burials, I gave Tate Uushona alias *Komanda Yeekomanda* (who commanded the SWAPO soldiers from Lubango to Cassinga) the printed report, hand-written, of the number of the dead bodies buried in each of the two mass graves. It is saddening that innocent civilians were killed, but it is also correct that a small number of soldiers were also killed. These included the camp administrators and some soldiers deployed in Cassinga for the security of civilians. However, it is also obvious that a significant number of the victims of the Cassinga massacre are not buried in the two mass graves. Many people escaped from the camp with terminal injuries and are suspected to have died in the bush. Many people also drowned in the big Cubango River – I saw people washed away by the strong water. People jumped into the water in attempts to swim across the big Cubango River. Most of these victims were women and children who could not swim but tried to save their lives.

Not surprisingly, the Boers call the Cassinga massacre a “battle” and a “victory” against SWAPO terrorists: because they could make no distinction between the SWAPO combatants and noncombatants and between children, women and terrorists. Of course, in war-torn Angola, they would not have expected SWAPO to abandon its civilian population without providing security for them. We had a responsibility to keep the civilian population away from the flashpoints of violence. Providing

civilians with security was also not a crime, but a humanitarian obligation. We also did not use civilians as “human shields” as the enemy alleges, but we tried to protect and shield them from the enemy attacks and indiscriminate killing. SWAPO fighters were trained to use the guerrilla combat tactics. Therefore, it is almost unthinkable that SWAPO kept such a large number of combatants at one place, let alone at the war fronts. It is indeed quite unnerving when the enemy deconstructs Cassinga into a military camp and the victims as combatants. It is hurtful, particularly for us who have seen the unfolding horror of the Boers’ indiscriminate and pitiless mass killing of women and children. *Eembulu*, the Boers did not drop in Cassinga to fight any battle, they knowingly went there to slaughter civilians. Indeed, for us who witnessed it, what they did to those people, most of them very young and the majority of them women constitute a war crime. It was indeed political and racial killings. The majority of our people died from close range shots, some bayoneted to death. However, the SADF chronicling of the Cassinga event is deconstructive, intended to obliterate their shameful and inhuman actions against the innocent civilians. The official stand taken by the SADF since the Cassinga massacre is however not surprising, they had never admitted to killing civilians throughout their occupation and militarization of Namibia.²⁰⁵

Narration and Violence

For all intents and purposes, Max’s story is charged with emotional intensity of the brutal violence that the narrator witnessed, survived and wants others to experience. However, Max’s testimony introduces another type of violence between the practicality of the Cassinga massacre and its narration or storyline. In fact, here, narration is so powerful as it eclipses and completely obliterates the referent or subject of the storyline. Hence, the story or text does not “visually startle, stupefy us into silence,”²⁰⁶ shock or cause harm to us physically and emotionally as the actual violence did, and still does, to the victims of the Cassinga massacre. This is because, violence is “cancelled out as it is introduced into the spoken sentence(s) or begins to be recorded on a written page(s).”²⁰⁷

This scenario also discloses a kind of brutality or damage happening to the practicality of the violence on the ground. That is, violence experiences severe injuries and damage as attempts are made to convert it into text or language. As a consequence of this vicious encounter between

²⁰⁵ The author’s interview with Paavo Max, Efindi, 2008.

²⁰⁶ Elaine Scarry, *The body in Pain*, p. 72.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid*, p. 69.

language and violence, or violence and text, the damage or the injury made to the body of violence is so extensive that violence is completely eliminated, “enfolded within the (written) language.”²⁰⁸

As a consequence, there is no actual presence or “visual experience” of the real and tangible brutal picture of the violence in the text: but conceptual experience, “abstraction” or extracts of the edited, detailed storyline attributed to the absence of the actual violence. Here, it is important to recognize that it is not, as Leonard V. Smith put it, “the more ghastly the details, the more true the testimony.”²⁰⁹

Certainly, empirical reality or objectivity of the Cassinga massacre lies beyond Max’s testimony. Notwithstanding the considerable inconsistency between the practicality of Cassinga and testimony, Paavo’s account above is nevertheless crucial in helping us discern the difference between actual experiences and sufferings of the Cassinga victims, which are incommunicable by any means, and the different ways of acting out experiences of suffering through the visual, oral or written techniques.

Admittedly, it proves very difficult for me to discuss every statement of instability or inconsistency between narration and its referent, or put differently, between testimony and memory. However, it is important to recognize that although survivors give vivid and substantial stories of the terrible things they witnessed and survived in Cassinga, it is nevertheless regrettable that every word of their testimonies becomes disentangled from the tangible and explicit shocking realities that survivors lament and are desperate to show to others. But, whatever the challenges that the oral representation of the Cassinga massacre presents, it remains crucial that survivors “recounting of their own historical experience can counter (the packaged) official history”²¹⁰ and contribute more stories to social history of the Cassinga massacre.

Testimony and Facticity

²⁰⁸ Ibid, p. 69.

²⁰⁹ Leonard V. Smith, *The Embattled Self*, p. 9.

²¹⁰ Helena Pohlandt – McCormick, “I saw a nightmare ...,” p. 38.

In recounting experiences of the Cassinga massacre therefore, survivors experience insurmountable inconsistencies between testimony and the actual violence as experienced on the ground. In the context of Max's account, it became quite lucid that the actual picture of the things he narrates as lived experiences is to a large extent undetectable and unaccountable in the oral picture he vividly told me for six hours. In the same vein, his endless nightmares and traumatic flashbacks of the Cassinga killings have slipped away. Such considerable exclusions disclose that the practice of violence on the ground as survivors witnessed and still remember vividly is beyond description.

In examining the French Soldiers' testimony of the Great War, Leonard V. Smith put it that "the meaning of the story lies beyond empirical reality."²¹¹ As such, testimony communicates realities that are more ambiguous than what the victim intends unpacking. From the interviews with different survivors of the Cassinga massacre, I construe that whatever survivors described as testimony of what they experienced in Cassinga reveals the undesirable absence of the tangible violence and the subsequent suffering of the victims in the "long aftermath" of the massacre. This is not to contradict the fact that testimony carries fundamental pockets of violence. These pockets contain some useful ingredients for historical research. In particular, such ingredients are fundamental traces which oral historians can rely on in their attempts to dig deeper into exploring and examining the relationship between testimony and its referent.

Of course, it is contentious to entirely embrace testimony as solid substance, let alone acknowledging it as evidence. However, while testimony is precious, irreplaceable, it is an insubstantial subject of the irretrievable experiences of the human ruin in Cassinga and the aftermath. This point resonates with Kimberly Nance's view that, despite their shortfalls, testimony should be treated as "sacred artifacts, something to be zealously guarded and preserved in its pristine state (as originally told by survivors) against possible contamination"²¹² by writers or readers.

Testimony and language

²¹¹ Leonard V. Smith, *The embattled self*, p. 6.

²¹² Kimberly A. Nance, *Can literature promote justice? Trauma narratives and social action in Latin America testimonio* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2006), p. 124.

If witnessing the Cassinga massacre entails capturing and preserving the raw data of the things as survivors witnessed their actual unfolding on the ground and the troublesome aftermath, then testimony or narration is a way of attempting to process such raw data into language. As testimony subscribes to the victims' efforts to unravel and reveal their suffering to others, language becomes the passage through which testimony travels to reach the intended audience. In considering that language flows from the inside of the victim's wounded body which still bleeds profusely, internally, language is expected to elicit, carry and convey the inner pains and suffering of the victims' body to the surface where others can tangibly feel and understand the damage that the massacre incurred on survivors' lives. In this respect, language endeavours not to elicit the practical experience of the violence but to articulate knowledge and awareness that the victims remain emotionally damaged and their ongoing suffering is not recognized by society.

Although language is expected to disclose and inform us about the physical and internal suffering as experienced or continuing to be experienced by the victims of the Cassinga massacre, it is so porous that it allows considerable and essential ingredients of violence to escape. In fact, language conceals all the things that the victims intend disclosing as tangible evidence through narration or testimony. However, it is possible to recognize segments of pain and suffering in the tone and pitch of the victims' oral testimonies. For example, during my face-to-face interviews with Paavo Max and other interviewees, signs of emotional suffering and endless pain were evident, but regrettably fall flat when oral testimonies were transcribed into written testimonies.

The fact that language as well as any other genre of testimony is not gifted with the art of containing and transmitting practical things to others does not imply that testimony is insignificant. I am saying this mindful of survivors' claim that their testimonies draw attention to very complex practices of the now, and the then, violence. That is, though language is considerably incapable of retrieving and eliciting practical violence in ways to which the victims aspire, its strength lies in unveiling gaps or "lacunae" which can encourage public dialogues about disconcerting issues that testimony is yet to disclose and make public. Certainly, the

victims are mindful of the fact that testimony cannot elicit the deplorable nature of their suffering and pain. They also do not simply aspire to the audience listening to their storylines. But they aim for testimony to draw a positive response in ways that assist the victims to possibly deal with their ongoing suffering and trauma.

Academic writing as a way of packaging oral accounts to meet a scholarly cohesion is one of the factors that completely obliterate particles of violence evident in the victims' language. For instance, the way I have packaged much of Max's unarranged items, as presented in the original tape and video recorded interviews. This includes my translation of the interviews from the interviewee's language, Oshiwambo, including my choice for the excerpts that I have used throughout this thesis. Nevertheless, despite the fact that the actual physical violence has been eclipsed by the survivors' own telling of testimonies and further eroded by my own (re)shaping of the data presented to me by the interviewees, the damaging effect of the actual massacre remains an everyday of survivors' experiences. Put differently, although the actual physical violence is not retrievable in the oral or written accounts of survivors, or because the text erodes and dissipates oral testimony into nothingness, this does not mean that the impact of the actual physical violence is also absent. Hurtful memories remain permanent injuries in survivors' lives and will forever demand remedies.

Metaphors in survivors' testimonies

According to survivors, the Cassinga massacre displaced residents in the camp, each one, in pairs or small clusters going in a different direction and route in search of protection. In the interviews, survivors narrated that those who found ways to escape from the camp formed small clusters to cope with the challenges of the unknown wilderness, panic, confusion, multiple injuries and fatigue. Nonetheless, each survivor was an individual in terms of each experience accumulated, hence each survivor presents a different account of what unfolded at a particular area of witnessing the violence, the type of injuries sustained and so on. Therefore, each survivor's testimony of witnessing the Cassinga massacre is uniquely different. It is "monofocal" and therefore represents pockets of vital ingredients that feed the public about what survivors went through and what they actually require now as a way of helping them to deal with their ongoing

sufferings. Nonetheless, every victim's account introduces the "incoherence" which, according to Lawrence Langer, "escapes the appearance of form." With particular reference to the Cassinga experience, the loss "of form" signifies the absence of the organic substance in testimony. To put it differently, what survivors experienced in Cassinga is one thing, while the telling of that experience is a different thing.

In their search for "truth" and "objectivity" of the brutal Cassinga massacre, metaphors, for some survivors, become components of expression of the violent experience. That is, in encountering the inconsistency between testimony and the actual violence on the ground, survivors resort to the use of metaphor. When I interviewed survivors, some of them used metaphors not as literary devices to flavor or spice their testimonies, but to indicate survivors' search for an effective and powerful way of describing personal experiences of the brutal Cassinga episode. This argument is evident in the context of Paavo Max's argument above. For example, consider the following statement: "I experienced a long night of much pain, horror and horrible stench of death." In a similar style, Max described the open terrain from the centre of Cassinga to the periphery of the camp, towards the river, as "a rich hunting ground for civilian lives by the Boers." It was one of the scenes where, according to Max "the predators easily hunted down their escaping prey in a substantial number," as people tried to escape death.

In attempts to show the richness and complexity of the referent or the actual situations that they experienced, survivors shunted metaphors to the "forefront" of their testimonies of the Cassinga massacre. The use of metaphors indicates survivors' desperate hunt for the Cassinga organic thing that escapes testimony. In other words, survivors' use of metaphors signifies the inconsistency of testimony and its incapacity to provide practical evidence for the claims that they make. Therefore, metaphors of violent death and suffering emerge in various survivors' accounts as a way of highlighting the narrator's concern about the substantial erasure of the organic matter that the victims intend showing or want the audience to understand. The inclusion of metaphor in the survivors' telling of the Cassinga massacre is therefore quite fundamental. It serves as a method of procuring numerous ways that attempt to unravel and disclose the deplorable nature of the Cassinga violence and its impact on the lives of survivors. This is to say that survivors find the use of metaphors helpful in their attempts to situate the reader/listener

closer to survivors' actual life experiences. Arguably, metaphors appeal to people's sensibilities with the intent to procure the ground for possible imagination of the enormity of the violence that the witness fails to relive and authenticate through the use of plain language.

In fact, survivors use of metaphors suggests that they intent putting their arguments about the Cassinga massacre clearly and persuasively to the inexperienced other. Notably therefore, survivors' attempts to convert the complexity of the different experiences of the Cassinga massacre into simplified or familiar meanings does not serve the purpose, to follow Karsten Harries, "of escaping from reality" or "as a weapon directed against reality ... to falsify the facts and, therefore, deceive the readers."²¹³ But it does suggest that the use of metaphors serves the purpose of facilitating deeper imagination, interpretation and drawing a better understanding of what the witness fails to unravel and elicit for the experience of the inexperienced person(s).

In describing his deplorable experience of the Cassinga massacre and the aftermath, Ignatius Vahongaifa Mwanyekange told me the following: "the picture of the Cassinga massacre is like a scene of mopane worms²¹⁴ run over by wheels as they crawl across the road."²¹⁵ Mwanyekange's use of the metaphor of mopane worms to describe the magnitude of the loss of lives and mutilated bodies is not about depersonifying or belittling the human loss. Instead, it is a desperate attempt to quantify and equate a particular and horrific scene of bloodbath and untold suffering of human beings. This suggests that in the absence of accurate or proper language "to certify" to the actual violence and trauma, survivors opt for the use of allusions and figurative language: not to substitute the organic, but as a way of trying to connect the reader or listener to the actuality of the deplorable things that individual survivors experienced and continue to feel as excruciating in their lives. In other words, the use of metaphor is supposedly, albeit it is immaterial, a substitute for the hidden scenes of human catastrophe. That is, by resorting to the use of the everyday metaphors (in local context) survivors aspire to create wider local

²¹³ Karsten Harries, in James E. Young, *Writing and rewriting the Holocaust*, p. 90.

²¹⁴ The survival of these creatures, mopane, which are approximately Five centimeter long, depends on mopane tree leaves, which determine their life span. When the number of the mopane exceeds supply, their niche is depleted in a few weeks as the entire mopane trees are cleared of the leaves. This situation compels them to flee from the foreseeable danger. They crawl across the endangered wilderness in search of a friendly environment. In the process of fleeing, they encounter many obstacles and threats to their lives. They fall prey to ruthless road users such as vehicles that leave them strewn across the landscape.

²¹⁵ Author's interview with Ignatius Vahongaifa Mwanyekange, Windhoek, 2009.

imaginations and interpretations which may facilitate and help draw out understanding of the enormity of the unnecessary loss of lives.

Indeed, the more survivors attempt to construct Cassinga from unfamiliar into familiar terms, the better it may help stimulate the desired public response or dialogue around the unresolved issues of that episode. Certainly, the Cassinga massacre is not “a metaphor for anything else.” The mutilated bodies and pools of blood were actual remains of human wreckage and nothing else can substitute them. Nonetheless, the use of the mopane, *omagungu*, lays emphasis on one other salient point I keep on returning to: it signifies survivors’ desperate hunt for an appropriate language to symbolize the unprecedented massacre and capture the imagination of the targeted audience.

Mwanyekange’s use of metaphor also makes a mockery of the pitiless behaviour of the attackers. The assailants wielded their weapons, unnecessarily, against vulnerable women and children who were destitute: displaced by war and in search of opportunities for a better tomorrow. In this context, the use of metaphor becomes significant in bringing to light the landscape of the dehumanized bodies: the mutilated human flesh insensibly strewn across the landscape of violence like maggots. This is in the context of the fact that human bodies were insensibly violated: bayoneted, mutilated and left unattended to in the sun, to rot and spoil like insects; the wounded neglected, abandoned and condemned to die as the enemy deprived them of receiving urgent medical assistance and early evacuation to hospitals as every interviewee lamented.

Nevertheless, the scenario that the bodies of the dead were violated and humiliated in multiple ways, such as bayoneting, should not surprise anyone. The practice of maltreating dead bodies and treating the wounded inhumanly was a customary practice of the SADF everyday conduct with local populations especially in the former combat zones along the Namibian northern border with Angola, especially in Owamboland. The SADF practice of abusing the bodies of the alleged SWAPO supporters and guerrillas was endemic in the war zones. Such practices included the notorious SADF/ Koevoet parading of dead bodies in public places for public viewing, or tying the bodies of dead people to their armed vehicles and driving around with them to scare and

intimidate the public²¹⁶ from supporting SWAPO. It was a way of warning the public about the consequences of rendering support or sympathizing with those involved in the struggle to free Namibia from colonialism and racial rule. It was also a way of intimidating people, especially the youth, from joining SWAPO in Angola. Many unlucky Namibians were killed as they tried to cross the Namibia northern border with Angola and no efforts were made to hand over the dead bodies to their families. In this way many Namibians were killed before crossing the border into Angola. To this day many families are in the dark about what exactly happened to their loved ones.

In bringing this chapter to an end, it should be noted that “if the function of literary testimony ... becomes to establish facts or evidence, it grows apparent first of all to the writer (interviewer) that he may be demanding of narrative an impossible task. In ... asking literature to establish the facts ... or evidence of events (is to) demand not just that words signify experiences, but that they become like (the event).”²¹⁷ In this relation, since testimony cannot authenticate what happened in Cassinga and thereafter, then it is important to note that the purpose of any testimony is not to account for the exactness of what happened on the ground or unravel the emotional and physical damage, the details of which cannot be “brought back to life, but ... the understanding of them”²¹⁸ can. It is extremely difficult for testimony to elicit and “bring back to life” violence, because, to narrate is to burn experiences to ashes. Therefore, testimony subscribes to the survivors’ hunt for the particles of practical experiences among the ashes.

Not turning away from the fact that testimony obscures and dissipates reality, it remains crucial that every survivor’s testimony provides intertwined and complex particles of violence which researchers must treat with utmost caution and absolute consideration. In fact, as I have pointed out earlier, survivors’ testimonies are crucial raw materials that can feed and inform dialogues and interrogations into the undisclosed realities of the Cassinga massacre.

²¹⁶ John Liebenberg & Patricia Hayes, *Bush of ghosts*, p. 47 & 247; Casper Erichsen, “Shoot to kill: photographic images in the Namibian liberation struggle / bush war,” *Kronos: Journal of Cape history*, Vol. 27 (November 2001), pp. 158-182.

²¹⁷ James E. Young, *Writing and rewriting the Holocaust*, p. 23.

²¹⁸ Ben Dinur “Zion,” in James E. Young, *Writing and rewriting the Holocaust*, p. 31.

Lastly, a few things raised in this chapter are worth reiterating. This chapter has attempted to explore the complexities regarding testimony's incapacity to elicit the survivors' untold pain and suffering since the Cassinga massacre. I have attempted to investigate how testimony obliterates the physical and emotional violence that the victims intend making explicit. I have also tried to explore different techniques and meanings embedded in the use of metaphors as survivors attempt to articulate the inexplicable violence. In this context, I have argued that the production and construction of testimony (unlike the massacre which was an event) involves the shifting of meanings, in conflict with the originality of the massacre. Hence, testimony is understood as disingenuous to survivors' efforts to disclose their shocking experiences to the inexperienced people.

Therefore, any testimony that aims to tell the "truth" or claim to authenticate the Cassinga massacre is problematic as no testimony can contain violence. Testimony is trivial, tacit and conceals many practical things that the victims of the Cassinga massacre observed on the ground and aspire to show to the inexperienced world. The presentation of testimony by the survivors of the Cassinga massacre is therefore very problematic, disappointing and frustrating for the survivors. This is when considering the fact that testimony reaches the intended audience unsubstantiated by the things that survivors rhetorically lament about and want the world to see. Tangible evidence falls apart and disintegrates in language and other techniques of attempting to disclose the Cassinga violence. In this relation, it is therefore misleading if testimony should be accredited with communicating the entirety of the horrific experience of Cassinga and the terribly unresolved long traumatic aftermath. Nonetheless, by giving precedence to the victims' silenced voice, testimony provides crucial residues which serve as an essential support base in creating a space aspiring to stimulate conversations, dialogues and debates with the intent to take the understanding of the Cassinga massacre beyond the present political confines of this national historic event.

CHAPTER SIX

THE SOUTH AFRICAN DEFENCE FORCE: DISCLAIMERS, INTROVERTS AND POLEMICISTS

Apartheid South Africa turned Namibia into a police state. The *Fact Paper on Southern Africa* from 1982 entitled “Apartheid’s Army in Namibia: South Africa’s illegal military occupation,” reported the following:

In the opening months of 1981 ... the number of South African troops in the territory had reached 100 000 – approximately one soldier to every 12 members of the Namibian population. ... The actual number of troops in Namibia fluctuates considerably, depending on preparations for attacks into neighbouring Angola. Before each of these attacks, additional troops are mobilized and moved to Namibia. This makes it difficult to reach an exact figure for any particular time. South Africa’s military build-up in Namibia has been accompanied by the enforcement of increasingly harsh and authoritarian security measures, to the extent that, by 1981, more than 80 per cent of the population were living under de facto martial law.²¹⁹

In this context, apartheid South Africa needed to repress and wage indiscriminate war against unarmed Namibian population groups to sustain its illegal and forcible hold on power in Namibia. Indeed, the greater the military presence in Namibia, the higher the rate of violence committed, with more people forced to leave Namibia, especially northern Namibia, and more loss of support for the SADF among the affected Namibian populations. The SADF and other security forces in Namibia were therefore unpopular. It also appears that the SADF was also, in general, unpopular among white South Africans. This could be explained by the fact this apartheid establishment was largely sustained by military conscripts who served a compulsory period of military service including going to “the border.” The SADF also maintained a force of military reservists who had served two-year compulsory military service, after which they returned to civilian life and waited to be called up any time for military service. The SADF appeared to have some trust in the military reservists as they were only called up for special operations such as the Cassinga operation.

²¹⁹ International Defence & Aid Fund, “Apartheid’s army in Namibia: South Africa’s illegal military occupation.” *Fact Papers on Southern Africa, No. 10* (London: Canon Collins House, 1982), p. 3.

It therefore appears that most of the SADF paratroopers who participated in the Cassinga massacre were individuals drawn from the Citizen Force which was made up of volunteers serving an initial period of training and active duty, followed by several years of reserve status. They rotated into active duty when called upon. According to Breytenbach, a battalion of 370 men who were involved in the Cassinga operation was referred to as a “composite battalion,” that is, the reservists were taken from two separate battalions, from 2 Parachute Battalion and 3 Parachute Battalion. Parachute Battalions 2 and 3 were reserve units of the Citizen Force, with all the officers, non-commissioned officers and men having completed either nine months, 12 months or 15 months of full-time military training, during which time they served with 1 Parachute Battalion.²²⁰ Jan Breytenbach has produced a list he claims includes all the names of all the paratroopers who participated in the Cassinga attack.²²¹

Recently, various pictures of the SADF paratroopers photographed during the Cassinga operation have also been surfacing in several publications of the Cassinga massacre, and a few of them are available at the former SADF archives in Pretoria. One of such photographs, which I retrieved from the SADF archives in Pretoria, appears below:

²²⁰ Edward Alexander, “The Cassinga raid”, Appendix C to Chapter 4.

²²¹ Jan Breytenbach, *Eagle strike*, pp. 446-451.



Figure 6. “Jan Breytenbach used a copy of this photograph in Appendix A of his book, *The Eagle Strike*. According to his caption, this group represents the “first lift of paratrooper companies precipitately lined up for extraction [at the parade in Cassinga]” back to Namibia. Source: SADF archive, Pretoria.

I have chosen this photograph to try and tease out the argument that not every paratrooper appearing in this photograph or obscured by it agrees with the SADF radical version of history that Cassinga was a non-civilian settlement. Regrettably, the techniques that I have used in this study such as visual and oral methodologies do not do much in terms of helping this study authenticate the things experienced by the paratroopers on the ground, or confirm individual paratroopers’ objection to the SADF meta-discourse of the Cassinga episode. In particular, photographs, as I have discussed in Chapters Two, Three and Four frame and silence the organic display of the Cassinga massacre by introducing impassable fortifications between the viewer and the things that the viewer wants the photograph to show and explain.

Nevertheless, it is still important to use this photograph to see whether it can navigate, to some extent, some of the issues I am attempting to explore in this chapter. I have already discussed the SADF camera operators’ deliberate techniques of focusing the camera eye away from the disturbing scenes showing the deliberate shooting of refugees, or scenes which exhibit the dead bodies of civilians in Cassinga. In this continuum too, the photograph of the group of

paratroopers appearing above does not only obstruct the face of the unspeakable human tragedy in Cassinga, and conceal individual paratroopers' different perceptions of experiencing what happened on the ground. Likewise, this photograph also denies the viewer the chance to identify and name the more culpable soldiers among them: those who were indeed in Cassinga on a business to kill and unconcerned to spare the lives of their unarmed political and racial foes. This photograph also alienates the viewer from obtaining a clue about who among the soldiers in this group was saddened by the SADF's needless actions against unarmed civilians. And, indeed who among these soldiers remained unapologetic and unfazed by the killings. The issues pertaining to what the SADF photographs of the Cassinga attack conceal and reveal here are obvious in this photograph, and I do not intend repeating them, as such issues have already been discussed in the preceding chapters, particularly in Chapter Three.

