

Remembering and Recollecting World War Two: South African Perspectives

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A dissertation submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the
degree of Master of Arts in Historical Studies

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2014

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Abstract

This thesis explores some of the memories and recollections of World War Two in South Africa today. It aims to address an absence of work done on South Africa in relation to World War Two, memory and commemoration. This thesis is as much about the diverse processes of remembrance and recollection as it is about the war itself and assumes that memories of the war can be located in different media. Accordingly the chapters herein are each delegated a media form, from newspapers, literature, memorials, film and photography to oral interviews, in which ‘memories’ of the war are located. The arrangement of the chapters mimics the history of the war’s remembrance in South Africa as it moved from public to private remembrance. This follows the historical context of South Africa from the war period until approximately mid-2013.

The white Anglophone experience is given prominence in approaching the subject of commemoration and World War Two in Cape Town. This is motivated by Vivian Bickford-Smith and John Lambert, both of whom recognise it as South Africa’s ‘forgotten identity.’¹ Nevertheless other non-white memories of the war are also discussed as important to understanding South Africa’s relationship to it. In particular, the sons and daughters of the Cape Corps briefly feature in this thesis in recognition of a greater Anglophone identity that is not necessarily bound by race. Black recruits are also touched upon as an oft-forgotten group involved in the war. Accordingly this thesis emphasizes that although some experiences and memories were shaped by race, there were others that transcended it.

Lastly the different media forms discussed within this thesis are suggestive of technology’s advances and its impact on the way memories are stored and retrieved. Ultimately, despite the fact that the war has fallen out of public remembrance in Cape Town today, this thesis concludes that it remains important to a few groups and individuals for whom it continues to inform a sense of history and identity.

¹ Vivian Bickford-Smith, ‘Writing about Englishness: South Africa’s Forgotten Nationalism,’ in Graham MacPhee and Prem Poddaer (eds) *Empire and After: Englishness in postcolonial perspective*, Berghahn Books (2007), 57-70; John Lambert, ‘An identity threatened: White English-Speaking South Africans, Britishness and Dominion South Africanism, 1934-1939,’ *Kleio* 37:1 (2005), 50-84.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost I wish to thank my supervisor, Professor Vivian Bickford-Smith for his unwavering support of this thesis. Moreover, his insights and knowledge have been invaluable in informing and guiding my research. Dr Lauren Van Vuuren, too, has been influential over the last few years and I thank her for her energy and creative thinking that have helped shape my work. Thank you also to the Department of Historical Studies at the University of Cape Town for their support.

Thank you to the National Research Foundation (NRF), whose considerable financial assistance has contributed towards this research. However, the opinions expressed and the conclusions arrived at in this thesis remain my own and are not necessarily to be attributed to the NRF. I am also grateful for being a recipient of the de Villiers-Smuts scholarship.

In particular I would like to thank the men and women who shared their memories with me, and warmly welcomed me into their homes. They remain at the heart of this thesis.

Thank you also to my family for supporting me in my studies. Lastly, a special thanks to Daniel Kaliski. Without you, I would never have made it through this last year and for that I remain forever grateful.

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Introduction

When the City of Cape Town announced its recent plan to relocate the Adderley Street War Memorial there was little objection. Some reports dramatically referred to the ‘public outcry’ against the monument’s movement, but who was this public they were referring to? Certainly there were mutterings from veteran groups about disrespecting not only the history of the City but the very men who gave their lives in the wars that the memorial represents.

However, beyond this murmur, the vast majority of Capetonians continued with the hustle and bustle of their daily lives. World War One, whose hundredth anniversary rapidly approaches, was well off the mnemonic radar of public memory in Cape Town. But what of World War Two? Globally, the war’s memory has been democratised, carried through popular culture in film and photographic images, a subject of horror and fascination. In South Africa, it remains, for the moment, a ‘living memory,’ with men and women, some well into their nineties, still recalling those bygone days.

This thesis explores some of the memories and recollections of the war in South Africa today. It is as much about processes of remembrance and recollection as it is about the war itself and assumes that memories of the war can be located in different media. According to Jan Assman, cultural memory consists of ‘that body of...texts, images and rituals, specific to each society and each epoch.’² Accordingly the chapters herein are each delegated a media form, from newspapers, literature, memorials, film and photography to oral interviews. Their arrangement mimics the history of the war’s remembrance in South Africa as it moved from public prominence to private remembrance. Furthermore the different media forms discussed within are suggestive of technology’s advances and its impact on the way memories are stored and retrieved. Ultimately, despite the fact that the war has fallen out of public remembrance in Cape Town today, the war remains important to a few groups and individuals for whom it continues to inform a sense of history and identity.

² Jan Assman as cited by Wulf Kansteiner, ‘Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies,’ *History and Theory*, 41 (2002)182.

A Context for Forgetting

In South Africa, tracing World War Two's remembrance outlines a process of forgetting. The South African war experience differed from that of other participating countries. Only a small percentage of its male population volunteered for the war and geographically, the country was distant from the battlegrounds. The landscape was never ravaged by battle nor invested with the same emotional value accorded to places of mass death - nor was the non-participating majority exposed to the horrors of war in any kind of personal way, unless through the experiences of a loved one. South Africa was emotionally and geographically distanced from the war.

The contemporary ruling white populace was divided over the issue of participation, and enlistment was voluntary. Most English-speakers, regardless of race, identified with Empire and supported the war. It was only those 'Anglo-Afrikaners,' who believed in Smuts and recognized the benefits of British ties, who supported the bid for participation.³ Numerous Afrikaners, who identified with the National Party, opposed the war. They associated 'Empire' with the bitterness of their defeat in the 1899-1902 Anglo-Boer War. Many, however, volunteered out of financial need. Ultimately roughly half of the white contingent was Afrikaans.⁴

For the majority of the black populace the war was just another European affair.⁵ According to David Killingray,

the Native Affairs Department, in co-operation with the military authorities, used a wide variety of means to encourage men to enlist in the Native Military Corps. Posters were placed in beerhalls, railway stations, cinemas and clubs, and on buses and trams...[yet] discrimination was invoked again and again by many Africans as a reason for not enlisting.⁶

Some volunteered for financial reasons but overall their numbers remained relatively few. Furthermore they were restricted to supportive, non-combatant roles, unable to carry arms.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Bill Nasson, *South Africa at War: 1939-1945*, Jacana: Auckland Park (2012), 15.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ David Killingray, *Fighting for Britain: African Soldiers in the Second World War*, James Currey: Suffolk (2010), 72-3.

Certainly the absence of any recognition for their participation in the First World War, and the continued racial discrimination against them, hindered the enlistment campaigns that did occur.⁷

Overall in 1939, out of approximately ten million South Africans of all races,⁸ 334 000 men and women (0.03%) volunteered their service (see table). Only a small percentage of the country's population was thus directly involved in the war. This limited participation meant that there were few people for whom the war would remain important.

Demographic Data, South African World War II Volunteers⁹

	African & Coloured	White
Male	123 000	186 100
Female	-	24 700

The war's distance and its contested meaning in the country created an unstable basis for long-term, wide-spread remembrance after its end. Furthermore Apartheid, which became far more prevalent in the everyday lives of South Africans, quickly overshadowed the war in the country's history and memory.

Both Apartheid and post-Apartheid governments have played a role in shaping the memories of the war. The former either actively avoided its commemoration or more indirectly silenced it by promoting other areas of remembrance. The latter, understandably, has pursued new heroes in commemoration of the colossal stand against Apartheid.¹⁰ Consequently the war does not play an important symbolic role for current affairs in the country today. In the rare event that the war is recognized, it is carefully, if not briefly, woven into the rhetoric of this freedom struggle. Otherwise, with the deaths of more and more veterans, their numbers

⁷ David Killingray, (2010), 72-3.

⁸ Jan Lahmeyer, 'South Africa: Historical Demographical Data of the Whole Country,' *Populstat Site*, (1999/2003) available at: <http://www.populstat.info/Africa/safricac.htm>.

⁹ Bill Nasson (2012), 19.

¹⁰ Bill Nasson (2012), 22-3.

dwindling in the face of old age, memories of the war are left to members of the subsequent generations and the realm of private remembrance.

Rationale

This thesis argues that despite the fact that the war is rarely remembered in South Africa today outside of a popular culture context or that of ‘world history,’ it remains an important period in the country’s history. On one level it is important because there still exist men and women for whom the war remains personally and politically significant. For veterans the war forms a part of their life-stories. For communities such as the sons and daughters of the Cape Corps, the South African coloured regiment in the war, disputes over the ownership of their current homes link directly back to the demobilization of their fathers. The war also informs their family histories and sense of identity.

Considering Apartheid’s racial discrimination, it is hardly surprising that generalizations (although only up to a point) can be made about white versus black and coloured memories of the war. Apartheid is thus largely absent from the narratives of the white veterans that were interviewed. A seemingly neutral force for them, their war memories remain untouched, untainted by it.¹¹ The war, for them, remains generally a moment of pride, but for most black and coloured veterans and their families, this pride has been mixed with betrayal - not only in terms of the government’s poor compensation plans after the war, but the denial of their human rights in the form of Apartheid. Thus the meaning of the war for those South Africans who do remember it today, although far from simple, is certainly important.

Moreover, the war’s movement from public to private remembrance illuminates other important aspects of South Africa’s history. The ‘white divide’ that separated public opinion over the issue of participation in the war is illustrative of a long history of antagonism between English and Afrikaans speakers in the country and it was those who opposed war who came to power in 1948.

¹¹ Sarah-Jane Walton, *Those Dying Days*, UCT Honours Documentary (Department of Historical Studies: 2012).

Nevertheless it is important to note that using the lens of the 'white divide' to understand the era and the South African World War Two experience(s) is inadequate. To portray this divide as the defining feature of the war and its 'meaning' would be to betray the black and coloured men and women involved, as well as simplifying a rather complex matter - for every individual represents a personal story of the war experience. It would also incorrectly suggest that all Afrikaners were right-wing and against the war and all English whites were liberal and unanimously for it. It might lead one to conclude that poverty was the only reason black and coloured men volunteered or even worse, support the impression that it was, after all, only a 'white man's war.' This thesis, although highlighting this 'white divide,' also insists on the complexity of the matter.

This thesis thus deals with a significant period in the history of South Africans. The war might have seeped out of public consciousness today, but it was a prevalent factor in people's lives during its years. Newspapers were filled with reports on the war, which were also featured on the 'wireless.' The 'bioscope' showed new reels propounding the strength and perseverance of the South African troops and the miracles of South Africa's industrial production. The newsreels were good for morale, but they also served recruitment purposes. In short, the war was a part of everyday discussion, especially in the cities. Cape Town in particular saw the ebb and flow of troops as they passed through on their journeys northwards. Families hosted the troops during their stays and the men became a common sight on the city's streets.

The war period is further significant as, rapidly approaching the establishment of Apartheid, it stands as a counterfactual moment to the rise of Afrikaner nationalism.¹² In particular, Smuts' victory in the bid to participate in the war represented a surge in loyalty to the Commonwealth. The period is also imbued with other transnational cultural markers - the swing jazz of the 1940s, or the likes of Mae West and Ginger Rogers filling the silver screens.

In South Africa the war was accompanied by a surge in industrial output, as well as mass migration to the cities and a brief relaxation of labour policy, allowing blacks and coloureds to fill positions otherwise reserved for whites. By the end of the war, for example, Cape

¹² Bill Nasson as cited from Sarah-Jane Walton, *Those Dying Days*, UCT (2012).

Town emerged as an ‘modern industrialized city.’¹³ Women, too, entered the workforce in greater numbers than before and represented roughly seventy percent of the munitions factories’ workforce during the war.¹⁴ Spurred on by increasing Afrikaner nationalism, as seen through the 1938 Great Trek Centenary celebrations, black and coloured politics too saw a hardening of beliefs. By 1943 it had become obvious that even Smuts did not intend to dispose of racial segregation.¹⁵ Thus the war is an important moment to consider in South Africa’s history as it laid bare many of the pre-existing tensions in the country. Beyond this, the war is significant in locating South Africa within a wider, global history.

Literature on South Africa and the War

World War Two is undoubtedly a popular historic subject, but the literature focussing on South Africa’s relationship to it is somewhat more modest. Albert Grundlingh notes that ‘[i]n contrast to the situation in Commonwealth countries such as Canada and Australia, South Africa’s participation in the Second World War has not been accorded a particularly significant place in the country’s historiography.’¹⁶ This is tied to South Africa’s complicated relationship to the war and the consequent process of forgetting. Karen Horn focuses on the South African prisoner-of-war experience as an important part of South Africa’s war story. She, too, argues that ‘through their post-1948 policies, the Apartheid government not only rendered South African World War Two veterans virtually voiceless regarding their participation in the war, but the government’s chosen ideology also resulted in international historians marginalising South Africa’s role and contribution to the war.’¹⁷

Besides Grundlingh’s own contributions, particularly on Anglo-Afrikaners,¹⁸ other notable works on the South Africa and the Second World War include Bill Nasson’s *South Africa at War: 1939-1945*¹⁹ (the most recent, and perhaps the most concise, account of South Africa’s

¹³ Vivian Bickford-Smith, Elizabeth van Heyningen and Nigel Worden, *Cape Town in the Twentieth Century*, David Philip: Cape Town (1999), 111.

¹⁴ Vivian Bickford-Smith, Elizabeth van Heyningen and Nigel Worden (1999), 97.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Albert Grundlingh, ‘The King’s Afrikaners? Enlistment and Ethnic Identity in the Union of South Africa’s Defence Force during the Second World War, 1939-1945,’ *Journal of African History* 40 (1999), 351.

¹⁷ Karen Horn, *South African Prisoner-of-War Experience during and after World War II: 1939 - C.1950*, University of Stellenbosch (PhD dissertation: December 2012), 2.

¹⁸ Albert Grundlingh, (1999), 351-365.

¹⁹ Bill Nasson, (2012).

participation in the war) and Jennifer Crwys-William's *A Country at War*.²⁰ Both Nasson and Crwys-Williams illustrate the period with great vivacity. This thesis draws upon their work as a basis for understanding the war period, but goes beyond them in its consideration of the war's commemoration over time. The dissertations of S. Chetty and LWF Grundlingh should also be noted for their contribution to the field of South Africa and World War Two. Although they were discovered too late for proper inclusion in this thesis, it would be remiss of scholars interested in the field to omit Chetty's *Our Victory was our Defeat: Race, Gender and Liberalism in the Union Defence Force, 1939-1945*²¹ and Grundlingh's *The Participation of South African blacks in the Second World War*.²²

David Killingray's *Fighting For Britain* is an important contribution to understanding black soldiers who fought for Britain, tracing enlistment strategies and treatment of the soldiers across the continent.²³ Killingray begins to address the lack of literature on African soldiers in the war. This thesis, in focussing on Anglophone identity, also recognises this shortfall in its own work and proposes that further study is required.

The most relevant and insightful work with regards to Cape veterans and their war memories is the work done by Kevin Greenbank, namely *You chaps mustn't worry when you come back: Cape Town soldiers and aspects of the experience of war and demobilization 1939-1953*.²⁴ The experiences of demobilisation in Greenbank's work are echoed in the interviews conducted for the purposes of this thesis. However unlike Greenbank's approach, the research herein is directly concerned with questions of commemoration and the cultural forms in which these memories are located. By situating itself in the present, this thesis seeks to understand the memories and meanings of the war as they change over time.

Theoretical Approach

²⁰ Jennifer Crwys-Williams, *A Country at War 1939-1945: The Mood of a Nation*, Ashanti: (1992). Many of the other works which are available regarding South Africa and the war are largely military histories tracking South African troops on their campaigns, such as Neil Orpen's series of volumes entitled *South African Forces World War II*. [Neil Orpen, *South African Forces World War II*, Cape Town: Purnell (1968).]

²¹ S. Chetty, *Our Victory was our Defeat: Race, Gender and Liberalism in the Union Defence Force, 1939-1945*, UKZN: PhD Thesis (2006).

²² LWF Grundlingh, *The Participation of South African blacks in the Second World War*, RAU: PhD Thesis (1987).

²³ David Killingray, (2010).

²⁴ Kevin Greenbank, *You chaps mustn't worry when you come back: Cape Town soldiers and aspects of the experience of war and demobilization 1939-1953*, Cape Town: UCT Press, MA Thesis (1995).

Indeed, this thesis expands upon the literature generated by these aforementioned authors and seeks to help further knowledge about World War Two in relation to South Africa. It also differs from these works in the importance it places on memory and commemoration, which has been largely untouched in the South African World War Two experience. In particular, this thesis explores the cultural media in which ‘memories’ of the war reside.²⁵ It suggests that as technology and society changes, so do the forms in which memories are located. Furthermore, tracing the war in varying media forms over time illustrates the war’s movement from public to private remembrance in South Africa and its changing meanings.

This thesis is thus influenced by the approaches of Albert Grundlingh,²⁶ Bill Nasson²⁷ and Jay Winter²⁸ in their explorations into the politics of remembrance, commemoration and the nature of memory. Winter’s discussion on the politics and ritualization of commemoration of the Great War is invaluable for approaching commemoration of World War Two in South Africa. Nasson and Grundlingh explore the Boer War and the sinking of the SS Mendi in the First World War respectively, as their representations have changed over time according to political agenda and projects of national heritage and commemoration. It is their longitudinal historical approach, starting from the event and leading up to the present day, which has been central to the shaping of this thesis in its discussions on World War Two in South Africa.

Astrid Erll’s article on ‘travelling memory,’ identifies cultural artefacts and media forms as repositories of memory.²⁹ Erll explains that

Travelling memory is a metaphorical shorthand, for the fact that in the production of cultural memory, people, media, mnemonic forms, contents, and practises are in constant unceasing motion... [and thus]...Mnemonic forms and contents are filled with new life and new meaning in changing social, temporal and local contexts.³⁰

Her work has inspired the multi-media approach in locating ‘memories’ of World War Two in this thesis and the way in which these memories are filled with ‘new life and new

²⁵ Such an approach is also applicable to subjects besides the war.

²⁶ Albert Grundlingh, ‘Mutating Memories and the Making of Myth: Remembering the SS Mendi Disaster, 1917-2007,’ *South African Historical Journal* 63:1 (2011), 21, 36.

²⁷ Bill Nasson, ‘Commemorating the Anglo-Boer War in Post-Apartheid South Africa,’ *Radical Historical Review* 78 (2000), 149-165.

²⁸ J.M. Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War, Between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century*, Yale University Press: Michigan (2006).

²⁹ Astrid Erll, ‘Travelling Memory,’ *Parallax* 17:4 (2011), 4-18.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 11-12.

meaning' to different people and in different contexts. Furthermore, it encourages a perspective which acknowledges new media forms as potential carriers of memory. Thus in addition to newspapers, memorials, literature and film, this thesis also considers interactive websites such as web-memorials and Facebook pages as contemporary forms with commemorative functions. Within this recently burgeoning field, this thesis offers fresh insight into the way the war is being remembered in South Africa.³¹ Taken as a whole, this thesis offers the most comprehensive view of South Africa and the war in relation to commemoration and the cultural media in which memories reside.

The white Anglophone experience is given prominence in approaching the subject of commemoration and World War Two in South Africa. This is motivated by Vivian Bickford-Smith and John Lambert, both of whom recognise that compared with the two big 'game-changers' of the twentieth century in South Africa, Afrikaner and African nationalism, 'white English-speaking South Africans' are part of a 'forgotten identity.'³² This research thus aims to help address this gap. It is vital to note, however, that 'Anglophone identity' is a category that cuts across race, gender and class. Indeed, through Britain's cultural hegemony in the Cape for close to 150 years it is those who continued to identify with the coloniser, its language, culture and economic ties, who largely supported South Africa's participation in the Second World War. The families of the Cape Corps, South Africa's coloured regiment during the war, are thus also interviewed because they also share this heritage. South African memories of the war are not limited to English-speakers and the importance of including non-English white, black and coloured experiences of the war is emphasized.

Memory's fluidity, its constant re-interpretation and adaption, consequently involves an approach which traces how the war's meaning and narrative has changed over time.³³ Integral to the 'what,' the 'when' and the 'how' is also the 'who,' and the war's movement from the realm of public consciousness to private remembrance is reflected in the media chosen. The

³¹ For examples of this literature see Aaron Hess, 'In digital Remembrance: Vernacular memory and the rhetorical construction of web memorials,' *Media, Culture, Society* 29 (2007), 812-828; Pamela Roberts and Lourdes A. Vidal, 'Perpetual Care in Cyberspace: A Portrait of Memorials on the Web,' *Omega: Journal of Death and Dying* 40:4 (1999-2000), 521-45.

³² Vivian Bickford-Smith, 'Writing about Englishness: South Africa's Forgotten Nationalism,' in Graham MacPhee and Prem Poddaer (eds) *Empire and After: Englishness in postcolonial perspective*, Berghahn Books (2007), 57-70; John Lambert, 'An identity threatened: White English-Speaking South Africans, Britishness and Dominion South Africanism, 1934-1939,' *Kleio* 37:1 (2005), 50-84.

³³ Halwachs postulated that 'remembering is always an active process of (re)construction and (re)presentation,' and, accordingly, that 'memory is always present-situated.' Halwachs as discussed by Godfrey and Lilley, 'Visual Consumption, Collective Memory and the Representation of War,' *Consumption Markets and Culture* 12:4 (2009), 280.

structure of the thesis roughly follows this movement, first focussing on newspapers, then monuments and memorials, literature, film and photography and, finally, interviews.

The focus on the war's movement from the realm of the public to private remembrance necessitates clarification of the term 'public remembrance.' Remembrance can be performed publicly (at public memorials, say), but this does not necessarily indicate widespread remembering. Neither is there necessarily a clear distinction to be made between recollection and remembrance. In fact, when dealing particularly with life histories, acts of recollection arguably automatically entail acts of private commemoration or remembrance.³⁴ Moreover the use of '*public* remembrance' or commemoration in this thesis is more akin to 'collective memory' as proposed by Halwachs who emphasizes 'the function of everyday communication.'³⁵ What is being dealt with, then, is "that most elusive phenomena, *popular consciousness*."³⁶ During the early 1940s, for example, the war would have been part of daily discussions and actions, if not nationally in South Africa, most certainly in the city centres including, most definitely, Cape Town. The war, then, has not been sustained in national memory over time. Wulf Kansteiner frames this process of forgetting as natural, saying that 'in "the field of cultural negotiation through which different stories vie for a place in history,"³⁷ failure is the rule.'³⁸ Collective memories when they do occur cannot be separated from the individual memories informing them (and visa versa) and, according to Kansteiner, these memories exist on a multiplicity of levels: 'families, professions, political generations, ethnic and regional groups, social classes and nations,' all of which can occur simultaneously as each individual belongs to 'several mnemonic communities.'³⁹

It is appropriate, then, to recognize 'memories' or narratives specific to certain cultural groups, and in this case an Anglophone culture within South Africa. However, far from representing 'easy access' to any given cultural group's understanding of the war, it must be acknowledged that any cultural identifier represents only one fluid facet of an individual's identity. 'Cultural memory,' can also be conceptualised as the idea that memories are 'embodied in mnemonic artefacts'⁴⁰ or Halwachs' emphasis on the 'materiality of

³⁴ If a distinction is to be made between remembrance and recollection it might be argued that remembrance is a more purposeful 'honouring of the past.' Nevertheless they lie within the same continuum.

³⁵ Wulf Kansteiner discussing Maurice Halwachs, (2002), 181.

³⁶ John Dower as cited by Wulf Kansteiner (2002), 180.

³⁷ Sturkin as cited by Wulf Kansteiner (2002), 193.

³⁸ Wulf Kansteiner (2002), 193.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 188-9.

⁴⁰ Halwachs as discussed by Godfrey and Lilley (2009), 280.

memory.’⁴¹ According to Jan Assman, cultural memory consists of ‘that body of...texts, images and rituals, specific to each society and each epoch,’⁴² including other objects of remembrance such as buildings, memorials, and even photographs and film. This affirms Astrid Erll’s ‘travelling memory,’ and it is with this in mind that this project has been arranged.

Methodology and Chapter Overview

Each chapter in this thesis analyses a cultural medium and has been ordered to roughly show the movement from public to private remembrance that the war has undergone. This also implies a vague chronology. Starting with newspapers during the years 1939-45, in which the war was central to public discourse, the thesis ends with interviews conducted over the last year so as to illustrate the move to private remembrance. This is, however, by no means exact.

Furthermore the chapters herein are unable to go to any great depth with their respective subjects. This is a consequence of the breadth of this approach, covering a wide range of media and over a span of seventy years. Each chapter warrants further investigation and could be a thesis in its own right. The problem of superficiality has attempted to be counteracted through a close reading of a specific case study in each chapter.

Chapter 1: Newspapers

Both the National Library and the University of Cape Town’s African Studies Collection were consulted for their microfilms of the Cape Times and Die Burger. They were chosen as respective representatives of English versus Afrikaans speaking whites, who disagreed with participation in the war and connections to the Empire (although these correlations between the readers and the newspapers cannot be so simply drawn). The newspapers were analysed according to the degree to which World War Two was mentioned and the way in which this was done. These representations were then considered in their respective socio-political contexts. Key dates specific to the war (such as 11 November, 01 September, 08 May, June

⁴¹ Wulf Kansteiner (2002), 182.

⁴² Jan Assman as cited by Wulf Kansteiner (2002), 182.

06) were examined, spanning a period of roughly seventy years from 1939 to the 2000s. Because of the wealth of information available, landmark years (ten, twenty five, fifty) were chosen for examination. This focussed the study by examining the years in which the war was more likely to be discussed.

Chapter 2: Literature

This chapter focusses on literature as a medium in which memories of the war are located. Select poems by Guy Butler were consulted along with his autobiography, *Bursting World*. In particular an analysis of the content of his work reveals universal truths of war. Alongside universalisms, Butler reveals particularly local understandings of the war as informed by his own identity. Butler is representative of a number of veterans who wrote about their World War Two experiences and this approach equally could have been applied to them.

Chapter 3: Memorials and Social Media

Chapter three traces the war's movement from public to private remembrance by focussing on Cape Town's war memorial in Adderley Street and its 'social life.' Rituals and acts of commemoration are central to its meaning and the dwindling numbers of supporters at annual Remembrance Day ceremonies is indicative of the process of forgetting the war. In contrast to this the South African Legion's Facebook page is explored as a site of active remembrance of the war, but the veteran sub-culture that is represented in the group is largely exclusive. A niche group, then, their acts of commemoration are more akin to private than public remembrance. Nevertheless the importance of online memorials is emphasized as an accessible way in which commemoration be performed.

The Adderley Street War memorial was researched as the main tribute to the two World Wars in Cape Town. Official documents from the City of Cape Town housed in the National Archives were consulted starting from the early 1920s (records from the most recent couple of decades are yet to be unsealed). These were used to determine who the main actors were in the construction and maintenance of the Adderley Street memorial and commemoration ceremonies and the justifications they gave for their actions.

The South African Legion's Facebook page was chosen as a social media site in which commemorative actions occur. Permission was granted to access the group's page which was then analysed according to its member demographics, content and form. It was analysed and contrasted with the Adderley Street Memorial as a contemporary form of commemoration.

Chapter 4: Visual Media

Chapter four, 'Visual Media' discusses the power of film and photography in recording events, but also in shaping memories. A private collection of World War Two photographs were donated to the project. They remain anonymous with little indication as to who the owner was besides the contents of the photographs themselves. These were then analysed as an archive according to both content and form in relation to the question of memory and World War Two. Film is also discussed as another popular visual medium. In particular the documentary *A pair of Boots and a Bicycle* was considered in both content and form as an example of a work focussing specifically on non-white South African experiences of the war.

Chapter 5: Interviews

Chapter five moves further into the realm of private remembrance. At the beginning of 2012 a letter was sent to the Cape Times requesting an interview with anyone interested in talking about World War Two memories. The Cape Times was selected for its Anglophone orientation, with which this thesis is concerned. Respondents were contacted and a preference was given to veterans (both male and female), then their families. Within this the selection was largely random and limited to practical constraints of time and labour.

In 2012, interviews were filmed by the author and edited into a short documentary entitled *Those Dying Days*. In 2013 interviews were continued as the project moved forward, this time with audio equipment. In-depth interviews were used with a preference for open-ended questions in which the space was provided for the interviewee to talk with minimal interjection from the interviewer. These interviews were considered in terms of the subjective meaning of the war for the interviewees. All consent forms and recording of the interviews are currently housed with the University of Cape Town.

Lastly a post-script acknowledges the limits of this thesis and suggests areas of research with the potential for further investigation.

Chapter One

Locating Remembrance: Newspapers

Cape Times, Die Burger and the war narrative

‘Afrikaners Unite in Dark Hour’⁴³ announced the headlines of *Die Burger* on the 06 September 1939. The Western Cape’s chief Afrikaans newspaper, representing the vast majority of Afrikaans-speaking whites therein, was lamenting the United Party’s decision to enter the war on the side of the Allies. Calls to put ‘South Africa First!’⁴⁴ and ‘Keep Union out of World Disaster,’⁴⁵ did not fit comfortably with the views of the *Cape Times* readership. Representing most English-speaking white Capetonians, they sincerely believed the war to be ‘this hour of destiny,’⁴⁶ in which ‘there should be no hesitation on the part of South Africa in arraying itself... on the side of the forces which are seeking to save the world from utter destruction.’⁴⁷ The fact that the war produced such diverging views whereby one person’s ‘darkest hour’ was the other’s ‘hour of destiny’ was inextricably linked to the colonial history of South Africa and the white identities forged therein. *Die Burger* and the *Cape Times* are important sources of information regarding this ‘white divide’ in their ability both to reflect and inform the opinions of the groups they seek to represent. The war, standing on the precipice of a turning point in South Africa’s history, can be seen as a battleground for many of these conflicting values and ideals.

Furthermore, these newspapers illuminate the war’s path from public to private remembrance over the years from 1939 to the early 2000s. While emerging at key points in history – its tenth, twenty-fifth and fiftieth year anniversaries – it is otherwise absent from public discourse. As ‘cultural carriers,’ these two newspapers offer further insight into the way in which the representations of the war change according to different contexts and in so doing exemplify the fluidity of memory and the construction of ‘history.’

It is this theme and the identification of other sites and carriers of memory, such as monuments and memorials, and photography and film, which will be similarly addressed later in this thesis.

⁴³ *Die Burger*, 06 September 1939.

⁴⁴ *Die Burger*, 04 September 1939.

⁴⁵ *Die Burger*, 03 September 1939.

⁴⁶ *Cape Times*, 04 September 1939.

⁴⁷ *Cape Times*, 01 September 1939.

Cape Times and Die Burger: Contexts

The *Cape Times* and *Die Burger* were both apt choices for examining representations of the war. Their continued popularity to this day, was an important consideration for a longitudinal study. Furthermore, in their largely divergent opinions (at least during the war), they offer insight into the political context of the time which helped to shape the South African war experience.

