

**A CRITICAL READING OF THE MYTHS IN  
Oliver Hermanus's *Moffie* (2019) and  
Christiaan Olwagen's *Kanarie* (2018)**

by

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## DECLARATION

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I declare that *A Critical Reading of the Myths in Oliver Hermanus's Moffie (2019) and Christiaan Olwagen's Kanarie (2018)* is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.



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(26 October 2022)

## SUMMARY AND KEY TERMS

The study focuses on two contemporary LGBTQI films that were periodised during the South African Border War: *Kanarie* (Olwagen 2018) and *Moffie* (Hermanus 2019) with the aim to identify myths prevalent in their visual representation. The dissertation argues that in order for toxic mythology to be subverted, a process of queering must unfold. Julie Reid offers an important insight with regard to the ethical value of myth. To Reid (2011:344) “myth ... carries the risk of inciting damaging social action [that] validates the critical analysis of myth, especially in terms of the ethical nature of its content”. In the study, these beliefs or myths include hegemony, religious superiority, nationalism, hegemonic discourses of hetero-patriarchy, heroism, patriarchy, white supremacy, militarism and heteronormativity. These myths are toxic in their nature. The study examines the prevalence of these myths in visual culture during the War and then identifies them in the two films. This is done in order to find whether *Moffie* and *Kanarie* are LGBTQI cinematic products that show progression from the antedating myths of the War era films, as well as to identify other visual representations that were produced during this time.

The analysis adopts Queer Theory as well as Barthesian semiotics to arrive at the conclusion that, for the most part, *Moffie* and *Kanarie* still serve mythology that is unrelatable to the social and political context of post-apartheid South Africa. These myths are only consumed by a particular faction of South African society. Moreover, their production is unethical given the responsibility that producers and artists have to not perpetuate toxic myths but rather queer them. This is especially important since it is insufficient simply to present alternative figures such as homosexuals visually in order to satisfy a supposed liberal product. On the contrary, the representation of homosexuality is not liberal at all if gay figures still conform to toxic myths of masculinity.

It is crucial that, if gay figures are represented, their representation should queer the myths that suppressed them in the first place. Otherwise, their inclusion is inconsequential and meaningless. It is thus disappointing that *Moffie* and *Kanarie*, for the most part, subscribe to the aforementioned myths in their visual representation of gay figures to satisfy the kind of mythology with which audiences are, sadly, familiar.

**Key terms:** the South African Border War; *Kanarie*; *Moffie*; hegemony; religious superiority; nationalism; hegemonic discourses of hetero-patriarchy; heroism; heteronormativity; patriarchy; militarism; white supremacy; LGBTQ!

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Preface

#### For Johnny

Johnny and I met that cold night  
His smile pale in the blind parade ground light  
I knew his scrawny frame would not survive  
In this bloodthirsty fight  
Yet he clutched his rifle – knuckles white

The Border is for men, I know – I hear this every other day  
Perhaps this is why bold young men choose to stay  
You see, Johnny wanted to be like me  
A desire that his broad smile could never hide  
His unwavering honour and alert eyes aside

I never knew why Johnny wanted to resemble me  
I know he was expelled from the circle of legitimacy  
That masculinity prescribes  
Did you, my friend, not know the pain this burden was  
That contorted the muscular trenches of my back

But the agony could not compare  
To the torment I felt  
On another pale night  
Shattered by a blinding light

I rushed outside my tent  
And there I found Johnny  
Limbs broken and neck bent  
And then another flash of light  
That quickly faded in my sight  
The earth below me crumbled  
I stumbled through a night  
darker than I'd ever known

A fatal slumber beckoned me  
Finally, in the distance, it was Johnny I could see  
Again, he smiled  
In the vibrant light surrounding him  
And then I knew that Johnny never belonged

To the parade ground  
Or the pale night  
Since the colour that surrounded him and me  
Was more authentic than my masculinity

And as I drifted away into the sky  
Below me I could see  
Our bodies folded in the ground  
But it was Johnny holding another rifle in his bony hand  
That belonged to a SWAPO sniper crawling injured through the sand

And as our soldiers rushed towards the scene  
I did not care for this bloody fight  
I cared for Johnny who was now with me  
Eternally, as Earth drifted out of sight

**Hendrik Christiaan Maas**

*For Johnny*, is a posthumous account of a gay man who is conscripted into the South African Defence Force (SADF). His sexuality and stature do not resemble the heterosexual kind of manliness that the army requires. He responds with a desire to conform to the kind of machismo that the author proclaims to possess. However, it is also apparent that a conformation to 'normative' masculinity comes at a cost, to such an extent that the author feels liberated from his position within the hegemonic order once he passes away. After death, as Johnny and the author ascend to the afterlife, the superficiality and mistaken belief in what is acceptable masculine behaviour is revealed as Johnny, despite his perceived inadequate masculinity, had indeed performed a heroic act.

*Moffie* (Hermanus 2019) and *Kanarie* (Olwagen 2018) were produced twenty-five years after the fall of apartheid and thirty years after the end of the South African Border War, or The Namibian War of Independence (1966-1989) (hereafter, the War): both periodised in a stage of South African history wrought with propaganda and censorship. They are not the first films released since the fall of apartheid, to include homosexual

figures.<sup>1</sup> However, they are the first set during the War. *Moffie* exposes an era in South African history that has largely been silenced. The film touches on conflicting sexualities, hypermasculinity, whiteness and the experience of a gay man in the South African Defence Force. *Kanarie* “deals with questions of love and sexuality within the restrictive confines of traditional male ritualistic spaces” (Pieterse 2019:378), such as the SADF. The aim of this study is to explore myths in *Moffie* and *Kanarie*, with particular reference to the positioning of the gay subject. This is done by identifying the prevalence of the mythology that circulated in visual culture during the War in the two films. These myths include militarism, nationalism, religious superiority, heroism, white superiority and heteronormativity as well as hegemonic ideology. Moreover, the dissertation considers the social value of myth in the context of the representation of the gay subject. Homosexuals should be presented in such a manner that the myths identified are not perpetuated in the two films, but rather challenged.

Julie Reid (2012:50) observes that the social value of a myth is of principal interest. It hinges on questions such as whether that which the myth asks the reader to believe or do, is in the interest of the continued wellbeing of democracy and society. She thus postulates that the ethical motive of myth is the main concern. That myth is accountable for the manner in which society functions under the banners of the ‘*status quo*’ is apparent when considering authors that draw from Reid’s research: Irina Turner (2019:95) postulates in “Axing the Rainbow: Does Fallism reconfigure post-apartheid nationhood in South Africa” that the “dominant national myth stabilises and affirms the

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<sup>1</sup> Some examples of gay characters in South African cinema include Oliver Hermanus’s previous film, *Skoonheid* (Hermanus 2011) that centres around Francois van Heerden (Deon Lotz). He resides in a typical Afrikaner environment (the Free State province). At first Francois appears to be an ordinary husband with a loving family. However, secretly, he engages in group gay sex sessions. The homosexual life that Francois leads unfolds awkwardly within a context of heterosexuality (Gray 2021:4). The film *Inxeba* (Tregrove 2017) centres around three different characters, Vija, Xolani and Kwanda. Vija and Xolani are both caregivers who are responsible for various groups of initiates during the process where young boys become men by undergoing circumcision. Xolani and Vija are both closeted homosexuals. Kwanda, who is assigned to Xolani does not hide his homosexuality. Throughout the course of the film, Kwanda often provokes his peers and Xolani and the practice of circumcision. The film reveals the struggle that Xhosa gay men experience (Kiguwa and Siswana 2018: 2). *Proteus* (Greyson and Lewis 2004) narrates the trial and execution of Rijkhaart Jacosz and the Khoi Claas Blank who are engaged in a sexual relationship in the Dutch Cape Colony (Ben-Asher, Brasell, Greyson, Lewis and Newton-King 2005:437).

status quo of that section of society” which, as Reid (in Turner 2019:95) suggests, “maintains political and social power”. Other authors also draw from Reid’s work when discussing counter-myths. In “Deconstructing political myths in television advertisements of major South African political parties during election campaigns: A critical analysis study” Mopailo Thomas Thatelo quotes Reid and Mary Sheridan-Rabideau (in Thatelo 2022:38). They define counter myth “as a conscious feeling of dissent and a deliberate action mainly to oppose the established dominant myth”. Thatelo (2022:38) uses Reid’s theory of counter-myth in order to illustrate that “within the premise of a dominant myth, there is an underlying production of oppositional discourse, largely produced by media audiences that make significant opposition to the dominant myth”. With specific regard to film, in “A Comparative Analysis of the process of Vergangenheitsbewältigung in Post-Apartheid South African Cinema as opposed to its Post-War Manifestations in German Cinema”, Luke Slade (2012:49) paraphrases some of Reid’s theories in his analysis of the film *Disgrace* (Jacobs 2008),<sup>2</sup> where the character, “Petrus ... continually creates ‘myths’ of harmonisation, perhaps in the same way that White South African have been known to do when arguing that black South Africans should stop focusing on apartheid and ‘move on’”. It is clear that myth is a vital aspect of the manner in which society functions politically and socially. The media also plays a role in the way that myth is produced and consumed.

The study aligns itself with these notions that myth is to be held accountable for the manner in which a particular society imagines and conceives of its own belief system. This is done in order to afford the dissertation a sense of significance as well as consequence. With regard to the sway that myth holds, Reid (2012:48) elaborates:

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<sup>2</sup> *Disgrace* follows the story of a David Lurie (a divorced man) who satisfies his promiscuous sexual needs. He seduces Melanie, a young mixed-race student. Afterwards she and her father bring a complaint against him. After David is forced to resign, he visits his lesbian daughter, Lucy. She is assisted by Petrus, a black man who lives close by. One day David and Lucy are attacked by three men, one of whom is associated with Petrus. One of the men rapes Lucy. David feels guilty for not being able to defend his daughter and is also perplexed by her unwillingness to seek justice. As time passes, David draws closer to Lucy. Petrus, however, claims that the attack should be left in the past. Later, pregnant from the rape, Lucy decides to keep the baby and gives the farm to Petrus. She is determined that she and her baby could play a role in shaping a country where blacks and whites might live peacefully together (Jacobs [sa]).

political myths “counteract social contradictions within society, making certain beliefs seem more coherent”. Owing to this, manifestation of the aforementioned myths is not merely an inconsequential by-product of a particular world view. On the contrary, it is at the core of the manner in which the world is not only interpreted, but also considered to be truthful. In this context, the picturing of masculinity that circulated during the War and apartheid rule had a negative effect in the sense that it preserved the aforementioned myths.

As will be discussed, this manifested in films such as *Captain Caprivi* (Venter 1972), *Terrorist* (Hetherington 1978) and *Six Soldiers* (Retief 1974). Moreover, many of these films were censored to alter the endings in such a way that it spoke to heroic coding as one of the cornerstones of masculine, heterosexual mythmaking. All these films presented the white conscript of the SADF as heroic, almost super-heroic. In films such as these, the South African public was unaware of the reality of the conflict (Doherty 2014:112).

Later, the SADF claimed its own silencing. It seemed to present itself as a victim of Afrikaner nationalism as well, even though it was not portrayed as such in apartheid War era film. Authors such as Jannie Geldenhuys (2009:352) writes that the SADF’s situation and what it achieved, was not really understood by the average South African. However, Rodney Warwick (2012:358) proposes a different perspective, especially with relation to Operation Savannah.<sup>3</sup> Despite Savannah’s merits it remained a “grave diplomatic miscalculation. South Africa would be deserted by both their fickle African allies and the CIA”. Furthermore, there was an insistence in keeping white SADF casualties to a minimum. However, ultimately it was impossible to conceal the failures of Savannah from the South African public since conscription was involved (Warwick 2012:358).

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<sup>3</sup> The SADF’s weaknesses and strengths were exposed by its intervention in the Angolan civil war from 1975 to 1976. This intervention was called Operation Savannah. The operation revealed the inadequacy of South African military equipment. However, the SADF’s strengths as far as the resourcefulness of its personnel and their skill for mobile warfare was also demonstrated. Regardless, effective and rapid Cuban military intervention showed that the SADF’s reaction to conventional warfare needed serious attention (Warwick 2012:354).

Given this, Jannie Geldenhuys's claim appears to lack accountability; especially so, since, in light of Warwick's observation, the South African public were, in fact, aware of the SADF's situation and it was not well received. This is not to say that the SADF failed in every aspect. Nevertheless, the narrative of heroism that Geldenhuys presents can safely be brought into question. As far as English or translated written texts are concerned, the motif of revealing previously silenced facts also emerged. Jannie Geldenhuys's "*At the front: a general's account of South Africa's Border War*" (2009) is not the only text that seeks to uncover the 'truth'. To mention a few: Piet Nortje's book, *32 Battalion* (2004) and David Williams's *On the Border, 1965-1990: The White South African Experience* (2008) explore "similar themes asserting the existence of an experience, indeed, an identity, which has otherwise gone untold, or been misrepresented" (Lazenby 2012:29). Against this backdrop, it is considered important to evaluate whether *Kanarie* (as an Afrikaans film) and *Moffie* (as in part an English language film) sustain mythologies in the same manner as Jannie Geldenhuys maintains in his questionable narrative of heroism.

## 1.2 Aims

The main aim of the study is to analyse the myths in *Moffie* and *Kanarie*. The first objective is to analyse myths of militarism, religious superiority, nationalist exceptionalism, heroism, white superiority and heteronormativity as well as hegemonic ideology in visual culture during the War. As a second objective the study seeks to find whether *Moffie* and *Kanarie* are successful in challenging the myths identified in the visual representation of the War era. This is done using Queer Theory and Barthesian semiotics as tools for analysing the manner in which the identified myths operate in the films. Another objective is to consider the representation of these myths within the context of Reid's concern regarding the ethical importance of mythmaking. These aims serve to contribute to the existing research in academic circles surrounding myth, visual studies and masculinity.

### 1.3 Literature review

#### 1.3.1 *Hegemony*

The study does not draw from a particular seminal source as far as hegemonic masculinity is concerned. Rather, the dissertation aims to serve the topic by drawing from a number of theorists such as Stephen Symons, James W Messerschmidt, PAH Labuschagne and Raewyn Connell. The central argument that these theorists pursue is that hegemony dominates alternative masculinities, including homosexuals.

Antonio Gramsci (in Klein 2016:100) proposes that hegemony does not only function to suppress subordinate figures, but also relies on the consent of alternative figures to remain oppressed: “hegemony is ‘characterized by the combination of force and consent ... Indeed, the attempt is always to ensure that force would be based on the consent of the majority’”. With regard to the aggression and power inherent in hegemony, Arthur Hall proposes system theory: Individual parts of a system work together to reach a common goal. If one part of the system is damaged, other parts may react to compensate in order for the system to remain stable. Reaching the common goal will be affected if change is allowed — therefore it is customarily resisted. In a masculine hegemonic system (idealised) male privilege will be enforced by the way people act in a social group, even if this is to their own detriment. This is particularly the case with regard to submissive masculinity such as homosexual bodies in a particular society (2013:48). Connell and Messerschmidt (in Ngumo, Yieke and Onyango 2020:3) substantiate with their theory: “The concept of hegemonic masculinity presumes the subordination of non-hegemonic masculinities”. What Gramsci, Hall, Connell and Messerschmidt suggest, speaks to the manner in which failed masculinities, such as homosexuals, participate in the maintenance of the hegemonic order. To situate hegemony within the gay context, Shinsuke Eguchiela (2009:193) proposes in “Negotiating Hegemonic Masculinity: The Rhetorical Strategy of ‘Straight-Acting’ among Gay Men” that “the straight-acting rhetoric emerges because some gay men want to achieve hegemonic masculinity to overcome gay effeminate images”. This suggests a



certain sense of exclusivity within the gay community, which is reserved for gay men who conform to hegemonic machismo. Jay Clarkson (in Sonnekus 2009:39) elaborates on this with his theorising of the relationship between homosexual machismo and effeminate homosexuality: homomascularity echoes hegemonic masculinity. As a result, inadequate masculinities such as effeminate homosexuals, transvestites and black gays are excluded from its self-definition. Symons and Labuschagne apply hegemony to the South African case.

In “An analytical perspective of Afrikaner ideological hegemony (1961-1980): The politics of Rugby”, Labuschagne (2015:130) discusses the relation between rugby and Afrikaner hegemony. He observes that, during a period when the National Party implanted their ideas and values in the general South African public, rugby was used successfully to perpetuate Afrikaner supremacy and to motivate hegemony. Along the same vein, Jacobus A Du Pasani (in Symons 2019:8) submits in “Shadows asking an Echo to Dance - Navigating ambiguity: How former conscripts (1980-1990) navigate memories of induction into the SADF in post-apartheid society”, that “rugby was regarded by Afrikaner males as ‘the king of sports’... an important vent for male aggression”. Ultimately, in light of the above, the central argument relating to hegemony that the dissertation draws from, is that it not only excludes alternative subjects such as homosexuals — it also enforces a system within the gay community where gays subscribe to hegemonic masculinity to evade malignment. As with hegemony, the study also consults a collection of theorists and not merely one seminal source, with regard to militarism.

### **1.3.2 Militarism**

Historically the media has been used to disseminate war propaganda and support for war efforts. As Robin Anderson and Tanner Mirrlees observe (2014:2), “since World War I, the U.S. military has woven media manipulation strategies into war’s planning, execution and aftermath, combining a mix of propaganda and censorship to sell war by

engineering public consent to war policy and stifling dissent” (Anderson and Mirrlees 2014:2). To exacerbate, images and representations of war does, for the most part, not bear any resemblance to actual conflict on the ground: “Media images, tropes, themes and myths of war often bear little resemblance to war itself” (Anderson and Mirrlees 2014:2). It is the contention of this dissertation that “media studies is pivotal for understanding militarism in past practices and contemporary developments, as so much of the recruitment and selling of war has taken place in visual and social media spaces” (Jonathan Dunnage, Susan T. Jackson, Eugene Miakinkov & Michael Sheehan 2019:9).

The central argument with relation to militarism in the SADF is that militarism served to unite whites in South Africa under the banner of national conscription and in so doing rejected alternative figures. Militarism was also conceptually related to patriarchy and the Eurocentric family unit. The theorists that the study refers to, include but are not limited to, Robert Morrell and Hilikka Pietilä.

Robert Morrell (2009:175) submits in “Masculinity in South African History: Towards a Gendered Approach to the Past” that a growing intolerance of ‘difference’ was brought about by national conscription and militarisation). This ties in with hegemony in two ways: Firstly, the aforementioned system that Hall referred to was arguably exacerbated by “images of valour, courage, endurance and maturity [qualities which have been] intimately related to the role of the male in ... military affairs” (Mazrui 1977:69). Secondly, militarisation doubtlessly signified compensation on behalf of marginalised figures to uphold hegemonic credibility in an environment where hegemony is already endemically threatened during war. Such compensation by especially gay conscripts came at a terrifying cost: “gay performance artist Steven Cohen recalls his very brief stint as soldier-in-training in 1985” (Mason 2015:74):

Several thousand people were lined up on the parade ground at Voortrekkerhoogte. I was 22 years old. Officials were calling names for different destinations, all terrible. Suddenly, one boy broke ranks, screaming from the bottom of his stomach as he ran. He was caught by the military police, who took him away. A week later, a similar

scream, in fact, the same primal scream, but from the pit of my own stomach, carried me out of basic training and into 1 Military Hospital's psychiatric wing (in Mason 2015:74).

### **1.3.3 *Militarism and patriarchy***

Similar to militarism, “media are one of the most powerful agents of legitimisation of patriarchy” (Erika 1986:57). Whereas women are not entirely invisible in the media, their representation is usually a masculine construction of women that is not based in reality (Erika 1986:57). In “Patriarchy as a State of War — the role of the peace movement and peace research”, Hilikka Pietilä (1990:3) proposes that patriarchy is a hierarchical father-centred system. Patriarchy is characterised by strict military rules that dictate how men should behave in platonic masculine relationships. In the context of Afrikanerdom, patriarchal overtones that apparently served as cornerstone to a kind of militarism within the family unit emerged in the Afrikaner's “‘dream topography’: the family farm, ruled by the patriarch and inscribed ... as a legacy for his sons, theirs to inherit and bequeath in perpetuity” (Barnard and Coetzee 2003:204). In this light, it is apparent that the compounding of the family unit and militarism served a militarised South Africa by the conditioning of younger men or even boys. Militarism was clearly inculcated as an honourable enterprise that should be respected, much as the father figure is within the traditional family unit. The fundamental arguments in the study with relation to religious superiority is that the traditional Church was weaponised to justify militarisation as a holy enterprise during the War. Furthermore, the Church participated in a motion to expel homosexual figures.

### **1.3.4 *Religious superiority***

The Afrikaner's self-perceived impression as being religiously superior was drawn from earlier epochs such as the construction of the Voortrekker Monument. These attitudes were disseminated in the visual representation of SADF documentaries. The theorists

that the dissertation draws from regarding religious superiority, include Stephen Symons, David Chidester and Robert Morrell.

Symons (2019:28) observes that the main task of the Church was to bolster its members' spiritual defensibility. It was the conviction of the Church that a war was being waged and that the war was just. In addition, the Church was instrumental in reinforcing Afrikaner masculinity. In, "Of Boys and Men: Masculinity and Gender in Southern African Studies", Robert Morrell (1998:617) substantiates: Even since the 1940s "the church and, for a period, the schools established under the Christian National Education movement were ... critical in protecting the position of Afrikaner men and in bolstering a new Afrikaner masculinity". This ties in with militarism, since a formative role was played by Christian National Education in the fostering of militarised hyper-masculine identities (Symons 2019:101). It is thus evident that the Church posed agency in the creation of myths of hegemony and militarisation that ultimately excluded homosexual figures. As mentioned, the Afrikaner's imagining of themselves as religiously superior emerged before the War. In "Embracing South Africa, Internationalizing the Study of Religion", David Chidester (1998:19) observes that the building of the Voortrekker Monument especially honoured December 16, 1938. This date, in accordance with the nationalist myth, signaled a moment when God entered into a holy pledge with white Afrikaners. Doubtlessly, as the Voortrekker Monument commemorates, a great deal of Afrikaner mythology was modelled on spiritual supremacy and, as mentioned earlier with regard to the view of the Church, engaging in 'just' wars such as the Border War.

### **1.3.5 Nationalism**

According to Dougless Kellner (in Kirsch 2016:1), " 'media culture ... provides the materials out of which many people construct their sense of ... nationality' ". Moreover, as Benedict Anderson (in Kirsch 2016:[sp]) suggests, "the media have an important part to play, as they can be seen as directly responsible for creating [a] sense of an imagined community". In the visual representation of the War, nationalism was portrayed as a

pacific motion to reclaim land. However, in reality, as is demonstrated in the study, nation building is a violent process. During the war, nationalism romanced militarism in order for the individual to reimagine himself as superior. As the study substantiates later, this was especially the case with masculine figures. The theorists that serve the analysis of nationalism include Sherry Shepler, Anne Mattina as well as Christi Van der Westhuizen.

In “The Revolt Against War” Jane Addams’ Rhetorical Challenge to the Patriarchy”, Shepler and Mattina (1999:163) examine Jane Addams’ address in 1913 when a clear “picture can be seen of the myths guiding and shaping culture in the early twentieth century”. They find that during that period, nationalism, that was considered to be a suitable means of individual identification, implied that any challenge to the nation would be perceived as a challenge to the self. Especially for the male character, the nation was the site of identification. Moreover, an elevated sense of self was created by identifying with the nation. If a masculine individual bought into the myth of the soldier, then the individual sense of self was raised since the soldier was perceived to have a higher purpose (Shepler and Mattina 1999:159).

However, Shepler and Mattina (1999:163) do not suggest that this formulation of nationalism only existed then. On the contrary, they observe that remnants and echoes of myths such as nationalism in the early twentieth century still echoes in contemporary culture). After all, as Shepler and Mattina (1999:163) submit “ethnocentric economic policies enacted during the last ten years by the United States government to protect its national interests from outside influence are grounded in the myth of nationalism”. Thus, if Shepler and Mattina’s description of nationalism is considered in the context of the War, then the implication is that hegemonic and militarist myths were augmented — especially in the masculine figure. Furthermore, as the dissertation is to demonstrate, the depiction of iconic images such as *The Raising of the Flag at Iwo Jima*, was replicated by the SADF on a *Paratus* magazine cover. In both cases a symbol of national unity was

created by the actions of the struggle. This included planning strategically as well as the implicit terrible labour of hand-to-hand combat (Hariman and Lucaites 2002:371).

In “Post-apartheid South Africa: Inward migration and Enclave Nationalism”, Van der Westhuizen (2016:8) observes that through sexual and gender policing in locations ranging from hair salons, restaurants to entire neighborhoods, Afrikaner Enclave Nationalism presenting as privatised micro-apartheid have been maintained. Virtual white spaces such as Afrikaans media products extend these whitened locales. As is to be shown, Van der Westhuizen’s theorising of Afrikaner Enclave Nationalism suggests that the Afrikaner perpetuates the predating myths of the War in modern cinematic products. Moreover, these films — much as *The Raising of the Flag at Iwo Jima* — serve as a collective moment where Afrikaners share a common identity and an adherence to a communal broader belief system<sup>4</sup>.

### **1.3.6 Heroism**

I.V. Trotsuk and M.V. Subbotina (2021:175) observe that “heroism is one of the most important ideas reflected in cinema throughout its history”. In a study conducted by B. Dana Kivel and Corey W. Johnson (2009:110) it is found that “through media consumption, men actively constructed and maintained impressions of masculinity based on notions of heroism, violence, and ‘macho’ images”. Moreover, in the South African context, heroism as a masculine construct was seen reflected in sport where the narrative of heroism was modelled on the idea “that rugby acted to ‘shape men’s [and children’s] bodies’ for military service” (Symons 2020:8). Furthermore, the association of heroism with sport related to militarism during the War era since the rugby stadiums of South Africa seamlessly created a transition between sport and the parade ground (Symons 2020:8).

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<sup>4</sup> The Raising of the Flag at Iwo Jima is an iconic photograph taken on 23 February 1945 when US marines raised the United States’ flag on the crest of Mount Suribachi during the Battle of Iwo Jima. (This Day in History 2022).

Theorising of heroism in the study relates to, but also differs from Afrikaner Enclave Nationalism: much as Afrikaner Enclave Nationalism perpetuates a metabolic system of Afrikaner myths of nationalism, the films of the War era perpetuated a system that portrayed the War as heroic. However, “In Screening the Border 1971-88”, Dylan Craig (2004:44) submits that contrary to enclave nationalism the portrayal of heroism in the War era film served a purpose: “to fight a political and ideological struggle for legitimacy in the hearts and minds of potential supporters of the regime and its war effort”. With regard to heteronormativity and white supremacy, this study is interested in the representation of the male body as well as the perpetuation of white superiority in post-apartheid South Africa.

### **1.3.7 *Heteronormativity and white supremacy***

The main arguments include that heteronormativity naturalises heterosexuality and posits heterosexuality to be the only ‘normal’ form of sexual expression. In the media, mainstream representation is still heteronormative and heterosexual. This is the case despite that prevailing taboos over the last few decades have been lifted. The depiction of sexual concerns with relation to homosexual figures are still relatively rare since it is considered to be abnormal (Seif 2017:7). Moreover, “mainstream media reinscribe and reinforce white supremacy, which leads to anti-blackness” (Baker-Bell, Stanbrough & Everett 2017:132). In this study, Apartheid Aryanism is coined to refer to the maintenance of white superiority as well as the unwitnessing of the African subject. Key theorists include Theo Sonnekus, Andy Carolin and Chris Broodryk.

Sonnekus (2009:37) argues that the representation of the gay male body has to subscribe to heteronormativity in order to evade malignment or homophobia. With regard to this, Sonnekus refers to homomascularity and the gay clone. In “Macho men and the queer imaginary: A critique of selected gay ‘colonial’ representations of homomascularity”, he argues that gay figures that conform to the gay clone format respond to the heteronormative myth. They fashion themselves to resemble male

heterosexual machismo as closely as possible despite that they are led to believe, through homophobia, that they are not men. It appears that gay clones long for heteronormative masculinity. In order to satisfy this longing, the gay clone distances himself from effeminate gay figures. Sonnekus's observation relates to the aforementioned system theory: homosexual subjects pose a threat to the hegemonic structure and have therefore to compromise in order for hegemony to remain intact. This undermines any protest to subvert homosexual malignment or acknowledge same sex legitimacy since a conformation to hegemony arguably also naturalises heterosexuality therefore excluding homosexual identities.

