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Who Killed Clemens Kapuuo?*

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On Easter Monday 1978, Clemens Kapuuo, the paramount chief of the Ovaherero and leader of the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance of Namibia, was shot and killed by unidentified gunmen in Windhoek. Although it never claimed credit for the assassination, the South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO) was blamed for the killing. Shortly thereafter, on Ascension Day, the largest military operation undertaken by South Africa since the Second World War, Operation Reindeer, was launched. South African forces attacked targets deep inside Angola and over 1,200 people were killed in a SWAPO camp that had been established at Kassinga. As justification for Operation Reindeer, the South African government referred to a number of incidents, of which the murder of Kapuuo was the most important. Based on a wide variety of archival, oral, and printed sources, the article seeks to situate the killing of Kapuuo. It traces the career of Kapuuo in conjunction with political developments within Namibia between 1971 and 1978. It demonstrates that throughout his political career, Clemens Kapuuo refused to compromise on a number of conditions relating to the political future of Namibia. In conclusion, the article argues that it is possible that Kapuuo was murdered by elements of the South African military intent on strengthening their hold on Namibia and South Africa at the time.

In the late afternoon of Easter Monday, 27 March 1978, on a cloudy day in Katutura – the apartheid township of the Namibian capital Windhoek – Clemens Kapuuo, the paramount chief of the Herero, stood talking to friends and colleagues who had called on him before commencing a journey. Wishing to talk to him freely, the party had stepped out of the back door of his store for a confidential meeting. Suddenly two to six shots rang out and Kapuuo collapsed into the arms of Gerson Hoveka, the Herero headman of Epukiro Reserve. Two men were seen running away. The police were called, and Kapuuo was loaded onto the back of a *bakkie* (pick-up) and driven to the *Nie Blanke Staatshospitaal Katutura* (Katutura Non-White State Hospital). Dr A. M. E. Twomey declared that upon arrival Kapuuo was clinically dead. A sodium bicarbonate and atropine drip was set up, heart massage was applied, and adrenalin was injected directly into the heart. However, 'all these measures were unsuccessful and resuscitation attempts were stopped after about 30 minutes'.¹ In the subsequent autopsy, carried out by Dr J. P. Nel, the cause of death was declared as *Skietwond deur Borskas met Bloedverlies* (gunshot wound through the chest cavity with bloodloss).² Unrest and inter-ethnic strife, which had been simmering in the weeks prior to

* This article has developed out of inquest papers found in Windhoek in February 1999. These have now been deposited with the Namibian National Archives in Windhoek. This contribution was originally presented as a paper at the *Public History: Forgotten History Conference*, which was held at the University of Namibia in August 2000. Many people assisted in the research and preparation of this paper. Thanks to David Simon and the two anonymous JSAS readers, as well as Robert Ross, Stephen Ellis, Neil Parsons, Jeremy Silvester, Casper Erichsen, Nancy Jacobs, Christian Carstens, Jochem Kutzner, Jannie Geldenhuys, Gert van Niekerk and a number of others.

¹ Kapuuo Inquest, Dr A. M. E. Twomey, statement regarding Clemens Kapuuo.

² Kapuuo Inquest, Post-Mortem Serial no. SAP 183/107/78.

Kapuuo's murder, now exploded. Katutura burned and, in the days that followed, houses, cars and property were destroyed, people were killed, and hundreds were driven from their homes.

The most important black political leader in Namibia had been killed. Yet, in the months that followed, the South African armed forces never formally charged anyone with the murder, although the official maxim was that SWAPO terrorists had murdered Kapuuo. However, SWAPO, for its part, has never formally claimed that its operatives killed Kapuuo.³ Anxious to know more, I was astonished to discover that no documents relating to the assassination of Clemens Kapuuo were to be found in the Namibian National Archives in Windhoek.⁴ Aware that an inquest had been conducted in the Windhoek Magistrates' Court, I sought to find the papers there. Inquiries there indicated that the files had been deposited with the archives, whilst the archives claimed never to have received them. Finally, through talking to former employees I discovered that shortly before Namibian independence in 1990, large amounts of documents had been deposited in two garages at the back of the Magistrates' Court. After two days of 'key searching' I finally managed to open one of the garages; this was stacked to the roof with documents relating to civil cases, homicide cases and inquests, as well as a jumble of broken fans, benches and chairs. Within half an hour, I was able to find the papers relating to the inquest of Clemens Kapuuo.

This article has developed out of the papers I found then. At first I merely wanted to discuss and describe Kapuuo and his assassination, but, as time passed, I became more and more intrigued and surprised by the political developments around the time of Kapuuo's killing. In the end, I have become convinced that what I had previously dismissed as mere coincidence could be more. In researching Kapuuo's murder, I have gradually moved away from suspecting people associated with SWAPO, towards believing that one of the myriad of South African government 'dirty tricks' departments was involved.⁵

There have been numerous assassinations in Southern and central Africa and these continue to engender debate and discussion. The deaths of Patrice Lumumba, Samora Machel, Chris Hani and others have failed to put an end to the often controversial political lives of these people.⁶ Every now and again, gusts of speculation and discussion breathe life into the glowing embers of the memory of people long gone. The memories of their deaths will be resurrected and refashioned to suit the political struggles of the day. In a sub-continent where much of the evidence regarding the 'dirty wars' remains hidden or has been destroyed, the absence of clear and unambiguous material and evidence will ensure that speculation will continue for many years to come. This is well illustrated in the recent work of Luise White, who has written an excellent book about the assassination of the

3 Similarly, it could be argued, SWAPO has never admitted to killing people detained by the organisation. For a discussion on the media campaign waged in Namibia in 1978 see, A. Heywood, *The Cassinga Event*, second revised edition (Windhoek, National Archives of Namibia, 1996), pp. 78–101.

4 By way of comparison, this would be a little like being unable to find documents relating to the murders of Hans Martin Schleyer (18 October 1977) or Earl Mountbatten of Burma (27 August 1979).

5 This is not to deny that SWAPO was involved in human rights abuses and murder. In exile, hundreds of SWAPO dependants and members were detained, tortured and killed without trial. Currently, the Namibian National Society for Human Rights, church organisations, and the 'Breaking the Wall of Silence' committee of ex-detainees continue to seek recognition and clarification regarding the deaths and disappearances of detainees in SWAPO custody. Evidence has come to the fore that directly implicates many within the current Namibian élite in human rights abuses committed during the 1980s. Implicated are, amongst others, the 'Butcher of Lubango', the current Chief of the Namibian Defence Force, Major General Solomon Dumeni 'Jesus' Hawala. Those seeking a detailed introduction to these events are referred to, S. Groth, *Namibia The Wall of Silence: The Dark Days of the Liberation Struggle* (Wuppertal, Peter Hammer Verlag, 1995).

6 A. de Villiers Minnaar, I. Liebenberg and C. Schutte (eds) *The Hidden Hand: Covert Operations in South Africa* (Pretoria, Human Sciences Research Council, 1994); J. Brassine and J. Kestergat, *Qui a Tué Patrice Lumumba?* (Paris, Duculot, 1991); Y. Bénot, *La Mort de Lumumba* (Paris, Chaka, 1989); AIM, *Samora, Why He Died* (Maputo, AIM, Mozambique News Agency, 1986).

Zimbabwean nationalist leader, Herbert Chitepo.⁷ In her work, White has followed the twists and turns of evidence and counter-evidence in relation to Chitepo's murder. In the end, White's work is not about discovering who did the deed; instead it seeks to discover what lies behind the charges and confessions made in relation to Chitepo's death. In contrast, I have written this article as part of an attempt to find out more about my past.

Who was Kapuuo?

Clemens Matuurunge Kapuuo was born on 16 March 1923, the year in which Samuel Maharero died in exile in Serowe, Bechuanaland Protectorate. Kapuuo was born at Teufelsbach in the district of Okahandja, the son of Onangandji Alexandrine Kandirikira and Clemens Kapuuo Snr, who became a wealthy and prominent trader and influential politician in Windhoek in the inter-war period. Apart from being related to Samuel Maharero through his matri-clan, Kandikirira, he was also the nephew of the first Namibian nationalist leader, Chief Hosea Kutako, Samuel Maharero's chosen representative in Namibia.

