

**Contesting Masculinities: A Study of Selected Texts of Resistance to Conscription into
the South African Defence Force (SADF) in the 1980s**

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Abstract

The theoretical framework for this thesis and analysis of primary texts revolves around the problem of conscription into the South African Defence Force (SADF) in the 1980s. The ideology of masculinity that underpinned and sustained the practice of conscription is referred to throughout as the hegemonic version. This term is interchangeable with others, namely masculinism and 'the real man.' The aim is to interpret the selected texts for strains of resistance to the practice of conscription and its assumptions as to what constitutes the natural or real man.

In the Introduction to this thesis I begin by explaining the personal dimension of my role as researcher, after which I motivate my research project and explain its theoretical and methodological orientation, focusing on the concepts that play a significant role in analysis of the primary texts. The Introduction concludes with an outline of the content of Chapters 1–5.

Chapter 1 begins with a brief discussion, on the general level, of the practice of conscription and resistance to it, and proceeds to a concern with conscription in 1980s South Africa. Attention is paid to prevailing attitudes towards gender and sexuality within both the SADF and the End Conscription Campaign (ECC). Discussion of gender and sexuality as constructs of identity proceeds to a focus on the conceptual tools for textual analysis provided by theories of masculinity. The final section of this chapter pays attention to specific post-structuralist notions of identity that serve analysis of the primary texts, that is, the notions of the subject, agency and the author.

Having engaged mainly with secondary texts in Chapter 1, Chapter 2 presents the first sustained critical engagement with primary texts in which resistance was expressed against the institution of conscription and the hegemonic version of masculinity that underpinned it. These expressions of resistance occurred within a rock music counter-culture of the period, known as the Voëlvry movement. Attention is given to overlaps or links between this counter-culture and that of America in the 1960s, as well echoes between the Vietnam and Border Wars. Analysis of these links is applied to a memoir selected for its appropriateness. Threaded through the chapter is a concern with expressions of masculine identity within the Voëlvry counter-culture, the SADF and the ECC.

Chapter 3 focuses on three novels and one collection of short stories, each narrated in the first person and written by gay authors who performed their National Service. Attention is

paid to the protagonists' perceptions of themselves, their troubled relationships with their fathers, and the struggle to come out within a context that prohibited them from doing so.

Chapter 4 concerns three wartime memoirs and two written by men who refused to perform their National Service. Underlying concerns in this chapter are the question of fact versus fiction in the genre of the memoir, authors' perceptions of and relationships with women, and expressions of vulnerability.

Chapter 5 concentrates on the interviews that comprise the Appendix. The chapter establishes its theoretical ground by focusing on principles of narrative structure and the relation of personal to narrative identity. The chapter pays attention to the displays of power and the vulnerabilities of both veteran soldiers and resisters. Theory deployed in analysis of the primary texts serves the principal concerns articulated in the title to the thesis.

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Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iv
Contents	v
Introduction	1
A Personal Note	1
Research Motivation	3
Theoretical Framework and Methodology	6
Chapter Outline	7
Chapter 1	10
Conscription and the Problem of Masculinity	10
1.1 Preface: Conscription as Theatre	10
1.2 Introduction	11
1.3 Conscription and Resistance to Conscription	12
1.4 <i>Hawks and Doves, Colonels and Cadres</i> : Conscription and Anti-Conscription in 1980s South Africa	15
1.5 Conscription and the Politics of Gender	23
1.6 Narrating the Psychosocial Legacies of Conscription	26
1.7 Theorising Masculinities	28
1.8 Notions of the Subject and Agency	34
1.9 The Question of the Author	36
1.10 Conclusion	39
Chapter 2	41
Counter-Cultures and Homosociality	41
2.1 Introduction	41
2.2 Popular Cultures	42

2.3 The Voëlvry Counter-Culture and the Question of Heroes and Idiots.....	43
2.4 Discourses of the Vietnam and Border Wars	54
2.5 Homosociality in the Oral Testimony of David Bruce and Rick Andrew's Memoir	62
2.6 Conclusion.....	64
Chapter 3.....	66
Gay Voices of Resistance	66
3.1 Introduction	66
3.2 Context	67
3.3 'Us and Them' in Galgut's <i>The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs</i>	69
3.4 Fathers and Sons in the Novels of Galgut, Behr and van der Merwe	73
3.5 Towards Other Masculinities: <i>The Smell of Apples</i> and <i>The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs</i>	79
3.6 The Problem of Coming Out in the Novels of Galgut, Behr and van der Merwe.....	84
3.7 Political Critique in van der Merwe's <i>Moffie</i>	93
3.8 Koos Prinsloo's Short Stories	96
3.9 Conclusion.....	100
Chapter 4.....	102
Memoirs	102
4.1 Introduction: Book Covers, Photographs and Captions	102
4.2 Missing Voices	105
4.3 The Genre of Memoir.....	106
4.4 Facts or Fictions?	107
4.5 Ways of Being Male In <i>Dead Leaves</i>	112
4.6 Poetry and Friendship.....	114
4.7 <i>Battle-Scarred</i>	121
4.8 <i>My Traitor's Heart</i>	125
4.9 <i>Under Our Skin</i>	127

4.10 Representations of Masculinity and Gender Relations in <i>Under Our Skin, My Traitor's Heart</i> and <i>Dead Leaves</i>	128
4.11 <i>Back to Angola</i>	131
4.12 Conclusion.....	133
Chapter 5.....	135
Interview-Texts	135
5.1 Introduction	135
5.2 Interview Procedure	136
5.3 Selection of Interviewees	137
5.4 Theoretical Framework	139
5.4.1 The Monomyth	140
5.4.2 Paul Ricoeur on Personal and Narrative Identity	143
5.5 Textual Influences	149
5.6. Expressions of Discord in Narratives of Resistance	152
5.6.1 Vulnerability	152
5.6.2 Strategies of Avoidance and Escape.....	159
5.6.3 Refuge as Survival Strategy	164
5.7 A Woman's Voice.....	168
Conclusion	173
Reflections on Theoretical Framework and Methodology.....	173
Research Findings: General	175
Specific Research Findings	177
Research Opportunities	179
Appendix: Interviews.....	182
Bibliography	248

Introduction

Man is a giddy thing. (Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing*)

A Personal Note

I would like at the outset to announce my stance or subject position as researcher. In her recently completed PhD thesis (2014) Theresa Edlmann acknowledges the importance of such acknowledgment:

My awareness of the need to be conscious of my own story, subject positioning and role in this research has been both difficult and enriching. There have been moments of inspiration, empathic unsettlement in the light of conscripts' narratives, and experiences of intense grief. (9)

Reflections rooted in private memory serve as sources of information not typical in scholarly writing. However, this private dimension relates closely to the primary and secondary texts that constitute the core of my argument, and has shaped its direction. It is thus necessary to ground the motivation, chapter outline and theoretical framework by giving substance to this private dimension.

The decade of the 1980s coincided with my sixteenth to twenty-sixth years. Throughout those years I faced yearly and sometimes twice yearly call-ups for National Service. For many of my contemporaries these call-ups announced something unavoidable, an inevitability they heeded. For others they presented a problem to be dealt with. At the start my response to conscription was contrary instead of ambiguous or actively oppositional. Upon receiving my first call-up paper at the age of 16 years I knew on an instinctual or somatic level that I would not obey the 'call to duty.' The prospect of being moulded into a soldier chafed against my evolving sense of self. I felt the impossibility of conforming to a fixed set of ideas, attitudes and rules that would make unacceptable demands on me. The cadet system practiced at schools as a means of preparing young white men for their National Service deepened my aversion. Though this aversion was not grounded in awareness of the larger picture, it took

very little time at university to become aware of the role the SADF played in securing the power base of the apartheid regime. When I was living in Cape Town in 1987, approximately a month after I had deregistered from a Masters degree, the military police arrived with a call-up paper at my parents' home in Johannesburg. My mother instinctively informed them that I was overseas. I kept a low profile through the subsequent years, resenting the fact that the SADF was constraining my liberty to move about and make choices of my own devising.

In mid-2010, sixteen years after the demise of apartheid, I decided to revisit the 1980s by creating a poetic conversation with others who had resisted conscription. At the start of the following year I set aside this project in favour of writing a PhD. I conducted three of the eventual eight interviews shortly prior to registration for the degree. The oral testimony contained in the Appendix provides a range of responses to conscription – from exile, to armed resistance, to different forms of evasion, to public refusal to serve. The interviews reveal that many men experienced themselves as locked during those years in what I consider to be liminal states of being. I grew interested in exploring these states of being through analysis of literary texts and interviews.

During the early stage of this research project I conducted an informal interview with a man who was a member of a group called *The Mankind Project* that originated in the United States and has members (predominantly white middle-class men) at more than forty interdependent centres in eight countries and on four continents. This movement assumes that modern men are alienated from themselves, from what the movement terms the universal 'deep masculine,' and that this essence needs to be regained. The Mankind Project is a mythopoetic men's movement that works with a specific concept of what it means to be a man. This concept is static. That is, it tends to neglect the fact that masculinity as concept and practice is amenable to shifts or changes and is a debatable and negotiable category in itself. Mythopoetic men's movements promote the idea that men urgently need to reinhabit and live true to an assumed essence through quasi-mystical rituals and retreats. I later discovered that members of this movement have an aversion to intellectualisations.

The member of The Mankind Project I sat beside posed questions about my PhD research. I told him that my own response to conscription in the 1980s was to avoid it. He replied – "Didn't that decision make you feel less of a man?" This question did not encourage me to answer that white masculinity in 1980s South Africa might be considered an ideological construct of a particular sort, and that it served particular political purposes. I simply answered – "no, it doesn't."

The above two reconstructions from memory suggest insights into the personal history, or what Edlmann terms the “psychosocial legacies” of conscription (2014), that underpin my thesis. What first motivated my return to that period of my life was the psychological damage it had wrought, both on myself and on close friends who had not complied with the call to perform their military ‘duty.’¹ Thus, and in echo with Edlmann’s commitment to her project, my return involves a therapeutic element of sorts.

Research Motivation

This thesis investigates the construction and enactment of masculine identities during the 1980s as reflected in the primary texts chosen for analysis. Particular notions as to what constitutes a man, or what conforms to the notion of a real man, played a crucial support role in the practice of conscription through those years. A number of books, essays, journal articles and conference papers have emerged that pay attention to the practice of conscription,² as well as to prevailing and alternative conceptions of what it means to be a man (Robert Morrell 2001, 2004 and 2006). This research has primarily been undertaken in the disciplines of politics, sociology, history, psychology and cultural studies. There have been full-length contributions to the study of conscription in 1980s South Africa from scholars within these disciplines. However, to my knowledge Daniel Conway’s study (2012) is the only full-length contribution that combines in equal measure a concern with the practice of conscription and discourses of masculinity in 1980s South Africa. An investigation that links these concerns to a thorough-going analysis of selected literary texts has not been offered. Jonathan Crewe observes that “literature and consequently literary history remains curiously underestimated in prevailing discourses of cultural memory” (76). The ambit of research for this thesis differs from that of theses written from within the social sciences in that emphasis is not so much on truth to ‘fact’ as to a concern with literary representations of resistance to conscription and associated notions of legitimate or authentic manhood.

¹ This is reflected by the fact that two of my interviewees (Graham Ellis and Garth Mason) were indeed close friends during the 1980s, and have remained so.

² See, for example, writings by S. Anderson, Gary Baines, Graeme Callister, Gavin Cawthra, Janet Cherry, Daniel Conway, C. Draper, Michael Drewett, A. Du Pisani, Theresa Edlmann, Michael Graaf, David Jones, Paul Morris, Oliver Phillips, Merran Willis Phillips and Peter Vale, referenced in the Bibliography.

Another important component of this research project is the attention paid to voices on the margins. Thus, the study leans toward redressing an imbalance by giving a good deal of attention to expressions of fraught and pained indecision, debilitating ennui or adriftness, and lingering psychological damage. There has been insufficient research into the voices of white men who went into hiding during the 1980s, men who were largely unheard and invisible and have remained so subsequent to the demise of apartheid. The experiences of this sub-grouping of men received little attention in the proceedings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) that followed transition to a non-racial democracy after the election of 1994. Their experiences were not spoken freely in the 1980s and thereafter. As will be seen, analysis of the literary texts and the transcribed interviews remedies this neglect.

An understanding of the politics of identity in apartheid South Africa clearly requires that attention be paid to the ways in which the state positioned each individual in terms of his or her race, gender, sexuality and class. It is therefore important at the outset to explain and motivate the fact that the central focus in this thesis is on a particular formation or construct of identity: the white man. Regardless of the degree to which the writers and speakers under consideration felt at odds with being situated within or outside of the ideological camp of hegemonic masculinity in 1980s South Africa, what they had (and have) in common is their whiteness. Whiteness studies has emerged as a discipline of its own, with conferences devoted to it, essays published in academic journals, and full-length studies.³ It has also generated heated, sometimes vitriolic, debate outside of academia. For example, three consecutive editions of the *Mail and Guardian* newspaper in September of 2011 contained responses in the form of articles and letters to the editor to an article titled “Why My Opinions on Whiteness Touched a Nerve,” written by Samantha Vice (*Mail & Guardian*, 2–8 Sept, 2011: 28–9). In this article Vice defends an academic paper⁴ in which she suggests that “white people should cultivate humility and silence, given their morally compromised position in the continuing racial and economic injustice of this country” (28). It is important to remain aware when considering different levels of identity operative in 1980s South Africa, of the past and ongoing problem of whiteness. To reiterate, the focus in this thesis is on a particular problem (and problematic) of identity – that of the white man.

³ Melissa Steyn’s *Whiteness*, published in 1999, was the first such study. Her subsequent works testify to the fact that whiteness remains a thriving (and thorny) issue.

⁴ This paper generated in its turn a flurry of reactions online and in the print media. See Bibliography for publication details.

In a “whites-only” society only white men were conscripted and discourses of whiteness were inseparable from the prospect, dilemma and experiences of being conscripted in the 1980s. For a disturbingly large number of white men the direct link of their racial identity to their masculinity was frequently unexamined. Virulent versions of this co-dependency emerged from groupings such as the Veterans For Victory, as explained in essays published in *Hawks and Doves* (Graaf 1988), to be considered in Chapter 1. In his book published in 2014, *The South African Border War: Contested Narratives and Conflicting Memories*, Gary Baines notes a “political naïveté” in memoirs of soldier-authors who confess their aversion to National Service, a partial awareness of the race-based divide upon which rested their social identity and status (*Border War* 20). This absence of awareness had a good deal to do with the apartheid state’s highly effective strategy of blinding white people to their privilege within a context premised upon such stark and brazen racial divisions. As Conway’s study (2012) and my own reveal, young white men with a degree of political consciousness were frequently the children of a generation which was defensive, often condemnatory, toward the attitudes of people from overseas who opposed apartheid policy. A personal example of this takes the form of recalling the aggression expressed by teachers, family members and schoolmates toward British anti-apartheid activist Peter Hain who spearheaded the call for sports boycotts. Because the central focus in this thesis is on questions and problems of masculinity specific to white men during the final decade of apartheid rule, it was not considered manageable to conduct broad-reaching research into the full range of identity positions, nor a general account of the problems of being white in 1980s South Africa.⁵

For the purpose of arriving at an understanding of the construction of these white men’s identity, the meanings and ‘truths’ of the selected primary texts are consistently measured against those propounded by the military, with its hegemonic version of masculinity. The originator of the term hegemony, Antonio Gramsci, uses it to refer to the operations of political control within civil society via ideological persuasion rather than brute force (206–207). Though the term has been taken up, modified and refined by contemporary theorists such as Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985), Judith Butler and Slavoj Žižek (2000), Gramsci’s basic definition adequately serves analysis of texts in this thesis. The central concern in chapters to follow is with the modes, range and styles of masculine identity

⁵ For a recent and useful summary of questions and problems of whiteness that pertain to 1980s South Africa, refer to Theresa Edlmann’s PhD thesis (82–86).

that contested the dominant or hegemonic masculinity of 1980s South Africa. Although due consideration is paid to the positions from which the writers and interviewees speak, interpretation is not constrained by the assumption that men can be dropped neatly into pre-existing pockets of identity. Instead, the scholarly intention is to read the primary texts in a way that can discern echoes and mutuality in dynamics that appear, on the surface level, to be in stark contrast or directly contestatory. The overarching aim of this research project is to understand the complex and shifting co-ordinates of masculine identity in a range of responses to the common obstacle or dilemma of conscription. The selected literary works that emerged during the 1980s and those that reflect back on the period provide the opportunity to uncover layers of response to the prospect, experience, effects and avoidance of conscription, and to the ideology of masculinity in which it was imbedded.

Most of the texts under analysis express responses to conscription into the SADF in the 1980s, although Rick Andrew's memoir *Buried in the Sky* (2001) and Kelwyn Sole's oral testimony refer to Border War combat in the mid-late 1970s. The only exception in terms of socio-historical context is Dan Wylie's *Dead Leaves* (2002), analysed in Chapter 4. The latter text focuses on Wylie's experience as conscript in the so-called Rhodesian Bush War from 1978–1980. His text proves to be amenable for inclusion in this study for a number of reasons which are explained in the introduction to Chapter 4.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

In accordance with the practice of literary criticism, the central task in this thesis is to utilise a range of theorists as prompted by the primary texts themselves. This analytic strategy best aids critical understanding of the primary texts by allowing use of a theoretical framework complex enough to speak to the shared elements, as well as to the irregularities, variables and internal contradictions. Generally speaking, and where it is deemed appropriate, textual analysis draws from gender theory, feminist theory and queer theory. Also where it is deemed appropriate for arriving at a critical sensitivity of the primary texts, use is made of specific or specialised theoretical concepts: the subject, agency and the author as articulated by post-structuralist thinkers, theories of autobiography, Joseph Campbell's notions of narrative structure, and hermeneutical philosopher Paul Ricoeur study of the relation between personal and narrative identity. The general and specific theoretical interests feed into an overarching

concern with a range of narrative representations that arose from or revisited white masculinity during the designated historical period.

Chapter Outline

The Preface to Chapter 1 introduces the reader to the idea and practice of conscription through the metaphor or analogy of theatrical performance, thereafter paying brief attention to the institution of conscription on a general level. The Chapter proceeds to contextualise study of the primary texts to which the chapters that follow are devoted. This contextualisation occurs on two levels: that of sociological analysis, as well as a discussion of theories of identity in general terms, and masculine identity in particular. On the first-mentioned level, attention is paid to selected works in which social scientists analyse the institution of conscription and resistance to it, primarily with reference to the span of time with which my research interacts. Discussion of these secondary sources involves identifying and placing emphasis on the politics of gender and sexuality, and this emphasis leads to what constitutes the theoretical spine for this thesis: the study of discourses of masculinity. In this way, the two levels of contextualisation – social history and theoretical orientation – are knitted with the aim of producing conceptual co-ordinates amenable to analysis of the primary texts. In the section that follows the notions of the subject, and the author are discussed for their usefulness in analysis of the primary texts. The chapter concludes by introducing a concern that runs through the chapters to follow: less publicly visible or marginal expressions of resistance to conscription and it's the masculinist ideology that attends it; voices that raise the question as to whether such responses came closer at times to achieving a substantial critique of the hegemonic version of masculine identity that “ruled the roost.”⁶

Chapter 2 engages with voices of resistance in the form of the South African rock music counter-culture of the 1980s known as Voëlvry. Attention is given to overlaps or links between the American counter-culture of the 1960s and the South African counter-culture of the 1980s, and the modes of masculine self-expression that characterised both of these counter-cultures. This includes discussion of echoes between representations of the Vietnam and Border Wars. Threaded through the analysis is a concern with the issue or problem of

⁶ A term applied to analysis of gay novels by Leon de Kock (2013), explored in Chapter 3.

homosociality as evident in the contexts of the military, the ECC and the South African and American counter-cultures. The chapter analyses representations of militarised masculinity within the mainstream media, in the form of advertisements, posters, lyrics of popular songs, pamphlets, cartoons, record and CD covers and photo-comics, along with challenges to these from the Voëlvry and ECC counter-cultures. Concern with the echoes between American and South African counter-cultures also involves a close reading of the first of the primary texts in the form of a memoir titled *Buried in the Sky* by Rick Andrew (2001). Importantly, an understanding of the discourses of masculinity that infuse Andrew's text is enhanced by reference to selected essays from social historian Gary Baines' study of the South African Border War (2014).

Sustaining the logic of Chapters 1 and 2, Chapter 3 deals with strains of resistance to conscription and its masculinist ideology, in this instance within novels narrated in the first person by gay authors who performed their National Service. Attention is paid to the protagonists' perceptions of themselves as other ("us and them"), troubled relationships with their fathers, and the struggle to come out, to create and live one's identity within a context that prohibited it. The texts discussed are a collection of short stories, *Jonkmanskas* by Koos Prinsloo (1982), and novels written by Damon Galgut (*The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* 1992 and revised edition 2006), Mark Behr's *The Smell of Apples* (1995) and André Carl van der Merwe's *Moffie* (2006). Analysis of the novels and short stories makes use of journal articles written by a number of literary critics who place emphasis on ways in which homosexuality was defined, controlled and oppressed during the 1980s and subsequently.

Chapter 4 discusses memoirs of wartime experience: Dan Wylie's *Dead Leaves* (2002), Anthony Feinstein's *Battle-Scarred* (2011) and Paul Morris's *Back to Angola* (2014). It also pays attention to two memoirs written by men who refused to perform their National Service – Rian Malan with *My Traitor's Heart* (1990) and Donald McRae in *Under Our Skin* (2012). The latter have been chosen for the fact that in each the authorial voice is, to differing degrees, at odds with that adopted in what I term mainstream memoirs. Authors of mainstream memoirs lean towards expressing pride and nostalgia when recalling their experiences as Border War conscripts. Two such mainstream memoirs, those of A.J. Brooks (2007) and Granger Korff (2009), serve the purpose of a briefly comparative analysis of the front covers and in-text photographs of their books with those of Wylie and Feinstein, as well as Rick Andrew (discussed in Chapter 2). The underlying concerns in this chapter are the question of fact versus fiction in relation to the genre of the memoir, the ways in which the

authors conceive of and represent masculine identity and gender relations, and their expressions of vulnerability. Textual analysis is aided by paying attention to theories of autobiographical writing. Elements of narrative discord are identified, and these are linked to expressions of vulnerability.

Chapter 5 concentrates on interviews conducted from 2010–2012 that comprise the Appendix to this thesis. The transcription of the interviews makes it possible to interact with the voices as narrative texts, thereby sustaining and concluding the literary critical momentum of the overall argument. The chapter begins by explaining the interview procedure and offering biographies of each interviewee. Detailed attention is paid here to the reasons each interviewee was chosen to deliver his or her testimony. Thereafter the theoretical foundation for analysis of the interview-texts is established. This foundation comprises a cross-cultural study of narrative structure in a work by Joseph Campbell (1949) and a thorough explication of hermeneutic philosopher Paul Ricoeur's theory of personal and narrative identity (1991; 1992). As with the preceding chapters, this chapter involves discussion of elements of narrative discord: alienation and vulnerability, avoidance, escape and quests for refuge. This discussion is summarised in the conclusion to the thesis.

Chapter 1

Conscription and the Problem of Masculinity

Masculinities are not fixed; they change over time, over space, and, not least, during the lives of men themselves. (Whitehead and Barrett 8)

Manhood is not the manifestation of an inner essence; it is socially constructed. (Kimmel 182)

1.1 Preface: Conscription as Theatre

The concept of theatrical performance is a useful point of entry to investigate the ideology of masculinity that underpins the practice of conscription in any socio-historical context.

Theatrical performances are shaped by scripts, some of which allow leeway for the actor to interpret the role, even permitting opportunities for improvisation. Others prescribe the role to be played. For an enactment of *Hamlet* to take place, a chosen performer is invited to play the lead role. If he chooses to accept the role his performances are shaped rather than entirely constrained by the script made available to him at the start. In the case of the young white South African man the call-up paper commanded him to play the role of a character without name, a uniformed everyman. The instant of the call-up can be considered one in which the individual decided how to read and respond to the über-script – the Defence Act and its amendments in the case of apartheid South Africa. The fact that opportunities for agency were denied the individual made instances of willed action compelling to explore. Indeed, a minority of individuals located and took advantage of openings or gaps for performances that were contrary to the mainstream performance. For example, in an essay concerned with gay and lesbian experiences in 1980s South Africa, Matthew Krouse narrates the co-scripting and staging of a drag show during his period of National Service (209–18). However, it is debatable whether such theatrical performances were in fact subversive. Judith Butler, in *Undoing Gender* (2004), asks: “What departures from the norm constitute something other than an excuse or rationale for the compelling authority of the norm? What departures from the norm disrupt the regulatory processes thereof?” (53) For the purpose of this thesis, “the

norm” is to be understood as the compliant response to conscription. Although even the compliant response is not monological or monochrome, it serves as a point against which to measure the “departures from the norm” as they appear in the songs, novels, memoirs, poems and spoken voices under consideration. The two questions posed by Butler are borne in mind when assessing the import and impact of these voices – the degree to which they subvert an institution and its ideology.

1.2 Introduction

The central aim in this chapter is to contextualise the study of primary texts with reference to sociological studies and theories of masculinity. These two areas of concern are of course interwoven, as is reflected in the structure of this chapter. The common thread that runs through the analysis of the primary texts is that of the discourses of gender, both hegemonic and resistant, that prevailed in 1980s South Africa. In this regard special attention is paid to masculinity as social construct. A brief general introduction to conscription as social practice is offered prior to detailed discussion of its specifics in 1980s South Africa.

The first secondary sources consulted are Michael Graaf’s collection of essays titled *Hawks and Doves* (1988) and Jacklyn Cock with *Colonels and Cadres: War and Gender in South Africa* (1991). Cock’s academic study, as its sub-title suggests, focuses in a scholarly fashion on the problems of war and gender in apartheid South Africa in the 1980s. On the contrary, though written and produced by students and staff of the Contemporary Cultural Studies Unit at the University of Natal, *Hawks and Doves*, edited by ECC activist Michael Graaf, is a mingling of academically oriented analysis with the polemic of political activists.⁷ The link Cock sets up of military life to the politics of gender is further developed by discussion of Daniel Conway’s *Masculinities, Militarisation and the End Conscription Campaign* (2012). Because of the noticeable overlap between Conway’s work and my own in terms of a sustained focus on discourses of masculinity, interaction with his work is indispensable in identifying the distinctive lineaments of my own research project. Following the discussion of Conway’s book is a focus on Theresa Edlmann’s PhD thesis “Negotiating Historical Continuities in Contested Terrain: A Narrative-Based Reflection on the Post-

⁷ This mingling is expressed by Michael Graaf in Interview B to be found in the Appendix, along with commentary thereon in Chapter 5.

Apartheid Psychosocial Legacies of Conscription into the South African Defence Force” (2014). As with the work of Conway, there are echoes as well as significant differences between Edlmann’s work and my own, and discussion of his and her work helps clarify the methodology for analysis of the primary texts in Chapters 2–5.

The emphasis these texts place on the politics of gender and sexuality prepares the ground for a discussion of theories of masculinity. Subsequent to this discussion, attention is paid to debates surrounding three concepts or questions that also pertain to analysis of the primary texts – those of the subject, agency and the author as explored by post-structuralist theorists Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault.

The final section of this chapter concerns expressions of resistance situated at the margins of the contest of masculinities, and this prefaces forthcoming discussion of voices which, in my view, invite more substantial academic engagement.

1.3 Conscription and Resistance to Conscription

A good deal of the studies of conscription as social practice are nation-specific. Because the central concern of this thesis is with strains of resistance to conscription as expressed in literary works, and specifically with literary works emerging from or revisiting South Africa in the 1980s, a detailed investigation of conscription on the general level is not considered necessary. Like Edlmann who devotes less than a page to a general history of conscription in her recently completed PhD (2014), my concern is nation-specific. Nevertheless, paying brief attention to the history of conscription on the general level as social practice or institution provides a useful starting-point for the analysis to follow.

Daniel Conway identifies “universal norms in contemporary states which operate conscription [...]” (20). The universal norms that underpin the authority whereby nation-states require individuals (primarily men) to enter military service have been practiced since the times of the Aztec Empire, ancient Greece and Egypt, the Roman Empire, medieval Europe and through to the Napoleonic Wars. Whether the context is that of ancient Greece or modern-day Israel, the primary links, or what Conway terms “interconnections,” (20) are between conscription, citizenship and masculinity. Because conscription “vests the state with specific and intrusive disciplinary powers,” it “impacts on citizenship, social discipline and other markers of identity,” or what Conway also refers to as “other politicised forms of

identity, such as race and gender” (20). These markers or forms of identity in their turn feed back into and reinforce the “particular conceptions of active citizenship and inclusion” (20). In other words, Conway suggests a two-way relation: the state’s construction of identities which in their turn serve and consolidate its power base. For this reason, a critical consciousness of the ways and extent to which the markers of identity such as race, class and gender participate in and perpetuate the status quo is a prerequisite for political transformation.

To reiterate, Conway asserts that military service is an “act that is not only publicly acknowledged as a marker of citizenship, but it also encompasses the development and acknowledgement of additional identities that pertain to political status” (22). Masculinity as a marked or fixed form of identity is of particular relevance to this study and is well understood in terms of the category of “inclusion” (20). “Above all,” states Conway, “military service generates and is dependent upon particular conceptions of masculinity” (22). In 1980s South Africa a specific version of masculine identity took precedence over any other and functioned as a declaration of the viable masculine selfhood. Acceptance of this notion demanded from the individual entry into what comprised the power base of the apartheid state, a domain in which the ruling masculinity was habitually ratified and reinforced by the state and its satellites in the forms of churches, schools, families and the media.

Though the links between military service, citizenship and “other politicised forms of identity” are universal, specific differences or variations are noticeable on the levels of both conscription and resistance to it. A striking variation is that some nations are more coercive in terms of implementation and the ideology of inclusion that underlies it than are others. This element of coercion understandably applied to nations that were or are regularly at war or consider themselves as frequently under threat of war. In the case of South Africa in the 1980s the latter form of coercion outweighed the former for the reason that the National Party government kept the public only partially aware of the realities of a war that was being waged at a distance. This distancing is reflected in the title of a play – *Somewhere on the Border* – written by Anthony Akerman. The play was first performed in the early 1980s and subsequently banned for publication by the apartheid Censorship Board. It protests that young white conscripts were sent to the Border and has recently been restaged at South African theatres, including at the National Arts Festival in 2011. Despite the apartheid government’s concealment of Border War realities, its ideologues concocted notions that

expressed the threat of war. Through the duration of the 1980s President P.W. Botha addressed the (white) nation with invocations of the ‘total onslaught’ and the *rooigevaar* (directly translated from Afrikaans as the red danger or threat). These terms, as Cock states, presented a “conspiratorial world view” central to which was “the belief that South Africa faced a ‘total’ or ‘revolutionary onslaught’ from the USSR and its allies” (*Colonels* 71). By contrast, in Israel war as both reality and threat was ‘closer to home.’ Resistance to conscription had higher visibility within the borders of South Africa than was the case in Israel. In South Africa ECC resistance to the Border War and its challenges to the notions of ‘total onslaught’ and the ‘rooigevaar’ were given occasional space in the columns of the liberal-minded newspapers. Also, media attention was given to a significant number of young white men who took a collective public stance of refusal to serve in 1988, 1989 and 1990. Although resistance to conscription in Israel took place on a smaller scale, what resistance there was received very little media coverage in the 1980s. Recently, the digital media has given a good deal of attention to the stance of refusal to serve taken by conscientious objector Natan Blanc.⁸ The visibility of Blanc’s resistance highlights the fact that few Israelis have taken the stance he has taken.

Differences between numbers of resisters aside, what often links them is a common foe in the form of the demand that the individual enter the military wing of a society whose social policy violates human rights. The either-or situation faced by the unwilling individual was and is at times complicated by the fact that in some countries, such as Norway, the option of social or community service is presented. Jacklyn Cock notes that in South Africa during 1983 and 1984 “a series of amendments to the Defence Act were promulgated to provide for a narrowly defined category of religious objectors the option of serving in non-military roles or doing community service” (68). Cynthia Cockburn states that refusal of the latter form of service constitutes an even more explicit challenge to the authority of the state (Cockburn in Cinar and Usterki ix). However, regardless of the manner in which conscription is implemented, a common factor is that the individual is obliged to perform this service in order to justify his or, in rare instances, her, citizenship. The notion of citizenship in itself amounts to more than an affirmation of nationality and, by implication, the conscientious objector responds to more than one constraint on his or her individuality. Cockburn observes that “the conscientious objector is most informative about the deep imbrication of

⁸ See <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/may/13/israel-jail-conscientious-objector-natan-blanc> for the details of Blanc’s stance, notably the fact that he is trapped in an absurdly repetitious cycle of reporting for service, refusing to serve, being imprisoned, then released, reporting to serve, and so on.

nationalism, militarism and *patriarchy* – that dreadful homosocial trio, locked in mutual need and adoration” (ix, author’s italics). Whether or not the conscientious objector might perceive himself as a specific symptom of the conspiratorial “trio” is open to debate. Cockburn’s italicisation of the word patriarchy points to a lack of critical attention that has been paid to it: “It is not every book or article about conscientious objectors which brings to the theme a gender analysis” (ix). There is substance to this lament. However, though Michael Graaf et al. and Jacklyn Cock provide a concrete or lived sense of the social and psychological realities of conscription to the SADF, their analyses also contain insights into the politics of gender that prevailed during the 1980s. The aim in the section to follow is to draw such insights from their work.

1.4 *Hawks and Doves, Colonels and Cadres: Conscription and Anti-Conscription in 1980s South Africa*

The National Party coming to power in 1948 saw the onset of the policy of apartheid, which included the establishment of a highly militarised society. In 1961, not long after the notorious Sharpeville massacre, a ballot system of conscription was introduced. This system lasted until 1967 with the introduction of universal conscription of nine months’ service for white males between the ages of 17 and 65 years. As Cock observes, the period of military service extended “in a chronology that parallel[ed] increasing black resistance” (*Colonels* 92). Conscription arrived at the apex of its control over white men’s lives in the 1980s. Cock offers a thorough account of the history of conscription from 1961 to the end of the 1980s,⁹ as do a number of other academics (see fn. 2). Theresa Edlmann has provided a highly detailed study of the history of conscription and its “psychosocial legacy” (“Negotiating Historical Continuities”).

From 1977 conscripts were expected to perform an initial period of two years of military service, followed by a further 240 days of so-called camps over the span of eight years, though these camps were not necessarily annual. Importantly too, in 1982 the number of days for camps increased from 240 to 720 days. Thus, during the 1980s white males were

⁹ Due to its publication date, Cock’s study does not extend its focus beyond the 1980s. The practice of conscription did persist into the early 90s, following the release of political prisoners in 1990 and the beginnings of the process of reconciliation that culminated in the first democratic election of 1994. However, the period of service was reduced to one year and this service was diluted or tamed in that there was no longer the prospect or risk of Border War or township ‘duty.’

liable for a total of four years of service. Also during this period, it was announced that conscription would eventually extend to white women and Coloured and Indian men.

In the 1980s the Defence Act and amendments to it determined the legal consequences attached to refusing the call-up. As Cock notes: “State of Emergency regulations defined as a ‘subversive statement’ anything which undermined the existing system of conscription.” A man’s refusal to render or report for National Service “carried the penalty of imprisonment for a period of one-and-a-half times as long as all periods of service the offender would otherwise still have been compelled to render” (*Colonels* 68–9). This resulted in a six year prison sentence for those who had not completed their initial two years. The latter refusals were rare, largely because young white men had absorbed an ideology of militarism. David Bruce was the first political (instead of religious) objector to receive the six year prison sentence. In Interview A in the Appendix, Bruce narrates his experiences prior and subsequent to imprisonment. Analysis of the interview is presented in this chapter as well as further discussion in Chapters 2 and 5.

Increases in the number of years the white man was expected to perform his National Service understandably coincided with the years of the Border War, from 1966 until 1989.¹⁰ The version of masculinity instilled in white children was facilitated by implementation of the cadet system, which involved paramilitary training in primary and high schools. This cadet system was “closely integrated with the Youth Preparedness Programme, a compulsory subject in all white schools” (71). An outdoor extension of this cadet system was the so-called “veld school.” Cock notes that these were “run on military lines and activities included inspection and flag-raising, survival training, tracking and camouflage, marching, and practical field training, as well as group discussions, lectures and films” (71). Statements from a few of her informants indicate “some doubt as to how efficacious this attempted indoctrination really was” (72). Conscientious objector David Bruce says of his veld school experience:

there were a variety of activities, all of them in some way orientated towards promoting patriotism and military preparedness. I was a bit uncooperative [...] and noticed that this ran the risk of incurring hostility from other boys. However, I was drawn into a more overt oppositional role by the lecture on ‘Insurgency’ which was the main indoctrination lecture [...]. I continually raised my hand to query and contest the assertions that were being made. One of the consequences of this was that the lecture was prolonged

¹⁰ This was also known as the Angolan Bush War, which was a conflict that took place from 1966 to 1989 between South Africa and its ally, UNITA (União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola) against the liberation movements of South West Africa (now Namibia) and Angola with its allies (mainly Cuban).

considerably so that it ended up going late into the afternoon. (Personal interview, 14 September 2011)

Within a social context tightly geared to restrain freedom of thought and action, resistance to conscription was, as already noted, the exception. Nevertheless, by the 1980s incidences of resistance had increased considerably. These responses took place on a range of levels. The most visible and direct forms of resistance were publicly-announced refusals to serve, anti-conscription activism and counter-insurgency. Cock terms the less visible strains of resistance “retreat.” For her this category includes the following four responses to conscription: deferment, evasion, emigration and suicide (*Colonels* 80). With regard to the last-mentioned, Koopman and van Dyk reveal that the suicide rate in the SADF had increased sharply by the 1980s: “during 1986, at the height of the South African counter-insurgency war, 453 SADF members committed or attempted to commit suicide” (118). Cock cites the following statistics provided by the Minister of Defence for 1988: 24 uniformed members committed suicide and 344 attempted suicide (*Colonels* 80). Echoing Koopman and van Dyk’s opinion, she concludes that “experts find these figures alarming” (80). Along the continuum of responses to conscription enthusiastic involvement could be positioned at the opposite end to suicide. It is a challenge to position compliance between these poles. Willing enlistment in the SADF could be considered an extreme form of compliance that took the form of joining the so-called Permanent Force (PF). However, this choice was not necessarily fuelled by patriotic zeal. Instead, some men elected to complete an extra two years of voluntary service in military or police units in order to avoid being called up for camps after their return to civilian life.

Although concern with enlistment does not fall within the ambit of this study, it warrants brief commentary for the light it sheds on men’s, and occasionally women’s, involvement in warfare. For example, in his essay “Understanding the Motivation to Enlist” Jonathan Vance observes that “in studying the motivations behind enlistment for military service, scholars have advanced an enormous range of explanations” (28). Having discussed these explanations, that include the opportunity to express a virile masculinity or “latent violent urges,” “a welcome and even enjoyable diversion from the boring and burdensome responsibilities of civilian life, peer group pressure, or a spirit of patriotism” (28), Vance concludes with this question: “If they [the soldiers] did not fully understand the motivation to enlist, how can we?” (40). Though the motivation to enlist was largely unquestioned and unproblematic for white South African men, involvement in the Border War or deployment to

quell “township unrest” led some conscripts to regret their decision to enlist in the first place. The question posed by Vance invites another: how easily can we arrive at an understanding of the decision to resist instead of enlist? As oral testimony and the texts under consideration will indicate, answers to the latter question are at times complex and slippery.

Another dimension of compliance manifests in the way conscripts recall their time in the army. Cock says that many of her conscript-interviewees “who had completed their military service felt positively about their experiences within the SADF” (*Colonels* 76). One of these informants asserts “The army does ‘make a man of you’” (76). However, another says “The South African army cultivates this macho, tough boy image. I was wary of breaking with this” (77). The expression of certainty in the earlier statement indicates the effectiveness of the SADF’s strategies to convince young men that their service constituted a rite of passage toward genuine manhood. Though the second statement expresses uncertainty, it is an uncertainty the respondent is clearly fearful to disclose or admit. This fearfulness confirms the fact that the SADF’s cultivation of the macho personality was largely successful.

Having referred to more subtle forms of compliance such as “acquiescence” and “allegiance,” Cock qualifies these designations by stating that compliance is an extremely broad, and even crude, categorisation and thus argues the need for a “more nuanced approach [that] would include analysis of various forms of informal resistance within the SADF, such as drug abuse, malingering, petty theft, sabotage and so on” (*Colonels* 75). Other nuances of resistance from within and outside of the military can undoubtedly be added to Cock’s list. Whereas certain texts and interviews indicate strategies of resistance from within the military context, others indicate strategies deployed outside of it: less visible forms of retreat mentioned earlier, such as deferment and evasion. Indeed, a number of the transcribed interviews reveal informal strategies very different from those identified by Cock – desperately inventive or despairing ways in which some conscripts dodged the draft.

The choice to defer National Service required documentary proof of registration as a student on an annual and sometimes bi-annual basis. This exercise of choice was sometimes met with disapproval. To heed the call-up after matriculating more often than not received a stamp of approval that arose from a shared sense as to what constituted typical and desirable manly attributes.

The dilemma posed by conscription intensified from 1984 through to 1989 with the apartheid government’s declaration of States of Emergency that involved sending SADF

troops into the townships to control what it called unrest. Young men and women who considered this control to be violence perpetrated against fellow-citizens formed a grouping of like-minded resisters in late 1984 and named it the End Conscription Campaign (ECC). Prior to the birth of the ECC resistance to conscription had low visibility within the public arena. ECC activism was effective, as evidenced by the fact that in 1988 (the year in which the ECC was banned) 143 young white men nationwide publicly announced their refusal to serve in the SADF, 771 refused to serve in 1989, and by 1990 1289 men had registered as conscientious objectors (*Colonels* 90). The ECC presented a version of masculinity that countered the one held and propagated by the military establishment and its voices of support within civil society, including government-sponsored newspapers, radio and television. Its refusal to accept conscription as an inevitable duty to be performed by white men gestured toward alternative notions of masculinity that can validly be considered counter-hegemonic.

As with *Colonels and Cadres*, the compilation of essays, *Hawks and Doves* (Graaf 1988), grapples from the vantage point of the counter-hegemonic voice with the State and the SADF's notion of manhood. Like *Colonels and Cadres*, it makes its political stance clear from the start. In the Contents page the final essay is announced as providing "a brief discussion of some of the implications for the client of the findings of the researchers." The ECC is the client. The topic under focus is announced in the compilation's sub-title, *The Pro- and Anti-Conscription Press in South Africa*. Pro-conscription voices were to be found in certain newspapers, magazines and state-sponsored television and radio. The SADF's principal mouthpiece was a magazine called *Paratus*. But the pro-conscription faction also expressed itself freely in other magazines, such as those produced by the so-called Veterans for Victory and student groupings such as the Durban Student Alliance (DSA) at the University of Natal and its affiliate at the University of the Witwatersrand called the Student Moderate Alliance (SMA). Veterans for Victory, as the name asserts, was a group of ex-SADF soldiers who reflected nostalgically on their involvement in the Border War. The DSA and SMA called themselves "liberals" and set themselves up in opposition to what they considered to be a left-wing hegemony on English language campuses. The DSA expressed its political convictions in its magazine *The DSA Freedom Fighter*. Other voices aligned themselves to an anti-conscription ideology. The significant ones here were the ECC's At

Ease, and *Resister*, a critical journal on South African militarisation produced by the Committee on South African War Resisters (COSAWR).¹¹

In two essays in *Hawks and Doves*, “The ECC as Other: Veterans for Victory” (47–58) and “Co-opting the Discourse of Resistance: *The DSA Freedom Fighter*” (59–72), close attention is paid to publications produced by these pro-conscription organisations. These essays analyse the ways in which “certain gender ideologies” construct and propagate particular notions of manhood. The first-mentioned essay begins by informing the reader that Veterans for Victory is an organisation which speaks on behalf of the “ex-servicemen of South Africa” (47). In its magazines Veterans for Victory expresses the necessity of remaining conscious of specific threats: communists, womanly men, women, *moffies*¹² and members of the ECC. The threat posed by “womanly men” is articulated by one of Cock’s informants:

A friend of mine who was doing his national service [...] on his very first day was pulled from a long line of men awaiting the regulatory haircut. He was selected due to the length of his hair and was told, ‘Let’s cut your hair first so that you can stand up when you piss – you no longer have to sit like a woman’. (*Colonels* 61)

Concerning the threat posed by women and gay men, Cock notes that Veterans for Victory, as trained soldiers, emerged from a context in which a “platoon was often called ‘a bunch of old women’ or told that the SADF was not for ‘girls’ or ‘queers.’ Such labelling came always when the group was not performing efficiently, quickly or aggressively enough” (61). Thus, concludes Cock, femininity and gayness were “clearly associated with weakness, vulnerability and feebleness” (61).

Cock presents a thorough account of the presence, however thin, of white women in the SADF and its supporting structures (96–149). In her analysis she emphasises this involvement through the 1980s in a range of roles that supported the SADF – from becoming members of the Permanent Force,¹³ to providing material support primarily through the Southern Cross Fund (106–9), to being members of civil defence and commando units (109–

¹¹ COSAWR was “an organisation of young South Africans who [were] exiled in England and the Netherlands as a result of their refusal to fight for apartheid” (Graaf 42).

¹² Shaun de Waal offers the following understanding of this term: “In South African slang the word ‘moffie’ covers a range of interrelated senses, including ‘male homosexual,’ ‘effeminate male’ and ‘transvestite.’ In its most wide-spread usage, it refers to the first category. The word [...] has had an overwhelmingly derogatory implication. Recently, however, it has been reappropriated by homosexuals and [become] partly a political statement analogous to the way in which homosexual activists in England and America have taken over the word ‘queer’” (*Defiant Desire* xiii).

¹³ Cock states that there were “only ten women colonels in the Permanent Force” at the end of the 1980s (96).

13), to involvement in armaments production and to providing ideological support (114–28). By presenting the information indicated above, Cock shows that although women were not involved in combat, “many provided the infrastructure that made combat possible” (183). This infrastructure extended to civil society and white women undoubtedly played a supportive role as conscripts’ mothers, wives, girlfriends, friends or colleagues. Anti-apartheid women’s groupings such as the Black Sash were very much in the minority during the 1980s. According to Cock, the Black Sash consisted of approximately 2000 white women. It was an organisation in which “‘Motherhood’ [played] a mobilising role” (182). A large number of Black Sash members rejected feminism. Informed by “their socially assigned role as nurturing mothers,” continues Cock, “they could no longer stand by and watch the violence inflicted on their children by the apartheid regime” (182). This violence included that inflicted on their sons by the SADF. Cock notes that the notion of “‘patriotic motherhood’” underlying this nurturing role played by the Black Sash “also surfaced in interviews with SADF women” (182). She notes that this image of patriotic motherhood “generates not only revolutionary commitment and defiance, but also docile obedience and repressive violence to preserve the existing social order” (182). This shared orientation toward a different form of national service – that of white women serving white men’s interests and actions¹⁴ – helps explain the absence or obscuring of women’s voices in the texts arising from or referring back to South Africa in the 1980s.

By paying careful attention to pamphlets, posters and cartoons produced by Veterans for Victory, it is made clear in *Hawks and Doves* that gay men were the organisation’s principal scapegoat and object of derision. ECC members were, as a matter of habit, equated with gay men. The “perverted sexuality and impotency of the ECC member” was contrasted with “the virile potency of the Vet” (*Hawks* 49). For these reasons, it was felt by Veterans for Victory to be an urgent responsibility to launch a smear campaign against gay anti-conscription activists, such as prominent campaigner Ivan Toms.¹⁵

The ECC, according to Graaf, was considered to be a conglomerate of these threats to the “normal and natural” man that was rooted in the governing politics of gender (48). In her Preface to *Colonels and Cadres* Cock asserts that her chapter on resisters aims to show “how the politics of gender was used against both radical men (castigated as ‘effeminate’) and

¹⁴ In the same chapter Cock comments upon the extent to which this form of National Service often characterised the relations of black women to black men involved in the liberation struggle.

¹⁵ A sense of Ivan Toms’ role as activist emerges from Theresa Edlmann’s interview comments contained in the Appendix.

women (dismissed as ‘social failures’) to discredit them and denigrate their commitment” (ix). The essays in *Hawks and Doves* offer a powerful response to such discrediting and denigration. The masculine subject-position occupied by Veterans for Victory was that of heterosexual anti-communist warrior and redeemer. Running counter to Veterans for Victory’s *Weltanschauung* is one that accommodates masculinities within masculinity; that does not preclude gay men from membership and does not hold to a Rambo idea and ideal of maleness. Macho archetypes such as Rambo are described by Graaf as “crusaders against the ignorance of those who did not go, who did not want to go, or who do not understand” (49). The fighting man is considered to be a member of an elite with a special creed. This privilege of belonging carries an aura of mystery, even of the poetic. An ex-soldier’s words are cited to illustrate this: “You have never lived until you have almost died, and for those who fight for it, life has a flavour the protected will never know” (49). Such a statement reflects an assumption about masculine identity to be found in a number of recent accounts offered by ex-Border War soldiers. It is articulated by a mercenary named K in Alexandra Fuller’s memoir *Scribbling the Cat* (2004): “I find I don’t trust people. It’s hard to trust someone who hasn’t looked up the wrong end of a barrel. You know? How do you know what someone is made of until you’ve broken cover with them at exactly the same time?” (65).¹⁶

Undoubtedly such veterans would experience difficulty entertaining the possibility that the notion of a ‘real man’ is contestable. David Bruce might have struck at least a few of these Veterans as a difficult man to pin down. It is not inconceivable that a veteran might experience a degree of difficulty, even self-doubt, at condemning a man who ‘stuck to his guns’ in his refusal to be conscripted; a man who chose six years imprisonment as the consequence of his commitment to what he believed to be a white man’s responsibility in apartheid South Africa. Having acknowledged the ideological gulf between an objector such as Bruce and a fervently patriotic conscript, it can be argued that a man’s bold and defiant refusal to be conscripted can, with a provocative twist, be plugged into stereotypical notions of masculine potency, warrior status and heroism so dear to the hearts of Veterans for Victory. It is not outrageous to suggest that a man who resists conscription might lean, in his way, toward an essentialist notion of masculinity. Cynthia Cockburn projects a style of masculinity apart from those that hold to an essentialist perception of masculine identity:

¹⁶ See Chapter 4 for brief discussion of Fuller’s memoir.

When represented as an alternative masculine heroism, sometimes explicitly compared to the heroism of the one who is prepared to die for his country, [conscientious objection] retains familiar masculine khaki. Or it can wear an unprecedented and surprising ‘look’ that refuses both of the two available masculinities – the one heroic, the other shamed and debased by refusal. It does not simulate femininity, either. Rather, it dons an autonomous, self-defined, gender and sexuality. This is dress for an altogether fresh and new gender act: anti-patriarchal, anti-heteronormative, anti-homophobic and pro-feminist. (ix)

Cockburn’s comment provides a way of introducing a focused discussion of attitudes toward gender and sexuality that prevailed in 1980s South Africa. Jacklyn Cock’s study confirms the importance of a gender analysis and, for the purposes of this thesis, it serves as a platform for discussion of Daniel Conway’s argument in the section to follow.

1.5 Conscription and the Politics of Gender

Conway (2012) discusses the role played by the ECC in the struggle for liberation. He says that despite the contribution made by the ECC the broader liberation movement insisted that it practiced a single-issue activism. Having acknowledged this limit, he declares that the importance of the ECC’s resistance campaign ought not to be downplayed. For Conway and other commentators it was undoubtedly important that a voice responded boldly and directly in the 1980s to the State’s strategy of co-opting all white South African men to the task of securing apartheid rule. In relation to what he calls “the nature and effectiveness of the challenge objectors posed to the tropes of masculinity that legitimated compulsory national service,” he poses the following questions in the earlier version of his book, his PhD thesis (2006):

Were these challenges consistent, effective and radical? Did they expose and deconstruct the mechanisms of identity production that engendered the binaries of militarised apartheid? Or did objectors become complicit in certain shared assumptions and practices of masculinity and citizenship? (8)

His answers to each of these questions are simultaneously yes and no. In his view, objectors did, albeit to a limited extent, become “complicit” with hegemonic versions of masculinity and citizenship. Revealingly, he observes instances of such compromise within the ECC: sexism, adherence to a “motherist” orientation that alienated feminist ECC activists, (*Masculinities, Militarisation* 149) and the strategic shift decided upon in 1987 to redirect

their conscientisation campaign at the white middle class and its values, which included disapproval of homosexuality. Despite having observed such instances of its falling short of a radical critique of the prevailing hegemony, he asserts that the ECC “disputed and derided the contention that military service in the SADF was an essential rite of passage for white men; it portrayed military service as a process that constrained, damaged and warped the masculinities of white men who were conscripted.” For these reasons, he speaks of conscripts as both “perpetrators and victims” (149).

According to Conway the presence in South Africa and “any society” of “multiple and fluid gender identities” created the space for “transgression and reformulation” (4) on the part of the anti-conscription movement. Such a shifting and negotiable space also afforded the state opportunities to create “spaces” for non-combatants and gay men. However, these spaces served to “maintain the legitimacy of compulsory military service” and to “isolate and stigmatise white South Africans who objected to conscription or apartheid” (4). Accordingly, Conway defines conscripts and objectors “not as unitary actors, adopting homogeneous subjectivities, but actors who draw from multiple discourses present at multiple levels” (4). This multiplicity generated continually “shifting” and “contingent” subject positions that grew from and supported both the state and the anti-conscription movement. Conway acknowledges that the discourse of militarised masculinity held out the “illusion of agency” to white men as conscripts, emphasising National Service as an adventure for the exercise of patriotism and masculine pride (68). This illusion concealed the fact that to a large extent the young man was bidden to serve instead of being invited to do so.

The automatic response of the majority of young white men was served as much by stereotypes of racial identity as it was by gender stereotypes. Both levels of stereotyping served to construct a one-dimensional masculinity. Conway’s argument emphasises the construction of identity on the level of gender and gender relations: “the politics of conscription and objection to military service for moral and political reasons is also a politics of gender” (3). He develops Cock’s argument by emphasising a feature glaringly present in the discourse of the state, and more subtly so within the anti-conscription movement: heteronormativity. Varela et al. state that this term was “first coined in 1993 in *Fear of a Queer Planet* [in which] Michael Warner uses it to describe how heterosexuality is taken to be normative. [It] secures privileges for those who consent to hegemonic norms, while non-normative behaviours, relationships and practices are stigmatised, illegitimated and rendered illegible” (92). For Conway the state’s and the military’s heteronormativity was rooted in a

sexism and homophobia which served to “police gendered binaries” (*Masculinities* 15). At the same time, “conscription [...] engendered heteronormativity, and the refusal to perform this act of masculinity and citizenship invited sexual stigma” (15). Conway highlights the fact that “gay objectors such as Ivan Toms were pressurised [by the ECC] to conduct their campaigns from a heteronormative and ‘respectable’ premise” (147). Although this observation is to be found in a number of essays in which gay activists recall the tendency within the liberation movement during the 1980s to sideline or silence their voices,¹⁷ there are exceptions to this observed tendency. For example, Julia Nichol, having lamented the ECC effectively silencing Ivan Toms’ homosexuality for the sake of its anti-conscription campaign, asserts that in the context of “the broad [liberation] struggle” in which gay activists, “with precious few exceptions,” were closeted, “Ivan’s stand was wonderful for [the gay and lesbian] cause” (78). Nichol’s use of the terms “wonderful” and “excellent” point to a glaring contradiction that can be posed as a question: in what way can the fact that Toms’ identity as a gay man was hidden by the ECC be considered as a highly significant contribution to “the progressive gay and lesbian movement”? Trengove Jones (2005) articulates this contradiction: “while committed to political change [...] identity as a gay white male was either hidden, ignored or derided during much of struggle experience” (136). The simultaneous commitment to political transformation and the experience of exclusion generated a symptom that he calls “inbetweenness.” This symptom registers as “a not always unawkward blend of sameness and difference” (136). The concept of inbetweenness provides a useful handle on the ways in which some men (not only gay) experienced their time as conscripts or resisters to conscription.

As Conway argues, neither hegemonic nor counter-hegemonic stances are univocal in their announcements of what it is or what it takes to be a man. For example, undercurrents or strains of paranoid insecurity, a fear of masculinity under threat, or emasculation, are present even in publications produced by Veterans for Victory and in *The DSA Freedom Fighter*. Also, within the counter-hegemonic faction there were assumptions and expressions of masculinity that were not unambiguous in their opposition to the hegemonic perception of gender relations. Conway notes the complexity of this ambiguity, or ambivalence: “The contention that objectors were an inherently ambivalent presence in the public realm (contesting practices of masculinity and citizenship, yet also claiming to embody the *true* constructions of them), created tension in the performances of objection” (*Masculinities*,

¹⁷ See essays by Kraak, Tatchell and Nichol in *Sex and Politics in South Africa* (2005).

Militarisation 4, author's italics). Edlmann also explores this ambiguity in her PhD thesis (2014), as well as in the interview with her that was conducted on 23 November, 2012 (included in the Appendix). Edlmann's research interests are discussed below for the purpose of clarifying and amplifying the specific concerns of my own project.

1.6 Narrating the Psychosocial Legacies of Conscription

In the Abstract to her thesis Edlmann states that her central concern is with "SADF conscripts' narrations of identity in the contested narrative terrain of post-apartheid South Africa" (vii). In the Introduction to her final chapter she reflects on her analysis of what she calls "post-apartheid narrative terrains of conscripts' narrations of identity" (228). In the Introduction to her thesis she expresses a need to "understand the psychosocial legacies of conscription," also within the post-apartheid context (1). Edlmann is concerned throughout with shifts and complexities that arise from possible merging, dissociation, discrepancy and antagonism at work between the apartheid era past, the more recent past of the transition period, as well as with the moments from which speakers remember and reconstruct their former and current lives. She announces this complexity in the first of her research goals:

To investigate the extent to which conscripts' experiences have influenced their narratives of identity in post-apartheid South Africa, with particular attention paid to how conscripts have dealt with the multiple (possibly conflicting?) identities of being participants in the apartheid regime's "total strategy" and citizens in an emerging democracy in the post-1994 context. (22)

Edlmann's study of conscripts' and resisters' narrativisations of their experiences is filtered through the lenses of historical and psychological studies. By contrast, my research ambit is narrower in that its guiding interest is literary narratives that speak from the 1980s or that speak back to that time from the perspective of post-apartheid South Africa. Thus, its focus is narrower in terms of the fact that the 'objects' of analysis are situated almost exclusively within the time-frame of the 1980s. Also, in contrast with Edlmann's study, analysis is weighted more strongly toward the fictive devices whereby the authors of the texts construct the truths of their past. Although Edlmann's research clearly shows awareness of narrative reconstructions of the past and, by implication, of the identity of the speaker, there are clear differences between her research and mine in terms of the areas and the degree of emphasis,

despite the fact that a common concern is the relation of narrative to identity. These differences are expressed by the choice of theoretical paradigm that serves analysis of the problematic of narrative and identity. Other points of difference are the fact that Edlmann's thesis grants more attention than does mine to the institution of conscription. Mine, as already observed, privileges literary representations of the prevailing ideology of masculinity.

In the second of her announced research goals Edlmann echoes and expands upon her first by stating her intention to "explore the dialectics between conscripts' personal narrations and contextual dynamics in both the apartheid era and the post-apartheid era" (22). Later she states that her research "sits in the rather uncomfortable [...] interface of the past and present, the 'macro' and 'micro,' the personal and socio-political" (77). Exploration of the complex and complicated "dialectics" between the apartheid and post-apartheid time periods as described here by Edlmann strike this researcher as humbly ambitious and, for the reasons stated above, are beyond the research ambit of my thesis.

Another, and significant, point of difference between Edlmann's and my readings of our research data revolves around conduct and interpretation of interviews. These differences will be explained in the section titled "Selection of Interviewees" in Chapter 5.

The common thread of interest that can be drawn from my work and that of Edlmann and other social scientists discussed above is that the lives of white men who participated in as well as those who resisted conscription had more than a good deal to do with prevailing notions of gender. A striking feature of the culture of masculinity in 1980s South Africa was the large-scale absence, unfelt presence or elision of women as meaningful agents. Cock echoes this view by stating: "prevailing notions of resistance have tended to obscure women's contributions" (*Colonels* 182). By way of expanding upon this point, Judith Coullie says that "gendered ideology is apparent in what is not said. [...] we might note the narrator's frequent failure to name the women in his life" (8). This neglect or failure applies to a reading of the testimony of many interviewees, as well as within the novels and memoirs to be examined in Chapters 3 and 4. Indeed, even with a resister such as David Bruce, mention of women as meaningful presences or agents is often in passing. Women are frequently accorded marginal status in narratives that record the "hero's journey".¹⁸ Their status is that of aid or ally for the proper unfolding of the protagonist's destiny – him becoming the man he feels compelled to become. More often than not, such becoming involves bonding with men.

¹⁸ See Chapter 4 for an account of what Joseph Campbell terms the "monomyth" of the hero and his journey in *A Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949).

Though at an ideological remove from men who participated, willingly or not, in the male bonding rituals and ethos of army life, alternative or progressive men frequently partook, albeit less crassly, in a similar orientation toward women, a similar complicity that served to sustain the imbalance of power relations between the genders.¹⁹

It has emerged thus far that understanding the constructed identity of the white South African man requires concern with “the processes and relationships through which men and women conduct gendered lives” (Connell, “Organization of Masculinity” 33). Decades of critical research in the field of gender studies has made it clear that masculinity does not occur in isolation. Instead, as Connell points out, an understanding of masculinity is “simultaneously a place in gender relating, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality and culture” (33).

Although analysis of the primary texts involves focus upon discourses of masculinity, theories of masculinity cannot be considered in isolation from other and related theoretical concerns with identity, such as those discussed above. For the purpose of this thesis, these and other notions of identity (including those addressed in 1.8) are best understood as facets, dimensions or satellites of the central theoretical concern in this thesis – discourses of masculinity.

1.7 Theorising Masculinities

Mention has been made of the tendency in family and society to encourage young men’s performance of their National Service as an expression of their innate manly attributes. Whitehead and Barrett provide an interpretation of such attributes: “Masculine power is largely exercised through self-regulation and self-discipline – a process of ‘identity-work,’ one consequence of which is to privilege and validate ways of being male/man/masculine in particular cultural settings” (17). Clearly the military setting is an appropriate locale, or crucible, for the exercise of “self-regulation and self-discipline.” However, it can be argued that the young man who chooses to study instead of heeding the call-up positions himself upon an island of time from which he exercises alternative forms of self-regulation and self-discipline; alternative forms of ‘identity-work.’ Young men who resisted the call-up sought

¹⁹ See interview with Theresa Edlmann in the Appendix and commentary thereon in Chapter 5.

other settings – such as student organisations, membership of the End Conscription Campaign (ECC) and the counter-cultural milieu of the time – in which they could express their discomfort with the going notions of masculine discipline and power.

The hegemonic style of maleness has, according to Whitehead and Barrett, arisen from the fact that “countless men actively resist the change implied by the gender revolution” (10). Such men, they continue, “often remain locked in a juvenile and crude display of masculinity that can only be sustained and reaffirmed through fraternal groupings, often misogynistic bonding rituals, rejection of intimacy and an avid denial of the other – be it women, femininity or gay sexuality” (10). As has been seen, attitudes of the kind observed here are blatantly present in the masculinity projected by the South African Defence Force and its mouthpieces during the period under study. Such attitudes are devoid of subtlety to the extent that a more appropriate designation is “masculinism” as defined by Brittan: “a dominant ideology or discourse that serves to naturalise male domination” (qtd. in Whitehead and Barrett 13). But masculinism does not entirely overshadow other masculinities, even in a context seemingly as hegemonically airtight as 1980s South Africa. Instead, as Whitehead and Barrett point out, masculinity is a domain for uncertain and negotiable forms of identity-work (17). Todd Reeser echoes this assertion: “what we take for granted [by ‘masculinity’] is not at all a given, but a fabrication or a construct of a given historical and cultural context [...]. Even within a single cultural and temporal context, ideas of masculinity are far from stable and fixed” (2–3). He elaborates:

a man oscillates between various relations of masculinity, he is never really simply in any one position or relation, but often somewhere in between [...]. To think about masculinity as in movement, as fluid, and as unstable necessarily keeps us from thinking in these culturally sanctioned molds that do not correspond to the complexity of masculinity. (14–5)

Understanding any discourse of masculinity as tending toward motion, fluidity and instability proposes a middle ground in which masculinities can be voiced. Thus Reeser promotes “a middle approach to masculinity, to find a compromise between the two positions and to locate the experience of masculinity somewhere between essentialism and non-essentialism” (50). Arguably, a “middle approach” in the context of 1980s South Africa was not readily achievable. The hegemonic version of masculinity touted during the apartheid state’s reign in the 1980s rendered it a time in which oppositional voices often emerged as skewed symptoms of the time rather than as agents for political change. Reeser asserts that an utterance such as

“I am a man and I am like that man over there and like all men” performs his notion of what amounts to an essentialist experience of masculinity, whereas a non-essentialist experience might be found in announcements such as “But I am not like your typical man” or “I am different from most men in this way,” or “I am not acting at this moment like a typical man” (50). On the one hand, considering masculine identity or any identity in terms of utterances such as these runs the risk of lapsing into simplification instead of clarification. On the other hand, Reeser’s words help to emphasise the fluidity and instability of identity. In the context of South Africa in the 1980s a man might have received a range of messages from different quarters, each of which in its way assumed to tell him who or what he was. A specific sense of what it means to be a man might come from parents, schools and friends at the same time as these expectations might be at war with what he senses or expects from himself, what feels true to him, however nebulous such intuitions might be. Indeed, modes of masculine self-expression present during the time under study and thereafter are frequently characterised by haziness on the levels of perception and performance. This presents a challenge for the analyst in terms of understanding how and where men positioned themselves along the continuum of available masculinities. As Stuart Hall observes: “identities are [...] points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us” (6). Although clear points of identity are often difficult to establish, it can also be said that in certain instances it is difficult not to be struck by the certainty or fixity of such positions. Indeed, the fact that many white men unquestioningly obeyed conscription as a legitimate call to duty illustrates a fixed instead of a fluid identity.

It is frustratingly difficult at times to answer the question as to whether the identities of young white men on the verge of being conscripted are more accurately regarded as fluid or fixed. The interplay of the will of the individual and the demands and strictures of institutions helps explain this difficulty. Stuart Hall in his essay aptly titled “Who Needs ‘Identity’?” states:

I use ‘identity’ to refer to the meeting point, the point of *suture*, between on the one hand the discourse and practices which attempt to ‘interpellate,’ speak to us or hail us into place as the social subjects of particular discourses, and on the other hand, the processes which produce subjectivities, which construct us as subjects which can be ‘spoken.’ (19)

Prior to considering the applicability of these words, it is necessary to explain two of them: “suture” and “interpellate.” The term suture, according to Hall, indicates a joining of the individual or subject to a subject-position. This requires “not only that the subject is

[positioned], but that the subject invests in the position” (19). This means that “suturing has to be thought of as an *articulation*, rather than a one-sided process” (19).

With regard to the concept of interpellation, John Higgins (1982) offers the following explanation:

The central thesis of Althusser’s theory of ideology is “Ideology interpellates individuals as subjects.” By ideology, Althusser means “the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence.” Interpellation is the name of the process which places the individual in his imaginary relationship to society, as a social subject. Interpellation is the name of the transition from “abstract pre-social individual to this ideological and social subject and it is also the name of the constant process of ideology: “The existence of ideology and the hailing or interpellation of individuals as subjects are one and the same thing.” (148)

Although these terms provide, on a general or theoretical level, a useful understanding of the construction of social identity, they gain only limited purchase on the specific construction (or interpellation) of white males in 1980s South Africa. The idea that subjectivity takes place at a “point of suture” suggests an element of strained liberty, even negotiability, which was largely neither known nor felt within the context in which this study is situated. The State-sanctioned discursive practices whereby the white man was “hail[ed] into place” frequently dominated, to the point of negation, that counter-identity suggested by Hall as “the processes which produce subjectivities, which construct us as subjects which can be ‘spoke’” (“Who Needs” 19). The opportunity to speak was not readily available. The imbalance here confirmed the effectiveness of the hailing or interpellation. The prevailing discursive practices whereby white men were positioned limited the opportunity for agency and there often seemed little hope, on cognitive as well as lived levels, that this state of affairs was temporary. Identity or selfhood during this time was a fixed form rather than a formation, a one-sided process instead of an articulation, a monolith rather than a construct. In light of this, it becomes a challenge to locate points of identity as subtle as those suggested by the terms “suture” or “temporary attachment.” However, acknowledgement of this lack of subtlety with regard to the formation of masculine identity does not entirely preclude the presence of shifts, contingencies and contrariness. Indeed, the texts and voices under scrutiny reveal that there is more at work than the spokenness and interpellation peculiar to the historical moment. Strains and undercurrents are detectable, and these indicate the exercise of the will against the *diktat* of conscription. Each man during those years had to position himself somewhere along a shifting line between complicity and refusal. A conscript, whose

status is that of a puppet, may be conned to pick up a script handed to him by the puppeteer. He may play the part assigned to him or he may cut the strings whereby the puppeteer articulates (in the anatomical sense) the motions of his jaw and his tongue. By doing so he lays claim to and exercises a voice of his own.

A balanced analysis needs to acknowledge that even alternative, contrary or contesting stances may be underpinned by a common sense of 'the masculine' instead of adhering to other masculinities, be these available, revised or invented. From a feminist perspective it can be argued that the problem is the masculine or patriarchy per se and that, until masculinity regards itself from outside of its own box it will not achieve political understanding and transformation. Having discussed the SADF's "crucial agency" in the political violence of the 1980s, and the politics of gender that prevailed during that decade, Jacklyn Cock explains that for her the term gender, instead of expressing a concern with men and women, is important in that it marks a "shift away from an exclusive emphasis on women's disadvantage and difference" and, by implication, men's advantage and control to a concern with "not only the social construction of 'femininity' but also of how masculinity is constructed and inscribed in structures of power and domination" (*Colonels* 26). She adds, importantly: "it also implies that we must take account of how men are disadvantaged by the predominant pattern of gender relations" (26).

Of course the white male depended on more than his relation to the female Other to secure his power and domination. The black Other clearly played a key role in the construction of his identity. For the white man, from birth till entry into the military, the black person was derided as a lowly and threatening Other and these perceptions were reiterated by commanding officers as God-given truths, with the conscript being continually reminded that by serving his nation he was keeping at bay the *swartgevaar*, the literal translation of which is black danger or threat.²⁰ These 'truths' played a key role in securing the mode of white masculinity during and, for many, after the period under study. Stuart Hall states that a man is "obliged to occupy a position across a 'lack,' a division, from the place of the Other" ("Who Needs" 19). Modifying Hall's language to suit my own purposes, the white South African male was ordered instead of obliged to occupy a position across "the place(s) of the Other." As observed earlier, SADF commanders deployed notions of the Other in the form of women, gays and blacks to build ultra-masculinity in conscripts.

²⁰ The *swartgevaar* was bedfellow to the National Party's *rooigevaar*.

