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HALF A CENTURY OF SOUTH AFRICAN “BORDER WAR” LITERATURE: A HISTORIOGRAPHICAL EXPLORATION

Abstract

Half a century ago, in 1966, the so-called “Border War” broke out in what was then called South-West Africa (SWA) – known as Namibia after gaining independence in 1990. It was the most comprehensive, costly and traumatic of all the apartheid wars, and although it focused on SWA/Namibia, the conflict spilled over into Angola and Zambia, and should also be viewed in relation to the role played by the then South African Defence Force (SADF) in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe and in Mozambique. While the War for Southern Africa (1966-1989) was being fought, a number of books on the conflict were published. In the 1990s, while South Africa experienced a decade of dramatic political changes and concomitant transformation, not many books on the war “up north” and “on the border” were published, but from about the dawn of the new millennium, there has been a steady stream of publications (mostly in South Africa) that deal with the above-mentioned conflict. Why this renewed interest? Who are the authors? What do they write about? This article endeavours to provide answers to these and related questions by analysing half a century of “Border War” literature, primarily focusing on books published in South Africa. The way in which these publications can influence people and thus, also the extent to which the legacy of the apartheid era is continued, will also be addressed. For obvious reasons, the issue of memory and violence, the legacies of trauma, the legacies of conscription, and the challenges with regard to researching the apartheid wars, as well as related matters, will also be interrogated.

Keywords: Border War; military history; Namibia; Angola; South African literature; national service/conscription; war memoirs; South African Defence Force.

Slutelwoorde: Grensoorlog; militêre geskiedenis; Namibië; Angola; Suid-Afrikaanse literatuur; nasionale diensplig; oorlogsherinneringe; Suid-Afrikaanse Weermag.

1. INTRODUCTION

It is sad, but a fact, that although South Africa became a true democracy in 1994, the country’s people and politics

(and that of some of its neighbours), continue to be influenced by the legacies of the conflict fuelled by the apartheid era. From 1966 to 1989 the so-called “Bush War” or “Border War” (albeit that it should rather be called the Namibian War of Independence, or perhaps, the War for Southern Africa of 1966 to 1989), raged in what was then called South-West Africa (SWA) – since independence on 21 March 1990, officially known as Namibia. This was the most comprehensive, costly and traumatic of all the apartheid wars, and although it focused on SWA/Namibia, the conflict spilled over into Angola and Zambia, and has also to be seen in relation to the role the then South African Defence Force (SADF) played in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe¹ and in Mozambique.² The military operations in Angola are, for obvious reasons, often referred to as being part of the Angolan (Civil) War, which started with the first actions against the Portuguese in 1961, and concluded only in 2002, when Jonas Savimbi, the leader of the resistance movement *União Nacional para a Independência de Angola* (UNITA), was killed.

Proceeding from the assumption that it is imperative that the history of the War for Southern Africa (1966-1989), including its causes and consequences, must be studied in an unbiased way, and that voice must be given to all those who took part in the conflict, it is the purpose of this study to provide a review and analysis of half a century of South African “Border War” literature; i.e. books published in South Africa from 1966 until 2016. The war affected the lives of hundreds of thousands of white South African national servicemen, tens of thousands of white, black and brown professional soldiers in the SADF, tens of thousands of members of the South-West African People’s Organization (SWAPO) and its armed wing, the People’s Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN), tens of thousands of Angolan, Cuban and allied soldiers, as well as the soldiers of UNITA, the millions of civilians in Angola, Namibia and Zambia, and the civilians on the “home front” in South Africa. Some of the questions that will be addressed will be the following: Why is there, since approximately 2006, a renewed interest in this war? Who are the authors? What topics (aspects of the war, etc.) do they write about? How can these publications influence people? To what extent do these publications continue the legacy of the apartheid era? Although there will be cursory references to other sources, and to publications produced in other countries, the emphasis in this article is on books published in South Africa that deal with the war of 1966 to 1989.

1 This role falls outside the scope of this study, but see, for example, J Lovett, *Contact: Rhodesia at war* (s.l.: Khenty Press, 1978), pp. 31, 42-43; JK Cilliers, *Counter-insurgency in Rhodesia* (s.l.: Croom Helm, 1985), pp. 9, 32; MN Louw and JS Bouwer, *The South African Air Force at war: A pictorial appraisal* (Melville: Chris van Rensburg Publications, 1995), pp. 144, 146. These references include references to the role members of the South African Police played in Rhodesia.

2 This role also falls outside the scope of this study, but see, for example, CJ Jacobs, “Conflict within the framework of the Cold War and regional tensions”, *Journal for Contemporary History* 34(1), February 2009, pp. 281-297.

In Section 2 of the article, a brief overview of the war of 1966 to 1989 will be provided. This will be followed by a review of the literature of the war (Section 3). Examples of books published in the years 1966 to 1989 (i.e. while the war still raged in Namibia and in Angola), in the 1990s (i.e. in the decade immediately after the cessation of hostilities), and in the years 2000 to 2016 (which saw the proliferation of “Border War books”) will be provided. In Section 4 the war literature will then be thematically analysed, before additional perspectives will be provided in the concluding section of the article.

Some of the publications will be discussed in some detail, while most will just be mentioned. For reasons of space, it is not possible to refer to all the books that have, thus far, been published on the war “up north” and “on the border” (terms often used in South Africa). Throughout this article, when there are references to book titles, an English translation [in square brackets] is provided if the book is available only in a language other than English; for example, Afrikaans – i.e. the home language of more than 50% of the white South Africans who fought in the war.

2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: THE WAR OF 1966 TO 1989³

After South African forces conquered German South-West Africa in 1915 (the first major Allied victory of the First World War), the territory (henceforth known as the British Protectorate of South-West Africa) in due course became a Class C Mandate under the League of Nations, and was placed under South African administration. The territory was now known as South-West Africa (SWA). Although it was never supposed to become part of South Africa, SWA was, in practice, administered as if it was a fifth province of the Union (and since 1961, the Republic) of South Africa. As a matter of fact, in the wake of both the First and the Second World War, the South African Prime Minister, Jan Smuts, tried (unsuccessfully) to formally incorporate SWA into South Africa. In 1960 SWAPO was established to fight for the independence of SWA/Namibia. The first SWAPO guerrillas⁴ entered Ovamboland in the north of SWA, from Zambia (via the Caprivi Strip) in September 1965, and by July 1966 they were conducting operations in northern SWA. On 26 August 1966 (the date usually regarded as

3 This brief overview in Section 2 is based on SL Barnard, “n Historiese oorsig van die gewapende konflik aan die noordgrens van SWA/Namibië 1966-1989”, *Acta Academica* 23(1), March 1991, pp. 102-127; CJ Nöthling, *Kroniek van die Suid-Afrikaanse Weermag (1912-1994): 'n Herdenkingspublikasie* (Silverton: SAMHIK, 2012), p. 104 *et seq.*; D Becker, *On wings of eagles: South Africa's military aviation history* (Durban: Walker-Ramus Trading Co., s.a.), p. 215 *et seq.* For more details, see also all the other sources referred to in Sections 3 and 4, *infra*.

4 One person's terrorist is another person's freedom fighter, and *vice versa*. In this article the more neutral term “guerrilla” will be used to denote SWAPO members who took part in the Namibian War of Independence.

the start of the Namibian War of Independence), members of the South African Police (SAP), assisted by helicopters of the South African Air Force (SAAF), attacked a SWAPO base at Ongulumbashe, defeating the insurgents.