Kapuuo senior owned several shops in Windhoek location and served on the location advisory board and his son grew up in a household and surroundings that continuously dealt in, and discussed politics. Like many of Namibia's other early nationalists, Clemens Kapuuo attended St Barnabas College in Windhoek, after which he qualified as a teacher at the Stoffberg Training College in the Orange Free State in South Africa.⁸ After teaching at Waterberg, the site of the Herero defeat in the Herero-German war, Kapuuo taught at Karibib and at his *alma mater*, St Barnabas.

Kapuuo was active in opposing the move, under the apartheid Group Areas Act, of the old location to Katutura, situated eight kilometres away. In this opposition Kapuuo co-operated with the present President of Namibia, Sam Nujoma. Opposition to the move, which included bus boycotts and a boycott of the municipal Beer Hall, culminated in a demonstration in which at least 11 people were shot and killed and many more injured by police on 10 December 1959. In the aftermath of the shooting, many people fled the location, fearing further violence, and the move to Katutura continued. However, in the end people were forced to move following the shooting of 10 December 1959. The last houses in the old location were forcibly cleared in August 1968. In the process, St Barnabas was also destroyed.⁹

Even though he understood the colonial languages of English, German and Afrikaans, Hosea Kutako, leader of the Herero in Namibia who had petitioned South Africa at the United Nations, used Clemens Kapuuo as his interpreter in all of his dealings with the press and South African officials.¹⁰ One such journalist noted of a meeting held in 1956:

7 L. White, *The Assassination of Herbert Chitepo: Texts and Politics in Zimbabwe* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 2003).

8 On the role of St Barnabas see, T. Emmett, *Popular Resistance and the Roots of Nationalism in Namibia, 1915-1966* (Basel, Schlettwein Publishing, 1999), p. 280. Unfortunately St Barnabas was closed by the South African authorities following the introduction of Bantu education.

9 For further information on the Old Location and the subsequent move to Katutura see, D. Ridgway, *An Investigation of the Shooting at the Old Location on 10 December 1959* (Windhoek, Archeia, 1991); W. C. Pendleton, *Katutura: A Place Where We Do Not Stay* (San Diego State University Press, 1974); C. von Garnier (ed.), *Katutura Revisited 1986: Essays on a Black Namibian Apartheid Suburb* (Windhoek, Social Sciences Research Centre, Roman Catholic Church, 1986).

10 Unfortunately, as yet, no published biography of Hosea Kutako is available. The matrilineal relative of the paramount chief Samuel Maharero; wounded in the Herero-German war; installed as headman in the Windhoek location after the South African invasion of Namibia; appointed by Samuel Maharero as regent in 1921; one of the first nationalist leaders of Namibia, he died in 1970.

My meeting with Chief Kutako took place in the poor shade of a thorn tree close to his home and Clemens Kapuuo was on hand to act as interpreter. I was immediately struck by his forceful facility in interpreting in English and Afrikaans my questions to his Chief and the answers. Where the Chief's voice lacked strength because of his age – he was then in his seventies – Clemens Kapuuo gave particular emphasis to his Chief's words by his penetratingly clear and unsmiling interpretations. I had a suspicion that the interpreter was amplifying and overstressing the answers his Chief was giving me. That left me with the strong impression that the power behind the throne was Clemens Kapuuo.¹¹

Thus, while Clemens Kapuuo and Rev. B. G. Karuaera acted as Kutako's secretaries and representatives, in the end, however, it was Kapuuo who was appointed by Kutako as his successor in 1960 and when Kutako died in July 1970, Kapuuo succeeded him.¹²

Clemens Kapuuo – secretary and confidante of the highly respected Chief Hosea Kutako – had been chosen to succeed Kutako, not only as chief of the Herero and representative of the house of Maharero, but also as a chief who would continue the tradition of struggle and opposition to South African rule that had been established by Hosea Kutako. During his long and complex life and his rule as chief of the Herero, Hosea had consistently sought to regain Herero, and later Namibian, rights to self-determination. Hosea Kutako died in 1970, a symbol of nationalist resistance to South African rule. Indeed, after the independence of Namibia, Windhoek's international airport, which until then had been named in honour of South Africa's second apartheid era Prime Minister, J. G. Strydom, was renamed in honour of Hosea Kutako, as was *Republiekweg*, a major thoroughfare in Windhoek.¹³ With the death of Kutako and the installation of Kapuuo, it was expected that Kapuuo would maintain Kutako's position of consistent opposition to South African rule.

The First Years of Kapuuo's Rule

During the first years of Clemens Kapuuo's rule as chief of the Herero he appeared to be following in the footsteps of his illustrious predecessor. However, there is no doubt that Kapuuo's style of leadership was different to that of Kutako. While Kutako favoured consensus politics and would allow meetings and discussions to carry on until consensus was reached, Kapuuo was a more forceful leader, and was not above cutting discussion short before consensus had been reached.¹⁴ Yet, in terms of policy, Kapuuo followed Kutako's example. The Herero-German war of 1904–1908 had brought about the destruction of Herero society, the loss of all its land, stock and goods, and the death of no less than 80 per cent of its population.¹⁵ As the son and representative of people who had experienced the full devastation of war, Kapuuo followed Kutako and opposed all calls to arms. Kapuuo knew full well what war had brought to the Herero of central Namibia.

In 1971, the year after Kutako's death, Kapuuo was elected head of the National Convention, a loose alliance of political parties united in their opposition to South African

11 D. Friedmann, 'Tributes to Clemens Mutuurunge Kapuuo 1923–1978', in *SWA Annual* 1979, p. 33.

12 Succession in Herero society, as in all societies, is bound to all manner of conventions, many of which come to be broken in the interests of power politics and pragmatism. Since the 1870s many anthropologists have sought to unravel the intricacies of Herero succession. E. Dannert, *Zum Rechte der Herero Insbesondere Über Ihr Familien – und Erbrecht* (Berlin, Dietrich Reimer, 1906) and D. Gibson, *The Social Organization of the Southwestern Bantu* (Unpublished D. Phil thesis, University of Chicago, 1952).

13 In 1999, a statue of Kutako was placed facing the buildings housing Namibia's parliament. Sadly, even though the statue had been placed there it remained wrapped in black plastic for no less than eighteen months until two other busts, considered to be representative of the Nama and Ovambo populations of Namibia, had been placed alongside it.

14 Indeed, the split that re-developed between Banderu and Herero proper after 1970 has been attributed to Kapuuo. For a discussion on Kapuuo's leadership style in contrast to that of Kutako see, K. Dahlmann, 'Das Erbe Clemens Kapuuo', in *Allgemeine Zeitung*, 10 April 1978.

