

Death and the Contemporary, Special double issue, *New Formations: A Journal of Culture/Theory/Politics*, 89–90 (2017).

Reminiscent of Nietzsche's famous axiom 'God is dead' in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*,<sup>1</sup> the collection of articles entitled *Death and the Contemporary* could fairly be summarised through a similarly resounding, yet more paradoxical, statement 'death is dead'. Retreated from 'contemporary everyday life, withdrawn to non-places of nursing homes, hospitals, hospices, funeral parlours, crematoria',<sup>2</sup> death is continuously reconceptualised. This sentence about the withdrawal of death from, I might add, Western contemporary life, travels across this double issue of *New Formations*, which deals with the topic of death from an interdisciplinary perspective. While the volume posits itself to also deal with it from an international perspective, it must be noted that only its resonance in the West is addressed.

The volume contains thirteen articles and ten book reviews. This review focuses on the articles, which could be grouped according to themes: death and the (in)visible, death and technological advancement, death and sexuality, death and fiction, and so forth. But their categorisation can also be in relation to different functionalities that link concepts,<sup>3</sup> where the role of literature and photography can be discussed as an erotic fetishisation of death, or where the role of the drone, the electric chair or medical equipment can be that of exerting power over living or dying. The reader is left with the possibility to examine these different strands and to make connections that end up threading different patterns in the fabric of the book. In this sense, the volume is cohesive and reads very well in multiple directions, without a specific order.

The opening article, 'The Prisoners of Starvation, or *Necessitas dat legem*' by Warren Montag, analyses how the concept of *property* has been removed from the subordination of the imperative to 'help live' and instead generated entire sections of the population to be 'abandoned to starvation'.<sup>4</sup> The need to protect property often happens at the expense of the *other*. As employed through the volume, the concept of the *other*, in Derrida and Levinas' terms, is conceptualised as the one not only that is *different* from the self, but also representing 'the outside'<sup>5</sup> through which our own finitude is measured. In the article on 'Deconstructing Death: Derrida and the Scene of Execution', Elizabeth Rottenberg discusses sovereignty as *seer* and *voyeur*,

as the taker of *the super-selfie* through regulating and enforcing the death penalty. Death becomes part of a bigger machinery: the law, the third parties involved, the clock and the time, and the apparatus itself, being the guillotine or the electric chair.<sup>6</sup> At the other end, in his article on 'The Face of the Good Death: Euthanasia and Levinas', Timothy Secret discusses 'the demand to cause the other to live', or the debate surrounding the topic of euthanasia and the ambivalence of ethics about this. While motivated by the desire to 'care for the other', wanting to keep someone alive is 'driven by terror at what would happen to us should we lose them.'<sup>7</sup>

Jonathan B. Platt's article on 'Zoya Kosmodemianskaya: between Sacrifice and Extermination' addresses a similar view concerning power over death, but through a different lens: the power of repurposing death for political, journalistic or literary discourse. The picture of Zoya Kosmedemianskaya, a partisan who was executed by German forces during the battle of Moscow in 1941, is described: Zoya lies in the snow, head tilted back, breast exposed. The effect it has on the viewer is to invite 'a desirous gaze',<sup>8</sup> thus merging the lines between death and the erotic. The same 'desirous gaze' is depicted in 'The Violations of Empathy', in which Jennifer Cooke discusses how empathy is understood and employed in poetry. Reimagining the *other* creates an intimacy where the possessor of that body, in death, has no agency over the gaze of the poet who thus appropriates it. Bridging in a more explicit manner the issue of sexuality and death is the article by Lisa Downing, 'Dying for Sex: Cultural and Forensic Narratives of Autoerotic Death'. The way in which society exercises power over the male and female right to pleasure is extended to censorship after death, according to taboos and normative gender expectations. Death and sex collapse in a discourse on normalcy versus abnormalcy and, as in the article on the death penalty, on what is rendered visible or invisible in public discourse.

