

“WE FUMBLLED WITH BUTTONS, WE SLUNG DOWN OUR GUNS”: QUEER  
MASCULINITY IN SOUTH AFRICAN WAR LITERATURE

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation focuses on war literature from South Africa from World War II to the end of apartheid (1939-1989). In World War II, volunteers were invited to “Join the Army of Sportsmen” and be part of the “team” fighting fascism abroad. The increasing paranoia of the apartheid regime, which came to power after the war, shifted the role of the soldier from volunteer to conscript, and it shifted the idea of war from an adventure abroad to a “total onslaught” with threats coming from inside the borders of the country as well as from without. In this dissertation, I consider the way discourses of masculinity and the military intersect and constitute whiteness and heterosexuality in South Africa. I argue that the presence of same-sex desires in the military transforms it into a site of contradiction and ambiguity, what Cynthia Enloe calls “patriarchal confusion.” I examine the incoherence of a white South African soldier desiring another soldier through three novels – Tatamkhulu Afrika's *Bitter Eden*, Mark Behr's *The Smell of Apples*, and Damon Galgut's *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs*. I use Jack Halberstam's theory of queer forgetting and queer failure and José Esteban Muñoz's theory of queer time to consider the ways such soldiers, through their performance in the military, render the military strange. Against the backdrop of racist and homophobic legislation seeking to construct whiteness as heteronormative and moral, I argue that soldiers desiring soldiers queerly fail their gender, their race, and ultimately their nation.

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## CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

“Dylan was always a sensitive child. I thought the army would make a man out of him. How wrong I was.’ He *was* a man, Mr. Stassen. Really. He coped with all the PT, the training, in fact, better than most” (van der Merwe, *Moffie* 273).

In their introduction to *Defiant Desire: Gay and Lesbian Voices in South Africa*, Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron state: “Asserting a lesbian or gay identity in South Africa is ... more than a necessary act of self-expression. It is a defiance of the fixed identities – of race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality – that the apartheid system attempted to impose” (5). Apartheid, the system of racial segregation that governed South African society from 1948 to 1994, was known for its racist ideology and its history of brutal racial oppression but, as Gevisser and Cameron assert, it was an oppressive regime for anyone who defied any of its rigid boundaries, including sexual ones.

Fixed identities, and the way same-sex sexual desires can push back against their imposition, are at the heart of this dissertation.<sup>1</sup> I began this project intrigued by the depiction of two white South African men who act on their sexual desire for each other while wearing the military uniform of the apartheid state. Such an image mobilizes a variety of ideas of masculinity,

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<sup>1</sup> Racial identities are contested terms with complex histories. I have chosen to capitalize Black and Coloured because, while these are complicated terms in South Africa, capitalizing them acknowledges their construction as a specifically political – and imposed – category. “White” is also a political category, but it carries a different history; capitalizing it can also carry a different meaning, which maintains white supremacy. In capitalizing Black and Coloured but not capitalizing white I seek to acknowledge the weight of this difference.

of the military, and of sexuality. As soldiers in the South African Defence Force (SADF) the men are the “property of the state”<sup>2</sup> and it was a state that relied on normative ideas about gender and sexuality. Tiffany F. Jones confirms this: “Heteropatriarchal views of sexuality supported white male power structures, promoted binary ideas of masculinity and femininity, normalised heterosexuality and determined social roles by biological sex” (398). The military positioned itself as the site of exemplary masculinity and, through the militarization of South African society, infused all aspects of daily life in apartheid South Africa.<sup>3</sup> Daniel Conway explains: “South Africa's discourse of hegemonic masculinity and citizenship was premised on racism, authoritarianism and upon militarisation” (“Fairies” 212). It is my contention in this dissertation that for soldiers of the apartheid state to act on a moment of same-sex sexual desire is not only disobedient; their multifold subversion challenges the structures of the military itself.

This dissertation brings together discourses of sexuality, masculinity, and the military to consider the disruptive possibilities of white male soldiers experiencing sexual desires for other white male soldiers in South African war literature from World War II to almost the end of apartheid (1939-1989). I open with Gevisser and Cameron, Jones, and Conway to foreground the interconnections between these discourses. I explore these connections through the construction of same-sex sexual desire in three novels centred around the South African military: Tatamkhulu Afrika's *Bitter Eden* (2002), set in World War II, Mark Behr's *The Smell of Apples* (1995), set at the height of apartheid in the 1970s, and Damon Galgut's *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* (1991), set near apartheid's end in 1989. I argue that the South African military discursively

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<sup>2</sup> The SADF national service intake form stated the conscript would become “property of the state.”

<sup>3</sup> Jacklyn Cock defines militarization as involving “both the spread of militarism as an ideology, and an expansion of the power and influence of the military as a social institution” (“Introduction” 2).

constituted white hegemonic masculinity in order to uphold the white heteropatriarchal vision of the apartheid state. I suggest a queer rethinking of military masculinity by exploring how narratives of same-sex desire in the South African military confuse and complicate ideals of both masculinity and the apartheid military. This reading of the novels helps create a space to reconfigure assumptions about gender, sexuality, and the military.

Locating disruptive homosexual desires in the military is not unique to apartheid South Africa. As Tom of Finland's art<sup>4</sup> iconically showed, there is something erotically subversive in taking the trappings of the state's masculine disciplinary authority, found in the soldier or the police officer, and producing a transgression of power by positioning them as erotic objects that invite a male gaze. Arguably, Tom of Finland's subversion is in the upending of dominance and submission; my interest is slightly different. In the literary construction of same-sex desire between two white South African male soldiers I find queer subversion not in the erotic reversal of power but in its rejection.

I read white South African soldiers desiring other soldiers as thwarting the power and fixed identity of the military itself. To do this, I use Jack Halberstam's ideas of queer failure and queer forgetting, and José Esteban Muñoz's ideas of queer time. Halberstam considers the liberating possibilities of making mistakes, of messing up, of failing to meet heteronormative markers of success and development. Muñoz considers queer time as an escape from the stranglehold of progress. For him, queer time is a space full of possibility, located in temporal horizons unbound by logic, and in gestures that signal beyond the page – constructions of time, in

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<sup>4</sup> The art of Touko Laaksonen, known as Tom of Finland, often depicted working-class men and men in uniform as hyper-masculine and hyper-erotized, with exaggerated genitalia and muscles. His work carries a lot of ambivalence regarding power and resistance.

other words, that are unencumbered by heteronormative demands.

Same-sex sexual desire in the South African military evokes an illegibility of identity within a space that relies heavily on demarcated boundaries of known and recognizable identity categories. Halberstam and Muñoz help me read soldiers who have same-sex desires as necessarily forgetting themselves as they forget the values represented by their military uniform – a costume imbued with discourses of remembrance, patriotism, tradition, and heterosexuality. Soldiers who have same-sex desires fail to uphold the values of the state and they 'forget' themselves to do so. Halberstam and Muñoz are useful for considering the disruptive possibilities of failure and forgetting as soldiers screw up by screwing others. Such sex acts make the uniform, and the men wearing it, strange, a site of confusion rather than certainty. Their failure to correctly perform heterosexuality masculinity in the military makes them queer.

David Halperin defines queer as “*whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant” (62). Soldiers acting on their sexual desires for men in the military are, decidedly, queer. They are defying that which is “the normal, the legitimate, the dominant” – characteristics that define the military itself. At the same time, such men – *as* soldiers – remain representative of the ultimate disciplinary symbol of the nation.

Examining the relationship between masculinity and the military in South Africa helps uncover the ways patriarchal power operates. The military upholds rigid assumptions about gender and sexuality as not just meaningful but motivational; these assumptions are an existential prerequisite to the institution itself. Those who act on same-sex desires in the military subvert the military's binary logic and its reliance on fixed, legible categories; in so doing, they threaten to undo the institution and the assumptions it maintains. Looking at the manifestations of this potential subversion – found in moments of same-sex desire in the military – exposes what

Cynthia Enloe calls “patriarchal confusion” (*Globalization* 32). She explains her term:

Patriarchy routinely tries to hide its confusion. One of the tasks of researchers is to pull back the curtain of alleged coherence and rationality to reveal the confusion operating just behind it. How that modernizing patriarchal capitalist confusion – evidenced by contradictions, mixed messages, ambivalence – is superficially rationalized and disguised is a question for any analyst who seeks to make sense of the contemporary international political economy. (*Globalization* 32)

Exploring the disruptions produced by same-sex desires in the South African military exposes the nexus of whiteness, masculinity, and heterosexuality that was so integral to the apartheid regime's idea of itself. The eruption of transgressive desires in the military reveals a military identity that is not constant but conditional; it is dependent on erasing any same-sex desires that otherwise might threaten the claims to certainty upon which military masculinity rests.

Looking at same-sex sexual desire in a location as rigid as the South African military helps uncover the fraught structures upon which patriarchal constructions of power rely. I take up Sarah Bulmer's invitation to locate sites of patriarchal confusion as a “productive way to engage with increasingly complex networks of gendered power in contemporary militaries, and beyond” (141). Unpacking the seemingly inherent connections between heterosexual masculinity and the military uncovers how power operates through gender and sexuality. Because the South African military, from its early days of commandos through to the apartheid military, linked performances of masculinity to participation in the military, the military in the South African context is an especially useful site for exploring gender and sexuality. The brutal divisions enforced by the South African apartheid state depended upon the construction of a muscular, heterosexual masculinity, embodied by the white (often Afrikaner) rugby-playing soldier.

Instances of men desiring men in the military expose the fragility of the categories of identity through which apartheid operated and, in so doing, expose military masculinity as a site of confusion.

### **Fixing Identities**

Without question, apartheid relied on the fixed identities expressed by Gevisser and Cameron. Oliver Phillips emphasizes this point when he writes: “Apartheid was bent on establishing identities as immutable. It depended on and developed through the intractability of categories that were embedded socially, and embodied physically as the designated stigmata of its various subjects. Such zealous righteousness was born from a certainty that had to be categorical, so that everything was fixed and lines were not blurred” (138). Previous governments had already enacted racist legislation, such as the Natives (Urban Areas) Act of 1923<sup>5</sup> and the Representation of Natives Act of 1936.<sup>6</sup> After the National Party (NP) came to power in 1948, however, the policy of apartheid became the governing ideology, seeking to reify identity and fix it in place through the Group Areas Act 1950,<sup>7</sup> the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act 1953,<sup>8</sup> and so on. Apartheid required identities that were static and knowable.

And yet, despite the desire for certainty, race in apartheid South Africa was socially constructed and dependent on social legibility. The Population Registration Act (1950),<sup>9</sup> a

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<sup>5</sup> This law required non-whites to carry a “pass” when in urban areas; it became the basis for the increasing state control of movement.

<sup>6</sup> This law removed non-whites from the electoral roll.

<sup>7</sup> This law curbed the movements of non-whites in cities and established where to live and work based on race.

<sup>8</sup> This law segregated facilities and legislated they should not be of the same quality for different racial groups.

<sup>9</sup> The Act defines each race: 1. (iii) “‘coloured person’ means a person who is not a white person or a native;” 1. (x) “‘native’ means a person who in fact is or is generally accepted as a member of any aboriginal race or tribe of Africa;” 1. (xv) “‘white person’ means a person who in appearance obviously is, or who is generally accepted as a white person, but does not include a person who, although in appearance obviously a white person, is generally

legislative cornerstone of apartheid, regulated race by dividing the population into three racial categories of white, Coloured<sup>10</sup>, or “Bantu/Black Africans.”<sup>11</sup> Unlike the “one drop” rule, used by countries such as the United States to categorize a person as Black, in South Africa it was appearance and reputation – far more than any reliance on racist biology – that determined race. As Deborah Posel explains, “Whites were distinguished by their 'high' levels of civilization, as manifest in their levels of education and skill, as well as their relative affluence. Natives were at the bottom of the heap on the grounds of their alleged lack of civilization, education and skill; coloured occupied the middle rank” (94). Such an approach resulted in the state defining whiteness as superior, but it was always conditional, dependent on the “correct” reading – meaning there was tremendous anxiety among whites that a misreading, or misbehaviour, could threaten their social standing.

Kopano Ratele reinforces the South African definition of whiteness as contingent: “The definition of a white person in South Africa was grounded on two pillars: colour and reputation” (166). What Phillips refers to as the belief in categories that were “embedded socially” (138) helps emphasize Ratele's point that reputation – something profoundly unfixed – was key to whiteness. Geoffrey Bowker and Susan Leigh Star, in their analysis of the role of classification systems in shaping modernity, demonstrate how the government used reputation to determine

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accepted as a coloured person.” The imprecise language of racial definition in the Act points to the social construction of race; in lived practice, it meant the government could broadly interpret and arbitrarily apply racial categories.

<sup>10</sup> Arising from the racism of colonialism and reified as an identity category under apartheid, the term “Coloured” refers to people of mixed racial heritage, including European settlers, slaves from India and Malaysia, and local Khoi, Xhosa, and San. Under apartheid, Coloured was a broad category that also included Indian South Africans and Asian South Africans. In 1959, the government amended the Population Registration Act to create seven sub-groups of the “Coloured” designation: Cape Coloured, Cape Malay, Griqua, Indian, Chinese, “other Asiatic” and “other Coloured.” Coloured remains one of the main racial categories used in South Africa.

<sup>11</sup> Because “African” translates in Afrikaans as “Afrikaner,” the government used terms such as “Bantu,” “Black African” and “Native” instead.

race in apartheid South Africa. They tell the story of David Wong, a South African businessman born in China to Chinese parents. Having emigrated to South Africa, Wong had his neighbours petition the Racial Classification Board and swear affidavits that he was white. As a result, he received a white registration card (217).<sup>12</sup>

The government's use of reputation as a component of race, while lending itself to absurdity as the case of David Wong shows, also functioned as an implicit caution for white South Africans: reputation mattered. The writer Bessie Head was herself living “proof” of this. Her white mother had an affair with a Black stablehand and, when her parents discovered she was pregnant, she was “locked away” in a Pietermaritzburg mental asylum. Head asserted that her mother had been “locked up in a loony bin to save the family name” (qtd. in Nixon, *Homelands* 102).<sup>13</sup> The contingent construction of whiteness in the South African imagination meant that reputation was something to protect.

Ratele makes clear that the state was anxious to police sexuality because claims to white supremacy were dependent on behaviour: “Sexuality was harnessed in the making and elaboration of white identities and society” (169). White gay men, by their very existence in apartheid South Africa, threatened the state's claims to supremacy. Peet Pelser, Minister of Justice,<sup>14</sup> articulated this concern in a speech he gave to the House of Assembly in 1967. Connecting the decline of Greek and Roman civilizations to the prevalence of homosexuality, Pelser urged the government to destroy what he called the “viper in our midst” (qtd. in Retief 99), suggesting that homosexuality would be the “utter ruin of our spiritual and moral fibre” (qtd. in

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<sup>12</sup> The government amended the Act in 1967 to include descent as a factor in establishing race.

<sup>13</sup> Head was then adopted by a series of foster parents before becoming a ward of the state.

<sup>14</sup> Peet Pelser was Minister of Justice from 1966 to 1974.

Retief 99).<sup>15</sup>The result of this speech was an increasingly draconian law policing white homosexual activity. As Gevisser observes, the South African authorities were “expelling from the laager anything that was deemed threatening to white civilization” (31).

The growing anxiety that sexuality could weaken the white state's claims to moral superiority resulted in greater sexual prohibitions: the 1927 Immorality Act, which banned extramarital sex between whites and Blacks, was repeatedly amended (1950: banned extramarital sex between whites and non-whites; 1957: banned all sex, including undefined “indecent acts” and solicitation, between whites and non-whites, and also prohibited keeping a brothel and living off the proceeds of prostitution; 1967: broadened the definition of solicitation and increased the penalties for sex between whites and non-whites; 1969: prohibited sex toys and prohibited acts between men that would “stimulate sexual passion”). The state also saw mixed marriages as a threat to itself, first instituting the 1949 Prohibition against Mixed Marriages Act, and then amending it in 1968 to render invalid any “mixed marriages” that had occurred abroad.

The Immorality Act and the Prohibition Against Mixed Marriages Act are examples of the state trying to legislate whiteness as a moral superiority, seeking to fix in place a performance of whiteness that was heterosexual and morally sound. That they were *only* concerned with policing whiteness – prohibiting extra-marital sex between white people and other races, prohibiting mixed marriages between white people and other races, and so on – suggested the state constructed whiteness through moral terms. White men having sex with men in the military

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<sup>15</sup> Retief translates part of the speech:

history has given us a clear warning and we should not allow ourselves to be deceived into thinking that we may casually dispose of this viper in our midst by regarding it as innocent fun. It is a proven fact that sooner or later homosexual instincts make their effects felt on a community if they are permitted to run riot [...] Therefore we should be on the alert and do what there is to do lest we be saddled later with a problem which will be the utter ruin of our spiritual and moral fibre. (qtd. in Retief 99)

therefore destabilized assumptions, not just about gender and sexuality but also about race.

### **A Nation of Soldiers**

Armed defence was an integral aspect to the settler psyche in South Africa. The early Boers adapted the armed militia, used by the Dutch East India Company to recover stolen cattle, to create the commando system – a locally organized mounted defence. Sandra Swart explains the Boer identification with the commando system was all-encompassing: “The commando lay at the heart of Boer society's sense of identity, simultaneously representing defence of freedom and the structure of authority” (738). Following the defeat of the Boers in the Boer War (1899-1902), South Africa became a self-governing dominion of the British Empire in 1910. The 1912 Defence Act created a new national army, the United Defence Force (UDF), blending the British style of a standing army with the Boer style of commandos. The Act obliged all white men between seventeen and sixty to perform military service: men between seventeen and twenty-five entered four years of training in the Active Citizen Force; everyone else joined Rifle Associations with ammunition provided by the state.<sup>16</sup> These “part-time” soldiers would supplement a small permanent force of 2, 500 soldiers. The Act also created a Cadet system, which required all white boys between thirteen and seventeen to learn shooting, signalling, and other fieldcraft. Central to the Defence Act was the idea that all white men had to participate in the defence of South Africa.

The full-time force of the UDF remained small until World War I when 230,000 South Africans of all races volunteered (Seegers, *Military* 30); after the war, the government demobilized much of the military to reduce costs. The UDF grew again during World War II,

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<sup>16</sup> The state provided rifles and ammunition for all men, aged twenty-one to twenty-five, for training in Rifle Associations; all other men would receive an annual allotment of ammunition for rifle practice and could purchase rifles at special rates. The Act sought to ensure all white men had the supplies and skills to defend the country.

when 406,000 South Africans of all races volunteered (Seegers, *Military* 66) and again shrunk after the war to a full-time force of about 5,000 men. The military remained relatively small until the 1960 White Paper on Defence, which supported the NP's anxiety about perceived threats both internal and external. The military, renamed by the NP as the South African Defence Force (SADF), now became a site of government attention and growth. In 1960, the military was an almost entirely full-time Permanent Force of 9, 019 members (0.29% of the total white population). By the end of the decade, the SADF had more than 202, 460 total members (5.44% of the total white population); by 1985, the military had grown to 424, 400 (9.2% of the total white population). Put another way, between 1969 and 1985, the white population increased by 23.6%. Over the same period, the SADF grew by almost 170%. These figures continued to increase until the end of apartheid.<sup>17</sup>

These figures demonstrate the extraordinary militarization of South African society as the government increasingly believed in military solutions to maintain its hold on power. Most of the SADF's growth was due to conscription – by the mid-1970s only about ten percent of the military were professional soldiers in the Permanent Force. While a legal framework for conscription – by ballot – had been part of the Defence Act since 1912, the government had not enforced it. This changed in 1967 when the government introduced compulsory conscription (national service). This required all white men between seventeen and sixty-five to perform nine months of national service and then participate in the Citizen Force (“camps”) for nineteen days a year for five years. By 1977, the government required twenty-four months of national service, followed by thirty days a year for eight years in the “camps.” In 1982, the government further extended participation

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<sup>17</sup> I calculated these figures based on numbers provided by *The Military Balance* 1965-1988 and *The Statesman's Yearbook* 1960-1996.

in the “camps” to sixty days a year for twelve years. The growing length of national service reflected the increasing instability in the country as perceived threats from within and abroad increasingly unsettled the government. It also reflected the isolation South Africa felt due to a 1963 voluntary United Nations arms embargo and then, in 1977, a compulsory United Nations arms embargo. South Africa had few allies but perceived itself to have many enemies.

While such figures show the growing size of the South African military, they do not capture the racial makeup of the institution. Both the UDF and the SADF were primarily white institutions – Gavin Cawthra puts the figure of Black men in the SADF at less than two per cent of the military (72). Non-white men and women could volunteer but, until the end of apartheid,<sup>18</sup> the SADF employed them in separate battalions or in non-combatant roles. Nyameka Mankayi explains, “Black men were recruited and trained for armed guard duty at military installations or as drivers, clerks, store men and dog handlers. These different job descriptions according to racial groups point to the different masculinities (subordinate and dominant) that exist within the militaries” (“Race” 26). In 1963, however, the Cape Corps,<sup>19</sup> a unit of Coloured soldiers that could trace its history to the Dutch administration of Cape Town in the 1780s, became a permanent unit of the SADF. In 1973, the SADF established an all-Black unit, the 21st Battalion, and, in 1979, the SADF created tribal battalions. Black, Coloured, and Indian volunteers were

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<sup>18</sup> In 1994, the new African National Congress (ANC) government dismantled the SADF and established the South African National Defence Force (SANDF). The SANDF amalgamated the SADF and the “homeland armies” of the Transkei Defence Force, Bophuthatswana Defence Force, the Venda Defence Force, and the Ciskei Defence Force; it also integrated Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), the armed wing of the ANC, and the Pan African Congress' army, the Azanian People's Liberation Army (APLA). For a discussion of this integration, see Heinecken and Van Der Waag-Cowling.

<sup>19</sup> Successive Dutch and British colonial administrations formed and re-formed the Cape Corps until it was officially disbanded in 1870. The UDF reconstituted it in 1915 to fight in World War I. It remained part of the UDF until after World War II when the NP disbanded the unit as part of their apartheid policy. The need for labourers in the SADF led to its re-formation in 1963 as a non-combatant service corps. In 1975, due to the increasing demand for soldiers, the SADF gave the Cape Corps, renamed as the South African Cape Corps Battalion, combatant status and commissioned the first Coloured officers.

able to play support roles in the military, but these roles did not operate outside the segregation system of apartheid.

The incorporation of Black and Coloured soldiers was not a sign of weakening apartheid. As Kenneth Grundy makes clear, “The Defence Force is part of the regime it defends” (“Use of Blacks” 142). For example, the SADF required white officers to lead Black and Coloured units. As Louis Grundlingh explains, “It meant that the black soldiers would be under the constant surveillance of men who were closely involved in the implementation of the government's race policy; they could be trusted to prevent black people from acquiring ideas not commensurate with white interests” (“Non-Europeans” 543). Black and Coloured soldiers also received less pay than their white counterparts and they were not able to attain the same ranks and standings as white soldiers. Indeed, the government amended the Defence Act to ensure that a Coloured soldier would always be junior to a white officer, even if he out-ranked him.<sup>20</sup> Black and Coloured soldiers also did not receive the same public acknowledgement as white soldiers when they died in battle.<sup>21</sup> For the apartheid government, maintaining white superiority was paramount – so while non-white soldiers played a role in the military, that role was always in support of the white system.

The South African military provides a particularly clear example of the consolidation of masculinity and whiteness as mutually affirming categories. As Jacklyn Cock observes, the South African military “has always operated to defend the status quo and thus to maintain both white and male supremacy” (“Women and the Military” 161). Men who have sex with men while

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<sup>20</sup> For a discussion of the contested recruitment and role of Coloured officer, see Grundy, “Use of Blacks” 140-2.

<sup>21</sup> The SADF did not make public the names of non-white soldiers killed in action. This omission reinforced the ANC's position that the SADF used Black soldiers merely as “cannon fodder” (qtd. in Grundy, *Militarization* 24).

wearing the uniform of the state's disciplinary arm under the military's assumed connection between hegemonic masculinity and compulsory heterosexuality. Such men blur the very boundaries the military appears to uphold. I am interested in investigating that contradiction.

The gay soldier posed a problem for the South African apartheid military because it relied on conscription but also on rigid categories of identity. All white men over sixteen had to participate in the SADF. However, it was not possible to be gay in the SADF, since a homosexual contradicted the SADF's portrayal of itself as the model of hegemonic, heterosexual, muscular masculinity. The existence of a “gay soldier” created a logical and logistical problem. Restricted Policy Directive (28 April 1982) reads: “All possible steps must be taken to combat the phenomenon of homosexuality or lesbianism in the Army. During the recruitment process care must be taken that persons with such behavioural disorders are not admitted to the Permanent Force” (qtd. in van Zyl et al.). Instead, army personnel invited men to “confess” their illicit – and illegal – desires. Officials sent those who confessed (and those discovered by other means) for treatment to Ward 22 of the military hospital of Voortrekkerhoogte, bringing into the open that which apartheid society had taught them to hide. The claim was that doctors could medically “cure” that which the military understood as a moral “failing.”

Mikkie van Zyl and others note that the threat such men posed was not to “security,” but to “heterosexist ideology” (van Zyl et al). To reconcile the disruption gay men in the military posed to perceived gender and sexual binaries, the SADF treated homosexuality as a “behavioural disorder.” Psychiatrists subjected soldiers sent to Ward 22 to what Gary Baines refers to as “bizarre psychosexual medical experiments” (*Border War* 85) including aversion

therapy, chemical castration, and gender reassignment surgery.<sup>22</sup> The SADF's refusal to tolerate “deviance” demanded realignment of physical sex to gendered expectations. The goal of such treatments was to either contain the apparent threat (by achieving a “cure”) or to justify a discharge from the army by transforming the body incompatible with national service into one ineligible for it.

Literature about the South African military often includes the paradoxical and ambivalent role of Ward 22 in the construction of military masculinity. André Carl van der Merwe dedicates *Moffie*, a semi-autobiographical novel of a gay man's experience in the SADF, to “all the people who suffered prejudice in the army and the tortures of Ward 22.” van der Merwe articulates the danger of being gay in the SADF when he recounts an episode of soldiers who discover two recently arrived conscripts kissing. The soldiers beat them up and then send them to Ward 22: “the two young men are further punished by being sent to a psychiatric ward. Their parents cannot help them – they are the property of the State. Going to the press is not an option, as the love between two men is illegal and punishable by law” (154). Anthony Akerman's play *Somewhere on the Border* also includes mention of Ward 22 as a place where the military punished and “cured” anyone who dissented from the SADF's version of militarized masculinity, as does Koos Prinsloo's short story “Border Story.” Gerald Kraak's novel *Ice in the Lungs* tells the story of a gay conscript who, after enduring Ward 22, escapes from the army and goes underground. Tom Sharpe's satirical novel *Indecent Exposure* takes a different approach. The local head of the South African police worries his officers are sexually attracted to Black women

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<sup>22</sup> The SADF maintained nothing occurred in Ward 22 without consent. van Zyl and others question the possibility of meaningful consent being given in such an environment. For further discussions about the SADF's use of aversion and electro-shock therapy, chemical castration, and the estimated nine hundred gender reassignment surgeries that took place starting in 1980 in Ward 22, see van Zyl et al.; Vincent and Camminga; Cock, “Engendering”; Baines, *Border War*.

and seeks to “cure” them of this transgression by using aversion therapy. The result is that the police become effeminately gay.

### **Gender and the Military**

As the existence of Ward 22 demonstrates, the military sustains and promotes gender norms. Helena Carreiras, using the categories Jean Elshtain<sup>23</sup> made famous, explains the gender work performed by the military: “Stereotypes of men as 'just warriors' and women as 'beautiful souls' have been used to secure women's status as noncombatants and men's identity as warriors” (5). Cock helps confirm this when she observes that, through combat, “the man affirms his role as protector and defender” (“Women and the Military” 167-8). This emphasis on reciprocal binary relationships demonstrates the presumed heterosexual masculinity so inherent in the military that when Lindy Heinecken asserts that “The military is without a doubt one of the most pro-typically masculine of all social institutions” (43), she need not add that masculinity is straight. The military produces and maintains hegemonic gender roles, making the connection between the military and (heterosexual) masculinity seemingly obvious and “natural.”

The soldier is emblematic of the nation as a whole. Nicole Wegner supports this when she argues that “[m]ilitarized masculinity as a concept involves the ongoing social construction of masculinity in the military that defines the 'ideal soldier,' an archetype that reflects the perceived gendered identity of the nation/state” (7). As Wegner makes clear, the nation invests the soldier with the expectation they mirror the nation's idealized citizen: white, male, and heterosexual. Carreiras agrees, arguing that the military not only creates and sustains assumptions about

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<sup>23</sup> Elshtain argues that the stereotypes of “Just Warriors” and “Beautiful Souls” function to cement women's position as the protected rather than the protector.

gender, it also bestows gender: “The military has for centuries been a source of normative conceptions of gender, which, on the one hand, amplify dominant cultural patterns and, on the other, actively participate in their production and reproduction. Thus, more than merely gendered, the military is also a gendering, gender-granting or gender-defining ... institution” (40). The military makes men and makes them matter.

The presence of women in the military demonstrates the military's role in reinforcing the fixity of gender categories. Carreiras notes that women are outliers in the military: “Since war has usually been defined as a male activity and highly valued masculine characteristics are often associated with it, the image of women warriors has been seen as inherently unsettling, entailing a symbolic rupture with the dominant gender order based on the separation of male and female” (5). That very few women have, until recently, participated in combat<sup>24</sup> supports her argument; historically, when women were combatants, they either disguised themselves as men or were exceptional figures such as Boadicea or Joan of Arc – disruptive figures, certainly, but their exceptionality contained their disruption rather than normalizing women's participation in combat. Gerard DeGroot confirms this when he observes that such figures did not challenge the gender order precisely *because* they were exceptional. They “could be dismissed as unrepresentative ... Some of these women were fascinating, others admirable, but all were freaks” (25). That women needed to disguise themselves as men in order to masquerade as fighters shows the dominance of soldier-as-man. Participation in combat, DeGroot argues, “was closed to

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<sup>24</sup> White women could enlist in the UDF in 1914 when the South African Military Nursing Service was established but they have only been eligible for combat duty since 1996. By way of comparison, women have enlisted in the United States Armed Forces since 1917 but have only been eligible for combat duty since 2013; women have enlisted in the British Armed Forces since 1902 but have only been eligible for combat duty since 2016. In 1985, Norway became one of the first countries to place women in combat positions; Denmark and Canada followed in 1988 and 1989, respectively.

women unless they could effectively become men” (26).

Despite its fixity in the national – and its own – imagination as being a site of masculinity, militaries do include women as the need arises. While some critics see women’s inclusion in the military as a mark of progress – Laura Sjober, for example, calls women’s participation in the military a “victory” (10) against sexism – others doubt whether this leads to real gender change. Even in the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF),<sup>25</sup> a military that claims to be more “progressive” in relation to gender, the fixity of gender roles, and the dominance of the heterosexual structure, remains. In her analysis of the construction of masculinity in the IDF, Orna Sasson-Levy argues the inclusion of women does not challenge gender roles because, for example, women soldiers must hide any marker of femininity (372). Indeed, although the state requires both men and women to perform military service, the IDF is such a site of ritualized masculinity that Danny Kaplan has referred to military service as a “second Bar Mitzvah” because “the military is based on a gender regime which intensifies gender distinctions” (127).<sup>26</sup> Kaplan and Ben-Ari Eyal coined the term “masculinary culture” (398) to convey the dominance of masculinity within the IDF despite the inclusion of women in all ranks.

Much like the women soldiers described by DeGroot, Sasson-Levy observes that it is only by masquerading as male that the female soldier has access to military power: “Female soldiers reproduce and reaffirm masculinity as the only source of military authority” (374). This helps explain why Carreiras refers to women soldiers as holding positions of “structural ambiguity” (48). The military does not cede its grip on being the domain of masculinity, even when women

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<sup>25</sup> The IDF claims to recruit and promote based on “universal and achievement-based criteria” (Sasson-Levy 369).

<sup>26</sup> The duration of national service in the IDF is different for men (thirty-two months) and women (twenty-four months); the military is also unlikely to deploy women to active combat areas.

fill its ranks. In an instance where women's participation does disrupt gender roles, the military treats this as something “temporary and localized” (Sasson-Levy 377), a femininity sacrificed for the good of the nation rather than a permanent change. It is what Michaela Hampf has called “deviant” (16) rather than destabilizing. When the soldier re-enters civilian life, she leaves any potential gender disruption behind.

### **“Botha's Babies”**

Thinking about the role of women in the South African military helps demonstrate how a belief in white supremacy, and the maintenance of rigid gender roles, were both vital elements of apartheid ideology. In the 1970s, the increasing demands on the military meant the SADF began to enlist white women<sup>27</sup> to free up white men for operational duties, just as the UDF had mobilized women during World War II.<sup>28</sup> Mady Segal refers to the intervening time as one of “cultural amnesia” (84), her term for instances when nations return women to the domestic sphere and treat their participation in the military as absurd. That the SADF began to actively enlist white women in the 1970s points to the state's growing need to consolidate whiteness with the military. Elaine Unterhalter makes just this point: “Women are more important in the SADF because they are white than because of the labour they perform” (111). The inclusion of white women in the SADF was not just about propping up low numbers in the workforce, it was also about mobilizing the white race around the military to foster political unity. Cock agrees: “The use of white women as a military resource is related to both economic and ideological requirements” (“Women and the Military” 155). Carreiras' idea of women soldiers occupying a

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<sup>27</sup> The SADF employed women in the support branches (finance, personnel, logistics, intelligence, welfare, secretarial and medical) rather than in decision-making roles.

<sup>28</sup> In World War II, 65,000 white women filled temporary positions and 25,000 white women participated in the Permanent Force. See Unterhalter; Cock, *Colonels and Cadres*; Lambert.

position of “structural ambiguity” (48), however, is not relevant to the SADF; indeed, as a state that relied upon the fixity, rather than the blurring, of identity categories the government went to great lengths to reassure the nation such women maintained, rather than sacrificed, their femininity.

As Minister of Defence, P.W. Botha<sup>29</sup> created the South African Army Women's College in 1971. To avoid a cognitive disruption caused by the idea of women being soldiers, the College trained white women in the SADF not just in warcraft but also in the use of cosmetics, dress, diet, and household management. The College selected only those who could positively present the image of the woman-in-uniform; these women would become what the media called “Botha's Babies” (“Women and the Military” 155). In this way, any contradiction between femininity and serving in the SADF was, as Cock notes, “deflected” (“Women and the Military” 155).

The SADF benefited from the consolidation of whiteness that white women brought to the military while ensuring the gender-defining capabilities of the military remained untroubled by their presence. Cock confirms women in the military did not disrupt gender norms; instead, “traditional notions of femininity are restructured and expanded ... It is important to stress that traditional notions of femininity are not abandoned in this restructuring. For example, on one occasion the day's programme included a fashion show” (“Fires Burning” 54).<sup>30</sup> While the SADF did not train white women to be merely decorative, they did seek to reassure the public that their inclusion in the military did not disrupt the gender order. Rather, their military skill was

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<sup>29</sup> P.W. (Pieter Willem) Botha served as Minister of Defence 1966-1980, as Prime Minister 1979-1984, and as State President 1984-1989.

<sup>30</sup> Cock also quotes from a February 1987 issue of *Paratus*, the monthly magazine of the SADF, which describes “Ouma” Marina Hogenboezen saying that for her, as for other women in the military, “shooting comes as naturally as baking in the kitchen” (qtd. in “Fires Burning” 51).

contained, positioned as subservient to their more important, and more reassuringly feminine, roles as wives and mothers. Monikers such as “Botha's babies” and “*soldoedies*”<sup>31</sup> disciplined any potentially disordered behaviours and threats to structures of power, keeping women in their domestic roles even as they participated in the defence of their nation. Conventional gender roles in the apartheid military remained fixed and certain.

### **The Family of Man: One Long Grey Line**

The importance of lineage – and the relationship between fathers and sons in particular – is central to the military's idea of itself. In her history of war, Barbara Ehrenreich reinforces the fixity of the military when she explains that what she calls the “Warrior Elite” understand themselves “to be part of one long, unbroken tradition linking father to son and, more generally, the fighting men of one time to those of another. In their own minds, they form a special kind of lineage – of which General Douglas MacArthur's famous image of a “long gray line” of West Point alumni is one fragmentary example – stretching back thousands of years” (151). Indeed, West Point's Washington Hall has a mural that depicts famous battles from the past two millennia.<sup>32</sup> Cadets at Canada's Royal Military College wear a uniform only slightly modified from that first worn when the College opened in 1876. Britain's Royal Military College, Sandhurst, contains rooms named after various noteworthy soldiers, such as Marlborough and Wellington,<sup>33</sup> and statues of Mars, the god of War, and Minerva, the goddess of Wisdom, stand above the entrance to the college, implying the college's roots reach to the ancient past. The

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<sup>31</sup> *Soldoedies* is a portmanteau of *soldaat* [tr: soldier] and *doedie* [tr: lass]; in the United States, terms such as “Rambette” similarly disparage women in the military. In the IDF, the term “*bachurila*” (blending “*bachura*” (tr: girl) with *gorilla*) mocks women soldiers' strength.

<sup>32</sup> The mural includes Joan of Arc, Richard the Lionhearted, the Battle of Hastings, William the Conqueror, Napoleon, Waterloo, Gettysburg etc.

<sup>33</sup> John Churchill, Duke of Marlborough (1650-1722); Arthur Wellesley, Duke of Wellington (1769-1852).

repetition of tradition evokes a continuous genealogy – a family – to which the soldiers belong.

Through this lineage, the military constructs itself as a site of unchanging values, populated by seemingly unchanging men. MacArthur himself, in the speech to which Ehrenreich refers, spoke not just of the “long grey line” but of the endless continuity of the military when he spoke of the eternal soldier:

Their story is known to all of you. It is the story of the American man at arms. My estimate of him was formed on the battlefield many, many years ago, and has never changed. I regarded him then, as I regard him now, as one of the world's noblest figures; not only as one of the finest military characters, but also as one of the most stainless. His name and fame are the birthright of every American citizen. In his youth and strength, his love and loyalty, he gave all that mortality can give. He needs no eulogy from me, or from any other man. He has written his own history and written it in red on his enemy's breast.

(MacArthur)

Historians need neither name the battles nor the soldiers. This is the rhetoric of fixity and lineage found throughout militaries. The soldier is, always.

The military as an institution ensures fixity of identity not just through emphasis on the timelessness of a noble past but, as Ehrenreich suggests, also through its reliance on an unchanging population of fathers and sons. Anders Ahlbäck describes the way lineage helps construct masculinity in the Finnish military: “In order to be men and step into the timeless chain of Finnish manhood, they had to dare what their forefathers had dared, sacrifice what they had sacrificed” (122). Stephen Symons evokes a similar idea of familial militarized masculinity in the South African context:

Attempts by English-speaking Whites at positioning conscription as a necessary national service were often underwritten by referencing the past exploits of family members who had served during the Second World War, having answered the call to defeat Nazism. In this regard, the scourge of Nazism was conveniently substituted by the pervasive threat of communism, aided by propagandistic government discourse. (516)

He notes that, for both English-speaking whites and for Afrikaners, what mattered even more than the entry into a family tradition was an entry into a national manhood: conscription became a “performative culmination of a social obligation ... so boys would enter adolescence and manhood, ever conscious of their role as potential warriors and protectors of the nation” (517).

To be a man, then, is to enter the “long grey line” of the military in order to repeat and reproduce the masculinity of the father and, by extension, the fatherland itself. This helps affirm Kimberly Hutchings' argument that the military and masculinity “secure each other's intelligibility” (402).

The novels examined in this dissertation each have characters who disrupt this continuity of fixity through their transgressive sexual desires. As such, they expand and complicate the connections between masculinity and the military, troubling rather than affirming “intelligibility.”

### **The Army Makes Men**

The military is a central actor in promoting and maintaining what Raewyn Connell calls hegemonic masculinity, a term that is useful to disambiguate the various power structures inherent between and within genders. She explains:

At any given time, one form of masculinity rather than others is culturally exalted.

Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy,

which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women ... hegemony is likely to be established only if there is some correspondence between cultural ideal and institutional power, collective if not individual. So the top levels of business, the military and government provide a fairly convincing corporate display of masculinity, still very little shaken by feminist women or dissenting men. (*Masculinities* 77)

Connell notes that the military as an institution is deeply intertwined with hegemonic masculinity: “When we note that most soldiers, sports professionals, or executives are men, we are not just talking about individuals. We are speaking about masculinized institutions. The organizational culture of armies, for instance, is heavily gendered” (“Arms” 22-23). In apartheid South Africa, public figures often called upon the connection between masculinity and the military with phrases such as “Let the army make a man of you.”<sup>34</sup> Conscription further entrenched this connection, making entry into the army what Symons calls a “performative and patriotic rite of passage” (520); this, in turn, reinforced the hegemonic ideal of the soldier.

The SADF became indelibly linked to performances of heterosexual masculinity. Michael Drewett agrees, arguing that conscripts “were told that it was their duty to serve in the military to protect mothers, wives, girlfriends or sisters. National service was seen as a rite of passage into manhood, turning immature boys into reliable fighters” (94). These performative constructions connecting citizenship and masculinity to the military impacted the larger society. Drewett notes, “not only did many conscripts accept the ideal of militarised masculinity, but made a fetish of it, in the process reproducing it on a general level so that it became an intrinsic component of a

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<sup>34</sup> For example, see Cock, *Colonels and Cadres* 74.

hegemonic white South African male identity” (96). South African society understood the army to be turning boys not just into men but into hegemonic heterosexual white men who would defend the apartheid state. Any threat to the military's construction of itself as a site of exemplary masculinity needed to be contained and disciplined. At the same time, the existence of such “dissenting men” exposes the complicated and tenuous systems upholding hegemonic military masculinity.

The military promotes itself as producing an idealized subject: the heroic, male, combat soldier. This unified and singular image of soldier subsumes roles as diverse as cooks, clerks, and nurses – other kinds of soldiers who complicate the hegemonic masculinity of the military. However, as Claire Duncanson acknowledges, “this multiplicity and contradiction [does] not seem to trouble the power of militaries and militarism in public life” (234); the complexities inherent in a term such as “soldier” disappear in favour of the dominance of an exemplary muscular military masculinity. Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity is therefore especially useful for considering the co-existence of multiple masculinities in the military. She demonstrates the importance of this work when she observes that we cannot begin to think differently about the military until we begin to think differently about masculinities: “A strategy for demilitarization and peace must include a strategy of change in masculinities” (“Pursuit of Peace” 38).

Robert Morrell uses Connell's definition of hegemonic masculinity to demonstrate that it is a particular construction of masculinity, rather than masculinity itself, that dominates at any given time. In South Africa, white, heterosexual, English-speaking men had been hegemonic after the Boer War but, as Morrell points out, ultimately it was the white, heterosexual Afrikaner who came to be exemplary of apartheid South African masculinity:

The desire for freedom from British influence and superiority over blacks was interpreted into a new masculinity which stressed the importance of independence, resourcefulness, physical and emotional toughness, ability to give and (depending on your position) take orders, of being moral and God-fearing. These values were gendered in the church, the schools, community meetings, on the sportsfields and in the Afrikaans media. (“Times” 15)

Hegemonic masculinity helps articulate relations of and to power.

The military's insistence on espousing a particular kind of hegemonic masculinity, as seen in MacArthur's speech above, carries with it an inherent heterosexuality. In imagining (and relying upon) the familial continuity of soldiers, the heterosexual nuclear family assumes a natural and ever-present role in the military; indeed, as Joanna Bourke explains, the “military was very aware of the importance of the biological father in enticing men to kill – after all, combatants frequently admitted that they had joined in imitation of their father or that, in combat, their father would appear in spirit, offering comfort and reassurance. In imitation of such relationships, the military establishment rhetorically evoked the symbolic parent” (*Intimate History* 132). The military's emphasis on – and imitation of – family renders MacArthur's “long grey line” one that is necessarily, and “naturally,” heterosexual.

### **Homosexual Ghosts**

While spectral fathers provide comfort in times of war, another kind of spectre haunts modern militaries: the soldier who engages in same-sex sexual acts.<sup>35</sup> Although sodomy was

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<sup>35</sup> This was not always the case. Plato's Phaedrus tells us “And if there were only some way of contriving that a state or an army should be made up of lovers and their loves, they would be the very best governors of their own city ... and when fighting at each other's side, although a mere handful, they would overcome the world ... Love would

already illegal under civil law, the British military updated the British Manual of Military Law in 1914 to specifically criminalize sodomy.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, in 1919, the United States military revised the Articles of War to criminalize the act of sodomy despite the already-existing prohibition against it in civil law. In South Africa, the wide-sweeping sexual acts “against nature,” proscribed under Roman-Dutch law, and the prohibitions on sexual behaviour named in the 1927 Immorality Act, already applied to the soldiers of the UDF and, later, the SADF as citizens of South Africa. However, the Defence Act still specified and named such acts as illegal.<sup>37</sup> As these examples demonstrate, homosexual acts in the military context provoked such anxiety that the military repeatedly needed to name them as deviant. By World War II, however, the military's use of the burgeoning field of psychiatry shifted this anxiety from the sexual act to a now articulated – and identifiable – sexual identity, the homosexual, and framed him as a danger to the military.<sup>38</sup>

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inspire him” (162). Louis Crompton argues that Plutarch, in “Dialogue on Love” (which describes the Lelantine War of approximately 700 BCE), documents the earliest instance of same-sex love in the military. Crompton notes that, by Plato's time, the idea that the love of a man would make a warrior brave had already become cliché (24). Plato's idea did play out with the Sacred Band of Thebes, a regiment made up of 150 pairs of lovers. Charles Hupperts observes the Band were able to make Thebes the most powerful state in Greece for forty years before Phillip II of Macedon routed them in 338 BCE.