Bob Pease argues the importance of moving beyond such “identity politics” (110), of problematising masculine identity with the aim of arriving at gender equity and social justice. Like Pease, Hall favours a concept of identity that “does *not* signal that stable core of the self, unfolding from beginning to end through all the vicissitudes of history without change” (3). In seeming echo, Judith Butler argues that “the time has come to break from ‘identity politics’” (qtd. in Elliott 125). Butler insists that the self is not to be understood “in terms of inner desires, psychological capacities or emotional needs” (126). Instead, “the self is produced in the act of performing sexuality, doing gender and enacting desires” (126). Thus Butler’s understanding is that there is not simply a doer behind the deed. Though there are echoes with the ideas propounded by Pease, Butler takes the challenge to hegemonic masculinity a step further by suggesting that attempts to reconstruct masculinity as part of a sincere commitment to achieve gender equity and social justice are naïve and futile. However, the futility Butler announces can also be read as an absence of agency that can be overcome by being politicised in the form of *Refusing to be a Man* – the title of a text by John Stoltenberg. Stoltenberg asserts that refusal to be a man serves as a strategy for moving away from identity politics and toward a gender politics for men that is progressive:

“the male sex” requires injustice in order to exist. Male sexual identity is entirely a political and ethical construction [...] and masculinity has personal meaning only because certain acts, choices and policies create it – with devastating consequences on human society. But precisely *because* that personal and social identity is constructed, we can refuse it, we can act against it, we can change. (2)

The logical conclusion to Stoltenberg’s assertion that “male sexual identity is entirely a political and ethical construction” is that refusing to be a man is the only way of redeeming oneself as a man. To effect this refusal is to go about reconstructing oneself. It is a political act that can be equated with David Jackson’s act of unmasking expressed in his critical autobiography *Unmasking Masculinity* (1990). For both masculinity theorists the ambition is the same. Whether refusing in order to make oneself anew, or unmasking in order to welcome a truer face, the desire is to rid oneself, insofar as possible, from the guilt of association. It is doubtful whether Butler would be entirely swayed by the transformative political power contained in the words ‘refusing to be a man’ or ‘unmasking masculinity.’ For a man to refuse or to unmask himself may be difficult. He may experience being awkwardly caught between the *zoon politikon* in himself and that being he catches sight of late one night while walking naked and alone past a full-length mirror. To refuse or unmask one’s man-self may

be considered by many men to be an unwelcome shift in gender identity. Jackson comments: “the ideological construction of masculinity, produced through competitive clashes, trials of strength and mental and physical conflicts, [is] achieved through the exclusion of those repressed “feminine” elements that it most fear[s]” (235).

Implicit in the above reflections on masculinity is acknowledgment that a variety of modes and styles of masculinity can be present at a given time in a given social context. The task in textual analysis is to regard men’s voices as connected to both actual and possible ways of being. Jacklyn Cock notes that responses by which ex-conscripts express reservations about having performed their military duty occur more frequently than responses which valorise the idea that military experiences established and promoted their manhood. This suggests that despite the widespread compliance there were not uncommon experiences of self-doubt, disinclination, resistance and subversion among conscripts; that attitudes toward conscription were more complex at times than outsiders perceived them to be.

Another complex locus of identity which relates to analysis of primary texts is what can be described as writerly identity. In the sections to follow attention is paid to this identity in the form of the post-structuralist problematisation of notions of the subject, agency and the author. The discussion begins with an account of debates that have revolved around these concepts.

1.8 Notions of the Subject and Agency

Awareness of the tensions at work between the agency of the subject and constraints thereon is indispensable to the task of interpreting the literary and oral testimony that emerged from and reflected back upon “psychosocial” realities in 1980s South Africa. A concentrated problematisation of the notion of the subject gained foothold within the post-structuralist or deconstructionist school of thought in the 1960s and has subsequently had considerable influence on theoretical orientation and methodology within the humanities and social sciences. In Drucilla Cornell’s words, post-structuralist theory has set about “debunking the myth of the centered, self-conscious subject transparent to itself” (1587). A useful means of further exploring this debunking of the myth of selfhood is to briefly enter a heated debate that has been frequently revisited, but that first took place in the pages of the literary journal *Critical Inquiry* from 1982 till 1985. The essay that set the cat among the pigeons was

one titled “Against Theory” by Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels (723–42). This polemical essay generated a number of responses in defence of the uses and value of theory, some angry and impassioned, and others more measured. The essays were gathered in a book, also titled *Against Theory* (1985), by the editor of the journal, W.J.T. Mitchell. Importantly, Mitchell begins his introduction to the compilation by stating that the collection of essays “might as well be entitled A Defense of Theory as *Against Theory*” (3). He argues that Knapp and Michael’s essay generated a broad and richer sense of theory and its uses than some of the initially combative responses might have indicated were possible; that in the end the debate created a dynamic interaction of ideas and methods, enabling theoretical expansion rather than a stalemate: “Knapp and Michaels help us to see theory’s need to defend, not merely assume, its value for critical practice, and they provide the occasion for this defense on a very broad front” (3). The inclusive theoretical orientation suggested by Mitchell helps explain the comment from the introduction to this thesis to the effect that a broad range of theoretical concepts guide my own critical practice.

More recent responses to the claims and problems addressed in Mitchell’s compilation are presented by Herman Rapaport in his book *The Theory Mess* (2001). Rapaport asserts that the notion of the decentred subject has been misunderstood by literary scholars as implying the negation of the subject, thereby excluding it as a point of reference in textual analysis. To illustrate this misunderstanding, Rapaport reports a response to it in 1966 from one of the founding members of the post-structuralist movement, Jacques Derrida:

The subject is absolutely indispensable. I don’t destroy the subject. I situate it, that is to say, I believe that at a certain level both of experience and of discourse one cannot get along without the notion of the subject. It is a question of knowing where it comes from and how it functions. (qtd. in Rapaport 6)

Thirty-six years after Derrida’s words, Judith Butler, in her essay “Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of ‘Postmodernism’” (1992), echoes this view of the subject:

To refuse to assume, that is, to require a notion of the subject from the start is not the same as negating or dispensing with such a notion altogether; on the contrary, it is to ask after the process of its construction and the political meaning and consequentiality of taking the subject as a requirement or presupposition of theory. (4)

In light of Butler’s words, that undoubtedly show the influence of Derrida, it becomes apparent that the espoused notion of the subject can more accurately be termed a

reconfiguration than an expulsion. However, a comparison of the words of these two theorists reveals a point of difference. Through using the term “political meaning,” Butler makes explicit what Derrida suggests, thereby according to the political its due weight on two levels: critique and activism. She argues that, while we are subjects, and therefore act, we are also acted upon by our contexts. Put differently, Butler takes full cognisance of the political necessity of agency at the same time as acknowledging constraints exerted by context and circumstance.

To reiterate, acknowledging the importance of notion of agency as analytic category does not imply exclusion of the notion of the decentred subject. Indeed, having explored in the above mentioned essay the question as to whether the post-structuralist problematisation of the concept of the subject might threaten political critique and transformation, Butler concludes:

If there is a fear that, by no longer being able to take for granted the subject, its gender, its sex, or its materiality, feminism will founder, it might be wise to consider the political consequences of keeping in their place the very premises that have tried to secure our subordination from the start. (19)

As is evident thus far, thinkers such as those already discussed, along with other post-structuralist thinkers such as Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes and Jacques Lacan (who did not necessarily call themselves post-structuralists) worked with a notion of the subject as something contingent upon and determined by what, for the sake of convenience, can be called externals. Logically speaking, influences external to the consciousness of the subject shaped or impacted upon that subject’s capacity for agency, such that the subject and agency were perceived as process or function instead of as a directly causal and communicative link of personality or individual essence to actions and consequences. This sense of the contingency and indeterminacy of the subject extends to another and related theoretical notion: the question of the author.

1.9 The Question of the Author

In an essay first published in 1980 Michel Foucault asked “What is the Author” (113–38) three years after Roland Barthes had already declared “The Death of the Author” (*Image* 142–48). Sean Burke (1998) speaks of an “anti-authorialism” common to Barthes, Foucault

and Derrida (42). In his essay Foucault renames the author as a “function of discourse” or an “author-function,” (124, 138) instead of a coherent intelligence that sets up the text’s truth to itself and the reality to which it speaks. In a later version of his essay Foucault introduces his argument as follows: “Beckett nicely formulates the theme with which I would like to begin: “‘What does it matter who is speaking,’ someone said, ‘what does it matter who is speaking’” (in Rabinow 101). In the body of his essay he develops this first-mentioned theme: “In writing, the point is not to manifest or exalt the act of writing, nor is it to pin a subject within language; it is, rather, a question of creating a space into which the writing subject constantly disappears” (102). The second theme involves an exploration of the absence of the author via the metaphor or figure of death:

Using all the contrivances he sets up between himself and what he writes, the writing subject cancels out the signs of his particular individuality. As a result, the mark of the writer is reduced to nothing more than the singularity of his absence; he must assume the role of the dead man in the game of writing. (102–03)

In the conclusion to his essay he sums up his challenge to the established notion or ideology of “the author”:

We would no longer hear the questions that have been rehashed for so long: Who really spoke? Is it really he and not someone else? With what authenticity or originality? And what part of his deepest self did he express in his discourse? Instead, there would be other questions, like these: What are the modes of existence of this discourse. Where has it been used, how can it circulate, and who can appropriate it for himself? What are the places in it where there is room for possible subjects? Who can assume these various subject functions? (119–20)

He clinches his argument with a return to Beckett: “And behind all these questions, we would hear hardly anything but the stirring of an indifference: What difference does it make who is speaking?” (120).

Foucault presents more than scepticism about the author as centred subject or agent. He offers a radical critique of this concept, which is transformed from a question to a statement by Barthes in his essay “The Death of the Author”: “Writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin. Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where the subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing” (*Image* 142). For Barthes the concept of author is a historically situated construct:

The author is a product of our society insofar as, emerging from the Middle Ages with English empiricism, French rationalism and the personal faith of the Reformation, it discovered the prestige of the individual, of, as it is more boldly put, the 'human person.' It is thus logical that in literature it should be this positivism, the epitome and culmination of capitalist ideology, which has attached the greatest importance to the 'person' of the author. (142–43)

Having thus posited the category of author as a product of a historically specific positivist epistemology, Barthes insists that this category be rid of the myth of its personhood or personality, which is no longer alive:

We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture. (146)

He urges the "necessity to substitute language itself for the person who until then had been supposed to be its owner;" insisting that "it is language which speaks, not the author" and that to write is "to reach that point where only language acts, 'performs,' and not 'me'" (143). As with the ideas of Foucault and Derrida, Barthes holding so firmly to a notion of writing as an impersonal act and the author as a redundant category for the critic, induces an element of doubt as to the politico-ethical implications of such thinking. However, Barthes' own words arguably allay such doubts:

Writing ceaselessly posits meaning ceaselessly to evaporate it, [...]. In precisely this way literature, by refusing to assign a 'secret,' an ultimate meaning, to the text (and to the world as text), liberates what may be called an anti-theological activity, an activity that is truly revolutionary since to refuse to fix meaning is, in the end, to refuse God and his hypostases – reason, science, law. (147)

What Barthes says here echoes Butler's words, cited earlier, that stressed that political consequences such as "subordination" attend an unquestioning acceptance of established notions of the subject and its cognates, agency and authorship; that, indeed, such notions can hold the power to confine or oppress the subject in terms of his or her choices and actions. Clearly, for both theorists, the challenges addressed at essentialist notions of the subject, agency and the author are politically motivated and purposeful challenges.

Considered in broad terms, it is accurate to say that even among post-structuralist theorists such as those discussed above there has been and remains little consensus on notions of the constitution of the subject and its correlates of agency and the author. In my textual analyses I seek to remain cognisant, as Derrida insists, of the “question of knowing where [the subject and the author] comes from and how it functions” (qtd. in Rapaport 6). It is also important to point out that, while my analysis deploys the concept of the decentred subject, it resists applying it to the extent of over-explaining the primary texts and thereby ridding them of distinctive elements that are not easy to accommodate or pin down.

In summary, the methodological approach that guides analysis of primary texts in 2–5 is that their meanings do not inhere. Critics are thus taken to be players instead of policy-makers in the field of literary analysis. For this reason, and as stated earlier, theoretical standpoints are drawn upon where and when it is deemed by this researcher that they speak most clearly and eloquently to the text under scrutiny. An outline of the links of theory to the primary texts is provided in the conclusion to follow.

1.10 Conclusion

This chapter has provided socio-historical and theoretical co-ordinates for the reading of primary texts in the coming chapters. This reading seeks to unravel a complex range of motivations behind resistance to military service. The less visible acts of resistance are explored, those taken by men whose objection did not assume a public face and came closer at times to challenging the governing notions of masculinity at its roots. A young man’s will or imperative to transcend social and ideological constraints on his liberty is compellingly expressed by Stephen Daedalus, the protagonist in James Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*: “When the soul of a man is born in this country there are nets flung at it to hold it back from flight. You talk to me of nationality, language, religion. I shall try to fly by those nets” (171). The country referred to in Joyce’s words is Ireland in the early part of last century, but the words reflect the subject position of many young white men in 1980s South Africa. As with Daedalus, the will to “fly by those nets” could take on the character of a quasi-romantic gesturing on ground-level instead of something lived or liveable. In this sense then, responses to conscription were in many instances closer to what Cock terms evasion. The following chapters explore a range of evasive strategies as expressed and enacted in a

range of literary genres, beginning with expressive forms that emerged from the counter-culture of 1980s South Africa.

Chapter 2

Counter-Cultures and Homosociality

Fuck this need to be masculine, fuck it. It's a curse.
(James Clelland, *Deeper Than Colour* 24)

*And for every goddamned fighting man who has brought us to our knees,
the time has come to shine the light and get rid of this disease:
the pestilence of patriarchs and the tyranny that they wield,
where culture vindicates their sins and keeps them well concealed.*
(Roger Lucey, "Into the Light," from *Now is the Time* 2015)

2.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter it was noted that resisters to the call-up sought locales in which they could assert counter-hegemonic notions of masculine identity, and that two such locales were the sub-culture of the End Conscription Campaign (ECC) and the oppositional popular culture, or rock music counter-culture, of the period – the so-called Voëlvry movement. Despite differences, there were undoubtedly points of overlap between the organisational culture of the ECC and the Voëlvry counter-culture. The latter was influenced in its turn by the American hippie counter-culture of the 1960s, and perceptions of the Border War, as articulated by both conscripts and resisters, echoed perceptions of the Vietnam War. These influences are read on the level of discourse more than by means of a comparative analysis of distinct politico-historical events. The focus is on both the hegemonic and counter-hegemonic popular culture of the period, and on a more conventional literary representation in the form of Rick Andrew's memoir *Buried in the Sky* (2001). Andrew's text is read in the light of two essays from Gary Baines' *The South African Border War: Contested Narratives and Conflicting Memories* (2014). In the first of these essays, "Writing on the Wrong Side of History? SADF Soldier-Authors Reclaim the Border War," Baines pays attention to the ways in which Border War memoirists' perceptions were controlled and their voices silenced, and that the silencing lingers as a symptom in the narrative reconstruction of their memories. In the second essay, "The Cultural Construction of Combat: Narrative Templates of the Border War," he emphasises "obvious resonances" between the Border War and the Vietnam War in SADF veterans' narrative reconstruction of their experiences. The final section of the chapter

interacts with David Bruce's oral testimony and Rick Andrew's memoir by way of assessing the homosocial dynamic between conscripts as well as resisters to conscription.

2.2 Popular Cultures

In the previous chapter mention was made of posters, pamphlets and cartoons produced by the Veterans for Victory through which they communicated virulent homophobia, misogyny and racism. In his essay titled "The Construction and Subversion of Gender Stereotypes in Popular Cultural Representations of the Border War" (2008), Michael Drewett states that such expressive forms promoted "the government's propaganda about gender roles and the military [and] were quickly taken up by the popular culture industry, so that militarised masculinity was popularised through the mainstream media in South Africa" (94). Drewett analyses specific expressions of militarised masculinity within the mainstream media as an indicator of prohibited masculinities. As noted in Chapter 1, subversion of these expressions of masculinity occurred in the form of advertisements, posters, lyrics to popular songs, pamphlets, cartoons and record covers produced by both the ECC and by the Voëlvry counter-culture. However, it was also noted that there were instances in which the media images by which the ECC countered the SADF version of masculinity played, at times, into the hegemonic version in their appeal to male-specific courage, bravery and strength. The same can be said of modes of masculine self-presentation within the Voëlvry counter-culture. However, and prior to embarking on a consideration of the Voëlvry discourse of masculinity, it is illuminating to select from Drewett's essay two examples of the kind of gender stereotyping performed by the mainstream media during this period.

On the cover to a single track record called 'Love Manoeuvres' by Dennis East (soundtrack to the film *Boetie op Manoeuvres*) a soldier sits on a tank in motion, his one hand holding the barrel tight between his legs while the other hand grasps his rifle. He smiles broadly. Behind him is a scantily clad young woman whose body language clearly indicates that she is pursuing her man. Drewett understates the picture's message: "a fair degree of sexual innuendo [is] suggested in the pose" ("Gender Stereotypes" 107). Words such as 'brazenly asserted' accurately reflect the politics of this message. Speaking subsequently of the "body politics" that characterised representations of men and women, such as that depicted on the record cover mentioned above, Drewett directly addresses the message

behind this record cover: “The penis is linked to strength, hardness, action and potency and to ‘have balls’ is to be courageous, a man of strength and action” (111–12). A related idea of manliness is expressed in a cartoon from a daily newspaper reprinted in Drewett’s essay. The cartoon depicts a middle-aged man with a *boep* (huge belly) standing with a five litre bottle labelled *Plonk* (slang for cheap white wine) in one hand while berating with the pointing finger of his other hand “a younger ‘alternative’ male (presumably his son) who is wearing ear rings, bangles [and long hair]: ‘Look what you look like! I can’t wait till the army makes a man of you!’” (102). The notion of masculinity underpinning the father’s assertion of a viable and desirable means of actualising masculinity is, of course, thrown into question.

2.3 The Voëlvry Counter-Culture and the Question of Heroes and Idiots

Timothy Trengove Jones’ concept of “inbetweenness” (136), referred to earlier, articulates the subject position of gay men who were political activists during the 1980s. This concept captures the ways in which some men experienced their time as conscripts or resisters to conscription. In the eyes of the state and the majority of white South Africans such individuals were considered to be shirkers of duty, half-men, even traitors in the eyes of some. Their reluctance or refusal to enter into their National Service was not, to a large extent, taken seriously. It was more often than not ignored by members of the racial grouping from which they emerged, thereby entrenching their status as inbetweeners. Resisters might experience themselves as occupying a no man’s land between the liberation struggle and the realm of the white power elite. This precarious stance made them vulnerable in the eyes of the state to become the ANC’s “useful idiots or dupes.” Indeed, as Conway observes, in 1987 President P.W. Botha said ““the ANC is laughing up their sleeves at the naiveté of useful idiots who, as Lenin put it, can be used to further the aims of the first phase of the Revolution”” (*Masculinities, Militarisation* 135). By way of riposte, not addressed directly at Botha, David Bruce said: “I wanted to reassure myself that I wasn’t somebody’s useful idiot” (Personal interview, 14 September 2011). This aversion to being co-opted by the State extended to his aversion to being a pawn²¹ in what he calls the “ECC’s publicity machine.” Bruce also recalls having distanced himself during the 1980s from the student left,

²¹ Echoing Bob Dylan’s well-known protest song ‘You’re only a pawn in their game.’

represented during that time by the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS).²² He announces: “I did not align myself” (qtd. in Conway 136). Aversion to alignment is echoed by Lloyd Ross who ran a record company called Shifty Records which produced what Conway calls “a white student and youth anti-conscription genre of music that started to flourish in the bars of Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town” (100). Ross said of this counter-culture: “Of course I was totally interested in the struggle [...]. But I’m not a movement type of guy and never joined any political party or organisation. What fascinated me was the culture coming out of it. That’s what I wanted to capture” (qtd. in Hopkins 87).

This genre of music was the Afrikaner rock music rebellion called Voëlvry. The term itself is fecund with meanings. On a literal level it means free as a bird. It also refers to the outlaw or the fugitive, and, because voël is slang for penis, it means ‘freed penis’ or ‘free the penis.’ If the *dubbeltteken* above the ‘e’ is removed, it translates as ‘feel free.’ Voëlvryers leaned toward anarchism, shades of liberalism, conservatism in terms of gender relations, amorphous disinclination, or confusion and despair, all of which revealed the influence of the Hippie counter-culture of the 1960s. Both counter-cultures shaped the content and style of David Bruce’s public refusal to be conscripted. He announced that his “ongoing fascination with Bob Dylan” played a significant role in creating his public persona:

I picked up on this idea that you have to control the way in which your own image is presented. I would insist on things like being photographed in this way and having a degree of control over what the pamphlets said about me [...] to reassure myself that I was the person doing what I did. (Personal interview, 14 September 2011)

But this disinclination to alignment expressed by Bruce and Ross raises an important question: how, in a time fraught with constraints and urgencies, in a political context distinguished by “States of Emergency,” was it possible *not* to be aligned? Conway provides a clue to answering this question by noting that artists, musicians and actors included in the ECC were “alienated from the rest of the left” (*Masculinities, Militarisation* 108). Indeed, it can be argued that by attaching to these counter-cultures Bruce allowed himself the least aligned mode of alignment. Thus, although it is incontestable that his refusal to undergo National Service exemplified a spirit of resistance that vindicated the ECC’s political agenda, other energies were at work in the stance he adopted:

²² NUSAS was an organisation formed by anti-apartheid white students.

The six years sentence would turn me into a celebrity. I wrote a piece on Bob Marley [who] emerged as an independent voice. I felt therefore that there was a role for somebody to speak to people like a rock or reggae musician would. I was invested in the counter-culture of the 1960s, resistance to the Vietnam War in the USA. (Personal Interview, 14 September 2011)

Bruce's aversion to being somebody's useful idiot indicates an obverse side to the coin: the life or pose of the celebrity or hero. Conway observes: "David Bruce conceded that, although his family were always politically radical, his personal relations with them had been difficult. By objecting he became a hero figure to them" (100). However, Bruce's testimony reveals that the anti-Establishment flavour of his heroism may have caused his parents discomfort. He notes the way in which his father aligned himself with the liberation movement:

My father first came to South Africa from England in 1948. He was a believer in "international government" and came to South Africa as he saw racism in South Africa as a key obstacle to its achievement. He was a member of something called the International Club where he became friends with Nelson Mandela. (Personal interview, 14 September 2011)

The respectability of his father's membership to the International Club contrasts sharply with Bruce's own less purpose-driven membership of an anti-establishment microcosm in the form of the bohemian suburb of Yeoville, close to Johannesburg's CBD, with its night clubs and *dagga* (marijuana) merchants plying their trade. He spent nights in a club called Jameson's enjoying the music of a rock band, The Cherry Faced Lurchers. James Phillips, whose pseudonym Bernoldus Niemand (translated as Bernoldus Nobody), was the band's lead guitarist and vocalist and a lynchpin member of the Voëlvry Movement. Having observed that many people had discouraged him from refusing to do his military service, Bruce recalls a chance encounter with Phillips: "He said that he'd heard that I was refusing to do military service and that I should do so if I knew it was the right thing for me to do." Bruce and Phillips resonated on another level: their identification with the songs of Bob Dylan. Journalist Shaun de Waal recalls a conversation with Phillips: "I once asked how he got through the army and he said: I sang every Bob Dylan song I knew" ("Lament" 2010).

A number of Phillips'/Niemand's songs conveyed a sense of the counter-culture and the contest of masculinities during the 1980s. One of his memorable, and banned, songs "Hou my Vas Korporaal" ("Hold me Tight Corporal") featured in his album *Wie is Bernoldus*

Niemand? (1984) and a compilation album titled *A Naartjie in Our Sosatie*.²³ This song recounts a conscript dreaming one night of being embraced by his corporal. The dream surprises him, but he feels strangely consoled. As De Waal observes: “instead of seeing the army as a rite of passage to manhood, the narrator is infantilised by the military” (“Lament” 4). He begs his corporal to hold him in his arms to comfort him. More surprising still, the following night he dreams of his corporal ordering him to run and fetch some dagga for him to smoke. The final verse, in translation, reads: “Yo Yo / Troop come here / Do you see that grass / No one sees that grass / Bring it here so I can smoke it / Hold me tight corporal.” These words subvert a stock mini-narrative in which the corporal orders the conscript to fetch a designated leaf from a designated tree. Upon returning with the leaf the corporal hurls verbal abuse at the conscript and orders him to run back to the tree and pluck from it the correct leaf. He returns with the incorrect one and the ritual, with its vulgar display of power, continues. By subverting this stock-narrative with a hint of tenderness Phillips achieves something unusual for the times, and deeply ironic: a hint of man-to-man intimacy, even homo-eroticism. As has been observed previously, both of the latter were outlawed by the military.

In another of his songs, “Snor City,” Niemand explains the genealogy of the white man’s moustache (*snor* in Afrikaans) as a cultural and ideological weapon. In the army Permanent Force soldiers and those promoted to the rank of lieutenant were accorded the privilege of growing their *snors*. “As with stripes,” says Michael Drewett, “the right to grow a moustache had to be carried, so that the moustache became associated with notions of the masculinised and the militarised body” (*Gender Stereotypes* 112). Naturally, Bernoldus, being a Nobody-man, never wore a snor. As Drewett notes, James Phillips wrote the song “Snor City” “in response to the mentality that led to this mass grooming of moustaches” (112). The inner sleeve of the album includes an insert, drawn by Niemand and included in his album *Wie is Bernoldus Niemand*. This insert appears in Drewett’s essay, and he says of it “we see here a face being attacked by a moustache which has grown out of control. Rather than being attacked by the enemy in a ‘total onslaught’, the person is attacked by a ‘total onsnort’” (112). The image, Drewett concludes, suggests that “the military mentality (unthinking conformity) is more dangerous to the soldier than is the mythical ‘total onslaught’ ie. the rooi- and swartgevaar” (112). The upper lip hair and the epaulettes on his

²³ The first album translates as *Who is Bernoldus Niemand?* The second translates phonically as *Anarchy in our Society* and literally as *A Tangerine in our Kebab*.

shoulders empowered the high-ranking officer to convince the conscript to serve his nation by taking part in the Border War. Max du Preez presents his view of this war:

there was a growing sense that the war in Namibia and Angola was unwinnable. Young men participating in the Border War found themselves in a decidedly [...] vicious conflict; being exposed to grave danger and incredible hardship while witnessing their own side brutalise and torture the enemy. To make matters worse, a news blackout meant that people back home were oblivious to reality (qtd in Hopkins 59).

As a result of the news blackout, du Preez continues:

We will never know how many young white South African men died or were maimed for life in Namibia or Angola. Nor will we know how many of them came back seriously disturbed human beings – the Defence Force never recognized the existence of the psychological condition, post-traumatic stress disorder. (59)

Despite the damage du Preez mentions, the dominant style of masculine self-expression during the 1980s, whether in the contexts of military or civilian life, helped convince young men to heed the call. It was an essentially combative style. To illustrate this, James Phillips recalls his experience of the whites-only suburb in which he grew up: “It was violent. You could never go out on a weekend without there being a fight. Always fighting, fighting. Don’t look at anybody. If you catch a guy’s eyes, there’s a problem” (99). Interestingly, this comment from Phillips on aggressive eye contact between young white men finds an interesting variant in the modes of masculine self-presentation at work within the Voëlvry counter-culture. Indeed Phillips himself, once he had assumed the identity of a rock musician, more often than not presented a concealed look, his eyes invisible to the viewer. In a photograph of the nine members of the Voëlvry nation-wide tour of 1989, Phillips has his eyes hidden behind the brim of his hat (15). In the DVD accompanying Hopkins’ text Phillips is wearing the same hat as he responds to questions. This concealment of eyes extends to the presentation of partial and unsatisfactory answers to simple questions. In response to being asked for the origin of his stage-name Phillips/Niemand replies: “I don’t know, it’s just that I’ve always liked the name Niemand.” Another prominent Voëlvryer, André le Toit, who used the stage-name Koos Kombuis (Koos Kitchen), habitually averts his gaze when

responding to questions.²⁴ He sits in his living-room, eyes concealed behind black lenses that reflect the wall opposite him, and grins in a spirit of patriarchal benevolence: “You can probably hear my children playing in the back garden.” Having thus set himself up as a renegade rocker in sterile suburbia, Kombuis proceeds to narrate snippets from the dissolute lives of Voëlvry musicians on tour and in concert. He clearly assumes his rambling answers, which have little bearing on the questions posed, to be one of his rights as a rock musician. There is a revealing echo of this style of masculinity in a scene from the film *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* (1973). Pat Garrett sits at a table in a bar room with his deputy sheriff, planning the capture of Billy the Kid. He becomes aware of another character sitting alone across the room and watching them. He asks this character, named Alias and played by Bob Dylan: “Who are you?” Alias replies: “That’s a good question.” Garrett, who is a blend of law-maker and hired killer, is unsettled by the response and resumes his conversation in order to regain awareness of his mission. Arguably, Alias/Dylan’s response mingles poses typical of the counter-culture man: commitment to a style of self-expression that puts clearly demarcated social roles (a man aware of his manly mission) in question, along with a self-love bordering on arrogance, even bravado. In the 1960s the former played itself out in a distinctive style of psychedelic self-presentation, which included publicly burning draft cards in an act of refusal to serve in Vietnam. The recognisable styles whereby such men set themselves up play with and undermine the perceptions and emotions of the Establishment. In doing so, however, they also set up what becomes a new orthodoxy of self-presentation, finally taming its revolutionary potential. Before further exploring the ways in which Voëlvry musicians presented their masculine identity, it is illuminating to isolate an example in the form of the lead singer of one of the cult rock bands of the 60s and early 70s – Robert Plant of Led Zeppelin.

Jack Burton speaks of Plant’s performances as exemplars of “the androgynous appeal of the classic rock god in all his glory” (xx). This androgyny, Burton asserts, came to function as “a social marker of absolute masculinity,” suggesting “a far more complex interplay of identities within the hard rock genre” than was to be found in “the more

²⁴ I acknowledge the gold mine (or mine-field!) of critical theory on ‘the politics of the gaze,’ including the work of Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Slavoj Žižek, John Berger. Focus in this portion of Chapter 2, as well as in Chapter 4, is on the male gaze in particular senses: concealment of the eyes as an exercise of political control, ways in which photographic images project this control, and the link of masculine styles of seeing to masculine styles of hearing. These performances of the gaze serve as tributaries to the central argument. For this reason, marshalling to the argument’s aid the elaborate theoretical machinery concerned with political functions of ‘the gaze’ is not deemed necessary.

obviously playful ambiguities explored [in the 1970s] by gender pioneers like David Bowie or Prince” (1). Burton proposes: “straight camp of the rock god [...] functions as “a virtual bastion of unreconstructed masculinity” (xx). Burton traces this to the blues movement, a movement rooted in black culture with its history of slavery and oppression and the experience of ongoing segregation. For him the urgent and raw messages from the blues movement stood in stark contrast to the insipid and tame messages emerging from the music of white middle class America.²⁵ But, Burton observes, there was another dimension to blues music and culture:

An examination of the implications of racial segregation on the representations of gender demonstrated in blues music presents a picture of a critical moment in the development of rock music as a predominantly homo-social world. It is undeniable that much blues music carries with it a strong element of misogyny [...] from Bo Diddley’s joyous crow of ‘I’m a Man’ to Howling Wolf’s tortured cry of ‘I should have quit you’ [...] infused with images of a powerful, sometimes violent, masculinity under threat from a potent combination of female sexuality and domesticity. (1)

Though there was segregation in both cultures, the echoes were partial. It can be argued that the white middle class in South Africa was blinder to the lives of black people than was the case in 1960s America.

Without overlooking the racial dimension, what is of particular interest is the “unreconstructed masculinity” identified by Burton. This certainly characterises the voices of Voëlvry musicians. Although there was contestation of the militarised masculinity propounded by the National Party and the SADF, the style of self-presentation was frequently conservative in its own way in terms of its gender politics. There was, as suggested earlier, an overlap of the politics of Voëlvry and that of the ECC. Conway makes it clear that the ECC’s politics of subversion continued to water the seeds of a combative masculinity that allowed little space for feminist concerns. But it could be claimed that this style of subversion was a strategic necessity and, therefore, the ‘truest’ response to the political demands of its time and context, and that judgments of compromise or complicity such as those made by Conway are easily arrived at from a post-apartheid vantage point. In similar fashion, Graaf observes that it is unfair in retrospect to hold the present ECC accountable for political claims and stances it did not take up in the 1980s (personal interview, 29 November 2010).

²⁵ See Martin Scorsese’s bio-documentary of Bob Dylan, *No Direction Home*, for convincing evidence of the political ignorance Dylan and other white folk and rock musicians grew up with and reacted against in the 1960s.

Thus, as has already been established, a double-sidedness was at work within the Voëlvry counter-culture. There was resistance to the status quo, even androgynous self-presentation, but there was also the heteronormativity noted and criticised by Conway and other feminists, such as Theresa Edlmann (in Personal interview 23 November 2012). Pat Hopkins quotes Jennifer Ferguson, a prominent singer-songwriter who later became an ANC MP:

I see a bunch of men on stage playing big cock rock. I'm also sceptical about the messianic dimensions the movement is taking on. We're coming John-Wayne style to save South Africa. I would like to advise them to exercise control, not just to be teen-rebels [...]. Remember big cock rock can always become flaccid. (Voëlvry 158)

Gisela Geisler (2005) says Ferguson "left parliament because she found it to be 'like being back at school where the patriarchal nature is designed to kill what's feminine'" (190). Hopkins laments Ferguson's criticism of the Voëlvry style of masculinity as amounting to "the most unexpected broadside" (Voëlvry 158–9). However, Hopkins' lament is easily countered by the fact that the "broadside" is announced by a feminist, making his lament itself a symptom of gender imbalance instead of balanced opinion. Ferguson's cautionary enjoinder challenges the argument that the combative response, as mentioned earlier, was strategically justifiable as a response to the political urgencies of the period. From a feminist perspective this argument is unconvincing.

To reiterate, the American counter-culture of the 1960s and the Voëlvry counter-culture of the 1980s were anti-establishment movements that often espoused an alternative style of living closer to anarchism than single-minded political activism, a style of living frequently uncomfortable with itself. This inbetweenness is abundantly evident in Bruce observing that his refusal to serve was not solely shaped by an unwavering political commitment. Indeed, he articulates a wide range of external determinants and states of mind that shaped his decision. Over and above a few reckless encounters with security policemen, Bruce recalls experiential determinants such as addiction to daily swimming, dagga smoking, the misery of being "a link in a chain of desperate unrequited love" and the purposelessness of continually re-registering for university studies as a way of deferring his National Service and thereby delaying the decision he felt to be inevitable. His internal co-ordinates included "heightened states of mind," "emotional or energy blockages," instances of "magical luminosity," being "chaotic, confused, fucked-up and semi-suicidal," "increased mental

energy and lucidity,” and being “a walking zombie” and “a walking genius.” In retrospect he interprets these swings in mood as expressions of his “bipolar condition”:

One of the things that I’ve had to come to terms with was that it was a type of mental instability that enabled me to do what I did. In a sense [this] enabled me to do something I was committed to doing, but not really capable of doing. The heightened state facilitated my capacity to make the decision and live it out. I always knew I was going to do it. It enabled me to do what I knew I was going to do, what I was committed to doing. (Personal interview, 14 September 2011)

Although he appears to grant to his “heightened state” a life of its own, there is also the sense that it has the power to unhinge his capacity to act out his political convictions. Young white men such as Bruce – born into privilege and having developed a political conscience – experienced the difficulty of living with ambiguities and contradictions, and at times this difficulty carried with it the risk of excessive introspection. Much of Bruce’s testimony points to vacillations of the will – a circularity of thoughts and emotions. These vacillations are well illustrated by him voicing three consecutive interpretations of the same incident:

[...] after the party had been going for a while, the police marched in [...] I was standing outside and [...] shouted through the window - “you fucking fascist!” What happened then was that this one young cop stepped up to me and kicked me full-on in the balls. It was a mean kick but it missed my testicles by millimetres so I didn’t double over. [...] We were all taken off to Hillbrow police station and [...] I wasn’t submissive [...] a lot of people, me prominent amongst them, were giving them a hard time. I insisted that I wanted to lay charges against them for assault and I think this contributed to their feeling that this might be more trouble than it was worth. Eventually we were all released. (Personal interview, 14 September 2011)

Later in his testimony Bruce contrasts the above incident with previous encounters with policemen:

JJ was holding the placard on the Apollo Café corner in Yeoville until the cops took hold of him and shoved him in the back of their van. I just went into a flat panic, running up the road to try and find a telephone to call someone from. There were also occasional demonstrations at Wits that I used to attend after I became a student there. But I’d dreaded them and was always fucking terrified. (Personal interview, 14 September 2011)

However, he reflects again on the “night of the party”:

I had this direct confrontation with the cops whom I formerly feared so much. But this time I didn’t feel cowed by it and emerged feeling somehow victorious. I suppose I

gained a sense from this incident that I could confront them and not be cowed by them. (Personal interview, 14 September 2011)

These shifts in Bruce's interpretation enact both a "refusal to be cowed" to being "fucking terrified," further complicating an understanding of the notion of heroism. The policeman's and Bruce's expressions of their masculinity have this in common: they are combative. As observed earlier, for Conway the anti-conscription movement frequently voiced its own form of combative masculinity, although the movement included committed pacifists.²⁶

Such combative proclamations of heroism amount to an essentially non-dialectical engagement or a contest leading nowhere new – ultimately consent instead of contest. For this reason, such proclamations fail to perform a meaningful unmasking of the ideologically inscribed or one-dimensional man. Both the voices of ECC activists and the voices of Voëlvry musicians and their fans lean toward consent in the way described above. If the notion of heroism had been substantially problematised and revised it might have laid the ground for more productive energies of resistance, along with a capacity to move toward an inclusive sense of what kinds of man it is possible to become. Burton's comparison of Robert Plant with David Bowie and Prince (and Freddie Mercury) emphasises a shift or progression in rock stars' expressions of their masculinity towards a more inclusive notion of masculine identity. Acknowledgement of this shift confirms that masculinities are shaped by the power relations and ruling ideologies of their historical moment. Further shifts have taken place through the five decades that have followed the 1980s. This considerable gap in time invites, as point of comparison, the citing of lyrics from a song titled "I Cry Sometimes," written and performed by a Grahamstown-based band called NIA Collective in 2013. Lead vocalist Sebastian Jamieson begins:

I cry sometimes when I see all of these chains holding me back from being me –
society's expectancy forcing me into its mould. And I don't want to be just another
clone. If I show you my tears and expose all my fears am I less of a man than you
expect me to be?

The song then moves into the rap-style lyrics of female vocalist Injairu Kulundu:

There are far-reaching consequences to versions of what it means to be a man. It
seems to me that there is a fracture beyond debates of nature and nurture, those cast-

²⁶ Michael Graaf was one of these, whereas Bruce made it clear during his trial that he would have served in an army if he had considered doing so to have been politically justifiable.

in-stone patriarchal roles [...]. There's gentler strains of the masculine that often have to defend being a feeling human. That may sound like another stereotype, but we do not have to look far to see the vices: the statistics, the violence, the fear, the shame – versions of what it means to be a man.

Ideas expressed in this song reflect those discussed elsewhere in this and the previous chapter: notably the presence in men, despite socially-sanctioned denial and repression, of emotions of vulnerability such as fear and shame. The lyrics suggest that these emotions are more than effects or symptoms. They are also opportunities to recast the version of masculinity that is “cast in stone.” At risk of oversimplifying, these lyrics indicate a capacity to reappraise masculinity that was not readily available in 1960s America or 1980s South Africa. Perhaps the lyrics of NIA Collective suggest that in the post-apartheid period ‘we’ have grown closer to a self-aware and politically progressive notion of masculinity? However, shifts in masculine self-perception and self-presentation from one decade or epoch to the next may be noticeable, but surely not generalisable. There is an element of the abstract in attempting to discern shifts of consciousness on the general level of historical change. On the other hand, focus on the individual better conduces to a concrete awareness of transformation and possibilities for transformation, for what Paul Morris, cited earlier, refers to as a “fuller masculinity.” It is debatable whether the idea of a “fuller masculinity” can be anything more than an essentialist ruse designed to detract attention from the fact that masculinity is always already a construct. To recap the earlier discussion of Stoltenberg's *Refusing to Be a Man*, assuming manhood to be a construct instead of an essence makes transformation of a man, as concept and practice, politically possible and desirable. To perceive masculinity as a construct is to make possible a depth of critique that cannot be achieved by an essentialist orientation towards masculine identity. By adhering to the former perception of masculinity, one often gains effective purchase on the complexity of the matter at hand: the fractures, fault-lines and elements of contingency that characterised the drama of white South African masculinities in the 1980s.

On one level the hero-idiot binary referred to earlier taps into an essentialist perception of masculine identity. On another level however, it makes strategic sense to revive the hero concept to take part in a comparative analysis of the discursive sites of the Border War and the Vietnam War.

2.4 Discourses of the Vietnam and Border Wars

In an interview conducted by Mandy de Waal a Border War veteran named Tony Batista recalls “a moment of truth and beauty in a war that made him who he is today” (np). Batista says of this moment: “It wasn’t like I was an idiot, but I still went in with my eyes totally closed.” Against his closed eyes and the idiocy he denies, Batista holds up the story of “one true hero” as the model for authentic manhood. This hero was a fellow-soldier and helicopter pilot who, with no concern for war-time allegiances, took upon himself the seemingly impossible task of single-handedly rescuing a civilian casualty from enemy territory. Batista sums up the impact on him of this soldier’s actions: “He saved two lives that day. In that moment he saved my life. I am not talking about the physical – but that moment in time has changed me so profoundly.” De Waal confirms: “A light came on in Batista’s life that day.” Batista’s reconstruction of the redemptive effect on him of a true hero creates a legend or romance. Romances and legends feature challenge, sacrifice, overcoming and becoming: heroes in their quests for triumph, truth and redemption.²⁷ Batista has revisited the notion of heroism in his story, wrested it from the ideological grip of the SADF, and recast it as a private myth that reaches beyond privacy. The ‘truth’ in his judgment is not in question. Other views of the truth of heroism are expressed in the narratives of Border War veterans as well as those of anti-conscription activists.

Another member of the Voëlvry movement, Johannes Kerkorrel, said of the Border War: “It’s Vietnam all over again” (Hopkins 59). In his essay titled “The Cultural Construction of Combat: Narrative Templates of the Border War” (2014) Gary Baines argues that “the symbolically constructed world of the South African soldier in the ‘Border War’ has obvious resonances with [...] narratives constructed by American veterans of the Vietnam War” (31). Baines examines ways in which “soldier-authors” such as Rick Andrew refashioned their experiences in terms of their knowledge of the Vietnam War, thereby mythologising involvement and resistance to it in ways that echoed the flurry of literary and filmic revisits that took place in the USA subsequent to the war. In 1960s America protest against the Vietnam War was actively voiced within the public arena. Whether these voices were heeded, ignored or rejected, they made themselves heard. There were distinct lines that separated the faction of resisters from the faction of participants, willing or unwilling, and apologists. In comparison, resistance in South Africa to involvement in the Border War was

²⁷ See Joseph Campbell’s *A Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949), to be discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

not widely or loudly voiced. Reasons for this were the government's largely successful policy of denying the fact that the SADF was involved in combat on the Border. Interviewee Graham Ellis recalls the effect on his father of this deceit:

My father suffered something of a political crisis, a crisis of conscience, at that time, because he had in fact bought into the government line that all this war was necessary to protect South Africa (white South Africa in truth) and that there were no soldiers in Angola. Yet, he knew that his son [Ellis' brother] was there when he heard government ministers declaring on radio that there were no soldiers there! Of course, this made him aware of his previous ignorance. And so he changed in political feelings and affiliation quite dramatically. (Personal interview, 15 November 2010)

As pointed out earlier, in the decades following the Vietnam War a significant number of films emerged that marked a seeming need to revisit that war and its consequences. There was a therapeutic element to these returns, reflected by the fact that after the war the diagnostic category Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) entered the layman's vocabulary. As noted previously, over the past two decades there have emerged a large number of nostalgic revisits of the Border War in the form of memoirs written by ex-conscripts and high-ranking commanders. However, there have been revisits of a different kind. These take the form of academic theses and journal articles, conferences and seminar papers, photograph exhibitions, newspaper articles, art exhibitions, novels, memoirs and the restaging of plays originally written during the 1980s. By way of example, in 2011 the South African National Arts Festival in Grahamstown hosted Anthony Akerman's *Somewhere on the Border*, first staged in the early 1980s. The playwright presented a lecture on the genesis of the play and its afterlife, situating it within its apartheid and post-apartheid contexts. The same year of this Arts Festival saw the launch of James Clelland's award-winning novel called *Deeper than Colour*, whose protagonist is a Border War veteran suffering PTSD. In a similar fashion to Akerman, the author presented a public lecture on the text. 2012 saw the transformation into dance theatre by Bailey Snyman of gay conscript André Carl van der Merwe's memoir-novel *Moffie*. In July 2013 Rhodes University hosted a conference, co-ordinated by the Legacies of the Apartheid Wars (LAWS) initiative which was founded by Theresa Edlmann, that focused, amongst other concerns, on the Border War and its damaging afterlife. On 24th May 2014 a conference titled "Silence after Violence" was held at the University of Free State. Thus it is clear that interest in the Border War shows no signs of abating.

The title to Baines' afore-mentioned essay makes it clear that "narrative templates" are central to the cultural construction of a combative masculinity (31). In his discussion of

these templates Baines identifies ten themes common to the literature of the Border and Vietnam Wars. These include a variety of attitudes towards the ‘enemy,’ attitudes toward women left behind, loss of innocence, fatalism, an uncomfortable sense of fighting for a lost cause, a love-hate relationship with combat, combat madness, post-traumatic stress disorder and soldiers’ experiences of “emasculatation/remasculatation” (“Narrative Templates” 34–41). Baines briefly discusses Rick Andrew’s *Buried in the Sky* in the light of this last mentioned trope. Prior to presenting my own reading of Andrew’s memoir in tandem with Baines’s reading, it is necessary to elaborate briefly on the idea of emasculatation as used by Baines.

Strategies of emasculatation were routinely deployed by SADF commanders to instil what it considered to be the mode of masculinity appropriate to soldiership. The task in basic training was to break down what was perceived to be the half-formed man in order to build up the man fit for battle. This mission to build up the conscript implied constantly defining what constituted masculinity by renouncing the ‘feminine.’” As discussed in the preceding chapter, Graaf et al. (1988) reveal that military men such as Veterans for Victory did more than merely renounce the feminine. Along with women and femininity, homosexuality and the racial other were accorded pariah status. It is difficult to deny that most, if not all, military training involves a renunciation of the feminine. The narrative event from Andrew’s novel that Baines mentions in order to illustrate this is that of the character James who receives a ‘Dear John’ letter (*Buried* 68–71). It is clear to James’ commanding officer Manie and fellow-conscripts that something has unmanned him. Manie approaches him and notices the letter:

‘What’s wrong Jim, what happened?’
 ‘The fucken bitch. She’s screwing my best friend. I never thought that she could do something like this.’
 ‘Ag, women will do anything, Jim. But your best friend? That’s another story.’ (69)

Baines states that, instead of being just another story, this one is to be found both in Border War and Vietnam narratives (“Narrative Templates” 38). Manie’s “Ag, women will do anything” is a reflex denunciation. However, his ‘wisdom’ does nothing to console James. The following day he and two other conscripts accompany James to the local shop where he uses the public phone to “reason with his ex”: “‘Ja but why do you have to wait till my back is turned? [...] and that bastard Terry I’ll pulp the cunt [...] you both betrayed me’” (*Buried* 70–1). This betrayal, Baines observes, is of a particular sort: “The character [...] is betrayed by his best friend but the girlfriend is regarded as being wholly to blame” (“Narrative

Templates” 38). Baines also notes that although women are usually treated with suspicion in war stories, men are deemed “reliable and trustworthy” (38). He adds: “The camaraderie and male bonding formed during training and combat is regarded by soldier-authors as one of war’s – indeed life’s – most lasting gifts” (38).

The renunciation of the feminine contained in Manie’s words takes place, as Judith Coullie observes, at such a “profound level of being” as to “result in greater investment in homosocial relations, than in male-female relations” (16). Having stated that “masculinity is a homosocial enactment,” Michael Kimmel continues: “we test ourselves, perform heroic feats, take enormous risks all because we want other men to grant us our manhood” (187). Referring to the Freudian model for the formation of male sexuality, Kimmel contends that erotic desire and the desire to emulate underlie the boy’s relation to his father during the pre-Oedipal phase at the same time as he sees his father through the eyes of his mother. By seeing him thus he repudiates her and by doing so he repudiates the feminine side of his psyche. But homoeroticism is illicit and must be suppressed. It requires homophobia to translate it into legitimate homosociality (187). Kimmel continues:

Homophobic flight from intimacy with other men is the repudiation of the homosexual within – never completely successful and hence constantly re-enacted in every homosocial relationship [...]. Homophobia is the fear that other men will unmask us, emasculate us, reveal to us and the world that we do not measure up, that we are not real men. We are afraid to let other men see that fear. Fear makes us ashamed, because the recognition of fear in ourselves is proof to ourselves that we are not as manly as we pretend [...]. We are ashamed to be afraid. Shame leads to silence – the silences that keep other people believing that we actually approve of the things that are done to women, to minorities, to gays and lesbians in our culture. (188–9)

Within the structurally homosocial context of military life other ‘normal’ men frequently become objects of derision. This derision serves the purpose of confirming an attitudinal consensus that keeps fear, shame and insecurity at bay. Such feelings cannot be voiced. In preparing for combat and in combat itself the fear to let other men see one’s fear is far more pressing than it might be in the context of civilian life. If a man in the former context was to voice his fear he would instantly be banished to the realm of the sissy, the untouchable. His honesty would taint and threaten the consensus. But the consensus is a construct. This means that opportunities for an honest voicing of fear and shame are, however rare, a possibility. Because such honesty is a possibility and not something actual, it is expressed on the level of

intimacy, providing faint suggestions that the consensus of silence might, if only for barely detectable instants, be challenged.²⁸

Insights provided by Baines and Kimmel point to the underside of heroism: fear and the strategy of silence that controls it or prevents it from spilling out and exposing the vulnerable man to the censure of other men. This suggests that the hero-idiot binary operates on two levels: the alternative versus the hegemonically inscribed male, and the contest of the hero and the idiot within the same man. On the second level, the voice of honesty whereby the soldier owns his fear may in fact be that of a hero instead of an idiot – the measure of his true or real manhood. This voice carries the potential to rupture and challenge the silent consensus more effectively than any other. By owning up to his fear and vulnerability, a man is more likely to express and enact pro-feminist views. Stoltenberg asserts that a political necessity for pro-feminist men is “to begin to live as a conscientious objector to all scenarios of male bonding – to refuse to cooperate with all the patterns of expectation that whenever two [or more] males meet, they are to respect one another’s masculinity and condone one another’s power over women” (qtd. in Murphy 2004: 48). Clearly the consciousness-raising suggested by Stoltenberg’s words is leagues away from the kind of consciousness that makes the renunciation of women and the feminine an unquestioned assumption or established truth. Kimmel asserts: “masculine identity is born in the renunciation of the feminine not in the direct affirmation of the masculine, which leaves masculine gender identity tenuous and fragile” (186). On the other hand, the identity of the gender-sensitive man is tenuous and fragile in its way, even more so within the ultra-masculine context of the military. Characteristically, the hegemonic man cannot or refuses to acknowledge tenuous and fragile emotions; whereas the gender-sensitive man, by failing to repress vulnerabilities such as these, sets himself up for dismissal of his masculinity. Though showing the feminine side might be construed as critique, the ultra-masculinity of the context swallows it up and neutralises it.

However, there is another dimension to the male bonding in the military and the denunciation of women. As Lynne Segal states, this denunciation serves a double purpose: “‘women’ used as a term of abuse for incompetent performance [...] serves not only to discipline men, but to raise ‘masculine’ morale against the threats of a more typically feminine reality of enforced servility and conformity characterising army life” (86). To equate incompetent performance with womanliness emasculates the conscript, but at the same

²⁸ See the novels and memoirs discussed in Chapters 3 and 4.

time it remasculates him by holding up the dread possibility of becoming a woman. It is simultaneously insult and strategy. Hints or suggestions of conscripts' feminine side are rare though detectable in memoirs and novels that record Border War experience. For example, in a narrative fragment titled "Jewellery," Rick Andrew recounts having found "two pods [...] that contain seeds made of a carvable, milky coloured substance" (*Buried* 104). He indulges a desire: "it is pure pleasure to carve into it with my pen knife. A blessed therapy [...] to create something small and sacred [...] something beautiful" (104). He acquires "a large mobile tool kit" and sets about crafting the pod into a pendant. Finally, he uses "a bootlace to hang it around [his] neck" (105). Clearly, the pendant sets him apart, is a marker of his difference:

I keep this talisman from the eyes of those officers who might see it as suspicious – a reversion to primitivism, touching dark shamanic forces, or just being a goddamned hippie. I wear the comforting pendant for the duration of the camp, and eventually give it into the hands of my wife when I get home. (105)

The will to craft his difference in this way carries with it an intensity that moves it to the level of a need. The attachment to beauty expressed by Andrew differs markedly from the meaning attached to the word in Batista's narrative, referred to earlier. The latter attaches to ethical or moral growth whereas the former, while not excluding these, attaches also to the "comforting" or redemptive capacity of an aesthetic awareness and sensitivity. Andrew's aesthetic sensibility involves the crafting of jewellery and the writing and singing of songs. In his memoir *Dead Leaves* (discussed in Chapter 4) Dan Wylie recalls writing poetry and sketching in a war zone. For both memoirists the use of hands to aesthetic ends represents an element of nurture – a capacity to respect the 'feminine side.' Although it is politic to be cautious of assigning gender-specificity to human activities, it might be argued that commitment to jewellery-making, art and poetry acknowledges and honours the gentler side in a context incommensurate with its expression. The contrary or oppositional mode of being male suggested by this portion of Andrew's memoir points to the fact that a space has been created for enactment of an alternative masculinity, a remasculation of its own. Andrew crafting the pendant points to his refusal to be entirely silenced by the going notions of the masculine. Intimations of other ways of being a man within a context unfriendly to such ways generate interest in understanding the ways alternative styles were stymied or silenced.

Gary Baines identifies and discusses a specific way in which the silencing mentioned above was practiced ("Soldier Authors" 13–30). This was a strategy whereby 'the truth' of the Border War was set up and vindicated. Baines focuses on expression of this strategy to be

found in the memoirs of ex-SADF soldiers of all ranks. Perhaps surprisingly, his analysis even reveals elements of vindication (sometimes including nostalgia) within memoirs that express aversion and shame about involvement in the Border War and ‘township duty’ (20). However, such memoirs fall short of monopolising the truth in that they present at times what might be called counter-truths.²⁹ The latter have largely been rendered impotent by the recent deluge of Border War memoirs written by both veteran military commanders as well as by impassioned combatants of lower ranks.³⁰ Baines provides as example of remembrances of Border War commanders “a recent collection of writings compiled by former SADF chief General Jannie Geldenhuys published in Afrikaans as *Ons was Daar* and translated into English as *We Were There*” (15).³¹ The title implies that “‘having been there’ was a prerequisite for providing an authoritative account of the ‘Border War’” (15), that “SADF soldiers of all ranks have [...] boldly proclaimed that their first-hand experience enables them to know and write the truth about the war” (14). Baines cites Harari as holding that “the quintessential late modern western war story describes war as an experience of learning the truth about oneself and about the world” (16). The hero of the story, Baines continues, “is most often an ignorant youth whom war turns into a wise veteran; a typical rite of passage story or Bildungsroman” (16). He emphasises the extent to which the truth claims made by veteran soldiers are essentially stories reflecting the journeys of heroes. But there are other stories that ask “What is it about war that teaches wisdom?” (16). For Geldenhuys and a number of ex-SADF commanders recalling the Border War the answer to this question is that the war was a just war with a cause each soldier agreed upon. This meant that each soldier’s participation was by definition heroic. The memories of war in Geldenhuys’ compilation uphold the truth of battle at the cost of truths. But what of truths not easily silenced or truths that refuse to be silenced? Clearly truth has a broader reach than that provided by those who “were there.” Truth extends to different assumptions or convictions as to what it meant to be there.

²⁹ Rick Andrew’s *Buried in the Sky* and Anthony Feinstein’s *Battle-Scarred* (discussed in Chapter 4) are examples of these.

³⁰ Baines presents a list of such memoirs published from 2001 to 2011. I pay attention to the two mentioned in the footnote above, as well as to Granger Korff’s *Nineteen With a Bullet* (2009).

³¹ Other such memoirs include Brigadier-General Dick Lord’s *From Fledgling to Eagle* (2000) and *Vlamgat* (2008), A.J. Brooks’ *The Border* (2007), Colonel Jan Breytenbach’s *The Buffalo Soldiers* (2002), Granger Korff’s *Nineteen with a Bullet* (2009), General Jannie Geldenhuys’ *We Were There: Winning the War for Southern Africa* (2012) and *The Eye of the Firestorm* by Major-General Roland de Vries (2013).

If one were to imagine a soldier-author admitting another or unofficial version of a military event, his own retelling would be doing more than expanding and individualising his mental horizon. By saying ‘this is not true to me,’ ‘this is not me,’ ‘being here is alien to me,’ he is laying claim to a particular truth or version of the truth. A mode of manliness as rigid as that deployed in the military context demands that the conscript turns his gaze from the “crack in everything,” thereby preventing the light from getting in.³² If the battle as self-same event is to be won, cracks cannot be noticed. However, no event, even a battle, can be considered an event in which selves respond as one. There is never one pair of eyes that perceives the event, which makes of it a battle experienced by distinct individuals instead of by the “universal soldier.”³³

Baines registers the importance, for the sake of achieving a balanced understanding of the Border War, to resist according “testimony a special epistemic privilege in our common understanding of the past” (“Soldier-Authors” 16). For this reason he validates the importance of listening to as broad as possible a range of voices in order to access as broad as possible a range of truths, or claims to truth. The testimony of those who were there presents only a part of the picture. Baines argues that the eye-witness voices, often voices more sensitive to narratives being rooted in discourse rather than facts, have as important a role to play in understanding the truths of battle as do the so-called “flesh-witnessing”³⁴ accounts (15). As noted earlier, another “part of the picture,” and one which has received less academic attention, is presented by men who were neither flesh- nor eye-witnesses. These were men engaged in a battle of a different kind: the conscientious objectors and the men who were not there because they either deserted, went into exile, enlisted in Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) or stayed within the borders of the country and evaded. Experientially, there were stark differences between the men in these two zones of battle. However, in terms of homosocial relations, there were also echoes.

³² Rephrasing the line from Leonard Cohen’s song “Anthem”: “There’s a crack in everything, that’s how the light gets in.”

³³ A series of science fiction films (1992–2012) in which the protagonist, an American soldier killed in the Vietnam War, re-emerges in the 1990s as a *Universal Soldier* (or UniSol).

³⁴ A term Baines borrows from Yuval Noah Harari (2008).

2.5 Homosociality in the Oral Testimony of David Bruce and Rick Andrew's Memoir

It has been seen that the South African and American countercultures influenced conscientious objector David Bruce and Border War veteran Rick Andrew. These countercultures created spaces for the exercise of oppositional or anti-Establishment voices; voices through which the silences imposed by homosociality could be challenged. However, echoing Conway's comments on the ECC brand of activism, I contend that these countercultures helped shape another type of homosociality instead of presenting a critique of the dominant one. In this sense, the counter-hegemonic aversion was, in the final analysis, little more than another version. It may have challenged the SADF and the apartheid state in terms of its racial policy and the ways in which it required white men to interact with each other, but it did not offer a significant challenge on the level of the gender politics of the time. Although this is not an overt oversight or omission, it is manifest on a subtler level: relations with other men and attitudes towards women that are not scrutinised or problematised.

Despite the anti-Establishment impetus of Bruce's and Andrew's narratives, any discomfort with or alienation from men whose agendas jarred with theirs was felt vaguely, as if awaiting words that were not yet available. This can be considered another level of inbetweenness. In the case of Bruce this was expressed as being a "walking zombie" and a "walking genius" on the one hand, and aligned to the ECC's sober political mission on the other. Different, though related, tensions of allegiance are present in Rick Andrew's narrative. In the section of his memoir that precedes the Epilogue, titled "Past Returning," he reveals these tensions by narrating a train journey to Cape Town in 1984, six years after the end of his National Service. A troop of soldiers boards the train and five of these soldiers enter his compartment with "all their kit and rifles" (*Buried* 194).³⁵ Their presence unhinges him: "I was reminded – at a time when I thought I had escaped it – of my captivity in South Africa's social, political and military grip. I didn't want to see the soldiers. I was flooded with anger, disgust and hatred for the spirit which surrounded and animated our times" (194). Andrew's feeling of entrapment and dread about the journey to come arises from the fact that the time in which he was one of the men carrying kit and rifles is long past, seemingly severed. But there is more to this scene than is offered by a first reading, and the added meaning is contained in his use of the word "animated." The idea that emotions of "anger,

³⁵ See in interview with Graham Ellis (Appendix) in which he recalls his entrapment in a train compartment with eager conscripts on the way to this and their basic training.

disgust and hatred” can animate “our times” is saturated with irony. It is difficult to understand how the ugly emotions generated by serving in the SADF in the 1970s and 1980s could have had the power to animate. However, use of the word suggests that the mode of homosociality the conscripts bring with them into his compartment on the train, remind him of ways of being that were entirely at odds with that mode. The suggestion is that such harsh emotions played a role in animating his time and that of fellow conscripts, even revivifying their spirit. Despite the dominance of the hegemonic man within the military domain and Andrew’s pained alienation from it as he sits in the train compartment, he clearly recalls gaps for self-expression, or what is referred to elsewhere as “redemptive intimacy.”

Varela and Dhavan state that “Hegemony represents itself everywhere in its saturating silences or ritual repetitions” (94). However, this invasiveness and pervasiveness is not without its fault-lines or cracks. Comaroff and Comaroff assert:

Undeclared and unspoken, hegemony only becomes a site for contestation when its invisible power is made transparent. And because hegemony must constantly be made, by the same token, it may be unmade. Intrinsically unstable and shifting over time and space, hegemonic orders are vulnerable. (qtd. in Varela and Dhavan 94)

An example of invisibility made transparent and the vulnerability that results from it is the narrative incident that follows the five conscripts having entered the narrator’s compartment. In this scene Andrew is subjected to an unwelcome display of power directed at him by the commanding officer. Feeling threatened, he withdraws to the toilet cubicle to fashion his pen knife into a spike weapon. This action contrasts sharply with his crafting of the pendant. Indeed, the makeshift weapon marks regression to a darker mode of self-assertion: “the spike emerged from between my first and second fingers [...] a sharp and lacerating weapon, medieval, sneaky, mean and ugly” (196). It signifies a return to a stereotypically manly mode of being that creates in the reader’s mind the expectation of violence. But the expectation is removed in the scene that follows: one of the conscripts picks up a guitar and a musical conversation ensues. The guitar is handed to Andrew and he plays his favourite tunes. The commanding officer stands at the margin of the group, seething with anger. Andrew, however, tries to overcome his defensive aggression: “I looked at him hard while I was playing the guitar just to let him know how the situation had changed. I was safe thanks to music. And then I relented, and gave him a smile, but he was too angry to let it go” (196). The interpersonal tensions contained in these words move to the personal level in the concluding lines to this section: “When the guys got off in De Aar I felt quite lonely in my

compartment” (196). This expression of loneliness contrasts with his having relished at the start of the journey the prospect of having the compartment entirely to himself. The pleasure of aloneness transforms to the displeasure of loneliness so that there is flatness to his final affirmation: “I cleaned up and turned my mind once more to my own journey” (196). The emotional tension in these words says a good deal about two often contrary modes of being with other men: the desire to be apart and the desire to be part of, expressing a sometimes comfortable and sometimes uncomfortable homosociality.

The young conscripts’ arrival in his compartment leads Andrew to reminisce on the time in his life in which he experienced himself as being held captive. The fact that he retrospects from 1984, a year in which the National Party held desperately to its reins of power, intensifies the stifled emotions he experiences. These emotions reflect the effectiveness of hegemonic control during the 1980s, a control that was achieved through decades of ideological persuasion or consensus-building directed at the white minority by the white minority government. In the previous chapter a sense was provided of the ritual-driven indoctrination by which the schooling system prepared young men for their military service. Varela and Dhavan describe this exercise of power:

The production of hegemony in civil society involves regulating everyday activities and interactions sustained over time so that it is no longer perceived as an operation of power. Through repetition it becomes so deeply inscribed in the everyday that it is invisible as a form of control. (94)

There is a significant difference between the voices of David Bruce and Rick Andrew, but there is also an echo of a particular sort. The difference lies in the degree to which young white men were aware of the apartheid government’s brazen exercise of control. For Bruce this exercise of control was visible enough to enable the stance he adopted. For Andrew lived awareness of this control came years after completion of his military service. However, it can be argued that their testimony is alike in the image it presents of an awkwardly positioned young man not sure how go about defining himself and his actions in relation to other men.

2.6 Conclusion

For a number of South Africans, black and white, and for a variety of reasons that related to the positions they occupied along the social scale of a segregated society, the 1980s might

have been experienced as alienating in one moment and instilling an urgent sense of belonging in the next. This chapter has focused attention on these shifts or tensions of identity with reference to a specific grouping – young white South Africans who were influenced by the counter-cultures of 1960s USA and 1980s South Africa. These counter-cultures helped receptive conscripts and objectors discover cracks or fault-lines they might exploit to achieve their own style of subversion; their own challenge to the norms that governed and secured the power base of the white minority during the apartheid years. The Voëlvry counter-culture did deviate from these norms, but this deviation did not automatically constitute subversion because, as Varela and Dhavan put it: “norms depend upon deviations for their continued existence” (96). Treatment in this chapter of man-to-man dynamics within the military context as well as the counter-cultural contexts of the 1960s provides concrete examples of this relation of deviations to norms as understood by Varela and Dhavan. These two authors point out an important lesson provided by Foucault: “that we are indebted to limits for they are not only constraints but also ‘conditions of possibility,’ namely, ‘enabling limitations’” (97).

The extent to which the Voëlvry counter-culture was enabled by limitations imposed upon political consciousness during the 1980s is debatable. Indeed, it has been suggested in this chapter that the critique of gender politics in both the American and South African counter-cultures was neither far- nor deep-reaching. Read generously, the political challenge presented by these counter-cultures can be left as an open question. The coming chapter marks a move to a different set of questions that arise from novels and short stories written by gay authors who performed their National Service.

Chapter 3

Gay Voices of Resistance

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter acknowledged the inbetween status of resisters who experienced themselves as awkwardly positioned between their resistance to conscription and their privileged position on the social scale. In Chapter 1 mention was made of the discomfort felt by gay resisters who did not always feel at home within the anti-conscription movement and the broader anti-apartheid struggle as a result of experiencing their own political interests as secondary or overlooked. This chapter pays attention to strains of resistance to conscription and its bedrock ideology of masculinity in texts written by gay authors who performed their National Service, each of whose protagonists narrate their experiences as conscripts. The texts discussed, in chronological order rather than order of analysis, are Koos Prinsloo's *Jonkmankas* (1982), Damon Galgut's *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* (1992, revised edition 2006),³⁶ Mark Behr's *The Smell of Apples* (translated edition published in 1995 and original Afrikaans edition, *Die Reuk van Appels*, in 1993)³⁷ and André Carl van der Merwe's *Moffie* (2006). Emphasis is placed on the tensions between the privately felt identity of a gay white man and the publicly sanctioned notions of what it means to be a man, as expressed in the journeys of each protagonist-narrator.³⁸ Thus the central concern is with processes of identity and counter-identity formation. For understandable reasons, but not necessarily, the contest of identities was often felt more acutely by gay men. Analysis of the texts makes use of critical works by David Medalie (1997, 2000), Michiel Heyns (1998), Rita Barnard (2000), Oliver Phillips (2005), Andrew van der Vlies (2011) and Leon de Kock (2013).

The chapter begins by mapping the socio-cultural co-ordinates pertaining to gay writing in 1980s and post-apartheid South Africa. This enables an informed assessment of the constraints on and liberties taken by Prinsloo, Galgut, Behr and van der Merwe. The analysis that follows is sub-grouped as follows: us and them; fathers and sons; moving towards other

³⁶ Although commentary refers mainly to the 2006 edition, a portion thereof compares extracts from both editions.

³⁷ Critical commentary refers to the English language edition.

³⁸ This term is used only here. It can be assumed that for the remainder of this chapter the word protagonist indicates that the protagonists in each novel are at the same time the novels' narrators.

masculinities; and the problem of coming out. These areas of focus make possible both an integrated and single-focused reading of the primary texts – a mode of reading well suited to addressing the complexities of identity-formation.

Having examined queer experiences and struggles for identity in the novels of Galgut and van der Merwe, and the suggested or implied struggle presented in Behr's novel,³⁹ the chapter will conclude with a consideration of the short stories of Prinsloo, a writer whose work provides a queer agenda that distinguishes it from the work of the other writers.⁴⁰

3.2 Context

Conscripted into the SADF, gay men and straight men experienced the same invasions of the liberty of their minds and bodies. As noted earlier, some accepted the constraints as rites of passage, while others were unhinged by these constraints, or withdrew in order to avoid danger and allay their fears. A bizarre response within the military to some gay conscripts' aversion was a practice called "aversion therapy." From the 1970s to 1980s this took the form of curing homosexual conscripts via electro-convulsive shock therapy of what was considered to be a curse and aberration against nature. Its principal practitioner was a psychiatrist named Aubrey Levine who fled South Africa for Canada in 1995. Levine has subsequently been charged with human rights abuses committed in South Africa and was sentenced to five years' imprisonment for molesting his gay patients.⁴¹

Damon Galgut managed his aversion to military service by conforming to the extent of being declared National Serviceman of the Month (NSM) in the April 1983 issue of the SADF's mouthpiece magazine, *Paratus*.⁴² The *Paratus* article praises Galgut's literary achievement – a novel titled *A Sinless Season* which he submitted for publication at the age of seventeen years. The irony of this recognition is that Galgut is gay and that the novel explores troubled homosexual relations in a boys-only reformatory. Paul Woods says of this reformatory:

³⁹ Though the content of *The Smell of Apples* does not present in a direct manner the challenges experienced by a gay protagonist, its inclusion is justified for the following reasons. Firstly, it provides a detailed awareness of the mechanisms of militarised masculinity which subjugated and outlawed gay men. Secondly, it presents, in a disturbing manner, a gay theme (or undertow) that connects to the protagonist Marnus' father.

⁴⁰ See Heyns 117–21.

⁴¹ http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2013-01-29-dr-shock-is-in-the-dock-and-now-his-wife-is-under-lock/#.VKRdzfnoh_w.