Death intimacy is also discussed by Francois Debrix in 'Horror beyond Death: Geopolitics and the Pulverization of the Human'. Drones and suicide bombers not only destroy the uniqueness of the body, but threaten to pulverise the human condition itself. This annihilation by drones, the eye of the Gorgon which pulverises whoever dares to reciprocate the stare, acquires a different meaning when the drones are seen as an extension of the human body. Similarly, in 'Drone Poetics' Andrea Brady describes such extensions as 'mobile spaces of predation'.<sup>9</sup> What the author calls 'the specific nature of the voyeuristic pleasure' is replicated in the art of personifying the drones through poetry.

The predatory desire manifests in photography as the camera recomposes the (dead) bodies it captures on film. In 'Why Have the Dead Come Back? The Instance of Photography', Roger Luckhurst explores political and aesthetic values of images of the dead, and the disarticulation of the body 'into separate systems' which start to inhabit a space of liminality. This in-between is also explored in 'Imaginary Intimacies: Death and the New Temporalities in the Work of Denise Riley and Nicholas Royle', by Georgina Colby. Here, death as intimacy is connected to losing a beloved other, which suspends the survivor in 'the timeless time'.<sup>10</sup> Death and life are then experienced 'in and outside time': a-temporal, *deep time*, layered.

The transforming of the experience of death into a poetic form that makes the concept understandable and 'narratable'<sup>11</sup> is also addressed in 'Blind Seeing:

## Book Reviews

Deathwriting from Dickinson to the Contemporary', by Peter Boxall. The living and the dead exist in a continuum and are depicted through the concept of 'blind seeing'<sup>12</sup> or a kind of 'lucidity' that mediates the act of 'seeing itself'.<sup>13</sup> The article on 'Sites of Death in Some British Fiction' addresses death disappearing from 'contemporary everyday life' and, as discussed at the start of this review, finding ways of emerging in other formats. The corpse becomes the bearer of evidence to be traced 'genetically, medically, forensically' and becomes separated from identity.<sup>14</sup>

As the essays in this volume have shown, death has simultaneously withdrawn from the normative visibility and re-emerged on different planes. The articles included in this volume depict the fascination, fear, desire to appropriate, to distance from, to transgress other concepts, through understanding and 'narrativising' death. Death in the contemporary is thus, in the broad sense, perceived and constructed as a constant negotiation with the core of the self. While the issues discussed in the articles can represent the history of engaging with the concept of death through various tools, such as photography, literature, technology, the articles interlock in a dynamic which comes full circle through managing to go a step further. They engage the reader at an intimate level, through addressing the relationship with the self, *otherness* and their (in)conceivable finitude.

Adina-Loredana Nistor  
University of Groningen, the Netherlands

## Notes

- 1 F. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (London, Penguin Classics, reprint edition, 1974).
- 2 R. Hampson, 'Sites of Death in Some Recent British Fiction', *New Formations*, 89–90 (2017), 212–29, at 212.
- 3 See E. Viveiros de Castro, *La Mirada del Jaguar. Introduction al Perspectivismo Amerindio. Entrevistas* (Buenos Aires, Tinta Limon, 2013).
- 4 W. Montag, 'The Prisoners of Starvation, or *Necessitas dat legem*', *New Formations*, 89–90 (2017), 12–29, at 13.
- 5 E. Rottenberg, 'Deconstructing Death: Derrida and the Scene of Execution', *New Formations*, 89–90 (2017), 30–47, at 42.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 T. Secret, 'The Face of the Good Death: Euthanasia and Levinas', *New Formations*, 89–90 (2017), 71–84, at 80.
- 8 J. B. Platt, 'Zoya Kosmodemianskaya between Sacrifice and Extermination', *New Formations*, 89–90 (2017), 48–70, at 48.
- 9 A. Brady, 'Drone Poetics', *New Formations*, 89–90 (2017), 116–136, at 135.
- 10 G. Colby, 'Imaginary Intimacies: Death and the New Temporalities in the Work of Denise Riley and Nicholas Royle', *New Formations*, 89–90 (2017), 170–191, at 191.
- 11 P. Boxall, 'Blind Seeing: Deathwriting from Dickinson to the Contemporary', *New Formations*, 89–90 (2017), 192–211 at 192.

