

https://dspace.org/

Rewriting history pomfret community stories

Firmino, Teresa Kutala

2018

https://hdl.handle.net/10539/28334

Firmino, Teresa Kutala (2019) Rewriting history:pomfret community stories, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, <http://hdl.handle.net/10539/28334>

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

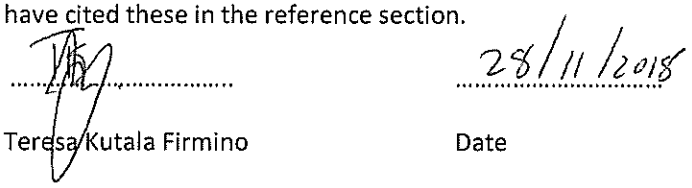
Rewriting History

Pomfret Community Stories

Teresa Kutala Firmino

A dissertation to the Faculty of Humanities of the University of the Witwatersrand in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters in Fine Arts.

Disclaimer I hereby declare that this dissertation is my own original work and has not been submitted before to any institution for assessment purposes. Further, I have acknowledged all sources used and have cited these in the reference section.



Teresa Kutala Firmino

28/11/2018

Date

Abstract

Rewriting history has been a form of self-determination since Histories of the oppressed were intentionally erased by oppressive systems such as colonialism. However, rewriting history is not only about retelling or remembering past events, but is required also to restore a sense of continuity within these communities. This thesis seeks to explore how storytelling can be used as a form to rewrite history, by using the Pomfret community – a South African community formed during the Angolan civil war – as a case study. The thesis unpacks the idea of rewriting history through storytelling, not only as oral storytelling, but as manifested through different art forms, including video installations, sound, found objects and paintings.

Each chapter begins with a story from the Pomfret community that navigates the different tools used to rewrite the community's history. The chapters are hinged on intersectional themes of: storytelling, as a form and why it is important in the research; memory, as a primary source of history and stories; home and belonging, looking at the Pomfret community in the present and how they engage with their history and stories; and healing, the last chapter, which looks at the trauma that the Pomfret community experienced, especially the women, during the Angolan civil war and the Border wars. In this way the research, in its totality, considers how storytelling can help a community to begin a process of healing.

Table of contents

Introduction

‘The shallow prison’ 5

Brief history of the Pomfret community 6

Rewriting history 13

Position of researcher 16

Moment of reflection 20

Storytelling

‘A man is never your family’ 23

Rewriting history through storytelling 26

Storytelling and memory 29

Storytelling and voice 35

History and fiction

Moment of reflection 39

Memory

‘The crying child at the post office’ 43

Memory and myth 44

Memory as a source of storytelling 50

Installation: *Memory: Crying Child at the Post Office* 52

Moment of reflection 53

Home

‘Father I am in love with a boy I met at the border’	56
Home and belonging	60
Where does the Pomfret community identifty as home?	61
What is their relationship to their home of origion, Angola, and their new country, South Africa?	63
Is Pomfret town home?	64
Moment of reflection	69

Healing

Will I be forgiven?	75
Healing through stories	77
Trauma	78
Military and masculinity	82
Christianity in the Kimbo	84
Moment of reflection (Conclusion)	88
Reference list	90

Introduction

The shallow prison

Commandante: "Bino, you are hereby sentenced to two days in our underground prison. You have broken the Blocouno law of passing without permission, do you accept those terms?"

Bino: "No, no, my mother sent me to Tia Maria's house, I didn't mean to trespass, please let me go …"

Thomas: "Commandante, his mother is Tia Isabella, she will kill us for imprisoning her son."

Commandante: "This is our law and it is final!"

Bino begins to panic, how could they leave him in this dark hole? He is not even part of those black gangs – that's what mum calls them – gangsters like their fathers. The hole was a shallow cave at the end of Blocouno; it was covered by an old rusted steel gate left by the Afrikaners after the unit was disbanded.

This fight between the Blocos started when the different families thought they were being robbed and some believed that the other Blocos were being ungrateful to the Afrikaners. Soon the young men started their own groups making sure that kids from different Blocos did not play in their territory. Bino tried to explain to his mother how these things work, but she just responded that if he does not do what he is told she will put him in her own prison. So now he is stuck here in the dark hole. He finally gets off his knees and sits on his buttocks. He watches the soldiers march up and down while

their Commadore shouts out commands: "Left, right left right. Attention, you're not doing it right, Frederick!".

There is a figure running across the dirt road in Blocodois. It is Nuno, the Blocodois leader. The dirt lifts and masks his feet as he sprints; it looks as if he is barely touching the ground. He shouts, "Guera! Guera!". More boys gathered around him. They stop in front of a house and knock. A fat, middle-aged woman opens the door; she frowns immediately when she realises a bunch of kids has disturbed an afternoon tea while watching The Bold and the Beautiful*. Eheke! The young boy is out of breath; the boys behind him also grow impatient and urge him to speak.*

Nonu: "Tia Isabella, they have captured Bino."

Tia Isabella is more annoyed: "Who captured Bino? I hope this is not some sick game, I will slap that small head out of your body."

Nonu: "Noa Tia, the Blocouno boys have put Bino in their prison."

Tia Isabella closes the door behind her and waves for them to show her where her son has been captured. The Blocodois leader and his boys begin to walk; they look like a little unit.

Some whisper: "Eya, Tia Isabella will beat them."

When they finally reach the edge of Blocouno the boys stop. There seems to be an uneasy silence. They do not want to be ambushed unarmed, so they pick up stones. A Blocodois soldier runs across the road and hides behind one of the houses.

Tia Isabella (fuming): "Where is Bino, show me?"

Nonu: “Bino is on the other side of the road; they won’t make it easy for us to cross their territory.”

Tia Isabella ignores the warning and takes the first step.

Shooo … There is a stone in mid-air. At this speed it can feel like a rubber bullet. It lands on Tia Isabella’s feet. She screams in pain.

“If I catch the person who threw that stone, I will beat you and take you to your mother and she will beat you. Bring Bino out now!”

Her demand is met with laughter behind the houses. The Blocodois boys are now standing in a circle and are discussing their next move.

Nuno: “Men we have to run through them to reach their headquarters. That is where they have imprisoned Bino.”

One, two, three and they begin to run … They are all sprinting, legs moving swiftly, stones are flying left, right and centre. Blocouno has turned into a battlefield. Some boys go home after being hit, while others continue the fight.

Meanwhile in the camp …

Blocouno boy: “Commadore! They are running, they are running.”

Commandante: “Send more men!”

Blocouno boy (sadly): “They have a mother with them.”

Commandante: “Dammit! These boys don’t know how to play.”

Tia Maria's son: "Eh! I am going home, Tia Isabella is my mother's friend. She will beat me if she finds out I was involved."

The Commodore realises he is losing his men. He moves closer to the rest of the men and says: "You are my soldiers and this is Blocouno! Are we afraid of a mother?"

"We also have mothers … pick up your stones and show them that we are committed to this game, that this is our game!"

Soldiers: "Yaaaaaaaaaa!"

The boys are taking cover now. Some of them are pretending to limp while others have nasty bruises. Tia Isabella is now boiling like a hot kettle. She cannot believe she is caught up in this silly game. She sees the Commodore and his troops running towards them. She picks up a stick and grabs the Commodore by his ear and drags him to the headquarters. She gives him a final slap and commands him to take lift up the rusted steel gate from the prison. He picks it up and Bino crawls out of his hole. She walks once more across the Blocouno dirt road holding Bino's head in her right hand. All the boys scatter like pigeons when she approaches. As she drags Bino home, a mother emerges from one of the houses. The Days of our Lives *must have ended.*

"Isabella, the kids are only playing, eh," she says. Tia Isabella clicks her tongue and continues walking.

Fin

Brief history of the Pomfret community

I will start this paper by first introducing myself. My name is Teresa Kutala Firmino; I was born in 1993 in a small town called Pomfret, which is situated in the North West province of South Africa. I am my father's firstborn and my mother's second born. I am an artist and a Fine Art student at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. I am also part of a collective (founded with Helena Uambembe) called Kutalachopeto, which means 'to see beyond something soft'.

The above information is important because it illustrates what Amos Funkenstein (1992), in his essay, 'The Incomprehensible Catastrophe: Memory and Narrative', refers to as 'narrative'. My personal narrative does not exist in isolation. Instead it is influenced by the narratives of my nuclear and extended family members and by the communities in which I was raised. My identity is in constant creation, and this is another process of the creation of my personal narrative (Funkenstein, 1992: 22). For example, I was named after my grandmother's older sister, an activist who died during the Angolan civil war. Similarly, my personal narrative will influence future generations in my family and the communities I belong to. My narrative does not only refer to the past, but also changes according to present conditions; and it will also change in the future. Future generations will retell my story according to how they interpret the past and how they make meaning in their own time. Just like the people before me, my narrative will form part of their past, present and future selves (Funkenstein, 1992).

On the eve of the 11th November 1975, Agostinho Neto, leader of the Marxist party, Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), declared Angola's independence from Portugal, thus becoming the new government of Angola. The National Union for the Total Liberation of Angola (UNITA), led by Jonas Savimbi, and The National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA), led by Holden Roberto, who had fought with the MPLA to liberate Angola from the Portuguese colonial hold, disagreed with the MPLA declaring itself as the new government. The disagreements led to a 30-year civil war between the opposing parties (Nortje, 2003).

These events happened as a backdrop to the Cold War, in which Angola became a canvas for the United States of America and the Soviet Union to display the amount of influence they yielded in the world. Added to this, other countries became entangled in the Angolan civil war. Apartheid-era South Africa, for example, entered the fray because of their fear that the civil war, and Communism, could infiltrate its borders. Cuba intervened as a peace-maker and spread the ideals of communism. Holden Roberto's FNLA was defeated by the MPLA and a large group of his supporters and allies had to flee Angola and become refugees in neighbouring countries. Many of these displaced people fled to neighbouring Zambia, Congo, Namibia and Botswana (Nortje, 2003).

The apartheid-era South African government saw this migration as an opportunity to recruit soldiers that were familiar with the Angolan territory, which led them to establish the 32 Battalion military unit soon after (Nortje, 2003). Jan Breytenbach, who was the founder of the military unit, was tasked with the job of training former FNLA troops in military tactics and combat. Breytenbach described the 32 Battalion men as the "scruffiest, most underfed, worst armed, most unwarlike body of troops'' that he had

ever seen in his life (Nortje, 2003: 22). FNLA troops were known as the most dominant group in the south of Angola and, as a result, the majority of soldiers who joined the 32 Battalion where assumed to be FNLA troops (Nortje, 2003).

Given Angola's unstable state at the time, many of these men had no military background; they were displaced civilians who sought refuge, with some leaving their homes with only the clothes on their backs. According to Nortje (2003), Breytenbach originally expected to receive 270 soldiers, but was met, instead, with thousands of men, women and children (Nortje, 2003: 39-40). On 27 March 1977, those who were accepted after the selection process were moved to the Western Caprivi in Namibia (ibid.). The new camp was later known as Pica Pau, Portuguese for woodpecker, and the locals called it Buffalo after the 32 Battalion emblem or Kimbo (meaning 'village' in Portuguese). There was no shelter for the refugees, so most of them lived in makeshift tents or in huts made from mud and sticks (Nortje, 2003: 41).

The South African Defense Force paid each Pica Pau soldier R10 per month, while other unit soldiers were being paid R32 a month (ibid.). To keep the men motivated, the SADF built houses for married couples and food rations were distributed to the families on a weekly basis. However, despite the SADF's contribution, it took a long time for Pica Pau soldiers to be recognised as a unit of the SADF. Nortje (2003) claims that there was no form of racism or discrimination in the unit, this despite the identity documents of all the Angolan soldiers bearing the term 'Solado preto', Portuguese for 'black soldier'. The living quarters of the white soldiers were also separated from the black soldiers. Later, a school was built by Warrant Officer Kanganjo, one of the

Angolan soldiers; stores were erected, and even dining halls were built (Nortje, 2003: 41).

