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Waking the dead: Civilian casualties in the Namibian liberation struggle¹

Martha Akawa
University of Namibia

Jeremy Silvester
Museum Association of Namibia

Abstract

The Liberation Struggle is marked by an absence of archival sources. This absence leads to an impossibility of systematic historical analysis of conflicting archival evidence; as a result, history is created with a broad brush on a monumental landscape. In terms of public history, the emphasis has been placed on the memory of the soldiers who died fighting in the liberation struggle. A post-war publication has listed their names, although those who died on Namibian soil remain buried in anonymous graves. The internet provides a virtual graveyard, which attempts to unite all those who died on the South African side during their 'Border War'. Such lists suggest that the compilers have been able to enter inaccessible archives and/or contact knowledgeable informants. Yet many of the soldiers who died, on both sides, during the Namibian Liberation Struggle died in Southern Angola and the community memory of the war in Namibia is more closely linked to the many incidents in which civilians were killed inside Namibia during the conflict. In Namibia, almost a generation after the end of the war, it remains unknown how many Namibian civilians died during the Namibian Liberation Struggle. Where estimates are provided, the victims are reduced to nameless numbers. The absence of a consolidated archival record of these deaths means that an important dimension of the war remains hidden. This article will present the work that has been done to create an archive of Civilian Casualties of the Namibian Liberation Struggle and discuss some of the challenges and difficulties associated with the project. It will argue that combining a range of sources into a new collection of consolidated information on individual deaths can challenge one of the archival absences on the liberation struggle and shape the historiography of the Namibian liberation struggle that is being created by a new generation of Namibian historians.

Preface

One day in early January, 1984 an old Ford truck set out from Ruacana. Twenty-five workers stood crowded in the back. After travelling just five kilometers from the small town the truck drove over a double landmine. The explosion left a huge crater in the ground and immediately killed ten of the people in the truck, whilst another six were severely injured, losing hands, arms and legs. None of the names of those who had died were provided in

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Dr Martha Akawa is History Lecturer at the University of Namibia. She just completed her PhD at the University of Basel focusing on gender issues during the Namibian liberation struggle. Her areas of interest include Heritage and the Namibian liberation struggle. Her latest publication is a chapter in an edited volume 'Posters in Action'. Email address: makawa@unam.na

Dr Jeremy Silvester taught in the History Department of the University of Namibia for 8 years after having previously taught at the Universities of Bristol, Keele and the West of England. He is currently the Project Planning and Training Officer at the Museums Association of Namibia. Dr Silvester is currently writing on heritage and public history, and the Namibian liberation struggle. His most recent publication was 'Posters in Action'. E-mail address: silvestj@iway.na

the press coverage of the incident ('Landmine that killed ten', Windhoek Observer, 1984).

On 23rd January, 1988 four young people were driving a Toyota Hilux van near their home when a unit of the Koevoet paramilitary police unit opened fire on their vehicle riddling it with bullets and totally destroying it. Cornelius Nghipukuula, aged 27, was killed immediately and two of the other occupants were wounded. The three survivors were told to report to the police station the next day to pay a R100 fine as an 'admission of guilt' for

These were just two incidents amongst many that occurred during the Namibian war of independence in which the casualties were not soldiers, but civilians. Yet the absence of the names of those killed in one of the largest landmine explosions that took place during the war seems symptomatic of the way in which civilian victims of the war remain unrecognized in accounts of the liberation struggle.

1. Introduction: War monuments and peace memorials

It is generally argued that there is a simple difference between monuments and memorials: Monuments celebrate victory, whilst Memorials show more concern with reflection and remembrance and are, therefore, more likely to encourage reconciliation. War memorials tend to focus on remembering the sacrifice of soldiers, rather than the other victims of war, civilians – the 'collateral damage' as it is termed in the language of the twenty-first century that dehumanizes and falsely sanitizes the horror of war.

