

SHADOWS ASKING AN ECHO TO DANCE

*Navigating ambiguity: How former conscripts(1980-1990)
navigate memories of induction into the SADF
in post-apartheid society*

by Stephen Symons

PhD Thesis

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“Shadows asking an echo to dance”¹

Navigating ambiguity:

*How former conscripts(1980-1990) navigate memories of induction into the SADF
in post-apartheid society*

by

Stephen Symons (u18389172)

Submitted to the

University of Pretoria

in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Historical and Heritage Studies

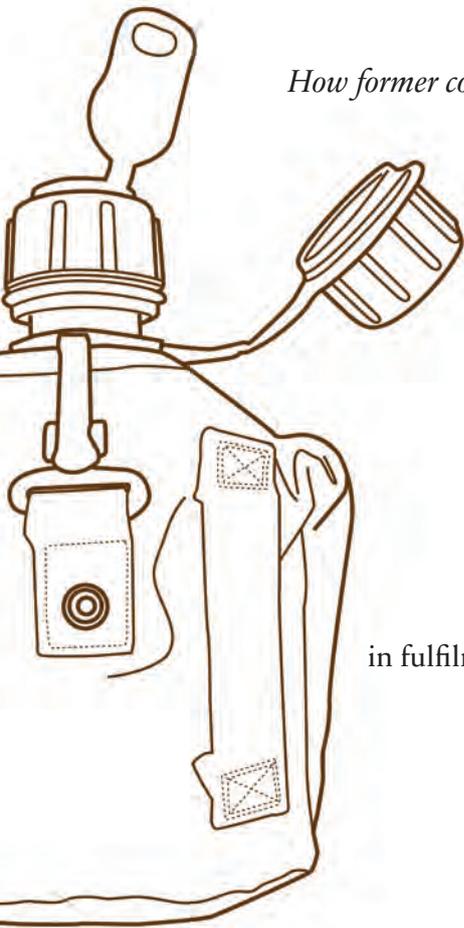
Date of submission: 15th January 2019

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¹ Adapted from a line from a Carl Sandburg poem: ‘Poetry is an echo asking a shadow dancer to be a partner.’ Sandburg, C., Hendrick, G. and Hendrick, W. (1996). *Selected Poems*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace, p.269.





DECLARATION

I, Stephen Symons, hereby declare that the work on which this thesis is based is my original work (except where acknowledgements indicate otherwise) and that neither the whole work nor any part of it has been, is being, or is to be submitted for another degree in this or any other university.

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My son was conscripted ¹

On the third night, after two days of gales,
air and memory collapsed into stillness
and I dreamt my son was conscripted —
the parts of his body that were once mine
were being ushered to a bus or a train.

On the morning of his leaving
I stood at his door and watched him wake
with strange shoulders and heard the sigh of a man
offered breath by a boy's heart. Overnight, I had become *my* father,
watching *my* son fade to a war of another father's making.

A reluctance of feet, shuffling towards
what some would call manhood. One carrying a tennis racket,
another a guitar, hauling bags and pillows stuffed with a
childhood's worth of laughter and the bedside whispers of mothers. Made
weightless by love, these are things not on the list sent by the army.

Morning became a planet of gravel lodged in my throat,
somewhere inside me something solar delighted in burning away
my son's presence. Somewhere inside my wife a dam was about to
flood a valley of her own making. It would drown us all.
Something inside *all* of us held our words to ransom.

Then the dream slowed to the rise and dip of a bee
heavied by pollen, following my son towards
cremations of morning light, past the idling bus or
shudder of the train's impatience, past good-byes
littered like egg shells, towards

this country that still demands its pound of flesh in the form of children —
so I prayed the prayer of an unbeliever, that they would not
steal his shoulders or stitch silence to his breath,
bloodied and spittled — like so many of us who have slept with death.



¹ *My son was conscripted* by Stephen Symons first appeared in the South African literary journal, *NEW CONTRAST* 182 (Winter 2018 issue).

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Abstract

This thesis seeks to contribute fresh insights into the construction of militarised masculinities, memory and whiteness during the height of the apartheid era. It focuses specifically on the militarised childhoods and conscription of white males into the former South African Defence Force (SADF), and how their memories navigate the ambiguities of a post-apartheid space. Situating itself within the interdisciplinary nexus of memory, masculinity, whiteness and creative visual studies, the study focuses on the decade from 1980 to 1990, primarily because this period marks both the apogee and decline of the regime's political and military hegemony.

While the South African Border War (1966-1989) has drawn much scholarly discussion and research, induction and basic training in the SADF remain a largely unexplored domain, particularly within the disciplinary framework of the study. The thesis responds to this gap, highlighting not the battlefield but memories of induction and basic training in the SADF. Drawing on a series of one-to-one interviews with ex-conscripts, I explore the formative and ritualised stages of the development of white militarised masculinities during the 1980s. These memories draw on furtive histories that have been largely excluded from presiding narratives, yet continue to resonate in the present, assuming the guise of collective or individual counter-memories, that are often infused with nostalgia.

I propose that conscription was perceived by white South African males, including their families and white apartheid society at large, as a mandatory rite of passage into adulthood, the price of white citizenship and privilege. This prompts a deeper exploration of the ex-SADF conscript's sense of self within the contested narrative geographies of post-apartheid South Africa.

The introduction and opening chapter provide a robust theoretical and methodological framework for the study, followed by chapters that trace the process of militarised childhoods,

induction into the SADF and basic training in chronological order. The thesis then shifts to an expository and analytical exploration of the creative component.

The written component is complemented by two exhibitions that combine traditional photography with digital imaging techniques, military *materiel* and architectural spaces (visit: <http://www.stephensymons.co.za> to view the exhibitions). The venues included an ex-SADF military base, the Castle of Good Hope in Cape Town (2017), followed by an on-campus exhibition at the University of Pretoria (2018). The creative component proposes new vantage points within the framework of creative visual studies. In this sense it intends to act as an alternative articulation in terms of knowledge production within the framework of masculinity, whiteness and memory, encouraging epistemological shifts relating to visual discourses within a post-apartheid space.

The conclusion includes reflections of how the thesis may encourage further inter-disciplinary methodologies aimed at mapping the narratives of ex-SADF conscripts. Additionally, the conclusion proposes that research of this nature may be of relevance to transitional contexts elsewhere, in which ex-conscripts or veterans, now seek means of reintegration into the society they call home.



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Special thanks to Lloyd Ross of Shifty Records for allowing me to use music from the Shifty Records back catalogue for my exhibition and website. In addition, I wish to thank Peter Cohen, and the members of the band *Bright Blue* for allowing me to use music from their back catalogue for the *NUTRIA* exhibitions. Their kindness provided the ideal musical backdrop to the *NUTRIA* exhibitions.

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Lastly, special thanks must go to my family, my wife Julie, and my children, Thomas and Emma. Thank you for your endless love, support and belief in me. My sacrifice became your sacrifice too.

List of abbreviations and acronyms

ANC	African National Congress
APLA	Azanian Peoples Liberation Army
CNE	Christian National Education
CF	Citizen Force (a post-national service member of the South African Defence Force)
DRC	Dutch Reformed Church
ECC	End Conscription Campaign
MK	uMkhonto weSizwe
NGK	<i>Nasionale Gereformeerde Kerk</i>
NP	National Party
PAC	Pan African Congress
PF	Permanent Force (a member of the South African Defence Force)
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
SAAF	South African Air Force
SABC	South African Broadcasting Corporation
SACBC	South African Catholic Bishops Conference
SACC	South African Council of Churches
SADF	South African Defence Force
SANDF	South African National Defence Force
SAN	South African Navy
SAI	South African Infantry Unit (followed by the number of the unit)
SAS	South African Ship (precedes the name of a South African Naval vessel or base)
SU	Stellenbosch University
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UCT	University of Cape Town
UDF	United Democratic Front
UMU	University Military Unit
UN	United Nations
UP	University of Pretoria
WITS	University of Witwatersrand

Keywords

Apartheid

Basic training

Conscription

Counter-memory

Forgetting

Hyper-masculinity

Memory

Masculinity

Militarisation

National service

Nostalgia

Post-apartheid

South African Defence Force

Whiteness

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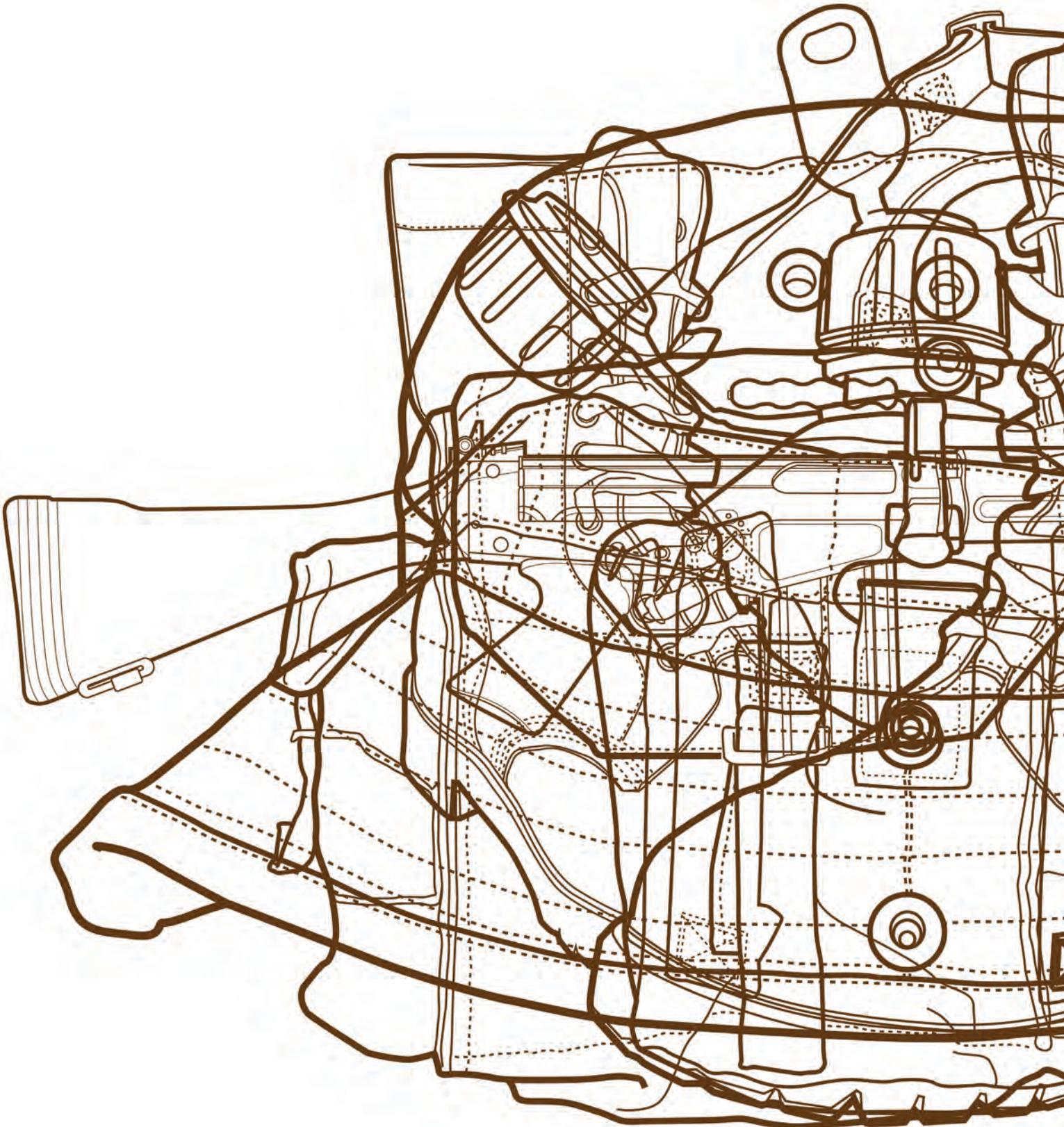
A note on terminology

Throughout this thesis, I use the term *post-apartheid*. For the purposes of this thesis, the term *post-apartheid* serves to mark the period from the inauguration of Nelson Mandela as the President of the Republic of South Africa for his term of office on the 10th May 1994 to the present, up to and including the presidency of Cyril Ramaphosa, who assumed office on the 15th February 2018. The term *apartheid* or references to the *apartheid era* encompasses the period from 1948 to democratic elections in South Africa in 1994. Although apartheid legislation was repealed on the 17th June 1991, fully democratic, multiracial elections in April 1994 effectively marked the end of the apartheid era in South Africa.

The term *conscript* or *ex-conscript* refers to a conscripted member of the South African Defence Force. The term *veteran*, refers to any member of the South African Defence Force, whether a permanent force member or conscript, who has seen active service in a so-called operational area, in most cases on the Angolan border during the South African Border War (1966 - 1989). The term *induction* or *call-up* refers to the physical induction of white male conscripts into the South African Defence Force. The term *national service* is interchangeable with the term *military service* and refers to the compulsory period of conscription of all white male conscripts during apartheid. The term *Permanent Force member* refers to professional personnel or soldiers of the South African Defence Force. The term *basics* is a shortened and generally accepted reference to the period of basic training for conscripts in the former South African Defence Force.

The terms *participant* or *interviewee*, are interchangeable and refer to the men and women who agreed to be interviewed and allowed the narratives or accounts of their militarised childhoods or periods of service in the South African Defence Force to be or included in this thesis.

Lastly, I use double inverted commas (“”) for all direct quotes from references, or for participant quotes within a paragraph. Longer direct quotes are indented from the left margin and separated by means of a paragraph break.





NUTRIA Exhibition installation artwork detail, The Castle of Good Hope, Cape Town, 2017 (photograph: Stephen Symons)



INTRODUCTION



Figure i Photograph of Biermann Company, SAS Saldanha 1990.
The author appears in the foreground, just to the left of the signpost.
(photograph: Stephen Symons)

Introduction

And what were we, us white men, with God on our side, our backs to the wall and our arses on the line on the southern tip of darkest Africa? What were we?

Whatever we were, and whatever it was that we were part of, in the end it left its mark on each and every one of us. Some wear that mark with pride. Some try hide it. Some don't even know it's there. The mark of Cain. The mark of having been part of a machine. Stamped on us like a serial number...

— Greig Coetzee, *Johnny Boskak is feeling funny, and other plays*

My journey begins in my pre-teen years, which were marked by an increased awareness that I was destined to be conscripted into the South African Defence Force (SADF) once I had completed my schooling. The thought of becoming a soldier was fraught with ambiguity, infused with trepidation, and juxtaposed with a boyish sense of pride. My romantic notions of soldiering were typical male constructs born of comic books, chivalrous Biggles novels, British war movies of the 1950s and Saturday afternoons spent playing soldiers with neighbourhood friends. Yet, the inevitability of conscription cast an ominous shadow over my youth, including tens of thousands of other white boys, during the apartheid era. Conscription prescribed a complex matrix of acceptable masculine responses within familial and societal spaces, abetted by schools and religious institutions. State endorsed sound bites such as, “the army will make a man of you” infiltrated the intimacy of father-son relationships, school classrooms and church sermons (Cock and Nathan 1989). I clearly remember my father reminding my brother and me that the army would “do us a load of good”. Suchlike statements served a complex role, oscillating between admonishment, threat and as a means to instil a sense of national pride and unswerving loyalty to the state.

Nonetheless, my almost exclusively white middle-class childhood years, and those of my fellow classmates growing up in apartheid-era South Africa of the 1970s and 80s were indelibly marked by the presence of the South African Defence Force, and ubiquity of *nutria* brown uniformed men in our lives. Conscripts donning their uniforms in public or in church on a Sunday morning reinforced the idealized image of the loyal *troepie*, as defenders of home and hearth from shadowy hordes of communists intent on invading the country. High school pointed to compulsory registration for national service and the national cadet programme which involved donning a *nutria* brown uniform and learning to drill with my classmates.

Looking back, we were oblivious to the chilling historical similarities to the *Hitler-Jugend*.¹ Militarisation, culminating in national service was perceived by white society as normative, clearly mapped out from childhood as an inescapable performative right of passage for white youths (Conway 2012). Propagandistic South African television and radio broadcasts sold national service as a civic duty of the highest order, as an honour bound sacrifice charged with religious intensity. I recall an overwhelming sense of being swept along by a powerful national current, that elevated my sense of whiteness as being superior to other races. After all, we were told that it was *us* whites who were stemming the tide of communism. We were the protectors of the nation, and as a white male, I accepted these skewed attempts to legitimise the SADF's role in the Border War without question and gave little thought to the moral implications of my stance. Naivety served the needs of the regime, and I was a teenager, barely eighteen years old.

Additionally, avoiding or delaying conscription in apartheid-era South Africa was the preserve of the wealthy, or those courageous enough to refuse to serve. Non-compliance was unheard of and dismissed as a cowardly option. Most young white males simply accepted their lot, relying on the consolations of fathers, older brothers or family friends that “if you kept

¹ The Hitler Youth or *Hitler-Jugend* was the youth organisation of the Nazi Party in Germany, established in 1922.

your head down, you would get through it". Interestingly most fathers of the conscription generation had little direct experience of war, most of whom were too young to have served in the Second World War. Some had served in the Korean War, but they were in the minority, considering South Africa had only committed one air force squadron to the conflict (Baxter 2012). Yet, their advice did little to assuage a growing sense of dread which I internalized for fear of being singled out as a *moffie*, a derogatory Afrikaans expression for a gay man. A *moffie* was the antithesis of the hyper-masculine ideals that so many white South African males had been socialized to ascribe to. As I neared my final year of school, the year of my matriculation, I distinctly remember a sombre Sunday evening television news broadcast listing the names of SADF conscripts killed in action on the Angolan border, presented against the heroic backdrop of a silhouetted bronze statue of SADF soldier. The names seemed somehow disconnected from my sheltered lifestyle, much like the Border War itself, which had entered white consciousness as South Africa's Vietnam, a far-off conflict fought on foreign soil (Baines 2003), yet the reality was drawing ever nearer for me as my high school career drew to a close. Of course, I could forestall my 24 months of national service by choosing to study or leave the country. Leaving the country was only an option for a privileged few, and those with family or friends living overseas. I would choose to study as a means to delay the inevitable, which in hindsight simply prolonged my anxiety.

My narrative is one of many, part of a white male template lifted from the apartheid-era, and irrespective of whether it involved actual military service in the SADF or not, the largely unspoken anxieties and trauma that conscription manufactured grazed all white youths and South African society at large. This study, therefore, avoids the well researched Border War, but focuses on the period leading up to and including induction into the SADF. This is a path that all young white men of the conscription era tread, spanning almost two and a half decades, reaching its apogee in the 1980s. Conscription produced a myriad of tangled narratives, some of which I have attempted to unravel by means of this thesis as they are given voice in the contested spaces of the post-apartheid era.

Research Background

There is no white pain or black pain or indian pain or coloured pain.

If we can see that, maybe we can resolve all of this.

— Wally Serote, *Transforming Museums: Mounting Queen*

Victoria in a Democratic South Africa

In 2014 I completed a postgraduate course entitled *Imaging the World in Photographs* convened by Dr Siona O’Connell and Prof. Nick Shepherd. The course focused on photography as a system of representation, one that linked the past, present and future within South Africa. I included a series of seventeen portraits that I had taken as a conscript in the South African Navy in 1990. The portraits were taken during the three-month basic training phase of *national service* in the SADF (South African Defence Force). I persuaded my superiors that a photographic record of the experience would serve the interests of the navy. As a result, I was allowed to document aspects of the basic training phase at SAS Saldanha naval training base. Dr Siona O’Connell was fascinated by the series, specifically how the photos functioned as an archive of a hidden and exclusively white history and suggested I research the topic further.

It is estimated that 600 000 men, in all, were conscripted from white South African society between 1968 and 1993 (Williams 2008). This allowed for the evolution of a complex socialised obligation towards conscription, buttressed by an oppressive political and military regime. The South African Border War and the SADF’s presence in the townships during the 1980s are covered by an extensive body of literature, both within academic (Baines 2008, Connors 2007, Edlmann 2014, Graham 2012, Jones 2013, Lazenby 2012, Olivier 2013, Rees 2010, Warwick 2009) and mainstream publishing (Blake 2009, Blake 2010, Thompson 2006). I discovered that the experience of induction and basic training had not been researched in any scholarly detail, and rarely moved beyond the anecdotal accounts of ex-conscripts.

With this in mind, I began engaging with former conscripts and realised that the period of induction and basic training assumed a pivotal role in how ex-conscripts related to their experiences within the SADF.

Many of the ex-conscripts that I conversed with, particularly those who had not been engaged in combat, saw basic training as a rite of passage within a highly militarised hegemony. These notions continue to resonate decades later in a vastly different South Africa (Conway 2012). The following is an extract from *Chapter 8 (Volume 4) of the Special Hearing: Compulsory Military Service (Conscription)* from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report. It demonstrates the pervasive influence and effects of the experience for ex-conscripts:

13. A psychologist whose clients include ex-SADF conscripts echoed these views. In a written submission to the Commission, Ms Trudy de Ridder of the Trauma Centre for the Victims of Violence and Torture, Cape Town, reported that: Most ex-conscripts report that they, their peers and their community saw service in the SADF as a natural part of growing up and “becoming a man”... The national education system consistently presented military training as a given part of the rites of passage of white men and the moral duty of anyone concerned with defending order and morality (Christianity) against the forces of evil and chaos (Soviet-inspired Communism)...

My experiences with ex-conscripts were characterised by their insistence that they could not have had the tools or information to challenge this view - especially at the age of seventeen or eighteen. Most report that once in the SADF, resistance to the fact of conscription, the chain of command or the politico-military objectives was unthinkable. In fact, most still associate their military experiences with a sense of pride - in their capacity for physical and psychological endurance... (O'Malley 2015)

Research Question

And, on the first occasion where I met De Klerk and his wife she said to me: “General, don’t you think we should do away with national service?” I said: “No Madam, I don’t think so. I think it’s a good thing.” She said: “Ag, die arme ou kindertjies [those poor little children]”. I said to my wife when we drove home that night: “Watch, this woman is going to make us lose national service.” “And it was so”, said Mering.²

— General Georg Meiring (Chief of the Army 1990–93)

My primary research question asks **how ex-SADF conscripts (1980-1990) navigate memories of induction into the SADF in post-apartheid society**. Of primary concern is how ex-conscripts give an account of the experience of induction into the former South African Defence Force, and in turn express and navigate the resultant ambiguities relating to memory, masculinity and whiteness within contemporary South African society. I intend to query how ex-conscripts navigate essentialised identities (of whiteness and gender) within the contested geographies of a post-apartheid space where racial identity is perceived as a form of entrapment (Durrheim et al. 2011). More recently, particularly during the presidency of Jacob Zuma (9th May 2009 – 14th February 2018), the post-apartheid-era has been marked by a number of legislative motions whereby fundamental freedoms of assembly, association and expression have come under threat. One such example is the controversial Protection of State Information Bill (also known as the Secrecy Bill) which is aimed at regulating the classification, protection and dissemination of state information. Christi Van der Westhuizen draws attention to a burgeoning of “populist inflections” during the post-apartheid-era in the *SA Reconciliation Barometer*:

Over the past decade, therefore, an intellectual quest to delegitimise apartheid

² This is an excerpt from a meeting between SADF General Georg Meiring and South African State President F. W. de Klerk (1989–94) in 1990 (Hamann 2001: 182). It appears De Klerk’s wife Marike was instrumental in the decision to do away with compulsory white conscription. Conscription was abolished in 1993 (Williams 2012).

hierarchies has given way to a more personality-driven approach that explicitly wields hierarchical subjugations to accrue support. As considered, if at times problematic, questioning of apartheid versions of identity has been supplanted by a rhetoric that increasingly draws on populist inflections of those very apartheid formulations. The effect is an exacerbation of existing fissures. (Van der Westhuizen 2013: 4)

While the Border War, and to a lesser degree, the internecine conflict in the townships has drawn much discussion and research (Baines 2008, Gear 2002, Scholtz 2013), the induction phase and basic training within the SADF remains a largely unexplored domain, particularly within the disciplinary framework of masculinities, memory and whiteness. My thesis responds to this gap, highlighting not the battlefield or combat environments but an investigation of induction and the basic training phase of SADF conscripts. Although the initial phase of training within the SADF was essentially a non-combat environment, the systemic physical and psychological immersion in a hierarchical military environment, typically occurring during basic training, was designed to impose and reinforce a hegemonic masculinity, and therefore marks a pivotal point within the gendering process that continues to resonate within the present (Conway 2012, Higate 2003, Locke 2013, Luyt 2002).

The primary research question prompts further sub-questions that will be answered within the context of each chapter of the thesis, namely:

1. What modes of expression and vectors of self-reflection are entered into by ex-conscripts as they attempt to navigate and consolidate the past and present?
2. What role does memory and nostalgia play in attenuating and re-framing accounts of induction into the SADF of the 1980s? The role of memory and nostalgia is clarified further under my research aims.

3. What were the forms of prudent compliance by conscripts within SADF structures?
 4. What role did Christian National Education (CNE), family and other youth organisations (such as Scouts and Voortrekkers) play in contributing to the militarisation of young white males during the 1980s?
 5. How do ex-conscripts navigate essentialised identities (of whiteness and masculinity) within the contested geographies of a post-apartheid space?
 6. What were the roles of white conscripts within the SADF? Simply put: Why were they there?
-

Research Aim

A nation's unity depends on a shared identity, which in turn depends largely on a shared memory. The truth also brings a measure of healthy social catharsis and helps prevent the past from recurring.

— Jose Zalaquett, *Balancing Ethical Imperatives and Political Constraints*

The thesis aims to present an extended meditation on the act of navigating the highly charged ambiguities faced by a specific group of white males in contemporary South Africa, namely ex-conscripts of the former South African Defence Force (SADF). Furthermore, this research aims to contribute fresh insights into the construction and concept of masculinity and memory ensuing from experiences of conscription within the SADF.

Situating itself within the interdisciplinary nexus of masculinity, memory and visual studies, the thesis focuses on recollections of the transitional phase of registration for military service (initially occurring within a secondary school environment), induction and basic training in the SADF, as well as the place/role/guises of these highly gendered memories within present-day South Africa. The thesis explores how ex-SADF conscripts now navigate the ambiguous territories of victimisation and perpetration in post-apartheid South Africa. The study engages with and traces conscript narratives (originating from a visual archive and a series of interviews) spanning the decade of 1980 to 1990. This period includes both the apogee and decline of the regime's political and military machinery, marked by demonstrative public opposition towards the SADF (Baines 2008, Baines and Vale 2008, Cock 1991, Cock, and Nathan 1989).

This research has academic worth in that conscript narratives relating to basic training sheds much light on the socialisation process and its subsequent impact – as it marks the first

performative act of citizenship (Conway 2012, Graham 2012) and thus enshrines a formative and ritualised stage of the development of a militarised masculinity, which continues to resonate within white memory. These memories have shifted from previously subjugated spaces and have entered the opportune confessional spaces of the democratic era (Baines 2012, Baines 2014, Doherty 2014, Edlmann 2014).

Herein lies the significance of the research: in that the experiences of conscripts have become counter-memories, which draw on furtive histories that have become largely excluded from presiding narratives (Lipsitz 1990). The related theories of counter-memory proposed by Stuart Hall and Michel Foucault concur with Lipsitz; that absence, silence and representation are interconnected elements in the formation of counter-memories. Hall (1997) and Foucault (1990) assert that institutions of power define what is true and the repetition of these representations construct knowledge regimes that result in the formation of dominant histories from which counter-memories are formed.

Many of these conscript narratives now occupy the realms of cyberspace and social media (Baines 2008 2012). These platforms serve as alternative modes of expression, as forums for catharsis and rekindling camaraderie, arguably as attempts at legitimising the past in a present that acknowledges notably different historical perspectives (2008).

As these collective narratives of counter-memory enter current post-apartheid confessional spaces, a gradual disjunction of subjectivities occurs. Many ex-SADF conscripts are now parents, with sons, and parallels are naturally drawn between past and present, specifically relating to the harrowing process of induction and basic training. By entering parental roles, ex-conscripts are forced to pose deeper questions relating to apartheid-era parental compliance with conscription. These comparative connections between past and present prompt the formation of counter-memories, which in turn allow for discontinuities or interstices through which other memories can emerge and directly challenge longstanding institutionalised memories (Hall 1997, Lipsitz 1990).

The very nature of institutionalised memory involves the use of semiotic systems in which discourse plays a pivotal role (Fairclough, Cortese & Ardizzone 2007). Here, “discourse” is conceived of as a means of representation. This follows Norman Fairclough’s view of discourse as a social practice, and as a specific way of comprehending experience (2007). Norman Fairclough (2003) notes that the term “discourse” can be used in two different contexts, namely as “language in use” (abstractly), or as “a particular way of representing part of the world” (concretely).

Discourse allows an institution to support its interpretation of events, histories and dogmas in the interests of self-preservation and hegemony (Fairclough, Cortese & Ardizzone 2007). Having been part of an institution, in this case the SADF, presupposes a social base within which sharing of memory, experiences and its discourse are conducted. However, discourse (written, spoken and visual) is also crucial to individual cathartic processes of necessary forgetting, not necessarily as an antidote to memory, but as a means of relinquishing redundant notions of masculinity (Epstein 1998). Further exploration of the inextricable relationship between memory and forgetting relating to the experiences of the ex-SADF conscripts is warranted.

This thesis aims to draw on and examine memories that have been forcibly silenced by a long established trend of socialised and militarised masculinities within white South African society. These narratives exist within a memory field that is markedly descriptive, white and self-reflective, often burdened by unspoken trauma, concomitantly related to the trauma of conscripts that were exposed to a combat environment (Caforio 2013, Draper 1999, Doherty 2014, Eldmann 2014). Whereas the trauma of battle has drawn much research over the past century (Bracken and Petty 1998, McVeigh and Cooper 2013), less has been conducted on conscripts who have been trained around the apprehension and expectation of war, but never actually go into battle. The discursive description of what experiences enter memory, how those memories are recalled and infused with nostalgia, and who remembers, serves to explain how the conscript’s construction of the past enters into a contested present.

The sensitive nature of these memories has encouraged a phenomenological approach to the research, comprising a qualitative methodology centred on a series of in-depth interviews with ex-SADF conscripts. Inevitably, this thesis grapples with questions related to victimisation and perpetration. However, it is not a primary aim of the thesis to categorise the conscript as a victim of a militarised regime that systematically inhibited moral thinking and choices (Cock and Nathan 1989), nor is it my intention to portray conscripts as true believers and zealous instruments of a system internationally recognised by *The Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid* in 1973 as a crime against humanity.³ Such perspectives are well established.

³ Read John Dugard's (Professor of International Law Department of Public Law, Faculty of Law, Leiden University) introductory note online: <http://legal.un.org/avl/ha/cspca/cspca.html>.

Rationale

This thesis proposes that conscription was perceived by white South African males (including the families of conscripts) as a mandatory rite of passage into adulthood (Cock and Nathan 1989, Conway 2012), the price of white citizenship and privilege, echoing Arnold Van Gennep's theory of rites of passage (Van Gennep 1960). The process and path of basic training can be effectively described by Van Gennep's rites of passage as the process involves an initial period of separation (from civilian society and family life), a "liminal period" (of exposing the conscript to harsh physical, emotional and mental privations) and finally incorporation and acceptance into a militarised environment (Turner 1969). More specifically, conscription allowed for an indelible physical and mental reinforcing of a racially based militarised masculinity within apartheid South Africa (Conway 2012, Cock and Nathan 1989). These masculinities have been largely suppressed, relegated to introverted and internalised memory fields (Draper 1999, Caforio 2013, Morell 1998). The manner in which these unstable constructs of masculinity and whiteness are expressed and traversed by ex-conscripts within contemporary South Africa is of particular interest to me.

Furthermore, the twenty-year mark after the transition from authoritarianism to democracy may be identified as a threshold (Boraine 2014, Du Preez 2014). South Africans born after 1994 can for the first time, exercise their right to vote. This generational change marks a consolidation of democracy while also posing a significant risk to historical memory as a shift to a younger generation occurs who have no living memory of the experience. Again, this necessitates further exploration, specifically addressing how contested identities of whiteness and masculinity are navigated by ex-conscripts within the present.

Issues relating to popular social representations and discourses of those responsible for violence in South Africa remain generalised and divided, marked by a deep-set racial legacy (Friedman and McKaiser 2009). The notion of the SADF conscript as a perpetrator, and in

other cases, a victim, appears to be aspects of social representation that tend to perpetuate racial stereotypes. The French theorist Serge Moscovici asserts that social representation is a process and the product of social constructs. Social representations are viewed as a system of values, ideas and practices with a dual function, namely for individuals to effectively orientate themselves in an attempt to make sense of their immediate environment, and secondly to allow clear communication with the establishment of codes of common sense for classifying their social spaces and histories (Farr and Moscovici 1984:3-69). These views are not necessarily shaped by reasoning, but a form of “social thinking” that are generated by two fundamental processes, namely anchoring (Moscovici 2001:42-49) and objectifying persons (2001:49-54). The anchoring process involves the labelling and classifying something, including linking it to the past. The process of objectifying is rooted in the detachment of certain phrases or icons from reality, actively involving a shift of meaning, so a new generalised reality is assumed (2001). An example of objectifying was demonstrated on the 23rd of May 2013 when Defence Minister Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula accused opposition members of parliament who were ex-SADF conscripts as “killers for apartheid”. She continued:

I am at the helm of a defence force that talks about peace that advocates for peace and stability in the African continent. I am not in a defence force that was maiming and killing women, civilians and children, at a time when you were conscripted and joined the SA Defence Force. (Independent Online 2013)

The comments of the Defence Minister Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula are by no means unique. Myopic representations of the ex-conscript, presenting little differentiation between conscripts and actual combatants necessitates a deeper elucidation of the experience. Further cross-disciplinary research has the ability to encourage a more human reply to all of those who were affected by conscription. In many instances, white males of the conscription generation are still key role players in South African society. Nkomo (2015) reports that 70% of key management positions are still held by white males, maintaining entrenched privilege

and power for a minority that holds significant economic sway. Wray (2006) asserts that an effective problematising of white identity necessitates a shift from the subordinate to the dominant (in this instance whiteness).

The navigation and decoding of the ambiguities that face all ex-conscripts, not only those who experienced combat, have meaningful implications for the welfare of broader South African society.

Research Design & Methodology

This thesis enters the aforementioned disciplinary framework via an archive of personal correspondence, including narratives, photographs and objects/memorabilia directly related to the research topic (see Chapter Four). My personal archive and visual expressions in the form of an exhibition, website and social media platforms scaffolds the argument, allowing for the development of modes of enquiry that inform the theoretical and supplemental practical component of the research topic. The research methodology will employ three approaches.

My primary investigation will follow a qualitative approach, employing a method of purposive sampling. In this case, the researcher decides on the individual participants, based on who would contribute appropriate data necessitated by the research project. I have relied on two seminal texts as a reference in establishing my interview methodology, namely Kvale (2008) and Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) mode of narrative inquiry drawing on experience and story in qualitative research. This component of the research project includes a series of twenty semi-structured one-on-one interviews with ex-conscripts from various arms of the SADF, including the army, medical corps, navy and air force. A series of further interviews were conducted with white South African males who were contemporaries of conscripts but did not enter the SADF for various (conscientious objection, religious or medical) reasons. The intention of embarking on a series of interviews, rather than relying on one interview, facilitated the evolution of deeper engagement with the participants, and allow their respective narratives to evolve naturally over a number of interviews. A total of 38 interviews took place between the 28th January 2016, and 13th January 2017.

I adopted a phenomenological method, relying on narrative enquiry to underpin my qualitative research methodology. The interviews were preceded by a detailed questionnaire that was emailed to the participants (Please see the addendum). A number of interviews

were also recorded (audio) with the consent of the interviewees, in the hope of providing a lasting audio record of the interview process. Permission for photographic portraits of all consenting participants was also granted, in the hope the portraits would have contributed to the visual component of the research project. This aspect of the interview process was however abandoned. Chapter Four elucidates my decision not to move ahead with portraits of the participants.

The interviews guide the study in the following ways:

- To gain a deeper understanding of ex-conscript experiences of the induction phase of military service in the SADF, particularly when viewed through the lens of post-apartheid South Africa.
- To explore the role of counter-memory within the narratives of ex-conscripts as a means to reveal previously hidden histories.
- To examine encapsulations and intersectionalities of whiteness, belonging and masculinity within the narratives of ex-conscripts, and examine how these constructs are expressed within the present.
- To query intertwined notions of nostalgia and memory on a more intimate level, namely via the interview process, and thus garner fresh insights into how individuals perceive their experience of induction into the SADF in the present-day, given the passage of time, and its catalytic effect on the development of nostalgia as a form of “social emotion” (Davis 1979).

Data analysis follows a specific qualitative method referred to as discourse analysis (DA).

Discourse analysis is a form of content analysis that examines how arguments engage with wider social practices. In addition, I also rely on critical approaches to discourse analysis. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) examines relationships between discourse and power, how inequalities are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk within social and political paradigms. I will be specifically relying on Van Dijk’s (2001) notion that “discursive

power”poses two questions, namely how do dominant groups control public discourse, and how these discourses of power control the mind and actions of the dominated groups.

The written thesis is supplemented by a creative visual component in the form of an exhibition that combines traditional photography with digital imaging techniques, military materiel and architectural spaces within an ex-SADF military space. An exhibition, titled “NUTRIA - Imprints of Conscription into the SADF” forming the supplemental component of the thesis, ran from the 6th June to the 16th June 2017 at The Castle of Good Hope in Cape Town. The Castle served as the provincial headquarters of the South African Army and has strong historical ties with the South African Defence Force.

The exhibition presented a series of creative engagements exploring the militarised pasts of ex-SADF conscripts, in the hope of encouraging open conversations relating to the hidden and oft silenced histories of all South Africans. The project involved a year and a half of planning and consultation with the administrative staff of the Castle, including the CEO, Mr Calvyn Gilfellan and the Head of Heritage, Culture and Education, Mr Azola Mkosana. The *NUTRIA* exhibition was the first of its kind, focusing specifically on basic training, to be hosted by the Castle in the post-apartheid-era, effectively disrupting a previously avoided aspect of the Castle’s role during the conscription era. *NUTRIA* was opened by Professor Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela and drew large audiences, both local and international, over the ten days it was accessible to the public.

In addition, this supplemental component of the thesis seeks to propose new vantage points within the framework of visual studies, and act as an alternative articulation in terms of knowledge production relating to masculinity and memory, encouraging epistemological shifts relating to the discourses and visual representation of whiteness and masculinity within South Africa. A website accompanied and documented the exhibition, providing an online archive, including galleries, walk-through videos, radio interviews and reviews. As a result

of me transferring my research to the University of Pretoria, *NUTRIA 2*, a revised version of the exhibition, was opened in the Humanities foyer of the University of Pretoria on the 9th of February 2018. This version of the exhibition, by virtue of its situation within an academic environment and the obvious demographic differences of its audience, also allowed for critical comparisons to be drawn with the exhibition at the Castle of the Cape of Good Hope. Chapter Four of the thesis is dedicated to the visual component of the thesis.

A third aspect of the research methodology involves the use of social media to gain further insight into the research topic. Social media platforms have established themselves as vital hubs of shared experience that articulate post-conflict reconstruction processes for ex-conscripts and ex-permanent force members (Stauffacher, Drake, Currion and Steinberger 2005). The User-generated content (UGC) of social media is publicly available, often anecdotal and includes the narratives of ex-soldiers and conscripts from many theatres of conflict (Vickery and Wunsch-Vincent 2006). The anonymity of the internet has allowed for an outpouring of previously silenced memory and emotion (Baines 2008 2012). I, therefore, utilised this medium, beyond the scope and confines of the interview process, as a less formal platform for exploring conscript experiences.

I have noted that the content of the interviews might raise some ethical issues. In the interests of anonymity and preservation of the subjects physical and emotional well-being, and professional integrity, all the necessary measures have been taken to ensure any engagement with the research project's participants follow the University of Pretoria's ethics guidelines. A detailed Ethics Approval form appears in the addendum.

Finally, this thesis aims to contribute to further debates that humanise the past and contribute to peaceful and productive co-existence and a better understanding of the shared histories of all South Africans.

Chapter Outline

The outline below provides a summary of the six chapters that make up this thesis. Please note all the chapters draw on the author's personal archive and information gathered during the interview process as a means of providing the text with specific narrative references, both past and present.

Chapter One: *Framing of the Research*

This chapter serves as an introduction to the concepts and issues to be dealt with in the research. It outlines the theory, research and literature relating to memory, whiteness and the role of the visual archive in the context of the research topic. It also draws attention to recent research, non-academic literature and visual representations of ex-conscripts.

Chapter Two: *“Casting Shadows” Militarised boyhoods in apartheid South Africa during the 1980s*

This chapter explores the socialisation and militarisation of white males up to induction into the South African Defence Force, and to a lesser degree white South African society, from 1980 – 1990. It focuses on the high school cadet programme, the role of sport and compulsory registration of conscripts. I argue how these programmes have left indelible impressions on ex-conscripts, irrespective of whether they were exposed to combat environments or not. It also explores present perceptions of the period within the contemporary space of post-apartheid South Africa.

Chapter Three: *“Basics – Sien jy daardie boom troep!” The experience of basic training in the SADF during the period 1980-1990 and how those memories traverse the post-apartheid space.*

This chapter forms a chronological continuation from Chapter Two. It traverses the path of basic training in the SADF from 1980 – 1990 and argues that basic training marked the first

performative rite of passage for the South African militarised masculinity. The experience marked a pivotal point of acquiescence within a complex racialised military hegemony. For many ex-conscripts, the effects of basic training continue to echo within contemporary spaces.

Chapter Four: *The NUTRIA exhibitions as creative visual expressions of conscription in post-apartheid South Africa.*

This chapter will examine the practical component of my thesis, acting as an exegesis to document the process of creating a website, social media platforms and mounting of two exhibitions in June 2017, and February 2018. I will seek to explain the investigative process, contextualise and articulate why the practical component is significant. I will examine the methodology and the manner in which the practical component was conceptualised, and additionally investigate the challenges involved in organising, creating and exhibiting the artworks.

Chapter Five: *“A Balsak in the attic”– Navigating ex-conscripts counter-memories and nostalgia within post-apartheid South Africa*

This chapter explores and navigates the role of memory, nostalgia and subsequent development of ex-conscript counter-memories. It argues that the articulation of counter-memories is intimately connected to establishing a sense of belonging for ex-conscripts in present-day South Africa.

Chapter Six: *Conclusion*

This chapter serves as a conclusion to the research project by proposing how future contributions can prompt debates relating to these *hidden histories*, so the past can continue to be humanised in the interests of peaceful and productive co-existence. The conclusion closes with a number of personal reflections.



NUTRIA Exhibition installation artwork detail, The Castle of Good Hope, Cape Town 2017 (photograph: Stephen Symons)



CHAPTER ONE

Framing the research



Figure 1 Stephen Symons, *Blerrie Kommunis (Bloody Communist)* 2016, Digital illustration

Chapter 1 - Framing the Research

Compulsory military service is one of the few aspects of apartheid that lays a real burden on whites.

— Laurie Nathan, National Organiser for the End
Conscription Campaign (ECC) from 1985-86

This chapter intends to provide a historical overview of conscription into the SADF and also serves as a framework for the theoretical concepts embraced by this research project. It outlines the theory, research and literature relating to memory, white masculinities and the role of the visual archive in the context of the research topic. It also draws attention to recent research, non-academic literature and visual representations of conscript experiences in the SADF.

Historical overview

The 1950s to 1960s

It is estimated that 600 000 men, in all, were conscripted from white South African society between 1968 and 1993 (Williams 2008: 21). While the Second World War relied on a volunteer system (Seegers 1993), peacetime conscription in South Africa for white males was introduced in 1957,¹ and was based on a selective ballot system (1993). The system annually conscripted approximately seven thousand men for a nine-month period.

The Sharpeville massacre in 1960 marked a pivotal point in South African national defence policy (Conway 2012), ushering in a period of fifteen years of confidence and prosperity for

¹ The Defence Act of 1957 was the product of larger budget allocations to the SADF and the rise of the isolationist tendencies of the Nationalist Government after 1948 and, in turn, a demonstrative shift from the dominance of the British influence (Conway 2012).

the South African regime, effectively buffered by other white minority colonial regimes such as Mozambique (Portugal), Angola (Portugal), and Rhodesia (Britain). Conway asserts the stability and security of South Africa were reliant on this *cordon sanitaire* of neighbouring states (Conway 2012), yet security concerns were raised by the South African government when Rhodesia made a Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) in 1965. Almost ten years later, in 1974, the unexpected disintegration of the Portuguese empire posed a significant threat to South Africa's regional security (Price 1991, Van der Waag 2015). The possibility of guerilla incursions across previously secure borders laid the foundation of threat perception, and a need to provide an effective military means to counter any cross-border incursions by insurgents into South Africa.

The 4th August 1967 marked the introduction of compulsory military conscription for all white males, over the age of sixteen, in South Africa. The initial period of service lasted between nine to twelve months and deferment was only granted to conscripts embarking on tertiary studies.²

The 1970s

In 1972, the period of conscription (referred to as national service) was increased to 12 months, including a further 19 days of annual service for a period of 5 years (ed. Cock, Satchwell 1991). This was in part a response to the territory of northern Namibia (previously South West Africa) falling under the auspices of the SADF and South African Police in 1974 to prevent *terrorist* incursions by the South West African Peoples Organisation (SWAPO) from Angola into Namibia. The years between 1974 and 1988 marked a pivotal period for South African conscripts, spanning a protracted state of low-intensity conflict along the border of Namibia, including SADF incursions and military operations into Angola (Williams 2008).

² Most South African high school students completed secondary schooling between the ages of 16 and 18.

In 1977, conscription increased from 12 months to 2 years, including 30 days annually for a further eight years after the completion of the initial 2 years (Cock 1991). This increase of the initial service period was the product of the 1977 White Paper on Defence, essentially a counter-revolutionary response on the part of Defence Minister PW Botha and Admiral HH Biermann (then Chief of the SADF) to the “Total Onslaught” (Van der Waag 2015, Alden 1996).

Although the intensity of the Border War increased significantly during the 1980s, the South African regime repeatedly denied any punitive counter insurgencies or major military operations in Angolan territory (Vale 2003), effectively propagandising the conflict as a just struggle to prevent communist forces from maintaining a strategic foothold in Southern Africa (Scholtz 2013). General Constand Viljoen, Chief of the SADF, mentioned after the war that the aim of the SADF “was to never win the war...but to check the expansionism of communism in southern Africa” (2013: 448).

The 1980s to 1990s

Although the sub-text of SWAPO’s armed struggle for independence and democratic elections within Namibia was a major aspect of the Border War, by 1979 SWAPO had lost its military initiative due to the efficacy of SADF operations (Williams 2012). Nonetheless, by the 1980s the demands of the Border War, and eventual involvement of Cuban troops, including Russian and East German advisors and auxiliaries, required unprecedented numbers of conscripts (Conway 2012, Scholtz 2013, Williams 2012). These demands were justified by a complex state infrastructure of *self-censorship* orchestrated by the National Party government.

The state-owned SABC monopolised radio broadcasting and later television portrayed

the conflict,³ and hence the need for conscripts, as a just cause against the *rooi gevaar*.⁴ The presence of *communist* forces was propagandised as a threat to the foundations of a Christian way of life in South Africa (Cock 1989, Draper 2001, Evans 1983). These ideals were served by an entrenched form of Christian National Education (CNE) within white schools which espoused Protestant-Christian principles within a predominantly Afrikaans paradigm. Vermeulen and Van Eeden explain:

CNE mainly obtained an Afrikaans accentuation under specific South African circumstances. Broadly...it indicated that education should be characterized by Protestant-Christian principles and, simultaneously, should be able to find tangent points with the nature, way of living and the specific owner of the cultured community/nation for whose children it was meant to be. (Vermeulen and Van Eeden 2005: 177-205)

For many conscripts, a dominant Christian ideology underpinned the belief that national service served a greater moral good and a need to stem a “Marxist Leninist Total Onslaught” (De Kock 2015: 91). De Kock states that “only a Total Strategy - a co-ordination of the state’s activities in the military, economic, psychological, political, diplomatic, cultural and ideological fields - would be strong enough to combat it” (De Kock 2015: 91).⁵ The Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Special Hearing on Compulsory Military Service (Conscription) noted that according to Reverend Neels du Plooy (SADF chaplain between 1977-90, and from 1979 public relations officer to the Chaplain General and Senior Staff Officer: Publications) that “The Church’s main task was to strengthen the spiritual defensibility of its members. The Church was now totally convinced [of] the fact that we

3 Television was launched in South Africa in 1976 (Williams 2012: 16).

4 Afrikaans for *Red danger*, the ominous threat of communist domination.

5 This is an excerpt from former Colonel Eugene de Kock’s (South African Police) book *A long night’s damage: Working for the Apartheid State*. De Kock was discharged from the South African Police due to his activities as head of the Security Police’s section C1 at Vlakplaas Farm, north of Pretoria. See Jo Ractliffe’s *Vlakplaas* (July 1999 - ‘drive-by shooting’ series) of black and white photographs as a visual exploration of de Kock’s activities at Vlakplaas.

were fighting the war ... we were fighting a just war” (O’Malley 2015: 54).

In 1982 citizen force camps were increased to 720 days, spread out over 12 years (Feinstein 1986, Cock 1990, Edlmann 2012). There was a notable increase in public acts of conscientious objection to serving in the SADF (Cock 1991, Conway 2012, Williams 2008), not on merely religious grounds, but as a demonstrative political statement against the regime and the socialised and gendered expectations of the vast majority of the white population (Conway 2012). These acts of resistance ran contrary to fundamental constructs of masculinity and accepted norms of citizenships within white South African society (Conway 2012). Conscientious objectors were punishable in terms of Section 126A of the Defence Act, and liable for a prison sentence of two to six years (Cock 1991). The decade spanning the 1980s also witnessed the formation, growth and increased support for the End Conscription Campaign (ECC), a non-violent social movement (Conway 2012) and pressure group that was formed in 1983. The ECC resisted conscription and the militarism of the apartheid state, often drawing support from the liberal environs of English-speaking tertiary educational institutions such as the University of Cape Town and Rhodes University (Grahamstown, Eastern Cape).

By the mid-1980s South Africa had assumed pariah status internationally. Sanctions placed unprecedented pressure on the economy, with the regime defaulting to a *laager* mentality, and employing familiar anti-communist rhetoric. Callister (2007) rightly notes that throughout the turbulent 1980s, white South Africans firmly believed the country was still part of the “civilised and technological advanced” West, an insularised space where particularly the white youth, both English and Afrikaans, were increasingly influenced by Western culture and consumerism. Black resistance within the borders of South Africa reached a critical mass by the mid-1980s (Cock & Nathan 1989). Organisations such as United Democratic Front (UDF), trade unions, Umkhonto we Sizwe, the military wing of the African National Congress (ANC) and whole communities posed a serious risk to internal security, forcing an over-stretched police force to rely on the SADF for assistance.

Between 1983 and 1984 almost 43 000 soldiers (many of whom were conscripts) were deployed in South African townships as a means to combat “internal strife” (Cape Times 19.05.1984). An ECC *Troops out of the Townships* rally in 1985 demonstrated a growing opposition among whites to the presence of conscripts in the townships. According to Laurie Nathan, a prominent ECC leader, by the mid-1980s, “the war resistance movement [had] expanded beyond its traditional constituencies, and an anti-war culture [had] emerged” (Cock & Nathan 1989). The deployment of conscript troops in the townships was a watershed moment, prompting previously ambivalent and neutral support for conscription to wane (Williams 2008).

In 1988 the South African government banned the ECC, and Advocate Sydney Kentridge for the ECC argued that the SADF generals “have declared martial law by means of an affidavit” (Williams 2008). However, by the late 1980s, the Border War had reached a stalemate, culminating with set-piece battles around Cuito Cuanavale, the subsequent withdrawal of the SADF, and signing of the Geneva Protocol in 1988 (Van den Haag 2015). A UN supervision force entered Namibia in 1989 bringing the 23-year old Border War to an end (Van den Haag 2015). In December 1989 conscription was reduced to one year (Saha.org.za 2015). The unbanning of the ANC in 1990 and a negotiated process of democratic transition resulted in an increase of internal political strife. However, a year prior to the first democratic elections, on the 24th of August 1993, Kobie Coetzee (Minister of Defence) issued a statement that the next call-up of white conscripts in January 1994 would be cancelled (Nytimes.com 2015).

Understanding memory

The act of remembering, forgetting and expressing memory plays a crucial role in this thesis, specifically how ex-SADF conscripts navigate and meditate on ambiguities of whiteness and masculinity within the post-apartheid space. Memories of conscription have traversed a period of over two decades, and enter the present in altogether different guises, as individual memories and collective memories. This thesis relies predominantly on narratives of memory in exploring the experience of induction and initial stages of training in the SADF.

Rhodes academic, Gary Baines, noted in an inaugural lecture on the 30th July 2014 that “we are in the midst of a memory boom” (Baines 2014). He noted that “reasons proffered for why we should remember past conflicts and catastrophes are seldom stated explicitly, rather, it that it is the right thing to do” (Baines 2014). Baines argues that “collective remembering is regarded as commendable, whereas forgetting is condemned, or at best, condoned.” Baines continues that forgetting should be viewed as an “antidote to memory” and echoes the historian, Tzvetan Todorov’s suggestion that one should not fall into the trap of a “duty of memory’, but focus on the “work of memory”. This thesis aims to draw on the “work of memory” as a means of navigating expressions of whiteness and masculinity for ex-SADF conscripts in contemporary South Africa. Nonetheless, Baines (2014) asserts that post-apartheid South Africa is a “long way from constructing a shared past, let alone morality.” Therefore this thesis will draw attention to the importance of collective and individual memory as a means of acknowledging and contributing to the construction of a *shared past*.

Counter-memory

Of particular concern to this research is the “meaning of absence in representation” (Villanueva 2011) and how memory emerges from previously hidden or subjugated experiences. My thesis relies on the work of three thinkers who have shaped a theory of counter-memory,

namely George Lipsitz, Stuart Hall and Michel Foucault. American sociologist, George Lipsitz defines counter-memory in *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Culture* (1990) as:

Counter-memory is a way of remembering and forgetting that starts with the local, the immediate, and the personal. Unlike historical narratives that begin with the totality of human existence and then locate specific actions and events within that totality, counter-memory starts with the particular and the specific and then builds outward toward a total story. Counter-memory looks to the past for the hidden histories excluded from dominant narratives. But unlike myths that seek to detach events and actions from the fabric of any larger history, counter-memory forces revision of existing histories by supplying new perspectives about the past... Counter-memory focuses on localized experiences with oppression, using them to reframe and refocus dominant narratives purporting to represent universal experience. (213)

Lipsitz's (1990: 213) concept of counter-memory unearths the past, exposing "hidden histories" that have been excluded from dominant narratives, gazing on past events from fresh perspectives. In this sense, conscript experiences and their related narratives enter the present as counter-memories. Lipsitz asserts that a counter-memory assumes the role of a counter-discourse, attempting to renegotiate the present and position itself against memories that dominate the present. Lipsitz (1990: 212) views counter-memory as a means of shifting historical focus from dominant narratives, thus challenging the "hegemony of dominant discourse". This notion is of particular interest in understanding how ex-conscript narratives position themselves within a post-apartheid space, where many conscripts feel that dominant narratives subjugate their past experiences (Baines 2014).

