Mediations of Violence in Africa

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Mediations of Violence in Africa

Fashioning New Futures from Contested Pasts

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BRILL

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PREFACE

This book has emerged from the joint residence of all but one of its contributors at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities and Social Sciences (NIAS) in the spring of 2008. We are grateful to Wim Blockmans, the NIAS Rector, Jos Hooghuis, head of the division for Research Planning & Communication, and the Scholarship Committee for putting their trust in our proposal. At NIAS we also thank the divisions for Administrative Affairs, Information Services & Support, and Facilities, for providing us with such a stimulating and supportive academic and living environment. A special mention of books, bicycles, lunches, concerts, yoga, and salsa dancing are de rigueur in this context.

We resided at NIAS as a theme-group entitled "Mediations of Violence in Africa." We owe a special debt of gratitude to those theme-group members whose work could not be included here. Both Mineke Schipper (Leiden University) and Karin Willemse (Erasmus University, Rotterdam) played an important role in the initial proposal and provided intellectual companionship and inspiration throughout. Karin Willemse also convened the preparatory workshop held at NIAS in December 2006 and worked closely with especially Lidwien Kapteijns and Naomi van Stapele. We also thank Floor Kulker, our theme-group research and administrative assistant, who helped organize the June 2008 conference.

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Daniel Owen, Els van der Plas, José van Santen, Marian Tankink, Marianne Vysma and Abdourahman Waberi. This volume has benefited substantially from the anonymous reader comments provided to us through the publisher. We alone, of course, are responsible for its inevitable shortcomings.

The editors would like to further thank the following institutions. Lidwien Kapteijns acknowledges the National Endowment of the Humanities, Wellesley College, and the Halabuur Centre for Culture and Communication in the Horn of Africa for their support of her sabbatical research. Annemiek Richters acknowledges the Leiden University Medical Center for granting her the study leave at NIAS during which she could lay the foundation for her contribution to this book. We would also like to acknowledge each other. In all aspects of the work that has gone into putting this volume together – from interacting with contributors to theoretical concepts – we have learned from each other and come to appreciate each other's strengths.

This volume shows how those who have experienced violence strive to come to terms with its consequences as well as how intensely political and contested such coming to terms almost always is. We believe that the perspectives it presents will be of interest to students, scholars, and practitioners with a wide range of interests.

INTRODUCTION

Lidwien Kapteijns and Annemiek Richters

During the last two decades, the field of African studies has seen a veritable explosion of scholarship dealing with violence. This reflects, of course, more than just an academic trend, for in many areas of Africa extraordinary outbreaks of large-scale state and collective violence have punctuated the continuing structural violence of poverty, lawlessness, and inequality. This volume contributes to this scholarship from a specific perspective, namely through six case-studies of how certain individuals and groups in Kenya, Mozambique, Rwanda, Somalia, and South Africa have engaged with the meanings and consequences of the political violence that has afflicted their societies. In this introduction, we first explain the concept of mediation through which these essays approach the study of violence and reflect on this mode of analysis in relation to the wider Africanist debate about how to study violence. We then give an overview of the chapters and highlight four themes that each chapter, in its own way, engages: memory; social suffering and healing; issues of space, scale and audience, and the performing and refashioning of identities. Our subtitle, "Fashioning New Futures from Contested Pasts", refers on the one hand to the conflicted nature of the mediations of violent past experiences we study and, on the other hand, to how actively these discursive practices and strategies shape and promote moral repair in the present and future.

The concept of mediation

Mediation, the central common concept around which this book is organised, is a multi-faceted and layered concept that, in the words of Louise Meintjes (2003: 8), refers to "a process that connects and translates disparate worlds, people, imaginations, values, and ideas, whether in its symbolic, social, or technological form". In this volume, the emphasis lies on the discursive dimensions of mediation, which here takes on three important meanings. First, at the most basic level, we regard the song and poetry texts, biographical and therapeutic interviews, testimonies, group discussions, and electronic interactions

that form the basis for our chapters as mediations in this sense that they constitute subjective representations of, and commentaries upon processes of violence that individuals or groups have experienced or are experiencing. Thus Kapteijns focuses on a particular genre of Somali poetry that is performed in Somali public space and Gunner on a particular young men's genre of acapella singing in Kwa-Zulu Natal. Van Stapele interprets what young men in a Nairobi slum tell her in the context of biographical interviews and Gibson, Igreja, and Richters analyse narratives and testimonies about suffering, resilience, and healing among their respondents in Mozambique, Rwanda and South Africa.

It is perhaps in the kind of African mediation each of us has chosen to study that our disciplinary background is most evident, with Gibson, Igreja and Richters representing medical anthropology, Van Stapele cultural anthropology, Gunner performance and cultural studies, and Kapteijns cultural and social history. Here we realized, perhaps even somewhat to our own surprise, that, theoretically speaking, we needed 'all hands on deck' and had to turn to inter-disciplinary tools and concepts to interpret our 'texts' (broadly construed) in their multi-layered contexts. Thus we found ourselves thinking about the impact of the genres of speech we studied (song and performance, testimony, 'small stories', 'prestigious' versus 'non-prestigious' poetry, proverbial language, and so forth) as well as how their intended audience and the spaces in which they situated themselves amplified or diminished their message. Nevertheless, the nature of our own conceptual tool boxes, interests, and theoretical insights, as well as our choice of relevant scholarship, strongly shaped each of our scholarly contributions. Our own scholarly interpretations, explications, and interventions, then, constitute the second dimension of the concept of mediation that is the axis around which this book turns.

The third dimension of the concept of mediation takes us back to the ways in which our source texts mediate violence. There is nothing passive either about our own scholarly analyses or about the mediations we study. We found the latter to be articulate and emphatic subjective conceptualisations and interpretations of the violent pasts and presents in which they were produced; they unveil or envelop in silence; they include and exclude; they skillfully maneuver between different scales and levels of analysis; they shape the future by addressing the past; in other words, with subtle and indirect or loud and in-your-face interpretations of the violence of the contested past, they actively fash-

ion the meanings of violence in the present and for the future. Most of the mediations are, moreover, strongly gendered – something that is perhaps not surprising when the subject-matter is violence. Because four of the six chapters focus on mediations of violence authored by men, what is gendered male, as well as the implications of such gendering for constructions of femaleness, is an important theme in many of the chapters. In the process of our studies, we also realized that our interlocutors – whether implicitly or explicitly – crafted specific uses for the contested past and often effortlessly connected not only the past, present, and future but also the local, national, and global scales and contexts of the violence they hoped to influence, overcome, reconcile, or heal. Thus they made active claims of citizenship on the state (as in Gibson's, Gunner's, and Richters' chapters); insisted on their own memory-making and the creation of their own memory-fields (as in Gibson's and Kapteijns' chapters); fashioned their own spaces for reconciliation and healing (as in Gibson's, Igreja's, and Richters'chapters), and resisted, adopted, or reconfigured dominant social discourses about morality, religion, ethnicity and the state (as in the chapters by Gibson, Gunner, Kapteijns, and Van Stapele).

This, then, is the third dimension of the concept of mediation that is at the core of this book, namely the ways in which our African interlocutors put their words and acts to work, what they intend their mediations to produce – denouncing certain violent mindsets and acts; coming to terms with having committed violence; personal and group healing; refashioning themselves as men or women; supporting one side in an ongoing conflict; pushing for a particular outcome, and so forth. It would be too simple to equate this meaning exclusively with healing, reconciliation, or even just bridging the distance separating different parties to violence. This dimension of the concept emphasises that mediations are – in Meintjes' words – both conduits and filters, which transfer as well as transform the violence of which they speak, and highlights that they intervene in, and are constitutive of violence in its myriad of meanings and consequences (Meintjes 2003: 8).[1] It is to the concept of violence that we will turn next.

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[1] A fourth aspect of the concept of mediation, that of mediation through the electronic mass media (developed so compellingly, for example, in Meyer & Moors 2006), plays a role in some of the chapters, especially those of Gibson, Gunner, and Kapteijns, but is not a central theme of this book.

On the study of violence

The scholarship on violence in Africa has witnessed a spirited debate about what kind of a "representational object" violence constitutes and what kind of methodological approaches violence as subject-matter requires (Donham 2006: 24). Here we want to discuss and position ourselves in relation to two approaches that appear to form the opposite ends of an important spectrum of proposed methodologies – one that emphasises violence as an extraordinary subject matter, requiring extraordinary epistemological approaches (e.g. Donham, Suárez-Orozco, Robben & Nordstrom), and one that regards violence as such a common social condition that an emphasis on its extraordinariness might obscure rather than enlighten (e.g. Lubkemann). Representative of the former approach is Donald Donham, who, in his "Staring at suffering: Violence as a subject", sees violence indeed as a different kind of representational object because it is characterised by "a kind of excess, an ambivalence of both attraction and repulsion, that does not affect other subjects" (2006: 24). According to Donham, the study of violence therefore demands what he calls an "epistemology of the extraordinary" that reconstructs the complexities of how violence came about by radically and thoroughly contextualising it (ibid.: 28–29).

A similar sense of the distinctive and extraordinary nature of violence as a subject of study is conveyed by Suárez-Orozco and Robben (2000: 7) who point at the unbridgeable gap between theoretical models and scholarly representations of violence and the unfathomable depths of human suffering that constitutes its experience by victims, perpetrators, and bystanders. In their introduction to *Fieldwork under fire: Contemporary studies of violence and survival* (1995), Robben and Nordstrom agree that it is impossible to define violence in any clear-cut, simple fashion, as nothing can stand in for it:

> In peeling back the layers of the many realities that impinge on this question of what violence is, we find that even the most horrific acts of aggression do not stand as isolated exemplars of a 'thing' called violence but cast ripples that configure lives in the most dramatic of ways, affecting constructs of identity in the present, the hopes and potentialities of the future, and even renditions of the past (ibid.: 5).

Robben and Nordstrom even worry whether violence can (or even should) be represented in writing at all, as to the extent that "violence is 'resolved' in narrative…it loses its absurdity and incomprehensi-

bility; paradoxically, the very qualities that we would like to convey"
(1995: 12). They nevertheless make a specific proposal for how to
approach the study of violence (1995: 9), an approach that comple-
ments Donham's insistence on contextualisation:

> Violence is a dimension of living. Attempts to apply equations of
> rationality or irrationality or to adjudicate violent events as mea-
> ningful or meaningless are beside the point because they are based
> on the misguided assumption that violence should be understood in
> terms of its function and objective. Violence may be carried out with
> logical precision, which does not make it reasonable, and is imbued
> with meaning, even though often emotionally senseless. Our search
> is not for cause and function but for understanding and reflexivity
> (ibid.: 9).

In his ethnographic study of Zaire, De Boeck also underlines the need
for a new epistemology for studying places that have been racked by
violence for many decades when he points at "the incapacity of much
of the academic discourse to grasp fully and make visible the changing
realities in contemporary Zaire" (De Boeck 1996: 90). According to De
Boeck, the standard vocabularies of social scientists can no longer con-
vey the collapse of neat distinctions between local, national, and global
levels. Moreover, "terms and concepts such as 'state', 'administra-
tion', 'government', 'governability', 'opposition', 'democracy', 'army',
'national budget', 'citizenship', 'law', 'justice', or even 'education' and
'health care' no longer seem to apply to the realities usually covered by
these terms" (ibid.: 91). To his mind, such terms fail to do justice to
how people's experience on the ground "jeopardizes cohesive cultural
systems and threatens cultural identities and habituses (ibid.: 93).[2] The
African mediations presented in this volume, however, show that it is
not only scholars who find it difficult to let go of "standard vocabu-
laries" that appear to help to order the world; several of the African
mediations analysed here struggle against the chaos engendered by
violence with precisely the vocabularies of state, citizenship, nation,
state, law, and so forth De Boeck criticises. This of course makes his
intervention no less compelling; it just shows how hard it is to think

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[2] Instead, De Boeck turns to the study of how individuals struggle to exercise "con-
trol over a politics of identity as self-representation" that encompasses a range of fields
from popular culture to healing and other rituals – precisely the kinds of mediations
that are at the center of some of the chapters of this volume. He explains a "new
dynamic 'model' of interaction" on p. 97.

outside of these categories and how difficult it is to analyse and understand the complexities of a political and socio-economic terrain that is shaped by conditions of sustained violence.

At the other end of the spectrum, Stephen Lubkemann's *Culture in chaos: The anthropology of war as social condition* (2008) presents a very different intervention in the study of violence in Africa. From the vantage point of a province of Mozambique in which war-time displacement and post-conflict return had involved very high ratios of people, Lubkemann argues that the scholarly foregrounding of war violence as of extraordinary and overwhelming significance could obscure (and has obscured) how people actually survive and re-establish their lives in war-zones. War and the violence of war are, in Lubkemann's view, not extraordinary states of exception, but an enduring social condition that must be studied with attention to continuities as well as disruptions. People's older social, economic and political strategies do not become irrelevant during or in the aftermath of violence, even if they are adjusted or transformed. This is also relevant to this book, in which several contributions highlight how such well-established strategies are discursively leveraged to shape the present, whether through the use of particularly authoritative genres of poetry, song, and proverb in the chapters by Gunner, Igreja, and Kapteijns, or by transforming a national discourse of ethnicity in the chapter by Van Stapele.

The chapters of this book represent an approach to the study of violence that does not refute or diminish the approaches outlined above but nevertheless redirect its momentum. When viewed through the lens of particular, subjective, 'insider' perspectives on the meanings of violence,[3] the questions about the ontology and epistemology of violent political conflict in Africa do not disappear but move inside our texts and are subsumed in, or dislodged by the discursive practices of those who, as victims, perpetrators, bystanders, and so forth, were party to the conflict. The texts we study do not provide answers to the specific questions raised in the scholarship mentioned above – the challenges of dealing with a subject-matter so emotionally fraught, so impossible to define and represent, so hard to contain in standard vocabularies,

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[3] With its focus on 'insider' views, this volume contributes to what Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, in their comprehensive anthropology on violence in war and peace, have called "an 'anthropologically informed' field of multidisciplinary violence studies" (2004: 26).

and so disruptive and yet so deeply intertwined with enduring social conditions. However, these texts, constituting mediations of violence in their own right, come to terms with the challenges of representing violence in ways of their own. It is *these* representations of violence that are the center of the case-studies in this book, while the insights from the scholarship outlined above, together with the many other studies on which we, individually or collectively, have drawn, have become a part of our diverse and interdisciplinary analytical tool boxes.

In what follows, we will discuss each chapter in turn and highlight how each of us has engaged with the sophisticated mediations of violence produced by our African interlocutors. After briefly presenting each chapter, we will trace four themes that form connections between our chapters: memory making; social suffering and healing; scale, space, and audience; and the refashioning and performing of identities. These common themes, however, figure quite differently in each of the mediations and cannot begin to do justice to the wide range of subjects and insights of each chapter.

The chapters

The mediation central to the chapter by Kapteijns is Somali poetry about the violence that accompanied the collapse of the Somali state in January 1991. Kapteijns discovered that the poetry Somalis regarded as legitimate poetic renditions of this theme and as conducive to peace and reconciliation was men's poetry, in men's prestigious genres, bringing men's reason and authority to bear on this matter of shared public concern. If this, on the one hand, infused this kind of poetry with a strong moral authority, it on the other hand limited it, causing aporia about who perpetrated what kind of violence against whom, as well as excluding the voices of women. Apart from this male prestige, poets also drew on the emotive power of authoritative memories of the past to present persuasive prescriptions for the future. Drawing on Pierre Nora's concept of *lieu de mémoire*, Kapteijns shows how poetic texts that adopted Mogadishu as a site for memory-making initially (1991) imagined past and future in nationalist terms but gradually (especially after 2003) began to do so in Islamist ones. As this genre of poetry was traditionally effective and emotive speech *par excellence*, mediating violence by leveraging an idealised past against the violent present constitutes an active fashioning of the future. The chapter shows how,

in the context of a new phase of the civil war and the rapidly expand-
ing Somali use of cyberspace, even this authoritative kind of poetry
at times loses its lofty self-positioning, descending more openly into
barely disguised partisanship and thus becoming as much about taking
sides as about making peace.

The chapter by Gunner focuses on Zulu song, namely the genre
of the *isicathamiya,* as performed by groups of young men in South
Africa's KwaZulu-Natal. The socio-political contexts Gunner outlines
for this mediation are, on the one hand, the grim past of the apartheid
years and, on the other, the political violence between Inkatha and
ANC supporters that caused death, destruction, and large-scale rape
in the area from the mid-1980s to 1994. This past is a silent backdrop
to the *isicathamiya*, as are the bleak and uncertain realities of South
Africa's 'new arrangement', the unstable state whose power over life
and death is invoked in Foucault's concept of bio-politics. However,
the young men whose performances Gunner studies attempt to fash-
ion new selves and imagine new ways of being in this 'New South
Africa'. Transforming a genre that, when it emerged in the 1920s,
allowed its performers to devise a sophisticated, modern embodiment
of manhood that defied and resisted masculinity in the image of apart-
heid rule, and incorporating echoes of Zulu war songs as well as other
South African, African American, and musical genres, the *isicathamiya*
performers re-imagine themselves as men and citizens. In their songs,
they fashion themselves as moral and modern men – sons, husbands,
and fathers – who advocate safe sex and responsible fatherhood, and
who, even as they categorically condemn rape, criticise the freedoms
South African women have been granted by the constitution. As they
mediate the structural violence of poverty, unemployment, and illness,
the *isacathamiya* singers appeal to the rights and duties of citizenship,
explicitly appealing to the state and its institutions for their rights.
Thus the *isicathamiya* songs, as Gunner puts it, disturb memories of
past violence, political marginalisation, and poverty as well as older
ideas of masculinity and militarism; instead they imagine an active,
modern, moral, and glamorous male citizenship for themselves.

Central to the chapter of Van Stapele are the narratives of young
men of Mathare Valley, a poor neighbourhood in Nairobi, who were
involved in the so-called "ethnic" violence following the Kenyan presi-
dential elections of 2007. Van Stapele analyses how these young men,
who before had identified less with nation-wide ethnic labels than with
their particular situation as young, poor men in their 'hood' (neighbour-
hood), came to be the targets, perpetrators, and witnesses of this post-

election violence. In the end, Van Stapele shows, these men also called this violence "ethnic". However, this label hides more than it reveals, for the young men mediated the violence – that is to say, interpreted it, and positioned themselves and engaged in historical memory-making in relation to it – in terms that were only partly bound up with ethnicity. Though they indeed engaged the dominant discourses about Kikuyu and Luo identities, their more immediate experience of the political violence was closely intertwined with the indirect or structural violence of their situation. This included their identity as men-in-crisis, unable to even properly marry; their economic vulnerabilities; the fierce economic competition between competing gangs, and their specific locations in, and claims to their neighbourhood. The political violence changed their social horizons and anticipated futures and thus affects how they navigate their lives in the aftermath of the post-election violence, including their performance of ethnicity.

The chapter by Igreja focuses on Gorongosa, a district of Sofala province, located in the center of Mozambique. This district was one of the epicenters of the civil war (1976–1992). Civilians actively participated in the fighting and formed the major part of the casualties. Igreja analyses testimonies he gathered in the context of a community intervention study conducted in 1998, paying special attention to the meaning these testimonies hold for their tellers in the socio-cultural context of Gorongosa and the politics of the state. Because there are ongoing disputes about the interpretation of history within the Mozambican government, there have been no government initiatives to help people deal with memories of the past through, for instance, the establishment of a truth commission that might bring what happened in the war zones into the open. War survivors in Gorongosa have had to rely on their own, indigenous resources to come to terms with the memories of violence that keep disturbing processes of recovery on both individual and community levels. The testimony method helped people mediate their memories of violence and suffering by giving them the opportunity to recast those memories in ways that highlight not just their victimisation but also their resilience and creativity in disempowering circumstances. By shifting their subject positions and modes of discourse during the narration of their memories, Igreja's interlocutors could begin to mediate between past, present and future, and thus to move on in life.

The focus of the chapter by Richters is the Byumba region in northern Rwanda, which shares with the rest of Rwanda a complex history of violence and repression that in 1994 culminated in the genocide. It

describes the suffering among the civilian population caused by war violence (1990–1994), the genocide itself, and ongoing violence in the aftermath. The chapter examines how a community-based sociotherapy programme introduced in Byumba in 2005 contributes to the alleviation of this suffering and analyses how it has affected the wellbeing of individuals and communities. In its current implementation, the programme focuses upon the problems of everyday life people choose to share with each other in small groups, rather than, as in Igreja's chapter, directly engaging painful memories of the past. The chapter compares the way sociotherapy contributes to healing with other interventions that have been organised, at different levels of Rwandan society, to heal the wounds caused by the political violence of the past. The various ways in which the state facilitates and hinders processes of coming to terms with this violence, especially as it engages different group identities, receive special attention. The fact that in Byumba the Tutsi formed a much smaller percentage of the population than elsewhere in Rwanda gives the shortcomings of the policies of the state extra weight and may enhance the importance of the sociotherapy programme there. Sociotherapy helps people regain their humanity and find the moral resources to invest in the future again. The programme thus emerges as a transitional social intervention that may help Rwandan people to reconstruct moral relations after wrongdoing, overcome their victimhood, and contribute to the rebuilding of their communities.

The chapter by Gibson takes us to South Africa, not to a specific location but to male, white former conscripts who fought in a protracted armed conflict on the border between Namibia and Angola (1966–1989). These former conscripts did compulsory service for the South African Defense Force (SADF) and, during the fighting, experienced a range of traumatising events, as perpetrators, victims, and witnesses of violence. However, after the war, their memories of these events long remained largely contained and unexpressed, because the wider national discourse on the political and social meanings attached to this war had shifted dramatically between the time it had been fought and the fall of apartheid. What had been officially extolled as a war of liberation was now condemned as an unjust war. As a consequence, the memories of the veterans remained disarticulated from the dominant, state-sponsored forms of national memory making that emerged in South Africa, including the Truth and Reconciliation Committee. The chapter shows how these veterans have nonetheless begun to slowly find ways to rearticulate their experiences against the grain of

what Gibson conceptualises as 'the national memory field'. The chapter analyses some of the veterans' own understandings of emotional disconnectedness and how these resonate or clash with local and international medical models, including that of post-traumatic stress disorder. It is especially through the electronic mediation of the internet that they appear to have begun to forge connections with each other, reconcile themselves with the memories of war, and construct new orders of significance.

Memory

All the mediations of violence analysed in this volume, even if the violence in question is still ongoing, explicitly or implicitly engage with the memories of violence. Often these memories remain unspoken and are displaced by something else, whether that something else consists of a special kind of memory-making that addresses the violence and yet avoids naming those responsible for perpetrating it (as in the Somali case) or of self-presentations that do not mention but yet try to supersede the memories of violence that resonate in the places, communities, and genres of speech from which they emerge. The latter is, for example, the case with the *isicathamiya* performers analysed by Gunner. These Zulu singers, Gunner argues, fashion themselves as new, modern (and glamorous) but moral men who insist on their own and their audience's rights and duties as citizens. They do not need to engage the memories of the humiliation and structural violence of the apartheid years or the brutality and bloodshed of the pre-1994 ANC-Inkatha confrontations explicitly, for these are still palpably present in their physical environment and its continued economic marginalisation. They do not need to name older constructions of Zulu manhood, as the memories of Zulu warriors as well as the resistant urban masculinity fashioned by their fathers resonate in the genre of *isicathamiya* itself.

In the case of Somali poetry analysed by Kapteijns, the silences are very different. Here too the genres of speech poets choose to mediate the violence of the civil war enable and constrain speech at the same time. Initially, in the immediate aftermath of state collapse, poets used the most respected male genres to infuse their attempts to heal the nation with moral authority. However, at the same time, this constrained them by making the specifics of the violence that

was perpetrated, including the identities of perpetrators and victims, unspeakable. Thus, the poets' conceptually sophisticated and abstract renditions of the memories of civil war violence resounded with the very silences that might well obstruct the repair of moral relationships (Walker 2006). For the Nairobi youth interviewed by Van Stapele, memory presents a very different challenge; the post-election violence in which they became engaged in 2007 was, on the face of it, deeply entangled with a Kikuyu-ness from whose history they, as poor young men, had mostly been excluded and of whose 'ancestral home' they had no experience or personal memory. Van Stapele shows how these young men are compelled to make sense out of this Kikuyu-ness by narrating it and associating it with aspects of their lives in their neighbourhood, for example, their inability to achieve the status and roles associated with respectable masculinity and the competition for particular economic niches in the Mathare Valley slum area.

The Mozambican individuals who gave testimony in the context of the therapeutic interviews conducted by Igreja also refashioned their memories of the violence they experienced during the civil war. In the absence of official recognition of the specific suffering of the inhabitants of this region – let alone any more tangible state assistance – Igreja found that his interlocutors responded well to the emphatic listening he was able to provide. In their testimonies, they did not see themselves as victims only. Instead, they also chose to remember how their active personal agency in the midst of suffering and disempowerment had made things better for themselves and others. The struggle over constructions of memory is most emphatically at the center of analysis in the chapter by Gibson. The former conscripts of the vicious border war that, after the fall of the apartheid regime, came to be seen as shameful and wrong found themselves in a double bind. The challenge of personally coming to terms with their memories of the violence of this war was made unimaginably more difficult because the war was being excluded and excised from the national memory-field, that is to say, from the kinds of memory-making allowed and promoted by the government at the national level. Thus these ex-combatants had to war with memory on more than one front and it is a credit to their courage and creativity that they succeeded in beginning to create their own memory-field.

Equally painful and largely unspeakable are the memories of recent violence in the northern Rwandese region of Byumba studied by Richters. While general references to the genocide are ubiquitous, in

the context of the ongoing structural violence of poverty and government policies that allow no space for public memoralisation of suffering by the Hutu population, the specific acts of violence experienced and perpetrated by local individuals remain unspeakable in everyday, face-to-face encounters. Like the Rwandan individuals interviewed by Buckley-Zistel (2006), participants in the sociotherapy groups appear to avoid explicit discussion of the memories of violence in order to re-establish the most basic of inter-personal relations.

Social suffering and healing

The concept of social suffering was introduced by Kleinman, Das and other anthropologists, in a series of three volumes, *Social suffering* (1996), *Violence and subjectivity* (1997), and *Remaking a world: Violence, social suffering and recovery* (2001). Social suffering refers to the devastating injuries that violence inflicts on human experiences and conditions, which for the purpose of research and intervention, are often split up into measurable attributes. The concept of social suffering entails that health, welfare, legal, political, moral, cultural and religious issues form a domain that should be approached as a whole. In their introduction to *Postcolonial disorders* (2008), however, Good et al. warn against the totalising potential of the concept of social suffering and insist that people, during and in the aftermath of violence, continue to exercise personal agency, and try to remake their everyday lives and to contribute in one way or the other to their social recovery and healing (ibid.: 11). They thus question "the validity of essentialising 'suffering' as a distinctive mode of experience" and caution against the "obvious hazard to approaching subjectivity among postcolonial societies through a focus on disorder and pathology" (ibid.: 10). Our chapters show on the one hand that, for some people, violence is indeed a totalising experience that robs them of their agency, but they convey on the other hand that many others, despite their suffering, succeed in 'remaking a world' with or without the support of outside interventions.

Here we present the healing from both "traumatic violence and other, more insidious forms of social suffering" (Das et al. 2001: 3) in terms of the mediations we study. In their critique of clan-based violence, Somali poets mediate the shock at having been betrayed by short-sighted and power-hungry political leaders and brutalized by

ordinary fellow Somalis. They aim at the healing of a collective mind-set that would allow for peace and the reconstruction of the state. The 'medicine' that they prescribe to their audience consists of national feeling and Islamic morality variously defined. The poets' focus is on what we could call 'political healing'. The Zulu singers in Gunner's chapter address in their songs the suffering that results from their troubled lives in an unstable social and moral order; the social ills related to disrupted family life and failing fathers, the pervasiveness of HIV/AIDS, and their own many difficulties in life. Their songs mediate the humiliated, impoverished, beaten down masculinity apartheid tried to impose and the social crisis around them. The healing they call for entails physical and mental health; economic wellbeing and the ability to create and sustain a family; the respect associated with a glamorous, modern masculinity, and a responsive state. They are all about configuring new national imaginaries, about socio-economic, political and cultural healing.

The young men in Van Stapele's chapter appear to be still reeling from the shock of having violated or (or having been violated by) fellow youth from the 'hood'. As they struggle into voice in their conversations with Van Stapele, they try to make sense of violence that still makes very little sense. They do so, partly, it seems, by 'trying on' the newly fashioned, post-violence ethnicity as a political identity, but mostly they articulate their social suffering as men-in-crisis for whom this new form of ethnicity does not appear to provide healing. Time will have to tell how they will remake their shattered individual and social worlds. The last three chapters endorse but add further dimensions to the healing processes already addressed by Kapteijns and Gunner. Healing is more than an intra-psychic process. It is also an issue of politics, justice, human rights, socio-economic development, forgetting and remembering, and reconciliation. The chapters by Igreja and Richters deal with these issues as they are embedded in local worlds and focus on healing within community settings, while Gibson's chapter focuses on war survivors who live distanced from each other and find healing especially through connecting to each other via the internet. The testimony-telling intervention Igreja studied took place within war survivors' households. Even though the method used was individually oriented, the intervention involved the whole community as it generated a great deal of spontaneous interaction and communication between community members (Igreja et al. 2004). A post-intervention measurement study had not been able to establish whether the inter-

vention had been effective in reducing the high level of post-traumatic stress disorder symptomatology (ibid.). However, the qualitative study of the effect of testimony telling, was able to identify that, in terms of healing, the intervention had benefited people because it had facilitated a process by which they were able to give new meanings to their trauma stories, which helped them to move on with life.

In contrast to many other post-conflict areas in the world, Gorongosa is an area where therapeutic interventions devised or directed from outside of Mozambique have been rare. The testimony intervention is an exception in this respect. Different from Gorongosa, Rwanda is an area in the world where outside interventions aimed at healing, reconciliation and justice are abundant. However, not everyone has access to them. In addition, not all of these interventions are directed to what people themselves identify as their needs in terms of healing. For instance, participants in the sociotherapy programme who have also gone through trauma counselling report that they did not benefit much from the latter. When they come home after counselling, they return to the very same environment that contributes to the problems from which they suffer. What people appreciate most in sociotherapy is that it helps them speak to others and thus to break out of their isolation and that it empowers them to actively re-engage with the future. Healing for them is "the building of social relations by performing the work of everyday" (Das et al. 2001: 14) and the exchanging of "small local stories" (ibid.: 16). The sociotherapy programme presented by Richters also appears to have the capacity to enable or enhance the effectiveness of other, often more top-down or less bottom-up interventions aimed at social reconstruction, including those organised by the state. Sociotherapy and testimony telling are just a few examples of a range of narrative therapies and community interventions applied in post-conflict settings. Both contribute in their own way to the recovery of voice after trauma and tragedy, which often marks the beginning of a healing process.

It is known from many other studies (e.g. Zur 1998; Green 1999) that in a context in which people are forced to 'forget' the violence they experienced or witnessed and repress their pain, this pain re-emerges as physical pain. In other words, when people have been unable to articulate their experiences of violence as a result of being silenced – whether by the state or by the community of which they are part (e.g., in Gorongosa and Byumba) or as a result of the non-narratability of atrocities – these experiences are embodied. Research suggests that

constructing memories together with others can be a creative and heal-
ing process. Memory, however, is tangled up with trauma, and unrav-
elling the trauma can itself be traumatic. This raises a central question
in 'trauma therapy': when, how, and to what extent should individuals
or groups seal or reopen the past in order to be able to work towards
a better future? And how do memory constructions at the level of
the individual, the group, and the state relate to each other? (cf. e.g.
Antze & Lambek 1996; Van Dongen 2004). It is in this context that
the sociotherapy method avoids going deep into memories in the ini-
tial stages of the intervention. The testimony method, on the contrary,
is primarily focused on remembering and de-conditioning memory.
When we compare the different approaches to memory-work in the
two methods, the different contexts in which they were applied are
crucial. In Gorongosa, the therapy consisted of face-to-face interaction
with an empathic listener, while in Byumba people who initially felt a
great mistrust towards each other cautiously began to engage in direct
interaction amongst themselves.

In the case of the ex-conscripts with whom Gibson spoke, it was the
men themselves who, after having lived in conditions of 'contained
instability', slowly began to break the silence about memories of war
experiences so painful that they had feared being overwhelmed by
them. In contrast to the people studied by Igreja and Richters who
broke their silence in safe spaces created in their own living environ-
ment, Gibson's informants used the internet to create such a space.
It was by reading all sorts of material on post-traumatic stress disor-
der (PTSD) and accessing information about this disorder through
the internet that they started to realise that what they were suffering
from had a name and this contributed to some relief. The subsequent
contacts they made with other ex-conscripts and the resulting camara-
derie of cyberspace was another step in a healing process they more or
less steered themselves. Similar to the participants in sociotherapy in
Byumba, the ex-conscripts perceive their recovery from various forms
of disconnectedness as moral repair and as reconciliation with them-
selves and with others. It is the cognitive and emotional connectedness
that appears to heal. War veterans are trying to find ways to re-con-
nect with each other, to converse, remember, and make meaning of
their memories. They also have begun to insist on a space within, and
perhaps a transformation of the national memory field that has until
now largely excluded them.

Space, scale, and audience

The mediations we study occupy a wide range of spaces in very different ways and yet have in common that they cut across and connect different spaces and scales. In all cases, the genre of speech or kind of text involved is closely intertwined with the space a mediation occupies and the audiences it engages. The issue of genre is central to the chapters on Somali and Zulu poetry and song. Through their choice of genre, Somali poets purposefully situate their message in shared Somali public space, that is to say, in national space, and draw on the authority of the genre, itself explicitly gendered male, to speak about matters pertaining to the public sphere and the common good, namely the politics of peace-making and state reconstruction that are considered the business of men. As they try to intervene in this shared public space, the poets show awareness of the different scales of the problems violence has brought with it: at the local level, the poisoned or diseased mindset of ordinary Somalis who have lost confidence in a shared morality and national belonging; at the national level, the opportunistic greed and unrestrained armed rivalry of Somali politicians and warlords who send their armed youth militias into battle even as they themselves sit and chat in five-star international hotels outside of the country; and at the international level, players of all kinds who compete to use Somalis as proxies for their own goals. However limited their repertoire of healing concepts, the poets connect these different scales in trying to move Somalis and change their minds.

The singers studied by Gunner, who sing in Zulu, one of the eleven official languages of South Africa, also draw authority from, and push back against the different aspects of their past and present that are associated with their genre of performance. The resonances with Zulu warrior songs refer both to a proud and heroic, anti-colonial manhood that commands respect and to the more recent violence between Inkatha and ANC supporters that threatened national unity and must be kept at bay. The visible continuity with the ways in which the generation of their fathers, through dress and performance, asserted their upbeat, modern, Christian urbanity in the face of the loneliness and humiliating poverty of the apartheid mines and hostels constitutes a different bridge to a past that is both local and national. The *isicathamiya* singers, moreover, sound national themes and articulate national claims of citizenship on the state, thus claiming as their audience

both the common people of South Africa and their government and connecting the present and the future. Moreover, the genre, both at its inception and today, incorporates international (e.g. African American and Christian) cultural forms and ambitions, the latter well represented by the internationally known and commercially successful representative of this genre, Ladysmith Black Mambazo. Again, it is how the singers use a locally rooted genre to connect different scales and spaces that is striking. The biographical narratives elicited by Van Stapele situate themselves in the public sphere differently, as they emerged from private conversations that are nevertheless deeply implicated in, and gesture towards the public sphere, cutting across local and national spaces and scales. The post-election violence that occurred and transformed relationships locally, in the neighbourhood, was directly connected to the national scale, namely to politics at the level of the state and to national discourses of ethnicity that draw on a multi-layered and complex past. Van Stapele shows that these young men came to perform identities that to a large extent drew on local predicaments and meanings but were nevertheless inescapably shaped by the ethnic card dealt to them by politics at the national level.

In the chapters by Igreja, Gibson, and Richters, we also see an intensely local mediation through which individuals as members of a group try to reconstitute their lives in spaces created by themselves but inescapably affected by the state and numerous and diverse international organisations. We already addressed the negative weight of the state in the context of the veterans of South Africa's border war. In the case of Rwanda, it is hard to explain the enthusiasm with which the people of Byumba have embraced the sociotherapy programme without the legitimising framework provided by the Church or in the absence of the contested memorialisation and reconciliation policies imposed by the central government. In Mozambique, the conspicuous failure of the government to acknowledge and compensate for its role in the violence suffered by the people of Gorongosa shaped the context of the latter's testimonies. The South African ex-combatants articulated quite explicitly the dominant national memory field that silenced and delegitimised their social suffering. However, in the case of Rwanda and Mozambique, the mediations are so silent about the governments currently in power that this silence itself resounds with significance and attracts attention to the disconnection between the local and the national scale. In all three cases, moreover, this articulation of local/

personal ways of coming to terms with national mediations of violence, involves international organisations, researchers, and sources of knowledge, again illustrating the connections between the personal and the public, and between the local, national, and international.

Performing and refashioning identities

Another body of scholarship that has raised the question of how violence should be studied and what kind of representational and analytical strategies it requires consists of the anthropological scholarship of genocide and large-scale communal violence. One crucial insight that has emerged from the work of scholars such as Bowen (2002), Bringa (2002), Donham (2006), Eltringham (2004), Feldman (1995), Fujii (2009), Lindegaard (2009), Hinton (2002), Mamdani (1996), and Willemse (2009) is the indispensability of a critical interrogation of the categories of 'groupness' that inform large-scale communal violence and the ways in which such categories and identities are shaped by but also shape violence. A failure to engage in such a 'deconstruction' and contextualization of the ways in which the 'groupness' in whose name violence was committed came to be constituted as such, these scholars argue, often means an uncritical acceptance of the categories that *result from* that violence and thus a simplification and distortion of the processes by which the "groupness" involved became so lethal. In the absence of such a critical approach, to quote Donham, "the 'projected' past marches toward the present as what are arguably outcomes are understood as preexisting causes" (Donham 2006: 28). The danger here is twofold. The first is that a scholar ends up siding with those who masterminded or committed the violence by accepting the identity constructs the latter intended (and often succeeded) to impose by force. The second is, as Donham puts it so poignantly, that '[t]his tendency to read the present (after violence) into the past necessarily overemphasises and overplays the role of hatred of the other as an explanation of violence. Nothing 'primordializes' identity more efficiently than the personal experience of violence, especially of violence that appears to be directed at one's group *as* a group' (ibid.: 28–29).

The critical analysis of the constructs of group identity plays a role in several of the mediations of violence we study in this book as well as our own analyses of them. To begin with the former, the chapter

by Richters shows that the Rwandese people of Byumba, in the course
of the healing process, transcend their own victim identity and resist
the simple and loaded dichotomy of victim and perpetrator – Tutsi
victim and Hutu perpetrator. In Gibson's study, the ex-combatants
of what is now presented as an immoral war resist a categorisation
that differentiates their war-damaged morality from other men who
killed for the political organisation that recruited them for its cause.
In the chapter on Somali poetry, the poets fulminate against the group
identity construct of clan, which they name, shame and try to explain
as a tool by which unscrupulous warlords manipulate the emotions
of ordinary people. Instead, they use their full powers of persuasion
to promote other kinds of 'groupness' and collective identity, either
that of nation (the way it used to be) or that of a newly imagined and
fundamentalist *umma* or Islamic community.

However, it is Van Stapele, in her chapter on Kenya, who most explic-
itly sets out to deconstruct the concept of ethnicity that informed the
'ethnic' post-election violence of 2007. Her analysis of the meanings of
ethnicity as they emerged from the words of the young men caught up
in this violence does not explain ethnicity away, but presents it as the
young men of Mathare Valley 'performed' and mediated it, that is to
say interpreted and enacted it. The politically dominant, nation-wide
discourses of ethnicity intersected with, and gained specific meanings
in the local context, while many other aspects of their lives as poor,
urban young men were also 'rolled into' their performance of ethnicity
(Willemse 2009). Neither the ex-combatants of Gibson's chapter nor
the Zulu performers of Gunner's accept the dominant constructions of
their masculinity and, in direct or indirect reference to the masculini-
ties they want to transcend, work towards the fashioning of new moral
selves. In contrast, the Somali poets studied by Kapteijns do not reflect
on how the authority with which they speak about the common good
in the public sphere is tied up with dominant notions of masculinity
and thus discourages, disparages, and excludes women's speech about
such matters. Here attempts to think against the grain about clan/eth-
nicity take the construct of dominant masculinity and its implications
for concepts of womanhood for granted.

Conclusion

In conclusion, with the concept of mediation as its analytical lens, this book presents six studies of the ways in which different groups of individuals from Kenya, Mozambique, Rwanda, Somalia, and South Africa present and enact both their subjective understandings of the violence that wreaked havoc on their societies and their strategies for overcoming and coming to terms with it. The greatest value of this volume, therefore, we believe, lies in the specificity that derives from this double movement of interpretation and contextualisation – by us, as inter-disciplinary scholars from different disciplinary backgrounds, and by the authors and actors of many kinds who are our interlocutors. Although the chapters are very different, this introduction has highlighted some commonalities between both our own approaches to the study of African mediations of violence and the strategies and themes that characterise those mediations themselves. The former are marked by the purposefully interdisciplinary approach that we had the opportunity to pursue together as fellows at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities and Social Sciences. The latter may serve as a reminder to scholars, policy makers, and practitioners in a wide range of fields (from human rights to development) that those who live through violence exercise agency in telling and powerful ways, and that it is worthwhile to (critically) engage with how they represent and affect the aftermath of the violence they experienced.

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MAKING MEMORIES OF MOGADISHU IN SOMALI POETRY ABOUT THE CIVIL WAR

Lidwien Kapteijns

> What is dearest to us is often dearer than the truth
>
> History is the poisoned well, seeping into the ground-water. It's not the unknown past we're doomed to repeat, but the past we know. Every recorded event is a brick of potential, of precedent, thrown into the future.
>
> – Ann Michaels, *Fugitive pieces*

Introduction

An incident

The power of Somali poetry was brought home to me at a conference of Somali Studies in London in 1993. A European expert on Somali poetry, who had collaborated with a noted Somali poet, stepped onto the podium to analyse some recent Somali poetry commenting on the current clan-based violence with all the venom and partiality of the moment. As soon as he recited the lines in Somali, a deadening silence fell over the large auditorium. Because this was London, a centre for Somali immigrants and refugees, there was a sizable Somali audience, from old men to young girls with neat *hijab*s, who had so far been engaged and animated. Now they became uneasy and quiet, and although the speaker, somewhat nonplussed and unnerved, completed his talk, the eerie atmosphere made it difficult to concentrate on what he said. When he finished, a whole orchestra of voices swept over him: how could he bring these kinds of texts into a public place. They had come here to learn something scholarly, not to be insulted and humiliated. They had come as Somalis and had not come prepared to be addressed and insulted like this. And however strongly the speaker explained that these lines were only illustrations for his analysis, his defence fell on deaf ears.[1]

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[1] London, School of Oriental and African Studies, European Somali Studies Conference, 1993.

The first point that this incident impressed upon me was the power of Somali poetry. Spoken before a Somali audience, the power of these lines as effective speech, in this case their virulence, as it were, could not be contained or bracketed by scholarly analysis; on the contrary, pronounced by a European scholar, its virulence might become even more dangerous. However, had the lines not referred to clan violence, their impact might have been different. The second insight that emerged was therefore about the emotive power of speech dealing with violence and about the relationship of Somali collective identities to space. Many Somalis in the audience were angry that, in this scholarly and public place, shared with other Somalis and non-Somalis, they were confronted with words that targeted their clan identity. Thus they suddenly found themselves differentially related both to the words spoken, and to the speaker and the people around them. Rightly or wrongly, they insisted that, in that particular context, their common identity as Somalis – their national identity – was the only relevant and appropriate one and that the speaker was out of line to address and construct them differently. The incident represents some of the themes of this chapter in condensed form, namely how Somali popular culture, that is to say Somali poetry, performed or disseminated in public (shared) space, mediates violence, that is to say, interprets, speaks about, and aims at intervening in violence.

This essay examines a particular set of Somali poems, namely texts that discursively use Mogadishu, the capital city of the independent Republic of Somalia since 1960, to mediate the violence of state collapse and reconstruction. Before turning to these specific texts, however, it is necessary to provide some background to the wider set of sources to which they belong and the violence with which they deal.

The violence

There are two shifts in the discourses about violence that are at the centre of this analysis and Mogadishu plays a significant role in both of them. The first one is a 'key shift'[2] whose destructive impact materialised in Mogadishu at the moment of state collapse in January 1991. It was a 'key shift' in the sense that it was a key or cumulative moment at which a particular kind of discourse – what I call 'the clan logic' – was

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[2] For the Foucauldian term 'key shift', see Willemse 2007: 19 and Mills 1997: 26.

burned into Somali bodies and minds through violence perpetrated in its name. This 'clan logic' is not simply the articulation of 'the significant other' as 'other clan', or 'enemy clan', but the articulation and implementation of an agenda for communal violence[3] and the mobilisation of people around the idea that individuals and groups constituting this 'other' deserve to die and must be killed or expelled.[4] The 'key shift' represents a new stage of clannist violence incited by leaders aspiring to take control of the state, in which Somalis who were *not* state actors and thus did *not* act as part of the institutions of the national state they shared (however unequally) with other Somalis proved ready to commit against other ordinary Somali civilians violence of such a scale and enormity that it fits the label of 'clan cleansing'.[5] Of course, this 'key shift' can only be understood in context, first, against the background of the Barre regime (October 1969–January 1991), which itself perpetrated large-scale clan-based violence (especially in 1988 in the northwest); second, in the context of Somalia as a whole, where scenes of violence comparable to those in Mogadishu at the time of state collapse were, with different perpetrators and different victims, seemingly endlessly played out (Amnesty International 1992).

Compared to this first 'key shift', the second discursive shift is in a different key. According to its advocates, an Islamic/Islamist discourse has the potential to wipe the slate clean and defeat clan thinking by articulating the Somali nation as a Somali *umma* inclusive of all Muslim Somalis. However, intimately intertwined with clan thinking and harnessed to the violent struggle over control of the state and the resources that are normally controlled by the state, this discourse is now used to justify further violence against civilians in the name of Islam. At the time of writing, Somalis throughout the world are being called to Mogadishu to engage in an armed struggle framed in religious terms. The clan militias of the 1990s have morphed into Islamist

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[3] The concept of communal violence refers to violence for which civilians target other civilians on the basis of their group identity. See Kapteijns 1994: 211–213.

[4] This does not mean that other examples of mass violence are less horrifying or less significant. These other occurrences, such as in Somalia's northwest in 1988, the Banaadir, the riverine area, Kismaayo, and so forth all deserve (further) study in their own right.

[5] My use of 'clan cleansing' parallels that of 'ethnic cleansing', which entails using force or intimidation to eliminate or expel individuals of another ethnic or religious group from a particular area in order to make that area ethnically homogeneous.

youth militias such as Al-Shabaab and Ahl al-Sunna wa'l Jamaaca,[6] while old and new warlords now claim Islamic credentials and titles. In the capital and throughout the country as a whole, this 'Islamist (il) logic'[7] has re-ignited large-scale communal violence, this time justified in the name of Islam rather than clan.

Popular culture, media, and public space

Somali poetic mediations of violence, including the texts that constitute the source base of this essay, are part of Somali popular culture, here defined both in reference to its content and its distribution and circulation. Thus popular culture is here understood as "culture that is widely disseminated, and widely viewed or heard and read" (Davis 1992: 1411) and that constitutes, in Nadine Dolby's terms, "an important locus of public debate and of individual and community agency" with "important implications for the public spaces and social fabric of a society" (Dolby 2006: 34). Somali poetry and popular songs fit these criteria. First, they are disseminated widely and in a variety of ways. The private exchange of cassette tapes, CDs and DVDs as well as their sale in local music shops from Jigjiga to Hargeisa and Toronto is still significant to distribution in- and outside of Somalia. So is their broadcasting on local and international radio programmes such as the Somali programmes of the BBC and the Voice of America, also accessible through the internet. There has also been an upswing in the publication of written anthologies and *diiwaan*s (collections of one poet's oeuvre), and original poetry and songs also feature in recently established Somali Studies journals.[8]

   The true revolution in communication and dissemination has been the emergence, in the course of the 1990s, of the 700 or so Somali websites, some of which specialise in the dissemination of poetry or songs and present these in the form of audio-, video- or written texts (Issa-Salwe 2005, 2006, and 2008). The fact that poetic messages and interventions are now "cast through new mass media or broadcast through new, transnational channels of communication" raises a host of new

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   [6] I follow Somali orthography to transcribe Somali names and phrases, even if they are based on Arabic. This means that the 'c' stands for the (Somali and Arabic) consonant ''ayn' and the 'x' for the aspirated 'h', while long vowels are doubled.
   [7] I am using this term parallel to that of 'the clan logic' above.
   [8] For example, *Halabuur: Journal of Somali Literature and Culture* (Djibouti).

questions (Meyer & Moors 2006: 7). Thus authors such as Bernal (ibid.), as well as Meyer and Moors (ibid.), ask about the construction and reconstruction of communities and audiences, the role violence plays in such constructions, implications for the concept of public space, inclusion and exclusion, what can be spoken and what not, what is kept secret and what made public, and so forth.

In the Somali context, these new electronic mass media have shaped, and are transforming, the architecture of Somali public space. There exists a digital divide between Somalia and the diaspora, although that divide is far from absolute, as even in small Somali towns there is often some internet access. Moreover, when we speak of Somali cultural production, Somali cyberspace, to use Bernal's terms, "overflows its electronic boundaries in a number of important ways" (2005: 663), just as it absorbs and disseminates expressions of popular culture circulating in different electronic formats. Thus the broader source base from which this essay draws consists of poems that were composed and/or performed and disseminated in Somalia, in neighbouring East African countries such as Kenya and Djibouti, as well as in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Sweden, Canada and the United States. They represent recordings of public or private performances and are disseminated in audio-, audio-visual, and written form via radio, music shops, and private exchange, as well as on the internet.[9] Somali cyberspace is becoming the single most comprehensive and continuously expanding depository and archive of Somali cultural production and, as such, increasingly generates the public sphere in which the kinds of mediations of violence studied here circulate. In this process, popular culture produced (or initiated) by Somalis in the diaspora (who form the majority of web masters for Somali sites) is becoming dominant. Although internet access is less available inside Somalia than in the diaspora, Somali cultural expressions and interactions are so intensely transnational and multi-media in nature that they bridge the digital divide and create, at least for the subject-matter and genre under study here, a differentiated but common public space.

Clive Barnett, commenting on recent revisions and expansions of Habermasian notions of the public sphere, refers in this context to the

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[9] My research association with the Halabuur Centre for Culture and Communication, located in Djibouti, from September to December 2007, played a crucial role in my ability to discover and access the texts analysed in this chapter. All the translations from Somali into English are mine.

concepts of "cultural public sphere" (attributed to Nancy McGuigan) and of "weak public sphere" (attributed to Nancy Fraser), to suggest two points also relevant to this essay. First, in Fraser's words, "a weak public sphere is constituted by those activities 'whose deliberative practice consist[s] exclusively in opinion-formation and does not encompass decision-making'" (Barnett 2004: 262). This insight helps to put the mediations of violence studied in this essay in perspective, for it provides, in Barnett's words, "a means of understanding the political significance of cultural practices without collapsing the cultural and the political into one another in over-inflated notions of cultural politics" (ibid.: 263). Second, the concept of "cultural public sphere" refers to how "a wide array of affective communicative and expressive practices of popular culture, in contrast to narrowly cognitive and rational understandings of deliberation", may contribute to the public sphere and to "the cultural formation of democratic competencies" of audiences in it (ibid.: 262–263). The poems and song studied here indeed constitute affective and expressive cultural practices of political opinion-making and thus a form of cultural politics in a 'weak', 'cultural' public sphere. In their intent to affect Somali political views of, and relations with, each other and thus to engage "issues of sociability and power", they also fit into what Lutz and Abu-Lughod have called a cultural "politics of everyday life" (1990: 2).

Poetry as effective and emotive speech

The poetry and song texts from which the texts presented here were drawn are mediations of violence related to the collapse and reconstruction of the state. It is striking how many texts dealing with this topic bring into play this wider social context without emphasising personal suffering. This may be due to what Somalis regard as appropriate ways of speaking about suffering and death in public. Speaking about private pain in ways that do not make a socially, politically, or even universally relevant point is, according to the rules of the Somali literary canon, rarely effective or prestigious speech, even if in certain contexts – that is, in particular genres, when recited or sung by particular categories of people (especially women and young men), in particular physical locations – such 'non-prestigious' speech will find and emotionally affect its target audience and also be sanctioned (Kapteijns 1999: 72–77). Christina Zarowsky (2001) noted the following in the context of anthropological interviews with Somalis in Northeast

Ethiopian refugee camps: "Somalis in Ethiopia…stressed politics, justice and poverty, and not private distress, in their interactions with me about their experiences of collective violence and forced migration" (ibid.: 313).This does not mean that people do not feel private pain, she argues, nor that they are silenced by community pressures. Rather, she notes:

> Individual experiences related to displacement and violence, including what may be glossed as 'emotions', are consistently interpreted not with respect to what they say about the interior state of an individual, but with respect to what they say about the situation of an individual vis-à-vis life circumstances and other social actors (ibid.: 313–314).

This insight is also relevant to Somali poetry. Zarowski is right in concluding that Somali society does not force individuals to be silent or suppress expressions of individual suffering and emotions. However, she does not consider that there exist rules that govern what can be appropriately said. The form speech takes – poetry or prose and, if poetry, which genre – as well as the identity of the speaker and the context of speaking, influence what speech is considered prestigious, legitimate, and effective in a particular context.[10]

Like the interview responses Zarowski elicited, much Somali poetry about the impact of violence on individuals has the intent of being effective speech, that is to say speech that affects change and forwards solutions that go beyond the individual alone. It might be argued that, in the Somali context, this poetry is the form of effective and emotive speech *par excellence* and is created to move its audience in purposeful ways. Conceived of by men in the most prestigious genres; pressed into the formal constraints of alliteration, metre, rhythm and melody; sharpened in meaning by poetic virtuosity and creativity; emotionally charged by the use of metaphors, memories, and ethical impulses that are often intensely inter-textual and inter-discursive and thus Somali to the core, poems and songs are intended to persuade and change the minds and hearts of their audience.