- 12 Ibid., p. 193.  
 13 Ibid., p. 210.  
 14 Hampson, 'Sites of Death', p. 227, n. ii.

Lenore Manderson, *Surface Tensions: Surgery, Bodily Boundaries and the Social Self* (Walnut Creek, CA, Left Coast Press, 2011, 295 pp., £32.99, paperback).

Taking the human body as her starting point, Lenore Manderson guides the reader through an exhaustive review of recent social science research on medical interventions that disrupt the body's surface, challenging the social construction of the categories normal and pathological, as well as theories of embodiment and well-being. She expertly weaves together research materials collected over more than a decade, including interviews with Australian men and women living with transformed bodies, popular cultural representations of the cyborg bodies made possible by late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century biotechnologies and, when needed to advance her argument, a historical review of biomedical developments. The result is an exceptional book, straddling the disciplinary boundaries of anthropology, the medical humanities, disability studies and biomedicine. While the empirical material presented is interesting in its own right, Manderson's forays into social theory and her demonstration of the ways that past imaginaries of cyborg solutions anticipate present and future biotechnologies are both provocative and convincing. The case she presents forces us to take seriously her argument that the normal and the pathological (*pace* Canguilhem) are not only constructed within the context of biomedicine; biomedical interventions, as well as the promise of progress and hope entwined in biomedical narratives, invite people to question and create new material understandings of what is pathological and what is normal.

The book begins with a fifteen-page preface in which the author reflects on her own experience with physical disability and the effects it has had on her sense of self and well-being. We learn that while she was involved in the researching and writing of the book, the author lost use of one hand, suffering excruciating but short-lived pain, as well as personally learning the various ways humans adapt to physical loss, working through practical, emotional, intimate and social challenges while also working toward a 'new normal'. For some, including the author, this might even mean boldly performing a new embodied subjectivity that invites observers to question their (and society's) normative ideas about pathology.

This preface, together with a short prologue recounting the story of Perdita, one of Manderson's ethnographic subjects, who lives with a colostomy, invites the reader to anticipate the arguments that unfold in the rest of the text. We come to see cyborg incursions into the human body not (only) as manifestations of bodily failure, disability and pathology, but also as markers of healing, emergent subjectivity, and new ways of being in the world. For many, the biotechnical intervention is what allows them to get on with life, to get back to working, loving and becoming.

The seven chapters that follow include two opening chapters that provide both theoretical and cultural backdrops to the more ethnographic chapters that follow.

## Book Reviews

In Chapter One, Manderson outlines her project clearly, telling us that the book is about ‘catastrophes of the body. It is not about immediate crises, but about life afterwards,’ and about how people come to see themselves in the wake of critical embodied changes (p. 23). Drawing extensively on Georges Canguilhem, Drew Leder and Henri-Jacques Stiker, she builds a frame for approaching ‘bodily irregularity, anomaly and identity’, which also takes up the work of Irving Goffman, Mary Douglas and Michel Foucault to situate her argument in a particular moment in European thinking when identity politics and projects came to be informed by corporeality, including race, gender, sexuality and disability (pp. 25–6).

Chapter Two takes on the figure of the cyborg, the human body transformed by technology, attending to popular cultural renditions of fabulated beings, as well as the biomedical practices that contain the air of the miraculous, even as they become rather mundane. Tying cyborg imaginaries and narratives to the modern project, Manderson highlights the ways that biotechnology invites us to ‘queer’ that which is considered normal and challenge, among other things, the ‘normal’ progress of disease and ageing.

In the four chapters that follow, the author draws on a range of bodily conditions that create what she terms ‘surface tensions’, requiring individuals to adapt body and soul. This marks an unusual ethnographic project, given that most medical anthropological research tends to be disease or condition centred. By contrast, Manderson is interested in ‘people who have new body parts, replacements or prostheses, or have lost body parts but still perceive them through phantom pain, or who live with parts from others’ bodies’ (p. 46). In particular, she explores the post-surgical lives of people living with stomas, artificial limbs, breast prostheses and implants, transplant recipients and people on dialysis, who are quite literally being kept alive by machines. By working across these conditions Manderson is able to develop the common theme of reconstituted identity for individuals, while also demonstrating attendant societal changes on a much larger scale.