Nevertheless, despite these insurmountable difficulties, through our own sense of the episode and various insights gathered from different sources we can virtually ascertain that many of these soldiers left Cassinga feeling worried: some of them indeed inflamed with anger and embarrassed by their collective actions against the innocent lives of civilians whom they were told, prior to landing in Cassinga, were armed terrorists. In this relation, a former SADF conscript told me that "several senior officers left the army after Cassinga ... disenchanted with the army over the SADF actions in Cassinga."²²²

In any military conflict that ends in humiliation, the individual soldier is the "great loser" and sufferer in the aftermath of the war. As I have pointed out earlier, the soldiers appearing in the photograph, most of whom are not captured by the camera's eye or excluded in the process of developing and printing the film, are lined up for evacuation from Cassinga to return to their families back home. However, many of them returned from Cassinga psychologically damaged, muted, some of them embarrassed and at odds with the army and some of their field commanders in Cassinga. Yet, a few others appeared "unfazed" or found solace in the "well accomplished mission." This is to say that the experience of the Cassinga massacre has given birth to a conflict-ridden relationship among paratroopers following the Cassinga massacre. This argument materializes in learning that when the paratroopers returned from the Cassinga attack, none of

²²² Email from an anonymous former SADF conscript, 13 November 2010.

them (to make a sweeping assumption) told anyone about it, not even their spouses. Consider the following statement by the wife of the commander of the Cassinga massacre:

Eventually my husband came home [back from Cassinga - my insertion] ... Then twenty five years later I learnt about that day [the day of the Cassinga attack] when I typed the manuscript of this book [Jan Breytenbach's book, *The eagle strike*]. I read the individual stories ... sometimes I cried as I read, because on that day, so long ago, I had been praying not knowing what they were going through ... My tears were because I didn't know. I didn't know what my husband went through when he came home because he never told me.²²³

This revelation suggests that the experience of the Cassinga massacre was so gruesome and inhuman to the extent that paratroopers shied away from disclosing the indiscriminate killing of innocent civilians. But what is completely unambiguous is that the SADF silence over or denial of the indiscriminate mass killings of civilians in Cassinga has divided and put the former paratroopers at odds with one another. This is primarily noticeable between the former senior commanders, the so-called professional soldiers of the operation, and their former junior officers.²²⁴ This conflict surfaces in the way different paratroopers unleash individual accounts that contradict the SADF official version of the Cassinga episode, as I will explain later.

Indeed, most people would have the view that they, paratroopers, all jointly agree with the SADF official telling of the Cassinga episode. The fact is, Cassinga paratroopers' testimonies of the Cassinga episode are much more diverse than what many people would have expected. In this relation therefore, this chapter discusses a scenario where Cassinga paratroopers can be divided into three dominant categories: disclaimers, introverts and polemicists.

The Disclaimers

As I have pointed out earlier, in the run-up to the Cassinga massacre, the SADF was prepared to ensure that "credible coverage and immediate release [of the SADF storyline of the Cassinga attack] is essential to counter claims of SADF operations against and mass killings of civilians, especially women and children."²²⁵ From this statement it appears obvious that the Cassinga violence was in all instances foreseeable, and anticipated to unfold into two very distinctive but

²²³ Statement by Jan Breytenbach's wife. In Jan Breytenbach, *Eagle Strike*, pp. 386 - 387.

²²⁴ Visit: http://www.sainfantry.co.za/e107_plugins/forum/forum_viewtopic.php?16

²²⁵ Chief of the SADF, "PSYAC Planning Directive No. 3 \ 78, Operation Reindeer (Top Secret): Phase Three (media coverage). " Source: SANDF Archive, Pretoria.

connected phases. This translates into the short- and long-term “resulting injuries,”²²⁶ comprising the physical violence (short term) and the rhetorical or emotional violence (long or indefinite violence). My task here is to grapple with the later, emotional violence.

In a move to “improve own credibility regarding” the massacre of Namibian refugees at Cassinga, the SADF entered a “critical period” of “media feeding,” in attempts to “clinically” repair the damage done to the SADF “credibility.”²²⁷ This move marked the beginning of the SADF public denial of the Cassinga massacre. In fact, it initiated the birth of those who are the disclaimers of the Cassinga massacre. This category of paratroopers can be best described as politically poisoned: “For the better or worse,” disclaimers are resolutely committed to perpetuating verbal, print media and photographic imagery which advocate the absence of any Cassinga massacre. They are belligerent, publicly adamant that there was no mass killing and maiming of innocent civilians in Cassinga.

The belligerent Colonel Jan Breytenbach is one of the Cassinga paratroopers who is publicly obstinate and adamant that paratroopers did not carry out the senseless killings and maiming of defenceless civilians.²²⁸ For instance, in the foreword to Graham Gillmore’s book, *Pathfinder Company: 44 Parachute Brigade 'The Philistines'*, Breytenbach wrote:

On Ascension Day, 1978, a composite South African parachute battalion jumped onto the tactical HQ of SWAPO's PLAN army, based at Cassinga, 250 kilometres north of the Angolan border to destroy the facility, their logistics, and to wipe out a strong concentration of SWAPO guerrillas. The airborne assault, part of Operation Reindeer, was an unqualified success; the whole base was destroyed. 608 PLAN fighters were killed, with many more wounded which pushed the final SWAPO death toll to well over a thousand. We lost only four paratroopers killed in action plus a dozen or so wounded. According to airborne experts in Britain and Australia, this was the most audacious parachute assault since the Second World War; the mounting airfield was well over 1,000 nautical miles away. I was the commander of that airborne assault, which although

²²⁶ Elaine Scarry, *The body in pain*, p. 75.

²²⁷ Media Analysis: Operation Reindeer (Top Secret). Ref. No. HS OPS 310 \ 4 \ Reindeer, Dated 8 August, 78, based on CSI'S Media Analysis document MI \ 205\13\1\1. Source: SANDF Archive, Pretoria.

²²⁸ See Appendix G of this thesis. Also visit: “Cassinga string”/ facebook. Online at <http://et-ee.facebook.com/topic.php?uid=40615219623&topic=15512>. Accessed on 29 June 2011.

successful above all expectations, also highlighted many shortcomings, some of which nearly led to a disastrous outcome.²²⁹

On a similar note, the then Right-wing Freedom Front Senator Tienie Groenewald, who was the military Chief of Staff of Intelligence at the time of the Cassinga massacre, defended the assault: "There was no massacre at Cassinga ...it was the finest military operation conducted by the SADF."²³⁰ And, during a special meeting of Parliament's Defence Committee called to investigate the unauthorised parade held by 44 Parachute Brigade in Bloemfontein on May 4, 1996, the former National Party Senator Mark Wiley who had been "at Cassinga" was quoted to have said that the remarks that Cassinga was a refugee camp are "nonsense."²³¹ In line with such representations, the disclaimers include individual ex-paratroopers calling themselves "proud warriors," who continue to claim that the Cassinga massacre is a deed of pride and heroism.²³² They are proponents of violence that unnecessarily continues to harm and exacerbate the suffering and pain of others, namely the Cassinga survivors and affected families of the dead and missing Namibians. This is eminently the case with their unrepentant, ironic and provocative statements, for example, arguing that apartheid-colonial violence in both South Africa and Namibia was "all worth effort ... the proud attainment of all those in the South African uniform-those who won... that is why Namibia and South Africa bore almost no scars of war when their respective movements towards political settlement began."²³³

Writing about Argentina's "Dirty War" junta (1976-1983), Marguerite Feitlowitz asks: "when known torturers are said to be heroes, what happens to the minds of those they injured?"²³⁴ In this relation, this work considers the SADF rhetorical violence as not only hurtful to the victims of apartheid's uncivilized law and order, but as also generally degrading to the dignity and integrity of all the victims of apartheid and colonialism in Namibia as well as in South Africa. It is also very worrisome and disreputable of some human beings to entertain a sense of being more human than other people are. The disclaimers' continuing rhetorical praise song of brutal

²²⁹ Jan Breytenbach's foreword to Graham Gillmore's book, *Pathfinder Company: 44 Parachute Brigade 'The Philistines'* (Johannesburg: 30 Degrees South Publishers, 2010), Foreword.

²³⁰ Minister to apologize to Namibia for military parade, online at <http://saf.romandie.com/post/11652/94803>.

²³¹ "ANC Daily News Briefing." Online at <http://www.e-tools.co.za/newsbrief/1996/news0606>.

²³² Jan Breytenbach, *Eagle strike*, p. 561.

²³³ Jannie Geldenhuys. *At the Front: A General's account of South Africa's border war* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2009), p. xv.

²³⁴ Marguerite Feitlowitz, *A Lexicon of Terror: Argentina and the Legacies of Torture* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. xi. Cited in Helena Pohlandt - McCormick, "I saw a nightmare ..." p. 24.

violence beyond the fall of apartheid-colonial rule, indicates a strategic shift of torture. “Torture” is a long-term strategy premeditated by the SADF before attacking Cassinga. In essence, in the wake of the collapse or the “breakdown” of the SADF military supremacy,²³⁵ proponents of the old order resort to emotional or rhetoric “torture” or violence as a way of revenging, in part, their military capitulation. This sort of vengeance invokes the continuation of the physical and emotional violence, to wound the victims by using a different approach. Thus, rhetorical torture is the continuation of the military violence by other means, to adapt Carl Von Clausewitz’s assertion that “war is the continuation of politics by other means.”²³⁶

Thus, this form of long-term torture is, arguably, a strategy that indicates the SADF “passion” to increase and transfer the pain and suffering of the victims “beyond the physical to the moral”²³⁷ realm of damage. This could also be translated in terms of Elaine Scarry’s observation that “torture” is “a parallel act of deconstruction. It imitates the destructive power of war... whereas the object of war is to kill people, torture usually mimes the killing of people by inflicting pain, the sensory equivalent of death, substituting prolonged mock execution for execution.”²³⁸

Certainly, the essence of this SADF rhetorical torture is a malevolent act against people already victimized, particularly the survivors and affected families whose lucky escape from Cassinga extinguishes the disclaimer’s joy and nourishes the disclaimers’ unease over the lives that were not destroyed. Indeed, emotional torture is unlimited and therefore worse than the physical violence: it is the extension of the unfinished violence, its project is to inflict heavier and prolonged human misery, to alter and misrepresent the voice, pain and suffering of the victims.

“The day of medals”

On the SADF calendar, the Cassinga anniversary marks a spectacularly impressive and award-winning day in honour of the soldiers who participated in the Cassinga attack. This is while Namibians remember and commemorate every anniversary of the Cassinga massacre as a day of

²³⁵ Elaine Scarry, *The body in pain*, p.78.

²³⁶ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret, commentary by Bernard Brodie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), pp. 91-93. Cited in Elaine Scarry, *The body in Pain*, pp. 77 & 334.

²³⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 91 - 93.

²³⁸ Elaine Scarry, *The body in pain*, p. 61.

mourning and loss of the innocent lives of irreplaceable loved ones.²³⁹ In the years that followed the Cassinga massacre, prior to South Africa democratization, the SADF adorned May 4, each year, as a public day of admiration, excitement, jubilation and celebration. It was possibly a regular practice in Namibia since the Cassinga massacre, but one of such provocative celebrations happened on May 4, 1988, when the SADF celebrated the tenth anniversary of the Cassinga massacre with a military parade in the northern Namibian town of Oshakati. During that occasion, “General Ian Gleeson, chief of staff of the SADF, boasted that the raid had been the most successful paratrooper operation of its kind anywhere in the world since World War Two.”²⁴⁰

On this day of “great jubilations and excitement” for the SADF, individual paratroopers were honored with medals and their names pronounced in due respect for their participation in the violence at Cassinga. Namibia’s transition to independence in 1990 pushed such open celebrations into silence. However, in South Africa, the SADF kept such celebratory parades alive, conducted publicly every year. This practice came to a halt, at least explicitly, when in 1996, Joe Modise, by then the Minister of the new South African National Defence Force (SANDF) declared it “an insensitive act”²⁴¹ and ordered that “steps should be taken to ensure

²³⁹ The Cassinga anniversary, May 4, is a national public holiday in Namibia. The day has been commemorated by SWAPO since the Cassinga massacre. Giorgio Miescher, Lorena Rizzo & Jeremy Silvester, *Posters in action: visibility in the making of an African nation* (Basel & Windhoek: Basler Afrika Bibliographien & National Archives Namibia, 2009) pp. 140 - 150.

²⁴⁰ The SADF celebration of the Cassinga massacre in 1988 was reported in *The Star*, 5 May, 1988, p. 3; *The Namibian*, 6 May, 1988, p. 5. Also see Piero Gleijeses, “The massacre of Cassinga.” Online at <http://emba.cubaminrex.cu/Default.aspx?tabid=6027>; Jannie Geldenhuys, *At the Front: a General’s Account of South Africa’s Border War*, p. 381. General Ian Gleeson was the overall commander of the Cassinga attack. He flew to Cassinga in the late morning of the Cassinga massacre.

²⁴¹ “SA to say sorry for celebrating Defence Force raid,” *The Star*, 4 June 1996. Also, see “SANDF Chief called to account for controversial parade,” *SAPA*, June 3 1996. The story reads: “The SANDF Chief called to account for controversial parade: SA National Defence Force chief Georg Meiring has been summoned by Parliament’s joint defence committee to account for a parade in Bloemfontein last month commemorating a controversial airborne assault in Angola in 1978”. Defence committee chairman Tony Yengeni said he had called the meeting so that Meiring could explain “how on earth they (the Defence Force) can continue to observe apartheid era crimes in the new South Africa.” On May 4, 1978, South Africa launched an airborne raid codenamed “Operation Reindeer” on what it claimed was a SWAPO training base in Cassinga, Angola. “But it was a very brutal massacre of women and children in a Swapo refugee camp in which hundreds of people were killed,” Yengeni said. Describing it as the Namibian people’s equivalent to South Africa’s Sharpeville massacre, Yengeni said Meiring should apologise to Namibians and South Africans as the 44 Parachute Brigade in Bloemfontein had “celebrated” the event by holding an anniversary parade on May 4 this year. The Ministry of Defence had been unaware of the parade, which was not “in keeping with the department’s policy.” The committee wanted to know whether Meiring was aware of the parade, and “we want him to assure us that nothing of this kind will ever happen again.”

that no similar event²⁴² ever takes place in the future. However, according to reliable sources connected to the former SADF soldiers, the celebrations of the Cassinga massacre as “a jewel of military craftsmanship” still take place in silence. In the following statement, Jan Breytenbach acknowledges that “the majority of the Cassinga paratroopers” still celebrate the Cassinga massacre as a victory for the SADF: “this order [the ANC order stopping the former SADF public celebrations of the Cassinga massacre] is slavishly obeyed by some of our PC [politically correct], former comrades but certainly not by the majority and most definitely not by the paratroopers who were there.”²⁴³

Once projected as a regional superpower, militarily, proponents of the former SADF are apparently not expected to be fever-stricken and die a silent death. The way disclaimers continue to pronounce derogatory public rhetoric such as referring to the Cassinga day as “SWAPO’s day of shame,”²⁴⁴ and other provocations which are currently flowing in the “Cassinga string” or Facebook provide ingredients for the argument I am making.²⁴⁵ This “renewed interest” in the Cassinga event mainly receives contributions from the former Cassinga paratroopers. Indeed, the paratroopers’ Facebook is gratuitously created as events which disclaimers “consider pivotal,” and as the “worst of the human viciousness” is purged from the “narrative proper.” This brings into focus the way that such narratives are a “destructive force.”²⁴⁶ As Helena Pohlandt-McCormick would put it in the context of apartheid South Africa’s attempts to silence and erase the history of the 1976 Soweto massacre, such attempts intend to “erase(d) the histories of their victims ... [and] contrived to create a history that deny their culpability...”²⁴⁷ Hence, the intent of the “Cassinga string” website (as well as other means of disseminating information) is to obscure the SADF role in the violence against civilians. Its less obvious aim is possibly to propel a certain distress: to infuriate and prolong individual victim’s long suffering and unhealed

²⁴² See, “Minister to apologize to Namibia for military parade,” *Mon Sejour en Afrique du Sud*, (Cape Town), June 1996: Available at: <http://saf.romandie.com/post/11652/94803>. Also in, “NZO to apologize to Namibia over Cassinga parade,” *ANC Daily News Briefing*, Thursday, 6 June 1996. Online at <http://www.e-tools.co.za/~etools/newsbrief/1996/news0606>.

²⁴³ Jan Breytenbach, *Eagle strike*, p. xvi.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. xvi.

²⁴⁵ “Cassinga string”/ facebook. Online at <http://et-ee.facebook.com/topic.php?uid=40615219623&topic=15512>

²⁴⁶ Maurice Habwachs, *Memory and history*, translated by Francis J. Ditter, Jr. and Vida Yazdi Ditter (New York: Harper and Row, 1980); Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish history and Jewish memory* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982); Susan A. Crane, “Writing the individual back into collective memory,” *American historical review* Vol. 102 (1997). Cited in Helena Pohlandt – McCormick, “I saw a nightmare ...” p. 28.

²⁴⁷ Helena Pohlandt – McCormick, “I saw a nightmare ...” p. 24.

emotional injuries. This is, for example, demonstrated by Ellen Namhila's response to Jan Breytenbach's article which was published in the *Sunday Independent* (see Appendix H of this study). The denial of the Cassinga massacre by some former paratroopers also discloses certain war madness and insensitivity on the part of the proponents.

Nevertheless, this sort of extreme, on the other hand, gives the public a conceptual picture to think about such violent rhetoric as a reflection of the former SADF's brutal actions which have coalesced and been eternalized in individual ex-soldiers refusing to yield to change or accept that apartheid was evil and unpopular. This unpopularity of course resulted in its political demise. Indeed, it is of much concern that such provocations continue to unfold, unnecessarily, many years after the fall of South African colonialism and apartheid rule in Namibia.

Nevertheless, the rising tide of the spoken and printed violence suggests that the disclaimers are taking this stand in response to the absence, in both Namibia and South Africa, of a law or an act of parliament outlawing and making it criminal to deny the SADF mass killing of Namibia civilians in Cassinga and elsewhere. Secondly, the disclaimers are embarrassed by their brutal conduct in Cassinga. Hence, they seem to create stories in the way they do, in attempts to (ironically) repair their damaged reputation. Thirdly, the disclaimers' denials and insults are inherent in SADF histories of habitual denialism, its notorious projection and casting of acts of brutal violence on to someone else. During the war, the SADF projected the notion that SWAPO terrorized its own people. For example, the SADF argued that one of the reasons for attacking Cassinga was "to maintain law and order and to protect the Owambo people from SWAPO intimidation."²⁴⁸

In following Larbi Sadiki's writing on the recent American military intervention in Libya, "protection via war is a perfect oxymoron ... The conduct of war for the 'protection of civilians' provides further proof of how war makes no sense even when executed with the best intentions in mind."²⁴⁹ With reference to the Cassinga massacre, the "oxymoron" or "absurdity" of killing civilians to protect civilians lives "calls for questioning the context" of the SADF illegal

²⁴⁸ Chief of SADF, "PSYAC Planning Directive No. 2 \ 1978, Operation Bruilof (top secret): Phase Four. Source: SANDF Archive, Pretoria.

²⁴⁹ Larbi Sadiki, "To bomb and protect." Online at <http://english.aljazeera.net/indepth/opinion/2011/03/2011329125911441807.html>.

occupation of Namibia and cross-border violations of independent and sovereign states, such as Angola. In terms of the discourse operating in the SADF, SWAPO was a terrorist organization, and its followers, particularly those who were in exile, regardless of age, gender, career, disabilities, etc. were all classified as ‘terrorists’. The irony however is that the Owambo people whom the SADF claimed to protect from SWAPO intimidation formed the backbone of SWAPO at home and in exile. However, the significance of this scenario lies in helping us to think that the SADF motive of attacking Cassinga was not to destroy a military camp or headquarters of SWAPO, but simply to cause general damage²⁵⁰ and effect a level of elimination among the civilian populace, the source of SWAPO’s strength and existence.

Be that as it may, the deeply saddened and non-provocative victims, some of them living with physical disabilities from Cassinga and all of them with levels of rage and despair, feel undignified when their sense of suffering, trauma and loss of loved ones continue to be exacerbated. Such systematic provocations unfold under the watchful eyes of the two postcolonial-apartheid states, Namibia and South Africa, and under the ambiguities of national reconciliation. The perpetrators enjoy state amnesty, void of any compulsion to acknowledge the unacceptable brutal violence against the Namibian civilian population. In this relation, the victims of South Africa apartheid and colonial atrocities are extremely sickened and irritated by the fact that in spite of the general amnesty granted to them, the perpetrators are not only unrepentant of killing untold numbers of Namibian civilians, maiming and causing incalculable destruction to property and livelihood, but they also continue, unceasingly, with disrespectful and injurious public rhetoric.

Another version that survivors find disconcerting entails, for instance, Breytenbach’s recent pounding denial that “my paratroopers did not carry bayonets or any other sharp instruments with which to slaughter women and children.”²⁵¹ Nonetheless, one thing is unambiguous in this regard. That is, with or without bayonets maximum damage could be inflicted on the targeted

²⁵⁰ Elaine Scarry, *The body in pain*, p. 65.

²⁵¹ Jan Breytenbach’s reply to the exchange of articles concerning the Cassinga attack, between Mike McWilliams and Randolph Vigne. See Appendix G: “Cassinga battle account reveals biased claptrap: a former SADF Colonel who led forces in controversial battle speaks out.” In the *Sunday Independent*, 3 February 2008.

victims, especially when the targeted persons possess no means of self-defence or were not trained to act that way.

In the context of the SADF denial of ever using bayonets to kill and maim, the concern of survivors is that the disclaimers are missing the central issue. That is, brutal violence against non-combatants in Cassinga is not a question of what weapons were used to kill, maim and cause other damage to people and property. What really matters is the undeniable fact that with or without the use of bayonets, innocent people were brutally killed, maimed, traumatized for life and disappeared without trace to this day. Indeed, it is important to note that even without the bayonets, survivors consider the paratroopers, themselves, to be killing machines or instruments of torture for the apartheid state violence. They themselves are more lethal than the military hardware they possessed. For weapons cannot inflict damage on their own. Violence is committed by people, even with their bare hands. In this regard, Elaine Scarry argues that the “designation” of “weapons” as “arms” implies an “extension” of the human body. In this way, “the human body” becomes “an extension of the weapon.”²⁵² Thus, it is the human body, rather than weapons, that perpetuates and executes violence. Indeed, as illustrated elsewhere in this study, the SADF were feared for their murderous capabilities, for with or without guns they were notorious for causing deadly injuries by means of kicking or even beating people to death.

Nonetheless, the issue of bayoneting civilians and the debate around it raises two important points. Firstly, it lays emphasis on the violent and unacceptable maiming and killing of human beings in an uncivilized and unreasonable manner by a military force that claimed to be the opposite. Secondly, it emphasizes survivors’ arguments that they did not have the defensive mechanisms or strength to keep the attackers at bay:

I, and many of my friends whom I lost in the bombing were not military people. We did not study military matters and did not have guns to fight anyone. I can state categorically that Cassinga was not a military base.²⁵³

Conscious of its wrong doings in Cassinga, the apartheid government in South Africa knew that it would face intense criticism from the outside world. This compelled the SADF to package a

²⁵² Elaine Scarry, *The body in pain*, p. 67.

²⁵³ Ellen Namhila, “I was at Cassinga and it was not a military base.” In *Sunday Independent*, March 9, 2008.

particular version of the Cassinga attack. So, to suggest that the world subscribes to a singular version of the “truth” of the Cassinga massacre, as the SADF suggests, is to obscure the multiple realities of the Cassinga massacre. Grahame Hayes observes that “truth ... (does) not primarily reside in the content of ... stories, but rather in recognizing the profound breach of human conduct that made many of these apartheid stories possible.”²⁵⁴ In fact, what disclaimers put on paper actually mirrors something that the Cassinga massacre has created. That is, it again reveals the impossibility of the massacre to be written on paper or to be told.

Notwithstanding the fact that the “truth” of the Cassinga massacre does not reside outside the body that constitutes it, disclaimers claim that what they write or tell the public is not from hearsay but from the mouth and pen of those who executed the attack on the ground.²⁵⁵

Interestingly, even before the massacre took place (as I have pointed out earlier), the South African government had already meticulously designed and put on paper deceitful ways of informing the public about the outcome of the Cassinga attack. Nonetheless, regardless of what the SADF official discourse of the Cassinga massacre tells us, it is important to note that such statements do not speak to the reality of the Cassinga massacre. Instead, they are issued as a mechanism to counter outside pressure and condemnation of the Cassinga massacre, and as a way of attempting to exonerate the SADF from any wrongdoing.

In this context therefore, it is crucial to think of such statements as embedded in the practice of “deceit and concealment” but which, as in the case of other violence perpetuated by apartheid South Africa, also convey a sheer “violent assault on the dignity of (the) victims.”²⁵⁶ As a “fundamental fact” of any violence, the SADF attacked refugees in Cassinga to finish them off. This is self-evident in the SADF central objective of attacking the camp: to “break the backbone of SWAPO”²⁵⁷ by killing as many civilians as possible. And indeed, this metaphor, “the backbone of SWAPO,” suggests young people, particularly children who were leaving Namibia in a huge and unstoppable exodus to Cassinga, Angola. South Africa perceived the huge exodus

²⁵⁴ Grahame Hayes, “We suffer our memories: thinking about the past, healing and reconciliation.” *American Imago*, Vol. 55/ 1(1998), pp. 29 - 50.

²⁵⁵ Jan Breytenbach, *Eagle Strike*, see Preface.

²⁵⁶ Helena Pohlandt - McCormick, “I saw a nightmare ...” p. 29.

²⁵⁷ Chief of the SADF, “PSYAC Planning Directive No. 3 \ 78, Operation Reindeer (top secret): Phase Three (Media coverage).” Source: SANDF Archive, Pretoria.

of young Namibians as a serious threat to the future political stability and the maintenance of apartheid hegemony and colonial rule in Namibia.

The denial of the Cassinga massacre is also embedded in the early 1990s political turnaround and transformation in both Namibia and South Africa that have placed the inflexible former servicemen further away from acknowledging responsibility for the violence committed against civilians during the period of South African colonial rule of Namibia. In fact, it is humiliating to them when the violence that apartheid exported outside the state of South Africa and the quasi-defeat they suffered at the end of the conflict is said to be “akin to the Vietnam war experience.” That is, a public perception that the war was unjustifiable and caused unnecessary and even catastrophic conditions for many innocent lives and property, especially in northern Namibia. Arguably, those who committed violence and acted as the tools of apartheid’s cross-border aggression benefited nothing from the violence. Instead, their service only earned them an undesirable public reputation. It is this undesirable publicity that instills embarrassment and uneasiness, in such a way that disclaimers find it extremely unacceptable to publicly acknowledge responsibility for the multiple deeds they committed during the course of the conflict, especially the indiscriminate killings of civilians, inside Namibia and outside its borders.