Song texts are also poetic texts but they can be, and often are, shorter and less complex in form than other poems, as they can bring to bear on their listeners a much wider range of the sound effects of

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[10] See Samatar 1982 for the classical (male) poetic genres and Kapteijns 1999: 72–77 and 154–157 for the so-called non-prestigious ones and for the "muting" of women's voices.

voice, melody, rhythm, and musical instruments. The emotive power
of songs thus lies in their aesthetic and sensual appeal as much as their
moral reasoning. No wonder, then, that when poets create a song, they
often use shorter poetic genres, while other poets use the tradition-
ally most prestigious 'male' poetic genres of *gabay*, *jiifto* and *geeraar*,
which, in their ideal form, express, the Somali poetic canon holds, the
well thought out intellectual arguments of wise and competent men.[11]

Men's voices in a man's world

In *Women's voices in a man's world* (1999), I showed in which tradi-
tional genres of Somali orature (or auriture) women could speak effec-
tively, even if not necessarily prestigiously, and how their voices were
muted by the conventions of the Somali literary canon and a social
hierarchy that made public affairs the business of men. Given that the
poetry studied here is poetry that circulates in shared public space and
mediates a subject-matter as public and central to the political sphere
of men as war and violence, in the male genres traditionally regarded
most suitable for the topic, it is perhaps not surprising that the vast
majority of poetic mediations of violence are authored by men.[12] This
does not mean that women never author poetry addressing the vio-
lence associated with state collapse. For example, some female poets
performed at most of the national reconciliation meetings and, like
men, a few women have begun to publish their poems (Amina Said
Ali 2005; Xaawa Jibriil 2008).[13] However, when poets are women, their
poems often do not get disseminated in the public sphere – nor are
they transcribed and published on the best known literary websites –
in the same ways as those of men.[14] Thus, as was true for the songs

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[11] For more information about the genres, see Orwin & Riiraash 1997 and Johnson
2001.

[12] Charlotte Hooper 2001 argues that the academic field of international relations
is dominated by men and particular constructions of hegemonic masculinity and also
produces such masculinity. Similarly, the authors of the poetic genre studied here, as a
part of the everyday politics of the cultural public sphere, articulate their genre and its
subject-matter as masculine and their own masculinity in terms of competence in it.

[13] In this chapter (and bibliography), I refer to Somali authors who have published
under a last name (often their third or grandfather's name) by that last name. In all
other cases, Somali authors are referred to by their first, father's, and grandfather's
name, in that order.

[14] Thus the few poems by women included in the literary Somali website www
.aftahan.com (accessed March 2008) are poems in which women, as women and espe-
cially as mothers, comment on women's issues.

analysed in *Women's voices in a man's world*, in the kinds of texts studied here it is the voices of men that are most commonly heard in shared public space, for even the songs that provide women's perspectives and are in their voice, are still most often authored by men.

The popular culture texts studied in this essay are only one kind of Somali mediation of violence. There are other such literary mediations, private and public, that are not examined here in detail but whose mention here helps to delineate the mediations that are central to this essay. First, there is a vast and scattered body of poems dealing with violence, circulating mostly in the form of audio-cassettes, that is produced and performed for an audience of like-minded people (relatives, friends, political allies). This includes what may be called virulent and incendiary poetry, often produced in the heat of the moment, in which men and women praise their own families/clans, vilify enemy clans, and jeer at the violence and abuse inflicted upon the latter. Such poems belong to the genre of *gubaabo qabiil* ("egging on the clan"). This kind of poetry draws on widespread and long-standing hate-narratives that are based on historical fact and fiction and form an archive of half-lies and rumors that are, and have been, used to justify acts of communal violence. Few Somalis would tolerate such poems in simultaneously shared public space and such texts would, minimally, provoke a display of anger similar to that in the London incident described above. However, as a phenomenon, they are widely known among Somalis and occasionally 'leak' into print. For example, Mohamed-Abdi's *Apocalypse* (1994: 17–18) includes some hateful and gloating taunts at the victims of the communal violence unleashed in Mogadishu in January 1991. Strikingly, Somali webmasters, even those specialising in literature, have *not* incorporated them into the mainstream Somali websites (Issa-Salwe 2005: 153–154).

Second, there have emerged other kinds of popular culture that deal with the violence of the Somali civil war (Somali-language short stories and novels, Somali sit-coms on DVD, Somali and Somali-English rap songs, and so forth). These represent relatively new genres, also fully deserving of further study. However, by the standards of the (changing) Somali literary canon, they barely exist and are regarded as irrelevant, linguistically mediocre and non-prestigious. While I refer to such texts in my analysis, the focus here is on a particular genre (men's prestigious poetry), about a particular topic (the violence of state collapse and reconstruction), making reference to a specific theme (Mogadishu), in shared public space (including Somali cyberspace).

Mogadishu as lieu de mémoire

There are two reasons why Mogadishu is the discursive site around which this essay is constructed. First, from 1960, when it became the capital of the new Somali state and the icon of Somali cosmopolitanism, modernity, and unity, its centrality to Somali history, for better or worse, has continued to increase. Today, nowhere in Somalia is the difference between pre-civil war and current realities more stark and grim than in Mogadishu. Second, in the Somali context, Mogadishu is a *lieu de mémoire*, a site for memory-making in the sense proposed by Pierre Nora (1989). Nora sees a "fundamental opposition" between memory and history. He sees memory as an organic, spontaneous, unselfconscious, ongoing remembering of particular experiences. History, on the other hand, is "the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer" (ibid.: 8). *Lieux de mémoire* arise, Nora argues, at the intersection of history and memory, "at the same time that an immense and intimate fund of memory disappears, surviving only as a reconstituted object beneath the gaze of history" (ibid.: 11). Thus, one reason why Mogadishu has become a *lieu de mémoire* in Somali mediations of violence is that the Mogadishu of before civil war destruction is irrevocably gone.

Moreover, there is in this context, as de Certeau phrases it, a "double alteration" at work, for not only is the Mogadishu of before the civil war no longer in existence but those who invoke its memory in mediations of violence do so prompted by very specific circumstances in the present, especially as exiles engaging with the city from far away. De Certeau's use of the term 'memory' has more in common with Nora's definition of 'history' than that of 'memory:' it is not the spontaneous, ongoing remembering that, at the moment of its disappearance becomes the vacuum that history fills and transforms (as according to Nora), but an act in and of the present and thus by definition at a remove from the past and thus 'other' to it. Thus de Certeau says, "Memory is played by the circumstances, just as a piano is played by a musician and music emerges from it when its keys are touched by the hands. Memory is a sense of the other" (Behar 1996: 81; de Certeau 1984: 86–87). In the space opened up as a result of this "double alteration", Somali poets and songsmiths, moved by the violence of state collapse and reconstruction, fashion Mogadishu as a *lieu de mémoire*, a 'site of memory', from which they speak to the present about the violence of the past and construct memories of the past to advocate for a particular future.

As articulated by Jewsiewicki and Mudimbe (1993: 10), a *lieu de mémoire* is a site of collective memory around which individuals and groups generate memories in such a way that these recollections make sense to them and 'work' for them, for example by allowing them to see themselves in a particular way or by allowing them to persuade others of something. A "site for memory" does not just hold but also shapes collective memory, and, as Jewsiewicki and Mudimbe argue, "collective memory is a means of producing meanings that belong to the political field". As a result, they write, "collective memory does not signify facts about the past: it is above all a semantic code for retrieving memories, for making sense out of historical details in direct relation to political legitimacy" (ibid.). It is this political and collective dimension (and intention) of memory-making in the sources of this essay that is pertinent here. Somali poets and songwriters have taken Mogadishu as a *lieu de mémoire*, as a discursive site *of* and *for* memory making, as they comment on the fate and future of the Somali people and their government.

The structure of this essay

The following focuses on Somali poems authored between 1991 and 2007 – a period that witnessed both shifts to violence outlined above – with some comparative reference to earlier poems and English-language texts. It examines a small set of Somali poems (including one song) that construct memories of Mogadishu as part of their mediation of the violence of state collapse and reconstruction. In doing so, it documents and provides a historical context for aspects of this violence and shows that the poetry mediating it constitutes a genre of speech that intends to shape and change the political subjectivities of its audience. The analysis of the changing political dimension of the poems is a central theme of this chapter and prepares for a re-visiting, in the conclusion, of the nature of the poetry under study and the shared Somali public space in which it situates itself.

Making memories of the background to violence

"Mogadishu, what happened?"

This essay begins with a relatively recent poem, called "Mogadishu, what happened?", in which the author directly addresses the city and asks it what has happened to it. The poem takes a historical approach

and evokes memories of the events that took place in the city in three periods – the era preceding and following independence (from 1955 to 1969), the time of the Barre dictatorship (from October 1969 to January 1991), and the moment of state collapse and its aftermath (from late 1990 to the present). Thus, even though it is not the oldest poem analysed here, it provides a basic chronology of events and presents a background against which the other mediations of violence studied here can be discussed.

"Mogadishu, what happened?" (*Muqdishooy maxaa dhacay?*), one of the hundreds of poems published on the Somali websites,[15] was written and posted to the web in October 2003 by a young Somali engineer called Cumar Cabdinuur Nuux "Nabaddoon", then based in London. It was written towards the end of the tenure of the Transitional National Government, during the extended Mbagathi peace talks in Kenya that, in 2004, gave birth to the current Transitional Federal Government, now under its second president. In this text, the poet interrogates the city about its past from the perspective of the lamentable present. Thus, after giving a glimpse of a war-torn Mogadishu split into hostile sections and strewn with dead bodies, the poet confronts the city first with its own image in its prime, the long decade following independence in 1960.

Making memories of Mogadishu in the long decade after independence

The memories Nabaddoon invokes at the beginning of his poem (stanzas 2–5) are all positive. They speak of natural beauty and people with the leisure and freedom to enjoy it; of security and prosperity, stable administration and economic development. As capital, he tells the city, you were the head and heart from which the whole country was governed. Thus he calls up memories of 'the good life' in Mogadishu in the 1960s (and perhaps even the early 1970s), when Mogadishu was loved and revered as the capital of the independent Somali state – a time when its infrastructure was improving, its harbour functioning, the agricultural production of its hinterland sufficient for both local

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[15] For the Somali text, see www.aftahan.com accessed on April 22, 2008. This poem is a *jiifto*, alliterating in 'm'. A *jiifto* is one of the prestigious male genres. It is shorter than the *gabay* and thus more like the *geeraar*, but often two lines are combined into one long one. Personal information from Martin Orwin, June 10, 2008. Also see Orwin & Riiraash 1997: 90. This poem consist of fifteen stanzas, all of which will be presented (in translation) in the course of this chapter.

consumption and export, its religious and secular education booming, its bureaucracy functional. However, interwoven with these positive memories, in the last lines of three of the four stanzas devoted to this time-period, the poet harshly destroys the idyllic picture he had just painted, for, at the time of writing, *qaat* and marijuana had taken the place of fruits and grains, he says, and unsophisticated countrymen were grazing their camels where there once were public institutions and roads. Addressing the city directly, he asks, who raped you, who defiled you?

> The sadness I feel for you, the unforgettable events,
> the cannons, mortars, and gunfire that struck every part of you,
> the dead bodies of your inhabitants that lie scattered everywhere –
> what do you think caused your fall from the high stature you had
> to where you are now, Mogadishu?
>
> Your beautiful seascape matching the colour of the sky,
> the fish, the ships travelling on and under the water,
> places to swim, tourist sites to visit,
> a central harbour, stable administration, security,
> you were graced with everything beautiful.
>
> Bananas, papaya, fruits of all kinds bearing our name
> reached many parts of the world.
> Mangoes and citrus fruits were growing everywhere,
> as well as maize and corn-cobs we gave to our livestock –
> have all these now been replaced by a range of mind-altering drugs?
>
> The centre of education, organised administration, and general super-
>   vision,
> institutes, Qur'anic and other schools, mosques to pray in,
> Mukarama road, so beautiful to the eye –
> what is the cause that now country hicks graze their camels there?
>
> Mogadishu, you are the capital of our country.
> If, as such you deserve respect,
> if you are the place from where all other towns are administered,
> if you are the heart, head, and nerve centre,
> what caused you to be defiled? What happened, Mogadishu?

The good old days of the nationalist era, symbolised by Mogadishu, are the launching pad for Nabaddoon's memory-making about violence. However, his poem contains no explicitly nationalist metaphors, especially in comparison to a second poem, to which it was a response, by another young poet, Maxamed Cabdiqaadir Maxamuud "Stanza", also

published on the web in October 2003. Stanza's poem, in the genre of *geeraar*, is called "Mogadishu" ("*Muqdisho*"). Its refrain addresses the city as the mother of the nation, represented in the popular culture of this era by a she-camel named Maandeeq, which symbolises an idealised, unified, sovereign Somali nation. Thus Stanza says: "You, mother of Maandeeq, Mogadishu, do you deserve the way you are today?"

Like Nabaddoon, Stanza actively engages in memory-making about Mogadishu's 'good old days', and does so with imagery that is even more emotional than that of the former. He is moved by sadness and a sense of gratitude, he explains, for Mogadishu is "the capital city, the home and technical centre of Maandeeq". After describing the city in metaphors of flowers, rain, thunderstorms, lightning, and particular conditions of the sky "for which everyone longs", he further addresses the city, in the second person, as follows:

> You, "mama" of our country,
> you, prayer mat of the finest,
> you, brain of the country from which the nation is administered,
> you, bridge of unity,
> you who are indispensable to peace.…
> you who carried the twins on your shoulders after their birth,[16]
> a home for guests and
> centre of learning[17] in which we were raised,
> you, mother of Maandeeq,
> Mogadishu, do you deserve to be the way you are today?

Even when he goes on to describe the violence perpetrated on and in Mogadishu, Stanza, indirectly, further invokes the city in its prime by listing the kinds of people who were violated in it: gifted creative writers and playwrights together with their enthusiastic audiences who would attend evening performances in the National Theatre; men of religion, including those who taught about Islam at all different levels; schoolteachers; migrants coming to town seeking work; children in schooluniforms, respectable ladies, and pretty young girls. Thus Stanza calls up the effusion and cultural effervescence of the newly indepen-

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[16] The twins refer to British and Italian Somaliland that came together in 1960 to form the unified Republic of Somalia. The concept of *gardaadis* refers to carrying a new-born on the shoulder during a coming-out ceremony forty days after birth. It is hoped that the baby will resemble the person who carries it on that occasion.
[17] Conjectural reading for *mucrab*.

dent, sophisticated, modern Mogadishu of the long decade following independence.

The term indicating urbane civility in Somalia in this period was *ilbaxnimo*. It encompasses a set of meanings associated with the sophistication of people living in urban communities made up of different kinds of people, open to other ways than their own, and aspiring to modern education and to an ideal of gender relations that were both more relaxed, gentle, and refined than city people believed country ways to be. Indeed, the long 1960s were in Somalia an era of 'modernity', that is to say, as Donham puts it, an era animated by the desire to be modern (2002: 244). The discourse of modernity in Somalia encompassed many hopes and beliefs, including a liberal belief in constitutional democracy and a representative, accountable government; individual rights and freedoms; social progress derived from formal, modern education, based on European models, and economic development inspired by scientific and technological progress. In the arena of culture, especially in the popular songs that came to epitomise the urban youth culture of this era, the discourse of modernity was dominated by the ideals of greater equality in gender relations and that of modern personhood. The idea of a "modern subject", in Lutz and Abu-Lughod's sense (1990: 6), with intense personal emotions and desires, is a core feature of the new genres of the popular culture of this era. Ideals such as romantic love, erotic sensuality, and companionate marriage were revolutionary, modern values at the time, as they emphasised individuality and the autonomy of the individual, challenged the traditional authority of family and clan, as well as narrow definitions of Islamic morality, and constructed new self-representations and selves (Kapteijns 2009: 103, 109).

Mogadishu of the 1960s and early 1970s came to embody this ideal modernity, both in the sense of an easy cosmopolitanism in the form of a mingling of Somalis and non-Somalis of different backgrounds,[18] and in terms of a sensual, carefree and, in many ways, quite innocent youth culture.[19] The epitome of this cultural ideal is one of the first Somali novels in Somali, Maxamed Daahir Afrax's *Maanafaay* (1981), which creates a picture of the urban youth scene from the perspective

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[18] Compare Farah 2007, in which Mogadishu serves as *lieu de mémoire* for a lost cosmopolitanism.
[19] Compare Barnes 1994.

of a young schoolgirl, named Maanafaay, who falls in love and is forced to steer a precarious course between new freedoms and old rules. Of course, in Afrax's *Maanafaay*, Mogadishu is not a 'site for memory', as the life Afrax describes was not yet a thing of the past and he himself was still a part of it. The same is true for a famous poem from this same era that resonates in title and theme with those by Nabaddoon and Stanza, Hadraawi's "Mogadishu, how are you?" (*Xamareey, ma nabad baa?*).[20] Yet, for Hadraawi Mogadishu was, in a way, a thing of the past, for, while the Mogadishu he imagined still existed, he himself was barred from it.

Hadraawi composed his poem in the 1980s from one of Barre's jails, fashioning his own memories of it as a site of great natural beauty, of glorious and patriotic history, and of sensual modernity. The lines, "You, umbilical cord of my country, nerve centre of my people, Mogadishu, how are you?" form the refrain in a poetic narrative that largely praises the city in the heavily nationalist rhetoric of the time. Hadraawi begins his poem by invoking Mogadishu as the shining star of a partially realised Somali unity. He speaks of the tree of freedom watered by the blood of those who died fighting colonialism, referring to the "flag that anchors our common birth". Mogadishu is to him "the sacred place where the tribulations of colonialism were washed away", the "place where those who embraced a rightful death" while fighting against colonialism "were honoured", and "the place where collaborators and colonisers were taught a harsh lesson and put into the grave". This nationalist, anti-colonial emphasis is quite different from that of Nabaddoon and Stanza's poems, which nevertheless celebrate the city's position as capital of a politically and economically functioning country, beloved by its people. However, the last, lyrical, part of Hadraawi's poem takes a very different approach and evokes Mogadishu as a symbol of modern Somali gender relations and sexual mores, that is to say, of the relaxed and sensual youth culture referred to above. Here Hadraawi first describes the beauty and sensuality of a Mogadishu night, comparing the moon to a seductively half-dressed woman, and then imagines himself catching a glimpse of the young couples whispering about love on the city's beach:

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[20] The Somali text is from www.farshaxan.com (accessed on March 3, 2008). *Xamar*, perhaps a colour reference ("red" or "reddish"), is one of the Somali names for Mogadishu.

> Like a young girl only hears about death from hearsay,
> I, Mogadishu, have grown thin longing for you.
> Last night I woke up with a start, the night sparkling with stars.
> the cool rain falling, the earth covered with pools of rain water
> and lush, untouched grass, in the season of prosperity,
> while your moon's gossamer dress had come undone,
> showing the outline of her body,
> the top of her head the colour of henna.
> Gorgeous people formed pairs and, after smoothing the tiny stones
> of your wonderful beach, put down their elbows
> and whispered softly about love's conventions,
> calculating their options.
> I, meanwhile, interested in finding out about
> the love play and the bright star of passion
> that make up the six letter word of *jacayl* (love)
> would every now and again steal a glimpse of
> the down on an arm, elegant finery, and
> the soft curve of an inner-arm.
> …
> You, life-blood of my country, nerve centre of my people,
> why do you remind me in prison of my agonised yearning?

There is no reference to the embodied *ilbaxnimo* (urbane sophistication) and dating habits of Mogadishu's beaus and belles in Nabaddoon's evocations of the city in its prime. The memories he dreams of the future are a far cry from the fashioning of the self that symbolised the dreams of modernity of Hadraawi's generation: the self as a secular, educated, 'desiring' individual, struggling to free mind and body from the dictates of the past. In the present era, with its strong Islamist influence, one gets a glimpse of the sensuality Hadraawi invokes only in the hard-hitting English-language rap of the Canadian-Somali rapper K'naan. The memories he makes in "My Old Home" are largely those of violence, but he contrasts these with the energy, pride, hope, joy, and stability of the 1960s and early 1970s:

> … the raindrops cool
> neighbours and dwellers spat up in the pool,
> kids playing football where the sand is suck,
> we had what we got and it wasn't a lot,
> no one knew they were poor,
> we were all innocent to greed's judgment.
> The country was combusting with life like a long hibernating volcano,
> with a long-term success like Jay Lo,
> farmers, fishers, fighters, even fools had a place in production,
> the coastal line was the place of seduction,

> the coral reefs make you daze in reflection,
> the women walked with grace and perfection…[21]

All the memories evoked in the poems presented here, old and new, are selective and in some sense romanticised. A very different picture of Mogadishu emerges, for example, from Nuruddin Farah's novel, *From a crooked rib* (1970), in which a penniless young girl, fleeing an arranged marriage in the countryside, gets manoeuvred into a number of exploitative sexual relations. The same is true for urban studies of Mogadishu. These speak of Mogadishu's vast slums and the sub-standard housing of many inhabitants, especially recent rural migrants, as the city's population increased from 70,000 in 1950 to one million in 1984 (Arecchi 1984: 211, 227), reaching two million on the eve of state collapse in 1989. However, in the recent poems (those by Nabaddoon, Stanza, and K'naan), the nostalgic memories of Mogadishu are qualitatively different, first, because they are directly and dramatically juxtaposed to violence, making the violation of people and places during the civil war all the more shocking and, second, because, with Mogadishu as their *lieu de mémoire*, they serve as a springboard for a particular imagining of the future, about which more below.

Making memories of Mogadishu under the Barre dictatorship (1969–1991)

Many of the roots of the violence accompanying state collapse lie in the twenty-two year regime of Maxamed Siyaad Barre. Nabaddoon's "Mogadishu, what happened?", with its chronological approach, analyses this era by interrogating the city about its past during the military dictatorship (stanzas 7–12). Before he does so, however, the poet comments on this approach and its authority (stanza 6). Invoking the sanction of history, he promises to be methodical, truthful, intelligent and learned, balancing a poet's thoughtfulness with fairness and common sense.

> Let's think this through and carefully, and
> step by step, evaluate what happened, Mogadishu.
> Let us consider this truthfully,

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[21] K'naan, transcribed from "My Old Home" on the CD Dustyfoot Philosopher. "Jay Lo" refers to the US celebrity Jennifer Lopez.

with sound judgment, knowledge, and a poet's thoughtfulness,
with a fair mind and even-handedly.
History will tell whether we acquitted ourselves of this satisfactorily.

Then the poet begins his moral indictments. In each stanza he lists a number of unconscionable acts that were committed in the city, to then conclude with the rhetorical question whether Mogadishu would not have fallen so deeply if such things had not been allowed to happen, if its residents had been less conformist and cowardly, and if the city itself had been more ethically aware and God-fearing. The recurring mention of the murdered sheikhs in the following stanzas refers to 1975, when the dictator Maxamed Siyaad Barre executed ten sheikhs for resisting the Family Law his regime was imposing by force, promising women more rights. To the minds of many Somalis, this incident, together with increased political (self-)exile and labour-migration to the Arab oil states, marked the beginning of a more intense and strict Islamic devotion at the individual level and the emergence of a set of Islamist movements in Somali society as a whole (Abdurahman Abdullahi n.d).

First the poet reminds the city of the religious leaders (sheikhs) and poor people who were killed in it while unbelievers were feasted and criminals applauded. Why did its residents approve or look away when Barre acted as if he were God and abolished the Holy Book; when he executed the sheikhs who had opposed the "godless family law" imposed by force; when his 'scientific socialist', 'revolutionary' regime fell foul of devout people who refused to conform to his corrupt norms, and why did the city gracefully welcome godless ministers and other unbelievers who made it their home? Were these not the reasons, the poet rhetorically asks, why Mogadishu was destroyed – its moral decline complete, a symbol of lasting conflict and hatred among Somalis?

If, in days past, sheikhs had not been executed in you,
if, in days past, poor people had not been killed in you,
if, in days past, godless infidels had not been regaled in you,
if, in days past, criminals had not been admiringly applauded in you,
would disasters this severe perhaps not have struck you?

Even worse, when your President,
the one responsible for the country,
said "I am to be worshipped" "I am abolishing the Qur'an"…
If, on the day he said that,

people had not ululated for him and been happy about that,
would disasters this severe perhaps not have struck you?

When the religious leaders were slaughtered
and our way of life was uprooted
and he [the president] imposed a family law on you with godless conceit,
if people had not ululated and been happy about that,
if people had not pretended not to see or know,
would disasters this severe perhaps not have struck you?

When those who, though they never stood in the way of anything good,
refused to join the revolution,
and when those who, because of religious conviction, refused to take
    bribes,
were cast out and called names,
when they were called "useless to their clan" and "ignorant of what is
    good for them",
what was on people's minds when they hid from the truth?

When from anywhere in countryside or town
anything good, any wage, anything useful was given only to you.
When our she-camel Maandeeq [the nation] was milked only for you,
What was on people's mind when they hid from the truth?

Mogadishu, when malicious, unbelieving, lying people,
ministers who never prayed, and everyone who was corrupt
made you their home, slept in your dwellings,
and killed the poor, while you ululated and
said "fine", "well done", were you not well aware of all this?

It is striking that the vast majority of the poet's indictments are articu-
lated as moral and religious lapses and transgressions. There is only
one exception to that, in the eleventh stanza, where he asks why Soma-
lis did not protest when all progress and development of any kind
became concentrated in Mogadishu alone, while the rest of the coun-
try was neglected and remained completely undeveloped.[22] Overall,
however, Nabaddoon interprets the city's past in terms of its religious
shortcomings only. The next section will sketch in greater detail the
historical background to the violence that accompanied the collapse of
the Somali state in January 1991.

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[22] Here the poet echoes a well-known poem by Cabdi Muxumed Amiin, who in
1986 addressed this very theme in a song entitled "Does Mogadishu constitute the
whole country?" (2006: 106–107).

Background to violence: the Barre regime

The history of the military regime and the 'scientific socialist revolution' of Maxamed Siyaad Barre was characterised by violence against some groups and individuals from its very beginning in October 1969 (Samatar 1991; Laitin & Samatar 1987). However, state violence and ruthless divide-and-rule policies against families and clans increased over time and sowed and deepened dissension and distrust. Most historical surveys of the period 1969–90 only report the most horrendous and massive crimes against humanity the regime afflicted, especially those in the Mudug region of central Somalia in 1979–80 and those in the northwest in 1988. But even on a smaller scale, the government's devious and purposeful creation and intensification of clan-antagonisms actively promoted clan consciousness and clan hatred.

For the Barre dictatorship, the enemy was first of all anyone who threatened its monopoly on power. However, it used clan-based divide-and-rule to undermine the potential unity, effectiveness, even the very self-image and identity, of all those who opposed it. For most of the leaders of the armed opposition fronts the enemy was the Barre regime, but they too increasingly used clannism as a strategy towards securing their own personal power. Towards the end of the Barre era, when it became clear that the end of the Cold War had left the dictator hanging by a thread, the stakes for the opposition leaders became even higher, while the top echelons of the Barre regime had to begin to face the very real possibility of having to stand trial for war crimes, mass murder, and gross violations of human rights.

The brutality of the last years of Barre's rule has been amply documented. The devastation by land and air of the Somali National Front (SNM), which had ensconced itself among the civilian population of the northwest, led, according to Amnesty International (1990: 22), to the flight of hundreds of thousands of people and the death of tens of thousands (Amnesty International 1990). In 1989, as popular protests intensified, arbitrary arrests, releases, and re-arrests, as well as summary executions were the order of the day. According to a U.S. army analysis, "the Siad Barre's strategy of using one clan to carry out government reprisals against a disfavoured clan had the effect of intensifying both inter- and intra-clan antagonisms".[23] Many Somalis believe

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[23] See www.africa.upenn.edu/ Hornet/horn_sml.html (accessed on April 23, 2008), U.S. Department of the Army: Analysis of Somalia, December 1993.

that Barre and some of his top government officials purposely tried to provoke clan warfare so as to divert the popular anger that would inevitably be turned against them if the state fell; even that some death squads pretended to have a particular clan identity when this was not the case (Issa-Salwe 1996: 103, 107). Though he gradually lost control of a country increasingly plagued by violence of many kinds, Barre still refused to step down.

By 1990, with foreign aid almost completely at a standstill (Rawson 1994), the country was economically ruined, abandoned by its former Cold War suitors, and politically completely destabilised. The armed opposition fronts proved unable to come together and put out a joint programme; instead, some of them began to plan to take the war into Mogadishu and to grab the power for themselves alone by any means necessary (Issa-Salwe 1996: 104). Moreover, no foreign power or international organisation succeeded in guiding the transition process and help Barre to leave. In May 1990, a group of 114 prominent Somali citizens, from diverse backgrounds and including former political leaders, major businessmen, intellectuals and religious leaders, sent Barre a Manifesto and called for his abdication, for the constitution of a transitional government consisting of representatives of all the armed opposition fronts, and the setting of a date for general elections (Bongartz 1991: 101–114). Barre refused. When members of the Manifesto group were brought to court, inhabitants of Mogadishu of many different backgrounds came together for a mass demonstration and were jubilant when the accused were cleared of the charges raised against them. However, those who could have turned back the tide of civil war did not do so.

By the time the dictator was driven out of Mogadishu on 27 January 1991, the city and the country were swept up in deadly communal violence during which ordinary civilians were robbed, raped, mutilated, abducted, expelled, and killed on the basis of the clan-family into which they had been born. In Mogadishu, this 'clan cleansing' began with the United Somali Congress (USC) campaign to exterminate and expel all those who were considered to be Barre's clan family – a targeting for violence that was almost immediately extended to other groups that were regarded as outside of what it considered its clan base. This campaign, which lasted into 1993 and covered the territory from Mogadishu to Galkaacyo, Gedo and Kismaayo, almost immediately sparked a cycle of war crimes, gross human rights violations, and 'clan cleansing' by other militias associated with friends

and foes of the USC, including militias reorganising around Barre. This violence caused destruction, human suffering, and famine[24] that rippled across most of southern, central, and (to a lesser extent) even northern Somalia. At the time of writing, large parts of Somalia are still in the grip of violence.

The discursive and political 'key shift' that marked the fall of the state was one by which the dominant political antagonism was no longer constructed in national terms (government against political opposition) and no longer mediated by national government institutions, however unequally shared. Instead, political leaders outside of the framework of the state (though in pursuit of control over it) mobilised, in the name of clan and outside the framework of national institutions, ordinary civilians for violence against other ordinary civilians. This key shift was achieved and buttressed through enormous violence. Those who wanted the state for themselves alone – vainly, it turned out – consciously decided on violence to wipe out and permanently expel hundreds of thousands of people, perhaps as much as one half of the population of the capital alone, drawing and reinforcing in blood what for many urbanites had been permeable and politically insignificant clan boundaries.[25] By the time ordinary people fell victim to this 'clan logic' and killed (and were killed) in its name, the key shift had occurred and a new alterity based on clan had triumphed. In Mogadishu this key shift, the resounding victory of the logic of clan hatred, took place in December 1990–January 1991. The next section will return to the poetic texts that engage this violence.

Making memories of the violence surrounding state collapse

The violence surrounding the collapse of the state takes up a small part of Nabaddoon's "Mogadishu, what happened?" (stanzas 1, 13, 14), but his evocation of it is concise and powerful, even though somewhat general. He first evokes a Mogadishu divided into hostile sections as

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24 This is the very famine that in December 1992 led to the U.S./U.N. intervention called Operation Restore Hope.
25 This violence also allowed those who had committed crimes against the people during the Barre regime – some of them occupying the highest and most influential government positions until the very last moment – to simply step away from their compromised pasts to re-emerge and make a new bid for power as the leaders of their clans.

a result of mortar and artillery fire. He shows us the dead bodies of its residents lying unburied in its streets and laments the brutalisation of vulnerable civilians such as women, children, travellers, guests, and those who had hoped to find a safe haven in the city. He reports the rape of virgin girls, whose modest dress (implying their religiosity) underlines the viciousness of their violation (stanza 13). Addressing Mogadishu in the feminine and in direct speech, the poet asks, rhetorically, whether 'her' failure to protect 'her' own honour as well as that of 'her' most vulnerable inhabitants was not due to religious unawareness or indifference.

Whom does the poet blame and hold responsible for the assault on the city and its residents? The trigger-happy, *qaat*-chewing Mooryaan, the young men who formed the bulk of the clan-based militias and gangs during the fighting, are explicitly mentioned as perpetrators (stanza 14).[26] However, the poet also accuses and expresses sorrow for the city of Mogadishu itself both for its moral demise and the lasting legacy of hostility that has marked the city in the aftermath. Even though Nabaddoon depicts the godless acts of the Barre regime as the roots of the evil that befell Somalia, it is Mogadishu that, even as it is blamed and pitied, symbolises the violence that destroyed nation and state. The only thing remaining for the poet, Nabaddoon says in conclusion, is to record for history its past glory and present pain (stanza 15).

> With the citizens of the nation, expecting women and children,
> guests, travellers, and those looking for a refuge all residing in you,
> Mogadishu, when, in your midst, veiled girls had their clothes ripped off
> and were robbed of their secret treasure,
> were you not aware of the Lord above, their Lord?
>
> Even worse, when arms-bearing Mooryaan,
> men high on drugs, out of their senses even before,
> took control of you, all that remained in you was
> *qaat*-chewing,[27] artillery battles,
> a moral standard to be ashamed of,
> and endless discord.

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[26] Mooryaan is one of the terms used for the young gunmen who perpetrated much of the violence in Somalia. See Mohamed-Abdi 2001 and Marchal 1993.

[27] *Qaat*, *qat* or *khat* (*catha edulis*) is a leafy plant whose leaves, or the bark of whose twigs, are chewed as a stimulant. It gives energy and keeps sleep away, but can also make people reckless and impulsive.

Since I cannot support or help you today,
since I moved away from you and the African continent
long ago, what can I do for you today?
To record for history your anguish and memorable past,
in perfect meter and enduring literary form
is something of which, through the talent God has bestowed on me,
    I am capable
and will never tire.

In Stanza's "Mogadishu", the transition from the Mogadishu of the glorious days of national unity and cultural flourishing to that of civil war violence is equally abrupt. This poem too emphasises the corpses lying in the streets and the destruction brought about by heavy arms and, here too, women (both married matrons and innocent girls) figure prominently in the evocation of the human losses caused by the violence. However, Stanza lists the many different honourable categories of civilians who were targeted for violence, especially men of learning. That Mogadishu, at this inauspicious moment, failed to find competent political leadership is a source of astonishment for the poet. In his view, 'the mother of the nation' did not deserve to be destroyed in this way.

But you were struck by disaster.
Every afternoon and evening,
every day and night,
one made one's way through you,
wading through dead bodies.
Brainless men from the countryside
disrespecting life itself,
made mortar shells rain down on your inhabitants:
on the poor soul who did no harm to anyone,
the wife representing the honour of womanhood,
the gifted author,
the much-needed leader (man of courage),
the precious verbal artist,
the sheikh who calls for prayer,
from whom people learn about religion
in the mosque,
and the excellent educators, who
teach mathematics in the schools....
You, place where migrants found a new livelihood,
you, mother of Maandeeq,
Mogadishu, do you deserve
the way you are today?

Millions of top intellectuals,
actors who provided entertainment
in evening theatre plays
which allowed people to laugh,
as well as students in their uniforms,
the mufti, and the religious scholar
died at the hands of
brutal, criminal killers
– not something to take lightly.
They aimed mortars at
a million beautiful, long-haired girls,
going about their business
unsuspectingly,
in the belief that nothing more would be heard about this.
[Mogadishu], where are your notable men?
Can they give advice concerning the common good?
Can the vulnerable civilians be saved?
Have your men gone mad?[28]
Is anyone competent out there advocating for you?
You, mother of Maandeeq
Mogadishu, do you deserve
the way you are today?

Although both poets refer to the actual perpetrators of the violence –
Nabaddoon calling them Mooryaan and Stanza "brainless men from
the countryside" – it is striking that neither assigns any political
responsibility for the violence, nor even mentions the political leaders
in charge of these gunmen, or gives explicit details about who killed
whom at what time. However, both poets present the violence of
state collapse in terms of a moral breakdown and an injury caused
to Mogadishu as a symbol of what once was the sovereign Somali
nation.

How much Mogadishu, which had symbolised the birth of Somali
nation- and statehood, came to symbolise its death, is evident from
one of the first songs created about the violence surrounding state
collapse in 1991, "Lament for Mogadishu" (*Baroordiiqda Xamar*). It
was written, composed and sung by Axmed Naaji, an artist of long-
standing fame who symbolises the rich, Creole cultural heritage of the
Benaadir coast to which Mogadishu belongs.[29]

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[28] Conjectural reading of *majneen*.
[29] The text is from an audio-cassette of a live performance held in Geneva, 12 July
1992.

Several features of the song's text, a poem alliterating in 'x' (the Somali aspirated h), are by now familiar to us. To begin with, Mogadishu is again presented as a woman and, as in Nabaddoon's poem, here 'she' is a raped woman. Full of sorrow, the poet wonders who would be willing or able to restore the raped city's honour and pay the customary compensation for such an offence. He seems to ask, 'how could one pay compensation for the rape of a whole city?' and to wonder 'how can the concept of compensation even be relevant when the rapists are the very male relatives who should have protected the city and should have collected the compensation for 'her' rape?' Moreover, praising the city as the heart of the nation is familiar to us from both Nabaddoon's and Stanza's poems, as is the rhetorical technique of invoking this glorious image only to introduce the violence with great suddenness – suggesting that the violence in Mogadishu took many people by surprise. The singer evokes the speed, furious force, and military might with which violence was unleashed on the city, and then takes his listeners back to how the city used to be, and to how safely and freely they once lived in it.

> Mogadishu, you have been violated,
> who will restore your honor?
> You are the place where my umbilical cord was buried
> – Mogadishu, you have been violated –
> the centre of my kin folk and siblings
> – Mogadishu, you have been violated –
> Great was your stature on the Horn of Africa's coastline
> – Mogadishu, you have been violated –
> The fire they opened on you came down like a hot wind
> – Mogadishu, you have been violated –
> With furious force they plundered your neighbourhoods
> – Mogadishu, you have been violated –
> snatching away your beauty all at once.
> We used to reside in you calmly, safely and freely.
> Mogadishu, you have been violated, who will restore your honour?

In the second stanza, the poet explicates the violence further by naming the social relations that were violated in its course. The poet criticises the 'clan logic' discussed above – the definition of a lethal alterity that results from the politicisation of kinship and its reduction to the bonds between patrilineally related groups of men – by lamenting how, in their violence, men ignored their relationships with their relatives on their mothers' and wives' sides. Thus he underlines how impoverishing 'the clan logic' is compared to customary Somali kinship

loyalties, which he sees as extensive and inclusive and without which the Somalis as a people would have nothing in common but a vague memory of distant common descent. The poet highlights the illegitimacy of the violence that defiled the city by contrasting it with historical memories of what was, in the poet's eyes, good and ethical. He does this by tapping into a nationalist discourse that connects the city both to the prestige of Somalis' unique, common customary law, and to the glory of anti-colonialist struggle and nationalist victory. He first invokes Mogadishu's patriotic past – the fact that the heroes and great thinkers of the anti-colonial struggle found their death there. Then he refers to the legitimising power of Somali customary law, by whose ideals in-laws and affines and mother's kin are considered an intrinsic and essential part of the kinship system (and clan group) and by whose logic the wisdom of deserving elders and religious leaders is to be observed. What happened to Mogadishu, the singer laments, is the rape of Somali nationhood itself. The subdued and slow beat of the music, the sad and measured diction, the emotive power of the references to the national past and the principles of Somali custom, all make the memorial that Naaji constructs in the field of memories called Mogadishu one that is capable of moving many Somalis deeply.

> Maternal relatives and in-laws became enraged with each other;
> Mogadishu, you have been violated;
> Those who freed you from the spiteful [collaborators] and the unbelie-
>   ving foreigners;
> Mogadishu, you have been violated;
> as well as our great thinkers were put into their graves;
> Mogadishu, you have been violated;
> and the wisdom of our political and religious leaders was rejected;
> Mogadishu, you have been violated;
> The families you sustained crossed the borders;
> Mogadishu, you have been violated.
> We used to reside in you calmly, safely and freely
> Mogadishu, you have been violated,
> who will restore your honour?

Making memories of the past to legitimise a vision of a better future

In Naaji's construction of Mogadishu as a *lieu de mémoire*, he celebrates it as a symbol of nation- and statehood by recounting and lamenting its fate at the very moment at which it was destroyed. Even though the poet does not suggest a specific solution, his elegy advo-

cates a return to idealised, culturally authentic and 'traditional' common institutions – an idealisation that was integral to the nationalist project of the 1960s–1970s and still resonates powerfully with Somalis. In other words, to the extent that this sad song projects any future at all, it does so in terms of the past it mourns.

In his "Mogadishu", authored about twelve years later, Stanza is more explicit about his hopes for the future. Before he concludes his poem with an entreaty to God, he describes how he, in a glorious dream, walked through Mogadishu and saw the following scenes:

> I got a glimpse of the *umma* united,
> without any military salute,
> during memorable games at which
> the creative lights of the nation performed;
> at a time when the name 'Somali'
> carried a dignified meaning again,
> clannism had been gotten rid of,
> and troubles and animosity did not exist;
> during a national holiday, on the occasion of the 'Id,[30]
> while the national parliament was passing motions,
> and I was writing poetry about it all;
> and with our Somali girls, with their long hair all done up,
> as their beauty deserves,
> ululating and festooning me with flowers,
> honouring me as a national poet,
> and not as Mohamed of such and so clan.
> Dear Lord, bring your estranged people back together;
> And you, mother of Maandeeq,
> may God find a solution for the problems that weigh down on you
> and remove from you the gloom,
> the imminence of war, and the darkness of the eclipsed moon.

What is striking in Stanza's ending is that, while he realises that his dream of the future depends on God's help and speaks of the Somali people as "the Somali *umma*", emphasising the common bond of their faith, the dream itself takes the shape of the sovereign, united, Muslim, Somali people, at peace, free from clannism and military rule, engaged in democratic processes, with the religious sheikhs officiating at holiday celebrations that encompass poetry and beautiful girls with uncovered hair.

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[30] 'Id al-Fitr or the Feast of Fast-Breaking at the end of Ramadan.

In contrast, in "Mogadishu, what happened?" Nabaddoon constructs Mogadishu and memories of Mogadishu differently. In his text, Mogadishu symbolises both the (now destroyed) sovereign nation and the moral failure of the Barre era. Even though the parties the poet blames for the violations of the period are the regime and its active and passive supporters, the city represents the main culprit, whose most grievous sin is, in Nabaddoon's view, the failure to be God-fearing and to resist those who were not. Indeed, in his poem, Mogadishu is a *lieu de mémoire* for memories that show how insufficient religiosity produced the city's demise. As we saw above, Nabaddoon explicitly asserts himself as a reliable memory-maker (stanzas 6 and 14) and it is in invoking this authority that he retrieves memories of Mogadishu and ties the past to the present in such a way that the solution to Somalia's woes is – proves to be – the proper observance of religious morality. By remembering the past in narrowly religious terms, Nabaddoon imagines a future that also takes this form.

Nabaddoon's poem shows how prominent religion had become in Somali mediations of violence by 2003. The next section will first examine this trend and then turn to two more recent poetic interventions in which Mogadishu plays a central role, both authored in 2006 as commentaries on the second shift to violence referred to above, that of the 'Islamist logic'.

Islamism in Somalia and the rise of the Islamic Court movement

One way of defining the discourse of Islamism is to equate it with 'Islamic activism' of a particular kind, namely one inspired by, and aiming at the promotion of beliefs and prescriptions based on particular interpretations of "traditions and teachings of Islam as contained in scripture and authoritative commentaries" (International Crisis Group (ICG) 2005: 2). The ICG's report on "Somalia's Islamists" distinguishes between three types of Islamist movements and organisations: missionary types, which strive to increase the religious observance of other Muslims through teaching and example; political types, which pursue political power, and, finally, jihadist types, which do not shy away from violent means to reach their goals (ibid.). Somalis do not have a single term for the phenomenon of Islamism but refer to Islamist individuals and groups – whether they advocate only a heightened personal piety as expressed, for example, in dress, or whether they have further political or even militant goals – as *wadaaddo* (sing.

wadaad), traditionally a word referring to 'men of religion', that is to say men who teach religion at whatever level of expertise.

Violence in Somalia has ebbed and flowed ever since the collapse of the state. Of the fifteen or so large-scale Somali peace talks, two produced transitional governments: the TNG (Transitional National Government, 2000–2004) and the TFG (Transitional Federal Government, 2004–present), now under its second president. With their early roots in the late 1970s, Somalia's Islamist movements, now including missionary, political, and militant (jihadist) groups, have gained political influence since the collapse of the state in 1991. Al-Ittixaad al-Islaami, the first major jihadist movement that aspired to establish an Islamic state and had adherents in and from many regions of Somalia, suffered a number of military defeats in each area where it tried to establish itself (Kismaayo, Bosaaso, and Gedo). Since 1996, smaller branches and remnants of the Ittixaad movement have combined and recombined with other jihadist groups and organisations, including the Islamic Courts movement that caught the attention of the world in June 2006 (ICG 2005; Marchal 2001, 2004; Menkhaus 2004).

The roots of the Islamic Courts movement lay in the violent and unstable conditions in post-state Mogadishu's various neighbourhoods. From 1993 onwards, small local Islamic law courts in different parts of Mogadishu, authorised by local elders to maintain a militia, arrest criminals and apply Islamic law (*shari'a*), began to form little islands of law and order in a city rendered ungovernable by competing warlords. It is believed that most courts were initially "less a product of Islamist activism than of Somalia's two most common denominators: clan and the traditional Islamic faith" (ICG 2005: 19). However, this situation changed as the courts came together in a coalition and hardline jihadists gained more influence. On 4 June 2006, this coalition, which had thousands of militia men working for it, ousted a coalition of Mogadishu warlords who were on the secret payroll of the United States.[31] The Courts movement got an enormous boost from this victory in the form of popular Somali outrage at U.S. support for this unlikely group of anti-terrorists, as well as world media attention.

However, in expanding their rule and threatening the very physical survival of the TFG, which was still the officially elected Somali government,

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[31] For a history of the Islamist movement in Somalia, including the Islamic Courts, see Menkhaus 2004 and the International Crisis Group 2005.

they both overestimated their own capacity and alarmed the U.S. The latter, convinced that the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), as it came to be called, harboured terrorists connected with al-Qaeda, belatedly threw its support behind the TFG, which brought in a (small) African Union peacekeeping force as well as Ethiopian troops. These entered Somalia formally in late December 2006 and helped the TFG defeat the ICU in early January 2007. The Ethiopian intervention was, and continued to be, highly controversial. It split the TFG's parliament and sundered and reshuffled political loyalties and alliances more generally. Even if one leaves aside the conflicts between highland, Christian Ethiopia and the lowland, Muslim principalities of medieval times, it is well documented that Ethiopia has brutally colonised the Somali-inhabited regions of Ethiopia ever since their annexation by Emperor Menelik in the 1880s and has continued to target the Somali people of this region by committing gross human rights violations against them even until today. With Soviet aid, it defeated Somalia in the war of 1977–1978, and it has played a highly ambiguous role in the reconstruction of the Somali state. Many Somalis, therefore, regard Ethiopia as the primary enemy of Somali nationhood and deeply resented and distrusted the Ethiopian military intervention in their country.

In the view of many others, however, Ethiopia also stands to benefit from stability on its border and, in any case, its approval of any political settlement in Somalia appears inevitable. However this may be, those who were already set on undermining the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) could now use Ethiopia as a foil – Somalis used the term *maqarsaar* – to rally various groups with widely diverging political goals in opposition to the TFG and in support of the Islamic Courts Union. This infusion of nationalist, anti-Ethiopian sentiment into the Islamist anti-TFG agenda proved to be politically quite powerful. Re-emerging in Asmara, the ICU became part of a new umbrella organisation, the Alliance for the Re-liberation of Somalia (ARS),[32] which fuelled further violence by calling for what may be called an Islamic jihad for liberation from Ethiopia's military presence in Somalia and the TFG leadership of the moment. Its goals were indeed achieved in December of 2008. The following two poems, however,

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[32] Somali opponents of the ARS quickly changed the Somali word for 're-liberation' (*dib-u-xuraynta*) to 'renewed brutalization' (*dib-u-xumaynta*).

were composed as part of the campaign to oust the Ethiopian military and TFG President Abdullahi Yusuf, and they speak to this situation.

Mediations of Islamism in the context of violence

Engineer Maxamed Cali Cibaar, a young poet who publishes his poems on the internet, authored two poems with Mogadishu in their title, both in 2006. On 26 August 2006, about three months after the Islamic Courts' victory in Mogadishu, Cibaar released a poem celebrating how the Courts had driven out "the Mogadishu warlords", restored law and order to the city, and taken down the checkpoints and barricades set up to extort money from passers-by. His title, "*Happy*," or "*How wonderful! Are people not strolling through Mogadishu?*", expresses his joy at these developments. In his brief introduction to the poem, Cibaar explains how happy he is to share the joy of "the Somali people" in welcoming the changes in Mogadishu. In his first stanza, he addresses himself to God:

> If I begin [my] poem in Your name, Lord,
> it is because you are indispensable to
> the believer who worships you, the infidel who lost his faith,
> Zoroastrians, Christians, the Jews who are out of hand,
> and even the hypocrites.
> That Mustafa, the trustworthy Muhammad (pbuh) is Your Prophet
> and that You are the One we worship is something to which I testify.
> Only a fool is not aware of your great generosity.

He then explains how long he suffered, waiting and beseeching God for something to happen. Now the time had come: "Has the ruined city…begun to wiggle itself free? Has the power of the people today become clear? Have the disaster-mongers not been swallowed up by the abyss?" Without naming "the Mogadishu warlords", he proceeds to describe what kinds of people had terrorised the city and what their transgressions had consisted of: how they snatched people's clothes, including women's scarves; how they broke into houses at night, and how they accepted money to kill and harass innocent civilians, especially women, children, orphans, and old people. He goes on to list the changes resulting from their removal: that the drugs (he may mean *qaat* but possibly also stronger drugs) and the decadence associated with them were rooted out; that the Mooryaan, fattened on their illegal gains, had been captured; that the harbour and airport had been cleared from warlords and were now flourishing and productive; that

the checkpoints and barricades had been cleared so that civilians could enjoy the fresh air outside: "Are people not passing along streets without rusty barricades and have the check-points from which some profited not been removed? Is it not wonderful that people are strolling through Mogadishu with a smile, as on a holiday?"

Cibaar explains how this could have happened and, while he does not mention the Islamic Courts by name anywhere, he phrases his explanation in religious terms:

> You must all turn towards what God has revealed to us
> I swear that working in unison means victory
> Its fruits are being reaped within just a few days
> Are people not welcoming the sheikhs and religious scholars?
> Are people not filling the mosques and the places of worship?
> Are the enemies who used to taunt us now not despondent?

But he also reproaches the people of Mogadishu for being distracted by greed, and for failing to notice that different groups were fiercely competing for the ownership of the ground under their feet. He asserts that the international powers are against them, but that this is not significant:

> Moscow and America do not want this, and Europe does not accept it,
> its talk consisting of worn out and stale words.
> We are independent; we are not their protégés.
> They attach importance to hiding what they are secretly planning.
> Let them not give us a million in aid or other wealth.
> Every man for himself, let us move our own cause forward.

The poem concludes with advice on what the people of Mogadishu need to do in order to safeguard their future. If we are true and observant Muslims, forget about discrimination based on clan and strive for unity, and take responsibility seriously and not as a way of personal enrichment, then security will be restored, schools will multiply, and poor people will find relief without foreign aid:

> Even though we bear responsibility, He is the one who governs this
>   world,
> if we take refuge with the Almighty and listen to His words,
> if we become true Muslims and follow the sunna,
> – clannism is darkness – if we get rid of it,
> unity is beneficial – if we do not spoil it through discrimination.
>
> If we abandon talk about family and "this one is related to me",
> if we give the one who works for our well-being the respect due to him,

if responsibility does not become like a sweet a fool sucks on or an
  entertaining pastime,
or wealth scooped up by the millions in profit,
if justice appears, fairly dispensed by a judge,
that love and kindness will come is something of which I am sure.

That people will not say to each other 'are you armed' is something of
  which I am sure.
That emaciation will become something extraordinary is something of
  which I am sure.
That the poor will get urgent aid is something of which I am sure.
That the schools will multiply is something of which I am sure.
That the vulnerable civilians will all invoke God is something of which
  I am sure.
That outsiders will be dispensable is something of which I am sure.
That I will find the Lord on my side is something of which I am sure.
Being a Muslim is our right, fight for it and pay no attention to mere
  man-made things! (3×)

This very last line of the poem is an encouragement – a militant motto,
repeated three times – that not only presents the struggle in Mogadi-
shu as a Muslim one but also casts Islam as embattled, as in need of
defence. It is interesting that this poem, with its embattled mood, pre-
ceded the military ousting of the Islamic Courts from Somalia at the
end of December 2006 by two months. Cibaar further developed some
of his ideas in a poem he composed more than a year later.

   "Mogadishu, you have a Lord, do not forget to be patient" (*Muqdi-
shaay, mawlaad leedahay, samir ha moogaanin*)[33] is a commentary on
a very different political situation and dates from 23 October 2007 or,
as Cibaar gives the Hijra date as well, 12 Shawwal 1428. As he explains
himself in his lengthy introduction to the poem, his *gabay* marks the
300th night since the "evil alliance led by the Ethiopian government
and the U.S." had invaded Mogadishu, a night he describes as having
"a special and painful memory for the Somali *umma* and Muslims
wherever they are". In this introduction, Cibaar makes his political
position, as an opponent of the TFG and its Ethiopian ally and sup-
porter of the Islamic Courts Union, now at least temporarily defeated,
abundantly clear, although he does not mention either by name. The
poet laments that the Somalis supporting the TFG ("hired criminals

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[33] The Somali text is from www.aayaha.com (accessed on November 9, 2007).

who call themselves by the same name we do") attacked the capital
with the world looking on in silence or even rewarding them. How-
ever, he sees a silver lining, for "the Somali people, especially those in
Mogadishu", offered resistance. These "heroes", he says, "deserve to be
praised, prayed for and encouraged". The poet concludes his introduc-
tion with wishing the "Somali *umma*" a quick victory.

