The copyright of this thesis vests in the author. No quotation from it or information derived from it is to be published without full acknowledgement of the source. The thesis is to be used for private study or non-commercial research purposes only.

Published by the University of Cape Town (UCT) in terms of the non-exclusive license granted to UCT by the author.

University of Cape Town

“Afterlives”: Resurrecting the South African Border War

Nicola Lazenby
LZNNIC001

A minor dissertation submitted fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of English Literature and Modernity

Faculty of the Humanities

University of Cape Town

2012

Contents

Abstract *p.3*

Preface *p.4*
Defining the "Border War" *p.6*

CHAPTER 1

The Politics of Victimhood *p.10*

CHAPTER 2

Constructing the "Afterlife" of the Border War *p.24*
Apartheid State-Sanctioned Silence *p.29*
The Other SADF Texts ....*p. 32*
The Truth and Reconciliation Commission ....*p. 35*
"The Silence of Stigmatised Knowledge" ....*p. 42*

CHAPTER 3

Framing the Victim: JH Thompson's "An Unpopular War" *p.48*
A Complicated Victimhood: Anthony Akerman's "Somewhere on the Border" *p.58*

Conclusion *p.73*

Abstract

What is known about the SADF, as the armed forces of the Apartheid government, is limited and very negative. This can be attributed to the Apartheid state's stringent secrecy and censorship laws and the atrocities perpetuated by the SADF, which were brought to light during South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). However, while the image of the SADF as a heinous perpetrator of Apartheid violence is undeniable, it is being complicated by the emergence of a range of recent cultural productions. Using Jacqui Thompson's collection of SADF memoirs, *An Unpopular War: From Afkak to Bosbefok* (2006), and the revival of Anthony Akerman's play, *Somewhere on the Border* (2012), this thesis explores how these cultural productions assert an alternative, individual, and humanised rendering of the SADF soldiers who experienced the Border War. The attempt to render these soldiers in an alternative light signals an anxiety regarding the way the SADF is remembered in contemporary South Africa. This anxiety resonates with broader issues of the role of "victimhood" in South Africa's national identity in the aftermath of Apartheid.

Preface

Anthony Akerman's play, *Somewhere on the Border* was introduced as a set work at the University of Cape Town in 2011 for the first time since the end of the South African Border War. Until then, the war was a topic that I knew very little about. This is especially surprising considering that my father was one of the 600 000 men conscripted for National Service in the South African Defence Force (SADF) between 1967 and 1993. I found it fascinating that I knew nothing about the experiences of an entire generation of men like my father, many of whom were living in my community.

I realised that there were in fact many other people who didn't know much about the Border War, and I also suddenly became aware of the swelling interest in the war within South African public culture. Books were being written on the experiences of the SADF conscripts,[1] television series dedicated hours to exploring the war in great detail,[2] art exhibitions grappled with South Africa's role in the war,[3] and university students were making award winning films[4]. I then heard about the great controversy regarding the exclusion of the fallen SADF soldiers' names from the Freedom Park war memorial, the Wall of Names. The Freedom Park debate highlighted a contestation regarding the classification of "victimhood" as a requirement for inclusion on the Wall. The exclusion of fallen SADF soldiers was met with virulent protest from SADF-affiliated groups. Could the revival of the interest in the Border War, and the atmosphere of anxiety about the way the SADF is remembered, have anything to do with one another? How could the anxieties exposed at Freedom Park be put into conversation with what these recent cultural productions were doing?

The subsequent investigation proved challenging. I found myself grappling with a constant and vibrant stream of emerging cultural productions regarding the Border War. Many middle-

---

[1] Many of these will be listed and explored in later chapters.

[2] Such as Linda de Jager's 26 part documentary series *Grensoorlog* [Border War], which ran on South African television channel, KykNET, in 2009.

[3] Michaelis Galleries in Cape Town hosted the exhibition "Not My War" in 29 June to 27 July 2012, which showcased the work of various artists reflecting on the Border War.

[4] Christopher-lee dos Santos, a graduate student from AFDA, created the short film *At Thy Call*, which in 2008 was part of the official selection for the Cannes Film Festival, and in 2009 won "Best Film" at the Cold Stove Awards.

aged "white"[5] men, upon hearing what my research was about, demonstrated a desire to testify their experiences to me (many of them traumatic). I got numerous emails from my contemporaries whose fathers or uncles had volunteered themselves to talk to me if I wanted any information regarding the Border War. I received old pictures from a few veterans, and even a poem written by a national serviceman during his time in the army. There was clearly an urgency to *tell*. I found myself trying to make sense of what the revival of the SADF-experience of the Border War in contemporary South Africa was about. Through an engagement with the emerging cultural productions, specifically the English literature, I began to map out the nature of this revival, and what it revealed about the SADF, the veterans, and present-day South Africa.

What is known about the SADF, as the armed forces of the Apartheid government, is limited and very negative. This can be attributed to the Apartheid state's stringent secrecy and censorship laws and the atrocities perpetuated by the SADF, which were brought to light during South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). However, while the image of the SADF as a heinous perpetrator of Apartheid violence is undeniable, it is being complicated by the emergence of a range of recent cultural productions. Using Jacqui Thompson's collection of SADF memoirs, *An Unpopular War: From Afkak to Bosbefok* (2006), and the revival of Anthony Akerman's play, *Somewhere on the Border* (2012), this thesis explores how these cultural productions assert an alternative, individual, and humanised rendering of the SADF soldiers who experienced the Border War. The attempt to render these soldiers in an alternative light signals an anxiety regarding the way the SADF is remembered in contemporary South Africa. This anxiety resonates with broader issues of the role of "victimhood" in South Africa's national identity in the aftermath of Apartheid.

---

[5] It must be noted here that the use of racial classifiers in this study is not a perpetuation of the racist stereotyping and grouping perpetuated by the Apartheid government. It is done in order to enable a reflection of the way the Apartheid government's segregation policies controlled and organised the experiences that could be had by various members of South African society (for example, for many years only those males classified as "white" under the Apartheid regime's legislation were officially conscripted into the SADF). As such, racial classifiers are utilised according to the terms by which the Apartheid government classified the various races in South Africa into generalised groups of "white", "black, "coloured", "indian" and "other".

Defining the "Border War"

It is important at this point to define what is meant by the use of the term "Border" and "The South African Border War". Unlike what the name implies, the Border War was not, in fact, limited to the geographical borders of South Africa. The term is also one which is contested within academia. As such, the following will outline some of these key issues and concerns regarding the term, and define what is meant by its use in this study.

The war into which South African men were conscripted between 1967 and 1993 was one which was being fought, from the Apartheid government's perspective, against "the threat of African nationalism aided and abetted by Soviet communism (Baines, 2008: 3). On the one hand, the South African government sought to protect its borders from the process of decolonisation which was spreading through southern Africa. It attempted, but failed, to prevent the liberation movements of its neighbouring countries – Zimbabwe (then Rhodesia), Mozambique, and Angola – from gaining independence (Baines, 2008). On the other hand, neighbouring German country Namibia (then South West Africa) was handed over to South Africa by the Western Allies after World War II "as a mandate on behalf of the League of Nations" (Baines, 2008: 3) in 1914. South Africa continued to occupy Namibia as its "fifth province" even after the mandate was terminated by the United Nations in 1966, and faced civil uprising within Namibia against their occupation as a result (Baines, 2008).

In her article, "Division in the (inner) Ranks: The Psychosocial legacies of the Border Wars" (2012), Theresa Edlmann explains that most of the Border War was fought in Namibia and Angola, with some of the conflict taking place in Mozambique and Zimbabwe. South African forces were used to combat the liberation forces in Namibia – the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) – which sought its independence from South African occupation (Baines, 2012). The SADF was also used in South Africa's involvement in Angola's civil war where, alongside American forces, they supported the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) and the Popular Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola (FAPLA) against the Russian- and Cuban-backed People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) (Baines, 2012). The Cold War context thus manifested strongly in the conflicts of the Border War, and this is how the South African government saw itself as fighting against the communist threat, "*Die Rooi Gevaar*" ["The Red Danger"] as well as African nationalism "*Die Swart Gevaar*" ["The Black Danger"] (Baines, 2008).

The SADF was also used within South Africa, serving alongside police in suppressing the resistance movements of its own internal civil war in the townships (Edlmann, 2012). In an attempt to ensure continued "white" supremacy, the South African government had enforced the system of Apartheid to oppress all those it classified as "non-white", and in doing so, suppress the perceived threat of African nationalism within its own borders. Resistance to this racist and oppressive system resulted in South Africa's own civil war with the Mass Democratic Movement rising up in the Liberation Struggle against the Apartheid (Edlmann, 2012). The Liberation forces which were exiled in neighbouring countries, some of whom were trained by the Cuban and Russian forces, and labelled "terrorists" by the South African government, were also the reason South Africa fiercely guarded its borders in order to prevent their return.

The notion of the "Border" in Border War is "polysemic: it has acquired a host of both literal and figurative meanings, and has accumulated a host of connotations when used in association with the wars in southern Africa between the 1960s and 1980s" (Baines, 2008: 5). It applies to many different geographical "borders", not simply those between South Africa and its neighbouring countries. It also applies to the figurative "borders" enforced by the Apartheid government between the different racial groups which it classified and segregated (Edlmann, 2012). Edlmann explains that "the apartheid state's construction of racially determined geographical (and ideological) lines between communities of people resulted in dynamics of otherness that profoundly shaped the ethos and identity of South African society. People who might otherwise have been neighbours, friends or lovers were legally constrained from associating with each other" (2012: 259).

Both Daniel Conway and Michael Drewett in their chapters which appear in *Beyond the Border War: New Perspectives on Southern Africa's Late-Cold War Conflicts* (2008), point out that the "border" is also one drawn between the ideal of the "white", heteronormative and masculine soldier, and other groups such as women, civilians and those classified as "non-whites" by the Apartheid government. The militarisation of South Africa and the legitimisation of the war by the Apartheid government relied on these gendered, racialised binaries of "protector/protected", and encoded soldiering as a fundamental, naturalised component of "white" masculinity in South Africa (Conway, 2008; Drewett, 2008). As Edlmann points out, the defence of the "Border" extended also to the way in which the Apartheid state policed "white" male identity; "the apartheid military system, and its accompanying conflation of citizenship and masculinity through conscription, became as much about policing the white population as it was about resisting African nationalism and communism" (2012: 261)

Finally, the notion of the "Border" and the term "Border War" is problematic and contested within academia. Historian Gary Baines points out that "The term 'Border War' encodes white South African points of view although it was not actually employed by South African government spokespersons. Still, its usage in the mainstream media and public discourse implied widespread acceptance of government rhetoric that the SADF was shielding citizens from a military threat posed by enemy forces massing on the borders" (2008: 7). As such, it is a term which many academics, who are critical of the Apartheid state policies, have chosen to avoid.

The study will refer to "The Border War" or the "Border" with the above complexities in mind, in awareness that it was a conflict fought on multiple borders, not limited to geographical delineations. Furthermore, the use of the term in this work is not a gesture of validation of the Apartheid perspective on the war. It does however signal that my investigation is primarily concerned with this supposed "white" male experience. It is also in the absence of, and ongoing debate regarding, an alternative, more appropriate term. This contestation is at the heart of what this paper attempts to explore, which is the multiple ways in which the past can be understood and negotiated, and the terms available for this purpose.

With all this in mind, Chapter 1 will explore the events at Freedom Park, and the anxieties that arise due to the exclusion of the fallen SADF names from the Wall. These anxieties pivot around the classification of "victimhood" as a requirement for inclusion on the Wall. Through an investigation of Apartheid state-sanctioned secrecy and silence, and a look at the SADF presence at the TRC, Chapter 2 will trace how existing knowledge on the SADF has been limited and necessarily very negative. Chapter 3 will demonstrate the ways that the recent emerging cultural productions on the Border War disrupt this negative image by providing an alternative representation of the SADF experience, and how this might speak to the broader issues regarding the status of “victimhood in contemporary South Africa.

CHAPTER 1

The Politics of Victimhood

In December 2002, The Freedom Park Trust sent out a call to architects across the globe to design a monument that would "go down in history" (Freedom Park Trust, 2002). The Freedom Park Trust was a small government department, set up in order to oversee the construction of a national heritage site. The site would be for the commemoration of historic South African events, specifically the celebration of human dignity and freedom. The Trust appealed for designs that would be "South Africa's own visible symbol of liberty" (Freedom Park Trust, 2002). Six months later, the Trust handed over the 52-Hectare site atop Salvokop Hill, Pretoria, for construction. It would be at this site where fallen SADF soldiers would be excluded from the process of national identity construction, and the ensuing controversy would reveal a contestation in the way the notion of "victimhood" is understood, and how it functions, in contemporary South African society.

The Park is envisioned as a place for reflection on the past in order to enable reconciliation and nation building. More specifically, the Park was constructed in the service of reconciliation and nation building through the commemoration of the South African past, and memorialisation of its key conflicts in which individuals fought and died for freedom and humanity. It is comprised of many elements, some of which are still under construction. These include spaces for meditation and reflection, such as the *Vhuawelo* or "labyrinth"; places for learning about the history of South Africa, such as the "interactive exhibition space" (Freedom Park, 2004-2012c) of *//hapo*; spiritual gathering places such as *Isivivane*; as well as the memorial element of *Sikhumbuto* set up to commemorate the key conflicts of South Africa's past. All these elements contribute to what is one of the largest, most significant heritage undertakings of its time. Baines asserts, "With a budget in excess of R700 million, it is one of the most ambitious Legacy Heritage projects championed by the Mbeki presidency in terms of the National Heritages Resource Act No. 25 of 1999" (2009: 334).

The nation-building project of the Park is underscored by its mission statement:

> To provide a pioneering and empowering heritage destination in order to mobilise for reconciliation and nation building in our country; to reflect upon our past, improving our present

> and building our future as a united nation; and to contribute continentally and internationally to the formation of better human understanding among nations and peoples. (Freedom Park Trust, 2004-2012a)

This vision is not limited to South Africans but extends to "all, with no regard to race and nationality, [who, at Freedom Park] will find the instinctive peace internal to every human being, which affirms to each, his and her humanity" (Freedom Park Trust, 2004-2012b). Indeed, parts of the Park have dedicated to the grand narrative of the human race, with a section called *//hapo*,[6] which will serve as "an interactive exhibition space where the story of Southern Africa, dating back 3.6 billion years, will unfold in narrative and visual form" (Freedom Park Trust, 2004-2012c). While specific to South African history as it is recorded here, the Park also asserts itself as a place of instinctual universal human appeal and values.

According to Deputy CEO of The Freedom Park Trust at the time, Peggy Photolo, Freedom Park was initiated in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Mandate,[7] which asserted that compensation, in the form of a memorial site, should be established to honour those who suffered under the Apartheid regime (Freedom Park Trust, 2007a). The proposed memorial "would enable visitors to come to terms with South Africa's divided history by providing a place where people could not only mourn the loss of loved ones who died in various conflicts, but also celebrate the victory of democracy and freedom. In short, the site would enable the public to remember the struggle for humanity and freedom" (Baines, 2009: 334). Baines, in his article "Site of Struggle: The Freedom Park Fracas and the Divisive Legacy of South Africa's Border War/Liberation Struggle" (2009), also explains that Freedom Park assumed the guiding principle of *ubuntu*[8] as it was established by the TRC

---

[6] Meaning "dream", a term disseminating from a Khoi proverb asserting that "A dream is not a dream until it is shared by the entire community" (Freedom Park Trust 2004-2012c).

[7] The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established after the end of Apartheid in order to shed light on the gross violations of human rights suffered during the Apartheid regime's rule, in the hopes of encouraging reconciliation and unity. It will be further discussed and explained in detail at a later point in this analysis.

[8] Baines defines this term as "integrated nationalism" and "an invented tradition and type of cultural essentialism that seeks to minimise the historical fault lines in South African society. It is a synthesis of African philosophy that stresses a common humanity and Christian theology, and emphasises the need for forgiveness as a prerequisite for reconciliation" and as such "became the cornerstone of the nation-building project" (2009: 334).

Mandate, and sought to promote healing and unity within a deeply divided and traumatised nation through the mechanism of collective memorialisation.

The vision behind Freedom Park as it is asserted is thus an inclusive one. It is a space for shared mourning and remembrance, attempting to serve the aims of healing, unity, reconciliation and nation building through memorialisation of some of the nation's key formative conflicts. It is a site for collective gathering, in order to honour those who died under the banner of freedom and humanity, while looking towards a brighter future. It thus necessarily extends itself to a wider, more universal appeal. Based on these inclusive ideals, this national monument becomes a symbolic site for the formation of a "new" South African national identity in the "aftermath of Apartheid"[9] through collective, public remembering, mourning, and potentially healing.

However, Freedom Park found itself in the thick of a highly controversial debate when the Freedom Park Trust rejected the names of the fallen South African Defence Force (SADF) soldiers for inclusion on Freedom Park's war memorial "Wall of Names". The Wall of Names forms part of a section of Freedom Park called *Sikhumbuto*. This is the section of the Park which is recognised as the "major memorial element" of Freedom Park (Freedom Park Trust, 2004-2012d). *Sikhumbuto* is where the Park aims to commemorate the various battles experienced in South African history which it identifies. It comprises a Gallery of Leaders,[10] an indoor Sanctuary with an Eternal Flame,[11] an Amphitheatre and the Wall of Names. The Wall of Names serves as the place where the names, or representative groups of names, of those who fell during the South African battles are recorded and memorialised.

The Park's website asserts that, with regard to these battles, it has a responsibility to

---

[9] Instead of using the term "post-Apartheid", which cleaves the flow of past events into those which occurred before 1994 South African democratic elections, and those which came after, I prefer to use the term "aftermath" in thinking in a less discontinuous manner about the past, which still has a living legacy in the present. This legacy should not be cloaked by the impression that "post-Apartheid" is somehow dislocated and autonomous from its past.

[10] Built in honour of individuals who have been recognised both nationally and internationally "whose leadership qualities and achievements have been pivotal in the struggle for humanity" (Freedom Park Trust, 2004-2012d).

[11] This flame burns in honour of those individuals who have died but have not been explicitly named, the "unsung heroes and heroines who lost their lives without their names being recorded in history" (Freedom Park Trust, 2004-2012d).