15 J.-B. Gewald, *Herero Heroes: A Socio-Political History of the Herero of Namibia, 1890–1923* (Oxford, James Currey, 1999), pp. 141–230.

rule. The convention included SWAPO, NUDO (National Unity Democratic Organisation, led by Kapuuo), SWANU (South West African National Union, led by the Maoist, Gerson Vei Hitjevi), Volksparty of Rehoboth, Voice of the People, and other groups.¹⁶ In the same year, Namibia was wracked by major industrial action. In the clampdown that followed, numerous people were detained and Clemens Kapuuo was fired from his position as a teacher on account of his political involvement and vocal opposition to South African rule.¹⁷ In the wake of the clampdown, thousands of young men fled into exile and the guerrilla war, initiated by SWAPO against South African rule, expanded. A state of emergency was declared in the northern parts of Namibia in 1972, and the following year the South African Defence Force took over the task of counter-insurgency in Namibia.¹⁸

Riding the Tiger

Yet within a few years, Kapuuo's role as a symbol of anti-colonial resistance would be thrown into doubt, when in 1975 he announced that he would be participating in the South African-sponsored Turnhalle Conference. The conference, held between South African government representatives and representatives of the South African appointed 'tribal Authorities', was to draft an ethnically-based constitution for the territory. In the run-up to the talks, Namibian churches expressed the opposition felt by many when they resolved that, 'these talks were unilaterally organised and planned by the South African government and were looked upon by the majority as unwanted and unjust'.¹⁹ The words of the renowned Namibian political scientist, André du Pisani, clearly expresses the confusion felt by many regarding political developments in Namibia in 1975:

For most local observers Clemens Kapuuo's decision to participate in the Turnhalle constitutional conference came as a surprise, for here was a man openly opposed to South Africa's policies of ethnic fragmentation in Namibia. Furthermore he had gone so far as to petition South Africa at the United Nations, and had previously rejected the Prime Minister's Advisory Council (the institutional predecessor of the constitutional conference) on the grounds that South Africa had no right to establish such a body.²⁰

How was it that a man renowned for his consistent opposition to South African rule suddenly chose to associate and co-operate with the South Africans? I believe that the answer lies in the issue of land. In 1962, the South African administration appointed the Odendaal Commission, of which it has been noted that:

The recommendations made by the Commission had little to do with promoting the welfare of black Namibians. Instead, they mirrored a desire to entrench territorial apartheid in Namibia.²¹

In terms of the Commission's report, the existing 'Native Reserves' were to be redesigned on a completely ethnic basis. 'Self-government' on the basis of these ethnic 'homelands' was to be the ultimate political objective.²² In terms of the report, the Aminuis Reserve, an

16 For further information leading to the formation of the National Convention see, T. R. H. Davenport, *South Africa: A Modern History*, Third edition (Johannesburg, Macmillan, 1987), p. 484; K. Dierks, *Chronology of Namibian History: From Pre-historical Times to Independent Namibia* (Windhoek, Namibia Scientific Society, 1999), pp. 136-137; and D. Herbstein and J. Evenson, *The Devils are Among Us: The War for Namibia* (London, Zed Books, 1989), p. 38.

17 Herbstein and Evenson, *The Devils are Among Us*, p. 39.

18 Colonel C. J. Nöthling, 'Military Chronicle of South West Africa (1915-1988)', in *South African Defence Force Review*, 1989.

19 'More Warnings on Talks', *Windhoek Advertiser*, Tuesday, 19 August 1975.

20 A. du Pisani, *SWA/Namibia: The Politics of Continuity and Change* (Johannesburg, Jonathan Ball, 1985), p. 286.

21 F. Adams, W. Werner and P. Vale, *The Land Issue in Namibia: An Inquiry* (Windhoek, NEPRU, 1990), p. 91.

22 Regarding reserves and reserves policy in Namibia see, W. Werner, 'No One Will Become Rich': *Economy and Society in the Herero Reserves in Namibia, 1915-1946* (Basel, Schlettwein Publishing, 1998), and 'A Brief History of Land Dispossession in Namibia', in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 19, 1 (March 1993), pp. 135-146.

ethnically mixed reserve, formed the basis of a future, still to be established Tswana homeland. It would thus have to be cleared of all inhabitants not deemed to be Tswana. In other words, the Herero living there would have to leave the reserve and resettle in Epukiro Reserve, the envisaged basis for a Herero 'homeland' (Hereroland), which would lie 200 kilometres to the North.²³

Aminuis Reserve and the lands associated with it were, and still are, of paramount importance to the Herero. In the 1920s, when the Herero had been forced off the central Namibian highlands, Aminuis Reserve was one of two major reserves in which the Herero were re-settled. Aminuis Reserve, more importantly Taosis, was the site of Hosea Kutako's settlement.²⁴ In terms of the report of the Odendaal Commission, the Herero would have to leave Aminuis. For the Herero this would mean further loss of land, an aspect that is of central importance to Herero society.

Thus it was that land, and more specifically the Aminuis Reserve, was to be the factor that ensured Kapuuo's willingness to begin co-operating with the South African administration. In 1974, after intensive lobbying on the part of Kapuuo and his followers, the South African government announced that it would no longer be pursuing the creation of a Tswana homeland in the Aminuis area.²⁵ By implication, the Herero living in Aminuis no longer faced the threat of forced removals. Kapuuo's intensive talks with the South African authorities in connection with Aminuis coincided with the decision of SWAPO to withdraw its support from the National Convention. In withdrawing from the convention, SWAPO lashed out at Kapuuo, who, for his part, emphasised the importance of land. Referring back to the wars waged by the Herero and Nama against German colonial rule and the loss of their lands, goods, and people in the early twentieth Century, Kapuuo argued that:²⁶

The Ovambos, who are today represented by SWAPO ... did not take part in a war against the Germans...

...

South Africa did not deprive the Ovambos of their lands. ... for the tribes of central and southern parts of South West Africa who have suffered terribly for more than 70 years under German and South African governments, this land and their rights are very dear to them, and they cannot and will never allow their lands and their future to be decided by a political organisation of just one tribe which was not elected by them.²⁷

In 1975, when the South African administration established a constitutional conference with delegates called from 'each tribe', SWAPO refused to participate, yet Clemens Kapuuo, as

23 Republic of South Africa, *Report of the Commission of Enquiry into South West Africa Affairs 1962-1963*, R. P. Np. 12/1964. p. 111.

24 Aminuis Reserve currently appears to be an area of singular ritual importance to Herero society. Herero leaders wishing to gain social recognition will travel to Aminuis and visit the *Ondangere* [a highly respected person who communicates with the ancestors] living there. Recently Chief Riruako has moved to Aminuis and set up a cattle post there. J-B. Gewald, 'We thought we would be free': *Ideals and Realities in the 1920s*, (unpublished paper presented at 'People, Cattle and Land: A Symposium on the Culture, History and Economy of Otjiherero Speaking People', Michaelsberg, Siegburg, September 1997); *Heaven on Earth: Herero Conceptualisation of Land 1920-1940*, (unpublished paper presented at 'Landnahme: Zur Historischen und Symbolischen Aneignung Lokaler Räume' Cologne, October 1998); and 'We Thought We Would be Free': *Aspects in the Socio-Cultural History of the Herero of Namibia 1920-1940* (Cologne, Rüdiger Köppe Verlag, 2000), chapter 2.

25 Du Pisani, *SWA/Namibia*, p. 286.

26 For further information regarding the wars waged by the Herero and Nama against German colonisation see, H. Bley, *South West Africa under German Rule, 1894-1914* (Hamburg, Lit Verlag, 1996); H. Drechsler, 'Let us Die Fighting': *The Struggle of the Herero and Nama against German Imperialism (1884-1915)* (London, Zed Press, 1980) and J-B. Gewald, *Herero Heroes*.

27 Herbstein and Evenson, *Devils Among Us*, p. 39. Kapuuo was referring to the fact that most of the Ovambo lands lay outside the German Police Zone and therefore dispossession akin to that suffered by the groups further south, who had fought against colonisation, had not occurred. Interestingly Kapuuo's words of 1975, mirror those of his successor Kuaima Riruako 25 years later, 'Ons Sal Vergewe Maar Nie Vergeet Nie', *Die Republikein*, 29 August 2000.

representative of the Herero was present. Kozonguizi, who had gone into exile in the early 1960s and had broadcast tirades on Radio Peking accusing SWAPO of having adopted a 'reformist approach', accompanied Kapuuo as his legal adviser.²⁸ Commenting on his involvement in the Turnhalle Conference, Kapuuo stated:

that his first priority was to consolidate the Herero position, and then to bargain for a reallocation of economic resources, notably land.²⁹

It would appear that Kapuuo, who consistently opposed the armed struggle, believed that he could 'ride the tiger' and gain the benefits that he believed his followers needed. Indeed, in May 1977, when the Chief Native Commissioner for Namibia, Mr Strauss, called a meeting with Kapuuo to discuss the formation of a Herero legislative assembly, similar to those that already existed in Owambo, Kavango and Caprivi, Kapuuo refused to attend on the grounds that he did not want to be involved in the creation of a 'Bantustan'.³⁰