Accordingly, while the *Cape Times* has had a long history of reflecting the opinions of English-speaking Capetonians, *Die Burger* was one of the bigger pro-Nationalist papers in the Cape. In fact under Apartheid it continued to become the mouthpiece of the National Party.⁴⁸ Elaine Potter, writing of the Apartheid period, argues that

the differences between the two structures, of Afrikaans and English-language press, were fundamental. They both reflected, and in some measure helped maintain, the existing divisions within South African society. The difference in their basic orientations, their relationships to the economy and polity, their audiences and their intentions were most clearly evidenced in the style and content of the two newspaper groups.⁴⁹

Thus studying *Die Burger* and the *Cape Times* from the 1940s to the near present not only gives insight into the changing war narrative as it is adapted, but also illustrates some of the changing social identities and political movements within the white community.

The press, accordingly, is particularly important to the ‘white divide’ which characterized South Africa’s entry into the war. This divide, evident in the papers at the time, is also a part of the war narrative told by many of the wartime South African volunteers and was a turning point for white politics in the country, whereafter Apartheid made its formal debut. The *Cape Times* was the Cape’s first daily newspaper and was central to the English press, which inherited a mildly more liberal attitude, at least compared to its Afrikaans counterpart. The Afrikaans press ‘was never touched by the liberalism sweeping Europe in the nineteenth century,’⁵⁰ and was a relatively late bloomer in the field of South African newspapers. It only emerged as separate from the Dutch press in the 1920s as an important part of growing

⁴⁸ Elaine Potter, *The Press as Opposition: The Political Role of South African Newspapers*, London: Chatto & Windus (1975), 9.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Elaine Potter (1975), 31.

Afrikaner nationalism.⁵¹ *Die Burger* was established simultaneously with the National Party in 1915. It serving as the ‘party organ’ and promoted ‘Afrikaner political and cultural ideology.’⁵² In stark contrast to the *Cape Times*’ support of the war, *Die Burger*’s adamant stand against participation was part and parcel of the National Party’s attempts to sever ties with its former colonial power, Britain, and gain complete (Afrikaner) independence.

A final note regarding the choice of medium is required. The ink-pressed pages of the newspapers were only one of the ways in which news was conveyed. ‘The wireless,’ too, kept listeners informed. South Africa’s radio, however, has historically been controlled by the state.⁵³ Under the United Party’s directive it espoused the same views as found in *the Cape Times*. Under the National Party’s control post-1948, the South African Broadcasting Corporation was similarly ‘subject to propaganda,’ echoing the views espoused in *Die Burger*.⁵⁴ The newspapers, then, approximate what would have been broadcast on radio.

Similarly the exclusion of the black press is due to the fact that during the years of Apartheid, ‘the African press (was) controlled and financed wholly by white interests, though frequently staffed and edited by Africans.’⁵⁵ It is thus difficult to trace a definite black opinion through papers controlled by whites and, more importantly, establish any sort of continuity with comings and goings of these smaller papers over the years.

Locating the War

In order to detect any trends or themes in the way the war has been remembered over the years, key dates were chosen so as not to be overwhelmed by seven decades of daily news from both *Die Burger* and the *Cape Times*. The first week of September holds particular significance in marking the outbreak of war in 1939. D-Day, VE Day and Armistice Day (which now commemorates both wars) are also used as focal dates for examination. Considering the war’s retreat from public memory in South Africa, back issues printed on these keys dates were examined during ‘milestone’ years (the ten, twenty-five, fifty and sixty

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² David Behan (1998), 101: Malan and Verwoerd both served as editors for the newspaper.

⁵³ Ibid, 49.

⁵⁴ Ibid. With the exception that South Africans could tune into the BBC overseas service broadcasts. A lack of BBC broadcasts transcripts in South Africa thus also limits that avenue of study severely.

⁵⁵ Elaine Potter (1975), 49.

year anniversaries) as they were more likely to reflect on the war. Each time jump allows for a change in context, both domestically and internationally. Representations of the war, as seen through *Die Burger* and the *Cape Times*, have changed over time as the war has been re-interpreted and re-integrated into other narratives.

Furthermore the frequency of news reflecting on the war has significantly decreased over time, to the extent that the war is sometimes not mentioned at all, even on some of the selected landmark dates. Interestingly, when the war is referenced in more recent decades, it is increasingly distanced from a South African context. It is not uncommon for the *Cape Times* to print, in the last decade or so, a picture of the Queen laying a wreath in Britain as the given report on Remembrance Day. The inclusion of such representations masks South Africa's own involvement in the war and places the war in the realm of other peoples' history.

Wartime Representations

It is striking, leafing through September 1939 of the *Cape Times*, how different things felt just seventy years ago. It is worthy of that oft-expressed saying, 'the past is a foreign country, they do things differently there.'⁵⁶ Both newspapers represent two overlapping but distinct worlds. The Union represented in the *Cape Times* is a smaller, more intimate and distinctly colonial world inhabited by a certain degree of 'good old British aplomb' celebrating ties to Empire. English language newspapers, in fact, had a history of 'modelling themselves on Fleet Street, and right up until the 1920s imported most of their journalists.'⁵⁷ The *Cape Times* continued the tradition and during the war period followed its Northern counterpart, the *Times* in London, in its representation of the war.⁵⁸ In contrast, *Die Burger's* world, equally small, is packed with the activities and aspirations of a burgeoning Afrikaner nation.

There is no doubting the *Cape Times's* position towards the war. The Allies were the 'voice of freedom' in the face of 'Germany's ruthlessness.' Britain was 'drawing the sword on behalf

⁵⁶ L.P. Hartley's opening lines of his novel, *The Go Between*.

⁵⁷ Elaine Potter (1975), 30.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

of every country which values freedom of conscience, free institutions and the unfettered right to shape their own destinies.’⁵⁹ Participation in the war according to this logic was for the *Cape Times* the only choice as ‘on the issue of this tremendous struggle depends their personal and national liberties.’⁶⁰ The appeal to freedom was recurrent and often phrased as a ‘cause’ or ‘crusade,’ appealing to a sense of justice and honour. Accordingly it was disgraceful to talk of neutrality as ‘it is the duty of the Union...to preserve the honour of South Africa and safeguarding of her interests.’⁶¹ Here the Union’s interests and Britain’s are seen as one.

The Nationalists too used the rhetoric of freedom, but as an argument against South Africa entering the war. They saw participation as impinging on their national liberty. *Die Burger* on 01 September 1939 published an article entitled ‘Loyal to the Empire,’ in which loyalty to Britain meant betraying South Africa and her people. It argued that ‘It’s time for the National Party, on behalf of the South African white population, to take a clear, unequivocal and resolute stance...that non-interference in European troubles is the way...We must guard against alien influence that will want to use this country as a tool.’⁶² South Africa finally did declare war on Germany after a parliamentary vote. The results were close and Smuts had defeated Hertzog’s faction, which was opposed to the war, by a mere eleven votes.⁶³ Despite the narrow victory, the *Cape Times* enthusiastically declared, ‘let those who proudly acknowledge today the courage and faith and honour with which General Smuts has saved the country from imperishable disgrace.’⁶⁴ For *Die Burger* and its readers, the results could not have been worse and with the resignation of Hertzog as Prime Minister, they resolutely proclaimed, ‘Afrikaners unite in dark hour’⁶⁵ and lamented the death of democracy in the country. Overall it remains clear, as Bill Nasson argues, that ‘there was no popular mandate for war in September 1939.’⁶⁶ It is this divided opinion, however, with conflicting representations of the war, which would help form an unstable foundation for long term memorialisation of the war.

⁵⁹ *The Cape Times*, 02 September 1939.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Die Burger*, 01 September 1939.

⁶³ Michael Crowder, *The Cambridge History of South Africa V8*, Cambridge University Press (2003), 285.

⁶⁴ *The Cape Times*, 06 September 1939.

⁶⁵ *Die Burger*, 06 September 1939.

⁶⁶ Bill Nasson (2012), 18.

The representations of the war did not so clearly maintain this dichotomy as the war progressed. *Die Burger* eventually accepted South Africa's participation and rather than disparaging their soldiers (half of whom were Afrikaans), proudly enthused about upholding the 'Springbok tradition.' Both newspapers agreed that South African soldiers were brave, persevering and endlessly cheerful. Even when approximately 30000 men were captured at Tobruk in June 1942, the tragedy was woven into a narrative of endurance.⁶⁷ The *Cape Times* cited General Smuts, saying, 'South Africans can take it...they uphold the fighting tradition of the South African army.'⁶⁸ In fact the loss was promptly put to use in an enlistment campaign, with newsreels at the bioscope encouraging men and women to 'Avenge Tobruk.'⁶⁹

The newspapers were vital to conveying news from the front, especially as the war for South Africans at home was a compilation of 'second-hand experiences.'⁷⁰ Reports were integral to the imaginations of the men and women in the Union and their conception of the war, as were letters written by soldiers and reproduced in the papers. One such series of letters written by 'Cape Town men of the 6th Division' was published in the *Cape Times*. The letters bore no hint of unsavoury behaviour, violence, loneliness, depression, fear and the appalling conditions of war. A heavily romanticized view, they instead spoke of 'Italy's entrancing beauty,' with its 'quaint villages,' 'idyllic mountain streams' and 'fields of poppies.'⁷¹ Readers in the fair Cape, so distant from the battlegrounds of the war, were left with a somewhat idealistic and simplistic impression of war.

On the 08 May 1945, the *Cape Times* released an article celebrating VE Day (Victory in Europe), in which General Smuts congratulated the Union. Despite the fact that the Union had been a country divided, he argued, and

unprepared in every respect, we had to rely on volunteers for active service, first in Africa and later for service everywhere...In spite of fears that the call for volunteers might fail, we succeeded in raising an army, which, in relation to our European population, compared favourably with that of every other country at war...At the end of the war our men were covering themselves with glory in the final battles of North

⁶⁷ Suryakanthi Chetty, 'Imaging National Unity: South African Propaganda Efforts during the Second World War,' *Kronos* 38 (2012), 118.

⁶⁸ *The Cape Times*, 22 June 1942.

⁶⁹ Suryakanthi Chetty (2012), 118. See Chetty for propaganda efforts and enlistment appeal during the war.

⁷⁰ Bill Nasson (2012), 19.

⁷¹ *Cape Times*, 07 June 1944.

Italy, just as they had done earlier in East Africa, Egypt, North Africa and elsewhere...⁷²

Victory celebrations were ‘sober,’ and ‘gay’ simultaneously, and while ‘ten thousand people [were] packed in the middle of Adderley Street...In the cinemas, films depicting the highlights from the war were shown. Portraits of the Allied war leaders drew prolonged applause. Patrons joined in singing popular songs of this and the last war with gusto.’⁷³

It would be easy to forget, reading the reports of the *Cape Times*, that such celebrations were not representative of a national fervour and that for millions of South Africans the war remained distant. The war story publicly remained largely a white one. Despite the thousands upon thousands of black and coloured volunteers, neither the *Cape Times* or *Die Burger* focussed on the experiences of these men. One of the few ‘non-white’ stories that did emerge in the *Cape Times* centred on a tank battle in which the Springboks were instrumental in ‘preserving vital supply lines for the Allies.’⁷⁴ It continued, saying,

[O]ne of the heroes of the engagement is a Native transport driver. For six hours this gallant band withstood charge after charge by German tanks...in the middle of this grim struggle, a native transport driver sat watching the soldiers all around him hurling anti-tank grenades...when a tank charged down upon him, he picked up a grenade and, after whirling it around his head like a knobkerrie, struck the side of the tank with it...when he was uncovered, he got up, shook himself and smiled. All he said was “Ow!”⁷⁵

The language describing the black transport driver appeals to what would have been stereotypical images in the imaginations of many white South Africans. Lazy in his sitting around watching the action, the black soldier finally picks up a grenade and throws it at an oncoming tank, but not before the writer feels the need to flourish the description with a little bit of tribal flair and has the ‘native’ take the grenade and ‘whirl it around his head like a knobkerrie.’ A simpleton, he recovers from what would otherwise be described as a heroic act by merely shaking himself off and smiling. Such descriptions negated the experiences of these men. It is understandable, then, how their services were easily forgotten.

⁷² Smuts as cited in *The Cape Times*, 08 May 1945.

⁷³ *The Cape Times*, 08 May 1945.

⁷⁴ *The Cape Times*, 04 June 1942.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

Perhaps one of the last faint threads from the Union's war story as presented on the pages of the *Cape Times* and *Die Burger* is that of the female experience of the war. Although women were not allowed to serve in a combatant capacity, many were stationed throughout the Union and even beyond. The newspapers, however, were far more likely to report on the activities of the male volunteers. This is in some ways understandable as the work done by most of the Union's women volunteers would have been largely behind the scenes – administrative, industrial or housing and entertaining soldiers. Thus although there were certainly news articles on women and their service, they were easily outnumbered by their male counterparts. The war was thus represented as a male affair.

Thus the war narrative presented by the *Cape Times* and *Die Burger* during 1939-1945 period itself is one of a divided country in which the former's loyalty to the empire, its obligations to the cause and crusade for freedom, are matched by the latter's resolute stand for neutrality. These newspapers made space for the experiences of the 'brave soldiers' who held up the tradition of the eternally enthusiastic Springboks. Providing the imaginations of readers with stories of bravery, glory and endurance, *Die Burger* and particularly the *Cape Times* give insight into some of the soldiers' experiences while masking others. Beyond the overall omission of the brutality of warfare, there was also little included of the experiences of black and coloured volunteers. Nevertheless it was this period in which the Union came the closest to achieving a national remembrance of World War Two, with thousands of people thronging the streets of Cape Town on VE Day. However calling this a 'national' remembrance belies not only the division in white politics, but also the millions of South Africans who were not involved, interested in or directly influenced by the war. Moreover, with the passing of time, the war soon retreated from public consciousness into the realm of private remembrance.

Ten Years later

During the ten years following the start of the war, much had changed in South Africa, although the 'Royal Visit' of 1947 displayed that pro-British sentiments were very much still alive. The *Cape Times* declared in its chief headline that the 17 February 1947 was the 'proudest day in the city's history,' when the Royal family stepped onto the docks in Cape Town to the welcoming cheer of thousands of men, children and women. Even sick children

in hospitals reportedly ‘listened excitedly’ to the radio announcing the royal affair.⁷⁶ This remarkable enthusiasm, combining a lingering sense of British identity bolstered by the royal visit with the sheer fanaticism inspired by celebrities – and they were *the* celebrities of the day – was, like the war, a dying throwback to imperial times. Merely a year later the National Party’s D.F.Malan sat at the helm, guiding the behemoth of Apartheid. The *Cape Times* named it the ‘poison brand’ of segregation, accusing the ‘Nationalists [of] running amuck.’⁷⁷ Internationally cries against the system had already begun and, with World War Two still fresh in the global imagination, a French newspaper attacked Malan as being a ‘disciple of Nazism.’⁷⁸

The rise of the Cold War also gave the government leverage to introduce new restrictive powers. Communism was the talk of the day and *Die Burger* was filled with warnings of its growing tide. With the introduction of the 1950 Suppression of Communism Act, so broad as to make almost anyone an enemy of the state, the *Cape Times* evoked the freedom crusade rhetoric of the war period, saying that although the newspaper ‘is against communism,’ the Act ‘is a vicious attack on all that is meant by the liberty of the subject and a subverting of those democratic freedoms for which the Western World has shed its blood.’⁷⁹ Indeed, established in the same year, Apartheid was poles apart from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is easy to understand, then, how remembering the war began to take the backseat to serious problems and policies, internationally and particularly domestically.

Die Burger demonstrates how the war was quickly rewoven into the context of the Cold War and on the tenth anniversary of the invasion of Poland it proclaimed ‘Danzig...a forgotten town behind the Iron Curtain.’⁸⁰ The article, a trivia piece, did not compare to the four-part instalment initiated by the *Cape Times* chronicling the ‘story of the war-time commandoes’. Entitled ‘The Green Beret,’ the serial was described as ‘the dramatic story... of the most thrilling records of daring and endurance in the face of the enemy.’⁸¹ The instalments were written by British novelist Hilary St. George Saunders and focussed on the Allied efforts. ‘Few,’ the *Cape Times* enthused,

⁷⁶ *The Cape Times*, 17 June 1947.

⁷⁷ *The Cape Times*, 08 May 1950.

⁷⁸ *The Cape Times*, 08 May 1950.

⁷⁹ *The Cape Times*, 08 May 1950.

⁸⁰ *Die Burger*, 01 September 1949.

⁸¹ *The Cape Times*, 02 September 1949.

will read the first instalment...without a rising feeling first of excitement and then of pride in the work of the Commandoes, that magnificent band of 25000 men drawn from all the Allied armies, who played so powerful a part in the overthrow of the enemy in World War II.⁸²

The series displayed the continued identification of many of Cape Town's English-speakers with Britain. Similarly a dinner, ball and special church service were held in honour of the Battle of Britain week, to which 'the mayor of Cape Town, the Commander in Chief...and several other prominent people,' had been invited.⁸³ The *Cape Times* was quick to remember the South African effort: 'Ten years ago today,' it stated,

as sirens in Britain wailed their warning, Britain declared war on Germany. Radios in South Africa were left on overnight for news from Britain and when the declaration came it was not unexpected. Four days later South Africa declared war. Volunteers flocked to the colours.⁸⁴

The article painted a rosy picture of the war period and was silent about the deep division that participation in the war provoked. It made the Union's participation as much a certainty as Britain's declaration of war, which 'was not unexpected' despite Smut's narrow victory against Hertzog. The war period, then, was already tinted with the warm wash of nostalgia.

Five years later Remembrance celebrations were still going strong. The National Party's power was initially tenuous and there was still hope for change in the form of a white liberal, *English*, government.⁸⁵ (It was only after South Africa was expelled from the Commonwealth in 1961 because of Apartheid's policies, that the last official tie to Empire died). This Anglophone identity continued to be celebrated in the *Cape Times*. 1955 marked the tenth anniversary of the end of the war. 'For many South Africans,' the newspaper proposed, 'the day will bring back memories, some glad some sad.'⁸⁶

Moreover the war was recontextualised in the *Cape Times* in light of the 'new era.' The children of the 'Atomic Age,' it told, 'knew nothing of the time when they were being born that the last shot in Europe had been fired, the last bomb fallen, and the last blackout lifted.'

⁸² *The Cape Times*, 03 September 1949.

⁸³ *The Cape Times*, 03 September 1949.

⁸⁴ *The Cape Times*, 03 September 1949.

⁸⁵ Elaine Potter (1975), 21.

⁸⁶ *The Cape Times*, 07 May 1955.

We fought for the four freedoms embodied in the Atlantic Charter. They were freedom of speech; to worship; from want; and freedom from fear...They were worth fighting for, and the four young Capetonians who looked at me with happiness in their eyes, and courage in their hearts, showed that they faced the future with the four freedoms well in their grasp.⁸⁷

This opinion, overflowing with optimism for the future, was not held universally and there were many for whom the war was proof of inhumanity.⁸⁸ Furthermore the ‘freedoms’ of which the article spoke certainly were not extended to the non-white populace. The early 1950s saw a slew of racial legislation including the Immorality Act, Group Areas Act and the Population Registration Act (1950). Furthermore the Cape, which prided itself in its liberal views, saw the removal of Coloureds from the voting roll in the 1951 Separate Registration of Voters Act. Clearly the four freedoms were kept well out their grasp.⁸⁹ Remembering the war, accordingly, did not involve South Africa’s non-white citizenry.

By 1955 both world wars were commemorated on the 11 November, ‘Remembrance Day.’ That year the South African branch of the British Empire Service League (BESL) organised a march whereby their shadows were to be ‘cast on the memorial at the bottom of Adderley Street by special floodlights.’⁹⁰ This marks a trend whereby remembrance was increasingly left in the hands of ex-servicemen groups rather than national government.⁹¹ Indeed, an article released by the *Cape Times* on the 17 September 1949 gives a good idea of what a government-supported (or even initiated) ceremony might have looked like. In contrast to the one day remembrance ceremonies on the 11 November, increasingly organised by ex-servicemen groups, the article discusses a four-day celebration for the inauguration of the Voortrekker Monument in Pretoria as organized by the government. Celebrations throughout

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Chapter Two looks at the literature of South African ex-serviceman Guy Butler who became deeply disheartened by the violence and destructiveness of humanity that he witnessed during the war. The war for him was not a cause for celebration.

⁸⁹ The ‘Torch Commando,’ was a World War Two South African veteran organisation which emerged from the work of the ‘Springbok Legion’ upon the state’s intention to remove the Coloured vote in was revealed in 1951. At its height it was able to gain the support of roughly 250 000 white ex-servicemen. According to Niel Roos, ‘this figure is not much different from the total number of white volunteers in the Second World War,’ and the large number of judges and other prominent figures greatly alarmed the National Party. The Commando specifically used the war, its memories and its memorials to ‘remind them [fellow men] of their obligations to their fallen comrades.’ This would be followed by a denouncement of the government’s intentions to end the coloured vote. However as quickly as it emerged, the organisation suddenly disappeared just two years later as, according to Roos ‘while it certainly captured the imagination of white veterans, its origins did not lie entirely or exclusively in popular discontent among white ex-servicemen. Rather, its emergence was something of a contrived affair.’ [Neil Roos, *Ordinary Springboks: White Servicemen and Social Justice in South Africa, 1939-1961*. Ashgate: Aldershot (2005), 129-30.]

⁹⁰ *The Cape Times*, 08 November 1955

⁹¹ Chapter three discusses this in great detail.

the country's capitals were held in remembrance of the 'pioneers' who took the first stand against British colonial control and headed forth into the interior. The war, in contrast, was not part of the National Party's imagined white unity.

Twenty-Five Years Later

The twenty-five-year anniversary of the war took place at a time of fully-fledged institutionalized racialism in South Africa, in which the Nationalists achieved 'their total triumph of political victory and power' in the formation of the Republic in 1961.⁹² Although the National Party's initial control of the government was shaky, 'in the subsequent decades by manipulating the machinery of government and by winning additional electoral support they clearly established their political dominance.'⁹³ Many English-speaking whites shifted their vote to the National Party, having enjoyed the rewards of an industrial boom during the 1960s. According to Tom Lodge, these 'swings towards the Right'⁹⁴ by English-speaking voters also grew from the 'reassurance that arose from the government's effective if harsh containment of rebellions by its black subjects.'⁹⁵

A glimpse through the papers during the years 1964 to 1970 illuminates the period: while debates over Vietnam raged, Houdini awed audiences in his latest stunt, slipping from leg irons.⁹⁶ 'Blast off nears' announced papers excitedly as the first men in space were about to be projected through the earth's atmosphere. At home, the Beetle was advertised as '1969's best-selling car,'⁹⁷ while the Black Sash held fetes to raise funds.⁹⁸ 'Coloured people are insurance conscious' announced the *Cape Times* (as if it were so profound a statement that it needed newspaper coverage), while worries over Scientology were thrown back and forth in

⁹² E. Potter (1975), 21.

⁹³ E. Potter (1975), 21. Potter explains that this Republic was achieved through 'the loading of rural constituencies, the abolition of the Native representatives, the elimination of the Cape Coloureds from the common roll, the disproportionate representation in South-West Africa, and the intensive indoctrination of their supporters, the Nationalists steadily became more powerful.'

⁹⁴ Tom Lodge, *Sharpeville: A Massacre and its Consequences*. Oxford University Press: New York (2011), 177-8.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* One only has to think of the March 1960 'Sharpeville Massacre' in which the government fired upon the peaceful protest of passbooks.

⁹⁶ *The Cape Times*, 04 September 1964.

⁹⁷ *The Cape Times*, 11 November 1969.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

the fear of 'its plan to take over the world.'⁹⁹ Clearly communism and the 'swart gevaar' were not enough to keep the white populace in sufficiently anxious a state. In the Republic, forced removals were underway and the Bantu Homelands Citizen Act saw the black population lose South African citizenship. This meant that every black man, woman and child was assigned to one of the ten homelands, which 'were not ten separate tracts of land, but instead a patchwork of scattered bits and pieces.'¹⁰⁰ The law ensured that "there will not be one black man with South African citizenship."¹⁰¹ Thus even if the government had wished to promote war remembrance, it certainly would have not meant much to the millions of people displaced and dispossessed in their own country.

For *Die Burger*, this quarter-century anniversary required a reiteration of their 1939 rhetoric and the war was woven, again, into a narrative in which participation was a mistake and a marker of the failure of freedom. 'For the nationalists,' it recalled, 'it was an evil day.'¹⁰² Recognizing the 'fight for freedom' argument proposed by *The Cape Times*, *Die Burger* assures its readers that English-speaking liberals are mistaken in their pride regarding the war, saying, 'for the large majority of our English-speaking fellow-citizens this [choice to participate] was right and remains a good and right decision.'¹⁰³ Instead, the article declares, the divide in 1939 was 'a struggle for national freedom against a colonialist submissiveness which continued to live in too many hearts after the imperialist domination from outside had disappeared.'¹⁰⁴ Participation thus was viewed as the choice made by those too feeble minded, too weak to take the stand for national independence. It is here that the 1964 *Die Burger* departs from its earlier self. There is, it argues, a silver lining to behold amongst the betrayal of participation. In hindsight, set against the successful rise of the Apartheid state, 'the national struggle embarked upon anew on that same September day...was very fruitful. It led to the Nationalist victory in 1948 and subsequently to the Republic in 1961.'¹⁰⁵ The war narrative found in *Die Burger* thus frames the 1939 decision to go to war, the 'betrayal' of the Union by the English-speaking whites¹⁰⁶ and the struggle within the white divide as an important step towards the establishment of Afrikaner rule. Thus rather than commemorating

⁹⁹ *The Cape Times*, 11-14 November 1969.

¹⁰⁰ David Matas, *No More: The Battle Against Human Rights Violations*, J. Kirk Howard: Canada (1994), 91.

¹⁰¹ Connie Mulder as cited in David Matas, *No More: The Battle Against Human Rights Violations*, J. Kirk Howard: Canada (1994), 91.

¹⁰² 'Nationalist viewpoint: *Die Burger*,' as cited in *The Cape Times*, 05 September 1964.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ Interestingly the article makes no mention of Smuts' Anglo-Afrikaners. They have been, essentially, wiped from the record.

the war as such, the article rather pays homage to the Afrikaans nation's struggle and subsequent victory.

The *Cape Times*' continued self-identification with white liberalism in the Republic is clearly seen in an article printed on the 10 June 1969, quotes Brig. H.J. Bronkhurst from the United Party, who said

Bantu who had taken part in the world wars were not yet receiving their due share and it was time that they should be regarded and treated on the same basis as white war veterans for pension purposes. In World War I about 82000 Bantu from South Africa had served in the army and in World War II another 80 000, sixty decorated for bravery. If South Africa were ever to have trouble again, the Bantu would be used again and there was no doubt that they would stand by South Africa.¹⁰⁷

Twenty-five years later and most of the black and coloured volunteers still had not received proper compensation for their services. Bronkhurst clearly felt that they would be 'used again,' (a somewhat appropriate phrase), however their continued mistreatment and abuse, intensified under Apartheid, made it doubtful in reality that 'there was no doubt that they would stand by South Africa.' With a history of service himself, Bronkhurst is representative of a shrinking public remembrance, belonging to niche groups (service and ex-service leagues) who, because of their own shared experiences and identification, continued to place significance in the commemoration of the war.

Remembrance Day of that same year, 1969, further illustrates the dwindling numbers of those participating in public remembrance. The *Cape Times* reported that 'about a thousand people attended the thanksgiving service held in the Garden of Remembrance at Fish Hoek yesterday where contingents of ex-servicemen and Red Cross and St John detachments were accompanied by the Caledonian pipe band.'¹⁰⁸ Adderley Street's memorial service did not fare so well and only roughly five hundred people attended. Far from being the general public, the group consisted of 'representatives of ex-service organizations, voluntary aid detachments and other groups whose members had served South Africa in two world wars.'¹⁰⁹ These five hundred to a thousand men, however, still only represented between 0.15 and 0.3 percent of the total number of South African volunteers in the war. On a national scale the number is almost completely inconsequential.

¹⁰⁷ *The Cape Times*, 10 June 1969.

¹⁰⁸ *The Cape Times*, 10 November 1969.

¹⁰⁹ *The Cape Times*, 11 November 1969.

Thus within the coverage of war remembrance in the *Cape Times*, there is already a move away from an overarching war narrative – at least one in which South Africa is central. Compared with the pride and bravery and the predominant freedom crusade rhetoric found during the war years and the tenth anniversary, articles twenty-five years on are increasingly limited to reporting remembrance ceremonies, reflecting international services or the local niche groups taking part in commemoration. *Die Burger's* representation of war commemoration is almost non-existent, with the biggest exception being the national viewpoint as reproduced in the *Cape Times*. Here the narrative of the Afrikaner struggle for independence is woven into the story of how the Union was betrayed by a ‘colonialist submissiveness which continued to live in too many hearts.’ Although vociferous a piece, the article stands alone and the war remains as purposefully forgotten as the Anglo-Afrikaners *Die Burger* chose to omit.

Fifty Years Later

The 50th anniversary of the Second World War led to a brief revival of the subject in the *Cape Times* and *Die Burger*. As the half-century mark, this was (and has been thus far) the biggest of the war’s anniversaries. The revival that accompanied it was serendipitously timed with the fall of Apartheid, which, along with the fifty years of history since the war’s end, meant that a re-envisioning of the war was well underway.

This was especially true for *Die Burger*, which up until then had been the mouthpiece of the National Party. Out of the crumbling façade of Apartheid it was forced to attempt the tricky task of embracing this all-new South Africa while simultaneously trying to retain its old readership.¹¹⁰ According to Herman Wasserman, ‘this repositioning coincided with a liberal consensus in the news media in general, in terms of which individual rights, independence of the media and freedom of speech were emphasized.’¹¹¹ These were, of course, rights that the *Cape Times* had clung to since its inception, but freedom of speech had been particularly difficult under Apartheid. The more-or-less on-going state of emergency declared from about

¹¹⁰ Herman Wasserman, ‘“We’re not like that”: Denial of racism in the Afrikaans press in South Africa,’ *South African Journal for Communication, Theory and Research* 36:1 (2010), 20.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

1960-1990 had had ‘severe censorship implications.’¹¹² The Publications Act of 1974, for example, meant that all media had to go through a board which decided whether the material was ‘undesirable’ (for the state) or not. In the later years of Apartheid, ‘the threat of censorship took on characteristics that became increasingly physical,’¹¹³ and the declaration of the third state of emergency in June 1986 was a deliberate attempt to ‘influence the media and thereby control perceptions of the struggle over South Africa.’¹¹⁴

The war, however, was most likely too far removed from the realm of the Apartheid censorship-machine to have blipped on the radar. It was neither ‘desirable’ nor ‘undesirable,’ rather too insignificant in the larger scheme of the state versus ‘the struggle.’¹¹⁵ The government, too, was not foolish enough to defame those soldiers who had volunteered and fought in the war (and possibly risk upsetting some of its precious white minority) – they were largely best ignored with the exception of the rare token appreciation. This might go some way towards explaining why Prime Minister PW Botha in November 1978 was found, rather out of the ‘National Party’ character, placing a wreath at the memorial wall in Simon’s Town ‘in honour of the memories of the fleet which were killed in action in World War Two.’¹¹⁶ The exception to the rule, it is difficult to say what made this year so special as to have had claim to the Prime Minister’s attention, but it might be understood in terms of the National Party’s continued attempt to attract the vote of English-speaking South Africans.