> reflect in an objective manner, past conflicts viz Pre-Colonial Wars, Slavery, Genocide, Wars of Resistance, the South African War [Anglo-Boer Wars], the First World War, the Second World War and the Struggle for Liberation. The objective here must be to transform group and community pain stemming from past conflicts into a shared national strength with an explicit objective for a way forward. (Freedom Park Trust, 2004-2012d)

These battles are chosen as representative of the South African struggles for freedom and humanity, and are asserted as being exhibited in an unbiased way. Indeed, Mongane Wally Serote, CEO of the Freedom Park Trust at the time, asserted that "When we refer to the term history, the challenge is that the truth is often in the eye of the beholder" (Freedom Park Trust, 2007b). It is therefore expected that Freedom Park seeks to tell this story with "historical impartiality" (Baines, 2009: 336). This would seem to be in accordance with the Park's mission statement of inclusivity: "all, with no regard to race and nationality, [who, at Freedom Park] will find the instinctive peace internal to every human being, which affirms to each, his and her humanity".

However, this impartiality comes under pressure when considering the Freedom Park Trust's decision to exclude the names of the fallen soldiers of the SADF. During its development stages, the Freedom Park Trust asked members of the public to submit names for consideration for the Wall of Names (Freedom Park Trust, 2006a). Space is provided on the Wall of Names for 136,000 names. Of these, 5000 are reserved for those who died during the Liberation Struggle. The Freedom Park Trust identifies them as "heroes and heroines of the Liberation Struggle who laid down their lives for freedom" (Freedom Park Trust cited by Baines, 2009: 335). Various SADF veteran groups submitted the names of their fallen comrades for inclusion. This was presumably based on the assumption that the Border War was an "extension" (Baines, 2009: 330), and rival force, of the Liberation Struggle.

However, SADF veteran groups were rejected by the Freedom Park Trust on the basis that "deceased SADF personnel did not deserve inclusion on the wall on the grounds that they had fought to preserve apartheid and defeat the struggle for liberation" (Baines, 2009: 336). This verdict did not change despite appeals made by pro-SADF groups such as lobby group

Afriforum and trade union Solidarity,[12] who stepped up to represent the SADF veteran interests in having the fallen soldiers included on the Wall. In defiant response, a "counter-memorial" (Baines, 2009: 337) was erected by SADF veterans very close to the Freedom Park site. Spearheaded by Steve Hofmeyer, whom Baines critically describes as a "shamelessly self-promoting singer, activist and SADF veteran" (2009: 336), the counter-memorial was erected in protest against Freedom Park's perceived exclusivity. Its plaque reads,

> For All Those Who Fell heeding the Call of Their Country including those whose names are not on the Freedom Park wall. So We May never Forget the Dearly Fought Freedom of all Ideologies, Credos, and Cultures and their Respective Contributions to our rich South African Heritage. (cited in Baines, 2009: 336)

Hofmeyer is also quoted as asserting that "history is not one sided" (Baines, 2009: 336), and he indicates that this is represented by the pyramid shape of the counter-monument. While the plaque makes the troubling suggestion that the SADF soldiers, or the Apartheid government, in their own way, believed themselves to be champions of their own version of "freedom", the call for "historical impartiality" is a noteworthy confrontation of Freedom Park's otherwise inclusive ideals. A meeting was subsequently arranged between the Freedom Park Trust, Afriforum and Hofmeyer, and a workshop[13] organised which attempted to deal with the issue.

In addition to the inclusion of the SADF names on the Wall, Afriforum requested that "the innocent civilians and security force members who died as a result of ANC 'terror attacks' should be acknowledged as victims of the Liberation Struggle" (Baines, 2009: 336). They also opposed the inclusion of the names of the fallen Cuban soldiers who had aided the Liberation forces in the conflict against the SADF, asserting that they were "fighting for communist world domination and not freedom" (Baines, 2009: 336). The Cuban soldiers

---

[12] Baines identifies these two groups as serving as "a watchdog for the protection of minority [read: white Afrikaner] group rights" (2009: 335), with Afriforum having, in the past, "accused the ANC government of deliberately undermining the rights of white Afrikaners [with] measures such as affirmative action, which are regarded as being designed to marginalise its constituency" (2009: 335).

[13] Baines details the meeting of the "South African Veterans Association, the Afrikaanse Taal en Kultuur Vereniging, SA Heritage and the departments of defence and justice [...] held on 8 February 2007. The workshop apparently did little to resolve the differences of opinion and the issue became polarised and racialised" (2009: 337).

were ultimately included, but Serote did agree that the victims of ANC terror be identified and honoured (but did not specify how this would be done).[14] The Freedom Park Trust had released a press statement on the issue, in which it appealed to the public for input on the controversy. It also included comments from Deputy CEO of the Trust at the time, Peggy Photolo, who asserted that "the core theme embedded in The Freedom Park is the struggle for humanity and freedom" (Freedom Park Trust, 2007a) and that the Wall of Names was based on honouring those who died for those ideals. She said that public input was required for more debate on the issue of the SADF's inclusion, that it should also be kept in mind that the Wall was not yet complete, and the Freedom Park Trust assured the nation that civilian names of those who died during the 1980s and 1990s would still be collected. Furthermore, the press release states that the names of the SADF were collected "based on the principle of inclusivity and representivity" (Freedom Park Trust, 2007a), but would still not appear on the wall. Their names were, however, presented a year later in a book at a wreath laying ceremony held at Freedom Park to the families of the deceased men, held on Women's Day in 2008 (Freedom Park Trust, 2008).

Because the Park privileges the celebration of freedom and humanity, and the Wall of Names is defined as a space for the heroes and heroines of the various struggles for liberation in South Africa's past, it would seem understandable that the Freedom Park Trust would necessarily exclude the SADF. Indeed, CEO of Freedom Park Trust at the time, Mongane Wally Serote asserts in a press release that "[t]hat the crime of Apartheid dehumanised millions of South Africans is a brutal reality. Another reality is that the SADF was used as a whip to perform gross violations of human rights in the name of apartheid (Freedom Park Trust, 2007d). The SADF is very clearly rendered by Serote as the villain of the Liberation Struggle, a perpetrator against the ideals of freedom and humanity enshrined by the "new" South Africa as they are asserted by Freedom Park. Despite what the plaque on the counter-memorial might suggest, "not all ideologies are committed to the cause of freedom – and white supremacy in the guise of Apartheid was most certainly not" (Baines, 2009: 336).

However, the "Freedom Park Fracas" (Baines, 2009) has exposed an inconsistency in the commemorative process of this national memorial; not all the wars listed at Freedom Park, nor all the names included from those wars, were necessarily in the service of freedom and humanity enshrined by the Park. The other wars represented on the Wall, such as the South African (Anglo-Boer) Wars, reflect the names of *both* sides of the conflicts, when it can be argued that the British Empire, in its attempt to attain and maintain colonial dominance in South Africa in the late 1800s and early 1900s, oppressed the Afrikaner constituency and violated their freedom and humanity.[15]

---

[14] The exact proceedings of the meetings are laid out in great detail by Baines in his article "Site of Struggle: The Freedom Park Fracas and the Divisive Legacy of South Africa's Border War/Liberation Struggle" (2009).

Furthermore, not all the names included under the Liberation Struggle were necessarily heroes and heroines who died in the name of freedom. Those who have been included on the Wall as "freedom fighters" have sometimes been civilians and innocent bystanders, and not necessarily individuals who actively gave their lives for a political cause:

> there has been slippage between the categories of 'hero/heroine' of the Liberation Struggle and 'victims' of apartheid, as well as a blurring of the distinction between combatants and civilians. It seems that suffering or victimisation, rather than furthering the aims of the Liberation Struggle, has effectively become the qualification for inclusion of names on the walls. (Baines, 2009: 337)

This comment exposes the fact that, while Freedom Park asserts that the qualification for inclusion on the Wall is having died for the cause of freedom and humanity, in actual fact, the qualification for inclusion is "suffering and victimisation". This would explain how both sides of the Anglo/Boer Wars can be included on the walls, despite the fact that the combatants were not necessarily champions of freedom and humanity. This would also explain how civilians could come to be included in the Liberation Struggle alongside the heroes and heroines.

---

[15] For example, as part of the effort to put pressure on the Afrikaner "guerrillas" during the conflict between British and Boer forces, concentration camps were set up across the country by the British forces. According to Marouf Hasian's work in *The "Hysterical" Emily Hobhouse and Boer War Concentration Camp Controversy* (2003), these camps initially started as "temporary structures" (2003: 145) used for the detainment of captured Boer guerrillas. The men were permitted to return home provided they upheld a promise to abstain from the conflict. However, when many Afrikaners returned to the conflict after their release, Lord Roberts passed a Martial law that permitted British officers to destroy the homes of those "believed to be aiding Boer guerrillas" (2003: 145). As a result, thousands of Afrikaner women and children were left destitute. These women and children landed up in the camps as so-called "refugees" (2003: 145) who "'surrendered voluntarily' and were 'in need of shelter'" (2003: 145). The conditions in the camps deteriorated rapidly, due to "changing military policy [which] created a chaotic situation where tens of thousands were placed in squalid camps" (2003: 146). As a result, many died of illness and malnourishment: "Somewhere between 20 000 and 40 000 children and women died in segregated Boer and "coloured" camps" (2003: 146).

Not all who died during southern Africa's conflicts were soldiers, and not all victims were champions of the cause of freedom and humanity as it is defined by Freedom Park. The exclusion of the SADF is therefore an indication that the Park does not classify these fallen soldiers as individuals who had experienced "suffering and victimisation" in the Liberation Struggle/Border War conflict. A vital point to note here is that the arguments, debates and small compromises which emerged in the light of the controversy all seem to revolve around who gets to be a "victim", and demonstrates an oscillation in the Park's definition of "victimhood". There are a host of unanswered questions and unresolved issues regarding the status of "victimhood".

Despite the heated debates, workshops and meetings mentioned in the paragraphs above, whether the SADF are victims of the Liberation Struggle/Border War or not is not what is actually at stake here.[16] What is at stake is the work this label of "victimhood" does within the Park as a heritage site for nation building. This is something which can be understood through David Simpson's discussion of commemoration as a process of identity construction. In his book, *9/11: The Culture of Commemoration* (2006), Simpson discusses memorialisation and commemorative practises in attempting to understand the commemoration of the 9/11 attacks on the American Twin Towers. He points out that the way a society commemorates its dead says a great deal about the way a society sees itself and the world it is a part of, or more interestingly, about whose interests its serves for a culture to be represented in a particular way. What can be gained from Simpson's work is that acts of commemoration are therefore not only acts of grief and healing, but of identity construction as well. As a state funded, national heritage site, Freedom Park is an instance of national identity construction.

---

[16] Baines himself falls into this trap in his attempt to adjudicate the basis upon which SADF soldiers might be classified as "victims" or recognized within the notion of "shared suffering". In his conclusion he argues both sides for and against the inclusion of the SADF names on the wall, entering himself into the debate for the first time instead of simply presenting it as was done throughout the article. He asserts that the SADF should not be included on the basis that they did not make as comprehensive a disclosure at the TRC as their MK and APLA counterparts, and that SADF soldiers need to "own up to their culpability" (2009: 339) if they wish to be recognized for any other experiences under Apartheid. On the other hand he argues that they should be included on the Wall on the basis that Freedom Park is supposed to be a nation-building site in the name of reconciliation: "Freedom park must move beyond paying lip service to nation building and dialogue, and make a concerted effort to remember the sacrifices of all who suffered and died for the freedom of their country. Given this mutual experience of suffering, it is only right that the names of the dead of both sides should be inscribed on the Wall of Names as a token of reconciliation" (2009:339). He attempts to negotiate the terms upon which the SADF can be recognised within the notion of "shared pain" and becomes yet another voice in the "victimhood" debate, when this is not what is actually at stake.

The Park bases the construction of at least one aspect of national identity in shared pain and suffering, mourned together, in the interests of reconciliation. This is seen in its objectives to "transform group and community pain stemming from past conflicts into a shared national strength with an explicit objective for a way forward" (Freedom Park Trust, 2004-2012d), and the Park's assertion that its spaces were created to "provide a pioneering and empowering heritage destination in order to mobilise for reconciliation and nation building in our country [and] reflect upon our past, improving our present and building our future as a united nation" (Freedom Park Trust, 2004-2012a). Importantly, these ideals were envisioned for "all, with no regard to race and nationality, [who, at Freedom Park] will find the instinctive peace internal to every human being, which affirms to each, his and her humanity" (Freedom Park Trust, 2004-2012b). This is all reflected in its creation of shared spaces for memorialisation and remembering of the dead. Indeed, chairperson of the White Community Mobilization Group within the Freedom Park Trust, Helaine Joubert, was quoted as saying, "It is often said that the one common emotion that we as South Africans share is pain. Although the pain stems from vastly different sources, the pain remains the same. It is our task to take that pain and turn it into a shared, national pain so that we can mourn our wounds together" (Freedom Park Trust, 2008). The common identity of suffering and "victimhood", regardless of its various causes, is what unites South Africans in this statement, and is how the Park envisions itself uniting them as a nation. By recognising the names of the fallen loved ones and community members of living South Africans, the Park creates a space where these living individuals can come to mourn them and be recognised as victims. What, then, is the effect of excluding the SADF from the Wall?

To answer this question, another must first be attended to. As Simpson might ask, what is the interest the Freedom Park Trust has in excluding the SADF soldiers from the way the conflicts of the South African past are remembered? If, as Baines asserts, "suffering and victimisation, rather than furthering the aims of the Liberation Struggle, has effectively become the qualification for inclusion of names on the walls" (2009: 337), then the exclusion of the SADF names suggests that the way in which the Park defines suffering and victimisation does not recognise the SADF experience. What interests does the Park have in rendering the SADF as non-victims of the Liberation Struggle conflict? These questions occasion an examination of the word "commemorate". The prefix "co -" denotes "together", and "- memorate" refers to "memory", as in "to remember". To commemorate is thus "co-memory", in a sense, to "remember together" (Higgins, 2010). As Simpson points out it functions at once on a personal and on a public level, subjective but collective at the same time:

> Rituals of memorialisation exist to assimilate [...] intense and particular griefs into received vocabularies and higher, broader realms than the merely personal. The routines of commemorative culture, whether private or public, exist to mediate and accommodate the unbearably dissonant agonies of survivors into a larger picture that can be metaphysical or national-political and is often both at once. (2006: 2)

Commemoration creates the sense of a shared burden of loss, while still maintaining the particularities of individual grief. This is seen in Freedom Park's assertion that the objective of the Wall of Names is "to transform group and community pain stemming from past conflicts into a shared national strength with an explicit objective for a way forward". Similarly, at the meeting held between the Freedom Park Trust, Afriforum and Steve Hofmeyer, then CEO of the Trust Mongane Wally Serote is quoted as saying of the Park, "It is our task to take the individual pain and turn it into a shared, national pain" (Freedom Park Trust, 2007c).

The problem which Simpson gestures towards is the assumption that private grief *can* be assimilated into a public representation of something which is essentially so individual and subjective. Can individual pain really be recognised as collectively "the same", as Joubert suggests? Can pain which stems from vastly different sources be considered as ultimately coming down to the same thing? The problem with the word "commemorate" – to "remember together" – assumes that everyone remembers the past in the same way. As has been seen in Freedom Park, this is clearly not the case. In fact, not only do individuals not remember the past in the same way, their memories are conflicting. Baines asserts the controversy demonstrates "an ideological contestation over the meaning of the Border War/Liberation Struggle" (2009: 338). How can individuals affiliated with contesting ideologies in the same war be remembered and mourned *together*? How can the dissonant griefs of those left behind be "turned into" a unified image or symbol, especially when this remembered past is so recent, and there are members of both sides still living?

Those who believe that it is possible and desirable for the SADF names to be included on the Wall, that a national scope for memory can be achieved, feel that "rather than treat one side as victims and the other as perpetrators, it would be more even-handed to regard these conflicts as a shared tragedy" (Baines, 2009: 338). This brings up a vital point, which is that the inclusion of the SADF names would assume "that there is a moral equivalence between being prepared to sacrifice one's life for the armed struggle and defending white supremacy" (Baines, 2009: 338). The inclusion of SADF names would fundamentally challenge what is understood by freedom and humanity in the Park, and undermine the basis upon which the Liberation Struggle was fought.[17] It is therefore not possible to recognise the SADF as individuals who experienced "suffering and victimisation".

If the requirement for inclusion on the Wall is victimhood and suffering, then in order for the fallen of the Liberation Struggle to be victims, the SADF cannot be. This is what is at stake for the Freedom Park Trust in holding up this particular representation of the past, which excludes the SADF and renders them as non-victims. In order for the Liberation Struggle to be justified as a struggle for freedom and humanity, it must be defined in opposition to the Apartheid government and the SADF. This is potentially why it did not matter for the Park to have both sides of the Anglo-Boer War included, even while certain aspects of the conflict contradict the ideals of freedom and humanity envisioned by the Liberation Struggle. It was not against this conflict that the Liberation Struggle had to be defined. The SADF can therefore necessarily not be seen to be comparable to the freedom fighters. They are constructed as villains and perpetrators against the ideals of the Liberation Struggle, and are not commemorated as equal victims of Apartheid. This sets up a necessary binary between the victims of the Liberation Struggle, and the perpetrators of the Border War, in Freedom Park's construction of victimhood as the basis of nation building.

What, then, is the effect of the SADF exclusion from the Wall? What makes this particular moment of memorialisation so fascinating is that there are still members of the particular group that has been excluded and vilified living in contemporary society. The omission of the SADF soldiers who died during national service from the Wall excludes SADF veterans, and the families and friends of former SADF soldiers, from visiting the Park in order to mourn and remember the SADF as part of those who are commemorated. This denies them acknowledgment of the kind of "pain" which is afforded to the other community members of those who *are* included on the Wall. As a result, two things occur through the exclusion of the SADF names. The first can be explained using Judith Butler's work on the commemoration of the 9/11 attack on the Twin Towers. Butler provides an extremely useful way of understanding what is at stake for the SADF veterans and communities in being excluded from the process of national identity construction. In her paper, "Violence, Mourning and Politics" (2003), Butler attempts to use the way the 9/11 was commemorated in America to understand "Whose lives count as lives? [...] what makes for a grievable life?" (2003: 10). She suggests that this adjudication is practised and exposed through public acts of grieving and commemoration: "the norm governing who will be a grievable human is circumscribed and produced in these acts of permissible and celebrated public grieving [and] how they sometimes operate in tandem with a prohibition of the public grieving of others' lives" (2003: 25). Therefore memorialisation and commemoration is not simply an act of identity construction, as Simpson suggests, but also a process assigning whose identities are "grievable"; "whose lives count as lives". Butler's observations regarding the commemoration of 9/11 are helpful in understanding Freedom Park. In the instance of Freedom Park, those whose lives are considered "grievable" are those labelled as "victims" of the various conflicts for freedom and humanity in South Africa's past. Because fallen SADF soldiers are not acknowledged as "victims", they are not acknowledged as "grievable", and their lives do not then count as lives. This not only excludes their communities from taking part in the process of nation building along with the communities of those who are included on the Wall, but because there are SADF veterans still living in South Africa, the "grievability" of *their* lives is undermined as well.