<sup>36</sup> Homosexual acts constituted a criminal offence in British civil law until 1967 when the Wolfenden Report led to the decriminalization of acts between men over the age of twenty-one. Military law follows common and statutory law so the illegality of homosexuality prior to 1967 meant there was no need to specifically stipulate its offence in military law. Nevertheless, the *1914 Manual of Military Law*, Chapter VII, “Offences Punishable by Ordinary Law,” Article 42 reads: “The offence of sodomy is when a male has carnal knowledge of an animal or has carnal knowledge of a human being 'per anum.' Penetration is required, as in the case of rape, to constitute carnal knowledge. A person over the age of fourteen allowing himself or herself to be known in this manner is guilty of the same offence.” It also includes Article 43: “It is an offence for a male person, either in public or private to commit, or to be a party to, the commission of any act of gross indecency with another male person; or to procure the commission of any such act. It is further an offence to sell or expose for sale or view any obscene book, print, picture, or other indecent exhibition.” The *Army Act of 1955* includes the more general provision, in Section 64: “Every officer subject to military law who behaves in a scandalous manner, unbecoming the character of an officer and a gentleman, shall, on conviction by court-martial, be cashiered.”

<sup>37</sup> In South Africa, the Defence Act of 1957 defined an “offence against a person” to range from murder, rape, kidnapping, procuring abortion, and sodomy; it also included both “scandalous behaviour” (Schedule 32) and “unseemly behaviour” (Schedule 45) as potential offences, all of which risked court martial.

<sup>38</sup> The same is true in the Canadian context. The Defence Act (1950) made “Disgraceful Conduct” a punishable offence but, during the Cold War, the Canadian Military became deeply concerned that homosexuals could be targets of blackmail. As a result, in 1967 the Canadian Military added CFAO-19-20, which dismissed suspected homosexuals from the Armed Forces. The Canadian Armed Forces repealed this rule in 1992 and, in 2016, removed

The reason for the exclusion of homosexuals from military service has never been consistent. Dean Sinclair summarizes the shifting attitude in America, a country whose policies on homosexuality in the military have been well documented:

During the 1940s, the military used psychiatry's determination of homosexuality as a mental illness to justify discharging gay soldiers; in the 1950s, homosexuals were determined to be particularly vulnerable to blackmail and thus a threat to national security ... When President Clinton proposed lifting the military's ban on homosexuals in 1993, Congress and military leaders emphasized the threat of undermining unit cohesion.

(702)

From the United States to the United Kingdom, from Sweden to Israel, militaries have historically deemed homosexuals “incompatible” with military service.<sup>39</sup> As Sinclair makes clear, in some cases this was due to a worry about morale and discipline and in other cases this was due to a worry about security risks. In all cases it was due to an inability to perceive homosexuals – or men engaging in same-sex sexual acts – as sufficiently masculine to wear the uniform.<sup>40</sup>

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all references to homosexuality being a reason for discharge.

<sup>39</sup> See Gade et al. for a detailed discussion of military policies that include or exclude homosexuals in the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, France, Italy, Belgium, Germany, Spain, Portugal, Netherlands, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and Israel. The American Department of Defence Directive 1332.14 (1982) captures much of the panic militaries around the world have felt regarding homosexuals in the armed forces. It reads:

Homosexuality is incompatible with military service. The presence of such members adversely affects the ability of the Armed Forces to maintain discipline, good order, and morale; to foster mutual trust and confidence among the members; to ensure integrity of rank and command; to facilitate assignment and worldwide deployment of members who frequently must live and work in close conditions affording minimal privacy; to recruit and retain members of the military services; and in certain circumstances, to prevent breaches of security. (qtd. in Sinclair 704-5)

<sup>40</sup> Social forces from the media to the military often treat men who refuse conscription as “failed men.” Sonya O. Rose describes a British newspaper in World War II mocking conscientious objectors as “national pansies” (qtd. in Rose 189). Similarly, the South African media and military mocked conscientious objectors (and the End Conscription Campaign (ECC) that supported them), as homosexuals. Daniel Conway quotes the crude homophobia of a “Veterans for Victory” pamphlet: “ECC; Our version: E-motional, C-owardly, C-hickenhearted. Now let’s expose these E-motional, C-owardly, C-hickenhearted Wets, Woofthahs and Waverers for what they really are ...” (qtd. in “Masculine State” 435).

The threat of the homosexual – or the threat of the performance of homosexual acts – occurring inside the military challenged the military's idea of itself. Worries about psychological fitness, morale, security, fighting prowess, and discipline were the articulated anxieties used to justify excluding homosexuals from the military. Arguably, however, these worries simply covered over a greater, more unspoken, fear: that the homosexual soldier would reveal the homoeroticism already present at the very core of the military. As same-sex spaces, which foster same-sex bonds, militaries are exceedingly homosocial spaces. Jon Binnie argues against discounting the military's potential for “same-sex sexual bonds and relations away from the constraints of family life” (19).<sup>41</sup> The camaraderie, the pushing oneself to extreme limits, the showering and sleeping in close quarters, as well as the emphasis on brotherhood, do have hard-to-ignore homoerotic undertones, which the military necessarily *must* hide in order for it to maintain its ideal of itself as the ultimate site of hegemonic heterosexual masculinity.<sup>42</sup>

One artist who made use of the homoerotic potential evoked by the military was Touko

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<sup>41</sup> A 1943 United States Military publication, *Psychology for the Fighting Man*, demonstrates the military's anxiety about the presence of homosexuals. Amid advice about sticking to a healthy diet and staying in touch with loved ones back home, the authors advise that, while the military screens for the “sexually abnormal,” they do sometimes slip into the army. This, however, should not cause concern: “If they are content with quietly seeking the satisfaction of their sexual needs with others of their own kind, their perversion may continue to go unnoticed and they may even become excellent soldiers ... But if, as not infrequently happens, such a man forces his attention upon normal men, there develops a situation of such gravity for the whole group” (340). They advise that homosexual desires may arise but should be considered without alarm: “So long as he is thus seriously worried and dissatisfied with himself, the chances are that he may be all right again when he returns to normal conditions of life. But he should put up a strong fight with himself to control his homosexual impulses and find some other outlet for his sex drive as soon as he can” (341). The authors suggest religion, sports, singing, and – intriguingly – dancing as solutions for “letting off steam” (342). Ultimately, they instruct the soldier that “since only real permanent relief for the pangs of sex longing can be obtained through speeding the victory and return to home, the soldier will find that putting his whole heart into the business of training for war and destroying the enemy will give him the greatest peace of mind” (342). In other words, kill to be straight.

<sup>42</sup> The connections between the military and homosexuality run deep. World War II, for example, enabled a gay subculture to develop in port cities such as San Francisco, New York, Durban, and Cape Town. Mark Gevisser, in his history of lesbian and gay organizations in South Africa, explains “gay men found public space within the quayside subculture that blossomed around docked warships. In Johannesburg, gay life sprouted in Joubert Park, where there was an army camp during the war, and the area became known for its bars; even though these bars were 'straight', they were patronised by gay Johannesburgers looking to meet off-duty soldiers” (18-19).

Laaksonen, drawing under the name Tom of Finland. Annamari Vänskä argues that “Tomland,” the imaginary world Laaksonen created in his drawings, celebrated a “hard warrior-masculinity ... as the highest ideal” (453). His men had exaggerated physiques and were modern working-class figures – soldiers, policemen, lumberjacks – found (and imitated, as the “clone”<sup>43</sup> style demonstrated) in real life. His work demonstrated what Jamie Gough calls “masculinity as sexual fetish” (121). Rather than maintaining a homophobic discursive formation that treated macho masculinity as heterosexual, Laaksonen's art helped challenge the stereotype of gay men as tragic invert figures who were visibly effeminate and weak. Instead, Vänskä suggests, it “validated a novel kind of gay male desire in post-war Anglo-American culture” (454). Laaksonen's emphasis on the eroticization of hypermasculinity subverted previously held assumptions about homosexuals: “The look drew from the distinct meanings of (heterosexual) American culture – toughness, virility, aggression, strength and potency – while opposing meanings traditionally attached to homosexuality” (455). As such, Laaksonen's work disrupted previously held assumptions not just about gay men but about the semiotics of masculinity more generally. Guy Snaith calls this imagery “emancipatory” (78) because it celebrated masculinity and reinvented gay culture as virile and butch. Gyms, biker bars, mechanic shops, rural farmland, and military barracks all became potential sites of same-sex desire and homoerotic fantasy rather than operating as purely heterosexual domains.

The homoeroticism found inside the military is central to the argument put forward by Derek McGhee in his work on the British military. He observes that the military's investment in

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<sup>43</sup> Martin Levine and Michael Kimmel describe the clone: “The clone was, in many ways, the manliest of men. He had a gym-defined body ... He wore blue-collar garb – flannel shirts over muscle-T-shirts, Levi 501s over work boots, bomber jackets over hooded sweatshirts. He kept his hair short and had a thick mustache or closely cropped beard. There was nothing New Age or hippie about this reformed gay liberationist” (7). Vänskä argues the look also emphasized the healthy muscular body as a counter to the media's portrayal of gay men as emaciated by AIDS (455).

its performance of a heterosexual masculinity, and its reliance on the idea of assimilation, means that it confers heterosexuality upon those who wear a military uniform no matter the sexual orientation of the soldier. He states: “A 'straight-acting' (non-obvious, manly or even 'ordinary') homosexual male can pass as, or be assumed to be, heterosexual, merely by being in the Armed Services. That is, membership of the Armed Forces can be said to provide the material circumstance whereby a 'straight-acting' homosexual Forces' member may pass and be assumed to be heterosexual” (220).

McGhee also considers how a de-sexualized environment is vital to the military's production of assimilation and camaraderie. Building on the work of Erving Goffman, Pierre Bourdieu, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and others, he argues that “the military subject is dependent upon the strict boundary creation and maintenance between the homosocial environments of the Armed Forces, with their 'non-sexualized' same-sex bonds; and the homoeroticism associated with homosexuality” (225). In other words, the military depends on the acceptance of certain kinds of intimacy – showering together, sharing tight sleeping quarters, “horseplay,” and so on – while rejecting more overt forms of homosexual intimacy found in sexual acts themselves. McGhee explains that “intimacy of the homoerotic variety is proscribed whilst a de-sexualized intimacy between men is prescribed. This latter form of male-bonding is the basis for the cohesion” (226).

Dana Britton and Christine L. Williams support this. They argue that the threat of the erotic entering the homosocial space of the military has the potential to undo the military itself: “Repression of homosexuality obfuscates the homoeroticism already present in the military context, purifying ties between men ... In a setting in which connections between men are seen as crucial in achieving the military mission and in which masculinity is synonymous with

heterosexuality the presence of openly gay men appears intolerable” (13). The military is invested in portraying an exemplary hegemonic muscular masculinity that is decidedly heterosexual. This investment thus relies on the denial of homoeroticism and, by extension, the denial of homosexuals and homosexual behaviour in the military.

I highlight the fear of homosexuals in the military to point to the threat they pose as both real and imagined. The very idea of the homosexual threatens the white, heterosexual, muscular masculinity upon which the military rests, and upon which it advertises itself. As McGhee notes, parents might not encourage their children to enlist if there was a risk they might be “corrupted” (212) by homosexuals or, indeed, if there was a chance their child might emerge from the military *as* a homosexual. The military necessarily must refuse and discipline the homosexual soldier in order for the fixity of the military to maintain its idea of itself. The “long grey line” is, decidedly, a straight one.

In the opening epigraph of this chapter from *Moffie*, Dylan's father believes that his gay son committed suicide during his national service because he failed to achieve the heterosexual masculinity promised by incorporation into the military. As Gevisser and Cameron argue, fixed identities were the operating ideology of the South African apartheid state. Its military arm, the SADF, functioned as the apotheosis of a white, heteronormative, patriarchal institution whose fixed identity was emblematic of the state itself. Conway demonstrates this when he notes that “militarized hegemonic masculinity was heterosexual and the body politic was formed around the concept of the nuclear family” (“Masculine State” 434). Tamara Shefer and Nyameka Mankayi, in their analysis of sexual practices among South African soldiers, observe that “across cultures and communities, aspects of masculinity such as the centrality of (hetero)sexuality, the importance of physical strength and control over women consistently emerge as key to

hegemonic masculinities” (191). They locate the military as the culmination of this version of masculinity: it is “highly masculinist, remains dominated by men, and certainly foregrounds traditional male principles of competition, aggression, power and control” (192). Shefer and Mankayi state that the relationship between heterosexual masculinity and the military is “harmonious and mutually affirming” (192). There is no room for failures.

### **Militarization and the State**

Apartheid South Africa was a heavily militarized society. Grundy notes that, in 1960, the budget of the SADF was 44 million rand; in 1985 it was 4,722 million rand (*Militarization* 19).<sup>44</sup> Grundy states that the growth of the SADF budget was evidence of “Pretoria's commitment to coercive maintenance of the white power regime” (*Militarization* 20). He goes on to say that the “size and composition of the forces also reflect a determination to build a formidable security apparatus that can deter potential aggressors and dissidents as well as achieve operational effectiveness when ordered into the field” (*Militarization* 21). In the span of twenty-five years South Africa had become a fully militarized society. The increase to military spending reflects this, as does the move from balloted conscription to the compulsory conscription of all white men over the age of sixteen, making national service central to the lives of white South African men and working to bind all white families to the military. To help prepare them for a military life, and accept national service as a rite of passage into manhood, the government made Youth Preparedness training compulsory in 1976 for all white girls and boys in government-run

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<sup>44</sup>Phillip Frankel explains that in 1960/61 defence expenditure was 0.9 per cent of the GNP, or 6.6 per cent of the state budget; by 1979/80 this figure had risen to 5 per cent of the GNP, or 14.3 per cent of the state budget (73). Gavin Cawthra makes clear these figures are very conservative estimates (81-3). For a further discussion of the budget, see O'Meara 224; Frankel 70-80.

schools.<sup>45</sup> Philip Frankel observes this meant the school curriculum devoted part of each week to “marching and other neo-military activities” (99). Grundy argues that by militarizing society through the education system the apartheid government created “a social atmosphere that makes military service seem attractive, military responses to policy issues sensible, and great military strength and expenditure seem acceptable” (*Militarization* 58).

The increasing militarization of South African society was due to the increasing dangers posed by the African National Congress (ANC),<sup>46</sup> its armed wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK),<sup>47</sup> and their growing acts of resistance and protest inside the country. The apartheid government also believed itself to be under threat from what it saw as a growing communist movement advancing throughout the continent: Russia and Cuba provided troops, weaponry, and logistical help to support the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), founded in 1956, the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) in 1960, the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) in 1961, and the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO) in 1962. To the NP, the liberation movements *were* communist movements; they made little distinction between the two because both were threats to their claim to power. However, military and government leaders positioned themselves as fighting a Cold War, rather than a “race war,” directing much of their rhetoric against communism. For example, in their *1987 SADF Overview*, the SADF makes no mention of race when they claim that the “African National Congress and its Marxist backers are fomenting unrest and subversive activities in the townships, trade unions, political and cultural

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<sup>45</sup> Cadet Training, a sub-section of the Youth Preparedness Programme (but compulsory only for white boys in government-run schools) involved tasks such as paramilitary drill and weapons training. The government provided the cadet uniforms, ammunition, and weapons at public expense.

<sup>46</sup> The ANC formed in 1912; the apartheid government banned it in 1960.

<sup>47</sup> MK formed in 1961.

organisations and even the churches, while the incidence of bombings, murders and intimidation against innocent civilians continues” (2).<sup>48</sup> Both the “red threat” of communism and the “Black threat” of African nationalism were threats to white minority rule and the apartheid system.

Defence Minister General Magnus Malan famously called these growing threats a “total onslaught,” stating it “is an ideologically motivated struggle and the aim is the implacable and unconditional imposition of the aggressor's will on the target state ... South Africa is ... involved in total war. The war is not only an area for the soldier. Everyone is involved and has a role to play” (qtd. in Grundy *Militarization* 11). In this way, Malan justified the increasing demands of conscription, the growing militarization of society, and the border wars South Africa was fighting. Everyone needed to do their part to win the Cold War or the liberation movements affecting their neighbours would spread inside the borders of South Africa and threaten their minority rule.

While a nation mobilizing against a threat was not unique to South Africa, what was distinct about South African society was the level of militarization for threats perceived to be not just external but internal. Frank Chikane, the Secretary General for the South African Council of Churches from 1987 to 1994, summarized the situation when he wrote: “The militarisation of South Africa is ... seen as a process of militarisation against the oppressed majority. The threat to the white minority state is not in the main an external one. The threat is an internal one. Thus militarisation is directed against the people of South Africa” (xi). Other countries may be similarly militarized in terms of military spending and reliance on conscription (such as Israel or

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<sup>48</sup> Cawthra observes, “So effective is this propaganda aimed at portraying SWAPO and the ANC as 'godless communists' intent on wiping religion off the face of the continent, that in an opinion poll of soldiers engaged in operations in Namibia, 90 per cent of them said that they were fighting to defend their religion in the face of a threat by 'atheistic communism’” (42).

Singapore). However, those societies aim their militarized force outwardly. Apartheid South Africa perceived the “onslaught” as “total” and directed its military force not only at perceived threats coming from outside the country but also from perceived dangers coming from cities and townships inside the country too.

The state perceived threats to be “everywhere” and reacted with military and legislative force. The General Laws Amendment Act (1962: right to detain without bail; 1963: right to detention without charge; 1969: right to prevent testimony), the Riotous Assemblies Act (1956: banning “treasonous” groups; 1974: curbing gatherings on private property), the banning of the Communist Party (1950), the ANC (1960), the Pan-African Congress (1960), the End Conscription Campaign (1988), and the United Democratic Front (1988) and, of course, the states of emergency<sup>49</sup> (1960, 1985-1990), when the state overtly mobilized the military against its own people, all demonstrate the increasing paranoia and anxiety of the apartheid state.

Malan's “total strategy” also involved women beyond their participation in the SADF. Cock lists several other, more peripheral, ways women contributed to the militarization of South Africa. One example was Operation Safe Ride<sup>50</sup> whose slogans were “They keep us safe in our homes. Let's give them a safe ride to theirs” and “Give Your Country a Lift” (“Fires Burning” 52). These slogans positioned women as “helpers” and as grateful for the sense of safety the men in uniform provided; as such, they reinforced the heterosexual structure of the society. Another

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<sup>49</sup> In March 1960, the government declared a state of emergency in eighty-three magisterial districts in response to the Sharpeville massacre; it remained in effect until 31 August 1960. In July 1985, the government declared a state of emergency in thirty-six districts in response to demonstrations against apartheid; it ended in March 1986. In June 1986, the government declared a state-wide state of emergency in response to demonstrations planned to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the Soweto uprising. This remained in place until 1990.

<sup>50</sup>Operation Safe Ride began in 1977 as a way to prevent troops from clogging the transport system.

example was the Southern Cross Fund,<sup>51</sup> whose slogan was “They are our security.” The Fund raised money to purchase luxury items such as pool tables and television sets for army bases. Cock makes clear this was really a marketing strategy to encourage the public to identify with and care about the military.<sup>52</sup> Organizations like the Southern Cross Fund emphasized the centrality of the family in the military by acting as an extension of a benevolent parent sending food parcels and presents to children away at camp. This familial role helped consolidate and reinforce the family as the motivation for the SADF itself. Cock writes: “Women's role is 'to keep the home fires burning,' to stay at home, produce babies and support 'our boys on the border’” (“Fires Burning” 53). In these ways, women helped maintain the heteronormative family and gender roles so central to the military itself.<sup>53</sup>

Women's largest role was in keeping up soldiers' morale. The SADF's *Paratus* included classified ads from teenage girls looking for pen-pals in the military so they, too, could “play their role.” *Paratus* also ran photo-stories, in both English and Afrikaans, which told cautionary tales of the desperation felt, and poor choices made, by soldiers who had not received letters from their mothers, wives, and girlfriends. The SADF booklet titled *While He Is Away* reinforces this message: “It's up to you to make sure that your letters and actions while he's away show him beyond any doubt that you love him just as much as always, and you're going to wait for him, no matter how long. A family that does not write letters weakens the whole platoon” (qtd. in Cock, “Fires Burning” 56). The effect was to idolize white domesticity by emphasizing the importance

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<sup>51</sup> The Southern Cross fund began in 1968 and had 250 branches throughout the country.

<sup>52</sup> Cawthra adds to this, explaining that the Southern Cross Fund also produced t-shirts: “I was there,” and “He is there” for soldiers and families to wear respectively (53).

<sup>53</sup> Cock notes that Johannesburg City Council restricted paid maternity leave to women whose husbands were currently serving, or who had completed their military service (“Manpower” 57). Enloe makes the connection even more explicit, observing that the South African state encouraged white women to have more children to produce more white soldiers (*Khaki* 76).

of home and the white nuclear family.

### **Queering the South African Military: Theoretical Framework**

The January 1982 issue of *Paratus* includes an image of a soldier, naked except for his shorts, reclining on his bed, petting a cat, while he reads letters from home. On the walls around him are images of women in various states of undress. In many ways this image captures the rhetoric and expectation of the military: a fit young man surviving the rigours of war with the support of fantasy, family, and friends. The caption reads “Christmas cards from home, and a bevy of beautiful girls ... what more could I want, asks Signaller C.M. van Niekerk” (ellipsis in original). The images on the walls work to reassure the spectator of van Niekerk's heterosexuality (and hyper-sexuality) and serve to reinforce the military's claim that it will “make a (straight) man of you.” This dissertation questions that claim.

Michel Foucault, Leo Bersani, Halberstam, and others are right that participation in particular sex acts does not guarantee a particular political stance. There are gay men who are conservative and lesbians who are racist just as there are gay anarchists and lesbian union organizers. No sexual orientation necessarily aligns with a political one; so too the sex acts enjoyed by individuals do not, in themselves, make any one fall into a political category of being on the left or the right. Indeed, while Michael Warner defines queer as “resistance to the regimes of the normal” (xxvi), Bersani argues that queer theory must uncouple sex acts from a necessarily disruptive political position. And yet I remain struck by the multivalent possibilities of Warner's phrase. For me, this is not about queer-as-an-identity-category. Rather, I read Warner's phrase as defining what it means to locate moments of queerness: as that which is disruptive, odd, uncategorizable, and dangerous precisely because of its illegibility. Halperin's definition of queer as being “*whatever* is at odds with the normal” (62) is useful because it reinforces queer-as-verb

rather than as queer-as-noun. Muñoz evokes queer performativity as “not the fact of a queer identity but the force of a kind of queer doing” (84). Drawing on this characterization, I argue that narratives involving South African soldiers desiring other soldiers enter into a “kind of queer doing.” Their same-sex desires throw into confusion the certainty of the military as being synonymous with exemplary hegemonic masculinity.

Jeffrey Weeks, following Richard Dwyer, uses the phrase “semiotic guerrilla warfare” (191) to refer to the disruptive possibilities of gay men masquerading as “macho men,” who refuse clear legibility and easy categorization by passers-by who might read the homosexual's muscular male body as heterosexual. While there is much in this that requires unpacking, but that is outside the scope of this dissertation, what I wish to evoke here is the threat, the unknowability, of the sexual desires and orientation of a man in a military uniform. This, for me, is the “resistance” waged by queered moments of same-sex sexual desire because they challenge the “regimes of the normal” and the fixed identities the military uniform reinforces and reassures.

In this dissertation I am not using queer as an identity category that substitutes for gay man; rather, I am using queer to think through that which disrupts, thwarts, plays with, but ultimately refuses, obedience to the state. I agree with Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore's assertion that the lesbian and gay community has failed: “The intoxicating visions of gay liberation have given way to an obsession with beauty myth consumer norms, mandatory masculinity, objectification without appreciation, and a relentless drive to police the borders. And yet what might we cultivate with our dreams that remain?” (14). I seek to return queer to the more radical and destabilizing threat that invites us to dream possibility rather than conform to homonormativity.

Muñoz is helpful in thinking through queer-as-disruptive possibilities. He opens *Cruising*

*Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* with the claim that “queerness is not yet here. Queerness is an ideality. Put another way, we are not yet queer” (1). In this statement I read queer not as an identity but as a transgressive possibility. Muñoz goes on to say that queerness “is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world” (1). “Now” is straight and limited while queer is open and embryonic. This is a good definition of what he elsewhere calls queer time – of possibility being located in the ungoverned, illegible, space. Because Muñoz reads queer as a site of ecstasy, I find him particularly useful for thinking through the ungovernability of desire's disruption caused by men having sex with men in the military.

Muñoz theorizes the possibilities of ephemera and grammatical devices to signal queer gestures that “connote a different register” (71); this is queer time. The gestures are “absent and they are present, disrupting a predictable metaphysics of presence” (71). To read through a queer lens is to read resistance: it is, as Muñoz says, to be “attuned to the ways in which, through small gestures, particular intonations, and other ephemeral traces, queer energies and lives are laid bare ... a queer gesture [is] one that accesses the force of queer ephemera. It is utterly legible to an optic of feeling, a queer optic that permits us to take in the queerness that is embedded in the gesture” (72). Taken together, these ideas allow me to read soldiers desiring soldiers as entering into a different register of time, one that escapes straight time/nation time's otherwise relentless forward march.

To return to the *Paratus* image of van Niekerk, Muñoz's work invites reading the image through a queer optic and attending to the image's contradictions and ambivalences, its ephemera, that signal beyond the page. Although images of women adorn the walls around van Niekerk, the image closest to his head is an advertisement for Camel cigarettes featuring the hypermasculine

(and homoerotic) “Camel Man” who sits by himself in a jungle. The tagline of this ad, “Where a man belongs,” reinforces the hegemonic masculinity promoted by both the cigarette manufacturer and the SADF. The homoeroticism encoded in the Camel ad, however, reinforces the homoeroticism of the soldier lying on his bed. In a different magazine such an image of a mostly naked male soldier, stroking something soft, reclining amid sexualized images, would read very differently. The *Paratus* image makes a visual gesture to the contradictions and ambivalences embedded in tropes of masculinity and muscularity in the military. The military is a site of the idealization of male bodies, but it must disavow any homoeroticism in order to function as the state's disciplinary arm. Here, however, the Camel Man's placement as one of the images of sexual fantasy disrupts the implied heterosexuality of the scene. This evokes Enloe's “patriarchal confusion.”

Considering the image in more detail, van Niekerk's statement contains an ellipsis: “Christmas cards from home, and a bevy of beautiful girls ... what more could I want.” This is a further example of Muñoz's “queer ephemera.” An ellipsis is a gesture to something lost (ideas, words, moments), a potential space of deviant desires rendered literally illegible; it is a visible deletion. Muñoz argues that queerness “is illegible and therefore lost in relation to the straight minds' mapping of space” (72). The ellipsis implies that van Niekerk may have said something the official narrative needed to delete. Read alongside the image of van Niekerk, his statement – rendered sanitized through the ellipsis – suggests that something must be lost in order to maintain the “space of heteronormativity” (72). Heteronormativity seeks to render absent that which disrupts and confuses – for Muñoz, this is the “temporal stranglehold” (32) of straight time. This is why gestures, ephemera, fleeting moments, and so on can signal a queer time; they are queer moments of performance that break away from the dominant expectation precisely because such

moments are incomplete, never fully known.

Jack Halberstam's theory of queer failure and forgetting is also central to my thinking. Building on the work of Monique Wittig, Halberstam argues that gender failure can be productive: “[from] the perspective of feminism, failure has often been a better bet than success. Where feminine success is always measured by male standards, and gender failure often means being relieved of the pressure to measure up to patriarchal ideals, not succeeding at womanhood can offer unexpected pleasures” (*Queer Art* 4). This is because “failing” at being a woman can mean she steps outside the heterosexual framework that defines a woman in relation to a man; once outside that hierarchical relationship “the lesbian,” for Wittig (and for Halberstam), enters a utopian realm of not-man, not-woman, becoming uncategorizable and illegible. Failing to live up to the hegemonic ideal of being a South African soldier by having sex with another man in uniform is to enter a similar realm of gender failure that renders the soldier necessarily illegible precisely because, as McGhee argues, militaries rely on the “assimilation and performance of Forces' masculinity” (220) such that “heterosexuality is assumed” (220).

To be illegible, as James C. Scott makes clear, is to gain autonomy and to escape the constraints and governmentality of the state: “An illegible society ... is a hindrance to any effective intervention by the state, whether the purpose of that intervention is plunder or public welfare” (78). Central to my project is an uncovering of the queerness of same-sex sexual acts taking place between men wearing military uniforms whose very illegibility haunted the apartheid imagination precisely because that imagination relied so heavily on fixed, known, and knowable identities.

Halberstam defines queer failure as “the refusal of legibility, and an art of unbecoming” (*Queer Art* 88). Building on Lee Edelman's ideas of queerness that link it to the death drive in his

work *No Future*, Halberstam argues that a heteronormative framework locates optimism and success in the figure of the child who represents the future-containing-the-past. Failure, however, is a move outside of this forward-moving drive and, as such, becomes a space of different possibility. Halberstam argues for the liberating aspects of failing. It is “undisciplined” (*Queer Art* 110) and, as such, threatening. This is because failure suggests “the promise of self-shattering, loss of mastery and meaning, unregulated speech and desire” (*Queer Art* 110) all of which become, as Halberstam notes, “unloosed” (*Queer Art* 110). Halberstam continues:

Dyke anger, anticolonial despair, racial rage, counterhegemonic violence, punk pugilism – these are the bleak and angry territories of the antisocial turn; these are the jagged zones within which not only self-shattering ... but other-shattering occurs. If we want to make the antisocial turn in queer theory we must be willing to turn away from the comfort zone of polite exchange in order to embrace a truly political negativity, one that promises, this time, to fail, to make a mess, to fuck shit up, to be loud, unruly, impolite, to breed resentment, to bash back, to speak up and out, to disrupt, assassinate, shock, and annihilate. (*Queer Art* 110)

White male soldiers having sex with other white male soldiers in the South African army are not easily read as the punk pugilists of whom Halberstam speaks since they are agents of, rather than challengers to, the system of oppression. Yet, arguably, they “fuck shit up” through their queer failure precisely because of the challenge they pose to the hegemonic masculinity of the military itself.

Alongside queer failure is what Halberstam calls queer forgetting. The military is an institution that relies upon tradition in order to maintain its “long grey line.” As I discuss in the next chapter, the rise of Afrikanerdom and the NP in South Africa also relied heavily on

remembering. Indeed, it was precisely the NP's ability to craft a particular version of history into a dominant and logical narrative that led to apartheid. Halberstam points to the centrality of memory in maintaining heteronormative logics: "Memory is itself a disciplinary mechanism that Foucault calls "a ritual of power;" it selects for what is important (the histories of triumph), it reads a continuous narrative into one full of ruptures and contradictions, and it sets precedents for other 'memorializations'" (*Queer Art* 15). In contrast, Halberstam suggests, forgetting is a mode of defiance: "Forgetting becomes a way of resisting the heroic and grand logics of recall and unleashes new forms of memory that relate more to spectrality than to hard evidence, to lost genealogies than to inheritance, to erasure than to inscription" (*Queer Art* 15). Representations of forgetting in novels about the South African military help interrupt such logics and "rituals of power."

My interest here is in the ways soldiers fail to uphold the values of the state by acting upon their transgressive same-sex desires and who 'forget' themselves to do so. Halberstam suggests that the act of forgetting and refusing the domination of the past is a queer act precisely because it challenges the "seamless continuity" of the "bourgeois family matrix, with its emphasis on lineage, inheritance, and generation" (*Queer Art* 74); it refuses the dominance of the family found in the passing on of knowledge from father to son.

Using Halberstam's queer forgetting reveals the heterosexual imperative written into both the military's and Afrikanerdom's impulse to remember. Halberstam argues for the queerness of forgetting: "A notion of queer forgetting within which the forgetful subject, among other things, forgets family and tradition and lineage and biological relation and lives to create relationality anew in each moment and for each context and without a teleology and on behalf of the chaotic potentiality of the random action" (*Queer Art* 80). The soldier, in the queer act of forgetting,

thwarts the military's "long grey line" with its emphasis on family, lineage, and discipline.

The act of forgetting, of course, is not necessarily a guarantee of revolution and freedom from constraint. "Forgetting" about histories that do not fit the national narrative, especially those histories involving people and cultures that are not patriarchal, white, and Christian, commonly occurs in order to uphold the seeming "natural" dominance of white heteropatriarchy. Halberstam points to the end of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* to suggest that forgetting "is also what allows for a new way of remembering" (*Queer Art* 82). In other words, forgetting certain histories makes room for thinking – and remembering – differently about the past and the present. These are fraught and potentially dangerous moves in a racist society. Yet they are also moves that are liberating and resistant because to remember differently is necessarily to push back against the narratives of the dominant group.

Race, like gender and sexuality, is an ideological construction mobilized by the state, part of the "us" and "them" binary so vital to capitalism, colonialism, patriarchy, and so on. Queer desires, in their move outside of such stratified categories, seek not to ignore race but to expand our knowledge of it, to think differently about it, to dissolve binaries around it while learning from the histories of it. Joseph M. Pierce concludes a discussion of the disruptive potential of queer politics by imagining new forms of kinship and being: "An us that wrestles individuality from the shackles of colonial history and moves it toward the horizon of an embodied we. An us that relates. An us that sings. An us that listens. An us that remembers. An us that feels, disrupts" (437). Queer desires make such horizons possible when queer is a position of politics, of pushing back, of rejecting histories of power.

In other words, queer as potential, as a horizon of possibility. This is not dissimilar to Benedict Anderson's idea that "forgetting" a past, and renaming oneself, causes a "profound

rupture with the existing world” (193).<sup>54</sup> The significance of forgetting in the novels I examine is tied to the ideological power of memory in the military and in the apartheid state. Afrika's protagonist Tom, and Galgut's protagonist Patrick, each “forget” themselves as they reject the singular logic of familial and social inheritance; it is this rejection that ultimately allows them to imagine new possibilities in the sexual space of rapture and rupture as they act on their queer desires. In contrast, Mark Behr's *The Smell of Apples* reveals, through the figure of Marnus, the dangers of insisting on the importance of memory and the repetition of the family.

Muñoz's work on queer time, and Halberstam's work on queer failure and forgetting, help me consider the ways these novels expose the ambivalence of masculinity in the military by looking specifically at men who desire men in the South African military just prior to, during, and just before the end of apartheid. Muñoz and Halberstam help me argue that such men are participating in Warner's “resistance to the regimes of the normal.” These men go “off-script” as they fail to uphold the expectations of hegemonic military masculinity. I read men desiring men in the military as destabilizing the tenuous foundation of a seemingly stable institution through their refusal of the fixed identity sewn into the fabric of the uniform.

The novels of this dissertation – Tatamkhulu Afrika's *Bitter Eden*, Mark Behr's *The Smell of Apples*, and Damon Galgut's *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* – are written by men who served in the South African military. Afrika volunteered with the UDF in World War II, while both Behr and Galgut were conscripts who each served for two years in the SADF. These men also became established authors. Afrika published nine volumes of poetry (four of which won South African

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<sup>54</sup> Anderson uses the phrase in relation to the French National Convention of 1792, which abolished the Christian calendar in favour of beginning at Year One; he also discusses the San Martin, 1821 decree, which abolished the terms “native” and “Indian” in favour of “Peruvian” (193).

literary awards), four novels, and an autobiography, *Mr. Chameleon*. Behr published three novels, with his first novel, *The Smell of Apples*, winning the 1995 CNA Award, the 1995 M-Net Award, and the 1995 Betty Trask Award. Galgut has published nine novels. His third, *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs*, won the 1991 CNA Award.<sup>55</sup> The Booker Prize short-listed his novels in 2004 and 2010; his novel *The Promise* won the Booker Prize in 2021.

I focus my analysis on *Bitter Eden*, *The Smell of Apples*, and *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* because they follow a historical trajectory, moving from World War II to the height of apartheid, to apartheid's end, and because they involve moments of sexual activity between men in the South African military. In two of the novels, *Bitter Eden* and *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs*, that sexual activity occurs as part of a conscious desire to reject the oppressive confines of heteronormativity. The act of fucking becomes an act of fucking shit up and of creating their own world, however temporary, in order to experience a moment of utopic unknowability. The third novel, *The Smell of Apples*, is an outlier in this regard. Behr's protagonist, Marnus, has a profoundly homoerotic encounter with his best friend but the overt sexual act of the novel – the rape of his best friend by Marnus' father – is decidedly an act of claiming the power bestowed by the state rather than its rejection. And yet the novel is, like *Bitter Eden* and *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs*, what Muñoz might call “perverse” in several ways: it is full of visual excess, it rejects linearity and, in a dream, Marnus experiences the utopic possibilities of a queer embrace. Apartheid was, at its heart, a regime centred on the fixity of identity, with the military held up as the ideal of a white, muscular, heterosexual masculinity. I am using these texts to

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<sup>55</sup> Although the novel won awards, it eventually fell out of print. After receiving a Booker nomination for *The Good Doctor* in 2004, Galgut's publisher suggested a new edition of *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs*. Galgut's “Author's note” to the 2005 edition of the novel explains “It is not a new book, but it's not quite the old one either.” This dissertation focuses solely on the original edition.

uncover the ways queer desires disrupted and troubled apartheid's disciplinary machinery.

### **Chapter Outline**

In Chapter Two I provide a brief history of the rise of Afrikanerdom to make clear why forgetting is an act of queer disruption in the apartheid state. I demonstrate how Afrikanerdom mobilized history and memory as a form of what Halberstam calls “generational time” (*Queer Time* 5) to construct a particular cultural mythology of Afrikaners as the “chosen people” of South Africa. I consider how this mythology was central to the construction of South African hegemonic masculinity as white, muscular, and soldierly, found in the repetitions of military identity from the commando, to the UDF, to the SADF, and found in the game of rugby, the sport of Afrikanerdom and especially of apartheid South Africa.

In Chapter Three I discuss *Bitter Eden*, Tatamkhulu Afrika's novel set in World War II. Against the South African state's positioning of the war as a site of heroic masculinity, Afrika's protagonist, Tom Smith, represents a queer disruption of South Africa's white supremacist logic: he falls in love with a British soldier, Danny, while in the prisoner-of-war camps. I use Suryakanthie Chetty's work on the way rhetorics of sport and mythologies of the Afrikaner past encouraged white South African men to enlist. Both Andy Carolin's and Jeremy Martens' work on the Immorality Act provides further social context for Afrika's novel. Halberstam's theory of queer failure helps me consider the ways Tom fails to meet expectations of masculinity and of soldiering. Halberstam's theory of queer forgetting allows me to consider the significance of the novel's lack of patriotism and lack of names, which I read as thwarting South Africa's reliance on memory and legibility. I then make use of Muñoz's and Elizabeth Freeman's theories of queer time to read the sexual acts of Tom and Danny's relationship as occurring outside the logics of order and linearity. The novel is central to my argument because *Bitter Eden* challenges

expectations of hegemonic military masculinity as Tom learns to expand gender and sexuality beyond the limits of legibility. In doing so, he opens up a space of possibility to unbecome, remaking himself as he chooses, free of the constraints of the past and of the hegemonic expectations around him.

In Chapter Four I discuss *The Smell of Apples*, Mark Behr's novel set at the height of apartheid. I read the novel as demonstrating ways that hegemonic masculinity and the military mutually constitute and uphold each other. If possibility is what characterizes Afrika's *Bitter Eden*, violence and rigidity characterize the world of the Erasmus family. I read the novel's scene of rape as the result of, rather than outlier to, the apartheid hegemonic military masculinity that dominates the novel. In *The Smell of Apples*, Behr demonstrates the impossibility of being part of the apartheid apparatus while unbecoming what it means to be a man. This is because of apartheid's reliance on the fixity of identity and the valuing – at every social level – of exemplary hegemonic military masculinity as necessarily white and heterosexual. I put Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity and Morrell's analysis of Afrikaner masculinity into conversation with Cock's work on gender in the South African military in order to consider the various ways the military, masculinity, and heterosexuality work together. I show how Halberstam's queer failure and queer forgetting are unable to take hold in the world of the novel because of the constant threat of discipline. Theories of queer time from Halberstam, Muñoz, and Freeman, however, are useful for reading the novel's structure – and the continual proleptic intrusions from the now adult narrator – as pushing back against the positioning of the army as a site of progress and development; they help me read Behr's novel as undoing the heteronormativity so central to apartheid. They also help me read the novel's queer use of italics as an eruption of feeling, rendered out of place amid the patriarchal stoicism of the military.

In Chapter Five, I discuss *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs*, Damon Galgut's novel set towards the end of apartheid. It tells the story of Patrick Winter, a conscript whom the SADF has discharged due to his experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Queer desires, which represent possibility and unknowing in *Bitter Eden*, and which the state disciplines and replaces with violence in *The Smell of Apples*, become sites of resistance and disruption in Galgut's novel. Halberstam's theories of queer failure and queer forgetting help me think through the disruptive effects of Patrick's queer masculinity. His inability to play rugby, the quintessential sport of Afrikanerdom in general, and of the SADF in particular, takes on central resonance in the novel as his failure at rugby connects to a failure to adhere to apartheid ideology. I use Shane Phelan's theory of sexual strangers and Rachel Woodward's analysis of military heroes to help me consider Patrick as an ambivalent figure who fails and succeeds, and I use Halberstam's, Muñoz's and Freeman's theories of queer time to consider the ways the typographical excess of the novel marks it as decidedly queer. I conclude by reading the sexual relationship between the protagonist and another soldier as both legible and illegible and, ultimately, as resistant to the expectations of military masculinity so vital to apartheid.

### **Conclusion**

Richard Leonard, in his analysis of the militarization of South Africa, explains the governing ideology of the SADF: “The South African Defence Force has, in common with other South African institutions, been shaped since 1948 by the apartheid policies of the Nationalist government and by the over-all strategic objective of ensuring, in the words of Prime Minister Botha, that ‘the principle of the right to self-determination of the white nation must not be regarded as negotiable’” (98). Botha presents the key principle of Afrikanerdom, apartheid, and the military: a belief in the inalienable right to power based on a fixed category of identity –

whiteness. The “total war” waged by apartheid required an increasing rigidity of identity categories. The “enemy” was Black and communist but also included anyone who threatened to disrupt the “knowable” categories of gender and sexuality.

The South African military, as the site of the construction and affirmation of hegemonic masculinity, required men to reflect the recognizable and fixed concept of masculinity upon which they based their claims to supremacy: white, muscular, and decidedly heterosexual. In the same way that Botha believed the right of white South Africa to protect itself was not negotiable, so too the state treated all categories of identity as knowable and certain. Apartheid – defended by the military – promoted a politics of seeing identity as fixed and immutable. My analysis of the novels of this dissertation considers the ways men sexually desiring men in the South African military complicated and confused this fixed and immutable construction of white masculinity.

## CHAPTER TWO: Afrikanerdom, Memory, and Hegemonic Masculinity

An idealized hegemonic masculinity, alongside the obsessive repetition of an idealized past, animated Afrikanerdom and the pursuit of apartheid. Both the military and the apartheid state utilized acts of remembrance to produce a fixity of identity regarding race, gender, and sexuality: the idealized South African citizen was white, male, and heterosexual. Men having sex with men in the South African military was an act of resistance to such fixity because such men – and such acts – trouble and undo the reliance on memory and history that a belief in such fixity required. This is because these “troubling” men, in the moment of abandoning themselves to their same-sex desires, abandon the history that is central to their construction as soldiers, the values upholding the military, and the state they represent. In experiencing same-sex desires such men “forget” themselves – they cannot have transgressive desires *and* perform the role of apartheid's soldier at the same time. Indeed, men desiring men in the apartheid military must necessarily “forget” themselves – not as a hapless forgetting, but a purposeful one. Such men “forget” themselves – and the histories and myths that produced and maintained Afrikanerdom and the apartheid state – in order to actively engage in a desire whose very presence renders their role as soldiers, and their representation of the apartheid state, as impossible, irreconcilable with the uniform they wear.

The act of forgetting reduces the power of memory's disciplinary control. Jack Halberstam's theory of queer forgetting is central to this dissertation because it demonstrates how

forgetting disrupts the dominant narrative of history to make room for other histories and othered memories. In any military, the act of forgetting is dangerous. It is an indication of uncertainty, of doubt, distorting the assumption that those who wear the uniform will do what they are told and can be relied upon to uphold the values of the state represented by that uniform. In the South African military, the uniform symbolized the remembrance of the past and the protection of a white future. It reassured the white public that they were safe from the dangerous Other (Black men and women, communists, homosexuals). Men having sex with men in the South African military, however, turned that reliable signifier of the values of the state – the military – into a site of queer forgetting and patriarchal confusion.

In this chapter I provide the context for understanding how instances of same-sex desire in the South African military – instances of forgetting – troubled expectations of the performance of white, heterosexual, hegemonic military masculinity required by the state. Afrikanerdom was motivated by their history, constantly looking to a version of the past that was heroic, noble, and condoned by God. Afrikaners mobilized this narrative, found in their cultural memory, to produce a mythology that positioned them as the “chosen people” of South Africa. Acts of remembrance built the Afrikaner nation, reifying identity as fixed and certain through its constant repetition, invoked in grand spectacles, in war propaganda, in sport, and in the military. Remembering the past – and remembering the correct version of that past – was vital to the rise of Afrikanerdom and to its creation of hegemonic military masculinity as white and heterosexual.

### **“I am an Afrikaner!”: Building an Identity**

In 1707, upon his arrest for public drunkenness, Hendrik Bibault coined a new term when he declared, “I am an Afrikaner!” (qtd. in Coetzee 105). Bibault's statement asserted identity as a

mark of difference. Bibault, a white man who had been born on South African soil, identified as African rather than European, and claimed that the laws of the Dutch East India Company (VOC), which had colonized the southern tip of Africa since 1652, did not apply to him. The term “Afrikaner” thus comes into being to demarcate the descendants of the early Dutch, German, and French emigrants from those who were employees or administrators of the VOC. G.H.L. LeMay explains those descendants felt they “had a stake in the country” (30) rather than just a “stake” in the economy.