With regard to Apartheid Aryanism, Sonnekus and Van Eeden (2009:89) submit the following: "it seems that interpreting 'gayness' in visual culture, or recognising an image's queerness, depends on the signifying presence of the supposed epitome of the gay ideal: white homomascularity". This suggests that since homosexuality can only be read if the signifier is a gay white subject, the African becomes invisible and silenced. Unwitnessing arguably engages in a process of forgetting, that amplifies a kind of privilege associated with a sense of silence, as Broodryk (2016:109) observes. In "Post-Apartheid Same-Sex Sexualities: Restless Identities in Literary and Visual Culture", Carolin (2021:6) elaborates: there is no worldwide applicability to positionalities such as lesbian, queer or gay. These forms of sexuality are considered to inhere within the cultural transfer and networks that the Global North dominates.

Carolin's observation suggests a sense of intolerance of difference that relates to the imposition of heterosexuality as a white manifestation. In reality it appears that even in the case of a maligned group — such as white homosexuals — diversity is not acceptable. As a phenomenon, homosexuality is fractured: gay figures not only compromise to satisfy the hegemonic order, but they also malign the (gay) African.



### **1.3.8 The War**

In *Beyond the Border War: New Perspectives on Southern Africa's Late Cold War Conflicts* (2008), Garry Baines and Peter Vale (2008:124) recall that the War had been waged against SWAPO (the South West Africa People's Organisation) since the 1960s. The war raged in the north of Namibia (which was then called South West Africa). There was collaboration between the South African security forces and the Caetano government's colonial authoritarian regime in Angola, with the goal to fight terrorism before 1975. The same year would herald a significant moment in the history of the War: after a drastic change in government in Portugal, the Portuguese pulled out of Angola at almost no notice. As a result, Angola was set for liberation. Since South Africa, at that stage, considered South West Africa (now Namibia) to be one of its provinces, the liberation in Angola just North of Namibia posed a communist threat (Wilsworth 2010:19). However, the mission to remove this threat would ultimately fail for three reasons: firstly, as mentioned, operation Savannah caused diplomatic discontent in 1976. Secondly, "over time, [South Africa's] involvement ... began to have a negative effect on the South African society and the country's economy" (Esterhuysen 2009:34). Finally, the strategic vulnerability of South African forces was exposed owing to an inability to dominate southeast Angola's skies. In view of this, the leadership of the South African forces as well as the South African government had to find alternative solutions (ibid).

### **1.4 Theoretical framework**

The area of study that is used in the dissertation consists of Queer Theory, which is a "post-structural theory that contests strict categorical views on ... sexuality (Dhaenens, Van Bauwel and Biltereyst 2008:335). However, in the theoretical framework established here, Queer Theory is revised. This is necessary since, as Nikki Sullivan (2003:48) proposes, Queer Theory has been criticised as informing or being informed by who is considered to be queer or who and what is not — in an oversimplified manner. As a result, dichotomies are found. These include 'us' and 'them', heterosexual or queer

as well as lesbian or gay identity. This is found operating in numerous accounts of identity and/or queer practice. Owing to this, it is frequently inferred that all heterosexuals are positioned in a normative and domineering space and that lesbians or gays can only hope to gain access to this position. Therefore, the term 'Queer Theory' does not sufficiently serve an analysis since it ultimately sustains heterosexual centrality and the perpetuation of binaries. Hence, the investigation rather aligns itself with Sullivan's approach. She suggests that it might be more constructive to use queer as a verb instead of a noun — in other words an identifiable positionality that is created by the performance of certain actions (ibid). Therefore, in this study, by using queer as a verb, the consideration does not as much lie with the identity of the homosexual/alternative subject, but rather the manner in which this subject actively contests myth. As the study indicates, it is from Sullivan's perspective that other theorists such as Michael Warner (in Sullivan 2003:50) have drawn to illustrate how queer "is not just a resistance to the norm, but more importantly, consists of protesting against 'the idea[l] of normal behaviour'". Historically, with specific regard to the countering of behavior that is considered to be normal through a process of queering, "camp was a means of queering heterocentrist film culture, and it both celebrated and satirized Hollywood films and their 'larger-than-life' characters and situations" (Benshoff 2004:7). This is seen reflected in Johan's mimicry of Boy George in *Kanarie*.

Secondly, using queer as a verb, complements a Barthesian method of analysis since myth, as the dissertation endeavours to demonstrate, is inter-linked with behaviour and inherently operates as a system that consists of idealism. For instance, the ideal of the myth of heteronormativity suggests heterosexual behaviour within the context of strict gender binaries and the myth of nationalism "is often associated with belief in national superiority and with hostility to outsiders" (Solt 2011:7). Arguably, such outsiders might include homosexual figures. Doubtlessly, queering is useful in deconstructing "the ways in which symbolic formations such as nations ... are marked by hierarchical (hetero)sexual binaries whose normativities can be disrupted and undone, and realities reformulated and rewritten" (Marshall 2018:7). Evidently, since queering contests

idealism, the use of queer as a verb, functions as a mechanism to evaluate whether *Moffie* and *Kanarie* queer the ideals towards which myth such as heteronormativity and nationalism strive.

In light of the aforementioned history of Afrikaner myth as well as myths of whiteness and the way that both operate in *Moffie* and *Kanarie*, Roland Barthes is considered a key theorist. This is the case, since “the assumptions of myth according to which media theory and media studies operate, originated within the field of semiotics, largely with the theorist Roland Barthes” (Reid 2011:2). Furthermore, as Reid (2011:116) suggests, myth also informs the idea that audiences become unified through self-identification. This could manifest as Afrikaner Enclave Nationalism — a concept that is expanded on in Chapter 2.

### **1.5 Methodological framework**

This study is qualitative in its nature. The dissertation comprises a literature study that focuses on the circulation of mythology during the Border War by drawing on a Barthesian understanding of myth. In addition, the theoretical understanding of the identified myths from a Barthesian perspective is then applied to two case studies: *Moffie* and *Kanarie*. Doubtlessly, there is an inherent weakness to the case study approach since the “conclusions established by such an approach may only be applicable to the specific case study which is being examined, and are not necessarily universally relevant” (Reid 2011:9). However, despite the weakness that such a method might pose, it is the conviction of the dissertation that the nature of the representation of myth in *Moffie* and *Kanarie* is of social significance to post-apartheid South Africa. Moreover, the case study approach allows for a site where the prevalence of antedating myths before and during the War might be tested. Especially in the visual analyses there is a measure of assumption at play, but this is approached as objectively as possible in the interest of demonstrating a particular phenomenon (see Reid 2011).

In the dissertation, Barthes's semiotics is used to illustrate how the meaning of signs and symbols connote to broader commonly-held value systems in Afrikaner history, the War era as well as in *Moffie* and *Kanarie*. To elaborate, Barthes (in Aiello 2006: 94) suggests that denotation and connotation are two separate levels in the articulation of signification with regard to visual communication. Denotation manifests as an image's literal meaning and connotation relates to the ideological or symbolic meaning of an image. On the connotative level the meaning of an image connotes an array of potential meanings which cultural codes inscribe. Keeping in mind that "the symbolism in myth is connotative rather than denotative" (Bennett 2019: [sp]), Shahd Hammouri (2020:3) submits that "myths are signs that are imbedded within our systems of signification and expressed in communication, and their study allows us to demonstrate how given social symbols mold into the fabric of the collective consciousness". With relation to myth, misrepresentation and misconception, Barthes famously analyses the front cover of the *Paris Match* magazine that portrays a young saluting African soldier in French military attire. The image suggests that "France is a great empire, without any discrimination amongst its citizens (especially those who are victims of its colonialization)" (Hammouri 2020: [sp]). This kind of misconception and misrepresentation bears relation to the study with respect to all the myths identified: the representation of homosexuality has to subscribe to hegemonic stereotypes despite that effeminate gays do not have access to such a representation; media images of militarism do not resemble the reality of war; the representation of the patriarchal family farm is entirely improbable. As Barnard and Coetzee mentioned, it manifests as *dream* topography; as the Voortrekker Monument commemorates, the representation of religious superiority informs the misconception that the Afrikaner engages in 'just' wars. As Roland Barthes (in Shu-ping 2017:212) concedes, myth "transforms history into nature"; depictions such as the replication of The Raising of the Flag at Iwo Jima informs a false sense of national unity and the reclamation of land. As will be demonstrated, this is also reflected in the narrative of propaganda films during the War period; the heroism associated with Rugby and military service is arbitrary and phantastic; similar to hegemony, homomascularity is considered to be the only form of acceptable gay representation and homosexuality is

misrepresented as being a white manifestation. All of these misconceptions and misrepresentations are owing to the fact that, as Roland Barthes (1972:143) concedes, myth “abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them the simplicity of essences, it does away with all dialectics, with any going back beyond what is immediately visible, it organizes a world which is without contradictions”.

Julie Reid (2011:163) observes that “to qualify any signified as myth, it ought to have appeared within the cultural artefacts of a society numerous times”. In view of this, it is considered vital to devote the second Chapter of the study to the history of Afrikaner myth before and during the War. This is the case since, as Reid suggests, the myths identified in *Moffie* and *Kanarie* cannot be deliberated without taking into consideration that they have been repeated in the past. Hence, it is considered important to identify the myths during the War before analysing if they are perpetuated in the two films. Theorists such as Chris Broodryk, Julie Reid and Stephen Symons are consulted throughout the study. They draw from Barthes’s theory of myth and apply it to the South African case — both with regard to South African cinema as well as the historical context of the Border War.

## **1.6 Overview of chapters**

The Second Chapter, entitled Representing the War in Visual Culture, is a comprehensive report on the mythology at play in the SADF and Afrikanerdom at large during apartheid and the War. Much of the discussion centres around the ‘othering’ of homosexual figures during this era. Border War films released during this period are also considered in order to establish the manner in which the apartheid and Border War myths are represented on screen. Furthermore, visual representations of the War in the media are also analysed. That the mythologies at play during this era have a historical basis that stretches as far back as the Voortrekkers and the Anglo Boer War, is an important point of discussion. Moreover, the Chapter also considers the agency of the End Conscription Campaign and how it subverted the myths at play during apartheid and the War. In

addition, the film *My Father's War* (Gardner 2016) is used as a case study. This is done in order to explore whether Border War films cater for an audience that still subscribes to Afrikaner myths in the contemporary sense. The Chapter encapsulates how myth operated both at the Border as well as in visual representations thereof. It also forms the bedrock for the discussion of *Kanarie* and *Moffie*.

The third Chapter, *Kanarie*, examines how the mythology at the Border reflects in a film that seeks to expose the marginalisation of homosexual characters. This Chapter will introduce Barthesian semiotic methodology, a queer(ing) theoretical framework as well as Butler's theorising of gender. After establishing a theoretical foundation for the Chapter, the discussion embarks on visual analysis of various screenshots from *Kanarie*. This analysis seeks to uncover how mythology emerges in the visual signification of the film. Ultimately, it is concluded whether these myths are queered or left intact by the representation of the gay subject, gender and apartheid artefacts in the military. This speaks to whether *Kanarie* is conscientious of, as Julie Reid postulated, ethical film making in the sense that responsibility is taken not to perpetuate the toxic myths of the War era.

The fourth Chapter, *Moffie*, expands the conversation by considering heteronormativity and whiteness in general. Consideration is given to the fact that *Moffie* is in part an English language film and it is anticipated that a qualitative finding might indicate whether the myth that circulates in *Kanarie* also emerges in *Moffie*. With regard to heteronormativity, the representation of male corporality as well as religious iconography are analysed. Then, regarding whiteness, the study escalates the discussion of Afrikaner myths identified in the previous Chapters to include whiteness as it is perpetuated in post-apartheid South Africa. Aspects of this Chapter include the unwitnessing of the African figure as well as the exclusivity afforded to white homosexuals. Hence, in this Chapter, the focus shifts from Afrikaner myths to myths of whiteness — such as white superiority — as it is presented in a partially English language film. The same methodology and theoretical framework applied in the *Kanarie* Chapter,

is used in *Moffie*. The final (Fifth) Chapter of the dissertation concludes the study. Suggestions are put forward for further research.

## CHAPTER TWO: REPRESENTING THE WAR IN VISUAL CULTURE

### 2.1 Introduction

From the outset, the author of this dissertation, as an Afrikaans speaking individual, would like to align his research approach and identify with Analette Steenkamp's submission with regard to Afrikanerdom — a term that is referred to throughout the study. Steenkamp (in Broodryk 2015:4) describes herself as an African who is white. She is interested in interrogating various myths that have become entrenched in Afrikanerdom such as a belief that African soil has been promised by God to the white Afrikaner. It follows that the study, when using the term 'Afrikanerdom' or 'Afrikaner', is referring to a particular faction of Afrikaans speaking society before, during and after the War era. This cluster subscribed to destructive social codes such as hegemony, myths of religious superiority and militarism. The aim is not to malign all of Afrikaans language speakers. The concern lies with unnerving trends that existed and still exists within Afrikaner society.

In preparation for examining two films on the South African Border War, *Moffie* and *Kanarie*, this Chapter analyses the dominant visual representation of the War through a purposive sample of several texts. Andre Wessels (2017:28) remarks that as many as 10 000 articles — including 117 academic journals — that deal with the Namibian War of Independence as well as the war in Angola, were published between 1966 and 2016. In addition, the War has featured in stage productions as well as collections of fiction and poetry (2017:28).

With reliance on purposive sampling, images are sampled from sources such as Willem Steenkamp's *South Africa's Border War 1966-1989* (1989), which provides a vast array of images. In addition, the official SADF magazine, *Paratus*, that subdued objectors and swayed public opinion by disseminating pro-war communication (Nel 2019:2) is used, as well as a screenshot of an SADF montage. Later, images of counter narratives of the End



Conscription Campaign (ECC) also serve as sources since the ECC opposed the South African Border War (Conway 2008:82). These images dispute the representation of Afrikaner identity in Steenkamp's book, the *Paratus* magazine, as well as the screenshot — all of which have been chosen on the basis that they exemplify intersections of Afrikaner ideologies identified here. These ideologies can be described as mythical in their nature since one of the objectives of political myths is the “achieve[ment] of [the] major goals of any ideology” (Hechter 2003:441). In the context of the SADF, these intersections emerged in the wake of a toxic hegemonic environment which sought to denigrate homosexuality.

Arguably, in general, the Afrikaner male subscribed to other patriarchal societies with relation to his attitude towards women. As Elsie Cloete (1992:47) observes, the Afrikaner's perception of himself as a hegemonic group was firmly entrenched by 1961. That is the year South Africa became a republic and most of the apartheid laws had already been promulgated. Raewyn Connell (in Abbasi and Joabad 2018:86) posits the difference between patriarchy and hegemony: contrary to patriarchy, “hegemonic masculinity is a type of masculinity mastering every other type of gender”. Here, the point of intersection between patriarchy and hegemony is read as creating complicity in hegemonic discourses of hetero-patriarchy in the Afrikaner male. According to Spike Peterson (1999:57) “hetero-patriarchy refer[s] to ‘sex/gender systems that naturalize/normalize heterosexual family forms and corollary heterosexist identities and practices”. However, hegemony enflames these forms, as mentioned before, mastering them to the extent that violence will be resorted to should hegemony fail to impose its rules (Abbasi and Joabad 2018:86). In point of fact, as Malose Langa, Gill Eagle, Graham Lindegger and Justin Maxwell (in Morrell, Jewkes, Lindegger and Hamlall 2013:10) observe, hegemony is rooted in, as well as based on, patriarchy. It follows that hegemonic discourses of hetero-patriarchy (the term that will henceforth be referred to as discourses of hetero-patriarchy) were closely related to the masculinised environment of the SADF. It expounded its reach beyond gender to dominate all sexualities with force, if needed. In addition, women as well as men who express their

gender in an alternative way will always contest hegemony as an accepted and legitimate form of male domination (Jefferson 2002:69). Connell (in Jefferson 2002:69) describes the masculinity of men who express their gender in a different manner as subordinate. It follows that, as Connell (in Jefferson 2002:69) elaborates, it is easy to expel men who are effeminate from the circle of legitimacy given their similarity to women. In this sense, discourses of hetero-patriarchy expelled femininities, albeit embodied in the masculine figure, as it drew from patriarchal ideologies and the patriarchal landscape by positioning effeminate gay men in the same location as women. Daniel Conway (2004:29) substantiates that the effeminacy displayed or perceived to be displayed by men, results in their relegation to the bottom of the masculine pecking order. Their masculinity becomes subservient to dominant masculinities and the indictment of effeminacy can be deployed against them. This serves as a disciplinary measure against disobedient men who contest the prevailing hegemonic order). Once again, in this manner, a masculine environment such as the SADF could marginalise alternative masculinities purely by the association of character traits and effeminate mannerisms. However, hegemony also intersected with militarism.

Stephen Symons (2019:8). affirms that there is a close relation between hegemonic masculinity and military establishments. At the stage of the War, during the boys' standard eight (grade 10) school year (the registration year for military service), a shift occurred towards actual military service in the cadet corps curriculum. This shift solidified a romanticised notion of hegemonic and militarised senses of masculinities (Symons 2019:93). Arguably, the SADF can be considered as a place that "reproduces the beliefs that have produced it [which leads to it playing] a crucial role in reproducing the geography of the state's hegemony" (Bernazzoli and Flint 2009:396). In this light, it should be kept in mind that in a society that has been militarised, the geography of hegemony emerges in terms of cultural expressions. This includes the embracing of visual signifiers of militarist customs and values as well as patronage of militarist policies (ibid).

It follows that the utopic military conditioning of the young conscript in the cadet curriculum merely obscured the verity of the perpetuation of hegemony imposed by the state. In addition, Andrew J. Bacevich (in Giroux 2008:39) draws on a Barthesian perspective with relation to militarism. To him, the soldier informs a cultural value system where militarism is romanced. He observes that, to Americans, the soldier is romanced and militarist power is viewed as the epitome of national greatness. Similarly, the SADF arguably also furnished the conscript with a strong sense of nationalist ascendancy. However, the trajectory of this display of militarism and nationalist significance intersected with hegemony, as noted by Symons. Hence militarist ascendancy was conflated to become a destructive formula of masculine control at the Border given the domineering nature of discourses of hetero-patriarchy as mentioned before. In a military environment where the use of force is endemic as a means to impose constraint, hegemony arguably found easy footing to resort to violence in order to maintain its power. As Connell (in Symons 2019:64) substantiates, “military institutions are organised ... between two masculinities — one [of which is] rooted in physical violence (namely the lower ranks, notably including conscripts)”. The draftee who refused military service was denigrated as being effeminate and an intermediary of communism (Conway 2008:435). It follows that militarised hegemony in the SADF expelled masculine effeminacy on the grounds of an arbitrary association with communism.

Rob Nixon (in Falkov 2019:274) substantiates that homosexual conscripts in the SADF were considered to be “intimately related to communists”. In this manner, the association of homosexuality with the enemy in the SADF ironically militarises the gay conscript in the capacity of the opposing side. This indicates the degree to which homosexuality was subverted in the SADF even to the extent that notions such as militarism was used against them. It seems as though the hegemonic exclusion of homosexuals was not enough. They had to be costumed and mocked as welcome to a military environment as long as it was not the SADF. Furthermore, militarism was instructive in the perception of religion during the war era. As mentioned in the

literature review, Christian National Education was instructive in the nurturing of hyper-masculine militarised identities (Morrell 1998:617). The Church also sought to reinforce the spiritual defensibility of its members — convinced of the fact that the war was a just war.

The motif of defence was arguably a result of the fact that “the Afrikaans religious community saw itself as beleaguered” (Liebenberg 2019:274). When militarism as a temporal agent of defence intersects with Christian religion it could lead to Christianity being romanticised. This is the case since otherwise the essential postulates of Christian teaching would stand in contradiction to the militarist idea (Crapsey 1916:247). In the context of the War this romancing was arguably orchestrated by “a strategic blurring of the lines between church and state” (Symons 2019:260). Since the state positioned fundamental Christian teaching as being in need of defence, Christian values were defended by the SADF conscript (ibid). Resultantly, a militarised Christianity essentially bypassed the anti-war fundamental Christian teaching mentioned before. Clearly, a romanticised notion of Christianity as being endangered releases its believers from any pacifistic vow as they rush to its defence at the cost of core Christian beliefs being muddied. This allowed for a tailored militarised Christianity to serve the War’s resolve. Examples of the militarisation of Christianity in the SADF, according to Sybrand Gerhardus Van Niekerk (in Wessels and Bredenkamp 2009:323), include the Canaries (founded in 1966) and the David Song Group (founded in 1985). Both were choirs that aimed to present the SADF in a positive light.

If militarism is viewed as a masculine activity, the intersection between religion and militarism exposes another social impact in conflict zones such as that of the Border. As Tamara Pavasovic Trost and Koen Sloopmaeckers (in Ganzenoort and Sremac 2016: 339) remark, “militarized masculine norms [are used] to elucidate ... religious ... superiority, whilst simultaneously ascribing subordinate characteristics of the masculinities (e.g., effeminate, homosexual) to the other ethnic groups”. As argued before, in the SADF, homosexuals were designated as being related to communists. What Trost and

Slootmaeckers propose, illustrates not only the relation between masculinised military characters and religious superiority but also the expulsion of alternative masculinities, such as homosexuals, from the narrative of religious ascendancy. Once again, in the capacity of religious superiority, the homosexual was othered. In addition, the heroic narrative inherent in Afrikaner nationalism did not provide for alternative masculinities either.

Daniel Conway (2008:76) recalls that “South African popular culture aided the perception of ‘the border’ as a distant yet heroic place”. From a Barthesian perspective, the Border thus satisfied a broader belief system of heroism. The heroic characterisation of ‘the border’ and its associated “romanticised ideal of military service” (Conway 2008:76) intersected with nationalism to invoke the “rally[ing] [of] the white nation and were a symbol of South Africa’s prowess” (2008:76). Julie Frederickse (in Conway 2008:77) recalls a 1981 SABC comment:

As over the weekend, South Africans rejoiced at the splendid victory of the Springboks in New Zealand, other of the country’s representatives were returning from the battlefield in Angola. Their mission, too, was splendidly accomplished ... There is good cause for pride in the performance of our men in New Zealand and Angola.

In white society, sport was instructive in the construction of the Afrikaner’s own self-perceived superiority. As Robert Morrell (in Symons 2020:8) observes, “sports heroes were idolised in a similar way to war heroes”. Specifically, rugby was closely associated with the heroic performance of war. As a participant in Daniel Conway’s study, “Masculinities, militarisation and the End Conscription Campaign” recalls,

[b]ack in the 80s rugby was everything at our high school. No one played hockey, it was called mof-sticks.<sup>5</sup> Going to practice on Mondays

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<sup>5</sup> “Roughly translated from Afrikaans, this fragment of schoolboy slang means ‘gay-sticks’, a derogatory term for schoolboy hockey” (Symons 2019:100).

and Wednesdays was like basics, they drilled us hard, it was full on. I felt like I was going to war on Saturday mornings ((in Symons 2020:8).

Thus, the heroic representations of the military and the war instructed collective expectations and behavioural ideas in the rugby stadiums of South Africa. As suggested in the literature review, sport served as the cradle for military service (Symons 2020:8). Hence, nationalist exceptionalism was informed both by the victory of rugby teams and the 'heroic' conquest at the Border. However, alternative masculinities such as homosexuals posed a threat to the unification of the nation and the ideology of heroism amongst Afrikaners, especially on supposed moral grounds. In truth, "ideas about homosexuality, in particular ... increased fears about the perceived moral degeneration of society" (Jones 2008:397). As a result, homosexuals could not represent any heroic social ideology and thus, much like all of the previous intersections discussed, were ostracised.

Myths of heroism, militarism and discourses of hetero-patriarchy are all arguably associated with the social context at the Border since "success in war [presumes] heroic risk taking" (Peterson 2010:23) and there is, as mentioned before, a strong relation between military organisations and hegemonic representations of masculinity. When viewed through the lens of Sherry Shepler and Anne Mattina's (1991:151) "contemporary understanding of the role of the [myth of the] soldier, [the myth of] nationalism and [the myth of] patriarchy", these myths became distillations of nationalist ideals such as religious superiority, patriarchy and nationalist exceptionalism. This was the case since some white males considered it their birth-right to include a God-given entitlement (Mason 2015:72) With regard to nationalist ideals, Chris Broodryk (2015:77) elaborates: "the mythical idea of the nation, emerging from an imagined position of purity and triumph, provides a foundational moment for a collective on which to romanticise their existence and from where to articulate their exceptionalism".

Some of these nationalist ideals, along with their amplifications of myths of discourses of hetero-patriarchy, militarism and heroism are reflected in the Afrikaans cinema of the

war era as well as in more contemporary Afrikaans war films. Katrin Voltmer (in Broodryk 2016:71) posits that it does not suffice if the media merely refrains from perpetuating stereotypes. In South African Afrikaans war films even this is hardly done, since “[War] films tracked the ideological purposes of the state ... during the three phases of the war itself” (Craig 2004:43), Dylan Craig argues that the films of the War era can be broken down into three phases themselves.

The first phase was characterised by heroic representation: “small bands of heroic white protagonists face[d]] large groups of incompetent terrorists egged on by evil foreign agitators” (Craig 2004:43). As is mentioned in the introduction, the purpose was to legitimise the ideological as well as political struggle of the regime and the war in the minds of those who supported the war effort. In the films of this era, the message is conveyed that bravery and discipline are all that is needed in order to triumph. South Africans are portrayed as militarily superior to their enemies (Craig 2004:44). Examples of the films of this era include *Kaptein Caprivi* where Captain Caprivi himself receives orders to rescue farmers who are being held hostage by terrorists (Craig 2004:30). The prisoners are killed until only the heroic Beukes remains (Craig 2004:31). In *Die Banneling* (Millin 1971) “the film’s hero ... is journeying into the allegorical landscape of threatened white colonial Africa” (Craig 2004:33), and in the sequel to *Kaptein Caprivi*, *Aanslag op Kariba* (Hall 1973), the action in the narrative unfolds in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) when Beukes and his wife find themselves in a hostage situation (ibid:32). In these films, the “thematic conventions match the outlook adopted by the detente-minded Vorster administration during the early years of the Border War” (Craig 2004:44). The potency of the political devotion of the narratives of these films, starkly contrasts with American cinema at the stage of the Vietnam War. Keyan Tomaselli (1985:16) notes that films such as *Coming Home* (Ashby 1978) and *The Deer Hunter* (Cimino 1979) critiqued America’s presence in South East Asia and underscored how the war devastated American society. In contrast, the South African cinematic experience during this phase and especially the *Kaptein Caprivi* films seem to have ignored any such themes and “rather followed the troops into action with no qualms at all” (Tomaselli

1985:16). *Kaptein Caprivi* and its sequel speak to a reductive and binary impression of life such as good and bad or black and white (Tomaselli 1985:16).

The second-phase War movies had a different agenda. The aim was, firstly identify the enemy and then, secondly, convince the viewer that in order to keep the enemy at bay, sacrifices were needed (Craig 2004:44). As a result of “regional and international developments between 1973 and 1975, South Africa [was stripped] of its Portuguese and Rhodesian allies, putting it face-to-face with unsympathetic post-liberation governments on several fronts” (Craig 2004:34). These films represent the characteristics of the enemy but also increase the impression of the importance of conscription (Craig 2004:44). They include themes of patriarchal ascendancy as projected in, for instance, *Die Winter van 14 Julie* (Scholtz 1977), which is a story about ‘lovers in trouble’. A message is sent to the viewer that despite it being inconvenient, military service is not only righteous, it is also embraced by the responsible and caring direction of authoritative figures. In *Die Winter van 14 Julie* this unfolds in the unit of the main character’s commanding officer (Craig 2004:36). A message is sent to the viewer that military service is honourable and unfolds under the caring nature of dependable figures.