In due course the conflict escalated. Members of the South African (SA) Army assisted the SAP in their efforts to eliminate the SWAPO guerrilla groups, but by 1973 the security situation in northern SWA had become so serious, that the SA Army took over the counter-insurgency (COIN) operations. When Portugal withdrew from Angola in 1975 (the latter became independent on 11 November 1975), the three liberation movements who had fought the Portuguese for more than a decade, namely the *Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola* (MPLA), *Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola* (FNLA) and UNITA, henceforth became embroiled in a civil war over control over Angola, with the FNLA and UNITA pitted against the MPLA (who had formed the government, and was supported by the Soviet Union and its allies, in particular Cuba). Encouraged by the United States of America (USA), South Africa invaded Angola in October 1975 (Operation Savannah) in support of the FNLA, and in particular, UNITA. SADF units reached the outskirts of Luanda, the Angolan capital, but political considerations, including a lack of continued diplomatic support from the USA, then forced South Africa to withdraw from Angola. The MPLA stayed in power, and supported SWAPO in its struggle for independence for Namibia. SWAPO's military wing, PLAN, henceforth had base facilities in southern Angola, and increased its military activities in SWA/Namibia.

The conflict in SWA escalated. Several SWAPO incursions took place, and the SADF retaliated with cross-border operations. In May 1978 the SADF once again hit back at SWAPO bases in southern Angola, in particular at Cassinga and Chetequera (Operation Reindeer). The controversy with regard to the attack at Cassinga continues.⁵ But SWAPO/PLAN incursions continued, and this led to a drawn-out and bitter conflict, with the SADF from time to time launching retaliatory attacks/invasions in Angola, with the concomitant destruction, death and trauma, also to the civilian population caught up in the fighting in the war zone. See in this regard, for example, Operation Rekstok (southern Angola) and Operation Safraan (south-western Zambia) in 1979.

Many other SADF operations in Angola followed; for example, Operation Sceptic (May 1980); Protea (August 1981), in which clashes between the SADF and Angolan forces (their armed forces known as the *Forças Armadas*

5 See, for example, JD Breytenbach, “Airborne assault on Cassinga, 4 May 1978”, *Journal for Contemporary History* 34(1), February 2009, pp. 141-163; SL Barnard, “The battle of Cassinga, 4 May 1978: A historical reassessment”, *Journal for Contemporary History* 31(3), December 2006, pp. 131-160; *Die Burger*, 7 November 2009, p. 5; *Saturday Star*, 19 May 2007, p. 11; *The Cape Times*, 3 May 1988, p. 6; EGM Alexander, *The Cassinga raid* (MA, University of South Africa, 2003); V Shigweda, *Enduring suffering: The Cassinga massacre of Namibian exiles in 1978 and the conflicts between survivors' memories and testimonies* (PhD, University of the Western Cape, 2011).

Populares de Libertação de Angola, FAPLA) and their allies also took place; Daisy (November 1981); Super (March 1982); Meebos (July/August 1982); Phoenix (February-April 1983); Askari (December 1983-January 1984); Modular (July-December 1987); Hooper (1987) and Packer (1988). Operation Modular started with clashes in the vicinity of the Lomba River, near Mavinga, and in due course moved to the vicinity of Cuito Cuanavale.⁶ Eventually, after protracted negotiations, the SADF permanently withdrew from Angola, and SWA became independent, as Namibia, on 21 March 1990. The war had cost the South African security forces more than 700 lives, and PLAN and FAPLA more than 11 000; at least 2 016 Cubans also died in Angola.⁷

3. THE LITERATURE OF THE WAR: A REVIEW⁸

In the years 1966 to 2016, as many as 10 000 South African newspaper articles that deal with the Namibian War of Independence and the war in Angola have probably been published,⁹ as well as at least 117 academic journal articles. Interest in the war “on the border” has also manifested itself in many other ways. See, for example, the well-known Afrikaans playwright, Deon Opperman’s *Tree aan! Die musiekspel* [Fall in! The musical], a nostalgic and sentimental musical about conscription that had a successful run at the State Theatre, Pretoria, in 2011. He also wrote the play *Môre is ’n lang dag* [Tomorrow is a long day], dealing with conscription (first performed in 1984). Fictional work includes the collected fiction and poetry by Cubans in Angola, compiled by D Burness (ed.), *On the shoulder of Marti: Cuban literature of the Angolan War* (Colorado Springs: Three Continents Press, 1996), 31 fictional stories by South Africans compiled

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- 6 L Scholtz, “Cuito Cuanavale: Wie het werklik gewen?”, *Scientia Militaria: South African Journal of Military Studies* 28(1), 1998, pp. 16-61; G Mills and D Williams, “Cuito Cuanavale, 1987-88: Every cause needs a victory”. In: G Mills and D Williams, *7 battles that shaped South Africa* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2006), pp. 167-188; *Cape Times*, 22 November 2011, p. 11; *Sunday Argus*, 20 November 2011, p. 4; *Beeld*, 29 February 2012, p. 16.
- 7 Sources provide different statistics with regard to casualties, and the correct figures will probably never be known. See, for example, W Steenkamp, *Borderstrike! South Africa into Angola 1975-1980* (Durban: Butterworths, 1983), p. 185; L Scholtz, *The SADF in the Border War 1966-1989* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2013), p. 444; *Die Transvaler*, 7 December 1989, p. 1; *The Star*, 7 December 1989, p. 1.
- 8 For an excellent earlier analysis of certain aspects of the war’s South African literature, see I van der Waag and D Visser, “War, popular memory and the South African literature of the Angolan conflict”, *Journal for Contemporary History* 34(1), February 2009, pp. 113-140. See also I Liebenberg, T du Plessis and G van der Westhuizen, “Through the mirage: Retracing moments of a war ‘up there’”, *Scientia Militaria: South African Journal of Military Studies* 38(2), 2010, pp. 131-149.
- 9 According to the data-base of SA Media at the University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, 8 697 newspaper articles were published 1977-May 2013.

by Jeannette Ferreira (ed.), *Grensoorlogstories* [Border War stories] (Pretoria: Litera Publikasies, 2012) and AC van der Merwe, *Moffie: A novel* (Hermanus: Penstock, 2006), a fictional work based on the notes the author kept during his national service, describing army life and also dealing with the previously mostly taboo subject of gays in uniform in a homophobic defence force.

A number of documentaries have been produced on the war, including a 26-part series broadcast by kykNET, the South African Afrikaans television company. And then a number of postgraduate theses have also been completed on the war, including those by Martha Akawa, *Our memories of the liberation war: How civilians in post-war Northern Namibia remember the war* (MA, Department of Anthropology/Sociology, University of the Western Cape, 2003), Catherine A Marrow, *Selling the war, surviving the war: The use of music during the Border War* (MMus, University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2009), JCK van der Merwe, *'n Oondersoek na die ontstaan en verloop van insurgensie in Owambo tot 1983* [An investigation into the origin and course of insurgency in Ovambo until 1983] (MA, University of South Africa, 1985); G Addison, *Censorship of the press in South Africa during the Angolan War: A case study of news manipulation and suppression* (MA, Rhodes University, 1980); EGM Alexander, *The Cassinga raid* (MA, University of South Africa, 2003); and GJ Sugarman, *The use of force in international law and the right to self-defence: A case study of the South African invasions of Angola* (MA, University of Notre Dame, United States of America, 1990). But, as has been indicated, the focus of this article is on books.

3.1 1966 to 1989

A number of publications on the war appeared while the conflict was still ongoing. In Michael Morris's *Terrorism: The first full account in detail of terrorism and insurgency in Southern Africa* (Cape Town: Howard Timmins, 1971), pages 90-122 deal with the war in Namibia. In the meantime the war escalated, South Africa invaded Angola in 1975-1976, and in 1976 appeared Willem Steenkamp's, *Adeus Angola: The seesaw war* (Cape Town: Howard Timmins). In the light of the secrecy that surrounded the SADF's operations, it was difficult to do proper research in the 1980s with regard to the war. There was also a tendency in certain quarters to glorify the South African involvement – see in this regard At van Wyk's *Honoris Crux: Ons dapperes/our brave*, published in two parts (Cape Town: Saayman & Weber, 1982 and 1985). In 1983, Willem Steenkamp's book, *Borderstrike! South Africa into Angola 1975-1980* (Durban: Butterworths) was published (republished in 2006 by Just Done Publications, Durban). This publication primarily deals with Operation Reindeer and Operation Sceptic, as well as the operations that followed in Zambia.