---

[17] Baines provides a similar assertion, saying "those who advocate the recognition of SADF personnel do not seem to realise that their position effectively undermines the ANC's claims to have fought a 'just war' against the illegitimate apartheid regime and, hence, to the moral high ground" (2009: 338).

This introduces a crisis of subjectivity; as South African citizens, by not being acknowledged as "grievable" human beings, the citizenship of the SADF veterans, while constitutionally and legally undeniable, is simultaneously undermined, as their lives do not "count" on a national scale. Their presence and wellbeing are demonstrated as no longer being a concern of, or holding significance for, the state. Furthermore, Butler explains in her work that not being considered "grievable" has the potential to veil past violence, as well as enable future violence, "violence against those who are already not quite lives, who are living in a state of suspension between life and death, leaves a mark that is no mark" (2003: 24). In effect, if the fallen SADF men (and potentially, by extension, their communities) were in fact victims of Apartheid in any way, it would be rendered invisible and unimportant.

This is aggravated by the fact that not only does the Park exclude the SADF from the Walls, but through the SADF exclusion, the Park also constructs the SADF as "perpetrator" against the ideals of the "new" South Africa, and this has implications for the veterans who are still alive. It is not just that SADF-veterans and their communities may not visit the Park to mourn the fallen soldiers. However, because of the SADF exclusion, and because the Liberation Struggle is defined against the Apartheid (and by extension, its armed forces, the SADF), to visit the Park would be to mourn those who have been identified as victims of the SADF. A visit to the Park by the veterans and remaining communities would then affirm and perpetuate the SADF subjectivity (and by extension, the subjectivity of the veterans) as uncomplicated and ultimate perpetrators against the ideals of freedom and humanity as it is constructed at the Park. If, as Joubert asserts, the shared pain of South Africans comes from many different sources, the Park allocates the source of the SADF veteran pain as an acknowledgment of guilt. The Park as an instance of nation building, renders the SADF as perpetrators against the celebrated national identity constructed, according to Freedom Park, on the basis of freedom and humanity. This means that they are not constructed as "South African" in contemporary society, but as perpetrators against what it is to supposedly be "South African". They are left out of the celebrated new "South African" identity as it is enshrined by the Park. Within the collection of voices combined in nation building, theirs is thus not only silenced but stigmatised at Freedom Park.

I want to argue that the "Freedom Park Fracas" (Baines, 2009) signals an anxiety of belonging on the part of the SADF veterans and their remaining communities. The controversy of Freedom Park exposes a heated attempt to define the terms of who is a "grievable" death, and hence, a significant life, in the "new" South Africa. The reactions of the SADF-affiliated groups to the exclusion of the SADF names demonstrates the attempt to seek inclusion in the national identity asserted by the Park on different terms. This has been demonstrated in the paragraphs above, and has seen a failed attempt to render the deceased SADF as "victims" so that they may be included in the celebrated "South African" identity, and not cast out as perpetrators against it. It has also seen the attempt, through mechanisms such as the "counter-memorial", to assert the SADF as "grievable", and by doing so, to make the lives of the SADF veterans (and potentially even their communities) who are still living, significant in contemporary South Africa.[18]

Why should the SADF not be vilified, since it was an aggressor in a war of its own making, and the soldiers of the SADF were actors of the illegitimate, racist Apartheid government, where many soldiers were indeed perpetrators of gross human rights violations? Indeed, the SADF was a perpetrator of Apartheid violence and oppression. However, the following analysis will demonstrate that this is precisely the issue which is complicated through the emergence of the recent English literature on the experiences of SADF soldiers in the South African Border War. The issue is made especially complex by the nature of these soldiers as conscripted men. Therefore, this study is *not* an attempt to argue whether the SADF soldiers should be considered as "victims" of Apartheid or not. Rather, I hope to explore the ways in which the issue of "victimhood" with regard to these men emerges and is made complex through the emerging Border War literature in this contemporary South African context. I explore the ways in which the category of "victimhood", and the way it functions in the aftermath of Apartheid, can be understood. It is within this conversation, generated by Freedom Park, that I wish to situate the emergence of these English Border War texts in contemporary South Africa.

---

[18] It should be noted that the veterans wanted to be recognised as "grievable" in the "new" South Africa, and for this reason, chose not to revert back to the existing soldiers' memorial at Fort Klapperkop erected by the Apartheid government in honour of those who died defending the Republic of South Africa in 1979.[18] If they had, they would simply have been asserting themselves as significant lives to a disgraced and bygone Apartheid state.

CHAPTER 2

Constructing the "Afterlife" of the Border War

In the year 1967, the first school-leaving "white" boys after the age of 16-years began to receive call up papers for their compulsory national service in the Apartheid state's military forces, the South African Defence Force (SADF). Up until 1977, they would serve for nine months. However, this increased to two years, with conscripts also periodically returning for shorter camps. As such, these young men would be in the compulsory service of the Apartheid government for a total of 720 days (Edlmann, 2012: 257). There were very limited options for those who did not want to serve, and harsh consequences for those who refused (Baines, 2012). Anyone who refused service was sentenced to six years in prison. Some went to university in order to avoid call up, while others fled the country into exile. At the end of 1983, the End Conscription Campaign (ECC) was established, which began to change the face of conscription (Nathan, 1989: 308). Edlmann, in her article, "Division in the (inner) Ranks: The Psychosocial legacies of the Border Wars" (2012), explains how instead of a six-year prison term, the ECC advocated for alternative forms of service. As a result, those conscripts who were able to prove that they were objecting on religious pacifist grounds were given an extended period of community service as conscientious objectors. However, those who objected on moral or ethical grounds were only given this option in 1992, when the political and social climate of the country had already begun to shift (Edlmann, 2012). Conscripts who objected on political grounds were never recognised as conscientious objectors. All this was an experience common to over 600 000 men who were conscripted and served in the SADF between 1968 and 1993. It is easy to see how Baines can assert that "ex-conscripts are not a homogeneous group and do not speak with a single or cohesive voice" (2009: 331). Young "white" conscripts came from many different social, cultural, political, economic and religious backgrounds, and would have had varied experiences of conscription. And yet it is conscription which brought these men together, and it is their individual and unique experiences which form the subject matter of a trend of recent cultural productions which have been bringing the Border War back into the public domain. What has occasioned this revival of interest in the Border War? What are these texts attempting to convey?

Jennifer Wenzel, in her book *Bulletproof,* evokes a useful term "afterlife" (2009: 2) in her discussion on the legacies of the past as they manifest in the present. She puts forward the notion that past events have an "afterlife", something which can be "revived and revised" (2009: 2) through "retrospective invocations of [the] past" (2009: 2). Her analysis is framed predominantly around what she calls "a remarkable coincidence" (2009: 2): the recurring theme amongst indigenous peoples[19] around the globe who, in response to the impact of colonial forces on their land and resources, all prophesised the same thing. This was a

> vision of a new era: the dead shall rise, the bounty of the land will return, and invaders and unbelievers will be swept away when the people purify their tradition and undertake new ritual practice. Such practices will protect them until the new order is established, for the invader's guns will shoot only hot water. The people will become bulletproof. (Wenzel, 2009: 2)

Wenzel is concerned with the way that these past prophesies, despite their "spectacular, seeming failures" (2009: 2) are revived and put to use in the present. This is what she calls their "afterlives", where the prophesies survive "their apparent failures to become repositories of aspirations for later movements" (2009: 2). The way that Wenzel demonstrates this is through the prophesy of the Xhosa cattle killing, where she asserts that its revival in the present can reveal "how understandings of nationalism and the nation vary across time and space" (2009: 2). As such, she traces the way that the *amaXhosa* have, and do, resurrect the prophesy in response to certain anxieties and aspirations in the present. She traces this through the role which cultural productions, such as literature, have to play in this resurrection, and how, as "aesthetic experiences, they offer a site of connection between past and present, dead and living" (2). Literature, as an object of study, thus has the potential to provide insight into why and how the "afterlives" of the past are put to use by individuals in the present.

The scope of Wenzel's study necessarily exceeds the way in which I wish to use it in my own investigation. However, it is useful for understanding that the way the past is put to use in the present – its "afterlife" – can reveal certain attitudes, anxieties, and aspirations of those who evoke it. As a result, the "afterlives' of historical events can be invoked as a certain kind of

---

[19] She refers specifically to "anticolonial millerian movements in Asia, Africa, and the Americas" (2009: 2).

identity construction. These "afterlives" can thus reveal how individuals negotiate their identities in the present day. It is this term "afterlives" which then becomes vital to understanding the recent emergence of a body of English literature texts which revive the personal experiences of SADF soldiers in the South African Border War after almost twenty years since the end of Apartheid and conscription. How is the Border War revived through these texts in South Africa today? What can its revival reveal about the aspirations or anxieties of these men in present-day South Africa? In what ways do these texts function as an attempt to negotiate their identities in the "new" South Africa?

These texts emerge in the midst of numerous cultural productions on the experiences of SADF soldiers in the South African Border War; books, theatre productions, short films, art exhibitions and documentaries all reviving the personal experiences of SADF soldiers. These seem to be in response to a perceived silence in the way this era and those who were involved are remembered. For the most part, these books, plays, films and series explore the experiences of SADF conscripts on the "Border": personal accounts, the circumstances of their service, experiences of trauma and PTSD, renderings of racism, violence, and the horrors of war, both during and after. Some of the books, as evident in their titles, gesture to the previously "untold", "silent" or "prohibited" nature of their contents. Examples include *A Secret Burden: Memories of the Border War by South African soldiers who fought in it* (Batley, 2007), *An Unpopular War: From Afkak to Bosbefok* (Thompson, 2006), *The Silent War: South African Recce Operations* (Stiff, 2001), and *Battle Scarred: Hidden Costs of the Border War* (Feinstein, 2011).

Piet Nortje's book *32 Battalion* (2004) is described as an insider's perspective which will "explode the myths surrounding the legendary 32 and set the record straight" (Amazon, 2012a).[20] David Williams' *On the Border, 1965-1990: The White South African Experience* (2010) expresses the activities of the SADF had, till now, " remained secret, the full story untold" and that this would be something which "David Williams - himself a conscript and member of the Citizen Force for ten years - begins to remedy" (Amazon, 2012b); and Jannie Geldenhuys' republished book, *At the Front: A General's Account of South Africa's Border*

---

[20] It is important to note that Amazon.com is not being used as an academic source. Instead, I am interested in the ways in which these texts appear in public culture. One of the ways this can be seen is how they are advertised and promoted within the public sphere. For example, by typing "border war books" into Google, one of the first sites which appear is Amazon.com, presenting the titles of these English texts. This site provides a synopsis or review of the various books, and also provides suggestions of other books within the same category.

War (2009), is asserted to include "facts unknown to civilians and even to some high-ranking military officials" (Amazon, 2012c).

Similarly, creator, director and producer of the 26-part M-net series *Bush War/Grensoorlog*, Linda de Jager, asserts on the series' website that these stories are being told "[f]or the first time ever – we reveal previously censored military footage which unashamedly tells the story of the true events of South Africa's Secret Bush War. This series packs a powerful punch providing an intimate, sometimes shocking, yet balanced glimpse of an important era in Africa's history" (Bush War, 2011). The series sets out to provide a platform to examine what "really" happened in the Border War, implying that the Border War is something which, up till now, has been underrepresented, misrepresented, or misunderstood, and that the series "offers new perspectives on the Border War through paradigms of diplomatic and military history and cultural studies" (Bush War, 2011). Furthermore, the home page of the website asserts that the series "constitutes a literal unburdening for those whose voices have been silenced for so long" and that "[t]hose interviewed have challenged the boundaries, broken the silences and even tackled some of the taboos about the war" (Bush War, 2011). The unburdening, in this context, from what can be gathered, might suggest the laying down of secrets or guilt and shame, or alternatively of past traumas suffered. There is a gesture towards the telling of the past in another, different, previously silent or "tabooed" voice.

In another example, a review of the revival of Anthony Akerman's play, *Somewhere on the Border*, appearing on the National Arts Festival website states: "When South Africa started exorcising its political past at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, one chapter in our recent history was given short shrift. That was the way young white men had been subjected to compulsory military service for several decades in a defence force that became politicized to a point where it was simply the brutal enforcer of apartheid" (National Arts Festival, 2011). Because the play primarily revolves around the stories and experiences of five "white" SADF conscripts during their time of service in the Border War, the review seems to speak to the same notion of silenced, misrepresented or underrepresented narratives within the context of the "new" South Africa, in the aftermath of Apartheid.

All these cultural productions, in some way or another, assert the secret, untold, incomplete, or misrepresented nature of the Border War and the experiences of the SADF men who were involved. It is through personal accounts and firsthand experience that they aim to remedy this and provide the "true" story, what "really" happened, from those who were there. The majority of these cultural productions have been in the field of literature, with the emergence of a group of English Border War texts.

For the most part, the recent English Border War literature is made up of a group of personal accounts published from the late 1990's, well after the end of Apartheid and conscription. It is important to note that there are a few novels, as well as plays, based on personal experience of the writers in the SADF, which also make up part of this group of English Border War literature. However, the novels are small enough in number to consider non-crucial to answering the question of what *way* the Border War is being revived in present-day South Africa, in the aftermath of Apartheid. Additionally, while the plays, such as Akerman's *Somewhere on the Border*, are being restaged now, unlike the recent English personal accounts, they were written before the end of Apartheid and conscription. I answer the question of how the play is being put to work through an exploration of the work the personal accounts attempt to do in bringing the first hand SADF experiences to the fore once more. There is also an existing body of Afrikaans literature on the Border War which was written before the end of Apartheid, but this will be discussed in more detail at a future point.

The emergent English Border War texts are mostly the memoirs, reminisces, diary entries and even poetry of the men who had experienced life in the SADF first hand. Some are narratives written by one person, while others make up part of a collection. They are written in English by predominantly "white"[21] former SADF servicemen who either have literary inclinations themselves, or are in collaboration with journalists. Their stories narrate an "insider's" perspective on the Border War. Baines says that these texts make up "a growing corpus of cathartic literature" (2009b: 178). He explains, creating a succinct snapshot,

> The (sometimes) reluctant soldiers often admit complicity in upholding the apartheid system not on account of

---

[21] While there are a few novels written by black authors, such as Mandla Langa's *A Rainbow on the Paper Sky* (1989) or Mbulelo Mzamane's *Children of Soweto* (1982) which, according to Henriette Roos "gave the view from the 'inner' frontier [...] where the actions of 'terrorist' and 'security forces' are seen from the other side, from a black perspective" (2008: 140-141), they were published before the end of Apartheid and conscription, and therefore do not form part of the revival of the historical period in present day South Africa.

> ideological convictions or patriotism, but rather because they believed that they had little choice in the matter. The most popular text has proved to be a collection of reminisces published under the inappropriate title *An Unpopular War.* The stories are told with a blend of honesty and self-delusion, candor and skepticism, and self-deprecating humor. Many of these narratives are suffused with nostalgia for the 'good old days' while, contrarily, evincing a modicum of guilt about the role the narrators played as perpetrators of violence and terror. But the overwhelming impression is that these ex-soldiers see themselves as having simply performed their duties as national servicemen. (Baines, 2008: 14)[22]

This revival of the SADF experience of the Border War, through English literature, thus seems to be about asserting the existence of an experience, indeed, an identity, which has otherwise gone untold, or been misrepresented. But what still remains unclear, throughout almost all of the English Border War texts, is exactly what the nature of the "silence" is that these texts assert to be breaking? In their steadfast assertions, no explicit explanation or elaboration is given. The question is, then, in what way have these SADF narratives been silenced, if at all? By whom, or what? And might this have something to do with why this literature has undertaken to revive the past at this particular moment in South Africa's present?

Apartheid State-Sanctioned Silence

The claim to silence made by or on behalf of the SADF veterans in these recent cultural productions makes sense when considering the state-sanctioned secrecy regarding the experiences of SADF soldiers on the "Border" during the Apartheid era. Military activities were kept secret by the Nationalist Party and the SADF; "the Border War was waged away from the public eye. Censorship and disinformation served to create a conspiracy of silence" (Baines, 2007: 2). Public access to state records, regarding, among other things, military operations, under the Archives Act of 1962, section 9(6), was severely restricted. Secrecy clauses limited information on "conscientious objection to military service… mental health institutions, military action (particularly beyond South Africa's borders)… police involvement in repression… weapons procurement and development , in varying degrees…" (TRC Final Report, Volume 1, 1998: 207). Information on almost every aspect of the SADF soldier's experience was limited and strictly controlled.

---

[22] Baines adds that, in exception, there are still those few personal accounts, for example, those written by "former army career officers [who] express few qualms about their actions" and are "noticeably devoid of self-recrimination" (2008: 14). However, what Baines' research suggests is that the greater majority of the texts follow this "cathartic" trend.

Additionally, it was not only the media and general public which were kept in the dark, but the families of the soldiers, and even the soldiers themselves. The government consistently kept the details of South African casualties secret from the media and the soldiers' families, and the SADF would often not disclose the details of military operations to the troops (Baines, 2007: 2-3). Furthermore, soldiers were required to sign declarations which, in accordance with the Defense Act, prohibited them from communicating any information, including to friends and family, regarding their activities and experiences in the army (Baines, 2007: 3). As such, silence about their experiences, on both official and personal levels, became a "way of life" (TRC Final Report, Volume 1, 1998: 207) for the SADF soldiers, even for those who were conscientious objectors.

This silence and secrecy was exacerbated by, and helped maintain, the existing and misleading romanticised image of war perpetuated by state propaganda and popular South African culture. Conway explains this saying that "[t]he geographical distance of 'the border' from white South African society helped create a romanticised ideal of military service on 'the border' [and] aided the perception of 'the border as a distant yet heroic place" (2008: 76). This "popular culture" included adverts, films, comics and cartoons which romaticised the image of the ultimate soldier, the "*Grensvegter*"[23], and the "Border" as a place of ultimate adventure (I discuss this in elaborate detail later in the analysis). The everyday realities of SADF soldiers were rendered silent and invisible, and glossed over with a romanticized image of the experience of war.