My narrative begins long before the Angolan civil war, and takes an abrupt turn when a woman flees from a polygamous marriage in her early twenties with her three sons. She will later become the lover of a 32 Battalion soldier nicknamed ‘Afrikaans’ by the people of the Kimbo. The story goes that the soldier had gained his nickname from being able to say a few words in the Afrikaans language. On the other side of my narrative, newlyweds and their little girl stand amongst the thousands of people waiting to be selected by the South African Defence Force to join their camp. The woman’s first-born son later falls in love with the newlyweds’ first-born daughter. Before the love story begins, the first-born daughter and first-born son grow up in the Kimbo until their early teens. Between 1988 and 1989, talks of Namibian independence from South Africa begin to surface and the 32 Battalion has to withdraw from its post. The Kimbo is relocated to a small town called Pomfret on the outskirts of the South African Kalahari desert. The relocation happens between 1988 and 1989. To the Pomfret people’s great disappointment, the unit is disbanded in 1993 as part of the agreement between the apartheid government and the African National Congress (ANC) (Nortje, 2003). Pomfret still remains a predominantly Angolan town in South Africa until the army unit is relocated, basic services such as water and electricity are cut, and many residents are forced to relocate to different places in South Africa.

Recently, the South African government declared Pomfret land to be a health hazard because of an old asbestos mine, which caused more Angolans to move to the neighbouring towns. However, Pomfret still functions and many residents refuse to

leave because they believe that Pomfret is the land that they were promised by the 32 Battalion for their services to the South African Defence Force (Nortje, 2003).

Rewriting history

The history of the Pomfret community is faced with misrepresentations and the risk of being completely ignored by the authors of the 32 Battalion history books, such as Piet Nortjie (1993) and Jan Breytenbach (2002). Much is written about the war and the founders of the infamous 'mercenary unit', but the Angolan 32 Battalion soldiers and their families are presented as footnotes to their stories.

When I researched the history of the Pomfret community, two dominant narratives appeared, namely, that of the 'betrayed community', and the 32 Battalion 'soldiers turned mercenaries' (Omar & Taylor, 2011). I think at this point it is important to understand that these perceptions of the community are neither completely true, nor false, because most of the history has been written by people who had some experience in the 32 Battalion or have heard the stories from members of the 32 Battalion. However, both written histories, whether true or false, lack the voices of the black members and their families who fought in the war and lived in the army camp. The lack of the black Angolan soldier's version of events has left many of the Pomfret youth, such as myself, with questions about their history. A few Pomfret elders speak about their experiences in the Kimbo because of the politics of being associated with the 32 Battalion. However, 32 Battalion has always been a mystery or a myth for many South

Africans. South African citizens only found out that the unit existed when it was being disbanded in 1993, and even then the media spoke mostly about the army rather than about the community (Omar & Taylor, 2011).

“A subject’s identity continuously constructed, is his or her history” (Funkenstein, 1992: 22). Funkenstein’s (1992) above statement leads me to these questions: What happens when these narratives or histories are lost or untold? What are the consequences for the individual or collective when these narratives and histories are told inaccurately? And if they are lost or told inaccurately, what can the individual or collective do to salvage their narratives and histories?

This has led me to believe that if the story of the Pomfret community is not told or continues to be misrepresented, the history of the people will be lost. The stories that are told in the history books and online will become the hegemonic narrative of the Pomfret people. James Baldwin in the (2016) film *I Am Not Your Negro* states that history is not in the past, it is in the present; that we carry our history with us, and that we are our history. This is why our narratives are important, because they form our identities and allow us to understand why we exist in a specific time and place.

Position of researcher

It is important to note that I was born in the Pomfret community, and so I was already familiar with some of these stories. When I was interviewing the various community members, I was treated as one of their own, or as their relative. This was both an advantage and a disadvantage. The advantage was that the subjects were eager to share their experiences with me. They saw it as a way to teach me the truth about what really happened in their lives during the Angolan civil wars. The disadvantage was that since they saw me as their child, there were some stories that they were not comfortable going into detail with. Importantly, stories of abuse in the community made the subjects uneasy.

Most of the conversations took place at different family gatherings, such as at funerals and parties, with the more personal interviews taking place in subjects' homes. These stories were then rewritten up, and some have been chosen by Kutalachopeto as subjects for our practice with Helena Uambembe.

In my chapter, 'Memory and Myth', I delve deeply into the process of collecting memories and turning them into fictional stories. The stories appear here as narratives in written form. However, a selection of them is reimaged and reinterpreted into paintings, performances, photographs, installations and videos. For instance, the introductory story, 'The Shallow Prison' (Firmino, 2016), was reinterpreted into a dual video installation called *Butora*, referencing an old Kimbo war game. The first video

portrays 32 Battalion soldiers marching to a Semba[1] beat, and the second video portrays a family playing Butora in their backyard.



Figure 1

Kutalachopeto and Teresa Kutala Firmino

Butora

Video installation; Video 1 (left): 07:19; Video 2 (right): 05:51

2017

Nonetheless, there were some community members who complained after a story called 'Sophia's Story' was displayed in Pretoria in the exhibition *Boda Boda Lounge*

[1] Semba is a tradition Angolan genre of music and dance.

Project – 2016 Cultural Hybrid, MB Studio, despite their anonymity being protected in the story. They felt that the story would be recognisable, mostly by members of the same community, even if it had been rewritten. I was told that it was inappropriate to publish such sensitive information about their individual and collective histories and they felt it was unnecessary to open old wounds.

This has required me to negotiate these concerns with members of the community. The negotiation often comes in the form of reading some of the stories to family members and listening to their feedback. If the feedback is positive, I try to apply the same formula when rewriting other stories, and when the feedback is negative, I ask them questions on how to improve or approach the story. During these conversations facts

Each chapter in the thesis is divided into three sections, starting with a story from the Pomfret community that introduces the chapter and is used as a link between the three the sections. The second section is used to build an argument and discuss the theories in rewriting one's history. The third section I refer to as 'moments of reflection'. The moments of reflection are there to give the reader a better understanding of the story and how it relates to the theory. It also allows me a moment to consider unresolved questions or events while I've been writing the thesis and my position at the moment of writing.

In the first chapter, I explore the use of memory as the main suppository of information for rewriting history. The experiences of members of the Pomfret community lie in their

memories and to rewrite their history one has to allow them to share these memories. The introductory story is called ‘The Crying Child at the Post Office’ (Firmino, 2016), a Pomfret town myth about a ghost that lives in the old Pomfret post office. Although there are many versions of the myth, the story I have chosen is from my personal memory of a grandfather telling his grandchildren about his encounter with the Pomfret post office ghost.

The second chapter starts with the story, ‘Father I am in Love with a Boy I Met at the Border’ (Firmino, 2016). The story is about two lovers trying to convince the girl’s father to let them live together. The story looks at home beyond physical space and place. In this chapter, I discuss ideas of belonging and definitions and understandings of ‘home’ with reference to the Pomfret community. The story touches on three questions about home and belonging in the Pomfret community that I tackle in the chapter: Where does the Pomfret community identify as home? What is their relationship to their home of origin, Angola, and their new country, South Africa? Is the Pomfret town home for the originally Angolan townsfolk?

The migration story of the woman who fled with her three sons from a polygamous marriage is a useful example for tackling these questions, for two reasons: firstly, she has been with the Pomfret community since the immigration of the Angolan population, and secondly, she is the one who initiated the narrative of my journey to Pomfret. In my moment of reflection, I interrogate my own feelings surrounding ideas of home and belonging. Some of my personal experiences also manifest in this chapter.

The third chapter begins with ‘A man is never your family’ (Firmino, 2016), a story about six women sharing stories about their experiences in Pomfret. This is how most of the stories in the community are shared. I investigate storytelling as a form or tool for rewriting history. Narrating our stories is important because it is how we create meaning in our lives. Storytelling not only allows the people of Pomfret to create meaning in their lives, but also holds our history. It is being used to share our experiences and our personal narratives. In the third chapter’s moment of reflection, I unpack the story extensively as it is directly linked to my family. This will give the reader greater insight into why I chose to fictionalise some of the stories. This moment of reflection grants me the vantage point to be able to have an informed discussion about some of the ethical questions in the project, both in writing this thesis and in my artistic practice.

The fourth and final chapter focuses on storytelling as a form of healing. The introductory story, ‘Will I be forgiven?’ (Firmino, 2016), is a story of an old man haunted by his memories during the war. The story presents itself as a series of flashbacks from the present to the past. The old man tries to tell us his personal narrative. I use his story as a means of entering into a greater discussion of the issues around trauma and abuse in the Pomfret community.

In order to discuss these issues, I have had to look into how the community functioned and what they normalised as a society, especially when it comes to domestic abuse. In the final moment of reflection, I add some of the conversations my family and I have had

about these issues. Because, as stated above, my personal narrative is influenced by the social clusters to which I belong, these conversations with my family have helped to form personal opinions and thoughts when it comes to these topics.

Moment of reflection

I have written a couple of stories and yet I feel that something is missing. Parallel to the writing of the stories I have been trying to complete my study. But all of this seems pointless, a fruitless endeavour. I imagine that this project will do something more than just intrigue the reader. I wish I could restrict the amount of people who might read the stories. They seem quite sensitive; just the act of listening to them and rewriting them seems so violent. However, the key word here is 'missing', have I missed something or rather I have been missing something. Reading James Baldwin's (2016) statement about carrying my history saddened me – does this mean I do not know who I am? But I was never given the chance to know who I am, and that is what I have been missing, to know who I am beyond the present me. As a primary school pupil I was always interested in history. As far as I can remember they taught us about the Nazis, the Rwandan genocide, industrialisation and "our" history, apartheid. I cannot help but think that the idea of apartheid at the time was foreign to me not because I was born in 1993 or did not understand it. Attending an Afrikaans school I clearly understood what racism, privilege and inequality were.

Yes, there was hope, and the idea of a rainbow nation excited all of us. But once in a while a group of Afrikaans boys would shout insults at you; your best friend would not

invite you to her birthday party because her parents would not allow a black child in their house, even if their domestic worker was black; or worst, a rugby boy would show off to his friends by choking you and you'd report them to a principal who'd just smile at you and say, "Nee, hulle speel net met jou", Afrikaans for "No, they are just playing with you". It was worse explaining this to your proud black parents who'd constantly remind you that it was a great privilege to attend a 'white' school, especially when they'd had to go all the way to the Department of Education for the 'white' school to put you on the waiting list.

What was foreign to me was apartheid as it was depicted in the 1992 South African film *Sarafina!* We didn't live in townships, we lived in army camps; we didn't have pass books, the South African Defense Force had its own military police, and from the stories that I heard their main job was to stop bootleggers from selling alcohol in the army camp. The Pomfret community's experiences of apartheid were in the army camps. I felt lost in the history class. I did not belong on either side of the apartheid narrative; and even if I did, it was never taught to me. This is the 'missing' or rather the loss that I felt and still feeling to this day.

Storytelling

A man is never your family

> *The shortage of available men also means that marriage is associated with accepting polygamous arrangements, which continue to be a common and socially acceptable practice in Angola. (Henda Ducados, 2007)*

There are six women in the room – a mother, two aunts and three sisters. The oldest sister is sitting between her mother and her two younger sisters on a large, brown sofa. Her aunts are sitting behind her on black plastic chairs. The oldest sister, known only as Sofia, is showing the women a video on her phone. The two aunts are laughing, the two younger sisters have confused looks on their faces, and the mother is not amused. Sofia realises that her sisters do not understand the video because it is in Portuguese.

She begins to explain: "The woman in the video laying on top of a red pillow has just received a call from her lover's wife. The wife is screaming on the other end of the phone for the woman to leave her husband alone. The mistress doesn't seem to be bothered and asks the wife if she lacks anything. The mistress politely says that she receives everything from her lover, and men in Angola are scarce, so she must get with the memo."

The aunts start laughing again and the mother is still quiet, looking at the women of her family.

The mother then turns to them and says: "Young women, when they say no man is worth dying for, they are not lying. In situations when men had to fight in different regions for a few years, the forming of secondary households was seen as legitimate.

My father, as you know, was part of the army, the South African Army. So he would travel in and out of South Africa because that was part of his job. My mother would hold back her tears. She was in her early twenties.

"When she got married she never really enjoyed her life. She was always faithful and patient despite all the temptations and pressures of living in the Kimbo, and later in Pomfret. Sometimes my father would stay away for months, and every time he came back a different man. He became very distant and abusive. I still have some of the scars from protecting my mother from him. Sometimes I believed that he thought we are the enemy, but these types of things were normal in the community. When we were moved to Pomfret, mother and I thought things would be better. My father would spend more time at home and we would rebuild our family connections. We thought the war had changed him, but now that the unit was disbanded he would definitely remember the love they shared.

"Things just got worse. My mother and father became more distant and drowned their sorrows in alcohol. My mother found out my father had a girl in the next town – nothing stays hidden in such a small community. My mother was not about to lose her husband to a South African woman. Once she followed him to the neighbouring town and found him in the arms of this other woman. There were rumours that they were fighting in the streets, my mother hitting and swearing at my father.