⁴² www.bidorbuy.co.za/item/138599651/PARATUS_MAGAZINE_APRIL_1983.html.

it becomes both an abstract setting and an exemplar of Foucault's notion that the carceral institution, whether it be prison, asylum, or medical hospital, acts to endorse, enforce and reinforce the patriarchal hegemony, the dominant order of masculine authority. (169)

Because the military institution is premised upon upholding "the dominant order of masculine authority" it too warrants being labelled a carceral institution. The irony extends to another level: in two novels Galgut subsequently wrote – *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* and *The Good Doctor* (2003) – he explores through his protagonists the psychological damage wrought by the two years of National Service he saw through to its end. In contrast with Galgut's survival, gay performance artist Stephen Cohen recalls his very brief stint as soldier-in-training in 1985:

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. (*Sunday Times*, 25 March 2012)

Whether the aversion manifested intensely, as with Cohen, or in the form of the darkly lingering detachment experienced by Galgut, it was felt in the pit of the stomach. Both confronted a fixed set of attitudes and actions within a society in which heteronormative masculinity was dominant. Homophobia was so deeply engrained in apartheid South Africa as to provide little or no space for gay voices of resistance. An understanding of this marginalisation of homosexuality benefits from awareness of shifts in gay writing from the apartheid to post-apartheid periods.

Focusing on gay writings from the 1980s till the present, Leon de Kock in his review of Eben Venter's latest novel, *Wolf Wolf* (translated into English by Michiel Heyns), asserts that Venter is in "the front ranks of writing that 'queers' the establishment – both the current one and its apartheid predecessor" (69). De Kock notes that queer fiction in South Africa has "acted as a wedge to dislodge the normative character of a racist and aggressively masculinist (and military) patriarchy, which [...] ruled the roost to disastrous human and political effect until 1994" (69). In the post-transition period, according to De Kock, gay writers of both genders gained a stronger voice because it had become possible for them to

hold to new perceptions and experiences. He says: “What is remarkable [in post-apartheid South Africa] is that the ‘queer’ content of a novel such as *Wolf Wolf* will in all likelihood be received as pretty much ‘normal’” (69). For de Kock this shift is attributable to contributions made “progressively and accumulatively” by gay writers during and after the apartheid era, regardless of gender, race or language of origin. He lists the most prominent of these writers: Koos Prinsloo, Eben Venter, Mark Behr, K Sello Duiker, Stephen Gray, Damon Galgut, Michiel Heyns, Thando Mqolozana, Hennie Aucamp, Johann de Lange, Joan Hambidge and Marlene van Niekerk. Research contributions from the Wits History Workshop, and studies available in the Gay and Lesbian Archive at the University of the Witwatersrand, have also, as de Kock puts it, helped to “reshape – for the better – our menu of options [as South Africans] for life and living” (69–70).

Oliver Phillips reflects on this broadening of the “menu of options” by interpreting interviews with ten gay men conducted 13 years after completion of their military service. Having emphasised “the contextual contingency of subjectivity” (137), he asserts that “the manner in which people situate themselves in relation to the dominant discourse of sexuality is formative of their experience as a whole, but not necessarily in a consistent or predictable fashion” (139). For de Kock the revised menu of options for masculine selfhood that characterised post-apartheid South Africa provides “a wonderful release from the ugly ‘white’ ghetto in which some of us can still remember living” (70). But at the same time as providing this release, we are also reminded of the narrow range of options the 1980s menu of masculinities presented to gay white men. This narrowness resulted in many gay men experiencing themselves as locked in specific binaries. For the purpose of textual analysis, the binaries focused upon are ‘us and them,’ pertaining to Galgut’s *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs*, and ‘fathers and sons’ in relation to the works of each of the novelists.⁴³

3.3 ‘Us and Them’ in Galgut’s *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs*

Damon Galgut’s novel *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* was first published in 1992, two years after the release of Nelson Mandela and two years before the democratic election that marked the end of apartheid. A revised edition of the novel was published in 2006. The action

⁴³ Concern with the father-son binary is notably absent from the short stories of Koos Prinsloo. An Explanation for this absence will be commented upon in section 3.8.

in the novel takes place in the period of transition from South West Africa to Namibia in 1990. The protagonist, Patrick Winter, is returning to Namibia having served on the Border the previous year. He accompanies his mother Ellen, who is returning to meet her lover, a former SWAPO soldier named Godfrey. Patrick hints at an unwilling, perhaps ill-considered, return to his experiences as an SADF combatant during the Border War. The novel begins in a mood of alienation and despair and in the process of narration these emotions link to formative incidents, incidents that bring to the fore the oppressive sense of ‘us and them’ that characterises Patrick’s perceptions of himself. This sense originates in his boyhood and manifests at important moments during his time as a conscript. Having witnessed the effects on his father of his brother’s death from “an ordinary traffic accident, in an army jeep somewhere on a nameless stretch of road” (18), he states:

Then I went to the army myself. I went reluctantly, too young and unsure to face the alternatives. I had no real idea of what lay ahead; just a sense that it was utterly at odds with my nature. But I thought that the sooner I went into it, the sooner it would be behind me. I didn’t know at that time how certain experiences are never past, even when they are behind. (24)

These words indicate that Patrick feels himself on the level of his “nature” to be “utterly at odds” with a specific and pre-cast notion of masculinity and the ways in which he is commanded to perform it. In the army the ‘us and them’ perception is concretised. If a man is gay, he is at a further remove from the heteronormative mould for masculinity propounded within the military context. Early announcement of his “crack-up” encourages the reader to expect a revelation of the incident or moment of truth that explains it (see 3.6 for discussion thereof).

Patrick’s return to South West Africa–Namibia reads as a journey into a heart of darkness. Having observed the “ennui” of the border post officials, the ensuing journey by car toward Windhoek through the flat, dry and predominantly uninhabited land is accompanied by jarring sensations: “We passed an occasional railway-line or shack, or car, which burst like noise out of the violent, dead silence and then passed away again” (40). Such observations can be read as foreshadowing the first substantial presentation of Patrick’s state of mind when he is in his hotel room after the first stage of the journey:

Suddenly and without apparent reason a familiar sensation started up at the base of my belly [...] it was a spasm, a shaking, a shadow passing over my soul. These little episodes had come to be referred to as ‘attacks’ [...] part biological, part

psychological. My teeth chattered. My bones vibrated. I perched on the enamel rim [of the bathtub], trying to assuage my grief. I was oppressed and horrified by things. (42)

As the narrative unfolds these biological and psychological sensations continue to intermingle or blur into one another. The will to regain awareness of the origin or cause is frustrated: it “passed away again” (40), “then it was past” (43). “Things” return unbidden, emotions resurface as “attacks” that are rooted in grief. His vulnerability infuses the narrative. This vulnerability is illustrated by his being informed while on the Border of the death of his grandfather with whom he did not have a close relationship. Despite this fact, while on sentry duty that night he cries, astounding his fellow guard. He finds himself saying “everything goes, everything goes” and further observes: “It was this sudden insight into the transitory nature of things that unmanned me” (31).

As conscript, the us and them dynamic brackets a world without nuances, and the one-dimensionality of it persists. At the first stop in his and his mother’s journey, in a town called Swakopmund, Patrick enters the only pub in the town to come upon a scattering of individuals whose muteness he experiences as menacing. When at last a few of them voice themselves, it emerges that they are white escapees from South Africa or the war in Angola who intend to start new lives in Namibia. However, Patrick observes, this “new life that all those people had come to here wasn’t much in evidence” (79). Instead, “it looked like a *shadowy sort of life [...] this twilight existence* on the western edge of the continent” (79, my italics). The motif of twilight threads its way from one narrative scene to the next. Earlier, he announces the “military twilight [he had] recently been through” (46), and at the end of a rickety pier in Swakopmund he encounters an old German man who has returned, after thirty years absence, to vote in the coming election. The old man proclaims: “This could have been a great country. There was hope here once. But now it’s all going down the toilet [...]. It is hopeless, but I have come back to vote for us. For *us*” (80). Patrick’s response is instant: “I pulled away from his hand. ‘Not us,’ I said, ‘not me.’ I started to walk away and then broke [...] into a run [...]. I was running from him [...] but also from that terrible *us*” (80).

The old man’s *us* is the plaintive cry of one who feels himself trapped in a twilight zone between a “great” past and a future without hope. Patrick’s desperate escape from the old man’s *us* is a prerequisite for articulating his own. His desperation reveals an echo between the voice of the old man and the voices of fellow-conscripts. On the basis of shared skin colour the old man freely voices his prejudices without a shred of self-consciousness. In

similar vein, Patrick's fellow conscripts assume the right to label him "*doos*"⁴⁴ for his lack of rugby playing skills. The *us* of the old man and the *us* of the conscripts arise from a sense of God-given entitlement assumed by some white males to be their birth-right. The "brotherhood of men" and the old man's *us* causes Patrick's alienation at the same time as it produces a clarity of perception: "I wanted no part in what it presumed. I wanted to leave it behind" (80). Thus knowledge of the *us* that unhinges him makes it possible for him to create and affirm an oppositional *I* that he feels to be authentic.

Patrick's experience of being at odds in this way resembles that expressed by the protagonists in the other novels, as well as the memoirs to be discussed in the chapter to follow. The common problem is that of what it means to be a white man. As noted earlier, critical engagement with the question or problem of 'whiteness' is outside the ambit of this research project, but this does not detract from the importance of heeding its inseparability within the context of apartheid South Africa from the discourse of masculinity that governed during this period. The intermeshing of whiteness and masculinity is voiced on the Border by one of Patrick's antagonists, Commandant Moller: "'You're not a girl. You're a man. A white South African man. We need you with us [...]. You get people who fake cracking up, just to escape their duty.'⁴⁵ But I know you're not like those people. You're a man'" (99). These words, uttered with a certainty impervious to any challenge, highlight the perceived link of manhood to whiteness, to the performance of public duty, and to the renunciation of the feminine. Patrick experiences the urge to giggle in response to the Commandant's pronouncements. But once the Commandant has proclaimed "You're the one who can't play rugby" he admits that this "damning truth kills the laughter" in him and makes him "want to cry" (99). If he were to giggle or cry this would serve only to confirm the Commandant's misogyny and homophobia.

However, there is something in the voice of the Commandant that indicates a sliver of cognisance. Simmering beneath "We need you with us" and "you're not like those people" is a desire to include the outlaw or outcast for the sake of what is perceived to be the greater good, and simply because he is a man. There is a blind obduracy at the same time as there is a desire for mutuality. The subtext of Commandant Moller's words is 'Shun them Patrick so that you can join us in our laager where we welcome you because it is your birth-right.' The

⁴⁴ Literal translation from the Afrikaans is 'box,' and the colloquial translation is 'cunt.'

⁴⁵ While on the border Patrick suffers a psychological collapse – what the Commandant calls his "freak-out" and his fellow-conscripts observe as his having gone "bossies" (Afrikaans word referring to a soldier losing his sanity as a result of combat experience).

laager mentality involves a pairing of paranoid insecurity and a male bonding sustained by racism, homophobia and misogyny.

Thus, even in the consciousness of an exemplar of the hegemonic man such as Commandant Moller there is a contradiction. For the gay protagonists the personal and interpersonal contradictions are different, distinctive and often glaring, and have to be negotiated for the sake of survival. The earliest us and them dynamic that required negotiation was that of father and son.

3.4 Fathers and Sons in the Novels of Galgut, Behr and van der Merwe

The father-son dynamic features significantly in the novels of Damon Galgut, Mark Behr and André Carl van der Merwe. The fathers play a role in convincing their sons that certain forms of behaviour, such as sporting prowess, hunting and sexual pursuit, provide the essential proof that they are not gay; they experience the necessity of making clear to their sons that heterosexuality is the irrefutable definition of what it means to be a man. The protagonists in each of these novels passively contest, to differing degrees, the style of masculinity exemplified by their fathers. In light of this contest of identities, it is perhaps surprising when thoughts of the father reveal something as thick as blood in the dynamic. Consider the way a passing conversation between Patrick, in *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs*, and his father is phrased: “My father made a noise: Maybe just a tiny glottal cry. For an instant, joined by a thousand kilometres of umbilical line, the telephone united us both” (56). In van der Merwe’s *Moffie* (2006) the protagonist Nicholas van der Swart expresses a similarly umbilical link to his father:

I feel an obscure sense of pride [...] for completing a year so totally against everything I stand for. I am also confused about being pleased that my father is given the opportunity to be proud of me – that I’m excelling at something he believes in after all the shame I’ve caused by failing at school, cricket, rugby and everything that is important to him. But strange as it is, despite our destructive relationship, I still harbour a subconscious desire to gain his respect. (300)

Such utterances generally express a possibility instead of an experience – an essentially futile yearning because the style of masculinity lived and propounded by the protagonists’ fathers is alien and sometimes threatening. Though the separation from their fathers is experienced as painful, there is more to it than emotions of defeat. At the passing-out parade that signals the

end of his period of basic training, Nicholas expresses ambiguous satisfaction at being slotted at last into his father's sense of what it means to be a man. He experiences this satisfaction as "obscure," "confused" and "strange" (300). Thus in the novel's final lines we find this proclamation:

How is it possible to have hated a time so much and then to discover that somewhere inside one is yearning for certain aspects of it? My only explanation is that when one has an experience that is so traumatic, it knots itself into your very fibre. Then a really good moment surpasses all others because of the acute contrast. (313–14)

For Nicholas and Patrick being conscripted is ironically enabling in that it makes it possible to articulate the alienation and vulnerability felt during boyhood. For Patrick, what he calls the males-only "club" of conscripts on the Border with its "rituals of kinship" confirms his "segregation" (63). An unusual and perhaps privileged insight arises from this experience of being excluded: "Perhaps only I felt it so acutely – the ennui and aimlessness, in which the overpowering maleness of the place started to suffocate me" (57). The overpowering maleness precipitates recall of a boyhood experience. His brother, having witnessed Patrick's failure to absorb their father's attempts to impart rugby-playing skills, issues the judgment: "Give it up Dad, don't even bother" (64). Patrick's response to his brother's jibe is to whisper to himself: "leave me alone" (64). Clearly, in this instant from his boyhood he has no male counterpart to turn to for recognition of other means of self-definition. Later, on the border, such a counterpart appears in the figure of Lappies, a farm boy he befriends who, like Patrick, fumbles a rugby ball and is scorned by the other conscripts: "Lappies, go back to the farm." "Lappies, joumoer!" These scornful words echo those delivered at Patrick for the same reason: "Winter, for fuck's sake. Winter, you doos!" (62). After their aborted attempts to be part of the game, Patrick and Lappies slap "each other on the back, pretending the heartiness neither could feel" (63). They are permanently excluded from all rugby matches and given the task of patrolling the perimeters of the camp, always in full view of the games under way. For Patrick this segregation "confirms[s] what had always been sensed" (63). Patrolling the perimeters of the masculine preserve reverberates with those earlier declarations, in the voices of fathers and brothers, that set up masculinity on the level of a territorial imperative. Patrick's and Lappies' banishment to the margins of the masculine preserve clearly points to fault-lines in the father-son dynamic. Given such rigid demarcation of manhood's borders, it is little surprise that attempts to create other modes of masculine interaction and companionship seldom progress beyond the level of suggestion or intimation.

Patrick is surrounded by fierce men who display no emotion. He describes his father thus: “I don’t believe he had a heart at all: this swollen, implacable man who wore shirts open to his belly [...]. I would return from school to find the house all empty of his presence, streaming with light” (13–14). The corollary to his father’s absence is that the house streams with light for Patrick and ensures that his mother “would be happier than usual, allowing herself the indulgence of a smile” (14). His father’s absence thus signifies opportunities for self-assertion. But the self-assertion is compromised by his awareness of the style of masculinity that characterises his father’s hunting trips: “He would go in the company of men; loud, hairy, intense as he. I had seen them often as they congregated on the lawn outside. Beers in their hands [...]. They were – and behaved like – *people in no doubt of themselves*” (14–15, my italics). The italicised words imply that Patrick *does* experience self-doubt, and that in the presence of such men it could not be otherwise.

But this dynamic is more complex than the binary suggests. It echoes his encounter with the old German man, discussed earlier. Though Patrick feels his own style of self-expression to be incommensurate with that of his father and friends, this impasse at the same time helps confirm the distinctiveness of his subject position even though, as a boy and young man, individuality is little more than a possibility. The detailed, even intimate, description of the loud and hairy men indicates that this possibility might take root. The fineness of these observations arises from the glaring differences between viewer and viewed – the gay man is viewing exemplars of the loudly heterosexual man from across the gulf that separates them from him. But it can also be said that the line that separates them from him, Patrick from his father, is at times indistinct. As noted earlier, in one moment the Commandant is fierce and in the next he softens in exhorting men of suspect masculinity to join his brotherhood. In one instant a man like Patrick is on the verge of giggles and tears, and in the next he recalls the slaughter of pigs: “It was a sign of my state of mind or soul that the screaming of the pig sounded almost beautiful to me” (28). This unbidden memory acknowledges the potential magnetism of violence, that a calculated taking of a life might be simultaneously appalling and enthralling. Thus the line between fierceness and vulnerability, for the Commandant or for Patrick, can be a porous one.

In *The Smell of Apples* the porous or indistinct line between the father and his son is present in the boyhood strand of the narrative. The other strand emerges from Marnus’ experiences as a Border War platoon commander. The fact that Marnus’ father has the rank of major-general in the SADF throws into stark relief the problems and internal

contradictions that relate to patriarchal masculinity and gay sexuality. It also accentuates the paradox of their showering together and the goodnight kisses. But more often than not the instants of tenderness are undercut or spoiled by emotions that indicate masculinism instead of a shared maleness that expresses something gentler. Reflecting on masculinism in *The Smell of Apples*, David Medalie (2000) notes the centrality of “the problem of belonging” and that this problem bears “explicitly or implicitly upon the issue of masculinity and, in particular, upon the ways in which men respond to the modes of masculinity which are offered to them at a formative stage in their lives” (“Wanton Innocence” 42). In Behr’s novel, Medalie continues, masculinity is “a model and an unheroic destiny, a site of profound contradiction” (42). The contradiction of dominance and gentleness is conveyed in the narrative sequence that follows the protagonist, ten year-old Marnus Erasmus, rejecting the Christmas gift presented by the visiting Chilean General to whom his father has attached the eponym “Mr Smith.”⁴⁶

What can be called the ‘fishing incident’ in the novel stands as an example of supportive masculinity denied in favour of a cold masculinism. Marnus and his friend Frikkie go fishing together, as they do on a regular basis. Marnus hooks what is obviously a large fish and a lengthy struggle ensues. The account of this struggle comprises eight pages of a 200–page novel. By the time his father and the Chilean General appear on the scene Marnus has managed to pull what is visibly a shark into the low water. His exertion has brought him to the brink of tears. He calls out for his father’s help to have it instantly refused. His father admonishes him: “Stop being a crybaby. Mister Smith and Frikkie are watching you” (97). Marnus has almost brought the shark in when, with a final lunge, it loosens the hook from its jaw and escapes. “He beat you,” says Marnus’s father as he turns and walks away with the General, without goodbyes, to meet a Brigadier van der Westhuizen (97–8). In the aftermath of his deeply felt defeat Marnus says to Frikkie: “Why didn’t he help me? If only he had helped me, everything would have been different” (98). Entirely sapped, he cries again, without shame: “I don’t care if Frikkie sees it” (98). The tears might (so to speak) be considered a watershed moment, indicating potential in Marnus to move toward a less constrained masculinity than that exemplified by his father, the General and the Brigadier – the possibility for a coming of age on his own terms.

⁴⁶ This concealment of the General’s identity as military leader in Augusto Pinochet’s dictatorship, and advisor to the SADF, is disturbing at the same time as it contains an element of political satire.

This incident reflects the hunting activities connected to the fathers in both *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* and *Moffie*. Each of the fathers' involvement in hunting is a means of bonding with their sons as well as honouring the legacy provided by their own fathers. The emotions linked to hunting are a way for the fathers to endear themselves to their sons, as in these words from Marnus in *The Smell of Apples*: "Dad always says the tusks are the only thing he is really sentimental about" (170). In the slide show presented for the Chilean General (170–1) the narrative moves seamlessly from images of Oupa standing with a boot resting on an elephant bull he has just shot, to slides of John Wayne in a film called *Hatari*,⁴⁷ to images of "Ters"⁴⁸ standing naked in a clearing [...] their hands tied above their heads with a soldier holding a bayonet against the one's chest" (171). The Major-General announces to all present that "these Ters are all the same". He clicks to the next slide and greets it with the comment, "once you catch them they quickly call you Boss again. They forget their Moscow training at the drop of a hat" (171). The following slide reveals the fate of the Ters: "Now the terrorists are lying in a heap and you can see they've been shot" (171). At this instant Marnus observes that his sister Ilse "gets up and says she's going to make coffee" (171). This throw-away comment from Marnus introduces an important sub-narrative: his sister absenting herself from the master-narrative propounded by both of her parents. It is a master narrative she has clearly heard many times as a form of weekend entertainment, and it reminds the reader of the fault-lines in 1980s white South Africa.

In André Carl van der Merwe's novel *Moffie* the protagonist Nicholas' father Peet exclaims that his reluctance to enlist for National Service makes a "moffie" of him, to which his mother responds "how can you call your own son that? You ought to be ashamed of yourself! I never want to hear that word in this house again. Sissy is bad enough" (20). But the seeds of shame attached to being a moffie are internalised from boyhood by Nicholas. Indeed, being reminded of this shame – in the voices of his father, uncle, cousins, sister and mother – is so relentless from boyhood through to manhood that it arguably facilitates the surprising ease of his coming out. The fathers' attempts to bond with their sons via the rituals of hunting, ball games and fishing serve to entrench in the sons their discomfort and revulsion, their alienation from specific performances of masculinity. Consider, by way of illustration, this father-son dialogue in *Moffie*:

⁴⁷ A film screened in 1960 in which John Wayne played the role of a big game hunter somewhere in Africa.

⁴⁸ Abbreviation of terrorists.

‘Don’t be a sissy, man!’
‘I’m not. I just don’t want to.’
You will play rugby! [...] One thing is certain, from this year on you WILL play rugby. And you’d better be careful – you’re turning into a bloody moffie! Do you want that, hey? Hey?’
‘No.’ (53)

What such dialogue reveals is that the process of arriving at acceptance of self, though underway from boyhood, is far from easy. Despite this difficulty Nicholas announces his sexuality: “I am gay. Gay – this word and everything it stands for – is what I am at the age of nine, although I have not even heard of it yet. I know it, I feel it and, in secret, I start living it” (59).

Openness or concealment aside, each boy is awkwardly and fearfully positioned in relation to enlistment in his father’s regime of maleness. Marnus in *The Smell of Apples* is situated in a kind of no man’s land in terms of his masculinity. Like the boy-protagonists in the other novels, he is made to feel ill at ease and belittled by his father. Arguably, the father-son dynamic in *The Smell of Apples* is more complex (and complexed) than that to be found in the novels of Galgut and van der Merwe. Though the father in Behr’s novel is, as military leader, more fixedly positioned in his patriarchal nationalism than are the other fathers, the range of emotional give-and-take between father and son is broader. The Major-General kisses his son goodnight, shuns him when he fails to live up to his expectations, beats him, hugs him and cries with him. Levels of chilling detachment and intimacy co-exist. Such a complex dynamic is not present to the same extent in the other novels. What Behr manages to suggest by means of the dynamic he sets up between Marnus and his father, along with the fact that Marnus’s sexuality receives no attention, is that the effects of fathers’ notions of manhood on their sons is not exclusive to the dynamic between a heterosexual father and a gay son.

As has emerged from discussion of the binaries of us and them and fathers and sons, it is often through the writing itself that the author-narrator manages the contradictions. By writing the troubled dynamics the author may exercise the opportunity to write them out of himself. It has been shown that the interpersonal dynamic between the homosexual us and the heterosexual them, as well as the particular dynamic of father and son is more complex than a first reading might reveal. For the protagonists in these novels a breakdown in these dynamics can signify a breakthrough, pointing toward other ways of perceiving, enacting, and ultimately owning, their distinct version of masculine identity.

3.5 Towards Other Masculinities: *The Smell of Apples* and *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs*

The boyhoods of the protagonists contain intimations of change, possibilities to move toward what feels to be a natural and authentic sense of themselves. As noted earlier, Marnus's emotions expressed at the end of the traumatic fishing incident in *The Smell of Apples* reveal a capacity in him to move toward a sense that there is something more to masculine identity than what is enshrined in the perceptions of his father, and signs of this capacity are expressed during his time on the Border. But it is possible to counter-argue that this is a skewed reading of the character Marnus, that it reads too much into his words. Behr himself, in an interview with Andrew van der Vlies (2011) spoke of creating the character Marnus as a "bid to grasp how an average racist heterosexual white man, who is also just an ordinary human being, is created and has that identity and privilege sustained – often without being conscious of the privilege thus afforded" (4). However, my reading grants to the character Marnus more credit in terms of the capacity for transformation suggested above than does the author. The bifurcated narrative structure supports this reading.

The italicised sections of the text present the experiences and consciousness of Marnus on the Border during and subsequent to the battle of Cuito Cuanavale. Throughout the narrative this Border War strand alternates with the story of his boyhood. Thus, instead of using conventional chapter divisions, Behr presents the reader with a subtle awareness of Marnus's consciousness from his boyhood as neatly inscribed ideological subject toward intimations of self-doubt, alienation, even reorientation in his years as conscript. The ideological matrix into which Marnus was born has shaped him to perform the role of platoon commander during the Border War. But his adult self, in its turn, speaks back to his past. Seeds of the shifts in his consciousness are present in the representations of masculine selfhood in and through his boyhood. His father exemplifies the hegemonic masculinity with its militarist, nationalist patriarchal attitudes, while his mother's life serves and valorises this mode of masculinity. Her gendered identity is no more than a masquerade of self-will or agency. It plays out in her passing comments on handshaking and Golda Meir,⁴⁹ as well as in the conflict between herself and her daughter Ilse. With regard to the former, Marnus reports:

⁴⁹ Israeli Prime Minister from 17th March 1969 until 1974 after the end of the Yom Kippur War.

Mum says its rubbish that women shouldn't shake hands. She says if more women could learn to shake hands there'd be more women like Golda Meir in this world. Even though she's a woman, Golda Meir is the one who's going to teach the Arabs a lesson. (35)

The implication here is that, despite the disadvantage of gender, Golda Meir will do what has to be done, thereby conferring on her the status of honorary man. Concerning the latter, Marnus's sister Ilse arrives at a level of political awareness their mother finds impossible to accept, creating an unbridgeable gulf between the two of them. Ilse's attempts to bridge this gulf are unsuccessful. Thus within Afrikaner nationalism there are rifts, fault lines. What Behr achieves by exposing these fault lines is awareness of a paranoia that characterised the mind-set of the Afrikaner establishment during the decades of the 1970s and 80s in which his narrative is set. The two strands of narrative are a technique for exploring the internal contradictions and fault-lines. Though the strands follow a logic of their own, there are rare instances in which portions of text from each strand can be interpreted as echoing or addressing each other. Two such portions are one that shows Marnus as a soldier interacting with the black section leader of his platoon, and the other that shows Marnus as a ten year-old reporting the content of a History essay of his that was published in the annual school magazine.

Having issued an instruction for escape to the black section leader the night before an expected mortar attack, which does happen the following morning, Marnus asks: "Why are you here?" The section leader is puzzled by the question and stares at Marnus as if he has gone "completely crazy" (120). Marnus repeats the question and wonders to himself why this section leader is "fighting against his own freedom" (119). He expects the section leader to state that his involvement is "a form of economic conscription, that he was here only because he was unable to find a decent job on account of the system" (119–20). He is thus surprised by this response: "To make war, Captain. We are not like the Cubans who take women to fight. It's men that must make war" (120). Of course this is not a direct answer to the question posed. What strikes the reader is the assumption underlying the answer: that the unity of maleness erases the racial divisions of the period. The notion of a brotherhood of men is what makes it possible for the black section leader to listen to Marnus's words, "God knows [...] eventually you blacks could end up being the same as the bloody whites" (120), and to respond: "Who else should we be like, lieutenant?" (120). The reader is left to reflect

upon whether this exchange of words reveals no more than the fact that an ideology of masculinity serves a racist ideology, and vice versa. One is also left to wonder if the interchange invites another and more generous reading of the character of Marnus; whether or not he is disappointed at the fact that his question has failed to elicit the reply that he, or at least a part of him, expected or even desired. Also, the very fact that Marnus asks such a question, with its jaded undertone, reveals that there is something about the role he performs that elicits discomfort. His asking this question leads the reader to question whether he is a man entirely at home within the world he knows.

In his essay published in the school magazine Marnus presents an account of what a walk through the local museum, observing exhibitions and paintings, teaches the observer about “our country” (159). His report adopts, from the outset, a detached, even objective, perspective, but soon enough the ideologically saturated nouns and adjectives sneak their way in:

the Settlers were too many for the Hottentots and they ran away like cowards. Then the Boers had to make war against [...] the Zulus because the evil Dingane’s impis murdered their wives and smashed their babies’ heads against the wagon wheels. The further north the Boers trekked in the olden days, the cheekier and more wicked the natives became. (159–60)

The concluding sentence to Marnus’s history of the Boers rings out loudest in its irony: “Open eyes are the gateways to an open mind” (160). This example of good writing by young Marnus holds tightly to the assumption that ethnic self-preservation is the duty of men. The “Boers who had to make war” chimes with the black section leader’s “It’s men that must make war” (120). As schoolboy and conscript Marnus is made to listen to the voice that clearly proclaims what is expected of him if he is to be admitted to the club or brotherhood: he must make war. In such circumstances, it is not easy to become conscious of other ways of being a man. However, as shown earlier in discussion of father-son dynamics in the three novels, there are moments of empathy and intimacy within a context that is averse to these.

Such moments are largely implied, and rare. One example is the sexual encounter between Patrick and Lappies in *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs*, an encounter described as “fumbling.” The language conveying it is curiously detached, denuded of intimacy: “We were suddenly fumbling with buttons, slinging down our rifles. I remember his breath on my neck. Standing pressed together, the immensity of the continent spreading outwards as though we were at the very centre of it, we took each other in hand” (68). The final phrase is erotically suggestive at the same time as it expresses mutual control and restraint. Yet it

gestures toward something else, something surprising: a spirit of expansiveness announced earlier as the “immensity of the continent” (68). This odd mingling of suggestiveness, expansiveness and restraint adds layers to the detachment already noted. It is a detachment that culminates in the words “and it was done” (68). Together these layers of meaning reflect the ambiguity that runs through and frequently riddles Patrick’s experience of other men, indicating once again that meaningful bonding seldom moves beyond the level of suggestion. The words quoted above are a rewrite of those to be found in the 1992 version of the novel, which reads:

Tugging and gasping, we moved our wrists in rhythm. It was an act of revenge, undertaken in pain: against men, who had made the world flat. ‘Leave me,’ I gasped, but it wasn’t to him: I was speaking to [my brother Malcolm], my father [and commander]. ‘Leave me,’ I called down the well of my past, to those who’d colluded against me. (76)

Comparing the original version of this sexual encounter with its 2006 rewrite, Michiel Heyns notes that in the original version the characters “make fumbling sexual contact, more in agony than in passion” (114). The striking difference between the rewrite and the original is that Galgut has removed from the former the agony referred to by Heyns, or has at least shifted it to the more distanced level of suggestion or implication. The fumbling remains, but condemnation of the hegemonic composite of brother and father and commander has been excised, or placed at a distance. The coming together with Lappies is credited in the 2006 version with a substance not present in the 1992 version – a degree of intimacy and nurture instead of an awkward and agonised encounter. Differences in the representation of gay identity in the two editions are also present in the following extracts:

There was, you see, a brotherhood of men, to which we could never belong. My father, my brother, the boys at our school: they knew things that I didn’t know. There was that in their hands that helped them catch balls; that helped them see objects in flight. Lacking this vision, I felt myself blind. I had watched, through the years, the grace of these men, that left shimmering trails on air. (1992: 70)

and:

There was a brotherhood of men, I now clearly saw, to which I would never belong. My father, my brother, the boys at school – they knew things I didn’t know. There was something in their hands that helped them to catch balls in flight. More than that: it was beyond me to participate in their rituals of kinship. I would never hunt animals in the bush, or stand around a fire with them, beer in hand, tugging at my moustache. I

was pale, I was weak, my jokes made them blanch. I would never be part of their club. (2006: 63)

The 2006 version revises the ambiguous, sometimes mystical, perception of the heterosexual other conveyed in the 1992 edition by the words “I had watched, through the years, the grace of these men, that left shimmering trails on air.” Indeed, the 2006 version offers an unambiguous renunciation that shifts from the condemnation in “I would never hunt animals in the bush” to the satire in “stand around a fire with them, beer in hand, tugging at my moustache” (63). This rewrite effects a clear and unapologetic assertion of his difference.

From early in the narrative, but especially in the first accounts of his experiences on the border, the reader gains a sense that Patrick is embarking on a quest to discover, perhaps inhabit, an alternative maleness. The same is true, to differing degrees, of the protagonists in Behr’s and van der Merwe’s novels. The mystery that runs through Galgut’s novel, via the withholding of information, enacts the protagonists’ tenuous movement toward the moment of truth alluded to earlier. But the journey is by no means an easy one. It is one in which the ‘real man’ hinders his capacity to become his own man, to the point that he must either succumb to the pre-determined journey or commit to the quest for his own identity.

The logical outcome of being a man in what Barnard refers to as a “racist and hyper-masculinist society” (207) is to engage in combat. Patrick relates the only battle experience during his time on the Border:

I have tried, in letters that were censored down to gibberish, to explain [it] to my mother: how it felt to be shooting at other people, trying to kill them before they killed us [...]. It went on for ever, or five minutes, full of smoke and noise [...]. The bodies lay on the ground, as if they were just resting. I don’t want to know, whether I was responsible for any of those deaths. I was shooting into a blue void, onto a screen on which action was being projected. None of it had anything to do with me. But I stood over one of the bodies and stared at him with mesmerised horror [...]. He wore his death with a kind of indifference, as though it didn’t affect him. (67)

The account of the battle scene is intimate in its details at the same time as it speaks detachment: “None if it had anything to do with me” (67). The narrative emerges from the mouth of a hero who may be an anti-hero; who is inside himself at the same time as he is looking in on himself. There is a sense that the protagonists of these novels are looking toward other ways of being in the world, other ways of being with men, but that the odds of arriving at such a place of refuge are stacked against them. Perhaps, and as noted earlier in

relation to the tensions that arise from the binaries of us and them and fathers and sons, the protagonists' lot in the world they know is to remain suspended in limbo, not knowing which way to turn until, with the passing of time, writing it down and out of themselves becomes possible.⁵⁰ These existential variables and uncertainties point to a problem that features in each of the novels: the problem of choice or, to be specific, that of coming out.

3.6 The Problem of Coming Out in the Novels of Galgut, Behr and van der Merwe

In *The Smell of Apples* the protagonist Marnus responds angrily to a fellow-conscript on the Border who bemoans the absence of choice: "The little Englishman in my platoon, a conscript from Durban [...] forever telling everyone around him that he hadn't wanted to do National Service. 'Exactly,' I said, 'you had a choice – like me – and you made the easier one'" (86). This interaction echoes one between Patrick, his mother and Godfrey in *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs*. The suggestion is that fully committing oneself to National Service or fully committing oneself to refusing to serve amount to an active exercise of choice. It might be argued that living out either of these choices indicates self-knowledge, even integrity. But both or either of these choices, in their absence of ambiguity, their vehemence, can be argued as playing or even buying into assertions of masculinity positioned on opposite sides of the same continuum. The suggestion then is that the men whose style of resistance, or participation, was less hard-and-fast (or *hardegat*)⁵¹ indicate a form of resistance that challenged the ideology of masculinity underpinning the harder choices instead of the so-called softer options. Whatever the stance adopted by the individual, the range of masculinities available was severely constrained. It can be argued that the gap between the response located in the gut and the response on offer (or, put differently, the will of the individual versus the external directive) is more starkly apparent in the experiences of gay men. But, as will be seen with regard to *Moffie*, this gap is not always clearly delineated.

In *The Beautiful Screaming of the Pigs* the protagonist Patrick's understanding of 'us and them' divisions on the level of racial identity marks an opportunity to define the self on its own terms. But the agency this promises does not progress beyond the level of potential or promise. Patrick's boldly expressed aversion to the old German man's 'us' does not extend to

⁵⁰ See commentary on Paul Morris' *Back to Angola* in the coming chapter.

⁵¹ Translates from the Afrikaans as hard-arsed.

openly resisting the notions of ‘us’ that continue to silence, suppress and complicate a man’s sense of himself in terms of his sexual orientation. The latter is not freely acknowledged. He expresses his “mental image” of his mother and Godfrey making love as “disturbing, for obvious reasons” (87). The fact that the obviousness is intimated rather than stated indicates detachment from his sexuality. Patrick’s primary experience of his awkwardness occurs on a broader level, as is to be seen in his introspection at the funeral service and political rally commemorating the life of an assassinated character called Andrew Lovell.⁵² He reflects: “Did I shoot Andrew Lovell? The fracture ran through me, through my life, down to a place where my life joined with other lives” (127). Experiencing himself as an impostor in the funeral service and political rally transports him back to the space he occupied after his “crack-up”:

I was back in a white hospital bed, with a doctor sitting beside me. ‘Try to describe how you feel,’ he said.
‘I feel dislocated,’ I told him. ‘Not part of life.’
‘Whose life?’
‘Mine. Everybody’s. *Life*.’ (127)

Italicised thus, life equates with existential despair and precipitates Patrick’s panicky escape from the death ritual:

Through the flickering bodies dancing and ululating down below, I saw the sand shining through. Under the joyous thunder of voices, I heard the thin, insidious wind. Years of war and ideology, all the laws and guns and blood: the whole huge tumult of history converged on a single point, and this was what it was for – for sand. Rocks and sand and air. Barren, omnipotent emptiness. We would all disappear, every one of us, and the only thing that would stay behind was the arid backdrop of the earth. Dry and dead and voiceless. (128)

These words resonate with the poetry of T.S. Eliot, notably “The Waste Land”. The echoes reinforce Galgut’s presentation of the life of the disaffected individual. The individual as inscribed in forms of living outside of but part of himself is rendered as nothingness, waste. Day-to-day political life is supplanted by an existential nothingness: “my individuality was isolation, my personality an absence. I didn’t connect with the world [...]. There was too much desert in me” (133). “My personality an absence” echoes Eliot’s assertion that poetry, or what for him amounts to poetry worthy of study, ought to involve an “escape from

⁵² A fictional rendering of the funeral of assassinated SWAPO activist Anton Lubowski.

personality.”⁵³ There is little doubt that Patrick is presented as an unusual individual who brims with contraries. His compulsion to escape from any notion of ‘us’ is felt as existential instead of solely contingent upon political context. The images of a barren landscape serve to accentuate his alienation and forlornness, his internal desert; and these emotions reflect their darkness back on the society that disallows, for him, a sense of belonging. The absence of a sense of belonging is structural in that Patrick’s voice as narrator emerges from an historical moment that does not permit reconciliation or integration: however unwillingly, he was complicit as aggressor against SWAPO prior to ‘finding’ himself in the country liberated by SWAPO and its allies. His subject position in relation to the broader politics of the time renders affirmation of his sexuality all the more difficult, even unlikely. His experience of entrapment is thus appropriately framed in existential terms.

The protagonist Marnus in Mark Behr’s *The Smell of Apples* also expresses entrapment. Whereas Patrick’s voice contains his past as complicit aggressor, at the same time it articulates his awkward presence in post-liberation Namibia. The skilfully woven double narrative in *The Smell of Apples* achieves a critique on the levels of race and gender relations that is subtle enough to be overlooked. In one instance however the critique generated by a fragment of the Border War strand of the narrative speaks directly enough as to require little interpretive labour:

Perhaps that summer ultimately determined it. Possibly not even the whole summer, just one week in December. Yet, by now, I know full-well that you cannot satisfactorily understand an event unless you have a picture of everything that accompanies it: the arrival of the visitor cannot be divorced from what preceded his coming. To understand my own choice I need to muster as much of the detail as possible. (31)

This paragraph functions as a bridge, unlike any other in the novel. It refers to the paragraph that immediately precedes it. But it also drops clues for what comes before it and what is yet to be revealed. In the paragraph that precedes this one Marnus as a boy recalls the arrival of the Chilean General in the first week of December 1974 and, in the paragraph that follows, he speaks as platoon leader of “the arrival of the visitor” and the role this played in setting “it” up. A little later “it” is spoken of as an “event” (31). This piques the reader’s interest: what is it that these clues will reveal? What is it that “cannot be divided from what preceded” the

⁵³ See Eliot’s essay “Tradition and the Individual Talent” in *The Sacred Wood* (1921): “Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality.”

coming of the General? And what exactly is the “choice” Marnus refers to? The suspicion is that there is something the protagonist knows, but resists revealing. This withholding of information forestalls arrival at what platoon leader Marnus calls “a picture of everything,” a picture that requires “muster[ing] as much of the detail as possible.” The announced necessity to know everything in detail is enacted in the scene that follows.

In this scene the action takes place in an “Ops-room or Ops-tent” in preparation for battle. The account here of the commander’s demand for detail serves to concretise in the reader’s mind the idea that certain truths, yet to be revealed, have shaped the trajectory of Marnus’s life, the “choice” he made. In this portion of the narrative the exercise of choice is confined to the commander’s strategising, driven single-mindedly by a necessity to establish the “cold objective facts.” To arrive at an effective battle plan the commander demands “exact statistics on the infantry, all troops, the morale of the platoons, the situation with victuals and the state of weapon-preparedness” (31). This urgent amassing of details reflects Marnus’s need to arrive at a “full” understanding of what brought him to whatever “choice” he has made.

Thus, choice is cast as a question and the reader is promised an answer. The answer or revelation finally arrives in the form of a plot event – the rape of Marnus’s best friend Frikkie. Through a hole in his bedroom floor, Marnus witnesses what he perceives to be the Chilean General on top of Frikkie. Curiously though, the livid scar he has previously observed on the General’s back is not visible. The scar signifies on two levels. Firstly, it stands as emblem of the General’s life as active soldier. But secondly, because it has mysteriously disappeared, it stands as a deception or lie. The latter meaning is one that Marnus, understandably, is not in a position to comprehend or admit. Even when the truth finally emerges it is not possible for Marnus to admit it on anything but an oblique level. He is tempted to reveal the fact that he has witnessed it to Frikkie because they had previously pricked their forefingers to mix their blood and vow that they would not keep secrets from each other.⁵⁴ Despite their blood pact however, there are things that cannot be spoken, that are, in truth, unspeakable: “if he wants to tell someone something he doesn’t want anyone else to know, then he tells only me. If he didn’t even want to tell me about Dad, then he’ll never tell anyone. And it’s right that way. Between us the secret will always be safe” (199). Only in a context governed by “a very brittle gender construction based on patriarchal social

⁵⁴ As noted earlier, rituals of male bonding – be they battles or the pricking of finger and mixing of blood – can be driven by secrecy and lies that assume the essential connectedness of men.

structures” (Conway in Louw 2013) can the two boys know that it is “right” to keep secret the truth of the rape. Via the eyes and voice of a child the truth – the rape of his blood-brother Frikkie – is revealed. Rather, it is suggested: the reddish reflection he observed in the mirror on the night of the rape returns in the form of his father’s red face after he has said goodbye to “Mr Smith.” The truth cannot be more than faintly suggested while what is indubitable – “and I knew all along that it wasn’t a dream” (194) – remains darkly cocooned. It can only be obliquely announced because it is known and felt by a ten year-old Afrikaans boy whose father is a high-ranking officer in the South African Defence Force. It is a highly effective plot device, all the more so for its shock value.

But what answers in the end do this narrative sequence and the bridging paragraph that sets it up offer the reader? Though the paragraph speaks directly to the information that precedes it and foreshadows what is to follow, the reader is left frustrated because a definitive answer to the question of choice is not provided. Is it the choice to say nothing about the rape of Frikkie? Or is it that this choice relates to and shapes those to come, the most significant being Marnus’ choice to take on the role of platoon leader during the Border War? Or is it that both of these choices can be explained by the fact that each character is inserted in a particular culture that hinders the capacity to choose – a culture easily understood by carefully reading the pages that precede the bridging paragraph? Detective work reveals clear-cut answers to the latter question: all of the external coordinates that define young Marnus’ sense of himself in his everyday world are specific to the white elite of apartheid South Africa. Examples of these coordinates are the international successes of the cricket and rugby teams, Penny Coelen wearing the crowns of Miss South Africa and Miss World, Chris Barnard performing the world’s first heart transplant, and attitudes towards “Coloureds,” the Mau Mau rebellion in East Africa and leadership in other African nations. Some external coordinates are part of the day-to-day lives of Marnus and his family, the significant ones being the secret visit of the Chilean General, and his parents’ preparation for a promotional dinner held for his father who has become “the youngest Major-General ever in the South African Defence Force” (14). The celebratory spirit in the Erasmus household preceding this promotional dinner makes it clear that for Marnus the decision to be conscripted will not be a difficult one. Nothing in their world is questioned, everything is assumed. Events outside of the family context are interpreted with a mingling of national pride and paranoid prejudice:

At Newlands, Eddie Barlow's team is doing a good job of showing the British how cricket was meant to be played, but because the whole world hates South Africa, the Springboks were forced to postpone their tour against the All Blacks. Dad says Nixon will be out of the White House before Christmas and it looks like the Americans are going to lose the war against the communists in Vietnam. Dad says it's typical of the Americans to try and prescribe to the Republic how we should run our country while their own president is such a rubbish. (12–13)

Thus choice, for what it is worth, occurs on a number of levels, such that it needs to be understood as a problem instead of a question that promises an answer, and that this problem or undecidability is the truth of the matter. The task then of the interpreter is to seek precursors to the problem of choice Marnus has to make following the rape he witnesses. The fishing incident is one such precursor in that it reveals a nascent self-consciousness in Marnus. He swears for the first time in response to Frikkie's "You know, you almost had that fuckin' shark" with the words "Fuckin' almost" (98). However, despite these suggestions of a slowly emerging capacity to think for himself, the psychological damage resulting from the fishing incident lingers – later Marnus reiterates his feelings of shame at having lost the shark (117). His capacity to think for himself, to choose to speak or not to speak, meets its greatest challenge in the climactic incident in the boyhood strand of the narrative. After the incident, and on the eve of his returning to Chile, the General presents gifts to Major-General Erasmus and his family. Marnus instantly thinks, "I don't want to open it. I don't want anything from the General and I hate Dad" (194). His emotions arrive at a catharsis in the bathroom with his father, following his refusal to have the gift of epaulettes pinned to the shoulders of his mock camouflage uniform. David Medalie states that Marnus's "refusing to put on the epaulettes which 'Mr Smith' has given him" represents a refusal to "take another step towards the masculinist and military identity which is [his] destiny" ("Wanton Innocence" 42). His father beats him for this act of insubordination and Marnus cries. Then the Major-General breaks down and sobs. They weep in unison, holding onto each other before his father says "bulls don't cry" and the two of them laugh.

A version of this scene occurs in the final fragment of the Border War strand of the narrative. Marnus and his men have suffered and survived a mortar attack and he is lying immobile, being assured by the black section leader that he will be fine, that his motionless legs will revive. His reply to this is difficult to fathom: "I try to speak to him, to tell him that I knew all along, just like all the others. But I am dumb" (198). On the surface these words bear no relation to what the section leader has said to him. But this moment in which he feels

the threat of paralysis arguably triggers recall of something deep-lying and unresolved – a return of the repressed. These words go to the heart of the matter: admitting that all knew what had taken place between his father and Frikkie. The general knew, his sister Ilse knew, and perhaps his mother knew. The announcement of his being “dumb” clearly echoes that instant in the boyhood narrative in which Marnus states that “the secret [between himself and Frikkie] will always be safe” (199), and resounds in the final words to both narratives. The boyhood narrative culminates in his mother’s words “The Lord’s hand is resting over False Bay” (200), while the Border War narrative ends in the words “Death brings its own freedom, and it is for the living that the dead should mourn, for in life there is no escape from history” (198). The history referred to – the 1970s and 80s in South Africa – is simultaneously inescapable and false. The inversion set up of the dead mourning the living suggests that the period of history that frames this narrative has a darkly insistent hold on the period following the official demise of apartheid, and that the ruling elite’s hold on power through those years was grounded in a self-serving and profoundly delusional sense of the social world they inhabited and controlled – a fundamentally false consciousness. Certain critics, including the author Behr, comment upon the depiction of a false consciousness in *The Smell of Apples* and assess the ways in which this is explored in the characterisation of Marnus.

Rita Barnard (2000) says of these final lines from the novel: “Closed off [...] by that weighty patriarchal hand, the novel conveys a kind of moral airlessness that may be new in South African writing” (208). Another way of understanding Barnard’s term “moral airlessness” is to consider Marnus to be a character without potential for change or transformation. Barnard notes that Behr’s novels can be set apart from novels in which protagonists, as Lars Engle puts it, “acknowledge their involvement in apartheid and the necessity of direct action: they accept that pursuing private innocence is itself a kind of complicity [...] and end in some commitment to a life of engagement and risk” (qtd. in Barnard 223). For Engle the “complicity plot” characterised “an important genre in South African fiction of the last decade of Nationalist Party rule” (208). Though Behr’s novel can also be considered as offering an account of “the ideological and repressive workings of the apartheid system,” it does not do so “in the course of a narrative of conversion [for the protagonist]” (208). In other words, Marnus does not undergo a moral transformation or conversion in response to the social injustices of the time. The second strand of what Barnard calls the novel’s “dual temporality” (208) forecloses such a possibility for transformation or conversion. The context presented in *The Smell of Apples* is one in which perceptions of the

other are determined by stereotypical understandings endlessly repeated – further displays of false consciousness. Within the family unit there is little possibility for dialogue and the capacity to care that might make such dialogue possible. Equally unlikely is that a capacity to care might grow from acknowledgment of differences in political opinion and a willingness to discuss these differences. As observed earlier, there is an unwavering certainty to the mother’s notions of race and gender. These notions are rooted in the sense of entitlement engrained in the consciousness of the ruling elite. Differences in political opinion are personalised to make the rift between the mother and daughter unbridgeable. The fact that the conflict is presented through the naïve mode of narration of ten year-old Marnus provides a neutrality of perspective. This neutrality complicates rather than simplifies the reader’s awareness of the political tensions, contradictions and fractures within the apartheid social order.

Although dialogue seems impossible between mother and daughter, or father and son, there are intimations, even visions, of different and gentler ways of interacting publicly and privately. Such incidents are fleeting. For Marnus they take the form of seeking to connect with characters who are racially ‘other’: Little-Neville, Jan Bandjies and Chrisjan. Despite the unlikelihood of connecting meaningfully to any of these characters, these intimations suggest that Marnus’s range of emotions is broad enough to make moral transformation or conversion a possibility, however faint. The intimation of it accentuates the difference between Marnus and his father. Barnard illustrates this difference by citing an incident, involving Jan Bandjies, that “stands in stark contrast to the novel’s final moment [...] when Marnus submits to his brutal and seductive father” (220):

I see Jan Bandjies with his bare chest and rolled-down overalls, bending over the nets. I put my hands round my mouth and shout loud: “Jaaaaan”! And yes! He hears me, because he looks up and I stick both arms through the window and wave like mad for him to see [...] he recognises me and he also puts up both arms to wave back. I can see he’s laughing, and I laugh back and keep waving. (*Apples* 186)

Barnard emphasises the extent to which this scene is “wholly affirming” (221). It indicates a possibility for connectedness way beyond the ken and experience of his parents.

In a discussion focusing on the “malignant scars” left by the Border War, held at the Franschhoek Literary Festival on 12 May 2012, Mark Behr’s comments revealed that he attempts in his writing to challenge the false consciousness that prevailed during the 1980s; that his writing arises from “an attempt to interrogate the ways in which violence perpetuates

itself in society, and to understand how – from a very early age – particularly boy children are prepared for a particular set of dynamic relationships which ensure that they perpetuate violence.” Wamuwi Mbaao (2014: np) notes that for Behr “the logic of ideology and the logic of masculinity come in the ability to abdicate thinking” and that “head-in-the-sand thinking encourages a washing-of-the-hands where culpability is needed.” If, as Behr suggests, acknowledgement of culpability is to be regarded as an ethical necessity, the ways in which the author creates and sustains the moral journeys of his protagonists carries considerable weight. For Behr the moral weight attached to the journeys of protagonists extends to acknowledgement of his own culpability. Having come out of the closet following publication of his novel, he came out in a very different way in 1996 by confessing that he had worked as a security police spy during his student years. Thus, he owned up to two ‘true’ identities, and the latter, as reflected in his own words, overshadowed or emerged at the cost of the former. It can be argued that with *The Smell of Apples* he admits and attempts to understand the head-in-the-sand thinking that promoted complicity.

If his writing serves as a means of absolving himself from the guilt arising from his complicity as spy for the apartheid regime, how and where is his homosexuality to be positioned? Perhaps two complicities are enmeshed: that of being co-opted into the role of police spy and that of being co-opted into silence about his gay identity. As noted earlier, an often virulent homophobia attended the sense of entitlement to social and political privilege. Whereas attitudes toward the other races were characterised by a willed and wilful blindness, there was casualness to dismissals of the gay man. The gay man was more often than not made to turn a habitual blind eye to himself and to live with his invisibility as if it were the natural state of his being. However, acknowledgement of this invisibility factor only partly explains what it meant to be a queer white man in 1980s South Africa, as depicted in the novels discussed thus far. This invisibility is easily detected in the works of Galgut and Behr, but less so in van der Merwe’s *Moffie*.

If a young man is rendered and renders himself invisible, this might absolve him from the burdensome responsibility of making a choice. Thus the question of visibility or invisibility links to the question or problem of choice. These problems run through plot action and character development in each of the novels. Whereas in Galgut’s and Behr’s novels the problem of choice is more often than not implied rather than openly broached or addressed, in van der Merwe’s *Moffie* it is made more visible to the reader. However, examination of van der Merwe’s novel reveals that the lines of difference separating his novel from those of Galgut

and Behr, though noticeable, are often indistinct. Discussion of the content and style of critique at work in van der Merwe's his novel also sets up the co-ordinates for a comparison of his and the other two novels with the short stories of Koos Prinsloo.

3.7 Political Critique in van der Merwe's *Moffie*

By dint of its title, André Carl van der Merwe's novel promises an assertion of gay identity. However, from the first pages the reader is struck by the protagonist Nicholas' internal contradictions. Nicholas feels compelled to make choices at significant moments, looking in two directions without a clear sense of which way to go. In the opening page he exclaims: "I have been thrown into hell; herded into the Defence Force, into the abattoir of its border war like an animal to slaughter, with no say over my destiny. Forced to kill people I don't know, for a cause I don't believe in" (11). The mote of consciousness contained in the final clause of this dark lament reads like a non sequitur. Meaningful cognition and willed action appear to be unthinkable. Nicholas casting himself as little more than a cipher raises the following question: if the aversion is so intensely felt, why the resignation to serve, to being herded to the border like an animal to slaughter? The question is difficult to answer, but what is evident for Nicholas in *Moffie* and Patrick in *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* is that they find or create a strategy to survive their entrapment. This takes the form of the intimacy experienced by both in the unlikely scenario of the Border War. The intimacy is redemptive in that it holds the trauma at bay, making it possible even for Nicholas in *Moffie* to recall his time on the Border with an element of yearning.

Nicholas chooses to come out during and indeed as a result of his time in basic training and on the Border. His emerging sexuality, his intimate and invariably revelatory dynamics with a number of fellow-conscripts is the nub of his becoming – his story which is also the author's story. His coming out is episodic, often rendered via references to the cosmos and culminating in the sacred instance of finding Ethan and Ethan finding him. The genuinely "acute contrast" contained in the novel's final line is that the military context was simultaneously the locus of his trauma and the locus of his becoming. These loci generate two narrative strands. The first depicts the trauma experienced by the protagonist and other soldiers known to be or suspected of being 'moffies,' and the second sets up and develops the fact that being in a men's only world serves as a 'condition of possibility' for coming out.

Often Nicholas keeps himself going, survives what many fellow-conscripts (gay and heterosexual) could not and sometimes did not survive by holding to moments of stolen intimacy and constantly fantasising his sexual union with Ethan. This union is, in many ways, the narrative's engine.

However, a journey of becoming is not simple, and the trauma narrative cannot be overlooked. In a visit to the notorious Ward 22 of 1 Military Hospital⁵⁵ Nicholas encounters Deon, a character he remembers as having been removed from the Border for kissing another conscript. Deon is damaged almost beyond recognition by electric shock therapy, hormone treatment and being confined in the same room as the mutilated corpses of SWAPO soldiers. The trauma he witnesses in the Military Hospital is Deon's at the same time as it points to something larger than and beyond him. For Nicholas trauma is primarily felt through shifts in his relationship with fellow conscript Dylan. Upon their first meeting in the army camp Dylan is set up as a frequently unfathomable and darkly alluring presence. Within the confines of the camp Dylan is essential to Nicholas's survival, becoming his shadow-self. Their bond, though known by both, is neither uttered nor consummated. Dylan experiences the regime of consciousness and emotions in the army as profoundly unhinging and commits suicide. Because he is considered by the SADF to be state property, his parents are not notified of his death. This refusal is fastened to the fact that the military commanders consider homosexuality as the cause of Dylan's suicide, and homosexuality is assumed to be a sin.

Late in the narrative Nicholas visits Dylan's father, who says to him: 'the thing is Dylan was always a sensitive child. I thought the army would make a man out of him. How wrong I was' (273). Nicholas replies – 'He was a man. Dylan could take it. Believe me, he was really tough. Please know that your son was a man [...] the finest there is!' (273). The last four words promise an alternative idea as to what constitutes a man outside of being "really tough" and being able to "take it." But the promise is not fulfilled, and announcing the counter-truth to himself is as much as Nicholas can manage: "'I want to say. 'Whatever a *man* is,' but I decide against it'" (273–4, author's italics). Thus the assumption voiced by Dylan's father – that sensitivity in a boy works against him becoming a man – remains unchallenged. This assumption is intrinsic to the socialisation of boys, and in the face of it the protagonists in each novel feel their inadequacy. However, their recollections of their boyhood reveal something more complex than the futility of resisting their fathers' notions of

⁵⁵ See Stephen Cohen's reference to the hospital in 3.2.

what a boy needs to do in order to become a man. Nicholas expresses this futility: “sharing my fear could prove too much, could make me lose control, and all I have left is this thin line of restraint. Nothing else is within my power” (12). Holding to a “thin line of restraint” prevents Nicholas’ (and Patrick’s) particular form of manliness from being constrained to the point of nullification. Thus, deliberately remaining silent in the face of the assumptions of their fathers and other men, withholding expressions of their fear, is the first stage in admitting who they are, or coming out. The gap in time between boyhood and the moment from which they narrate it in an attempt to make sense of it suggests that as boys they verged continually on powerlessness. However, despite the debilitating strictures, agency is shown to be possible. Within what Nicholas refers to as the “unmitigated hell” and “outrage that is the Defence Force” (12), the “thin line of restraint” he clings to signifies a mix of hopelessness and strategy. Restraint can lead to secrecy, and secrecy for a gay man in the army can secure survival. Nicholas expresses it as a necessity:

I think there is a possibility that Malcolm might be gay, and I think he might know that I am. The Defence Force distinctly forbids homosexuality as an unpardonable offence against God and country. So we show nothing, not even to each other. He tests me with supremely crafted clues, but I would never drop my guard in this purgatory. (78)

In *Moffie* the effect of the Border War ensures that his “equilibrium has been disturbed permanently” (54). Following the suicide of Dylan the Captain of the regiment presents his lecture-sermon on the motives underlying this suicide: “according to the experts these people are mentally ill. It’s a sickness, and I’m told they hate themselves so much for their evil lusts that they simply can’t live with themselves” (156–7). The Captain concludes: “if there are any more moffies here, get the fuck out of my company NOW! We’re given a bunch of sissies and we have to make men out of you before we can hope to beat the shit out of SWAPO” (157).

The horror expressed by Nicholas of being herded to the Border to “beat the shit out of SWAPO” is reflected in Galgut’s novel, and in an implied manner in Behr’s. In the case of *Moffie*, the persistent expression of entrapment works against the sympathetic identification with the protagonists achieved by Galgut and Behr. Whereas this absence of subtlety in the mode of narration is what separates van der Merwe’s story from those of Galgut and Behr, Prinsloo’s mode of narration is considerably different from all of theirs. The section to follow explores these differences and assesses the form of critique achieved thereby.

3.8 Koos Prinsloo's Short Stories

In Prinsloo's short stories the tyranny wrought by the notion of the 'real man' and the anxieties of being gay in the army are either absent, imperceptible, or present on a level not easy to articulate. In the coming discussion of his short stories the following questions will be addressed: does the seeming omission of the question of choice from treatment of his protagonists indicate political ignorance? Or does it suggest that by showing rather than telling or filtering his protagonists' experiences through the lens of moral judgment he is providing a deeper-reaching critique than that achieved by the three novelists? Prinsloo's stories were those of an openly gay man living in what de Kock refers to as the "white ghetto" of 1980s South Africa (70), without the benefit of release provided by a post-apartheid vision.⁵⁶ Although, as already observed, the space available for self-expression was markedly broader during the post-transition period, voices of resistance were making themselves heard.

Heyns observes that a distinctive element of Prinsloo's stories is the fact that they are "more ambivalent in their implied attitude of the world of male activity and sexuality" (117). His stories, and the lives of the characters within them, are comparatively devoid of ambiguity in a particular sense. Heyns observes: "Prinsloo's stories are brutally unapologetic about the homosexual nature and acts of the protagonist" (117). He achieves thereby a deeper-reaching critique than that achieved by Galgut, Behr and van der Merwe. Whereas the novelists present their critique by focusing on their protagonists' Border War experiences, Prinsloo shows (rather than tells) the pained alienation of conscripts at home, many of them having returned from the Border. By positioning his conscript-protagonists in their civilian contexts he achieves a different form of critique, one more accessible to the common reader.

During the 1980s the Censorship Board was a very active state apparatus whereby the hearts and minds of the white populace were protected and controlled. However, literary dissidents such as Prinsloo exploited opportunities to slip through chinks in the armour. His collection of short stories, *Jonkmanskas* (young man's chest or kist) is a case in point. The back cover blurb for the compilation reads:

⁵⁶ Prinsloo died from AIDS in March 1994, prior to South Africa's first democratic election.

“Manly experiences” stand at the forefront of Koos Prinsloo’s texts. This is how the grandfather in “Die Jonkmanskas” describes his hunting experiences as a pioneer in Kenya. But these stories are primarily concerned with the young man in South Africa of today: his reaction to military duty on the Border and how, as serviceman, he negotiates civilian life – often with cynicism and violence against self; his intellectual quest; his sexuality; and how the past impacts on his attempts to shape his life. (np)⁵⁷

The personal struggle expressed above moves to the level of the existential: “A vision of spiritual upheaval emerges; inner turmoil. Ultimately Prinsloo’s work persuades us that, in one way or another, people suffer and are helpless” (np).

Despite this acknowledgement that some white men experience themselves as incapable of being agents in their own lives, even as victims,⁵⁸ these words point to a distinct form of dissidence at work in *Jonkmanskas* – a dissidence that relates directly to his mode of narration. Henriette Roos says of his mode of narration: “In a special sense all of his stories are border stories in that they represent borders between moral and ideological conventions, imagination and fact, word and image being challenged such that the opposites become exchangeable and run into each other” (qtd in Olivier 1). This exchangeability and mingling of opposites reveals a mode of narration that Heyns calls “moral neutrality” (119), or a dispassionate presentation of incidents and interactions between characters (120). For Heyns an outcome of Prinsloo’s deliberate “refusal to order his data in terms of a hierarchy of significance” is that in his stories “sexual encounters, disturbingly, seem neither more and no less meaningful than the atrocities and trivialities he records so dispassionately” (120).

Despite the dispassionate presentation of characters, Prinsloo’s stories are, as Heyns notes, “not simply indifferent to the plight of others” (121). The fact that his stories “do not comment explicitly on the political situation in which they are steeped” (120) does not mean they are less telling in their critique than is the work produced by the other gay writers. Heyns illustrates this difference in styles of critique by comparing an aspect of Prinsloo’s work with that of Galgut: “to Galgut sex between men represents an act of defiance, to Prinsloo sex is itself part of the Emergency, an assertion of the predatory nature he has in common with the [white] male society to which he is nevertheless in important respects an outsider” (121). Thus, Heyns argues that Prinsloo’s stories are “themselves embodiments of [the political] situation, apparently amoral and fragmented recordings of data, with no single experience

⁵⁷ Translations from Prinsloo’s stories, and secondary texts commenting on them, are mine.

⁵⁸ In the final stage of writing up this thesis yet another memoir, *Kill Yourself and Count to 10: A Journey to Hell and Not Quite Back* (2014) by Gordon Torr emerged. This novel reconstructs the experiences of a conscript admitted as a result of a clerical error to the rehabilitation programme run by the “rogue psychiatrist” Aubrey Levine, mentioned earlier.

privileged over any other” (120). This narrative *modus operandi* imbued with neutrality of perspective can be illustrated by considering a few of Prinsloo’s stories.

In “Fighting for Peace”, as in many other stories, the plot action and the interaction of characters are bold and disturbing. The reader meets the unnamed protagonist, AWOL (absent without leave) we later discover, in his army uniform wandering the streets of Cape Town, seemingly without aim. Despite this pedestrian blankness of spirit, perhaps because of it, something is brewing. The reader is then introduced to a character named “the man” who walks past the bench upon which the serviceman sits, slows down, turns back and sits beside him. The man’s attempts at friendly conversation are rebuffed until he dissolves the tension by inviting the serviceman for a beer in his flat. There they engage in dialogue that refers back to the title of the story:

“What exactly do you do in the army?”
“I kill ters ...”
... “What do you achieve thereby?”
“What do you mean?”
“It’s futile, man, ‘fighting for peace is like fucking for virginity’.”
“You can do nothing else.”
“And therefore you own the right to kill people.”
“Don’t preach at me if you don’t know what the fuck you’re talking about.”
(Jonkmanskas 29)

The confrontation is resolved:

“Then why did you join me? Hunger?”
“Ja!”
“Ja, I’m sure you get enough bodies up there.”
“Fuck you!”
“With pleasure.” (30)

The serviceman removes his R1 rifle from his *duffelsak* (duffel bag), directs it at the man and orders him to undress while unbuttoning his own pants. The man hesitates before removing his watch and shirt and turning his back on the serviceman while removing his pants. The serviceman’s breathing quickens as his rifle remains directed at the man and he issues the order: “Look at me.” As the man turns to look, in the story’s final line, there is an astonished expression on his face. Heyns comments indirectly on this mingling of sex and violence: “If in his stories sex itself often seems like an atrocity committed upon a consenting partner, that may be a measure also of the meaning of desire in a violent society” (121).

On the levels of plot and character development his short story “Grensverhaal”⁵⁹ moves in discernible though uncertain directions. For example, the protagonist, while undergoing military training on the Border, hears about the death of his closest female friend. This news makes it possible to go on leave to attend her funeral. Her death flashes in his consciousness when he is in a Turkish bath at the instant of orgasm with an anonymous pimply-faced man. Such casual sexual encounters are woven into a record-keeping narrative style that recurs in other stories. Heyns observes that Prinsloo’s stories are also distinctive because his “provocatively autobiographical characters exercise their sexuality as both rebellion against and complicity in that man’s world that is desirable and repulsive at the same time” (117). He asserts, as noted earlier and in contrast to Galgut, that Prinsloo is “brutally unapologetic” about the homosexual activities of his characters (117).

For Prinsloo, as opposed to each of the novelists, the father-son dynamic is of little or no consequence in the unfolding of plots and character development. This absence indicates that in his work little is made of an important component of induction into socially sanctioned masculinity. His protagonists appear to experience no need to justify themselves, to define themselves against father, mother, schooling and the army. As Heyns states, their “sexuality is contextualised without being in any way ‘explained’” (118). The shaping role played by socialisation appears to be “beside the point,” to borrow the title of another of Prinsloo’s short stories. In “Beside the Point” the gay character Louis meets his friend Henry outside the Market Theatre half an hour before the play *Adapt or Dye*⁶⁰ is to be performed. Henry asks Louis if he had noticed a car in the parking ground occupied by drunk men and dagga stompies (butts). They walk to the car and meet Konrad. Henry introduces them to each other, informing Konrad, tongue-in-cheek: “Louis is gay, forgive him” (37). The humour in this comment is less obvious in the 1980s than it is likely to be from the vantage point of the present. During those years in which Prinsloo’s stories are located such an utterance would more often than not have been regarded as morally indefensible by the ruling white elite as well as the man-in-the-street.

⁵⁹ From *Forces’ Favourites*, compilation of short stories edited by Andrew Donaldson, 89–96.

⁶⁰ *Adapt or Dye*, a satirical play written and performed by gay playwright Pieter-Dirk Uys, derived its title from P.W. Botha’s speech of 1979 in which he exhorted white South Africans to “adapt or die.” This call arose from Botha’s move toward a reformist policy that amounted to a very selective relaxing of certain controls such as the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act, as well as a desire to foster the economic independence and growth of the “homelands.” Revealingly, there was no relaxing of the criminalisation of gay relationships. Such limited reforms still formed part of the so-called “total strategy” whereby the apartheid government held fast to the reins of power.

Through all of his stories Prinsloo effectively challenges the Afrikaner establishment. Homosexuality is normalised rather than concealed, thus challenging de Kock's assertion that such normalisation is specific to post-transitional writing. In Prinsloo's work being gay is presented as a case proven instead of an argument that needs to be advocated, as in van der Merwe's *Moffie*, despite the fact that the latter was published twenty four years after *Jonkmanskas*. With this difference in mind, van der Merwe's 'message' falls short of that presented by Prinsloo; and for this reason the following opinion from Theresa Edlmann is open to challenge: "it provides a subtle narrative of a gay man's experience of conscription and South African society at large" ("Negotiating History" 90). In summary, the style of resistance or subversion rooted in Prinsloo's aesthetic is markedly different from those to be found in the works of van der Merwe, Galgut and Behr.

3.9 Conclusion

It has been seen that the problem of choice features in each of the novels discussed. A good deal of attention has been paid to this problem in Mark Behr's *The Smell of Apples*, as well as to the existential and aesthetic choices made by the author in the 1980s and thereafter. The protagonists in Galgut's and van der Merwe's novels confront both the problem of choice in terms of their participation in military life, and the problem of admitting to being gay within a context in which a rigidly defined masculinity is enforced. Different intensities and styles of aversion to military service, and to the masculinist ideology it upholds, are present in the three novels and in Koos Prinsloo's collection of short stories.

A significant concern has been the father-son dynamic in the three novels under study. With the protagonists in Galgut's and van der Merwe's novels day-to-day activities attach to and are shaped by their relationships with their fathers, as well as with other men who are part of their social circle. There is nothing unusual about this in that it is a commonly identifiable element of any boy's socialisation. However, because these narrators and their authors are gay, it can be argued that the tensions between themselves and their fathers are especially threatening. The fathers to whom the life trajectories of the narrators are connected might be described as pointing to a singular masculine type. This type, or stereotype, displays a limited range of emotions. However, it has also been shown that with regard to the above-mentioned novels there are elements to the father-son dynamic that cannot be encompassed

by the idea of one type or one style of masculinity. In Prinsloo's short stories, on the contrary, father figures are visible by their absence.