Throughout the world the focus of the heritage that commemorates war is on the military. However, Michael Rowlands has argued that "one of the features of nationalist war memorials has been their capacity to turn traumatic individual deaths into acts of national celebration and heroic assertions of collective values" (Rowlands, 1999:129). In Namibia, a massive heritage project, for a small country, has been the construction of Heroes Acre (essentially a memorial graveyard containing the virtual graves of early leaders of anti-colonial resistance and the actual graves of selected leaders who have passed away since Heroes Acre was opened). The dominant figure at the site is a huge statue of a soldier, carrying an AK-47 and throwing a hand grenade. Funerals provide an opportunity to celebrate the lives of individuals and use the eulogies on their lives to assert collective values and a national identity. Heroes Acre does not only contain military leaders, but also civilians who are considered to have contributed to the struggle for independence.

Critics have contrasted the focus at Heroes Acre on a few individuals with the 'democracy of death' planned in the South African equivalent, Freedom Park, in Pretoria which will attempt to name and remember, as far as possible, all those who have been killed as a result of past conflicts in the country. It can be argued that a monument such as Heroes Acre located, as it is, in Windhoek far from the regions where much of the fighting took place does not provide an adequate site of remembrance for the thousands of people who lived in the war zone in Namibia and were killed during the conflict.

In defense of Heroes Acre, it might be argued that this is not its intended purpose, but that in the pursuit of nation building there is a conscious effort to forget the suffering of the past and to celebrate the triumph of the liberation movement. Rowlands (1999, p.131) has argued "Triumphalism . . . achieves this through the assertion of collective omnipotence and by banishing from memory those acts of humiliation when the nation failed to protect its own young." Memories of the feared knock on the door at midnight, the horrific images of cars and bodies randomly ripped apart by landmine explosions, the cries of the children

caught in the crossfire of war. These are the memories that most people would probably want to banish from their minds, but they are also the reality of a war, which has left profound physical and mental scars on Namibia. Indeed the absence of a detailed account of the impact of the war on the civilian population of Namibia may result in a version of the war which downplays the terrible impact of the conflict inside Namibia.

At present, it is not even known how many civilians died during the war. Efforts have been made to document the names of those who suffered in the struggle, but, to date, it has been the names of the soldiers on both sides which have been remembered and memorialized. Swapo published a book in 1996 entitled 'Their Blood Waters Our Freedom' which contains the names (or combat names) of 7,792 members of PLAN (the People's Liberation Army of Namibia) who died during the liberation struggle. The memorial list does not only include those who died in combat, but also those who died in car crashes and other accidents.

On the other side, the South Africans were able to more publicly acknowledge their military dead during the war itself. A monument was erected in Tsumeb in July 1981 with the following inscription in Afrikaans 'Tsumeb commemorates its fallen whites who died as a result of terrorism'. White SADF soldiers were often flown to South Africa for burial, but the deaths of black soldiers fighting in SWATF and Koevoet were not so publicly commemorated or accorded burials. Indeed, there were reports that in some instances Koevoet and PLAN fighters were anonymously buried together in mass graves. Today the South Africa War Graves Project has created a web site that lists the names of each South African soldier who died during what is dubbed the 'South West Africa Border War' – a total of 2,365 names. It is interesting to note that the figure contrasts significantly with the 715 members of the security forces that Willem Steenkamp claims were killed during the 'Border War' in a book published towards the end of the war (Steenkamp, 1989, 185). Furthermore it seems that whilst this list includes those who died in the South African army from all races (and clearly includes those from 32 'Buffalo Battalion'), it may not include the considerable number of people who served in the South West Africa Territorial Force (SWATF), the notorious counter-insurgency police unit (Koevoet) or those who served in various paramilitary organizations such as the Ovamboland Home Guard or as bodyguards.