"The situation created a lot of tension in the house; I was forced to take care of my younger siblings while mum drowned in her tears. Neither my mother's tears nor her outburst changed my father's ways. In fact, there was a time he was on leave, but he

spent the whole weekend away from home. When he came back on that Sunday night, drunk, my mother had had enough. She confronted him, asking him where he was coming from.

"I can still hear her screaming, I can still see the tears in her eyes and the veins on her hands as she gripped his shirt. My father, for some reason, was calm that night; or maybe it was the alcohol. He just watched her scream. I can still remember his eyes – they were empty, emotionless, as if he was not even there. How could he not understand her pain, her love, her frustration? She only wanted a home, was that too much to ask? After a while he'd had enough and decided to leave. She would not let him go. She held onto him. And this time I could see the anger building up in his eyes.

"He pushed her against a window. The window broke. My father was so angry he proceeded to pull her out of the broken window and continue beating her. By the time he held her lifeless body it was too late. I mean, this could not be happening; a few seconds ago they were fighting. My mother's voice as powerful as her beating heart. In those few seconds my father pulled my mum out of the broken window that cut her throat. In those few seconds she looked at me, and I would never hear her voice again. In those few seconds I lost my mother to a man who left us a long time ago. I swear a few seconds ago my mother was there: alive, her voice as powerful as a beating heart!

"You don't understand, I saw her lifeless body falling from that man's hands and as it hit the ground. Reality cut through me. I held her body as the blood flowed from her neck. She was left to bleed like a sacrificed animal. A sacrifice that no god would accept. My mother died fighting for something that was already broken from the moment he left her

embrace to go into what we only knew as 'the bush'. He had already left us a long time ago, and this time he took her with him."

The six women, the mother, the two aunts and the three sisters were silent for a while; only the sound of the video filled the space. And when the video ended, Sofia swiped to the next video.

Rewriting history through storytelling

> [P]eople emplot their actions and their understanding of the world through the narratives they recount and listen to … whether inside or outside Africa we construct our own and others' identities and aspirations and meanings through stories. (Finnegan, 2007: 22)

The story, 'A man is never your family' (Firmino, 2017), attempts to illustrate one of the typical ways in which stories in the Pomfret community are shared. Most of the stories of and by the Pomfret community are told spontaneously, when you least expect it, or at family gatherings.

Community members are not professional storytellers or historians, but they are people who possess a wealth of stories to share. In 'A man is never your family' (Firmino, 2017), a mother is sharing the story of the death of her own mother. The aunts and sisters understood the video as it was intended – as a comedic skit. However, it triggered a very tragic memory in the mother's mind. I have heard the story many times from different people in the community, but the most memorable version comes from my own mother. My mother's version of the story is filled with such emotion that it completely changes the atmosphere in the room.

The move from Kimbo to Pomfret left many people with the hope that their lives would improve but most of the families had to start from the bottom to be where they are now, especially those who decided to leave the SADF. Many women in the community died, leaving their children behind. Their widowed husbands continued to live their lives with

their children and new wives, while their late wives' children were forced to grow up quite quickly. They had to take care of the siblings of their deceased spouses – many of them left school early, and some joined the SADF.

Stories such as 'A man is never your family' (Firmino, 2017) also affected how the women in the community, and in my family, construct their identities. The title of the story is a popular saying in the community, especially amongst the women. It functions as a warning to young women, implying that a man can never be trusted, or that a man cannot be as supportive as your family. Many women in my family are very independent, and the biggest complaint from their husbands is that they cannot do anything without involving the family. One can say that the women in my family are very family-oriented and do not trust outsiders easily.

Storytelling and memory

According to Finnegan (2007), when a community stops sharing their stories, it is as if they have lost their memories. This in turn can affect a community's and an individual's sense of identity. They can lose a sense of who they are and where they come from. Once the community's memory or stories are lost, people begin to find alternatives for creating meaning in their lives. For example, Minister Louis Farakhan (1990) in an interview on *The Phil Donahue Show* says that African Americans' history was deliberately wiped out (Farrakhan, 1990). African Americans were barred from practicing their cultures or religions or speaking their languages. This was a way for the

slave masters to control and enforce their religions and cultures on Africans. When these restrictions were finally lifted, African Americans had been so subjected to white supremacy that it in turn created an inferiority complex, which affects the black community to this day. Farakhan (ibid.) maintains that the Jewish community wants the world to remember their past because they do not want history to repeat itself. Shouldn't the African American community do the same in order to avoid a resurgence of slavery and the treatment of African Americans as second class citizens?

When it comes to the Pomfret community, it is not only about history repeating itself, but also about history being forgotten or never being told (Farrakhan, 1990). In order for history not to repeat itself, or in this case to be forgotten, Finnegan (2007) states that we should be cautious about the stories we tell about ourselves or those that others tell about us because it strongly influences how we identify ourselves and what we do with our "storied selves". She goes on to state that Africans all over the world, despite their history being told by outsiders, have been telling their stories in different spaces using different art forms, such as music and film. Through these different mediums they have challenged colonial or westernised notions of who the African was, is and ought to be.

Africans have been defining themselves using their own voices throughout history. The question is, who do we want to listen to and why? Finnegan (2007) holds that African voices seem to be silenced because we are looking for them in the wrong places. Some African stories are passed through a Western lens before they are recognised or given credence as worthwhile contributions to the canons of literature and art. As a result, a

plethora of works created by Africans is relegated to the sidelines of history because it does not fit the Western standard at the time. Finnegan (2007) argues that the "subaltern voices" so often assumed to be silent or suppressed can be heard loud and clear if one cares to locate oneself outside of Western academies and networks. The stories of the Pomfret community do not live in academic books or novels, but rather in places where the community meets, such us at family gatherings, funerals and weddings (Finnegan, 2007).

I want to take this argument further by discussing and questioning through which institutions these voices have been playing. It is true that Africans have not been completely silenced, but it becomes this idea that the institutions we speak against reclaim our voices back into themselves. Instead of creating an alternative, we become a genre in the same institution that we speak against. Those that claim to listen come in with their own preconceived ideas that dominate the speaker's voice in the grand narrative. When you speak under their lens, no matter what you say, it benefits or adds to their constructed narrative because their voices are deemed more important.

The story 'A man is never your family' (Firmino, 2017), as Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) states, shows how indigenous peoples have a desire to tell their own stories, write their own versions, in their own ways, for their own purposes. The mother shares the story of her mother's death with her sisters and daughters to reveal a painful truth of their family's journey to Pomfret. In this way, rewriting or reconstructing history goes beyond the physical exercise of writing or recording what happened in the past. Instead, it becomes the act of deconstructing, re-evaluating what has been recorded before, and gathering all the fragments that were omitted from the accounts of previous historians.

Speaking about X's ethnographic practice, which placed primacy on first-hand accounts, Finnegan (2007: 9) asserts: "… the only acceptable form of ethnology was the life history, self-told, but for a long period of time relatively few anthropologists followed his example of allowing informants to speak for themselves".

In the introduction to his book, *African voices, African lives: Personal narratives from a Swahili village,* Pat Caplin (1997) poses the question about the democracy of writing and rewriting community histories, and further asks whose voice and words should be granted permission to tell an individual or community's "life history"? He approaches these questions as an anthropologist concerned with the role of ethnographers who deal with personal narratives, and how much power they wield when creating these texts. James Freeman (as cited in Caplin, 1997) draws an important connection between the philosophies behind writing and rewriting histories and the importance of taking into cognisance the writer's position and relative power within the process and its outcomes. Freeman expresses his thoughts thus: "[T]aking a life history is rather like being a theatre director and that is important to understand this luminal phase of the creative process" (Caplin, 1997: 11). This supports my argument that the writers of history have the power to edit people's stories to fit their versions of history (Caplin, 1997).

In *Perceiving Pain in African literature,* Zoe Norridge (2013) explores how this method can be used as a healing process. However, it is vital to understand the pain, violence, and other sensitive subjects that these stories carry before considering 'healing' for the

individuals who carry these memories. Norridge argues that the pain is usually caused be the denial or refusal to let individuals speak:

> Writers who have lived through oppression, loss and childhood trauma stress their right to an individual voice precisely because their public right to self-expression, intrinsically bound up with self-determination, was denied at the time. (Norridge, 2013:2)

In solidifying her argument, Norridge uses the British Pain Society's definition of pain as being "what the person feeling it says it is", meaning that pain is subjective, that each individual's experience and memory of pain is unique. In my first-hand research process for this paper, I have used the above understandings of history creation to underpin my methodology. However, this unique research itself has demanded that I be aware of my position of power within the process, further complicated by my belonging to the community which is the subject of my research. This statement further complicates my claim that this method of storytelling will bring the Pomfret community a form of 'healing', thus pushing me to interrogate my own position within this project (Norridge, 2013).

Yvonne Vera is an example of a writer who explores some of the themes that I have been working with in my research. Vera is a Zimbabwean-born author, who is known for her poetic prose and her ability to broach difficult stories that both confront and draw the viewer in. This is something I hope to achieve with my own writing. According to Lunga (2003), through her writing Vera is aware that 'official' history is selective and benefits

those who had the authority to write the history at that time. Vera intentionally rejects colonial history and has admitted to distorting and reconstructing history so that at the end the reader is presented with a representation of history as fiction. Writing history through fiction presents us with possibilities of reimagining history beyond what has been written by the writers of 'official' historical accounts (Lunga, 2003).

Her short story collection, *Why don't you carve other animals* (Vera, 1992) inspired my stories because they remind me of the stories of the Pomfret community. For example, in one of the stories called 'It is hard to live alone', Vera (1992) speaks of married women and their children in small communities watching their husbands leaving their homes to fight in a war. The elder women advise the new bride about the uncertainty and other difficulties that come with being a wife and mother in the time in which they are living. One such uncertainty is not knowing if their husbands will return to their homes. The women who lived in the Buffalo army camp in Namibia would wait for months for their husbands, not knowing whether or not they would return from the border war.

In the story 'A man is never your family' (Firmino, 2017), a mother not only shares the difficult journey of her family, but more specifically her own mother's journey and end. Her mother's story creates a doorway to begin the conversation of the past and present experiences of the women in the Pomfret community. The story of the women in the Pomfret community is the story of the community because they are the ones who stayed behind to build the community (Vera, 1992).

When writing the stories I always try to place the characters in a certain place and time be describing what is around them, or what they are physically doing in the stories. The women in the story ‘A man is not your family’ (2017) are placed in a time after the war, because they are watching a video on a phone. The mother’s monologue in the story gives a brief history of the Pomfret community and a sense of what a couple in the community would have been going through at the time. The short stories are almost presented as memories that are being slowly unpacked for the audience. While writing or telling the stories I do not want to describe every single detail, but I want the reader or audience to visualise the story. Vera (1997) not only subverts official history, but takes this further by presenting the reader with stories of everyday people rather than stories of the grand narrative. Through this we are able to understand how the grand narrative has affected the ordinary people in Zimbabwe. Suddenly the history is not about who won or lost the war, but rather about how the people in Zimbabwe were affected by the war and how they remember the war. This way of looking at history allows us to make sense of reasons why, despite the end of the war, women in the Pomfret community still have sayings such as “A man is never your family”, and how that describes to a certain degree the relationships between men and women in the community.

Storytelling and voice

Storytelling can take many forms, from theatre, writing, and poetry, to film. This is evident in my own practice when storytelling begins to take different forms, such as

paintings and installation. Storytelling is a social act, where usually the elders or women of the community tell stories to the younger generation. Storytellers in the community tell stories for two different reasons. The first is to entertain their audience or remind them of past events that could make them laugh or cry. The second is to pass down values and knowledge about the community to the younger generation. There is something about storytelling that allows a certain freedom to the storyteller and the audience. From speaker to speaker the story will be told differently. Behind that specific person's voice, parts of the 'history' are uncovered. Storytelling grabs the imagination that I think a theoretical academic paper may not allow. It gives the audience the freedom to interpret and re-imagine what so many have imagined. Both the storyteller and the audience recreate the story. The audience is directed by the storyteller's voice and words (Smith, 1999).

The ability to speak claims a certain power, where power, in this case, refers to the capacity to control your story, to have the power to talk about your experiences without filters, and the power to decide how and where your stories are told. In my own practice I always have to negotiate when to speak and when my voice is important when performing the stories. On one hand I am a scholar and an artist doing research and writing about the Pomfret community, but most importantly I am a Pomfret community member rewriting her history.