Lipsitz's view of counter-memory differs from that of Foucault. Foucault (1977) proposes that counter-memory "must record the singularity of events outside of any monotonous

finality,” whereas Lipsitz (1990) suggests that a process of acknowledgement must be effected before truths or justice of any experience or action can be judged. Foucault’s concept of counter-memory is inextricably bound to the subjugation of knowledge and notions of power. For Foucault, counter-memories are modified interpretations of history, resulting in the “transformation of history into a totally different time” (Foucault 1977). In this instance, Foucault’s concept of counter-memory is of relevance to understanding how time contributes to the modification or “transformation” of history. Furthermore, Demos (2012) notes that collective counter-memories often facilitate positive transformation, specifically if they antagonise established narratives. These collective counter-memories “designates a practice of memory formation that is social and political, one that runs counter to the official histories of governments, mainstream mass media, and the society of the spectacle”. Many ex-SADF conscript memories occupy the domain of Demos’ concept of counter-memory. Demos understands counter-memory as an act of memorialisation, “a collective practice of relearning - of forgotten, suppressed, and excluded histories, which then becomes an act of political subjectification” (2012).

Hutchens concurs with Lipsitz in that counter-memories are formed when forgotten memory (Hutchens 2007: 53) is recalled to counter an “official” or predominant discourse of events. Hutchens proposes that counter-memory is “anti-archival” in the sense that it is not deemed worthy of official inclusion in dominant narratives. Counter-memories offer to “displace” (45) or re-constitute previously hidden or excluded histories. Hutchens offers unique insights into how these counter-memories can present themselves, as an anti-archive that assumes a new identity in relation to the canon. For Hutchens, “the logic of counter-memory is a logic of exception”(54) owing its existence to contrasting dominant or official narratives. In this sense, I will argue that the counter-memories of ex-SADF conscripts appear to be emerging at a point in South African history, presided over by a dominant political memory of exclusion.

Collective memory

The concept of collective memory cannot be ignored. The term collective memory was first coined by Maurice Halbwachs in 1925 and argues that collective memory is bound to a collective identity. Halbwachs' concept of collective memory opposes personal recollections and forms part of social or historical memory (Halbwachs 1992). According to Achugar (2008: 12), collective memory is "one of the social practices through which society transmits and reproduces the subjective interpretation of its past in a way that it is received by the members of the group as an objective fact". Achugar notes that all collective memory has its counter-memory, echoing Williams and Lipsitz's argument (Williams 1977, Lipsitz 1990) that any attempt to "memorialise the past" (12) allows for the formation of gaps from which counter-memories emerge. These counter-memories become capable means to address and even contest dominant historical narratives, particularly within a South African historical context, where histories remain racialised and contested. Hall asserts that within "certain historical moments" dominant narratives are constructed, cementing memories that maintain the status quo (Hall 1997). Hall notes that those in power have the ability to dominate, selectively represent and uphold certain histories (1997).

In *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, Hall discusses Foucault's contributions to understanding the dynamics of power and knowledge in relation to the repeated institutional representations of historical narratives. This alludes to Foucault's (2003: 7) concept of "subjugated knowledges" that contain "historical contents that have been buried or masked in functional coherences or formal systemizations", that essentially act as points of incubation for counter-memories. Of particular importance is how ex-SADF conscripts continue to express these counter-memories within a post-apartheid space.

The tenuous nature of power differences in memory, specifically in hegemonic terms have been effectively explored (Gramsci 1977, Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983, Williams 1977). Hegemonic memory is achieved via cultural dominance, allowing for the development

of *a continuity of the past* that assumes the role of an “official memory”. These official memories, and in some instances collective memories, always provide discontinuities or gaps for counter-memories to emerge (Lipsitz 1990, Williams 1977). Davis and Starn (1989: 5) note that “the private sphere and the practices of everyday life define and conserve alternatives to the official memory of public historiography” and prompt the emergence of counter-memories. According to Davis and Starn an interdependence, rather than a resistance, can exist between memory and history. Davis and Starn argue that counter-memories encourage “methodological diversity”, where “memory is treated in terms of experience, ideas, images, forms of textuality and philosophical investigation”(5). This concept has particular relevance to my exploration of conscript narratives via a visual archive of photography and mixed media installations.

Visual counter-memory

In relation to the formation of visual counter-memories, Barthes (1980: 91) argues that “not only is the photograph never, in essence, a memory...but it actually blocks memory, [and] quickly becomes a counter-memory”. Barthes continues that the photograph exists within its own visual domain and counters the process of remembering, and to some extent replaces memory. Ruchatz explores Barthes’ notion that photographs have the ability to “not only prompt but also redirect and change memories according to what is iconically perceived and indexically authenticated” (Erlil, Nünning and Young 2008: 373). Ruchatz perceives photography as “a kind of memory” and that the photograph exists “as a reminder that triggers or guides remembering” (373). This study will examine how the photograph, via a series of exhibitions, guides memory, specifically towards the domain of counter-memory. It appears that limited scholarly research or literature exists that examines visual expressions of counter-memory. In this sense, I will explore how the visual archive enters the realm of counter-memory, and how the archive assumes the guise of a counter-memory and locates itself in post-apartheid South Africa.

Sontag notes that photographs act as a “connection with the past” (Movius 1975), yet the act of forgetting is of possible importance too. Here too, French author Paul Ricoeur poses important questions in his book *Memory, History and Forgetting* (2004) exploring why some events enter memory whilst others are forgotten. Ricoeur (2004: 477) proposes that a “reciprocal relationship between remembering and forgetting” exists, and that it is both memory and forgetting that shape our understanding of historical experience and subsequent composition of historical narratives. The visual component of this study seeks to explore Ricoeur’s reciprocal relationships between memory and forgetting, and the manner in which audiences respond to artistic triggers of memory. Paul Connerton’s view of memory and forgetting is also beneficial to this research, in that he disassembles the assumption that memory is virtuous, whilst forgetting is not “necessarily a failing” (Connerton 1989 2008). He identifies seven types of forgetting, namely: “repressive erasure, prescriptive forgetting, forgetting that is constitutive in the formation of a new identity, structural amnesia, forgetting as annulment, forgetting as planned obsolescence, forgetting as humiliated silence” (60-70).

Connerton’s (2008: 67) concept of “forgetting as humiliated silence” resonates within the framework of this project, specifically in that some acts of forgetting may be an attempt to bury experiences “beyond expression and the reach of memory” (68). In this regard, Connerton (2008) asserts that the absence of memory and necessary forgetting are a means of survival. Gary Baines (2014) also notes the views of New York Times journalist David Rieff, expressed in his essays *Against Remembrance* that exploring historical memory tends to highlight the differences rather than reconcile them. Therefore the act of forgetting becomes an “antidote to memory” (Baines 2014).

Relationships between memory and nostalgia

A crucial aspect of this study is the relationship between memory and nostalgia. Svetlana Boym’s seminal text *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001: xvi) acknowledges that nostalgia is “not

merely an individual sickness but a symptom of our age, a historical emotion, and therefore inextricably bound to memory”. Boym (2007: 7-18) understands nostalgia as not merely a longing for a place but rather a time period. Boym’s concept of nostalgia aids this research project as many ex-SADF conscripts are attempting to reframe their past experiences and create “private or collective mythologies” often within the virtual domain of cyberspace. Boym notes that nostalgia is “not always retrospective, it can be prospective as well”(xvi) having a “direct impact on the realities of the future” (xvi), as is the case with ex-SADF conscripts grappling with the ambiguities of present-day South Africa.

Boym cites Michael Kammen’s *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (1991: 668) who writes that nostalgia is “essentially history without guilt”. Heritage is something that suffuses many ex-conscripts with pride rather than shame. This proposition resonates within the scope of my thesis, in that nostalgic recollections of conscript experiences could be interpreted as memories relinquished of guilt. Again, a creative interpretation of memory relinquished of guilt offer the possibility for fresh insights into understanding the complexities of conscript memories.

For Boym “modern nostalgia is paradoxical” (9) and therefore has the ability to conjure “subjective visions of afflicted imagination that tend to colonize the realm of politics, history, and everyday perception” (9). Boym notes that “outbreaks” of nostalgia are often “accompanied by political and cultural manifestations of longing” and “loss” (10), which is linked to a “dislocation in space”, and “the changing conception of time” (7).

Therefore I cannot disregard the importance of nostalgia, and its inevitable entanglement with memory for ex-SADF conscripts, many of whom who are constantly deferring the uncertainty of the present to the past, whether it is within the realms of cyberspace or amongst fellow ex-conscripts at a social gathering. Boym notes, “The imperative of a contemporary nostalgic is to be homesick and sick of home—occasionally at the same time” (18).

Expressions of Conscription - Literature

Research covering the experience of SADF conscripts during induction and basic training remains scant, with most texts focusing on conscript experiences of the Border War and its aftermath. Bergh's phenomenological study of conscript's attitudes and perceptions of the SADF was conducted as early as 1986 (Bergh 1986), at the apogee of the regime's military power and offer the reader the first glimpses of the conscript experience within an academic framework. Interestingly most research examining conscription during the 1980s came from distinctly liberal English-speaking institutions such as the University of Cape Town (UCT) and Rhodes University. Gibson (2010) noted that research relating to the exploration of conscript discourses during apartheid remain mostly unmapped territories.

However, there has been a gradual increase in popular literature exploring the experience of the SADF conscript in the context of the Border War, surfacing in 1990, three years before conscription was abolished. One such example is correspondent Jim Hooper's experience with *Koevoet*, an elite South African-led counter-insurgency unit (Hooper, 1990). Further narrative accounts (Andrew 2001, Feinstein 1988 2011, Fowler 1995, Jurgens 2000, Phillips 2002) began to emerge in the decade following the end of conscription and continues to occupy the shelves of commercial bookstores (Blake 2009 2010, Thompson 2006).

Many of these books include the anecdotal accounts of conscripts, commencing with the induction process and culminating in accounts of combat on the border or patrols within the townships. These accounts were described as the "voices of South African National Servicemen" by author Jacqui Thompson (2006). Thompson's *An Unpopular War* occupies important historical terrain, presenting "cathartic" (Lazenby 2012: 48) conscript narratives almost two decades after conscription ended. These narratives attempt to give voice to a previously silenced history, posing questions relating to belonging and counter-memory that

will be investigated in detail within this thesis. Baines notes that Thompson's *An Unpopular War* served as a *template* for a number of similar texts by other authors (Baines 2012: 89). Further examples include Cameron Blake's *Troepie - from call-up to camps* (2009) and *From Soldier to Civvy - Reflections on National Service* (2010). UCT student, Busi Mnguni's (2011) review of Thompson's *An Unpopular War* proposes:

The debate concerning the legitimacy of white male experiences is a symptom that indicates that the reasoning that drives the way we talk, analyse and interpret apartheid and post-apartheid history closes spaces and opportunities for meaningful engagement rather than opening them up.

DefenceWeb editor Leon Engelbrecht's review of Thompson's *An Unpopular War* (2006) advocates a remembering of ex-SADF conscript experiences. Engelbrecht writes:

Thompson asserts in her preface that "today, it is not socially acceptable for these men to talk about their experiences." This is certainly reminiscent of the decade after the US abandoned Vietnam and may give rise to the incorrect view that the SADF "lost" the Border war. But that is a discussion for another time. Relevant here is that the reviewer has not experienced this social unacceptability for himself. Whether talking to former NSM, "PFs" from that era, former insurgents, the current leadership of the SANDF or colleagues at the office, most are interested in that period and ask pertinent questions. So, let's reminisce! (Engelbrecht 2015)

Minter notes that some aspects of military literature, including books that document the experience of conscripts (Andrew 2001, Holt 2005, Webb 2008), present the experience as an act of patriotism, and that much recent literature relating to the Border War presents the narratives of veterans who felt "they were fighting for a just cause in defence of their country" (Minter 2007: 148). Interestingly, Danielle Graham identifies "three strands of discourse"

(Doherty 2014) relating to the Border War in her MA study in 2005. These include the Generals (Geldenhuys 1995, Malan 2006), members of the special forces (Breytenbach 2008), and conscripts. Graham also notes that Gary Baines identifies three categories of writing relating to the Border War, namely: military histories (Williams 2008, Scholtz 2013), leftist academic texts, and Afrikaans *grensliteratuur* (Cock 1989, Giliomee 2003). *Grensliteratuur* (Border literature) emerges in the mid-1970s as an Afrikaans literary response to the apartheid government's military involvement in Namibia and cross border operations in Angola. It grappled with issues of trauma, identity and the militarised violence of the SADF, including the work of authors such as Etienne van Heerden, Louis Kruger and P.J. Haasbroek.

Confessional narratives

In addition, a number of so-called “confessional narratives” that are predominantly penned by English conscripts emerge from the mid-2000s (Baines 2004). These include, amongst others, Clive Holt's *At Thy Call We Did Not Falter: A Frontline Account of the 1988 Angolan War as seen through the Eyes of a Conscripted Soldier* (2005) that provides a detailed narrative of the horrors of combat and the author's subsequent struggle with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Other *confessional narrative* accounts of conscripts, include Andrew Feinstein's *Battle Scarred* (2011) that presents the account of a medical doctor within an army psychiatric unit, Steven Webb's *Ops Medic: A National Serviceman's Border War* (2008), Granger Korff's *19 with a Bullet* (2009) and Tim Ramsdens *A National Serviceman's Story* (2007).

Texts relating to induction and basic training within the SADF

However, for the purposes of this thesis, I have concentrated on literature that specifically focuses on induction and the subsequent period of basic training within the SADF. There were a number of studies and academic texts that examined the psycho-social and psychological effects of conscription prior to the millennium. These included Draper (1999),

Feinstein et al. (1986), Flischer (1987) and Foster (1991). Notably, Price (1989) described the experiences of five English conscripts in relation to the militarisation and socialisation process, emphasising issues of masculinity, patriotism and camaraderie. Price also identified the role of organisations such as the End Conscription Campaign (ECC) in relation to the inherently militarised nature of white South African society. Conway (2012) gives a detailed account of the role of the ECC, anti-militarism and war resistance during the 1980s in actively destabilising the hegemony of the SADF in the collective psyche of white South Africa, whereas Callister (2007) addresses earlier public reaction and resistance to conscription spanning the period 1952 to 1972.

Draper (2001) cites that Flisher's psychological study of the induction process of conscription argues that the initial stages of National Service can be discussed within the theoretical framework of crisis theory. Flisher asserts that two types of life crises present themselves to conscripts, namely developmental and transitional life crises.

The notion that conscripts were faced with a transitional life crisis, one that involved both "intellectual and emotional disorders" (Draper 2001) is of benefit to the qualitative methodological processes of this thesis, specifically when addressing the structure of the one-on-one participant interviews. In an earlier project (Draper 1999), focusing specifically on the experiences of conscripts on the so-called *Kaplyn* (Namibia/Angolan border), discourses emerge from Draper's study relating to the effects of conscription, and subsequent transitional difficulties of re-entering civilian society.

Gibson (2010) notes that many conscripts were possibly coerced into perceiving that conscription was a necessary patriotic duty, pressured by parental and familial expectations. Gibson (2009) also notes that the aforementioned views held by many conscripts were the result of a complex socialisation process that was pervasive in white South African society. Cock considers this socialisation process in detail in *War and Society* (Cock and Nathan 1989), and

proposes that militarisation is a “contested concept” (2) and should be distinguished as three social phenomena, namely: the military as a social institution, militarism as an ideology and militarisation as a social process. *War and Society* (Cock and Nathan 1989) initiated insights into the SADF at a time in which conscription was still enforced, and provided a unique overview of the social and psychological effects of conscription, including an examination of SADF ideologies and structure. Conway’s (2012) thesis echoes the voices of *War and Society* and observes “that one of the most consistent features of pre-1994 South African society was progressive militarisation, in terms of both activity and the social conditions necessary for war making” (33).

Cawthra notes that the process of induction into the SADF involved the stripping away of a conscript’s individuality and sense of identity (Cawthra et al. 1994). This aspect of the militarisation process played a crucial role in the depersonalisation process of basic training, and was a deeply traumatic experience for many conscripts, often resulting in psychological damage, and even suicide (Cock 1989, Cawthra et al. 1994). Yet Cock, Conway and Cawthra give no detailed account of the actual process of induction and basic training, and how the experience resonates for conscripts within a contemporary space, a gap that will be addressed by this thesis.

Examining the militarisation of South Africa’s youth

Feinstein et al (1986) examined the attitudes of students towards conscription and the response of conscripts’ mothers at the height of the regime’s powers and offered insights into the influence of other institutions and systems, such as the secondary school cadet system, *veldschools*, the role of the media and peer group pressure. Gavin Evans’s essay *Classrooms of war: The militarisation of white South African schooling* (Cock and Nathan 1989: 283-297) reveals the “pace and scale” of the socialisation and militarisation process of white males prior to induction into the SADF. Evans investigated the role of the SADF within civilian society,

also providing a brief overview of the high school cadet programme, on-campus university military units and the segregated “leadership training camps” of the 1980s. Cock examined further issues relating to the link between masculinity and violence within the SADF and the ANC’s Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) of the 1980s in *Colonels & Cadres: War & Gender in South Africa* (1991) and effectively challenged conventional notions of masculinity within South African society. A detailed review relating to texts that explore conscript masculinities and whiteness will follow this section.

Recent texts relating to conscription into the SADF

There was notable growth in the number of popular and academic publications relating to the Border War and SADF conscript experiences from the mid-2000s. Theresa Edlmann (2014) notes in her PhD thesis exploring “the post-apartheid psychosocial legacies of conscription” within a narrative framework, that the burgeoning of SADF conscript literature from the mid-2000s onwards could be attributed to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) highlighting “the importance of personal narratives about apartheid”. Edlmann cites Sasha Gear’s (Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation) “unprecedented research” that included the combat experiences of members of the SADF (including conscripts) entitled *Now that the War is Over: Ex-combatants Transition and the Question of Violence* (2002). Gear’s essay *The Road Back: Psycho-social Strains of Transition for South Africa’s Ex-combatants* (Baines and Vale 2008: 245-259) is note-worthy to this research in that it examines how ex-combatants (including ex-SADF conscripts) reconcile past experiences and their militarised identities with the present, yet again, it focuses specifically on ex-combatants, and not all ex-SADF conscripts.

The TRC’s special report *Special Hearing: Compulsory Military Service (Conscription)*, headed up by Professor Pumla Gobodo-Madilizela also provided a forum for conscript narratives and demonstrates the pervasive influence and effects of the experience for

ex-conscripts. The hearings included the accounts of conscientious objectors, ex-combatants, permanent force members and ex-conscripts who had not experienced combat. The following is an extract from *Chapter 8 (Volume 4) of the Special Hearing: Compulsory Military Service (Conscription)* from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report:

13. A psychologist whose clients include ex-SADF conscripts echoed these views. In a written submission to the Commission, Ms Trudy de Ridder of the Trauma Centre for the Victims of Violence and Torture, Cape Town, reported that: Most ex-conscripts report that they, their peers and their community saw service in the SADF as a natural part of growing up and ‘becoming a man’... the national education system consistently presented military training as a given part of the rites of passage of white men and the moral duty of anyone concerned with defending order and morality (Christianity) against the forces of evil and chaos (Soviet-inspired Communism)...

My recent experience with ex-conscripts has been characterised by their insistence that they could not have had the tools or information to challenge this view - especially at the age of seventeen or eighteen. Most report that, once in the SADF, resistance to the fact of conscription, the chain of command or the politico-military objectives was unthinkable. In fact, most still associate their military experiences with a sense of pride - in their capacity for physical and psychological endurance...? (O’Malley 2015)

Foster, Haupt and De Beer’s *The Theatre of Violence: Narratives of Protagonists in the South African Conflict* (2005) examine the often contested labels of *perpetrator* and *victim*, moving beyond the domain of TRC, in an attempt to present further representations of contested identities within a post-TRC South Africa. This is of importance to this thesis, specifically the manner in which the publication addresses the importance of problematising the concept of victim and perpetrator within a post-apartheid space. *Theatre of Violence* skirts the experiences of conscripts, focussing specifically on the South African Police and non-military state security personnel.

Postgraduate academic research relating to conscript experiences and narratives has also flourished since the mid-2000s, including Connors (2007), Edlmann (2014), Graham (2012), Jones (2013), Lazenby (2012), Olivier (2013), Rees (2010) and Warwick (2009). Professor Gary Baines (Rhodes University) has conducted significant research related to the Border War, and SADF conscript experiences, most notably how ex-conscripts are coming to terms with the Border War in post-apartheid South Africa (2008), and revealing hidden memories of the Border War (2008). Baines has paid particular attention to the rise of the internet as a forum for expressing conscript experiences, a *safe* environment for recovering previously hidden and silenced memories. His working paper *A virtual community? SADF veterans' digital memories and dissenting discourses* (2012) provides a detailed analysis and overview of the role of the internet as a means of expressing conscript narratives.

Beyond the Border War: New Perspectives on Southern Africa's Late-Cold War conflicts (Baines and Vale 2008) can be considered a seminal collection of papers, albeit functioning within a similar paradigm to *War and Society* (Cock and Nathan 1989), it offers a fresh academic perspective of the Border War, almost two decades after Cock and Nathan's *War and Society*. In this sense, *Beyond the Border War* is of value to this body of research, although it is important to note that Magaziner's 2009 review rightly proposes, the book "falls into the old trap of South African exceptionalism", and the views of the *enemy*, including SWAPO and Cuban soldiers, are largely ignored.

The role of the Internet

South Africa's 'Border War' (Baines 2014), presents itself as a second volume to *Beyond the Border War* (Baines and Vale 2008) and is an important study of the impact of the Border War on contemporary South African society. Baines adopts a multidisciplinary approach, encompassing military history, politics, memory studies, literature and recent visual expressions of the Border War. Although the book focuses primarily on the Border War,

it functions within a theoretical framework that aids my research, specifically the role of memory, issues of victimhood and the various guises that conscript narratives assume.

The internet, with its blogosphere, forums, social media platforms and websites present a diverse range of conscript narratives, opinions and histories, most notably expressed on websites such as *Sentinel Projects*. Sentinel Projects is the most extensive online repository of personal accounts of military service in the SADF. It presents personal narratives, homage pages, photo galleries, military unit sub-forums, official ex-SADF documents, histories, virtual walk-throughs and hyperlinks to other websites of a similar theme. An example is the detailed account of induction into the SADF given by André, a qualified clinical psychologist (Sadf. sentinelprojects.com 2015).

Many SADF social media groups and forums exist. Among the more popular social media platforms are Facebook and the SADF Living History Group (<http://sadfgroup.org/>),⁶ an online community that notes that it is a non-political organisation that “does not glorify war” but seeks to “educate about the humanity” of those “who served” (SADF GROUP 2015). Bush War Books (<http://www.warbooks.co.za/>) is an online store dedicated to selling literature relating to recent Southern African conflicts, specifically the Border War. This website offers an extensive overview of current popular literature that encompasses ex-SADF conscript narratives. The homepage of the website features the following quote, “War does not determine who is right - only who is left” (Warbooks.co.za 2015).

Tim Hewitt-Coleman’s blog *www.slegtroep.blogspot.com* provides a unique commentary in that he attempts to create an intersection of past and present, posing questions regarding the role of ANC in ‘subverting’ the histories of conscripts. Hewitt-Coleman writes:

⁶ Among the more popular social media sites are the following Facebook groups:
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/grensoorlog/> (55 000 members as of Dec. 2018)
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/BorderWar/> (9 000 members as of Oct. 2018)
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/100757163371431/> (4000 members as of Oct. 2015)

What is more surprising though is that as the ANC became dominant, so little effort has been made to record and popularise this significant episode [The Battle of Cuito Cuanavale], where conventional forces came head to head in Southern Angola in the late eighties, resulting in a bloody and crushing battle, which led to a South African withdrawal from Angola, the acceptance of UN resolution 435 and the paving of the way for UNTAG to take control in Namibia.

All this, a very significant blow to the forces of Apartheid,but no real contribution from MK and the ANC.....Is it because the ANC cannot claim involvement in this defeat of the Apartheid System that we will pass slowly into the past without being acknowledged by “History”? (Hewitt-Coleman 2009)

The majority of these online narratives are related to the Border War narratives, although some posts do focus on the period of induction. Baines (2012) notes in *A virtual community? SADF veterans’ digital memories and dissenting discourses* that much like the Vietnam War, “the Border War was followed by a relative - not absolute - silence” (4). Baines adds that “ex-SADF conscripts have gravitated to the apparent political neutrality of cyberspace” (8) and therefore rely on the anonymity of the internet to “contest their invisibility in post-apartheid” South Africa. This is of importance to this study, given its need to explore various modes of expression employed by conscripts as they navigate the ambiguities of post-apartheid spaces.

Baines proposes that the internet provides conscripts and veterans with a means to challenge what Gear refers to as the “silence of stigmatized knowledge” in her essay *The Road Back: Psychosocial Strains of Transition* (Baines and Vale 2008). In this sense, Baines (2012: 14) rightly notes that cyberspace allows ex-SADF conscripts to “preserve a sense of belonging to a community - albeit a virtual one”. By 2016, social media platforms, such as Facebook, had become primary points of virtual contact and expression for ex-conscripts, offering insights to the manner in which white males of the conscription era traverse the present. These virtual

environments of community and camaraderie also appear to have become comfort zones for many ex-conscripts, offering expected forms of digital anonymity.

The narratives of homosexual conscripts

The narratives of homosexual conscripts are usefully described in *The Aversion Project Report* (1999) which details the appalling medical treatments prescribed by SADF psychiatrists in an attempt to *cure* homosexuality. The professional misconduct of the medics involved in *The Aversion Project* was documented in submissions to the TRC and subsequent exposure in the media. These narratives are of importance to this study as they are not combat specific, but often includes accounts of conscripts who were abused by fellow conscripts and members of the SADF's medical corps during the initial phases of training.

Andre Carl van der Merwe's partly autobiographical novel *Moffie* (2006) gives a disturbing yet vivid account of the abuses suffered by a homosexual conscript in the SADF. Hamish Pillay's novel *The Rainbow Has No Pink* (2008) also grapples with the abuse of homosexual conscripts. In a 2008 interview he explains:

This was a time when every white male was expected to report for national service. Young men claimed to be gay in a bid to avoid serving their time. What they didn't see coming was a campaign involving 'gender re-assignment' operations — and worse — aimed at making these recruits more 'suitable' for conscription.⁷

Worthy of inclusion in this review is Mark Behr's award-winning *The Smell of Apples* (1996),⁸ which proved to be a critical success. Originally penned in Afrikaans its narrator, a white Afrikaans boy traverses the complex familial and social relationships of 70s apartheid South Africa and eventual immersion in the SADF. It presents a compelling account of the

⁷ Visit <http://bookslive.co.za/blog/2008/12/08/behind-the-rainbow-has-no-pink-hamish-pillay-interviewed/> for the full interview.

⁸ Behr's *The Smell of Apples* (1996) was the winner of the Art Seidenbaum Award for First Fiction from the Los Angeles Times, winner of the M-Net Award, winner of The Eugene Marais Award and winner of the CNA Literary Award. It was also nominated for the Booker Prize.

socialisation and eventual militarisation of white apartheid-era masculinities, and examines parental compliance and re-enforcement of the process. Behr, an ex-SADF conscript, subsequently admitted that he worked as an apartheid government agent whilst a student at Stellenbosch University from 1985 to 1989.⁹ In 1996 Behr confessed of his activities as an informant at a conference in Cape Town entitled *Fault Lines: Inquiries Around Truth and Reconciliation* (Mail & Guardian, 1996).

Fictional conscript narratives and poetry

More recent novels that examine the experience of ex-SADF conscripts is James Clelland's *Deeper than Colour* (2010), winner of the 2010 European Union Literary Award, Johan Vlok Louw's *Eric the Brave* (2012) and Gordon Torr's *Kill Yourself and Count to 10* (2014). Both Clelland and Torr's novels deal with issues of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, as their respective protagonists attempt to negotiate the trauma of their experiences. Torr's novel highlights the stress of induction into the SADF and the horrors of a fictional rehabilitation programme for homosexuals, psychopaths and drug addicts, similar to *The Aversion Project*.

Conscript experiences have also been expressed in two recent anthologies of poetry, namely Karen Batley's *A Secret Burden* (2007) and Patricia Schonstein's anthology of conflict poetry *Africa Ablaze* (2013). Batley notes in the forward of *A Secret Burden*:

The more receptive time is now, when there is a visible resurgence of interest. Distance in time means that it is now all right to talk about the war. There are reassessments taking place and the former need for political correctness is gone. (xvi)

Schonstein's anthology *Africa Ablaze* (2013) is unique in that it includes a number of poems that traverse induction and basic training within the SADF, unlike Batley's anthology that focuses exclusively on poetry that emerged from the Border War.

⁹ *An Interview with Mark Behr* by Andrew van der Vlies appears in *Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Studies* (2011), available online: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17533171.2011.533910>.

Expressions of Conscription - Film and Theatre

Documentaries and film

The creative disciplines of film and media have provided a number of pertinent narratives that encompass induction and the initial stages of basic training within the SADF. Within the medium of film, *At Thy Call* (2007),¹⁰ an award-winning short film by student director Christopher-Lee dos Santos about racial and cultural tension in the South African Defence Force, is arguably the most authentic. Again, the film climaxes with scenes from the Border War, but *At Thy Call* provides its audiences with disturbingly realistic scenes of training within the SADF during the 1980s.

There have been a number of films framed by the experience of SADF conscripts, including Darrell Roodt's *The Stick* (1988), Matt Raubenheimer's *Pro Patria* (2011) and more recently *Seun* (2015) and Craig Gardener's *My Father's War* (2017), in which a son encounters his father, as a SADF conscript on active duty during the Border War, via a series of dream narratives. According to an online synopsis, *My Father's War* grapples with issues of parental abandonment, anger and reconciliation.¹¹ Most recently, Christiaan Olwagen's *Kanarie* (2018) grapples with homosexuality within the SADF. The film is framed by a conscript's experience in the South African Defence Choir called the *Kanaries* (Af. for *Canaries*).¹²

The M-Net/Kyknet series *GRENSOORLOG* (2011) is of importance to this study as it initiates a series of conscript and veteran narratives from both of the conflict, including unprecedented dialogue between ex-combatants, ranging from rank and file soldiers to high-ranking officers.

10 *At Thy Call* (2007) was directed Christopher-Lee dos Santos, whilst still a student at the African Film and Drama Academy (AFDA) in Cape Town and was screened at the Cannes Film Festival in 2008. (Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christopher-Lee_Dos_Santos)

11 Visit <https://www.facebook.com/groups/MyFathersWar/> for an overview of Gardener's *My Father's War* and projected release dates for 2016.

12 Visit <https://www.kanariefilm.com/> the official website of Olwagen's film, *Kanaries* (2018).

The website dedicated to the series notes:

GRENDOORLOG constitutes a literal unburdening for those whose voices have been silenced for so long. GRENDOORLOG firmly places the issues of TRUTH & RECONCILIATION back onto the Southern African political agenda and at the centre of popular imagination.¹³

The majority of documentaries related to the SADF focus on the Border War including *Across the border* (Vredeveld 1999), *War Stories* (Lampen 2011), *My Heart of Darkness* (Van Niekerk 2011), *Bush War Battle Sites* (M-Net 2011) and *Stories, Shadows and Dust* (Eriksen 2012). Interestingly, film or television documentaries relating to ex-SADF conscript experiences within the townships or initial phases of training within the SADF appear to be non-existent.

Also worth noting is the documentary *Property of the State: Gay Men in the Apartheid Military* (Kruger 2010). Kruger's documentary, which followed in the wake of *The Aversion Project Report* (1999), highlights the experiences and treatment of homosexual men within the SADF. The documentary includes enactments, a theatrical account by Greig Coetzee and an interview with Mike Smith, an aversion therapy survivor.

Conscript narratives on the stage

However, it is within the medium of theatre that most audiences have been exposed to the conscript experience of induction and basic training within the SADF. The first theatrical production was Anthony Akerman's *Somewhere on the Border* (1986), first performed at the National Arts Festival at the height of the regime's power in 1986. Edlmann (2014: 184) notes that Akerman's play was performed "in the midst of a state of emergency in South

¹³ Visit <http://grensoorlog.com/> for an overview of the series including a full episode listing. The following two Episodes of worthy of mention in that they explore conscription and the activities of war resisters and anti-conscription organisations such as the End Conscription Campaign (ECC):
 Episode 2: TWO WORLDS
 Episode 17: OF REBELS, OBJECTORS AND DEFECTORS

Africa, and during a time when the play was banned for publication”. *Somewhere on the Border* returned to South African stages in 2011, and according to Edlmann, “still drew audiences in Grahamstown, Johannesburg and Cape Town”.

Ex-conscript Greig Coetzee’s tragicomic one-man performances of *White Men with Weapons* and *Johnny Boskak is Feeling Funny* offer compelling insights into the SADF conscript experience, exploring in disturbing detail various conscript narratives. As Edlmann (2014) notes, the popularity of both plays poses intriguing questions relating to the cathartic necessity of conscript narratives that are seemingly cloaked in humour and nostalgia. Greig offers his audiences, often made up of ex-SADF conscripts, a “comfortable space” inextricably bound to memory, in which they are able to re-assess their position within a contemporary South Africa. Greig’s *White Men with Weapons* was first performed in Durban (1996), in Edinburgh (2000) and more recently in London (2013). Edlmann (2014) rightly notes the longevity of plays such as *White Men with Weapons* are evident of a vacuum that needs to be filled.

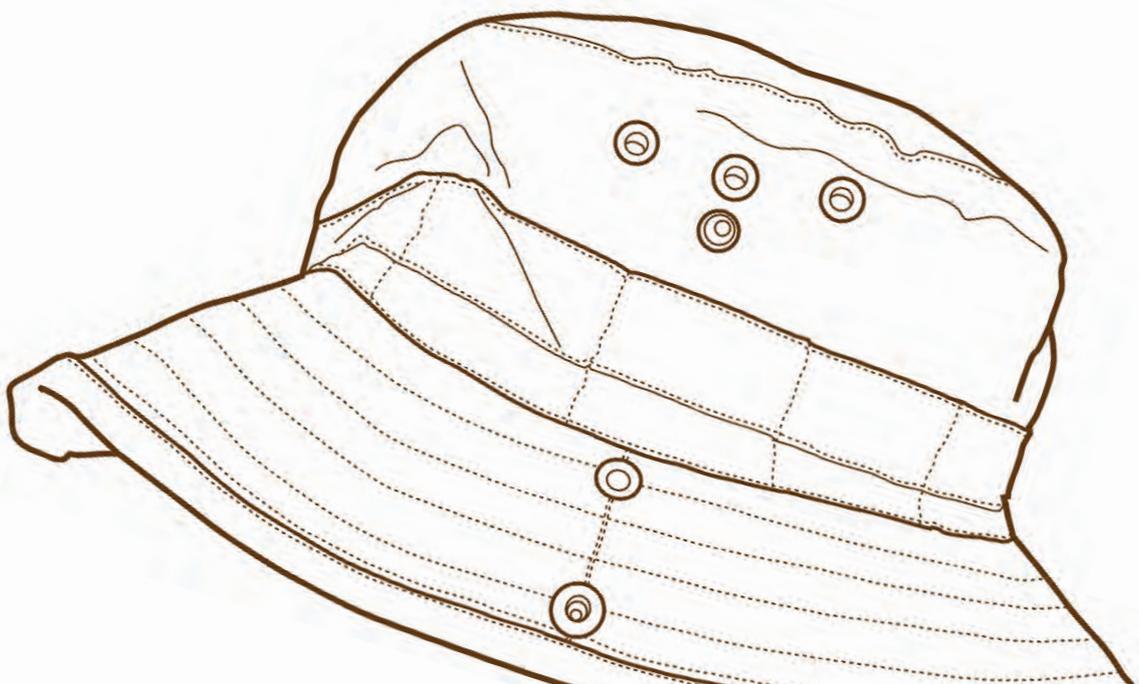
Most recently, Deon Opperman’s 2011 musical *Tree Aan* is deeply entangled in a nostalgic interpretation of conscript memories. *Tree Aan* is a large scale musical production, in stark contrast to the dark comedy of Greig’s *White Men with Weapons*. Opperman’s play appears to skirt the trauma of conscription, presenting a quasi-romanticised construction of the experience. Deon Opperman explains:

The men who fought this war were never debriefed. After national service, we were freed into society, as if nothing ever happened...I know that thousands of men of my generation will, through this musical, finally get the debrief that is so crucial. It definitely gave me closure and I am also showing the mothers, aunts, sisters, girlfriends and everyone who waited, what it meant to be a troepie.

(MambaOnline.com 2015)

Moira de Swardt's 2011 review of *Tree Aan* echoes the play's role in reinforcing a nostalgic and somewhat romanticised notion of conscription. De Swardt writes, "Report for military service, border duty and a wonderful journey through our remembered past" (de Swardt 2015).

Tree Aan was sold out during its first run in the State Theatre in early 2011, prompting a re-run later in the year. The popularity of the nostalgic tones of Opperman's *Tree Aan* poses interesting questions as to how largely white post-*apartheid* audiences are engaging with the previously silenced memories of ex-SADF conscripts.



Expressions of Conscription - Photography and Fine Art

Photo books

There have been a number of diverse creative responses in the field of photography and fine art to the experience of conscription, and most notably the Border War, over the past few decades. These include a number of publications and exhibitions that were created in the 1980s such as artist Peter Badcock's *Images of War* (1981), consisting of a series of illustrations accompanied by poems (written by the author), documenting the conscript experience of the Border War. The book serves as a commemorative and largely sympathetic account of the experience and makes no attempt to challenge the moral implications of the conflict.

Ex-SADF conscript and photo-journalist Johan Liebenberg's *Bush of Ghosts - Life and War in Namibia 1986–1990* (2010) showcases a photographic archive of the Border War during the 1980s, including a record of the war's effect on the civilian population. A number of his photographs are of relevance to this study as they depict the induction process of conscripts into the SADF.¹⁴ Liebenberg was not an official embedded SADF photographer, allowing him to access "other structures of support and other strategies to get close to South African soldiers" (Liebenberg and Hayes 2010: 12). According to academic Patricia Hayes, who wrote the introduction to *Bush of Ghosts*, Liebenberg poses the question, "What is the story of the people in the photograph?" (20) and "What is the story of the photographer?" (22).¹⁵ How, when and where these questions intersect within present post-apartheid South Africa are vital elements of this research's *problematique*.

¹⁴ See John Liebenberg's Flickr website: <https://www.flickr.com/people/johnarthurliebenberg/>. The following album: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/johnarthurliebenberg/albums/72157631942458741> includes photographs of SADF conscripts in training. Also see: <http://www.digitalcollections.lib.uct.ac.za/collection/islandora-6928>.

¹⁵ Patricia Hayes' introduction to *Bush of Ghosts* is available online: https://www.academia.edu/11712031/John_Liebenberg_and_Patricia_Hayes_Bush_of_Ghosts_Life_and_War_in_Namibia_Cape_Town_Umuzi_Random_House_2010_.Introduction.

Cameron Blake's *Troepie Snapshots - Pictorial Recollections of the South African Border War* (2011) possibly offers one of the most comprehensive collections of conscript photographs and SADF documentation, including photos from the induction process, the various phases of basic training, the Border War and a chapter dedicated to visual material from the ECC.

In addition, the internet has established itself as a massive photographic repository of ex-SADF conscript experiences, ranging from sites such as *Sentinel Projects* to the various social media platforms that were discussed earlier in this chapter.¹⁶

Fine Art and sculpture

According to Morris (Baines and Vale 2008), critical artistic representations of the Border War (and conscript experiences) first came to the attention of the South African public at the Johannesburg Biennial (1995) with a sculpture of a prosthetic leg titled, *Leg from Angola* by Cuban artist, Fernando Alvim. This was the first of a series of interventions by Alvim to give voice to the historic silences surrounding the Border War. In 1997 Fernando Alvim, a Cuban national, Angolan Carlos Garaicoa, and South African Gavin Younge, began collaborating on a project called *Memórias Intimas Marcas* (Memories Intimacies Traces), based in Cuito Cuanavale (Angola), the location of the last major battle during the Angolan War. The project is important in that it was an artistic attempt at exploring memory and the traumatic “residue” of the Border War from Cuban, Angolan and South African vantage points, yet also encompassing other African conflicts. The project drew various artists and included three exhibitions in Southern Africa and Europe, including the work of ex-SADF conscripts and permanent force members such as Colin Richards, Jan van der Merwe and Willem Boshoff.

It is also worth noting the exhibition *Not My War* (June – July 2012) at the Michaelis Gallery

¹⁶ Please consult footnote no. 18 for a list of online photographic archives related to the experiences of SADF conscripts.

(Michaelis School of Fine Art, UCT) which included work by a number of prominent South Africa artists reflecting on South Africa's involvement in the Border War, conscript experiences and its impact on present South African society.¹⁷ The exhibition marked the 25th anniversary of the battle of Cuito Cuanavale and recognised the importance of an artistic counter to the considerable surge of conscript and Border War narratives in recent years. Mary Corrigan's review of the exhibition notes:

...the paradoxical position of the white conscript as a victim of a system that was designed to benefit those of his race made it difficult for border veterans' stories to enter the public discourse because they contradicted the dominant nationalist narrative that the ANC had established, where those who fought on behalf of the *apartheid* state were the perpetrators, while those who battled against them undeniably occupied the position of victims. In other words, it had become politically incorrect for whites to articulate their ambivalent roles. And so it was that for almost a decade after democracy, the silence around the border wars remained undisturbed, unchallenged.¹⁸

Corrigan's statement necessitates the need for continued exploration of conscript narratives and echoes this project's proposition that these histories have established themselves as counter-memories within a post-apartheid space. Natasha Norman's essay *In the Foxholes of History* that accompanied the exhibition warns that:

The recent growth in an emerging white discourse of the Border War is powerfully cathartic, however, new borders are likely to emerge in this discourse if it is not kept within the perspective of a larger socio-political framework?¹⁹

17 *Not My War* was curated by David Brits, and participating artists are Wayne Barker, Christo Doherty, Paul Emmanuel, John Liebenberg, Jo Ractliffe, Colin Richards, Chad Rossouw, Penny Siopis, Christopher Swift and Gavin Younge. Visit <http://www.davidbrits.com/not-my-war-exhibition/> for images of the exhibition.

18 Read Corrigan's complete review here: <http://corrigan.blogspot.co.za/2012/07/the-silent-war.html#more>

19 Natasha Norman's essay *In the Foxholes of History* is accessible at: <http://notmywarproject.blogspot.co.za/>

This thesis intends to explore how these “new borders” are navigated by all ex-SADF conscripts, not merely those who were “on the border”.

Photographer Jo Ratcliffe’s projects, *Terreno Ocupado* (2007–2008), *Terras do Fim do Mundo* (2009–2010) and *Borderlands* (2011–2013) are essentially a contemporary *de-peopled* representation of Liebenberg’s topographies, that bear the “traces of war” decades later. Ratcliffe photographed ex-SADF bases such as Pomfret, Kimberley (including Schmidtsdrift and Platfontein), Riemvasmaak and Angolan battlefields, presenting stark landscapes that bear the echoes of largely unresolved histories.

Ratcliffe’s photographic series was included in a landmark exhibition at the Tate Modern (26 November 2014 –15, March 2015) titled *Conflict, Time and Photography* including the work of photojournalists and artists whose “primary source material is the aftermath of various conflicts from around the world”²⁰

Wits academic, Christo Doherty’s exhibition *Bos: Constructed Images and the Memory of the South African “Bush War”* (August - September 2011) formed part of a creative arts PhD.²¹ Doherty relies on American photographer David Levinthal’s photographic work with miniatures and toys, which Doherty describes as “critical post-modernism”. Doherty explores the memory of the Border War, via a series of miniature dioramas, drawing on photographic references, including both disturbing and banal scenes from the border. He argues “that photographs are themselves complex and constructed objects that do not provide a simple truth about either history or memory” (Doherty 2014: i), again stressing the importance of continued research into attempting to explore the role of visual imagery within the context of conscript experiences.

20 Visit <http://thetriad.org.uk/news-item/conflict-time-and-photography-at-tate-modern-exhibition-review/> <http://lomokey.com/blog/conflict-time-photography-at-the-tate-modern-london/> for an overview and examples of the *Conflict, Time and Photography* exhibition at the Tate Modern.

21 Visit Christo Doherty’s blog for a detailed description of the creative process the artist employed to create the dioramas for the *Bos* exhibition: <http://doherty.co.za/bushwars/> and <https://www.flickr.com/photos/christop-ics/sets/72157626541502166/>

Mention must be made of a recent photographic series of Ukrainian conscripts entitled *He's Won A Lottery* (2015). Ukraine aimed to re-introduce conscription in December 2015 and Lithuanian photographer Neringa Rekašiūtė and TV personality Beata Tiškevič-Hasanova collaborated to produce a series of portraits of uniformed conscripts weeping. Although the series has been criticised as a seemingly contrived emotional representation of the effects of conscription, it poses meaningful questions relating to the viewer's perception of masculinity.²²

Conclusion

To date, there are no studies relating to the experiences of ex-SADF conscripts that draw on a combined theoretical framework of whiteness and masculinity within the spheres of personal narratives, memory and nostalgia. This study, in essence, involves a hitherto unprecedented exploration of a creative visual reply intersecting with a theoretical framework in an attempt to further a better understanding of how the conscript generation live their shared histories in contemporary South Africa.

²² Visit <http://pulptastic.com/14-men-react-new-mandatory-army-conscription-lithuania-powerful-photo-series/> to view the series.



Whiteness

How ex-SADF conscripts address and navigate notions of whiteness within a post-apartheid space is of importance to this thesis. Apartheid instilled, categorised and institutionalised a divisive sense of race. The normalcy of white superiority was inextricably bound to the apartheid regime's socialisation of white male conscripts and was perceived as deterministic, bolstered by a long-standing institutional construct of whiteness as a normalised category (Steyn 2001). W.E.B. DuBois' landmark studies over 100 years ago addressed how the sustained invisibility of whiteness by whites maintains white privilege, which in turn laid the foundations of whiteness studies (Du Bois and Edwards 2007, Du Bois and Sundquist 1996).

An overview of whiteness studies

Whiteness studies had its origins as an academic discipline in the United States in the 1990s, progressing into the new millennium, as an attempt to negotiate and describe the cultural, historical and sociological particulars of individuals who are identified as white (Kaufman 2006). These investigations included the work of Bonnet (1998), Hill (1997), Kaufmann (2006), Lipsitz (1998), Nakayama and Martin (1999), Roediger (1994) and Ware and Black (2002). Richard Dyer's *WHITE* (1997) remains an important text in that he draws attention to the paradox of whiteness, where white skin implies the absence of ethnicity. For Dyer representations of whiteness are pervasive. He proposes that 'the invisibility of whiteness as a racial position in white (which is to say dominant) discourse is of a piece with its ubiquity' (3).²³

Much of the aforementioned writing was seen as an attempt to catechize long-established subjective notions of whiteness, and disrupt dominant narratives that perceived whiteness as normal, where whiteness was perceived as a racial benchmark against which all other races

²³ Visit http://pmc.iath.virginia.edu/text-only/issue.998/9.1.r_kuchta.txt to read a review of Richard Dyer's *WHITE* (1997).

are measured. Jensen (2005: 115-118) notes the interconnective relationship between white men and white masculinities, as a means of establishing white dominance within society. This is of particular relevance to this study's exploration of the interconnectivities between whiteness and masculinity.

Whiteness studies within South Africa

Although whiteness studies emerged from the United States, much research has also been conducted in South Africa, notably by Steyn (2001), Steyn and Conway (2010) and Steyn and Forster (2008). Steyn (2001) notes that further explorations of South African whiteness are necessary to disassemble entrenched social constructs, provide catharsis and allow for humanised narratives to be voiced.

Conway (2007: 78) notes that “conscription also served as a means by which intra-white social and political cleavages could be moderated and a new white South African identity be forged”, and therefore sustain the racial hegemony of the white minority regime. Conway also notes that previous exclusionary discourses that marginalised non-Afrikaans whites were gradually dismissed as pressure mounted on the regime during the 1970s. White Afrikanerdom recognised the need to incorporate white English speakers, to maintain white hegemony. Conway observes that the SADF lauded previously marginalised Jewish, English, and Portuguese servicemen, and even emphasised the SADF's British military heritage and that white English speakers were “afforded new claims of citizenship’ when they entered the SADF as conscripts” (425).

Paradoxically, many South African military units (such as 32 Battalion) were largely made up of black soldiers (Nortje 2003). In some cases, conscripts were instructed by black non-commissioned officers (NCOs) during basic training.²⁴ Again, Conway notes that national service in the SADF was presented as a masculine privilege, part of a “pervasive cultural

²⁴ A number of the author's 1990 intake of national servicemen were instructed by Indian and Coloured NCOs during basic training at SAS Saldhana.

mythology” (2007: 426). Caforio (2013: 32) also examines the links between whiteness and militarisation and cites Steyn (2001) and Sennet and Foster (2001) in proposing that there is an “ambivalent, unstable, guilty mesh surrounding white South African identity” which continues to affect “how white individuals understand themselves, others and their relations to others”. Again, Conway and Caforio’s assertions prompt continued research that grapples with processes of de-mythologising and disrupting long-standing notions of whiteness.

Melissa Steyn’s seminal *Whiteness Just Isn’t What It Used To Be* (2001) examines changes within South African white identities in the post-1994 period, paying attention to shifting narratives concerning race. Steyn’s collection of 59 white narratives emphasises the ongoing need to facilitate conversations related to whiteness within South Africa. For Steyn, whiteness studies interrogate a largely normalised and invisible sense of whiteness. The need to make visible or out whiteness (Steyn and Conway 2010) and examine these subjectivities within a post-apartheid space is crucial.

In this respect, Samantha Vice’s controversial paper *How Do I Live in This Strange Place?* (2010) proposed the view that whites should feel shame for their whiteness and inherited social advantages. Vice argued that South African whites should retreat from public life and contemplate their sense of privilege. Vice was subjected to a storm of protest, noted in an article by political commentator, Eusebius McKaiser. As a riposte to Vice’s paper McKaiser (2011: 34) offers the following advice to whites, “You have an unqualified political and ethical right to engage in the political and public spheres of (y)our country, but be mindful of how your whiteness still benefits you and gives you unearned privileges”.

Loen de Kock’s article *Blanc de Blanc: Whiteness Studies - A South African Connection?* (2007) is noteworthy, in that de Kock draws attention to the need to “de-essentialise” South African whiteness. De Kock (2007: 187) proposes how the complexities of whiteness studies might be “tackled” within a South African context, focusing on a correlation between whiteness

and “wildness”. De Kock proposes that “whiteness,” by virtue of its complicity with apartheid has been ‘delegitimised,’ and according to de Kock, “rendered blank”. De Kock notes that whiteness studies is a “wholly understudied area” and that “researchers should go there and see how it moves”.

Steyn notes Conway’s assertion that conscription underpinned white power and defined the white nation (Steyn and Conway 2010), yet with the transition to a democratic dispensation, “the loss of political power has engendered a new sense of crisis”(287). Steyn (2001: 150) writes in *Whiteness Just Isn’t What It Used To Be* of “an acute sense of loss of the familiar, loss of certainty, loss of comfort, loss of privilege, loss of well-known roles . . . a delusional home now collapsed”. How ex-SADF conscripts navigate this ongoing sense of crisis is vital to a broader understanding of South African whiteness – specifically male whiteness.



Masculinities

An introduction to masculinities

Connell's key text *Masculinities* (1995) acknowledged the dynamism and multiplicity of masculinities and eschewed essentialist views of men (Morrell 1998 2001). For Connell (1998: 607), and anthropologists such as Andrea Cornwall and Nancy Lindisfarne, masculinities were diverse and fluid (1998). Morell notes that the aforementioned texts "acknowledge the existence of dominant forms of masculinity as a frame" and that masculinity is a "collective gender identity and not a natural attribute". In this sense, Morrell emphasises that masculinity is a social and often institutional construction, often including a plurality of masculinities, that is contested, and fundamentally fluid. This notion echoes Connell's idea of no singular masculinity, but a complex configuration of many masculinities at play (Connell 1995: 12, Connell 2002).

Connell and Messerschmidt's (2005: 835) reformulated the concept of hegemonic masculinity is noteworthy, in acknowledging Paul Higate's (2003) study that a "diversity of masculinities" is often encountered in military institutions. Connell and Messerschmidt note that specific forms of hegemonic masculinity become "entrenched" in military institutions, in turn reiterating Charlotte Hooper's (1999: 479) notion that military service is deemed to be the "fullest expression of masculinity". Hooper sees military service as a rite of passage, where basic training is the embodiment of a "physical and social shaping of the male body" (480). Brian Taylor (2006: 169) notes in *Responding to Men in Crisis*,

Although 85 percent of men who went to Vietnam did not see combat and many encountered resistance to military authority, they came under intense pressure to conform to a culturally constructed 'false memory syndrome' that demanded stories about war as a male rite of passage.

Hooper asserts that “militarisation as an institutional process follows different paths under different international circumstances” (480) echoing the SADF’s racially based system of conscription, that essentially underpinned the apartheid state’s grip on power. Hooper cites Connell’s argument that military institutions are organised (“historically”) between two masculinities – one rooted in physical violence (namely the lower ranks, notably including conscripts), and another dominant “officer” and administrative class (482). This notion emphasises the need that conscripts, specifically in the case of apartheid-era conscripts, were required to be adequately militarised prior to entry into the SADF.

White militarised masculinities within South Africa

Conscription in South Africa was bound to various guises of masculinity (Conway 2012, Morell 1998) and remains a pervasive presence in the lives of ex-SADF conscripts as indicated in the research of Caforio (2013), Doherty(2014), Draper (1999), Edlmann (2015) and Epstein (1998). Conscription was advocated as a necessary civic duty for white males, a performative culmination of a complex socialisation process that had its origins in childhood (Conway 2012, Cock and Nathan 1989, Lazenby 2012). Conway notes that conscription was perceived as a rite of passage and deeply enmeshed with notions of hegemonic and militarised masculinities (Conway 2012) whereas Epstein (1998) argues that whiteness is often “made visible through violence”, and is entangled with all South African masculinities.

The process of militarising South African white males has been carefully documented in Cock and Nathan’s *War and Society* (Cock and Nathan 1989), including a chapter authored by Gavin Evans titled *Classrooms of war: The militarisation of white South African Schooling*, detailing the role of schools, universities and related youth activities to prepare adolescent white males for the “national priorities of an increasingly militarised state” (283). The influence of the SADF over white schooling from the mid-70s, as a means of preparatory military training, allowed for the development of Connell’s complex configuration of masculinities, yet little research

has been conducted as to how those masculinities now negotiate contemporary spaces.