It took more than two decades of conflict “up north”, before there were attempts to provide more complex, professional analyses of the war. The 1980s culminated with three important publications. First, there was the publication

of the SADF's "official history" of its involvement in Angola during Operation Savannah from November 1975 until March 1976. Researched (with some assistance by a few others) and written by Prof. FJ du Toit Spies (an Afrikaans-speaking historian from the University of Pretoria's Department of History), *Operasie [Operation] Savannah: Angola 1975-1976*, was published in 1989 (i.e. the year when the war ended) by the South African Department of Defence Documentation Centre in Pretoria. Like most official histories, it is somewhat selective and superficial in its presentation of events and, at that stage, all relevant sources were not necessarily available, but – notwithstanding the fact that it was only published in Afrikaans – it nevertheless served as basis for many other publications. The research on this publication started in 1978, but after the manuscript was completed, it was left unpublished for some time, until a censored version was eventually published.¹⁰

Interestingly enough, another book that dealt with Operation Savannah, also appeared in 1989, namely Sophia du Preez's *Avontuur in Angola: Die verhaal van Suid-Afrika se soldate in Angola 1975-1976* [Adventure in Angola: The story of South Africa's soldiers in Angola 1975-1976] (Pretoria: JL van Schaik). This book, which is still only available in Afrikaans, can be regarded as falling into the category of "new military history"; looking at the combat experiences of the SADF soldiers.¹¹ In 1989 the first overview of the entire Border War was also published, namely Willem Steenkamp's *South Africa's Border War 1966-1989* (also published in Afrikaans as *Suid-Afrika se Grensoorlog 1966-1989* (Gibraltar: Ashanti, 1989)). For many years this was the only book of its kind.

3.2 The 1990s

Soon after the war in Namibia ended, a number of noteworthy publications on the conflict appeared; some of them outside the borders of South Africa. One of these was Fred Bridgland's *The war for Africa: Twelve months that transformed the continent* (Gibraltar: Ashanti, 1990). In this comprehensive study, it is shown how and why South Africa became immersed in the conflict; Cuban involvement is discussed, and the conflict is described through the eyes of various role-players. Then there was Richard Dale's 70-page *The South African Defence Force and the Namibian War of Independence: The politics of counterinsurgency in Southern Africa, 1966-1989* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 1991).

Former USA Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Chester Crocker's 1992 book, *High noon in Southern Africa: Making peace in a rough neighborhood* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company) shed light on the political and diplomatic dimensions of the conflict. In some autobiographical works,

¹⁰ See also Van der Waag and Visser, pp. 120, 123-124.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 127-128.

the Namibian War of Independence is dealt with only in one or more chapters. See in this regard, for example, Peter McAleese, *No mean soldier: The autobiography of a professional fighting man* (London: Orion, 1994; republished, London: Cassell, 2001). McAleese served in the SADF “up north”, but also saw military war service in Aden, Borneo, Angola (as a mercenary for the FNLA), in the former Rhodesia, in Zambia and in Mozambique. Special operations have always fascinated military enthusiasts, as well as members of the public in general, and the first of several such publications to deal with the Border War, was the prolific military author, Peter Stiff’s 608-page *The silent war: South African Recce operations, 1969-1994* (Alberton: Galago Publishing, 1999; with a second edition in 2004). Thus, by the end of the 1990s the war book topics had become more diversified, and gradually more and more “ordinary soldiers” were writing their war memoirs, strengthening the war’s “history from below” base. The new millennium would lead to more diversification and, in due course, an avalanche of new publications.

3.3 2000-2016

Paul J Els, a retired Warrant Officer (Class 1) of the old SADF, has published extensively on the Border War. His first book of the new millennium was: *We fear naught but God: The story of the South African Special Forces “The Recces”* (Johannesburg: Covos-Day, 2000; first revised edition published in April 2009, and second revised edition in December 2009). The year 2000 also saw the publication of the autobiographical *Chopper pilot: The adventures and experiences of Monster Williams* (Weltevreden Park: Covos-Day Books, 2000; reprinted, Nelspruit: Freeworld Publications, 2008). Adventures continued in 2001 with Jack Greeff’s *A greater share of honour* (Ellisras: Ntomeni Publishers), dealing with his memoirs as a Recce officer (a revised edition of the book was published in 2008; Durban: Just Done Productions).

In 2004 Paul J Els published a somewhat disjointed *Ongulumbashe: Die begin van die Bosoortlog* (Valhalla, Pretoria: PelsA Books), with an English version (that did not add anything of real significance to the original text) appearing in 2007: *Ongulumbashe: Where the Bushwar began* (Wandsbeck: Reach Publishers).¹² SWAPO’s side of the conflict was addressed in the book by SWAPO member Oswin O Namakalu, *Armed liberation struggle: Some accounts of PLAN’s combat operations* (Windhoek: Gamsberg Macmillan Publishers, 2004); unfortunately, not really a worthy addition to the historiography of the war.

Since about 2006 more and more books, written by “ordinary soldiers” (conscripts and members of the Citizen Force) have been published in South Africa. It was as if they had become frustrated by the fact that so far, others had been speaking on their behalf, in most instances trying to justify

12 See also *ibid.*, p. 125, including footnote 50.

why South Africa became involved.¹³ Three very important books published in 2006 are worth mentioning. Louis Bothma served in 32 Battalion from 1977 until 1979 as a conscript junior officer, later obtained a PhD in Economics and was a lecturer in Economics at the University of the (then Orange) Free State in Bloemfontein, before resigning and devoting himself full-time to historical research and writing. In 2006 he published *Die buffel struikel: 'n Storie van 32 Bataljon en sy mense* (Bloemfontein: LJ Bothma), later published in English as *Buffalo Battalion: South Africa's 32 Battalion* (Bloemfontein: LJ Bothma, 2008). By 2013 the Afrikaans book had been reprinted 17 times. The original text was reprinted five times; the revised second edition, which increased the original text by about 30%, was reprinted ten times. The English book is a revised version of the second revised Afrikaans edition, and has been sold out. This excellent contribution towards the historiography of the war attests to painstaking archival and other research, and is, on the whole, a balanced account of a very controversial SADF unit.¹⁴

In *An unpopular war: Van afkak tot bosbefok – voices of South African national servicemen* (Cape Town: Zebra Press, 2006; also published in Afrikaans as *Dit was oorlog: Van afkak tot bosbefok – Suid-Afrikaanse dienspligtiges praat* (Cape Town: Zebra Press, 2007), JH Thompson demythologises the war. Although there is the possibility that some of the aspects of the book are fabrications, the no holds barred book sheds light on what it was like to be a (“plattelandse”/rural, urban, English, Afrikaans and/or gay) conscript, as well as how those on the “home front” experienced the war years.¹⁵ The other important 2006 book, Gen. Magnus Malan’s autobiography, will be referred to in more detail in Section 4, *infra*.

Karen Batley (with Ian Liebenberg, Carol Allais and Tienie du Plessis) published on the experiences of SADF national servicemen in *A secret burden: Memories of the Border War by South African soldiers who fought in it* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2007). The Cuban experience in Angola, 1975 to 1988, was portrayed in the book by G Risquet, P Gleijeses and R Remirez, *Cuba y Africa: Historia común lucha y sangre* [Cuba and Africa: A shared history of struggle and blood]¹⁶ (Havana: Casa Editoria, 2007). The next year saw the publication of the very important scholarly work, edited by Gary F Baines and Peter Vale, *Beyond the Border War: New perspectives on*

13 Liebenberg, Du Plessis and Van der Westhuizen, p. 138.

14 Information supplied by LJ Bothma to A Wessels, 10 May 2013 (e-mail). For a review by Abel Esterhuysen of the Afrikaans book, see *Scientia Militaria: South African Journal of Military Studies* 35(1), 2007, pp. 135-137. See also Van der Waag and Visser, pp. 130-131.

15 Liebenberg, Du Plessis and Van der Westhuizen, p. 139. See also a review of the book in the *African Historical Review* 43(2), 2011, pp. 115-118.