The relation of narrator to author has been addressed. The extent to which the controlling voices in these narratives are plainly autobiographical relates to the extent to which the sexuality of the narrator is present in the narration. The controlling voice in van der Merwe's novel is less disguised than those in Galgut's and Behr's novels. Arguably, in this respect his voice more closely echoes that of Prinsloo. However, it has been seen that what separates van der Merwe's voice from Prinsloo's is the aesthetic that guides each of them. Prinsloo's mode of narration, the detachment of his aesthetic, does not ask or require the reader to make moral judgements. It has been argued that by deploying this aesthetic Prinsloo achieves a closer rendering of a range of gay experiences in 1980s South Africa and thereby achieves a deeper-reaching critique of the hegemonic masculinity that "ruled the roost." By showing the reader a hedonistic sexuality in a context of Calvinist restraint, Prinsloo presents something entirely different from what van der Merwe presents. Whereas van der Merwe's aesthetic mode is conservative, Prinsloo in his experimentalism consistently takes liberties. This difference explains why van der Merwe's representation of gay men's experiences, whether in inhospitable domains or their own, is so much the tamer, presenting a sometimes toothless critique. In this sense, if not aesthetically, the voice of resistance in van der Merwe's novels more closely resembles that to be found in the novels of Behr and Galgut than it does the essentially untamed stories of Koos Prinsloo.

Neither gay nor heterosexual subjectivities are unilinear. It is important in attempts to understand the disaffection and lostness of the protagonists in these novels to be aware of the frequently thin or porous line between the self and the other, as well as that between personal and narrative identity. These dualities shall be explored in the coming two chapters that focus on the autobiographical voice and the spoken voice.

Chapter 4

Memoirs

Among the fictions of the self, the versions of the self, that [autobiography] yields, are there any that are truer than others? How do I know the truth about myself? (JM Coetzee, “On the Question of Autobiography” 117)

Autobiography is a kind of self-writing in which you are constrained to respect the facts of your history. But which facts? All the facts? Of course not. You choose the facts insofar as they fall in with your evolving purpose.
(JM Coetzee, “On the Question of Autobiography” 117)

What, indeed, does man know of himself! Can he even once perceive himself completely, laid out as if in an illuminated glass case? [...] woe to the calamitous curiosity which might peer just once through a crack in the chamber of consciousness [...]. In view of this, whence in all the world comes the urge for truth? (Nietzsche in Kaufmann 44)

*My hero must be a door into a manhood of my own choosing. (Dan Wylie, *Dead Leaves* 64)*

4.1 Introduction: Book Covers, Photographs and Captions

Of the five memoirs considered in this chapter, three were written by men who performed National Service: *Dead Leaves* by Dan Wylie (2002); *Battle Scarred: Hidden Costs of the Border War* by Anthony Feinstein (2011) and *Back to Angola* by Paul Morris (2014). The covers of the books and the photographs between the covers present a shared iconography: combat aircraft, armoured vehicles, fatigues, helmets and rifles, scenes of battle.

Interestingly, similar images are to be found on the covers of mainstream memoirs. Even a mainstream memoir such as Granger Korff's *19 With a Bullet* (2009) presents at times a more than one-dimensional account of his war experience and what led to it. Despite this fact, there remain significant differences between a memoir such as his and those discussed in this chapter, and the photographs between the covers of the book invite an extra-literary way of marking this difference.

Prior to commenting on the photographs in the memoir it is illuminating to focus briefly on a snippet of the narrative that shows a specific role photographs played for Korff. He narrates a meeting with friends who were fellow-soldiers more than twenty years after the Border War:

So, many years now after the bush war in southern Africa [friends and I] have got together over the years in different countries around the world and hoisted a few to the old days. I cried like a baby. I wept too, when I buried the horrific close-up photographs of the dead SWAPO and FAPLA that I carried in my photo album and showed off for 18 years. Some of the people in those pictures I had personally shot. I dug a hole in the backyard and buried the ashes there. As I did so, I felt a burden lift instantly from my shoulders. (340)

The fact that for 18 years he has carried photographs in his wallet of “SWAPO and FAPLA” he has “personally shot” reveals how effectively these soldiers were objectified and dehumanised. This dehumanisation explains the absence of a noun after “SWAPO and FAPLA.” As commentary on the novels discussed in Chapter 3 revealed, the trophy mentality performed by displaying images of dead men was not uncommon. However, other moments of recall, in the form of photographs that represent Korff’s life after his time as Parabat, serve to offset these utterances. The text’s 75 photographs representing military life are bracketed by two pre-war and four post-war photographs. The pre-war images are captioned: “The author as a child, playing soldiers,” and the second reads “The author savours his long hair just before his enlistment.” The photographs that provide a sense of his post-war civilian life record moments from his boxing matches in Los Angeles, with the following captions: “The author knocking out an opponent in the fourth round,” “the author fighting [a] particular opponent [who] had just come off a split-decision loss to a world-renowned ‘bad ass,’” and “Korff with a deep cut. He fought on to lose on a points’ decision.” The final image is especially striking. Its caption reads: “Granger Korff knocking an opponent out of the ring, raising his arm in victory. Note his opponent’s feet sticking up in the front row – coincidentally where the judges are seated.” The caption renders a macho consciousness with a sense of humour. This rendering, along with the technical details contained in the captions to the other photographs, indicate that the writer assumes a particular reader: the white South African man who knows his boxing, who grew up watching Gerrie Coetzee, Kallie Knoetze, Pierre Fourie and Harold Volbrecht in action before South African fighters were, as a result of apartheid, excluded from competing internationally. Korff’s choice of the images he deems

significant is not under question. What is under question is the notion of masculine identity they assume and promote – that a man is, regardless of context, a warrior.

The front cover of another mainstream memoir, A.J. Brooks' *The Border* (2007), presents a webbed helmet resting atop a pole, and on this helmet stands an open-winged butterfly. The background shows dry land stretching past a large green tree to the horizon and a clear blue sky. The scene expresses peace and a touch of beauty. On the front cover of Anthony Feinstein's memoir *Battle Scarred* a webbed helmet is also positioned in the foreground. This echo resulted in my walking past it twice in the "military" section of a Johannesburg bookshop before registering its title and realising that it clearly contained between its covers a critical reading of Border War experiences. On closer inspection I noted that the webbed helmet lies askance on its tip. Behind it a blood-splattered stretch of dry scrub leads to the horizon where a helicopter lands and soldiers alight from a combat vehicle. Two of these soldiers are bending to lift a stretcher from the ground. The blood is superimposed upon helmet, scrub, soldiers, vehicles and sky. It is *on* rather than *in* the scene, which presents the image as a construct instead of a bald rendering with touches of nostalgic remembrance presented by the cover to Brooks's memoir.

The front cover image of Feinstein's memoir resembles that of Rick Andrew's *Buried in the Sky* (2001) which also presents an alternative reading of the Border War. In the latter a bare-chested soldier, who is the author with a rifle strapped to his shoulder, stands with his torso obscured by clouds and a webbed helmet over his eyes. The same image is replicated within the pages of the text, but in the latter the horizon of the page cuts clean the soldier's face below his eyes. These images signify a blocking or cutting of the capacity for vision. In a context in which the eye of the conscript-beholder is told what to make of the scenes before him there is not a secure viewpoint, no space for the eye to move and assess. Eyes without ambit watch instead of see. The eye absorbs and seeps into the zones of combat it beholds. These zones grow familiar, are normalised. The conscript's gaze is domesticated to the extent that what he sees is no longer strange; it becomes neither more nor less than what lies before his eyes, what is available to his vision. If locales of violence and bloodletting are domesticated, then properly seeing such acts and places for what they are becomes unlikely, even unnecessary. Why bother questioning one's illegitimate presence on the borders of other countries when one can be braaiing and drinking beer and being *gesellig* (convivial) with one's fellow conscripts?

A borderline consciousness hinders the conscript's capacity to see outside of himself and, by extension, within himself. Detachment and alienation attend what the eye sees, and this detachment and alienation run through each of the narratives under discussion. The blocking of vision suggested by these images applies also to the exercise of the voice. This exercise is suggested in the transformation of the voice onto the page in the image on the front cover of Dan Wylie's memoir *Dead Leaves*: a pen emerging from the breast pocket of a camouflage uniform. The pen in the pocket signifies the importance for the reader of remaining alert to the idea that the very writing of these memoirs is a strategy for surviving military service, and transforming, perhaps healing, thereafter.

Wylie speaks of his attempts to return to and reconstruct his past as engaging "an ethics of perpetual discomfiture" ("Witnessing Brutality" 194). Just as military commanders' attempts to marshal the conscripts' gaze could not entirely contain the direction of his eyes, so too do the voices that dictate obedience fail to allay the discomfiture that makes possible the stories of aversion and resistance, stories that revoice previously neglected or overlooked experiences. The genre of memoir provides the opportunity to regain missing voices.

4.2 Missing Voices

In her paper delivered at the Legacies of the Apartheid Wars (LAWS) conference held at Rhodes University in 2013 Michele Pickover, co-ordinator of The Missing Voices Project, observed that during the post-apartheid Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) hearings, initiated in 1996, very little testimony from rank-and-file SADF soldiers was heard. Instead, "sanitised stories" were presented by military leaders. Pickover's project grew from the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR) calling for a broader, more representative "archival trace." This sense of missing or ignored voices relates to the fact that military incidents outside of the borders of South Africa were given hardly any attention. The private truths of the Border War were subsumed by the dominant military discourse through its construction of what Pickover refers to as a "meta-truth." The memoirs that emerged post-apartheid adhere to this meta-truth. What emerges from these revisits is what Pickover names "conformity of perception." This conformity involves frequently nostalgic accounts of heroic patriotism that tally with the "head-in-the-sand-thinking" referred to by Wamuwi Mbao, which in its turn relates directly to the "abdication of culpability" (n.p). These narratives are

invariably linear. Though such monological narratives might contain their strains of resistance to militarised masculinity, detecting such strains is frequently a strain of its own for the interpreter. The generally unquestioned assumption underlying such narratives is that the reader, male or female, has already bought into the notion of manhood that drives the story being told.

On the other hand, the counter-narratives, those that bear more visible strains of resistance, are characteristically more fractured. From the fracture-lines contrary voices emerge. In the case of rank-and-file soldiers these cracks illumine truths that present to the reader a broader spectrum of lived rather than programmed experience. Just as texts discussed thus far participate in extending the “archival trace” to which Pickover refers, so too do the texts to be analysed in the body of this chapter, as well as the interview-texts in Chapter 5.

4.3 The Genre of Memoir

Although memoir is, in a way, a sub-genre to autobiography, what it shares with autobiography is its concern with the events of a life. Like autobiography, the memoir is driven by the intention to be true to the events of the life being spoken. Textual analysis in this chapter works from the assumption that claims to the truth of experience is contingent upon the speaker’s subject position and circumstances. Each memoirist is always and necessarily doing more in the telling of his or her past than recounting its seminal incidents and truths. His or her process of writing is as much narrative reconstruction as it is a window to a selected past. The memoirist is simultaneously narrator and protagonist. The protagonist stands with his or her face pressed up against the window to the time and events under scrutiny, such that he or she has no sight of the window’s frame, or, at most, a peripheral sense of it. The narrator, on the other hand, perceives both the window frame as well as that mysterious, even confusing, protagonist who resembles but is not quite him or herself. Who is it that speaks when the speaker says I? Or what is it that speaks? These questions will be addressed by engaging briefly with studies of the genre of autobiography in the works of Paul John Eakin (1985; 1992) and Jacques Derrida (1988). Working with a problematic sense of truth-telling ensures that due attention is paid to the concept or problem central to consideration of the texts in this chapter, as well as those focused upon in the other chapters: that of choice or agency. There are no simple answers to questions of choice or agency.

Whether a man complies with the call to duty, whether he accepts commands, whether he is trained and enters the battle field, or whether he refuses in his way while others refuse in theirs, is always a matter of individual choice. Such choices are not necessarily constants. Different men make different choices, and one man's choices might change. The memoirists under study in this chapter express either their discomfort in relation to military life or in their refusal to take part. The authors narrate their insecurity and experience of apartness. For Dan Wylie in *Dead Leaves* this apartness is rooted in poetry, art and nature. Rian Malan in *My Traitor's Heart* (1990) speaks from the vantage-point of a draft-dodging rebel or hippie. Donald McRae in *Under Our Skin* (2012) is a left-leaning student and journalist aligning himself with the struggle against apartheid. Anthony Feinstein in *Battle-Scarred* is an unwilling doctor who finds himself on the Border "a world away from [his] quiet suburban life in Johannesburg" (11) and seeks ways to manage the resultant internal contradictions. Paul Morris, in *Back to Angola: A Journey from War to Peace*, chronicles his return by bicycle as a private mission of healing to the battlefield of Cuito Cuanavale a quarter of a century after his involvement as rifleman in this battle. The common thread is contrariness, something that runs against the grain, straining, in the least accommodating of worlds, to hold to itself.

The questions and concerns raised above, relating to the articulation of insecure or labile senses of masculine selfhood, as well as the veracity contained in such articulation, show that the idea of writing the self, masculine or other, is complex and problematic, as the epigraphs to this chapter suggest. Exploration of the complex formation and counter-formation of masculine identity begins with Dan Wylie's memoir *Dead Leaves*.

4.4 Facts or Fictions?

The starting-point for this discussion of the complex relation of the writing-self to the self-revisited is well served by paying careful attention to Dan Wylie's *Dead Leaves*. Wylie's memoir serves a double purpose. Firstly, it proves to be highly amenable to application of the theoretical rubric for this chapter as a whole. This amenability relates directly to the fact that Wylie's mode of narration is more self-conscious than that which is at work in the other memoirs. Secondly, Wylie's memoir serves as measuring-point or fulcrum around which the other memoirs will be discussed and assessed. In his essay entitled "Witnessing Brutality"

(*Telling Wounds* 192) that reflects on his memoir, Wylie observes: “much of the memoir is not just about me trying to become a writer, it is me, becoming the writer I needed to be then in order to witness, but which I was not” (192–3). To understand the act of writing as reconstruction of a time gone by is to acknowledge that it is a process and not a means of accessing what can be known. For the reader, understanding the time and events of which the writer speaks requires a sense of the self or identity from which the reconstruction emerges. Awareness of the complexity of these dynamics is essential to understanding each of the memoirs under discussion.

In his memoir Wylie reconstructs his time as conscript in the final two years of the so-called Rhodesian Bush War, otherwise known as the Second *Chimurenga* or the Zimbabwe War of Independence. In his Foreword to *Dead Leaves*, Anthony Chennells states: “The experience the book confronts of a white fighting for the indefensible emerges more morally complex than we may have thought possible.” This statement prompts questions: what was it that made it difficult, even impossible, to conceive of a young white man’s involvement in “the indefensible” as “morally complex,” and what constitutes such complexity? Though Wylie’s memoir may not present clear-cut answers to these questions, it does indicate ways of living out a private masculinity in the face of governing versions thereof. Chennells speaks of Wylie’s memoir as “superbly [...] rehearsing the language and narratives that have formed competing memories and setting them against other public narratives, the official histories of this period” (xv). It is precisely Wylie’s capacity to work with language in the ways suggested by Chennells that gives an aesthetic quality to his recollections. More so, and as will be seen, his memoir examines the ways in which an aesthetic sensibility creates spaces to affirm the potential to be more than the man one is pressured to be.

Though he considers it to be a memoir, Wylie acknowledges that *Dead Leaves* leans towards deployment of fictional devices. Indeed, he states in the disclaimer that precedes the body of his memoir: “Although this account is *fairly closely* autobiographical, no one is likely to recognise themselves in these pages. My companions in this experience have been fictionalised out of all recognition” (viii, my italics). In “Witnessing Brutality” Wylie addresses the problem of remembering by suggesting that fictional selves are created as a means of negotiating dishonesty. He declares that the truth of his time, 1978–80, is retrospective and imposed:

I scarcely recognised myself [in the dairies recording military service]. I felt like a character, somebody else’s fabrication whose reality eluded me, yet whose counter-

reality began to pervade me, to undermine the present “me.” This “I” began to dissolve, or to become a collage of “I”s – eyes – watching me from those yellowed pages. (191)

The Wylie “I” writing the memoir casts a suspicious eye back on the journals written by his past “I.” He reads this “I” as more of a fabrication than a being he can call himself. To make matters worse, this past “I” dissolves as he casts his eye ahead from the vantage-point of the yellowed pages of his journals to the man who presumes can write about him. All the doubt and confusion and distrust indicate that a unitary “I” appears to be out of the question. What is certainly put into question is the capacity of the memoirist to make claims to the truth. One is struck here by an echo between Wylie casting the authorial “I” as a fabrication, something that dissolves, and the radical scepticism of Foucault for whom the author is a functional principle and Barthes who declares the Death of the Author (see Chapter 1). “In short,” says Wylie, “I fictionalise” (192). As Paul John Eakin (1985) notes, this awkward relation of the eye to the “I” is expressed in the title to Elizabeth Bruss’s journal article “Eye for I: Making and Unmaking Autobiography in Film” (1983). According to Eakin, Bruss, following Derrida, has a “chastened sense of the fundamental limitation of any autobiographical text” (225). She challenges “the traditional transcendentalist conception of autobiography” with these words:

We were apt to take autobiography as at least expressive of a common underlying reality – a self existing independently of any particular style of expression and logically prior to all literary genres and even to language itself [...]. Perhaps subjectivity takes shape by and in its language rather than using language as a ‘vehicle’ to express its own transcendental being [...]. The autobiographical preoccupation with capturing the self on paper [demonstrates] the delusion of a subjectivity trying to be ‘through and through present to itself’ in the very writing that is the mark of its own absence. (qtd. in Eakin 225)

Eakin comments: “the desire for presence [...] to which autobiography aspires [...]” is, in Derrida’s words “‘always already’ at one remove from the reality of being” (224). If it is accepted in general terms that the individual’s attempts to represent himself on paper are delusional, then the implication, when casting one’s eye on a specific moment in a life, is that such a moment cannot contain ‘truth’ or a meaning that inheres. To believe otherwise means not taking cognisance of the role played by the lenses through which the teller views and reviews the events or raw material from his or her past. The lenses are replaced through the passage of time as the teller’s eyesight alters, and different lenses are worn by different tellers

who may be revising shared moments. Thinking back from the moment in which he looks back, Wylie experiences his past as “sliding and rolling under [his] feet like oiled rocks in a streambed” (155).

Claims to personal and public truths made in autobiographical writing link to the non-fictions of lived maleness and the fictions of its hegemonic inscription. Thus a man’s retelling his past problematises that past and the masculine role he was required to perform. In many of the memoirs under discussion, the contrast between what has come before and what might follow military service suggest a welcome widening of the range of ways whereby the man might rename himself. The “perpetual discomfiture” of Wylie’s experience keeps him at a distance from the kind of man he is expected to be, while also preventing him from falling prey to a sentimentalisation of events or relationships of the kind identified in Chapter 2 in relation to Mandy de Waal’s interview with Border War veteran Tony Batista, who speaks of his “moment of truth and beauty” (2013 np).

As it was suggested earlier that the notion of a “fuller masculinity” is an essentialist ruse designed to distract attention from the fact that masculine identity is a construct, so too could it be said that a “moment of truth” denies the fact that the past often consists of debatable truths; that it is recast as much and sometimes more than it is recorded. Reflecting on the relation of the event or “material” to its telling, Hans Magnus Enzensberger observes: “The material, whether documentary or fiction, is in each case only a prototype, a half-finished article, and the more closely one examines its origins, the more blurred the difference becomes” (35). Early in his narrative Wylie offers what amounts to an apologia for the degree of agency writing can claim. He proposes that telling one’s story is necessarily partial, contingent upon an unpredictable alchemy of word and event. The memoir’s capacity for effective recall is questionable:

Writing will not be the end of it: the memories are reinforced, not exorcised. I do not believe I will be purified by it. So much is inevitably lost, dismembered, misremembered: perhaps nothing is fully redeemable. Is it possible to grow out of oneself? Hasn’t memory become impossibly disorientated among the tricky labyrinths of the imagination and self-justification? Is there a mirror which does not distort or a story which, even in its distortions, does not tell too much? (*Dead Leaves* 4–5)

This lack of trust in the veracity of his old voice pronounces a riven identity: a man performing his duties as soldier, and a man who writes. This writing is acknowledged as “futile” at the same time as it is a life-line that connects him to a “moral conscience”

(Witnessing Brutality” 154). He asserts: “I cannot refuse the writing. I know, deep down, that I will go on writing, that I will pick up my pen again tomorrow and for years to come, and indeed to the end of my days. *But for what?*” (155). In the aftermath of his involvement in the accidental shooting of two civilians he is devoid of words. If writing is conceived as a means of reliving an incident from one’s past, then an incident that is traumatic might render this reliving difficult, even impossible. In such instances the fact that one is a writer is a problem.

The mode of knowing that drives Wylie’s narrative achieves a closer approximation of the truth precisely because it questions the possibility of truth, thereby presenting a more convincing account of choices made and lived by conscripts. Indeed, Wylie’s epistemology is rooted in a particular ontology, such as that to be found in the fictional works of Samuel Beckett. Reflecting on the opportunity for agency available to him as a conscript, Wylie observes:

I feel like the characters in Beckett’s play *Waiting for Godot*, still fresh in my mind from school:

Estragon: I’m going.

He does not move. (*Dead Leaves* 31)

Beckett’s novel *The Unnamable* (*Trilogy* 1979), which is essentially an anti-novel, expresses an extreme version of Wylie’s distrust of the truth-telling capacity of words:

I seem to speak, it is not I, about me, it is not about me [...]. The fact would seem to be, if in my situation one may speak of facts, not only that I shall have to speak of things of which I cannot speak, but also, which is if possible even more interesting, that I shall have to, I forget, no matter. And at the same time I am obliged to speak. (267)

The words by which Beckett sets up his position as narrator partially echo the manner in which Wylie sets himself up. In contrast, as noted in Chapter 1, the echo between the epistemologies of Beckett and Michel Foucault, as articulated in the latter’s essay “What is an Author,” are exact instead of partial. Foucault sets up “the theme” of his argument with Beckett’s statement (as opposed to question), “What does it matter who is speaking,” and concludes the ‘message’ of his argument with the same statement. Though for Beckett, Foucault and Barthes there is no road to the truth, for Wylie there may be one, but it has multiple lanes. This skepticism is expressed by the regular undercutting of his authorial voice. He presents a narrator who inhabits his world but is not inhabited by it. It provides the

reader sufficient space to discern the complex relation of the narrator to his world – those points of connection and severance that constitute his time in the army.

Points of severance and connection manifest in Wylie's representation of his interactions and relationships with other men. In order to “rebuild [his] humanity” (4), he needs to overcome the constraints of the situation in which he finds himself. To be specific, he needs to define his ways of being a man in response to the ways he witnesses others performing this role.

4.5 Ways of Being Male In *Dead Leaves*

From early in his narrative, Wylie sets himself up as a particular kind of man: poet, virgin and teetotaler. This separates him from the prototype espoused by his fellow-conscripts. The differences, which at times generate awkwardness and insecurity, never manage to unhinge him. The pen in the breast pocket of his uniform, mentioned earlier, is the primary marker of this difference.

In Chapter 2, titled “Divine Accident,” Wylie recounts being knocked over by a military vehicle, which causes torn ligaments around his left knee and a broken bone in his hand. The injury sees him transferred to clerical duties, which he experiences as profoundly emasculating. Later, Lieutenant Whorehound advises that, instead of continuing with these duties, Wylie undergoes training to become a tracker. It is a suggestion that redeems Whorehound as “almost human.” In amusing echo with his avowed atheism, Wylie experiences the opportunity for release from clerical duties as a divine accident. However, no sooner has he celebrated this opportunity for escape than he observes its “worrisome aspects” (32). But these aspects are, in their turn, undercut by what he terms “gross bravado”: “It will be tough, much in the nature of Selous Scouts,⁶¹ and the job which follows dangerous. Work will be entirely military, mostly recce, and contact with the enemy probable. But I am determined to go through with it” (32). Though a “nauseous hopelessness” (31) is not far beneath the surface, this transition from clerk to tracker signifies the crossing of a threshold. But no sooner has the significance of this crossing been announced than Wylie confesses: “I do not tell National Parks that I have scarcely mastered the About-Turn” (33). In the portion

⁶¹ The special forces regiment of the Rhodesian army that was operative from 1972 until the transfer of political power in 1980.

of text preceding this confession a character he names Mursil M Misflitt is introduced. Misflitt is presented with an attention to detail that resembles characterisation instead of a character-sketch. Indeed, Wylie professes that he manages Misflitt's "irritating, sucker-like presence" by "turning him into Literary Material" (31). Having observed that Misflitt is "one of those medically unredeemable [...] apparently hopeless characters who occasionally get washed up on the Army's intolerant margins," Wylie proceeds to present an account of Misflitt's style of self-presentation: "Mursil is a slender boy with baby-curly blond hair to which he pays much attention – indeed he is femininely fastidious in all such matters, taking up to twenty minutes to get fully dressed" (32). Misflitt's femininity contrasts with the new man towards which Wylie aspires. However, the characterisation is ambiguous. Mention has been made of the "Army's intolerant margins" (31) and the rendering of Misflitt moves from "pathetic" and "hopeless" to "sad" (32). This marks a move from feelings of repulsion to pity and compassion. Attached to this shift, or arising from it, is an admission of his own fallibility and vulnerability: "He cuts a sad figure and I patronise him terribly, trying to grind away my own timidity in the mortar of a desperate pragmatism" (32). Acknowledgement here of his own timidity, as well as the desperation that fuels becoming a tracker, suggest that he and Misflitt are not necessarily a world apart from each other: they both bear constraints on their liberty, regardless of the kinds of men they are.

A very different link between two men takes place in the form of Wylie presenting to his father as Christmas present "a monumental history of guerilla warfare, *War in the Shadows*" (186). He says of this gift: "Despite everything, warfare, its tactics and technologies, continue to exert an archetypal masculine fascination on both of us" (186). This statement generates questions. Where do the roots of fascination with warfare lie? Does this fascination with the tactics and technologies of warfare connect to an archetypal masculinity, or does a stereotypical rather than archetypal force help explain this fascination? In other words, does such fascination carry the load of a generalisable truth instead of being an ideological construct or device that serves political ends? Finally, does not the use of the term archetype overstate the case, giving undeserved weight to institutionalised violence? There is a single answer to the above questions: it is important and necessary to debate and contest established, often oversimplified notions of masculinity, and to acknowledge that use of the term archetype overlooks the role played by socialisation, ideological persuasion or brainwashing in the construction of the man willing to serve.

In the final phase of Wylie's military duty a willingness to serve emerges in the form of him taking on the role of medic. This shift in duty might be considered a form of atonement, but seeing it thus is not a simple matter for Wylie. Attending to a 12 year-old girl whose legs have been blown away he wonders: "what the hell can she be thinking when one white man in uniform blows her legs away and another one comes in to help her?" (190). Later he undercuts the assertion that care for this girl is his "volte-face" and "atonement" (191) with these words: "but as I look at the downturned face of that girl, wonder what god-awful legless life she will end up living, I am not convinced" (191). An encounter such as this cannot be expunged from his memory. It and others linger like a "strange virus, here hardening arteries and deadening certain nerves, there raking the surface of perceptions to an exquisite tenderness" (192). These polar opposites – hardness and tenderness – co-exist in the same man.

In his recollections Wylie provides a complex picture of a man divided, emotionally and morally, by his time and situation. In what he says and his mode of telling he gestures toward a more inclusive orientation toward masculinity. Two portions of his life that do foster this orientation are working with words and friendship. These serve as forms of atonement and refuge.

4.6 Poetry and Friendship

On the train that will transport him and fellow-conscripts to their military base Wylie "take[s] refuge in silently composing and memorising a description of the "rhythmical-awkward never-constant clack and rumble of the points; wheels or linkages silvery-musical click and squeal like trailing wire; growl and engine-surge on the upclines; sparks flying disconsolately out the window" (11–12). The urgent and visceral energy in the coupling of words expresses the influence of Gerard Manley Hopkins, Robert Frost, Walt Whitman or other poets to whom the young man may have attached dreams of his own becoming. His poetic sensibility sets him apart and is simultaneously a source of refuge and vulnerability. He reflects: "I am the poet in the machine, unprotected and afraid" (12). The pen of the poet brings succour of sorts, yet this succour is compromised by awareness of the limits of language. Despite these constraints, Wylie's awareness of his identity as writer, with the refuge it affords, is sustained through his telling. Importantly, as suggested earlier, this stability of self is aided by

attachments to ‘significant others’; that is, other conscripts who see and support him for what he is. The first of these is the character Tim Boot.

Boot enters Wylie’s story as the chief ranger and commander of the tracking course he has been enlisted to attend on the banks of the Zambezi River. Wylie says of Boot:

In some lonely part of my being I know that I have been looking for a role model, a hero, someone both like and different from my father. My hero must be a door into a manhood of my own choosing. I find myself wondering if this is the man. It feels right to be a little afraid of one’s hero. (64)

Earlier, Wylie notes: “[Boot] daunts, disturbs, attracts me” (61). There is a magnetic inscrutability to Boot: “Mobile lips twitch in the merest beginning of a smile, sardonic or welcoming, it is difficult to say” (61). Later he records his awareness of Boot with these words: “The long upper lip is curled and expressive, hovers somewhere between sensitivity and cynicism [...] there is an ambiguous twinkling at the corner of his mouth” (63–4). It is not surprising that Wylie, in the presence of Boot, begins to gain cognisance of what at the age of nineteen years is probably little more than an inkling of his ‘man-to-be’: “I recognise a tenderness [...] even, perhaps a fundamental loneliness to mirror my own” (65). Boot as a mirror image affords Wylie the opportunity to know himself better, but it is a knowledge that confirms his fundamental loneliness. At times this loneliness discovers tenderness. The avenue of release for this tenderness is his creativity – his poetry and paintings. In a “spare moment” Wylie, while leaning against a mopani tree and sketching nearby elephants, becomes aware of movements behind him and turns to discover Boot looking down at his sketch pad (67). “You’re good,” says Boot, and he offers to pay Wylie to create a painting. This request is a powerful instant of recognition, of connection to another unusual man. Because of Boot his counter-identity – that of poet and painter – is out in the open. This suggests that even within the most constrained situation there is possibility for self-definition and the exercise of personal will, a holding to ways of being that depart from the one presented by the military. Boot’s recognition of his art is at the same time recognition of what lies at the roots of it: the beauty of nature. Wylie says of “the abundance of wildlife” (66–7) at Mana Pools: “It is as close as I have got in my life to the timelessness of an Elysium. It is not some mythical heaven – an Eden devoid of violence or danger – but it is a world that governs itself entirely without us” (67). This experience of nature’s indifference connects to his sense of beauty. He records his experience of a patrol through a Game Park: “No barrack walls, no shouting or gunfire – instead an engulfing silence wide as the sky. I realise how

desperately I have longed for beauty. I am moved almost to tears by the curves of sables' necks and scimitar horns. Everything is grandly wet. My very skin exults" (42).

The presence of Boot in his world enables him to feel solitary at the same time as he feels "at home" (67), echoing his perception of nature as "a world that governs itself entirely without us" at the same time as it is, perhaps for this very reason, profoundly inhabitable. The presence of nature and of Boot brings him to a level of self-awareness he might not otherwise have gained. Thus, though not directly stated at first, it cannot be doubted that the poetic is rooted in this deeply sensual celebration of nature. His exultation contains promise of transformation: beauty will find or be granted its words, its intimations of immortality. His apprehension of nature is redemptive, salvatory and a matter of survival: "I hoard these fragments of beauty the way a man lost in a desert sucks on a stone for moisture" (44). Later he proclaims that in the natural world "poetry becomes possible again" (67).

Wylie's poetic apprehension of nature indicates attunement and sensitivity not necessarily typical of the performance of masculinity that attends the life of a military man. There is a gap between the man he feels himself to be and the role he is expected to perform. If the identity of his own choosing is that of poet and painter, one who has the power to transform nature into poems or paintings, then the role imposed upon him induces insecurity and, in his own words, "cowardice" (38). Observing a fellow conscript with whom he experiences an affinity Wylie states: "He polishes and polishes. I see reflected in his sad, sedulous face, the cowardice I suspect in myself" (38). Later he observes that heroes, against his expressed need for them, "are going to be hard to come by" and that it will be "even harder to become one" (38).

Arising from a discussion with Wylie and other conscripts, Boot says: "Killing anything, even other people, means there's a failure of the imagination, to *be* that animal. That imagining, *that's* true compassion" (73). This statement instantly reminds Wylie of his mother who has "invested an apparently unlimited capacity for love – and with it, necessarily, an almost equally unlimited capacity to bear pain – in protecting from human encroachment her patch of [land]" (73–4). Thus his male role model stirs memories of his mother. But Boot's care and compassion for all animals carries a tinge of pessimistic misanthropy, felt also by Wylie: "Tim Boot and I agree that the world would be a better place without most of the people in it" (74–5). Significantly, in Mana Pools, Boot's natural habitat, Wylie finds "echoes of the dank and sun-splashed womb of [his mother's] forest" (74). This is not to suggest that he needs or wishes to define himself as anti-man, but rather that he prefers to use

distinctive co-ordinates as a means of shaping his sense of himself. His mother's and Boot's domains, their preferred habitats, expressed as "womb" and "great haven," provide sanctuary from "the ashen valley in which humanity wages war against itself and against the indigenous creatures" (74). Of course, the active agents in this waging of war are men. Despite the fact that being in this male-specific "ashen valley" chafes against both his and Boot's better natures, their actions participate in endangering the "Rhino Elysium" in which they find themselves. However, the fact that both he and Boot are sensitive to nature's indifference, that the domain they inhabit is essentially no man's domain, amounts to a form of redemption. As already suggested, this redemption connects to a specific female energy in the form of Wylie's mother, who is connected in her turn to "the *omphalos*, the world-navel, the fountainhead, of all regenerative possibility" (74). Such hallowing of what is often considered to be a female preserve is unusual in the voice of a male writer. Indeed, this sentiment is either absent or superficially present in the other memoirs under discussion in this chapter. With an element of irony, Boot is presented as a character of contradictions. He is a 'real man' rooted in a male-specific world, but, at the same he leans toward the feminine principle with its regenerative energies of love, compassion and imagination. Compassionate identification with "the *omphalos*" points toward an alternative masculinity. This leaning towards alternatives reflects in Wylie recalling a wisdom uttered by Boot: "quoting the fantasy writer Ursula Le Guin, [he said that] the opposite of civilisation is not primitiveness, but war" (103). Understandably, Wylie experiences this wisdom uttered by Boot as difficult to stomach. It makes him feel "nauseous with the suspicion that this war is a conflict we have brought down upon ourselves, under totally false presumptions" (103). This nausea arises from his incapacity or resistance, during his time of service, to fully absorb the truth that causes it: "But then I cannot say it, not to my parents, not even to myself" (103). In conclusion, the character Boot serves an important function in the narrative: he is an intimation of other possibilities for masculine selfhood, a role model. His unceremonious departure carries for Wylie the weight of romance: "I feel betrayed, bereft, stung" (94).

The character of Charlie Locker, another senior officer, performs a function similar to that offered by Tim Boot, though taken a step further. Wylie introduces Locker as having "something of Boot's self-containment" (121). He recalls Locker quoting lines from Shakespeare during their first meeting, and suspects that he is the only one "to pick up the reference" (120). This constitutes another moment of mutual recognition: "our eyes lock, and then crinkle at the corners. We are friends, just like that. It feels to me like a reprieve" (120).

Once again, moments of reprieve or refuge suggest ways of being ‘outside of the box.’ Later Wylie observes that in his civilian life Locker is a newspaper editor, and asserts that “it is my destiny, it seems, to be drawn to men with portable typewriters” (121).

Thus Wylie experiences himself as drawn to a man who is drawn to nature, and to a man who is drawn to working with words. Both men function as co-ordinates or touchstones, directing him toward ways of being with men that grow from the men themselves instead of from the dictates that attend the notion of the ‘real man.’ Indeed, these relationships enhance his capacity to understand and judge those who willingly bow down to the ideologically constructed man: “Our leaders, we persuade ourselves, are neither more experienced nor more intelligent than we are. They merely have more damaging scope to play out their Oedipal neuroses” (129). A particular leader is singled out: “So, in the service of Major Goodlooker’s unresolved Oedipal impulses, back into the cockpit of thorny torture we go” (131). Mentions of unresolved Oedipal impulses and neuroses indicate a critical awareness of the construction of a particular thwarted and stunted masculinity, such that any complexity is, in truth, not more complex than a complex.

Wylie’s attachment to Boot is, in a sense, a rehearsal for his subsequent attachment to Locker. Attachment to the latter moves him a step closer to an intimacy he has not known: “He gets up suddenly and gives me a lingering, bony hug. I have never been hugged by a grown man before, as an equal” (142). The connection to Boot does not manifest in like manner and Boot’s departure from his life, as observed earlier, carries with it an emotion of hurt. The “lingering, bony hug” with Locker expresses an intimacy between two men that is unusual within the military context, and unprecedented for Wylie both within and outside of this context. He welcomes it as an emblem of trust, compassion and understanding between two men: a genuine relation. In contrast to this moment of intimacy, much of the male bonding Wylie experiences arises from the imperatives and perils of combat. His first experience of combat is a mistake in that he and his fellow-soldiers open fire on “running figures [...] a boy, two, perhaps a man” (144). No enemy soldiers were in fact present and the dead man turns out to be a teenaged girl. In a subsequent letter he comments on this event: “I suppose one should feel remorse at this sort of thing, but I really feel nothing at all, no joy, no sadness, deadness only” (146). He is conscious of this deadness as a means of turning away from moral implications: “Who am I protecting, with this sanitisation? My parents, myself, all of us. I have said that guilt is a room we have been shut out of. But we continue to build the walls around us, a redoubt of willed and willing numbness and silence” (146).

In the subsequent combat incident Wylie does experience feelings of remorse and guilt towards his fellow-soldiers. Revealingly, this skirmish is narrated in the third person, thereby reflecting his will to detachment as a means of managing his emotions. Also, the shift to third person narration reflects what has been seen and not spoken. As commander of his unit or “stick,” he alone sights the guerillas through the legs of cattle. He keeps this sighting to himself, which leads directly to the confrontation: “The consequence of my silence isn’t long in coming” (147). He bears the weight of his silence secretly. After the conflict he is sitting with a fellow-soldier:

He grins at Rob. Rob grins back, gives a thumbs-up.
‘You did OK,’ Rob whispers.
He shrugs.
You coward, he says, but silently. (149)

The grimness of spirit evinced by this concealment is, Wylie observes, misinterpreted by Charlie Locker: “You can’t live on heroism. Heroism isn’t a food. It’s a drain. It’s a succubus. A deception” (149). Later Charlie, disturbed by Wylie’s silence, pleads: “Don’t go hard on me. On yourself. Don’t shut down. You’re a poet” (150). This plea respects the idea that creativity is an antidote to combative masculinity. Because he holds to his secret, Wylie does experience himself as hardened, shut down. However, he is conscious of this: “I cannot admit to Charlie Locker – or even to myself – that I have shamed him; that his very warmth, his moral intelligence, cut me like a blade; that I can’t see where to fit the beautiful into my world now.” Charlie is, asserts Wylie, “a beautiful man” (150).

Then, as suddenly as Tim Boot disappeared, Charlie, with his warmth and moral intelligence, has gone: “returning to Bulawayo to run his newspaper and family” (150). In the paragraph that follows this departure Wylie is told that Boot is dead. The pain of these two moments returns him to two wisdoms: “No narrative, I tell myself. Only the moment. No narrative. Only the moment” (150). Significantly, these wisdoms have emerged earlier from the mouths of Boot and Locker, and Wylie returns to them during other painful moments, those moments that confirm his “fundamental loneliness” (65). The wisdom of Buddha – that of living in and by the moment – lends authenticity to turning away from words. After news of Boot’s death which, for the first time in the narrative, evinces tears, the two wisdoms conflate to perform the double function of paean and mantra, mourning and consolation. Through the “hard cold wind [and] tears” Wylie returns to his camp and his bed: “as I snivel down onto my fraying stretcher to sleep – something hard beneath my pillow. A book. *Seven*

Pillars of Wisdom” (151). This is clearly Charlie’s parting gift for him: an affirmation of the literature that joined them and gave depth to a relationship that would endure beyond the suffocation of will and spirit wrought by warfare.

Later Wylie reconnects with Charlie: “He takes me home, tells his kids I am their long-lost brother. No one I have ever known is so adept at simply being in the moment” (169). In conversation with Charlie he says, “I knew I chose to pull that trigger. Yet I do not *feel* I chose” (170). Two choices are suggested here. The first grows from a directive that permits no choice: you will serve your time as soldier. The second posits that because he is conscious of the fact that he can choose, he did not need to pull that trigger. The latter impulse – that he can refuse to play his part – is not perceived as separate or distinct from his capacity to make the more ethically loaded choice to comply. The choice to comply might, for some men, carry a darker legacy than that carried by a man who enacts a clear-sighted refusal to serve. The choice made by the conscientious objector, though uncommon during wartime, is frequently given the stamp of approval thereafter. On the other hand, perhaps Wylie’s acknowledgment of these intertwined impulses provides a space for private salvation: a sense that looking back at the dilemma might make it possible to extract himself from “the violence that clouds [his] own veins” (169).

As a conscript Wylie finds and fails to find himself in a context in which racial and gender roles are fixed, fraught and sometimes dangerous. This instability can result in a conscript having his agency nullified. He is fixed as a cog in the military machine. But gaps or grey areas⁶² might be sought out and discovered, and within these agency might be resumed, other ways of being found and expressed. For Wylie two interlinked intimacies serve as keys to unlock doors to more finely tuned ways of being a man: his attachment to poetry, art and nature, and his relationships with the two men he names Tim Boot and Charlie Locker. These attachments make possible what he feels ought to be expressed within a context that disallows or censors expression. The title to his reflection on his memoir – “Witnessing Brutality” – expresses this need to uncover what has been concealed. The same need is expressed in the sub-title to Anthony Feinstein’s memoir – *Hidden Costs of the Border War* – to which attention now shifts.

⁶² This sense of the availability of spaces, however small, for agency is echoed by Wylie asserting in “Witnessing Brutality” that “[...] blindness was never total, volition was never entirely drained” (191).

4.7 Battle-Scarred

As suggested earlier, the act of writing is in itself a form of exorcism for Wylie and Feinstein. Like Wylie's memoir, Feinstein's records his aversion to performing his National Service. Also like Wylie's, it sifts through the damaging effects of involvement in warfare for private moments of consolation and release.

Feinstein begins his military service as a graduate from medical school. After his basic training has been completed, and on the strength of six weeks' study of psychiatric disorders, he is sent to perform the role of psychiatrist at 1 Military Hospital in Pretoria.⁶³ Later he is posted to the border to perform the same role. Similarly to Wylie, he strains and chafes against the expectations and demands of conscription. He also feels himself as strung between two camps – that of his known world with its half-formed notions of manly identity and that of his new world that blocks the avenues in which to shape his identity. Like Wylie, he finds himself in a borderline state that generates feelings of discomfort, fear and uncertainty. For example, having been relocated from the relatively safe post of Oshakati to Tsandi, a dangerous outpost “slap bang in the middle of SWAPO's backyard,” Feinstein observes: “In a blink, my survival – something I never doubted – has become uncertain” (132).

In both of these locales he is expected to diagnose and treat men with a range of psychotic disorders. These disorders are extreme and “florid”: “The nature of life in the military, with the strictures that come with rank and the individual's preordained place in an unyielding hierarchy, leaves no space for wiggle room. When the cogs slip the results are more often than not extraordinary” (27). He narrates such a “florid” case study in the form of a fellow-conscript whom he names Jardine parroting every word uttered by a corporal he names Smits. In the psychiatric ward Jardine is diagnosed as suffering a form of psychosis known as echolalia. After being transferred to the border, Feinstein continues to experience a wide range of psychotic disorders: “Not a month passes without further tragi-comic variations in the patients that come my way. How can it be otherwise? Madness and the military, what a combustible mix!” (27). The combustibility of this mix is illustrated in a string of case studies. These frequently perform the role of counter-narratives in that they are premised upon a gap or disjunction, for many conscripts, between the masculinity that rules and the

⁶³ As seen in Chapter 3, André Carl van der Merwe in his novel *Moffie* presents an insider's or inmate's account of the psychiatric ward of this hospital.

private masculinity, the given versus the lived. This disjunction is experienced on the level of the unconscious and expressed as symptoms. Other than “florid,” these symptoms are referred to as “gross pantomime” (25) or “high farce” (35). The symptoms presented by a character named Jacques who fits neatly into the mould of the ‘real man’ due to the fact that he had been “a sporting hero” are puzzling, “slipping away from any diagnostic formulation” (28). His commanding officer and fellow-conscripts (referred to as “Jacques’ fan club”) are “nonplussed” by his decline (28), his abandoning or deserting his former man-self. Jacques’ decline is described as a “quick fall from grace,” which clearly suggests that both sporting prowess and the capacity to conform to military command are indicators of a hallowed manhood. Feinstein speculates as to whether this desertion of self might have been caused by something traumatic that had happened in “the operational area” (28).

The symptoms of another two cases are presented by their wives. Marie describes her trouble with and abuse at the hands of her husband Tiny, a soldier who carries rank. Tiny is another “rugby-playing hero” (80), a “behemoth [...] layered in fat, with an oceanic belly and ham-like arms” (79). Marie explains that their trouble began when their union failed to produce children. Tiny’s family members, assuming that Marie was “barren,” advised the two of them to visit a fertility clinic. After tests, it is revealed that Tiny has a very low sperm count, despite the fact that “he is hung like a horse” (83). Tiny’s response is to get away from “the farm [where he and Marie live] and all the talk” (83). An opportunity presents itself: “Patriotism gave him a handy excuse – the communists were massing on the borders, the natives were growing restless and the nation needed strong, young white men” (83). In this way Tiny manages the affront on his manhood by attaching himself to a large-scale performance of a macho masculinity sanctioned by State, family and his church. But the embarrassment that relates to his very low sperm count clearly lingers, and it manifests as abuse of his wife.

Having explored such case studies, Feinstein shifts his focus to men who do not present florid symptoms of masculinity in crisis. His primary focus here is on his own psychological instability, his feelings of entrapment: “The road of many sorrows has brought me to the end of the line [...]. Here I huddle behind walls of sand, captive to an ideology I never believed in and a lethal enemy towards whom I bear no malice” (193). There are echoes elsewhere in his narrative of this feeling of entrapment, of being entirely at odds with what is seen and experienced. Left to wander in the residence of a Colonel, Feinstein enters a room and recoils at what he sees:

One of the walls is plastered with photographs. Each photo is of an insurgent killed in combat: bloodied corpses and bodies with hideous wounds line the wall. In some of the photos, policemen stand alongside the corpses. No one is smiling. There is no posing, no triumphalism [...] are these grotesque images merely décor? (187–88)

Photographs functioning as trophies echo the protagonists' encounters with similar photographs and hunting trophies in Mark Behr's *The Smell of Apples*, Damon Galgut's *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* and, as has been seen, in Granger Korff's *19 With a Bullet*. As with these texts there is disturbing emotional neutrality to displays of brutal conquest: "A wall of horrors in the middle of a home of a benign-looking, quiet-spoken puppet-master, a man so comfortable with death he doesn't notice it any more than he does the unceasing sprinkler outside his window" (188).

Like Wylie, Feinstein's alienation relates to an aesthetic sensibility. Both apprehend beauty in highly unlikely contexts. Upon entering a bar in a garrison camp on the border, Feinstein observes: "The barman is dozing while a radio plays Mozart's string quartet, Kochel 387 [...] what a marvel to hear it here of all places. Beauty, at last" (95). This attachment to beauty frequently serves a salving and salvatory purpose.

Once again, in parallel with Wylie's account, the clash of private and public identities brings to the fore the question or problem of agency. Feinstein states:

When my deferments ran out, I looked at my options and made my Faustian pact. I would join the army, in a time of war, but on my own terms. I believed it enough to give up my lease on my apartment⁶⁴ and buy a return ticket. What an outrageous fantasy. I never did have any control. (194–5)

He continues: "I am here because of a failure of the imagination,"⁶⁵ a failure born out of naiveté and complacency" (194). What is admitted here is that his decision to obey his call-up amounted to an acceptance of the inevitable when this might not, through proper exercise of the imagination, have been inevitable after all. But this first failure of the imagination is not necessarily the end of the matter. His memoir provides ample evidence of the imagination's capacity for revival. Within the war zone the conscript who feels at odds or trapped faces the challenge to exercise and honour his imagination, to find ways – through songs, paintings,

⁶⁴ In Paris on a music scholarship.

⁶⁵ This is an exact echo with a statement made by the character Tim Booth in Wylie's *Dead Leaves*.

love relationships, friendships, poetry – to maintain his individuality. Such exercise of the imagination was up against considerable opposition. Feinstein recalls: “If there is one lesson that has been rammed home since I arrived at this cockamamie endeavour called the Border War, it is that the individual is expendable, lower than snake shit” (194). He goes on to observe that the corporal who continually reminded him and his fellow-conscripts that they were lower than snake shit “was telling the truth, his foul-mouthed curse full of insight” (194).

Having completed his stint on the border, Feinstein is called up for month-long camps on the outskirts of areas of unrest such as the townships of Sebokeng and Sharpeville, and finally decides he can no longer “heed the call to don uniform and prop up a rotten edifice” (201). He purchases a one-way ticket to London to discover, unexpectedly, that this decision does not bring an end to his sorrows. These sorrows are replaced by “the ache of separation from family, friends and country” (201–202). In his final retrospect on his time in the army Feinstein offers what he calls “a small confession”:

There were lessons to be learnt in Tsandi and Oshikati that I could never glean from sitting on a quiet bench in the leafy Parc Monceau. To admit otherwise now would be churlish. There is in war an intensity to the moment that exposes character with the precision of the vivisectionist. No half measures there, no place to hide, good and bad starkly revealed. (203)

This confession carries with it the implication that within an extreme situation such as the Border War truths about oneself might surface and shape one’s subsequent choices, even shaping one’s future. However, despite admitting another angle on the matter, despite his announced desire not to be churlish in his reflections on his past, he instantly undercuts his confession: “none of it was necessary, not a single thing. History has given its damning verdict and it came as neither surprise nor consolation” (203). He presents the final word on the matter: despite the fact that good may at times flow from the bad, the experience of conscripted engagement in warfare was neither necessary nor justifiable.

Attention now shifts to memoirs written by two men, Rian Malan and Donald McRae, neither of whom need to make the confession Feinstein makes. By avoiding National Service they spared themselves the burden of doing so. Attention to the work of Malan and McRae serves as a prelude to a comparative analysis of these two memoirs and Wylie’s *Dead Leaves* that revolves around representations of masculine identity and attitudes towards women.

4.8 *My Traitor's Heart*

Rian Malan's memoir, *My Traitor's Heart*, better called a work of literary non-fiction, spans his youth and early 20s in apartheid South Africa, his going into exile as draft-dodger in 1977 and wandering through Europe before settling in Los Angeles in 1979 where he worked as a journalist. He returned to South Africa in the mid-1980s. His memoir was published in 1991 during the period of transition, and the bulk of it revolves around his return to South Africa and his work as a crime reporter and investigative journalist. Book 1 of the three that comprise the memoir touches directly upon this chapter's concerns.

Malan exclaims: "fuck their army, whose summons to service I had been dodging since I was eighteen. I wasn't going to carry a gun for them" (74). He comments earlier:

after high school, white boys were supposed to report for military service, the most dreaded rite of a white boy's passage. *Not mine, though*; not if I could help it. The South African Defence Force was run by mean hairybacks⁶⁶ who toughened you up to keep blacks down. They forced you to leopard-crawl from horizon to horizon, or run around the Namib desert carrying telegraph poles – a notorious torture known as pole PT. I considered myself above such indignities, *of course*, but my stated reasons for avoiding call-up were political. I was a white leftist, and white leftists did not serve in apartheid's army. (63–4, *my italics*)

The italicised phrases place emphasis on what has too often been under-emphasised in commentary on resistance to conscription – the fact that aversion was a given for some young men. Such men were up against considerable opposition to their resistance or disinclination, frequently from their fathers or other male relatives:

my Afrikaner father wanted me to do my duty and put on my uniform for my country. I had been dodging military service since I was eighteen, and now I was twenty-two and running out of options. They wanted me in June [1977], infantry, Walvis Bay, and this time there was no way out. (82)

The dearth of options presented to Malan and other young men during the 1970s and 80s threw many such men into a quandary, manifesting in twilight forms of forbearance.⁶⁷ Malan elaborates:

⁶⁶ A derogatory term referring to Afrikaans men.

⁶⁷ See my prose-poem "Manifesto from the Crepuscular Colony (during internal exile)" in *Comeback* (2009), written in 1988 when I was in hiding from the Military Police.

I either reported for duty or left SA forever. It was not an easy decision. I got drunk most nights rather than think about it, and then I lay down under my naked light bulb, watching the shadows stirring on the wall and listening to the footsteps in the alley outside. I was waiting for something. (82)

The footsteps in the alley and the waiting suggest menace, foreboding. Malan's account of the years preceding going into exile is coloured by the fact that he worked as a crime reporter for the daily newspaper *The Star*. Although there was then a dangerous element to his work experience, the sensation of weighted waiting echoes that of many other white men during the same years. There were commonly felt sensations – pained contradictions (often family versus self) and alienation, disorientation, disabling experiences of the strangeness of one's life at the interface of private and public selves. Malan records the impossibility of finding a stable ground for himself in a context in which, within the same day, he would be *jolling* with his "black brothers" and saying "ja-nee,"⁶⁸ Colonel [...] you certainly have a point there, Colonel" (82) in response to the fascist ravings of a Colonel Rooi Rus Swanepoel.⁶⁹ Such contradictory experiences pointed to the unwilling living out of two lives without hope of reconciling them: "I'd close my eyes and think, this is not my life. This is too weird to be true" (82). Malan's account of the period leading from his boyhood to exile is titled "Life in this Strange Place," which grows from the line "how do I live in this strange place" from a song by Bernoldus Niemand. These titles in their turn echo the title to the opening chapter of Wylie's memoir – "The World is Elsewhere." For some the contradictions were unlivable enough to impel them into exile. As Gready puts it: "Malan ran because in South Africa's polarised society he was stuck in the middle unable to commit himself either way" (91). Revealingly, a collection of essays written by Malan subsequent to the demise of apartheid and his return from exile is titled *Resident Alien*. As the title clearly indicates, these essays express experiences of disaffection and alienation within the new political order. In an informal personal interview (6 July 2014) Malan insists that his journalistic integrity demands unbending alertness to all forms of political mismanagement and corruption. He argues that political incorrectness in service to the truth is the ethic that guides his writerly

⁶⁸ Translates directly from the Afrikaans as 'yes-no.'

⁶⁹ Malan says of Rooi Rus (Red Russian) Swanepoel: "He was so right wing that he thought his own government, the most right wing in the world, was infiltrated by Reds. Colonel Swanepoel's exploits as chief interrogator of the Security Police had been discussed at the United Nations. His alleged cruelties had made him a one-man propaganda liability [...]. He was soon sent to the border where he enhanced his reputation still further as commander of a notorious counter-insurgency unit called Koevoet – the Crowbar" (80).

investigations. This stance contrasts with that adopted by another journalist, Donald McRae, whose memoir is discussed in the following section.

4.9 *Under Our Skin*

In *Under Our Skin* (2012) journalist Donald McRae presents the story, as David Robson observes, of “an idealistic young South African in the early 1980s [who] was faced with a stark choice: sign up for National Service, serve six years in prison or leave the country” (np). A feature of McRae’s testimony is not present in Malan’s memoir, nor in any of the others discussed thus far. This feature is his mode of narration.

Surprisingly, McRae’s first engagement with the predicament of conscription occurs 277 pages into his memoir via a cursory mention of his closest friend’s decision to “get it over with.” This mention is prefaced by an account of the detention and torture in the infamous John Vorster Square of white political activists Neil Aggett, Liz Floyd, Aurret van Heerden, and Barbara Hogan that culminated in the death of Aggett, the first and only white anti-apartheid activist to die in detention. This account constitutes a narrative of its own and is clearly the result of a devoted task of investigative journalism. It occupies close to a third of his 418-page memoir and details the life, relationship with Liz Floyd⁷⁰ and death of a man he had not met. The facts narrated predate McRae’s decision to go into exile and bear no direct relation to his own life or that of his contemporaries. This raises the question – what is the purpose of this lengthy sub-narrative? In answer to this, the Aggett story may be considered a means of measuring one form of white resistance, in the form of refusing to be conscripted, against another. He downplays going into exile as a meaningful exercise of agency: “My story is nothing compared to his [Aggett’s]” (409), announcing his own life story as a “little tale against [an] epic saga.” Indeed, McRae attaches very little moral weight to his own aversion to what the apartheid state expected from its white citizens, which included his refusal to undergo National Service by going into exile. Feelings of guilt clearly outweigh the possibility of attaching even a shade of the heroic to his and other resisters’ refusals. Thus, McRae’s own story functions as a backdrop to the Aggett story. In one sense Aggett and Floyd are no more than secondary or passing characters, mentioned to McRae by

⁷⁰ McRae devotes as much attention to the sexual relationship between Aggett and Floyd as he devotes to his own relationships.

his friends. But in the narrative itself they are rendered as fully rounded characters. This rendering of character, combined with the plot devices of tension and resolution of tension, and what David Robson terms “fly-on-the-wall” descriptions (n.p), make it resemble a novel or screenplay.

The question can be posed as to whether McRae’s narrative strategies would have emerged in a time and context not as laden with emotions of guilt and shame. His Aggett narrative blurs the customary lines between non-fiction and fiction. By doing so it provides a safer way of revisiting the guilt and shame felt and experienced by white people with political awareness and conscience during the 1980s. This distancing effect also inspires a vehemently voiced opposition to apartheid, from a distance, and the distance runs the risk of taming the vehemence into political correctness. McRae’s memoir does present critique, but the scope and depth of it is, in a particular sense, problematic. This problem is explored further by engaging in a comparative analysis of representations of masculinity and gender relations in McRae’s work and that of Rian Malan and Dan Wylie.

4.10 Representations of Masculinity and Gender Relations in *Under Our Skin*, *My Traitor’s Heart* and *Dead Leaves*

Via his use of the first person Dan Wylie takes the reader into the heart, mind and entrails of the Rhodesian army. Moreover, by immersing the reader in the consciousness and emotions of conscripts in a grisly, realistic and hands-on manner, his narrative casts a more sharply focused critical eye on, amongst other things, the clearly gendered agenda of military life that makes assumptions about what constitutes the common and appropriate masculine life.

Whereas McRae’s political sympathies are clearly stated from the start of his memoir, Wylie’s are more transparent, less mediated. They are the thoughts and experiences of a 19 year-old conscript. Although Wylie bemoans his poor eyesight early in his narrative, on a metaphorical level his seeing is not aided by lenses. McRae’s vision, on the other hand, is shaped or tinted, arguably prescribed. In a sense, he tells what he already sees. A narrative, be it fiction or memoir, in which the voice of the narrator emerges from a less clearly defined ideological position carries within it the seeds for a more effective critique.⁷¹ The voice of such a narrator grows from his discomfort, the fact that he has not bought into the ideology

⁷¹ See discussion of Koos Prinsloo’s narrative modus operandi in the previous chapter.

that secures the functioning of the military machine at the same time as speaks from inside that machine. Stated differently, Wylie presents what Stephen Clingman calls a “history from the inside” (1). By this term Clingman refers to that “area of activity” [called fiction] “in which historical process is registered as the subjective experience of individuals in society” (1). By implication this statement suggests that the writer is positioned at the interface between public and private life.

A significant event in the life of the young white man that occurs at the interface of public and private masculinities and has the power to make him one of the boys or an oddity is the loss of virginity. Early in Wylie’s memoir the reader is alerted to the fact that a particular form of agency, of political power, attaches to whether or not as a young man one acknowledges one’s virginity. The notion of virginity being lost is a curious contradiction because for fellow conscripts this loss amounts, in truth, to a gain. That is, it amounts to properly becoming what one nominally is: a man. The loss equates with status. Bearing these assumptions and constraints in mind, the act of announcing one’s virginity can be regarded as a political act. Having listened unwillingly to a character named Mekong’s account of his sexual conquests, including his fear of having contracted a disease from a 14 year-old, Wylie confesses his virginity to an older conscript, Pipstring. Pipstring professes to be shocked and henceforth refers to Wylie as “Snow White” (19–20). Thus, from the outset the narrator sets himself up as an atypical man. This atypical characteristic is highlighted by the fact that he is in a context which suppresses ambiguity and uncertainty. McRae’s narrative expresses a predatorial mode of sexual behavior, from a story of bravado to a fleeting self-effacement and back again to another expression of bravado. McRae boldly announces his loss of virginity at the age of 15 years. Later in his memoir he shares his sexual encounters with a fellow-student, as well as his illicit or politically subversive encounter with a black woman, who is an equal on the levels of education and political commitment, in a shebeen in Soweto preceding his going into exile. Malan experienced the loss of his virginity to a black domestic worker in the back room of a house in white suburbia.⁷² Both Malan’s and McRae’s experiences carry political weight, Malan’s the more so perhaps because it transgresses both racial and class divides. Both accounts smack of masculine bluster or macho posturing. Are these stories of sex across the colour line, of ‘immorality’,⁷³ told for the sake of proving to the reader and the implied detractor that something separates them from the average white

⁷² Revealingly, during the apartheid years black female domestic workers were customarily referred to as ‘girls’ and male gardeners as ‘boys.’

⁷³ Inter-racial sex was in contravention of the Immorality Act promulgated by the apartheid state.

man in apartheid South Africa? Although the sexual act mentioned may not be considered as mainly an act as those performed by Neil Aggett, and although inter-racial sex was not punishable by detention and torture, it occupied a position along the continuum of resistance. On the other hand, there is an intimation of doubt, a ring of hollowness to McRae's articulation of his sexual experiences that is not evident in Malan's. This uncovers a subtext of self-disavowal in McRae's testimony, reminding the reader of the feeling of guilt mentioned earlier.

Upon consideration of the function these vignettes or micro-narratives perform within McRae's narrative as a whole, it can be argued that they do little more than conform to the notion that gender relations involve sexual conquest. Though McRae's conquests are muted to an extent that the character Mekong's in Wylie's memoir certainly are not, they occupy positions along the same continuum of power relations. Alternately, in Wylie's treatment of his relations with women there is expression of a style of maleness the reader can trust due to the fact that it does not appear to take up a position of dominance. Wylie's account of his first 'conquest' sets it apart from both McRae's and Malan's by according respect and status to a woman's voice (167–69; 176).

Unencumbered as Wylie's memoir is by ideological certainties, the narrator's reflections and his dialogue with characters presents different angles on the matter-at-hand, along with a sense that the matter-at-hand cannot be settled. By way of example, in the Prologue to his memoir Wylie recalls a verbal interchange between himself and the father of one of his students as having provided "a good point at which to revisit that most dramatic, most bizarre experience of my life" (2). In response to this ex-military man stating that his daughter should be sent to an Army training camp to "'teach her some discipline,' all-but-forgotten memories resurface like a bile in the throat" (1). These memories are felt as a sickening return of the repressed. He instantly denounces the advice of the father in the form of a plea delivered to the daughter: "'Don't you dare do anything like that,' I begged. 'The military is the most destructive, the most demonic system humans have ever invented. Don't'" (2). However, the vehemence of this plea is immediately undercut: "'You lived through it,' she pointed out. 'Was it really so bad?' I had to admit. It hadn't been all bad." (2) Though not relished, the co-existence of the good and the bad is acknowledged. The matter-at-hand remains unsettled. This ambiguity raises for Wylie his own problem of choice: the choice to write (and write out) his experiences, and the fact that this choice heralds liberty as

much as it is hindered by circumstance. As corroboration of this ambiguity, he cites words from Sartre's essay "Why Write?":

for one, art is a flight; for another, a means of conquering. But one can flee into a hermitage, into madness, into death. One can conquer by arms. Why does it have to be writing [...] ? Because, behind the various aims of authors, there is a deeper and more immediate choice which is common to all of us. (qtd. in *Dead Leaves* 4)

Sartre's words incite and clarify for Wylie his own sense of writerly identity: "In writing, I want to reassert a freedom of choice which I have been denied, or have not had the courage, or have been too blind, to exercise" (4). The compulsion to write provides an avenue for release at the same time as it directs one to unearth sometimes sickening truths from one's past. Very different energies compel Wylie and McRae to write. The pained ambiguity in the interchange with father and daughter referred to above inspires Wylie to return to the letters he sent to his parents, the vignettes he submitted to publishers, the photographs of himself camouflaged and armed and, most importantly, his "collection of twenty stubby black diaries" (2). These provide the raw material for him to "rebuild [his] humanity" (4). However, rereading his diaries culminates in condemning them as "self-cocooning pages" riddled with inconsistent and delusional self-justification. These point to "the greater horror of [an] absolute absence of guilt" (3). Having said this, Wylie relates guilt to choice and compassion or care:

guilt had never been allowed. Guilt implied caring, a conscience, and choice. Conscience was precisely what we had been systematically shut out of. Choice was like a garden filled with light and steaming plants, where growth happened, and new flowers were painfully born. (3)

There is less clarity to McRae's sense of the relationship of choice to care. Indeed, McRae's testimony leads one to question which exercise of choice lies closer to the concept and practice of care, which holds more promise for light and growth? These notions of care, light and growth feed into analysis of the final memoir, Paul Morris's *Back to Angola*.

4.11 *Back to Angola*

Psychotherapist Paul Morris' memoir, *Back to Angola* (2014), recounts cycling back to the country in which he served as a conscript during the Namibian War of Independence. The

journey is a means of healing himself. As with commentary on Malan's memoir, attention is paid here to a portion of text that confronts the construct of masculine identity that prevailed, a confrontation that gestures toward asserting a counter-identity.

In the chapter titled "Growing Boys into Men" Morris revisits his boyhood and adolescence, a time in which he was moulded to be a man who would perform his National Service on the Border. He recalls an interaction between himself and a female school teacher:

'Are you a moffie, Paul?'

I gaze at her through eyes that have looked on the world for six years. I haven't been taught to bite back the tears that are welling in them. Miss Williamson. She bullied me into playing rugby because moffies stay behind with the girls when they do handicraft; when the boys go up the hill to the playing fields. And if you don't play that, you're a moffie, which is a bad thing even if you don't know what it means. 'Stop crying, don't be a sissy. Get yourself a glass of water at the sink. Boys don't cry.' (96)

Miss Williamson's control of young minds hinges on an unambiguous sense of the gender division. While bemoaning the painful psychological effects of this rigid division, Morris acknowledges the persuasive power of Miss Williamson's words. Her words effectively induce shame in the boy in order to shape him into the kind of man who conforms to her notion of the real man. Morris notes that shame functioned as a tool from boyhood through to the period of military service that served to engrain the hegemonic version of masculine identity:

It [shame] usually starts early, when it is used by teachers, parents and peers to get us to conform. As boys, pain and tears were the first things that had to be dealt with. We learnt to take the pain, run it off, be a man, tough it out. Shame was put to good use in forcing us to close down. It refused to allow our complexity to bloom. It virtually pathologised a whole range of our humanity: our sadness, our fears, our tears and our creativity. (110–11)

The "whole range of our humanity" mentioned here provides a finer sense of what Morris means by the "fuller masculinity" ("The Journey" np). However, awareness of this range of emotions did not translate into expression of them. Though Morris acknowledges that "during Basic Training some men cried into their pillows at night" he also acknowledges: "I may have done so myself, but so thorough was my fear of shame that I've suppressed the memory" (*Angola* 111). The internalised directive was to "swallow hard, grit your teeth and make a joke through the painful cataract that separates you from yourself" (111). He renames

this cataract a membrane: “The membrane hardened, became less opaque, but if it broke – fractured under the skin – then you’d ‘cracked’ and you were ridiculed. You couldn’t take the pain – what kind of man were you?” (111). The painful cataract or hardened membrane helps explain his and fellow-conscripts response to an attempted suicide:

He was just that inconsiderate fuck who thought he could get an easier deal if he took a razor blade to his wrists. I had no sympathy for him either; I had to be there and so did he. I had no stomach for others’ pain. I hadn’t learnt how to reach out to them in support and brotherhood. Instead, they were ostracised, cast out, like the 19 year-old who tried to kill himself. (111)

Discussion of Rick Andrew’s *Buried in the Sky* in Chapter 2, as well as the oral testimony to be discussed in the coming chapter, reveal the fact that judging a man’s expression of pain as an inconsiderate act was an automatic or reflex response. This expresses a particular homosocial dynamic, also discussed in Chapter 2. But Morris’ words suggest alternative forms of homosociality – the possibility for “support and brotherhood,” acknowledgment of opportunities, however threatened or partial, for empathy. These possibilities or opportunities, in the case of Wylie’s testimony, find expression in the domains of creativity and friendship. But the doors to such domains were more often than not shut. The effectiveness of this exclusion of possibilities for self-expression is announced in the final words to the chapter: “The system had done its job” (*Angola* 111).

Acknowledgement of the “whole range of [men’s] humanity” can be understood as awaiting arrival through the passage of time of the man who can look back at himself, as does Morris, by means of his actual and symbolic return to a portion of his past he feels the need to exorcise.

4.12 Conclusion

A common feature in the memoirs discussed in this chapter is that the narrator-protagonists take up positions of aversion and resistance to military life and the ideology of masculinity that underpins it, be this resistance overt in the form of exile (McRae and Malan) or ethical and emotional realignment on the part of unwilling conscripts (Wylie, Feinstein and Morris). Analysis of texts has been double-pronged: to identify in the selected memoirs challenges to the status quo, and to discuss the modes of telling or linguistic styles whereby these

challenges are presented. In parallel with the previous chapter, it has been argued that the more skilled and inventive the aesthetic, the more telling the critique. The texts under study do not necessarily present radical critiques of the status quo. Rather, they raise questions that provoke discomfort, and this discomfort encourages a sense that there ought to be, and are, alternative ways of being within a social matrix whose attitudes are fixed and stale.

As has been shown, a significant feature of these memoirs is the intimacy of the narrator's voice, which includes unashamed admissions of vulnerability. In the introduction to the thesis it was noted that this feature of the narrative voice is what separates the memoirs under consideration from many of the memoirs written by Border War veterans. In the former the choices the protagonist is seen to make, and the aesthetic choices made by the author, create a vulnerability that is believable. The choices indicate growth-points in the manner of a *Bildungsroman*.

Textual analysis in this chapter reveals that hegemonic masculinity during the 1980s, along with aversions to it, did not operate in a vacuum. Indeed, masculinity is linked always, as Conway confirms (2012), to points of identification: whiteness, nationality, gender relations and sexual orientation.

The chapter to follow interacts with voices of aversion in the form of the transcribed interviews contained in the Appendix. Though the central focus remains the problem of masculinity, the testimony makes clear the inter-relatedness of the points of identification mentioned above. Analysis of the oral testimony draws upon Joseph Campbell's study of narrative structure, and Paul Ricoeur's study of the complex dynamic of narrative identity and personal identity.