Even after Apartheid, the situation regarding access to the experiences and realities of Border War veterans was still not straightforward. The Apartheid government had destroyed vast amounts of state documentation – amongst which were military records – before the hand over to the new democratic government. The TRC's final Report asserts that this "purging of official memory" (TRC Final Report, Volume 1, 1998: 229) was in the service of preventing the new democratic government from having access to certain information which would implicate the apartheid government in gross violations of human rights.[24] This destruction of documents, such as those from security establishments like the SADF, would have made it difficult for the TRC to do its work in uncovering the events and violations of human rights committed by or against the SADF under Apartheid rule.

---

[23] Afrikaans translation: "Border Fighter"

This silence applies not only specifically to the Border War and the experiences of the SADF, but includes the experiences of other groups of armed forces, such as Mkhonto we Sizwe (MK) and the Azanian Peoples' Liberation Party (APLA), as well as the larger global context of the Cold War. This is a larger context which is only just beginning to come under academic investigation, according to a group of essays collected by Baines and Vale (2008). Baines signals this "scholarly 'silence' " (2007: 8) with regard to the Border War and its wider context, and indicates that it could largely be a result of the abovementioned censorship and secrecy policies of the Apartheid government, the destruction of state files, and the fact that "access to military archives [by scholars] involves a lengthy process of declassification" (2007: 1-2).

Accordingly, Henriette Roos suggests that in the aftermath of Apartheid, "less restrictive publishing policies […] played a part in this re-emergence of English Border War texts" (2008: 150). This would suggest that the English texts were indeed the first to break the silence and confront the misrepresentations of the Border War as they existed during the Apartheid regime's rule. However, there is, in fact, a significant, existing body of work on the experiences of the SADF conscripts on the "Border", written at the height of the war, which precedes the English "cathartic" texts.

---

[24] Baines refers to this as "Officially-imposed amnesia" (2007: 3).

The Other SADF Texts

There are four main categories of Border War texts, identified by Baines. The first category comprises of the texts asserted as military histories, most often politically biased and authorised by the SADF. The second is "left-leaning academic writing which was critical of the apartheid regime" (2009b: 176). The third is *Grensliteratuur*,[25] a body of fiction written by dissident, predominantly male Afrikaners during the war, who attempted to deal with "the construction of a new Afrikaner identity" (2009b: 177), and finally the fourth, the English literature texts discussed in the paragraphs above, which include the novels, plays and memoirs, written from personal experience, which are "primarily representative of the experiences of white English-speaking national servicemen" (2009b: 178). The first three categories occur predominantly before the end of the Border War and the hand over to the new democratically elected government in 1994, while the English works were largely absent until well after. While the English Border War literature has only emerged recently within the last decade, it resonates as part of a larger culture of existing Border War texts, dating back to before the end of Apartheid. It is the last two categories of literary texts which are of most interest to this study.

Grensliteratuur serves as a significant body of work on the experiences of the SADF conscripts on the "Border", written in Afrikaans at the height of the war, which precedes the recent English Border War literature. Roos, in her review of Border War literature, asserts that "what constitutes the core of *grensliteratuur* are those texts written over a period of less than a decade by a group of authors who themselves, in one way or another, were involved in the Border War" (2008: 144). While Baines asserts that *Grensliteratuur* was most often written by men who seldom had first-hand experience of the war, Roos contests and complicates this category. She asserts that, in fact, some of the highest productions of *Grensliteratuur* texts were from soldier authors, and that, while small, significant contributions were also made by female authors.

Furthermore, she identifies another body of literature at the time which served to reinforce the romanticised perception of the war. She states: "Besides the traditionally romanticized

---

[25] Translated as "Border Literature", and referring specifically to the Afrikaans fiction produced during a period of approximately a decade at the height of the Border War.

image of war as a site for heroics, male bonding and patriotism, these texts – in some cases directly linked to SADF initiatives – served to keep up morale amongst the troops' next of kin by painting a fictitious world held in place by male power, supportive women, and a divine right to victory" (2008: 142). These narratives were in the form of novels, as well as short stories in popular magazines and even manifested in Afrikaans films, and were most often written by individuals who had not served in the SADF themselves. While this literature was "not accepted as 'high brow' [it] reflected and strengthened the then dominant social discourse – specifically amongst Afrikaans-speaking white people, but not exclusively so – of a general acceptance of official policy and its related military propaganda" (2008: 141). It is against this body of work, which legitimised state propaganda, that Roos suggests *Grensliteratuur* asserted itself.

Grensliteratuur was attempting to undermine popular beliefs and myths regarding the experiences of SADF soldiers in the war perpetuated within dominant social discourse, and "challenged the validity of what was disseminated as 'true' by official sources" (2008: 147). The documentary style of *Grensliteratuur* fiction and the autobiographical influences in the work aimed "to *report* what was happening" (2008: 144) to SADF soldiers and their communities. Roos explains that this subversion of the dominant stereotypes was what defined the work.[26] She finishes by saying that "[t]hese texts informed a society in denial about what was censored by newspapers at the time, and thus contributed to capturing a history of the horrifying times" (2008: 145).

Much of what the recent English Border War literature purports to do in exposing the "real truth" of the SADF experience, as it had been censored by the Apartheid state or obscured by popular culture, is what *Grensliteratuur* had already begun to attempt through fiction at the height of the war. This undermines the assertions made by the recent English Border War literature that it reveals previously untold "truths" about the SADF experience. However, the English Border War texts do still hold some claim to breaking the silence imposed by Apartheid. Roos explains that during Apartheid, the publishing of English texts regarding the experiences of soldiers in the Border War was not considered socially acceptable, "publishing these war stories at a time when a strong anti-war and anti-apartheid culture existed among English-speaking intellectuals was not only regarded as politically incorrect, but probably also economically unviable" (2008: 139). English texts were not published by the mainstream press in the same way as Afrikaans texts were. She says that there is "a long-standing tradition in Afrikaans writing to (sometimes) serve the interests of language and culture – [which] meant that manuscripts were often published even if they were unlikely to be profitable or supportive of the political *status quo*" (2008: 148). In other words, despite the fact that *Grensliteratuur* did not necessarily serve the interests of the Apartheid government at the time, it was nevertheless published by the Afrikaans cultural elite.

---

[26] As such, the majority of the work was narrated by a soldier, and some of the themes include the rejection of military authority, alienation from civilian life and trouble re-adjusting upon return, the revealing of secrets, political and social upheaval and violence, and going mad or "*bossies*", critical looks at the treatment of those considered the "enemy", the guilt carried by soldiers as a result of their atrocious actions, unease and reservations from those back home, and the subversion of military masculinity through feminine or homosexual voices.

Furthermore, she admits that *Grensliteratuur* was not always all that well received. She explains that despite the (at times) inclusive intellectual Afrikaans publishing tradition, *Grensliteratuur* was still affected by censorship and banning under the Apartheid regime (2008: 146-7). She also suggests that there were "uncertain", "conflicting" (2008: 146) and "muted" (2008: 147) reactions to the *Grensliteratuur* texts at the time, and that this can be attributed to the fact that it existed alongside a body of popular literature which reinforced the dominant stereotypes that *Grensliteratuur* attempted to undermine. Furthermore, she posits that the proximity of the *Grensliteratuur* texts to the on-going war, and the fact that it only dealt with one side of the conflict, potentially limited its relevance. The overwhelming impression Roos gives is that while the *Grensliteratuur* texts enjoyed roughly a decade of significant production they ultimately fell by the wayside. As a result, despite the efforts and even successes of these texts in exposing certain realities about the Border War, there is much that still remains obscure.

In the light of *Grensliteratuur's* shortcomings, the English texts provide a collection of personal narratives which were banned and prohibited under Apartheid legislation, considered socially taboo by the English intellectual elite, and distorted by the romanticised image of war promoted by the state and popular culture of the time. The recent English Border War texts do, then, hold some stake in asserting a previous silence and taboo of specifically English voices in the context of existing Border War literature. They are also justified in challenging the legacy of the Apartheid state-sanctioned silence as it might still exist, despite the previous attempts of *Grensliteratuur* to contest it. Indeed, Sasha Gear, in her study *The Road Back: Psycho-social Strains of Transition for South Africa's Ex-Combatants,* points out that the soldiers "who were sworn to secrecy have not seen these threats revoked anywhere, at the same time being in the 'habit' of secrecy and/or associating it with ethical and professional behaviour" (2008: 253). However, the claim the English texts have to breaking the silence in the light of *Grensliteratuur's* shortcomings does not account for the fact that there *has already* been an attempt to grapple with the SADF experiences in the aftermath of Apartheid.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission

South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) provided a platform for the unburdening of Apartheid secrets, and this included those experiences of the SADF. It was intended as an inclusive platform for all South Africans

> whereby our society can leave behind the past of a deeply divided society characterised by strife, conflict, untold suffering and injustice, and commence the journey towards a future founded on the recognition of human rights, democracy and peaceful co-existence, and development opportunities for all South Africans irrespective of colour, race, class, belief or sex. (Omar, 1995, cited in TRC Final Report, Volume 1, 1998: 48)

Along with being a platform for casting off Apartheid secrets, the TRC was also a nation-building project. Its inclusive vision sought to unite *all* South Africans, who shared a common past of "strife, conflict, untold suffering and injustice", in order to rebuild a "new" nation based on the "recognition of human rights, democracy and peaceful co-existence". The foremost purpose asserted by the TRC's Mandate was to "uncover as much as possible of the truth about past gross violations of human rights [...] in the belief that this task was necessary for the promotion of reconciliation and national unity" (TRC Final Report, Volume 1, 1998: 49). This would be done through public hearings, where both the victims, and the perpetrators of gross human rights violations within a mandated period, would testify.

In addition to this, the TRC set up a Special Hearing explicitly for the experiences of conscripts during their time in compulsory military service. The aims of the hearing were to "provide an opportunity for those who suffered, and continue to suffer from their experiences as conscripts, to share their pain and reflect on their experiences", which was not only for those who were directly involved in the conflict, but also in order to create a more comprehensive understanding of the "range of experiences of those affected by conscription" (TRC Final Report, Volume 4, 1998: 223). This necessarily included those individuals who had objected to service, who left the country to avoid it, members of the South African Police (SAP) and those who served in the townships, as well as the families of these men. The commission envisioned this as an opportunity to "raise public awareness about the reality and effects of post-traumatic stress disorder" and "develop recommendations on rehabilitation and reconciliation" (TRC Final Report, Volume 4, 1998: 223) from these findings.

Despite the TRC's asserted inclusivity and even-handedness, and despite the shroud of secrecy imposed by the apartheid regime which the TRC was attempting to cast off, Baines' chapter in *Beyond the Border War: New Perspectives on Southern Africa's Late-Cold War Conflicts* (2008) details how very few SADF soldiers testified at the TRC, with many of the individuals in top structures of the defence forces (not limited to the SADF) publicly refusing to testify. The question is then, why did SADF veterans not feel that they could, or did not wish to, use the TRC as a platform for the kind of unburdening and sharing of experiences under an abusive regime?

The structure of the TRC, and the general self-imposed absence of the soldiers from the process meant that, for the most part, the SADF could only appear as perpetrators. While the TRC asserted itself as a platform for the unburdening of Apartheid secrets and censorship, it was not an adequate platform for comprehensively breaking the silences on the experiences of the armed forces, not limited to the SADF. The foremost purpose asserted by the TRC's Mandate was to uncover the "truth" about gross violations of human rights, and was not a platform for the testimony of any and all experiences silenced under Apartheid.[27] The TRC asserted a "victim-centred approach" (TRC Final Report, Volume 1, 1998: 53). This meant that it sought "to provide the space within which victims could share the story of their trauma with the nation [and it sought] to recognise the importance of the due process of law that ensures the rights of alleged perpetrators" (TRC Final Report, Volume 1, 1998: 2). The testimonies were thus envisioned in two main categories: those from victims of gross human rights violations, and those from the perpetrators who committed them, with the recognition that victims could also be perpetrators and vice versa. Perpetrators would be granted amnesty in exchange for full disclosure of their actions if it could be proven that their actions were politically motivated. The TRC Mandate reiterated that dealing with the untold narratives of these various individuals would be done in a "fair and even-handed" (TRC Final Report, Volume 1, 1998:13) way.

---

[27] In his book, *Ambiguities of Witnessing* (2007), Mark Sanders asserts that the "dominant tendency among scholars interpreting the Truth commission testimony has been to point to the inadequacy of the commission's procedures in allowing stories to be told, or to its facilitating only certain kinds of stories" (7). Similarly, Claire Moon, in her investigation of the discourse of reconciliation at the TRC, *Narrating Political Reconciliation* (2008), asserts that "'victim and 'perpetrator' constitute the subject positions from which authoritative and

My assertion is that the TRC was thus limited as a platform explicitly for the exposition of the suffering and victimisation caused by gross human rights violations, limited to the form of "bodily integrity rights" (TRC Final Report, Volume 1, 1998: 64).[28] If an experience did not fall within this category, it could not be recognised within the TRC. The Mandate itself recognised that this was a limited scope of suffering and victimisation (TRC Final Report, Volume 1, 1998: 65). However the Mandate asserted that the TRC was to be taken as only one aspect of the attempt to grapple with past human rights abuses in South Africa, and while its primary focus was on the abuses of bodily integrity rights, it did not suggest that these were the only violations of human rights which had happened. This being said, however, the only testimonies which appeared on the platform of the TRC were limited to those of either the victims, or the perpetrators, of *gross violations of human rights*.

I find this especially significant considering that the TRC's Mandate placed restrictions on the conditions under which the armed forces could be considered victims of gross human rights violations. All armed forces, including the SADF, were classified as "Combatants"[29]

---

binding statements about South Africa's violent past are made" and that "the constitution of victim and perpetrator is an effect of the TRC's *particular* historicisation of the South African apartheid past" (2007: 51).

[28] These were violations of "the right to life, the right to be free from torture, the right to be free from cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment and the right to freedom and security of the person, including freedom from abduction and arbitrary and prolonged detention" (TRC Final Report, Volume 1, 1998: 64).

[29] The armed forces of a Party to the conflict consist of all organised armed forces, groups, and units that are under a command responsible to that Party for the conduct of its subordinates... Members of the armed forces of

under the Mandate, and thus could not apply for gross violations of human rights in the same way that "Protected Persons" could. The report stipulates that a person classified as a "Combatant" is permitted to engage in certain acts which would, in non-combat situations, be considered unlawful, such as killing (TRC Final Report, Volume 1, 1998: 73). These laws meant that the "Combatant" was permitted to "use (lethal) force against enemy combatants in the process of trying to subdue the enemy as quickly as possible", and would not be held "personally liable for the consequences of their acts" (TRC Final Report, Volume 1, 1998: 74). This is not to say that any and all use of force is unrestricted, and must instead adhere to strict codes of conduct regarding the "laws of war".[30] Additionally, they were subject to "minimum protections"[31] (TRC Final Report, Volume 1, 1998: 74). Any acts which violated the conditions of this conduct were considered gross human rights violations by the TRC.

---

a Party to the conflict are combatants; that is to say, they have the right to participate directly in hostilities. (TRC Final Report, Volume 1, 1998: 74)

[30] These stipulated that combatants could not use force against "wounded, sick and shipwrecked members of the armed forces and civilians; prisoners of war; civilians, including those interned and those on the territory of the enemy or in occupied territories", or otherwise known as "Protected persons" (TRC Final Report, Volume 1, 1998: 74).

[31] The Mandate as it appears in the TRC Final Report includes the outlines of "minimum protections" as stipulated by Common Article 3 of the four Geneva Conventions:

> Persons taking no active part in the hostilities, including members of the armed forces who have laid down their arms and those placed hors de combat [outside combat] by sickness, wounds, detention, or any other cause, shall in all circumstances be treated humanely, without any adverse distinction founded on race, colour, religion or faith, sex, birth or wealth, or any similar criteria. To this end, the following acts are and shall remain prohibited at any time and in any place whatsoever with respect to the above-mentioned persons:
>
> (a) violence to the life and person, in particular murder of all kinds, mutilation, cruel treatment and torture;
>
> (b) taking of hostages;
>
> (c) outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment;
>
> (d) the passing of sentences and the carrying out of executions without previous judgement pronounced by a regularly constituted court, affording all the judicial guarantees which are recognised as indispensable by civilized peoples. (See also Protocol I, art 75).

(TRC Final Report, Volume 1, 2008: 74-75)

Thus, provided they adhered to the laws of war and minimum standards of protection, being a "Combatant" meant that an individual could not be held accountable for their acts against enemy "Combatants" which, in non-combat situations, would be considered gross violations of human rights. However, this also meant that anyone still considered a "Combatant" could not be considered a victim of gross violations of human rights either. The TRC itself recognised this, declaring that "[a]rmed conflicts between clearly identified combatants thus provided the only exception to the Commission's position that victims of gross violations of human rights should include all who were killed, tortured (and so on) through politically-motivated actions within the mandated period" (TRC Final Report, Volume 1, 1998: 73). This distinction means that despite any experience of having their bodily integrity rights violated, as "Combatants", security forces were not recognised as victims in this sense.

This is not to say that members of the armed forces could not ever testify as victims of gross human rights violations. Indeed, they could at any point during their service as "Combatants" fall into the category of "Protected Person". This could happen if, during combat, he fell under the abovementioned "minimum protections". However, Gear relates how, even among the members of the SADF who *did* testify, "Relatively few made statements as victims, choosing not to categorise themselves in this way" (2008: 264). This corresponds on an official level with "the submissions of political parties such as the NP and the ANC, which did not identify their members killed in combat as victims" (TRC Final Report, Volume 1, 1998: 73). As a result, the testimonies of the SADF individuals who did come forward were predominantly those made as perpetrators of gross human rights violations.

The TRC's binary focus on the victims/perpetrators of gross violations of human rights, and the fact that as "Combatants" the SADF could apply predominantly only as perpetrators, might be why, as Gear suggests, SADF soldiers "experienced pressure from their ranks not to participate […] and variously regarded [the TRC] as biased, uncompassionate, additionally stigmatising, and distorting their experiences" (2008: 264).[32] Similarly, the understanding of the "Border War" under Apartheid rule destabilised under the new government, as Baines accurately asserts, "South Africa's white minority's 'Border War' was the black majority's 'Liberation Struggle'" (2009: 330). He suggests that the SADF did not testify about their experiences as they believed they had been fighting a legitimate war, and felt "bound by a (misplaced?) sense of loyalty to the old regime and fellow soldiers, or for fear of being held accountable by the ANC government for human rights violations" (2009: 339), which were indeed perpetrated by SADF individuals, and were not necessarily politically motivated offences. It is also possible that SADF soldiers did not want to admit their guilt for the effects it would have on their personal lives and relationships. In the light of the secrecy surrounding the war on both official and personal levels, the TRC would have been the first, and incredibly public, occasion where the acts of these men were revealed. Indeed, the TRC Mandate states,

---

[32] This notion of stigmatisation becomes important at a later stage of my discussion, where I demonstrate how Sasha Gear employs the term to talk about stigmatised knowledge.