16 The assistance provided by Naomi Morgan and Elsabé Joubert with regard to translating this and other Spanish titles, is gratefully acknowledged.

southern Africa's late Cold War conflicts (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2008).¹⁷ And then there were also the books by David Williams, *On the border: The white South African military experience 1965-1990* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2008) and Jan Breytenbach, *Eagle strike! The controversial airborne assault on Cassinga* (Sandton: Marie Grove Publishing, 2008).

At least two of several books published in 2009 were the reminiscences of ordinary soldiers: Cameron Blake, *Troepie: From call-up to camps* (Cape Town: Zebra Press; also published in Afrikaans as *Troepie: Van blougat tot bosoupa* (Cape Town: Zebra Press, 2009) – a collection of excerpts from interviews with former conscripts – and Granger Korff, *19 with a bullet: A South African paratrooper in Angola* (Johannesburg: 30 Degrees South Publishers).¹⁸ In 2010 Graham Gillmore published *Pathfinder Company: 44 Parachute Brigade – the Philistines* (Johannesburg: 30 Degrees South Publishers; second impression in 2011) with 2010 also seeing the publication (by Veritas Books, Pretoria) of the comprehensive three-volume regimental history of the South African Corps of Signals by Walter Volker (ed.), *Army signals in South Africa: The story of the South African Corps of Signals and its antecedents*; *9C-Nine Charlie! Army signallers in the field: The story of the men and women of the South African Corps of Signals, and their equipment*; and *Signal units of the South African Corps of Signals and related signal services*.

The stream of new Border War books continued in 2011. Arn Durand published his *Zulu Zulu Golf: Life and death with Koevoet* (Cape Town: Zebra Press, 2011) on that controversial multi-racial unit, followed by a sequel in 2012: *Zulu Zulu Foxtrot: To hell and back with Koevoet* (Cape Town: Zebra Press). See in this regard also Sisingi Kamongo and Leon Bezuidenhout's *Shadows in the sand: A Koevoet tracker's story of an insurgency war* (Pinetown: 30 Degrees South Publishers, 2011; with the Afrikaans version published as *Skadus in die sand: 'n Koevoet spoorsnyer se verhaal van 'n insurgensie-oorlog* (Pinetown: 30 Degrees South Publishers, 2011)). Completely different are the experiences and views of Anthony Feinstein, *Battle scarred: Hidden costs of the Border War* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2011; with the Afrikaans translation published as *Kopwond: Vergete slagoffers van die Bosoerlog* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2011)), in which the detrimental psychological impact and consequences of the conflict are described.¹⁹ And from the “other side”, there was Gennady Shubin and

17 For reviews, see, for example, *African Historical Review* 43(2), 2011, pp. 119-121; *International Journal of African Studies* 42(2), 2009, pp. 319-321; *Journal of Cold War Studies* 12(1), Winter 2010, pp. 173-175; *South African Historical Journal* 61(2), 2009, pp. 429-430.

18 For reviews, see, for example, *African Historical Review* 43(2), 2011, pp. 122-126.

19 For a review of the Afrikaans book, see *Historia* 57(1), May 2012, pp. 218-220.

Andrei Tokarev (eds), *Bush War: The road to Cuito Cuanavale. Soviet soldiers' accounts of the Angolan War* (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2011).²⁰

In 2012 David Williams's book, *Springboks, troepies and cadres: Stories of the South African Army, 1912-2012* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2012) was published, as well as Louis Bothma's *Vang 'n Boer: Die stryd tussen Boer en Ovambo* [Catch a Boer: The struggle between Boer and Ovambo] (Bloemfontein: The Author, 2012). The most important Border War publication in 2013 was that of Leopold Scholtz, *The SADF in the Border War 1966-1989* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2013); with the Afrikaans version being, *Die SAW in die Grensoorlog 1966-1989* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2013).²¹ At long last, 25 years after the main fighting in the Namibian War of Independence ended, there was a thoroughly-researched scholarly book on the war as a whole, albeit that it concentrates on the role of the SADF.

The year 2014 saw the publication of one of the most fascinating and controversial publications to date on the war, namely Daniel Steyn and Arnè Söderlund's *Iron fist from the sea: South Africa's seaborne raiders 1978-1988* (co-published – Solihull: Helion & Company; Rugby: GG Books) in which the exploits of South African Special Forces (Recces), with the assistance of the SA Navy, in Angola and Mozambique are discussed in detail.²² The most important scholarly work published in 2014 was, without doubt, Gary Baines's excellent *South Africa's 'Border War': Contested narratives and conflicting memories* (London: Bloomsbury Academic), in which he, *inter alia*, indicates how SADF war veterans struggle to make sense of their role "up north on the border".²³ Another noteworthy 2014 publication was Richard Dale's *The Namibian War of Independence, 1966-1989: Diplomatic, economic and military campaigns* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company).²⁴ In 2014 a book was published in Portugal that deals with the SADF's early role in the war when Angola was still under Portuguese control: Miguel Júnior, *A mão Sul-Africana: O envolvimento das Forças Armadas de Defesa da África do Sul no sudeste de Angola (1966-1974): Um estudo de contrain-surreição* (Cascais: no publisher indicated, 2014).²⁵

20 For a review of the book, see, for example, *Journal for Contemporary History* 37(2), December 2012, pp. 314-317.

21 For a review article on some of the 2012-2013 books, see CJ Jacobs, "Books on the Border War, 1966-1990", *Scientia Militaria: South African Journal of Military Studies* 41(2), 2013, pp. 142-149.

22 For reviews, see, for example, *African Historical Review* 48(1), 2016, pp. 158-160; *Scientia Militaria: South African Journal of Military Studies* 44(1), 2016, pp. 256-259.

23 For a review article by C Doherty, see *Journal for Contemporary History* 41(2), December 2016, pp. 273-281. See also review in *South African Historical Journal* 69(1), 2017, p. 1 (online).

24 For a review article, see C Saunders, "Namibia's liberation struggle and resistance: A critical view of some recent perspectives", *Historia* 60(2), May 2015, pp. 201-211.

25 The reference to this source was found in a review of the book in the *International Bibliography of Military History* 34(2), 2014, pp. 234-235.

The next year, *A far-away war: Angola, 1975-1989* (Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2015), edited by Ian Liebenberg, Jorge Risquet and Vladimir Shubin, was one of the most important War for Southern Africa books to be published. Here the war was, to a large extent, seen through the eyes of authors not always sympathetic towards a “Western” or South African perspective on the war.²⁶ But this publication’s most important contribution is the “Bibliography on the Border War” (pp. 165-200) which contains the most comprehensive list of sources on the war published until mid-2015, including more than 500 books, more than 500 articles, many postgraduate theses, as well as novels and other sources. Other 2015 publications included Koos Stadler, *Recce: Small team missions behind enemy lines* (Oxford and Philadelphia: Casemate Publishers; also published in Afrikaans as *Recce: Klein-span operasies agter vyandelike linies* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2015)). Books published in 2016 include Willem Steenkamp and Helmoed-Römer Heitman, *Mobility conquerors: The story of 61 Mechanised Battalion Group 1978-2005* (Solihull: Helion & Company Limited) and Leopold Scholtz, *The Battle of Cuito Cuanavale: Cold War Angola finale* (Solihull: Helion & Company Limited).

4. A THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF THE WAR LITERATURE²⁷

If the books that in the years 1966 to 2016 have been written on the war in Namibia and in Angola (1966-1989) or books in which one or more chapters or sections deal with that war, are analysed, it is clear that they deal with a variety of themes. This includes prisoners of war (WM Amutenya, *Brave unyielding comrades: The untold story of Vietnam (Chetequera) prisoners of war in the liberation struggle of Namibia* (Windhoek: MacMillan Education Namibia, 2011)); psychological aspects (see the book of Anthony Feinstein already referred to); and the role that Cuba played (see, for example, the book of Risquet, Gleijeses and Ramirez, already referred to). In several books that do not, in the first instance, deal with the war in Namibia and in Angola, there are references to this conflict. This includes books that provide factual information on the old SADF in general or an analysis of the SADF (for example, Gavin Cawthra, *Brutal force: The apartheid war machine* (London: International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, 1986)); books on the history of Namibia (for example, PH Katjavivi, *A history of resistance in Namibia* (London: James Currey, 1988)); and

26 See also book reviews in *Scientia Militaria: South African Journal of Military Studies* 44(1), 2016, p. 294 and 44(2), 2016, pp. 163-172; *Historia* 61(2), November 2016, pp. 133-135.