Irving Hexham opens his study into the history of apartheid by suggesting “the ideological roots of Afrikaner nationalism are to be found in the Calvinist religion of the early white settlers who arrived at the Cape of Good Hope in the mid-seventeenth century” (1). The historian Hermann Giliomee adds to this, arguing that the lack of a clear, unifying identity amongst the white inhabitants of the Cape was important in relation to the eventual emphasis on Christianity as a marker of difference: “Perhaps because the Cape was not colonized by people of a single European nationality, the colonists were even more inclined to use their Christian identity as a political identity” (*Afrikaners* 41). As such, the now articulated “Afrikaner” identity also incorporated a Christian – primarily Calvinist – identity.

The Great Trek, and the mythologies surrounding it, reinforced the patriarchal character of Afrikanerdom already present in its emphasis on a Christian identity. Between 1835 and 1845 more than thirty per cent of the white population of the Cape began the Trek, in part to find better land and in part to reject British rule.<sup>56</sup> Giliomee summarizes the reasons for the Great Trek as

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<sup>56</sup> In 1814, the Dutch government ceded control over the Cape to Britain. The British abolished slavery in South Africa in 1834, a main instigating factor for the Trek. For a detailed discussion of this history, see Giliomee,

the lack of land, labour, and security, coupled with a “pervasive sense of being marginalized” (*Afrikaners* 144). The Boers, or Voortrekkers, organized “trek parties” around family structures, demonstrating the centrality of family in early Boer culture. Giliomee notes: “the leadership had to rely on the established patriarchal family structure and on military reputation to maintain their control” (*Afrikaners* 163). The leaders of the Trek emphasized order and discipline because they saw themselves as “law-abiding people, pushed beyond all limits, [who] had chosen to trek rather than rise up against the government” (*Afrikaners* 156). Relying on the family's patriarchal structure was an effective way to enforce order while reinforcing the significance of the patriarchs themselves.

The Great Trek is central to the creation of the valiant Afrikaner mythology. Vernon February explains it “was the source not only of the heroic and the epic, but also of the romantic and the colossal” (42). Discourses surrounding the Great Trek constructed Afrikaners as independent, invincible, and hardy – as people who could not only survive but thrive in the wilderness, secure under God's protection. Those who undertook the Great Trek were not acting on behalf of a nation, as if they were participants in a typical imperial narrative, but rather on behalf of themselves. Nevertheless, the Trek became emblematic of an idealized group identity: one that was independent from the British, self-reliant, and sanctioned by God. As such, the Trek provided a firm base for Afrikaner nationalism.

### **Generational Time**

I draw attention to these facets of Afrikaner mythology to note how a certain construction

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*Afrikaners*; February; LeMay.

of masculinity – family oriented (and therefore heterosexual), independent, Christian, respectable, legible – is constituted alongside a certain construction of a national history. The Trek can thus be read as part of what Halberstam calls “generational time,” defined as when “values, wealth, goods, and morals are passed through family ties from one generation to the next. It also connects the family to the historical past of the nation, and glances ahead to connect the family to the future of both familial and national stability” (*Queer Time* 5). Halberstam's concept of “generational time” is useful because it helps frame the connections between family history and national history, turning individual experiences into cultural inheritance and eliding gaps and fissures in favour of a coherent historical logic.

“Generational time” also helps clarify why certain groups – in this case, Afrikaners – feel entitled to lay claim to certain kinds of histories – such as that of the Trek – while others (English-speaking white South Africans, Black South Africans, and so on) do not. The overlapping of familial and national histories consolidates a sense of belonging but also a sense of coherence and legitimacy. As Halberstam points out, power is maintained through this repetition: “generational logics and temporalities extend the status quo in a way that favours dominant groups” (*Queer Art* 123). Understanding the Trek as part of “generational time,” therefore, makes clear this is not a benign history available to any white South African. Rather, it is a birthright only for the Afrikaners, the cultural heirs who, in turn, look to this history to reproduce cultural conventions and cultural scripts.

The metonymic slippage between Boer, meaning “farmer,” Voortrekker, meaning “pioneer,” and Afrikaner further illuminates the relevance of reading this history through the lens of Halberstam's “generational time.” Ken Barris observes that Afrikaners often use these terms

interchangeably precisely because Afrikaners “valorise their pastoral history” (91) and treat it as an inheritance to which they alone can lay claim. They ignore material differences and historical contexts in favour of a unified, fixed identity that such slippage enables.

### **Building a Military Identity**

If the Great Trek provides the founding mythology of Afrikanerdom, the ox-wagon is its central icon. The Afrikaners embarked on the Great Trek using ox-wagons that served as both a mechanism of transport for goods and supplies and as a mobile home. Voortrekkers moved their ox-wagons to form a protective laager, or circle, at night or when under siege. While LeMay observes that the laager was a “formidable defensive rampart” (26), he also acknowledges that the ox-wagon is a curious symbol: “It was slow, but it was reliable and it got there in the end. It was not the symbol that would appeal instinctively to all men, but it was thought to reflect certain facets of the Boer character” (27). The importance of the ox-wagon to Afrikanerdom is shown in its inclusion in the former national anthem “Die Stem van Suid Afrika,”<sup>57</sup> in street names around the country, and in the name taken by an anti-British, pro-German group that formed during World War II, the Ossewabrandag<sup>58</sup> (OB).<sup>59</sup> The ox-wagon – and the laager it enabled – are key

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<sup>57</sup> Tr: “The Call of South Africa.” The first verse includes the line “From our plains where creaking wagons cut their trails into the earth” (3). The anthem was sung alongside “God Save the King/ Queen” from 1938 until 1957 when it became the sole anthem of South Africa. In 1994, the new government combined the Xhosa hymn/African National Congress (ANC) anthem “Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika” with “Die Stem” to form a new national anthem.

<sup>58</sup> Tr: Ox-Wagon Sentinel or Ox-Wagon Brigade, founded in Bloemfontein in 1938 to promote the “perpetuation of the spirit of the ox-wagon” (qtd. in LeMay 184).

<sup>59</sup> Brian Bunting points out the links between the OB and Nazi Germany explaining, for example, that OB members were “exhorted to ‘think with your blood,’ and the creed of *Blut und Boden* [tr. blood and soil] was expounded in the OB Press. ‘Family, blood, and native soil – that is, next to our religion and our love of freedom, our greatest and our most sacred national heritage’” (92-3). That the OB used a defining symbol of the Trek helps demonstrate the vital role of the Trek in the Afrikaner imaginary. At its height, the OB had between 200,000 and 400,000 members (91). Its members included John Vorster (Prime Minister from 1966-1978) and Geoffrey Cronjé, the subject of J.M.

to Afrikaner identity: they keep the family together in a defensive structure and therefore they reinforce the patriarchal power of the father. The ox-wagon and laager also demonstrate the extent of Afrikaner militarization: the symbol of family and the home could easily become a fort.

The other key aspect of Afrikaner military strategy was the opposite of the laager: the commando. Originally made up of groups of farmers, accompanied by soldiers from the VOC, commandos recovered stolen cattle and assisted with the defence of the territory. Unlike the laager of heavy and slow ox-wagons, the commando was nimble and only loosely structured. However, like the laager, the commando also reinforced the importance of familial and patriarchal structures. Robert Morrell argues that the commandos helped forge what he calls “establishment masculinity,” defined as “authoritarian, unforgiving and unapologetic” (“Times” 17). Morrell sees the commandos as having a vital role in the forming of Afrikanerdom, arguing elsewhere that they were key to the building of social kinship systems (“Of Boys and Men” 617). Sandra Swart agrees that the commando system was central to these social structures. She explains that it “functioned as a practical and symbolic mode of masculinity of Boers ... The commando system extended into politics, culture and social mythology” (738). Although the laager and the commando are different military strategies, they both evoke the importance of family and a militarized masculinity. Swart makes the connection clear: “Boer family life was patriarchal ... Commando structure and the paternalism of domestic life accustomed men to follow their 'father's' word. The leaders were often seen as community fathers, operating on the same domestic principles extended in the public arena” (740). Familial and social relations were key to achieving power and respect. Heterosexuality, obedience, and a willingness to fight were

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Coetzee's famous “The Mind of Apartheid.”

implicit in the construction of successful Afrikaner masculinity. This reinforces Kimberly Hutchings' argument that the military and masculinity "secure each other's intelligibility" (402), mutually constructing and supporting each other.

Afrikaners saw themselves as "God's Chosen People." The Battle of Blood River, which took place on 16 December 1838, is key in the building of this aspect of the Afrikaner identity. The battle occurred between a few hundred Boers and thousands of Zulu. Making use of the security of the laager formation and the agility of the commando structure, the Boers triumphed with only a few minor injuries reported on their side and a tremendous loss of life on the other.<sup>60</sup> Because the Boers had prayed for God's protection in the moments before the siege began, they saw this as the reason they "won" the battle. The Afrikaner calendar marks the day as the Day of the Covenant.<sup>61</sup> In these ways, heterosexuality, Christianity, muscular masculinity, and the military all intimately connect to the iconography of Afrikaner identity.

The Boer War (1899-1902)<sup>62</sup> also played a key role in the formation of an Afrikaner identity. The Voortrekkers settled and controlled the Transvaal, which declared itself a republic in 1852, and the Orange Free State, which declared itself a republic in 1854, while Britain retained control over Natal and the Cape. After the discovery of gold in Witwatersrand (in the Transvaal) in 1886, and diamonds in Kimberley (in the Orange Free State) in 1887, Britain tried to consolidate both Boer republics into a confederacy and it was this that led to the Boer War.

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<sup>60</sup> Hexham claims over three thousand Zulu died in the battle, with only three Boers injured (11).

<sup>61</sup> Charles Bloomberg explains the Day of the Covenant is so-called because it is "the day when God made known his covenant with his 'chosen people'" (27).

<sup>62</sup> The war ended with the Treaty of Vereeniging, which incorporated the Boer republics into the British Empire. Britain ceded self-rule in 1910, establishing the Union of South Africa. In 1961, South Africa became a republic and severed relations with Britain.

Giliomee notes that, despite profoundly unequal sides, with 250,000 British troops fighting against 50,000 Boers, the Boers held off defeat for more than three years (*Afrikaners* 250).<sup>63</sup> A growing militancy among Boer women helped achieve the military superiority of the Boers. British efforts to subdue women – from burning their homes to imprisoning them in concentration camps – ultimately failed. Giliomee observes: “Setting their houses on fire did not cow them. Some candidly declared that they preferred their houses to burn down than to see their husbands surrender ... Women scorned men who gave up the fight” (*Afrikaners* 256). A heroic militancy – demonstrated by the women as well as the men – became central to the mythology of Afrikanerdom. Their eventual defeat in the war, however, meant that Britain came to dominate South African daily life and English became the language of education, politics, and business. As Jacobus Adriaan du Pisani explains, it also meant that Afrikaners needed to “redefine” their place and identity in South African society (“Hegemonic Masculinity” 157).

### **Building a Political Identity**

All prime ministers of South Africa until the end of apartheid in 1994 were Afrikaners. Moreover, each of the first three Prime Ministers (Louis Botha,<sup>64</sup> Jan Smuts,<sup>65</sup> and James Barry Munnik Hertzog,<sup>66</sup>) had been Boer generals in the War, demonstrating the interrelatedness of the

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<sup>63</sup> LeMay and others credit the commando system – with its ability to quickly adapt to changing conditions, to respect local knowledges, and to allow for multiple decision-makers – with prolonging the Boer War, despite being heavily outnumbered and out-armed by the traditional, hierarchical army of the British.

<sup>64</sup> Botha (1862-1919) was Prime Minister from 1910-1919. In 1905, he and Jan Smuts established *Het Volk*, an Afrikaner-focused party in Transvaal.

<sup>65</sup> Smuts (1870-1950) was Prime Minister from 1919-1924 and from 1939-1948.

<sup>66</sup> Hertzog (1866-1942) was Prime Minister from 1924-1939. In 1906, he established *Oranje Unie*, an Afrikaner-focused party in the Orange River Colony.

nation and the military. Botha, with Smuts as his deputy, established the South African Party (SAP) and came to power after the first general election in 1910. The SAP pursued a policy of reconciliation with the British after the war, envisioning British and Boer interests co-existing under a British flag. William Vatcher explains that Botha and Smuts represented Boer conservatism, but not Boer extremism (29).<sup>67</sup> Most Afrikaners, however, considered the SAP too pro-English, especially after the government sent the military to end a strike by white miners in 1913. Working-class Afrikaners saw this as proof the government was on the side of the British mining magnates rather than on the side of the *volk*.

Hertzog, who had been Minister of Justice in Botha's government, ultimately rejected what he saw as the anglicization of white South Africa and established the National Party (NP) in 1914 as the political home of Afrikanerdom. The NP's goal was the creation of an Afrikaner republic.<sup>68</sup> Hertzog centred his platform on the protection of Afrikaans language and cultural production; he also encouraged the promotion of unskilled white workers (bringing in a minimum wage for white workers through the 1925 Wages Act, for example). This helped the NP gain power in 1924 as part of a coalition government with the Labour Party.<sup>69</sup> To further

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<sup>67</sup> For example, the SAP advocated for English and Afrikaans as equal languages, and they opposed mine owners importing Chinese labourers. However, because the English controlled mining and other commercial enterprises, Botha was reluctant to alienate British interests.

<sup>68</sup> There is some irony in the fact that the founder of the NP, the party that would eventually bring in apartheid and that treated identity as something fixed and immutable, carried in his very name the unfixity of identity. Hertzog's parents named him after James Barry Munnik, one of the first children born by caesarean in which the mother also lived; James Barry, who performed the operation, was a doctor with the British Army serving in South Africa. James Barry was born Margaret Ann Bulkley but assumed the name (and corresponding gender identity) of James Barry while on a boat from Ireland to England. Thus, entwined into the name of the man who created the NP is the legacy of a cross-dressing doctor.

<sup>69</sup> The NP's condemnation of Smuts' behaviour to end the strike led to Hertzog aligning with the otherwise British-oriented Labour Party in order to promote the interests of the white working-class.

consolidate whiteness and protect white interests, Hertzog passed the 1930 Women's Enfranchisement Act, which gave the vote to all white women over the age of twenty-one. The goal of such a move was to dilute any potential voting power held by Black or Coloured men in the Cape (which had a non-racial, qualified franchise – being literate and owning property) despite the lack of any actual threat posed by non-white voters. In 1936, the Representation of Natives Act removed Black and Coloured voters from the electoral roll entirely.

In the early 1930s, aiming to resolve the economic crisis facing South Africa, the NP formed a coalition government with the SAP. Agreeing on seven key points, such as equal language rights, the further development of segregationist labour policies, economic help for white South Africans, and a new flag, Hertzog and Smuts ultimately “fused” their parties under the banner of the United South African National Party (UP) and won the 1934 election. The decision to put aside the creation of an Afrikaner republic in favour of staying in the British Commonwealth led hardline Afrikaners, such as Daniel François Malan,<sup>70</sup> to break from the NP and establish the “Purified” National Party (PNP) in 1934. The PNP formed the government's opposition until 1948 when the National Party, newly reconstituted with Malan as its leader and running on a platform of apartheid, won the election.<sup>71</sup> Afrikanerdom no longer had to compromise its vision of an Afrikaner republic.

### **Building a Linguistic Identity**

Afrikanerdom was an idea. There was no homogenous Afrikaner group since the language

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<sup>70</sup> Malan was a minister in the Dutch Reformed Church and editor of *Die Burger*, an NP newspaper in the Cape.

<sup>71</sup> The NP held onto power until the first free elections in 1994.

spoken as Afrikaans differed depending on region and upbringing; there were also huge differences between those who followed the strict Calvinism of the Dutch Reformed Church and those who practiced a more liberal Protestantism; and then there were differences between rural and urban Afrikaners, rich and poor Afrikaners, and so on. This meant, as Anne McClintock notes, Afrikaners “had, quite literally, to invent themselves” (369). Elise Cloete agrees, explaining the Afrikaner identity was something that needed to be made: “A *volk* had to be constructed by forming alliances between disparate groups of people. Institutions geared specifically to promoting the image of unity (such as the Broederbond<sup>72</sup>...) were created. The idea of a God-given destiny was promoted and Afrikaner figures from the past mythologised and presented to generations of school children as representing ‘truth’” (45). The past was a remembrance of the imaginary. The actual lived past – of infighting, of poverty, of unheroic struggle – became a kind of “empty time” that did not figure in history or memory. Rather, Afrikaner culture wrote new social scripts in which the correct remembering was that which fit into a narrative of progress and social uplift, with a cultural identity located in the mythical past that would anchor the success of the future. This is “straight time,” in every sense.

Giliomee argues that Afrikaner nationalism arose largely in response to the Boer War; he suggests Afrikanerdom, like other nationalist movements, was an “an ideology of popular protest” (“Constructing” 85). Peter Vale agrees, noting that the Afrikaner press portrayed the British as outsiders: they were “*uitlanders* [outlanders] who were intent on exploiting and excluding locals while extracting from the country the maximum amount of wealth” (254). In

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<sup>72</sup> Afrikaner teachers, lawyers, and other professionals formed the Broederbond (tr: “Brotherhood”), a secret society to promote the interests of Afrikanerdom, in 1918. For a discussion of their history, see Wilkins and Strydom.

other words, the British were colonial intruders while Afrikaners laid claim to an essentialist mode of belonging. Afrikaners positioned English-speakers – linked to their imperial past through the inheritance of language – as taking what they wanted without concern (which, in turn, framed Afrikaners as those from whom the English-speakers were doing the “taking”). In contrast, Afrikaners positioned themselves as those who belonged: they were not taking *from* the land because, as Bibault's claim to identity as an “Afrikaner” asserted, they were *of* the land. Theo Sonnekus supports this reading: “Historically, one of the major endeavours of nascent Afrikaner nationalism was to disavow the European heritage of Afrikaners in an attempt to create a sense of an indigenised white ethnicity that sought equity with, but distinctness from, British settlers” (96). English-speakers could claim “home” as both South Africa and Britain. Afrikaners, however, did not have a similar linguistic or cultural root outside of South Africa. Hence, it was their language of Afrikaans that helped cohere the Afrikaner identity and that helped reinforce the idea that Afrikaners were “of” South Africa.

Isabel Hofmeyr argues the Afrikaans language was key to the success of Afrikaner nationalism: it was a unique language of its place. Hofmeyr terms Afrikaans a “kitchen language” (97), a patois blend of various Dutch and German dialects; it also incorporated a variety of Indigenous, Malay, and Portuguese languages that the settlers encountered from slaves around the Cape. Hofmeyr's term captures the informal, Creole aspect of Afrikaans. She observes: “almost the only place where Afrikaans or some form of it was consistently spoken was in the household. At work most people spoke English. In church ... they heard Dutch sermons and sang Dutch hymns, while in school many parents opted for English education since English language skills were a crucial passport to jobs in a 'British' urban economy” (114). Afrikaans, being a

language of the domestic sphere, helped reinforce Afrikanerdom's emphasis on family and the exultation of the (white, heterosexual, Christian) home. Also important is that Afrikaners' second-class status – not in relation to the metropole of Europe, as in Benedict Anderson's formulation of the development of nationalism in the “new world,” but in relation to white English speakers in South Africa – fed into Afrikaner nationalism and its sense of “protest.”

This is the “generational time” of Afrikaner history. Halberstam does not directly name language as part of that which passes from one generation to the next. However, it functions inside Afrikanerdom similarly to the “values, wealth, goods, and morals” (*Queer Time* 5) of other forms of familial and national inheritance, especially in the Afrikaner context where language itself was the vehicle of culture. And, much like other forms of inheritance, it was one that circulated through women in the domestic sphere to benefit men in the public sphere.

### **Afrikanerdom: A Family of Man**

Family, which had already been such a key aspect of the Great Trek and the Boer War, became even more central to Afrikanerdom as it sought to create a reproducible and sustainable Afrikaner identity. February argues this meant the family was “the absolute corner-stone of Afrikanerdom ... Without the family the perpetuation of the *volk* would not be possible. The Afrikaner was both family man ... and national man” (97). Having established an ethnic Afrikaner identity, Afrikaner nationalists relied on the nuclear family as a social unit that replicated and reproduced the values of Afrikanerdom. Katharina Jörder helps demonstrate this in her discussion of photographs from the 1949 inauguration of the Voortrekker Monument. She observes that the images show Afrikaner leaders in suits while their wives are in Voortrekker dress. The effect is to suggest the men are modern while the women are traditional: “the

Voortrekker costume especially worn by the politicians' wives not only recall the ideal of the *volksmoeder* but also contrast the men's modernity and role of leadership" (181). In other words, Afrikaner Woman only participated in the public space as a symbol of the timeless and eternal, a living representation of the romanticized Afrikaner past.

The emphasis on the family, of course, reinforces the heteronormativity of the nation and helps explain the apartheid state's eventual panic surrounding homosexuality. As Tim Dean suggests, "Homosexuality can be viewed as threatening because, insofar as we fail to reproduce the family in a recognizable form, queers fail to reproduce the social" (Caserio et al. 826). Afrikanerdom was certainly not unique in emphasizing heteronormativity as an integral element of its structure. Jacqui M. Alexander observes that the state "has always conceived of the nation as heterosexual in that it places reproduction at the heart of its impulse" (46), reinforcing hegemonic heterosexuality as a key feature of what she calls "good citizenship" (46). Alexander's point aligns with José Esteban Muñoz's argument regarding "straight time": "the only futurity promised is that of reproductive majoritarian heterosexuality, the spectacle of the state refurbishing its ranks through overt and subsidized acts of reproduction" (22). Deborah Gaitskill and Elaine Unterhalter demonstrate this "overt" demand of Afrikanerdom to reproduce itself when they describe the government exhorting Afrikaner women in the 1960s to "Have a Baby" to celebrate Republic Day (65). Beyond their reproductive role, Afrikaner women were otherwise "invisible" (65) in the public male world of Afrikanerdom.

In his description of an idealized Afrikaner masculinity, du Pisani demonstrates how Afrikanerdom relied on the centrality of the past in the present: "the hardworking and honest Afrikaner farmer, the heroic *bittereinder* Boer warrior, *ons armes* [our poor], the family man as

good provider” (“Hegemonic Masculinity” 171). Afrikanerdom mobilized around this image – of resistance to control (be it by VOC or British administrators), of living off the land, of looking after his family and community – in order to set itself apart from the English-speaking white South Africans and from Black South Africans.<sup>73</sup> Vatcher captures this sentiment when he writes of the Afrikaner: “The use of a gun and a horse determined the worth of a man, and the possession of land and sheep and cattle determined his wealth” (49). Women may have reproduced the family – and played a vital role in sustaining Afrikaner culture through the development of Afrikaans in the home – but it was the “generational time” of Afrikaner men, from Boer soldiers to the Broederbond, who were producing Afrikanerdom. McClintock supports this idea in her description of Afrikaner history: a “divinely organized military conflict baptizes the nation in a male birthing ritual, which grants to white men the patrimony of land and history. The white nation emerges as the progeny of male history through the motor of military might” (369). In McClintock's estimation, women need not figure in such a history since it is the demonstration of muscular, military masculinity that is the valued legacy passed from father to son, from the past to the present.

While a particular construction of masculinity was central to Afrikanerdom, Afrikaners also found commonality with other white men in their displays of power – over Black men, over women in general, over white homosexual men, and so on. Belinda Bozzoli's description of gender relations in South Africa as a “patchwork quilt' of patriarchies” (149) is salient since it helps capture the different and shifting organizational structures of – and between – men of

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<sup>73</sup> Ownership over land and the protection of the family was a form of masculinity denied Black men since laws prevented Black men from owning viable land and ensured Black men earned low wages.

different social categories. Without question, all white men had power in relation to Black men. However, Afrikaner and English-speaking white men had unequal access to that power. Unlike what Morrell refers to as the British “imperial masculinity” (617), encoded and institutionalized through education, government, and bureaucracy, Afrikaner masculinity had relied upon institutions such as the commando and the family for its performance of power. The British destruction of Boer farms during the war meant Afrikaner men lost access to much of their economic power and, after the Boer War, Afrikaner men lost access to political power as the British brought the republics under their control.

Afrikaners had also, of course, lost much of their military identity in the Boer War. The changing visual codes of military masculinity – more specifically regarding facial hair – help demonstrate this. Even though the United Defence Force (UDF), founded in 1912, sought to be a blend of both the British army system and the Boer commando system, Morrell makes clear that the result contributed to the loss of masculine identity amongst the Boers: “The Union Defence Force was nothing like the commando where Afrikaner men had gathered in ways that collectively affirmed their ethnic, racial and gendered identities” (“Of Boys and Men” 617). It was not just that the UDF provided a different structure to defence; it demanded a different organization of men. Swart explains that age had been a key feature of Boer masculinity: “leadership was by a patriarchy of old men. Hence beards were important for their dual symbolism of age and manliness, as iconic representation of Republican masculinity” (747). In contrast, the British soldier was clean-shaven. And, indeed, Swart notes that the Defence Act brought a soldier's facial hair “under the control of the state” (747). She quotes from the King's Regulations and Orders for the Army, 1912: “The hair of the head will be kept short. The chin

and under lip will be shaved but not the upper lip. Whiskers, if worn, will be of moderate length” (qtd. in Swart 747).<sup>74</sup> Swart, Morrell, and others argue that it was not just the Boer War, but a variety of pressures on Afrikaner masculinity, which contributed to the rise of Afrikaner nationalism.

Afrikanerdom mobilized around a particular version of history as they looked to secure their place in the future. Swart explains that Afrikaners relied on particular forms of remembering, noting the “nostalgic *ubi sunt* motif was a powerful element of populist rhetoric” (742). The Broederbond played a crucial role in the construction and maintenance of hegemonic Afrikaner masculinity, seeking to promote only those who echoed the values of their forefathers. Membership in the Broederbond itself was subject to several requirements: white, male, Afrikaans-speaking, over twenty-five, financially independent, with an implicit expectation of being heterosexual, politically conservative, and having a commitment to the nation and culture. du Pisani observes these requirements “represented the Afrikaner nationalist 'manly ideal” (“Hegemonic Masculinity” 159). The Broederbond succeeded in cultivating the unified and fixed Afrikaner identity that would become so central to apartheid and so central to the military that defended it.

### **Fetishizing the Past**

There were concerns the Afrikaner was, however, becoming indistinguishable from

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<sup>74</sup> The role of facial hair in the construction of military masculinity is also discussed by Michael Drewett. He observes that the moustache became a symbol of masculinity in the South African Defence Force (SADF) and marked the wearer as an experienced soldier (as opposed to a newly arrived recruit). Drewett notes the irony of the SADF's ubiquitous moustache, since moustaches are also icons of masculine culture within the gay community, and that “in the end the dominant form of masculinity ironically mimicked the very gay culture it most abhorred” (90).

English-speaking South Africans; by the 1930s, many Afrikaners had married English spouses. du Pisani explains the impact of this: “For Afrikaner nationalist leaders this was a worrying trend, which they perceived as a battle for the 'soul' of the Afrikaner” (“Hegemonic Masculinity” 163). In response the Broederbond created a cultural arm, the Fereasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurvereniginge (FAK), in 1929. Nancy Clark explains the FAK was responsible for nationalist art and music exhibitions that “called on people to remember their past – one marked by suffering at the hands of British imperialists” (28). In 1931, the Broederbond also founded the Voortrekkers, a youth group modelled on the Boy Scout and Girl Guides movement (but without the requirement to swear an oath of allegiance to the British monarch). In these ways, Afrikaner nationalism actively produced generational logics of cultural inheritance and history with which to reproduce itself.

In 1938, the FAK organized the centenary celebration of the Great Trek.<sup>75</sup> McClintock describes the commemorative events of the Trek's centenary as “an orgy of national pageantry” (371). Eight ox-wagons were each named after a male Afrikaner hero, with a ninth wagon named *Vroue en Moeder* to “generically” represent women's contributions (McClintock 371); the wagons then traced the “original” routes taken on the Trek.<sup>76</sup> Albert Grundlingh and Hilary

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<sup>75</sup> While the timing of the centenary was incidental to events happening in Europe, there were some fascist influences circulating inside Afrikanerdom. The OB's swearing loyalty to the *volk*, for example, had clear connections to Nazism, as did Oswald Pirow's New Order, a group he formed inside the NP. However, Grundlingh cautions against making too direct a connection between Afrikanerdom and fascism, observing that while there was some support, it was always limited and found in “mutual ideological sympathy rather than a deep-seated structural similarity” (“Trajectory” 33). He argues that Afrikaner nationalism emerged from its own history, stating that it “owed its characteristics and thrust more to the evolution of a specific historical ideology with its own constituent elements, and the localised material conditions of the times, than to the adoption of an ideology that originated outside the country” (“Trajectory” 33).

<sup>76</sup> The ox-wagons departed from the statue of Jan van Riebeeck in Cape Town; some went to the Voortrekker Monument in Pretoria while other ox-wagons went to Blood River. In total, they visited over five hundred places.

Sapire suggest the emotions of the crowds were “akin to mass hysteria” (21). As a simulacrum of Afrikanerdom's founding mythology the centenary was an enormous success. The celebrations renewed interest in Afrikaner culture and language, invented traditions,<sup>77</sup> and functioned to unite Afrikaners with a sense of pride about their past.

Anderson argues that print-capitalism is a constitutive feature of nationalism. In the Afrikaner context, however, it was pageantry, rather than print, which expressed and circulated nationalist desires. This is a central aspect of McClintock's argument about why the Trek's centenary celebrations captivated Afrikanerdom. Where literacy might be the reserve of a small male elite, pageantry could demonstrate a collective unity in what she calls “mass national *commodity spectacle*” (374). Breaking with Anderson's nation-as-modernity thesis, McClintock argues that the symbols of the nation-state are not the result of Enlightenment and reason. Instead, she suggests that nationalism mobilizes codes of “fetishism” (374) – a regressive, rather than progressive, thesis. She explains: “More often than not, nationalism takes shape through the visible, ritual organization of fetish objects – flags, uniforms, airplane logos, maps, anthems, national flowers, national cuisines and architectures as well as through the organization of collective fetish spectacle – in team sports, military displays, mass rallies, the myriad forms of popular culture and so on” (374-5). And indeed, this is what the centenary celebrations achieved: binding Afrikaners together into an imagined community through the spectacle of history and tradition. It was nationalism as theatre.

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<sup>77</sup> Eric Hobsbawm explains “invented tradition” as “a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past” (1). For example, to celebrate the centenary of the Trek, Afrikaners grew “Voortrekker beards,” wore “Voortrekker kappies” or bonnets, gave infants “Voortrekker names,” and so on. See Grundlingh and Sapire for an extended discussion of this.

Key here are the ways particular forms of remembering are bound into nation formation and nationalist identity. The centenary celebrations animated an Afrikaner identity amid the competing ideologies and visions for a white South Africa precisely because they called upon a mythical past and, as those myths were being re-enacted in the present, they collapsed the temporal distance between the two. D. F. Malan's 16 December 1938, speech to commemorate the centenary of the Battle of Blood River performed this kind of present remembrance. Grundlingh and Sapire summarize it: "Once again, as occurred a century ago, Afrikaners were facing the same enemy, the 'non-white' and the Briton. Only the battlefield had shifted; instead of facing the 'enemy' in the veld, the urban labour market had now become the arena of struggle ... 'Your Blood River is not here. Your Blood River lies in the city'" (23).<sup>78</sup> Malan relied on a rhetoric of nostalgia to help produce an identity for the present. It was a construction of white masculinity as eternally heroic, battling a variety of enemies to achieve not survival, but supremacy.

The firm anchoring of a positive future found by looking back at a romanticized past was a constitutive feature of the centenary celebrations and of Afrikanerdom more generally. The fixity of identity, located in the repetition of symbols used by the Broederbond and the NP – celebrating the Trek, idolizing Voortrekkers – shows their reverence of an unchanging nationalism. Such nationalist repetition also found its way into the South African military when, in 1939, the Hertzog government named the military headquarters "Voortrekkerhoogte." The British had named this base, built in 1905, "Roberts Heights" after Field-Marshal Lord Roberts,

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<sup>78</sup> Grundlingh and Sapire put attendance figures for Malan's speech at over 200,000 (20).

Commander-in-Chief of the British Forces in South Africa. Renaming the base with not only an Afrikaans name, but a name linked to the proud Boer past, was deeply significant.<sup>79</sup> This demonstrates Cloete's point that Afrikanerdom put heroes of the Afrikaner past into the service of the Afrikaner present to create a continuous, generational line of heroic Afrikaner masculinity.

Afrikanerdom's emphasis on the past and on patriarchy as central elements of its identity echoes the values of the military, an institution also constantly looking backward, anchoring itself in a patriarchal lineage, and remembering a particular version of a past constructed for ideological ends. Finding identity in acts of remembrance – reconstructing the Trek, honouring battles as sacred covenants – is precisely how “generational time,” functioning as a national inheritance for Afrikaners, produces an identity that is fixed and straight. In two of the three novels I discuss in this dissertation, it is precisely the protagonists' refusal to repeat the past (despite their participation in the military – and the idealized national identity it embodies) that marks them as queer. Their acts of forgetting, or un-remembrance, become instances of queer failure, opening out spaces to think differently. To undo oneself and unbecome, rather than perform the self as a repetition of what has come before, is to interrupt the logic of continuity so central to Afrikanerdom and “generational time.”

### **The Sport of War**

Evoking the logic of continuity with the Afrikaner past was central to the recruiting strategy of South Africa in World War II. The government in 1939 was a coalition party with Hertzog as Prime Minister and Smuts as his deputy. Neither Hertzog's NP nor Smuts' SAP was

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<sup>79</sup> In 1998, the ANC government renamed the base Thaba Tishwane, after the Ndebele leader.

comfortable in this coalition. Afrikaners saw Hertzog as betraying the central principle of Afrikanerdom in agreeing to delay the creation of a republic, while the British saw Smuts as betraying the interests of English investment by supporting white labour policies rather than advocating for cheaper Black labour. Despite winning a clear majority in the 1938 election, these tensions erupted the following year when Britain declared war on Germany. Hertzog put forward a motion of neutrality.<sup>80</sup> This motion failed. Smuts then put forward a motion that South Africa support Britain and declare war on Germany. Smuts' motion passed. On 4 September 1939, South Africa joined the war on the side of Britain with a vote of eighty in favour, sixty-seven against. Hertzog resigned and Smuts became Prime Minister.

According to John Lambert, more than forty per cent of white South African men of military age volunteered to fight in World War II (67). They joined for many reasons, including both the practical, such as financial need, and the ideological, such as hoping to make real Smuts' "South Africanism." Jacqueline Deirdre Pretorius explains that "South Africanism," espousing liberal values such as volunteerism and co-operation, envisioned the construction of a white national identity based on bilingualism and a mutual understanding (577). Grundlingh explains the appeal of Smuts' vision: it "promoted a composite white South African nationhood consisting of Afrikaans and English-speakers which stood in contrast to the narrow ethno-nationalist line taken by the National Party" ("King's Afrikaners?" 359). "South Africanism" suggested an idealized shared future for white South Africans.

Bringing Afrikaners on board with this vision was challenging, considering the motion to

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<sup>80</sup> The 1931 Statute of Westminster gave South Africa autonomy from Britain in declarations of war.

join the war on the side of Britain had passed by just thirteen votes. Indeed, lingering Afrikaner resentment against the British meant the government ruled out the use of conscription. Instead, Smuts and the UDF prepared a recruitment drive to make participation in the war appealing. As Grundlingh notes: “the call to arms had to be presented in such a way that it could be construed not as oppositional but as complementary to Afrikaner political and cultural interests” (“King's Afrikaners?” 354). To achieve this, Smuts employed strategies similar to the Broederbond and the NP: mobilizing history and cultural remembrance.

Grundlingh describes *Noordwaarts*,<sup>81</sup> a propaganda film produced in Afrikaans, as demonstrating Smuts' use of the past to support his goals. Set in a farmhouse full of Afrikaner iconography (such as a painting of Paul Kruger, a participant in the Trek and a hero of the Boer War), the eldest son enlists and returns home to show off his gun. He compares his new gun to the Voortrekker rifle, making the message of continuity clear: the gun of the past merges with the gun of the present. The family talk about the Voortrekker battles, including Blood River, linking Hitler to the Zulu leaders who betrayed their trust. The mother declares that the Voortrekkers did not surrender then and should not do so now. The film ends with footage of South African troops in action and flashes back to the Trek and the Boer War while an Afrikaans folk song plays in the background (“King's Afrikaners?” 357). In this way, *Noordwaarts* framed the war not as something antithetical to a proud Afrikaner past but as part of “generational time,” suggesting the continuous and linear link of Afrikanerdom.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Tr: *To the North*

<sup>82</sup> The military used a similar tactic to recruit Black men to the Cape Coloured Corps. Louis Grundlingh describes a film that depicted Black soldiers wearing modern uniforms while carrying assegais. He notes: “for the authorities, blacks lived in a timeless void; customs of the nineteenth century also applied to the twentieth century”

Smuts also used Afrikaner iconography to stage what he called the “Steel Commando,” a “road show” that went to rural communities and encouraged civilians to handle weapons and learn about military equipment and strategy (“King's Afrikaners?” 356). Its success relied on evoking the commandos of the traditional Afrikaner military past while connecting that past to the present need for volunteers. Grundlingh quotes a speech in which Smuts makes this connection clear:

We are back to the days of swift movement, surprise, mobility and skill – the days of Botha, De la Rey and De Wet, the days of High Adventure. This is the new warfare to which I am calling you, and I know that no country in the world possesses greater aptitude for this mobile warfare than South Africa, with its youth accustomed to life in the open and swift movement over the wide spaces. (qtd. in “King's Afrikaners?” 356)

In his speech, Smuts evokes the Boer War as part of a symbolic, heroic past and he frames the current war as a continuation of that historical “adventure.” In doing so, Smuts mobilizes masculinist colonial fantasies that envision the land as an empty playground, made up of “open” and “wide spaces;” it is land bestowed, claimed, and defended by and for white men. He invites members of his audience to imagine that they honour and write the history of the land through their performance of military skill.

Of course, the government did not just need to recruit Afrikaners for the war effort, but also English-speaking South Africans. Suryakanthie Chetty discusses a recruitment advertisement

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(“Recruitment” 183). While the anachronism is striking, it is also clear that the recruitment of both white and Black men relied on portraying the war as an extension of the proud past.

in *Libertas*<sup>83</sup> designed by the UDF to appeal to Boer- and British-descended white South Africans. It positioned the war as a colonial adventure, reminiscent of both the imperial project and the Trek. Under the headline “Join the Springbok Army of Sportsmen,” the advertisement depicts uniformed white South African airmen from a bomber squadron, sitting on a wooden crate set amidst trees, holding up their mascots: two baby cheetahs. The copy reads: “You need to be tough to tame a cheetah, but it is all part of the campaign up north. The South African soldier today takes it all in his stride. There is a place for you in this Sportsmen's Army” (qtd. in “White Man's War” 304). Chetty notes that this propaganda, which connected war, sport, and nationalism, was central to the construction of a white South African masculinity irrespective of linguistic heritage: a “common element is of the colonial mindset of white adventurers on safari, dominating the natural landscape. It creates a restricted world of male camaraderie on the basis of gender as well as race – neither women nor black men are present in the images” (“White Man's War” 311). This echoes McClintock's reading of Afrikaner history as a genealogy of white men. Here, however, the advertisement constructs both Afrikaners and English-speakers as white, heroic men through their shared colonial history of “mastery” over the land. They inherit and reconfigure colonial ideology – and colonial aesthetics – that reproduce the land as a site of white male adventure.

The advertisement also highlights the fixity of identity so central to white South Africa. The military uniforms evoke the British empire, linking South African soldiers to soldiers throughout the commonwealth. At the same time, the baby cheetahs, the jungle backdrop, the

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<sup>83</sup> *Libertas* was a bilingual South African magazine published in the 1940s aimed at consolidating a white South African identity.

upturned crate upon which the soldiers sit – coupled with the reference to adventure “up north” – evoke the pioneer struggle of the Great Trek. Such UDF propaganda took the different histories of the nation, both Afrikaner and British South African, and produced in their stead a singular, white South African masculinity. Like *Noordwaarts* and the Steel Commando, what the UDF envisioned here was a heroic white male past linked to the present through “generational time.” They framed the war as an exotic, colonial, masculinist sporting adventure: soldiers would tame wild animals and conquer land, while enemies were just an “opposing team.” The UDF rendered a clear and legible masculinity – now neither Afrikaner nor British but, instead, South African, as white and militarized.

### **Sport as War**

Like the military, sport was also the site of the construction of an idealized white masculine identity in South Africa. The easy slippage between sport and war was precisely what Smuts was evoking in his World War II recruitment campaign that invited men to find their place in “this Sportsmen's Army,” as if defending the nation's reputation (in sport) and the nation's borders (in war) were interchangeable concerns. J. A. Mangan also sees the connection between sport and war: “war has served sport and sport has served war. To concentrate on one without the other is to be guilty ... of an incomplete entry in an incomplete ledger – the association is that strong” (“Prologue” 2). Mangan is speaking here of European history but he could be talking about South Africa. Indeed, in the South African context the military and sport – specifically rugby – are almost metonymically mapped onto each other.<sup>84</sup> Sport historians David Black and

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<sup>84</sup> In 1862, officers from the 11<sup>th</sup> Regiment played against the civil service in the first recorded rugby match in South Africa.

John Nauright write, “Governments have long supported physical education and sport as a means of fostering a healthy and economically productive work force in peace time, and a militarily effective populace in times of war” (3), reinforcing what John Hoberman calls “sportive nationalism”<sup>85</sup> (“Nationalism” 184). Michael Messner agrees, noting the particular emphasis on masculinity when he writes “Politicians and military leaders praised sport for instilling in boys and young men the courage and strength necessary to defend the nation” (*Power* 19). Sport, like the military, is always ideologically endowed.

Cora Burnett traces the historical connections between sport and the military to antiquity: “As an almost exclusively male domain, sport dates back to the ancient Greeks, Romans, Asians and Egyptians who utilised combat sport such as nude boxing and wrestling to prepare men for war. It celebrated male toughness and bravery, as well as the prowess and athletic proportion of male bodies as effective 'weapons' in combat” (72).<sup>86</sup> Athletic competitions maintained the health of warriors and proved their readiness for battle to their enemies. Donald Kyle agrees: “Aggression in war and competition in games externalized and embodied excellence, confirmed status, and brought honor” (56). The ancient soldier's skill in both sport and war came to represent the epitome of heroic masculinity.

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<sup>85</sup> Hoberman explains “sportive nationalism” as that which “promotes sportive success in international competitions as an instrument of national self-assertion ... Implicit in sportive nationalism is also the more urgent idea that victorious athletes are indispensable symbols of national vitality who contribute to the survival of the nation through role-modelling effects. In this sense athletes can function as symbols of national willpower and strength” (“Nationalism” 184-5).

<sup>86</sup> Plato discusses the connections between athletes and soldiers in *The Republic* (59-61); Richard Giulianotti and Gary Armstrong note that, in *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle also makes the connection clear when he observes that men assure themselves of their self-worth on the sports-field when not at war (381).

In nineteenth-century Britain, the military cultivated a doctrine of muscular Christianity.<sup>87</sup> Niko Besnier and Susan Brownell explain that proponents of such a doctrine “saw the cultivation of the body as a means to an end that consisted of not only Christian faith, but also moral rectitude; racial purity; masculinity; and action in the service of God, country, and empire” (447). The military treated sport as connecting a genteel, moral character with displays of manliness and muscles, finding in sport a site of convergence between idealized masculinity and idealized whiteness. J. D. Campbell, in his analysis of the connections between sport and the military, reinforces this point: “Field sports and team games were not only essential ingredients in the social life of the Victorian Army officer, but they were seen as necessary and valuable elements in his training for war. That these pastimes could be used as a means to build character, foster *esprit de corps*, teamwork and courage was a widespread belief” (27). Hence moral values were co-constitutive of the gentleman soldier mobilized in the service of empire.

Messner raises a similar point about sport's ideological purpose in British public schools. He notes the schools used sport as an instrument to “inculcate 'initiative and self-reliance,' along with 'loyalty and obedience'” (*Power* 10); in other words, sport was a means to produce a particular kind of “manliness” that was seen as vital for success over the empire.<sup>88</sup> This is seen in Reverend J.E.C. Welldon's<sup>89</sup> “The Imperial Purpose of Education:”

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<sup>87</sup> Donald E. Hall explains “muscular Christianity” is “an association between physical strength, religious certainty, and the ability to shape and control the world around oneself” (7). It originated in Victorian novels such as Charles Kingsley's *Two Years Ago* (1857) and Thomas Hughes' *Tom Brown's School Days* (1857).

<sup>88</sup> Henry Newbolt's “*Vitaī Lampada*” (1892) is an example of such muscular Christianity. The poem draws connections between sacrifice in the game of cricket and on the colonial battlefield.

<sup>89</sup> Welldon was Headmaster of Harrow from 1885 to 1898.

The pluck, the energy, the perseverance, the good temper, the self control, the discipline, the co-operation, the esprit de corps, which merit success in cricket or football, are the very qualities which win the day in peace or war. The men who possessed these qualities, not sedate or faultless citizens, but men of will, spirit, and chivalry, are the men who conquered at Plassey or Quebec. In the history of the British Empire it is written that England has owed her sovereignty to her sports. (qtd. in Mangan, *Games* 35-6)

Welldon demonstrates how the body-in-sport can be seen as the national-body-in-battle. These are the same values Smuts invoked in his “Join the Army of Sportsmen” campaign: athletic, white, masculine bodies put into service of – and as – the nation.