Cibaar opens his poem by addressing Mogadishu and praising it,
both in terms of its importance to Somalis and his own personal mem-
ories, especially of his childhood education – now remembered from
across a distance of time and space, that is to say from Western Europe
in 2007. Later in the poem he also praises Mogadishu for its natural
beauty and rich resources (stanza five):

> You honorable one, city I love and long for in my heart,
> shining light that reaches as far as the countryside and protects against
>   darkness,
> the mirror in which we can be seen, the stage of the Somalis,
> indispensable part of our country as well as its brain;
> your attractive beauty, your radiant looks,
> the 'Id holidays and the leisurely strolls we took in you,
> when I remember this, I wake up with a start in the middle of the night.
> I would be happy if I could live in you once again,
> for, listen, the love that has lingered in my heart makes me long for you.
>
> Before I could even distinguish between the right and wrong paths,
> if I had not gone to the Koran school and had not been taught the
>   alphabet,
> if your teachers had not taught me *miim* and *waaw* [the letters 'm' and
>   'w'],
> if I had not been taken to a well run school like the one called "The 15th
>   of May",
> if the difference between what is acceptable and what not, had not been
>   explained to me,
> if I had not been given the key to [further] learning, and
> if my own knowledge had not been measured by a scientific standard,
> I might not have aspired to the level I have reached.
> You are a spring that never runs dry and sweet honey,
> You, my teacher, are the school that gave me my very first education.
>
> Although I now live at a great distance from you, in a distant place,
> although I physically travel all over Europe,
> my mind is with you day and night."…
>
> Your moderate weather and temperate climate,
> the Indian Ocean's waves perfect for seaside tourism,

> fruits and vegetables of every kind, bananas and citrus fruits,
> the papaya groves, the river visible in the distance,
> livestock to be milked, a blessing to us,
> a large number of business establishments,
> goods changing hands, all kinds of waged work,
> and, on top of this, oil and ores –
> these are things you cannot find on a map, I believe.
> You, rare gift that good luck bestowed on us, we thank you!

After calling up these memories of the city, the poet turns to the current violence taking place in it. He names as perpetrators Mooryaan, mercenaries, crazy men, and low servant-folk, while he lists as victims vulnerable civilians (women, children, old people, orphans), and young girls molested by shifty youths – millions of people all "imprisoned in you, Mogadishu".

Cibaar puts the violence committed against Mogadishu in the context of an explicitly Islamic history. He asserts that the enemies want to turn Mogadishu into a city of sin and that they make toilets out of mosques, burn holy books, and attack all Muslims. He calls up memories of early (or actually pre-) Islamic history, equating his enemies with: "those who were envious of the Ka'ba and hoped for its destruction", and – in reference to 521 CE, the year of the Prophet's birth, in which Abyssinian troops marched on Mecca – "those who are comparable to the troops that brought along elephants in suicidal brinkmanship and madness". Then he extends the comparison to show that Mogadishu's hardship is neither new nor exceptional in the context of what has befallen Muslims in general. It therefore behoves Mogadishu to show forbearance and be patient.

> Rivulets of blood flow among the sheikhs and the places of worship.
> Prominent people are hunted down, muezzins stabbed.
> Those who sought refuge in you are annihilated and killed.
> If you are subjugated today, in the past, Mecca,
> the home of the Prophet (pbuh) too was burned down.
> You heard what the Mongols did to Baghdad in its time.
> Even today the youth of Jerusalem is burned alive by gangsters.[34]
> You are not the only one who is having the foot on the neck.
> Wherever God is worshipped people are attacking in the night.
> Even if they are cutting you in pieces with saw and scissor,
> Mogadishu, you have a Lord, don't forget to be patient.

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[34] His reference is here to the Israeli government.

Thus Cibaar gives the Courts movement an illustrious and global religious context. He goes on to characterise those Somalis who are not on the side he advocates as those who betrayed the city that had raised them ("you were their mama and carried them on your back") and as 'hypocrites' – people who only pretend to be Muslims – receiving monetary rewards for their help to the U.S. and Ethiopia. However, he assures his audience that the sacred texts of Islam and the folk wisdom of the Somalis show that evil will not triumph:

> The Americans who are engaged in transgressions and that pig-headed
>   Bush,
> the schemes of Ethiopia and those who pledge allegiance to the cross,
> and the hypocrites they use to help them, who are licking their lips for
>   bribes,
> and are paid to raze you to the ground –
> their conspiracy and their secret plans are well known,
> for there are angels at the ready who do not miss even a minute.
> As the Qur'an and the Sunna have shown us many times
> and as our proverbs, the wisdom of our literature, also say,
> the wrongful criminal will not succeed and will be swallowed up by the
>   abyss.
> Mogadishu you have a God, don't forget to be patient.

The poet ends his poem on a positive note, telling the city that, as droughts pass and make way for a reawakening of nature, so Mogadishu will recover. If people live as true Muslims, Mogadishu will see unity, justice, security, and peaceful co-existence. It will become a political and economic power to be reckoned with – its power extending deep into Ethiopia.

> You [Mogadishu], who are so generous to guests,
> if you are now sad and angry,
> the day will come, God willing, that you will ululate....
> One day, people will all refuse to engage in clannism of any kind
> and they will forget that pig-headed and unprincipled individuals ever
>   even existed.
> Mogadishu you have a Lord, don't forget to be patient.
>
> Whatever is evil in your society results from the deception of dishonest
>   people.
> If you understand the deceit of the enemy and what it means,
> and if the Almighty God brings about the good things for which you
>   hope,
> if you will be washed with holy water and become one,
> if people take their cases to just courts,

where those responsible for judging you are honest and straight,
if the oppressed citizen gets what he deserves,
if forgiveness spreads and people interact justly,
when the people who were barred from each other become like twins
    again,
and the baby animals are freed from their small enclosure and pen,
your future is victory and pure unity.

Ma sha' Allah, with your wealth greatly increased,
with rich finances and productive factories,
with ships that you send everywhere and airplanes in the skies,
protected by soldiers who are feared and can command compensation,
with you ruling the whole area from the residence of the conceited
    Tigreans to which Meles belongs up to Maqalla,[35]
Mogadishu, you have a Lord, do not forget to be patient.

That Cibaar mediates and thus recasts the violence of the Somali civil war in Islamic terms is obvious. He presents a Somali *umma* as facing an international anti-Muslim enemy, with Mogadishu as site of this battle, and "the people of Mogadishu" in the role of the true Muslim soldiers. The enemy, who had been cast in terms of the 'clan logic' during the first shift to violence at the time of state collapse, is now defined in Islamic terms as hypocrites and paid stooges of the enemies of Islam. How does Mogadishu figure in these (highly partisan) commentaries on current politics? Does it still function as a *lieu de mémoire*?

In "Are people not strolling in Mogadishu?"(*Maashaa-Allee, Sow Muqdisho Laguma Mushaaxaayo!*) this is perhaps doubtful. Its introduction refers to Mogadishu as "the capital of all Somalis", but the emphasis does not lie on the national identity of the Somali people but on their religious dimension – the Somali *umma* – symbolised by the people of Mogadishu, who thus become a symbol for the Islamist cause. However, in Cibaar's second poem, Mogadishu indeed serves as a site *of* and *for* memory. The memories invoked of Mogadishu's past are somewhat ambiguous. Cibaar may depict Mogadishu's past and future in terms of its leading position in Somalia and beyond, but he makes no explicit references to a common Somali national past. Rather, he speaks of his own childhood memories, purposefully

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[35] This reference is probably to the Ethiopian city and not the Yemeni port city of al-Mukalla. The poem alliterates in 'm', so the geographical reference should perhaps not be taken literally.

sidestepping – a comparison with Nabaddoon's poem appears to suggest – the national memories so common in other poetry. Yet, in his imagining of Mogadishu's future power, he speaks of forgiveness (for the clan-based violence Somalis perpetrated against each other), and of unity and an end to clannism (both also nationalist goals). However, in his vision, it is a particular commitment to Islam that will produce this result, not a common national identity, dream or destiny.

Instead, Cibaar attempts to make Mogadishu into a special symbol of a different kind, not one of national unity and liberal modernity but of Islam, and constructs a mythological and heroic Islamic present for the city whose national past is of little use to his Islamist agenda for the future. Here he sets himself a difficult task, for there is (as yet) no Islamic narrative at hand that is unique to Mogadishu and common to Somalis. To fashion Mogadishu as an Islamic symbol, Cibaar therefore presents it as the site of a current, local battle over Islam with global significance. However, this is only possible if he excludes from his definition of the 'Somali *umma*' and his synecdochic construction of 'the people of Mogadishu' all those Somalis who at that moment represented and supported the TFG under President Abdullahi Yusuf in Mogadishu.

In Naaji's "Lament for Mogadishu" and Stanza's "Mogadishu", the city was 'the site of memory' in which the Somali independent nationhood of the past served to inspire national unity and state reconstruction in the future. Nabaddoon invokes that past to mark the immorality of its betrayal. However, in his dream of a more Islamic future, Mogadishu plays no special role except to have its past lovingly recorded for history. In Cibaar's poems, Mogadishu no longer symbolises the birth and death of Somali nation- and statehood but marks the contemporary local site of a global battle for Islam that is generating glorious memories that are to legitimise an Islamist future. An Islamic imaginary might, in principle, indeed be able to transcend the divisions caused by the communal violence of 'the clan logic' that marked state collapse. This is why it has gained so much support among Somalis. However, in Cibaar's Islamist memories, Mogadishu survives as a symbol of only one side of the conflict – the side that claims Islamic legitimacy for itself and excludes from this discourse those Somalis who did not, and do not agree with its particular political agenda. It became a divisive symbol, as the poetry in which it figured sided with, and promoted the cause of the ICU (Islamic Courts Union) and

ARS (the Alliance for the Re-liberation of Somalia) against Abdullahi Yusuf's TFG (Transitional Federal Government).[36]

In December 2008, Abdullahi Yusuf was forced to resign from the presidency of the TFG and Ethiopia began to withdraw its troops. At the end of January 2009, Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, the former spokesman of the ICU became the president of Somalia. He has not been able to unify or pacify the Islamist militias that continue to wreak havoc in large parts of Somalia. The Islamist logic has become the dominant discourse in which the violent struggle over the control of the state is being justified and pursued. However, if we imagine a barber's pole, a kind of glass or plastic tube in which three (red, white and blue) vertical stripes turn around and upwards, then we can imagine the three intertwined discourses of (anti-)clannism, nationalism and Islam(ism) as those three stripes; in continuous movement and continuously appearing to take each other's place, these three discourses constitute, and will constitute for a long time to come, the shape of Somali politics.

Conclusion

This chapter examined memory-making about Mogadishu in a genre of Somali poetry as it dealt with the violence of state collapse and reconstruction in shared public space. With regard to memory-making, it showed that, in the most recent texts studied here, Mogadishu, which had symbolised the birth and death of Somali sovereign nationhood, itself died as a symbol of that nation. But what can we conclude about this genre of poetry as effective, legitimate, and prestigious speech when it mediates violence? How does such speech situate itself in public space, shaping and being shaped by it? This is the burden of this conclusion.

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[36] On April 21, 2007, in a highly partisan lecture mobilising Somalis and raising funds in support of the "jihad of national liberation" from U.S.-supported Ethiopia and the TFG in Mogadishu, Prof. Abdi Samatar made positive mention of Cibaar (http://video .google.com/videoplay?docid=-8642058014906262487# (accessed January 18, 2010); www.newsomalia.Blogspot.com (accessed on March 1, 2008)).

The public space of Somali poetry

The incident with which this essay opened suggested that there was a relationship between poetry as legitimate speech about violence, the space in which it is expressed, and the way in which it addresses Somalis and constructs their collective identities. The public space subscribed to – and fashioned by – the poetry studied here appears to be very similar to a – by now greatly criticised – Habermasian public space, one in which allegedly rational men speak rationally about matters of common interest.[37] This public space is, moreover – most of the poems examined here suggest – conceived of as national space, in which Somali national identity, or Somaliness *(soomaalinimo)*, is respected and protected. This would explain – a subject that I will pursue elsewhere – why poetic mediations of violence that claim to be legitimate and prestigious speech in this public space show aporia when it comes to denouncing specific clan-based violence, or holding specific war criminals accountable. In other words, such an interpretation of public space means, in effect, that the mediations of violence studied here have, in the end, not found a way of making the communal dimension of the violence discussable, and thus do not actually get to mediating concretely how violence *was differentially perpetrated and experienced*. It would be easy to criticise such aporia, such an unwillingness or incapacity to come to terms with the specific violence experienced by Somali individuals and groups; however, perhaps this limit to speech is a measure of the enormity of the violence that has befallen Somalis and the depth of the loss of trust and confidence in 'Somaliness'. In Ann Michael's novel, *Fugitive pieces*, the protagonist describes the attitudes towards life of his parents, both Holocaust survivors. While, for his mother, the horror of the experience enhanced each moment of life in the aftermath, he says, for his father it diminished everything that came after: "Loss is an edge; it swelled everything for my mother, and drained everything from my father. Because of this, I thought my mother was stronger. But now I see it was a clue: what my father had experienced was that much less bearable" (Michaels: 223).[38]

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[37] Habermas 1989 believed that such a bourgeois public sphere developed in Europe from the seventeenth century onward.

[38] Some such coming to terms occurs in other genres and works of Somali popular culture such as Osman 1996 and Faysal Axmed Xasan 2000, which are the focus of my ongoing research.

As mentioned above, Somali websites, overwhelmingly hosted by Somalis in the diaspora, constitute an increasingly important part of Somali public space. Though their political perspectives and biases are often immediately clear, as far as the poetic mediations of violence studied here are concerned, the most respected ones have upheld a notion of national space, and have largely kept off-line (refused to publish) poetry and songs that divide Somalis by engaging them differentially as individuals belonging to clans (Issa-Salwe 2005: 153–154). It is fascinating that the avoidance of specific references to (and verbal attacks on) the clan(s) of the poet and his audience is relatively recent; for example, this was still common practice in the cycle of poems called "the Hurgumo series" of 1978 (Samatar 1989). The reason for this is unclear. Perhaps it is a measure of how the popular culture of the nationalist era captured the Somali imagination. Or, perhaps, the communal violence of the 'clan logic' has raised the stakes to such an extent that what was brilliant and humorous political polemic then has now, because of the communal nature of the violence of state collapse and reconstruction, become a matter of life and death. It is possible, as Issa-Salwe proposes, that the collapse of the state has inspired Somali poets and their web hosts to try to protect whatever is left of national space and to work towards new commonalities. If the latter is correct, then, in the context of this particular mediation of poetry and song, those websites that constitute shared Somali cyberspace are a force for preserving and rebuilding national identity and a national public space (Issa-Salwe 2005: 153–154).[39]

In 1991, at the time of the first shift to violence, that of the clan logic, there was no Somali internet and cyberspace therefore played no role in the construction of what poetry was appropriate in the shared public space. Somali websites emerged in the course of the 1990s. Even though the regional and clan backgrounds of their founders and target audience are often very obvious, when it comes to the poetic mediations of violence studied here, they appear to have sensors that exclude specific references to clan-based violence. At the time of the second shift to violence, in 2006, more than 700 Somali websites were flourishing. What is striking about the Islamist poetry of Cibaar is that he advocates violence (in his view, violent resistance) and is nevertheless

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[39] The conscious nature of this effort was confirmed to me by Abdelkarim Hassan, one of the founders of www.wardheernews.com, during a conversation in San Diego on January 8, 2010.

included in the literary websites and thus gets away with it; that he claims Islam for one side of the civil war and gets away with it; that he presents the city as symbol of jihad, even though it was also the capital of the official government (the TFG) under Abdullahi Yusuf and contained many Somalis who supported it – and gets away with it. Does this mean that Somali literary cyberspace as national space is changing and less able or willing to preserve and promote peace? Or does it really not have sensors defending itself against the 'Islamist logic', bristling only at the divisiveness of the 'clan logic'? Time will have to tell. Somali literary websites do not feature the same kinds of instant response options that are available to readers and listeners of opinion pieces posted to some popular Somali on-line news sites. There, that is to say in the spaces allocated for reader responses, clan slurs and hate speech do figure, though no one would consider them in any sense prestigious or effective speech.[40]

However, there are signs that, in contrast to the simultaneously shared academic public space represented by the incident at SOAS with which this essay began, shared Somali literary *cyber space* cannot easily protect itself from politically divisive speech and calls for violence when these couch themselves in men's prestigious poetic genres and engage the legitimizing discourses of anti-clannism, nation, and Islam.

Public space as man's space

I argued above that the public space nationalist poetry and prestigious mediations of civil war violence construct for themselves is a space in which allegedly rational men speak rationally about matters of common interest. This also explains why women's poetic speech on matters pertaining to, and circulating in this public sphere is not registered or acknowledged (that is to say, valued, memorised, or disseminated) to the same degree. When it comes to mediations of the violence of state collapse, legitimate speech turns out to be men's speech, and the poets, the genres in which they express themselves, the public space they construct and share, and their primary audience are all gendered male. While Somali women have, to an extent, bought into these unwritten rules of the male literary canon about what constitutes for

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[40] There is also a burgeoning number of unstudied list-serves and electronic sites that are restricted on the basis of clan or sub-clan membership.

them appropriate speech, genre, and space, it is clear that, when they transgress these rules, they are largely ignored.[41] However, the muting of women's voices is only one aspect of the gendered nature of 'prestigious' and 'legitimate' mediations of violence, for the latter have resulted in very particular representations of women. This is also visible in the texts focusing on Mogadishu that were examined here.

With the exception of the last poem analysed above (Cibaar's "Mogadishu, you have a Lord"), all texts present women exclusively as victims. Women, as young virgin girls, as pregnant mothers-to-be, and as mothers with children, consistently figure as vulnerable, defenceless, and passive individuals who are in need of, and have a cultural right to the protection of men. Moreover, in several poems (especially those of Naaji and Nabaddoon), women bear exceptional burdens of symbolic representation: their brutalisation, especially rape, symbolises the breakdown of the nation and national unity, as well as human morality itself. The city of Mogadishu too is gendered female and is in some of the texts studied here presented (even blamed) as a woman (and woman-as-nation) who was raped. From a comparative perspective, loading women down with the burden of symbolically representing the morality of the group is typical of nationalist discourse. In Somali nationalist discourse, women, constructed symbolically as the custodians of authentic Somali cultural values, saw their modernity (and thus their social freedom and personal agency) defined and limited in terms of the new nation's 'traditional' culture and morality. Thus, the representation and morality of the nation was increasingly compressed into women's symbolic duty to reject modern frivolity in favor of 'traditional' morality, and this made women who failed to live up (or appeared to do so) to the expectations of this nationalist discourse socially vulnerable.[42]

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[41] See Amina Said Ali 2005 and Xaawa Jibriil 2008. Like their male counterparts, women poets in the 'prestigious' public sphere mediate violence as if they were not part of it as victims, perpetrators, or bystanders; appeal to the same discursive triad of nation, anti-clannism, and Islam, and demonstrate the same aporia about the specifics of the violence of 'the clan logic'.

[42] As Pettman puts it: "'[i]n a complex play, the state is often gendered male and the nation gendered female'. Women, that is, are commonly constructed as the symbolic form of the nation whereas men are invariably represented as its chief agents" (Cited by Wilford 1998: 1). See also Yuval-Davis 1998: 31–32 and Kapteijns 2009 for the tensions between women's actual social and economic roles and their symbolic burdens.

When the war broke out, such symbolic representations of women 'invited' and intensified the violation of women. As in Bosnia, the targeting of women for violence, especially also sexual violence, was a deliberate USC policy as it tried to 'cleanse' a particular clan family from large areas of central and south Somalia. Like their male counterparts, women were members of the targeted clans. However, because they were women, the sexual violence perpetrated on their bodies carried two special symbolic charges. First, rape (often gang-rape committed in public) targeted women's own moral personhood for destruction. Second, because they symbolised and presented both the human dignity of their male protectors and the physical continuation of the wider group, their rape was intended to undermine the continued dignified existence of their families and clans. Given that it was fellow Somalis who violated them, this sexual violation struck at the essence of Somaliness and at the common national identity, shared morality, and common future that had been imagined in its name.[43]

As they had borne the burden of symbolical representation of the morality of the nation before the civil war, for the poets studied here women now came to embody the immorality of the destruction of the nation during the war. For these male poets to acknowledge that the violence of the civil war was initiated and perpetrated largely by men, and to support women's claims on and against men as legitimate claims, is a significant and valid position to take. Moreover, that respect for women as traditionally protected, vulnerable civilians remains a powerful cultural ideal that structures Somali women's citizenship is a positive cultural value. The problem lies in the fact that women, in the texts studied here, *only* feature as such weak and vulnerable beings and victims. Even in "Mogadishu, you have been violated", which laments the inclusive kinship relations that 'the clan logic' violated, this older kinship code, which after all treated women as unequal and thus relegated them to secondary citizenship, is unduly romanticised.

In reality, during the fighting and when and where violence died down, women's agency was exceptional. Women survived, saved their children and other relatives, friends and neighbours. At times they participated in the violence, urged the killers on, and blindly supported their clan, while at other times, they actively brought about peace, demonstrated for it, brought about reconciliation, and served as

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[43] Compare Wobbe 1995.

men's conscience. In the aftermath of violence – where one can speak of an aftermath – in Somalia and in the diaspora, some women participated in the many international peace talks, even if, in this context, they often toed the lines drawn by related men rather than advocating women's agendas (Bryden & Steiner 1998). Finally, as a result of the war, both in Somalia and in the diaspora, women were compelled to take on ever more of the family's labour in- and outside of the home. None of this is reflected here (Gardner & El Bushra 2004). The poets studied here (whether nationalist or Islamist) perpetuate and do not break away from representations of women that ignore their agency and, at least in some cases, present them as embodiments of the morality and unity of the Somali nation and *umma*. This, indirectly, maintains men in the position of arbiters of proper womanhood – and of what this, in their view, implies with regard to women's dress, social movement, educational ambitions, economic activities, and so forth – in the aftermath. Thus, the mediations of violence examined here can truly be called "men's voices in a man's world".

Acknowledgements

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THE ROAD, THE SONG AND THE CITIZEN:
SINGING AFTER VIOLENCE IN KWAZULU-NATAL

Liz Gunner

Abayaz' ingoma mabakhanyiselwa ngengoma
For those who know the song, may it inspire them
– Polly Danger Boys song, March 2007

Violence and the citizen

This chapter explores the ways in which singer and song play a role in enabling the imagining of citizenship in the post-apartheid era in South Africa. My focus is on groups of performers of the genre *isicathamiya* in the city of Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal, and in the districts to the south of the city. These are neither rural nor urban. They may even appear to the passer-by as bleak, anonymous. Such barren topographies do not yield their secrets easily, but to those who live there or close by, and to those who documented the violence, their trauma in the decade preceding 1994 is well known (Aitchison 1993; Bonnin & Sitas 2000). The low-level civil war between the followers of the United Democratic Front (UDF), often proxy for the still banned African National Congress (ANC), and the Inkatha Freedom Party (covertly supported by the military power of the dying apartheid state) set the region in the spiral of a vicious low-level civil war where rape, murder, coercion and the destruction of property were all common-place. Rape in particular is mentioned by two writers as part of the widespread brutalization of youth on both sides of the conflict, and a means of asserting masculine authority and settling political scores (Bonnin 2000; Campbell 1992).[1] The memories of this era of violence, I suggest, still mark life there, and may be one reason why the songs I document seek with a particular intensity to define, imagine and

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[1] My sources for the history of this period are in the main from the archives on the civil war in the Natal Midlands held at the Alan Paton Centre, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg campus.

even to enact what it means to be a citizen in the new post-apartheid state.

The acts of singing which I track from the later era of the early 2000's often look forward to the future and engage with the present rather than the past. Yet their strong engagement with the *making* of new citizens and with ideas of citizenship – which include in many songs ideas of masculinity and what constitutes the good man – stem in part, I argue, from the scars of the Natal Midlands experience of violence. This took place *within* the wider structural violence of the apartheid era. Only one group, the Pietermarizburg Naughty Boys, in a song on their demo CD from March 2007, overtly touched on the civil war. Significantly, the words of their song linked that suffering with the scourge of AIDS which followed and then took both events as a means of looking forward to build something new in the present where the presence of harmony is not seen as a given and where conflict and disruption hover as a constant possibility within the new state. The reference in the song below to 'our leaders are shaking hands' is an oblique way of highlighting the working together of old enemies, Inkatha Freedom Party and ANC members in the new era of the free citizen, and the reference to past destruction is at one level also a reminder of what could easily happen again:

> How long Almighty?
> Look Lord at the orphans,
> And the other heroes whom we are always burying.
> The earth is never satisfied.
> Some leave us through disease,
> Others die by guns, spears, fire.
> Oh the sorrow!
> Some sleep in the open fields,
> Others have no family because of the civil war.
> Beautiful Africans,
> We can differ in our opinions but let's not quarrel.
> Our leaders are shaking hands.
> What has happened is awful,
> But put aside your bad deeds and your grudges....[2]

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[2] From the March 2007 demo CD of the Pietermaritzburg Naughty Boys, titled *Imali yoqolo* (Small of the Back Money i.e. The Child Benefit Grant). I have translated it from isiZulu. All song translations below are mine.

The vision of this song by the Pietermaritzburg Naughty Boys suggests a past looking over the shoulder of the present. If you drive along the R617 south on the winding, hilly road out of the centre of Pietermaritzburg, past Edendale towards Elandskop, and then further to Bulwer and the Drakensberg mountains, you see the burnt out homes, the shadows of old homesteads in the grass, the new modern houses, the fresh community halls. Past and present quite materially co-exist. In such a difficult place, the language and laws of the new era and the history of the struggle to achieve it can be inspirational. A group such as Polly Danger Boys, in one of their best known songs, chose to sing not about local issues but about the wider, national success and about heroism.[3] The words of their song illustrate the moving towards the embodying of a heroic masculinity that includes a blueprint of a new citizenship of rights, education, prosperity, obligations:

> You showed the aspirations of the blacks to white people
> Although things were hard for us
> We're proud of our country South Africa
> Baba[4] Mandela, you're the greatest hero of all
> You're a man among men
> Because you stood fast for the country through the struggle
> For ten years and more we've had freedom in this land
> Until today we are free, till now we have all that the world has to offer
> There is no one on earth like you
> All those years you spent in jail Mandela
> And you had it tough
> You were in jail for leading the country, Father's country
> And even in jail you said 'Never, I won't give up,
> Even if the whites sit on our necks.'
> And it didn't end there. You came out of jail and brought us progress
>   and peace.
> You suffered, Mandela.
> You were imprisoned for years and you stayed in until we were free.
> We must praise him, for the black government and for his work for us
> Because now we have rights to choose education and to work
> We say hurrah, hurrah for Mandela

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[3] This song, performed at the National *isicathamiya* competition in Durban, won them first place in the Top Twenty section in 2008.

[4] Here Mandela is called 'Father' in isiZulu, and at the end of the song he is called Father (*Ntate*) in another of the national languages, SeSotho, spoken alongside isiZulu by many who live very close to the Drakensberg mountains and the Lesotho border. The song thus gestures to a non-ethnic inclusivity in its idea of 'South Africa'.

> We say hurrah, hurrah for Mandela
> Oh Ntate Madiba
> Hurrah for Madiba – we thank you for what you've done for us.[5]

The song celebrates Mandela as father and inspirational national leader, hailing him as 'Father' in both isiZulu and Sotho. His life narrative, caught in their song, traces the move from a violent and disenfranchised past into the era of rights and citizenship.[6]

Both the above songs, in the *isicathamiya* genre which critics have noted draws both on notions of tradition and the modern (Erlmann 1991, 1996; Gunner & Gunner 2008; Gunner 2008), deal either directly or indirectly with questions of citizenship and with living in a state where rights and responsibilities are central to the idea of being a citizen. Song can thus embody the new world of the citizen and can mediate aspirations of the citizen and define sites of debate and conflict. Discussions on the citizen by both Ruth Lister (2007) and Engin Isin (2008) make the point that citizenship is not simply a given, but that it has to be imagined and enacted. Isin asks how do subjects *become* citizens "as claimants of justice, rights, responsibilities? How do subjects constitute themselves as citizens?" (Isin 2008: 18). Neither Lister nor Isin refer to the cultural space of song and performance in relation to making real the notion of the citizen. Their emphasis on *enactment* and *claiming*, however, chimes well with the evidence from the songs that had a place in the repertoires of the *iscathamiya* performers who sang at public venues and their practice points, up and down the winding R617 – and, in the case of the Pietermaritzburg Naughty Boys, at their practice venue in the heart of the old city before the R617 snakes off towards Edendale and Mbali.[7] The topics of the songs are varied: the subjects of manhood, masculinity and 'the good man' recur, as the songs carry messages about rape, adultery, the husband, and the family. The topic of AIDS, addressed in a number of songs besides that of the Naughty Boys quoted above, is also set within the discourse on

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[5] This song for Mandela was one of Polly Danger Boys' practice songs at the Phungula home at Zondi Store near KwaMadlala. Nkosikhona and two companions sang it for me again at KwaMadlala on March 30th 2007. They often performed it at KwaMadlala and at other venues.

[6] Nkosikhona's father, Moses Phungula, composed it and Nkosikhona's group worked it through and performed it.

[7] PMB Naughty Boys would perform at venues along the R617 but their practice venue was in Boom Street at the back of the bar and restaurant, KwaFreese's, in earlier years a venue in its own right for *isicathamiya*. See Gunner 2008.

the citizen: in one song the singers urge the (then) Minister of Health to make Antiretroviral (ARV) treatment available; another song urges the use of condoms; yet others address the state of roads and the devastation of the land; some, a few, deal with the older *isicathamiya* theme of courtship – perhaps the oldest of all the themes in the genre, according to the Naughy Boys leader, Bhejane Mthethwa.[8] All, I argue, can be interpreted as ethical acts seeking to inscribe new social values, urging listeners/audiences to think about the meaning of 'the citizen' and act out the values of the song in their lives. Both the performance and the active, listening, viewing audiences thus become involved in what Isin calls "acts of citizenship" which exist "distinct from (but related to) the status and habitus of citizenship" (Isin 2008: 16). I argue here, then, that song can be a crucial means of enacting citizenship in the post-apartheid era. In this study my focus is on the *isicathamiya* genre and on its life along the R617. Yet other genres such as *kwaito*, hip-hop and gospel are equally likely to show this engagement of song with the ideals of citizenship, each articulating the specifics of a local history and context (Coplan 2008).

   In the songs below the urgent inscribing of what being a citizen means comes from the knowledge of what it could be to exist outside the state, in what Agamben has called "the camp", the state of exception (Agamben 1997). The *enactment* of citizenship is emphasized also in Chipkin's recent study on the South African state (2007) where he states: "The citizen is hailed through democratic institutions and acts according to democratic norms – what I call 'ethical values'" (Chipkin 2007: 15). The citizen singers whose compositions shape this chapter are not from the metropolitan heartlands. The political and cultural repertoires on which they draw and which they stitch together are complex and often contested. They have had to imagine from below the democratic acts and the ethical values that make the political space of what in isiZulu is often termed, '*uhlel' olusha*', literally 'the new arrangement', the democratic era (Chipkin 2007). These new possibilities of being subjects and citizens have been beaten out in the dialogue of song and in the difficult imaginings of what a national and democratic future might be. In the process, new forms of self-reflexivity have emerged that engage with ideas of manhood, being a modern citizen

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in a peaceful state, a worker, a son, a father, a brother, a husband, a lover. Underneath their often glittering stagings lies the recent violent history of their district (and in a wider sense, the country). From their songs we can see the possibility of 'new men' and 'new citizens', different modernities and the fragility of that process. Alongside the idea of democracy and rights – *amalungelo* in isiZulu – lies the spectre of what could be: the camp, the state of exception for the non-citizen citizen, the deep and terrifying estrangement within the modern state that Agamben explores with such ruthless clarity (ibid.).

Song, I suggest, becomes a means of mediation. It mediates and works as a discursive site for shadowed memories of violence that work towards an alternative mode of being in the present; it imagines new forms of masculinity even as it disturbs older ideas of militarism and patriarchal manliness; it disputes poverty and, in the very glitter of its performance, suggests the glamour of a new world that its art can bring into being. Thus the songs provide texts for the fashioning of new technologies of the self that allow for an entry into, and a making of, a democratic "form of society", as Chipkin puts it (2007: 15).

The central node of my study is a small place with the winding R617 running through it. The area is known as KwaMadlala. I argue that *isicathamiya* as it was performed during the three years on which this study is based – 2005–2007 – became a genre that could survive violence, and absorb and mediate it. It could be used, too, to imagine the new state and the new way of being within it, as citizens. Through its assertive flexibility it enabled shifts in habitus and created new cultural capital, as singers and their audiences, who were often their peers, and those who came from the same area and the same ways of living, strove to create new identities for themselves. Besides the KwaMadlala site, I take the reader to two linked sites of song, one the mountainous and rural Luboza near Bulwer and the other, the urban Mbali township near Pietermaritzburg. All three sites are linked by the road that runs between them as a communicative link enabling other symbolic, cultural and economic connections. At all these sites the singers of *isicathamiya* in the years I mentioned imagined and acted out a fragile and provisional agency, and sought a place for themselves in 'the new era'.

Songs and a place

Consider, for instance, the community hall at KwaMadlala, just off the road some 35 kilometres south-west of Pietermaritzburg, as a node of performance within the longer stretch of the R617. The hall, built post-1994, sits tucked away down a lane, in bare, high country on the way to the foothills and then the high peaks of the southern Drakensberg. Houses nestle along the lane and an untidy store set back from the road marks the entrance from the main thoroughfare, the winding tar road between Pietermaritzburg to the north, the mountains to the south, and bustling, coastal Durban in the east. Combi taxis pass on their way to Edendale, Mbali and Pietermaritzburg; trucks move along it. Cars fly by in both directions. The tar road has no markings and you look quickly each way before you cross. Life is cheap. Houses and yards are in the main small. Work is far away, usually in Pietermaritzburg or even the distant coastal city of Durban down the N3 highway. For many there is no work. And for some there is singing: church groups, *ingoma* dancing, gospel and *isicathamiya*. For the older residents there is the memory of specific acts of violence, and for younger ones the marks of that violence and its place in the local memories of the area, since KwaMadlala was well within the region marked by the civil war to which I have already referred. The singers' compositions sometimes bear the shadows of old, unspoken battle lines. The ANC affiliations of Naughty Boys and Polly Danger Boys can be read by insiders; the shadow of old Inkatha affiliations lingers over the songs of groups that worry about the family and the citizen but tend to highlight the danger of too much departure from 'tradition', too much freedom for women. All, however, are united by the love of the genre, its making, and the space performance provides for entering the discourse on the democratic present.

KwaMadlala Community Hall was built in the post-1994 era as part of the new push to establish local government structures and amenities throughout the country. On Sunday afternoons it becomes the concert hall for the *isicathamiya* teams from the immediate area and further afield. The event in late March 2007 is one of a stream of such events that feed into a wider scene. Each team belongs to the Elandskop Music Association – one of a larger group of *isicathamiya* organizations that fall under SATMA, the South African Traditional Music Association. Sometimes their names mark their loyalties or their ideals. There are

the Mafunze Black Singers who come from the Ngcobo land closeby;[9] Pietermaritzburg Home Boys; Pietermaritzburg Naughty Boys; Red Lions; Kheth' ukuthula (Peace Choosers); Polly Danger Boys; PMB Q Singers, and Pietermaritzburg Black Scorpions. Things move slowly, the audience trickles in – they pay their money at the door. Paper is plastered over the windows so that those who can't/won't pay the R4 entrance fee can't peep in. The organizers sit at a special table. Each group pays in their R180 and, as Pietermaritzburg Black Scorpions are the 'owners of the performance' ('*iminikazi womdlalo*'), they take the gate money and make sure the hall is in order for the event – the chairs in rows, floors swept, old sweetpapers picked up. The rest of the money will be used for the first, second and third prize, the prizes for the Swankers, and for paying the judges. Groups take turns to *nandisa* (sweeten) the audience as things warm up and get a chance to tune up their voices too, while other groups practise outside. Soon the whole building begins to buzz and almost jump with the sounds of song.

Before the singers come the Swankers, the male and female models of sartorial elegance and haute couture who have their own competition. Swanker No. 1 wears a grey suit with cream tie, handkerchief, tie pin, cream shirt. His immaculate socks, watch, belt are all displayed with neat quick stylish moves focused on the judges who sit with eyes fixed on the stage, oblivious to the waves of song sweeping all around them. They are watched intently by the audience some of whom are very young boys and girls, many young girls and youths, and some older people. There are two rounds of Swankers – the first is a semi-private competition among the five top, regular, semi-professional Swankers. It is called in Zulu '*ukuqhudelana*' (to find the top rooster). Each competitor puts in a sum – perhaps R100 – and the winner takes all. This is followed by the Open Swanking and in this the semi-professionals compete, often in a different outfit, with a wider group that includes the younger Swankers. One of them is Mdu, who sings with Pietermaritzburg Black Scorpions. He wears a dark suit, has a neat, controlled walk, turns with a lift of his heel, leans backward and lightly flicks his grey/white tie, opening his jacket to show off his elegant shirt as he does so. The audience admires his controlled flamboyance and loves him because he is one of them. But he doesn't win.

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[9] Mafunze is the main honorific praise name, *isithakazelo*, for the surname Ngcobo.

The singing outside from various points reaches a crescendo matched only by the volume of noise inside. Then come the women Swankers. There are no semi-professionals among them and they are mostly from close by. Zama Ngcobo, for instance, in her elegant black evening gown comes from KwaMadlala. The women are dressed in floating gauzes, some flowing loose, some hugging the body. Often there are evening dresses that would look good on the cover of *Bona, Drum* or *Ebony* magazines. When I ask Zama and her friends why they take part as swankers, they tell me they would like to be models, and that they watch the model shows on TV and study the styles in *Bona* and the other popular magazines aimed at young black readers. They too, are watched intently by the audience, particularly the other young women and girls, and congratulated as they come down off the stage. The Swankers, both men and young women, are part of the perceived link to a world of glamour, style, high fashion that is both local and global. The singing performers too are a part of this cultivation of a style – a local, performative style of the modern (Ferguson 2002: 100–104).

The names of the winners are noted by the organizers and like the names of the winning teams of singers will be passed on for announcement on the Tuesday evening radio programme devoted to the results of competitions and to song and commentary on *isicathamiya.* This will be on Ukhozi FM, the isiZulu station of the public broadcaster, the SABC. Among the Swankers, like the teams of singers, the fact of competition is important as well as the unpredictability of knowing who will win. The singing teams travel to other venues to compete, so too do the Swankers. They too are a key part of the listening/viewing audience who takes note of the singers' words and mimetic choreography. Some swankers, both women and men, may in time become household names in the *isicathamiya* fraternity, their names announced as winners week after week on UkhoziFM. Shortex Makhathini and Jo Ndlovu are two well-known Swankers who often compete at Kwa-Madlala. Among the young women though, none have as yet built up a regional reputation such as that of the magically elegant Nolitha Khumbaca of the Durban YMCA *isicathamiya* venue. Reputations, money and ideas all move along the circuits formed by the performing venues and the regular radio programmes that update listeners on events, results, personalities and the songs.

Only at this point, after the two rounds of male Swankers, and that of the young women, does the *isicathamiya* competition itself begin. The eight teams who will be competing have drawn lots for their

positions and the first team to move with synchronized rhythmic steps toward the stage is Polly Danger Boys. The noise in the hall subsides and the MC exerts his authority. The singing competition has begun. Two judges sit gazing at the stage, score sheets and pencils on the table in front of them and their backs to the audience, out of reach. The seventeen singers in matching grey suits, white gloves and white shirts range in age between 15 and 22 (with one of 9) and are led by Nkosikhona Phungula, who stands out as the most elegantly dressed of all in a close fitting dark beige suit. He leads them in with his high 'soprano' and they follow with a strong bass line. They take the words of the song, throw lines between the parts but always keep the strong bass moving with rhythm and synchrony, their feet, their white-gloved hands, their bodies, miming, dancing as they sing. At the base of their choreography is the line, taut or loose but always 'there' (Meintjes 2004). Even when a singer or singers move into the centre, they come from and return to the line. As in dance forms deep in the Zulu cultural archive, such as *ingoma* or *ukugiya*, the line signals both their unity and the play of the individual within the group. Then, as a climax, they move into the final 'step' section, which often holds the nub or core message of the song. This is the part for which the audience often waits breathlessly. It shows most intensely the dancing skills of the singers and their ability to combine their hand gestures, marked off by their white gloves, feet and body moves to display their choreography. The semiotics of the dance are meant to enhance the power of the song and its message. This does not always happen. Sometimes the dance dominates and the song falls away. But this is not the ideal.

The song which Polly Danger Boys choose from their repertoire is about rape. It is sharply admonitory and plain speaking. It has a stark, shocking quality in the way it hurls imperatives at the audience, berates its generic male rapist, invokes a vision of a wasted future and a squandered present. It calls up the opposite of the hope of the new era caught so powerfully in their other, equally well-known song in honour of Mandela and the world for which he fought (see above). The social milieu they invoke through this song is profoundly dystopic. Rape may have marked the years of the civil war of twenty years earlier, but it also sits uncomfortably, disturbingly in evidence in the social experience and sexual politics of the present, the new democratic era of *uhlel' olusha*. People listen carefully, though probably each member of the audience, from the very young listener of no more than

seven years to the oldest there, has heard the song with its bitter, stern message before. The audience enjoys the tightly choreographed moves, the 'play' of the song and the youthful singers' mastery of the complex harmonies which the genre demands. The space of performance allows the singers the authority to speak harsh truths and to overturn the normal expectations in Zulu culture of deference to age. Most immediately, their song mediates the experiences of sexual violence that are part of the present of their own community but exist as a wider malaise in urban and rural post-apartheid South Africa (Posel 2005). Their song enables difficult truths regarding a troubled masculinity and an unstable social order to surface and to co-exist alongside the search for what the new era could be:

Hlanga lomhlabathi	Salt of the earth
Kothenjwa bani kulelizwe	How can you trust anyone in this land
Uma amadoda ephenduka izilwane	If men have changed to wild animals
Esephenduka abadlwenguli?	If they've changed into rapists?
Ungamqala kanjani umntwana omncane	How can you look at a small child
Umdlwengule umthathe ulale naye?	Rape her, take her, sleep with her?
Noma seyikhona ingane	And she's just a child
Wena muntu uyaqhambeka	You, man-person you're breaking her
Uyihlukumeze ubulale ikusasa layo.	You've fouled her, killed her tomorrow.
Akugcinini lapho sibabonile bebamba ogogo.	And that's not the end of it, we've seen them grabbing grandmothers.
Uyephi unembeza wabantu besilisa?	Where's the conscience of menfolk gone?
Shwele xolelelani izingane ezisencane.	Say sorry, ask forgiveness from the little ones.
Mawubuye unembeza kubantu bakithi!	Let's get conscience back to our people!
Kuzobanjani kubadlwenguli bezingane	Are we still going to have child rapists
Uma kufika u2010 kuyobe kunje?	When 2010 comes round?
Uma kudlwengulwa,	And if there's been rape
Izingane zophila kanjani zihlukunyezwa?	How will the abused young have a decent life?
[Step] Mawubuye unembeza kubantu bakithi!	Let's get conscience back to our people!

Several terms in their song mark it as embedded in the moral discourse of the new era: its hopefulness, its desire to feature ethical values at the center of the new life, its righteous anger. The root of its discontent is the shock at what men have become. The profound disruption

of any normative moral order and in particular what constitutes a
man is made clear in the 'if men have changed to wild animals'. Fixed
in syntactic parallel with 'wild animals' and linked to it through the
repetitive syntax is 'rapists'. Thus 'wild animals' and 'rapists' are set
outside the moral order. Their opening call 'Salt of the earth' ('*Hlanga
lomhlabathi*') pulls their audience into a shared space of normality:
uhlanga, in isiZulu 'root, stem, ancestry', calls on associations with an
older social order as well as the new post-apartheid one. Later in the
song, with the phrase '*ubulale ikusasa layo*' (literally 'you've killed her
tomorrow'), the singers point specifically to the future of post-apart-
heid hope in a variant of the much used phrase '*ikusasa lethu*' – 'our
tomorrow', which was constantly on people's lips and in the media in
the early years after 1994. Again, by using the weighted word, '*unem-
beza*', meaning 'good conscience, guiding principle of right' (Doke &
Vilakazi 1972: 543), the singers call on a discourse of ethics, first aimed
at men: 'Where's the conscience of menfolk gone?' They follow this
by a gesture of enfoldment, bringing men back from the wilderness
where rape has placed them and back to an ethical community: 'Let's
get conscience back to our people!' The line '*Mawubuye unembeza
kubantu bakithi*' echoes with the older call of the liberation struggle,
'*Mayibuye iAfrika!*' Each calls up the idea of a just community, each
speaks to its own time. Set also in the singers' minds is the South Afri-
can future within the global community signalled by the reference to
the Football World Cup to be held in South Africa in 2010. 'Will we
be seen as an ethical nation? Will we *be* an ethical nation?' the singers
ask. This focus on the future and on a quality of life to which to aspire,
part of the post-1994 legacy, is again underlined in the final line of
their song, '*zophila kanjani*?' which implies 'what kind of life' will the
abused be able to live?

The fact that the rape song by Polly Danger Boys was not being
aired for the first time and would have been quite familiar to many
in the audience did not diminish its power or its ability to generate
meaning with each new performance. There was a strong and often
voiced view among listeners who came week after week to watch their
favourite teams perform, that to have difficult truths – about male
sexual delinquency for instance – publicly aired through performance
meant that they could more easily be discussed between people as part
of ordinary conversations. The power of the message filtered into the
immediate social fabric and the act of singing lifted the pressure of

taboo.[10] The Polly Danger Boys' stern, beautifully executed (this was clearly the general view of their performance of the song) message on rape also fed into a pool of songs and ideas on the same topic circulating from other *isicathamiya* groups and gospel choirs that on some occasions would perform at the same event in the same hall and be judged in their own category. Thus Polly Danger Boys had performed the rape song at the Te Huis Hall in Mbali (the township adjoining Edendale) in a larger, more formal competition with several city dignitaries present and many more men of their fathers' generation, as well as their peers, in August 2006.[11]

The Afro gospel group, Stars of Freedom, with singers of both sexes who often shared performing space with the *isicathamiya* singers, had their own powerful song on rape delivered in the Afro gospel style which I had heard in KwaMadlala hall four months earlier. Their anger at what men had become and the sense that this was in important ways a stain on the new era was strongly present in their words. The whole message, in keeping with the gospel style, was set within a call to God for help. What was striking was the local consonance of ideas across genres and the outrage expressed through song, which became a safe place from which youth could express views on shocking sexual matters. There were differences: Polly Danger Boys' rape song left open the idea of who constituted 'our people' and thus was more inclusive of a wider, national community they were trying to call into being. Stars of Freedom stipulated '*isizwe esimnyama*', 'the black nation'. Yet they too used the strong term '*unembeza*', 'conscience' and turned the earlier anti-apartheid struggle rhetoric '*Phansi…*' 'Down with…' to new use as they too set rape outside the ethical. In keeping with the dramatic performance style of Afro gospel they mimed as they sang but kept within the limits of the genre.[12] Many who heard Polly Danger Boys would know that Stars of Freedom too, like a number of other groups, had rape in their repertoire:

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[10] This was the view given quite unequivocally by audience members whenever I asked them about whether or not messages in songs were effective.

[11] This event was one of a number of *isicathamiya* competitions sponsored by Mr. T. Njilo, a local business man and philanthropist and the owner of Nduduzo (Comfort) Funeral Parlour in Pietermaritzburg.

[12] The words were written out for me by one of the singers and she set them in numbered verses. So I have kept her format.

(1) Sizwe simnyama madoda | Men of the black nation
Ngabe kwenzenjani ngalabadlwenguli? | What's the happening with these rapists?
(2) Siyabuza bo | Hey we're asking
Ngabe likuphi | Just where
Ngabe likuphi ikusasa lethu. | Just where is our tomorrow?
Kudlwengulw' izingane | Children are being raped.
Kudlwengulw' izalukazi | Old ladies are being raped.
Ngabe yini enifunayo emadoda? | What's it you want, men?
(3) Yini eniyifuna? | What do you want?
Yini na yin' enifunayo? | What exactly do you want?
We madoda yini, badlwenguli? | Hey men, rapists, what is it?
(4) Oh Somandla bandla | Oh Almighty One and the congregation
Safa saphel' isizwe sakho | We're totally finished we your people.
Ngabe yini na? | Why why is this?
(5) Ingabe uyephi inembeza? | What has happened to conscience?
Walala nengane yakho | You slept with your child
Waqeda ubuntombi bayo | You finished off her girlhood.
Walala nomama wakho | You slept with your mother
Awu ihlazo elingaka | Such a huge disgrace
Ekuzal' unesono. | You must have been born sinning (?)
Phansi ngabadlwengul' izingane | Down with the rapers of children
Phansi ngabadlwengul' izalukazi | Down with the rapers of old women
Malibuya elikaMntaniya | May the country of [Queen] Mntaniya of old return.[13]

Okubuhlungu ngabadlwenguli | What's painful about the rapists [is that]
Bayaboshwa namhlanje kusasa baphumile | One day they're in prison, the next they're out.
Baba somandla uthul' uthini | Father God you're silent what are you thinking

Uma izwe lakho lonakala kanjena? | If your land is going to pieces like this?
Thina amathembu ethu siwabeka kuwe. | As for us we put our hopes before you.
(9) Ulithemba lethu weSomandla | You are our hope Mighty One
Ulithemba mdali wezulu nomhlaba | You, our hope, Creator of heaven and earth.

Ufanel' ukudunyiswa. | You are worthy of being glorified.
(10) Masimdumise simkhonze | Let us glorify him and worship him
Ulithemba lethu sonke. | He is the hope of us all.

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[13] Mntaniya is one of the oldest remembered figures of the Zulu royal women, a sister of Jama, grandfather of King Shaka who built the Zulu kingdom by conquest from 1818–1828. Thus to invoke her name is to call up associations of an ideal past community of social harmony and well-being.

There were no Afro gospel groups performing on the Sunday after-
noon in March 2007 when Polly Danger Boys sang on rape. Yet the
theme of a sullied manhood and thus a masculinity in crisis linked to
an endangered people/nation featured a number of times in the songs
of other competing groups. The Red Lions, from Khuthwane, closer
to the Drakensberg foothills, had their own style, although they were
not seasoned performers. They chose to combine a number of pow-
erful and currently circulating themes in a single song: the appeal to
the higher powers of God in the fight against the scourge of rape; the
sorrow at the destruction wrought by AIDS and finally the appeal to
people to place themselves in a trajectory of memory and belonging
that harked back to a deep historical past. Thus for them, as for Stars
of Freedom (and more allusively for Polly Danger Boys), the present
had to be tied into the acknowledgement of a past that represented an
ideal social order in contrast with the difficult present. To call up the
past, however, neither Red Lions nor Stars of Freedom invoked the
name of Shaka, the epitome of the conquering militaristic leader;
the names invoked were that of an earlier famous royal woman,
Mntaniya, and of Malandela, the distant great-grandfather of Shaka.
The idea of continuity linked to that of community, though, was
important. Thus of the unknown rapist they sang: 'He's raping the
children of [our ancestor] Malandela'.

Yet another group, this time from Mbali, the township off the R617
close to Edendale and Pietermaritzburg, called themselves the PMB
Q Singers. Young men in their teens or early twenties, they sang on
the topic of rape and combined it with a call to God for help. 'Moth-
ers are weeping and the times have changed', they sang to their audi-
ence. Two singers, an 'alto' and a 'tenor', knelt as if in prayer and the
group sang on with vigour 'Men, leave this raping'. They mimed this
injunction by a phallic pelvic thrust synchronized with a downward
move of their white-gloved hands towards the phallus as they sang.
The message was unmistakable. And manhood again was subjected to
harsh scrutiny:

Sithi yeye yeye madoda	We say stupid stupid men
Isintu somuntu wesilisa siyini?	What's the culture of manhood here?
Ikusasa lengane yini?	What's the future of the child?

For their 'step' – the fast final dance where a group shows off its danc-
ing prowess and shifts its choral style – they hammered their mes-
sage home with their own brand of panache, their leader falling to

his knees in supplication as the others, in part harmony, threw the message between them and out to the audience and judges: '*Sithi yekelani ukudlwengula!*' 'We say, give up raping!' They led off with high co-ordinated steps linked with a sliding shuffle, as PMB Home Boys Number 6, waiting at the back of the hall, came slowly, rhythmically in, their charismatic leader Mbongiseni Dlamini, immaculately suited in light beige, came sweeping up from the back of the hall as his group moved on to the stage.

The community and shaping masculinities

The circulation of the songs of different groups of mainly young singers, each attempting to give a distinctive voice to the problem of rape, pointed to the deeper mediation in which the singing and performance engaged. Rape remained in the social memory as part of the trauma of the Midlands civil war, and rape still uncomfortably marked the present. It was the dystopic sign in the new democratic present for which the songs and singers yearned, and which they at times (as in the Mandela song) celebrated. The sexual violence and abuse of women was mediated countless times as groups performed in their public venues and when they practised in either a room in the township (as in Mbali), at the back of a downtown bar (as in Pietermaritzburg), or in one of the small houses of a homestead (as in the more rural parts near KwaMadlala). What the singers were also raising through the trope of rape was the anxiety surrounding notions of masculinity and manhood in a changing social order with high unemployment in which men had little chance to build their own homesteads through marriage and paying the brideprice (*ilobolo*) (Hunter 2005: 220; White: 2001). All these anxieties of the present resonated with the older memory of the civil war and its sexual violence against women.

Robert Morrell (2001) has pointed to the long history of violence and masculinity in South Africa. Not only was there the aggressive masculinity implicit in imperial policy at the time of the Anglo-Boer war, there was too the masculinity of the men of the Boer Republics with their willingness to resolve disputes by fighting and an unbending resolve to defend 'the Boer way of life'. Alongside this was the masculinity of the African polities, in particular of the Zulu and Xhosa who put a high premium on martial prowess as the highest sign of a true man (Morrell 2001: 12). Morrell turns then to the violent masculini-

ties that life in the goldmines produced when Afrikaner foremen challenged African miners, and the violent life of youth in the townships
as the era of apartheid began to instigate its web of regulations over
the black population. Thus, co-existent with the valorization of martial
achievement in the old tenets of African culture in rural areas was the
valorization of violent gang masculinity in the townships of the urban
areas. Moving into the latter years of apartheid, Morrell comments
on the atomisation of South African society in the apartheid era and
continues:

> The country's history also produced brittle masculinities – defensive and
> prone to violence…for black men the harshness of life on the edge of
> poverty and the emasculation of political powerlessness gave their mas
> culinity a dangerous edge. Honour and respect were rare, and getting it
> and retaining it…was often a violent process. (Morrell 2001: 18)

Yet most importantly for the present study Morrell points to what he
terms the 'jostling masculinities' (2001: 125) of the present where there
is no one dominant model of masculinity but contending voices. Recent
work by Mark Hunter (2005) on Zulu masculinities makes a similar
point. He notes that the 'lived experiences of poor schooling and unemployment' for 'poorer predominantly African South Africans' limit the
ability of many young men to make 'positive choices' so widely canvassed by the 'Love Life' campaign (ibid.: 219–220). He argues against
"a stereotype of static African masculinities" and notes the present
"complex and contested processes of cultural change" (Hunter 220).[14]
The notion of cultural politics to which Mark Hunter points, and the
ways in which individuals both contest and look to preserve cultural
beliefs, marks the practice of making song in KwaMadlala. The themes
on which they composed showed them observing, commenting and
in some cases demanding, or advising on social issues. Again, this
enabled the songs to mediate forms of violence around them. The
structural violence of poverty, which Hunter (2005), White (2001),
and Campbell (2003) have all noted, has had such a severe impact on
masculinity and family life, filtered into the songs. One of the most
popular songs of Mbongiseni Dlamini's Pietermaritzburg Home Boys
in 2006 and 2007 was called '*Hlel' Umndeni*', 'Manage the Family'. It
was their choice for the March competition at KwaMadlala HalI. Like

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[14] Both Morrell (2001) and Hunter (2005) draw on the seminal work on masculinity by Connell (1987, 1995); see also Carton 2006.

the rape songs, it scrutinized sex and masculinity but it addressed itself to family heads and to married men. Through the trope of the family the singers turned their gaze on the social ills relating to disrupted family life and, in their view, bad fathers. 'Limit your families' they urged, 'Look at what you see around you!' They also worried about pregnant schoolgirls and urged the Government to take action. They too saw themselves within Africa and 'the nation'. Their song urged people – men, most of all – to 'manage the family' ('*hlel' umdeni*') and be more responsible about begetting and rearing children. 'Look at the young children sleeping on street corners. Look at the very young mothers with infants on their backs', they sang, weaving their song around dazzling choreography and introducing a rock and roll melody and the words 'It's never too late to change your mind' into their opening moments.