The Political Climate in South Africa and Namibia, March 1978

In early 1978, at the time of Kapuuo's murder, it is safe to say that the apartheid government of B. J. Vorster was under pressure. The Soweto student uprising of 1976, the collapse of Vorster's vaunted policy of *détente* with Africa, the independence of the Portuguese colonies, Angola and Mozambique, along with the presence of Andrew Young as the Carter administration's ambassador at the United Nations, all served to bring pressure to bear upon Vorster's regime.³¹

That government, which was centred upon a power base within the highly politicised South African Police force, and its off-shoot (Vorster's own creation), the Bureau of State Security, demonstrated a clear lack of vision, beyond that of brute violence, when it came to dealing with opposition to its rule. The callous killing of Steve Biko in 1977, coupled with the continued unrest in South Africa, showed up the inability of the South African security apparatus to control and contain dissatisfaction within the black community.³² Effectively, Vorster was unable to control the South African situation and lacked the later vision and ideology characteristic of Botha and his *securocrats*.³³

In early 1978, at the time of Kapuuo's murder, P. W. Botha was the South African Minister of Defence, General Magnus Malan was Chief of the SADF, General Constand Viljoen was Chief of the Army, Major-General Jannie Geldenhuys was the commanding officer of the South West Africa Command, and General Kat Liebenberg was commander of the South African forces in Sector 10, Namibia.³⁴

Following Angolan independence in 1975, SWAPO moved its headquarters from Dar es Salaam in Tanzania to Luanda in Angola. In 1975, South African armed forces invaded

28 Herbstein and Evenson, *Devils Among Us*, p. 24. Interestingly, in the early 1960s Kozonguizi had broadcast anti-imperialist propaganda from Radio Peking and had accused SWAPO of adopting a 'reformist approach', p. 9.

29 Du Pisani, *SWA/Namibia*, p. 286.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 360.

31 Davenport, *South Africa*, Chapter 16. Du Pisani, *SWA/Namibia*, p. 380 deals with the Dakar conference on Namibia and Human Rights, which firmly rejected *détente*.

32 On South Africa and Vorster, it is well worth reading Donald Woods, *Biko* (New York, Henry Holt, 1987).

33 On the vision and ideology of Botha and his *securocrats* see, P. Frankel, N. Pines, and M. Swilling (eds), *State Resistance and Change in South Africa* (London, Croom Helm, 1988).

34 Liebenberg would later become commander of special forces and involved in the covert propaganda campaign of the South African government in Namibia during the Namibian independence elections. S. Ellis, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 24, 2 (1998), p. 283.

Angola with the covert support of the CIA. Operation Savannah, as the invasion was named, was carried out without the South African cabinet, let alone parliament, being informed.³⁵ However, sections of the Broederbond were informed (most notably its chairman, Gerrit Viljoen, who later became the South African Administrator-General for Namibia). Closer to home, SWAPO, or more specifically its military wing, PLAN (People's Liberation Army of Namibia), stepped up its military campaign against the illegal South African occupation of Namibia. Following Angolan independence, PLAN launched annual 'invasions' of between 500 to 1,500 soldiers. Although these incursions were inevitably driven off by SADF actions, they did ensure continuing popular support for SWAPO. United Nations General Assembly Resolution 3111, of December 1973, declared SWAPO 'the sole legitimate representative of the Namibian people'. One unfortunate consequence of this resolution was that many Namibians in exile, most notably SWANU members, found themselves ostracised, forced into joining SWAPO, deported or detained. The indications are that South African agents had infiltrated SWANU members in exile and were instrumental in encouraging them to return to Namibia. In the event, many Namibians who had gone into exile in the early 1960s now began returning to Namibia. One such person was V. Mbaeva, a lecturer at CUNY in New York, who returned to Namibia from exile in the hope of becoming 'Bantu Commissioner' at 'Rietfontein Block' in the Herero Reserve.³⁶

Another returnee was Kozonguizi, who became Kapuuo's legal adviser in the constitutional conference that became known as the Turnhalle Conference. In response to the Turnhalle Conference, the United Nations reiterated its continuing opposition to the South African occupation of Namibia. UN resolution 385 of 1976 once again revoked South Africa's rights to administer Namibia and led to the establishment of the 'Western Five' Contact Group, comprising Britain, France, West Germany, Canada and the US. In early 1977, the Conference submitted a 'final concept' for the establishment of an interim government and a plan to create three layers of administration under which the country would proceed to independence. However, many in Namibia as well as the outside world rejected Turnhalle because it was structured on an ethnic basis, particularly at the second and third levels of government, where the basic territorial divisions outlined in the Odendaal Report were to apply.³⁷

As the Turnhalle Conference progressed, large sections of the Namibian population continued to declare their allegiance to SWAPO. Thus, in 1976, a major section of the country's Nama population, under the leadership of Rev. Hendrik Witbooi (grandson of the great anti-colonial leader Hendrik Witbooi), declared allegiance to SWAPO. Similarly, in 1977, a major section of the Herero, most notably those allied to the royal house of Maharero/Tjamuaha, publicly declared that they would have no further dealings with the Turnhalle Conference, and that they supported SWAPO. Interestingly, at that stage, the royal house of Maharero/Tjamuaha was being led by Rev. B. G. Karuaera – the man who, along with Clemens Kapuuo, had been Hosea Kutako's personal secretary. Kapuuo, for his part, formed an alliance with representatives of the eleven other ethnic parties participating in the Turnhalle Conference and formed the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA) in November 1977.³⁸

35 As the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) noted, 'Indeed, the issue (Operation Savannah) was not even raised at cabinet level until the invasion was several months old and no longer a secret', C. Villa-Vicencia and S. de Villiers (eds) *The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report* (hereafter *TRC*), volume 2, chapters 2 § 13 (Cape Town, CTP Book Printers, 1998).

36 *Allgemeine Zeitung*, 'Beinahe ein Schwarzer Bantu-Kommissar', 17 November 1976, p. 1.

37 Davenport, *South Africa*, p. 486.

38 J. Pütz, H. von Egidy and P. Caplan, *Namibia Handbook and Political Who's Who: Post-Election Edition* (Windhoek, Magus Company, 1990), pp. 66–69.

The Killing of Kapuuo

In early February 1978, Clemens Kapuuo attended a DTA rally in the settlement of Okahao in northern Namibia. During the proceedings, Toivo Shiyagaya, Health Minister in the South African-administered local government of Ovamboland, was shot and killed by a single gunman who jumped onto the stage. The gunman, who was immediately killed by members of the Ovambo home guard, a SADF-sponsored paramilitary organisation, was later identified as Mathias Mauni and described as a 'SWAPO terrorist'.³⁹ Towards the end of February 1978, unrest broke out in Katutura. The conflict degenerated into a series of clashes that appeared to follow ethnic divisions.⁴⁰ The newspapers of the time describe the clashes as being between the DTA and SWAPO, or 'SWAPO en Herero', where SWAPO came to be equated with Ovambo.⁴¹ The unrest culminated in the killing of Julius Kambirongo (an aide of Clemens Kapuuo), whose throat was slit and who was then battered to death, after he had opened fire on a crowd of SWAPO supporters.⁴² The unrest died down after church leaders initiated talks between SWAPO, DTA, and other community representatives. Three weeks later, on the evening of Easter Monday 1978, Clemens Kapuuo was gunned down.

The materials contained within the inquest docket for Kapuuo indicate that the assassination of Kapuuo was meticulously planned and carried out. Kapuuo was shot by two men who fired between two and six bullets in total. The newspapers at the time claimed that the shots had been fired from a Tokarev pistol, implying SWAPO involvement, but no mention was made of this in the inquest. Instead, the calibre of one of the recovered bullet casings is given as 7.62 mm. The autopsy, conducted by the state pathologist Dr J. P. Nel, indicates that soft-nosed dum-dum bullets were used. Dum-dum bullets leave small entry holes and 'mushroom' or explode as they pass through the body. In the case of Kapuuo, he was hit by a bullet which entered just below his left shoulder blade and ripped through the lower part of his left lung, tore through his aorta, oesophagus, and trachea. The bullet then cut through the upper half of his right lung before exiting the body. The lower part of Kapuuo's back was covered by the fragments of a second bullet that had disintegrated before impact.