Jacklyn Cock's *Colonels & Cadres - War & Gender in South Africa* (1991) explores the links between war and gender in South Africa in the 1980s, drawing attention to military training (in the SADF) as a form "socialisation into brutality" (56). Cock's study examines the process of basic training, likening it to a "dehumanisation" process, that binds masculinity and militarism in an attempt to transform young men into soldiers (59). Cock notes that the system of conscription in South Africa was racially determined, a type of nationalistic manhood that was bolstered by methods of "ideological coercion" originating within the school environment, and often glamourised by apartheid-era media. Cock notes that legal, ideological and social coercion was omnipresent, exerting constant pressure on young white males destined for military service.

Cock (1991) concludes that it was not surprising that compliance was the response of the vast majority of SADF conscripts. Cock also mentions the role of women (including the girlfriends of conscripts) and family as "an important source of the connection between masculinity and militarism" (74) but does not examine their respective roles in detail. In this regard, it is also important to note Catherine Draper's (2001) qualitative analysis of the discourses of families of ex-SADF soldiers, which investigates the effects of military service on families, and its resultant trauma. Interestingly, Draper also pays attention to the positive aspects of the military experience, such as the formation of close bonds and camaraderie between soldiers.

Recent academic explorations of militarised masculinities in South Africa

Nyameka Mankayi's paper *Masculinity, sexuality and the body of male soldiers* (2010) offers psychological insights into the way in which soldiers in the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) construct their masculinity and sexuality. Mankayi (2010: 26) discusses how

“men’s bodies intersect with their masculinities” within a military institution, noting that the body is a key construct in the formation of a militarised masculinity. Mankayi also alludes to Cohn’s (2001) notion that the military offers young men the opportunity to assert and prove their manhood, allowing the institution the power to “groom male bodies for violence” (25). Barrett (2001: 1306) concurs, stating that the military has “socialised millions of men according to some traditional blueprint”.

Of importance to this study, is Mankayi’s (2010) observation that military weapons, such as the rifles that soldiers are issued with, can be construed as idealised extensions of the “militarised body” (34). Mankayi notes that most of the SANDF participants of her study agreed that carrying and handling a weapon was pleasurable and provided “a sense of manhood” (34). Henri Myrntinen also discusses the “special relationship” soldiers develop with weapons, focusing on the relationships between the construction of masculinities and the sexualised symbolism used in conjunction with weapons. Further questions need to be posed regarding how ex-SADF conscripts now address and express these hegemonic ideals of masculinity within contemporary civil society. For many, cyberspace (Baines 2008 2012 2014) and social gatherings such as *braais*,²⁵ act as a locus of masculine narratives for ex-SADF conscripts, in which they re-imagine their experiences in a contemporary space.

In *Men After War* Stephen McVeigh and Nicola Cooper (2013: 8) discuss the formation of “alternative masculinities after war”, noting those men who resisted and rejected militarism, such as conscientious objectors and war resisters are often portrayed as “effeminate, naive, untrustworthy and even politically dangerous”. How these men are perceived in a South African context, decades after the end of conscription presents a gap in the knowledge base. Furthermore, McVeigh and Cooper note that the “silence of the veteran”, and “moreover *his* silencing” is of importance to the field of memory studies (9). This is the case with many ex-SADF conscripts, where memory has been repressed and largely marginalised. According to

25 *Braai* (Afrikaans) is a South Africanism for a barbeque.

McVeigh and Cooper “the status of the veteran also has the power to disturb and dismantle widely accepted versions of national narratives of conflict” (9) as masculine identities that still feel the pressure of their military experience. McVeigh and Cooper argue that masculine identities need to be “configured” and “mediated” and “sometimes modified to fit into the dominant frames of socio-cultural discourses” (10). This thesis will attempt to grapple with these configurations of masculinity, specifically in relation to race (whiteness) within the post-apartheid space.

There has been a recent increase of scholarly research dedicated to exploring the psycho-social relationship between whiteness and masculinity, specifically related to the Border War notably by Luyt (2002) and Caforio (2013). Rees (2010: iii) examines masculinity and sexuality in the South African Border War, exploring the “ideologies inherent in constructing the white Afrikaner man, his woman and their family”, whereas most recently, Theresa Edlmann’s (2014) doctoral thesis in history and psychology explores “narrative-based reflections” of conscription, including an exploration of whiteness in relation to gender.

Conway’s notion of militarised masculinities in South Africa

Daniel Conway’s (2012) seminal socio-political study, *Masculinities, Militarisation and the End Conscription Campaign War Resistance in Apartheid South Africa* is the most comprehensive recent examination of militarised masculinities, analysing the relationships between militarisation, sexuality, whiteness and homophobia under the apartheid regime. Conway’s study is noteworthy in that he investigates the construction of militarised masculinities in apartheid-era South Africa, where a militarised white masculinity evolved into a dominant form of masculinity. These constructs pose interesting contemporary challenges, namely, how do I attempt to deconstruct these militarised masculinities in a contemporary post-apartheid, or at least allow for these masculinities to give an account of themselves.

Although Conway does not explore the effects of the militarisation of white males in a contemporary space, his historical analysis is informed by contemporary militarised societies such as Turkey and Israel.

This research project also draws on recent international studies of conscription and militarisation, namely Ute Frevert's *A Nation in Barracks: Conscription, Military Service and Civil Society in Modern Germany* (2004), Orna Sasson-Levy's *Constructing Identities at the Margins: Masculinities and Citizenship in the Israeli Army* (2002), Yagil Levy's *A Controlled but not Restrained Military: Conceptualizing the Control of Militarism* and Kopano Ratele's paper *Violence, Militarised Masculinity and Positive Peace* (2012). All of the aforementioned texts present varied arguments relating to the often inextricable relationship between masculinities, conscription and militarised societies.

I'M NOT A
COMMUNIST!





NUTRIA Exhibition installation artwork detail, The Castle of Good Hope, Cape Town 2017 (photograph: Stephen Symons)



CHAPTER TWO

“Casting Shadows”

Militarised boyhoods in apartheid South Africa
during the 1980s



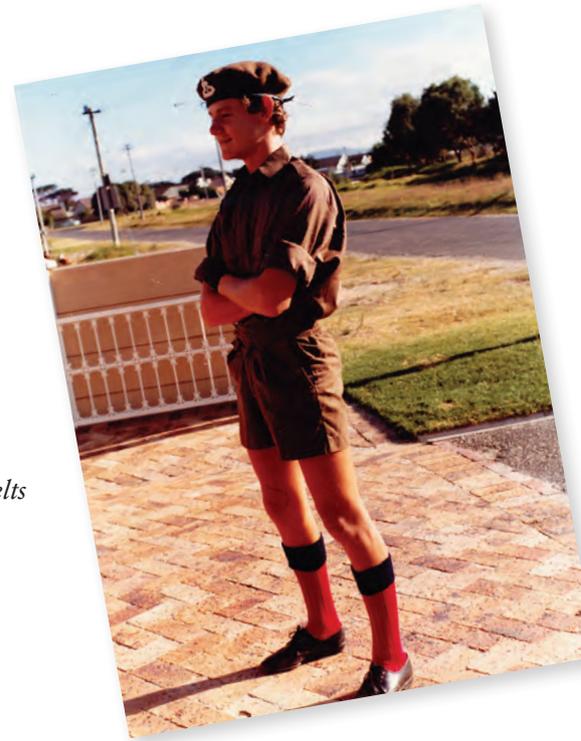
Figure 2 Photograph of the author and friends “playing soldiers” 1977
(photograph: Nanette Symons)

Chapter 2 - “Casting Shadows”

Militarised boyhoods in apartheid South Africa during the 1980s

We trained for years,
barefoot in long shards of grass
with catties stuck in toffee pockets,
then in berets and rugby socks
on yellow pitches and in dappled quads.

— Stephen Symons, from the poem *Sand melts
at 3000 degrees Celsius*



Introduction

The ways in which South African society was gradually intruded upon and militarised, reaching its apogee in the mid-1980s, involved a nuanced and complex ideological architecture designed to preserve the status quo of white minority rule. This chapter provides a series of insights as to the structures and scaffolding of militarising white South African males during the 1980s. I intend to discuss the process from childhood up until induction into the SADF, accompanied by the personal accounts of ex-conscripts.

I will point to defining moments of the process of militarisation, often originating in childhood, and suggest that the state relied on the tacit compliance of Christian National Education (CNE), immediate family structures and consumerist influences, for the effective formation of a militarised masculinity within apartheid South Africa of the 1980s. Although this chapter traces the process and presents personal accounts of a militarised childhood, it ultimately questions how these indeterminate memories enter and attempt to navigate a contested present, namely a post-apartheid space, where they assume the guise of counter-memory, often infused with a deep sense of nostalgia.

Formulating a militarised state of mind

When does militarisation begin for a child? Does it begin in the home or in the classroom? Does it begin within a church, or germinate and take root from watching a news programme or war movie on television? Perhaps it begins in a back garden, playing war games, or reading war comics? These are questions that are difficult to answer, yet the Reverend Neels du Plooy, a SADF chaplain between 1977 and 1990 posed a similar series of questions at the *Special Hearing for Compulsory Military Service(Conscription)* at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that took place in Cape Town on the 23rd of July 1997:¹

- a) Why did the overwhelming majority of healthy, young and motivated South African white males of good standing, Afrikaans and English-speaking, unconditionally do national service - and more even than that, look forward to it?
- b) Why did parents accept national service as a necessity and a general way of life?
- c) Why did young people having difficulties at school suddenly see national service as a very good cause and a very good reason to quit school the moment they became eighteen?
- d) Why did parents feel obliged to inspire young men with problems at home or at school to join national service in the hope that disciplined training, etc. would do them good?

This chapter will, therefore, attempt to grapple with a number of Reverend Neels du Plooy's questions, beginning with my first memories of the SADF, and the inevitability as a white male, of facing conscription in apartheid-era South Africa.

¹ Visit <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/special/index.htm> to access Parts 1-4 of the *Special Hearing for Compulsory Military Service(Conscription)* chaired by psychologist Prof. Pumla Gobodo Madikizela of the Human Rights Violations Committee.

I remember the moment clearly, it was the mid-1970s and I must have been between eight and ten years old. I was in the family car, a green Ford Escort, with my father at the wheel. My brother and I were sitting in the back seats, kept in check by my grandmother. We were travelling towards the south peninsula's Muizenberg beach, as we drove by Youngsfield military base. Platoons of soldiers in full kit were drilling alongside the perimeter fence of the base. I asked my grandmother whether I would need to go to the army one day and I can recall her reply clearly, "Don't worry, you won't have to go to the border, you'll just play soldiers like those boys."

Her reply remained with me and framed my childhood concept of national service within the SADF. Many white South Africans viewed national service as a necessary social duty, an exclusive and entirely natural white male rite of passage, rationalised by sound bites such as, "the army will make a man out of you". The presence of the Border War cast a pervasive shadow over white South African society during the 70s and 80s, framed by ominous phrases such as *total onslaught* and *rooi gevaar*. Cock (1989: 3) echoes these thoughts and notes that Enloe's (1983) analysis of "militarism" involves a gradual "intrusion and encroachment" into civilian environments, affecting what Watson (2011: 44) refers to as the "social construction" of childhood, thus subjecting a child or adolescent "to all the power dynamics [and processes it] engenders".

The state's process of coercion focused on the nation's youth, an obvious and captive starting point to perpetuate notions of threat, fear and rationalise the necessities for racial segregation. Macmillan (2011: 65) argues that militarisation is "not only the acquisition of bodily skills required to (potentially) take life", but also requires the correct "disposition". The process of achieving a militarised state of mind required various mechanisms and called for a *total strategy*.

This chapter examines how the state's apparatus was employed to formulate and inculcate a *total strategy* that involved the gradual militarisation of the nation's white youth from an early age.

By the mid-1980s, the SADF relied heavily on regular intakes of white conscripts to combat increased resistance within and beyond the borders of South Africa. Cock and Nathan (1989: 2) rightly note that militarisation is a “contested concept” and part of a complex social process that takes place on an economic, political and ideological level. Jochelson and Buntman (1989) note the mechanisms of militarisation included utilising the resources of a largely state-controlled media, allied to Christian National Education (CNE), the school cadet system and various consumerist means. In addition, Lazenby (2012) notes Drewett’s (2008) assertion that militarisation became a key component in the formulation of white masculinity in apartheid South Africa. These formulations of a white militarised masculinity relied heavily on a number of ideological mechanisms that prompted the compliance of both white English and Afrikaans speaking South Africans.

Conscription as compliance

Irrespective of the cultural and political differences of apartheid-era white English and Afrikaans citizens, the ideological mechanisms of militarisation required the compliance of *all* white South African familial structures. Doubtless, the handing over of an 18-year-old son for 24 months of military service to the state demanded a substantial amount of parental and familial compliance.

In this regard, the National Party government employed a coercive rhetoric of fear, portraying the threat of communist expansion in Southern African as a means to justify conscription and national military preparedness (Cock 1989, Patterson 2009, Gear 2001). Allied to Afrikaner society’s strong views on patriarchy, puritanism and authoritarianism, national service was perceived as a necessary civic duty, whereas white English speaking South Africans adopted a largely passive, yet compliant attitude to conscription. Many of my conclusions are generalisations and are by no means inclusive of all ex-conscripts, either English or Afrikaans speaking. Baines (2009: 331) rightly notes that “ex-conscripts are not a homogeneous group” creating an ambiguous landscape of compliance for white apartheid-era South Africa.

Conscription - English and Afrikaans landscapes of varying compliance

Conscription was and remains fixed in the memory of many English speaking ex-conscripts as an experience that had to be endured, as a national and distinctly masculine rite of passage. An English speaking ex-conscript explained his parent's views on conscription were largely unknown, expressing that his parents viewed conscription as an inevitable and necessary demand placed on its citizens by the state, despite experiencing the trauma of his cousin committing suicide because he "couldn't cope with the relentless pressure of training" (Grant).

These perceptions of viewing conscription as a *national service* were underwritten within English speaking society by often referencing the past exploits of family members who had served during the Second World War, having answered the call to defeat Nazism. In this regard, the scourge of Nazism was conveniently substituted by the pervasive threat of communism, aided by propagandistic government discourse. The attitudes of white English speakers towards conscription remained largely ambivalent, yet ultimately compliant. Here, two ex-conscripts describe this sense of ambiguous compliance:

To be perfectly honest I actually don't know what my parent's views were on conscription and didn't know back then either. It was just a reality that had to happen and I never heard my parents saying what a bad idea it was or how it was something that should not happen. (Grant)

There seemed to be real or perceived differences between Afrikaans and English speakers, but the system managed to keep us together by presenting a common danger in the form of the rioting masses who wanted to take the country by force and destroy us. (Walter)

Most English speaking conscripts felt an overwhelming sense of inevitability, that conscription was simply something that white South African men were compelled to do. Conscription in apartheid-era South Africa, much like death and taxes, was an unavoidable certainty. The following interview excerpt points to the largely unquestioned societal and parental pressures of fulfilling one's national duty, echoing Lazenby's (2012: 43) view that "conscription was constructed as an accepted, necessary trajectory of white masculinity in apartheid-era society":

They thought pretty much the same way I did - the inevitability of having to go and they trusted that I would make it through. My cousin went into the President's Guards and he committed suicide because he couldn't cope with the relentless pressure of training and perfection that the corps required. This did impact the family. (John)

In contrast to the above statements, Afrikaans speaking society's attitude towards conscription tended to be more committed. Conscription into the SADF was often underwritten by largely hyper-masculine Afrikaner historical narratives. These include, amongst others, the heroic exploits of Voortrekkers and Boer War commandos, often against overwhelming odds, pitted against the machinery of the British Empire or belligerent *hordes* of indigenous tribes.

Allied to skewed legitimacies of preserving a sense of white national identity, conscription was notably justified by the ominous threat of communistic expansionism within Southern Africa. Here, an Afrikaans ex-conscript explains his father's attitude towards conscription:

As a child, I remember my father saying that the army turned boys into men, it was something that Afrikaners had done for generations. He would go on about teenagers fighting in the Boer War. I remember him saying to my brother that it was an honour to be part of SADF, it was the best army in Africa because it was a white

man's army fighting to preserve our way of life. He never mentioned the blacks, but always said it was left to the Afrikaners to stop the Cubans and communists. (Petrus)

Past heroic exploits and a sense of superior cultural identity were employed as a means of presenting national service as an honour bound duty that demanded unswerving loyalty, particularly among white Afrikaners. Given the political dominance of the Afrikaner, the contributions of English speaking conscripts or professional black SADF soldiers, actively engaged during the 70s and 80s in the Border War, tended to be blurred out of apartheid-era narratives. The role of English speaking conscripts and black soldiers were revised, in favour of a dominant Afrikaner ideological narrative. For many ex-conscripts, the SADF acted as a forge for white Afrikaner militarised ideology, which dominated the manner in which conscription was rationalised and marketed to whites during the 1980s.

Stemming the tide of Communism - a means to rationalise conscription, in the past and present

Although the intensity of the Border War increased significantly during the 1980s (Scholtz 2013), the South African regime repeatedly denied any punitive counter-insurgencies or major military operations in Angolan territory (Vale 2003), effectively propagandising the conflict as a just struggle to prevent Communist forces from maintaining a strategic foothold in Southern Africa (Scholtz 2013, Liebenberg, Risquet and Shubin 2015). General Constand Viljoen, Chief of the SADF, mentioned after the war that the aim of the SADF “was to never win the war...but to check the expansionism of communism in southern Africa” (Scholtz 2013: 448).

With the previous statement in mind, I want to draw attention to a view still held by many ex-conscripts, that they played a vital role in stemming a communist tide of domination in Southern Africa. This belief continues to serve as a platform of moral justification within the

post-apartheid space, from which their narratives can be articulated and interpolated in the present with relative ease.

Conscripts were portrayed as heroic *defenders of the realm* and protectors of a Christian-based social order, of home and hearth (Cock 1990), acting as the antithesis of the *rooi gevaar*. The term *rooi gevaar* was coined by former prime minister Hendrik Verwoerd, and it subsequently entered the Nationalist Party's lexicon of fear as a means of justification, and to shift attention from the regime's inherent racist programmes. Koen (Mail and Guardian 2013) points out that the many guises of the *rooi gevaar* were not only the "sinister" communist forces of Angolans and Cubans threatening the country's borders, but "it could infiltrate through a Pink Floyd record, or an errant peace sign on a teenager's jeans", and thus threaten the bedrock of family life. Morrell (2001) also notes that the influences of globalisation, beginning in the 1950s, made gradual inroads especially within conservative white Afrikaner society, that would ultimately manifest itself in forms of protest by the 1980s.

Therefore the regime's rhetoric of fear became a means of self-preservation, aspects of a longstanding *laager* mentality that was woven into the intimacy of family structures, childhood and the social fabric of white society.

I would like to think here how the regime's need for self-preservation employed a subtle but necessary shift in focus from its inherent racist ideology, diverting the white populace's attention to one of foreign threat, to that of a "faceless enemy" (Bassinger 2003), as a means of moral justification. This allowed for the effective dehumanisation of the *enemy*, but also provides a comfortable space of rationalisation and justification for ex-conscripts in the present. I noted during the interview process that ex-conscripts would justify their views, using the threat of communism as a diversionary tactic to shift focus from issues of race and the regime's racist ideologies:

Why were we conscripted? It's simple really, we were fighting to prevent a communist take-over of South Africa. That's what people don't understand. It wasn't about race or politics. It's a lot more complex than that...to protect the country and fight the perceived *swart gevaar* at the time, being terrorism and communism, emanating from the Communist block... (Mark)

Again, ex-conscript Joe relies on the threat of communism as a means of justification, but unlike Mark's previous statement, Joe remains cognisant of the propagandistic intentions of the regime. Nonetheless, as is the case with many ex-conscripts, the enemy is never "South African citizens" or "non-communist inhabitants":

I didn't see it as a white supremacist thing but more as an anti-communist thing. We were brought up believing that the communists were the baddies and we were there to fight the communist spread. Those were the days before the Berlin Wall fell, when the Cold War was at its height and everything communist was evil. Ronald Reagan and Maggie Thatcher were in power, and I think supported the SA government for those reasons. We were young and naive and fell for much of the National Party propaganda. Of course, it's all ridiculous now, looking back, but that was the way it was then. I didn't see national service as being there to control and/or fight the decent South African citizens and the non-communist inhabitants of our neighbouring countries. (Joe)

However, the gradual process of militarisation of South Africa's white youth could not be achieved without the tacit compliance of family, who would act as an agency to buttress the racial and gendered construction of a militarised male, as a protector of home and hearth.

Filial obedience - The family as an agency for militarisation

Paternal attitudes towards conscription

The role of the family as agents of compliance in South Africa's programme of militarisation cannot be underestimated. Ahlbäck's (2014: 132) study of Finnish conscripts draws attention to the importance of "filial obedience" and notes that the conscript "essentially set[s] out to defend a power structure that was not dominated by him and his comrades but by their father[s]". Conway (2012) and Morell (1998) note these notions of "filial obedience have their roots in childhood, and are bound to various guises of masculinity. Ahlbäck's (2014: 132) study notes that conscripts are both the sons of fathers and the regime, where their sense of masculinity acts as a fulcrum. Conscription was advocated as a necessary civic duty for white South African males, a performative culmination of a social obligation that had its origins in childhood (Conway 2012, Cock and Nathan 1989, Lazenby 2012), so boys would enter adolescence and manhood, ever conscious of their role as potential warriors and protectors of the nation.

Although conscripts were only liable for national service from age seventeen, fathers often impressed on their sons "that the army would make a man of you" during their adolescent years leading up to induction into the SADF. Suchlike statements served a dual purpose for both father and son, as a hyper-masculine vector for the father to rationalise the inevitability of national service, and for the son to simply acquiesce to an inevitable national duty that marked the transition from childhood to manhood. For some families, conscription was an inescapable rite of passage, while other parents used conscription as a means of leverage, coercion, or even as a threat if school results or behaviour were not up to standard. Prof. Seegers, at the TRC's *Special Hearing: Compulsory Military Service (Conscription)* in July 1993, drew attention to the role of the family in determining compliance to conscription:

The attitude of parents are [sic] very, very critical, but not only parents but where the rest of your family is. What have your brothers done? What do your sisters think, and what does the rest of the family [think]?

Subtleties of language: differences between *conscription* and *national service*

At this point, I would also like to draw attention to the use of language by interviewees, namely two terms – *conscription* and *national service*. Although my conclusions might well appear as reflexive (Potter and Wetherell 1987), the term *national service* now appears to be archaic, originally employed by state and military institutions to describe forced military service in the SADF. The term *national service* is seemingly benign and implies a patriotic willingness to serve. Its euphemistic nature was ideally suited to the regime's Orwellian lexicon, and its usage by whites in apartheid South Africa denoted compliance and acceptance of a citizen's patriotic duty. However the usage of the term *conscription* in both the past and present, implies resistance to forced military service, and is a part of a more individual and reactionary vocabulary to describe the experience, much like the term *army*, which is an often used and somewhat dismissive term employed by ex-conscripts to describe service in either the army, air force or navy. Take note of the manner in which terms *national service* and *army* are employed in the following extract of an interview with an ex-conscript:

Ja, if I didn't do well at school my old man would threaten me with national service. You see, if you were seventeen and still at school, and were not pulling your weight, there was always the army. There was no way I was going to university, but who wanted to go to the army at seventeen? (Paul)

Paternal threats, paternal reticence

Paternal threats of sending sons directly to the SADF after the completion of high school

were not uncommon. Many fathers of conscripts during the 1970s and 1980s had little or no immediate experience of military service, hence their views of the military were largely based on the emotionally distant experiences of World War 2 or Korean veterans (Morgan and Kunkel 2007).

Interestingly, I wonder whether apartheid-era fathers would have so readily complied with conscription if they had been veterans of a previous armed conflict. Here are two conflicting views encountered during the interview process:

My dad never went to the army, although he would always go on about how he was part of some school cadet corps. His concept of the military was very British, consisting of parade grounds and marching bands. It was a simplistic and sanitised view, perhaps even a romantic view. (Oscar)

My father was a decorated WW II veteran and I think was unable to handle the idea of his offspring doing military service, yet he handled it, as he handled the trauma of his own military service, with repression and denial. My father hated politicians, bureaucrats and petty officials and there were many stories, some of them very funny, of his collisions with authority. But on a certain level his experience of war, being seriously wounded, and seeing the triumph of apartheid on every level engendered a fatalistic state characterized by passivity. (Mark)

Paternal influences on the formation of militarised masculinities in apartheid South Africa are undoubtedly complex and varied. Draper (2008: 11) draws attention to the role of parents “in the development of children’s attitudes towards conscription”, yet when these paternally exerted pressures are articulated in the present they produce morally confusing and contested spaces of memory. For many both English and Afrikaans speaking parents,

the notion of a patriotic father ready to offer his son to the military is a simplistic and generalised view. Ugolini's (2016) study of *Middle-Class Fathers, Sons and Military Service in England 1914-1918*, places the stereotypical image of a patriotic and obliging father under scrutiny and complicates the oft-held view that paternal attitudes towards conscription were overwhelmingly compliant. Ugolini notes that many fathers of English First World War conscripts did indeed feel the need to question, and in some instances facilitate resistance to the call of duty. Much like the experiences of SADF conscripts, Ugolini notes these ambiguities were often allied to connotations of silence, fear and even shame, as is demonstrated by the following ex-conscript's statement:

What I do recall is telling my Dad years later that I had taken a stand as a conscientious objector once in the SA Navy, refusing to bear arms for the institution. He was reading his papers and, without looking up, said something about that having been my choice, implying it was not his. I had hoped he would be proud. But I think he was actually ashamed. (James)

Within apartheid-era South Africa of the 1980s, the attitudes of fathers to conscription were influenced by a state discourse imbued with patriotic and hegemonic masculine rhetoric. The notion that military service in the SADF was the price of South African citizenship permeated paternal attitudes towards conscription. The following account once again draws attention to a sense of ambivalence to military service:

My parents' position was that we had all been through enough in Rhodesia. But I suspect my Dad also felt it may have been a duty, and inevitable, and he advised me to study first because that would give me options, even in the army. He had not fought in Rhodesia - the army sent him home because he had flat feet - but his elder brother had lied about his age to join the fight in WW2 and had been a POW under the Japanese for over two years. So, mixed feelings, I suspect... (James)

Maternal attitudes towards conscription

Women often played a crucial role in perpetuating the creation of gendered binaries, yet the role of the male as protector carried a unique set of burdens for the conscript. Cock (1990: 26) notes the hidden strain of manliness in her seminal book, *Colonels and Cadres - War and Gender in South Africa*, drawing attention to the subtleties of gender relations in apartheid-era South Africa, and its determinants, that “operate mainly to privilege men and subordinate women”. As Ahlbäck (2014: 132) notes, the role of mothers was more ambiguous, whereby the son was loved by his mother, and in turn felt obliged to act as a “protector”, interwoven with emotions of pride and moral duty.

Women as the protected, sons as the protector

Drewett (2008: 95) notes that the state had clear views of “men as protectors” and “women and children as the protected”. This delineation of gender roles not only allowed for the germination of militarised masculinities but also pressured females to *acquiesce* into stereotypical roles on the home front. Drewett (2008: 95) rightly notes Cohn’s observation that the acceptance and acting out of these gendered roles are as much a product of conflict, as they are a means of justification, hence my use of the word *acquiesce*. Much of my research points towards maternal compliance to conscription enveloped by a deeply felt reticent silence. Here a sister describes her somewhat detached feelings about conscription:

My mother and both grandfathers volunteered during World War 2 so I grew up with army stories, so it seemed the natural order of things when my brothers were conscripted? (Lucy)

It appears that when these silences are ruptured and then articulated they are imbued with feelings of regret and helplessness. Here, a mother of a conscript relays her feelings:

I always knew my boy would have to go to the army. Sometimes I would watch him playing in the garden and imagine him in his uniform. At that moment I wished I could have frozen time and that he could be that boy playing in the garden forever. I knew there was nothing I could do to stop it. I suppose I felt helpless..?’
(Susan)

Dominant hegemonic masculine discourses presided over white South African society of the 1980s and perpetuated a subordination of the feminine. The narratives of mothers, sisters, girlfriends or wives have been “blurred out of the narrative” (Ahlbäck 2014: 220) resulting in a largely gendered perception of the militarisation of white apartheid-era South Africa. Some female recollections relating to conscription often speak of loss and helplessness, yet in some instances, helplessness suffuses to a sense of pride:

I cried for days when Johan went to the army. My husband had no idea how upset I was. I would cry when he went to work. Johan was my only son, but when I saw him in his uniform I felt so proud of him. At first, I didn’t recognise him, he looked so grown up. (Dean)

Cock (1989: 53) draws attention to a blurring of the lines between militarisation and gender, quoting Enloe’s view that women were categorised as “peripheral, as serving safely at the rear”. Women act as gendered participants in the militarisation of their sons, underwriting what Ahlbäck (2014: 232) refers to as a type of “narrative homosociality” that actively “conceals any emotional dependence on relationships with women, not least mothers”. The following statement certainly positions this ex-conscript’s mother as a gendered participant:

When I think back, my parents said remarkably little. They did not discuss the call-up with us (they had five boys). My mother was distressed and worried, but she tended to defer to my father in all important things. (Stuart)

Cock (1989: 55) also draws attention to the role of mothers in perpetuating and indirectly aiding the process of militarisation by providing their sons with war toys which I will discuss in further detail later in this chapter. Although Cock discusses the role of mothers briefly, she notes the manner in which the state appealed to mothers to adopt a “positive attitude” (56) and see conscription as means of instilling discipline and a sense of independence.

I would argue that the peripheral role of the *caring mother* remained a subtle ideological construct of a hyper-masculine state, that encouraged a sense of silent compliance, reiterating the ascribed maternal role as a carer, and the future role of the son, as a protector. Cock (1989: 53) also draws attention to “indirect linkages”, such as Nazi Germany, whereby the state simply equated femininity with domesticity. Mothers were required “to stay at home, produce babies’ and exist in a state of complicit silence”(53). Here, an ex-conscript reflects on, and attempts to rationalise the “complicit silences” of his mother:

My mom didn’t really have any obvious opinions of conscription, or the fact that we had to go to cadets and or enjoyed running round the house with toy guns as kids. I could say she felt it was what boys did and had to do. There was a silence attached to the fact that my brother and I were eventually going to be called up. I’ve never asked how she really felt about me having to go to the army. I think she didn’t want to upset me. (Johan)

I want to also draw particular attention to Cock’s (1989: 63) notion that the process of the militarisation of white youths was “neither smooth nor uniform” from a familial perspective, but a complex and rather blurred series of “contradictions”, including cultural and social determinants based on class, language and parental attitudes. These “contradictions” were myriad and were the product of a culturally complex white society in apartheid-era South Africa, not simply based on divides of culture and language. In this instance an ex-conscript grapples with the ambiguities of having to serve in the SADF, drawing attention to a “sense of resignation” that is evident in the following account by an ex-conscript:

They [parents] felt pretty much the same way I did. There was this belief that you must go and “do your bit” for your country, that the army would make you a man, and there was that same sense of resignation that this was just the way it was. My mother didn’t like the fact that I was going to be so far away. Obviously, the risk of dying on the border was in the back of everybody’s minds, but this wasn’t such a big deal, as we knew statistically that the vast majority of people came back home alive. (Joe)

Many participant narratives described the difficulties of grappling with the intricacies of the present, with its social, political and racial ambiguities. The result were accounts that were often rife with contradictions, as demonstrated by Mark and Petrus’ comments:

I remember my mother’s shock and distress both in 1967 when conscription for all white males was introduced and how it was heightened after 1972. I was ten years old when it really dawned on me that it was going to happen to me too. I thought of it with dread and mostly managed to put it out of my mind, but it was a constant subtext of disquiet and distress for me. I think now that it was one of the main reasons I decided that I wanted to be a doctor. I reasoned as a child that I would be a healer, and therefore would not have to kill anyone. Later I also came to think that it would be a way of using the two years in a useful way rather than wasting them bored out of my mind in the uniform of the SADE. (Mark)

It was a gradual build-up over years to inevitable participation in the conscription process. Not only was it accepted, but it was accepted with anticipation. (Petrus)

Petrus’s description of the “conscription process” as a “gradual build-up over years” was assisted by the white Christian National Education (CNE) schooling system and various

religious denominations within apartheid-era South Africa. The following section focuses on the role of CNE as a formulator of white militarised masculinities.

Christian National Education (CNE) as an agency of militarisation

The process of militarising white South African males has been well documented in Cock and Nathan's *War and Society* (Cock and Nathan 1989), including a chapter authored by Gavin Evans titled *Classrooms of war: The militarisation of white South African Schooling*, detailing the role of schools, universities and related youth activities to prepare adolescent white males for the "national priorities of an increasingly militarised state" (Cock and Nathan 1989: 283).

Schools as nurseries for militarisation

The influence of the SADF on white schooling from the mid-1970s, as a means of preparatory military training, allowed for the development of Connell's (1995: 44) complex "configuration" of masculinities "structured by gender relations".

From this point, I want to focus on the role of schools as "nurseries" (Frankel 1984: 99) for the preparation of white males for military service. Msila (2007) notes that apartheid-era education was never a "neutral act"(146), clearly influenced by a dominant and racially divisive political discourse that entrenched white privilege. Christian National Education within white schools was buttressed by Protestant-Christian (Calvinist) principles that adhered to a predominantly Afrikaans paradigm. CNE not only espoused the values of the Nationalist regime, opposing a long established British system of education but attempted to instil a system "grounded in the life and world-view of the Whites most especially those of the Boer nation as senior White trustee of the native..." (as noted in Article 15 of the CNE policy of 1948). Vermeulen and Van Eeden (2005: 177-205) explain:

CNE mainly obtained an Afrikaans accentuation under specific South African circumstances. Broadly...it indicated that education should be characterized by Protestant-Christian principles and, simultaneously, should be able to find tangent points with the nature, way of living and the specific owner of the cultured community/nation for whose children it was meant to be.

For many conscripts, a dominant Christian ideology underpinned the belief that national service served a greater moral good and a fostered imperatives to stem a “Marxist Leninist Total Onslaught” (de Kock 2015: 91). Eugene De Kock states that:²

Only a Total Strategy - a co-ordination of the state’s activities in the military, economic, psychological, political, diplomatic, cultural and ideological fields - would be strong enough to combat it. (91)

Pervasive notions of a country under threat infiltrated childhood, manufacturing socio-psychological pressures rooted in threat and fear, that may be argued were irrespective of race. Both black and white children were taught to fear each other. The school environment served as vectors for impressing ideological agendas. Bruce remarked that he felt a genuine sense of worry when a school principal warned the white student body at an assembly that if they were not diligent, blacks were waiting to take to their jobs:

To be honest, I grew up feeling that there was a bogeyman wanting to pounce on the country. As a child, I remember sleeping with a .22 rifle under my bed. I was probably about twelve years old. That was during the ’76 riots. I think the government was pretty effective in instilling a sense of fear in its all its citizens, white and black. I remember our school principal telling us that if we didn’t pull our weight

² This is an excerpt from Colonel Eugene de Kock’s (South African Police) book, *A long night’s damage: Working for the apartheid State*. De Kock was discharged from the South African Police due to his activities as head of the Security Police’s section C1 at Vlakplaas Farm, north of Pretoria. See Jo Ractliffe’s *Vlakplaas (July 1999 - Drive-by shooting series)* of black and white photographs as a visual exploration of de Kock’s activities at Vlakplaas.

and study hard the blacks would take all our jobs. Thinking back, there was pressure from all angles. A child shouldn't have to endure that sort of pressure. (Bruce)

These constructions of fear were fuelled further by the school cadet system, which served to prepare white youths for military service in the SADF.

The school cadet system

The compulsory school cadet system, what Seegers (1993) refers to “as national service by imitation” at the TRC, was implemented at white secondary schools as a coordinated effort between the SADF and provincial education departments to prepare high school males for national service. It was officially brought under SADF control in January 1976, although it had existed in various guises beforehand. The school cadet system had its origins within the British colonial era of marching bands and drill squads, but it was the Defence Act of 1914 that made provision for the actual implementation of a school cadet system (Dorning 1987). The militarisation of white South African youth was pervasive and not an entirely male preserve. Although the school cadet system was perceived as an exclusively male programme, girls were also encouraged to participate in drill teams on a voluntary basis, and all scholars underwent “youth preparedness” and “other training programmes of a military flavour” (McGill Alexander 2000: 287).

The invasion of Angola, and internal strife within South Africa such as the Soweto uprising in 1976, unsettled any notion of long term stability within South Africa. The school cadet system was the ideal forum to instil a sense of military preparedness (civil defence) amongst the nation's white male youth, which would eventually “serve as a nursery for national service”(Frankel 1984: 99). As an exclusive gendered domain within the school system, its martial intentions had an obvious appeal for many adolescent males. Cock notes that the SADF hoped the cadet corps would “develop a sense of responsibility and love for their country and national flag” (Cock 1990: 69), and in turn develop an awareness of the

“malevolent revolutionary forces” that threatened South Africa (*Paratus*, September 1980). A further excerpt from, *Paratus* (1980), the official magazine of the SADF, outlines the state’s attitude towards the cadet programmes:

The cadet system has brought a new awareness among schoolboys of the nature of the onslaught against South Africa. They recognise and understand the threat and are highly motivated to undergo training to aid them in combating it.

Interestingly, the cadet system was also perceived by the SADF as a potential intelligence gathering network, whereby pupils were encouraged to report any “actual or potential enemies” (Cock 1990: 70) to a cadet officer, more than likely a teacher, as soon as possible. The cadet system relied heavily on teacher compliance and the authoritarian nature of white apartheid-era schools. In many instances teachers were ex-SADF conscripts and would don their uniforms and be addressed according to their rank during the weekly cadet corps training sessions or lectures:

The issuing of uniforms etc. was haphazard and bizarre. Some of the teachers were involved – mostly Afrikaans guys who had been in the SADF recently. They were real characters and their English created much mirth. (John)

During Standard Eight (Grade 10), the registration year for military service, there was a shift in the cadet corps curriculum towards actual military practices such as map reading, civil defence, enemy propaganda, “the necessity of compulsory military service” (Cock 1990: 70) and a strong emphasis on physical fitness. An ex-conscript recalls these *shifts*, that in some instances, involved the handling of real weapons:

Those who had actual rhythm in them joined the drill squads, but the best of all was the bivouac camps. Spending a weekend in the bush, doing camouflaging and getting to shoot target practice with R4’s, LMG’s, 9mms, etc. It was quite something for the

city slickers. (source: <http://mybroadband.co.za/vb/showthread.php/426529-Cadets-at-school>)

These shifts served to cement an ideology that romanticised a hegemonic and militarised sense of masculinity, instilling a sense of martial pride, where the cadet programme was perceived as a performative preamble to becoming a soldier:

Cadets prepared us for the army. We were taught to march, some guys actually got to handle R1 rifles, but most of us thought it was a joke. (Mark)

Well, I eventually moved out of cadets as I was chosen to be part of our school musketry team. Yes, back in the day we had REAL guns and shooting in school. (source: <http://mybroadband.co.za/vb/showthread.php/426529-Cadets-at-school>)

Cadets, therefore, served to groom boys for national service, involving a complex confluence of adolescent masculinity, Afrikaner nationalist ideology and militarised identity. Yet, as Conway (2012: 60-61) notes, cadets provided the ideal space for “individual objectors to develop their critique of the military” and create exceptions to the norm, resisting the cadet programme. In addition, these exceptions also gave rise to deep-set fears of the military:

Dread, in the pit of my stomach. What I really despised was having some Afrikaans teacher, *snor*,³ and shouting orders and picking out *okes* who were slacking,⁴ for caning, usually at his office during the break-time that followed. (James)

3 Afrikaans for a *moustache*.

4 Afrikaans slang for a *man, guy* or *bloke*.

Variations in cadet programme compliance

It is important to note that the efficacy of the cadet system varied from school to school, particularly across English and Afrikaans speaking schools. Cock (1988: 286) notes that information gathered from a series of interviews with school cadet officers between 1982 and 1983 revealed “considerable variation in the way the programmes were implemented, with Afrikaans schools tending to be far more enthusiastic”. Schools with “low-key programmes” were encouraged to “upgrade”. So-called liberal English speaking schools treated the cadet programme as a necessary evil, as a means to prepare their male learners for the inevitability of national service. Non-compliance within the cadet system was rare and usually occurred within the liberal preserves of English speaking high schools. An English speaking ex-conscript recalls his attitude, and a liberal high school’s view towards the cadet programme:

No, we never had cadets, although in matric, we did some marching etc. to help us adjust but I think looking back, it was probably to keep the Department of Education happy as Westerford was, and is a traditionally liberal English speaking school. (Phil)

Afrikaans high schools tended to take the cadet programme more seriously, taking great care to not only prepare their learners for the parade ground but to also provide instruction in more obvious military activities such as target shooting. Inter-schools shooting competitions were encouraged, and much like sports such as rugby were espoused as traditionally Afrikaans activities that prepared boys for manhood. Here, an Afrikaans speaking ex-conscript recalls his experience of the cadet training programme, and again the divides of language and culture are felt:

It was part of the school curriculum and therefore had to be done. Marching was less exciting – target shooting was significantly more exciting, as well as bi-annual

weekend camps of route-marching, map reading, etc. The downside to cadets was the uniform - brown shorts and shirt, which resulted in the Afrikaans speaking children being *ripped* off regularly by English children who shared the same school bus service. (Petrus)

Yet, memories of the cadet system are often recalled by ex-conscripts with a certain amount of disdain and irreverence:

I was a cadet during high school. I was at an English medium government high school called Parktown Boys High School. It had a proud tradition, but I have to admit that it was essentially mediocre as a teaching institution on every level.

We were all forced to participate in cadets, except the Jehovah's Witnesses. I would say we were all reluctant to participate and both resented and disliked it. (Mark)

Conway (2012: 60) notes that although the cadet programme served the needs of a militaristic masculine Afrikaner ideology, it had been a “long-standing feature of South Africa’s prestigious English speaking boarding schools”. Conway (2012: 60) draws attention to the manner in which the cadet programme was an unlikely marriage between “militarised rituals and *Total Onslaught* rhetoric...interwoven with British imperial discourses”. The following two accounts describe this unlikely marriage of Afrikaans and English culture and ideology on the parade ground of a high school:

Cadets were the activity of Thursday mornings all through the year, from 8am to 10.15am. The school had a brass band which drilled on the main athletics field, while the other two levels of rugby fields were allocated to parade ground drill. In matric, as a prefect, I was an officer. The commands were all the same as the ones in Basics, but oh-so-quaintly in English. (Mark)

I never really related it to the army itself – barely even picked up the connection. I just saw it as a form of *show* or *entertainment* we were preparing for down the line, for an audience. I did not enjoy the standing to attention for long periods, but for the rest, I just kind of went with the flow and did it without too much deep thought. I certainly wouldn't have chosen to do it, as it seemed fairly meaningless. I would have been happier not doing it, than doing it. (Grant)

Therefore, narratives relating to cadets often present an ambiguous masculine world bound to idealised notions of playing soldiers, and in a sense, also obliging to prepare for the future performance of national service:

I feel bitterly disappointed that we were blind to what was really happening. Yes, cadets was a joke, but we were all being conned into becoming soldiers, yet remained obedient. (Craig)

Craig's succinct statement reveals the ambiguity of a militarised state of mind, its social insensitivities and the manner in which it contaminated childhood. The vast majority of white male high school learners remained "obedient" to the regime's process of militarisation (Conway 2012, Cock and Nathan 1989, Msila 2007). Compliance was fuelled by ideological programmes that instilled a fear of others and ultimately sustained racial and cultural insularisation in apartheid-era society. These ideological programmes were assisted by state media apparatus and popular media, to a point where compliance was perceived as the obvious and only route to follow.

However, as many of these memories of high school cadet programmes enter the present, the incongruities, absurdity and even disappointment of compelling teenagers to don uniforms, within a seldom neutral educational environment, draw obvious comparisons to similar histories, most notably the rise of Nazism, including references by ex-conscripts to the Hitler Youth, such as the following example:

I hated cadets and the way the teachers wore their uniforms, showing off their rank. Thinking back on it, we must have looked like the Hitler Youth when we used to march down the main street of our town. (Peter)

Karl Jaspers (2000: 12-13) makes a pertinent point in *The Question of German Guilt* when he writes:

We are divided along different lines of disappointment...we must not let the divergence faze us, the sense of being worlds apart. We want to find the way to each other, to talk with each other, to try and convince each other.

Veldskools

Msila (2007) points out that CNE was aided by indoctrination “programmes” such as *veldskools*,⁵ that were established in the early 70s under the “pretext of nature study”. *Veldskools* were essentially paramilitary camps for both sexes that only existed in the Transvaal. *Veldskools* provided ideal regimented forums for the dissemination of SADF propaganda, fear-mongering and a means to prepare white youths for national service (Evans 1989). They included practical field exercises including basic tracking, map reading and camouflage techniques, often followed by afternoon lectures and films focusing on foreign and domestic threats to the stability of South Africa.

The dangers of communism and the growing threat of the ANC were typical points of discussion and instruction. Evans (1989) gives a detailed overview of the structure of *veldskools* and describes the close relationship the SADF enjoyed with the organisers of *veldskools*, including consulting on organisational planning and *veldskool* curriculum.

⁵ Afrikaans for *bush schools*.

Evans also notes the manner in which the *veldskool* system infiltrated the Transvaal education system and placed pressure on teachers and principals to actively participate in programmes, to such a degree that those teachers who were “unwilling to participate” received “negative points” which would affect their salaries and career opportunities (Evans 1989: 294). Evans notes that liberal English–medium schools were less compliant, and that many pupils had an “apathetic and ambiguous response” (294).

Nonetheless, according to Evans, the *veldskool* indoctrination programme did indeed influence the views of many high school learners in the former Transvaal. When the *veldskool* system is viewed through a post-apartheid lens it acquires a darkly absurd hue. An ex-conscript articulates his experience of a *veldskool*:

I think the whole point of a *veldskool* was to take you out of the city and give you a feel of what it was to be like in the army. Yes, you were separated from your family and you were treated as if you were a soldier. They woke you up at about 5am and drilled you *stukkend*. Most of the lectures were concerned with the threat of communism and how effective the SADF was in protecting South Africa from terrorists etc. Thinking back, it was nothing but pure propaganda. It all seems like a bad comedy now. (Danie)

Schoolboy rugby - the scrummaging of hyper-masculine stereotypes

Masculinity is sign-posted within the apartheid-era school environment by means of sports such as rugby, that are espoused as exclusive masculine domains (Messner 1990). This aggressive naturalising of masculine dynamics within sport points to an intimate connection between military organisations and hegemonic representations of masculinity. Du Pasani notes that “rugby was regarded by Afrikaner males as ‘the king of sports’...an important vent for male aggression”, and that “sports heroes were idolised in a similar way to war heroes” (Morell 2001: 166).

These notions further emphasised the need for secondary school environments to facilitate a seamless transition from the sports field to the parade ground, and thus reinforce white hyper-masculine stereotypes, in preparation for military service. Rugby became and remains a cultural touchstone for white South African men, particularly in Afrikaans society (Conway 2012, Morell 2001). Furthermore, Conway (2012: 74) notes that “the use of the body in sport”, particularly rugby, “was militarised” in white apartheid-era society and “used as a key means by which militarised masculinities” were constructed and asserted.

Historically, South African rugby has always been imbued with a religiosity that has transcended its position as a national sport. Rugby established itself as a sport of mythic proportions and an almost exclusive preserve for white Afrikaans hyper-masculinities. Despite its British imperial origins, rugby was claimed and labelled as a sport for Afrikaners, initially as a means to challenge British cultural imperialism, but ultimately as a sport that epitomised and fixed idealised notions of Afrikaner masculinities in the minds of boys.

This mindset acted as the scaffolding for the construction of militarised school boy masculinities. School sports such as hockey, often referred to as *mof-sticks*,⁶ were eschewed in favour of rugby. Weekly rugby practices were likened by interviewees to military basic training, culminating in Saturday matches that are still referred to as *clashes* or *battles*, demonstrating “the interconnections between school sport, the body, war and masculinity” (Conway: 71):

Back in the 80s rugby was everything at our high school. No one played hockey, it was called *mof-sticks*. Going to practice on Mondays and Wednesdays was like basics, they drilled us hard, it was full on. I felt like I was going to war on Saturday mornings.
(Danie)

⁶ Roughly translated from Afrikaans, this fragment of schoolboy slang means *gay-sticks*, a derogatory term for schoolboy hockey.

Conway (2012: 71) asserts that rugby as a school sport during the conscription era, acted to “shape men’s bodies” for military service, yet it did not only act to mould the mindset or physicality that military service in the SADF demanded, but also acted as a benchmark from which masculinity could be measured and affirmed. I conclude this section with the following account by an English speaking ex-conscript whose prowess as a rugby player acted as a path to friendship and acceptance among fellow Afrikaans speaking conscripts:

As the only English speaker in my dorm, I was called all sorts of names by the Afrikaans troops. At first, they treated me like dirt, until our first Wednesday sport’s parade. When they discovered I was a 1st XV centre at school, everything changed. It was as if I was given a passport to their world. Funny enough, I’m still friends with one of my Afrikaans army buddies. (Charles)

Registration for military service

Allied to the role of the church, and here I refer to the Dutch Reformed Church (NGK), there is little doubt that Christian National Education played a formative role in nurturing hyper-masculine militarised identities within the classroom and on the sports fields of white apartheid-era schools. The process was gradual and largely effective. Allied to the cadet programme, it was the process of registering for military service while still at high school that would mark the first in a sequence of performative acts leading to induction into the SADF. Here an ex-conscript remembers the excitement of having to register for conscription at age 16:

Yes, naive excitement. I never ever doubted or thought of the consequences. It was what we all did, [or] had to do...it was a reflection of your manhood. It was not politically motivated. It was never anti-black. We were fighting *die rooi gevaar – kommunisme* (the red communists at our borders). So in a nutshell, I was quite excited to be part of the boys who were going to go kick butt... (Andries)

By the time apartheid-era boys entered the high school environment of the white education system, the ground for Cock's (1990: 69) notion of "ideological coercion" had been well prepared. During the 1980s registration for compulsory military service took place within the secondary school environment and was generally accepted and presented by the white education system as a patriotic rite of passage for all 16-year-old white males. Non-compliance was unheard of, and in most instances, registration took place in Standard Eight (Grade 10) and involved the entire male year group. Here, an Afrikaans ex-conscript describes the excitement of the experience:

Excitement... that I was now part of a registered conscription process. Compulsory registration forms sent to all boys during grade 9 (1979), which caused a great deal of animated discussion amongst all of-age boys. (Petrus)

Yet, a contradictory view yields insights to feelings of trepidation and a deep-felt sense of betrayal on the part of the participant's former school and church:

I fully understood that this was being done by my school, the ultimate head of which was the Archbishop. I felt very betrayed by them...very nervous, lots of time spent trying to work out how to get out of it, extreme anger at the fact that my name was put down by my school. I wanted to go and talk to our neighbour at the time, Charles Villa-Vicencio, but never found the courage. (Gareth)

As these narratives enter the present, irrespective of their emotional gaze, I began to problematise the collaged nature of memory. Many of these childhood recollections enter an ambiguous present, after decades of relative silence, as ruptures and fragments, rather than complete coherent narratives. This echoes Stimpson's view of memory as a "collage of recollections" (1987: 259-265) and prompted me to consider whether this unravelling of often uncomfortable memories necessitated a nostalgic lens to add some sense of rational

clarity in a post-apartheid space. Here, an ex-conscript infuses his memories of childhood with a deep sense of nostalgia that is promptly tempered by his conscience, and is arguably tinged with a sense of guilt:

Everything worked back in the 80s. You could ride to school on your bicycle and knew things would work. The currency had value, the streets were clean and there was no corruption. I didn't really worry about having to go to the army. Everyone was part of the cadet programme at school, and then there was the army. It's how things worked and it wasn't all that bad. I guess the blacks couldn't say the same though. (Stephen)

To conclude, Ms Burton gave the following account of the registration process of conscripts while still at high school at the TRC (1993). Burton explains:

It's another way in which young people were drawn into the system. Those who were still at school, young men who were still at school at the age of 16 their names were registered at the school for handing in for eligibility for conscription, so it was at that stage already that young men and their parents had to face the fact that their names were going into the pool from which the conscripts would be drawn.⁷

Universities as agents of militarisation

The influence of militarisation within South African universities during the 1980s was limited, although according to Cock (1989) the SADF did make attempts to increase its presence in a number of so-called white universities. Most attempts were successfully resisted by traditionally English speaking universities such as the University of Cape Town (UCT) and Rhodes University by means of student councils and the End Conscription Campaign (ECC).

⁷ Visit <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/special/conscrip/conscr01.htm> for the full transcript of Ms Burton's testimony at the TRC in Cape Town on the 23rd of July 1993.

Nonetheless, a number of Afrikaans and dual-medium universities incorporated University Military Units (UMU) (284) which functioned as on-campus SADF military units for ex-servicemen, or those students seeking information about their upcoming military service. UMU's were either fighting or protective units (campus defence units) that allowed students to continue with various forms of military training within the university environment. All male students, staff and administration personnel who were liable for annual military camps or national service were required to register with their UMU.

During the research process, I encountered an ECC document (ECC Collection Number: AG1077, [sa]) from the mid-1980s that provided detailed information about the history and functions of UMUs on university campuses. The document notes that Commando units consisting of student and university staff members were established at most Afrikaans language medium universities after the Soweto Uprising of 1976, and were incorporated into so-called UMUs in 1980 (40). The document draws specific attention to the UMU at the University of Pretoria which placed a “stress on border camps, with the rector at the University having paid a visit by helicopter to the [university] unit on their first border camp” (40). The University of Stellenbosch established a UMU in 1982, albeit with some student opposition. The only English language university that established a UMU at the time of the ECC document's publication date was the “highly conservative” (40) University of Port Elizabeth (UPE).

According to Conway (2012), English speaking university students were less-impressionable and generally more politically sensitive than their Afrikaans speaking counterparts. Cock (1989: 284) notes that the academic programme itself was militarised at many Afrikaans speaking universities with the inclusion of “military and security-related courses and research institutes” during the 1980s. This was partly due to the growth of ARMSCOR⁸, the national arms manufacturer, investing in “extensive research in the area of weapons development” (ECC Collection Number: AG1077, 40).

⁸ According to Cock (1989: 5), ARMSCOR was “the fifth largest arms producer in the world” by the mid-1980s.