> Often this is the first time that an applicant's family and community learn that an apparently decent man was, for instance, a callous torturer or a member of a ruthless death squad that assassinated many opponents of the previous regime. There is, therefore, a price to be paid. Public disclosure results in public shaming, and sometimes a marriage may be a sad casualty as well. (TRC Final Report, Volume 1, 1998: 9)

The soldiers' personal reservations towards the TRC thus limited their presence there, and are perhaps the reason why information on the Border War, and the representations of the SADF and their experiences of it, was relatively limited within the TRC. Baines asserts, "the Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) devoted a single chapter of its seven volume report to events beyond South Africa's borders" (2008: 1). Similarly, Christopher Saunders, speaking with specific reference to Namibia and Angola, says that "[w]hat happened in the region was given very short shrift: of over 2 700 pages in the five volumes, only some 60 or so relate directly to what happened in Namibia and Angola" (2008: 268). This could have been due to the fact that out of the total 1646 amnesty applications, there were 293 Security Force amnesty applications which were made, and of these, only 31 were by SADF members (Foster *et al*, 2005: 14). The 31 accounts which were made related predominantly to incidents which happened within South Africa's borders, and did not shed significantly new light on what had happened in the region as most "were either already in the public domain or were connected to applications by Security Branch applicants" (TRC Final Report, Volume 6, 1998: 182). Along this line, the TRC Report also identifies various incidents which it knew to have been perpetrated by the SADF, both inside and outside of

South Africa, but for which it had not received any amnesty applications, and as such, more information was not available.

The SADF presence, and hence, the representation of their experiences at the TRC was limited by the soldiers' personal feelings towards the process. This was further aggravated by the SADF soldiers' unwillingness to testify at a Special Hearing set up by the TRC as a platform for the experiences of conscripts during compulsory military service. Baines explains, "SADF conscripts were wary and suspicious of the TRC despite its assurance that the testimonies given during its hearings were 'neither an attempt to look for perpetrators, nor a process that will lead to the awarding of victim status'" (2008: 12). Some SADF soldiers were concerned that they would not be believed if they were to come forward with their experiences, "[s]ome reported that the lack of public knowledge about the war created suspicion about their stories, while others were summarily dismissed as sympathy seekers or outright liars by former SADF generals and their apologists" (Baines, 2008: 13). This is understandable considering how SADF generals "displayed a singular lack of willingness to take responsibility for their acts of commission and omission" (Baines, 2008: 13), and that the SADF soldiers felt lied to and "betrayed when the very authorities that they were convinced would protect them and provide security left them in the lurch" (Baines, 2008: 13). Fittingly, Gear relates how the hearing was "treated with hostility by most ex-SADF officials" (2008: 264). As a result, the information generated by the TRC on the SADF came predominantly from the 31 amnesty applications, despite the TRC's attempt to make a gesture towards acknowledging the experiences of the conscripted forces, and the majority of their experiences went unexpressed.

Thus the challenge to silence made by the English Border War texts is strange, considering the silence at the TRC was predominantly self-imposed. This means that the English Border War texts are about more than just breaking the silence through a "cathartic" confession of their dubious actions during their service, as these acts have already been revealed by the TRC process (albeit in a limited way).[33] A return to the Border War literature provides more insight. In her Preface to one of the most popular[34] collections of personal SADF narratives, *An Unpopular War: From Afkak to Bosbefok*, Thompson makes a striking statement regarding the ex-SADF soldiers, "Today, it is not socially acceptable for these men to talk about their experiences. But even if the politics of the time were abhorrent, this doesn't make the soldiers so" (2006: x). Thompson does not simply challenge a silence which is the legacy of the historical, Apartheid state-sanctioned censorship and misinformation. She additionally perceives the silence as the result of a *social exclusion* of the histories and memories of these men in present-day South Africa. As has been seen in the paragraphs above, this is not, in fact, an accurate accusation. What, then, is the basis for Thompson's assertion?

---

[33] See for example an incident where Granger Korff unashamedly narrates his execution of a wounded, unarmed enemy soldier in *19 with a Bullet* (2009). Similarly, in Thompson's *An Unpopular War* (2006), an SADF soldier narrates how captured enemy soldiers were tied to the hood of the combat vehicles and driven through thorn trees all the way back to camp, or another relates an incident where a detained enemy soldier is tortured and eventually killed.

Her statement suggests that because of their affiliation with the "abhorrent" politics of Apartheid as national servicemen – indeed, their roles as actors of the state – these men and their experiences have become stigmatised in the aftermath of Apartheid. It is as a result of this that Thompson is suggesting that these men have been silenced; unable to, indeed, prohibited from, telling their stories until now. Her amputation of the SADF soldiers from the politics of the time is a troubling justification for why their stories should now be heard, but I will discuss this later in the analysis. Thompson does not elaborate any further on why it is not socially acceptable for these men to discuss their experiences. While this in itself is problematic, it does raise an interesting question of why she would claim that the SADF men are a topic of taboo in present-day South Africa. It also raises a question of agency; if these men are indeed being silenced, who, or what, is silencing them?

"The Silence of Stigmatised Knowledge"

As has been seen in the paragraphs above, the information regarding the SADF and its activities in neighbouring countries was sparse at the TRC. What information is available, while accurate, is limited, and presents an uncomplicated representation of the SADF as purely perpetrators of gross human rights violations. Gear asserts that in the absence of other platforms for the expression of the SADF experience, this existing knowledge about the SADF "has arguably served to stigmatise alternative and additional stories and knowledge even before they are revealed. Accordingly, the nature of the recorded histories can be seen as assisting in keeping alternative and additional knowledge hidden, at the same time as discrediting ex-combatants' sense of their selves" (2008: 253-4).Therefore it is not simply that there have been no platforms for these experiences as the recent Border War literature might be seen to suggest. Instead, it is possible that the existing platforms provided limited and villainous representations of the armed forces, including the SADF men, and this has led to their stigmatisation.

---

[34] In the first six months of its publication, Thompson's collection had already been reprinted six times (Baines, 2007: 15) and by 2009, it had been reprinted eleven times (Edlmann, 2012: 266).

The TRC Final Report asserted that most gross violations of human rights were at the hands of security forces; it found "the state – and in particular its security agencies and affiliated policy and strategy formulation committees and councils – to be the primary perpetrators of gross violations of human rights" (TRC Final Report, Volume 6, 1998: 181). The 1583 reported acts perpetrated by Security Forces included abductions, bombing and arson, body mutilation and destruction, fraud and theft, intimidation, torture and assault, killings and attempted killings (TRC Final Report, Volume 6, 1998: 186). With the lack of any additional platforms for the public expression of their experiences, it is solely with these acts which the SADF soldiers become associated. Through the TRC the SADF soldiers appear predominantly as perpetrators of gross violations of human rights, and the SADF is cast as an uncomplicated perpetrator in one of the most significant (highly publicised, formative) constructions of national identity ever undertaken in the aftermath of Apartheid in South Africa.

The fact that what is known about SADF soldiers is limited and predominantly negative is aggravated by the very fact of their identity as soldiers. This is very clearly explored through Ross McGarry and Sandra Walklate's discussion on the associations of soldiering with violence, aggression, and crime in their article *Peering through the looking Glass: The Soldier as Victim* (2011). Their work with British soldiers serving in Iraq is interesting because it highlights the fact that soldiers are associated with violence due to the nature of war, being its "potential to produce mass victimisation and because acts of such victimisation and violence perpetuated by state action also frequently constitute human-rights violations" (901). Their point is made clear if applied to a South African context through the report of the TRC, which revealed that, indeed, the highest number of gross violations of human rights during its mandated period were perpetrated by the security forces. Soldiers are associated with crime as they are expected, as part of their job description, to carry out certain actions which would, in "civilised" or "moral" society, be considered illegal (such as killing another human being). This notion is seen explicitly in a South African context in the TRC's classification of the armed forces as "Combatants". As a result, the soldier can be viewed as a powerful and skilled perpetrator of violence, possibly even bordering on the inhumane, particularly considering the soldier's partial exemption from the rules governing "humane" or "civilised" society.

Furthermore, McGarry and Walklate discuss numerous studies conducted with British armed forces questioning the extent to which military life leads to criminal behaviour, such as the sexual abuse of fellow male and female soldiers, torture and the committing of human rights abuses, sexual abuse and rape of civilians, and acts of genocide, all of which "may or may not be authorised by the state" (2011: 903). There are also further studies cited which mark the "rising interest in the extent to which military service itself acts as a bridge to criminality in other spheres of social life" (2011: 903), such as domestic violence, after service. Their findings are applicable to this investigation, firstly as security forces admitted gross violations of human rights at the TRC, as well as the fact that the latter end of the Border War saw increasing "instances of interpersonal violence and the phenomenon of 'family murder' whereby white men would inexplicably murder their families and then commit suicide (Pretoria, in fact, had the highest number of 'family murders anywhere in the world)" (Conway, 2008: 84). Similarly, McGarry and Walklate point out that it possible to ask "questions about the legality of state action itself and the deeds done by agents of the state acting in its name" (2011: 901). Wars themselves can be considered "illegal", such as Apartheid being classified as a crime against humanity, and South Africa's occupation of South West Africa (now Namibia) continuing even after the mandate was terminated in 1966. The soldiers of the SADF, as actors of the Apartheid state, are implicated in its crimes, whether directly or indirectly.

An important point in McGarry and Walklate's study is that there are heteronormative "masculine connotations associated with 'soldiering'" (2011: 900). They explain that war is "an act of violence [that] is mainly conducted by men", that "encourages violent masculine behaviour" (2011: 901). This is very interesting when considering the SADF. According to Conway's chapter in *Beyond the Border War: New Perspectives on Southern Africa's Late-*

Cold War Conflicts (2008), it was this very heteronormativity, which was used to legitimise SADF conscription and national service. SADF military conscription was constructed as an accepted, necessary trajectory of "white" masculinity. Conway asserts that "governments waging military conflicts must ensure that men consider military service as an essential duty as *men* and women must believe that it is their duty to support men as soldiers" (2008: 77). Both Conway and Drewett note that national service in South Africa was constructed as "a rite of passage" (Conway, 2008: 77; Drewett, 2008: 94) from boyhood into manhood, where war was the mechanism which transformed "immature boys into reliable fighters" (Drewett, 2008: 94). As such, Drewett stresses that militarisation became instituted as a fundamental component of masculinity in Apartheid South Africa.[35]

The "ideal" South African male was an SADF soldier, constructed to be "truly masculine [...] brave, courageous and prepared to fight on the border" (Drewett, 2008: 101). The SADF soldiers were thus associated with violence and aggression. An example used by Drewett is the photo-comic *Grensvegter*[36] which came out once a month and "celebrated the exploits of [...] a stereotypical Rambo-type muscular brave soldier who regularly single-handedly fought and defeated the enemy, in the process rescuing a white female" (2008: 105). SADF soldiers in South Africa were thus also cast in heroic "defender roles" (Drewett, 2008: 95) constructed as protectors of "white" women and children back home. Drewett also explores the ways in which advertisements perpetuated these notions of the masculine, heteronormative protector, often depicting soldiers and their girlfriends or wives together in order to sell various products and services.

Since soldiering and heteronormative masculinity were constructed as a core component of the identities of "white" males in South Africa during the Border War, any experience which did not fall within the parameters of this identity could undermine the war effort. As such, these alternative experiences were strictly policed and made taboo by the Apartheid state. This can be seen in the social policing of this heteronormative masculine gender role; "anyone who refused to serve in the SADF was systematically denounced and ridiculed by the state as feminine and cowardly" (Drewett, 2008:104). Drewett accurately asserts that "clearly the pressure was on to be a strong, disciplined soldier, whose heterosexuality and masculinity were not in question" (2008: 106). He goes on to explain that the majority of this gender policing was done in the army through verbal abuse, "On arrival in the SADF any sign that someone was not a model soldier was met with a retort about his failure to be masculine" (2008: 102). Drewitt explains that this was often done through incredibly sexist or discriminatory "othering", by suggesting the conscript was feminine, or homosexual, instead of the ideal heterosexual masculine soldier. Men were not "allowed" to be anything but the kind of man which legitimised the Border War. As such, any attempt to resist conscription, or undermine the war effort, would have undermined the conscript's very identity as a "male". This would have meant that conscripts might not express experiences, thoughts or ideas which did not fit into the heteronormative ideal, for fear of undermining the accepted norm of their "male" identity, or for fear of being ridiculed by the state or fellow soldiers. This might still be the case today with veterans who still carry those internalised ideals of masculinity. Due to this internal policing, the SADF soldiers were associated with a particular construction of masculinity which was fierce, aggressive, violent and forceful.

---

[35] This government propaganda was perpetuated through various institutions, such as the church and the education system (Craig, 2008), school cadet programmes, as well as through propaganda and pro-SADF cultural productions such as campaigns, films, magazines, songs, and the media (Conway 2008; Drewett 2008).

[36] Afrikaans for "Border Fighter".

The atrocities revealed in the TRC, and the negative connotations of the identity of the SADF soldier, is what serves to stigmatise additional information before it has even emerged. An example of this stigmatisation is given by Gear, who says

> some SADF conscripts' resentment at their 'good' SADF deeds (or valuable contributions) will never be appreciated is complicated by a discomfort at the expectation that it should be. Other ex-SADF members may struggle with the recollections of the enjoyment and adventure experienced during national service (or parts of it) [...] because it is not considered right to have enjoyed any part of the experience because of the stigma associated with anything done in the name of the SADF. (2008: 254)

To have enjoyed the experience of soldiering, or to want to be recognised for it, is to suggest an enjoyment of the atrocities revealed through the TRC, and enjoyment of the aggressive, violent identity of soldiering. Wanting to be recognised, according to Gear, "comes with the discomfort at the expectation that [they] should be" (2008: 254). While these expressions of enjoyment and the desire for recognition may reveal something new about the nature of the SADF or soldiering, it will be met with resistance because of the existing stigma associated with it. Furthermore, SADF veterans themselves might be too ashamed as a result of the stigma to express experiences which are associated with the SADF; they might not even want to be identified as being a part of it at all.

Similarly, the Freedom Park Fracas shows how the conscripts involvement with the SADF disqualifies them from having their potential experiences of suffering and victimisation under Apartheid recognised in the "new" South Africa. To include them on the wall would fundamentally undermine the core values upon which the Liberation Struggle was fought. Freedom Park necessarily stigmatises the SADF, and the experiences of the SADF soldiers (besides those against which the Liberation Struggle was fought) are rendered unimportant to the state. Gear's assertion that existing knowledge on the SADF stigmatises additional information on their experiences is realised here. I believe that part of the work these recent English Border War texts are doing by reviving the past of the SADF is to contest the "silence of stigmatised knowledge" (Gear, 2008, cited by Baines, 2008:11) as it is created through the instances discussed in the paragraphs above, by providing alternative representations of the SADF soldiers' experiences, in addition to those which have already been exposed through existing knowledge.

CHAPTER 3

Framing the Victim: JH Thompson's "An Unpopular War"

Jacqui Thompson's top selling collection of personal SADF narratives, *An Unpopular War: From Afkak to Bosbefok* (2006) comprises of a series of personal accounts taken from interviews with forty ex-SADF soldiers. It is broken into chapters or various "themes" which serve to organize the accounts, which appear in the form of short vignettes. While this is not the first of the English "cathartic" Border War texts, it has proven through sales figures to be the most popular, and has served as a "template" for subsequent books by other authors (Baines, 2012: 89).[37] As such, it has the potential to provide useful insights into the appeal of these texts, and the nature of the revival of the SADF experience of the Border War through English literature. It also serves as a useful starting point for an investigation into the way these texts purport to challenge the "stigma" and "taboo" associated with the SADF.

In her Preface, Thompson elaborates on her choice of what Baines deems the "inappropriate title" (2007: 11) of her book. She explains that "[t]he war [...] was an unpopular one on many fronts. Many young men, straight out of school or university, were not staunchly patriotic and did not want to give two years of their lives to the military, mother's didn't want to lose their sons, and South Africa's Apartheid Government was condemned internationally for fighting an unjust war" (2006: x). The war is thus constructed as "unpopular" firstly in the sense that young men were forced to fight, not that they necessarily actually wanted to, not having much choice besides a jail term, or enrolling in a university they might not be able to afford or have the qualifications to get in to. And it is not just the young men who were opposed to fighting in the war, but their families and implied communities too, with Thompson appealing specifically to the suffering of a mother faced with the potential death of her conscripted child.

These young men are constructed as not necessarily endorsing or even really believing in the war they were being forced to fight in by the government. This aligns them with the second way in which the war is constructed as "unpopular", which is that, in an international arena, it was denounced as unjust, and the Apartheid government was ostracised and sanctioned. A divide occurs between the perpetrator of the "unjust war" and unjust system, the Apartheid government, and the individuals who are forced to partake in it. As such, Thompson's preface shifts the agency of perpetration from the soldiers onto the Apartheid government:

---

[37] See Blake Cameron's works for example, *Troepie: From Call-Up to Camps* (2009), and *From Soldier to Civvy* (2010).

> It was a radically different political climate – one that now, from the perspective of a non-racial and democratic South Africa, is almost impossible to comprehend. Today it is not socially acceptable for these men to talk about their experiences. But even if the politics were abhorrent, this doesn't make the soldiers so. (2006: x)

Thompson implies that as a result of their association with the system of Apartheid, these soldiers, like the politics of the time, have become "unpopular" – or rather, "abhorrent" – in today's "democratic", "non-racial" society. As there is no longer a place for the abhorrent politics of the past in today's society, there is also not a place for these men or their stories about their military experiences. Baines, referring to the SADF veterans' exclusion from the Wall of Names war memorial at Freedom Park, asserts, "ANC government spokespersons have tended to label the SADF the 'apartheid army' and regard its soldiers as tainted by their role in upholding the status quo [...]" (2012: 85). In the "new" South Africa, it appears that these soldiers are officially considered as one and the same with the abhorrent regime of Apartheid – functions and instigators of its oppressive and hateful system. They are painted – "tainted" – with the same brushstroke of contempt and dismissed as part of a repulsive past that is separate from the present day.