The actual assassination seems to have been carried out by a team of four men driving a blue Chevrolet custom pick-up with Windhoek registration plates and black wrought iron railings attached to the loading bed. The truck was parked some distance from the street in which Kapuuo's store was located. The car turned and stopped, three of the men got out to urinate, then two walked off and the remaining man re-joined the driver in the cab of the truck. After about half an hour, it was reported that the two men came running back and jumped onto the back of the Chevrolet, which by that stage was already rolling down the street with its engine running. The Chevrolet and the hit team disappeared, never to be seen again.

SWAPO Blamed by the Media

Immediately after Kapuuo's assassination, the media and the South African authorities blamed SWAPO for the killing. A report carried in the *Windhoek Advertiser*, a Windhoek newspaper, the day after the assassination noted:

³⁹ *Allgemeine Zeitung*, 28 March 1978.

⁴⁰ In the run-up to the forced removal of the inhabitants of the old location to Katutura, Dr Oswin Köhler, later to become the founding professor of African Studies at the University of Cologne, designed a street-plan for the new settlement, and divided the settlement up according to ethnic lines. A copy of the map is to be found in the cartographers' office at the Institute for African Studies in Cologne.

⁴¹ *Die Suidwester*, 1 March 1978; 6 March 1978; and 7 March 1978.

⁴² *The Windhoek Advertiser*, 6 March 1978; 7 March 1978; 8 March 1978; 9 March 1978; and 10 March 1978.

The *Advertiser's* night staff was probably the first to learn of the shooting. About 15 minutes after the assassination, a telephone call was received to say that Mr. Kapuuo had been murdered. We at first took the story to be a hoax, but a quick check proved it true. At that stage, the Divisional Commissioner of Police, Brigadier H. V. Verster, made a brief statement in which he confirmed the attack on Mr. Kapuuo, Brigadier Verster was conspicuously angry and made a few strong derogatory remarks about the SWAPO movement which he blamed for the assassination.⁴³

The German language newspaper, *Allgemeine Zeitung*, also blamed SWAPO and described Kapuuo as the third sacrificial victim [*opfer*] after the earlier killings of Chief Elifas in August 1975 and Toivo Shiyagaya in February 1976.⁴⁴ The following day, the newspaper claimed that Kapuuo had been shot with a Tokarev pistol, and reported that South Africa's Foreign Minister, Roelof 'Pik' Botha, as well as troop reinforcements, had been flown in to Namibia from South Africa.⁴⁵ The Afrikaans language newspaper, *Die Suidwester*, cited Brigadier Verster and quoted him as saying, '[I]t is logical that the assassins (*sluipmoordenaars*) could be SWAPO terrorists from the north of South West'.⁴⁶ In addition, *Allgemeine Zeitung* reported that on account of the cartridges found at the scene of the killing it had been concluded that a Tokarev pistol had been used.⁴⁷

Given the mindset that existed in Namibia at the time, what Verster and the newspapers said indicated that the signs clearly identified the killers of Clemens Kapuuo as SWAPO 'terrorists' who had come from the north armed with Tokarev pistols – weapons produced in the Soviet Union. Witness reports collected by the police in the days following Kapuuo's assassination identified the killers as either Ovambo or SWAPO guerrillas. As one of the witnesses stated, 'I know Ovambos'.⁴⁸ While another witness stated, 'Given that the deceased was headman of the Herero people, I suspect that the deceased was shot by Swapo terrorists'.⁴⁹

The Aftermath

Almost immediately after news of Kapuuo's death became known, ethnic clashes broke out in Katutura. Riot police, who had been flown into Windhoek earlier on in the month, and armed gangs of Herero and SWAPO militants clashed with one another in a spiral of violence.⁵⁰ Informants living in the area of Kapuuo's shop remember the time as one of teargas and fear, with most residents seeking shelter in their houses for days on end.⁵¹

With the killing of Kapuuo, and the widespread belief that he had been killed by SWAPO (and thus Ovambo) guerrillas, the war in Namibia became highly ethnicised. The war in Namibia was represented in simple terms that placed southern and central Namibia in opposition to Ovamboland, and the DTA against SWAPO. The united urban opposition

43 *The Windhoek Advertiser*, 28 March 1978.

44 *Allgemeine Zeitung*, 28 March 1978.

45 *Allgemeine Zeitung*, 29 March 1978. The murder weapon was not recovered, and the inquest makes no mention of the possible make of the gun used.

46 '[D]is Logies dat die Sluipmoordenaars Swapo Terroriste uit die Noorde van Suidwes kan Wees.', *Die Suidwester*, 28 March 1978.

47 *Die Suidwester*, 28 March 1978.

48 Inquest, the evidence of Berta Philander.

49 Inquest, the evidence of Ebson Kaapama.

50 At the time of Kapuuo's shooting I was a pupil at one of Windhoek's schools. An image remains with me from that time of camouflaged police Land Rovers careening down Bahnhofstrasse on their way to Katutura. In the back of these vehicles were policemen in riot gear carrying pick handles.

51 Interviews conducted in August 1999.

to South African rule, which had existed so strongly in the Old Location, and had to some extent continued to exist in Katutura, was broken. Henceforth, it became well nigh impossible for people to enter parts of Katutura. Whole sections of the township had effectively become no-go zones.⁵² The ethnic separation so keenly sought by apartheid planners was achieved overnight. From this time on, young Ovambo men would have been courting death if they were to venture alone into those areas of Katutura that were zoned for Herero occupancy. Many young men simply disappeared, their mutilated bodies found later in the vicinity of Goreangab dam.⁵³

Henceforth, the Herero turned their backs *en masse* on SWAPO. Whereas in the past there had been attempts at forming a united front against South African occupation, the killing of Kapuuo effectively ended this.⁵⁴ Whilst conducting research amongst Herero living in Botswana, anthropologist Kirsten Alnaes noted the following:

...the belief that SWAPO had killed chief Kapuuo. (...) At this time I was told: 'SWAPO is our enemy, they kill our people. SWAPO killed our chief. SWAPO take our children to take them to the boers to kill them'.⁵⁵

There have been unconfirmed rumours that, as of September 1977, when Rev. Karuera declared his support for SWAPO, Clemens Kapuuo had initiated talks with the SWAPO leadership. However, it is more likely that talks between SWAPO and Kapuuo took place in November 1977, when Kapuuo travelled to the United States to lobby members of the OAU at the UN.⁵⁶ In an interview conducted shortly after the death of Kapuuo, Emil Appolus, one of the founding members of the Ovamboland People's Organisation, which later became SWAPO, reiterated Kapuuo's standing as a true nationalist.⁵⁷

The Democratic Turnhalle Alliance, the party to which Kapuuo had been elected as president, was extensively funded by South African government 'slush fund' money.⁵⁸ In the aftermath of Kapuuo's killing the DTA did all in its power to 'milk' the incident for what it was worth. The run-up to Kapuuo's funeral, as well as the funeral itself, was used by the DTA as a continuous publicity campaign. Particularly pathetic was a photograph placed in one of the Windhoek newspapers that showed three adolescent boys with bowed heads at the grave of Chief Hosea Kutako in Okahandja, with the following caption:

At the grave of his predecessor, brown and white, Nama, Herero and Afrikaner position themselves in silent tribute on either side of their Herero chum. These young members of the DTA ... in a strikingly quiet graveyard in the heart of South West.

On Sunday thousands of mourners are expected there to pay their last honours to Clemens Kapuuo, leader of his people and – through his presidency of the alliance in which all eleven population groups of the country are united – also leader of the whole of South West.⁵⁹

Be that as it may, it is true to say that following the assassination of Kapuuo, the DTA gained popular support, particularly amongst the Herero population of Namibia.