In contrast to these military lists no list has been compiled bearing the names of civilians who died during the war. Indeed the only figure that has been suggested can be found in Steenkamp's book where he claims that 1,087 civilians died between 1981 and 1988. His book was published in 1989 and so does not include figures from the final months of the war and he claims that the statistics for the period 1966-1980 were not available. Steenkamp also claims that his, unreferenced, statistics demonstrate that the majority of civilian deaths were "... killed by mines Plan had laid" (Steenkamp, 1989, p. 235). It is in this context that the 'Civilian Casualties Project' has been conceived and initiated.

2. An overview of the civilian casualty project

The Civilian Casualties project has very limited objectives, mainly because it has very limited resources. The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission spent three years gathering information and had dozens of researchers. In our project two researchers, the author and a colleague Jeremy Silvester from the Museum Association of Namibia had only 18 days to do research. We have also benefited from some help from part-time student assistants Ms Romie Nghiulikwa, Ms Delila Kalangula and Ms Helena Showa. We have received funding from the Archives of Anti-Colonial Resistance and the Liberation Struggle Project led by a Steering Committee chaired by one of SWAPO's founding members, Hon. Toivo ya Toivo, who spent 18 years imprisoned on Robben Island.

We used most of our allotted time conducting an initial survey of newspaper coverage of the war. We have been able to cover just ten years in this time namely the period 1st January, 1979 to 30th April, 1989. The newspaper coverage has enabled us to identify 992 and 230 from the inquest individual cases of war-related civilian death. The project has produced the following evidence. We have already compiled seven files listing, in alphabetical order, individual cases. Each case consists of an information cover sheet containing both personal information and any references to an individual case (which it is hoped can be expanded upon as the project evolves) and a typed version of any newspaper article referring to each case. The computer file containing all the typed newspaper articles is, of course, searchable.

At present, the database lists 276 cases where it has not yet been possible to identify the name of the victim which means that 29% of the civilians listed as killed during the liberation struggle to date remain unidentified. Of those killed 317 were killed by landmines and 316 were killed by assassination squads that took them from their homes, usually during the night, and executed them. In 92 cases, the cause of death is not yet clear due to insufficient information, whilst the remaining 222 were killed in a variety of other ways. The information collected on each individual includes their full name, age and gender, the date and site of their death, the cause of death and the sources from which information has been obtained. Of course, the information obtained from the newspapers is often vague and incomplete, but it does already enable us to provide some interesting statistical analysis. For example, we were able to identify the gender of the victims in 681 cases and in those cases, 28% of the victims were women. When the database is more comprehensive in its coverage, we will also be able to provide more detailed analysis of the regional distribution of violent incidents and a summary of annual and seasonal differences, which will provide an alternative way of charting the impact of the war.

The paper will continue by considering three major challenges that faced us in our research (locating source material, defining the spatial and temporal boundaries of the project and debating the concept of a civilian) and consider three important issues that may be raised by the presentation of this research in the public domain in Namibia.

3. Resurrecting the anonymous dead: The search for sources

The biggest challenge facing the project was to identify the most time-efficient way in which to locate the required information. It is for this reason that we have started with a newspaper survey and worked back from the dates of independence. The initial survey has consulted one of three newspaper sources for each month covered. *The Namibian* newspaper was used to cover the period 1985-1989. *The Namibian* had a staff permanently based in the north and therefore tended to provide the most detailed coverage of events in the war zone. *The Windhoek Observer* was launched in May 1978 and provided extensive coverage of inquests. *The Windhoek Observer* has, therefore been consulted, as far as possible, for the period 1979-1985. The other paper that has been consulted at times is *The Windhoek Advertiser*, another English-language paper, but one that apparently relied exclusively on South African Army Press Conferences as its source of information and therefore contains accounts of incidents which contain far less detail that was normally found in the other two papers. However, newspapers as a source had severe limitations and we realized that newspaper coverage of civilian casualties was far from comprehensive - over a quarter of the victims mentioned in the newspaper articles we looked at remained unnamed and oral histories suggested that many deaths were not reported to the authorities - and so not picked up by journalists.