History and fiction

Rewriting history is an act of reimagining one's past in a world replete with pre-inscribed histories that have set themselves as truth. Rewriting history not only requires one to re-imagine your past, but also complicates these pre-inscribed histories. In my process of rewriting stories, I borrow from the past and present to fictionalise the Pomfret community histories. I refer to them in the plural as 'histories', because there are various contending versions of the Pomfret community history. I have gained more informative, detailed and valuable information from the Pomfret community members' personal experiences than from 'official' histories recorded in history books. That is not to say, however, that the 'official' history of the community and the one I offer here are mutually exclusive. Instead, the first-hand accounts from members of the Pomfret community prove that while 'official' history emphasises the Angolan civil war and the creation of the 32 Battalion, several other histories were occurring simultaneously. This interface complicates, gives different perspective to, and even enriches the 'official' history.

Additionally, my process has required me to fill in many gaps in the stories that I am told by the community members. In some instances, 'official' history has been invaluable in this regard. Simultaneously, my practice has assisted me in giving meaning to the past and present of the Pomfret community and has challenged proponents of 'official' history's decision to turn a blind eye to first-hand stories from the Pomfret community.

Li Cao (2017) in her lecture ‘History and fiction as narrative: A Chinese perspective’, suggests that once the hero in a grand story is replaced by an ordinary individual, human life becomes the focus of the narrative. In turn the grand history is subverted by the small histories. In her presentation she speaks of two types of historians during the East Hun Dynasty: officials who had to write the ‘true’ and ‘objective’ history on one hand, and the story writers who wrote stories based on what they heard from street rumours and gossip. The latter yielded more possibilities because they didn’t claim to be the singular and exclusive truth. Instead, they evolved into universal stories that were told repeatedly by different people in different generations – entering the realm of folklore. The storywriters used different techniques, such as humour and clichés, to captivate and retain their audiences’ attention. These techniques allowed the story writers to blur the lines between history and literature, truth and fiction.

When a story is told, history, literature, truth and fiction compliment and contradict each other. For example, the above story is about the women in the Pomfret community, but can also be read as a story about ordinary women from anywhere in the world who have and continue to feel the effects of domestic abuse. The collective narrative of a community changes if grand narratives are replaced by personal narratives (Cao, 2017). These personal narratives can often paint a clearer picture of what really happened, for example the journey of the Pomfret community.

Moment of reflection

The story ‘A man is never your family’ sounds better in Portuguese: ‘Um homem nunca é sua família’. It is a saying that I heard often amongst the women in my family. It was strange because my father and uncles are very present in our lives and very much part of the family. As I grew older, I began to understand that this saying referred to lovers, boyfriends and husbands. The statement came into being after the women’s experiences in the Buffalo camp. Many of them left their old lives in Angola with the hope of building new and better lives with their husbands. They left their families behind, not knowing if they would ever see them again, to follow strangers or men they loved into a new world. I can imagine their initial relief and eagerness to escape the civil war and uncertain life in the refugee camps.

Although there are many successful marriages in the community, many of the women have experienced abuse and disappointment in their households. It is important to understand that this statement is not about the nature of blood relations, but rather refers strongly to the nature of love or unconditional love: that a man can never love you unconditionally like your family loves you. The word ‘never’, or ‘nunca’ in Portuguese, suggests that from the beginning of the relationship the woman has to be aware that at any given moment this love could cease to exist. This story is based on a true story; I have heard the story from some of the women, each of them with their own way of telling it. I was three months old when the mother in ‘A man is never your family’ died, so I have no recollection of her. I would like to believe that she was a woman who never gave up. She tried to hold on to everything that reminded her of home and family. Her

husband is the one who took her through this journey, from the borders to Pomfret. So I could imagine her fear and frustration when things started falling apart. It could be that she allowed herself to go through all that pain because she felt there was no escape. Where would she have gone if she left her husband? What would have happened with her children? The way my mother told the story, with such sadness and anger, it was as if she had been there the moment it had all happened.

Short stories can be simple yet, because they are short, they hold a lot of complexity. The story tries to give you as much information as impossible in a few lines. When it comes to ‘A man is never your family’, I tried to capture humour, comfort, fear, shock, pain and anger in one story. They say a successful writer knows that the feeling is in them before it reaches the paper. Yes, I find comfort in the women in my family, and we are a family that always jokes around with each other. However, fear, shock, pain and anger had to come from somewhere else. I could never understand the feeling of the mother who held her dying mother in her hands, for I have never experienced that before. Even with that said, I have experienced feelings which assisted in trying to imagine what she felt in that moment as she told the story. Each time I read or perform the story these feelings resurface, because they come from me and my experiences.

The writing of this story, ‘A man is never your family’ (Firmino, 2017) was followed by a series of five paintings. The paintings are a collage of clothing, beads and paper on canvas. Each painting represents a sister in the story; I am the sixth sister who reads the story. I tried to re-embody each character in each painting by representing them with

a certain piece of clothing. For example, Figure 2 represents the youngest sister. She is represented with a white tunic in a dancing position on top of a light pink background. She is young and naïve. I could imagine her staring at the women of her family as they speak about their traumatic experiences, not understanding, but simply listening.



Figure 2
Teresa Kutala Firmino
(*Six sisters 1*)
Mixed media
2018



Figure 3

Teresa Kuta
(Six sisters
Mixed medi
2018



Figure 4 (left)

Figure 5 (right)

Teresa Kutala Firmino

Six sisters
(The two aunts)

Mixed media

2018





Figure 6
Teresa Kutala Firmino

Six sisters 3

Mixed media

2018

Memory

The crying child at the post office

> *There is no pure memory only recollections, memory always starts from the present to go back in time. (Nathan Wachtel, 1990: 4)*

It is late on a Saturday night. Like on any night, Avo is sitting with us around the fire. He is sitting on a black, plastic garden chair with a cold Black Label in his right hand. He moves closer to the fire and adds more wood with his left hand. The glow of the flames makes his eyes enter a long, distant stare. It looks as if he has just entered into another era, searching through his memories. His eyes become watery; I am not sure if it is the smoke coming from the fire, or if the memory he is searching for has brought tears to his eyes.

As he sits back onto the black plastic chair, he takes a sip of his chilled beer, looks at the bottle and says: "My children, alcohol is a dangerous thing. You know when we moved to Pomfret my house was not far from your grandmother's house, your father's mother. She used to sell beer and play Brenda on a small cassette player. My friends and I would sit in her backyard for hours, drinking. When we had all had enough, we would walk home in our drunken states.

"Now there was a specific night that the taste of the beer urged me to stay longer. All of my friends had left and I sat with my in-law, your father's mother. I cannot remember what we spoke about that kept me so long in that backyard. Since I stayed a few blocks from her house, I was confident I would reach home unharmed. So after a few goodbyes I stood up and began my journey home. Now, between your grandmother's house and my house there used to be a post office … I am not sure if it is still there …

People used to say, when you pass that post office at this hour you would hear a crying child, crying for his mother. So I tried my best to be quiet as I read the blue and red post office sign.

"But see, my children, I had so much to drink and too many troubles. Sometimes alcohol makes you have arguments with yourself. Only God knows why I decided to have one of those arguments on that night. I was swaying from one end of the street to the next. Only the yellow street, light lit my path. As I drew closer to the post office gate, I heard the first cry. I swear I stopped dead with fear! I could feel the alcohol leaving my body, my heart pounding in my chest. After a few seconds I thought to myself that this is ridiculous, so I began walking again, wobbling from left to right, arguing with my fear, swearing that if I saw a ghost baby that night I would never drink again. And then I heard a second cry. This time I was annoyed. Did he know I had a drinking problem? I turned to look at the post office and screamed, 'You sly dog, if you knew the problems I've had you would also be a drunkard!' Who would want to be stuck in the post office anyway? Even I would cry every night, watching all this mail going in and out the building, yet my spirit is stuck in a space of transit. I laughed at his sad state and continued home. When I finally reached my house, I stood by my gate and looked back at the red and blue sign. I swear I heard a final cry … but then again, I was a drunk man."

Avo took a final sip form his now warm beer. Once again the flames from the fire reflected in his eyes and I could not help but wonder if he could still hear the crying baby.

Memory and myth

The story you have just read is a memory of a former 32 Battalion soldier and South African Defence Force veteran. In the story he is telling his grandchildren a memory he has of the town post office ghost. The story, or rather the myth, of the post office ghost is very popular in the Pomfret community. Although many people know the story to be a myth, many still claim to have experienced something similar to what the old man experienced on that night.

This story is known as myth not due to the fact that it is about a ghost, but because it has survived throughout the different generations of the Pomfret community. Each generation seems to have their version of the myth, since no one really knows who the first person was to really experience the post office ghost, or who created the myth. As a result, many community members have claimed to be the myth's creator. Some use it to speak about their fears and others use it to teach young children not to wander off at night. This is part of the reason why the story has survived, because it could be told over and over again by different people (Blumenberg, 1985).

According to Ruth Funkenstein (1993), when an individual is telling a story they select what to say and the story is usually not told in chronological order. This happens because memory is a collection and construction of an individual's experiences. An individual cannot necessarily remember events in a linear pattern because they remember events or experiences according to their individual perspective and subjectivity (Funkenstein, 1993: 22). I am not sure if the old man also claimed the myth to be of his making, or if he really experienced the post office ghost that night. In the

story he also questions his memory by reminding us that he was drunk. Hans Blumenberg (1985) sees the transformation of a story into a myth as a process which sees the story become dislocated from its date so that it could be localized in any context. However, the fact that he gives us a sense of time by describing the setting of the event, for example, "*Now between your grandmother's house and my house there used to be a post office* ..." makes the story more believable because the post office was shut down after the old man moved to another block in Pomfret (Blumenberg, 1985).

The old man's statement that he was drunk could also be seen as his way of alluding to the fact that he does not remember things clearly. Alistair Thomson (2010) argues that for an individual to maintain mental good health they have to forget much more than they remember. Put differently, an individual remembers what their mind selectively decides is important to their lives. These important events or experiences can be associated with trauma, happiness and/or a range of other emotions, usually something that has brought about a significant change in the individual's life (Thomson, 2010: 83). Blumenberg (1985: 141) also argues that memory is not really a place to find what is true, but rather what is significant.

Due to the towns military history there were many old men who served in the military in Pomfret. I only remember a few things about the old men. For one, they were known for telling war stories and stories such as 'the post office ghost'. The people in Pomfret respected them because of their old age, especially those who were part of the 32 Battalion. They were also known to be strict men because of their no nonsense attitude – a trait that they picked up from their time in the military. If they came to visit their

families, they would spend much of their time alone in the garden, or sit under the shade with a cold beer. I never associated the word ‘fear’ with them, or with any emotion that would contradict their hard personalities. The story ‘The crying child at the post office’ (Firmino, 2016) is important to me because, as a child in Pomfret who was scared of the old men, it allowed me to see a sense of vulnerability in one of them. Considering Funkenstein’s (1993) argument that an individual selects what to say when telling story and an individual’s memory is a construction, my assumptions could be read as me projecting or placing this vulnerability in the character known as the grandfather in the story.

In the above paragraphs, I have mentioned two reasons why this story is important to me. Firstly, because it’s a very popular story in the community, and secondly, I first encountered the story through one of the old men that I feared as a child. Collective memory, according to Jenea Tallentre (2001), is a shared knowledge that two or more people of a social group remember or have stored in their memories. The story of the post office ghost is part of the Pomfret community’s collective memory. This story functions in a similar way to how collective memory has been constructed, shared and passed on. I do not know much about the Pomfret post office, or even how it looked. Only the story remained from that old man and other versions from Pomfret community members. Psychologists Charles Stone, Theofilos Gkinopoulos and William Hirst (2017) suggest that selective memory induces forgetting and one only remembers when it benefits you or, as they put it, “to serve the current working self” (Stone, Gkinopoulos & Hirst, 2017: 288). I cannot say that the old man was serving his ‘current self’ when he

was telling the story, or if he was trying to teach his grandchildren something, but as he was drinking his beer by the fire his memory was triggered. At that moment the story or memory served a purpose in his life. However, I am more interested in the fact that members of the Pomfret community, especially those who have not been back to the town for a considerable amount of time, only have a few memories of Pomfret. One of the lasting memories that is shared among former residents is the story of the post office ghost. I will assume that this is due to two possibilities; the first is that as Stone, Gkinopoulos and Hirst (2017) suggest, the community members are more likely to remember the story because it has been told repeatedly within the community. They also suggest that the story's narrator takes their audience into consideration when delivering the story. For example, the old man, knowing that he is speaking to his grandchildren, describes the location of the post office by using their grandmother's house, which they are familiar with; thus: *"Now between your grandmother's house and my house there used to be a post office …"*. Second, the audience only rejects what is said when it threatens their identity, thus forcing them to remember what was not said, and they start filling up the gaps that make them remember who they are. However, the post office ghost story is part of the Pomfret community's collective memory and identity, and that is why it has survived for generations, like it survived in my own memory (Stone, Gkinopoulos & Hirst, 2017).