The anxiety about women's sexuality surfaced many times in the songs of the *isicathamiya* groups that clustered around KwaMadlala Hall. For some groups there was the worry that the rights of the new nation were going too far with some of their 'concessions' to women. A common anxiety was about abortion and groups worked this into songs in ways that showed them reworking key terms and phrases to hold *their* particular message. Thus Lucky Boys from Bulwer[15] sang unequivocally against abortion; they used the key term '*unembeza*', 'conscience', to bolster their anti-abortion position, and the phrases '*abantu abamnyama*' 'black people', and '*uhlanga olunsundu*' 'the brown race', to invoke a communal, unchanging ethic:

Sithi Awu! Sekuyoze kubenini?	We say Oh No! For how long
Sobhukela umkhuba omubi?	Are we going to see this awful habit?
Okukhishwa ngabantwana?	Of getting rid of children.
Singabantu abamnyama	We are black people
Ngeke kushintshe lokhu.	Nothing's going to change that.
Pho! Sikhulelani nga lo mkhuba omubi?	Oh how can we grow with that dreadful thing?
Okubulawa kwezingane	Of killing young children
Ngokuhoshelwa kwezisu	By yanking [them] out of stomachs
Kuphuma im'phefumulo engenacala	The innocent soul is finished
Lohlanga olunsundu	For the brown race
Kuyisono naphambi lomdali	It's a sin before the creator
Kwayaphi unembezo	What's happened to your conscience

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[15] As they lived closer to the mountains and some distance from KwaMadlala they visited irregularly and when they could arrange transport.

Kinina abantu besifazane	You womenfolk
Njengoba nibulala izingane ezingenacala?	That you're killing innocent little ones?[16]

Pietermaritzburg Black Scorpions, a regular competitor at KwaMadlala, like the Lucky Boys from Bulwer, saw the abortion act as giving far too much freedom to women. 'Let's make it clear we don't agree with Parliament about those rights' ('*Asimphikisa ePhalamende ngenxa amalungelo*'), they sang. Their step finale, in which they could both hammer home their point and show off their balletic, athletic dancing, stressed their distance from government on this: 'Chabo madoda! Asivumi lendaba! 'No no men! We don' go along with this!'

For the Lucky Boys, from their home close to the mountains, with only the distant Pietermaritzburg or the coastal city of Durban as sources of work, there were other messages in their songs that touched on issues of sex and masculinity. Marriage with its ideal of the homestead (*umuzi*) and the man as household head, and the paying of the brideprice still seemed something to which to aspire. Drawing on the old theme in the genre of courtship and the troubles of love, they sang about a young man wanting the *ilobolo* cattle back after an affianced girl had changed her mind; the rebuke, however, is not to the woman concerned, but to the new man:

Waze wangenza isililo sengubo	You've brought me a heap of trouble
Ngokumthathela uNomathemba yami	By taking my Nomathemba
Intombi yakwaMsibi	The girl of the Msibi's
MfokaMadela	You of the Madela's
Wangithwes' ubunzima	You've made my life very difficult.
Besengisebenzile	I worked really hard
Ngazishaya zonke ezamalobolo	I handed over all the *lobolo* cattle
Ngithi azibuya lezo nkomo ezamabheka	I say let all the marriage cattle come back
[step] Sithi eye ah! Zibuye weMa!	Oh! Ah! Ma! They've got to come back!
Lezo nkomo zamabeka!	Those marriage cattle!

Another strong theme was linked to masculinity and allowed songs and singers to mediate intense suffering related to AIDS. As a theme this has circulated in *isicathamiya* songs for several years, but the unrelenting ferocity of the pandemic, especially among the poor and among

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[16] I recorded a number of the Lucky Boys' songs at a practice session at the Mncwabe homestead in Luboza, Bulwer on 23 March 2007.

those living in rural areas, keeps it high in the minds of composers and their audiences (Gunner 2003, 2006). As I mentioned earlier, only the song by the Naughty Boys from the 2007 demo CD (see above) drew together the social disruption of the civil war and the destruction to the social fabric caused by AIDS. Yet I argue that the thread of memory of the disruption of the war impacted on the handling of AIDS in songs by later singers from those areas. Bulwer, home of the Lucky Boys, may have not been at the epicentre of the war, but it was involved and affected by it. Their *inkosi* (traditional leader) was one of the minority of traditional leaders who supported the ANC and had done so in an earlier decade before 1994. Even though song united former enemies as they strove to become citizens in the new dispensation, some things were still not possible: "I cannot meet with XXX even to discuss the organization of *isicathamiya*", the Bulwer organizer remarked quietly to the district organizer, Lucky Mkhize, in March 2007, as we drove from Bulwer down the R617 towards Pietermaritzburg. 'I cannot sit at a table with him, you must understand', he stated, referring obliquely to a former Inkatha warlord who lived close to KwaMadlala and who had an interest in *isicathamiya.*

Lucky Boys from Bulwer had their own AIDS song, in which they attempted to give it their personal mark and to be as powerful and eloquent as possible. Also they wanted it to be topical and relate to their particular rural dilemmas.[17] The song mediates the suffering both of their district and their own personal experiences. It begins with a widely used saying,[18] thus suggesting the weight of community wisdom and honed rhetoric behind them, to highlight their own plight as the youth of Africa. Like most singers the persona they adopt sets them within an imagined community of the modern nation (through the plea to 'Father Mbeki'), the pre-colonial Zulu past (children of Malandela) and the more encompassing 'people of Africa'. The thrust of their message, however, was intensely local, aimed at their peers and government officials:

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[17] Interview with Tau Khetha Mncwabe and members of Lucky Boys March 23rd 2007, Luboza, Bulwer.

[18] 'Sakubona sakubeletha', 'Suffering we've seen you we've carried you on our backs' is also the title of a well known Zulu serial radio drama which had a wide following on Ukhozi FM in early 2002.

Saze sakubona sakubeletha	Sorrow we know you we've borne you on our backs.
Thina sizukulwane saseAfrika	We the young descendants of Africa
Kulomhlaba esiphila kuyo.	Here on this earth that sustains us.
Thina sibhekene nalengwadla yengculazi	We're staring at the sudden attacker AIDS
Esibhubhisa umhlaba wonke	That's wiping us out the world over
Siyacela kubaphathi bezompilo	We beg you health officials
Sisho kuwe Manto Shabalala Msimang	We say to you Manto Shabalala Msimang[19]
Anihlangane nabangqongqoshe?	Please meet up with the producers?
Nibonisane ngalele khambi	Make a plan about that medicine
Elinciphisa ukwanda kulesi sifo.	That holds back the spread of that disease.
Sinxus' uBaba Mbeki	We beg Father Mbeki[20]
Anikele ngalo kuye yonke imitholampilo	To give the medicine to every single clinic
Ukuze nabampofu balithole kalula.	So that the poor too can have it easily.
Nina bakwaMalandela siyaninxusa	You Malandela's children we implore you
Ukuba nibanikez' uthando	Give them love
Sisho laba abahwaqe yileli ciwane.	We mean those who have the virus.
Siyanicela nonke amaZulu amahle	We beg you all beautiful Zulus
Kesibuye esikweni lokusoma.	Let's go back to the thigh-sex method.
Mhlawumbe kuzokwehla ukuwanda ngalesi sifo	Maybe it'll reduce its spread
Ngoba kubuhlungu okwenzekayo	Because it's so painful what's happening
Kule lizwe esakhe kulo.	In this land where we have our homes.
Lesi sifo asikheth' ibala lomuntu	This disease doesn't discriminate
Sidla famuka sidla silaza.	It eats the young it eats the old.
[step] Nansi inselelo	This is the advice
Esiyibheka kinina esibheka abezizwe	That we give to you and to everyone
Sithi masizivikela ngejazi lomkhwenyane	We say let's protect ourselves by condoms.[21]

The members of Lucky Boys had many personal sorrows and difficulties in their own lives: out of seventeen members, four of the team were orphans, those who studied were at poorly resourced rural schools, and only their leader, Khetha Mncwabe, had a regular job, in Pietermaritzburg. Their song on AIDS, though, framed by the powerful proverb

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[19] Dr Manto Shabalala Msimang was Minister for Health in the ANC government under President Thabo Mbeki at the time I recorded the song in March 2007.
[20] President Thabo Mbeki was still in office in March 2007.
[21] Literally, 'the husband's overcoat'.

of suffering, 'Sorrow we know you, we've borne you on our backs' portrays them as representatives and spokesmen of their community who look outward and seek a way forward. Usefully, too, the flexibility of reference of the proverb could easily allow an encompassing of the sorrows of civil war turmoil as well as that of the immediate present. They carry a message to their own age group but across generations and across gender. They plead not only that the ARV treatment[22] be made more easily available but that those who suffer from the virus should be loved. The song itself can be seen as an ethical act carrying new social values, with its singers seeking a place as subjects in the larger democratic institutions gestured to by the mention of health officials, the Health Minister and the President.

Alongside the broader inclusivity of familiarity with the structures of the new state, the Lucky Boys' repertoire stuck also to the local and used an older belief system to make their point: the starkness of the social crisis around them, which could be read as a form of structural violence, was mediated in the following short song which had crossed genres and was also an *ingoma* dance song:

Siyabhul' isangoma	The diviner divines
Sishay' amathambo	S/he throws the bones
Sithi konakele kule ndawo.	S/he says the place is in pieces
Sibona kuvalwe imizi	S/he sees shut homesteads
Kufa abantu ngapha nangapha	People are dying here and here
Ngenxa yilo mthakathi.	Because of the witch
Sash' isangoma	So spoke the diviner
Sathi umkhumba (?) usendaweni	S/he said badness is in the place
[step] Yafa yaphela indawo	The place has had it, its finished
Yilo mthakathi.	Because of the witch.

Lucky Boys' songs, then, negotiated old and new knowledge; in their songs they drew on older cultural repertoires that linked disaster in the community with the fear of witchcraft and they composed new songs that looked to the norms of the new democratic institutions, of which they believed themselves to be part. Their site of subjectivity included the intensely pressured local space (with its older war-shadow still there) and the wider imagined community into which the new government institutions, particularly through the form of local govern-

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22 One of former President Mbeki's legacies was the delaying of ARV's availability to patients through the health service because of his refusal to acknowledge the link between HIV and AIDS.

ment, drew them. As mentiond above, other songs of their repertoire covered the terrible state of roads and the many fatal accidents; their anxieties about the new freedom given to women in the new constitution and their repugnance at the rate of crime. Their crime song showed them again positioning themselves as concerned citizens with the right to state their case through the genre of *isicathamiya*:

Ngabe nayibona le nto embi eyenzeka e	Afrika You must've seen the awful thing happening here in Africa
Thina sibhekene nenkinga	As for us we can see a problem
Kuleli zwe esiphila kulo	Here in this land we live in
Sekwanda ubugebengu	Crime is on the up and up
Sibona abakhuthuzi	We see robbers
Besikhuthuza mihla namalanga	Robbing us day in and day out
Lezi I'nswela boya zigcwele umhlaba wonke	Those criminals cram the earth
Emadolobheni abomthetho bathwele kanzima	In towns keepers of the law are having it hard
Ngokukhonjwa kwamabank'	Through bank robberies
Nangokudunywa kwezimuntu	Through people getting mugged
Kodwa MaAfrika amahle	But beautiful Africans
Ngokubambisana singalwisana nobugebengu	By working together we can fight together
Obukhungethe iAfrika.	The crime that's shaming Africa
Lobugebengu abubuhle	It's not good
Obenziwa ile nswelaboya	The stuff being done by the evil ones
Ngoba bululaza isithunzi soAfrika	Because it demeans the dignity of Africa.
[step] Shwele Somandla!	Pardon Almighty!
Awusivikele kulobugebengu!	Please protect us against this crime!

Both being a man and a citizen featured as the subjective sites with which the Lucky Boys worked as they performed through song possible forms of manhood and citizenship. Yet it was far less easy for them than it was for the regular KwaMadlala groups to have an audience and to use their municipal hall. When we went to the hall called Bethlehem for their concert and competition, the expected audience of mainly young people did not materialise. The intimate public which was built up from the families of singers, friends, relations and aspirant singers at KwaMadlala had not been able to constitute itself here. Nevertheless a performance of sorts to a tiny public took place. Three beautifully dressed choirs performed for each other and for the few of us who were there. The difficulties of being part of a working conduit of communication through song in a distant and impoverished rural community were plain to see. Nevertheless, Shange, the organizer of

the Bulwer Music Association, went back down the winding tar road with us to Pietermaritizburg for the next regional meeting. The choirs could practise for the huge inter-regional Durban competition held in November, for which the municipality would provide buses. They would also listen as part of a wide listening community to the weekly radio programmes. They would compose new songs, and new ideas would circulate. Debates on marriage, manhood, rights, responsibilities, and the state of things would continue to surface in the songs. Style and the balance of voices would be worked on. They might obtain the funds for travel to compete again soon at KwaMadlala. The trophies won in past competitions, which adorned the solid round house at KwaMncwabe where Lucky Boys practiced, were proof of a hard road well travelled and perhaps of the way ahead. The network of ideas, skills and emergent self-fashionings linked them as performers, young men and citizens to other groups struggling with similar imaginative and social processes at other sites linked by the winding tar road and by the experience of both the disenfranchisement of apartheid and the violence of a local war. Mbali, the township next to Edendale and very close to the R617, was where PMB Q Singers practised. Their take on song and their responsibilities as singers showed both similarities yet also differences from that of Lucky Boys.

Further down the road: Mbali township, singing and the subject

The singing both for their own generation and to a wider public marked the intention of Lucky Boys. The fact of new municipal local government structures that paid attention to arts and culture also meant that there was formal recognition of the skills and input of cultural groups in shaping civic society. Thus singing as acts of citizenship had its place in the way ordinary people were seen as practising citizens. The process was both etic and yet emic and part of a larger perception of civic rights and responsibilities. They were able to 'act as agents, individually or in collaboration with others' (Lister 2007: 4) and convey to others the urgency to do likewise. So although Lucky Boys were in some ways isolated, at the end of the road, near the high mountains and the border with Lesotho, they were within something new, and they knew it. They were poor, 'suffering sat on their backs', but they knew there was a structure of local government and a wider national government to which they could relate as subjects and 'enacting citi-

zens' (Isin 2008: 17). Through songs they could create not only new cultural capital but, as I have mentioned above, invest in the symbolic and social acts of citizenship. Singing was consciously a way of making citizenship an active reality. By making this connection (see Majikijela's comment below) singers were simply making explicit in a modern context the rights of performers in African society to speak difficult truths with impunity. It is the dynamic reinterpretation of this in the context of modern citizenship and through the *isicathamiya* genre in this particular localized context with its own bundle of history which is so striking.

PMB Q Singers from Mbali township, next to Edendale and Pietermaritzburg shared many concerns with Lucky Boys in their songs.[23] Like the KwaMadlala groups such as Polly Danger Boys, with whom they often shared venues, they sang fiercely on men's marauding sexuality (in this case rape) – 'We say stupid stupid men. What's the culture of manhood here?' – and boldly chastised both their elders and their own generation. They too were young, poor and in some ways boldly transgressive in the role they took through song. More than many other groups, though, PMB Q Singers reached out in song to new ways of including women's subjectivity and sexuality as a topic for public airing. Thus, in one of their practice songs, they took the topic of the pain of childlessness enunciated from the woman's point of view; again, men did not look too good; they sang in the confessional mode, and as if it were a woman speaking:

Inkinga enginayo kulomhlaba	I have a problem on this earth
Iyasinda esabheka abheka ubuhlungu	It's tough and gives me much pain
Uma ungathol' abantwana…	If you don't bear a child [and that's my case]
Namhlanje ngihlekiswa	Today people make fun of me
Ngihlekiswa kwaNgubane	They make fun of me at the Ngubanes
Ubuhlungu uyaqaqamba	The pain bores into me
Sengibizwa ngenyumba…	They call me barren… [and my husband goes with other women][24]

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[23] I had seen PMB Q Singers perform at KwaMadlala in early March and later visited them at the house where they practised in Mbali Section 1, with their choir master Mr Bongani Molefe. The texts and viewing remarks here are from that visit.

[24] This is not the full text.

The idea for this song came from the group's leader, Majikijela Mtolo.
Again song enacts, performs a challenge and a harsh social critique
and, as performance, claims authority and immunity. 'You see', said
Majikijela, 'You can *sing* critically about an older man [than you] who
takes other women because his wife doesn't conceive, even though you
can't *say* it to him!' Women's Zulu song traditions have a long history
of such confessional and (often) obliquely critical takes on the world,
but it is not common in *isicathamiya* (Gunner 1979). In their taking of
the space of song and performance as protected and powerful the sing-
ers were drawing on the Zulu cultural archive to challenge aspects of
the arrogance of older men and patriarchy. They had their own fierce
take on AIDS too. Dust and death were conjured powerfully from
their words addressed directly to their own generation, the youth:

Wena omusha	You young one
Cabanga impilo yakho	Think about your life
Uzoshiya umhlaba	You're going to leave the earth
Cabanga uzoshiya lo mhlaba	Think, you will leave this earth
Iyobulala ayikheth' ibala…	It kills and does not discriminate
Uzolal' ethuneni	You will lie in the grave
Wena uzoshiya ubumnandi balo mhlaba	You'll leave behind the sweetness of the world
Ushiy' izintandane anezidingo	You'll leave needy orphans[step]
Uzoshiya lo mhlaba.	You're going to leave this earth.[25]

Other songs followed, one chastising men who preyed on the wives
of men at work, and one on education and how badly South Africa
needed it. For this latter topic they used the same powerful construc-
tion used by other groups to envisage a better future: '*Mayibuye*' ('Let
it come back'): '*Mayibuye imfundo eSouth Afrika.*' 'May education
come back to South Africa.'

As the generation borne for the most part in the last years of local
violence or the early years of the new era, PMB Q Singers used song
to speak with fervour of what they hoped for in the new order. The
enactment of agency as citizen-subject, of fraternity and the right to
pronounce on matters of public importance marked their performance
(Chipkin 2007: 203–204). As the practice ended, their choirmaster/
manager (*umphathi*), Mr Bongani Molefe, an *isicathamiya* singer from
an earlier generation, announced they had been invited to perform at a

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[25] This is not the full text.

church gathering in Mbali just before Easter. The songs and messages would have an audience, a circulation, an ethical enactment. It would be part of a 'communicative' democracy. The space of performance protected by the older cultural archive becomes part of a new 'communicative ethic' basic to 'democratic political legitimation' (Lister 2007: 8). A crucial element of song as democratic enactment is linked for the *isicathamiya* singers to ideas of masculinity, as many of the songs of PMB Q Singers make clear. There is too the notion of iconic masculinity where the citizen as conscious 'father' makes good a past absence.

Citizen, song and heroic masculinity

The self-styling of the citizen for the singers of *isicathamiya*, as the above songs show, can not be decoupled from fashionings of masculinity. In considering the options available to men and youth, including the adoption of that of a violent and anti-social model of masculinity found in the townships (Xaba 2001), Robert Morrell refers to work by Elaine Unterhalter and remarks that one of the most powerful emerging masculinities centres on Nelson Madela. Unterhalter has termed this 'heroic masculinity' (Unterhalter 1999). This new, heroic masculinity is caught in the 'Mandela' song of Polly Danger Boys quoted near the beginning of this chapter. Such a song of praise remains in some measure a utopian gesture. It is nevertheless part of a present in which the idea of the citizen can be hammered out in song, where the 'son' singers salute the national 'father'. In this case the 'sons' inherit a present and a future from an iconic 'father' who sits alongside the jostling fathers of the archive.

There are, though, other continuities between fathers and sons that have a bearing on the *isicathamiya* songs of the present as they are performed along the spine of the R617. These help to explain the performers' ability to produce powerful and disturbing messages, or defiant ones. How is it that the singers produce discipline, glamour and beauty of body, dress and voice in a bleak and in some ways desperate environment such as KwaMadlala, Luboza, Mbali? Possibly the new makings of identity – both personal and social – which the young singers employ are building on the self-fashionings of the earlier generations of *singing* fathers. It has been noted that the strains of migrant labour have led to the image of the absent father being most common in accounts of black fatherhood in South Africa (Morrell &

Richter 2006). Yet when I asked young singers – from KwaMadlala and elsewhere – why they sang, they often replied, 'It's in the blood' (*kusegazini*). When pressed, they explained that they would watch their fathers perform at home when they were back at weekends, or at month end, but most of all they would watch them at the Christmas concerts, which the returning menfolk always held. Sometimes it was their older brothers who had been the mentors, but basically the idea that the singing was something that could go from father to son seemed a strong one. On one level this was a passing down of the archive outside any narrow form of tradition. What it also emphasized was this genre of song, *isicathamiya*, as a form of ritual performance in which the long role of singing finds expression in this hybrid genre born of the modern.[26] Here too, the liminal space of performance allows the saying of the unsayable. And it is this modern use of ritual space and liminality that is able to tie in with singing as acts of citizenship, as communicative democracy is performed in song in the new era of *uhlel' olusha*.

The act of naming also passes into a new usage that ties in with an old established way of using names in poetic rhetoric to signal ties of memory, history, identity, as in *izibongo*, praise poetry. Thus the generational continuity based on the passing down of a skill of a new kind of singing shows itself in the naming of the KwaMadlala group Polly Danger Boys. 'Polly' was the name of Nkosikhona's singing grandfather (Polly Phungula) who sang in King Express Brothers, hence the taking of his name by his grandson when he formed his group. Polly's son Moses Phungula sang with the Pietermaritzburg group, the Naughty Boys, the only *isicathamiya* group to survive in the city from the 1940s (Gunner 2008). Now both he and his father-in-law Mkhulu Hlela (Grandpa Hlela) advise (and in the case of the Mandela song, compose for) their singing offspring, Polly Danger Boys. This following in the steps of a singing father – either a blood father or a surrogate singing father – is one way of explaining how the genre in this particular local context has survived the violent last years of the old regime as well as the local civil war and marked out a place in the uncertain promise of the new era. There are genealogies of singers and

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[26] For a short account of the diverse origins of *isicathamiya* and in particular its early years in Pietermaritzburg see Gunner 2008.

groups, 'songlines' which may also be bloodlines. 'Polly Danger Boys come from Naughty Boys', singers remarked to me several times.

As their song (quoted at the beginning of this chapter) demonstrates, Naughty Boys used the resources of the genre, and of the Zulu cultural archive, to construct a discourse and a subjectivity that distanced war and violence in the search, through performance, for 'the citizen'. They may have played a crucial role in signaling and creating a new narrative of the present. Their songs have acted as a catalyst for the imagining of new ways of being a man and a citizen by other younger groups. In addition, though, the evidence from the groups I have discussed here suggests that the capacity to imagine a new place for oneself comes from a deep sense of change, and as a response to the new rights (*amalungelo*) that were ushered in after 1994. Yet, as the songs above demonstrate, the discipline and beauty held in the form of *isicathamiya* exists in a wider landscape of bleakness and despair. This stretches back to the old structural violence of apartheid, the bitter local civil war and encompasses the structural violence of poverty that marks the present of many singers. The national imaginary is fragile, infinitely negotiable. Contesting views circulate and compete through different kinds of media. Song is not a panacea; it exists as art within cultural formations and shapes the historical and national moment.

The practitioners of *isicathamiya* are part of the fragility of the modern citizen – caught in the violent and uncertain national and global present, where, as Agamben reminds us, meanings and power are always in a state of negotiation, where the citizen is a fragile cipher within an unpredictable state. Yet song as mediation can shape the consciousness of singer and observer. It has a stake in the shaping of relations between citizen and state, and in the configuring of 'national imaginaries' (Askew 2002). '*Abayaz' ingoma mabakhanyiselwa ngengoma*' ('For those who know the song, may it inspire them'), sang Polly Danger Boys, thus pleading for a link between singer, listener, citizen and stating, again, the power of the song.

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MAISHA BORA, KWA NANI? A COOL LIFE, FOR WHOM? MEDIATIONS OF MASCULINITY, ETHNICITY, AND VIOLENCE IN A NAIROBI SLUM

Naomi van Stapele

Introduction

Wanaich looks at me with an intense look in his eyes:

> They just took that man.... and cut him with a *panga* [machete in Kiswahili]. Then they come to me and ask for my I.D. It was like a checkpoint. They put *kuni* [firewood in Kiswahili] and stones on the road. There was no way you could pass them, and they want to know if you are PNU[1] so they look at your I.D. I was scared but I saw a guy I was in school with, you know at Depot Field. So this guy come to me and say I am from *Mtaa* [ghetto neighbourhood in Sheng][2] and that I can pass. I never went back and stayed low for weeks. What if that guy had not been there? Eeeeh, I don't want to think about that. [Interview 1]

The young men at the checkpoint would have interpreted Wanaich's name on his identity card, Samuel Wainaina, as an indication of his Kikuyu identity and, thus, of his support of the Party of National Unity (PNU). These young men supported Raila Odinga who was the Luo presidential candidate of the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) and the main opponent of Mwai Kibaki, the Kikuyu presidential candidate of PNU. For reasons explained below, the dominant discourse on citizenship in Kenya interpreted the political divide that led to violence in the days following the General Elections, held on 27 December 2007, as ethnic, pitting so-called Luo against so-called Kikuyu. The tensions broke out into open violence in several impoverished rural

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[1] PNU stands for Party of National Unity, the party from incumbent, and Kikuyu, President Kibaki during the 2007 General Elections in Kenya. Kibaki's main competitor was Raila Odinga, the Luo leader and presidential candidate of ODM, the Orange Democratic Movement.

[2] Sheng is a slang language that derived from many different languages such as Kiswahili, English and other languages spoken in Kenya. Sheng is mostly spoken in urban centres in Kenya and other cities in East Africa.

and urban localities,[3] as soon as President Kibaki was inaugurated during a hurried swearing-in ceremony on 30 December 2007. In Rift Valley and Coast Provinces, other ethnic groups such as the Kalenjin and the Kissi were also involved in the violence, but that did not alter the leading perception in Kenya that this was about 'Luo' and 'Kikuyu'.

In Mathare Valley, and in many other slum areas in Nairobi (De Smedt 2009), Mungiki gangs (which had a strong Kikuyu profile) and Taliban gangs (which had a strong Luo profile but are not related to the Taliban in Afghanistan) clashed in support of the opposing political parties. The 'Luo' men who took to the streets in Mathare Valley after the inaugural ceremony on 30 December 2007 shouted slogans accusing all Kikuyu of being Mungiki and PNU-supporters and, therefore, thieves. In their eyes, Kibaki had stolen the elections with the backing of the entire Kikuyu community. In the week that followed, many Kikuyu inhabitants were violently driven away, their houses occupied, their businesses and shops looted and burnt, and many women raped. Many young rioters spontaneously joined the Taliban gangs while groups of 'Kikuyu' men retaliated and were accompanied by Mungiki gangs from ghetto villages in the surrounding neighbourhood. The violence quickly spiralled out of control and, within days, Bondeni Village, the ghetto village in Mathare Valley at issue here, was turned into a ghost town of smouldering ruins. Later reports gave evidence of the organised nature of the violence that took place in these localities (Human Rights Watch 2008). Of interest here, however, is why so many poor young men from different ethnic groups became participants in the violence. Instead of viewing these men simply as 'young men for hire', I propose to take a closer look at their personal motivations and legitimisations that are, as I will show in this chapter, closely linked to processes of identity construction. In addition, I will show how dominant discourses on citizenship, fuelled by the political rhetoric of politicians that pitted ethnic groups against each other, acquired meaning in Bondeni Village in the run-up to, and during the 2007 General Elections, because of very specific local

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[3] All localities where violence erupted after the General Elections of 2007 (such as Eldoret, Mombasa or the Nairobi slums) were home to poor communities with limited resources. See http://www.peaceinkenya.net/EVRI-REPORT.doc (accessed on 15 November 2008), http://ushahidi.com (accessed on 5 November 2008) and Human Rights Watch 2008.

dynamics that were marked by intense gang rivalry between Mungiki and Taliban factions (Mueller 2008: 13).

Wanaich did not vote nor does he perceive himself primarily as a Kikuyu young man. He is an orphan who has few ties with family outside Nairobi and he calls the ghetto in Mathare Valley, a slum neighbourhood in Nairobi where he was born, his ancestral home[4] or *ocha* in Sheng. He is not the only person in the Mathare ghetto who primarily identifies with the locality in which he was born rather than with an ethnic label. The majority of the young men with whom I met and worked identified with many different ethnic labels. They spoke the local Sheng as their first and, generally, only language, and had little affinity with the vernaculars, the culture and the rural regions generally associated with their ethnic backgrounds. The question therefore arises, why, during the post-election violence, the men at the checkpoint positioned themselves as Luo, and why they brutally targeted neighbours they considered Kikuyu.

In this chapter I argue that ethnic differences by themselves do not explain the post-election violence. The application of the concept of ethnicity as an explanatory concept by itself glosses over the underlying dynamics of historical, political, social and economic factors that come together in a particular locality at a particular moment in time. In order to get at these underlying factors, I will analyse how some of the young men who were in one way or the other involved in the post-election violence – as perpetrators, victims, or both – constructed their identities. As will become clear below, I follow a concept of ethnic identity that is not essentialist but strategic and positional (Hall & Du Gay 1996: 2). Moreover, ethnic identity acquires meaning through intersection with other aspects of identity, such as gender, class, and age; analysis of these intersecting identities in relation to the aforementioned factors that came together in Mathare Valley at the time of election in 2007 can deepen our understanding of why these men constructed 'us' and 'them' in ethnic terms. The ethnic labels they adopted resonated with, and were influenced by, dominant constructions of how citizenship was inflected by ethnicity (and thus by national political constructs of Kikuyu- and Luo-ness). This helped make the

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[4] Home, for the young men I interviewed, can mean a variety of things. It can mean a rural area where parents live or were born, or, more generally, where members of the ethnic group live.

opposition between 'us' and 'them' seem natural and endowed it with certainty. Why this binary opposition became relevant among poor people in a specific locality and contributed to the post-election violence in that locality is the question I will pursue here.

The concept of violence is difficult to define because it has the property to encompass a multitude of actions, structural manifestations and societal realities and experiences (Bay 2006: 3). Western reporting often explains violence in Africa as irrational and primordial, especially in relation to so-called ethnic violence. In this chapter, I focus on a definition of violence that first of all regards violence not as an anomaly but as part and parcel of universal, and not just African, social processes. I separate here, for analytical purposes, a direct form from an indirect form of violence. With direct forms of violence I mean acts of violence that physically threaten and/or harm people's bodies and their livelihoods. Indirect violence includes the in- and exclusionary aspects of constructions of citizenship in post-colonial Kenya based on ethnicity that form the foundation of legitimating discourses of escalating and excessive acts of direct violence. In this chapter I generally refer to direct forms of violence but, when analysing the history of legitimating discourses in relation to acts of direct violence, I turn to the analytical concept of indirect violence. I have adopted from De Vries and Weber the insight that the violence at issue here is practised in the name of self-determination. When constructions of citizenship define an 'other', it is actually the 'self' that is determined; acts of violence legitimised by processes of 'othering' are therefore attempts to demarcate the boundaries that separate 'self' from 'other' (De Vries & Weber 1997: 1–2).

Violence as a social process involves perpetrators, victims, and witnesses and these are interlocking, fluid and overlapping identities with fuzzy boundaries (Stewart & Strathern 2002: 163). Individuals and groups construct and legitimise violence in fluid and context-bound subject-positions that shape and are shaped by episodes and acts of violence. In negotiating these positions, people construct dominant and subdominant discourses. The dominant discourses on citizenship in Kenya refer to the group of utterances, texts and practices (Mills 1997: 6) produced by the respective governments since independence in 1963 that allotted subject positions of 'citizens' and 'foreigners' to ethnic groups in Kenya. The term subdominant discourse refers to the way these utterances, texts and practices were negotiated by the people

it addressed.[5] This process of negotiation gives insight into the mediation of violence and a study of the latter shows how such mediations are part of the process of violence and can even beget violence. Mediation in this context is how the men I interviewed attempted to grasp the post-election violence, how they positioned themselves in relation to this violence and attempted to legitimise post-election violence and their positions. The stories the men told me during our interviews and, especially, the process of narration itself, constitute the practice of mediation being studied in this chapter (Meyer & Moors 2006: 7).

In this chapter I will take a closer look at the locality of Bondeni Village (Bondé in Sheng), a ghetto village in Mathare Valley, and explore how young men who committed, suffered or witnessed the post-election violence, mediated violence, reconstructed history, and positioned themselves as Kikuyu. I will do this by analysing and contextualising the interviews I conducted with them between July 2005 and August 2008. In what follows, I will present Mathare Valley in 2007 as the junction of different histories, namely those of the construction and manipulation of the construct of Kikuyu by the colonial government, the anti-colonial Kikuyu resistance movement called Mau Mau, and the post-independence administrations of Kenyatta (1964–1978) and Moi (1978–2002). I will also touch on the history of migration to Nairobi and Mathare Valley since colonial times, and the history of the social and economic relationships and competition between and among different groups of immigrants in Mathare Valley. I will conclude this chapter with an analysis of how the history of gang rivalries between Mungiki and Taliban factions in Mathare Valley contributed to heightened tensions and culminated into a full-blown gang war during the violence that followed the General Elections of 2007.

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[5] Discourses are always in dialogue and in conflict with other positions and, therefore, they are the site of constant disputes over meaning. With negotiation I mean how people who, in a particular context, are not part of powerful institutions relate to, respond to, and contest widely accepted and highly authoritative 'truths'. In this process, excluded discursive positions, which I term subdominant discourses, sometimes take the form of open resistance and contestation but, more often and less obviously, they develop as part of processes of (group) identity construction.

Resisting incrimination by remembering Mau Mau

The subdominant discourse *Kikuyuism* has been constructed by poor Kikuyu groups to respond to the negative depiction of the category 'Kikuyu' and the violence directed at various Kikuyu groups since the colonial era in three different stages. The history of *Kikuyuism* has three key shifts, namely the construction of *Kikuyuism* as a resistance ideology during the colonial era, the transformation of *Kikuyuism* into an ideology of subdued defiance against the Kenyatta government during the 1960s, and the emergence of *Kikuyuism* as an ideology of social change during the Moi era in the 1990s. *Kikuyuism* is a word popularly used in Kenya to refer to a version of ethnic politics advocating political, social and economic rights for the Kikuyu and other so-called 'related' ethnic groups (Berman 1996: 313–344; Wamue 2002: 27). It is also the term used by Kikuyu and non-Kikuyu people in Mathare Valley to refer to this subdominant discourse. Some Kikuyu groups might take offence at the application of *Kikuyuism* in this chapter because, since independence, the term has often been used by politicians from other ethnic groups to describe the alleged political ambition of the Kikuyu to 'colonise' Kenya (Mueller 2008: 7). As will become clear below, the colonial and, later, the Moi governments described the Kikuyu as a group of criminal barbarians and treacherous ethno-chauvinists. *Kikuyuism* emerged as a reaction to this and transformed the connotation of these accusations by emphasising the uniqueness and superiority of the Kikuyu. Instead of 'colonisers', *Kikuyuism* described the Kikuyu as 'freedom fighters' (Ochieng 2001).

The first key shift in the history of this subdominant discourse occurred during the colonial era when *Kikuyuism* became the ideology of resistance of the Kenya Land and Freedom Army[6] that came to be known as Mau Mau (Elkins 2005: 380). In general, the colonial administration in Kenya considered members of indigenous groups in Kenya to be subjects not citizens. It categorised the members of indigenous groups as tribal Africans and classified them as specific tribes that were confined to certain territories. Disparate and fluid ethnic groups were lumped together within the artificial borders of

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[6] The scope of this chapter does not allow me to go into the historical connection between the debate about female circumcision in Kikuyu culture, the emergence of *Karing'a* churches and schools, and the development of *Kikuyuism* during the 1920s and the 1930s. See for this Anderson (2006) and Berman and Lonsdale (1992).

the colonial state and in Native Reserves. This sparked the emergence of specific, and in some cases entirely new, ethnic identity constructs and these entities became the main vehicles for gaining access to state resources (Mamdani 2002: 29). The colonial administration encouraged competition and division between these political entities to avoid unified opposition. The group emerging in this period as 'the' Kikuyu was already the largest ethnic group in Kenya during the colonial era and makes up 21 percent of the population of Kenya today (Throup & Hornsby 1998: Figure 1.1). The Kikuyu inhabited the area of Central Province nearest to what became the colonial capital city Nairobi (Kanogo 1987: 8–9). Thus Kikuyu people were the first to interact intensively with the colonisers and some were offered limited education to serve the colonial administration. At the same time, the latter started to demonise the Kikuyu to ensure that this privilege was not used to organise a united front against the colonial government (Anderson 2005a: 279–288).

The growing resistance among the Kikuyu during the 1940s derived from the destitute situation of many of the former wage-labourers and sharecroppers (commonly known as squatters) who had been evicted from the 'white' settlers' farms (Maloba 1993: 28). From 1937, and especially after World War II, the government had decided to repatriate 'undesirable' Kikuyu wage labourers, made redundant by mechanization and technological developments, from the 'white' settler farms back to the Native Reserves (Interview 2). Many repatriates had nowhere to go, because the reserves in the Central Province were overpopulated (Elkins 2005: 23). The repatriates became illegal squatters in the rural area of Rift Valley Province and in the sprawling slums surrounding Nairobi. These rural and urban illegal squatter communities were poverty-stricken and desperate, and they organised demonstrations, strikes and other acts of defiance to vent their frustrations (Elkins 2005; Berman & Lonsdale 1992; Odhiambo & Lonsdale 2003). The colonial government responded to the growing unrest by declaring a State of Emergency and by using excessive force (Maloba 1993: 28) which only fuelled the resistance further. It was not until 1953 that groups of fighters organised themselves sufficiently from their bases in the forest to resist the colonial security forces (Kershaw 1995: 44; Berman & Lonsdale: 253). Moreover, recent scholarship suggests that the resistance movement grew as a result of the brutal conditions Kikuyu people faced during the State of Emergency and not just as a result of the grievances that had led to the initial protests of the late 1940s

(Rosberg & Nottingham 1966: 277–319). In other words, the colonial government's violent repression of popular unrest during the State of Emergency was crucial to the outbreak of the Mau Mau insurgence.

Alongside its military campaign, the colonial government launched a smear campaign that typified all the Kikuyu people as Mau Mau and as barbarians, cannibals and ethno-chauvinists. In addition, between 1952 and 1956, the government detained large sections of the Kikuyu population in order to defeat the support base of the forest freedom fighters (Elkins 2005: 308; Anderson 2005a: 90; Ogot 2003: 10). Upon release during the late 1950s, many Kikuyu ex-detainees could not return to the Native Reserves, because these areas were overpopulated, and had no choice but to join the illegal Kikuyu squatter communities in either the rural or the urban areas. These expanding squatter communities in Rift Valley Province were perceived by pastoralist communities as 'foreigners' and this led to violent conflicts between vigilante groups from both communities. The Kikuyu vigilante groups that sprung up during the early 1960s in the Rift Valley Province called themselves the Kenya Land Freedom Armies, in memory of the original name of the Mau Mau movement, and they re-invigorated *Kikuyuism* as their ideology (Bay 2006: 14). These vigilante groups among the Kikuyu squatter communities of the 1960s heralded the emergence in the late 1980s of the Mungiki movement, about which more below. The rural Kikuyu squatter communities set their hopes on the first president of Kenya after independence, a Kikuyu man called Jomo Kenyatta ('the light of Kenya', in Kiswahili). It was the belief of many Kikuyu people that Kenyatta would assist them to get back the land that, in their eyes, had been taken from them by 'white' colonial settlers and their Kikuyu collaborators. Their hopes were dashed when Kenyatta established a dictatorial government that created and favoured an elite group of individuals from different ethnic backgrounds who were loyal to him and to whom he distributed most of the former 'white' settler farms. Only 20 percent of the land left by 'white' settlers was divided up and sold to co-operatives of Kikuyu squatters in Rift Valley Province. The rest was distributed to the new political and economic Kenyan elite, among which were many Kikuyu who had collaborated with the colonial government (Holmquist 1994: 76).

In addition, the Kenyatta administration further consolidated its power by undermining powerful Luo political leaders using imprisonment, smear campaigns and even assassination (Throup & Hornsby 1998: 29). The Kenyatta administration categorised Luo men as 'lesser

males' and thus as 'second rank citizens', because the Luo did not cir-
cumcise (*Kihii* in the Kikuyu language means uncircumcised and it is
a common nickname for Luo men), and therefore, in this perception,
Luo men never transcended the stage of boyhood (Ogot 2003: 33).
With this rhetoric the Kenyatta government legitimised the political
marginalisation of Luo opposition leaders. The wealthy and urban
Kikuyu man, in whose identity specific gender, class, and ethnic attri-
butes converged, came to embody the dominant notion of Kenyan
citizenship. The 'other' in this construction of citizenship came to be
epitomised by the image of the 'rural Luo boy'. In response, the Luo
elite who were alienated from the centre of power perceived the dic-
tatorial tendencies of the Kenyatta government as solid proof of the
'colonising' nature of the Kikuyu people and thus revived the colonial
negative image of the Mau Mau movement.[7]

Kenyatta's ethnocentric and elitist approach galvanised not only
further tensions between the Kikuyu and other ethnic groups in Kenya
but also among different Kikuyu groups. Behind Kenyatta's façade of
democratic nationalism, the Kikuyu elite, mainly consisting of former
Kikuyu collaborators with the colonial government, were unscrupu-
lously favoured by the Kenyatta government. While *Kikuyuisation* is
a term most commonly used to refer to that aspect of the process of
nation building during the Kenyatta era that was characterised by eth-
nic and class favouritism (Smith 1991: 111), I also use this term to refer
to how the Kenyatta government's discourse on citizenship legitimised
the process of *Kikuyuisation*. The dominant discourse of *Kikuyuisation*
stood in stark contrast to the subdominant discourse of *Kikuyuism*.
Even though both centred on a notion of superiority of the Kikuyu
group, especially in relationship to the Luo, they differed in almost
everything else. First of all, the former was constructed by the powerful
Kikuyu elite, while the latter was constructed by marginalised sections
of the Kikuyu community. Secondly, the notion of superiority at the
core of *Kikuyuism* was constructed in reference to how the Mau Mau
movement had responded to the stigmatisation of the Kikuyu label by
the colonial administration, while *Kikuyuisation* articulated Kikuyu

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[7] Due to the limited scope of this chapter I focus only briefly on the Luo opposition
leaders in relation to the Kenyatta government and do not analyse the positions of
other, such as Kalenjin and Maasai, opposition leaders who also played an important
role in the political arena of that time.

superiority in terms of the concentration of resources in the hands of a small political elite.

The main discursive bone of contention between the Kikuyu elite and poor Kikuyu groups, however, was the memory of the Mau Mau movement. The government's discourse on citizenship, *Kikuyuisation,* and the subdominant discourse *Kikuyuism* differed in the way they remembered Mau Mau. The Kenyatta administration systematically ignored the historical existence of Mau Mau, therefore avoiding the moral obligation to return the land that had been taken away from Mau Mau fighters and those who had been detained during the State of Emergency. In doing so, the Kenyatta administration ignored the plight of the Kikuyu poor who had often been affiliated with Mau Mau and wanted public acknowledgement and material restitution for former Mau Mau freedom fighters (Ogot 2003: 34). Therefore, the idolisation and mythologisation of the Mau Mau movement became a central feature of *Kikuyuism* during the Kenyatta era. This constitutes the second key-shift in how urban and rural Kikuyu squatters constructed *Kikuyuism,* for now *Kikuyuism* became more centred on notions of purity and moral superiority in contrast to the alleged perverted and morally corrupted version of Kikuyu identity of the elite. It became an ideology of subdued defiance. *Kikuyuism* thus became a way of resisting marginalisation by a president poor Kikuyu squatters had perceived as 'their own'. In this period, *Kikuyuism* gave birth to a number of social, religious and even political organisations that glorified Mau Mau and these organisations spread rapidly throughout the illegal rural and urban Kikuyu squatter communities (Anderson 2002: 531).

The third key shift in *Kikuyuism* was prompted by the radically different, even opposite, construction of 'the' Kikuyu in the dominant discourse on citizenship during the Moi era (1978–2002), which I, following Ngunyi, here call *Neo-Majimboism* (Ngunyi 1996). The term *Majimboism* refers to a political system of ethnic federalism that was developed by Moi and other ethnic minority opposition leaders from the Kenya African Democratic Union (KADU) during the last years of the colonial era (Haugerud 1995: 213, Ochieng 2001). In the context of *Majimboism*, each ethnic group is entitled to ownership of its 'traditional' land and the resources associated with it (Anderson 2005b: 563). When Kenyatta and the Kenya African National Union (KANU) won the 1964 general elections, Moi and his cohorts left KADU and joined the government. With this move KADU ceased to exist and

Majimboism as a prominent political ideology disappeared from the political arena until it was revived again by Moi when he took power in 1978.

The smear campaign by the Moi government against 'the' Kikuyu during the 1990s was legitimised by a new form of *Majimboism* that was centred on strong anti-Kikuyu sentiments (Wamwere 2003; Hauguerud 1995: 34). *Neo-Majimboism* was never meant to be implemented but it legitimised harsh political measures to undermine the powerful Kikuyu elite (such as the expulsion of Kikuyu individuals from high-ranking positions). The Moi government also used this discourse to discredit the opposition of Kikuyu intellectuals who objected to the dictatorial tendencies of the Moi government (Wanaina 2004; Wamwere 2003). Moreover, it set in motion a propaganda machine that culminated during the 1990s in the violent eviction of many Kikuyu people from the Rift Valley regions (Githongo 2002). Here we can observe a continuity of history because the Moi government's discourse on citizenship drew on the widespread suspicion inherited from the colonial era. In response to this violence perpetrated by the government against 'the' Kikuyu, *Kikuyuism* now became an ideology of open rebellion against the government. It was in this context that the Mungiki movement emerged among the poor, illegal Kikuyu squatter communities of Rift Valley Province from the late 1980s onwards. In the course of the 1990s, the Mungiki movement took control of many of Nairobi's slum neighbourhoods, where local Mungiki gangs established protection rackets. One of these slum neighbourhoods was Bondé in Mathare Valley and it is to this village I will return now. As will become clear below, the history of *Kikuyuism* in Bondé helped the Mungiki movement to gain control of the area and this, to a large part, shaped the tensions that led to the post-election violence.

My mtiach ('my ghetto' in Sheng), motherhood and neighbourhood

During the time of my research,[8] Bondé increasingly came to be perceived by its inhabitants as a Kikuyu village, in contrast to an adjacent community called Area 4B, which was increasingly considered a Luo village. Economic and social tensions between these two

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[8] I have conducted research in the slum village of Bondé in Mathare Valley for an average period of three months annually since 1998.

neighbourhoods led to violence that followed the 2007 general elec-
tions. In this section I will explain why, despite the ethnically mixed
make-up of both neighbourhoods, Bondé was increasingly perceived
as Kikuyu and Area 4B as Luo and why tensions between these two
competing neighbourhoods led to the post-election violence. One of
my research participants, Buda, described Bondé as follows: "We are
from Bondé. This side. Our community is Kikuyu because we are
Kikuyu. Across the two bridges is Luo territory and this is Kikuyu"
(Interview 7).

Mathare Valley is one of the largest slums on the outskirts of Nai-
robi with approximately half a million inhabitants. The main industry
in Mathare Valley consists of brewing and selling *chang'aa*, an illegally
brewed alcohol. Bondé is quite a small neighbourhood in Mathare
Valley, but it is the epicentre of the very lucrative *chang'aa* business.
Bondé stretches out for roughly a kilometre alongside Juja road, the
main road, and has approximately 45,000 inhabitants. From Juja road,
it is possible to reach the river marking the border of Bondé in a five-
minute descent into the valley; yet I have met people in this slum
village who had not seen Juja road for more than a year. They were
down at the river day-in and day-out brewing, selling and/or drinking
chang'aa.

One of my research participants, Kingi, was a young Kikuyu father
of two and the grandson of one of the first women to migrate to
Bondé during the colonial era. His grandmother, Çuçu (grandmother
in the Kikuyu language) Kingi, had been evicted from a 'white' settler
plantation during the late 1940s and had been forced to migrate to
the urban area in search of employment. The rest of her family had
later moved back to the Native Reserves in Kiambu but there was not
enough land available to sustain the whole family. As a young and
unmarried Kikuyu woman, Çuçu Kingi stayed in town, became the
breadwinner of her immediate family and made money by brewing
chang'aa for the soldiers based near Bondé. The majority of women
who lived in Bondé during the colonial era belonged to the Kikuyu
group (White 1990: 206) and most of these women shared the same
history and cultural background as Çuçu Kingi. Some of these women
had, in one way or the other, been affiliated with the Mau Mau move-
ment during the 1950s and, after independence, they had found solace
in remembering and sharing their rural cultural ways. *Kikuyuism*, with
its strong and quiet reference to the Mau Mau movement, formed a
basis for social interaction among these women who faced a new and

unfamiliar situation in the urban slums (Interview 3). Many of them had been detained or had lost husbands and other relatives during the State of Emergency. Rarely did these often highly traumatised women talk about the atrocities they had experienced, but many derived a sense of superiority by remembering the Mau Mau struggle in silence. By constructing this sense of superiority, they were able to cope with the imposed subject positions that characterised them as prostitutes, barbarians, criminals, and Kikuyu ethnic chauvinists (Nelson 1987: 4). Çuçu Kingi stated:

> Many of us came from Kiambu, some from Nyeri, but mostly Kiambu and we shared a culture. We all spoke Kikuyu. Not like today…now our youth don't even know Kikuyu and that is bad. This side, our side became strong together and we all know each other. Later Luo came on the other side of the river…but much later and at different times. They are not strong together. We were here first and we are like people from God, we love God…our Christian God and we follow our culture. Mathare Valley is not our *gishage* [ancestral land in the rural area in the Kikuyu language] because this is not where we were to live from our God. [Interview 4]

Çuçu Kingi remembered Bondé in its early days as a cohesive community of (Kikuyu) people who spoke the same language and who shared a similar culture. She contrasted this past with the present situation of Area 4B, which she perceived as fragmented and 'Luo'. She articulated the difference between the older settlement of Bondé and the newer one of Area 4B in terms of the difference between Kikuyu and Luo. She related that the Kikuyu in Bondé "were here first" and "are like people from God"; this is how she worded her claim to land in Bondé and her claim to a status of superiority for being Kikuyu. Women in Bondé had used the land that later came to be known as Area 4B as vegetable gardens until the 1970s, when gradually new people took up residence there as illegal squatters. In the ways the former constructed these latter as (exclusively) Luo, we can see that the binary constructed in *Kikuyuisation* (the dichotomy between the urban Kikuyu male citizen and the rural Luo boy) informed and intersected with how these women, in the context of tensions in their immediate environment, interpreted and articulated notions of entitlement. It shows us that *Kikuyuism* in Mathare Valley, embraced by people who had not benefited one iota from the process of *Kikuyuisation*, intersected with the anti-Luo political discourse of the Kenyatta government. Many (but not all) of the new migrants who settled in Area 4B were indeed Luo,

but the reason why women in Bondé constructed Area 4B as Luo, must also be sought in the language and discourse available to them during the 1970s. The anti-Luo hate narrative that is central to *Kikuyuisation* acquired meaning in Mathare as women in Bondé appropriated this narrative in order to comprehend the growing tensions between Bondé and Area 4B.

Thus the arrival of new immigrants triggered in Bondé a further consolidation of a neighbourhood identity based on a form of *Kikuyuism* that centred on strong anti-Luo sentiments. The Kikuyu inhabitants of Bondé used the memory of Mau Mau to legitimise their current claims to urban land. They had fought for 'land and freedom' and therefore had more rights to occupy land in Mathare than other Kenyans. The historical coincidence of the earlier urban arrival of many Kikuyu women later led to an economic divide between Kikuyu and other inhabitants of Mathare Valley. During the colonial era, the male population of Bondé had been ethnically mixed, while the female population had been predominantly Kikuyu (White 1990: 94). The majority of Kikuyu women who migrated to the slums during the 1950s and 1960s could not return to the rural area in the way that men could. Men customarily inherited land and women could only return to the rural area as someone's wife. Most men, however, preferred to marry a woman from the rural area because of the stigma of prostitution widely associated with women in the urban areas (White 1990; Nelson 1987).

The Kikuyu women who stayed in Bondé had been able to accrue some capital from brewing *chang'aa* in the decades prior to the arrival of the new immigrants in Area 4B. These women engaged in relationships with men from different ethnic groups but they had remained heads of the household. Bondé gradually became a matrifocal community with a social culture that was largely based on *Kikuyuism*. During the 1970s and 1980s the sons of many of these women began to buy land, build stone houses and set up *chang'aa* businesses in Bondé. This head start in accruing and investing capital led to an economic divide between older settlers, mostly descendants from the first female Kikuyu settlers, and the newer settlers, among whom many were (and all were constructed as) Luo. This economic divide led to a particular division of labour in Mathare. Many young Luo men from Area 4B, together with many other young men (with Kikuyu or other ethnic backgrounds), became brewers in Bondé. However, the process of brewing and selling in this location was predominantly controlled by

wealthier Kikuyu people, who also constituted the majority of land-lords in Bondé. This led to the dominant perception in Bondé that the 'rich' people were Kikuyu and the 'poor' Luo. Considering the fact that all of them lived in a ghetto village, these were relative notions, but the construction of a class divide in ethnic terms fuelled the political tensions that marked the post-election violence of 2007.