In considering that the camp was an easy operation for the paratroopers, one discerns with near-certainty that Cassinga was not what the disclaimers describe it to be. There are several hints even within their own discourse to corroborate arguments that Cassinga was a noncombatant facility. Namely, if Cassinga were not a soft target, the SADF would not have decided to drop paratroopers deep into enemy territory where the enemy (and this is ironic) could by far “outnumber the paratroopers.” For example, Operation Reindeer as it was officially code-named consisted of 370 combatants,²⁵⁸ though in some other sources this figure is higher (as illustrated in the previous chapters). In this context therefore, it is almost unthinkable for this small number to parachute into the territory of more than “4000 armed fighters” and miraculously get away without incurring significant casualties, except losing less than five men.²⁵⁹ The crisis in this case is not that the organic picture of the Cassinga massacre remains mysterious. But it is a new zone

²⁵⁸ Jan D. Breytenbach, “Airborne assault on Cassinga base, 4 May 1978,” p. 147.

²⁵⁹ Edward Alexander, “The Cassinga Raid,” p. 139.

of mystery that unfolds when disclaimers dismiss other Cassinga narratives as untrue. In fact, the “truth” of the Cassinga massacre is what the disclaimers conceal and try to obliterate as previously discussed.

As I have put it earlier, disclaimers exploit Facebook and other social network spaces to package the SADF version of the Cassinga massacre. They appear to be more self-absorbed than thinking of the effects on Namibians. In fact, it can be argued that for this category of former soldiers, the victims of the Cassinga massacre do not matter as they do not exist as people for them. But whatever importance the disclaimers attach to the text as the absolute “truth” of the Cassinga massacre, this is indeed inconsequential and incompatible with the ordeals experienced on the ground and which continue to torment the lives of many people in Namibia today. In other words, for the disclaimers, the concept of telling the “truth” means the untelling, reconfiguring or unravelling of what is virtually unrepresentable. Because in every text or spoken language, “truth” falls flat, it is suppressed and obliterated.

The “embattled self”

In the preface to *Eagle strike!* Jan Breytenbach noted the following:

It certainly was a day of violent death, a day when eagles descendent from the sky above Cassinga to wreak terrible vengeance on the occupants of what was considered to be a major SWAPO base by the SADF and a refugee camp by SWAPO.²⁶⁰

This statement sets out a number of pertinent issues. The first issue is the narrator’s retreat from the militaristic terms that Cassinga is associated with by the SADF. Arguably, the escape from the usual singular SADF rhetoric of referring to Cassinga as a “military base” into a more inclusive “considered to be a major SWAPO military base by the SADF,” might appear to legitimize Breytenbach’s personal experience of things on the ground. Secondly, this statement unpacks something important with the term “considered.” In other words, the decision to destroy Cassinga was based on a perception, which translates into a semi-acknowledgement that it was not yet a military camp. Hence, the Cassinga massacre was not aimed at destroying a military facility, but the attack on Cassinga was embedded in the SADF fear that the majority of the

²⁶⁰ Jan Breytenbach, *Eagle strike*, p. xi.

young people in the camp were potential SWAPO fighters. Ironically, most of the children who were in Cassinga did not make it to military training. Instead, many were sent to non-military schools in different countries around the globe, in particular to Cuba. Indeed, when examined closely, disclaimers' reports of the Cassinga massacre unleash, as I will explore below, personal accounts which deviate from the SADF framed picture of the Cassinga attack.

In another article entitled "Airborne assault on Cassinga," Breytenbach retreated from the SADF framed description of the Cassinga trenches as the "defensive facilities" from where SWAPO combatants launched defensive attacks against the advancing paratroopers. Consider the following statement: The trenches constituted a space where the SADF performed the most sinister, "horrific slaughter [or caused] horrendous death toll"²⁶¹ of unarmed civilians. He further stated that, the trenches were "filled to the brim with escaping SWAPOs."²⁶² These acknowledgments are important for three reasons. Firstly, they corroborate survivors' testimonies that women and children clogged the trenches where they were ordered to seek protection from the aerial bombardments. The paratroopers caught up with civilians in the trenches where they bayoneted and shot them at point-blank range.²⁶³ Secondly, the "escaping SWAPOs" corroborates survivors' arguments that the victims were unarmed and posed no threat to the paratroopers, nor did they intend confronting the paratroopers as they had no weapons. What is then particularly disturbing is the order that Breytenbach needlessly issued for the brutal massacre of the harmless and defenceless "SWAPOs" in the trenches.

In the following statement Breytenbach discloses the command he gave for the indiscriminate killings in the trenches:

Johan Blaauw had requested my permission to clear the trenches - facing him - immediately ... [because as] the AA [anti-aircraft] guns were put out of action for good - the clearing parties - moved with more freedom to clear the trenches still occupied by SWAPO. The two clearing parties (Johan Blaauw and Tommy Lamprecht platoons) met in the middle ... the subsequent slaughter was horrific²⁶⁴

²⁶¹ Jan Breytenbach, "Airborne assault on Cassinga base, 4 May 1978," pp. 154 - 155.

²⁶² Ibid, p. 154

²⁶³ The bayonetting and the shooting of civilians at close range cropped up almost in every interview with survivors.

²⁶⁴ Jan Breytenbach, "Airborne assault on Cassinga base, 4 May 1978," pp. 154 - 155

Thirdly, such indirect acknowledgments suggest that the perpetrators of the Cassinga massacre knowingly killed and maimed civilians “willfully and wantonly.”²⁶⁵ The two adverbs “willfully and “wantonly” infer acts of knowability and reckless action intended to cause greatest loss to lives and property. Therefore, the authorization to use “deadly force against” helpless civilians clogging the trenches as their last hope of surviving the killings put the SADF official discourse of the Cassinga attack to a litmus test. Indeed, such conduct “amounted to a criminal culpability.”

It would seem in fact that the deplorable things that the paratroopers committed against civilians in Cassinga are so colossal that the attempts to contain and hide everything become almost impossible. Arguably, the more the disclaimers attempt to deny the unnecessary killing of civilians, the more their statements fall flat or become contradictory, thereby making concessions to the things they attempt to obliterate and conceal. The following statement corroborates the argument I am making:

There was a massacre ... I was the one who led my paratroopers through an orgy of killing women and children.²⁶⁶

Since the experience of individual paratroopers in Cassinga enters the public space through the SADF-constructed and packaged genres of testimony, it is possible to think differently about the exterior landscape of experiencing violence in Cassinga: as that which unsettles, contains and renders invisible the awful experiences on the ground. But, it also means that irrespective of the disclaimers’ attempts to conceal the unacceptable horror of the Cassinga massacre, it is almost impossible to “hide everything.” Instead, the perpetrators’ persistence in trying to conceal unacceptable violence is a way of leaking and disclosing conflicting narratives. These contradictions are important indicators. They suggest a presence, yet subtle, of multiple and terrible undisclosed realities of the Cassinga massacre. Nevertheless, the “real” witnesses of the Cassinga massacre were the paratroopers, not the survivors who were beleaguered with fear, panic, shock and confusion. Likewise, “the best source of evidence on the scene of any crime is

²⁶⁵ Roy Gutman, David Rieff, Anthony Dworkin, (eds.), *Crimes of war: what the public should know* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 2007), p. 429.

²⁶⁶ Jan Breytenbach, *The eagle strike*, p. 553.

always the perpetrator himself ... who almost always wants to confess”²⁶⁷ in ways and manners that are subtle. Therefore, it is common that when reading the disclaimers’ statements against the grain, one can be almost certain to spot aporias and ambiguities: because, when writing about the Cassinga massacre which was so deplorable, it becomes almost impossible to forge a language that can completely hide and silence everything that the perpetrator intends to suppress and conceal. Such residues of the untold practicalities should be considered as important indicators of the missing realities on the ground. Importantly, since such aporias testify to these missing realities, they help navigate social science researchers towards exploring and closely examining the complexities and difficult issues that disclaimers attempt to hide and destroy.

The Introverts

These are the former paratroopers who are generally tight-lipped about the Cassinga matters. Since they are reticent, it is difficult to locate them and listen to their individual stories. Generally, they appear not to entertain the idea of sharing issues of the Cassinga event with people falling outside the former SADF niche. Nonetheless, their dormant positions or low public profile pertaining to issuing individual accounts of experiencing the Cassinga massacre, may be deciphered in terms of several other meanings.

In the first place, their silence may be understood as a way of protestation and of distancing the self from the SADF mainstream of the official discourse of the Cassinga massacre. That is, these individuals may be disenchanted with what happened in Cassinga and hence prefer to stay out of the Cassinga public spat. Their silence may also suggest compliance with the former SADF enforced restrictions that forbade individual soldiers or any other person from making public statements about personal experiences of violence in the war zones. In fact, Section 118 of the South Africa Defence Act states, among other things, that:

²⁶⁷ Forensic psychiatrist Andrew Hodges utilizes a pioneering method of “thought print decoding” technique, based on the unconscious mind’s universal urge to tell the truth. Hodges shows how suspects unconsciously confess between the lines (in both written and oral communications). He also spotted valuable forensic documents, such as emails, that analysts or readers care not to read between the lines for the deeply hidden meanings or realities can be overlooked and go unnoticed if when critical readings or listening to the perpetrators rhetoric is ignored. By decoding the hidden messages scene by scene, Hodges was, for example, able to unlock a “Pandora’s Box of deceit”, etc. In Andrew Hodges, *into the deep - the hidden confessions of Natalee’s killer* (Birmingham: Village house publishers, AL., 2007), pp. 33 - 38.

no person shall publish in any newspaper, book or pamphlet, or by radio or any other means ... any information relating to the composition, movement or dispositions of the SADF ... or any statement comment or rumour calculated directly to any member of the SADF or any force or any activity of the SADF ... calculated to prejudice or embarrass the government in its foreign relations or to alarm or depress members of the public, except where publications thereof has been authorized by the Minister or under his authority.²⁶⁸

However, it appears implausible to link this prevailing silence to former SADF conventional norms of repression against those found guilty of contravening the stringent codes of the Army, such as the unauthorized disclosure of censored and restricted sensitive information about the possibly deplorable things that the SADF carried out in conflict zones. It is also difficult to accept that the stringent code of conduct or service in the SADF should have any effects today. However, I would like to think of it, silence, as acting in response to the individual moral values, peer influence, negativity about the foregone political and ideological orientations as well as disappointment and embarrassment with the old order of doing things in the name of apartheid and colonial oppression. I am thinking this way because of the barricades and challenges, outlined below, I encountered in trying to find and interview soldiers in this category of paratroopers. I would have loved to sit down with the ex-paratroopers and listen to their individual stories of the Cassinga experience. Because, it is possible that what is written and spoken through the media or other medium of communication about them, as a collective, could break up into dissimilarities when narrated by the participants themselves as individuals.

The number one challenge in trying to find them, the “introverts,” has been where to locate the former Cassinga paratroopers more generally. The second issue has been how to establish a line of communication, or how to introduce myself to them in such a way that they would welcome and trust me as someone they can openly talk to about their divergent experiences and interpretations of the Cassinga event. The third and most difficult challenge has been how to introduce my background to them, possibly unacceptable to many of them: namely telling them that I grew up in the SWAPO camps and I am a former PLAN combatant, perhaps a “terrorist” still to them. At the time of completing this study I have only succeeded reaching out to a few of

²⁶⁸ Tony Weaver, “The war in Namibia: social consequences.” In Gerhard Totermeyer, Vezera Kandetu and Wolfgang Werner (eds.), *Namibia in Perspective* (Windhoek: Council of Churches in Namibia, 1987), p. 239.

the former Cassinga paratroopers' through intermediaries. The reception from a few who responded through emails was generally embarrassing and discouraging. I felt rejected by the apprehensiveness and sometimes unfriendly responses from some of them. This emerges in the email correspondences I exchanged (via intermediaries) with some of the paratroopers.

One of the introvert paratroopers, for example, notified me through an intermediary that he would accept the interview on the condition that I meet certain requirements as elaborated in the following excerpt:

I take note of your request in a positive light. Can you please, however, give me more details about yourself, e.g. ID no: R.S.A.; Namibian or Angolan; Date of birth; Domicile; Religion; Academic and Military background etcetera, as well as your planned meeting place with me ... I could agree to be interviewed on the condition that no questions are asked about how many people I killed at Kassinga.²⁶⁹

It appears that, among other issues, the introverts' uneasiness about openly accommodating others and unpacking what happened in Cassinga carries the aura of disgrace embedded in the gruesomeness of the violence. As it emerged from my correspondence with individual paratroopers as well as by reaching out to a few of their immediate family members, the Cassinga massacre left many paratroopers riddled with psychological problems. This trouble is evident in some of the responses, which I received from individual paratroopers, harboring strong or inflammatory language. In one of such email correspondences, the correspondent promised menacingly to "fuck [me] up before he speaks to (me)"²⁷⁰ or accept an interview. In the logic of things however, this individual's verbalized anger does not intend doing to me what it exclaims it will do or intends doing. Instead, this genre of verbal assault can be ascribed to the fact that following the fall of apartheid, ex-service men were abandoned, many of them suffering from emotional and psychological trauma.²⁷¹ There had never been "formalized counseling" or support for the soldiers who returned from the war zones. Many of them returned perturbed by the senseless violence they committed or carried out. The SADF did nothing to stop the onset of

²⁶⁹ Email exchange with anonymous Cassinga paratrooper, February, 2010.

²⁷⁰ Email exchange with anonymous Cassinga paratrooper, February, 2010

²⁷¹ A statement by Cliff Holt, in "Soldiers relive apartheid war in surge of writing: post traumatic stress prevented many from talking about it till now," *Weekend Argus*, 14 October 2006, p. 15.

Post Traumatic Disorder (PTSD),²⁷² especially in considering the soldiers who were returning from places where extreme violence was unleashed, such as in the case of the Cassinga massacre.

It is also important to note that the SADF was a ruthless entity even to its own employees and their families. This relates to the fact that the public and indeed many families remained (even to this day) in the dark²⁷³ about what their family members experienced or went through at the fronts. Consider the following statement:

My wife did not understand the context or the logical sequence. She knew I had been in the war, but knew I didn't speak about it. By writing it (post-war), it's given both of us a better understanding.²⁷⁴

Since nobody was expected to say anything about the madness of war, it was impossible for friends and families, including spouses, to suspect that returning soldiers were suffering from difficult memories that required individual families' understanding and finding ways to help and assist the victims. Instead, many families, it appears, interpreted that their family members were proud and happy when they returned from the front. Consider the following naive interpretation by one of the spouses upon her husband's return from the Cassinga massacre:

Eventually, my husband came home ... he was wounded (on) his wrist ... The paratroopers talked often about that day and their experiences and I did not always take in what they said. But, I knew that this was a day in their lives they would never forget but somehow I thought it was just another episode in their military lives. Something they were proud of because they are not only soldiers of the best quality but paratroopers prepared to go and do their duty and lose lives for the sake of others.²⁷⁵

One assumes that many other families and women married to soldiers in the service of the SADF shared perceptions and experiences such as that of Mrs. Breytenbach. Ironically, soldiers

²⁷² A statement by Cliff Holt, "Soldiers relive apartheid war in surge of writing: post traumatic stress prevented many from talking about it till now," *Weekend Argus*, 14 October 2006, p. 15; Karen Batley (ed.), *A secret burden: memories of the border war by South African soldiers who fought in it* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2007).

²⁷³ Jan Breytenbach, *Eagle strike*, pp. 384 - 387.

²⁷⁴ A statement by Cliff Holt, "Soldiers relive apartheid war in surge of writing: post traumatic stress prevented many from talking about it till now." In the *Weekend Argus*, 14 October 2006, p. 15.

²⁷⁵ Statement by Jan Breytenbach's wife. In Jan Breytenbach, *Eagle Strike*, pp. 384 - 387.

returning from the war front or episodes like Cassinga were not “proud of their duty” as their families perceived them to be. Crucially important however is noting that the predominant presence of psychological problems, presumably among many ex-SADF members, is not only confined to the suffering of individuals alone. Such individual problems discharge far-reaching negative effects within the radius of family circles, workplace and other interactions in the public space, such as in the response I got from Dolf that he would “fuck” me up before he accepts that I interview him.

An anonymous daughter (name withheld) of a former Cassinga paratrooper disclosed in email correspondence through an intermediary, that her father is “very angry with the SADF ... (he was) heavy handed ... and exceptionally strict on (us) when (we) were growing up.”²⁷⁶ Nevertheless, this lady now in her early thirties, does not understand or know the things that made her father particularly angry with the SADF or why he had been harsh with his children. An anonymous former SADF conscript suspects that the absence of the “peace of mind” of this former paratrooper means that this individual probably “carries a burden of having killed excessively for many years. If he can speak up he would find some peace of mind.”²⁷⁷ But it is also important to note that the former SADF paratroopers’ anger and discontent with the SADF also reflects the fact that there has been no acknowledgment for what they (ex-SADF members) did in service, and no mourning for their losses. And, as things turned around at the end of the conflict, it became apparent that the SADF did not only lose the war but also fought “an unpopular war - one that was not politically correct.”²⁷⁸

The polemicists

Jan Breytenbach is perhaps the greatest proponent of the SADF version of the Cassinga event in the present time. However, in considering that every “narrative practice has its own requirements which undermine” the presentation of “truth” as experienced on the ground, or in ways “truth” is conveyed in “a juridical sense,” it becomes evident that “in a true war story nothing is ever

²⁷⁶ Email exchange with anonymous daughter of a former Cassinga paratrooper, February 2010.

²⁷⁷ Interview with an anonymous former SADF military conscript, 2010.

²⁷⁸ In the *Weekend Argus*, “Soldiers relive apartheid war in surge of writing,” 14 October 2006, p. 15.

absolutely true.”²⁷⁹ In fact, the “truth” of war or violence is not inherent in any “narrative practice,” but “truth” of the matter resides, as I have already pointed out, in what the proponents of the Cassinga massacre seek to undermine.

The polemicists category of the Cassinga paratroopers, therefore, consists mainly of individuals whom Mike McWilliams rightly describes as “emotional about the facts being published [by senior officers] because (such facts) do not match”²⁸⁰ individual paratroopers’ experiences of witnessing Cassinga as it took place. Polemicists aspire to narrate and present testimonies of the previously untold individual stories of paratroopers’ experiences of the unfolding of the Cassinga attack on the ground.²⁸¹ However, polemicists risk victimization and ostracization by the disclaimers for disclosing in public things that the SADF wants to keep concealed. The disclaimers accuse the polemicists of being disloyal, disrespectful of the army and their former commanders, and ridicule them as “junior officers (who) suffer from delusions of adequacy.”²⁸²

The fact of the matter is, since the advent of democracy in South Africa, there has been a “surge of publications ... on the internet ... and unofficial servicemen’s websites ...”²⁸³ In addition, the veterans of the war are, according to an ‘anonymous former senior citizen force officer,’ “seeking fellowship privately rather than publicly.”²⁸⁴ One example is the Operation Savannah veterans’ organization that consists of members of the SADF who took part in Operation Savannah in 1975 and 1976. Other associations include former members of the 61 Mechanized Battalion Group as well as individual former soldiers with stories about their experiences of the border war.²⁸⁵

In this context, in recent times, there have been explosive exchanges of conflicting accounts of the Cassinga experience among the Cassinga paratroopers themselves. This tension is recognizably between the extreme paratroopers, disclaimers, who deny the massacre (and require individual paratroopers to keep the secrets), and the moderate paratroopers who feel that they

²⁷⁹ Tim O’ Brien, “How to tell a true war story.” In *The things they carried*, 1990, p. 82. Cited in Leonard V. Smith, *The embattled self*, p. 14.

²⁸⁰ http://www.sainfantry.co.za/e107_plugins/forum/forum_viewtopic.php?166

²⁸¹ See anonymous soldier statement. In *The Star*, 8 May 1993. footnote

²⁸² http://www.sainfantry.co.za/e107_plugins/forum/forum_viewtopic.php?166

²⁸³ *The Weekend Argus*, “Soldiers relive apartheid war in surge of writing,” 14 October 2006, p. 15.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p. 15.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p. 15. Also visit: http://www.sainfantry.co.za/e107_plugins/forum/forum_viewtopic.php?166

“have spent a long time digesting” their bitter experiences of the Cassinga attack. The moderates or polemicists are unhappy with what they call the “astounding accounts” of Cassinga by senior officers. These debates unfold in newspaper articles, journals, books, and the SADF veteran websites such as the South African Infantry Association website.²⁸⁶ In one of such instance, Reconnaissance Commando Lt HP (Pierre) Hough (retired) rebuked the absence of the “many defining moments” in the paratroopers’ published accounts and writings of the Cassinga massacre. Hough argues that:

Cassinga Day is overshadowed by its tragic results: many innocent women and children or non-combatants died! ... Unfortunately, it is surprising that the paratroopers’ published materials on Cassinga ... all missed ... first-hand evidence ... on the defining moments at Cassinga.²⁸⁷

The central argument in this study regarding the impossibility of any text to elicit tangible evidence of brutal violence, is in fact one of Hough’s major concerns. He is particularly “dismayed” and astonished by the fact that the paratroopers’ articles and memoirs omit practical realities on the ground. For example, he is specifically concerned with Jan Breytenbach’s book, the *Eagle Strike*, which he describes as not an “honest reporting”,²⁸⁸ of what actually unfolded on the ground in line with what individual paratroopers experienced at different corners and outskirts of the camp.

On the contrary, Cassinga disclaimers want the public to believe that no paratrooper disagrees with the SADF official version of the Cassinga massacre. This is the context of the following statement:

Except for one senior paratrooper, a Brigadier General [Edward George McGill Alexander] and so - called ‘Master jumper’ ... not a single paratrooper from among the 367 who took part in the Cassinga “massacre” had stepped forward to confess that his conscience had finally forced him to spill the beans.²⁸⁹

Breytenbach and others are stuck in the argument that the disclaimers’ version of the Cassinga event is the “fundamental truth ... unvarnished by the wishful and supine thinking of some

²⁸⁶ http://www.sainfantry.co.za/e107_plugins/forum/forum_viewtopic.php?166

²⁸⁷ http://www.sainfantry.co.za/e107_plugins/forum/forum_viewtopic.php?166

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ Jan Breytenbach, *Eagle Strike*, p.xv.

contemporary ex-soldiers and politicians.”²⁹⁰ Interestingly, disclaimers argue that any narration of the Cassinga event that falls outside, or is critical of the SADF official version, is untrue and misleading. For example, when Mike McWilliams learned about Hough’s intentions to write his own account of what he actually experienced in Cassinga, he rebuked Hough because he would never articulate or divulge any tangible truth through descriptive writing of the Cassinga experience. Why? Because, “words ...cannot ... tell it.”²⁹¹

Similarly, in a case involving Brigadier General McGill Alexander’s (the same as Brigadier General Edward George Alexander) MA thesis, “The Cassinga Raid,” Jan Breytenbach was “perturbed” when the author (a former paratrooper) raised issues of the paratroopers’ ruthless killing of women and children in Cassinga. Breytenbach argues that Alexander:

Failed to research this aspect (Cassinga) usefully and critically as any researcher should have done. Instead, he ignored what I and my paratroopers had to say about the matter by lending his ears out to hysterical accusations from the opposition, including the new SANDF in which he had served while preparing his thesis. Irremediable damage had already been done to the good name of the paratroopers and the Air Force of the old SADF and Alexander (formerly a respected paratrooper) blatantly reinforced the damaging perception that we acted like a bunch of blood thirsty murderers and rapists. How do we rectify it? I doubt if we can ever put the record straight.²⁹²

Breytenbach continued with the following lines:

In my mind he (Alexander) has no loyalty [for breaking the silence] to his former paratrooper comrades in arms. As a paratrooper myself, I therefore, no longer wish to be associated with Brigadier General McGill Alexander because of a Masters Cum Laude degree he had acquired at the expense of the good name of the paratroopers of which he too was once a commander.²⁹³

²⁹⁰ Mike McWilliams, *foreword* to Jan Breytenbach’s book, *The Eagle Strike*.

²⁹¹ http://www.sainfantry.co.za/e107_plugins/forum/forum_viewtopic.php?166

²⁹² Jan Breytenbach, *The Eagle Strike*, p. 544.

²⁹³ *Ibid*, p. 561.

The trouble here involves one central issue. Why anoint it as the “fundamental truth” when Cassinga is constructed as part of a military infrastructure, but ridicule it as “false” when other paratroopers express concern that the SADF official version is “overshadowed” by not conceding the spilled blood of “many innocent women and children”? These attacks illustrate the bitter relationship between disclaimers and polemicists who do not agree with the SADF official version of denying the killing of innocent women and children in Cassinga. These are some of the complicated issues that this chapter has attempted to explore and thereby challenge the reader to pursue to the next level. In addition, it should be borne in mind that the higher the rank or commanding role that one played in making Cassinga a success for the SADF, the greater the degree of negativity towards acknowledging that Cassinga was a massacre.

Lastly, it should be noted that the systematic mass killings of civilians in Cassinga did not only result in the victims’ never-ending emotional suffering. Individual paratroopers also left Cassinga with painful and disquieting memories about the inhumane and unacceptable violence which they unleashed on defenceless civilians in Cassinga. The following statement by one of the paratroopers illuminates this scenario:

There were just too many wounded Some conscious, some were not. We found this woman clutching her screaming baby ... (with) terrible wounds inflicted by an Air Force bomb. There was no hope for her. I had to shoot her ... I don’t know how many people I shot that day. ... I can never describe what it did to me. It was too much. I later broke down.²⁹⁴

²⁹⁴ Anonymous soldier, *The Star*, 8 May 1993.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE AFTERMATH AND THE VICTIMS' LONG OVERDUE JUSTICE

If the Cassinga attack has left the perpetrators emotionally wounded, as suggested in the statements of the anonymous paratrooper above, how much damage and suffering did it cause to the victims of the Cassinga massacre? This chapter explores the damage, effects and unresolved issues affecting the victims, in general, since that terrible episode. As I have pointed out earlier, the SADF's killing of innocent civilians in Cassinga was a deliberate plan.²⁹⁵ According to the TRC reports, the Cassinga massacre amounted to "a breach of humanitarian law."²⁹⁶ In this context, following the collapse and fragmentation of colonial rule in Namibia, which also arguably signaled the eminent fall of apartheid in South Africa, the victims of war and other forms of colonial violence hoped that independent Namibia would pursue humanitarian issues and make accountable those who perpetrated such violations under apartheid rule in Namibia.