The assassination of Kapuuo also meant that the position of paramount chief of the Herero fell vacant. This was taken by Kuaima Riruako, a man with an extremely

52 Interviews conducted in August 1999.

53 Interviews conducted in August 1999 and September 2000.

54 Du Pisani, *SWA/Namibia*, p. 153, on the formation of South West African National Liberation Front.

55 K. Alnaes, *Report on the Political Climate Among Herero-Speakers in Botswana 1978–1979 and 1980*, unpublished report in author's possession.

56 Interview conducted in Windhoek, May 2000.

57 *Die Republikein*, 31 March 1978.

58 In operations Heyday and Victor, the DTA continued to receive South African slush money even after Namibian independence in 1990. *TRC*, volume 2, chapter 2, 'The State Outside South Africa Between 1960 and 1990', §132–136.

59 *Die Republikein*, 7 April 1978 (author's translation).

convoluted past. In the early 1960s Riruako had gone into exile, living in Botswana, Zambia, Ethiopia and Ghana. After the *coup* in Ghana he was deported to Zambia, which in turn deported him to South Africa. After a year of torture and solitary confinement in Pretoria, Riruako was declared a prohibited immigrant and dumped on an island in the Zambezi river, from which he was rescued by Zambian fishermen after three days. In 1969, following the intercession of an 'American development officer', Riruako received funding from the African-American Institute which enabled him to travel to New York.⁶⁰ In 1973, Riruako was appointed NUDO's chief representative to the United Nations.⁶¹ In 1977, Riruako addressed the United States Congress as NUDO's representative. That same year, Riruako came to enjoy the dubious distinction of being the first exile to return to Namibia on a South African passport. At the time of Kapuuo's assassination, Riruako was in Paris, which is also where he was informed that he was to become the new paramount chief of the Herero. Riruako was inaugurated as paramount chief of the Herero in Toasis in the Aminuis Reserve.⁶² The ceremony took place in a DTA tent, and DTA vehicles were used to ferry attendants to and from the ceremony. At the same time, Riruako was elected as president of NUDO.⁶³ When internal elections were held in Namibia in November 1978, the DTA, led by Chief Riruako, polled 41 of the 50 seats available.⁶⁴

The assassination of Kapuuo was used by the South African administration to justify its crackdown on SWAPO within Namibia. Indeed, SWAPO itself was never formally banned, as had been the case with the ANC and PAC in South Africa; instead, the movement was allowed to continue to exist although SWAPO activists were subject to continual harassment and detention.⁶⁵ As one South African official told Major Robert C. Owen of the American air force:

... the so-called internal wing of SWAPO is even allowed to conduct 'legitimate' political activities throughout Namibia to keep it out in the open, and to keep the faint-hearted from going to Angola.⁶⁶

Following Kapuuo's assassination, Axel Johannes, one of the most prominent SWAPO activists in Namibia, was arrested and accused of the murder. The treatment of Johannes is indicative of what happened to SWAPO activists around the country. At one stage he was taken to a river in the vicinity of Windhoek, hung from a tree, buried in sand, systematically beaten and told to disclose the identity of Kapuuo's assassins and the whereabouts of the murder weapon.⁶⁷ Even though Johannes could prove that he was not in Windhoek at the time of the murder, he was tortured to such an extent that he signed a prepared confession.

60 Regarding Riruako, information can be found in 'Kuaima Riruako - Herero Leader', in *S.W.A. Annual* (Windhoek, South West Africa Administration, 1979), p. 157, Pütz, Von Egidy and Caplan, *Namibia Handbook*, pp. 201-202, and Du Pisani, *SWA/Namibia*.

61 It must be borne in mind that these appointments are merely paper tigers; they had no official legal standing with the UN as such, and appear to be a ruse to lobby delegates from the UN.

62 Pütz *et al.*, *Namibia Handbook*, pp. 201-202. 'Kuaima Riruako - Herero Leader', in *S.W.A. Annual*, p. 157. Interviews conducted with Riruako, August 2000. Further research needs to be done on the life of Riruako in exile. Simple questions such as who paid for his flights to and from Namibia and New York still remain unanswered. It is likely that Riruako was approached by the South Africans in New York in the run-up to the Turnhalle Conference, and that from at least 1976 onwards Riruako was living on South African money channelled through NUDO in New York.

63 'Nuwe Leier Ingeseen vir die Hereros', 24 July 1978 and 'Nou Skyn die Lig Weer Vir Herero's', *Die Republikein*, 28 July 1978.

64 Dierks, *Chronology of Namibian History*, p. 160.

65 Du Pisani, *SWA/Namibia*, p. 391; AG 26/1978 (18 April 1978).

66 R. C. Owen, *Counterrevolution in Namibia*, Air Chronicles Home Page. <http://www.airpower.maxwell.af.mil/airchronicles/apj/apj87/owen.html>.

67 Herstein and Evenson, *Devils Among Us*, p. 35.

Yet, 'No one was ever charged for this murder, though we know from Axel Johannes that the police were desperate to assign responsibility to SWAPO which has always denied it'.⁶⁸

Apart from cracking down on SWAPO within Namibia, the killing of Kapuuo was also used to justify the escalation of the SADF's military presence in Namibia and southern Angola. In early May 1978 Operation Reindeer was launched. This consisted of a series of major cross-border raids against SWAPO camps in Angola.⁶⁹ The wider ramifications of this Operation are examined below. The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission has summed up the impact of these raids as follows:

Some 1 200 people – South West African, Angolan, Cuban and South African – died; over 600 others, overwhelmingly South West African and Angolan, were wounded in the attacks on Kassinga and Chetequera that day. It is probable that some died later from their wounds. In addition, several hundred were captured at Chetequera. No prisoners, or perhaps at most a handful, were taken from Kassinga.⁶⁹

At a press conference in Windhoek, Major-General Jannie Geldenhuys, the Commanding Officer of the South West Africa Command, announced the raid and justified the operation on, amongst other grounds, the killing of Kapuuo and Toivo Shiyagaya.⁷⁰ In a late-night broadcast on the South African Broadcasting Corporation, which first broke news of the raid to the public, Geldenhuys stated:

On March 27 two terrorists assassinated the leader of the Herero people, Mr Clemens Kapuuo. The attack took place at his home in Katutura just a short while after he and his tribal council decided on asking the Administrator-General for better protection of the political leaders of South West Africa. Before his death Mr Kapuuo was a strong supporter of the total destruction of terrorist bases across the Angolan border.⁷¹

Following Operation Reindeer, the SADF presence became more pronounced than ever before and the further militarisation of Namibia continued with the introduction of conscription for Namibians.⁷²

Covert Operations

The emphasis was more placed on disruption by means of indirect means of getting the enemy to kill itself, to detain itself and to disrupt itself. And physically killing them was placed more or less ... [a]s a last resort, sort of method. (Former CCB operative before the TRC).⁷³

After 1975, South African paramilitary personnel, some of whom had served in Rhodesia, honed their skills in counter-insurgency warfare in Namibia. Military units, such as 32 Battalion, which was established in 1976, were a home for former FNLA fighters from Angola as well as African mercenaries,⁷⁴ whilst Special Forces units, such as

68 *Ibid.*, p. 39. For biographical details regarding Axel Johannes see, Pütz *et al.*, *Namibia Handbook*, p. 279.

69 On the military history and triumphalist coverage, see for example <http://www.netcentral.co.uk/~cobus/CASSINGA.htm>; M. Norval, *Death in the Desert: The Namibian Tragedy* (Washington, DC, Selous Foundation Press, 1989); W. Steenkamp, *Borderstrike* (Cape Town, Butterworths, 1983); W. Steenkamp, *South Africa's Border War: 1966–1989* (Gibraltar, Ashanti Publishing, 1989).

70 TRC, volume 2, Chapter 2, §41.

71 Du Pisani, *SWA/Namibia*, p. 393. Interview conducted with Jannie Geldenhuys in Pretoria, 3 July 2000.

72 Cited in, Heywood, *Cassinga Event*, p. 92. It must be remembered that at the time in SADF parlance 'terrorist' was shorthand for SWAPO.