In the early hours of 27 December 2007, the day of the General Elections, many people from Bondé queued at the local primary school that was being used as a polling station for the day. The day had been eagerly anticipated by Kingi who had a *hotelli* (a small restaurant by the roadside in Sheng) and a business of selling chickens. In the weeks before the elections, a few men had visited his *hotelli* to warn him that the *hotelli* would be theirs after Election Day. They had told him that they had a right to his property because ODM (the Orange Democratic Movement) would win and "the time for the Kikuyu to have every-thing while the rest suffered deprivation would be over with a Luo man [Raila] as president" (Interview 5). Election Day passed without a presidential winner. The first skirmishes occurred on the following day, when groups of young men started to vent their frustration over the delay in announcing the winner. On that day Kingi lost everything. Within hours Bondé was plunged into chaos: businesses were looted, houses were set on fire, and the only people walking the streets were young men wielding crude weapons. Most people from Bondé escaped to the main road, where they set up camp for the night. As will become clearer below, this was not the first time they had had to flee their homes to escape the havoc caused by gangs of young men, but it was to become the worst upheaval ever.

Kingi told me that, in his view, most of the perpetrators of the post-election violence were the young Luo brewers from Area 4B.

> I can't believe what is happening in my village. I never expected them to fight us like this. I think it's because they are jealous because we own houses and the businesses and they work for us. They [the young Luo men from a brewing baze, a hang-out in Sheng, in Area 4B] came before election and told me that my *hotelli* will belong to them after election time. They looted my *hotelli* but did not burn it. [Interview 5]

Kingi attempted to explain the violence by evoking the dichotomy of 'us' against 'them' that intersects with the antagonism between the Kikuyu and the Luo label prevalent in both *Kikuyuism* and *Kikuyuisa-tion.* Kingi explained the episode of violence as an outburst of frustra-tion and jealousy and, at the same time, acknowledged the economic

gap between 'us' and 'them'. A young man from Area 4B and child-
hood friend of Kingi called Tyson legitimised the violence as follows:

> 411…[a slogan used by ODM supporters to separate the Kikuyu label
> from the other ethnic labels and portray the Kikuyu as 'enemies of the
> state'] It is us, 41, against 1. They are thieves and they have oppressed us
> too long. They had Kenyatta, and Kibaki…you see what happened! All
> the land, good land is theirs. [Interview 9]

By constructing notions of 'us' and 'them' that mirrored Kingi's con-
struction of 'us' and 'them', Tyson legitimised the violence as a tool
to free the alleged oppressed 'forty-one tribes' from the yoke placed
upon them by 'one tribe', whom he described as 'thieves'. Interest-
ingly, Tyson and Kingi grew up together. For a long time, Tyson and
Kingi had been friends and they had worked together as alcohol brew-
ers until Kingi had married. On Friday nights they still came together
to hang out at the *baze* where they used to brew *chang'aa* together. It
was a shock to Kingi that Tyson was among the men who looted his
hotelli.

   A few days after Kingi had lost his businesses, I met him in the
city centre. He was in a great panic because he could not evacuate his
grandmother. Kingi's grandmother refused to leave Bondé and told
me in a later interview why.

> I live here. I am old. I have no *gishage* [ancestral land in the rural area
> in the Kikuyu language] to go to. What can these boys do to me? I have
> seen everything and I don't fear. I stayed with my goats, I can't leave my
> goats! They did not touch me. They know I was here first. [Interview 6]

Çuçu Kingi regarded the men who perpetrated the violence as 'Luo
boys' and this draws on the way Luo men were considered primitive
Kihii, uncircumcised and therefore lesser men, both in the context of
Kikuyuisation and that of the form of *Kikuyuism* prevalent in Bondé.
In a similar way to the process of 'othering' central to *Kikuyization*
during the 1960s, the notion of primitive *Kihii* became the epitome of
the 'other' in *Kikuyuism* in Bondé.

   This process of 'othering' became exceptionally poignant during the
early 1990s when the influx of (mainly Luo and male) migrants in
to Area 4B stopped the Bondé women from using the 'other side' as
vegetable gardens altogether. The disdain many older Kikuyu women
expressed towards Luo men derived from their observation of these
earlier tensions between themselves and the new settlers in Area 4B
and thus shaped the construction of their own Kikiuyu identity. In

their eyes Kikuyu culture was modern and Christian. This is illustrated by how Çuçu Kingi, in the previous quote, separates the Kikuyu people who are to her "like people from God" from the 'backward Luo'. In both Tyson's and Çuçu's perception, the Kikuyu label is different from other ethnic labels in Kenya. Kingi explained to me that, during his childhood, his friendship with men like Tyson had been constantly scrutinised by his mother and grandmother and they had made it clear to him that they would never accept a Luo woman as a daughter-in-law. The economic divide between Kikuyu business owners and Luo brewers, as Kingi put it, was for his grandmother proof of the superiority and modernity of Kikuyu culture. Many young men in Bondé grew up with mothers and grandmothers who spoke the Kikuyu language as their first language and who held on to a form of *Kikuyuism* that vividly remembered Mau Mau, and contrasted itself to Luo culture. At the same time, these young men had fathers from many different ethnic groups and grew up with friends of diverse ethnic backgrounds, most of whom spoke Sheng as their first language. This brings us to the question of why many of these men, men who had been friends all their lives, suddenly found themselves at opposite ends of the conflict during the post-election violence.

'Boys II Men', the role of gender and age

When he wanted to move his grandmother from Bondé during the post-election violence, Kingi told me the following:

> I can't get my Çuçu to move…they rape all women…you know why? They are not married and they are jealous of what we have…now they take what we have enjoyed all these times. [Interview 5]

In the previous section Kingi interpreted the violence in terms of the perpetrators' jealousy of the relative economic wealth some Kikuyu people enjoyed in the locality of Bondé. Here, Kingi gave a new connotation to the word 'to have' or 'own'. It's not just the material means these men envied, in Kingi's eyes, but the fact that these material means enabled Kikuyu men to get married and 'have' a wife. Marriage in Kenyan culture defines manhood but marriage is a costly affair and this forces many poor men to remain unmarried and having to cope with the social stigma generally attached to an unmarried status. All the young men with whom I met and worked in Bondé negotiated what I call here the imposed subject position of 'ghetto boy'. The

prevalent image in Kenya of people living in the slums is a stereotype typified by words such as backward, dangerous and primitive. In this dominant discourse on poverty, the picture of 'young men for hire' is especially highlighted. It constructs young men from the slums as foot soldiers for criminals or opportunistic political leaders. The 'ghetto boy' is never a man but always a 'boy' who never leads but is always led by other more powerful and knowledgeable men. Fighting this imposed subject position, the men who participated in my research developed different subject positions, as the story of Buda illustrates.

Buda was 29 years old. His mother belonged to the Kikuyu and his father to the Luo group. He spoke both Dholuo and Kikuyu fluently, but his first language was Sheng. Depending on what was most comfortable, Buda fore-grounded a different ethnic identity and spoke a different language in different contexts. However, he told me that he was most comfortable when he talked Sheng and felt most at ease when he was down at the *baze* with other young men from Bondé. Buda spoke to me about a major incident that had happened to him three years earlier. His girlfriend had had a baby and they had settled together in his house. After a few weeks the girl ran away to live with another man and it became clear that the baby was not Buda's, even though he had paid for the hospital and all the necessary items.

> My friends say *jazaa numba* ['join us', in Sheng] when I am drunk, you know, to join the gang so the number is strong. I can even do that when I am drunk, I really have to stop drinking. At night I don't sleep because of my lady so I drink to forget. When I drink I get *boostah*! [to get energy or courage in Buda's way of talking] ... I feel like *kude?…kudedi*! try or die, it is *conc* [strong in Sheng] and I forget. [Interview 7]

'*Kude?… kudedi*!' is a Sheng phrase that means 'try or die' in the context it is mostly used. It reflects the reality of slum life; when you do nothing, you have nothing and you will die! Many young men I met had no hope and were entirely focussed on day-to-day survival. '*Kude?… kudedi*!' expresses fear of both physical and social death. These men were expected to provide for their families, protect the honour of their women, and follow the rules of their cultures, but many of them lacked the means to do so.

One day I met a young Luo man called Sam, a good friend of Buda, who found himself trapped by responsibilities which he could not fulfil.

> I can't sleep, Naomi, I am a waking dead, I drink and my head is scared. My brother is in mortuary and I need to bring him home but I don't have the money. I have to bring him home otherwise I can't build a house and be buried at home. I have a wife and kid and I am not doing good. [Interview 8]

Sam earned between 200 and 300 Kenyan shillings a day brewing alcohol, whereas taking his brother home to Kisumu would cost around 30.000 Kenyan shillings. These calculations are exclusive of the funds needed for a proper burial, for which Sam was primarily responsible as well. He explained that he would be ostracised by his family in the rural area near Kisumu if he could not live up to these responsibilities. The implications of this were unbearable, because it ultimately meant that, in addition to his brother becoming a restless soul for not being buried in ancestral lands, he feared he would become one too. Moreover, his social status would deteriorate because he would then have failed to provide his family with the one thing all families in Bondé strive for, a rural home to which to retire and in which eventually to be buried. Many young men such as Buda, Kingi and Sam grew up in Bondé without a father but nevertheless harboured ideas of manhood that defined men as heads of households and main providers for, and protectors of women and children. Both Kingi and Sam cared for a grandmother, a mother, several sisters, a wife, and children. These men carried multiple burdens on a salary of not more than two Euros a day. The fear of social and physical death always loomed over them and, for that reason, some men avoided marriage altogether and continued to be 'ghetto boys'. Buda was highly vexed about his girlfriend, but he explained to me that his frustration was not related to discovering that the baby was not his or that she had cheated on him. He was afraid, he told me, of how the community would react to it. He was petrified of becoming the subject of village gossip because that would severely impact his status as a man.

When we were discussing this, another friend of Buda, Motion, entered the room and gave us a piece of his mind:

> I am a bachelor and 29, ha ha, I am free and can eat where I want. You know, I have a kid, but I can't marry because I have no job. I want to marry but how can I marry? I have no money and women want you to take care of them. They cheat most guys into marriage, they become pregnant and then they have to marry this girl. It is not even your child! Ha Ha. I think 80 percent of the guys in ghetto married because they

were cheated, and the rest don't have the money to marry, like me. [Interview 10]

Motion, like Buda, had a Kikuyu mother and a Luo father. He worked as a conductor at a *matatu* (public transport mini bus in Kiswahili). On the days he was not selected by the owner of the *matatu* to work, he did odd jobs for a *chang'aa* bar. Like most unmarried men, he ate at *hotelli's* and slept in a small corrugated iron sheet room near the river. Motion related that he did not have a steady job and therefore could not get married. Some men like Motion chose to avoid the pressure of being a man by deliberately prolonging the phase of boyhood. These men did not differ from Sam or Kingi in terms of jobs, earnings or even in having children or not. However, they clearly differed in lifestyle. The men who chose to prolong the phase of boyhood by staying unmarried identified themselves with the subject position of a 'ghetto boy' and they claimed pride in amplifying its rebel attitude. Most 'ghetto boys' past the age of 22 dressed according to the latest style, spoke the 'real' Sheng like many teenagers, and hung around with younger men. Many of these men wanted to have a married life and even felt that they should get married, but they were afraid of not being able to live up to the responsibilities associated with it. 'Men who chose to remain boys' or 'ghetto boys' became a new social category in Bondé during the late 1990s and it enabled these men to legitimise their bachelor status and yet have a fairly respectable position in the community. They acquired respect from the community because groups of these 'ghetto boys' organised themselves and assisted the community elders in establishing security. As such, they were the predecessors of the Mungiki and Taliban gangs who would succeed these 'ghetto boys' as vigilantes and guarantors of security in the early 2000s.

Erick, a Kikuyu man and a friend of Kingi, was 38 years old and still identified himself as a 'ghetto boy' and, although he lived with a woman and had children with her, he called himself unmarried. Erick regarded himself as unmarried because he had never gone to the family of his 'lady', as he called his girlfriend, and presented himself as her husband and father of her children. Such a visit would set in motion a complicated procedure of reciprocal visits between both families, which would result in paying dowry for his wife and for a formal wedding ceremony.

When I go home with my wife her parents take me as an outsider because I never paid the dowry and never went there to visit with my

men. I don't like going there because I am nothing to them. At Christmas time I go to my home and she takes the kids to her home, you know, she is also not part of my family so she has to go home during the holidays…I think all the money for the dowry and the wedding is not good, you know for us in ghetto we need that money for business…I have no *shamba* [a piece of land in the rural area in Kiswahili] and have nothing to save money, that kind of money so we don't get married. [Interview 11]

It is interesting that, in this quote, he referred to his 'lady' as his wife and that, in their everyday life, they seemed very much married. They had, what is termed in Kenya, a 'come to stay' marriage. Most marriages in Bondé are 'come to stay' marriages, because no one can afford to pay the dowry. There was, however, a difference between Erick and Kingi, because Erick did not regard himself as married, while Kingi regarded himself, and was regarded by his wife's family, as her husband and the father of her children, even though he too had never paid the dowry. Kingi had, however, vowed to pay the dowry eventually. Erick never even went to his 'lady's' home to claim fatherhood of the children and therefore was not formally acknowledged by the mother's family. This was a crucial difference, because Erick's lady and her family could not turn to Erick for financial assistance, while Kingi was the main provider for both his wife's and his own family. Erick's only responsibility was to his own family and, therefore, he was perceived and thought of himself as a bachelor.

I first interviewed Erick in 2001, when he talked to me about his frustrations at not being married while he was already in his thirties. He brewed and drank *chang'aa* and slept down at the river in a house he shared with many other *chang'aa* brewers. During the late 1990s, at the same time that more and more men chose to remain 'ghetto boys', some young boys formed a gang in Bondé and, through their criminal activities, were able to marry girls and have a life that normally was associated with men in their mid-thirties. The men with whom I worked described these boys as 'the boys who became men overnight'. These young boys, or young 'thugs' as they are generally called, sparked jealousy among older men who were unmarried, had no steady job and had less opportunity to take care of a 'lady'. As Erick put it:

There are many young men in ghetto; boys who are thugs but they have a house and they are married. They paid dowry and have everything, some of them are 17 but they are men. Like, these guys have just been

circumcised and now they got all that wealth and a wife and they are
married men. When you see that you want that but I am afraid of going
to a house and rob, you can get shot, police have no mercy and…so I
can do drugs but these guys control that. They can kill you if you try to
come in. It's like they are the men and we are the boys. They are the new
elders in the village ha ha ha 'Boys II Men' [a famous R&B group from
the USA]. It's about money not about age. [Interview 12]

Most unmarried and unemployed men I spoke with over the years
were jealous of these young boys 'living the life'. This suggests that
the rebel attitude central to the social category of a 'ghetto boy' was
constructed out of necessity and not out of choice. The lives of Erick,
Buda and Motion changed dramatically when the Mungiki movement
entered Bondé. Erick in particular found economic and social security
in his affiliation with the movement. It made him feel like a man with
power, and gave him a sense of pride and belonging. Instead of mak-
ing fun of him, the young 'thugs', began to fear him. He began to wear
his hair as dreadlocks and started to learn to speak Kikuyu exactly as
it was spoken by the Mungiki gangs in Bondé.

The rise and fall of the Mungiki gang in Mathare Valley

The Mungiki movement took control of several ghetto villages in
Mathare Valley during the late 1990s. The local Mungiki gangs (or cells
as the Mungiki movement terms them) established protection rackets
and, in response, 'ghetto boys' and young 'thugs' from Luo-dominated
ghetto villages began to organise themselves as local 'Taliban' gangs.
The scope of this chapter does not allow me to go into the outside
political support these groups may have had or into the relationship
between former vigilante groups of 'ghetto boys', local gangs of young
'thugs' and the Mungiki and Taliban gangs established later (Ander-
son 2002). Here it must suffice to say that many 'ghetto boys' joined
the Mungiki gangs, while the Taliban gangs attracted both 'ghetto
boys' and young 'thugs' and that both gangs received outside political
support.

The reason why not many young 'thugs' joined local Mungiki gangs
is because their rules of conduct were too strict, which required too
radical a break with the life they enjoyed as 'thugs'. The arrival of
Mungiki gangs in Mathare Valley prompted the proliferation of Tali-
ban gangs and, from the early 2000s onwards, these rival groups fre-

quently fought turf-wars with each other. In this chapter I focus more on the Mungiki movement and the young men who, at some point, strategically identified with it, because Bondé was its stronghold. In this section I will first focus on the emergence of the Mungiki movement and the establishment of local Mungiki gangs in Bondé and then analyse the rivalry between the Mungiki and the Taliban gangs that reached its zenith during the post-election violence.

The Mungiki movement was allegedly founded during the late 1980s to protect the Kikuyu squatter community during the clashes surrounding the 1992 elections in Rift Valley Province instigated by the Moi government (Wamue 2002: 39, 25) to oust Kikuyu inhabitants from KANU strongholds. The Mungiki movement was primarily inspired by *Kikuyuism* and believed that Christianity perpetuated 'neo-colonialism'. *Kikuyuism* became more focussed on social change as a result of the clashes instigated by the Moi government and at the same time these clashes brought about an influx of Kikuyu refugees to areas such as Bondé, whose presence transformed the local construction of *Kikuyuism* in Bondé. If *Kikuyuism* had already entailed criticism of the Moi government, now its mood turned to rebellion, with the memory of Mau Mau overtly expressed. It is this transformation within *Kikuyuism* that facilitated the emergence of the Mungiki movement, which called itself the 'sons of Mau Mau'. Ndura Waruinge, the movement's leader during the late 1990s, stated that the Mau Mau movement "had come back to Kenya" because independence had not yet been achieved (Wamue 2001: 456).

The Mungiki movement took its protest against the Kenyan government and Western institutions to the streets of Nairobi. The movement used a new version of *Kikuyuism* to address present-day situations such as the widening gap between the rich and the poor that, in the eyes of the movement, was primarily caused by the IMF and the World Bank (Wamue 2001: 463). It called for a return to 'African' political, economic and social traditions to stop the spread of a 'perverted and decadent westernised' culture at the expense of the urban (Kikuyu) poor (Wamue 2002: 5). Its ideology was also aimed at the dominant discourse on citizenship constructed by the Moi government, *Neo-Majimboism*, that at its core regarded Kikuyu squatters in the rural area as 'foreigners' and members of the Kikuyu group in general as criminals and ethnic chauvinists. In response, the Mungiki movement constructed its own version of Kikuyu identity and

portrayed it as pure and morally disciplined. In doing so the move-
ment clearly resembled earlier organisations that were inspired by ear-
lier constructions of *Kikuyuism*.

When the Mungiki movement entered Bondé during the late
1990s, its revolutionary form of *Kikuyuism* coincided with the form
of *Kikuyuism* constructed by the majority of Kikuyu inhabitants liv-
ing in Bondé. The convergence of these forms of *Kikuyuism* helped
the movement gain control of almost all aspects of community life
in Bondé. The Mungiki movement had two major tools of mobilisa-
tion in Mathare Valley. The first one can be called 'gender pride' and
the second 'economic gain'. Men like Erick became affiliated with the
Mungiki movement because it gave them a sense of pride in being
Kikuyu men and gave them access to economic opportunities. The
memory of Mau Mau in the movement's construction of *Kikuyuism,*
and the term 'sons of Mau Mau' gave these young Kikuyu men a sense
of belonging and claim to the land on which they resided. Erick com-
ments upon this in the following quote.

> I was not really Mungiki but I worked with them. But some people saw
> me as Mungiki and now they had fear, and some boys asked me to help
> them. I worked collecting the money. My life was good and money was
> good. I was happy I did not work brewing chang'aa but I just went
> around to people and ask for money. I was proud to be a Kikuyu man,
> to be a son of Mau Mau. [Interview 11]

It is interesting to realise that Erick had felt proud of being a Kikuyu
man when he was working for the Mungiki movement, while earlier
on he had described himself as a 'ghetto boy'. The shift in his self-iden-
tification from boy to man is related to how the community perceived
him, took him seriously, or even feared him. No longer associated
with the Mungiki movement, he is now a self-proclaimed bachelor
and regarded by the community simply as a boy. However, during his
work for the Mungiki movement in Bondé, he had enjoyed powers
generally associated with adult men and had been respected and feared
as he thought a man should be.

The Mungiki movement was drastically transformed during the
second half of the 1990s. Although still present in the rural areas,
the movement became more prominent as an urban vigilante group
with large protection rackets in the slums of Nairobi. The question is
whether we can actually speak of a Mungiki movement rather than
of multiple variations, or franchises, of Mungiki movements that are
somehow linked to one another. More research is needed to answer

that question. As the Mungiki movement rapidly grew in popularity and size in the urban slums of Nairobi during the late 1990s, Bondé became its 'headquarters'. Both the national media and the Mungiki leadership itself estimated its membership at 1.5 million, an unlikely high number (Wamue 2001: 454). Even if exaggerated for reasons of sensationalism (in case of the press) and propaganda (in case of the Mungiki leadership), during its dominance in Bondé from the late 1990s to November 2006, it was a force to be reckoned with in local politics.

Young men like Erick became involved in the movement because it appeared to provide them with economic opportunities and social status. Its ethnic profile intensified the ethnic dimensions of already existing economic fault lines in Bondé. As we saw above, these fault lines first originated from the sentiments between older and newer settlers in Bondé and Area 4B. This ethnic aspect became even more significant when the young men recruited by the movement, despite their prior identification with multiple ethnic identities, now increasingly began to identify themselves as Kikuyu. However, among those inhabitants of Bondé who became increasingly angered by the multiple 'taxes' the Mungiki movement exacted – for the right to brew beer, for security, electricity, and even for access to sanitation – were also many Kikuyu. Buda embodies the ambiguity felt by many when he described the movement as 'good' and 'bad' in the same breath:

> If they [members of the Mungiki movement] caught you at night doing something bad they can just kill you, they don't care. They are bad. If they see you walking around at night after say ten they will question you but if they see you a second time they will severely beat you up because then you are up to no good. They have reduced robbery and rape to zero…They are good guys. It is safe at night. They patrol the main road but more the *chochoros* [the alleys of the slums in Sheng] because that is where things happen. [Interview 7]

Initially, many Kikuyu people in Bondé did feel a certain amount of sympathy for the movement because it constructed a form of *Kikuyuism* to which they could relate. Moreover, the 'security' it provided was much welcomed by most people living in Bondé. However, in 2003 and 2004, the Mungiki movement lost most of its esteem in the community and it was rumoured to have lost 70 percent of its members.[9]

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[9] In 2004, Kenyan newspapers started to report about a 'Mungiki death squad', allegedly founded to hunt down and kill defectors from the Mungiki movement who

The incidents that led to the movement's downfall in Bondé were partly caused by its intense rivalry with local Taliban gangs. Though the latter may have had some links to Luo politicians, they did not develop direct links with any national movement, as the Mungiki movement did.[10] As a result, the organisation of the Taliban gangs differed from the Mungiki gangs since they were comprised of very loosely organised groups of youth. Tyson explained to me that the name Taliban was in fact a pun and refers to how many poor Luo people compared their level of hardship to that of the Afghan Taliban whom they saw as trying to resist American occupation with crude weapons such as stones. Before the name 'Taliban' came into vogue, some groups of young Luo men, mostly 'ghetto boys', called themselves 'Baghdad Boys' or 'Palestinians' for similar reasons, and they often used stones when they fought (Opala 2000). Appropriating these names reflected the resentment many young Luo men in Mathare Valley harboured against the alleged dominant and powerful Kikuyu group. Many young men, such as Tyson, identified with the Afghan Taliban because they felt occupied by 'the' Kikuyu. This resentment was underpinned, according to Tyson, by the fact that the Mungiki movement controlled the ghetto village he (and other non-Kikuyu) lived in (Interview 9).

The Mungiki gang in Bondé extorted a steep 'brewing tax' from the *chang'aa* brewers in Bondé and Area 4B, much to the dismay of both the brewers and the, mainly Kikuyu, bar owners. They could, however, not resist the local gang, which for a long time was very powerful because it had the backing of the larger Mungiki movement and the sympathy of many Bondé residents. The situation changed when the Mungiki movement as a whole lost that sympathy as a result of the Kariobangi Massacre of March 2002 (Anderson 2002: 531). During this incident twenty-two Luo individuals were randomly killed by Mungiki movement followers in retaliation of an earlier killing of two Mungiki youth by Taliban members (Anderson 2002: 531). Kariobangi is a ghetto village adjacent to Mathare Valley and many people in Bondé had lost relatives and friends, or knew people who had been injured

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had left the movement en masse after its failed attempt at political participation during the 2002 elections. At that time, a new oath-taking campaign was organized by the Mungiki movement to initiate new young Kikuyu men into a death squad called 'Bargation' which is an acronym for the slogan: 'no bargain over death' (Kwamboka 2004).

[10] My current research project focuses in part on the history of the emergence of Taliban gangs in Mathare Valley and their ties with larger political organisations.

during the mayhem. They began to regard the local Mungiki gang, and the larger movement to which it belonged, with great suspicion. When an increasing number of community members stopped complying with Mungiki-imposed rules, such as paying a house or business 'tax', the movement was increasingly forced to resort to forcing the gang to use violence to maintain its control. Community members who had thus far been the eyes and ears of the gang, for example, stopped informing on Taliban efforts to infiltrate the brewing *bazes* for the movement. When fissures began to appear in the armour of the local Mungiki gang, this created space for the local Taliban gangs to gain in strength.

Other factors too led to the Mungiki movement's downturn in Mathare Valley. In addition to losing its main support base among members of the Bondé community, another key factor was the change in the national and local political climates. Although more research is needed, it is safe to say that the power struggle between Mwai Kibaki and Raila Odinga at the national level was linked to the turf wars between these gangs. Between 2005 and 2006, the major shift in local power relations in Mathare Valley mirrored the power shift between Kibaki and Raila as a result of the 2005 referendum on the new constitution (Mueller 2008: 23). In the run-up to, and aftermath of the referendum, Raila developed the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) into a strong opposition party. At the same time, the Kibaki government, defeated at the referendum, was increasingly brought into disrepute as a result of burgeoning corruption scandals. This national shift in power relations had immediate repercussions on local power relations in Mathare Valley.

These repercussions are illustrated by the fact that the Mungiki movement gradually lost its dominant position in Bondé to Taliban gangs at the very moment that the ODM gained support nationally. The final blow to the Mungiki gang phenomenon in Bondé came in November 2006 when different Taliban gangs, known supporters of ODM, joined hands to oust it. The Taliban gangs were assisted in this move by large sections of the Bondé community, but they also must have had powerful political backing of some kind. Bondé is the epicentre of the *chang'aa* industry in Nairobi and it is unthinkable that the Mungiki movement, however weakened in terms of moral support from local community members, would have given up Bondé if not for lack of powerful political support. The General Service Unit (GSU), the military police, came in soon after violence erupted and

played into the hands of the Taliban gangs by organising a crackdown on Mungiki members. At the same time the GSU established a curfew and this prevented the Taliban gangs from taking complete control of the brewing *bazes* in Bondé.

The Taliban gangs had no ambition to control all of Bondé and were only interested in controlling the lucrative *bazes*. Pushed back to their ghetto villages, these gangs continued to try and take control of these Bondé *bazes* from outside ghetto villages such as Area 4B. The Mungiki movement was still present in Mathare Valley, although not in Bondé, and some of its gangs still controlled a few ghetto villages. This prevented the Taliban gangs from completely taking over the brewing *bazes*, as they were held back by fear of Mungiki retaliation for their role in ousting its gang from Bondé. Between November 2006 and December 2007, Taliban and Mungiki gangs clashed occasionally, while the brewing *bazes* were largely left uncontrolled by either gang. The Taliban gang from Area 4B sought help from local ODM politicians and, in return, mobilised large crowds of young men and women to attend ODM rallies in Mathare Valley that were part of ODM's campaign for the 2007 General Elections. It was not until the post-election violence broke out that the Taliban gang from Area 4B was able to establish full control of the brewing *bazes* in Bondé, because then the Mungiki movement had lost its other strongholds in Mathare Valley altogether.

Here we see how local politics and gang rivalry intersected. The post-election violence cannot be understood without taking into account how political tensions acquired meaning in these particular localities. The young men who were involved in the violence were not just 'young men for hire'; rather, their actions were based on their own strategies and motivations.

Tyson joined the Taliban gang in Area 4B a few months before the elections in 2007, and at the same time he became an official ODM agent. He organised rallies and distributed T-shirts and flyers to promote ODM in Mathare Valley. During the post-election violence, Tyson was one the first men to set up a checkpoint on the main road in Bondé to prevent non-ODM supporters from remaining in Bondé. He was also involved in looting Kikuyu property and still lives in a Kikuyu-owned house he took over at that time. This is how Tyson related the violent events:

> When you look at Goldenberg [a well known corruption scandal], it is Kikuyu, Anglo Leasing [also a well known corruption scandal], also Kikuyu, they think it is their country but they can't live with us, the other tribes. We can all live together but not with them. They are tribalists and now they stole the presidency. It's Raila who should be president. *Chungwa Moja, Maisha Bora* [(One orange makes life cool, the campaign slogan for ODM]. Now we select people who can enter the Gaza strip [with which he means Bondé], ha ha ha. [Interview 9]

Tyson's way of thinking was typical for the young men who rampaged through the streets of Mathare during the weeks of violence that followed the 2007 General Elections. Tyson spoke of forty-one different ethnic groups all united against the lone Kikuyu group. The latter had already been constructed as criminal, ethnically chauvinist, and 'foreign' by the dominant discourse on citizenship of the Moi era. During the election campaigns of 2007, these different hostile characterisations of the Kikuyu converged and compounded each other to such an extent that some ODM politicians began to define 'the' Kikuyu as 'enemies of the state' (Waki Report 2008). Many people, ODM and PNU supporters alike, expected Raila to win and the last polls before the elections had indeed predicted his victory.[11] The first skirmishes in Bondé occurred because many people felt impatient with the delay of the Electoral Commission of Kenya to announce the results. Tensions rose as the days went by and when, on 30 December, three agonizing days later, President Mwai Kibaki was sworn in, these tensions culminated in a full-blown war in Mathare Valley. In Bondé, the Taliban gangs and other ODM supporters violently evicted Kikuyu inhabitants from their houses and businesses.

The violent clashes in Mathare were depicted by many (inter)national media and later reports on the violence as ethnic clashes instigated by politicians, although the attack of the Taliban gangs on Bondé must also – and perhaps more significantly – be understood as a move to consolidate their power and establish themselves as the rulers of the brewing *bazes* in Bondé. The consequences were devastating. Kingi's restaurant and hair saloon were looted and destroyed. Erick was threatened because of his past connection to the Mungiki movement and escaped to the rural area. Buda had left Mathare Valley right before Election Day guided by a sense of dark foreboding. Motion became affiliated with the Taliban gangs and played down

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[11] http://africanpress.wordpress.com/2007/11/14 (accessed on 15 October 2008).

his Kikuyu side. Sam and Tyson had also joined the Taliban gangs and both moved into a house vacated by Kikuyu refugees, where they still reside today. Wanaich, as we saw in the vignette with which this chapter opened, was stopped at a checkpoint by some Taliban members, but was able to escape and did not come back to Bondé for two months. Today, after months of tension, which the peace agreement signed between the PNU and the ODM could not quell, Bondé has been reduced to a ghost town. Some of its former Kikuyu inhabitants still reside in the refugee camps on the fringes of Mathare Valley, while others have settled in other areas. Bondé has been split into two, with Lower Bondé, where the *chang'aa* is brewed, still under the control of the Taliban gang from Area 4B and Upper Bondé now the refuge of the displaced Kikuyu businesses and bar owners. The two sections are economically interdependent and thus connected, but, underneath the surface, tensions simmer and it would not take much for them to flare up again. As Kingi put it:

> You know, people in Bondé cannot fight those rich people so…we fight each other. How can they say,…*Chungwa Moja Maisha Bora!'* [One orange makes life cool! ODM slogan] The whole village is burned, empty. Shops are looted. You know…where do they go now for food? We all stand in line for the Red Cross and we fight for *unga* [maize flour in Kiswahili]. *Maisha bora…kwa nani?* [A cool life,…for whom? In Kiswahili]. [Interview 5]

Conclusion

In contrast to the more dominant depictions by the (inter)national media, the post-election violence did not derive from unchanging primordial tensions between ethnic groups manipulated by politicians. This chapter shows that, in order to understand episodes of violence like those following the elections of 2007 (of which political manipulation was a big part), we must examine the historical, social, economic and political factors that come together in a particular locality at a particular moment in time from the perspectives of the people involved in the violence, whether as perpetrators, victims, or both. To understand this violence from the perspective of its participants, the specific histories of the Kikuyu ethnic label during the colonial period and the Moi presidency are of crucial importance. However, it is important to keep in mind that the discourse about ethnic labels thus constructed are, and have been, politically strategic constructs;

the people who are supposed to belong to these constructs and reap the consequences whether they want to or not, such as the Kikuyu and Luo poor, hardly ever fit them.

In their self-presentations, the young men I interviewed mediated the post-election violence in terms of 'us Kikuyu' and 'them Luo' and vice versa. This chapter shows that these ethnic labels hide more than they reveal and can thus not be used as an explanatory concept on their own. It is evident from this analysis that ethnic identity is a performed identity (Butler 1999: 33) that is constructed by individual people in relationship to ever changing contexts. The young men who killed and died in the name of a collective ethnic identity construct turned out to actually know very little about the history of those constructs or about past social relations between the particular ethnic groups to which they refer. The construction of rival groups on ethnic grounds is related to the specific history of *Kikuyuism* in Bondé, and also related to how the Kikuyu-Luo antagonism, which came to dominate national discourses of citizenship, acquired meaning in the context of Bondé. The fact that a young man like Motion was first affiliated with the Mungiki movement and later with the Taliban gangs illustrates that the increasingly exclusive identifications of young men with either the Luo or Kikuyu label, at the expense of other ethnic labels, were primarily strategic choices to serve current needs.

The intersecting, context-bound, and fluid identities of the young Kikuyu men show how they mediated violence through the construction of *Kikuyuism*. Furthermore, the process of narration, the practices of mediation themselves, provide insight into the underlying factors that led to the violence. By explaining that, in his eyes, the perpetrators of the post-election violence were jealous, primitive and unmarried *Kihii* [uncircumcised men in the Kikuyu language], Kingi's mediation of the violence highlights the intersection of ethnicity with gender, locality and class identity. The same is true for Erick's story, in which political and ethnic affiliation, economic opportunity, and conceptions of moral manhood are all intertwined.[12]

This chapter demonstrates that the post-election violence can only be understood when the strategies, motivations and legitimisations constructed by the men involved are included in our analyses. In

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[12] Both the concept of masculinity-in-crisis in Mathare Valley and the perspectives of non-Kikuyu men living there need to be researched in more depth.

addition, we have seen that a closer look at local and historical group relations can improve our understanding of why specific hate narratives acquired meaning in a particular locality at a particular moment in time. Finally, the history of gang rivalry has provided us with insight into how the political instigation of violence by politicians (Human Rights Watch 2008) in the run-up to, and during the post-election period, provided Taliban gangs from Area 4B with a long-awaited opportunity to take control of the brewing *bazes* in Bondé. Top-down analyses of politically motivated violence can only highlight its orchestrations but lack insight into why people become involved. They must therefore be complemented with analyses of such types of violence 'in the moment' and 'from below'.

Acknowledgements

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TESTIMONIES OF SUFFERING AND RECASTING THE
MEANINGS OF MEMORIES OF VIOLENCE IN
POST-WAR MOZAMBIQUE

Victor Igreja

Introduction

This chapter explores the role that testimonies can play in helping survivors to come to terms with painful memories of the violence of the civil war (1976–1992) in Gorongosa, a district of the Sofala province, located in the centre of Mozambique. Gorongosa district is a former war zone where the majority of the people survived the war while remaining in their home area. At the end of the war, many survivors wished to forget the horrors they had undergone and focus on the task of repairing their lives. However, intrusive wartime recollections often disturbed post-war recovery processes. Given the local importance of narrative to give meaning to past experiences in Gorongosa, I engaged in conversations, in partnership with a Dutch-based mental health centre (Centrum '45), with war survivors in order to determine whether the testimony method could help them deal with their painful wartime memories. War survivors accepted the offer and I selected and trained two assistants, one male and one female who worked as translators from the local language into Portuguese. The testimony sessions were performed in secluded spaces within the yards of the witnesses' own houses.

The process of testimony-gathering and testimony-giving created alternative social spaces vis-à-vis the endogenous social spaces where other healing interventions take place. The survivors' positive reaction to participation in this study is perhaps related to the fact that this was a pioneering study in a region in which research until now had been confined to the main urban centres. An outsider intervention of this nature carried out only five years after the end of the civil war conveyed the idea to survivors that it was important to share their wartime experiences. Moreover by triggering the return and valorisation of the personal experiences of war, the act of giving an account of oneself and being listened to became a subtle form of self-empowerment for the witnesses.

The testimonies were collected in Gorongosa during the months of June to November of 1998. A partial presentation of the results of this project took the shape of a description of quantitative results and focused on the psychotherapeutic role of the testimony method to ameliorate symptoms of post-traumatic stress (Igreja et al. 2004). Hitherto the qualitative results have not been analyzed. Moreover, as my research association with the area has been long-term (1997–2009), I have continued to meet and to talk with many of those who participated in the testimony-giving project of 1998. Many of the contextual aspects that I include in this chapter, therefore, derive from these long-term conversations with war survivors and the post-war generation in Gorongosa and elsewhere in the centre of Mozambique.

My argument here is that a careful reading of the content of the testimonies I collected shows that witnesses in this study appropriated the testimony method and used it in ways that allowed them to recast their upsetting wartime memories. This means that assisting trauma survivors to build a narrative of the traumatic events helped them to provide a framework for the memories of sad events. This framework was developed in a way that was conducive to exploring meaningful aspects of the multiple positions they assumed during the civil war and their identity as survivors and members of a specific culture. In order to grasp the complexities of the language used during the testimonies and then to highlight some of the socio-cultural specificities of the testimonies I studied, I traced back the genealogy of the testimony method as it was developed, particularly after World War II, in the context of court proceedings and therapeutic practices. In my analysis of the testimonies I also drew on a set of theoretical ideas on different "forms of talk" (Goffman 1981), particularly on ideas about the "intersection of spheres of discourses" (Ricoeur 1977), the "ethics of verbal transactions" (Smith 1975), and the performativity of words (Austin 1975; Geurts 2006; Riley 2005), about which more below. By showing the relevance of the historical matrices and analyzing both different forms of talk and changing subject-positions, I will show that the testimony intervention adds an important resource to deal with the painful memories of the war.

In this chapter, I will first briefly trace the development of the testimony method and its psychotherapeutic applications as a way of gaining insights into the meaningfulness of the war survivors' testimonies presented in this study. I will then analyze how narration or talking can facilitate creativity and resilience – both significant concepts in

the context of coming to terms with wartime experiences – and show the importance of the ways in which the testimonies presented were constructed. I will place the testimony method and its effectiveness in the context of the types of conflict resolution that have been dominant in Mozambique and that have been characterized by political strategies of enforced silence and oblivion. I will show how this intervention, when compared to the multiplicity of local resources (namely agricultural production, traditional justice, traditional healing and Christian religious groups), gave a possibility for war survivors to talk meaningfully about their painful memories of the civil war. I will then turn to the content of the testimonies in general and give a summary of four testimonies I selected for further analysis. On the basis of the accounts survivors gave about wartime events in which they themselves and others participated, I analyze the possibilities of coming to terms with memories of experiences of violence by analysing the "verbal design, i.e., the work of discourse" (Ricoeur 1976: 47).

A brief historical account of the concept testimony

Narrations of past events are common phenomena in many cultures. What differs are the vehicles, modes and purposes of narration. Testimony, which is usually conveyed through narration, is also culturally widespread. The use of testimonies as a means of accounting for mass political violence has been on the rise in the course of the last two decades (LaCapra 2001). This interest in the voices of survivors is the result of a gradual shift in processes of documentation of political violence, particularly after the Second World War. In the aftermath of World War II, it was through written documentation that the victorious alliance invested their efforts to understand the intricacies of the Nazi bureaucracy of extermination. These documents were used in Nuremberg as principal evidence to indict, put on trial and punish a selected group of high ranking officials of the former Nazi regime. During these trials very little attention was given to the testimonies of the survivors of the Nazi regime.

It has been argued that the turning point that led to the use of survivors' testimonies as sources of evidence about war crimes occurred in Jerusalem during the trial of Adolf Eichmann (1961–1962). Annette Wieviorka (2006) suggests that this trial marked the beginning of the 'Era of the Witness', in which survivors' testimonies emerged in the

court of justice as key sources providing objective evidence in trials for war crimes. This presentation of evidence through oral testimonies signalled the importance of focusing on attempts "to understand experience and its aftermath" (LaCapra 2001), which was neglected during the Nuremberg trials. The use of oral testimonies provided by survivors of political violence has not been without suspicions. These suspicions have been raised because even though through testimonies "language transmits the direct experience of 'eyewitnessing'" (Felman 1992: 101), "there is no singular past waiting in a pristine state for our (re-)discovery. Past experience is constantly reworked in conscious and unconscious ways" (Flax 1993: 45). That is, even in the context of courtrooms, issues of objectivity, truth, verification, distortions and partiality that are intrinsic to memory work should not be thoroughly discounted (Schacter 1995). The emphasis that is usually placed on objectivity and veracity during testimony-giving is related to the specific Western contemporary genealogy of the testimony genre which is not identical with the ideas and practices of testimony-giving in non-Western societies. The strict focus on truth and factuality (which often emphasises the precise sequence of events) as central to testimonies created some confusion in terms of the most relevant aspects to consider when people give testimonies in other cultures (Krog et al. 2009).

In post-World War II Europe, bearing witness to traumatic experiences in the immediate years after the war, and in the following two decades, remained confined to courtrooms and the evidence-giving process there. Outside these spaces most war survivors remained silent. When initiatives to give testimonies began to capture the public imagination, it was principally through the concept of courtroom evidence that the testimony came to be used in processes of comprehending mass political violence.

Moreover, it was almost twenty years after their actual experiences of violence when reasonable numbers of World War II survivors started to go public and tell their stories, that people began to take notice of their testimonies: It was issues of truth and inaccuracy in particular which captured the attention of the listeners and those who started theorizing on the genre of the testimony. In contrast, ideas about how testimonies can be vehicles for orally transmitting memories of human suffering as subjectively experienced, and also to convey experiences of resilience and creativity, were less often considered. There have been some studies exploring the relation between language and creativity

in everyday speech (Carter & McCarthy 2004). However, similar studies have not been conducted to explore how testimonies of traumatic experiences can display forms of resilience and creativity through language.

In order to lend some clarity to the debates about the nature of the testimony genre, a distinction was suggested between "the witness in the courtroom and the witness of oral history" (Assmann 2006). Inger Agger (1994), who used the testimony method with refugee women settled in Denmark, suggests that this double valence of testimonies is composed of "objective, judicial, public, and political aspects as well as subjective, spiritual, cathartic, and private aspects. Testimony thus contains the quality of uniting within its structure the private and the political levels" (ibid.: 9). In the judicial context, the primary obligation of the witness is "to provide factual information that will help to discover the truth and to distinguish between the guilty and not guilty" (Assmann 2006: 266). This does not mean that survivors giving testimonies in non-legalistic circumstances are not concerned with issues of truth and attribution of responsibility. They are, but their testimonies may also be related to broader biographical aspects of their past experiences of victimization and survival (Assmann 2006). In this respect, it has been argued that an accurate memory of the past "may or may not be necessary for an individual 'cure'...But one may argue that such memory, including memory that confronts the traumatic dimensions of history, is ethically desirable in coming to terms with the past both for the individual and for the collectivity" (LaCapra 2001: 95). Ahead of the development of this conceptual division of the testimonies as involving objective and subjective aspects, and following the ever present folklore of Catholic religious intuitions that "talk or confession redeems and thereby heals", the testimony method was used in Gorongosa both to gather evidence of political violence and to generate psychotherapeutic effects among testimony-tellers.

Psychotherapeutic approaches to testimonies and the construction of meaning

In the domain of psychotherapy there have been experiments using testimony as the principal method. In the 1970s and 1980s, a group of Chilean psychotherapists gathered the testimonies of victims of the former Chilean military government (Cienfuegos & Monelli 1983). As

a result of narrating their experiences of the horror inflicted by officials of the Chilean military state, coupled with expectations of justice, the Chilean psychotherapists found that the act of voicing the experience of torture produced psychotherapeutic effects on the testimony-givers. Yet the psychotherapists Cienfuegos and Monelli (1983) did not analyse the dynamics of testimony-giving in terms of how experiences are conveyed through oral speech (in the case of this study, the types of speech used during narrations of traumatic experiences) or the role of words in the cultural and religious milieu of torture survivors.

In the 1990s, the testimony method as a psychotherapeutic modality was used with women refugees of political and sexual violence exiled in Copenhagen (Agger 1994); Bosnian refugees in Chicago (Weine et al. 1998); and Mozambican survivors of the civil war (Igreja et al. 2004). A key feature of the testimony method as a psychotherapeutic intervention is the deconditioning of memory through a process of helping trauma survivors to put perception and sensations into words (Van der Kolk et al. 1996). Based on analysis of testimony-giving processes in a non-Western society (Krog et al. 2009), the deconditioning approach and the forging of a link between private shame and political dignity as mechanisms of personal and social recasting does not clarify how war survivors give accounts of themselves and others. Although the process of moving from private shame into political dignity (Agger 1994: 10) is a very important form of mediation because of the transference of the trauma story from the private to the public domain, it seems that in this process there is no allowance for a change of subject positions of the witnesses in terms of assuming the multiple roles that the witness played during the time of the political conflict. There is an emphasis on the form, which is implicitly featured by a linear model of time in the narration. In contrast, hardly any attention is given to the dynamics of testimony-giving, the possibilities of changes in subject positions during narrations, the ways in which subjectivity and culture are played out during the testimonies and how war survivors recreate this genre of speech through different linguistic means that move beyond the description of facts. In addition, the current approaches to the testimony method do not give due attention to cultural beliefs and practices related to the performativity of words and how these beliefs and practices shape the testimony-giving processes.

Although memory is the point of departure in processes of testimony-giving, this does not mean that memory is also the point of arrival. Trauma survivors may use their testimonies to establish new connections of meanings through the already existing "networks of meanings". It can be argued that even if war survivors make use of already existing networks of meaning, their use in a new context is "a form of innovation" (Ricoeur 1977: 311). One important question can be raised about the issue of innovation; if there are pre-existing networks of meaning, to what extent does the integration of a posterior experience convey the meanings of the original experience?

In his *The philosophy of literary form*, Kenneth Burke stated that these networks or "charts of meaning are not 'right' or 'wrong' – they are relative approximations to the truth" (Burke 1957: 92). The testimonies, either with the goal of presenting facts or broader biographical aspects, can only offer approximations to the truth about past traumatic events. It seems that nowhere are these multiplicities of truths as pervasive as in the case of narrations of experiences of war violence. As Greg Grandin (2004) wrote in *The last colonial massacre*, wars are "composed of many stories, as many as there are individuals, families, and communities that lived through it, and each story has a different turning point and climax" (ibid.: 3). Because of the multiplicity of turning points in the experience of trauma (as a perpetrator, victim, bystander or all three) during civil wars and in subsequent reflections, it is argued that only testimonies that are featured by intersections of spheres of discourses (Ricoeur 1977) are capable of moving beyond rumination about the past toward the recasting of new meanings about the past experiences. This leap forward through testimonies displays features of resilience and creativity of testimony-givers and the willingness to start anew. In this context, instead of ruminating about painful memories which, while justifiable, may impede the creation of new social relations, the willingness to start anew is demonstrated by talking about personal and collective painful memories and in tandem gaining insights from a process of assisted narration in the context of the testimony method intervention. This carefully assisted procedure, along with the responsiveness of the survivors, can help in attributing new meanings to their very upsetting memories and thereby foster the creativity and resilience to confidently move on in life.

Wartime experiences, resilience and creativity

Studies of civilians living in contexts of war have tended to emphasize experiences of victimization. In contrast less attention has been given to processes of resilience and creativity in the wake of war situations. One of the reasons for the few available analyses of resilience and creativity concerns the risk that an emphasis on these human processes may be perceived by the victims as a form of denial of their traumatization. However, studies on resilience among families living amid various kinds of crisis situations, suggest that "resilience is forged through adversity, not despite it" (Walsh 1996: 271). This link between recognition of victimization and resilience is not well explored in studies of war-related traumas. Therefore paying attention to, and taking seriously, how war survivors talk about past experiences is necessary to better understand how resilience is indeed constituted through serious adversity.

Resilience is understood as "the ability to withstand and rebound from crisis and adversity" (Walsh 1996: 261). This capacity, which can be individually and collectively fostered, does not imply a rapid achievement of closure. Instead, "recovery is a gradual process over time" (Walsh 2007: 210). From this approach to resilience, coming to terms with traumatic losses "involves making meaning of the trauma experience, putting it in perspective, and weaving the experience of loss and recovery into the fabric of individual and collective identity and life passage" (ibid.).

Processes of giving meaning to traumatic losses vary. These variations can be related to the creative capacities of individuals, the specific situations that they get involved in, and cultural factors. For the purposes of analysis in this article, I use the idea of creativity as a resource involving original interpretations and actions by individuals and collectivities in the face of commonplace or extraordinary experiences (Mpofu et al. 2006). In this case, *original* means that people create a new set of discourses through proverbial language and actions to respond to the challenges they are facing.

Carolyn Nordstrom (1997), who carried out ethnographic studies during the civil war in Mozambique, describes mechanisms of "profound creativity that defeats, not one side or the other but violence altogether". The mechanisms of creativity described by Nordstrom were part of a "core survival strategy and a profound form of resistance to political violence and oppression". Many of the examples that

Nordstrom uses to illustrate these creative processes refer to risk-taking acts, such as staying behind in war zones to help others in need, or building little huts and living on farming plots in war-affected areas. Accordingly, these were "mechanisms of asserting personal agency and political will in the face of intolerable repression" (ibid.: 13). The current study differs from that by Nordstrom because it focuses on a different geographical area and a different time-period. At the time of this study, five years after the end of the civil war, war survivors were no longer facing an intolerable repression and they did not have to undertake serious risks to guarantee their survival.

Dori Laub (1992: 69) suggests that memories of the traumatic past shape a person's present life in every respect. It is this continuity of traumatic memories that led to the use of the testimony method (Igreja et al. 2004) and suggests the need to pay attention to issues of resilience and creativity deployed to deal with painful memories and their consequent, and seemingly unending, intrusions in the survivors' lives. During Nordstrom's study almost any action performed by the survivors could be seen to demonstrate creativity because everyone had to craft solutions to survive in the midst of the war violence. In the context of this study, the conditions of living had changed and war survivors were now dealing with memories of their violent past experiences and were engaged in trying to recreate stable and predictable social environments to live in. It has been suggested that these post-war times also have their own serious challenges and perils, particularly the risk that individual and collective memories of the violence can be transformed into "programs for revenge and hatred" (Cohen 2001: 245). In this regard, the willingness to start anew requires some degree of creativity in order to purposefully avoid repeat violence as a mechanism of coming to terms with memories of violent past experiences.

The contexts of political violence in Mozambique and its aftermath

Mozambique has gone through almost three decades of political violence. First it was the anti-colonial war waged by Frelimo against the Portuguese colonial army (1964–1974). After a decade of anti-colonial war, the country achieved independence on 25 June 1975. However, in the aftermath of independence, in 1976, there was a deterioration of political relations between the newly formed Mozambican government and the neighbouring former Rhodesia. This deterioration culminated

in the invasion of Mozambique by the military forces of the ex-Rho-desian regime in August of 1976 and the massacre of Inhazonia, a village located in Manica province in the centre of Mozambique. As a corollary of this foreign invasion and the Inhazonia massacre, the civil war began. It was initially confined to the central provinces of Manica and Sofala. Later, the civil war spread throughout Mozambique, and Gorongosa and other rural districts all over the country were severely exposed to, and affected by the violence, more so than the urban parts of the country.

The exact date and origins of the civil war remain a matter of politi-cal and scholarly dispute (Chingono 1996; Dinerman 2006; Hall 1990; Isaacman 2003; Vines 1991). Although these political and academic debates are important, still no comprehensive analyses have been made of the full implications of what the late commander-in-chief, Samora Machel, said in the aftermath of the destruction of Renamo headquar-ters in Gorongosa (Casa Banana) in 1985: "We took over Gorongosa and five hours was enough (…) the snake's back is broken".[1] The snake that the late Machel was referring to was not a real snake; during the alleged five hours the military joint forces involving the Mozambican and Zimbabwean army had been dropping heavy bombs that killed people. On that occasion the late President ordered: "Make Sofala and Manica provinces the graveyards of the armed bandits".[2] There is still a need for an analysis of the effects of these military orders on the people who inhabited Sofala and Manica.

Almost two decades after the end of the civil war there are still expectations in different segments of Mozambican society that the truths about the serious abuses and war crimes perpetrated by Fre-limo and Renamo during the civil strife will be displayed. In spite of the continuing absence of state initiatives to revisit the violence of the past, the responsiveness of war survivors to participation in this study indicates the pertinence of creating social spaces in war-torn societies for survivors to bear witness to their experiences of being betrayed and humiliated by their own state and kin. The social spaces created for this witnessing can also allow war survivors to assume their share of responsibility for some of the violent events, and boost the possibilities

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[1] Samora Machel in "Notícias", Maputo 07 September 1985, p. 1.
[2] Ibid.

for them to attribute new meanings to their intrusive and discomforting recollections.

Resources and social spaces for healing in post-war Mozambique

Besides the studies on the civil war and its aftermath referred to above there are also many studies on Mozambique showing that different locally available resources contributed to various post-war healing processes. These resources are traditional and Christian religious healers, traditional judges, and land for farming (Hayner 2001; Honwana 1996; Igreja 2003; Igreja et al. 2009; Lubkemann 2008; Luedke 2005; Marlin 2001; Nordstrom 1997; Schafer 2007). What has not been the subject of comprehensive focus in post-war Mozambique is the analysis of how "local discourses on violence play a role in the reconstruction of the social fabric in the aftermath of a civil war", as Alex Argenti-Pillen (2003: 12) did in Sri Lanka. No attempt has been made so far to systematically study how, in a cultural context of shared recognition of the performativity of words, bearing witness through testimonies can offer opportunities to understand the subtle processes of coming to terms with intrusive recollections of the Mozambican civil war.