However, it turned out that the importance of shielding and protecting the perpetrators from possible prosecution for the alleged violence against civilians overwrote the victims' demand for legal action. With particular reference to the theme of this study, the survivors and victims of the Cassinga massacre are unhappy about a number of things. The following are the key issues that exacerbate the Cassinga victims' anger and suffering: (1) reconciliation without justice; (2) the impassable frontier between the Cassinga mass graves and the affected family members.

As I have pointed out earlier, the Cassinga massacre is one grain of sand among many other untold killing and disappearances of innocent Namibians inside and outside the country during the South African colonial rule of Namibia. Prior to discussing the pertinent areas of unhappiness of Cassinga victims, it is very important, to bring into context the broader picture of brutal acts

²⁹⁵ Chief of the SADF (Top Secret), "PSYAC Planning Directive No. 3 \ 78, Operation Reindeer, Phase Three (Media coverage), 25 April 1078," Source: The SANDF Department of Defence Documentation Centre, Archive, Pretoria.

²⁹⁶ *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report*, "The state outside South Africa between 1960 and 1990," Vol. 2, Ch. 2 (1998), Cape Town, pp. 50 - 58.

of violence and suffering perpetrated against Namibians by apartheid South Africa and colonialism more generally.

To start with, the issue of the Cassinga massacre contains some echo of the twentieth century genocide (1904 - 1908) of the Hereros by the German troops of colonial occupation in what the imperial government then called German South West Africa. I make this argument with reference to Lieutenant-General Von Trotha's extermination order of the Herero population. Of course, Cassinga was not a genocide in terms of what actions officially constitute a genocide, whereas the case of the Hereros was genocidal, conducted over an extended period and across the length and breadth of the "Herero nation" which paid dearly in terms of lives and property. More than eighty thousand of the known total Herero population were killed, displaced and starved to death as their means of survival, predominantly cattle, were confiscated, deliberately killed and the few water points in the "dry desert sands" or Omaheke, of the Kalahari Desert where the Germans mercilessly drove the Hereros were poisoned.²⁹⁷ The point here is that there is a parallel between General Von Trotha's extermination order then, and the order to exterminate Namibians in Cassinga in 1978 by Peter. W. Botha, the Minister of Defence at the time of the Cassinga massacre and later Prime Minister and State President of South Africa.²⁹⁸

Franz Fanon refers to decolonization as "the meeting of two forces, opposed to each other by their very nature, which in fact owe their originality to that sort of substantification which results from and is nourished by the situation in the colonies."²⁹⁹ In the context of the recent Namibian war of national liberation from apartheid South Africa, two armed confrontational sides were involved. These were the largely unpopular SADF on one hand, and the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN) fighters on the other.

²⁹⁷ See for example, Jan- Bart Gewald, *Herero Heroes: a socio-political history of the Herero of Namibia 1890-1923* (Oxford: James Currey Ltd., 1999), pp. 170 - 211; Jeremy Sarkin. *Colonial Genocide and reparations claims in the 21st century: the socio-legal context of claims under international law by the Herero against German for Genocide in Namibia, 1904-1908* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2009).

²⁹⁸ Of course, the case of the Cassinga killings occupied a relatively tiny space, a civilian camp, unlike the entire "Herero nation." Nevertheless, both killings were conducted by foreign forces of colonial occupation and were instigated to annihilate indigenous populations for political and economic gains of the colonialists.

²⁹⁹ Franz Fanon, *Wretched of the earth*, translated by Constance Farrington (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), p. 35.

Between 1966 and 1989 PLAN fighters, with the assistance of local communities, waged a protracted guerrilla warfare campaign against the powerful South African Army of colonial occupation. Though clandestine by necessity, SWAPO fighters received a great deal of support among local communities in the former war zones, particularly in Owamboland. Nevertheless, in the nature of every armed conflict, it would be practically incorrect to discount PLAN fighters from practices of violence against civilians. The reality is that, in many instances, SWAPO combatants were accused of executing civilians suspected of being informers or collaborators with the colonial government.

Within apartheid South Africa, “necklacing”³⁰⁰ was used as a weapon to root out enemy collaborators within the population of the oppressed. In similar ways, the killing of *omapuli* by SWAPO fighters served the same purpose as the “necklacing” of perceived enemy collaborators in South Africa. Chris Hani described this violent device, “necklacing,” as a “revolutionary method of dealing with collaborators ... to remove the cancer of collaboration of the puppets.”³⁰¹

In the case of Namibia, civilians did not openly exercise “summary executions” of the suspected enemy informers. But they reported people in their communities suspected of being “enemy puppets” or collaborators to PLAN combatants. Alleged South African collaborators were locally called *omapuli* or *epuli* in the singular form. *Omapuli* were executed, killed violently, or have disappeared to this day. However, the practice of knowing and identifying who was actually an *epuli* was a complicated exercise. To this day, it remains very difficult to identify and provide evidence about who actually was in the secret payroll of the SADF.

There is also a concern that some accusations emerged because of personal jealousy and other unethical practices among different categories of people and class in society. Another danger was that there were also South African trained secret police, locally known as *Iikengelela*. These

³⁰⁰ Riedwaan Moosage, “The impasse of violence: writing necklacing into a history of liberation struggle in South Africa” (MA thesis), University of the Western Cape, June 2010. Also online at <http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=2645>; <http://mybroadband.co.za/vb/showthread.php/86046-Guards-robbed-forced-to-drink-petrol>; <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/hrvtrans/submit/np2.htm>.

³⁰¹ Ibid, p. 74.

were the equivalent of the South African *Askaris*,³⁰² who committed atrocities against civilians while disguised as SWAPO combatants.

In efforts to suppress and pacify the Namibian opposition to colonial rule and the illegal occupation of Namibia, the SADF and other South African security forces killed thousands of innocent Namibians in the “operational areas and across the Namibian border.”³⁰³ In most cases, such killings were deliberate acts of reprisal against civilians who were suspected of being SWAPO supporters or followers. The SADF security forces did not only create violence, but also put in place proactive mechanisms to deny or justify (and, it is debatable whether any act of violence is justifiable) acts of violence. For example, sometimes when the SADF planned and carried out mass murders of innocent civilians (SWAPO followers) it deliberately created counterfeit “grave incidents.”³⁰⁴ Such dangerous war strategies were necessary to create the impression that SWAPO was terrorizing and murdering civilians, namely “its own people.”

³⁰² Askaris were conduits of passing secret information of the ANC to the state. They were black policemen and agents, among the civilian population, recruited by the apartheid government to feed it with information about activities of the ANC, plans, channels of material support, and so on.

³⁰³ Some of the well known violent episodes that the South African security forces were suspected to have carried out include the following. The Hochland Park \ Windhoek shootings of demonstrating Namibians on 10 December 1959, resulting in the killings of 13 civilians. Then there was the Oshipanda \ Oshikuku killings, which happened “on 10 March 1982 at a traditional homestead of Kuku Gisela Uupindi. Ten civilians innocent Namibian men, women and children were cold-bloodedly executed by soldiers belonging to the so-called Ovambo home-guard which forms part of the South African Army of repression and colonial occupation in Namibia. The soldiers came to the homestead (belonging to Kuku Gisela Uupindi), in the middle of the night and ordered all 12 members of the extended family to line-up. Minutes thereafter, they started spraying their victims with bullets. Only two survived - by feigning death. They have unmistakably identified the soldiers. They recognized a certain Nakale whom they described as notorious and brutal commander of a task force of the South African army known as Koevoet.” Author not cited, In *The review of African political economy*, Vol. No. 24 (Summer 1982), p. 122; Also available in a “statement by Sam Nuuyoma, President of South West Africa People’s Organization (SWAPO) of Namibia, to a meeting of the EEC Parliamentary Group, Brussels, 28th September, 1982, pp. 7 - 8. One other violent episode involving the killing of civilians happened at Oshakati when a bomb exploded inside a local bank on the 19th February 1988. 27 people were killed and more than 70 others badly injured. Most of the victims were nurses and teachers. The perpetrators were never convicted, though signs indicate that the South African police perpetrated the bombing in order to discredit SWAPO. Nevertheless, South Africa blamed SWAPO for the Oshakati killings and reacted with a failed air raid into SWAPO bases, on the morning of February 20 1988, in the Lubango area such as, the Tobias Hainyeko Training base where I was that morning. Visit: <http://www.spiritus-temporis.com/1988-oshakati-bomb-blast/>

³⁰⁴ For example, the contested assassinations of Clemens Kapuu (assassinated on March 27, 1978), the paramount chief of the Ovaherero community; Toivo Shiyagaya (assassinated on February 1978); as well as the destruction of the Ruacana Hydro Electric Power Station, in a space of a few months and days (respectively) before the Cassinga attack. In this relation, according to South Africa, Operation Reindeer was aroused as a result of “the recent border invasions from the Angolan side. There have been 49 incidents since August of last year (1977) to the end of January (1978). One of these border invasions have led to the murder of an Owambo minister, Toivo Shiyagaya. As a result, the SA Army has proceeded to implement more disciplined action as to protect the integrity of the area by following the terrorists. ... the murder of Kapuu, has created a relative good climate to justify Operation Reindeer

Incidents of this kind include murders of civilians especially prominent figures in different communities. This was a necessary pretext to “create (the public) impression that retaliatory actions (against ‘terrorists’ supporters/followers) were not only justifiable but necessary.”³⁰⁵ In this context, prior to the SADF attack on Cassinga, it was crucial to create “an impression of increasing SWAPO military activities in the operational area(s).”³⁰⁶ Such “grave incidents” were designed to “... reach a high intensity by D minus 2 (that is, 2 days before the Cassinga attack).”³⁰⁷

Therefore, in examining the Cassinga massacre, I have argued that the victims’ unending suffering and anger are not only testimonial to, and belated or extended traumatic experience of, the Cassinga event alone. Their memories are also linked to a hybrid of other traumatic experiences across the landscape of violence in Namibia and in the neighbouring countries where many Namibians sought refuge. For example, many of the Namibians who returned from exile had the misfortune to find their families killed and their homesteads destroyed.³⁰⁸ Civilians, particularly in the operational areas, the former war zones in northern Namibia, Owamboland,³⁰⁹ were frequently and deliberately killed, harassed, intimidated, beaten and their homesteads and

internationally. Delay of the operation will decrease the effect of the factors.” In The Chief of the SA Defence Force, “Press release by the Commander General, Cmdmt SWA General Major J. J. Geldenhuys,” H 30PS/328/3/3/1/2/1. Source: SANDF Archive, Pretoria. For debates about the assassination of Chief Kapuuo see Jan – Bart Gewald, “Who killed Clemens Kapuuo?” A paper presented at “Public History - Forgotten History,” Conference held at the University of Namibia 22 - 25 August 2000; Also in “Who killed Clemens Kapuuo?” Jeremy Silvester’s summary of Gewald paper. In *The Namibian Weekender*, 20 July 2001, p. 4.

³⁰⁵ Chief of SADF, “PSYAC Planning Directive No. 2 \ 1978, Operation Bruilof (top secret): Phase Two.” Source: SANDF Archive, Pretoria.

³⁰⁶ Chief of SADF, “PSYAC Planning Directive No. 2 \ 1978, Operation Bruilof (top secret): Phase Two.” Source: SANDF Archive, Pretoria.

³⁰⁷ Chief of SADF, “PSYAC Planning Directive No. 2 \ 1978, Operation Bruilof (top secret): Phase Two.” Source: SANDF Archive, Pretoria.

³⁰⁸ John Liebenberg & Patricia Hayes, *Bush of ghosts*, pp. 180 & 259.

³⁰⁹ Owamboland is located in the north central part of Namibia (along the border with southern Angola). It was the major combat zone between the South African troops and SWAPO fighters. For details about some accounts of colonial violence in northern Namibia read: Ellen Namhila, *Kaxumba KaNdola: man and myth. The biography of a barefoot soldier* (Basel: Basel Africa Bibliography, 2005); Ellen Namhila, *Tears of courage: five mothers, five stories, one victory* (Windhoek: Archives of Anti-Colonial Resistance and the Liberation Struggle Project, 2009); Ellen Namhila, *The price for freedom* (Windhoek: New Namibia Books, 1997).

property destroyed by the South African security forces. This was especially so of the Koevoet.³¹⁰

Koevoet was a counter - insurgency unit, based on the Rhodesian Selous Scouts model.³¹¹ Its top echelon was comprised of the battle - hardened veterans of the Rhodesian war - among them Colonel Eugene de Cock and Eric Winter, Captain Sakkie van Zyl and Beachball Vorster, Lieutenant Frans Conradie and Warrant officer Snakes Greyling. The Koevoet unit was arguably responsible for numerous human rights abuses, before Namibian independence, and operated with impunity.³¹²

Troubling stories are told about how the South African Security Forces³¹³ stopped at nothing to force information out of people. They razed homes, abducted people from their homes, tortured and shot civilians at will, stole and killed domestic animals. Especially when the Security Forces discovered the tracks of SWAPO guerrillas, the local people were intimidated and tortured to disclose the whereabouts of the “SWAPO terrorists.” Captured SWAPO fighters who refused to cooperate with the security forces were tortured badly, often unnecessarily shot dead,³¹⁴ or ended

³¹⁰ In addition to the Koevoet (a special police counter-insurgency unit), there was also the South West Africa Territorial Force (SWATF), formed at the beginning of the 80s. It conscripted Namibians into the force with intend to indigenize the military conflict. Boys as young as 14 years old were targeted for recruitment to fight against SWAPO combatants - their own brothers - who had taken up arms to liberate the country. Frustrating visitations by the SA security forces to schools (sometimes interrogating and beating up teachers and students) prompted many students to stay away from schools. In particular, it was mainly male students who stopped going to schools as rumors were spread that they would be recruited into the enemy forces. This resulted in many of us (both boys and girls) seeking ways to flee Namibia and join SWAPO in exile, as a way of avoiding forced recruitment into the South African security forces and to seek opportunities to complete our studies. This political harassment, the fear to join the SWATF or SWAPOL (the South West African Police Force) explains why the beginning of the 1980s experienced the largest exodus of children and youths, most of them leaving their parents behind for exile. See Peter Stiff, *The Covert War: Koevoet operations, Namibia 1979-1989* (Johannesburg: Galago Publishers, 2004).

³¹¹ Peter Stiff and Ron Reid. *Selous Scouts-Top Secret War as told to Peter Stiff* (Alberton: Galago Publishers, 1982).

³¹² *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report*, “The State outside South Africa between 1960 and 1990,” Vol. 2 / Ch. 2 (1998).

³¹³ Locally, the security forces were called *omakakunya*, which means merciless and brutal forces. It is a local slang originating from the earlier period of the South African rule of Namibia when the government institutionalized chiefs or headmen in place of customary kings among different ethnic communities of northern Namibia. The chiefs were protected by local Tribesmen, Home Guards, vested with the ruthless power to strip people naked for buttocks flogging. *Epokolo*, the thorny rib of the palm tree was the commonest tool of enforcing punishment by flogging. Such floggings were, by and large, politically motivated and men were primarily subjected to such public humiliations.

³¹⁴ See the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report*, “The State outside South Africa between 1960 and 1990,” Vol. 2, Ch. 2 (1998), Cape Town, p. 75.

up in notorious places such as the Oniimwandi detention camp east of Oshakati. The former Oniimwandi military and detention camp is where, according to oral sources, many victims who were suspected of rendering assistance to SWAPO fighters as well as captured SWAPO soldiers were harshly interrogated, severely tortured and many of them disappeared.

In particular, the police unit Koevoet (crowbar), a counter-insurgency unit set up by Brigadier Hans Dreyer of the South African Police's Security Branch in June 1979 - was widely perceived as more brutal than the SADF "because of its bounty or cash for corpses policy."³¹⁵ Each Koevoet involved in the killings received a monetary reward. According to the TRC reports, between R 1000 and R 2000 *kopgeld* or "cash-for-corpses" reward was paid.³¹⁶ The TRC also reported that:

At the height of the war, in the early to mid-1980s, Koevoet alone claimed a kill rate of around 300 to 500 people a year, for which its members were paid a bounty per corpse ... Koevoet ... kept no proper or official records of the identities, numbers or whereabouts of people it killed ... These practices were confirmed by journalists who were allowed to travel with security force units ... As the war progressed, South African security forces, especially Koevoet, resorted increasingly to summary executions of captured combatants. The payment of bounty served as an incentive for the extra-judicial murder of captives. The representative of the International Committee of the Red Cross in South West Africa said in 1981 that 'it simply does not happen in any conflict or battle that you have a clash with 200 people and forty-five killed and no prisoners or wounded are taken.'³¹⁷

The mutilated dead bodies were displayed publicly as a psychological weapon to intimidate local populations from supporting SWAPO. In his amnesty application in December 1996, Lance corporal Sean Callaghan described his experiences of serving with the Koevoet in the operational areas in northern Namibia as follows:

I can remember loading bodies onto and off casspurs (armed military vehicles). After a contact, we tied bodies onto spare tyres,³¹⁸ bumpers, mudguard, and left there until we got back to the base camp, until they could be unloaded. This

³¹⁵ *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report*, "The state outside South Africa between 1960 and 1990," Vol. 2, Ch. 2 (Cape Town: 1998), pp. 50-58.

³¹⁶ *Ibid*, 264 & 268.

³¹⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 68 - 70.

³¹⁸ John Liebenberg & Patricia Hayes, *Bush of ghosts*, pp. 47, 97 & 247.

could be (after) days of driving through thick bush, and the skin could be worn right off the bodies.³¹⁹

When I carried out interviews about the secret war graves in northern Namibia between 2000 and 2005,³²⁰ interviewees who witnessed the exhibition of mutilated and spoiled bodies in northern Namibia by the security forces showed me different places where unknown people had been buried in these secret graves, many of them in unmarked shallow mass or single graves. In most cases, according to oral accounts, when the SADF dumped spoiled bodies of alleged SWAPO fighters near Cuca shops or school grounds, security forces forced the public to view them and sometimes instructions were given for the corpses not to receive burials.³²¹

A number of international organizations also confirmed such horrific reports. For example, in 1981 a delegation from the British Council visited Namibia and “conducted extensive interviews with church and community representatives. They reported that torture and intimidation were widespread. Their documentation of more than twenty individual cases included incidents where corpses of alleged guerrillas were dragged through villages behind military vehicles.”³²²

As many civilians feared for their lives, numbers abandoned their homes and communities and fled or attempted to flee the violence to neighbouring countries, such as independent Angola. Frequently, the SADF went after them in pursuit with massive force to capture or eliminate them. In either case, civilians had always been, by and large, the victims. The SADF also carried out regular air raids of the settlements where displaced Namibians established themselves into organized communities of exiled civilian populations. Such communities in refugee camps,

³¹⁹ *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report*, “The State outside South Africa between 1960 and 1990”, Vol. 2, ch. 2 (Cape Town, 1998). Also see a report by Christof Maletsky, “Koevoet killed for hell of it: teams kept scoreboards of death.” Online at <http://www.bnvillage.co.uk/black-roots-village/81294-koevoet-killed-hell.html>.

³²⁰ The history research project was funded by the Ford Foundation to collect and document material culture and oral history in the former Owamboland. It conducted interviews with local people about local cultures in north central Namibia and the impact of war violence on individual lives. The project also hosted a weekly radio program, published booklets and organized exhibitions.

³²¹ Interviews with Festus Kaapanda KaNangolo, David Ilende, Shivute Sebulon, Selma Nangolo, Julia Nuulimba and many others.

³²² *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report*, “The State outside South Africa between 1960 and 1990,” Vol. 2, ch. 2 (1998), Cape Town, pp. 47, 97 and 247.

particularly in Angola and Zambia,³²³ received logistical support from the international community, including the significant role played by UNICEF and the UNHCR, who sponsored many Namibian refugee children to complete their studies in foreign countries.

“Reconciliation without justice is meaningless”

The Namibian policy of national reconciliation may be applauded from outside as genuinely working and exemplary for other nations emerging from political, racial or ethnic conflicts. But since independence the majority of the Namibian population who suffered South African colonial occupation and brutality have expressed great resentment about the national policy of reconciliation. For many Namibians, in general, the Namibian model of reconciliation means reversed violence. This claim is embedded in an acknowledgement that the genre of Namibian reconciliation inhibits the victims of South African colonial violence demanding social justice for the untold damage of apartheid-colonialism in Namibia. Hence, reconciliation means another genre of emotional torture of the majority population groups that already bear the historical brunt of apartheid and colonial violence.

As illustrated below, the majority of the Namibian population feels that reconciliation is not an equitable project. It is accused of bias and favoritism by way of offering preferential treatment, such as the provision of protection to those accused of involvement in heinous crimes against innocent Namibians.

In October 1990, a National Consultation of Churches was held in Windhoek, Namibia. Its theme was “Mission of the Church: reconciliation and nation-building in independent Namibia.” In its closing statements, the church groups outlined that “National reconciliation without confession was ... meaningless.” The consultation called upon the “oppressors, particularly the

³²³ The following were some of the Namibian refugee settlements outside its border: Cassinga, Kwanza Sul, Sumbe, Ndalatando, Kabuta, Namibia Health and Education Centre near Lubango (Angola); Nyango, Kitwe (Zambia); Ludima in Congo (Brazzaville).

white society, to confess their active role in promoting and defending colonialism and apartheid; to confess the sinful attitude of viewing black humanity as inferior...”³²⁴

When they reviewed the political situation “shortly before the implementation of UN Resolution 435³²⁵ at its meeting in Luanda from 8 – 11 February 1989, SWAPO’s Central Committee felt that a reconciliation policy was necessary to ‘enhance the chances of peace in Namibia’ and to ‘heal the wounds of the war.’ The CC’s press statement of 23 May 1989 announced its resolution to adopt a policy of ‘national reconciliation.’”³²⁶ Certainly at independence, as a standard requirement for any nation emerging from war, “the focus immediately shifted from winning the war to winning the peace.”

SWAPO moved quickly to declare the policy of national reconciliation. Although Namibia has been remarkably peaceful since independence, reconciliation, which is politically perceived as the cornerstone of the prevailing peace and stability, is seen by the formerly oppressed in Namibia as irreconcilable with the practice of equitable justice.³²⁷ This is unambiguous in the voice of the church to which many Namibians are spiritually affiliated. In fact, reconciliation is “just a rhetorical concept and a tool” for maintaining racial, class and economic inequalities in society.³²⁸ In fact, reconciliation is a political tool: in the Oshiwambo language, reconciliation translates into *edhiminathanopo lyopapolitika*. This translation infers that reconciliation is a political project, one that is concerned with advocating political forgiveness.

When I conducted interviews with survivors of the Cassinga massacre most of them bemoaned the national policy of reconciliation. One of the issues they raised is the daunting character of this policy. It coerces the victims into submission and compromises their dignity and humanity.

³²⁴ Gerhard Totemeyer, “The role of the church in Namibia: fostering a discourse on reconciliation.” In Du Pisani, A. R. Kössler & W.A. Lindeke (Eds.). *The long aftermath of war-reconciliation and transition in Namibia* (Freiburg: Arnold Bergstraesser Institut, 2010), p. 118.

³²⁵ A UN Security Council Resolution adopted on 29 September 1978. It puts “forward proposals for a cease-fire and UN-supervised elections” in Namibia under South Africa apartheid and colonial rule. Resolution 435 ultimately led to the independence of Namibia in 1990 after protracted and bitter liberation struggle.

³²⁶ Gerhard Totemeyer, “The role of the church in Namibia,” 2009, p. 117.

³²⁷ “National reconciliation-lip service or reality?” In the *New Era*, 15 August 2008.

³²⁸ Gerhard Totemeyer, “The role of the church in Namibia, 2009, p. 117.

The victims are compelled to repress³²⁹ and contain trauma without alternative provisions for its remedy. In a broader sense, this way of shielding the war-time perpetrators of violence betrays the fundamental principles of SWAPO as a liberation movement. In fact, liberation movements across Africa were spearheaded by “compassionate” national projects embedded in the promise of national liberation, restoration of justice and human dignity which colonial rule jeopardized.

Richard Falk bemoans the way former liberation movements abandoned and betrayed the people’s cause following the attainment of political independence:

The great transformative struggles of the past century involved a series of challenges throughout the global south to get rid of the European colonial empires. But, political independence did not bring an end to the more indirect, but still insidious, methods of control designed to protect economic and strategic interests. Such a dynamic meant reliance on political leaders that would sacrifice the wellbeing of their own people to serve the wishes of their unacknowledged former colonial masters.³³⁰

Chris Tapscott’s analysis of the “symbolic gestures of national reconciliation”³³¹ in Namibia puts it this way:

While the policy of national reconciliation has been lauded internationally as a mark of political maturity ... (and) while (it) has played an important role in overcoming the immediate political, racial and ethnic tensions of the past, for many Namibians the policy is also seen to be entrenching the status quo by protecting the pre-independence gains of the minority and by legitimizing patterns of social differentiation that had persisted in the colonial era.³³²

To this end, Henning Melber adds the following:

National reconciliation and no institutionalization ... declared the past would be left behind without being publicly debated for remembrance and conscious dialogue over the injustices committed.³³³

³²⁹ Lauren Dobell, “Silence in context: truth and / or reconciliation in Namibia,” *Journal of Southern African studies*, vol. 23/ 2 (1997) 371- 382.

³³⁰ Falk Richard, “The toxic residue of colonialism,” online at <http://english.aljazeera.net/indepth/opinion/2011/02/2011213201140768988.html#>

³³¹ Henning Melber, “National reconciliation - lip service or reality?” In *New Era*, 15 August 2008.

³³² Chris Tapscott, “National reconciliation, social equity and class formation in independent Namibia,” *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 19 / 1 (March, 1993), pp. 29 - 39.