The infiltration of university curricula by the SADF allowed for a legitimate military presence on campus. *Strategic Studies* courses were set up at the University of Natal to supplement officer training and were offered at third year or honours level, irrespective of whether the student had a previous degree. The SADF's reasoning behind UMUs was that students often “de-learn[ed]”(40) their previous military training while on campus, and UMUs would additionally prevent students from absconding from attending SADF camps. This was, according to the SADF, because university environments were “major sites of resistance” (40) to conscription. According to the ECC (ECC Collection Number: AG1077, 40) the University of Natal did away with their UMU due to increased pressure from the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS).⁹ In addition, those conscripts who had opted to follow a professional military career as officers in the SADF were offered the opportunity to study at a university military faculty. In this respect, the SADF was able to gain an ideological foothold within the tertiary educational system, albeit on mostly Afrikaans speaking university campuses. One such example that continues into the present is the Faculty of Military Science at Stellenbosch University.

An undated (ECC document - AG1977: 41) pointed to an article by Cape Times columnist Willem Steenkamp, that advocated the need for establishing a UMU at UCT, although no records of a UMU at UCT exist.

Therefore, the university campus acted as a nexus of both contact and resistance to the SADF, determined by means of the university's medium of instruction and political standpoint. The SADF understood the necessity of establishing a firm presence on university campuses as a means to sustain compliance, and maintain its ideological imprint on conscripts who had completed their national service. Additionally, UMUs could also monitor and process those students who were expected to report for military training after the completion of their university studies.

⁹ NUSAS was a non-racial student organisation formed by white students and sympathetic to the plight of Black students. NUSAS represented all university and technikon students in South Africa and was founded in 1924 from nine English and Afrikaans-speaking universities. NUSAS dissolved in 1991 and the Student Patriotic Front was formed.

Yet the university space was also a refuge of sorts for SADF conscripts, particularly those who were attempting to delay their military service. The SADF would defer a student's studies on an annual basis, provided they passed their courses. Nonetheless, the infiltration of the SADF into the tertiary academic environment, although not pervasive, still represented a concerted effort to militarise the youth of apartheid-era South Africa. To conclude, an ex-conscript describes how his attitude changed when he began his studies at UCT after completing his military service in the SADF:

Apartheid was like water to a fish when I was that age. It was all very much normal and part of life. Amazing how my attitude changed a few years later when I started at UCT. Tertiary education absolutely overturned my views of apartheid. Suddenly I was at art school studying among people who had been with Nelson Mandela on Robben Island, ANC supporters, etc. and these people became good friends.
(Johan)

The role of the Dutch Reformed Church (NGK) as an agent of militarisation

I also want to draw attention briefly to the role of the church as an active participant of the regime's *Total Strategy*.¹⁰ Here, I refer specifically to the role of the largely Afrikaans Dutch Reformed Church (NGK), which was supportive of state policy whereas the more politicised English speaking churches, such as the Anglican Church were often active voices of protest and social conscience, including leaders such as Archbishop Desmond Tutu (Hill 2007: 97). According to the TRC's *Special Hearing on Compulsory Military Service* transcripts (1993), Reverend Du Plooy drew attention to the role of the church, specifically Afrikaans speaking churches. Du Plooy referred to an "unholy marriage" between church and state, elaborating on the manner in which the NGK, at synod level, "co-operated fully with the SADF on issues

¹⁰ The concept of *Total Strategy* was a concerted effort on behalf of the apartheid government during the era of P.W. Botha (State President from 1984 to 1989) to convince both domestic and international role players, including, citizens, governments and investors that a *total onslaught* by communist forces, assisted by the Soviet Union, was threatening the existence of *democratic* South Africa, and therefore the Western world (Coleman 1998).

of military and national service” and acted as an “ally”(Vol.4, Chap.8: point 18). The church followed the advice of the National Party regime and Defence Council and reiterated the need to stand against the *Total Onslaught*. The church would, therefore, serve as an interlocutor between white families and the SADF, playing an important role in winning the hearts and minds of South Africa’s white population, commencing with children in Sunday school and in the classroom. Schools served as an ideal environment to instil a sense of patriotism and allegiance to the state, underlined by the religious principles of CNE.

It was only as late as 1985 that the South African Catholic Bishops Conference (SACBC) made an official statement, *A Call for an End to Conscription*. The SACBC’s statement was followed by the South African Council of Churches (SACC), led by the Reverend Allan Boesak, declaring apartheid a heresy. As a result, the SACC subsequently suspended the NGK from its membership (Hill 2007: 97). The Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Special Hearing on Compulsory Military Service (Conscription) noted that according to Reverend Neels du Plooy (SADF chaplain between 1977-90, and from 1979 public relations officer to the Chaplain General and Senior Staff Officer: Publications) that:

The Church’s main task was to strengthen the spiritual defensibility of its members. The Church was now totally convinced [of] the fact that we were fighting the war ... we were fighting a just war. (O’Malley 2015).

Additionally, during its 1982 synod, the NGK re-examined its previous stance on conscientious objection, which included refusing to fight for the SADF on the Angolan border or in the townships of South Africa. Conscripts who refused to bear arms were rejected as un-Christian by the NGK, pointing to the ubiquitous influence of the regime’s power.

Interestingly, Reverend Neels du Plooy noted at the TRC (1993) that all SADF soldiers:

...were issued with a special edition of the New Testament and the Psalms, but this Bible had a message bound in from Mr PW Botha, first as Minister of Defence and

later as State President. The message said, and I just quote one sentence,
This Bible is the most important part of your military equipment

Toys and comics as a means of militarisation

The germination of a militarised masculinity begins in childhood and toys are echoes of the adult world. War toys such as toy guns, reinforce the notion that a military solution is a masculine, collective and socially acceptable response. Cock and Nathan (1988: 299) cite Jochelson and Buntman who note that “toys embody social and cultural definitions of what constitutes appropriate interests, activities and (the) behaviour of children”. Here, an ex-conscript recalls role-playing as a Border War soldier:

My friends and I used to play war games in an open plot at the end of our road. No one wanted to be the *terrorists*. I used to wear my Dad’s army webbing and his *staaldak*.¹¹ We used broomsticks and bits of wood as R1s. (Stephen)

The mythology of combat, perceived as inherently honourable and courageous, often has its origins within the formative realms of childhood, aided by toys, the media and popular literature. Apartheid-era war toys were almost exclusively masculine, including a plethora of plastic replica guns, miniature vehicles, scale models and associated literature.

Even innocuous toys such as yo-yos were transformed into militarised products, emblazoned with SADF insignia, as “statement(s) of moral support” (Cock and Nathan 1988: 305). Other examples included a Border War themed board game culminating in a successful *contact* with *terrorists*, with the proceeds of sales going to the Southern Cross Fund. Cock notes that according to Frankel (1984: 98), “the actual effect of the Southern Cross Fund [was] to market militarisation in a way which encourages public identification” (Zack-Williams 2004: 139).

¹¹ Afrikaans for *steel helmet*.

Children's comic books

Examples of literature included boy's comics of the 1980s (*Battle*, *Warlord*, *Battle Picture Library* and *Action*). Many of these comics were published by Egmont Publishing in the United Kingdom and included mainly World War 1 and 2 narratives, that dominated the children's magazine shelves of newsagents such as CNA and Paperbacks of the 1970s and 80s. These weekly comics provided largely idealized scenarios, entrenching stereotypes of a non-human enemy (in most cases, the Axis powers), indirectly serving the militaristic ideals of a regime that relied heavily on a dichotomous *us* and *them* mentality, underpinned by a racist ideology.

Although these largely foreign comics included narratives of unrelated historical conflicts, their depictions of conflict were driven by moral or political means. It can be argued that the largely World War 2 narratives served a two-fold function in apartheid-era South Africa. The historical narratives of World War 2, the Korean and Vietnam War served as titillating distractions from the realities of the Border War, but also served to reinforce and romanticise the heroics of soldiers in battle. Many of the English speaking conscripts that I interviewed mentioned the formative role of comics in their childhood, particularly weekly British war comics and the hardback cover annuals that were often added to Christmas stockings. The realities and horrors of battle were the one-sided afflictions of a dehumanised Axis enemy, whilst honour, survival and heroics were reserved for the victorious Allied forces:

Yes, I grew up on *Battle* and *Tiger* comics. The Germans and Japanese were always portrayed as the enemy, much like the *terrorists* of the Border War, although I never drew any parallels between the two. (Paul)

Here, I would also like to draw attention to the use of language in British comics as a means of cementing the concept of an alien other. Japanese soldiers were referred to as *nips*, *yellow bastards* or *Japs*, whereas German soldiers were referred to as *krauts* or *fritz*. The dehumanising

of an enemy by means of language continues to the present, yet within the racialised divides of the apartheid-era, comic book representations of an objectified enemy dovetailed ideally with the regime's references to the enemy as *terrorists* or *commies*.

***Poes boekies* - South African photo-comics**

In addition, popular local pulp photo comic books of the 1970s and 1980s such as *Grensvegter*, *Swart Ruiter*, *Kyk* (produced by Republican Press) and *Kaptein Caprivi* (which appeared in popular Afrikaans magazines such as *Huisgenoot*) were heroic constructions of white hyper-masculinity, of safari suit-clad men protecting *home and hearth* from the total onslaught of the *rooi* and *swart gevaar*. These A5 sized adult comics were widely available, in both English and Afrikaans, and could be purchased at newsagents and local cafés throughout South Africa. Scott (2011) notes in her thesis on comics and war that comic book heroes are often iconic mirrors of dominant political, patriotic and gendered ideals. In the case of the *Grensvegter* comics, the enemy was often portrayed as bearded, possibly alluding to Cuban soldiers who were deployed in Angola during the Border War whereas the hero, Rocco de Wet, was moustachioed and assisted by a trusty black side-kick. De Wet would always be tasked with a perilous rescue mission involving a damsel in distress, with the narrative climaxing in a daring rescue.

These narrative templates served to reinforce and impress stereotypical views of race and gender on white males. *Grensvegter* comics were always populated by a demonised enemy lacking in Christian morality and humanity that demanded the heroic intervention of a Rocco de Wet (*Grensvegter*) or Kaptein Caprivi. The predictable narrative arc always concluded where order and a sense of peace were restored within the racialised moral hierarchy, with de Wet always emerging as a chivalrous hero. Rocco de Wet's world is one where race and gender occupy clearly delineated territories, one where the fog of war does not exist. In a sense, these *clarities* provide one with insights into how South Africa's Border was perceived by white

apartheid-era society – a war of *total onslaught* where a white minority, assisted by largely faceless black side-kicks, was being fought to halt wave after wave of *terrorist* insurgents set on communist domination.

Although the South African photo comics were intended for adult audiences they were also read by teenagers and even children. The simple photographic narratives meant that the heroic exploits of *Grensvegter* transcended language and age, effectively acting as vectors of militarisation across a broad age spectrum.¹²

Selling conscription by means of film, radio & other means to children

Film

The influence of film as a means of propagandising conscription cannot be dismissed either. The perennially attractive Afrikaans *Boetie* films, *Boetie Gaan Border Toe!* (1984) and *Boetie op Manoeuvres* (1985), directed by Regardt van den Bergh are good examples and were released at the height of the regime's military power.

The *Boetie* films were military comedies that portrayed the SADF conscript experience as a necessary rite of passage, with the protagonist, Boetie (played by Arnold Vosloo), ultimately gaining self-respect and emerging from his army experience as a responsible adult male. The redemptive narrative is clearly patriotic, presenting gendered, cultural and racial stereotypes that underwrite the dominant political views of the time. Although the *Boetie* films were Afrikaans productions, primarily intended for white Afrikaans speakers, the universality of conscription in white society also drew English speaking audiences. The *Boetie* films remain generalised imprints of white apartheid-era society's perception of conscription and the SADF. They functioned as state endorsed cinematic representations of patriotic

¹² SADF conscripts referred to photo comics as *Poes Boekies* (Afr.), loosely translated as *vagina books*, possibly alluding to the sexual innuendo and provocative photography of the *Tessa* photo comic books of the era.

duty, cloaked in humour and presenting all the expected military archetypes – such as the reluctant but ultimately patriotic conscript, the English speaking rebel and strict but fair non-commissioned officer. Nonetheless, it is clearly evident that the *Boetie* series seeded and shaped perceptions by cinematic means of what induction into the SADF would hold for many white youths. An ex-conscript elaborates further:

Ja, the Boetie movies showed the light-hearted side of the army. After seeing *Boetie gaan Border toe* I felt strangely at ease about going to the army. I understood it wasn't going to be a joyride, but the sense of camaraderie portrayed in the movies somehow made me feel at ease. (Andrew)

Radio

The South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), the state-controlled radio and television broadcaster, was also an indirect agent of the militarisation of white South African males during the 1980s. The inevitability and pervasive presence of national service were underscored by radio request programmes such as *Forces Favourites* (Springbok Radio) and *Fun with the Forces*. Programmes were presented by Esmé Everard and Pat Kerr on Sunday afternoons between 2pm and 5pm. For countless white teenagers growing up in South Africa in the 1970s and 80s, the voice of Esmé Euvrard and Pat Kerr presenting *Springbok Rendezvous* and *Forces Favourites* became an aural backdrop for Sunday afternoons. Messages of support and dedication from the home front (or to use SADF slang - *the states*) to “our boys on the border” were for many teenagers and parents the only reference they had of a distant war fought on the borders of Angola. Conscripts referred to Esmé Everard as Tannie Esmé (Aunty Esmé, Afr.), and in some instances as their *Bosmoedertjie* (bush mother, Afr.). Drewett (2008: 99) notes that Pat Kerr, presenter of the *Forces Favourites* radio programme was awarded the Order of the Star of South Africa in 1982 for “her exceptional service of military importance”.

A compilation record album, amongst others, titled *Forces Favourites* comprising of cover versions of the most requested songs were released in the 1980s. These pro-military record albums often featured a bikini-clad woman holding a rifle. Drewett (2008) observes that the imagery was a clearly suggestive, gendered and a militarised representation of women.

Military tattoos and air shows as displays of might and right

Popsecu (2008: 43) notes “milestones in Afrikaner history” have always been celebrated with “pageants, festivals and parades”. Ceremonies, such as air shows and military tattoos were impressive displays of the South African Defence Force’s position as Africa’s military superpower. These events encouraged a strong masculine sense of patriotism and were essentially festivals of a militarised society. They also performed a crucial role in reassuring white society that a strong, capable and world-class defence force was on standby to defend the country’s citizens. Lomsky-Feder and Ben-Ari. (1999: 14) note that Fernandez (1986) draws on Weber’s (1958) assertion that military parades are displays of “*instruments of violence* of which a nation-state enjoys sole possession and legitimate use”. In the case of the SADF, these displays and celebrations of “instruments of violence” also functioned as less than subtle warnings to future or current enemies, foreign and domestic

Yet military parades, exhibitions and air shows were also vital points of contact and public relations for families and their children beyond the experience of conscription. They were marketed by the SADF as family events, including the sale of memorabilia and flags, as a day out for fathers and sons, where civilians could experience the military might of the SADF face-to-face:

I remember going to an air show at Ysterplaat in the early 80s. The sound of those Mirages is what did it for me. I remember writing to the air force when I was in Standard 8. I wanted to be a fighter pilot. (Michael)

Cock (1988: 305) also notes that these “overt” shows of military power assured civilians that

“the defence of the nation” was intact and in good hands, yet as indicated by the interview extract above, these events also functioned as a seductive means of encouraging young males to pursue a military career.

Entering the present

We all experience memory differently in the varied environments of the present. The present becomes inextricable from the past when it is bound to memory. Connerton (1989: 3) rightly notes “that images of the past commonly legitimate a present social order”. Yet, for many ex-conscripts, their memories are constantly butting up against the present, running contrary to dominant social discourse and order, hence my use of the term *counter-memory* to construct a theoretical framework to examine the memories of ex-conscripts.

The largely militarised childhoods of the conscript generations of white South African males and their immediate families have entered the post-apartheid space in various guises, ranging from deeply personal memories to broader connections of memory to the present, most notably, as digital or virtual forms of social memory, that echo Connerton’s (1989) notion of commemorative ceremonies as a form of social memory. Interestingly, for many ex-conscripts, their militarised childhoods have become digital commemorations or memorialisation, within the realm of the internet, expressed on social media platforms such as Facebook in the form of virtual photographic collective and communicative memories (Weltzer 2008). These memorialisations are imbued with the nostalgia of a lost childhood, and an idealised and even romanticised social order of things. Yet, these memories remain fixed to the past and are reticent to accept the present. Digital and online spaces that accommodate memory will be discussed in Chapter Five.

I would like to argue that in some instances memories are expressed as essentialised failures to accept the lived past. In many respects, the memories of ex-conscripts and the pervasive

militarisation of white apartheid-era society, are one of many reflections of present white South African society and exemplify a sense of whiteness that is indelibly marked by the divided histories of all South Africans. Further scholarly examination of the memories of white militarised childhoods will perhaps allow us to understand and navigate the palpable silences of white South African society more effectively, including white males of the conscription era, many of whom still exert a tremendous amount of economic power and decision making within the present. A number of the participants of this study saw their racially insularised childhoods as the “accepted order of things” (Petrus), something that remains unquestioned to the present. Petrus commented that his childhood was framed by “the National Christian Education doctrine [that] pushed by both schooling and religious institutions” (Petrus).

As Boym (2007: 18) notes “The imperative of a contemporary nostalgia is to be homesick and sick of home – occasionally at the same time”. Here, Boym touches a nerve as she illuminates an important “paradox” that notes, “the stronger the loss, the more it is overcompensated with commemorations, the starker the distance from the past, and the more it is prone to idealizations”. These “idealizations” also allow for a series of contradictions within the present as is demonstrated by the following account:

I remember from an early age (probably around 10 years old) of friends, family and neighbours older sons having to go the army. As a small boy, there was also the anticipation of ‘adventure’ and the excitement of being a soldier. Yet I was suckered into National Party propaganda, that we were in a fight together with the rest of the ‘decent’ Western world to prevent the spread of the evil tentacles of communism.

(Joe)

However, Pickering and Knightly (2006: 923) note that this idealisation of the past, in this case, childhood, “can be viewed as potentially dangerous in that it closes down the transactional

value of the past in the present and results in various degrees of social amnesia”.

On occasion, I encountered manifestations of a selective “social amnesia” during the interview process, whereby memories of childhood were often presented as a type of disaffection with the “velocity and vertigo of modern temporality”(923). However, as Pickering and Knightley (2006: 923) note that simply viewing nostalgia “as a defining feature of amnesiac culture necessarily entails the degradation of social and cultural memory” and thus dismisses the *gravitas* of an individual’s memories. I, therefore, draw attention to the importance of taking cognizance of Connerton’s (1989: 2) observations regarding the difficulty of “extracting our past from the present” in that time passages have a tendency to “influence, or distort, our experience of the present”. Andries’ sense of the present appears to be “distorted” by the lens of nostalgia:

[I] have to admit [I] had absolutely no political view on the matter, it was a fact of life totally accepted...once we started getting call ups ...the question was never “why” it was more “where” ...how far from home ? What type of climate? What division? Cannot say it was all that bad, everything worked back then, and today? Look at how things are run, look at the schools, it’s a disaster. A fucking joke ...! No self-pride ...No discipline..the SANDF is a bunch of overweight squatters in uniform... (Andries)

Yet, for the individual ex-conscript, their formative memories of a militarised childhood, spanning the 60s, 70s and 80s remain foundational in their perception of the present. These memories demand the lens of the present and are inextricably allied to personal, cultural and social perceptions of the world, that is in a state of continual modification. In some cases the militarised childhoods of ex-conscripts retreat into palpable silences. It is perhaps Karl Jaspers’s (1947) notion of *moral guilt* that best explains the silenced shame of many of these men. This begs an important question: Should these silences be considered part of

the macro-crime of apartheid? What is understood, is that the white apartheid-era male's childhood remains a private contest of shame, guilt and ambiguity. Perhaps this extract from an ex-conscript interview describes the aforementioned ambiguities that have prompted a need to embrace silence:

I have already told you about the image that stays with me: like the Ancient Mariner, I have an albatross around my neck. Sometimes it stinks, sometimes it is very heavy, sometimes I hardly know that it is there. Part of it is the fact that they did make me into a soldier despite my best efforts. Part of it is the taint I carry of having worn the uniform of the oppressive Apartheid regime. Part of it is the lasting effects of traumatic stress, in perennial insomnia, emotional distance, episodic dysphoria, depression, rages, grief. A BIG albatross! (Connor)

By recalling the past, the present inevitably acts as a lens, altering and compressing the manner in which the past is perceived in the present, much the same as a telephoto or zoom lens. How these narratives are altered, condensed or distorted is largely due to the influence of a liminal present. Once these narratives enter the present, they enter a terrain where both identity and recognition are in a state of flux, where identity is constantly being renegotiated.

Participants spoke of the difficulties they encountered in attempting to position their childhood in the present. They employed phrases such as “surreal” and “dreamlike” when imagining the “absurdities” of a militarised childhood, and the pervasive influence of the state in every aspect of their lives, including schools, their homes and the church.

This leads me to Stuart Hall's (2000: 301) notion “that identities are necessary constructions and necessary fictions” and begs the question: Where does memory begin or end? With this in mind, I relied on Grice's view that identity (and memory) is composed of a “series of total temporary states which belong to the one and the same self, or person” (Perry 2008: 73-94). Memory becomes a blur of oscillations between past and present. These “temporary

states” allowed for memories of militarised childhoods to form what I would like to refer to as “collages of memory. Here, two participants refer to their memories as either “pieces” or “fragments”:

Completing this form has both brought back many memories and also helped put the pieces together, into some sort of coherence...that somehow now means a lot to me. (James)

My childhood memories of the 80s seem like fragments of glass now, scuffed by time. To be honest, no particular memory of my childhood sticks out. I remember colours, the brown of my cadet uniform, the sound of the letterbox, knowing my call-up papers would arrive soon. Then other obscure memories of my mom’s worried face when I said I wanted to join the air force. It feels like it was the best of times, but also, as Dicken’s says, the worst of times. There’s a certain amount of anger at how things turned out though. It’s best we don’t talk about it...(Sean)

These attempts to re-negotiate the present, as demonstrated by the accounts of ex-conscript, now tend to enter the post-apartheid space as counter-memories, acting to challenge and run counter to the “hegemony of dominant discourse”. Lipsitz (1990: 212) views counter-memory, as a means of shifting historical focus from dominant narratives to previously silenced spaces.

I would argue that the construction of these counter-memories is “symptomatic” of a post-apartheid space, to echo Svetlana Boym’s (2007: 8) notion that nostalgia “is not merely an individual sickness but a symptom of our age, a historical emotion”. Chapter Four will examine the role of memory, nostalgia and subsequent development of ex-conscript counter-memories. Additionally, Chapter Four will argue that the articulation of counter-memories is intimately connected to establishing a sense of belonging for ex-conscripts in present-day South Africa.

Conclusion

The SADF, acting as a *government agency*, employed various agents of militarisation such as Christian National Education (CNE) and religious institutions to inculcate a sense of military preparedness in the white youth of the 1980s. The fallout and unspoken burden of these programmes continue to be felt within the contested spaces of present-day South Africa.

Again, the perception that apartheid South Africa's programme of militarisation was gender specific and confined to a specific age group or race is a misconception. The militarisation of apartheid South Africa was pervasive, yet it was ultimately self-limiting. The pressures of global socio-political change, such as the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, exposed the nationalist regime to vulnerabilities and changes far beyond its control, inviting increased resistance and non-compliance.

South Africa's programme of militarisation impacted all sectors of society, and although it was primarily aimed to prepare white youths for military service, it altered the nation's psychology indefinitely, engineering a deep set fear of others, both foreign and domestic. These fears continue to cast a long shadow of division that extends into the present.



NUTRIA Exhibition installation artwork detail, The Castle of Good Hope, Cape Town 2017 (photograph: Stephen Symons)



CHAPTER THREE

“Basics – Sien jy daardie boom troep!”

The experience of basic training in the SADF between 1980-1990 and how those memories traverse the post-apartheid space



Figure 3 Basic training – beach party, SAS Saldanha 1990 (photograph: Stephen Symons)

Chapter 3 - “Basics – *Sien jy daardie boom troep!*”

The experience of basic training in the SADF between 1980-1990 and how those memories traverse the post-apartheid space.

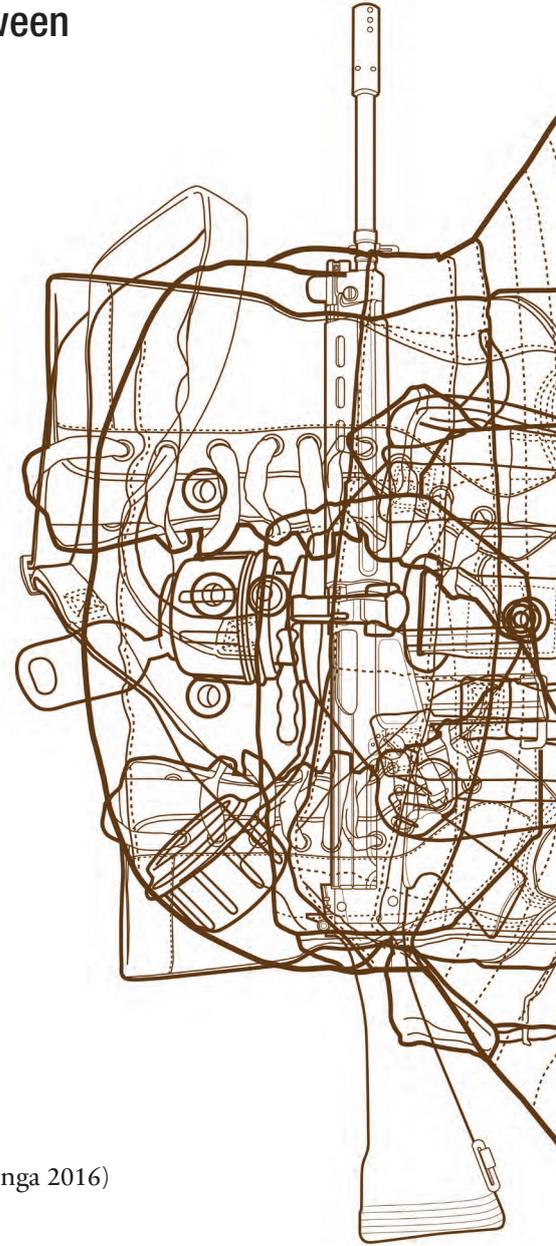
I remember a day when every father
became an Abraham, every son an Isaac.

But there was no poised blade breaking sunlight,
just the hum of idling buses,
treading the beginnings of day.

Somewhere rams were caught in the fynbos,
waiting to take the place of the Isaacs –
but no Angel intervened.

There, just the firm grip of sons’ hands
and the impatience of engines.

— Stephen Symons (*Questions for the Sea*, uHlanga 2016)



Introduction

This chapter seeks to give a unique overview of basic training in the former South African Defence Force (SADF), relying on the personal accounts of former conscripts as a means to understanding the influence that induction into a military environment still exerts on ex-conscripts within the contested space of the post-apartheid era. This chapter will argue that although most conscripts did not experience actual combat, basic training undoubtedly marked the first performative rite of passage for the white militarised masculinities.

Additionally, I will show that the experience of basic training in the SADF marked a pivotal point of acquiescence within a complex racialised military hegemony.

Conscription was perceived by white South African males (including the families of conscripts, and white society at large) as the price of white citizenship and privilege. Conscription was considered a mandatory rite of passage into adulthood (Cock and Nathan 1989, Conway 2012, Price 1989), echoing French anthropologist, Arnold Van Gennep's three-stage paradigm of rites of passage which was described in his seminal work in 1909, *Les rites de passage* (Van Gennep 1960). The foundation for these rites of passage for the SADF conscript was laid by means of the active socialisation and militarisation of white males, often originating in childhood, and culminating with induction into the SADF.

To achieve this, the regime relied on the tacit consent of Christian National Education (CNE), state propaganda and institutionalised coercion. Connell (1987) notes that schools play a crucial role in authoritarian states. This was clearly demonstrated by means of Youth Preparedness (YP) and the cadet programmes within white South African schools during the apartheid-era, which Conway (2012: 60) proposes “essentially sought to bind school-based masculinities to military service”. The militarisation of white apartheid-era males was discussed in detail in Chapter Two. At this point, I would like to provide the reader with an overview of the structure of basic training in the SADF during the 1980s.

A brief overview of basic training in the SADF

Universal conscription for all white male South African citizens was introduced in 1967. These *men* were liable for military service from the age of 17 until the age of 55. In 1977 National Service was extended from 12 months to 2 years, including a further 5 years of citizen force camps.

During the 1980s there were two intakes annually, one in late January or early February, and another in July. Conscripts usually received their call-up papers by mail or telegram, which would detail the branch of service, the military unit they had been allotted to, and exact date they were required to report for duty. The duration of national service was 24 months.

The structure of basic training varied according to the branch of service (Army, Navy, Air force or Medical Corps), but the duration of *basics* normally ranged between ten to thirteen weeks (Caforio 2013). Conscripts received training from instructors who normally held the rank of lance-corporal or corporal, in the fundamentals of drilling, military theory, physical fitness and weapons handling. Theory classes also provided the ideal opportunity for the dissemination of state propaganda (Cock 1989, Conway 2012) and reinforcing of the hegemonic status of the military (Conway 2012).

Basic training functioned as a fundamental military ritual within the SADF, with the sole intention of inculcating young white males into military life. Haldén and Jackson (2016: 245) describe basic training as incorporating “highly gendered language stressing a heterosexual, masculine ideal”. Basic training provided an ideal opportunity to cement perceptions that South Africa was a state under siege, effectively at war with communist forces intent on invasion. An End Conscription Campaign (ECC) information pamphlet titled *Militarisation Dossier* (1986), published as part of the Human Awareness Programme included the following excerpt from an Allied Building Society (1955-1988) *Guide to National Service*. The following propagandistic statement clearly positions the Allied Building Society, which was a national South African financial and savings institution, as an agent of the ruling Nationalist Party’s rhetoric. Note the patriotic call for the conscript to *do his duty*, and a thinly veiled attempt to rationalise the need for basic training. Again, the brochure emphasises the Defence Force’s primary aim of turning a conscript into a soldier:

During basic training the Defence Force endeavours to turn the serviceman into a good soldier – someone who has the discipline to act quickly and effectively with his comrades. Many of the methods which are used appear strange and illogical to you, some may well be so, but it will be worth your while, in the long run, to do your share and not try shirk your duty. (12)

Another excerpt from the same ECC pamphlet provides an emotional appeal made to SADF conscripts reporting for National Service by Adrian Vlok, the Minister of Law and Order in South Africa from 1986 to 1991. Vlok employs the rhetoric of fear and threat typically employed by the Nationalist Government of the time, in an attempt to justify conscription (Cock 1989). Note how Vlok positions the conscript on the *winning side*, as a protector and defender of peace, echoing Conway's (2012) notion that a "discourse of sacrifice" was imperative in selling conscription to white South African society:

You are now standing on the side against enemies who want to bring tears and violence to our part of the world. But the price of peace is always a high one and only those of us prepared to pay the price will, in the end, have peace. (Citizen Newspaper 1985)

Basic training in all arms of the Defence Force culminated with a ceremonial passing out parade to which families and friends would *proudly* bear witness to the official induction of conscripts, as soldiers in the SADF. General Jannie Geldenhuys, Chief of the SADF (1980 – 85), gave the following *advice* to conscripts: "But rest assured of this – you stand on the threshold of service of the highest order to yourself, your nation and your fatherland." (ECC pamphlet 1986: 13).

Basic training marked the completion of the induction phase of a conscript's period of national service and was normally followed by specialist instruction appropriate to a particular corps or unit.

The role of the Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) or instructor

NCOs played a fundamental role in the basic training of conscripts. Their primary function was to mould civilians into soldiers, to forge military identities, in some instances at a great physical and psychological cost to the conscript (Cock and Nathan 1989, Cafario 2013, Edlmann 2014). Most NCOs were conscripts themselves, often a year into their national service, or in some cases, permanent force members of the SADF. In this sense, the NCO acted as both an agent and symbol of a military ideal. Here, I use the word *acted* purposefully, referring to Hochschild's (1979) notion of males *acting* to enforce and perpetuate traditional forms of masculinity. Therefore, both the NCO and the conscripts under his command were *actors* of sorts, performing within the SADF's playhouse of militarised masculinities.

It is important to note that NCOs formed the backbone of the SADF, acting as vital components of the military machine. Heitman (1983: 60) refers to the NCO corps as the "skeleton, the framework that holds the rest together in the necessary form and allows it to function". Most conscripts would spend the duration of their basic training under the command of a lance-corporal or corporal, in the case of the army or air force, or able or leading seaman in the case of the navy. The relationship that developed between the NCO and conscript during basic training was a microcosm of the institutional composition of the military, and one that continues into the present as indelible memories for many ex-conscripts.

These memories of basic training are often presented as narratives that include anecdotes of aggression, profanity, unswerving discipline, physical fitness, endurance, and even violence, all necessary foundational constructs for the preservation of a hegemonic militarised masculinity. In addition, most forms of instruction in the SADF were in Afrikaans. For many English speaking conscripts, the defence force was an Afrikaner domain:

Similarly, it seemed that 99% of all the corporals, sergeants SM's etc. seemed to be Afrikaans, with all instruction in Afrikaans, so it really seemed as if the Army was Afrikaans dominated and driven, we English were kind of towing the line. (Paul).

The NCO served as the primary point of reference for conscripts and forged perceptions of the military environment, both during basic training and into the present. NCOs were often perceived as brutal or sadistic, although in some instances this was not the case. An ex-conscript described their corporal as a "sadistic, and even brutal" (James), whereas another recalls the following humanising experience during basic training:

I remember injuring my knee during PT and could hardly run. I was expecting the Afrikaans instructor to show me no mercy but he pulled me aside and told me to sit out the session. The following day he asked me in broken English how I was doing and whether the medics had sorted me out. He seemed genuinely concerned. I was speechless. (Sean).

Crossing the language barrier between English and Afrikaans

Conscription attempted to cement white unity across different language and cultural groups, in the hope of creating a *homogeneous* white South African militarised masculinity. This sense of a unified white military community was however never the case. The cultural divides between English and Afrikaans speaking conscripts proved to be widespread and were accentuated during basic training. Participants of this study related that conscripts, "tended to hang out in different groups. On the whole, the Afrikaans speaking conscripts were more compliant" (Gareth). Here are two revealing accounts by ex-conscripts describing the differences between English and Afrikaans speaking conscripts:

Afrikaans conscripts were generally more disciplined during [the] initial phasing

of National Service - this differentiation became less evident as basics progressed - with the exception of alcohol & drug abuse, which remained (in the main) activities undertaken by English speaking conscripts. (Petrus)

My family name is [very Afrikaans]...so I was placed in a 100 % Afrikaans bungalow. I had a baptism of fire [and] found out very quickly that there [sic] where [sic] definitely a cultural difference...as an outsider I quickly learned that I was to speak the language [Afrikaans]. (Andries)

The SADE, particularly the army, was perceived as an Afrikaner preserve, whereas the navy tended to lean towards the cultural traditions of its colonial forbear, the Royal Navy. The SADF had a policy of alternating Afrikaans and English on a weekly basis, although participants of this study explained, “the English week turned out most of the time to also be Afrikaans” (Phil).

Irrespective of the cultural and political differences of white English and Afrikaans speaking white citizens, the SADF required the *consent* of all white South African societal structures.

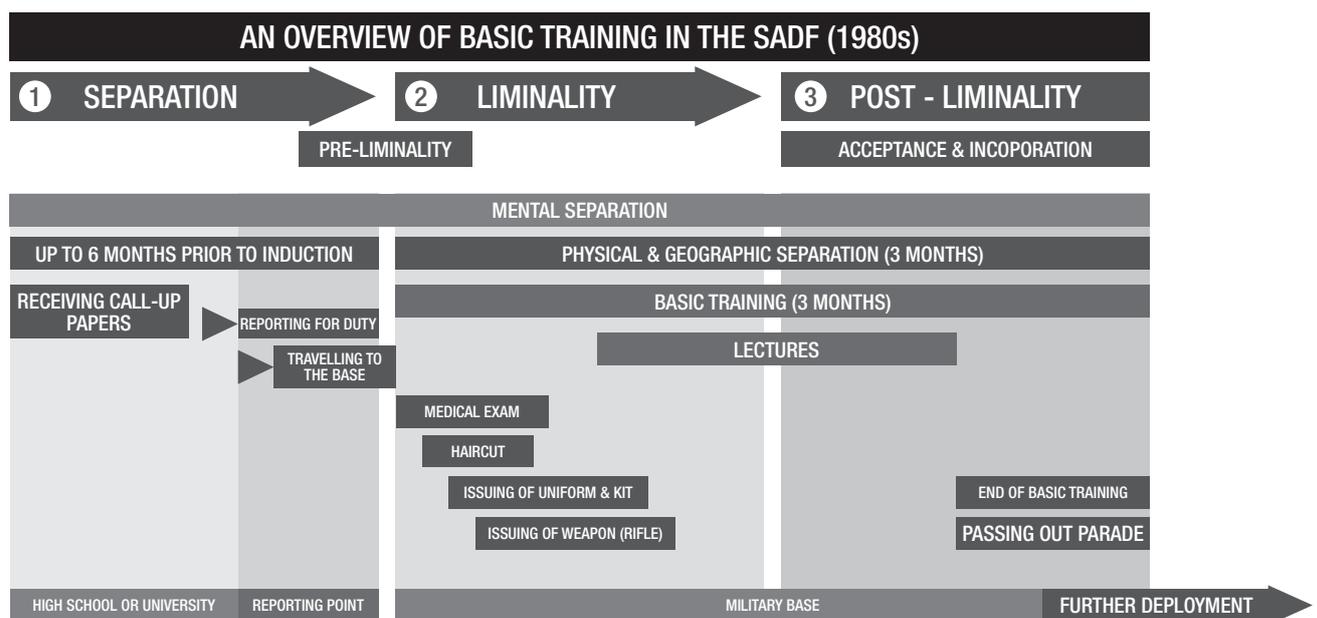


Table 1: A chronological overview of basic training drawing on Van Gennep's three-part structure for rites of passage

This echoes Conway's (2012: 21) conclusions that military service, and particularly basic training, aimed to position the conscript as an active "political agent" of the state, irrespective of language divides. Therefore, according to the state, conscription helped preserve the *freedoms* enjoyed by *all* South African citizens, although it ostensibly served the needs of the white minority. The conscript was, in turn, acknowledged and lauded by both English and particularly Afrikaans speaking white society as a participatory citizen. Conway (2012) and Cock and Nathan (1989) allude to the "*privileged status*" (Cock 1989: 12) of the SADF soldier within white society. This perception of the soldier as *privileged* also acted to smooth the obvious differences between English and Afrikaans speaking language groups in the SADF. Conway (2012: 40) acknowledges that Afrikaner society required "the consent of English-speaking whites, as did the deepening militarisation of South Africa".

Yet the differences between Afrikaans and English speaking conscripts were largely the result of generalised cultural and historical constructs, often beginning in childhood (Evans 1989). English speaking ex-conscripts described Afrikaans conscripts as "a lot more eager and keen" (Tony) and here, an English speaking ex-conscript explains that these differences were also rooted in longstanding political differences:

I went into the army with much of the traditional prejudice of the English-speaking South African against the Afrikaner, and to some extent I unlearned it. The Afrikaans speakers were generally far more accepting of the army and identified with the stated mission of fighting the ANC and fighting communism. We did not discuss politics because of this and more or less agreed to disagree. (Mark)

Participants of this study spoke of the *complicated nature* of English speaking language conscripts, pointing to an array of different cultural and national identities, such as the "Greek, Portuguese and a very English Bishops boy" (James), whereas "the Afrikaans *okes* [Afrikaans slang for *guys*] were more devout, and accustomed to believing their parents, teachers and *dominee*" (James). The fractured nature of language and cultural differences

within the SADF, despite it being an Afrikaner preserve, were of grave concern to apartheid-era politicians. PW Botha, the South African State President from 1984 to 1989, stressed the need for *Unity through Strength*, that Afrikaner society would not survive the *Total Onslaught* without the support of white English speaking society (Conway 2012). Yet, this was by no means an indication of the capitulation of Afrikaner hegemonic identity, as is demonstrated by the following quote by PW Botha from the mid-1980s, “The security and happiness of all minority groups in South Africa depend on the Afrikaner” (Crwys-Williams 1994).

Again, it is important to note many of my conclusions are generalisations and are by no means inclusive of all ex-conscripts, either English or Afrikaans speaking. As previously stated in Chapter 2, academic Gary Baines (2009: 331) rightly notes that “ex-conscripts are not a homogeneous group”. There are always exceptions “to the majority”, and where possible this chapter will also attempt to draw attention to those exceptions.

Framing the path of basic training by means of Van Gennep’s rites of passage

I will be examining the path of basic training under headings that can be clearly described by Van Gennep’s three-part structure for rites of passage, originally applied to coming-of-age rituals and marriage ceremonies. Rites of passage “divide time and social life into normal and exceptional segments” (Haldén and Jackson 2016: 9), with conscription serving as an apt example of an “exceptional segment”. Haldén and Jackson (2016: 10) continue to explain “there is also an obvious affinity between rites of passage” and induction into the military. Turner (1969) explains that Van Gennep’s rites of passage commence with an initial period of *separation* (from civilian society, gender and family life in the case of a conscript), and is followed by a *liminal period* (where the conscript would be exposed to harsh physical, emotional and mental privations) and finally concludes with *incorporation and acceptance* (in the case of a conscript, into a militarised environment). Charlotte Hooper (1999: 480) also

perceives military service as a rite of passage, and describes basic training as “the embodiment of a physical and social shaping of the male body”.

Although both conscripts and their families perceived national service as a *rite of passage*, or a *necessary duty*, at this juncture I would like to briefly refer to the state’s presentation of conscription as a *sacrifice*. Conway (2012: 68) notes that the military magazine *Paratus*, and high ranking officers of the SADF employed a “discourse of sacrifice”, which “ultimately served to discipline men into performing conscription”.

The destruction of self

Therefore, induction into the SADF, followed by basic training allowed for an indelible physical and mental reinforcing of a racially based militarised masculinity within apartheid South Africa (Conway 2012, Cock and Nathan 1989), suspending a conscript’s lived reality and previous sense of masculinity. Conway (2012: 60) draws attention to an excerpt from a SADF leaflet that states explicitly, “National service may be virtually regarded as a modern-day initiation school. It is generally considered that the Defence Force makes a man out of boys”. The ritualistic stripping away of a conscript’s sense of self during basic training, of impressing a sense of uniformity and anonymity in service of the state, still poses many unanswered questions for ex-conscripts. The forcible separation of the conscript from a non-military social space to an often brutal hyper-masculine environment required the *destruction* of the conscript’s previous identity, which according to Van Gennep (1960) results in a crisis of sorts. These crises, which were experienced by many ex-conscripts during basic training, have been largely suppressed and relegated to introverted and internalised memory fields (Draper 1999, Caforio 2013, Morell 1998).

Allied to Van Gennep’s theory, I have also relied on Victor Turner’s concept of liminality. Turner expanded upon Van Gennep’s concept of liminality, particularly in his book *The Forest*

of *Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (1967). Turner noted that liminal individuals, such as tribal initiates *have* nothing, “no status, insignia, secular clothing, rank, kinship position, nothing to demarcate them structurally from their fellows” (98). This concept dovetails with military training, where Turner’s *liminal entities* (Haldén and Jackson 2016) in this case, are conscripts experiencing the rigours of basic training. These youths, much like initiates, have been forcibly separated from society and thrust into an often brutal social space and militarised social hierarchy, primarily based on rank and a member’s service record.

***Communitas* - suffering as a community**

Conscripts, therefore, form a communal group in which they all are equally separated (from society) and stripped of their identity by means of the military ritual of basic training. This echoes Turner’s (1967) notion of *communitas*, whereby the privations of the *liminal* period of a rite of passage prompted feelings of community and solidarity among initiates. This *suffering* as a community during basic training was of obvious benefit to the process of manufacturing obedient militarised masculinities, and exemplifies the metamorphosis of a boy into a man. Conway (2012: 61) refers to an excerpt from an article in *Paratus*, the official magazine of the SADF,¹ that states, “after two years he will emerge a man...?”

The force number - *The mark of Cain*

This stripping away of identity was furthered by the SADF assigning an eight-digit force number to conscripts on receipt of their call-up papers, which acted as a means of immediate identification. Conscripts were referred to by their force number in all forms of communication with the SADF and were expected to be able to repeat their force number without hesitation. Again, a conscript’s force number was an integral part of the *separation*

¹ *Paratus* was the SADF’s official magazine from November 1970 up to April 1994. A total of 281 issues were published which were widely distributed within the SADF and also made available for purchase in local newsagents.

phase of the rite of passage, a relinquishing of the conscript's previous civilian identity and the dehumanisation of an individual's sense of self. Almost all participants of this study were able to repeat their force number decades later, with varying degrees of pride and dismay. In some instances, ex-conscripts still had copies of their call-up papers. Playwright Greig Coetzee concludes his play *White men with weapons* (1996) with this pertinent statement:

And what were we, us white men, with God on our side, our backs to the wall and our arses on the line on the southern tip of darkest Africa. What were we?

Whatever we were, and whatever it was that we were part of, in the end it left its mark on each and every one of us. Some wear that mark with pride. Some try hide it. Some don't even know it's there. The mark of Cain. The mark of having been part of a machine. Stamped on us like a serial number:

The performer comes to attention and says this quickly

COETZEE -G - G3 - K2 - 8 - 3 - 5 -2 - 8 - 0 - 0 --- 0" (Coetzee 2009: 88)

This chapter, therefore, attempts to navigate the experience of basic training, by means of the framework of Van Gennep's rites of passage, allied to Turner's concept of liminality, in the hope of providing some clarity in attempting to navigate the unstable constructs of masculinity and whiteness of ex-conscripts within post-apartheid South Africa.

Separation (induction into the SADF)

Van Gennep (1960) describes the first stage in a rite of passage as *separation*, noted by a loss of identity. This loss of identity is usually abrupt and even violent in nature, but most importantly, is marked by a rupture of the ties to self, family and social environments. In the case of SADF conscripts, I will argue that a conscript's loss of self was initiated on receipt of call-up papers, which were normally mailed six months prior to induction into the SADF.

Mental separation prior to induction into the SADF

A number of interviewees (Tony and AP) recalled feeling a sense of dread or immediate disconnection from reality when they received their call-up papers. Woo Yong Chung's (2011) academic paper on military service and rites of passage relating to South Korean soldiers draws attention to the act of separating a conscript from society specifically during basic training. Although Chung's observations hold true for most instances of conscription into a military environment, my research points to conscripts experiencing feelings of despair, separation and apprehension as early as the receipt of their call-up papers from the SADF. White males received their call-up papers in the final year of secondary school, preparing for matriculation exams, a stressful event in itself. An ex-conscript described that the receipt of his call-up papers was "a point of surrender" (Sean) and that he felt a sudden feeling of disconnection from his "previous life"

Others felt a sense of excitement, a chance to become a man. Conway (2012: 61) observes that "call-up days became increasingly celebratory occasions". Here, an ex-conscript elaborates on these attempts to celebrate and market conscription to white society:

My family and I were invited to attend an introductory evening at SAS Unitas (Navy) a month or so before my call-up. It was well attended, there was even a buffet, and the navy personnel went out of their way to present national service as a boy's adventure of sorts. We were informed of career opportunities in the navy. I wondered if I was the only conscript who felt sick to my stomach. (Sean)

These statements by former conscripts are critical in understanding that the months leading up to reporting for military service in the SADF allowed for the preparation of conceptions of masculinity that would be further impressed on the conscript during basic training. As such, the receipt of call-up papers served as the initial sign-post, indicating the onset of Van Gennep's process of *separation*, in this case, from civilian society. Conway (2012: 21) rightly

notes that the formation of the “manly” citizen-soldier is a series of complex interconnections between “gender, military service and citizenship”.

Receiving call-up papers

The receipt of call-up papers while the conscript was still immersed in a schooling system that served as a tacit agent of the state certainly assisted this process of alienation, aided by the further influences of family and white South African society at large.² Conscripts described being “overwhelmed” and “helpless” on receipt of their call-up papers, yet hesitant at expressing these emotions for fear of being labelled a *moffie*,³ or *baby*. Scheff (2003) argues that boys are socialised to hide signs of weakness or express fear, which in turn exerts a strong influence on their construction of masculinity. Allied to a patriarchal social environment, particularly that of apartheid-era Afrikaner society, most conscripts remained silent, and in most instances, this silence of compliance extended to the family. An ex-conscript explains:

I came from a somewhat liberal family, but I think that’s just the way it was in those days, and although my folks voted for the Democratic Party, it was par for the course for only white males to be conscripted (Paul).

Randall cites Mead’s (1934: 486) observations that individuals follow “feeling rules”, whereby they display socially appropriate masculine emotions, which was often the case when conscripts were faced with the prospect of military service. A number of interviewees described how they “quickly learned to not express their emotions” (James), or display “emotions of resentment or fear” (Mark), but would rather “take it like a man” (Sean). This echoes Goffman’s (1959) findings that male emotions are often self-presentations, and socially determined whereby genuine feelings are suitably adjusted and managed, in an

² See the addendum for an example of the author’s call-up papers for 1989.

³ Derogatory Afrikaans slang for an effeminate or homosexual man. The term also alludes to a man who is fearful, or reluctant to perform a *masculine* activity. See André Carl van der Merwe’s novel *Moffie* (2006) about the experiences of a gay conscript in the SADF.

attempt to maintain and present a socially accepted masculine response. Secondary school, the church, family environments and peer groups acted as spaces of formulation for these “self-presentations” of emotion by SADF conscripts.

Trepidation - the days leading up to induction into the SADF

The days leading up to reporting for duty were described by ex-conscripts as filled with “trepidation” (Petrus), with diverse a range of concerns, ranging from the consequential to the banal. Examples included whether they would “cope” with the rigours of basic training (Walter), “be able to stomach army food” or “iron clothes correctly” (Sean). Yet the majority of ex-conscript interviewees expressed feelings of resignation or a sense of capitulation, that national service was a “rite of passage” (Petrus), a necessary civic duty or simply the cost of adult citizenship, an experience all white South African males had to endure. Here a conscript describes the feelings of trepidation leading up to reporting for duty:

The day of departure loomed. The night before, I could hardly sleep. I had been away the previous weekend with my mother, sister and stepfather. He was a great guy. He had been in the Air Force during the Second World War, in Egypt, Italy and Austria. He spent the weekend trying to talk some courage into me.

(The Ancient Armourer)

Physical separation - reporting for duty

However, it was the day of reporting for duty that stands out in the minds of many conscripts. For some, they described it as the “worst day of their life” (Sean), an event that remains indelibly fixed in their memories. Van Gennep’s (1960) concept of *separation* resonates here, in that conscripts either travelled by rail or bus to their respective military bases. This physical separation from the familiar, to a remote geographic location, plays a crucial role in the initial

stage of this rite of passage for conscripts. The majority of SADF conscripts were between the ages of 17 and 21, having either recently matriculated from secondary school, or graduated from a technikon or university.

This sudden thrust into the military proved to be a shock, prompting what Hochschild (1979) refers to as the acting out of masculine emotions and the modification of an individual's personality. The conscript was not only removed geographically from his home and family but also forced to separate himself from his normal emotional responses such as a fear of the unknown. Here, a conscript describes his feelings:

The masses gathering at Wingfield. The tears getting onto the bus. And the long bus journey through the night to Upington... I remember the emotions of the journey, leaving my family and girlfriend and not knowing what I was in for... and thinking just how long a year seemed... (Phil)

In short, the conscript was forced to *man-up* and act the part of a soldier, not a child. This positioned the conscript as an “actor” (Hochschild 1983: 35), enforcing and scaffolding the construction of traditional forms of masculinity. These masculinities always referenced attributes such as physical prowess, mental toughness, and internalised emotional responses (Burns and Ward 2005). A conscript described that “*klaaring* into” the SADF seemed “surreal and distant” (Sean 2016),⁴ an event where no man dared to shed a tear, except perhaps the mothers, sisters and girlfriends of departing conscripts. Another participant described the “falsity” of the experience, the manner in which the military had presented the farewell as a “show”, as he “wondered” what his fellow conscripts “were hiding” (James 2016). The following statement by an ex-conscript describes a different approach to dealing with the fears of induction into the SADF:

Ja, my mom was in tears as we were herded onto the Samil's (military trucks) to

⁴ *Klaaring in* is an Afrikaans expression, commonly used by SADF conscripts, referring to induction into the SADE.

be transported to the trains at Wingfield. It was a cold winter's day. I knew one other guy who was going, not well, but we stuck together. He was beyond scared, so I was dealing with him, which made me feel a lot better, braver and less worried.

(Paul)

Other conscripts simply wished they had the courage to resist the call-up:

Yes, [I]got drunk in the Pig and Whistle the night before, hardly slept, tossed and turned all night about the choice I had made, lay there wishing I had the courage to go into exile and join the ANC. Out to Wingfield, into a bus, loud ugly man in uniform swearing all the time, felt numb. (Gareth)

Again, the previous narratives echo Connell & Messerschmidt's (2005) and Cornwall, Edström, and Greig's (2001) observations that masculinity (and femininity) is often contextually specific, in that it is culturally and socially determined, and adapts to its environment.

Pre-liminality – initiating separation by means of geography and identity

What followed for SADF conscripts is what I want to refer to as a pre-liminal period that bridges Van Gennep's (1960) first two parts of rites of passage, namely separation and the liminal period. This transitional phase normally took the form of a bus or train journey, whether lasting a few hours or a number of days, it allowed for the further bolstering of traditional forms of masculinity, where loose friendships, alliances and bonds were formed, initially along lines of language.

For most conscripts, this was their first exposure to actual members of the SADF, in the form of non-commissioned officers (NCOs) who instigated the onset of the liminal period, by

means of introducing the conscript to the rigours of military discipline. This was normally achieved by shouting orders and issuing threats as a foretaste of the physical and mental privations that would follow their arrival at the military base. However, in some instances, this was reserved for the moment of their arrival. An ex-conscript described how NCOs “did not say much on the bus” (James), and reserved their abuse for the moment of arrival, thus adding to the tension and a sense of impending doom. James recalled the instant of their arrival at the base was marked by much verbal abuse, and at that moment he realised that he was “now in it”. Phil describes his arrival at the military base in Bloemfontein: “I approached it as positively as I could but remember getting a serious lump in my throat by the time we were halfway to Bloem. I also remember the train going very quiet.”

Here, another ex-conscript describes the ambiguities and a prevailing sense of tension that marked the day of his departure for national service:

I recall being dropped off at Sturrock Park behind Wits University at 6 am, the crowds of anxious, tense young men carrying all kinds of kit bags, the presence of the corporals and sergeants in uniform, their initial masks of professionalism and reasonableness stripping by degrees to reveal them to be the aggressive, foul-mouthed, subhuman abusers they really were. (Mark)

For most conscripts, the moment of their arrival at the military base marked the onset of the Van Gennep’s second part of a rite of passage: the liminal period.⁵ Here, the same ex-conscript describes the onset of the liminal period of basic training, marked by a stripping away of his civilian self:

Then there was more shouting and abuse at the other end, as we were chivvied into military lorries and off to the dreary camp. I recall sitting and standing in queues and queues. Shouting. Hunger. Thirst. Discomfort. Soaked in the rain waiting in queues.