Memory as a source of storytelling

Memory is important to the project of rewriting history because it is the primary source of the stories. Alistair Thomson (2012) in his article, 'Memory and remembering in oral history', contends that memory as a source of "collecting history" was first disregarded by historians. Previously, historians had concluded that due to subjectivity and old age, memory was distorted and constructed, thus rendering it an unreliable source. They believed that both the interviewer and interviewee influence the outcome of a story, and that sometimes collective memory affects individual memory. One can argue that the story of the post office ghost and how it was passed on could be an example of a memory being distorted and constructed. However, Thomson (2012: 79) suggests that the story being distorted and constructed provides clues on meanings of historical experiences and the relationships between "past and present, memory and identity, individual and collective memory". All three of these relationships help people to make sense of their lives and the world.

Memories carry the past, and stories allow us to retell or recollect these memories. In the case of the post office ghost, I looked into my own memory to reconstruct the story. I know the story because I have heard different individuals' stories about the post office ghost. However, it is more than just a story; it forms part of the Pomfret community's collective identity. According to Nathan Wachtel (1990), memory is stored in our "psychological unconsciousness". This means that it stretches beyond me, my grandfather, and even his great grandfather. This makes me believe that even if memory is not conserved, it still exists within us (Bourguet, Valensi & Wachtel, 1990).

Similar to inherited trauma, children can carry memories of trauma from their parents even if they have not experienced it themselves. This trauma can still influence how they react to moments of stress (Pember, 2016). This is why memory works from the present to the past. It is triggered by something in the present, which allows an individual to recollect a memory. If the history of an individual is not known or understood, these reactions to stressful or traumatic moments would be seen as abnormal. I will explore this topic in more depth in my chapter on healing.

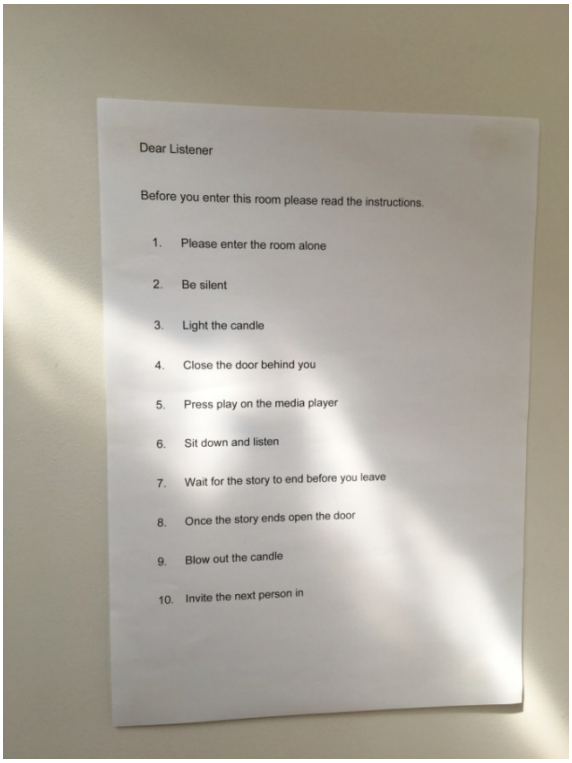


Figure 7



Figure 8

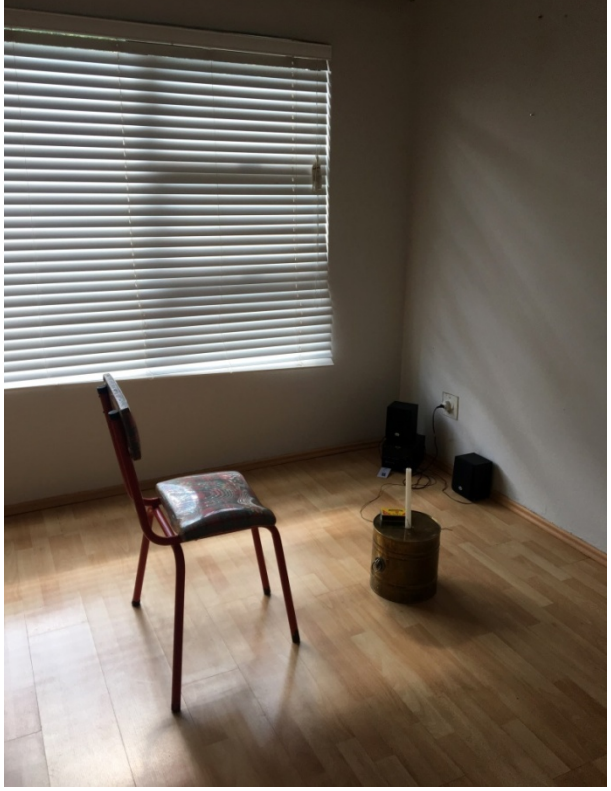


Figure 9



Figure 10

Teresa Kutala Firmino

The crying child at the Post office

Installation comprising: paper with instructions, chair, candle, matches, sound system, small tin drum

2018

This story was part of an installation where participants were given instructions to go into a room alone, light a candle and play the story on a media player. Since the story is very descriptive, for example the description of the grandfather sitting on a black garden chair and placing wood on the fire, it was used to trigger the participant's memory and imagination. Once participants sit down and light the candle, just like the grandfather in the story, they become their own storytellers by listening to the story and creating the visuals in their minds. The installation was created in the hope of it triggering a participant's memory, as an experiment in exploring ideas such as remembering from the present to the past. Each participant would leave the installation with their own version of the story, remembering the story – as stated above – with memories that benefit them or serve their current working self (Stone, Kinospoulos & Hirst, 2017: 288).

Moment of reflection

I found it very interesting that the ghost resided in the post office, since most of the Pomfret elders lost contact with their family members during the civil war. Many built new families in the Kimbo. Those who did have contact eventually stop receiving letters. I would like to believe that the story of the post office ghost became popular as a result of the community members' sense of longing for those they had left behind.

I am also interested in why the ghost cried, and didn't not laugh or sing or even call out a name. It is said that when a ghost cries it is because they did not fulfil their purpose in life or they did not receive justice. The 32 Battalion men where known as killing machines, the 'famous terrible ones', which makes me wonder if these old men were not haunted by their victims. They never speak about the atrocities they committed on the battlefield; they only speak about their victories. When the ugly and hidden memories begin to surface they drown themselves in alcohol, hoping it will make them forget their troubles, but it just turns them into monsters. What happened when my old man closed the gate and entered his house was never discussed. Even he only remembers the ghost and suppresses all the painful memories. For me, the ghost and its cries is a reminder; the ghost represents the memories that he tries to suppress. He spends his time arguing with it. When he first encounters the ghost he is afraid, he even feels as if the alcohol, the tincture against memory, leaves his body. He then realises that he should not be afraid of something that he cannot see. By the second cry, he is annoyed with it: why must he remember such troubles? By the third cry, he realises that he cannot escape it. That is why he still remembers the story, or even the cry of the

ghost. These are just assumptions because he never clearly articulates his troubles in explicit terms.

My encounter with one of the commanders at a Pomfret reunion also gave me some idea of why many of the old men suppress their memories, or rather how they do this. In our brief conversation, the commander seemed to have a different idea of the 32 Battalion and the Kimbo from the one that I had. He saw himself as a hero that had served his country; he was proud of being part of the most well-trained special forces in Africa and of being a father to the Pomfret community. Maybe this is what the old man and his peers were told, that they were heroes, and part of a great army. He could have been a consumer of history listening to his generals, only selectively remembering what they said and forgetting his own experiences and soon as their version of history became his as well. But the ghost will not permit him to forget; one cannot simply erase one's own experiences. Rewriting history is a project against forgetting, and simultaneously the creation of 'new' memory.

Home

Father I am in love with a boy I met at the border

Angelina's father:

Mais, Angelina how could you love such a man?

His dark skin, his lean body

Let us not forget that difficult woman, his mother

How can you love such a dark-skinned boy?

His skin was stained by his journey

His flesh dried by the hot sun

His bony knees ashed by the dusty streets

His silence, never speaking

His hands hardened by the hard labour

Of carrying his home wherever he goes

He is homeless, where will he build a home for you?

Angelina! Listen to your father

Not a dime in his pocket that boy

Drinking sweetened water and Savie's last week's bake

Indulging in old bread

His eyes whitened with poverty

His pupils darkened by the green belt

His nails stained by shoe polish and wood

Angelina, he smells of fried fish and 10 cent coins

His only joy is running after the plastic ball

His eyes watery, his nose running

Angie's response:

Father, I too carry my home on my shoulders

We will travel the dirt roads together

His dark skin will be my shade

I will make him meals of bush meat

He will pick up weight and become a man

I will wash the dirt off his face

I will remove his torn clothes

Place him in a hot bath

I promise, he will shine under my care

He will not need to wash his hands to receive his wages

Father I have heard you

Even his mother will learn to love me

Angie's lover's response:

My home I have left behind

My mother is not difficult

Strength should not be mistaken with stubbornness

Nine months she carried me

Nine thousand miles she carried me

My skin the shade of my father

Whom we left behind

The war his only home

My body small, my heart brave

I have crossed many rivers

And at the border I rest

In Angelina I find refuge

Her warm hands stripping the cold lashes of the green belt

The stains in my nails are the blood of my neighbours

My in-law, do not read the pain in my eyes as poverty

I will build a home for Angelina

I will even wear the green belt that has torn my skin for Angelina

Home

I have chosen this story for the chapter on home because, in a way, it describes how the Pomfret community members have constructed their homes. For many, home is where you are settled, whereas for others, home is where they came from. The story is based on an argument between Angelina, her father and her lover. Angelina and her lover are trying to convince her father to allow them to be together. Angelina's father, being the arrogant and prejudiced man that he is, does not think that the lover is worth his daughter's hand. He discriminates against the lover because he does not have a place to call home and doesn't want his daughter to suffer the same fate. He tries to make the lover look undesirable to Angelina by shaming him for his dark skin. Angelina responds to this by reminding her father that she too is dark-skinned, that his dark shade will be the place where she will find comfort. The lover tries to defend his course by stating that although he has no home, he will make a home wherever he is with Angelina.

The story touches on three questions about home and belonging in the Pomfret community that I will tackle in this chapter: Where does the Pomfret community identify as home? What is their relationship to their home of origin, Angola, and their new country, South Africa? And is the Pomfret town home?

Where does the Pomfret community identify as home?

To answer this question we must first start with where the Pomfret community started. I will not generalise about the origins of each member of the community, but rather use the woman who fled with her three sons' migration story to describe the different Pomfret community homes. In this chapter, she will be known as Angelina. Angelina was born in Angola in a small village in the province of Huambo. The province is largely populated by the Ovimbundu people, my grandmother's people. Huambo is known as the province most affected by the war. Angelina describes her former home as a green and fruitful place. They lived off the land and owned it. Angelina's departure from her home was a forced one, when she was taken by a Congolese officer to be his wife, at the age of sixteen. She never saw Congo as home; she only has stories of hardship and pain in Congo. She ran away from Congo at the age of twenty with her three sons. She moved back to Angola when the civil war was at its peak and she fled once again with her sons to Rundo, a small town in the north of Namibia. There she met a former National Liberation Front of Angola (FNLA) troop named Afrikaans, who had been recruited into the SADF secret unit, the 32 Battalion. They were moved a few miles away from Rundo to an army camp known to the locals as Kimbo, or Buffalo.

Her relationship with Afrikaans did not last. She had no choice but to leave her three sons with her friends in the Kimbo while she went to find a new home for them. From there she moved from town to town, trying to earn some money to send to hers sons. She met her second husband in Zambia. He was also an officer in the Zambian army, and fathered her fourth child, her only daughter. He too was abusive, and she decided to leave him as she had the others. When the SADF announced that the unit would be

moved to South Africa, she joined her children. She married her last husband, a SADF soldier, in Pomfret. Now she moves between her sons' houses, to Pretoria, Johannesburg and Riverlo. Sometimes she goes back to her old homes to visit her friends and family members.