Victorian Britain connected sport and the military to construct an idealized gentleman soldier who would expand and maintain the empire. Richard Giulianotti and Gary Armstrong demonstrate this connection by recounting the apocryphal observation, attributed to Lord Wellington, that “The Battle of Waterloo was won on the playing-fields of Eton” (382). They note that such a statement captures the epitome of British imperialism: “namely that sporting practices can contribute massively to masculine military pedagogy. This ideology reached its zenith before and during the First World War, when numerous works of literature deployed the similes of war-as-game and sportsman-as-soldier” (382).<sup>90</sup> The Christmas Truce of 1914 exemplifies the mythology of war as an enterprise conducted by gentlemen observing rules of fair play such that a game of football – and the gathering of the dead – could safely occur in the midst

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<sup>90</sup> James Norman Hall's “The Cricketers of Flanders” (1917) serves as a good example here. His poem describes soldiers lobbing grenades as if they are cricket bowlers. The poem ends “And others say, as we have said: / 'A sportsman and a soldier still!’” (39-40).

of battle.

Hitler used sport not to inculcate a set of values in his athletes, but rather to demonstrate the ideological supremacy of Nazism to the world at the 1936 Berlin Olympics. Despite fascist ideology having what Hoberman calls a “principled hostility to internationalism” (“Political Doctrine” 31), the occasion did allow the Nazis to celebrate their particular ethos: “the cult of the nation, the glorification of war, and the doctrine of race” (“Political Doctrine” 31). The Communists similarly used sport to model their success. Jim Riordan observes that almost all Soviet sports figures were “soldiers or police officers, guardians of public order and role models for a disciplined, obedient and patriotic citizenry” (47). Most countries have treated sport as a national spectacle; while many have sought to demonstrate their ideological superiority through their sporting success, using their athletes as what Hoberman calls “political proxies” (“Political Doctrine” 33), Giulianotti and Armstrong observe that the Nazis and Soviets were noteworthy for their particular use of sport as a site of the “symbolic flexing of militarised, nationalist, masculine muscles” (383).

Of course, nations are far more complex than displays of “sportive nationalism” convey, since national bodies choose teams that promote a particular version of the nation's imagining of itself. For example, apart from the 1904 St. Louis Olympics (when two Tswana men, Len Taunyane and Jan Mashiani,<sup>91</sup> became the first Black South Africans to compete in the Olympics), only white athletes represented South Africa until the end of apartheid.<sup>92</sup> South

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<sup>91</sup> Len Taunyane and Jan Mashiani ran the marathon at the 1904 St. Louis Olympics but were not part of the Olympic team. The men were already in St. Louis, performing re-enactments of the Boer War (they had served as runners in the war itself) at the St. Louis World's Fair occurring at the same time.

<sup>92</sup> South Africa sent its first racially integrated team to the 1992 Barcelona Olympics.

Africa, however, never claimed the whites-only teams represented the whole of South Africa. Prime Minister John Vorster reinforced this point in a speech to parliament in 1971. He was talking about the national rugby team, but he could have been talking about all international sports delegations from South Africa, when he asserted that the team did not represent the South African nation: “It is representative of the whites of South Africa” (qtd. in Bigalke 152).

As Vorster made clear, a nation's athletes reflect the national hegemonic imaginary rather than a national accuracy. And, of course, that national imaginary can change. Jesse Owens was one of eighteen Black athletes who competed as part of the American team at the 1936 Berlin Olympics. Mark Dyreson claims that Owens' performance in Berlin helped “to alter American perceptions about the nature of race and athletic performance” (247) in ways that previous medal-winning Black athletes had not.<sup>93</sup> Dyreson argues that it was the opportunity to push back against Hitler at the 1936 Olympics that brought the public on side. While Owens and the other Black athletes traveled separately to events at home under the segregation laws of the United States, they were at the same time used to construct a racially integrated national identity in the face of Hitler's Aryan ideal. Dyreson observes that Owens' Olympic victories “transformed him into an icon for American popular culture and pushed him onto the pages of even the most ardently segregationist newspapers in the American south” (252), causing him to become “a symbol of the changing racial dynamics in American culture” (252). This is part of the complexity of sportive nationalism. The media treated Owens' athletic success as a heroic product of the American economic and political system to show up the limitations of Hitler's Nazism while ignoring the

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<sup>93</sup> At the 1932 Los Angeles Olympics, Eddie Tolan, Ralph Metcalfe, and Phil Edwards all won medals.

ways racism at home continued to limit Owens' access to wealth and opportunity. For another thirty years white Americans could demand Black people remain segregated – insisting on race as a mark of difference – while at the same time cheering for them and celebrating their success, their American-ness, on the sports-field.<sup>94</sup>

Sportive nationalism treats athletes as reflective of the spirit and values of their nations. Be it South Africa's whites-only teams, Hitler's Aryan ideal, or segregated America's adoration of Jesse Owens, nations treat sport as an idealized representation of the nation. Tara Magdalinski and Timothy Chandler further develop the role of sports in the construction of a national identity. Invoking Anderson's “imagined community” (6) they write:

The international context of sporting events and competitions ... provides a site at which nationalist struggles can be performed in a kind of 'war without weapons', and the physical capital expressed on the playing field is respected as emblematic of economic and political strength. Citizens are taught to recognise athletic bodies as the embodied nation, and are reminded by the adornments, insignia and other physical markings that highlight and confirm the nationalistic enterprise. Individual bodies thus signify the greater imagined community and, as such, provide powerful, accessible symbols with which citizens are invited to identify. (3-4)

Strikingly, when they speak of athletic bodies and insignia that “confirm the nationalist enterprise,” they could easily be talking about the military – and indeed in South Africa these

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<sup>94</sup> America is not unique in this regard. By way of another example, the New Zealand rugby team perform a haka before each game. The New Zealand audience thus identify with, and honour, a Māori heritage that colonialism sought to suppress.

institutions are intimately linked.

The “Springbok” appellation had referred to the South African rugby team since their first European tour in 1906. During World War II, the name came to also refer to white South African soldiers, as seen in the UDF's advertisements that invited white men to "Join the Springbok Army of Sportsmen.” The propaganda arm of the UDF also used the rugby team's logo in a variety of circumstances, from soldiers' cigarette cases to posters advising soldiers of “correct” behaviour while overseas. Neil Roos, in his analysis of white South African soldiers in World War II, discusses the importance of this connection to rugby: “The idea of the Springbok soldier, with all of its nationalistic connotations of status and selection, proved to be highly effective in mobilizing potential white recruits; it also provided a focal point for white servicemen’s identity” (28). Indeed, this connection was so entrenched that the World War II Africa Service Medal<sup>95</sup> featured the Springbok logo. In using the name of "Springbok," the white, muscular, successful masculinity of the rugby team was bestowed upon the soldiers.

This link between sport and the military, each coming to represent the "embodied nation," is especially clear in an Afrikaans-language UDF advertisement featuring Danie Craven,<sup>96</sup> a popular Afrikaner rugby player in the 1930s. Grundlingh describes the advertisement:

a large photograph of a resolute Danie Craven in uniform, peering into the distance, proclaiming, 'I am playing in the biggest Springbok team ever; join me and score the most

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<sup>95</sup> The government awarded the Africa Service Medal to members of the UDF, the South African Police, and the South African Railway Police, for service during the war.

<sup>96</sup> Craven played scrum-half for the Springboks from 1931-1938, was captain in 1938, and was president of the South African Rugby Board from 1956-1993. He also set up the physical education division in the UDF in 1941.

important try of your life.' Exhorting fellow Afrikaans-speakers 'not be spectators only', he encouraged them 'to join their teammates, to push in the scrum; it is the only place for a 'true Springbok' and it was only in this team that the 'sweet sensation' of 'ultimate victory' could be savoured. (Grundlingh, "King's Afrikaners?" 358)

Craven wears the UDF uniform while speaking the language of rugby – the team, the try, the scrum, and so on – conflating the semiotics of military masculinity with those of rugby. Moreover, he does so in Afrikaans, blending together the various codes to imply that the “sweet sensation” of victory is something available for only the “chosen” to experience. In other words, such an advertisement produces a national white masculinity by using the two kinds of "Springboks" (rugby and the military) to bolster and constitute each other.

### **Rugby: Apartheid's Game**

The military was the apotheosis of heterosexual, hegemonic, white masculinity in South Africa, the Springbok was the military's central icon, and rugby was its symbolic sport. I explore the connections between rugby and white South African masculinity in more detail in Chapter Five, but I pause here to consider rugby's role in the construction of Afrikanerdom. As Black and Nauright make clear, the link between Afrikanerdom and rugby is strong: “In South Africa ... sport traditionally played a prominent role in reinforcing rigidly distinct racial, or racially based community identities. Rugby, in particular, became intimately tied up with Afrikanerdom” (10).

There is some heavy irony in rugby being the sport associated with Afrikanerdom considering it was originally a British game. Afrikaners harboured a deep resentment toward Britain. It was to escape British rule that they trekked north and it was to retain their

independence that they fought the Boer War. It therefore does seem surprising that Afrikaners adopted as their own a sport many first encountered while in prisoner-of-war camps during the Boer war. The pleasure of beating the imperial power at their own game, however, should not be underestimated. And Afrikaners were *very* good at rugby. Between 1903 and 1956, the Springboks won or drew almost every international test series they played – and they saw their success at rugby as a way to push back against Britain. Dean Allen confirms this: “Whenever they played the Britons, it was the Anglo-Boer War in explicitly nationalistic and ethnic terms all over again” (52). Through these triumphs, Afrikaners were building an identity. Black and Nauright agree that their wins gave Afrikaners “a sense of achievement, of a collective national self-worth that came as movements towards Dominion, or nation, status gathered force” (25). Afrikaners took the game of British imperialism and turned the sport into a game that represented the anti-imperial ethos and national identity of Afrikanerdom.

Afrikaner values found their reflection in rugby's athletic display of white masculinity. For example, in 1906, during their first European tour, the Springboks refused to play the English team until England withdrew James Peters, the only Black member of the English squad. Starting in the 1920s, New Zealand removed Māori members of the All Blacks<sup>97</sup> as a concession to the South African segregation policies.<sup>98</sup> In 1965, Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd,<sup>99</sup> one of the central architects of apartheid, reiterated his government's policy that no Māori could compete

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<sup>97</sup> New Zealand's All Blacks were so-named due to their wearing black uniforms.

<sup>98</sup> South Africa's segregation policy meant that the Empire Games of 1934 took place in London, despite having been awarded to Johannesburg, after officials raised concerns over South Africa's refusal to allow non-white participants. For a discussion of this, see Gorman.

<sup>99</sup> Verwoerd was Prime Minister from 1958 until his assassination in 1966.

with the All Blacks team about to embark on a tour of South Africa, leading to the cancellation of the tour. In 1967, Vorster rescinded this prohibition, granting Māori players the status of “honorary whites.”<sup>100</sup> In doing so, Vorster sought to defuse the potential threat of the All Blacks pulling out of the 1970 tour while also addressing the contradiction of non-white players appearing on whites-only playing fields. As Nauright observes, such a move “reflected the refusal of the Vorster regime to reform any of the main pillars of apartheid law” (“Fleas” 63).<sup>101</sup> In these ways, the sportive – and racist – nationalism of South African rugby reinforced a fixed national identity in the “war without weapons” of the rugby pitch.

In the 1960s the Springboks started to face anti-apartheid protests during their overseas tours. Apartheid South Africa saw sport victories as proof of their superiority and as a vindication of their political regime. Black and Nauright confirm this: “As *the* dominant international rugby power, only challenged by New Zealand, through the first half of the twentieth century, South Africa's rugby success came to symbolise both the actual and potential achievements of the Afrikaner people on a world scale” (61). As a result of Afrikanerdom's sporting nationalism, sports became a central focus for the international Anti-Apartheid Movement.<sup>102</sup>

Resistance took different approaches. In 1969, the Stop the Seventy campaign in Britain protested every rugby match during the Springboks' tour, achieving their aim of stopping the

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<sup>100</sup> Nauright notes the government suggested to the New Zealand Rugby Union that there should “not be too many” Māori, and “they should not be too dark” (“Fleas” 60). He also notes that this decision contributed to a split in the NP as hardline members felt it contravened the spirit of apartheid (“Fleas” 60).

<sup>101</sup> My focus here is on rugby, but it is worth noting that Vorster cancelled the 1969 British cricket tour of South Africa when Britain announced their side would include Basil D'Oliveira, a Coloured South African who had emigrated to Britain. That Vorster chose to adapt policies to accommodate the All Blacks but refused to extend such accommodation to the British cricket team indicates just how important rugby was to Afrikanerdom.

<sup>102</sup> For an overview of the history of sports boycotts against South Africa, see Nixon, “Apartheid.”

South African cricket tour scheduled for the following year. The Australian Council of Trade Unions refused to support the Springboks' 1971 tour of Australia, resulting in the Australian Air Force having to transport the team.<sup>103</sup> In 1976, twenty-eight nations boycotted the Summer Olympics to protest the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) refusal to ban New Zealand, despite the IOC's claim to censure any nation having sporting contact with South Africa.<sup>104</sup> Finally, in 1977, all Commonwealth countries signed the Gleneagles Agreement, which discouraged sporting contact with South Africa, further isolating the Springboks.<sup>105</sup>

So synonymous were the Springboks with the apartheid regime that their 1981 tour of New Zealand became a battleground for international tensions around apartheid. Robert Muldoon, the New Zealand Prime Minister, felt the Rugby Union of New Zealand should have autonomy, in effect touting what Hamish McDougall calls the “no politics in sport' mantra” (203).<sup>106</sup> Joshua Rubin explains that, in response, anti-apartheid activists “endeavored to make the performance of sport unavoidably political” (146).<sup>107</sup> Massive demonstrations occurred throughout the country, planes dropped “flour bombs” onto the field of play, and hundreds of protesters chanting “The Whole World is Watching” stormed the pitch. Together, their actions

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<sup>103</sup> Members of the transport trade unions refused to service vehicles carrying Springboks, hotel workers went on strike, and mass protests resulted in a state of emergency being declared. The Australian government cancelled the South African cricket tour planned for the following year. For more about the Australian anti-apartheid movement in sport, see Limb, especially pp. 921-35.

<sup>104</sup> The IOC banned South Africa from competition in 1964 and officially expelled them in 1970.

<sup>105</sup> Other bodies followed suit. For example, in 1981, the International Rugby Board banned South Africa from international competition. In 1985, the United Nations adopted the International Convention against Apartheid in Sports.

<sup>106</sup> For a discussion of Muldoon's position, see Nauright and Black 213; Danilewitz 38; McDougall.

<sup>107</sup> Rubin notes the anti-apartheid South African Council of Sport had the slogan, “No normal sport in an abnormal society” (145).

cancelled matches and resulted in the country's largest mass arrest outside of industrial action.<sup>108</sup> The ramifications were such that the Springboks and the All Blacks did not meet again until 1992.

Rugby may have united much of the world against South Africa, but it often functioned to unite white South Africans inside the country.<sup>109</sup> LeMay demonstrates this when he writes, “Even the most dedicated Nationalist could join with the English in commemorating the exploits of the Springboks” (180). Despite the close link between rugby and Afrikanerdom, the Springbok lineup has always included both white English-speaking and Afrikaner players,<sup>110</sup> resulting in the media praising the team as evidence of a united, proud, athletic, and inherently masculine white South African nation. However, this unity was often conditional on success. Burrige Spies explains that, although there were not public rifts between English-speaking and Afrikaner players on the Springbok teams (76), the public reacted badly to the English-speaking players if the Springboks performed poorly (77).<sup>111</sup> Nationalists, however, framed rugby as *the* sport of Afrikanerdom because they saw the game as evoking what they considered to be the defining

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<sup>108</sup> The 1981 Springbok Tour of New Zealand was one largest civil disturbances in New Zealand's history. Trevor Richards says there were 205 demonstrations, involving more than 150,000 people, with almost 2000 arrests (26).

<sup>109</sup> This was not the case in World War II when social divisions in South Africa regarding the war manifested themselves in the “rugby split.” Grundlingh explains that many Afrikaners were incensed that rugby matches were raising money for the war effort (“Playing for Power” 193). This led to Afrikaner nationalist clubs breaking away from the majority-English South African Rugby Board (SARB) to form their own rugby boards. Though they reunited after the war, the Broederbond had used the rift to take control of the sport's politics to shape it more securely as the symbol of Afrikanerdom.

<sup>110</sup> Despite having members who were English, the Springboks communicated on the field in Afrikaans. Supporters believed that their opponents' inability to understand the Springboks' commands contributed to their success.

<sup>111</sup> André Brink supports Spies' assertion: “I can remember how pupils and teachers alike grumbled about the presence of the 'bloody Englishman' Basil Kenyon and the 'bloody Jew' Cecil Moss in 'our ' teams. Significantly enough no one ever said a word about Okey Geffin's semitic extraction: after single-footedly winning the first test against the All Blacks he was enthusiastically accepted as an honorary Afrikaner” (“Foul” 222).

Afrikaner values of courage and combat.<sup>112</sup> Indeed, the link between Afrikanerdom and rugby is so strong that Robert Archer and Antoine Bouillon, in their book *The South African Game: Sport and Racism*, name the chapter about rugby “The Chosen Sport of a Chosen People.”

Archer and Bouillon suggest that rugby represents the laager, thereby linking rugby to the heroic Afrikaner past and demonstrating Afrikanerdom's reliance on modes of remembrance for identity production. Reading the rugby scrum as a laager is a particularly compelling idea because it evokes the idea of the men, grouped in a circle, as symbolizing not just the ox-wagons (and thus the homes of the Afrikaners, grouped together for protection against the unknown dangers posed by nature and humans) but the families of those on the Trek. The players, then, in their scrum and in their playing formations represent for the apartheid state the mythopoetic courage, independence, and heritage – blood and cultural – of the people who they treat as the Ur-Afrikaners. With their bodies-as-laager, the rugby players in effect symbolize “generational time” by bringing the past into the present.

André Brink reads rugby as representing not an idealized Afrikanerdom of the past, but the stark racist reality found in the lived experience of apartheid: “rugby was the very emblem of a system of values specifically associated with the Afrikaner” (“Foul Play” 222). Brink argues that Afrikaners' attraction to rugby lies in the game's brute physicality and emphasis on dominance over an opponent, but also because it is a game of what he calls “foul play” (“Foul Play” 224). He reads the underhanded tricks, the fine line between what is legal and what is not

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<sup>112</sup> Such a sentiment helps explain Brink's reference to Geffin as an “honourary Afrikaner.” The Springbok player Bill Payn trained Geffin to play rugby barefoot while they were in a prisoner-of-war camp during World War II. In 1949, Geffin won thirty-five of the Springbok's forty-seven points in a four-match test against the All Blacks.

(depending on whether one is caught), as mimicking the apartheid system itself. While detention without trial was legal, the torture and sometimes murder that could occur in detention was not. The lack of legality, however, did not stop its occurrence (“Foul Play” 225). Many of the classics of anti-apartheid literature detail the impossibility of seeking answers, let alone justice, within the apartheid state since the state ran itself as a game of “foul play.”<sup>113</sup>

The journalist Frank Keating takes a more romantic view of rugby. In describing the Springboks' return to the international stage in 1992, he extolled the significance of rugby for the Afrikaner spirit: “Rugby is the mother's milk, the lifeblood, the elixir that fuels ... [Afrikaner] arrogance. And clothed in their vestments of green and gold, the Springboks are religious icons and totems to the faith” (qtd. in Grundlingh, “Playing for Power?” 185). In the game of rugby, Afrikaners express their masculinity, honour their past, and symbolize the values of Afrikanerdom. As Keating suggests, rugby is the secular religion and the life force for the Afrikaner. And, as Zachary Bigalke makes clear, the “generational time” of the sport limits the scope of its inheritance when he observes that the “semiotic value of Springboks rugby ... was explicitly confined to white identities” (154).

The link between rugby and the military in the South African context goes beyond sharing the name of “Springboks” during World War II. Since Afrikanerdom and the military were so closely connected, the symbolic link between the military and rugby takes on further resonance. Nauright notes, for example, that both rugby and the military rely on collectivism and the need for group solidarity to dominate an opponent (“Sustaining” 238). Both rugby and the military

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<sup>113</sup> For example, Paton, *Cry*; Power; Brink, *Dry*; Gordimer.

require discipline and strength. And both are homosocial spaces fostering male friendship and male bonding. These are spaces that birth boys into men, where patriotism and patriarchy are the motivating factors, and where a white, heterosexual, muscular, masculinity is necessary for entry into the laager-cum-scrum. Chandler and Nauright make the links between rugby and the military clear when they write “Manly might on the football field, it was thought, would translate into fighting the good fight to protect the empire on the battlefield” (6). General Magnus Malan,<sup>114</sup> Minister of Defence, drew the connection between the South African Defence Force (SADF) and rugby directly when he said: “You can take a rugby player and within half an hour make a soldier of him” (qtd. in Grundlingh, “Responses” 103). Such was the deep connection between the two institutions.

### **From UDF to SADF**

Smuts' use of sport, and particularly the appeal of being connected to the Springboks, may have encouraged white South African men to enlist in World War II, but his larger dream of “South Africanism” did not last after the war. The white South African military units had put aside linguistic and cultural differences to fight for a common cause abroad, but their sense of “brotherhood” in the field did not transform the military (or South African society more broadly) upon their return. Rather, the post-war military became a site of cultural contest as Afrikaners and English-speakers struggled to co-exist. After they came to power in 1948, the NP sought to reshape South African society by promoting the interests of Afrikaners and the goals of Afrikanerdom. The military, as an institution reflective of the hegemonic ideals of the nation,

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<sup>114</sup> Magnus Malan was Minister of Defence from 1980 to 1991.

became what Annette Seegers calls an “Afrikanerized institution” (“Apartheid's Military” 148).

The UDF had been a blend of the British military system, with its permanent standing army, and the South African commando system, with its participants having what Mark Phillips refers to as a “some-time soldier, some-time citizen” (18) role. While the structure of the military remained essentially the same after 1948 – a permanent force supplemented by part-time commando forces – the ideology governing the institution was markedly different. To have the military more closely reflect the government's ideals the new military leadership ended military exchanges between Britain and South Africa, encouraged early retirement of soldiers, and brought in a requirement for soldiers to be bilingual. This latter element effectively discouraged English speakers from staying – or enlisting.

The new Afrikaner military also reconfigured history and tradition to fit their own narrative. Not only did they decommission regiments, design new flags and uniforms for the various service branches, and replace British medals and honours with South African ones, they also banned World War II medals and the Red Tab that indicated service in the war.<sup>115</sup> Seegers defends this decision: “Since the [Red] Tab reminded soldiers of old political divisions, it ruffled feathers in the workplace. In other words, the Red Tabs discouraged professional relations” (*Military* 95). While Seegers may be right that the Red Tab indicated a mark of difference that could threaten collegiality, to see the banning of medals as a matter of workplace relations is far too simplistic. In erasing the medals from public view the government was rewriting history.

Decommissioning regiments and banning medals was about correcting that which

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<sup>115</sup> For a sustained discussion of this, see Grundy, *Militarization*; Seegers, *Military*; Roos.

interrupted Afrikanerdom's particular form of nationalist remembering. David Katz confirms this when he writes, "The history of South African participation in the war was sacrificed in the face of Afrikaner nationalism and their desire to build an Afrikaner nation" (284). The "sacred history" of the Afrikaners – organized around the Trek and the Boer War – contributed to a narrative that positioned Afrikaners as the heroes of history, powerful despite their persecution. World War II medals that represented co-operation between white South Africans in the defeat against racism and fascism, and that symbolized more broadly a sense of international responsibility, had no place in the "new" official remembering. The medals had to go. In 1957 the UDF became the SADF. In effect, Seegers argues, the NP "excised" (*Military* 95) any symbolic link to the British past.

"South Africanism" may have failed but, while the SADF was a site of cultural contest, it was not one of racial contest. The NP's growing anxiety about independence movements gaining ground in Angola, Namibia, Zimbabwe, and Mozambique, plus the growing militancy of the African National Congress (ANC) and its armed wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) within the borders of South Africa, meant that the military felt they needed to expand to protect their minority rule.<sup>116</sup> In 1967, rules around conscription changed to address this need. What had been an unenforced ballot system now became a requirement of citizenship for all white men between seventeen and sixty-five years old.<sup>117</sup> This meant the SADF needed to reduce its Afrikaner-focus

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<sup>116</sup> Gavin Cawthra estimates the strength of the military in 1967 at approximately 150,000. Due to conscription, by 1977 this had grown to 350,000 (65).

<sup>117</sup> Conscription increased dramatically as the NP's paranoia grew:

1967: 9 months national service

1972: 12 months national service + 19 days/year for 5 years in the Citizen Force

to consolidate whiteness as a united front against a common “enemy.”

There was little resistance to this policy shift from inside or outside the SADF. Afrikaners inside the SADF now linguistically dominated the institution.<sup>118</sup> And, of course, the SADF – like all militaries – was not a neutral institution but was an agent of the state. The government chose the leadership of the SADF for their loyalty to Afrikanerdom and to the NP. In the 1980s, Prime Minister P.W. Botha centralized the security establishment under the National Security Management System, further concentrating military decision-making and power in the hands of the few. As such, English-speakers posed no threat to the Afrikaners in the SADF.

Outside the SADF, the government framed the policy of increased conscription as an opportunity for white unity; they encouraged Afrikaans- and English-speakers to put aside their differences for the good of the nation. Stephen Symons suggests that Afrikaners more easily adapted to conscription because of Afrikanerdom's cultural emphasis on earlier military battles: “White Afrikaners tended to be more committed, framed by largely hyper-masculine Afrikaner historical narratives. Past heroic exploits and a sense of superior cultural identity were employed as a means of presenting national service as an honour-bound duty that demanded unswerving loyalty” (516). However, as Seegers explains, the SADF subsequently sought to undo this alienating effect by reducing their Afrikaner-focus and instead aimed public relations campaigns

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1975: 12 months national service + 3 month tour/year for 5 years in the Citizen Force

1977: 24 months national service + 30 days/year for 8 years in the Citizen Force

1982: 24 months national service + 3 month tour/year alternating 1 month tour/year for 12 years in the Citizen Force. The government also conscripted all white men who had missed the call-up in the 1950s and 1960s. They now had to undergo one month of Commando training and then serve twelve days a year until they turned sixty-five.

<sup>118</sup> Seegers notes that by 1974, Afrikaans-speakers made up 85% of the SADF (*Military* 92).

at English-speakers in order to position the military as a site for the idealized construction of whiteness itself. She remarks, “national service constitutes a very important mechanism for the maintenance of racial solidarity ... By its very nature, national service moderates intrawhite cleavages, creates bonds that override social and other distinctions, and circumvents the problem of self-selection among volunteers” (“Apartheid's Military” 162). The apartheid state needed both Afrikaans- and English-speaking white South Africans to identify with the military because, as Melissa Steyn and Daniel Conway point out, conscription “underpinned white power and defined the white nation” (287). A well-staffed, exemplary, white military was integral to the apartheid state.

### **Resisting the Call-Up**

Seegers observes that the public saw the military as “crucial to the maintenance of white racial solidarity ... Certainly, there are few indications that whites will publicly criticize the military's activities” (“Apartheid's Military” 163). While the heavy militarization of South African society meant that few white South Africans questioned its constant presence in their lives, some did push back against the military's demand to prove good white citizenship by wearing the uniform. English-speaking groups organized much of the resistance to conscription.<sup>119</sup> The National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) and the End Conscription Campaign (ECC), for example, not only mobilized support for conscripts who

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<sup>119</sup> For example, in 1974, the South African Council of Churches adopted a motion condemning conscription. The Committee on South African War Resistance (COSAWR), founded in 1978 by South Africans living in exile in London and Amsterdam, helped resisters claim political asylum abroad. Philip Frankel estimates that between 1977-1981, COSAWR helped a thousand objectors gain asylum in Britain alone (133). The Black Sash, a white women's anti-apartheid organization, passed a motion in 1983 demanding an end to conscription, and they helped establish the End Conscription Campaign (ECC) later that year.

refused the call-up, they also helped create a public discourse<sup>120</sup> of resistance with which to challenge the apartheid government.

The government took the threat of such resistance seriously. Jacklyn Cock explains the government's harassment of the ECC: "Meetings, publications and activities of the organization were banned. Disinformation, death threats, fire-bombings, assaults, break-ins, and anonymous counter-propaganda against the organization were commonplace" (*Colonels and Cadres* 88). The government also responded to the mobilization against conscription by increasing the penalties for anyone failing to report for duty<sup>121</sup> and for anyone found encouraging objection to conscription.<sup>122</sup> As Lynn Berat makes clear, through such penalties the state was seeking to prohibit public debate about conscription (149).

There may not have been many resisters, but the existence of a visible white resistance to conscription was obviously threatening to the apartheid regime. Resisters risked long jail terms; in this sense, resistance to conscription required bravery and sacrifice – the very values that had

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<sup>120</sup> Arguably the Black Sash, formally known as The Women's Defence of the Constitution League, had already helped to create this space of resistance through their visible demonstrations against apartheid. Founded in 1955 to oppose the NP's plan to increase the senate to pass apartheid legislation, the "Black Sash" moniker came from wearing black sashes at demonstrations to symbolize their mourning for the constitution.

<sup>121</sup> The government made no provision for conscientious objection but agreed objectors could petition their unit to perform non-combat service (such as working as a cook, clerk, or driver). If the unit was unwilling to accommodate the objector's beliefs, the military charged the objector with refusing to perform military service, punishable by up to six months in prison. In 1972, this punishment increased to fifteen months; in 1974, it increased to up to six years in prison. In 1974 the government amended the Defence Act to provide a narrow definition of a conscientious objector who could render community, rather than military, service. Berat notes that between 1973-1978 the government convicted over 2,600 conscientious objectors, almost all of whom were religious objectors (152).

<sup>122</sup> The 1974 Amendment to the 1957 Defence Act added Section 121 (c), reads:

Any person who uses any language or does any act or thing with intent to recommend to, encourage, aid, incite, instigate, suggest or otherwise cause any other person or category of person or persons in general to refuse or fail to render any service to which such other person or a person of such category or persons in general is or are liable or may become liable in terms of this act, shall be guilty of an offence and liable to conviction to a fine not exceeding five thousand rand or to imprisonment for a period not exceeding six years or to both such a fine or imprisonment.

previously been the reserve of idealized military masculinity. Conway reinforces this when he writes, “The breach white male objectors had made enabled new and transgressive subjectivities to enter the public realm and destabilize militarized masculinities” (“Contesting” 133). Men refusing to answer the call-up challenged the apartheid regime's construction of white South African masculinity. As a result, the state disparaged resisters in the media, in their workplaces, and in their communities,<sup>123</sup> questioning their adherence to hegemonic masculinity. The state mocked men who chose not to serve as unmanly, untrustworthy, communist, and – crucially – homosexual. For example, Ivan Toms was a gay Christian doctor who had completed his initial national service but later refused to comply with any further call-ups. He became the target of a five-year campaign to shame and intimidate him that only ended when he went to jail. He tells of state agents putting up homophobic posters in his neighbourhood that declared “ECC does it from behind” (258) and “Ivan Toms is a fairy?” (258).<sup>124</sup> The state sought to contain the potential disruption such men posed by positioning those who refused military service as not being part of the idealized white heterosexual masculine nation.

Despite the risk of incarceration, growing numbers of men did resist conscription. In the early 1970s, one or two conscientious political objectors a year went to prison. In 1984, just over fifteen hundred men failed to report for duty. After the SADF deployed troops in the Black townships during the state of emergency in 1985, that figure increased by five hundred per cent

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<sup>123</sup> See Conway “Contesting” for a discussion of *The Rape of Peace*, a booklet produced by the pro-conscription, SADF-funded, Veterans for Victory, which used various homophobic slurs against conscientious objectors.

<sup>124</sup> See Toms for a discussion of the various strategies the state used against him, such as advertising his car for sale at a very low price, depositing manure on his doorstep, and so on. For a discussion of the ECC's decision to keep Toms' homosexuality secret to “protect” the organization, see Nicol 77-79; Tucker 42-43. For a broader discussion of the gender and sexual politics inside the ECC, see Conway, “All These Long-Haired Fairies.”

(Cock *Colonels and Cadres* 81).<sup>125</sup> By 1986, the government stopped publishing such figures.<sup>126</sup> These numbers were embarrassing for the apartheid government, but the overall numbers of resisters did remain low since, as Seegers, Cock, and others note, young white men had been socialized into an ideology of militarism that rendered such refusal unusual.<sup>127</sup> However, as well as the formal resisters, conscripts also performed various modes of what Cock calls “informal resistance” within the SADF: “drug abuse, malingering, petty theft, sabotage and so on” (*Colonels and Cadres* 75). One of the arguments of this dissertation is that such a list could also include same-sex sexual activity within the military.

### **Conclusion**

Nations operate through various modes of remembrance and reproduction – of the populace, of the culture, of the language, of the history. It was a particular form of remembering, and its relentless repetition, that helped construct the Afrikaner identity as fixed and certain. A white, heterosexual, heroic, muscular masculinity came to symbolize Afrikanerdom and this figure – with moustache and military uniform – in turn came to represent the apartheid state. National remembering, bound into generational logics, repeated itself in the home, in games of rugby, and in the men who were themselves treated as symbols of the state: soldiers.

This dissertation is about the disruptive potential of white South African soldiers who

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<sup>125</sup> Cock notes that in 1984, 1,596 conscripts failed to report for duty; in 1985 that figure was 7,589 (*Colonels and Cadres* 81).

<sup>126</sup> For a detailed discussion of resistance to conscription, see Berat; Cherry; Conway.

<sup>127</sup> Even though the numbers remained low, the government still felt threatened by the presence of organized resistance. In 1987, Malan said the ECC was “just as much an enemy of the Defence Force as the African National Congress” (qtd. in Cherry 360). The government banned the ECC in 1988.

forget themselves by having sexual desires for other men while wearing the uniform of a military that policed not just geography but identity. Apartheid heavily relied on acts of remembrance in order to support its claims to power. Those who would forget such history are disruptive figures: they threaten the national remembering and they remove themselves from claiming the inheritance of white South Africa's "generational time." In doing so, they suggest a different order is possible.

**CHAPTER THREE: “‘Have I served as an officer and a man?’” (79): Queer  
Masculinity in Tatamkhulu Afrika's *Bitter Eden***

As many critics have observed,<sup>128</sup> different literary genres are associated with the different wars of the twentieth century: World War I is most associated with poetry, World War II with the realist novel, Vietnam with satire, and the more recent Gulf Wars with the blog. Paul Fussell argues the literature of World War II generally featured none of the homoeroticism of the poetry of World War I. He writes,

Compared with passionate writing in the Great War, the convention in the Second is that love is strenuously heteroerotic. From the Second War there seem to be none of those poems fantasizing loving 'lads' that the lonely imagination threw off in Flanders and Picardy ... If we do hear now and then of such 'minority' sexual compensations, they seem largely limited to the POW camps, with their extreme circumstances of deprivation.

(*Wartime* 109)

Fussell explains the homoeroticism in World War I poetry as arising from its temporal proximity to the late Victorian Aesthetic Movement that had established a tradition of valuing the erotic attractiveness of young men (*Great War* 304). Santanu Das agrees with Fussell that the Aesthetic

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<sup>128</sup> See for example, Fussell *Wartime*; Winter; Norris; McLoughlin.

influence was important: “Sensuousness mixed with pathos as the wistfulness of *l’amour impossible* was deflected onto the early death of the boy. Most of the war poets eagerly tapped into this tradition” (131). However, Das also attributes much of the homoeroticism of World War I poetry to the public schooling of many of the poets who had grown up in an environment of “‘chaste’ but distinctly ‘homosexual’ crushes” (130). For Allan Bérubé, the homoeroticism of war literature is more about circumstance than literary movement and class. In his analysis of lesbians and gay men in World War II, he argues soldiers “had the chance to experience what it would be like to live in a world where prejudices against male-to-male love, affection, and sex were suspended, if only temporarily” (200). For Bérubé, it was the homosocial conditions of war that helped foster homoerotic relationships.

While there are novels set in World War II that feature overtly homosexual relationships not connected to prisoner-of-war camps,<sup>129</sup> Fussell is right that the literature of World War II was not as urgent as that of World War I. It contained far less conviction that anyone would heed its message of war's horror and futility. Instead, the literature of World War II turned the focus inward. Fussell observes that “the Second World War often came close to being boring, with a sigh, not a scream, its typical sound” (*Wartime* 132). My interest is in the nature of that sigh as a sound expressed *between* men rather than *of* men and how that sigh disrupts assumptions about gender and sexuality in the context of the military and of South Africa.

Tatamkhulu Afrika's semi-autobiographical World War II novel, *Bitter Eden*, queers white South African military masculinity by rendering identity – be it in relation to nation,

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<sup>129</sup> For example, Gore Vidal's *The City and the Pillar* (1948), Walter Baxter's *Look Down in Mercy* (1952), and Mary Renault's *The Charioteer* (1953).

gender, or sexuality – as ambivalent and therefore stripped of its determinant meaning. Afrika's narrator, Tom Smith (a man with a purposefully anonymous name), demonstrates identity to be something not fixed and legible, as the government of South Africa required, but mutable. Once he abandons the fixtures that prop up masculinity as a meaningful category of identification, Tom reveals masculinity is nothing more than an empty signifier. This is in sharp contrast to the rhetoric developing in South Africa at the same time in which the novel is set that favoured a hegemonic, Christian, muscular, militaristic masculinity as symbolic of the idealized Afrikaner past and of the future South African nation. The evacuation of the signifier of white South African male, brought about by Tom's journey in *Bitter Eden*, enables a queer rethinking of military masculinity. Using Jack Halberstam's argument about queer failure, and its attendant performance of queer forgetting, and building on José Esteban Muñoz's and Elizabeth Freeman's theories of queer time, I argue that *Bitter Eden*'s exploration of same-sex desires calls into question the hegemonic masculinity so central to the South African military and it disrupts assumptions about legible and fixed identities so central to the racist organization of pre-1994 South African society.

*Bitter Eden* exposes symbols of nationalism – symbols that have their basis in, and in turn uphold, hegemonic white masculinity, and that foreclose ambiguity in favour of the known – as fallacies relying on mere costume and the persistence of memory. If queerness is a challenge to fixed identity, as Michael Warner's “resistance to the regimes of the normal” (xxvi) suggests, then *Bitter Eden* shows how queer desire thwarts expectations of gender and sexuality within the military. Halberstam's theory of failure and forgetting is useful here: to “unloose” (*Queer Art* 110) oneself from history, and to embrace Muñoz's “losing” (72) of oneself in a different order of

time, is to experience new possibilities of being. To refuse the weight of one's history and the expectations of one's gender by acting on illicit, homosexual, desires in the military, while going to war on behalf of a nation that reifies legible categories of identity, is to enter a counterhegemonic state of confusion, newness, and unpredictability. Afrika's protagonist queers the categories of gender and sexuality and, in doing so, challenges the South African state's reliance on the fixity of identity.

Afrika's biography reveals the elasticity of identity in defiance of the South African government's belief in, and reliance upon, rigid categories. Born Mogamed Fu'ad Nasif in Egypt in 1920 to an Egyptian father and Turkish mother, the family moved to South Africa in 1923 where his parents died shortly after of the flu. A Methodist family then raised him as John Charlton.<sup>130</sup> During World War II, he enlisted with the United Defence Force (UDF); the Germans and Italians captured him – alongside 33,000 Allied soldiers – at Tobruk and held him as a prisoner-of-war for three years. After the war he settled in Namibia and had a variety of jobs (miner, drummer, bookkeeper) under the name Jouza Joubert. He returned to South Africa where he renounced his “white” classification and, in 1964, embraced Islam, taking the name Ismail Joubert. In 1967, in response to the government's destruction of District Six, he founded Al Jihaad, a militant Muslim anti-apartheid organization that later affiliated with Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK). He wrote under his African National Congress (ANC) codename, Tatamkhulu Afrika. As Michelle Decker aptly observes: “he crossed the colour line and revealed its arbitrary violence while abiding by a deeply ethical code that ran counter to capitalist and imperial logics

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<sup>130</sup> Afrika published his first novel, *Broken Earth*, under the name John Charlton in 1940. The publisher's warehouse was bombed in the Blitz, and all but two copies of the book were destroyed.

of accrual, self-protection, and preservation of power” (136).

For a novel about memory and the power of forgetting, the novel's performance of remembering and forgetting itself traces a queer trajectory. Afrika wrote *Bitter Eden* while in prisoner-of-war camps in Germany and Italy. Nazi guards found the manuscript as they were moving the prisoners to another location. In his obituary of Afrika, Keith Gottschalk recounts Afrika's story: “two SS guards silently tore up the manuscript in front of him ... later, he reconstructed it from memory” (Gottschalk). Gottschalk's “later” belies the passage of time here. Afrika wrote the first version of this novel in his twenties; it was almost sixty years “later” that he wrote it again, publishing the novel at the age of eighty-two.

Afrika centres this temporal distance himself by opening the novel with Tom as an old man being taken back in time through memories provoked by the arrival of a letter. Suggesting history resides in an archive of the flesh, rather than in official narratives, Tom brings the past into the present through a combination of feel and memory: “I touch the scar on my cheek and it flinches as though the long-dead tissue had a Lazarus-life of its own” (1). He reinforces his reluctance to resurrect that past through the italics, the dashes, and the exclamation points that he scatters in the opening section, conveying a tension between wanting and hesitating to explore the memories. Tom further expresses this discomfort and uncertainty as he reads the letter: “Then comes the bald statement that it is *he* that has 'passed on' – how I hate that phrase! – after a long illness whose nature they do not disclose” (1). The layering of the unspoken as private familiarity, public innocuousness and legal privacy makes clear that the weight of silence is not static; its meaning – like memory – is in constant flux. A novel about failing and forgetting the social scripts of white South African military masculinity thus foregrounds in its opening the

queer confusion of remembering that which is long-forgotten but known intimately enough to need no utterance, of recalling a history that has remained unspoken despite its public display through the scar on his cheek.

I begin by briefly discussing the Immorality Act of 1927, the military construction of the hero, and the South African World War II propaganda that constructed this hero as white. This provides context for my discussion of Tom's anxieties as he falls in love with another man and helps me position this relationship as refusing the legibility such legislation – and its attendant ideology – required. Using Raewyn Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity, I consider the ways in which Tom fails to correctly perform as a soldier. I read Afrika's protagonist as moving from an anxiety about being Othered to ultimately embracing a queerly failed masculinity when he performs the role of Lady Macbeth. Using Christine Berberich's work on nostalgia in war propaganda, and Fussell's analysis of memory in war literature, I consider the significance of Tom's queer forgetting in the novel and the way those who queerly forget markers such as nation and family create themselves anew. In the final section of the chapter, I use theories of queer time and Annie Potts' analysis of male sexuality to argue that the illegibility of temporal markers in the novel produces an inability to read the novel's central relationship in legible, conventional terms. This helps me argue that Afrika's *Bitter Eden* pushes back against the rigid expectations of identity as something fixed and knowable in the South African military.

### **Making Whiteness**

Of interest here is the fixity – and legibility – of identity by which white South Africans constructed and maintained their belief in their racial and moral superiority. Throughout the

1920s, the government enacted legislation focused on shoring up white power in South Africa.<sup>131</sup> The Immorality Act of 1927 was a central legislative apparatus that mapped legible and fixed identities of race, gender, and sexuality onto the body politic. The Immorality Act amalgamated existing provincial legislation that prevented Black men from having sex with white women outside of marriage and it added a new prohibition against white men having sex with Black women outside of marriage. Because the Act forbade sexual relations across racial lines, it was a governmental mechanism linking whiteness to morality. Jeremy Martens explains: “sexual transgressions across the colour line were believed to be sufficiently serious to warrant banishment from white civil society” (238). While nominatively addressing a fear of miscegenation,<sup>132</sup> the core of the Act was about producing a white superiority through sexual morality. Martens argues politicians felt that “immoral sexual relations between the races would undermine white civilisation” (239).<sup>133</sup> As Martens points out, the government used sexuality to construct whiteness as both a racial and a moral category.

The Immorality Act is of central concern in relation to *Bitter Eden*. Tom Smith's anxieties about performing masculinity incorrectly, and thus his fear of being Othered, cause the central tension in the novel. The Immorality Act enforced not just whiteness but straightness. Martens

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<sup>131</sup> For example the Natives (Urban Areas) Act No. 21 of 1923 (which created townships and sought to control the movement of Black people in the cities), the Industrial Conciliation Act No. 11 of 1924 (which prohibited Black people from joining trade unions), the Mines and Works Act No. 25 of 1926 (which sought to keep Black people out of jobs), and so on.

<sup>132</sup> The Act was silent, for example, on sex between whites, Indians, and Coloured South Africans.

<sup>133</sup> Despite there being very few mixed-race marriages before the ban in 1950, the National Party (NP) mobilized around the threat Black men posed to white women and to the white race. The moral panic around sexuality enabled white men to take on the role of protector of women and the race in general. Jonathan Hyslop observes the connection here to the American South at the turn of the century: “their claim to 'protect' Southern white women against blacks shored up their position in the hierarchy of gender just as centrally as it did their position in the hierarchy of race” (60). The NP sought a similar 'protection' in South Africa.

argues that the blurring of racial boundaries threatened claims to white supremacy. Andy Carolin agrees, adding that the blurring of sexual boundaries also threatened such claims. Carolin makes clear that the Immorality Act constructed white sexuality as necessarily straight: it “functioned ... to produce and police heteronormative whiteness” (111). The Immorality Act demarcated the risks of deviance and rendered race, gender, and sexuality as not just clear and legible categories but categories that upheld each other. Carolin argues that it “is through the Immorality Act that idealised notions of whiteness needed to be produced and policed – legally, symbolically and reproductively – to sustain the racial myths of Otherness and superiority on which apartheid was based” (113). It was a legislative mechanism to construct and police the boundaries of whiteness. To contravene the Act was to contravene the very core of white South African society. The social and legal ramifications meant that white South Africa cast out of the laager anyone who placed whiteness in peril.