Although the author is careful to consider the ways that class, race, age and nationality shape access to biotechnical fixes, as well as how such fixes come to be incorporated into new sensibilities of normalcy, the ethnographic material makes clear the important ways that gender intersects with emergent cyborg selves. This is true not only for the ways that individual men and women come to terms with bodies altered through biomedical intervention, it is also true for the particular ways that cyborg bodies are imagined in the public sphere. The reproduction of the disturbingly fantastical graphic artwork, *Overstepping*, by Julie Rrap, in the book’s concluding chapter drives home the point that the ways human bodies are re-sculpted are often in keeping with cultural moulds that limit femininity (and sometimes masculinity) to narrow physical ideals (p. 258).

This is a book that will be of interest to people in the social sciences (especially anthropology and sociology), cultural studies, history of medicine and the medical humanities. Although the book is well worth reading from cover to cover, each chapter also stands on its own. I would recommend this book to academic professionals, as well as to university students interested in thinking across disciplinary boundaries to understand the ways that individuals and societies are shaped by emergent

technologies, as well as the ways that societies anticipate the coming of particular cyborg possibilities.

Eileen Moyer  
University of Amsterdam

Casey Golomski, *Funeral Culture. AIDS, Work, and Cultural Change in an African Kingdom* (Bloomington, IN, Indiana University Press, 2018, 215 pp., \$30.00, paperback).

The last two decades have seen a marked renewal of anthropological and historical interest in death, corpses and funerals across the African continent, and beyond. Sparked perhaps most definitively by Verdery's 1999 *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies*,<sup>1</sup> this resurgence has fed into, and out of, a wide variety of both older and more recent discussions stretching from (to name only a few) the politics of funerals, land and belonging, to violence, post-conflict transition and resolution; and from forensic archaeology and the exhumation and reburial of human remains, to new critical debates about the display and restitution of human remains from museums; and from rising concerns about the commercialisation of death and the commoditisation of human organs and substances, to the vagaries of the HIV/AIDS, Ebola and other epidemics, amid a proliferation of new techniques of end-of-life care, pathology and the medicalisation of death. This has become a huge and diverse field, sparking a range of new publications, such as, indeed, this journal, *Human Remains and Violence: An Interdisciplinary Journal*. And it is this broad area of academic endeavour in which the book under review, Casey Golomski's empathetic ethnography of Swaziland, *Funeral Culture. AIDS, Work, and Cultural Change in an African Kingdom*, finds its obvious home.

Golomski engages significantly with a number of key debates within this field, most noticeably the second or third wave of writing about the long-term social and cultural effects of the changing HIV/AIDS pandemic, Swaziland's suffering from which was unrivalled in a region already by far the worst affected globally. In this way, the book also contributes to the now large body of historical work on changing funerary practices across the region as well as the burgeoning new anthropological literature on Pentecostalism, and the changing politics of burial, land and belonging this has fed into. Golomski is adept at handling and engaging with these expanding literatures, based on his on fine-grained ethnography. While it is likely that the substantial new understandings the book offers of how the AIDS pandemic has affected everyday practices and materialities of life, death and care-giving in Swaziland will be very well received, it is his original descriptions, discussion and analysis of new forms of life and funerary insurance in particular (chapter 3) which will probably be most widely noted, celebrated and cited. There is some very original stuff here, particularly his account of how the rapid expansion of Swaziland's life insurance market built upon, and then transformed, an existing plethora of burial societies and cooperatives with the promise of ensuring 'decent' and 'dignified' funerals in

## Book Reviews

the future, which is in many ways a profoundly social concern and therefore also often a secretive one.