The current constraints on our time mean that the project cannot be very ambitious in terms of the scope of sources that it will be able to consult. A further two phases are scheduled in the current project:

i) A national media campaign.

A national media campaign will be launched using the initial list produced during the newspaper-based phase of the project once the whole period of the war has been covered. The aim of the campaign will be to encourage members of the public to come forward to make corrections to the list or to provide information about people who are not named or included in the current list.

ii) Direct mailing to key partners.

A copy of the initial list complete with a covering letter and a simple information sheet will be distributed to Regional Councils and through the Council of Churches. The support of the Council of Churches has already been obtained for this phase of the project. The idea is that pastors announce the request for information during their Sunday service. This stage of the project will be crucial, as it will place the information gathered by the project in the public domain.

Although this work has already exhausted our current research time, two additional phases have been identified for which research should be carried out: a) Newspapers should be cross-referenced in each individual case and, where different information is contained, this should be added to the files. This is particularly important given the debatable spelling of some of the names of places and people found in the newspaper articles consulted already. b) An oral history phase should be launched to follow up on contacts when individuals contact the project with information about cases – the interviews carried out by the author into the assassination of her own uncle and aunt during the war demonstrate the considerable additional detail that can be obtained from this source. Oral history will be particularly important in efforts to identify cases where individuals were killed, but the incident was never covered in the newspapers

SWAPO publications and SADF archival material should be consulted to expand the range of sources consulted so far. An initial survey of *The Combatant*, the newsletter of SWAPO's guerrilla forces, indicates that in the early years of publication (during 1980 and 1981) it would list cases of assassinations carried out by SWAPO's armed forces. A total of 11 assassinations carried out by SWAPO were acknowledged in 1980 and 1981, but an initial survey suggests that no further cases were acknowledged after this date. However, of the cases listed only two was reported in contemporary newspapers. A further list that would be interesting to consider is the infamous 'death list' referred to in a church newspaper, *Omukwetu*, which claimed that 50 prominent businessmen in northern Namibia had been listed for assassination. The completion of the database and case files would enable comparative analysis of such information. The archives of the SADF have also, largely, not been investigated. It seems likely that relevant material, if it still exists, could be accessed through South Africa's Freedom of Information legislation. Another source of information is expected to be data provided by inquests. In many cases an inquest was held into the death of each individual at a Magistrate's Court with the majority of cases involving war-related deaths being heard at Oshakati or Tsumeb. Until now the researchers have only looked at the inquests of the Ondangwa Magistrate court. However, an initial survey suggests that they often contain more limited information than might be expected, for example the inquests into a number of landmine explosion cases seemed unable to identify the victims even several months after an incident had taken place.

4. Chronological and spatial boundaries of the 'Namibian Liberation Struggle'.

A second challenge facing the project has been placing spatial and chronological boundaries for the liberation struggle on our database. Our initial research has covered the period 1979-1989, which covers most of the period when the guerrilla war was having its most serious impact inside Namibia. Whilst there were some high-profile incidents in the early years of the war, such as the assassination of the Ndonga King, Fillemon Elifas on 16th August, 1975 it is generally argued that the war in northern Namibia became far more intense after the withdrawal of the SADF from Angola at the end of March, 1976 and the consolidation of SWAPO military bases in Angola close to the Namibian border (Steenkamp, 1989, p. 43, 60). Our initial intention was to cover the period from 26th August, 1966 as the battle of Omugulugwombashe is generally taken as marking the launch of the armed struggle and ending on 1st April, 1989 with the implementation of UN Resolution 435 which marked the start of the transition to independence in 1990, however, due to ; we decided to start with 1979.