Against the background of marches and protests reflected in headlines such as ‘four dead, 100 hurt in Cape violence,’ ‘nation-wide arrest,’ ‘two million people in stay-away’¹¹⁷ and ‘Apartheid in its last years of perverse existence,’¹¹⁸ it is somewhat remarkable that the war did manage a mention. The week of the beginning of September 1989 signalled fifty years since its start. For the most part, however, South Africa’s involvement was still omitted and unsurprisingly so: once again, the government’s reticence towards the war combined with the ongoing tensions and violence in the final stretch of Apartheid meant the war was far from people’s primary concerns. Thus on the 04 September 1989 the *Cape Times* announced that ‘Britons mark war’s fiftieth anniversary’ (note ‘Britons’ specifically and no mention of

¹¹² Christopher Merrett, ‘A Tale of Two Paradoxes: Media Censorship in South Africa pre-liberation and post-Apartheid,’ *Critical Arts: South-North Cultural and Media Studies* (2001).

¹¹³ *Ibid*, 53.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, 54.

¹¹⁵ This indeed reflects the National Party’s move away, after the war, from anti-Imperialist concerns, rather focussing on the white median in the face of the black ‘other.’

¹¹⁶ *Die Burger*, 13 November 1978.

¹¹⁷ *The Cape Times*, 07 September 1989.

¹¹⁸ *The Cape Times*, 08 September 1989.

the Republic).¹¹⁹ Besides this the only indication of remembrance within the Republic according to the paper, was an advertisement in which the public was invited to attend a panel of veterans discussing ‘aspects of the war,’ organised by the ‘local branch of the Military History Society.’¹²⁰ Thus the last remnants of public remembrance had finally given way and were left to those niche groups for whom the war remained important.

Perhaps the only article which made any correlations between South Africa and the war did so in relation to the final years of Apartheid. Here the *Cape Times* reported that ‘West Germany had learnt from such memories [of the war] and formed a responsible nation but accused East Bloc governments of replacing Hitler’s regime by a new dictatorship.’¹²¹ Clearly set within the context of the last years of Apartheid as well as the Cold War, the idea of a ‘responsible’ nation was important to South African liberals in a country which had been, for so long, anything but.

Slowly but surely, from the idea of a ‘responsible Germany,’ a rhetoric of redemption emerged in both the *Cape Times* and *Die Burger*, gaining particular strength around 1994. Thus besides information pieces for historical interest’s sake (such as a replicating a huge map of D-Day schematics),¹²² the war began to be woven into South Africa’s new 1994 theme: democracy. In an article entitled ‘The Meaning of D-Day,’ *Die Burger* concluded that ‘the blood that was spilt in France is a big part of European democracy today,’¹²³ and must be recognized accordingly. This volte-face continued in a new-found appreciation of the Allied cause. The Commonwealth was spoken of in a tone of admiration. So too was the Allies’ ‘advance into the mountain terrain of Northern Italy,’ which was ‘extremely dangerous and tiresome.’¹²⁴ Such descriptions in the past would more likely have been found in the pages of the *Cape Times* than the pro-Nationalist *Die Burger*.

Similarly *Die Burger*, in June 1994, wrote of Germany (now united since the disintegration of the U.S.S.R) and her path to redemption. Germany, it argued, had no previous democratic tradition, but had since become ‘one of the most democratic countries in the whole world.’ Accordingly its history ‘has a clear lesson for South Africa – the task of a land which still needs to cultivate a democratic culture is seemingly facilitated through growing

¹¹⁹ *The Cape Times*, 04 September 1989.

¹²⁰ *The Cape Times*, 06 September 1989.

¹²¹ *The Cape Times*, 02 September 1989.

¹²² *Die Burger*, 06 June 1994.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

prosperity.¹²⁵ A year later, in May 1995, the ‘redemption’ theme is heard again along with the parallels between Germany and South Africa. The article concluded that May 8, 1945, the Axis’ defeat, was ‘a clean slate for Germany.’ Here *Die Burger* clearly wishes 1994 to be a similar washing-away of past sins for South Africa.

Nevertheless *Die Burger* was still performing a careful ‘balancing act’ between its old readership and the new nation. This shift to a democratic South Africa was not easy for all involved, as expressed in several letters written to the editor. One such letter expressed deep concern about the position of Afrikaners as well as the Afrikaans language, saying ‘it is high time that we Afrikaans-speakers have our voices heard! Are we now strangers in our own land?’¹²⁶ Despite the fact that for fifty years the white voice was largely the *only* voice heard, this man’s worry is illustrative of the struggle of having to re-imagine one’s identity. *Die Burger* is thus also trying to reassure its readers: this struggle is the very same that went on ‘in the hearts of the German people,’ and, like Germany’s subsequent unity and prosperity, South Africa will flourish if people will embrace democracy. By emphasizing Germany’s prosperity the article also arguably seeks to comfort its readers that despite democracy, there is no reason for them to lose their wealth or position in society.

D-Day’s fiftieth anniversary in the *Cape Times* was also reinterpreted according South Africa’s new democratic bearings. Post-Apartheid South Africa was once again admitted into the Commonwealth of Nations (with headlines reading ‘Back into the fold: South Africa in Commonwealth, mending a 33 year old rift’).¹²⁷ The *Cape Times* concluded that ‘South Africa’s readmission...could not have been more happily timed, practically on the eve of the fiftieth anniversary of D-Day.’¹²⁸ The article inserts South Africa back into the Commonwealth, and the war-story along with it:

[F]or South Africans, though not involved in the Normandy landings as a national unity, individually formed part of the huge and complex Operation Overlord, helping man the British squadrons that provided total air superiority and the awesome fleet of naval craft that transported the army across the Channel. The bombardment by air

¹²⁵ *Die Burger*, 07 June 1994.

¹²⁶ *Die Burger*, 08 May 1995.

¹²⁷ *The Cape Times*, 01 June 1994.

¹²⁸ *The Cape Times*, 07 June 1994.

and sea did much to soften up the enemy defences, making it possible for 156000 Allied troops to land on the beaches that day...¹²⁹

No longer an international pariah, the *Cape Times* used the opportunity to reclaim South Africa's share of the Allied victory and return bravery, courage and endurance to the tarnished reputation of their soldiers to the extent that, unlike in previous decades, South Africa's involvement in D-Day was now made into a pivotal part of the plan. So whereas *Die Burger* used the war and Germany's post-Cold War unification to argue for a clean slate and to encourage its readers to embrace democracy in the name of progress and prosperity, the *Cape Times* took the chance to revitalise its position as a Commonwealth member and reclaim its former wartime glory.

However, just as *Die Burger* revealed signs of the discontent of some of its readers ('Are we now strangers in our own land?'), *The Cape Times*, too, published an article expressing doubt regarding the degree to which the new government really did care about commemorating the war. Entitled 'Why South Africa dare not forget,' Gerald Shaw,¹³⁰ the author, conceded that

although less was made of these anniversaries [South Africa's one year of democracy and the fiftieth anniversary since the end of the Second World War] than we might have expected, Parliament did honour those who lost their lives in the causes of Nazi tyranny. On May 10, appropriately, there were speeches in the National Assembly and a wreath-laying ceremony in tribute of South Africa's war dead of 1939-1945.¹³¹

However, he feels that 'Mr Colin Eglin, DP MP for Pinelands was the moving spirit behind the occasion having recently visited the battlefields and war cemeteries in Northern Italy.' Accordingly he finds it

[s]urprising that a government led by the African National Congress, which had fought against racialism and colonialism since 1912, should not have made more of a most significant watershed in the long struggle against racialism and white supremacy. Perhaps this was in deference to the feelings of Afrikaner nationalists,

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ And author of the book, *The Cape Times: An Informal History*, David Philip: Cape Town (2000).

¹³¹ *The Cape Times*, 12 May 1995. These speeches in National Assembly were not part of a continued trend, but were rather part of the country's project of reconciliation.

many of whom opposed the Allied war effort [but] a nation which loses or suppresses its memory is no better than an individual suffering from amnesia.¹³²

Mr Shaw was most likely accurate in his assumption that the newly elected democratic government was not looking to take any antagonistic steps towards their previous oppressors and risk breaking unity, fragile in its infancy. More than anything else, opinions such as those of Mr Gerald Shaw, suggest that although the war had drifted out of the minds of South Africa's larger public sphere, it nevertheless remained alive in the hearts of many individuals.¹³³

The final lines of Mr Shaw's article are indicative of another version of the war narrative that has, for the most part, remained the preferred version today on the rare occasion it is remembered. Mr Shaw writes, 'South Africa's best chance of avoiding a return of tyranny in a new guise will be to keep alive a sense of history, remembering the sacrifice of those who died so that we may be free.'¹³⁴ The war, framed as the struggle for democracy and freedom, was weaved together with the fight against Apartheid¹³⁵

Remembrance Day in 1998 was omitted from the pages of *Die Burger*¹³⁶ but briefly appeared in *The Cape Times*. Besides a standard shot of the Queen laying a wreath at the foot of the war memorial in Britain (framing the war as an international affair), the two other mentions Remembrance Day received takes the form of personal correspondence – one a comment in the notice column and the other a letter to the editor. The former, written by IJ Thomas, writes that,

[a]s ceremonies were held in Cape Town yesterday to mark Remembrance Day, let us not forget the life and work of a courageous woman. Let us remember Gladys Lee for the pain she suffered fighting the apartheid authorities to make them aware of the plight of the downtrodden. Would the mayor and other speakers have been able to tell the story of her trials and tribulations?¹³⁷

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Either veterans themselves, family members of veterans, or members in the military service who place continued importance on the historical deeds of fellow soldiers.

¹³⁴ *The Cape Times*, 12 May 1995.

¹³⁵ The very lines *The Cape Times* touted in 1939 – with the exception that even amongst white liberals, racism was still apparent.

¹³⁶ There is, however, an Op-Ed on the more temporally distant reconciliation of Blood River, commemorating the great battle.

¹³⁷ *The Cape Times*, 12 November 1998.

With the pain of the death of a loved one coming clearly through his writing, IJ Thomas expresses the need to commemorate the Apartheid struggle, compared to which the war is too far removed. The latter letter to the editor, in contrast to Mr Thomas' opinion, is irate as result of the silence around 'the war heroes of El Alamein.' Tony Mariner, the author of the letter, praises the Springboks of El Alamein with a degree of gusto that would have made the wartime *Cape Times* proud. The 'supreme sacrifice' made by many of these men, according to Mariner, was recognised and 'for fifty years throughout the length and breadth of this our beloved land, young and old would gather in public places at the war memorials...frail widows would weep silently and remember their loss, comforted that the nation shared their sorrow.'¹³⁸ Mariner's version of war remembrance is highly romanticized and seemingly oblivious not only to the white divide of 1939, but to the NP government's subsequent silence regarding the war. It is true that the first ten years did see a high degree of remembrance. This remembrance, however, was not national in light of the fact that the majority of the country did not participate in the war. Furthermore the passing of time saw war remembrance become increasingly the interest of niche groups and individuals. Thus as touching as the image of 'frail weeping widows, comforted that the nation shared their sorrow,' is, the nation, in actual fact, was doing no such thing. It was, instead, amidst the throes of Apartheid. Mariner concludes that 'apparently the city management in Cape Town would rather forget than remember...The citizens of Cape Town must take back their city from a management that has no soul, no sense of history, that insults the sacrifices made by its citizens and is careless of sacred traditions.'¹³⁹ The contrasting views between Mariner and Thomas highlight the politics of remembering, particularly in a nation so long divided. Although still very much a part of the personal remembrance of individuals, the war for many meant and means nothing in comparison to the loss and trauma experienced during the fifty years since the end of the war and the establishment of Apartheid.

Sixty Years Later

The representation of the war sixty years later in *The Cape Times* was largely a continuation of the fiftieth anniversary themes and it is fairly safe to say that it remains the same today.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

The emphasis on South Africa's re-entry into the Commonwealth has largely fallen away, however, and with *Die Burger* almost completely silent regarding the war, its 1990s 'redemption theme,' too has disappeared. Time has marched on, the Cold War now belongs to a different era and democratic South Africa has been embracing its new heroes: those of the liberation struggle. The war lies largely forgotten here – except in the memories of niche groups and individuals, many of whom express their concern at its seeming obscurity in the larger public consciousness. Where it is mentioned, the war is carefully woven into the 'liberation struggle' rhetoric in which it, too, had the fight for freedom central to its cause.

2005's VE Day was most prominently marked in the *Cape Times* by an article reporting 'City Remembers the Holocaust...marking the sixtieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz' which 'close to a thousand members of the Cape Jewish community attended' as well as 'ex-officers of the SAAF, Army, Navy as well as the Jewish ex-service League, Jewish Maritime League and MOTHS' who laid wreaths. After a moment of silence the Israeli national anthem was sung accompanied by students from Herzlia High.¹⁴⁰ Despite the headline, which suggests a wider remembrance, the article indicates that it is only niche groups whose identities are still invested in the history of the war. The Jewish community, largely omitted from the war story over the years (and unsurprisingly so in *Die Burger* considering that many nationalists were not exclusionary in their racism), notably sang the Israeli anthem, not the South African. "History," Judge Dennis Davis was quoted saying at the service, "is an event that happened some time ago to somebody else. Memory is a part of our story and a part of who we are."¹⁴¹ The quote is relevant in that for many South Africans the war is history, long since passed and swept away, and it is only those individuals and communities who share special ties to the war (whether through direct experience, that of loved ones, or, as with the Jewish community a fundamental part of their cultural identity) who view such history through the personal term of 'memory.'¹⁴²

Similar niche-group remembrances took place across the city. 'Sixty years ago...Capetonians partied in the streets to celebrate the news,'¹⁴³ reported Jaime Griesgraber for the *Cape Times*. Comparatively, the 2005 ceremony held at Ysterplaat airbase, 'to honour the 334000 South African troops – all volunteers...about 12000 of whom lost their lives,' was attended by 'military officials and families of veterans.' Reminiscent of Tony Mariner's

¹⁴⁰ *The Cape Times*, 10 May 2005.

¹⁴¹ Judge Dennis Davis as cited in *The Cape Times*, 09 May 2005.

¹⁴² See chapter four for a discussion on the difficulty in separating the two.

¹⁴³ *The Cape Times*, 09 May 2005.

1998 letter expressing deep concern about the war being forgotten, Gordon Hodgetts wrote in to the *Cape Times*, regarding the absence of ‘our esteemed Executive Mayor who failed to grace the Remembrance ceremony at the Cenotaph with her presence “because of other urgent matters.”’¹⁴⁴ ‘What,’ he asks, ‘could be more important than taking a couple of hours once a year to honour those who lost their lives in the service of their country and for freedom?’ Although hinted at in this letter, it is in the *Cape Times*’ article ‘Remember the fallen heroes: From the bloody fields of Flanders to our liberation struggle,’¹⁴⁵ that the war is truly appropriated by the liberation struggle rhetoric. ‘Armistice Day,’ the article reads,

came to symbolize the end of the [First World] war and provided an opportunity to remember those who died. After the end of World War Two in 1945, Armistice Day became known as Remembrance Day to include all those who had fallen in the two world wars. It later included those who died in other conflicts and in South Africa this includes the liberation struggle.¹⁴⁶

The need here to explain what Remembrance Day is highlights the degree to which many are unfamiliar with the Second World War, let alone this day of commemoration. ‘The sound of gunfire celebrates a cherished peace,’ Koning writes, whereby ‘veterans from the two world wars, other armed struggles and the South African liberation struggle will once again observe a symbolic two minute silence in remembrance of those who made the ultimate sacrifice.’¹⁴⁷ For most South Africans Remembrance Day here is meaningless without its connection to the liberation struggle. Thus although the war is viewed through this discourse, it is also largely side-lined by it.

As it has fallen more and more into the dusty tomes of history, rather than the mind’s-eye of lived memory, it is unsurprising that the war narrative, where it does appear in these later years, does not include women or home front experiences (even during the war period these stories were few and far between). Perhaps what *is* surprising is that unlike the revival of the SS Mendi and the reintegration of black soldiers into the South African tale of World War One,¹⁴⁸ the newspapers remain silent about World War Two’s non-white volunteers despite

¹⁴⁴ *The Cape Times*, 15 November 2005.

¹⁴⁵ *The Cape Times*, 11 November 2005.

¹⁴⁶ *The Cape Times*, 11 November 2005.

¹⁴⁷ *The Cape Times*, 11 November 2005.

¹⁴⁸ Albert Grundlingh, (2011).

the ‘freedom struggle’ rhetoric.¹⁴⁹ Having come full-circle, this ‘liberation struggle,’ discourse is not far from the ‘crusade for freedom’ rhetoric espoused by the *Cape Times* in 1939. Even the Nationalists then had argued for the cause of freedom, even if their logic took them down the path of non-participation.

The process of forgetting can be traced from the original ‘white divide’ - a time in which the call for an Afrikaner nation began to outweigh a slowly fading English-speaking identity based on a sense of Empire - through the throes of Apartheid, to the post-1994 democratic government. Geographically distant, the war garnered the support of only a small portion of the South African populace and it is hardly surprising that it has become ‘an event that has happened some time ago to somebody else.’¹⁵⁰ Thus falling out of the realm of public commemoration, as seen through studying the *Cape Times* and *Die Burger*, and as shall be seen in the following chapters, the war remains in the memories of small groups and individuals – comfortable, for now, in the realm of private remembrance.

¹⁴⁹ Perhaps this is as a result that World War Two did not have one significant tragedy involving black soldiers, unlike the sinking of the SS Mendi in World War One.

¹⁵⁰ Judge Dennis Davis as cited in *The Cape Times*, 09 May 2005.

Chapter 2

Locating Remembrance: Literature

Guy Butler's Bursting World and collected War poems

War is a loathsome affair. It is only the stoicism of the chaps that makes it human at all. We are going to win and soon; but I can work up no enthusiasm for victory when I see dead Germans, or hundreds of dog-tired men who have endured much, driven to surrender; or burnt-out homesteads smoking among spring-green fields; or hearing the bellowing of wounded cattle. Maybe it's because I've had a safe war, but there's no triumphing over my enemy in me at all, no hatred, only an over-riding pity for human weakness. Everybody is tarred with the same brush.¹⁵¹

This paragraph is an excerpt from *Bursting World*, the second part in a series of three autobiographies written by the South African academic Guy Butler. Written in the 1970s, it chronicles and reflects on his experiences in the Second World War, often drawing upon material from his war-time diary. Far from being an obscure figure in South African society, Butler was 'publicly influential,'¹⁵² particularly between the 1940s to 1970s.¹⁵³ Beyond this, it has been suggested that Butler was one of the most prominent of South Africa's World War Two poets¹⁵⁴ and his war autobiography was a popular read at the time of its release.¹⁵⁵

Despite this, it is unlikely that any randomly selected South African today would be able to identify what these war-weary lines have to do with South Africa, let alone be able to identify their originator. As Jonathan Hyslop points out, Butler today is 'in danger of being forgotten.'¹⁵⁶ So why even look at the likes of Butler, another forgotten relic of the Second World War in South Africa's history?

¹⁵¹ Guy Butler, *Bursting World: An Autobiography 1939-1945*, David Philip: Cape Town (1983), p 110.

¹⁵² Chris Thurman, *Guy Butler from a Post-Apartheid Perspective: Reassessing a South African Literary Life*, UCT (PhD thesis) (2007), 1.

¹⁵³ Jonathan Hyslop, 'Colonial intellectuals at the end of Empire: Manning Clark's Australia and Guy Butler's South Africa', *Kleio* 38:1 (2006), 26.

¹⁵⁴ G.M Miller and Howard Sergeant name Guy Butler as 'one of the most talented of these young men' [South African war poets]. [Cited in Albert David Adey, *Themes in South African English Poetry*, University of South Africa (MA Thesis) (1976), 36.]

¹⁵⁵ Chris Thurman (2007), 353. Thurman does continue to note that, 'read and enjoyed initially by English speaking South Africans both for their narrative appeal and out of a certain nostalgia, the books are now almost cultural artefacts.'

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

Forms of Remembrance: Literature.

Perhaps the immediate answer to this question lies in the arguments made by Paul Fussell, Samuel Hynes and Jay Winter, emphasizing the importance of literature as a component of the cultural production of war remembrance. According to Hynes, ‘the written recollections of the men who performed the acts that taken together constitute a war must also be memorials.’¹⁵⁷ In such a light, Guy Butler’s World War Two literature is in itself a performance of commemoration. The act of writing is only half of this process of remembrance; the reader, too, is forced to participate in the narrative, is forced to ‘remember.’ As Hynes succinctly puts it, ‘you participate vicariously in Robert Graves’s war when you read *Goodbye to All That*.’¹⁵⁸ This makes literature a unique form of commemoration, according to Hynes, compared to others as ‘you don’t experience a cemetery that way.’¹⁵⁹ He does not, however, leave it there, rather Hynes continues to question the degree to which personal narratives form a part of collective remembrance – the extent to which private memories become public. He concludes by recognizing the need to find another term for shared recollections as ‘memory’ implies ‘the mental faculty by which we preserve or recover our pasts,’ ‘a now reaching back to then – you may have an image of the past in your mind, but it isn’t memory but something else, a social construction, history.’¹⁶⁰ Personal narratives of war can, through a process of selection (and forgetting), be combined with others to form a ‘common notion’ or ‘shared myth,’¹⁶¹ ‘a simplified, dramatised story that has evolved in our society to contain the meanings of the war that we can tolerate, and so make sense of its incoherence and contradictions.’¹⁶²

So why, then, has Guy Butler’s World War Two literature fallen into obscurity? It is not that it has just been rejected in favour of some other war myth, rather, it is characteristic of a lack of myth in South Africa when it comes to the Second World War. Indeed, the war myth of Hynes’ writing is non-existent, perhaps except in a form of a historical curiosity or footnote attached to the more important of South Africa’s accepted grand narratives.¹⁶³ Despite Smuts

¹⁵⁷ Samuel Hynes, ‘Personal Narratives and Commemoration,’ in Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan (eds), *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge (2000), 205.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 206.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid*.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 206.

¹⁶¹ Hynes notes that ‘myth’ here is ‘not a synonym for falsehood.’ [*Ibid*, 207].

¹⁶² *Ibid*, 207.

¹⁶³ ‘Myth’ I used along the lines of Hynes in *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture*, whereby it is ‘not a falsification of reality, but an imaginative version of it, the story of the war that has evolved, and has come to be accepted as true.’ The same can be applied to other national myths beyond war. Samuel

declaring in his August 1947 address that the Union of South Africa's involvement in the war was ““a great chapter in the history of our country,””¹⁶⁴ this belied the deep division in the country regarding the war¹⁶⁵ and, ultimately, ‘the war had been a troublesome and ambiguous episode, creating no glorious national myth and forging few common bonds.’¹⁶⁶ If this this is so, and the work of Guy Butler (among other South African World War Two poets¹⁶⁷) has fallen into obscurity, we return to our earlier question: why should we pay him any attention? There are a few reasons one can suggest – the popularity of his wartime poetry and later autobiography *Bursting World* meant that his representation of the war would have been influential in shaping the conflict in the minds of his readers, forming a mid-point between personal and public remembrance; and his work remains important as a particularly South African account of the war, one which links not only to the Empire and the transnational experience of war, but one which constantly invokes images and impressions of South Africa in his descriptions of Europe and North Africa.¹⁶⁸ It is thus necessary to explore Butler's representation of the Second World War as seen through his wartime poetry and autobiography, *Bursting World*.

Butler's War

It is only proper to note, somewhat obviously, that Butler does not present a ‘universal South African,’ (this in itself is an impossibility of sorts); rather, his own war narrative is heavily

Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture*, Anthenuem: New York (1991), p xi. Such ‘grand narratives’ naturally pertain to the Apartheid years, ‘the freedom struggle.’ As discussed in the previous chapter, the 2012 Remembrance Day Ceremony held in Johannesburg, (the ceremony historically commemorated the dead of World War One, also known as ‘Armistice Day’ or ‘Poppy Day,’ and later World War Two) saw ‘South Africans pay tribute not only to the nation's wartime dead, but also those who laid down their lives in the struggle for freedom and democracy.’ In such a way the story of South Africa's involvement in both World Wars has been subsumed into the larger freedom struggle rhetoric. [Janet Szabo, ‘South Africans remember soldiers of the Great War and Freedom Struggle,’ in Christopher Szabo (ed.) *Springbok: Journal of the South African Legion of Military Veterans* (2012), 15.]

¹⁶⁴ J. Smuts as cited in Bill Nasson, *South Africa at War, 1939-1945*, Jacana: Johannesburg (2012), 10.

¹⁶⁵ Bill Nasson succinctly explains, ‘Acutely divided, South African society was framed by brittleness and schism rather than cohesive strength and unanimity’. [Bill Nasson (2012), 15-16.] He is referring here to the divide in opinion between English and Afrikaans speaking whites on whether to join the war or not. Most of the Afrikaners were strongly pushing for neutrality, while the majority of English speakers saw the support of Britain as part of their very identity.

¹⁶⁶ Bill Nasson (2012), 11.

¹⁶⁷ Such as Roy Campell, Uys Krige, William Plomer, R.N. Currey [Cited in Albert David Adey, *Themes in South African English Poetry*, University of South Africa (MA Thesis) (1976), 8.]

¹⁶⁸ As shall be discussed, the reverse is also true. Imagery of both South Africa and Europe (largely stemming from his literary background) become intertwined in both his war poetry and autobiography.

influenced by his childhood in the small town of Cradock in the Eastern Cape, his identity as a white liberal, his extensive reading of and preference for Romantic poetry and his increasingly difficult relationship with religion. In 1941 Butler volunteered despite coming from a household with strong pacifist views (a heritage of his Quaker-Methodist upbringing)¹⁶⁹ because he was

[p]ersuaded that fascism was so great and evil that we must volunteer to fight against it - evil, not because it was imperialist and expansionist, not even because it was nationalist, but because it turned nationalism into religion and elevated race to a first principle... Indeed, fascism in the form of the Ossewa Brandwag was growing apace. If Hitler won the war it would triumph in SA and the racial prejudices of white South Africa, already pervasive and powerful, would then become sacrosanct and be elevated to the first principle of South African policy....we had our own dreams for our country.¹⁷⁰

Within this reasoning lies his liberal views that helped inform his decision to join as, he continues, ‘the Cape native franchise must be restored and extended to the other provinces. There must be a massive expansion in native education. The industrial colour bar must be abolished...’.¹⁷¹ Signing up was thus a way for him to challenge the path that South Africa was taking in the late 1930s.¹⁷² Ultimately ending up as a Captain with the ‘Sappers’ (South African engineering corps), his task as an ‘Information Officer’ in the North African and Italian campaigns often involved giving lectures to the troops and the upkeep of morale.¹⁷³ (This non-combative role resulted from his pacifist beliefs). His liberal leanings and, accordingly, his war tale are thus particular to their time in South Africa and they remain important in their ability to capture the moment – one where World War Two highlights the division among whites in the society, while simultaneously representing one of the last opportunities to push South Africa in a liberal direction. As Nasson explains, besides the majority of the black and coloured populace for whom the war was beyond their concerns,¹⁷⁴ many Afrikaans-speaking whites were fiercely against participation in the war, ‘some

¹⁶⁹ Chris Thurman, ‘African, old and new: Guy Butler and the ‘African Renaissance,’ – A long view,’ *South African Journal of English Studies* 23:1, 25.

¹⁷⁰ Guy Butler, *Bursting World 1939-1945*, David Philip: Cape Town (1983), 131.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Afrikaner nationalism was on the rise as seen through the Great Trek Centenary celebrations. Butler documents this in *Bursting World*. Butler (1983), 82-3.

¹⁷³ Thurman (2006), 25.

¹⁷⁴ Those who did volunteer largely did so for monetary reasons – war was a higher paid endeavour than mining – but only slightly so.

preferring peace, while others voicing their anti-British sentiments to the extent where they were either implicitly or explicitly pro-German.¹⁷⁵ Such sentiment had its roots in the British defeat of the Afrikaners in the 1899-1902 Anglo-Boer War and, accordingly, the call for arms in 1939 was just another British imperial project of a Crown no longer ruling over the Union. Ultimately support was garnered largely from English-speaking whites and Smuts' 'Anglo-Afrikaners.'¹⁷⁶ Those Afrikaner volunteers not included within this group signed up largely as an answer to unemployment and poverty and, in such a way, the war for them was a job rather than a cause or a calling.¹⁷⁷

A letter from his mother describes the effects of the national divide on his home town, Cradock:

...Cradock is very quiet - so quiet that the stream of business seems to have stopped. Don't push all Afrikaners into the Nazi-Nationalist lot - some are fine and disgusted by this idiotic propoganda. There has been plenty of Nazi propoganda about....There's a nice young woman at Rocklands named Miss P. who told her history class that the British sent the "Athenia" to the bottom themselves so they could blame the Germans! I hate people who take advantage of young minds like that! It's shameless. Daddy is tired out - listening to the radio, and not speaking...Keith is recruiting - we have not seen him for days. A two nation country is an awful job...¹⁷⁸

Beyond his identity as a white liberal with Quaker origins, Butler's poetry and autobiography is also fused with a sense of place and the physical landscape of his childhood never quite leaves his writing. His autobiography is probably quite obviously so, beginning in South Africa before he leaves for war, starting with his years at Rhodes University (even after signing up he spends most of his training in country). His awareness of landscape in his writing and a love of nature come not only from growing up in provincial Cradock, but also from his affinity with the Romantic poets. Thurman provides us with a typical image of young Butler, 'reading Keats under pear trees planted in the sparse Karoo.'¹⁷⁹ Butler in

¹⁷⁵ Bill Nasson (2012), 15-16.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ A letter from Butler's mother dated 14 September 1941 as cited in Butler (1983), 110-111. 'Two nation' here is referring, once again, to the split in English and Afrikaner opinions and loyalties with regards to the war.

¹⁷⁹ Thurman (2007), 101.