*Die Winter van 14 Julie* militarises patriarchy in its replacement of a father figure with a commanding officer. *Mirage Eskader* (Retief 1975) presents heroic themes as it “details the struggle to succeed, and the eventual journey into maturity and warrior status, of two trainee pilots” (Craig 2004:35). In essence these themes draw on existing sentiments in South African society at the particular stage. For instance, films such as *Mirage Eskader* present signs of conflicting relationships with the West. Distinction is made between courting positive opinion from the West and fending off criticism (Riley 2012:142).

Finally, the third phase is separated by Craig into two categories: pro- and anti-establishment. Pro-establishment films such as *Boetie Gaan Border Toe* (Van den Bergh



1984) “operat[e] in a far lighter tone than even the most antiseptic of second-phase Border War films” (Craig 2004:40). The timidity described is evident from the film promo:

Boetie is the kind of guy who will do everything to avoid his national service, until his father bribes him to go. This is the story of a boy who develops into a man whom his country can indeed be proud of. Full of humour, toughness and a certain kind of tenderness that will be remembered for a long time (Doherty 2014:124).

As Craig (2004:40) notes, the ‘evil terrorist hordes’ themselves, a staple of the genre since *Kaptein Caprivi*, is noticeably absent from the *Boetie* movies. In point of fact, according to Christo Doherty (2014:124), the enemy is never identified or visible and the actual confrontation is presented as a cacophony of flying bullets and explosions. The invisible enemy merely functions as a backdrop to the spectacle of machismo that unfolds in the foreground of the struggle.

Anti-establishment films were made when it became apparent that the fall of apartheid was inevitable. This required a renegotiation of memory and experience (Craig 2004:45). Films such as Darrel Roodt’s *The Stick* (1988) was “made ‘outside the fold’ of military-civilian collusion that typified the South African film industry” (Craig 2004:41). Roodt opposed South Africa’s military presence in Namibia. His approach was also pacifistic (Doherty 2014:121). It is worth noting that *The Stick* was banned (Rijsdijk 2017:105) in South Africa since it exposes the extent of government control in the creation of cinematic narratives.

As is argued in section 2.4, it is disappointing that contemporary films such as *My Father’s War* (which was released only six years ago) perpetuates the social Afrikaner discourses already discussed, as they are reflected in especially the second and pro-establishment third phase Border War films. Unlike the cinema of the War era, these more recent films arguably hold no social context to instruct them. The discourses,

previously at least, were required to serve a purpose (such as motivating conscription into the SADF) but later have grown redundant and inconsequential. One would not be mistaken to expect that a heated hegemonic environment such as the SADF and its homophobic reservations would pose the ideal setting for a narrative that interrogates hegemonic toxicity and the grotesque treatment of homosexuals. Regrettably, the War narratives have predominantly neglected to address what seems to be one of the most controversial aspects of the War.

## **2.2 Myth at war: The construction of Afrikaner identity at the Border and beyond**

As mentioned in the literature review, myth neutralises social contradictions in order to make certain views appear more coherent (Reid 2012:48). In view of this, Afrikaner identity had to be negotiated in alignment with the re-imagining of a temporal space: “the discourse of ‘the border’ became a powerful cultural sign in white society and underpinned a mythology that sustained and intensified South Africa’s militarisation” (Conway 2008:75). The Border, presented as a mythical agent to white South African society, thus foregrounded unified conviction and support of the War effort. It compounded the myths of nationalist exceptionalism, religious superiority and patriarchy as well as their related amplifications of militarism, heroism and discourses of hetero-patriarchy in resistance to the communist threat. The interplay between these myths, as well as the marginalisation of alternative masculinities, is elaborated on by considering Sherry Shepler and Anne Mattina’s (1999:159) submission regarding the aforementioned mythical formulation of the soldier (as arguably a signifier of militarism), nationalism and patriarchy: “soldiers are not just individual persons serving in a military force. Rather, they are ordinary people who become the defenders of national ideals. In effect, they embody the concepts for which they are fighting”. They continue to suggest that “any challenge to a particular myth is a challenge to the legitimacy of a culture” (1999:163). That, which Shepler and Mattina posit, illustrates the manner in which militarism is mythically formulated to reject countering or resistance by expounding the singularity of the soldier as symbolic of the plurality of the

nation. It follows that, in the Border War context, the cultural signification of 'the border' and its resulting unification of the Afrikaner nation as a macrocosm along with its myths of nationalist exceptionalism, religious superiority and patriarchy, was distilled to mythical formulations of militarism, heroism and discourses of hetero-patriarchy in the microcosm of the SADF. As stated before, hegemonic masculinity masters every other type of gender and will resort to violence when failing to impose its rules. In the SADF this domination was actively endorsed by the marginalisation of alternative masculine figures such as homosexuals. A homosexual conscript could not symbolise the social order of the apartheid regime since they were considered to be "a predatory threat that placed the purity and hygiene of the national body politic at risk" (Falkov 2019:274). It comes as little surprise, therefore, that every measure was taken to silence and expel these masculinities. The aim was to 'cure' homosexuals (McGreal 2000:1). Through the 1970s and 1980s some conscripts had to undergo chemical castration and others were pressured to undergo sex change operations (Durstun 2016:35). As Paul Kirk and Terry Bell (in Kaplan 2004:1) observe, despite homosexuality having been removed as an illness from the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders from 1973 onwards, there were allegations that approximately 900 men underwent sexual reassignment surgery. This is the only known incidence of such operations in military hospitals. These mythical tropes present in the broader structure of Afrikaner society and those resulting from its distillation in the SADF, denoted indescribable horror for the homosexual conscript.

Nationalism, especially when considered exceptional, as a myth, arguably intensifies the predicament of alternative masculinities since it proposes a reciprocatory relationship between the microcosm of the SADF and the macrocosm of Afrikaner identity. As mentioned in the literature review, if nationalism is considered to be an acceptable and advocated form of individual identification both publicly and socially, then it follows that to challenge the individual would imply also to challenge the nation (Shepler and Mattina 1999:159). Nationalism suggests that the nation is at the core of identification, more so for the masculine subject. If men identify with the nation, an elevated sense of

self is created. The myth of the soldier suggests that soldiers have a 'higher purpose'. Accordingly, men would replicate the soldier's ascendancy onto an individual sense of self, affording the masculine figure with a 'higher' role or purpose.

It follows that the Afrikaner myths of nationalist exceptionalism, religious superiority and patriarchy were amplified to become a utopic space of self-identification. The romanticism of death and the superior religious overtones in the male individual as having a higher purpose, translated to what became a masculine social ascendancy in Afrikaner society. The Church especially posed agency in the creation of this self-nurtured identity marker. As mentioned in the literature review, Afrikaner masculinity and Afrikaner men were protected by Christian National Education and the Church since the 1940s (Morrell 1998:617). In addition, as mentioned before, the Church aimed to strengthen the spiritual defensibility of its members and was convinced that a 'just' war was being fought. Hence, the romanticised notion of the male conscript at the Border, which was bolstered by the Church, solidified the Afrikaner man's position as superior both nationalistically, religiously and sexually. However, discourses of hetero-patriarchy, which can arguably be identified as the most destructive myth, came part and parcel along with the aforementioned amplification of already existing myths in the Afrikaner male character inasmuch as conscripts, "whether willingly or unwillingly, were complicit in preserving a hegemony based on the superiority of a white minority" (Symons 2019:203). In this sense, discourses of hetero-patriarchy became part of the Afrikaner man's utopic space of self-identification. It follows that the idealised soldier who was instructive in a personal sense of self in the Afrikaner male character, could not to any extent identify as homosexual since, to the Afrikaner, it would be a personal assault. Nicky Falkof (2019:274) substantiates: "Gay white men, by their very existence, suggested a possible weakness in the ideal of the white South African patriarch". Lastly, Shepler and Mattina (1999:160) note that patriarchy underlies nationalist mythmaking as well as the myth of the soldier. Patriarchy promotes male leadership and superiority. Since patriarchy forms the bedrock of the entire social fabric, it cannot easily be identified or challenged.

Despite this, in the context of the SADF and marginalised masculinities, challenges to the patriarchal mythology can be identified and delimited. As argued before, the violence associated with war and a military organisation such as the SADF, condensed patriarchy to become hegemonic discourses of hetero-patriarchy in the SADF in its domination of alternative masculinities and not just women. As Raywen Connell (in Ngumo, Yieke and Onyango 2020:3) mentioned in the literature review, hegemonic masculinity assumes that non-hegemonic masculinities are subordinate. Shinsuke Eguchi (2009:194) suggests that “society pressures gay men to negotiate who they are according to hegemonic masculinity”. One such negotiation has been termed by gay men themselves: straight-acting. It is maintained that straight-acting gay men “perform who they are to conform to similar hegemonic masculine stereotypes” (2009:194). This is elaborated on in Chapter 4. Such performance is but one of the examples of negotiation with hegemony. As mentioned before, in the SADF, these negotiations were taken to gruesome extremes such as sexual mutilation. It becomes evident that discourses of hetero-patriarchy in the SADF required marginalised masculinities to compensate for the preservation of such discourses despite the cost.

Furthermore, an idealised version of discourses of hetero-patriarchy also existed in the Afrikaner male, as previously described to be part of his utopic space of self-identification. This resulted in Afrikaner masculinities demanding the same compensation from alternative masculinities as heterosexual masculinities required in the SADF. It follows that this stratified discrimination at the Border and beyond in Afrikaner masculinities, pushed the homosexual conscript even further towards the periphery. It is therefore unsurprising that “accounts exist of suicide during treatment [of homosexual conscripts in the SADF] and after discharge ... the most well-known [being] Jean Erasmus, who killed himself after providing detailed information about the [aversion] programme” (Kaplan 2004:1415). It is considered to be a challenge to broader understandings and myths in society, when victims of trauma verbalise their experience (Doherty 2015:37). That being said, it is not suggested here that all of Afrikaner society

was homophobic at that stage, as such an assertion would be impossible to quantify and likely incorrect. What is argued, is that the myths discussed required hegemonic attitudes and social injustices from those members who subscribed to them. In imagery that portray the war visually, these tropes of myths of militarism, heroism, discourses of hetero-patriarchy and its related myths of nationalist exceptionalism and religious superiority, regrettably still reflect in some visual representations of the War, three of which will be sampled in the section that follows.

In conclusion, myths of nationalist exceptionalism, religious superiority and patriarchy, in those Afrikaners who subscribed their identity as such, condensed to become mythical notions of heroism, militarism and discourses of hetero-patriarchy at the Border. This was actively enforced by the marginalisation of alternative masculinities. In addition, the compounding of heroism, militarism and discourses of hetero-patriarchy spoke to the mythical ideology of the nation amongst those Afrikaners who identified with it. It constructed a utopic space of self-identification in the masculine Afrikaner figure as he re-imagined his identity as superior in as far as gender, nationalistic superiority and religious ascendancy were concerned. This self-perceived superiority was receptive to myths of discourses of hetero-patriarchal attitudes as the Afrikaner reimagined and idealised himself to embody the mythical formulations of heroism, militarism and discourses of hetero-patriarchy nurtured at the Border. As a result of this, marginalised masculinities such as homosexuals were thrust to the periphery both at the Border and in the broader structure of Afrikaner society.

However, homosexuals were not without recourse — especially “in the mid-1980s, with the creation of Gays and Lesbians of the Witwatersrand (GLOW). [In addition to this] by the early 1990s the issue of constitutional rights for gays and lesbians began to engage the legal and academic communities” (Massoud 2003:302). These spaces allowed for homosexuals to articulate their dissent of the apartheid regime’s homophobic rhetoric and were instrumental in the fracturing of the totalitarian mythical formulations this section has deliberated. By employing the mythical formulations discussed, the visual

portrayals of the war are analysed, the foundation laid and contextualised, and markers are provided for the queer representation in *Moffie* and *Kanarie*.

### 2.2.1 Nationalist exceptionalism and heroism



**Figure 1:** Re-enactment of the Raising of the Flag at Iwo Jima. (Paratus Magazine 1971)



**Figure 2:** U.S. Marines of the 28th Regiment, 5th Division, raise the American flag atop Mt. Suribachi, Iwo Jima on February 23, 1945. The iconic Pulitzer Prize-winning photo was taken five days after the Marines landed on the island. (ABC News 2020)

Homi Bhabba (2013:1) suggests that the nature and imagining of nationalism do not originate from a specific identifiable point in history, but rather emerges in the mind's eye. The hazing of the nation's origins arguably allows for association and replication to capture timeless and abstract collective understandings amongst those with the same ideological leanings. Figure 1 is an almost faithful replication, save for the flag, of the iconic moment when the Stars and Stripes were raised atop Mount Suribatchi during the battle for Iwo Jima in February 1945 (Hariman and Lucaites 2002:363) as seen in Figure 2. Of the elements in the image, the flag is most important since, in both cases, it determines a collective understanding of nationalism "as a powerful mode of definition and identification" (Hariman and Lucaites:371). As mentioned in the literature review, the raising of the flag at Iwo Jima served as a symbolic moment when combat and

strategic planning informed a sense of national unity (Hariman and Lucaites 2002:371). Similarly, the *Paratus* magazine cover welcomes the viewer to unite with the military under the apartheid flag and participate in its exceptionalism as it represents the determination and discipline required to rise to its station. In reality, the viewer, as representative of the nation, is invited to ascend to a utopic space of identification with the heroism associated with the soldiers. This resonates with Shepler and Mattina's (1999:159) view that, especially, masculine identification with the soldier uses the higher purpose of the soldier to define the individual sense of self. As they argued, nationalism "allow[s] individuals to have a higher role or purpose and to have a higher form of loyalty" (Shepler and Mattina 1999:159).

Loyalty towards the nation as represented by the flags and soldiers in both images also read as loyalty towards the reclamation of land. The *Paratus* issue in Figure 2 was published during the same year as the release of the film *Die Banneling* which, as previously described, follows its hero into the allegorical landscape of threatened white colonial Africa. Since one of the more obvious readings of the images is arguably the "connection between victory and territorial occupation" (Hariman and Lucaites 2002:371) it appears that, at least in 1971, the representation of the conquering and reclamation of threatened land appeared more than once in the media. It follows that, as with the Vorster administration's forbearing approach to the early war years mentioned before, both *Die Banneling* and the *Paratus* magazine cover present the locus of identification of South Africans and the Afrikaner as inclined towards less aggressive expanse into foreign territory than the reclamation of land. The thematic conventions in *Die Banneling* and as read in the *Paratus* magazine, resonate with nationalism as originating from an indistinct origin: the hero in *Die Banneling* travels to a fictional space and the flag raising on the *Paratus* magazine cover draws its ideologies from a romanced understanding of nationalism from earlier epochs such as the raising of the US flag at Iwo Jima. However, since the circumstances rapidly changed for the war effort especially after 1975 when "the SADF was first involved in a conventional type war since 1945" (Warwick 2012:354) South African nationalism adopted what



nationalism is generally frequently considered to be: a nation/state-building process that is extreme and violent (Paasi 2015:21).



**Figure 3:** A 1981 issue of the Paratus Magazine.  
(Paratus November 1981)

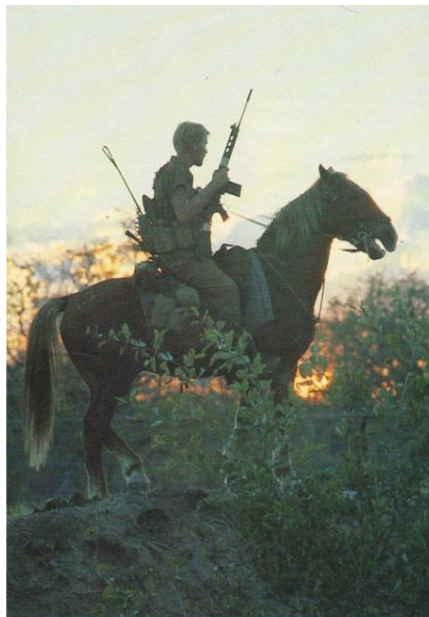
This can be seen in later *Paratus* magazine covers such as the 1981 issue seen in Figure 3. The cover lines read: “The Neutron Bomb. Key to Peace?”, “Enemies of RSA become desperate” and “Exclusive: SADF patrols Indian Ocean”.

In conclusion, the replication of collective understandings of nationalist superiority as spatially dislodged from the lineage of time, provides for generic social implications in whichever context it unfolds. In the case of the War, magazine covers such as *Paratus* in Figure 1 draws from nationalist mythology as it recalls and replicates in popular memory — for example the raising of the flag at Iwo Jima. In its presentation and its collective considerations of a particular era of the War, it promulgates a unification of nationhood and a collective understanding of what is expected from broader society to preserve the heroic act of strategy, precision and labour that it signifies. As Chambliss established before, heroic characterisation is important as a means to inform society about

collective understandings and behavioural ideas. The reading of Figure 1 coincides with the same submissions made to South Africans in, for instance *Die Banneling*, since both suggest the reclamation of land without referring to or delimiting a particular space. The onus seems to lie with the SADF as representing the exceptionalism of the nation whilst simultaneously allowing the nation to ascend to the heroic utopia of the soldier. It would only be once the War had adopted a more aggressive stance that, as can be seen in Figure 3, such a utopia would become soaked in blood.

### **2.2.2 Militarisation, hegemony and power**

As Bernazzoli and Flint posited before, one of the ways that reproduction of the state's 'geography of hegemony' unfolds, is the adoption of visible signs of military culture. As will be argued in the light of the images in this section, two such visible signs are horses and horseback riders.



**Figure 4:** "A figure from bygone times, yet in the vast bushveld of the Border War, it makes perfect sense" (Steenkamp 1990:200). (Translation from Afrikaans by author)

In Figure 4, sourced from Willem Steenkamp's book *South Africa's Border War 1966-1989* (1989), a young man on horseback is poised against the backdrop of sunset. He holds his gun up as if highly alert. When the representation of the horseback rider is read in the context of the Afrikaner's dream topography (Barnard and Coetzee 2003:204) (as discussed in the literature review), where the patriarch rules the family farm and dedicates it to his sons to inherit in perpetuity, horseback riding is romanced as associated with masculine ascendancy in an undetermined pastoral space.

The horseback rider, as the caption concedes, is reminiscent of a previous era — arguably referring to early eons of Afrikaner history such as the Great Trek where the so-called 'Farmer's Horse' accompanied the Voortrekkers (Alexander 1977:45). In this sense, the horse and its rider are instrumental in the theme of discovering new territory and laying claim of land in order ultimately to contribute to a domestic system of settlement, maintained for generations by means of patriarchal perpetuity. Yet, the caption hastens to contextualise the image as taken during the War, which amplifies the aforementioned domestic system in which the horse and its rider participate to become a far greater social compulsion. There are patriarchal overtones in the description of the Border as "a constant reminder that there were 'boys on the Border', men to be precise: ones who had crossed that symbolic border from boyhood to manhood through military training, a border that separated them from femininity" (Drewett 2003:79). This representation of the Border as having patriarchal agency replaces a domestic system with a militarised social formulation, since the Border literally and figuratively furnished the young conscript with a gun and a horse as signifier of power. The compounding of a patriarchal domestic system, as argued before, was refined to become part of a hegemonic discourse of hetero-patriarchy (especially considering mention of separation from effeminacy) and as bolstered by the presence of horse power. Undoubtedly, horses have occupied a powerful role throughout much of South African and South African Afrikaner history.

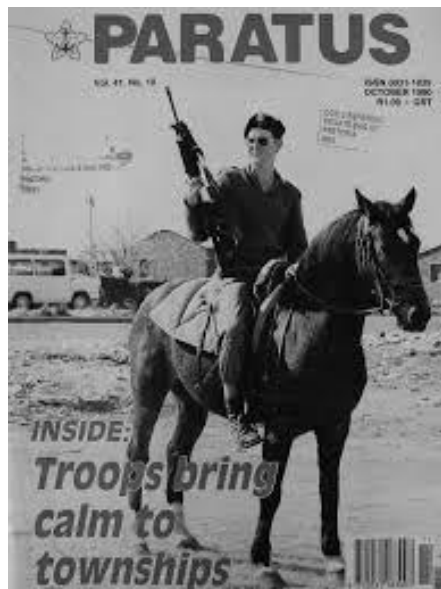


**Figure 5:** Afskeid (Farewell) by Danie de Jager, unveiled in 1986. It depicts a Boer bidding farewell to his family to serve in the war against the British. (*Military History Journal* Vol 8 No 1 – December 2017)

Aside from the fact that, even since the early settlement of the Cape, “the role of the horse was predicated on power, in both symbolic and material manifestation” (Swart 2003:63), the disruption of Afrikaner domestic systems by militarism traces back to earlier epochs of Afrikaner history such as the Anglo Boer War (1899-1902) as it has been captured as a statue seen in Figure 5.

The statue depicts a Boer soldier on horseback presumably leaving his wife and child behind. The subscript reads ‘afskeid or ‘farewell’ with the date 11 October 1899 — the day that marked the beginning of the Anglo Boer War. The aforementioned adoption of visible signs of military culture as a reproduction of the state’s geography of hegemony reflects here. The patriarchal domestic system is also subverted by the militarisation of masculinity reinforced by the power embodied by the horse. In this sense, the positioning of the participants complies with discourses of hetero-patriarchy as the Boer is positioned above his wife as well as in control of his horse. He dominates the scene and represents the battle that is to unfold. To preserve this action, those below him are

required to negotiate their roles as his wife is left behind, and his horse enables him. In addition, as mentioned with reference to the War, the feminine is expelled from the masculine action of war. The geography of hegemony does not provide for the inclusion of women or any form of effeminacy.



**Figure 6:** A mounted troop photographed in a township (Swart and De Vries 2012: 417).

During the War and apartheid era the horse, as signifier of militarism and power, enabled the hegemonic figure to impose his authority as seen in Figure 6 since, according to Lieutenant Colonel Albert van Driel “mounted troops were ... better able to retaliate against civilians” (in Swart and De Vries 2012:417). However, the aforementioned power that horses signified already in earlier white South African settler history such as the Anglo Boer War, meant that, as submitted by Sergeant Major Arno Dreyer (in Swart and De Vries 2012:418), excessive violence was not necessary to control townships, partly owing to the established symbolic power of the horse. Contrary to the statue in Figure 5, “the romantic representation of these mounted soldiers and the idealized horse-human pairing” (in Swart and De Vries 2012:417) captured the horseback rider from a different perspective as that seen on the cover of the *Paratus* magazine in Figure 6. The rider in this image is posing with sun spectacles as

he presents his gun next to him. His sophisticated appeal is far removed from any association with violence and conflict — as the caption reads: “Troops bring calm to townships”. There are no other participants in the image aside from the horse, and in the background, a taxi and the township are visible. Significantly, this is a 1990 issue of *Paratus* and it reflects the same motive as the third phase anti-establishment films of the same era described before. The SADF is now portrayed as being in the townships which, like the third phase anti-establishment films, seems to seek renegotiation of memory and experience in preparation for the aftermath of apartheid. It can thus be suggested that there was a trend in popular culture to achieve this goal. However, even here, the horse functions as a symbol of power and the nonchalant general composition arguably merely obscures the veracity of the destructive social codes of hegemony, power and masculinity. Because of this supposedly peaceful presence “many townships turned into battlegrounds and tens of thousands of people were killed” (Kynoch 2003:8).

To conclude, the disruption of Afrikaner domestic systems that led to the formulation of discourses of hetero-patriarchy were seen during the War as well as earlier, during, as also presented here, the Anglo Boer War. In both cases, the masculine action of war required compensation and at times expulsion from hegemonic domains — especially as was the case with effeminacy — regardless of the gender in which it could be read. Horses have historically represented power in both symbolic and material manifestation. They posed agency in the compounding of hetero-patriarchy in their capacity to symbolise militarism to which the horseback rider could lay claim. The horseback rider became an enigma, a weapon with transcendental skills. In point of fact, according to Hendrik Prinsloo (in Swart 2010:261), “some Boers ... granted their horses almost mystical power, feeling that their horses could ... warn them of danger ahead”. Later, as the war came to an end, the horseback rider and that which it represented was relocated, in a premeditated manner, to attempt a more contemporary negotiation with new realities — such as the looming crumbling of apartheid. However, even then, discourses of hetero-patriarchy symbolised by the rider and his horse merely became obscured by pacifistic rhetoric, such as seen on the *Paratus* magazine cover in Figure 6.

### 2.2.3 Religious superiority



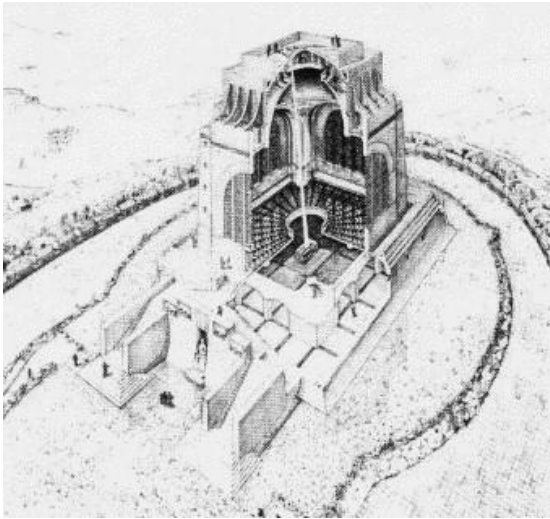
**Figure 7:** Screenshot of a montage of imagery of the Border War, 2020.  
(Screenshot by author)

Figure 7 presents two conscripts to the right of the frame. To the left the words ‘ONLY THE FITTEST WILL SURVIVE’ are printed in bold letters. The image proposes religion as a governing agent, pledging conquest to those who remain faithful to it. The soldier to the left looks toward the cross as it bolsters his efforts to defeat the enemy. In binary opposition those who relinquish their faith or have never adopted it, quite literally as the image suggests — considering the presence of the vulture — do not endure and fall prey to death. It follows that the wording ‘only the fittest will survive’ becomes inflated by religious overtones since competency and survival, as the image suggests, cannot exist without the presence of God. The association of aptitude with religion not only exalts it but also codes it as subverting the previously mentioned fundamental teachings of Christianity that condemn warfare: Christianity is romanced as having the ability to bolster success in battle, thus abandoning any pacifistic religious teaching. In addition, the Christian trope emerges as instructive in the SADF’s efforts to preserve the sanctity of the social and religious customs of the Afrikaner and to safeguard its imagined position of purity and exceptionalism as Broodryk (2015:77) has noted before. The

placing of the cross at the top of the frame signifies the Afrikaner's self-perceived religious supremacy which, like discourses of hetero-patriarchy, militarism and power, was inherited from an earlier epoch. Andre Du Toit (1983:920) substantiates: "the Voortrekkers and the Republican Afrikaners conceived of themselves as a chosen and covenanted people, like the Israelites of the Old Testament". The historical backdrop that Du Toit refers to, thus informed a value-system of superiority and exceptionalism in Afrikaner society. These myths were monumentalised by the building of the Voortrekker Monument. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the Voortrekker Monument commemorated December 16, 1838 — a time that was considered sacred since, as the nationalist myth suggested, God entered into a holy pledge with the predecessors of white Afrikaner and joined them from the heavens.

The marriage of religion and Afrikaner ancestry speaks to the union of the corporal and the divine as a mythical agent at play in the self-perceived religious superiority inherent to Afrikaner identity. In addition, the monumental preservation of this mythological ideology of religious supremacy appears to have perpetuated well beyond the time of the monument's construction as reflected in the religious superiority read in Figure 7. Doubtlessly, as the Voortrekker Monument commemorates, a great deal of Afrikaner mythology was modelled on spiritual supremacy and, as mentioned earlier with regard to the view of the Church, engaging in 'just' wars such as the Border War.





**Figure 8:** The Voortrekker Monument, Pretoria. Source: Heymans (1986) (in Crampton 2001:227).



**Figure 9:** Each year, on 12 noon of 16 December, the sun's rays fall upon the words inscribed on the red granite cenotaph (Brand South Africa 2013).

The Voortrekker Monument's architecture also resounds with the ascendancy towards and association with divinity as read in Figure 8 and 9. The Monument's architecture was synchronised to ensure "that the ... sun came through the aperture in the roof at dawn every December 16, to fall directly on the granite monolith that served as the central altar" (Chidester 1998:19). On the altar the words "*Ons vir Jou Suid-Afrika*" or "We for you South Africa" are engraved. These words allude to Afrikaner identity as a collective as well as to divinity, as seen in the placement of the cross in Figure 9, directly connecting to the heavens on the same date each year. Similarly, the soldier in Figure 7, who is a representative of national identity, as Shepler and Mattina explained before, is inextricably bound to and bolstered by the divine to achieve his goal in warfare.