³³³ “National reconciliation-lip service or reality?” In *New Era*, 15 August 2008. Similar arguments about the Namibian national reconciliation and other unaddressed issues in post - colonial Namibia are available in the following publications: Henning Melber (ed.), *Transition in Namibia: which changes for whom?* (Uppsala: nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2007); Kim Groop, “The Church, the State and the issue of national reconciliation in Namibia”

In considering these views, there is a fertile ground to argue that other than its “rhetorical concept” or the falsely painted outside picture that is politically packaged, reconciliation is problematic and unpopular among the actual victims of colonial violence in Namibia. Whether issues confronting Namibia today in relation to its colonial past can only be addressed satisfactorily through the “institutionalization” of the policy of national reconciliation (such as in the case of the failed TRC project in South Africa), or open dialogues over the injustices committed by South African apartheid and colonial rule in Namibia, is debatable. What appears obvious however is the fact that the Namibian policy of national reconciliation is a political commodity initiated by external powers (as I will elaborate later) to deny Namibia’s victimized population groups their inalienable rights and justice.

The effective collapse of justice in the application of the Namibian model of reconciliation is tantamount to breaking down the victims mentally and emotionally. In a similar vein, Mahmood Mamdani has discussed “the collapse of a paradigm of justice” in postcolonial equatorial Africa and the “ascendancy” of a problematic paradigm by the name of reconciliation in the case of the 1994 postapartheid South Africa,³³⁴ with “no built-in mechanism for a mandatory reciprocity.” Mamdani’s formulation echoes the undesirable end result whereby both postcolonial Namibia and postapartheid South Africa legalized reconciliation without necessarily seeking to prosecute and punish perpetrators of the premeditated and systematic killings of civilians.

Echoing the same concern, Paul Conway writes that reconciliation in Namibia “implic(s) amnesty or forgiveness but without any process that allowed for a sweeping investigation of war

(Åbo Akademi University, Finland, 2010); Joe Oloka-Onyango, “The status of human rights in Sub-Saharan Africa, Namibia,” Human Rights Library, University of Minnesota; “Don’t force our hand: govt,” *The Namibian*, 12 Sept 2007; Andre Du Pisani, “Liberation and tolerance.” In Henning Melber (ed.). *Re-examining liberation in Namibia political culture since independence* (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2003); Andre Du Pisani, Reinhart Kossler, William A. Lindeke (eds.). *The long aftermath of war-reconciliation and transition in Namibia* (Arnold Bergstraesser Institut, 2010), pp. 129 - 136; Reinhart Koessler, “Public Memory, Reconciliation and the Aftermath of War: a Preliminary Framework with Special Reference to Namibia.” In, Henning Melber (ed.). *Re-examining liberation in Namibia political culture since independence* (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2003), pp. 99-112.

³³⁴ See Mahmood Mamdani, “When does reconciliation turn into a denial of justice,” Sam Molutshungu Memorial Lectures Pretoria, 1998 (HSRC Publishers).

crimes ... prosecution of unrepentant criminals, or compensation to victims.”³³⁵ In this respect, postcolonial Namibian reconciliation is oblivious to the will of the people and obviously intimidates and prohibits the victims from laying claims against the well-known perpetrators of apartheid-colonial violence. As I have already said, this disturbing scenario suggests the persistence of the colonial and racial mentality of privileging and treating colonial masters preferentially and as superior and untouchable.

In this context, above, the Cassinga victims’ pervasive suffering and anger are partly embedded in the disappointment, frustration and despair when considering the numerous injustices that reconciliation is associated with, promotes and defends. For example, the victims are unhappy with the sweeping amnesty granted to the perpetrators, irrespective of the crimes they are suspected to have committed and many of whom remain unrepentant. Think about Colonel Jan Breytenbach (and others) who, despite his commanding role in Cassinga is publicly unapologetic and, vocally, continues to cause further suffering to survivors and families of the missing people by publicly and continuously denying the Cassinga massacre.

The general feeling among the victims is that genuine forgiveness and reconciliation are unattainable without a fair trial of perpetrators, as long as they continue to deny the defenselessness and innocence of the Cassinga victims. The amnesty granted to the perpetrators is thus ineffective as it is biased against the victims. This is also the case in South Africa where the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established to hear the crimes committed by the SADF and the apartheid government in general, but the commission ended rather inconclusively. That is, it ended without holding the perpetrators accountable for the numerous acts of brutal violence committed against civilians during apartheid rule in South Africa.³³⁶

³³⁵ Paul Conway, “Truth and reconciliation: the road not taken in Namibia,” in the *Online Journal of peace and conflict resolution* Vol. 5/1 (Summer 2003), pp. 66 - 76; Gwen Lister, “Concentrate on the issues,” in *The Namibian*, November 5, 1999, p. 5.

³³⁶ According to Kader Asmal, “the Truth and Reconciliation Commission lack(ed) a prosecutorial function precisely because it lack(ed) the procedural safeguards necessary to determine individual guilty or innocence. If those safeguards are built into the process by judicial ‘fiat,’ then the question arises: why the commission (did) not pronounce on individual guilt or innocence, converting itself into a full-blown war crimes tribunal (similar to the Nuremberg trials) that recommends criminal and civil sanctions, or even - by status - is empowered to impose them?” Kader Asmal (et al.), *Reconciliation through truth: a reckoning of apartheid’s criminal governance* (Cape Town and Johannesburg: David Phillip and Mayibuye Books, 1997), p. 23; Desmond Tutu, *No future without forgiveness* (New York: Doubleday, 1999).

Except for the granting of “conditional amnesty,”³³⁷ which did not, as Juan E. Mendez put it, “apply automatically but for which potential defendants must make a formal application. The benefit (was) granted only in exchange for full and truthful confession.”³³⁸

The TRC as a process of enforcing the victims and perpetrators of apartheid to make “truth confessions” is implausible in practical terms, therefore it serves more of a transitional political function. This requires further discussion, but I should leave it here as it implies a different trajectory. Nonetheless, the way the TRC dealt with issues of the “victors’ justice”³³⁹ in postapartheid South Africa can be argued as having been highly influential in Namibia’s own process of dealing with issues of justice and reconciliation. This is taking into consideration the fact that the political landscapes of the two countries are inextricably connected and intertwined since South African rule in Namibia. Thus, the failure or success of reconciliation in South Africa would have meant the same in Namibia too.

The TRC and Namibia

“In 1997, South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) requested that hearings be held in Namibia ... The Namibian government formally rejected that request.”³⁴⁰ Nonetheless, Namibia’s rejection of the South African model of reconciliation was on the basis of the argument that the country is “sovereign and independent.” Some officials of the Namibian government were quoted to have argued that Namibia should not simply copy what might or might not be done in South Africa.³⁴¹ Politicians also argued that Namibia understands its past better and could visualize negative consequences which were likely to result from “simply copying” and pasting other countries’ formulas for dealing with their unique pasts. Such political

³³⁷ Ifi Amadiume and An Naim Abdullahi (eds.), *The politics of memory: truth, healing and social justice*, 2000, p. 134.

³³⁸ Juan E. Mendez, “Latin America experience of accountability.” In Amadiume, Ifi and Abdullahi, An Na’im (eds.), *The politics of memory: truth, healing and social justice*, 2000, p. 134.

³³⁹ Mamdani, Mahmood, “The truth according to the TRC.” In Ifi Amadiume, and An Na’im Abdullahi (eds.), *The politics of memory: truth, healing and social justice* (2000), pp. 176- 183.

³⁴⁰ Paul Conway, “Truth and reconciliation: the road not taken in Namibia.” *Online Journal of peace and conflict resolution*, Vol. 5/1 (Summer 2003), p. 5.

³⁴¹ Paul Conway, “Truth and reconciliation: the road not taken in Namibia.” In the *Online Journal of peace and conflict resolution*, Vol. 5/1 (Summer 2003), p. 66 - 76.

statements however appear vague, ironic and should be challenged by the realities outlined below.

Namibia's refusal to bring the perpetrators to account for the violent crimes committed in Namibia touches on a decolonization problem, as it were. It is reported that "SWAPO had signed an agreement with the then apartheid South African government not to take legal action against individuals for their role during the liberation war."³⁴² In view of this secret agreement, whatever its content, it can be argued that the decision taken by SWAPO prior to independence "not to take legal action" against individual perpetrators can be interpreted as an unfair political decision, one that does not work in favour of the majority of its people. The secret bilateral agreement between SWAPO and the "then apartheid South African government" is inconsiderate of the apartheid victims' aspirations and expectations. Such a decision should be perceived as one of those painful compromises that SWAPO had to adhere to, in exchange for Namibian independence - without justice.

One should also take note of the fact that even if the SWAPO-led government would have viewed it as ethical to follow and pursue possible prosecution of individual perpetrators, there are also fundamental issues that could backfire and implicate SWAPO leaders one way or the other. Such issues point to fundamental deterrents for the SWAPO majority-led government's refusal to encourage an ethos of fair trials and prosecution of those accused of brutal violence during the war for Namibia's independence. I am thinking this way with regard to the fact that SWAPO as a liberation movement, to agree with Paul Conway, "was betrayed by numerous spies and informers collaborating with South Africa's apartheid regime just like the African National Congress (ANC) had been. Some SWAPO officials were undoubtedly overzealous in their efforts to discover, discredit and destroy spies within the (SWAPO) ranks."³⁴³

³⁴² "Namibia: Struggling with the past," *Integrated Regional Information Networks reports*, 27 August, 2007. Accessed from: <http://www.mopanetree.com/human-rights/473-namibia-struggling-past.html>. Also visit, <http://allafrica.com/stories/200511141407.html>

³⁴³ Paul Conway, "Truth and reconciliation: the road not taken in Namibia, in the *Online Journal of peace and conflict resolution*, Vol. 5/ 1 (Summer 2003), p. 70; Siegfried Groth, *Breaking the wall of silence* (Wuppertal, 1996), pp. 100 - 121; Sue Armstrong, *In search of Freedom: the Andreas Shipanga story as told to Sue Armstrong* (Gibraltar: Ashanti Publishing, 1989).

Evidence is, in most cases, difficult to ascertain and verify when dealing with historical records, especially oral narratives. Nevertheless, most survivors told me that the destruction of Cassinga and the loss of so many lives involved the work of alleged enemy spies within the exiled population. It is also told, orally, that SWAPO suspicion and detention of the alleged spies started in the immediate aftermath of the Cassinga massacre. In this context, individuals in the SWAPO leadership who issued orders to detain and interrogate the arranged spies, in attempts to root out suspected enemy hibernators and protect the Namibian revolution from collapsing, also face accusations that such actions constituted a violation of human rights. And, I would like to believe that this is one of the reasons or challenges that explain why the SWAPO government pretends to be happy with the type of the reconciliation that the majority of Namibians consider unpopular.

Nevertheless, although the TRC did not meet expectations of many victims in Namibia and South Africa, it however made some important pronouncements. For example, the TRC findings spelled out that Operation Reindeer:

Violated the territorial sovereignty of the Republic of Angola and resulted in the gross human rights violations against the civilian occupants of the Cassinga camp. This entailed deliberate planning on the part of the following persons: Prime Minister BJ Vorster in his capacity as Head of State; Minister of Defence PW Botha in his capacity as political head of the SADF; General Magnus Malan in his capacity as chief of the SADF; Lieutenants General Constand Viljoen and RH Rogers in their capacities as chiefs of the Army and Air Force respectively.³⁴⁴

The TRC also pronounced that the SADF Air Force use of fragmentation bombs while fully aware that the camp hosted civilians constituted an “indiscriminate and illegitimate use of force and a violation of Protocol 1 to the Geneva Convention of 1949. The foreseeable killing of civilians ... was therefore a breach of humanitarian law.”³⁴⁵ Paradoxically though, perpetrators of the Cassinga massacre merited no trial in a law court. The only loophole was the request made by the TRC to give testimonies to the Commission, mainly on matters concerning the crimes of apartheid committed in South Africa, and in return they would receive amnesty from criminal

³⁴⁴ *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report*, “The State outside South Africa between 1960 and 1990,” Vol. 2 / Ch. 2 (1998).

³⁴⁵ *Ibid*

prosecution. That is, they should testify before the Commission in exchange for “official forgiveness,” which is not the same thing as the pardon and forgiveness by the victims of the violence.

Not surprisingly, apartheid era leaders who appeared before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission were all acquitted without admitting to state-sanctioned atrocities. In his second submission to the TRC dated the 23rd of March 1997, in reply to the questions that the Commission submitted to the National Party on 12 December 1996, F.W. de Klerk stated that the National Party is “not prepared to accept responsibility for the criminal actions of a handful of operatives of the security forces of which the Party was not aware and which it would never have condoned.”³⁴⁶ Paradoxically, this statement exists face to face with the fact that those who carried out gross violation of human rights such as in the case of the Cassinga massacre were politically decorated and honoured with medals and others, as discussed in previous chapters. Consequently, forgiveness without justice in an independent Namibia is seen as “a tool in the manipulation of power relations, making the oppressed even more victims of justice... in such a way that it strengthens [the perpetrators’] position and weakens that of the victim.”³⁴⁷

I am not saying that the prosecution of the alleged perpetrators can excise the damage, recuperate the wounds or bring the dead back to life. But I am trying to show the victims’ alarming concerns that the “general amnesty,” granted to the perpetrators of the Cassinga massacre, has been a very painful experience to many victims. In the context of this discontentment, there is an implicit link between the perpetrators’ impunity from prosecution and the uninterrupted continuity of survivors’ ongoing pain and suffering.

According to survivors, a slow and transparent process should have preceded reconciliation, to foster genuine forgiveness and acceptance of each other. That is, a moderated process committed to the public hearing of testimonies of violence from both sides. This should go hand in hand

³⁴⁶ Truth and Reconciliation Commission: political party submissions, transcript of the National Party, party political recall in Cape Town - 14 May 1997. Online at <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/special/party2/np2.htm>; <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/252666/De-Klerk-apartheid-apology-was-inadequate-ANC-says.html>; <http://www.nelsonmandela.org/omalley/index.php/site/q/03lv02167/04lv02264/05lv02303/06lv02331/07lv02333.htm>.

³⁴⁷ John de Gruchy, “*Reconciliation-restoring justice*” (London: SMS Press, 2002), p. 172.

with the full course of the law, namely litigation, against those found guilty of perpetuating violence against civilians. In the absence of such processes, survivors feel that the unconditional exemption of perpetrators from prosecution, regardless of the brutal atrocities they committed, implies that the perpetrators are considered more human while the victims are treated superficially and as inferior or lesser beings.

The victims also feel strongly that there should have been legislation that makes it illegal for any explicit denials of the Cassinga massacre to be made. Since Namibia has no specific act or law declaring any denial of the Cassinga massacre (explicitly or implicitly) to be illegal and a violation of human rights, individual members of the dismantled SADF feel empowered to continue, as discussed in Chapter 6, with euphoric parades on the occasion of the Cassinga anniversary. In the same vein, unapologetic perpetrators who try to repair their damaged public reputation also exploit the prevailing state of silence arising from Namibia's apparent indifference to dealing with or prosecuting the disclaimers of the Cassinga massacre. Indeed, it is painful for the survivors of the Cassinga massacre and families of the dead and the missing when an architect of the Cassinga massacre, such as Lieutenant General Constand Viljoen, remarks that "the SWAPO government has been very quiet about Cassinga in recent years because they knew that, in truth, no massacre had occurred"³⁴⁸ as Lieutenant General Constand Viljoen put it. Paradoxically, Viljoen, the then chief of the South African Army at the time of the Cassinga attack, flew to Cassinga to see it for himself.³⁴⁹ And indeed, one can argue that Cassinga was Viljoen's project.

While initially the SADF considered Cassinga a politically sensitive target if attacked militarily, Viljoen initiated it, designed it and defended it irreversibly. For example, as I have pointed out in Chapter One, prior to the Cassinga attack, Viljoen locked horns with other senior officers who advised that Cassinga should be excluded from the list of the SWAPO bases drawn up for the SADF attacks at the turn of 1978. As the Chief of the Army, Viljoen threatened to bring to a halt other SADF operations in Angola if the decision to wipe out Cassinga received no approval.³⁵⁰

³⁴⁸ "Battle of Cassinga still rages on," *The Star*, May 19, 2007, p. 11.

³⁴⁹ Edward Alexander, "The Cassinga raid," pp. 142-143.

³⁵⁰ Viljoen is reported to have been furious when Peter W. Botha, then the Minister of Defence, initially rejected General Magnus Malan's (the chief of the South African Defence Force) submission on "27 February 1978 ...

Nevertheless, as indicated earlier on, such deliberate acts of verbal violence take advantage of the prevailing state of the sweeping impunity granted to the perpetrators without any conditions or restrictions attached to it. Why the Namibian model has not worked to address these issues of the “victors’ justice” could be influenced by the following political factors.

The Namibian negotiated settlement and SWAPO compromises

Apartheid South Africa and her political and economic allies (especially in the west) had a major influence in packaging the content of the policy of national reconciliation with the intent to protect the strategic interest of the minority whites, at the expense of the victims of apartheid in both Namibia and South Africa. Writing about enormous compromises that SWAPO made in the process of diplomatic negotiations leading to Namibia’s independence, Lauren Dobell observes that “there is little evidence, however, to suggest that SWAPO leaders made any efforts to protect the Movement’s 1976 Political Programme for post-independence development from dilution.”³⁵¹ Indeed, the pursuit of justice for all was one of the key issues of this 1976 SWAPO political programme.³⁵² Dobell went on to say that the SWAPO leadership “would have been under enormous, perhaps irresistible, pressure ... having placed all their eggs in the diplomatic basket, SWAPO leaders may have perceived no option but to accede to the compromises demanded by the other parties to the negotiations brokered by the Western Contact Group (the USA, Canada, France, UK, and West Germany).”³⁵³ The western brokers all had strong ties with the apartheid

requesting the Minister of Defence to approve the SADF plan to attack five SWAPO base complexes (including Cassinga) in Angola.” In response to the initial request, P.W. Botha is reported to have only “initially approved an attack on only four of the bases” recommended for the attack. Cassinga was excluded from the list. I think, the reason being that Cassinga was predominantly a civilian settlement and attacking it would not auger well for South Africa in the context of the international community. In Edward Alexander. *The Cassinga raid*, pp. 80-92; data from Edward George Alexander interview with General C. L. Viljoen on 2 May 2002. Also see, *the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report, Vol. Two*, p. 50-58; Magnus Malan, *My life with the SA defence force* (Pretoria: Protea Books House, 2006).

³⁵¹ Lauren Dobell, “SWAPO in office.” In Colin Leys and John Sauls (eds.), *Namibia’s liberation struggle*, pp. 175.

³⁵² The Constitution of the South West Africa People’s Organisation (SWAPO) of Namibia: adopted by the meeting of the Central Committee July 28th- August 1st 1976, Lusaka Zambia.

³⁵³ Lauren Dobell, “SWAPO in Office.” In Colin Leys and John Sauls (eds.), *Namibia’s liberation struggle*, p. 175; Vivienne Jabri, *Mediating conflict: decision-making and western intervention in Namibia* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990); Laurent Kaela, *The question of Namibia* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1996), pp. 90 - 126; Lauren Dobell, *SWAPO’s struggle for Namibia, 1960 - 1991: war by other means* (Basel: P. Schlettwein Publishing, 2000).

government in South Africa.³⁵⁴ Indeed, as Peter Katjavivi puts it, the five western members of the UN Security council had “consistently blocked any moves to compel South Africa to withdraw from Namibia.”³⁵⁵

Dobell’s argument corroborates Kadar Asmal, a leading ANC activist who disclosed that, following the fall of apartheid in South Africa, he and others “campaign[ed] for a South African equivalent of the Nuremberg trials, until faced with the reality of a negotiated revolution which ruled out imposing victors’ justice.”³⁵⁶ There is an underlying identical analogy between the “negotiated revolution” in South Africa and the Namibian negotiated political settlement which disappointingly followed “the 1982 Constitutional Principles drafted by the Western Contact Group,”³⁵⁷ rather than being influenced by SWAPO’s political programme for an independent Namibia. This was confirmed:

On the first day of the constitutional deliberations when Nujoma opened the talks by proposing that, in the interests of making speedy progress, the newly elected Constituent Assembly adopt the 1982 Constitutional Principles as the basis for a new constitution. The unanimous approval of the proposal hastened the drafting process significantly, but at the price of circumventing debate on many fundamental issues.³⁵⁸

Certainly, as outside influences and interests determined the emerging Namibian independence constitution process, the victims of apartheid and colonial violence paid heavy concessions. In essence, the way the process leading to the independence of Namibia was constructed, protracted and then finally hijacked by the Western Contact Group has had detrimental consequences on the lives of the victims of apartheid and colonialism in Namibia. In particular, as justice is not on the

³⁵⁴ Lauren Dobell, “SWAPO in Office.” In Colin Leys and John Sauls (eds.), *Namibia’s liberation struggle: the two-edged sword* (1995), p. 175.

³⁵⁵ Peter H. Katjavivi, *A history of resistance in Namibia* (London and Paris: James Currey, 1988), 114 - 120.

³⁵⁶ The Nuremberg Trials were a series of military tribunals held by the main victorious allied forces of World War 11. Major political and military leaders of Nazi Germany, indicted for aggressive war, war crimes, and crimes against humanity, were brought to trial before the International Military Tribunal. In the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust, the world was faced with a challenge of how to seek justice for an almost unimaginable scale of criminal behavior of Nazi German leaders. The International Military Tribunal (IMT) held at Nuremberg, Germany, attempted to broach this immense challenge on a legal basis. In October 1945, the IMT formally indicted the Nuremberg defendants on four counts: crimes against peace, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and conspiracy to commit these crimes.” Visit: <http://www.ushmm.org/museum/exhibit/focus/warcrimetrials/>

³⁵⁷ Lauren Dobell, “SWAPO in office.” In Colin Leys and John Sauls(eds.), *Namibia’s liberation struggle: the Two-edged sword*(London: James Currey, 1995), p. 175; Lionel Cliffe, Ray Bush, Jenny Lindsay and Brian Mokopakgosi, *The transition to independence in Namibia* (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner, 1994).

³⁵⁸ Lauren Dobell, “SWAPO in office.” In Colin Leys and John Sauls (eds.), *Namibia’s liberation struggle: The Two-edged sword* (London: James Currey, 1995), p. 176.

side of the victims of the Cassinga massacre, grief, trauma and other forms of suffering continue to leave survivors in solitary victimhood. Put differently, when expectations for social or “restorative justice” have been violated or silenced by the constitution as the supreme law of the country, the victims’ traumatic memories continue “ruminating.” That is, routinely generating intrusive harmful memories which unremittingly slide the victims back into the unbearable dark moments of apartheid and colonial ferocity.

Rumination as such, infers the frequent return of traumatic memories, as I shall explain further below. And whereas survivors are of the opinion that unwanted thoughts can be suspended temporarily, the traumatic memories return relentlessly in obstinate and harmful ways. This disconcerting recurrence of bitter resentment and anger is therefore, among other issues, due to the victims’ betrayed and devalued expectations that SWAPO compromised in the process of Namibia’s independence.

During the first SWAPO Congress in independent Namibia that was held on 6 - 10 December 1991, whose theme was “From National Liberation Movement to Political Party - Solidarity, Freedom and Justice,” the issue of reconciliation came into the spotlight. Lauren Dobell reported the following:

The government’s policy of national reconciliation ... came under the fiercest fire from delegates, who perceived it as shoring up an unjust status quo. Reconciliation ... was too high a price to pay for stability ... if it continued to be seen to benefit the ‘haves’ at the expense of the ‘have nots.’³⁵⁹

In an interview with Lauren Dobell about what the nation was to expect from the Congress, the former Deputy Minister of Information and Broadcasting, the late Daniel Tjongarero, said the following:

We will obviously have to deal with the question of dissatisfaction among the rank and file of the whole issue of national reconciliation ... obviously it is our responsibility to explain why we have done certain things, [otherwise] the opposition, if it doesn’t find fault with what you are doing, it instigates your own supporters against you, saying ‘Look, these people have done nothing to help your lot.’ But once you start talking to people

³⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 187.

about the limitations you have, and also about their own responsibilities to take control of their own lives, then I think it becomes much easier.³⁶⁰

Regrettably though, more than twenty years since the SWAPO first congress in independent Namibia which was expected to make significant changes and amendments to the party programme and constitution “from the one previously (constitution) ratified in 1983,”³⁶¹ the nation still waits for the government to explain the “limitations” and hindrances linked to reconciliation which have betrayed the victims of apartheid and colonialism since independence. Indeed, the government appears to be buying time in dealing with the issue of reconciliation by taking advantage of the victims’ culture of “passive victimhood.” In the context of this notion that Namibians are reluctant to open up their political anger and frustration, SWAPO backbencher at that time, Danie Botha, observed that:

The only way these problems (regarding general unresolved issues of the past) to be resolved is for the links to be strengthened between the leadership and their supporters. Because of our historical situation these are not as strong as they should be - but again the onus is on us (politicians) to look critically at ourselves ... We are lucky here that the people are ... not so terribly critical [as they are in South Africa], but we must not misuse that openness and accepting kind of spirit...³⁶²

On “the impossibility of telling,” Felman, Shoshana & Laub Dori observe that Holocaust survivors do not:

Find peace in silence, even when it is their choice to remain silent. Moreover, survivors who do not tell their story become victims of a distorted memory, that is, of a forcibly imposed ‘external evil,’ which causes an endless struggle with and over a delusion. The ‘no telling’ of the story serves as a perpetuation of its tyranny. The events become more and more distorted in their silent retention and pervasively invade and contaminate the survivor’s daily life. The longer the story remains untold, the more distorted it becomes in the survivor’s conception of it, so much that the survivor doubts the reality of actual event.³⁶³

³⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 184.

³⁶¹ Ibid, p. 186.

³⁶² Lauren Dobell, “SWAPO in office.” In Colin Leys and John Sauls(eds.), *Namibia’s liberation struggle*, p. 184.

³⁶³ Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: crises of witnessing in literature, psychoanalysis, and history*(New York and London: Routledge, 1992), p. 79.

In exploring the silences of the victims of the “social and political conflicts”³⁶⁴ which engulfed apartheid South Africa, Helena Pohlandt- McCormick coined the concept of “collusion between violence and silence.”³⁶⁵ In my study, this reality, the collusion between violence and silence, translates into the obvious reciprocal relationship between people’s experience or memory of violence and the ongoing public silence regarding the violence, which continues in the private spaces of the victims.