For instance, words and certain forms of talk constitute forms of power that can create or transform reality as it has been observed in some societies (Geurts 2006), or suggested in philosophical analysis on the performativity of words (Austin 1975; Riley 2005). Kathryn Geurts (2006: 176) notes vis-à-vis the Anlo-Ewe of Ghana that, "words are not only information or knowledge but also sound, so in addition to their meaning, words have physical power which operates not only at the site of the ear and mind but throughout the entire body". The implication of this recognition is that people in different cultures may tend to systematically be aware of the "ethics of verbal transactions" (Smith 1975). Ethics in this case means that people engaged in a conversation develop basic codes of conduct and expectations about respecting these codes, which determines what is appropriate to say in particular circumstances. These codes also inform the speakers about the necessity of using specific forms of talk in order to verbally expand the intelligibility of meanings of lived experiences. The ethics of verbal transactions also mean that the assumptions governing the mutual claims and responsibilities of speakers and listeners during conversations are substantially qualified, in the sense that speakers tend to more

consciously judge the appropriateness of the circumstances, agents or people involved, and the forms of talk.

I argue that in this study of testimony-giving the witnesses spoke in ways that could not have taken place in other circumstances because of the politics of voice in this post-war society. Both at national and local levels, this politics is featured by almost everyone arguing that he or she was directly or indirectly affected by the violence of the war. Consequently survivors locally, on an individual and an institutional basis, do not hastily demonstrate empathy to listen and to help each other give meaning to their memories of violence in war. For instance, there are survivors of the war who argue that the best way to deal with their traumatic memories of the civil war is to keep busy working in their fields. Yet there are periods of the year when there is no systematic and routine farming (Igreja et al. 2009). In the endogenous space of the traditional courts, it is uncertain whether survivors can succeed in constructing meaningful testimonies because of the state amnesty law that prevents judges from hastily agreeing to adjudicate in wartime offences (Igreja 2010). The newly created Christian religious communities persuade their followers to unconditionally forgive the perpetrators of violence, keep silent and forget the past as one of the requirements for Christian redemption (Igreja & Dias-Lambranca 2009). My longitudinal research in the area has confirmed that it is through the interventions of war-related spirits that war survivors have been compelled to engage in serious conversations about the profound divisions of the past in order to reach a resolution. However, although in these endogenously created social spaces for spirit possession rituals there is narration using a metaphorical lexicon and a performative expression of emotions, the agency of the sufferer is said to be replaced by that of the spirits. This substitution of agency temporarily suspends the conscious accounts of the sufferer. Instead it is the spirits, in their role as creators and enforcers of rights, which primarily bear witness to the collective experiences of great wrongs. Within this context, the alternative social spaces that I created in collaboration with the testimony-givers were pivotal for the return of the subject as a witness of primarily personal experiences of violence and suffering. For these reasons, in the jointly created social spaces, war survivors performed testimonies that provided clues as to how the combination of description of past experiences with proverbial language generates "the power to redescribe reality" (Ricoeur 1977).

This power is very important in light of the type of resolution of the Mozambican civil war and the colossal challenges that survivors faced in the aftermath to rebuild their shattered social world. The necessity of rebuilding this shattered social world cannot be underestimated in post-civil war Mozambique because many of the rural war survivors had to fend for themselves. With the exception of the demobilization and socio-economic reintegration of the former soldiers that was to a certain extent assisted by the Mozambican government and international aid institutions (Schafer 2007), the majority of war survivors had not only to rebuild their socio-economic resources by themselves, but also had to find their own ways of coming to terms with the memories of their violent past experiences. Coming to terms in this context means that in spite of the suffering due to the civil war, the painful post-war memories and the politics of silence and abandonment, war survivors wished to jointly create alternative social spaces to give testimonies of their incredible experiences. During the testimonies the survivors could invent words to express their eagerness to start anew in order to better master their violent and upsetting wartime memories.

The war survivors in Gorongosa district and their testimonies

The use of the testimony method as an intervention followed a therapeutic protocol. Before initiating the intervention people were publicly informed about the main results of the initial quantitative assessment (Schreuder et al. 2001) and my field assistants and I invited the people, on a voluntary basis, to take part in a follow-up study. We explained to the participants that we would use the testimony, which in the local language is similar to what is called *ku panganiza* (to narrate), in order to try and deal with their intrusive and unpleasant memories of the war. As in the case of the Anlo-Ewe of Ghana (Geurts 2006), one important cultural feature of the Gorongosa people is that they establish particular relations with words and forms of narration, in the sense that how one speaks and the circumstances in which one speaks are not dissociated, and are sources of power.

The testimonies were given on an individual basis as a way of letting the witnesses speak freely and without the intrusion of others. The individual encounters also secured confidentiality in relation to narration of sensitive events that could be regarded as a kind of denunciation of other people's actions during the civil war. On each occasion

the participants were invited to narrate in a comprehensive way one major traumatic event they had experienced, of which the memories continued to intrude. The decision for the choice of only one traumatic event was related to the fact that survivors of protracted civil wars have too many experiences that have affected them differently. Hence we wanted to focus on one major traumatic experience that kept afflicting the participants. We understand the term 'comprehensive way' as meaning a coherent description of a) the facts concerning the event (time, place, duration, and people involved), b) the person's role during the event (observer, participant, active or passive), c) the individual and social dimensions of the experience, d) perceptions and feelings at the time of the event, e) perceptions and feelings at the time of the testimony-giving, f) the relationship between the past experience and the present situation; and g) feelings about the future (individual, family and community). The aim of letting the witnesses narrate a coherent story drives the testimony method to issues of past facts, i.e., we expected a linear description of the past events and experiences. The focus on individual and social dimensions attempts to elicit whether the individual was alone or in a group during the event. The relationship between past and present tries to establish whether the individual develops a trajectory in which the past is responsible for the present predicament. Trauma disrupts the sense of the world: many traumatized people feel that the world is a terrible place to live; for this reason there is a need to help the witnesses in building coherent narratives about past facts.

In total I gathered sixty-five testimonies in which twenty-seven were given by women and thirty-eight by men. The content of the testimonies can be divided between prominent themes and less conspicuous issues. The most prominent aspects entail storylines of victimization as a result of different forms of violence during the war. The more subtle aspects of the testimonies concern the grit and creativity with which they are delivered.

In general, the testimonies contained portrayals of very appalling experiences: a permanent near-death state, forced separation from the spouse and family members, survival of rape attempts, exposure to aerial bombardments, being physically wounded, imprisonment, *gandira* [enforced labour: transportation of military and non-military goods], forced conscription, death of children because of famine, loss of a leg and in another case loss of both eyes after stepping on landmines, witnessing soldiers perpetrating the murder of relatives, being

stabbed by soldiers, loss of relatives due to illnesses, humiliation, witnessing public executions, poisoning by soldiers, torture, witnessing exhumation of a corpse, disappearance of relatives, false denunciation by neighbours, and the ambush and murder of a soldier.

A group of sixty-five testimonies were collected and numbered. The four vignettes presented in summary below were randomly selected for analysis.

> *Testimony 1*
> I suffered a lot in 1985 from the war of the *komeredes* [Zimbabwean troops]. We were in the bush in Nhazwicasse in an area controlled by Renamo. On the day that the attack started I was with my mother. The *komeredes* were shooting and dropping bombs on us from a short distance; my mother fell down, then I grabbed my mother's leg and started pushing her so as to escape. I could not leave my mother because I know that *the goat that stays behind is waiting for the scourge*. When the *komeredes* started their major attack, we had heard that their helicopters did not have the possibility to access inside the Gorongosa Mountains, so we went to hide inside the forests that are in the middle of the mountains. However, the soldiers were shooting at us from the helicopters, they dropped many bombs and they started burning the forests. People died like rats. Everything was in flames and the sky was dark because of the smoke. The *komeredes* wanted to force us to leave the bush and then take us to the communal village. We hid in the mountains and we spent seven days without eating; we only ate on the eighth day. If I had not pushed my mother she could have been killed. Until today I have the spirit to take care of my mother because she is the one who raised me. Every day I do not forget my mother. I pray to God to help my mother. I am praying for my mother and my mother is praying for me. I am the one who is taking care of the whole family.
>
> *Testimony 2*
> I was more or less 13–14 years old. The *komeredes* [Zimbabwean troops] had not yet arrived. My parents had already died of illness. I was kidnapped in order to force me to be a soldier. I was in my uncle's house and four Renamo soldiers arrived. It was in the evening and I sat down close to the firewood. They tied me together with the other young people and took us to a military base called Nhaca Detcha. When we arrived there they untied us, and we began receiving military training. I trained but I did not last many days. While we were training, Renamo soldiers used to take us to do *gandira*. They used to give us very heavy luggage. We put the luggage on our heads and our backs. I trained during three weeks. When we did *gandira* we could not sleep for days on the way. Renamo ambushed and destroyed a train travelling from Sena to Inhaminga which was loaded with merchandise; the soldiers took us to the site of this destruction and we had to carry the merchandise to the

Renamo's military base. I was imprisoned by Renamo forces for one year and then I ran away. Although it was dangerous to run away, because if the soldiers found you they tortured you and would sometimes murder you, I decided to escape in the middle of the night. I told the soldiers that I was going to fetch water from the river and I never went back to the base. When I arrived at the river I saw a soldier having sex with a woman. I walked slowly, I took a strong stick and I hit him. I don't know if I hit him on the back or on the head, but the soldier fainted; I don't know if that soldier died. I got worried, but then the woman said, *shamuale* [friend] *the water that fell down in the soil can no longer be recovered* so let's run away otherwise if they find us, they will murder us. In this way, we both escaped from the soldiers.

Testimony 3
It happened in the middle of the war perhaps around 1987. The *matropa* (governmental troops) kidnapped us from our *madembe* (old residences) and took us to the communal village. But you know, *in the zone that you do not know*, *you will eat with your enemy*. So one day in the morning I was going to the river to fetch water to cook. In the middle of the way there was a stem of a tree with new leaves. A landmine was hidden behind that stem. I stepped on it and I flew up and then I fell down when the landmine exploded. When the landmine exploded I saw everything: I was crying and screaming. In my navel there were fragments of the landmine. My leg broke down. All the bones were destroyed. When the landmine exploded I lost my leg and I lost a lot of blood. I could not see where my leg was but I could sense the smell of the blood and I had dizziness/light-headedness. The doctors had to cut my leg. It was Renamo soldiers who placed that landmine because if it was the *Komeredes*' landmine, I could have died.[3] I cannot manage to forget this experience because it has affected my body. Other times I think that the elders were right to say that *in order to see the eyes of the snail one has to be very attentive*. If I had been more attentive when I was going to the river perhaps this event might not have happened. When I walk I begin to appreciate those who have both legs, then I begin to feel a lot. I cry because of it. Because of the injury I also suffer while cultivating my field. Besides that, the government does not help me even though it was they who created this war. I think that people give me some consideration now because I help so many sick people since I started working as a healer. When a patient comes back to tell me that he or she feels better I also feel happy and I try to forget the war suffering.

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[3] War survivors usually claim that the landmines of the governmental troops were much more dangerous and these often killed people whereas the landmines used by Renamo troops only destroyed the person's legs.

Testimony 4

I was living in Maringue and I was about to be killed by Frelimo soldiers because they accused me of being the wife of Matsangaissa. Frelimo soldiers arrived in my house on a Sunday. There were many soldiers. On that morning in our house there were two of my sisters-in-law, the others were children. At that time I already had a son. When the soldiers arrived I was preparing myself to go to the church. They arrived and they ordered us to follow them. They took my brothers' blankets. On that day we were in total fifteen women and one man and we were taken to their advanced post. When I arrived there it was November and I stayed there until February. Already one day after our arrival the sexual assaults began. I suffered from sexual violence three times. During the day we used to pound grains of maize to cook for the soldiers. When it got dark the soldiers used to call us. They were different soldiers. They used to threaten us with death. One of the rapists said that he wanted to marry me but it was only to abuse me. I was very afraid. I thought I was going to die. When they raped me I did not fight because I wanted to save my life. The rape only stopped when we were transferred from that advanced post to a communal village. When I think of these experiences of suffering, I realize that the only good thing that war gave me was a child because *that which was born does not get lost*. I think that I suffered much, but at least I got one more child who is now grown up and sometimes he helps me. All my children got married, they gave me several daughters-in-law, and they also help me a lot.

Analysis of the testimonies

From the perspective of oral history, these four testimonies provided evidence that can be used for writing subaltern histories of the Mozambican civil war. The writing of subaltern histories, however, is not the main aim of this chapter. The main goal is to analyse how the use of metaphorical speech and changing of subject positions through the testimony process can help survivors in coming to terms with memories of civil war violence. Of particular significance in these testimony-giving processes is that the witnesses did not limit themselves to present factual details of their past experiences of trauma; details such as "in 1985 with the war of the Komeredes…in Nhazwicasse an area controlled by Renamo…I grabbed my mother's leg and started pushing…soldiers were shooting at us from the helicopters…My parents had already died of illness…four Renamo soldiers arrived…It was in the evening…Renamo soldiers used to take us to do *gandira*…Renamo ambushed and destroyed a train travelling from Sena to Inhaminga…I got imprisoned by Renamo forces for

one year…The *matropa* [governmental troops] kidnapped us…the
landmine exploded…The doctors had to cut my leg…I was living in
Maringue…it was November and I stayed there until February…they
raped me…I got one more child."

Instead, the witnesses transferred these objective events in their nar-
rations into the sphere of subjectivity and metaphorical language. It
appears that this transference and mixture of discourses was done in
order to convey significant aspects of their violent memories of the
civil war. At first sight, and being unaware of the role of culture in
narrative constructions, one could wrongly dismiss these testimonies
since they are not indicative of past facts. One recent example of the
attitude of ill regard toward testimonies shaped by cultural practices
containing metaphoric or oneiric language is given by Antjie Krog,
Nosisi Mpolweni and Kopano Ratele (2009). These authors analysed
the testimony of a woman called Mrs Konile, a survivor of the apart-
heid regime violence who appeared and testified at the South African
Truth Commission. As a result of Mrs Konile's testimony they sug-
gested that "frequently there are testimonies that do not fit the general
framework" (Krog et al. 2009: 43). In the case in point, Mrs Konile ini-
tiated her testimony before the acclaimed commission by intersecting
spheres of discourse in which a bad dream involving a goat was at the
centre of her narration. Initially for the authors, as well as some of the
notable grey-haired commissioners, Mrs Konile's work of discourse
seemed "largely incomprehensible and incoherent". It was only later
that Krog, Mpolweni and Ratele realized that instead of dismissing
these kinds of testimonies "it is important to reread these 'non-fitting'
testimonies in order to arrive at a fuller knowledge of who we are
as individuals". For that, in lieu of strict protocols on the use of the
testimony method based on factual evidence there is a "need to make
use of indigenous languages and knowledge systems to access greater
understanding and respect" (ibid.).

In post-war Gorongosa the witnesses not only intersected spheres
of discourse, they also took different subject positions. The changing
of positions is consistent with the view that the agency of survivors
should be conceived as the "product of different subject positions –
transgressor, victim, and witness" (Das 1997: 222). These changes
become intelligible by focusing on how war survivors "did things with
words" (Austin 1975), that is, the narration of basic facts from the
position of victims and the subjective use of expressions such as "peo-
ple died like rats" or "the only good thing that war gave me." As the

testimony-giving process advanced, the witnesses "had words doing things with them" (Riley 2005), i.e., by using proverbial language as a recurring feature of their testimonies.

It is noteworthy to mention that it was not the expectation of this testimony intervention to have testimony-tellers deploying proverbial language. However, I did not prevent the witnesses from using language in ways that they felt were meaningful for them. I came to understand that this language was instrumental in connecting their past experiences to the existing networks of meaning. The establishment of connections between present and past and the dialectics of description ("to do things with words") and redescriptions of reality ("to have words doing things with us") is a creative process, which indicates the need of speakers to formulate "a new experience in words" (Ricoeur 1977). The post-civil war development of new meaningful experiences, and the capacity to put these experiences in words, requires that war survivors have some degree of mutual understanding of the multiplicities of the civil war experiences, otherwise people can remain stuck in the past. The state of being stuck prevents trauma survivors from getting involved in new meaningful experiences, and contributes to the continuation of their compulsive and repetitive violent behaviour. The insidious violent debates in the Mozambican national parliament between Frelimo and Renamo parties over the abuses and crimes committed during the civil war illustrate very well the compulsive and repetitive behaviour that emerges from the conscious or unconscious fixation on the past. Both parties lack a shared understanding of their positions in the past and in the present, therefore their members in parliament demonstrate their incapacity to build new meaningful political relations and experiences (Igreja 2008). This study argues that the ways in which some war survivors presented their testimonies made important contributions to reconstructing their personal and social identities over time, as demonstrated by the willingness of the witnesses to give further details of their past experiences long after the intervention study had been finished.

The idea of a "desire" or "need" to talk as expressed by war survivors in this study is reinforced by the fact that another unfulfilled expectation of the research team was to have war survivors narrating only one memory of an overwhelming traumatic experience. Yet survivors were eager to narrate more than one, and on some occasions their testimonies represented a conglomeration of multiple traumatic experiences at once. As a result I had to be flexible in order to accommodate

the needs of the war survivors to tell more than one overwhelming experience and to change their subject positions while they gave their testimonies.

Disintegration and the significance of kinship ties

In the case of the first witness, he gave accounts of survival during one of the most publicized and violent battles of the Mozambican civil war: the assault on Renamo central headquarters in Casa Banana in 1985, to which I referred earlier in quoting the late Machel's jubilant statements of this battle's outcome. Through the first testimony we learnt that the joint forces of Zimbabwean and Mozambican soldiers engaged in destroying Renamo's military base by destroying the forests and eventually capturing those who had remained alive. This was part of a military strategy known as 'to dry the river in order to kill the fish'.

Despite the magnitude of the military violence, the testimony-giver gave indications that he did not quickly give up the desire for survival. He ran away to save himself but also succeeded in saving his mother. On one level, this reported experience is consistent with those described by Nordstrom (1997) in her study during the civil war. The witness's experience indicates resilience when one takes into account other stories of civil war survivors during sudden military strikes, in which the reaction of the people was not to think of saving others. Some war survivors expressed this experience of erosion of solidarity in times of profound crisis by saying: *the blanket of winter, each person grabs it to his or her own side*. That is, in the face of suffering each person only thinks of him or herself. In the midst of the military bombardments, instead of thinking of the whereabouts or predicament of others, the immediate reaction was *safe-se quem puder* (sneak away those who can).

On another level, the narration of this interlocutor differs from the narrations described by Nordstrom in that the war survivor used another type of discourse as part of his story-telling of past experiences of peril and escape. The use of metaphors was not to describe facts. Following Ricoeur (1976) it could be argued that this witness was *redescribing reality* in an attempt to cross the threshold of an experience; this can be interpreted as a creative process indexing the willingness of the speaker to formulate a new experience in words (Ricoeur 1977) and thereby develop "a guide for future action" (Lakoff & Johnson

1980: 156). But the possibility to formulate this new experience and develop future actions could not come about without changing his subject position. For instance, positioning theory suggests that "every social interaction presupposes and creatively invokes culture, intelligible forms of action and identity" (Carbaugh 1999: 160). By paying attention to the local ethics of verbal transactions, one can register how individuals spoke and listened in ways that were congruent with some of the values of their culture and, consequently, continuously positioned and repositioned themselves in order to meet their subjective and cultural expectations to move on and start anew.

During the testimony-giving, witness # 1, as was the case with others, shifted his subject position from speaking as a war survivor to speaking as a member of a specific culture, with knowledge of some of the values that sustain his culture, and the awareness of the consequences of failing to uphold these values: to have a family and relationships. These values were not expressed by the acts themselves but by the proverb he deployed: *the goat that stays behind is waiting for the scourge*. This utterance means that a person who loses his proxy relatives (father and mother) is doomed to suffer. The upholding of this value was the driving force behind his risky struggle to escape and survive as a family instead of letting his mother die in the bombardments carried out by the Mozambican and Zimbabwean joint armies; the context of the testimony allowed this witness to put into words his embodied cultural values and past experiences.

From violence to resistance

Another aspect of the first testimony is that the first witness and his mother ran away and hid in the bush of the forests that they knew well. I know of other cases of individuals who only came out of their hideouts from the mountain after the war's end. This means that they resisted the governmental troops' attempts to kidnap them and consequently label them as *recuperados* (recovered). This was the label that the governmental officials gave to the people who had been previously under Renamo's control. It conveys the idea that *recuperados* had once been lost and ended up in the hands of aliens and bandits. However, from the perception of the people themselves, this idea of being previously lost did not make any sense because for them, as witness # 4 said, *that which was born does not get lost*. This means that children are always born either with the mother or father's face. In the context of

interpreting war events, the saying suggests that the fact that Renamo soldiers had rebelled against the Mozambican state did not disavow them from still being considered "children of the zone". Many people living under Renamo control did not feel that they had been lost as the governmental officials affirmed and labelled them. Their act of hiding and refusing to join the Frelimo government can indeed be interpreted as a way of demonstrating some degree of power and political will instead of succumbing in the face of extreme violence (Nordstrom 1997).

On various occasions of testimony gathering, I systematically asked my interlocutors about their determination to remain in the war-zones and live in the midst of suffering. The answers indicated that neither Renamo nor the governmental troops allowed the free movement of people. If someone was caught by either army, that person could be tortured, severely wounded or killed. Yet some war survivors took serious risks in order to fulfil their own goals of escaping. This risk-taking position was described by testimony-teller # 2. The content of his testimony began by highlighting the experience of compulsory recruitment of young men to fight in the war and the experience of *gandira*. Although *gandira* was very traumatic for many people, women seem to have suffered more than men because of the close connections between *gandira* and rape. But for the sake of the specific issues that I want to highlight as contained in the testimonies, I want to draw attention to something that remains between the lines of this testimony # 2. The witness does not claim to be a strong or clever person in the first place. In fact it was the upsetting character of this memory that led him to narrate his past experience of escape. The memory was unpleasant because sometimes he had intrusive thoughts indicating that if the soldiers had found him he could have experienced a kind of double death: death because of trying to escape and death due to hitting the soldier. He and other war survivors had witnessed individuals who were caught during their escape and were subsequently publicly executed in the midst of the war-zones. Yet when he started to tell the story of his experiences it became clear that, although he had been victimized at the hands of the soldiers, he had never totally surrendered to their power. This dimension of his experience, that is, the fact that he had not been totally dominated, had not been clear to him until the moment that our talk through the testimony was initiated and gradually unfolded. At the time of his abduction, he kept animating himself with fugitive thoughts and, when he perceived that

there was an opportunity to attempt escape, his fear was transformed into a source of self-mobilization to run away. The escape became even more meaningful because along the way he was also able to save a woman from further sexual assault by striking the soldier's head with a branch of a tree.

The meaningfulness of this testimony is identified by acknowledging the possibility of the soldiers' weaknesses in some circumstances. By giving an account of these weaknesses, this witness put in evidence not his victimization but his own resistance and creativity. The soldiers, no matter how powerful they were, still on some occasions could be deceived. Some individuals who fell under the soldiers' control managed, amidst fears of pain and death, to be resilient and creative in ways that generated results for their own good. For instance, it could be said that perhaps the captors of testimony-giver # 2 had expected that since it was evening their victims would not dare to run away because, in general, people fear the darkness in Gorongosa due to the not uncommon stories of people being attacked by ghosts in the middle of the night. Yet testimony-giver # 2 was determined to escape, which he did for his own salvation. In a no less important register, it is also possible that the captives managed to escape because the soldiers were too tired to control them. One testimony gave this indication; someone managed to escape from a prison located in a Renamo military base because all of the soldiers fell asleep. The soldiers were not machine guns; physically they were humans like any other persons. The recognition of this fact leads us to understand that civilians were not only victims; sometimes they created their own leeway that made the life of the soldiers miserable and their power less significant. On some occasions civilians bargained with the soldiers and their commanders directly; on other occasions civilians simply devised their own strategies to frustrate the soldiers' intentions to do harm.

From victimhood to acknowledgement of responsibility

Various testimony-givers said that *the rabbit does not move away from his place because of thirst*. The interpretation of this proverb is that a person does not run away from his home just because of suffering, and that one has to be cautious because as witness # 3 said, *in the zone that you do not know, you will eat with your enemy*. When human beings are removed from their social and ecological environment, a successful adaptation is not impossible. The issue is that in the context of war,

a miscalculated adaptation could lead to serious injury or death. This possibility was also suggested by testimony-giver # 3. Like many other *recuperados*, she had been kidnapped (*ku batiwa*) by the government troops from her *madembe* in the bush and moved to the government-controlled communal village. She had learnt in her childhood that *in order to see the eyes of the snail one has to be very attentive*. Sensibility to pleasant clues and signs of danger is learnt in the multiple processes of interaction between the individual and the social and ecological circumstances throughout life cycles. Some of these sensibilities are not automatically transposable from one social world to another, nor from an environment of peace to one of guerrilla warfare.

In a guerrilla war, the environment is a strategic asset to inflict pain or to defeat alleged enemies. In the case of witness # 3 she wanted to go to the river to fetch water. She took a pathway that looked familiar to her. Although she noticed that in the middle of the pathway there was a stem of a tree, and although she was even attentive enough to spot the aesthetics of the lying tree, she was not able to sense the most important thing on that early morning of 1987: the peril that awaited her behind the stem of the tree. The traps that she had learnt to master (say, a hidden green coloured snake in green coloured grass) were more discrete than the stem of the tree crossing her pathway that morning.

When witness # 3 was able to register what had become of her, she was covered all over with blood. This testimony reiterates the importance of paying attention to the use of additional linguistic devices to convey meaning to things that matter most to the people in this study. It also shows that victims are not always fixated on their search for arguments and counterarguments to name and blame others. Since this was a zone that she did not know, she said that she should have been extra careful because, as she had indeed learnt from her elder relatives, in a foreign terrain the risk of falling into dangerous traps is great. By referring to her previous teachings, the testimony-teller shifted her position from being the usual poor victim of war, whose fatality fell upon her, to one in which she assumed partial responsibility for her plight. Testimonies uttered from plural subject positions offer possibilities to interpret testimony as a form of "symbolic action" (Burke 1957). This is an action through discursive practices that mingles objective, subjective and proverbial accounts during testimony-giving. It triggers in the listeners the "imagination into a 'thinking more'" (Ricoeur 1977) beyond of that which happened as a precondi-

tion to appreciate how survivors can create new meanings to memories of violent past experiences through words. Additionally, this act of thinking leads me more to concluding that this witness speaks in this way to convey her susceptibility to engagement in new forms of social action.

Although it could be argued that this position of testimony-giver # 3 resembles a sort of guilt feeling, which may appear in the aftermath of encounters with disasters, my interpretation is that the testimony-teller was not expressing the feeling of something; she was expressing the cognition of something. Indeed she pushed my imagination to understand that she was acknowledging that her ancestors were right when they taught that the potentialities of human beings are knowable through the interactions that they establish with their social and ecological environment. And, by implication, this acknowledgement suggested that she was assuming a degree of responsibility for that tragic event. With the knowledge that she possessed, she recognized that she could have properly assessed the circumstances and acted differently for her own good.

From rape to motherhood

The last testimony in this analysis discloses a very closely guarded public secret in post-war Gorongosa. It was one of the few accounts of personal experiences of rape in my study. War survivors speak of rape being a common event during the civil war but when they do so they often refer to someone else's fate. They also speak of *gandira* as being closely associated with the rape of women and say that many men and women living under Renamo control did *gandira*. When it comes to rape people dissociate from this experience, but keep authentic to the experience of *gandira*. Perhaps this silence over personal experiences of rape is a way people have found to protect themselves. What is most interesting in the account of testimony-giver # 4 is the way in which, one could say, she turned the experience upside down. People say in Gorongosa that *if you cannot change the course of an event, why make it worse?* This may sound like a fatalist position, but more accurately, it reflects the local pragmatic values and strategies. The saying is consistent with people's pragmatism because during arguments about matters gone wrong, as witness # 2 said, *the water that fell down in the soil can no longer be recovered*. This is the kind of proverb that many people easily use in conversations in Gorongosa. It means that it is

not possible to undo a past experience; what is required is to use past experiences to do better on another occasion. This way of conceiving things does not diminish people's sense of what is right and wrong. Instead, it seems that it may work to buffer people against feelings of melancholy and drive people to search for solutions.

In the context of this war, the testimony-teller felt powerless in the face of the soldiers' power and that predicament made her feel miserable and deeply outraged. Indeed, she said that she completely lost trust in men. Yet in the end, as a result of ruminating, she thought that at least the war gave her something of which today she is proud. She said that when she found out that she had become pregnant as a result of the rape, she never planned an abortion because she could not kill someone who carries her own blood. Stories coming from other former war zones suggest that the humiliation caused by rape was accompanied by strong desires to get rid of the pregnancy through planned abortion (Chelala 1998). This predicament does not seem to have been the case in Gorongosa during the civil war. As stated above, wartime rape remains a sort of public secret, yet I never heard of stories of abortion during the war.

The testimonies presented above depict both a range of wartime experiences that took place in the former-war zones and also important features of human resilience and creativity in the face of wartime adversities and post-war challenges. These testimonies give indications that focusing on resilience and creativity as part of people's talk does not dismiss or deny their victimization at the hands of known and unknown perpetrators. On the contrary, the ways in which war survivors gave their testimonies demonstrate that suffering is one of the conditions of intelligibility of resilience and creativity. In addition, and most importantly, the eagerness of survivors to give testimonies demonstrated the positive role of testimonies and empathic listening in assisting war survivors to come to terms with their terrible memories of the war.

Concluding remarks

This chapter analyzed the testimonies of a randomly selected group of war survivors in Mozambique. The main argument here is that war survivors intersected spheres of discourses and took different subject positions while they were giving testimonies of their wartime

experiences. This change of positions while narrating about their past experiences is meaningful in the sense that being a survivor of a civil war intrinsically entails that the individual has accumulated multiple and contradictory experiences. In their attempts to convey to me the truthfulness of what they lived through in the past and how they felt in the present, war survivors had to break away from the limitations of the testimony method as it was applied in the post World War II period in the context of official trials and more recently in the context of psychotherapeutic interventions in different countries. The witnesses in this study also demonstrated the existence of other ways of bearing witness through testimonies besides the current standard that focuses on narrations of past events and keeps witnesses statically in a position of either a victim or perpetrator (Agger 1994; Cienfuegos & Monelli 1983; Felman & Laub 1992). Once placed in one of these two positions, very little room is left for the alleged victims or perpetrators to verbally act as reflexive individuals. Reflexivity here means the recognition by the speakers that living in contexts of civil wars and the struggle to remain alive encompass complicated experiences that in the post-war period cannot be narrated through static subject position and subsequent enumeration of facts. This type of static positioning assigned to witnesses of mass political violence hampers the possibility of understanding the complex processes involving human subjectivity and culture in contexts of civil wars and post-war recovery efforts.

The protocol for this intervention study in Gorongosa was initially framed within this limited understanding of what it means to give a testimony in the aftermath of political violence in general and, in Gorongosa, of a protracted civil war. Therefore we initially asked the participants on an individual basis, a priori considering them as victims, to factually narrate an overwhelming event that had happened to them during the civil war, the memory of which kept haunting them. This approach revealed limitations for three reasons. First, we had not initially fully recognized that the way in which the civil war was fought in Mozambique, particularly in the former war zones where everyone was on some occasions forced to take, or change, sides, led to the emergence of a multiplicity of different subject positions. These positions were confounded by the roles of victims, perpetrators, collaborators, cowards, liars, traitors, thieves, prostitutes, and bystanders. Second, we were not aware that in order to render their experiences meaningful, war survivors would need to use other discursive resources besides the opportunity, jointly created, to give testimonies of factual past

experiences. Third, we had not expected that the individually-oriented and controlled intervention would have a domino-effect on the community in that it triggered conversations among war survivors about the memories of their past experiences. On the one hand, our incapacity to have a strictly controlled intervention represented a methodological limitation to our intervention design (Igreja et al. 2004). On the other hand, it demonstrated that our intervention resulted in creating a community process in which witnesses engaged in conversations about the past which overcame the prevailing post-war practices of silence in the former war zones.

When the testimony sessions started, war survivors broke through the limitations of the testimony method by shifting their subject positions and deploying forms of talk that cut across spheres of discourses. Although questions could be raised about issues of truth in these interplays of discourses, it has been suggested through the study of metaphors that "the more important questions are those of appropriate action. (…) what is at issue is not the truth or falsity of a metaphor but the perceptions and inferences that follow from it and the actions that are sanctioned by it" (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 158). The perceptions and inferences that follow from these intersections of discourses is that testimonies also offer possibilities to convey human resilience and creativity through language. The testimonies demonstrate that life was not easy in the former war zones of Gorongosa. Yet in the testimonies it was not only suffering and victimization that mattered, the witnesses gave indications of their abilities to escape from death. Sometimes it was their fearlessness that allowed them to escape from their violent captors.

Through the use of local proverbs during testimonies, the witnesses gave different meanings to their violent past experiences. The use of proverbs could be considered as inappropriate because testimonies are concerned with facts whereas proverbs seem to redescribe or displace facts. However, the use of proverbs showed that these are important individual and cultural devices that play a role in reframing the understanding of violent past experiences. Once I asked one witness why he had used a proverb during a narration of his past experiences. He answered by uttering another proverb: *a bird in a closed forest is not noticed unless when singing*, meaning that it is difficult to know what is happening in someone else's heart unless the person utters or performs something. In the context of narrating past experiences,

this answer was intended to say that describing past events gives an impression of a certain past experience, the occurrence, in this case, of a past wrong. Yet the description does not give an account of what the person made of that experience because there is a gap between experience and language. Therefore people feel the need to surmount that gap by using other forms of talk, in this case proverbs. We can then argue that when someone uses a proverb the person is at once describing and redescribing reality as an attempt to convey to the listeners "something new about reality" (Ricoeur 1976: 52). When witnesses get involved in this type of narration they are paving the way to engage in new experiences instead of ruminating about the past. Although proverbs are part of popular use in many societies, the ability to use them effectively (that is, to render clear the narration of an intricate past experience) or the ability to create them does not happen all the time. It is part of creativity that emerges in varying interactions of the individual with others; and talking with overtones of creativity features prominently in Gorongosa as war survivors know that, in the midst of the chaos, *you masticate but do not swallow*. That is, *the things that you disagree with, do not keep them inside the heart* as the Gorongosas say. Finding creative ways of talking out 'experiences burning inside the heart' is an important characteristic of the socio-cultural identity of the war survivors in Gorongosa as it is of other people, as argued by Ruth Finnegan (2007) about speaking as a central mechanism to promote social action among the Limba of northern Sierra Leone.

Acknowledgements

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SUFFERING AND HEALING IN THE
AFTERMATH OF WAR AND GENOCIDE IN RWANDA:
MEDIATIONS THROUGH COMMUNITY-BASED
SOCIOTHERAPY

Annemiek Richters

Introduction

One of the key challenges in the aftermath of large-scale political vio-
lence is the restructuring of shattered social worlds. A renewed form
of social cohesion is required particularly in places where people have
to live together in close proximity and depend on each other in every-
day life. At best, this cohesion should be considered acceptable and
meaningful by all population groups. This raises the question of how
people re-form earlier connections, both instrumental and affective,
across the lines drawn by the violence.

Around the world throughout history, individuals, families and com-
munities have proven able to endure the adversity of war, shock, and
stress with great tenacity and stamina. This also holds for contempo-
rary wars to varying degrees. In these wars whole populations are vic-
timized by a continuum of violence and individual and social suffering
is ubiquitous. The type and degree of suffering may differ, depending
on the kind of traumas people experienced and the resources on which
they can still draw, but hardly any individual, family or community
escapes from it. In some cases they will eventually regain a satisfactory
level of well-being. In other cases they are irreversibly affected by the
violence of war. In cases in which people, families and communities
have insufficient strengths and resources to foster healing, the question
is if and how interventions from outside these communities can and
should assist in this process. Can these interventions effectively medi-
ate in the mending of the wounds to the social body and its cultural
frame and thereby strengthen community resilience?

In this chapter the focus will be on the aftermath of the recent vio-
lent political conflict in Rwanda[1] and on the related human suffering,

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[1] After a political settlement or military victory and a ceasefire, a society usually
moves from a condition of negative peace (a condition of which the principal char-
acteristic is the mere absence of violence) to positive peace (a condition of stable and

in particular the suffering at a communal level. In particular, this chapter will deal with the contribution of one particular intervention to heal the wounds of war in a specific regional setting of Rwanda. The concept of healing for the purpose of this chapter is broadly defined. It refers to any strategy, activity or process that improves the psychological health of individuals following extensive violent conflict and, linked to the former, any strategy, activity or process that repairs and rebuilds local and national communities. This implies restoring a normalized everyday life that can recreate and confirm people's sense of being and belonging (adapted from Hamber 2003: 77). In the scholarship on post-conflict societies, healing is frequently used in a psychological sense and juxtaposed to reconciliation. For me, however, reconciliation in the sense of social reconnection is a core aspect of the healing of individual and collective trauma and suffering in the aftermath of war.

The intervention I will examine is the community-based sociotherapy programme, which the Byumba Diocese of the Episcopal Church of Rwanda (EER) established in September 2005 in the north of Rwanda.[2] The term 'community-based' is used to contrast the Byumba form of sociotherapy with clinic-based sociotherapy, in particular as practised in psychiatric clinics for traumatised refugees in The Netherlands, from which the Byumba approach originated. 'Community-based' in the context of Byumba means that this programme is based in a geographically defined set of communities, namely, the Byumba region and, within this area, in communities of people living in the same place (e.g. neighbourhoods) or working, studying of worshipping in particular places and institutions (e.g. a school or a church). 'Community' defined as a value (e.g. meaningful relationships between people and well-functioning supportive social networks) can be considered a potential successful outcome of the Byumba sociotherapy, as here

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widening shared values). After this transitional phase a consolidation period follows. It has been argued by many authors (e.g. Longman 2004a; Reyntjens 2004) that Rwanda, after a one-sided settlement of the conflict, is still in a phase of negative peace.

[2] EER stands for the French *Eglise Episcopale au Rwanda*. The geographical area covered by EER Byumba is equivalent to that of Byumba Province, one of the twelve provinces of Rwanda at the time. Per January 1, 2006, the Rwandan Government established five new provinces, replacing the previous twelve. EER Byumba still covers the same geographical area as before; in this chapter referred to as Byumba region or simply Byumba. Even though the name of the Episcopal Church of Rwanda was recently changed to Anglican Church of Rwanda, the abbreviation EER is still commonly used.

communities (conceptualised as valued social worlds) were shattered due to war and genocide and thus need to be created. Sociotherapy aims at meeting this need.

Before I introduce sociotherapy in Byumba further and examine its workings and outcomes, I will first give a brief description of the history of political violence in the north of Rwanda and its consequences, followed by an analysis of the wide range of attempts to address and redress these violent legacies in the public sphere. These overviews provide the context in which the sociotherapy programme operates.[3]

The political violence in the north of Rwanda and its legacies

Rwanda has a complex history of violence and repression that in 1994 culminated in genocide.[4] Colonial rule created, transformed, and deepened racial and ethnic categories and inequalities, which, intensified under the post-independence regimes, resulted in a range of conflicts (Fletcher 2007; Mamdani 2001; Prunier 1995; Reyntjes 2004). Race and ethnic politics, moreover, intersected with complex gender politics (Schäfer 2008). This intersection took a particular turn in the years prior to the genocide and led to the targeting of Tutsi women with massive sexual violence in the course of the genocide. This violence was supposed to contribute to Hutu racial and ethnic purity and the destruction of the Tutsi enemy (Baines 2003).

During the genocide a large part of the Tutsi minority population was killed, more men than women (Jones 2002). Many Tutsi women were first raped and then killed. A substantial proportion of the women and girls who survived rape were infected by HIV/AIDS (Amnesty International 2004). Hutu were killed as well, although in much smaller numbers than Tutsi; among those killed were Hutu

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[3] In my description of this context I rely on information collected during a field study of the Byumba sociotherapy programme (2005–2008). This field study has also generated most of the empirical data I present in other parts of this chapter. Regular follow-up visits to the programme provided an additional source of information.

[4] In Rwanda there is a battle with history and memory going on, which has a great impact on the meaning people give to their suffering. The various interpretations of history and memory have been the object of much analysis (Buckley-Zistel 2006b: 134). It is beyond the scope of this chapter to do full justice to these various interpretations and their impact on present-day social life in Rwanda. I restrict myself to presenting what seems relevant for understanding the context of Byumba in which the sociotherapy programme functions.

politicians who supported the peace agreement signed in Arusha in 1993 between the Rwandan government and the opposing Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF). Other people targeted were Hutu civilians who helped Tutsi escape the genocide, and those Hutu suspected of being accomplices of the RPF. Fujii (2009), whose research adopted the new micropolitical approach to social violence (King 2004), points to the many complexities and ambiguities embedded within the Rwandan genocide. In her micro-level analysis she shows that individuals were not always targeted based on their ethnicity. Killers spared some Tutsi and some Tutsi joined the killers. In addition, Fujii's empirical data show that ethnicity in its 'natural' state was ambiguous and fluid. The categories of 'perpetrator', 'victim', 'bystander', and 'rescuer' were not exclusive and stable either. Actors moved back and forth between categories, or straddled multiple categories at the same time.

The genocide was preceded by a civil war that was fought primarily in the north of Rwanda, a part of the country where the Tutsi formed a much smaller percentage of the population than elsewhere in Rwanda. The war started with the invasion by the RPF from Uganda into neighbouring Rwanda on 1 October 1990. Predominantly of Tutsi origin, many of the RPF members were second-generation refugees who had fled to Uganda in order to escape the ethnic purges in Rwanda and had settled there from 1959 onwards. The RPF introduced a regime of terror into the 'liberated' part of the country, including Byumba. Low-intensity fighting between the RPF army and the FAR (Forces Armées Rwandaises – Armed Forces of Rwanda)[5] was punctuated by several massacres. Over the next few years, the terror led to massive displacements of people – Hutu as well as Tutsi – to refugee camps and other places of shelter further south. In April 1994, the displacement took a new turn. For instance, Taba, a commune south of Kigali, had to deal with large numbers of displaced persons, including many originally from Byumba, who had been pushed south by the fighting in and around Kigali. According to Des Forges, "[e]mbittered by their long months of misery, they swelled the numbers of persons ready to kill Tutsi" (1999: 275).

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[5] The FAR was the army of the Hutu-dominated Rwandan regime that fought the RPF during the 1990–1994 war and was a major actor in the genocide in 1994. The armed wing of the RPF was the Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA).

During and after the 1994 genocide, part of the remaining Byumba Hutu population, but also some Tutsi, fled to refugee camps in neighbouring countries and remained there for as long as seven or eight years. Some never returned. The experience of those who were internally displaced or exiled abroad was often quite traumatic. Exile was the continuation of war by other means. Camps were highly militarized and living conditions in and around camps were very harsh. The result was that thousands of people died of hunger, disease, and direct violence (Prunier 2009: 24–36; Reyntjes 2009: 79–98).

The victimization of Hutu by the RPF has until today been surrounded by a conspiracy of silence in a variety of ways. According to Reyntjens (2004: 197–198), the RPF killed tens of thousands of innocent civilians before, during and after the genocide. He observes that many of these incidents remain little known or were, at times deliberately, underestimated in the press and other publications. Another way of enforcing this silence is to deny it any official space in the post-genocide nation-building process, which could have allowed people to talk about Hutu who were murdered and mourn their deaths. As Longman and Rutagengwa (2004: 177) found in their empirical research, most Hutu feel limited in their ability to speak freely, particularly to express criticisms, because of fears that they will be accused of having participated in the genocide or of promoting division. At the same time, there is a deep longing among the Hutu population for acknowledgement of their suffering during the violence. The public denial of this suffering causes an additional imbalance within ethnically mixed communities (Molenaar 2005: 89–93).

While it is often written that in Rwanda it really were your neighbours who killed you, this is only partly true of northern Rwanda. I was told that in Byumba people often do not know who killed their relatives.[6] Women often do not know who the soldiers were who raped them. People could not always distinguish whether the military men who killed and raped belonged to the RPF or the FAR. To confuse people, soldiers sometimes wore the uniforms of the other army. As in other parts of Rwanda, however, there were also persons and groups

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[6] As Longman (2004b: 43) argues "different parts of the country and different social groups experienced the genocide differently, and existing research only scratches the surface of this diversity". Rigorous empirical research needs to be done to bring out these differences. An example of the kind of research proposed by Longman is the research conducted by Fujii (2009).

who had some degree of prior social familiarity with the area and con-
tributed to the violation of the population, whether in the form of
betrayal, intimidation, harassment, imprisonment, or killing. The vio-
lation was not only directed from Tutsi to Hutu but Hutu also violated
other Hutu in various ways (see also Fujii 2009).

The fact that the north of Rwanda was mainly inhabited by Hutu,
of whom the majority had already been displaced when the genocide
began, explains that killings during the genocide, which were mainly
directed at Tutsi, were not as frequent in the Byumba region as in
other regions of Rwanda. However, genocide killings did also take
place in Byumba, as well as reprisals by the RPF. I was told that many
people in Byumba have no idea of the overall scope of the genocide in
Rwanda. In their perception of what happened around them, a double
genocide took place.[7] Like the Hutu population elsewhere in Rwanda
(Buckley 2006b: 137), they consider themselves victims as well, as they
suffered from the violence of war, the harsh conditions of refugee
camps, post-genocide revenge killings, and undeserved and ruthless
imprisonment.[8]

In Byumba everyone is affected by the violence of the past. For
example, the thirty-two individuals participating in the first training
of sociotherapists had collectively lost 365 close relatives and 1295
close friends, classmates, neighbours, and colleagues, in addition to
various other kinds of losses. Many people who returned home from
displacement and exile found their property stolen or destroyed. Both
warring parties, the RPF and the FAR, had looted and destroyed not
only the properties of civilians but also of churches and the State. In
one particular part of Byumba province, 90% of the houses had been
destroyed. Little medical care was available. Church activities such as
prayer groups, baptisms, and marriages had ceased, and the church
as an institution had been desecrated, undermining the moral and

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[7] Hutu were indeed killed by Tutsi on a huge scale. This scale is, according to
Reyntjes (2004), neglected in the historiography. However, most sources dismiss the
claim of a 'double genocide' since the RPF crimes were usually unorganized and rela-
tively few in number, and thus do not meet the definition of genocide – the execu-
tion of a pre-determined plan to exterminate a certain population group (Molenaar
2005: 90). Reyntjes (2009: 86–96) questions this claim, but makes no definite counter-
claim.

[8] See for a description of the life inside Rwandan prisons after 1994 Tertsakian
(2008). She confronts the reader with a morally complex world, full of contradictions,
where the absence of justice makes it almost impossible to differentiate between the
guilty and the innocent.

spiritual fabric of the community (Mugiraneze 2004). While some of the ruins of war have been cleared up and institutions are functioning again, wounds remain, social conditions are poor, and violence in everyday social interaction is widespread (Gasibirege 2007).

The landscape of healing interventions in the
aftermath of the genocide

Since the genocide, a wide range of strategies and activities have been developed to assist communities and individuals in the mediation of experiences of violence aimed at individual and social healing. Major actors in this process are the Rwandan Government of National Unity, non-governmental organizations, and civil society actors. Below I present a few examples of healing interventions promoted by those actors. This will enable me to identify the specificities of the Byumba sociotherapy in comparison with those other interventions.

Government programmes

Since the end of 1994, the new government has made the promotion of national reconciliation central to its political programme. This vast enterprise has included both judicial and non-judicial responses. The local-level gacaca courts – a modernized form of traditional gacaca, which was a community-based conflict resolution institution – is one of the three judicial responses. The other two are the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) in Arusha, and national-level domestic genocide trials.

     The objectives of gacaca are to relieve the regular courts by speeding up the genocide trials, bring justice and (where necessary) punishment to specific categories of criminals, reveal the truth about events during the genocide, eradicate undeserved impunity, and stimulate healing and reconciliation (National Service of Gacaca Jurisdictions 2004). On billboards promoting gacaca jurisdiction across the country, this vision was expressed in the text printed below a representation of the terrible suffering caused by the genocide: "The truth heals – Tell what we have seen, admit what has been done and move forward to healing" (*Ukuri kurakiza – Tuvuge ibyo twabonye, twemere ibyo twakoze bizadukiza*). For the Government of Rwanda, the rationale underlying gacaca jurisdictions is that truth leads to justice and justice to reconciliation. Social healing is advanced through uncovering past wrongs,

introducing closure, and moving on to a consolidated peace (Buckley-Zistel 2005: 113).

The pilot phase of gacaca began in June 2002 and it was launched nationwide two years later. Studies done on the effect of gacaca agree that, of all the gacaca objectives, healing and reconciliation is the least often met (e.g. Buckley-Zistel 2005; Ingelaere 2008; Leegwater 2005). A major reason for this is that the State controls which grievances can be aired and thus forces self-censorship upon the population. What is particularly at issue for most of the Hutu population is that the gacaca courts are unable to deal with RPF crimes and revenge-killings by Tutsi civilians. The fact that these crimes are eclipsed from view establishes a moral hierarchy of right and wrong, pain and suffering which, in turn, creates a mass of unexpressed grievances under the surface of daily life (Ingelaere 2008: 56). In the empirical research Leegwater (2005) conducted among Tutsi and Hutu population groups, Tutsi genocide survivors are the least positive about the effects of gacaca. They generally claim that gacaca courts are unable to bring justice, promote reconciliation or heal the wounds. An illustration of this assertion is the story of a genocide survivor with whom I spoke. I call her Constance.[9]

Constance is a young Tutsi woman. She lives in a village in the Byumba region together with many other genocide survivors. Her parents and many of her relatives were killed during the genocide. She knows the killers. Some of them were her former neighbours, others were refugees from the town of Byumba. She experienced that some survivors falsely accused people of having killed her mother. Constance did not support those accusations and told the court what, according to her, was the truth. Her evidence resulted in some people being set free and this caused her to be despised and hated by other Tutsi. The relationship Constance now has with her Tutsi neighbours is bad. It was not easy for her to testify, but she felt that it was important to tell the truth. "Others want to see just anyone suffer, because they were also suffering. Many of them allowed themselves to be bribed into giving false testimony". Constance was also asked by fellow Tutsi to give false testimony. Unlike many others, she was not offered any money for this. The irony is that the Tutsi in her neighbourhood now accuse Constance of giving a false testimony, which, they tell her, she gave because she was bribed into doing so. Constance cannot talk about

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[9] The names of interviewees in this chapter are pseudonyms.

her problems with anyone. That, she says, is the cause of her isolation and continuous suffering. When it was explained Constance what sociotherapy might have to offer her, she reacted: "I do not want to join such an activity. I have my own problems. No one has the same problems as I have. That is why I am isolated".

Activities of the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC)

The NURC is a semi-autonomous national institution. The Rwandan Government of National Unity created it in 1999 by law "with the aim of eradicating the devastating consequences of the policies of discrimination and exclusion that had characterized the successive repressive regimes of Rwanda" (www.nurc.gov.rw). According to the NURC, the unity of all Rwandans is an absolute principle on which to build the nation. Traditional values of unity must be reasserted, reinforced, and taught to all Rwandans. The Commission does this through the distribution of poems, songs, radio broadcasts, civil education programmes, and *ingando* (solidarity camps).[10] The camps are set-up for the civic education of university students, released prisoners, returning refugees, gacaca judges, and local authorities amongst others. Rwandans are told in seminars and through radio broadcasts that 'they have to unite', as Buckley-Zistel's interviewees often put it (Buckley-Zistel 2006a: 109). According to my key informants from Byumba, this message reaches people only selectively, as not everyone has a radio. In addition, in the Byumba region, during the genocide memorial days in April each year, the majority of people have not attended memorial events, and if they have a radio, they often turn it off when programmes to memorize the genocide are broadcasted.[11]

Like gacaca, the various memorialization strategies implemented by the government are contested because they lead to re-traumatization and a one-sided emphasis on Tutsi victimization (Brandstetter 2004, 2005; Richters et al. 2005). A woman in Butare (a town located in the south of Rwanda) said: "When others go to the site to commemorate, I stay home and think about what I have lost. What happened

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[10] See for an overview of NURC activities, evaluation and impact assessment: Institute for Justice and Reconciliation 2005.

[11] In the memorial period of 2009 for the first time memorial activities were brought to the level of villages. Its impact in Byumba still needs to be analyzed.

to me has no place in this [official] commemoration, because my children died differently and elsewhere". Another woman from the same town stated: "The commemoration done each year could damage the process [of reconciliation]. Hearts remain injured with the repeated commemoration" (Longman & Rutagengwa 2004: 174). The core of what these women from Butare said I heard expressed many times in Byumba. However, there is also a change going on in Byumba. Local authorities acknowledge that due to sociotherapy the attendance at memorial conferences has increased substantially. Sociotherapy has helped people to overcome re-traumatization during the memorial period. Solange is one of such people.

Solange is a Tutsi woman, 45 years old, who was raped twice during the genocide. Two of her brothers, her parents, and four of her children were killed. One child as well as her Hutu husband survived. She testified that, due to sociotherapy, she had felt much better during the last memorial period than before. The pictures in her mind were no longer so disturbing. "I even listened to the radio, I felt as normal", she said. Her husband had also listened to talks about trauma during the last memorial period and that had contributed to a change for the better in his behaviour towards her. Before he had, for instance, blamed her for having been raped and often told her to go back to her 'previous husbands' (the men who had raped her).

Ingelaere (2008: 45–46) observes that nowadays "every socio-political state initiative, from poverty alleviation programmes to resettlement schemes to political decentralization, is framed in the languages of 'reconciliation', 'strengthening unity', 'empowerment' and the 'rebuilding of social relations'". According to him, a major problem with these government nation-building efforts is that they are essentially top-down processes, and do not contribute much to *ubwiyunge*. This concept refers to interpersonal reconciliation, which is a matter of the heart and a state of feeling in social relations (ibid.: 50, see also below). It should be distinguished from *kubana*, which refers to living together as a matter of necessity. The first can be called 'thick' and the latter 'thin' reconciliation. Solange's story suggests that in terms of healing, community-based programmes may complement government ones to good effect.

The NURC recognizes that grassroots associations have perhaps been more successful in fostering reconciliation than national campaigns of reconciliation that prescribe tolerance, acts of forgiveness, truth, and participation in judicial and commemoration programmes.