In South Africa, the memorial concept behind the Sikhumbuto section of the new Freedom Park has been far more expansive. An effort is being made to name and remember everyone who "... laid down their lives in the struggle for humanity and freedom cutting across eight conflict areas: These are Pre-Colonial, Genocide, Slavery, Wars of Resistance, South African War (Anglo-Boer War), First World War, Second World War and the Liberation Struggle" (see www.freedompark.co.za). At present, a register of names suggested by members of the public can be found on the internet, whilst the ultimate objective is to build a wall inscribed with all the names suggested and approved.

However, even if our project does not try to embrace such broad ambitions, it can perhaps be expanded by including the highly prominent deaths of thirteen civilian victims, who were killed by police during a demonstration against the forced removal of the Old Location in Windhoek on 10th December, 1959. The end of the conflict for civilians is also more difficult to fix than it might appear. For example, in September 1989, six months after Resolution 435 came into effect, a high profile white member of SWAPO, Anton Lubowski, was assassinated in Windhoek. Perhaps the opportunity can also be used to make the point that the impact of landmines on the civilian population did not magically end with independence. The latest edition of the international Landmine Monitor notes that in Namibia "Since 1999, landmines and UXO have killed more than 138 civilians and injured at least 450" (Landmine monitor, 2006).

A further issue has been a spatial one. At one level, we had to consider the geographical scope of our study. A great deal of the fighting between South African forces and PLAN combatants took place in southern Angola. During this fighting hundreds of Angolan civilians were also killed. Could these be identified and added to the toll of civilian casualties in the Namibian Liberation Struggle?

It should also be noted that a further problem has been presented by a number of cases in which the researchers had to decide whether or not the death of a civilian was directly war-related and cases where an individual was reported missing and the available evidence is not clear as to whether or not they had been killed. An example of the first instance would be a car accident in which the victims collided with a military vehicle in northern Namibia as a result of the militarisation of the region or the 34 individuals, who were killed during violence in the township of Katutura during March, 1978. An example of the second would be the case where the mother of Mr Hishiinawa Haludilu stated in

September 1987 that her son had been taken to the SADF Sector 10 base on 8th August, but that he had subsequently disappeared and had not been seen for six weeks. In such cases it is difficult to know whether Mr Haludilu might have returned at a later date, might have been released and left the country or might have been killed (Undersiege by soldiers, 1987). (The Namibian)

5. 'Civilian' status and the implication of guilt and innocence

The third major challenge facing the project has been the haziness surrounding the definition of a 'civilian'. One of the central features of international law regarding the rules of war in recent decades has been an effort to make the distinction between the combatant and the civilian. The division has formed the basis of the idealized presumption that war should consist of a simple conflict between two armed forces, which avoids as far as possible death or destruction to the 'innocent' civilian population on both sides.

It has been thought provoking to write this paper against the backdrop of the war which took place in Iraq. In both the Namibian case and the more recent Iraqi war, a question was raised about the definition of a civilian in the context of a guerrilla war being waged against what is apparently perceived as an illegal occupation. As armies become increasingly technologically advanced and difficult to confront on the open battlefield, to what extent are the logistical support systems (such as the railway lines and trucks driving fuel, food and ammunition) legitimate targets? if civilians run such operations, does this make them legitimate targets?

The Geneva Convention attempts to define the role of the 'non-combatant' as a category that is somewhat different to that of a civilian, but in recent conflicts the grey areas seem to grow ever larger. A further layer of complexity comes when a liberation movement views an illegal occupation as being sanctified by the establishment of a so-called 'puppet' government consisting, as in Vichy France during World War Two, of officials who were perceived as 'collaborators'. In northern Namibia in particular the homeland government in the form of the 'Ovamboland Legislative Assembly' in its various forms, was considered the most provocative example of a South African engineered ethnic alternative to SWAPO's vision of 'One Namibia, One Nation'. Did the participation of individuals in this administrative system make them legitimate targets?