27 When, in Section 4, a reference is made to an author and a book already referred to in Section 3, only the surname, or name and surname and/or title (or shortened title) of the book will be provided. If a book is, for the first time, mentioned here in Section 4, full particulars (author, title, publisher and place and date of publication) will be provided.

books on the militarisation of South Africa (for example, Kenneth Grundy, *The militarization of South African politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988)).

Most of the Border War literature deals with the military aspects of the war and with conscription (national service), where these two topics for obvious reasons, usually overlap, and many of the publications can also be regarded as memoirs, consequently having a strong autobiographical slant. Furthermore, most of the literature deals with the SADF's military activities "up north". As far as the SADF's military operations are concerned, the books of Els (*Ongulumbashe*), Spies (*Operasie Savannah*), Steenkamp (*Borderstrike!*), Helmoed-Römer Heitman (*War in Angola: The final South African phase* (Gibraltar: Ashanti, 1990)) and Peter Stiff (*Nine days of war* (Alberton: Lemur Books, 1989, with a second, revised edition, published in 1991 by the same publisher)) provide a chronological review of events in the war zone, more or less from 1966 to 1989, while the books by Steenkamp (*South Africa's Border War*) and Scholtz (*The SADF in the Border War 1966-1989*) provide overviews of the war as a whole. It is interesting to note that, as far as could be ascertained, the only other overview of the war that has been published has been in Poland, by Krzysztof Kubiak, *Wojna graniczna w Angoli 1975-1989* [Border War in Angola 1975-1989] (Zabrze: Wydawnictwo Inforteditions, 2010).

Many other books deal with aspects of the war; for example, there are "regimental histories" on 32 Battalion (a battalion that consisted mainly of black Angolan refugees who fled to SWA in the aftermath of Operation Savannah; sometimes referred to as the SADF's "Foreign Legion"). See in this regard the books by Bothma (*Buffalo Battalion*); Colonel Jan Breytenbach, the founder and first commander of the battalion (*Forged in battle* (Cape Town: Saayman & Weber, 1986); *They live by the sword: 32 'Buffalo' Battalion – South Africa's Foreign Legion* (Alberton: Lemur Books, 1990); *The buffalo soldiers: The story of South Africa's 32 Battalion 1975-1993* (Alberton: Galago, 2002)), and Piet Nortje, who also served in the unit for many years (*32 Battalion: The inside story of South Africa's elite fighting unit* (Cape Town: Zebra Press, 2004; first published in 2003; paperback edition in 2004); *The terrible ones 1-2: A complete history of 32 Battalion* (Cape Town: Zebra Press, 2012), and *The Battle of Savate: 32 Battalion's greatest operation* (Cape Town: Zebra Press, 2015)). Written by men who served in 32 Battalion, the above-mentioned publications are, at the same time, campaign or battlefield histories, and also of an autobiographical nature (military memoirs). See, in this regard, also Delville Linford (with Al J Venter), *As the crow flies: My Bushman experience with 31 Battalion* (Pretoria: Protea Book House, 2015).²⁸ The role of the SADF's Special Forces (Recces) have been discussed in books like those of Steyn and Söderlund, Stiff, Els (2015), Stadler, and Greeff (already referred to above), as well as P Matthyssen,

28 For reviews of this book, see, for example, *Historia* 61(2), November 2016, pp. 136-138; *South African Journal of Cultural History* 30(2), December 2016, pp. 132-135.

M Kalkwarf and M Huxtable, *"Recce": A collector's guide to the South African Special Forces* (Johannesburg: 30 Degrees South Publishers, 2010).

In several South African military history books, there is a chapter or more, or at least certain pages of the book that deal with the Border War. In some instances it is literally just a few pages; for example, pages 96-100 in the 119-page regimental history, *Militêre geneeskunde in Suid-Afrika* [Military medical science in South Africa], 1913-1982 (Pretoria: Military Information Bureau, SADF, 1983). See also certain portions of, for example, the following books: Greg Mills and David Williams, *7 battles that shaped South Africa* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2006, pp. 167-188); Paul L Moorcraft, *African nemesis: War and revolution in southern Africa, 1945-1990* (London: Brassey's, 1990, pp. 101-109, 213-251); CJ Nöthling, *Kroniek van die Suid-Afrikaanse Weermag (1912-1994): 'n Herdenkingspublikasie* [Chronicle of the South African Defence Force (1912-1994): A commemorative publication] (Silverton: SAMHIK, 2012, pp. 99, 104-105, 107, 109, 111-119, 125, 133-148); Siegfried Stander, *Like the wind: The story of the South African Army* (Cape Town: Saayman & Weber, 1985, pp. 46-54, 102-103); Peter Stiff, *Taming the landmine* (Alberton: Galago, 1986, pp. 86-125); Al J Venter and friends, *War stories: Up close and personal in Third World conflicts* (Pretoria: Protea Book House, 2011, pp. 29-56, 159-178, 221-240, 326-359), and Ian van der Waag, *A military history of modern South Africa* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2015, pp. 256-265, 268-272, 277-278, 280-282). See also the books of Baines and Vale, Els (1991), McAleese, Morris (1971), Volker, and Williams (2012), which have already been referred to.

Perhaps because flight has always fascinated humans, fast jets and large aircraft have always drawn attention, and because pilots have always been regarded as the glamour boys of the sky, books about air forces, war in the air, and air combat are commonplace. Thus far, only one book that *in toto* deals with the role of the SAAF in the Border War has been published, namely the one by the late Brig.-Gen. Dick Lord, *From fledgling to eagle: The South African Air Force during the Border War* (Johannesburg: 30 Degrees South Publishers, 2008). But, in several other books on the SAAF and aerial warfare there are portions that deal with the role of South African jet, transport, helicopter and support aircraft pilots in the war; for example, Peter Bagshawe, *Warriors of the sky: Springbok air heroes in combat* (Johannesburg: Ashanti Publishing, 1990, pp. 19-24, 63-69, 155-161, 186-189, 245-258, 269-270); MN Louw and JS Bouwer, *The South African Air Force at war: A pictorial appraisal* (Melville: Chris van Rensburg Publications (Pty) Limited, 1989, and second edition 1995; pp.140-234, second edition); and Michael Hamence and Winston Brent, *Canberra in southern African service* (Nelspruit: Freeworld Publications, 2001, pp. 71-78). A book that deals with the pilots "on the other side" is HT Hernandez's *Trueno justiciero: Mis campañas en cielo angolano* [Thundering

justice: My campaigns in Angola] (Havana: Casa Editoria/Editora Politica, 2005), the story of Cuban pilots in Angola, including references to the battle of Cuito Cuanavale.