As seen throughout history, mythical formulations of religious supremacy in the Afrikaner character crystallised conceptually both in the representation of the individual as well as in the collective. It has been perpetuated in both monumental preservation and visual representation. The Voortrekker Monument "ensured that the primordial nineteenth-century sacred time of beginnings would be re-enacted each year"

(Chidester 1998:19). As Julie Reid (2012:48) postulates, a group's understanding of its current predicaments and how it arrived at the present state of affairs is informed by political myths that serve to mythologise the particular group. It follows that the mythical formulation of religious superiority for the Afrikaner arrived at pivotal moments such as the construction of the Voortrekker Monument and that which it represented. It was then perpetuated to more contemporary moments such as the South African Border War, continuously instructed and bolstered by a strong belief in union with the divine, despite the cost.

### **2.3 Narratives of resistance: The myth of freedom and the myth of Afrikaner domination**

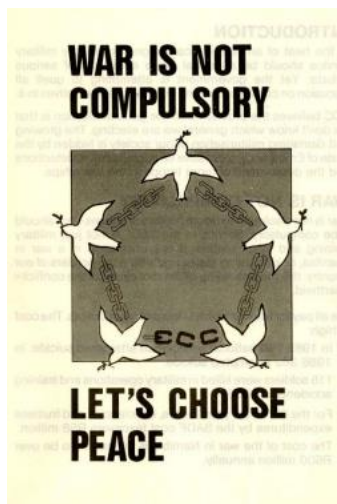
In the late 1970s cracks appeared in the foundation of Afrikaner mythology. As argued in section 2.2, totalitarian Afrikaner mythology was constructed by a value system that created intersections between mythologies such as nationalist exceptionalism, religious superiority and patriarchy with officious myths of heroism, discourses of hetero-patriarchy and militarism. These myths had been well established already in earlier ages of Afrikaner history. The social self-perceived Afrikaner ascendancy upon which these myths were modelled, exacerbated and inflamed resistance during the war era especially with regard to forced conscription. In an American study it is found "that conscription decreases mass support for war" (Horowitz and Levendusky 2011:524). In the case of the Border War, this can be seen reflected as well, particularly with regard to the End Conscription Campaign (ECC). Jela Dobošová (2009:314) posits that the Biblical story of the Tower of Babel, which represented the unwanted world to be destroyed by God leaving segregation in its wake, was a key justification of apartheid and motivation for the National Party (NP) that continued until the 1980s. The NP sought to govern the divine inevitability of segregation as a means to provide society with law and order (Dobošová 2009:314). The NP "purified society of alternative voices, which were associated with revolution such as communism and radical liberalism" (Dobošová (2009:314). In the context of the War, the enemy and world communism were

considered to be indivisible from the ECC and other objectors (Conway 2008:430). It follows that the ECC in its perception as related to communism posed a threat to myths of Afrikaner ascendancy as embodied in the NP's rule and those who supported its war effort. The ECC was seen as subverting law and order that the NP purportedly imposed. This was the case since, as recalled by Tientie Du Plessis (in Deysel 2007:33) an ex-conscript and ECC activist, it was perceived to be a criminal act should you publish anything for the ECC. As a result, ECC material was purposefully published in order to see how the government would respond. However, nothing happened. This was owing to the government realising that if they gave the ECC publicity, more troops would not arrive for military service.

It follows that resistance to the war was a cornerstone of the ECC since a central theme of ECC campaigning was to contest the Border War (Conway 2008:82) and it was executed successfully. Despite this, men who resisted military service were considered by the South African government to be effeminate, cowards and sexually deviant (Conway 2004:25). Since the ECC wanted to be considered as respectable whites, issues of sexuality were avoided (Conway 2004:25). It appears that, whereas the ECC contested the War, it did not subvert the cultural expectation that whites should be reputable. Owing to this, the ECC did not fully vacate from the narrative of ascendancy — a narrative which had become prevalent, especially in Afrikaner mythology, as mentioned before.

If Afrikaner mythology is considered to be underscored by a self-perceived myth of domination, the following theory by Max Weber (in Szelenyi 2015:3) should be kept in mind: “[a] genuine form of domination implies a minimum of voluntary compliance, that is, ... an interest in obedience” and the “domination imposed ... is justified [since those who are subordinate to it] cannot find a realistic alternative”. Since the ECC doubtlessly presented such an alternative, the theory explicates the efficacy of the ECC and also arguably the reason why, as mentioned before, many troops did not register for military service when given an alternative to Afrikaner domination. The images sampled below

appeared in ECC campaign pamphlets as well as on posters. These images draw on established myth and symbols of freedom that counteract the myths of Afrikaner domination discussed before. The ECC favoured equality, human rights, freedom, peace and justice as cornerstones to democracy (Pretorius and Sauthoff 2004:23). Freedom, as one of the myths to which the ECC sought to subscribe, can be framed and understood by considering Hannah Arendt’s postulation regarding the myth of freedom. To Arendt (in Besier 2008:48), only action informs freedom as a political phenomenon — not will or the act of thinking. Owing to this, to act is to be free; it is the ability to practice freedom. If the subjects of domination believe that domination is justified since they cannot find a realistic alternative, as mentioned before, the myth of domination can be seen as modelled on limitation and restraint. The myth of freedom subverts this model by formulating its premise on the removal of constraint and a call to action, thus, as already stated, providing an opportunity to practice freedom. The myth of domination thus relies on static social coding whereas the myth of freedom promotes active participation. In accordance with that which Arendt posits, the images sampled below present freedom as an act. Some of the images are read as a capturing of motion with truncated phrasing to anchor meaning. The capturing of motion juxtaposed with symbolism presents a composition that instantly communicates intent.



**Figure 10:** [ECC campaign] (War is not compulsory, let’s choose peace ... 2017: [sp]).



**Figure 11:** [SADF emblem] (SA security forces ... 2020: [sp]).



**Figure 12:** [ECC Campaign] (Stop the call-up ... 2017: [sp]).

Figure 10 captures doves flying away from the extremities of chains outlining a pentagon. The pentagon signifies the emblem of the SADF as seen in Figure 11. The doves with olive branches in their beaks break the chains that signify the binding, enforced system of conscription, thus proposing, as mentioned before, an alternative to the myth of Afrikaner domination. The broken links of the chain form the letters ECC establishing the End Conscription Campaign as the agent that allows the chain to break and subsequently the doves of peace to fly freely. This theme of stasis versus action is articulated in the visual composition of other ECC campaign images such as Figure 12.

In this depiction a conscript is presented in a humiliating position, trousers down and crouched forward in a toilet stance. He is tied down with red rope and framed inside the outline of the SADF emblem. The image signifies agony and restraint imposed by the SADF, underscoring the Afrikaner myths of domination imposed forcefully upon the conscript. Again, the wording calls for the subversion of stasis in order to allow for the practice of freedom. The choice of red as the colour of the rope and the outline of the wording not only represents the violence associated with the War but, given the conscript's crouched posture as if in pain, also alludes to mental agony. The image exposes a deeper stratum present in the myth of domination and its associated static social coding as inflicting mental harm. Yet, arguably, the image undermines its own intent that reveals a weakness in the ECC's campaigning. Since the image focuses on the effects of conscription as it existed in the broader framework of the myth of domination by denying the conscript an alternative, it is clear that, as Daniel Conway (Conway 2004:208) observes, the ECC was in favour of white men who did not wish to join the SADF owing to political reasoning. However, owing to the ECC's unwillingness to radically challenge the apartheid government in so far as heterosexual masculinity, citizenship and military service is concerned, the ECC's full political sway was diminished. Hence it appears that an image such as this only partially fulfils Arendt's theory of the myth of freedom since the locus of participation rests within a privileged group, disregarding and even preserving the stasis of alternative masculinities, such as

homosexuals, in their subordination to Afrikaner domination. As Conway mentioned earlier, the ECC still sought to be perceived as respectable whites and they avoided contentious issues of sexuality.



**Figure 13:** A conscript clawing at the map of Namibia.  
(Baines 2004:1)

Figure 13 also captures motion as resistance to stasis in both material and mental manifestations. However, the same critique as above can be submitted. In the bottom left the words “S.A.’s VIETNAM” are printed in bold black letters, a phrase that suggests that the outcome of the war in Vietnam is similar to the SADF’s illegal occupation of Namibia (Baines 2004:1). Akin to the War, the war in Vietnam did not ultimately achieve its aim. As Linda Dittmar and Gene Michaud (1990:6) submit, “for the Americans, the legacy of the Vietnam War is a legacy of ... futile sacrifice”. The soldier in the illustration reaches with strong, muscular arms and fingers clawed against the geographic outline of the map of Namibia all in red. As with Figure 12, the red colouring represents violence and blood. His mental agony is signified by the cramping of his fingers as it rips away in

frustration. The image captures ferocious movement and rebellion against the static social coding of the conscript as he is subjected to domination. His white arms and neck are juxtaposed with the red map and the name Namibia printed in black letters on the red map, alluding to the African blood spilt during the war. Yet, given that the ECC failed to challenge the NP's stance on alternative masculinities, as mentioned before, the image ironically deflates its own liberal submission in its resolve to perform freedom on a segregated stage — leaving alternative masculinities in the wings.

## 2.4 My Father's War — a case study

The plot of *My Father's War* revolves around Dap, the main character, who has a dysfunctional, toxic relationship with his father, David. He is an ex-conscript suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, following his experiences at the Border. Dap does not validate his father's suffering; on the contrary, he condemns the War as an extension of apartheid ideology. Because of the War and David's conscription, Dap spent much of his childhood without a father figure and resents his father for his absence. As a result, the narrative portrays Dap as an angry drunk who listens to heavy metal, drives under the influence of liquor, wrecks his father's car and socialises with friends who contribute to his excessive drinking. This affects David so severely that he requires hospitalisation. He is supported by his black ex-conscript friend, Floyd. Miraculously, about thirty minutes into the film's running time, Dap starts dreaming that he is present at the Border with his father as his commanding officer. At first, his mother does not believe him once he reveals his dreams to her. However, when Dap starts recounting details of his father's experience that he had never been told and could not possibly have known, he manages to convince his mother. This leads to Dap's redemption as he forgives his father's absence once he has fully appreciated his father's experiences at the Border. Ultimately, David invites Dap to meet his fellow ex-conscript friends, one of whom tells Dap that if he "can only be half the man [his father] was, [he will] become more than a man". They challenge Dap to join them in scaling a cliff wall followed by a braai at the top. The scene concludes as the men honour a fallen comrade.

### 2.4.1 *Semiotic analysis*



**Figure 14:** A young child posing on top of a military vehicle, *My Father's War*. 2016.  
(Screenshot by author)

The opening credits roll over a montage sequence of a toddler playing on a couch next to his mother, followed by documentary footage of conscripts leaving their families behind and engaging in combat. The sequence ends with the same toddler standing on top of a military vehicle next to an artillery shell as seen in Figure 14. Finding no evidence to the contrary and given the manipulated positioning of the artillery shell next to the toddler, the author assumes the image to be artificially aged in order to explicate the manner in which transtemporal commodified nostalgia poses agency in the toxic representation of Afrikaner myths.

In Figure 1 in section 2.2.1 the facilitation of association and replication by hazing the nation's origins to capture nostalgic timeless and collective understandings amongst those with the same ideological leanings, has been explored. In a similar fashion, a purposefully manipulated image such as Figure 14, arguably functions to evoke nostalgia by deploying an artificially aged image as a denotative sign in a society with shared moral propensities and mythological proclivities. Jean Baudrillard (in Niemeyer 2014:54) suggests that, as is arguably also the case with the Afrikaner, intentionally aged



photographs have a mythologising effect. It reminds of the halcyon days yet it also exists in the present because it bears the hallmarks of realism. It follows that artificially aged images such as Figure 14, provide transtemporal mythology by employing symbolic signs especially since such images appear authentic.

Figure 14 is bizarre in its binary representation of innocence symbolised by the toddler and violence by the military vehicle and artillery shell positioned next to him. Here, the composition suggests the priming and intersection of myths of militarism and patriarchal ascendancy in family units as signified by the toddler. Hilikka Pietilä (1990:5) suggests that there is a conceptual relation between family unity and the military chain of command. In both cases obedience is valued and disobedience is punished. Obedience to power is essential to a functional military machine as well as to a patriarchal family unit.

Transtemporal mythologising of a militarised patriarchal family unit is underscored by the artificial ageing of the photograph presented in sepia. The toddler's tidy appearance denotes successful priming of discipline and virtue and the low angle positions him as superior. Evidently, masculine ascendancy and military obedience is transposed onto a young boy. This reflection of the radicalisation of youth and especially male youth, might satisfy the mythological appetite of those Afrikaners who wish to position their socio-political penchant and value systems in a space that is receptive to masculine militarised patriarchy. However, the toxicity of it in the broader context of a post-TRC South Africa becomes clear — especially as far as the redundancy and toxicity surrounding Afrikaner masculinity are concerned. South African stories have tended to become a site of resistance to and critique of hegemonic masculinities amongst young and adolescent South Africans. In 1994, Elwyn Jenkins (in Mitchell and Smith 1996:176) suggests that “many of these texts deal with a youthful protagonist's entry into, exclusion from, or resistance to dominant hegemonies”.

It appears that there was already a motion towards resistance to hegemony in the portrayal of South African youth some twenty-four years ago. It therefore becomes disturbing that *My Father's War* would present a projection of militarised patriarchy, an equally destructive myth, onto a young boy in a film released in 2016. The boy's tidy appearance next to an artillery shell on top of a military vehicle might be collectively understood (in a metabolic system of Afrikaner production and consumption with the same values, ideas and practices) to symbolise discipline and obedience. Yet, this does not account for the changeable meanings of these arbitrary signs (Harman 1986:152) in a broader South African social context. The ideological social relocation in a post-TRC South Africa would and should result in the decoding of these meanings as being toxic. Producers of films such as *My Father's War* ought to be cognisant of this. The binary presentation of innocence and violence implies a sense of negation. It is congruent to a mode of discursive response that Heidi Grunebaum (2015:31) suggests to be in support of a sense of denialism of the past. Rather than acknowledging complicity, the sentiment leans towards claims of not having been responsible for what occurred. There is thus no motion towards redemption.

The guiltlessness symbolised by the toddler, despite his superior positioning from a low-angle, juxtaposed with the violence symbolised by the artillery shell, disavows complicity on the grounds of ignorance. The child cannot participate in the submission of a violent act of war. The artillery shell virtually overwhelms the size of his body and the military vehicle is not only too gigantic to fit into the frame, but large enough to dwarf even his small physique. Conceptually the mere size of the military equipment renders him unable to enact violence despite him being a product of militarised patriarchal mythology as argued before. Toxic reminiscence of moral detachment transposed onto the youth not only speaks to utter disregard of accountability in a society aspiring for reconciliation but also fails to explore their vulnerability beyond mere guiltlessness. The constructing of their identity as products of militarised patriarchy instead of as victims, in an image such as Figure 14, signifies a redundant representation. As mentioned before, contemporary South African narratives tend to position the youth as resistant

to dominant hegemonies. In addition, in a strategy to provoke moral satisfaction, such an image disregards an opportunity to deploy the innocence ascribed to suffering children in war films, as Karen Lury submits (in Hitchcock 2016:20) and thereby claiming responsibility for past transgressions as, for instance seen in Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (1993).



**Figure 15:** Girl in red coat, *Schindler's List*. 1994.  
(Shane O'Neill)

Figure 15 is an iconic still from *Schindler's List*. The Jewish girl is presented wearing a red coat in a ghetto in an otherwise black-and-white film. Subsequent to this shot, her lifeless body, still dressed in the red coat, is seen being carted away. As with Figure 14, the image is artificially aged in the choice to film in black and white, yet unlike Figure 14, her red coat transgresses the hallmarks of authenticity by the solitary use of colour. Hence, the transtemporal reminiscence of socially commodified mythology is shattered as the red coat “becomes a visual metaphor representing the Jews, or, the universal victim — childlike and female, thus innocent passive and powerless” (Rapaport 2002:58). It appears that, instead of radicalising the youth as seen in Figure 14, the youth is positioned as victim. The representation of their vulnerability is not exploited to be receptive to the transposition of destructive mythologies. Rather, the representation of

their helplessness underscores liability. In the context of South African contemporary narratives, a motion towards this is emerging, as noted by Claudia Mitchell and Ann Smith. However, it fails to occur in the introductory screenshot from *My Father's War* or, as the narrative unfolds, it further highlights the redundancy and toxicity in the negotiation of memory and mythology in yet another South African war film. Much as in the third, second and third phase Border War films, the harmful consequences for society are not acknowledged.



**Figure 16:** David reacts to a backfiring exhaust pipe, *My Father's War*. 2016.  
(Screenshot by author)

In Figure 16, Dap and David take David's car to be repaired after Dap has crashed the car in a drunken state. An exhaust pipe in the workshop backfires and David instinctively reacts to the sound as if it were a gun shot. His hands hold an illusionary gun as if to retaliate. David's reaction alludes to his post-traumatic stress disorder and an inability to dissociate from his experience at the Border. Yet again, as with Figure 14, the image denies implicitness.

The symbolism of violence signified by presenting the gun as a connotative sign that is understood conceptually rather than corporeally, alludes to David's state of mind. Also, the incongruous irrationality of his re-enactment of the past in a workshop appears to signify lacking self-restraint through an influence beyond his control. His reaction is

inculcated rather than autodidactic alluding to indoctrination. It follows that David is released from culpability since, as Grunebaum stated before, he does not pull a trigger and his re-enactment is a product of military conditioning. Also, David's reaction does not underscore accountability: Dap, positioned in the background, observes his father re-enact a sequence that demonstrates memory to be instructed by the dictation of a bygone governing system. David is not held responsible for the negotiation of his memories in a film that is partly periodised in a post-TRC South Africa. In point of fact, David is presented as unable to reform his own militarised patriarchy as it is presented as having been imposed upon him and not adopted free-willingly as he manically reacts to the sound of a backfiring engine with an illusionary gun. This pardoning of militaristic patriarchy is reversed in, for instance, *Full Metal Jacket* (Kubrick 1987) where a second mode of discursive response is presented: "the confessional ... [which] ... tends to map narrative structures of address onto moral discourses of ... admission [and] acknowledgement" (Grunebaum 2015:31).



**Figure 17:** Private Pyle committing suicide, *Full Metal Jacket*. 1987.  
(Screenshot by author)



**Figure 18:** Private Pyle sucking his thumb during a drilling exercise, *Full Metal Jacket*. 1987.  
(Screenshot by author)



**Figure 19:** Private Pyle with a donut shoved into his mouth, *Full Metal Jacket*. 1987.  
(Screenshot by author)

*Full Metal Jacket* “suggests that America’s involvement in Vietnam has as much to do with repression as containment” (Schweitzer 1990:68). The visual portrayal of Private Pyle, the “pudgy, slack-jawed, totally lacking in motor skills ... platoon goat” (Doherty 1989:27) is introduced as a result of this. He ends up taking his life after killing his heartless militaristic patriarchal general as well as a fellow soldier. The dehumanising and demasculinising of Private Pyle resonate with the social impact of the Vietnam War, both in an individual capacity as well as the broader capacity of the repression of the Vietnamese. Private Pyle is depicted numerous times with items shoved into his mouth as seen in figures 17, 18 and 19: his thumb, a donut and ultimately an M-14. The violation of his privacy signified by the syntagmatic relation of his pulled down pants, also by the demasculinising sucking of his thumb and the silencing of his voice by the donut forced into his mouth, ultimately leads him to “suck his phallic M-14” (Schweitzer 1990:68). It quite literally subverts militarism. In addition, it demonstrates the consequence of resistance to hegemonic totalitarianism underscoring the renegotiation of the memory of the Vietnam War for American audiences. Contrary to *My Father’s War* and the many Border War films that preceded it, *Full Metal Jacket*, which was released during the same period as the third phase Border War narratives in 1987, had already re-negotiated the memory of “the United States['] enjoy[ment of] a hegemonic position in the ... first years of the new century, in terms of ... military power...” (Pfaff 2001:221), in its critique of hegemony. It is unacceptable that South African War films such as *My Father’s War* insist on remaining denialist and persist in producing toxic representations of militarised patriarchal Afrikaner mythology thirty-five years after the Border War ended and twenty-two years since the first TRC report was handed to president Nelson Mandela.

#### **2.4.2 Socio-political context and mythological critique**

The dominant mythology identified in the semiotic analysis of the screenshots was militaristic patriarchy. Mythologies such as militarised patriarchy are commodified within a broader structure of Afrikanerdom. Christi Van der Westhuizen (2016:6).

suggests that “individuals become Afrikaners by becoming consumers of Afrikaner space and culture”. It follows that, conceptually, the Afrikaner realises its mythology through the consumption of its own cultural products and their associated mythologies. Because of this, the Afrikaner will mainly consume cultural products that reflect the Afrikaner’s own mythical value system. Van der Westhuizen (2016:1) terms this motion towards an exclusive consumption from what is arguably an exclusive production of Afrikaner products, Afrikaner “enclave nationalism”. As suggested in the literature review, gender and sexual policing maintain privatised micro-apartheid in homes, hair salons, restaurants as well as Afrikaans media products (Van der Westhuizen 2016:8).

The visual analysis of the screenshots demonstrated how *My Father’s War* presents as one such re-enactment of Afrikaner culture in its toxic recycling of especially masculine militaristic patriarchal Afrikaner mythology. It extends the mythology that sustains Afrikaner domestic spaces and socio-masculine confinements. The “neo-nationalism” (Van der Westhuizen 2016:8) that characterises the enclave into which the Afrikaner has nestled in the new South Africa, has arguably resulted in retraction of the antedating cinematic mythological space of, for instance, the Border War narratives discussed in section 2.1. These solitary Afrikaner spaces of mythological consumption have allowed for a territory where “Afrikaners can continue to construct themselves and their collective identities through acts of consumption” (Steyn 2016:494). The perpetuation of Afrikaner value systems through a metabolic system of cultural production and consumption explains the lingering presence of destructive Afrikaner mythology in Afrikaans film and also why it is alarming that films such as *My Father’s War* perpetuate especially militaristic patriarchal Afrikaner mythology. It bears testimony of not only toxic filming, but also a much broader cultural and by extension masculine crisis in South African Afrikaner society and its sympathetic unapologetic toleration of the mythology that informs this value system. It follows that the coding of mythology in film presents as agent in the value system of the society within which it is consumed. Julie Reid (in Steyn 2016:494) elaborates in her consideration of the analysis of Afrikaans history film. She posits that the social value of a myth is of primary concern. This is owing to



consideration that must be given to the effect that a particular myth might have on the health of society as well as on democracy per se. Again, there are thus ethical implications involved with regard to the motivation of a myth (Steyn 2016:494). The menacing consequence of the perpetuation of Afrikaner mythology in films such as *My Father's War* becomes clear, especially considering the coding thereof in a post-TRC (Truth and Reconciliation Commission) South Africa. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission provided victims of apartheid with an opportunity to disassemble the supposed 'truths' that were hegemonic during the apartheid era. In doing so, apartheid victims could reclaim the validity of their differences and their station in society as well as challenge the authoritarianism and absolutism of the apartheid regime (Lenta 2000:53).

Evidently, the TRC created a new context for South Africa to re-negotiate memory in alignment with the reconciliation of past transgressions. Undeniably, it was during the TRC hearings that details of the Aversion project discussed earlier first came to light. A "detailed investigation of treatment of homosexuals in the South African Defence Force by a coalition of groups, including the Medical Research Council [was submitted to the TRC]" (Kaplan 2004:1415). However, *My Father's War* is far from what should arguably be a visual TRC in its denial of a changed South African social context. On the contrary, for the most part, *My Father's War* fails to become a political film. With regard to political film, Chris Broodryk (2016:1) offers a useful interpretation: that it is not as much a case of making films that are political, but rather to make films in a political manner. Films should be socially conscious and address resistance and struggle. To him, it is important that films should visually represent a kind of language that is political in its nature by resisting conventional and traditional aesthetic norms.

The film's failure to achieve that which Broodryk describes, speaks to its dismissal of post-TRC South African social ideology. This is particularly disturbing since the TRC was partly successful in its attempt to re-negotiate white and Afrikaner identity in post-apartheid South Africa. Antjie Krog (2015:207) recalls that during the TRC hearings

Afrikaners were, for the most part, the perpetrators<sup>6</sup>. Their testimony was in the Afrikaans language and their accents situated them in lower middle-class contexts. It became clear that these Afrikaners had been abused by the political powers of the time to the extent that their current position was understandable.

Krog not only reveals forgiveness but also a certain vulnerability in the Afrikaner with regard to its station in post-apartheid South Africa. It follows that it is crucial that a measure of ethos, as Reid suggested, should accompany the creation of mythology in narratives such as *My Father's War*. Nonetheless, Afrikaner myths such as militaristic patriarchy, as seen reflected in the film in question, still persist in an exclusive Afrikaner production and consumption enclave. This is not only socially hazardous but disorientating to a crippling extent to those Afrikaners who struggle to position themselves and re-negotiate their memories within the broader framework of a new South Africa. In relation to this, Broodryk's reference to socially conscious filmmaking both in narrative and aesthetics is amplified since it is evident that the coding of mythologies should be cognisant of susceptibility at the point of decoding. It is acknowledged that "[Umberto] Eco, in 1971, talks of the possibility of 'aberrant decoding' when the ideological leanings of the addressee function as a code switch and lead to the text being actualized in a different ... way to the predicted outcome" (in Bianchi 2015:120). Hence it is not suggested that the coding of destructive mythologies in narratives such as *My Father's War* is necessarily intended to cause social harm. Nevertheless, it is not unreasonable to expect that a film produced for South Africans, periodised during a controversial era of South African history, should be mindful of new ideological social migration in the country where it is to be screened and by proxy the mythology that is to be consumed. A nation crying for reconciliation and equality should and arguably will reject forms of masculinity which, in narratives such as *My Father's War*, are represented to be "positioned as more powerful and others as more

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<sup>6</sup> Antjie Krog is "a white woman poet, journalist and book author, of Afrikaans descent, [who] is often positioned and used as the voice of ethical response in the context of the nation-building and democratising project that is South Africa since the end of white domination in 1994" (Garman 2009:3).

subjugated, [which as Connell suggests] accounts for the vulnerability of men taking up a subjugated position of masculinity” (in Morrell, Jewkes, Lindegger & Hamlall 2013:16). Given the ideological mitigation that has emerged in South Africa, these mythological formulations are more likely to give offense and translate as abusive. In addition, the resurgence of such masculinities in cinematic narratives unfolds in a social environment that has underscored inequality and protest for inclusion further afield: on university campuses throughout South Africa, the Black Lives Matter movement highlighted students’ expectation for universities to become a decolonised space (Ampofo 2016:17). A galvanising movement away from oppression and marginalisation is emerging. Doubtlessly, the production of oppressive mythologies such as militarised patriarchy in narratives such as *My Father’s War* is not only destructive but increasingly redundant. The value systems that these myths underscore have to be re-negotiated and reconciled in alignment with post-apartheid South Africa.

From the above it is evident that the coding of deleterious mythologies of militarised patriarchy seen reflected in *My Father’s War* is testimony of cinematic impotence: “the conceptual epitome of interpassivity (in the sense of eluded accountability) and of the insipid (poverty of the political imagination)” (Broodryk 2016:107). The evasion of accountability for the creation of a cinematic product that is compatible with reformed ideologies and an ineffectual imagination of masculinity twenty-five years after the fall of apartheid, signals a critical moment for South African Afrikaans cinema. Revolutionary mythological production that is both ethical and contingent with a national discourse of inclusion and equality is overdue. If, indeed, *My Father’s War* had attempted this change, firstly by being the first South African film to be released in two versions, Afrikaans and English, secondly by introducing a black character in the narrative and thirdly by presenting a few scathing remarks about apartheid, then it was only successful in exposing its market-driven initiative in the case of the first attempt, by submitting the same mythology simply in two languages. In the case of the second, by coercing a black character to comply with patriarchal Afrikaner militaristic mythology, it demonstrated complete ignorance of the measure of insult implied. Finally, in the case of the third, it

exploited what is arguably the most disgraceful era of South African history to illustrate what is supposedly reprehensible rebelliousness. Its lack of political appreciation and visual potency along with the perpetuation of Afrikaner myths of militaristic patriarchy and the outright denialism of complicity, merely speaks to its retreat into a micro-apartheid domain regardless of its inconsequential, wearisome protests and misguided attempts at inclusion.