⁵ The word *liminal* is derived from the Latin, *limen*, meaning threshold in English.

Getting mattresses, sleeping bags, *pikstel*, tin trunk well after dark, marching in the dark over a building site and falling into rain-filled trenches and over mounds of mud, and finally into a dank, dusty, bungalow after 10pm. Misery. I remember it.
(Mark)

The liminal period – breaking and forging a new *soldier-self*

Although Van Gennep describes the liminal period of a rite of passage as a transition phase, for the interests of this chapter I have drawn on Victor Turner’s understanding of the liminal period as a space where the initiate is “removed, secluded, darkened, hidden, without rank or insignia, in terms of social structure, neophytes are invisible.” (Turner 1964: 234).

For SADF conscripts this threshold was a space that had little or no connection to civilian life. For the conscript, the physical act of geographic separation from any civilian reference point was complete. Ex-conscripts described SADF bases as Spartan environments, and in some instances, they likened the surroundings to a prison. One ex-conscript described himself as a “willing prisoner of the state” (Gareth). In this sense, the military base served as a locale of separation and isolation, both mentally and physically, where a secluded conscript community could be subjected to the stresses of basic training. This is where the NCO would act as a mentor and facilitator of the transition from civilian to soldier, often stopping short of physical violence, to force the conscript to recognise and adapt to his soldier-self (Angstrom 2016).

Van Creveld (2008) notes that “every military training system begins with the humiliation of the trainee, not just as a means of ‘punishment,’ but as part of an overall strategy designed to erase any regional and class differences” (48), and to “provide tangible proof that they are entirely dependent on their superiors” (49). SADF conscripts would be immersed in a “tightly choreographed process” (Whitworth 2008: 5), where “every detail of life was prescribed, regulated and enforced. Every moment was accounted for.

The liminal period of basic training in the SADF included a number of initial key events that would facilitate this transition of the conscript, namely: a medical examination, a haircut, the issuing of the conscript's military kit and most notably the issuing of a weapon. Again, all of these key events played a dual role, to manufacture a military sense of self and aid the construction of a militarised masculinity. NCOs referred to conscripts during basic training as a *roof*, an Afrikaans expression meaning *scab*, firmly impressing on the conscript his absence of status, marking an "interstructural situation" devoid of reference points, where the conscript, as a neophyte, is "betwixt and between" (Turner 1964: 234).⁶

The liminal period – a series of military initiation rites

The 'medical'

Once a conscript had arrived on a SADF base he would have to undergo the first of a series of *initiations* into the military environment. The medical examination was a particularly stressful and emasculating event, one that still remains fresh in the mind of many conscripts. Conscripts had to strip to their underwear and were subjected to a battery of physical examinations to determine whether they were fit for basic training. A conscript's medical classification ranged from *G1K1* (as fit for duty) to *G5K5* (unfit for service in the SADF). The *G* rating indicated fitness for ground duties, whereas the *K* rating referred to health determining geographic and environmental factors.

Medical status as a signifier of masculinity

A conscript's medical status also acted as a signifier of masculinity, of his physical condition, and presented him as a willing participant for further training. Those conscripts who were declared medically unfit were often referred to as *the sick, lame and lazy*, essentially positioning

⁶ See the addendum for a copy of a letter sent to the author's parents from the base commander of SAS Saldanha, informing them how their son was coping with basic training.

them as outcasts, unworthy of comradeship and of no benefit to the military. An ex-conscript described a conflicting sense of relief and dismay when he was declared medically fit for basics, “I felt for the guys who were G4K4. The corporals gave them a hell of a hard time, but at least they now had a ticket back home.” (Sean 2016). Cafario (2013) elaborates on the mindset of the conscript’s previous statement and notes that some conscripts would “demand a reclassification”, in an attempt to “redeem themselves as warriors worthy of a real war” (109) so that they could be “matched to the military ideal” (110).

It is important to note that for many white South African apartheid-era males, the concept of a physically able and strong body was the result of complex social constructions of their masculinity and sense of whiteness, often originating in childhood, and exemplified by school sports such as rugby.⁷ Conway (2012) cites Woodward “The body is the surface on which gender identities are inscribed, performed and often resisted” (2003: 51). Therefore, a satisfactory *G1K1* military medical examination result not only confirmed they were fit for military service but also served as an acknowledgement of an ideal masculine body and mind, one that was willing to serve the state.

A conscript explains his strong desire for a *G1K1* classification from JH Thompson’s *Unpopular War* (2006: 13):

I said to them, ‘Stuff you guys, I’m here to fight!’ So the guy scrubbed the G4K4 [medical classification] off my back and I signed an indemnity form allowing me to perform G1K1 duties – Brett, age 18”.

The pressures to live up to those ideals were also described by an ex-conscript during my interview process:

I sailed through the physical, but the camp doctor called me after I had filled in the

⁷ Conway (2012) and Morrell (2001) write in detail about masculinities and sport, particularly rugby. Conway discusses the connection between militarised masculinities and sport, whereby sports such as rugby acted as a “powerful social metaphor for white [South African] society” (71).

rudimentary psychological questionnaire and asked me if I had any previous mental problems. To be honest, I didn't know if I'd handle basics, but I felt so pressured by what my bungalow mates, family and friends at home would think, I said I'd be fine.

(Sean)

The military haircut

Apart from the obvious hygienic reasons, the obligatory military haircut also served as a physical shedding of a conscript's civilian identity and the first of many military *rituals* to create a sense of complete uniformity. The military haircut is employed as a means to physically reiterate a soldier's uniform and remove any sense of individuality. An ex-conscript described his haircut in basics as a deeply depressing experience and likened it to a "point of no return" (Erasmus). He goes on to explain that it felt as if he was looking at a "stranger in the mirror", that "the army had erased his previous identity at the barber" (Erasmus). Arkin and Dobrofsky (1978: 159) also notes that the military haircut does away with a conscript's sense of vanity, where vanity is "believed to be the prerogative of women".

Therefore the military haircut is one of a sequence of ritual deaths or sacrifices that occurred during basic training. The ritual of the military haircut validated the experience as a rite of passage and rendered the initiate (the conscript) receptive to further change.

In rare instances, the ritual of the haircut was extended to a ritual that aligns itself closely to the often degrading experiences of tribal initiates. An ex-conscript explains:

Our company was assembled in the communal toilets and we were ordered to shave our pubic hair. The Afrikaners obliged, but a number of us English conscripts refused. The instructor went mental. When some brave individual said he would report the instructor to his superiors, the whole sordid experience imploded. Some of the guys

had tears in their eyes. It was one of the most demeaning experiences of my life. (Sean).

Again, this is a further example of a brutal ritualised attempt to erase a conscript's previous identity, and even though the results are not visible, the deeply unsettling intimacy of the experience remains fixed in the mind of the individual as a crisis of self. Furthermore, these degrading crises were experienced as a community of initiates, and according to Van Gennep (1960) and Turner (1967), these crises of community are to be expected during to the liminal period of a rite of passage.

Thus, I can describe the aforementioned ritual as yet another attempt aimed at destabilising the conscript's previous sense of identity and status, possibly at a great psychological cost. Although these practices were certainly not endorsed by the SADF, and were in many instances illegal, they reinforced the reformulation of a new hyper-masculine self. Those men who refused to oblige these abject communal rites, presented themselves as recusants and unworthy of being labelled a real man, or reliable soldier. This leads me to the role of the military uniform within the formulation of a militarised masculinity.

The military uniform

Military uniforms signify authority, brotherhood and solidarity within the military, a particular branch of service and the unit or regiment a soldier is attached to. Besides the obvious functional necessities of a military uniform, when a soldier wears a uniform he subsumes his identity into a larger entity. Additionally, Myrntinen (2006) observes that a military uniform sets an individual apart from the rest of society, allowing him to be immediately identified as a soldier.

The issuing of a uniform, including webbing and a helmet, to SADF conscripts cemented

the process of separation from civilian society, attempting to impress a sense of military community, unswerving loyalty and conformity on the conscript. The donning of a uniform and a helmet also emphasised the dehumanised soldier-self and allowed for the conditioning of a militarised state of masculinity. An ex-conscript described his uniform as “transformational”, that wearing a helmet and his webbing made him feel “superhuman” and “demanding of respect” (Petrus). A number of participants also expressed feeling a sense of pride to be part of a longstanding military tradition, whilst another ex-conscripts took exception and felt “properly trapped in the system” (Gareth) when they were issued with a uniform.

A conscript’s newly issued uniform is part acquiescence to the system, yet also functions as an aspirational element of the liminal period. Mankayi (2008: 23) notes that the military acts to “groom” idealised male bodies for violence, citing Cock (2001) and Agostino (2003). Therefore the military uniform acts a vital accessory in this grooming process. Ultimately, uniforms act as visible symbols of a soldier’s rank and how “close to a theatre of combat a military member has come” (Disler 2005: 23). It can be argued that uniforms are symbolic displays of a male’s inherent willingness and readiness to engage in combat (Goffman 1997, Connell 1995), irrespective of whether they see combat or not. Here too, Van Creveld (2008: 23) describes a uniform as a tangible display of a gendered militarised masculinity, “Perhaps most important of all, they must protect the [male] body and emphasise its [masculine] contours, but without giving rise to charges of foppishness and/or effeminacy”.

To sum up, a military uniform engenders generalised perceptions of the wearer in a public space. A SADF uniform positioned the conscript as compliant, and allowed for a tangible and visual reconfiguration of a conscript’s previous sense of masculinity, to that of a hegemonic militarised masculinity. The SADF’s *nutria* brown uniform acted as a visible statement of compliance in public,⁸ presenting the conscript, irrespective of his personal convictions, as a

⁸ *Nutria* is a SADF term designating the dark brown standard operational uniform issued to all SADF army and marine corps conscripts.

willing participant and performer for the state. In the case of the SADF conscript, a uniform claimed the wearer's identity and served as a visible expression of the regime's power and presence.

However, despite the importance of a uniform in the forging of a militarised masculinity, it is the soldier's personal weapon, his rifle, that serves as the ultimate expression of latent military power, and of his intent to act as a soldier in service of the state.

“This is my rifle” – the rifle as a component of a hegemonic militarised masculinity

Cock (2001) argues that guns are a vital component of a hegemonic militarised masculinity and the issuing of a weapon, in the form of an R1 or R4 rifle to SADF conscripts,⁹ marked a pivotal point during basic training. In relation to Van Gennep's (1960) liminal period of a rite of passage, the issuing of a weapon to conscript can be construed in two ways: firstly it visibly identifies him as an enactor of the soldier-self, and secondly, his weapon binds him to the military community.

Weapons are inextricably connected to military culture and sexualised representations of militarised masculinities (Mankayi 2008, Cock and Nathan 1989). The emphasising of an intimate sexualised relationship between a soldier and his rifle are clearly evident in marching songs, that have entered popular culture, and for example, have been represented in Stanley Kubrick's Vietnam war movie *Full Metal Jacket* (1987). A scene from the movie depicts a platoon of conscripts who are ordered to hold their rifles in one hand and place their other hand over their crotch while chanting in unison, “This is my rifle. This is my gun. This is for killing. This is for fun”. In this instance, the bond between a soldier and his rifle takes on highly sexualised connotations, where the purpose of his rifle and penis are clearly

⁹ The R1 Battle Rifle (1960) was a copy of the Fabrique National FN-FAL locally-produced under license in South Africa. The Denel R4 Assault Rifle (1980) is the current standard-issue assault rifle of the South African Army.

determined, yet their similarities are obvious. The rifle and penis are seen as symbols and tools of the soldier's masculinity. SADF conscripts were often instructed to refer to their rifles as their *vrou*, an Afrikaans word meaning wife or girlfriend. SADF conscripts were ordered to treat their rifle accordingly, and in some instances were even ordered to kiss their rifle goodnight before going to bed (Stephen).

Myrntinen (2003: 38) asserts that "men's bond with weapons seems to be forged in at an early stage of childhood", and that "boys mimic the behaviour of armed male role models, be they knights, soldiers, warriors, police, thieves or cowboys, role-playing which almost inevitably requires the presence of toy weapons". Therefore the actual acquisition of a real weapon by a young man within a military space acts to buttress those notions of manly prowess, yet as Myrntinen observes, in the case of conscripts and specifically soldiers in action, "men are not only disproportionately the perpetrators of violence, but also often its victims" (38).

A soldier's rifle is emblematic of his soldier-self and positions the soldier as an agent of state-sanctioned aggression. Basic training in the SADF was accepted as a necessary privation by the majority of white men, and I would propose that the issuing of a weapon to a soldier served as a tangible status symbol and an often daunting acknowledgement of their potential power as a future soldier. For the conscript, this was perhaps the first step in the liminal period of basic training that placed responsibility and transferred power, in the form of a weapon, into the hands of a conscript. In a sense, it also marked the first aspect of Van Gennep's third phase, of incorporation and acceptance, whereby the system was beginning to acknowledge the conscript's new identity as a soldier.

The morality of carrying a weapon

For some conscripts, the issuing of weapon was a deeply problematic moral or religious issue. Here, I would like to draw attention to two exceptions, namely a participant who refused to carry a weapon during basic training, and another who managed to avoid weapons by

joining the army band. This first excerpt from the interview clearly details the trauma and relentless pressure placed on the conscript:

Doubtless. I think most are unaware - and don't want to know - how apartheid indoctrination actually functioned, especially on boys and young men. It struck me in Saldanha how young these *okes* were and I realized that conscription victimized the youth in all of us. In the final attempt to humiliate me and intimidate others when I refused to touch a weapon, the interrogator got so frustrated he asked me, in front of the barracks, why I would not do this. And when I replied, I felt I had an audience among other guys who also were not OK with the whole thing. On the day conscripts went to the shooting range, there were 13 or 14 from my barracks who hid or found some excuse. And the Navy let it go, for fear (I imagine) of rumours of a revolt reaching the press. (James).

The second excerpt from an ex-conscript interview describes a less traumatic different path, "I refused to carry a gun and made sure I went into the band...in about week 3" (Phil 2016).¹⁰ Therefore, although the vast majority of SADF conscripts did not question the issue of bearing arms for the apartheid regime, there were rare instances of resistance within the system. When the process of forging a culture of white militarised supremacy met with instances of resistance or objection, dissenters were immediately suppressed by any means necessary. Masculinities that threatened to compete with the hegemonic militarised masculinity of the SADF were marginalised and referred to as traitors, communists or *kaffirboeties*.¹¹ Myrttinen (2003: 38) concurs, "Violent masculinity also involves the suppression of alternative, competing masculinities not only in others but in oneself as well".

10 SADF conscripts who refused to carry a weapon were often made to carry broomsticks, metal poles or buckets to draw attention to their non-compliance.

11 The derogatory Afrikaans word *kaffirboetie* (English: Kaffir brother, or black buddy) was used to describe a white person who displayed allegiances or sympathy for the plight of black South Africans during apartheid.

Products of violence

Additionally, there are no records indicating the number of firearms-related deaths during basic training in the SADF over any given period of time. Most reports of an anecdotal nature and were suicide related. An article that appeared in the Citizen newspaper (1985) reported there were 25 conscript suicides during 1984, a further 37 suicides in 1985 and two suicides by March in 1986. A number of participants involved in this study did mention near-fatal mishaps with firearms during basic training, “Some *oke* lost his thumb at the rifle range. He didn’t listen to the corporal and paid the price. He was charged for damaging state property – himself, but perhaps that’s just a rumour because we never saw him again” (Sean). An excerpt from the Sunday Star newspaper (1985) that appeared in an ECC information pamphlet (1985) points to the ubiquitous presence of weapons, “There were bullet holes in the floor of the guardroom from people fooling around with firearms”.

The shared intimacies between the militarised masculinities and weapons of SADF ex-conscripts, therefore, become vital components in understanding how ex-conscripts navigate the post-apartheid landscape. Myrntinen (2003: 41) notes that weapons “are the embodiment of violent, often militarised models of masculinity, which, in turn, have broader socio-political ramifications”. These “broader socio-political ramifications” will be addressed in Chapter Six.

Abuse during basic training

Van Creveld (2008) asserts that “every military education system ever designed starts by humiliating its trainees” (48). This was especially true of the SADF. Much like other military institutions, abuse in the SADF was physical, psychological or verbal. Again, this allowed for the breaking down of the conscript, in the hope of forging an unquestioning and loyal soldier.

Verbal abuse

Verbal abuse was common, often involving sexual profanities, ridicule and at times racist comments. Verbal abuse tended to be gendered, trainees were referred to as *meisies*,¹² and the homophobic term *moffie* was directed at conscripts who were not coping with the physical or mental rigours of basic training. Disler (2006: 26) cites Livia and Hall's (1997) observations of the usefulness of "queer linguistic theory" for the study of homosocial environments such as military institutions. Whitworth (2008: 6) notes that it is not a coincidence that verbal abuse during basic training is "gendered, raced and homophobic". Whitworth argues that "young soldiers are learning to deny, indeed obliterate, the other within the psyche". The stripping away of the "other" and conscript's previous sense of self is a crucial aspect of Van Gennep's liminal period of a rite of passage, allowing for the creation of a solidaristic soldier-self. Additionally, Kimmel (2001) notes that men are inherently fearful of humiliation (whether physical or verbal) in homosocial environments, particularly where proof of one's manhood is governed by demonstrative acts of physical prowess or skill with a weapon.

The military, and in this instance basic training, served as the ideal space for other men's approval of a man's accomplishments. These militarised masculine spaces relied on hierarchical relationships of power and ultimately unswerving obedience (Connell 1995). Van Creveld (2006) and Steyn (2001) note that aggression or abusive training methods are necessary mechanisms when attempting to forge civilians into soldiers.

Van Gennep's liminal period of a rite of passage draws on these mechanisms of aggression, and even abuse, to destabilise and then strip away previous identities, forcing initiates to occupy an ambiguous social position. In the case of SADF conscripts, this state of ambiguity naturally provided fertile ground for the inculcation of a militarised state of being.

Ex-conscripts were reluctant to recall any instances of racist verbal abuse, but given the racialised nature of the SADF during apartheid, some instructors certainly did employ racist

¹² Afrikaans for *girls*.

language. Racist language ranged from references to the *swart gevaar*,¹³ to overt racist terms such as *kaffirboetie* (See footnote 6).

Physical abuse

The lines between physical training and abuse were often blurred during basic training in the SADF. Ex-conscripts speak of *rondvoks*,¹⁴ *opvoks*,¹⁵ and *beach parties* (the naval equivalent of the army's *opvok*) which were essentially highly strenuous repetitive runs or drills in full kit that would bring conscripts to the verge of physical and mental collapse. These seemingly barbaric practices, that Conway (2012: 61) refers to as “ritualised tests”, did, however, instil a sense of *communitas* or *esprit de corps* among trainees, who undoubtedly viewed their instructor as the common enemy.

In addition, any sign of weakness or malingering drew immediate attention and further punishment. Thus, individuality was erased and “uniformity enforced, with the objective of making everybody respond with machine-like reliability and predictability” (Van Creveld 2006: 49). The previous quote is illustrated by the following excerpt from a participant interview:

We, as you know, we were fucked up 9-love. I hated it...we all hated it...(we) had 6 suicides in the first 5 weeks...one attempted (he landed up in DB)...but slowly we became machines...one team with one goal...just thinking about how well trained we were still gives me goose flesh...boyhood melted away...our civilian ideals (were) replaced by a brotherhood of brown....” *werk saam*” had a very real meaning... (Andries).

13 Afrikaans for *black danger*, or threat of a black civil insurrection.

14 Afrikaans for *fuck around*.

15 Afrikaans for *fuck you up*.

The previous statement describes the transformative processes that SADF conscripts underwent in basic training but neglects to mention that the changes and abuses that conscripts were subjected to occurred in an “alien environment which operated according to a different system of values and norms” (Price 1989: 137). Therefore the rigours of basic training and its associated abuses forced a conscript to adopt new value systems, far removed from his previous life as a civilian. As a uniformed soldier, morally conflicting issues, such as killing another human being, were simplified and now sanctioned by the military and the state.

Indeed, the abuses suffered by conscripts during basic training certainly altered their views of the comforts and freedoms enjoyed by civilian society. Simple comforts such as a good night’s sleep became a distant memory. Sleep deprivation was employed as a means to break down a trainee to the point of physical and emotional exhaustion, SADF conscripts were often woken before dawn, “I remember the sound of the whistle screeching to wake us up at 4am every morning” (Phil). Sleep deprivation pushed conscripts to a point of complete exhaustion:

I would sleep in lectures, on the toilet, eating meals. I had never felt so tired in my life. I would have done or said anything for an hour’s sleep and our corporals knew that...” (Sean)

As basic training progressed, some conscripts began to change their views of civilian society. An ex-conscript describes his contempt for civilian friends, who had avoided conscription by deferring their national service by extending their university studies:

There was trouble at UCT, and there were rumours that the army might be called in to deal with the students. Some of those students were friends of mine, but after what

I had experienced during basics I had no issue with sticking it to those guys. I was hoping our unit would be assigned to riot duties. I felt nothing for them, they had no idea how I had suffered. Thankfully it never happened. (Sean).

Interestingly, these changes in attitude were noted by a number of participants in this study, and points to the effectiveness of communal suffering, and fracturing of civilian bonds due to the unrelenting intensity of basic training. The intended end result is the forging of a new *militarised brotherhood*. Van Creveld (2008: 53) notes, that basic training aims “to break down ties that bind young men to society”, to a point that the new ties that bind trainees together are so strong that they would continue to function, “even when looking death in the face” (54).

Basic training as an agency for state propaganda – conscripts in the classroom

All SADF conscripts would be subjected to a series of lectures that dealt with topics directly related to the branch of their service. These included weapons handling and safety procedures, military tactics, command structures and the role of the SADF, including its ideological aspirations and beliefs.

Lectures during basic training served as a continuation of the ideological programme that high school students were subjected to as part of the national cadet programme, which according to Evans (1989: 284) had a two-fold objective, namely to facilitate and ease the transition into a military environment, and secondly to “create an ethos” that would be receptive to SADF ideologies. Additionally, Evans (1989) argues that schoolboys entering the SADF had to be cognisant of the pervasive threat of communism to South African (white) society, but also be sufficiently motivated and willing to serve in the SADF. Therefore ideological lectures during basic training served to reiterate the lessons *learned* as cadets in high school.

In an undated address to conscripts, possibly during 1985, General Jannie Geldenhuys, Chief of the SADF (1980 – 85), cautioned conscripts not to be swayed by anti-SADF propaganda:

Knowingly or unknowingly, you were subjected to a systematic, subtle process which has possibly given you a distorted view of certain principles and institutions – including the Defence Force. Soon, however, you will gain first-hand knowledge about the SA Defence Force and the role which you as an individual must play in the defence of your heritage. (ECC pamphlet 1986: 13).

Ideological lectures during basic training, therefore, focused on creating and preserving the mindset of a white political community in service of the state, constantly emphasising the need for a military solution to withstand the so-called *swart* and *rooi gevaar*. Conscripts recall lectures that enforced the aforementioned notions of a country, and more specifically, a way of life under unrelenting foreign and domestic threat. These threats served to not only preserve the need for conscription but additionally convinced conscripts they were defending hearth and home.

In this sense, the state made an active emotional plea to SADF conscripts that they were not simply doing their duty or performing what Conway (2012) refers to as “acts of citizenship” (Isin and Nielsen 2008), but also acting as protectors of their families. SADF propaganda relied heavily on the blurring between “state discourse and personal agency” (57), clearly demonstrated by the following statement by an ex-conscript:

I can remember being told that without us, our sisters and mothers would all be raped in their beds, that we were there because we loved them... it was all around us, constantly being reinforced. If you loved your family you would do this. (Paul).

Therefore, as basic training progressed, conscripts were moulded into soldiers by a variety of mechanisms, both visible (haircut, uniform and issuing of weapon) and ideological.

Determining whether state-sanctioned attempts at ideological instruction, during basic training, were successful or not, is impossible to ascertain. A number of ex-conscripts that I interviewed were aware of the political intentions of lectures during basic training, whilst others simply found it interesting, “I found it interesting learning about the ANC, Nelson Mandela etc. in the Comm Opps class. It was pretty neutrally presented at that time” (Johan 2016). In this instance, an ex-conscript recalls the ambivalence of the experience:

Yes. I lost certain illusions about how tough I was, how resilient to coercive and brainwashing practices. They did succeed in making me into a soldier, a thing that I thought was impossible. Yet in another way, I learned to respect myself because I know that when the chips are down I am a survivor, and I cannot be driven past a certain point. The brainwashing failed. (Mark).

The notion of the SADF conscript as an unswerving patriot answering a call to arms is an obvious generalisation, yet a number of ex-conscript interviewees acknowledged the effectiveness of the SADF’s propagandistic intentions. An ex-conscript explains, “So all of us white boys were hoodwinked through very clever and persistent propaganda. We were taken for an ideological ride” (Joe).

Post-liminality: incorporation and acceptance into a militarised community

This section describes the last phase of basic training and draws on Van Gennep’s (1960) *post-liminal* period which involves a recognisable process of *incorporation and acceptance* for the initiate. As basic training drew to a conclusion, conscripts would be incorporated and accepted into the military community by a means of the increasing acknowledgement of their tasks and duties. They would be treated less harshly by their instructors and other

military personnel, and would be accepted as fellow comrades by those conscripts who had been inducted in earlier intakes.

Having endured the privations and rigours of basic training, and achieved a sense of *communitas*, conscripts would be restored as fully fledged soldiers. Turner (1966: 172-1273) refers to a “status-reversal” that takes place during this final phase, in which “the liminality of life crisis, therefore, humbles and generalizes” (170) suffuses into the final phase of incorporation and acceptance. An initiate “must undergo liminal rites that rudely abase him” (170) before a new integrated self may emerge.

Resistance to post-liminality

This was certainly the case for SADF conscripts, having entered basic training as boys, fresh out of high school or university. They would emerge from the experience, in the eyes of the military, as men, or more specifically, as soldiers in service of the state. Conway (2012: 61) proposes that the aforementioned notion that conscription made men of out of boys was a “consistent theme of state discourse”. Yet, this process also threw up contradictions, and instances of conscript resistance and non-compliance within the system, particularly towards the end of basic training.

This was possibly due to a number of reasons but is nonetheless important to note as exceptions to the rule, that basic training did not always produce perfect soldiers. These acts of resistance were not necessarily the product of a moral dilemma, but precipitated by a culmination of hardships experienced during basic training and the realisation, as conscripts, they had been forcibly conscripted by the apartheid regime. An ex-conscript described the last week of his basic training as:

A wake-up call...I'd given the army 3 months of my life, my blood sweat and tears, for what. They'd pulled the wool over my eyes for years, and it took three months of hell to wake me up" (Sean).

The passing out parade as a celebration of post-liminality

Again, it is important to recognise this period of *incorporation and acceptance* at the end of basic training aimed to ritualise and accentuate the imprint of a militarised masculinity. Basic training in any military institution often culminates in a passing out parade which functions as an important military ritual marking the transformation of a civilian into a soldier. A passing out parade in the SADF would present the conscript to a larger military community and his family, as having *successfully* completed his basic training. Irrespective of whether this held true for the individual, a passing out parade ritualised the acceptance and incorporation of a *community* of conscripts into the military, and was celebrated as such, by means of much pomp and circumstance. Military or state dignitaries would be invited to address and acknowledge the commitment and achievements of conscripts. Awards would be presented to top-performing conscripts and patriotic speeches would be made that "reinforced the status quo" (Price 1989: 136). Turner (1966: 201) however notes that there are some problems with "elevation and reversal" (136), in that although they (conscripts) can now "lord it", these types of rituals ultimately "reinforce structure" and preserve established hierarchies.

Turner (1966: 169) notes that all rites of passage "which accompany any change of a collective sort from one state to another" also involve "life-crisis rites and rituals of induction into office [that] are almost always rites of status elevation". In this regard, conscripts would emerge from basic training as a unit. Basic training in any military institution constantly enforces the importance of working as a cooperative unit that follows orders without hesitation. The individual's identity is subsumed by community and hierarchy, in this case, the platoon, section, unit or military branch of service, and, in turn, the individual becomes entirely reliant on his comrades in arms and his superiors.

The concept of the *troepie* - a post-liminal *soldier-self*

On completion of basic training, conscripts would often be referred to as *troepies*, an endearing diminutive of the Afrikaans word *troep*, and possibly an amalgamation of the English *troop* and Afrikaans *troep*. As Conway (2012) rightly notes the term *troepie* positioned the SADF soldier as a likeable citizen soldier, a son and honourable defender of the nation. Conway (2012: 65) observes that the *troepie* was the “iconic South African soldier” and presented the conscript as “admirable and masculine, a ‘man’s man’”, but by no means a hyper-masculine *grensvegter* (border war fighter).

For Conway, the *grensvegter* was a “more hardened masculine construct”, whereas “the *troepie*’s masculinity was not threatening or hyper-masculine”. Therefore basic training served as a rite of passage to create *troepies* who were undoubtedly militarised masculinities but remained one of “our boys”(65). Note the use of the phrase “our boys”, which emphasises a sense of youthful innocence and claim on the individual by family, the military and nation as a whole. Therefore *troepies* fresh out of basic training can be perceived as incorporated militarised masculinities that were yet to be blooded by combat, but no less important than conscripts on active duty on the Angolan border or on patrol in South African townships. The *troepie* instilled a sense of confidence in the white public at large, perpetuating the performative role of the citizen-soldier as a benignant defender of the nation.

The notion of the *troepie* is important in understanding the third period of Van Gennep’s rites of passage. The conscript that emerged from basic training was not only incorporated and accepted into the SADF as a soldier but also as a *troepie* in the eyes of the nation, still bearing some semblance of his boyhood identity. Despite the tenuous nature of the connection to the conscript’s previous civilian identity after basic training, the concept of the *troepie* helped assuage familial and public views of a dehumanised conscript army, where soldiers were *manufactured* from boys.

Conclusion

Basic training was an experience that almost all conscripts had to experience unless a medical condition prevented any rigorous forms of physical exercise. Nonetheless, all SADF conscripts would experience some form of an inductive process into the military. Although the vast majority of these conscripts would never experience combat, the process of basic training left an indelible mark on the memories of these men and their sense of masculinity. In addition, basic training unavoidably positioned conscripts as active agents of the apartheid regime in the eyes of black South Africans, and to those who resisted the apartheid regime. By the mid-1980s the efforts of the End Conscription Campaign (ECC) was drawing increasing public attention to the moral dilemmas of national service. The ECC would do much to present the SADF conscript as a young white man who was forcibly inducted into a racialised military system.

Irrespective of whether conscripts felt morally responsible or not, their experiences of military service enter the present as conflicted memories. The manner in which these memories are navigated in the post-apartheid space will be dealt with in Chapter Six.

Whereas most studies of SADF conscripts tend to focus on the Angolan Border War, research that draws specific attention to basic training and induction into the SADF and its resultant memories remains scant.

Basic training would serve as a rite of passage for hundreds of thousands of white South African males from the late 60s to the 90s, reaching its apogee in the 1980s, acting as a cumulative performative act of a militarised childhood. An ex-conscript described basic training as “the Matric of CNE, and as such was the final molding[sic] of the youth into a Nat[ionalist] style of thought” (Paul 2016). Irrespective of what followed basic training, it remains the most performative act of a militarised masculinity within the lives of ex-conscripts. Van Creveld

(2008: 50) notes that basic training changes men forever, that “the childish, the weak and feminine must die for the manly and the strong”, emphasising a triumph of the masculine over the feminine, and of the institution over the individual.

Perhaps Greig Coetzee’s seminal play *White men with weapons* (1996), presents us with the most pertinent description of how basics in the former SADF continues to echo in the present for thousands of white South African males attempting to navigate an ambiguous present:

Living dinosaurs are what we’ve become, us white men of Africa. The ‘Ride Safe signs’ have disappeared. The radio dedications to our boys on the border are no more. Pat Carr...Esmé Everard...even Magnus Malan went away. But we’re still here. Some of us relieved, some of us confused, some of us bitter. Most of us trained to kill. The misfit conscripts of a war that vanished overnight.

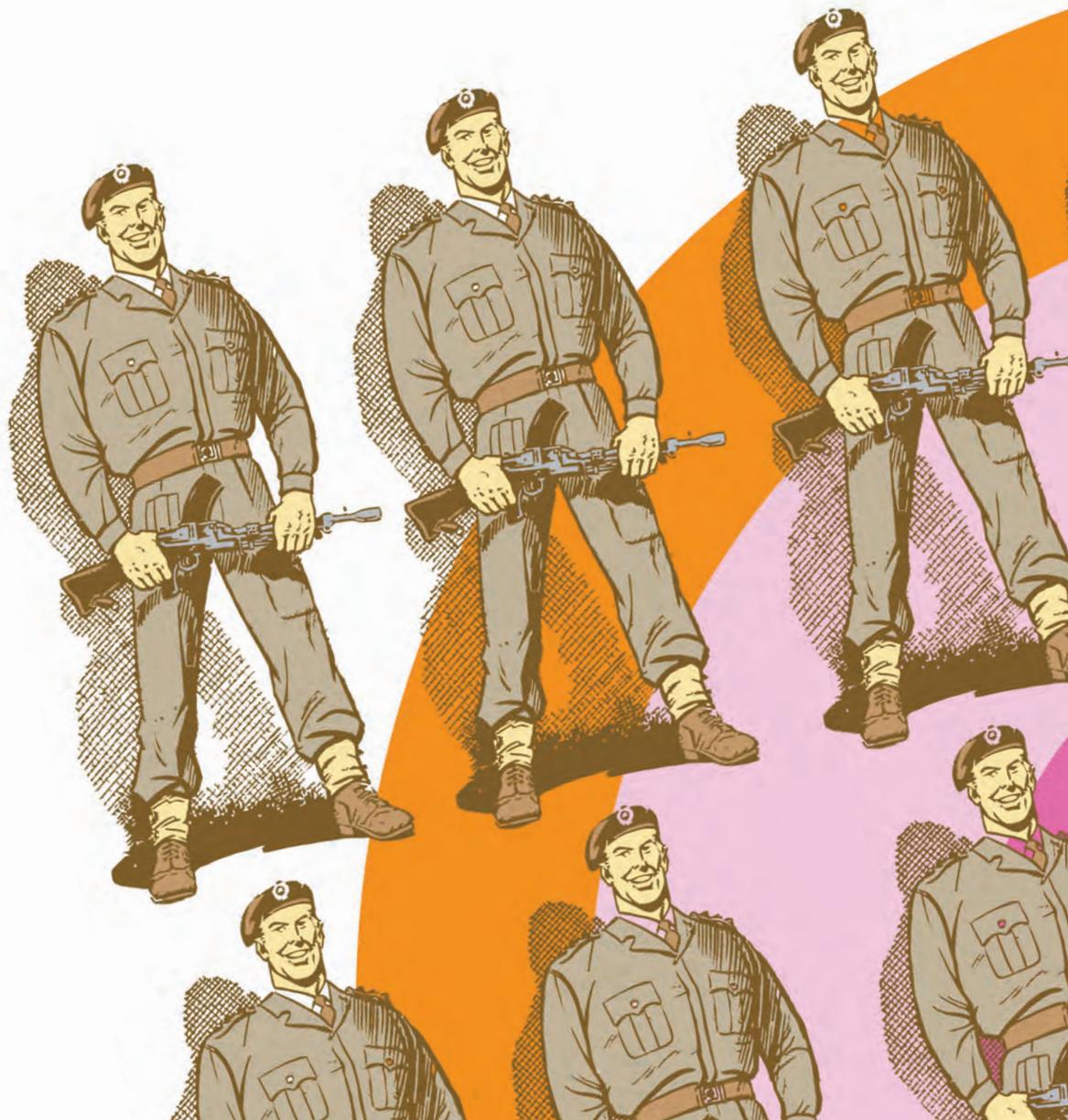
For most of us, it started with a bus or a train. I remember that bus trip well. The sniffer dogs checking our bags for dope before we boarded. Tear-stained girlfriends, brave mothers and sisters. Awkward fathers and brothers. Friends with nothing to say.

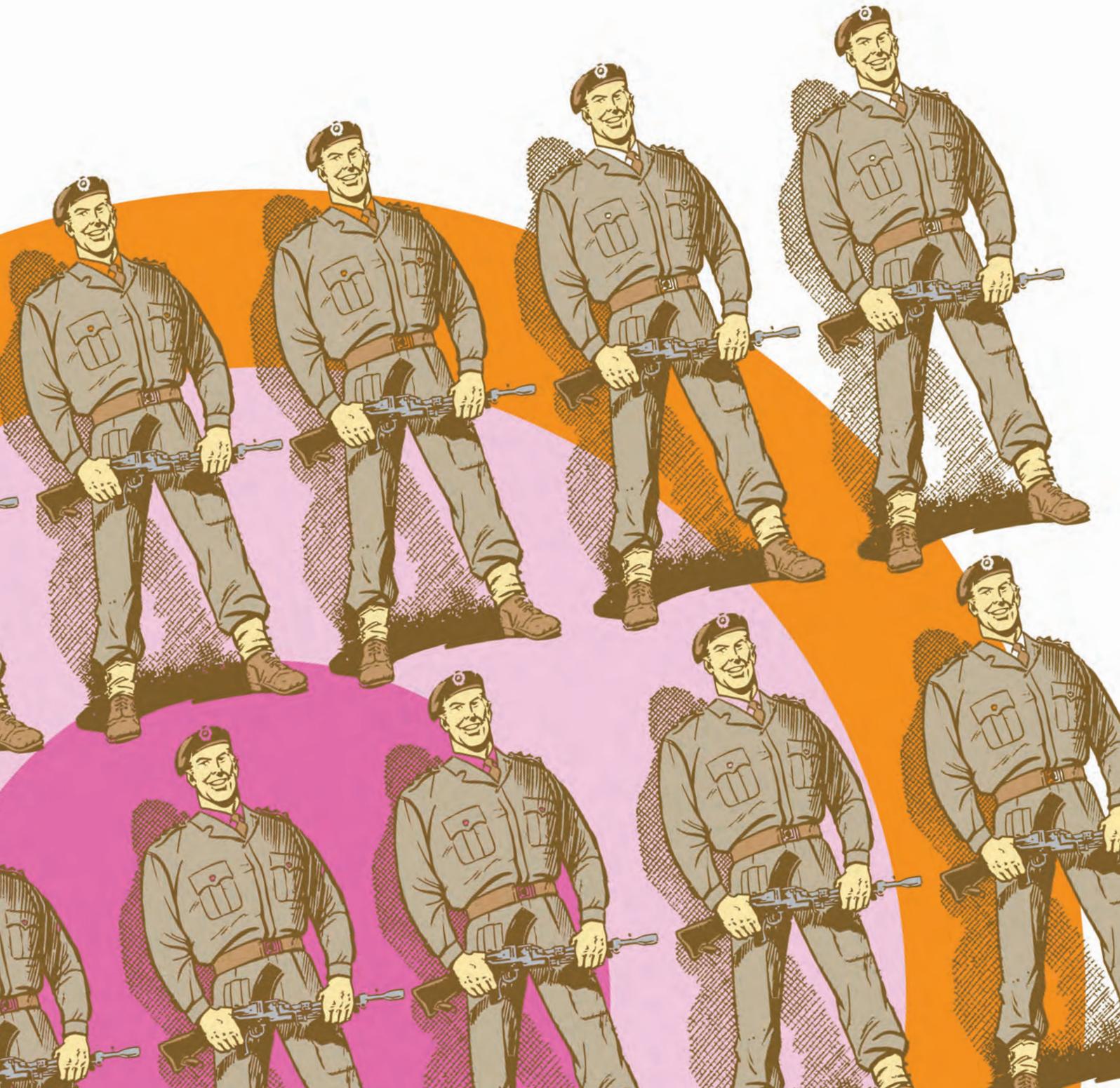
And then a silence like you’ve never experienced. The collective gloom of that group of conscripts seemed to weigh the bus down as it crawled up those Natal hills... Arriving at the training camp at five-thirty in the morning. Standing in queues, watched by grinning corporals who knew what lay ahead for us. And then in no time, I could hardly remember being a civilian.” (Coetzee 2009: 57-58)

Both Afrikaans and English families accepted basic training in the SADF as a rite of passage for myriad reasons, and to varying degrees of consent. Furthermore, I would argue that the state held white apartheid-era society to ransom by means of conscription, coercing hundreds

of thousands of white men to serve as perpetrators of a racist ideology.

Yet, on the other hand, the now fading generations of ex-conscripts continue to believe that basic training marked the starting point of a national effort of white males to stem the tide of communism, without which South Africa would have become a Soviet puppet state.







NUTRIA *Exhibition* installation artwork detail, The Castle of Good Hope, Cape Town, 2017 (photograph: Stephen Symons)



CHAPTER **FOUR**

The NUTRIA exhibitions as creative visual expressions of conscription in post-apartheid South Africa



Figure 4 Stephen Symons, *Ek kannie meer nie* 2016, Digital illustration

Chapter 4 - The *NUTRIA* exhibitions as creative visual expressions of conscription in post-apartheid South Africa.

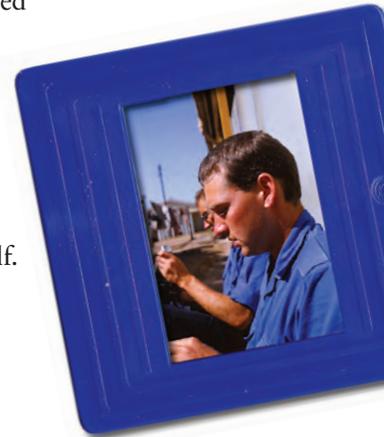


What is no longer archived in the same way is no longer lived
in the same way.

— Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever*

Art attracts us only by what it reveals of our most secret self.

— Jean-Luc Godard, Paris, 1st October 1952



Introduction

This chapter will examine the practical component of my thesis, acting as an exegesis to document the process of creating a website, social media platforms and mounting of two exhibitions that took place at the Castle of Good Hope in June 2017, and subsequently in the Humanities Building foyer on the campus of the University of Pretoria (UP) in February 2018.¹

Therefore, I will seek to explain the investigative process, contextualise and articulate why the practical component is significant. I will examine the methodology and the manner in which the practical component was conceptualised, and additionally investigate the challenges involved in organising, creating and exhibiting the artworks. It was my intention that the practical component of this thesis proposes new vantage points within the framework of visual studies, and acts as an alternative articulation in terms of knowledge production within the framework of masculinity and memory. Additionally, the practical component

¹ The modernist style Faculty of Humanities building was constructed in 1977 at the height of apartheid, and was designed by UP alumnus Brian Sandrock, of Brian Sandrock Architects (Artefacts.co.za, n.d.).

of my thesis serves to prompt epistemological shifts relating to the discourses and visual representation of whiteness and masculinity within South Africa.

Lastly, this chapter will also interrogate and articulate the response of audiences to the exhibitions. Dally et al (2004) cite Marshall and Newton (2000: 2), who suggest that “parameters of research” should be expanded “to embrace other forms of understanding and engagement”, including “scholarship” that embraces “academic research beyond common scientific enquiry”. In this sense, the practical component of this research project strives to serve as a provocative and creative exploration that journeys beyond “rational-logical, empiricist models of research that are defined as *legitimate*” (2). Additionally, Eisner (1995) is cited by Dally et al (2004: 2) who draws attention to the importance that the creative “journey or process is paramount” to understanding “practice-based” or artistic components

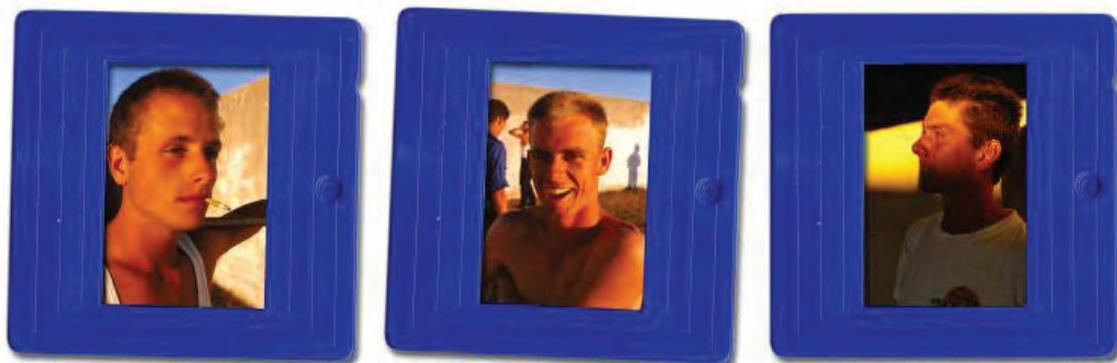


Figure 4.1 Conscript portraits, SAS Saldanha 1990 (photograph: Stephen Symons)

of scholarly research. Dally et al state that scholars need to note the difference between the “process” and “product” of practice-based research (Eisner 1995), something that this chapter will attempt to demonstrate clearly. With this in mind, the following section outlines the *journey* of the practical component.

The journey

I was conscripted into the South Africa Navy at the end of 1989, a point of critical mass for the South African Defence Force (SADF) as the military superpower of the African continent.

The final set-piece battle of the so-called Border War culminated around the town of Cuito Cuanavale along the Lomba River in Angola and reached a stalemate in March 1988 (Scholtz 2013). The Battle of Cuito Cuanavale forced the SADF to enter the first round of trilateral negotiations, arbitrated by the United States, which procured the withdrawal of Cuban, uMkhonto we Sizwe,² and SADF troops from Angola and South West Africa (Namibia) by 1991, marking the beginnings of a period that playwright Greig Coetzee (2009: 43) refers to as the “collapse of the well-oiled machine that had propped up apartheid for decades”.



Figure 4.2 Bierman Company, SAS Saldanha 1990 (photograph: Stephen Symons)

It was during my basic training at the naval base, SAS Saldanha in 1990, that I took a series of photographic portraits of fellow conscripts with a Minolta XG1 single lens reflex analogue camera. Photography was forbidden on SADF bases but I had persuaded my instructor and his officer commanding that a photographic record of the initial three-month basic training stint would serve the interests of the navy. As a result, I was allowed to document certain aspects of the basic training phase. However, my superiors would never receive the processed photos.

² uMkhonto we Sizwe (isiXhosa for *Spear of the Nation*) was the armed wing of the African National Congress (ANC). It was co-founded by Nelson Mandela in December 1961 (Simpson 2016).

Almost 25 years later, in 2014, I embarked on an MA in Creative Writing at the University of Cape Town (UCT) and used the portraits as part of a postgraduate course entitled *Imaging the World in Photographs*, convened by Dr Siona O’Connell and Prof. Nick Shepherd. The course focused on photography as a system of representation, one that linked the past, present and future within South Africa. I decided to include a series of 17 portraits that I had taken as a conscript in the South African Navy in 1990. Dr Siona O’Connell was fascinated by the series, specifically how the photos functioned as an archive of a hidden and exclusively white history and suggested I research the topic further, which evolved into a doctoral research project. Therefore, the genesis of this thesis is rooted in a photographic archive that had been *hidden* for over two decades.

My previously *hidden* photographic archive also reflected *other* contemporary silences, namely those of ex-SADF conscripts. I, therefore, proposed exhibiting a practical component, to supplement the written component of this thesis as an alternate means to “read the silences” (Carter 2006) of “excluded groups”. When I employ Carter’s phrase “excluded groups”, I am referring specifically to ex-conscripts living within a post-apartheid space. Carter (2006: 217) writes how “invoking silence can be used by the marginalised against the powerful”, and here I draw attention to the notion of an exhibition functioning as an artistic “counter-archive” that prompts marginalised voices to speak freely or renegotiate memory, within the context of a creative space.³

Carter (2006: 216) notes that “silence implies voice”, and “does not equal muteness”. In this sense, my choice of a creative component does by no means *soften the reply*, but rather allows for a visually rich space where individuals can choose to engage with their lived experiences or retreat back into silence. Carter (2006: 220) identifies the obvious links between the archive and memory, citing Nora’s assertion that “modern memory is, above all, archival”. Palmer Albers (2011: 251) cites Foucault and argues that an archive is not merely a tangible collection of photographs and documents, but rather “a larger system outside of ourselves

³ See page 306 for a copy of the curatorial statement for the *NUTRIA* exhibitions.

that shapes and determines our own systems of dis-course”. For ex-conscripts, this “larger system” is embroiled in memory and ambiguity as it attempts to navigate a post-apartheid space.

Therefore, my choice of adding a supplemental visual component to the thesis was two-fold. Firstly, it aimed to examine and *trigger* memories of conscription from the less *prescriptive* vantage point of the visual arts. Secondly, the choice of exhibition venues, namely the Castle of Good Hope and campus of the University of Pretoria, allowed the practical component to move beyond the individual, and disrupt the larger historical connotations of locale.

Titling the practical component (exhibition) of the thesis



Figure 4.3 *NUTRIA* exhibition title 2017 (design: Stephen Symons)

The title of the exhibition was decided prior to the commencement of any project planning or creative work. My intentions from the outset of this project were to choose a title that would serve as a *signifier* of sorts, acting as a *memory trigger*, in that the title would not necessarily signify something concrete, but also the “psychological” (Saussure 1983) or conceptual. I, therefore, chose the word *NUTRIA* as my exhibition title in that it represented the ubiquitous drab brown colour of high school cadet uniforms and SADF uniforms, tents, transport and armoured vehicles. One may further argue the colour *nutria* was emblematic of the conscription era, acting as one of apartheid’s omnipresent hues, much like the orange

and blue of the *old* South African flag (1928–1994). Additionally, the colour *nutria* was not only representative of military might but was also indicative of oppression to the black majority, particularly from the mid-1980s when increasing numbers of SADF conscripts were deployed in townships throughout South Africa (Sandler 1989).

The final title of the exhibition at the Castle was *NUTRIA - Imprints of Conscription into the SADF*, whereas the subsequent exhibition held at the University of Pretoria was simply titled *NUTRIA 2 - Imprints of Conscription into the SADF*.

***NUTRIA* exhibition at Castle of Good Hope, Cape Town**

(6th to the 16th June 2017)



Figure 4.4 Entrance to the Castle of Good Hope 2017 (photograph: Bernard Gagno)

The choice of venue

A number of possible venues for the exhibition in Cape Town were discussed with my supervisors, Dr Siona O'Connell and Professor Nick Shepherd. Venues included the permanent gallery space at the Centre for African Studies at UCT, the South African National Gallery and the Castle of Good Hope. In early 2016, on the advice of my supervisors, I decided on the Castle as an exhibition venue.

The Castle of Good Hope served as the provincial headquarters of the South African Army and has strong historical ties with the South African Defence Force. My relationship with the Castle began in 1985, as a student applying for annual deferment from National Service.⁴ The Castle held a unique historical position, serving as the administrative hub in the Western Cape for the management, allocation and deferment of SADF conscripts. Military personnel and administrative staff stationed at the Castle reported directly to SADF headquarters in Pretoria. Lieutenant W.M. Bisset of the SA Navy, elaborates on the role of the Castle in an article that appeared *Scientia Militaria* in 1979:

But perhaps the most important thing about the Castle today is that it occupies an increasingly important place in all our hearts. For many years it has been the central point from which young men have left Cape Town for military service in war and peace, and until recently it housed the South African Defence Force Recruiting Centre. When the trained men of our Citizen Force Units and Commandos return home it is here that the joyful reunion with parents, wives, sweethearts and children takes place. (Bisset 1979: 24)

I approached the public relations office of the Castle and was referred to the Head of Heritage, Culture and Education, Mr Azola Mkosana. I expressed my intention to initiate a visual exhibition of *recollection* and the *recollector*, whereby the artist actively re-imagines and counters memories of conscription into the former SADF. I explained that the exhibition would present a series of creative engagements exploring the militarised pasts of ex-SADF conscripts, in the hope of encouraging open conversations relating to the hidden and oft silenced histories of all South Africans. My proposal was favourably received by Mr Mkosana who was particularly interested in giving voice to a largely silenced and sensitive era of the Castle's history, namely its role during the apartheid era.

⁴ See the addendum for a copy of a deferment letter sent to the author from the SADF.

A subsequent introductory meeting was scheduled with the CEO, Mr Calvyn Gilfellan, followed by a series of productive discussions, whereby my curator, fine artist, Mark Erasmus and I presented our plans, intended date for the exhibition and creative objectives. Mr Calvyn Gilfellan was equally positive and requested we provide him with a document outlining the design, intended dates and projected outcomes of the exhibition. In October 2015, Mr Calvyn Gilfellan informed us, after prior consultation with his executive committee, that the exhibition would be declared a heritage project of the Castle of Good Hope. This decision served as a welcome endorsement on behalf of the Castle, allowing me the use of the exhibition space for the duration of the project at no charge.

After prior consultation with Mr Gilfellan and Mr Mkosana, I was offered a number of potential exhibition venues and decided on Alleman's Barracks,⁵ formerly housing soldiers



Figure 4.5 Curator, Mark Erasmus in the exhibition venue, Alleman's Barracks 2017 (photograph: Stephen Symons)

at the Castle, particularly during the First and Second World War. The room itself takes the shape of an elongated rectangle, measuring almost 50 metres in length by about 4 in metres width, in turn, offering a wealth of creative possibilities given the nature of its shape and history.

⁵ Alleman's Barracks is named after Rudolf Siegfried Alleman, who began his military career as a soldier and later became captain of the militia and commandant of the Castle in 1747. (Source: http://www.sa-cannon.com/the_french_period_at_the_cape.html#.W8spwfZoSUK, <https://www.stamouers.com/stamouers/a-c/19-alleman-rudolph-siegfried>)

The project took approximately 18 months to complete. Funding and material support for the project was provided by The Mellon Foundation and The Centre for Curating the Archive (Michaelis School of Fine Art, UCT).

Disrupting historical connotations of locale – a dissensus of space

How does one critique and ultimately disrupt long-established histories and memorialised associations of place, particularly in an architectural environment such as the Castle, which still bears the physical stains and traces of the conscription era? The interiors of many of the rooms, barracks and offices are still furnished with the self-same desks, chairs, cupboards and fittings from the apartheid-era. The office of Mr Azola Mkosana, Head of Heritage, Culture and Education still reverberated with the sensual echoes of apartheid South Africa, little had changed in 30 years. The colour, textures, smells and furnishings of Mr Mkosana's office still seemed steeped in a bygone era, as what Svetlana Boym (2007: 16) refers to as “material embodiments of nostalgia”.