It therefore supports associations that have emerged organically on the local level and plans to develop associations in areas where reconciliation has been problematic. According to Breed (2006: 507), over three hundred associations have emerged from incentives such as bee-keeping, building houses, and establishing theatre, cultural, or debating groups. At the time of her research, sixty of them were linked to the NURC and were supported by the Commission through reconciliation training workshops and monetary support for the purchase of livestock or equipment. Based on her analysis of the use of theatre for reconciliation, Breed (2006) expresses the concern that government-supported grassroots actions for reconciliation may "become co-opted into contestable processes of national identity formation" (512) instead of contributing to "truthful and analytical communication about the current state of post-genocide Rwanda" (508). This raises the question if and to what extent political and social conditions in Rwanda allow for this kind of communication at all and, if they do, how this communication may possibly be facilitated.

Trauma counselling and therapy

Data from Rwanda indicate that the openness to reconciliation is related to multiple personal and environmental factors. One of these factors is suffering from the symptoms that are categorized by Western psychiatry as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Pham et al. 2004). The cluster of PTSD symptoms overlaps with those Rwandans refer to as *ihahamuka*.[12] Shortly after the genocide the term *ihahamuka* (mental trauma) has gained prominence in *kinyarwanda* vocabulary to give expression to what had become a common phenomenon in Rwanda. In interviews it was described to me as: people 'being overwhelmed by what is inside them'; finding expression in, for instance, being very talkative, talking to oneself, being easily irritated and jumpy, crying without apparent reason, acting as if one is out of one's mind, or aggressive behaviour. At first, directly after the genocide, there was no

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[12] See also Bolton (2001), who focuses on the verb *guhahamuka* (to be traumatized) instead of the noun *ihahumuka* (trauma) as my informants usually do. When the Rwanda leadership realized that some people were using these terms in derogatory ways, their use came to be seen as politically incorrect. *Ihahumuka* (or *guhahamuka*) is a strong term, portraying a person who suffers from it as a mad person. The term is gradually being replaced by the 'softer' term *ihungabana*. For ordinary people, however, this term also connotes madness, or in any case being 'half mad'.

psychiatric professional expertise available in Rwanda to help people deal with this kind of mental suffering due to war and genocide. Soon, however, the international community stepped in, trained Rwandans in trauma counselling or more specialized trauma therapy, and helped to set up various kinds of trauma programmes in Rwanda. Most of these interventions were primarily based on Western psychiatric conceptualizations of psycho-trauma, and thus pathology based and individually focused.

The Rwandan government has recognised the need to address the suffering resulting from traumatic stress that is widely prevalent in Rwandan society. However, due to the lack of appropriate training, staff shortages and time constraints, psychological problems are scarcely treated in regular medical services. A hospital may have just one person specialized in trauma therapy. In Byumba hospital, for instance, a clinical psychologist who was trained at the National University of Butare offers such therapy. Next to the few government services for mental health care, a slowly increasing number of non-governmental organisations in Rwanda provide trauma counselling and therapy. They are often internationally funded. Most of these organisations have their headquarters in the capital Kigali and operate mainly in this city and its surroundings, predominantly targeting the Tutsi population. Some of them, however, have slowly decentralized their services, and new organisations have sprung up to offer trauma counselling services in various parts of the country. Most of the first trauma counsellors and therapists in Rwanda received their education abroad, or were trained by international NGOs within Rwanda. They subsequently teach what they learned to others, including lay persons.

One of the largest and most wide-ranging trauma counselling and treatment programmes is implemented by ARCT (Rwandan Association of Trauma Counsellors). This Association was founded in 1998. It offers training in how to deal with trauma providing different levels of knowledge and skills to various categories of people (for instance, psychosocial leaders who work in secondary schools, nurses, and counsellors of people living with HIV/AIDS), and provides trauma counselling services across the country. These services are intensified during the memorial period in April when 'trauma cases', due to the re-experiencing of genocide events, increase substantially.

It has slowly been recognized more broadly within Rwanda that individual trauma counselling and therapy has its limits. First of all,

the magnitude of people in Rwanda who are severely affected by traumas related to war and genocide is so overwhelming that it would take too much time and manpower to give them individual trauma care. It has been estimated that modern criminal justice for over a 120.000 people who qualify for it would take more than 100 years to complete. That was the main reason for turning to a modernized community justice system of gacaca. Many more than 120.000 people would need 'modern trauma therapy' if the Rwandan population should be diagnosed according to Western psychiatric criteria. Subsequently, Rwanda would need many more therapists than the country would ever have available, despite its ongoing trauma counselling training, because the costs would be prohibitive. Another, perhaps more important, limitation of psycho-trauma therapy lies in the fact that people in Rwanda particularly suffer from the social wounds that war and genocide has left them with. Both limitations, each for different reasons, call for a more community or group oriented approach to mental health. This is confirmed by quite a few people who joined sociotherapy after trauma counselling. Their common reaction to trauma counselling is: "I went there alone and when I came back I found the very same people who had been the source of my problems! With sociotherapy it is different and better because it created a whole new and safe social network. I came to have new friends who love me, take care of me, and visit me".

Church-based interventions

The churches in Rwanda play a major role in rebuilding Rwandan society and healing the minds of people, as well as attending to their physical well-being. They do so through Christian counselling, bible teaching and prayers, discussion and training on topics as diverse as human rights, healing, justice and peace, support for education, housing, agricultural activities, HIV/AIDS treatment, and income-generating projects. Churches alongside other charitable institutions, as well as women's groups, have sponsored countless peace-building, reconciliation and community-building promoting programmes (Longman 2004a).[13]

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[13] Longman (2004a: 74–75) indicates that a "simple search on the worldwide web produces more than twenty thousand web pages that discuss reconciliation in

The Rwandan government has asked the churches to assist in bring-ing unity and reconciliation back to the country although the churches were already doing that before the government issued its call. It is, after all, the mission of the church to respond to those in need of assistance. This mission has been taken up with fervour. Those Rwan-dan Christian churches that had supported the ethnic ideology in the crises of 1990–1994 have now embraced a ministry of reconciliation (Gatwa 2005; Guillebaud 2005). The long-established churches face a lot of competition in this respect from the large number of evangeli-cal establishments that, since the genocide, have been introduced into Rwanda from abroad. All churches base their contributions to recon-ciliation on biblical texts.

An example of a church activity focusing on biblically-grounded healing and reconciliation are the seminars of the African Evangeli-cal Enterprise (AEE), which last two to three days. Religious leaders (pastors, evangelists) and lay leaders from different ethnic and church backgrounds are invited to these seminars and are told that they will encounter God and one another on an emotional level during their participation. In the seminars, passages of the bible are used to show that God's heart is aching in the face of all the misery present in Rwanda and that Jesus has come down to comfort the mourning. At a certain stage people are asked to write down or draw all the things that have hurt them in the past and to subsequently nail their papers onto a wooden cross and thus to symbolically hand all their pain over to Jesus. Later the papers are taken down and burned, with the biblical promise that God will give 'beauty instead of ashes'. This ceremony is followed by talks about forgiveness and reconciliation. Towards the end participants testify that they feel relieved and healed. According to the AEE staff, it is not the seminars that bring about healing but Jesus (Grohmann 2009; Guillebaud 2005; Steward 2008: 183–186).

Rwanda". The examples of names of community-building and reconciliation pro-grammes which he gives are 'The Healing through Connection and Understanding Project', 'The Peace-building among Rwandan Youth Project', and the 'Social Trans-formation Program'. He continues: "Programs range from trauma counselling for victims of rape to solidarity camps organized by the Catholic Church to promote dialogue among young people to a project for prisoners to raise crops for the families of genocide victims. The diverse projects are united by the common goal of diminish-ing the divisions that keep Rwanda's population separated".

Apparently the transformation people go through during the AEE seminars is quite impressive; participants who had been initially highly suspicious of each other were eventually seen hugging one another. Nevertheless, some people familiar with the AEE programme expressed doubts about the sustainability of the observed transformations and the impact of the seminars on participants' behaviour in their day-to-day life. AEE has reason to hope that this impact is there to stay, since many of the estimated 8,000 people who had participated in the seminars by 2006 are said to belong to a 'critical mass' of opinion leaders (Grohman 2009). Further research will have to tell whether this hope is justified.

The request for sociotherapy and its implementation

The Episcopal Church of Byumba Diocese (EER Byumba), in line with other churches in Rwanda, had already implemented an array of programmes to assist the Byumba population to recover from the legacies of the war and genocide, before implementing the sociotherapy programme in 2005. The church had been active in the areas of building community capacity, agriculture, animal husbandry, community food security, widow assistance, promotion of public health care, peace building, education, sponsoring of school fees, and raising the literacy level among the population. Some members of the Diocese had participated in training workshops for trauma counselling, but did not feel capable of effectively caring for the traumatized population. The numerous demands from individuals for trauma care and the seriousness of people's problems were considered a burden too heavy for any individual to carry. There were no trauma counselling programmes in Byumba, and all requests by the Diocese to other organizations with expertise in this field to set up such a programme were rejected because of lack of capacity.

In 2004, Cora Dekker and I paid a visit to Byumba to explore how Rwandan society coped with the traumas of the past. When she was invited to do so, Cora explained to an EER church pastor about her work as a sociotherapist with traumatized refugees in the Netherlands. A few months later that same pastor requested us, on behalf of EER Byumba, to implement a trauma programme based on sociotherapy methods in Byumba. This pastor and another representative of the church later explained their request as follows:

> There is a general feeling of insecurity, powerlessness and desperation among the population. Many people do not care about themselves anymore. People have lost their interest in dignity and do not mind about the future. Some have become aggressive in reaction to just anything, whether good or bad. Others are aimlessly wandering around without courage or a plan to survive.

When I challenged my discussion partners by asking them whether material assistance might not be more instrumental in healing than therapy, the response was that, first of all, the "curtain hanging over someone's thinking has to be removed"; first "people have to get out of the confused thinking of life". A further discussion about the prioritization of therapy over tangible, material help – food, money to send children to school, shelter, micro-credit – led to the insight that the best approach would be a kind of ecological one that would address the complexity of people's needs for assistance to regain their humanity. Eventually the main objective of the requested sociotherapy programme was formulated as 'helping people to reduce mental and social distress and regain feelings of dignity and safety in the aftermath of war and genocide'.

The sociotherapy programme began in September 2005 with a three-month training period, in which more than a hundred people from different backgrounds, professions, and church affiliations were trained to facilitate sociotherapy groups (from here on known as socio-groups). After a further month of preparation, the programme began to be implemented in the field. Three years later, 140 group facilitators were working in the field, and a total of more than 4500 people had participated in socio-groups. On average ten to twelve people participate in any such group, for about three hours, once a week for a period of fifteen weeks. Each group is facilitated by two trained group facilitators. The latter only receive a small remuneration for their work.

From the beginning, the programme was supported by the different churches in the area as well as a range of local authorities. They were all instrumental in inviting people to participate as socio-group facilitators or participants. At first there was some suspicion that the intervention was intended to convert people to the Anglican Church. This suspicion was soon allayed, as people found that anyone who was interested could participate. Until now there has been no sign of anyone changing their church affiliation. Indeed, Muslim individuals

participate, as well as people who are not affiliated to any church at all.[14]

The socio-group participants do not receive any financial incentive for their participation, nor any form of refreshments. This is different from almost any other programme offered to people in Rwanda. It seems that the main motive for people to participate in the many training sessions and workshops organised by local and international NGOs, and by the many new churches in Rwanda (including the AEE) is the incentive participants receive. An interest in what the activity has to offer in terms of content comes in second place. When asked for his view on whether to give in to the appeal of people to satisfy their material needs as an incentive to participate in the sociotherapy programme, the Bishop of EER Byumba, whom I consider as the guardian of the programme, voiced as his opinion that that would ruin the programme. It would bypass the goal of sociotherapy which is to help break the circle of victimhood and dependency, to restore people's dignity, and to create connectedness. The bishop's view was accepted by the staff and what is locally called the 'field leading team' (the first 32 trained sociotherapists) and its application seemed to work in practice after the initial struggle to get the view accepted by socio-group participants. However, it still happens occasionally that people start participating in a socio-group with the expectation of material benefits and leave the group after four or five sessions when they find out that their expectation is not met.

The core of the sociotherapy method in Byumba lies in its principles and phases. The principles are: interest, equality, democracy, participation, responsibility, learning-by-doing by using here-and-now situations. These six principles are applied throughout the six phases a socio-group traverses in the course of fifteen weeks; the phases of safety, trust, care, respect, new rules, and attention for memory. I will

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[14] Rwanda has a population of 10.4 million. Roman Catholics comprise 57 percent of the population, main line denomination Protestants 26 percent, Seventh-day Adventists 11 percent, and Muslims 5 percent. There are a growing number of Jehovah's Witnesses (approximately 15,000), evangelical Protestants, and Christian-linked schismatic religious groups. Other groups include indigenous religious practitioners and Baha'is (United States Department of State, *2009 Report on International Religious Freedom – Rwanda*, 26 October 2009, available at: http://www.unhcr.org/ref world/docid/4ae86111c.html [accessed 3 January 2010]). It is estimated that in Byumba 2% of the population is Muslim.

discuss these sociotherapy principles and phases further in the next few sections.[15]

Socio-groups meet in a variety of physical locations in which people generally feel at ease. This can be a school, a church, someone's house, benches under a tree, or in an open field. The programme's philosophy is that the use of the various locations should be free of charge, since the programme is meant for the well-being of the whole community. The idea is that in these locations group members, always sitting in a circle, together create a social space in which they begin to feel safe and where a healing process can develop. The following case study illustrates what this process can be like for participants in the programme and what its impact can be.

The impact of sociotherapy on the life of Seraphine

Seraphine completed one year of primary school. After that she was kept home by her parents so that she could look after the cows. She married young. To escape the 1990–1994 war violence she and her family moved south. However, during the genocide, her husband and one of her six children (a three-year old girl) were killed in front of her eyes by soldiers.[16] When the militia wanted to rape her, she successfully scared them off by telling them that Nyabingi – a goddess Rwandans used to fear and were supposed to appease with ceremonies – would take revenge if they harmed her. Yet, despite that narrow escape then, she was cruelly raped by three *Interahamwe* soldiers later on, when she fled with her remaining children to a refugee camp in Tanzania. After two years in the camp, she went home with three of her children, and the other two joined later. She found her house destroyed and, as she has had no means to repair it, they had to live in it as it was. After some time, she was advised to have herself tested for HIV/AIDS. The test was positive. A local association provided her with medicine. However, knowing that she was HIV positive added to her misery. Her sleeping problems caused by the nightmares of the violence she

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[15] See for a full description of the background and set up of the programme Richters et al. 2008a and 2008b.

[16] Seraphine gives confusing accounts of the identity of these soldiers; in one interview she referred to them as *Interahamwe* (Those who work/attack together' – the civilian Hutu extremist militia), in another as RPF soldiers.

had experienced and her worries about daily life increased. She "spent whole nights weeping". She was not a good Christian, according to herself, because she drank alcohol. She stopped drinking after joining the church and people in the church assisted her. They told her that she should be patient and continue to pray and that God would help her. She followed the advice given to her, and life went on. However, she often felt isolated and believed that people continued to distance themselves from her.

One day, Seraphine was invited to join sociotherapy. She accepted, hoping that this might help her to solve some of her problems. In the socio-group she started to feel safe and experienced, as she put it, "a release of her heart". She was advised by group members to forgive, and she wanted to follow their advice. However, she did not know whom to forgive, since she had not succeeded in finding out who had killed her husband and child. In sociotherapy she discovered that she was not the only one with problems. She explained that she learned to trust others; that others gave her peace in her heart: "It was like vomiting; everything in my heart came out". The group helped her to overcome her problems of communicating with others, she said. Seraphine added that now she can talk to other people, friends and neighbours, who are now also willing to help her. The neighbours see her interacting with others, so they also start interacting with her, and she with them. However, Seraphine stated that she still suffers from trauma, headache, and nightmares. She can now share these problems with others, which is a big relief, but she needs more help.

Seraphine continues to meet with her socio-group members, all widows, but now in the context of the income-generating association they started together.[17] The association is like a family for her. Asked what makes sociotherapy so special, Seraphine responds enthusiastically: "doing things together, the support, and the security". She could talk about her secrets and thus share them with others, trusting that those others would not gossip about it. She enjoys the strength of mind she has regained.

The sociotherapist who facilitated Seraphine's group provided some additional information after the first interview I had with Seraphine,

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[17] It is estimated that a third of the sociotherapy groups take the initiative to start an association for income-generation, a third continue meeting regularly, and a third do not meet anymore after the programme of fifteen weeks has ended.

namely that Seraphine's husband had been killed because the military had suspected that he was affiliated with the RPF. On Seraphine's return, even her own family considered her as an RPF affiliate and thus did not have a good relationship with her. Seraphine, as a Hutu, was at first not entitled to the support the government provides for genocide widows, as such aid is confined to Tutsi women whose husbands were killed during the genocide. Through the intervention of a local authority representative, however, she eventually received a cow from the government, which helped remedy her inability to feed her children properly.

The representative for women in the village where Seraphine lives noticed a remarkable change in Seraphine. "I was the one whom Seraphine insulted as being useless to her. But after joining this programme, she came to ask me for a pardon; she said 'I calmed down, sociotherapy has strengthened me'. Before, Seraphine was always alone. Today her morale is far higher. She came to invite me and I accepted her invitation and promised her that I will help her in some activities".

Another local leader, a woman, told us in an interview about the impact of sociotherapy on widows, including Seraphine, in her area: "Before, I considered them as pitiful outcasts, as they did not collaborate with others in common activities, arguing they were too poor. But today they are smart; they wear clean clothes, attend meetings, participate in many activities, and operate in associations in order to cultivate the land. You find that they broke out of isolation".[18] Apart from Seraphine's association, there are four other, similar associations – each also consisting of a group of widows who had participated together in a socio-group – in the area. Sociotherapy does not provide material or finances to start such an association, but it appears that, due to sociotherapy, the women felt motivated to raise funds themselves. Later, they were the first to be supported by a small micro-credit programme that was connected to the sociotherapy programme. Nowadays, the women of the five associations proudly sell their products (beans, sorghum, potatoes, cauliflowers, etc.), even to people who come all the way from Kigali (a distance of two hours' drive) to buy them. It appears that other people in their neighbourhood take notice of this and feel encouraged to come out of their own isolation.

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[18] Many of the female local leaders of Seraphine's and surrounding villages later joined a socio-group themselves.

The experience of the sociotherapy programme corresponds with that of the NGO World Vision, as expressed by Gasana (2008). When Gasana began working with survivor communities for World Vision in 1999, he was struck by how many survivors lacked energy and displayed immense apathy towards most aspects of life. He concluded later that unless survivors experienced healing of their trauma, they would not be able to overcome their poverty by becoming productive (ibid.: 156).

Resilience and healing through sociotherapy

In the sociotherapy programme widows are singled out as one of society's vulnerable groups that might benefit from the programme. The husbands of the widows I personally met had died of disease (before, during, and after the war), poisoning (the underlying medical cause of this 'poisoning' is frequently AIDS), and the violence of the war and genocide. Sometimes husbands never returned from Congo, where they had sought refuge or joined the military. Widows have always suffered from hostilities enacted by their families-in-law. Now also their own family members and children turn against them, trying, often successfully, to rob them of their property, chasing them out of their own houses, and withholding material and social support. Often widows have lost family members and children during the war and genocide, which means an additional loss of (potential) social support. One woman said to me: "I am the only one left". She lost both parents and all nine of her siblings during the war and genocide. Her husband who had survived the violence with her died of AIDS in 1996.

As before the war, a widow is still regarded in Rwandan society as a weak creature without agency, vulnerable in particular to the whims of men. Men can come to her for sex at any time, since there is no husband in the house to protect her, I was told repeatedly when discussing widows' problems. It is a major problem that the number of widows has increased substantially since the war. In addition, there are a large number of women who are alone because their husbands are in prison. Thus, there are many needy people, and resources are limited. This means that widows have to compete amongst themselves and with others for sympathy, social support, and men to marry or have sex with. The problem is amplified by the relative lack of men after the war and genocide. Widows are blamed by married women for

taking their husbands away from them. Looking at this phenomenon from another angle, widows are the victims of poverty, loneliness, and lack of affection, and men sometimes take advantage of all that. All these conditions add to the widows' suffering. Many widows, such as Seraphine in the past, suffer from hopelessness, isolation, stigmatization, extreme poverty, losing their mind or going mad, and wanting to commit suicide but fearing death and being anxious about leaving children behind without any support.

In the context of vulnerability in which widows live, some show great resilience in the sense of an ability to 'bounce back' from all sorts of adversity. They enact, for instance, a strong sense of responsibility in raising and protecting their children, including orphans they have decided to take into their care. Another example is their engagement in work that used to be men's work, such as the construction of roads and brick buildings. In addition, there is active resistance among widows to the culture of widows' sexual availability for men. There are, however, also widows who do not bounce back and do not resist society's attitude towards them. Instead, they may reduce their sensitivity and in this way make themselves less vulnerable. To me, it seems, Seraphine was quite resilient, actively taking care of her children as best she could. As she said, in sociotherapy she met widows worse off than her – some of whom I also met – among them women whose resilience seemed to have been irreversibly affected, that is to say before their participation in sociotherapy.

Next to socio-groups for widows, there are groups for ex-prisoners, orphans, single mothers, people living with HIV/AIDS, women who take care of children with HIV/AIDS, secondary school students, men living in difficult home situations, married couples, and the elderly. Each of these categories of people has group-specific problems. There are also so-called mixed groups with men and women, youngsters and old people. No specific socio-groups are available for women with experiences of rape, Hutu or Tutsi women with husbands and sons in prison, and children with parents in prison, even though these categories of people are seen as particularly vulnerable.[19] However, people with these problems are among the sociotherapy participants

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[19] In the context of Byumba, selecting people to participate in a socio-group on the basis of these specific problems would most likely contribute to stigmatization.

and their specific problems can be raised within their socio-groups if they choose to do so (cf. Richters 2008).

There are variations in the injuries people suffered and the resilience they developed. A significant feature of what people share across categories is the loss of a common sense of moral orientation and trust, resulting, for instance, in a lack of the traditional and much valued social togetherness, a loss of dignity, and lingering stigmatisation. In addition, people suffer from structural violence in the form of poverty, hunger and degrading material circumstances. All these social forces result in a complex of health problems of a spiritual, moral, social, psychological and physical nature. In the sociotherapy programme, loss of dignity, lack of being cared for, and mistrust are presented as the key elements of people's suffering. For the sociotherapists and sociotherapy group participants dignity means worthiness or being valued (*agaciro*), having value as a human being (*ubumuntu*), having a good image or reputation (*kugira ubuhamya, bwiza/kuboneka neza*), being blameless (*ubuziranenge*), and being a person of integrity (*ubunyangamugayo*).

For widows, for instance, dignity means being cared for instead of being neglected, disrespected, and mistrusted. "So and so did this to me and it made me feel like others". The widow quoted here feels recognised as a human being through being cared for. However, widows keep hearing nasty words from people around them, which strip them of their dignity and humanity. Often they are too ashamed to go out, and thus feel isolated. "A widow is a widow and it is all over, it is like we are finished" (widow). For ex-prisoners, dignity means to remove the shame and humiliation that burdens them after their prison release. "You come out of prison as a person who is infected (*ukuramo ubwandu*). People do not trust you" (ex-prisoner). It means that, when they come out of prison, the value and respect ex-prisoners had had in society before their imprisonment is lost. Even when an ex-prisoner is released because he proved to be innocent, he still feels shame. For ex-prisoners the meaning of dignity is to be accepted into society again.

Sociotherapy appears to be an intervention that can help people break through their misery, even in situations in which their resilience seems to have been irreversibly affected. What people like Seraphine appreciate in sociotherapy is being respected by others again, and being given the opportunity to speak, tell their stories, and be listened to in a respectful way. The socio-group functions for them as

a family and a doctor at the same time. Before their hearts were like a stone, they say. However, sharing their story with others and listening and processing advice from them unburdens their hearts and gives them peace and security. Sociotherapy helps people begin a process of coming to terms with experiences related to the violence of war and genocide and/or the violence that is part of their present day-to-day life. The 'healing of their hearts' helps them to constructively confront their daily problems by taking the initiative to reconnect with others who harmed them and start a process of reconciliation with them. Their identity as victims gradually dissolves. As people often say: "Sociotherapy gave me my humanity back".

The way people describe what sociotherapy can do for them does not match with what the term sociotherapy may suggest: a medicalizing approach to social problems. Because of the possible connotations the term 'therapy' may conjure up, a more appropriate term would have been desirable. However, the term sociotherapy soon found its way into Byumba society and elsewhere in Rwanda, which makes it difficult to think it away now. People do understand that the intervention works through its 'community as doctor' method (Rappoport 1960), meaning that it is the community of the socio-group that heals. While sociotherapy is first of all directed at the social level and not the psychophysiology of a person, it appears to have a healing effect on the individual mind/body as well.

When sociotherapy is labelled by sociotherapists and beneficiaries as 'medicine', as it regularly is, the term serves as a metaphor for something that works quickly and effectively. As one AIDS-affected widow – who like Seraphine was suffering from 'weakness' (not having the moral strength to do things), hopelessness, isolation, fear of death, and stigmatization – said in an interview: "Nurses cure the body but sociotherapy cures the illnesses of the heart". As Seraphine, quoted above, put it, "it was like vomiting, everything in my heart came out'. In Byumba the practice of sociotherapy is also referred to as *isanamitima* (heart repair; a term people use for various kinds of counselling, particularly trauma counselling), *inyigisho* (teachings), *amahugurwa* (trainings), and *kuvurana kivandimwe* (healing each other in a brotherly/sisterly way). The people participating in sociotherapy, however, usually call it *soserapi* or *seziterapi*.[20]

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[20] Lately the local term *umususurutsatsinda* (someone who warms up a group, a group 'warmer') has been proposed for sociotherapist, c.q. socio-group facilitator. It

Sociotherapy does not work for everyone quickly and effectively. Annonciata, for instance, a young single woman, testified after thirteen group sessions: "To be honest, I was not satisfied, these are only words. I cannot get body lotion and soap. There is nothing to help me buy what I need. I did not bring out my inner problems". It happens occasionally that participants leave the group half way during the sessions because, for various reasons, they do not want to speak about their problems. It is estimated that twenty percent of the people who participate until the end are not satisfied because of unsolved problems, often severe emotional problems. Many of them join a second group. Some are advised by sociotherapists to seek more specialised care.

Suffering from a damaged inter-est

People participating in sociotherapy demonstrate by their behaviour and speech that what they suffer from most can be conceptualized as the loss of *inter-est* and that the key to sociotherapy's effectiveness is its contribution to the restoration of that *inter-est*. *Inter-est* is a concept introduced by the ex-patriate trainer Cora Dekker as the first principle of sociotherapy in Byumba. She derived that concept from Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition* (1958). For the philosopher Arendt, the condition of human existence is plurality. Interest in each other starts because of that plurality. Dekker explained the principle of *inter-est* (presented to the trainees as 'interest') in her training by saying that people who are interested in each other can ask questions like: 'how are you', 'what do you mean', 'how do you do things', 'how do you see things', 'how do you experience things'. In this way a dialogue starts.

Sociotherapists link the principle of interest particularly to the phase of care. They explain it to group participants as the first step towards caring for someone. Showing someone that you care, is to first show an interest in him or her. When you start asking the question of 'how are you', you show that you care about the person you address. As a sociotherapist in Byumba put it, "Disregard for another person may lead to loss of life, a woman may hang herself because she feels humiliated.

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refers to the animation of group dancers. When the group seems tired or discouraged, 'seems cold', the members of the group need someone to 'warm them up'.

Children might possibly become street boys and girls, as a result of feeling uncared for, or disliked".

Arendt (1958: 182–183) distinguishes two meanings of the concept of *inter-est*. People's specific, objective, worldly interests "constitute in the word's most literal significance, something which *inter-est*, which lies between people and therefore can relate and bind them together. Most action and speech is concerned with this in-between, which varies with each group of people (…)". As Arendt puts it, this first "physical, worldly in-between along with its interests is overlaid, as it were, overgrown with an altogether different in-between which consists of deeds and words and owes its origin exclusively to men's acting and speaking directly to one another". She refers to this second, subjective in-between reality as "the web of human relationships", indicating by the metaphor its somewhat intangible quality. Widows experience the collapse of the *inter-est*, the collapse of the web of the social relations they belonged to in the past, as social death. As Arendt writes, a "life without speech and without action is literally dead to the world; it has ceased to be a human life because it is no longer lived among men" (ibid.: 176). In Byumba one would say that that life is a life without humanity (*ubumuntu*). The testimonies of different categories of people confirm that destructive social forces in Byumba evidently have not only brought along a form of physical death, but also social death – "a disempowering descent into passivity and privacy, solitude and silence" (Jackson 2006: 44).

The anthropologist Michael Jackson (ibid.: 39), who was greatly inspired by the work of Arendt, writes that violence – like storytelling to which I will turn below – occurs "in the contested space of inter-subjectivity, its most devastating effects are not on individuals *per se* but on the field of interrelationships that constitute their life worlds". This is precisely what is at stake in a post-war society such as Byumba. Virtues that people value but that have been lost due to the violence are acts of greeting, visiting each other, and inviting one another to parties and ceremonies. A sociotherapist from Byumba gave the following example of such loss: "Imagine, someone in my village recently built a fence between his plot of land surrounding his house and that of his neighbour without an opening in it, which would enable that neighbour to easily come in to borrow salt or matches when he lacks these basic provisions at a particular point in time". There are many Rwandan proverbs which express the importance of living in harmony with other people and being no one without another. One of them is,

for example, *Kubaho ni ukubana* (The value of existence is to be with others). The moral system expressed in this proverb fell into disorder in Byumba; a disorder which people experience as threatening.

The recovering of inter-est *through storytelling*

Socio-group participants say in their testimonies that the key to their recovery is being able to speak to each other again in the safe environment of a socio-group. As Seraphine stated: "Now in the sociotherapy programme and talking with others, the situation improved". In socio-groups people share togetherness by sitting together, praying, playing games, joking, singing, dancing, communicating through body language and talking. While I focus in this section on the speaking, it is important to realize that this act of speaking is embedded in the other forms of sharing I have listed. People tell each other stories, discuss with each other the problems presented in those stories, and advise each other on what to do. The talking and sharing is important for people to regain their dignity. A sociotherapist going over what they had learned in a meeting with colleagues expressed this as follows:

> The first thing sociotherapy does is to enable people to retrieve their dignity and to give them a platform to speak. When a person gets a chance to talk with others, that person takes the opportunity to ask himself 'how do they see me'. Others take the opportunity to show him that he is not the only one with that particular problem. Feeling that he is the only person who has that problem is often a serious sickness in itself. And even if he is the only one with a problem that haunts and overpowers him, others support him and he starts wondering 'Can others stand by me'? 'Is it possible that when I say something it is understood'? When people start talking, they begin to open up. They wake up and begin to see things more clearly, where they got lost and what made them lose their worthiness. At the end of the programme beneficiaries say 'I can live with this and my life will continue'; 'it also happened to others and this comforts and strengthens me and gives me the zeal to live on'. Sociotherapy is like a teacher and a medicine. You (as a sociotherapist) have to prepare it well and they have to take it well.

Since most people in Byumba hide their problems and do not speak about them, people walking around in the neighbourhood might easily think that the others are fine. This makes that person feel jealous and frustrated. However, such negative feelings gradually appear to decrease in socio-groups when people get their dignity back. Another sociotherapist also links dignity to talking to each other.

> I see dignity nowhere else but in the dialogues, in that freedom of spea-
> king in a group of different people. The fact that someone is able to talk
> among people makes him or her feel respected. That freedom fills a void
> in the life of that person. Freedom is a very important thing, and it is
> here that I determine whether dignity has returned.

For sociotherapists dignity is closely related to safety and trust, both
of which are considered to be the backbone of sociotherapy. "When a
person feels that he or she has safety and trust, dignity is immediately
present, all these three things come from the discussions" (sociothera-
pist). Safety, trust and dignity develop with the development of a space
of shared *inter-est* by the socio-group.

> An indication that trust and safety are present is when a person who
> came thinking that his life is holding by a thread, has joined others for
> a new journey and in the process of opening up, they talk, they laugh,
> they show it by giving their testimonies, they show it by saying that
> they thought that they were 'dead' because of carrying the burden alone.
> Looking at them talking, happy that they have reached a point where
> they can share their problems with others, shows that trust and safety
> are there. If someone joined the group thinking that he is the only one
> who is heavy-loaded, but found that there is someone else he can share
> the burden with, it is an indication that he has taken an exemplary
> step forward. Safety and trust bring along something called *ubumuntu*
> (humanity). (sociotherapist)

Jackson's exploration of Arendt's view on storytelling leads him to
write that storytelling has the power to heal. In line with Arendt's
conceptualization of the *inter-est*, Jackson (2006: 58) points out that
"in bridging the gap between private and public realms, storytelling
enables the regeneration and celebration of social existence, without
which we are nothing". The term 'public' signifies for Arendt (1958:
50) "two closely interrelated but not altogether identical phenom-
ena. Jackson (2006: 11) paraphrases the way Arendt describes both as
follows:

> Phenomenologically, the public realm is a space of appearance where
> individual experiences are selectively refashioned in ways that make
> them real and recognizable in the eyes of others. Sociologically, the
> public realm is a space of shared *inter-est*, where a plurality of people
> work together to create a world to which they feel they all belong.

For Arendt (1958: 58), the private realm denotes a conglomeration
of singular and reclusive subjectivities "deprived of the reality that
comes from being seen and heard by others (…), what matters to him

(private man) is without interest to other people". In Arendt's view, storytelling is never simply a matter of creating either personal or social meanings, but an aspect of the *inter-est* in which a multiplicity of private and public interests are always problematically in play (ibid.: 182–184).

Sociotherapy in my view can be seen as a public realm in the way Arendt defined it; a realm or space where a shared *inter-est* gradually develops in the course of the sessions. Like violence, storytelling occurs in the contested space of intersubjectivity. The value of telling each other stories in socio-sessions lies precisely in that, even if participants contest them, they usually do so in an atmosphere of mutual care and can be guided towards constructive criticism.

In socio-groups people primarily speak in the form of what Bamberg (2006) and Georgakopoulou (2006a&b) call 'small stories', to be distinguished from 'big stories'. The term 'small stories' refers to stories that are usually very short, which is why they are called 'small'.[21] More importantly, however, the term is meant to refer to stories told during interaction with others, the kind of stories people usually tell in everyday settings. They are often about very mundane things and everyday occurrences; frequently about very recent ('this morning', 'last night') everyday-life events. Georgakopoulou (2006a: 126) calls these "immediately reworked slices of life" that arise out of a need to share with friends what had just happened, "breaking news". This term aims to capture the dynamic and ongoing nature of these small stories. Small stories are more about imagining the future than about remembering the past, which is usually done in big stories.

The term 'big stories' refers to the often relatively long stories about personal experiences of past events as they are elicited in, for instance, therapeutic interviews and biographic narrative research. Big stories are also told in socio-groups, particularly when the group reaches the memory phase. Then at least some of its participants may tell others about the painful experiences related to the political violence they went through in the past. It was remarkable that the telling of big stories was absent in the socio-group of ex-prisoners, which was observed by the local researcher Rutayisire (2008). A lengthy period passed in

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[21] The term small was chosen over short, since the term 'short-stories' has already been coined for a particular literary genre. And the term 'Big Stories' was chosen over 'Grand Stories' in order to avoid the possibly confusing allusion to 'Grand Narratives' as coined by Lyotard.

that group before the men changed from 'we-talk' to 'I-talk', but even then their genre of speaking remained in the form of small stories.

An example of a particular kind of small story in socio-groups are those told in the round of so-called 'weekly news', news about the good and bad things that had happened during the past seven days, the days between the previous and the present meeting. Such 'breaking news' is usually presented immediately after the opening prayer, at the beginning of a session. Examples of such news presented in a women's group were news about family conflicts, health problems, roof leakages, and livestock problems. Examples of news in an ex-prisoner socio-group were about having been busy sowing sorghum, having one or two sick people at home, the payment of the compulsory health insurance (which is experienced as a nightmare, especially when one has a wife and eight children to take care of, and fears that non-payment may result in imprisonment again), and the reduction in livestock prices, resulting in a drop in income. The local researcher documenting the meetings of the ex-prisoner group noticed after some time that in almost all meetings the men, with a few exceptions, said more or less the same thing, 'a sick child or sick wife'. It had become almost like a routine statement.[22] This does not take anything away from its relevance. The round of weekly news contributes to the development of trust needed to construct the *inter-est* in the group. Once a certain degree of safety and trust has been established in the group other types of small stories are also included and, at least in some of the socio-groups, begin to gradually intermingle with big stories about people's lives.

What Bamberg (2006) writes about the point of telling stories in interactional circumstances applies very well to what happens in socio-groups. "Usually, speakers bid for the floor to tell a story in order to make a point and to 'account' for one's own (and/or others') social conduct as a matter of stake and interest, that is to say, "making past actions accountable from a particular (moral) perspective for particular situated purposes" (Bamberg 2006: 144). At this point Bamberg quotes Drew (1998: 295).

> In the (interactional) circumstances in which we report our own or others' conduct, our descriptions are themselves accountable pheno-

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[22] An experienced sociotherapist would be able to break through this 'routine' by raising other types of starting questions.

mena through which we recognizably display an action's (im)propriety, (in)correctness, (un)suitability, (in)appropriateness, (in)justices, (dis)-honesty, and so forth. Insofar as descriptions are unavoidably incomplete and selective, they are designed for specific and local interactional purposes. Hence they may, always and irretrievably, be understood as doing moral work – as providing a basis for evaluating the "rightness" or "wrongness" of whatever is being reported.

What people do in socio-groups by telling their stories is the moral work described in this quotation (see also Walker 2006). In addition they advise on what is morally the best way to behave. This can be to forgive the person who wronged you. Another piece of advice can be not to present the case discussed in the group to a court, which will cost a lot of money and is likely to be ineffective, but solve the case among the people involved in it. Many discussions in the socio-groups focus on conflicts. The three types of conflicts mostly addressed in the groups are family conflicts (such as domestic violence), conflicts due to incompatible interests (for instance disputes about the ownership of a piece of land), and conflicts related to ethnic differences. This illustrates that the Hutu/Tutsi dichotomy is far from being the only cleavage in Rwanda's society. As Buckley-Zistel (2006b: 138) observes, "Hutu and Tutsi groups are in themselves diverse, providing cause for many other conflicts. Moreover, boundaries along ethnic identities are not always clear-cut". She met, for instance, amongst Tutsi survivor groups a number of Hutu women whose Tutsi husbands had been killed. Other examples of the fluidity and ambiguity of ethnic identities are Hutu (like Seraphine) who are perceived by other Hutu as Tutsi; Tutsi women joining Hutu female neighbours to visit their husbands or sons in prison, and mixed marriages in which husbands and wives remain loyal to each other.

Concluding remarks

Sociotherapy as implemented in Byumba is presented in this chapter as one of the many interventions in Rwanda to facilitate the healing of social and individual wounds caused by the political violence of its recent past and, as a continuation of that past, the ongoing day-to-day traumatisation by a continuum of violence, including structural, social and family violence. The Rwandan war and genocide share with many other contemporary violent conflicts features that undermine the foundation for well-functioning communities. However, though

there are similarities, political violence takes different forms and affects people and communities differently. These differences also exist within countries. Thus, in Rwanda, different parts of the country and different social groups experienced the war and genocide differently.[23] As Fletcher puts it, "…Rwanda in April 1994 was a place of a thousand civil wars: distinct, if not unconnected" (2007: 41).[24] These differences and their aftermaths turn out to have implications for the functioning of sociotherapy, which is set up to meet the specific needs of communities in search of healing.

Even though sociotherapy has been brought from abroad, in Rwanda it has been adapted to local circumstances and needs. It is, for instance, not clinic-based as in the West where sociotherapy originated, but community-based, and adjusted to the communities in which it functions. The specific needs of communities in the Byumba region are different from for instance, the Nyamata region, where a second sociotherapy programme started in 2008. Nyamata communities suffered much more from the genocide than Byumba in terms of the number of genocide killings. As a result, the Nyamata sociotherapy programme established socio-groups that were all mixed, with perpetrators and victims of the genocide represented in most groups. This difference between the two programmes is under study and will be reported on in the near future. Here I will summarize what the specificities of the Byumba sociotherapy are in comparison to the other interventions in Rwanda which I have briefly presented in this chapter.

A major difference between sociotherapy and contemporary gacaca is that everyone participating in sociotherapy can bring just any problem forward for deliberation. The goal of these deliberations is not to identify guilt as in gacaca and to reach a verdict, but in a safe environment discuss and if possible solve daily life problems. Sometimes the group chooses a few people from among themselves to act as 'people of integrity'. These people visit a group member at his or her own home in order to discuss there the problem he or she presented in the group with the very people actually involved in the problem. Occa-

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[23] See Fujii (2009) for a situational analysis of two different rural communities – one in North and one in South Rwanda – and their experience of the genocide.

[24] Fletcher's expression must be understood in reference to the fact that Rwanda is often referred to as the 'Land of a Thousand Hills' due to its mountainous and irregular terrain.

sionally this initiative aggravates the problem instead of solving it. In most cases, however, the result is positive. Sociotherapy reminds people of traditional gacaca, which they remember as a valued institution. However, people also appreciate the way sociotherapy differs from traditional gacaca, in the sense that the principles of equality, democracy and individual responsibility (for instance to contribute to the case brought forward) as they are applied in sociotherapy were not as thoroughly applied in traditional gacaca (cf. Ngendahayo 2008).

It is its broad, ecological focus that distinguishes sociotherapy from most reconciliation activities in Rwanda. Communities are shattered by more than issues directly related to ethnicity, and sociotherapy aims to allow people voluntarily to share with others their experiences of what is at stake for them. It turns out that most of them suffer from social and moral disorder in their direct living environment, and extreme poverty as a cause and a consequence of this disorder. Sociotherapy, in contrast to many other social healing interventions, does not give any material compensation for participation in its activities. However, it regularly results in a renewed social vitality to address issues of poverty by starting income generating activities together and helping each other to, for instance, build houses for those in need, or work for them in their fields.

A major difference between sociotherapy and trauma counselling is that sociotherapy is less individually oriented than trauma counselling. People in Byumba who went through the latter testify that they do not like the individual-oriented method of asking so many questions. That gives them the feeling of being judged. Besides, coming back to the same environment where neighbours harass them and where they are confronted with symbols of bad memories, such as a tree under which a family member was killed, causes one to relapse if there is no one to support the person in question. Another problem in trauma counselling is that speaking on a one-to-one basis prohibits the client from realizing that he or she is not alone in his problems. In people's perception sociotherapy relates in many ways to the Rwandan culture of togetherness which people cherish in their memories, while trauma counselling does the opposite. However, a sociotherapist commented at this point that, even though sociotherapy promotes individual responsibility within the context of togetherness, a negative effect of its approach may be that people are able to hide too much behind the togetherness. Where needed, more training and experience can give

sociotherapists the courage and skills to break through this attitude of placing the locus of agency – the responsibility to act – onto the group and away from individuals.[25]

Churches have many activities that may promote healing. One difference with sociotherapy is that in church people are often addressed in large groups, which does not favour confidential communication. And in a one-to-one pastoral counselling situation, the individual is too exposed and may feel uneasy. In that particular counselling setting, answers are sometimes given by counsellors that are based on pre-established biblical frames-of-reference, even before the question asked by the client has been heard. And the question a person himself or herself wishes to ask may not be posed because in that particular setting there is a lack of trust and lack of competence to formulate it well. The contrasting, specific and distinctive character of sociotherapy with its phases and principles is the fact that participants share regularly well facilitated time and space for a relatively long period. Spontaneously, however, elements of Christianity like prayer and the use of biblical texts are integrated into sociotherapy. People seem to appreciate this. It is explained to me as part of their culture. However, sociotherapy works for people also without Christian elements. This became evident in socio-groups in which, after the programme had been running for two years, these elements were – as a kind of experiment for the sake of assessing the value of prayer and bible reading as part of sociotherapy – deliberately excluded from the sessions.

While sociotherapy, in important aspects, differs from other interventions, it also complements these other programmes and even makes them more effective. The experiences with sociotherapy suggest that it has the capacity to mediate other, often more top-down or less bottom-up programmes in the sense of enabling or strengthening the healing potential of these other interventions. Sociotherapy may, for instance, function as the social hammock in which individual trauma therapy can be embedded and in this way improve the benefits of trauma therapy for those who do not benefit enough from sociotherapy alone. One reason why local authorities appreciate sociotherapy is that it has

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[25] As Fujii (2009) in her chapter on 'The logic of groups' explains, 'joiners' (the lowest level participants in the genocide) killed in groups, not individually. For joiners, groups become sense-making. In contrast, 'resisters' never looked to any group to make sense of the situation they faced. "Instead, they look to their own consciences or 'hearts'" (170).

increased attendance at public memorial events in April. Case studies, like the one of Solange, indicate that, with sociotherapy as a hammock, the trauma-generating effects of this attendance decrease and the healing effects increase. Christianity has already been integrated into sociotherapy. Church activities – such as charity and socio-economic development initiatives – on the other hand may be more effective if they incorporate sociotherapy. Various church leaders in Byumba confirm that this is indeed the case. In short, sociotherapy is a bottom-up approach to healing that helps to build a new foundation for well functioning communities and may thus strengthen the (potential) benefits of other, even top-down, interventions.

To conclude, there may be limitations to the information on which I have based my interpretation and evaluation of sociotherapy. It is possible that the information I was able to gather overstates its positive effect for some people and skips over its ineffectiveness for others. The fact that I have so much more information about sociotherapy's positive effects than its lack of effect, or even negative effects, may be due to the fact that stakeholders in the programme were so surprised and overwhelmed by the positive changes sociotherapy has introduced in people's individual lives, in families and in communities that they were less aware of sociotherapy's failures. However, they also continuously try to adjust the programme in response to its challenges and limitations, which include: the authoritative way in which some sociotherapists lead groups; the emotional burden on group facilitators and their lack of knowledge and skills to properly handle all situations that may arise in groups (for instance, accusations and aggression); the additional training needed to handle severe traumatic stress, accountability of perpetrators, and feelings of guilt; the limited amount of (follow-up) training for facilitators due to financial constraints; the shortage of supervision of facilitators and after-care for participants; the limited options for referring people to more specialized forms of care, and the ever-present problem of poverty as a cause of many conflicts.

Longitudinal research is needed to evaluate the impact of sociotherapy in the long-term. For instance, what will happen when external funding of the programme ends, when it is taken over by the State or develops in a direction that enables people to become critically thinking citizens of a State that may not like this? It is difficult to predict where this transitional social intervention will lead. For the time being at least it is an intervention that seems to be appreciated and accepted by the majority of its stakeholders positioned at all levels of Rwandan

society. One of its most important effects is that people begin to realize that they are not alone in suffering from particular problems, as has been said again and again in the many testimonies that have been collected. Together, people start feeling strong again, and able to face whatever they have to face. *I buharankakara havuga abagabo ntihavuga umugabo* – In difficulties the voice of one person cannot save him or her, only a collection of voices can do that.

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"THE *BALSAK* IN THE ROOF":
BUSH WAR EXPERIENCES AND MEDIATIONS AS RELATED
BY WHITE SOUTH AFRICAN CONSCRIPTS

Diana Gibson

Introduction

When he talked about the silences surrounding the experiences of
conscripted South African combat veterans in the Bush War, Marco,
an activist for traumatised soldiers, told me:

> I get a lot of email mostly from veterans' wives and girlfriends and they
> wonder if I can help them because the men are very fucked up and then
> (the women) reading the information…usually they (wives, girlfriends)
> go and do research and look for help on the internet. Not often the vete-
> rans themselves because they are in denial: because the first thing you
> have to do, you have to take a step towards healing. And many of them
> are shit-scared. They put their *balsak* up in the roof with their pictures,
> looting, all the shit, their memories and they are shit-scared to take it
> down. I took mine down but it takes courage to look into it. It wasn't
> easy, it took more than ten years. (Marco)

For the combat veterans discussed in this chapter, the *balsak* above is
an artefact of involvement in a protracted armed conflict on Namib-
ian and Angolan soil in the so-called 'Border War', 'Forgotten War'
or 'South Africa's Vietnam'. It came to an end in 1989, when Cuban
troops withdrew north of the fifteenth parallel in Angola and the
South African troops left Namibia under the auspices of the United
Nations.[1]

From 1975 onwards South Africa became increasingly involved
in a protracted military conflict that was very much part of wider
global political and ideological processes. The South African Defence
Force (SADF) established a strong military presence on the border of
Namibia and Angola.[2] According to Vale (2003), the Cold War and

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[1] After the First World War Namibia was administrated by South Africa.

[2] In Angola, a civil war raged between the Movimento Popular de Libertação de
Angola (MPLA) and União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola (UNITA),
the two major groupings that had previously fought a liberation struggle against the

global politics influenced and promoted the South African involvement in the war.[3]

I focus on experiences of white South African male ex-combatants who did compulsory military service and saw active combat during the war. Those experiences, although traumatising, remain largely contained or unexpressed. Over time the possibilities of 'talking about' the war have nevertheless changed – due to national politics, the hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, as well as the activities of white war veterans themselves. The construal of war and its outcomes for those affected by it, both soldiers and civilians, have shifted over time. After 1989 the issue of mandatory conscription became more politicised and the justness of the Bush War was increasingly questioned. This trend has intensified in the wake of e.g. the anniversaries of some of the armed conflicts – particularly commemorations of the contentious battle of Cuito Cuanavale. Further controversy followed on the omission of the names of South African Defence Force troops (including conscripts) who died in the Bush War from the wall of names of the fallen at the national memorial site, Freedom Park, in Pretoria (cf. Baines 2009; Gibson 2009). The war has become highly politicised and imbued with notions about ethics and morality that differ from the time of the conflict itself.

The latter trend has equally been identified by studies concerning other recent war zones – e.g. Vietnam, Bosnia, Israel, Iraq and Palestine (cf. Ashplant et al. 2004; Cockburn & Zarkov 2002; Gregory 2004). In this regard Herman (1992) argues that it seldom becomes 'legitimate' to give attention to negative outcomes, e.g. trauma, for ex-combatants in armed conflict. Unless veterans themselves take trauma and long-term negative health outcomes up as an issue, trauma largely remains hidden and unaddressed. Similarly, Solomon (1993) concluded that

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Portuguese colonial power. The MPLA, in turn, supported the Peoples' Libertation Army of Namibia (PLAN), the military wing of the South West Africa Peoples Organisation (SWAPO). Cuba and Russia provided military advisors, troops and armaments to the MPLA. By the end of the war there were about 400.000 Cubans in Angola. Over the years South Africa sent about 120.000 soldiers to the war zone to support UNITA. This movement also, at times, received aid from the USA and the Peoples' Republic of China.

[3] South Africa partly became involved in the Bush War because of the country's concern about the presence of a Marxist government, a Cuban military force and Russian advisors in Angola. South African – like American – propaganda focused on the threat of communism. Although the SWAPO was never banned in Namibia, the military wing PLAN, had military bases in Angola.

the acknowledgement of possible combat related psychological and social sequelae are often rejected by cultural master narratives and military discourses.

The memory of war, which includes responses manifested for example through combat stress or post-traumatic stress, is multivocal and is structured by power. Accordingly nationalized memories often constitute the meaning of a war by giving credence to some and delegitimizing others. This is what Lomsky Feder (2004: 84) calls a memory field.[4] The South African national memory field is somewhat hegemonic/authoritative and has hierarchies. Thus some memories cannot be authoritatively expressed, while others can. The shift in discourses surrounding memories that can be expressed or must remain suppressed has a long history all over the world (cf. Ashplant et al. 2004; Cockburn & Zarkov 2002; Gregory 2004). As with American veterans from the Vietnam War, the narratives of former South African conscripts, who had been deployed outside the country, are still at odds with the processes and spaces of public memory-making.[5] This is because they blur the boundaries between heroes and victims and between perpetrator, victim and beneficiary. Like all armed conflicts, the passing of time gradually makes more information available about the Bush War and results in new interpretations of, and meanings attached to its historical events and processes, as well as with personal and shared experiences (cf. Baines & Vale 2008). As indicated above, recent analyses include questions concerning the morality of South Africa's involvement in a war outside its own borders.[6] There has lately been renewed academic interest in South Africa's involvement in the

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[4] Such national projects of memory-making can be very distorting. In this regard Zarkov (2002), for example, questions the discourse around what in the Netherlands is referred to as the Srebrenica trauma. She argues that it has come to represent the feeling of powerlessness and humiliation of Dutch soldiers in Srebrenica, which, by extension has effected the Dutch national self-image. In such discourse the experience of the Muslim refugees in and from Srebrenica is effaced and does not come to bear on the national memory.

[5] During the time of the war, conscripts were legally silenced by an Official Secrets Act and were not allowed to publicly speak about the war (Official Secrets Amendment Act 065 of 1965).

[6] When some South African troops, including conscripts, were deployed in a number of South African townships in the late 1980's, resistance against conscription rose. All white males had to register for conscription at the age of 16 and military service was compulsory after the age of 18 years and/or completion of secondary or tertiary education. An estimated 430.000 to 450.000 males served as conscripts over time. Not all of them were involved in the Bush War.

Angolan/Border/Bush War. This follows on years of secrecy about it. After 1988 an increasing number of professional soldiers (Breytenbach 2003; Geldenhuys 1995, 2007; Malan 2006: 3) published officially con- doned accounts of the war. Lately more personal narratives from ex- conscripts have appeared (Batley 2007; Holt 2005; Thompson 2006). Although the social sciences and humanities gave scant attention to the subject of the war itself, a fiction genre in Afrikaans literature, called *grensliteratuur* (border literature) (Baines 2003; Roos 2008; Stra- chan 1984; Van Coller 1990; Van Heerden 1983) developed.

This chapter falls within the discipline of medical anthropology, with a specific focus on issues concerning trauma in relation to a par- ticular group of veterans. I attend almost exclusively to their distress- ing experiences before, during and after armed conflict, the meanings they attached to it, and the ways in which they tried to more or less successfully maintain their emotional and psychosocial equilibrium. My aim is to try to understand how the men, who were compelled to participate in armed conflict, attempted to make sense of, and sur- vive in a battle zone – making and experiencing warfare. Although I do not explicitly sketch battles, all of the men at some or other time came under fire and returned fire, slept and took cover in fox holes or trenches or bivouaced in the war zone and experienced being bom- barded. Through the sometimes harrowing narratives of war veterans I attempt to gain insight into ways in which they dealt with war circum- stances, its effects and aftermath. All found ways to take up their lives again afterwards – to mediate their experiences – mostly by insisting on the necessity of having and maintaining 'inner strength' and thus physical and psychological resilience. I use mediation here in the way it is utilised by Scarry (quoted in Nordstrom 1998: 110), namely as involving the creation of worlds and selves that are viable, as well as the construction of "new orders of significance".