This reciprocity, tied up with “passive victimhood,” is thus repressive and recycles undesirable repercussions. Thus this vulnerable situation denies the victims a voice, courage and strength to bring forth the individual or collective experiences of violence, or to try and create public dialogues around issues of the political torture inherent in the collusion between the political injustices of yesteryear and of today. In a different context Elaine Scarry writes that torture, like any other act of brutal violence, “is such an extreme event ... and the pain it brings about is so real that there is a reluctance to place it in conversation by the side of other subjects. But this reluctance ... increases [the victims’] vulnerability to power.”³⁶⁶

Indeed, “if sufficiently pervasive and enduring ... violence moves beyond the harm to individuals and coalesces ...”³⁶⁷ in such a way that it suppresses, obscures and impairs the victims’ ability to collectively open up and demand justice which each victim desperately needs. Because as Pohlandt-McCormick puts it, “while the collusion between violence and silence might appear to disrupt or, worse, destroy the ability of individuals to think— the individual historical actor can and does have the will to contest and engage with collective memory and official history.”³⁶⁸ As a consequence, the victims’ endurance of pervasive violence results in a regular rumination of violence.

Emotional rumination

³⁶⁴ Helena Pohlandt - McCormick, “I saw a nightmare ...” p. 23.

³⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 23.

³⁶⁶ Elaine Scarry, *The body in pain*, p. 60.

³⁶⁷ Helena Pohlandt - McCormick, “I saw a nightmare ...” p. 24.

³⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 23.

In view of the above situation, it is ironic that survivors and affected families are under the political obligation to forgive and reconcile. Nevertheless, it is unambiguous in survivors' testimonies that their resentment for the perpetrators of the Cassinga massacre have not diminished. Instead, they act under the political condition of coercion that suppresses their discontentment, silences it and attempts to obliterate it. Therefore, in the absence of the victims' justice, genuine forgiveness is on trial. Survivors demand justice for the victims, which for them transcends the political drive to forgive and reconcile while side-stepping justice and fairness. These unbearable degrees of uncertainty are nurturing further damage in the everyday lives of survivors and make healing almost impossible when the aftermath of the Cassinga massacre remains largely unresolved.

In attempting to contextualize some of the issues raised above, I argue that the post- Cassinga intensity lies not so much in the victims' remembering of the traumatic past. The recurring intrusion of survivors' distressful moments is connected to post-colonial Namibia's own hiatus. That is, Namibia's failure to deal with the victims and the perpetrators of apartheid in unbiased ways. This state of affairs, promoting the ongoing drive of emotional trauma, causes rumination, which refers to survivors' regular reflections on the difficult and unwanted traumatic experiences or moments of the Cassinga massacre and its aftermath. In this context, rumination relates predominantly to the survivors' disappointments about their unfulfilled expectations. Such emotional pain about the victims' disrupted expectations activate and bring around - or cause to ruminate - memories of traumatic experiences. The derailing of the victims' expectations, therefore, has negative implications on survivors' aspirations to come to terms with the Cassinga killings and contain ongoing human suffering. This disruption creates the bond between traumatic violence and the evolving emotional anger. For example, the failure of the state to demand from the perpetrators an official acknowledgment and apology for the massacre unravels, time and again, the "traumatic knot," thereby creating an enabling space for the survivors' endless suffering.

Literally, without political will on their side, the victims find themselves pushed into formidable and precarious situations. Their individual tenacities and strength of "active coping" with traumatic stress succumb to the prolonged existence of emotional and physical suffering in

isolation. This is contrary to the victims' aspirations to free their lives from the burden of traumatic memories and emotional distress which gives rise to rumination arising in response to the blocking of valued goals. To put it differently, traumatic emotions arise "when schemas are disrupted." In this case it is the broken "schemas" of unfulfilled victims' beliefs and expectations following the end of violence. Hence, when post-violence conditions are in conflict with established expectations or beliefs of the victims, emotional impulse is generated. This brings around unwanted traumatic memories. And therefore, once the victims' expectations have been disappointingly interrupted in this way, traumatic experiences are reconnected, reactivated and stay active as long as the machinery that evoked the human suffering is let loose or not held accountable.

It is also important to recognize that although the tension created and sustained by the victims' disrupted expectations are emotionally traumatic, such tensions also serve as useful "impetus in seeking solutions" to unresolved traumatic experiences. In other words, tensions emanating from disrupted expectations can draw the victims closer to each other and encourage them to collectively respond to issues of collective suffering and seek common ways of dealing with the sources of the recurring emotional traumas.

The issue of the abandoned mass graves

When the process of repatriating home 41 000 Namibian exiles³⁶⁹ began in June 1989, under the auspices of the United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG), SWAPO and the international bodies involved in this exercise appeared to have not outlined measures regarding the preservation and protection of the permanent homes – in a sense irreplaceable assets of our national heritage - of Namibians who died in exile from war and natural causes, especially in refugee camps in Angola and Zambia. Perhaps the issue of dealing with the welfare of the war graves and human remains in exile awaited the attention of the government of an independent Namibia. Sadly, over twenty years into independence and the human remains of those Namibians killed in the course of the liberation struggle, particularly with regard to the Cassinga mass graves, have not yet received the recognition and treatment they deserve. The route that Namibia

³⁶⁹ William Claiborne, "Namibian exiles begin to return home," *The Washington Post* (June 13, 1989).

has taken is contrary to the United Nations General Assembly Resolution that calls for every nation emerging from violence to abide by the protocol of accounting for the graves of missing persons after hostilities end and thereafter protecting them.³⁷⁰

As Cassinga enters a vague future with layers of unresolved issues piling on top of one other, the burden of the human remains of the Cassinga victims is one of the issues which place the heaviest weight on the people affected by the entire episode. It is one of the emotional issues that survivors and affected families want resolved. During the Cassinga commemorations held at UN Plaza, Katutura, in Windhoek on May 2006, Agnes Kafula, a survivor of the Cassinga massacre, asked the “government to consider allowing survivors to visit the mass grave(s) of those who died”³⁷¹ at Cassinga. During the 2007 Cassinga commemorations in Windhoek, she (Agnes) again, speaking on behalf of other survivors, “urged the government to take the initiative to bring back the remains of those comrades who perished in the liberation struggle so that they [can] get a proper burial.”³⁷²

³⁷⁰ “Article 34 of the Geneva Convention of 12 August 1949. It must be noted however that local residents at Cassinga have tended the graves. Both mass graves have the inscription “Massacre at Cassinga 4 May 1978. WE Will Always Remember Them”. See Jo Ractliffe, *As Terras do Fim do Mundo* (Cape Town: Michael Stevenson, 2010), pp. 27 and 115.

³⁷¹ See Appendix L of this thesis: “Cassinga events need to be documented.”

³⁷² See, Appendix M of this thesis: “Don’t scrap Cassinga Day.”



Figure 7. A photographic scene of one of the Cassinga mass graves. This photograph was taken in 2009. It suggests that the Cassinga mass graves are in a poor and abandoned condition. Photographer: Jo Ractliffe.

The Cassinga mass graves are not only in very poor condition³⁷³ but they are also abandoned and disconnected from the living world related to them. The families, relatives and comrades of those thought to have died in Cassinga and buried in the mass graves have not visited them since their burial there. The survivors urge that the government should coordinate things in ways that “allow survivors” and families “to visit the mass grave(s).” This request is entrenched in the prevailing disturbing disconnectedness between the dead and their loved ones, as well as a reference to the victims’ improper and dishonourable burial in the mass graves. Generally, survivors and many families whose loved ones disappeared during the war and who suspect that the Cassinga human remains could be those of their missing relatives and friends feel they have the obligation to visit the dead and connect with them physically and spiritually.

³⁷³ Jo Ractliffe photographs of the Cassinga mass graves, online at http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/reviews/pollack/jo-ractliffe-at-the-walther-collection-4-15-11_detail.asp?picnum=4

In fact, it is wrong to perceive the identities of the Cassinga human remains as belonging to unknown Namibians. Although the victims buried in the Cassinga mass graves are generally unknown to many Namibians, the fact remains that everybody killed in Cassinga was knowable to individual survivors. But it is also valid to point out that the violent manner in which the killings unfolded damaged survivors' knowability of their comrades killed in the massacre and the ways they could ascertain their burial in the mass graves. Nonetheless, the mental picture or "mental snapshots" of friends and comrades' names and faces remain: they survived the physical damage and extinctions of the victims' dead bodies. It is this preservation of the survivors' mental pictures, reflective of the individual identities and names of the comrades, that survivors want to maximize in reclaiming the presence of the dead.

While the Namibian government is yet to pronounce its commitment, long overdue, for those who feel bereaved and unconsolated, it is survivors generally who initiate making contributions to the preservation of the Cassinga historic site. They initiate breaking the silence and anonymity surrounding the myth of the nameless people who disappeared as a result of the Cassinga massacre, and who did not return home when the violence ended. As an agency entrusted with different obligations by the dead in different individual capacities, survivors are enthusiastic about listing the names and ages (as most of them were children) of their comrades who are missing following the massacre. It is the preference of most that the retrievable names and photographs, as traces for the missing physical identities of the dead, should be inscribed at the site of the mass graves. In this way, the Cassinga historic site could possibly rise above the existing silences and disconnectedness from the living world into a rich and fathomless exploration ground of the missing people, their identities and their untold traumatic experiences.

It is also important to add emphasis that the search, albeit in vain, for those people, mainly children, whose fate remains unaccounted for ever since the end of the conflict that divided and displaced families particularly in northern Namibia, is a way of attempting to find remedy for the injuries that are still open. Further, the initiative to turn the Cassinga mass graves into a quest for a ground or space consecrated to the missing people's identities and untold narratives of their terminal injuries and painful deaths is reflective of the SWAPO declaration in the immediate

aftermath of the Cassinga massacre. On June 1, 1978, Sam Nuuyoma, the founding president of SWAPO and first President of Namibia stated the following:

The names of hundreds of Namibian men, women and children who were murdered in cold blood by the fascist troops of racist South Africa at Cassinga ... will forever remain imprinted in the pages of Namibia's history as heroes and martyrs of freedom and human dignity.³⁷⁴

Literally, there is a remarkable degree of softness or flatness in the way the Namibian ruling party, SWAPO, appears to have compromised the liberation struggle ideals concerning the preservation of the Cassinga historic site. Thus, while SWAPO as a liberation movement promised “social justice” for the victims of colonial violence when Namibia became independent, it is however unfortunate that postcolonial Namibia is naively sitting on these unfulfilled issues. The issue is not that the suffering and traumatic memories of Namibians affected by the massacre have dissipated. But the two periods, the liberation struggle and postcolonial Namibia, appear to be remarkably characterized by a set of dissimilar values and meanings attached to those who sacrificed their precious lives for a free Namibia.

Culturally, as well as biologically, it is difficult for the bereaved families to find closure and serenity in the presence of the frontiers of divide between the world of the dead and of the living. Furthermore, it is believed that the bodies of the dead cannot “rest in peace”³⁷⁵ until they speak, connect with and feel the recognition and warmth of the living world. But by contrast, the Namibian government naively perceives the issue of the Cassinga human remains, *iipongo*, as not a priority of the state:

In respect of the heroes and heroines who died at Cassinga, [the] government has already done its part in collecting the soil from the mass graves in southern Angola and placing it at [the] Heroes Acre in the capital.³⁷⁶

Generally speaking, the majority of the people affected by the Cassinga massacre do not agree with the government's stance regarding the issue of the Cassinga human remains. In particular,

³⁷⁴ Sam Nuuyoma's Foreword. In the “Massacre at Cassinga: climax of Pretoria's all out campaign against the Namibian resistance,” Special bulletin of the South West Africa People's Organization SWAPO, 1978.

³⁷⁵ Thomas M. Hawley used the concept of “rest in peace” in reference to the body remains of the unknown American soldiers of the Vietnam war: Thomas M. Hawley, *The remains of war: bodies, politics, and the search for American soldiers unaccounted for in Southeast Asia* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2005), p. 4.

³⁷⁶ See, “Don't scrap Cassinga Day,” in Appendix M of this thesis.

the metaphor of the “soil,” a symbolic gesture, as a substitute for the dead as the state appears to argue, undermines the spiritual and physical connections between the living and the dead. In the context of Namibia, such a practice is therefore unethical: it does not conform to any of the Namibian local cultural practices and is therefore unrecognizable and cannot help comfort individual families still knocked down by the Cassinga massacre. The point of concern, however, is that survivors and affected families were not consulted in this regard. The government did it alone without any consultations made with the public for opinions and consensus about how best Namibia can pay tribute to the human remains of the liberation struggle. Consultations with the public and also with specific expertise should not have been overlooked, since the loss of human lives affects individuals, families and clans (some with unique norms of burying and paying tribute to members of their clans) more than it is a collective or a national responsibility.

Nonetheless, the appropriate ways that should be followed in honouring the dead at Cassinga received varied proposals from survivors and relatives of the missing victims with whom I have raised this issue. There are those who feel that the proper way of paying tribute to the Cassinga victims is by exhuming the human remains, identifying the bones, repatriating them to Namibia and giving them a proper burial in the “home soil,” closer to their families and communities. However, others contest the initiatives to dig up the mass graves, exhume and repatriate the human remains back home. They are of the opinion that if a monument is constructed at the site where the violence was committed and in the neighbourhood of the original burial sites of the dead, visitors would feel more connected to the actual suffering and experience of the dead. Unfortunately, the fact that the Cassinga human remains are across the border of another sovereign state suggests that the Namibian government may experience some challenging bilateral issues and limitations in developing this historical site the way it wants and at its own pace.

While it proved extremely difficult for the comrades and affected families to visit the Cassinga mass graves during the Angolan civil war that lasted until 2002, this is no longer the case. However, any project aimed at developing and preserving the Cassinga heritage site depends on the support and willingness of the Angolan government to allow Namibians uninterrupted access to utilize and develop Cassinga into a place of documenting and preserving the history of that

historic site. In this context, I also feel that Cassinga should be treated, counted and recognized as an international shared space where people of different nationalities lost their lives and loved ones. I am thinking in the context of the fact that not only Namibians died during the Cassinga attack. Angolan civilians who lived in the area of Cassinga also died during the massacre. Equally so, the Cuban international forces also lost many soldiers who tried to come to the rescue of Namibians.³⁷⁷ And South Africans, according to their sources, reported their own human losses in Cassinga. Therefore, not only Namibians lost their loved ones there, but Cassinga is coupled with shared transnational traumatic memories.

The perpetrators and the “search for closure?”

The war for the independence of Namibia and the end of apartheid rule in South Africa ended with distinctive “winners and losers” on the political front. Indeed, this political turn around disparaged the hard-nosed ex-soldiers in the SADF. In fact, this category of soldiers had “their array of stresses” emanating from the unpopular war which ended in complete humiliation. This is unambiguous in considering that some of the hard-nosed ex-soldiers of the vanquished army continued with euphoric military parades celebrating “historic victories” of the SADF such as that of the Cassinga massacre.³⁷⁸ Yet, it is also evident that for some soldiers the “defeat” of the apartheid army by SWAPO, ANC and their allies, predominantly the Cuban international forces, marked the beginning of the end of most soldiers’ service, most of whom were conscripted into the unpopular apartheid security forces.³⁷⁹

In fact, the end of the war marked the beginning of a process of self-retrospection into the injustices and crimes committed during the war. It marked the beginning of individual journeys in search of closure which for many of the ex-servicemen is difficult to find: because as Jan

³⁷⁷ It is reported that “around 150 Cuban soldiers were killed.” This number accounted for the Cubans single biggest casualty rate during its military involvement in Angola. See, Edward George McGill Alexander, “The Cassinga raid,” Jan Breytenbach, *Eagle strike*, pp. 321-359.

³⁷⁸ “SA to say sorry for celebrating Defence Force raid,” *The Star*, 4 June 1996. Also see the “SANDF Chief called to account for controversial parade,” SAPA, June 3, 1996.

³⁷⁹ Thompson, J. H., *An unpopular war, from afkak to bosbefok: voices of South African national servicemen* (Cape Town: Zebra Press, 2006).

Breytenbach put it, “closure is a strange concept ... without realizing it I have probably ‘found’ it long ago!”³⁸⁰

There is no ambivalence in Breytenbach’s statement regarding the meaning of closure. Fundamentally, the search for closure exposes impassable frontiers which disconnect the “embattled self” from the SADF official discourse of the Cassinga massacre. The trouble is, “closure” becomes a “strange” thing, inconceivable or “unrealizable,” as Breytenbach puts it, when the hunt to find it often proves to yield no fruition.

The un-selfconsciousness pertaining to finding closure suggests that perpetrators of the Cassinga massacre are weighed down by emotional pain and suffering. It also discloses the perpetrators’ endless victimhood and fixation in the belated emotional violence. The uninterrupted emotional suffering since the contemporary moment of the actual Cassinga massacre materialize in the perpetrator’s urge to make physical returns to the mass graves of the innocent people killed in a gruesome manner (see below). This return seems indisputably embedded in the individual perpetrators’ hunt for closure. But it is also a return that, objectively, would not lead to any emotional closure. Instead it would make a strong public statement about the unsettled issues of the Cassinga massacre which the perpetrators are circumventing and dodging.

The critical moment of self-retrospection

³⁸⁰ Jan Breytenbach response to the author’s request to interview him. Response from Jo Ractliffe (an intermediary), 20 November, 2009.



Figure 8. Colonel Jan Breytenbach is photographed here during his 2009 trip back to Cassinga. The author has not been able to access photographs where Breytenbach is photographed at the site of the mass graves. But according to sources who were with him he wept as he related the Cassinga attack to his team members when they visited the mass graves. Source of this image:<http://www.google.co.za/images?hl=en&gbv=2&tbn=isch&sa=3&q=Jan+Breytenbach+Cassinga+TRIP>

In May 2009, Colonel Jan Breytenbach, the commander of the Cassinga massacre, made a decisive retreat from attempts at political manipulation. He and seventeen others, according to an anonymous source who was in the group, visited the Cassinga mass graves in the Huila Province, Angola. The motives for Breytenbach's and others' return to Cassinga are self-evident. But several historical truisms pertaining to the cruel behaviour of the SADF presence and their operations in Namibia and Southern Angola (particularly between 1975 and 1989) can help us unpack and translate this visit as a search for closure.

Breytenbach's visit to Cassinga followed the launch of his publication, *The Eagle Strike* in 2008, in which he blatantly denied the Cassinga massacre, attacked critics of the Cassinga massacre such as Edward McGill Alexander, and audaciously and unapologetically defended his role as the ground commander of "Operation Reindeer." When examined closely, Breytenbach's

publications, including several articles about the Cassinga attack,³⁸¹ and his visit to Cassinga posits important but conflicting meanings. His written accounts of the Cassinga attack, on one hand, refute that there was ever a massacre of civilians at Cassinga. This is whilst his visit to Cassinga can be translated as a therapeutic search for the ongoing suffering, caused by the immense bloodshed and loss of lives of hundreds of innocent civilians. Indeed, as the ground commander of the Cassinga massacre, the unacceptable violence against civilians affected him precisely. So, whatever the case, it is without a shred of doubt that he considers himself totally and individually implicated in the killings of so many innocent Namibians. In a literal sense, the initiatives to kill or not to kill when confronted with the practicality of noncombatants in the camp rested squarely on him.

Therefore, seeing Breytenbach through different spectacles and performances, as a disclaimer of the Cassinga massacre and also as a self-constructed visitor to the mass graves of the people killed under his orders, is testimony to the “embattled self.” Put differently, these different pictures situate Breytenbach in the complex and parallel positionalities of victim, perpetrator and witness. Whilst the different pictures of the perpetrator and witness mirror Breytenbach’s role of executing and experiencing the horrible massacre, at the same time, it is the simultaneous position of the “victim” that is most interesting here.

The concept of the perpetrator as a victim of the violence that he orchestrated is important to explore. The important question would be: What is the significance of Breytenbach’s unexpected visit to the Cassinga mass graves? Why did he make such a surprise return to Cassinga? In examining testimonies of the French soldiers of the Great War, Leonard V. Smith suggests the following: “the experience of violence [that] ... Cendrars ... lived was never ‘overcome,’ in the sense of being comfortably resolved.”³⁸² In this context therefore, Breytenbach’s return to Cassinga thirty-one years after the killings, appears to confide something of his struggle with the

³⁸¹ Such as the “Cassinga battle account reveals biased claptrap”; “Airborne assault on Cassinga base, 4 May 1978;” “Bullets do not lie, but it appears people do;” “Foreword” to Graham Gillmore’s book, *Pathfinder Company: 44 Parachute Brigade 'The Philistines,'* 2010.

³⁸² Leonard V. Smith, *The embattled self*, p. 12.

burden of the never-overcome emotional distressfulness and the urge to find “closure” for his role in the Namibian armed conflict since 1966.³⁸³

This scenario also means that since traumatic events are unbearable in their horror and intensity, perpetrators’ long-term suffering and struggle with traumatic memories of the crimes they committed compel them to consider taking a new path, perhaps towards accepting their wrongs in subtle ways. The visit to Cassinga by a group of former SADF members also heralds the former soldiers’ attempts to understand violence beyond the political frontiers that manipulated former soldiers and compelled them to repress and digest painful violent experiences.

It is also important to see this visit in the context of the fact that the SADF has abandoned its soldiers³⁸⁴ when the conflict ended on a fragmented chapter of apartheid rule of South Africa and colonialism in Namibia. As such, individual soldiers are left alone to seek individual ways of dealing with their postwar predicaments. This scenario also explains that many former SADF are frustrated and angry with the way the SADF told them lies during the war about the “enemy” they were fighting.

In an interview with the *Cape Times* Newspaper, some former soldiers said they were brainwashed by the apartheid rulers to believe that SWAPO, like the then-banned African National Congress, posed a terrorist threat. Now that the two movements are ruling in Namibia and South Africa respectively, former soldiers have come to realize that they were fighting for nothing:

We were fighting the swart gevaar (black danger) and communism. But now SWAPO and the ANC have the most democratic constitutions in the world, a former Koevoet member, Herman Grobler, said ... And the people we were fighting against weren’t communists. They were ordinary people ... It was our war we forced on them ... The memories of the past and the public condemnation have taken their toll [on the ex- SADF members] ... some have had nervous breakdowns, and many have committed suicide ... They felt that they had no

³⁸³ See Appendix J of this thesis: Breytenbach role in the Namibian armed conflict and other places.

³⁸⁴ This is in spite of the fact that the majority of the former soldiers required counseling and other assistance to help them deal with individual suffering and traumatic experiences arising from the problematic things they did in the war zones.

purpose in life ... Nobody thinks you have any right to exist. It is the Vietnam syndrome. You are not being acknowledged for who you are - that you fought as a soldier for your country.³⁸⁵

In this context, above, former SADF soldiers, at least those with resources, are in search of ways to deal with and come to terms with individual traumas of the war that betrayed their cause. Nevertheless, the scenario of perpetrators visiting Cassinga also challenges, ridicules and reminds Namibians of their long-overdue obligation to visit, which has not been publicly done since the Cassinga massacre, and pay tribute to their own people. It is also a rebuke to the poor state of the mass graves. In view of this embarrassing state, Brigadier-General Dick Lord who was interviewed in 2009 on the SABC radio show about their trip to Cassinga in Angola, indicated that some of the former Cassinga paratroopers have initiatives to raise money to erect a memorial at Cassinga to honour the dead. Not underestimating the complexities and contestations that may arise from different quarters of the public with regard to the perpetrators' initiatives to erect a monument at Cassinga, the initiative itself challenges the way Namibia and specifically the Namibian government has, for very long, neglected and abandoned the Cassinga historic site.

What is however important to reiterate, as I approach the end of this chapter, is that the former South African soldiers' experience of the "border war" and their realization of coming to terms with emotional traumas by opening up to the public has given birth to several websites. This is in fact important for Namibia, with its rich, but largely untold, traumatic stories of colonial violence. One example of such sites is the *61 Mechanised Infantry Battalion Group Veterans Association*, which I have noted earlier in the preceding chapters.³⁸⁶

Such projects, which are dedicated to the collection of the ex-soldiers' stories of the border war experiences, vindicate individual soldiers' attempts to deconstruct and disconnect their individual experiences from political realities. Crucially important is noting that such stories, regardless of their side or inclination, stir up new opportunities that can accommodate different

³⁸⁵ Emsie Ferreira, "Koevoet: it was a luvverly war," *Cape Times*, Thursday, September 28, 2000; Also, see the Republic of Namibia, *The constitution* (Windhoek: Government Printers, 1989).

³⁸⁶ Visit: <http://www.61mech.org.za>

dimensions and realities about contested events³⁸⁷ such as Cassinga, in such a way that they inspire critical public dialogues. For example, reading different accounts of war experiences by different former SADF soldiers inspires inquisitive interrogations to explore why, for instance, certain individual paratroopers continue to deny the violence while others disclose emotionality about the unpleasantness of the border war experiences. The dissemination of such accounts also invites different responses from the other side, in such a way that both sides can open up to each other, place the past and the present in the face of each other, engaging each other in debates, encouraging more public openness and finding a common ground for the understanding and acceptance of each other beyond the political divide.

Another obvious element exuding from the public dissemination of the ex-servicemen's heralding of the war experiences is that it allows individual efforts to find solace in each other's shared experiences of the violence. As individuals, abandoned and forgotten by apartheid, they aspire to make their individual traumas less burdensome by drawing strength from others' similar experiences and ways of coping with individual traumas of the apartheid war and violence. As human beings, we can generate strength and courage in confronting our challenges in life when we, for example, learn and become aware that others do experience similar challenges in life. This brings me to another salient point, as this chapter ends. That is, the dissemination of the war stories is not only a way of helping each other, as ex-soldiers, to manage the traumatic memories of the war. But it does mean that some of these ex-soldiers feel that sharing their stories, testimonies of the war and violence, with the wider public could be a way of acknowledging one's mistakes and of seeking public acceptance and forgiveness.

³⁸⁷ Willem Steenkamp. *South Africa's border war 1966- 1989* (Gilbraltar: Ashanti Pub., 1989).

CONCLUSION

Violence against unprotected civilians such as at Cassinga is arguably done with the intent, as Brian Fishman writes on the recent Norwegian attack, “to disrupt and destroy institutions or symbols of a political order they despise ... to intimidate people not touched by the attack directly.”³⁸⁸ Indeed, the experience of the Cassinga massacre on the ground was a short-lived and devastating event. But it “ends not as an event but as a process,”³⁸⁹ which in the long run does not destroy a particular political order and legacy, but inflicts permanent damage and emotional suffering on the lives of the affected people.