Chapter 5

Interview-Texts

To say “instant” is to say fatal instant. The instant is the reciprocal and contradictory envelopment of the before by the after. One is still what one is going to cease to be and already what one is going to become. One lives one’s death, one dies one’s life. (Jean-Paul Sartre, Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr 2)

PM: So pariah status was conferred if one was a member of the ECC or one was gay?

GE: Yes, those were two repulsive possibilities that might have occurred amongst these young men, and had you stood up and said “well, nobody has mentioned this, but actually I am an axe-murderer, and the corporal might say “no that’s fine, don’t mention that. We’re only concerned with evil people.”
(Interview with author, 15 November 2010)

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an object of analysis different from those presented in the preceding chapters: the spoken voice in the form of transcribed interviews. The fact that these interviews have been transcribed provides the opportunity to interact with the voices as texts, thereby sustaining the analytic framework of the thesis as a whole. Attention is paid to the eight interviews that comprise the Appendix. As stated in the Introduction to this thesis, the oral testimony contained in the Appendix provides a range of responses to the same dilemma or predicament of conscription – from exile, to armed resistance, to public refusal to serve, to different forms of evasion. The latter includes resistance in the form of avoidance both within and outside of the military context. A common thread that runs through the testimony of each interviewee is the psychological costs or damage subsequent to the official demise of apartheid.⁷⁴

The chapter begins by explaining the interview procedure, and proceeds to introduce the interviewees by means of brief biographies. The principal aim of these biographies is to motivate selection of the interviewees. Thereafter, the theoretical framework for a close

⁷⁴ As noted in Chapter 1, Theresa Edlmann in her PhD thesis provides a thorough-going and deeply empathic account of the “psychosocial” legacy of National Service.

reading of the interview-texts is established. This is achieved, firstly, through a brief discussion of Joseph Campbell's idea of narrative structure, specifically the notion (or narrative template) of the "monomyth," followed by a detailed exposition of Paul Ricoeur's theory of narrative and personal identity. Ricoeur's complex understanding provides interpretive tools appropriate to a close and nuanced reading of the interview-texts. This close reading involves identifying strategies of avoidance and quests for refuge as articulated by the interviewees, as well as drawing out threads of discord and vulnerability from the narratives by which they frame their experiences of conscription and resistance to it.

However, as already stated, it is necessary, firstly, to explain the interview procedure and to justify the choice of interviewees.

5.2 Interview Procedure

The interviews took place between late 2010 and November 2012. The interviewees were subsequently emailed complete transcripts of their testimony to allow them the liberty to do whatever editing they deemed necessary. Only David Bruce and Michael Graaf interacted with the transcribed interviews.

The questions I asked Bruce were shaped by the fact that he and I were exact contemporaries, students at Wits University during the early to mid-1980s. Our shared awareness of the often volatile student politics of the time facilitated an easy speaking and listening form of interview, what might be described as a less formal or organic interview procedure. Perhaps because of this organic element, Bruce expressed a desire to reread the transcribed testimony in order to correct any inaccuracies, as well as to add further details toward presenting a 'complete story.' The interview with Michael Graaf was also organic in its way, outside of the conventional question-and-answer format. This involved handing Graaf a list of prompts in the form of questions at the onset of the interview (these preface the transcription, thereby allowing him a more relaxed and contemplative style of response – a narrative flow. Graaf made no alterations to the transcribed interview, but felt that there were important details he had not shared. He corrected this perceived lack by sending two emails, which are included as postscripts to the interview. The remainder of the interviews were conducted in the more conventional question-and-answer format.

Interviewees were assured that portions of their testimony which caused them discomfort would be omitted. They were presented with the option of having their names omitted. None of them took this option. Although I have in the main transcribed the testimony as it was spoken, on one occasion I excised a portion of text, from the interview with David Josey, which distracted attention from the areas of concern guiding my overall analysis. Brett Myrdal decided, shortly before completion of this thesis, to extract more than half of the transcribed interview for private use, as raw material for a memoir he intends to write. Interviewees were assured that recordings of the interviews would be disposed of, although none requested this. Only in the case of the interview with Kelwyn Sole is there simultaneous commentary on a work from another genre, namely his narrative poem “Ovamboland.” The poem is presented after the interview with him. Informal interviews were conducted with three men: a member of The Mankind Project, a man who served as conscript in the early 1990s, and the author of *My Traitor’s Heart*, Rian Malan. These interviews pertain respectively to the Introduction and Chapter 4. As stated earlier, and prior to presenting the theoretical framework for analysis of the interview-texts, it is necessary to justify in a more detailed manner my choice of interviewees in the form of brief biographies.

5.3 Selection of Interviewees

David Bruce was the first resister to be sentenced to six years imprisonment for his publicly announced refusal to perform his National Service. A considerable amount of attention has been paid to Bruce’s story in the body of this thesis, primarily in Chapter 2. There are two reasons for the extent of this inclusion. Firstly, as interviewer I was struck by the significant role the counter-cultures of 1980s South Africa and 1960s America played in his decision-making process, as well as by the ways in which he managed his term of imprisonment. Secondly, I was struck by the fact that Bruce’s testimony revealed his ambiguous attitude towards his stance of refusal and the circumstances surrounding it, along with his subsequent reflections upon their after-life or legacy. His testimony reveals a firmness of will, along with a hazier wilfulness. This contrast or contradictoriness has been discussed in Chapter 2, and more will be said of it in discussion of Bruce’s testimony in this chapter.

Michael Graaf’s testimony expresses a turn-around in his attitude toward and responses to conscription. He shifted from an unquestioning readiness to obey his call-up

after completing his final year of schooling to active and visible resistance in his work as an ECC activist committed to pacifism. The latter took the form of devising strategies to avoid attending camps, publicly announcing his refusal to do so, and fasting in protest against the institution of conscription and the practice of sending young conscripts into the townships to quell what the National Party government called “unrest.”

Graham Ellis articulates a complicated range of responses to conscription that took place over a period of three years. In this sense his situation echoed that of Graaf, but there were significant differences. These differences reveal the maleficent influence the institution of conscription exerted on the lives of a number of men during the 1980s and thereafter.

Brett Myrdal opted to go into exile with the express purpose of becoming a soldier for the armed wing of the ANC, uMkhonto weSizwe (MK). Myrdal’s choice and its resultant actions are especially interesting for their directly oppositional stance, setting them apart from the choices and actions of other interviewees who also experienced their aversion to conscription while schoolboys, namely David Bruce, Garth Mason and Graham Ellis,. A comparative assessment of the testimony of these interviewees reveals a complex mix of inter- and intra-subjective levels of disinclination.

Through his testimony Kelwyn Sole expresses insights into a larger span of time in which the institution of conscription exerted its control over a specific grouping of individuals. His selection as interviewee was motivated by the fact that, through the exercise of his memory, he transformed or reconstructed his experiences in an overtly fictionalised manner; to be precise, in the form of a narrative poem. This reconfiguring of his experiences links his testimony to the memoirs analysed in the preceding chapter. For the sake of continuity in my argument, it struck me as important to point to echoes between the fact-based fictionalisation whereby prose writers and poets sought to make sense of experiences that, more often than not, failed to make sense.

Garth Mason’s testimony noticeably echoes that of Josey and Ellis. However, it also reveals subtle differences from theirs in terms of the after-effects of resistance to conscription. Though Mason expresses the duration and dark weight of this legacy, his testimony evidences a man not entirely lost to himself, existentially adrift. In analysis of his testimony the reasons for this difference are explored and explained.

David Josey provides a significantly unusual response of one who resisted conscription from within the military machine. His testimony expresses a logic of rebellion: a refusal to bow down to the dictates of the patriarchal authoritarianism that governed the lives

of young white men within the institutions of the family and the schooling system, and that served the purpose of naturalising the call to military duty, preparing the young man to obey it unquestioningly. The selection of Josey as interviewee was also motivated by the contrast between the sometimes invigorating creativity of his escape strategies against the fact that his experiences, similar to those of Ellis, lived on as psychologically disabling.

Theresa Edlmann offers the perspective of a feminist ECC activist during the 1980s, as well as that of one who had chosen to revisit the period, and her involvement therein, from an academic perspective. Her PhD thesis expresses the public and private dimensions of experience, making her subject position as researcher that of both insider and outsider. This struck me as important because it echoes my own research position. Inclusion of Edlmann as interviewee was strongly motivated by the fact that, like Conway, she has offered a study of the gender politics within the ECC in the 1980s, and paid attention to the role played by narrative in the construction of identity. The above concerns reflect my own. However, and equally importantly, her research has helped me to identify significant differences. A specific, and important point of difference, revolves around choice of interviewees, along with the theoretical framework and procedure that informed analysis of interview material. To be precise, Edlmann's testimony helped to place emphasis on the fact that my analysis of interview material made use of a particular narrative-and-identity paradigm – that of hermeneutic philosopher Paul Ricoeur (1991, 1992) and, to a lesser extent, that of Joseph Campbell (1949).

Detailed analysis of the interview-texts amply justifies the above-mentioned choices. However, prior to doing so, it is necessary to provide the theoretical co-ordinates for analysis.

5.4 Theoretical Framework

Establishment of the theoretical framework, as noted earlier, will begin with a brief discussion of Joseph Campbell's exhaustive study of myths and stories across cultures and histories in *A Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949). It is argued that this narrative template, or monomyth, gains effective purchase on an understanding of Brett Myrdal's testimony. However, the usefulness of its application to his testimony also reveals its interpretive limits. These limits are addressed and remedied through careful exposition of Paul Ricoeur's theories on narrative and personal identity as explored in his essay "Life: a Story in Search of

a Narrator” (in Valdes 1991) and the chapter “Personal Identity and Narrative Identity” from *Oneself as Another* (1992).

5.4.1 The Monomyth

A string of significant moments can be traced through the testimony of each interviewee. In narrative terms, these constitute plot points. In this respect, the narrative template emerging from Joseph Campbell’s *A Hero with a Thousand Faces* proves useful. Campbell discerns a story, common through history to all cultures and civilisations, that he calls the “monomyth” (3–46). This monomyth consists of identifiable plot events or points that centre on the journey of a protagonist whom the reader first meets in his or her ordinary world, the world in which he or she is compelled to make a decision that properly sets the story in motion. In Campbell’s terms, the instant the decision is made constitutes the crossing of a threshold or heeding the call to adventure. The decisive instant can be equated with a rite of passage that propels the protagonist into a world that is “distinguished by formal, and usually very severe, exercises of severance, whereby the mind is radically cut away from the attitudes, attachments and life patterns of the stage left behind” (10). For the young white man the call Campbell announces took the specific shape of the call-up. The decision to be made was a simple either-or: to enter, willingly or unwillingly, or to refuse. The instant in which a choice is enacted certainly echoes that instant in which the young white man – whether he embraces, succumbs or resists induction into the military – is introduced as “life adventurer” to the “forms and proper feelings of his new estate, so that when, at last, the time has ripened for the return to the normal world, the initiate will be as good as reborn” (10). In the portion of the story that follows the crossing of the threshold the protagonist encounters challenges of circumstance, suffers setbacks, confronts and overcomes enemies and forges strategic alliances, shifting shape in response to these. A feature of this stage of his journey is the possibility of attachment to a mentor in the form of a person, idea or ideal. These components of plot and character propel the protagonist toward resolution of some kind. Driven by an internal logic, the story often finds closure in the form of the protagonist retelling his story, reflecting on how he came to be in the position from which he retrospects. The telling performs the purpose of moving the story toward closure. However, the closure might not

necessarily take the form of redemption or enlightenment. Instead, it may yield something unsatisfactory, darkened by doubts and misgivings and, in a sense then, open-ended.

The narrative structure propounded by Campbell is put to use in analysis of the oral testimony in this chapter. An awareness of tensions, strains and complexities on the levels of plot and character facilitates an understanding of interviewees' 'journeys' in a social setting in which the borderlines between identities were as rigid and insistent as they were in 1980s South Africa, a context in which the apartheid state registered each individual, through the so-called Population Registration Act, in terms of his or her race. Although the narrative template of the hero's journey does not preclude exploration of the tensions and contradictions between public and private identity, its formulaic conception of the journey of the protagonist raises questions as to the scope of its understanding. Thus, although the narrative template identified by Campbell allows space for the hero or heroine to exercise his or her agency, there is arguably a limit to its capacity to comprehend complexities and inconsistencies in the oral testimony. This limit is explained by the fact that the more formulaic conception of subjectivity tends to underplay elements of indeterminacy. By setting the protagonist or hero on a course of action, the journey that ensues bears the weight of predestination, its unfolding carries with it this weight, and the story's ending strikes the reader as the actualisation of a private destiny.

Despite the reservations expressed above, I experienced a temptation to hold up and test Campbell's narrative template against the narrative of one of the eight interviewees. To this end, the testimony of Brett Myrdal was chosen. Myrdal's testimony adheres closely to the structure of the monomyth. Indeed, it can be described as fitting into the template in a literal manner. This literal element is evident in the protagonist heeding the call to adventure and departing from his ordinary world by crossing the border between South Africa and Zimbabwe. This first crossing serves as prelude to the crossing of the threshold that properly sets the story in motion: his arrival in East Germany for military training. His story's script, its plot points, differs from those of the other interviewees. The principal difference is that Myrdal's story concerns a white man embarking on a mission to liberate the black majority from white minority rule, struggling to bring into being a social order that is a world apart from the one into which he was born and grew up. The other interviewees either remained within the borders of their ordinary world, engaged in a struggle from within it, or took what some have called the softer option of exile. His choice also differs in that his departure was premised upon engagement in armed combat to make possible his return to a transformed

ordinary world. Myrdal's story enacts the internal logic of the protagonist's journey: that it is essentially a quest. The sword in the stone in Myrdal's story is the liberation of a nation. In these respects, as suggested earlier, the plot points for his story fit more neatly into the template of the hero's journey. However, this easy fit does not imply that the claims to truth and heroism expressed in his narrative are definitive. Because ethical stances adopted by individuals are contingent upon personal, inter-personal and contextual specifics, the categories of truth and heroism remain unfixed, mutable and debatable, as is confirmed by analysis of texts in the preceding chapters. The sense of significant moments or turning points in the life of the individual can reflect the notion of the hero's journey, but not necessarily so. Interviewees' relation to their significant moments can be complex and uncertain. Referring to the current flurry of narrative returns to the Border War, Edlmann states:

One of the reasons for so many narratives emerging now is that men who were conscripted are going through a shift into a different phase of life, just as they were doing when they were being conscripted; and one of the things one needs to do is revisit past experiences and make new meaning of them.

(Interview with author, 23 November 2012)

The subtext and the timbre of the narrative is its own and these play a role in shaping and reshaping what is said, and what is said feeds back into these subtler elements of the voice. There are elements of the unsaid in what is said, hinting at other spaces from which the voice may frame its narrative anew. Articulations of the self continually shift, and these shifts are present in much of the testimony. From one instant to the next the voice might move from a register of toughness, bordering on the kind of bravado and bombast that characterises the macho stereotype, to rarer expressions of vulnerability and fragility. This shift is starkly present, for example, in the testimony of Brett Myrdal.

The shifts can be explained in a broader sense by what Ricoeur terms "the play of concord and discord" that characterises narrative itself ("Life" 435). Instants of surprise, contradictions and discord are present in Myrdal's narrative and those of the other interviewees, and for this reason it is important to avoid the risk of applying Campbell's paradigm such that it oversimplifies the interview data. Avoiding this risk requires taking into account the problematic relation of personal identity to narrative identity. Exploration of these concepts will add a hermeneutic sensitivity to analysis of the oral testimony, and invites substantial engagement with the theoretical insights of Paul Ricoeur.

5.4.2 Paul Ricoeur on Personal and Narrative Identity

Paul Ricoeur's understanding of the relation of narrative to identity is more subtle than that of Joseph Campbell. However, in his essay "Life: A Story in Search of a Narrator," he articulates a shared insight by asserting that "we [as readers] are less captivated by the unexpected aspects of the story and more attentive to the manner in which it moves toward its close" (427). This preference for closure or resolution is that of both teller and reader/listener. It shapes the questions posed by the interviewer as well as the ways in which the interviewee composes his or her responses. Ricoeur, in his systematic study of the relation of narrative to identity, provides awareness of the extent to which stories are anchored in the lives that are narrated at the same time as the lives are anchored in the stories. As precursor to further analysis of the oral testimony it is necessary to pay close attention to Ricoeur's essay as well as the chapter "Personal Identity and Narrative Identity" from *Oneself as Another*. Davidson and Michel observe that in *Oneself as Another* Ricoeur distinguishes himself by "a twofold rejection – on the one hand, he rejects the self-positing of immediate consciousness or of a sovereign ego, and on the other hand, the pure and simple dissolution of the subject" (7–8). This two-fold rejection is important in that it is sceptical of the notion and practice of individual agency at the same time as it does not entirely dispel this notion. This understanding of the relation of the subject to agency indicates a difference from the theoretical stance adopted by the post-structuralists Barthes, Foucault and Derrida. At the same time, he shares with these theorists a sense that the ground of being in the world is uncertain and shifting. Acknowledgment of this provides a productive interpretive angle on the oral testimony discussed in this chapter. Davidson and Michel later assert that the following affirmation goes along with Ricoeur's two-fold rejection: "the self can be constructed through a long and patient interpretation of what does not belong to it, of what it will perhaps never be able to possess entirely, of an outside that can be in itself, and of a strangeness in the form of the other or the stranger" (10). This statement also applies to the oral testimony under study in that it identifies a disorientation in the individual – an uncomfortably co-dependent relation of a man to the 'real man.'

A resister constructs a sense of self in terms of what he believes he is and what he is not, which confirms the importance of the role played by narrative fiction in the construction of selfhood. Ricoeur's understanding of selfhood, of how the individual articulates him or

herself or the other, is inseparable from recognition of the function of narrative. In his essay he states:

Fiction, particularly narrative fiction, is an irreducible dimension of *the understanding of the self*. If it is true that fiction cannot be completed other than in life, and that life can not be understood other than through stories we tell about it, then we are led to say that a life *examined*, in the sense borrowed from Socrates,⁷⁵ is a life *narrated*. (435, author's italics)

Thus fiction plays a “considerable, mediating role” in the interpretation of a life. For Ricoeur “the very texture of a life” involves “the mixture of doing and undergoing, of action and suffering” (432). He continues: “it is this mixture that the story seeks to imitate in a creative way.” The dynamic of the life and the story that involves the mixture of doing and undergoing, of action and suffering, is what takes place for the conscript when he confronts and exercises choice. Indeed, for each interviewee that moment in which the choice – self-consciously or unthought – is made is one in which the mix or entanglement of doing and undergoing, of actions and suffering, is the starker for its context-bound and oppressive simplicity: its either-or. Ricoeur insists upon the dependency of this relation: “living experience requires insertion of the narrative and perhaps expresses a veritable need for it” (433). Ricoeur elaborates this felt need to narrate our lives:

We do not cease to re-interpret the narrative identity that constitutes us in the light of stories handed down to us by our culture. In this sense, our self-understanding presents the same traits as the understanding of a literary work does. In this way we learn to become the *narrator of our own story* without completely becoming the author of our life. (437, author's italics)

In light of these statements, echoed in statements made by Campbell, the call to duty for each of the male interviewees functioned as a fixed or immutable plot point around which each had to create a story of resistance. Certainly, the fixed or immutable plot point accentuates the difficulty for the individual of “completely becoming the author of [his] life” (437). For this reason, the interpreter is presented with the challenge of finding those moments in which the speaker exercises the authorial instead of the solely narratorial voice. Ricoeur speaks of life as “*an activity and a desire in search of a narrative*” (author's italics) and roots this desire in what he calls “the *pre-narrative quality of human experience*,” of life as “an

⁷⁵ Socrates's well-known assertion is that a life unexamined is a life not worth living.

incipient story” (434, author’s italics). These assertions – that the impulse to narrate is not only complex in itself, but that its roots pre-exist stories and that their incipient presence points to a desire to tell the true and compelling story – encourage the analyst to identify ways of telling that are not predictable or formulaic. A fixed directive does not guarantee a fixed response. Interviewees sought and articulated spaces for exercise of self-will both within and outside of the military context. Evidence of this is present in the memoirs discussed in the previous chapter, and in the novels and short stories discussed in Chapter 3.

It is expressions of vulnerability that often spark creative or original configurations of meaning. Unpredictable shifts in narrative emphasise the fact that choice and agency, if frequently unlikely, is always possible. In a good deal of the oral testimony, notably in that of Mason and Josey, the telling emerges from margins of selfhood invisible to the hegemonically inscribed perceiver. Or the hegemonically inscribed perceiver may have a partly formed and puzzled understanding of what motivates the marginal man to resist his military duty. He overcomes his partial understanding and puzzlement through condemnation and ridicule.

Ricoeur, in “Personal Identity and Narrative Identity” (1992), argues the importance of habit in the individual’s recognition of and settling into a sense of him or herself: “habit gives a history to character, but this is a history in which sedimentation tends to cover over the innovation which preceded it, even to the extent of abolishing the latter” (121). For Ricoeur “the dialectic of innovation and sedimentation” underlies the “acquisition of habit” (122). At the same time, the “equally rich dialectic of otherness and internalisation” underlies the “process of identification” (122). On the basis of this dialectical interplay, Ricoeur concludes that “it is then comprehensible that the stable pole of character can contain a narrative dimension, as we see in the uses of the term ‘character’ identifying it with the protagonist in a story” (122). In light of this sense of the complexity of character presented by Ricoeur, the call to adventure suggested by Campbell does not signify constancy or reliability on the levels of plot and character, or the premise of the story. Instead, the protagonist might veer from one subject position to a distinctly different position, aligning, misaligning and realigning him or herself. In the case of the female interviewee, Theresa Edlmann, her identity as feminist within the organisational culture of the ECC manifested at times in experiences and emotions of awkwardness and discomfort.

Problems of alignment, or what Ricoeur would regard as a difficult relation of the *idem* (sameness) of identity to its *ipse* (selfhood), are not uncommon in the context of group

resistance. Ricoeur speaks of these terms as “the two major uses of the concept of identity” (115) and they infuse his analysis. In terms of the *idem* of identity, shared resistance sets up and partakes of a new and distinctive set of values by which resisters continue to define themselves, to build a shared subject position or locus of shared interest. Ricoeur observes that through identification with the hero and the common cause “an element of loyalty is thus incorporated into character and makes it turn toward fidelity, hence toward maintaining the self” (121). In this the two poles of identity “accord with one another” (121). For Ricoeur this proves that “one cannot think the *idem* of the person through without considering the *ipse*, even when one entirely covers over the other” (121). This covering over of the self by the sameness is evident in much of the oral testimony. But, as has been noted earlier in relation to David Bruce’s words, a dialectic rather than a stifling binary remains possible, asserting thereby the ever-present potential for agency.

The above insights can be applied to the simultaneously personal and common moment: that in which the young man decides how to respond to the way his will is being acted upon. The decision sets in motion a process of sedimentation whereby a new and often committed sense of self is inhabited and becomes habitual. This habituation conduces to formation of coherent or unified narratives open to interpretation and reinterpretation, open to a commitment on the part of the listener or reader to detect sub-texts and über-texts. The sub-texts of particular interest, as suggested earlier, are those that express uncertainty and vulnerability. Such expressions are frequently apparent in the interviewees’ reflections on their past, on the decisions made and what ensued. Likewise, attempts to slot experiences into a larger framework or order of understanding take place in the moment of narrative recall. By means of the latter the speaker articulates a larger, private and at times metaphysical awareness to manage the uncertainty and vulnerability. Both narrative strategies are evident in the testimony under consideration.

A contradiction is present and needs to be taken into account. As noted earlier, the moment in which the decision has to be made is an either-or moment. But it is also an existentially open or narratively unsettled moment, a moment pregnant or raw with possibility. A related characteristic of the threshold moment, even for the individual who is only partly conscious of its gravity, is the legacy it contains or prefigures.⁷⁶ The moments or

⁷⁶ The importance of this legacy constitutes, as will be seen, the core of Theresa Edlmann’s PhD thesis, as well as the Legacies of the Apartheid Wars Project she set up and sustained. It is a project that has generated a revisiting of experiences of conscription to address the need for both politico-historical understanding and for

plot points in the life that precede it help to explain the decision that is made. On the other hand, the plot points that will follow the threshold moment, or what Campbell regards as the moment in which the call to adventure is heeded, are essentially unpredictable. However, despite this unpredictability, the life that follows the threshold instant might, as Ricoeur notes, settle in or concretise the identity of the speaker (121).

The relation of past to present selves assumes the complicated and complicating mediation of memory. The gap in time between the instant of remembering and the threshold instant is littered with as many shadows, blind-spots and fictionalisations as it is with facts and truths. As Nietzsche states in his essay “On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense”: “What does man know of himself! Can he even once perceive himself completely, laid out as if in an illuminated glass case?” (qtd. in Kaufmann 44)

The *idem* component of identity, the sameness, is comprised of what Ricoeur calls “*acquired identifications*” (121, author’s italics). He elaborates:

To a large extent, the identity of a person or a community is made up of identifications with values, norms, ideals, models and heroes in [and by] which the person or the community recognises itself. The identification with heroic figures clearly displays this otherness assumed as one’s own, but this is already latent in the identification with values which make us place a “cause” above our own survival. (121)

We have already seen the extent to which the notions of hero and cause feature in a good deal of the oral testimony under consideration, as well as in the mainstream memoirs previously referred to. In the case of the latter the cause is to play a role in stemming the tide of the *rooigevaar* and the *swartgevaar*, and for those interviewed the cause, not always clearly perceived, is to remain true to a set of values that run counter to such invocations. The hero is set up as a figure to aspire towards, a model against which to measure one’s purpose and worth. The hero instils an idealising impulse, to move toward recognition of the self and the hero-other as one and the same. But something in the individual as agent, or in some individuals, can work against acquired identification. Having suggested that such recognition might generate a “perseverance of character,” Ricoeur qualifies this statement by observing that a “perseverance of faithfulness to a word that has been given is something else again” (123). By faithfulness to a word Ricoeur means expression of “a self-constancy which cannot

psychological healing, a move toward what Edlmann terms “compassionate conversations” between men who were formerly enemies.

be inscribed within the dimension of something in general but solely within the dimension of “who?” (123). For David Bruce, though the notion of heroism features, this “word” holds a particular sway. The forcefulness of his invocation “I am nobody’s useful idiot” removes the question mark from “who.” On the other hand, the self-conscious construction of himself in the image of the celebrity reinstates the question mark: “in a way, you could read the whole thing as my way of turning myself into a star. I knew that the six year sentence would make a celebrity of me, and the truth was that I wanted that.”

Ricoeur’s theorising runs the risk of paradox. That is, of privileging awareness of the self as construct at the same time as holding to a belief in the possibility for self-actualisation, the latter being grounded in an essentialist epistemology. The template of the hero’s journey propounded by Campbell adheres to the notion of the self as inherently and innately capable of purposeful and meaningful agency. Such a perception of the self invites an element of suspicion despite the fact that, as acknowledged at the outset of this chapter, Campbell’s narrative template presents a useful analytic handle on the oral testimony. The ideas of Ricoeur provide a means of resolving this paradox of the possibility for agency versus its erasure.

Ricoeur notes, as does Aristotle, that the plotting or composition of a life, its telling, “is not a static structure but an operation, an integrative process which does not come to fruition other than in the receiver of the story being told” (“Life” 426). This integrative process, Ricoeur continues, “confers on the narrated story an identity one can call dynamic” (426). It is this acknowledgment of the dynamic quality of narrative that resolves the paradox and this dynamism ensures in its turn that “what is being told is precisely this or that story, singular and complete” (426). Ricoeur assumes that “the subject [who narrates] is never given at the beginning” (437). Thus no claim is made to a self that goes about discovering and articulating its essence. But this unfixable or indeterminate, instead of naturalised, element of identity suggests that individuals act in accordance with their own ideas and modes of being. Without the shaping presence of narrative, Ricoeur says, the teller risks “reducing itself to a narcissistic ego,” (437) and it is literature that can liberate us from this egoism and thereby ensure the prevalence of what he calls narrative identity. Through the presence of literature in life, and through the narrativising of life, “a *self* is born” (437).

Though Ricoeur acknowledges that the question of identity – the “Who am I, actually” – can “at times be a question without an answer (“Identity” 139),” his theory of identity leans toward its “mineness” at the same time as it heeds its “sameness.” For Ricoeur,

says Atkins: “the question ‘Who am I?’ can never be fully explicated. This is because, in asking ‘Who am I?’ the ‘I’ who poses the question necessarily falls within the domain of enquiry: I am both the seeker and what is sought. This circularity gives a ‘questing’ and dialectical character to selfhood” (np). A dialectic is at work instead of a duality. Awareness of this dialectic includes awareness of the possibility that “narrative theory [occupies a] common boundary with ethical theory” (“Identity” 139). To extrapolate from the theoretical to the level of the personal, it can be argued that narrativising a life means engaging that life on the ethical level. Clearly, the interview-texts express ethical considerations and the adoption of ethical standpoints.

The intention, following Ricoeur, is to remain aware of the singularity of the narratives, their specific plot points, despite the fact that these are responses to a shared set of external co-ordinates or determinants. His ideas on personal and narrative identity are borne in mind through analysis of the interview-texts that follows.

5.5 Textual Influences

A useful point of entry for drawing out the distinctive elements of oft-shared plot points is those occasions in which interviewees openly express the influence of literary or philosophical works on the choices they made in relation to conscription, as well as on a broader political level. These influences are at times announced as formative.

As noted in Chapter 2, David Bruce acknowledges the importance of the lyrics of Bob Dylan, Bob Marley, punk rockers and Joan Baez. It has already been seen that a significant device Bruce deployed in narrativising his identity (in Ricoeur’s terms his *ipse* or selfhood) was attachment to model figures or heroes from the counter-cultures of 1960s America and 1980s South Africa. He also recalls the formative influence of Arthur Miller’s play *The Crucible*:

One of the main networks at school was Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible*. I identified strongly with John Proctor who is the central character. He is an archetype of someone who feels compelled to stand up for what is right, even at great personal cost, to the point of being self-righteous and judgmental of others.

(Interview with author, 14 September 2011)

Bruce feels that his moral sensibility is firmly attached to the character John Proctor (another instance of Ricoeur's idea of acquired identification). However, and contradictorily, he goes on to state: "I am not quite sure what it says about me." Indeed, he frequently undercuts his pronouncements of moral certitude:

It would be a mistake to regard me as 'anti-authority.' I would not characterise myself as a rebel at heart. When I refused to do military service one way in which I reassured myself was that, at the same time that I was defying the law, I was also, in an overt way, subjecting myself to the state's authority.⁷⁷

(Interview with author, 14 September 2011)

His perceptions of the character John Proctor as knitted to his private destiny – "I understood this type of role as a role that I would have to play" – outweigh what he admits in the words cited above, as well as the uncertainty he expresses. The uncertainty and the intimation of a tendency to comply with authority sit uneasily alongside his now familiar avowal that verges on a credo: "I was nobody's useful idiot." The avowal runs more convincingly through his testimony than do the admissions of uncertainty and a preference to comply with the authority of the state. As suggested in Chapter 2, this conflict of voices can be understood as symptomatic of what he calls his "bipolar disorder" that manifested as an aversion to being the idiot of the State as well as of the resistance movement. In other words, he experienced an incapacity to live in accordance with anyone else's expectations, thereby performing with the kind of integrity that made of him a hero on his own terms, however uncertain and unsettled the experience of his aversion might have been.

In terms of textual influences he regarded as formative, Michael Graaf acknowledges a specific novel:

During my training in Oudtshoorn I'd observed the kinds of guys who were in leadership positions – the PF career officers. They had an incredibly narrow-minded mentality, were virtually caricatures. Read *Catch-22* and you'll spot the type. Any military operation could only be discredited when led by such oafs, thugs, morons.

(Interview with author, 29 November 2010)

⁷⁷ This statement invites assessment in the light of Judith Butler's statement, cited earlier: "What departures from the norm constitute something other than an excuse or rationale for the compelling authority of the norm? What departures from the norm disrupt the regulatory processes thereof?" (*Undoing Gender* 53). Bruce's logically impossible position – that he self-consciously defies the law as he bows down to authority – complicates assessment in the terms Butler provides.

Graaf also voices the influence of the life and thoughts of Gandhi: “When I was on the border I asked my mother to send me a book on Gandhi. I read it and it influenced my becoming a pacifist.” Finally, he recalls the influence of the lyrics of Pink Floyd:

In the Mess we had TV sets [...] one of the conscripts showed an animated video of “Brick in the Wall.” We sang: “hey corporal, leave these troops alone.” The video, banned by the SABC, was shown within the heart of the beast. I remember clearly that scene of the hammers marching. (Interview with author, 29 November 2010)

As with Bruce’s testimony, the first literary reference for Graaf is an early co-ordinate for his journey, contributing in its way to the call to adventure identified by Campbell. For Graaf the contrast is striking: the “thugs” and “morons” laid the ground for alternative self-definition. As in the kind of narrative examined by Campbell, the process of self-definition consists in challenges and breakthroughs, alignments and contestation.

Just as Joseph Heller’s *Catch-22* served as a moment of truth and a particular plot point for Graaf, coincidentally, it also played a part in Brett Myrdal’s narrative. By the time Myrdal refers to *Catch-22* his story of resistance is already under way. Myrdal has by this point in his narrative crossed the border between South Africa and Zimbabwe for the first stage of his military training. In Zimbabwe he awaits the call to East Germany and is required to invent a story in order to distract the apartheid operatives who are well aware of his departure, his exact whereabouts and the next stage of his adventure. Myrdal acknowledges the role played by Fowles’ novel in inventing his cover story:

So I’d planned what my story was going to be. I was going to say that I was going to Greece to teach two of my students who wanted me as a private tutor for three months. I spent the weekend writing letters to myself as if I was in Greece, sent to members of the Greek Communist Party. I dated these letters, and I read *The Magus*. And it gave me a lot of anecdotal information, as if I was living there. So I used that book to inspire my letters that I wrote then to my family in South Africa, knowing that the Security Police would intercept them and confirm that I was in Greece.
(Interview with author, 12 January 2011)

For other interviewees, such as Garth Mason, Kelwyn Sole, Graham Ellis and Theresa Edlmann, the texts – be they fiction, poetry, philosophy or psychology – frequently indicate a sane way forward, a way of revising the story of the past to set down the co-ordinates for a story that asks to be continued, or a new story. The narrative moves by a stringing together of episodes or fragments, some from the life of the teller, others from stories that have been read

or have been passed down. The teller seeks and cites stories that support his or her story, that sustain the momentum of the central story until it arrives at an ending which makes sense and satisfies both the teller and the listener.

A harmony of sense and satisfaction validates the idea of narrative as a pattern or template. However, such a notion of harmony instantly arouses suspicion and calls for a reminder of Ricoeur's insistence on the problematic link of the story to the life. As noted earlier, Ricoeur stresses the importance of remaining "attentive to the manner in which [the story] moves toward its close" ("Life" 427). Remaining attentive equates with consistent awareness of discordant elements in the testimony of the interviewees, to be explored in the sections to follow.

5.6. Expressions of Discord in Narratives of Resistance

The concern in this section is with discordant elements in the testimony of interviewees. Discord is expressed as alienation and vulnerability, and these expressions chafe against the comparatively seamless master-narrative of compliance, duty and the ordinary world. This discord and chafing generates strategies of avoidance and escape, which include the search for islands of refuge from the constraints and intrusions on body, mind and soul.

It will be seen that what expressions of vulnerability and responses to it have in common is that they challenge the linearity of plot as well as consistency or sameness in the representation of character. In such instances, interviewees' memories are framed in ways that counter prevailing masculinities, be these masculinities orthodox or counter-orthodox.

5.6.1 Vulnerability

Speaking of his arrival in Lusaka as the second stage of his journey to East Germany for military training Brett Myrdal says: "I was met at the airport. Of course I didn't have the right documents for customs. I was trained to have eye contact with no one. I was terrified."

Indeed, his account of his military training vacillates throughout from assertions of physical strength, endurance and camaraderie to admissions of being terrified. A challenge or obstacle that presented itself to Myrdal was the fact that he was the only white MK trainee, which generated distrust in other trainees, although it was in the end a distrust that was overcome as

a result of Myrdal's physical strength and his knowledge of military tactics. Still later in his testimony he narrates the painful contradiction between the spirit of peace that motivated his return to South Africa during the period of transition, and the discomfort induced by his lingering identity as combatant. Thus, a good deal of Myrdal's testimony shifts from expressions of hyper-masculinity, to admissions of vulnerability, to the consolations of camaraderie and back again to similar assertions, consolations and admissions. This pattern is present, if to a lesser extent, in the testimony of other interviewees.

Experiences of vulnerability frequently relate to a strained sense of belonging, as is evident in the testimony of activists such as David Bruce, Michael Graaf and Theresa Edlmann who express aversion, despite their political commitment, to being neatly positioned within organisational structures. After his period of National Service, Graaf, like Bruce, felt alienated from the student left at university. This alienation shifted to establishing allegiances around the cause of anti-conscription and found expression in fasting and commitment to pacifism. Edlmann says of the years of her involvement in the anti-conscription and anti-apartheid organisations: "there were always uncertainties and ambiguities. You were standing for some things and not necessarily for others but not necessarily against them. It was a muddled and complex time." Garth Mason declares his disinclination towards aligning himself with a publicly announced refusal that would attach him instantly to the organisational structure and culture of the ECC. Kelwyn Sole, David Bruce and David Josey, as shall be seen, express particular forms of aversion.

The strains and contrariness manifest not only in articulations thereof, but in the life choices made by these men and women – the journeys embarked upon. There is in each of these paths something that rankles, that spawns statements of regret, difficulty, even mourning – a frequent sense that a life has been lived, but only partly and unsatisfactorily. This element of the partial takes different shapes. For example, memories attached to military life are, for some men, more complex than clear-cut aversion or negativity. Gary Baines asserts that the "literary memories [of "liberal white males"] conjured up a *nauseous nostalgia* for military life and the Border War" (*Border War* 161, my italics). This disagreeable pairing of nausea and nostalgia is occasionally detectable in testimony discussed earlier, as well as in novels and memoirs already discussed. However, statements such as those made by interviewees Ellis and Mason express a nausea that is not tempered by nostalgia.

The voices of resisters who had something of a public profile during the 1980s, such as Graaf and Bruce, reveal discord of a particular kind. In the years subsequent to their political visibility they have receded into the wings of the public stage, or sought ways of counter-defining themselves. For this reason, their testimony often presents insights into an untidy or strained relation of the public to the private personality. In the post-apartheid context and subsequent to the falling away of conscription, Michael Graaf articulates the need for a new form and style of activism in response to discontent with the social dynamics and cultural consciousness of post-apartheid South Africa.

Feelings of disaffection and alienation were closely linked to the expectation within the schooling and family contexts and white society at large for the young man to participate in a rite of passage to manhood in the form of conscription. Even in the cases of men such as Bruce, Mason and Myrdal, who knew unambiguously that they would not serve, these exhortations had the power to unhinge them. Bruce states:

By the end of July 1987, just before I was due to report, I had a sense of starting to feel quite low. In the months that followed things got quite desperate. My memory of what my motivations were when I went to university after finishing school are not very clear. (Interview with author, 14 September 2011)

Ellis echoes this absence of certainty:

Even though I was able to go to University I had no clear idea what I should be studying, but I was clear enough in my mind that I did not want to go into the army and in this instance it was Business Science. I simply had to do something to avoid the call-up [...] something in which I had no real interest.

(Interview with author, 15 November 2010)

Experiences of isolation and alienation did not solely attend a refusal to serve. Myrdal expresses the alienation and bitter loneliness that followed his return from exile. Conway speaks of the voices of resisters as expressing “dislocated masculinities that contest dominant or hegemonic models” (*Masculinities* 7–8). There is an echo between this notion of “dislocated masculinities” and interviewee Garth Mason speaking of a deferred mode of living, an absence or “adriftness.” Mason speaks of early experiences that shaped his relationship to conscription and, by implication, the unfolding of his masculinity:

My earliest encounter with the military was with a Christmas present I got when I was in Grade 1 or 2 – something I’d asked for, really wanted. It was a camouflage war uniform, and a plastic helmet and a gun, along with a leather bandana I’d got from my

grandfather (probably a World War 2 heirloom). I loved uniforms and played these imaginary war games with myself for hours. Battling, dying and being revived again. When I was ten years-old, that was the first time I remember thinking, the reality dawning, that there was this call-up. (Interview with author, 26 October 2012)

Mason recalls, also as a ten year-old boy, the experience during the early days of television of watching the dramatisation of one of the battles that took place during the Angolan Civil War that was named Operation Savannah by SADF strategists. He explains the effect of this viewing: “for the first time, it dawned on me that I would have to go into the army. There was this feeling of horror. I realised then that I could not do this. Whatever the society required me to do, I was unable to do it.” It was an aversion that persisted through his teenage years and thereafter. Something of this deep-seated aversion is reflected in the testimony of David Josey. He traces his disinclination to National Service to his relationship with his controlling mother from the age of six months.⁷⁸ Josey begins by narrating what resembles an Oedipal drama. Clearly the mention of conscription triggers a return, simultaneously unfathomable and threatening, to primary, even primal, experiences of disaffection, alienation and trauma. His testimony suggests that conscription generated in some a fear that prohibited retreat into an inwardness which promised restoration of self instead of its dissolution. It was a society in which voices were muted; emotions mummified. Mason echoes Josey:

All I lived with was a sense of fear. It was something you couldn't speak in such a male-dominated society. It really started forming my masculine identity at that time, contrary to the prevailing masculinity in the country. It started cutting out a sense of oneself which said one didn't belong. So really I certainly grew up with a lot of insecurity, feelings of inferiority, displaced bravado – just trying to find a way to express oneself. (Interview with author, 26 October 2012)

For Mason his sense of himself as a young man involved knowing on an intuitive level that he did not belong, and experiencing disabling emotions that arose from being told, in the forms of words, deeds and silence, that he could not belong. He reflects upon the impact on his sexuality of this irreconcilable tension: “one definitely had a sense of deficit in terms of one's sexuality, which I still carry with me. Terms that were bandied about then to define others – *moffie* or leftie or other derogatory terms aimed to pin people down. That was the world we lived in.”

⁷⁸ See comment at start of interview with Josey.

The stifling of will and the experience of being silenced express vulnerability. Kelwyn Sole points to the fact that this stifling and silencing shaped his poetic work from his narrative poem “Ovamboland” to subsequent and aptly titled volumes such as *Blood of Our Silence* and his latest, *Absent Tongues*: “What’s going on with my poems is the concept of silence and speaking, that’s always been there. *Blood of our Silence* is about the wounds of keeping silent, or that even silence has its own blood – the wounds of people that don’t speak.”

The title of the compilation of conference paper essays discussed in the previous chapter, *Telling Wounds* (2002) responds to the final clause in Sole’s statement. The notion that speaking has the power to cure has gained parlance in more than the domain of psychoanalysis. However, the assumption is not necessarily a given. Something difficult is also at work in attempts at “witnessing brutality,” as Dan Wylie puts it, and telling wounds. There was a sense that even politically progressive men did not speak their vulnerabilities, that insufficient vocabulary was available for them to do so. In their testimony there are fleeting announcements of vulnerability that, as listener, one wishes to be developed, transformed into narratives. It can be said that narratives may serve to open up and explore vulnerability, and to do so may benefit both sayer and hearer. Honest introspection, admissions of vulnerability, could unpack both hegemonic as well as alternative brands of masculinity – highlighting their limits, be they glaring or subtle. Such narratives and sub-narratives do emerge from the oral testimony, strikingly so in the voices of Mason and Ellis. Consider the intensity of Ellis’s admission of his vulnerability: “I went through extremes, and I suppose it says something about me that I went through such extremes, and in the negative sense someone might say that this shows a lack of character, unnatural vulnerability, or whatever.” Use of the words “unnatural vulnerability” reveal the control the ideology of the real man exerted on young white men during the 1980s.

Thus, testimony reflecting the either-or instant is loaded with a pained irreconcilability – a suspicion that the one choice, assumed to be true, does not necessarily make the other false and worthy of blanket dismissal. Myrdal faced a decision or dilemma of a different kind. He frames his commitment to become an MK soldier in the 1980s with these words: “Why should I, just because I’m white and educated, say that I’m too good to be a soldier?” Revealingly, the ground upon which Myrdal announces his new self is also shaky. In a social order that is premised upon false dichotomies the challenge for self-definition is felt more acutely. The moment in which the decision is to be made is loaded. The “should I”

and the “just because” reveal the anxiety imbedded in the moment of choosing, of taking sides. Even what appears to be an unambiguous avowal of selfhood, of a counter-self, is fraught with self-doubt and insecurity.

David Bruce recalls a telephone conversation with a friend in exile during the run-up to his own trial: “Perhaps he asked ‘Why? What’s it going to achieve?’ I couldn’t say to him ‘It’s going to work like this and this and this.’ So I said ‘It’s a gamble.’” Despite the weight attached to the fact that his refusal brought with it a mandatory six year prison sentence, his words “this and this and this” suggest something unspecific. The latter element is confirmed by Bruce likening his decision and its effects to a gamble. By using this word he acknowledges that he is deciding upon the next stage of his journey on the basis of a roll of the dice in a situation in which the dice is loaded. The analogy of gambling captures the experiences of risk and the possibility of luck, as well as emotions of hope, fear, resignation and, unquestionably, courage.

Theresa Edlmann notes the mix of emotions experienced by other resisters: “by resisting conscription you were standing for some things and not necessarily for others but not necessarily against them.” By way of working against this confusion Edlmann speaks of the importance of understanding and challenging what she calls the “discursive laagers” from within which individuals – be they resisters, fence-sitters, combatants or family members connected to these groupings – revisited the roles played by the military during the apartheid past. From these capsules or laagers of perception different individuals accessed and reconstructed their memories of a shared past in ways that made the term ‘shared’ a misnomer. These laagers of perception, or what Edlmann in her testimony also refers to as “discursive delineations,” limit the possibility of genuine and fruitful dialogue, or even of healing. Constraints on the liberty to speak, Edlmann notes, manifest in the current prominence given to conscripts’ and objectors’ narratives of remembering. She argues that “the same kinds of dilemmas” with regard to racial, gender and economic privilege are being faced in the historical present as were faced during the apartheid past: “what we say comes out of being positioned, out of prescribed identities rather than being able to speak with vulnerability and subjectivity – in a similar way to how it was playing out in the 1980s.” For Edlmann, “how each person wove his journey through [conscription] was incredibly complex, and a lot of it covert rather than overt.”

A range of covert paths were taken by interviewees, but there were also responses best called inaction or inertia of the will. When speaking of his time working as a post-graduate student and lecturer, Mason states:

When I think of myself at the age of twenty-four at University I see that it wasn't a path. It was a place where I was hanging out, deferring. It's not necessarily just a matter of a career path, but a sense that one has a purpose, a direction. I never had that. (Interview with author, 26 October 2012)

Even with an interviewee such as Myrdal, whose choices and actions appeared overt, there were shifts from certainty and clarity to self-doubt. Also, the overt path carried with it no guarantee of certainty or ease. Indeed, Myrdal's testimony reveals that his overt decision to train as a soldier carried and still carries with it a painful legacy of dislocation and alienation. On the other hand, overt paths that transgressed the borders separating the discursive laagers from each other were undertaken. For Michael Graaf and Paul Morris this amounted to crossing the literal border that separates their present lives from their time as conscripts during the Border War. Thus Morris, as already seen, crossed the border to Angola to meet and reconcile with men who were his enemies in the battle of Cuito Cuanavale. Graaf revisited his own Border War past by returning to Namibia in late 1988 in the spirit of peace and reconciliation that accompanied implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 435.⁷⁹

The social context of 1980s South Africa was one in which the young white man was habituated into a macho mode of masculinity. The SADF, as Morris observes, served as venue or breeding ground for the "rite of passage" whereby white men were grown into "rulers and bosses and heads of families." Morris further observes that within the patriarchal regime of schools and the military the instant response to reluctance or refusal to obey those in authority was "violent punishment," quashing of individuality, "suppression of emotions" and adherence to "trivial dress codes" (108–10). Having echoed in his testimony these limitations indicated by Morris, Ellis proceeds to articulate his pained awareness of his brother's and cousins' combat experiences on the border. He provides a detailed and grisly account of these experiences. Ellis announces his "anxiety on several fronts." Other than those already mentioned, two more "fronts" may be included: firstly, the intense discomfort he felt in the face of his parents' pride at his brother qualifying as a Parabat and, secondly, his

⁷⁹ The Resolution was adopted in 1988. It put forward proposals for a cease-fire and an election to be supervised by the United Nations (UN).

burgeoning and “sophisticated understanding of the machinery that [lay behind it all], that made it possible.” He goes on to state: “the authoritarian structure was something I despised, all the more so when I realised the atrocities it allowed.” Because this authoritarian structure required and perpetuated a clear-cut notion of the masculine, Ellis rejected it as idea as well as practice. Importantly, the unobvious threats to self-determination and integrity posed by the military and other organs of civil society did not, for ex-conscripts such as Morris and a resister such as Ellis, entirely foreclose the exercise of agency. This made it possible to pick apart and discard the noose of conscription.

Vulnerability in the shapes discussed above makes clear its link to strategies of avoidance. The testimony of a number of the interviewees reveals a debilitating disharmony of private and public personalities, or what Ricoeur terms the *ipse* and *idem* dynamic. This disharmony often made decisions and their enactment complex and difficult. A sense of this complexity emerges from considering the strategies of avoidance adopted by some of the interviewees.

5.6.2 Strategies of Avoidance and Escape

Mason’s testimony provides the starting-point for a concern with the strategies by which some white men avoided being conscripted. As with other interviewees, the principal and legally viable strategy of avoidance took the form of registering for study at a tertiary institution, thereby making possible applications to the so-called Exemption Board for annual and sometimes bi-annual deferments of military duty. Mason sustained this avoidance strategy for ten years, from 1984 to the official removal of conscription from the statute books: “There were the different strategies one used. I did Classics and never went to one lecture, didn’t write the Exams, so I took it to fail, to extend my [undergraduate] degree to four years.” This successful deferment carried with it a cost. Mason emphasises the extent to which conscription shadowed his life, keeping it at bay for ten years, rendering his university years a “desert of deferral,” a particular brand of angst and ennui that ramified beyond its time and played a significant role in the fact that, as he puts it, he “found [his] life at the age of forty-seven.” This last observation points to the fact that possibilities for a self-determining life, in which one was aware of the lives and plight of one’s fellow South Africans, were

denied a significant number of white men during the 1980s, as well as beyond that time. For Mason, fractures and scars remain:

there's a lack of investment, an underlying depression that has always been there – that I'm not leading my life, there's a hollowness to it. It was the battle one didn't want to fight that becomes the defining chorus of your life and it's a strange feeling because the fear has gone, but there's a sense of deep loss, of time lost.

(Interview with author, 26 October 2012)

This mix of emotions resulting from deferment is present in the testimony of other interviewees. Ellis observes: “this business of deferment brought relief at the same time as it postponed fear or left dread.” David Josey, having reflected on the many years he spent escaping and evading National Service, concludes:

It was a limbo time, and in many ways it was good for me in that it gave me time to introspect and to get the kind of education that was important to me in the first place. But in terms of getting on with my life, the fact is I still haven't gotten on with my life. (Interview with author, 18 October 2012)

Whereas Mason attests to a sense of arriving at a workable notion of his life, Josey's and Ellis' testimony expresses no such arrival.

The testimony of some interviewees suggests that the system had not always “done its job,” as Paul Morris observed. Within what Ellis terms an “atmosphere” and “mindset” frequently defined by indifference, callousness and brutality, some individuals felt and later expressed their distaste and aversion. Ellis speaks of the testimony of his Parabat brother making it certain that for him it would have been “traumatic to have been there at all.” Ellis observes that his brother “could not stand the cries through the night of men who had been tied to trees and were being tortured to death.” He recalls another of his brother's experiences: “a sixteen year old girl was asked for information, and was savagely beaten and clubbed, using a pick handle, to death. This also sickened him to his stomach.” For Ellis such stories reflect a “mindset” that naturalised “young men taking trophies from other men that they had killed, even in the form of clothing, sometimes fingers, sometimes penises.” Hearing such narratives served, at times and for some, to galvanise either the spirit of resistance they carried with them into the “operational areas” or to shape their strategies of avoidance. From within an atmosphere and mindset that was monolithically patriarchal, each of the interviewees faced the challenge of shaping his or her alternatives.

Stories relating to the horrors of combat were offset at times by what Ellis calls “different types of stories.” He recalls his brother recounting “with hilarity certain situations in which death was highly likely, and therefore terrifying.” Ellis announces the awkwardness he felt when listening to such stories: “funny or not, those were not the situations I ever wanted to be in.” It can be said that Ellis’ awkwardness evidences the workings of an individual consciousness and conscience within a context that regards assertions of individuality as transgressions. But the assertions of individuality, instead of being clear-cut, were often fraught with insecurity and self-doubt. Even in the testimony of interviewees such as David Bruce and Graham Ellis, for whom avoidance was a given, there were moments of wavering and self-doubt. The testimony of Ellis reveals a string of plot points that reflect such moments. Early in his testimony Ellis states that his aversion to serve was unambiguous:

I can say that I regarded the possibility of conscription with dread for political reasons as well as psychological reasons in terms of my own frailties. Even though I had played first team rugby I did not feel confident that I was up to what it takes to be a soldier, and I realised that the war that was being fought was nothing like the war that the government claimed was being fought.

(Interview with author, 15 November 2010)

However, once he had dropped his postgraduate studies early in 1987 he flew to London as a political asylum seeker where he experienced himself to be waiting in a kind of twilight zone, anxious and depressed and without stabilising co-ordinates. After just under six months he felt compelled to abandon waiting for confirmation of his application for asylum and returned to South Africa and the compromised condition that was more familiar to him. Finding it impossible to abide an inbetween state of being, he heeded his January 1988 call-up and reported for National Service. After three days, having spoken to a sympathetic conscript-psychologist, he was dismissed on the grounds of being psychologically unfit to serve. However, the story did not end at this point. In order to be granted complete exemption from National Service Ellis was required to consult a psychiatrist on a regular basis for a period of 12 months in order to prove his claim for exemption. There was no guarantee that this reprieve would be granted, but in the case of Ellis it was. Such a confusion of motives and actions was commonly experienced, amounting to a historically specific style of emotional disorientation ennui for a historically specific style of individual. In white South Africa of the 1980s motives and actions were never neatly designated. Those who sought gaps in the lines or fractures in the system were rendered instantly visible by their contrariness. Each

interviewee concocted his own assertion of self in the face of the common constraint or predicament. Thus, as previously noted, conscription was simultaneously constraint and condition of possibility. But the obvious corollary here was that a limited range of possibilities was available.

Though Myrdal's decisive instant or threshold moment, and the story incited by it, differs sharply from those told by other interviewees, there is a striking parallel in memories of boyhood socialisation. Myrdal recalls the school cadet system with its non-negotiable concepts of manhood and its attendant brutality:

It taught me a hatred of militarism, a hatred of thuggery, aggression. Small men beating up kids just because they could. When you got lashed by a man who was in uniform it was worse than getting lashed on any other day. And I was usually getting lashed. I detested that uniform and that I was being prepared to be an officer in that system. (Interview with author, 12 January 2011)

The cadet system played a role in concretising his resistance to apartheid to the point of donning a different uniform, that of an MK soldier. Thus the strategy of avoidance for him was clearly to defect and take on the role of combatant against the apartheid state. Though his choice neither demands nor requires justification, the irony of it rings out.

The testimony of Garth Mason points to the fact that for him the oppressive experience of being conscripted played a significant role in the creation of a counter-identity; an identity shaped by intellectual reorientation, a commitment to critical thinking. There is ambiguity or, more aptly, complexity, in David Bruce's account of the effects of conscription during his university years. The looming inevitability of it certainly played a role in slowing down his studies. He put confrontation with conscription on hold by neglecting to write exams as a result of dagga smoking and other distractions rooted in the student counter-culture of that time (discussed in detail in Chapter 2). However, as has been noted, there was no ambiguity to Bruce's knowing that he would not serve in the SADF, a fact he knew while still a schoolboy. It was no more than the details of his refusal that remained unclear to him. In fact, his arrival at clarity in this regard verged on the accidental or serendipitous. Andie Miller, cited earlier, states that for Bruce the problem of choosing played itself out as a difficult and pained private epistemology: "many of his choices, which flow against the mainstream, are a process of research: to explore less popular choices in the realm of possibility" (4–5). Acknowledgement of the role played by possibility takes account of the fact that the individual does not necessarily inhabit his life in a decisive manner at any given

moment. His testimony reveals that the latter, at times, generated an existential inertia, and this inertia translated into escape strategies such as dagga smoking and addictive swimming. What emerges from Bruce's testimony is a sense of an individual shifting from the capacity to exercise agency, to assert a position in the world, but that such assertions contain an undercurrent of uncertainty and doubt, leaning toward a sense of the partial, contingent and fleeting elements of his stance, his subject position – an inbetweenness. In this sense, Bruce provided just one example of what characterised the testimony of each interviewee and confirmed for this interviewer that none of the interviewees could be slotted neatly into one or the other category of resistance.

Echoing the testimony of Mason, Bruce's sense of self and destiny was shaped by the certainty and authenticity of his resistance. However, the manifestation of this certainty in the form of his public refusal was complicated by the fact that his stance was rooted in both a counter-cultural existentialism and what he regarded, in retrospect, as a borderline psychological state. Bruce subsequently makes sense of his existential disorientation as a diagnosed bipolar condition. It is arguable, from a different interpretive viewpoint, that this disorientation can also, and validly, be interpreted as a psychological symptom arising from constraints and impositions specific to the period; as much an effect of the power relations of the time as a 'condition' of being, with the notion of an intrinsic identity this designation suggests.

David Josey's management of his circumstances differed from Bruce's in that it took the form of resisting the life of the conscript from the inside. His testimony presents another angle on Ricoeur's *ipse-idem* dynamic of identity. Josey's actions were distinct from those of ECC members for whom actions were weighted more strongly toward the *idem* (or sameness) of identity than toward its *ipse* or singularity. Although Josey's testimony proves the effectiveness of the process of gendered socialisation that preceded and eased the young man's entry into military service, it differs in this respect – his aversion to the draconian consciousness of the time manifested in a willed and inexorable decline into misdemeanors, such as stealing milk coupons. Such misdemeanors resulted in his being admitted to a reformatory called Boys Town. Josey says of his parents' unquestioning acceptance of this shift in his circumstances: "Everything the authorities said my parents would accept. It was the same with the army." This acknowledgement of his time in the reformatory as prefiguring his time in the army, as performing the role of a rehearsal, leads him to observe: "in my particular case it's the whole spectrum of power that needs to be understood because it's all

related.” The impossibility for Josey of surviving within educational institutions, be they conventional or punitive (although the distinction at the time was a thin one) manifested during his National Service as habitual escapes from basic training and camps. He became an accomplished escape artist, an artful dodger. Having spent a large portion of the early 80s removing himself from military duties he finally moved into Hillbrow and the military police appeared to have forgotten about him. This proved to be a short reprieve. But with a change in circumstance (the will to marry and get a job) he reported for military service and was sentenced to another two years of service despite the fact that he had already, because of his escapes, completed more than two years. However, Josey’s experiences of military service ended with appropriate abruptness:

Eventually I thought fuck it and just walked out. I was half way down the passage when these guys stopped me, one with a hand on my shoulder. I slapped it away and said ‘I’m not interested, go play toy soldiers with someone else.’ And I carried on walking, nobody stopped me at the gate. That was the end of that. They had obviously decided I was too much trouble. (Interview with author, 18 October 2012)

As Josey’s testimony and that of other interviewees, as well as novelists and memoirists, attests, very little justified conscription and its legacy. However, interviewees also share dimensions of their experience distinct from confinement to a tiny cell in a dungeon for insubordination, as was Josey. Exploration of this other dimension follows.

5.6.3 Refuge as Survival Strategy

Oral testimony reveals another strategy of managing or surviving conscription and its effects. This takes the form of attaching the self to something larger than it, be this attachment to something beyond the here-and-now, or alternatively and fully inhabiting it. It amounts to seeking, and perhaps finding, refuge. Leanings toward private credos for living aid the individual to explain and explain away the intrusions on self that have been explored in detail thus far. Larger orders of understanding whereby the resister or ex-conscript overcomes his past might take the form of intellectual and/or spiritual reorientation.

For Kelwyn Sole this reorientation took the form of the political poetry he wrote. This poetry divided him from the role imposed upon him at the same time as it provided a way of

asserting a distinctive oppositionality, frequently expressed as disjunctions of present perceptions versus past experiences:

I guess my political poetry has always been about showing allegiance, but showing that things aren't one-dimensional. That's how I see "Ovamboland" [1987, included in Appendix]." It shows that there's very weird kinds of human interaction. In that war zone it was very easy to get caught up in stuff that you didn't know, had no ability to tell who you were or what you believed in. You just got caught between, as I said, these two juggernauts. That's partly what I was trying to do in that poem.
(Interview with author, 15 June 2012)

Sole perceives the role of poetry as therapeutic in a sense. That is, it provides a strategy for untangling the knot between psychological wounds and silence. He states:

My poetry was the only thing that wasn't stymied by post-apartheid in the nineties. Poetry was a way for me to have questions not directly related to politics, but to kind of show that they fit together. You know [in "Ovamboland"] two teenagers are riding on a bicycle, with slight sexual tension even – these other aspects that don't necessarily conform to political imperatives. The everyday is infused with politics, but it's politics in the broad sense. (Interview with author, 15 June 2012)

His testimony provides his own angle on vulnerability, this time from the perspective of a conscript on the border in the mid-70s, at the onset of the Angolan Civil War. In the poem "Ovamboland" Sole offers an intimate, even domesticated account of Border war experiences at the same time as he builds up a narrative of counter-definition, of allegiance with the political battle fought by the Angolan and Namibian liberation armies. The opening scene in "Ovamboland" echoes images from an exhibition of works presented by Christo Doherty and John Liebenberg at the Grahamstown Arts Festival in 2012, in the form of model figures of SADF soldiers and their families at the Kunene River near the Angolan border in November of 1987, braaiing, picnicking on blankets on the sand, drinking beer and suntanning on top of armoured vehicles.

The poem "Ovamboland" can be seen as providing for the poet a way of preventing the fears and insecurities that attend the situation in which he finds himself from getting the better of him. By crafting scenes of conflict the poem acts as a safety valve or harbour for the poet-soldier, as has been seen in relation to Wylie's memoir. Thus Sole wrestles poetically with his experiences as a conscript on the Border. The opening scene to "Ovamboland" conveys this co-existence of domesticity and danger. He constructs quasi-idyllic scenes

“improbable” enough to carry portent. Fighter jets “cleave the air [...] arrows of death, arrows of portent,” erasing from the poet’s eye the preceding images:

The birds are gone
the pictures on the lake scrubbed off.
And they sigh,
gather their remaining lunch
the peels and the eggshells
and climb back into the darkness
of their patrol. (39–45)

The above scene resonates with scenes from Francis Ford Coppola’s film *Apocalypse Now*, with a soldier skiing behind the small warship making its way into the heart of the Vietnamese jungle in search of the character called Kurtz, and the scene in which the Commander orders two of his men to surf while bullets and missiles pock the river shore, ignite the air about their ears, and fleck the waves they ride. Other scenes from the poem explore the internal tensions and contradictions of a “leftist in search of new experience” (113–14). In one of these scenes the speaker witnesses a “drunk Home Guard” push a woman into the bar where the speaker sits with three fellow-conscripts. The Home Guard kicks and slaps the woman and she screams “fuck off, go to hell!” The speaker and his friends consider this to be “a lovers’ quarrel” and they “carefully ignore the rocket launcher strapped to his sodden back” (143–54). Vignette by vignette, often sitting uneasily alongside each other, Sole enacts an aesthetic of resistance.

Mason’s survivalist quest for refuge took on different shapes – those of intellectual alignment and an idiosyncratic spirituality:

In many ways my spirituality was related to deferral, a means of escape. I escaped into esoteric spiritual things. My spirituality is far more Zen-oriented now. It’s about conscious living, about being awake now, nothing special really. I think my spirituality came home when I could face the now. Not now in terms of a mystical sense; just treading water, shovelling shit, that kind of thing.
(Interview with author, 26 October 2012)

David Bruce testifies to a similar form of refuge:

I was released from jail and struggled to recover any centredness. I went through all kinds of stuff, suicidal episodes and other instabilities. The big turning point for me was through encountering meditation and Buddhism, especially following a nine-day retreat I did at Ixopo in 1999. (Interview with author, 14 September 2011)

Whereas the transition Bruce speaks of is from the absence of “any centredness” to the day-to-day spirituality of Buddhism, Myrdal’s is from the atheistic eschatology of dialectical materialism to a loosely defined and unaligned spirituality. Myrdal announces that he “became an expert in the ABC of Marxist-Leninism” while training as an MK soldier and presently leans toward a less doctrinaire and quasi-spiritual framework for understanding the patterns whereby individuals go about shaping meaning from and for their lives.

Earlier the point was made that David Josey’s strategies of avoidance differed from those of other interviewees in that he conducted his resistance from the inside. His testimony differs too in relation to his quest for refuge. For example, Josey recalls what followed the first of his many escapes:

It was such a blissful three days it didn’t matter. I’d taken no food. When I’d got to the top [of the mountain] I’d gone some way then came to a little lake with trees around it and a small cave. I sat there in the shade and just watched these ducks on the lake. I ended up vegging out and watching these ducks. It was great.

(Interview with author, 18 October 2012)

The image is of Josey sitting in lotus position at the crest of a mountain meditating upon ducks. Whether enacted or not, he is *in situ* to compose a haiku before resuming his journey to the valleys below where his fellows continue to orbit the sameness that drives the common life. Setting aside romanticised notions of Josey’s *ipse* or those of any of the other interviewees, a contradiction needs to be pointed out to return us to the ground of the argument. On the one hand, Josey’s sustained rebellion finally secured his release. On the other hand, the impossibility of effecting compromises of any sort had a damagingly lasting effect: “But in terms of getting on with my life [...] the fact is I still haven’t gotten on with my life.”

As has been seen, interviewees’ arrival at intellectual or spiritual safe-houses more often than not followed or came to fruition after the fact of their National Service. By activating memories of their strategies of avoidance, escape and refuge they manage the aftermath of a morally, intellectually and emotionally stunting experience. The revisiting can be likened to that of an author revising a novel or play he wrote in the past and assigning a different role to its protagonist.

The closing section to this chapter presents a distinct point of view: that of Theresa Edlmann interpreting the plot points common to the stories discussed thus far. The point of view that guides Edlmann’s point of view is a privileged one in a particular sense: it presents

insights into the experiences of veterans and resisters which are often not easily provided by the men themselves. Importantly too, she extends her interpretation to a concern with questions and problems that pertain to white masculine identity in the post-apartheid period.

5.7 A Woman's Voice

A sense has already been provided in Chapter 1 of the ideological complicity of white women in 1980s South Africa. In terms of serving the interests of the SADF these roles included those of mothers, wives, girlfriends, entertainers and radio hosts (see Cock in *Colonels* 96–149). In her testimony and her research work Edlmann provides counter-definitions of roles played by women through focusing attention on women who were involved in resistance to conscription in particular and, on the general level, of resistance to the full gamut of apartheid policies. She asserts that insufficient emphasis has been placed on the impact conscription and its legacy has had on women and the extent to which South Africa in the 1980s was a baldly and blatantly masculinist society:

It's almost as if there was this masculine energy taking on a masculine system, and that's where the potency was felt far more than in relationships with women. Was that sexual potency being lived out in taking on a system rather than in the experience of intimacy and vulnerability with women, even for objectors? Whether you went in to the army or whether you objected, there were still performances of masculinities.

(Interview with author, 23 November 2012)

Her testimony, journal articles and PhD thesis make highly visible white men's "vulnerability" as a result of conscription. In the testimony of male interviewees, on the other hand, admission of vulnerability is often less visible, occurring mainly on the level of undercurrents rather than stated truths or confessions. This discrepancy can be understood by the fact that, as a woman, she did not have to confront the realities of conscription directly, thereby permitting her the critical distance that facilitates a fuller and more nuanced awareness. However, it might also be argued that Edlmann's involvement as an ECC activist, the extent to which conscription affected and shaped her life, is abundantly clear in her testimony. Indeed, her experience of the demands and perils of conscription was closer to the reality of it than it was to many of the men who served. Edlmann notes that some men turned away from the reality as if it belonged to someone else, was a simple waste of time, had

hardly happened, or had been a pleasant and entertaining interlude. Her testimony communicates that some white men of the conscript generation were and are surprised at the degree of acceptance and passivity that characterised many other white men's orientation towards conscription.

However, as has already been observed, admissions of vulnerability from men of this generation were felt and expressed. The testimony of Mason and Ellis provides examples of this. Their acknowledgement of vulnerability on different levels corroborates the observations made by Edlmann. However, Edlmann's commentary on the range of subject positions taken up by white men in response to conscription avoids fixing the character of the man to the choice he made and the actions he performed. However difficult it may seem for an ECC activist and feminist to exercise sympathy for ex-conscripts who claim that their time spent in the SADF was constructive, even uplifting, Edlmann in her testimony, written work and her work as founding director of the Legacies of the Apartheid Wars Project, asserts the importance of resisting all too easy moral judgments. She emphasises what she calls "compassionate conversations." Her commitment to arrive at an understanding of a range of vulnerabilities, along with ways of compassionately responding to these, set the work announced above in motion. She recalls a social gathering at which an "enormous farmer" who was an SADF Border War veteran unconsciously vindicated her impulse to revisit the issues and problems generated by conscription in the 1980s. Upon hearing about her projected area of research he said: "I shot five kaffirs in Angola but I remember every single one of their faces." Edlmann recalls her thoughts as she drove home after this interaction:

I remember thinking how did those of us who thought we were fighting for justice miss the fact that those who were colluding with the State were caught in this unbearable tension between an ideological trap and a sense of human connection with the people they were fighting against and killing?