## 2.5 CONCLUSION

Afrikaner identity pivoted on critical moments from earlier ages, such as the settlement of the Cape, the Great Trek inland and later the Anglo Boer War as well as the inauguration of the Voortrekker Monument. Against this backdrop the value system that informed the identity of the Afrikaner manifested as myths of superiority in so far as religion, nationalism, gender and militarism are concerned. Especially gender and militarism facilitated a code of discourses of hetero-patriarchy in Afrikaner masculinity, or at least those who subscribed to it, by the subversion of hetero-patriarchal family systems aided by the empowerment afforded by the power of the horse.

Militarism at the stage of the Border War imbued the conscript with symbolic assets afforded to him by the nation. However, given the superior tone already appropriated by the Afrikaner from earlier epochs, these properties translated into becoming destructive discourses of hetero-patriarchy, marginalising alternative masculinities such as homosexuals in the SADF. In this light there was a compounding of value systems: the existing self-perceived superiority inherent to the Afrikaner was amplified by the nationalist exceptionalism afforded to the conscript during the war. This led to abhorrent treatment including mutilation of conscripts who identified as homosexual. The war perpetuated Afrikaner myths of nationhood with myths of discourses of hetero-patriarchy and religious superiority carving its way through the centre, thus forging a new militant Christian Afrikaner empire — one which united to expel that which posed resistance to it, as was the case with gay conscripts. The Afrikaner's reimagining of

himself as associated with the heroism of the conscript at the Border, created a utopic space of self-identification in his perception of what the implications for the Nation were for his character. Regrettably, one such implication was his identification with social codes of hetero-patriarchal discourses that presaged even further expulsion for marginalised masculinities.

Arguably, as Robert Hamerton-Kelly (in Muller 2004:21) observes, the Afrikaner character was receptive to identification with such destructive codes in its mythology of nationalism through a measure of powerlessness as well as an elevated sense of victory. This emerged owing to a sense of victimhood as a consequence of British imperialism and injustice, as well as the elation of conquering blacks in battle — despite being outnumbered by them.

The victor trope of the Afrikaner arrived at “the construction of the Voortrekker Monument [in 1949, which] helped consolidate a set of heroic narratives about a shared ethnic past, one that united all Afrikaners and legitimized political claims for power” (Autry 2012: 149). Not only was the Afrikaner politically orientated to reject homosexuality, but his adoption of power informed by his heroic past grew to such an extent that he monumentalised a union with the divine in the architecture of the Voortrekker Monument. The narrative of heroism is a longstanding motif in the history of Afrikaner identity as well as the Afrikaner’s broader value system: it has been mythologised, monumentalised and re-enacted. As seen in the images sampled, Afrikaner mythology remained unyielding during the Border War era. Despite this, to the war machine as a whole, success in battle did not signify South African political victory (Mos 2013:74).

The ECC signalled the onset of the subversion of Afrikaner nationalism and its agency in the maintenance of mythical codes of domination inherent to Afrikaner identity. It served as a voice of dissent in its protest against enforced conscription by destabilising the restraint and limitation upon which the myth of domination was modelled and

propagated freedom as a mythology underscored by practice and participation. However, as argued, the ECC appears to have, in some of its visual representations, undermined its own intent by failing to dislodge its ideology of freedom from an existing segregated space. In point of fact, as Daniel Conway posits, the ECC wished to maintain its perception as being respectable whites and they were hesitant to address issues of sexuality. The cultural expectation that whites should be decent was thus perpetuated by the ECC. As seen in the images, the campaigning was vividly executed. That there was cause for this is indisputable since there was, for instance, according to *The Star* of 21 February 1987 and *The Weekly Mail* of 31 April 1986, an increased number of suicides in the SADF: 429 suicide attempts during 1986 as well as 24 actual suicides by uniformed personnel (in Cock 1989:11).

However, arguably, the ECC did not arrive at a point where it fully participated in a liberating process for all conscripts regardless of sexuality. Their protest remained forbearing despite the vivacity of their cause. It appears that even their narrative of resistance did not include homosexuals; those who most desperately needed it. Afrikaner enclave nationalism has allowed for the perpetuation of deleterious Afrikaner mythology including, as identified in the case of *My Father's War*, militaristic patriarchy. It is testimony of the dismissal of a motion towards the re-negotiation of memory in a country striving for reconciliation and the inclusion of marginalised groups.

*My Father's War* presents yet another Border War narrative that denies accountability, rather deploying symbolic signs that satisfy the value systems of enclaved consumers. It follows that the film does not allow for the disruption of commodified mythology and make way for the consensual decoding of visual metaphors to resonate universally as seen, in for instance, *Schindler's List* and *Full Metal Jacket*. This speaks to the unethical coding of, as is the case here, denialist patriarchal militaristic mythology. Even if this might not be intentional, it does not serve as an excuse, since contemporary South African Border War narratives should be mindful of the ideological migration that has occurred in a post-TRC South Africa and the offence implied by presenting impotent

visual compositions thirty-five years after the Border War has ended. In addition, some Afrikaners, as revealed by Antjie Krog, are disorientated with regard to their position in a new South Africa. The incessant bombardment of deleterious mythology onto not only South Africans but also Afrikaners in the visual compositions of films such as *My Father's War* does not contribute to a conciliatory cause, rather, it promotes segregation. Truly, if Afrikaans cinema remains a project that is driven by the market instead of creating political awareness, Afrikaans films will remain impotent — offering minimal response to political change. To avoid cinematic impotence implies a spurring moment of political awareness as well as aesthetic prosperity in content and theme (Broodryk 2016:218). In view of this, considering the prospects of a post-TRC South Africa, a lack of political responsiveness and an unwillingness to take accountability in films such as *My Father's War*, are becoming increasingly intolerable. If this does not change, it most certainly does not bode well for the future of South African film-making.

### CHAPTER THREE: *KANARIE*

*Kanarie* is a musical war-time drama. It follows the journey of Johan Niemand, an eccentric young man with a vivid imagination and fascination with Boy George. When he is conscripted into the SADF he joins the army choir, the *Kanaries* (Afrikaans for Canaries) where he falls in love with one of his fellow choristers, Wolfgang. As the narrative unfolds, Johan is faced with a difficult choice: does he hide his true identity thereby sacrificing his romance with his friend or does he embrace who he really is. Eventually he confronts his own reservations by speaking to the pastor also functioning as choir conductor, who reminds him of the difference between wanting to be accepted by others and by God and wanting to be accepted by oneself. *Kanarie* is “an excavation of the violence and trauma inflicted on young men by state apparatuses of control and compounded within the family unit and the broader Afrikaans community” (Pieterse 2019:381). It follows that *Kanarie* ventures into a domain populated by nationalist apartheid mythology and hegemonic ideology both in broader society as well as domestic environments.

Having established the mythologies that circulated during the War, this Chapter will interrogate how these myths operate in the visual representation of *Kanarie*. More specifically, in line with the research question, the aim of this Chapter is to analyse whether the representation of gender and the homosexual figure and other apartheid artefacts, such as the apartheid flag, indeed queer Afrikaner value systems and mythmaking in a post-apartheid cinematic product. Roland Barthes (in Trifonas 2001:13) concedes that, for the sake of ideological effect, myth distorts reality and furtively produces history out of prejudice and bias while quietly suspending the need for questioning cultural representation. This distortion is naturalised by myth and in doing so presents a point of view that can readily be accepted as being a truthful representation of existence. In this light, the Chapter will analyse the aforementioned myths and their relation to homosexual figures, apartheid artefacts and gender by identifying to what extent queering is deployed in the visual representation of *Kanarie*



to challenge the naturalisation of myth to which Barthes refers. The aim is to establish whether the film does, through a process of queering, excavate the aforementioned nationalist myths imposed by state apparatuses as well as the hegemony associated with the violence and trauma inflicted on young men during the War. The Chapter is, however, not only interested in analysing the portrayal of nationalist mythmaking and hegemonic ideology. Other myths, including militarism and religious superiority are also considered since these myths were at play in the historical context of the War as demonstrated in Chapter 2. It is the conviction of the study that *Kanarie* should queer these myths as well, not only since they are visually represented in the film — as will be demonstrated — but also since they pose agency in the rejection of homosexual figures during the War itself.

### **3.1 Whitewashing the sword: Militarism and religious superiority in *Kanarie***

During the Border War era, “conscription attempted to cement white unity ... in the hope of creating a homogenous white South African militarised masculinity” (Symons 2019:128). This motion towards confederacy was also seen reflected in the Church. This was the case since, as Jaap Durand (in Aaboe 2007:78) observes, the ideological and theoretical basis of political strategy to address the problems that pluralism posed was provided by Afrikaner civil religion. Moreover, the notion that South Africa was a Christian country was underpinned by Afrikaner civil religion preventing the South African populace from becoming secular or empty. The union between Afrikaner religion and militarism is perhaps best summarised in a message from former president Mr PW Botha printed in a special edition of the Bible issued to conscripts. The message read that the Bible is the most important part of a conscript’s military equipment (Symons 2019:108).

In the analysis of *Kanarie*, consideration is given to whether the Holy Cross, the Bible and church buildings are portrayed as recurrent symbols that inform a value system of militarist purification as a holy and just enterprise. This is vital, since whitewashing of

the ferocity of militarism does not provide for it to escape the hegemonic constructs that uphold it. On the contrary, both religion and militarism are founded in hegemonic social calibration. As Conway (in Symons 2019:64) notes, the idea of hegemonic masculinity was enmeshed with conscription as a rite of passage. In addition, anyone who contested the religious hegemony of the Church (that sought to justify the War) experienced some measure of exclusion from society (Albertyn and Kruger 2020:12). Since the cornerstone of genderism is conceived of hegemonic ideals — that include heteronormativity and binary sex categories (Vaccaro and Koob 2019:1324), genderism as a myth is at the core from which sanctified militarist mythology emerges. As Judith Butler (in Althaus-Reid and Isherwood 2007:307) submits, the myth of the heteronormal matrix supports the Church. In addition, according to Betty Reardon (in Crespo 2016:11), gender and militarism are deeply interdependent. Butler (in Hermann-Wilmarth and Holbrook 2013:4) notes that gender obscures its origin by a collective treaty to produce, perform and sustain discrete as well as polar genders as cultural fabrications. Despite being fictional, the production of polar genders is so credible that not adhering to them results in punishment.

This resonates with the expulsion from society that results from any protest against religious hegemony. The representation of Johan mimicking the gender-bending fashion of Boy George is a significant point to consider. Evidently, such a representation is a flight of fancy. To fantasise about Boy George entails a moment when a mutual treaty to perform gender is polarised. It becomes a psychic space that allows for the queering of gendering — the very pillars that uphold sanctified militarism. As William Pinar (1983:188) suggests “Boy George ... as a kind of ‘cultural icon’ ... expresses, although in extreme terms, the direction of gender reformulation.

Because of this, the study is interested in considering Johan’s gender-bending performance as Boy George, since evidently the heteronormative space surrounding him (as seen in Figure 21 in the visual analysis) and the symbols of sanctified militarism against which he is portrayed, should be queered. Furthermore, Johan has to avoid the

problems associated with queer theory by, as Janet R. Jakobsen (in Sullivan 2003:50) phrases it, completing “the Foucauldian move from human being to human doing”. This is the case since, as Sullivan notes regarding the use of queer, the onus shifts from a nameable identity, to a set of actions (Sullivan 2003:50). In *Queer Theory*, Deborah P Britzman (2005:153) elaborates that the theory does not signify actors, but actions. If it is found that if Johan queers the heteronormative gendered space that surrounds him, then it unfolds as a set of actions — a gender performance or more accurately, a gender performativity — rather than simply embodying an alternative figure. As Raphael Costambeys-Kempczynski, Claire Hélie and Pierre-Antoine Pellerin (2012:2) observe, to Judith Butler performance and performativity are not the same. Gender is performative in the sense that it constitutes the identity it claims to be. In this light gender is an action or a doing by a subject that did not pre-exist before acting the deed. Gender entails repeated acts by an individual within a regulated framework. Owing to this, an individual is unable to choose his or her performance of gender since he or she only exists inside of an existing context of gender acts. In other words, it could be argued that an imitation of Boy George is performative. It is therefore important to consider whether Johan bends gender against the backdrop of an existing framework of what the correct manner of gender performativity should be. In this case Afrikaner myths of militarism and religious superiority doubtlessly inform the rigid regulatory framework of gender performativity. Therefore, it is potentially so that Johan’s gender-bending performativity destabilises militarist and religious spaces that have, as Henri Lefebvre (in Ek 2006:55) observes, been “occupied and used, and has already been the focus of past processes whose traces are not always evident on the landscape”. Hence, as the visual analysis will uncover, the mimicry of Boy George could serve as a potent agent critiquing heteronormativity and consecrated militarism.

### **3.2 A red flag: Nationalism and hegemony**

Jacqueline Maingard (1995:26) observes that there is a continuity between Afrikaner mythic history and the present, owing to the design of the old South African flag. The

flag included small facsimiles of the British flag as well the flags of the former Boer republics. It follows that the old South African flag was instrumental in the perpetuation of the Afrikaner myths and value systems identified here, including nationalism. The flag served as a symbol of white solidarity and a collective identification. Doubtlessly, as Antjie Schuhmann and Ashleigh Lopez (2019:122) submit, in a society that has experienced violence and oppression as well as suffering the residual effects of cultural white hegemony, its symbols are powerful discursive tools. The uncriticised representation of symbols like the flag, statues or 'Die Stem' two and a half decades after apartheid, demonstrates the undisrupted tradition of white domination. Since the depiction of these symbols still continues, there should be calls for strong public, political and cultural reaction couched in the need for a productive motion towards remembering.

In reality, "both the old flag and anthem are symbols of the regime of white supremacy and racist ideology that still pervades South Africa economically and culturally" (ibid). Hence, with reference to Julie Reid's (2011:344) concern regarding the ethical value of the representation of mythology, as mentioned in Chapter 2, the representation of the apartheid flag could betray the repositioning and re-negotiation of memory towards which contemporary South Africa strives. The historical accuracy of portraying the apartheid flag in a film periodised during the 1980s is not contested. However, the concern lies with whether the representation of the flag queers the ideals of nationalist mythology in a post-apartheid cinematic product. This is important since the symbolic appropriation of Afrikaner nationalism, as signified by the flag, is conceived of hegemonic social coding especially in the case of South Africa with, for instance, the use of rugby. As mentioned, rugby was used by the National Party (NP) to serve Afrikaner superiority as well as to realise a particular hegemony in an era when the NP wanted to impose their values and beliefs on South African society. As mentioned in Chapter 2, sport served as a seamless transitional activity from the stadium to the parade ground (Symons 2020:8). In this context, the depiction of queer figures cannot rely on stereotypes in *Kanarie*. Gay characters should not be represented as struggling to satisfy

the physical demands of army training. If this is the case, then the ideal of hegemonic behaviour remains superior.

With regard to stereotypes, from a semiotic perspective, George Lakoff posits that social stereotypes are metonymical — meaning that a subcategory or member is considered to represent the category as a whole. This allows for judging individuals quickly. Given that the characterising of cultural expectations is informed by stereotypes, popular entertainment tends to exploit stereotypes in most cases (in Feng 2009:456). Arguably, in order for a stereotype to be considered negative, heterosexuality has to be considered as normal. Owing to this, negative stereotypes are judged since they fall beyond the parameters of what is considered to be natural. In doing so, negative stereotypes serve as a thoroughfare to satisfy cultural anticipation as well as value systems. In this light, the marginal character should not satisfy or support, but rather queer the hegemonic ideal.

### 3.3 Visual Analysis

#### 3.3.1 *Militarism and religious superiority*



**Figure 20:** Johan, dressed as Boy George, walks down the street, *Kanarie*. 2019. (Screenshot by author)

Figure 20 is a screenshot captured from the opening sequence of the film after Johan's two friends have challenged him to walk down the road wearing a wedding dress in the small town where Johan resides. The sequence cuts to a flight of fancy as Johan sports an outfit mimicking Boy George's iconic fashion. In the far background there is a music teacher standing next to a piano. Closer, on the left, a flower arrangement competition unfolds. To the right, a teacher is preparing to cane a schoolboy. All the boys in the image eventually break away, join Johan and walk confidently towards the camera.

The boys serve as icons of Johan's younger self and the various ideological gender constructs to which he subscribed. Johan's psyche is portrayed as a product of his past. Undoubtedly, some of the depictions such as the flower arranging and the piano lessons symbolise a type of gender performance that transgresses the heterosexual parameter. As Butler submitted earlier, punishment is inflicted upon those who do not adhere to or believe in the performance of gender. Moreover, "those men who dare to cross gender boundaries and step into the female world are sometimes regarded as homosexuals — that is, not as normal men" (Johansson 2004:40). This serves as motivation for Johan's castigation. According to Justin Powell (201:21), corporal punishment is enmeshed with the values of conduct in the societies that we are part of. Both in the past and the present these methods of strict discipline have led to stigmatisation and the enhancement of difference. In other words, any challenge to the ideal of normal behaviour inherent to the mythical value systems of a particular community is severely punished — often through corporal punishment.

It follows that the imposition of corporal punishment not only naturalises heterosexuality but also proliferates stigmas. The representation of coerced adherence to militarism populated by disciplinary ideologies is elaborated on by Michel Foucault (in Bartky 1997:93): institutions like the army and schools coerce the body, its mannerisms as well as its behaviour. This is done in order to have a hold over how the body may operate in terms of technique, speed and efficiency. As a result, docile, practiced and subjected bodies are produced.

As mentioned earlier, within the context of the Border War, imposition of the state's hegemony emerged through conditioning of the young conscript. Arguably, the SADF functioned as the epitome of a pacifying social system insofar as militarism is concerned — perhaps understated regarding the treatment of homosexuality. In the castigation scene this act of corporal coercion which Foucault refers to, can thus be seen as symbolising a similar priming of militarism at a younger age. As Lorraine Macmillan (in Symons 2020:516) argues, militarisation is the correct disposition and also the procurement of corporal skills required potentially to kill. If militarisation is viewed as a system of knowledge inculcating a calibrated character formulation imposed by means of discipline in both the classroom and the army, then, in light of Foucault's submission, such disciplinary power extends as far as the dictation of physical countenance. It follows that disciplinary directives of this nature arguably sets the stage for stigmatisation, as Powell suggested earlier, and by extension also stereotypes. However, specifically in this instance, they are based on physical cues such as mannerisms or choice of attire. It is against this backdrop that the militarisation of the schoolboy functions satirically as an interrogation of sanctified militarism.

The schoolboy leaves his desk and joins Johan in an androgynous protest aimed at queering genderism that supports militarist whitewashing. As mentioned, the myth of militarist whitewashing is dependent on the myth of gender. The critique of the reformation to Afrikaner religious superiority is presented in Johan's dress and in the positioning of the piano teacher, the judges standing by the flower decorations and the scolding teacher. From this perspective the screenshot presents as a wedding ceremony with Johan wearing a lifted veil as he walks down the aisle surrounded by his two bridesmaids as well as the guests — represented by the school teacher, piano teacher and judges — positioned along the sides. As mentioned earlier, the young boys represent fractions of his former self. His own imitation of Boy George presents him as an androgynous bride in an ecclesiastical space. The destabilisation of converse gender formulae and the patent construction of the wedding scene creatively assert a counter-symbolic critique of Afrikaner sanctified militarist mythology. Gender subversion here

undermines the constitution of religious militarist whitewashing, since it obliterates the genderism or more specifically, the gender performativity upon which it relies.



**Figure 21:** Johan dances in a street in front of a church, *Kanarie*. 2019.  
(Screenshot by author)

Similar to Figure 20, Figure 21 is a screenshot that destabilises genderism upon which sanctified militarism, as symbolised by the church in the background, depends. The dance sequence unfolds in a street in Villiersdorp. Johan is positioned in the centre of the frame surrounded by the boys in school uniform as well as his female friends. In the background a church is visible. Unlike Figure 20, the image includes a larger area surrounding Johan, allowing him not only to queer the representation of the subjects, but also the space surrounding him.

This depiction in the small town of Villiersdorp is deeply imbued with cultural religious expectations of apartheid mythology. The church towers above the cars and the dancers. Andy Carolin (2020:92) recalls a sermon given by the military chaplain in *Kanarie*:



[t]he onslaught is out there. It's in our homes. In our streets. In this very building. Amongst us ... Now is the time for us Christians to take up the sword, in order to defeat the power of darkness.

Carolin (2020:92) continues by proposing that this address is a depiction of an imposition of the moral absolutes of apartheid upon an elusive national culture that is made to be imperiled by threats such as homosexuality to the fundamental principles of Church and family

It follows that the perceived deleterious content of place as well as the discrimination imposed upon those who associated with its supposed malevolence, posed as a threat to militarist sanctification. However, Johan's mimicry of Boy George queers this value system in the space surrounding him. This is done despite the fact that such spaces present a physical manifestation of mythical ideologies such as militarism and religion even though no unvarnished relation between the two is immediately evident. In Figure 21, Johan subverts an environment imbued as partial to Afrikaner religious superiority and its militarist counterpart. Johan queers a space of which the content is idealised to be limited to the parameters dictated by sanctified militarism. In doing so, he engages in a process of queering as "a deconstructive practice focused on challenging normative knowledges ... and spaces, thereby unsettling power relations and taken-for-granted assumptions" (Hunt and Holmes, 2015:156) that inform sanctified militaristic mythology. Furthermore, as mentioned before, Johan performs Boy George's iconic gender bending and therefore completes the Foucauldian move from 'being' to 'doing'.

Sanctified militarist mythology clarifies the conditions and needs of its existence: to expel any perceived perils that might query their prejudice. After all, myth is partial to those principles that govern its origin. Annette De Rougemont (in Jordaan 2008:234) substantiates: "a myth expresses rules of conduct of a given social or religious group. It issues accordingly from whatever sacred principle has presided over the formation of this group". It follows that, ethically, myth is accountable for the conduct of a religious or social group. Myths should not prescribe toxicity in the behaviour of a particular

party. Fortunately, neither Johan nor the dancers adhere to the regulations imposed by a space that has been mythically imbued and officiated under domination of the sword. If anything, he reverse-twists the sword.



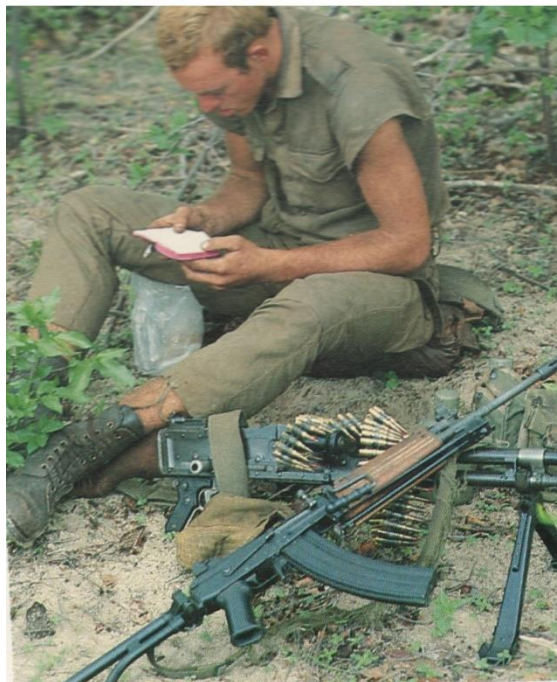
**Figure 22:** Johan reads his Bible, *Kanarie*. 2019.  
(Screenshot by author)

Figure 22 is a screenshot captured after Johan has arrived at the barracks. He has placed his luggage on the bed and covered his ears from the mayhem that unfolds in the background as the foul-mouthed sergeant rushes the new arrivals into the building. Johan resorts to reading his Bible. In the background, to the left, a conscript can be seen praying and to Johan's right another conscript also reads from the Bible.

As with Figure 20, the portrayal of a social disciplinary system is clear, not only given the presence of the pestering sergeant in the background but also the tormented subjects as one rests with his head in his hand and others read from the Bible as if desperately seeking salvation in a holy script. In this depiction, Johan participates in the broader myth of sanctified militarism as he turns to his Bible for redemption. The content of the space surrounding him is also mythologised as redeeming the act of conscription to be

just and holy. As mentioned, the Bible was perceived to be the most important part of a soldier's weaponry.

The Bible forms the pinnacle of the composition as it is closest to the viewer and the beds diverge away from this focal point to ultimately form a square. Between the legs of the square, the conscripts are scattered. Some of them are comfortable in the setting as they relax on their beds and others, as mentioned, seek deliverance. Moreover, "squares represent solidity, a perfection that is static [and] dependable" (Beyer 2019:1). The representation of permanence and fidelity symbolised by the square, resonates with unity that the Church seeks to sustain. Moreover, the superior undertones of Christianity as instrumental in maintaining solidarity as well as functioning as agent in the fortification against multiplicities, speaks to the reformation of the Church to militarist mythology. As mentioned, conscription attempted to unify South African militarist masculinity.



**Figure 23:** A rifleman lays aside his R4 and reads his little issue New Testament. (Steenkamp 1990:251)

Arguably, Figure 23 demonstrates as little queering as Figure 22. The depiction of the alliance between religion and militarism blatantly echoes PW Botha's message mentioned earlier. This is an authentic photograph of an anonymous soldier reading from the New Testament issued to him at a bushveld military base with a loaded rifle resting by his side. It is representations such as Figure 22 and 23 that resound with notions of the War as a "spiritual war [that was] directed against 'communism, Islam, witchcraft [and] unBiblical heresies like liberation theology in the Christian Church'" as Peter Hammond (in Askin 1990:29) states in *Frontline Fellowship News and Information for Intercessors*. Indisputably, the SADF was viewed as a "missionary force" (in Askin 1990:34). As mentioned in Chapter 2, homosexuals were perceived as having close ties with communism (Conway 2008:435). Also, 'unBiblical heresies' doubtlessly alludes to a further revolt against homosexual figures based on a misguided value system. It is thus baffling that *Kanarie* would conform to this kind of religious and militarist idealism in the representation of Figure 22. Johan is not queering the sacred union between Church and warfare. On the contrary, much like the soldier and his New Testament, it is in this matrimony that he finds solace. It follows that the manner in which Johan is represented does not queer militarist and religious dictation imposed upon his character as an alternative figure. An image, such as Figure 22, which functions both on a mythical level (in the representation of religious superiority and militarism) as well as a symbolic level (in the portrayal of the square as a symbol of unity and non-secularism) represents distinctive Afrikaner identities: those who have found retreat in enclaved nationalist spaces.

After the political transition in South Africa, "Afrikaners no longer had a civil religion, a divine telos, or a collective narrative that justified their entitlement to power" (Steyn 2019:63). Hence, the absence of queering in the image can be said to cater to an Afrikaner nostalgia for that time when the collective sanctified militarist mythologising of Afrikanerdom was attainable by virtue of the socio-political and cultural context that supported it. This does little to progress towards a queered representation in figures 22

and 23, and is ultimately disappointing given that *Kanarie's* main character is a marginalised figure.



**Figure 24:** A conscript and his sister or girlfriend holding hands in front of a Cross. *Kanarie*. 2019. (Screenshot by author)

Figure 24 is a screenshot that demonstrates the problematic nature of sanctified militarism as well as alluding to the powerful agency of the Church in maintaining a superficial veneer of the war as being a just and holy enterprise. A soldier and what is presumably his girlfriend hold hands in front of a wooden cross. Michael Hughes and Carolyn Kroehler (in Liebenberg 2019:273) observe that a multitude of socialising agents during apartheid came into play in the process of (re-) producing the epitome of the ideal warrior or citizen. One of these factors was the family. It goes without saying that this process of socialising was underscored by adherence to norms that were imposed by social unanimity and so-called positive enforcement. Indeed, “the process of militarization was reinforced by social institutions such as the family ... and the Churches” (Baines 2009:8). Yet the domestic and religious agency at play in the creation of an ideal militarist force as symbolised by the soldier holding his female partner’s hand in front of a holy symbol, does not historically reflect the perception of family, across the Border. In fact, in the armed forces some men enjoyed being separated from women. There was also no room for any kind of femininity or feminine qualities.