Protocol 1 of the Geneva Convention dealing in particular with the status of civilians during armed conflict, clearly states that for an organisation to be recognised as a 'combatant' it should "enforce compliance with the rules of international law applicable in armed conflict" (Ricou, 2005, p94). Failure to comply with the rules of war is one of the criteria which leads an organisation to be branded as a 'terrorist' organisation.

However, the distinction between 'combatant' and 'civilians' is not as simple as it might first appear as, according to the Convention, an individual or group might be attacked and viewed as a 'combatant' in cases where they are involved in "activities closely associated with the direct infliction of violence". Activities such as gathering intelligence for targeting purposes and servicing a weapons system may be considered direct participation in hostilities' (Ricou, 2005, p. 156).

Heaton Ricou (2005, p. 157) argues that the interpretation of this phrase would mean that activities such as supplying information that provides an advantage to one side in a conflict ('spying' or 'informing') might fall within this category as it could be directly linked to the

infliction of violence by one side on the other, whilst the simple supply of food and water to combatants would be “considered sufficiently removed from the infliction of violence that civilians providing such services to combatants are unlikely to be considered to have taken a direct part in hostilities”. However, it is clear that this ‘grey’ area provides a space in which it is possible to debate whether an individual has been involved in activities that enable him/her to be treated as a ‘combatant’ and, therefore, a ‘legitimate’ target, rather than a ‘civilian’. The Civilian Casualties Project has therefore not attempted to engage in such subjective judgments, but has worked on the simple definition of a ‘combatant’ in terms of the initial definition of the Geneva Convention mentioned above.

In cases where it has already been possible to cross-reference sources it is clear that there might often be disagreement about the reasons behind the death of an individual. The Windhoek Observer of 3rd July, 1982 contained a brief report on an inquest into the death of Mr Ruben Mbwalala. His young wife was reported to have simply explained that he was ‘fetched one evening by five unidentified and unknown black men’ and told to ‘drive them to Angola’ in his Toyota truck. The next day Mr Mbwalala’s body was found near his home with a single bullet through his head. The report did not give the date of the incident or the age or occupation of Mr Mbwalala. However, the issue of *The Combatant* dated April, 1981 provided more detail. It stated that on 5th April, 1981 an ‘... enemy collaborator, Ruben Mbwalala, was eliminated at Etilyaasa about 60km south west of Oshakati. His vehicle, a Toyota and a .303 Mauzzer [sic] rifle were captured’ (*Combat reports, 1981*). The fact that the report in *The Combatant* alleges that Mr Mbwalala was armed might support the allegation that he played a role in the local administration and was perceived by the authorities as a possible guerrilla target.

In South Africa, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission did not work with the concepts of civilians and combatants, but rather considered the abuse of human rights. The advantage of this approach was that it enabled them to also consider the cases of the abuse of captured guerrillas and to consider the morality of the way in which people were treated according to international standards that, for example, condemn torture or the execution of people without trial. This enabled the TRC to consider cases such as the torture and killing of captured ANC guerrillas, but also cases where people in the townships were ‘necklaced’, being killed by a burning tyre. The researchers decided that the Civilian Casualties Project does not have the resources, mandate or sufficient information to judge whether the death of a particular individual might or might not be justified in military terms. They have therefore, listed all individuals as civilians who were not, as far as evidence permits, members of one of the organized armed units taking part in the war. Thus, the armed bodyguards organized and employed to protect politicians have been viewed as combatants, whilst politicians (who might have had their own personal weapon) have been treated as civilians.

6. Playing with Pandora’s box: Research and reconciliation

The final challenge that has faced this research project has been the consideration of the consequences of putting the research into the public domain and addressing an audience of relatives, rather than researchers. A recent article in *The Namibian* newspaper discussed the consequences of the discovery of a number of mass graves near former South African military bases in northern Namibia. The article was entitled ‘Opening Pandora’s Box’ and made the point that once Namibians started asking questions about the identity and cause of death of the bodies that had been found, the Government might face further demands to research and remember the many other combatants and civilians who died or disappeared

during the liberation struggle, at known grave sites (such as at Cassinga in Angola) or in lesser known incidents such as those being documented by the Civilian Casualties Project.