Most of the South African soldiers who fought in Namibia and in Angola were national servicemen (conscripts). Compulsory whites-only male conscription was first introduced in 1968, when training entailed nine months in the SADF, later extended to a year of training, and still later – as from 1977 – two years. After the completion of the initial training period, the national servicemen became part of the Citizen Force and were supposed to do a number of camps, each lasting a few weeks or up to three months. After the cessation of hostilities in Namibia/Angola in 1989, national service was scaled down, and abolished in 1993. While some South African men of conscription age skipped the country to avoid military training (see in this regard also the role played by the organisation End Conscription Campaign, ECC),²⁹ approximately 600 000 white men underwent compulsory military training (something that in itself traumatised many), and of these, more than 50% saw active service in northern Namibia and/or in southern Angola – mostly only (“kids”) 18 or 19 years old. These young men can be regarded as both victims of and perpetrators in South Africa’s apartheid war; but they are, in many instances, still suffering the consequences of their involvement.³⁰

“On the border” the fighting national servicemen were forced to do extraordinary and sometimes terrible things in unusual times; and/or they experienced these things. It is consequently self-evident that books on national service (and on conscripts and the war) would also be published. All of these publications are, of course, also of an autobiographical nature; keeping in mind that political beliefs can taint memories, and that memories also tend to be selective. See in this regard, for example, Rick Andrews, *Buried in the sky* (London: Penguin, 2001); Barry Fowler (ed.), *Pro patria* (Halifax, UK: Sentinel Projects, 1995; and later Durban: Just Done Productions, 2006), which Van der Waag and Visser define as, “a pioneering prosopographical study of a group of servicemen in the South African Medical Service”;³¹ Clive Holt, *At thy call we did not falter: A frontline account of the 1988 Angolan War, as seen through the eyes of a conscripted soldier* (Cape Town: Zebra Press, 2005; reprinted 2008); and Steven Webb, *Ops Medic: A national serviceman’s Border War* (Alberton: Galago, 2008). Other

29 As far as the ECC is concerned, see, for example, MW Phillips, *The End Conscription Campaign 1983-1988: A study of white extra-parliamentary opposition to apartheid* (MA, University of South Africa, 2002). See also P Mason, *Contesting masculinities: A study of selected texts of resistance to conscription into the South African Defence Force (SADF) in the 1980s* (DPhil, Rhodes University, 2015). The ECC was dissolved in 1994. See *Weekly Mail & Guardian*, 26 August-1 September 1994, p. 12.

30 See, for example, T Edelman, “Divisions in the (inner) ranks: The psychosocial legacies of the Border Wars”, *South African Historical Journal* 64(2), June 2012, pp. 256-272.

31 Van der Waag and Visser, p. 137.

personal reminiscences include Wynand du Toit’s *Judasbok: Verraad ter wille van oorlewing* [Treachery in the interest of survival] (s.l.: The Author, 2015).³² From “the other side” there are books like, for example, Gennady Shubin, *The oral history of forgotten wars: The memoirs of veterans of the war in Angola* (Moscow: Memories, 2007) and Igor Zhalarkin’s book (in Russian) that contain the memoirs of a participant in the Angolan War (Moscow: Memories, 2008).

The above-mentioned books are examples of “history from below” (i.e. the stories of the so-called ordinary people); but the war literature has also produced books by two SADF generals; i.e. works “from above”, written by men who (“traditionally”) have “made history”. Jannie Geldenhuys worked his way through the ranks to eventually become the officer commanding of the then South-West Africa Command, later Chief of the SA Army and eventually – from 1985 until 1990 – Chief of the SADF. In these capacities he held crucial supreme command positions during the Border War, and also played an important role during the peace negotiations. In 1993 his first book, *Dié wat wen: ’n Generaal se storie uit ’n era van oorlog en vrede* [Those who win: A general’s story from an era of war and peace] (Pretoria: Van Schaik) appeared, with the English version in 1995: *A general’s story from an era of war and peace* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball). The popularity of these books led to a “new” edition in 2007: *Dié wat gewen het: Feite en fabels van die Bosoorlog* [Those who have won: Facts and fables of the Bush War] (Pretoria: Litera; reprinted in 2008 and 2009); also published in English as *At the front: A general’s account of South Africa’s Border War* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2009). But, in practice, Geldenhuys merely added a new foreword and epilogue to the previous Afrikaans text, as well as a number of appendices.³³

Magnus Malan was also a career soldier, eventually also serving as Chief of the SA Army (1973-1976) and Chief of the SADF (1976-1980), and then becoming Minister of Defence (1980-1991) under State President PW Botha and later FW de Klerk – i.e. a career that spanned the war years. In 2006 Malan published his autobiography, *My lewe saam met die SA Weermag* (Pretoria: Protea Book House), with the English version published simultaneously as, *My life with the SA Defence Force* (Pretoria: Protea Book House): a fairly dull book which, “tries to glorify the apartheid military experience” and, “is scathing about former national servicemen writing their histories from below”.³⁴ On the part of leading figures on “the other side”, it is only Ronnie Kasrils, a founder member of uMkhonto weSizwe (MK) – the armed wing of the African National Congress

32 Du Toit, a Recce, was captured in Angola in 1985 and eventually freed after prolonged negotiations. See also A Soule, G Dixon and R Richards, *The Wynand du Toit story* (Johannesburg: Hans Strydom, 1987).

33 For reviews of these books, see, for example, *Die Volksblad*, 24 January 1994, p. 6 and *Historia* 56(2), November 2011, pp. 226-228.

34 Liebenberg, Du Plessis and Van der Westhuizen, p. 144.

(ANC) – and later Chief of MK Intelligence, in his *'Armed and dangerous': My undercover struggle against apartheid* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1993) that refers (albeit only cursorily), to the struggle in Namibia and in Angola (see, for example, pp. 169, 187, 295-296).³⁵ The book does shed some light on the interaction between liberation movements in Southern Africa, in particular between the ANC and its armed wing MK, SWAPO and the MPLA.

Many of the books discussed or referred to are of an autobiographical nature (for example, those of Geldenhuys, Malan, Fowler, Holt and Feinstein) or include an element of a personal memoir, for example, Els (2000) and Gillmore. Some of the titles also mirror the authors' views of the war – see, for example, that of Geldenhuys, Du Preez and Thompson (already referred to previously).

5. PERSPECTIVES AND CONCLUSIONS

Although the war “up north” and “on the border” ended some 30 years ago, this conflict continues to rage in the hearts and minds of some (most?) of those who were directly or indirectly involved with it. Consequently, there are people who still tend to become emotional when they think, speak or write about the conflict. After all, thousands of people were traumatised by the war, and the scars (be they physical, psychological, and/or in the form of anger or fear) are still with or amongst us.

The march of time continues relentlessly. The youngest of the war veterans are today (2017) 46 years of age; most of them are in their late-forties or older, and some have already passed away. In 30 years' time, not many will be left, and by 2050, most will be gone. How do these people today (2017) remember their war experiences? How and why do they think back to the war years? When one endeavours to find answers to these and related questions, one must, of course, distinguish between white South Africans' experiences and reminiscences, and those of other members of South African society. And then, the experiences and reminiscences of the SWAPO/PLAN guerrillas, the inhabitants of Namibia and Angola, the FAPLA soldiers, as well as that of the Cuban, (former) Soviet Union, Eastern European and other veterans must also be taken into account.

The way in which one refers to the war of 1966 to 1989, can say something about how one looks at and prefers to remember the war, and about the perspective from which one is writing or speaking: the Bush War (there in the jungle, in “darkest” Africa); Border War (which can remind one of the nine frontier wars that were fought on the Eastern Cape frontier from 1779 to 1878); the Namibian War of Independence; the Angolan War; the (Great) South(ern) African

35 See a review of this book in *Die Volksblad*, 10 January 1994, p. 6. The book was republished in revised and updated format in 2004 as *Armed and dangerous: From undercover struggle to freedom* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball).

or Apartheid War (which links it to the liberation struggles in Zimbabwe and in Mozambique); or the War for Southern Africa or the Southern African War.