Despite the passage of decades, the Castle presented itself as a space of contradiction and incongruity, where the very same photographic frames that had previously contained portraits of apartheid-era generals, now frame the photos of post-apartheid South African National Defence (SANDF) generals. In this sense, the Castle presented itself as a historically charged site that allowed me to propose artistic “methods such as participation, collaboration, contemplation and encounter” (Burke 2016: 63) that would serve to unsettle and “activate” memory. Often, these memories required *disrupting*, so as to “provoke a reassessment” (3). The advantages of employing art to create meaningful ruptures are explained further when Burke cites Twerdy (2012: 59) who asserts “art’s true domain of competence is not consensus, but dissensus:⁶ art succeeds best at disrupting received assumptions and challenging prejudice”.

Therefore the *NUTRIA* exhibition at the Castle strove to provoke and stimulate deep-seated

⁶ *Dissensus* is defined as widespread disagreement, dissatisfaction or dissent.

views held by ex-conscripts, their families and the public at large, in the hope that the conflation of site and sudden *intrusion* of my artworks would “incite questions and stimulate alternatives” (Burke 2016: 64), and thereby challenge previous histories. An example of one of these previous histories was discovered when accessing an End Conscription Campaign (ECC) archival record (Collection Number: AG1977) of a *Notice of Motion and Affidavit*, dated 20th May 1988 (10). The document points to a *Weekly Mail* newspaper article dated 5th February 1988, where Colonel J.J. Claassen, Commanding Officer of the Western Province Command Headquarters at the Castle conceded that SADF personnel based at the Castle had embarked on a campaign to discredit the ECC, and “undermine its good intentions” (10).

The *NUTRIA* exhibition at the Castle would, therefore, attempt to “disrupt and unsettle [longstanding] underlying power relationships and conventions” (Burke 2016: 66), both visible and hidden.

Disruption by design – the choice of mediums for the exhibition

I had originally intended to exhibit a series of ex-conscript photographs to supplement the interview process of my thesis, simply as a means of humanising the accounts of the study’s participants. The photographs would form a series of portraits of ex-conscripts in their homes, places of work or at leisure, where the photograph is not explored “as a question (a theme) but as a wound: I see, I feel, hence I notice, I observe, and I think” (Barthes 1981: 21).

However, once I had commenced with the interview process, the notion of photographing interviewees prompted a sense of personal unease, in that the eventual exhibiting of portraits of ex-conscripts in a public space, despite signed approval, felt like I was skirting an increasingly visible ethical boundary. Susan Sontag (2005: 3) notes that “photographs furnish evidence” and the “camera record incriminates”. This “implicit aggression” (4) that

Sontag describes is present in every photograph, dissuaded me from pursuing a series of photographic “portrait-chronicles” (5) allied to the interview process. The connections and resultant connotations felt exploitative, whereas the *photographer*, I felt I was favouring the *photograph*, and its afterlife in a gallery space, over the individual and their deeply personal experiences (9).

In this regard, I decided to explore other creative articulations of representing my experiences and those of the ex-conscripts that I had interviewed. I consulted with my supervisor Dr Siona O’Connell and curator, Mark Erasmus, arriving at three distinctly separate mediums for the exhibitions, namely the inclusion of my personal archive of photographs and documents stemming back to my experiences as a conscript in the SADE⁷ accompanied by a series of original digital artworks and installation artworks. Installation artworks can be considered as artistic environments, often occupying an entire room or gallery space. The spectator, not only looks, but also *experiences* the installation, and is prompted to physically explore, to walk through or around the installation as part of the visual conversation. Installed “environments” are mixed-media constructions or assemblages usually designed for a specific place and for a temporary period of time. The term “environments” was first employed by the fine artist Allan Kaprow in 1958, when he described his altered interior spaces as “environments”, which prompted a new means in which art interacted with audiences (Meyer-Hermann, Perchuk and Rosenthal, 2008).

I was drawn to artist Ilya Kabakov’s (Tate 2016) concept of installation art, in that “the main actor in the total installation, the main centre toward which everything is addressed, for which everything is intended, is the *viewer*”. Therefore, installation art becomes a “complete, unified experience” (Tate 2016) whereby the architectural space, the installation itself and spectator engage, interact and experience. In this sense, Alleman’s Barracks in the Castle became the architectural environment in which my installation pieces would unsettle, pry

⁷ See the addendum for examples of personal correspondence to and from the author during basic training.

open and disrupt the previously hidden histories of the conscription era, for both the Castle and the spectator.

Artist, Ilya Kabakov (Kabakov et al. 2005: 148) believed that “Total installation art” incorporated all forms of art, including music, and even theatre, proposing that if the artist had manipulated the environment successfully, the spectator “is simultaneously both a ‘victim’ and a viewer, who on the one hand surveys and evaluates the installation, and on the other, follows those associations, recollections which arise in him”. Again, this notion of an installation as a means to prompt “associations [and] recollections” served the objectives of the creative component of my thesis, in that the artworks would serve as stimuli to *trigger memory*.

My access to digital means for the production of artwork, namely desktop computers and software such as Adobe Photoshop and Adobe Illustrator, made the incorporation of digital artwork an obvious choice. I drew inspiration from a number of visual sources for this aspect of the creative component, including British war comics of the 1980s,⁸ vector (linear) artwork reminiscent of clothing patterns, engineering plans or cross-sections, and hand-drawn facsimiles of weapon profiles that often appeared in reference books of the 1970s and 1980s published by the likes of Hamlyn or the Diagram Group.⁹

Creating the artworks

Drawing on my photographic archive

My personal archive of photographic portraits of conscripts comprised of 18 slide transparencies of conscript portraits and a further 12 photographic 4 x 6 inch (102 x

⁸ *Battle Picture Weekly* (1975-1988), which ran for 673 issues was published by IPC Magazines (UK) and distributed to most Commonwealth countries. Consult Chapter Two of this thesis for detailed information on the role that British comic books played in militarising white apartheid males.

⁹ See *THE NEW ENCYCLOPEDIA OF WEAPONS* (Harding 2007) re-published and updated by St. Martin's Press as an example of a hand-illustrated (pre-digital age) reference book.

152mm) *jumbo* size prints. All the images were digitally scanned for archiving and exhibition purposes. In this sense, the digitisation of the slide transparencies *gave presence* to a previously forgotten archive. Barthes (1981: 87) argues “every photograph is a certificate of presence”. All 18 portraits that were exhibited at the *NUTRIA* exhibition at the Castle of Good Hope in June 2017 became “certificates of presence” which would ultimately demand some form of acknowledgement within the exhibition space.

A further six photographs, including group photographs from my basic training in the SADF and a selection of childhood photographs from the 1970s, were also included as part of the exhibition. Although I will analyse a selection of individual artworks in detail at a further point in this chapter, I would like to presently draw attention to the notion of how photographs follow “a nostalgic path of memory”. Although Barthes (1981: 87) argues that “our consciousness does not necessarily take the nostalgic path of memory”, and adds that “the Photograph’s essence is to ratify what it represents”, I was nonetheless struck by the effect that my childhood photos exerted on my memory, in that they certainly prompted me to follow “the nostalgic path of memory”, but simultaneously evoked conflicting emotions of compliance and complicity. Boym (2007: 9) warns that “nostalgia is seen as an abdication of personal responsibility”, that “produces subjective visions of [an] afflicted imagination”.

Therefore, as my personal photographic archive entered a vastly different and contested present, I hoped they would act as proactive reflections of a militarised past, not simply as visual motivation for *a nostalgic trip down memory lane*. I hoped that the unsettling *presence* of my personal archive would encourage further articulations of other militarised pasts, and not necessarily just those of ex-SADF conscripts.

All the photographic artworks and digital illustrations were presented behind glass, within wooden frames (painted in either white or black), measuring approximately 600 x 800mm.

The digital illustration process

The creation of digital illustrations required a substantial amount of planning and preparation. I had to initially source original copies of *Battle Picture Weekly* comic books. I did have access to a number of copies from my childhood but managed to purchase digitised copies of the entire series on e-Bay in late 2015.¹⁰ This allowed me to source images that I could employ as inspiration for a series of digital illustrations for the *NUTRIA* exhibition.

The digital illustration process was almost entirely computer-based. Original illustrations were scanned, traced and recoloured, as a basis for the *re-interpreted* compositions. Here, I



Figure 4.6 Examples of *Battle Picture Weekly* (IPC Magazines) and *Warlord* comics (DC Thomson publishing)

attempted to preserve the inaccuracies of hand-rendered illustration techniques within a digital sphere which demanded the addition of inconsistencies in contrast to typically *clean* digital contours, colouring and detail. I created nine artworks in total based on British war comics of the 1970s and 80s, and a further ten artworks based on technical drawing manuals and hand illustrated profiles of weapons. There were four illustrations of weapons and

¹⁰ Visit <https://picclick.co.uk/Battle-Picture-Weekly-1-141-on-DVD-plus-17-251645858383.html> to view examples of the digitised collections of *Battle Picture Weekly* for sale on DVD.

ammunition profiles, which were almost direct copies of original hand-rendered artworks that appeared in reference books from the 1980s. Again, the attempt to create digital artworks of hand-rendered originals proved to be a challenge, but the end results were most satisfactory. A further seven digital artworks included illustrations of weapons, and SADF equipment, such as boots, hats, water canteens and webbing. The style of these illustrations was visibly different to the comic book illustrations and weapons profiles, relying on a fixed linear stroke width technique to create simple artworks, reminiscent of children's colouring-in books. This stylistic approach to the illustrations was intentional, so as to draw obvious connections with the militarisation of boyhoods in apartheid-era South Africa. Detailed analyses of selected artworks will be discussed at a future point in this chapter.

Creating the installations

The process of creating the installation artworks can be divided into three distinct phases, namely the conceptualisation and planning, sourcing of material and creation of the installation pieces. The conceptualisation process for the installation artworks stretched over three months and ran concurrently with the creation of the digital artworks. I was faced with three distinct challenges during the conceptualisation process:

1. How do I fill the 50 x 4m expanse of the Alleman's Barracks exhibition space convincingly, so the end result does not feel too sparse, and the artwork, rather than the space converse with my audience?
2. How does my choice of material, found objects and the installation itself serve to trigger and disrupt memory, rather than memorialise the past?
3. Furthermore, due to the racial specificity of my research, namely focussing on militarised white apartheid-era males, I was required to be constantly wary of the implications of creating a racially insularised space. Therefore, by the very nature of the exhibition's contents and venue, I had to constantly audit any unintentional

by-products, such as memorialisation, romanticisation and commemoration, that might arise from using military *materiel* within a military space. In this regard, I became cognisant of how Ann Curthoys (Ashplant, Dawson and Roper 2000: xiii) draws attention to commemorations of war in Australian society, where it is often “implicated in racial exclusion”, and used as means of nationalist populism. I would strive to avoid the pitfalls of memorialisation, romanticisation and commemoration so often incorporated into military spheres.



Figure 4.7 Plywood crates, including lids, measuring 121(l) x 44(w) x 26(h) cm 2017 (photograph: Stephen Symons)

Conceptualising the installations

The challenge of conceptualising the installation artworks was addressed during a number of discussions with my supervisor Dr Siona O’Connell and curator, Mark Erasmus.

The sweeping expanse of the exhibition space needed to be *disrupted* and even *ruptured*, yet also reflect the military orderliness of a barracks. I intended to echo the room’s function as a military barracks by arranging part of the installations in a regimented manner, alluding to the rows of beds, *trommels*,¹¹ and cupboards of a typical barracks. I had initially decided to use

¹¹ Afrikaans for a *trunk*. A SADF *trommel* was usually a lockable olive drab steel truck that was placed at the foot of a conscript’s bed in a military barracks.

actual SADF beds,¹² but opted to manufacture 12 plywood crates, including lids, measuring 121(*l*) x 44(*w*) x 26(*h*) cm. The crates were left unpainted, not unlike cheap pine coffins, and would be arranged along the length of the barracks.

Each crate could act as an independent installation, but also form part of a series of twelve pieces. I decided to prop the lid of each crate against the right-hand wall of Alleman's Barracks and shift the crates to the centre of the room. I then glued a laser cut 3mm SupaWood® copy of each participant's force number to the lid of each crate.¹³ The wooden crates would, therefore, function as repositories, acting as a recently unearthed archive in disarray, containing SADF uniforms, webbing, boots, helmets, caps, eating trays, spent cartridges and life-size replicas of SADF weapons. The untreated plywood crates would function as *revealing* "constructions of memory" (Baines and Vale 2008: 159), acting as ambiguous manifestations of complicity and trauma that attempt to navigate a post-apartheid space.



Figure 4.8 Stephen Symons, *Friday, last period* 2017, Mixed materials (photograph: Stephen Symons)

12 SADF army beds were available for purchase from Premium Steel (www.premiumsteel.co.za) in Gauteng at approximately R1 000.00.

13 The SADF assigned an eight-digit force number to conscripts on receipt of their call-up papers, which acted as a means of immediate identification. See *The force number - The mark of Cain* in Chapter Three. SupaWood® is a medium-density fibreboard (MDF) ideally suited for laser-cutting highly intricate contours.

The exhibition's *introductory* or *invitational* installation piece, titled *Friday, last period*, was an original wooden school desk, measuring approximately 840mm(*l*) x 640mm(*w*) x 840mm(*h*), mounted on a white melamine panel plinth. The desk was covered with a variety of miscellaneous items from the 1980s, including a bible, school dictionary, call-up papers and a copy of a *Battle Picture Weekly* comic. A school blazer and SADF Pattern 73 backpack were slung over the backrest of the desk.¹⁴ The desk installation would serve as a *repoussoir* for exhibition visitors,¹⁵ not merely acting as an invitation to the exhibition, but also drawing attention to the militarised boyhoods of white males, to what fine artist Abrie Fourie refers to as “the peculiar confluences of political and religious ideology” (Baines and Vale 2008: 170) espoused by Christian National Education during apartheid. *Friday, last period* acts a creative vector, referencing Fourie’s Bible series which formed part of the landmark 1997 *Memórias Intimas Marcas* (Memories Intimacies Traces) exhibition, first shown in Luanda (Angola), and subsequently at the Castle of Good Hope(159).¹⁶



Figure 4.9 SADF uniforms hanging from Alleman’s Barracks ceiling 2017 (photograph: Stephen Symons)

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- 14 Apartheid-era schoolboys would often use their father’s military backpack, referred to as a *grootsak* (Afrikaans for a *large bag*) as a satchel for their school books.
- 15 In two-dimensional art, a *repoussoir* (French for *push back*) is a pictorial device, usually placed in the foreground of a composition, where it acts as an invitational device to lead the viewer’s eye towards a focal point.
- 16 The *Memórias Intimas Marcas* (Memories Intimacies Traces) exhibition was not without controversy. According to Dubin (2016: 20), a heckler got into a fistfight with one of the artists (who considered himself to be Angolan) and told him to “go back to Europe”; implying the artist was not African.

The low-slung roof of Alleman's Barracks allowed for a compelling visual conversation to develop between the installation artworks and a series of oversized A0 (841 x 1189mm) *documents* hung by means of elasticised cord from the ceiling. The *documents* included enlarged copies of SADF documents, including personal call-up papers, deferment papers and personal correspondence from friends and family.

Additionally, I hung used and unused SADF uniforms upside down from the ceiling, pegged to elasticised cord, as if hanging from a wash-line. There was no honouring of the uniforms, they were creased and in some instances well used. Pockets were left open, shirts half-buttoned, and some uniforms were soiled. This was intentional, in that the sloppy presentation of uniforms shifted the *conceptual* position of the installation from a simple reference to military uniforms hanging from a wash-line into a counter-memorial of sorts, antagonising memories of perfectly folded uniforms on pristine beds in a barracks awaiting the inspection of a commanding officer. Young (1992: 9) argues that counter-memorials “return the burden of memory to visitors themselves”, initially disrupting and then demanding an active reply on the part of the viewer, which was the intention of the *NUTRIA* exhibition.

The process of sourcing and manufacturing material for the installation artworks

The military *materiel* and miscellaneous objects for the installations were sourced from both military surplus suppliers and part of my personal archive, that included letters, documents, photographs and the last remaining items of my original SADF uniform. I became intrigued as to why I had kept these items. Boym (2007: 8) describes nostalgia as “not merely an individual sickness, but a symptom of our age, a historical emotion”. Boym's observations beg the question of whether my need to keep a few items of my uniform served as a connection and inevitable “yearning for another time”? I can clearly recall the cathartic act of discarding the bulk of my uniform as if I was shedding a skin. Shoes, boots, berets and a greatcoat were given to friends and my parent's gardener. The incongruous image of our gardener wearing

my combat boots and *ship's blues* remains a striking memory,¹⁷ yet it was a fairly common occurrence during the 1980s to see labourers and gardeners donning *nutria* coloured bush hats, trousers or shirts. The inclusion of these remaining nostalgic *threads* within the *NUTRIA* exhibition is what Boym argues as “prospective” and revealing, in that “the fantasies of the past, determined by the needs of the present, have a direct impact on the realities of the present” (8).



Figure 4.10 Replica Denel R4 Assault Rifle and laser cut profiles 2017 (photograph: Stephen Symons)

The manufacturing of replica weapons for the installations was a further challenge and required the creation of resin casts of an R1, R4 and AK-47 assault rifle.¹⁸ This process proved to be technically challenging so I contacted *Mike's Models* based in Gauteng to assist me with the resin casting process. Relief half-cast profiles of actual weapons were made, as it is illegal to make full casts of military weapons in South Africa. Once the raw resin casts had been cast and cured, they were primed and spray-painted in gunmetal grey, as per the original weapons.

In addition, the installation artworks required hundreds of laser cut card and 3mm and 5mm SupaWood® profiles of weapons, vehicles, aircraft and soldiers. The process involved creating digital vector profiles that were then laser cut in the Michaelis School of Fine Art's

¹⁷ 'Ship's blues' or 'blues' were standard SA Navy work dress, worn by sailors on board ships, or on shore duty.

¹⁸ The R1 Battle Rifle (1960) was a copy of the Fabrique National FN-FAL locally-produced under license in South Africa. The Denel R4 Assault Rifle (1980) is the current standard-issue assault rifle of the South African Army. The Russian AK-47 Assault Rifle or *Kalashnikov* was the iconic weapon of choice for liberation movements throughout Africa. The AK-47 was also the weapon of choice for special forces operators within the SADF.

digital lab. Here, I was initially assisted by Peter Jenks, the technical manager of the lab. I subsequently attended a course by Mr Jenks and was able to do the bulk of the laser cutting without assistance.

The installation of the exhibition took place from Thursday the 1st till Monday 5th June 2017. The exhibition installation was managed by my curator, Mark Erasmus and two assistants. The exhibition was opened to the public on Tuesday 6th June 2017 by Professor Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela to an audience of approximately 100 invitees. The exhibition ran from the 6th June till Youth Day, the 16th June. Head of Heritage, Culture and Education, Mr Azola Mkosana, suggested extending the exhibition to the 16th June, a public holiday in memory of the June 16 Soweto Youth Uprising. The Soweto Uprising began in Soweto, a sprawling township to south of the city of Johannesburg, and soon spread countrywide, primarily in protest of the sub-standard education of blacks in apartheid South Africa.¹⁹

The role of music in the *NUTRIA* exhibition

Increased resistance to the construction of white militarised masculinities during the 1980s was also expressed by means of dissident South African popular music, by both English and Afrikaans language rock bands, such as Bright Blue, the Kalahari Surfers, Bernoldus Niemand (the alter-ego of English-speaking musician James Phillips), and the Afrikaans new wave *Voëlvy* movement, including the likes of Koos Kombuis and Johannes Kerkorrel. The landmark *Voëlvy* tour in 1989 drew nationwide attention to patriarchal modes of Afrikaans society, white hegemony and opposition to conscription (Van der Merwe 2015).

Many of these artists performed on university campuses, under the banner of the End Conscription Campaign, which were “highly politicised” events, placing musicians at

¹⁹ One of the main causes of the Soweto Uprising “was a directive from the Bantu Education Department that Afrikaans had to be used on an equal basis with English as one of the languages of instruction in the department’s secondary schools”. The Soweto Uprising marked a pivotal change in the socio-political landscape in South Africa. (South African History Online 2013).

“considerable risk” (Van der Merwe 2017). This distinctly irreverent style of music was in direct opposition to the more conservative styles of state-sanctioned Afrikaans performers such as Gé Korsten and Bles Bridges (Baines and Vale 2008). Leon Schuster and Gé Korsten’s “Ag Man Dis Lekker In Die Army” characterises a misconceived romantic notion of conscription and the Border War as a humorous boy’s adventure, far removed from the violence and privations of war. Korsten and Schuster sing arm in arm with *troopies*, who are presented as willing happy-go-lucky defenders of home and hearth, quite at ease with their national duty.²⁰

I decided that the inclusion of confrontational anti-conscription South African music of the 1980s into the *NUTRIA* exhibition would add an intense aural quality to the viewing experience. In early 2017 I approached Peter Cohen of Bright Blue, a prominent English anti-apartheid band of the 1980s and early 1990s. Cohen granted me permission to use a number of iconic Bright Blue tracks, including *Weeping* (1987) and *Window on the World* (1984) for the duration of the *NUTRIA* project. In addition, I contacted Lloyd Ross, founder of the progressive Shifty record label, which released the anti-apartheid *Voëlvy* compilation album, for permission to use music from the Shifty archive. Ross immediately obliged, granting me permission to use any music from the Shifty label, which included the Kalahari Surfers, Bernoldus Niemand, and Forces Favourites and *Voëlvy* compilation albums.

Here, I would like to draw attention to Bernoldus Niemand’s first single *Hou my vas Korporaal* (1983),²¹ that offered a distinctly wry, yet scathing take on white conscription. *Hou My Vas, Korporaal* challenged the bedrock of Afrikaans hegemony, cloaked in humour and peppered with SADF army slang. The single was banned by the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) and rejected for distribution by the largest record sales outlet in South Africa at the time, CNA (Waal 2010). Niemand, an ex-conscript himself, sings of a conscript who pleads

20 Visit <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OKtNTwvGft4> to view the music video of Leon Schuster and Gé Korsten’s *Ag man dis lekker in die army*.

21 *Hou my vas Korporaal* translates into English as *Hold me tight Corporal*. Visit <https://samilhistory.com/2017/06/30/hou-my-vas-korporaal/> for further information.

with his corporal, to “hold him tight”, explaining that he is “a child completely lost”, “feeling nauseous”, having to “play war with the best days of his life”.²² Niemand draws attention to the state’s complete programme of militarisation with subtlety, culminating in the sickening realisation that he will have “to play war” with the “best days of his life”. When Niemand sings that “it is my duty, not my choice”, one feels the conscript is not only succumbing to the pressures of his army experience but also those placed on him by his family, girlfriend and white society at large. Niemand weaves a palpable sense of disillusionment into *Hou my vas Korporaal*, concluding with a refrain that reflects the conscript’s unswerving and inevitable obedience to the white society,



Figure 4.11 *Hou my vas Korporaal* 1983
(courtesy of Shifty Records)

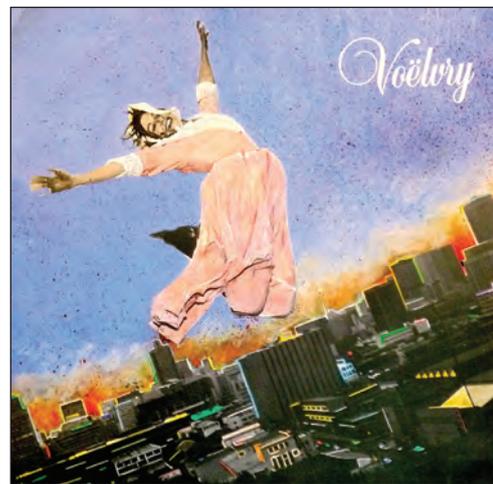


Figure 4.12 *Voëlvrý* 1989
(courtesy of Shifty Records)

Yes yes yes, all my friends and I together	Ja ja ja, ek en all my maatjies bymeekaar
Together, together	Bymeekaar, bymeekaar
yes yes yes yes yes yes yes	Ja ja ja ja ja ja ja
yes yes yes yes yes yes yes, Corporal!	Ja ja ja ja ja ja ja, korporaal!

English translation

Original Afrikaans lyrics

²² Visit <https://lyricstranslate.com/en/hou-my-vas-korporaal-hold-me-tight-corporal.html> to view the lyrics of *Hou my vas Korporaal* in English and Afrikaans.

I included nine tracks from the 1980s in the *NUTRIA* exhibition that were played at the exhibition opening on the 6th of June 2017.²³ The addition of music had a remarkable effect on the viewing experience, creating a *soundscape* with a distinct a sense of time and place. I was approached independently by a number of visitors at the opening ceremony who added that the inclusion of music certainly made for a very emotional viewing experience.

The *NUTRIA* exhibition opening

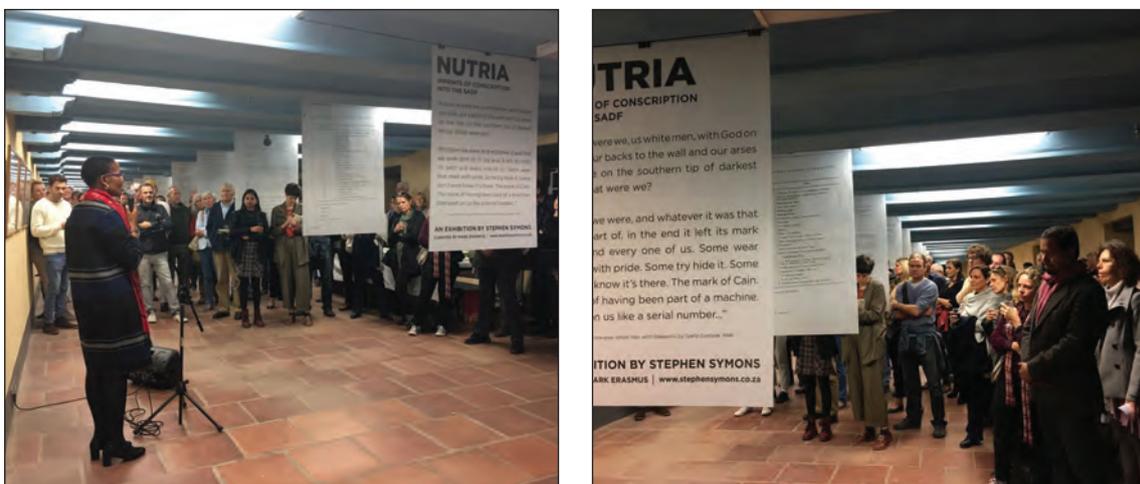


Figure 4.13 *NUTRIA* exhibition opening address by Prof. Gobodo-Madikizela 2017 (photograph: Stephen Symons)

Professor Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela’s opening address drew attention to the importance of giving voice to silenced histories,²⁴ and posed the following question, “if it is not articulated (or spoken about) where does it go?” (Cain 2016). Lyndall Cain (2016) of the Centre for Curating the Archive (UCT) writes:

Gobodo-Madikizela, now a professor of clinical psychology and previously a part of a special hearing on conscription for the TRC, told of a time, in 1983, when she found herself in a church in the Eastern Cape, surrounded by young, white men in uniform. She got up, not wanting to worship with men responsible for her people’s pain, and,

²³ A complete tracklist of the songs chosen for the *NUTRIA* exhibition is listed in the addendum.

²⁴ The *Special Hearing for Compulsory Military Service (Conscription)* that took place in Cape Town on the 23rd July 1997 was chaired by psychologist Prof. Pumla Gobodo Madikizela of the Human Rights Violations Committee.

as she did so, she made eye contact with one of the soldiers, she saw how young he was and it was this that made her think “what is it like to be forced into a war you know nothing about?”.

During the opening address, Professor Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela emphasised the need to explore diverse ways to address the *collective* silences attached to South Africa’s past, so that *we*, as all South Africans, could engage in honest reciprocal conversations. Prof. Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela drew attention to the *NUTRIA* exhibition, as a creative means to address and stimulate much-needed conversations about the *collective* militarised memories of South Africans. Although Kattago (2015: 3-4) notes that Sontag (2003: 85) argues “strictly speaking, there is no such thing as collective memory”, the *NUTRIA* exhibition strove to disrupt what Maurice Halbwachs (1992) refers to as *collective memory*, whereby memory is intimately connected, shared and framed by a social group (in this case, ex-conscripts). These *collective memories* are notably defined by membership of a group that is “delimited by time and space”.

Therefore, Professor Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela’s opening address drew on the importance of not merely addressing the private memories of *individuals*, but also the *collective memories* of all militarised South Africans. In this respect, a productive and less insular intersection of individual and community occurs, functioning within a locus that traverses race, age and history.

Analyses of selected artworks

The *NUTRIA* exhibition consisted of 39 framed artworks, including digital illustrations, photographs, and a series of *re-imagined* baby clothing and bibs. Eight A0 sized documents and eight items of SADF uniforms that were hung from the ceiling of Alleman’s Barracks. A further 13 installation artworks were arranged throughout the exhibition space. I have chosen a selection of artworks for analysis, allowing for more detailed analyses of specific pieces, rather than opting a broad overview of the exhibition.



Figure 4.14 Photograph of the author’s brother used for *Playing soldiers* 1976 (photograph: Nanette Symons)

Playing soldiers (2107)

Medium: Digital print of original 1976 photograph from the artist’s personal archive

Dimensions: 59.8 cm × 79.7 cm (23 ½ in. × 31 in.)

Playing soldiers is a photograph of my brother, taken in the back garden of the home of family friends in Bothasig, a white working-class suburb to the north of Cape Town. The photograph is dated 1976, a pivotal point in South Africa’s history, marked by the Soweto uprisings, which were referred to by the state as *riots*. The Soweto uprising would lead to nationwide unrest in the black townships, in protest of the racist directives of the Bantu Education Department.¹⁸

Paul, Johnston and Short (2015: 3) refer to Anne Higonnet’s observations that photographs of children are typically “adorable or cute”, yet when children are dressed in soldier’s uniforms they send out “conflicting semiotic signals”. A child wearing an adult’s military uniform presents a jarring “contradiction of innocence and [adult] experience”. Paul, Johnston and Short point to a “reversal” or “turnaround” occurring. In the case of *Playing soldiers*, the

photograph becomes a collection of incongruities, both visual and human, magnified by the passage of time. The desaturated hues, soft focus and camera's accidental light leakage, emphasise a photograph fixed within a vastly different era, at distinct odds with the present, butting against an altogether different morality of what it is to be a child in the present. The photograph of a young boy, no older than ten years, burdened by webbing and an oversized helmet, while gripping a real weapon is indicative of the fundamental incompatibilities of the military and childhood. Here, a child bears what one would consider "adult burdens of responsibility"⁽⁴⁾. The rifle, much like the spade, are *tools* of distinctly contrasting trades, and emblematic of adult professions, yet ultimately, in the case of *this* boy, he too *will* become a conscript and a *tool* for the state. Neitzel and Welzer (2012: 20) refer to a German soldier's description of himself as a weapon (or tool for war), "We're like a machine gun. A weapon for waging war".

The spade, the boy's rigid arm, the rifle and vertical post of the Vibracrete fence form a disturbing series of repeated vertical lines,²⁵ yet the R1 rifle is clearly the photograph's *punctum*, which Barthes (1981: 27) describes as "that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)". Is it the rifle's lethal latency, in this case, in the hands of a child, that truly disturbs or pricks at our present-day moral frame of reference? The image of a child dressed in a uniform, holding an actual rifle may seem repugnant when orientated within our present moral frame of reference, yet the photograph remains a revealing reflection of the time. Neitzel and Welzer (2012) note that frames of references differ extensively according to historical periods, and are often denoted by cultural differences, which points to how militarisation was perceived and accepted by white society as normative during the apartheid era. As Barthes (1981: 27) notes, the photograph is not merely a sentimental record, but it shifts in the present and becomes a wound, where the spectator, sees, feels, and in the act of observation, thinks.

25 Vibracrete is a pre-cast modular walling system found throughout South Africa and was particularly popular in the 1970s and 80s. Vibracrete walls remain a common feature of white middle-class suburbia in South Africa.

As spectators we view the photograph with hindsight, the smiling boy standing stiffly to attention cuts an aspirational figure, yet at that specific moment, he remains blissfully unaware of an inescapable militarised future. He wears the kit of a SADF conscript who was more than likely on a weekend pass from his military training, willingly and with a childlike sense of pride. Neitzel and Welzer (2012) contend that total institutions, in this instance the state and the SADF, “function as hermetically sealed worlds”, intent on producing an end result. Therefore, the photograph of the kit-laden boy represents and assumes the guise of a “hermetically sealed world,” that becomes inconsonant, and even shocking when viewed in the present. As Sontag (2005: 14) notes, “photographs shock insofar as they show something novel”.



Figure 4.15 Stephen Symons, *From cradle to call-up* 2017, baby’s bib, cotton and canvas (photograph: Stephen Symons)

From cradle to call-up (2107)

Medium: Embroidered label and cotton vest

Dimensions: 21 cm × 29 cm (8 in. × 11 in.)

From cradle to call-up consists of a triptych of white bibs that include a SADF style name tag sewn onto the centre of each bib. SADF name tags would normally list a soldier’s surname, yet in this instance, I replaced the surnames with typical SADF slang, including the Afrikaans

words: “*RONDVOK*”, “*AFKAK*” and “*BUDDYNAAIERS*”.²⁶

Again, I strove to create an emotionally disruptive intersection of militarisation and profanity on an infant’s bib. This was enhanced further by the use of nutria brown ribbing and name tag, clashing with the white cotton fabric of the bib. Fine artist Penny Siopis achieves a similar uneasy marriage of materials with her artwork, *Cowrie Scarf* (1999), where she sews multiple rows of cowrie shells onto a nutria brown SADF-issue scarf. Again, Siopis allows for a disturbing visual and conceptual conversation to develop between the organic (cowrie shells) and a man-made military item.

The creative process of the artwork was further influenced by South African artist Manfred Zylla’s *Boys from the Border* (1983), a series of graphite on cardboard sketches of perspectively distorted figures in SADF uniform, either running or standing to attention. All the figures have the faces of infants, that serve as unsettling physical contradictions when combined with their adult bodies. The moulding and *manufacture* of militarised bodies, beginning in childhood within apartheid-era South Africa, is well documented (Conway 2012, Cock and Nathan 1989). Artistic replies to the militarisation of white South African males are not uncommon (Blake 2011, Baines and Vale 2008), yet in the instance of *From cradle to call-up*, I challenge the very origins of the process of militarisation, returning to infancy. Here, I was tempted to query whether the seeds of white militarisation were sown unwittingly from birth – in the manner in which boys were dressed, and masculated?

Although I initially considered soiling the bibs with mud and blood, I decided otherwise after a number of subsequent experiments, preferring to draw attention to the infancy as pure and untainted. Nonetheless, the addition of the nutria name tags and ribbing altered the

²⁶ The following Afrikanerisms all originated within the SADF

Rondvok - to be fucked around.

Afkak - refers to how one feels when under great physical and mental stress in the SADF. The literal meaning in English is “to shit oneself”.

Buddy naaier - the phrase describes someone who has no respect for his comrades, an individual who “screws” his “buddies” or is simply not a team player.

dynamic irrevocably, alluding once again to the pervasive presence of the SADF in the lives of white males, even from infancy. *From cradle to call-up* acts as a codified reminder that the process of militarisation had no real beginning or ending, in that its effects continue to echo into the post-apartheid space.

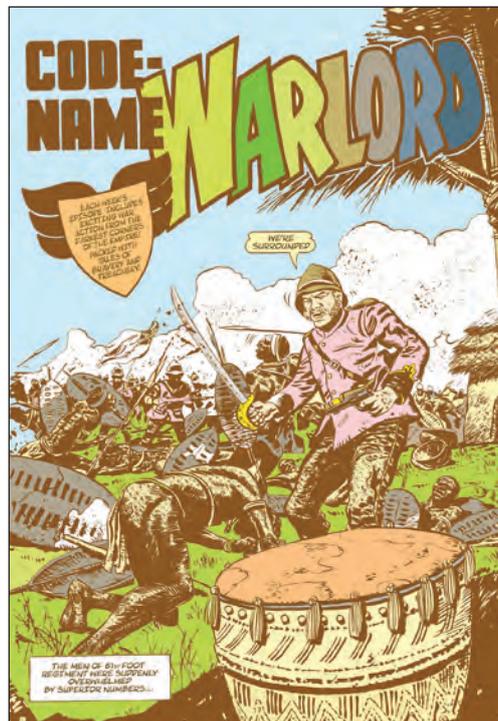


Figure 4.16 Stephen Symons, *Warlord* 2017, Digital Illustration

Warlord (2107)

Medium: Digital print

Dimensions: 59.8 cm × 79.7 cm (23 ½ in. × 31 in.)

Warlord is what I would like to refer to as a personal piece. My childhood was filled with books and comics, particularly British World War 2 themed weekly comics of the 1980s such as *Warlord*, *Battle Picture Weekly*, *Action* and *Valiant*. As previously mentioned in Chapter Two, these weekly comics provided largely idealized scenarios, entrenching stereotypes that indirectly served the hyper-nationalistic needs of a regime that relied heavily on a dichotomous *us* and *them* mentality, underpinned by a racist ideology.

Warlord depicts the scene of a last stand in a fictitious colonial African county, where a small contingent of white colonial soldiers is being overwhelmed by a vastly superior force of black tribesmen. *Warlord* references binary racialised concepts of *us* and *them*, indirectly drawing attention to apartheid's meticulously constructed notions of a *total onslaught*, expressed as the *rooi* and *swart gevaar*. A British officer declares, "We're surrounded", but continues to fight on defiantly, aware that his position will soon be overrun. A number of my other artworks also referenced expressions of threat, including *The Horror! The Horror!*, which represents a *banzai* charge of World War 2 Japanese infantry. Again, the artwork indirectly queries the apartheid government's concerted efforts to sell the concept of a *total onslaught*, a ubiquitous threat that could only be countered by the complete militarisation and mobilisation of white society. The preservation of *decent* South African (white) society demanded an unswerving commitment to the cause and required great sacrifices on the part of its citizens if it was going to stem the *faceless hordes of communists* massing on the country's borders. It is also important to note that the "authorised narratives" of the *total onslaught* applied to a specific group of South Africa's citizenry, namely whites, emphasising a dichotomous *other* (Richters and Kapteijns 2010). At no point did apartheid state discourse attempt to position the *total onslaught* as a threat that was inclusive of all race groups.

Therefore, both artworks draw attention to contemporary white silences, to a long-standing reticence, that questions the practice of employing military solutions to preserve inherently racist ideologies. Yet, as Popescu (Baines and Vale 2008) notes, fascinating instances of "mirroring" (42) occurred in apartheid-era South Africa, where a "plain dichotomy" between white or black, or communists and capitalists occurs, an uneasy triangulation emerges... [where] the rival camps mirror each other's discourses in uncanny ways" (43).

This begs the question, how different were apartheid South African perceptions of threat to those of the very people they were in conflict with? The inevitable parallels are certainly unsettling.



Figure 4.17 Stephen Symons, *Hou my vas Korporaal* 2017, Mixed materials (photograph: Stephen Symons)

Hou my vas Korporaal (2107)

Medium: Plywood, paper, MDF board and fabric (installation)

Dimensions: 59.8 cm × 79.7 cm (23 ½ in. × 31 in.)

Hou my vas Korporaal borrows its title from the 1983 Bernoldus Niemand song that was discussed earlier in this chapter. The artwork functions as an installation piece, comprising of a wooden plywood crate, measuring 121(*l*) x 44(*w*) x 26(*b*) cm which is filled with nutria brown shirts, NCO arm patches, a web belt and bush hat. Various laser cut orange and nutria brown paper card silhouettes, 3mm SupaWood® profiles of weapons and military *materiel* are scattered over the uniforms. The artworks also include corporal, sergeant and warrant officer rank badges.

The plywood boxes formed part of a series, acting as *repositories of memory*, which in the case of this artwork, focuses on basic training and the relationship between conscripts and their superiors. Although I have discussed the relationship between instructors (NCOs) and conscripts in detail in Chapter Three, this artwork attempts to move beyond those military power dynamics and navigate how those uneasy relationships enter the present, as memories or nostalgic reminiscences. As Boym (2007: 7) notes, nostalgia can only survive in a “long

distance relationship”, yet with all the installation artworks, I have attempted to disrupt the idealised distortions that are characteristic of a “long-distance relationship” by presenting the artworks as raw, and even unfinished in certain instances. The plywood boxes were left unpainted, and as previously mentioned, may be referred to as pine coffins. Although the artworks were meticulously arranged, the uniforms were creased and scattered with laser-cut profiles of military items. The importance of presenting the memory field of the ex-conscript in disarray was a primary intention of the *NUTRIA* exhibitions. Edlmann (2013) and Gibson (Richters and Kapteijns 2010) rely on Lomsky-Feder’s concept of a memory field, as “constructions of social memory spaces” (Edlmann 2013: 4). For me, the memory fields of ex-conscripts, namely the landscapes of conscription and the apartheid, are inevitably disorderly and contentious, where many of the plywood boxes and their contents were simply scattered across the exhibition space.

As Gibson notes (Richters and Kapteijns 2010: 238), the memory fields of SADF conscripts are ambiguous and contested terrains, which “defines what can be heard, how it can be told, and what will be silenced”. Interestingly, Gibson adds that the present also defines who has the right to feel trauma. Many of the ex-conscripts that I interviewed echoed Gibson’s observations, in that they felt the present demanded that they need to ask permission to feel to any sense of shame, guilt or even trauma. In this sense, all the installation artworks, including *Hou my vas Korporaal* poses a critical, but possibly unanswerable question, “How do the memories of ex-conscripts reconcile with the present?” Additionally, as Gibson also notes, researchers need to be cognisant that many ex-conscripts have found unique means to cope with their past by a “contained instability” (238).

My choice of choosing plywood boxes with lids, speaks to Gibson’s notion of a “contained instability”. In Gibson’s case, she uses the analogy of a *balsak* (kitbag) that becomes Pandora’s box, which draws obvious parallels with my choice of a plywood box, acting as an archive or repository of memory. Naturally, the viewer decides how those memories enter the present, often tentatively, and at times imbued with nostalgia.

Hou my vas Korporaal poses direct questions to ex-conscripts, but also acts as a bridge between the past and the present, activating and triggering memory, but more importantly prompting questions. Whether ex-conscripts decide to articulate or internalise their questions, they remain questions, fixed in one's mind, pricking at one's consciousness.

Public reaction to the *NUTRIA* exhibition at the Castle of Good Hope

NUTRIA drew large audiences, including local and international visitors. The exhibition was open to the public from the 6th June to the 16th June 2017. I would like to present this section of the chapter under two sub-headings, discussing the reactions of ex-conscripts separately to those of the general public, primarily because the reactions of either group were so varied.

Ex-conscript reactions to *NUTRIA*

The *NUTRIA* exhibition evoked a wide range of contrasting emotions and reactions, but I was particularly struck by how many ex-conscripts explained that the process of viewing the artworks prompted them to speak about their militarised childhoods and their period of national service in the SADF for the first time in many years. All the visitor reactions to the exhibition were noted *in situ* or gleaned from a visitor's book that clearly stated that their comments might be included in this thesis. The visitor's book was monitored by the Castle's security personnel.

The apartheid state played a crucial role in the formulation of a *culture of pervasive silence* among ex-conscripts and their families. Although the post-apartheid space has played a role in the marginalising and silencing of ex-conscript narratives, the origins of ex-conscript silences are deeply enmeshed in the mechanisms of secrecy that were employed by the SADF. All SADF conscripts and permanent force personnel had to sign declarations in terms of the Defence Act prohibiting the divulging of any information relating to military operations.

Baines (2008: 10) rightly notes, that “the Nationalist Party government and the SADF did not take the soldiers or their families into confidence” in that the “authorities only released info on a need to know basis”.

For some, the exhibition presented a deeply uncomfortable space, one in which “picked at scabs that I thought had healed” (Andries 2017). In one instance an ex-conscript wrote a comment excusing himself from the opening ceremony. He explained that although he thought the exhibition was “excellent”, it prompted too many uncomfortable memories to surface.

Others spoke of the “disjunctures between what was been fought for....and their current situations” (Caforio 2013: 111), and how “the Nats had dropped us in the shit” (Garth 2017). Interestingly, this positioned ex-conscripts as *victims* of both the present and the *past*, a finding that is echoed by Caforio (2013). Caforio also argues that the concept of the conscript as a *victim* does not allow for conscripts to be “constructed as perpetrators”. I would add that this conflation of the ex-conscript as both victim and perpetrator in a contested present continues to perpetuate a *culture of silence*. Another ex-conscript described feelings of betrayal, “we were conned by the SADF, they used us and then forgot we existed. As for the ANC, they’re just hoping we’ll die rather sooner than later” (Craig 2017). Baines (2008: 5) describes this sense of unease that exists for ex-conscripts within the present, in that they have become liminal figures, marginalised and best forgotten, where “official amnesia [is]...reinforced [by] self-imposed silence”. The notion that ex-soldiers embrace victimhood as a means to distance themselves from complicity is well documented, both locally by Baines (2008), Cock (1989) and Caforio (2013), and internationally, in Neitzel and Welzer’s seminal book *Soldaten* (2013) that examines the transcripts of German World War 2 prisoners of war.

Allied to the view of the conscript as a *victim*, a number of visitors expressed a deep sense of regret or sadness at the depth of the apartheid regime’s programme of militarisation. An ex-conscript related how *NUTRIA* had allowed him “to view his national service through a different lens” (Sean 2017).

Another expressed he felt “a return of his anger towards the SADF, now decades later”. He added that the copies of the A0 call-up papers “sent a shiver down his spine” (Johan 2017).

In contrast to the previous statement, another ex-conscript described the *NUTRIA* exhibition was a “balm”, in that he felt “at home” amongst the uniforms and replica firearms. His interpretation of the exhibition alludes to what Michael Kammen (1991: 688) refers to as “nostalgia...[that] is effectively history without guilt”, a space that Caforio (2013: 111) argues serves the “purpose of whiteness in contemporary South Africa...as essentially nobody is blamed”. This echoes Baines’ (2008: 5) argument that the experiences of SADF conscripts are related “as if they were devoid of a political context”.

The oft-quoted prescriptive justifications held by ex-conscripts that conscription was a necessary evil to stem the tide of communism or *Rooi gevaar* in Southern Africa were encountered on a number of occasions. Again, the perceived threat of communism manifested itself as a *diversionary tactic*, possibly as a means to avoid acknowledging issues of complicity and accountability, and yet in a few extreme instances, the intention of the exhibition was *completely* misread. I noted a comment by two ex-conscripts who were most appreciative that I had “honoured” a “forgotten cause”. They both perceived the exhibition as a memorialisation of conscription, stating that the sacrifices made by SADF conscripts in preventing a communist invasion of South Africa have been erased from “the ANC’s history of the new South Africa” (John 2017). I was commended for honouring a “forgotten war,” although the exhibition made no mention of the Border War. This assumption was encountered many times, and revealed a notable aspect of ex-conscript and white apartheid-era consciousness, in that the militarisation of white males, conscription and induction into the SADF are considered synonymous with the Border War. The Border War appears to function as a cumulative discursive expression of white militarised masculinities.

Other public reactions to *NUTRIA*

General public reactions to the *NUTRIA* exhibition at the Castle of Good Hope were equally varied, yet I encountered two distinct groups, namely those who had some personal connection to an ex-conscript, as a family member, girlfriend or spouse, and a second group made up of international visitors and South Africans who had little or no connection, by means of race, family or age, to the conscription era.

Most of my interactions with visitors who had a personal connection with an ex-conscript were emotionally driven narratives of loss, regret and even anger. I did not encounter any expressions of pride or patriotism, but rather to the contrary, as demonstrated by Mary's statement:

The army destroyed my brother, from start to finish the entire experience had a deep lasting psychological effect on him. Looking at the exhibition and listening to the music of the era, gave me a sense of how every white person in South Africa was touched by the army experience. (Mary)

Mary's statement understates the exclusionary nature of apartheid society, in that SADF conscripts, whether willingly or unwillingly, were complicit in preserving a hegemony based on the superiority of a white minority. Of course, "the army experience" also had a profound effect on the lives of black South Africans, which is often ignored. One such example is the SADF's increased presence in South African townships from the mid-1980s (Cock and Nathan 1989). Therefore, the *binary* nature of apartheid-era hegemonic discourses continues to echo in the present, perpetuating a sense of denial, where the aftershocks of white conscription and the Border War are only felt by white South Africans.

Other visitor's comments included, "we're so happy that you are addressing this issue" (Jane 2017) and "I had no idea that white males were conscripted during apartheid". This was particularly apparent in the responses of young black South Africans, of the so-called *born free* generation,²⁷ many of whom were unaware that conscription was an exclusively white burden. Here, former ECC activist Laurie Nathan (Jaster and Jaster 1993: 33) explains that "conscription – unlike other aspects of apartheid – imposes a real, tangible, material burden on whites. People were asked to give up four years of their lives, and possibly life itself".

An international visitor from Argentina also commented on the parallels between the history of conscription in Argentina and South Africa, drawing attention to the plight of Argentinian conscripts in the wake of the 1982 Falklands War (*Guerra de las Malvinas*), who were subjected to appalling conditions during the 10-week conflict in the South Atlantic. He added that the plight of Argentinian conscripts largely ignored when they returned home.²⁸

Kris Marais' *State Property*, as a mean of creative interplay with the *NUTRIA* exhibition.

A few weeks prior to the 6th June opening of *NUTRIA*, I was approached by *Tri Nexus Social Capital Services* (*Tri Nexus SCS*), a creative collaboration between Kris Marais (Author), Tauriq Jenkins (Director) and Maura Talbot (Producer) that specialised in presenting spoken word poetry performances. *Tri Nexus SCS* speaks to a "host of post-Apartheid South African hearts that are congested – with silence" (Tri Nexus Social Capital Services 2017). Marais speaks of "hearts that have haemorrhaged silently, and mostly out-of-view, for decades. Many unwittingly bearing crudely cauterized wounds" of conscription into the *SADF*.

Marais inquired whether *Tri Nexus SCS* could run a series of evening performances within the *NUTRIA* exhibition venue, that "called on affected South Africans to begin to speak and

27 *Born frees* are South Africans born after the fall of apartheid (1994). According to Mpongo (2016), *born frees* make up almost 40 per cent of the population of South Africa.

28 Visit <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-34335103> where an Argentine conscript gives an account of abuse by superiors during the Falklands War (1982).

share their stories, to heal and halt the inter-generational perpetuation of the Apartheid war” (Tri Nexus Social Capital Services 2017). I welcomed Marais’ offer, and within 48 hours he had obtained official permission to run a series of five evening performances within the Alleman’s Barracks exhibition space, from Friday the 9th June to Friday 16th June (Youth Day). Each performance ran from 7pm to 9pm and was followed by an open discussion afterwards in the hope of ex-conscripts and possibly their families sharing their stories.²⁹ The audience were also free to view the *NUTRIA* exhibition allowing for a meaningful interplay between the visual arts, poetry and open discussion.



STATE PROPERTY: THE CONSCRIPTS OF APARTHEID – UNTOLD STORIES OF A SOCIALLY CONSTRUCTED SILENCE

A performance of composed and found poetry (the poetry of the spoken word), presented by Tri Nexus SCS, speaks to the many many things that shaped, unleashed and shut down the conscripts of the old SA Republic and the society that constellates around them. It seeks to open the secrets that separate and divide, and that keep those who were complicit, militarised and traumatised, still imprisoned in the war. Still susceptible to fear filled reactions.

This is an invitation for affected South Africans to begin to speak and share their stories. A call to halt the inter-generational perpetuation of that war.

The presentation will run for 50 minutes with up to 1 hour open discussion with audience afterwards.

Venue: Castle of Good Hope, Cape Town.

Dates & Time:
 7pm, Friday 9th June 2017
 2pm Saturday 10th June
 2pm Sunday 11th June
 7pm Thursday 15th Jun
 2pm Friday 16th June

Admission is free. Seats are limited.
 RSVP to info@tri-nexus.co.za or call Maura on 072 386 0537.



Figure 4.18 Invitation for the Tri-Nexus SCS *State Property* performances 2017 (courtesy Tri-Nexus SCS)

²⁹ Visit https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-WkLpP48_7Y to view the author read the poem, *Letter home* from the collection, *Questions for the Sea* (2016) published by uHlanga Press. The poem also appears in the addendum on page 307.

***NUTRIA 2* exhibition in the Humanities building foyer, University of Pretoria, Pretoria**

(9th February to 31st March 2018)



Figure 4.19 Humanities foyer at the University of Pretoria 2017 (photograph: Stephen Symons)

The choice of venue

At the close of 2017, I transferred my research from the University of Cape Town (UCT) to the University of Pretoria (UP). My supervisor, Dr Siona O’Connell encouraged me to prepare a revised version of the *NUTRIA* exhibition, titled *NUTRIA 2*. The exhibition opened in the Humanities foyer of the University of Pretoria on the 9th of February 2018. *NUTRIA 2* was organised in consultation with the Department of History and Heritage Studies and my supervisor, Dr Siona O’Connell. This version of the exhibition, by virtue of its situation within an academic environment and obvious demographic differences of its audience, allowed for an interesting shift from the military space of the Castle of Good Hope to that of a university campus.

As previously mentioned in Chapter Two of this thesis, the influence of militarisation within South African universities during the 1980s was limited, although according to Cock (1989), the SADF did make attempts to increase its presence in a number of so-called white universities. Most attempts were successfully resisted by traditionally English speaking universities such as the University of Cape Town (UCT) and Rhodes University, by means of student councils and the End Conscription Campaign (ECC). Nonetheless, a number of Afrikaans and dual-medium universities incorporated University Military Units (UMU) (284) which functioned as on-campus SADF military units for ex-servicemen, or those students seeking information about their upcoming military service. UMU's were either fighting or protective units (campus defence units) that allowed students to continue with various forms of military training within the university environment. All male students, staff and administration personnel who were liable for annual military camps or national service were required to register with their UMU.

During the research process, I encountered an ECC document (ECC Collection Number: AG1077, undated) from the mid-1980s that provided detailed information about the history and functions of UMUs on university campuses. The document notes that Commando units consisting of student and university staff members were established at most Afrikaans language medium universities after the Soweto Uprising of 1976, and were incorporated into so-called UMUs in 1980 (40). The document draws specific attention to the UMU at the University of Pretoria which placed a "stress on border camps, with the rector at the University having paid a visit by helicopter to the [university] unit on their first border camp" (40).

More recently, during National Science Week 2010 celebrations, a South African Air Force Mirage F1-Cz aircraft was unveiled in front of Sci-Enza Science Centre on the university campus (Erhardt 2010). A UP aeronautical engineering student said the following at the unveiling ceremony,



Figure 4.20 Dassault Mirage F1-Cz, University of Pretoria 2013 (photograph: DanieB52)

I'm sure in time this 'French Diva' will become a landmark on campus and visitors to the Sci-Enza Science Centre will notice her grandeur and gracefulness, if not her beauty. I am sure many a youngster will look up at her and dream their own dreams. (Erhardt 2010)

Interestingly, Dassault Mirage F1-Cz's from No.3 Squadron were based at Waterkloof AFB, near Pretoria, and saw action during the Border War.