Bursting World is not unaware of this relationship to the Romantic poets and their influence on his sense of the world.¹⁸⁰ Describing Grahamstown he says,

[u]nlike Cradock, Grahamstown is rich in trees. The charming Botanical Gardens contain a great variety of trees, many of them handsome exotics. The hills are covered in scrub pine, the old roads lined with blue-gums. But I liked trees from the temperate European zone best, oaks and poplars in the valleys along the small streams...There was something about the vegetation and the atmosphere to make me feel that I had at last moved into a place and a climate in which the poetry which had been my food for years belonged...one could imagine oneself in Europe, with all the sense-data of one's favourite poems suddenly present all around one.

Butler's imagination and work are thus infused with his tangled relationship with both South African and European landscapes, tropes, experiences and expressions. 'Poplar and Pine' brings together his Romantic influences with his heightened sense of place (the Karoo finds itself uneasily alongside the European pine) and the language of war. The poem, too, is a reflection on the tension Butler feels between his African and European heritage¹⁸¹, between the home of his childhood and the home of his literary imagination – the tension that lies within his identity as a white South African, descendent of British settlers:

Karoo child at the farm's cool fountain
I first met and loved those trees
which my distant ancestors
had come from Europe across the seas.

Flanked by both, this dawn I watched
the battle for Florence start –
a city long in the map of my mind,
mother of poetry and art.

¹⁸⁰ Don MacLennan, 'The Poetry of Guy Butler,' *English in Africa* 32:2 (2005), 41.

¹⁸¹ Geoffrey Hutchings, 'Ghost at a window pane: the War poetry of Guy Butler,' *English in Africa* 15:2 (1988), 25-6.

And I had forgotten what they meant,
 silver poplar, dark green pine,
 until I saw two towers today –
 the tension is still mine.

The tension Butler experiences is not necessarily only a particularly white South African experience as much as it is also a part of his colonial heritage – a reminder, despite the Union's progressive pull away from the Commonwealth, of Empire.

Don Maclennan furthermore suggests that this timelessness present in many of his poems and descriptions of place represents a tension in Butler's world between the 'old' and the 'new,' between the history of these cities and the present confusion, mechanization, modernisation and chaos of war.¹⁸² Similarly to 'Poplar and Pine,' 'Common Dawn' expresses this tension, as the last two stanzas read:

Alone, awake, I sense how still
 is the presence of a timeless hill,
 how universal all this air,

 till I can hardly bear to face
 such sweet and subtle commonplace,
 the sunlight everywhere.

The simple pleasure and beauty of 'sunlight everywhere' is a painful contrast to the more difficult experiences of war,¹⁸³ but nevertheless such moments of beauty form a vital part of Butler's war story, as seen from the very beginning.

Indeed, after his time in Grahamstown and his decision to volunteer, Butler's training largely took place in a place called Sonderwater ('without water'), its name descriptive of its bare

¹⁸² Don Maclennan, 'The Poetry of Guy Butler,' *English in Africa* 32:2 (2005), 43.

¹⁸³ Almost like flowers Butler describes the 'sweet stink of corpses, on and off, for a couple hundred metres.' Butler (1983) 206.

and barren character, with which Butler struggled. Upon visiting the nearby Spitskop, Butler felt a profound sense of relief in being amongst a more life-filled setting. His description of Spitskop highlights not only his love for nature, but his Romantic style of writing learnt from his extensive reading, ‘the beauty of the setting after the dusty regimentation of Sonderwater went to my head. My diary contains sharp jottings, as though I were seeking to preserve precious images ... view glorious. My soul was my own, and I and the earth were God’s.’¹⁸⁴

Such excerpts also betray a certain degree of optimism and innocence that characterised Butler before entering the war. In his poem *The Parting*, we encounter not only his Romantic tendencies, filled with images of nature,

Mounting, they crossed the ridge beneath the stars
whose midnight brilliance seemed to shake and fill
the silence with dim strumming, like guitars
heard from a distance when the air is still;
when the hidden half of the heart’s responsive wire
emits its own, still barely known, desire.¹⁸⁵

but his excitement for going to war (‘midnight brilliance seemed to shake and fill...’). Indeed, the last paragraph reads that ‘all the danger in him leapt and sang,’ indicating that despite the danger of war, there was still a feeling of boyish adventure¹⁸⁶. The danger of war was not completely unknown to him as his poem *Embarkation* tells

Into many waters
from harbours far and wide
from dawn to dawn, by star and sun
to the ragged edges of the world
the grey hulls glide:
across an earth contracted to span

¹⁸⁴ Butler (1983) 130.

¹⁸⁵ Guy Butler, ‘The Parting,’ *Collected Poems*, David Philips: Cape Town (1999), 13.

¹⁸⁶ Geoffrey Hutchings (1988), 28.

the turbines pulse with cargoed death
 to where, on shaking fronts,
 blood stiffens various coloured shirts
 and killers calmly shrug and say,
 ‘I did not know or hate this man.’

This is, indeed, not the innocence displayed in the troops going into World War One.¹⁸⁷ The men on the ship, not having even reached their destination, were already ‘cargoed death,’ heading towards the fighting where ‘blood stiffens various coloured shirts.’ The last two lines in which ‘killers calmly shrug and say,/ ‘I don’t know or hate this man’’ also point towards the disillusionment many felt in the war and the pointlessness of the violence and death. Indeed, speaking of the World War Two generation, Hynes states that,

These people would differ from their elders in many ways, but perhaps most importantly in the fact for them that the Myth of the War had already been taken from when they reached maturity; it was a part of their world, it was the truth about war... men [of this generation] would go to war in a mood very different from that in which their elders had volunteered in 1914. They would go without dreams of glory, expecting nothing but suffering, boredom and perhaps death.¹⁸⁸

Bursting World, however, is still framed as a tale of the move from the innocence of childhood to the realities of manhood, an experience that many soldiers would have gone through, especially those still in their youth. The autobiography even begins with an excerpt from Yeats’ poem ‘A Dialogue of Self and Soul,’ in which he clearly marks the work as a ‘bildungsroman,’

A living man is blind and drinks his drop,
 What matter if the ditches are impure?

¹⁸⁷ Although there is a degree of uncertainty as to ‘which Butler’ wrote this poem. As with his autobiography, written during the 1970s about his war experience, Butler continued to work on his poems throughout and after the war (he desperately wanted to be published). This results in a split subject – the Butler of the time and the Butler reflecting back. So, despite *Embarkation* dating back to his 1938-1943 period, it is not impossible that a later sense of disillusionment seeped into the editing of his earlier works.

¹⁸⁸ Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture*, Anthenuem: New York (1991), 467.

What matter if I live it all once more?¹⁸⁹
 Endure that toil of growing up;
 The ignominy of boyhood; the distress
 Of boyhood changing into man;
 The unfinished man and his pain
 Brought face to face with his own clumsiness;
 The finished man amongst his enemies?

Butler's deliberate placement of Yeats' poem before his own tale frames the experience of his past self and the 'distress/Of boyhood changing into man.' It takes a while, however, for Butler to shake this innocence. During the beginning stages of his time in North Africa, Butler writes of a similar experience to the contrast he felt between Sonderwater and Spitskop. The passage, once again, also shows Butler's inescapable sense of place and Romanticism:

Imagine a dry heat and a flat grey-yellow sea of sand and little stones. Your moving truck is the centre of a slowly turning horizon under a colossal cloudless sky... Suddenly your heart and head are filled with the tumult of sweetness - the scent of mimosa, the definite Karoo smell of mimosa in bloom. Though the leaves are smaller the tree has the same white thorns. What luxury! You are suddenly alive, yourself, Guy Butler, the boy from Cradock; a scent you have grown up with, smelt every spring of your childhood, is here, in this place in nowhere, this vacuum of the world. The shock to your memory stimulates your whole being, and you hunger for Jean to be there to see the yellow pom-poms of the flowers, and the hundreds of butterflies fluttering over them. You may have lost your bearings, but you have found the delicate core of the desert.¹⁹⁰

Thus even in the North African desert, Butler reverts back to imagery of home. He later admits to the sense of limbo a soldier feels – perhaps indicative of why 'place' matters so much in his writing - and upon returning to his hometown on leave he feels that, 'Cradock

¹⁸⁹ This is also, perhaps, a reference the process of writing one's autobiography, having to recall and relive (and reshape) old memories 'once more.'

¹⁹⁰ Butler (1983),175.

was suddenly no longer my place. Almost all friends and relatives of my age were away somewhere, mostly in the armed forces.’¹⁹¹ This ‘limbo’ is heightened by Butler’s own identity while travelling through the real landscapes of his literary past – a feeling of being neither truly European nor African, the exact same tension found in his writing.

Butler’s disillusionment develops throughout the novel as his war years continue. Besides a growing feeling of uselessness as an information officer, the continuance of uncomfortable conditions and the boredom of war, the constant contact with death and the extreme violence of war led to a deep questioning of self. This boredom is seen clearly in his poem ‘Killing the time before the Time of Killing,’ which contains a repetitive theme ‘Yesterday: dust and heat.../Today, heat and dust.’ The poem begins:

Yesterday: dust and heat.

The same routine from dawn to dusk

shirts grown stale with sweat

and the marionette

movements of arms and feet.

Today: heat and dust.

Respirators, gas alerts, alarms,

then bayonet drill, jab and thrust

machine slick, quick

movements of minds and arms.¹⁹²

Beyond the uncomfortable conditions and boredom of wartime (throughout *Bursting World* this idea of monotony is repeated, ‘Life was getting so terribly monotonous...I felt dry inside like sand.’¹⁹³), the poem shows an awareness of the modern nature of warfare – of man as part of the war machine, ‘the marionette/movements of arms and feet...machine slick, quick.’ Individuality is cast aside along with freedom of will, they are ‘controlled like rolling stock

¹⁹¹ Ibid, 66.

¹⁹² Butler, ‘Killing the time before the Time of Killing,’ (1999),29.

¹⁹³ Butler (1983),176.

on rails/while life and death dispute the signal box and points...moving swift and clean/as parts of a machine.'¹⁹⁴ Despite the numbness of this anonymity and the repetitiveness of the daily motions, there are times in which Butler is reminded of his individuality, 'reading a letter from my home, apart,/ I know my soul to be my own again/ by the tension and turmoil in my heart' and 'beneath the battle dress and drill/still we live as individual men/or die as loners, lovers, husbands and sons.'¹⁹⁵ The poem also points towards the experience of being separated from one's loved ones for long periods of time – for Butler, it is his wife, Jean, for whom he longs. This yearning closes the poem:

What hungers distances deny.

There's a letter waiting, in your hand.

As long as the Last Post lasts
that single bugle lifts
my longings to the quiet sky.

Silence falls like moonlight on the sand.

What hungers distances deny.¹⁹⁶

Bursting World is interspersed with the letters Butler has written to Jean and, at times, ones she has written to him. His war narrative is thus one shaped by his relationship with her and his struggle in their being apart. It is no wonder that boredom and uncomfortable conditions, combined with a longing for home and loved ones, would compound the experience of disillusionment soldiers experienced during the war, witnesses to and participants in its violence.

The occasions where Butler does write about action and the physical violence are few and far between. Accordingly, with his emphasis on travel and place and his position as a non-combatative officer, the autobiography has, overall, a gentle feel. Even his descriptions of his

¹⁹⁴ Butler, 'Killing the time before the Time of Killing,' (1999), 29.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

brief encounters with battle feel removed and unsurprisingly so, as rather than being immediate diary entries (which he sometimes draws upon), Butler is reflecting back on his experience. This temporal distance allows for his Romantic lyricism to shape his experience and for afterthoughts to enter such descriptions. Thus, in *Acquafondata*, Italy,

The guns were so many and firing so fast that it seemed that the Allies had managed to invent a gun... the mediums and heavies crashed and thundered; a flicker of gunflashes so fast that one looked at the world as if it were being flung on to a dark screen by a projector with a jerky mechanical fault...All of this was predictable. Awesome, efficient, idiotic, heroic. What I had not expected were the nightingales. Every so often there would be a second's pause in the cataract of thunder. That silence space was filled with elated, ecstatic song.¹⁹⁷

The instances in which a sense of immediacy is expressed result from Butler's changing from a past tense (of his reflective self) to a present tense. It is on such an occasion where Butler is seemingly most affected by the violence of war and its utter disregard for life, its callous casualness and absurd randomness. After chastising one of his men for not checking the oil on one of their trucks, Butler orders him back. Moments later,

An explosion cracks the sky. Something hits the tent and the canvas tears. I rush outside. The truck is a square shadow skew in a cloud of dust. I jump on the running board and wrench the jammed door open. Seedman is lying mixed up with the gear lever and the brake handle. The engine of the truck is visible, and blood from the stump of his right leg, taken off at the thigh, is spurting over the cylinder nuts and spark plugs. I grip him by the shoulder and lift him out. He is limp...I try to locate the arteries, pressing my thumbs into his groins, but his blood, red and frothing like burgundy, goes on spurting...¹⁹⁸

The immediacy of this account also lies in his personal relationship with Seedman compared with the distance of the nameless allies fighting in the distance at *Acquafondata*.¹⁹⁹ Butler describes how he felt after Seedman's accident, saying,

¹⁹⁷ Butler (1983), 207.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 247-8.

¹⁹⁹ The other chief occasion in which this is seen is when Butler recalls his experience upon hearing that his brother, having volunteered for a high-risk operation, had been seriously wounded: 'O Jesus, Jesus, I don't really believe in all this crap but Jesus, 'my lieve God', may it please you to save Jeffrey. Not for my sake. For his mother's, father's sake. Spare them. Keep him alive. Jesus, Jesus, Jesus.' [Butler (1983), 232]. For any readers

I was not feeling bad; no nausea; while the physical aspects of the affair registered clearly on my senses, my senses, it seemed, were out of touch with my emotions; which reacted neither with pain nor fear. Neither with relief nor disgust. It puzzled me, their remoteness, this detachment, this divorce between heart and head. Perhaps I had lost the capacity to feel or to suffer; perhaps all pity and revolt were dead in me. Perhaps I was getting tough. Or perhaps some subconscious defence mechanism was functioning.²⁰⁰

Chris Thurman speaks of ‘the separation of heart and head’²⁰¹ as a part of the wartime condition. Butler later concludes that, “‘this remoteness, this detachment, this divorce between heart and head ... perhaps our species in its fight for survival had developed this disconnecting reflex, automatic during war’”.²⁰² Such feelings of utter disillusionment are similarly expressed in the opening excerpt of this chapter, where Butler ‘can work up no enthusiasm for victory,’ after seeing the pointlessness and ravages of war where ‘everybody is tarred with the same brush.’²⁰³ Thus it is war itself which has become the enemy in Butler’s mind, despite his initial clarity of his conviction of the need to stop Hitler.²⁰⁴ Within this, if everyone is ‘tarred by the same brush,’ Butler is also providing a portrait of war in which any hero-myth which might exist is complicated.

Indeed, by the end of the autobiography Butler appears to be thoroughly disillusioned and depressed. Writing to his wife Jean, he confesses, ‘[n]ow I see no purpose in living; life strikes me as a farce, in which one is always experiencing...the endless sex stories in the mess, the endless listening to the war news, the endless looking at periodicals, the endless shaving in the morning, the endless meals...’.²⁰⁵ A little later he describes how ‘the fog stayed thick inside me. It was a condition for which I have no words. To say ‘iron had entered my soul’ sounded positively pleasant. One could, perhaps, extract the iron. This fog altered the substance of which my soul was made...’.²⁰⁶ Even amongst the celebrations of the

familiar with the experience of having a family member in the war, such a moment would certainly have resounded strongly for them.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Thurman (2007), 119.

²⁰² Butler as cited in Thurman (2007), 119.

²⁰³ Butler (1983), 110.

²⁰⁴ Indeed, he notes upon seeing a dead German whose decomposing body, bloated and blighted with flies, that ‘furious at the indignity, I hooted: and the insects took off in a little cloud, revealing the blackened face. They had zoomed back on their platter before the rear wheels of the scout car passed him.’ [Ibid, 215.]

²⁰⁵ Butler (1983), 254-5.

²⁰⁶ Ibid, 275.

start of 1945, Butler continues to hover on the brink of an existential crisis, writing in his war diary,

So 1945 starts with a jocular cannonade. I feel sick to death of existence. Time is slow and sad enough. This coming year, although it may bring victory, is also going to be the year of most suffering, and the most sickening betrayals of hopes and dreams. This alcoholic celebration, this artificial rejoicing is really very hollow and ridiculous.²⁰⁷

He then writes to his wife, saying, ‘[y]ou can have no idea how old I feel, darling. Almost four and a half years in uniform. And uniform has, I discover, made a moral coward out of me. I am no longer capable of clear clean thinking, or acting according to principles. I have practically no principles left.’²⁰⁸ Thus, once again, although Butler was not involved in any direct killing, no immunity to the violence of war was awarded to him.

Despite this embitterment, Butler never does shake his Romantic lens and his autobiography is lavishly studded with descriptions of nature similar to his initial description of Spitskop, even in his later war years:

I noted how, among the poplars, the men were getting into their tents. Here and there a cigarette glowed, and a guitar strummed. But these were mere noises off and stage props. The leading actors were the mountain, its white snow cap pale blue under the moon, and birds - nightingales. It was the first time I had heard them. What a range in note and expression! Even more lovely than the poets had led me to expect.²⁰⁹

This Romantic treatment of nature combines with his emphasis of a sense of place and the two, taken together, form a wartime travelogue. His description of urban and rural scenes alike point towards travel as being as much a part of his war narrative as one’s conventional image of wartime violence – in fact it forms a far greater part of Butler’s story than does action. This results partially from his position as a non-combative officer and, despite his disillusionment, Butler recognised in his writing of *Bursting World* that the war had nevertheless ‘enriched him immeasurably.’²¹⁰ Drawing upon his education and own love for

²⁰⁷ Ibid, 278.

²⁰⁸ Ibid, 280.

²⁰⁹ Butler (1983), 202.

²¹⁰ Thurman (2007), 148.

literature and history, he feels in *Bursting World* that he is ‘among great ghosts’²¹¹ and muses over the historical haunting of “‘Jacob and Moses...Alexander the Great, Caesar and Pompey, Antony and Cleopatra, Joseph and Mary, Saladin, St Louis of France, Napoleon and Lawrence of Arabia.’”²¹² In Italy he befriends a monk with whom he discussed Shelley, Byron, Keats and Browning²¹³ while writing to his wife about the wonders of Florence, talking of ‘bells tolling from towers whose tops were hidden in the mist – that sent a thrill down my Romantic spine...I hope to write at least one perfect poem about this place which, next to you, I love with a passion...she is a courtesan of a city. She seduced me the first time I saw her...’²¹⁴

In his descriptions of cities and landscapes, Butler’s vividly paints the atmosphere and faces of the places and people he meets. (His war-time poetry similarly shares this transportative quality combined with awe for the ancient). The reader is thrown into world of Cairo’s topsy-turvy hustle and bustle, its curious combination of the ancient and the mythic with ‘the clashing colours and sounds in the bazaars...commercialism gone mad.’²¹⁵ Indeed, in and amongst ‘the congestion and complexity...the sandstone simplicity of the huge triangular silhouettes against the clean desert sand was disconcerting...the running to and fro of human beings became suddenly a silly thing, the bargains a vulgar impertinence before these stony statements in the sun.’²¹⁶

Thus the depiction of war that Butler presents is particular to a white liberal experience of the war, infused with an imagination informed by the words and worlds of the Romantic poets. His use of the South African landscape in both his autobiography and poetry would have resonated strongly with his South African readers, especially those either in the war themselves or with family members who had served. In *Bursting World*, in particular, Butler’s account of the war is firmly placed in the national division over South Africa’s participation (although he pays alarmingly little attention to the condition and presence of black and coloured troops, despite his self-acclaimed liberalism) and is thus useful in contextualizing South Africa’s path beyond the war as well. Although non-combative, Butler’s experience of the war is as valid as any other and his affinity for the Romantic poets,

²¹¹ Ibid. As an information officer, Butler gave lectures on these ‘personalities from antiquity’ as phrased by Thurman. [Thurman (2007), 148.]

²¹² Butler as cited by Thurman (2007), 148.

²¹³ Butler (1983), 271.

²¹⁴ Butler (1983), 268.

²¹⁵ Butler (1983), 170.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

combined with his sense of place, offers a form of travelogue which transports the reader back in time. However, despite his retreat into the Romantic, his tale also offers insight into the boredom and discomfort of war and the utter disillusionment many soldiers experienced. He ultimately concludes: 'My mind won't let me forget those organised madhouses called armies ... [which] set about murdering each other under a variety of holy banners. Little has happened in subsequent years to alter my reluctant discovery that I belong to a deeply flawed species.'²¹⁷ So, although Butler remains largely forgotten, his own offering of commemoration lost to a dusty death of library shelves, his work is still worth examination and the insight which it offers into not only a first-hand experience of war, but a particularly South African one, should not be diminished.

²¹⁷ Butler as cited in Thurman (2007), 148.

Chapter Three

Locating Remembrance: Monuments, Memorials

On the 11 February 1925 the B.E.S.L. (British Empire Service League) wrote to the City of Cape Town, upset by the ‘desecration’ of the Adderley Street War Memorial. Included within the acts of sacrilege were the ‘undesirable characters making a rendezvous of the site’ at night, while ‘in the day the hawkers rest their wares on the sacred stone.’²¹⁸ Similarly in October 1932 complaints reached the City that the previous Armistice Day had been tainted with ‘several remarks passed about the dingy appearance of the memorial.’²¹⁹ In response, the Honourable Secretary of the South African Infantry Brigade (overseas) Association requested that the memorial ‘receive early attention’ before the upcoming annual ceremony.²²⁰

Today such complaints seem trivial and are the least of the City’s concerns. Indeed, in order to make way for the extension of the *MyCity* bus line, the memorial is destined for relocation. The decision to move it from its symbolic site, where soldiers used to march to war, has been met with little attention. Even the ex-servicemen community remains divided over the matter.

This division goes to the heart of the meaning of the memorial itself as well as the wars it represents. While one veteran found the idea of relocation reprehensible, another conceded that the advancement of public infrastructure is important. Relocation, it was argued, could be positive as the memorial is difficult to reach. Stuck on a concrete island surrounded on either side by bustling Cape Town traffic, the memorial is inaccessible and its environment discourages quiet contemplation.²²¹

Ultimately there has been a large degree of apathy. Many people simply do not care about the fate of some old artefact from a bygone era, nor share in the history to which it speaks. Both this division and this apathy indicate changes that have taken place over the last sixty years: the memorial today is largely function-less, partly resulting from the war’s temporal distance, but also as a consequence of the change in white English-speaking identity (the group largely

²¹⁸ Letter from B.E.S.L. to the City of Cape Town, 11 February 1925, Cape National Archives, 3/CT: B344/4.

²¹⁹ Letter to the City of Cape Town, 14 October 1932, Cape National Archives, 3/CT: B344/4.

²²⁰ Town Clerk’s report, 22 October 1932, Cape National Archives, 3/CT: B344/4.

²²¹ Interview with A.E Kramer: Sarah-Jane Walton (Cape Town: June 2012).

concerned with supporting the war and later with representing it). Moreover, the memorial's loss of meaning is tied to a change in the identity of the City itself.

Contrasted with the Adderley Street Memorial's lost legacy is the Facebook page of the South African Legion. The site is a current, semi-public platform in which the commemoration of past wars remains integral to its function. It is a living, interactive memorial which transcends physical location and offers a dynamic space to share information and memories. Its growing strength emphasizes that although the Second World War has seeped out of the public memory of the City and the nation, it still remains important to the lives of some South Africans.



The Adderley Street War Memorial 2012, prior to suggested relocation.

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The Adderley Street War Memorial

Jay Winter in *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* identifies two main areas of interest regarding memorials: the political and the ritual. War memorials 'as foci of the rituals, rhetoric, and ceremonies of bereavement,' are as significant, he argues, as those acting 'as carriers of political ideas.'²²³ In contrast to individual acts of commemoration, public ceremonies involve both the political and the ritual as their organization largely resides

²²² Photograph by author, Cape Town (2012).

²²³ Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History*, Cambridge University Press (2007), 78-79.

within political bodies. In the case of the Adderley Street War memorial, it was the City of Cape Town that was ultimately in charge of organizing the local Armistice Day ceremony (later Remembrance Day), strongly encouraged by ex-servicemen organisations such as the B.E.S.L (later the South African Legion) and the M.O.T.H.s (the Memorable Order of the Tin Hats).²²⁴

Private commemoration involving the memorial has been increasingly difficult as its position in a busy thoroughfare makes it virtually inaccessible. The site, with the smell of petrol fumes and the roar of engines, discourages quiet reflection while public commemoration centring on the memorial has only been possible by closing off the road. As the city has changed so has public commemoration been handled by different groups over time. Originally, after the memorial's establishment post World War One,²²⁵ the city's identity was still linked to Empire, albeit increasingly tenuously as local and central governments' political persuasions diverged. In the Cape, largely pro-British governance helped along the memorialization cause. However the coming of Apartheid saw a shift in power to the Nationalists, and those having to align themselves carefully within the new order. The consequence was a deliberate distancing of the government from previous ties to Empire.²²⁶ Ultimately this facilitated the forgetting of the war and, accordingly, the war memorial's loss of meaning over time.

MW Coldicott Gardener, the Mayor of Cape Town from 1920 to 1922, encouraged the commemoration of the Great War.²²⁷ He 'convened a meeting of citizens for the purpose of taking steps to immortalise, by the erection of a memorial, the South Africans who made the great sacrifice in cause of their country.'²²⁸ It is this memorial which would come to represent not only the Great War, but the Second World War and the Korean War. This initiative taken by the Mayor is illustrative of a distinct anglophile colonial identity celebrating ties to Britain. The Adderley Street Memorial was also part of South Africa's larger task of commemorating the Great War. In particular the battle of Delville Wood, where South Africa's First Infantry Brigade sustained terrible casualties in its first stand on the Western Front, was singled out as an important site for a National War Memorial.²²⁹ Nasson argues

²²⁴ This memorial is focussed upon as it has been the City's main memorial to the two world wars (as well as the Korean War) and remains a familiar landmark.

²²⁵ 1924 to be precise. This will be shortly discussed.

²²⁶ Bill Nasson (2012).

²²⁷ City of Cape Town, clerk's notes: 1920, Cape National Archives, 3/CT: B344/4.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Bill Nasson, 'Delville Wood and South African Great War Commemoration,' *English Historical Review*, cxix (Feb. 2004), 57.

that this memorial on the Somme ‘was meant to be more than just securing a public site of mourning to pay homage to the Union war dead. From its inception, it was envisaged as a spiky political commemoration of Dominion identity... a tracing in granite and marble of the colonial strengths of the South African character...’²³⁰ However the celebration of a colonial identity was met with resistance and ‘white politics hinged on the abrasive division between national Dominion loyalty and the surly anti-war dissent of Afrikaner nationalism.’²³¹

In 1920 Adderley Street was chosen for the new memorial’s location, ‘on the way where many of the gallant lads marched their last on South African soil.’²³² After two rejected proposals, citing busy traffic and railway extension at the docks, the centre of Adderley Street was eventually decided upon.²³³ It was thus only in 1924 that the memorial was unveiled and the dedication made by the ‘Major-General His Excellency the Earl of Athlone.’²³⁴

The pamphlet of the unveiling service provides a description of the memorial. The central ‘Victory’ figure set on a pedestal embellished with base-relief and rising above two soldiers flanking her, is ‘emblematic of the triumph over evil, typified by the feet of Victory crushing the serpent entwined around the globe.’²³⁵ Aesthetically speaking, the overall effect is triumphalist. Particularly in the 1920s, ‘Victory’ dominated Adderley Street, soaring above the pedestrians down below. Today, as Helen Binckes discusses, its previous might is lost to a sea of buildings that simply dwarf it.²³⁶

The memorial’s inscription too reflects the same rhetoric as found in *The Cape Times* during the wars: ‘To the immortal honour of the South Africans who made the supreme sacrifice in the Great War. This memorial is dedicated in proud and grateful recognition by their countrymen. Their names liveth forever more.’²³⁷ James Mayo argues that ‘remembrance of the past by communities cannot be separated by the ongoing values they wish to embrace.’²³⁸ Thus the bravery, sacrifice and triumph suggested in the memorial is emblematic of the

²³⁰ Ibid. Nasson explains that the celebration of a colonial identity was part and parcel of ‘Jan Smuts and Louis Botha’s cause of construction the new post-1910 Union of South Africa as a British Dominion based upon unified white nationalism.’ (62). Such unity would remain only a distant dream until Apartheid where the state sought to unite whites against the sea of the ‘swart gevaar’ (‘black danger’).

²³¹ Ibid, 60.

²³² City of Cape Town, clerk’s notes: 1920, Cape National Archives, 3/CT: B344/4.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Memorial Dedication Service Pamphlet, 03 August 1924, Cape National Archives, 3/CT: B344/4.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Helen Binckes, *South African Public Memorials of World War One: A historical view of processes in public memorialization through their symbolic content, with particular reference to Cape Town*, UCT MA Thesis (2010), 129.

²³⁷ City of Cape Town, clerk’s notes, April 1920, Cape National Archives, 3/CT: B344/4.

²³⁸ James M Mayo, ‘War Memorials as Political Memory,’ *Geographical Review*, 78:1 (1988), 70.

values and ideals largely specific to the English-speaking community in Cape Town, who viewed themselves proud members of the British Commonwealth, and thus honoured to share in the Allied victory in both world wars.

It must, however, be noted that the memorial does not make space for representing South Africa's black and coloured volunteers as 'Victory,' and her bronze soldiers, are modelled and cast as Caucasian. Although the records are silent about this decision, it can be assumed it reflects the racist sensibilities of the time. Ultimately this excludes 'non-whites' from the bravery and sacrifice extended to the rest of the force through the memorial.



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Above: The Memorial dominated Adderley Street in the 1920s.

Below: The face of 'Victory'



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²³⁹ Sourced from: Property Poser: 'Some Outrage at proposal to move Adderley St. Cenotaph,' <http://www.propertyposer.co.za/some-outrage-at-proposal-to-move-adderley-st-cenotaph/>



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One of the bronze-cast soldiers flanking the Victory figure.

After the Second World War it was initially suggested that a separate war memorial be constructed, but the idea was eschewed for the appendage of more plaques to the Adderley Street memorial as it was thought that there were ‘more useful ways to employ the same funds.’²⁴² It was also decided by the Council that ‘insofar as Cape Town is concerned, to discontinue the observance of Delville Day and to establish in substitution therefore a Remembrance Day in commemoration of the fallen in both wars.’²⁴³ The day was combined with Armistice Day, around 11 November, whereby ‘a civic commemorative ceremony’ was ‘to be held on such day under the auspices of the council.’²⁴⁴ Accordingly, the 07 November 1948 (the closest Sunday to the 11 November) saw Cape Town’s first Remembrance Day ceremony, ‘in homage to those who made the supreme sacrifice,’ and after gathering at City Hall, a parade was led down to the cenotaph at the foot of which wreaths were laid. For the ceremony, the first of its kind, gold-edged VIP invitations cordially ‘requested the pleasure

²⁴⁰ Photograph by author, Cape Town (2012).