* * *

From this study it is clear that already, while the War for Southern Africa of 1966 to 1989 was being fought (primarily in the north of Namibia and in southern Angola), a number of books on the conflict were published. In the 1990s, while South Africa experienced a decade of dramatic political changes and concomitant transformation, not many books on the war “up north” and “on the border” were published, but especially since 2006 there has been a steady stream of books (mostly in South Africa) that deal with the above-mentioned conflict.³⁶

Why the new or renewed interest? Some of those who took part in the conflict believe they have an obligation to younger people to tell what happened, and to tell what it was like “on the border”; just as some of those who fought in the First and Second World War, and so many other conflicts, had the urge to tell their stories. A new generation of South Africans (many who were born after the war “up north” had ended), would also indeed like to know more about the war their fathers and/or other family members or friends tell them about. Modern social media have also provided new platforms where people can air their views and engage in debates. It was as if, after the cessation of hostilities, many participants were in a state of shock and did not have the time or inclination to take stock of what had happened, of what they had gone through. Some two decades later (post-1994, post-apartheid, post-Truth and Reconciliation Commission), sufficient time had lapsed for people to look back and take stock – and was and is there the need to gain a better understanding of what exactly happened, why and how; and what the meaning of it all was (and is); in short, to try and make sense of it all (the trauma, the mayhem and the madness, the fog of war). Some books are also written by participants after they retired, either from a military or civilian career, and now have ample time to write.

It must, of course, also be kept in mind that all SADF members (both permanent force members and national servicemen) had to sign a secrecy declaration, in line with the Defence Force Act. Even after the war ended, SADF members and former members were still bound by this act, and they were not supposed to publish information that could be regarded as classified. Classified documents first had to be declassified before they could be consulted – a process which could take very long. And then, of course, people also feared victimizations. They did not want to be associated with the Special Forces;

36 For an excellent review article of a number of “Border War” books published 2006-2008, see Liebenberg, Du Plessis and Van der Westhuizen, pp. 131-149.

they were scared that they could be asked to appear before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

The authors of the Border War literature are mostly “amateur (popular) historians” and/or journalists who write popular works for the commercial market; often people with little or no historical training, and who often have neither the inclination nor the time to do archival research.³⁷ Many are former national servicemen; a few are retired generals (Geldenhuys, Malan); only two are trained professional historians (Spies, Scholtz). And then there is Baines, “a historian of war rather than a military historian”,³⁸ who has produced a unique publication on the war; in particular, on the war’s aftermath and also on the consequences that the war had for those who were involved.

One can say that apartheid was a policy thought out and implemented by Afrikaans-speaking people, and that “The War” was to a large extent directed by Afrikaners; after all, since the 1960s most of the top brass of the SADF were Afrikaans-speaking, due to the “Afrikanerisation” and “affirmative action” that the National Party government implemented when it came to power in 1948. And yet, most of the South African publications that deal with the war “on the border” are published in English, with very few of the books appearing only in Afrikaans – for example, Du Preez (*Avontuur in Angola*). Of course, most authors would like their books to be accessible to a readership outside the borders of South Africa. Some of the books that were originally written in Afrikaans have been translated into English, for example, Louis Bothma’s *Die buffel struikel* and Jannie Geldenhuys’s *Dié wat wen* and *Dié wat gewen het* (to which reference has already been made), as well as, for example, Nico van der Walt’s *Bos toe! ’n Storie oor die laaste fase van die Grensoorlog soos beleef deur ’n junior offisier van 32-Bataljon* (Pretoria: The Author, 2007) which was also published in English as *To the bush and back: A story about the last phase of the South African Border War as experienced by a junior officer of 32 Battalion* (Pretoria: The Author, 2008). A few of the books written in English have been translated into Afrikaans, for example, Anthony Feinstein’s *Battle scarred* and JH Thompson’s *An unpopular war*. Perhaps there is a stronger writing culture amongst English-speakers; but perhaps authors keep an eye on the publishing market and know that in an effort to get a manuscript published, and also to secure a larger readership, it is advisable to write in English.

Over and above the reasons for the renewed interest in the Border War that have already been alluded to, there is also the concomitant question of: What motivates people to put pen to paper (fingers on the keyboard)? For some, financial gain can serve as a motivation. For others, there is the urge to write

37 As far as the role of so-called “amateur historians” in general is concerned, see D Fourie and M Whittle, “Where fact and memory meet: The amateur historian’s contribution to military history”, *Historia* 58(1), May 2013, pp. 143-166.

38 Baines, p. 7.

about their personal experiences in an effort to make sense of their past and to come to terms with that past. For a few, it might be the nostalgic yearning back to the so-called “good old days”, to adventure, to camaraderie; perhaps even to perpetuate the idea of a “heroic” past. Depending on how the story of the past is written, the Border War literature can serve as a catharsis, can play a role in healing old wounds, but can also strengthen the notion of male domination, of “us and them” in the broad political sphere; and can accentuate racial feelings. After all, it was a predominantly white (or at least a white-led) SADF that fought against forces that were predominantly black. In that way, there is the danger that at least a portion of the Border War literature can perpetuate the apartheid values and legacy. On the other hand, the post-1994 South African National Defence Force can, from a military point of view, probably learn from the old SADF when it comes to matters such as discipline, organization and leadership.

The “Border (War) literature” can, without any doubt, influence people – for the better or for the worse. In the history of South Africa, and in particular the history of the Afrikaner “volk” (people), the *border* (frontier) is of particular significance. For many people the border/frontier is more than just a place (or a region), more than merely a geographical space, but is a condition, as well as a state of mind. It is there where old ideas and old myths can be destroyed, and where new ones can be created.³⁹

The “Border (War) literature” must, of course, also be seen against the background of myth-making. There are, in many instances, more to it than mere nostalgia. There is a reason to believe that several of the publications are written to promote the idea of a “heroic” past. Of course, one could argue that many people are, or become, what they think of themselves, and are influenced by what they believe of their past; by the myths they create about their past, and about their role in history. In the light of the fact that the (not so great/extensive) Great Trek of the 1830s (together with the Anglo-Boer War of 1899 to 1902) was, for many years, the most epoch-making event in the history of the Afrikaner; the idea of defending yourself on the border (for example, the Eastern Cape frontier) against those that you perceived to be savages, and then to move across the border/frontier into the unknown, and once again having to defend yourself and to fight for survival, “The Border” has obtained a special meaning for many Afrikaners. In the border areas where they had settled, Afrikaner identity was forged. Interestingly enough, one could now also argue that during the war of 1966 to 1989 “on the border”, many Afrikaners for the first time fought side-by-side with black people, and that to some extent, the new South African identity of a post-apartheid, post-1994 South Africa can be traced back to that time “up north”.

39 See, for example, H du Plessis, “Die Groot Trek 175: Storie of historie?”, *Tydskrif vir Geesteswetenskappe* 53(3), September 2013, pp. 438, 443-445.

Just as the events during the Anglo-Boer War of 1899 to 1902, and in particular the destruction wrought by the British scorched-earth policy and the deaths among the civilian population brought about by the concomitant camp system for white and black civilians, traumatised thousands of people and cast a dark shadow over the history of twentieth-century South Africa, the Border War also traumatised many people. The trauma caused by the Anglo-Boer War was, in many instances, transferred to the next (and following) generations.⁴⁰ The same danger exists with regard to the War for Southern Africa. The transgenerational traumas of the twentieth century have haunted South Africans (and others) for many years. Traumatic memories with regard to conflict (whether it is the Anglo-Boer War, the Liberation Struggle, or the Border War) should bind people together, rather than divide (successive generations), across cultures, races, political and other beliefs. After all, all South Africans share a common past, including traumatic events, such as the War for Southern Africa. For the negative consequences of the memory of trauma experienced collectively, to end, empathy, as an important element in overcoming inter-group prejudice, is needed, as well as knowledge and insight into South Africa's history, including the (military) history of the Namibian War of Independence and the war in Angola.

For some people, there is a nostalgic yearning for the war years; others were so traumatised, and in some cases still to an extent, suffer from the consequences of that trauma, that they prefer (and try) to block out the memories of that traumatic past. After all, one's memory can, in an instant, take one back in years to traumatic and other events, and in that sense the legacy of violence and trauma is perpetuated. That is also true of the legacy of conscription. Many national servicemen did not adapt easily to civilian life and some are still haunted by their experiences with regard to, for example, basic training, ridicule during training in general, and the terror of combat.