Thompson asserts that this is unfair. She authorises her discussion on the grounds that their affiliation with these abhorrent politics was compulsory, that they were not necessarily supportive of the Apartheid regime and, for this reason, their experiences deserve to be brought into public discourse, especially as these were experiences which were "profound" and had a "lasting impact on them" (2006: x). Thompson divorces the politics of the past from the present; the past has become something which is completely separate from the present, so much so that from our position in present-day South Africa, it is reportedly "impossible to comprehend". There is the implication that these soldiers, still alive in the present, need to be understood in a new light, separate from the abhorrent politics of the past. In Thompson's attempt to achieve this, she asserts that the book provides the stories of the SADF men "as they were told, with no embellishment or editing to make them seem better men, or worse" (2006: x).

However, there is still a significant amount of work which has gone into setting these stories up within a particular framework of victimhood. The chosen title and preface have already shown themselves to be conceptually geared towards this idea, and the same is apparent in certain aesthetic choices. Firstly, the cover depicts a young boy, in his late teens or early twenties, roughly the same age as many of the young men who were conscripted into the South African National Defence Force. He stands in uniform, with a backpack, a helmet and camouflage in the long dry grass, insinuating that he is, or potentially will be, in some circumstance of combat. The background suggests an expanse of bush and veld, and two possible, yet blurred, fellow soldiers. This is significant as the terrain is much like that which would be found in Namibia or Angola where many SADF troops would have encountered battle on the "Border". He is bent over, awkwardly holding what could be the tip of a rifle obscured by the long grass, and his face is smeared with mud, and what looks like a bit of blood. He looks off into the distance behind the camera, with an ambiguous expression of fear and alertness. His hand hovers just above the (potential) rifle as if he has seen something. This creates a sense of vulnerability and tension, as it introduces the possibility of a threat to which the young soldier is preparing to respond. This vulnerability is further enhanced by the fact that the rifle is obscured, and that it is difficult to tell whether it is in fact a rifle, as it renders the boy *visually* weaponless, despite the fact that he is clearly in some kind of potential combat situation. While the mud does at first obscure his features, upon closer inspection one sees his youthful, hairless face, and his somewhat pudgy hands, neither of which belong to a man. It becomes clearer that he is in fact quite young, just a boy, and he invokes a sense of pity, and further emphasises his vulnerability. Thus before the reader has even opened the book, they are confronted by the representative image of the boys whose stories are to be found within: vulnerable, scared, young soldiers in danger.

Within the book itself, the narrators of the vignettes are "identified by their first name and their age at the time, although some preferred to remain anonymous" (Thompson, 2006: ix). She asserts that there are no false names used. This has the effect of personalising the stories with the use of "real" first names. More interestingly, however, is the indication of the age at the time that the story happened. The stories are told by the forty adult men Thompson interviewed, who are all roughly middle aged by now. However, by situating the story within the perspective of a teenage boy, the sense of vulnerability is enhanced. It may also have the effect of heightening sympathy for the narrator on the part of the reader, which might not have been felt had these experiences been expressed from the narrative perspective of a middle aged man. Similarly, the stories themselves do carry strong renderings of trauma and suffering, both psychological and physical.[38]

This discourse of victimhood is further expressed through the reviews as they appear on the first few unnumbered pages of the book. One reads, "A riveting, personal look at recent South African history, and a poignant reminder of the multi-faceted effects of war on innocent youngsters" (review from Kate Turkington in "front material" cited by Thompson, 2006). Another review asserts that Thompson's book "has lifted the lid on something that needs to be out in the open to finally be allowed to heal" (review from *The Saturday Star* in "front material" cited by Thompson, 2006). The soldiers are framed as childlike, inexperienced and naive individuals on whom the war would wreak profound, harmful, and lasting effects. There is even the sense that something about the nature of war and its brutal consequences can be learnt through the stories which these soldiers have to tell – these "poignant reminders". They have been harmed by these "shocking experiences" (review from *You* Magazine in "front material" cited by Thompson, 2006) and, as such, are victims of this vilified system of war, wrongly silenced and excluded from telling their (otherwise secret or shameful) stories in the present day, "New" South Africa. Thompson's mention of a vastly "different political climate" may also be a gesture towards the powerful Apartheid propaganda, silencing and censorship of the time, which potentially adds another nuance to the lack of agency and silence of these young men.

Thompson is making the assertion that this book, with its collection of personal memories and vignettes from SADF veterans, signals and challenges a perceived, "unfair" perspective which condemns those who were conscripted and served in the SADF as "abhorrent". She humanises the SADF by individualising the stories of the men who formed it, and gives them first names and ages. She presents them as individuals with their own varying experiences of conscription, instead of one coherent military force. In doing so, she interrupts the existing association of the SADF as a unified force purely for violence, aggression, and the perpetration of atrocities. She presents another side to the SADF soldiers, which has indeed been predominantly unseen; one of trauma and suffering due to their involvement a war in which they were forced to participate.

---

[38] Examples include a soldier who remembers crying on his first night in camp because he felt so alone. Another soldier testifies his experience of being raped by one of his superiors. One conscripts relates how his training officer almost killed one of their squad members by hanging him from his neck off a bridge for not being fit enough, and only spared him because he had been pulled off by army officers who happened to be nearby. Finally one conscript relates waking up months after returning home from the war and having a traumatic flashback of the time a surprise attack was carried out on his bungalow, killing some of his comrades.

It is apparent that Thompson's text presents a few problems. The first makes a return to Baines' assertion that "the book bears an inappropriate title" (2012: 89). He says that, to the contrary, the war was "never unpopular among the majority of conscripts or with the white populace at large [...] military service was still regarded by the majority as a necessary price to pay for white rule" (2012: 89). While there was some dissent amongst the 600 000 men who were conscripted into the SADF between 1967 and 1993, Baines asserts that the majority "believed the apartheid regime's 'total onslaught' rhetoric, which maintained that the twin threats of African nationalism and communism were intent on destroying white society in South Africa" (2009: 331). Most young "white" men over the course of a 25-year period fought in a war that they, at the time, believed to be legitimate. While the End Conscription Campaign (ECC)[39] was a formidable force of opposition to conscription and the politics of Apartheid,[40] in the larger context of the Border War, it was only established at the end of 1983, during the last half of the National Service call-up period. Furthermore, while the ECC enjoyed an increase in support from young men who did not want to serve in the townships, this did not mean that they were necessarily taking an anti-Apartheid (and anti-privilege) stance (Conway, 2008). Thompson's assertion that the war was "unpopular", and that these men were helpless victims of a compulsory system, is only accurate in part.

Another problematic feature of Thompson's work is the political evacuation within both Thompson's framing of these stories, as well as within the vignettes themselves. There is barely any attempt to contextualise the war within the broader political climate of South Africa, Africa or the Cold War. This is especially problematic as the project asserts itself as "unbiased". Thompson's discussion of the historical and political context from which these narratives emerge is, in total, limited to less than half a page in her Preface.[41] It sheds no light on the war, why it was being fought, or by whom. There is no discussion about the attitudes towards the war except for saying that men were not staunchly patriotic, and that the Apartheid government was condemned internationally, neither of which is not elaborated upon. This mystifies why it is not "socially acceptable" for these men to talk about their experiences, and does not provide any explanation for why this might be.

---

[39] The ECC was established in order to "build pressure on the government to end conscription; to raise awareness of and opposition to militarisation and the SADF's role in South Africa, Namibia and southern Africa; to win support for non-military and non-governmental forms of alternative service for all conscientious objectors; and to 'work for peace and justice in South Africa" (Nathan, 1989: 310).

[40] Indeed, it was so successful in its endeavours that in 1988, it "became the first white organisation to be banned by the South African government in over twenty years" (Nathan, 1989: 308).

Within the narratives themselves, this lack of political context, awareness, or opinion is also present. The first blatant political evacuation is in the narrativisation of being sent to the army. There is no mention of any political affiliation, personal belief, or political awareness whatsoever beyond the fact that service was a state sanctioned requirement. One conscript relates, "The busses were packed with guys from all walks of life. Some were wealthy, with the attitude of: okay, we've got to take it on the chin and have to go to the military, but we're going to handle it. Then there were those who were down and out, and this was actually saving them. Going to the army would provide them with a roof over their heads and three meals every day." (Thompson, 2006: 3) There is very little choice expressed on the matter; going to the army is something that must be endured, "taken on the chin". Despite there being many different people present, "from all walks of life", conscription is compulsory regardless of personal preference or affiliation. This seems to form the crux of this political evacuation: service was made compulsory by the government, regardless of one's political affiliations or

---

> [41] Until 1994, all white male South Africans were called up for National Service in the year they turned 18. This could be deferred for a few years if the person was studying, but to avoid it meant a jail term. In the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s hundreds of thousands of young men served in the military, most going through intense physical training and many of them being sent to fight the war in northern Namibia and Angola. (2006: ix)

And,

> Even though most National Servicemen called up for military service did not experience combat, their time with the military had a profound and lasting impact on them. The war, fought primarily in South Africa's protectorate South West Africa (Namibia) and in Angola, was an unpopular one on many fronts. Many young men, straight out of school or university, were not staunchly patriotic and did not want to give two years of their lives to the military, mother's didn't want to lose sons, and South Africa's apartheid government was condemned internationally for fighting an unjust war. It was a radically different political climate – one that now, from the perspective of a non-racial and democratic South Africa, is almost impossible to comprehend. Today, it is not socially acceptable for these men to talk about their experiences. But even if the politics were abhorrent, this doesn't make the soldiers so. (2006: x)

personal beliefs, and this lack of agency seems to be at the forefront of the majority of these narratives, veiling, and perhaps excusing the fact that these political affiliations and beliefs are not identified or explored. This excerpt also suggests that, in fact, besides being compulsory in general, the army was also some kind of saviour to the poor. Their participation in the army is thus constructed as one based on desperation, coming from circumstances where even basic needs such as shelter and food were not met. In this sense, serving in the army was *not* a choice, but even if it had been optional, it might not have been much of a choice anyway as one between desperation and survival, at least for those who were "down and out". Participation is then rendered completely non-political in this instance.

Even within the narratives of those individuals who volunteered, no political attitude or awareness is expressed regarding the Apartheid government. Voluntary participation is constructed on the basis of necessity, or harmless boyhood excitement. One conscript says, "I've always had a love of weapons and combat uniforms. I didn't get called up; I volunteered. It was the only way I could eventually get a job. No one would hire you unless you had completed military service" (Thompson, 2006: 3). Even though he volunteered, it is established on the basis of a hobby, a love for weapons and uniforms, something that might be expected of little boys. As such, voluntary participation is depoliticised, and made harmless. The agency of volunteering is also immediately undermined as, even if one did choose not to serve, allegedly no one would hire an individual who had not completed their army service, which suggests one would not be able to sustain a livelihood. Participation is seen as a necessary hurdle to overcome in order to continue with life in a sustainable way; to get a job and be able to support oneself in the future. Once again, volunteering is rendered as not much of a choice anyway, and de-politicised.

Perhaps the most explicit example of this political evacuation is that the word "Apartheid" is mentioned throughout the entire 238-page book (which is on the experiences of the armed forces of the Apartheid government) only twice. The first time appears in the Preface, and the second time is 60 pages later, in the chapter titled "Black and White" (Thompson, 2006: 59). This chapter serves as the only four pages in the book dedicated expressly to the issue of race, and explicit interactions between individuals of different races – a major factor in Apartheid policy, as race served as the basis for segregation and oppression in the interests of "white" supremacy. But even this chapter, which is the closest one comes to explicit political insight or discussion, is politically evacuated. Instead, the narratives in this chapter serve to reinforce the separation of soldier and politics. For example, a conscript relates how he had volunteered to be part of the "Parabats", an elite parachute battalion. Being one of the 27 individuals left over after a gruelling two-week selection course, he had gotten to know and befriend an individual identified as "Captain L", and a "coloured" individual identified as "Captain C" from the South African Coloured Corps who was also on the course. To celebrate their completion of the course and earning their "wings", they had wanted to go to the steakhouse, Spur. Captain C had refused, saying that he would be too embarrassed because he would not be allowed in:

> So I said to him, kak man, but he insisted they wouldn't let him in [...] And I thought, fuck, this is 1985 and they won't let him into the Spur 'cause he's coloured. I just thought, here is this guy who is a captain in the military who wants to become a Special Forces soldier and he's not allowed into the Spur! It was the first time it dawned on me that, fucking hell, this apartheid thing was a real issue. (Thompson, 2006: 60)

Not only does a discussion of Apartheid not appear within the texts, but when it does appear, it does not provide any insight, and serves merely as a vague gesture towards something not necessarily well understood or previously considered significant to the experiences of the soldier. The way in which Apartheid is discussed here functions to create a divide between the soldiers and the war, and the Apartheid government and its politics. This soldier has not even been aware that Apartheid was "a real issue", which seems to suggest the soldiers are not affected by Apartheid *in the army*, and as such do not know, or are not implicated in, what is going on back in South Africa. Different rules seem to apply in the army regarding race – even "coloured" people are in the army, together with "whites", and not only that, occupy high ranking positions and status, and even strike up friendships with their fellow "white" soldiers. The surprise the soldier feels about Captain C not being let into the Spur is on the basis that he has a high rank, and is part of an elite group of special forces soldiers; he has earned his rank and status in the army, and as such should be allowed to go wherever he pleases, regardless of his race, supposedly according to the army.

The absence of political context excludes, or worse, creates an incomplete picture for a particular readership who might have limited, or completely lack, experience of the country's socio-political background and, more specifically, of the army culture from which the terms originate. Furthermore, because of the lack of contextualisation on the part of Thompson, no critical distance is achieved between the soldiers narration of themselves and the events of their past as they see them in retrospect. I find this all especially concerning with regard to the Border War as, in accordance with the previous discussion on Apartheid state sanctioned silence and censorship, there is already such limited information (and even *mis*information) regarding the era.

Perhaps what is most troublesome about this political evacuation is the fact that the role of the SADF in a system which was condemned as a crime against humanity, and its nature as an aggressor in a war of its own making, is rendered invisible. However, this is precisely what makes Thompson's text so interesting. In removing the soldiers from their context, she is able to sidestep the stigma and taboo regarding their experiences in the "new" South Africa. The same holds true for the political evacuation present in the soldiers own narratives. The divorce of the conscripts from their stigmatised context creates a space through literature where alternative experiences of the SADF – in addition to those which are already known – can be heard. In Thompson's work, these alternative experiences are those of the suffering and victimisation of SADF soldiers. Thompson's work and the personal memoirs individualise and humanise the SADF and, in doing so, subvert the monolithic image of the SADF as an uncomplicated perpetrator of Apartheid. While the political evacuation is very problematic, the fact that it occurs at all signals the tensions in the way in which the SADF soldiers are remembered, and highlights an attempt to alter it. The construction of these soldiers as "victims" appeals to the notion of "shared pain" which is, according to the likes of Freedom Park, common to all South Africans in the aftermath of Apartheid. It renders them as the kind of individual – one who is acknowledged as a "victim" of Apartheid – who can be included on the Wall of Names. The political evacuation veils the antagonism of ideologies between the Liberation struggle and the Border War, and enables the soldiers to be rendered amongst those who belong in the "new" South Africa, instead of as perpetrators against its ideals of freedom and humanity.[42]

---

[42] It is fascinating how Sanders also points out that even with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's final report, the "picture, the image of apartheid occupies a central place, despite a generic phrasing of the act […] that entirely avoids the word. Apartheid is, in a word, repressed" (2007: 37). Similarly, he also indicates the fact that the perpetrators of gross human rights violations were divorced from their own actions as perpetrators, explaining how "by offering perpetrators the chance to make good on their own behalf [by coming forward and testifying], the commission, in the exceptional cases when the chance was taken, created a sense that

The experience of the Border War is resurrected through these texts in order to subvert the limited, predominantly negative image of the SADF which is perpetuated through existing knowledge. These texts, as public cultural productions, can be put into conversation with the events at Freedom Park. The fact that Thompson does attempt to frame these men as victims is very interesting, and might indeed gesture to the same concerns explored through the Freedom Park Fracas. While this may be, it is important to note that these English Border texts are not necessarily in direct response to any single event. Instead, it is more useful to see them as indications of a climate of anxiety with regard to the way the SADF is remembered in public culture, and the place of the veterans and their communities within the national identity as a result of this.

Thompson's work and the work of other English texts like hers, while interesting for the anxieties which they signal, are problematic. In order to present alternative information about the SADF, they must necessarily divorce the SADF from the history of Apartheid atrocity which stigmatises it. This is not only historically inaccurate, but also politically irresponsible. However, a recent cultural production does exist which manages to raise the anxieties of the Border War texts in a much more productive, nuanced and useful way. The re-staging of Anthony Akerman's play, *Somewhere on the Border* (2012, first written in 1983), revives the conscript experience of the Border War in a way which at once subverts the stigmatised image of the SADF, but still allows for this stigma to co-exist. While I acknowledge that these two cultural productions are from different genres, and as such any comparison would be unfair, I address Akerman's work as part of the conversation which these English Border War texts raise.[43] Through the experiences of five young conscripts during their national

---

perpetrators may have acted as a proxy for, and thus performatively separated themselves from, a former violator-self" (2007: 11-12). The work done by Thompson's text, as well as the assertions made by Sanders, seem to speak to a similar attempt to sidestep the stigma associated with perpetration in order to enable an alternative rendering of these individuals within a "united" nation. The function of this alternative rendering in the TRC is evident in its role as a nation-building project, but the way it functions in relation to Thompson's book will be explored at a future point in this study.

[43] There is also significant work which can be done, for example, in a comparative study between Border War texts which are written and those which are performed. A fascinating study which I would like to explore outside of this investigation would be why theatre is perhaps a better suited medium through which to explore the issues which have been presented by the re-emergence of the Border War into public culture. However, the aim of this thesis is an investigation into the way the SADF experience is being revived in order to re-negotiate belonging in the "new" South Africa. As such, this is not an avenue which can be pursued within the present study.

service in the Border War, the restaging of Anthony Akerman's play, *Somewhere on the Border*, complicates the way victimhood can be understood in the aftermath of Apartheid.