²⁴¹ Photograph by author, Cape Town (2012).

²⁴² City of Cape Town, clerk’s notes, 24 September 1945, Cape National Archives, 3/CT: G23/22.

²⁴³ City of Cape Town, clerk’s notes, July 1948, Cape National Archives, 3/CT: G5/24/1.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

and company' of prominent members of the community.²⁴⁵ Similarly in 1949 letters were dispatched to all councillors and heads of departments expressing the Mayor's 'hope that as many councillors as possible would support him by attending the service.'²⁴⁶ The majority did attend. The invitation was sent out to the public in the form of advertisements sent to *The Cape Times*, *The Cape Argus*, *Die Burger* and *Die Suiderstem*. *The Argus* thus announced that 'Remembrance Day...will be observed throughout the Union on Sunday...and in Cape Town a civic service will be held in City Hall.'²⁴⁷ Even here, however, it was noted that 'the initiative for organizing services has been left to local authorities and interested bodies,' and thus the state had, as early as 1949, washed its hands clean of one the last reminders of Britain's colonial legacy.

Jay Winter explains that the meaning of such memorials 'was highly personal,' but that 'it used collective expression in stone and ceremony to help people...accept the brutal facts of death in war.'²⁴⁸ The ritualistic characteristics of the ceremony – the hymns which were sung each year ("The Supreme Sacrifice" by Arkwright), the moments of silence, the playing of The Last Post, the march to the parade and the laying of wreaths – were thus important acts of community. They confirmed the community partaking in the commemoration and formed a collective acknowledgement of those lost and those left behind to grieve. Winter suggests that for many in Britain and France, this confirmation of community went beyond the local and was 'an act of citizenship' whereby 'to remember was to affirm community, to assert its moral character, and to exclude from it those values, groups or individuals that placed it under threat.'²⁴⁹ South Africa's association with the war was not so clean-cut as such ceremonies were more likely to reflect an Anglophone local identity or even a 'pan South African British loyalism,' as 'local authorities and interested bodies,' were responsible for their organisation.

Even within Cape Town, where pockets of pro-British sentiments continued after Apartheid's official implementation, there was division over remembering the war. Despite a 1954 report of an impressive display of solidarity in commemoration, in which '200 Cape Town firms display[ed] wreaths...in remembrance of men who fell in the two world wars,'²⁵⁰ Dr T.B. Davie, Vice Chancellor of the University of Cape Town recognized that 'Remembrance Day

²⁴⁵ City of Cape Town, clerk's notes, 07 November 1948, Cape National Archives, 3/CT: G5/24/2.

²⁴⁶ City of Cape Town, clerk's notes, November 1949, Cape National Archives, 3/CT: G5/24/3.

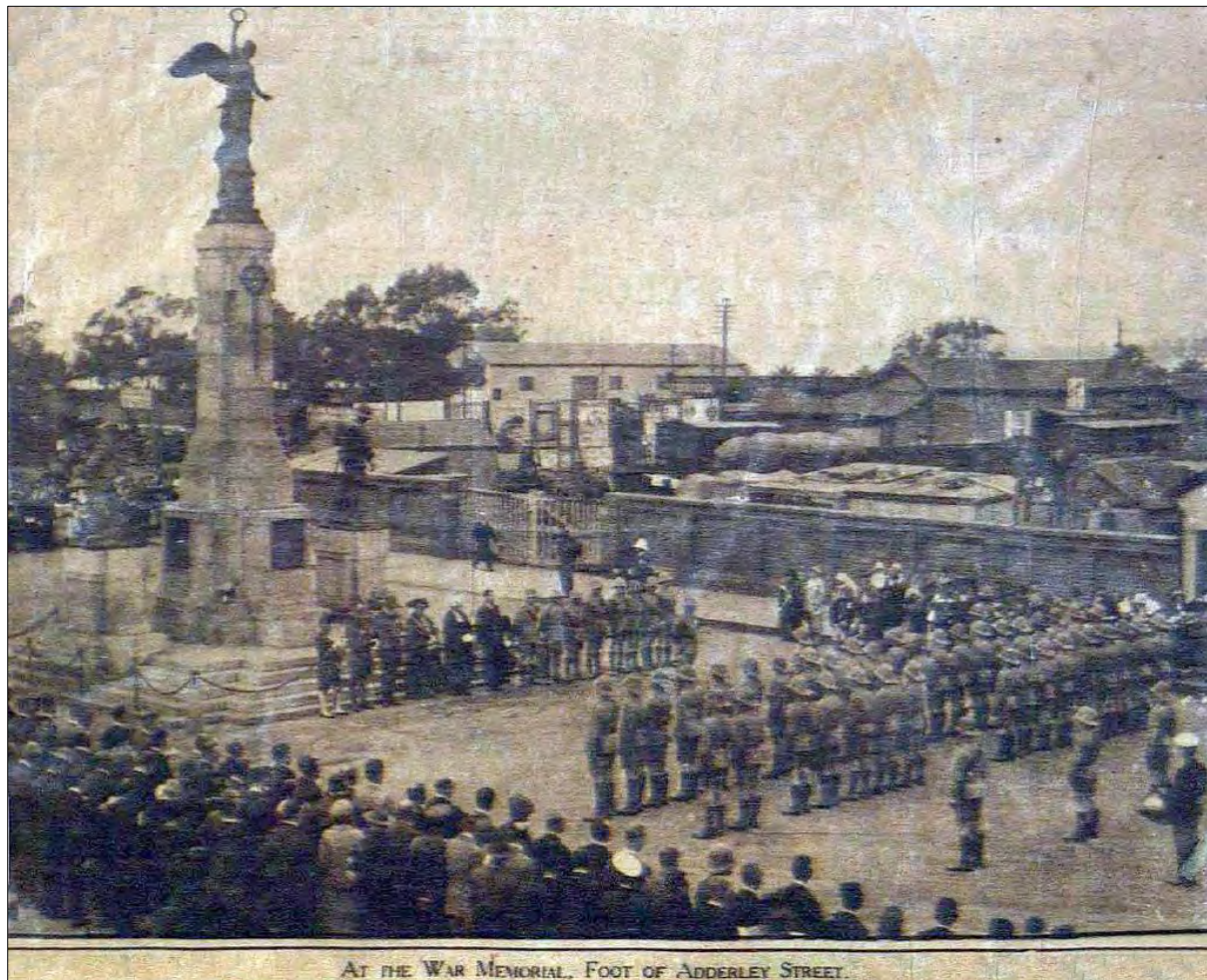
²⁴⁷ *The Cape Argus* as found in City of Cape Town, clerk's notes, 1950, Cape National Archives, 3/CT: G5/19.

²⁴⁸ Jay Winter (2007), 94-5.

²⁴⁹ Jay Winter (2007), 80.

²⁵⁰ *Cape Argus*, 04 November 1954, as found in Cape National Archives, 3/CT: G5/19.

could be a hollow mockery if South Africans neglected to foster more harmonious relations between black and white and English and Afrikaner.²⁵¹ Furthermore, most Afrikaner nationalists did not desire to participate in a display of pro-British sentiments and the petty politics around the memorial ceremonies portrays the all too familiar theme of white division.



AT THE WAR MEMORIAL. FOOT OF ADDERLEY STREET.

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The Adderley Street War Memorial, Cape Town has historically been used for Remembrance Day ceremonies. This photograph, from the Cape Times, dates back to 1926.

The ceremonies from 1957 to 1959 illustrate the ‘petty politics’ resulting from the white divide. While Nationalists deliberately attempted to distance themselves from the ceremonies arranged, British loyalists felt ties to the Crown were sorely downplayed. The Chairman of the General Purpose Committee in 1959 was tasked with the resolution of a letter written to the Mayor of Cape Town three months prior. In the letter General Sir Roger Wilson expressed his deep unhappiness that no mention of the Commonwealth was made in the 1958

²⁵¹ *The Cape Times*, 11 November 1954, as found in Cape National Archives, 3/CT: G5/19.

²⁵² Photograph as found at: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/hilton-t/4799098829/in/photostream/>.

ceremony. ‘Remembrance Day,’ he argued, ‘has always been appointed as the day for paying homage for [sic] the dead of the whole Commonwealth,’ whereas ‘last Sunday...there was no mention of the Queen, no Commonwealth flags were displayed and only one anthem [the Union’s] was played.’²⁵³ After some investigation, the Chairman had discovered the cause of the omission. The town clerk had noted that

In 1957 prior to the Remembrance Day service certain dignitaries in the government service normally and traditionally invited to attend accepted the invitation in the first instance but subsequently regretted their inability to attend, ‘owing to unforeseen circumstances.’ The same pattern was followed in 1958. Verbal enquiries elicited the information that if ‘The Queen’ was to form part of the service, the enquirers would be precluded ...from attending. At that stage, ‘Die Stem’ had been established as the one and only national anthem and the Union flag by act of parliament as the one and only flag of South Africa.²⁵⁴

Consequently it was decided that ‘the Queen’ and the Union Jack were to be omitted. Upon reflection (and the insistence and indignation of General Wilson’s letter), the two were promptly returned to the ceremony. The result however, was a quiet compromise. A proviso laid out by the Committee stipulated that ‘on Remembrance Day or any other gathering sponsored by the council where it is proper to emphasize our link with the British Commonwealth of Nations, “The Queen” and “Die Stem” shall be played and the Union Jack should be flown with the Union flag.’²⁵⁵ The implication was, of course, the exclusion of these symbolic ties more generally. The ceremonies thus reflected what was arguably a pan-Commonwealth or Anglophone identity, but as the City came under Nationalist governance, such pro-British identities came more and more under negotiation.

Ex-servicemen, in particular, remained vocal regarding the memorial and the ceremonies around it. In 1958 a ‘controversy’ arose when the City announced the need to move the memorial out of Adderley Street in order for the road to be widened and protests from ex-servicemen swiftly ensued.²⁵⁶ The City Council noted that previously ‘strong feelings manifested in certain quarters in 1956 (when the question was previously considered) in favour of keeping the memorial where it is.’²⁵⁷ Mr Will Costello wrote to *The Cape Times* arguing that forty years earlier it had been stated publicly by the then Mayor that the

²⁵³ Letter to the Mayor of Cape Town from General Sir Roger Wilson, 15 November 1958, Cape National Archives, 3/CT: G5/19.

²⁵⁴ Report from General Purpose Committee, 03 February 1959, Cape National Archives, 3/CT: G5/19.

²⁵⁵ Report from General Purpose Committee, 26 February 1959, Cape National Archives, 3/CT: G5/19.

²⁵⁶ Extract from *The Cape Argus*, 21 May 1958, as found in Cape National Archives, 3/CT: G23/21.

²⁵⁷ *The Cape Argus*, 19 June 1956, as found in Cape National Archive, 3/CT: G23/21.

memorial was to have its site in Adderley Street ‘in perpetuity’ and that Honikom, the Mayor of 1958, was just looking for a way to remove it.²⁵⁸ However, not everybody felt relocation a blasphemy, and an anonymous letter stated that the author was ‘sure they [the war dead] would not want a memorial for what they regarded as an unpleasant duty that had to be accomplished.’²⁵⁹ Similarly another letter to *The Cape Times* concluded that ‘invariably, as time passes, memorials become relics merely dating something unhappy of long ago and far away...hence who will care where the memorial stands?’²⁶⁰ A compromise was finally met, and the memorial remained in Adderley Street, thirty feet from its original position.²⁶¹

This tug-of-war surrounding the memorial stresses its contested meaning over time. The rhetorical question ‘who will care where the memorial stands?’ posed by the anonymous author above, picks up on a theme fundamental to the life-histories of most memorials – the fact that many become ‘relics merely dating something unhappy of long ago.’²⁶² James Mayo observes that,

although war memorials may be preserved, the society around them changes and so does its interpretations of history. These changes may alter the perceived meaning of war memorials...certain wars and events are considered less important, and when they are largely forgotten, the meaning in their memorials also fades.²⁶³

Winter similarly acknowledges this process:

[t]he act was located specifically in time and place. Once the moment of initial bereavement had passed...then the meaning of the memorial was bound to change. They could have no fixed meaning...Like many other public objects, they manifest what physicists, in an entirely different context, call a ‘half-life,’ a trajectory of decomposition, a passage from the active to the inert. Their initial charge was related to a huge population of bereaved people.²⁶⁴

There are two paths for memorials as set out by Winter here: reinterpretation into new narratives or erasure of meaning. The war has over the last decade occasionally been reframed as part of a more general South African liberation struggle (as is discussed in chapter one). This sporadic reintegration, however, is hardly sufficient to stir the memories

²⁵⁸ Letter from Mr Will Costello to *The Cape Times*, 26 March 1958, as found in Cape National Archive, 3/CT: G23/21.

²⁵⁹ Anonymous letter to *The Cape Times*, 26 March 1958, as found in Cape National Archive, 3/CT: G23/21.

²⁶⁰ Anonymous letter to *The Cape Times*, 11 March 1958, as found in Cape National Archives, 3/CT: G23/21.

²⁶¹ Minutes of Council Meeting, 21 May 1958, Cape National Archives, 3/CT: G23/21.

²⁶² The ‘merely’ similarly indicates a disregarding of the importance of the war, despite its local and global significance.

²⁶³ James M Mayo (1988), 73.

²⁶⁴ Winter (2007), 98.

of sixty years prior as, unlike the ‘huge population of bereaved’ of which Winter speaks, South Africa’s participation in the war was far from pervasive enough to warrant enduring remembrance. Nor does the aesthetics of the memorial offer itself easily to re-interpretation.²⁶⁵ With its Caucasian faces excluding black and coloured citizens, it would be difficult for the memorial to symbolize those who fought against the Apartheid state. Memorials and monuments from the pre-1994 era were retained, in a reconciliatory manner, as important to the country’s history. New heroes and causes have since been cast in stone, iron and a multiplicity of other materials as part of the democratic government’s task of commemorating events more close to home.²⁶⁶

The ‘trajectory of decomposition...from the active to the inert,’ thus best describes that state of Adderley Street’s Cenotaph. Already in 1960, *The Cape Times* released an article about the ‘dwindling numbers’ at the annual memorial service. The author, Brian Barrow is recognizing the move of the war from the public life it once led, to the private recollections (memories) and physical collections (objects and photographs from the war) of individuals. Niche groups continue to commemorate the war dead, but their existence lies murkily half-way between the public and the private. Barrow continues that,

[t]he vast majority of people have either forgotten or cannot be bothered to remember. This in spite of the fact that in World War One about 12400 South Africans of all races lost their lives and more than 12000 were killed in World War Two. Thousands more were maimed for life or severely wounded. In the Union there was hardly a man, woman or child who, in some way however small, was not affected. Yet the greatest war in history has already receded into a bygone age.²⁶⁷

Nevertheless, he comfortingly concludes that ‘their spirit of sacrifice remains; it has become the tradition of the nation.’²⁶⁸ Unfortunately for Mr Barrow, the ‘spirit of sacrifice’ regarding the wars was at no point a nation-wide sentiment as even during the war year support from

²⁶⁵ According to Gary Baines, ‘Where there is a lack of consensus as to how the nation should be defined, it follows that whoever wields power has the wherewithal to decide who is included and who is excluded from the ‘imagined’ community.’ [Gary Baines, ‘The Politics of Public History in Post-Apartheid South Africa,’ *History Making and Present Day Politics*, Rhodes University (MA) (2007), 3]. As argued earlier, the imagined community represented in the memorial is exclusive to male, white soldiers – women are not commemorated, despite their various legitimate war-time experiences.

²⁶⁶ According to Ciraj Rasool, ‘it was announced that a host of new monuments was being planned to recognize ‘the heroes of the struggle against apartheid and the history of a black majority officially deemed until recently to have no past worth remembering.’ (Nelson Mandela Museum: Exhibition brief and proposal’ committee discussion document). To counter the dominance of colonial and Afrikaner monuments...the National Monuments Council had endorsed a host of new heritage sites, many associated with Mandela.’ [Ciraj Rassool, ‘The Rise of Heritage and the Reconstitution of History in South Africa,’ *Kronos* 26 (2000), 12.]

²⁶⁷ Brian Barrow, extract from *The Cape Times*, 13 October 1971, in Cape National Archives, 3/CT: G5/24/1

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

within the white community was split. Ten years after Mr Barrow's lament, a letter to the editor of *The Cape Times* pleaded, 'let's have one united Remembrance service.' 'Sir,' the author politely directs the editor,

[n]ow that Remembrance Day is almost here, I would like to appeal to ex-servicemen and women to attend the civic Remembrance Day service at the City Hall...During the past few years the attendance at this solemn and moving service has dropped considerably and last year it was sad to see the pathetic number of ex-servicemen present.²⁶⁹

It is clear that despite the importance of the war for such individuals and niche groups, the war has faded from the public sphere to that of the private. Consequently, when the City of Cape Town announced its recent intentions to relocate the memorial, it met relatively little resistance. This represents a marked departure from the controversy stirred up by the same proposal in the late 1950s.²⁷⁰

The majority of people who opposed the memorial's most recent relocation were those for whom the memorial represents an important link to their pasts – namely veterans, older citizens and some members of the Anglophone community. Bill Nasson, too, was troubled. As a historian he remains aware of the significance of the wars in South African and international history. “The point is,” Nasson argues, that

the Cenotaph's present location is symbolically significant...It is close to where the shoreline would have been before the Foreshore reclamation, so the docks, ships, the sea, and presently opposite the railway station - again significant...perfectly suited to reflect the city's connections with the world of the world wars.²⁷¹

Opinions on the memorial's relocation were found on the internet. They, too reflect the divided outlook surrounding the move. A generational gap is blamed by one respondent, who states that

The people supporting this move are mostly young students fed a daily diet of movies shot in NY and LA. They haven't a clue about the history of Cape Town...Why should we listen to teenagers and those barely out of university? Cape Town

²⁶⁹ Letter to the editor, extract from *The Cape Times*, 13 October 1971, in Cape National Archives, 3/CT: G5/24/1.

²⁷⁰ *The Cape Times* reported that 'Heritage Western Cape gave the city the go-ahead for the relocation earlier this year after the public was given a say.' *The Cape Times*, 22 July 2013.

²⁷¹ Bill Nasson, 'Some outrage at proposal to move Adderley St. Cenotaph,' *The Cape Argus* duplicated on IOL Property website, 14 March 2012:
http://www.iolproperty.co.za/roller/news/entry/some_outrage_at_proposal_to.

residents...are very fussy about change in their City. They will not approve of a new bus station at the expense of the Cenotaph (try doing that in London!)...²⁷²

Beyond believing the worst of Cape Town's youth, the letter inappropriately makes the comparison between Cape Town and London. South Africa's war experience, legitimate as it may be, is a far cry from the damage felt on the home front in Britain as well as the involvement of her entire populous at the time. Responding to the above comment, Andres de Wet wrote,

Cape Town: Capital of NIMBYism²⁷³ and aversion to progress. Well done on making every attempt to hold Cape Town back. We'll NEVER be a global city and economy leader at this rate....Aversion to everything that is new is not being historically sensitive, it's being short-sighted. Cities that stagnate, die!²⁷⁴

De Wet thus frames the moving of the memorial as a question of progress versus stagnation in comparison to the generational gap outlined by the first respondent. What follows is a peculiar squabble online between two. Others attempting to join the conversation, soon are seemingly pulled in to the cyberworld tussle of identities and values. Words and accusations such as 'outlandish,' 'childish,' 'outdated,' 'selfish,' and 'heritage' are thrown around, and ultimately no compromise is reached. The argument is left hanging in a cloudy huff of anger and indignation. Such lively discussion reflects that the memorial is still linked, for some, to a sense of identity, history and heritage.

According to Mayo 'patriotism becomes authentic by its physical manifestation in sacred memorials and by the intimate experience of these memorials. Loyalty becomes more than a word or feeling; it has a local place.'²⁷⁵ Although 'patriotism' might not be fitting in this context, a sense of identity and shared experience, especially in the ex-servicemen community, is part of the memorial's materiality. Adderley Street, beyond being originally symbolic, has over the years been imbued and invested with the memories and emotions that such people have associated with the memorial. The objections to its removal might represent fears surrounding the dislocation of memories and their tangibility as accorded

²⁷² Comment by 'Clear' in response to Daneel Knoetze, 'Moving Cenotaph an appalling idea,' IOL news website, 13 March 2012. Accessed 31 July 2013: <http://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/western-cape/moving-cenotaph-an-appalling-idea-historian-1.1255126#.UfjQCo37B0k>.

²⁷³ NIMBY is an acronym for 'not in my back yard'.

²⁷⁴ Comment by Andres de Wet, directed at 'Clear' in response to Daneel Knoetze, 'Moving Cenotaph an appalling idea,' IOL news website, 13 March 2012. Accessed 31 July 2013: <http://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/western-cape/moving-cenotaph-an-appalling-idea-historian-1.1255126#.UfjQCo37B0k>.

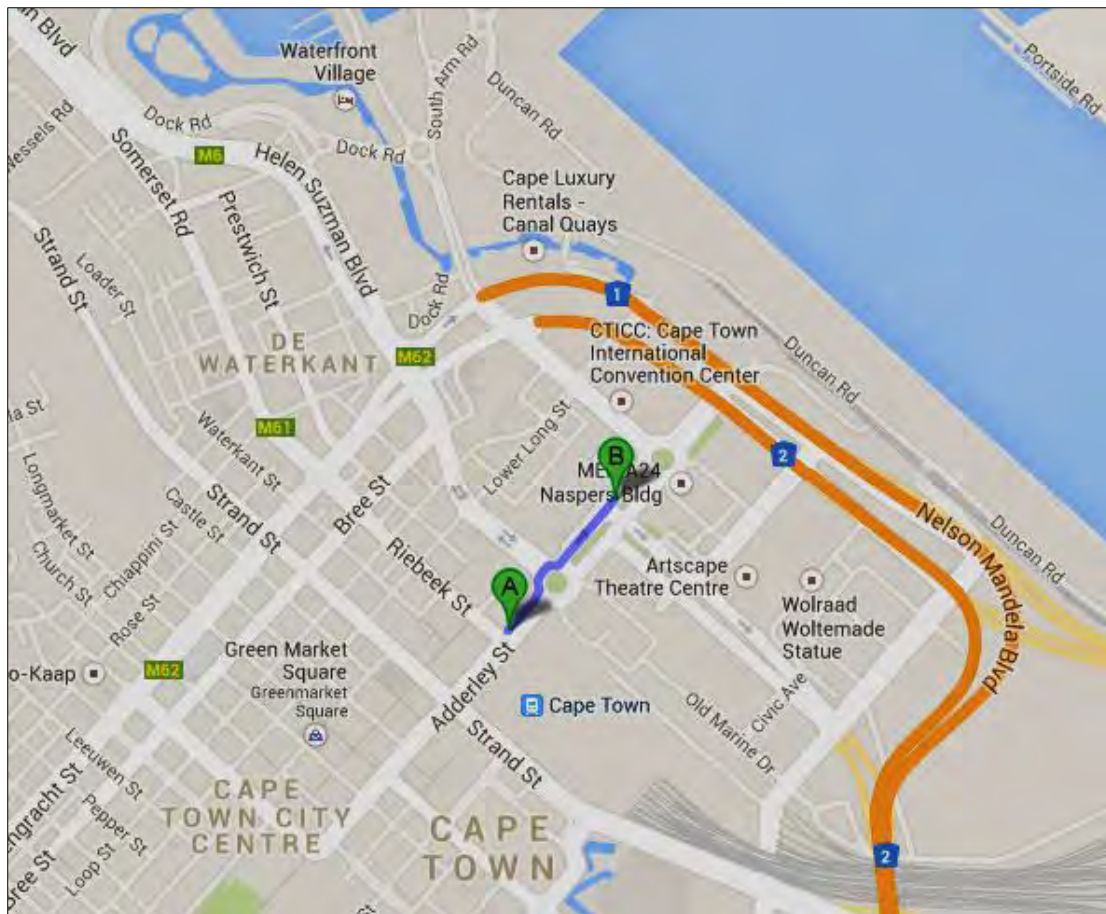
²⁷⁵ Mayo (1988), 70.

through the memorial. Questions regarding respecting the dead also arise – as if the memorial’s relocation represents the relocation of their very bodies. A cenotaph, after all, holds many of the same functions as a gravestone – a physical marker offering some remaining tangibility to the dead and a space in which they can be mourned and remembered. It should be emphasized, however, that it is difficult to attribute these contentions to Cape Town’s larger population considering the war’s overall dislocation from public memory. Furthermore, as a prominent part of Cape Town for roughly ninety years, the memorial and the minor controversy surrounding its relocation arguably also stems from a sense of the city and its physical history. This might be more reflective of the tensions between De Wet and his opponent above and is not necessarily directly linked to the war.

Echoing decisions regarding the proposed movement of the memorial in the late 1950s, the City has decided to keep the memorial close to Adderley Street. According to a recent *Cape Times* article, ‘half a century ago the memorial was shifted by 30 feet (9.14 metres), today it is being moved 300 metres to the Heerengracht Meridian.’²⁷⁶ The City, it says, remains confident that ‘the new location will make the monument far more accessible to members of the public, as well as for ceremonies,’²⁷⁷ although this in itself is difficult to gauge. Nevertheless, as was originally planned before the building of the foreshore, the memorial once more will be closer to the sea and the point from which thousands of soldiers would have departed on their way to war.

²⁷⁶ Jason Felix, ‘Tough Task to move war memorial statue to new home,’ *The Cape Times*, 22 July 2013.

²⁷⁷ Jason Felix, *The Cape Times*, 22 July 2013.



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The Memorial's relocation from (A), its original position in Adderley Street to (B) along Heerengracht Street.

South African Legion: Digital Remembrance

The B.E.S.L (British Empire Service League) was born in Cape Town, 1921, out of 'the serious plight in which men found themselves'²⁷⁹ after being discharged from duty post World War One. In 1941, during the Second World War, it was renamed the 'South African Legion of the BESL' in response to the 'white divide.' With Apartheid's consolidation in 1948, the name was changed again to accommodate the new rulers. Thus 'empire' was ousted in 1952 as an unofficial taboo-word, resulting in 'the South African Legion of the British Commonwealth.'²⁸⁰ According to their website, 'the aim of the BESL was to provide care, employment and housing.'²⁸¹ As the most prominent of ex-servicemen organizations, along with the MOTHS (Memorable Order of the Tins Hats), the SA Legion has played a vital role in the maintenance of Remembrance Day services across the country. From its start, it has

²⁷⁸ Image: <https://maps.google.co.za/>.

²⁷⁹ 'About the South African Legion,' The South African Legion Website. Accessed: 01 August 2013: <http://www.salegion.co.za/about-the-sa-legion.html>.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ Ibid.

maintained a multi-racial approach. A 1944 pamphlet boldly declares that ‘it is determined with all of its power and authority to continue that struggle on behalf of those serving in this war, irrespective of race, sex or colour, to ensure that they shall get a square deal and that the promised made to them shall be carried out in the post-war years.’²⁸² Unfortunately, the Apartheid state’s policies did not match up to the Legion’s non-racial views and the website reports that ‘a major clash took place when the Legion reacted strongly in 1956 to the Government’s move to ban black and coloured veterans from Remembrance Day services.’²⁸³ Needless to say, the Legion was not always able to fulfil its vision of itself.

Today, the Legion has kept up with the times with both a website and a very active Facebook page. Contrasted with the Adderley Street Memorial’s fading legacy, the Facebook page of the South African Legion is an example of a semi-public platform in which the commemoration of past wars is integral to its function. In this way, the webpage is a current, dynamic, interactive memorial which transcends physical location. Traversing the internet, it is a space in which information and memories are shared, and wars, veterans and family members are commemorated. Its growing strength, too, is testament to the fact that although the Second World War might have seeped out of the public memory of the City and the nation, it still remains important for some South Africans, locally and abroad. As an ex-servicemen organisation, the Legion has a continued interest in commemorating past military conflicts which remain central to the sense of identity of its members.

Place, as seen above with the Adderley Street War Memorial, has always played an important role with memorials. Often public and symbolic, the location of a memorial is further imbued with the memories and narratives triggered by the physicality of the monument. A space for individual and collective remembrance, it comforts mourners and those who wish to remember that they are not alone in their memories, sentiments and values.²⁸⁴ According to James Mayo, ‘whether a statue, a place, a building, or a combination of these and other elements, a war memorial is a social and physical arrangement of space and artefacts to keep alive the memories of a person who participated in a war sponsored by their country.’²⁸⁵ The emphasis on physical location as part of a memorial’s requisite qualities, however, is challenged by the ability to communicate similar sentiments online. The internet, despite its

²⁸² *The South African Legion of the B.E.S.L* (pamphlet), Johannesburg 1944, 2.

²⁸³ ‘About the South African Legion,’ The South African Legion Website. Accessed: 01 August 2013: <http://www.salegion.co.za/about-the-sa-legion.html>.

²⁸⁴ Bernard Barber, ‘Place, Symbol, and Utilitarian Function in War Memorials,’ *Social Forces* 28:1 (1949), 65.

²⁸⁵ James Mayo (1988), 62.

intangibility, can equally fulfil the qualities of ‘a social and physical arrangement of space and artefacts to keep alive the memories...’. Here it is ‘cyberspace’ rather than physical space that is the basis of the memorial, and a web address rather than a physical address marking the access to its site. ‘Artefacts,’ normally in the form of historic photographs are shared along with the personal texts written onto the page’s wall, providing both memories and historical trivia. The page is extremely active, with multiple posts (people writing on the war and/or uploading photographs, pictures or documents) occurring hourly. Participation is interactive and members freely comment on these posts. Unrestricted by physical location, the internet allows a global means of instant communication, allowing people to participate no matter where they might be (as long as they have access to the internet). The ability of cellular phones with internet capability has similarly made accessibility easier – no longer is a computer necessary to participate. One of the drawbacks of a cyberspace location, however, is that unlike a physical memorial, it is not easily locatable amongst the millions of webpages. One, generally, has to deliberately search for it, in this case the South African Legion – to find it, usually by writing key words into an internet ‘search-engine.’ In this sense such spaces can be quite exclusive, even if not deliberately so.

The SA Legion’s Facebook page is ‘semi-public’ in that membership to the page is required. This is attained through a request sent to the site’s creator, who has the power to reject or approve the application. The page is thus exclusionary to anyone deemed unsuitable. Here some personal interjection is required. In order to gain membership, I had to describe my research-interests in order to justify the application. Other members in return viewed my online profile, and my age, sex and background were immediately commented upon.²⁸⁶ In contrast to the general membership profile of white, male men with a military background, I remained an outsider despite being welcomed into the group.