If someone had to ask Angelina, "Where are you from?", she could give multiple answers and they would all be right. Angelina is what Abeer Yusuf in her 2014 Tedx Terry Talk, 'Growing up between cultures', calls a 'TCK' – a third culture kid. She describes a TCK as someone who has three cultures – namely, where her parents come from, the country she grew up in, and the third is the culture she negotiates because of having these two cultures. As Yusuf (2014) argues, every time she is asked where she is from, she panics, because she has five addresses. Yusuf tells the audience that she feels most at home when she is at the Charlie airport in Singapore, because that is the airport her family used to fly to the different places where she lived. This idea of a place to call home was true when Angelina was much younger, but as she grew older her idea of home and belonging changed. Home was not a physical place anymore and survival became more important than belonging. Like Angelina in the story, that which she loved most became home – her children. However, she would proudly tell you that she is Angolan, but refuses to go back and live there with her remaining siblings because her children are in South Africa. The idea of home being someone you love is very romantic and heartfelt, but with someone like Angelina who never had the chance to settle anywhere long enough to call home, it makes practical sense. Yusuf (2014) states that knowing where you come from matters, because if you

know where you are from you know what your ‘place’ is in the world. For the Angelina in the story, it is being a lover, and for the woman who fled with her three sons, a mother.

What is their relationship to their home of origin, Angola, and their new country, South Africa?

Nationhood and citizenship are important in this chapter on home because the first generation of the Pomfret community were naturalised as South Africans through an irregular process. The people of the Pomfret community were mostly refugees on Namibian borders when they were recruited into the SADF. They were promised a new home and a new start in South Africa for their services in the 32 Battalion. By joining the SADF they pledged allegiance to the South African flag and laws. At the time, none of them could predict who would win the war, or if black South Africans would one day run the South African government. Their main aim was to survive the war and hopefully get a better future for themselves and their children in South Africa. From my conversations with the community, many of the elders describe the disbandment of the 32 Battalion and their relocation to Pomfret as a betrayal, especially when the then South African government decided to relocate the community. The elders had believed that the houses and the land belonged to them, but they actually belonged to the Ministry of Public Works (NEWS, 2008).

When the decision was made to disband the 32 Battalion unit, the aim of the government at the time was to slowly integrate the Pomfret community into South African society. Many of the soldiers were given the option of either resigning and

getting a payout, or remaining in the SADF. The unit that was in Pomfret was called South African Infantry Two (2 SAI), but this unit was later relocated. Those who remained in the SADF relocated with 2 SAI to Zeerust, and those who were not soldiers remained in Pomfret with their families. The ANC-led government had to decide how to deal with the community that stayed behind when the SADF left and basic services to the town were curtailed.

Marc Helbling (2008) suggests that government officials dealing with naturalisations have the difficult task of deciding who 'belongs' to them. This is why a foreigner applying for citizenship has to go through several procedures before they are given the necessary documents to be recognised as a citizen of the particular country. Since the ANC-led government did not naturalise the Pomfret community members, looking at the history of the community they had to decide if they belonged to them (Helbling, 2008). Helbling (2008:23) states: "… naturalisation is about the symbolic and emotional aspects of full membership in a nation-state".

This leads me to the next question: what qualifies the Pomfret community to be considered South African, beyond their official documents? According to Helbling (2008), national consciousness[2] comes from two main claims, namely, on civic territory and ethnicity. However, nation states are constantly changing, and diversity in a country can mean different things, thus making these two main claims almost invalid. People are constantly moving and finding new homes all around the world, and this idea of movement is not new to Africa. The first claim is through history: although they came

[2] National consciousness is when a group of people have a shared sense of national identity.

from different countries when they fought during the border wars, they were fighting for South Africa. Many soldiers received medals and ranks because of their service to the SADF. Now this claim complicates matters because they had been fighting under the apartheid government. However, unlike the white community in South Africa, they did not benefit from apartheid; they were still treated as second class citizens due to their race and nationality.

The Pomfret community had to find their own way to integrate themselves into South African society after they received their citizenship. The government expected them to assimilate and be absorbed into South African society. This idea was odd because, at the time, the South African agenda was to amalgamate society, to bring diverse people together despite the history of the country. However, the Pomfret community was relocated to the edge of the Kalahari Desert, away from society, with the nearest town being two hundred kilometres away. According to Mikkola (2013), assimilation concentrates more and involves becoming similar or making similar. Migrants or refugees who assimilate into a certain dominant society are expected to speak the dominant language and practice local cultural and social activities. This creates tension from both sides because the migrants or refugees who have left their homes usually hold on more to their 'home' culture because it is part of their identity. On the other hand, the people in the dominant culture might accuse them of not wanting to be a part of their society. Despite this, the Pomfret community has moved beyond the 32 Battalion and the army – many are civil servants, doctors, lawyers, government officials,

and some are even South African sports heroes, for example Jamba Isaac Ulengo, who plays rugby for the South Africa Blue Bulls rugby team (Mikkola, 2013).

Is Pomfret town home?

When the community was moved to Pomfret, many believed that it would be a temporary arrangement. The people of Pomfret believed this because the town was far from what they were promised for having served in the SADF. At that time, when they first moved to their new home, it was an old, abandoned asbestos mining town with old buildings, barely visible roads, and waist-high grass. According to Nortje (2004) the SADF only had eight weeks to prepare for the families' arrival. This was clearly not sufficient time, and seven hundred people were left with no choice but to stay in tents while waiting for their houses to be built. Even the way that the town was laid out resembled the old regime: the officers with higher ranks, who were mostly white, stayed in the suburbs with big houses, while the lower ranks were placed in an area that resembled an old South African township or, as Nortje (2004:22) describes it, an old "coloured township".

Since the army unit was built in Pomfret, many efforts have been made to improve the area. For example, a huge market with fresh local produce sourced from the neighbouring farmers was opened. This was done to afford community members access to fresh produce, as the nearest town is 200km away. Water and electricity facilities were built so that people had good basic services. Pic a Pau, the Kimbo

school, was rebuilt so that the community's children could attend primary and secondary school there. With these improvements, spearheaded by the SADF, the newly located Pomfret community members became more at ease and began rebuilding their lives in Pomfret. However, this was short-lived.

There are many theories on why the unit was disbanded, from rumours of mismanaged funds, discrimination, to their alleged involvement in the Phola Park[3] incident where they had been accused of 'heavy-handed' actions, acting without police support, and even rape. Nonetheless, in 1992, it was announced that the 32 Battalion was to be disbanded with its final march on the 26th March 1993. It said that during the march one of the white commanders interrupted a speech to reassure the 32 Battalion soldiers that the South African government did not break its promise, but he was met by an angry and hopeless crowd and had to be spirited away before the situation got out of hand. Since then it has been a downward spiral for Pomfret. The SADF relocated to other units in South Africa, and basic services began to be cut off. Recently, Pomfret community members have been instructed to relocate to towns such as Mafikeng where they have been given Reconstruction and Development Plan (RDP) houses. However, many refuse to leave Pomfret, and have urged the South African government to provide them with basic services. In response, the government has declared the town a health hazard because of the old asbestos mine in the area. The only government facility left

[3] Phola Park is the small East Rand township that was allegedly attacked by the 32 Battalion when they were deployed there to maintain law and order.

open in the town is the Pic a Pau school. In time, it is expected that the town will become an old, abandoned asbestos mining town once again (Nortje, 2003: 278-280).

While each individual has their own sense of home, I am interested in the Pomfret community as a collective. We could say that, like my grandmother, the community's home is with their loved ones, but many of them left their loved ones in different places during the war. Pomfret the place could be seen as home as well, but many Pomfret community members have left Pomfret. Some of the Pomfret community members' children have never set foot in the town. However, I believe the majority of the Pomfret community has created what Madsen (2003:65) considers a "dual attachment to their host country and country of origin." The community still engages in some Angolan cultural practices, including music, language and marital rites. However, within this dual attachment there are many aspects that often intertwine, become new, or are completely alien to both the country of origin and the host country. The community is neither South African nor Angolan, they are not only Angolan migrants who came to South Africa to find work or a better living, and they are not only refugees who fled the civil war to South Africa (Selasi, 2005).

Moment of reflection

The question of belonging has always been an emotional one for me. I had always found comfort in being South African, until I encountered the uncomfortable truth about who I really am, or how people in South Africa see me. I always knew that I was

different, but never questioned my identity as a South African. I remember in primary school the other black children would tell me to sit down whenever the teacher counted the different races in the classroom. They would, without doubt, tell the teacher that I was not black because I didn't speak their language, or the texture of my hair was too soft, or my English was too good and there was something odd about my accent. I was definitely not white or Indian, too dark to be coloured, and not black enough to be 'black'.

When you are at home, you don't think about 'who you are'; 'who you are' is all around you. But as soon as you leave your comfort zone there are triggers everywhere: in a taxi, having to explain to the taxi driver why you responded to his question in English; always having to explain why you do not have an 'African' surname. Even during the xenophobic attacks in 2012 I found comfort in my identity book until my older sister was attacked in a taxi because she didn't understand Zulu. The first thing they told her is to go back to where she came from. I could imagine her thinking, as I do sometimes as well, where do I go back to? We have only known South Africa as home; Angola is this distant place that some of us might never see.

I visited Angola in 2015. I was told that I would feel right at home because everyone spoke Portuguese like I do. Instead, everything in Angola was unfamiliar; I felt more like a foreigner in Angola than in South Africa. The Angolans noticed that I was different; I guess my broken Portuguese was spoken with the 'wrong' accent as well. They couldn't understand why I used phrases like 'eish' and 'neh'. They found it funny that I could not believe that Shoprite was so clean in Luanda, and called me a "spoilt brat" for complaining about dirty tap water. Home, then, becomes an imagined place that cannot

be fixed to a land, in both countries. I have to constantly negotiate who I am. I am both a foreigner and a native that always has to explain, because you can only be one of the two. How does one feel unwelcomed in your own home? And if you are home, why do you feel the need to feel welcome?

The story about home was followed by three large paintings depicting the story's characters: the father, Angelina and Angelina's lover. They are a collage of clothes, acrylic paint, spray paint and paper. Behind the characters is a map that stretches from Johannesburg, to Pomfret, and Namibia.



Figure 11
Teresa Kutala Firmino
Father
Mixed media
2018



Figure 12
Teresa Kutala Firmino
Angelina
Mixed media
2018



Figure 13
Teresa Kutala Firmino
Angelina's lover
Mixed media
2018

Healing

Will I be forgiven?

How do you measure a man's mental state, especially after a traumatic experience such as a war? We are all surrounded by ghosts, we are all responsible for the war; a special dark space. I see the bible lying in front of me and I turn to it. It leaves me with more questions: Will he be forgiven? Will I ever forget?

To tell you the truth, I don't want to forget. Memory is my punishment. I remember their faces. I remember her face. Of course I do, how I can forget, especially her? Why should I regret anything? It was a war. I did love her once; just that night we had both dreamt of a life together.

Her breast lay open in front of me, her legs bear – how I could not love her? She smiled at me and I was bewitched by her naughty smile; she wanted me, I tell you. So I did what any man in my situation would do, I took her! We danced, her hands stroking forbidden places; or maybe it was my hands. I was too drunk to remember. She was a decent girl, she was just poisoned by the war. It took all the innocence from her. I once imagined her working on her father's farm, the one she told me about. I imagined her surrounded with lush green plants, a basket tucked beneath her armpit. As I watched her, she turned to look at me, and that naughty smile that many knew so well turned into that innocent grin that I always wished it could be. Did I trust her? Of course not, I met her in a whorehouse – any man could've taken her home that night, I was just the unlucky one. I was blinded by duty and beauty. Both pious; both can lead a man to his grave. At least duty gave me purpose, but beauty made the war cold. I remember my mother was a lovely woman, a good Christian woman. She obeyed orders, she knew her place. My father, an unforgiving man. He put her in her place and he was a real

man. I was a real man, so how could she take me for a fool? I cannot remember that day clearly, or why or how or what lead me to …

You see, I was the laughing stock of the camp. The whole camp knew. I had to do something; I had to show them that I was a soldier. She betrayed me and the penalty was death. I don't even understand what drove me to such madness. I only remember the rage – it just took over my mind. I wanted to get rid of anything that gave me joy; I did not deserve it, and I did not deserve her.