Readers will also enjoy his sympathetic and insightful discussion of some of the more garish aspects of contemporary funerary practices and material culture; the plastic flowers and other tacky memorial trinkets, and especially the 'take-away' food culture of funerals, which Jean Comaroff previously dismissed as the 'banal accoutrements of death'.<sup>2</sup> Golomski convincingly shows how Swaziland's complex and lively 'new funeral culture' and its 'expanded market of life insurance ... more consumer options for tombstones and caskets, funeral feasts, and catering, morgues and funeral parlours, the country's first crematorium, new Christian religious practices of healing and resurrection, and pharmaceutical and social resources of global health and humanitarian aid entities,' is 'anything but banal'.<sup>3</sup>

But to limit an assessment of this book to its undeniably significant contributions to the new broad literature on changing death in Africa would be to do it something of a disservice. This is *not only* a very good ethnography about changing meanings, experiences and practices of death in a particular part of the continent. It is also a book full of ethnographic thick description and evocative analysis about everyday *life* in Swaziland, Africa's last 'absolute monarchy'; about change amid continuity and vice versa; and about how the two – life and death – are inevitably bound and intertwined in transforming ways. Perhaps most of all it is about what it takes – the *work* that it takes, socially, culturally and spiritually as well as economically – to make a *dignified* life and death worth living and dying in the early twenty-first century. The significance of how people engage with the challenge of achieving this 'dignity' in death is something that has already been noted by other scholars, in particular by historians of African urban lives in the mid-twentieth century. Golomski's great achievement here is to show what this challenge looks like, and how people respond to it, in the early twenty-first century's wake of a devastating AIDS pandemic, and, of course, in Swaziland's peculiar cultural and political context.

Embedded in the careful work that it took to produce this ethnography there is also a very significant discussion (and perhaps even defence of) 'culture' as a complex, multiple and therefore irreducible ethnographic thing or things, in all its/their diversity of meanings, values and uses. Golomski's commitment to sensitive, rich and empathetic ethnography sustains this concept exactly by refusing to essentialise or reduce it but, rather, by celebrating its incomplete and emergent multiplicity, as it appears contingently but always consequentially in everyday life in Swaziland. And it *is* significant that all this takes place in Swaziland, where a peculiar political and historical context means that discussions around 'culture' and 'Culture', 'tradition' and 'customs' take on a particular shape exactly because of the country's unique geography and history, and the way that its elite maintain their absolutist monarchical and clan rule on the basis of very particular versions and manifestations of it. This extenuates why a discussion around 'culture' and its multiplicity of uses and meanings may be of particular interest and usefulness here; but the implication of *Funeral Culture's* central point that 'the cultural work of ordinary citizens, as part of a changing and globally connected world, can powerfully disrupt cultural essentialisms and political claims about cultural authenticity and morality'<sup>4</sup> is one that

should resound powerfully far across the region and beyond, particularly in the depressingly current context of deepening inequalities, far-rightism and xenophobia, which have become recurring markers of late neoliberal capitalism across the globe.

The first three chapters of the book focus on 'the long term physical, spiritual and economic preparations for death and funerals', dealing with Swaziland and the international community's responses to its enormous HIV/AIDS mortality rates (chapter 1), the 'coterminous' rise of Pentecostalism that accompanied the epidemic (chapter 2) and the neoliberal economic reforms that sparked Swaziland's new, expanding life insurance industry (chapter 3). The focus in the last three chapters shifts towards 'how funerals are produced'.<sup>5</sup> The first of these (chapter 4) focuses on 'body politics', exploring rising cases of 'corpse custody' and 'burial location' disputes, alongside often negative responses to the opening of the country's first crematorium in 2007. Although there is an intention here to consider 'the materiality of human bodies' or, as I prefer, 'corporeality', actually this is one chapter where I felt the analysis could have gone deeper, beyond the rather obvious point that in a context of historical and continuing material dispossession, and ongoing social and ritual obligations linking the dead to the living, the destruction or obliteration of bodies through cremation would not be well received. I would have liked to see more discussion here of bodily materials, and the containment and transformation of corporeal substances that is central to both life making and sustenance, and to effecting the kind of 'dignified' transition through death that is clearly of key concern here. There is some discussion of 'incorporation', but this feels not well followed through. I also wonder whether a deeper consideration of the corporealities of life and death might have offered a better link to the chapters that follow, on the eating (indeed feasting) that accompanies funerals and places such a burden on relatives (chapter 5), and on new materialities of commemoration (chapter 6). I found it hard to avoid the sense that a closer focus on corporeal substances and materials, rather than already bounded bodies, might have afforded a deeper consideration of material flows and substances that are involved in both food preparation and eating, which form a crucial part of the sociality of funerals, as well as a deeper understanding of the changing roles of tombstones, clothing, 'personal ephemera' and other memorabilia as mnemonic or memory objects through which to remember and therefore sustain or even 'hold still' the dead. Just as bodies are sometimes taken for granted here, so are objects and things, although of course I am ready to concede that this minor critique of the book might just as well reflect my own interest in Ingoldian concerns with flows and blockages of materials against any pre-ordained reification of already constituted 'bodies' and 'objects', and we cannot assume that this works for the people of Swaziland, with whom Golomski spent so much careful time.