Indeed, most members are South African ex-servicemen or have an interest in the military history of South Africa. The page thus reaffirms the shared values and sentiments of the group, and members discuss and commemorate a variety of military conflicts and events – from World War One through to current political affairs.²⁸⁷ Many of these ex-servicemen have family members who served in past conflicts and there is a pride in the familial occupation. Members are thus able to relate to each other by sharing personal experiences from their pasts, or that of their relatives’. Sometimes the information shared is not

²⁸⁶ It was implied that I was an innocent schoolgirl who could be easily shocked by their stories.

²⁸⁷ With no military background, I was further distanced from the group.

necessarily related to personal experience, but an explanation of an event or military action. This occurs more frequently with the older conflicts, seen as pieces of military history likely to be found interesting by fellow ex-servicemen. Other times family members of veterans join the group in search for information of their loved ones and the group tried to help out, or at least put the searcher in touch with those likely to know.

The Legion's Facebook page is not only a site of commemoration. Facebook itself is primarily a means of networking, communication and information sharing. This affects the way in which commemoration occurs compared to websites which solely function as web-memorials.²⁸⁸ Remembrance of any given war, campaign, battle, regiment or individual is thus not centralized, nor can it be easily located if it was referred to in a past 'thread.' Facebook works chronologically with the most recent posts found at the top of the page. Consequently the further back in time a comment was posted, the further down the page the user has to scroll. In contrast, a memorial website is usually dedicated to one thing alone and is highly centralized, with a home page around which information is gathered. Although not necessarily static, web-memorials do not undergo as much change as do Facebook pages. Indeed there is almost a daily post regarding World War One or World War Two on the Legion's page, normally in the form of a historic photograph with comments. Even as I write more material is uploaded to the page. A World War Two photograph of the Sixth South African Division in Italy has just been posted – the bare branches of wintery trees framing a tank charging through a river. The photograph which has stirred up some chatter about the war, is just one of many recently added by the same member. Some photographs and posts do not receive much attention, others gain the Facebook 'tick of approval' (the 'like' button at the bottom of every post), and can lead to a formidable thread of commentary.

Examples of commemoration on the page are plenteous. On the 27 June 2013, it was posted that,

as the anniversary of the Delville Wood battle approaches in July we start with this poignant and very sad image. Here a South African nurse places a wreath on her brother's grave at Delville Wood, 17 February 1918. Here, eighteen months earlier, during the Somme offensive in July and August 1916, the South African Brigade had suffered 2300 casualties out of 3153 officers and men.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁸ See Aaron Hess, In digital Remembrance: Vernacular memory and the rhetorical construction of web memorials, *Media, Culture, Society* 29 (2007), 812-828.

²⁸⁹ 27 June 2013, South African Legion Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/South-African-Legion/142385935931147>.



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The photograph accompanying the above post on the South African Legion's Facebook page: 'Here a South African nurse places a wreath on her brother's grave at Delville Wood, 17 February 1918.'

Such posts allow members to reflect both privately as well as publicly by commenting on the page. They are invitations to acknowledge past events and participate in the act of commemoration. Similarly, on the 27 June 2013, Job Maseko²⁹¹ was commemorated. A black volunteer of the South African Native Military Corps, Maseko received a medal 'for meritorious and courageous action in that on or about the 21st July, while a Prisoner of War, he...sank a fully laden enemy steamer...while moored in Tobruk Harbour.'²⁹² The post continues to detail Maseko's actions which are 'made more remarkable in that [he]...as a 'black' African could only be deployed in a non-combat role due to racial policies at the time.'²⁹³ Besides commemorating the man, such posts also are illuminating for those unfamiliar with the subject.

Besides these acts of commemoration, made directly on the page itself, some posts are photographs and reports of ceremonies of commemoration that have taken place elsewhere. This allows members from all around the world to share within the process of remembrance even if they themselves were unable to physically attend the event. Thus one member posted a photograph of the latest annual Delville Wood Service, entitled 'We Must Never Forget!

²⁹⁰ Photo copyright: IVM, the South African Legion Facebook page, 27 June 2013: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/South-African-Legion/142385935931147>.

²⁹¹ The chapter, 'Photographs and Film,' discusses Maseko's representation in the documentary *A Pair of Boots and a Bicycle*.

²⁹² South African Legion Facebook page, 21 July 2013. <https://www.facebook.com/pages/South-African-Legion/142385935931147> and <https://www.facebook.com/groups/sa.legion/>

²⁹³ Ibid.

SALUTE!’ to which another member responded, ‘Never fear...we won’t. Near, Far, Wherever we Are. We fought the good fight, ran the race to its end and keep the remembrance flame alive. Salute and respect to all SA military, generations past and present.’²⁹⁴ Many posts are created simply for the sake of historical interest. These posts can trigger acts of remembrance - photographs or stories shared by other members. As a site of networking and communication, the page also is used to notify members of upcoming ceremonies and events. Thus the recent discovery of the bodies of three World War One South African soldiers ‘found near a brick factory in Zonnebeke at the end of 2011,’ led to their planned reburial at the Tyne Cot Cemetery in Belgium.²⁹⁵ In an urgent announcement, members were asked to ‘copy and paste this link everywhere you can’ in the ‘need to raise the awareness of this very significant event’ which sought to put the men, finally, to rest.²⁹⁶

With a stream of daily posts, the South African Legion’s Facebook page has in many ways replaced the Adderley Street War Memorial’s function. Far more accessible and convenient, it offers a space to network, communicate, commemorate and learn, while reinforcing the values and sentiments shared by the group’s members. The page illustrates World War Two’s move from public consciousness - arguably only ever widespread during the war itself - to the realm of private recollections and semi-public platforms. However, even these can be difficult to discover and exclusionary, with the Legion’s page often preventing ‘outsiders’ to the largely masculine ex-servicemen membership from participating in group commemoration.

The South African Legion is an example of an ex-servicemen group which has ‘gone digital,’ and in doing so has allowed members to be brought closer together, regardless of location.²⁹⁷ This suggests that memories at different points in time are stored in different media and in different ways. It is thus unsurprising that the internet is playing a larger role in acts of commemoration and memorialization today. The Legion’s Facebook page is also a further indicator that the war’s importance today in South Africa is located largely within these niche groups, rather than the general public. Although newspapers framed the current relocation of the Adderley Street War Memorial as an issue full of contention and outrage,

²⁹⁴ SA Legion Facebook page, 22 July 2013: available at: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/South-African-Legion/142385935931147>.

²⁹⁵ South African Legion Facebook Page, 27 June 2013 : <https://www.facebook.com/pages/South-African-Legion/142385935931147> and <https://www.facebook.com/groups/sa.legion/>

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁷ The Legion has created a Facebook page for South Africans in the UK.

most failed to note that such debates have taken place in a largely white arena – hardly representative of Cape Town’s populace, let alone South Africa’s. The debate over the memorial’s relocation does, however, raise questions of who is remembering the war and why. Public acts of commemoration are both ritualistic and political, as seen through the petty politics surrounding Cape Town’s Remembrance ceremonies over the years. Cyberspace memorials offer the possibility of ‘correcting’ the omissions of past physical monuments – ones which have excluded black and coloured veterans (as well as women) from the war narrative of bravery and sacrifice.²⁹⁸ Thus the importance of online forums and webpages for discussion and commemoration should not be taken for granted. Memories move with the times and it is thus important for researchers within the field to do so too.

²⁹⁸ Such memorials, like the Cenotaph, are almost impossible to change physically.

Chapter Four

Locating Remembrance: Photography and Film

In an age overcome with visual media, saturated with the proliferation of countless images flashing on a multiplicity of screens, photography and film are central in locating both history and memory. In an attempt to trace South African memories of World War Two in the visual media today, this chapter discusses the entanglement of ‘memory’ and ‘history’ with photography and film and the power they have in shaping ‘acts of imagination.’²⁹⁹

This chapter discusses an anonymous collection of World War Two photographs as a means of exploring the importance of photographs as cultural carriers and as objects of remembrance. In doing so it also reveals some of the limits of the medium as a cultural carrier of memories and the challenges it poses to researchers interested in memory.

The importance of the film *A Pair of Boots and a Bicycle* is also explored. Similar to the photographs, film often attempts to document the world, but like photography, this documentation can only ever be partial and fragmented. Nevertheless the film represents one of the only locally-made films made about South Africa’s World War Two experience(s), and moreover does so through the lens of black and coloured veterans. If Robert Rosenstone’s claim, that film is replacing the written word as the popular medium of history, is to be taken seriously,³⁰⁰ then *A Pair of Boots* should be considered a powerful possibility in locating the ‘memories’ and experiences of these largely forgotten soldiers.

Ultimately, the visual media are important sources in History today and should be emphasized in their power to locate, transform and transfer ‘memories,’ as long as their limitations are similarly recognised.

²⁹⁹ Films and newsreels during the war also would have informed and fuelled the public’s imagination about the war. The newsreels were particularly important for propaganda and for marvelling at the might of the sturdy Springboks, or the wonders of the Union’s industrial power. For an analysis of film and propaganda in South Africa during the war period see Suryakanthee Chetty, ‘Imagining National Unity: South African Propaganda Efforts during the Second World War,’ *Kronos* 38:1 (2012). For a history of the cinema in South Africa and the importance of the war period, see Thelma Gutsche, *The History and Social Significance of Motion Picture in South Africa 1895-1940*, Howard Timmins: Cape Town (1972). Similarly see David J Gainer, ‘Hollywood, African Consolidated Film and ‘Bioskoopbeskawing,’ or Bioscope Culture: Aspects of American Culture in Cape Town 1945-1960,’ Master of Arts: University of Cape Town (January 2000), 101.

³⁰⁰ Robert Rosenstone, ‘The Historical Film: Looking at the Past in a Postliterate Age,’ in Marcia Landy (ed) *The Historical Film: History and Memory in Media*, New Jersey: Rutgers (2001).

Iconography and Acts of Imagination

Iconic images of World War Two have come to inform a popular understanding of it. Their intense proliferation, heightened through their accessibility via the Internet, has had a democratising effect on the war. The war's images are shared and absorbed into the personal imaginations of people worldwide. People can imagine the war as if they had been there, as if the memories were their own.

Films and photographs can blur the line between memory, imagination and history. Angela Landsberg refers to 'prosthetic memory,' which 'enables individuals to experience, as if they were memories, events which they themselves did not live.'³⁰¹ As visual media, films and photographs possess the power to suggest memories and experiences. Most people today know what World War Two looked like but they did not experience it first-hand. They could even imagine, in great detail, being there. This act of imagination is enabled through 'prosthetic memories' and the proliferation of World War Two photographs and films.

History and memory, after all, also involve acts of imagination. Memories are often *pictured* mentally, and similarly with the rise of visual media, so too is history. Furthermore both history and memory are fluid constructs, constantly rewoven, adapted and *re-imagined* in different contexts and circumstances. Marianne Hirsch similarly sees a blurring between memory and history in her term 'postmemory.' Referring specifically to the second generation trauma victims of the Holocaust, she proposes that 'it is the presence of embodied experience in the process of transmission that is best described by the notion of memory as opposed to history and best mediated by photographic images.'³⁰² There is a sense that memory more accurately expresses the feeling of personal relationship to, or experience of, events others have lived. Hirsch refers to this as an 'embodied connection,' or an 'affective link to the past.'³⁰³ Photographs, then, have the potential of mediating this connection between history, memory and embodied experiences. Film, with its additional sensory capacity for movement and sound, to an even greater degree suggests embodied experiences and blurs the line between history and memory.

³⁰¹ Robert Burgoyne, 'Memory, history and digital imagery in contemporary film,' *Memory and Popular Film*, Manchester: Manchester University Press (2003), 223.

³⁰² Marianne Hirsch, 'The Generation of Postmemory,' *Poetics Today* 29:1 (2008), 110. Sun Ju Ahn describes 'embodied experiences' as 'being surrounded by simulated sensory-motor information in mediated environments that create the sensation of personally undergoing the experience at that moment.' S. Ahn, *Embodied Experiences in Immersive Virtual Environments*, Stanford University (PhD: May 2011), iv.

³⁰³ Marianne Hirsch (2008), 110.

Hirsch acknowledges that ‘of course we do not have literal “memories” of others’ experiences’ but although ‘postmemory is not identical to memory,’ it ‘approximates [it] in its affective force.’³⁰⁴ While film audiences today have learnt how to ‘read’ films and to unconsciously separate hyper-realistic depictions of past events from ‘reality,’ the power of film to suggest these experiences is nevertheless impressive. One only has to think of the opening minutes to Spielberg’s *Saving Private Ryan*. With a shaky hand-held camera aesthetic, the viewer is drawn into the action onscreen, immersed in the chaotic massacre of the Normandy landings in June 1944. Spielberg painstakingly replicated the immediacy and the horror of the event and was acclaimed by war veterans and historians alike for the film’s feel of authenticity.³⁰⁵ This speaks to the power of the visual media in locating and suggesting experiences and memories.

‘Postmemory’ also can involve the blurring between public and private images. Hirsch explains that, ‘this adoption of public, anonymous images into the family photo album finds its counterpart in the pervasive use of private familial images and objects in institutions of public display.’³⁰⁶ The transmission of ‘memory’ however is not limited to ‘documentary’ photographs and films, be it public or private, but as with Landsberg’s proposal it can include fictive representations of the real, such as those found in many a docu-drama or historical drama. Andreas Huyssen believes that ‘we cannot discuss personal, generational, or public memory as separate from the enormous influence of the new media as carriers of all forms of memory.’³⁰⁷ He continues,

[t]hus, for example, it is no longer possible to think of the Holocaust or of any other historical trauma as a serious ethical and political issue apart from the multiple ways it is now linked to commodification and spectacularization in films, museums, docudramas, internet sites, photography books, comics, fiction, even fairy tales and pop songs. Phenomena such as *Schindler’s List* and Spielberg’s visual archive of Holocaust survivor testimonies compel us to think traumatic memory and entertainment memory together as occupying the same public space, rather than seeing them as mutually exclusive phenomena.³⁰⁸

³⁰⁴ Ibid, 109.

³⁰⁵ Phil Landon, ‘Realism, Genre and *Saving Private Ryan*,’ *Film and History* 28:3-4 (1998), 58 .

³⁰⁶ Marianne Hirsch (2008), 111.

³⁰⁷ Andreas Huyssen, ‘Present Pasts: Media, Politics, Amnesia,’ *Public Culture* 12:1 (2000), 29.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

In his book *Armed with Cameras*, Peter Maslowski talks about the phenomenal presence of World War Two photographic images in the ‘collective American memory,’ in which the event remains ‘astonishingly vivid.’³⁰⁹ Considering the powerhouse that is Hollywood, it is probable that recent global imagination regarding the war approximates *Saving Private Ryan*. Furthermore one only has to tune in to the ‘History Channel,’ to choose between a daily regurgitation of World War Two footage in the form of countless documentaries, each varying slightly in topic and narration (although these arguably do not impress upon the viewer the same horror and violence of war as does Spielberg’s opening sequence in *Saving Private Ryan*).

Undoubtedly there is a proliferation of these images in popular culture and memory. As Astrid Erll contends, ‘memories’ are not subject to borders, but are carried and transmitted worldwide through a range of cultural media.³¹⁰ This ‘travelling memory’ is akin to Landsberg’s ‘prosthetic memory’ or Hirsch’s ‘postmemory.’ Each author makes the connection between the visual media, real and imagined experiences.

A Pair of Boots and a Bicycle

Directed by Vincent Moloi, *A Pair of Boots and a Bicycle* is important beyond the fact that it is one of the only films regarding the South African black and coloured experience of World War Two.³¹¹ It is significant in that it powerfully portrays both the experiences of the men during the war as well as the meaning of the war for them today. The film’s focus is thus as much about memory and the construction of narratives as it is about the war itself. In a nation which has largely forgotten the war, and to an even greater extent black participation in it, the film is a poignant reminder that it was not, after all, just a ‘white man’s war.’

³⁰⁹ Peter Maslowski, *Armed with Cameras: The American Military Photographs of World War Two*, Macmillan: New York (1993), 9.

³¹⁰ Astrid Erll, ‘Travelling Memory,’ *Parallax* 17:4 (2011), 4-18.

³¹¹ *A Pair of Boots and a Bicycle: the story of Job Maseko* (Vincent Moloi, 2007).

Not terribly much has been produced (especially in terms of filmed histories) about the Second World War in terms of a South African context and narrative. The epic documentary series *The World at War* may mention Commonwealth troops, but rarely are South Africans distinguished amongst them. Perhaps the most notable documentary made within the country is *Those Crowded Years*, but four decades have passed since its release and it can hardly be argued to have had a lasting impact. This in itself is a sign of the silence around South Africa and the Second World War in this country. My own 2012 documentary, *Those Dying Days*, although discussing the relevance and meaning of the war in Cape Town today, is largely bereft of black and coloured veterans. My own failure to portray these men has made *A Pair of Boots* a significant film to discuss.

Film historian Robert Rosenstone has made the claim that film has replaced the written word as the popular medium for history – if we are to take this claim seriously *A Pair of Boots* has great potential for locating the ‘memories’ and relating the experiences of these otherwise largely forgotten soldiers.³¹² The film, however, is also suggestive of war experiences, and memories, which cut across the racial boundaries so readily enforced under Apartheid.

A Pair of Boots and a Bicycle follows the story of the director, Vincent Moloi, as he attempts to understand why these black and coloured men ‘cared to fight in a white man’s war.’ Interviews with several veterans are intercut with the talking heads of professional historians, the former describing their subjective experiences, the latter providing the ‘objective’ context. This journey takes Moloi to North Africa as he tries to trace the experiences of South Africa’s black and coloured volunteers. In so doing on film, the viewer also is given the opportunity. The film is used to commemorate the life of black volunteer Job Maseko. Through a series of re-enactments, Moloi depict Maseko’s tale. After volunteering for the war because of monetary considerations, Maseko was placed with other ‘non-European volunteers’ in a supportive (ie non-combatant) capacity. He was stationed with the South African 2nd Division in Tobruk and, when it was captured by Rommel, he continued to do hard labour as a prisoner of war. It is during his time here that he was able to sabotage a German ship by filling up a condensed milk tin with the innards of bullets he found in the desert. Afraid he would be found out, Maseko managed to escape and wandered the desert until he fortunately encountered Allied troops and was taken home.³¹³ *A Pair of Boots* thus uses the prism of Maseko’s life, woven together with supporting interviews of surviving veterans, to try to understand the experiences of these black and coloured volunteers. Moreover, by including his own reflexive exploration, Moloi questions the meaning of the war in South Africa today.

Integral to the film’s ability to impart an impression of that meaning is the film form itself and the available ‘information loads’ it best conveys. These can include the sights and sounds of a time and place, as well as the emotional power elicited in the visual interview or re-enactment. The relationship between ‘history,’ ‘film,’ ‘meaning’ and ‘truth’ is complex and film as a medium for history has been much contested. For Ian Jarvie, the failure of filmic history is that “the moving image carries such a poor information load and suffers

³¹² Robert Rosenstone, ‘The Historical Film: Looking at the Past in a Postliterate Age,’ in Marcia Landy (ed) *The Historical Film: History and Memory in Media*, New Jersey: Rutgers (2001).

³¹³ *A Pair of Boots* (2007).

from such discursive weakness that there is no way to do meaningful history in film.”³¹⁴ Rather than a poor information load, Rosenstone argues, film provides different information loads than the written word, particularly in its ability to convey

a slice of life, intensified by the genre of drama and the power of the medium. Film may lack the ability to provide deep psychological insight, or excessive descriptions of particular intellectual and political milieus, but it can suggest with a terrifying immediacy how the past looked, and how people moved, felt, spoke and acted in time. Unlike the written word, the biofilm, even in its flashbacks, always functions in the present tense, suggesting, even making you feel, as if you have lived through those moments yourself.³¹⁵

Moloi’s film is successful in its attempt to sketch life for black and coloured soldiers in the late 1930s. The historic footage he uses, combined with speeches made by both Smuts and Churchill, draws upon the iconic images and sounds of the war period. These act as visual cues, simultaneously offering context and pulling the viewer deeper into the imaginative realm of the war. For this the interplay of visual history, memory and imagination is paramount.



Above: Stills from *A Pair of Boots and a Bicycle*. Moloi shows historic footage alongside re-enactment. By juxtaposing the two he is making a claim regarding the veracity of his own representation.

The same method is used to locate the film within the framework of wartime South Africa and archival footage of Johannesburg’s streets is intertwined with the melancholic jazz-notes of a single saxophone. This suggests the poverty of the time, which was particularly felt in

³¹⁴ Ian Jarvie as cited in Robert Rosenstone, ‘History in Images/History in Words: Reflections on the Possibility of Really putting History onto Film,’ *American Historical Review* 93:5 (1988), 1176-7.

³¹⁵ Robert Rosenstone, 108.

South Africa by the non-white populace. This poverty was a key reason for many black and coloured men who volunteered. Moloi is able to suggest this through the filmic form itself.

A number of historians act as ‘talking heads’ in the film. They are used to convey important information regarding the period’s background that cannot be done so easily through audio-visual cues alone. Chopping and changing between these historians, Moloi is able to weave a contextualization of the period leading to the outbreak of the war. He describes that, ‘like many others, Job Maseko and his family moved to the city...in search of a better life.’ Historian Pallo Jordan explains over images of Johannesburg in the 1930s the devastating effects of the 1929 Great Depression in which ‘all blacks were left, more or less, defenceless.’³¹⁶ Thus Maseko, illustrated through re-enactment, leaves his position as a mineworker for the war in order to make (a little) more money, which would then also enable him to marry his girlfriend, Zanele. Moloi uses the prism of Maseko’s life to illustrate the experiences of many of the volunteers.³¹⁷

The ‘white divide’ in the Union’s politics is also explained, albeit a little too simply. Moloi narrates that, ‘with memories of the Boer War in mind, the South African Prime Minister of the time, General Hertzog, was not in favour of joining the war on the side of the British Empire. This caused a division in white politics.’ Historian Luli Callinicos adds that ‘many Afrikaners said they would never lift a gun against the Germans.’³¹⁸ What this statement too strongly suggests is that all Afrikaners were opposed to the war. It doesn’t make space, then, for Smut’s Anglo-Afrikaners who supported the war, or the thousands who volunteered their services out of financial need.³¹⁹

Nevertheless Moloi’s contextualization must be commended as it extends beyond the bounds of South Africa. Using an interview conducted with Terry Charman, from the Imperial War Museum in London, Moloi explains that Atlantic Charter ‘seemingly promise[d], if not a utopia, a better post-war world based on President Roosevelt’s four freedoms...freedom of speech, freedom of religion, worship and the press [sic].’ Placing the Charter ‘amongst the war aims of the Allies, they had been able ... to get the support of many of the peoples in the colonies.’³²⁰ The inclusion of this information connects the war and the experience of these

³¹⁶ *A Pair of Boots and a Bicycle* (2007).

³¹⁷ As noted in the introduction, many white Afrikaners were also forced to volunteer for financial reasons.

³¹⁸ *A Pair of Boots and a Bicycle* (2007).

³¹⁹ Albert Grundlingh, ‘The King’s Afrikaners? Enlistment and Ethnic Identity in the Union of South Africa’s Defence Force during the Second World War, 1939-1945,’ *Journal of African History* 40 (1999).

³²⁰ *A Pair of Boots and a Bicycle* (2007).

men to a global experience of colonization. It also goes some way towards explaining, beyond the pressures of poverty and financial need, the reason, as Moloji frames it, these men chose to fight in ‘a white man’s war.’ It finally allows Moloji to explain the utter disappointment and disillusionment most black and coloured South African veterans felt when, on their return to South Africa, their compensation was almost completely non-existent and their chances of freedom crushed with the introduction of Apartheid.³²¹

According to Albert Lichtblau the creation of films, especially documentary films or the filmed interview, is the creation of ‘documents of remembrance.’³²² ‘The camera’s eye,’ he argues, ‘can help us show more clearly that remembrance is an interactive process that not only attempts to mobilize memory but also uses the haptic sense³²³ and physicality.’³²⁴ The use of interviews in *A Pair of Boots* is one of the film’s chief strengths in that it shows the non-verbal gestures and signals involved in understanding the meaning of an event for a given interviewee. Without these interviewees, mostly coloured and black veterans from the Second World War, the powerful ‘emotional load’ that the film is able to convey would be largely lost.

Indeed, for Pierre Sorlin, the biggest problem with film as a historic medium is in that it is inherently ‘fictional,’ reconstructing ‘in a purely imaginary way the greater part of what they show.’³²⁵ Fiction, in his mind obscures ‘truth.’ Robert Rosenstone has addressed this view by questioning ‘truth,’ saying ‘But what truth? The factual truth [accuracy], the narrative truth, the emotional truth, the psychological truth?’³²⁶ Similarly Natalie Zemon Davis urges historians to think about film in terms of its potential for ““telling about the past in a meaningful and accurate way.””³²⁷ Moloji through his use of talking-heads, archival footage and audio and, most importantly, interviews has done precisely that. Beyond providing largely the ‘factual truth,’ he has through the stories told by these veterans offered an ‘emotional truth’ and a ‘psychological truth’ about their experiences and memories of war.

³²¹ See David Killingray, *Fighting for Britain: African Soldiers in the Second World War*, James Currey: Suffolk (2010); also Sarah-Jane Walton, *Those Dying Days* (2012).

³²² Albert Lichtblau, ‘Case Study: Opening up Memory Space: The Challenges of Audiovisual History,’ in Donald A. Richie (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of Oral History*, Oxford: New York (2011), 277.

³²³ To do with tactile sensory information – this feeds into the embodied experiences as discussed by Hirsch and Landsberg.

³²⁴ Ibid, 279; this ‘haptic sense’ (sense of touch) and ‘physicality’ call attention towards the visuality of film and how a sense of place is conveyed.

³²⁵ Pierre Sorlin as cited by Robert Rosenstone, ‘Does a filmic writing of history exist?’ *History and Theory* 41 (2002), 136.

³²⁶ Robert Rosenstone (2002), 144.

³²⁷ Natalie Zemon-Davis as cited by Robert Rosenstone, ‘Does a filmic writing of history exist?’ *History and Theory* 41 (2002), 141.



Above: Stills of World War Two veterans Petrus Dlamini (left) and Charles Adams (right) from *A Pair of Boots and a Bicycle*.

The interviewees provide an emotional truth of the war, but also a narrative truth in that they are paramount to providing a better understanding of why these men joined and their experiences of war and they supplement Maseko's narrative. Thus Petrus Dlamini explains how 'In South Africa I couldn't get a job. The best option was to join the army.'³²⁸ Similarly John Magnus Africa explains how, 'from 1932 to 1939, work was very scarce,'³²⁹ while Thomas Mautsoa explains that 'my parents were poor. We had nothing. So to support my family I had to join the army and go to war.'³³⁰ Accompanying the testimony Moloi has matched archival photographs of men standing in queues, their faces cast in the monochrome film of the time. While the footage and music immerse the viewer in the period, the stories of the soldiers add depth and a human face to the times of which the historians speak.



Above: Stills from *A Pair of Boots and a Bicycle*. Black volunteers queuing to sign-up and receive their uniforms.

The black volunteers were not allowed to handle guns. Instead they left South Africa having

³²⁸ Petrus Dlamini, *A Pair of Boots and a Bicycle* (2007).

³²⁹ John Magnus, *A Pair of Boots and a Bicycle* (2007).

³³⁰ Thomas Mautsoa, *A Pair of Boots and a Bicycle* (2007).

only trained with spears.³³¹ ‘We were afraid of the places we were going to,’ explained Mautsoa, ‘we thought of going to war to fight with people we did not know as we boarded the ship. Our families were full of tears...We cried ‘Goodbye South Africa! Bye-bye South Africa.’³³² Such fears were experienced by all soldiers alike.

The siege of Tobruk is recalled in the documentary with memories of fear. ‘One night,’ Mautsoa relates,

while we were sleeping on the ground, there was an older man next to me, Mr Maseko...I asked him, ‘what is that noise?’ ‘*Twiiiiing, twiiiiing.*’ He said, ‘my child those are bullets. They are firing at us.’ I was so afraid. I thought of my mother and father...I’d hear blasts coming from the artillery, ‘*Po! Po! Twiiiiing, po!*’³³³

After the South African capture at Tobruk, most of the white soldiers of the 2nd South African Division were deported to Italy as prisoners of war, whereas Maseko and other coloured and black men were kept as labourers for the Germans and Italians.³³⁴ Indeed, it was during his capture in Tobruk that Maseko sank a German ship. Dlamini tells how, ‘we were very happy that he managed to bomb the ship. We were all happy because they were our enemy at the time. They were our enemy.’³³⁵

The randomness of killing comes through in the veterans’ accounts. Death was not glorious – it was real, tangible and senseless. Dlamini describes how ‘many died...when we woke up we saw the injured and the dead lying like dead sheep.’³³⁶ Charles Adams explains, ‘in war there are no celebrations. Yours today, mine tomorrow. I get killed today, you get killed tomorrow.’³³⁷ Dlamini reflects how the later battle of El Alamein

turned so ugly. It was God’s will we survived. Oh man it was difficult. Soldiers died. Both black and white...It’s like giving away your life. Our hearts had given up hope. You don’t think of anything else. You only think of your path. Will I live, be injured or die?³³⁸

³³¹ As Moloï explains, it was feared that if given guns, these men might turn on their oppressors.

³³² Ibid.

³³³ Thomas Mautsoa, *A Pair of Boots and a Bicycle* (2007).

³³⁴ *A Pair of Boots and a Bicycle* (2007).

³³⁵ Dlamini, *A Pair of Boots and a Bicycle* (2007).

³³⁶ Ibid.

³³⁷ Charles Adams, *A Pair of Boots and a Bicycle* (2007).

³³⁸ Petrus Dlamini, *A Pair of Boots and a Bicycle* (2007).

Mautsoa echoes this, saying, ‘We saw death with our own eyes.’³³⁹ These memories of fear and the futility of war, reflected in the faces of the men on screen, would have been experienced by soldiers, black and white, everywhere.

War for these men was not glamorous. Unlike the collection of World War Two photographs donated to this project, in which only tales of laughter, loved-ones and the excitement of travel are told, the stories that these men share provide an important counterweight to the boyish adventures of war. The same excitement and sense of adventure is repeated in interviews conducted with white South African veterans, who frame the war as the best years of their lives (see Chapter Five). Undoubtedly fear was an emotion experienced by all men alike, regardless of colour, yet it featured far more in the war narratives told in *A Pair of Boots*. The simplest reasons are twofold. Firstly, without access to the entire footage of Moloji’s interviews, it is impossible to know the questions he asked his interviews or what directives he might have given them. Nevertheless he *did* shape their memories. This is compounded by a further layer of mediation – that of the filmic form itself. The film’s specific focus on Maseko and his experiences, as imagined by Moloji, shapes the way these interviews have been used. The memories in the film are highly mediated, and the images and sounds against which they are juxtaposed influence the way they are understood.