Separation from females allowed some men to assert power by denigrating their own women (Baines 2012:13).

Not only does this speak to the binary gender formulations that uphold militarism, but it also suggests a kind of toxicity at play in the perception of women in the SADF. Doubtlessly such a bearing on women is far removed from any moral supposition as symbolised by the cross. Yet, despite this, Figure 24 captured from *Kanarie* as a film that has demonstrated the capacity to queer binaries does not proceed to do the same in this instance. Instead, the image conforms to the idealism of a fraudulent social contract between domesticity and militarism consecrated by a wooden cross. In this respect, the image also reveals the powerful agency of the Church during the War era.

Apart from posing resistance to pluralism, arguably to reach a social unanimity, the Church also underscored the normality of heteronormativity resulting from the aforementioned hetero-normal matrix upon which the Church relied. In Figure 24, *Kanarie* does not queer the gendered ideal that supports sanctified militarism. Aside from this, the Dutch Reformed Church also positioned itself in opposition to other denominations. Since 1948, the Afrikaner Church served as an ecclesiastical partner to the administration of South Africa in SWA [South West Africa]. This was needed since there was an eminent struggle to counter the Roman Catholic Church and Lutheran influence that were both in support of SWAPO (Saayman 2011:211).

This questions the notion of the SADF as a missionary force given its intolerance of other Christian denominations. The veracity becomes clear: religious ideology was merely a façade underneath which the SADF forged its way northwards. There is no queering in the image to expose this. It merely replicates the idealism which allowed for the Church to be perceived as autonomous, heteronormative and superior. Owing to the aforementioned agency of the Church in creating a militarised society, “national service was widely regarded as a necessary commitment to make in order to ensure the continuation of white power and privilege” (Baines 2009:8). In fact, in a bid to minimise white casualties, the SADF employed quite a number of proxy forces. These surrogates

were coerced; from the 1980s they experienced the impact of the fighting even more than white soldiers did (Baines 2009:9).



**Figure 25:** An African child holding an artillery shell.  
*Kanarie* 2019.  
(Screenshot by author)

Hence, the religious priming of South African society as the war being a just and holy enterprise, did not bode well for African forces albeit that they too fought against the resistance. *Kanarie* briefly acknowledges this as seen in Figure 25. However, it is not the presence but the absence of religious symbolism that denies the African child soldier the same consecration that the white combatant enjoyed. Instead, as Joe Ellen Fair (1993:18) submits, it appears that the ‘othering’ of the African becomes a manifestation associated with ‘savagery, ‘blackness’ and ‘tribalism’ laying the groundwork for social classification. The viewing of the African in this derogatory light becomes naturalised and objective — it serves to explain determining social factors.

Arguably, reasoning of this nature explains the African child’s disavowal of religious absolutism as he is located outside of the Western collective. This social action is justified by his objectification. The image does not queer this Western social idealism, rather, despite the image perhaps evoking pathos, the child remains primitive and part of the bush. It follows that the absolutism of militarism belongs purely to the western construct and arguably the representation of a black body nothing more than a geographical signifier. Truly, it is disappointing that *Kanarie* does not recognise and queer

objectification of this nature, but rather conforms to religion as an agent of sanctification only to those who, at times, did not bear the brunt of the fighting.

### 3.3.2 *Nationalism and hegemony*



**Figure 26:** A family posing in front of the old South African flag, *Kanarie*. 2019. (Screenshot by author)

Figure 26 is a screenshot of a mother surrounded by her two daughters as well as her two conscripted sons, posing in front of the old South African flag. Kirk Sides (in Carolin 2020:166) cautions “against the hegemony of apartheid narrative paradigms for telling South African history”. The flag in Figure 26 speaks to this concern as symbol of Afrikaner nationalist hegemony. In point of fact, Afrikaner nationalist hegemony was successful in the making of a myth that only they spoke for everyone who identified as an ‘Afrikaner’. Any oppositional thought to this within the Afrikaner community was suppressed (Willemsse 2017:1).

It follows that the flag as a backdrop to the family suggests autonomy not only as a symbol of apartheid but also sovereignty as an inter-social ideal amongst Afrikaners. This relates back to the raising of the flag at Iwo Jima since, in both cases, the flag activates



a value system that treasures nationalism as a strong form of identification. The flag informs a romanced understanding of nationalism from the past. However, despite the welcoming impression that the screenshot provides, nationalism is in actuality related to violence in order to sustain a nation or state building process as mentioned before. The image does not only refute queering the idealism that such an artefact of apartheid symbolises — it proceeds further to un-queer the superiority of a fraction within Afrikaner culture. The consistency of this dogmatic idealism that the screenshot represents, uncovers its partiality to an apartheid narrative prototype. Arguably, the image conforms to the patriotic utopia of the soldier's return home.

It would require little ingenuity on *Kanarie's* behalf to queer representation of this nature since it could merely rely on historical cues. Brendan Boyle (in Baines and Barkhuizen 2020:667) postulates that in the SADF the males who returned to civilian culture from the SADF experienced a 'crisis of masculinity'. Whereas their combat skills might have allowed them to be part of the hegemonic group in the army, these gendered practices might not have been similarly valued back home.

Yet, the stereotypical idealistic representation of patriotism in the image skirts the queering of hegemony despite the fact that it would be as historically correct to queer such a myth as the portrayal of the apartheid flag. Moreover, as an Afrikaans history film, it would not be inaccurate to question mothers who are characterised as being patriotic and militarised in white, mainstream pop culture (Conway 2008: 84), given the presence of what is presumably the mother in the screenshot.

The women's magazine 'Fair Lady' published an article in 1988. A mother's 19-year-old son was killed in Angola (Conway 2008:84). The extract read:

Isn't it terrible that it should be my son? . . . Personally, I feel that our children should not be fighting in that war. It is our duty to give our sons to the army – nobody really wants them to go, but it is our duty to send them. But . . . we are not told that our children are being sent into Angola. We think they are in South West Africa (ibid 89).

In addition, the ECC wanted to destabilise the impression of the hegemonic male soldier by having, for instance, printed a leaflet that purported that conscription is a direct threat to mothers and wives (Conway 2008:88).

The War as heroic or even utopic was clearly demystified, dismissed and even queered by some women. To boot, the War was recognised as a hegemonic effort placing women and mothers as victims. This clearly speaks to what was at the very least a disillusionment of hegemonic nationalist ideology especially as far as it affected subordinate figures such as women. Hence, it is troubling that an image such Figure 26 would present a proud mother in front of a flag that symbolises hostility and oppression when it appears that historically many mothers had begun to protest against the consequences of the Nationalist regime — albeit merely a result of concern for the safety of their sons. The colours of the drapes that frame the subjects resemble the colours of the apartheid flag. The family is symbolically captured within a nationalist hegemonic system. Afrikaner ideology embraces a family unit as a utopic idealisation of the perceived merits of the Afrikaner's hegemonic nationalist ideology.

Since “national symbols — in particular, national anthems and flags — provide perhaps the strongest, clearest statement of national identity” (Cerulo 1993:244) and given that a number of mothers and women had become disillusioned by Afrikaner hegemonic nationalist ideology, the representation of the family in front of the flag is further problematised. It appears that, during the War, many women had in effect begun to realise that the flag and the nationalism that it represented was a distortion of reality. The reliance on the stereotypical portrayal of a proud family in support of their conscripted brothers and sons metonymically signifies, as William Dezheng Feng posited, a broader cultural expectation in support of nationalism and hegemony, both of which some women had begun to realise were farcical.

Although the screenshot does not portray homosexual figures, the flag symbolised the perpetuation of the Afrikaner mythology that suppressed marginal figures including homosexuals and women — this is despite the fact that, as mentioned, many mothers queered the ideal of the myths related to conscription. Ian Parker (2017:235) observes that “queer functions at its most radical as an activity rather than as a noun”. Jamie Lee Coull (2015:42) elaborates that possibilities arise that are not exclusively related to gender or sexual identity if the idea of queer is used as a verb. As Stephanie Lawler (in Coull 2015:42) submits, this could include heterosexual single mothers who subscribe to the heterosexual ‘other’; for instance, a person who identifies as straight, yet cannot or is unwilling to satisfy all the requirements of heteronormativity. Since the mother in Figure 26 could arguably be single, the representation could have expanded the scope of queering beyond gender and sexuality. The image could have included a mother who does not satisfy the conditions of heteronormativity (a subsidiary to hegemony) as dictated by the SADF. This would have been historically correct. If an argument is to be made that the apartheid flag should be included for historical accuracy, then the same should count for women who subverted the nationalist and hegemonic ideology associated with conscription. Moreover, the flag positioned behind the participants acts as a discursive tool that activates contemporary oppressive mentalities through the re-articulation of unethical Afrikaner mythologies.



**Figure 27:** A sergeant reprimanding Ludolf, *Kanarie*. 2019.  
(Screenshot by author)

In Figure 27 Johan's friend, Ludolf, is caught offering Johan biscuits. The sergeant rushes in and reprimands Ludolf. He is clearly dumbfounded as the sergeant aggressively points at him. Ludolf transgresses heteronormative gender parameters by enacting a domestic maternal gesture. This representation of a negative stereotype emphasises the normality of hegemony as symbolised by the sergeant and the inability of the gay conscript to satisfy or even relate to the hegemonic ideal.

In this regard, the image denies queering since it represents the normalcy of hegemony. Moreover, it also speaks to the dualistic nature of homosexual culture in the representation of femininity. Edmund White (in Clarkson 2007:193) observes that by asserting that certain gay men produce forms of masculinity that are less authentic, essentialises their masculinity as feminine, thereby ignoring the fact that all masculinity is performative. In addition, by viewing some gay men as reproducing a less authentic version of machismo is divisive since it isolates those who do not conform.

It follows that in Figure 27, the representation of Ludolf as effeminate does not only suggest his expulsion from the gay hypermasculine ideal but also indicates the

essentialising of his character as a homosexual stereotype. This reductionist representation is problematic since, as Shaun Cole (1977:21) proposes, it curtails the reality that the gay semiotic is more refined than straight sign language since roles are not as clearly defined in gay culture. It is not really possible to determine a gay man's sexual preference as far as activity or passive/aggressiveness is concerned. Since gay figures have more sexual possibilities than heterosexuals, they require a more complicated communication system.

In this respect, metonymical signification is arguably incongruous in the representation of a gay character such as Ludolf. Undoubtedly, it points to the satisfaction of a mythological cultural expectation of gay men as being effeminate. Thus, an exploration or queering of the reductionist portrayal of camp homosexuality is evaded despite the multifarious nature of queer expression. The artificial representation of the gay character as maternal also denies him access to the apartheid nationalist ideal, and further relegates him to the periphery.

As mentioned before, Afrikaner hegemonic nationalism claimed autonomy as a voice which spoke for Afrikanerdom in general and alternative expressions were stifled. As Hein Willemse (2017:1) suggests "it's therefore not surprising that socio-political history often casts Afrikaans as the language of racists, oppressors and unreconstructed nationalists". Hence, the representation of a gay character failing to access hegemonic nationalism perpetuates the perception that Afrikaans is a language associated with oppression. It goes without saying that this does not bode well for a film that presumably intends to offer an alternative view of the War. In fact, it is baffling. Also, as Conway (in Sloodmaeckers 2019:251) proposes, conscription in apartheid can be viewed as a constitutive performance of citizenship as well as manliness for white South Africans. However, for the South African state, conscription was a tool to control political and social intra-white cleavages. This was done with the aim to forge a new kind of white South African identity that was couched in notions of heroism, virility and strong masculinity.

Doubtlessly, the presence of the sergeant seems to perpetuate Apartheid hegemonic idealism of this nature. In addition, the representation of hypermasculinity consigning the alternative masculine figure in Figure 27 falls prey to the stereotypical paradigm. In correlation with this, Sofia Lucy Kostelac's (2015:62) submission that since we have replaced 'real history' with the 'history of aesthetic styles' we are unable to access this past. This is the case since we view history through the lens of our own stereotypes, which are never within reach. Reasoning of this nature unfolds through the logic of pastiche. With regard to pastiche, Broodryk (Broodryk 2016:60) observes that in pastiche eccentric and distinct identities are essentialised to sameness and repetitiveness. As a result, films that supposedly aim to celebrate diversity become banal.

It follows that the hegemonic masculine stereotype in a periodised setting is formulated by contemporary interpretation. This distorts ingenuity; favouring modern conceptions of social binaries. In addition, the pastiche representation of masculinity in Figure 27 counteracts diversity as a thematic objective in the film through replication. There really is nothing ingenious about the depiction of a hegemonic subject disparaging a marginal figure, especially in the context of early Border War films.



**Figure 28:** Christopher – Lee dos Santos’s *At thy call*.  
‘Who the f ... said you can speak English?’  
(Screenshot by author)

Figure 28, a screenshot taken from the 2013 short film *At thy Call* (Dos Santos 2008), depicts an English conscript being scolded for not speaking Afrikaans. In Figure 29, *Boetie Gaan Border Toe* presents the conscript being reprimanded for laughing. All these representations are negative stereotypes that naturalise hegemonic masculinity. Moreover, the repetition of these binary aesthetic styles neutralises the perception of sexualities regardless of the context within which they are periodised.



**Figure 29:** Regardt van den Bergh's *Boetie Gaan Border Toe*.  
(Screenshot by author)

### 3.4 CONCLUSION

*Kanarie* queers the genderism that upholds Afrikaner myths of militarism, religious superiority, nationalism and hegemonic ideology in certain screenshots. However, other depictions maintain the supposed normality of heteronormativity, refuting queering. In this regard, *Kanarie* as a film seeking to address alternative voices within a hegemonic environment, undermines its own objective because of its reluctance to indict these mythical ideals. That it demonstrates the capability to queer gender binaries is evident in the satirical mimicking of Boy George, which allows for potent political commentary in relation to religious superiority and militarism.

This is done regarding the portrayal of characters as well as the spaces that they inhabit. However, in the remaining screenshots, *Kanarie* leaves sanctified militarist mythology intact to the point where it relates to the original portrayal of these myths in visual



culture during the war. The Church is prominently represented as a domestic and militarist unifying agent despite the ruin that this marriage caused. The Bible perceived as a weapon, echoes crusade propaganda, which “was not only the liberation of the Holy Land, but also its settlement by a righteous people especially chosen by God” (Portnykh 2019:485). Perhaps *Kanarie* does not understand its own contradiction in this regard: Surely the film cannot sustain the myth of the War as being a holy endeavour in some of its representations, yet simultaneously, in other depictions, queer the genderism upon which this sanctification relies. This blurs the parameter of *Kanarie’s* concern relating to alternative figures. African subjects passively remain in the colonial paradigm as little more than geographical signifiers. The portrayal of women is denied any political agency concerning the rejection of nationalism and hegemony despite that it would have been historically correct to do so. In reality much of the queering of nationalist hegemonic idealism already existed as historical account. Moreover, the flag does not queer the ideals of nationalist mythology. It is unacceptable that the film blatantly ignores this in its visual representation of nationalism and hegemony. Instead, *Kanarie* satisfies contemporary understandings of stereotypes.

Ludolf cannot access the nationalist ideal owing to the threat that he poses to the constituency of the autonomous Afrikaner elite. This preserves the notion of Afrikaans as the language of the oppressor. Arguably, *Kanarie* should have avoided this at all costs if it had to any extent been conscious of its propagandist filmographic predecessors. Yet, the representation of the expulsion of marginal figures or even those who do not conform to the hegemonic nationalist demands of the army, manifest in repetition with no political agency or queering. On the contrary, these depictions perpetuate the supposed normality of hegemony as in *At thy Call* and *Boetie Gaan Border Toe*. In these depictions it is clear that Afrikaans history film exploits the existing prejudice of the Afrikaner enclave nationalist. It should be kept in mind that, according to Tess Salusbury and Don Foster (in Falkof 2012:22), in contrast to the English South African, the Afrikaner has followed a philosophy of group affiliation. Arguably, owing to this, the value system of the Afrikaner is deeply enmeshed in Afrikaner culture. As Christi van der Westhuizen

(2016:8) mentioned in Chapter 2, Afrikaner Enclave Nationalism (as a form of privatised micro-apartheid) extends to Afrikaans media products. This perhaps explains why *Kanarie* as a mainly Afrikaans film does not, for the most part, subvert this toxic cycle of production and consumption of the myths of the War and the Apartheid era. In order for *Kanarie* to have subverted this, the mythology that circulated before and during the War would have had to be queered by the representation of homosexual figures and apartheid artefacts.

*Kanarie* is more than simply another cinematic product. Its visual representation accounts for perceptions of homosexuality in post-apartheid South Africa. The film arguably forms part of one of the “textual practices of cultural production ... that inform the meanings and signifying systems through which same-sex sexualities circulate within national ... imaginaries” (Carolin 2020:1). Indeed, there is an ethical aspect to the manner in which the film visually represents its subjects. *Kanarie* could have changed the course of Afrikaans history film and perhaps Afrikaans film in general. Let it serve as inspiration for future cinematic products of its kind.

## CHAPTER FOUR: MOFFIE

### 4.1 Introduction

This Chapter aims to explore the myths of the apartheid era and beyond in the context of *Moffie*. By doing so, it is anticipated that a conclusion could be reached as to whether *Moffie* rebukes toxic mythmaking. Since *Moffie* is partly an English language film (most of the main characters are English speaking), the Chapter introduces a brief outline of White English South African identity. This is used as a backdrop against which *Moffie's* treatment of myth can be considered as an English language film.

The rest of the Chapter consists of three tiers. Firstly, an examination of heteronormativity and its relation to *Moffie* will be discussed. Secondly the concept of Apartheid Aryanism will be considered and the manner in which the film interacts with this notion. Both the first and the second tier will be complemented by a Barthesian semiotic analysis. The semiotic analysis will expose the way in which the film communicates its stance towards heteronormativity and Apartheid Aryanism. In the third tier the presence of queering in the respective films will be evaluated. This will be done in order to assess whether *Moffie* impeaches some of the myths identified in the previous Chapters.

The theoretical centre of the examination of heteronormativity is strongly influenced by the work of Theo Sonnekus. He provides the necessary vocabulary to analyse the representation of the male body. His work also strongly speaks to that of others who build forth on Judith Butler's theory of gender, where clothing and behaviour demonstrate the nature of masculine performativity. Moreover, drawn from previous discussions about religion, it is also considered important to gauge how religion and heteronormativity interplay — specifically in the Barthesian analysis.

Apartheid Aryanism is a concept that hinges on the notion of justification. It is an enabling device that perpetuates hegemonic ideology and myths of white superiority. It is considered to be an important factor since *Moffie* is a post-apartheid cinematic product and should, as indicated, impeach these myths. In other words, the film should not participate in this process of enabling destructive myths, especially given that it is partly an English language film.

As said before, the conceptual centre of queer functions best if it is used as a verb. This is so, since otherwise it becomes bifurcated into polarities that undermine the ultimate goal of queering: a resistance to the norm. As Virginia Konchan (2019:1) submits, “to queer something ... means examining its foundations and questioning them. To queer is to examine our assumptions and practice transcending the habit of settling for pre-defined categories”. Arguably, myth produces pre-defined categories in the sense of who is deemed to be superior and who is not. In this sense queering subverts myth since it challenges the classification of dominant and subordinate identities. To reiterate, myths cast understandings as obvious and normal (Musson, Cohen and Tietze 2007: 55). Whereas film makers might not necessarily be familiar with queering, they ultimately do or do not succeed in reaching its goal. As Keyan Tomaselli (in Broodryk 2019: 210) suggests, a progressive cinematic product should be radical in its nature. It should be aware of its own technique, style, technology and conventions and how this molds the reality being portrayed. It is the conviction of this study that one of the ways to achieve this is to deploy a process of queering.

#### **4.2 White English South Africans**

According to Tess Salusbury and Don Foster (in Farber 2012:15), White English South Africans (WESSAs) do not have much of a sense of group consciousness. Salusbury and Foster suggest that this is apparent owing to a lack of literature that is self-reflexive. WESSAs also do not really demonstrate nationalistic group consciousness, nor community cohesion or political associations that speak for their interests. This

suggests a certain lack of unity in WESSA culture. The Afrikaner, as this study has thus far shown, subscribed to a collective consciousness insofar as numerous mythologies are concerned. In contrast, English South Africans “have historically adhered to the philosophy of individualism and have resisted defining themselves according to a group membership” (Falkov 2016:22). Because of this, it would appear that, contrary to Afrikaner Enclave Nationalists, WESSAs do not demonstrate a collective interest in consuming their own cultural products or mythologies, since these do not really exist in the first place.

Joane Nagel (in Farber 2012:15) observe that there is not really much to say about WESSAs. This is contrary to the Afrikaners. Jessica Evans and Peter Redman (in Farber 2012:15) at least concede that the English are interested in inclusion and not opposition. It would thus appear that *Moffie*, as a partly English language film, would subscribe to this sense of inclusion, or at the very least, not a collective exclusion — as is the case with the Afrikaner and his mythologies. Yet the liberty subscribed to the English South African is not necessarily as altruistic as it might appear.

As John Lambert posits, “the collective history of WESSAs is frequently not sufficiently positive to make remembering it a pleasing experience” (in Salusbury 2003:27). Regardless, this does suggest a certain mindfulness of a negative past — something the Afrikaner might not yet have shown in the recycling of mythology in films such as *Kanarie*. Owing to this, it would not be unrealistic to expect that *Moffie* would queer the mythology that the Afrikaner subscribed to since WESSAs demonstrate self-awareness with regard to how they are positioned against what might be a negative historical backdrop.

### 4.3 Heteronormativity

As discussed in the previous Chapter, *Kanarie* demonstrates the capacity to queer Afrikaner hegemonic ideology and myths of militarism, religious superiority and nationalism in certain screenshots. However, the queering of these myths does not unfold in other depictions. Resultantly, *Kanarie's* objective to expose the peril of alternative figures is undermined, since hegemony and its mythical counterparts are not indicted. *Kanarie* is capable of queering gender binaries — especially with relation to the satirical mimicking of Boy George. Overall, it appears that *Kanarie* does not disrupt the so-called normality of heteronormativity.

To situate heteronormativity within the previously discussed concept of discourses of hetero-patriarchy, Kristen Myers and Laura Raymond (in Herz and Johansson 2015:1011) suggest that “heteronormativity points at the everyday and mundane ways in which heterosexuality is privileged and taken for granted, that is, normalized and naturalized”. In other words, as a myth, heteronormativity engages in a process of naturalising heterosexuality. This is done in order for heterosexuality to be collectively considered as a standard or normal form of sexual orientation in alignment with the value system of a particular culture. As a result of this, heterosexuality and heteronormativity participate in the course of naturalisation as is also seen in *Kanarie*. Arguably, films denoting homosexual characters should queer heteronormative mythmaking and disrupt naturalisation if the intention is to present a progressive and nuanced product. As mentioned, it is useful to think of queer as a verb. Annamarie Jagose (in Milani 2014:206) elaborates: queer can be thought of as a verb that problematises sex, gender and sexuality that is considered to be normative. Arguably, normal conceptions of gender, sex and sexuality subscribe to heteronormativity. In other words, heteronormative mythmaking should be queered in order to disrupt the naturalisation of heteronormativity and heterosexuality, otherwise gay characters reside on the periphery of representation. Here they present as shallow caricatures, unable to conform to the heteronormative ideal of heterosexual orientation. For

example, as shown in the previous Chapter, in *Kanarie* the stereotypical representation of Ludolf is reduced to a reductionist and stereotyped understanding of homosexuality.

In *Moffie*, another South African film denoting homosexual representation in the heteronormative SADF, heteronormativity is perpetuated. However, in *Moffie* heteronormativity emerges in the depiction of the male body as well as the representation of religious iconography. In this sense, it would appear that heteronormative mythology is still in circulation, regardless of the cinematic product partly having been filmed in the English language.

In order to gauge *Moffie's* representation of heteronormativity, the section will identify two visual tropes that will be semiotically analysed. Firstly, the nature of the depiction of the unclad or semi-unclad male body will be considered. It is anticipated that the undressed male body will expose if and how the film conforms to the gay clone format and associated homomascularity. Secondly, religious iconography will be identified in order to evaluate to what extent homosexual representation participates in a narrative of silencing. After a short introduction, a semiotic analysis of these tropes will be conducted. Subsequently, the extent to which *Moffie* queers the heteronormative ideal will be discussed. The degree to which the heteronormative ideal is queered will expose how homosexuality is tailored to conform to heteronormative mythmaking in *Moffie*.

#### **4.3.1 *Semiotic analysis of the male body and religious iconography***

*Moffie* is a biographical wartime romance drama. As with *Kanarie*, two conscripts, Nicholas Van Der Swart and Dylan Stassen struggle to come to terms and negotiate their sexual orientation in the hegemonic SADF. Their attraction towards each other is subdued enough to be hidden, but apparent to both of them. Nicholas befriends Michael Sachs who also sides with Nicholas against the homophobic Niels Snyman. As a result of the homophobic environment, Nicholas's disdain for the abhorrent

treatment of conscripts who are even suspected of so-called ‘sodomy’ becomes clear in his attempts to rescue Dylan from an ‘asylum’ bunker once he is suspected of being homosexual. After the war has ended and Nicholas sets out to find Dylan, their attraction is briefly acknowledged but as the narrative closes, they separate once again. The film seeks to tell a story of gay awakening in the military. The director endeavours to invite the viewer to witness the situations, encounters, relations and gaze of the main protagonists and antagonist. This will be analysed semiotically throughout the Chapter.

In 2003 Martin Botha (2003:9) observed that, in South Africa, “our images of gay men and women are limited and still on the margin of the film industry”. Now, many years later, with the release of films such as *Moffie*, progression has arguably been made. This is especially so, given the thematic valour to periodise *Moffie* during the height of apartheid in a heteronormative militia. Yet, as mentioned, it is the manner in which homosexuality is juxtaposed with heteronormativity that determines whether *Moffie* meets the general progression that South African gay cinema has made. Theo Sonnekus, who has written extensively on the representation of the gay male body, identifies a setback with relation to the depiction of homosexuality and heteronormativity in visual arts: homomascularity and the gay clone.

- ***The male Body***

In *Moffie* the unclad male is presented as homomascularity. It conforms to the gay clone format. As indicated in the literature review, homomascularity gay figures subscribe and respond to heteronormative mythmaking. To them, it is important that they present themselves in a manner that resembles heterosexual machismo despite that homophobia would lead them to believe that they are not men. Part of this process of conformation to heteronormativity entails that homomascularity figures distance themselves from effeminacy. Homomascularity subjects align themselves with the butch heterosexual stereotype since they perceive this form of masculinity to be ideal



(2009:37). As mentioned in Chapter 2, straight acting gay men conform to masculine stereotypes (Eguchi 2009:194). In this manner the gay clone subscribes to the myth that homosexual figures have to conform to heteronormativity, in order for their masculinity to be acceptable — despite of them being gay. Spaces such as “communal showers ... operate as context for the representation of nakedness in legitimated ways that defuse both vulnerability and obscenity” (Cover 2003:54).



**Figure 30:** Michael Sachs takes a shower with fellow conscripts, *Moffie*. 2019.  
(Screenshot by author)

Figure 30 is a screenshot of Michael Sachs and a few other conscripts socialising in a communal shower. Michael is positioned naked with his back to the camera. The screenshot does not necessarily contribute significantly to the narrative of the film; however, it does reveal a great deal regarding the representation of the male body in *Moffie*. The conscripts are clearly comfortable in one another’s presence despite that they are naked. As mentioned, this is owing to communal nude masculinity being considered as acceptable in, what is in this case, the SADF’s value system. Arguably, this display of comfort welcomes the gay clone construct. Hypothetically a gay clone would feel comfortable in a setting shown in the screenshot since his physical features as well as the performance of his sexuality conforms to the myth of the heteronormative man. After all, as Martin Levine (in Kularski 2013:3) observes, the gay clone is “essentially a gay male who embodies and embraces the culture of homosexual masculinity while

simultaneously presenting as the product of normative socialization”; arguably, such as in a communal shower.