### **Making Heroes**

Militaries also have a profound investment in policing and maintaining gender roles. There is a metonymic slippage between masculinity and the military such that the connection between them seems rooted in common sense and ideas of the natural. Maria Stern and Marysia Zalewski draw attention to how gender stereotypes and military stereotypes construct and reinforce each other in what they call the military's “basic storyline” (621):

The military and the protectors of women and children and the nation (with the men as soldiers) are cast as strong masculine heroes, whilst, through the gendered discourses of militarisation, enemy men are routinely feminised. Discourses of militarisation and gendered discourses are co-constitutive and also interact with myriad other discourses

such as those that reinforce racism, nationalism, classism, heterosexism. Hence, militarisation depends on 'men' and 'women' being, acting, identifying, even thinking as men and women constituted through these intersecting discourses. If 'men' are not men, and 'women' are not women, then the rationale driving militarisation might unravel. (621)

As Stern and Zalewski observe, the military is both making and mobilizing gender roles. The cultural construction and maintenance of the idea of soldier-as-hero, implicitly resting on the assumption of the soldier-as-male, is vital to the army's conception of itself.

Raewyn Connell reinforces this point. Speaking about hegemonic masculinity in the military, she writes:

the imagery of masculine heroism is not *culturally* irrelevant. Something has to glue the army together and keep the men in line, or at least enough in line for the organization to produce its violent effects. Part of the struggle for hegemony in the gender order is the use of culture for such disciplinary purposes: setting standards, claiming popular assent and discrediting those who fall short. The production of exemplary masculinities is thus integral to the politics of hegemonic masculinity. (*Masculinities* 214)

The military cannot exist without the myth of the heroic soldier to sustain it. Breaking apart that synecdochic connection between man, soldier, and hero undoes the military institution. To meaningfully disrupt these cultural values of honour and valour would mean that militaries – all militaries – would “unravel.”

However, the myth of the heroic soldier remains integral to the military. This is the case even when the nature of that heroic role changes. Das argues that the horrifying conditions of

World War I disrupted the previously held “basic storyline” assumptions about heroism: “The myth of heroic masculinity fostered through the works of Rider Haggard and Rudyard Kipling and encouraged through the public school sporting system exploded in the mud and blood of the Western Front. A very different order of male experience, one that accommodated fear, vulnerability, support, and physical tenderness, sprang up in its place” (136). Das is elucidating the cultural construction of heroism. The Victorian gentlemen-heroism of Henry Newbolt's “*Vitai Lampada*” and Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* becomes the World War I anti-heroism of Wilfred Owen's “*Dulce et Decorum Est*” and Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*, which becomes the World War II daring-heroism of Paul Brickhill's *The Great Escape* and James Jones' *From Here to Eternity* and so on. Put another way, so overdetermined is the expectation that a soldier will be a hero that, even when the markers of a soldier's heroism change – even when, like Owen, they disavow the existence of heroism by calling it “the Old Lie” (27) – the implicit presence of that heroism remains. Due to the soldier's willingness (or at least perceived willingness) to sacrifice himself for a greater goal, his already present masculinity-as-soldier gains further layers of heroic masculinity when in battle, whether he is performing acts of daring or of kindness. So entrenched is the narrative that soldiers perform heroic acts in war that any homoerotic undertone to their camaraderie is what Das calls “honourably exempt from such charges” (110). This allows the military to continue to rely upon the soldier-as-hero to police and maintain legible gender roles such that the ideal soldier is the epitome of heterosexual, muscular, military masculinity. In the South African context, that hero is also decidedly white.

In World War II, the UDF mobilized rhetorics of whiteness and heterosexual masculinity in their positioning of the war as a colonial sporting adventure. The UDF slogan, “Join the

Springbok Army of Sportsmen,” yoked together white masculinity, colonial adventure, and athleticism. By referring to the soldiers as “Springboks,” thereby linking rugby to the military, the UDF achieved what Albert Grundlingh calls “a common denominator, linking Afrikaner culture and war” (“King's Afrikaners?” 358). In other words, the UDF confirmed and conferred codes of white masculinity upon its soldiers.

Suryakanthie Chetty demonstrates the construction of a white South African military masculinity by pointing to the UDF's re-writing of history. A recruitment advertisement from a 1941 issue of *Libertas* portrays a white soldier charging with a bayonet. The caption reads, “In the present push up north the deeds of our fighters, who charge with fixed bayonets singing and shouting native war-cries as they go, have astonished their friends and terrified their foes” (qtd. in “Imagining” 112). Chetty notes the anachronism: “the 'native war-cries' originated with the historical settler enemy yet is here appropriated by white soldiers in a combat situation which excluded black soldiers. The emphasis is on heroism on the part of the individual which still exerted a strong hold on the imagination despite the alienation of modern warfare” (“Imagining” 113). The Boers (and other white colonizers) *heard* the “native war-cries” as they encountered – and attacked – Indigenous peoples. Yet here, the white soldiers claim the “war-cries” as their own, shouting them in a context that specifically excludes Black soldiers and that works to mobilize and reinforce white masculinity as dominant and powerful.

The appropriation of non-white signifiers of battle recasts the war as nothing more than a (racist) children's game, playing out fantasies of colonial domination. Whether it was mobilizing the semiotics of the colonial safari in depicting soldiers holding up baby cheetahs, or positioning war as an exotic adventure full of games, these advertisements played on the perceived power

and muscularity of the white soldiers. As Chetty suggests, the UDF recruitment campaign evoked the colonial romance of Rider Haggard and John Buchan, positioning the white male soldier as an athletic, timeless warrior, someone who would easily conquer the enemy, dominate the land (and by implication women), and deserve the name of hero. In contrast to such war propaganda and military rhetoric, Afrika's novel emphasizes the anti-warrior and the anti-hero. In doing so, he challenges and subverts the fixity of South African military identity.

**“You are a Springbok. You are a Volunteer. You are a Man”:<sup>134</sup> Queer Failure**

*Bitter Eden* is primarily set in the prisoner-of-war camps of Italy and Germany. Donna Coates observes that prisoner-of-war novels have an “emphasis on the anti-warrior, the man forced out of the action” (154). They are, however, normally still heavily imbued with the rhetoric of war; tropes such as escape (to heroically rejoin the action)<sup>135</sup> and noble suffering (to heroically withstand the unspeakable cruelty of the enemy)<sup>136</sup> help emphasize the otherwise sidelined soldier's masculinity and heroism. In these ways, then, prisoner-of-war novels typically still reinforce the military rhetoric of hegemonic masculinity despite their centre of action taking place away from the front. Afrika, however, upends these expectations through his anti-hero who fails to “correctly” perform – and who comes to reject the constraints of – hegemonic military masculinity.

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<sup>134</sup> UDF poster. See Pretorius 614

<sup>135</sup> For example, Uys Krige's *The Way Out* narrates the experience of a group of South African and Canadian soldiers who have escaped a prisoner-of-war camp in Italy. While their sole focus is to find a way through the mountains to rejoin the war, it is memories of home that keep up the men's morale.

<sup>136</sup> For example, Laurens van der Post's *The Seed and the Sower* is a South African novel about a Japanese prisoner-of-war camp that centres on a battle of wills between prisoner and guard. The novel's hero, Major Celliers, refuses to bend to his captor's will and, as a result, dies a “noble” death.

A moment just after Tom has met Danny serves as a good illustration of this tension between conventional ways of understanding masculinity and their upheaval in the camp. After explaining that each “hut boss” is the highest-ranked officer assigned to the hut, meaning the hierarchy of the camp follows the hierarchy of the army, Tom reflects: “What, I wonder, is Danny's rank, then wonder why I should quite so sharply want to know” (51). Tom employs a military logic to place and understand this man he has just met. In doing so, he echoes the white South African ideology of categorizing identity. He then immediately disavows such a question, chastising himself as he misreads his question as a sign of valuing that which he hates (hierarchy) and that of which he is afraid (becoming closer to the man he just met). His embarrassment marks the confusion of challenging the constructions of masculinities that have structured his world.

Chris Dunton observes that Afrika peoples his novels with protagonists who have an anxiety around their claim to masculinity; they are, Dunton writes, “subjected to a testing of their notions of masculinity” (148), assessing the “accuracy” and behaviour of each other, or what Dunton refers to as engaging in the act of “regarding” other men (154). This is an important feature of *Bitter Eden*. That Tom feels pressured to test himself against other performances of masculinity – even in a location as overwritten with hegemonic masculinity as the military – evokes the South African state's constant surveillance and policing of boundaries of identity. As Carolin notes, the state's belief in the superiority of whiteness “was not merely an objective classification of race but rather an active production and policing of idealised ways of *being* white” (111). To perform well is to fit in and hold on to power; to err in the performance is to draw attention to one's failure and to blur the boundary upon which claims to power are based.

John Tosh explains hegemonic masculinity as: the “gender structure of society [that]

comprises unequal power relations between men and women, and between different categories of men” (42). Simply having particular genitalia or behaving in particular ways is insufficient for entry into hegemonic masculinity's “safety zone.” Kobus du Pisani makes this clear in relation to hegemonic Afrikaner masculinity, which “marginalised alternative masculinities by silencing or stigmatising them. Hegemonic Afrikaner masculinity was intricately bound up with social and political power in Afrikaner society and hence with Afrikaner nationalism” (“Puritanism Transformed” 157). In Afrika's novel, Tom is neither interested in claims to power nor in being marginalized. The result is a constant tension regarding his role in the military. For example, during their first meeting Danny says, “I was in the tank corps. What were you?” “A machine gunner,” I half-lie, not caring overmuch that I do; only hoping he will not ask more questions ... A survivor with an attitude, I am not going to lightly admit that I was mostly an anti-gas wimp at H.Q.” (46). One must perform “properly” and adhere to particular conventions to attain success.

Connell observes that hegemonic masculinity operates by a process of relation and hierarchy: dominant masculinities subordinate and exclude Othered masculinities (*Masculinities* 78). Such gendered Othering is of course not unique to South Africa – Connell argues that any society or culture organized around relational gender contains hegemonic masculinity and hegemonic masculinity, by definition, relies on exclusion. But in the context of the reification of identity that is happening in South Africa at the outbreak of World War II, and especially in the context of the military – an institution that assumes it is the exemplar of hegemonic masculinity – questions and concerns around the “correct” performance of masculinity are central. In *Bitter Eden*, Afrika draws our attention to the complexity of masculinity and how a failure to perform “properly” challenges the categories of identity underpinning white supremacy.

## Failing to Shoot

Queer failure provides a productive lens through which to read Afrika's novel. Halberstam values queer failure as an escape from dominant expectations: “failure allows us to escape the punishing norms that discipline behavior and manage human development with the goal of delivering us from unruly childhoods to orderly and predictable adulthoods. Failure preserves some of the wondrous anarchy of childhood and disturbs the supposedly clean boundaries between adults and children, winners and losers” (*Queer Art* 3). Not only does Afrika's protagonist fail at being a “good” soldier but, once in the prisoner-of-war camps, Tom meets a variety of men who both resist and embrace the “art of unbecoming.” In his “testing” and observing of the men around him, Tom learns that failure is generative rather than sterile and that, through embracing failure, he comes to experience the possibilities enabled by unbecoming a man.

Afrika's protagonist simply wants everyone to leave him alone, caring neither about performing heroic actions nor about defying orders. He recognizes, however, that he fails in the role of good soldier. At the end of the novel's opening battle Tom says:

A bomber, pregnantly not ours, lumbers over the wadi on its way to the sea, its shadow huge on the ground, its belly seeming to skim rock, scrub, sand. I dutifully pump the gun's last exotic rounds at it, marvelling that, for once, the gun does not jam. But there is no flowering of the plane into flame, no gratifying hurtling of it into the glittering enamel of the sea, and I stare after it as it rises into higher flight and am drained as one who has milked his seed into his hand. (5)

There are several significant symbols in this scene. One is that Tom sees the enemy plane as a

grotesque woman of monstrous fertility. Planes are feminized,<sup>137</sup> but here Tom describes the plane as obese, lacking any elegance or reverence with which a pregnant woman might otherwise be associated, and the plane is pregnant not with potential life but with assured death. Part of the plane's monstrosity is its refusal to participate in the overdetermined moment: the plane should explode but does not. Tom is also not correctly participating in the codes of war here. While he claims a national position through his reading of the plane as “not ours,” he fails to perform the white South African heroic masculinity so promised in the UDF advertisements. This battle should be a paean to patriotism, with Tom reinforcing his whiteness and masculinity through the construction of an exciting battle-as-sport. However, rather than assert superiority over the enemy by treating the moment as one of a hunt, with the plane his prey, Tom only “dutifully” shoots at it. Afrika is foregrounding failure here, refusing the codes, and disrupting the tropes of the war genre.

The other notable symbol here is Tom treating the gun as his penis. Yet neither the gun nor the penis carries the phallic power to threaten the pregnant plane. Rather, he triggers the gun in a masturbatory fashion. The gun-as-penis is neither a symbol of hypermasculinity (he fails to penetrate his target) nor a symbol of failed masculinity (he is spent after the encounter as if he has ejaculated). It is this ambivalence, this refusal to fit into neat categories, that complicates the construction of soldierly masculinity in the novel.

There is an erotic pleasure of confusion here. In his failure to perform as a successful

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<sup>137</sup> Like ships, planes are conventionally feminized. Oft-cited reasons for this include that they “carry” people; that *navis*, latin for ship, is a feminine noun; owners dedicated their ships to goddesses to bestow luck; and they were objects controlled by men.

soldier (in that he does not shoot down the plane) Tom does perform as a successful man (in that he does shoot his load). The incongruity of a soldier masturbating in battle invites a productive moment of disorientation. The scene recalls the military chant: “This is my rifle, /This is my gun. /This is for killing, /This is for fun;” the chant explicitly equates a weapon with a penis such that the recruit needs to “learn” the difference.<sup>138</sup> Carol Burke explains the military uses this chant to induct soldiers into the discourse of the institution: it is “a new professional vocabulary, not by distinguishing penis from weapon, but, in fact, by conflating them; for the successful trainee both are bodily appendages” (427). Tom, however, has failed to “shoot” the right weapon.

Desire becomes what Halberstam would call “unloosed” (*Queer Art* 110) in this moment of battle that does not conventionally invite expectations of ejaculation. Tom's failure to bring down the plane becomes secondary to the physical pleasure of orgasm. In side-stepping the norms that regulate and control behaviour, Tom engages in the kind of queer performance Muñoz discusses: “that is, not the fact of a queer identity but the force of a kind of queer doing” (84). In failing to bring down the plane, but in succeeding in imagining that he brings himself off, Tom is harnessing Muñoz's “force of a kind of queer doing” (84) precisely because he is failing to perform the role of successful soldier. In masturbating rather than killing, but operating within the codes of the military, Tom is confusing the boundaries that demarcate gender, race, and orientation so crucial to the South African state's production of exemplary white masculinity.

Afrika constructs Tom as a South African soldier who is deeply anxious to satisfy the

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<sup>138</sup> Antony Ackerman's play about the South African Defence Force (SADF), *Somewhere on the Border*, includes this chant in a highly sexualized scene. A South African soldier performs drag while also reminding his audience that he has a “weapon.” See also Cock, *Colonels and Cadres* 60-65 for a discussion of how the SADF used this chant to link masculinity with militarism.

expectations of hegemonic masculinity, representing the sense of being under constant surveillance and the fear that any perceived transgression might mark him as Other. As Dunton notes, his “regarding” (154) of other men is about measuring himself in relation to what he perceives as more successful performances of masculinity. After the opening battle, the enemy takes Tom's unit prisoner. When his lieutenant asks him if he wants to escape, to “hand [himself] over like a sheep or make a break?” (7), Tom admits his failure: “I hear myself saying, 'make a break,' even though previously there had been no thought of that in my mind. I am honest enough to admit that I am no hero” (7). This is another example of the ambivalence surrounding military masculinity that Tom embodies. Tom knows the “right” (as in hypermasculine, heroic soldier) answer is to resist surrender. Yet he also admits he had not even considered such a possibility and, in doing so, he reveals the fiction underpinning the idea of the “naturally” heroic soldier. That he claims to be “honest enough to admit [he is] no hero” (7), however, purposefully obfuscates since he has not been honest with his lieutenant.

Afrika constructs significant confusion surrounding masculinity. The lieutenant orders Tom into a truck and is surprised Tom has neither kit nor gun. Despite having successfully performed the role of soldier, by sabotaging his anti-gas vehicle (7), Tom feels only shame: he did not retrieve his weapon and kit from it before lighting it on fire, marking him as having failed to perform the role of soldier “correctly.” It is not that Tom is a complete failure when measured against hegemonic masculinity; rather, the masculinity he performs – and wants others to see him performing – is a complex construction. Rachel Woodward explains that what she calls the “warrior hero” model of military masculinity involves a constant tension between acting as an individual and as part of a group but, she notes, “the warrior hero is a model of military

masculinity, not a tangible reality” (644). She is right that the warrior hero model may be an ideal rather than a lived experience, but it is the model against which such experience is measured.

David Morgan extends Woodward's model of military masculinity, arguing that military masculinity relies upon “two contrasting models of heroism, one focusing on the warrior, the heroic individual, and the other focusing on 'brothers in arms'” (174). Indeed, the tension between these two ideals may be a defining feature of military masculinity, making the successful achievement of both-at-once an impossibility. Nevertheless, Tom feels he has failed. He helped his unit (protecting his 'brothers in arms') by destroying the weaponry that the enemy could otherwise turn against them, but he cannot recognize the success of such an act. He focuses instead on his failure to grab the equipment he will need (an individual failure). In this sense, the “testing of their notions of masculinity” (148) – which Dunton rightly identifies as a key feature of Afrika's protagonists – remains unresolved.

Tom learns that successful, legible, heroic military masculinity is a constantly moving target. An example of this is when Tom reads the other men in the truck as being far more “successful” men than himself because they have remembered their kitbags. The lieutenant immediately betrays his men by handing them over to the Germans. A man sitting next to Tom reacts: “the hulk with a beard [is] beside me and a gun seems to flow into an extension of his hand, but his aim does not match the buccaneer beard and the lieutenant stares, chalk-faced and open-mouthed, as his shoulder shatters and the revolver farts a useless round into the sand” (8-9). The epitome of hegemonic Afrikaner masculinity – the “hulk,” whose masculinity renders his weapon a part of his own body – is shot dead by a German. Tom takes the “hulk's” kit as his own. Again, there are complex layers to the depiction of masculinity. The man with military power, the

lieutenant, immediately relinquishes that power by ceding to the enemy. The “hulk,” who derives his masculine power from his large stature, Boer-like beard, and willingness to kill the very person who betrays them, fails in what should be a heroic moment. Tom, whose lack of a kit signified his failure to perform heroic military masculinity, claims the “hulk's” kit for his own and so fits in with the other men left in the truck without risk of being Othered for his transgression. This is Cynthia Enloe's “patriarchal confusion” (*Globalization* 81), and it demonstrates Sarah Bulmer's argument that the “reproduction of patriarchal norms in the military” (137) is “radically contingent” (137) rather than fixed and settled.

Tom's fear of failing to conform to conventional expectations of military masculinity increases once he starts to fall in love with Danny. The military functions as an ideological site of hegemonic masculinity that is aggressive, muscular, and decidedly heterosexual. Gary Baines makes this clear: the “military environment is one in which hyper-masculinity and patriarchy are seldom challenged. Any deviance from heterosexual norms is not tolerated” (*Border War* 85). The military is also an extension of the state which mutually constructs race, gender, and sexuality as fixed and legible such that the state could police and enforce their imaginary boundaries.

Afrika alludes to this homophobic environment when his protagonist contemplates the mechanics of same-sex sexual relations. He realizes he is purposefully imagining something revolting to “frighten myself back into the cosy straitjacket into which I was born and raised” (94-95). Such “straitjacket” thinking is what Martens, Carolin, and others are referencing when they discuss how legislation such as the Immorality Act worked to construct whiteness as superior, recognizable, and heterosexual. Barbara Bush describes this thinking in similar terms:

“By the Second World War, white South Africans had created an enclosed white world from which they tried to erase black South Africa” (144). She explains the specifically gendered dynamic of this social structure: “Physical prowess in sport, hunting and outdoor pursuits defined pioneering, hyper-masculine 'colonial man' as a heroic husband to 'colonial woman', the bearer and protector of the white race ... This articulation of gendered white identities was vital in sustaining racial supremacy” (145). Debbie Epstein agrees, arguing that the ultimate arrival of apartheid legislation after the war was a culmination of this conception of race and gender: it “could be argued that the separation of the racialised self from the gendered and sexualised self would be impossible ... apartheid over-determined the interconnectedness of race and gender” (52). Tom's potential sexual transgression threatens expectations not just of being a soldier, and not just of being a man, but also of being white.

### **Failing to Learn**

A common trope of war literature treats war as a site of education where soldiers learn profound truths on the battlefield; it is this access to a particular kind of knowledge that helps construct the soldier-as-hero. Yuval Noah Harari opens his study of war memoirs with just this point: “The quintessential late modern Western war story ... describes the experience of war as an experience of learning the truth about oneself and about the world. The hero of the story is most often an ignorant youth whom war turns into a wise veteran” (1). Harari states that, in war “the purest core of the mind can resurface” (15), unencumbered by decadent ideas or physical needs. Sarah Cole demonstrates just how far back in history this expectation of war-as-teacher can be found: “Homer, inaugurating the western epic tradition, imagined superlative men-of-war whose very essence was forged in the crucible of combat” (“People in War” 25). Ultimately Harari,

Cole, and others see war as a site of revelation. As Catherine Brosman explains in her discussion of war literature, it is challenging to move away from such thinking: “even as modern writers seek to deny its validity, its glory, its persistent image as a crucible of character, war remains an enduring cultural myth as well as a continuing human experience” (95). Such thinking reinforces the military rhetoric that claims it is in the army where “boys learn to become men,”<sup>139</sup> and, as Margot Norris puts it, that “war is what makes a man a man” (17). Afrika's novel thwarts the conventional war-as-bildungsroman trope by having his protagonist learn not how to *be* a man, but how to *unbecome* one, undoing the expectations of white military masculinity to embrace other possibilities and other ways of being in the world.

Tom is not purposefully failing to meet the expectations of military masculinity. However, his failures do constitute an act of resistance to the gender order so vital to the construction of South African masculinity and to the maintenance of white superiority. It is this gender order that works to underpin the South African military. From Tom's own ineptitude at being a soldier, to the lieutenant's quick reversal from heroic resistance to selfish betrayal, to the “hulk's” failed act of heroism, Afrika's novel makes clear that, even amongst those playing more legible and conventional roles, white South African military masculinity is a plural and unstable concept. It is Tom's anxiety about being Othered that results in his constant “regarding” of the performances of masculinity around him and that then exposes this “patriarchal confusion.”

Tom begins the war anxious to “correctly” perform the role of white South African male. And in some ways, he does follow Harari's war-as-bildungsroman trajectory as he comes to learn

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<sup>139</sup> See for example, Cock, “Manpower;” Cock, “Introduction;” Swart; Bourke, *Intimate History*; Karpinski; Baines, *Border War*; Symons.

certain truths about himself and the world around him. But where Harari envisions war as a pinnacle of heteronormative, honourable, hegemonic military masculinity, where acts of heroism and sacrifice reveal truths about being a man, Tom's education in war comes to be about undoing the markers of legible masculinity. As he “regards” and befriends a variety of men in the prisoner-of-war camps he learns that a monolithic, “correct,” masculinity does not exist. He learns, instead, that there are exciting possibilities found in the blurring of what he had previously thought to be clear identities.

This pushing of boundaries is what Muñoz characterizes as an instance of loss once recognizable ways of apprehending the world disappear in favour of newness. He explains, “To accept loss is to accept queerness – or more accurately, to accept the loss of heteronormativity, authorization, and entitlement. To be lost is not to hide in a closet or to perform a simple (ontological) disappearing act; it is to veer away from heterosexuality's path” (73). Once Tom begins to reject the “straitjacket” of heteronormativity and idealized South African masculinity he can begin to “accept the loss” or, as Halberstam would put it, to embrace the liberating possibilities of queer failure.

Tom's failures allow him to move beyond social expectations and so beyond the “punishing norms that discipline behavior” (*Queer Art* 3). An example of Tom failing to “discipline [his] behavior” is when the Italian commander of the camp announces (as it turns out, incorrectly) that the war is over: “For a moment, we stand, buttocks to crotch, irresolute and stunned as at a tidings of death, not joy. Then a roar erupts, and I hear myself yelling, and Danny is kissing me on the lips, and I am kissing him back and knowing no discomfort at that, it seeming the inevitable and only way to say what heart and tongue can no longer hold” (116). In

learning to fail to live up to the standards society expects him to emulate, Afrika suggests that Tom is then set free from their constraints.

### **Failing Masculinity: (Un)becoming a New Man**

Afrika's protagonist moves from an anxiety about correctly upholding the codes of hegemonic masculinity to learning to embrace a new kind of masculinity when he plays Lady Macbeth in a prison camp production of Shakespeare's play. Tony, the camp's theatre director, explains that, rather than continue with the farces he has been staging, he wants to put on a “serious play with men playing the parts of women as though they *were* women and not men” (135). He chooses *Macbeth* as his vehicle for an over-the-top visual extravaganza and seeks to rework the play into “the highfalutin thriller that it really is, and have those slobs out there panting for the visuals” (135). Even in his desire to stage serious drama Tony sees it as an opportunity to create an erotic spectacle. This is indeed a fitting approach for a play that finds many parallels with the themes of the novel. *Macbeth*, like *Bitter Eden*, is a text full of ambiguity, particularly regarding gender, and it is a text about the unfixity of identity and the process of unbecoming. Unlike Tom, however, the figure of Macbeth is a well-respected soldier, recognized as a hero by his king. Indeed, Macbeth's initial description is as a great warrior and a great man (1.2.16-23). Even though his wife wants him to become king, however, she worries he is not man enough (1.5.13-20). She herself wishes to become undone, to tear away the feminine flesh to reveal the violent not-man, not-woman inside her. Nothing is as it seems or stays certain in Shakespeare's play.

The three witches who open the play, and who speak in rhyme and prophecy, themselves most represent ambiguous states: they are both apparition and embodied, shifting from one to the

other without apparent concern. They are women but, in their bearded and “weird” (1.3.30) state, they challenge what “being woman” means. Alexander Leggatt describes the witches as inhabiting what he calls “border zones” (182): “Of the earth or not, alive or not, questionable or not, women or not” (182). Macbeth, his wife, and the witches each occupy spaces of liminality in the play: to be a king when you are not, to be a man when you are not, to be alive when you are not. So too in *Bitter Eden* the ambiguity of identity is a constant theme. The men in the camp are in war but out of battle; they are soldiers but, as prisoners, they have neither weapons nor power. And, during moments of particular cruelty, their captors render them more dead than alive. Yet, like Tony's vision of the visual component of the play, there is an erotic undercurrent in an environment of war and death.

Occupying such a liminal space is at first uncomfortable for Afrika's protagonist. He worries that he is not correctly performing masculinity, acknowledging he fails ever further in his performance once he falls in love with another man. As a white South African he is right to worry. Any transgressive performance of masculinity that challenged hegemonic Afrikaner masculinity's claim to supremacy was threatening; as Nicky Falkof makes clear, South Africa “was a state and a society that would not tolerate deviance from norms of gender or behaviour” (286). Tom begins the war invested in fitting in, anxious he not be read as Other through his imperfect performance of masculinity. In the “border zone” of the camp, however, away from the state's surveillance, his understanding of masculinity profoundly expands.

In a novel about a soldier's journey to discover what it means to “be a man,” it is learning to play Lady Macbeth that teaches Tom the pleasure of opening up his identity to embrace a far wider definition of masculinity. Tony coaches Tom in his performance: “She it is who has

always been a part of you, but you never knew it and now you must know it and wake her and set her free, and she must move your parts and speak with your tongue, and you will look on from the sidelines like the rest of us and ask, 'Is that me?' And it will be and yet it won't" (141-142).

What Tom learns here is that gender is both performance and intuition. Bérubé, in his discussion of the uses of drag in World War II, argues that drag performers “played tricks with gender, becoming masters of the art of illusion” (85). But what Afrika depicts here is something different. Tom achieves a recognition that it is masculinity – and its stability as an identity – that is an illusion.<sup>140</sup> Tom is uncomfortable as he lets go of the trappings of masculinity he has tried so hard to cultivate; indeed, Muñoz acknowledges loss accompanies newness. However, Tom comes to recognize he may always have had the potential to embrace this other side of himself: “Was [Tony's] coaxing to life in me this previously dormant foetus of my feminineness ... or was any such calculation matched by my own subliminal, never-to-be-spoken-of readiness to learn?” (145). Tom begins to experience the “wondrous anarchy” (*Queer Art 3*) Halberstam finds in moments of failure, disturbing boundaries and producing new ways of being.

Once Tom takes the stage as Lady Macbeth, his transformation becomes complete. Tom describes becoming Lady Macbeth with language that is violent, animalistic, and chaotic: “ripping *me* wide from the instant of my first entrance, is a snarling tigress of malevolent cunning between my thighs. I know it is working by an almost shift of the air, a reaching out, not to me but to that which is transcending me, that is not me yet, from the beginning, has never been anything *but* this alternative according to Tom” (147-148). The violence of Tom's transformation

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<sup>140</sup> This question of instability extends beyond gender in *Macbeth* to all aspects of identity, from the porter repeatedly asking, “Who's there?” (2.3) to Macbeth asking the witches, “What are you?” (1.3.47) to Lady Macbeth asking, “What are these faces?” (4.2.78)

evokes Lady Macbeth's famous speech:

Come, you spirits  
 That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here  
 And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full  
 Of direst cruelty. Make thick my blood;  
 Stop up the access and passage to remorse,  
 That no compunctious visitings of nature  
 Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between  
 The effect of it. Come to my woman's breasts  
 And take my milk for gall (1.5. 38-46)

Her speech demonstrates what Leggatt calls an “instability of gender” (193), rendering not a gender reversal but something new: “The body is still female, but the values it exemplifies belong to a gender that ... has no name” (194). She gives rather than receives commands, and she harnesses the powers of the universe as she seeks to change her shape. In this way, Lady Macbeth is a queer figure. She disrupts that which is known and categorizable and in doing so she poses an uncomfortable threat precisely because she remains paradoxical and illegible. The violence, and violent imagery, expressed by Tom and Lady Macbeth makes sense. To open up a new part of one's identity, to birth that which hegemonic expectations of masculinity has suppressed, is to experience loss, but it is also to anarchically render oneself as new.

Halberstam argues that experiencing queer failure – posing a challenge to heteronormativity and its relentless push toward progress and the future – is “self-shattering” (*Queer Art* 110), messy, and shocking, precisely because it wrests space for the unexpected, the

unpredictable, the unknown. The sense of moral – and racial – superiority undergirding the apartheid regime was contingent on refusing liminality. The policing of racial, sexual, and gender identities was not just about demarcating clear boundaries to control but also about asserting the state's ability to know everything, even the activities of the bedroom. Like the violence of Lady Macbeth's speech demanding she be “unsexed,” Tom's violent description of his performance conveys the necessary violence that occurs when expectations of identity shatter. No easily read identity remains. There is nothing legible left for the state to catalogue.

Tom's embrace of the role of Lady Macbeth reveals that he has gained the ability to put aside the trappings of hegemonic masculinity to become both man and woman, both soldier and actor, both lover and beloved. Full of this new knowledge about himself, and the lengths to which the category of masculinity can stretch, he is “unsexed” in order to emerge as a new man. His performance results in Danny's return to his bed. Significantly, he awakes the next morning with an erection, “persuading myself that, Queen or no Queen, I am still as much of a male as ever I was” (151). By “failing” to correctly perform the codes of white South African masculinity, Tom discovers a more fluid experience of gender and sexuality. It is not meaningless, but it is illegible.

### **“Never Forget You Are a Citizen of South Africa”:<sup>141</sup> Queer Forgetting**

Afrika's *Bitter Eden* foregrounds the act of remembrance while, simultaneously, celebrating the possibilities of forgetting. There is a tension between the South African state's persistent emphasis on memory and patriotism as markers of a national identity – such as the centenary celebrations of the Trek or the UDF's Springbok propaganda – and Afrika's

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<sup>141</sup> UDF poster. See Pretorius 608.

protagonist, who rejects the dominance of the past. Tom's refusal to allow the past to govern him is a queer, resistant move against the state. Halberstam argues that to forget is itself an act of queerness: it resists “the heroic and grand logics of recall” and generates possibilities of invention rather than “inscription” (*Queer Art* 15). To forget, then, is to intervene and challenge the dominant organization of time, what Freeman calls “chrononormativity.” She defines this as “the interlocking of temporal schemes necessary for genealogies of descent and for the mundane workings of domestic life” (xxii), meaning it is the “use of time to organize individual human bodies toward maximum productivity” (3). Straight time relies upon a linear and progressive understanding of time such that it renders the process of cause and effect “natural” and obvious; memory and tradition come to appear as common sense. Queer forgetting, however, offers a disruption to chrononormativity. It is what Halberstam calls an “art of unbecoming” (*Queer Art* 88). Put another way, it is mode of unmeaning.

White South Africans reified the past. This is clear in how Annette Seegers centres memory and history in her explanation of what she calls the “idealised heroic image of the Afrikaner” (“Towards” 484). She explains this figure should demonstrate: “ardent patriotism; strong religious sentiments; devotion to language; a sense of common historical experience; a sense of racial integrity; a rural stamp in his way of life; remarkably homogeneity; and the will to survive” (“Towards” 484). Colonel J.C.C. Laas, the first leader of the Ossewabrandwag (OB), an Afrikaner paramilitary organization, also reinforced the importance of history to Afrikaner identity. Laas asserted that the OB would be “celebrating Afrikaans national festivals and our heroes' birthdays, erecting memorials, laying wreaths at monuments, locating and keeping in repair places of historical interest as well as the graves of Afrikaners who perished on the 'Road

of South Africa” (qtd. in LeMay 184). This constant impulse to remember as a key facet of Afrikaner identity stands in sharp contrast to the acts of forgetting found throughout Afrika's novel.

The emphasis on remembering is especially relevant in the context of war. Memory and nostalgia figured heavily in World War I and World War II recruitment campaigns around the world. These campaigns often positioned the values that helped construct the nation – evoked through images of “home” and “tradition” – as being under threat. Berberich argues that World War I British recruitment posters elevated the British countryside to the level of cultural object, where “images of the countryside were used to forge and perpetuate a sense of national identity and 'place' to unite the populace in support of the war” (31). The posters evoked a nostalgia that reminded soldiers of what they were fighting to protect. She uses Modris Eksteins to support her argument that soldiers were, in many ways, sent to fight for a fictionalized Britain. Eksteins explains “the German adventure was a revolutionary threat, a threat to security, prosperity, and integrity. It was a threat to the Wessex landscapes of Hardy's novels, to the Shropshire lad of A.E. Housman's imagination, and to Mr. Badger of Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind and the Willows*, who had built his house on the remains of an ancient civilization” (132). Berberich and Eksteins argue the nostalgia evoked in this fictionalized chocolate-box version of a village-based Britain motivated soldiers to fight.

In the South African context, the UDF mobilized a similarly fictionalized past – linking participation in the war to a nostalgic remembrance of the Trek and the Boer War, finding heroes not in the drama of Hardy but in the colonial adventure of Haggard. The UDF's propaganda, however, did not position such nostalgic constructions as under threat. Rather, the propaganda

presented a continuous heroic lineage: where men of the past had stood up against a bully at home, they now were helping others do the same as part of a continental and global military.<sup>142</sup>As Geoffrey Hutchings observes in a discussion of South African war poetry, the soldiers saw themselves “as outward-looking, part of a great empire enjoying its finest, not its final, hour” (26).

The symbols of the nation rely on memory and repetition to carry meaning. Fussell, in his analysis of pastoral imagery in the poems of World War I, demonstrates how national modes of remembering become dominant. Talking about the role of the red poppy in remembrances of war, Fussell notes that Flanders field, the inspiration of John McCrae's famous poem, also contains blue cornflowers: “But blue cornflowers have no connection with English pastoral elegiac tradition, and won't do ... One notices and remembers what one has been 'coded' – usually by literature or its popular equivalent – to notice and remember. It would be a mistake to imagine that the poppies in Great War writings get there just because they are actually there in the French and Belgian fields” (*Great War* 268). It is precisely the “codes” of memory that are of interest here because they come to function as the dominant narrative – the poppy represents the remembrance of war – while other histories disappear from the record – the presence of blue cornflowers in Flanders field, for example.

The poppy is a good example of Halberstam's argument that the “logics of recall,” or national modes of remembering, can be hard to resist. As Fussell makes clear, the poppy is a

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<sup>142</sup> *South Africa at War*, a booklet compiled by the South African Public Relations and Information Office, helps reinforce this with chapters such as “The Industrial Front: Repair Shop of the Middle East” and a map demonstrating South Africa's strategic importance in relation to shipping lanes causing it to become “once more the 'Tavern of the Seas,' the converging point of shipping lanes from all parts of the free world” (26-27).

palimpsest, overwritten with various meanings. He explains that, as a perennial, the poppy was associated in the pastoral tradition with immortality, in the Victorian period with homosexual desires, while at other points the poppy's soporific aspects have evoked oblivion and death. He writes, "These little paper simulacra come from pastoral elegy ... pass through Victorian male sentimental poetry, flesh themselves out in the actual blossoms of Flanders, and come back to be worn in buttonholes on Remembrance Day" (*Great War* 270). It is not that the meanings cannot shift but they do remain relatively consistent (passion, blood, death) and connected in the cultural imagination. The poppy-as-palimpsest demonstrates how difficult it is to turn away from such signification: the poppy can never just *be* a flower; a blue cornflower cannot mark war's remembrance.

Bodies also function as palimpsests. From the personal (scars, tattoos) to the familial (name, religion) to the social (gender, race, nationality) bodies carry meanings that are at once constant and ever-changing. Whether it is a scar's physical reminder of an accident, a name by which one is called home, or a government document designating race and gender in ways the state can process and police, the various ways the body is written upon enable the state to decipher and discipline its citizens. At the same time, of course, the writings on and of the body can shift such that the "origin" is but a trace. A scar's story can be rewritten, names and gender can change, the legibility of race depends on contextual and historical forces. This is especially the case in war, where a race, a religion, a nationality, a uniform can carry codes of meaning that designate enemy or ally. That the signing of a treaty or the re-drawing of a map can change the meanings of those designations demonstrates how easily those codes do not stay still.

In South Africa, of course, the government sought to treat bodies not as palimpsests but as

entities of fixed and certain meaning. Glen Elder makes this clear. He discusses the South African state's reconfiguring of geographical space as carrying the meaning of the racial categories constructed by the state: "Questionable and historically inaccurate racial categories became indisputable realities once they were written on the landscape in the shape of bounded *racialized* spaces occupied by *racialized* subjects" ("Body Politic" 153). Elder uses the term "state voyeurism" ("Body Politic" 158) to indicate how obsessed the government was with policing the categories it created in order to support its claims of the moral superiority of whiteness. The state coded all bodies with racial and moral meaning. To "forget" – to misbehave, to transgress, to ignore the state's classification – was to be disruptive to the very foundation of the state. To refuse the "logics of recall," in other words, was to move beyond the boundaries of the known and knowable. This is what happens in the prisoner-of-war camps of *Bitter Eden*.

If bodies are palimpsests upon which the various codes of social memory (gender, race, age, nationality, culture) are written in order to form legible identity, then what becomes clear in *Bitter Eden* is that abandoning these markers leads to queer possibilities of thinking otherwise. In sharp contrast to Mark Behr's *The Smell of Apples*, which I discuss in the next chapter, there are no nostalgic remembrances of past cultural signifiers or symbols of iconic nationhood in *Bitter Eden*. What there is, instead, is a profound sense of unanchored existence. The soldiers are quite literally out-of-place, often not knowing their geographical location as their captors move them from one prisoner-of-war camp to another, and they are similarly out-of-time, having no sense of how long they have been in one camp or another. Without overwritten markers of belonging and identity, the men in the camps become just bodies-of-flesh rather than representations-of-identity. They are rendered strange as they become free from social constraints. They "unbecome."

A central element of military identity intimately tied up with remembering is that of patriotism. In Afrika's *Bitter Eden*, however, patriotism is mostly absent. On the sole occasion Tom overtly names patriotism, he renders it paradoxical. Douglas, with whom Tom creates a quasi-domestic relationship early in the story, arranges for the two of them to sort prisoner records in the Italian prison camp, a job that Tom intimates comes about because Douglas told the guards he used to work as a clerk in Second Division Headquarters. If so, then Douglas has betrayed the army's orders to never give information about oneself to the enemy. Tom observes that "Douglas, with admirable and patriotic amorality, insists we do next to nothing for our double ration of macaroni and rolls" (36). Even the phrase "patriotic amorality" confuses here. It could suggest that Douglas atones for his earlier betrayal; he performs patriotism by doing nothing. It could also suggest that to be patriotic towards South Africa is amoral due to the increasing racism and fascism at home. Alternatively, it could suggest that South Africa itself is amoral and so amoral acts are a form of patriotism. Because *Bitter Eden* is a war novel set in a prisoner-of-war camp, it is part of a genre that often centres the assertion of national identity as the prisoners seek to recreate the hierarchy of their unit, continue the rituals associated with home, or assert the difference between soldier and captor. But here, Afrika's novel obfuscates the meaning of patriotism.

The novel's lack of patriotism is significant. Nations stoke patriotism – found in the playing of national anthems, the raising and lowering of the national flag, the celebration of particular icons, and so on – to actively create and sustain the state. Patriotism operates as a continual act of remembrance. Joanne Nagel argues in her study of masculinity and nationalism that "the national state is essentially a masculine institution" (251) and, as such, "[t]erms like

honour, patriotism, cowardice, bravery and duty are hard to distinguish as either nationalistic or masculinist, since they seem to be thoroughly tied both to the nation and to manliness” (252).

John Somerville extends this idea that patriotism operates as a metonymic slippage of both nationalism and masculinity: “As to risk one's life is a supreme form of courage, so to risk one's life for one's own people and one's own 'fatherland' became a supreme form of patriotism, and the making of war itself thus became the supremely patriotic profession and institution” (568).

Patriotism is a masculinized activity of proving one's manhood and one's national loyalty through risk of sacrifice. Yet nationalism is all but erased in *Bitter Eden* and so too is patriotism, further complicating the construction of masculinity here. Afrika renders Tom as South African through his occasional use of Afrikaans but that is the extent of his national identity. Tom refers to almost everyone with single syllable slurs – “Yids” (11), “wogs” (14), “Ites” (14), “poms” (40), “Krauts” (165) – suggesting that national and ethnic identity is only something to spit out in anger. To be patriotic, for Tom, may well be an amoral act.

In rejecting patriotism, Tom rejects the nation – and the nation's past – and creates himself anew. Halberstam argues that forgetting is what “allows for a new way of remembering” (*Queer Art* 82); forgetting becomes queered when it allows for a non-teleological, chaotic *now* that is unanchored and unencumbered. There is something rapturous in the rupture from the past. Halberstam's conception of queer forgetting is productive precisely because it gives way to newness.

Forgetting, however, can take on a negative aspect. Gary Kinsman argues against what he calls the “social organization of forgetting” (“Queer Liberation”). He uses the example of how

homonormative histories “forget” the left-leaning politics of early lesbian and gay organizing.<sup>143</sup> This is not a benign forgetting. Rather, Kinsman is pointing out that a neoliberal queer agenda – one that centres rights and middle-class privilege – deliberately erases queer histories' radical leftist politics. Neoliberal histories purposively forget modes of organizing that considered the connections between class, race, gender, and sexuality, that acted in solidarity with the oppressed, and that challenged the state's claims about “national security” and state surveillance. Kinsman argues that, instead, what emerges is a form of remembering that disguises “a white, middle-class queer stratum ... as a 'universal' strategy for lesbian and gay human rights” (“Queer Resistance” 142).

Kinsman is right to caution against the impulse to forget queer histories' radical roots in favour of a homonormativity that values same-sex marriage rather than anti-capitalist revolution. But this is still to risk reading the present as logically arising from the past, essentially replacing one (right wing) history with other (left wing) histories. Halberstam is not suggesting we forget all histories to make way for a queer liberation from the past. Rather, I read Halberstam as arguing in favour of self-creation, of not being bound by – or bound in – to previous narratives. Halberstam reads queer forgetting as inherently connected to queer failure: to forget one's keys, where one parked the car, or the name of one's neighbour, is an act of silliness, of rupture, of not correctly obeying the strictures of normalcy. It is to allow for a moment of relief, of escape from the perceived stability of society. Tom's rejection of patriotism, as he sits in a prisoner-of-war camp, evokes the forgetting of Halberstam rather than that of Kinsman. Tom is not seeking to

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<sup>143</sup> As an example of such “forgetting,” Kinsman explains that activists chose the name “Gay Liberation Front” out of solidarity with the anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist Vietnamese National Liberation Front. Dominant versions of post-Stonewall history erase this connection (“Queer Liberation”).

promote a different version of a singular history. In Tom's "forgetting" of the state, he is irreverently rejecting precisely the kind of legitimacy and normalcy the military and the nation demands. Put another way, Tom's lack of patriotism in *Bitter Eden* is an act of "forgetting oneself." Abandoning a conventional marker of identity and participation in war frees him to behave in ways that are part of his "unbecoming."

Afrika draws attention to the possibilities enabled by rejecting the past by rendering nationality mostly absent. He does something similar with names, another dominant marker of identity-informed-by-history. Names become almost meaningless in the novel. The moniker of Thomas Aloysius Smythe marks the novel's protagonist as English South African although he repeats that he "hates poms" (40), a stance that marks him as more Afrikaner than English; he also rejects whatever heritage his name encapsulates when he changes it to "Tom Smith." His act of forgetting his name designates a clear break with the ordered logic of chrononormativity, what Freeman calls the "forward movement" (5), which demands the constant reproduction of the family. Instead, in forgetting his familial past, in claiming a name that is generic and unidentifiable, in creating a mythopoesis of imagined origins, Tom interrupts the sequence of patriarchal, and national, repetition.