This study has grappled with a number of complicated and challenging issues, particularly arising from the ongoing pain of the victims in the long aftermath of the Cassinga massacre and the challenges they face in the attempt to disclose their deep and enduring suffering through the medium of testimony. What has come to the fore in this study is that survivors’ narration of the Cassinga experience is about confronting contradictions, obscurities and unhappiness. In this regard, the difficulties of eliciting the experience of violence and subsequent suffering of the victims through visual and oral techniques has formed the centrepiece around which critical issues in this study have rotated. In concluding this study, it is crucial to revisit some of the key problematic areas with which this study has grappled.

Let me start from the end matter of this study, Chapter 7. The Cassinga massacre represents the darkest chapter in the history of the Namibian liberation struggle. In particular, survivors of the Cassinga killings continue to bear the brunt of that deplorable moment. Yet, the perpetrators walk freely. Sadly, those I term ‘disclaimers’ of the Cassinga massacre, in particular some of the paratroopers who were personally involved in the Cassinga massacre, continue to enjoy the gruesome moment of their killing-spree. They are obstinate about coming face to face with others’ reality. They do this by flatly denying, publicly, the brutal killing of innocent civilians.

³⁸⁸ See, Brian Fishman, “Lessons of Norway attacks,” available at: <http://edition.cnn.com/2011/OPINION/07/22/fishman.norway/index.htm>, obtained on 24 July 2011.

³⁸⁹ Leonard V. Smith, *The embattled self*, p. 151.

For the survivors of the Cassinga massacre and affected families, the ongoing war rhetoric is another form of violence. The denial of the Cassinga massacre inflames the victims' anger and bitterness, and makes it difficult for these people to accept the national policy of reconciliation as genuinely fair. Ironically, the political stability that Namibia experienced since independence is attributed to the so-called working policy of national reconciliation. On the contrary, the reality of the Namibian policy of reconciliation is perceived by many Namibians as entrenched in the erroneous "power of enforcement."³⁹⁰ The victims of colonialism and apartheid brutality insist that the policy of reconciliation without litigation is brutally violent: one which compels the wounded body and memory to become a mere political tool; one which is shrouded in political hypocrisy, as it does not recognize the dignity of the victims but obliges them to dance to the tune of the perpetrators of colonial violence.

In this context, many perceive the Namibian national policy of reconciliation as a façade, one that is politically correct but which, in reality, is patronizing and hurtful to many people, repressing the victims' voices so they do not raise issues of social justice. The victims raise genuine concerns, yet their issues and protestations are largely individual and circumvented by being confined to private spaces. Clearly therefore, there is a "collusion" between reconciliation and the injustice of the supreme laws of the land. This is especially so when reconciliation deprives the victims of their rights to appeal to, and even sue, the colonialist government for the untold damage to human beings and property.³⁹¹

It is worth reiterating that although the victims are conscious of the fact that reconciliation is biased against their sufferings, they are entangled in the chains of "passive victimhood." There are two factors, among many others, that I would like to attribute to creating this precarious situation. In the first place, the state of passive victimhood means that the victims emerged from the Cassinga violence too debilitated, till now, to resist the post-Cassinga pathos and the enduring suffering which causes prolonged pain than the actual massacre that was short-lived.

³⁹⁰ Elaine Scarry, *The body in pain*, p. 120.

³⁹¹ Related to these resentments is the issue of the Kenyans who are on the verge of suing the UK government for the alleged torture by British colonial authorities during the Mau Mau struggle for the independence of Kenya from the British rule about 50 years ago. See for example, "Mau Mau Kenyans allowed to sue UK government." Visit: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-14232049>.

Secondly, the notion of suffering in silence is inherent in the culture of enduring pain quietly during decades of colonial violence. Brutal violence unleashed by the SADF against the local population of civilians, particularly in the former war zones, was an everyday experience.³⁹² Nevertheless, the perpetrators were untouchable. They were beyond questioning, let alone prosecution.

The fact that apartheid and colonialism had for decades suppressed the victims so that they endure their suffering in silence appears to have a strong influence on the victims today. That culture is arguably central to the interrogation and understanding of the prevailing passive victimhood of the formerly colonised. This is notwithstanding the fact that the victims do freely raise their suffering in one-to-one conversations, such as when I approached them to tell me their stories. When speaking to those willing to listen, survivors aspire to reach a wider audience, in particular the government. This is an indication that the yoke of traumatic memories is heavier for each survivor in isolation, and it requires public hearing and possible intervention on issues of concern for the victims.

One of the things that trouble survivors and they would like communicated to the government is that they register great unhappiness about the sweeping amnesty extended to the perpetrators of the Cassinga massacre. Consider the following scenario:

These people have permanently damaged our lives beyond repair. We did not do them any wrongs and they must apologize for what they did to the innocent people ... Why don't they bring them here [in Namibia]? They [the perpetrators] owe us so much, we have so many unsettled issues with them ... we want to communicate with them, to remind them of the merciless and racial killings of the unprotected civilians and the maiming of so many of us... we want to remind them that we did not provoke them in any way, but they were brutally violent and indiscriminately killed defenseless people including babies and pregnant women ... should they have done that to fellow

³⁹² “Before we are all wiped out,” *Dateline: Namibia*, Issue No. 3 (New York: New York Times Company, 1982). Interviewed about his visit to Namibia and South Africa, Carl Mau, the General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation stated that “the South African government and its forces in Namibia are committed to eradication and not giving up - with very little conscience anymore ... They are now determined to go forward and care very little anymore about who gets hurt in the process ... The present administrator general ... has very little sensitivity anymore to the massive human suffering going on in the territory for which he bears responsibility”. In *Dateline: Namibia*, Issue No. 3 (New York: New York Times Company, 1982).

whites? Most of the victims were women and children and the enemy knew that plain fact ... they have damaged so many lives. Justice must prevail if we are to forgive them.³⁹³

It is particularly painful for the victims that the perpetrators are given political pardon without acknowledging and apologizing for the untold crimes³⁹⁴ they committed against innocent Namibians. In spite of the deplorable issues that the victims of the Cassinga massacre raise, things are not co-ordinated beyond the confines of the individual. There is no open platform where the victims can coherently and collectively express their disappointments and difficulties.

Nonetheless, the deeper meaning as to why post -colonial-apartheid laws in both Namibia and South Africa are lenient towards the perpetrators of apartheid violence must be explained by the uncompromising ties or relationship between politics, law and economy. The 19th Century French philosopher and politician, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, characterized laws as follows:

We know what they [laws] are, and what they are worth! They are spider webs for the rich and mighty, steel chains for the poor and weak, fishing nets in the hands of the government.³⁹⁵

For many victims of the Cassinga massacre, these words resonate. In our democratic state – Namibia - it is virtually the elite who exercise influence on the laws and politics of the country. Hence, in the case of Namibia and South Africa, those with financial and economic power, mostly the formerly ruling minority whites and their external allies, as well as the emerging or already well established black elites and politicians, have the power to influence and navigate the laws and the political landscape of the state in ways that suit the welfare of the minority - the rich and powerful. Nevertheless, the question whether social justice (for example, if the perpetrators were to be prosecuted, pay reparations for the damage incurred) can bring about recovery and reduce the recurrences of traumatic memories is a topic for a different research undertaking.

On memory and testimony, my focus has been specifically limited to the application and understanding of the two concepts in relation to the interviews conducted with survivors of the

³⁹³ Author's interview with Lazarus Namutenya Cornelius, Etunda, February 2008.

³⁹⁴ The crimes that the SADF committed in Namibia against civilians such as in the case of the Cassinga massacre and many other atrocities not highlighted in this study are commonplace among many communities in Namibia and widely reported in the press.

³⁹⁵ Visit: http://thinkexist.com/quotes/pierre-joseph_proudhon/

Cassinga massacre. I have struggled to draw the distinction between the two concepts in accordance with the challenges and insurmountable difficulties which survivors experienced as they tried to unpack violence through different ways of narration. The process of interviewing survivors presented me with the discovery of considerable differences or distinctive separations between testimony and memory. This dichotomy became evident when the interviewees' attempts to elicit violence through testimony proved contradictory and unworkable. That is, when survivors encountered insurmountable limits to show the world the empirical picture of the violence as knowable to each individual witness. Thus, while memory stands for the tangible picture of the violence which continues to hurt the victims, causing repeated injuries and perforating old wounds, testimony, on the other hand, belongs to the range of unsuccessful techniques such as narration or storytelling which survivors used in attempts to elicit the actual world of endless injury and pain. Testimony is unacceptably "annoying," according to survivors, it frustrates them deeply because it is in conflict with what they want the world to see and understand.

Survivors describe testimony as considerably shallow, immaterial and inauthentic. It is trivial, tacit and conceals many practical things which survivors observed on the ground and aspire to show the inexperienced world. Testimony reaches the intended audience unsubstantiated by the violence that survivors bemoan and want the world to experience and understand. In the same vein, survivors' endless nightmares and traumatic flashbacks of the Cassinga killings become slippery when survivors attempt to show these pictures to those of us who might be skeptical of these everyday experiences since Cassinga. In view of the inconsistency between testimony and memory or the organic picture of the Cassinga massacre and the excruciating aftermath, the public should not embrace testimony as communicating the entirety of the horrific experience of the Cassinga massacre and the terribly unresolved long traumatic aftermath. While testimony fails to represent Cassinga precisely, I contest Leonard V. Smith's position that it is "possible to think about it [testimony] coherently and analytically."³⁹⁶ But here it is critical to listen to the victims' voice of trauma, previously silenced, as a way of stimulating conversation, dialogue and debate with the intention to take the Cassinga massacre beyond the political misrepresentations and ongoing polarizations.

³⁹⁶ Leonard V. Smith, *The embattled self*, p. 19.

On photographs, the central argument has been that visual images obscure many secrets. Photographs, be it those taken by the SADF or by SWAPO allies during, or in the immediate aftermath of, the Cassinga massacre can eclipse and hide more than what they disclose to the viewer. Since the available photographs of the Cassinga massacre obscure the untold experiences and memories of the dead, they produce shadows of darkness rather than disclosing the memories and narratives of the particular scenes of violence they claim to represent. In this context, I have argued that to photograph violence as in the case of the Cassinga open mass grave in Chapter 2 and elsewhere, is not to capture the reality of the actual mass graves. Instead, to photograph is to frame, and to frame is to taint and obscure the face of the natural violence.

The tainted images that photographs of the Cassinga massacre promulgate evaporate evidence and nourish inconclusive dialogues between different witnesses, writers and commentators of the Cassinga event. Therefore, in working against the eclipsing of the untold violence that the photographs of the Cassinga massacre entails, the viewer should become aware that the actual experience of the Cassinga massacre on the ground was more diverse and complex than the marginal realities which photographs show. Instead of embracing photographs as authentic and unpacking the things or states of world they appear to designate, photographs should be instead examined as standing in front of the material world they intend to designate.

In this continuum, since photographs are problematically related to the referent or the real things that they claim to represent, theories that perceive photography as authenticating violence should be contested. For instance, the “truth” that the photograph of the Cassinga open mass grave claims to represent is challenged by survivors who told me that the photograph of the mass grave is a mediocre portrayal of the deplorable experience of brutal violence on the ground.

Nonetheless, this is not to say that this photograph and other pictures of the Cassinga massacre “are stilted or unconvincing. However composed and staged, they bear witness to real events.”³⁹⁷ They are in some sense testimonies to the actual SADF heinous violence against civilians, so brutal and enormous that the camera eye developed cold feet to capture any more, or because the

³⁹⁷ Alan Trachtenberg, *Reading American photographs*, p. 73.

camera could not see and encompass, at the same time, violence as it unfolded at different corners of the camp.

On the contemporary situation of the Cassinga mass graves, I have argued that injury and pain of the victims have not waned. Instead, emotional trauma and pain have waxed since the Cassinga massacre. In essence, survivors' trauma and suffering have been reinvigorated and coalesced into passive victimhood since Namibia's political independence in 1990. Namibian democracy has closed its eyes to a number of things that the formerly oppressed population groups consider problematic to ignore. One key sensitive issue pertains to the dividing wall between the Cassinga mass graves, family members and Namibia in general. The mass graves are monumental sites in the history of the Namibian liberation struggle. For many Namibians, generally, it is inconceivable that the mass graves remain inaccessible since Namibia became politically independent. Surprisingly, this happens as Namibia marks every anniversary of the Cassinga massacre as a national mourning day. Perhaps this suggests that the recitation of the Cassinga stories is more significant than the tragedy and victimization of the dead in the apparently forgotten Cassinga mass graves.

In this regrettable situation, it is ironic to remember, commemorate and mourn this historic day while the wishes and expectations of the victims, including the dead, are dishonoured. It is of course possible that the belated internal armed conflict between UNITA and the MPLA government may have been a defeating factor for families and comrades not to visit the mass graves since the bodies were buried there in the manner of paupers. However, it is deeply saddening and injurious for those who are sensibly touched by the Cassinga massacre. This is because, regardless of the return of peace to Angola in 2002, Namibia is yet to initiate any paying of tribute and upgrading of the status of the Cassinga mass graves.

In drawing a more general picture, Namibia's approach to the remains of the war for Namibia's liberation is shockingly disappointing, if not shameful. I am saying this in response to many troubling questions at the back of my mind. For example, is there a marked grave(s) for the hundreds of people (both civilians and SWAPO military cadres such as Wilbard "Nakada"

Tashiya and others) killed during the raid of the Vietnam camp on May 4, 1978? What about the remains of the Oshatotwa attacks in Zambia?

Equally so, what is the state of the graves of thousands of Namibians who died of natural and other causes in camps such as Cassinga, Kwanza-Sul, Ndalatando and at different other places (mainly in Angola and Zambia) where Namibians settled in exile? Graves of several SWAPO cadres are identifiable in Angola and Zambia,³⁹⁸ but if Namibia cannot follow South Africa's route of repatriating cadres home what can be done to give such Namibians proper burials and reunite them with their families? The historic burial sites in exile are not the only important sites which postcolonial Namibia is idly watching fall apart and disintegrate. At home, sites of traumatic memories of the liberation struggle collapse and disappear inside the country. This is while Namibia shamefully watches on. Some of these historic sites include the unmarked graves of PLAN combatants who died fighting inside the country and were secretly buried by local communities in the areas where they operated.

There is also a concern that when initiatives were taken to mark some of the war graves in the former war zone, things were done without proper consultation with the people involved in the burials of the PLAN combatants. As a result, in many ways the plinths marking the grave sites are misleading as they simply read, "a Namibian hero is resting here" when, in many cases, more than one person is buried at the site.³⁹⁹

In coming to the end of this study, it is important to emphasize the concern that Namibia's unresponsiveness to the demands and expectations of the victims of violence and trauma serves to reinvigorate and consolidate emotional trauma and suffering of the people already wounded. To think that colonialism and its encompassing violence are the things of the past is to be naïve

³⁹⁸ These include, to list very few of them, Putuse Meekulu Apollus, Lineekela Hailundu Kalenga, Peter Eneas Nanyemba, Greenwell Matongo, Kapuka Nauyala, David Kamwi, Jason "Wanehepo" Hamutenya Ndadi, Augustus "McNamara" Nghaamwa, Isack "Pondo" Ndeshtiwa Shikongo, Natalia Ndahambelega Mavulu, Nabot Helao Nafidi, Homateni Kalweenya and many other. Some names of the people who died under the SWAPO care, their causes and places of death (in some cases) are listed in the SWAPO Party publication: *Their blood waters our freedom: glory to the heroes and heroines of the Namibian liberation struggle* (Windhoek: Namib Graphics, 1996).

³⁹⁹ Vilho Shigwedha, "turning in their graves." In *The Namibian Weekender*, 24 August, 2001; Vilho Shigwedha, "Commemorating the Combatants," online at <http://www.namibweb.com/commemorate.htm>; Vilho Shigwedha, "Ondeshifilwa." Online at: <http://www.namibweb.com/ondes.htm>

about the trauma and continuing suffering of the victims of apartheid and colonial repression. Likewise, to think that “reconciliation without justice” is capable of mending past injustices and heal the open wounds is to aggravate the suffering of the victims of unforgiveable war crimes against the vast majority of the civilian population, especially in the former war zones.

Critically, the ongoing suffering, unhappiness and despair of the victims of apartheid’s brutal violence in Namibia should not be simply understood as belated relics of the dark moments or trying times when apartheid unleashed violence on civilians to prevent black rule and the independence of Namibia. Such pathos should be read as firmly anchored in the painful memories of postcolonial Namibia’s failure to deal with the aftermath of the Cassinga massacre in an unbiased and fair manner. In particular, there is a need to deal accordingly with the obstinate and arrogant disclaimers who for no justifiable reason continue to disseminate the denial of the Cassinga massacre in different public avenues.

The pervasive practices of the perpetrators and their ongoing “assaults” on the victims of colonialism and oppression not only unveil the impracticality and the uselessness of the Namibian policy of national reconciliation in terms of rebuking and holding perpetrators of violence to account. Of much concern is that the unshakable disclaimers’ arrogance is unacceptably injurious to the whole body already in pain. They reinvigorate and reactivate trauma that the victims battle so hard to switch off as they do not want their lives to be preoccupied with remembrance of the traumatic memories of the Cassinga massacre. Hence, the understanding of the experience of the Cassinga massacre best translates into the never ending present which is “increasingly likely to overwhelm any foreseeable” futures.

So, as the spectres of apartheid’s brutal violence threaten to cast a pall into the future, it is important to attempt to get to the bottom of some of these difficult issues and conditions. It is necessary to interrogate the situations and mechanisms which reinvigorate the ongoing suffering of survivors and affected families of the missing people. In view of some of the survivors’ registered worries and demands there is, among them, an urge for Namibia to revisit things, to juxtapose the past and present to make them interrogate each other and do things based on reason and frankness. This does not only call for a collective and united voice of the victims. Above all,

political will and commitment is pertinent. Nonetheless, it is critical that the victims are consulted and regarded as experts in matters concerning their damaged lives.

It is also crucial that the victims' ongoing suffering and trauma, especially in the case of survivors of the Cassinga massacre, should rise above the concept of a "shared heroic sacrifice." This understanding is political and therefore problematic: the notion of the "heroic sacrifice" suggests closing the chapter of the unresolved issues of the violence. This is because the embedded political association or marriage between the shared violence and political heroism constitute an urge to discourage survivors and affected families from pursuing justice for the violated rights of the victims. This is one reason why so many years of prolonged silence have elapsed as survivors embrace "passive victimhood" due to political manipulation. This perilous situation overlooks the fact that when traumatic memories experience repression for a considerably protracted period of time, the burden of memory becomes heavier for the victims to manage. And, with time, these ticking bombs will definitely explode. The Herero issue with the Germans regarding the 1904 - 1908 genocide which is now simmering is a lesson here.⁴⁰⁰ In this regard, the way many survivors are showing an interest in narrating their individual experiences of the massacre and the aftermath can be interpreted as a way of attempting to respond to the unaddressed issues regarding the forfeited "survivors' justice" since independence.

Most importantly, the victims of the Cassinga massacre, affected families and their offspring have every right to rise above the lines of political subordination, exploitation and abuse of the victims' inalienable human rights. They have all the right to demand that the South African government acknowledges and takes responsibility for the "collateral damage" permanently inflicted on the lives of innocent people. Otherwise, legal channels to sue the government of the Republic of South Africa for the severity of the unacceptable acts of collateral damage to civilians and their property should be explored and debated.

⁴⁰⁰ Jeremy Sarkin. *Colonial Genocide and reparations claims in the 21st century: the socio-legal context of claims under international law by the Herero against German for Genocide in Namibia, 1904-1908* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2009).

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Statement by the Administrator-General for SWA, Judge MT Steyn.

Through consideration of all possible factors and the requests of various politicians in this area I have consulted with the South African government and with their permission have asked the army to launch a limited operation in South Angola to destroy certain terrorist bases. The pressure exerted from the northern leaders like Pastor Njoba and Mr. Alphens Majebero have in recent times increased after members of their tribes came under terrorists attack by members of SWAPO. I have repeatedly invited SWAPO on numerous occasions- and I am still doing it- to participate peacefully in the political process of this country, but such a process can't take place if headmen are kidnapped, women are assaulted, scholars kidnapped and members murdered by people that come across the border. I would not be able to do my duty if I did not give adherence to law and order in this country. I trust that the world will realize that we can resolve the problems in this area democratically and around a confederation table that will be mutually beneficial to all the inhabitants as well as to ensure prolonged stability. The security forces that are represented here will at all times adhere to law and order and will not tolerate any intimidation or any other form of terrorism. In this case there were no measures taken against SWAPO, but against those elements in SWAPO that were revolutionary in controlling this country through violence and who hold no respect for country borders. I trust that everyone who considers the welfare of the inhabitants of Southwest Africa/Namibia to be of importance will support me in the decision I am forced to take. My thanks, and thanks to the peaceful people and to each member of the army that fights in our interest against the forces of anarchy and the revolution.

Source: Chief of the SADF (Top Secret); PSYAC planning directive No. 3/78, Appendix B to PSYAC No. 3 / 78, SANDF Archive, Pretoria.

APPENDIX B

Statement by the Commander General, Commander Southwest Africa, General Major JJ Geldenhuys, S.M.

On request of the Administrator-General ... Southwest African troops (sic) and troops of the SA Army initiated a limited operation several hours in Southern Angola with the instruction to destroy bases occupied by terrorists. The troops (including parachute troops) received instructions not to act under any circumstances against members of the local population or against any of their property. It was also relayed to our troops to avoid any confrontation with the Angolan government forces. Notwithstanding the reasons given by the Administrator general for this drastic action, the patience of the security forces have been tested in recent times to the utmost extremes by a large number of illegal border crossings and acts against our patrol guards and temporary bases near the border. Terrorists have initially avoided contact with the security forces and were determined on intimidating and damaging business of the local population, but in recent times they have acted in larger patrols against smaller SA patrols-to ensure safe passage over the border. ... We trust that in a couple of hours that everything will be finished and that the Angolan troops will abstain from becoming involved in this ... internal case. Gradually as the operation is progressing news will be available on a regular basis to the press.

Source: Chief of the SADF (Top Secret); PSYAC planning directive No. 3/78, Appendix B to PSYAC No. 3 / 78, SANDF Archive, Pretoria.

APPENDIX C

Suggested approach for statement by Minister of Defence & The Guidelines for statement by GOC SWA.

~~TOP SECRET~~APPENDIX B TO PSYAC
PLANNING DIRECTIVE NO 3/78

SUGGESTED APPROACH FOR STATEMENT BY MINISTER OF DEFENCE

1. General. It is suggested that the first announcement of the operation comes from SWA because:

- a. It indicates that the decision is primarily an SWA matter.
- b. It places the matter in a low profile regional perspective.
- c. It allows the RSA government room for manoeuvre in that the outside world must first react, before the RSA government states its attitude.
- d. It could suit our ends should Angola/SWAPO decide to play down the effect of the operation and their reaction to it. This is unlikely to happen if the operation is initially announced by the Minister.

2. Approach. Should the Minister decide to make a statement, it is suggested that the following broad approach be followed:

- a. Confirm that the RSA government had been consulted and requested to support the operation.
- b. That the Angolan government was aware that its territory was being used as a base for aggression against the peoples of SWA but, notwithstanding protest, had failed to stop such internationally unlawful activity.
- c. That SWAPO had been dealt a heavy blow in the interests of SWA democratic progress.
- d. Latest operational details.
- e. That the RSA, in the future as in the past, will always give serious consideration to any request for support in maintaining law and order in SWA and promoting democratic progress to independence in SWA.

DEFENCE INTELLIGENCE
DECLASSIFIED

22 JAN 2007

J.A.L. STEINMANN
72563596PE W01~~TOP SECRET~~

GUIDELINES FOR STATEMENT BY GOC SWA

1. General. This statement may be made in conjunction with or separately from a statement by the AG, SWA. It should be issued as soon as success has been confirmed and withdrawal has commenced. The following general guidelines apply.
2. Profile. The operation must be presented as having been a self defence operation. It is the latest of a series of hot pursuit operations.
3. Justification. The operation is motivated by:
 - a. The increasing intensity of border violations culminating in the serious incident of D minus 1.
 - b. The history of SWAPO intimidation of the Owambo people and the murder of elected political figures.
 - c. SWAPO statements and evidence of a pending SWAPO offensive to forestall democratic elections in the territory. The role of Cassinga in the SWAPO infrastructure.
 - d. The above called for preventative self-defence operations to protect Namibian lives and property from SWAPO.
4. Consultation. The operation was preceded by consultation with the relevant bodies in SWA/Owambo.
5. Results. An indication of the results of the operation and the nature of own casualties.

DEFENCE INTELLIGENCE
DECLASSIFIED

22 JAN 2007

J.A.L. STEINMANN
72563596PE WO1

~~TOP SECRET~~

Source: Chief of the SADF (Top Secret); PSYAC planning directive No. 3/78, Appendix B to PSYAC No. 3 / 78, SANDF Archive, Pretoria.

APPENDIX D

Some photographs taken by the SADF during the Cassinga attack.



Figure 1. No caption. Source SANDF Archive, Pretoria.



Figure 2. No caption. Source SANDF Archive, Pretoria.



Figure 3. No caption. Source SANDF Archive, Pretoria.



Figure 4. No caption. Source SANDF Archive, Pretoria.



Figure 5. No caption. Source SANDF Archive, Pretoria.

APPENDIX E

Extract from the transcription of the author's interview with Rev. Samwel Mateus Shiininge about his experience of the 'Vietnam' attack.

In the interview, Rev. Samwel Mateus Shiininge told me that he was born on September 10, 1923 at Onakayale in Ombalantu, northern Namibia. At the time of the 'Vietnam' attack, he was the head of the Evangelical Lutheran Owambokavango Church (ELOC) - now known as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN) - mission at Oshikango shaPopawa. This place is located about 25km from the Angolan south western border with Namibia. Rev. Shiininge was sent there in 1974 to, according to the interview, "plant the seeds of Christianity" among communities in southern Angola.⁴⁰¹

Oshikango Shapopapwa, also called *Osheetekela* is the same place where SWAPO established the 'Vietnam' military camp. The area was suitable for the SWAPO combatants in considering its proximity to a perennial water point, *etale*, and a dense forest called *omufitu gwaSheetekela* or the jungles of Sheetekela. SWAPO military camp at that place was strategically located as it was closer to the Namibian border. For that reason, it provided a reception to many civilians (before they were transported to Cassinga) who were escaping from Namibia by the north western route entering into Angola.