(Interview with author, 23 November 2012)

Her testimony makes it clear that the brand of masculinity which governed during the 1980s filtered into and was felt within the resistance movement, often in the form of what Edlmann terms an unchallenged and ongoing "patriarchalisation." She recalls experiencing this imbalance in her personal life during that time:

The role of a woman in an issue like militarism is very very complex because you are standing alongside men in facing this overwhelmingly violent oppressive system, that is oppressing not only black citizens but you as a woman as well. At the same time

though you are standing alongside men who are themselves politically unconscious of their own issues. (Interview with author, 23 November 2012)

In another portion of testimony she returns to an ugly memory of her time as ECC activist:

I am personally a survivor of sexual violence in a relationship with somebody I stood alongside at ECC functions. And so as a woman in the ECC there were these multiple levels at which one was having to deal with patriarchy both out there and within the organisation. (Interview with author, 23 November 2012)

Statements such as these make it clear that a particular form of vulnerability was experienced by women who were feminists involved in the anti-conscription movement:

How does one as a woman, as a feminist, take on an issue that is so much about the other as in men, as in the militaristic, the patriarchal, as in violence, and hold onto one's opposition ideologically while not sacrificing one's vulnerability and subjectivity in the process? (Interview with author, 23 November 2012)

Though her work emphasises the importance of "hearing the vulnerabilities of men,"⁸⁰ Edlmann's testimony also, and equally importantly, reveals the fact that the gender relations of the time, including those between male and female activists, were troublingly complex:

recognising that when you strip away the ideological and patriarchal and the system and the wadawadawada masks, as a feminist I had to completely revise everything I'd ever constructed to separate myself out from patriarchy. I had to acknowledge that the silent stoicism that patriarchalised men are taught to use as a coping strategy was something I completely colluded with. We never created spaces where we could really be vulnerable. (Interview with author, 23 November 2012)

Edlmann looks back as researcher on a time in which she was an anti-conscription activist. From her position as researcher she is necessarily apart from a time she was part of. This shift in perspective adds weight to the lament in the closing words to our interview: "we never created spaces where we could really be vulnerable." The implication here is that such spaces for the expression of vulnerability have subsequently been created. However, little in the rest of her testimony convinces the reader that this is the case. Indeed, to claim the presence of such spaces in contemporary South Africa may not be much more than the articulation of a wish, a wish contained in Edlmann's notion of "compassionate conversations." The

⁸⁰ Edlmann recalls as part of her research experience ex-SADF combatants "breaking down, weeping" and her having to turn off the recorder as they narrated their trauma: "men having killed, not being able to speak to their children about this."

expressed need for compassionate conversations is clearly a response to her lament. But how, it can be contended, does one go about creating spaces in which one is at liberty to share one's vulnerability? Might not a vulnerable conscript or resister shy away from or baulk against being directed into a space in which he might voice his woes, choosing instead to do so privately by composing a memoir, novel, short story, poem or song? It has emerged from the previous chapters that men explored less visible, even covert, ways of dealing with their vulnerabilities. And the creative works and oral testimony show that vulnerability is in itself a slippery concept.

As observed earlier, the idea of 'conditions of possibility' or 'enabling limitations' helps explain the ambiguities of vulnerability. The testimony analysed in this chapter reveals concealed and creative strategies whereby conscripts managed the tensions experienced at the interface of private and public selves, the tensions between the narratives of the 'real man' and those of discrete men, the self-narratives versus the narrative template provided by the real men. Through the 1980s the institution of conscription could rattle or unhinge or animate a man. In the face of it the conscript or resister might create a space in which to host his contrariness, a space in which to gestate a poem, novel, memoir, song, or simply to meditate upon a duck on the lake. Such gestures toward liberation are present, and for the reader or interviewer it is a matter of fishing for the pearls of dissent.

In sum, each of the interviewees expressed and enacted a refusal that carried consequences on the level of lived experience and, importantly, on the level of what the resister experienced as self-knowledge. But what Caputo refers to as "non-knowing" gains as much purchase on the oral testimony as the expressed knowledge of circumstance and self. It has been observed that this non-knowing is evident in interviewees slipping away from, undercutting and feeling unsure of their capacity to know or speak their situation, even with those who took up a stance of unwavering commitment to what they knew and felt to be right and true. Caputo links the concept of non-knowing to Foucault's "hermeneutics of refusal" that "confesses that we do not know who we are" (19), and he also speaks of "the irrepressible capacity of human beings for being-different, for being otherwise than we are presently constituted" (19). These statements reflect the testimony discussed in this chapter.

The idea of what is felt to be right and true indicates the link of ethics to personal and narrative identity, and these are interwoven with the issues or problems that have been addressed through textual analyses in this and the preceding chapters. The conclusion to the

thesis presents an assessment of the research findings, a summary account of their interwoven concerns, and suggestions for further research opportunities.

Conclusion

*Last year's words belong to last year's language and next year's words
await another voice.* (T.S. Eliot, "Four Quartets" 189–223)

The aim of this thesis has been to identify and interpret expressions of resistance to conscription and the ideology that underpins them as presented in a wide range of selected texts. The thesis presents a book-length study of the problems of resistance to conscription and masculinity in South Africa by using literary and transcribed interviews as texts for its analytical base. I would like, firstly, to reflect on the methodology and the theoretical framework that guided my research. Secondly, I present general impressions of the research findings. Thirdly, I will return to each chapter in order to reiterate its areas of concern and points of interest, as well as the specific insights that grew from analysis of the primary texts. Finally, I will suggest opportunities to extend the ambit of my research to other and related domains.

Reflections on Theoretical Framework and Methodology

As stated in the Introduction, the schools of theory from which analytic tools were drawn were those that were considered amenable to interpretation of specific texts from a range of genres. In other words, a specific concept or set of concepts aided the reading of a specific primary text, whereas other concepts served analysis of other texts. I would like to offer a brief account of the ways in which analysis of texts was aided by ideas drawn from the following schools of thought: post-structuralism, post-Marxist theory, gender theory, feminist theory, queer theory, theories of autobiography and the hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur.

Post-structuralist notions of the subject, agency and the author informed analysis of the written and oral texts. From application of these concepts there emerged a sense that, as author of his life, the conscript, ex-conscript or resister was neither centered nor easily definable. Analysis of the primary texts validated this awareness. A close reading of the texts confirmed the 'truth' that subjectivity is decentred, but also that it speaks of the role songwriters, authors and interviewees accorded to notions (however debatable) of identifiable subjectivity, or subject positions that carried traits that could be perceived as either innate or

the accretions of habit. This duality of perspective suggests that the agency of the subject was not merely compromised by its being constructed and contained in the first place by external factors such as the socio-historical moment and the contingencies of everyday life. At any given moment all, or many, or a few, or one or two of these constitutive elements might participate in the constitution of the subject, and have things to say about how to read or listen to his or her voice. In the case of young white men in the 1980s who faced a common circumstance or dilemma, what was acted upon took on shapes that the man, despite the fact that he did not own them, called his own. He might, by making such a call, have invoked his birthright to liberty, or he may have called upon an ethic that countered the call-up. Whatever his response, it is valid to suggest that the call was his own business inasmuch as any call can be considered such. For this reason, and as evidenced by the textual analysis, the expressions of uncertainty may be read as containing seeds of certainty, and vice versa.

Post-structuralist theories of autobiography, such as those of Paul John Eakin, Jacques Derrida and Elizabeth Bruss, as well as the theorising mentioned above, played a significant role in interpretation of the full range of selected texts, but especially the memoirs analysed in Chapter 4 and the oral testimony in Chapter 5. By announcing the death of the author (*Image* 146), Roland Barthes raised this question: is originality, on the levels of the text's content (or message) and form (or aesthetic) ever a possibility? Discussion of the primary texts led to the posing of a question that partly challenges Barthes' extermination of a common-sense notion of the author as agent instead of as medium for "the tissue of quotations" that constitute the text (146). Indeed, the primary texts suggested that originality is, arguably, a possibility on the level of the aesthetic or authorial construction of the text, and that on this level the politics of the text can be located, put into question and assessed. The comparative analysis of van der Merwe's *Moffie* (2006) and Koos Prinsloo's short stories (1982) provided a fruitful opportunity to explore this link of aesthetics to political critique.

Analysis of texts through each of the chapters drew upon the specific ideas of hegemony, interpellation and heteronormativity that originated, respectively, with the social theorists Antonio Gramsci, Louis Althusser and Michael Warner. The overarching concern with discourses of masculinity, sexuality and gender relations drew from a number of social and literary theorists, including the following: Gary Baines, Frank Barrett, Judith Butler, Jacklyn Cock, Daniel Conway, Michael Drewett, Theresa Edlmann, Michael Graaf et al, Stuart Hall, David Jackson, Michael Kimmel, Peter Murphy, Bob Pease, Todd Reeser, Lynne

Segal, John Stoltenberg, Varela and Dhavan and Stephen Whitehead; along with theorists already mentioned.

Analysis of novels and short stories written by gay authors made use of the writings of literary critics with a queer agenda – a sensitivity to the often pained irreconcilability of a gay man's identity with the ideology of the 'real' or hegemonic man who, as Leon de Kock noted, "ruled the roost" in 1980s South Africa. These literary critics included Leon de Kock, Andrew van der Vlies, Michiel Heyns, David Medalie and Rita Barnard.

Interpretation of autobiographical writings was guided by Joseph Campbell's study of narrative structure, and ideas of the relation of narrative to personal identity to be found in the work of hermeneutical philosopher Paul Ricoeur. The latter's ideas were thoroughly engaged with before being put to use in analysis of the oral testimony.

The methodology underpinning analysis of the primary texts, which included the transcribed interviews, was that of literary criticism. This mode of reading texts made possible a nuanced awareness of tensions, strains and complexities that occurred on the levels of plot, character and the authorial voice; thereby assuring that textual dynamics were not at risk of being overlooked as a result of being situated within a social context in which the borderlines between identities were as rigidly insistent as they were in 1980s South Africa. The literary critical paradigm for reading the primary texts was fruitful. It revealed that the hegemonic masculinity against which many resisters forged their paths of resistance was not jettisoned wholesale. Gaps or blind spots in the conception of gender relations were shown to be evident to differing degrees in the texts analysed. Insights that grew, sometimes unexpectedly, from application of the above-mentioned theories and methodology are presented in the sections on research findings that follow.

Research Findings: General

Attention throughout the thesis has been given to the grey, liminal or inbetween areas of conscripts' and resisters' experience. The instant that set the inbetweenness in motion was that in which the white man came face-to-face with conscription: the moment that demanded from him a single choice from a limited range of options. The texts revealed that the question of choice was a vexed one in itself. Statements from authors and interviewees articulated ambiguity about the choices made and ambiguity as to their consequences. Testimony shows that being pressed to make an unwelcome choice to face unwelcome consequences threw

some men into the afore-mentioned liminal zone or no man's land. In each chapter attention has been paid to such voices and it has been found that even those that appear to have been neatly positioned on either side of the ideological divide express instants of a twilight consciousness. Linked to this consciousness, the texts have also revealed that it is common for resisters to experience shifts from the clarity of outright refusal to self-doubt, and from indecision to unexpected reorientation. Oral and written testimony provided many examples of men at odds with themselves and their lives, locked in a debilitating circularity of cause and effects. The vulnerabilities experienced by writers and interviewees included fear, shame, despair, disorientation, regret, depression, anxiety, ennui and trauma. In the literary and interview-texts discussed in this thesis the authors and speakers articulated a preference not to have performed their military duty. Those who openly resisted, or performed what Jacklyn Cock terms "retreat responses," said that doing what their conscience demanded of them was frequently felt to be burdensome.

Importantly, and perhaps unexpectedly, comparative analysis revealed that those texts in which authors and characters announced a political leaning that was unambiguously 'progressive' or left-wing, were at times the ones in which the politics of masculinity was situated closer to a hegemonic than counter-hegemonic perceptions. It was argued that texts which expressed vulnerability in an uncertain, complex and self-conscious manner achieved the more politically conscious perception of masculinity and of gender relations within a context that refused to accommodate such perceptions. In other words, analysis of the memoirs, novels and oral testimony revealed that the problematisation of masculine identity did not necessarily bear a direct relation to the professed certainty and boldness whereby the author announced his political position.

Also emerging from analysis of the texts was a sense that at times even the darker elements of the recollections revealed slivers of yearning for the 1980s. These rare but refreshing instances of recall indicated that something important had been learned and that this had played a part in the conscript or resister revising and reshaping his identity. However, the few authors that expressed this thought also expressed their discomfort with it and undercut the claim it made to truth. Indeed, the testimony of the writers and interviewees focused upon made it clear that any renewal or rechanneling of the self was in response to provocation instead of encouragement or a fostering spirit.

The texts revealed that for the unwilling conscript caring and being cared for related directly to finding outlet in creative acts, intimate friendships and love relationships. Also,

some of the interviewees and writers spoke of finding solace subsequent to the 1980s by attaching themselves to something beyond the here-and-now, such as idiosyncratic or esoteric forms of spirituality. Such transports of the imagination and emotions played an important role in keeping at bay the destructive forms of homosociality propounded by military commanders.

Specific Research Findings

In Chapter 1 analysis of the selected primary texts was contextualised on two levels. Firstly, reference to secondary sources provided the socio-historical co-ordinates to frame the analysis that followed in Chapters 2-5. At the same time, theoretical co-ordinates that would enable analysis were identified and explored. The first-mentioned level of contextualisation relied on sociological studies of the institution of conscription, written by scholars from 1988 until 2014. This discussion acted as an inroad to the theoretical core of the argument in this thesis: the gendering of identity, in particular the social construction of masculinities. Common threads drawn from the socio-historical and theoretical domains of study were the institution of conscription in 1980s South Africa, and the ways in which notions of masculine identity spawned by this institution and society at large placed white men in the positions of either buying into or contesting its claims to truth and its practice. Thereafter, specific theoretical co-ordinates, namely post-structuralist notions of the subject and agency, and the question of the author, were explored for the contribution they would make to analysis of the primary texts. The chapter concluded by pointing toward articulations of masculine selfhood or subjectivity that are difficult to position or assimilate into a general account; voices situated in marginal or liminal zones. Thus, having established, in broad terms, a context for analysis of the primary texts, a specific area of interest was identified: one that would be explored in the chapters that followed.

Chapter 2 dealt with a wide range of texts, ranging from songs and record covers to cartoons, posters and a memoir. The expressive forms were situated within the competing popular cultures of the time, and they presented political attitudes and convictions from the hegemonic and counter-hegemonic camps of masculinity. Importantly, what emerged from the comparative analysis of these oppositional expressions of white men's identity was the element of sameness, but also the sense that, despite the undeniable echoes, there were

observable differences. The similarities found expression at times in men's attitudes towards women, whether these men were oriented toward the counter-culture or were hegemonically inscribed. The chapter concluded by noting that the subject position of men who affiliated with the counter-culture of the period deviated from and at other times conformed with the prevailing norms attached to masculine identity. This paradox or contrast was further explored in the chapters that followed.

Chapter 3 narrowed critical attention to a more clearly defined or singular genre of writing: novels by gay male authors. Once again, the aim was to conduct a comparative analysis in order to help the reader identify echoes and differences. What emerged from the close reading of these chosen texts was awareness of the ways in which the political content of the texts related to aesthetic forms whereby the authors communicated their 'messages.' A comparative analysis of André Carl van der Merwe's novel *Moffie* (2009) and Koos Prinsloo's short stories written in the 1980s showed that the political impact of a message could be argued as being the more effective as a result of the sophistication and experimentalism of its aesthetic rendering; that a self-reflexive and strikingly original aesthetic makes possible a deeper-reaching political critique.

Chapter 4 extended exploration of the intimate link of the political to the aesthetic by paying careful attention to a varied range of memoirs. Three of the texts under consideration were written from the point of view of men who had 'served,' and two through the eyes and pens of men who had resisted conscription by going into exile. As with the preceding chapters, analysis revealed similarities and differences. The aesthetic modes that guided each narrative were compared, and this comparison generated insights that echoed as well as refined those arrived at in Chapter 3. Thus, the relation of the aesthetic mode to communication of the political message was confirmed. But the sense of this link was refined by the realisation that the effectiveness of the critique was in its turn closely linked to a more dimensioned expression of vulnerabilities. Awareness of this difference arose from the exercise of aesthetic judgment. However, the chapter concluded by acknowledgement of the common factor. That is, whatever the nature of the link between expressions of vulnerability and depth of critique, the inciting object, or the enemy, was the same: the unwelcome external imperative of being conscripted, and the mono-dimensional attitude and style of maleness that attached to it.

The concern with expressions of identity in the form of narrative voices was picked up and followed through in the final chapter, this time with focus on the transcribed oral

narratives. Analysis revealed a set of insights reflecting those that emerged from analysis of the memoirs, novels and texts from the popular culture of the 1980s. Once again, what emerged were articulations of liminality, a not always reliable sense of identity. Comparison was made between the political certainty expressed in the testimony of an interviewee (Brett Myrdal) and that of a memoirist discussed in Chapter 4 (Donald McRae). It was argued that the testimony of both ‘authors’ indicated men who were sure of themselves, who ostensibly knew themselves. On the other hand, the testimony of a number of the other interviewees indicated men living uncomfortably within the boundaries that separated one ‘type’ from another. Interviewees who revealed shades of awkwardness felt during the 1980s and through to the moment from which they wrote or spoke their experiences, clearly leaned toward a complex, inclusive and problematic sense of masculine identity, while the first-mentioned ‘type’ revealed a less complex sense of the politics of identity. However, comparative assessment did not indicate an absence of vulnerability in interviewees whose testimony appeared the more transparent in terms of the certainty mentioned above. Indeed, a close reading of the afore-mentioned texts uncovered internal contradictions and therefore prohibited a simplistic interpretation. Analysis generated an awareness of different degrees to which authors inhabited the available masculinities. The modes and style of inhabitation were shown to be multiple.

Each interviewees exercise of agency and his or her representation thereof was his or her own, with internal dynamics both alike and unlike those of others. In an overall sense, and in echo with the findings of previous chapters, analysis of the testimony showed that, however complex or knotted interviewees’ experiences may have been, they were precipitated by an imposed circumstance, and that the damaging repercussions of it (or what Edlmann usefully terms its psychosocial legacy) were highly regrettable and, in the final analysis, unnecessary.

Research Opportunities

Attention has been given in this thesis to voices that articulate or intimate towards alternatives. These ask to be heeded by the researcher. It is important to widen the field of research such that it includes voices that have too often been overlooked, often for the fact that they have not been presented opportunities to articulate and thereby gain hold of their

experiences. I would like to suggest research opportunities that arise from the findings of this thesis.

Important research into the experiences and perceptions of Border War veterans has been undertaken by Gary Baines, Michelle Pickover in her Missing Voices Project (referred to in Chapter 4), as well as by Theresa Edlmann in her PhD thesis and journal articles. Pickover's project centres on the collection of interview data in order to set up an archive of historically-based testimony, and Edlmann's work concerns interpretation of such data and its links to the history of which it speaks. The work of these researchers and others who presented papers at the Legacies of the Apartheid Wars conference at Rhodes University in 2013 has established the ground for further data gathering and interpretation by postgraduate students. By way of illustrating this opportunity, in the year Edlmann completed her PhD thesis she took on the task of supervising the research of an MA student whose aim is to address the question as to how the shift from apartheid to post-apartheid South Africa affects SADF veterans' perceptions of themselves and their social roles.

Focus on other genres of writing and performance, such as theatre, dance, art exhibitions, photograph exhibitions and blogs is likely to provide valuable insights into the problems of identity formation that have been explored in this thesis. Some of these genres have played a support role in my overall analysis.

My research findings point to other missing voices, in particular voices that provide the opportunity for the application of gender-based theory. For example, a researcher could do well to focus on black women's experiences as Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) soldiers, along with their experiences in the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) in post-apartheid South Africa. This would entail paying close attention to gender relations within MK, a concern which formed part of Jacklyn Cock's *Colonels and Cadres: War and Gender in 1980s South Africa* (1991). Gender-based analysis would also do well to explore the identities of gay black men in apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa. In 1980s South Africa there was a disturbing concealment and victimisation of gay black men. This prejudice, though far from overcome, has, undeniably and within post-apartheid black society, indicated a higher level of tolerance and acceptance, even an unprecedented liberty in terms of gay self-expression and social visibility. These historical shifts warrant systematic study.

Research opportunities suggested above are arguably specific to the disciplines of the social sciences – history, psychology, politics and sociology. However, in my view, and as

my argument has hopefully shown, there exist opportunities for collaborative and interactive research between social scientists and literary critics. Regardless of scholarly point of view, a good deal of research within the humanities involves the interpretation of narratives.

In conclusion to this thesis, the primary texts resisted, to varying degrees, the researcher's initial expectations as often as they confirmed them. Indeed the reading of texts has proven the limits of binary thinking, such as one man's idiot is another man's hero, and has favoured the wisdom of the dialectic. Although textual analysis has shown that the testimony, individually and as a whole, did not present a radical critique of the politics of gender in 1980s South Africa, the questions posed and the challenges levelled generated discomfort, and the discomfort pointed toward alternative ways of being, even within a society premised upon artificial divisions, the damage of which has lingered and which remains a challenge to be taken on and an obstacle to be overcome.

Appendix: Interviews

Interview A.

David Bruce (born 15th June 1963)

Interview conducted 14 September 2011. Revised and expanded upon by Bruce in the form of emails sent 2nd and 7th May 2012.

One distinct memory of mine is a night when I was in Standard 9 (Grade 11). It was in 1980. I was maybe still only 16. I was at a friend's house. We were drinking, talking to his older brother Anthony, and the subject of the army came up. I remember clearly afterwards when I was going to bed thinking that I would never go.

My parents were what you might call 'politically concerned.' My mother was a German Jew who arrived in South Africa in 1939 as a refugee from Nazi Germany with her mother. Her father had left Germany the previous year to find somewhere for the family to escape to. My father first came to South Africa from England in 1948. He was a believer in 'international government' and came to South Africa as he saw racism in South Africa as a key obstacle to its achievement. He was a member of something called the International Club where he became friends with Nelson Mandela. My father was not Jewish but my mother was an observant Jew and I had a Jewish upbringing of sorts which, of course, included gradually becoming aware of the Holocaust. I think I would be correct in saying that my mother did not speak openly and freely about the Holocaust and that this was something that to some degree I became aware of through other people. Nevertheless, one way in which the consciousness of the Holocaust was expressed in my family was that there was a strong sense of being opposed to racism. I think in a lot of Jewish families no comparison was made between apartheid racism in South Africa and the racism that Jews experienced in Nazi Germany. But in my family the two were equated. In other words, I grew up to understand that the racism of the apartheid system was the same racism that resulted in the extermination of millions of Jews.

Another thing here was that, though I went to cheder on Tuesday afternoons and Saturday mornings I generally attended schools and was in classes where there were very few Jews. The school was 'streamed' according to whether you did Latin or French. I was the only Jewish boy in all the French classes. I also did not have a surname that identified me as Jewish, and so was not known as a Jew by many of my classmates. Related to this, at school and elsewhere, I would be exposed occasionally to people making casual anti-Semitic remarks. They wouldn't be directed at me, but they would really upset me. Related to these things, for me apartheid was just wrong. It upset and offended me deeply. When I heard black people being called kaffirs or when I used to see the police trucks loading people who didn't have their pass books it used to really kill me.

One of the main networks at school, I think it may have been in Grade 10 (1979), was Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*. I am not quite sure what it says about me, but I became very invested in this story and identified strongly with John Proctor who is the central character. In the play he is an archetype of someone who feels compelled to follow his conscience, to stand up for what is right, even at great personal cost. So, as a school boy, and perhaps particularly so during the latter years, I became invested in the need to act morally, to the point of being self-righteous and judgmental of others. But it also seems that I understood this type of role as a role that I would have to play. There were other examples, but the most visible way in which I acted this out whilst at school was at veld school in the Groot Marico, also in Grade 10. As I remember, there were a variety of activities, all of them in some way orientated towards promoting patriotism and military preparedness. I was a bit uncooperative – for instance, being tardy in my arrival at the morning flag-raising (I noticed that this also ran the risk of incurring hostility from other boys). However, I was drawn into a more overt oppositional role by the lecture on "Insurgency" which was the main indoctrination lecture, starting, as I recall, after lunch the day after

we got there. I continually raised my hand to query and contest the assertions that were being made. One of the consequences of this was that the lecture was prolonged considerably so that it ended up going late into the afternoon. Partly for this reason – because I think he came from a fairly pro-apartheid family – one of the other boys started shouting at me. There was a boy called JJ who raised his voice in my defence. I had developed a vague friendship with JJ in the art class, which included him cutting up one of my pictures. One consequence of this was that JJ now actively promoted me as someone who should become part of a group of boys that he was friends with. Up to that point I had been incredibly isolated socially, having had no one, apart from my brother, who I spent time with outside of school. I already had a strong interest in music, including having at least one Clash album. We became rebels of a kind together, giving ourselves short crude haircuts, identifying with punk and smoking dope.

Nevertheless it would be a mistake to regard me as ‘anti-authority’. I think I have always been inclined to obey authority and would not characterise myself as a rebel at heart, so that defying authority is something that caused a lot of internal conflict. When I refused to do military service one way in which I reassured myself was that, at the same time that I was defying the law, I was also, in an overt way, subjecting myself to the state’s authority.

My memory of what my motivations were when I went to university after finishing school are not very clear. I think that part of it was that a friend James in particular had older sisters at university and partly under his and their influence, without having given any real thought to it, I decided that I would do a legal BA. I think there was some sense that it wasn’t really a matter of choice. If I didn’t go to university I would have to go to the army. During 1981, which was my final year at high school, student opposition to apartheid had also been prominent in the media – there were people like Sammy Adelman and the Cachalia brothers who were all, I think, banned and so on. So I had a sense of an affinity with the oppositional politics that seemed to characterise the university world.

I went to Wits in 1982, and immediately became absorbed in left politics. Initially I was part of a structure called “Projects Committee” which was a sub-committee of the Student’s Representative Council (SRC) through which funds could be channeled into political activism. After about a year in Projects Committee I started working on the student newspaper *Wits Student*. I think that for much of this time I did not really dwell on the issue of conscription, being engaged mostly with the politics of the left and the repression that it faced. But the emergence of the End Conscription Campaign (ECC), which was established in 1984, made the issue more present for me and one of the pieces I wrote for *Wits Student* engaged with anxieties about having to serve in the military. Though there were these musings about the issue, as a result of being at university I did not have to confront the issue, though I think that it was something that intruded and which I agonised about every now and then.

I was never a very successful student and at the end of 1986 I failed one or two courses that I needed to complete my BA. I was informed I couldn’t re-register and I had a call-up for the beginning of February 1987. I applied for readmission, as well as for deferment of my National Service. About two weeks before I was due to report for my call-up I was readmitted to Wits and also got deferment of my call-up. However, I had gone through a period of intense anxiety. It was the closest I had come to having to confront the issue of what to do about the army. At the time my decision was that if I wasn’t granted deferment I would have gone to Zimbabwe a few days before I was due to report.

So I was back at university, but my life had changed quite substantially. In August ’86 I’d had a fall-out with my colleagues at *Wits Student* and withdrew from the newspaper and the student left. So, at the end of 1986 and the beginning of 1987, especially after my conscription worries had passed, I was quite carefree. I had a part-time job at Hillbrow Records and I was working there quite a lot, so money wasn’t a problem. I was registered for a few law courses, but not attending many of the lectures. In 1984 I’d discovered swimming and after that I’d swim a kilometre every day at the Yeoville public pool. Since mid-1984 I’d also been staying in a commune on

Louis Botha Avenue in Berea (though it was a Louis Botha Avenue address it was known as 'Johnson Street'). I was smoking a lot of zol, walking around barefoot, listening to a lot of music. I was part of the Yeoville crowd, going to Jameson's and other clubs in town on Friday and Saturday nights, listening to the Cherry Faced Lurchers and all. In February 1987 my friends went down to the Transkei. There wasn't space for me in the car and I hitch-hiked down to join them. There was a little caravan there but I just slept in my sleeping bag on the ground outside. In the mornings I would wake looking down onto the beach and the sea in the small bay. We also then went up to the Natal South Coast and again I hitched after them. I'd hitched around in Johannesburg before, and once hitched with a friend to Zimbabwe, but never done something like this on my own before.

At the end of March each year the public swimming pools close down for the winter. There was this thing that had happened to me in 1984. I only came to understand that it was a type of bipolar episode many years later in 1999 or so. Since then my sense of it has been something like this. I was a pretty fucked-up, internally chaotic and confused person, very shy, introverted and lacking in virtually any interpersonal awareness. But I was also naturally quite fit and quite strong, especially after I started swimming. At the end of the swimming season I was no longer using up my physical energy. I don't know if this makes sense physiologically, but I have a feeling that this 'excess' physical energy translated itself into mental energy or tension. My sense of this now is that I had a lot of internal emotional or energy blockages and that the heightened state of physical fitness and 'free' energy was working on these and releasing them.

I was suddenly highly articulate and full of ideas, a 'walking genius.' There was a sense that I understood things now, that I could see how things were related to each other and could articulate these relationships. There was a kind of magical luminosity to things as if the world and I were more alive. Having been immersed in the intellectual world of university Sociology courses and left wing politics I inevitably expressed this in a new-found fluency with regard to politics. My thing was race. I started articulating the idea that the left was in a type of denial about the significance of race.

So then, in 1987 there I was back in Yeoville. I'd had this close shave with the call-up and also this personally liberating journey to the Transkei. I was still at university and working at Hillbrow Records and living in the commune and swimming up a storm and so on. But in some sense I was at a loose end. For instance, despite the fact that I was at university I didn't have any sense of purpose about being there.

Then the swimming season ended and once again and I had this experience of increased mental energy and lucidity and a high level of vitality. There is an unbalanced side to it, but it also feels accurate to describe it as, in some senses, a heightened state of mind.

One of the things that also happened then was that two of my closest friends, who had left South Africa because of the army, came back for a visit in early April. Again this was something that made me confront the call-up issue. Would I also leave South Africa to avoid the army? Having a British-born father, I had a British passport, so in some ways this could have been quite easy.

There was also this incident that took place. Martin, who was one of the friends who had come back, had established a tradition of hosting these big parties at Johnson Street. Someone would cook a big pot of soup and you would set up a sound-system in a couple of the rooms. The music was all pre-recorded onto cassette tapes. So to mark their visit we organised one of these parties. I recorded all the music, so in a sense I organised this one. I remember one of the tapes started with the Rolling Stones – "Well what can a poor boy do 'cause in sleepy London Town there's just no place for a Street Fighting Man." It was at a time when the country was in flames. From the afternoon there was police activity in the area around the house – it was a period of intensified repression and the house was known as one of the left wing communes in the Berea area. There were police, at one point in the afternoon, in the park opposite the house. At some point that night, after the party had been going for a while, they marched in. There were lots of people there. Though I was generally prone to reacting to the police in a very anxious way, this time I was very cool. I was doing something, perhaps adjusting the music,

in the pantry alongside the kitchen. I took a hit of this joint that I was holding and then dropped it, stubbed it out with my shoe, and went outside. I was standing outside the kitchen window. There was an altercation in the kitchen, maybe they were starting to arrest people. I shouted through the window: “you fucking fascist!” It was directed at this cop who was involved in this confrontation with a woman called Odette. There was this police reservist with them and he came marching out the house saying “whose the Jewboy here?” (later I heard that he too was Jewish). There were some Jewish friends of mine who then got involved and I got dragged or marched outside with them and put up against this police car. What happened then was that this one young cop stepped up to me and kicked me full-on in the balls. It was a mean kick but it missed my testicles by millimeters so I didn’t double over. I probably had a bit of bruise but I wasn’t hurt badly at all. Murray and maybe Mike also got in a bit of a wrestling match with them, then Murray and I were put in the front seat of one of the vans. With about two dozen other party-goers we were all taken off to Hillbrow police station. As I’ve said, my mental state was one of fluidity and confidence and again at the police station I wasn’t submissive. They went through some elaborate charade of dividing people up into two groups to separate out those who were to be charged. But a lot of people, me prominent amongst them, were giving them a hard time. I insisted that I wanted to lay charges against them for assault and I think this contributed to their feeling that this might be more trouble than it was worth. Eventually we were all released.

I can compare this to another incident – probably in early 1982. JJ, another friend and me had somehow got involved in a placard demonstration against detention without trial. If people did this in groups it amounted to an “illegal gathering.” So, the way it worked was that one of you would hold the placard and one or two others keep watch nearby in support. JJ was holding the placard on the Apollo Café corner in Yeoville until the cops took hold of him and shoved him in the back of their van. I just went into a flat panic, running up the road to try and find a telephone to call someone from. There were also occasional demonstrations at Wits that I used to attend after I became a student there. But I’d dreaded them and was always fucking terrified.

So the night of the party really shifted things for me. I had this direct confrontation with the cops whom I formerly feared so much. But this time I didn’t feel cowed by it and emerged feeling somehow victorious. There was a kind of centredness (if a person who is manic can ever be centred). Perhaps it’s not appropriate to reduce it all to being bipolar. I suppose I gained a sense from this incident that I could confront them and not be cowed by them.

There were other things. I was a link in one of these chains of desperate unrequited love. I think there was this girl who quite liked me. But then I was in love with this other girl who was in love with this other guy who gave her nothing but misery. In the logic of things then I had nothing to lose. I had a sense that I was going nowhere and there seemed no point in endlessly extending my university career. At the very least, there were no commitments that held me back.

There was also, as I have said, an intensification of repression. There had been the 1985 State of Emergency and then another one was declared in June 1986. One of the things that happened in April 1987 was a security police raid on COSATU⁸¹ House. There was this very striking picture on the front page of the *Mail and Guardian* of these silhouettes of people inside the building with their hands up against the windows. I remember this made a strong impression on me. I thought that the next thing would be that they would take us out of our houses and shoot us, that if one was to act one had to do it before it was too late.

During April and May that year I became clear that I was not going to apply for deferment of my military service. Initially I was hesitant about this, but then became certain I would not. By the time the call-up arrived sometime in May I had already decided that I would not apply for deferment. It’s a bit fuzzy now. I think the thing in those days was that as soon as you were admitted to university for the year you could notify the SADF and then you would not get an August call-up. Anyway, I’m not clear about the exact sequence, but I think in

⁸¹ Congress of South African Trade Unions.

April I dwelt on this at some length. Definitely by May I had decided that this is what I would do – I would not apply for deferment and then would refuse to do military service.

As a result of the establishment of the ECC there had been increased activism around the call-up. Most people who didn't want to do their National Service were resisting it in other ways, so there were not many objectors who were openly refusing to do it. This was especially the case after they changed the law in 1983. If you said you were a religious pacifist you could now do alternative service, but if you just refused you would be faced with a mandatory jail sentence. Though I wasn't involved in ECC I kept an eye on what was happening with all this. The case that provided the key lesson on what needed to be done was that involving Philip Wilkinson in 1986. He had done the initial two years of military service but was now being called up for a camp. He publicly announced his refusal and then didn't report for the camp. But it seemed at that point that the authorities didn't want a confrontation on the issue. All they did was charge him for "failing to report," an offence which carried a fine rather than a mandatory prison sentence. So the simple lesson was this: if you wanted openly to refuse, you had to report and refuse. Otherwise the authorities might side-step the issue, thereby undercutting the stand and statement you were trying to make.

I experienced a kind of clarity. I felt that I knew exactly what to do, that I would be sentenced to six years in prison and that it could have a big impact on things. I understood that you had to go and report for your call-up and refuse there and then. When it got close to the time I was due to report I arranged to see Kathy Satchwell to ask her to be my lawyer. She thought that I wouldn't necessarily get a six year sentence. I insisted that this was what would happen.

One thing I also clarified for myself was that it would be very difficult to do the whole thing if I told people about it in advance. I anticipated that (as frequently happened after I had refused) people would have tried to discourage me from doing so. I remember that James Philips (or "Bernoldus Niemand") was one exception to this rule. I bumped into him on the street one day at Clarendon Circle in Hillbrow. He said that he'd heard that I was refusing to do military service and that I should do so if I knew it was the right thing for me to do. Another thing was that I didn't want to be in a situation in which I'd committed myself to refusing and then ended up feeling I had to do so because I'd told them I would rather than because of my own resolve to do so. I brought JJ - who I'd become friends with again and who was staying in Johnson Street - into my confidence, and also told my parents. Also, just before I did it I told the other people in the house as I thought it was my responsibility to do so in case there were repercussions.

It seemed clear to me also that the argument I was making that provided the basis for my stand had a clarity and simplicity to it. My mother's family – my family – had suffered in Germany as a result of racism. It therefore made no sense for me to fight in defence of a racist political system. At the end of the day the war that the SADF was fighting was a war that was made necessary by the racist policies of the South African government. It was not that I did not have internal doubts about what I was doing. But I could also see that the argument that I was making was in some senses incontestable as a moral defence for my actions.

It also seemed to me that the general trend was one of increasing polarisation in the country. The government did whatever it could to demonise its political opponents, feeding into the potential for abuse and atrocities by the security forces. Though I believed the armed struggle was justified, bomb blasts and other violent actions were consistently used by the government to further demonise the democratic movement. I had little sense that the armed struggle was taking us further towards liberation.

I remember in the run-up to my trial talking to Martin on the phone from New York. Perhaps he asked "Why? What's it going to achieve?" I couldn't say to him "It's going to work like this and this and this." So I said "It's a gamble." But all the time I had this sense of knowing how it would work. The ANC at the time had this thing called armed propaganda, spectacular things like blowing up Sasol II and so on. In my mind what I was doing was unarmed propaganda. A day or two after I was sentenced one of the guys in Diepkloof, a very good guy

called Andrew Meredew who was doing time for robbing banks and had been tortured by the Brixton police, secretly passed me these pages torn out from the papers. The story of my sentencing was all over them. Even *The Citizen*, which was known as a government paper, had me on the front page. From that point on I carried the knowledge that my plan had worked. I knew that the six year sentence would blow up in their faces. But, unlike the ANC's bombs, it wasn't something that the government could use so easily to promote white fear and their control over the minds of the white population.

This is not to say that I predicted every aspect of the situation clearly. I imagined that, when I reported to refuse to do military service, I would be taken and tortured to reveal the names of the conspirators who had put me up to this. During my years in the Wits left I had formed the impression that the security police were very effective in infiltrating clandestine groups, which to me implied that there was no point in getting involved in anything clandestine. In Projects Committee in 1982 I had been on fairly good terms with Robert Whitecross who was later revealed to be a member of the security police, and was responsible for Carl Niehaus and Jansie Lourens being imprisoned for their ANC activities. I didn't feel I would withstand torture. I imagined that under torture I would betray all my comrades and therefore that it was better that I never had any secrets that I would have to give away. But I imagined that, due to the fact that my father had known Nelson Mandela, the security police would assume that I was acting under direction of the ANC, and try to extract the details from me. So, part of my reason for approaching a lawyer (Kathy Satchwell) prior to refusing to serve was that I hoped she would help to get me out of the detention I anticipated would follow from my refusal.

They were killing people then, and I thought they might kill me. I believed that the kind of threat that I posed was not one they could deal with other than by killing me. One of the reasons why I thought it would be better to remain silent before refusing was that if they got wind of the whole thing they might do something to me to stop me from doing it. However, I also thought there were things that would protect me against this. One of these was the special relationship the South African government had with Israel. Because what I was doing emphasised my Jewishness and foregrounded the experience of the holocaust, I thought they might hesitate to kill me for fear that that this would cause fallout in their relationship with the Israelis. Perhaps all this shows how little perspective I had at the time. But that's what I thought back then.

On the 5th of August I walked to Sturrock Park. I told the first person in uniform that I came upon that I was refusing to do military service, but he just directed me down the ramp. There was an entrance point where there was someone more senior. I told him that I was refusing. I was handed over to a guy called Staff Sergeant Flattery. He had a little van parked there, indicated that I should get into the passenger seat and got in to chat to me. No doubt it was not unusual for them to have cases of guys who had objections or anxieties about their call-ups, and this was their routine way of dealing with them. He asked if I had medical ailments of any kind. The implication was that anything of this kind could easily be used to secure me an 'easy' posting, such as a job in the kitchen. I was firm though. I told him I had no interest in such options and that I was refusing to do military service of any kind. As I remember, he then went to speak to a senior officer. I even have some vague sense that they might have radioed someone in a more senior position. Wherever it came from, it seems that the instruction was to let me go. So, probably not more than 20 minutes after arriving, I was walking out of there. It was finally only a year after that, on the 25th of July 1988, that I was finally sentenced to imprisonment and started my time in jail. In the period that intervened I did spend a night in Brixton police cells after being formally arrested on the 23rd of February 1988.

I often refer to that year, from August 1987 to July 1988, as the worst year of my life. I've been down in the dumps, semi-suicidal etc. at various times in my life, but this was the most unrelenting and deep depression that I've had. The stuff I've read about bipolar disorder is that the cycles tend to be at most a few weeks in length, so it seems that my bipolar experiences are fairly atypical. As in 1984, it was a number of months before I well and truly hit rock bottom (though prior to that I'd been through a crazy period where I got into fights with all kinds of people, and so on). By the end of July 1987, just before I was due to report, I had a sense of starting to feel quite low. In the months that followed things got quite desperate. After getting into a confrontation with the

owner of the record shop I lost my job there. I suddenly was without money. Though dagga isn't addictive in the same way that other drugs are, there is a mild addiction. Whether through addiction or not, I continually turned to dagga, and beer, to escape from my depression, which, of course, only aggravated it. Whenever I hear Bob Dylan's "Just like Tom Thumb's Blues" it reminds me of that period: "I cannot move/ My fingers are all in a knot/ I don't have the strength to get up and take another shot." There's another line of my own (perhaps plagiarised from somewhere) which also evokes it for me – "I can't even get onto my knees to pray." I was totally fucked through the later period of '87 and into '88, a walking zombie. Somehow I got little jobs, in the Management and Geography libraries at the university and at *Look & Listen* on the other side of Pretoria Street in Hillbrow.

One thing that also started weighing me down, more and more so towards the end of 1987, was this: what if they just let me go? What if they didn't contact me, just left me alone? Wouldn't I be seen as someone who was desperate to martyr myself, if I still forced the issue by publicising the fact that I'd refused to do military service? I couldn't work out how to deal with this. Could I just walk away and leave the whole thing behind me?

The problem was resolved for me early in 1988. In January the SADF contacted my folks and said they needed a statement from me – why I wasn't willing to serve. For whatever reasons I decided not to respond to this. I think my folks then got another call and I was asked to call them. I was asked to come into the Military Police headquarters at Langlaagte. Again I was offered an easy posting to a kitchen or other non-combat role. They said to me they would let me think about it, but if I was still committed to refusing they would have to arrest me. There were two young guys there who were doing their call-ups in the MPs. One of them – I think his name was Robert – said his mom ran the bistro at No. 58 Pretoria Street, just a block down from Hillbrow Records. Late in the afternoon I was taken to the Brixton Police cells and held there overnight. The next morning I was in the Magistrate's Court and was released on my own recognisance. I don't know if it was a coincidence or whether my arrest was planned as part of a broader crackdown, but the news that day was that the UDF and 16 other anti-apartheid organizations had been banned.

My case was postponed till April, then till May. Finally the trial date was set as 19th July 1988. I pleaded not guilty. Flattery was called to give evidence that I'd reported for military service and that I had refused. I was then called by Edwin Cameron to give evidence in my defence. Under cross-examination by the prosecutor I admitted to everything that Flattery said I had done. "Why, if you admit all of this, do you still plead not guilty?" asked the prosecutor. This was a perfect line of questioning as far as I was concerned because it enabled me to make the rhetorical point that I wanted to make: "Because I don't believe it's an offence," I said. As anticipated, the magistrate made short shrift of this in passing judgment. Refusing to do military service was clearly an offence under the Defence Act, he said. I was found guilty.

Evidence was presented in mitigation, the witnesses being my mother and Dr Ntatho Mothlane. This had no effect. The wording of the Defence Act implied that the court had no discretion. It was a mandatory sentence of one and a half times my military service commitments. This conclusion was confirmed by the Supreme Court in 1989 (though they did chop 15 days off the sentence which they said had been miscalculated). But it was eventually overturned at the end of March 1990 by the Appellate Division, after having been persuaded by the advocate for Ivan Toms and myself that the words "shall be liable to" did not in fact mean that a sentence of 1.5 times one's outstanding military service obligations was mandatory. The Appellate Division concluded that the original court (and the Supreme Court) had erred by concluding that there was no discretion on sentence.

I was then moved out of my cell in Pretoria Central to another section with a small group of unsentenced prisoners (one of the prisoners there was an acquaintance from my early days in D Section who had been released and was back in jail for another offence). So I spent my last weekend in jail as an unsentenced prisoner who had been convicted and served 20 months in jail, but who still had to be sentenced. On Monday 2nd of April

1990 (20 months and five days after being imprisoned) I was driven back to Johannesburg once again in the custody of military police. In court my case was remanded again and I was released pending re-sentencing.

Again my case was postponed and I think I was finally resentenced towards the end of June 1990. I was sentenced to the time that I had done (20 months). Everything had changed. The Berlin wall was down, the war in Namibia was over, and the ANC had been unbanned. National Service and, as a result, the sentences of conscientious objectors, had been cut in half. The policy in terms of which conscientious objectors were not eligible for parole or remission had been reversed. Kathy Satchwell asked the social worker from Pretoria Central to come and give evidence on my behalf and she told the court that it was likely that I would have been released any day anyway at the time I was released.

Until then it had been understood as a mandatory six year sentence. The system was that ordinary criminals could get out without serving their full sentences if they behaved well and thus qualified for remission and parole. But prisoners classified as security prisoners had to serve mandatory sentences. In the case of conscientious objectors, we had it both ways: we were ordinary criminals rather than security prisoners and thus kept with the general (white) prison population, rather than with the politicals in the security section. But, for purposes of remission and parole, we were treated the same as security prisoners.

My general view has been that prison wasn't that bad. Part of my frame of reference was that of the concentration camps. From that perspective it is hard to see the kind of jail that I was in as anything too terrible. I also compared my position to that of young black guys who would be shot dead for throwing a stone at the cops (or less). So I had a way of looking at it in terms of which what I was going through was nothing too terrible.

But from another perspective it was pretty horrible. There was a traumatic side to the whole experience. The thing with me is that I wasn't a well-adjusted, centred person, but was quite fucked up anyway. So it's difficult for me to disentangle the messed-up person I was from what objecting and jail did to me. I don't have a sense of regret about doing it, but I sometimes say that it would have been better if someone else, someone more appropriate, had done it. A more centred person might have dealt with the whole thing in a better way. Apart from my first couple of weeks when I was at Jo'burg prison and the short time when I was on hunger strike, I was never on my own. I was always with other people. But I've never had ease with other people. In prison I struggled with the blatant racism of most of the people around me. There was a sense that the mental world I occupied, in which I'd taken a course of action based on principle, was a million miles beyond the comprehension of virtually all of them. Other than at Christmas time one moves around the prison a fair amount during the week, going to the work sections, and so on. So one is not completely confined. But the environment is very harsh, particularly some of the more recently built sections. D section was very harsh – these crude, barbaric buildings. Once I was promoted to the fourth category of prisoner after one year I was sent to another section – B Section – which had nicer cells (some of the older sections were these much nicer red-brick buildings). On some levels it was easily endurable. The worst that I went through was self –inflicted. I went on smoking zoll in there, but the dagga was very harsh. I would have these very bad tremors when I smoked it. I had been training a lot with the other prisoners in the evenings in D Section. I felt fucking awful and it took me a little while to realise that the training I was doing wasn't appropriate on the food we were getting. Towards the end of my stay in prison I started doing yoga and stopped smoking. At the end of my time there I was beginning to experience a kind of balance.

Then I was released from jail and struggled to recover any centredness. I went through all kinds of stuff, suicidal episodes and other instabilities. The big turning point for me was through encountering meditation and Buddhism, especially following a nine-day retreat I did at Ixopo in 1999. Around that time I also saw a therapist who insisted I go for a psychiatric assessment. The psychiatrist got me to read Kay Redfield Jameson's *An Unquiet Mind*. It seems that my bipolar condition was no longer active, so I've never been medicated for it.

But understanding the episodes I'd had as 'bipolar' helped me understand a lot about some of the things I'd been through.

One of the things that I've had to come to terms with was that it was a type of mental instability that enabled me to do what I did. In a sense the bipolar episodes (or the manic parts thereof) enabled me to do something I was committed to doing, but not really capable of doing. The heightened state facilitated my capacity to make the decision and live it out. I always knew I was going to do it. It enabled me to do what I knew I was going to do, what I was committed to doing.

Another part of this whole thing was the role that rock music played in my life. It's probably true that many people who take an interest in music themselves have aspirations to become stars, and that was certainly true in my case. So, in a way, you could read the whole thing as my way of turning myself into a star. I knew that the six year sentence would make a celebrity of me, and the truth was that I wanted that. I'd been a keen follower of the rock music scene. I had an ongoing fascination with Bob Dylan. From reading about Bob Dylan and people like Prince I picked up on this idea that you have to control the way in which your own image is presented. So I knew that there was a publicity machine in the form of the ECC which would promote my case, but I tried to control how I was presented. I would insist on things like being photographed in this way and having a degree of control over what the pamphlets said about me. I wanted to be in control of the images made of me; to reassure myself that I was the person doing what I did, that I wasn't somebody's useful idiot.

Another part of it all was my position on race. I was strongly aware that my emotional investment, the origins of my investment, was around racism. Within the student left (and I think the left more generally), the orthodoxy was that the struggle was about class more than race. This kind of thinking couldn't really accommodate the idea that it was really about both. As I mentioned earlier, in 1984 when I was bipolar I had articulated some thoughts along these lines in interventions from the floor at NUSAS conferences. In the student left it was as if racism was not an issue. No meetings or publications or anything focused on racism. The concept of non-racialism acted to silence the issue of race. So taking a stand around racism was a way for me to assert the importance of race and racism as issues (though I don't think anyone in the left really listened to me as someone who was making an intellectual contribution). Making myself into a 'star' also enabled me to turn the tables on the left in another way – because I had never been put forward as a leader by them, never having been nominated as someone who should stand for the SRC. As I have said, I lacked confidence and any feeling for the interpersonal – so it made sense that I wouldn't have been seen as leadership material.

If it seems like I am trying to diminish what I did, you would be misunderstanding me. I do believe that what I did was an act of courage, that it was truly heroic. There was this part in the film *Man on a Wire* about the guy who walked between the tops of the two World Trade Centres in 1974 just after they'd been built. After they'd got him to come off the wire and arrested him they sent him to a psychologist to determine if he was mad. He said something to the psychologist like – "Can't you see how beautiful it was?" That's how I feel about what I did. But what has always interested me about it, at the same time, is the sense I have that it worked for me on so many different levels.

There were other influences from the world of music. I identified with punk, but also with the counter-culture of the 1960s and the resistance to the war in Vietnam that was part of it. Within the white student left for some reason, there was a massive internal faction fight every two years. In 1982 when I came to Wits there was one going on. There was another in 1984 in which I got my hands dirty. I ended up being used by one faction to stick a knife into the back of the other faction (this also served my own petty personal agenda). And, sure enough, they were at each other's throats again in 1986. It disturbed me then, with the shit hitting the fan in a big way, that the student left were at each other's throats when the issues on the streets seemed to be so much more pressing. There was an article I wrote for *Wits Student* on Bob Marley. It relied heavily on a couple of books I had which portrayed Marley as someone who stood against the internecine conflict that characterised the rivalry between political parties in Jamaica, and which mobilized the youth against each other. So I saw

what I was doing as appealing to people across the lines of confrontation – something I was doing for the guys in the SADF and for the young guys in the townships whom they and the police were shooting at. It was an act rooted in the conflict, but it also stood above it.

Interview B.

Michael Graaf (born 2nd March 1962)

Interview conducted 29th November 2010 in response to the following prompts:

How would you define your attitude toward serving in the SADF in the years preceding as well as immediately prior to going in?

Please offer an account of your experiences and your attitude (perhaps shifts in attitude) during your period of National Service.

If, upon completion of your National Service, you were asked to present a retrospect of those two years in which you focused on gains (in a broad sense) and setbacks or regrets, what would you say?

Describe the ways in which the SADF continued to be a presence in your life after you had completed your National Service.

Do you consider your experience in and of the SADF as having had a lingering effect on your life? If your answer is yes, please talk about the nature of this effect.

Offer your judgment of the effects exerted on South African society by conscription into the SADF in the 1980s.

MG: My attitude prior to going in was uncritical. I'd more or less swallowed the myth of protecting our people against terrorism, and I subscribed to the rite of passage mythology. My older brother came out just before I went in. There had been no cadets at my school, and I had wished the school had a shooting range. There were no questions for me other than whether I should study first or not. I reported for duty in Middelburg at 4 SA Infantry Battalion. We were asked at the start: "who wants to volunteer for Junior Leaders School at Oudtshoorn?" I volunteered and underwent a three to four weeks screening process, followed by nine months in Oudtshoorn. I was assigned to a border unit, and during those nine months I spent two months in the border zone, a place called Oshivelo, in tribal territory between white farms, south of Ovamboland. Only a third of us were given rank; the rest were called RTUs (returned to unit). After two or three screenings you could be made a corporal or 2nd lieutenant. Guys with degrees could become full lieutenants. I was made a 2nd lieutenant. They streamed me into the transport course (I suppose I lacked the killer instinct!) After eight months there was the chance to exercise some choice – to join a particular unit. Representatives from these units were sitting behind desks on the sports field while we sat in the grandstands till instructed to move. We rushed across the field. My first choice was the Zulu Battalion. Having stood some time in the queue I was told they needed a Permanent Force (PF) Transport Officer for 101 Battalion in Ondangwa, an air base in central Namibia. The town was fortified and our base was formerly a clinic. Sunset was the prime time for ambush. Soon after arriving there, at sunset, a vehicle was ambushed, burning, a kilometre short of the gate. As the guerrillas retreated through densely inhabited shebeens, Koevoet troops came out shooting. The rest of us went into the bunkers – with walls made from sandbags. We shot into the dark. Afterwards there were only two bullet holes in the walls of our camp. I was the only one who didn't shoot. I'd decided beforehand that I would never shoot unless in self-defence. Two or three local inhabitants were killed in the crossfire. We just shot in case anyone was there – a kind of hysteria of non-combatants. I transported food, ammunition etc., was only involved in quasi-combat.

During the Oshivelo period members of my platoon went on expeditions down to Grootfontein – a huge logistics and airbase north of a railhead. We went there to fetch food, loading it on the train. In this same railway yard were wagons containing crates of landmines. We had always been led to believe that such landmines

were the chief weapon of the terrorists. One of the guys said: "I didn't know we used landmines." A skeleton in the closet. During my training in Oudtshoorn I'd observed the kinds of guys who were in leadership positions – the PF career officers. They had an incredibly narrow-minded mentality; were virtually caricatures. Read *Catch-22* and you'll spot the type. Any military operation could only be discredited when led by such oafs, thugs, morons. Among the conscripts was a general feeling of resentment about being forced into a situation of danger, isolated from family, friends, women. Sometimes it expressed itself in terms of punishing the army by stealing, sabotage. There was also resentment towards "civvies" – they were also culpable because it was for their sakes we were "doing this shit." There was easy and cheap access to alcohol in 101 battalion. 101 consisted of black soldiers from Namibia and Angola – unemployed men. It was the best job they could find. Conscription was not implemented in Ovamboland. There were Coloured guys from Windhoek. The combat troops were career soldiers. Each platoon consisted of thirty guys with a lieutenant as platoon commander and headed by a white corporal. These platoons were used in active patrols, some were sent into Angola, but mostly they patrolled Ovamboland.

In my first year at University I felt alienated from family and peers. I had a look at NUSAS (National Union of South African Students) and it seemed artificial to me. The only thing I enjoyed was Film Society. But I got involved with NUSAS just to do something. I felt critical of and superior to those leftie wankers celebrating MK. That really struck me as a wank. But at least they were trying to do something constructive instead of most of the students who wanted to enter a fool's paradise in the form of their careers. I had become anti-militaristic, critical of the tendency to think that MK were doing a good thing. For me liberation did not amount to liberation if it involved militarism. There were PF soldiers in MK as well. It was a matter of sending cannon-fodder to fight other cannon-fodder. A friend lent me books critical of the SADF. Off my own bat I had taken an interest in Gandhi. In Durban my mother had employed an upholsterer – an old man who was a follower of Gandhi. When I was in high school one of our text books contained a chapter on Gandhi which wasn't covered in class. But this chapter hooked onto my memories of the old man. When I was on the border I asked my mother to send me a book on Gandhi. I read it and it influenced my becoming a pacifist.

Having left the army I was made to be a member of the Durban regiment. But I was living in Pietermaritzburg then, during my first year at University. I got called up for a camp in Durban during my first University holiday. I would have been expected to participate in Officer's Mess events to build team spirit, but I didn't go because I was based on the Pietermaritzburg campus. So I got out of it via the University lying to the army – saying I was not able to go for "academic reasons." The following year I had moved to Durban but had to report to the Natalia Regiment in Pietermaritzburg for camps. So, once again, my camp duty was deferred! A total of two years of camps were forthcoming. I would be doing camps into my forties – for two weeks to a month of each year. Employers were obliged to pay you for doing such service, being a member of the so-called Citizen Force. This was part of white South African reality.

Near the end of my degree I did one "seminar" or "symposium" during the time of the township unrest – 1987 and 1988. The point of this seminar was to retrain us for so-called township duty, watching videos of necklacings and so forth. I decided to go to this seminar out of curiosity and it vindicated my critical belief that this was a right wing project of note. This guy from Military Intelligence had been sent to the Natalia Regiment. He presented this theoretical thing that was so over-the-top in its right wing stance that most of us felt it to be an insult to our intelligence. We staged a mini-revolution, complaining that we were expected to swallow this shit, this total onslaught ideology. I was already an MA student, exploring Magnus Malan et al. being involved in low-intensity counter-insurgency. I had edited *Hawks and Doves* – a study of the pro- and anti-conscription press – through the Contemporary Cultural Studies Department at the University. This study contained a critique of right wing militarist counter-revolutionary theory. So now I was having first-hand experience of this theory. Part of this seminar was the annual Officers Mess Dinner at Victoria Club in Pietermaritzburg – a notorious colonial hang-out with a Union Jack flying outside. It was a Gentlemen's Club, no women permitted. I was curious. It was a very cheap, full dinner. I considered it a component of my Cultural Studies and notified them that I was a vegetarian. By that stage there had already been a newspaper article about me fasting in protest

against conscription. As I said earlier, before the formation of the ECC I had been reluctantly involved in NUSAS. I was a grudging member, but at least it was something until the ECC emerged. I turned my back on NUSAS to something more relevant, and attended the ECC launch in 1984. It was something like tilting at windmills, Don Quixote stuff. No one then could imagine conscription being terminated or Mandela being released. We never thought this could change. Instead, there was the feeling of heading toward Armageddon; that sanity would never break out. A bunch of nutcases were running both sides. I fasted in 1987 and '88 after Richard Steele and Ivan Toms had fasted. These fasts played a role in launching the ECC. Steele had been detained before my first fast was to begin, and I fasted in protest against his detention. Richard was curator of the Gandhi Museum in Phoenix. He was an active Quaker. Mine was a personal fast of eleven days with no organised publicity. Steele was released. My next fast was 21 days, beginning on the day my younger brother was conscripted and ending on International Namibia Solidarity Day. There were newspaper interviews and Ivan Toms visited me and warned against avant-garde enemas. Ivan had already completed a fast. It was a Gandhian thing to do. I knew that newspaper clippings were kept by Military Intelligence to be used in my trial. The trial took place from 1989–90. At the beginning of 1989 I was an MA student and employed as a researcher from a grant given for research into free enterprise media messages directed at black South Africans. At the beginning of 1989 I had an epiphany generated by an LSD trip. I realised I was sick of doing camps; all the subterfuge. Furthermore, I was sick of the effects on my peers of ducking and diving. The Conscientious Objectors Support Group (COSG), ECC etc. all supported conscripts. Having served, I was in a strong position to be an objector. In early '89 I sent a letter to Natalia Regiment proclaiming that I had decided not to do any further service in the SADF. I proposed that if they left me alone I would not cause any trouble, suggesting a compromise. There was no response. Because I had taken this step I resigned from my research post as it meant I could be taken anytime and leave them in the lurch.

It had been announced that UN Resolution 435 would be implemented and I felt it was time for me to return to Namibia to help. It was after the battle of Cuito Cuanavale in late 1988 when the SADF lost air superiority and there was a negotiated withdrawal early in '89. As I was removing myself from military service, I thought let me return in peace. I spent three months in Namibia from July to September. I got by doing research for the Namibia Peace Plan 435. It was not an NGO, but a study group of professionals. I arrived with letters of reference from Richard Steele to Quakers there, suggesting work I could do as a media researcher. They needed a deeper study to be done as intervention in the political process – to show the UN that a free and fair election was severely compromised by the Apartheid State's broadcasts through the SWABC (South West African Broadcasting Corporation), which was, essentially, a mini-version of the SABC (South African Broadcasting Corporation). The SABC was linked to the Broederbond. Radio and TV news was taped and I sent printouts back to Prof Tomaselli at the CCMSU (Contemporary Cultural and Media Studies Unit) on the Durban campus. So my being there was, in a way, a pilgrimage for the CCMSU. I went to the border and threw a stone into Angola. I revisited Ondangwa and Oshivelo. Now I was a peace-keeper. It was a cathartic revisiting. My girlfriend joined me in the trenches. I took photos of the mass grave at Cassinga where Namibians were massacred.

With regard to my ECC involvement, I was involved mainly in the Culture sub-committee, which overlapped with my social circle. In fact, the Culture Comm lived mainly in Angel City, our commune (a house owned by my father). There was a triple overlap of activists, jolling friends and housemates (ex-students and others). While I was in Namibia I got a call-up paper for the end of that year – 1989. I already had a personal support group in place and we convened a meeting. On the call-up date I arrived at Natalia Regiment with supporters, my mother, lawyers and journalists to announce that I had dug my heels in and was refusing, formally, to serve. They gave us tea. There was a legal officer who took me to the police station. According to military regulations, refusal to serve had to be dealt with by civil law. It all happened in slow motion – taking a year, with remands from charge to sentencing. In November of 1990 I was sentenced to one year in prison suspended on condition I do unpaid community service. It had become politically possible at that stage to have a jail sentence suspended, being the year Mandela was released. I did 400 hours of community service, working in Casualty Ward as a porter in King Edward Hospital – a NICRO-supervised service run by a social worker. I had done 18 hours per

week for about six months and the sentence was for 3000 hours, so I still had the bulk of it left to do. My case came to appeal at the Supreme Court in Pietermaritzburg in mid-'91. I had full back-up from the Legal Resource Centre. Lawyers put it to the judge that I apply for amnesty under the Groote Schuur Minute and that I cease community service until the amnesty hearing. Amnesty was granted and the charge was removed from my criminal record. I had no longer committed an offence.

When I had the epiphany I mentioned earlier, I could see how my friends' lives had been fucked up by dodging. I thought – I'm in a much stronger position than them. Really fucked up guys couldn't survive the psychological damage and this resulted in some family murders. At one point there was a rumour they were going to extend military service to three years. I remember one guy saying – 'I'll steal a bloody Mirage.' Criminal action was a response. People sensed this National Service wasn't a constructive way to spend one's time. The beneficiaries were the elite, not ordinary citizens.

While I was in Oudtshoorn in 1980 the National Schools Boycott took place, especially in the Cape. One of our weekend passes was denied because we were told "the Coloureds are restless." The school kids had seized upon Pink Floyd's "we don't need no (apartheid) education" from their song 'Brick in the Wall.' That song was blacklisted. In Infantry School we had a few video machines, our own TV studio and network. There was equipment for recording and guys operating a studio. In the Mess to which we marched and sat to eat we had TV sets. It was quite thrilling that one of the conscripts showed an animated video of 'Brick in the Wall.' We sang: "hey corporal, leave these troops alone." The video, banned by the SABC, was shown within the heart of the beast. I remember clearly that scene of the hammers marching. I remember my first experience of reggae at Ondangwa in 1980 during socialising time, drinking in the camp's pub. We were paid R2 per day and a beer cost 40 cents. Money went into your account on a monthly basis; there was even danger pay. I had R5000 when I came out and could have bought a brand-new Mini. There was some economic empowerment. In *Catch-22* the protagonist reflects to himself that there were two good effects of war – removing children from the pernicious influence of their parents, and paying well.

30/11/2010

Other items that estranged me from the SADF:

Sjambokking. This was inflicted mainly on the Ovambo troops, as summary punishment for AWOL, in addition to pay being docked, I seem to remember. Sometimes they would be lined up ten or more at a time. It was formally administered, only on the buttocks. I was aware that it was a contravention of the SADF's own rules, also of civilian law. The most horrifying case to me was when it was done to a fellow conscript, after he confessed to the chaplain (NG dominee) that he had suicidal thoughts. It seemed that the commandant and dominee concurred that a good thrashing would exorcise him. The full-time Military Policeman, corporal Joe (an Ovambo) who captured AWOLers, often in groups at shebeens known as cuca-shops, did most of the sjambokking but always in the presence of an officer, all of whom were white, and some of whom tried their hand with the sjambok.

False flag activities. I found out by accident that at least some of the deeds ascribed to "terrorists" were actually performed by "our" side. We were aware of a special operations unit known as the Takkie Squad - since they wore non-standard footwear, in a war where tracking was key - commanded by a Rhodesian called Theuns Kruger, strangely bearing only the rank of sergeant. The rank-and-file members of this unit were "turned" SWAPO guerillas, led by white mercenary non-South African types. However, they were believed to engage in deceit directed at guerillas, for example having a vulnerable-looking Land Rover bakkie with a canvas canopy under which was an armour and a machine-gun which could pop up once an ambush had been enticed. This Q-car was named after the Q-ships used to entice U-boats.

However, one day some members of 101 Battalion killed two or three members of the Takkie Squad, believing them to be actual SWAPO guerillas. And all hell broke loose along the chain of command. It came about as follows: our Ondangwa base had only one entrance/exit, with a boom operated by a career "hek-wag" by the name of Johannes, older than the combat troops. He lived nearby and went home by bicycle every night, and returned in the morning (the gate was locked at night as there was a curfew).

So one day instead of Johannes, his young son appeared saying his father has been abducted by SWAPO, and is being beaten up in public. As transport officer I was immediately told to provide two Buffels, and a rescue expedition went off, with Cpl Joe driving one of them, and a PF Lieutenant Möller in command. They of course had radios with them, standard practice. They returned in a few hours, with the battered Johannes and two or was it three corpses. So far so good, but then it came out that this action had involved entering an area which that week had been declared frozen by Sector 10 command at Oshakati. Being frozen meant that only units specifically ordered by Sector 10 could enter. Furthermore one of the corpses had tried to surrender by approaching the Buffel holding his hat inside-out, to show a day-glo panel (usually worn that way during a gunfight so that the helicopter gunships would know not to shoot you). However Cpl Joe stood up in his armoured cupola and shot the guy at short range with a pistol. Lt Möller later told me as he was preparing to head back to civvy life after tendering his resignation, that he had been scapegoated. He had conferred with our commandant (Luther de Bruin) about entering the frozen area, and de Bruin undertook to get authorisation from Sector 10, telling Möller to proceed meanwhile, given the apparent life-and-death nature of Johannes's situation. Thus I learned that "fake" terrorists were performing real acts of terrorism. So when each week's update came from Sector 10, summarising incidents and declaring areas frozen, it took on a different light. Not just information, also disinformation. I sometimes wonder what became of Corporal Joe. He was a sadist, probably a psychopath, and widely hated. He was rather camp, always wearing tight non-regulation shorts. Incidentally years later the troops of 101 mutinied at being consistently ordered into the most dangerous situations in Angola, to spare South African lives. At the time of my refusal I anticipated being the one to blow the lid off this type of thing, but in the months following, Dirk Coetzee blew the whistle on Vlakplaas and the use of Askaris ("turned" guerillas). So by the time I testified, it was old hat, pus was gushing from the security establishment.

9/12/2010:

As you know the army was intensely Afrikaans in its hegemonic culture – even die-hard English-speakers felt the need to swear in Afrikaans to achieve effect. Anyway on arrival at 101 Battalion and during our “orientation” I became acquainted with one of my fellow members of the minority of junior officers from Infantry School who were Anglophone, called “Robbie” Robinson. He seemed decent enough at that time, but over the next 13 months I would see him sporadically between his periods of operational duty (i.e. patrols as a platoon leader), turning into a caricature out of *Apocalypse Now*, as he developed a hatred for the enemy, and described in detail how he devised booby traps. The most memorable used the rocket part of a flare, but instead of the pyrotechnic payload it just had jagged spikes daubed with shit, so as to cause infection.

It must be borne in mind that access to medical attention was one of the biggest asymmetries in that war. Due to air superiority, “our” side was assured of timely assistance right up until late stages of the war (in fact I would argue that the loss of that assurance was a major aspect of the impact of the SADF's loss of air superiority in the late 80s, and a reason for the end of the war). Our adversaries, however, had to choose between whatever they could improvise in the field from whatever first aid supplies they carried with them, or risk seeking attention in civilian hospitals and clinics, where they would be extremely vulnerable. Hence the monstrosity of Robbie's intentions. I must also add that he disregarded the possibility of non-combatants falling victim to his booby-traps.

Interview C.

Graham Ellis (born 5th August 1963)

Interview conducted: 15th November 2010.

PM: Please speak about your attitude to National Service while at high school, especially your response to your first call-up paper.

GE: In fact I had some definite impressions of what conscription entailed because of having three uncles who used to get weekend passes from Valhalla. They had been called up to the Airforce which was based at Valhalla, although each of them lived in Port Elizabeth. So I came to know from them something about conscription. And each of their experiences was thoroughly unpleasant. So I was aware that it entailed great physical and psychological stress in the Basic Training, but also that it remained unpleasant in various ways once they had gotten through that. And they mentioned that things would have been much worse for them had they been called up into the Infantry. So I was at least aware of the fact that this was not something to look forward to. And in the first few years of high school we did have, as part of Youth Preparedness, a particular programme. We were forced to learn how to march, and were forced to march every week. This was called Cadets and I strongly disliked the authoritarian nature of the whole programme. It was something I did not appreciate at all. Though at that stage I had little political awareness, I simply am not the kind of person that enjoys taking orders, with people behaving *en masse* as it were, instead of as individuals. And with the threat of punishment should they not cooperate or make mistakes while attempting to cooperate, and so on. And so at the end of my Standard 8 (Grade 10) year at Northcliff High School (that was 1979) there came a day when all the boys in that age group – sixteen or turning sixteen – had to fill in a form giving all personal particulars. And it was known that these forms would then be sent on to the military, and on the basis of this information each boy would receive a military call-up at the end of his Matric year. I remember feeling very anxious that day about what might follow because I realised it was something that could not be avoided.

PM: When you arrived at the end of your Matric year, along with all other young white men you had to make the decision: to go in or to defer your National Service till after your tertiary studies. You've told me previously that you made the decision not to go in right then. What motivated this decision? What factors made you delay your National Service?

GE: There were a number of factors, one of them being that my brother had been conscripted and had undertaken further military training to become a member of the Parabat Battalion. From the stories he told me – firstly about the training that took a full year, and then about his activities as a soldier, what was done and what he saw – I knew that this was something I absolutely did not wish to undergo; in no way to be involved in it. Even though I was able to go to University (which was what I did), I had no clear idea what I should be studying, but I was clear enough in my mind that I did not want to go into the army. So that was the primary reason for me studying, and in this instance it was Business Science. I simply had to do something to avoid the call-up, in this instance something in which I had no real interest. A significant factor influencing my decision to register for course at University was awareness of my brother's being in the army. I heard from him stories about what was actually happening in Angola at that time. For me, the horror of many of the incidents he recounted made it clear to me that I was opposed to the authoritarian nature of the military environment. Also, by that stage I was aware that what the official government – the National Party – claimed about the nature of the border war and the need for a conscripted military force there were bogus, part of an ideological campaign to convince white South Africans to allow their sons to be conscripted to support this so-called war to protect South Africa. Some of my brother's stories might be worth relating, when he was on active duty in what was then South West Africa and Angola. Importantly, the government firmly denied that there were South African soldiers in Angola. I was well aware of the fact that there were because my brother was there!