However, the researchers are aware that despite their efforts to be as objective as possible and not to ascribe blame to one side or the other for individual deaths, the release of the information being compiled may raise a number of difficult issues. The most obvious of these will be, firstly, the political reception that such research might receive given the approach to National Reconciliation that has been chosen by the Namibian Government. Secondly, the possibility that the publication of such research might encourage claims for compensation. Thirdly, the likelihood is that such research may encourage questions about responsibility and accountability for individual deaths that have been documented and highlighted in the public domain for the first time. The production of history is always an intervention in the present and historians should not be naive about the consequences of their actions.

Reconciliation

South Africa chose to establish a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which could provide amnesty to individuals on the condition that they provided full disclosure about their involvement in past human rights abuses during the apartheid era. In contrast, in Namibia, a blanket amnesty was announced with the public being encouraged to forget about the past, not to open old wounds and to move forward as a new unified nation. Critics argued, "The problem with this approach is that it does not leave any room for accountability. In this way, perpetrators were absolved of responsibility and victims were effectively told that the government will not entertain any complaints" (Jewel and Greenbaum, 2005).

However, as stated previously, substantial publicity was given to the unearthing by builders of mass graves near a number of former SADF military bases in northern Namibia in November 2005. This resulted in the Government making a public commitment to try to identify the victims. An investigation resulted in a report that included in its recommendations the view that archival research and oral history should be used to obtain information to help the authorities identify those buried in the mass graves. On 6th December, 2005 a Ministerial Committee chaired by the Minister of Justice, Pendukeni Ithana, was appointed to take forward the recommendations of the report (Opening Pandora 'Box, 2006). It seems highly unlikely that the Government would want to prosecute anyone based on these *investigations*, but it does suggest a new openness to acknowledge, document and identify the victims of the war. Indeed a recent survey of five Southern African Countries and their 'victim support service' specifically criticized Namibia on the basis that 'there is no official government support for victims' (Jewel and Greenbaum, 2005). The South African-based Transitional Justice Programme urged the introduction of psychological counselling for the direct and indirect victims of wartime violence, but no formal programme to provide counselling for those affected by the war has been introduced in Namibia. However, the research on the mass graves and research into civilian casualties might encourage claims for direct financial compensation for the families of the victims.

Compensation

On 15th April, 2003 President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa announced that people who had been identified as 'victims' of the apartheid regime by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission would receive a one-off symbolic payment of R30,000 as compensation for

their suffering (see www.csvr.org.za). The issue of compensation for those who suffered during the liberation struggle has been a re-occurring one in Namibia and remains politically sensitive. The demands for compensation to date have come primarily from ex-combatants. In November 1995 a special Ex-combatant Trust Fund was established, but during 1998 ex-combatants were involved in a number of high profile protests. In 2006, there were renewed calls for monetary compensation by an organized group of ex-combatants, which led President Pohamba to announce the establishment of a new Ministry for Veteran Affairs and the allocation of N\$5.8 million for the building of new homes for veterans with a further N\$2 million to be budgeted in a five-year plan. Lately the ex-combatants have been camping in the front of the ministry of Veteran Affairs, making unaffordable demands, for instance an one-off payment of N\$ 500.00 each plus N\$ 8000.00 a month to be paid for the years spent in exile. Also included in the list of demands are free education for their children and farms.

However, whilst it should be relatively easy to provide conclusive evidence that a person was or was not an active member of PLAN; it becomes more difficult to determine compensation for civilian victims of the war. One of the main reasons for this would be that there is considerable uncertainty about the actual identity of those who carried out many of the killings during the war.