In rejecting his familial identity, Afrika's protagonist rejects the core of Afrikaner culture itself: the valorization of remembrance, family, nation, and history. Seegers argues that family is central to Afrikanerdom: "the family is a strong, ordered unit and ... within it, men are patriarchal figures. This consensus will not be contested" ("Towards" 479). Vernon February agrees, noting Afrikanerdom venerated the family: "Family ... blood purity ... religion ... fatherland ... and a love of freedom ... these were the greatest cultural and national inheritances of the nation" (97). The

Immorality Act made clear that this focus on family was not just about maintaining a heteropatriarchal structure so central to what Halberstam calls the “generational time” (*Queer Time* 5) of the nation. As February shows, it was also about maintaining racial purity such that the state constructed whiteness as moral and patriotic. By forgetting his roots, Tom can forget himself; he can move outside of the national chrononormativity and become something new.

The only other character in the novel to have a first and last name is another South African, Douglas Summerfield. Douglas struggles to establish rules and codify relationships; his fixed name serves to signify his need to acknowledge his history and cement his place in the world. Douglas *needs* his name to anchor him to a known and understood world. That he finds significance in his name marks Douglas as a willing participant of “generational time,” just as Tom's renaming of himself marks him as someone who rejects it. Afrika reinforces this point through the details Tom and Douglas share about their respective families. Douglas tells Tom “all about his sterling silver upbringing and his as sterling silver, still living and doting mum and dad, and has shown me photos of his wife and kid” (32-33). In sharp contrast, Tom makes up a history: “I tell him my mother was a gypsy who told fortunes in a tent she pitched in her flat in Hillbrow, and my father did time for flogging stolen watches in the street and, when they died early on in my life, I paid my way through university with the loot I earned at night from running with a gang whose mark is still on my shoulder, and I show him what looks like a branding with a hot iron” (33). The man with the “true” last name provides photographic evidence of his family; for Douglas, these elements of identity function to normalize him because they anchor him in the logic of chrononormativity, with its emphasis on succession and remembrance; they locate him inside “generational time.” Tom, the man who changes his name, and who reveals apathy towards

identity and family history, makes up a playful past imbued with theatricality and absurdity.

Forgetting, however, is not just irreverent; it is disruptive. Halberstam notes: “For women and queer people, forgetfulness can be a useful tool for jamming the smooth operations of the normal and the ordinary. These operations, generally speaking, take on an air of inevitability and naturalness simply by virtue of being passed on from one generation to another” (*Queer Art* 70). Halberstam is talking here of inconvenience, of interrupting social expectations through forgetfulness, by thwarting their “smooth operations.” While this is indeed disruptive, I read the possibilities of forgetfulness as more expansive because, in forgetting one's name, one “jams” the state. Douglas' identity is one that is rooted in evidence and history; he fits into the legibility demanded by the nation. In contrast, Tom's identity is ever-changing and purposively unanchored. He is illegible, and as such refuses the “hail” of home. He is a menace.

When placed in the context of a South African prisoner-of-war novel such acts of forgetting become all the more disruptive and queer through their insistent refusal to engage in the discourse of heroism and bravery so common to the genre. Whether it be in a soldier's desire to return to the fighting (as in Krige's *The Way Out*), or to return home (as in van der Post's *The Seed and the Sower*), discourses of patriotism and masculinity, found in an emphasis on remembering, are common in South African prisoner-of-war novels. National histories also revere the act of remembering. Chetty observes that South African soldiers played rugby matches as an act of national remembrance despite the dire conditions in the prisoner-of-war camps: “The physical exertion when many were on the brink of starvation, suggested that playing rugby was more than mere recreation ... [it was] an assertion of patriotism” (“White Man's War”

320).<sup>144</sup>Tom is very far from such displays of patriotism. By having a protagonist who purposefully forgets who he is and from where he comes, Afrika troubles the South African hegemonic masculinity's reliance on memory and fixed identity.

Halberstam's argument that forgetting is a way to resist “the heroic and grand logics of recall” (*Queer Art* 15) enables me to read Tom's “forgetting” of his name, his family and his past as making space to “live life otherwise” (*Queer Art* 2). To reject the father is to break free from the hegemony that denies the interstitial spaces of unbecoming that Tom is increasingly inhabiting in the camps. Changing his name and making up a history is an act of queer forgetting that enables new ways of being in the world once Tom abandons his past. It also renders Tom illegible to the state. The Immorality Act, the Population Registration Act and other pieces of racist legislation functioned to surveil and catalogue the population. Kopano Ratele demonstrates this when he explains the state “sought to invent or reproduce whiteness, cleanse it, spell it out, fix it in place, and defend it against discolouration by other racialized categories of identity” (161). To not be legible risks blurring the lines – of gender, of race, of sexuality – that the South African state needed to remain clear and fixed. To forget oneself is to become free.

Perhaps the most surprising form of forgetting in the novel is Tom's having “forgotten” his relationship with Danny once he returns home to South Africa after the war. Tom's growing desire for Danny has dominated the narrative of *Bitter Eden*. It is a surprise, then, at the end of the novel to remember that this powerful love story begins with an acknowledgement of forgetting it. As he contemplates the package that has arrived from the now-dead Danny, Tom

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<sup>144</sup> Arguably, it was also an assertion of heterosexuality, lest the homosocial environment of the camp suggest Fussell's “minority compensations” (*Wartime* 109) were taking place.

wonders, “Am I permitting a phantom a power that belongs to me alone? What relevance do they still have – a war that time has tamed into the damp squib of every other war, a love whose strangeness is best left buried where it lies?” (3-4). I return to Kinsman's caution about how the “social organization of forgetting” connects to the homonormative state. Kinsman and Gentile argue it “is based on the annihilation of our social and historical memories ... This social organization of forgetting is crucial to the way in which social power works in our society. We no longer remember the past struggles that won us the social gains, social programs, and human rights that we now often take for granted” (21). That Tom has forgotten Danny would seem to demonstrate Kinsman and Gentile's concerns about forgetting certain histories, certain memories, in favour of the dominant narrative of the nation.

Rather than Halberstam's forgetting, which is queer, playful, and inventive, Kinsman's forgetting is about the loss required to conform to relations of power. In that regard, Tom's forgetting of his relationship with Danny does seem to suggest that he has fallen prey to the “social organization of forgetting.” Tom may have forgotten Danny – and his homosexual, disruptive past – in order to fit in with the white South African national narrative to which he returned after the war: the growing discourse of apartheid, the increasing emphasis on heroic white masculinity, and the heteronormativity of a society governed by the Immorality Act. This is the danger of the “social organization of forgetting:” it erases that which does not conform. This is, however, to remain in the realm of the legible and the known.

My reading of Afrika's novel is one that embraces the playfulness of Halberstam's queer forgetting by rejecting the conventional trajectory of a love story. By forgetting about Danny, Tom is, queerly, challenging the idea of love as having a linear logic and challenging the idea of

desire – even self-shattering desire – as being necessarily *memorable*. Read in this light, Tom's having forgotten about Danny profoundly resists the normalizing discourses of romance and love that insist relationships move in a progressive fashion from dating to monogamous marriage – in other words, the forward-moving impulse of positivity, productivity, and reproduction that is at the core of heteronormativity. While there is a danger that embracing forgetting might risk legitimizing the homophobia that refuses to see relationships between men as anything other than quick fucks, so what? By forgetting about a significant and meaningful relationship Tom does, effectively, escape the heteropatriarchal conception of love as following a forward movement, as indelibly marking love on the heart, as treating relationships as meaningful only when they are legible. Instead, the queer act of forgetting here is one that enables an idea of love as messy, complicated, and multiple to embrace what Halberstam envisions as generating “new forms of knowing” (*Queer Art* 7). It is to move away from meaning-making and instead to value the “nonsense ... antiproduction ... and unintelligibility” (*Queer Art* 106) of relationships that escape the state's sanction and observation.

To forget is to escape the hold of the past to make room for other stories, other possibilities. Purposefully forgetting both family and nation, while wearing a uniform in the service of that nation, denies the very meanings of the name and the flag sewn into that uniform. To forget is to deny the uniform's meaning and purpose, to revel in semiotic confusion rather than codes of certainty. It is, Halberstam suggests, to “fuck shit up” (*Queer Art* 110). Forgetting a deep and meaningful same-sex relationship that occurred while wearing that uniform, and forgetting it not out of shame but out of a desire to thwart the legibility of heteropatriarchal constructions of love, adds another level of queerness to this narrative of forgetting.

### “Spend a Day by the Sea”:<sup>145</sup> Queer Time

Queer failure – and queer forgetting – are for Halberstam, Muñoz, Freeman, and others, inextricably connected to queer time. Halberstam defines queer time as operating “against the logics of succession, progress, development, and tradition proper to hetero-familial development” (*Queer Art* 75). This is similar to Muñoz who defines it as “stepping out of the linearity of straight time” (25). Instances of queer time in the novel are moments of disruption against expectations of masculinity, expectations of the military, and expectations of the South African state. These moments of illegibility, or what E.L. McCallum and Tyler Bradway, building on the work of Kevin Ohi, call “thwarted moments of understanding” (10), become productively unsettling.

The South African state's valorizing of the past – the UDF recruitment posters evoking colonial adventure and the Afrikaner emphasis on family as just two examples – means that acts of forgetting step outside of logics that support white supremacy. Afrika has most of his characters “forget” patriotism and patronyms in the camp. This signals a different logic of time being at play that rejects “generational time” and thereby erases the inevitability of the past determining the present. The absence of these markers indicates a different conception of identity and belonging.

It is not just the uniform's markers of the social constructs of identity – nation and name – that disappear in the prisoner-of-war camp. The camp also renders age – the mark of progressive time on the material body – strange and unfamiliar. In her analysis of World War I

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<sup>145</sup> UDF poster. See Pretorius 618.

soldiers, Joanna Bourke observes, “All men's bodies were endowed with signs and declarations of age, generation, class and ethnicity. It was within this socially constructed 'frame' that bodies lived, were imagined and died” (*Dismembering* 11). In the South African context, reading the body as a site of “truth” takes on even greater import. Carolin explains that, because the production of whiteness in South African society was “predicated on the separation, oppression, exploitation, and violation of bodies that were not white” (111), constructing and maintaining a belief in the fixity of identity was vital. Ratele agrees, arguing that the legibility of identity was central to the construction and maintenance of white supremacy. He notes that the state “sought to fix the categories of the white self and social identity” (165). Afrika's queer construction of military masculinity, however, erases age from his characters. In doing so, he raises questions about what happens when a fixed marker of identity, something knowable as part of the body's “frame,” disappears. The lack of legible age comes to function in the novel as a metaphor for the possibilities made available when one is no longer legible to the state. It is to enter a queer time where one can explore, as Halberstam notes, the “potentiality of a life unscripted by the conventions of family, inheritance, and child rearing” (*Queer Time* 1).

During their first conversation, the recently arrived Danny remarks to Tom that time seems to have sped up in the camp. He observes that the other men “look like all the granddads I ever seen. Real creepy, them” (42) to which Tom responds, “Watch it! You will be just as creepy soon ... But I feel you. I don't want to look like a granddad before my time” (42). But time also slows down. Tom describes Tony, the camp's theatre director, as “in his late forties, but does not look all that much older than my still very early twenties, his spry, sinewy body possessing the agelessness of those in whom the grinning granddad lies dormant till the bones buckle under

the load” (55-56). Later, once the Italian guards stop distributing Red Cross parcels, the prisoners age considerably but also return to a child-like state, giggling incessantly, cracking jokes “only they are not jokes – more like little kids' shouting at the bogeyman in the hope that that will make him go away” (91) and, in one instance, morphing from adult to infant, and from human to bird: “the one of us with the usually outsized eyes that now have grown huge, who looks over the edge of his bunk and despairingly gapes, but only contrives to look more like a nestling waiting to be fed a worm” (91). That age has become something that shifts, extends, and regresses reinforces the idea that nothing, not even the code of years written onto the body, remains fixed and stable in the camps. This lack of adherence to linearity suggests a different logic is at play.

Part of the pleasure of queer time is its illegibility and its refusal to behave. Freeman argues that instances of queer time are “visible in the forms of interruption ... [and] are points of resistance to [the] temporal order that, in turn, propose other possibilities for living in relation to indeterminately past, present, and future others: that is, of living historically” (xxii). The lack of clear age markers in *Bitter Eden* function as a “visible interruption” to conventional ways of reading the body. Adults become children; the young become old. There is a sense of the carnivalesque, of the grotesque, and of the absurd once the conventional chronotope disappears. In the context of the South African military, this takes on even greater significance because it evokes the possibility to defy legibility and evade the state's surveillance. It suggests the body is not the site of truth the South African state believes – and needs – it to be.

Playing with age is not the only way Afrika invites a reading of queer time in the novel. He draws a connection between queer time and queer masculinity when Douglas bites Tom on the cheek (163). Douglas' relationship to sexual identity and masculinity has changed throughout

the novel. Despite his claim to be heterosexual (with photographs of a wife and child to prove it) most of the soldiers in the camp read him as gay. Indeed, Tony responds to Tom's inquiry as to why he does not like Douglas: "It's not that I don't like him. I *hate* him.' 'But why?' ... 'Because he is like a sister that has left the tribe'" (57). His early, platonic-but-domestic relationship with Tom, as they help each other retain dignity despite the degradations of the camp,<sup>146</sup> positions their relationship as the kind of deep male friendship that treads a fine line between homoerotic and homosexual relationships so common in war literature. However, having shifted from heterosexual husband to celibate homosexual husband, once Tom and Danny move in together Douglas starts to take on other roles: the sissy, the jealous lover, the dangerous degenerate.

Douglas ultimately goes mad. Tony explains, "all the bits and pieces that, when fitted together, answered to the name of 'Douglas' and came when you called it ... flew out like the springs and cogs of a clock you have smashed against a wall" (157). In his novel *Afrika* is creating an "Eden" where men can explore a variety of masculinities, made possible by rejecting the markers of nation, name, and age. Having abandoned temporal logic and order, they are able to embrace Halberstam's "potentiality" of a "life unscripted" (*Queer Art* 1). That *Afrika* describes Douglas' madness in terms of time, using the symbol of a destroyed clock, suggests that there is anxiety and discomfort in entering queer time for those who value the markers of legible identity and the order of succession and progress. Put differently, time – the symbol of logic and linearity – has become disordered and incoherent in the camp. When the world of the camp strips away external codes of identity, those who rely on such markers for meaning fall apart. Douglas bites

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<sup>146</sup> Beyond sharing their limited food and supplies, Tom defends Douglas against a prisoner who angrily claims he cannot enjoy masturbating while Douglas is praying the rosary (31); Douglas also nurses Tom through a bout of dysentery (35), for example.

Tom in a violent kiss.

The scene that immediately follows Douglas' attack of Tom is one of order and disorder as stability and gender roles are re-established but also undone. The medic treating Tom says the scar will be permanent but reassures him that he can tell his future children “that's where they shot daddy in the war!” (164). The medic overwrites the indelible mark of homosexual desire as the indelible mark of heroic, heterosexual, military masculinity. But, as if such successful hegemonic, heterosexual masculinity is too much in the space of the camp, the medic then teases Danny: “*You* bite him like that?” (164) to which Danny responds with the threat of violence: “You wanting to eat your teeth?” (164). The various men assert, uphold, and challenge codes of masculinity throughout the scene.

Afrika's novel calls into question the ideals of hegemonic military masculinity upon which white South Africa relied. Here, there is confusion as gender roles are seemingly re-established, and markers of time and progress are re-inserted into the narrative only to then thwart conventions and become undone. The reference to having children in the future evokes the seeming inevitability of reproduction bound into heteronormativity as the medic reads Tom's cheek through the codes of heterosexual military hero. But the camp(y) medic then circumvents this construction of time as forward-moving and progressive. The medic implies something illicit (and therefore sexual) has occurred by “cheekily” suggesting that it was Danny who bit Tom's cheek. The wound transforms from a mark of (potential) heroism into one of homosexual desire; it is not a battle scar but rather a lover's scar. The medic's remark re-codes the cheek from symbolizing the straight time of heroic masculinity to instead symbolizing time as anti-progress. Forward-moving straight time is protective of a future that produces the children who will ask

about their father's scar. In its non-productive expressions of sexuality, a queer desire thwarts the idea of that future being realized at all.

The disorientations of the scene are not just related to time and sexuality, but also to gender and sexuality. In some ways the scene is hypermasculine in that it reinforces a link between masculinity and violence. This makes sense considering all the characters are soldiers and, as Connell observes, “Violence on the largest possible scale is the purpose of the military” (*Masculinities* 213). Michael Kimmel argues that the connection between masculinity and violence exists not just in the military but in constructions of masculinity itself. He suggests violence is part of what makes masculinity legible: “Violence is often the single most evident marker of manhood ... it is the willingness to fight, the desire to fight” (132). The medic reassures Tom that his scar will mark him as having experienced (acceptable, heterosexual) violence; as Harari, Connell, Kimmel, and others suggest, to experience violence in war is to gain a marker of legible masculinity. Danny responds to the medic's teasing with the threat of (homophobic and therefore acceptably heterosexual) violence, providing a link between heterosexuality and masculinity, evoking the “basic storyline” of Stern and Zalewski's soldier-as-protector. Later, when Danny returns to talk to Tony about Douglas, he has “invisible six-guns slapping his thighs” (164). This elicits an image of a frontier-American-cowboy rather than an English soldier in a German prisoner-of-war camp, linking Danny's performance of heroic masculinity with that of a globalized colonial masculinity, one again inherently overwritten with violence. Robert Morrell makes this point when he argues that colonialism was a violence that initiated both colonizer and colonized into what he calls “new ways of war and [it] injected violence into the very gender identity of men” (“Men” 322).

Yet, despite the apparent confirmation of the association between violence and masculinity, Afrika challenges this easy connection. The medic demonstrates that, while Tom's scar will be permanent, its meaning is not. Danny expresses his anger through behaviour characterized as timeless, with the reference to his "invisible six-guns," yet his anger is fleeting – his mood is "grimly quite gone" (164) when he returns to Tom. The present time of the war becomes a heterosexual family fiction narrated in the future to not-yet born children about the not-yet experienced past. So, while the tropes of hegemonic military masculinity are present here as a constant, timeless, global heroism of threatening and experiencing violence, the meanings attached to the instance of violence become illegible and queer.

This is the pleasure of being out-of-logical-time and therefore outside of the overdetermined meanings ascribed to identities. A married man who has become an effeminate homosexual commits violence and permanently marks his former friend's cheek; the cheek injury stands as evidence of erotic play – Douglas was trying to madly "kiss" Tom – but it can be read in the future as a sign of wartime heroics; Danny responds to the medic's insinuation of homosexual activity by threatening physical violence, asserting a homophobic, heterosexual, aggressive masculinity, and yet he does so to protect the reputation of his boyfriend. The point is that meaning here becomes not illogical, but indeterminable. That the mark on Tom's cheek can be read in such different ways evokes the pleasure Freeman locates in queer time's "resistance to [the] temporal order" (xxii). The novel reveals the absurdity of the military – and the South African state – seeking to fix and determine identity and meanings linked to those identities by exposing its "patriarchal confusion." By reinventing masculinities at every turn, while playing with the coded expectations written into gender roles, Afrika radically reconfigures ways of being

that challenge, rather than uphold, racist and sexist ideologies.

**“We swam under a riven moon, our limbs' pale tentacles seeking our beginnings in our ends” (16): The Queer Time of Desire**

Queer time is an escape from logic and order. At its core, *Bitter Eden* is a love story about the burgeoning romance of Tom and Danny as they wait out the war in a prisoner-of-war camp. Tom and Danny have many instances of sexual activity but each, in its way, plays with the idea of progress and “success.” The disordered nature of their sexual intimacies reinforces the disruptive potential of queer time.

Sex – especially as the act associated with men's sexuality – is oriented primarily around the erection and the orgasm. Annie Potts states “the 'hard on' is the essence of male sexuality” (87). She explains that the “focus on hardness, strength, activity, and endurance in hegemonic masculine sexuality determines how a man measures his own 'success in sex;’ it centralizes sex around the penis and universalizes penises, constricting the possibilities of heterosex and limiting what counts as enjoyable male sexual experience” (89). The orgasm itself, as Linda Williams details in her examination of the prevalence of the “money shot” in pornography, provides “the sense of an ending” (93). While the polymorphous pleasures of sex may be messy and entangled, both Potts and Williams suggest there is a logic imposed onto sex acts that sees them as following a recognizable trajectory towards conclusion rather than being ongoing and constant.<sup>147</sup>

In the world of the camp, men having sex – or even talking about their erections – is not a

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<sup>147</sup> I am thinking here of Luce Irigaray's critique of phallogocentrism.

particularly noteworthy event. There is an ever-present undercurrent of homosexuality and homoeroticism. Afrika has his narrator offer little judgement about this; Tom treats such background sexual encounters with a sense of conventionality and understanding. This supports Fussell's suggestion that prisoner-of-war camps were not a homophobic environment (*Wartime* 109). However, Fussell's implication that men in the camps engaged in what he calls "'minority' sexual compensations" (*Wartime* 109) suggests it was "deprivation" that led men to make sexual choices they would not otherwise. Afrika's novel, in contrast, is full of men for whom the male body is an *erotic* choice, from the soldier who was a cross-dressing prostitute before the war (141), to Tony and his "stable" of boys (141), to Camel, the painter who "has the habit of looking at [Tom's] fly as though unbuttoning it and whose sketches ... do little to swing the balance the other way" (58). Tom and Danny's sexual relationship, however, moves outside of either of these legible codes of sexuality. It is neither compensatory nor merely erotic. Rather, it thwarts the accepted conventions of sexuality and enters a decidedly queer time and space as it becomes unloosed from fixed meanings; it carries a sense of incoherence as it challenges expectations.

***Sex I: Active or Passive?***

Tom and Danny's first sexual encounter occurs early in their friendship. The men must strip naked and sleep in the open while the guards delouse their bunks and belongings. Tom and Danny share a blanket and Tom wakes in the night to find Danny's penis has fallen into his hand:

Danny reverses sides, facing me now, but still sleeping, an arm across my chest, his breath, faintly on my cheek, smelling only of itself and his one knee resting on my thigh. He is bearing down on my arm that lies straightly between us, palm upwards, and I try to withdraw it, but the knee on my thigh slips over further, angling him more sharply

towards me, and his genitals flop down into my palm, the pubic hairs bristling against my wrist, but the penis and testicles slack and warm as a plucked but still living bird. (107)

Tom is uncomfortable; he is not yet ready to acknowledge – let alone act on – his feelings for Danny and yet the detailed description of Danny's body reveals Tom's careful observation of him. What follows adds further confusion to this intimate moment: “Unlike the genitals, his body is cold, its saddening boniness trembling slightly against my own rebellious bones, and I lie, crucified on a crossroads of indecision as to what to do ... and I curve my fingers lightly over the core of his maleness with its waning warmth and think, 'To hell with it!' and sleep, his breath a trusting on my cheek” (107).

This scene is full of contradictions. Danny's body “crucifies” Tom, but Tom also “crucifies” himself through his reluctance to act. Danny's sleeping, passive body pins Tom down; Tom's awake, active body is unable to move. It might be Danny's penis that makes Tom especially uncomfortable, being the focus of conventional male sexual activity (as Potts suggests), but it is Danny's whole body – rather than just his penis – that behaves sexually: it is “bearing down” and “angling him more sharply” (107) *into* Tom's body. Adding to the contradictions of the scene, even as he decides against any sexual activity, Tom places his hand *around* Danny's penis. Tom may want to be a passive being, but he actively moves in a sexual manner. This scene demonstrates Das' argument that war literature contains not just homoeroticism and homosexual acts but something in between: an “ambiguous zone between diffuse homoeroticism and more conscious acts of homosexual intention” (26). Tom is firmly located in ambiguity here: he experiences internal regret over a moment he could not control, full of remorse for the intimacy produced by a body he obviously desires.

This is a moment of queer time, of stepping beyond the logics of linearity and predictability. The language of the scene, with its dissembling of body parts, its merging of life and death, and its images of sacrificial Christianity, is reminiscent of any number of battle scenes found in war novels. Here, however, such language describes two men lying naked together not due to battle but due to bugs. The “battle” Tom experiences is not against a dreadful enemy but rather about whether to disturb the sleeping Danny, who might be embarrassed once he realizes his penis has fallen into Tom's hand, or whether to simply feign ignorance and fall asleep. The scene between Tom and Danny ultimately becomes disordered and illogical. It is not a moment of conscious sex, but it is a moment of sexual intimacy that has rendered sex strange. It is a perverse turn away from coherence and there remains about it something that is, as Ohi might say, “unresolved” (9).

### ***Sex II: Blurring Binaries?***

Muñoz's idea of queer time as “stepping out” of straight time's relentless linearity is useful for reading the moment in the novel when the war has ended and the soldiers are celebrating on an airfield as they wait to fly out of Germany. If queer time is a moment of boundaries disappearing, of linearity and logic moving aside, then the description of what happens next fits Muñoz's argument: “There is an explosiveness in us as in a cat's fur before a storm, a primal, reactive energy that bloodshed and death breed, that seeks not to out as every cumulative force must, whether it be a lava or merely a pus, and I shift uncomfortably as one holding back an embarrassing wind” (210). The profound overlaps with the banal as the men become ciphers of the energies around them. Tom and Danny begin to wrestle: “teeth nuzzling into my neck ... throat roaring like a ravening wolf's, lissome, cunning body twisting round me

like it has no bones ... We laugh and pant, roll around like angry cats ... lie for long moments, rigidly entwined, eyes staring into eyes, breath meshing into breath, then start again ... not letting the tumbling parcels interrupt the intricate subterfuges of our limbs” (211). The homoerotic poetics here is unmistakable but so too is the absence of order and logic. The men become cats, then wolves, then shapeless beings who dissolve into each other; they are violent and still, howling and quiet, attending to private intimacy while in public view of the other soldiers. Adding to Muñoz's argument of queer time, Halberstam locates it in “non-normative logics and organizations of community, sexual identity, embodiment, and activity in space and time” (*Queer Time* 6). Tom's narration produces a “non-normative logic,” a queer poetics; he does not just “step out” of time but blurs legibility entirely.

This is a moment of queer time, of rupturing logic as the primal energies of the earth erupt through Tom and Danny. McCallum and Bradway argue that queerness carries with it possibility: “its ruptures in meaning, its thwarted moments of understanding – *are* the place where it preserves and transmits queerness as potentiality” (10). What follows also “thwarts understanding:”

Then, suddenly, I want out, am inwardly crying for him to stop, not even thinking, though, to cry out ... Silently we wrestle on, seriously now as though we sought a death, eyes unseeing, fixed, as eyes painted on a mask – or those that watch a sky beyond a sky, a self within a self? Convulsed, he stops first, face to my face, permitting that I overpower him, knowing that I cannot, then flings himself off me, lies, face down, alone. (211)

Again, there is a blurring of expectation and logic: the moment of pleasure has become a moment of pain. They breathe as one, but Tom cannot communicate his desire to stop; they are

celebrating having survived the war, but move as if in search of death; their eyes are unseeing, but also see deep into the soul. It seems as if this is a move toward the bleak, the rapture of intertwined bodies becoming riven with despair. This is queerness as potentiality, an alternate sexual poetics.

In other words, it is a queering of sex, of thinking differently about masculine sexual pleasure as being neither oriented around the penis nor the orgasm. Instead, there is an illegibility to the sexual intimacies here, a re-ordering of touch to the body as a whole. Potts argues that thinking beyond erections, interrupting the “synecdochal relationship between the man and his penis” (85), would not only decentralize the focus on the penis in sex but potentially its phallic power more generally. She invites a different kind of thinking that escapes “hegemonic masculinist imperatives” (100) and that would, instead, consider the male sexual body more broadly: “a sexual Möbius strip in which mind/body and culture/nature are no longer opposites but come into play across a single eroticized surface that turns continuously from one into the other. These male bodies might become differently inscribed, coded for holistic pleasures, for jouissance beyond the phallus/penis” (100). Tom and Danny treat sex as a “sexual Mobius strip;” they find pleasure away from the penis and they do not treat orgasm as the goal. While a conventional sexual story line moves toward orgasm as satisfaction and result, Tom and Danny's public-yet-private, bestial-yet-human, loud-yet-silent sexual act begins, rather than ends, with the pleasures of ecstasy.

If Afrika's protagonist has undergone a journey in *Bitter Eden*, it is the shift from being anxious about his performance of military masculinity to embracing an unsettled, disruptive, more expansive masculinity, one that does not adhere to the rigidity demanded of the military: it

is one that is queer. In response to Danny's discomfort after they wash off their surreptitious orgasms, Tom says to him: “Look we wrestled and we were randy, so we came. That is *all*” (212). The brashness of his statement – a statement that contains no concern about the transgression, no couching what they have done with ambiguity or anxiety – belies the purpose of his statement: to offer comfort and reassurance to Danny so that they can continue their relationship in the future. It is both sensitive and harsh. Tom further demonstrates his new kind of masculinity as he and Danny part. It is a scene that is fleetingly intimate – their hands “hardly” (212) touch – but it is also full of hypermasculine bravado. Danny “suddenly turns round, yells, ‘You don't visit me, I'll bash you! You hear?’” (212); Tom responds: “Up you! I yell back” (212). This is a moment of exquisite confusion. It takes what seems familiar and renders it as unsettled. The performance of hegemonic masculinity, located in the brash threats of violence and jocular insults, covers over the confusion of their recently shared orgasms. Nevertheless, bravado intertwines with sentimentality: Tom and Danny are shouting across the tarmac to make plans for their next date.

The two men rewrite the hypermasculine to publicly declare their emotional connection. This is Jeffrey Weeks' “semiotic guerrilla warfare” (191): Tom and Danny subvert the codes of masculinity, here marked by being a soldier, articulating violence, and teasing to cover emotions, with the masculine unbecoming layered beneath their words. This is queer time: it is not that the binaries reverse – tough men who are sensitive – but, rather, the binaries themselves disappear. It is desire – failure, forgetting, queer – as transformative, taking the known categories and blurring them into something new and unknown.

*Sex III: Sex, Interrupted?*

Afrika's narrator disrupts expectations about gender and sexuality at every turn in order to confound any easy understanding about South African military masculinity. Tom visits Danny at his mother's house just before returning to South Africa. In sharp contrast to the repressive, claustrophobic world of Danny's home is the chaotic and natural world around it: “the grass seeding and lush and the flowers, with their obligatory bees, all the more having a ball for not being planned ... the water is deep and green as from a long bleeding of leaves, and patches of lily pads are floating on it like giants' severed ears” (226). In opposition to the oppression of the house, which stands in for civilization and “generational time,” nature is expansive and free.

In his analysis of the pastoral in gay literature, Brian Fone argues that writers often construct nature as a safe place to act on homosexual desires: “Those who would dwell in Arcadia seek out that secret Eden because of its isolation from the troubled world and its safety from the arrogant demands of those who would deny freedom, curtail human action, and destroy innocence and love” (13). David Bell agrees, suggesting that in “the lesbian and gay imaginary, such a mythic place construction frees up sex from social norms, marking same-sex desire as 'natural' and even as spiritual” (553). Alone together in the outside-of-civilization location of nature, Tom and Danny can return to being themselves after the awkwardness of trying to fit into post-war society. After a swim they relax on the grass: “everything is coming together again as [Danny] drops onto the grass and starts to roll around in it, making like a dog, penis flailing out of the glistening bush of the pubic hair and his eyes, shrewd as a satyr's, black as a seal's, enticing me to join him in the perilous innocence of his world” (227). They harness the pleasures and energies of nature as they roll around on the grass, abandoning clear logic and order as Danny's

“satyr eyes” suggest a shift from man to god, evoking Bell's argument of the pastoral raising same-sex desire to spiritual heights.

The novel, however, plays with the idea of an idealized, queer pastoral. As they lie naked together on the grass, it is difficult not to expect that Tom and Danny's sexual desires will now culminate in a legible, conventional conclusion of legible, conventional sex. Danny initiates it: “No stopping now,' and he draws one leg over both of mine, his genitals nestling in the soft hollow of my side, penis slowly stiffening and his face nuzzling into my neck, and we lie for a long while so, and I know that he is wanting me to roll over, but to do it in my own time, and I, too, am wanting that” (228). Tom has fully come to terms with his sexual desires for Danny. His earlier worries that having intercourse with a man would lead to questions about his masculinity and his identity, to being Othered by the state, have now disappeared as he embraces sex with a man, calling it “a fusion that will forever change its shape” (229). Reflecting on the impact of Muñoz's work, Ramón Rivera-Servera explains that Muñoz was interested in queer performance “as evidence of alternative routes to being in the world; as utopian pathways, not to a naively futuristic elsewhere but to a deeper, affectively dense, understanding of the inadequacies of the present” (146). The sexual encounter between Tom and Danny is a moment of this utopic possibility, outside of time and space in a pastoral idyll. It is what Muñoz himself refers to as “the force of a kind of queer doing” (84), interrupting straight time and rejecting the prewritten codes of militaristic masculinity.

Afrika, however, unsettles expectations. A group of picnickers come “crashing” (229) through the brush and interrupt Tom and Danny just before the moment of penetration. Tom and Danny scramble to put on clothes and leave the scene. It is a moment of utter devastation – the

novel has seemed to be working up to this moment of consummation, after all – and yet it also is a moment of interruption that must happen. Society, represented by the picnickers, must intrude upon the scene because Tom and Danny are not actually in a pastoral idyll nor has Danny actually become a satyr. They are human men surrounded by broken-down homes in a British village. The values of the society around them have not undergone the same epistemological shift as Tom and Danny have experienced in the camps. As such, Tom and Danny remain profoundly out-of-place. They are soldiers who have returned not as heroes but as liberated prisoners-of-war; they have spent an unknown amount of time in a world solely of men and, in that constructed world of the camps, they have each adjusted and changed their opinions about men and about sexuality. Danny, a married man, returns not to his wife but to his mother; Tom, a South African, returns not to South Africa but to Britain. As such, their out-of-placeness is precisely what allowed them to imagine themselves as satyrs and as free from the confines of civilization represented by Danny's house and by the picnickers.

But reality does intrude. The moment of mutual erection – and acknowledgement of those erections – is it. To consummate the relation in the conventional sense – through penetration and orgasm – would be to render their relationship legible and bound by temporal logic. Instead, it remains in the interstices, fantasized about but staying in the dreamscape of possibility. This is Halberstam's queer failure writ large as Tom and Danny remain in a state of unbecoming. Halberstam writes, “maps of desire that render the subject incoherent, disorganized, and passive provide a better escape route than those that lead inexorably to fulfillment, recognition, and achievement” (*Queer Art* 130). Anything other than failure would reduce their relationship to something legible and articulable precisely because it would render it as fitting into a coherent

trajectory of “success.” They escape the confines of normativity by remaining outside legibility.

This is queerness as potentiality, the queer time of sex not as progressive and conclusive but as radically re-oriented to a state of constant possibility, of satyrs and men and satyrs as men and, crucially, of soldiers about to have sex with each other in a field. Ohi envisions “queerness as potentiality” (10) in relation to literature's ability to thwart understanding. This scene of almost-sex ruptures expectations, ruptures coherence, and ruptures the progressive logic of time. It is to remain as “potentiality.”

It also ruptures the legibility and fixity the South African state required for the policing of sexual, racial, and gender boundaries. Martens explains that the South African government used the Immorality Act to “strengthen the connection between racial membership and respectable behaviour” (235). Tom commits a grave offence against the Act by engaging in “unnatural” behaviour, but he does so in ways the state cannot easily categorize. As a white South African soldier sexually aroused by another man, Tom confuses the South African – and military – understanding of masculinity-as-heterosexual and their understanding of whiteness-as-morally-superior. He is a South African soldier, legibly inside the parameters of hegemonic masculinity, but his desire for another man marks him as Other; he is white, but his desire for another man transgresses the moral boundaries of whiteness. Simply put, Tom challenges what seemed to be clear categories of white, man, and soldier. Elder argues this is precisely what South Africa feared about white homosexual men: that they would threaten “a patriarchal and racial order that shaped interlocking structures that provided many white Afrikaner males access to power in South Africa” (“Body Politic” 162). At the core of this “threat” was the implication that identity was not as fixed and certain as the government needed it to be. Afrika’s novel demonstrates the

resistant potential, the “patriarchal confusion,” found in white South African soldiers desiring other men.

### Conclusion

Halberstam concludes the titular chapter of *The Queer Art of Failure* by discussing a variety of children's films whose narratives are organized around outsider-hero figures. These figures are all in some way “different” to their larger community. Halberstam suggests that “While these narratives of difference could easily serve to deliver a tidy moral lesson about learning to accept yourself, each links the struggle of the rejected individual to larger struggles of the dispossessed” (120). Halberstam details the way such films connect queer failure to a larger politics of solidarity: “In *Shrek*, for example, the ogre becomes a freedom fighter for the refugee fairy tale figures whom Lord Farquaad ... has kicked off his land; in *Chicken Run* the chickens band together to overthrow the evil Tweedy farmers and to save themselves from exploitation; in *Babe* the sheep rise up to resist an authoritarian sheepdog; and in *Finding Nemo* Nemo leads a fish rebellion against the fishermen” (120). Halberstam suggests that these films are a celebration of losers: they depict those who have been cast out coming together to resist and fight back. This is important in terms of Halberstam's project to provide a toolkit with which to push back against the heteronormative logic implicit in success and optimism. These films redeem the loser, the failure, by resisting the structure that sees them as such. While Halberstam may be right that these films reinforce an alternative to the politics of heteronormativity and success, I think Halberstam is ultimately reading these films as celebrating queer communities rather than queer failures.

My interest is a bit different: I am interested in the ways white South African soldiers who

desire men confuse and complicate the military itself. I am not interested here in acts of solidarity amongst soldiers who are “seen as” failures because they have homosexual desires. This redemptive idea of solidarity suggests a kind of neoliberal homonationalism that fights for the “right to serve” but does not challenge the existence of the military. Rather, my interest is in failure itself. White soldiers desiring other white soldiers in the South African military *really* fail. The queer failure *of* soldiers is a fundamental failure *to* soldier. In failing to perform the hegemonic masculinity signalled by their uniforms, they fail to be soldiers. In failing to be soldiers, they fail to uphold the ideology of the South African state. And they forget – their history, their nation, their names. They fail completely and they remain failures. In wearing the uniform and participating in the military they are part of the state apparatus and yet, in their failure, they cannot be interpellated by the state. They are both inside and outside of the ideological apparatus in which queerness can only ever be failure. Queer failure reveals the contradictions at the heart of that apparatus.

The queer desires of *Bitter Eden* bear witness to a break, a crack, in the discourses of white supremacy that underpin South African hegemonic masculinity, and that maintain the metonymic link between masculinity and the military. The racist, heterosexist, militaristic logics of South Africa before and during apartheid expected soldiers – agents and models of the state – to be white, heterosexual, muscular men. Tom's sexual desire for Danny means he fails to achieve and uphold this ideal. Fucking Danny would not fuck up the military; bringing off his lover does not bring down the state no matter how queer their sex act. However, in failing to perform the correct codes of white militaristic masculinity, in exposing the contradictions of such a gender construction through his queer failure, a new gender order finds possibility.

## CHAPTER FOUR: Rotten to the Core: Military Masculinity in Mark Behr's

### *The Smell of Apples*

Set in 1973 and 1988, Mark Behr's *The Smell of Apples* reveals white hegemonic military masculinity in South Africa as something corrupt and rotten. Eleven-year-old Marnus Erasmus, son of the South African Defence Force's (SADF) youngest major general, Johan, narrates most of the novel as he recalls the week his family hosted a secret visitor, a Chilean general known as "Mister Smith." Twenty-six-year-old Marnus narrates the novel's erratically interleaved proleptic sections. Now a lieutenant in the Permanent Force of the SADF, Marnus' italicized descriptions of his future depict the dystopic reality of Afrikanerdom's emphasis on looking backwards, and of South Africa's "secret" border war in Angola. This is a novel full of secrets – not just military secrets but family secrets. From Marnus' mother surreptitiously listening to jazz in the car, to his sister, Ilse, secretly steaming open a letter from her aunt whose "liberal" views receive no welcome in the Erasmus home, everyone here is hiding something. At the novel's core, however, are two male relationships: that between Marnus and his father, and that between Marnus and his best friend, Frikkie. Marnus' discovery of his father raping Frikkie becomes the central secret of the novel; the silence that surrounds such an instance of corruption demonstrates not just the hypocrisy at the core of apartheid but the violence underlying hegemonic masculinity.

This novel makes clear how masculinity and the military mutually constitute each other

and work to underpin white supremacy. The apartheid state anchored itself in the unchanging mythologies of the past and it believed in identity as something knowable and categorizable. It treated the white heterosexual nuclear family as the nation's ideal and found the rigidity and ubiquity of the military to be a source of comfort. The child Marnus represents these values – he wants to grow up to be a soldier just like his father. While the adult Marnus has achieved this dream, his backwards-looking narration demonstrates the perverse stagnation found in Afrikanerdom's emphasis on remembrance and the fixity of identity. There is no productive future here.

Tatamkhulu Afrika's *Bitter Eden* reveals the queer potential of male desires and erotic friendships as failure and forgetting reconfigure gender and sexuality in the military setting of a prisoner-of-war camp. Tom's failure to accurately perform hegemonic military masculinity, and his purposeful forgetting of his identity, enable him to imagine new forms of masculinity full of generative possibilities despite his military environment. Damon Galgut's *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs*, discussed in the next chapter, renders same-sex desire as an act of resistance against the military; Galgut's protagonist, Patrick, refuses to emulate hegemonic military masculinity through his acts of failure and forgetting. Tom's and Patrick's queer desires each trouble the certainty of identity so vital to the military and to apartheid. Queer desires in these novels are unsettling, disruptive, and illegible; they help expose the “patriarchal confusion” of the military.

Queer desires' disruptive potential, however, is not available in *The Smell of Apples*. E.L. McCallum and Tyler Bradway suggest that queer is not a static designation: “some people queer identities and other social practices. Queer marks an opportunity for reinterpretation. In this

sense, queer is not an identity, a thing, or an entity but an activity” (3). Queer desires in *Bitter Eden* and *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* threaten to dismantle systems of power – they are acts of doing. This is not the case in *The Smell of Apples*. The novel demonstrates the impossibility of being part of the apartheid apparatus while engaging in generative acts of desire and unbecoming what it means to be a man. And Marnus does want to belong to the apartheid state. He is the idealized son of the Erasmus family and of his nation. He is eager to uphold apartheid's reliance on the fixity of identity and its valuing of exemplary hegemonic military masculinity.

*The Smell of Apples* is set at the height of apartheid and at its centre is the young protagonist's idolizing of his soldier-father. In every way Marnus and Johan are the opposite to Afrika's Tom Smith. Where Tom reinvents himself to forget the familial past, the Erasmus men are proud of their familial legacy and repeat it through constant re-telling and lived imitation; where Tom spits out national slurs and rejects claims to patriotic pride, the Erasmus men celebrate national remembrances and venerate national figures; where Tom learns how to expand his understanding of masculinity to include same-sex desires, the Erasmus men operate within a closed, fixed environment, shutting down such possibilities by belittling Otherness.

Behr's novel makes constant reference to remembrance and repetition, reinforcing Jack Halberstam's argument that heterosexuality is dependent upon “grand logics of recall” (*Queer Art* 15). In doing so, the novel exposes the devastating effects of “generational time” (*Queer Time* 5) found in the claustrophobic categories of identity, family, and history. Marnus strives to resist such modes of failure and he refuses to forget himself. It is his valuing of his role as a good Afrikaner son, and his performance of a successful military masculinity, that links him to an official mythopoetic history and that assures him access to power. To unbecome is to move

outside this structure of belonging. It would unfix him from that which gives him meaning.

I begin by providing some literary context of South African “border war” literature and some historical context for the growing anxiety and paranoia that characterized the apartheid state. I then turn to a discussion of how the novel constructs idealized military masculinity to show that the violence at the centre of the narrative, the rape, is the result of – rather than outlier to – the hegemonic military masculinity of South African society. So ubiquitous had militarism become in the daily life of apartheid South Africa that the war trope of platoon leaders breaking down new recruits through shouting and punishment has simply become part of the white South African family dynamic. I consider how the threats of disciplinary violence, used to maintain the correct remembrance and the correct behaviours necessary to apartheid, mean the novel's characters cannot engage in a queer failure and queer forgetting as can characters in Afrika's *Bitter Eden* and Galgut's *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs*. I end the chapter by reading the proleptic sections of the novel through the lens of José Esteban Muñoz's and Elizabeth Freeman's theories of queer time. I read the novel's lack of temporal linearity, and adult-Marnus' lack of character development, as troubling assumptions about hegemonic military masculinity and as blurring the fixity of identity so vital to apartheid and its army.

### **Literary Context: Border War Literature**

*The Smell of Apples* is part of the South African war genre of *grensliteratuur*,<sup>148</sup> or border literature. The genre first emerged in the 1970s with authors writing in Afrikaans about military

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<sup>148</sup> J.C. Steyn first used the term in his short story “Op pad na die grens” (tr: “On the Way to the Border”). See Doherty 28 for a discussion of the term's origins.

actions, including what H.E. Koornhof calls “unashamed eulogies of army life” (276). Christo Doherty describes these texts as upholding apartheid; they were “‘special forces porn’ but with an exotic African background” (27).<sup>149</sup> In the 1980s and 1990s, however, the border war genre came to be associated with English-speaking conscripts whose narratives more broadly resisted the culture and purpose of the SADF. Louise Viljoen, in her discussion of border war stories, explains “Their texts tended to be critical of the ideology underlying South African military action, to emphasise the unhumanity of the war and to subvert stereotypical views about heroism, valour and loyalty” (458). Doherty agrees, arguing that the authors of border war stories “present themselves as haunted by traumatic memories of their wartime experience and as seeking to purge themselves of the effects of these memories through a process of public narration” (26). It is a complex genre. Many border war texts provide a counter-narrative to the official story told by the military; at the same time, many of these authors use their narratives to seek atonement – while abdicating personal responsibility – for participating in and upholding the apartheid state.