73 J. Geldenhuys, *Die Wat Wen: 'n Generaal se Storie Uit 'n Era van Oorlog en Vrede*, (Pretoria, J. L. van Schaik, 1993), p. 53.

74 TRC, volume 2, chapter 3, §226. Evidence before the Commission also suggests that, in some instances, the security forces were able to arrange for killings to be conducted by a third party.

75 TRC, volume 4, chapter 8, §56. 32 Battalion, often referred to as the 'Buffalo Battalion', was created in 1976 by Colonel Jan Breytenbach. It largely comprised black soldiers and contained many foreign mercenaries. Its operational strength was approximately 1,500. The officers commanding 32 Battalion were Colonel J. D. 'Jannie' Breytenbach (1976–1977); Colonel G. J. Nel (1977–1978); Colonel Deon Ferreira (1978–1983); Colonel E. G. Viljoen (1984–1988); and Colonel M. B. Delpont (1988–1993). P. Stiff, *The Silent War: South African Recce Operations, 1969–1994* (Alberton, Galago Publishing Company, 1999), pp. 191–196.

1 Reconnaissance Regiment, were also home to professional, black African soldiers, as opposed to conscripts.⁷⁵ However, those soldiers who were considered most successful, in terms of 'Kill-rates' were the hunter-killer units set up in 1979, known as *Koevoet* (Crowbar). An integral aspect of this murderous organisation was the use of turned SWAPO combatants known as *Askaris*.⁷⁶ *Koevoet* was originally set up in imitation of the Rhodesian Selous Scouts:

... which specialised in 'pseudo-operations', a technique learned from British forces in Malaya and Kenya and the Portuguese *flechas* or irregular police troops in Mozambique and Angola. The Selous Scouts, using black troopers disguised as nationalist guerrillas, operated in enemy territory, capturing and interrogating guerrillas and using the intelligence gathered to launch an immediate surprise attack. After such an act of treachery, a captive could not return to his guerrilla organisation but could now be induced himself to become a Selous Scout, by which time he had been definitively 'turned'. Such 'turned' guerrillas were called *Askaris*, a Swahili word acquired by British forces in the Mau Mau insurgency and transmitted via Rhodesian officers to the South African Police.⁷⁷

The Directorate of Special Tasks (DST) was set up in the mid-1970s specifically in response to the independence of Angola.⁷⁸ The officer commanding Special Forces was directly responsible to the Chief of the SADF, bypassing normal channels of command.⁷⁹ In addition, 'all sensitive Special Forces operations were vetted by the Minister of Defence and in the case of particularly sensitive operations, by the State President'.⁸⁰

In the first days of early March 1978, Katutura was struck by a wave of increasingly violent clashes – allegedly between SWAPO and DTA supporters. Calls for a major military operation (later to be known as Operation Reindeer – see above) can be first traced coming from the CSOPS (Chief of Staff Operations) on 27 February, which coincides with the outbreak of troubles in Windhoek.⁸¹ On 8 March 1978, Lieutenant General Constand Viljoen defined his targets; shortly thereafter, planning for Operation Reindeer was approved. This, in turn, coincides with the ending of unrest in Windhoek.⁸²

The original operational orders for Operation Reindeer indicate the extent to which the South African military created incidents and manipulated popular opinion in ways that were beneficial to its perceived interests:

76 *TRC*, volume 2, chapter 3, § 50. 1 Reconnaissance Regiment (1 RR) was based in Durban and consisted of a training component and an operational wing which provided personnel for cross-border raids such as those on Matola and Maseru. In the 1980s it was a predominantly black unit with white senior officers, and with a strength of approximately 1,000. Officers commanding 1 RR were Commandant J. G. 'Jannie' Breytenbach (1972–1975); Major (T/Cmdt) J. C. Swart (1975–1981); Colonel E. Olckers (1981–1983); Colonel A. Bestbier (1983–1988); and Colonel G. Keulder (1988–).

77 *TRC*, volume 2, chapter 2, § 103. 'After the formation of Koevoet, it became standard practice to "persuade" captured guerrillas to "turn" and become askaris assisting Koevoet in the conflict against their former comrades. This was a practice pioneered by the Rhodesian Selous Scouts, the archetypal model for Koevoet and the unit within which most of Koevoet's founding members had learnt their counter-insurgency skills. There is considerable evidence that the process of "turning" was accompanied by torture and that the price of non-compliance was summary execution. Once "turned", these askaris and other Koevoet members are said to have carried out atrocities while disguised as SWAPO fighters in order to discredit the liberation movement, as the Selous Scouts had done during the Rhodesian war'.

78 Ellis, *JSAS*, 24, 2 (1998), pp. 267–8.

79 *TRC*, volume 2, chapter 3, § 42. DST was a highly clandestine operation. Details of the command structure of DST in its early days are sketchy but it is known that then Colonel (later Major-General) Marius Oelschig was the commanding officer of DST's Field Office in Rundu from December 1978 to 1982.

80 *TRC*, volume 2, chapter 3, § 49. From its inception and until the early 1990s, the GOCs Special Forces were Major-General F. W. Loots (1974–1982); Major-General A. J. Liebenberg (1982–1985); Major-General A. J. M. Joubert (1985–1989); and Major-General E. Webb (1989–1991).

81 *TRC*, volume 2, chapter 3, § 48.

82 *TRC*, volume 2, chapter 2, § 21. 'Wilde Nag in Katutura', *Die Suidwester*, 1 March 1978.

83 *TRC*, volume 2, chapter 2, § 24–26. See *Die Republikein*, 22 March 1978 detailing the funeral of Julius Kambirongo, who had been killed in early March.

phase two: beginning D-7: The key idea should be to create the impression of a resumption of SWAPO border violations and attacks on SADF patrols, especially against the local population. The intention would be after a relatively quiet period to refocus attention representing it as a seasonal trend. Shortly before D-1, information should be released on a SWAPO build-up. Thereafter, on D minus 1, *a grave incident (real or imaginary) must take place. Either attempted assassination or cross-border attack on SADF patrol base.* In the case of the latter, some casualties could be attributed to this attack; ...⁸³

The operational orders clearly indicate that the SADF was not above creating incidents and manipulating the true cause of death of its own soldiers. Particularly disturbing, in the light of the above, are the contents of an undated message from SWA Command to the Chief of the Army accompanying the operational orders found by the TRC:

*Contingency plans in progress to create own incidents that can be attributed to SWAPO should insufficient publicity or further SWAPO actions be forthcoming.*⁸⁴

In other words, in March 1978 the SADF, or more particularly DST, was involved in a project designed to cause support for the SADF's intention to expand its role in Angola and Namibia.

Kapuuo was killed on Easter Monday, 27 March, and buried on 9 April. On Ascension day, less than a month later, South African forces launched Operation Reindeer, the largest combined operation carried out by South African forces since the Second World War. In the event, the killing of Clemens Kapuuo was one of the 'incidents' used by the SADF in its justification for the raid on Kassinga.⁸⁵

South Africa and the Killing of Kapuuo

Whilst much of the history of the liberation struggle in Namibia still remains under-researched and unwritten it seems that a strong argument can be made that South African operatives were responsible for the killing of Clemens Kapuuo.

Windhoek in 1978 had a total population of under 200,000 people, of whom 150,000 would have been black. It is probable that there were no more than 5,000 motor vehicles registered in Windhoek at the time. Very few of these vehicles would have been Chevrolet Custom pick-ups and even fewer would have been blue with wrought iron bars. The inquest papers make no mention of any attempt to trace the vehicle that was used – a vehicle which, given its size and cost, would have been noticed had it been abandoned, burnt or simply transferred to another part of the territory.

No firearms were ever recovered, although a recovered bullet casing was sent to Pretoria for ballistic analysis and comparison.⁸⁶ According to the report contained in the inquest, the casing was compared with the casings received earlier, and a negative result was reached.

We know from the affidavit of the Senior Medical Superintendent in the state hospital in Windhoek, Dr David J. Parsons, that the South African security police were involved in investigating the assassination. Parsons addressed his affidavit detailing the certification of Kapuuo's death to 'Security Police' Windhoek. Yet none of the security police's findings is included in the docket.