I see her naked body dragged across the camp. I see myself naked. I had to show them who we really are. I remember them cheering, running behind her small, limp body as I dragged her for everyone to see. I could have done so much more, but she was gone the moment I struck her. I could have given them a show, this is what they wanted. They loved me for it – brave soldier, a real man. I wept the next day like a scared child. I became afraid of my own reflection.

I see women, their legs spread, and some scream and cry out, others just lie numb, their bodies shivering; and her body familiar with this pain. Do I see a monster? Do I see a soldier, a fearless brave soldier?

So why am I tormented? Her face haunts me. I have grown old, my skin stained by time. Her face is still beautiful, but empty. She left nothing behind, just a memory. Will I be forgiven?

Healing through stories

> Stories are a way of understanding our experience, helping us to organize what we have experienced and predicting what we might experience next. (Golding, 2014:22)

The story I have chosen for this chapter on stories as a form of healing, attempts to imagine the type of torment a 32 Battalion soldier would go through today, long after the war has ended. Many years have passed since his days in the army, yet he battles with his conscience about the atrocities he committed while he was a soldier. From the beginning of his monologue he is in conflict with himself. He says that “we are all responsible for the war ...”, but later admits that he is looking for forgiveness or a way to forget the memories that torment him. In his process of trying to find forgiveness he presents himself as a victim of circumstance, a predator, and most importantly, he is what Marc Hill (2009) in his article, ‘Wounded healing: Forming a storytelling community in Hip-Hop Lit’, calls a “wounded healer”. A wounded healer is someone who has experienced or caused pain and trauma and retells their stories to heal others, and who by telling or facing their stories heal themselves as well (Hill, 2009).

A wounded healer begins his therapy by narrating their life story to others. Since a life story’s main source is memory, stories help the wounded healer to place them in order to create meaning, or rather make sense of his experiences. When he narrates his stories we are able to get a sense of who he is as an individual. In other words, we get a

glimpse of his identity. Eric Miller (2015), a psychologist, states that the way an individual tells their life story, whether they choose to share many memories or not, shapes and reflects who they are. The old soldier gives us a glimpse of who he was during the war, and who he has become, and how these two opposing sides still battle each other. As a young man he was a fearless, violent soldier, and now he is a tormented old man.

Trauma

The question of violence, abuse and trauma is not something that is often discussed in the Pomfret community. Community members prefer sharing stories of collective experiences, such as the Angolan civil war and the border wars, but there seems to be a taboo when it comes to sharing stories that are personal and not as accessible in the public sphere. Stories such as 'Will I be forgiven' (Firmino, 2016) and 'A man is never your family' (Firmino, 2016), that directly reference abuse against women in the community are seen as private and untouchable. As Tanya Lee Allport (2009) in 'Woman writing trauma' states, the representation of violence against women manifests in false constructions of gendered spheres. Women are usually associated with the domestic sphere, which is seen as a private space. Due to this notion of women belonging in the domestic sphere, certain types of violence were seen as acceptable and a form of disciplining. Women were expected to accept and adhere to these notions. Allport (2009) takes it further by stating that it was even seen as desirable and "Christ-like", which is true also in the Pomfret community. When women reported abuse to authorities and leaders of the community, who were all male, they were directed to

the church to solve their marital issues and forced to return to the men who abused them. When the community was still living in the Kimbo, women who chose to leave their husbands were not allowed to stay in the camp. They needed to be married to a soldier to stay in the army camp, so most of them stayed, because conditions as a refugee woman or the prospects of going back to the civil war were not viable options.

According to Marlene de le Cruz-Guzmán (2012), African people who have been through civil war have been traumatised twice. The first trauma comes from being colonised, and the second is their experience in the civil war. Colonial rule and the trauma it induced on Africans forced many Africans to cling together against one common cause, which was to be free and independent countries. The strategy of colonialism was to divide and conquer. A good example of this is the South African Apartheid system that restricted different ethnics groups to certain regions in the country. South Africans that where against the Apartheid system, though constantly reminded that they were less than human, clung to what reminded them of their humanity: their communities and the struggle for freedom. South Africa did not go through a civil war after their independence but many countries such as Angola and Nigeria only found a form of peace after their civil wars. Civil wars cause a second wave of trauma because suddenly the people one clung to for a sense of community and humanity, turn against each other (De la Cruz-Guzmán, 2012).

Both the women and men in the Pomfret community carry these traumas, but the women have experienced a third trauma. De la Cruz (2012) explains that post-traumatic

stress is not only experienced by people who have been through a war, but by people who have also experienced 'trauma inducing experiences', such as rape, abuse, accidents and torture. I will assume that when the women in the community experienced the second wave of trauma, they clung to what gave them a sense of community and humanity, which were their husbands and the people in the Kimbo. Many of the women experienced abuse, and some were even killed by their husbands. Those who survived could not cling to the community for support because violence against women became a norm in the Kimbo, even if it was frowned upon. Similar to the soldier's story, most abusive men in the community were praised for beating their wives because it was seen as a sign of strength, manliness and putting the woman in her place (De la Cruz-Guzmán, 2012).

> … loss of volume control also known as a distorted internal system of arousal, that allows the psyche to register harmless people or events as viable threats, and a repetition compulsion that becomes the victim's way of remembering. (De la Cruz-Guzmán, 2012: 41)

There are many theories as to why many of the men in the Kimbo were abusive towards their wives. The most popular is the theory that the women where unfaithful, and that this drove the men to do terrible things, such as killing their fellow soldiers in the battle field or beating their wives to death. It is said that they were so scared of betrayal that it drove them crazy. De la Cruz-Guzmán (2012) suggests that the most common feeling from people that have experienced civil war is betrayal. This comes from people being

violated by the politicians or institutions that they believed gave them freedom. They put so much faith and trust in the intuitions and people that fought with them against colonial rule that the idea of betrayal was unimaginable, for example, Angolan people being betrayed by the MPLA after all the parties had fought for Angola's independence from Portuguese colonial rule, leading to 22 years of civil war. Civilians were caught between the three parties, MPLA, FNLA and UNITA. Many people, like the Pomfret community members, had to flee to neighbouring countries, and some have never returned to their country of origin.

The fear of betrayal, especially in the men, I will argue, went hand in hand with hegemonic masculinities in the community. In order to understand why the fear of betrayal was so prevalent in the community I had to look into how the men understood and perceived themselves, especially in comparison to the women who were the victims of their violence. As Ron Viny (1999) states, understanding the relationships between men and women, and men with other men, are important in understanding our past and presents. Of course not all the men in the Buffalo or the Kimbo were violent, but the stories and memories of the violence still haunt the community to this day and have affected many families in the Pomfret community. It is also important to understand that although the men shared many beliefs and experiences, they all came from different walks of life. I want to look at the external factors that might have influenced their understanding of what it meant to be a man during their 32 Battalion years. By just looking at how the men in my own family, my father, male cousins, uncles and grandfather, who are all members of the Pomfret community, portray masculinity, I

understand it to be very diverse. However, due to their history, two dominant factors emerge when it comes to defining what it means to be a man: the military and Christianity (Viny, 1999).

Military masculinity

The Angolan men that were part of the 32 Battalion were said to have come from two different places, namely refugee camps, and FNLA rebel factions, both groups fleeing the Angolan civil war. General Breytenbach even called the men the most “unwarlike” bodies he has ever seen (Nortjie, 1993). These same men went through various types of training in the military and are now known as the few men that were part of the ‘famous terrible ones’, the 32 Battalion Special forces. The soldiers were trained the South African Defense Force way, which was to be aggressive, physically fit, and to maintain a clean and neat appearance. When it comes to being physically fit and aggressive, the SADF training played a big role in defining what it meant to be a man for the men in the 32 Battalion. Mankay (2008) states that military training reasserted constructs of manhood, and was used to prove one’s masculinity. The 32 Battalion’s motto was “Forged in battle”; the men had to appear strong, aggressive and unemotional, and appear neat and clean, as if the war had no effect on them. Mankay (2008) explains that the military legitimised and idealised violence by grooming the men to be violent, making them believe that the violence was necessary, and praising them for it. It is said in the Pomfret community that the most violent men were praised by the high-ranking officials and called brave soldiers. The cleanliness was seen as a way of disciplining the men, and if they did not obey they were punished by being told to do

more physical training. There were rumours of violence against the men who did not obey. They had to maintain this discipline even after the training; it became their way of life. This way of disciplining and idealising violence was usually brought into the family households by the men. The women and children in the community were expected to be clean, neat and disciplined. The white officers' wives, who were mostly Afrikaans, gave the women in the community lessons on how to maintain a clean and neat household and how to treat their husbands. The women were taught tasks, such as knitting doilies[4] to put on furniture, bake koeksisters[5], and even how to iron their husbands' uniform. There were even annual baking competitions so they could show off their skills to the whole community. To this day, many Pomfret homes have doilies and porcelain artefacts in their homes.

Mankay (2008) states that due to the fact that the men were trained to see their bodies as weapons or as tools, they could, in turn, relate that to a woman's body. And since the women were not seen as fit to be soldiers who could yield a weapon, they were usually seen as tools. Their place was in the domestic space to maintain the household and breed children. Soldiers in the Kimbo got married so they could be granted a house in the military camp. This came with many benefits, such as food packages every month, and the respect of the community. If the women and children did not fit into the standards set by the white officers' wives, it was seen as an embarrassment, and the

[4] A doily is a wool or cotton ornamental mat used to decorate different surfaces, usually furniture.

[5] Koeksisters are a traditional Afrikaans baked confectionery made from fried dough that is dipped in syrup.

men would turn to domestic violence to discipline the women and children (Mankay, 2008).

Christianity in the Kimbo

Religion played a very important role in the Kimbo, and later in the Pomfret community. The churches were places of worship and cultural activities, such as the very popular Youth Christmas Day Play, where the youth of the community would act out the traditional biblical nativity narrative and add another play that would tell a story of the people of Pomfret. The church was also a place where many conflicts were resolved. Issues such as adultery, family feuds, and anything that the Commanders of the camp chose not to get involved in, were assigned to the church. There were two main churches in the Kimbo: the Catholic Church and the Protestant Church. These churches stood as the community's institutions; there were church leaders, women's groups and youth groups in both of the churches. Christianity, according to Lovemore Togarasei (2013), is a patriarchal religion, and this was the type of Christianity the people in the Kimbo believed in. Christianity being patriarchal contributed to the construction, or rather the definition of hegemonic masculinities in the community. This is evident in how I was brought up, where the men, as Togarasei (2013) argues, are the heads of family, while the women should submit to their husbands. Over the years these ideas have been challenged, but there are still traces of them in our everyday lives. Even the women in the community are active agents in the production of hegemonic masculinity; mothers will teach their sons and daughters these same values.

Christianity does not necessary promote violence against women, but has been constantly used to oppress women. It validates characteristics of hegemonic masculinity, such as dominance, power and authority. According to Togarasei (2013), the world that the biblical characters portray limits women to the domestic sphere and allows them very little access to the public. To add to this, women were generally considered as the source of sin (Lev.12'2-5): from Eve deceiving Adam to eat the forbidden fruit, to the times of Jesus where the rules against women were so harsh that they could not eat at the same table as men (Togarasei, 2013). Many of the women in the community got married at a very young age and grew up in very different conditions. For example, my grandmother was not brought up as a traditional Christian woman; she worked on the farms, took care of her old father, and sold produce at the market. This is not to say that these values did not exist in African cultures, but in the times of the civil war men had to go and fight, while the women stayed behind and became the heads of many households. The women in the community had to be homemakers, give their husbands pleasure, produce children and be disciplined. They not only had to play these roles, but make sure they upheld their husbands' reputation in the community by being good Christian women (Togarasei, 2013).

The men's military training and their Christians beliefs gave them a sense of power and control. Due to their own psychological trauma, the men used violence as both a tool to maintain this false notion of power, and as a coping mechanism. Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela (2003) in her article, 'The dynamics of violence in peacetime: Trauma-tic continuities', argues that victims of abuse and violent conflict often become perpetrators

of violence as a way of dealing with their sense of powerlessness, shame and humiliation. The amount of abuse in the Pomfret community was a sign of the people's suffering from a painful past and, at that time, their present suffering (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2003). Women didn't have the same power as men; they were silenced by these oppressive ideals, remained with their trauma, and had to find other tools besides violence to cope. According to Allport (2009), due to them being silenced and oppressed, many women find it difficult to express their trauma. Put differently, they find it difficult to tell their stories. Allport takes this further by stating that women find it more difficult to speak about their experiences in their communities because the type of language used to speak about trauma is not associated with women. For example, women in the Pomfret community are said not to have experienced trauma because they were not in the frontlines of the war. The internalisation of the different traumas, from the civil war, to being rendered voiceless, has thus become a norm and been passed down in the Pomfret community. Women are expected to be strong and silent when experiencing issues such as abuse or depression, and when they speak they are told to pray, thus forcing them to go back to the institutions that oppress them (Allport, 2009). Gobodo-Madikizela (2003) offers a solution by suggesting that women, and any people that have experienced trauma, should be given platforms to speak about their experiences. The woman in the story 'Will I be forgiven' (Firmino, 2016) will never have the opportunity to tell her story, but many women like her can begin telling their stories on their own as a way to begin a process of healing from their trauma.