A Complicated Victimhood: Anthony Akerman's "Somewhere on the Border"

Akerman, himself an ex-conscript, wrote *Somewhere on the Border* while in self-imposed exile in Holland in 1982. It was intercepted in the mail in September 1983 on its way to playwright Athol Fugard in South Africa, and subsequently banned. Akerman cites the Directorate of Publications which ruled that, according to the Publications Act, the play was found "harmful to public morals" due to the obscene and indecent language, and "prejudicial to the safety of the state, the general welfare or the peace and good order" due to the fact that it cast the SADF "in an extremely bad light" (Akerman, 2012: xxxii). The banning of the play on these grounds is significant, considering that *Somewhere on the Border* was indeed written as an anti-conscription play; Anthony Akerman asserts that he "wrote the play as a protest" and that "it was one of the voices raised against the brutalisation of the South African military and I'm still proud of that" (2012: xxvii). While it was banned from publication in South Africa, it was not banned from performance on stage, and as such, *Somewhere on the Border* was performed for the first time on African soil in 1986 at the Grahamstown Festival during a State of Emergency. It appeared again in Johannesburg in 1987, and in Durban in 1990.

The play protested the brutality of the military by exposing the experiences of five ordinary conscripts, characters who, according to Akerman, were based on his own experiences, as well as the experiences of other ex-SADF soldiers whom he had spoken to (Akerman 2012: xii). Doug Campbell, the character around whom the play primarily revolves, is the liberal Englishman, who does not believe in the army or the legitimacy of the war but, in order to survive, is forced to betray his ideals. Paul Marais is a good hearted Afrikaans boy with Christian values who, after witnessing the casualties of an attack they carry out on an "enemy" base, finally comes to realise that the war cannot be accommodated by his religious beliefs. Trevor Mowbray is a wiry and racist Afrikaner who, along with the macho, lewd joker Hennie Badenhorst, is always looking for a good time. Both function as the ideal heteronormative masculine soldier, and reproduce Apartheid propaganda in wanting to kill "terrorists" and "Russians". There is also soft-spoken David Levitt, an English speaking Jew who does not really want to be in the army, but feels it is his duty. He is held together by his sweetheart back home to whom he writes letters. When she finally breaks up with him because he has to go to the "Border" and she can no longer wait for him, Levitt begins to fall apart. Without the girlfriend whom he, as the "ideal" soldier, is supposed to protect, he begins to question the war, and in the face of combat and death, realises he is not prepared to die for the army. In the frenzy of his epiphany, he runs out of the base camp and is killed in a surprise attack. All the conscripts fall under the command of the aggressive, violent, and abusive Bombadier Kotze, a bully with the aim of breaking the conscripts down in order to make ideal soldiers out of them. Finally, there is the "Black Actor" who, according to Akerman, "is more of a Brechtian than a naturalistic character" (2012: xii). He comes to represent "*Die Swart Gevaar*" ["The Black Danger"] of African nationalism as it was perceived by the Apartheid government, as well as an enemy soldier or "terrorist" in the final scene. He also represents the oppressed masses, those classified as "non-white" under the Apartheid regime, as well as an image of freedom – an "avenging angel, freedom fighter" (2012: xii) according to the playwright.

In presenting the SADF as five young conscripts and their Bombadier, Akerman's play, like Thompson's work, individualises the coherent image of the SADF as a unified force of Apartheid violence. It demonstrates that a system, even one such as Apartheid, is made up of individuals who, in the case of conscription, came from very different backgrounds, religions, cultures, and even races, and had varied views and levels of political or moral awareness about the war. It pluralises and humanises the military machine of the Apartheid regime by exposing the SADF soldiers as complicated, conflicted human subjects, who cannot easily be classified as either for or against Apartheid, and who do not measure up to the "ideal" South African male soldier. It also exposes the military system as a brutal source of victimisation for the conscripts.

Generally, this is rendered visible through the use of language in the play. Many of the reviews both during its first performances, and again more recently in contemporary South Africa, registered the atrocious, vulgar, and offensive language of the play. But this language demonstrates an important process, which is the verbal and physical abuse endured by these five young conscripts. As has been discussed in the chapters above, the Apartheid government legitimised the war effort by constructing soldiering as a core component of South African masculinity. This masculinity was strictly policed within the Apartheid state, and much of this policing was done during basic training in the form of verbal abuse or name-calling, intended to undermine the conscripts' sense of themselves in favour of an ideal heteronormative masculinity. This name-calling is explicit throughout the play, and its vulgarity is part of what got the play banned in the first place.

The vulgar language used by Bombadier Kotze is where this abuse is most evident and predominant. When Kotze is first introduced to the audience, he enters during a scuffle between Mowbray and Levitt over a cigarette. He chastises them, "I come here to inspect the guard and I find you behaving like a pair of *moffies* [queers]. Come here! Look out there. What you see? You see South Africa. What else? Blackness. *Die Swart Gevaar* [The Black Peril]. You here to watch that, not to play silly buggers!" (Akerman, 2012: 6). He insults them by insinuating that they are homosexual, and that real men would not be messing around when there is a country to protect. He compares their failure to "playing silly buggers", with the connotation of the word "bugger" once more being a reference to homosexuality, and insinuates that Mowbray and Levitt's scuffle while on duty is akin to sodomy or gay sex. In another incident, Kotze castigates Campbell while he forces the rest of the squad to do push ups:

> Listen, my man, I'm going to tell you something. [*To the others.*] You sound like a bunch of women on the job. On your feet! [...] I'm going to tell you something, Kammel, so you better listen good. You perhaps think you a big deal, but take it from me, I'm not impressed. I can eat ten of your kind before breakfast, Kammel. I'm a hard man. I take my holidays on the Caprivi Strip. I've broken men twice your size. I've heard them cry out for their mothers, Kammel [...] That's not a joke, Kammel! I don't make jokes. I straighten people out. And if you don't get into line, I'll pull a cow's cunt over your head and let a bull fuck some sense into it. (Akerman, 2012: 11)

Kotze undermines the labouring men by suggesting that they sound like prostitutes at work instead of like soldiers. He insults the ideal masculinity which they are supposed to subscribe to by suggesting that they are women. Kotze turns on Campbell, who has thus far proven to be resistant to the army and its rules. Kotze establishes himself as the ultimate soldier, so much so that he takes his "holidays in the Caprivi strip".[44]He undermines Campbell's masculinity by suggesting that Campbell is nothing more than a child who will cry out for his mother by the time he is through with him. He likens Campbell's head to a "cow's cunt", which is in need of a bull to "fuck some sense into it". This suggests that Campbell's subversive ideals and thoughts about the war are senseless, and that Campbell is like a woman who needs a good "fuck" to straighten him out. This incredibly offensive and derogatory language is used not only to humiliate Campbell by undermining his identity as a "man", but also functions as a double edged sword in doing violence to the subjectivities of women and homosexuals as well.[45] Finally, Kotze's alteration of Campbell's name to "Kammel" indicates that undermines Campbell's sense of self in an attempt to "break" him. By doing this, he asserts that the army decides his identity – "Wrong, Kammel! I tell you what is your name" (Akerman, 2012: 10) – and who he is at present is not good enough.

Through Kotze's abuse, the army is very clearly defined as an exclusive place which is only for "white", heteronormative males. When Levitt returns from home with a cake baked by his mother, which he and the rest of the conscripts sit down to share, Kotze crushes the cake underfoot, saying, "What you bringing this woman rubbish in here? This is a army camp. Don't dirty this bungalow up with bitch cakes" (Akerman, 2012: 52). The army is very clearly not a place for anything feminine or female, in this case, an association with the domestic. Similarly, after an unsatisfactory inspection, he yells, "For crying out loud, just look at the floor [...] This is not a *kafferhok* [kaffir cage]" (Akerman, 2012: 21). While in the play the Afrikaans word "hok" is defined as "cage", a more accurate Afrikaans translation is "sty" or "pen" where animals are kept. "Black" people, as they were defined under the Apartheid government, are simultaneously rendered as filthy animals by this racist epithet. Kotze uses this racist remark to compare the conscripts' bungalow to a sty, suggesting it is filthy. At the same time he threatens their ideal and dominant "white" subjects by suggesting they are like "black" people. Once again this disturbing language is a double edged sword, at once undermining the conscripts' claim to the ideal of "whiteness", and undermining and offending the subjectivity of those considered "non-white" by the Apartheid regime.

---

[44] The Caprivi Strip was an operational combat area cleared out between Namibia and Angola.

[45] Drewett refers to this kind of name-calling in the army as "the obvious sexism of using the term 'girl' as an insult" (2008: 102), and the same applies to using the term "gay". Using these terms as insults suggests that being female or homosexual are negative things to be. There is much more to be said on the gender policing as it occurred in Apartheid South Africa, both for males and females, as well as the kinds of subversion that took place, however this is not within the scope of this investigation. This investigation does not exhaust the issue of gender in the army.

Besides verbal abuse, Kotze is also responsible for the physical abuse of the conscripts. When Kotze finds Mowbray and Levitt scuffling, he knocks their heads together while yelling at them. During an unsatisfactory bungalow inspection, he swings at Mowbray and knocks him to the ground, right after making him crush a lit cigarette in his fist. When Campbell is resisting his authority, Kotze grabs a fold of his skin and twists it while making Campbell call out what colour it is. He also makes the conscripts do senseless drills, sending Campbell to run and fetch a leaf from a tree, and upon his return, telling him it's the wrong leaf, and sending him back again.

The audience sees the abuse and identity policing become internalised and self-perpetuate through the interactions between the soldiers themselves. At one stage, Campbell's resistance to Kotze's authority gets the whole squad into trouble and their weekend passes are cancelled. To get back at him, the entire squad, including the mild Christian, Marais, strip him naked before the audience and cover his genitals in shoe polish. They, in place of Kotze, physically violate and shame him for his subversive behaviour against the ideal of soldiering. They literally attack his masculinity through the very thing biologically associated with being male, and with that which is, within the construction of heteronormative masculinity, most associated with male power. The way Campbell undermines soldiering is not simply undermining the myth of his own masculinity, but also becomes "a form of gender treachery" (Drewett, 2008: 102), where the identities and lived experiences of others are implicated and come under threat by his subversive behaviour. As a result, Campbell's subversive behaviour is punished by his fellow conscripts, instead of by the Apartheid state or authority figures. Similarly, the soldiers verbally police one another in the same way the audience is used to hearing Kotze speak. For instance, when getting ready for inspection Mowbray is resistant, "I don't gotta stand no bladdy inspection" (Akerman, 2012: 18), to which Badenhorst replies, using the same gender "othering" used to police the ideal heteronormative masculinity, "Do something to your bed, Mowbray, it looks like a used *poeslap* [cunt rag]" (Akerman, 2012: 18).

The brutalisation of the conscripts by the military is also evident in the individual character development of each of the conscripts. The most explicit example is of the main protagonist, Campbell. Campbell is a subversive character who does not support the army. From the beginning of the play there is the suggestion that he has been causing trouble for the army. Campbell gives Marais an ambiguous answer when Marais asks him whether he has been in the detention barracks in Pretoria. He doesn't subscribe to the same rules which the other soldiers so stringently follow. He is messy in the bungalow despite the rigorous inspections, deliberately dropping cigarette ash on the floor, and meditating on his bed which all the other conscripts keep ironed square. He shows a lack of interest when Levitt tries to help him learn how to set up his bed for inspection. This behaviour puts him at constant odds with the Bombadier throughout the play, with Campbell repeatedly undermining his authority. He pretends not to understand Afrikaans when the Bombadier gives him orders, corrects the Bombadier every time he deliberately calls him "Kammel",

> **CAMPBELL:** Could you repeat that in English, please Bombadier?
> **KOTZE:** *Jou ma se moer.* [Go fuck yourself.] You see how these men are shitting off, Kammel? You know why, Kammel? Because you are full of shit, Kammel.
> **CAMPBELL**: My name's Campbell, Bombadier.
> **KOTZE:** Is that so?
> **CAMPBELL:** Yes, Bombadier.
> **KOTZE:** Wrong Kammel! I tell you what is your name.
> **CAMPBELL:** My name's Campbell, Bombadier. (Akerman, 2012: 10)

He continually asserts his identity as his own, keeping his name regardless of what the Bombadier says. He refuses to allow the army to begin to mould who he is, because he sees through what the army is actually doing. This dissent is shown, on various occasions throughout the play, in Campbell's views that go against the army and demonstrate that he has not been taken in by the Apartheid propaganda or politics. During an argument with Kotze, he reveals his apathy for the war, and the fact that he does not subscribe to the Apartheid rhetoric about the "Border" and what the SADF are doing there:

> **KOTZE**: [...] Kammel, there's a war on the go. People is laying down their life for your freedom and you don't take the effort to shave. You letting down the whole side. Don't you care man?
> **CAMPBELL**: Not really Bombadier.
> **KOTZE**: What you say? [...] You lower than shark shit, Kammel. So don't try and put yourself on my level.

> **CAMPBELL**: I won't, Bombadier.
> **KOTZE**: You think you different. But it's us against them, Kammel, and you on our side if you like it or not.
> **CAMPBELL**: That's not what I believe Bombadier. (Akerman, 2012: 22)

Campbell does not care about the army, and does not believe in the reasons for the war. He also does not subscribe to the view that it is "us or them", or that he even has to pick a side at all. Indeed, one of his first lines in the play is "Like I wasn't really into making choices" (Akerman, 2012: 16). His ironic comment to Kotze that he will not try to be on his level signals his disdain for the army. He undermines Kotze's authority by asserting his views and standing his ground in spite of Kotze's abuse and attempts to break him. He further demonstrates his awareness of what is really happening on the "Border' during a discussion with Marais:

> **CAMPBELL**: Hey well, I tune you the way I view it: if there was no apartheid, there'd be no war.
> **MARAIS:** In my own life I've never been unkind to the black man.
> **CAMPBELL**: Not you, Paul. Like it's the whole thing.
> [...]
> **MARAIS:** I'm against Apartheid.
> **CAMPBELL:** But you don't mind going up to the Border?
> **MARAIS:** You have to defend your country.
> **CAMPBELL:** Is that what you think?
> **MARAIS:** Don't you love South Africa?
> **CAMPBELL:** I don't hate Angola.
> **MARAIS:** That's where the terrorists come from.
> **CAMPBELL:** Hey, Paul, think man. What we doing in Angola? We fighting a colonial war.
> **MARAIS**: But the SWAPO is fighting us.
> **CAMPBELL**: Didn't you say you have to defend your country? Maybe they think like you. (Akerman, 2012: 44-5)

Campbell is able to identify the war within the larger context of decolonisation in Africa. he also identifies Apartheid as a means to oppress so-called African nationalism within South Africa's own borders. He undermines the notion of the SADF as an unthinking, brutal, violent killing machine. He recognises that Apartheid is a system, and that while individuals may not be unkind or racist, they operate within, and support, a system which is. As such, he subscribes to the idea that the system can be undermined on an individual basis. Marais spouts language which rings with Apartheid war rhetoric and propaganda, and gives the sense that he believes it wholeheartedly. Campbell subverts these beliefs by once again complicating the binary between "us and them". This demonstrates his humanity in the way in which he perceives the combatants of the war.

However, even Campbell does not escape the brutality of the military, and he is finally forced into a situation where he must betray his ideals in order to survive. Not only is he faced with relentless abuse from the Bombadier and his fellow conscripts for his subversive behaviour, but the audience finally discovers the reason Campbell ultimately came to the army. He explains to Marais that he had been caught by the MPs (Military Police) and taken to Pretoria, where he was thrown into One Mil Hospital after telling them what he thought about the war. He decided that he would stay in the mental hospital if it meant he didn't have to go to war, "And me, I thought I was crafty. I had a rap with this psychiatrist and I tuned him this and that and I blocked for Africa. Like if you had to be fucked in the head to be exempted from killing people, I could get into that" (Akerman, 2012: 46). However, they start to treat him with drugs, "feeding me on medication, these full-on downers, like to break my resistance" (Akerman, 2012: 45). He also finds out that they are treating people with Electroshock Therapy if they do not want to go to the "Border". After witnessing the effects of the treatment on a fellow patient, he decides he would rather be conscripted. He joins the army, believing he will be able to stand by his ideals irrespective. This is witnessed in a comment he makes to Levitt, whom he tells "Don't let yourself get taken within yourself" (Akerman, 2012: 16). In other words, even if he is physically conscripted into the army, within himself, he is against it. This is, in part, why Campbell is untouchable by Kotze's abuse of his masculinity, because while he is in the army, he does not subscribe to its ideals, and is therefore not threatened when he falls short of them.

It is only once Kotze places Campbell in a position where his ideals literally cannot save him that Campbell is forced to betray them. In the final scene, Campbell stands in the aftermath of an attack on a perceived enemy base. A wounded enemy soldier is at his feet. Kotze stands holding the wounded soldier's gun,

> **KOTZE:** [...] Finish him off Campbell.
> **CAMPBELL:** What?
> **KOTZE:** That enemy. You know how to use your bayonet.
> **CAMPBELL:** He's wounded.

> **KOTZE:** Do him a favour then. Put him out of his misery. Give him a bullet.
> **CAMPBELL:** No. I can't.
> **KOTZE:** Yes. You can.
>
> KOTZE *points the Black Actor's AK47 at* CAMPBELL.
>
> It's you or him Campbell, it always has been.
>
> *This tableau is held for a moment, then* CAMPBELL *raises the rifle, points it at the* BLACK ACTOR, *and fires. The shot rings out the theatre is plunged into darkness.* (Akerman, 2012: 81)

Campbell is represented at once as a victim of the Apartheid state's systematic abuse and coercion, and as a perpetrator of human rights violations by shooting an injured, unarmed soldier. While Campbell has done his best throughout the play to complicate the binary between "us and them", he is forced into a situation by Kotze where what is at stake is his own life. There is no blurring of the lines when the choice is between his own life or death. The military has forced him into a position where he must betray his ideals in order to live. As the final tableau suggests, the SADF transforms everyone to its own ends by forcing conscripts into a position where, regardless of their personal beliefs, in combat the choice is between one's own life and death. Not even the most informed and politically aware men such as Campbell can hope to get away.

Therefore, as an anti-conscription play, Akerman's production serves as a warning. It resonates with the same appeal as a poster by the End Conscription Campaign, bearing the slogan, "I am terrified of what I will be forced to become for my country" (Drewett, 2008: 109). The play bears witness to the victimisation and brutalisation of the young conscripts by the military system of the SADF, and exposes the flaws in the "ideal" SADF soldier and the vulnerabilities of the conscripts; while the *Grensvegter* is eternally brave, aggressive, and victorious, real soldiers are human, mortal, and vulnerable. The SADF is humanised through the exposition of the conscripts as vulnerable, complex characters. This interrupts the rhetoric surrounding the SADF as a place which transforms boys into men by suggesting that, in fact, it strips them of their agency, breaks them and turns them into monsters. Looking simply at the experiences of the conscripts in this play, I was compelled to feel sympathy for them, and to view the "real" enemy as the Apartheid state and the brutal military system. The play does, indeed, render the SADF "in an extremely bad light" (Akerman, 2012: xxxii) in an attempt to dissuade citizen support of the war and conscript sign up. In so doing, the SADF conscripts are rendered in such a way as to evoke sympathy as having been brutalised by the Apartheid regime.