PM: So in the early 80s there was denial by the National Party government that there were any SADF soldiers in Angola?

GE: Indeed. And, in fact, my father suffered something of a political crisis, a crisis of conscience, at that time, because he had in fact bought into the government line that all this war was necessary to protect South Africa (white South Africa in truth) and that there were no soldiers in Angola. Yet, he knew that his son was there when he heard government ministers declaring on radio that there were no soldiers there! Of course, this made him aware of his previous ignorance.

PM: Did your father communicate this realisation at that stage, or subsequently?

GE: He only communicated it some years later. And that's how I know it was for him a decisive event that caused him to think about a lot of other things with new eyes. And so he changed in political feelings and affiliation quite dramatically.

PM: But at the time your brother was a Parabat in the SADF I take it he believed the NP notion of "total onslaught"? So while your father and your brother believed that the latter was doing his National Service, were you beginning to question these truths?

GE: Very much so, so it created a difficult time, causing me anxiety on several fronts. As it did, I'm sure, for my brother and the rest of the family. There was no doubt my parents were extremely proud of my brother for what he had achieved, becoming such a qualified soldier, and also that he was risking his life for this cause they took seriously, believed – that there were these active threats to South Africa.

PM: So there was pride. No doubt your brother was awarded with what they called "wings" in a big ceremony or parade? But you have indicated that there was an underside, a dark side to what he experienced. Do you have recall of that dark side, things he may have communicated to you about his experiences on the Border during that time?

GE: Yes, I remember the occasion in which my brother was awarded his wings. It was something the family attended. Although I had mixed feelings, my parents were extremely proud of this achievement, aware of the dedication and suffering behind it. I realised they did not have any idea what was to follow. Now that my brother had qualified as a soldier, he would be spending the next year as an active soldier in a terrible war. And so I became aware of the true nature of what was happening on the Border from hearing my brother's stories. And it was many years later that my parents became aware of what actually went on. Certainly some of the stories were hard to hear and hard to relate. But I can say that an older cousin, older than both myself and my brother, had also been a Parabat, and we knew from some of his stories that in those days the soldiers would hang the corpses of the soldiers they had killed from trees and that they would carve the Parabat insignia on the backs of these dead soldiers. This was done to put fear in the hearts of any of those who might think of taking up arms against the SADF in that Border War. And my brother relates that it had become an embarrassment to the South African government in some ways that the Parabats mutilated corpses in this way, and that it had officially been outlawed. Nevertheless, the atrocities committed seem in general no different from this particular atrocity.

PM: And any specific memories that your brother related to you about his own experiences on the border?

GE: Well, many. Some that come to mind are ... The Parabats of course are trained to be deployed by air into enemy territory, and to be highly effective in small groups operating on their own. But, in the case of Angola the Parabats were deployed in a different way, in which they made use of their fitness and their small arms ability, and their ability to live on their own in the bush for extended periods. And one particular, let's say class of events, that would occur is that SWAPO insurgents who were looked after and given safe haven at the bases of

some of the Angolan government forces, known as FAPLA, would move from those safe bases across the border into South West Africa and lay mines and set off explosions at points of significant and crucial financial infrastructure, and having done that they had to immediately flee and return to the base from which they had left in Angola. It was specifically the Parabats who were deployed to track down these fleeing insurgents, and make every effort to kill them before they returned to their bases. Such was the challenge for these insurgents to get back to base before they were pursued and caught that they were provided with ampules of heroin which they regularly injected in order to keep running well beyond the endurance of any normal person. And the Parabats would pursue them in armoured vehicles, using San trackers (then called Bushmen) and essentially it was well-nigh impossible for these fleeing insurgents to reach base, and they would be tracked down and killed.

PM: Were your brother and his fellow Parabats dropped by aeroplane in that zone?

GE: In those cases they weren't in fact parachuted in because they knew that the insurgents would be fleeing and couldn't be that far over the border at that stage, so the idea was to track them down because in that bush you wouldn't even know where to let the parachutists land. They would go in armoured military vehicles that had bullet-proof sides, able to knock trees over if they needed to. They depended on the incredible skills of the San trackers because those trackers kept them on the path. So demanding was it to keep up with these fleeing insurgents that the Parabats were not fit enough to run on their own at that pace and for that distance. So they ran in shifts. There were possibly six Parabats, and two of them would run with the tracker each time, partly because they needed to be there to respond immediately to an ambush. The tracker could run continually with no heroin, not losing the track. So the soldiers were in the armoured vehicles most of the time, and when the insurgents were caught they would kill them and take their trophies.

PM: How were these San trackers brought in to work on behalf of the South African Defence Force?

GE: That I wouldn't know, and it is indeed a very surprising phenomenon because they had been some of the greatest victims of the colonial and apartheid machine, to the extent that in the 1900s they were hunted like animals. The government issued hunting concessions: sometimes you could get a concession to kill, say, ten springbok, and you could also get a concession to hunt ten San people. So it's especially strange that they would work for the SADF, but the truth was they had no way of resisting the powers the SADF had, and so I suppose for them it was a place of safety because now they were inside the machine that used them, but they weren't mistreated or vulnerable in the ways they had been. Interestingly, that makes me think of what was called 32 Battalion which was entirely made up of African soldiers (I think Colonel Breytenbach headed that) and they were known as the most brutal and deadly of all the battalions. That also poses the question – how did it come about that the most feared soldiers in the South African army were in fact a black regiment. So those are the ironies, the cruel ironies.

PM: Another of my interviewees – Michael Graaf – was at Ondangwa as a driver, and he remembered the way the 32 Battalion soldiers were treated. He recalled them being flogged by their white masters. They were brutalised if there was any dissent ...

GE: Well, that explains everything I suppose – abuse people to the extent that they become abusers. To gain further sense of the horror of it all, the soldiers would take trophies from the enemies they killed – which entailed sharing out hats and boots and such-like things – they did notice that when they removed the boots of these insurgents that there was no flesh or muscle around the ankle area – such had been the extent of the damage as a result of their fleeing the Parabats with the aid of heroin. Another set of stories that comes to mind is, in fact, not about pursuing the enemy or guerrillas as such, but action taken against the local villagers in southern Angola who it was known were often sympathetic to the cause of SWAPO (they hid some SWAPO insurgents so that they seemed part of the village). And in order to extract information from these PVs as they called them – *plaaslike bevolking* or local inhabitants in English – they would in fact torture individuals, and the torture was so severe and horrific that even my brother, who was a highly trained soldier (and had killed) could

not stand the cries through the night of men who had been tied to trees and were being tortured to death. And, in another instance, a sixteen year-old girl was asked for information, and was savagely beaten and clubbed, using a pick handle, to death. This also sickened my brother to his stomach. So, after having heard such stories, I was certainly aware of what was going on and although I knew I would never be involved as a soldier like that, I was aware of those horrors. They were enough, and I was also aware of the general environment that made that possible. So it would have been traumatic for me to have been there at all. And just the mindset that I became aware of, of young men taking trophies from other men that they had killed, even in the form of clothing, sometimes fingers, sometimes penises, to the extent that the military authorities had to issue orders that all guerrillas killed were to be brought back to the main camp so that their bodies could be checked, to be seen if anybody had taken a finger or whatever as a trophy. Ears were also sought-after trophies. I could probably remember more stories. Well, in fact, to give you an idea of a different type of story, which is in its own way rather disturbing, is certain situations in which death is highly likely, and therefore terrifying, yet soldiers would recount some of those incidents with hilarity, and nobody can hear the way it's been told and not be shocked. So, for instance, one story my brother told was that early one morning just six of them who had been in the bush for some weeks were waking up and one of them took a shovel and went off to do his ablutions behind a tree, and he was foolish enough to wear thongs, or slip-slops around camp, and suddenly they were ambushed and he came fleeing back from the bushes with his pants around his ankles and in his slip slops being fired at by the enemy. And he simply stood where he was and emptied his magazine, killing some of the enemy and wasn't hit himself. And this was a story recounted as one of the many crazy things that this particular soldier named Puddles would get up to. And, funny or not, those were not the situations I ever wanted to be in. And, as I say, having a more sophisticated understanding of the machinery that lies behind something like this, that makes it possible – the authoritarian structure – was something I despised, all the more so when I realised the atrocities it allowed.

PM: In the period that followed your schooling were there shifts in attitude? What influences were there on your attitude towards going into the army, were there experiences that concretised your feelings and led to you making a definite decision as to whether to go in or not to go in during the time you were at university from the early to the mid-80s?

GE: Well, there were many experiences, and, in general, perhaps being exposed to a more enlightened group of people played its part in confirming my disinclination. I can say that I regarded the possibility of conscription with dread for political reasons as well as psychological reasons in terms of my own frailties. Even though I had played first team rugby I did not feel confident that I was up to what it takes to be a soldier, and I realised that the war that was being fought was nothing like the war that the government claimed was being fought. So I had the option of going to university, and fortunately my academic results were such that I could easily get into university. In fact, I had very little idea what I should study and ended up making a choice which, retrospectively, was quite ridiculous – choosing to study Business Science. But at least I was at university, and given deferment. This business of deferment brought relief at the same time as postponed fear, or left dread – because on each occasion that you were given deferment it was granted for a year and that meant you would get another set of call-up papers a year later, and should you have no grounds for deferment at that stage, you were legally bound to accept your conscription demands. So at the end of that first year at university I knew that Business Science had been a foolish choice, and I was very worried that, unless I started a new course, I was going to be conscripted. And so at that stage my motivation to start studying again the next year for a new degree was as much to do with avoiding conscription as being clear in my mind as to what I would like to, or should be, studying. And so that issue of deferment was real for a number of years and I managed to get a degree, getting deferments along the way. But as the years went by it became more and more obvious that I was not going to get deferment, and that I was going to be conscripted ...

PM: You say you were no longer going to get deferment because you had finished studying ...?

GE: That is correct. And so the issue loomed larger and larger ...

PM: So you did an undergraduate degree.

GE: A BSc degree.

PM: And after that you did not decide to do a postgraduate degree to further defer your National Service?

GE: In fact, I did register for a teaching diploma. But that was not because I was at all motivated and felt that it was an appropriate course for me to do. I wanted to get one more year's deferment, which I got as a result of registering. I didn't attend the course.

PM: So you got another year's deferment. Do you remember what year that was?

GE: It would have been 1986. So as that year approached its end I knew I would be receiving call-up papers for 1987.

PM: Did that happen?

GE: It did. And on that occasion I knew somewhat more about what it was appropriate for me to study, so I registered to study senior undergraduate courses in the Philosophy Department, and was given deferment. I finished that first semester successfully, but at the middle of 1987 I decided to attempt to go to London and apply for political asylum on the grounds of escaping conscription and making a statement of resistance.

PM: Did you do that?

GE: I did. And, once again, it was something I was not at all prepared for, or had the ability to cope with. It turned out very differently when I got there, compared with what I had been told would happen. Nevertheless, I made a formal application ...

PM: Where did you make this application?

GE: In London. One of the first things that made it possible for me to go to London was that I had met some people in Cape Town who were part of a group called the Congress of South African War Resisters (COSAWR), and they gave me the impression that there was a support committee in London of young white South African men who in a sense made arrangements for people like myself coming into the country and finding our feet. But it turned out they were completely disorganised and offered no such help at all. So I then applied directly through the formal channels of the British Council and received papers which gave me the status of an asylum-seeker – allowing me to remain in England while the process unfolded and my application was evaluated.

PM: What was the space of time before you would be notified as to whether you would be granted political asylum?

GE: It was indefinite. It was never made clear who made the decision, and it was part, I think, of a policy on the government's part that no time span needed be given because it made it more difficult for people to see the process through if they had to wait a long time, not knowing when the wait was going to end.

PM: Your stay there, though it was interim, was legitimate, pending a decision from the authorities as to whether you would be allowed to stay?

GE: Yes, my status was legally, formally, that of an asylum seeker. And, well, things didn't go well and I lost hope, fell into depression and returned to South Africa in December of 1987.

PM: I would like to return you to the period shortly before you went into exile to ask if there were particular experiences that made it possible for you to make such a significant decision?

GE: Right, many things. One of them being simply through exposure to a group of young people who were very different from a lot of the people I had known till then – who were politically enlightened and committed and motivated towards a cause that I came to support more and more. So it was a process of education and awareness, and seeing the importance of the stand that certain people at historically white universities had taken. That was the one side. On the other side I had some experience that made me even more aware that the SADF was fighting in a war that was not well known to the general public. So, for instance, on one occasion I had the misfortune of having two Parabats staying in the house I was staying in. And that was the time of the clashes between groupings in the Crossroads area of Cape Town, and these two Parabats had been sent to Cape Town to help deal with that situation. And I listened to what they had to say, and they spoke to me freely. They were proud of the fact that they had shot black people ...

PM: Were these connections of your brother's? Or professional soldiers?

GE: No, they were Parabats serving the second year of their National Service, younger than my brother. Events had in fact changed since the time my brother was a Parabat in that terrible violence was occurring in places such as Crossroads, which hadn't been the case some years before. So that was a new front of confrontation, as it were.

PM: SADF troops were in the townships in the mid-late 1980s ...

GE: Exactly. That was a phrase that was often used at the time – troops in the townships. But the government, of course, made the claim that they were there to keep the peace and protect people, both black and white. But from an insider's perspective I came to realise that there were young white conscripts who were shooting black people in Crossroads at that very time, keeping a count of how many they had shot ...

PM: So these guys spoke freely to you about the murder of people in Crossroads?

GE: They did, and with such a lack of awareness of the fact that others might be affronted and horrified by that attitude. For them it seemed that what they were doing was of such a nature that nobody would question them, that they would be held in high regard rather than have somebody respond with disgust or alarm. And the way they spoke was they made no mention of the people they shot – what grouping they were from. I know the *witdoeke* were one particular grouping. But for these guys it was just a matter of shooting black people. So much for the government's claim that the troops were there to protect those who lived in the townships and elsewhere. So that was horrifying. It was at that stage that the National Party had begun to use the military not only on the borders, but throughout South Africa. And South Africa was not just a police state – it was a military state during the States of Emergency declared at that time. And the troops in the townships were doing a lot more than the politicians had claimed.

PM: Did you have any contact with the End Conscription Campaign (ECC) from the mid-80s onwards?

GE: I did indeed. I received an education as a result of meeting people from the End Conscription Campaign, and they strongly encouraged my more enlightened insights at that stage, playing a very important role in helping me to see the wrongs of the SADF?

PM: Do you remember any particular encounters with the ECC?

GE: I remember mainly attending gatherings – sometimes protests or get-togethers in which speakers debated issues. So as a result of that kind of exposure, as well as making friends with some individuals, it strengthened my beliefs.

PM: Once you had returned from London, how did you deal with this problem of serving in the SADF?

GE: Well, it was a crisis, and I had hoped that I might be able to take a stand and refuse to be conscripted, to obey my call-up instructions. But, the cost of that decision was six years in jail, and I felt I couldn't endure that. To my horror, but not so much to my surprise, I received call-up papers within two weeks of returning to South Africa, which indicates that my movements had been monitored, and they knew exactly where I was, despite the fact that my home address had changed twice since I had left school and returned from London. And then I gave up hope, I suppose, of avoiding conscription. I presented myself at a gathering point and we were put on trains and sent to Kimberley. I can go back and tell you that it didn't in fact start in Kimberley, but in Cape Town, and we boarded a train, with six of us in my compartment. Things were traumatic from that moment. The five other chaps, if you can call them that, in the compartment, were all school-leavers (18-year olds) and I was a lot older, and they were all extremely excited about joining the army. They were completely ignorant of anything that an organisation such as the ECC might be in a position to teach them were they willing to learn. So it was a scary situation being with these youngsters on edge with anxiety, but who also felt themselves at the onset of an adventure. That was how it was for them. So there was discussion about when they thought they would be able to shoot their first terrorists, and expressing anxiety about certain things they had heard from other people prior to being called up. I remember one of them asking a question along the lines of – "I wonder if there's going to be an *opfok* at some point and I don't know if any of us will survive that." And it turned out that an *opfok* is something that is declared by a corporal if a conscript fails to meet some standard, and it is extremely punishing physical abuse in terms of endurance, basically as a form of punishment to push someone to the very edge. This was discussed with a mixture of excitement and anxiety. But in general the sense was that these guys were at the beginning of an adventure. So there was no doubt in their minds what they were there for.

PM: In other words, they bought into the ideology of playing their role in stemming the tide of the total onslaught. They genuinely felt they were serving?

GE: Exactly. They were serving to defend their country.

PM: So that's surely an extreme situation for you – to be in a compartment for the journey from Cape Town station to Kimberley with these young men. I mean, you must have wondered how you were going to survive the coming two years of National Service. And what happened when you arrived at your camp, how did you manage these contradictions. Obviously you had to be silent about what you were thinking.

GE: Indeed. In fact, I was amazed at how well these youngsters had been brainwashed, had bought into what the government wanted them to believe, because at some point one of them in the compartment with me mentioned the ECC with malice and disgust, and the others went along with that. It was as if they felt that they themselves could never be in the company of such a worthless and dangerous element of society. So it was chilling to see how well prepared these young men were for what they were going to endure, and that they sincerely believed, sadly, what their government and parents and teachers had very effectively taught them to expect and what was to be done. So, upon arriving at Kimberley we were herded into army trucks and taken to a huge parade ground, and at this stage, with various trains arriving, there must have been more than two thousand conscripts all gathered there. We were told to sit down, and a high-ranking officer came to address us, as it were, and it didn't take long before he raised certain issues, and it's important to remember that this is in a context of two thousand young men having been brought together from all over the country. And, after a fairly typical pep-talk, as one might have expected, a question was then asked: "If there is anyone here who is a member of the ECC, would you please stand up." Now it would take a very brave person to stand up, and nobody, of course, did stand up.

And the next question was “are there any homosexuals present, and if there are would you please stand up.” And of course the tone in which these questions were asked made it perfectly evident that if somebody stood up in response to either of those questions they would immediately have singled themselves out for hostile ridicule and abuse, and that this was going to be a defining moment for the coming two years, and that they would suffer badly. So again nobody stood up.

PM: At this stage you weren’t a member of the ECC, though your sympathies were there?

GE: No. In fact, I don’t even remember considering the issue of membership. So in my mind it was a group of like-minded people who felt strongly about the same issues. So at that stage I could technically have claimed that I wasn’t a member of the ECC, but even if I had been I wouldn’t have had the courage to stand up there.

PM: Do you think these questions were asked of all conscripts in camps at that time?

GE: Yes. There seemed to be a standard speech and procedure.

PM: So pariah status was conferred if one was a member of the ECC or one was gay?

GE: Yes, those were the two repulsive possibilities that might have occurred amongst these young men, and had you stood up and said – “well, nobody has mentioned this, but actually I am an axe-murderer,” and the corporal might say – “no that’s fine, don’t mention that. We’re only concerned with evil people.”

PM: So after you and the others had declined from owning up to these aberrations, what happened next?

GE: By that stage I was already quaking and in a bad way. I hadn’t managed to sleep, had been for about 36 hours on that train with those young men, and now it was 45 degrees heat in Kimberley. And as somebody who suffers, particularly badly then, from frequent headaches and migraines, I knew I was in trouble. So at the end of that long and awful day, which included the things I have mentioned, as well as scrubbing between bricks with a toothbrush, it ended with a fully-developed and violent migraine headache which even the corporal became concerned about. But there was no available medication so I suffered through the whole of the next night not getting any sleep – the second night of no sleep. By that stage I was in a state of panic as to whether I could cope at all with these circumstances. And just to say, one of the things that everybody knows about military training is that it tries to strip away all individual personality characteristics, which is why you will find yourself in a massive dormitory or whatever you would call it, each with his bed with a metal trunk, the same beds and sheets, and you would need make that bed to a degree of perfection that is completely insane, and so I was already feeling the pressure on me to try to maintain my identity in the face of this. It seems that most of the young men there handled it easily, and, as I say, the excitement remained. But for me the idea of showering with other people all at once and listening to all of their talk so wildly different from the kind of talk I would like to hear, and then having to try to sleep with four hundred bodies around you, that was very rapidly starting to make me feel.

PM: How many days did this persist?

GE: Not many at all. The first day was the train, then that night, then the introduction and the rest of that day and the night with the migraine, and the next day there was still a lot of kit to be handed out and that sort of thing – so that was a case of hanging around and, of course, hearing others talk, but no physical activity or punishment as yet. And then that afternoon we were told that we were going to be put through a thorough medical examination. And this was indeed an involved process in which one went from stage one to stage two and so on, each stage in a different building. They checked your hearing, your eyesight, they checked this and that; and that afternoon I heard an announcement that people whose surnames began with the same letter as mine were to report to some building and in that building was to be conducted what they called a “welfare

interview.” I had no idea what that meant. When we arrived we were given a table to sit at and a form to fill in. It was obvious to me that the questions were asked to weed out vulnerable people, psychologically vulnerable people. So they included (and this is not because gay people are necessarily psychologically vulnerable) questions such as – have you ever had sex with another man, and so on. And one of the questions...

PM: So this was a standard set of questions everyone was asked?

GE: Yes. It was a prepared form and you had to answer every question at your own table with your own form, answering in private as it were. And at that stage I was panicking, thinking I was not going to survive this psychologically. So there was a question in this form that asked whether you had attempted suicide before. Of course I had realised the point and purpose of this so-called welfare form, and even though I hadn't attempted suicide by then, I did answer yes, that I had. I was thinking of ways of escaping this horror I found myself in. And sometime after that I was called (on the same day) and sent to a clinical psychologist who happened to be a conscript with the rank of lieutenant without having done an officer's course, but because of his qualifications he was given that rank. And it was very fortunate for me that he happened to be somebody who was not a member of the Permanent Force, and who probably shared similar views to mine. I think he recognised soon that I wasn't going to cope and he, essentially, helped me to be released. I can't remember the name of the category, and it wasn't that simple, but he did arrange that I would be dismissed from serving in the army for a year, at which point I would receive my call-up again and I would need to attend a military psychiatric hospital in Cape Town in order to be evaluated.

PM: After a year you would have to go to a military psychiatric hospital?

GE: I would be assessed periodically through that year.

PM: Through that year – so you were given a year's deferment; it wasn't an exemption?

GE: That's right. It was a twelve month medical deferment which required ongoing assessment of this problem by military psychiatrists. So certainly after arriving back I visited the hospital on a few occasions, but by then a private psychologist became involved, so that then terminated my having to go to what happened to be Victoria Hospital in Cape Town.

PM: So I assume the private psychiatrist or psychologist you saw had to send reports to the army on your condition?

GE: Yes, and to report to the psychiatrists at the military hospital who worked for the military.

PM: This army psychologist who had helped you, had he asked you particular questions, or was it obvious to him that you were not going to manage this coming experience; and he decided to help you?

GE: He did help me. I think he was compassionate and intelligent. He could tell I was traumatised, panicking ... he didn't quiz me on the suicide attempt. But because I had studied Psychology myself he asked me some standard questions, and I was hoping to give him answers that would allow him to classify me as schizophrenic, deluded and hallucinating. So he started asking me those questions and I answered the questions in ways that were not frank and easily perceived as simply an attempt to manipulate the situation. And I think it was at that stage that he started to realise that the answers I was giving him weren't entirely truthful, but they did give him reason to write down things I had said, and I felt that he was feeling sorry for me. It was a difficult situation because we were at one table in that large room in which psychologists were at each table, so one didn't have proper privacy. But at one point I did notice that nobody nearby would hear and I simply said to him underneath my breath – “you've got to get me out of here if you can.” Then he didn't ask any further questions and he said – “I will.” That was when he signed the form which I had to take to the next stage. I was still required to

complete the full medical evaluation which ended up with the form being signed by the chief military officer at the base. So I had this in my hand and I understood what it meant – that this is an order for me to be released.

PM: Were you then released with immediate effect?

GE: Well, what happened was that when I got to the chief medical officer he looked at my form, then at me, and he said “this is bullshit, I’m not going to obey this.” He told me to return to my bungalow. So, having felt I was going to be let out, having now been told that was not going to happen at all, I was shocked; and I went back to this psychologist who had signed my form and told him this had been overridden. Far from saying “sorry about that, I thought it would have worked,” he was immediately upset about it and said to me “nobody can counter this order I’ve given.” And he came back with me and confronted this medical practitioner who was the chief medical officer on the base. He presented himself to this medical officer who was livid with him for having signed the form in the first place, and now to come and challenge his order, his opinion ... Remarkably, this young man stood there and asked this officer what qualifications he had in Psychology; and he had none. He was a medical doctor. This psychologist said to him: “I am the one who has the qualification and it is my duty to perform the function I have been assigned to perform, and I stand by this decision.” He mentioned a few legal codes etc. and the medical officer became red then blue in the face, was extremely angry, but he realised he was in the wrong and that this man who was an officer in the SADF had authority in this instance.

PM: This chief medical officer was of a higher rank or were they the same rank?

GE: No, the medical officer was of a higher rank, but the psychologist was a specialist.

PM: So this specialist – you say he was a young man, about your age?

GE: Yes, he was about two years older than me.

PM: So you were standing there witnessing this confrontation?

GE: Yes, and I was horrified that my release might be revoked, and I was scared on behalf of this psychologist at the almost uncontrollable rage he was confronted with. That medical officer had obviously never been challenged in that way – that was the impression. To my enormous relief the chief medical officer was informed by others that he was in the wrong and he had to then undo his overruling of that, and I was taken off and told that preparations were being made for me to get a train ticket and go home. I must say that whatever anybody else might think about my situation, my inability to deal with it, that psychologist – I wish I could meet him and thank him personally for what he did, because he saved me from unknown but severe trauma that I was going to suffer. He had never met me before, but he struck me as a humane, compassionate, intelligent person who was a conscript and not somebody who had bought into the ideology.

PM: He obviously saw how desperate you were, which is why he stood by you.

GE: Yes, I would dearly love to let him know how he helped me. It was crucial intervention really. He did just what he was meant to do. He was there to make psychological evaluations and diagnoses, and it wasn’t the case that he thought he would help me get through this but that he didn’t actually believe that I needed it. I think he genuinely, in his professional capacity, believed that I shouldn’t be there, and he stood up for that remarkably. So I found myself back on the train from Kimberley after four days, feeling somewhat liberated. The relief took about six hours to work its way out of my system, and then I started feeling I had been given a chance to survive, and I knew I had to do this stuff with military psychologists etc. which was interesting in itself. But I then felt I had a new lease on life, it was as clear as that. I would not have survived. And thank heavens for him.

PM: Do you consider all the experiences you have spoken about – experiences revolving around conscription – as having had a lingering effect on you, your life?

GE: It did have such an effect because it was rooted in torment, fear; something that couldn't be avoided. Having had that threat of conscription hanging over me for so many years made me feel more vulnerable, bad about not managing situations. And certainly the few days I spent in the clutches of the military were some of the most awful of my life. I went through extremes, and I suppose it says something about me that I went through such extremes and, in the negative sense, someone might say that shows a lack of character, unnatural vulnerability or whatever. But I think, in a non-judgmental sense, the options available to me were not options I could easily embrace and follow through, so it was a question of feeling that one has no control and of having to make some choice, each of which would be awful.

PM: Of course the word 'options' asks to be put in inverted commas, because what kinds of options were there? People responded in different ways, and maybe there are certain personality structures that have to make a decision, and yours was one such. Others might more easily adapt to a kind of twilight state – internal exile.

GE: I'm thinking of an incident that I may as well mention now because it touches on this idea of so-called options. It's about a mother dealing with her son in relation to the call-up. This particular individual was doing an Honours degree at UCT, and the military had been sending him his call-up papers through the years. I think he had the option of getting a British passport, but these issues had not entered his life till then. After his Honours degree his deferments had lapsed, and he had told his mother he would not be going into the army. It was the last thing in the world he wanted to do, and had told his mother he would be ignoring the call-up. And she contacted the military authorities and told them his address. He was absolutely stunned. His mother told him she was worried about him, scared, that he couldn't run away from this, and it was best he got it over with. What happened was that he left South Africa immediately and went to Oxford where he is now a Professor (thanks to his mother). The fact that conscription was something that was not going to go away was damaging for me, as well as the attempts to get out of it that failed and made me feel even worse about myself, and then the actual experiences, being in that limbo situation that gave me twelve months to pull myself together and go back in. I was told I would be called up the following years. The psychologists at the military hospital walked around in white coats, and one of these psychologists told me I was not depressed and that I would go into the army. You're just acting he said. He even pointed out young men walking around like zombies, no doubt having undergone ECT and drug therapy, and he said – this is what is going to happen to you. So you must choose now. Fortunately I was able to see a private psychologist who had certain ethical codes to live up to, who then referred me to a psychiatrist, a senior psychiatrist who seemed to have a lot of clout, held in high esteem. One of the things this psychiatrist did was hand me a book on the philosophical implications of quantum physics written by a physicist named David Bohm. He specifically said to me he wanted me to read this book and think about this idea called "morphic fields." Then he said, "firstly, if I get you out of going into the army, you must understand that you won't be able to work in any government post in the future." And I said, "I can accept that." And then he said, "I tell you, you won't be going into the army." He handed me this letter. But, once again, these psychiatrists at the military hospital refused to accept that, and in this situation they then confronted the wrath of a senior psychiatrist who couldn't believe that these pathetic, incompetent, uneducated psychiatrists would dare to override the clear clinical diagnosis he had made. He turned on them and they didn't challenge him again. So I was extremely lucky. I saw from the inside what they do to young men who do not have the support of outside professionals. It's not surprising the army's psychiatric wards were full of conscripts. Very seldom did they send somebody home. They would take you into what they called their care, but it was abuse. They were loath to send anybody home; why I don't know. If those people are not going to be soldiers, why not let them go home rather than medicate and abuse them. But I suppose they were considered to be state property.

Interview D.

Brett Myrdal (born 17th June 1960)

Interview conducted 12th January 2011

PM: Thinking back, how would you define your attitude to serving in the SADF during your school years, and especially after receiving your first call-up paper?

BM: I can remember '76 when I was in Standard 9 (Grade 11). It was very simple to remember, it was quite vivid because it was the time of the introduction of TV in South Africa and we lived in a place called Taybank in Port Elizabeth, out in the western suburb. It was divided by a couple of steep valleys from Malibi, the Indian township, and New Brighton, the African township. So, with this arrival of TV you would have this test pattern on the whole day until the 7 o' clock News came on, and at that stage the Apartheid State thought they could use the media to show how effectively they were controlling the situation. So on the news you would see troop carriers moving through the townships and the kids fighting back, and smoke and fire, and then I'd look out over the valley and see the same smoke and fire, and I knew then this was what was coming my way. I knew then very well that when I got my call-up I would be expected to do this kind of work. So even then in Standard 9 I knew I would not go into the SADF. And another piece of preparation was the cadet system. We were forced to do cadets; it was compulsory and our school was very proud of their cadets for some odd reason, along with Bishops in Cape Town. I was at Grey High School in Port Elizabeth, and they saw it fit to have what they thought was the most expert cadet system. So on Wednesdays the school was in uniform; our Maths teacher and Science teacher were Citizen Force Captains and Majors in the SADF, and they would come to school in their leather gloves, with batons and officers' hats. The school was regimented. Every Wednesday we would be at school in our military uniform, and the whole day would be dedicated to cadets. You would have lessons in your military uniform, then two hours of cadets. And if you misbehaved, didn't march straight, you would do an extra parade on a Friday afternoon, which was a punishing exercise.

PM: This was a boys' school?

BM: Yes, it was. In Standard 10 Constand Viljoen (Minister of Defence) came flying in by helicopter to the school to do an inspection of the troops – the whole school, 650 pupils in uniform, lined up. And he told us then that we were being prepared to be officers in the SADF. So there was no messing around. I knew exactly what was coming, which spurred me on to do as well as possible in Matric so that I could go to University and get a Teacher's Diploma (this qualified me for a bursary so that I could study). You were funded for the degree and had to teach for as many years as you had been funded. This was obviously a good strategy for getting out of the call-up. So I worked hard at my Matric to get good grades, and it paid off. So I knew I would not be going into the SADF before I even got to University.

PM: You mentioned '76. So you were aware of the Soweto uprising of that year.

BM: That's what I said – it was shown on TV; you know, as seen on TV.

PM: Were you politicised in any way in terms of your parents' opinions or attitudes? It is fairly unusual for white boys of that time – despite the media coverage of Soweto – it was a blinkered experience; not giving people the sense that there was injustice.

BM: That's true, that's true.

PM: So what made you almost critical from the start? When you were a schoolboy you already had an aversion to going into the SADF.

BM: My mother played a role. My father was apolitical. My mother was too, but she was strongly Christian; I wasn't. But she had a very strong ethical outlook on the world, and spoke out against the government and against apartheid, and stopped my father from using the word "kaffir" in the house. There were many fights at the dinner table around that. She took quite a strong stand. She definitely played a role.

PM: But you just knew on some kind of intrinsic level?

BM: No, the actual brutality of the headmaster and the scholars once they became officers at school showed me what a uniform does to people. They became thugs; created power by being in control of you, and I suppose this exposure to militarisation politicised me at school.

PM: Sorry to interject, but the person I interviewed last also had cadets at his school, but it wasn't as formal as your situation. He didn't have to wear a uniform, just marched in his school uniform. He remembers not being able to deal with being told what to do, the authoritarian approach, being told to march in a straight line or you would be punished.

BM: Ja, ja.

PM: It was in him: there was no way he was going to enter such a reality after school. But he says he wasn't at all politicised at that stage; it was just knowing he couldn't deal with authority, being part of a machine.

BM: Ja I shared that, but I also had this moral outlook my mother imposed from her Christian point of view that apartheid was unjust and engaging yourself with something that was unjust didn't make sense. But I didn't have a good understanding of why and what. That I only developed at University; but I knew I wasn't going to do it.

PM: So at the end of your Matric year you had a clear sense. Do you remember your call-up paper that year?

BM: Yes, it was for 6 SA Infantry, Bloemfontein, and I knew – no ways, never. I would find a way of not going there. But I knew quite early on because in Standard 9 I had performed quite badly academically, got 7% for Maths, but at the end of Matric I got 70%. I was highly motivated to get to University to avoid the SADF. So I can thank school for teaching me things I didn't like. It taught me a hatred of militarism, a hatred of thuggery, aggression. Small men beating up kids just because they could. The level of corporal punishment that went with it was intense at our school, but on Wednesdays it was worst. When you got lashed by a man who was in uniform it was worse than getting lashed on any other day. And I was usually getting lashed ... and I detested that uniform and that I was being prepared to be an officer in that system.

PM: Good, that leads me to my next question. Could you tell me something about the shifts in your attitude (you've given me a sense already that you were averse to it) while you were at University – facts or concerns that played a role in you deciding to do what you did, which was to join MK? And also if you can recall the exact moment you made that decision?

BM: I can remember that moment and then look back, because it happened because of a string of preceding events. It happened – that moment – in late June of '84 when I'd already left the country. I was in Zimbabwe and had already been working in the ANC underground for a year.

PM: So when did you finish your studies?

BM: I only finished in '84. I had one half-course hanging from '81 and only completed it in Zimbabwe in '85. So I did a Bachelor of Science in Chemistry. First year I passed everything, second year I passed everything at UCT in '78, '79 and '80. In '80 I finished my major, but not a support course. I failed Maths 2. And then I got

involved actively in politics – '81, '82 and '83. I was only apparently studying as far as the SADF was concerned. I registered for an Honours and a Masters ... and then I decided to object in the June call-up of '83. I became a conscientious objector, and my intention was to go to prison ... I'm not being very sequential, chronological here. Let me go back to my first year at University. I got involved in NUSAS politics in '78. I was also an intense rock-climber at that time; that was my passion through the 90s. But I got more and more involved in student politics. At the end of '78 I met a guy, Shepherd Miti, through the church who needed books for study, as well as ANC literature. I was able to find, through University contacts, literature that he needed and I took them to him at New Brighton township. There were meetings at churches (the church was simply a safe place to meet) and he politicised me further. He became president of COSAS (Congress of South African Students) at that time. And then in '79, my second year, and '80, I always knew I had this pending problem: what the hell was I going to do at the end of my degree. I got more involved in politics, and there was a debate within NUSAS at that time as to whether white people who were progressive should actually leave the country or rather stay and keep their skills here for the future South Africa. And there was one guy in particular, Aurret van Heerden, President of NUSAS, who argued that white people who played a leadership role in the struggle were too valuable to lose to exile and needed to stay, go into the SADF and keep their skills here so that they could be ploughed back into the country. It was a very convenient argument for not having to make any big sacrifice – not having to leave the country. He was a very persuasive guy, and managed to persuade a number of black students in AZASO (Azanian Students Organisation) and COSAS that certain white people were so useful that they needed to stay in the country. Anyway, it was an ethically corrupt position, especially after the SADF got more active in the townships. There were counter-arguments in NUSAS to the point where he was discredited as President of NUSAS. He was based at Wits University. He was kind of one of those guru politicians, he had a lot of followers. In those days NUSAS was characterised by personalities, quite egocentric, who were able to develop such logically persuasive arguments ...

PM: So for him was there no mention of the option of objecting?

BM: He thought objecting was a crazy idea, that it was only for religious people, people who were pacifists, not pragmatic politicians.

PM: So this was all prior to the birth of the ECC?

BM: That's correct. They were challenged by COSAS and AZASO, and my friendship with Miti was part of that challenge. They were saying "hang on, you're a South African. If you want to be in a non-racial South Africa you've got to see yourself as the same as everyone else." So my political exposure deepened and by 1982 certain friends of mine – mainly Gavin Evans and Mike Evans – had left the country to meet up with the ANC, first in Namibia and secondly in Zimbabwe, and they came back with a position that ran counter to Aurret van Heerden's to say that whites need to resist, if they can, that progressive whites need to find ways of not going into the SADF. And so they looked to the churches because ethical religious individuals of the churches were making the most sacrifices at that stage – religious pacifists such as Peter Moll and Anton Eberhardt, those guys. And the message coming back from the ANC was to make links with the churches. I wasn't a member of the ANC, but I saw myself as aligned, so I started to work with the Conscientious Objectors Support Group (COSG) in Cape Town.

PM: So that was the situation in the early 80s. Gavin Evans was very involved, wasn't he?

BM: Right. In the early 80s COSG groups were set up in order to support individuals like Peter Moll and Richard Steele around their personal needs in detention barracks. They stood on religious grounds. You know, the ethics of the situation meant that – whether you were religious or secular – you would come to the same conclusion: that apartheid is unjust; and so the objectors support groups started to be established in the major cities. And we started to work with them, also setting up smaller groups of people to find ways of staying out of the SADF; known as conscription advice groups that explored creative alternatives such as staying in the

Bantustans, changing addresses, changing of identity, anything that would work. We formed these semi-secret informal groups which would provide support to each other in finding ways of avoiding the call-up, including ways of going into exile, which was considered a last resort. In 1982 there was Billy Paddock who was the first 'just war' objector. All of the others had been religious pacifists. But Billy Paddock, who was killed in a car accident in the late eighties, said that he was not against war if it is just. He understood that there were sometimes ethical reasons for considering a war to be just. He quoted instances like the South American fights for freedom, for Nicaragua and the like, with the Catholic Church on the side of the poor – where you could argue conditions for a just war. And he argued that this applied to South Africa and that he wouldn't fight in an unjust war. Even though he was a Christian he did not stand as a pacifist. So he got the maximum two years and I was his direct support along with another guy, Richard Good – we formed his particular conscientious objector's support group and helped him.

PM: So he was in prison then?

BM: Ja, he got sent there for two years, but he only sat one. No one actually sat the full two years. Two years was the maximum and he got one. So we helped him craft his court statement and do the research that was required to put forward his position. Following him was a non-religious objector called Peter Hawthorne. He also argued the just war position, but from a secular base – a purely moral argument. And again we formed a support group around him, helping him with a press statement, getting legal advice. He went into prison, like Billy Paddock he sat in Pretoria Central, and later Pollsmoor, not with the political prisoners, not in Voortrekker Hoogte in detention barracks. He sat a year with the ordinary criminals. It was quite tough because there was potential for violence – Billy and Peter were seen as kaffir-lovers so they had a hard time in prison. They had to watch themselves all the time. So, by supporting first Billy Paddock and then Peter Hawthorne, we were initially acting on the mandate of the ANC to develop a kind of white resistance consciousness around conscription.

PM: So you were aware of the ANC position on all this via people like Gavin Evans and Mike Evans who had illicitly gone out and spoken to ANC operatives in other African countries?

BM: Exactly. Zimbabwe in particular. The person I spoke to in the main there was Peter Roussos, and his brother Mike Roussos was working in Johannesburg in the Communist Party cell and the ANC cell. Anyway, with regard to my own situation, I couldn't go on pretending to study. I was working part time as a printer, making my own income, and I decided then that I was also going to object, and that was now before the June '83 call-up, after supporting, first of all, Billy and Pete in '81 and '82. And I was going to object on the basis of the Freedom Charter⁸² – to take it one step further. It would not just be a just war position and a moral position, but actually arguing that the ten points of the Freedom Charter was what we would like to see in the country. I was travelling the country gathering support for this position, and at that time the debate was intensifying. A tricameral government was being mooted – that Indians and Coloureds would get representatives and that they might in turn be expected to obey call-ups.

PM: Which never happened.

BM: Which never happened. I linked with Allan Boesak and the Natal and Transvaal Indian Congresses. I travelled around the country talking to those people, and while that was happening there was a general increased level of debate around conscription and the Black Sash conference took place in about August of '83; and my trial now, I'd already reported in June of '83 to Voortrekker Hoogte and told them I wasn't coming. They could have kept me there, but they said you have a trial in November. I don't remember the date because it never actually took place. So at this Black Sash conference in '83 they passed this resolution calling for an end to conscription, and I was sitting later that night on the same day talking to my mate Roland White who is now in New York, the last I heard. Late at night we were discussing what to do about our situation ... We realised that

⁸² The Freedom Charter was a document advocating the fundamental rights and values for the achievement of a non-racial and democratic South Africa. It was officially adopted on 26th June 1955 at the so-called Congress of the People in Kliptown.

this was a brilliant opportunity to do much more than just pass a resolution at a conference. In fact, by calling on the State to stop conscription one evaded Section 10, 1 (c) of the Defence Act which said that in no way whatsoever could one influence any person or any group of persons to even think about not obeying the call-up and you could then get a seven year sentence or a R10 000 fine. Instead of this, instead of influencing people to think about evading the call-up, we would call on the State not to call people up, and that was it – opening up legal space for resistance to conscription. I came back to Cape Town and I met with a group of friends that were active politically in NUSAS and the ANC underground at that time about the potential for developing a campaign. And we got pretty excited and we realised this was the way to go. And we started to use my impending trial which was coming up in November as a means of pushing the idea of the ECC. That happened. The ECC got launched just before my trial date. I went up for my trial by train on a Friday – took the train up to Johannesburg and was going to go through to Pretoria to Voortrekker Hoogte. My mother was going to give evidence, to say that I am a South African. And I'd spoken to Solomon Mhlangu's mother, he was the first MK guerilla to be executed. In '76 when I was sitting in a barber shop it came on the radio that this guy had killed some people in an aborted attack in Jeppe Street. And so he was hung. Many years later then (from '76 to '83) I went to see his mother to ask if she would give evidence to say that her son was a South African. And the case was going to therefore state that this was a civil war. Here was one mother – Mrs Myrdal, saying, "my son is a South African." Here's another mother – Mama Mhlangu saying, "my son is a South African." Case closed. No one should be expected to fight against their fellow citizens. This is not a communist onslaught. So it was simple case. Norman Manoim, Gilbert Marcus and Edwin Cameron were the attorney, and junior and senior counsel for the court martial. The trial was due to start on the Tuesday. We arrived by train on the Sunday night and on the Monday morning I got a phone call from Norman Manoim saying the case is off, as that Friday a new law had been gazetted increasing the sentence from two years to six years, and that anybody who was a bona fide religious pacifist would no longer be imprisoned. They would be given six years of community service. All other objectors would now go to prison for six years. I wasn't prepared for six years; I was going for a two year bargain. I thought two years National Service equals two years in prison. At least I don't have to do camps, you know. So I decided not to do it. I was so ready for prison. I'd given up smoking cigarettes and prepared myself physically. I didn't know what to do next so I went surfing for two weeks at Seal Point and I stayed there. Then I came back to Cape Town, and I was being surveilled and Mike Evans met me and said – look, the ANC wants to talk with you, so please go out of the country and meet them. So I did. I went out dressed like a Rhodesian – short pants, veldskoens and went across the the border ... Although I must say I had some trouble getting in, but I got across into Zimbabwe, and they said to me we want you to know that you must stay in the country as long as you can and then when you have to leave, fine, meanwhile while you're in the country we want you to set up an underground war resisters network with one person in every city. And they trained me in secret communication. So I came back into the country and I went and approached people – one in Johannesburg, one in Durban, one in Cape Town and one in Grahamstown and got a network going. I had a couple of refusals, which is terribly disconcerting as you reveal yourself in the eyes of someone as being willing to work for the ANC and they know who you are. And you try to ask people who you think will say yes and some said no.

PM: Was this your first meeting with ANC operatives?

BM: Formally yes., in '83 around December. I now realised I was working for the ANC. I got a call-up in June of '84 and I continued to do this underground work, and informally for the ECC, but quite low profile. But by this stage the Security Police were all over me, having made a profile for myself.

PM: So they were expecting you to be there for the trial and you didn't arrive?

BM: They dropped the charges against me after passing that new Act. They wanted me. They released a statement that said I could now benefit from doing community service; that I no longer needed to go to prison; but that in order to benefit you had to be a religious pacifist. So it was a cynical move: I was being set up for six years.

PM: So you decided?

BM: I decided there was no ways.

PM: So you were in hiding then?

BM: Ja, semi-hiding for the first six months of '84. Travelling around the country and deepening these conscription advice group cells that had been set up to support those who were disobeying the call-up through any means. So, come June I leave the country and go to Zimbabwe and I was being debriefed completely and they put the question to me – “you know it's 1984, this is the year of the combatant. The slogan is ‘every patriot a combatant, every combatant a patriot.’” So that was the conversation. This guy was giving advice to people who arrived.

PM: The official launch of the ECC was only '84 wasn't it, although they already existed in '83?

BM: No, it was launched already towards the end of '83. Already structures were established.

Back to my recruitment to MK, I noticed about the ANC that if you were white you mostly had a job as some kind of propaganda writer, intellectual, advisor, but not a soldier. If you were black you were mostly a soldier. And I thought – hang on, there's something wrong here. Why should I – just because I'm white and educated – say that I'm too good to be a soldier. I thought it was the same ethical arguments as to why I shouldn't fight for the SADF; also obliged me to say – once I'd been asked the question – yes, to join MK. So I said “Yes, I would do that.” And I was in an ANC unit there for six months, where we did training in underground work, propaganda work, but no military work. I think it was about a day or two after New Year, January '85, I was at a party. It was getting quite late, having a nice time when I got a tap on the shoulder and this guy says to me, “we want you to leave on Monday for military training.” But I'd been prepared. I knew the time was coming. They had told me I would be going for three months and I must prepare a cover story. I'd been teaching Chemistry and Physics at one of the colleges there and so I'd planned what my story was going to be. I was going to say that I was going to Greece to teach two of my students who had now returned to Greece. They wanted me as a private tutor for three months. I spent the weekend – from that Friday to the Monday – not sleeping, just writing letters to myself as if I was in Greece, sent to members of the Greek Communist Party. I dated these letters, and I read *The Magus*, I forgot who wrote it?

PM: John Fowles.

BM: Ja, John Fowles, a brilliant book. And it gave me a lot of anecdotal information, as if I was living there. So I used that book to inspire my letters that I wrote then to my family in South Africa and my friends in Zimbabwe, but mainly South Africa, knowing that the Security Police would intercept them and confirm that I was in Greece.

PM: So you didn't write directly to the SADF?

BM: No, no. I wrote to my family – my sister, my brother and a couple of people in Zim, but I knew the letters to South Africa would be interfered with, and they certainly were (it came up later).

PM: So the SADF knew where you were, and they knew about your connection to the ANC?

BM: They knew I was in Zimbabwe Ja, they could put one and two together. They didn't know I was working in the ANC but thought I probably was. So when one disappears and joins the ANC you've probably gone for military training. Meantime these letters had been sent back. My parents had the opportunity to go on the first trip overseas of their lives and they decided they were going to go via Greece to see me (laughs). Of course, I've

got a *post restante* address which is a collect yourself address and I couldn't respond to their letters. They found this rather mysterious, but things happened. I actually ended up staying for nine months, not three months. So three months ran out quite quickly. And I went first of all to Zambia, during those nine months. In Zambia on my own I was met at the airport. Of course I didn't have the right documents for customs. I was trained to have eye contact with no one. I was terrified. As I was pushing my trolley through customs this guy comes up, calling me by name. Meantime I've always used a code name. "Hi Brett ... wadawadawada." It was my old friend from YCS (Young Christian Students) in Cape Town, called Mzi Khumalo, was working (I didn't know but I guessed; it turned out later) in the Communist Party Secretariat, and was also in charge of managing arrivals. Hey do I want to know this guy. "Come with me ..." he knew I was coming; I didn't know it was going to be him. Anyway, he sorts me out. I was doing my best to be incognito.

We flew on to Angola, and you got taken to a camp, an MK camp just outside of Luanda, and they do briefings. Every time you come to any hurdle of an ANC MK area you have to write your biography! And, thinking of that, if you're a spy you're going to make a mistake in your biography (obviously if you're an intelligent spy you won't). I'd never thought of that, but it was a routine requirement that you write your biography. And you try to write as little as possible because you don't want some fucker to know about you. As much as is needed to keep them okay, but you know you don't put details about where you're from because you know the likelihood is that at least twenty percent of the people you're meeting are spies, so you've got to look out for yourself. So don't give away where you're from, names of your family or anything about your personal background. Except for these so-called security guys, how do you trust them. So it's quite tricky. Next thing I'm on a plane to East Germany.

Interview E.

Kelwyn Sole (born 17 March 1951)

Interview conducted 15th June 2012

PM: I've called "Ovamboland," which was published in *Staffrider* in 1987, a narrative poem in fragments that presents an account of your experiences on the Angolan border during the period of the Border War from the seventies to the 80s. What I'd like is for you to tell me the story behind the poem – from its genesis to its publication, and also to reflect on its afterlife for you. When you reread that poem from where you are now, what experiences go on in your mind? Do you experience it mainly as a period piece – something firmly situated in its historical moment, or are there energies or undercurrents, shades or echoes there; a kind of continuity. How do you relate to the poem from where you are now. And, I suppose, on a kind of ethico-aesthetic level, when thinking about poetic language, did it aid you in digesting, morally, what you went through there? Or, to put it differently, did poetry help you in treating wounds (and I assume there were wounds), psychologically, on levels of felt emotion, lived experience? But please start by contextualising the poem for me.

KS: Okay, what I'll start with is to tell you about being in the South African army, and why I was in Ovamboland. I matriculated in 1968, and after that I decided to do my army training with what they called the commandos in those days. You could do it in such a way that you took a month or two months per year and do your training kind of piecemeal. A lot of university students at that time took that option. So I went once or twice a year. I took my training in Kimberley where the very big commando base was. And I went for two months in the first year, and a month of every year after that, and I did that for several years. I was trained as a machine-gunner (I was not very good at shooting anyway). You've got to understand that in those days it was quite interesting in that there was a notion that there was a threat on the border, but it wasn't immediate. And I remember one of my many training camps. One was at Lenz where we did nothing for a month but guard duty. We ate whatever we could find and lounged about. It was English and Afrikaans university students so we kind of got along. So it was, oddly enough, no sweat. The first year I was at University I had to go to commando in July and December. The following years I was mainly going in December during the varsity vacs. It was a system that didn't last. But I did this for a number of years, certainly beyond my undergraduate years. It ended up that I no longer had to go to Kimberley. My base was a little commando unit north of Johannesburg, and it was quite interesting because at that stage I was going through a kind of radicalisation at University – in a very young form, but it was still there. I eventually declared myself a conscientious objector. I still had to go to these things, but I wouldn't carry a gun. In those days they had provision for this. You had to do all the shit everyone else did but you wouldn't fight. That lasted a few years but I then left completely; they lost contact with me. I left to do an MA in England where I got involved with a woman who was Nehru's grand-daughter who was a fairly important politicising agent. This was now '74, '75 and when I came back from that I took a job at a school in Botswana, and in 1976, while in Botswana, one night four guys turn up at my bungalow and they're from Soweto on their way for military training. Somebody gave them my address. They were fleeing to MK, were basically schoolkids. I put them up for a night or two, and then they left. What I only discovered later was that one of the four was a police informer. I know this because I found him hanging around students in Joburg a year or two later. But when I came through to go to London to see my girlfriend I got zapped on the border. They were waiting for me, knew exactly when I was coming, and they took my passport away. I only saw that passport fourteen years later in 1990. What I then did when I got back to Joburg (now you're talking the beginning of '77) was write to the Minister of Defence, who was at that point P.W. Botha, and I more or less said to him – if you want me in the army, I want my privileges as a South African citizen. As a result of which some army guy turned up at my flat in Yeoville, with these huge eyes, and he says to me, "man what have you done? They wanted you at the army yesterday." And they threw me, I was dishonourably discharged from the army. So I don't have those pressures. I'm in the army at a time when they treat conscientious objectors more kindly. There's not the actual pressure of the law. So I was sitting in Joburg a little lost, and I decided to write to a guy called Ed Morrow who was a churchman in Namibia and offer my services as an English language

teacher. I'd been cut off from my girlfriend and was now stuck in South Africa. Prior to that I had decided never to live in South Africa again. The idea was that I would stay in Botswana and she would come and live with me once she had finished her degree. That fell apart. So Ed Morrow asked me to come and I ended up there in the middle of '78 and for a couple of months I worked as an organiser of English language teaching. In those days there was all this enthusiasm about learning English for liberation. The fact of the matter is that I lasted only a few months in that role because both Ed Morrow and the guy who was my immediate boss, Justin Ellis, got deported, thrown out of Namibia. And I ended up, weirdly enough, running this thing that was called the Christian Centre which later became the Council of Churches in Namibia. This was '78. So I spent a year or so running this organisation. I'm not religious, and there are some funny stories that I won't go into now. I was there at the time they were discussing forming the Council of Churches, and the organisation I was working for, and some of the churches, were seen as very SWAPO-inclined. What happened to me was that I was thrown out early in 1980. There was an Administrator-General guy called M.T. Steyn and he goes. The new guy arrives and I'm out. I am now declared an undesirable alien in Namibia by the South African government. Now in terms of law that is bizarre, very, very weird, because in effect what South Africa is claiming is that I'm being deported from South Africa. And I actually talked to lawyers up there and thought about taking this to court. And what they advised was that once you got back to Joburg they will simply ban you and not let you come back here. So I decided not to. So I had a short period, two years, in Namibia, and the Border War had started.

PM: So you weren't there as a soldier.

KS: I wasn't. I was there working for the churches, I travelled around a lot. We started some schools and development projects. But once or twice I travelled into the war zone, and the poem comes from when I went into Ovamboland with the church. We were supposed to be looking at church property and church schools. We didn't go into the actual operational area, but I was in places like Oshikati and to the north of Oshikati, including quite remote bush schools. When I first got to Namibia they wanted me to become headmaster of a school that was on the border. You could hear the mortars every night, between Namibia and Angola. They wanted me to be headmaster there and I said no way. And the guy who did become headmaster there said to me this is not going to last. He eventually got captured by SWAPO. They came to the school one night and hauled him out. What he told me was that one night it would be the South Africans, the next night it would be SWAPO, people coming through the school all the time, kids being recruited etc. SWAPO took him and tried to say that he was a South African spy and he spent several years in jail in Angola. When he was released it was as a South African spy, and the media asked what he had to say, and he said well, I'm not a spy. At which Nujoma started yelling and screaming – we'll put you back in jail. So that's what I missed. If I had ended up in that school I would have been meat caught between the two wheels of the grinding machine. I was back in South Africa a few months into 1980. I think what happened was that there was a lot of tit-for-tatting going on, and what happened was that there was by that stage again a group of teachers in the school and I called in two mates of mine from Cape Town. One of them now ran the school, under me as such. What happened was that in late '79 we worked out that one of the teachers was an informer. Now I would have left her alone because for me it's best to know where your informer is, but it happened in such a way that the other teachers knew about it, and I had to fire her. And I think my deportation was retaliation for firing her. What they did a year or two earlier was ... we had libraries of banned books because there was this thing that the church had that we were not part of South Africa and did not abide by its rules. We'd struck a deal with the Security Police that I would take the banned material out of the libraries and put them in a loft cupboard in my office. So what they did when they wanted to deport me was to simply say we found you with a whole lot of banned material, even though they told me to put it there. And they took books such as Carlos Fuentes' *Change of Skin*, a book on astronomy called *The Exploding Universe* (laughs). You know they really didn't know what they were doing. Anyway, I was set up, it was as simple as that. There was a kind of tit-for-tat going on then. Also, my memory was that SWAPO was all over the place at that time. There were opposing factions within SWAPO who were coming to me outside of the situation and asking what do we do, so SWAPO was a mess too. It was an incredibly volatile situation.

PM: So that was the context underlying your poem?

KS: Ja, that's why it was a very different context to everyone else. I was fortunate enough to have been kicked out of the South African army.

PM: I'd assumed upon reading it that you'd been there?

KS: Most people would assume that ...

PM: And that's why I spoke of wounds earlier on, but you were more of an observer. With that particular sequence where you're referred to as "Calvin Sore" I assumed you were just a conscript?

KS: No that was actually at a roadblock and this guy couldn't spell my name and he wrote Calvin Sore and I thought wow, that has to go into a poem. But most of what's in the poem actually went on there; I don't think any of it is much fictionalised. I mean, the churches were particularly big in Angola, in Ovamboland, and this particular church had a German wing and a Finnish wing, and you'd have this weird thing in Ovamboland of these bright Ovambo students going to Finland to study. So this guy in the poem was a real deal. I didn't use his real name, but there he was, sitting in this house in a war zone as a builder for the church and there was a sauna (I've never forgotten this) – they had a sauna in Angola where it's never below 30 degrees!

PM: And that character, Reimo Hakonnen was Finnish?

KS: Ja, as I say I changed names, but very little else. So a lot of that I suppose I imagined, if anything, the very last piece about the girl on the bicycle. Ja, that's imagined, but most of the rest of it is little vignettes I put together, that I saw, things that happened to me.

PM: That last scene I read as a statement of your position, your affiliation?

KS: Ja it was that. It was also a statement of how in a war both sides get caught up in this weird milieu in which they're in opposition but have other things on their minds than having enemies around them, if you know what I mean?

PM: Ja, and also for me there was an element of menace in the fact that children, so many children, were amputees, hit by landmines. There was a sense that this girl might ride onto a landmine.

KS: You know I remember once or twice feeling utter fear, and once I felt I was being watched. We were going along one of the main roads to Oshikati and I suddenly saw a car that had hit a landmine. I still remember I went cold, and this happened once or twice that I would see things that made me scared. What was the other thing that frightened me? Sun City, Bophutatswana also frightened me. That I didn't make up obviously.

PM: And the character Reimo Hakonnen survived a landmine blast?

KS: That was fictional, I don't know what happened to the guy. I do remember at times we were driving the cars on tiny bush roads and that was really scary. But even the scene of me on the toilet, with the big spider, was real. The experience of sitting there with these footsteps going past and thinking – who could that be? I just sat as still as possible. So I was kicked out of the army before they started putting a screw on conscientious objectors. And before there was really combat. Before then I don't think they had really involved conscripts in it much.

PM: Well, it was happening in the early eighties on the border.

KS: But I do remember in Windhoek seeing these South African guys who had obviously been given passes and were just sitting on the steps of shops. You could see they didn't really know what to do with themselves. You

could see they were pretty high. I'd gone through a hippy phase and I know dagga, so I could see them – these young young boys goofed out of their heads. So that's where the poem comes from.

PM: Did you write the poem then or subsequently?

KS: I wrote it subsequently. I put bits of it in *Staffrider*, I can't remember when.

PM: The complete poem is in an issue of *Staffrider* published in 1987.

KS: Ah. I only got back to my poetry (having decided to become a poet while at school where I had a very romantic idea about it), but with the kind of mindset at that stage I decided the struggle was more important, so I just gave it up, didn't bother. But after I was back in Joburg in the mid- to late eighties I started writing bits and pieces again. I can't remember it coming out as a complete poem in *Staffrider*. Certainly it comes out in the first book, *Blood of our Silence* ...

PM: I assume I've read the complete poem in a 1987 issue of *Staffrider*. It certainly reads as such.

KS: Really? There are two or three poems set in Namibia in *Blood of our Silence*. The one is called Hewat. It was the name of a SWAPO activist called Hewat Beukes. A very interesting kind of situation because he was in Reheboth and his wife was Erica Beukes and I really admired her. She was a tough activist. Now there's this kind of fairly shameful period in SWAPO after I'd gone when they started shooting a lot of people as spies, and Erica's brother was shot, as well as my original boss in Windhoek was shot. It's either when Nujoma first came back, or when he's president, I'm not sure but I've seen the footage – there's a woman starts screaming at him and that's Erica Beukes. She's saying to him – what's happened to my brother? You sod, you shot my brother.

A lot of my poems I would see in jazz terms, kind of variations on a theme, and "Ovamboland" is like that. As I've said to you the most synthetic thing about it is the ending, very calculated, as you said, to show which side I'm on, but also to show the weird situation that children and young people found themselves in – the soldier on the one side who's thinking about sex basically with pictures from *Scope* all over the place, and the woman on the bicycle.

PM: Well those impressions, and what I referred to as narrative fragments, made it quite exceptional compared with the kind of poetry that was appearing through the 1980s, so much of which was univocal, just political rhetoric. And a poem like this works very well because it presents a range of viewpoints, such that there is more dimension and depth to the political commitment, the allegiance that is stated at the end. It works as a more powerful political statement than the Mzwakhe Mbuli-type of rhetoric that was popular during that time.

KS: I guess my political poetry has always been about showing allegiance, but showing that things aren't one-dimensional. That's how I see "Ovamboland." It shows that there's very weird kinds of human interaction. In that war zone it was very easy to get caught up in stuff that you didn't know, had no ability to tell who you were or what you believed in. You just got caught between, as I said, these two juggernauts. That's partly what I was trying to do in that poem. A lot of my wounds have been about being frustrated at how easily people fall into old positions, particularly racial cultural positions, and my poetry was the only thing that wasn't stymied post-apartheid in the nineties. Poetry was a way for me to have questions not directly related to politics, but to kind of show that they fit together. You know, there's this whole thing about the everyday, the ordinary, and my kind of take is that, at the same time as war and politics are happening, two teenagers are riding on a bicycle, with slight sexual tension even – these other aspects that don't necessarily conform to political imperatives. I brought out a piece in *New Formations* that argued that the everyday is infused with politics, but it's politics in the broad sense. I'm less impressed with writers who see their politics as simply supporting one party. I think politics should infuse a much greater sense of your reality. That's been pretty much my stance, which hasn't changed much since the mid-80s. It kind of answers some of the questions you're asking.

PM: Yes, these are interesting responses to what I called wounds. I was obviously thinking you had been there as a combatant, but you were more of an observer and there were different kinds of wounds that you've been speaking about.

KS: What happened to me in the early 80s when I move to Joburg is that I became very politically visible. I lived in Yeoville and became part of the post-student left. That time took its toll on me – the 80s in Joburg was not a fun time. I was quite heavily victimised in the beginning, they gave me a very hard time – just kind of surveillance stuff, the bugging of phones that I got quite good at finding; police raids. It was funny because what started happening by about '85 was a kind of split in the left. You've got those Yeoville people who are probably in the ANC, but you don't know it. And there's a group of mainly older ones like myself – people I was particularly close to who were much more critical about joining the ANC. And it came out at one point because the UDF set up a thing called JODAC for young whites and we set up a thing called the Yeoville Debating Society which was critical. I gave the first speech and, clearly, there was this guy sitting there looking all solemn, a white dude who has obviously been planted to hear what we say. And then I went to some JODAC meetings, and the first one I go to this guy comes up to me and says, "very good to see you Kelwyn, a voice of dissent is a very good thing" you know, that kind of thing, somebody needs to write about it! But clearly there was a split, with the younger generation feeling they needed to belong, and the older generation feeling more distanced from it all. And what I realised, very slowly, was that I probably have a mild form of post-traumatic stress because I know when I first came to Cape Town in '87 I just wanted to bury my head, cut myself off from the past, and I kind of had this desire to just put my head down and go into a cave for a while. In retrospect I see I was quite stressed out. You know it had been cumulative, what with Botswana and Namibia and then being in the Joburg left. I think a lot of people were.

PM: It was a very turbulent time, the 80s, which is part of why I'm focusing my attention on it – because of the effects it had on my generation, a bit younger than yours.

KS: I think that it's the younger generation that really copped it majorly. We didn't quite. I mean, I was partly politicised because there was this thing called black consciousness in the 1970s, so it's way before the squaring up. In the 70s the ANC is hardly a presence as far as I'm concerned. I mean you had this left in Johannesburg, at Wits, and at UCT, but it's very ephemeral and in the air and not rooted in anything at all, I think. So in a sense it was like my army experience, it was nasty but I dodged the really heavy stuff, by chance really. I mean, I wouldn't have liked to put myself in the position of someone who was a conscientious objector in the 1980s.

PM: The story of David Bruce is interesting. He was taken on by the ECC almost as an icon and it turns out that his story is some way away from the image that was created of him. He created his own path ...

KS: That's hard, because you are created in other people's images. There's this battle going on and you're supposed to fit into a certain position within it.

PM: And he didn't, or only partially. He spoke of himself as "nobody's useful idiot."

KS: There are a lot of useful idiots around nowadays.

PM: Groupings were trying to squash him into moulds.

KS: That's quite traumatic. I suppose in my case when I think about wounds they came from trying to maintain a position I actually believed in morally and politically, in the face of ... and you have to keep your head down. I was critical in the 80s, but I wasn't that critical, or I would have been zapped. I was seen as much closer to the ANC than I was ... There have been horrible instances of people compromising a kind of individual morality for the sake of taking a stance ... What's going on with my latest volume of poems, *Absent Tongues*, is almost an

echo of my first, *Blood of Our Silence*...the concept of silence and speaking, that's always been there. But *Blood of our Silence* is more about the wounds of keeping silent, more of a double entendre. This is about what about those tongues that don't speak, how do you speak on behalf of, how do you not speak on behalf of ... One of the criticisms I got for that was that there's a lot too much first person plural in it. But I do that deliberately; it's a question of whether you like it or not. I've constantly had a thing about silence and who is allowed to speak. *Blood of our Silence* is more about the wounds that come from being silent, or that even silence has its own blood – the wounds of people that don't speak.

* * * * *

Ovamboland⁸³ by Kelwyn Sole

Lake Otjikoto lies azure
round a bend in the road,
and wakens you
after miles of sleepy veld,
trees which gesture warnings.

There is a prehistoric frog
on four wheels
squatting in the carpark
a sick blotched brown,
its steel chassis canted up
into a v
to lessen landmine blasts.

At the lake they sit,
three policemen,
two white and one black.
Slowly they feed the fish
their sandwich crumbs.

We stare in wonder:
improbable peace has spread
its blankets
on the body of the morning

small tilapia
flick like solace to the surface
of our waking dreams
and disappear once more
slapping waves upon the edge:
a brigandage of jays
has shown up in the withaaks, start
to gabble for the bread.

Suddenly there's a
— SCREAM — like tearing paper
through the sky, and one Mirage,
no two, THREE! cleave
the air at tree-top height

in tight formation,
arrows of death, arrows of portent
directly overhead:

recoil.
The birds are gone.

The pictures on the lake scrubbed off.

And they sigh,
gather their remaining lunch
the peels and the eggshells
and climb back into the darkness

of their patrol

* * *

Roadblock. Figures
order cars off the road
between flashing red lights.

A crouching man in camouflage
prises our hubcaps with a bayonet

black passengers are jostled together
in long lines and searched

gets up with cracking knees
pokes our doors' lining an

old man is led away
protests in Ndonga⁸⁴
his splayed feet pull
at the useless earth we're motioned

to the table.

'Jou naam?' to me.
— Ferrets in his ear
with the butt of a pencil
half listens

⁸³ The version of this poem reproduced here appeared in *Staffrider*, Vol. 6 No 4, 1987.

⁸⁴ Ndonga, Kwanyama – dialects of the Ovambo language. (Oshivambo)

scratches his belly with his
non-writing hand then writes
with great care
tongue tip held between teeth

CALVIN SORE —
meticulously sketching the boils
onto my puritan soul

* * *

From the window of the car,
a burnt-out
car. We look at it,
and sweat.

* * *

So, late, we hurried
as the late afternoon flung grey
across the grey road
and covered with clouds
the sunset's flow and blister

we had no time to see
that Ovamboland is perversely beautiful:

arrived at Onandjokwe
just before the curfew

'Don't,' said our host, 'go
outside after dark. There's a path
here that people' (emphasized, a smile)
'sometimes use.'

Throwing belongings in a chest,
darkness pressing in, I felt
my bowels wrench and stiffen
dashed outside into the close evening
looking for an outhouse.

A drop of water on the thatch,
then another, and it seemed the heavens
must have opened like a sewer
the first downpour of spring

and me bemused,
too dry to run and too terrified to stay,
vacillated far too long.

By time the unending roar
of water began to ease
it was eleven o'clock. Outside
the blackness grew intense,
a mighty fist that clutched no moon.

A muscular spider pulled itself
into view on the cistern
and glared at me:

then, to my added horror,
footsteps crunched stealthily
past the door.

I sat in the dark and contemplated
this first heroic encounter
the passage of a leftist
in search of new experience

my first night in the war zone,
spent sitting on a toilet

* * *

— and the other space of fear:
'a landmine victim's face will freeze
so he looks like a laughing mule
his upper lip pushed up
by the fiery blast of air
and a betrayed grin
of surprise', he says

'landmine victims who don't die
usually lose their pecker and both legs
in any case.

There are only two
ways to drive in this screwed-up country
watch the road in front of you
like it was your mother-in-law
or drive like hell'

(inching through the drifts of sand
more jumpy than you'll admit
where a half buried coke tin
's enough to cause you panic)

'— you'll get used to it'

(the crackle of shots in the night
firecrackers
cut short)

and the worst moment of all
drinking with three friends
at a bar in Oshakati
all red plush and flies

the door bangs open:
a drunk Home Guard
Pushes a woman in, kicks and slaps her

she screams 'fuck off, go to hell!'

a large pink brassiere
flops from her torn t-shirt
SUN CITY BOPHUTHATSWANA

to our minds, he's polite enough:

a lover's quarrel, merely —
we gulp our drinks
carefully ignore

the rocket launcher strapped
to his sodden back

* * *

Here the policemen go barechested
and the makakunyas,⁸⁵ young boys, spit
on their country: last night
a store was destroyed by 'persons unknown'

the police blame the guerillas,
the guerillas blame the police;

and the small trader
caught in these sudden eruptions
like dog's vomit on the ground

sat up in bed (knowing which side he was on)
and wondered
which side
was on him

* * *

The bodies pile in the morning,
found in neat rows
next to the homestead palisades

In front of the sights —
a six-month child, its face
blown away by the careless
gesture of a finger:
a cast off doll
that was his mother,
her chest tattooed with bayonet thrusts

They are easy to delineate

Behind the sights —
a question mark

What did he think of,
afterwards?