Notwithstanding all the (mostly popular) books that have been published on the war "on the border", military history, in general, is a neglected subject in South Africa; especially from an academic point of view. There is still a lot of work to be done with regard to the War for Southern Africa of 1966 to 1989; for example, with regard to women in uniform on the side of SWAPO and FAPLA, and the SADF's scorched-earth policy in Angola. The story of black participation in the war on both sides, to a large extent, also still has to be told. It is important that the so-called Border War must be placed in its correct broader context; i.e.

40 See, for example, A Wessels, *The Anglo-Boer War: White man's war, black man's war, traumatic war* (Bloemfontein, 2011), pp. 135-162 and A Wessels, "The Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) and its traumatic consequences". In: P Gobodo-Madikizela (ed.), *Breaking intergenerational cycles of repetition: A global dialogue on historical trauma and memory* (Opladen: Barbara Budrich Publishers, 2016), pp. 161-173; and, in general, also F Pretorius (ed.), *Scorched earth* (Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 2001) and S Kessler, *The black concentration camps of the Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902* (Bloemfontein: War Museum of the Boer Republics, 2012).

as a war that affected the whole of southern Africa. After all, it became part of the broader southern African liberation struggle. More in-depth archival research is also necessary. Gradually the literature of the war must move beyond the “I was there” memoirs and also beyond the “us” and “them” history.

Significant numbers of SADF and related “war documents” were destroyed in the run-up to the 1994 political change-over,⁴¹ but in the South African Department of Defence’s Documentation Centre in Pretoria, there was nevertheless, by 1994 already some 3 680 linear metres of archival material that bear directly on the war “on the border”.⁴² Today (2017), approximately 750 000 of the some seven million records (files) kept by the Documentation Centre, deal with the years of conflict, 1966 to 1989, and of the above-mentioned 750 000 files, approximately 45% have already been declassified. Each file contains, on average, about 150 pages – i.e. a total of probably more than 50 million pages of archival material is already available to the researcher.⁴³ For many years there were also restrictions on access to SADF documents, and, as was pointed out earlier, this was one of the reasons why, for many years, not many books on the War for Southern Africa were written. But, as has been pointed out above, a vast volume of documents are today available. And then there are the books written in Portuguese, Spanish and Russian, that – ideally – should become available in translated form, so that “the other side” of the story can also be better understood.

One must be careful not to criminalise history as such. People must feel free to do research, and to air their views, without fear of victimisation. After all, the SADF’s soldiers, for example, did not start the conflict in Namibia and in Angola; they were sent in to win time for the politicians to negotiate a better peace, but now find themselves on the “wrong side” of history.

In the interest of reconciliation and nation-building, no-one must be (or feel) excluded, unlike what happened at Freedom Park in Pretoria, where the names of those SADF soldiers who died in Namibia and in Angola have been excluded from the Wall of Names, while Cubans and others who died fighting in the interest of SWAPO and its Angolan allies, have been included – something that can lead to further alienation and stigmatisation.⁴⁴ In the meantime, the SADF dead have been honoured thanks to a special memorial that has been built on the grounds of the Voortrekker Monument, just across the road from Freedom Park.

41 Liebenberg, Du Plessis and Van der Westhuizen, p. 142.

42 Van der Waag and Visser, p. 116.

43 Information supplied by L Jooste to A Wessels, 21 May 2013 (e-mail).

44 P Labuschagne, “Monuments and meaning making: Freedom Park and the bumpy road to reconciliation and nation building in South Africa”, *Journal for Contemporary History* 37(1), June 2012, pp. 158-170; G Baines, “Site of struggle: The Freedom Park fracas and the divisive legacy of South Africa’s Border War/Liberation Struggle”, *Social Dynamics* 35(2), 2009, pp. 330-344. See also Baines, *South Africa’s “Border War”*, pp. 155-170.

The increase in the number of South African Border War books, more or less coincided with a renewed interest in the history of the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902), where the centenary of the latter conflict stimulated interest in that traumatic conflict and led to a large number of new books (and articles) on the war of 1899 to 1902. For many years (for example, in the course of the twentieth century, until at least 1961, when South Africa became a republic), the Great Trek of the 1830s and the Anglo-Boer War can – as has already been said – be regarded as the most important defining events in the history of the white Afrikaner people. It is probably not far-fetched to say that the Border War of 1966 to 1989, has now, to a large extent, become the new defining event in the lives of many white, in particular Afrikaans-speaking South Africans, and that the literature on that war is on the one hand a reflection of this, but simultaneously also plays a role in making it a defining event.

The (political) victors usually (re)write history. In post-1994 South Africa there is a tendency to either side-line the history of the white Afrikaner and/or to brand white people (and especially Afrikaners) as the perpetrators of all that was evil in pre-1994 South Africa. Consequently, there are people who feel alienated. In an effort to regain a feeling of “belonging”, there are people who reach back to aspects of their past, often seeking out so-called heroic elements in that past. For many younger white (Afrikaans-speaking) South Africans, the Anglo-Boer War is just too far away in history; but many of their fathers fought in Namibia and/or in Angola, and thus, the stories of that conflict are kept alive, and views in that regard are transferred to a younger generation. Some of these young people are also eager to read more about “what daddy did”.

The conflict in Namibia and Angola was a tragic episode in the history of southern Africa. This does not mean that there were not soldiers on all sides that distinguished themselves in whatever way (as reflected in many of the publications that have been referred to), but many people died, and many more were traumatised. Many people have the need to speak about these events, to be heard, to know what exactly happened (for example, the circumstances under which a family member or loved one died), to (try and) make sense of the past; to find closure.⁴⁵ The books that have been published on the war can, at least in some instances, contribute towards a better understanding of the past, and even towards healing the psychological wounds of the past. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance that on the basis of responsible historiography, voice should be given to all role-players, and that one should also listen to what everyone

45 See in this regard also, for example, W Boshoff, “Die repatriasie van die Ebo-4: Die lokaliserings en opgraving van die grafte van vier Suid-Afrikaanse soldate in die Ebo-distrik, Kwanza Sul, Angola, 1975-2012”, *Journal for Contemporary History* 37(2), December 2012, pp. 191-223; and, going back to an earlier conflict, the 2017 efforts to locate the remains of four Blenheim bomber crew members who died in Kenya during the Second World War when their aircraft crashed into a mountain.

(combatants and non-combatants, on all sides) has to say, with an open mind. On balance, history is a discussion without end, and the debate concerning our past, including the history of the War for Southern Africa must be stimulated, and the memories of the past must be kept alive and dealt with in their various nuances of meaning. Moreover, it must not be misused for personal, political and/or ideological reasons. The books on the war of 1966 to 1989 can assist people to give an account of their own but also of their shared past. One should also keep in mind that history enables one to forgive, without the need to forget.

The Border War still elicits divergent emotions, both from participants, other victims and perpetrators, as well as interested members of the public. Although, on the one hand, the nearly three decades that has lapsed since the end of the War for Southern Africa, is too short a period to obtain the necessary time distance which is a basic prerequisite for an unbiased view of the past, time is, on the other hand, running out. Memories are fading, or become tainted by what is read or is said by other people; the war veterans' ranks are becoming thinner. Some information has unfortunately, already been lost for ever. But all the books (and other publications) that have been published in the years since the conflict broke out in 1966 and in the half century until 2016 (and beyond), are important sources that can be used in future research.

Half a century of “Border War” literature has produced books that have dealt with almost every aspect of the SWA/Namibian/Angolan conflict, including the role played by the SADF, PLAN and FAPLA; regimental histories; autobiographical sources; prisoners of war, medical matters, and war trauma. But that is not to say that there are not topics that can and must be researched and analysed in more detail, or to suggest that the stream of “Border War” books will not continue. Some authors look back at their “Army days” with pride and seek to justify the war; others are very critical and/or condemn it outright. The spate of “Border War” books that are published in South Africa will indeed most probably continue, as there is no sign that it will even out in the foreseeable future. Of course, the quality of the books vary, but they all bring some kind of perspective, and the literature of the War for Southern Africa can contribute towards a better understanding of the controversial and traumatic events of 1966 to 1989. In conclusion, it can also contribute towards ensuring the future of the (shared; controversial; traumatic) southern African past.