On a connotative level, a homosexual viewer might experience this representation as erotic especially since, at a meta-level, communal nude masculinity implies representation in the lived homosexual experience. As Stuart Hall (in Caprioglio 2021:1) observes, connotatively homosexual viewers unpack dominant readings to reveal negotiated or oppositional plots, characterisations, or inferred backstories. The above interpretations are not necessarily the intended narrative provided by media industry professionals. However, if depictions or narratives are only read connotatively, then gay representation is merely implied and thus also avoidable. Again, this does not serve to trouble heteronormativity. Even if the possibility exists for a gay viewer to interpret the representation as erotic, the depiction can still be embraced by the broader value system that communal nude masculinity signifies: the picturing of nude men in a shower is acceptable and natural heterosexual behaviour. In view of this, essentially, not only is a communal shower a permissible space that resides within the parameters policed by heteronormativity, but any connotative function to homosexual lived experience can be denied and avoided.



**Figure 31:** Michael Sachs and Nicholas watch a softball match, *Moffie*. 2019.  
(Screenshot by author)

Similarly, the iconography Figure 31 perpetuates heteronormativity and accommodates the gay clone construct. The image is a screenshot of Michael Sachs and Nicholas watching their fellow conscripts enjoying a softball match. The sun casts shadows in the muscular curves of their backs as they relax under the blue canopy of a cloudless sky. Nicholas's shoes are velskoens or 'vellies'. These farmstyle shoes consist of soft leather and rubber soles.

Similar to Figure 30, sport arguably serves as an activity that can be read as erotic by a homosexual viewer. Doubtlessly, sport includes physical contact between muscular men or, at least, during the softball match in Figure 31, an opportunity to view the topless male body. Yet as with the communal shower scene, touching or viewing the topless male body does not transgress the parameters of heteronormativity during sport matches. On the contrary, as Donald Sabo and Sue Curry Jansen (in Whannel 1999:253) submit, "sport for boys has, since the mid-nineteenth century, had a close association with the inculcation of the values of dominant masculinity". If masculinity is considered as superior within the heteronormative paradigm, then Nicholas, as a gay subject, participates in the heteronormative coding of the screenshot. He is, after all, sitting topless with his back to the viewer. This not only estranges the viewer from his gaze but it also suggests that his gaze is not queer. He simply forms part of a sporting activity that is traditionally considered to be heteronormative. Owing to this, he subscribes to the gay clone format. As Michael Kimmel (in Kularski 2013:14) submits, "sport is an essential component of masculinity that often involves risks and physical contact between men". Furthermore, the gay clone "embrace[s] the normative socializations of masculinity" (Kularski 2013:3). Martin Levine (in Kularski 2013:3) suggests that in order to do so, "relentless repudiation of femininity" is required. Given this, Nicholas's adherence to heteronormativity implies a phobia of effeminate gay men. Connotation to homophobia is perpetuated further by the positioning of Nicholas and his heterosexual friend, Michael, in the centre of the frame since it foregrounds a male partnership against the backdrop of a sporting activity.

The companionship connotes to alliance and brotherhood. This does not breach the parameters of heteronormativity. On the contrary, the coding of the screenshot appears to signify homosociality in the partnership between Michael and Nicholas. As Sedgwick (in Yaeger 1985:1141) explains, “‘homosocial’ ... is a neologism meant to be distinguished from ‘homosexual’ and connotes a form of male bonding often accompanied by a fear or hatred of homo-sexuality”. Evidently the display of homosociality is aligned with heteronormativity and the value systems of the SADF.

Anthony Brown (2018:16) observes that “‘vellies’ [are] associated with (hetero)sexuality of ‘straight guys’ [and it] reinforces the sexing and demarcation of the body through clothing”. Moreover, the association with the farm, frames vellies as heteronormative. Hence the heterosexual costuming of Nicholas as a gay figure appears to connote the ‘gay clone’. Representation of this nature is problematic since it perpetuates homophobia towards figures that are not ‘straight acting’ — a term discussed in earlier Chapters. Daniel Harris (in Henderson 2010:40) substantiates with regard to a divide between ‘straight acting’ and effeminate men: once gay men attempt recreating themselves in the image of mythical icons of American machismo such as gunslingers, cowpokes and leathernecks, homosexuals fail to relieve their sense of shortcoming to heterosexual men. Straight men’s candid sexual self-assurance remains the subcultural hallmark of male legitimacy. An attempt to restore the pathology of the homosexual body by participating in the costuming of the new masculine machismo, has resulted in the ultimate failure of liberation from the belief in the heterosexual male’s evolutionary supremacy. On the contrary, gay men have become their worst enemies. They have become punitive, homophobic detractors of the effeminate behaviour of the stereotypical queen. Reference to American myths such as cowpokes and leathernecks does suggest that American white English stereotypes do not queer masculine mythmaking. Because of this, effeminate homosexuals are maligned. Similarly, the heterosexual connotations of Nicholas’s vellies sustain a narrative of homophobia. Homophobic hatred of this nature is specifically aimed towards men whose gender performance, through clothing, falls beyond the demarcation of the heterosexual body

as facilitated by heteronormative costuming — such as vellies. For example, as seen in *Kanarie*, Johan cross-dresses as Boy George — a performance that is transgressive of the heteronormativity associated with the SADF. In the case of *Kanarie*, the transgression of heteronormative costuming allowed for a potent critique of gender binaries. The furthest that *Moffie* ventures to subvert the heteronormative body is by representing Nicholas and Dylan topless in a trench as they lovingly stare into each other’s eyes. But this moment is as isolated and covert as the trench in which it unfolds.



**Figure 32:** Dylan and a fellow conscript roleplay a scene where Dylan is a flirtatious cashier and his friend a man buying cigarettes, *Moffie*. 2019.  
(Screenshot by author)

The homophobic reaction to figures that do not conform to the gay clone construct is sustained in Figure 32. However, here effeminacy implies a kind of failed masculinity. Dylan and a fellow conscript role-play a scene where Dylan pretends to be a flirtatious cashier and his fellow conscript a man buying cigarettes. Dylan’s right-hand rests coyly on his chin with his left hand on his chest. The conscript’s eyes point downward to Dylan’s groin. This screenshot is also captured from the softball match.

Since Dylan is a man, he evidently stages a mockery of a homosexual figure that does not conform to the 'gay clone' format. The positioning of Dylan's hands connotes effeminate homosexuality. Adam Davies (2020:105) elaborates: "the term 'effeminate' has historically been viewed as a form [of] 'failed masculinity'". In this light, Dylan's effeminate behaviour is culturally primed to signify a kind of masculinity that is inadequate in the value systems of the SADF. The arbitrary relation between effeminacy and a failed masculinity codes male effeminate behaviour or the effeminate male body as a symbol of masculine inadequacy. It is thus implied that to be an effeminate homosexual figure resides beyond the periphery of heteronormative behaviour. Arguably, owing to this, Dylan ridicules the stereotypical worst that masculinity can offer — as observed by Sonnekus (2009:37). Brian Hansen (2014:65) submits that at the heart of the cultural perception of the gay stereotype resides the mistaken belief that a gay man acts effeminately or that sexual orientation and performance are one and the same.

In this context, the relation between the effeminate gay stereotype and sexual orientation in itself is misguided: there is no connotation between effeminate behaviour and sexual orientation. Yet the prior is suggested to connote the latter. Thus, the coding of the screenshot mocks homosexual malignment despite that homosexuality, as seen in Hansen's observation, does not emerge in the screenshot's signification. As Bethy Leonardi (2017:96) observes, "gender expression is a misunderstood proxy for sexual orientation". Owing to this, the screenshot simply signifies and fulfils an anti-effeminate bearing that supports the 'gay clone' stereotype and by extension heteronormativity. The effeminate male body is coded to present a nostalgic longing for the machismo associated with heteronormativity.

- **Religious iconography**

To locate religious iconography in *Moffie* within previous discussions of religion and Afrikanerdom, Christian symbols such as the cross connotes an effort to defend Christianity at the Border. In alignment with this, Stephen Symons (2019:260) observes

that many ex-conscripts believed that the SADF soldier was a defender of home and hearth, Christian values and the war effort. Moreover, in *Moffie*, the Cross as a symbol of Christianity is represented as a memento of home and hearth as well as family. Evidently, as Jacqueline Hudak, and Shawn V. Giammattei (in Smothers 2020:8) suggest, “the discourse surrounding the idea of family is heteronormative”. Traditional family units enjoy natural privilege and is typified by one mother, one father and their children (in Smothers 2020:8). Heteronormativity dictates gender and familial structure. The discourse surrounding this idea is heteronormative (Smothers 2020:8). Aliraza Javaid (in Smothers 2020:8) observes that sexuality is also affected — especially for men. To them heterosexuality is seen as compulsory.



**Figure 33:** The sergeant looks over while the conscripts are watching a propaganda video, *Moffie*. 2019.  
(Screenshot by author)

Figure 33 is a screenshot of the conscripts seated, watching a propaganda video. Afterwards, as the lights in the room are turned on, some appear uninterested. Niels Snyman, the homophobic bully second to the left, seems intent with the material he has just viewed. In the background a cross is visible.

The conscripts are portrayed in a homosocial setting. Tankut Atuk (2021:135) proposes that amongst exclusively men, homosocial bonding in the name of military cohesion would be acceptable if the terms for what is praised and what is denounced are easily separated. So, for instance, if you were to touch another soldier inappropriately but in jest, it might be acceptable. However, if it is done in a serious manner, it would be strongly denounced. Arguably, in addition to the examples Atuk mentions, the presence of the Cross serves as a moral arbitrator of what kind of homosociality is acceptable in the military setting of Figure 33. Whereas the image only represents heterosexual men, the presence of the Cross suggests that the SADF becomes a 'home away from home'. The cross signifies a certain loving of the home in the SADF's value system. In this light the cross symbolises the maintenance of heteronormativity as cornerstone to both the family as well as the heteronormative environment of the SADF. As mentioned in previous Chapters, heteronormativity and religion interplay with domination and hierarchy. Hence, the representation of a religious symbol that sustains heteronormativity, frames the army as a hierarchical familial institution that enforces compulsory heterosexuality, thus marginalising gay figures.

Arguably, the screenshot does little to suggest a subversion of domination and hierarchy. It also does not represent a disruption of homosexual malignment and silencing. Rather, the coding of the screenshot relates more to the mentality of Nicholas's adversary — a vicious defender of heteronormativity. Even the representation of homosexual characters against the backdrop of religious symbolism does not subvert heteronormativity. On the contrary, as seen in Figure 34, homosexual characters and religious iconography eventually result in silencing homosexuality.





**Figure 34:** Ryan de Villiers in *Moffie*  
(IMBD)

In Figure 34, Dylan stares into the distance. In the background, above him, a cross is visible on a church building. Much as Figure 7 discussed in Chapter 2, Figure 34 is coded to suggest that success in battle is predicated on the Christian faith. The positioning of the cross above Dylan suggests that his survival as a soldier depends on belief in God. Evidently, as posited in previous Chapters, the Church of the time expelled homosexuals, arguably leaving compulsory heterosexuality as an aspect of heteronormativity to be the only resort. Hence the representation of Dylan against a religious backdrop connotes the silencing of gay figures and a conformation to heteronormativity in the SADF. This is exemplified by his isolation in the frame.

Akin to Figure 7, the Church abandons a dovish teaching in the screenshot. Instead, the Church, as a heteronormative institution, is weaponised against homosexuality. As with the dead soldier and the victorious soldier in Figure 7, the screenshot suggests a division between Dylan's sexual orientation and the expectation that he should conform to heteronormativity. Perhaps this explains his mockery of effeminate gays in Figure 32.



**Figure 7:** Screenshot of a montage of imagery of the Border War, 2020.  
(Screenshot by author)

#### 4.3.2 Discussion

As mentioned in the previous Chapter, Janet R. Jakobson suggests that the term queer should be used as a verb and not as a noun. Similar to *Kanarie*, *Moffie* does not, for the most part, queer mythology to the extent that it is subversive. This is in spite of it being partly an English language film. In most of the screen shots sampled, the male body maintains heteronormativity. In the communal shower scene, for example, the signification is merely connotative, excluding alternative interpretation by a homosexual audience that might read the screenshot as erotic. Inadvertently this implies that such a reading could also be avoided by a heteronormative audience. In addition, the representation of the nude male body in a communal shower is coded not to transgress the parameters of heteronormativity. This is owing to a military communal shower being an acceptable and normal space for collective male nudity. As observed by Eli Manning (2009:2), “to queer something is to question normalcy by problematiz[ing] its apparent neutrality and objectivity”. In the scene in question, the representation of the normality associated with communal showering is not problematised, resulting in un-queered representation of heteronormativity. The absence of queering in the shower scene, therefore, results in heteronormativity not being subverted.

In another example, the athletic masculine physique in Figure 31 is coded to signify homomascularity or the 'gay clone'. Nicholas's vellies have strong heterosexual connotations. This maintains the heteronormative ideal at the expense of effeminate homosexual figures. Moreover, the representation of Nicholas next to his heterosexual friend, Michael Sachs, connotes homosociality that invokes rejection of homosexuality. Again, heterosexuality as an aspect of the heteronormative ideal is prioritised in the way that Nicholas is costumed as well as the brotherhood that is connoted between Nicholas and his friend.

Finally, in the film, effeminate gestures ridicule camp homosexual figures as pointed out in the discussion of Figure 32. The demasculinised male body connotes a yearning for homomascularity. This unfolds despite *Moffie's* presumable aim to expose the marginalisation of alternative masculinity. In most of the representations, homosexuality is customised to match heteronormativity. It appears as a case of: the closest that homosexual figures are able to appear heterosexual, the better. As Jane Robbins (2021:1) submits, queering erases "any concept of normality, in whatever aspect of existence, so marginalized people can create their own reality". Given this, conformation to heterosexuality does not allow for the creation of new realities by gay figures even in a partly English language cinematic product. On the contrary, it merely perpetuates existing Afrikaner myths surrounding heterosexuality and heteronormativity.

With regard to religious iconography as illustrated in Figure 33 and 34, *Moffie* struggles to liberate its gay characters from a narrative of silencing. Instead, the Cross is presented as a symbol that naturalises a militant family unit, one that enforces compulsory heterosexuality whilst rejecting gay figures. The positioning of Dylan in front of a suspended Cross suggests that in order for him to be successful in battle, he has to conform with Christianity and by implication, the heteronormative Church. As mentioned in Chapter 3, during the War, the Afrikaner Church countered other Christian denominations (Saayman 2011:211). Owing to this, it appears strange that *Moffie*, as a

partly English language film, conforms to Afrikaner religious mythmaking. This pursues the mythical ideal of Afrikaner heteronormativity and no queering is achieved. It is not suggested that a film denoting homosexual figures should only include those who are maligned by heteronormativity. However, in the representations sampled, it occurs seldom that the ideal of heteronormativity is queered. To reiterate, films, like *Moffie*, should be self-aware of the implications of mythmaking that constructs certain identities as superior to others.

#### 4.4 Apartheid Aryanism

David Allen Harvey (2014:280) observes that the Aryan myth “was ... used to argue for the superiority of the ‘Aryan’ peoples of contemporary Europe over the non-Aryans, and so it became a justification for ... white supremacy”. If those who are suppressed are complicit in the perpetuation of white supremacy as a hegemonic system (Allen 2006:11) then Aryanism also manifests as a justification for hegemony.

Arguably, the myths that relate to whiteness, as represented in *Moffie*, resemble Aryanism. It underscores mythology that relies on hierarchical social systems such as white superiority and hegemony regardless of the language used in the film. However, the nuances of Western Aryanism as it manifested historically and more recently, differ from Apartheid Aryanism. In particular, whereas both Western Aryanism and Apartheid Aryanism draw from Eurocentric and Western myths, these differences emerge in their wake. The Aryan Nations Organisation, which was a white separatist organisation based in Idaho, did not survive the death of Richard Butler, their founder. In contrast, the idea of the Aryan Race did not die with Hitler or the fall of Nazism (Godwin 1996:8). On the contrary, “it has continued to inspire a worldwide group of esotericists who combine an engagement in the spiritual path with an attitude to Nazism ranging from compliance to enthusiasm” (Godwin 1996:8). In South Africa, a motion towards the denouncement of white supremacy unfolded symbolically. For instance, the fall of the Rhodes statue on 9 April 2015, which was preceded by the ‘Rhodes Must Fall’ movement, aimed to

symbolise the fall of supremacy and white privilege at the University of Cape Town (Sonnekus 2016:476).

The fall of the Rhodes statue thus heralded a significant moment in South African history, especially amongst the educated youth. However, as Christi van der Westhuizen (in Symons 2019:7) observes, there has been a quest to delegitimise the apartheid chain of command over the past decade. However, the very questioning of these apartheid hierarchies appears to draw on the mainstream populist nuances of the original apartheid formulations, leading to increasing fissures.

Because of this, it appears that, contrary to the demise of the Aryan Nations Organisation and the white separatist mythology to which it subscribed, the end of apartheid rule did not mean that white superiority and associated hegemony in South Africa have been subverted. Arguably, this applies to all white South Africans and not just Afrikaners. As mentioned, the myth of Hitler's Aryan race has persevered long after Nazi rule disintegrated. Similarly South Africa is still significantly fractured as far as racial inequality is concerned in the post-apartheid era. As Bernard Magubane (2000:33) submits, the new South Africa is burdened by the psychological and structural defects of white supremacy to such an extent that there is still much left to be desired.

With this in mind, the term Apartheid Aryanism justifies hegemonic ideology and myths of white superiority as they appear in post-apartheid South Africa. In the contemporary sense, the mythologies that Apartheid Aryanism upholds, might have become more accepting towards homosexuality. However, as will be demonstrated, the progression to condone homosexuality in the post-apartheid era is far less liberating than it might appear: white homosexuality still enjoys privilege that might be denied from its African counterpart. Therefore, Apartheid Aryanism can be extended to 'homosexual Apartheid Aryanism' (a term that will be used in this section) since even in the case of homosexual orientation, white superiority and associated hegemony is maintained.

During a sequence in the conscripts' train journey to the Border, a black man is attacked at a station when the soldiers hurl food at him from the train. As the camera lingers on his face the inhibited rage of a figure crushed in the palm of suppression, emerges. He is nameless and has no origin or agency. His suffering might be conveyed, but as the scene cuts back to the boys on the train, it is clear that the sequence does not support their apish behaviour; it remains about them. They remain superior. Later, after the war had ended and Nicholas and Dylan reunite, they are portrayed in a sublime and picturesque apartheid Cape Town as they drive down Chapman's Peak Road.

The wind plays in their soft hair as they drive with open windows and Nicholas squints in the summer sun at the azure ocean below. It appears that these two characters have become further removed from and are more blind to the black victim left behind along the journey to the Border. In fact, they embody the mythology of the Aryan man when they arrive at the beach basking in the sun and enjoying the summer heat.

As mentioned, Apartheid Aryanism still persists in post-apartheid South Africa. In *Moffie's* narrative, the myths that Apartheid Aryanism upholds are denounced in favour of the African victim. Visually, however, as will be seen in the semiotic analysis to follow, this is done by deploying signs that connote Apartheid Aryan mythmaking and the associated privilege. As well-intended as this might be, it remains problematic since, as an inevitable consequence to this coding, the African becomes unwitnessed. As Broodryk (2016:109) indicated in the literature review, unwitnessing suggests forgetting. That exacerbates silence, and in turn, it inflates privilege. The privilege that unwitnessing and silence entails, seems counterproductive in *Moffie*. The film cannot simultaneously unwitness African figures but also attempt to expose privilege, since unwitnessing inadvertently implies privilege. The reason *Moffie* fails in this regard is perhaps owing to it being a historical film. As Didier Fassin (in Kidron 2015:146) substantiates, trauma-related victimhood is still disseminated by international agents of memory as being Eurocentric and Western. This is not necessarily a true reflection of the cultural and socio-political realities that transpire on the ground.

It ties in with Kostelac's notion of pastiche in Chapter 3: the past can no longer be accessed as a putative reality. Instead, the past can only be gazed upon from contemporary understandings of stereotypes. Arguably, owing to this, Euro-western perspectives of victimhood are often imposed despite that these perceptions might be incorrect. *Moffie* is also an international agent of memory. As Anton Kaes (1990:113) observes with regard to memory, the image poses agency in the functioning of history and memory. Cinematic images serve as a technological bank that does not really offer escape. These images legitimise and shape our impressions of history. In addition, in the age of electronic reproducibility, memory is public. Technology has allowed for memory to become socialised.

In this light, Kidron's submission speaks to the coding of *Moffie* as connoting Apartheid Aryanist mythmaking. It appears that the only way *Moffie*, as a South African film, exposes African victimhood is by coding representations to signify the Western or Eurocentric myths that Apartheid Aryanism justifies. This may include white superiority to the extent that a picturesque drive by two gay white men along Chapman's Peak in apartheid South Africa, is tolerated. Conversely, the myths related to whiteness sustained by Apartheid Aryanism, also engages in a process of unwitnessing, or transparency. Woody Doane (in Perry 2007:379) observes that the universalisation or normalisation of whiteness serves as a fundamental element in the relation between the reproduction of whiteness as well as the transparency of whiteness. Moreover, the blending of transparency and existing domination permits whiteness to be cast as the mainstream of nation and culture.

The transparency of whiteness "posits whiteness, and thus white cultural norms, as not only normative/normal, but as good, while those cultural norms of the non-white Other are inherently evil" (Jefferson-Jones 2017:542). Hence, the transparency or unwitnessing of whiteness and the unwitnessing of the African do not differ in meaning since both are modelled on naturalisation. However, respectively, their outcome differs: white unwitnessing maintains white superiority, whereas African unwitnessing

maintains African subservience. With specific regard to *Moffie*, the coding of the representations as Eurocentric or Western is couched in the perception that it is normal or natural to signify white superiority as a myth upheld by Apartheid Aryanism. This is so, despite the film seeking to denounce African subservience. The film cannot seek to expose African subjugation by coding its visual representation in alignment with the naturalisation of white supremacy. Owing to this, the white closeted gays are not aware of whiteness and blackness. They are blinded by the apartheid system. They do not see injustice. They are mute. Whereas Nicholas and Dylan are gay, they still conform to the naturalisation of Apartheid Aryanism.

#### **4.4.1 *Semiotic analysis of white superiority and hegemony***

Tropes that connote white superiority and hegemony will be identified in the visual representation of *Moffie*. This is done in order to demonstrate how the film relies on Apartheid Aryanist coding that legitimatises Western and Eurocentric myths. Doubtlessly it is owing to this coding that the dynamic of African victimhood remains invisible in *Moffie*, despite black actors having been cast in small roles. It is also on account of this coding that white, closeted homosexuals do not see the injustice of the apartheid regime, but that they rather form part of the aforementioned fissures of white superiority and hegemony that still exist in post-apartheid South Africa. In order to pursue this argument, screenshots coded to exemplify Apartheid Aryanist mythology are purposively sampled.

The portrayal of rifles in *Moffie* is reminiscent of Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket*. There, the rifle becomes a carnal symbol when a platoon of conscripts shout, "This is my rifle. This is my gun. This is for killing. This is for fun". Evidently the soldier's rifle connotes sex. His rifle and penis symbolise the soldier's masculinity (Symons 2019:147). In the SADF, conscripts often had to refer to their rifle as their wife or girlfriend. Sometimes they were even commanded to kiss their rifle goodnight (Symons 2019:148). These moments of uniform virility doubtlessly imply that any deviation from white superiority



and hegemony albeit on ethnical or sexual grounds was unacceptable in the SADF. Since the rifle was effeminised in the SADF, it arguably became a symbol of white heterosexuality and family. After all, the rifle was referred to as a 'vrou' (wife). Moreover, as mentioned in Chapter 2, the family unit and the military chain of command are hierarchical organisations and, in both cases, disobedience is severely punished (Pietilä 1990:5). In this sense the rifle became a measure that both preserved the white family unit in a foreign space but also served as a guideline for appropriate behaviour and conduct to satisfy the superiority of a white hegemonic military regime. The screenshots sampled in the following section all represent rifles since the rifle signifies the mythology substantiated by Apartheid Aryanism in the context of a South African cinematic product.

#### 4.4.2 *Analysis: White superiority and hegemony*



**Figure 35:** Michael Sachs standing at attention, *Moffie*. 2019.  
(Screenshot by author)

The coding of Figure 35 maintains white superiority and hegemony upheld by Apartheid Aryanism. The conscripts are represented standing at attention and uniformly holding their rifles upright. Their faces are stern and their eyes focused as if staring into the abyss

of violence that they will soon face once they have completed training. The rifles function as the most polysemic aspect of the image. They are symbols of white fertility as well as a moment of discipline both of which serve as a measure to maintain the subjugation of the black underclass.

Doubtlessly this concept needed to be collectively understood by white society. As Albie Sachs (in Busari 1990:129) submits: In apartheid South Africa “white domination was achieved by the gun and [was] maintained by the gun”. In this manner, the rifle signified the myth of white superiority. *Moffie* adopts this cultural understanding. To this end, the film relies on the collective impression of the rifle as a symbol that maintains white superiority. Moreover, cinematically, the rifle is understood as a phallic structure. In *Full Metal Jacket*, Stanley Kubrick is interested in exploring the relationship between the structural alignments of the penis and the rifle in American military customs (Owen 2002:258). Milton Bates (in Owen 2002:258) elaborates that American combatants become their rifles — precise, hard and remorselessly inflicting death.

Hence as represented in the screenshot, *Moffie* draws from the rifle as a symbol for the maintenance of white superiority as well as a symbol of procreation. The intersection between white superiority and procreation — both symbolised by the rifle — codes the rifle as a phallic structure that maintains white supremacy. In this manner, the rifle’s coding in *Moffie* is infused with a kind of generative white supremacy as a mythology that Apartheid Aryanism justified.

As mentioned, in the SADF the effeminacy associated with the rifle was inculcated. In other words, the meaning attributed to the rifle was taught framing it as a symbol of effeminateness or more specifically, as mentioned, a ‘*vrou*’ or wife. Doubtlessly the rifle symbolising a female partner frames the conscript as a male partner or husband. Thus, the effeminacy that the rifle connotes completes a family unit. As mentioned in Chapter 2, both the family unit and the military are hierarchical organisations and disobedience

is punished. Since a rifle is used against the enemy, it is doubtlessly also a symbol of violence.

The presence of a symbol of violence as well as a symbol that completes a heterosexual family unit, speaks to the relationship between the family unit and the military. Whereas a heterosexual family unit might suggest patriarchal mythology, the violence connoted inflames patriarchy to become hegemonic in *Moffie's* SADF. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the patriarchal agency associated with the Border replaced a domestic system, with a militarist social formulation. In this manner the military family unit, unlike necessarily the domestic family unit, becomes a space that expels alternative figures such as homosexuals. This explains Nicholas's absence in the screenshot and also why his close friend is positioned alone.

Since the screenshot signifies (generative) white supremacy as well as hegemony, the coding is Eurocentric and Western. As argued, as a consequence of this coding, it is implied that the African is invisible. In reality *Moffie's* representation of the military, its mythologies and the symbols that inform them are drawn from the deleterious myths that rendered the African invisible during apartheid and the war. The myths were justified by Apartheid Aryanism. Henry Louis Gates (in Powell:747) outlines this setback in his observation of the struggle to depict the black figure on the white page: he states that there is an irony at play in positioning the black self in Western discourse since it is in those spaces where blackness is negated. Similarly, it is apparent that an attempt to position black subjugation through the signification of Apartheid Aryanist mythologies on screen, is to position the African in a space where he was unwitnessed in the first place.



**Figure 36:** Niels Snyman mimics pointing a ‘rifle’ at Nicholas, *Moffie*. 2019.  
(Screenshot by author)

Figure 36 expounds this impediment. The screenshot critiques the transparency of whiteness. However, it also preserves the privilege associated with the white homosexual figure. After a violent homophobic confrontation in the barracks, Nicholas resorts to presenting a heterosexual pornographic magazine that he has in his possession. This is done as a ruse to conceal his homosexuality. Following this, Niels Snyman mimics pointing a gun at Nicholas, apparently not convinced by Nicholas’s subterfuge. The representation doubtlessly invokes pathos for Nicholas aligned with the thematic aim of the film.