This was my only slight disappointment with the book, which I otherwise enjoyed immensely for its sympathetic, careful and indeed caring, yet always thick ethnography; and for its sophisticated engagement with a variety of new debates and discussions in the already crowded field of new studies of death in Africa. Thick, sensitive, ethnography-led monographs in anthropology have for a long time become less



## Book Reviews

in vogue than they once were. In *Funeral Culture* Golomski shows us the enormous value of deep, sustained and empathetic ethnographic field-work, and I hope others working across our discipline, and on new studies of death, corpses and funerals across the African continent, will take note.

Joost Fontein  
University of Johannesburg

## Notes

- 1 K. Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburials and Postsocialist Change* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1999).
- 2 J. Comaroff, 'Beyond Bare Life: AIDS, (Bio)Politics, and the Neoliberal Order', *Public Culture*, 19:1 (2007), 197–219, at 203, cited in C. Golomski, *Funeral Culture. AIDS, Work, and Cultural Change in an African Kingdom* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018), p. 4.
- 3 Golomski, *Funeral Culture* p. 4, n. 2.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 182.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 27.

Vilho Amukwaya Shigweda, *The Aftermath of the Cassinga Massacre. Survivors, Deniers and Injustices* (Basel, Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2017, 169 pp., £23, paperback).<sup>1</sup>

On 4 May 1978 South African paratroopers assaulted the refugee camp of the South-West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) at Cassinga, Angola. This raid marked a turning point in a process of war which John Saul has rightly termed the 'Thirty Years War for Southern African Liberation'.<sup>2</sup> In his PhD thesis, which he defended at the University of the Western Cape, Vilho Shigweda, a Namibian historian and former People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN) fighter, musters a range of perspectives to demonstrate persisting controversy around this event, and notably the enduring pain that still haunts the survivors. Shigweda also emphasises shortcomings for which he blames in particular the Namibian government. His study deserves keen interest besides the critical analysis offered, for it is based on forty-five qualitative interviews, mostly with survivors, but also with other witnesses of those times. Moreover, an extensive correspondence by e-mail goes some way towards including perpetrators on the side of the then South African troops. Thus, this books takes the debate around Cassinga to a new level.

Even the mere course of events and decisive circumstances are subjects of controversy. Immediately after the raid, SWAPO stressed that the camp at Cassinga had been a place where refugees from Namibia were living, among them many women and children. This contrasts starkly with the South African claim at the time, which primarily saw Cassinga as a military establishment, and thus as a legitimate target in warfare. Shigweda contrasts the accounts by Namibian survivors with the persistent claims of leading paratroopers. However, he leaves no doubt that credence

has to be given in the first place to the recollections of Namibian survivors who, at times in ghastly, concrete detail, report bodily mutilation and psychological trauma. Above all, detailed accounts of the course of events as experienced by those living in the camp refer to the summary shooting of the helpless and/or heavily wounded, which also included bayonetting people. In contradistinction, former South African commanders simply deny such occurrences with a view to salvaging the version of Cassinga as a military establishment and thus allowing the entire operation to appear as a legitimate military strike.