Therefore, the choice of the University of Pretoria campus as a venue for *NUTRIA 2* presented an ideal opportunity to disrupt and draw attention to the university's previous history and associated silences, as an educational institution that assisted, promoted and perpetuated the formulation of white militarised masculinities during apartheid.

Creating *NUTRIA 2*

NUTRIA 2 included a selection of framed artworks, including photographs and digital artworks from *NUTRIA*. The installation piece was made up of three plywood boxes, military *matériel*, replica weapons, SADF uniforms and a number of A0 copies of call-up papers, and miscellaneous SADF documents. The preparation, including the painting of the hanging surfaces, was prepared by a number of UP post-graduate students, who were managed by Dr Siona O'Connell's academic assistant and post-graduate student, Dominique Niemand.

All the artworks were freighted from Cape Town to the university campus a few weeks prior to the exhibition opening on the 6th February 2018.

Designing and exhibiting *NUTRIA 2*

The University of Pretoria exhibition venue offered a smaller exhibition space than Alleman's Barracks at the Castle in Cape Town. Nonetheless, the limited space of the Humanities foyer of UP was a hub of constant student traffic, allowing thousands of students to view the exhibition, resulting in significantly higher visitor numbers than the Cape Town exhibition. Additionally, the demographic also differed to the Cape Town exhibition. *NUTRIA 2* saw students, lecturers and university personnel making up the bulk of the viewers. The only ex-conscripts viewing the exhibition would have been white male lecturers between the ages of 45 and 65. On the whole, *NUTRIA 2* was viewed by a far younger demographic, providing further opportunities for diverse and challenging responses to the exhibition.

An important objective of the *NUTRIA 2* exhibition was to create a unique disruptive experience, ultimately confronting the role of the university as an agency for conscription during the apartheid era. This was achieved by a number of ways, beginning with the display of large strips of vinyl lettering measuring 2,5 metres in length, that were adhered to the tiled floor of the foyer. The phrases were presented as provocative statements in both English and Afrikaans, and were as follows:

1. 600 000 men, in all, were conscripted from white South African society between 1968 and 1993
2. "Compulsory military service is one of the few aspects of apartheid that lays a real burden on whites" — Laurie Nathan
3. Afkak, Basics, Bossies, Doppies en Balsakke³⁰
4. Ag man, dis lekker innie army! The army will make a man of you...³¹

30 *Afkak* (Afr.) - literally to *shit* oneself. Usually a punitive form of physical exercise.
Bossies (Afr.) - bush mad or combat crazy.
Doppies (Afr.) - the cartridge cases left over from shooting.
Balsakke (Afr.) - literally *ball bag*, a military canvas kitbag.
 (Source: South African Legion of Military Veterans - The United Kingdom 2012)

31 "Ag man, dis lekker innie army!" Afrikaans for, "Oh man, it's great in the army".

5. ROOI GEVAAR | TOTAL ONSLAUGHT

6. COMPLICITY. ACCOUNTABILITY. TRAUMA. NOSTALGIA

The backing boards, from which the framed artworks were hung, were painted in alternating bands or chevrons in SADF *nutria* (dark brown) and an orange colour matching the old South African flag, acting as visual references to the unit shoulder flashes of the Regiment University of Pretoria.³²

An analysis of the *NUTRIA 2* installation artwork



Figure 4.21 *NUTRIA 2* installation detail, University of Pretoria 2018 (photograph: Stephen Symons)

The *NUTRIA 2* installation artwork, can be best described as a creative *counter-silence*, that challenges the previous histories of a militarised campus. There were repeated attempts by the SADF's to establish UMUs throughout South Africa during the 1980s, where UMUs acted as a strategic continuation of the militarisation of education from a secondary school level to the university environment (ECC Collection Number: AG1077, undated).

³² The Regiment University of Pretoria was renamed as the 17 Field Artillery Regiment. The regiment ended its relationship with the University of Pretoria in February 1974 (Wilsworth 2010).

Unlike the orderly arrangement of the installation artworks on exhibit at the Castle in Cape Town, I chose to present the UP installation in a state of disarray, as if the contents of the crates were spilling into the university space. Ultimately, the *NUTRIA 2* installation functions as a representation, provocation and interrogation of the university's historical connections with the SADF. Three plywood crates were placed in no particular order, at various angles, seemingly *overflowing* with a variety of replica weapons, uniforms, helmet, boots and other miscellaneous military items. Again, hundreds of laser cut card and 3mm SupaWood® profiles of weapons and military *materiel* were scattered over the installation much like confetti, representing countless fragments of memory.



Figure 4.22 *NUTRIA 2* installation detail of laser-cut profiles, University of Pretoria 2018 (photograph: Stephen Symons)

The plywood crates and their contents were placed over layers of A0 size enlargements of call-up papers and copies of official SADF documents related to conscription, alluding to what Kaufman and Jelin (Ashplant, Dawson and Roper 2000: 105) refer to as “levels of memory”. Kaufman and Jelin note that the “subjectivity of the present” always infiltrates the act of remembering, whereby “the labours of memory” becomes layered with not only the act of remembering of the event but also “narratives of fact” and intergenerational factors, such as “who tells, who listens, [and] who keeps quiet”.

This sudden chaotic unearthing and spillage of uncomfortable memory in the heart of the university 's campus, namely the UP Humanities Building foyer, was influenced by French fine artist Christian Boltanski's *No Man's Land* (2010), an installation made up of a 12-metre mound of clothing at the Park Avenue Armory. I was drawn to Boltanski's concept of clothes functioning as a "placeholder for real human beings who [have] lived real lives" (Abruzzini 2018). Yet the *NUTRIA 2* installation not only functions as a "placeholder for real human beings", but as an expression of counter-memory and connections to place, surfacing within a contested present. Lipsitz (1990: 227) notes that "counter-memory is not a rejection of history, but a reconstitution of it".

Therefore *NUTRIA 2* not only attempted to reconfigure but also *reconstitute* an incongruous and inevitably discomfoting historical intersection of two institutions, namely the academy and conscription. Yet, what is the significance of these reconstituted intersections? Although the relationship between university and state was an exclusively white marriage of convenience, when this uncomfortable intersection presents itself in the present, the conversation is no longer a racially exclusive exchange, but a conversation that demands the inclusivity of all voices, irrespective of generation or race.

By situating the *NUTRIA 2* installation within an academic space that had intimate historical connections with the SADE, the university could effectively act as a catalyst for further robust debate about uncomfortable histories. The public reaction to the *NUTRIA 2* exhibition suggested that longstanding silences, whether self-induced or imposed by means of dominant political discourses, can be challenged effectively by visual or creative means. These departures from established lines of disciplinary practice may also offer alternative approaches in re-evaluating the historical relationship between the university and state. To conclude, *NUTRIA 2* challenged how we give voice and choose to articulate disagreeable memories and histories.

Public reactions to the *NUTRIA 2* exhibition

Public reaction to the *NUTRIA 2* exhibition originated from three groups of visitors, namely students, lecturers and non-academic university personnel. The *sudden* appearance of an artistic installation of military equipment, uniforms, replica weapons and artworks drew varied, and at times, extreme replies.

Within hours of the exhibition's opening, the Dean of the Faculty of Historical and Heritage Studies was inundated by calls for the exhibition to shut down immediately. Although I was not privy to specific objections on the part of university staff, it was apparent that the exhibition had exposed embarrassing connections between the institution and the SADE. Interestingly, no such objections were raised at the *NUTRIA* exhibition at the Castle, in Cape Town. Despite calls for *NUTRIA 2* to be closed, the Faculty of Historical and Heritage Studies refused, emphasising the need for honest engagement with the university's uncomfortable histories.

I received both negative and positive commentary, and on one occasion was challenged by an ex-lecturer as to why the exhibition was "myopic", and focused specifically on whites, effectively dismissing the histories of the military wings of black liberation movements such as the African National Congress (ANC) and Pan African Congress (PAC). I explained that both Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) of the ANC and the Azanian People's Liberation Army (APLA) of the PAC were made up of volunteers, who were not forcibly conscripted by the state. Elucidating further, I drew attention to the exhibition's intended focus, namely addressing the issues of white conscription, white masculinities and whiteness, which were clearly detailed in the curatorial statement.

The aforementioned reaction draws attention to the oft-held misconception that the SADF was made up of volunteers, who were willing servants of the state. Although a professional permanent force functioned within the SADF, the bulk of the SADF's manpower during the 1980s was made up of conscripts. Interestingly, parallel historical misconceptions exist with regard to the German *Wehrmacht* during World War 2. The majority of German soldiers during World War 2 were conscripted (Roberts 2010).

A number of university employees (I did not ascertain their role within the institution) mentioned they were ex-conscripts and that the exhibition “touched a nerve” or “brought up long forgotten memories”. There was an understandable reticence on their part not to elaborate further, given their relationship as employees of the university.

On the other hand, white male students were far more forthcoming, providing anecdotes of their father's military service, often packaged with phrases such as “when the army worked” or “when South Africa had a real army”, which were not dissimilar to some of the views expressed by the ex-conscripts of this study. The comments of these students echo Boym's (2007) view that nostalgia is infectious, and can become a transgenerational affliction. Even though the disruptive and anti-memorial nature of the *NUTRIA 2* was obvious, nostalgia-infused misreadings of the artworks, still occurred. On one occasion, I was even asked where one could purchase the replica weapons that were included in the exhibition.

A number of black students expressed interest in the history of white conscription, curious as to why it existed. In most instances, much like the reactions of Cape Town audiences, knowledge of racially exclusive white conscription among the black population seemed limited. Most black students seemed genuinely surprised that white conscription existed. I feel compelled to ask, are these knowledge gaps yet further reverberations of South Africa's mutually insular racial histories?



Figure 4.22 Stephen Symons, Homepage, *NUTRIA* website 2017 (screenshot: Stephen Symons)

The *NUTRIA* exhibition website

A website accompanied and documented the exhibition, acting as an online archive, including galleries, walk-through videos, radio interviews and reviews. The exhibition website can be accessed here: <http://www.stephensymons.co.za>.

The WordPress website took three months to develop and was launched in April 2017, in anticipation of the forthcoming June opening of the *NUTRIA* exhibition in Cape Town. Again, the website served as a vital virtual alternative for those who could not visit the exhibition in person and included an explanatory interview (9th June) with Lucinda Jolly, Arts and Culture editor of Fine Music Radio.³³

Furthermore, the creation of a website allowed both *NUTRIA* exhibitions to *live* beyond a limited time-frame, providing a digital space for further virtual exhibitions and other modes of expression, including video, music, interviews and hyperlinks to similar projects elsewhere within cyberspace.

³³ Visit http://stephensymons.co.za/?page_id=3734 for the Fine Music Radio interview and video walk-through of the *NUTRIA* exhibition at the Castle of Good Hope.



Figure 4.23 Stephen Symons, *NUTRIA* social media posts, Facebook 2017 (screenshot: Stephen Symons)

Promoting the *NUTRIA* exhibition by means of social media

The third aspect of my research methodology involved the use of social media to gain further insight into the research topic. Social Media platforms have established themselves as vital hubs of shared experience that articulate post-conflict reconstruction processes for ex-conscripts and ex-permanent force members (Stauffacher, Drake, Currion and Steinberger 2005). This so-called User-generated content (UGC) is publically available, often anecdotal and includes the narratives of ex-soldiers and conscripts from many theatres of conflict (Vickery and Wunsch-Vincent 2006).

Baines notes the anonymity of the internet has allowed for an outpouring of previously silenced memory and emotion (Baines 2008 2012), and I, therefore, decided to utilise this medium, beyond the scope and confines of the interview process, as a less formal platform for exploring conscript experiences. Presently, the following Facebook event page: https://www.facebook.com/events/765260726960683/?active_tab=discussion includes discussions, articles and posts related to the subject of conscription into the former SADF that was allied to the *NUTRIA* exhibitions.

Conclusion

Both *NUTRIA* exhibitions began by giving voice to an intensely personal photographic archive, whereas other artworks reflected on “the shared/common experience” and memories of other ex-convicts, which were subsequently “projected into a public arena...promoting a new sectional or oppositional narrative,”(Ashplant, Dawson and Roper 2000: 17). In this sense the exhibition forms part of a disruptive counter-narrative or counter-archive, opposing dominant political discourses rooted in dismissal and silencing, yet simultaneously challenging the memorialised or nostalgic notions of some ex-convicts, and broad compliance of white society during apartheid.

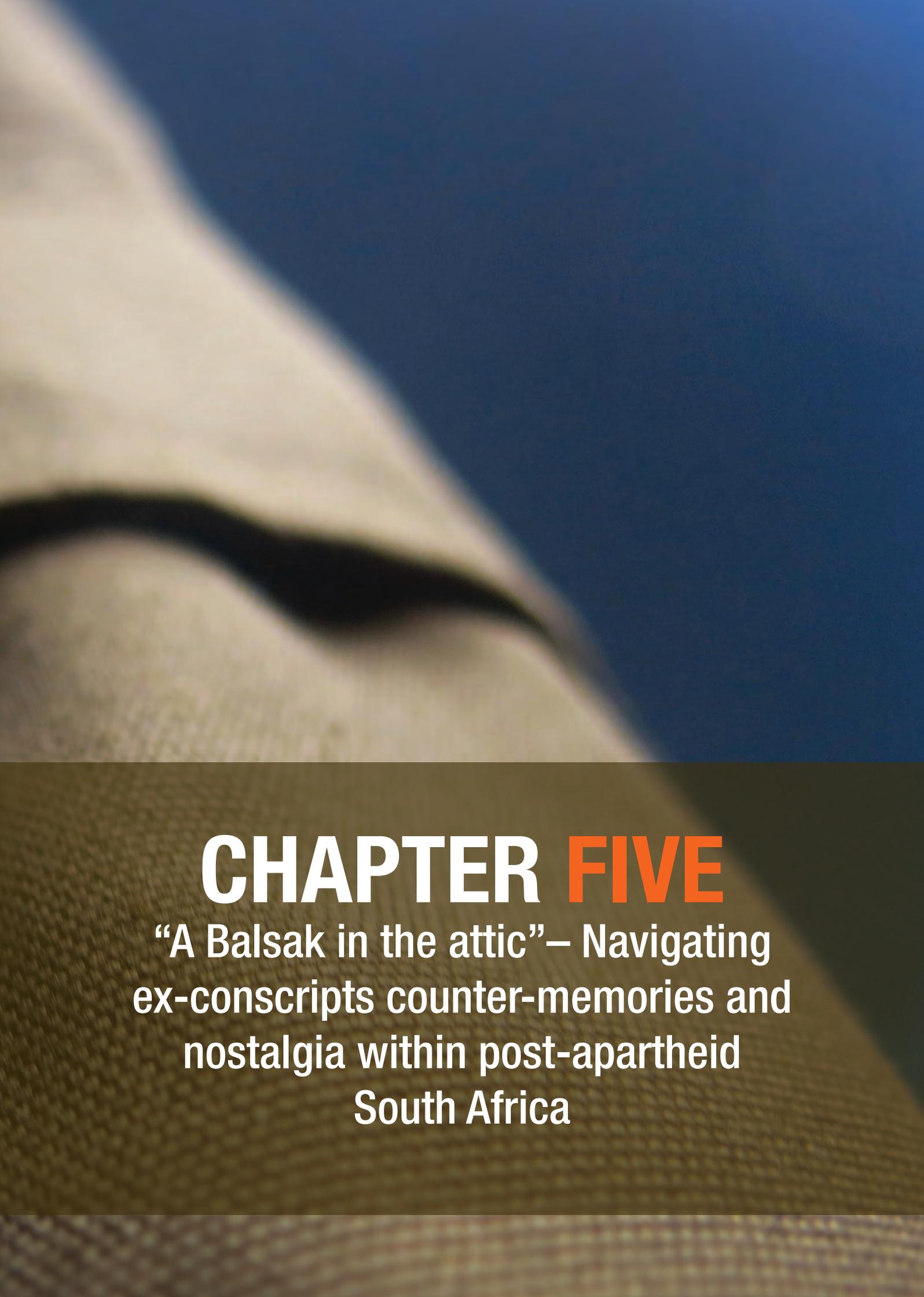
The *NUTRIA* exhibitions were essentially a series of counter-memories, perhaps imbued with what Boym (2007: 14) refers to as “reflective nostalgia”, whereby “re-flection means new flexibility, not the establishment of stasis”. For Boym, “reflective nostalgia” reveals that “longing and critical thinking are not opposed to one another, [and] do not absolve one from compassion, judgement, or critical reflection”. Counter-memory is therefore *naturally* disruptive.

To conclude, it is hoped the creative component of this thesis, specifically the exhibitions, that now exist within a digital domain, will continue to act as stimuli for reflection, restoration and meditation, and encourages the exploration of further inter-disciplinary methodologies aimed at traversing and mapping other silenced narratives of South Africans.

Finally, I hoped the inclusion of a supplemental creative component will contribute to further alternative methods of scholarly research that ultimately humanises the past and contributes to peaceful and productive co-existence and acknowledgement. The need for these individuals to reclaim agency within a distinctly different social terrain remains a challenge (Edlmann 2014, Gear 2002, McKaiser 2011). Boym (2007: 18) rightly notes, “Home, after all is not a gated community”.



NUTRIA Exhibition installation artwork detail, The Castle of Good Hope, Cape Town 2017 (photograph: Stephen Symons)



CHAPTER FIVE

“A Balsak in the attic” – Navigating
ex-conscripts counter-memories and
nostalgia within post-apartheid
South Africa

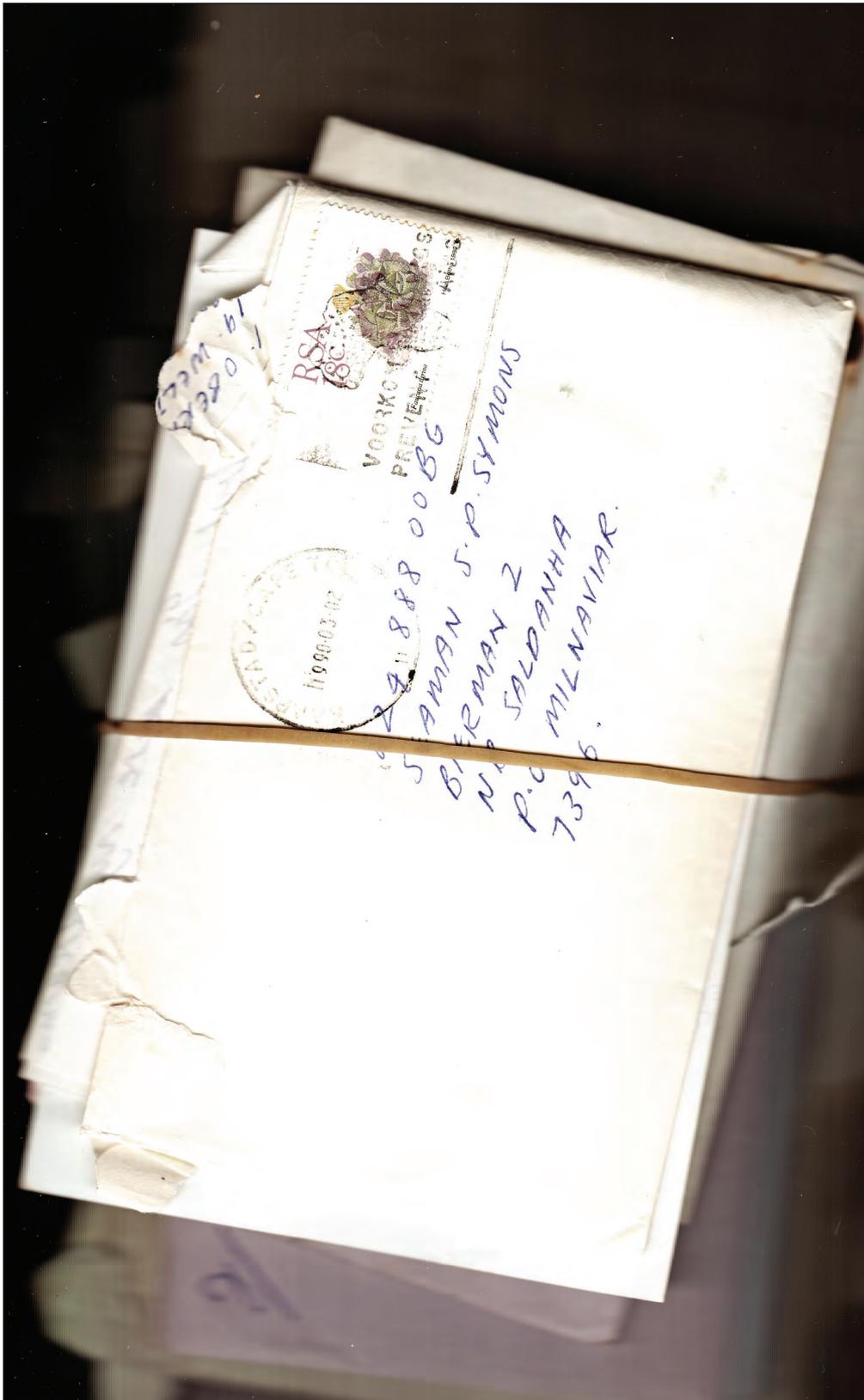


Figure 5 Stephen Symons, Photograph of the author's archive of letters as a SADF conscript 2016 (photograph: Stephen Symons)

Chapter 5 - “A *Balsak* in the attic”¹

Navigating ex-conscript counter-memories and nostalgia within post-apartheid South Africa

But most whites in South Africa cannot remember the past because they can’t find a past to remember that includes blacks other than objects, housemaids, garden boys, gas station attendants, and the like. The physical distance created by apartheid also created a psychological distance, giving their memories little to recall.

— Padraig O’Malley, *Shades of difference*, 2007

There are many questions, but no answers. Just stories. Just memories.

— Calitz, *Die Burger*, 2018 ²

Introduction

Ex-conscript Jason’s reply was unique, in that it felt like the ideal answer to so many of the questions that my thesis grapples with, particularly in how the memories of ex-conscripts navigate an ambiguous and contested post-apartheid space. His unexpected narrative emerged from the largely reticent memory field of ex-conscripts, yet fraught with regret and a reluctance to revert to nostalgic reminiscing. For Jason, the present has become a catalyst for the frank renegotiation of unsettled memories:

The SADF had a darker side which I don’t think any white man can be proud of. I am surprised how many still view their contribution as heroic, or feel that it was a good thing. I am still a bit confused by my own role, to tell the truth. As we see standards slip under the current ANC government I get the feeling that a lot of white men feel justified in feeling nostalgic about their SADF experience, or that they have

1 The image of the *balsak* in the attic is borrowed from Diana Gibson’s paper, *The Balsak in the Roof: Bush War experiences and mediations as related by white South African conscripts*. See Richters and Kapteijns (2010).

2 Translated from Afrikaans: *Daar is baie vrae, maar nie antwoorde nie. Net stories. Net herinneringe.*

somehow claimed a moral high ground due to the deterioration around us.

(Jason)

Jason's views are certainly not the norm and run counter to what Gibson (2009) refers to as a (white) South African memory field that is somewhat hegemonic and authoritative. Nonetheless, his statement brings the aims of this chapter into sharp focus – which is to interrogate the role of counter-memory, nostalgia and forgetting in a contested present. By relying on the accounts of ex-conscripts gathered during the interview process, I argue that their articulations of the past are intimately bound to white male ambiguities within present-day South Africa.

Edna Lomsky-Feder (2004: 84) notes that the “conceiving of memory” tends to marginalise the individual, giving preference to “national narratives”, where the act of remembering “assimilates personal memory into the collective”, or tends to “search for an authentic counter-voice”. Lomsky-Feder contends that the aforementioned approaches tend to neglect the memories of the individual, who “creates his own world” that is simultaneously bound to a “memory field that is socially framed”. These “national memories”, are “placed in service of the national project”, and are essentially conveyed, reinforced and fixed by means of “rituals, media and school curricula”.

I therefore also rely on Neitzel and Welzer's (2012) concept of “frames of reference”. Past actions, and in this case the memories of ex-conscripts, are better understood in the present if I situate “the perceptions and interpretations of people in specific historical situations”. Thus if I want to ask questions such as, “Why are so many ex-conscripts memories infused with nostalgia?”, I should endeavour to orientate memory within a *frame of reference*. This requires moving beyond the present and demands a mapping of the socio-historical, cultural and ideological landscapes where those memories were birthed.

Understanding frames of reference

Neitzel and Welzer (2012) draw attention to four different frames of reference in their seminal book *Soldaten*, which analyses recorded conversations between German prisoners of war, namely:

1. “Frames of reference of the first order” are commonly accepted categories of what is good or evil, or forms of social etiquette, such as how individuals address each other (9).
2. “Frames of reference of the second order” are more “concrete”, in that they are defined by periods of time, such as the duration of the apartheid regime, or how long white conscription existed in South Africa. Neitzel and Welzer’s (2012) define “Second-order frames of reference” as existing within a “socio-political space” that can be “clearly delimited”(10).
3. “Frames of reference of the third order” are even more specific, in that they define actual socio-historical events, such as the Border War, or Soweto uprisings.
4. “Frames of reference of the fourth order” are personal assumptions and “modes of perception” that individuals employ to position themselves, and give meaning to their world.

Much like Neitzel and Welzer’s (2012) study, ex-conscript narratives are orientated within the bounds of second and third frames of reference, in that their accounts are delimited by time periods or “socio-political spaces”, namely apartheid, childhood or conscription, and additionally specific socio-historical events, such as the Border War. It is also important to note that frames of reference are not clearly delineated or separated, but are blurred and continually overlap and intersect each other. Here, I want to add that frames of reference also determine how ex-conscripts navigate their sense of masculinity and whiteness within the present. I would argue further, that for many white South African males, particularly ex-conscripts, their experience of the present is still framed by apartheid ideologies and its

associated *norms* of whiteness and masculinity. Therefore, frames of reference allow for what Neitzel and Welzer refer to as prefabricated interpretations of events (18). In the case of ex-conscripts, these prefabricated interpretations are “imported” into memory and are resilient to the time passages since the advent of the democratic era. Here, Tony exhibits a sense of reticence to break with the past, expressing a need to justify “why he was there.” Yet, Tony skirts the political and moral implications of having served in the SADF, still relying on a frame of reference that is firmly fixed in the past. Although Tony creates his “own personal version” of remembering, he nonetheless “adopts certain meanings, rejects [or edits out] others” and thus presents an alternative “strategic” formulation of his experiences (2004: 85):

It was an experience that on a day to day basis had its ups and downs, it had good and bad moments, many life lessons and experiences that stand one in good stead as an individual for the rest of one’s life. If one takes the politics out of it I feel good about it. (Tony)

However, Mark’s following response presents a demonstrative contrast, a notably more frank *reframing* of his experiences as a conscript in the SADF. Mark’s poignant reply to the question, “Why were we there?” discard the filters of the past and is orientated within a frame of reference that clearly acknowledges the present. Nonetheless, as Lomsky-Feder (2004: 85) notes, remembering is always “performed within the context of a field of memory that is socially constructed”:

I was there because old men with power wanted more power and more wealth and were prepared to use and abuse young men to get it and keep it for them. I agree with Judith Lewis Herman that ‘Rape and combat might...be considered complementary social rites of initiation into the coercive violence at the foundation of adult society,’ and with Ernest Hemingway that ‘[wars] are made, provoked and initiated by straight economic rivalries and by swine that stand to profit from them.’

I was there to maintain powerful Nationalist party politicians and capital interests and their English capital accomplices in their control of power, wealth and the colonialist project.

In 2007 my psychic defences failed and I started to get flashbacks of my time in the SADF, went for therapy and constructed a narrative of my time in the army. I have come to recognize how profoundly it has changed and scarred me. I have had to learn to see myself as a victim of the system of legal conscription, and also a perpetrator as a soldier in the Apartheid war machine. So I hate the SADF, and yet I am also part of the SADF. (Mark)

Mark's reply concludes on a note fraught with ambiguity, yet his account stands out as an exception among other ex-conscripts narratives, many of whom are reticent to escape the memory fields of the apartheid-era. Lomsky-Feder (2004: 86) notes that the accounts of war veterans often "gain power" because of their testimonial character. These intimate personal narratives are easy to relate to and are distinctly emotional. Yet, in Mark's account, the act and "flexibility" of personal retrospective narration also encourage reflexive behaviour in the present on the part of the narrator (Lomsky-Feder 2004). Mark acknowledges that he cannot completely escape history or his role as a conscript within the SADF.

Here, I concur with Lomsky-Feder's (2004: 91) observations that the accounts of ex-conscripts, most of whom belonged to a similar social group despite divides of language, exhibited two "distinct voices", namely a "dominant voice" and a less common "other voice". So-called "dominant voices" include ex-conscript memories that remain inextricably bound to the memory fields of apartheid. These narratives often rely on some form of justification for their past actions and tend to avoid issues of complicity, personal crisis or responsibility, regressing to past frames of reference. Furthermore, "dominant voices" are often imbued with nostalgia, and exhibit *gaps of forgetting*, self-imposed silences that are articulated as counter-

memories, manifesting themselves within socially exclusive environments. These spaces often take the form of *locales of camaraderie*, ascribing to what Theresa Edlmann (2014: 46) refers to as “discursive *laagers*”³ *Locales of camaraderie* could be, among others spaces, *braais*,⁴ the dinner table or social media groups within the digital domain.

Encounters with Lomsky-Feder’s (2004) “other voice” were less common in this study. These “other voices” tended to involve modes of self-critique, honesty and self-reflection that were fixed within present frames of reference, avoiding nostalgic attachments or the need to assume the guise of counter-memory. Mark’s revealing account is an apt example of an “other voice”:

My conscription has changed me, in some ways warped me permanently, and left me in other ways with strengths and compassion that I might never have attained otherwise. I embarked on research into conscripts for a master’s degree research report as a kind of logotherapy, also a necessity of studying and understanding my trauma, what we were doing there, what it all has meant. (Mark)

Mark’s account comes across as frank and clear, and appears to be an exception among ex-conscripts. The following section examines the manner in which ex-conscripts attempt to reframe their memories of conscription with nostalgia, as a means to navigate or simply position themselves *comfortably* within the post-apartheid space.

³ Edlmann (2014: 46-47) describes “discursive *laagers*” as “representing what people perceive to be discursively necessary when polarised beliefs, interpretations of history and ideological positions need to be defended against change or reinterpretation”. The Afrikaans word *laager* describes a mobile defensive encirclement of wagons most notably used by Afrikaners during The Great Trek during the 18th and 19th century.

⁴ *Braai* (derived from *braaiivleis*) is an Afrikaans word for a barbeque over open coals.

Nostalgia: *nutria*-tinted memories of conscription

The word “nostalgia” comes from two Greek roots, *nostos* meaning “return home” and *algia* “longing.” — Svetlana Boym, 2007

I was particularly struck by a line in the South African movie *Kanarie* (2018), where SADF Pastor Engelbrecht (Jacques Engelbrecht) advises the protagonist, SADF conscript Johan Niemand (Schalk Bezuidenhout), “Remember this feeling, this anger, otherwise, it will just turn to nostalgia one day”. Svetlana Boym (2007: 8) notes that a “mix of nostalgia and politics can be explosive”, which is undoubtedly the case for many ex-conscripts, as their memories leak into a present in which many white middle-age males feel marginalised and disembodied. The frequent usage of words such as “forgotten”, “ignored” and “unappreciated” by the participants of this study are indicative of the contemporary disaffections of white males of the conscription era. These disaffections have a tendency to find temporary solace in the act of infusing memory with nostalgia.

When Boym (2007: 9) cites Michael Kammen’s assertion that nostalgia is “essentially history without guilt”, she illuminates an oft-hidden feature of ex-conscript memories. The interview process of this study revealed, on occasion, a *distanced* romantic gaze when looking back on the militarised childhoods and subsequent induction into the SADF of white males. These romantic notions of the apartheid-era act to conserve what Baines (2012: 5) refers to as a “(ma)lingering militarised identity”. Additionally, a nostalgic gazing back to a militarised and racially divisive past has further implications, in that the romanticising of the past tends to abrade the present, giving rise to feelings of discontent with society and the state. These “present discontents” (Ashplant, Dawson and Roper 2000) or disaffections, provide fertile ground for memory to “abdicate responsibility”, and occupy the “guilt-free” space of nostalgia, where complicity or accountability are skillfully evaded (Boym 2007: 9). Nostalgic diversions of memory are well suited to the needs of ex-conscripts hoping to make sense of a contested

present in which they feel they have been silenced, marginalised or simply forgotten. Yet, Boym's (2007: 7) analogy of nostalgia as a cinematic double exposure, "of past and present, of dream and everyday day life" alludes to nostalgia as becoming ultimately self-destructive, where "the moment we try to force it into a single image, it breaks the frames or burns the surface". In this sense, nostalgic notions of the past are always at odds with the present.

For example, a number of the participants of this study felt they were of little use to the South African nation-building project. These feelings tend to revert to a divisive "blame-game" that ultimately buttress the divides between race and prompt idealised recollections of a past that never existed. Here, Paul expresses his deep discontent, feeling that the contributions of ex-conscripts have been simply forgotten, and written out of history by dominant state and societal discourses:

History is written by the victors, and the SADF came second. There are MK vets associations etc. They get pensions and medical support. What about those [SADF conscripts] who were injured in the conflict? What about showing us some form of recognition, even though we may have been active pawns in a global conflict? We did our time and do exist, we lost, we won, we were there, we too should be in the history books. I offered my childhood and youth to my country and what have I received in return. (Paul)

Nostalgia as a "subjective vision" within an obsolete frame of reference

A notable number of participants contributing to this study felt a pressing need to reminisce fondly, offering no excuses about their experiences as a SADF conscript. Pickering and Keightley (2006) note that nostalgia can "operate ideologically", in that it functions as a "contradictory phenomenon", particularly when it operates in spaces where individuals, such

as ex-conscripts, feel marginalised and excluded. In the following statement, Daniel's *nostalgic self* longs for a time that never existed. This form of nostalgia is what Boym (2007: xviii) refers to as "reflective nostalgia" that "dwells in *algia* (aching), in longing and loss, [and] the imperfect process of remembrance". Daniel's nostalgia is the product of an entirely "subjective vision" fixed to an *obsolete* frame of reference, namely that of a white defence force within a racist society:

It wasn't all that bad. I miss it, especially that sense of camaraderie and the way everyone respected us. Not like this useless excuse of a defence force we now have. They are an utter embarrassment to the uniform. Nothing works in this new defence force, they couldn't fight their way out of a paper bag. *Us troeps* weren't even professional soldiers, but we certainly acted like it. Ja, it was best. We were the best. You could say it was the best of times and the worst of times. (Daniel 2016)

As Boym (2007: 7) rightly notes, "the danger of nostalgia is that it tends to confuse the actual home and the imaginary home". Daniel's vision of the past as it enters the present echoes O' Malley's (2007) statement, "The physical distance created by apartheid also created a psychological distance, giving their memories little to recall". Daniel questions and views the present through a lens *tinted* with nostalgia, constantly drawing comparisons between the present state of the SANDF and a distinctly romanticised past. Daniel's oscillations between past and present conclude on a conflicting note, "it was the best of times and the worst of times", which points to the manner in which conscription into the SADF has become a morally ambiguous memory field in the present. Despite the nostalgic overtones of Daniel's account, he nonetheless retrospectively recognises that conscription was also "the worst of times". Baines (2008) observes that shifts have occurred among certain conscripts, particularly among those who previously supported the Border War and objectives of the SADF, where increasing numbers of conscripts now feel their allegiances were in vain.

Boym (2007: 9) contends that “outbreaks” of nostalgia are often “accompanied by political and cultural manifestations of longing” and “loss” (10), which is linked to a “dislocation in space”. Here, Andries turns this sense of “dislocation” to anger, echoing Boym’s (7) notion that nostalgia is “the moment we try to force [memory] into a single image, it breaks the frames or burns the surface”:

Pride has succumbed to a vacuum, it’s a fucking joke! [The SANDF] has no self-pride, no discipline. [They] are a bunch of overweight squatters in uniform. They will be sent to their deaths if a war had to break out. Do you think anybody gives a toss?
(Andries 2016)

Reflective nostalgia stalls Andries’s attempt to reconcile with the present, yet despite his anger, Andries realises that the past is irrevocably lost. Comparisons between the professional abilities of the SANDF and SADF were commonplace during the interview process. Andrew’s criticisms of the present abilities of the SANDF echo the sentiments of a number of other interviewees:

Yes, whereas I was fairly proud to have been in the SADF, and been able to protect my country from Communism and perceived terrorism, the SADF is a shell of what it once was, and I feel it is a laughing stock of a defence force and fighting unit. I have no respect for the government, nor what they have done to the SADF. (Andrew)

Sedikides and Wildschut (2016: 130) argue that nostalgia may act as a buffer against “psychological threat”, in that outbreaks of nostalgia are triggered by threat, but in turn, nostalgia has the ability to act as a buffer and even “alleviate or counteract this negative impact”. Here, I would argue that nostalgia is a temporary balm, and certainly, in the case of ex-convicts, it distances rather incorporates.

Nostalgia is a “long distance relationship” that never existed

The utopian constructs of nostalgia are well documented (Boym 2001, Hobsbawm 1987) and as Boym (2007: 7) notes, nostalgia “can only survive in a long distance relationship”. These long-distance relationships that ex-conscripts have established with their militarised childhoods and subsequent induction into the SADF are complex entanglements of emotion and history, that concur with Boym’s notion that nostalgia is a longing for a *time* rather than *place*. The interview process revealed repeated narratives where ex-conscripts reminisced fondly about a “lost time”, rather than specific places. Participants always require the present as a reference point, when they speak of their yearning for a “lost time”, which in turn facilitates their nostalgia.

Interestingly, the nostalgic narratives of ex-conscripts often reference a *failed present*, namely the post-apartheid space, which offers social and emotional challenges, disrupting long-held views of their sense of whiteness and worth. Again, comparisons are often drawn between the professionalism of the SADF and the SANDF, at times extending to the manner in which public and government services have failed in the *new* South Africa. The SANDF is described as dysfunctional or unprofessional, primarily because it is staffed by blacks, whereas the apartheid-era SADF was a “white man’s army”, comprising of highly trained professionals. These often racially charged references to a *failed present* echo Boym’s (2007: 9) argument where nostalgia establishes and makes connections between individual biographies, and the biographies of groups or nation, essentially between “personal and collective memory”. Yet Brent’s comparison between the SADF and SANDF comes across as nuanced, and more thoughtful, yet nonetheless still positions the SADF as a superior fighting force:

From a purely operational point of view comparing the SADF to the SANDF it is apparent how professional and disciplined the senior officers were and how much has been lost in the last 20 years. This reticence is undoubtedly a function of South

Africa's ongoing racial tension coupled with a populist attempt at re-writing history, ameliorated now that the contemporary ANC government no longer has a monopoly on sainthood. [Recent] literature allows us a less biased, more introspective and accepting view of our country's history. (Brent)

Yet, in some respects, the SADF was a far superior fighting force than the present SANDF, so the subjective nostalgic visions of ex-conscripts do contain some measure of truth. Scholtz (2013: 454-455) notes that James F Dunnigham's 1993 analysis of all the armed forces of the world, "determined by evaluating historical performance", ranked South Africa first in Africa, with only Germany achieving a higher ranking.⁵ Nonetheless, as Scholtz notes, the SADF's role was to perpetuate the status quo of a racist regime, a nonetheless contentious point for many ex-conscripts.

Like most romantic long distance relationships, nostalgia's preoccupation with time rather than place means the act of nostalgic reminiscing constantly cycles back to the present. Nostalgia can only survive if the present does not meet the needs of the relationship. For many ex-conscripts, the post-apartheid space remains a foreign clime, yet for some, the past remains equally unwelcoming. The result is an inhospitable landscape of both past and present that seeks the protective mantle of nostalgia. To conclude this section, I draw on Gavin's poignant reply to my question, "How do you position yourself as a white male in the present?":

I feel tremendously torn between my past and the present. There are days when I remember the camaraderie, the sharpness of the coastal light of our base, the spectacular sunrises and sunset, the Friday braais, rugby on Saturdays and laughs, it was quite special. It was a bittersweet time of lasting friendships and simplicity. I say

⁵ The 2019 Military Strength Ranking, compiled by Globalfire Power, ranks the South African National Defence Force at 32 out of 137 countries, a significantly lower ranking than Dunnigham's 1993 report on the former SADF. Visit: <https://www.globalfirepower.com/countries-listing.asp>, which describes GlobalFirepower.com as "an annually-updated, statistics-based website tracking defense-related information of over 137 nations" that exists "as a wholly-independent resource".

“simple” because we were oblivious of our roles as members of the SADF’s conscript army. Black South Africans skated the periphery of our lives, they were simply seen and not heard, whether they manicured our suburban gardens, swept the streets, collected our refuse or built our houses. And now, within a country tottering on the precipice I feel compelled to relive the simplicity of those days. Yes, I do feel a sense of guilt when I see those imbalances and injustices weighed up against what you’d probably call white privilege. I’m not sure how to articulate my reasons for longing for those simpler times, and I’m not saying it was a free ride for us white boys during apartheid. My time in the SA Navy had its moments, which I’d prefer to not talk about, but thinking back, I cannot help feeling what I suppose you’d call nostalgia.

(Gavin)

Expressions of nostalgia act as a means of avoidance, reticence and even resistance to embrace a shared present. The nostalgia of the ex-conscript is often allied to a sense of whiteness and a military past that is largely obsolete, yet I cannot dismiss Boym’s (2001: 31) concept of “restorative nostalgia”, which “put[s] emphasis of *nostos* (returning home)” and not merely escaping to a past that never existed. Gavin’s account appears to be an exception to the norm and takes the form of Boym’s “restorative nostalgia”, whereby Gavin attempts to “rebuild the lost home and patch up the memory gaps”. Gavin’s revisiting of his past becomes an attempt to rebuild, reconcile and make sense of his experiences as an ex-conscript in the present.

Expressions of counter-memory: swimming against the current of the present

I have described Lipstiz’s (1990: 213) concept of counter-memory in Chapter Two in detail, as a means of remembering that unearths the past, exposing “hidden histories” that have been excluded from dominant narratives, gazing on past events from fresh perspectives. In this sense, ex-conscript experiences and their related narratives do enter the present as

counter-memories. Lipsitz concurs with Hutchens (2007) when she argues that a counter-memory assumes the role of a counter-discourse, attempting to renegotiate the present, and position itself against discourses that dominate the present. The manner in which memory renegotiates the present and finds new means to express itself is of particular interest in understanding how ex-conscript narratives position themselves within a post-apartheid space, where many conscripts feel that dominant narratives subjugate their past experiences (Baines 2014).

Who *constructs* and *cultivates* dominant discourses in the post-apartheid space? This is an important question, specifically as a means of gaining insights as to why ex-conscript memories assume the guise of counter-memory, nostalgia or simply remain silent. During the interview process, I posed the aforementioned question to a number of participants. The following is a point form summary of their answers:

- The ANC government and political parties such as the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) have *rewritten* recent South African history, positioning white ex-conscripts as the vanquished.
- The ex-conscript is simply on the wrong side of history and the wrong colour, a black majority means a black history or an exclusive ANC discourse.
- Dominant discourses are constructed by those in political power, by a black majority ANC government. These discourses position the ex-conscript as a perpetrator and a willing servant of the apartheid regime.
- Ex-conscript narratives have no place in dominant and mostly black ANC narratives.
- Ex-conscripts have been stigmatized, and in turn silenced, by the shame of their past, or the fear of having been made accountable. Accountability demands responsibility, so therefore, “it is best to remain silent”. I will discuss ex-conscript silences in more detail at a later point in this chapter, particularly regarding whiteness in relation to the silences of ex-conscripts.

Therefore whoever *constructs* and *cultivates* dominant discourses in the present, in turn “forces the revisions of existing histories by supplying new perspectives about the past” (Lipsitz 1990: 213). Here, Gavin, a participant of the study, attempts to situate himself within a post-*apartheid* space, demonstrating what Lipsitz (1990: 213) refers to as a means to “reframe and refocus dominant narratives”:

I get the impression that the silences associated with my past as a national serviceman in the SADF are both self-inflicted and dictated by the state. I would go so far as to say that my memories have been delegitimised, even though I would readily admit in a public forum that I was a cog in the apartheid machine. Yes, that is to be expected, considering we live in a country that references an ANC scripted history, and ex-national servicemen are by no means part of the winning team. The so-called National Party history syllabus that I was taught at school no longer exists, it’s simply been replaced by an ANC script. At times I feel that I’m made to wear my whiteness like a Jew in Nazi Germany. That sounds a bit extreme, but that’s how I feel, and it’s very interesting to see how the government’s attitude pushed many ex-conscripts to form social media groups and share their stories in a virtual reality. I would even say that movies like *My Father’s War* are expressions of discontent with the manner in which the government have side-lined the history of white soldiers. Besides the net, Exclusive Books are full of Border War memoirs, novels and personal accounts of ex-SADF conscripts and personnel. From Generals to *troeps*, it feels like these guys are sticking it to the government from their bookshelves and computer screens.
(Gavin)

Gavin’s references to the surge of Border War and conscript narratives in print, film and on the internet encompasses what Demos (2012: 1-2) describes as collective counter-memories. Collective counter-memories can facilitate positive transformation, specifically, if they antagonise established narratives, and “designate a practice of memory formation that is social and political, one that runs counter to the official histories of

governments, mainstream mass media, and the society of the spectacle” (Zembylas (2015: 219) draws attention to Burlein’s (1999) view that counter-memories “are counter not because they are foreign to the mainstream, but because they draw on mainstream currents in order to redirect the flow”. This “redirection of mainstream currents” is particularly evident in the manner in which ex-conscripts indulge in compensatory forms of memorialisation, such as the privately funded SADF Memorial Wall situated nearby the Voortrekker Monument or the online South African Roll of Honour managed by John Dovey (Baines 2012). This “redirection of mainstream currents” towards more personal narratives of dissatisfaction was also encountered during the interview process. Here, Mark grapples with the hegemony of dominant state narratives in the post-apartheid space, redirecting attention to his personal experiences as a conscript:

My past is of no importance to Zuma’s ANC. I keep hearing about the contributions of black freedom fighters and how they brought about change. As an ex-national serviceman I feel invisible, even now, decades later I dare not mention that I was in the army. My suffering is of little consequence in the new South Africa. I have stories too. It’s good to see that some guys of my generation are beginning to be heard, or at least being listened to. But I would say the wrong people are listening. (Mark)

Hall (1997) asserts that within “certain historical moments”, dominant narratives are constructed, cementing memories that maintain the status quo. “Historic moments” such as the genesis of the democratic era within South Africa in 1994 resulted in distinct shifts of political discourse, supposedly subjugating the narratives of ex-conscripts. These dominant and official memories, allied to the meta-narratives of the state, have allowed for the discontinuities or gaps for counter-memories to emerge (Lipsitz 1990, Williams 1977). In this sense Hall’s (1997) notion that those in power have the ability to dominate, selectively represent and uphold certain histories have in turn prompted the proliferation of *sites of counter-memory*, most notably for ex-conscripts, within the digital domain in the form of social media groups and blogs.

Yet, as Lipsitz (2001: 213) notes, counter-memory “relies on [both] myth and aspects of history”, but is also “suspicious of both categories”. In this sense, counter-memory embraces the ambiguity of memory but remains committed “to detach events from the fabric of any larger [or dominant] history”. Lipsitz’s concept of counter-memory relies on peripheral spaces of expression, or *sites of counter-memory*, where a process of “reframing and refocusing” can occur. Of course, the relative anonymity of the internet and social media platforms are ideally situated as *sites of counter-memory* but conversely suited to perpetuating a nostalgic revisiting of the past.

In this sense, I propose that counter-memory has the ability to skirt nostalgia, and vice versa, in what Zemblyas (2015) describes as a “survival mechanism” to make sense out of conflicting and traumatic experiences. This need by conscripts to express counter-narratives, which are often imbued with a nostalgic gaze that looks fondly on the past, have found a home in the digital space, particularly on social media platforms such as Facebook or YouTube. Zemblyas (2015) notes that scholars should not be dismissive of the advantages of nostalgia, and here I add, particularly when it intersects with counter-memory, to gain fresh “critical perspectives” of the manner in which ex-conscripts grapple with feelings of loss, whiteness and the ambiguity of memory within a post-apartheid space.

Social Media as a virtual site of counter-memory and nostalgia

Comminos (2013) draws attention to the advantages and “untapped potential” of digital spaces, or information and communication technologies (ICT), to act as a means to “enhance post-conflict reconstruction processes”(3) whereas Gary Baines (2012) writes in detail about the Internet’s role, specifically social media and blogs, as archives of memory and spaces of “dissenting discourses” for *white* SADF veterans. The internet offers a safe haven for the counter-memories of ex-conscripts to take root and enter discursive spaces where many ex-conscripts often reminisce about a golden era of moral, political and economic well-being, perpetuating the myth of white excellence.

Social media platforms such as Facebook serve the needs of ex-conscripts intent on explaining why “they were part of the SADF”, at times perpetuating an outmoded form of nationalist government reasoning, that the SADF played a major role in stemming the tide of the *rooi gevaar* (communism). This shifting of attention from the complicity of the individual, namely the ex-conscript, to an amorphous political ideology such as communism was often encountered on social media platforms. Brian’s YouTube comment poses questions whether the commonplace blaming of communism for past Southern African conflicts is simply a diversionary tactic to shift of responsibility or complicity away from the ex-conscript:

Im (sic) English Im (sic) proud of my 10 years part-time in the SADF. I miss those days. I look back now with pride and it made me the right wing anti-Marxist I am today... im (sic) 67 now and im (sic) fit strong and ready to serve again. Fuck communism. (Brian)⁶

As Baines (2012) rightly notes, the online discourses of ex-conscripts are peppered with SADF slang, incorporating coded and often profane terms that defined SADF conscript hyper-masculinities and a racialised logic. The following comment from a SADF Facebook group member attempts to re-position the role of conscripts in the present by means of memory:

If it wasn’t for our sacrifices this country would have gone to the dogs long ago. Some troops paid the ultimate price and now we are treated as non-citizens in the “new” South Africa. We need to tell our stories. What’s the point of a past if the ANC won’t allow us to remember. Unity is strength! (Gert)

Additionally, I want to draw attention to the relative anonymity of the internet as a means to buttress a sense of whiteness in post-apartheid South Africa. Baines (2012: 7) writes that whites “share in the collective responsibility for upholding the apartheid system”, yet many

⁶ Visit <https://youtu.be/SId3er16QeQ> to view the video, titled *Brothers in Arms*, on YouTube.

believe that South Africa’s “economic and political stability”, and general infrastructure is the legacy of the pre-democratic era. Furthermore, online posts demonstrating black incompetence at institutional levels, whether within the SANDF or government structures, tends to become focalised on social media platforms, often drawing nostalgic comparisons to the *old* South Africa, and “how things really worked back then”. This is particularly apparent when comparisons are drawn between the old SADF and SANDF of the post-apartheid era. Here, Simon draws comparisons between the SADF and SANDF on YouTube:

As an ex-SADF 84 /85...this video looks rather potent. The sad truth is that today, thanx (sic) to the way things are in SA today, the current army would find the Salvation army a formidable opponent. (Simon)⁷

These comparisons inevitably position whiteness as superior, normative and invisible, alluding to Steyn and Conway’s (2010) argument that whiteness in the democratic era is in a state of crisis. For ex-conscripts experiencing a racial and masculine “crisis”, social media platforms become collective *comfort zones*, where they can reconnect and relive the past, escaping what Cafario (2013: 32) refers to as the “ambivalent, unstable, guilty mesh surrounding white South African identity”. Although social media platforms such as Facebook and YouTube are fertile mnemonic landscapes where counter-memories can take root, they conversely act as exclusively white spaces, often shrouded in nostalgia and military camaraderie. Yet, within the insular and often racially ring-fenced confines of ex-conscript and SADF veterans Facebook groups, white ex-conscripts often pay tribute to fallen black comrades who died during the Border War. I pose the question of whether the honouring of fallen black SADF soldiers are indirect allusions to whiteness, “through reference to a discourse of blackness” (88)? I would argue this honouring of black soldiers by white ex-conscripts simply perpetuates the invisibility of whiteness? The vast majority of white conscripts would have rarely encountered professional black soldiers, and were more likely to encounter blacks engaged in menial tasks

⁷ Visit <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HTSKA05jDzw> to view the video, titled *SADF*, on YouTube.

as labourers or gardeners on military bases, and certainly not as professional soldiers on a day-to-day basis. Therefore, the recognition of fallen black soldiers on social media sites is not an only an expression of camaraderie, but also a mutation of white guilt, “a largely unarticulated sentiment” that Caforio (2013) and Steyn (2001) note is deeply embedded within the psyche of South African whiteness.

Shifts in whiteness and masculinity since 1994, the advent of the democratic dispensation, have also led to instabilities for white men of the apartheid-era, particularly ex-conscripts, resulting in feelings of marginalisation, victimisation and a loss of identity. Allied to a reticence to abandon apartheid-era notions of whiteness and masculine hegemony, increasing numbers of ex-conscripts have resorted to carving out nostalgic comfort zones within online environments. The virtual articulations of ex-conscripts concur with Caforio’s argument that whites have embarked on composing a series of “*petit* narratives” in an attempt to “explain and promote” how being white (and a male) should be constructed in a contested present.

The *Old Warriors of the SADF* Facebook group is a good example of a *comfort zone* for ex-SADF conscripts and permanent force personnel.⁸ The group’s motto “We Served With Honour. Core Values: Honour - Integrity - Dignity - Selflessness - Unity - Communication - Association” promotes camaraderie and regularly honours fallen SADF soldiers, but also acts as a platform for collective counter-memories to be formulated, albeit at times with nostalgic overtones. The photographic archives of ex-conscripts are not only visual reminders of a bye-gone era but also personal photographic signatures of “flesh-witnessing” and as “having been there”. These memorial attempts at re-establishing a sense of presence, diminishing complicity and legitimacy, albeit among former comrades, possibly amplify present instabilities of whiteness, masculinity, and the deep-seated inertia of white apartheid-era masculinities. The need for ex-conscripts to re-affirm themselves, and more so restore their dignity, appears to be a primary concern of social media groups.

⁸ Visit <https://www.facebook.com/www.oldwarriors.of.the.sadf/> (Old Warriors of the SADF)

The *Facebook SADF Veterans Organization's* mission statement strives “to restore the dignity, integrity, hope and honour and attend to the needs and rights of all pre-1994 members of the South African Defence Forces”. Davis and Starn's (1989) pre-social media era statement argues that counter-memories encourage “methodological diversity”, where “memory is treated in terms of experience, ideas, images, forms of textuality and philosophical investigation”(5). This is certainly the case for many SADF social media groups, where photographs, anecdotes and political discussions have become digital expressions of shared memory. However, these digital spaces are exclusive and reject those who have had no “firsthand knowledge of what it was like in the SADF” (Baines 2012: 12). Here, Gary, a member of the BORDER WAR 1966-1989 Facebook group takes offence to a post by an individual “posing” as a conscientious objector:

This week my blood boiled as I heard the story, of a man now 60. Who when the call up came to his school. Hid in the toilet. Did not register, ducked and dived being called up. Happily living a carefree hippy existence. While his brother did his army, all his friends did their thing. He now indicates he was a conscientious objector. I shot back, “you were nothing of the sort, but a leech, a *jippo gat*, a *sleg etter*” and all other names he probably does not understand. Because after all he never went and heard them.