As indicated above, there is currently a tentative acknowledgement in South Africa that the Bush War might also have had 'human con- sequences' for some of the conscripted and permanent force veter- ans (Gear 2008). Yet, in the national space of memory making these former soldiers are frequently perceived and politically represented as having fought on the 'wrong' side, i.e. that of the apartheid state. This is particularly evident in the fact that the experiences and narratives that largely fall outside those elucidated through the most publicised official platform for mediation of memories in South Africa, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). In South Africa the TRC has

to a large extent become the memory field from within which the national recollections for the 'new' South Africa emerged. While the TRC expressed support for the voicing of alternative narratives about the Bush War and held a special hearing on compulsory military service, very few ex-conscripts used this forum to tell their stories (Baines 2008). While I use the TRC as a backdrop for discussion, my ultimate focus is on the discomfiting narratives, embodied experiences, and memories of conscripted veterans of the Bush War. These are emerging somewhat against the grain of national memory-making, of which the TRC was a part.

Marco's reference to the canvas army kitbag in the ceiling serves as an extended metaphor for the conscripted Bush or Border War veteran's symbolic Pandora's box. I tease out different interrelated layers of the idea of 'the army kitbag in the roof' to try to untangle some of the complicated issues related to the experience of war for a particular group of South African men. Ultimately the aim is to understand how some have found ways to reconcile with their experiences, while others struggle to come to terms with its after-effects.

As indicated above, I draw for my analysis on Lomsky Feder's (2004) notion of memory fields. Previously the memory field of the border war from a South African perspective had valorised the then dominant political and military versions of the war. Eventually the field began to incorporate the memories of soldiers, although they could only express them in a heroic and patriotic way. The memory field did not allow war veterans to raise the spectre that they may not only have 'lost' the war, but that it was possibly even unjust. Yet, even with the broadening of the memory field, veterans could not really express trauma. Currently the most legitimate way for a veteran to give expression to war experiences is through the recognition and memory of trauma suffered. For former conscripted veterans, however, trauma is perceived as providing negative access to the memory field. Although such distress has become legitimated and authoritative after the hearings of the TRC, it is also stigmatising as a form of weakness.

The kitbag, its contents and hiding place, are thus at once symbolic and existential. If it is opened unwarily, the carefully enclosed and as yet 'unmediated' experiences of camaraderie, heroism, adventure, but also of pain, anger, sorrow, fear, regret, indignity, nightmares, distress and tedium may be let loose. Although memory is personal, and is expressed and experienced in various ways, it nevertheless derives meaning from a memory field. The latter was previously situated in

the service of the national project of the army and the apartheid state. Currently the national memory field circumscribes the reinterpretation of the past as directed by the new post liberation project. Within that field there are hierarchies of memories – some are more 'valid' and can be more openly expressed than others.

If unmediated experiences are exposed injudiciously, the 'war inside' – the different artefacts and their related visceral memories of "being fucked up and fucked over" (Marco) – will be laid bare. The *balsak* (scrotum – Afrikaans) is about a metre long, shower-proof and designed to be secured with a padlock. By closing it up and consigning it to the ceiling many conscripted war veterans, especially those who experienced and/or committed violence "have found some way to cope, not think about it, close it down, throw it away, and find a sort of synthetic stability" or at the least a "contained instability", while simultaneously "knowing but not wanting to know that it is there, in the ceiling, not wanting to stir it up" (Marco). According to Marco, when the *balsak*, and all it represents, the "shit inside", remains hidden, the veteran cannot mediate or find a way to come to terms with the related memories and experiences of violence, fear, pain and dread. To make a "step to healing" they will have to "look into it" (Marco).

During the Bush War the *balsak* formed part of a particular memory field that involved the mainstream national projects of memory making. I will start by first 'unpacking' the *balsak* as a historical, cultural product of war. After the war it was stashed in the ceiling and in the meantime its meaning shifted. I need to stress that, for white males in South Africa during the last two and a half decades of apartheid, the kitbag is a symbol of a particularly masculine rite of passage, i.e. conscription. The kitbag was subsequently hidden away in the ceiling, historically in South African houses, a place of concealment for, e.g. weapons. People believe that, by storing potentially harmful things in the ceiling, these things are out of sight, reach and, hopefully, out of mind. I will then try to show that the TRC can be constituted as an effort to at least bring some of the issues related to the war, particularly conscription, into the public sphere or 'down from the ceiling'. Yet, because of the parameters of the hearings, the 'contents' of the *balsak* could only be represented in particular ways.

I then tease out the meaning of the *balsak* as a 'container' – for artefacts, memories and experiences – good and bad – and, finally, analyse the deeply personal narratives and experiences of conscripted veterans, and their 'steps' to 'open it up' two to three decades later.

In this regard I try to show how alternative spaces for meaning and memory are arising and link this to how some veterans have found meaning for their experiences, while others try to forget, or even have to struggle with the emotional after-effects. In the rest of the chapter, I will mainly use the narratives of two former conscripts, the war veterans Marco (Afrikaans-speaking) and James (English-speaking), both of whom had found ways to break through what Baines (2007: 3) refers to as the "officially-imposed amnesia" and the "secrecy and oppressive silence" concerning the war. To explore the issues raised above I use selections of narratives about the Bush War, including published veterans' accounts. I present a linear historical narrative, beginning with the time of the war and then examining the aftermath.

The research

I focus on a study of twenty-three Afrikaans-speaking and twenty English-speaking former conscripts who experienced combat during the Bush War. The participants in the study were recruited through a snowball sample method. I believe that many of the veterans were willing to participate because I was familiar with many aspects of the war. I grew up in Namibia and lived there during the war. It affected the way in which we lived our lives. Almost all my younger male relatives, and a number of male friends and colleagues were combatants or military correspondents in the war during this time. Some of these men above were injured, some died, all of them saw death, pain and suffering. Some were deeply traumatised, others less severely so. A few seemed relatively unaffected by their experiences

The research was conducted through a number of extended in-depth interviews, e-mails, telephone conversations, online discussions through websites, and letters. All the participants were at some stage under fire, had killed somebody and/or had witnessed the death of one or more combatants. They had seen military action during smaller skirmishes and/or in major operations in Angola such as Savannah (1975), Reindeer (1978), Protea and Daisy (1981), Modular and Hooper (1987), and Cuito Canuvale (1988). Three ex-combatants had joined the End Conscription Campaign (ECC) after they had completed their two years of military service – and had seen combat in the Bush War. The ECC started to resist compulsory conscription in 1983. In accordance with my agreement with the participants, all their names have

been changed. These veterans all completed their secondary education and thirty-eight have some form of tertiary education. They are now in their late 40s and 50s. Four were retrenched from work after 1994 as a result of the government's policy of affirmative action. All the men currently work in the private sector. Two of them formally sought psychological help some years after their war experiences. Four said they had considered suicide. All of them still have contact with other veterans. The men were asked to participate on the basis of their experiences: of having been conscripts and 'Bush War veterans', of having been exposed to stressors such as fear and death, and of having caused death or severe harm to others during the war (Green 1990: 1638).

The Bush – inside the balsak

> It dawned on us when we crossed the big river…We were told that things were going to be a bit hairy, when they handed out the wills. Then you understood that this was serious stuff…we were going up to the border…we were going any further than that. We went to Hooper. (James)

There was a great deal of denial of the war by the South African government while it was in progress and what information about it was released to the press at the time was often skewed and self-serving. In current state discourses the above incursions into Angolan territory remain as carefully circumlocuted under the new political regime in South Africa as under the old. Although every conscript received a balsak, there was and still is contestation about who can properly or legitimately narrate the Border conflict, which the kitbag partially represents. In this regard the reminiscences and embodied experiences of individual conscripts go against the grain of much of the above mentioned field of memory. Yet, only certain 'versions' of memory could be brought into voice and particular kinds of experiences narrated during the war. Thus the structures of power defined its parameters. During the conflict, the SADF and the politicians did the war-talk. Most of the extant literature about the war involved chronicles of military history. In these, the focus is on weapons, strategies, tactics and the course of campaigns and battles (Baines 2003). To all intents, conscripts, irrespective of the status of their units, could not voice their lived experience in public, no matter how harrowing it might have been. While some experienced their training as an onerous necessity

or even an adventure, for a number it ultimately proved to be fatal, even outside the battle field. Thus a great deal is left unsaid. Nonetheless, like all armed conflicts, the Bush War also left: "damaged or obliterated tangible and intangible goods…lives lost, those maimed, or even missing" (Dale 2007: 206). What remains unspoken is taken up again later in this chapter.

At the same time, as James said, the conscripted veterans 'had gone further', had 'crossed the big river' into Angola. I want to argue that, when the soldiers 'crossed over', they entered a "gray zone" of "troubling moral experience" (Kleinman 2006: 17). What was at stake in this in-between space was not only the individual's ethical dilemmas but more so South African society's and the government's moral double standards and resistance to the admission that any war ultimately means that ordinary men are expected to, and do, kill (ibid.: 22). When talking about his experiences and memories of the conflict and of the silence surrounding it, one of the veterans quoted to me from Christopher Marlowe:

> Thou has committed—
> Fornication: but that was in another country
> And besides, the wench is dead.[7]

For many veterans the war was indeed 'another country' where illicit 'intercourse' happened with, and in opposition to "those who are against us" (Piet). The border was a political demarcation but also a symbolic one between the inside of the state and the outside of the 'other', the enemy. It was imperative to give the foe, the communists (who were also black), 'a proper *opfok*' (fuck them up) through the deployment of South Africa's superior army. In official South African accounts about and during the war, 'the wench' – whether understood as symbolising the offensive, irreligious, backward, cowardly, threatening 'other', or, even more disjunctively, as either the unheroic *troepie* (troop) or the *bosbefokte* (bush fucked) war veteran was indeed 'dead' – censored out, relegated to the ceiling. In these official accounts, the war was seemingly mainly about global and local politics, or the various armed units involved, the progress of different battles, number of tanks, vehicles, helicopters and numbers of troops engaged in it. Yet, there is always 'more' to the story of the war (Jackson 2006: 24). For,

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[7] The Jew of Malta, IV, I, 41–43.

example, the cousin of one of the participants in my study died during training, probably as a result of exhaustion, but his death was never satisfactorily explained by the SADF. In a similar vein, Cawthra et al. (1994) mention that the rate of suicide among conscripts was high, but no official statistics have ever been released. Three participants in my study mentioned that suicides happened during their basic training. Marco said that he had seen "the blood in a bungalow, everyone knew what had happened but we never talked about it". Many conscripts were injured or killed by 'friendly fire' or accidents with weapons.

What remained largely unsaid or between the lines of 'authorized' narratives, was that the hostilities were about the protection of a particular way of life, namely apartheid (Geldenhuys 1995, 2007; Malan 2006). By extension, a specific group of 'citizens', i.e. the so-called white population, were protected from a perceived threat, and in the process the humanity of the perceived 'other' was frequently abrogated. In such accounts, the individual veterans who experienced the 'gray zone' in an existential way, remained bracketed out or mute.

As argued above, in the war, the border was at once real and imagined. It separated the ordered and 'mundane' from the ambiguous, the bush, the 'barbaric' and the 'other'. For example, in the bush, as Marco said in the introduction of this chapter, there occurred incidents of 'looting'. Some troops posed for photos with the bodies of dead enemies, others collected ammunition, shrapnel, bits and pieces of armour, uniforms and such of their slain or flown adversaries. Moreover, those who crossed the border could be contaminated by the 'bush' and ran the risk of becoming wild themselves. The bush is a space that is somehow outside control and restraint, a dangerous liminal zone where terror and threat loom large. Some of the experiential narratives from the gray zone, from "another country" (Batley 2007: 82), refer to the fear of waiting for an attack, of sitting out endless bombardments in an armoured vehicle or a trench. They speak of setting up or walking into ambushes, seeing a friend killed – blown up or burnt beyond recognition. Some soldiers were wounded; some shot suspected 'terrorists' who could equally have been civilians; others accidentally killed a friend and were sent back to base as "one medivac and one body", with a deceased buddy lying at his feet on the floor of the helicopter (ibid.). Thus on the other side or "up there":

> The military creates a different set of rules for you (to) live by…up there it was…all right to deal with problems in a violent manner, because

that's what you were doing. It was perfectly all right to take innocent people in their own country, and killing them. The only way you can deal with it is by saying; 'no one said to you: This is bad'. If you look at what happened, and I've been reading a lot of books about it, how many people were killed there? There were thousands. It was a massacre on a monumental scale. (James)

The books James refers to represent a memory field through which the war was portrayed from a carefully sanitised distance, as if from 'another life'. They edit out the disparities – even while they overlap, albeit in unacknowledged ways – with the experiences and stories of men like James and Marco above. The aforementioned 'books' served as a form of containment, a closing off of particular notions of the 'truth' about the 'Border'. Yet just below the surface, such narratives are shadowed by other renditions of the Bush experience, by the fact that "at the time it was our life, it was real" (James).

In the first years of the war, the SADF paid scant attention to the potential psychological impact that participation in hostilities in another country might have on conscripts. In this regard a veteran opined that the SADF had flagrantly abused the fact that military service was compulsory. Unlike permanent, career SADF members, the conscripts were initially only assessed by the army to ascertain whether they were psychologically 'fit' for service. This involved a very brief interaction with one psychologist interviewing about 300 'new' troops (Fowler 1995, 1996).

As the war continued, the army gave more attention to combat-related stress (CRS). Psychologists, who were themselves conscripted but not deployed operationally, mainly used two models, namely the post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) model and a model of combat stress developed in Israel (Gabriel 1982). The latter focuses on preventing PTSD from developing fully by debriefing people who had experienced traumatic events – as soon after the event and as close to where the event had happened as possible. In the case of the SADF, debriefings did not occur immediately or close to the spot where the traumatic event had taken place. Psychologists remained in the permanent military bases and did not go into the battlefield. Conscripts who had experienced traumatic events were referred to them, and if they were in a group, were debriefed one after the other, if at all. A debriefing was basically an abbreviated version of psychological techniques that were supposed to elicit a narrative about the trauma from the person to help him to deal with what had happened.

Clive Holt (2005) reports that, after an operation during which all his fellow conscripts had been killed, he was told to report as part of a group of ten for a debriefing.

> We went into the tent and sat on small benches arranged around the perimeter in a U-shape. The psychologist sat in the middle of the U with a clipboard and some papers. It was about 10h30, and the psychologist said something about having to be somewhere by 11h00…he began by asking if there was anything that anyone would like to talk about relating to our experiences…You could have heard a pin drop. Everyone just sat there…the psychologist eventually managed to drag some information out of us, but the session was over in 25 minutes.

Barry Fowler (1996: 45), himself a former conscript and psychologist, writes about the superficial debriefings offered to war veterans by the SADF:

> The psychologists were outsiders-intruders? – and the soldiers were not going to open up and express their feelings to us. It must almost have been an insult to the soldiers: You've been in a war, and now you've all got to go and see the shrinks, and we all know that shrinks work with mad people don't we?

Clive Holt (2005) indicates that veterans' experiences and memories are both indeterminate and contradictory. Rather than reinforce extant master narratives, they transgress them and infringe on their boundaries. These narratives confound taken-for-granted notions about the war (Jackson 2006). They are narrative "borderlands" that "speak otherwise" (ibid.: 26). At the same time, they risk becoming a different kind of containment with its own 'truths', for example that seeking psychological help is an admission of 'madness'.

In the next section, I use the TRC as starting point for the emergence of alternative memories of the Bush War. I nonetheless show that, even here, only particular kinds of memories had credibility. I subsequently turn to the moral and emotional 'gray zones' of war and argue that the TRC could not deal with these in a way that resonated with how the veterans themselves experienced and tried to make sense of the war. The chapter then explores the emergence of counter memories, and spaces for it, such as publications and websites that have arisen in the past few years.

Taking the kitbag down from the ceiling

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was mandated to promote National Unity and Reconciliation by ascertaining "the truth in relation to past events", namely politically motivated gross human rights violations committed between the 1st of March 1960 to the 10th of May 1994. The TRC had to provide as "complete a picture as possible" about the nature, causes, extent, background, circumstances, factors, contexts, motives and circumstances of such violations. The investigations furthermore aimed to establish the fate or whereabouts of victims. To enhance the possibility of reconciliation the perspectives of both victims and the perpetrators were represented at hearings (du Pisani & Kwang-Su 2004). It was also the one official South African forum that expressed support for the emergence of alternative narratives about the war. Yet, during the hearings of the TRC, the Bush War itself, because it fell partly outside the country's borders, was not actually addressed (cf. Saunders 2008). While the apartheid regime was disinclined to create or even allow a narrative space to its foot soldiers, the TRC nonetheless expressed support for the emergence of certain alternative representations about the war. Yet few veterans actually told their stories. According to Baines (2007), soldiers feared that the TRC would become a witch hunt and that they would be blamed as perpetrators of crimes against humanity. Bound by a sense of loyalty to fellow troops, few veterans came forward and related their experiences in the Border War.

There was a special hearing on compulsory military service, yet very few ex-conscripts used this forum to tell their stories. Similarly, Baines (2007) noted the lack of historiography concerning the Bush War, and even the academic silence, influenced by the Official Secrets Amendment Act (1965), surrounding it. According to Baines, conscripted soldiers did not give evidence to the TRC because of the public ignorance about the war and their suspicion of conscripts' stories. Some veterans were dismissed as sympathy seekers or liars (ibid.). For many veterans their experiences belonged to – as James put it – 'another life':

> For the guys who died – that was an absolute waste. First of all it doesn't feel as though it was ever a part of my current life. It's a movie part that you play. I think it was like that for everybody. We weren't supposed to be there, so it didn't really exist. (James)

While the TRC was in search of particular 'truths' about the past in the present, for veterans the war had been a kind of rupture, something separate – during the war their presence in Angola was cloaked by secrecy and the public was unaware of their experiences. Although the war had been at once very real and embodied, it had become illusory – like watching a movie, something that did not exist. At the time of the TRC hearings the Bush War had also become increasingly politically discredited and contested. It had been neither lost nor won, and all former 'truths' had shifted (Cock & Nathan 1989; Draper 1999; Gear 2002).

Although the activities of the SADF outside the borders of South Africa largely fell outside the parameters of the hearings of the TRC, it can nevertheless be argued that this forum (TRC) made a rhetorical shift in the narration of war memories possible. With the passing of time, the stories of ex-conscripts like Marco, and the meaning attached to them, had become narratable in other than the former nationalistic and militarized ways – for example as resistance to apartheid and as trauma suffered while fighting a war. A slow trickle of more anti-heroic, everyday stories of conscripts and of the war is emerging in South Africa. In these stories, there are references to young men who collapsed from heat, emotional exhaustion or sheer battle related stress (Batley 2007; Holt 2005; Thompson 2006). Nonetheless, some of these young men themselves, particularly those who somehow feel that they had failed, simply do not "want to meet anyone from that situation again" (Batley ibid.: 83).

Only seven ex-conscripts gave individual testimonies to the TRC, three of whom had done service on the border. The TRC sent out a public notice via the media for 'evidence' to be brought before a special hearing on military conscription. Although the call for submissions stated that it was not an attempt to find perpetrators or award victim status, it nevertheless stressed that the focus was on violations during apartheid, and on suffering and post-traumatic stress disorder (TRC April 29, 1997). The hearings also involved submissions concerning the End Conscription Campaign, as well as short reports concerning the socio-political and religious context of conscription.

According to Borer (2003: 1089), the discourse of human rights tends to set up a dichotomy of perpetrators and victims as two distinct groups, each assumed to be homogeneous. The TRC hearings on conscription has also been criticised because most of the individual

testimonies submitted were by anti-conscription activists and nega-tive about the SADF; participants were largely portrayed as victims of the state and/or as sufferers of PTSD. Yet the situation had in reality been far more complex and many, if not most, ex-conscripts were both recipients and agents of violence, suffered from it and also inflicted it. People who were victims in one situation often were perpetrators in another.

What the TRC highlighted, albeit unwittingly, was that acts formerly presented by the state as legitimate violence, e.g. the actions of the SADF and the security apparatus structure, were now reinterpreted as oppression, even as a flagrant violation of the sovereignty of another country. In the ensuing narrative shift, the heroes and enforcers of 'border security' in the past could just as easily become perpetrators and violators, while the 'terrorists' and 'communists' against whom they had acted were now revealed as heroes, freedom-fighters and lib-erators. Although the TRC gave rise to particular shifts in narratives about the war, it also signalled that the *balsak*, as cultural product and a former canonical narrative about the war, had at least been taken from the ceiling.

As discussed above, the TRC specifically gave attention to narratives about trauma. According to Colvin (2003: 153):

> With the inception of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 'sto-rytelling' arrived as a privileged mode of publicly communicating painful experiences…Part psychotherapy, part legal testimony and part histo-riography 'telling your story' has become a powerful, if ambivalent, way to contribute to a new history of the old South Africa…memory worth talking about – worth remembering – is memory of trauma.

This kind of 'trauma talk' was both potentially fraught with pain and difficulty, and also has hierarchies. Particular combat narratives con-cerning trauma – e.g. those of Mkhonto we Sizwe (MK) soldiers who fought against apartheid – were deemed, in the changing political cli-mate of the new regime, more genuine and creditable than those of conscripted soldiers who fought on behalf of the former government. At the same time, as I indicated before, being labelled as a person who has a 'disorder' such as PTSD was quite stigmatizing in the SADF and was often perceived as an indication that the sufferer lacked the neces-sary mental strength; it was interpreted as a form of attention-seeking, self-centred weakness. It is significant that Marco's submission to the TRC did not focus on himself – it dealt with the need for and ways to

assist traumatized veterans. He did not tell his own story and memory of trauma (www.doj.gov.za/trc/special/conscrip/conscr01.htm).

The TRC, however, did make the emergence of contesting memories and narratives about the war more possible, and this trend has been slowly gaining impetus. In this regard Baines (2007: 2) argues that ex-combatants from both sides are exploring their place in post-apartheid South Africa by revisiting memories of their military experiences. In this way they "are breaking rank and telling their stories" (ibid.).

Increasingly conscripted war veterans, as remembering subjects, articulate or disarticulate their own experiences from existing representations of the Bush War. These include, first, the apparently 'neutral' books and treatises of military history which approach the war from a strategic viewpoint (cf. Abbott et al. 1991; Steenkamp 1989). Second, there are the realistic, but circumspect depictions of soldiers as daring men, who sacrificed themselves for the greater good of their fellows. In these publications the spectre of possible personal trauma is not raised (cf. McAleese 1993; Steenkamp 2006). These are particularly masculinised portrayals of the war which tended to sanitise the potential and real psychological fall-out of this conflict.

I will now turn to the stories, the contents of the kitbags, and how ex-combatants have tried to 'distribute' their memories, to encode them in different ways, and if possible, to come to terms with them in some way. The next section is about the memories and experiences that remain largely unexpressed by many veterans because, as Marco said at the start of the chapter, the veterans are 'shit-scared' to face and deal with the emotional 'gray zones'. Yet, as intimated earlier, more 'unheroic' personal narratives of ex-combatants are becoming available through the publication of academic and other articles, conference presentations, personal war-biographies, poetry, in television programmes about the war, on websites for veterans, etcetera.

The "shit inside"

> Demons? – I don't know because I don't know what the benchmark is. (James)

While James has demons to deal with, he is unsure of the parameters of the memory field that will enable him to converse with and about it – even to re-member it. One possible field is that of psychiatry. Here it is accepted that the experience of violence (as subject and/or

perpetrator and/or witness of it) can affect one. In relation to war and trauma, the PTSD model is probably the best known, but also the most contested.

At the same time, in South Africa at least, there has been great opposition to the idea that particular groups of people who had killed, i.e. those perceived as 'offenders' or 'perpetrators', can suffer from PTSD (Stein et al. 2007). This is because the 'disorder' has been largely politically appropriated as a signifier of victimhood. In this regard a comment by Mongane Wally Serote, CEO of the Freedom Park Foundation, that the names of South African soldiers who died in the Bush War would not be honoured on the Wall of Names of Freedom Park is illuminating. The reason given was that "they don't deserve it because they didn't die for freedom and human dignity" (Classen 2006: 1). In public narratives, white Border War veterans are increasingly politically positioned as somehow culpable. This has made their subjective experiences even more 'unspeakable'.

> (I) never talk about it, what is the use, people don't want to know. I feel very insulated and unfeeling. Sometimes I respond with this overpowering anger. Some of Paul's (a fellow conscript) blood and guts were splattered on my face…I just went and shot him (Angolan soldier)…it haunts me…I am always angry…Some things can just trigger it…and I was right back there seeing their faces…I have this carving he made (Paul)…sometimes I sit and just stare at it…*ek is bossies, alles in my is gestol*) (I am crazy everything in me is congealed. (Pieter de Jong)

In this chapter, I am nonetheless interested in the 'demons' or culturally informed ways of expressing distress rather than the 'benchmarks' or psychiatric models. Anthropology as a discipline gives credence to claims of local people that they are sometimes, for example, possessed by spirits. We approach our research as if spirits, for example, are indeed there (Claus 1979). We also recognize that actual experience and suffering can be re-presented through 'demons' in particular ways, whether sufferers call this spirit possession, PTSD, '*bossies*' (bush), 'the war within' (Marco) or combat stress reaction (CSR) (Solomon 1993).

> A lot of people talk about PTSD without actually understanding what happened. Unless you have been there, you cannot understand; you can't really see what's going on. It's not quite what everybody thinks it's about. People who were there have a better grip on it than anybody else. The people who write all the articles and crap need to go through a war to realise that it's not quite the same as they think it is. (James)

> Who do you go and talk to, the head *tiffies* (head mechanics/ psychologists), they were useless. (Albert)

Although the TRC hearings gave specific attention to PTSD, most of the ex-combatants I interviewed were very ambiguous about it. Firstly because it is often understood as a pathology, a form of mental derangement. Secondly, it is not something people "like to talk about" (Marco). While none of the men in my study were able to forget their combat experiences, and most had distressing memories and dreams, the majority rejected the notion that they might be suffering from a psychological 'disorder' (Stein et al. 2007). This was interpreted as a lack of "mental toughness" (James). It is a theme James returned to a great deal in his narrative about the battle situations he was involved in (Operations Modular and Hooper) during the war:

> The toughest muscle in your body sits between your ears. If you can control that, everything else becomes relatively simple. It's all about determination. You live or fail by what's between your ears. No matter how tough you think you are, or how big you think you are, if you don't have it right up there, you're not going to make it … It was early morning when we had a Victor Victor[8] and I was outside the Ratel at the time and I jumped into a foxhole. Something felt odd under my feet, I bent over to see what I was standing on, it was the corpse of a dead FAPLA (Angolan soldier) or Cuban, and we were on a previous battleground … After a while it doesn't bother you, you see much worse. It was something that to a large extent formed the character of a lot of people who were there … Life really does slow down into the typical war scenes as shown in the war movies. Small things lose their significance … you either become totally focused on the job at hand or become totally immersed in fear. The time when the situation really takes its toll is before the battle, the time sitting, waiting, this is when you sit and think about what can happen … then it happens, a bombardment and then you sit and wait … one of the gunners goes into an absolute state of shock. It got so bad that he was replaced by the back up gunner … The thoughts that run through your mind … relate to what your greatest fears are, for some it is death. For me it was being disabled by a land mine.[9]

James emphasised that, in time, he became desensitized to horror, that he was not bothered anymore, that his character had been annealed on the battleground. He had been tempered or hardened under fire. Yet he simultaneously experienced a continuous sense of dis-ease. He

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[8] Air attack warning.
[9] See also Sentinel projects website. www.geocities.com/sadf/index.html.

could nevertheless not contemplate a mental breakdown during battle, of becoming immersed in dread or panic. What is 'between your ears' helps you to contain your experiences. Those who had fallen to pieces or frozen up during battle were afterwards always viewed with a certain contempt and perceived as somewhat cowardly. As Marco was quoted in the beginning of this paper, James had created an artificial emotional steadiness for himself.

Although Marco was more comfortable with the notion of PTSD at the time of my study, he nevertheless did not use it in relation to himself. He instead referred to his "mind scars" and psychological "wounding".[10] Marco, who had experienced a number of battles said about his own experience:

> We were pulled into Angola to start the process of Smokeshell and Quito Canuvale – We did lots of reconnaisance work, we did lots of patrols, we were dropped in the bush for weeks on end. We participated in big battles, sometimes smaller, sometimes conventional, where they had the armoured divisions, infantry, stopper groups. We were the special trained unit; we were also often used in small groups in Angola and Namibia. Sometimes we did unconventional ops. (Marco)

During operation 'Smokeshell', a military drive deep into Angola by South African troops, a company of parabats had been severely mauled by the Angolan army. Marco and his unit were sent to support their embattled comrades. The battle was severe and there were a large number of mortalities on both sides. In the 'mop-up' afterwards, Marco and another soldier found a seriously injured Angolan soldier lying under a bush. It was very unlikely that the wounded man would survive or be able to receive any medical assistance.

> At first I thought that I'd put him out of his misery with a bullet…we were low on ammo…I decided to cut his throat with my survival knife. I had never cut someone's throat before…I pushed myself to do it…I somehow had to see whether I could do something like that…testing myself in a way I suppose…I mean, if I was a soldier then I should be able to do a thing like that…cut a throat. Afterwards, I knew…I never felt like it again…never. As I was cutting, he started to make these horrible noises…he began to shake all over, and blood was pouring out of the wound…and…he just didn't want to die. I don't know what came

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[10] In this regard I feel that Stein et al. (2007: 142) are rather dismissive when they state that PTSD "can emerge only in the context of later social dissatisfaction with the violence inflicted".

over me…I panicked…just cutting and cutting and cutting like crazy…
and thinking: die, just die; please die now. It was very horrifying…I
didn't think it would take such a long time…I had to cut through the
neck bone…it made such a horrible noise…and it was so bloody…you
can imagine. But the worst part was when in the end I managed to cut
through the spinal cord…a kind of gush of air hit me in the face…ex-
cept that it wasn't air…it was his soul leaving him…really…it felt like
that…and then the head fell off. I stood up and staggered back, sha-
king my head, blood dripping from my hands…it was like coming out
of a trance…and then I saw my buddy…he was staring at me with
wide, frightened eyes. I saw that he was shocked, scared, disgusted,
confused…he stepped back a few paces…I reached out to him…wan-
ted to stop him and tell him…hey, it's OK…I didn't mean to…it was
an accident…I don't know what came over me…look at me…it's just
me, old Marco…your buddy…but I couldn't get the words out…and
he just walked away. Something happened that day between the two
of us that can never be erased. He was deeply shocked by what he'd
seen…and so was I…it was like suddenly standing face to face with the
darker side of man. From that day on, nothing was the same…there was
some kind of shadow between us. I sometimes caught him looking at me
in a strange way…and it was the same with me, when I saw other guys
doing gross things…you get frightened by seeing in another the evil that
you know you also have in yourself.[11] (Marco)

Like some of the other participants in my study, Marco had seen deaths
and severe injuries before and been exposed to a great deal of violence
on the Border – both during conventional battles and in 'unconven-
tional ops'. Yet in the aftermath of the battle, during the 'clean-up', he
was still inexorably driven by some unstoppable impetus, something
he had to be able to do if he was a 'real soldier' (which he actually
already epitomised). I use Marco's painful and pain-causing narrative
to try and tease out some of the murkiness of the experience of war.
According to Collins (2008: 93–94) and Shay (1995), during battle sol-
diers can become caught up in an intensive 'frenzy' of anger, fear and
alarm, which drives them to kill. This tension intensifies still more in
close combat and, after the battle is supposedly over, can nonetheless
relentlessly circle back upon itself in a massive release of aggression in
which the person repeats violence "over and over…A forward panic is
violence that for the time being is unstoppable" (Collins 2008: 94).

It is a terror that is forced down the tunnel of an irresistible physi-
cal-emotional impetus that "piles up" in the recurring use of violence

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[11] See also saveterans website.

(Collins 2008: 94). Although Marco, as quoted above, initially represents his actions as if they had been calculated, he then intimates that while 'pushing' and 'testing' himself, he was in a panic-state, repeating the same violence over and over as if in a trance. Something appalling had come over him, and he had never ever felt such an explosion of feelings and engaged in such horrifying acts. According to Collins, it is this hot "emotional momentum" that carries the violent panic forward. As a result, the soldier "cannot change his feelings again during the last rush with a veil of blood before his eyes. He does not want to take prisoners, but to kill".[12] Holmes (1985) views the intense, overheated release of pressure and tension after a "close, small-arms" encounter as a very dangerous situational driving force of which the combatant can easily lose control.

Reading Marco's narrative is, I presume, disquieting, even repulsive for the reader, but it is included in this text for a reason. I use it in the hope that it will give us some understanding of his own experience and the effect it had for the deceased, his buddy and himself. According to Grossman (1995: 31), the actions of looking a person in the eye, "making an independent decision to kill him, and watching as he dies due to your action combine to form the single-most basic, important, primal and potentially traumatic occurrence of war". For years after the war Marco was haunted by the spectre of the dead and 'evil' he had seen in himself. A shadow had come between his buddy and himself. This was intensified by seeing the other 'gross things' that happened in this borderland. He had recurring flashbacks and nightmares. Initially Marco could only achieve a semblance of a 'contained instability'.

Ultimately Marco's narrative is a link back to the gray zone of disquieting moral experience (Kleinman 2006), and even more so to the question of the moral culpability of his (and my) own society. Foster (1997) emphasises that the atrocities attributed to, for example, ex-conscripts such as Marco should be understood as historico-political disorderings comprised of power, anti-communism, anti-colonialism and political governance. He argues that modernity, ideology, cultural and organizational forms enabled perpetrators to view their violent acts as moral and worthy and accordingly facilitated it. Draper (1999) in turn stresses that there were individual differences between conscripts and that some experienced or did more violence than others.

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[12] Ernst Jünger, a German soldier quoted in Holmes (1985: 381).

Korber (1992) further argues that, through the mechanism of 'doubling' and psychic numbing, a combatant like Marco separated himself from his weapon and that this made it possible for him to kill.

Irrespective of how we try to explain this, killing another person can be a stressor – physiologically, psychologically, morally – and can be deeply traumatising has wide scholarly acceptance (MacNair 2002). The names given to the culturally informed ways in which a person can express such distress through certain embodied 'symptoms' have differed over time and in different settings, for example, PTSD, CRS, demons or *bossies*. Marco could not bear the thought of returning to do another stint of border duty and he ultimately took himself and his memories underground, he deserted, buried and locked away his "darker side" and "shadow" deep in his psyche (Marco). As he fled from his country, he also tried to escape from the kitbag, the Pandora's box, afraid the 'evil inside' might break out.

According to MacNair (2002), even psychotherapists find it difficult to listen to accounts of atrocities narrated by a perpetrator. These are essentially unhearable and veterans are aware of this intuitive response from most listeners or readers. In the South African setting, men like James – and particularly Marco, who was a member of an elite combat group – were expected to have the mental toughness, the psychological stability to be able to deal with their experiences and with the things they had seen and done. They had also been members of a privileged white group and their own personal existential crises of trauma are now perceived as self-inflicted. In this regard, many Bush War veterans prefer to remain silent, even though they realise that they are unlike ex-conscripts who had *not* experienced war. They feel they are also different from the people who made their submissions to the TRC. According to Marco:

> There are different silences. Forced silence, being scared, not being given the opportunity to talk. There is no audience for your story. The silence can also be about the intensity of the emotion. My silence was that nobody understood. When I tried to talk about it people got so fucking scared, some thought I was bullshitting or just got freaked out, or did not want to listen. And then, while there are some conscripts talking about how they patrolled in the bush or even about being *bossies*, they are reluctant to talk. Many do not want to have the memories. Some did not experience combat. Or if you have been in combat the trauma is so overpowering, in close combat, you cut somebody's throat, you shot someone at close range, you mowed down villagers, your friend got shot, you got shot, the constant threat, seeing the blood, the dead,

> that is a fair amount of trauma and you do not want to remember that, you do not want to talk about it, it is so upsetting. I have met veterans who after 30 years, 25 years, when they met me and got to know about the work I do, they are still shit scared. When I spend time with my one reconnaissance friend who really wants to talk and can't get a word out, he has such a need to talk, but cannot. For people like him there is a long way to go. (Marco)

At the time of the war, neither James nor Marco could find ways to relate their experiences to an army psychologist. Marco wiped it from his memory and was only able to talk about it after 1993, when, as a result of recurring nightmares, he finally found a way to voice it first to himself and a psycho-therapist, and then to other ex-combatants. James had flashbacks and was easily startled.

> I've often woken up thinking, Did I kill somebody innocent? Did we ever do anything that was wrong? Did we ever shoot somebody that we shouldn't have? Funny hey, I went through a period when I wasn't quite sure what was dream and what was reality. I'm not sure how to explain it. I would think that there were things that I had to do. I would wake up at night and think; 'have I done this?' I don't understand what I was supposed to do. I had a problem trying to differentiate between what was reality and what was a part of the subconscious…Now you have these two sets of rules. Society says violence is not acceptable, it does not solve anything, however we…(were) immersed in an incredibly violent situation to solve a problem of national importance…You don't teach a person to kill people, spend months doing it, and then expect him not to do it. You couldn't really debrief people and then put them back into…civvies (James).

Taking a step

Jonathan Shay, a psychologist who has done extensive work with Vietnam veterans suffering from PTSD, stresses this point in his book *Odysseus in America* (2002). Shay uses the story of the Odyssey after the fall of Troy to draw analogies between the experiences of combatants in the Trojan War and present conflicts. On his journey Odysseus and his fellow ex-combatants are trying to find their way back to their island, Ithaca. On the way they have to deal with the Sirens, whose song lures sailors to their death on the rocks. Many people think the seductive song is about sex, but according to Homer the Sirens sing the following:

> For we know everything that the [Greeks] and Trojans did and suffe-
> red in wide Troy. Over all the generous earth we know everything that
> happened.

Thus the Sirens knew the full, ultimate truth of what happened in the
war. They knew both the past and the future. The sirens are so danger-
ous because, once a sailor listens to their song, he is not able to stop
doing so, he cannot 'take a step to healing' and eventually dies from
sheer self-neglect. Kafka (1995), in "The silence of the sirens" (1995),
is deeply ambivalent about them, and argues that their silence could
be even more fatal than their singing. If they remain silent, the veteran
remains with his own experiences, demons, and imaginations to tor-
ment him and drive him mad. Odysseys himself listened to the sirens,
with the assistance of his fellow travellers. They plugged their own
ears and tied him up, held him tightly and supportively, but they also
prevented him from staying to listen to the song forever. Afterwards,
when they reached land again Odysseus was changed; he could talk
about the song, even when he was overcome by emotions and sorrow
at the moment he did so. In the end, Odysseus was also the only sur-
vivor of the whole terrible journey. He had remembered the past and
ended up looking to the future.

Like Odysseus, ex-combatants have had to find alternative ways of
making sense of and re-membering their experience. They can only do
so within the company of others who 'know everything', who had been
to the war zone and had been faced with an enemy who was really
trying to kill them and towards whom they reciprocated in intent and
action. Like the Sirens, other veterans know the full, ultimate truth
of what happened in the war. It is not surprising that ex-combatants
have had to find alternative ways of making sense of and remembering
their experience.

Just as the meaning attached to memories of the Bush War are shift-
ing, so have the spaces available for such reminiscences and efforts
to find sense in them, deal with their remorse and pain and to voice
them. Some have written confessional texts in cyberspace or have pub-
lished personal narratives as forms of expiation and catharsis. Holt's
book *At thy call* (2005), Batley's collection of writings and poems
(2007), Dovey's *Soldier's verse* (2006), and Thompson's *An unpopular
war* (2006) are examples. Others have narrated their stories through
the growing number of websites aimed at veterans. These include that
of South African Veterans Association (SAVA), Sentinel Projects, the

South African Bush Veterans Association, 32 Battalion, and so forth. The sites have been created and are run by veterans themselves. They provide a space for shared experience and connect ex-combatants with people with similar experiences inside and outside South Africa. They appear to assist veterans in establishing what happened to others, give them the opportunity to tell about their own experiences and to try to make sense of it. Marco started such a website because:

> It took me ten years roughly to work through my own trauma, to dis-cover that what I suffered from was trauma. I realised it when I was watching a programme about the Vietnam vets on DSTV. It was called, I think, the war within, where these vets were talking about this thing cal-led post-traumatic stress, they were naming the symptoms, and suddenly I realised this was what I was suffering. They were naming the symptoms and I recognized it. From that day on I started to read everything about combat related psychological trauma. Then it was called *bossies* (by sol-diers), post-trauma and combat related (by psychologists).

As indicated by Marco, in psychiatry it is accepted that the experi-ence of violence can affect one. In psychiatric terms, and in line with psychotrauma models, the apparent emotional scarring described by him and other ex-combatants, i.e. depression, flashbacks, violent rage, an inability to interact with people, severe mood swings, disturbing dreams, anxiety, psychic numbing, apathy or being '*gestol*' (as Pieter puts it), are viewed as classical manifestations of violence-related suffer-ing, even post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (De Jong et al. 2003).

It appears that incomplete emotional and cognitive processing of traumatic experiences may lead to 'disorders' like PTSD. In this regard the use of the word *gestol* is significant. It means that some-thing congeals, stops flowing, hardens, coarsens, freezes. Many vet-erans described a state of being emotionally, socially and spiritually congealed. Moreover, Marco, as well as all the other participants, used the words *bossies, bosbefok* (bush, bushfucked) or *bosbedonnerd* (bush-crazy) when they discussed the sometimes cruel and callous behav-iour and responses they themselves displayed or witnessed at times in the combat zone. To be *bossies* literally means to be wild, outside of humanity, animalistic. It signifies being so coarsened as to be beyond, or cut off from, social and moral order. This state of 'frozenness' and brutalization is confirmed by the limited number of studies done on the psychology of warfare and combat in relation to conscripts (Fowler 1995, 1996; Hooper 1990). Although most of the participants in this study intensely disliked the notion of combat-related 'disorder', they

would nevertheless sometimes say things such as "we have all seen a range of symptoms" (James) or "there are symptoms you know" (Mike) to describe their own shared understanding of the experience of war and its aftermath. In this regard the notion of post-traumatic stress has been incorporated into their own making-sense of their feelings and behaviour, but the conception of it as a 'disorder' is often rejected.

Marco, as an activist, uses the medical concept of PTSD. This was the framework within which he had come to terms with his own 'demons'. Although he also uses the term *bossies*, he knows that the utilisation of the model of PTSD as a starting point can give recognition to veterans who suffer. Treatment for the inability to process traumatic events is usually achieved through various forms of psychotherapy and the use of pharmaceuticals. This includes an acceptance of the need for therapy, either individually or as a group, recalling and reliving, and confronting and mourning by way of narrating experiences, feelings and meanings. Through such a process, it is believed, traumatic experiences can be processed, and cognitive and emotional connectedness can at least to some extent be restored. While the treatment for PTSD is usually individualised, Marco uses it as a broad framework for developing group therapy by and for war veterans. Yet, as indicated previously, giving voice to what happened in war is something veterans do not easily accomplish.

> Soldiers have different kinds of trauma. I thought there was nothing out there. There was not any help at all to help people like me with combat related stress, not in South Africa, there was not any help available at all. I did a lot of my own research and my own reading on the different wars, the different traumas, the different ways of trying to deal with it, the different methods of counselling. Then I realised that information needs to come out in some way, the only way, the best way, the quickest way to people who do not have any information, was internet. I wanted to get a site up, and load on my experience, my information on that site to make it available to vets all over the world and we can link ourselves up, have an exchange of information and hopefully the site would become an interactive discussion site. I felt there was nothing like it on the internet. I wanted to create a site where you can go in, if you were a psychologist, if you were a soldier, where you could go in and help yourself. So I built the site over ten years. I never did any funding, we are not like an organisation that runs an office from somewhere, it has always been a co-ordinated network of self-help groups in South Africa. Members are ex-conscripts, we never succeeded in getting any of the other vets. Most of the vets we fought against were MPLA, they were

abroad. The people like MK (Mkhonto we Sizwe),[13] their experience was quite different, I think they need their own site. I tried running groups myself, I tried to incorporate the black vets, but I discovered you had to establish a safe place for say the white vets first because the traumas are different, the history. (Marco)

According to a number of studies (Boscarino 1995; Moorcroft 2006; Stein et al. 2007), social connectedness can be both psychologically supportive and protective. Just as cohesion can reduce fear in the face of peril, as James described when he stressed the close-knit and taken-for-granted support of his team members during the war, so facing danger together can bring about a kind of unity and trust that, even though it cannot unmake the past trauma, can help people to reshape and finally to deal with it (Shay 2002: 211). Baines (2007) comments on the benefits of websites for Bush War veterans who turn to them "to tell their stories in order to contest their invisibility in post-apartheid South Africa":

> The camaraderie of cyberspace has largely replaced bonding/drinking sessions in pubs and reunions of veterans' associations. In fact, the reach and scope of the informal networks…serve as a kind of virtual veterans' association. This community of war veterans…has established a network of sites to exchange memories and, in some cases, provide platforms for advice on matters like PTSD.

James and some of his friends keep close contact through the internet.

> The group; myself, David, and Andre were quite a close group, and we still are. H was killed probably about five months into Angola. M, he totally went off the rails. S just disappeared. One guy we don't know where he is. Only one went off the rails badly, totally *bossies*, last I heard he was living like a *bergie* (person who lives on the mountain) in Cape Town. I think the interesting part is that all of us have seen a set of symptoms. We understand each other. I am sure we feel that nobody else understands us. We don't see life in the same perspective as everybody else. You don't often get a group of friends that you know that you can absolutely trust their intent…The really valuable things were food and water. Nobody would take your food and nobody would take your water. As a result of this, I know that there are four or five guys out there who I

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[13] Mkhonto we Sizwe was the armed wing of the ANC. It was not part of a formal defence force. Although MK had a detainee camp in Angola, called Quattro, its members never significantly participated in military operations or battles during the Bush War, in Namibia, or Angola.

can absolutely trust. That trust is at the very core of what their very prin-
ciples and value systems are…I'm still in regular contact with most of
the guys…We are planning…the 20th anniversary of Hooper. A wants
to invite some of the Cubans that he has been in contact with…We
tracked down the tanker that was involved in the tank that was shot out
in front of us…He was looking for the guys who had pulled him out of
the tanker (tank). It wasn't about the war. It wasn't about 'them or us'.
It wasn't about *die rooi gevaar* (red danger) or *die swart gevaar* (black
danger). Your section was there, and that's what you were expected to
do. Quite a few have a deep anger, particularly at the current situation in
the country; the fact that we and the international community are now
told that 'the struggle' forced the change, and how 'the struggle' did eve-
rything. We are on the back-foot because you can't exactly prove them
wrong. Nobody admitted what really happened…it's difficult to talk to
somebody who wasn't there because nobody quite understands. A lot of
people talk about PTSD without actually understanding it. That particu-
larly from the medical fraternity. I don't think people understand…It
was about the fact that you had your section up there, and that's where
you were…Unless you have been there, you cannot understand; you
can't really see what's going on…Its not about feeling guilty…People
who were there might have a better grip on it than anybody else…
There's a different set of motivators…There is a part of me that is hard,
not a thing. Then you're 'psychotic' or something. Yes, there are things
that I don't understand emotionally; because it didn't do anything for
us, I think you block it out…It's not that I believe that I am a psycho
or anything…have they created something that they don't quite unders-
tand and we've never been deprogrammed…Everything for me is cal-
culated; that is the really frightening part…after Hooper the debriefing
officer said remember you are not allowed to kill people anymore…it
was a very strange suggestion.

While the South African government and non-governmental organi-
sations (NGO's) have given a great deal of attention to the experiences
and suffering of victims of apartheid, and to some extent to those of
its most obvious perpetrators, the memory about the border war has
increasingly become a contested, ambiguous terrain (Lomsky-Feder
2004). The meaning attached to war is very much a cultural and politi-
cal product and defines what can be heard, how it can be told, and
what will be silenced – who suffered from trauma, who needs help
with it and who does not. Ex-conscripts, who were never members of
the permanent force in the first case, have no access to their veterans'
organisations and the little help that may be available.

   Veterans' websites are possible spaces for veterans to look inside the
kitbag of memories. The sites also serve as spaces to commemorate the

dead, give updates and news, and provide opportunities for discussion, meeting points and blogging. As stressed by Baines (2007), all of them either overtly provide information about PTSD/CRS, or refer veterans and their families who request help to people who have the necessary experience and skills. Some of the sites develop local self-help groups and some grow into full-fledged veterans organisations. Yet such web-sites can exact a toll on the webmasters and veterans who are trying to assist each other in a process of healing.

> You can get swamped in this work. Think of it, if you are a veteran, there is nobody you can phone when you want to commit suicide. When I set up SAVA, people would phone me up and they say, I have a gun against my head and I want to kill myself and I have to talk him out of it. I did that for a long time but my family got quite traumatised, having the war in my home. Their problem is so huge, who do you call when you think of suicide. Like with the commemoration of the battle or a traumatic experience that comes up – who do you call, you call me, nobody can really talk about it. That is the kind of training I am trying with colleagues to set up in South Africa…We have worked on it and the foundations are there.…If you do this kind of work, in the course of the counselling of vets, there should be a self-sustaining project. There are a lot of conscripts like me, fraught with guilt and shame for what they have done. They want to go back to Angola and do something there, help if they can, like some of the Vietnam vets went back to Vietnam and worked (there). These vets were calling me and asking me can we set up something where we can go back there and link up with vets from there (Angola) and maybe do something together. There is a lot to be done…it has been so difficult to get vets to talk, to get black vets to talk, to get Angolan vets to talk, to get white vets to talk, because they are worried about what is going to happen to their story. (Marco)

This final sentence is also a warning to us as researchers, when we attempt to gain access to these stories and use them to try and create new narrative spaces for memories that may run counter to, or sit uneasily with, the actual memory-making process of veterans. Like the war veterans, we have to be very cautious when we open the kitbag and 'stir things up'. As Marco stressed, "some don't want the memories". Their stories and memories, like Marco, have 'gone underground'. Many others have found a way to cope, even if it means a 'contained instability'. Yet, what was ultimately left inside Pandora's box after all the bad things had escaped, was hope: the tentative steps towards healing that the veterans seem to be trying to make by themselves and for themselves.

Conclusions

In this chapter I have argued that how and what war veterans can and may recall and narrate is shaped by a field of memories which constitutes the meaning of a particular war, the South Africa's Bush War, far from home, on the border between Namibia and Angola. Within this memory field there are hierarchies of pain and tiers of sacrifice that can be publicly, albeit differentially, communicated in the memory project of the new nation-state. While some narratives can now be tentatively narrated, it has to happen in particular forums and has to take on specific shapes.

Having been silenced in the past, the memories of Bush War veterans have not really been articulated yet in relation to emerging national memory-making about violence, conflict and its meaning. Those who are given a space to narrate their memories are particular kinds of veterans, that is the 'real', emotionally-scarred soldiers, or those who resisted apartheid or were its victims. But the way in which they can remember their experiences still has to resonate with, and find meaning within, the new, nationally acceptable field of memory.

Veterans, as remembering subjects, are nonetheless slowly finding ways to redistribute their experiences against the grain of, or in contestation to canonical narratives, thereby transgressing and perhaps even undermining them. New spaces for the articulation of their voices are evident in the slowly emerging anti-heroic publications as well as on websites for veterans. These sites provide bridges between the narratives of ex-conscripts who had shared 'another life' in 'another country' – those who 'have a better grip on it than anybody else'. Here ex-conscripts and war veterans are trying to find ways to re-connect, to converse, remember, make meaning and hopefully come to terms with some of the 'gray zone' moments they had encountered in the borderland.

War veterans seem to indicate that, unlike SADF (or non veteran) psychologists, fellow combatants – even 'vets from there' (Angola and Cuba) – can understand the pain, rage, grief and sense of betrayal that they have to live with. During the Bush War their voices and experiences were constantly muted by law and this was enforced by the perceived necessity of having to find a political solution, given the precarious position of the apartheid state in the 1980s. When the conflict ended the troops were instantly and, many feel, ignominiously with-

drawn from Namibia. Coming to terms with wider society has proved complex because the Bush War "created something that they don't quite understand and we've never been deprogrammed" (Mike). In the reality of post-apartheid South Africa there were and are virtually no resources to assist the no-longer-young white conscripts to restore connectedness.

At the same time veterans whose lives have been particularly dislocated by the war, and who try to come to terms with the past have to negotiate and articulate their experiences within available 'models' concerning such disconnectedness. The most prevalent locally constructed understanding of the disjointedness of experience and memory of some veterans is *bossies*. It is ultimately a somewhat derogatory term, implying literally being outside of humanity (and sanity). The other available, medicalised framework for understanding and naming what they feel is PTSD. This model is simultaneously perceived as a sign of mental chaos, psychosis and as a mental disorder. The embodied signs described as representing PTSD are nevertheless recognised as somehow correlating with veterans' own existential experiences and somatisation. This makes it possible for them to 'name' their disconnectedness, thereby gaining some power over it and finding a way to engage with the past. Once their feeling of being ill at ease has been 'named' (by themselves or other veterans) they seem more capable of realising that they 'have to take a step towards healing'. To do so they have to take the *balsak* down and open it, but society is not particularly supportive, and constantly reminds them that they contributed to their own 'eroded' moral life. This is particularly so since the war has become discredited and the apartheid government has not explicitly taken responsibility for what happened.

Nonetheless, as I intimated earlier, what is emerging once the *balsak* – the omnipresent Pandora's box in the attic – has been opened, is a glimpse of new hope, which can be undermined or supported by wider society. According to Walker (2006), hope is a resource for coping, and a form of societal sustenance. In this regard a number of studies have shown that social support from family and others who have had similar experiences can give powerful physical and emotional sustenance to veterans and enable them to find meaning in their experiences. The process of restoring balance nevertheless has a cost. It can open old wounds and can severely disrupt the veteran's family life, where a careful emotional balancing act might have brought some

equilibrium. Opening the *balsak* can bring 'the war' into the veteran's home and many prefer to forget their 'other' life and maintain silence.

Some, like Marco, can find no alternative but to seek for some kind of moral repair – "of moving to a situation where some degree of stability in moral relations is regained" (Walker 2006: 6). In this regard eight of the participants in my study have visited some of the former battle sites and five have made contact with at least one former 'enemy', who like them (and the sirens), 'know everything' that war veterans – be they South Africans, UNITA, PLAN, MPLA or Cuban – 'did and suffered' in the Bush conflict. In search of healing, the coordinator of SAVA, Marius van Niekerk, had visited Namibia and Angola to develop a film project that will enable veterans who had fought on different sides in the war to narrate their stories. He calls it the healing journey "during which former enemies…who fought around Cuito and Mavinga try to get reconciliation with each other, yourself and…the memories of the war".

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