Shigweda gives special attention to the prolonged debate on the photo image that went around the world in 1978 and has become something of an emblem of the massacre of hundreds of Namibians: dead bodies stacked up in an open mass grave. His research partners assured Shigweda that this photograph was taken several days after the event, when press people were brought to Cassinga and one of the mass graves was opened up again. However, Shigweda is not too concerned with the questionable character of the image, which has also been repeatedly used by South African propaganda. Yet he reports the univocal response of his research partners when confronted with the image: they felt deeply hurt and enraged, since in their view the photo in no way conveys their suffering and anguish.

This finding serves as a starting point for two considerations: on the one hand, Shigweda stresses the clear distinction that needs to be made between 'memory' and 'testimony', where the latter designates the direct, unquestioned recollections of the survivors and is harnessed, not least to the concerns of the independent state of Namibia. At the same time, this state's policy in the field of memory is subject to scathing critique from this perspective. Criticism is directed in particular at the blanket amnesty extended for all perpetrators on all sides, which formed a vital part of the negotiated transition to independence in 1989/90. In these terms, 'amnesty' is understood in the context of an agreement termed as 'reconciliation' and which comes down to keeping silent about the crimes committed during the war on all sides. In this way, not only were the culprits exempted from prosecution, but any serious investigation into what had happened was in fact forestalled. Shigweda demonstrates what this means, in particular by looking at the activities of the paratrooper units. They still celebrate the day of the massacre, commemorating the event as a heroic military feat, although in South Africa under majority rule they are no longer in a position to do this with ceremony and in full public view.

However, the interviews also testify to the considerable unhappiness of the survivors with the form of commemoration in independent Namibia. Certainly, immediately after independence 4 May was declared a public holiday. But this does not change a situation where those who were the immediate victims and eyewitnesses feel excluded from the proceedings, where little note is taken of their experience. Moreover, many people in Namibia who were made victims of war at Cassinga, as well as on many further occasions, feel neglected today. This circumstance is also symbolised in the scant attention given to the mass graves at the site of the erstwhile camp in Angola. Similarly, for the human remains which had been deported to Germany during colonial times, this lack of attention by officialdom contrasts with people's wish to identify the bodies in the graves and to bury them at home, in their

## Book Reviews

places of origin. Thus, for those people affected, unless and until what happened is clearly established and identified as the object of genuine reconciliation, the constantly repeated call for 'reconciliation' will remain an empty slogan. From this perspective, the aftermath of Cassinga is a sad story which adds to the deficits in the politics of Namibian memory. To be sure, Shigweda has opted to leave aside the question of how the problems he identifies may relate to the rather triumphalist image of a military victory over the South African army that is officially projected, and which he also addresses occasionally. Such considerations would also pertain to the *spy drama* which victimised hundreds of activists in southern Angola.

Nevertheless, this book is a very moving read that invites careful reflection. However, the book would be much more accessible and effective had it been edited properly – or, indeed, at all. It is full of minor and also major grammatical mistakes; a lengthy part of the main body text also appears in a footnote, and at times the text is overly sententious. Here the author might have been even more convincing if he had taken a more distanced stance.

However, a new and centrally important dimension has been decisively charted here. This dimension is of great relevance not just for the ways the Cassinga massacre is treated among the Namibian public and beyond, but more generally for the memory politics pursued by liberation movements in power. Shigweda takes his rightful place among a crop of younger Namibian historians who recently have not only provided highly interesting, stimulating work but have also shown courage in taking a stand, where necessary, in critiquing the official version of history.

Reinhart Kößler  
Arnold Bergstraesser Institute, Freiburg, Germany

## Notes

- 1 This review was published in German in *PERIPHERIE*, 1 (2018), 109–11.
- 2 See e.g. J. S. Saul, *The Next Liberation Struggle: Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy in Southern Africa* (Brecon, Merlin Press, 2005).