There were the objectors, but they did community service for 2 years and wore blue overalls. There were those who studied first, went later or never went due to on-going studies. There were those, due to their citizenship(sic) were not eligible for a call-up, some did not go. Some went anyway(I have Brit frient(sic) who went).I am at peace with this group. (Barry)⁹

Barry respects objectors who did “community service”, and even those who avoided the SADF by means of prolonged studies, or foreign citizenship. For Barry, these offences to memory are

⁹ This comment can be found on the Facebook group *Grensoorlog/Border War* (posted: 22/06/2016).

honour bound and contravenes what Baines (2012: 12) refers to as “having been there”, which remains a “prerequisite for providing an authentic account” for many SADF conscripts and veterans. This holds true for many SADF social media groups, that actively *block* members who have not served in the SADF, essentially functioning as closed communities that require a vetting process prior to admission. In this sense, when counter-memories are expressed on social media groups they remain insularised and are prevented by entering larger discursive spaces by the gatekeepers (or administrators) of social media groups. These counter-memories rarely enter the public domain, where they can actually effect “mainstream currents in order to redirect the flow” (Zembylas 2015: 219).

Therefore, although social media platforms serve as receptive collective environments for ex-conscript counter-memories to emerge, these narratives do appear hesitant to move beyond their digital *comfort zones*. This sense of reticence ultimately serves to draw the wagons of Eldmann’s “discursive *laagers*” closer, thereby prolonging the ongoing silences that are often associated with ex-conscript narratives. Again, the need for ex-conscripts and SADF veterans to engage and share their histories rarely move beyond ex-SADF communities, and here I include the surge of printed publications relating to the SADF and Border War that have graced bookstore shelves over the past decade. The target market for SADF narratives, particularly within the medium of print, remains the ex-conscript or SADF veteran. This insularised sense of community also extends to the more intimate spaces of family and friends, be it at the dinner table or the *braai*, where so-called army talk remains the preserve of only those who “have been there”.

Nonetheless, scholars should not view the expressions of ex-conscripts within the digital landscape as closed or limited, but rather as the first tentative steps to give voice to their memories and shared histories. The memories and narratives of ex-conscripts are by no means homogeneous, but form part of a diverse array of intricate and complex reflections between past and present, and will no doubt continue to oscillate between the two vastly different ideologies of the past and present. Furthermore, the digital *comfort zones* of collective

counter-memory present intriguing spaces for further research, and beg the question: Where to next? As Baines (2102: 14) notes, “it remains to be seen whether the growing noise of these disembodied voices are ever likely to achieve a critical mass”.

Locales of camaraderie

During the interview process, a number of participants expressed it was easier to discuss their experiences with a fellow ex-conscript. Participants felt I would understand their experiences better, and in this sense, fellow ex-conscripts felt that our shared histories would serve as a key to speak openly and frankly. One such participant explained that his family, and those who had not served, would *never* understand national service in the SADF, and in this instance, he was not referring to the horrors of combat, but rather his experiences as a conscript during basic training. Gary Baines (2015: 90-91) draws attention to Harari’s studies of military memoirs that describe the concept of “flesh-witnessing”, positioning individuals who have actually lived the experience as authentic “experiential authorities”. It is important to note that Baines observes that employing a “we were there” logic ultimately serves to “invoke authority”, and prevent other individuals such as “family members or scholars” from speaking. Here, Walter explains that he can only talk about his experiences among friends “who were there”:

Only amongst friends and pretty much those who had been through the same experience. It is difficult to talk about it to others as they do not have a reference point to relate to. I was in the school cadets, Voortrekkers and then the army. Few people except those guys who have been there will understand those times. I guess it’s like anything in life. (Walter)

Although the interview process was the nexus of this study, it was among the most informal, and at times intimate gatherings of white South African masculinity, namely the *braai*, that “army stories” would bubble to the surface with alarming candour.

The uniquely South African culinary practice of preparing meat over an open fire is referred to as a *braai*, originating from the Afrikaans word, *braaivleis*. A *braai* is perceived as a traditionally male and Afrikaner domain, although South Africans of all races and cultures are passionate about *braaing*. The public holiday National Heritage Day (24th September) is unofficially referred to as National Braai Day, a moniker conceived by a chef, Jan Scannell, aka Jan Braai, with Emeritus Archbishop Desmond Tutu lending social credibility to the event by becoming the patron of National Braai Day in 2007 (Joubert 2012).

The South African *braai* has long been acknowledged as a space of cultural belonging and socialising among South African males, particularly among white Afrikaner males. The *braai* is a gendered signifier of masculine identity, bonding and camaraderie, yet also acts, as what I refer to, as a *locale of camaraderie* for the ex-conscript. Joubert (2012) cites Paponnet-Cantat's (2003: 11) assertion that "culinary traditions translate a sense of national belonging, ...as well as [acting as] a marker of collective identity formation". A *braai* gathers and then teases the rarely articulated narratives of ex-conscripts to life, at times aided by the consumption of alcohol. Nonetheless, once these narratives are given voice, it is only those males "that have been there" that are *permitted* to contribute to the conversation. In this sense, ex-conscript conversations within a *locale of camaraderie*, are largely age and gender exclusive interactions, where those who were not part of the experience of "flesh-witnessing" are shifted to the periphery of the conversation. Shaun explains further:

I think it's difficult for men of our age [the conscription era] who didn't go to the army. It's as if they missed out on a life changing experience and will never understand what it was for those of us who experienced it. I think some of them feel slightly embarrassed when we start chatting about our army days around a *braai*, for example. Understandably, it's not something they can relate to. It's like having never played rugby, and everyone around you is talking rugby. To be honest, it's like having been in a secret society that no one really wants to talk about. (Shaun)

Neitzel and Welzer (2012) draw attention to the importance of the *group*, and specifically camaraderie within military spaces, where the *group* exerts far more influence over the *individual*. Neitzel and Welzer (2012: 336) cite Stouffer's 1948 study that "ideological convictions, political views, and personal motivations" are of secondary importance within "the context of a group". In other words, the relationship with one's comrades outweighs everything else. This is evident in the relationships of ex-conscripts and veterans, who often form longstanding friendships after their military service. Therefore, *locales of camaraderie*, such as the *braai*, become safe social environments for former comrades (or ex-conscripts) to share their memories openly. Paul describes army talk around a *braai* as an "ice-breaker", explaining that the topic of conversation "always comes round to that question":

Yip, we all talk, it is a great *braai* conversation maker, also an ice-breaker, somehow after enough *vleis* (meat) and *dop* (alcohol), it always comes round to that question, so where were you? (Paul)

The manner in which these memories are given voice within these spaces is intriguing. These conversations are often marked with a sense of one-upmanship, bravado and infused with nostalgia, "a longing for the good old days". Neitzel and Welzer (2012) note that this is most likely because bragging and exaggeration are common elements of day-to-day conversation. Many fireside ex-conscript narratives are fuelled further by alcohol and tinged with humour. Yet, at times these narratives do take on darker hues, such as Johan's story, which he relayed to fellow ex-conscripts at a *braai*:

I wasn't on the Border, but I had a hell of a tough time during basics. We *kakke*d off big-time! Our corporal had noticed that one of the guys wasn't pulling his weight. He said that we need to sort it out as a group, or else we would all get punishment drill till basics ended., and that was weeks ago A guy called Smit wasn't preparing for inspection properly. One night, while he was asleep, the guys put bars of soap in their socks and let him have it. It was like that scene in the movie *Full Metal Jacket*. The guy

cried the whole night. His body was black and blue. I can't say it was right or wrong what we did. (Johan)

I personally witnessed on a number of occasions the manner in which ex-conscripts shift the conversation to their military pasts, often around a *braai* or after a meal. In most instances, narratives tend to cascade in succession between interlocutors. Once the topic of conscription is broached, stories are offered for comment and the “taking-turns” rules for a conversation ensue (Lerner 1996). There are also notable physical shifts among the interlocutors, that involves the closing of ranks, a possible pre-emptive drawing up of a conversational *laager*. The conversational circle closes, yet the *braai* (or fire) remains the hub. This results in a closing of ranks, meaning “those who were not there” are marginalised, and shifted to the periphery of the conversation. Lerner (1996) writes of the “pro-social” effects of fire, in that it engenders conversation and intimacy. Given the cultural significance of the *braai* for white South African males, particularly Afrikaners, and fire’s associative “pro-social” effects, it comes as no surprise that ex-conscript memories find a home around the *braaiivleis*. The following is an excerpt from a conversation I had in 2016 with Jeremy, about ex-conscripts reminiscing around a *braai*:

I think a *braai* acts like a microcosm of a social media group, but the obvious difference is that it's occurring in physical reality. One guy, normally someone who was in the army, puts a story out there, much like *posting* a photo on a social media group, and before you know it other guys who were in the SADF are making comments and contributing to his story. It has this strange snowball effect, and suddenly the whole conversation swings to the past. Ja, it's pretty amusing how no one really talks about the bad stuff. I'm surprised how some guys sugar coat the whole affair as if it was a two-year holiday camp. I wonder how many of their stories are truthful. And then some guys just keep quiet. They just hang around the edges of the conversation, but I suppose that's a lot like social media too. You never know who's lurking in the shadows. (Jeremy)

Jeremy's concludes his observation by drawing attention to the silences of ex-conscripts, an area that has been examined in depth by a number of scholars, including Baines (2012),

The *near* silences of ex-conscript

Baines (2012: 78) “treats [the] silence [of SADF soldiers] as a collective phenomenon”, where it can be “institutional, consensual or strategic”. For Baines, the silence of SADF conscripts has its origins within the strictures of apartheid and is directly linked to state enforced silences. These institutionalised silences were one of many impressions of white apartheid ideology, part of a means of preserving a racist hegemony. The survival of the Nationalist apartheid regime and its securocrats demanded that SADF conscripts were sworn to silence and were prohibited from revealing details of their military service, particularly in the so-called operational areas or townships. Photography was forbidden, and the letters of conscripts were censored.

Additionally, these collective silences have been carried into the present and butt up against the democratic era due to feelings of complicity, allied to a “consensual silence concerning possible human rights abuses during apartheid” (Baines 2012). Yet, these silences are also inextricably bound to notions of forgetting and white amnesia (Vinitzky-Seroussi and Teeger 2010). A number of ex-conscripts simply prefer to forget and not talk about their experiences in the SADF. Andries (2016) explains, “It’s been put in the box with all the other things that didn’t happen”, and prefers to remain silent, whereas Gareth (2016) discusses his experiences as a SADF conscript, “very rarely and only with guys that were also in it”.

Dominant forms of collective memory are often expressed in what Vinitzky-Seroussi and Teeger (2010: 1103) refer to as “formal and informal rituals, historical museums, central and peripheral monuments, history books, school curricula and much more”. These dominant forms of collective memory have a tendency to side-line the memories of those who do not fit the template of dominant discourses, whether along cultural, political, social and even racial lines. This appears to be the case for ex-conscripts, who feel their silences are the product of

being written out of history, or that they are perceived as instruments of the apartheid regime. William's silence is rooted in avoidance and "being made to feel guilty as a white person":

Look, I prefer to remain silent on the topic of the SADF. I never saw combat, wasn't in the townships and had a pretty easy time in the army, but I don't like being made to feel guilty as a white person. It's difficult enough. These days it's better to just keep your head as white, and keep to yourself. Say something slightly off-centre and they'll haul you before the Human Rights Commission. It's a whole lot easier to zip your lips. My wife knows I was in the army, but I never talk about it. (William 2017)

Yet are these *silences* truly *silent*? The plethora of books, social media groups and public commemorations involving ex-SADF conscripts and veterans are by no means an indication of a complete collective *absence of voice*. The collective silences of ex-SADF conscripts have evolved into what Vinitzky-Seroussi and Teeger (2010: 1112) refers to as a "covert silence", which is not a complete silence, but rather a silence where an uncomfortable past is "hinted at but not explored", so as to prevent "conflict over representations of shameful and contested pasts". In this regard, I was compelled to ask whether the silences of ex-conscripts are a "compromise" of sorts, within the post-apartheid space. Covert silences tend to permit acts of remembering, yet remain cognisant of dominant discourses. These "covert silences" avoid overt political references, at least in public forums such as social media groups, although lapses do occur, particularly within social media comment threads, where I have observed political or racist statements.

Furthermore, do the "near silences" of ex-conscripts also imply a sense of white discomfort, where the privileged position of white males in society has been systematically eroded since the end of apartheid? Caforio (2013) points to the difficulties that ex-conscripts have experienced in expressing what it means to white in the present. The notion that whiteness is "invisible and normative" (87) remains a deeply contested issue in white South African society, and in the case of ex-conscripts, is entangled with a need to avoid complicity or public admission of having been part of an institution that defended a racist regime. As one participant puts it:

The reason I don't talk about my time in the SADF is that you are immediately labelled as an active supporter of apartheid. Am I the guilty party? I had little choice, I was press-ganged into service as a conscript. I suppose I did have a choice, either jail or the SADF. Besides, white society or more specifically white males had been brainwashed by the system since an early age. School, church and even my immediate family prepared me for national service. My parents weren't activists, they were typical middle-class whites. What do you expect? Can you blame me simply going with the flow, when as ex-SADF national servicemen we have been sold down the river? (Matthew)

Matthew believes silence offers a path of least resistance in a contested present. Interestingly, Matthew's statement echoes the sentiments of many other ex-conscripts who feel betrayed and furthermore discursively positioned as a victim (Cafario 2013). There is no doubt that SADF conscripts had to endure privations and all manner of suffering during their national service (Blake 2010, Thompson 2006), yet they rarely see the "particularity" of their whiteness (Rothenberg and Munshi 2005). Ex-conscripts enter the present oblivious of their whiteness, relying on frames of reference constructed during the height of apartheid. This reliance on whiteness as a normative yet invisible means of representation allows for what hooks (1992: 167) refers to as the "myth of sameness". This sense of "sameness" levels the playing field of race, and allows for the ex-conscript to avoid complicity and position himself as a victim. Once positioned as a *victim*, the ex-conscript can conveniently discard the past, envelop it in silence or discard memory altogether by means of forgetting.

Forgetting as a "humiliated silence"

The discarding of memory is closely linked to Connerton's (2008: 67) concept of "forgetting as a humiliated silence", specifically in that the act of forgetting may be a necessary attempt to bury experiences "beyond expression and the reach of memory" (68). The reasons for this mode of necessary forgetting are indeed complex, and it would be remiss of me to propose

a generalised view that ex-conscripts want to employ forgetting as a means of relinquishing responsibility or erasing humiliating experiences. This need to relinquish responsibility is portrayed by Michael's statement, that clearly demonstrates his pressing need to forget not only his experiences as a conscript but his entire childhood. For Michael, his youth is best forgotten:

This may seem strange but my reasons to avoid my past, and better still completely erase it has less to do with trauma but more to do with how I feel about being white. On one level I want to forget that I'm white, that I grew up in white apartheid South Africa, went to a white school, went to a largely white university was called-up into a white army. All this stuff about race has exhausted me over decades. It feels all too South African and I want to put it behind me. I don't feel ashamed, perhaps part of me does, but I feel thoroughly exhausted by my white skin. I've made plans to leave the country which might well help me forget. (Michael)

As Connerton notes, "forgetting as a humiliated silence" is perhaps paradoxical because humiliation is so difficult to forget. For many ex-conscripts, the process of induction into the SADE, and particularly basic training were humiliating rites of passage and best forgotten. Perhaps for some ex-conscripts, the finality of forgetting is a form of *antidote to memory* and is simply employed as a survival mechanism. Here, participant, Craig gives his reasons for needing to forget:

Besides being gay, I was a pretty sensitive guy and the army did me no good. It didn't make a man out of me, and it certainly didn't engender any sense of national pride. I wasn't a team player and struggled throughout basic training, which was very tough. On a physical level, it was fine, but the psychological abuse was intolerable. Fellow troops were fine, in fact, some of them were pretty supportive. Most of us

were university graduates, but our corporal was a complete prick. I took me years to feel whole again, and then only I managed to survive the experience by wilfully forgetting my national (dis)service. (Craig)

Conclusion

The manner in which ex-conscripts remember, silence or forget their militarised childhoods and experiences of induction into the SADF remain vitally important reflections of white male ambiguity in a contested South Africa (Draper 1999, Baines and Vale 2008, Doherty 2014, Edlmann 2015). Their memories are undoubtedly rife with contrast, contradiction and are by no means homogeneous, yet remain inevitably bound to a deeply affective past.

Whether their memories assume the guise of collective or individual counter-memory, nostalgic reminiscing or become “covert” (Vinitzky-Seroussi and Teeger 2010) or “humiliated silences” (Connerton 2008) they remain revealing expressions of white males who still play an important role in South African society. According to Anwar (2017) only “23% of the shares traded on the exchange are held – directly and indirectly – by black South Africans.”¹⁰ Despite the protestations of ex-conscripts to the contrary, that they have been systematically marginalized by the black majority, white males of the conscription era remain a potent economic force within the post-apartheid landscape, still firmly gripping the economic reins of power in many sectors of the market.

How these men remember or forget their militarised pasts continue to ripple throughout South African society. Family and close friends remain at the epicentre of where memory impacts the present, and whether memory is given voice or silenced, its effects continue to ripple throughout broader South African society, irrespective of race or gender. Memories

¹⁰ Also see: <http://ww2.oldmutual.co.za/old-mutual-investment-group/insights/magazines/tomorrow-2016/who-owns-the-jse> for a report by Old Mutual titled “WHO OWNS THE JSE?”

of militarised childhoods and conscription into the SADF continue to serve as frames of reference, and whether they are discarded or remain templates for behaviour, the collective weight of memory endures, directly or indirectly, and remains a cumulative burden for all South Africans.





DIE!

I'M NOT A TERRORIS...
ARGH!



NUTRIA Exhibition installation artwork detail, The Castle of Good Hope, Cape Town 2017 (photograph by Stephen Symons)



CHAPTER **SIX**

Conclusion



Figure 6 Detail from the installation piece, *Staaldak, webbing en geweer*, Nutria Exhibition 2017
(photograph: Stephen Symons)

Chapter 6 - Conclusion



I was conscripted into the South African Defence Force at the end of 1989. I entered the army as a self-righteous, left-wing activist – fresh from a university culture of anti-apartheid demonstrations, mass-meetings and playing at being a revolutionary. As I was too selfish to spend five years in jail, I reported for service, donned the uniform, refused to carry a rifle, and became rather good at being a useless soldier. And then, halfway through my basic training, Nelson Mandela was released and I realised I was in a very privileged position – I could witness this momentous time from within the SADF. My plan was to record the collapse of the well-oiled machine that had propped up apartheid for decades. The plan didn't quite work out. The well-oiled machine turned out to be a clumsy, drunken mass of humanity – a mix of psychopaths, cowards, philosophers, killers, breadwinners, thieves, walking wounded and ordinary guys trying to get through it one piece. But I also despised the self-righteous kid I was when I went in.

— Greig Coetzee, *White men with weapons*, 1996¹

Introduction

This study has aimed to provide an extended meditation on how memories of militarised childhoods and induction into the SADF of white males enter the post-apartheid landscape. Both whiteness and masculinity are primary determinants as to how ex-conscripts give voice to their memories in a contested and ambiguous present. These articulations of memory are not necessarily homogeneous, whether swimming against the currents of dominant political discourses in the form of counter-memory or simply reverting to the relative comfort zones of nostalgic reminiscing (Boym 2001). In some cases, ex-conscripts have allowed the burden of memory to slip into “covert silences” or lapse into purposeful forgetting. Nonetheless, memory remains a powerful presence in the lives of ex-conscripts, framing decision-making and perceptions of self in a post-apartheid space.

¹ The foreword to the script of Greig Coetzee's awarding winning play, *White men with weapons*, first presented at The Square Space Theatre, University of Natal, Durban on the 11th March 1996.

For many ex-conscripts, their ideological frames of reference have changed significantly since the advent of the democratic era, yet the invisibility of whiteness and an apartheid mindset of *othering* race groups tends to persist. Little has changed to shift white economic and social privilege, although many ex-conscripts would argue to the contrary, stating for example, that Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) has pushed middle-aged white males to the periphery of a shrinking job market. Additionally, many ex-conscripts believe increasing crime levels in South Africa, and the spillage of crime into predominantly white suburbia are indicative of rents in the social fabric of the country, primarily due to the incompetence of a largely black and ineffectual police force and justice system. The desire by many of the participants of this study to compare the past with the present, or more specifically the apartheid-era with the democratic era of ANC governance, are perhaps diversionary attempts to avoid issues of complicity or open acknowledgement of the role that conscripts played during the apartheid-era. In this sense, open acknowledgement does not necessarily position the ex-conscript as a victim or perpetrator but encourages further conversation and engagement.

I would argue a reluctance to converse on the part of ex-conscripts, and white society at large continues to devolve into acts of forgetting, one of many deep impressions that apartheid has made on whiteness. These self-induced silences, on the part of ex-conscripts, was first demonstrated during the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's special Hearing on Conscription in Cape Town 23rd July 1997. According to Marais (2017) only 0.005% of ex-SADF conscripts (35) made submissions. Twenty-two of those ex-conscripts were conscientious objectors and members of the End Conscription Campaign, and were thus "conscientised".

The interwoven nature of whiteness, masculinity, and militarisation is undoubtedly complex and varied, suffusing the largely insular spaces of the digital domain or congenial locales of camaraderie, such as social gatherings or more intimate male spaces such as the *braai*. It is doubtful whether ex-conscript narratives will ever truly enter more mainstream forums of open engagement. Despite numerous publications relating to the SADF and its role in

apartheid society, these publications are rarely self-critical, avoiding issues of compliance or complicity, yet prefer to articulate ex-conscript memories within the realms of military history or as personal memoirs. This avoidance to unpack the deeper socio-political complexities of the role of the ex-conscript provides fertile ground for further scholarly research.

Summary of findings

In terms of the main research question, as to **how ex-SADF conscripts (1980-1990) navigate memories of induction into the SADF in post-apartheid society**, I have come to understand that the militarisation of white males and the presence of the SADF in apartheid society was pervasive, and memories of these life events continue to echo in the present, assuming various guises and modes of expression. Militarisation and conscription did not only affect those white males who were inducted into the SADF and went on to perform military service. This view is myopic, in that *all* white South African males were groomed for conscription from an early age, assisted by the various organs of the Nationalist regime including Christian National Education, youth organisations, the church, and largely state-controlled press and media.

Memories of induction into the SADF are not restricted to the period of physically entering the military, but cover an expanse of time, traversing militarised childhoods prior to induction, which in turn aided the shaping of militarised masculinities. Although the initial period of basic training extended beyond physical induction into the SADF, it functioned as a cumulative act, a rite of passage in the making of white militarised male bodies and minds.

Attempts by participants to make sense of this metamorphosis from civilian to soldier tended to shift responsibility towards those in authority. In some instances, participants employed phrases like “we were brainwashed”, “coerced” or “seduced” by authority figures such as fathers, teachers and pastors. According to Coetzee (2001: 30) “the ideology of patriarchy” is a central tenet within South African society, particularly in apartheid-era Afrikaner society,

where the role of the father was “absolutised”, “idolised” and “extended to other areas of society”. Therefore, questioning conscription during apartheid was akin to challenging the patriarchy of state, which oversaw the processes of formulating and entrenching white militarised masculinities. Furthermore, the concept of the conscript as “state-property”,² or as an “instrument of the state” was impressed on the conscript. For example, conscripts were “charged with damage to state property” if they attempted self-harm, or injured a fellow conscript. In this sense, a number of participants felt justified in arguing that their bodies (and minds) were no longer their own, that they had relinquished a responsibility of self, and were simply being manipulated by powers beyond their control.

A number of participants spoke of the manner in which religion was used to justify SADF and apartheid reasoning, including a strategic blurring of the lines between church and state. These ideological adjustments to reality allowed the regime to sustain notions of white supremacy and “other” or objectify the enemy. The apartheid regime’s construction of a politics of fear, most notably the *rooi gevaar*, presented tangible threats to white society that, according to the regime, could only be halted by means of military force, thus justifying the need for conscription (Conway 2012).

A revealing aspect of this study was an overwhelming need by ex-conscripts to justify *why they were conscripted into the SADF*. In almost all instances, ex-conscripts spoke of the need to stem the tide of communism as a means of justification. The regime’s ideological adjustments of reality took place over decades, ultimately leading to what Coetzee (2001: 301) refers to as a form of societal “tunnel vision”, which tended to focus on certain “states of affairs” while ignoring others. In this sense, the perception of external threat, initially beginning with communism, would be inevitably allied to the threat of race, namely the *swart gevaar*, which presented a far more intimate and domestic fear to whiteness in South Africa. The concept of the SADF conscript as a defender of home and hearth, of Christian values and the fabric

² See Kris Marais’ poem *Conscripts, State Property* (p. 256) in the 2013 Africa Ablaze anthology (Africa Sun Press) compiled by Patricia Schonstein.

of white society remains enmeshed in the memory of many ex-conscripts, and tends to divert attention from open and frank acknowledgment, yet also prompts interstices of uncertainty to manifest in the present. These gaps are often rife with confusing and conflicting impressions of the role of the conscript in apartheid-era South Africa, although in some cases ex-conscripts have grappled with memories of their militarised pasts openly, admitting that they were not merely cogs in the apartheid machine. These ex-conscripts appear to be part of a growing minority who are engaging openly and antagonistically with their pasts, whether by means of one-on-one engagements or by means of broader public demonstrations of a re-articulation of memory. Examples include books such as Paul Morris's *Back to Angola* (2014), or academic interventions, involving ex-conscripts, such as the *Symposium for Conscription* held at the Beyers Naude Centre at Stellenbosch University in early 2016.

By the advent of the 1980s conscription was rooted in the white national psyche, and perceived as a normative and necessary civic duty, inextricably bound to hyper-masculinities and a sense of white prerogative fixed on an essentialist view of race. These ideological frameworks not only placed a largely unspoken burden on white males destined for military service but also exerted stresses on their immediate families and white society at large. Additionally, the interview process revealed that men who avoided, conscientiously objected or resisted military service felt similar pressures and concerns, not unlike those men who were physically inducted into the SADF.

Nonetheless, a number of participants of the study adopted a firm “you had to have been there” mindset and were dismissive of the experiences of those men who “dodged” or delayed their call-up. Interestingly, this sense of disdain for white males who avoided military service is often framed and justified by militarised concepts of honour, integrity and camaraderie, and are inherently insular by nature. This reluctance to gaze beyond obsolete frames of reference rooted in apartheid is indicative of a sense of white disillusionment within the post-apartheid space, and tends to encompass broader white society.

Memories of conscription continue to echo across the white South African national identity, albeit a publicly avoided or self-silenced past (Baines 2015, Gibson 2009, Caforio 2013).

Conscription remains a locus of white memory and masculinity, at times given voice in the home, around the *braai*, or more recently within the digital domain, where collective memories have become digitally memorialised within online large communities. Ex-conscripts remain decision makers and influential role-players in the economy and social fabric of South Africa, prompting continued research and a better understanding of the complexities of their pasts, and the manner in which they navigate the present. However, it remains to be seen if these conversations will ever take place in broader public forums. A pressing need to articulate memories of conscription was observed throughout the interview process, yet only when certain pre-conditions existed that facilitated a comfortable, uncritical environment — a safe space that held no surprises for participants.

Study limitations & recommendations

The most obvious limitation of this study is that it was conducted by a white ex-conscript, a point that might well prompt criticisms of misrepresentation or position the research as subjective. Furthermore, the notion that whiteness, masculinity and memory are fixed and compartmentalised is problematic. I propose that the aforementioned theoretical frameworks are fluid, and are in constant conversation with each other, and in a sense enjoy a complex symbiotic relationship.

Although this research breaks new ground in examining induction and basic training in the SADF within the framework of memory, masculinity, creative visual studies and whiteness, it is recommended that future studies consider the inclusion of black attitudes to conscription, particularly within the context of the SADF's role within the townships, which remains a largely unresearched and sensitive aspect of apartheid histories. Furthermore, scholarly analysis of the experiences of black resistance fighters and SADF conscripts remains limited,

particularly within the theoretical framework of race, militarisation and memory. Here, I include comparisons of the vastly different militarised childhoods of white and black males during apartheid.

Current samplings of participants in studies relating to conscription are predominantly white males, partly because of the mindset that conscription is still perceived as a predominantly male preserve, yet as previously mentioned, its effects were far-reaching, including broader white society. Scholars have tended to focus on conscript experiences from within the SADF, or at times examining the narratives of conscientious objectors, yet the experiences of white males who delayed or escaped their military service have not been researched. Furthermore, scant research has been conducted on the effects of conscription on females or the family unit. Past examples include Cock's investigation of the role of women in the SADF (Cock and Nathan 1989). A more recent example is University of Pretoria masters student, Dominique Niemand's research examining the relationships between white Christian Afrikaner females and conscription during the 1980s. The role of parents, siblings and female attitudes and responses to conscription have received scant attention and provides fertile territory for further research.

This study uncovered an overwhelming need by ex-conscripts to rationalise conscription with continued references to the threat of communism during the apartheid-era, pointing to the success of the regime's ideological programme among white South Africans. Although the Border War certainly included Soviet and Cuban interventions in the form of troops, advisors and weapons, further study is required to grapple with these ideological aftershocks of apartheid, that constantly refer to the so-called *rooi gevaar*, or threat of communism.

Another area that prompts further scholarly attention is the differences in cultural attitudes to conscription between Afrikaans and English speaking ex-conscripts, particularly within the post-apartheid space. Although this thesis skirts the dissimilarities, more specific research will shed light on the internal dynamics and eventual transformation of the SADF's conscript army into the South African National Defence Force of the democratic era.

Final reflections

I would like to conclude my PhD journey with a number of personal reflections. As a parent, I felt compelled to imagine how my parents, and what other fathers and mothers must have felt, facing the inevitability of their sons being inducted into SADF during the 1980s. As the Border War moved towards its climax during the 1980s and internal unrest in the black townships increased, active duty or combat for white conscripts became a real concern. Academic and ECC resistor, Laurie Nathan (Cock and Nathan 1989) noted that conscription was possibly the only real burden white South Africans had to endure during apartheid. I believe this burden was carried silently and at great emotional cost by the parents of conscripts. The apartheid regime's rhetoric of fear necessitated a ubiquitous silence that was impressed on all South Africans, black and white alike, that has taken decades to find its voice. In the case of whites, giving voice to these uncomfortable silences demands an honest articulation of white complicity during apartheid. However painful, unsettling or even traumatic this process of acknowledgement might be, it will no doubt also be cathartic and revealing. This has certainly been the case for me, as an ex-conscript and *child* of the apartheid-era.

This research project has posed more questions than having provided answers, yet it has allowed me to scrutinise my memories of an uncomfortable past under a lens that added a sense of clarity to my position as a white militarised male in a vastly altered present, that in turn pleads for a constructive sharing of the histories of all South Africans. The act of sharing and acknowledging each other's histories, and here I refer to specifically to histories that have been divided for decades along lines of race, will allow for a more human understanding of each other. The legacies of apartheid persist, and both black and white silence actively perpetuate apartheid legacies of racial divisiveness.

Although this research project dealt exclusively with white conscription, it acted as a mirror,

reflecting the deep and endemic pain of all South Africans. Nation-building requires open conversations and admissions of guilt, compliance and complicity before positive construction can commence. Unless these conversations are initiated, whether around the dinner table, *braai*, in larger public or academic spaces, we are doomed to repeat the socio-political imbalances of the past. Exclusionary modes of negating and silencing any history are ultimately destructive and rooted in an apartheid mindset of racial domination.³

South Africa's political future appears to be shifting towards a more populist mode of politics, delineated along lines of an essentialised view of race. Participants of this study expressed deep concerns about their futures, but particularly the futures of their children, yet conversely expressed a reluctance to engage with South Africans of other races. The militarisation of white males and conscription into the SADF is one among many painful and shameful South African histories, and the full extent of its damage will never be quantified. I believe that white inertia remains a crucial determining factor in moving forward in the hope of building a future in which nationality is not preceded by means of race.

³ Here, I refer to Nelson Mandela's opening statement at his defence in the Rivonia treason trial, April 20 1964, "During my lifetime I have dedicated myself to this struggle of the African people. I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die." (Nelsonmandela.org, 2019)



NUTRIA Exhibition installation artwork detail, The Castle of Good Hope, Cape Town, 2017 (photograph: Stephen Symons)

A collage of various textures and objects. It features a dark green woven fabric, a grey textured fabric, a brown button, several heart-shaped pins in various colors (black, light green, brown), and pieces of light brown paper with irregular edges. A metal tool, possibly a stapler or punch, is visible in the lower right corner. The word "REFERENCES" is overlaid in white text on a dark horizontal band.

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Figure 7 Stephen Symons, *Patterns of militarisation* 2017, Digital Illustration

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NUTRIA Exhibition installation artwork detail, The Castle of Good Hope, Cape Town, 2017 (photograph by Stephen Symons)



ADDENDUM



Figure 8 Stephen Symons, *The Horror! The Horror!*, 2016, Digital illustration

Addendum - Part 1

Interview Schedule & Consent to Participate forms





Interview Schedule

Induction

1. What are your first childhood memories of conscription and having to go to the 'army'?
2. Were you a member of a school cadet programme, and if so, were you an active or reluctant participant?
3. Do you remember how you felt about the school cadet programme?
4. Do you have any memories of having to register for military service at the age of 16?
5. If so, please describe the process and how you felt?
6. Do you remember how you felt when you received your first set of call-up papers?
7. Where was your first call-up? (arm of service and unit)?
8. Can you recall your parents' attitudes to conscription, and if so did they hold different opinions of conscription?
9. Can you express what it felt like that only white males had to perform National Service?
10. Did you have any views on apartheid prior to induction into the SADF?
11. At the time, did you feel distinctly different to other racial groups in South Africa?
12. Did you report for duty immediately after high school or did you go to university, college or a technikon?
13. If you decided to study in tertiary institution immediately after school, did tertiary education change your views of apartheid and conscription?
14. Were you aware of the End Conscription Campaign (ECC) and what were your attitudes to the organisation?

Basic Training

15. Can you recall any events or memories of the day of your departure for National Service?
 16. Can you provide an account of a particular event or series of events from basic training that still resonates with you?
 17. Could you discuss any differences between English and Afrikaans speaking conscripts?
 18. Do you feel that basic training was a life-changing experience?
 19. Do you remember your force number?
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Further Questions

20. Did you experience combat during your period of conscription?

You are under no obligation to elaborate on this question.

21. Do you ever talk about your experiences in the SADF, and if so, with whom?

22. How would you feel, as a parent, if your son was conscripted into the military?

23. How do you feel today about having 'served' in the SADF

24. Why do you think you were conscripted into the SADF? Why were you there?

25. Have your opinions of the SADF changed since 1994?

26. Do you think most South Africans have a maligned view of ex-conscripts?

27. What is your profession?

28. Do you have anything further to add?



PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Dear Participant

My name is Stephen Symons and I am a PhD student from the University of Pretoria conducting research on how former conscripts (1980-1990) navigate memories of induction into the SADF in post-apartheid society.

Consequently, I invite you to participate in this research project. You do not stand to benefit from participating in this study. Furthermore, you do not stand to suffer any consequence/ risk or consequence in any way as a result of participation in the study. The interview data gathered by me will be analysed and integrated into my thesis, publications or journal articles. If you agree to be interviewed, and the subsequent data being used in these ways, please indicate so on the attached Consent Form. Furthermore, all data collected will be stored digitally in a safe password protected location for the duration of five years and disposed of correctly when no longer needed.

Due to the nature of the interviews, full anonymity and confidentiality cannot be guaranteed as I will be privy to the identity of the participants. Similarly, the interview data may form part of broader projects and parts of the interviews will be replicated in related projects. My supervisor will also have access to the interviews. Thus only partial confidentiality can be promised due to the fact that some identifying details may be recognised.

Kindly note that the information that you provide as part of your submission will be anonymised. In other words, your interview will be included in my thesis under a pseudonym and in a manner that will make it impossible for you to be identified. However, if you wish to be identified in the research and publications that will flow from this research endeavour, please indicate so – in which case I will include your interview in my thesis under your own name. *(Please Turn Over)*



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Please also note that you may withdraw from this research and your interview data from our database at any point in the future. If you have any questions about the project, please feel free to contact myself or my supervisor at the e-mail addresses or telephone numbers provided below.

CONTACT PERSONS

Researcher: Stephen Symons
Cell 082 569 5607
E-mail *stephensymons@gmail.com*

Supervisors: Dr Siona O'Connell
E-mail *sionaoc@gmail.com*
Prof. Nick Shepherd
E-mail *ns@cas.au.dk*



CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

I, _____, after having read the participant information consent I agree to participate in the research project '*Shadows asking an echo to dance*'- *Navigating ambiguity: How former conscripts (1980-1990) navigate memories of induction into the SADF in post-apartheid society.*

In so doing, I understand that:

The study is taking place in Cape Town and surrounding suburbs.

1. My participation in the study is voluntary
2. I may withdraw from the study at any time by instructing the researcher listed above that I would like my interview data deleted from the archive. I may also refuse to answer an interview question.
3. My interview data will be anonymised.
4. My anonymised interview data could be selected for analysis
5. My anonymised interview data could be selected for publication in a number of outputs generated by the project.
6. I may request that my name be attached to the published narrative if I so wish.
7. Your signed consent form will be stored separately from the responses you provide
8. You may retain this information sheet for reference and contact Stephen Symons via email (stephensymons@gmail.com) if you have any queries.

Signed:

Date:

DD/MM/YEAR



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CONSENT FOR INTERVIEW TO BE RECORDED & TRANSCRIBED

I, _____, after having read both the participant information sheets, give consent for my interview to be recorded and transcribed.

I understand that should I so desire, the audiotaped interview can be deleted after it has been transcribed.

Furthermore, I understand that the recordings will be stored digitally in a safe place that is password protected and only the researcher and his supervisor will have access to the recordings.

Please tick the box if you:

AGREE to have your interview recorded and transcribed.

DO NOT agree to have your interview recorded and transcribed.

Signed:

Date:

DD/MM/YEAR



CONSENT FOR PHOTOGRAPHIC PORTRAIT

I, _____, after having read the participant information sheet give my consent to be photographed and for the photograph to be exhibited in a public exhibition related to this research project.

Furthermore, I understand that the photograph will be stored digitally and only the researcher and his supervisor will have access to the photograph.

Please tick the box if you:

AGREE to have your photograph taken.

DO NOT agree to have your photograph taken.

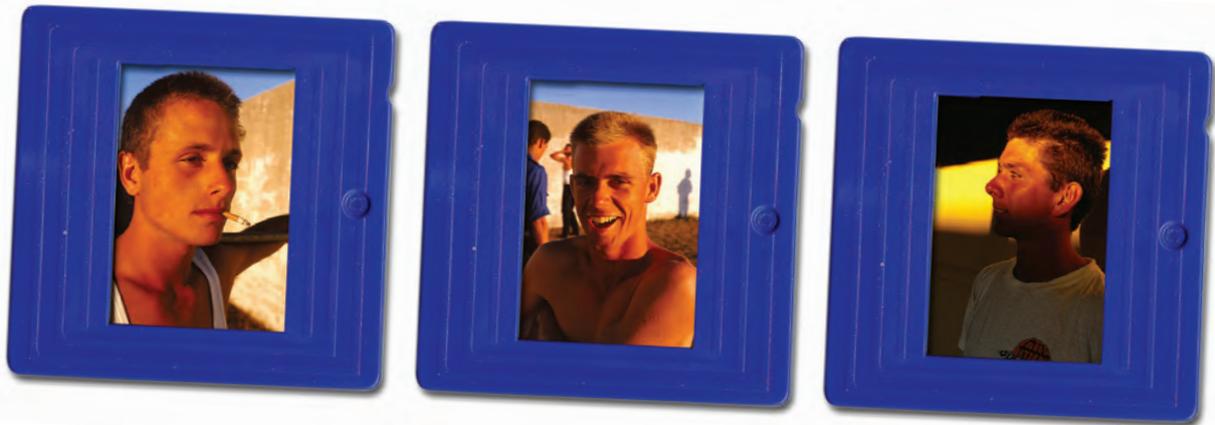
Signed:

Date:

DD/MM/YEAR

Addendum - Part 2

Additional Documents



REF NO. RB/ E40
ENQUIRIES: TELNO 269721

SP SYMONS
22 MATT SYBRAND ROAD
SYBRAND PARK
MOWBRAY
7700

OFFICE OF THE
EXEMPTION BOARD
PRIVATE BAG X281
PRETORIA
0001
88/07/01

POSTPONEMENT OF NATIONAL SERVICE FOR STUDIES

SYMONS SP 82488800 BJ

I REFER TO YOUR CERTIFICATE OF REGISTRATION.

POSTPONEMENT OF NATIONAL SERVICE UNTIL 31 DECEMBER 1988 HAS BEEN APPROVED.

FURTHER POSTPONEMENT OF NATIONAL SERVICE WILL BE SUBJECT TO SATISFACTORY
PROGRESS WITH YOUR STUDIES.

THIS OFFICE MUST BE ADVISED IMMEDIATELY SHOULD YOU TERMINATE OR CHANGE
DIRECTION IN YOUR STUDIES.

YOURS FAITHFULLY

CMDT HJ KEMPEN
SECRETARY EXEMPTION BOARD: COMMANDANT

Figure 8.2 SADF postponement of national service letter for the author, Stephen Symons, 1988.



Telephone : (02281) 42211
 Extension : 130
 Enquiries : Lieutenant Commander B. Weller

SANB/B/102/02 FEB 90

Naval Base Saldanha
 PO Milnavair
 7396

February 1990

Mr and Mrs P.A. Symons
 22 Sybrand Rd
 Sybrand Park
 7700

Dear Mr and Mrs Symons

Stephen has been at the base now for a few days and seems to have settled into his new routine and surroundings. We will encourage him to write to you as soon as possible.

Your son's welfare is of great importance to us. He will be required to adapt to the new environment soon and to make some sacrifices. We urge you to support and encourage him to do his best at all times. It is only with a positive attitude that he will both enjoy and value his training. Furthermore, he will be proud that he is contributing to the defence of our country.

Ensign Callie is Stephen's Divisional Officer for the duration of his basic training. As they are in close contact with each other, I suggest that you direct all queries regarding his welfare or progress directly to the Ensign. I will ensure that all matters are promptly and satisfactorily resolved. You are also welcome to contact me personally if you so wish. Any enquiries to the Chief of the SA Defence Force, the Minister of Defence or other parties, will only be redirected to me for further investigation; so by contacting us directly, an unnecessary delay could be prevented.

During the course Stephen will be given an opportunity to apply for Officer's Selection. Should he be interested, you are advised to have the following documents readily available to forward to him :

- a. Std 10 certificate and symbol sheet or highest educational qualification.
- b. A certified true copy of Birth Certificate or Identity Document.
- c. Two Testimonials (eg from School Principal and Minister).
- d. Written approval (if a minor) signed before a Commissioner of Oaths or Judge.

Figure 8.3 Page one of a letter from SAS Saldanha Naval Base to the author's parents at the commencement of basic training, 1990.

2

We cordially invite you to visit him at Naval Base Saldanha from 10:00 to 17:00 on Sunday 4 March and Sunday 11 March 1990. Kindly liaise with him so as to ensure that you do not visit him on a day that he is on duty.

You are welcome to contact your son by phoning him between 19:00 and 22:30 on weekdays, between 12:30 and 22:30 on Saturdays and between 08:00 and 22:30 on Sundays. We regret that we cannot accept personal calls through the Naval Base exchange.

The telephone numbers at which you can contact your son are as follows :

- a. Public Telephones. (Code 02281) 42814, 41023, 41005, 41035, 41006 and 41031.
- b. Incoming Calls Only. (Code 02281) 42286/7/8/9.

Lastly, I would like to inform you that the Prize Giving Parade will take place on Thursday 22 March 1990 at 14:00, for which you will receive a formal invitation. I sincerely hope that you will be able to attend this important event.

Yours faithfully


(P. C. CRATHORNE)
OFFICER COMMANDING NAVAL BASE SALDANHA : CAPTAIN (SA NAVY)

Figure 8.4 Page two of a letter from SAS Saldanha Naval Base to the author's parents at the commencement of basic training, 1990.

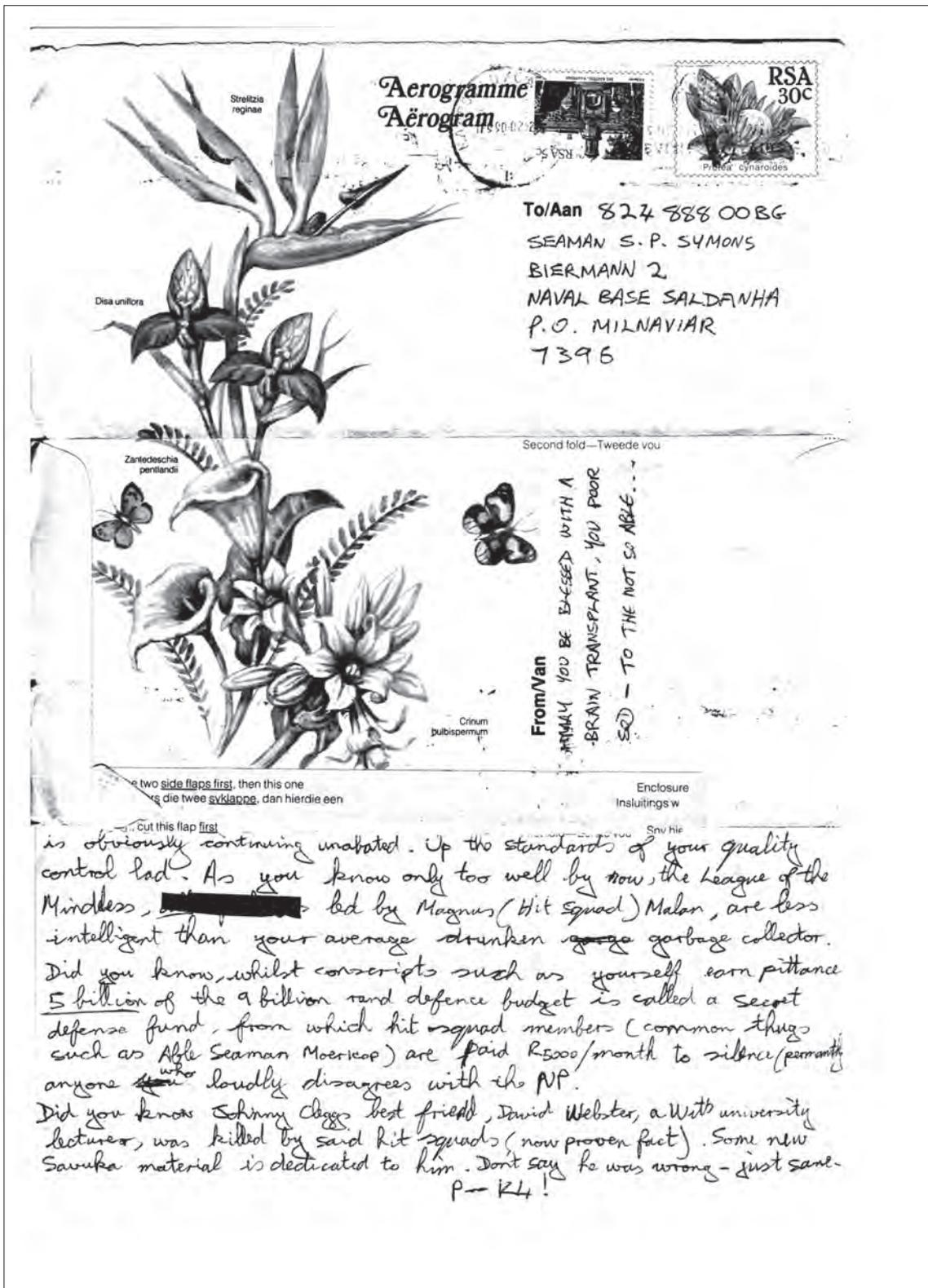


Figure 8.5 Censored letter to the author during basic training, 1990.

①

Monday 19/2/90
1.00am

Dear Mom, Dad and Paul

Hi, how you all. You won't believe this, but here I'm sitting. It's 1.10am, in the quartermaster's office doing my duty watch for the week. I'm what's called the boatswain and I have to make sure the quartermaster stays wide awake ~~between~~ ^{between} 1.00am and 2.00am. After 2.00am someone relieves me and I go back to bed. There's ~~nothing~~ nothing happening now so I thought I'd drop you a line. The quartermaster, who's just ~~at~~ ^{an} 17 year old national serviceman is so engrossed in his book, I'd thought it would be best to write than waste time with idle conversation.

Well, it looks like it's going to be a typical Saldanha day - hot and dusty with mist in the late afternoon. That's the normal weather pattern for this place. The dust ~~is~~ ~~is~~ is quite incredible. It seems to get into every nook and cranny making cleaning things like rifles an absolute waste of time. It's actually quite nice to be up so late because there's ~~no one~~ ^{no} no one around, everyone's sleeping, and it's good to be by yourself for awhile. This place gets a little overcrowded at times so it makes a change to have a little privacy even though it's at an odd hour. I'm becoming a professional at time wasting.

Sorry but my rifle keeps falling against my leg!
 Peter's diary

Figure 8.6 Excerpt from a letter by the author to his parents during basic training, 1990.

NUTRIA

IMPRINTS OF CONSCRIPTION INTO THE SADF

The exhibition *NUTRIA - Imprints of Conscription into the SADF* seeks to interrogate the manner in which memories of the conscription of white males into the former South African Defence Force (SADF) enter a contested present. South African society was gradually intruded upon and militarised by the Nationalist government, reaching its apogee in the mid-1980s. This involved a nuanced and complex ideological architecture in order to preserve the status quo of white minority rule. The post-post apartheid space and its dominant political discourses have prompted memories of conscription to assume the guise of counter-memory. American sociologist, George Lipsitz's concept of counter-memory describes how memories unearth the past, exposing 'hidden histories' that have been excluded from dominant narratives (Lipsitz 1990). Lipsitz views counter-memory as a means of shifting historical focus from dominant narratives, in an attempt to re-negotiate the present, thus challenging the 'hegemony of dominant discourse' (Lipsitz 1990: 212).

Unless these memories of a militarised past are addressed with honesty and humanity we are doomed to separate futures that essentially ignore the 'lived realities' of others. These largely silenced 'militarised journeys' began in childhood and have entered the present imbued with a sense of nostalgia and romanticism. I believe these memories can be navigated, acknowledged and disrupted effectively within a creative sphere.

The exhibition NUTRIA simply presents a series of creative engagements exploring the militarised pasts of ex-SADF conscripts, in the hope of encouraging further conversations relating to the hidden and oft silenced histories of all South Africans.

Stephen Symons
March 2017

AN EXHIBITION BY STEPHEN SYMONS
CURATED BY MARK ERASMUS | www.stephensymons.co.za

Figure 8.6 Curatorial statement for the *NUTRIA* exhibitions.

LETTER HOME

I The shadows of the steel window frames
are drawn back
then released by a breeze
to reveal the sun-cracked gauze
that lets the flies
and mozzies in.

Pretorius sits in a slash of light
brushing the *opvoek* out of his boots
whistling
– more spit than sound –
as his hand blurs over the laces,
scuffing his palm
to the colour of his overalls.

We're all here –
some in shorts that have slipped their drawstrings,
others in vests with the life hung out of them –
cleaning rifles,
or licking lies into envelopes.

Beyond the base
churches are peeling for believers.
Drunken notes tumble into the bungalow,
swirling homesick notes,
drawing memory into sunlight,

so a happiness
that masquerades as dust
is held briefly by
the doorway.

II *Ja, julle vokking naaiers
gaan nou lekker afkak*
is how it would begin.

But before that:
a shuffling line,
dribbling fucks,
forming in the
after-lunch heat

so we could drop sandbags
into each other's packs.
Slowly the weight would
grow bones,
gather flesh
and sinew,
and gnaw at our backs.

Pretorius always stuffed a wet towel
under his webbing
to ease the rasp;
clots of Vaseline, too,
that would stain his browns –
a bitch to wash out.

III A week later they found him in the heads,
door ajar,
still sitting on the throne.
A skull flopped forward,
revealing a cracked bowl of bone,
a chrysanthemum of brain
dripping pools of blood, exploring
the flecked tiles and the butt of his R1.

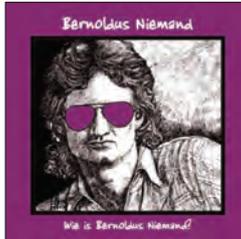
It lay there
in the snuggery
between his toes:

the blackened brass casing
of his final letter home.

Addendum - Part 3

List of songs used for the NUTRIA exhibitions

1



Willie Smit

Album: **Wie is Bernoldus Niemand**

Artist: Bernoldus Niemand (James Phillips)

Release date: 1985

Label: Shifty Records

2



Hou my vas Korporaal

Album: **Wie is Bernoldus Niemand**

Artist: Bernoldus Niemand (James Phillips)

Release date: 1985

Label: Shifty Records

3



Window On The World

Album: **Jive Wire**

Artist: Bright Blue (Lyrics by Robin Levetan)

Release date: 1984

Label: Polygram

4



Weeping

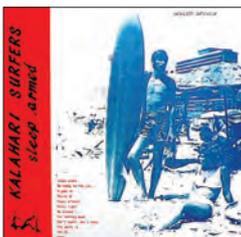
Album: **Weeping**

Artist: Bright Blue

Release date: 1988

Label: EMI

5



Greatest Hits

Album: **Sleep Armed**

Artist: Kalahari Surfers

Release date: 1988

Label: Shifty Records



6



Ou Ou Lied Van Afrika

Album: Eet Kreef

Artist: Johannes Kerkorrel en die Gereformeerde Blues Band

Release date: 1985

Label: Shifty Records

7



National Madness

Album: Forces Favourites

Artist: The Aeroplanes

Release date: 1988

Label: Shifty Records

8



Veraaiers

Album: Sleep Armed

Artist: Kalahari Surfers

Release date: 1988

Label: Shifty Records





Shadows asking an echo to dance

Navigating ambiguity: How former conscripts(1980-1990) navigate memories of induction into the SADF in post-apartheid society

by **Stephen Symons (u18389172)**

Submitted to the **University of Pretoria**

in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Historical and Heritage Studies

7700

Date of submission: January 2019

Supervisors:

Associate Professor Siona O'Connell, University of Pretoria, South Africa

Associate Professor Nick Shepherd, Aarhus University, Denmark



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Denkleiers • Leading Minds • Dikgopolo tša Dihlalefi