Being part of this cycle as a descendent of the Pomfret community, I began investigating different forms to engage with my inherited trauma and my present traumas as a young, foreign – or rather perceived as foreign – black woman in South Africa. I began by self-writing, which is the act of writing one's experiences for both the present and future self in the hope that the future self will, through this process, recognise past coping mechanisms in order to deal with trauma. I then began unpacking my inherited trauma by researching my family history, and realised that the stories being told by the 'official historians' did not tell my people's story at all, because the stories I knew growing up were different to those official histories. I started having conversations and listening to family members and people from the Pomfret community about our history, and realised that much was left unsaid. Some of the stories would manifest in different ways, such as 'The shallow prison' (Firmino, 2016), where children would re-enact the past in games, or retell the stories in their own way. Gobodo-Madikizela (2003) states that children re-enacting painful past experiences, even if they did not experience it themselves, is a way for them to make meaning of the past, while making it accesible and less fearful for themsleves (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2003). Rewriting the Pomfret community stories, whether through fictional short stories or artworks, has helped me to engage with my own trauma.

Moment of reflection

From a young age we have always been told horrific stories of how many women have died in the Kimbo, from my own grandmother's story, to the woman who just collapsed on the dirt road holding her six-year-old daughter's hand. The stories have become

almost like ghost stories – something the older women would share when they wanted to warn us about men. I remember building the images in my head; they would appear like flashbacks as if I was one of the bystanders watching the woman in the story being daggered. My father once told me that he was a child when it happened, but he remembered running behind her, throwing stones and cheering, while the husband dragged her body. For the young boys it was sport, something they experienced often. I wonder if the young girls threw stones and cheered as well. My father was a child, he didn't know better; or maybe he knew something else. I judged my father the day he told me the story. I could not imagine him finding pleasure in such a horrific event. He has always been someone I've looked up to when it comes to morality, values and empathy. I knew my judgement could not hold; he was a child that grew up in a community that believed, or rather normalised the idea that beating up your wife was a sign of strength. Even when the elders told us the story they began by painting the woman as this villain: she was unfaithful, she slept with the neighbour, she danced with another man indecently, and he got her from a brothel, so it was in her nature to sleep around.

When I wrote this story I was very reluctant to make it another tragedy. The story was meant to be about the woman who was beaten to death by her husband and left to die on a tree like a buck being kept to be eaten later by a leopard. The whole community apparently saw this and did nothing. But for some reason I wrote a story about her husband in his old age regretting his mistakes. It could be that I wrote his version of the story because he is the only one that can tell the story of what really happened on that day. When he was reported to the officers, they praised him for being a brave and

heartless soldier. When we asked General about this, he said he never heard of this story, and that he was only the commander in the camp for two years. This is why rewriting history through storytelling is important to my research and practice, as manifested in this study. It is said that she was killed by her husband because there were rumours that she had been unfaithful.



Figure 14

Teresa Kutala Firmino

Will I be forgiven?

Performance; mixed media

2018

Conclusion

In a country such as South Africa that went through a great political transition after a long and violent history, the need to look back at the trauma that the oppressed people went through becomes crucial. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (1995-2002) was the beginning of this investigation. However, communities such as the Pomfret community did not have the opportunity to participate in the conversations of trauma and healing in the country. The Pomfret community for a long time remained secret and, until its disbandment in 1993, and still now, many South Africans do not know about the small Angolan community on the edge of the Kalahari Desert. This thesis was written not only to reveal this history, but also to look at the stories and the trauma that the Pomfret community went through during and after apartheid. Since not much of the history is written, I had to begin looking at different ways to both investigate and write the history of the community. This led me to theories focused on rewriting history through storytelling.

As mentioned in chapter one, storytelling is important in a community because it gives people a sense of identity. This is not only significant for individuals in the community, but for people outside of the community as well. In a country where xenophobia exists, understanding people's narratives – who they are, their history, and why they live amongst us – becomes crucial. In order to investigate and rewrite the Pomfret community's history I could not rely on the few books already written, which only speak about the war and only mention the Pomfret community briefly. I began by first speaking to the older generation in my own family, and later I started interviewing members of the broader Pomfret community. Memory became my greatest resource but, as mentioned

in the chapter on memory, memory is selective and subjective. One story can have many different versions and sometimes community members do not want their stories to become public. This led me to begin writing the stories fictionally, or telling the stories through the various mediums that I use in my artistic practice, including video, photography, performance and painting, where my process of making would begin with me selecting a certain story, choosing the best medium to help me tell the story, and finally extracting either keywords or descriptions in the story and creating an artwork. This way of working worked better for certain stories, for example 'A man is never your family' (Firmino, 2017). I could interpret the story by creating paintings of the characters in the narrative. However, some of the stories, I believe, lose their potency when reinterpreted into visual artworks, and this led me into a different way of working, by combining the story and the artwork together. Both the story and artwork become one installation. This does not mean that the artworks cannot stand on their own, but once the performance is over, the viewer is left with interpreting a 'complete fragment', which can tell a similar or completely different story.

The risk with memory is that sometimes, as an interviewer asking the interviewee to recollect their painful history, it can trigger one's own trauma, which in turn, in my experience, made the interviewer reluctant to speak. In the chapter on trauma and healing, I mention De la Cruz-Guzmán's (2012) theory that, when a person that has experienced trauma has their traumatic memory triggered, they usually go through the same emotions that they experienced when the actual trauma happened. As a member of the Pomfret community I found that some of the stories were difficult for me to hear as well as to write. Thus, rewriting the stories fictionally helped not necessarily to

depersonalise them, but rather made me look at the stories from outside of my personal experience, and I was able to retell and notice the complexities in the Pomfret community's narrative.

These complexities appeared mostly in the chapter on home. Though the idea of home, and having a sense of belonging causes anxiety, especially in the Pomfret community youth, rewriting the stories helped me recognise how the community has been coping with these anxieties for a very long time. It made me realise that even if the Pomfret community cannot indentify a physical place where they belong or call home, their sense of community and family gives them that comfort, or fills that gap to some extent.

Reference list

Allport, T.L. 2009. Women writing trauma: An analysis of psychological trauma in Ingeborg Bachmann's Das Buch Franza, Christa Wolf's *Kassandra*, Patricia Grace's *Cousins*, and Ngahuia Te Awekotuku's *Ruahine* – mythic women. Available at: https://researchspace.auckland.ac.nz/docs/uoa-docs/rights.htm (accessed: January 23, 2018).

Appiah, S.K. 2013. Continuity and discontinuity in traditional African narratives. *Reseach on Humanities and Social Sciences*, 3(5), 10.

Blumenberg, H. 1985. *Work on myth.* Cambridge: MIT Press.

Bourguet, M.N., Valensi, L., & Wachtel, N. (1990). *Between memory and history.* Chur: Harwood Academic Publishers.

Butler, K.D. 2001. Defining diaspora, refining a discourse. *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, 10(2), 189-219.

Caplin, P. 1997. *African voices, African lives: Personal narratives from a Swahili village.* New York: Routlege.

Creary, N.M. 2012. *African intellectuals and decolonization.* Ohio: Ohio University Press.

Danial, Z. (director). 2007. *South Africa – The Buffalo Soldiers* [motion picture]. South

De La Cruz-Guzmán, M. 2012. Trauma and narrativity in Adichie's *Half of a yellow sun*: Privileging indigenous knowledge in writing the Biafran war. In N. Creary (ed), *African intellectuals and decolonization*. Ohio: Ohio University Press.

Africa: Journeyman Pictures.

Farrakhan, M.L. 1990. Minister Louis Farrakhan on *The Phil Donahue Show*, March 13. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YutEPd1kZbU.

Finnegan, R. 2007. *The oral and beyond: Doing things with words in Africa.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Funkenstein, A. 1993. The narrative study of lives. In Josselson, R. & Lieblich, A. (eds). *The narrative study of lives.* London: SAGE Publications.

Gkinopoulos, T., Hirst, W., & Stone, C. 2017. Forgetting history: The memonic consequences of listening to selective recountings of history. *Memory Studies*, 10(3), 286-296.

Gobodo-Madikizela, P. 2003. 'The dynamics of violence in peacetime: Trauma-tic continuities'. *56th Annual DPI/NGO Conference, Human security and dignity: Fulfilling the promise of the United Nations*. New York: United Nations, 2-9.

Golding, K.S. 2014. *Using stories to build bridges with traumatized children: Creative ideas for therapy, life story work, direct work and parenting.* London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Helbling, M. 2008. *Practicing citizenship and heterogeneous nationhood.* Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Hill, M. L. (2009). Wounded healing: Forming a storytelling. *Hip-Hop Lit and Student Experiences*, 111(1), 248-291.

Josselson, R., & Lieblich, A. 1993. *The narrative study of lives.* London: SAGE publications.

Kanneh, K. 1998. *African identities: Race, nation and culture in ethnography, pan-Africanism and black literatures*. London and New York: Routledge.

Kilomba, G. & Pareigis, J. 2017. Afro Germany – Being black and German. *DW Documentary*, March 29. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pcfPVj5qR1E.

La Vecchia-Mikkola, V. 2013. *Longing to return and space of Beloning: Iraq's narratives in Helsinki and Rome*. Doctoral thesis. Available at: http://www.doria.fi/handle/10024/93834.

Lunga, M.J. 2003. Yvonne Vera's narrative craft. Available at: http://ir.nust.na/bitstream/handle/10628/194/Lunga.%20Yvonne%20Vera%27s%20narrative%20craft.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y, 1-19.

Madsen, K.D., & Van Naerssen, T. 2003. Migration, identity and belonging. *Borderlands Studies*, 18(1), 61-67.

Mankayi, N. 2008. Masculinity, sexaulity and the body of male soldiers. *PINS*, 36, 24-44. Available at: http://www.scielo.org.za/pdf/pins/n36/03.pdf (accessed July 19, 2017).

Mvunidura, W. 2008. *Memory and violence: Displaced Zimbabwean rural communities reliving the memories of the March 2008 political violence.* Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press.

Norridge, Z. 2013. *Perceiving pain in African literature.* London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Nortje, P. 2003. *32 Battalion: The inside story of the South African elite fighting unit.* Cape Town: Zebra Press.

Omar, Y., & Taylor, T. 2011. Forgotten and alone. *Sunday Independent*, September 27. Available at: https://www.iol.co.za/sundayindependent/forgotten-and-alone-in-pomfret-1145411.

Pember, M.A. 2016. Intergenerational trauma: Understanding natives' inherited pain. *India Country Today*, May 10.

Peck, R. (director, writer) & Baldwin, J (writer). 2016. *I am not your Negro* [motion picture]. Switzerland, France, Belgium, USA: ARTE France, Independent Lens, RTBF,

RTS, Shelter Productions, Velvet Film.

SABC. 2015. Pomfret residents accuse government of neglecting them. *SABC Digital News*, July 28. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ibjnu8qh7KQ.

Smith, L.T. 1999. *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*. London & New York: Zed Books Ltd.

Tallentre, J. 2001. Strategies of memory: History, social memory and the community. *Social History*, 34(67). Available at: http://hssh.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/hssh/article/viewFile/4545/3740 (accessed July 19, 2017).

Thomson, A. 2012. Memory and remembering in oral history. In Ritchie, D.A. *The Oxford handbook of oral history.* New York: Oxford University, 77-82).

Togarasei, L. 2013. Christianity and hegemonic musculinities: Transforming Botswana hegemonic masculinity using Jesus of Luke. *Scriptura*, 112(1), 1-12.

Viny, R. 1999. A history of masculinities in South Africa: Context and parameters. *New Contree*, 45(September), 85-97.

Yusuf, A. 2014. What is home? Growing up between cutures. *TEDx Terry Talks*, October 25. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=quS_pMGIlec.

Welcome to Huambo. Available at: http://www.welcometoangola.co.ao/?it=province_more&co=340&tp=25&LG=2 (accesses August 5, 2017).