* * *

The army, the headman says,
have taken to noting
those villages they think
feed the swapo's

plant landmines
under bushes in the area,

⁸⁵ makakunyas – local slang for homeguards

carefully smooth over
the disturbed earth

and strew the ground with sweets

* * *

Reimo Hakonnen, fifty, balding
with a wife and two boys, lives
in a pink sprawling bungalow of stone
under a huge fig tree
fifty yards off the dirt road.

You can hear his rueful laugh
as the army convoys
spread dust on its fitful leaves
on winter days,
wending their stubborn path
to the north.

— It's not the best of times, here.

The school you can see
from the west verandah
is deserted now, students fled
past the borders for military training
or southwards to the mines.

Their lonely goalposts lean like drunken sailors
on the plain.

Once, he says, you could look
eastwards past the mission lands past forever
where the cucimbas⁸⁶ jewel the plain
to the wisping shouts of children fishing
lifting their flamingo legs in the water;
the cobwebs of skein nets raised and dipped
even real flamingoes

— once, he says, young girls
would promenade on Sundays
twirl parasols as bright as parakeets
rest under the palm trees at noon
and politely refrain from gossip
only about each other.

Reimo Hakonnen is a builder,
and has lived here sixteen years.
The Hakonnens still eat cold meat and bread,
tomatoes and cheese for every meal
and say their grace seriously
while spiders watch from the thatch above.
There's a sauna in their yard.

The children speak
no Afrikaans, no English,
but Finnish and Kwanyama⁸⁷
Sometimes they dance in the heat
round and round
round and round

⁸⁶ cucimbas – shallow perennial pools in Ovamboland

⁸⁷ Ndonga, Kwanyama – dialects of the Ovambo language.
(Oshivambo)

then squint at the sky
and try to not fall over.

He leaves early in the morning,
silently. His hands lead him
as if by instinct to the new school
the church is building further down the road.
Else he travels over the factious countryside,
instructing the need to listen to your palms,
the use of wood and stone.
When asked if he is ever scared,
he only smiles.

Months later
in neglectful Windhoek
I hear he finally drove his bakkie
over a double landmine:
the result looked
like a giant lizard took a bite
out of the engine block.
Reimo Hakonnen, however, stood up
and walked away from the wreckage
almost apologetically.

And still, from time to time,
friends of mine
journalists and voyeurs
speak of his wife, his hospitality,
the house's cool interior
and his inscrutable children. I hear

he lives on with his ordinary courage,
with patience and with forbearance
through the cursory war

* * *

I see your coloration, your ghost
much clearer than did yourself
when you traded sight for obedience
and the futile doctrines of your skin

so when your truck danced
on the road of your amazed innocence
and your death spat from the sand
in one enormous tongue
and the legs came apart from your body
and the blood ran, placidly
into the disregard of a foreign land
it was too late for questions,

too late a humbling, the rage
pulls back your lips now without speech
without a face
and the words lost from your tattered mouth
accepting flies like raisins:
the realization you were tricked
by a Humpty Dumpty parliament perched
on the spattered walls of its army.

Everything's the same.
It is too hot this summer
to mourn long for the ruptured dead
or the herd boy child you one day shot
who stood in the way of your heavy gun.

I mourn instead
the contempt of our false rulers
for all the flesh they crucify:

you're a victim too,
you fool.

From the tail of their eyes
(a blue set, and two brown)
two teenagers watch each other
surreptitiously

the one
is under orders,
hides from an ardent sun
in the shadow of the dugout roof.
Scope girls strew the sweating floor —

obsessed with them, he sighs
and tilts his machinegun embarrassedly
towards a distant road.

On the road
the other, laughing.
Her bike teeters with a load
of milk and oshikundu

the spokes wink bottle-tops

and from her saddlebag
three streamers wave behind

a defiant blue, red and green⁸⁸

Kelwyn Sole

⁸⁸ blue, red and green – Swapo colours

Interview F.

Garth Mason (born 3rd September 1965)

Interview conducted 26th October 2012

“... the battle you didn’t want to fight becomes the chorus of your life ...”

PM: I would like you to tell me your story about your responses to conscription into the SADF in the 1980s, from schooldays when it first became a reality – how you responded to the call-up literally, and thereafter. Also, the effects of this on your life subsequently.

GM: Well, you know it’s the truth that we grew up in a highly militarised society, and my earliest encounter with the military was with a Christmas present I got when I was in Grade 1 or 2. I think it was something I’d asked for, really wanted. It was a camouflage war uniform, and I had all these badges and a US flag I’d collected from somewhere, and stars, and I had these insignia sewed onto the uniform. This gift also came with a plastic helmet and a gun, along with a leather bandana I’d got from my grandfather (probably a World War 2 heirloom). I loved these things you know, somehow I loved uniforms and played these imaginary war games with myself for hours. Battling, dying and being revived again. When I was in Standard 2 (Grade 4 now) when I was ten years old, that was the first time I remember thinking, the reality dawning, that there was this call-up. At that time – the early days of television in 1975 – there was a battle in Angola called Operation Savannah that was dramatised. The SADF intervening in the Angolan Civil War. In this country there was this military ethos, uncritically embraced. I remember watching this dramatised battle on SABC TV and, for the first time, it dawned on me that I would have to go into the army, that there was no way out. There was this feeling of horror. I didn’t want to do this, go into the army, and I remember thinking I don’t understand what this is all about in terms of who was the enemy, what was portrayed as forces out there waiting to invade. Certainly the way it was portrayed the enemy was ... it wasn’t the *swartgevaar* at all. It was just this amorphous unspoken enemy that needed to be destroyed. That was the first time I thought about such things. What also struck me was that they weren’t fighting in South Africa. It was in a foreign land, and this also filled me with fear. It was a fear that I didn’t understand what this war was about. Nevertheless, it was something inescapable. And that fear was seated in me throughout my schooldays. I realised then, at the age of ten, that I could not do this. It wasn’t a political realisation at that stage. Whatever the society was, what it required me to do, I was unable to do it.

PM: Obviously you couldn’t intellectualise it then, just felt it.

GM: It was something you couldn’t speak in such a male-dominated society. It really started forming my identity, my masculine identity, at that time. It’s only upon reflection that I can realise how this happened, how I started defining my maleness in opposition, contrary to the prevailing masculinity in the country. There were probably a lot of boys in that situation, but they were without voice. But it started cutting out a sense of oneself which said one didn’t belong. And trying to find a place for oneself, very clumsily trying to create an identity for yourself within the schooling environment which was geared towards the militarisation of the youth. It impacted on all levels of society – from the way your sexuality was constructed to the way that you were or were not accepted by society if you followed those mores or didn’t, the values society held as acceptable. So I certainly developed into an outsider, socially awkward. But, as you say, it was not intellectual, a cognitively grasped process. It wasn’t something that you could write about and try to make sense of; all I lived with was a sense of fear. What I was going to have to do, how I was going to deal with it. As the time approached – Grade 10 – when the army arrived at the school and we had to give them our names to put on their lists, I think from then on, at 15 or 16, it was coming. It never left you. Well, it never left me – that this day was coming to deal with this call-up. When I think back now there were positive sides to it because it led me into an intellectual life. It forced me to think. It forced me to be alternative in my thinking and to see a value in that. And of course there was a pretentiousness in that way of thinking at times. But I think what took a long time to resolve itself was the

... how should I say ... let me say one's sexuality didn't develop normally. When I think back I see that we lived in a society that – because it was so male-dominated and militaristic – your sexuality had to find other avenues to develop; there weren't many options at that time. There wasn't the variety of masculinities that there are today. So really I certainly grew up with a lot of insecurity, feelings of inferiority, displaced bravado – just trying to find a way to express oneself. So that was the school experience, and I suppose the university years were the deferment years. There were the different strategies one used. I did Classics and never went to one lecture, didn't write the Exams, so I took it to fail, to extend my degree to four years. You were allowed eight years to study in those days without interference. And I extended it to nine because at that stage I was finishing my Masters and had become a junior lecturer. You know, it was eight years, but there was finality to it – after eight years you had to deal with this issue.

PM: Clarify the dates for me. Your matric year was?

GM: '83, came to university in 1984. I got my BA in '87 and my Honours in '88, and I spent three and a half years doing my Masters. I managed to get deferment for nine years and by that stage the military structure was collapsing. But I got my call-up and there were no more deferments. I got my final train ticket in '92, so it must have been a July call-up. Obviously I didn't go and fetch it. And I remember panicking, worrying about it. Things were changing so fast, apartheid was dying, its limbs already in the grave. I phoned the ECC one night at their office in Yeoville and asked them what I could do. They said that legally they couldn't give any advice. They weren't allowed to tell me what I should do. They could provide support if I decided to object. But what I was phoning for was to know what they thought – was this going to last? Could I ride it out? Luckily I could, because the next year things collapsed before the election. But it affected so many us – friends of mine were in hiding; internal exile, others left the country, others went in and didn't last there. So these different strategies of avoidance had been played out.

PM: Just to take you back awhile to the '80s, when you were at University, what kinds of shifts were there for you, if your sense of resistance was consolidated? In other words, did you get more of a political sensibility?

GM: Well, it's strange how fear develops, how it becomes part of your personality. Definitely there was always that ten year old – the absolute horror of thinking that one day you would be holding a gun, being shot at or killing somebody. That wasn't political then, but that fear stayed with you. I didn't want ever to be in such a situation. It was anathema to my being - in a war situation. I was never part of the political left, although I did participate in extra-governmental and anti-apartheid educational organisations, but I didn't see myself as part of the liberation struggle. As you became conscientised at university the absurdity of going into the army and defending apartheid became obvious, but for me it was about the horror. It wasn't a political stance for me. It was just the horror of being forced into a situation you didn't believe in. It was a gut response ... to the point that I didn't want to participate in political struggle. There was that group of 147 guys who made a public statement that they wouldn't participate, co-ordinated by the ECC. And I said I would be part of that and the night before I pulled out.

PM: So you were asked to?

GM: Yes, I was going to do it, be part of that first group. So I didn't want to be identified with a political grouping.

PM: So you withdrew from that public statement of refusal to serve?

GM: Ja, I didn't want to. For me it was a gut response. It was about that first and long-standing realisation – that this was so contrary to my being, I couldn't do it. What was being asked was evil. I didn't want anything to do with it, even political opposition to it, although my hatred at that stage for the Afrikaner was immense (and I don't think that was anything unusual). I mean I couldn't even study Afrikaans at school, got an F for it in

Matric because of how I had created a persona for Afrikaners. And now that I've worked with Afrikaans people I can see that it was an imposition. But it was the militarised experience that was thrust upon me through the State media. A lot of the deep anxiety and agitation that I've had to deal with was formed by the army. I suppose it was a central point in many of our lives. And I suppose if you think about personality development, the centrifugal forces that construct your personality and identity, it's deeply damaging if that force is one of horror. It's like it's this hollow vortex you don't want to look at and can't participate in and that's informing what decisions you make and what unconscious movements your life takes. So what happens is your life's course becomes one of deferment. It's terrible that I had to waste so much time. I feel frustrated about that now. If you went into the army it was a matter of deferment because you couldn't invest in your life. It was a profoundly damaging legacy, shaping your life.

PM: It's an interesting point you make there – that you're living your life by deferring it.

GM: It's a matter of not knowing when you're going to start living your life. All I know is that I cannot do a certain thing.

PM: But knowing that doesn't necessarily help because there it is like a Sword of Damocles. It's waiting for you.

GM: The personality I've inherited, that's developed, is one of absentness. I absented myself, and I still do it. I know I've managed to make a life, career-wise and family-wise, so I'm not an outsider. But I feel like an outsider. I feel very awkward about being thrust into a limelight situation. And perhaps that's just me, an inherent shyness perhaps. But I don't discount the fact that factors were very influential. And you know it wasn't just the army, although it was as you say a Sword of Damocles hanging there. But there were the teachers that took part in that whole culture, male and female. We grew up in an incredibly violent society – being hit, having things thrown at you, being insulted. The kind of nurturing our kids have now, everything is structured around nurturing. There was nothing of nurturing in the way we were brought up. Possibly they were saying then it was ways of toughening us up. But it wasn't that – it was a process of violence. So what one did with that – some people managed a sort of jocularly, other allowed themselves to be toughened up. But one just cringed with fear at this type of thing. But, you know, there was an element of looking within, and that was good, and I still say we developed a critical frame of mind, and that was good.

PM: In response?

GM: Yes, and I don't see that in the youth today. There were positive aspects that became part of us.

PM: I suppose there was a sort of counter-definition at work, because you had a very clear definition coming from the State and obviously the army was just an organ of the State. And if you felt deeply averse to that you had to go about defining yourself against that?

GM: Yes, setting oneself up against the norm. But it's so sad – I look at colleagues of mine who are Afrikaans and imagine what they would have been like at school – they were just as desperate as I am now, struggling to find their identity, struggling to maintain their Afrikaans identity. They are more or less contemporaries of mine, perhaps a little older. So I look back with some compassion because there was often the case of the bully hiding his own fear. I suppose that the way that my life has happened is that it takes time, and I don't believe in goals, working towards meeting certain targets because of that very early experience. You know, the feeling that life was moving very slowly. Some might have been lucky in a sense and stayed in one job all their lives, chugged along. One thing that hasn't been adequately addressed is the lack of investment; the lack of investment in our lives.

PM: I suppose that links to this idea of being absent from your life that you mentioned earlier. When you speak of investment, are you speaking not of investment in self, but the investment of society, even of parents, schooling, the social structure, in oneself – which is very different from what you mentioned as the nurturing energy of this generation, our children. So what you're speaking about is a feeling of adriftness as a youth?

GM: Definitely. And in a way it's helped in terms of living in a post-apartheid society because I haven't felt the threat of losing my identity. But there's a lack of investment, an underlying depression that's always there. I think that has always been there – that I'm not leading my life; there's a hollowness to it. It was the battle one didn't want to fight that becomes the defining chorus of your life. Then you don't fight the real battle of your life, if you want to use that metaphor that life is about the struggle to overcome. But I think that now, at the age of forty seven, and for the first time in my life, I've started to feel, had flashes of seeing that there is a meeting of identity and experience. And I wonder if that's a common experience – starting to feel, in one's late 40s, that one is beginning to walk in some kinds of synchronous motion. A sense that this is me here, and it's a strange feeling because the fear has gone, but there's a sense of deep loss, of time lost. So you know, I've just finished this PhD, and the reason I have so many corrections to do is that I was so driven to do this thing. I did it in eighteen months, but it was almost to catch up because I'd lost so much time, that I had to do this thing before the end of the year – an intent to catch up, make up for lost time. It was something I could have done in my twenties, early thirties, but the processes weren't in place psychologically. I suppose I could have done it ... there were other factors at play – I got retrenched, divorced. All that impacted on me – the academic career. But, you know, there was always that experience of deferral with the army, so there was never a sense of I want to do this. For the first time in my life now there was this sense of wanting to do this PhD, because it was time now to actually do something, to invest in my life and take this course. When I was an academic before I was just drifting along, didn't really think of it as a career, as a life journey, something I wanted to do with my life.

PM: You just found yourself in a life and kept yourself there to avoid the army?

GM: Yes, it's part of what I'm going through now. You know, they talk about the early thirties as the time you're going about establishing a course for your life. For me it's happening at the age of forty seven. Look, it's not specific to me. If you were a 47 year old black man the story would also be one of lost time through disadvantage. So these are different stories and one can only tell one's own. So you don't want to just tell your own victim story because there are many stories of damage. It's important that these stories are told. As this thing called conscription loomed there was always the sense of what am I going to do about it then, what are the strategies of avoidance. I never really explored addiction to drugs, but I can see how that would have worked as a strategy of avoidance. But I certainly escaped into fantasy, fantasising about how I could have lived my life – which is a bad habit.

PM: How you could have lived your life?

GM: Well, how I could. I suppose you project these fantasy narratives onto things – how this is going to play out, how that's going to play out. And these are other aspects of deferral. You know, actually live the experience.

PM: What you've said is that this army thing created a consciousness, a way of being in the world that was detrimental to carving a path?

GM: But when I think of myself at the age of twenty-four at University I see that it wasn't a path. It was a place where I was hanging out, deferring. It's not necessarily just a matter of a career path, but a sense that one has a purpose, a direction – that I never had.

PM: You compare yourself, and I suppose that's at the root of some of these fantasies.

GM: You have to catch yourself, say what the hell am I doing playing games with my mind and emotions? This is your life, just live it for God's sake! And in many ways my spirituality was related to deferral, a means of escape. I escaped into esoteric spiritual things. My spirituality is far more Zen-oriented now. My approach to my life is Zen. It's about conscious living, about being awake now, nothing special really.

PM: So you say you can understand your spirituality in relation to this deferral of life, this adriftness?

GM: Definitely. Transcendence certainly wasn't gained from lived experience. I think my spirituality came home when I could face the now. Not now in terms of a mystical sense; just treading water, shoveling shit, that kind of thing.

PM: Chopping wood, carrying water; what's the sound of one hand clapping? (laughter)

GM: So I think I'm fortunate to have come through it and be in a position now in which I've found my life, despite the time lost. Many were damaged far more than I was.

PM: Do you think your choice, if you can call it that, of going into internal exile made it easier for you to emerge from it?

GM: But that wasn't an option; it simply happened. It wasn't a conscious choice of going into internal exile. I was just deferring, and thank God apartheid collapsed because I don't know what I would have done. There was no choice; it was just a matter of hanging in there. But let's say it hadn't collapsed and I got that ticket – I don't know what the fuck I would have done. At that stage I was married in '91 and in a job. I don't know what I would have done. Fortunately I was not forced into it, there's no hero's story, there was no making of decisions – am I going to do this, am I going to do that? It was just a desert of deferral. Some people were more courageous than I was in response to the horror of it. If there was anything about it was that I was true to myself – I knew I couldn't do this and there was no way I was even going to try to convince myself that I could.

PM: You couldn't be swayed, and you knew that from a young age. It's clear you didn't have to go to university to be politicised in order to know that you would not go into the South African Defence Force. You mentioned earlier notions of masculine identity and what that amounts to, and how narrow the conception of it was in the society in which we lived.

GM: It affected one's being affirmed or not, because one didn't participate in the image-making, such that girls weren't attracted to you. I'm sure there were girls who also didn't feel part of that militarised masculinity, but they weren't in the foreground, so one always felt rejected and one's entry into the life of relationships came late. There was a lot of insecurity around that, which is unfortunate, looking back, unnatural. The current generation are exploring relationships at school, whereas as many of us only started to do so at university. There was a very narrowly defined sense of sexual attractiveness, sexual entry points, masculinity. I'm sure girls had the same kinds of experiences of what was acceptable, what was considered attractive. So one definitely had a sense of deficit in terms of one's sexuality, which I still carry with me. These days there are more avenues for self-expression, more recognition. Terms that were bandied about then to define other – moffie or leftie or other derogatory terms. These terms we grew up with and they're no longer around, they're historical notions that aimed to pin people down. That was the world we lived in.

Interview G.

David Josey (born 25th September 1960)

Interview conducted 18th October 2012

“And my not going into the army meant I wasn’t a man.”

PM: I would like you to offer me an account of your path in relation to conscription from your schooldays through to the present, in terms of effects those experiences on your life.

DJ: [the testimony sets off with a lengthy account of the origins of a deep-lying insecurity and alienation that grew from his dynamic with his Afrikaans mother at the age of six months – a dynamic characterised by incapacity on both sides to recognise and respond to the other. He claims that this experience of alienation, narrated to him (by his mother) later in his life, played a significant role in his orientation toward structured or organisational modes of living, especially his schooling and compulsory military service]

... once I’d been to Hillbrow hiding from the military, and hiding from them (my parents) because they were telling the military where I was. What happened in Hillbrow was a personal transformation in that I really got time and space; it was a good space to grow. What I say here filters into the ways I responded to conscription. At high school I made every effort to get expelled from the boys’ school I was at. I was possessed by the need to have a liaison with a girl; and I was entirely disillusioned with the teaching which seemed of no use to me. I was tired of hearing about a guy called Wolraad Woltemade in primary school year after year and the Great Trek at high school. My grandfather on my father’s side had been an aerial photographer during the war. What these guys did was go out over enemy territory and take photographs for bombing purposes. And they would send the aerial photographer out afterwards to see the damage. I went to a total of about thirteen schools. In Grade 10, as part of an effort to get expelled, I wrote Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year on all my Exam Papers. All I really wanted was to have a girlfriend. I eventually went to a day school, hoping to sit at the back of the class and not to be noticed by anybody. What actually happened after I went in was that everybody seemed to know who I was. I had this reputation as a fearless bad guy so people treated me with a lot of respect. And that was kind of detrimental because it was really cool to be a bad guy and really difficult to turn away from and everyone wanted to be my buddy, including girls. But I was very shy and kept my distance. I fell in with what everybody expected of me. Before the end of that year I had been in prison and had a probation officer. I knew that school was of no use to me, and I began to feel I was insane; I was like nobody else. I went to Boys’ Town for children with behavioural problems and family problems. Everything the authorities said my parents would accept. It was the same with the army.

PM: So already a dynamic with the army was being set up?

DJ: Exactly. In my particular case it’s the whole spectrum of power that needs to be understood because it’s all related.

PM: In that culture of South Africa in that time the dominant form of personality was an authoritarian one, and clearly everything in you, from an early age, ran against that. This made it impossible for you to be in institutions, from a school to a military institution?

DJ: That’s right.

PM: Yet your parents plug into this authoritarian idea of a social personality?

DJ: Precisely. I regarded Boys' Town as a sentence I got at the age of sixteen or seventeen. Essentially what happened was that I was picked up by a policeman. In those days you had these milk vans that would go around at about four o' clock in the morning and people would place plastic coupons in them, but some people were just too lazy to buy them so they'd put money in instead – which was great pocket money for me. In order to keep things going I'd steal coupons from people's bottles and whenever I found money I would replace it with coupons [laughs]. It just kept the whole thing going. I didn't kill anybody; and eventually I was caught by a police reservist one night [further explains events leading up to his arrest]. They locked me up in this really dark cell smelling of urine. Then I noticed this other presence – a real criminal. Now I was really freaked out and offered him a cigarette from a box I'd smuggled in. So I made prison talk and asked him what he was in for. He said murder! He caught his wife in bed with another man and shot the two of them. It was a crime of passion then, and there he was in a cell feeling sorry for himself; not a murderer at all. So I experienced being at Boys' Town as a prison sentence. I expected to be released after a year and was told I would remain there. So I just left, lived in Krugersdorp on the streets for a few months before going back. I'd missed the final Exams of Grade 10 because I was a street kid in Krugersdorp. During the next year they let me go, and even though it was against the law at that time not to complete Grade 10, they decided to leave me alone and let me go to the army. So I waited some months and went into the army in January of '79. At that stage I wasn't happy about this, I really didn't want to do this type of thing. I'd heard some unpleasant stories and thought I wasn't going to go. But people were on my case and eventually I decided it was my duty to go in. There were things happening, serious things that weren't coming out in the news, and I felt I really had to go out there and defend my family and the country, and it was only two years. To go in, come out and find that my life was finally my own after this traumatic fucking childhood. I'd come out of the army and make my own decisions for once in my fucking life. Let's just go in and get it over with. I reported to Sturrock Park and right at the beginning they started to go through our bags and throw stuff out, essentially treating us like shit. And then on the train it was horrifying. And once there it became clear that if there was serious shit happening then these people would have been serious, the training would have been serious. It was obviously just a fuck-around, and they had a bunch of ego-mad kids venting whatever, just being the fucking arseholes they were. So this threat they'd made me feel was so serious couldn't have been so serious either. But then I was committed, I was there, in Bethlehem to do my basic training. There were three units: the main unit which was in Bethlehem and two satellite bases, 21 and 22 Field Battalions. 22 was where I went and it was up in the Drakensberg mountains somewhere. Out there in the satellite bases you had no real idea what was happening; there were no towns so you couldn't see or hear anything. They could do what they liked to us there, and I made up my mind pretty soon that I would get out of there. A couple of the kids got freaked out and ran away before me. The problem was that they would go down to the main road and puts their thumbs out. And by the time the third car had passed you'd have been out there for five hours already and they'd come out to collect you. So it was obviously not a cool route of escape. But we were up in the mountains and there was only one way in and one way out, so you were pretty screwed actually. But what I'd noticed was they were preparing most of our food at the main base and bringing it in a Bedford van out to us in these aluminium cases. They were delivering these boxes at four o' clock in the mornings, collecting the empty ones and driving back to the base camp. Perfect opportunity. So I would pack all my stuff and would make sure I was there early in the morning. And it was just two of them – the driver and his assistant, and they would do everything themselves. They would go in to get things and leave the van unattended. All I would have to do was get into the back and catch a ride into town. That was what I was ready to do. But they were really keeping us up very late preparing for inspections the next morning. What happened the morning I had this whole thing planned was that by the time I got there there were these two tail lights – the van was on its way back. But I'd committed myself to going and I couldn't imagine another day in this fucking hell-hole – it just tore me apart.

PM: So what did you do next?

DJ: There was this cliff on one side of the camp. I climbed up it and didn't reach the top until midday. I looked down and there were these ants going about their business.

PM: So you climbed this cliff without any gear?

DJ: It wasn't that tough. And the only option I had left was the unknown on the other side of this cliff.

PM: So you had no idea where you were going; you just left?

DJ: When I escaped from Boys Town I had also taken a back route, over the Magaliesberg mountains. So I'd already had experience of this kind of thing – missioning on for three hours through a wilderness then sleeping in the cold for another three and missioning on again. Time elongates and you get really paranoid; kind of apocalyptic experience. But I also knew from this Magaliesberg experience that eventually you hit something, something happens.

PM: So what did happen then?

DJ: It took three days before I hit the road, but it was such a blissful three days it didn't matter. I'd taken no food. When I'd got to the top I'd gone some way then came to a little lake with trees around it and a small cave. I sat there in the shade and just watched these ducks on the lake. I ended up wasting the entire day vegging out and watching these ducks on the lake. It was great.

PM: A form of meditation?

DJ: Absolutely. I was clearing my head of all that; I'd just been through two weeks of hell being trained by those total fucking egotistical nutcases. Then I'd missioned on and it took another couple of days to get to a road.

PM: Were you wearing a uniform?

DJ: Yes, that's all I had. This is where it gets a little confusing, because I did this more than once. I spent so much time on the road, and every time I got back to camp they took all my clothes away from me, so I was always on the road in my uniform. This first time, I think, I wore my tracksuit over my uniform. No. I was wearing my uniform and I told everyone somebody had died. I forget who I said, it wasn't my father. But I said I'd got permission to go to the funeral. These guys were all farmers and all into this military thing, and one look at my browns and they knew this guy's fresh, no fading whatsoever, straight out of the box. Same with the boots and beret and everything. And it was good – them accepting that and giving me lifts. But I made the mistake of going back home, going to my friends. It was fairly obvious I couldn't go back to my parents because I knew they would tell them where I was. But my friends told them where I was. They would phone either the army or my parents. They kept picking me up in the beginning and dragging me off to Wits Command. I would be in the cells there for a couple of weeks then these poor guys would arrive to escort me back to camp, back to Bethlehem.

PM: How many times did this happen?

DJ: I can't remember. Many times. At that stage there was still no other opportunity.

PM: Unless you were a religious pacifist?

DJ: That's it. You see, what other people were doing was pretending to be mad, pretending to be gay, pretending to be a Jehovah's Witness. I was in a different headspace. I had come to the realisation prior to that that the only way I was going to get to the bottom of anything was with absolute honesty, in all respects, with myself. I couldn't deceive myself or allow myself to be deceived in any way. And I had to approach everything directly and with integrity and honesty otherwise I was going to wander around in this mad forest for the rest of my life.

I needed to find a way out of it. For me doing any of those things would just have been. For me there was no other recourse. I couldn't be a conscientious objector. There was no End Conscription Campaign, and there was no support. I was the only person I knew who considered this to be an unlawful assault on me. Everyone else considered it to be legitimate. I was the only person who felt they were overstepping boundaries.

PM: In the late 70s religious objectors had support structures in place.

DJ: Religious objectors: I didn't even know about them. I had no contact with them or anybody related to them. It wasn't in the newspapers. I felt myself to be out there on my own, entirely on my own, and the only option available to me at that time was just to leave again and again and again. I had learnt how to pick the locks on handcuffs with a piece of wire. What happened was these escorts would come to fetch me at Wits Command. We would board the train and they would handcuff me spread-eagled to the top bunk of some compartment. It was the same ritual every time. Continuously, no matter where I was, I would wear my jeans with turn-ups with a piece of wire hidden there. And every time I saw those handcuffs coming out I would reach into those turn-up and have a piece of wire in my fist as they cuffed me. And from there it was a piece of cake to open them. I would escape. It was milk train which stopped regularly. My escort would be asleep. I was securely handcuffed so where the fuck could I go? I would get out and go home.

PM: And when you got there?

DJ: I'd be home (not with my parents) for a couple of weeks and somehow these people always found me.

PM: These people were very vigilant. They were watching every one of us. Their eyes were on you. None of my friends who were hiding from them managed to do so for long. The Military Police were always aware of where you were.

DJ: You may be right; I'm not claiming to know that much about it. But I suspect that in 1979 people like me weren't that much of a problem for them.

PM: Perhaps that's true, but then why were they coming to get you so hastily after each of your escapes?

DJ: I'm convinced it was because of my parents informing them, because the moment I was convinced about that and left, not telling anyone, friends and family, where I was going, into Hillbrow where I got myself a job under my own name and was staying in a block of flats, nobody came to fetch me. Once I'd got to Hillbrow that was the end of that: no more trouble with the army. They were pretty clueless then. Later on, in the 80s they became more vigilant. I remember living with a friend in Hillbrow from '88 to '91. In that period he was at RAU University and had joined what was called AAA (Afrikaners Against Apartheid) and they were constantly contending with spies coming into the organization. It had become hectic by then – so much infiltration, very different from 1979. It was clear they weren't actively searching for me during that time I was in Hillbrow. My best friend then, who was a British citizen and therefore exempt from the whole thing, was constantly on my case and I said "why the fuck don't you go in then?" And eventually he did and he came out pretty fucked up. They took him to the border, and at last he understood what I'd been talking about. He didn't have the guts to do the whole freaky stupid thing I did. He had to tie people up on barbed wire fences and interrogate them to reveal where they were sheltering enemies in their villages. So he came out rather fucked up.

PM: So your friends felt it was your duty?

DJ: Everyone I knew was completely pro this whole thing, and my not going into the army meant I wasn't a man ... My argument at the time was why couldn't these people just leave me alone. Everybody was going through this thing. You couldn't get a girlfriend if you hadn't gone in; you couldn't get a job if you hadn't gone in. Firstly, if you were employed and you still had to do your two years National Service, they wouldn't take

you on and, secondly, you weren't really regarded as worth employing if you hadn't been into the army. So that was the environment I was in. I felt that nobody wants to live with that stigma that goes with not going into the army, so why didn't they just leave me alone? So I got myself a job at the Blood Bank in Hillbrow at the start of 1981. You had to have a Matric with university entrance. But I've always been reasonably well-spoken so it was easy to convince them that I was qualified but didn't have the papers to prove it, but would provide them as soon as they arrived. And they just accepted me. I was in a laboratory as a technician. We were actually responsible for the lives of people. I was there for about a year. I don't believe the army had a clue where I was. In fact, eventually what happened was that I had a girlfriend in about '84 and we were getting pretty serious, wanted to get married and start a family, and I just had these nightmare visions of having a son, and my son being about four or five years old and the door comes crashing down and these military police come in and drag me away. I couldn't go through with that, so I went back to Bethlehem and said to the guys there – what are we going to do about this? I had to explain who I was because they had no records. There was nothing about the kit that had gone missing. They sent me to the local civilian court where they gave me a R100 fine and sentenced me to another two years of National Service. So I was now liable to start afresh. So I thought, let's do this, somehow get through it. Then they sent me another set of papers to go to Kensington. So I went through to Kensington and handed my papers over and they said to me – no this isn't a call-up, this is just to let you know that you're a member of this camp and we'll call you when we need you. I realised there had been a mistake and I said let me speak to your Staff Sergeant, I need to get this clear. I said to him I was not supposed to have been called up for another two years. He said forget about the two years, you're a member of the citizen force and just have to be available for camps. And I said can I have that in writing, and I got it in writing. Actually it never turned into a problem. Anyway, at that stage I had a carpet installation business with men working for me, relying on me for their sole means of income, so I was getting deferments on camps. And I think it was in '86 (the whole thing is jumbled up in my memory), my deferment was refused. So I had to go in, I think for two months, and my men had to go without an income. We spent the first two weeks just waiting for kit to arrive. It was a whole big fuck-around. They had us in tents in the front section of this Kensington unit and they took us out to Lenz where they had us camped out in tents on charcoal. We were going into Soweto, and they gave us this incredible briefing – we were going in there to deal with conflicts between Xhosas and Zulus. They showed us this horrific video of necklacings. Images that stuck in my mind were these ten year old kids prancing around these still smoldering bodies hacking chunks off them with these big pangas. I couldn't help thinking later on that these were the kids who were hijacking people and shooting them just for the sake of it. But, given the briefing via the videos I thought – this is a good idea, we're going in there to stop this shit. However, nothing was happening; we never came upon such incidents while we were there. On the patrols we did in these anti-mine army-brown vehicles with v-shaped bottoms, I think they were called Buffels, we were the problem. These Buffels were open, so people in the street would see us facing each other with rifles bristling out from the tops of these vehicles – evil-looking fucking things. And we were patrolling in these things, and what happened was that the kids were getting bored and taking out catapults and shooting at us and at innocent people in the streets. And that was pissing me off and I was quite vocal about that, and people were getting really pissed off with me for making a nuisance of myself. The one time we went down a street and there were these guys playing football, and they saw this huge thing bristling with rifles and they scarpered. So we went chasing after them, caught one of them and started slapping him around – why were you running away? Why were you hiding? What do you know about the ANC? And that pissed me off and I told the corporal and he got upset with me and said he would speak to me later. I was super fit then; I was a cyclist, and they took me to this obstacle course and made me run it. And it was so easy for me, which pissed him off even more. I realised there was no way he could run this course himself, so I stopped, sat down cross-legged and said I'm not doing any more of this till you do it with me. So he started doing this war dance around me, screaming and shouting. I wasn't interested; eventually he called the Staff Sergeant and told him what was going on. Now he was the one who knew my story and he went on a rant about how insubordinate I was. I just kept quiet and eventually he asked me – what's your story. Now this whole thing had affected me so I started telling him what was going on with me until I was ranting myself and I ended by saying – I'm not doing any of this anymore, consider me to be a conscientious objector. You guys are fucked in the head and I'm not doing this anymore; and I want to see a psychologist. And this was when ...

PM: This was roughly the time the ECC was going?

DJ: I didn't know about it then. I only got to hear about it in '87. I joined, and the Weekly Mail did an article on us and they took a photograph of us and put it on the front page. I was one of the 147 objectors making a public statement.

PM: To go back to that Staff Sergeant ...

DJ: It was a whole military thing. I had this thick folder on me, and I found out later that friends in Intelligence in Pretoria, some of them from Boys Town, were disappearing my files. One of them told me later he had access to the files and there were things he was making vanish. I'm not really sure how ... for some reason they didn't know about me in Kimberley; there was something happening there I was regarded as a bad guy and went to Detention Barracks a number of times. I can't remember how many times they had come to collect me and I'd escaped off the train. I skipped court martials and didn't get to Pretoria Detention barracks (laughs).

PM: The Artful Dodger.

DJ: The utter respect these guys were treating me with, making sure I was secured every time, because then, when we were getting paid R30 per month, the fine for letting a prisoner escape was R100 – more than three months of pay for letting a prisoner escape. But these guys were volunteering for it anyway because they considered it time out – on the train doing nothing. So they were fined every time I escaped, which was why they eventually got me back in. And when I was back in camp I had this reputation as a Ninja, a Houdini, a monster of sorts. So when they eventually got me back they had this little house of sorts, in Bethlehem, that they'd turned into a prison with rooms of various sizes. There were two rooms just big enough to fit an army mattress into, with a metal grate on the one side. I was locked up in one of these rooms, more a cubicle.

PM: So did you escape more times than they got you back?

DJ: Many many more times. So this Staff Sergeant knows about me, probably has file on me, and I've come back in, a kind of volunteer, but he knows I'm a dodgy case, can get quite hectic and he doesn't want that in his camp so he very quickly allowed me to become a conscientious objector. So instead of sending me home he allowed me to stay in camp. But it was great. Everyone else would have to quick march to get their food and I just strolled out; I didn't have any of the duties. But two mornings per week I would catch a ride to Wits Command in Johannesburg where I would see the psychologist I'd demanded, and in the afternoons I'd return. But at that stage I had a flat just up the road from the Wits Command so I eventually would just have teas with this psychologist who was also a captain in the army ... he took just one listen to my story and after that never asked me any questions. We would just have tea and talk shit about stuff, and then I would go back home, water my plants and spend the rest of the day there and at about 5 o' clock go back again. I was just seeing it out, the two months. Then eventually this same psychologist gave me an envelope with a letter in it to the Staff Sergeant. When I got home I seriously considered steaming it open to see what was said, but I didn't, which I regret to this day. So I handed it over to the Staff Sergeant and you could see the steam coming out of his ears. His expression changed, he looked up from the letter, gave me this piercing look and said "Fokof ..." It was the end of the camp anyway, so I did fokof.

PM: And was that the end of it?

DJ: No it wasn't. I had tried to get deferment, and maybe that letter had upset him because the next time I applied I didn't get deferment. But that next time I was still finishing a carpeting job so only pitched up two weeks late, went through to report, but this time the place was deserted. The guys had gone straight off to the border (it was a border call). Some officials were there and they told me to go home and report again the

following morning. So they had me coming there every day waiting for this hearing, this internal thing. I didn't know what was going on, didn't know what was in that letter. And eventually I'm marched into this room where I've got to stomp my foot and stand to attention and this lawyer guy starts to talk about my previous infringements, what a bad guy I am. And I'm listening to this and it's slowly dawning on me that this legal officer has made promises to everybody and he needs just one scapegoat to make good on it, and I'm the one, he's going to take me down.

PM: What interests me is that it seems clear that what that army psychologist said in that report could not have been in your favour, otherwise you would have been granted deferment. Your psychologist was an army sympathiser?

DJ: Quite possibly. But what I think this guy did was not meant maliciously – I think he'd sent a letter saying – “you fucking arseholes, you've let this guy fuck you over again.” I don't think he meant to nail me because he saw that I was out of there already, and maybe he even thought he was doing me a favour and he might have thought that, given this letter, they might not call me up again. And this got their backs up. I don't know exactly what had happened but this legal officer was clearly out to get me. Eventually I relaxed this standing to attention thing and thought fuck it and just walked out. I was half way down the passage when these guys stopped me, one with a hand on my shoulder. I slapped it away and said “leave me the fuck alone you toy soldier fucks! I'm not interested, go play toy soldiers with someone else.” And I carried on walking, nobody stopped me at the gate. I went home, got no more letters. That was the end of that. Nothing happened after that. They had obviously decided I was too much trouble.

PM: And this was around the mid-80s?

DJ: It might have been '86. I was only really aware of the ECC by '88.

PM: But by that stage you were safe?

DJ: Yes, I aligned myself to their sentiments and their cause but by that time it was all behind me.

PM: Interestingly, yours was very much an individual struggle.

DJ: Ja, the whole thing was.

PM: It wasn't like you were aligning yourself with any organisations to support you. You were basically saying “fuck you” to these people because you simply didn't want to do this, and not necessarily, from what I've gathered, for heavy political reasons. But of course it's not as simple as that. For example, there was that moment in the township you've spoken about.

DJ: Yes, but it was all tied up with other things. It all goes back to my Afrikaans mother, and she had this authoritarian attitude, which I associated with the Afrikaners. And later on when I was about ten we moved into this area that was extremely military. And I realised even back then at Afrikaans friends' houses I went to there was always this authoritarian man who everyone was shit-scared of, and if the mother said she was going to tell him about anything you started quaking in your boots. When I looked at the Afrikaans schools I saw they were exactly the same; their structure was exactly the same. And the government was exactly the same – all the Afrikaner structures were just like that, and I realised this quite early. It was that I was against, and in that sense I was against the government. There was also this other thing – as I've said, I was on this quest for personal transcendence, freedom, and I needed space for that which nobody was giving me. They were trying to put you ...

PM: ... into little boxes, including literally a tiny little box with a grating?

DJ: Ja, exactly, all the time – the Germiston cells, the boarding schools, the classrooms themselves; nobody was giving me the chance to learn anything, and it was all under guise of teaching me. So it was about personal freedom, but I was also against apartheid, but I don't think I realised the damage apartheid had done because, from my point of view why didn't everybody just stand up for their personal rights and we'd just change the system overnight. But everyone was agreeing, and buckling under and being afraid, and that also pissed me off. Why didn't people just stand up for what they believed in? There were opportunities to join the ANC, get an ANC card in the 80s, and I did consider the fact that that would make me a target, but that wasn't the reason I turned them down. The reason, once again, was that the ANC was far too militant for me and was buying into someone else's ideology and I thought we all had to stand up firmly for what we believed in to get the whole things sorted out. I still believe that.

PM: Umm ...

DJ: I'm very much an individualist.

PM: Which is a political position of its own perhaps?

DJ: I guess. Well, I was against the government, but as you rightly observe, it wasn't political in that sense. It was political in another sense.

PM: Well, it was a style of being that you revolted against – an authoritarian style of being in the world.

DJ: Ja, I would rather have had no government at all?

PM: Interestingly, you never did the full two years of National Service, but you probably ended up doing more than that in terms of continually escaping over a span of years, time in detention barracks?

DJ: I did much more than that amount of time, particularly if you understand that I couldn't get on with my life, which was eventually why I went back. It was a limbo time, and in many ways it was good for me in that it gave me time to introspect and to get the kind of education that was important to me in the first place. But in terms of getting on with my life. And the fact is I still haven't gotten on with my life.

Interview H.

Theresa Edlmann (born 18th February 1964)

Interview conducted 23rd November 2012

“There was a deeply fractured experience of life.”

PM: What I’ve asked my male interviewees to offer is the beginnings of their awareness of the SADF, and of conscription, in their lives; along with the shifts and changes in that, the involvements from school years and through subsequent years. I would like you to give me a sense of your journey till the present moment, relating to these experiences?

TE: How long do you have (laughs)? Where does one start with these things? Well, I was born on a sheep farm in the Karoo and grew up with stories about war. My grandfather had fought in the Second World War, and gravesites from the *Anglo-Boer War* (as we called it then) were very nearby. My father and grandfather had narrowly escaped being lynched by the *Ossewa Brandwag*. So the history of war and violence and a sense of living in a country functioning on perpetual senses of threat I imbibed with my mother’s milk. But the system of conscription as such really only impacted directly, as far as I recall, when I was in high school. By that stage my father was running a dairy farm just outside of Pietermaritzburg and was part of the *Commandoes*. This was late 70s, early 80s if my memory serves. And we used to go along to family days in which they would demonstrate, in their browns, leopard-crawling through the veld firing blanks, with bits of straw sticking out of their hats and give us rat packs, and weren’t our fathers wonderful being on standby to protect the nation. And it suddenly made sense of the drills we were doing at school in case the terrorists came to attack, and that was who my father was fighting – these supposed terrorists. And I remember feeling distinctly uncomfortable, that I didn’t want to subscribe to this. I didn’t understand why, but it just felt profoundly wrong. I matriculated in 1981, so I do remember 1976, and I remember being deeply disturbed by it. I was at a Methodist school and my Matric year was the first year that black students matriculated with the majority of white students, and so there was a slow dawning of political consciousness for me because a black friend and I went into a *Wimpy* to have a coffee and ...

PM: So this school you were at was inter-racial?

TE: It was a church school which at that stage were allowed to have a certain percentage of students to be black – usually *homeland* leaders’ children. This friend was such ... and black clergy could send their children to these schools, but it was never more than 20%. A quota system. So at this *Wimpy Bar* my friend and I were told to leave because it was a whites-only restaurant. That was my moment of political awakening, despite the fact that I had grown up on farms. To the extent that, during my first two weeks at University I had joined a group ... you know, having been in a church school, leaders like Desmond Tutu, Beyers Naude, Peter Kerchoff had been hugely influential on my life. So a Christian spirituality concerned with social justice was formative. So I was part of this group, the Students Union for Christian Action, and what was interesting about SUCA was that it had a particularly Christian focus but also, post the NUSAS and SASCO split – that split at universities of white left organisations from the black left – SUCA was one of the few organisations left that had representation from all the racial groups, as well as on English and Afrikaans campuses. So it was very lively and intense and in many ways an exhilarating organization. That shaped my later involvement in the ECC because significant people that had been involved in SUCA had been Peter Moll, Ivan Toms, and Charles Yeates was spoken about in reverential tones. So that whole discussion about “just war” theory versus pacifism was going. You know, others were talking about Gramsci, we were talking about just war. And so when the time came that ECC was established, I was on the Pietermaritzburg campus and very involved in the launch. I was doing Drama at the time and remember being part of a *skit* in which I was wearing a bright red top and a floppy hat and doing a Pieter-Dirk Uys style impersonation of Tannie Elise Botha talking about our wonderful boys going to fight on

the Border. So it was just a natural progression for me to become involved with this issue. We were part of the wave of the ECC being launched on campuses like Wits and UCT, though a couple of months later than them. And I became involved in supporting people who were applying to the Board for Religious Objection and part of the Conscientious Objectors Support Group (COSG) both in Durban and Pietermaritzburg. I moved to Cape Town in 1987 and was part of the Regional Committee there, with Ivan Toms being such a formative and formidable figure there. It was soon after his fast. There was a group of us – six or seven – that formed the churches group within the ECC. What you were saying before the interview about counter-cultural elements of the ECC was true, let's just say it was a very diverse organisation. We were the earnest Christian types. We went along to youth groups.

PM: Including Ivan?

TE: Yes, Ivan was very much the leader of the church group, just as he was very much involved in the gay resistance. He was quite a maverick. But we used to go to church groups to encourage young men to object. And I've actually met someone through my research who was at one of those youth groups and who did object, so that felt like a moment of vindication, because sometimes young people would get very upset with us and report us to the elders of the church and we would be manhandled off the church premises for speaking treason.

PM: Did you visit schools?

TE: No. Our particular target group, for want of a better term, was churches because the Board for Conscientious Objectors accepted people on pacifist religious grounds, and we felt that these were people who could legitimately, and without too much risk to themselves, object. We wanted to encourage them to do so, but it didn't go down terribly well. People got extremely angry.

PM: So there was a lot of resistance to that within the churches?

TE: Very much so. Well, mostly the congregations, because sometimes the priest would say, "yes, do come" and members of the congregation would get terribly upset. And I remember the night before Ivan Toms went into prison we had an inter-faith service on the lawns of *Bishop's Court*, and I was part of a drama group that performed there. I don't remember everyone who was there, but I do remember Philip Ivy was there who turned the purple cannon on the police – his moment of infamy, a complete rash-headed action (laughs). And I remember Cyril Harris, a Rabbi, was there, and an imam from the local mosque; and Desmond Tutu came wandering through the gardens in a scarlet dress saying Ivan, look what you've done, you've bought all these people together.

PM: A purple theme: the cannon and Tutu's robes.

TE: Yes (laughs) ... slightly different hue. And then, in 1988 after the banning of the ECC, I was not aware of how people continued to do work. I lost touch with most organised groupings within the ECC at that stage. So while I continued with similar activities that was pretty much the end of my involvement, except that much later – it must have been '98 or '99 – Charlie Bester had developed a play about his time in prison and I was teaching Drama at a private school in Cape Town at that stage and invited him to perform at the school. He and I both spoke quite strongly to young people at the school about the importance of their involvement in social issues. So it kind of popped up again in different ways, and the start of my research grew from that awareness. I left teaching, worked for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (again involved in inter-faith initiatives to support the Commission), moved to Grahamstown, started an NGO to support that kind of work, and was asked to speak to a farmers' association about racial reconciliation. And in the midst of this talk – to open up the conversation – I made a comment about how difficult it must have been for men who served in the SADF to adapt to the post-'94 context. And this enormous farmer shot to his feet in response to my remark; he said "you and I have to talk," and sat down again. I remembered being manhandled before on church premises and

expected that to happen again, but actually he went about pouring out his stories about his trauma relating to Angola. It was a real turning-point for me because I suddenly became aware ... I was stunned, I just stood there with my mouth hanging open. I remember as he was talking he put a cold beer in my hand and I didn't take a sip, then another, and they just stood there and got warm. I was transfixed by what he was saying; and he used a phrase that started my PhD journey. He said "I shot five kaffirs in Angola but I remember every single one of their faces." And I remember driving home and thinking how did those of us who thought we were fighting for justice miss the fact that those who were colluding with the State were caught in this unbearable tension between an ideological trap and a sense of human connection with the people they were fighting against and killing. So that was the seed of my PhD. What happened was we were beginning to fold the NGO I was running and I started saying to people I think this issue of conscription needs to be looked at as an act of research rather than by an NGO. And somebody said do you know Gary Baines is looking for students, and it started there. So I registered at the beginning of 2009 and November of that year was the ECC's 25th year reunion which gave me a sense of broader connections relating to what I was trying to do. And it was very heartening for me to hear the comment "we were against conscription, not conscripts." We need to support conscripts in dealing with the legacy of their experiences. And that's where all the chatter started on the *ecc list* suggesting why don't we do that. October of 2010 was when the current Archbishop made that call for the dehumanising effects of conscription to be spoken about and addressed. And that was just the final impetus for *Atlanta Philanthropies* to say we'll offer funding; nobody else on the *ecc list* stepping forward to start the project and eventually me saying I'm happy to start facilitating something if others would support me. It was really a mandate from ECC to start a project. Atlanta Philanthropies gave me funding to fly people in ... remember I told you we put on the play *Somewhere on the Border*, there was a lecture by Anthony Akerman (author of *Somewhere on the Border*), we spoke about that novel *Deeper than Colour* and then this group of about twelve people (some of them ECC people like Gerald Kraak, Janet Cherry and others conceptualised the project, and towards the end of the year I approached Rhodes about housing it at the University.

PM: Is this the Legacies of the Apartheid Wars project, which you birthed and are running?

TE: Pretty much, ja. I'm running it, and it emerges directly out of my involvement with the ECC. We'd like to call it Addressing the Legacies of Apartheid.⁸⁹ For me what's become quite clear – I really like that phrase Patricia Hayes uses in her *Bush of Ghosts* book when she talks about the self-referentiality⁹⁰ of many conscripts' narratives, and it's almost as if white people were the only people living in Southern Africa at the time, that they were the only ones to have experiences about the so-called Border War, when Namibia and Angola belonged to other people for goodness' sake. Even conflicts in the townships with other citizens of South Africa, the majority of South Africans ... so the whole Apartheid Legacies project is concerned with conscripts and ex-enemies from that time working together in various ways, but we can talk about that another time. For me it's about shifting what I call the discursive laagers that have been constructed around the memories of conscription.

PM: What was the origin of the *ecc list*?

TE: They just started a google group when the 25th anniversary event was being set up. I don't know if this is true for some of the men you've interviewed who objected, but certainly it's come up for me – what I've realised in terms of my own story, doing this work with conscripts, is that these conscripts were just one generation among many men who had gone to war. There was the Second World War, the First World War, the Crimean War, the South West African Rebellion, and I think this was part of the pressure for men at that time – you're the next generation, if your government says go to war you must go to war. That's your duty, it is part of how your performance of masculinity is constructed (to use Daniel Conway's language); and I think that's an important thread. What's not as acknowledged is the impact it had on women, so I grew up with stories of my grandfather being captured in Tobruk and nearly dying, having the last rite read over him as a prisoner of war in

⁸⁹ Subsequent to this interview, Edlmann set up and coordinated the Legacies of the Apartheid Wars Conference which was held at Rhodes University in July 2013.

⁹⁰ *Bush of Ghosts*, 11. See comments Chapter 5.

Italy – and so there was an early sense for me of the horror of war regardless of the political issue behind it. So my stand was as much political as it was close to being pacifist. You know, there were ‘just war’ versus pacifist debates, but for me violence is a short-term and very seldom productive option, and war is included in that. And so that stood alongside the ideological issues about what the apartheid state was doing – the way in which it was turning white men into cannon fodder, creating this frontline whereby they were inexcusably defending their power-related agenda in Southern Africa within the broader Cold War dynamic. So there were two threads to it for me; and also watching my father’s involvement in the Commandos. Another thread is that when, in 1985 or 1986, Commandos were put on stand-by for going into the townships, my father resigned in the face of much political and social pressure, even from his own family. He said I will not attack fellow-citizens. I will defend my home, but I will not be aggressive towards fellow-citizens. So that was a formative moment for me as well – my family story. I think every white South African’s story has a thread of war running right through it; and I felt this stops with me. I will not perpetuate this. Even as a non-combatant I will not perpetuate this.

PM: So your father wasn’t liable for compulsory National Service. Was he liable for the ballot system?

TE: He was never balloted, and he was too old by the time it became compulsory, but then one of the apartheid state’s many strategies – particularly when township unrest started taking place – was that all farmers became part of Commandos. They were given military training, uniforms. It was part of the winning hearts and minds strategy.

PM: So in a way your father did absorb the sense that was created of a threat from outside, an onslaught?

TE: I think particularly for farmers who had been attacked. In fact he was attacked with a crowbar – hit on the head and he very nearly died. So it was never very clearly ideologically articulated in our home, and I think he wasn’t unique in that. It might speak to your own background as well – this thing of taking stands on issues. They were never clear, unambiguous stands. There were always uncertainties and ambiguities. You were standing for some things and not necessarily for others but not necessarily against them. It was a muddled and complex time. But that was just a seminal moment. He wasn’t a member of the PFP; he was a member of the United Party, but that thing of attacking fellow-citizens rather than defending your country against external threat – that was the watershed moment for him. I think he was an example of border dynamics in South Africa, because when conscripts started going into the townships was when the ECC took off. It was the end of ’84 into ’85 when those States of Emergency were declared. The parallel between the numbers conscripted and the number of suicides among those who were serving just shot through the roof – early signs of the collapse of the system.

PM: Do you have statistics that indicate the rise of the suicide rate during that time?

TE: Ja, ja. A number of researchers quote statistics that were read out in Parliament, so they were likely to be very conservative figures. In fact, I cite them in that paper of mine in that email I sent you – the rapid escalation of suicides.

PM: I’m interested in any personal memories of yours that revolve around conscription – relationships, shifts in relationships?

TE: I didn’t have any brothers. I had a cousin who was eighteen years older than me, and he would come and stay with us on Pass sometimes because we were close to his base. But it’s interesting that you ask that. In my school years I knew very few men who were conscripted. My closest male friends, and certainly the men I went out with, the man I married, were all fellow resisters. So for me that stuff was so strong in who I am that being in an intimate relationship with somebody who had made decisions I was not comfortable with would have been intolerable, and remains so.

PM: So you were at home within a resistance culture, including your relationships?

TE: Very much so; that was my social circle. And I lived in a religious community as a digs. We used to hide activists, hide documents and so on. That was my community during a time of being very estranged from my family. So there was a very close personal thread through all of that as well.

PM: So there were tensions between you and your parents with regard to your activism?

TE: Yes, my mother disapproved very strongly; told me that if I ever got arrested they wouldn't come and bail me out because I would have brought shame on the family. My father was more ambivalent. And in fact at the time he was still involved with the Commandos he phoned me one time and warned me about a raid that was being planned on a few students' houses.

PM: And your parents were both Christians I assume?

TE: Yes.

PM: So your mother managed to live with that ...?

TE: Well, there's one little verse in the entire Bible that gets cited on this – that the government is put in power by God, that all governments are an extension of God's authority and therefore you must obey them. Very convenient, just obliterating all the other stuff in the text. That one gets pulled out on all occasions. My mother and I clashed on many things (laughs). We were both strongly opinionated women that sat on different sides of ideological divides. And there was a family history. My uncle went into exile, causing huge upset for my mother's parents. He went into self-imposed exile after Sharpeville. He could see where things were going and didn't want to be part of it, and she was always terrified that my activism would bring similar heartache and upset. It was very unprocessed emotional stuff. So family relations and political dynamics were intensely interwoven. What was hugely encouraging for me was having a strong conviction of church leaders I trusted seeing things the same way. So it wasn't purely an act of rebellion. It was a strange life because, as a deeply spiritual person, I had more to support my arguments than people who were part of a counter-culture that was more overtly rebellious. I managed to weave a far more subtle path (laughs).

PM: Ja, I suppose you would be thinking about people such as David Bruce, who took that stand?

TE: Absolutely, ja.

PM: Not on religious grounds at all?

TE: Well I'm talking about conflicts with my family. But once I was in my activist circles, the fact that I was a Christian made no difference. It was a moral position, an ethical position in a broad sense, and I clearly supported anybody who resisted, be they religious or atheist. At this community I stayed in in Pietermaritzburg there were seven of us, and we knew that one of the people staying with us in the digs had served in the military and been an officer, but refused to talk about it. And it was only recently, earlier this year that I discovered he had been an officer in Battalion, and he had been living in a community that fully supported ECC and SUCA; and I really don't think he was a double agent. He's not a devious person at all. But I think there were many men for whom the borders between serving and not serving were confusing and very permeable. I mean Ivan Toms himself who served and then objected, Paul Weinberg who served and then objected. There were many well documented cases. I mean Mark Behr himself. It took going into the army to realise what it was, then object to it later.

I've heard increasing numbers of anecdotal accounts from officers feeling that gay men, in the early eighties, were demoralised troops and they would give them a quiet discharge. And then you look at a case like *Moffie* –

Andre Carl van der Merwe's experience. He went through the whole training as an openly gay person, and survived the system. Then there were the others who ended up in the hands of someone like Levine. So even with negotiating sexuality in the midst of it there weren't clear lines. There was a deeply fractured experience of life. There were these discursive delineations, but how each person wove his journey through it was incredibly complex, and a lot of it covert rather than overt. And I think that's a lot of why it's an issue for us now. Martin Cornell who's the only person I know who has done statistical research around levels of trauma contacted Parktown Boys' High where he went to school and asked to send a questionnaire to all the old Parktonians who went into the military and did a PTSD risk analysis of all the answers. He was talking about the Eriksonian phases of life and that one of the reasons for so many narratives emerging now is that men who were conscripted are going through a shift into a different phase of life, just as they were doing when they were being conscripted; and one of the things one needs to do is revisit past experiences and make new meaning of them. And I think a lot of that is happening now with our generation, which is also why you and I, who matriculated in the same year, are working in the same area of research, a whole generation trying to make sense of that time.

PM: It does appear to be a wave of sorts, a trend of returning. So Erikson's suggesting that in one's middle age one revisits, or needs to revisit where one was in one's twenties?

TE: Your shift into adulthood, yes. It was the age when most men were conscripted – very intense, very formative, as is the shift into middle age.

PM: What is interesting is the tensions that happen in the retellings, the rhetorical strategies, the language itself – I find this interesting. What I was thinking today was that the men who had a public profile, or a degree of public profile – like Michael Graaf, David Bruce and, to an extent, Kelwyn Sole as well – often there is more tension in their voices that points to a level of discomfort in terms of the relation of public and private selves. Some of the guys who were not in the spotlight at all seemed to speak more easily with less fraught terminology, less strained or fractured rhetoric. So it's interesting looking not only at the past and present selves, but also the public and the private selves.

TE: Well, and I think the apartheid and post-apartheid selves. What came out so strongly at the ECC 25 Reunion was the rhetoric of that time, for example watching video footage of the Evans brothers speaking at public events in the 80s – they would never use that language now. There are layers, showing how it's become hollow or redundant and sometimes ridiculous. It was this whites only organisation and for white people to be spouting that kind of language now has ambiguities to it now that it didn't have back then. And there was a lot of hand-wringing at the ECC 25 event about did our risks and what we fought for come to nothing? Do we still have a place and a meaning as white people, where do we place ourselves? And for me that was one of the strengths of the ECC at the time, and it remains one of the driving forces for me in this work – I think as white activists of course we are trying to undo injustice and of course that requires deconstructing our own sense and working within a broader context, working within a sense of the perceived other, the ideological other, the racial other, that I actually think the harder, more complex and in some ways more important work – and I use this term quite guardedly – is to work within our own community, to call on whites to interrogate and deconstruct and shift our own ideological and identity-related constructs, because so much of the conflict that's going on within our society shows so little shift in attitude.

PM: There's a new complexity certainly.

TE: And they're building on old stuff that particularly white people would never have gone into – it's too scary. We have to acknowledge the monsters that we were part of. And just to go back ... One of the big challenges in being an activist, I used to find, was that one was always speaking about systems, ideological things, power struggles, moral struggles, and purely subjective narratives really struggled to hold a voice. And if you think about a lot of the subjective poetry, it wasn't published at that time. I remember an Egyptian psychologist saying at the time you people are so obsessed with systems you have lost your soul. And I think he was right. So in this

research I have found that one of the challenges I have faced, and I'm interested to hear how this has played out for you, is to what extent am I focusing on phenomenology and to what extent am I focusing on context (because the narratives are always about both)? And as a researcher any choice I make foregrounds one aspect of the narrative at the cost of the other. Or even if I do find a way of balancing it's still a wobbly balance.

PM: Yes, that's interesting for me in terms of a number of people I've spoken to, but also on the level of aesthetics. For example, the way in which Kelwyn Sole spoke about the 1980s – the Mzwakhe Mbuli-type consciousness – echoes what you've said...

TE: Ja.

PM: ... about the lack of a properly subjective narrative, or an authentic voice coming from an individual; because there was mainly this ideological voice speaking what people should think and how they should think, and you didn't get real stories. I'm looking at a poem of Kelwyn Sole's called 'Ovamboland' published in 1987 in *Staffrider*. It was his account of when he was in Namibia during the time of the Border War. There's an interplay of voices that provides a complex sense of the social reality, the dynamics – which you didn't find in the popular literature of that time. And he's seen how that continued into post-apartheid society. Always positioning himself as ultra-left, having big issues with the ANC leadership now. In this poem he practises his own sense of how to articulate the realities we confronted, as sense of the real contradictions and tensions and the difficulty of pinning these things down, preferring not to pin them down; to pigeonhole in the way ideological language so often does. So I'm interested in the kinds of aesthetic choices people were making and putting into practice in the 1980s. So I find it useful what you've said about these discourses from then and now. If you use the language of that time now you do so with a tinge of embarrassment.

TE: Appearing ridiculous (laughs).

PM: It was a lively time. Remember those debates in the Weekly Mail – the cultural reactionaries such as Stephen Watson and Lionel Abrahams arguing against Andries Oliphant and Jeremy Cronin – people taking up such clear positions as if there wasn't a position between them, a more nuanced, complex perception of things.

TE: Absolutely.

PM: ... that you could look at things this way and that way.

TE: And it was always more ideological than subjective, or touted as ideological rather than subjective.

PM: So your concern is with political relations and issues, but you're also concerned with the individual voice – with healing, I suppose?

TE: For that reason I've chosen ... ja, two things about being a woman in the ECC and being a woman doing this research, I cannot but function from within a feminist approach, and one of the key principles of that is that the personal is political; and the very first paper I gave, in 2009 after the conference that Gary Baines and Peter Vale organized, calling the personal political – that every choice a conscript made was simultaneously personal and political. It was often the political consequences that were focused on more. The personal consequences were arguably more dire in their long-term effects, and it's been very interesting in the interviews I've done to see the extent to which we have and haven't been able to address that. And I really like the way Daniel Conway has brought feminist theory into his work – for me those are the strongest parts of his book. I do think feminism brings very helpful and insightful lenses to what was going on. So that's the one piece. The other piece that's difficult for me to talk about even now – partly because it's personally difficult, but also because it's how I've struggled in my own writing – is how ... what does it really mean to be a woman caught up in this very violent militarist system? What were we really fighting against? There's a lot of talk about the ambiguities, the culture

of the ECC and relationships within ECC and I've never found a safe place to talk about it because it often gets deflected by ECC people themselves, or else I'm saying it to people who don't really understand or weren't part of the organizations ... the ... the role of a woman in an issue like militarism, is very very complex because you are standing alongside men in facing this overwhelmingly violent oppressive system, that is oppressing not only black citizens but you as a woman as well, at the same time though you are standing alongside men who are themselves politically unconscious of their own issues. And I am personally a survivor of sexual violence in a relationship with somebody I stood alongside at ECC functions. And so as a woman in the ECC there were these multiple levels at which one was having to deal with patriarchy both out there and within the organisation. And the way in which ...

PM: Does Daniel Conway address that?

TE: He speaks to the fact that it was raised, and he's right in that it was never addressed. We raised it again and again but even amongst women there were ... I mean as a member of the churches group I was in a very different space from that of – for want of a better word - the *dagga rookers*, the kind of free and easy hippy lifestyle. So with regard to sexual politics we were in completely different places; even as women we were in different places on these issues. And so there was a lot of ... how does one as a woman, as a feminist, take on an issue that is so much about the other as in men, as in the militaristic, the patriarchal, as in violent, and hold onto one's opposition ideologically while not sacrificing one's vulnerability and subjectivity in the process? In the research I've done those are the moments I have felt myself going over an emotional and physical cliff. In about 2010 when I was interviewing conscripts I was hearing the vulnerabilities of men in the interviews, a similar experience to what you've described, men breaking down, weeping; this intense catharsis and having to turn off the recorder that was forcing me to revise ... as a researcher this was traumatising in itself hearing these stories about men having killed, not being able to speak to their children about this – all this stuff. I was doing several interviews a week at one stage. But at the same time recognizing that when you strip away the ideological and patriarchal and the system and the wadawadawada masks, as a feminist who thought I knew where I stood in relation to me, I had to completely revise everything I'd ever constructed to separate myself out from patriarchy. I had to acknowledge the silent stoicism that patriarchalised men are taught to use as a coping strategy was something I completely colluded with. We never created spaces where we could really be vulnerable – certainly in my experience and with my friends. We were so involved with the ideology of things and it took me years to speak about my experience of sexual abuse because it kind of wasn't important at the time in some ways. And yet I think if we'd been able to acknowledge our subjectivities and just the subtle nuances of what was happening for each of us as people, as human beings, the personal that was so often squashed by the political, I wonder if we wouldn't be in a much better place now. Even in this research I'm doing now I don't quite know how to write that; I feel it's going to be a separate piece of writing, because I want to do research work with women in the present because I feel I understand the questions I need to ask as a result of the journey I've traveled. But it's a constant tension and a question and an ache almost. You know we thought we were so right, that we had this moral and ethical right on our side and we could take on anything and make the world a better place, and I'm not sure we really did. I think our own blindnesses have been iterated in succeeding decades. And vulnerability was scoffed at, certainly in my experience. And I think it's happening now. I mean, imagine if the people at Marikana could take away the positioned masks for a moment and just be vulnerable with each other – the farmers and farm workers in De Doorns. I did a seminar at WISER a few weeks ago and there was a woman whose home had been raided in New Brighton by conscripts, and she was very upset by the research I'm doing, and said why are you looking at the experiences of these people? And, rightly or wrongly, I acknowledged what she said, but I ended by saying my starting point in this research is to start from believing that everybody in that room, from white to black, was a living being – and I start from there.

PM: I'm interested in the silence, the silencing, you spoke of earlier in white social life and in white mens' life particularly – within families, at schools and other public domains. You spoke of a silent stoicism earlier – a strategy of not acknowledging fear, vulnerability. Those are masculine vulnerabilities, mainly silenced. It's clear that for many men a lot of the reticence, the vulnerability, the pain that was connected to conscription is

ongoing, having to struggle with these things still, is rooted in the silence, not being able to speak to their parents, at school. To speak would have been seen as a cowardice, raising objections to particular ways of being male in their social grouping. These people, and especially men, didn't speak their discomfort, their vulnerabilities at that time (of course some claim they never experienced these). Also, I wondered often while listening to my interviewees, where are the women in your lives. There seemed, in a good deal of their testimony, to be a striking absence of women as presences, agents. For this reason I'm interested in hearing about your own experiences – as a clearly involved, engaged being, as an activist – of discomfort, vulnerability.

TE: There was a moment at the ECC reunion when I was with a woman, a friend who was married in America who was totally outside of things; and there were these huge photographs on the walls of many of the objectors. And she knows David Bruce, and looked at the photographs and said "he's so sexy in this photograph." And I was struck by that too. There was a sense of sexual potency in those photographs that I don't remember from that time. It must have been just part of who we were. I do remember it with some of the speakers – Cameron Dugmore, the Evans brothers, Laurie Nathan – you know there was often this shifting on the balls of one's feet, this very pelvic energy in the way they would speak. And I've often had this thought flickering through my mind (it's an uninterrogated thought), but it's almost as if there was this masculine energy taking on a masculine system, and that's where the potency was felt far more than in relationships with women. That's a question rather than a statement. Was that sexual potency being lived out in taking on a system rather than in the experience of intimacy and vulnerability with women, even for objectors? One of the things I appreciate about Daniel Conway's argument is whether you went in to the army or whether you objected, there were still performances of masculinities. They were different but they were both performative; and I think in that performativity there was a sacrifice.

PM: Yes, it seems there wasn't a rich range of options for being a man during that time. You could be macho or counter-macho, but if you were something in between or insecure or problematised, there weren't places to go and sit down and feel comfortable.

TE: I actually agree with you, but I think it's important to say there were for some. Even some of the men I've mentioned have moved on to very different ways of being. And also there are stand-out exceptions for me amongst the men who publicly objected. One is Ivan Toms and the other is Richard Steele. When Ivan fasted in the Cathedral there was a priest who fasted with him who I think worked with Ivan in negotiating a journey with him about what he was performing and how he lived his sexuality that invited the discussions of vulnerability. So again one makes claims and there are counter-claims. One says this is how things were and then there are exceptions. I'm finding that to be one of the hardest things – to allow space for that. And Richard is exceptional in the sense that he started as a Baptist and issues were clear-cut; and his journey into a deeply personalised non-violence, ultimately training as a homeopath, has meant that I see him in a very different way from many of the other men. You see, I think there is a difference between those who went to prison, those who did community service, those who took the stands but never went into detention or suffered for the stands they were taking. Within those groups there are different paths, different journeys and narratives to be found.

PM: Yes, there's a considerable range of narratives. The interesting ones are those where it is difficult to pin down exactly where the person fits in in terms of the available ways of being a man, whatever that means.

TE: And how do you write it? (laughs)

PM: You look for the tensions and speak about how they unfold, express themselves. I'm not too concerned about understanding the psychology of them, but rather how they manifest on the page, and maybe just leaving it at that. But there's a pretty muddled, confused, hard and dark eighties, as Rick Andrew puts it, in which there wasn't much space for individuals to find themselves.

TE: Another thought, just as you say that, is I wonder what if part of the prominence that conscripts' narratives and objectors' narratives are being given at the moment isn't because we are facing the same kinds of dilemmas now, that as a white person or a clever black person or whatever kind of person you are, what we say comes out of being positioned, out of prescribed identities rather than being able to speak with vulnerability and subjectivity – in a similar way to how it was playing out in the 1980s...

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