Although Kapuuo clearly had been murdered, the inquest docket indicates that the inquest findings were 'returned for filing' by the chief clerk of the Attorney-General and were not submitted to a judge, let alone to a judge of the supreme court.

⁸⁴ TRC, volume 2, chapter 2, § 27. Italics added.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* § 28.

⁸⁶ Du Pisani, *SWA/Namibia*, p. 391.

⁸⁷ It is interesting that the bullet was handed over into the custody of the captain of a regular SAA flight 744 in Windhoek, to be personally handed over in Johannesburg.

At the time of the TRC (Truth and Reconciliation Commission), former SADF officers set up the South African Defence Force Contact Bureau.⁸⁷ In dealing with Operation Reindeer, the *SADF Contact Bureau's Analysis of the TRC Report* stated that Lieutenant General Viljoen noted in a memorandum to the Chief of the SADF, General Magnus Malan, that Kassinga base was involved in 'The planning, control and co-ordination, including the intelligence function of operations against SWA'.⁸⁸ According to the *TRC Report* one of the priorities of Operation Reindeer was to ensure that 'Documents as well as useful weapons were to be removed'.⁸⁹ Col. C. J. Nöthling has noted of Operation Reindeer in his *Military Chronicle of South West Africa (1915-1988)* that 'A large quantity of equipment and supplies were destroyed and valuable documents seized. The loss of trained personnel and the effect of the information obtained by the security forces was a serious setback for SWAPO'.⁹⁰ The TRC report cited a message sent by SWA Tactical HQ at the time of the raid on Kassinga, which stated *inter alia* that 'A large number of documents were seized in the OC's house'.⁹¹

Thus, it would seem that one of the main objectives of the operation, the seizure of documents, was achieved. Given the above, if SWAPO had been involved in the execution of Clemens Kapuu, the planning, intelligence, coordination and so forth would have been executed from Kassinga base. In addition, given the success of Operation Reindeer, it is more than likely that SADF troops would have captured documents relating to the assassination of Kapuu. However, these documents, if any were captured, were not revealed at the time. Letters and enquiries addressed to the former generals Viljoen and Geldenhuys in 2000, did lead to interviews, but failed to bring to light any of the documents that allegedly proved SWAPO's involvement in the killing of Kapuu. Geldenhuys did state in an interview in 2000 that, on the eve of Namibian independence, documents relating to the murder of Kapuu were offered to Dirk Mudge, chairman of the DTA, by General Willie Meyer, the SADF general 'in charge of closing shop'. Geldenhuys stated that Mudge turned down the offer, on the grounds that the documents would be dismissed as propaganda.⁹² Nevertheless, the *Windhoek Observer* regularly prints extracts from documents allegedly captured during Operation Reindeer, which the newspaper's editor claims to have in his possession.⁹³

In Summing Up

The assassination of Clemens Kapuu was used in part by the SADF as justification for the launching of Operation Reindeer, which heralded the renewed overt involvement of South Africa in southern Angola. Operation Reindeer effectively scuttled any possibility of Namibian independence being attained through the five nations proposal that had been accepted by Vorster on 25 April. Instead Namibian independence came to be delayed for another ten years as South African securocrats sought to socially engineer Namibia into

88 Comprising a panel of the four former chiefs of the SA Defence Force, generals Malan, Viljoen, Geldenhuys, Meiring, and WO1's Holliday and Röhrbeck, and the convenor Maj. Gen. Marais.

89 *SADF Contact Bureau's Analysis of the TRC Report*, § 109.

90 *TRC*, volume 2, chapter. 2, § 26.

91 <http://www.rhodesia.myweb.nl/swatf.htm>

92 *TRC*, volume 2, chapter 2, § 38.

93 Interviews conducted with General Geldenhuys in Pretoria, during May and July of 2000.

94 'Recalling the Murder of a Son of the Soil', 25 March 2000, and 'Did South Africans Kill Clemens Kapuu?', 2 September 2000, both in *The Windhoek Observer*.

something more to their liking. During this period, Namibian society came to be highly militarised. The South African proxy army, the South West African Territorial Force, was established and compulsory conscription was introduced for all male Namibians south of the 'Red Line'.⁹⁴ The war became highly ethnicised; packaged as a war between Ovambo 'terrorists' and other Namibians within the various ethnic units of SWATF.

The assassination and the blame for the assassination, which was placed upon SWAPO, were used to justify the South African security forces' crackdown on SWAPO activists still living within Namibia. Kapuuo's assassination ensured that many Herero came to support the DTA *en masse*. The perception that SWAPO had killed Kapuuo effectively ended any form of dialogue that may have existed between SWAPO and large sections of the Herero population.

Conclusion

If the killing of Kapuuo was a covert South African operation, it was a gamble, but one which paid off. It seems possible that the assassination of Kapuuo was one of the 'incidents' mentioned prior to the launch of Operation Reindeer in the undated memo from SWA Command to the Chief of the Army. This referred to 'contingency plans in progress to create own incidents'.⁹⁵ Operation Reindeer not only scuttled Namibian independence, but it also destroyed any possible overt western support that Vorster's regime might have hoped to have gained from his policy of *détente* and a possible form of Namibian 'independence'. The leaking by military intelligence of information that led to 'Muldergate' and the 'information scandal', sealed the fates of Vorster and his henchmen.⁹⁶ Vorster's days were numbered. Henceforth, P. W. Botha and his securocrats would come to determine southern African politics.

Conspiracies are not the usual haunt of academic historians, who should certainly refrain from becoming involved in such theories. By nature, conspiracy theories defy refutation. Nevertheless, the evidence emerging from the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission as well as the recent trial of Dr Basson have given increased credibility to the incredible.⁹⁷ In this article, a case has been made for the involvement of elements of the South African Defence Force in the killing of Clemens Kapuuo. This view stands in direct contrast to the claim that SWAPO was responsible for his killing.⁹⁸ In this, the article mirrors the work recently completed by Luise White on the

95 The 'Red Line' separates Northern Namibia from the commercial farming districts of Namibia. The 'Red Line' was originally instituted in 1896 as a veterinary precaution, but has evolved into a border separating the 'communal' areas of Namibia from the commercial areas.

96 TRC, volume 2, chapter 2, § 28.

97 Frankel, Pines and Swilling, *Resistance and Change*, p. 5.

98 During the trial of Dr Wouter Basson, the former head of the SADF's covert chemical and biological weapons programme, the prosecution charged that between 1981 and 1988 more than 200 SWAPO members were poisoned and then dumped into the sea from an aircraft. According to the indictment, this was done to relieve 'overpopulation' in an internment camp. '200 Swapo detainees were "dumped in sea"', *The Namibian*, 10 August 1999. H. E. Purkitt and S. F. Burgess, 'South Africa's Chemical and Biological Warfare Programmes: a Historical and International Perspective', in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 28, 2 (2002), pp. 229-253.

99 There are other views as to what happened: people have also argued that Kapuuo was killed on account of the power struggles within the DTA or within Herero society itself. In early August 2000, the author and Casper Erichsen conducted an interview with Chief Kuaima Riruako in the parliament buildings in Windhoek. In the course of the interview, which dealt primarily with Riruako's activities in exile, he stated that Katuutire Kaura, current president of the DTA, the erstwhile official opposition in Namibia, had been in Jamba, the UNITA stronghold in southern Angola, shortly after the killing of Kapuuo. According to Riruako, Kaura had told him that the South Africans had hired a UNITA hit team in Jamba to assassinate Kapuuo. He also alleged that that this hit team had been flown in and out of Windhoek by the SADF. For his part, Kaura has refused to comment on Riruako's allegations. Interview conducted with Riruako in Windhoek, 21 August 2000.

assassination of Herbert Chitepo. In the case of Chitepo there have been four confessions to the killing and at least as many accusations. As with the assassination of Chitepo, it is possible that we will never know who killed Kapuuo. In the absence of a systematic history of the liberation struggle, it seems as though the struggle will remain fertile ground for conspiracy theorists for many years to come.

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