Beyond Maseko’s involvement in the interview process, and the subsequent manipulation of the testimony during editing, the experiences of the black and coloured volunteers after the war were dramatically different from those of their white counterparts.³⁴⁰ Indeed white veterans returned from the war to a fairly comfortable life, cushioned by the policies of Apartheid. In stark contrast, not only were black and coloured veterans poorly compensated for their services, they returned to a world without freedom.³⁴¹ Their war memories are thus mediated by post-war disillusion and years of oppression under apartheid and woven into a tale of betrayal, despite the danger they had put their lives in. Francis Wilson describes that

for blacks the experience of travelling outside the confines of a segregated society was profoundly liberating whilst for many whites the goals of the war as well as meeting all sorts and conditions of men and learning of a world far richer in culture

³³⁹ Thomas Mautsoa, *A Pair of Boots and a Bicycle* (2007).

³⁴⁰ Sarah-Jane Walton, *Those Dying Days* (2012).

³⁴¹ Francis Wilson, ‘Southern Africa,’ in ‘Michael Crowder, *The Cambridge History of Africa V8*, Cambridge University Press (2003), 285.

than anything they had ever dreamed of made the social structures at home seem mean and petty.³⁴²

The war had imparted a hope for freedom at home, but this was sorely denied, their sacrifice in vain. All of Moloi's veteran interviewees – John Magnus Africa, Petrus Dlamini, Charles Adams, Lota Mfelang and Thomas Mautsoa – affirm this feeling of betrayal. Even the title of the documentary, *A Pair of Boots and a Bicycle* highlights the experience of these black and coloured soldiers that Maseko represents, with the failure of the state to compensate 'non-European' black and coloured volunteers with anything other than a pair of boots and, if they were lucky, a bicycle. The introduction of the Apartheid state furthermore limited any claim they could have made after demobilization. Most of the interviewees, filmed in their uniform from yesteryear, display a pride in their involvement with the war. The war, however, is also remembered as a source of sorrow, anger and betrayal. Thomas Mautsoa explains the pride that, 'when people asked us why we went to war we said, 'if it wasn't for us there wouldn't be world peace.' We were fighting for the world.'³⁴³ He then sadly recalls how, 'we waited a long time for a ship to take us home. When we boarded the ships...we were full of hope. Our Father said that it was a new South Africa, not that old South Africa we knew. Women and children would be free.'³⁴⁴ John Magnus Africa voices the anger of their betrayal and mistreatment, saying angrily, 'is this peace? I don't call this peace, and it's not peace yet. Sixty years ago and it's still not peace.'³⁴⁵ Petrus Dlamini explains,

They told us, when we return and the war is won, we will be well compensated. "Kaffir" even though you've been to war, you are still a kaffir. Now when you look for the things we were promised where are they? They are not there. You get the raw end. That's what we got. Passbook! Show your permit. And food...when white people eat over here, you have to be far away. [Silence, he gulps...] That what hurt us the most...especially me, that really hurt me...being called a "Kaffir" soldier. Even when I joined the police force, I thought I was a policeman. They said I am a "Kaffir policeman." It was not the beautiful dream we were promised.³⁴⁶

In that moment the camera is able to capture the raw emotion of the man. Clearly upset, he looks away from the camera and holds his head in his one hand. The power of film in

³⁴² Ibid.

³⁴³ Thomas Mautsoa, *A Pair of Boots and a Bicycle* (2007).

³⁴⁴ Ibid.

³⁴⁶ Petrus Dlamini, *A Pair of Boots and Bicycle* (2007).

translating the meaning of the war for these men is difficult to deny. Watching the scene it is impossible not to be touched by it, angered by it or, as a white South African myself, implicated in the history of discrimination of which Dlamini speaks. The way in which the memories of these men have been mediated through post-war events is also made evident. In many ways, then, the documentary contributes to the meta-narrative of what the war means for many non-white participants today and for this reason ‘memory,’ remains central to its cause.

Moloi concludes the film by visiting the graves of black and coloured veterans of the war at the cemetery in El Alamein. At the bottom of each grave he places a South African flag, the camera hovering over the inscriptions of the headstones. Each name, carefully etched, is accompanied by the soldier’s age and is a reminder that many of these ‘men’ were barely out of boyhood. Moloi’s careful omission of music in this scene allows the whine of the wind to carry his own lament: the cost of victory was that so ‘many soldiers lost their lives,’ and as black and coloured men they were not even recognized for it. Having completed his journey, his interviews, his travelling, his own immersion into the period, Moloi is finally satisfied that he has achieved his goal, ‘to restore dignity to these restless souls. My journey is over...I now know their story. It is a tale of courage and betrayal, hope and despair. Job Maseko, man of the military Native Corps and the Cape Corps, I salute you.’³⁴⁷

A Pair of Boots and a Bicycle is, accordingly, important for the location of the memories and the experiences of these otherwise largely forgotten men. Their tale of war is inseparable from their experiences as ‘men of colour’ under Apartheid and the pride that they felt for fighting in the war is met with the pain of betrayal, left with neither compensation nor freedom. The film’s strength in conveying the psychological and personal ‘truths’ of these experiences should not be undermined, nor its ability to immerse the viewer in the period. This is, ultimately, complicated through post-war mediations of these memories and through the influence of the filmic form itself. Moloi’s personal journey into understanding these men is thus akin to my own interest in the war. Although largely forgotten, their stories provide an important counterweight to the predominance of white voices in remembering the war both more generally as well as specifically for this thesis. Furthermore their tales of war in this documentary, marked by the fear of battle and the randomness of death, are important in balancing out the otherwise positive narratives found in some of the other media: the hype of

³⁴⁷ Vincent Moloi, *A Pair of Boots and Bicycle* (2007).

The *Cape Times* in its renditions of the resilience and cheer of the Springboks, or the collection of photographs in which the moments captured are of the familiar faces of loved ones, the keepsakes of camaraderie or the fleeting fancy of foreign lands. It is to these photographs that we now turn.

Uncovering an Anonymous Archive

Huysen, Landsberg and Hirsch all point towards the importance of visual media in locating historical narratives in which the lines between ‘history and memory,’ ‘private and public’ and ‘fictive and real’ are blurred. Nevertheless photographs and film are important sites of memory and are instrumental in informing an imagining of the war. They are important in their ability to convey a sense of the possible experiences and events found within them, despite the limits of the medium.

When this research began in 2012, an advertisement was placed in the *Cape Times* in the hope of eliciting information about the war, particularly from men and women with close ties to it. One respondent had no such affiliation, but had discovered a collection of World War Two photographs amongst the bric-a-brac of a Cape Town second-hand shop and she donated the collection to the project. The photographs remain anonymous. There is no indication of to whom they originally belonged, besides their collective content which suggests a white South African veteran.

This thesis so far has suggested a path that war remembrance has followed in South Africa. From the public discourse it provided during the war, it has with time faded into the realm of more select and private remembrance. The question arises as to what happens when even the private individual, to whom such memories and photographs belong, is gone. What can photographs, in and of themselves, reveal of the memories they contain? In order to approach this question, this anonymous archive is considered in terms of what it can or cannot say about photography, memory and the war.³⁴⁸

³⁴⁸ According to Okwui Enwezor, ‘every photographic image has been endowed with the principle of uniqueness...within that principle lies the kernel of the idea of the photograph as an archival record - the capacity for mechanical inscription and the order of direct reference that links the photograph with the indisputable fact of its subject’s existence are the bedrock of photography and film.’ Thus ‘because the camera is literally an archiving machine, every photograph, every film is a priori an archival object.’ Okwui Enwezor, ‘Archive Fever: Photography Between History and the Monument,’ as available at: http://wiki.davidarts.com/images/5/59/Archive_Fever.pdf.

According to Martha Langford a photographic album is a ‘repository of memory’ and an ‘instrument of social performance’ and should be ‘understood by recognizing its original function as a mnemonic device for storytelling and situating it in the realm of orality.’³⁴⁹ The ordering of photographs in an album is thus usually a process of careful deliberation in the construction of one’s own historical narrative³⁵⁰ to the extent that some theorists have suggested that ‘the construction of alternative realities is the personal album’s main function.’³⁵¹ As historical documents photographs, like text, film or audio, remain purely partial representations of an event³⁵² and photographs are as much about what remains outside the frame as that chosen to be in it.³⁵³ Collectively taken, photographs in an album or archive are even further fragmented - partial representations of split-second moments in a timeline.

The constant re-imagining of one’s own life story can be somewhat stabilized by photographs as cues in the self-narrative, but sometimes this re-imagining can lead to some images being removed from the album, no longer fitting in to the self-story. Conversely photographs can be powerful tools in uncovering a hidden history, or a different take of the established version. Ultimately the meanings of photographs remain unfixed, referencing events outside of themselves and no longer accessible. The images captured with each frame can be reinterpreted by the same individual at different points in time, or perceived altogether differently by others. The instability of the photograph and the collective archive thus challenges the researcher wishing to understand the events or the people they represent. It is with these considerations in mind that the anonymous World War Two collection is discussed.³⁵⁴

³⁴⁹ Martha Langford, ‘Speaking the Album: An Application of the Oral-Photographic Framework,’ in Annette Kuhn, Kirsten Emiko McAllister (eds) *Locating Memory: Photograph Acts*, Berghahn Books: US (2008), 224.

³⁵⁰ Okwui Enwezor, ‘Archive Fever: Photography Between History and the Memorial,’ as available at http://wiki.daviddarts.com/images/5/59/Archive_Fever.pdf. Accessed May-August 2013. 22.

³⁵¹ Ibid.

³⁵² Peter Loizos refers to photographs as ‘restricted but powerful records of real-world, real-time actions and events.’ Whils photographs themselves are ‘not unproblematic, or above manipulation, and they are never more than representations or traces of more complex past actions.’ [Peter Loizos, ‘Video, Film and Photographs as Research Documents,’ in Martin W Bauer and George Gaskell (eds), *Qualitative Researching with Text, Image and Sound: A Practical Handbook*, 93-4.]

³⁵³ According to John Berger, ‘photographs bear witness to a human choice being exercised in a given situation. A photograph is a result of the photographer’s decision that it is worth recording this particular event or that this particular object has been seen.’ [John Berger, ‘Understanding a photograph,’ *Selected Essays and Articles: The Look of Things*, Penguin Books: New York (1972) as reproduced online at: http://www.macobo.com/essays/epdf/berger_understanding_a_photograph.pdf, 2.]

³⁵⁴ Elizabeth Edwards, recognizing the photograph as fragmentary and purely representational, considers photographs for the pasts that they suggest, rather than necessarily reveal, as ‘the truth.’ [Elizabeth Edwards, ‘Photography and the Performance of History,’ *Kronos: Visual History* 27 (2001), 15.]

Unlike some photograph albums which can span a number of decades, this collection is limited to the war years alone. It is a period of someone's life isolated from the rest of their history. The war story for this individual, whatever the reason may be, was thus kept separate from other life experiences. Combined with this, the fact that the images were neither ordered nor carefully catalogued suggests that they were not for the most part objects of daily remembrance nor necessarily formed a part of an oft-repeated narrative (this is, of course, in contrast to the war years when they were deemed important). Whereas some individuals keep significant photographs around their homes - in albums, hanging on walls, sitting on dressers and shelves, some even forming a shrine-like space of remembrance and commemoration - these have no indication of having been displayed.³⁵⁵

Nevertheless these photographs are likely to have held a 'sensory and emotional impact...as things that matter'³⁵⁶ for the individual in question. Similarly to memorials then [see Chapter Three], as objects of remembrance these photographs would have been imbued with the emotions tied to the memories they represented. The materiality of photographs is thus integral to the process of remembrance and their physicality is important. Shaped by the very light rays entering the camera in the given moment of capture, they are a tangible, visible link to the past.

The archive consists of photographs of (white) friends and family around Cape Town and South Africa. It is accompanied by snapshots of Smuts in the desert, and plenty more of troops in various locations including North Africa and Italy. Some of the photographs are simply landscape shots, forming a visual travelogue. Enwezor believes that this 'desire to document,' to 'purposely preserve the moment,' is a part of the 'constant construction of "aide-memoires"; a gigantic machine of time travel...a mechanism through which we return to the past.'³⁵⁷ These photographs would also have allowed the soldier to state 'I was there' and to recall upon viewing the experiences and sights he felt important enough to capture. If collecting and documenting these photographs is in part because of their function as objects of remembrance and in part integral to the construction of an 'aide memoire,' then their

³⁵⁵ Although this is impossible to say for certain.

³⁵⁶ Elizabeth Edwards, 'Photographs and the Sounds of History,' *Visual Anthropology Review* 21:1-2 (2008), 28.

³⁵⁷ Okwui Enwezor, 'Archive Fever,' 12-13.



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4

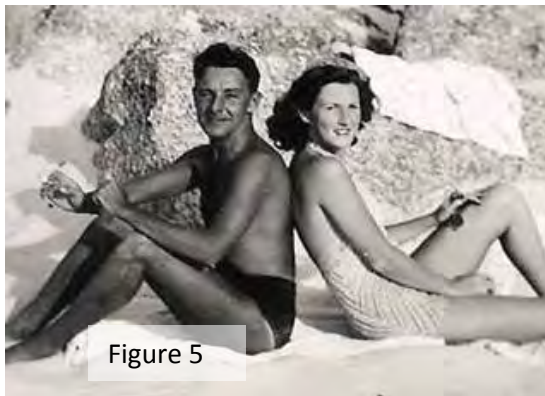


Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7

content is telling of those people and places deemed important enough to be remembered, to be included within a potential life-narrative.³⁵⁸ Over a third of the collection is of women,

³⁵⁸ John Berger, 'Understanding a photograph,' *Selected Essays and Articles: The Look of Things*, Penguin Books: New York (1972), 2. As reproduced online at: http://www.macobo.com/essays/epdf/berger_understanding_a_photograph.pdf

family and friends, varying between spontaneous shots and planned portraits. ‘Sweetheart’ photographs such as ‘figure 1’ were often deliberately taken for troops on the move as keepsakes. ‘All yours! - Patricia’ is scribbled across the photograph of the woman in figure 6, with a hint of a romantic relationship.



Figure 8



Figure 9



Figure 10



Figure 11



Figure 12



Both women (figures 1-4 and figures 5-6) appear frequently in the archive which might suggest either both being sweethearts at one stage or another, or one being a family member or close friend (although the impression of the pictures suggest otherwise) or, a third possibility, is that the album itself is a combination of the photographs of more than one veteran. Figure 7 is a spontaneous ‘buddy’ shot, with what appears to be four of five friends all clambering on to the same motorcycle whereas figure 8 is an example of the planned ensemble, most likely a gathering of family members. Figure 9 highlights the fluidity of the two categories in that it encompasses both ‘people’ and ‘travel’ Shot in Italy, the men posing nonchalantly for the camera point towards the camaraderie and close friendships formed during the war.

Figures 1 through 9, simply a small sample of the number of ‘people’ shots in the archive, highlight the importance of people for the unknown soldier both during the war and after. Their faces, represented and reproduced in the photographs would have been integral to his war narrative and experience. During the war they would have played an important role as keepsakes from home, reminders of love and sources of comfort while in foreign lands. Their materiality would have mattered, a tangible connection to those

people and places left behind. Sometimes a source of comfort, these photographs would also have stirred up other emotions associated with the events, people or places captured within. The capturing of these ‘foreign lands’ indicates that the experiences of travel are inseparable from the soldier’s war story. The works of Guy Butler as well as the interviews conducted for this thesis corroborate the fact that the war tale formed by many soldiers was, in fact, a travel

narrative. Each travel photograph documents places visited - significant in their beauty, their exoticism or simply for being different to home. Figure 10 is one of many shots taken in Egypt in which its ancient past has peaked the photographer's interest.³⁵⁹ Figures 11 and 12 (the latter most likely a postcard) show the objectification of 'the other' on camera. Indeed, those faces captured on film are not viewed as 'people' as much as part of the exotic landscape and, accordingly, the exotic experience of travel. Figure 13 is a postcard found amongst photographs taken of Lake Como, Italy, and its surrounds, with magnificent vistas and idyllic waters. During the war the *Cape Times* published a series of letters describing 'Italy's entrancing beauty,' with poppy-filled fields and life of luxury in grand old villas [see chapter 1]. Images such as figure 13 would have captured the imagination and encouraged this version of events.

The 'travel' photographs in the collection, from Italy, North Africa and Cape Town, taken with the 'people' photographs both suggest that the unknown soldier was a white South African. Not only do the photographs' locations match up to South Africa's presence in North Africa (in the African Campaign) and later Italy (Italian Campaign), they even include shots of General Smuts in training camps and outside El Alamein. Furthermore many of the 'people' shots are set in 1940s Cape Town, often with Lions Head or Table Mountain featuring in the background.

The absence of black or coloured faces in the photographs themselves, apart from those clearly understood in terms of the 'exotic other,' and the abundance of white faces in contrast, points clearly to the collection's owner having been a white South African. This absence is a further reminder of the exclusivity of what is captured in a photograph and the countless other possible narratives that might escape the examiner.

The photograph, in its capturing of specifics, fragments and displaces the moment out of context and out of time. Thus because archives have as much to do with absences and forgetting as inclusions and remembering, this collection can be analysed in terms of what is missing. Combined, the two major themes of 'people' and 'travel' have created an idealized version of war, one where the smiling soldiers in the photographs are forever happy captured in that moment. It is a story of meeting exotic people in exotic places, but also of the love of

³⁵⁹ As mentioned in an earlier chapter, Guy Butler wrote of Cairo that in and amongst 'the congestion and complexity...the sandstone simplicity of the huge triangular silhouettes against the clean desert sand was disconcerting...the running to and fro of human beings became suddenly a silly thing, the bargains a vulgar impertinence before these stony statements in the sun.' Guy Butler (1983), 170. Many of the photographs in this collection are able to provide visual illustrations for Butler's own war story.

friends and family. What is missing, then, is the violence of war, the ravages of buildings and bodies, the bloodying of men and the clouding of mind – none of the complexities and the chaos of war is shown. The only hint of any violence in this collection is a photograph or two portraying the consequences of fighting – a tank overturned on the side of the road, an airplane found wrecked in the desert, or a building in ruins, reduced to rubble (Figure 14). Besides these suggestions of violence, there is no hint of there even being an enemy to fight. These absences are obvious and felt by anyone vaguely acquainted with any war.

Furthermore, as suggested earlier, the other stark absence in terms of a South African narrative of the war is that of the black and coloured volunteers who would have been there alongside the white soldiers, putting their lives on the line as truck drives, stretcher-bearers and the like. Any friendships formed with them, outside the restrictive confines of South Africa's racialized norm, are thus also missing. In fact, according to the war narrative sketched out by these photographs collectively, black and coloured volunteers did not exist at all.

Yet in and amongst this enjoyable collection of friendly smiles and interesting places there is one photograph which in particular does not comfortably fit with the rest. It is a disquieting shot and evokes a strong sense of voyeurism (Figure 15). A man, native to North Africa (one might presume from his headwear), is uncomfortably leaning forward, his neck stiffly extended in opposition to the weights strung around it. The initial impression that this strange ensemble is an act of strength, dare or show, is quickly shattered by the cane formidably lingering in the hand of the man directly behind him. Surrounding the pair, men in uniform look upon the spectacle.³⁶⁰ Indeed, it is most probably because it was a spectacle that the photograph was taken in the first place. Thus my own horror at what might be an abhorrent punishment is a stark reminder of the entrenched racism of the age as well as, more generally, the inherent instability of photographic meaning.

The anonymous collection is thus a rich source regarding the war. It tells of loved ones, of travel, of youth, of an innocent war in exotic places and with exotic people. Nevertheless it remains fragmented, as for every moment captured, there remain a million more omitted. The memories within the photographs are highly mediated and, without stability of meaning, highly contested. Yet, if this archive is not taken alone, and is placed amongst the proliferation

³⁶⁰ Even if this interpretation is wrong and this is not a form of punishment or torture, it is still a disturbing photograph.

of popular images of the war, it takes on new meanings. These meanings are generated in relation to the prosthetic memories found in films and documentaries. The photographs in turn alter the meanings of the iconic images of the war. In this case, the collection adds to the universals of war, and to the commonalities of the experience, a particularly South African flavour.

Both *A Pair of Boots and a Bicycle* and the anonymous World War Two archive are suggestive of the visual media's strengths and weaknesses as carriers of memory. Like no other media, the sensory experiences imparted through film and photography blur the line between memory, history and imagination. Many of these 'prosthetic memories' of World War Two have reached iconic status and can be used as visual cues and contexts, as suggested in Moloi's documentary. The audio-visual capacity of film further enables the capturing, in great detail, of memories as they are recalled. In so doing, *A Pair of Boots and a Bicycle* offers an important insight into the experiences of these forgotten men, but moreover the meaning the war has for them today. The memories provided, however, are highly mediated both through the lens of the men's post-war lives, as well through the filmic form itself. Neither is the photographic archive immune to these shortfalls. In particular, photographs are fragmentary in nature and their meanings inherently stable. These meanings furthermore can only be understood in relation to a wider context of the iconic World War Two photographs which mediate them. Thus the power of the visual media as cultural carriers of memory must be recognised, while also accepting their limitations.

Chapter Five

Locating Remembrance: Interviews with Veterans and Family³⁶¹

Questions of commemoration and memory are central to this thesis – memory’s fluidity and constant revision, and the cultural forms in which it can be located.³⁶² From newspapers to monuments, photographs and film, the structure of this exploration has moved from the realm of public remembrance to the private, tracking the ways in which World War Two has largely been forgotten in South Africa today. It is time to return to the heart of the matter, to private remembrances. For it is the men and women who experienced the war and the war-period first hand, who most clearly and closely remember it. Age has long since caught up with many of them, and the few that remain hold the last, first-hand memories of the war. By placing this chapter last, these testimonies should be seen in the context of the other cultural forms explored throughout the thesis. Many of these forms – whether they are newspaper articles, the literary works of Guy Butler, ceremonies and processions, or films and documentaries – have had the potential of mediating or influencing these memories. Some of these memories have been passed down to their children, forming ‘secondary memories.’ These ‘memories’ are far from static and have, in different times and contexts, taken on different meanings.³⁶³ Nevertheless when considered collectively, these primary and secondary memories are representative of the main remembrances of the war in South Africa today and are a reminder that the war remains important to the life-stories and histories of many South Africans.

Constructing the Interview

It is important to recognise my own influence in the construction of the war narratives told by each interviewee. Valerie Yow states, ‘life history’ is not the simple recording of testimony,

³⁶¹ This chapter results from interviews conducted in Cape Town, 2012 and 2013, some of which were included in a documentary, *Those Dying Days* (2012), submitted in partial completion for my Honours degree at the University of Cape Town, from which some interviews shall be referenced.

³⁶² A term borrowed from Astrid Erll (2011).

³⁶³ Sarah-Jane Walton, *Those Dying Days*, UCT Honours Documentary Film (2012).

as ‘it is the interaction between the interviewer and narrator which changes the relation.’³⁶⁴ Portelli similarly notes that ‘memory is not a passive depository of facts, but an active process of creation of meanings.’³⁶⁵ Together, interviewer and interviewee created a meaningful narrative about the interviewee’s life and war experiences. A preference for open-ended questions gave space for each interviewee to speak freely, thereafter more precise questions were asked. Yow speaks of the importance of the dynamics between interviewer and interviewee in shaping oral narratives in terms of gender, class, age and status.³⁶⁶ The majority of the interviews were conducted with white, middle-class men and those who were alive during the Second World War are now in their nineties. This might have influenced the war narratives in terms, for instance, of what they deemed acceptable for me, as a young, white, middle-class, female student, to hear.

Equally, the political nature of the memories of the sons and daughters of the Cape Corps meant that the academic nature of this research had to be insisted upon. The community has been fighting for the ownership of their houses which, they argue, were promised to their fathers as part of the government’s demobilization scheme. Nevertheless the hope that these interviews might help their cause likely influenced their narration. Lastly, I have been aware of my own position of privilege as a white South African implicated in a past of racial oppression which is tied to the very politicization of this community’s war memories.

Personal Primary Memories

The war stories narrated by the veterans seemed ‘rehearsed and largely chronological, their memories fixed to an orderly sequence of passing time.’³⁶⁷ Alice Hoffman argues that some memories are permanent, ‘resistant to degeneration’³⁶⁸ known as ‘archival memory.’³⁶⁹ Archival memories are formed ‘of events deemed significant at the time they were experienced and which have been consequently rehearsed and consolidated over time, ready

³⁶⁴ Valerie Yow, ‘Varieties of Oral History Projects: Biography,’ *Recording Oral History, A Practical Guide for Social Scientists*, Sage: London (1994), 186.

³⁶⁵ Alessandro Portelli, ‘What makes oral history different,’ *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and other stories, form and meaning in Oral History*. New York (1991), 52.

³⁶⁶ Valerie Yow, ‘Interpersonal Relations in the Interview,’ *Recording Oral History, A Practical Guide for Social Scientists*, Sage: London (1994), 137.

³⁶⁷ Sarah-Jane Walton (2012).

³⁶⁸ Alice Hoffman as cited by L. Abrams, ‘Memory,’ *Oral History Theory*, London: Routledge (2010), 80.

³⁶⁹ L. Abrams (2010), 81.

for recall.³⁷⁰ Accordingly memory does not necessarily deteriorate with age.³⁷¹ These war-stories consist, then, of memories considered particularly important to the interviewees. The temporal distance from the war, too affects the way it is perceived, including traumatic experiences. Abrams reveals that although ‘there is general agreement that traumatic experiences are remembered differently from the everyday...there is disagreement as to the precise relationship between memory and trauma.’³⁷² Hunt and Robbins argue that ‘the veteran is someone who has been traumatised...only through narrative development will they find peace in their memories.’³⁷³ It cannot be assumed, however, that all veterans were necessarily traumatised. Rather, by forming a storyline the veteran is required to incorporate the memories of the war, traumatic or not, with those of the everyday. The narrative process reconstructs the meaning of these experiences which themselves ‘change their meaning during the course of a person’s life.’³⁷⁴ This includes the softer tint of nostalgia - as for many of my interviewees, it is war as an ‘adventure’ which has been most emphasised. The difficulty in recalling the emotions felt during the originating experience, and the malleability of the memories thereafter means that traumatic memories can be re-interpreted or omitted altogether. This might contribute to the general positivity of the war experiences of the veterans interviewed.

Interviewees and Themes of War

The themes collated here are assembled from the interviews with primarily white, male, middle-class veterans of the war. Most of them were born in South Africa, with the exception of two Britons (Douglas Denny and Peter Poland) who moved to the country shortly after war’s end. Nevertheless, their memories of the war have been influenced by the years they have since lived in South Africa. Two of the interviewees are female (Marian Faiman and Irene Lampart) and counteract the largely masculine experiences of the war. Particularly, they are able to illustrate life in Cape Town during the 1940s for women in service. Faiman and Lampart, with veteran Simon Lewis, also represent a Jewish association with the war,

³⁷⁰ Ibid.

³⁷¹ Ibid, 90.

³⁷² Ibid, 93.

³⁷³ Hunt and Robbins as cited by L. Abrams (2010), 95.

³⁷⁴ L. Abrams (2010), 93.

volunteering in response to Jewish persecution overseas. Overall the group can be characterized by an Anglophone identity. This choice-selection resulted from the advertisement I placed in the Cape Times, upon searching for interviewees, and my own interest in Anglophone identity in Cape Town. The response by largely white Anglophone speakers over the age of fifty is unsurprising, considering the Cape Times' historic appeal to the Anglophone community. The absence of younger respondents is also understandable considering the trend towards the war being forgotten in South Africa, with the older generations more likely to remember it. Lastly, the choice of interviewees from the respondents was both methodical and random. A preference was given to male and female veterans over friends and family of war veterans, but the interviews were also arranged according to whom was available and when. A time and man-power constraint further encumbered the number of interviews possible. Ultimately the result is a startling lack of black and coloured veterans in this thesis. Although their absence creates an incomplete picture of the war in relation to South Africa, it does allow for the focus on white Anglophone identity.

Joining Up

Individuals volunteered for multiple reasons, but these reasons also varied across individuals. For Douglas Denny the choice was simple: not only had his friends joined up, but the war represented an escape from an unhappy household with an abusive father. The sense of escape and adventure it offered him resonated with many of the veterans.³⁷⁵ Peter Poland had been a naval cadet in Britain in the years leading up to the war. His love of the navy and the fact that his father had fought in World War One, combined with a sense of excitement, made joining up an obvious choice. Ideology was not a factor, and he 'did not hate the Germans.'³⁷⁶ Alfred Edward Kramer, too, joined up for a taste of adventure. Fresh out of school, he felt unsuited to an indoor job and volunteered.³⁷⁷ Irene Lampart and Marian Faiman both had older brothers in the war. They signed up after Smuts initiated his 'Avenge Tobruk'

³⁷⁵ D. Denny, *Those Dying Days* (2012).

³⁷⁶ P. Poland in *Those Dying Days* (2012).

³⁷⁷ A.E. Kramer in *Those Dying Days* (2012).

campaign,³⁷⁸ needing more volunteers when South Africa lost a large percentage of her fighting force to prisoner of war camps in Italy.³⁷⁹ Simon Lewis was one of these men captured. Lewis, Lampart and Faiman believed that they had an obligation to be involved, having grown up in Jewish families and hearing of the stories coming out of Europe regarding Jewish persecution.³⁸⁰ Unlike many ‘poor whites,’ Black and Coloured veterans, these men and women did not join up for financial reasons; nevertheless the reasons they joined are varied.

Within each narrative there is a sense of the war period as a bygone era. Babs Cochrane describes how,

Cape Town was different of course and it was parties, up and down, up and down. The pubs were full every night and the main thing was dancing. Oh! Crikey! One would think there was a picnic on...then the Australians arrived. They were impossible - there were thousands of them. They walked up from the docks, up Adderley Street and anything in skirts they used to embrace!³⁸¹

South Africa experienced a few minor shortages - white flour, canned fruit and such like - but nothing particularly difficult to manage without.³⁸² Marian Faiman describes how, ‘I was engaged and you couldn’t buy material for wedding dresses...but it [the war] didn’t really affect us compared to Europe. I can’t say we suffered except if we had family who were killed.’³⁸³ She does concede, however, that some men did return changed and that they ‘never got over it, really.’³⁸⁴ Irene Lampart’s reminiscence is a reminder that the war story for many was the story of youth. This increases the likelihood of nostalgia linked to these memories. Working in the castle, she described the era as a ‘hectic time, all the officers used to come and report to the castle and wanted to take you out whether you were married or not and I was quite innocent and unsophisticated and very wary of these men,’ but ultimately she confides that ‘to me it was more like an adventure...I was young, you know?’³⁸⁵ It was also a time of worry of potential invasion as well as the concern for family members on the front.

³⁷⁸ Seen in newsreels from the time.

³⁷⁹ M. Faiman in *Those Dying Days* (2012) and interview with I. Lampart, Sarah-Jane Walton (Cape Town: April 2013).