Robert Gordon, in his analysis of border war memoirs, argues against reading border war literature as a literature of resistance: “While it is undoubtedly part of a long tradition of literature which challenges authority, it does so within ritually demarcated boundaries which in the final analysis rather than undermine the ungodly status quo of Apartheid arguably serves to sustain it” (80). Ernst van der Wal agrees, arguing that because such texts still “conform to ideals surrounding white, cisgender heterosexuality” (62), disparaging gay soldiers as “other” to the “real men” soldiers of the SADF (75), the genre in many ways is holding up rather than

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<sup>149</sup> For example, *Grensvegter*, a photo-story series published by the Republican Press from the 1960s to the 1980s, helps demonstrate Doherty's claim.

dismantling the role of race, gender, and sexuality in the construction of white masculinity.

Nevertheless, South African border war literature does depict fear and weakness inside the military. In doing so, Doherty is right to observe that it subverts what he calls the “harshly masculine” (31) culture of the SADF. Behr's novel fits squarely here: it functions as a counter-narrative by portraying the military as a site of confusion, by depicting soldiers who feel terror rather than courage, and by exposing the corruption at the heart of apartheid. The genre may not be dismantling the valuing of white military masculinity at the centre of apartheid, but it is troubling its foundations.

### **Historical Context: A Paranoid State**

By the 1970s, South Africa was in full crisis. Resistance movements led by the African National Congress (ANC), unions, and student groups<sup>150</sup> were growing in the townships and the cities. Meanwhile, neighbouring states such as Angola and Mozambique were fighting for independence. Because the Soviet Union and Cuba were actively supporting these independence movements, the apartheid government believed an impending “red threat,” coupled with a “Black threat,” could topple their claim to minority power. Gary Baines explains that Defence Minister General Magnus Malan<sup>151</sup> was a “securocrat whose world view was informed by Cold War logic” (“Visual Narratives” 276) such that he believed the liberation movements throughout the continent were “doing the bidding of the Kremlin, and that African nationalists were surrogates

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<sup>150</sup> Mark Behr was part of one such anti-apartheid group, the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS), at the University of Stellenbosch. He later revealed he had worked as a state spy, reporting on both NUSAS and the End Conscription Campaign (ECC). See Behr "The Behr Truth" and "Living."

<sup>151</sup> Magnus Malan was Defence Minister from 1980-1991.

of the Soviet Union” (“Visual Narratives” 276). As Daniel Conway observes, these perceived threats were also occurring at a time when boycotts and embargoes protesting apartheid policies meant South Africa was feeling increasingly isolated from the rest of world (“Masculine State” 423).<sup>152</sup>

The combination of the perceived “red threat” and “Black threat” led the South African government to develop what Baines calls a “siege mentality” (“Visual Narratives” 277). In 1973, Malan declared South Africa was facing a “total onslaught” to which it could only respond with a “total war” (qtd. in Leonard 13). Baines explains the impact of this, stating that white South Africa “closed ranks in defence of the laager. The invocation of national security served to discipline society, defining the parameters of permissible conduct, whether politically, legally or socially” (“Visual Narratives” 277). This had implications throughout white society. Youth Preparedness Programs, compulsory for boys and girls in all white government schools, ensured they received early training in civic duty, military preparedness, and discipline. Voortrekker groups and veld schools further militarized white South African children by becoming integrated with the school curriculum, teaching warcraft and survival skills.<sup>153</sup> By 1977, the duration of national service, which had become compulsory ten years earlier, had increased from nine months to two years (plus an additional thirty days a year for eight years). All white families

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<sup>152</sup> This feeling of isolation still continued almost two decades later. The SADF's *1987 SADF Overview* reinforces this point: “Today the RSA [Republic of South Africa] is confronted by a full-scale external threat in all its facets. On the international front, the Republic is isolated and subject to boycotts as never before. It is the target of a concerted and multi-dimensional political, economic, psychological and propaganda onslaught by virtually the entire international fraternity” (2).

<sup>153</sup> Gavin Evans explains that while it was not compulsory for all white children to participate in veld schools, it was compulsory for all white state schools to participate. Teachers who did not participate received “negative points which affect their salaries and promotional possibilities” (294).

became tied to the military and had a role to play in the “total war.”

Apartheid had a need to police, control, and categorize. The Population Registration Act (1950) classified all South Africans by race; the Group Areas Act (1950) mapped a racial geography onto South Africa through the forced relocation of non-whites. The Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act (1949), the Immorality Amendment Act no. 21 (1950), and the Immorality Amendment Act no. 23 (1957) criminalized not just marriage but any sexual relations between races. These laws demonstrate how the state tried to fix – both as in solidify and as in recuperate – whiteness. Kopano Ratele makes just this point: “out of the marriage of ideas of making whiteness and ideas about sexual morality there emerged a very particular notion of being white and specifically of a hard, sexualized, ruling white masculinity” (161).

Andrew Tucker shows that such laws demonstrate the increasing paranoia of the ruling National Party (NP): “To the growing list that already included black African, communist, Jewish and English conspiracies could now also be added the queer conspiracy. This fear ran so deep within the National Party that the South African police recommended that, as with suspected communist groups, informers should be used to infiltrate and report on homosexual gatherings” (41). In 1966, when police arrested 350 men at a “gay party” in Forest Town,<sup>154</sup> an affluent suburb of Johannesburg, the government's fears that gay men were a “new and perilous group that threatened the white nation” (41) seemed to be coming true. The government responded to this moral panic by seeking to further amend the Immorality Act.<sup>155</sup> The Forest Town Raid stands

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<sup>154</sup> The police charged ten men: nine for dressing as women in public and one for indecent assault on a minor. For a history of the raid, see Gevisser; Elder, “Of Moffies.”

<sup>155</sup> Organizing in response to debates around the new laws led to the formation of one of white South Africa's earliest lesbian and gay rights organizations, the Law Reform Movement (LRM). The LRM focused only on ensuring that

as a key moment in South African history that exposes Afrikanerdom's great fear of difference. Tucker confirms this when he notes that, by the “late 1960s, social hysteria, sensational media reports and new laws had firmly implicated queer men as both a menace and jeopardy to the white nation” (42).

This formative moment in South African legislative history demonstrates the anxiety surrounding Otherness in white South African society and it emphasizes the fixity of identity so vital to apartheid's ideology. The Roman-Dutch common law that South Africa inherited from the early Dutch colonizers already criminalized sodomy (a catch-all term for acts ranging from anal intercourse to oral intercourse to mutual masturbation). The 1969 Immorality Amendment Act, however, increased the state's surveillance of the activities occurring inside private bedrooms. It banned sex toys, and it prohibited any kissing or touching between men that might “excite” another (the so-called “three men at a party” law). Discussing the 1969 Immorality Amendment Act, Kobus du Pisani argues it “seemed that the aim of the legislators was to reinforce heterosexual masculinity as a social norm by warding off the threat of white homosexuality” (“Shifting” 196). Key here is the anxiety about “white homosexuality” rather than acts of homosexuality among the broader population (for example the “mine marriages”<sup>156</sup> between Black men). As du Pisani makes clear, the concern was not about sexual acts per se, but rather the “potential threats a homosexual identity could pose to the fabric of Afrikaner society” (“Shifting” 204).

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the amendments to the Immorality Act did not criminalize lesbianism and homosexuality. According to Gevisser, the LRM worried they might appear too radical by taking an anti-apartheid stance, giving credence to the ruling NP's stereotype of homosexuals as “leftist agitators.” They sought to find a space for homosexuals within apartheid rather than bring down apartheid (35). The LRM failed to reform the law, but they did succeed in reducing its severity.

<sup>156</sup> For a discussion of “mine marriages,” see Moodie et al.

While all bodies and all sexual acts came under the intrusive eye of the apartheid state, the NP's particular obsession with white homosexuals indicates they saw white homosexuals as posing a significant threat to claims of white superiority and to white masculinity. This is because apartheid intertwined whiteness with morality. Jeremy Martens explains how the state used the Immorality Act to construct a particular kind of whiteness: "Whiteness was defined in both moral and racial terms, and those whites who lived immorally confused the equation of race with civilisation and blurred the racial boundaries on which white supremacy was predicated" (234). Andy Carolin further demonstrates this connection: the "interconnectedness of racial supremacism and sexual moralism in the production of heteronormative whiteness ... was the ideological foundation of the state" (112). The result was that the state tied whiteness to the performance of an exemplary heterosexuality.

The South African context provides an interesting locus for examining constructions of masculinity because whiteness, masculinity, and heterosexuality were the triumvirate upon which the state constructed a fixed moral and racial superiority. The military assuaged much of the moral panic and hysteria surrounding white gay men because all white men between the ages of seventeen and sixty-five were required to undergo military training and perform military service. Military discipline and conduct would "correct" any "misbehaving" tendencies. If the possibility of white gay men posed a threat to the nation, the military could contain it.

The military is a boundary making, boundary marking, institution. It promotes a particular version of masculinity as muscular, noble, protective, and heterosexual. Part of the rhetoric surrounding the SADF was that it would make "men out of boys" and that it would produce "real men." Jacklyn Cock confirms this: "The 'Let the army make a man of you' theme was often stated

by public figures” (*Colonels and Cadres* 74). She explains that, in an *Eastern Province Herald* article (16 April 1987), Malan “referred contemptuously to male members of the End Conscription Campaign (ECC) as 'mommy's little boys’” (qtd. in *Colonels and Cadres* 74). Cock shows how such homophobia was relatively common in South Africa when she quotes from a letter to the editor published in *The Saturday Star* (23 July 1988) that simultaneously mocks the masculinity of resisters and assumes the military will transform homosexuals into heterosexuals: “All these long-haired fairies should be forced to do their military training. Maybe they will become men” (qtd. in *Colonels and Cadres* 74). This demonstrates the state – both government and citizen – as valuing the military not just as a protector of nationhood, but as a protector and producer of an acceptable gender identity. The military does not just make men, it makes straight men.

The white South African military man becomes the marker against which to measure all other masculinities. Robert Morrell, in his analysis of South African masculinities, observes that South Africa has always been a militarized nation, pointing to the early settler use of the commando system that was a key organizing principle of local communities. He notes that white South Africa did not resist conscription: “A passive white population accepted these developments not only because it believed government propaganda about 'swartgevaar' (the danger posed by blacks) but also because the idea of being a man – being a protector, a wage-earner and knowing the right thing to do – made such steps seem perfectly logical” (“Times” 17). In this way the military was able to claim its position as the seemingly “logical” site to reflect exemplary white masculinity.

### Fixing an Identity in Place: Hegemonic Masculinity

Unlike Afrika's *Bitter Eden*, whose protagonist worries his performance of masculinity fails expectations, Behr populates *The Smell of Apples* with men who are confident they are the epitome of white hegemonic South African masculinity. du Pisani characterizes this as being white, financially stable, Protestant, Afrikaans-speaking, implicitly heterosexual, politically conservative, and of “irreproachable character” (“Hegemonic Masculinity” 159). Johan, the protagonist's father, exemplifies this identity through his position in the military, his role in the family, and his active participation in the Broederbond. Marnus' adoration of his father, demonstrated through his incessant refrain of “Dad says,” further elevates Johan's status.

Johan is a proud Afrikaner. Upon the NP's victory in 1948, one of the architects of apartheid, Prime Minister Daniel François Malan,<sup>157</sup> said, “the history of the Afrikaner reveals a will and a determination which makes one feel that Afrikanerdom is not the work of men but the creation of God” (qtd. in Moodie 1). Johan echoes such mythopoetics as he and Marnus drive back from his brother's orchard in a car full of apples. He tells his son, “‘And this country was empty before our people arrived. *Everything, everything* you see, *we* built up from nothing. This is our place, given to us by God and we will look after it. Whatever the cost' ... 'Dad, do you smell the apples?’ I asked in the dark. 'Ja, Marnus,' Dad answered as he turned the Volvo back on to the road. 'Even the apples we brought to this country’” (124). Johan echoes Malan in his implication the land was “empty” before their arrival and through his allusion to the covenant made with God. He also imagines an unseen threat that demands defence, implying the ever-

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<sup>157</sup> D.F. Malan was Prime Minister of South Africa from 1948-1954.

present need to be ready to act with violence. He is the Boer warrior of the past, prepared to defend his claim to the land with blood.

But Johan is also a modern, athletic, Afrikaner man. His success at sports signifies his success at upholding hegemonic masculinity that, in turn, upholds white supremacy. Michael Messner demonstrates these connections when he argues that colonial ideology used sport to “socialize boys to a certain kind of 'manliness' whose *raison d'être* was the administration of domination over (mostly nonwhite) colonized peoples” (*Power* 10). Photos of Johan's boxing success hang in his son's room, his past rugby success justifies having opinions about his son's team, and his fishing and hunting success is the envy of his son: “Every October, Dad and Brigadier Van der Westhuizen go up to the Okavango swamps to do tiger-fishing. Dad wanted to take me along with him once, but Mum said I was still too small. I begged and begged to go with Dad, but Mum put her foot down” (162). Johan represents a sports-loving, colonial adventurer who exerts power over people and nature from inside a world of hegemonic, sportive, military men. Such scenes reinforce the theme of repetition and continuity so central to Afrikanerdom and the novel. The violence of the colonial past extends into the present through such sportive excursions, and the son's eagerness to imitate his father further reassures the continuity of white Afrikaner hegemonic masculinity.

Repeating Afrikaner origin stories and being athletic are two key elements of hegemonic Afrikaner masculinity. Another key element, of course, is a connection to the military that in turn produces what du Pisani calls “national manhood” (“Hegemonic Masculinity” 172). Michael Drewett agrees, observing that there was no meaningful separation between a soldier and a white South African man during apartheid: “militarised masculinity [was] so ingrained that being a

soldier was 'not an occupation but a male identity'" (95). And Johan is not "just" a soldier. Being the youngest major-general in the SADF immediately marks him as heroic; his secretive hosting of the Chilean general reinforces his especially vital role inside the military. He is an exceptional military man. He is an exceptional Afrikaner.

At the end of the novel, Marnus gains entry into this world of manhood by demonstrating the strength of his penis. His father asks, "Tell me first, my little bull, is there froth in the water yet in the mornings when you have a pee?' I smile and nod my head. Dad laughs and says yes, I'm big enough to go tiger-fishing now, and Mum should stop worrying about me" (200). There are echoes here to the World War II propaganda that invited white South African men to "Join the Springbok Army of Sportsmen." By inviting Marnus to join the fishing and hunting trip, his father welcomes Marnus to the "team" of white military men.

While Debbie Epstein is right when she asserts that "masculinities have to be understood as socially situated and unstable, and, therefore, capable of change" (53), Johan demonstrates the effort of Afrikanerdom to resist change. Repeating the foundational myths of the Afrikaner past for his son suggests a continuous legacy stretching from the Boers to the present and into the future. His athleticism maintains his position as a colonizer who dominates the space around him. His military success marks him as linked to the commandos of the past and able to defend the present. His is a seemingly "timeless" Afrikaner masculinity.

### **The Safety of the Uniform: Militarism and the Family**

The SADF necessarily constituted itself as a site of heterosexual masculinity. Speaking about militaries in general, Nicola Cooper and Stephen McVeigh assert: "Soldiers not only

represent the nation in arms, they are also seen as the embodiment of national values. Armies have often been perceived as exemplary schools of virility and vectors of ideals of manly virtues” (246). The story of Johan and Leonore's first meeting demonstrates this stylized performance of soldier-as-straight. Johan tells the Chilean general that, while at West Point Military Academy in the United States, he attended an evening of Afrikaans music performed by Leonore, who was touring South African missions. Leonore confesses, “I was so homesick and when this young Afrikaner officer with the broad shoulders and handsome face appeared in front of me like Sir Lancelot, I fell in love with him almost at once ... While I sang I could see the longing all over his face, and I thought: A man in uniform, who can be so touched by music” (69). Johan's appreciation of Leonore's singing does not threaten his masculinity precisely because he wears a military uniform, the signifier of exemplary, heterosexual, Afrikaner masculinity. Marnus reinforces this connection later in the novel when he says he and his father make fun of men who sing: “we called everyone who sang, poofers ... [Mum] says you aren't a poofter just because you sing, but Dad just laughs and says he's not so sure” (104).<sup>158</sup> It is precisely because such men are not wearing the military uniform, and so do not have immediate access to the visual code of heterosexuality bestowed by the uniform, that Marnus and his father can mock them.

Conway agrees that the military bestows acceptable codes of masculinity upon its soldiers. In his discussion of how the SADF operated as a site of unity for the imagined white nation he notes that *Paratus*, the monthly magazine of the SADF, featured some unexpected figures as National Serviceman of the Month. These men included “a surfer, a gay novelist, a

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<sup>158</sup> Cheryl Stobie observes that the ease with which the family members use the term 'poofter' “indicates the community's homophobia” (“Fissures” 77). Such epithets function to remind Marnus of what is acceptable and what is not.

fashion designer, a singer, an actor and a photographer” (“Contesting” 131).<sup>159</sup> Conway argues that it was their role in the military that specifically coded them as *successful* men: “Had a fashion designer, author and surfer not been conscripts, their masculinity would have been relegated to marginal status, so the practice of military service transformed this. The men could be acknowledged as true men and patriotic citizens” (“Contesting” 131). It is the uniform that marks the wearer as belonging to the heroic world of the military and thus as belonging in the world of exemplary men. Raewyn Connell argues, “gayness, in patriarchal ideology, is the repository of whatever is symbolically expelled from hegemonic masculinity ... Gayness is easily assimilated to femininity” (*Masculinities* 78). Because, as Carol Cohn puts it, the military “deauthorizes” (242) the feminine in favour of venerating the masculine, the wearing of the military uniform bestows an assumption of entry into hegemonic masculinity and, therefore, it bestows a reassuring heterosexuality. Such is the dominance of the connection between heterosexuality and the military that, even for a gay novelist, the marker is one of being straight.

The other significant element located in the story of Johan and Leonore's first meeting is how it subtly points to the militarization of South Africa. Leonore's musical performance celebrates South African culture, but it is the military uniform worn by Johan that represents “home.” Militarization imbued every facet of South African society. Conway explains: “This militarisation was premised on a hegemonic discourse of personal identity that was bound with military norms. Everyday activities, such as sport, were inherently tied to military service, true manhood and presented as 'common sense'. This hegemonic gendered discourse was, in turn,

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<sup>159</sup> The gay novelist was Damon Galgut, who was National Serviceman of the Month, April 1983.

linked to understandings of what it was to be a good, patriotic South African” (“Fairies” 208). A South African military uniform symbolized not just the nation – as a flag might – but, as Cooper and McVeigh assert, the “embodiment of national values” and everyday life of that nation.

The apartheid state's anxiety about external threats meant that the violence of hegemonic military masculinity was constructed as reassuring and the uniform symbolized not just “home” but protection. Stephen Symons argues that South Africa had a “*laager* mentality that was woven into the intimacy of family structures, childhood and the social fabric of White society” (516). This is seen in the novel when Johan speaks at Marnus' school as it celebrates the centenary birthday of C. J. Langenhoven, composer of the national anthem, “Die Stem van Suid Afrika.” Johan concludes his speech with images of violence: “Blood may still flow, but this country will be made safe for our children, even if it does cost our *blood*. As our forefathers trusted, let also us trust, O Lord. With our country and our people all *will* be well ... because, *the Lord Almighty rules*” (71 ellipsis in original). The speech demonstrates the normalcy of martial rhetoric and declaring loyalty and protection through the spilling and sacrificing of blood against an unseen threat. It receives a standing ovation and a governmental nod of approval: “Mum was sitting next to the Minister. When everyone stood up, he turned to Mum and said that if he had any say in it, Dad would be sitting in the Cabinet too one day” (71). The speech, the applause, and the government's blessing all demonstrate that the state condones militarized thinking at every level of society. There is no room for independence or the blurring of boundaries.

### **The Queerness of Making Straight Little Soldiers**

The inescapable influence of militarization culminates in Marnus and Frikkie's construction of, and participation in, a blood-brother ceremony. The violence enacted through the

militarization of South African society – from apartheid's policing of identities, to the SADF's incursions across borders to defend against a fear of communism and independence, to Johan's speech declaring the spilling of blood as a necessary requirement for the defence of the nation – finds its echo in Marnus and Frikkie when they declare their loyalty and brotherhood to each other.

Marnus and Frikkie complement each other in many respects. They both play on the school's under-eleven rugby team, with Frikkie as captain and Marnus as vice-captain. Frikkie is “the naughtiest child in class” (2) and “behave[s] like a hooligan” (52), protecting Marnus from any potential bullies despite being smaller than most other boys. In contrast to Frikkie's bravado, Marnus lives in a world of punishment and worry. He allows Frikkie to copy his maths homework so that he will not be publicly humiliated, but later he is overcome with anxiety: “That night I begged the Lord to forgive me for the lies and for allowing Frikkie to copy. I tried to explain to God that I had only lied to Miss Engelbrecht to protect Frikkie” (8). That Marnus is willing to risk damnation for Frikkie indicates the depth of their friendship.

Marnus is eager to share the truth of Mister Smith's identity with Frikkie, despite Johan's insistence it remain secret; as Frikkie states, they “tell each other *everything*” (76). To resolve the contradictory demands of obedience to one's father and loyalty to one's best friend, Frikkie suggests they become blood-brothers. He explains the process: “People become blood-brothers when two friends, two best friends, mix their blood and make an oath that they'll always be friends. An oath like the voortrekker oath. Then they must help each other forever, and swear that they'll tell each other everything, that they'll never tell anyone else, and that they will even give their lives for each other” (76-77). The militarization of white South African society is evident

here. Conway explains the wide scope of such militarization: “military codes of discipline, courage, patriotism, duty and respect for authority infused civilian life” (“Fairies” 212). As good Afrikaner boys, fully indoctrinated into the ideology of the state, neither Marnus nor Frikkie questions the need to spill blood to “prove” their worth.

What follows is a highly sexually charged moment:

I take two elastic bands from the desk. We each tie a band around our forefingers, and the tips turn red almost immediately ... [Frikkie] shows me his finger turning blue. Mine is a funny purple ... 'Stick it into my finger,' he says, and holds out his finger to me. Frikkie bites his nails and now the skins are all curled up around the nail of his forefinger. 'Do it yourself,' I say, and hold out the compass to him. 'You must do it, otherwise it doesn't work' ... With my free hand I push the compass against his finger that's looking like a mulberry. 'You'll have to press harder, else nothing will come out. Stick it in.' This time I shove harder and Frikkie jumps back when the point goes too deep. 'Ouch!' he groans. 'That's too much.' Almost at once, there's a drop of blood on his fingertip. 'Let me do yours quickly,' he says. 'Before the blood falls off mine.' I hold out my finger to him. I close my eyes as he comes towards me with the compass. I feel the jab and when I look again, there's a drop of blood, pushing up from the skin. Then we rub our fingers together until it's sticky. (78)

The scene enacts an instance of queer confusion. Their fingers engorged, purple, and pulsing, take on phallic resonance<sup>160</sup> and evoke penetrative sex with phrases such as the “tips turn red”

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<sup>160</sup> The geometry compass used to draw blood in this scene adds to the phallic significance as it both metaphorically penetrates the boys but is also a tool used to measure and map distance for architects, surveyors etc. As such, the

(78), “With my free hand I push” (78), and “Stick it in” (78). The boys are also experiencing pleasure at each other's hands: Frikkie “groans,” (78) Marnus “close[s his] eyes” (78) and the resulting fluid is “sticky” (78). Queer erotics are present, but operate as an undercurrent, ignored in favour of the ceremony confirming access to hegemonic Afrikaner masculinity.

Marnus and Frikkie turn away from the queer poetics present in their blood-brother ceremony. In doing so, they demonstrate the rigidity of identity under the apartheid regime. Muñoz argues that a queer gesture “signals a refusal of a certain kind of finitude” (65). His idea of the gesture as signalling to, rather than as defining, helps illuminate the instability of this scene. To borrow M. Jacqui Alexander's phrase, the queer potential of the ceremony could “destabilize that which hegemony has rendered coherent or fixed” (192). This could also be Halberstam's “wondrous anarchy” of “unruly childhoods” (*Queer Art* 3). And indeed, a variety of queer possibilities are present here – choosing pleasure, eroticizing friendship, engaging in creative acts of mischief, and so on.

The undercurrent of queer potential cannot develop, however, because it does not serve the masculine order as they know it and as they seek to access it. A violent masculinity is the only masculinity that is meaningful for Marnus and Frikkie. They do not seek to destabilize; they seek access to the discipline of the dominant order. To “prove” one's worth to hold secrets, to become part of the exemplary Afrikaner brotherhood, requires the performance of violence. Rather than turn towards the homoerotics present in their ceremony – choosing that which is destabilizing, undoing, “self-shattering” (*Queer Art* 110) – they instead stay within the limited

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compass carries the weight of colonial exploration and the prizing of patriarchal knowledge.

vision offered by apartheid that rationalizes violence to maintain the fixity of identity. Faced with the queer potential of pleasure and the unknown, or the state that requires the performance of violence to grant access to Afrikaner military masculinity, they choose the state.

Michael Kimmell, Connell, and others argue that, while masculinity is not inherently prone to violence, violence is central to legible performances of hegemonic masculinity. It becomes what Pumla Dineo Gqola calls a “hypervisible and self-authorising performance of patriarchal masculinity ... where such performance hints at masculine violence or a contest between forms of manhood” (“Difficult Task” 64).<sup>161</sup> The link between masculinity, violence, and the military is metonymic. The layers of violence present in the scene demonstrate this: the violence of drawing blood, of proving loyalty, of constructing and negotiating kinship systems, all work to echo the boys' inevitable military future. That they believe it is important to draw blood to “prove” these values indicates just how inculcated they are in apartheid and military ideology. This is Conway's point about the militarization of white South Africa: Marnus and Frikkie have grown up in a system that is dependent on the violence of fixed identities for its maintenance, that commits acts of violence against fellow citizens such that the “front” is both inside and outside the country, and that has so normalized military violence that conscription is a rite of passage to achieve masculinity. Gqola reinforces this connection when she writes that children in apartheid South Africa were “socialized into societies that were constituted by violent interaction in their very fabric” (“Cult” 113).

The violence of apartheid society also occurs at the individual level as the children

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<sup>161</sup> Gqola is here talking about the Jacob Zuma trial and the spectacle of masculinity in the aftermath of apartheid.

demonstrate their conformity to the system through their declaration of a violent loyalty. In this way, the scene illustrates Marnus and Frikkie's readiness for their military future. Baines shows how the performance of masculinity operates through repetition: “the peer pressure reinforcing conformity to social norms influenced most boys, making them want to emulate their older brothers, fathers and male relatives who donned a military uniform and embodied the archetypal hero or warrior. After all, it is in the institution of the family where role models are first learned” (“Visual Narratives” 283). White heterosexual Afrikaner man is not a benign or objective category; rather, as Marnus and Frikkie's ceremony demonstrates, it is an actively produced identity. The homoeroticism of their ceremony – the desire to share the intimacy of a secret, body parts becoming engorged, penetrating to spill fluid – does not disappear, but such normative violence overwrites it, rendering it illegible.

In a scene overladen with themes of Afrikanerdom, white supremacy, and militarism, the boys then swear their oath, inventing and repeating phrases as they seek to articulate a meaningful declaration of loyalty:

“We swear before the cross of Jesus Christ ... That from now on we're best friends ... That we'll never ever repeat what one of us has told the other ... That we'll tell each other everything ... That we will die for each other ... One for all and all for one ... In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord ... May God strike us dead if we ever tell someone else about things that are our secret ... We swear on our mothers' lives ... Amen” (79-80).

Frikkie suggested the oath would be “like” the Voortrekker oath and it is certainly haunted by echoes of colonial violence through its evoking of the Day of the Covenant. Hence, it connects the boys' declaration of loyalty to a vital moment in the mythology of Afrikanerdom. The

demands of bodily sacrifice in the oath also work to evoke “Die Stem.”<sup>162</sup> In doing so, it echoes Johan's speech given during the Langenhoven celebration and makes their oath anthemic, a declaration to the nation at large. That Alexandre Dumas' motto of the Musketeers of the Guard also makes its way into their blood-brother oath suggests the circulation of an exemplary, universalized masculinity found in demonstrations of loyal soldiers and loyal friends. And, of course, loyal brothers. This has important connections to constructions of Afrikaner masculinity that treated familial relations as vital. In her analysis of Afrikaner masculinity in the early twentieth century, Sandra Swart writes that the commando system “was largely a projection of the relations of the domestic realm. The paternal relations of commando had reflected patriarchal social relations – uncles and nephews, fathers and sons ... Public expressions of loyalty were made in terms of the father and son relationship ... The commando system derived much of its power by reflecting the domestic situation” (740). An idealized Afrikaner masculinity permeates their oath as the boys swear their loyalty to each other as an act of private friendship, social brotherhood, and public citizenship.

The blood-brother oath demonstrates the inculcation of the children into a militarized society: they accept the need to prove their willingness to sacrifice themselves. There is also a theatricality to the performance of loyalty here. While it arguably arises from the swashbuckling heroes found in Dumas' novel, it also circulates in what Bloke Modisane called the “frontier mentality” (17) of white South Africa when “the law dangled in the holster and justice was swift” (17). Building on this, Troy Blacklaws argues “the young hero of apartheid stories inhabits a

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<sup>162</sup> For example, “We are thine, and we shall stand,/ Be it life or death, to answer to thy call, beloved land” (17-18).

hazardous frontier world, pervaded by violence and calling again and again for proof of bravado” (127). Marnus and Frikkie's ceremony demonstrates they can perform heroic manhood. At the same time, it suggests that heroic manhood is something to continually perform through legible and recognizable codes of violence and sacrifice.

Kimberly Hutchings argues that the connection between masculinity and war is not an inherent or constitutive relation: “masculinity is linked to war because the formal, relational properties of masculinity provide a framework through which war can be rendered both intelligible and acceptable as a social practice and institution” (389). The reverse, however, is also enabled: the formal, relational characteristics of war – and the military in general – provide a framework that renders masculinity intelligible. Each enables the production – and legibility – of the other. Marnus and Frikkie's over-the-top performance of sacrificial, heroic masculinity evokes the military because the military itself is an institution reliant on over-the-top performances of sacrificial, heroic masculinity. Their ceremony upholds the fixed identity demanded by apartheid of white heterosexual hegemonic masculinity and it functions as a successful demonstration of heroic manhood that reassures their future ability to take on the role of hero or warrior.

### **“Where is Dad?” (176): The Failure of Man**

There are two significant instances of failure in the novel, both of which trouble the idea of white military masculinity being rigidly heterosexual and honour-bound, and both of which connect to a violent inscription of hegemonic masculinity. They are not moments, however, of disruption. The first, Johan's rape of Frikkie, is the result of a moral failing by someone who might be queer – as in not sexually straight – but the rape is the result, rather than the undoing, of

hegemonic military masculinity. The second, Marnus' failure to obey his father once he has knowledge of the rape, has the potential to be read as queer – as in Michael Warner's “resistance to the regimes of the normal” (xxvi) – but his momentary resistance creates only a potential crack rather than an undoing of the power connected to military masculinity. Johan corrects Marnus' failure with punitive violence and Marnus subsequently chooses to protect his father – and by extension the apartheid state – rather than his friend. The potentially disruptive queer failure turns into simply a moral failure.

Halberstam's theory about queer failure enables a reading of queerness as interrupting the propulsive drive of heteronormativity and white supremacy. Queer failure creates spaces for thinking differently and therefore creates opportunities for undoing, for unbecoming. Tom, in *Bitter Eden*, feels anxiety about having sex with men because he has trouble reconciling his same-sex desires with his concern to correctly perform masculinity. As he learns that gender can be fluid rather than a fixed norm – as he learns to embrace queer failure – his same-sex desires help him undo rather than uphold the hegemonic military masculinity that rendered him anxious. In the next chapter, I argue that Patrick, in *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs*, similarly embraces queer failure when he has sex with another soldier while performing national service, undoing expectations of military masculinity. Having failed to be a good South African soldier, Patrick also then fails to be a good South African son, choosing his own path away from that prescribed by his family. To fail is to thwart the social order. Halberstam writes: “The queer art of failure turns on the impossible, the improbable, the unlikely, and the unremarkable. It quietly loses, and in losing it imagines other goals for life, for love, for art, and for being” (*Queer Art* 88). The failures in *The Smell of Apples*, however, are not liberating. They do not result in new ways of

being in the world, nor do they reshape the boundaries of masculinity to include fluid understandings of gender and sexuality. Rather, failure here is the moral and physical violence that underpins hegemonic military masculinity.

**“This is my rifle/This is my gun;/ This is for killing/ This is for fun”: Moral Failure**

Apartheid was, without question, a violent system of confrontation that required a militarized society to maintain it. Behr's novel demonstrates the ubiquity of the military in everyday life. That the Chilean general stays with the Erasmus family itself points to the lack of separation between the domestic family home and the military base. This, coupled with a military uniform representing “home,” the violence of Johan's centenary speech, and Marnus and Frikkie performing a blood-brother ceremony, works to reinforce the militarization – and the violence – the apartheid regime required such that it infused every level of South African society. Johan's successful performance of Afrikaner military masculinity culminates in his rape of Frikkie. The rape does not destabilize the structures or threaten the system upon which Johan's power rests. Rather, the rape is the awful inevitability *of* such violent structures.

The family gathers in the living room and Johan shows the visiting general slides of torture and brutality from a recent military incursion into Zimbabwe (167-173). What is unsettling is not simply the dehumanization of Black bodies, displayed as if they are hunting trophies; it is that such gruesome images function as entertainment in this domestic scene. The slides serve as proof of Cock's claim that “war strips men of their humanity and reveals their capacity for violence and evil” (*Colonels and Cadres* 91). The general, as a symbolic repetition of hegemonic military masculinity, reciprocates with stories of his participation in the recent Chilean military coup. The fetish of cruelty in this scene reminds that the military is not a

benevolent institution that protects and defends an innocent nation, providing a benign rite of passage for its sons to emerge as men. The military is always violent, it is always dangerous, and it is always upholding what Joanna Bourke calls an “oppressive regime” (*Dismembering* 128). The soldiers are products of the military's “oppressive regime,” but they are also simultaneously agents of its violence.

Demonstrating their acculturation into the military regime, and the success of its normalizing of violence, Marnus and Frikkie fall asleep during the slide show as if comforted by the displays of power and aggression. When Marnus later wakes, Frikkie is no longer beside him. In the uncomfortable and confusing scene that follows, Marnus discovers his father sexually assaulting Frikkie in the room below his own. It is a difficult scene. This is in part because the child who narrates the scene is unwilling to admit his father's involvement: he assumes the perpetrator must be the general. It is also difficult because that child cannot see properly: he observes the scene by peeking through a hole in the floorboard. Marnus says: “Soon I can make out that his other hand is on Frikkie's John Thomas. Now his face is against Frikkie's and it looks like he's pressing him against the wall and kissing him. I want to choke ... he's moving Frikkie's hand up and down his [own] mister ... I *must* go and call Dad!” (175). Finally, the sun illuminating the room coincides with Marnus' recognition and understanding: “I can see: the scar is gone from the general's back. I sit up slowly and unroll the carpet” (177). That Marnus mistakes his father for the general reinforces their mutually successful performance of hegemonic military masculinity such that it is only the general's scar on his back that marks the difference between them. Having articulated his faith in his father's ability to restore order, Marnus cannot admit it is his father in the room below. Instead, Marnus names the identity of Frikkie's rapist

through silence: it is not the general.

This scene has received a lot of critical attention. Rita Barnard reads the rape of Frikkie as a “homosexual act” (210), while Michiel Heyns reads it as an instance of “homosocial transaction between men” (94),<sup>163</sup> and Lindsey Michael Banco reads it as an act of “homoerotic aggression” (29). Cheryl Stobie reads Johan as bisexual and argues this is evident through the married major general's apparent desire for Frikkie (“Fissures” 70); Chantal Zabus disagrees with Stobie and instead argues that Johan is a closeted homosexual (171), finding the evidence not just in Behr's own autobiography but in Johan's sexual desire for Frikkie's male body.

These readings centre relations of desire and focus on categorizing that desire as something that is, at the very least, not straight. While there is something queer happening in the novel, Johan's rape of Frikkie is not it. In this dissertation I use queer to mean that which is disruptive to “regimes of the normal” (Warner xxvi) and that which is “at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant” (Halperin 62). As such, this scene, and what it represents, is the opposite of queer; Johan's rape of Frikkie is the inevitable result of his militarized outlook. It is not disruptive of dominant systems of power; it *is* those dominant systems of power.

This is not an obvious position to hold. In her discussion of British soldiers in World War I, Bourke rescues them from the assumption that they were already inevitably violent by arguing that the brutality of war *caused* men to be “temporarily” hawkish: “aggression and stoicism were regarded as characteristically masculine – *but they were traits that were expressed only because of the exigencies of military existence* and men longed to return to their familiar worlds where

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<sup>163</sup> Heyns reads Marnus as “giving” Frikkie to his father.

manly nurturing and emotiveness could once again flourish” (*Dismembering* 25 italics mine). In her more recent analysis of violence in the military Bourke maintains this position, blaming the culture of the military for producing violent men: “Aggression is rewarded; cultures of dominance, routine” (“Military Sexual Trauma” 89). Danny Kaplan and Eyal Ben-Ari, however, building on the work of Connell, argue that the military is the site of hegemonic masculinity precisely because it emphasizes particular characteristics already associated with masculinity: “this ideal includes such traits as independence, risk taking, aggressiveness, rationality and heterosexuality” (400); they note that the military “tends to intensify the stress on such characteristics ... it is combat service that is the focus of masculinity” (400). In this way, then, war and the military are not making men violent. Rather, war and the military are exacerbating the violence that renders hegemonic masculinity legible. War and masculinity are, as Hutchings notes, “mutually constitutive and mutually reinforcing, with masculinity acting as an enabling condition of war and vice versa” (391).

In *The Smell of Apples*, these military characteristics of aggression and brutality saturate the home through the figures of Johan and the general as they socialize in the domestic sphere. For such men there is no distinction between war and not-war, no difference between the battlefield and the living room. Their bonds of aggression are enabled by the military, by the celebration of military power, and by the sharing of military stories brought about by Johan's perverse “holiday snaps.” Godfrey Maringira, in his analysis of military masculinity, emphasizes that violence is the purpose of the military: “The military remains one of the most violent and masculine institutions in the world, where men are trained to be legitimately violent towards others” (S103). Maringira observes that the result of such training is that all spaces become

potential battlefields, and all people – even fellow citizens – become potential enemies (S103).

As they sit in the living room admiring slides of torture, Johan and the general make no distinction between work and home, between the body and weapon. Cock argues that the “This is my rifle” chant, used as the title of this section (and referenced in the previous chapter in relation to Tom Smith's masturbatory shooting of a weapon), “fuses” (*Colonels and Cadres* 60) masculinity and militarism. Susanna Trnka agrees, arguing that the chant reshapes the soldier in the image of the military: “By equating the penis with a 'gun', the rhyme functions to acculturate the military recruit into a frame of mind that equates sex with violence, and killing with 'manhood'” (235). The chant re-codes the recruit such that the symbols of the military become indelibly written upon the soldier's body. This supports Maringira's claim that the military induction of a soldier into violence is so absolute that there becomes no difference between the soldier and the weapon they hold: “Guns become metaphorically embedded in the minds of soldiers ... Guns are symbols of power and extensions of soldiers' bodies” (S105). Violence permeates all aspects of the military.

Johan's rape of Frikkie emphasizes how military masculinity and white supremacy are mutually constitutive. Sally Hayward's analysis of masculinity in the work of Nawal El Saadawi is useful here because she argues that the rape of a young boy is about socializing him “into a violent masculinity and an authoritarian and sexually exploitive patriarchal system of which he is, inextricably, a part” (144).<sup>164</sup> Johan's rape of Frikkie is also about socializing him into “a violent masculinity.” Military power operates as a destructive force; his society is one that is inescapably

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<sup>164</sup> Hayward is here discussing the rape of Haj Ismail in *God Dies by the Nile*.

violent precisely because apartheid treated categories of identity as a meaningful basis for oppression and violation. The rape is not an act of sexual desire; it is an act of power rendered sexually. Where Marnus and Frikkie's blood-brother ceremony contained “groans” (78), signalling the language of pleasure, here there is just silence. Nothing is challenging “regimes of the normal.” As Sophie Smith notes in her discussion of war literature, “the savage masculinity of war is but an amplified version of constructions of heteronormative masculinity more generally” (185). Johan's rape is an extension of the military's demonstration of power. It is the “regime of the normal.”<sup>165</sup>

The rape is not an instance of exceptional violence. The Erasmus family is the apartheid state in microcosm: the military father, the sacrificial mother, and the obedient children. In this light, Johan's rape of Frikkie runs parallel to the apartheid state's violence and violation of its own citizens since a militarized state sees violence and violation as logical solutions. It is a violence rendered on to the national body, where all are subordinate to the SADF. It is alarming for Marnus to discover the rape, but Behr portrays the rape itself as neither terrifying nor frightening for Johan or Frikkie: “Frikkie is lying on his stomach. His head is covered with the pillow. The general is bent forward over him and his pyjama-pants are lying on the floor ... He pulls Frikkie's legs apart and it looks as if he's rubbing something into Frikkie's bum” (177). It is only in

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<sup>165</sup> Connell argues that “fascism was a naked reassertion of male supremacy in societies that had been moving towards equality for women” (*Masculinities* 193). While the NP were not an openly fascist party, and while it is outside the scope of this dissertation to analyze the fascist underpinnings of apartheid, it is worth considering here the similarities between Connell's assertion about fascism's overt celebration of masculinity in reaction to the rise of women's rights and the NP's overt celebration of white militarized masculinity in reaction to the growing demands for equality from those constructed as Other: Black, Jewish, gay etc. Connell goes on to say, “To accomplish this, fascism promoted new images of hegemonic masculinity, glorifying irrationality (the 'triumph of the will', thinking with 'the blood') and the unrestrained violence of the frontline soldier” (*Masculinities* 193). This is precisely what Johan's slides celebrate – total white male supremacy over Black male bodies. This is the pinnacle of excessive military masculinity.

remembering Frikkie is an eleven-year-old boy that the scene takes on discomfort.

Echoing Hannah Arendt, Cock argues: “Many South Africans who engage in acts of cruelty are 'terrifyingly normal'. They are people who have been socialized into conformity; into unthinking obedience to authority, and into the belief that some human beings (Jews, 'moffies', 'kaffirs' or communists) are non-human and outside the boundaries which define humane treatment” (*Colonels and Cadres* 56). The main activity in this process of normalizing violence is “socialization into a rigidly masculine and militarized construction of self” (*Colonels and Cadres* 56). Thus, the rape is not a sign of queer failure precisely because there is nothing disruptive about it. Halberstam argues that queer failure is “the refusal of legibility, and an art of unbecoming” (*Queer Art* 88). The opposite occurs in this scene: it is a highly legible display of masculine power. The rape is, indeed, “terrifyingly normal” in the context of apartheid South Africa as it socializes Frikkie into the inherent violence of white military masculinity. Johan's act of rape is not disruptive to military logic or to apartheid logic; rather, it is its terrifying inevitability.

The “terrifyingly normal” violence of military masculinity is given added symbolic resonance when Frikkie connects apples with his rape. Earlier in the novel, when Johan and Marnus are returning from his brother's orchard in a car full of apples, the apple takes on the symbol of mythopoetic Afrikanerdom as Johan tells Marnus: “Even the apples we brought to this country” (124). Apples – already heavily laden with symbolic meaning in literature since the fall of Eden – here represent colonialism and white supremacy. Frikkie reinforces this connection when he takes an apple from the fruit bowl the morning after the rape: “‘These apples are rotten or something,’ says Frikkie, and he turns his apple around in his hand after sniffing at it. ‘They

stink. Smell this,' and he holds the apple to my nose. I smell the apple in his hand. It smells sour ... 'It's not the apple, man. It's your hand,' and I take his hand and sniff the inside of his palm. It smells sour. He pulls his hand back” (179). It is not the apples that are sour, but the smell of Johan's semen on his hand. In associating the smell with the rotten apples, however, Frikkie draws attention to the rot at the heart of apartheid and the violent masculinity that maintains it.

Frikkie washes his hand with water, then soap: “He sniffs again, but shakes his head and says it's still not gone” (179).<sup>166</sup> Disinfectant finally rids Frikkie of the smell of semen: “What do you think it was?’ I ask. Frikkie's eyes fill with tears, and he looks down at his bare feet and shakes his head, and now I know what it is” (179). Neither Frikkie nor Marnus are able to speak their new knowledge despite being “blood-brothers” who “tell each other *everything*” (76). The silence of this scene points to the impossibility of finding a language to speak disruptive truths inside a structure (family, culture, state) that depends on secrets and lies to construct the categories of identity upon which it relies. Johan is a white, heterosexual, father, husband, and soldier. The boys cannot acknowledge anything that might threaten the certainty of those mutually constituted identities. To do so would expose the identity categories upon which Johan claims his authority – and upon which the apartheid system rests – as shifting and complex rather than absolute. Forms of violence surround Marnus and Frikkie, from thinking they need to spill blood to trust each other, to the slides of torture on display in the living room, to the rape, to the apples, to the system of apartheid itself. The unspeakable – the rape – transforms into the

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<sup>166</sup>The scene is reminiscent of Lady Macbeth's inability to wash away the stain of murder: “Out, damned spot! Out, I say!” (5.1.34) and, slightly later, “Here's the smell of the blood still. All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. Oh! Oh! Oh!” (5.1.48-49). While the inability to wash away the “evidence” of the violence is similar, the scene is not parallel to Frikkie: violence has been done *to* him, not *by* him.

unremarkable. Their silence maintains the status quo and the systems of violence around them.