The Lutheran Mission home and the church were located a stone's throw from the SWAPO base at Vietnam. Rev. Shiininge recounted his experience of the SADF attack of the SWAPO camp at Vietnam as provided by the following excerpt:

The attack took place on the Ascension Sunday, May 4, 1978. I had just returned home from the church that afternoon. And, as I was lying down, for a siesta, on a mat or *oshiinda*, under a pawpaw tree shade I was awoken by a thundering noise. I got up quickly ... bombs were exploding all over the place and dust was oozing everywhere. The attack was unexpected. The SWAPO soldiers were loosely in and outside the camp. Some of them were at the kitchen when the attack happened as it was lunchtime ... The bombers retreated towards the northeastern direction of the camp and never returned ... as soon as the bombing planes left, a reconnaissance plane moved in and began circling the camp continuously. At the same time, the ground forces moved in with armed vehicles. A heavy fight erupted between the Boers and the SWAPO soldiers. Some of my family members and I escaped from the mission home ... we went to

⁴⁰¹ "The Evangelical Lutheran mission work began in southern Angola led by the Rhenish missionary A. Wulfhorst from 1891 to 1915. Due to political circumstances, the Lutheran Christians left Angola in 1915 for northern Namibia, thinking that they belonged to the same ethnic group as the people located south of the Namibia border. In 1933, Angolan Lutherans returned to Angola and were served under the administration of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN). In 1954 Simon Ndatipo became the first ELCIN pastor to work in Angola permanently, and in 1962, Rev. Noa Ndeutapo of ELCIN replaced Rev. Ndatipo. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Angola erected its first church building at Shangalala in 1965. It became a member of the Lutheran World Federation in 1997 and today has 29,000 members." Visit: <http://www.elca.org/Who-We-Are/Our-Three-Expressions/Churchwide-Organization/Global-Mission/Where-We-Work/Africa/Angola/Mission-History.aspx>

hide in the middle of the *omahangu* field. It was a good harvesting season and the tall and thick *omahangu* stalks provided good cover for us but not protection.

While hiding in the *omahangu* field, the fight intensified and we felt very much unsecured ... A group of young girls also joined us. The crowd was getting bigger ... we feared that the enemy might find us there, but it was also unsafe to move away ... When the fight subsided ... we decided to vacate that position. I suggested that the best place to find protection was to run inside the thick forest that surrounded the camp ... but my wife, meme Hilya Martin [late], warned against possible dangers inside the jungles. That idea was revoked ... alternatively, we decided to take the direction where we could find Angolan homesteads ... We came to the homestead of Nghidulika Komukwiyu, but no one was in the house ... People fled for fear of their lives ... We came to the second homestead, which belonged to Paulus and still we found no people in the house. Late in the afternoon, we found a man, his name was Ndongili. He was riding a horse ... I did not remember to take my shirt and shoes when I fled from the house and as it was getting cold ... Ndongili gave me a shirt and left us there

From there, we went to the homestead of Sarafi yaNangombe. He accommodated us for weeks. He also gave me shoes and clothes to wear... The big trouble was my mother-in-law, Ruth Shooya [late] who was not with us. We left her inside the missionary home when we escaped. She was very old and we could not take her with us ... Two days later, my conscience compelled me to go back to the camp to try and find her. I was escorted by two villagers, members of my parish ... I also wanted to assess possible damage to the church and to the mission home ... we found the church and the homestead completely destroyed ... some people went inside the church for protection, thinking that the attackers would not tamper with and cause harm to the church building. They were mistaken as the church and the mission house were all bulldozed and razed to the ground by the casspirs and other armed vehicles.

My mother-in-law was nowhere to be located ... We searched all over the camp expecting to find her body ... we later learnt that the Boers, attackers, found her in the homestead. They accused her of being a SWAPO's medicine woman - a witch or *omulodhi*. She was an elderly woman, but they tortured her so badly and took her back to Namibia. We stayed in the dark about her whereabouts for months... we presumed that she was killed in the attack. Months later, I got a clue, through our mission station at Oshaangalala, that she was alive but kept in prison in Namibia ... she did not receive proper medical treatment for her injuries while in prison. As a result, her health deteriorated while incarcerated ... the

church intervened and she was released after spending about a year in detention ...

After her release, she lived with Simon Ndatipo in Ombalantu, but her health deteriorated further. In 1980 I sent for her to come and stay with us at Osheetekela. But her health did not get any better. She died in 1982 and we buried her there in Angola (Vietnam) ... Anyway, I should tell you that what I saw in the camp when I went back to the mission church and house is very difficult to describe ... people's bodies were scattered everywhere in the camp ... What exactly happened to their bodies and whether the bodies of prominent commanders whom I knew like Nakada (Wilbard "Nakada" Tashiya), Mbango and others were ever recovered for burial I do not know, as I did not go back there until things settled ...

Source: Rev. Samwel Mateus Shiininge's interview with the author, Etunda, 2007.

APPENDIX F

UNICEF report on Namibian refugee at Cassinga before the attack.

In mid - April 1978 - just three weeks prior to the South African attack - a delegation from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) visited Cassinga. They observed a flood of refugees coming directly from Namibia under pressure and repression from the South African army, which is currently attempting to establish a non-man's-land on the Angolan - Namibian frontier. The delegation estimated the number of Namibians between 11, 000 and 12, 000. With regard to the composition of the refugee population, the mission found that the young population, that is to say, adolescents, children and infants constitutes the majority. The percentage of women also seems to be considerable. Thus, the mission concluded, the vulnerable groups apparently represent approximately 70 per cent of the total population [...]. The remainder [...] is composed of adults, with very few elderly persons. The school going population was estimated close to 2, 500. As would be expected in any rapidly growing refugee settlement, the UNICEF mission identified a number of problem areas, however, it was positively impressed by SWAPO's organization and administration, as well as by the determination shown by the refugees: one is struck by the organization of their health services, their education and sanitation ... [programmes]. Therefore, in the rational essence of the actuality of Cassinga, it is evident that it was indeed a Namibian refugee centre, administered by SWAPO with the assistance of the United Nations and protected by a small SWAPO military force, which included a senior SWAPO commander. Representatives of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees and the World Health Organization who visited Cassinga three weeks after the raid ... verified on the ground ... the extreme savagery, the attempted annihilation, and the systematic destruction wrought upon a group of refugees under the protection of the High Commission for Refugees. ... That these people were civilians is attested to by all the evidence that this UN mission has been able to gather ... All the facts (on the ground) that this UN delegation have been able to verify reveal that what happened in Cassinga must be described as criminal in legal terms and savage in moral terms. It reminds us of the darkest moments of modern history.

Source: Tor Sellström, *Sweden and national liberation in Southern Africa: solidarity and assistance 1970 - 1994, volume 11: solidarity and assistance 1970 - 1994* (Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2002), pp. 352 - 363.

APPENDIX G

“Cassinga battle account reveals biased claptrap: a former SADF Colonel who led forces in controversial battle speaks out”

I have followed the Sunday Independent letters between Mike McWilliams and Randolph Vigne of Cape Town concerning the Battle of Cassinga. I am totally in agreement with Mike McWilliams since I too was there – in fact, as Mike’s commander on that fateful day.

Concerning Annemarie Heywood’s accusation in her *The Cassinga Event: An Investigation of the Records*, it can be stated categorically that the battlefield was carefully prepared by South West Africa People’s Organisation (Swapo) and People’s Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola (FAPLA) troops before the international press arrived. Thus, there was no reliable evidence to be obtained from a subsequent photograph of a so-called “mass grave” to show the bodies of “the great majority of women and children” slaughtered by the paratroopers or the Air Force.

Nor could there be because there never was such a grave to photograph. There was and still is, however, one photograph – and one only, of a so-called mass grave, which shows a great majority of men, all them combatants, with only three women barely recognizable among the lot and, significantly, without any evidence whatsoever, of dead or mutilated children.

This is the photograph that is used by Heywood, Vigne and others to accuse my paratroopers of butchering women and children indiscriminately, pregnant women having their stomachs ripped open by bayonets, after they had been raped, of course, to get at the unborn as well.

If there had been a photograph sent into the world showing a huge heap of women and children massacred by the “Boers”, John Vorster’s government would have become history overnight and the concerned five western nations would have given up the whole attempt to come to a peaceful solution for the South West Africa Namibia problem.

They and others would have instituted a water-tight sanctions plan, perhaps even a blockade of the South African and South West African coastlines, even used military force to kick the South African Defence Force (SADF) out of South West Africa Namibia. And even the Security Council would have been driven to accept Swapo as the only legitimate government of SWA / Namibia.

But there was no such photograph of hundreds of massacred innocents, if not the thousands, because the rumoured mass grave had, unfortunately, already been covered up before the first camera arrived on the scene.

It would, of course, have been sacrilege to reopen the grave of such a tragic event just for the sake of photographic evidence. So they had to make do with what they had and rely on Goebbels-type hype and propaganda to sway the ignorant masses and their “not-so-ignorant” leaders by embroidering the alleged atrocities committed by barbaric, crazed paratroopers.

The only photograph they could produce had to serve, but no matter. An energetic propaganda offence would change the shortcomings of this photo, as pointed out above, into an instrument of almost gospel truth.

For Vigne's information, my paratroopers did not carry bayonets or any other sharp instruments with which to slaughter women and children, a fact he could have verified with General Constand Viljoen himself, since he had taken the infantry's bayonets away some years before Cassinga.

Incidentally, Viljoen also arrived on the scene of battle, unexpectedly, and the least Vigne could have done was to confirm his perceived details with the general who started it all, a man who was pronounced by Nelson Mandela himself as one of a very few totally honourable and honest men he has ever dealt with during his remarkable life.

I nevertheless refer Vigne, again, to the extremely prejudiced Cassinga Event, authored by Heywood, which he unequivocally favours, and specifically to the photograph I have mentioned, which is the only one ever used to accuse us of a genocidal massacre.

Then there is, of course, also the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report Vigne can go and dig up. He will discover that even the biased truth commission found that there was no substantial evidence, in spite of Heywood's accusations, that we, the paratroopers, had wiped out a refugee camp while pretending to attack a Swapo base.

If that is not enough information for him, I, as honorary colonel of the Legion of Associated Airborne, Republic of South Africa, invite him to a night out with paratrooper veterans in Benoni, or here in Sedgefield, to have a snort or two and to discuss his reservations with men who were there. I can assure him that the men are always on their best behaviour so that he [sic] need not fear being given a torrid time.

A less dodgy approach would have been to buy an older colleague, namely Willem Steenkamp, a malt whiskey and to tap his brains on many aspects of the border war.

Vigne is perhaps ignoring the fact that Steenkamp was a brilliant war correspondent for the Cape Times and that he wrote a book called Border Strike which covers, among others, the Reindeer and the Cassinga battles extensively.

This is by far a much more reliable and balanced account from the pen of a cool and calm reporter with impeccable integrity - compared with the prejudiced horror story told by a biased, almost hysterical Heywood.

So Vigne's excuse that only Heywood's less-than-salubrious effort should be considered is, to tell the truth, dishonest and holds no water at all with me.

Vigne knows about Steenkamp, where he comes from and where he can be found. What is more, Steenkamp is a Capetonian and thus easily accessible to a fellow Capetonian like Vigne.

On the other hand, Vigne can wait for my own telling of the Cassinga event to see the light of day in the near future. In this book, which he will have to buy (no freebies from me), I have gone out of my way to expose the manufactured evidence Heywood had used to project a deliberately skewed account into the world with the specific objective to discredit the whole SADF as baby killers and thus to cover up the vitally important fact that Swapo had badly lost the most strategic battle, ever, up to that point, in the history of the border war.

Unfortunately, the author of the masters thesis referred to by Vigne also relied, to some extent, on Swapo and Heywood claptrap, especially in some critical areas, to substantiate a somewhat watered down “accidental” killing scenario of civilians – the so-called “collateral damage” profile the Americans are so fond of using when justifying especially bombing raids, while discussing events during the Vietnam and Iraq wars.

My book has been written specifically to contradict the “baby killer” tag and a host of other serious accusations made by the author of the masters thesis and, by extension, by Heywood et al – thus also by people like Vigne who make ill-considered statements without proper research and cross-checking.

I have meticulously researched my book over a much wider spectrum than any previous pontificators on the Cassinga battle with the almost inevitable result that none of us really come out of the Cassinga battle smelling of roses. Nevertheless, we emerge with our humanistic reputations and our pride, as paratroopers and air men, still very much intact.

Lots went wrong on that day, up to a point when imminent disaster became almost a certainty, but the fighting spirit of all my paratroopers and some very brave pilots and aircrews pulled us through, so that we could go home more or less intact to claim a most remarkable victory.

Colonel Jan Breytenbach was first commander of 44 Parachute Brigade and commander of the paratroopers during the Cassinga battle.

Article authored by Colonel Jan Breytenbach. Source: *Sunday Independent* 3 February 2008.

APPENDIX H

Ellen Namhila's response to Jan Breytenbach's article

"I was at Cassinga and it was not a military base"

I refer to the correspondence in your columns re: Cassinga.

I am a Namibian survivor of Cassinga, which was a Swapo refugee camp attacked and bombed by the South African Defence Force's (SADF's) air force and paratroopers on May 4 1978.

I was there when it was bombed and I, and many of my friends whom I lost in the bombing were not military people. We did not study military matters and did not have guns to fight anyone. I can state categorically that Cassinga was not a military base.

We had run away from Namibia because of apartheid repression. Swapo established a refugee camp for us at Cassinga. It was a camp for children and youths like myself, and there were elderly people who were responsible for cooking our meals and doing the administrative work of the camp, such as nurses, gardeners and teachers. Our teachers did not carry guns.

The SADF is fully responsible for its own casualties, which might have been due to their own miscalculations. We the residents of Cassinga did not have guns to kill anyone. The air force dropped bombs all over the place and put the life of their own personnel in danger.

Why didn't they attack Swapo military camps? What did we do to them to be bombarded like that?

It is strange that in today's world we still have people who are trying to earn their glory out of merciless killings of innocent lives and that newspapers such as yours should give space for a disgraceful regime to claim the glory over those of us who are still recovering from the trauma of the Cassinga massacre.

Ellen Namhila, Namibia

Source: *Sunday Independent*, 9 March 2008, p. 6.

APPENDIX I

"Bullets do not lie," Jan Breytenbach's response to Ellen Namhila's letter.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Editor reserves the right to shorten and edit letters. Writers must give their full names, addresses and contact phone numbers



ame of soccer on the Sea Point promenade. in open space, accessible to all South
PHOTOGRAPH: SOPHIA STANDER

Bullets don't lie, but it appears people do

I have read with amused astonishment Ellen Namhila's description of the attack by South African paratroopers on Cassinga on May 4 1978 ("I was at Cassinga and it was not a military base", *The Sunday Independent*, March 9).

What really tickles me is her interpretation that we South Africans had been shooting ourselves during the ensuing "massacre", which obviously accounted for our own casualties.

There were no weapons anywhere to be found in the Cassinga "refugee camp", according to Namhila.

I will only discuss this aspect as the rest has been covered a number of times by both the former paratroopers and, of course, the helpless "refugees" that survived this "atrocious" slaughter by the bloodthirsty Boers.

I was, according to Namhila, shot through the wrist by one of my own men. It could only have been with an AK-47, which the paratrooper who did the dirty deed had to have smuggled in since his service rifle, a good old 7.62 R1 rifle would have taken my whole hand away.

Similarly, Backhouse, who was badly wounded, having his aorta severed, obviously by an AK, SKS or more likely a PPSH, would have had his whole heart system and most of his chest cavity shot away if it had been one of his own mates who had done him in with an R1.

Norman Reeves had an incoming bullet stopped by a pencil flare projector in his top pocket.

If it was a R1 rifle (Nato 7.62 bullet) it would have carried this pencil flare deep into his chest cavity which would have meant the end of Norman Reeves.

Likewise, Dries Marais, our intrepid Buccaneer pilot who had come to our rescue, collected a number of anti-aircraft holes in his plane, two shots through his two Rolls Royce Spey engines, but nevertheless kept flying because of the ruggedness of the plane.

If it had been one of our 20 mills he would, however, not have made it.

Thus, the three of my men killed, the one MIA believed killed and the dozen or so wounded were done in by paratroopers behaving like a bunch of cowboys during a drunken brawl.

Perhaps I had the very substantial numbers of AK-47s, PPSHs, SKSs and other weaponry parachuted in to create the impression, through pictures taken at the time, that Cassinga was a South West Africa People's Organisation military base and not a refugee camp as claimed.

**Jan Breytenbach
George**



Source: *The Sunday Independent*, 16 March 2008

APPENDIX J

Jan Breytenbach's role in regional and other conflicts

Jan Breytenbach was the SADF number one [paratrooper], experienced, of proven ability and deserved all respects of the SADF. According to Edward George Alexander, the Chief of the South African Army, General Constand Viljoen tasked Jan Breytenbach “to plan the ‘assault’ on Cassinga and to train the troops for it. ... There was no one else (in the SADF) with the proven combat leadership of Jan Breytenbach. ... In 1966 he (Breytenbach) commanded the paratrooper contingent that participated in the first action of the war in Namibia when a helicopter assault was carried out on the SWAPO base at Ongulumbashe.... In 1969, he and three other hand-picked paratroopers who were under his command, were sent on a top-secret mission, masquerading as mercenaries, to assist the Biafrans in the Nigerian civil war. For his part in (Biafra) War Breytenbach was decorated by the President of Gabon. This adventure led directly to the founding of South Africa's first special force units, 1 Reconnaissance Commando (‘The Recces’) with Jan Breytenbach as its commander. In this role he led clandestine operations into Zambia, Tanzania (raiding Dar-es-Salem harbour from a submarine), Angola and Mozambique ... On 22 January 1974, Breytenbach and five of his Recces parachuted into Mozambique with 35 Rhodesian SA paratroopers in an operation against ZANLA (Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army) guerrillas only weeks before the coup in Portugal. ... When South Africa became involved in the Angolan civil war in 1975, Breytenbach was the first training team commander sent to assist the FNLA (Frente Nacional de Libertacao de Angola - National Front for the Liberation of Angola). He formed the battalion of FNLA forces known as ‘Bravo Group’ and led them as part of Task Force Zulu, participating in phenomenal advance across southern Angola to the coast, then up towards Luanda, fighting one battle after another, first against the MPLA and then against the Cubans. ... When the South Africans withdrew from Angola, Breytenbach brought Bravo Group with him and eventually engineered their absorption into the SADF as the notorious 32 Battalion. He commanded them ... conducting ... counter guerrilla operations into Angola ... At the time of ... Cassinga ... Colonel Jan Breytenbach was probably the most experienced combat commander in the SADF. Certainly he was the most highly decorated soldier in the SA Army and one of the very few to have first hand experience of parachute operations. He had an intimate knowledge of the fighting capabilities of SWAPO, the MPLA (and) the Cubans.”

Source: Edward Alexander, “The Cassinga Raid,” pp. 96-102.

APPENDIX K

The SADF torture and deliberate killing of the suspected SWAPO fighters as told by Lance Corporal Sean Callaghan & Warrant Officer John Deegan, former SADF soldiers:

“The third specific incident that I remember is chasing a SWAPO unit commander or political commissar. We picked up his spoor and chased him for two days ... this was typical of the style of contacts that I was involved in. Five Casspirs, fifty men chasing one or two people running on foot. We finally did catch him, hiding in a kraal. The unit commander ... lined up a bunch of Koevoet people next to the hut he was in and drove over the hut with the Casspir. Everyone then fired into the rubble ... The SWAPO commissar was pulled out of the rubble and given to me to keep alive. He had been shot in the arm and the leg and had been driven over ... because he was a commissar, he would have been carrying a handgun. John [Deegan, acting unit commander] started to interrogate him while I was putting up a drip. The purpose of this interrogation was to find the handgun ... We never found the handgun because John shot him in the head out of frustration while I was still attending to him. The incident and the face of this SWAPO commissar haunted me in dreams for years.” [Statement by Lance Corporal Sean Callaghan, amnesty application, December 1996].

“[The SWAPO commissar] was a veteran ... he would have been an excellent source of information but he was so fucked ... each team had an army medic and Sean started patching up this guy while I was busy interrogating him ... and he was just going ‘kandi shishi’ (I don’t know anything), even at this stage he was denying everything ... and I just started going into this uncontrollable fucking rage and he started going floppy and I remember thinking ‘how dare you, I’m talking to you, how dare you ignore me...why don’t you answer me’ and then this is what I was told afterwards. I had my 9 mm in my hand and I was just pushing my way through the team ... and apparently what happened was I started ripping ... Sean had put a drip into the guy’s arm and started plugging the bullet hole to get him together ... he would have pulled through ... I ripped all the bandages, the drip off the guy, pulled out my 9 mm, put the barrel between his eyes and fucking boom I executed him ... and they told me afterwards I was just screaming, I was raging ... ” (Statement by Warrant Officer John Deegan).

Source: Lance Corporal Sean Callaghan & Warrant Officer John Deegan - accounts of an incident to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s conscript hearing, Cape Town, June 1997. In the “Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report: Volume Two, Chapter Two, The State outside South Africa between 1960 and 1990.”

APPENDIX L

“Cassinga events need to be documented”

It wasn't the first time the story had been told, but judging from the age of many in attendance and the silence during its telling, one could have believed that it was.

“We heard a strange sound coming from the south-eastern side of the camp,” Cassinga massacre survivor Agnes Kafula started, recounting the events of 28 years ago, which left hundreds of Namibians dead. Kafula was speaking at the annual commemoration of Cassinga Day in Windhoek yesterday, which was held at the UN Plaza in Katutura. She recalled how they quickly learned that the sound came from South African Defence Force (SADF) aircraft which proceeded to drop bombs onto the southern Angolan town, and send in forces.

“Many were shot at close range. Small kids thrown against trees and big stones,” she said, losing her voice at times. “Our wounds have healed,” she finally said after narrating how she, along with other survivors, some of whom stood behind her holding candles, managed to escape the onslaught. “But our scars remain. May their souls rest in peace.” Kafula asked the government to ensure that the history of Cassinga was documented “in the form of a booklet” to ensure that what happened does not become lost to future generations. She also asked Government to consider allowing survivors to visit the mass grave of those who died, while asking that those who were instrumental in saving the lives of survivors be recognised as national heroes and heroines.

Former Prime Minister Hage Geingob also stressed the need for this part of Namibia's history to be documented, regardless of how painful it might be. “Many want us to forget what we went through. They want us to believe that Namibia started on March 21 1990. But history is about everything, the good and the bad,” Geingob said. “We must be careful in this country not to play down certain events. We must not take our reconciliation for granted.” In conclusion, Geingob cautioned Government to become more proactive in addressing issues of land and economic empowerment, in order to avoid possibly dangerous consequences. “There are many Namibians who are angry. Angry also with their leaders who say let's forgive and forget. Let's address the land issue, the economic issue, before it's too late,” he said. The plaza was filled with Namibians young and old, who sang songs of remembrance between the speeches.

Source: *The Namibian*, 5 May 2006.

APPENDIX M

“Don’t Scrap Cassinga Day.”

Windhoek - Deputy Prime Minister Dr. Libertina Amathila outrightly dismissed some public sentiments that Namibian holidays, including Cassinga Day, should be scrapped because there are too many holidays, arguing that the country's independence came at a very high price. Addressing hundreds of Namibians at the UN Plaza in Katutura on Cassinga Day on Friday, Amathila stressed that each citizen must never forget that the independence that they have enjoyed for the past 17 years was won the hard way by those who died in the war of liberation. “We will not allow their sacrifices to be forgotten or be reduced to insignificance and we will not reduce holidays. We value our freedom and we value the contribution made by our fallen heroes and heroines,” said Amathila.

The latest sentiment by the Deputy Premier, who was addressing the crowd on behalf of President Hifikepunye Pohamba, comes in light of some suggestions from various quarters in the country that there are too many holidays. It is being suggested that these holidays be scrapped, including Cassinga Day. However, Amathila was quick to dismiss these suggestions. “I wish to use this opportunity to dispel those suggestions with the contempt they deserve and I want to remind those persons making these suggestions that the blood of the victims of Cassinga as well as other victims of the liberation war, waters our freedom!”

The significance of Cassinga Day dates back to 29 years ago, on May 4, 1978, when thousands of innocent Namibian civilians were brutally attacked and hundreds killed by the South African apartheid military forces at Cassinga, a Swapo refugee camp in southern Angola. The commemoration on Friday was graced by the presence of the Founding Father of the Nation Dr Sam Nujoma. Amathila noted that the hard-won independence and sacrifices made should not be taken for granted, but rather respected through hard work. “As people, we must always be mindful that the virtues of peace, tranquility and political and social stability are building foundations for a prosperous and strong nation. We must never take these virtues for granted,” said Amathila. Cassinga Day should be seen as a day of reflection on the country's historical journey to freedom and for looking at the way ahead in addressing the daunting challenges of poverty, unemployment and social disparities. “It is about reminding ourselves, individually and collectively, about the challenges we still need to address and to re-awaken our sense of national consciousness and dignity,” she said. In respect of the heroes and heroines who died at Cassinga, government has already done its part in collecting the soil from the mass graves in southern Angola and placing it at Heroes Acre in the capital. Steps are also under way to construct a monument at the mass gravesite at Cassinga, in memory of those who died for the liberation of the country.

Earlier that day, Amathila laid a wreath in honour of the Cassinga heroes and heroines at Heroes Acre. Speaking on behalf of the group of close to 20 Cassinga survivors present at the commemoration, Councillor Agnes Kafula said the 4th of May was a very sad day in the history of the country. “This was a barbaric act of cowardice by the South African apartheid regime. Although our wounds are healed, the scars remain and the pain and anguish that we have gone through 29 years ago is still fresh in our minds,” said Kafula. She added that as Cassinga survivors, the spirit of those who sacrificed their lives in the liberation struggle such as at Cassinga would not rest until their remains are brought back home. “Therefore, we urge our government to take the initiative to bring back the remains of those comrades who perished in

the liberation struggle so that they get a proper burial,” said Kafula, adding that plans are under way to set up a Cassinga Trust.

Source: *New Era*, 7 May 2007