The controversial play was met with wide critical acclaim, with reviews praising it as "a report from hell. It is an impassioned, horror-struck revolt against the brutalisation of militarism and the morons, political and otherwise, who are responsible" (Tyler, 1990: 15). Another asserted that is was "a powerful and perceptive examination of our society" (Thamm, 1986: 5). Yet another said how "The play hits out unsparingly at the futility, the ugliness, the hopelessness and the waste of war. It spells out the sense of danger, the desperation, the fear" (Meijer, 1990). The sentiments of the reviews reveal how the play had succeeded in raising awareness and encouraging audiences to "think again" (Tyler, 1990: 15) about what the military was really all about. Unsurprisingly, it encountered resistance from the authorities, and barely an hour before they were to appear on stage in 1987, the actor's uniforms were confiscated by the police. Similarly in Johannesburg in 1987, two actors were attacked after the play by pro-military audience members, with one of them being hospitalised. The irony that a play exposing the brutality of the South African military system and the policing of the masculine soldier identity should be met with such violence from the security forces emphasises its purpose as an anti-conscription play.

However, with its restaging in contemporary South Africa, this play is no longer an anti-conscription play. In the aftermath of Apartheid and the Border War, the play, and its rendering of the SADF conscripts as victims of a brutal Apartheid military system, takes on new meanings and begins to signal a different set of concerns. Since its run in 2011 at the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown, and then again in 2012 in Cape Town and Johannesburg, it has received wide critical attention and acclaim. The shift in why it is now significant in present day South Africa begins to reveal itself through the way in which the reviews have praised it.

Many of them signal the play's significance in the light of the trauma the war caused to conscripts: "A country at war is a country which inflicts serious psychological damage onto its people, both the soldiers it sends to war and to the civilians who know and love those soldiers [...] This is the story of how the South African Border War or the Angolan Bush War

(1966-1989) tore into the lives of those involved" (Swardt, 2012). Similarly, another asserts how "Many of the young men who served their military conscription were damaged by the experience. Physically and emotionally, they were scarred by the brutal way their superiors treated them, or from the moral abhorrence of killing an enemy because their skin was a different colour" (Stones, 2012). The play has become an instance where the brutality of the war and the military system is acknowledged not as a warning for potential conscripts, but in retrospect, as something which still causes suffering amongst the veterans who are living in contemporary South Africa. The reviews, in the same way as the recent English Border War memoirs discussed in previous chapters, assert this play as breaking the silence, "After almost two decades of silence, the border war has forced its way back into public discourse and this production of Somewhere on the Border is part of that dialogue" (The Market Theatre, 2012). It is seen as an instance where " 'The Forgotten War', is being drawn back to the attention of South Africans as 'the Lost Generation' is acknowledged and given space to tell their stories" (Swardt, 2012).

One of the play's successes is in literally recreating an experience, on a public stage, of something which was silenced and censored for many years by the Apartheid government. Through its use of army language (both atrocious and distinctive) , its props and costume which replicate those used in the SADF, and even the characters which have been criticised in reviews as perhaps somewhat "stereotypical", it reconstructs a world which was denied during Apartheid, and stigmatised in its aftermath. As theatre, it renders it visible before the audience as a slice of the past, played out literally before their eyes in a way which the private experience of reading a memoir cannot. It is a literal revival and resurrection of the past on stage. As a result, it has been the occasion for the start of a discussion about conscription (something which this paper has shown has not entered into public culture as yet except in a very limited and necessarily negative light). Akerman shares that he is often approached after performances by SADF veterans, "The conversation starts, 'I haven't spoken about the army in 15 years'" (Akerman, personal communication 2012, February 22). It has provided a catalyst to discuss the SADF and the men who were a part of it. It has also, Akerman says, provided the opportunity for an "intergenerational dialogue", as many of the children of the veterans are now of the age where they would have been conscripted (Akerman, personal communication 2012, February 22).

That the play has become a kind of platform for the expression of the conscript's traumatic experiences harks back to the language of the TRC. The idea of "telling stories" in order to know the "truth" about a specific event in a public forum is similar to some of the core functions of the TRC. However, in the aftermath of Apartheid, and in the light of all the atrocities that *have* been revealed about the SADF, however limited, this play is not simply something which allows an uncomplicated narrative of these men as victims. The play is indeed subversive in showing an alternative experience of the SADF – one which is individualised and humanised – and as such complicates the monolithic image of the SADF as an abhorrent perpetrator of Apartheid violence and atrocity. It does complicate the notion of victimhood as it is understood in contemporary South Africa by providing a new understanding of conscription. However, it is here where the role of the "Black Actor" becomes absolutely significant, as it creates a productive tension within the play, reminding the audience why the SADF were on the "Border" in the first place. In a contemporary context, this sidesteps the pitfalls of works such as Thompson's, and does not allow the audience to shy away from the contestations of victimhood as they are grappled with in the "new" South Africa.

The "Black Actor" has few lines, but his mere presence in the play is subversive. He mocks them with the irony of his presence in the camp. While the Bombadier and the conscripts are concerned with the enemy "out there", he is ever present within the fences and barracks. The fact that he plays a worker on the base, as well as the enemy soldier in the final scenes, blurs the lines which distinguish who the "enemy" is. In the opening scene, while Levitt has his back turned watching the danger that is somewhere "out there" in the audience (the same place Kotze gestures to when explaining the "blackness" that they are defending South Africa against), the "Black Actor" crosses the stage and fires a mock shot at him. Clearly, the "enemy" is already amongst the soldiers, and he is not who the soldiers think he is. The very fact that the audience is gestured to on multiple occasions and identified as "blackness" and danger signals the play's blurring of who is considered an "enemy". The "Black Actor's" presence begins to undermine the legitimacy of the war by exposing the fact that while the Apartheid government's rhetoric claimed to be fighting a war against communism "somewhere on the border", the real aim of the conflict was the continued oppression of South African citizens classified as "non-white". His presence shows the soldiers up as part of that oppression, and mocks them while they express their delusions about who they are fighting. This is further seen when he mocks the soldiers during training. He pretends to march along with them, a humorous imitation of the men. He is a reminder that while the soldiers are training to fight the enemy in Angola and on the "Border", this enemy does not in fact exist as the Apartheid government says it does, and the people whom the soldiers are really fighting are actually amongst them, fellow (oppressed) South African citizens. This renders their training pointless and laughable, and shows the soldiers up as believing puppets of Apartheid propaganda.

His treatment at the hands of the conscripts also reminds the audience that the SADF were the armed forces of a racist, oppressive and hateful regime.

> **MOWBRAY**: Hey Sambo! You know what we gonna do? We gonna shoot those baboon cousins of yours in Angola.
> **BLACK ACTOR**: Baas?
> MOWBRAY: You better be a good boy or you get the same. See?
> [...]
> Before he fucks off I want to see a kaffir dance.
> **BADENHORST**: Ag Trev, the ou's got work to do.
>
> MOWBRAY *points his rifle at the* BLACK ACTOR
>
> **MOWBRAY**: Let's see you do a war dance.
> **MARAIS**: Put down the rifle.
> **MOWBRAY**: Fuck you. It's a free country.
> **LEVITT**: What's the ou done to you?
> **MOWBRAY**: I want to see what you people do before you fight.
> **BADENHORST**: Listen Sam, don't worry over him, see. I give you this packet of smokes if you dance.
> **MOWBRAY**: That's an offer you can't refuse.
> **BLACK ACTOR**: I'm not smoke Baas.
> **MOWBRAY**: He's a clever kaffir.
> **BADENHORST:** Here's fifty cents then.
>
> *He throws the coin at the* Black Actor's *feet.*
> *[...]*
> *The BLACK ACTOR does a gumboot dance. The others also throw coins at his feet. The dance becomes increasingly defiant and explosive.* (Akerman, 2012: 54-5)

The "Black Actor" is abused and humiliated by Mowbray who uses a derogatory racial epithet against him, and forces him to dance at gunpoint. His agency is completely stripped from him, and his use of the term "Baas" denotes the servitude and subjugation of those considered "non-white" by the Apartheid regime under the rule of "white" supremacy. The word evokes a power relationship where the "Black Actor" is rendered powerless. Despite the attempts of Badenhorst and the other conscripts to calm the situation, and even their clear expressions that they do not believe what Mowbray is doing is right, in paying the "Black Actor" instead of making Mowbray stop, they are complicit in Mowbray's oppressive demonstration. Mowbray's words to the "Black Actor" expose the Apartheid regime's agenda in sending troops up to fight on the "Border" – there is no difference between shooting an enemy "out there", and shooting oppressed South African citizens within the "borders".

The paradox the "Black Actor" presents for the way in which the notion of "victimhood" can be understood within the play was registered succinctly by one of the reviews. One reviewer from TimesLIVE asserted "One feels sorry for the characters and for the generation of men they represent. But at the risk of sounding cold and unsympathetic, one is reminded by 'the black actor', that, as a class, fighting the war was just about the only price white South African men paid for all the benefits they gained from apartheid" (May, 2012). The presence of the "Black Actor" highlights the fact that there are two contesting narratives within the play. This is also something which Ndinomolo Ndilula, the actor who played the "Black Actor" in the performances of 2011 and 2012, asserted during an interview. One of the predominant experiences he relates is his awareness, as an actor on stage, of the audience, and the discomfort his character brings to the fore in a play where the victimhood of young "white" conscripts is subject: "I sometimes feel, not so much an unwillingness to engage with the character, but within the audience I feel a sort of shame or a wanting to sort of distance themselves from him. Whenever he enters he breaks the story, because you want to feel for these boys, you want to love them because they too are hurt, and then he comes in, and then they do what they do to him and it sort of breaks that" (Ndilula, personal interview, 2012 March 13).

Ndilula registers the "Black Actor" as an interruption of the rendering of the SADF soldiers as victims of the Apartheid regime. It forces a consideration of what it means to view the SADF as victims of Apartheid when they are complicit in its implementation and the oppression of the majority of South Africa's population classified as "non-white" by the Apartheid government. However, Ndilula relates how it is a discomfort felt by both "black" and "white" audience members alike, "For most black people the whole situation is always so strange when you say, you know, people were hurt, and that's why the 'Black Actor' coming on to stage is also so discomfiting because you say, these boys were there by force and they were hurt and they are victims, yet still, you know, they did this" (Ndilula, personal interview, 2012 March 13). On the one hand, the play is able to provide an experience which has otherwise not been exposed within public culture in South Africa. It confronts the stigmatisation of SADF narratives, but at the same time, provides a reminder of why this information has been stigmatised to begin with. Ndilula makes clear that these multiple realities co-exist within the play, creating complex tensions between different versions of history. In his role as the "Black Actor" he feels "I'm in a whole different play, that's how I sort of see it" (Ndilula, personal interview, 2012 March 13).

The co-existence of these two narratives within the play – what Ndilula refers to as "my text and the real text" (Ndilula, personal interview, 2012 March 13) – and the discomfort which Ndilula registers from the audiences of multiple races, highlights why the play is a successful rendering of the complex and contested notion of victimhood in the "new" South Africa. Instead of divorcing the SADF from their context within Apartheid, as in Thompson's text, Akerman immerses the context within the play where it surfaces every time the "Black Actor" appears, or whenever one of the soldiers makes a racist slur. The careful nuance the play constructs around victimhood is made especially blatant in the altered ending of the play. In the printed text, Campbell shoots the "Black Actor", however, in its recent re-staging in 2011 and 2012 the ending is left open and ambiguous. The lights are blacked out as the gunshot rings out, and audience is not sure whether Kotze shoots Campbell, which would redeem Campbell for sacrificing himself for the greater ideals of freedom and humanity, or whether Campbell chooses to shoot the "Black Actor", in which case, he is complicit in Apartheid and becomes a perpetrator, despite his humane and liberal ideals. The staging of the play preserves the complexity of "victimhood" as it emerges through this subject matter, which has been seen to have wider echoes in South African public culture. The play, in producing and cultivating this complexity of victimhood, highlights some of the anxieties that arise when considering that "victimhood" is part of what is considered by the likes of Freedom Park to be "common" to all South Africans in the Aftermath of Apartheid.

Conclusion

The Border War has been resurrected in contemporary South Africa through cultural productions such as Thompson's book *An Unpopular War*, and the revival of Akerman's play, *Somewhere on the Border*. What work do texts such as these do? What ambitions and anxieties to they reveal about the ways in which the SADF is remembered in the Aftermath of Apartheid? The work these texts do is part of an attempt to grapple with the notion of victimhood as it is understood in the aftermath of Apartheid. What is known about the SADF is limited. The Apartheid state-sanctioned secrecy, specifically pertaining to the experiences of its defence forces, kept the experiences of these soldiers – both the atrocious and the mundane – silent and censored. Furthermore, Apartheid propaganda and public culture created and perpetuated a romanticised image of the war and soldiering, which remained intact despite the attempts of literary works such as those classified as *Grensliteratuur* to undermine these popular beliefs and myths.

While the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established after the end of Apartheid in order to shed light on some of the secrets of Apartheid oppression, it provided a limited and negative image of the SADF. Firstly, it could only illuminate events pertaining to the gross violation of human rights, which rendered many experiences under Apartheid invisible, not simply with regard to the SADF. Secondly, even while the TRC set up a Special Hearing for conscripts, the presence of the SADF was limited due to the conscripts personal reservations towards the process. Finally, because the armed forces were classified as "combatants", they could not apply to testify as victims of gross human rights violations in the same was that "protected persons" could. This was not to say they could never testify as victims, but even amongst those who did choose to testify, hardly any did so as victims, choosing not to assert themselves in this way. As a result, the few submissions that were made at the TRC by the SADF rendered the SADF soldiers, whether conscripted or not, predominantly as perpetrators of gross human rights violations.

Besides the TRC, there has been no further attempt to provide a platform for the experiences of these soldiers. As a result, what is known about these soldiers is extremely negative. This is aggravated by the fact that the identity of the soldier, specifically in a South African context, is associated with violence, aggression, and crime. The negative image of the SADF as a monolithic perpetrator of Apartheid violence has served to stigmatise any further information which could be known about the soldiers who were a part of it. It is this stigmatisation which the emerging cultural productions, such as Thompson and Akerman's work, interrupt. It is not contested that SADF were indeed perpetrators of Apartheid atrocity. However, by providing a humanised rendering of the SADF as complex, individual soldiers, through giving an account of their experiences of brutalisation and victimisation under the Apartheid military system, these texts provide an alternative rendering of the SADF to what is already known. This complicates the monolithic image of the SADF as an ultimate perpetrator, and attempts a more complex understanding of these men.

However, within works such as Thompson's, this is done in a problematic way. The SADF soldiers are divorced from their political context within the framing of Thompson's text, as well as within the individual soldiers' narratives, and cast as uncomplicated victims of the Apartheid military system. This political evacuation sidesteps the stigmatisation of these men's stories, because it avoids the association of their narratives with the stigmatised SADF and Apartheid. However, this is politically irresponsible and misleading, and renders the atrocities that were committed by the SADF invisible. The restaging of Akerman's play, however, provides a more nuanced and complex rendering of these men as both victims and perpetrators. The play, through a literal manifestation of five conscripts' army experience of brutality and victimisation, does provide an alternative understanding of conscription and the SADF. However, it does not allow this victimhood to remain uncomplicated, and through the presence of the Black Actor, and the play's ambiguous ending, it maintains the complexities of the notion of victimhood with regard to the SADF soldiers.

The significance of what Thompson and Akerman's texts attempt and grapple with becomes apparent when put into conversation with a controversy such as the "Freedom Park Fracas". The Freedom Park debate highlighted a contestation regarding the classification of "victimhood" as a requirement for inclusion on the Wall. Because Freedom Park was asserted as a place where South Africans could build a new nation through the recognition of shared pain, the exclusion of the SADF from the Wall also excluded the remaining veterans and their communities from one of the most public and fundamental processes of nation building since the TRC. This creates anxieties regarding who "belongs" in the "new" South Africa. As it stands, the soldiers are cast as perpetrators against the ideals of freedom and humanity which the Park asserts the "new" South Africa is built on. Their exclusion throws into question what subjectivity the remaining veterans and communities are able to occupy in the aftermath of Apartheid.

The framing of the SADF as victims by the recent Border War texts resonates with broader issues of the role of "victimhood" in South Africa's national identity in the aftermath of Apartheid. Providing alternative representations of the SADF soldiers as victims indicates an attempt to negotiate the terms of belonging in the "new" South Africa on the basis of "shared pain". The problem of political evacuation in Thompson's text, and the complexities and nuances maintained in the way Akerman's play presents the notion of victimhood, is indicative of the contested nature of victimhood as a qualification for belonging in the "new" South Africa. There is no resolution to the complexities and contestations of victimhood as they stand. Even as I write, an SADF veteran group on the social media site, Facebook,[46] has just this week seen a sudden influx of ex-conscripts responding to a deeply traumatic experience posted by a veteran in this online forum. What I have hoped to do with this paper is signal the ways in which the notion of "shared pain" is problematic when considering contesting versions of a traumatic past. This is especially so when it is this "shared pain" which is used as a qualification for belonging. The resurrection of the border War through the emerging cultural productions in contemporary South Africa signals this inadequacy, and is an attempt to renegotiate the notion of "shared pain" in the aftermath of Apartheid. This is demonstrated most emphatically through the urgency with which the recent English Border War texts (and the wider context of Border War cultural productions) continue to appear.

The way the past is remembered in the aftermath of Apartheid limits or excludes certain groups from being a part of the "new" South Africa. The anxieties and ambitions raised by these texts, in their revival of the Border War, signals the fact that despite the ideals of unity and reconciliation enshrined in the TRC, and their perpetuation through the kind of memorialisation which occurs at Freedom Park, South Africa is still not a unified society. While there is the attempt to negotiate these dissonant and contesting experiences of the past in order to form a unified and coherent national identity, the controversy and complexities

---

[46] https://www.facebook.com/#!/groups/331114016961618/.

forces the question of whether this unity, specifically on the basis of "shared victimhood", is actually possible.