Diana Fuss (in Linke 1999:129) concedes that, “deconstructing the category ‘white’ involves making visible its “founding metaphors and ideology of invisibility”. Whereas Niels Snyman is pointing a firearm at Nicholas, this gun is not present in the material sense — but it is certainly suggested to be. The positioning of Niels’s right fingers on a trigger and left hand as a support for a barrel forms the outlines of a rifle. As established, the rifle is a symbol of hegemony and white superiority. However, given that its visibility is present merely through suggestion, the rifle remains physically absent. Owing to this,

*Moffie* arguably succeeds in making the invisibility of myths of hegemony and white superiority visible by outlining the edges of a rifle but leaving the space in between empty: the rifle and that which it signifies is not physically visible but it is suggested to be. Furthermore, the act of mimicking a rifle undermines its function to enact violence. In this sense it could be considered as an ‘abnormal’ act. Hence, the normalisation and universalisation of white superiority and white hegemony is suggested to be abnormal. In the South African case, the collective understanding of the gun as a symbol of white superiority is rendered visible and exposed even if merely through suggestion. In this manner the invisible gun becomes a symbol of the entitlement of white superiority and hegemony. However, Nicholas is a gay white character. Gene Lim and Belinda Hewitt (2018:340) find that the queer white subject or the specifically white transparency, both entrench and protect White LGBTQI individuals as having privileged status.

Nicholas’s visibility as a gay white figure suggests that homosexuality as an imperialist import is natural. Moreover, despite being homosexual, the superiority of his whiteness affords him privilege within a marginalised community. What Lim and Hewitt suggest means that it would be difficult to code a gay white character in a South African film without remaining restrained by the mythologies that Apartheid Aryanism justifies. Even more significant is that *Moffie* forms part of a lineage of army films produced during the 1980s — such as *Boetie on the Border* and the other films discussed in Chapter 2. Mark Gevisser (in Peach 2005:117) observes that the *Boetie Gaan Border Toe* movies were queer. He favours the theme of white boys in the army that included homosexual picturing.

Gevisser’s perception of gay picturing in the army films of the 1980s is positive; however, he perhaps fails to recognise how problematic the ‘whole white boys ... thing’ is: the mythologies that these groups represent is not taken into consideration. Then, as (disappointingly) now, the liberation implied by homosexual imaging only exists within the context of a privileged white gay cluster. This unfolds despite that gay representation should, especially now, be aligned with a broader racial mapping that

includes black homosexuality. A representation such as Figure 37 does not meet this expectation. The time has come that not merely gay representation is celebrated. This tends still to apply only to a privileged group that is visually coded to sustain the myths that Apartheid Aryanism upholds. In point of fact, gay representation is not enough. It is time to liberate homosexual representation whilst also troubling the myths that sustain white gay privileged groups. This would paint a white backyard homophobic bully as a far more relevant antagonist.



**Figure 37:** Nicholas with his rifle in the bush, *Moffie*. 2019.  
(Screenshot by author)

The weapon as a symbol of white superiority and hegemony and the gay white figure sustaining Apartheid Aryanist mythology manifest in Figure 37. Similar to Figure 36, Figure 37 also upholds white homosexual privilege as well as a reliance on homosexual Apartheid Aryanism to code homosexual figures. Once Nicholas and his fellow conscripts finally engage in war, Nicholas is presented with face paint and a cap with twigs attached as camouflage. His rifle rests in his arm and his eyes are focused and alert.

Previously, Nicholas used a heterosexual pornographic magazine as a ruse to hide his homosexuality. However, the coding of Figure 37 suggests that he has progressed beyond this. As mentioned, the rifle symbolises effeminacy. It also completes a heterosexual family unit. Hence, the firearm, much as the pornographic magazine has done, serves as subterfuge for Nicholas's sexual orientation. In effect, he finds shelter behind the hegemonic military family unit that the rifle connotes in the SADF. As Jacklyn Cock (in Mankayi 2008:34) observes, "military weapons and their implicit threat of aggression arguably constitute the ideals of hegemonic masculinity".

Moreover, as a study conducted by Mankayi (2008:34) finds, to carry a rifle is a visceral experience. It also instils a sense of masculine achievement. As a matter of fact, high apartheid considered racial rule as identical to white supremacy (Dubow 2015:237) and in the SADF "it [was] the soldier's personal weapon, his rifle, that serve[d] as the ultimate expression of latent military power, and of his intent to act as a soldier in service of the state" (Symons 2019:147). Hence, aside from the hegemonic family unit that the rifle connotes, his rifle was collectively understood as connoting servility to white supremacy during apartheid rule. Doubtlessly, Nicholas's ruse is potent and convincing. However, again, his ploy is coded to signify Apartheid Aryanist mythmaking, as the rifle connotes white superiority and hegemony in the SADF. Furthermore, the camouflage that Nicholas wears is symbolic of the transparency and resultant naturalisation he enjoys as a white homosexual character.

As Theo Sonnekus and Jeanne van Eeden (2009:89) submit, "it is, for example, extremely rare for gay publications to represent black men as gay, and finding images depicting black men as a gay couple, in the same manner that white subjects are represented, is difficult". The same can arguably be said of film. As Sonnekus and Van Eeden (2009:89) submitted in the literature review, homosexuality or queerness is only interpretable in visual culture if the signifying presence is aligned with white homomascularity as the so called 'gay ideal'. Their observation speaks to the reliance on Apartheid Aryanist coding to connote homosexuality as a white manifestation. In fact, it appears that the

signification of homosexuality is not interpretable or rather recognisable unless it is expressed by a white homosexual figure. White homosexuality as a 'gay ideal', attests to gay white privilege and superiority amongst the LGBTQI community in general. Arguably, the representation of Nicholas in this manner serves little purpose if the intent is to subvert homosexual Apartheid Aryan mythology and not just to protest against homosexual discrimination in the SADF. As mentioned, these setbacks are on account of *Moffie* being a historical film. It does appear that *Moffie*, as an agent of memory, succumbs to the same pitfalls as other historical media given the reliance on Apartheid Aryan mythology in the film's coding. However, if South African cinema is to contribute to the relief of the psychological and structural encumbrances of white superiority, then South African films would have to move towards acknowledging political transition and not just homosexual liberation. This should be the case for historical films as well. South Africa has a rich history that can and should inspire cinematic products. However, if the visual coding of these films remain restrained by Apartheid Aryanist coding then there really has not been significant progression away from the war films of the 1980's.

#### 4.5 Discussion

During apartheid and the Border War, the firearm became a symbol of white superiority and hegemony. This was collectively understood by white society and was in alignment with its value system. In the SADF, the rifle connoted virility and procreation. *Moffie* draws from these codes in its representation of whiteness and its relation to the firearm. Symbolically, the rifle also connoted a domestic family unit that was enflamed to become hegemonic in the military family unit of the SADF. This does not facilitate queering since the ideal of white hegemony as an exclusive construct is maintained. Furthermore, moments of discipline also maintain the ideal of the subjugation of the African. This is not merely owing to black figures hardly being represented. Rather, the coding of the rifle as a sign that connotes the myths — such as white superiority — as justified by Apartheid Aryanism, leaves the African unwitnessed.



Nicholas's presence in Figure 36 suggests that homosexuality as an imperialist import is natural and normal. This positions him as a privileged white character within the LGBTQI community. Moreover, as seen in Figure 37, Nicholas and his firearm are again coded to signify the mythology that Apartheid Aryanism justified. This speaks to homosexuality as only being recognisable if it conforms to Apartheid Aryanist mythmaking. In other words, it is only if the signifying presence visually conforms to Apartheid Aryanism as the gay ideal, that 'gayness' is recognised. It follows that, in Figure 37, *Moffie* does not queer the ideal of white homosexuality. Ntongela Masilela (2009:1) submits that South African national cinema still does not exist. Instead, until recent times, cinema in South Africa has been hegemonic and of service to white superiority, subjugation and white nationalism. To her, this fact is not deniable and it explains why South African film form is so deplorable.

It has been established that the myths that Apartheid Aryanism legitimises, still burdens post-apartheid South Africa. This suggests that Apartheid Aryanism is a drawback that extends beyond Afrikaner mythmaking. It includes all white South Africans. Moreover, what Masilela outlines, indicates that these myths saturate South African film as well, regardless of the language or identity of the producer or the audience. Perhaps this explains why "in almost a hundred years of cinema in South Africa, the country has yet to produce a single masterpiece or great film" (2009:1). If truth be told, the coding of South African films such as *Moffie*, much like South Africa as a democratic state, will have to be liberated from the mythologies justified by Apartheid Aryanism during apartheid as well as in post-apartheid South Africa. Once this is achieved the profound movement of political transition in South Africa will reflect on a social level as well as on the silver screen.

#### 4.6 CONCLUSION

*Moffie* maintains heteronormative mythmaking. This unfolds in the representation of the male body as well as the way in which masculinity is performed through clothing and

gestures. The scope of masculine representation reaches from the gay clone and homomascularity to failed effeminate masculinities. Because of this, the ultimate goal to expose the plight of alternative figures, implodes. Homosexuals are represented as self-loathing. They appear fervently to guard against any effeminate stereotyping that might cast them beyond the parameters of heteronormativity. The picturing of Christian symbols, specifically the Cross, compounds homosexual reformation to a religious teaching that is often hostile towards gay figures. This is evidently problematic since it appears that in order for a conscript, such as Dylan, to participate in a narrative of victory in war, he also has to stifle his own sexual orientation.

Ultimately, in the screenshots sampled, the backdrop against which homosexuality is cast is one of bias. Only the most heteronormative of homosexual figures are portrayed as ambassadors of liberation even though they are shrouded by a curtain of machismo. Moreover, *Moffie* participates in the process of Apartheid Aryanist justification.

Different to the Aryan Nations, but perhaps similar to Nazi Aryanism, hegemonic ideology and white supremacist mythology that Apartheid Aryanism upholds, has not receded after the ending of apartheid. Unfortunately, this is also seen reflected in *Moffie*. Even though *Moffie* represents gay figures, they are cast as homosexual Apartheid Aryanists. In other words, even the homosexual characters subscribe to the myths that are sustained by Apartheid Aryanism. Semiotically, the images are coded to satisfy the ideal of Apartheid Aryanism. By conforming to the myths that were validated by Apartheid Aryanism, the African remains unwitnessed.

Finally, *Moffie* does not queer the ideal of myths of heteronormativity, hegemony and white superiority. The film is, for the most part, unaware of its representation of masculinity — albeit homosexual in context. No resistance is posed to the ideal of masculine behaviour. Whereas *Moffie's* two main characters are gay, the power inherent in their whiteness and manliness carries favour with ideal representations of race and sexuality. *Moffie's* picturing of homosexuality might be testimony to a

progressive attitude towards gay figures. However, they are only figures that belong to an existing privileged cluster that enjoys a more liberal embrace. Clearly, African figures and failed masculinities remain on the periphery of representation in the reality that *Moffie* portrays. *Moffie* does not realise a new world for South Africa. On the contrary, it appears that *Moffie* caters for the Afrikaner enclave nationalist despite partially being an English language film. This is unexpected since, as Falkof suggested, white English South Africans do not ascribe to a group membership as much as Afrikaans South Africans do. As with *My Father's War*, that was merely filmed in two languages visually representing the same toxic mythmaking, the language component in *Moffie* appears to have no impact on the representation of mythmaking either. This suggests that the issue does not rest with the dominant language of the audience but rather a greater social compulsion to embrace the myths that circulated before and during the war. Evidently, the warped representation of homosexual figures in South African film is severe despite South Africans having been dubbed the Rainbow Nation.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

### 5.1 Summary of Chapters

In Chapter 2, it is found that Afrikaner identity at the Border functioned as a site where nationalist exceptionalism, religious superiority and patriarchy were distilled to become myths of heroism, militarism and discourses of hetero-patriarchy. Moreover, discourses of heteropatriarchy resulted in the marginalisation of women and alternative figures such as effeminate homosexuals. Despite that militarism during the War was romanced, it is demonstrated that romanticised military conditioning of the young conscript was in reality merely a perpetuation of the state's hegemony. Again, alternative masculinities — such as those who refused military service as well as effeminate homosexuals — were considered to be deviant or even associated with communism. Moreover, the Church concealed the militarist mythmaking at the Border by positioning the War as a just and even a holy enterprise. This was a motive of defence since the Afrikaner religious community saw themselves as besieged. As a result, militarism intersected with religious superiority thereby evading pacifist Christian teaching. Hence, the Church was militarised given its support of the War effort. Heroism during the War intersected with nationalism. This is especially seen in the relation between rugby and conscription where both informed a sense of nationalist pride and exceptionalism. In turn homosexuality was perceived to threaten the supposed moral integrity of the Afrikaner. Evidently, owing to this, homosexuals could not represent the nation.

Afrikaans cinema during the War reflected Afrikaner mythology and was divided into three different phases: the first phase reflected the heroism associated with the Border. The second phase intended to encourage conscription. During the third phase the War was represented in a far lighter tone. The visual representation of the War, covers from the *Paratus* magazine and a screenshot from an SADF montage are sampled. These images represent myths of nationalist exceptionalism and heroism, militarisation,

hegemony and power as well as religious superiority. Nationalist exceptionalism is seen reflected in a *Paratus* magazine cover that is almost a faithful replication of the iconic image of the Raising of the Flag at Iwo Jima. Both these images inspired a collective moment for the nation to rise to a utopic but also arguably imagined station where heroism was associated with conquering new land even though it was in a less aggressive manner. This aligns with the first phase Border War films. However, a later cover that portrays a soldier holding a rifle with face paint as camouflage relates more to the reality of what nation building often implies: it is violent and aggressive.

Militarisation, hegemony and power is seen reflected in the representation of a horseback rider. The horse and his rider are mythically imbued with patriarchal overtones from earlier epochs of Afrikaner history such as the Voortrekkers. However, as mentioned, during the War, patriarchy was enflamed to become hegemonic in the violent context of the SADF. Later depictions situate the soldier and his horse in the townships with the aim to impress a sense of anti-establishment pacifism much as the third phase Border War films did. In reality, however, this is worth considering, since there is record of violence between troops and township residents.

As far as religious superiority is concerned, the Church as defender and justifier is seen reflected in a screenshot from an SADF documentary. The screenshot suggests that the Church bolsters success in battle. Religious supremacy also emerges from earlier eras in Afrikaner history such as the building and design of the Voortrekker Monument. In both cases the physical and the divine combine to position the Church as superior. The ECC was successful in its efforts to counter conscription but even this campaign was flawed. The organisation subscribed to a sense of moral integrity. It was, after all, this sense of morality that excluded homosexuals. Visually, however, the ECC did subscribe to the myth of freedom. In the case study of *My Father's War*, it becomes clear that Afrikaners participate in a consumption and production process where the Afrikaner prefers to consume his own cultural products and also, arguably, mythologies. Moreover, it is

found that the mythology in the film is in service of the antedating myths during the War, particularly as far as militarist patriarchal mythology is concerned.

Chapter 3 examines the prevalence of the myths identified during the War in the visual representation of *Kanarie*. The myths at play include militarism and religious superiority as well as nationalism and hegemony. It is found that, visually, *Kanarie* participates in the same narrative of religious exoneration of militarism as was seen during the War effort itself. This manifests in the depiction of church buildings, the Bible as well as the Holy Cross. Owing to this, *Kanarie* for the most part, does not queer the ideals towards which myths of religious superiority and militarism strive. It is also established that genderism, as a myth, is at the core of sanctified militarist mythmaking. In isolated instances, *Kanarie* does succeed in queering militarist sugar-coating when Johan destabilises gender polarities in his mimicry of Boy George. This is seen reflected when Johan is positioned against the backdrop of a social disciplinary system or in front of a site that is imbued with apologetic religious mythmaking of the war effort. However, in other representations, Johan conforms to militarist whitewashing by seeking salvation or comfort in a Holy Script. Representation of this nature simulates a photo actually taken during the War itself as a conscript reads the Bible next to a loaded rifle. In another depiction a conscript and his girlfriend pose in front of the Holy Cross. This suggests the powerful agency of the family unit in the process of militarist mythmaking glossed over by the Church. In *Kanarie* the representation of African forces does not enjoy the same religious consecration. On the contrary, they are merely presented as a geographical signifier.

As far as nationalist and hegemonic mythmaking is concerned, the representation of apartheid artefacts — such as the old South African flag — disavows queering. Similar to the raising of the flag at Iwo Jima, and the replication of it on the *Paratus* magazine cover, the old South African flag inspires a strong form and profound moment of nationalist identification. By representing a welcoming family unit in front of the old flag not only betrays the verity of nationalism as associated with violence and aggression,

but also neglects to acknowledge that during the War era, many mothers and wives had begun to realise that that which the flag represents, is a lie. With regard to hegemony, *Kanarie* represents stereotypes. Johan's gay friend, Ludolf, is presented as overweight and effeminate. As a result, hegemony is posited to be natural and normal. Ultimately and regrettably, it is found that *Kanarie* does not demonstrate a convincing progress towards queering the antedating mythology that manifested during the War as well as the films of the War era. Also, as with *My Father's War*, these myths appear still to satisfy an enclave nationalist consumer. Owing to this, despite that *Kanarie* addresses a controversial topic of homosexuality in the SADF, Afrikaner mythology still reigns supreme in the film's visual representation.

Chapter 4 explores *Moffie's* representation of myths of heteronormativity as well as Apartheid Aryanism. White English South Africans are considered and it is found that *Moffie*, as a partially English language film, still caters for an Afrikaner enclave nationalist consumer. With regard to heteronormativity, the male body as well as religious iconography are taken into consideration. The representation of the male body conforms to the 'gay clone' format. This construct suggests that gay men need to perform heterosexual machismo in order to be accepted into the circle of masculine legitimacy. As a result of this, heteronormativity is not queered. *Moffie's* representation of male nudity is captured in spaces such as the military communal shower where nakedness does not transgress 'normal' heterosexual behaviour. Even though a homosexual audience might experience such a representation as erotic, this would merely unfold on a connotative level. This means a heterosexual consumer can avoid such a reading. Nicholas is also costumed in heteronormative manner — especially with regard to shoes such as his '*vellies*'. This kind of representation speaks to a sense of homophobia within the gay community itself, as effeminate gay figures who do not conform to heteronormative costuming are rejected from an exclusive masculine gay confederation. The representation of homosociality exacerbates this since it suggests a hatred for gay figures. To further emphasise the rejection of effeminate men, *Moffie* presents the camp gay figure as having failed in his masculinity despite that such an

impression is completely unfounded: since effeminacy is performative, it bears no relation to sexual orientation as Brian Hansen submits.

As far as religious iconography is concerned, the depiction of the Holy Cross frames the army as a familial institution or ‘a home away from home’. Owing to this, the SADF is represented as subscribing to heteronormative mythmaking. Furthermore, the representation of religious iconography results in the silencing of homosexual figures. Much as the SADF documentary screenshot analysed in Chapter 2, *Moffie* suggests that success in battle depends on a belief in God. Apartheid Aryanism — that refers to white superiority as well as hegemony — emerged in *Moffie* as well.

Aryanism is a term coined in this study and it is found to share similarities with Nazi Aryanism in the sense that white superiority is perpetuated long after the disintegration of an oppressive regime such as Nazism or apartheid. Owing to Apartheid Aryanism, homosexuality is cast as a Western import. As a result, white homosexuality still enjoys a certain sense of exclusivity despite that white gays belong to a marginalised group. *Moffie*’s narrative denounces Aryanism in favour of the African. However, this is visually orchestrated by deploying signs that connote to the myths that Apartheid Aryanism legitimises. It is found that this is counterproductive and paradoxical since the signification of Apartheid Aryanism results in the unwitnessing and disremembering of the African figure. Visually, the representation of rifles connotes Apartheid Aryanist mythmaking. Much as in Stanley Kubrick’s *Full Metal Jacket*, the depiction of the rifle in *Moffie* does not queer, but rather maintains hegemonic and white supremacist mythmaking. Owing to this, the representation of the rifle becomes a moment of discipline when alternative figures, such as homosexuals, are rejected. Since the rifle is also a phallic structure, it signifies generative white supremacy as well as a heterosexual family unit. This is due to the rifle being referred to as a ‘wife’. The representation of Michael holding his rifle in the absence of Nicholas suggests that Michael is committed to the institution of a heterosexual relationship leaving no space for a homosexual subject such as Nicholas. Since the representation of Michael and his rifle signifies white



supremacy, the African is rendered invisible. This is contrary to a narrative that denounces African subjugation. When the homophobic Niels Snyman mimics pointing a rifle at Nicholas, the invisibility of the rifle does queer the privilege that the white figure enjoys as superior and hegemonic. As mentioned, it is the invisibility of whiteness that results in it being perceived as supremacist. However, the representation does not proceed to queer white supremacy and hegemony completely since the rifle is pointed at a white homosexual character suggesting that white homosexuality as an imperialist import is natural. Since the rifle represents a family unit, the depiction of Nicholas and his rifle exacerbates the existing problem with the rifle as a symbol of white supremacy and hegemony. Nicholas now hides his sexuality by holding a rifle that signifies the heterosexual family unit. He also disguises his sexual orientation behind the rifle as a symbol that connotes servility to white supremacy. The camouflage that Nicholas wears, suggests the transparency and naturalisation of white homosexuality. In this light, homosexuality appears only to be recognisable if white homosexuality is signified as the gay ideal. The representation of Nicholas and his rifle does not proceed further to queer the mythology that Apartheid Aryanism supports. His representation merely reads as a protest against homosexual malignment in the SADF.

Ultimately it is found that the predated myths of the War era are, for the most part, maintained in *Moffie* and *Kanarie*. Respectively, the films either subscribe to stereotypes in order to style heterosexuality as normative and natural, or that homosexual representation is only acceptable if gay figures conform to homomascularity. These representations emerge against the backdrop of religious superiority, militarism, nationalism, hegemony, heteronormativity and white supremacy. Doubtlessly, *Moffie* and *Kanarie* recount the story of gay awakening in the SADF. Regrettably, the visual representation of marginalised figures is represented in a daze shrouded by the myths of the past.

## 5.2 Contribution of the study

Research surrounding the manifestation of the antedated myths of Afrikaner and white history in gay South African Border War cinema remains fairly limited. Aside from reviews on *Moffie* and *Kanarie*, in the year of the submission of this study (2022), several academic texts have investigated *Moffie* and *Kanarie* individually, however, only one prominent academic article has been written that specifically focuses on both films: “The construction of split whiteness in the queer films *Kanarie* (2018) and *Moffie* (2019)” by Grant Andrews. However, his focus only relates to whiteness and heteropatriarchy. As demonstrated, the scope of this dissertation advances far beyond whiteness and heteropatriarchal mythology. The study includes a plethora of myths couched in Afrikaner history and how it is reflected in the two films with relation to the positioning of gay subjects.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, *Moffie* and *Kanarie* are the first gay films periodised during the War. This has opened the discussion to a period in South African history when homosexuality had been completely ignored in visual cinematic representation. Owing to this, the dissertation exposes new fissures in the contemporary visual representation of Afrikaner mythology as well as myths of whiteness in general. In light of Reid’s theorising, these myths are unethical and responsible for the circulation of the toxic mythology of the War era in contemporary films such as *Moffie* and *Kanarie*. Included in the fractures present in modern visual representation of Afrikaner myth is the finding that Afrikaners can only consume gay visual representation if it subscribes to the mythology that the Afrikaner devoted himself to before and during the War. Furthermore, it appears that gay characters are only representable if they subscribe to traditional notions of masculinity. Ultimately, in this respect, the dissertation contributes to cast light on the previously unaddressed manner in which homosexuality has been pictured and positioned in films periodised during a South African war and the myths that accompanied it.

### 5.3 Limitations of the study

Whereas the study does address gender expression, the focus remains mostly on myths that are associated with the masculine figure. As demonstrated, hegemony, patriarchy and discourses of heteropatriarchy malign alternative figures such as women and homosexuals. Furthermore, the dissertation only employs two case studies. This was done since the hypermasculine environment of the SADF posed a setting that would call attention to the destructive myths identified. However, it can reasonably be expected that the SADF and the Border War were by no means the only environments in South African history where toxic myths came into play. In addition, the study does not necessarily provide an understanding of how gay film has progressed since the ending of apartheid. This can be with relation to the queering of the myths of the apartheid era as well as the period in Afrikaner history that preceded it.

The Afrikaner is only one of many cultures in South Africa, yet two Chapters are devoted to the Afrikaner specifically. WESSAS are briefly discussed in Chapter 4 in *Moffie*. However, perhaps this is not expansive enough to demonstrate a clear understanding of how English culture in South Africa positions or judges homosexuals or alternative forms of gender expression. More importantly, the dissertation does not include consideration of homosexuality in African cultures — specifically in film. This despite the fact that during the 1970s “through the Bantu film industry ... only a few inferior paternalistic films for blacks were made, chiefly by whites. Gay and lesbian characters didn’t exist in these films” (Botha 2003:5). These limitations flag opportunities for further research.

### 5.4 Suggestions for further research

Doubtlessly, further research could explore the representation of the LGBTQI community in various examples of visual culture from the War and the military. It would also be valuable to examine the ways in which the LGBTQI community of the War era

is represented in post-apartheid South Africa in documentaries. Archives such as Gays and Lesbian Archives (GALA) at the University of Johannesburg could prove to be a valuable resource to gain insight into the history of the LGBTQI community in South Africa during the War. According to Tirza True Latimer (2013:34), Ann Cvetkovich (a queer theorist) postulates that suppression, disregard and stigmatisation of queers have catalysed 'archive fever'. According to her, queer archives are archives of feeling. Hence archives such as GALA could serve as a means of understanding how the LGBTQI community perceive and self-present themselves given, what is evidently, a painful past. This study mainly focuses on the representation of masculinity but alternative sexualities extend beyond the male sex. By studying the past of an entire community that has been ostracised within a malignant hegemonic environment such as the SADF, will allow for profound insight into the different ways that other alternative sexualities (and not just men) queered the toxic myths that were rife during apartheid and the War. Evidently the consequence of being lesbian in the SADF was similar to being gay: both cases were characterised by human rights abuses as was focused on by the Aversion Project (Schaap 2011:39).

Homophobia also occurs in sub-Saharan Africa. As mentioned in the literature review, the liberation of Angola posed a communist threat to South Africa (Wilsworth 2010:19). However, South Africa was not able to remove this threat. Adam J. Kretz (2012:211) observes that "a small yet significant group of nations, including ... Angola, lack any express prohibition on homosexual activity, but have interpreted other statutes in a manner that establishes *de facto* criminalization". It could be valuable to investigate how the Angolan LGBTQI community since the War era is visually represented given the outcome of the War. Rita Schäfer and Eva Range submit that Rolling Stone (the Ugandan publication) posted the names, photos and addresses of one hundred Ugandan homosexuals in early 2010. A picture of David Kato was also published on the front pages<sup>7</sup>. An unknown weekly publication sold two thousand to three thousand

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<sup>7</sup> David Kato, as a human rights defender and an activist for gay rights had a considerable influence on Ugandan LGBTQI rights (University of York [sa]:[sp])

copies that encouraged readers to hang homosexuals (2014:4). Thus, the consequence of the outcome of the War also denoted anguish for the LGBTQI community in Angola. This would be an interesting point to consider in further research since it would broaden the scope beyond simply the position of the LGBTQI community in post-War South Africa.

The poem, *For Johnny*, is a posthumous fictional account of masculine experience of myth in the SADF. However, the scope of the poem perhaps applies to more than just *Johnny*. Rather, it relates to humanity and the plethora of mythologies, sexualities and inter-social dynamics found on our planet, as well as the way this is portrayed visually in the media and the opportunities for further research that it might present. As this dissertation has shown, the mythologies that circulated during the War are still perpetuated in contemporary cinematic products. This is the case despite that *Moffie* and *Kanarie* seek to address the plight of homosexuals in the SADF. Arguably, the social environment at the Border was complex. However, especially in *Moffie*, gay characters are positioned in a space that only allows for binaries – such as straight acting gay men and effeminate gay men. This resonates with Barthes's (1972:143) submission earlier that myth abolishes the complexity of human acts. Ultimately, if South African cinema seeks to deliver a product that represents alternative figures, such as homosexuals, then it follows logically that this must be done in the absence of the mythologies that suppressed them in the first place.

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