Accountability

The issue of 'accountability' would prove highly problematic in the Namibian context, given the absence of disclosure or autobiographical statements by those responsible for particular deaths. Indeed the prevalence of allegation and counter-allegation and the use of deception by the South African forces make it difficult to determine with certainty which side was responsible for many of the killings with both sides often denying responsibility – particularly for assassinations.

As early as January, 1979 SWAPO announced that the South Africans had established a special assassination squad consisting of '40 whites and 50 blacks'. Over the next few months a large number of violent incidents were attributed to an organization that was known as 'Koevoet' or 'One Way' (or to local people as the Omakakunya – bone suckers) (90 SA Assassins in SWA, 1979) (Windhoek Advertiser). SWAPO claimed that these assassinations were then being blamed on their guerrilla forces. In June 1980 a church newspaper, Omukwetu, announced that it had obtained a copy of a death list containing the names of 50 prominent leaders and businessmen in northern Namibia. It was alleged that the list had been found on the body of a car crash victim, Mr Leevi Naftali Amadhila (also known as 'Kamwonga'), who SWAPO described as the commander of the 'false guerrillas' ('Viljoen's statement', 1980) (Windhoek Observer). The South African Administrator-General, Viljoen, responded by initially denying the existence of any 'Koevoet' unit ('Alarming Whispers about Death Squad code-named Koevoet, 1980) (Windhoek Observer). Today it is well documented that Koevoet was established by a small group of men, such as Eugene de Koch who was later implicated in the activities of 'Death Squads' in South Africa.

Koevoet was, technically, a police unit, but there is evidence that such deceptive tactics were also used by army units. Two SADF soldiers from the 'Recce' unit, dressed in SWAPO uniforms with SWAPO issue boots and weapons which were readily available at their base, were prosecuted for killing a watchman on 6th September, 1981. ('Murder whispered, 1983 (Windhoek Observer) and there were further reports of soldiers pretending to be guerrillas in the Kavango Region (SWAPO or Soldier, 1982) (Windhoek Observer) Peter

Stiff (The Silent war, 2001) has also acknowledged in his work based on interviews with many former South African soldiers that it was not uncommon for soldiers to disguise themselves as SWAPO guerrillas and that they justified this as a tactic that assisted them to obtain information about guerrilla movements. Towards the end of 1981, the SADF also announced that it had captured three diaries from SWAPO guerrilla leaders, one of which also contained a death list which 'mostly contain the names of those who have been labelled 'informers' ('War Diaries of insurgents captured', 1981). Indeed, it has already been noted that PLAN itself acknowledged that it had carried out some assassinations. For example issues of PLAN's information bulletin, *The Combatant*, published between August, 1980 and January, 1982 describe the assassination of eleven civilians who were described as 'puppets' or 'informers' and two of whom were members of the Ovamboland Homeland 'Government'.

However, the confusion caused by the constant claims and counter-claims over responsibility would make it very difficult for the Namibian Government to support individual claims for compensation.

Conclusion

The Civilian Casualties Project seeks to provide greater insight into an important aspect of the Namibian Independence Struggle. It is not an attempt to create a Namibian Truth and Reconciliation Commission, but it might be viewed as having the potential to contribute to a different kind of memorial to the war that could further national reconciliation and assist in promoting collective national values. For example, the researcher have already documented that landmines were one of the major causes of death of innocent civilians. The landmines that caused these deaths were certainly planted by both sides. Since independence, the Namibian Government has taken a strong position on the issue of landmines. It has signed the Ottawa Convention of December 1997 'prohibiting the stockpiling, production and transfer of anti-personnel mines' and the Namibian army destroyed its own stockpile of 50 tons of landmines in a large controlled explosion on 24th July, 1998 (Moyo, 1998). One way in which this strong stand might be publicized in Namibia could be a memorial to all those Namibians who have been landmine victims. This would suggest one way in which Namibia might use a memorial to civilian casualties to reflect on its painful past in order to promote national values that enable the building of a better future² (Freedom Park, 2005).

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