³⁸⁰ Interview with S. Lewis, Sarah-Jane Walton (May 2012: Cape Town).

³⁸¹ B.Cochrane in *Those Dying Days* (2012).

³⁸² Bill Nasson (2012), 10.

³⁸³ M. Faiman in *Those Dying Days* (2012).

³⁸⁴ Ibid.

³⁸⁵ Ibid.

‘My father was always anxious over the war, he worried himself sick over it...but he was proud of my brother,’³⁸⁶ Lampart remembers. Mingling with these memories were others of the political tensions between those pro-war, and those staunchly against it. Babs Cochrane recalls, ‘Jan Smuts was in the war...we used to call them the SAPS and the NATS. Now I was in the country at that time - they didn’t speak to each other there.’³⁸⁷ Kramer describes the workings of the Ossewabrandwag, an anti-war extremist group, ‘Oh there was one section of the Afrikaners who gave a lot of trouble...they formed a band of gangsters. They blew up railway lines...They placed bombs in military places...’.³⁸⁸ Ultimately Peter Poland sums up his experience, saying ‘I had fun and I regret to say that I did enjoy it.’³⁸⁹ Denny and Kramer echo this sentiment - Denny exclaiming ‘It’s an unbelievable life - if you only knew...’³⁹⁰ with Kramer fondly admitting, ‘it was a wonderful time for me...it was a blessing in disguise.’³⁹¹

Travel and Romance

In stark contrast to the horrors of war, each of the veterans focussed on a sense of place and travel. For Denny, involved in the British navy, Cape Town captured his imagination with its ‘beautiful landscapes and friendly people’ during a stay-over and he moved there shortly after the war.³⁹² Kramer tells of his travels on the way to and in the African Campaign: ‘my first swim I had in the sea going on three years was in...Mogadishu. And, oh, it was so beautiful. You know they talk about the Mediterranean being blue and it’s true, it’s so unbelievable.’³⁹³ The excitement of new places is further conveyed in his description of Cairo: ‘I spent ten days...running around, tried the curry and so on. Went to the Mosques, went to the, eh, museum - which has a million things, absolutely marvellous.’³⁹⁴ Reminiscent of the postcards in the private album collection or of the writing of Guy Butler, it was Italy which was favoured by Kramer,

³⁸⁶ Ibid.

³⁸⁷ B.Cochrane in *Those Dying Days* (2012).

³⁸⁸ A.E.Kramer in *Those Dying Days* (2012).

³⁸⁹ P. Poland in *Those Dying Days* (2012).

³⁹⁰ D. Denny in *Those Dying Days* (2012).

³⁹¹ Interview with A.E Kramer: Sarah-Jane Walton (Cape Town: June 2012).

³⁹² Interview with D. Denny (Cape Town: July 2012).

³⁹³ Ibid.

³⁹⁴ Ibid.

It was the first time I had been to a country where there was civilization and the people... They're a lovable people. And ah, we got know some very well. I got to know one or two very well as you can imagine. And so many attractive women - oh, ooh! By the hundreds! 'Cause most of their men were in prisoner-of-war camps, there was a dire shortage of men. Which suited us fine!³⁹⁵

Kramer's sense of place was, in particularly linked to his 'romantic escapades':

Her name was Obedia.. We had, ah, a casa on Lake Como...we spent seven days leave there... and I went there and the army gave darts every night and snacks. And of course they [Italians] came for the snacks, they were starving...that's where I met her. Those were quite a romantic six days...I used to row her across the lake. She wanted to make love in the boat, but I said no, no [laughs]. But that's the Italian people...they're not like you or I, who hide our stuff, we live behind shields here, we live behind veneers and so forth. They were so open. And we became very close. In fact, um, I knew in my heart it had gone as far as it would ever go - but I honestly never realised how far it would go...In fact I didn't tell her we were leaving...and then she found out. And she made her way out from Milan and she got to see me...say goodbye to me, and there she was behind the tank, waving 'arvederci, arvederci!'.³⁹⁶

What is most remarkable is his confession:

But I think in general if you were to ask me what do you think when the war ends ...I'd say I'd choose for the war carrying on. It's strange. We got the news in Italy, we're just outside Milan...at the time. The Germans had blown up a bridge so we couldn't the tanks across the bridge. So there was a delay and the war ended while we were there. And my immediate feeling was - and I mean my immediate feeling - was 'oh hell, now what!' It was as if my life was cut off. That was the feeling. It's strange. I should have been jubilant...but not at all. And I don't really know why. I had become so used to that life, it became my life...I would rather be at war than be at

³⁹⁵ Interview with A.E Kramer: Sarah-Jane Walton (Cape Town: June 2012).

³⁹⁶ Ibid.

home in peace. Those were lovely days. Especially the part in Italy - that was beautiful.³⁹⁷

Kramer's travel narrative highlights his current nostalgia about the war. His experiences of violence and trauma are overshadowed by memories of exotic landscapes. There is no single narrative of the war, and Kramer's illustrates the pleasures that accompanied its violence.

While Kramer's tale might be suggestive of fleeting wartime rendezvous, key to Simon Lewis's narrative is his marriage to his fiancé and the letters they wrote during the war. As a prisoner of war, captured during the fall of Tobruk, these letters were a vital source of sustaining his morale. He describes, 'On 15 June 1940 I got engaged to my fiancé, her name was Pauline. On the 17th I left for the army, June 1940. I came back on the 12 June 1945, five days short of five years and we married twelve days later. She wrote me a letter every day of the five years.'³⁹⁸ He recalls with a mingling of love and sadness how,

after she died, in 1998 I found the package that had every letter I'd sent to her in the army and as a prisoner-of-war...she'd written to me but I'd never received cause they were returned to her...And there I found not only letters but photographs of her that she sent me that I never saw.³⁹⁹

Lewis' memories of war, then, are inextricably linked to memories of his wife and their life together. His partial framing of the war as a love story is not uncommon, as both Irene Lampart and Marian Faiman met their husbands while working in the Castle in Cape Town (used as wartime military headquarters). They, too, link the war to romance in their narratives.

Violence

Amongst the adventures of youth and the excitement of travel lurk the largely unspoken stories of violence and fear. Nostalgia and the malleability of memory, perhaps, are responsible for this silence, but my non-military background and my own identity as a

³⁹⁷ A.E Kramer, (Cape Town: June 2012).

³⁹⁸ Interview with S.Lewis, Sarah-Jane Walton (Cape Town: May 2012).

³⁹⁹ Ibid.

female, too might have contributed to the softer versions of the war that I was told. The male veterans' reserve moreover might be the influence of an older generation of masculinity, in which such 'feelings,' are unbecoming of a man, associated with weakness and femininity. Those rare accounts of violence that did emerge, are a reminder of the contradictions and complexity of the war experience. Experiences of pleasure co-existed with those of brutality, even if uneasily so. The constructed, linear timelines narrated by all the veterans have aided the management of this complexity – structuring a beginning, middle and end to their war stories. In a moment of reflection, Kramer admitted that 'I think the person who says they are not afraid is almost immediately a liar. Because we all feel fear.'⁴⁰⁰ Thomas Tracey⁴⁰¹ revealed how sometimes the violence was best left unspoken,

I read somewhere someone who'd been in the thick of things for six years got the VC and they said they could not even take anything out of him [he would not speak] about the war...I think that was a better idea...[than telling] about how your crew commander died and fell into your lap...keep that to yourself.⁴⁰²

Tracey's own relationship to the war is difficult: 'I don't, ah, feel much about it. It's too long ago now. Sixty-eight years. I don't speak about it.'⁴⁰³ His 'not speaking about it' would suggest that there remain strong emotions attached to the war, despite his claim that these have long since vanished.

Peter Poland's narrative is punctuated by a repeated, haunting memory. In it he reveals that it was standard policy during the war for ships not to rescue the men cast overboard when their own vessels were lost in battle. This theoretically avoided enemy submarines from targeting and sinking the rescuing party. Leaving men wounded and drowning, but still alive, was the unfortunate consequence. Their 'terrible screams,' accompanying their 'white faces and black holes where their mouths are [sic]' remained for him so vivid, that even the tense of his narrative changes to the present on the memory's recall.⁴⁰⁴ Poland remains adamant in his narrative that he 'had fun,' but this testimony reveals a more complicated experience of war.

Most South Africans before fighting in Italy were involved in North Africa. When Tobruk fell to Axis soldiers in June 1942, roughly 11000 South Africans were taken as prisoners of

⁴⁰⁰ A.E Kramer, (Cape Town: June 2012).

⁴⁰¹ Pseudonym, as requested.

⁴⁰² Interview with T. Tracey: Sarah-Jane Walton, (Cape Town: April 2012).

⁴⁰³ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁴ P.Poland, *Those Dying Days* (2012).

war.⁴⁰⁵ Simon Lewis was one of these soldiers and was deported to Italy. Having been a prisoner of war, his narrative reveals that bodily violence was also experienced through deprivation and harsh conditions. Given a choice to work for food or starve, Lewis recalls he did not eat for a week, not wanting to support the Axis effort. Endurance became a way of life and at times the captives had to walk hundreds of miles, or were ‘crammed into trucks like cattle,’ without food or water.⁴⁰⁶ Twice in his narrative Lewis repeats that upon being captured at Tobruk, ‘I had the feeling of relief that I would see the end of the war.’⁴⁰⁷ This insistence made in hindsight is arguably a narrative strategy to claim control over the experience and memories, to contain the trauma he experienced.

Of course there are multiple other ‘themes’ which inform the war experience - humour, camaraderie, food and leisure-time and the list goes on. Rather than denying these experiences, by focussing on a few of the major themes, I hope to have revealed a complicated understanding of the experiences of war. Experiences of youth, romance, travel and adventure existed alongside violence and endurance – each perceived by the individual at the time in terms of their relative position – including their affiliations to South Africa. Furthermore, each veteran’s memories have been shaped by the socio-political context of South Africa during and after the war. In particular, their Anglophone identities, in stark contrast to the anti-war Nationalist orientation, meant that their war efforts were not long celebrated, and were quickly swept away by more pressing historical currents. Edna Lomsky-Feder’s research comes to a similar conclusion: ‘[t]he personal memory of war is not homogenous but, rather, multicoloured: some remember the war as a traumatic experience and others as a heroic event; some recall it as an experience that obstructs personal development, and others as an empowering one.’⁴⁰⁸ These memories, tinted with nostalgia, are constantly in flux, reworked and re-narrated over time and in accordance to present needs. Nevertheless, they are the last remaining first-hand accounts into another world gone by. Taken alongside photographs, literature, film and newspapers, the testimony of these men and women bring the period to life and act as the glue binding the content of these cultural forms together. Moreover they give humanity, and a meaning to the war experience, subjective as it may be.

⁴⁰⁵ Neil Roos, *Ordinary Springboks: White Servicemen and Social Justice in South Africa, 1939-1961*, Ashgate: Aldershot (2005), 34.

⁴⁰⁶ S. Lewis (Cape Town: May 2012).

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁸ Edna Lomsky-Feder, ‘Life Stories, War, and Veterans: On the Social Distribution of Memories,’ *Ethos* 32:1 (2004), 82.

None of the veterans interviewed today belongs to any ex-servicemen associations, nor have any of them attended Remembrance Day services on a regular basis. This corresponds to the socio-political situation in South Africa after the war in which the war was distanced. Certainly the Nationalist government did not celebrate the war or the veterans' Anglophone identity. Without a solid basis for public remembrance the memories of the war remain memories of another age and, at least for these veterans, a closed chapter in the history of their lives. Despite this, the war is important to them, even if it is unspoken in public discourse. The interviewees are an enduring reminder that the war played a role shaping both global and local affairs. Indeed, it was the lives of the families of the veterans that, too, were inevitably affected by the war and 'secondary memories' of the period have been passed down through the generations.

Secondary Memories

For a small community in Diep River, Cape Town, the war is of great significance. Their fathers were part of the Cape Corps, South Africa's coloured regiment in the war. The houses the families now occupy were built for their fathers as part of demobilisation schemes. The community has come to believe, through the stories passed down by their elders, that these houses were intended to be owned by the veterans, rather than rented as they still are today. Amidst attempts to reclaim this ownership, these sons and daughters of the Cape Corps are frustrated by inability to get clarity on the matter.⁴⁰⁹ The community itself was broken up in the 1960s under Apartheid's Group Areas Act, 'a resettlement scheme along racial lines.'⁴¹⁰ Hugely traumatic, family and friends were separated and relocated to designated non-white areas. After Apartheid some of the community were able to return to their homes in Diep River, but legally were unable to attain ownership. The upset community argues that this disrespects their fathers' service during the war. Desiree de Lange laments, 'we are really a disgruntled group now. The memories of our late fathers who fought in World War Two, who were promised these cottages...they never had the opportunity now we as their descendants should get that opportunity.'⁴¹¹ The community's 'memories,' of the war are intricately tied

⁴⁰⁹ Sarah-Jane Walton (2012).

⁴¹⁰ V. Bickford-Smith, N. Worden and E. Van Heyningen, *Cape Town in the Twentieth Century: An Illustrated History*, David Philip: Cape Town (1999), 158-9.

⁴¹¹ Desiree de Lange in *Those Dying Days* (2012).

to South Africa's racial policy and their and their fathers' experiences under Apartheid. The trauma of forced-removals is woven into their story. According to Jean Botha,

When he was discharged...they were promised a bicycle which he never got and if I'm not mistaken it was talking about a house as well.... But up to today we didn't receive the houses...And the saddest thing is that then we have to go to Lavender Hill...he died very soon there of sadness. That is what I can remember from my father.⁴¹²

Katie Sheldon echoes this sentiment: 'I grew up at number 22 Schuring Street... I was about nine or ten when we forcibly removed from here...when we lived in this area we lived as a family. I think the saddest part is when we were put in Lavender Hill, we were all scattered.'⁴¹³ This theme of 'broken promises' is familiar, voiced by Vincent Moloji's interviewees in *A Pair of Boots and a Bicycle*. It arguably forms a dominant 'black' South African narrative regarding the meaning(s) of the war. JS Mohlamme explains the policies in place for returning black and coloured soldiers,

After they had received a cash allowance of two Pounds, a khaki suit worth two Pounds, and a gratuity according to their length of service, the government considered that to be the end of the matter. Those who had secured an employment in the interim also received a bicycle. The purpose of a bicycle was to help the ex-servicemen get to his place of employment with minimum delay.⁴¹⁴

Moreover it was the hope of better treatment at home that was not realised after the war. Mohlamme reveals that,

The African soldiers had every reason to believe that their lot would improve after the war, for the Prime Minister of the Union, General JC Smuts, had expressed himself in favour of fair treatment for African soldiers in February 1942 when he said, 'I want the natives to be treated fairly and decently and not just discarded when their service is finished.' Despite such assurances from so eminent a person... African hopes were shattered.⁴¹⁵

He also explains that

⁴¹² Jean Botha in *Those Dying Days* (2012).

⁴¹³ Katie Sheldon in *Those Dying Days* (2012).

⁴¹⁴ JS Mohlamme, 'Soldiers without reward: Africans in South Africa's Wars,' *Military History Journal* 10:1 (1995): <http://samilitaryhistory.org/vol101jm.html>. Accessed June-August 2013.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid.

a Financial Assistance Scheme was established to help ex-soldiers re-establish and adjust themselves to civilian life. The total amount of financial assistance awarded by the Directorate of Demobilization was 10 019 844 Pounds for male whites, 135 566 Pounds for female whites, 70 964 Pounds for members of the Cape Corps and a mere 5 795 Pounds for members of the Native Military Corps.⁴¹⁶

This betrayal went deeper than wartime promises and hopes and was intricately involved with a sense of identity. Part of Desiree de Lange's pride in her father, as well as her anger around his treatment, was that 'he fought for King and Country.'⁴¹⁷ The National Government after 1948 was not concerned with celebrating Anglophone identity, yet alone recognizing 'non-white' claims to it. For this Anglophone identity was not exclusive to whites and cut across the colour spectrum.

The stories of betrayal and dispossession told by members of this community are peppered with humorous episodes, such as Gertrude Adam's tale of her father's attempts to make koeksisters in the desert.⁴¹⁸ Similar to a doughnut, the koeksister is traditionally deep fried and then covered in syrup. For Adams, the humour in her father's tale lies in the fact that although he was 'missing some ingredients,' the koeksisters were still the best the men had ever tasted. Only in the hardships of war could this be true. Other vignettes show an awareness of the violent landscape in which their fathers would have operated. Jean Botha describes how her father 'used to tell us what the worst thing was for him, they used to sleep in holes and then one day this man that was sleeping next to him, his eye was shot in two parts and he said that was the worst for him in the war.'⁴¹⁹

Moreover these 'memories' of the war have been strongly influenced by the relationship that these sons and daughters shared with their fathers. Even their mode of transmission is indicative of this as John Fortuin explains,

These things that I'm telling you I heard when my father had a conversation with my mother and his cousin about the war. Then we listened [laughter] in on these conversations, but boy if he catches you, you get a clip...you were not supposed to

⁴¹⁶ Ibid.

⁴¹⁷ Interview with Desiree de Lange, Sarah-Jane Walton, (Cape Town: July 2012).

⁴¹⁸ Gertrude Adams, *Those Dying Days* (2012).

⁴¹⁹ Jean Botha, *Those Dying Days* (2012).

listen in to their conversations. So that is why we can't give you as many details as we would like.⁴²⁰

Fortuin's insight into the transmission of these stories goes hand in hand with Jean Botha's lament that 'there is a lot of things that a person don't remember.'⁴²¹ Memory's instability means that over time there is much that is forgotten. For the sons and daughters of the Cape Corps the salient memories are those which involve their current socio-political struggle. This all contributes to the episodic nature of the community's recall, rather than the oft-rehearsed linear narrative presented by veterans of the war itself.⁴²² Thus second-generation memory differs in function from the self-narrative of veterans and can have a particular political role.

For Ken Gardner, Warwick Ibertson and Eric Bothma, Apartheid had no such effect on their understanding of the war. Their mutual identities as white males meant that Apartheid was a seemingly 'neutral force' in their lives. It is their respective relationships with their fathers, veterans of the war, which have been key to their understandings of the war. These second-generation 'memories' are even more imaginatively charged than first-hand memories of the war, with family members filling-in 'the blanks' into the stories that they were told. Photographs have played important mnemonic roles in offering insight into their fathers' experiences and are highly treasured. They suggest memories, as understood by Landsberg's notion of 'prosthetic memory,' by helping family members to imagine the moments captured within the photographs and integrate them into their own narratives.

Ken Gardner, unlike Bothma and Ibertson, was born long after the war's end. The youngest of his siblings by far, he held the attention of his father with whom he had a close relationship. Unlike his siblings, Gardner was the only one seriously interested in his father's war years. He explains that this was a result of the childhood camping trips his father took him on. Moreover his own later service in the Border War meant that he felt connected his father's stories, perhaps through a shared sense of masculinity. He muses,

Maybe because I went to the army...in the armoured division, so he would tell me stories about the armoured cars in the desert and Montgomery and Rommel the desert rat, about how Montgomery ultimately outsmarted Rommel.... I think I was at that age

⁴²⁰ John Fortuin, *Those Dying Days* (2012).

⁴²¹ Jean Botha, *Those Dying Days* (2012).

⁴²² Sarah-Jane Walton, *Those Dying Days* (2012).

when he started telling me the stories...[when] I wasn't thinking about drinking or girls...and lying there in the darkness ...I was very, very...very blessed to have had that time with him. Very few sons have that special time with their fathers.⁴²³

His father had volunteered out of a sense of adventure and a 'sense that Hitler was evil and that Germans and Nazism had to be defeated.'⁴²⁴ Tasked with developing photographs from reconnaissance, he never saw any action such that, 'he spoke about the war with a smile on his face because he had such a lovely war, as he put it.'⁴²⁵ Although Gardner's experience in the Border War made him aware of the grimness involved with war, his father's stories of World War Two remained positive. A poem his father wrote on the topic of desert rats, which is imbued with much personal significance for Gardner, illustrates this positivity. Entitled the 'Lost Battle,' the poem humorously details the troops' nightly encounters with desert rats. A double meaning is perhaps intended as 'Desert Rats' was further a nickname for the British Armoured Corps in North Africa:

Under the cover of darkness the rats came forth
 They came from the South and they came from the North
 Streamed from the East and poured out of the West
 To shatter our peace and disturb our rest.
 They scampered out from unlikely places
 And scurried over our feet and faces
 Into every corner they penetrated
 And great was the havoc they created.
 Every night they indulged their passions
 By nibbling our food and gnawing our rations
 And when at last they could eat no more
 They played noisy games all over the floor.⁴²⁶

⁴²³ Interview with Ken Gardner, Sarah-Jane Walton (Cape Town: May 2013).

⁴²⁴ Ibid.

⁴²⁵ Ibid.

⁴²⁶ Excerpt from *The Lost Battle* by Gardner's father.

Ultimately Gardner's understanding of the war highlights the malleability of memories according to the personal relationship he had with his father, but also his own experiences as a soldier. Furthermore, it is the photographs, medals, certificates and, in this case, poems, that as cultural carriers continue to play a role in second generation memories and understandings of the war. They also inform familial and self-identity.

Both Ibertson and Bothma share an understanding of the war which emphasizes absence, as both lost their father's during the war. Ibertson never knew his father, while Bothma was an infant when his father went to war. This departure forms one of his earliest memories:

I was about three years old and... what stuck with me was going through the Park station in Johannesburg, down the stairs and seeing them all off on the train. That was the last we saw of him. From there, things just went downhill....Then the news came that he was killed.⁴²⁷

Although he never knew his father, Bothma still notes a sense of loss and a lack of closure. His father was buried in Italy, too far away for a 'poor white' family to visit and symbolically detached from the graves of his other family members buried in South Africa. A photograph is the closest thing he has to his father and, along with a few others, is extremely important to him, integral to his ability to imagine the man he never knew.

The other chief factor influencing Bothma's 'memories' of the war is his experience as a 'poor white,' which is inseparable from his father's absence. His father's death meant the loss of the main breadwinner in a large family. Without financial support, his family lost their house outside Johannesburg and were relocated to government housing for similar (white) families: 'eventually a truck came up, loaded all our belongings and took us to a camp...almost like barracks.' Bothma reiterates that 'it was virtually a battle for survival,' but also that money had always been tight as his father had volunteered for 'financial reasons.'⁴²⁸ His background, furthermore, illustrates an Anglophone identity that cuts across linguistic and cultural borders, as is the case with some members of the Cape Corps. As he explained, 'my mother's family and my father were very Jan Smuts-orientated, they thought the world of him...that's part of the reason they supported the war ...in my mother's house you weren't

⁴²⁷ Interview with Eric Bothma, Sarah-Jane Walton (Cape Town: April 2013).

⁴²⁸ Ibid.

allowed to speak Afrikaans you had to speak English.⁴²⁹ It is perhaps in this way that Apartheid influenced his understanding of the war and his own identity as he confessed that,

to be honest we have never voted for the National Party - we have voted for the opposition. Even my wife who is from Pretoria - I met her in Pretoria, her father was a Colonel and National Party people, they accepted us and we got on.⁴³⁰

It is the legacy of this Anglo-Afrikaner identity that instils Bothma with pride over his father's actions in the war and he admits that, 'even my children today think he is a hero.'⁴³¹ Furthermore, like the Cape Corps, Bothma's memories of the war are both personal and political, linked to the white politics surrounding the war between the SAPS and the NATS.

Ibertson began his tale by framing it as 'the story about my father whom I never knew.'⁴³² Since his retirement, he has painstakingly retraced his father's last year leading up to his capture at the battle of Sidi Rezeg and his death shortly thereafter. It was the fact that his father had been buried in Greece, far from the other prisoners of war sent to Italy, which sparked off his investigation.⁴³³ His mother, who remarried, seldom spoke of his father and Ibertson's search into the mystery of his father's burial has been a personal journey of discovery. He admits that, '...it was, um, very emotional. I don't know why. Because it is quite strange that one lives one's life and works without caring but when you retire, you have this ability to look back and think...'. Even so he recalls that was curious from a young age, saying 'I was six years old when I started asking questions...I was always very conscious of it...and proud of the fact.' Similar to Eric Bothma's tale, his investigation into his father's war experience remains purely personal, without any political agenda and ultimately he feels that it 'made me proud of him and made me find out more about my family whom I hardly knew.'⁴³⁴

Clearly the war has been instrumental, even decades later, in shaping the lives of South Africans. It might have fallen out of public remembrance, but the war continues to inform select private lives – whether it be personally, politically or a combination of the two. These memories, in turn, have been mediated by the experiences of the individuals in question and

⁴²⁹ Ibid.

⁴³⁰ Ibid.

⁴³¹ Ibid.

⁴³² Interview with Warwick Ibertson, Sarah-Jane Walton (Cape Town: April 2013).

⁴³³ Ibertson's father was injured with other prisoners-of-war deported to Italy. Their freighter, 'Sabastiano Vernier,' was wrecked and his father picked up and taken to Greece as an axis hold. It was shortly thereafter that he died.

⁴³⁴ Ibid.

the socio-political context of their lives. These memories have also been influenced by the various cultural media in which other memories and representations of the war are located. Newspapers, literature, memorials, photographs and film – each medium has played a role and will continue to play a role in shaping memories of the war.

Conclusion

Thus central to this thesis has been the way in which various media have shaped and mediated the memories located within them. That said, when collectively taken, the media discussed in this research have revealed a rich wealth of diverse experiences of the war, both universal and local. Additionally, as much as race has mediated the way in which the war was experienced and remembered in South Africa, this study has also suggested that some experiences transcend the racial divide. Race remains a necessary, yet inadequate framework to understand South Africa's war experiences and memories.

Each medium explored in this thesis is accompanied by its various strengths and weaknesses as a cultural carrier for memory. The same can be said for this thesis. Many of its chief strengths lie in its approach. Amongst the various works written about South Africa and World War Two, this thesis is one of the first to broach the topic of its memory and commemoration. Moreover, it is highly original in its comprehensive approach of using a wide range of media to locate and discuss memories of the war and how they have evolved over time.

Yet there are consequences of such a wide-ranging approach. The chapters included in this thesis are unable to go to any great depth with their respective subjects. This is compounded by the time span of roughly seventy years this thesis has covered in order to understand war remembrance in South Africa today. 'South Africa' as an area of historical research is also extremely broad and thus only samples of war recollections are given and generalizations made. This points to the possibility and necessity of future research centring on specific locales. The problem of superficiality, nevertheless, is partially counteracted through a close reading of specific case studies in each chapter.

Furthermore, in attempts to address South Africa's 'forgotten identity,' the research here has focused on white Anglophone experiences. The result is a marked absence of black and coloured experiences and memories of the war. Nevertheless, as this thesis has noted a purely racial framework can be misleading. 'Anglophone identity,' for example, cuts across the racial divide. Furthermore while both the documentary *A Pair of Boots and a Bicycle* and the testimony of the Cape Corps Community emphasise the effects racial discrimination has had on the experiences and memories of war, they also reveal experiences that transcend race.

There is plenty more research to be done on South Africa and World War Two, and particularly so in relation to memory. If given the space, this thesis might have further focused on a gendered experience of war in the South African context, or have gone to greater lengths to locate non-white veterans of the war. Moreover, this research begs a comparative approach and, in particular, with the experiences of other Commonwealth countries. The field remains rich and promising in research possibilities.

It is worth repeating that despite the war's shift out of the realm of public remembrance, it is nevertheless highly significant in informing the histories and identities of men and women in South Africa today. They and their families remain at the heart understanding South African experiences and memories of the war and any future studies should bear this mind.

Revisiting the Memorial

The layout of this thesis has suggested the Second World War's movement from public to private remembrance in South Africa. In the chapter on monuments and memorials this is explored particularly through the declining 'social life' of the Adderley Street War Memorial and its subsequent relocation. The interviewees illustrate the form and content of the private remembrances which remain. Their opinions on the Adderley Street War Memorial, too, reflect the quiet, yet contested climate of war remembrance in Cape Town. The mixed response to the memorial's relocation again reiterates war's contested place in the country's memory and its move from public prominence to private remembrance.

For some, the memorial's relocation has been a betrayal of the lives lost during the war. Marian Faiman, when asked, believed that 'it should not be moved. The war memorial was for South African soldiers and we did protect the country.'⁴³⁵ Peter Poland, too, voiced that he would be 'very strongly opposed'⁴³⁶ to the relocation. Kramer and Denny, however, both viewed the move positively as the memorial's location – stuck on an island between lanes of heavy traffic in Adderley Street – has made it difficult to visit. Kramer argued that 'if you go to a World War memorial you go to wherever it is'⁴³⁷ while Denny openly admitted that

⁴³⁵ I.Faiman, *Those Dying Days* (2012).

⁴³⁶ P.Poland, *Those Dying Days* (2012).

⁴³⁷ A.E.Kramer, *Those Dying Days* (2012).

‘those guys that are six feet under are not going to be worried about it.’⁴³⁸ Lastly John Fortuin, speaking on behalf of the Cape Corps community and referencing their experiences under Apartheid and their fathers’ betrayal, said that ‘with all the developments in South Africa on the political front I think a lot of people might have cared about it but I don’t think they really care anymore - certainly not me.’⁴³⁹

The memorial’s contested space and meaning is thus connected to the varied first and second-hand ‘memories’ of the war and the socio-political developments that frame them: from the split between Smuts’ Anglophone pro-war propulsion and Hertzog’s Afrikaner nationalist opposition, to Apartheid and the years since. Despite the war’s obvious move into the realm of private remembrance, the men and women interviewed have reaffirmed the war’s importance in the lives of South Africans at the time, and its continued, even if faded, significance in shaping identities and histories today.

This thesis has attempted to trace a few of the memories of World War Two in South Africa today as located in a variety of media - from newspapers, to literature, memorials, photography, film and oral testimony. In doing this, this thesis has traced a shift from public to private remembrance of World War Two in the country. There was, in fact, never a strong basis for the war’s commemoration in South Africa. At the war’s onset the country was divided as whether to participate alongside Britain or not and for the majority of South Africans, the war was both emotionally and geographically distant. The socio-political context of Apartheid also quickly occupied the nation’s attention, and the war was swiftly forgotten. The National Party certainly did not actively commemorate the war, wanting to sever ties to the country’s Commonwealth connections. The post-Apartheid government, too, has had its own concerns with commemorating heroes of the struggle against oppression. The war thus finds little place in the minds and memories of most South Africans today, apart from veterans of the war and their families, for whom it remains significant. This is not to say South Africans cannot or do not imagine the war, as with the proliferation of photographs and film of the war on both television and the big screen they certainly do, but rather that this imagining is almost entirely divorced from a local context. The war has become *other* people’s history. Except, that is, for those remaining few.

⁴³⁸ D.Denny, *Those Dying Days* (2012).

⁴³⁹ J.Fortuin, *Those Dying Days* (2012).

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