

Untold Stories and Disconnectedness. The Dilemma of Conscript Veterans of the Bush War ¹

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Abstract. This exploratory article scrutinizes the ways in which 12 white Afrikaans-speaking former conscripts - who experienced combat during the long-drawn-out low-intensity war along the border between Angola and Namibia – understand, give meaning to and deal with their violent conflict experiences in the context of political change in South Africa. The article highlights some of the predicaments faced by men who had seen and done violence during a war that has been remained largely undisclosed to the public. The former conflict is also increasingly reinterpreted as having been unjust. The paper argues that Afrikaner identity has long been constructed as somehow ‘spoiled’ and that this affects the ways in which ex-combatants can express their memories and lived experiences of the war. Yet veterans are increasingly creating ways in which they, as remembering subjects, are nonetheless slowly finding ways to redistribute their experiences in an effort to make sense of the past.

Keywords: war; violence; trauma; Afrikaner; identity; Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)

1. Introduction

I find it very hard to get on with people... [I] never talk about it, what's 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 blood and guts were splattered on my face... I just went and shot him... [SWAPO

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