**“I move forward a few paces, but come to a standstill” (195): Failing at Queer Failure**

The first indication of Marnus' desire to resist the logic of military masculinity, what Halberstam calls “avoid mastery” (*Queer Art* 121), is when Marnus refuses to open the present the general has left for him. Reinforcing the military as a gendering institution, the general has left presents that each represent socially prescribed gender roles: a pistol for Johan, earrings for Leonore, Chilean fabric for Ilse, and epaulettes for Marnus. Marnus' refusal to accept the gift is a moment of potential queer failure: to “turn away from the comfort zone of polite exchange ... to fail, to make a mess ... to disrupt” (*Queer Art* 110). Having witnessed Frikkie's rape the previous night, and therefore having learned about the destructive power deployed by the military figures he idolized, Marnus now considers the military harmful rather than heroic. Connell argues that it is “the successful claim to authority, more than direct violence, that is the mark of hegemony (though violence often underpins or supports authority)” (*Masculinities* 77). Marnus, however, has literally and figuratively seen through the cracks and now understands that hegemonic masculinity is not something worthy of adoration and imitation: it is unabashed, exploitative power, propped up by violence. By refusing the general's present, Marnus fails to enter heteronormativity's “comfort zone of polite exchange” (*Queer Art* 110). He disrupts expectations and causes a rupture through his rudeness. By rejecting the general's gift, Marnus not only interrupts the system of manners and convention, but he also seeks to remain uncontaminated by the gift's violent effects.

Marnus fails at failing, however, and succumbs to pressure to open the present. At first, he cannot understand what he sees: “I can't make out what they are” (195). This evokes his earlier

blindness to the corruptions that lie at the heart of apartheid, the military, Afrikaner masculinity, and the family, as he echoes his previous night's confusion when he had looked through the crack in the floorboard and remarked: "I can't make out what they're doing" (175). The link binds the two scenes. The manifestations of patriarchal power, so banal in their everyday occurrence, are indeed difficult to "see." As Connell observes, hegemonic masculinity is mostly "not visible as a project" (*Masculinities* 213). Masculinity's invisibility is the very mark of its privilege. Christine Beasley agrees: "masculinity is almost invariably invisible in shaping social relations, its ever-present specificity and significance shrouded in its constitution as the universal, the axiomatic, the neutral" (86). Beasley suggests that exposing such structures has disruptive potential.

Drawing attention to masculinity's unspoken but ever-present role in shaping social relations – in other words, seeing power – thwarts its ability to masquerade as common sense, hiding in plain sight. She argues: "rendering gender and masculinity visible offers a challenge to existing power relations and their continuing reiteration" (87). Marnus is starting to see the power circulating around him; he is potentially gaining the ability to disrupt its repetition and expose its effects through this "failure" to remain blind. The general's gift of epaulettes marks his welcoming of Marnus into the fraternity of militarized manhood: "Dad says it's a great honour when a general gives someone his epaulettes. He says I must have really impressed Mister Smith for him to give me such a special gift" (195). Yet it is a welcome Marnus no longer wants.

Halberstam argues that while failure can mean disappointment it also provides an exit from the inevitable future that awaits. Queer failure rejects "generational time" and forges a new path; it sidesteps the "toxic positivity of contemporary life" (*Queer Art* 3). By refusing to open the present, Marnus does *try* to refuse his predictable future of hegemonic military masculinity;

he tries to fail. But the system – his family – overpowers him. He concedes and opens the present and then succumbs to further pressure from his family to put on his camouflage suit so his father can attach the epaulettes. His change of clothes, however, brings a more defiant attitude. Rather than obey authority he attempts again to resist both his father's (now tainted) touch and his own inevitable rite of passage into Afrikaner militarized manhood symbolized by the attaching of the epaulettes: “He sees me standing in the doorway, and says I must come closer to him so that he can fit on the epaulettes. I move forward a few paces, but come to a standstill. I stare at the pistol in his hands ... I'm scared of him. He speaks again, but I can't hear what he's saying” (195-196).

This is a moment of queer resistance because the failure is disruptive. Marnus fails to obey his father, despite his father holding a weapon that reinforces his patriarchal and military power. It is a moment of defiance – and as such it is a moment that is chaotic, unruly, confusing, and threatening. Marnus fails to move forward but he also fails to understand what his father is saying; it is as if he has stepped outside of the conventions and logic of language. In this moment, he undoes, he unbecomes, and in doing so he threatens the fixed identity of obedient son to both his father and the nation. In this moment, of standing on the threshold, Marnus fails to uphold the expectations placed upon him. His failure marks a queer rupture that suggests other possibilities of defiance, of ambiguity, of ecstatic confusion.

This is not, however, a moment of failure that takes hold. Both Tom, in *Bitter Eden*, and Patrick, in *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs*, fail to uphold the values of the military and of the South African state through their failure to replicate heroic, heterosexual, military masculinity. Their same-sex desires lead each of them to undo systems of knowledge and legible identities. But such boundary-blurring and expectation-rupturing is not possible here. Marnus is simply not

strong enough to withstand the pressure because he is too young; he does not yet know the conscious pleasure of queer desire that could fortify his challenge. This is not resistant failure that opens up unexplored futures. His failure fails – he gets subsumed back into the system. But it is a momentary interruption that hints at other possibilities.

In apartheid South Africa, a failed masculinity that threatens to undo the gender system by not participating in its costume and performance cannot stand. Johan picks Marnus up and hits him: “He hits me on my bum and across my back, and it feels like I'm losing my breath. He's shouting at me but I can't hear what he's saying. All I hear is the sound of the sea and hundreds of birds around my head. Then I start crying, and I hear his voice again” (196). Johan, too, starts crying: “Well, well. What's up with all this crying? Bulls don't cry” (197). The disciplinary role of the state intervenes and restores order, punishing the misfit and returning him to his prescribed gender role: his father attaches the epaulettes.

This scene demonstrates the tension between coercion and consent through which hegemonic power operates. In this regard, it echoes a common trope in war literature: the destabilizing insult-and-tease scenes as drill instructors screaming at new recruits and junior soldiers, only to later offer encouragement and tenderness.<sup>167</sup> Baines notes: “Basic training is typically described as a rupture; an attempt to systematically strip the recruit of his civilian

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<sup>167</sup> To take just one example, Anthony Ackerman's play *Somewhere on the Border* depicts Kotze, a brutal commander, screaming at Campbell, a soldier who had tried to get out of national service by pretending to be insane: “You got to hate, Kammel. No other way to survive. Let's see some hate, man. Go on, you cunt, eat your liver. Hate, you bangbroek, hate! I shit on your grandmother's grave. I fuck your mother in her mouth. I hold down your sister and rape her up the bum. Hate me, you bastard. Hate me! Let me see your hate. Give me your hate, Kammel, and when the time comes I'll know where to point it...” (28). Later, Kotze assumes a paternal role when he tells the unit, “Listen here. You a first-class bunch of men. I been meaning to tell you that. Just now we crossing the border and I could say I'm proud to have you boys riding with” (51).

identity, force him to accept military discipline without question, and convince him of the justice and validity of the military system” (“Visual Narratives” 282). Richard Rambuss highlights this tension in his analysis of Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket*. He explains that the marines are “variously, often simultaneously, effeminized and hypermasculinized by ‘Mother Green and her killing machine’” (196).<sup>168</sup> This “make you or break you” dichotomy is central to military discipline. Bourke suggests it is also about building unit cohesion; she argues it helps recruits “merge with the group” (*Dismembering* 128). Allan Bérubé further explains, “To prepare male recruits for the extreme psychological demands of combat, officers during basic training stripped away each man's civilian identity, placed him under great physical and emotional stress, and – with drill and repetition, rewards and punishments – trained him to act like a soldier and initiated him into military life” (36). The military makes the soldier in, through, and for, violence.

Despite the violent initiation into – and purpose of – the military, it is not an institution that operates solely through coercion. In his study of conscription in Finland, Anders Ahlbäck argues the military is also a site of “national desire and production” (25). He explains the military's appeal: it “offers its soldiers attractive models for ‘successful’ socialization and social harmony, such as notions of military comradeship or stern officers’ ‘fatherly’ caring for their troops” (25). This discursive power results in the military's ability to bestow markers of legible, exemplary hegemonic masculinity upon soldiers – they gain the symbolic reward of heroic masculinity – because the military can, just as easily, emasculate and shame (as seen in Johan's

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<sup>168</sup> Rambuss reinforces this point of give-and-take in relation to Hartman, the main sergeant in the film, who teases a recruit from Texas: “Only steers and queers come from Texas ... and you don't look much like a steer to me, so that kinda narrows it down! ... I'll bet you're the kind of guy ... that would fuck a person in the ass and not even have the goddamn courtesy to give him a reach around! In *Full Metal Jacket*, Marine Corps camaraderie – its fraternal male manners – demands some gesture of sexual reciprocity” (196).

slides of torture). Derek McGhee further demonstrates this: “appropriate heterosexualized varieties of masculinity (masculinities which connote heterosexuality), become in this environment homogenized and habitually assimilated and internalized” (219) through “surveillant discipline and visual assimilation” (219). Coercion and consent make the recruit into the image of the legible, exemplary, soldier.

The violence that disciplines Marnus' moment of failure to accept the epaulettes – his attempt to refuse his father, his nation, and his military future – is the same violence that disciplines recruits into homogenous and obedient soldier-roles. Ironically, then, what began as a moment of resistance, of Marnus refusing his induction into military masculinity, becomes a moment of military training, preparing Marnus for his inevitable, appropriately heterosexual, military future: military violence disciplines him into becoming a docile military subject. That this scene ends with his father attaching the epaulettes confirms Marnus' re-entry into the system.

The failure has failed and Marnus once again becomes an inheritor of “generational time,” participating in the repetitions necessary for the maintenance of apartheid and Afrikanerdom. As Marnus falls asleep that night wearing his camouflage suit with the general's epaulettes now attached he thinks not about the rape but about the reassurance that Frikkie did not tell him what happened: “If he didn't even want to tell me about Dad, then he'll *never* tell anyone. And it's right that way” (199). The violence of white masculine power is, truly, unremarkable. Dressed in the imitation uniform, decorated with the general's epaulettes, Marnus becomes his father, accepting the corruptions at the heart of apartheid.

Marnus had a momentary queer failure to obey the patriarchal authority of his father and the state. The military state met this moment of autonomy with violence, refusing the queer

possibilities of thinking and being otherwise. Masculinity will not be undone here. As an indication of his successful initiation into the world of military masculinity Marnus then becomes aroused for the first time: “I feel something between my legs. My John Thomas is hard and it feels warm and nice when I push my hand into my pants to hold it” (199). The erotics of power and obedience cement Marnus' inevitable military future.

The failure fails. This is a frustrating moment in the novel because, at the very moment Marnus could expose hegemonic military masculinity for its perversity, he chooses to side with his father. He succumbs to the allure of accessing this power through his father – the state's – approval. Where *Bitter Eden* and *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* both suggest that same-sex desires can lead to a queer failure that produces a generative queer resistance, this is not the case in *The Smell of Apples*. Behr does not offer a visible queer desire that could challenge the authority of the state through its blurring of identity categories and refusal to respect the Immorality Act. As with the blood-brother ceremony, any potential queerness gets supplanted by the allure of power and belonging. Instead, the novel emphasizes apartheid's family values through Marnus' constant refrain of “Dad says.” He is a proud son of his family and his nation such that he even refers to the prime minister as “Uncle.” In apartheid South Africa, the son, the family, and the state, are one. There is no re-invention available here.

**“A *volk* that forgets its history is like a man without a memory. That man is useless” (38):**

### **Refusing to Forget**

Halberstam argues for the possibilities located in queer forgetting: “We may want to forget family and forget lineage and forget tradition in order to start from a new place, not the place where the old engenders the new, where the old makes a place for the new, but where the

new begins afresh, unfettered by memory, tradition, and usable pasts” (*Queer Art* 71). Freeman refers to acts of forgetting as “living aslant” (xv) and being “out of synch with state-sponsored narratives of belonging and becoming” (xv). Like Halberstam, Freeman finds value in not being bound by history: of “inventing possibilities for moving through and with time, encountering pasts, speculating futures, and interpenetrating the two in ways that counter the common sense of the present tense” (xv). This is what empowers Tom Smith and allows him to expand his understanding of masculinity; in the next chapter I argue this is what empowers Patrick to move beyond the bounds of hegemonic masculinity in *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs*. For both Tom and Patrick, forgetting becomes a powerful act of resistance because it thwarts what Halberstam calls the “grand logics of recall” (*Queer Art* 15). But for Marnus in *The Smell of Apples*, to forget family, lineage, and tradition is to forget that which gives him meaning. Without the past, Marnus simply cannot exist in the present.

### **“Dad will show you how” (15): Keeping History Alive**

Afrikanerdom relied on strategies of remembrance to build a cultural nationalism. Albert Grundlingh reinforces the centrality of the past in the creation of Afrikanerdom when he writes, “A marked feature of the way in which Afrikaner nationalism was constructed was the emphasis on history” (“Trajectory” 27). It is, of course, a specific version of history – one that sees Afrikaners as the heroic victims in the struggle for independence, one that casts white men as the central players in the historical narrative, and one that tidies up any disorderly accounts so that the past is logical, knowable, and repeatable. It is history as “state-sponsored narrative,” or, history from above.

Behr's novel demonstrates the significance of remembering the “correct” version of

history and how Afrikanerdom deployed it to maintain claims to white supremacy. This is Gary Kinsman's "social organization of forgetting" ("Queer Liberation") that writes out of the historical narrative that which is disruptive and radical. Halberstam argues there is danger in valuing dominant histories because they maintain the status quo, keeping hegemonic values in place. These are the "generational logics" that seek to maintain power through the seeming stability produced by "the continuity of ideas, family lines, and normativity itself" (*Queer Art* 123). "Generational logics" demonstrate how Afrikanerdom and the apartheid state used history and remembering to reinforce its claims to power.

An early instance of "generational time" in the novel is when Marnus asks his father about shaving. His father reassures him that he will teach him when he is ready; when Marnus asks his father if his grandfather taught him how to shave, Johan responds: "Oh yes, in this same bathroom" (15). The past repeats in the present as repetitions of the performance of masculinity become almost eternal: the father will teach the son how to behave as a man in the same place where his father taught him. The repetitions of masculinity-as-history continue in the symbolism of the shaving brush: "The handle of Dad's shaving brush is inlaid with ivory from the bottom ends of tusks of an elephant that Oupa shot next to the Ruvu in Tanganyika. The tusks are mounted on either side of the fireplace in our lounge" (14). The ivory-handled shaving brush represents exemplary masculinity and white supremacy; it functions as a signifier of the bravery and success of the hunt. Such a mark of violent colonialism, made palatable through its domestic display, merges with the rituals of masculinity through the act of shaving. Colonial histories map themselves onto family histories, the legacy of which finds generational meaning through the repetition: the father teaches the son to become a man like him using objects that reinforce their

hegemonic position.

Marnus is an idealized son of Afrikanerdom. He demonstrates his successful indoctrination into a repeatable and reproducible Afrikaner history by repeating the racist discourse he has learned at home. A fishing kit is missing from the family's garden shed. Despite his many decades of service, the family assume their gardener, Chrisjan, has stolen it. Marnus explains, "Mum says that's exactly the way the Coloureds are. You can never ever trust them. All the years of supplying them with a job and a decent income, they simply turn around and stab you in the back. Just like the Mau Mau in East Africa. 'Thus the viper sucks from your bosom without you even knowing'" (20). Such a moment indicates apartheid's reliance on remembrance and repetition. Marnus is a child; he has no way to judge the similarities between Chrisjan's actions and those of the Mau Mau, just as he has no way to understand the reference from Sophocles' *Antigone*.<sup>169</sup> The mindlessness of these repetitions that fill the text – and Marnus' world – work to sustain the world of which he is a part.

Gayatri Gopinath calls the dominant narrative, that which actively produces and maintains its power, "capital H history" (8). The racism of apartheid required constant repetition through active production to maintain its effect. Instances of familial repetition work to demonstrate how the invocation of history and modes of remembrance work to produce whiteness. Be it an episode of a child eager to take his place in the family's generational cycle by learning to shave with symbols of the family's colonial legacy, or of a child repeating the racism of his parents,

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<sup>169</sup> Creon says to Ismene, "You sneaked about the house like a viper and sucked/ my blood when I was off guard. I did not realize I was/feeding two ruins and subversions of my throne" (531-534). This language also evokes Peet Pelsler's speech about the threat posed by homosexuals: "we should not allow ourselves to be deceived into thinking that we may casually dispose of this viper in our midst by regarding it as innocent fun."

manifesting the “right” repetition maintains the system of power. Marnus' indoctrination into the racism of apartheid works alongside his indoctrination into a military culture that relies on the same repetitions as it, too, upholds history and tradition.

### **Remembering the Right History**

This is not to suggest that there are no counter-narratives or messy histories in this novel. But even these show the limits of dissent and “forgetting” within the system of apartheid. One such moment is when Frikkie claims his great-grandfather hired hunters to clear his land of Indigenous peoples, yet his teacher refuses this version of history: “Miss Engelbrecht said it wasn't true. It wasn't the Boers that killed off all the Bushmen, it was the Xhosas. She said the Xhosas are a terrible nation and that it was them that used to rob and terrorise the farmers on the Eastern frontier” (8). Frikkie's brutal family history of bloodshed-as-sport challenges the school's more palatable positioning of Afrikaner-as-civilizer (as a mere bystander to, rather than perpetrator of, bloodshed and genocide). This could threaten to undo the tenuous version of history insisted upon by the teacher. Rather than challenge the accuracy of seemingly opposite claims, however, Marnus simply accepts that both are true: the Boers did not kill the Bushmen, except when they did. This is the contradictory and totalizing danger Halberstam locates in using memorialization and memory as a disciplinary mechanism.

Halberstam, following Foucault, exposes history's (and memory's) “tendency to tidy up disorderly histories” (*Queer Art* 15). Marnus holds both Frikkie's family lore and the teacher's “state-sponsored” version of history as mutually circulating histories. To challenge the veracity of Frikkie's history would threaten the repeatability and respectability of Afrikaner masculinity in the family; to challenge the teacher's version of official history would be to threaten the

repeatability and respectability of “official” Afrikanerdom. The “disorderly histories” are “tidied up” so that the ruptures disappear. Such an episode serves to suggest the limit of disorder within the novel itself.

Disorder is central to Gopinath's argument. She discusses the value of uncovering queer histories found in unconventional locations: “informal archives made up of discarded or devalued objects, and in haptic journeys through dust, dirt, and detritus” (8); such stories refute the disciplinarity of history, the order and logic of official archives. As a result, she argues, such an approach “disrupt[s] the normative ways of seeing and knowing that have been so central to the production, containment, and disciplining of sexual, racial and gendered bodies” (7). The story told of Frikkie's great-grandfather may belong to the “informal” family archive, passed down through its telling rather than through textbooks, but the story itself still maintains white, masculine, colonial power. Gopinath sees the disruptive effect of informal archives as challenging what she calls the “entire apparatus of vision that is the inheritance of colonial modernity” (8). Frikkie's family history, however, offers no such disruption. It may be part of an informal archive but the story itself still participates in official History. This means Marnus can incorporate the official historical record into his understanding of the informal record and not challenge the authority of the remembering.

Halberstam celebrates the resistant possibilities of forgetting: “resistance lurks in the performance of forgetfulness itself, hiding out in oblivion and waiting for a new erasure to inspire a new beginning” (Queer Art 69). Such forgetfulness – interrupting the repetition – is precisely what Marnus cannot perform while remaining a good son of Afrikanerdom. Acts of remembrance are co-constitutive with the performance of Afrikaner military masculinity. To abandon one is to

abandon the other. This is clear when adult-Marnus thinks about the value of memory but does so in terms of a military briefing:

*“It resembles an Ops-room or Ops-tent: the commander discusses everything, not only the heavy artillery. He demands exact statistics on the infantry, all troops, the morale of the different platoons and companies, the situation with victuals and the state of weapon-preparedness ... Only once he has all of this – the cold objective facts – only then can he make an informed choice, his subjective intervention, his analysis, his battle plan. Only then does he become deadly.”* (31)

This is Afrikanerdom. Halberstam, Kinsman, Gopinath, and others argue that uncovering disruptive queer histories relies on excavating informal moments, gestures, and nuances that are not part of the official record. In Marnus' memory-as-the-military, however, the state disregards the “unruliness” of memory, the mess and chaos of sideways histories, and the pleasures of uncovering hidden accounts. In its stead is a different form of remembrance that locates, scrutinizes, and then deploys “cold objective facts.” The dominance of militarization in the apartheid state is such that the military takes even memory – that which is normally full of disorder, complicated emotions, and imagination – and arranges it into a coherent order, reduces it to knowable facts, and turns it into artillery. This is military memory, memory as defence, but also memory as protector; this is memory as a weapon. To remember differently, to “queerly forget,” is to become a traitor to the state.

### **Remembering Oneself**

There can be no abandonment of history to foster self-creation here, as there is in *Bitter*

*Eden* and *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs*. Marnus' inability to see beyond the limits of apartheid, and beyond the military masculinity required to uphold it, means he participates in an insistent remembering rather than a resistant forgetting. The novel's structure makes this especially clear as the adult Marnus looks backward to childhood with his interleaved proleptic narrations. Afrika's and Galgut's novels each demonstrate Halberstam's argument of queer forgetting as something generative and creative: it "refuses a straight and Oedipal logic for understanding the transmission of ideas" (*Queer Art* 69). Tom Smith and Patrick Winter each act on their same-sex desires while in the military and do so, at least in part, as an act of rejection of the expectations of fixed identity and hegemonic masculinity represented by the uniform they wear. They blur the categorizations of identity, and they refuse the weight of family – and national – history, forgetting themselves as they embrace their lovers, finding in the queer embrace a different way of being in the world. They each show how queer forgetting can create something new, uncontaminated by the past.

Marnus Erasmus, however, neither wants to forget his history nor his place in it. Muñoz defines queerness as full of anarchic freedom, "a horizon imbued with potentiality" (1). He reads queerness as possibility, as that just out of reach. In undoing the systems of meaning – names, histories, identities – queer forgetting forges the new, the unknown, the "potential." But, like Douglas Summerfield in *Bitter Eden*, Marnus can only exist within the known. He does not want to be illegible, like Tom or Patrick. Marnus very much wants others to see him. He seeks legibility and values moments of recognition, from being thrilled the school yearbook publishes his essay – "I can't wait to show Dad" (158) – to deriving pleasure that he looks like his father – "I comb my hair in a side parting just like Dad's" (63). When the Chilean general remarks on the

similarity between Marnus and a photograph of Johan as a child, Marnus is pleased: “I'm glad I'm going to look like Dad one day” (169). Tom and Patrick each reject legibility because they reject the system it helps uphold. Marnus, in contrast, values such legibility as a symbol of belonging and certainty.

Marnus' desire for recognition is most evident when he and Frikkie encounter Chrisjan begging: “He's acting as if he doesn't recognise me. But he *has* to know me. After all, he worked in our garden for thirty years, first for Oupa and then for us” (164). Marnus is only eleven; his claim that Chrisjan should recognize him because he worked for his family for decades indicates just how much Marnus values the similarity of his appearance to his Erasmus lineage. The scene then escalates:

“Chrisjan!” I say. “Don't you know who I am any more?”

“Hasn't the baas got a little loose something –”

“*Who am I!*” I shout at him, getting all irritated. I tell Frikkie we should go home. We get up to leave.

“I'm looking for empties, my Crown,” he says, eyeing the half-empty bottle of cream-soda I'm holding in my hand.

“Well, first tell me who I am. *Then* you can have the bottle and go get the deposit for it.”

(164)

The encounter threatens Marnus' understanding of himself as a visible and identifiable Erasmus man. It unsettles him not because Chrisjan is insufficiently deferential, as a Coloured man speaking to a white boy, but because Chrisjan has forgotten him.

Chrisjan's act of forgetting, his lack of recognition, opens up a space of possibility that is full of the new and unknown. Halberstam states: “forgetfulness becomes a rupture with the eternally self-generating present, a break with a self-authorizing past, and an opportunity for a non-hetero-reproductive future” (*Queer Art* 70). But this is exactly what Marnus fears because his identity arises from repetition and remembrance. He needs others – all others – to see him as the son of Johan and as a worthy inheritor of the apartheid state.

And yet there is something queer about Marnus. Homoeroticism does inform many of his encounters, from teaching Frikkie how to win at spinning tops by “kissing” (3) the opponent's top, to the blood-brother ceremony he and Frikkie undergo, to his contemplation, as an adult, of a fellow soldier's body: “*As he walked away into the falling dusk, I looked at his narrow back beneath the uniform, and his dark neck seemed unexpectedly vulnerable*” (120). He does not, however, forget himself to act on these same-sex desires. In the context of apartheid South Africa, of course, this makes sense. As Glen Elder argues, “the body of the apartheid subject was foundationally coded in heterosexual terms upon which a politics of race was laid by the State” (“Body Politic” 154); what Elder calls the “interlocking structures” (“Body Politic” 162) of race, gender, and sexuality in South Africa necessarily required the “good” son of Afrikanerdom to be white, male, and straight since it was this nexus that the state used as the basis for its claims to superiority.

Marnus only values state power. There may be something decidedly homoerotic happening between Marnus and the soldier whose body he appraises, but his valuing of the structures of power represented *by* the uniform, rather than his valuing of the body *inside* that uniform, means he does not move beyond upholding the white heterosexual military masculinity

it represents. He ultimately abandons even the potential pleasure of friendship, as experienced earlier in the blood-brother ceremony, because it does not give him legible meaning and power. The fixity of identity, the dominance of the military, and the ubiquity of looking backward to celebrate a hermetic historical remembrance all work to produce heteronormative whiteness in apartheid South Africa – and they all work to give Marnus meaning. Marnus is not looking for queerness-as-utopic possibility; he is not living “aslant.” He is deep inside the “state-sponsored narratives” that anchor his sense of being. As the good son and eager inheritor of Afrikanerdom all he does is look backwards to gain legibility and legitimacy in the present. The radical place of unknowing and undoing, which lies beyond the bounds of identity and history, is therefore beyond Marnus' reach.

### **Queerly Forgetful Dreams**

In keeping with Marnus' idealized role as a good Afrikaner son it is only the world of dreamscape, rather than the conscious world, that gives rise to any potential queerness. Marnus has a recurrent dream of transformation, and this dream suggests a different order of being precisely because it escapes the confines of white hegemonic military masculinity, of legibility, of fixed identity. Muñoz is helpful here: “what we really know as queerness, does not yet exist ... to access queer visibility we may need to squint, to strain our vision and force it to see otherwise, beyond the limited vista of the here and now” (22). It is in the dreamscape that Marnus “forgets himself.”

Marnus first experiences this dream the night his father violently disciplines his attempt to resist receiving the general's epaulettes. He has his first erection while feeling assured Frikkie will not expose Johan's perversity and then he falls asleep: “And for the first time, I dream the

dream of me and Frikkie galloping along Muizenberg Beach. We're in uniform and the horses are right up against the water ... When [Zelda Kemp] sees we're going to catch her, she runs up the beach towards the dunes. I laugh and turn to look at Frikkie. But it's not Frikkie on the horse next to me. It's Little-Neville" (199). Marnus and Frikkie share an exhilarating moment while wearing military uniforms – potentially queering the military – and the queerness then extends beyond white male desire for white male in the military environment; here, they are chasing Zelda, a neighbourhood girl, and then Frikkie turns into Little-Neville, the son of the family's Coloured maid. This dream has an excessive queerness about it. The rigid categories of identity required by apartheid here become blurred and rendered obsolete as one figure turns into another. His desire for his best friend turns into a desire for a girl and this turns into a desire for a Coloured boy. His sexual object is moveable, changeable, seeming to be free from the restrictions and the rigidity of his father's world. If being queer is about disruption, then Marnus' dream may be the very epitome of queerness.

I want to read this dream as the redeeming feature of this novel, as representing a disruption to the rigidity of apartheid's military masculinity. After all, here is a white male soldier's desires indicating a movement beyond categories of identity, offering an intoxicating vision of possibility, of blurred boundaries, and of pleasures prioritized over power. But Marnus' dream is *not* that moment. It is disruptive, for it reveals he has transgressive sexual desires. But those objects of desire are not equal to him. Frikkie has been raped; Zelda is poor; Little-Neville has been tortured and lies prone in a hospital bed, his broken body evoking the torture victims of Johan's slides. While each of these dream figures may represent sexual desire, it is a sexual desire that insistently re-inscribes desire with power. Marnus' erection and his wet dream, then, become

a sexual desire of and for the state itself and the power and privileges it will confer upon him. The dream signals a potential disruption to order and logic, a potential queering of desire, but even in Marnus' dreams his obedience to the state takes over. It is again a fleeting queerness, a momentary trace rather than a desire that takes hold.

The transgressions of Marnus' dream are multiple and overflowing, but its excess does not penetrate the waking world of the novel. Marnus does forget the rigidity of identity required by apartheid in his dream and he almost entirely forgets himself. The re-inscription of power, however, suggests there is no real escape. There is nothing redemptive here. Queerness is about undoing structures of power, being at “odds with” (Halperin 62) and staging a “resistance” (Warner xxvi); it is about “reinterpreting” (McCallum and Bradway 3) the self and one's surroundings. Marnus does not act on his same-sex desires, and he does not seek to undo any of the structures of power that serve to give him meaning. He does not choose to break with his history. He does not consciously forget himself.

### **“It's for the living that the dead should mourn” (198): Queering Time**

Marnus may have homoerotic leanings and transgressive queer dreams, but his character does not offer an exit strategy from the hegemonic military masculinity that upholds apartheid precisely because he *wants* to uphold the system. He fails at failing and he consciously refuses to forget himself, his family, and his nation's history. Marnus does not step outside of “generational time;” he embraces it at every turn since it is what anchors him to a history he values.

The proleptic sections of the novel, however, may function as a form of queer time. Halberstam argues that queer time operates against “the inevitable and seemingly organic models

we use for marking progress and achievement” (*Queer Art* 70). Queer time is, ultimately, a disorder of time and logic that escapes the propulsive, forward-moving straight time of heteronormativity. It moves beyond the logic of family, of progress, of a singular, linear time; it could offer an escape from the stagnant repetitions of history. In Afrika's *Bitter Eden*, the characters enter queer time as they explore and expand ideas of gender and sexuality. The prisoner-of-war camp causes them to be out-of-time, both in terms of being non-actors in the action of war, and in terms of the mistreatment they suffer that removes from their bodies the passage of a legible, chronological time. The queering of time in Afrika's novel, manifested through reconfigured understandings of sexual desire and sexual activity, enables a kind of freedom from history and logic; it is generative and full of possibility.

Such queer time is not as easily available here and it is certainly not something consciously embraced by Marnus. Tom Smith and Patrick Winter each engage in sexual acts with other men, experiencing the *jouissance* of pleasure as they disrupt the expectations of identity prescribed by their military uniforms. But there is no similar “gay” here, in any of its myriad meanings. Even in a potential masturbation scene there is an absence of pleasure. Adult-Marnus pulls out his penis to urinate and forgets he is holding it (64). Upon remembering, he then extensively describes his penis (64-65), contemplating every aspect of his genitals. The scene ends in a kind of flaccid futility as he merely zips himself back up.

While queer time is not generative in *The Smell of Apples* in the same way as it is in *Bitter Eden*, the liberating *potential* it offers remains the same. Freeman argues that, because queer temporalities operate as an interruption in the expected order, they “propose other possibilities for living in relation to indeterminately past, present, and future others” (xxii). Adult-Marnus'

narration performs just such an interruption – the sections are graphically different, they thwart the novel's progressive chronology and, perhaps most queerly, they refuse to participate in a patriotic narrative. In these sections, time refuses to organize itself for history's ends.

### **Queering Typography**

Each of the fifteen proleptic sections of the novel appears in italics, enacting a queer gesture that signals beyond the page. Muñoz argues that queer time can exist in such gestures: “The gesture interrupts the normative flow of time and movement” (91). Muñoz reads the parentheses and the italics of Elizabeth Bishop's poem “One Art,” for example, as “graphically differentiated” (71) and argues that they “communicate a queer trace, an ephemeral evidence” (71). I read the italicized sections in Behr's novel as a similar mark of visual excess that invites a queer optic, a different register beyond the page.

The italics here are strange. Italics convey emphasis; they perform a graphical mark of feeling – of emotion – on the page. This is in stark contrast to Marnus' memory-as-military briefing where he readies for recalling “cold objective facts” (31) in memory's “Ops-room” (31). Indeed, as Nyameka Mankayi makes clear, “Emotional and physical vulnerability is ... not tolerated in the military” (“Masculinity” 27). Cock confirms this: “The military encourages a form of ultra-masculinity which requires aggressiveness, competitiveness and the censure of emotional expression” (*Colonels and Cadres* 58). The italics, however, refuse such “censure.” They symbolize the expression of emotion, the trace of that which has been written out of the official “briefing” of war. They resist the military's desire for discipline and control and, as such, gesture elsewhere, to a different order of time.

In his seminal study of gender in the United States Navy, Frank Barrett shows how the military uses difference to construct hegemonic masculinity: “One way to emphasize discipline, endurance, and rationality as masculine traits is to depict lack of discipline, unreliability and emotion as feminine” (141). This is part of the heterosexualization of the military. As Barrett observes, “Homosexuals have also been 'othered' using these terms. For years, one of the core arguments for excluding homosexuals from military service was their lack of discipline and unreliability” (141). And, one might add, their threat of displaying emotion. In this way, the italics in these proleptic sections come to function as the visual mark of Other, a site of emotional excess. They refuse the rational, unemotional logic valued by the military, but they also threaten the clear fixity of gender and sexuality upon which the military relies. They evoke the spectre of homosexuality through their emotive typography – a flamboyance of feeling rather than the stoic rationality of exemplary (heterosexual) soldiers – and they disrupt the military's construction of itself as the site of hegemonic masculinity.

Italics can also mimic handwriting, suggesting the ephemeral trace of a writer's hand, the intimacy of the body leaving its mark. Such a queer tilt is out of place in the military. The military's hyper-masculinity is such that a weapon becomes a part of the soldier's body. Soldiers chant “This is my rifle/This is my gun.” Afrika's narrator describes “the hulk” as having a gun that “seems to flow into an extension of his hand” (8). Johan is unbothered by holding the Chilean general's gift of a pistol while talking to his family because the weapon has immediately become a part of him. Mankayi makes clear the ubiquity of weapon-as-bodily-appendage in the military: “It is not only physical strength that is key in the bodily representation of the military but also the use of weapons viewed as an extension of the body for military men” (“Masculinity”

27). Soldiers' bodies become “killing machines.” But here, the italics suggest the weapon is a pen that bears witness, the body is one that seeks to tell rather than kill.

The italicized passages are in many ways the threat posed by Halberstam's queer figure in that they are “loud, unruly, impolite” (*Queer Art* 110). The italics are an over-the-top performance; they disrupt the order and obedience demanded of the military. They also disrupt its repetition. Sarah Bulmer argues that “patriarchal confusion” is located in sites that expose the “radically contingent character of the reproduction of patriarchal norms in the military” (137). The italics evoke something personal – a textual voice seeking to convey emphasis or emotion, an actual hand that is writing – and thus refuse these “patriarchal norms.” The italics are undecidable, unruly, uncontained – and unreproducible. Rather than uphold the white hegemonic heterosexual masculinity of the apartheid military, the italics queerly move beyond the page. They suggest other possibilities.

### **Queering Chronology**

The proleptic sections function as a visual disruption, but also as a chronological disruption. Adult-Marnus' narration of the border war erratically interleaves with child-Marnus' narration of the week the general came to stay. As each narration interrupts the other, the effect is to stage a temporal resistance operating, as Halberstam would say, “against the logics of succession, progress” (*Queer Art* 75). The proleptic passages themselves also trace a chaotic chronology as adult-Marnus mixes his recollection of the past few years in the military with events occurring in his present alongside imaginary futures – recalling, for example, a soldier who died the previous year while also remembering a lieutenant who died the previous day, and then imagining how his mother will hear news of his own death (100-101). The narrative arc of

the proleptic passages moves forward in time: Marnus' unit prepares for battle (12), he comes under attack (117), and he dies of his wounds (198), but these episodes erratically interrupt child-Marnus' narration. The effect produces a state of temporal confusion. There is no sense of progress here; rather, there is continual interruption, and a dislocation of time and meaning. Such temporal chaos evokes the confusion of war, certainly, but it also points to the queering of time.

Freeman similarly reads a lack of sequential order as queer time, a sidestepping of logic and of linearity. In her introduction to *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*, Freeman discusses Robert Graves' 1915 war poem, "It's a Queer Time." The speaker of the poem is an injured soldier; he oscillates between describing the horrors of war and his visionary hallucinations as he slowly dies. Freeman argues that part of the poem's queer time is its refusal to participate in any patriotic narrative: "this poem narrates military history's failure to fully organize time toward nationalist ends. The speaker is a soldier who refuses to die for the glory of his country but comes back for more and more of the pain that will give him access to a queer world of his own making" (x). Something similar is happening in the non-sequential chronology of Behr's novel. The continual looking backwards, the inability of any one narrative time to develop coherently, suggests that time is "incompletely realized" (xv). As in Graves' poem, here too is a soldier not fulfilling the military's desire to organize time for nationalist ends. Time is incomplete, unstructured. As in his dream, the proleptic sections take on an other-worldiness; they become an ironic site of transformation.

Afrikaner history is, decisively, "straight time." It relies on logics of succession and inheritance, valuing patriarchal authority and military heroes. The "patriotic narrative" of Afrikanerdom was one of service to the *volk*, manifested through reproduction and adherence to

the idealized, heroic, heterosexual, white muscular masculinity so celebrated in their mythopoetic origin stories. Afrikanerdom – and the apartheid state it produced – could not entertain a concept of time as unstructured or unknowable precisely because it needed to know, close down, fix, and define all categories of identity. The Immorality Act, the Mixed Marriages Act, the Population Registration Act, and so on demonstrate how *much* the state felt entitled to know in their anxiety to control the category of whiteness. Any transgression from this fixed identity threatened the claims to white supremacy upon which apartheid was based. To “step out” of straight time – out of the realm of order, progress, development, knowability – was to step out of the laager and become queer threat and menace.

But Marnus, arguably, does transgress in the proleptic sections when he disrupts the expectations associated with being a soldier. The novel's chronological disruptions take on ideological implications as Marnus “steps out” of the nationalist, masculinist, heroic order of Afrikanerdom. When a nearby platoon comes under attack, Marnus refuses a section-leader's request to offer them assistance: “*I leave the radio's volume turned up, making sure he can hear Van Schoor's hoarse voice calling to the Colonel for help. He is shouting in Afrikaans and English and Portuguese – all at once*” (42). Marnus resists participation in one of the most conventional aspects of war: the value of camaraderie. Bourke explains the centrality of this trope: “combatants reported that they were able to kill because of the love they felt for their comrades. The importance of comradeship in enabling men to 'carry on' is at the heart of most histories of 'life at the front': so much so that it has become a cliché of military, cultural history” (*Intimate History* 130). Yet this is not a moment of Bourke's “love,” of Ahlbäck's “military comradeship” (25), of brothers-in-arms risking all for each other. In refusing to help his fellow

soldiers, Marnus defies a cliché of war – he disrupts the expected order.

In refusing to offer help, Marnus also defies the SADF's construction of itself as a site of idealized white harmony. Conway explains: “The presumed masculine camaraderie of [national] service aimed to forge white national bonds and the public image of the white male conscript symbolized white South Africa's apparent unity and resolve” (“Contesting” 129). In contrast, adult-Marnus is something of an anti-hero here: he exposes the fallacy of soldiers-as-brothers and the fallacy of the SADF being a site of white “unity.” In cruelly making sure everyone hears the unanswered calls for help, he upends any expectation of the uniform being a sign of discipline and honour.

Writers of war often treat war as the site of personal growth and experience, a form of bildungsroman where the vital knowledge gained clarifies and purifies the soldier. Yuval Noah Harari considers war a “quasi-mystical experience of revelation” (1); Peter Jones sees war as an opportunity for soldiers to prove themselves through “instances of initiation and maturation” (21). Christopher Hamner notes that combat continues to circulate in the cultural imagination as a rite of passage, stating it is “the activity that both tests manhood and proves manhood. In many ways it represents not just a uniquely male endeavor but *the* archetypal male endeavor” (276). Indeed, this is precisely how the SADF marketed conscription in apartheid South Africa: participation in the military assured entry into a successful, adult, heterosexual hegemonic military masculinity. Baines demonstrates this by pointing to the SADF slogan that claimed that it is on the border “where our sons become men” (qtd. in “South Africa's Vietnam?” 6).

The proleptic sections of the novel, however, actively subvert the genre of war literature that celebrates the transformative potential of the battlefield. Marnus' unit comes under attack.

The ensuing battle scene is not a revelatory experience for Marnus. Indeed, he abandons his men at the crucial moment: *“In the branches above my head, tracers fly past like deadly fireflies, and my head pounds from the noise. Almost tripping over a discarded webbing, I suddenly know there's nothing I can do for them any more. From this moment on it's each man for himself. I allow myself a quick glance over my shoulder, then speed up”* (118). This is not a moment of education and Marnus is not proving himself in war's crucible here. Just as he earlier thwarted soldierly expectations by not helping a nearby unit under fire, here too Marnus refuses to participate in any patriotic or patriarchal narrative of courage and camaraderie. Marnus disregards the military's creed to “Leave no man behind;” his “each man for himself” attitude threatens the very foundation of the military's structure. Marnus runs away.

I do not want to suggest that a soldier who runs away from battle is “unmanly.” But, within the context of apartheid South Africa, that is precisely the construction of such a soldier. For Marnus to fail to uphold the social expectations of the soldier-role (to become a man, to belong to the fraternity of “brothers-in-arms,” to be a hero) is not to risk an individual blunder but to threaten the stability of the sign of whiteness. It is to be one of the figures Malan mocked as “mommy's boys” (qtd. in *Cock Colonels and Cadres* 74), the men whom the media framed as effeminate, emasculated precisely because they had not accepted the ability of the military to turn them into (heterosexual, masculine) acceptable men. This is the military's work of boundary making and boundary marking. Having constructed the military as a site of idealized white heterosexual masculinity, the SADF positioned anyone outside of that boundary as Other. Since Marnus only has meaning inside his performance of successful, heterosexual, military masculinity, running away erases his legibility.

As if to confirm adult-Marnus' entry into queer time, what Muñoz calls “queerness as horizon” (32) that escapes “the temporal stranglehold” (32) of straight time, the proleptic sections end with a paradox, an excessive gesture that points to time operating on a different order and with a different logic. As he dies, adult-Marnus hallucinates the comforting embrace of his father and thinks: “*Death brings its own freedom, and it is for the living that the dead should mourn, for in life there is no escape from history*” (198). The statement is both hyperbolic and confounds sense, operating as another kind of textual interruption to the progression of chronological time. Death may provide a relief from the totalizing terrain of apartheid, but it is not a relief available to experience. It is the living who mourn the dead, not the other way around. The paradox of this final statement, however, does offer an alternative to the oppression of the apartheid regime. Freeman explains queer time as that which “elongates and twists chronology” (x). She details instances of sequential interruption, such as asynchrony, ellipsis, prolepsis, surprise, and so on (xxii) as forms of queer time because they intervene in the expectation of time as something progressive and ordered – they interrupt the “normal” and they suggest a different register. Bringing Muñoz and Freeman together produces a reading of Marnus' paradoxical statement as indeed queer: to claim that the dead mourn the living is to suggest that there is a time outside of logic and beyond history. It is to unfix time, to interrupt the sequence.

The narrative disorganizes time, thwarts military tropes, and renders patriotism unavailable. By actively avoiding the tropes of development and progress conventionally found in war novels, *The Smell of Apples* contains a profound tension. The protagonist gains his sense of self from the generational logics that arise from his family and from the apartheid state. Yet the narration thwarts ideas of progress and development. Indeed, adult-Marnus looks backwards

and behaves like a child in his adult present. The result is to reveal not just that the ideology of apartheid is stagnant and suffocating; his narration also puts the lie to the idea of progress, development, and maturity as occurring in the military. The proleptic sections expose the lies at the foundation of the military by revealing that the military does not make men and war does not make heroes. Time is queer here as the proleptic passages behave in unpredictable and illegible ways. They reveal time as queerly disordered, gesturing beyond the page to what Muñoz might call a “vastness of potentiality” (141).

My reading of the novel's queer time may offer a space full of “potentiality,” but Marnus is not constructed as interested in the embrace of difference available to him. Unlike Tom Smith and Patrick Winter, Marnus does not welcome the possibilities enabled by queer time. There is no act of sexual resistance, no queer embrace to thwart the fixity of identity that was apartheid's necessity. Marnus fails to perform white military masculinity correctly, but he is not seeking redemptive escape. Marnus stays stuck in the impotence of apartheid and its stagnant repetitions of violent history.

### **Conclusion**

Afrika's *Bitter Eden* and Galgut's *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* each include soldiers who embrace transgressive sexual desires for other men in the military. In doing so, they offer a moment of queer resistance to the hegemonic military masculinity that was so crucial to apartheid's ideological hold. On the contrary, Behr's *The Smell of Apples* does not offer a similar figure who rejects the trappings of military masculinity to embrace a different way of being in the world. Behr's novel is about men who espouse the values of apartheid through their rigid and fixed adherence to a white, military hegemonic masculinity, whose militarized perspective is so

encompassing that they make no distinction between the home front and the war front. If there is a queer resistance here, it is in the novel's non-chronological structure and in the paradox with which Marnus' life ends. Adult-Marnus suggests that it is only by escaping from history that one can experience freedom. This is precisely the escape Afrika's protagonist experiences when he abandons his patronym and patriotism, and it is precisely the escape Galgut's protagonist experiences when he similarly renounces familial and national expectations. Marnus, trapped as he is in the claustrophobic environment of apartheid, cannot escape history in life since it is only that which gives him meaning.

In arguing for the value in reaching towards a queer utopia, Muñoz suggests that the “not-quite-conscious is the realm of potentiality that must be called on, and insisted on, if we are ever to look beyond the pragmatic sphere of the here and now, the hollow nature of the present” (21). Behr demonstrates the “hollow nature” of the apartheid present by revealing the perversity that existed within the heart of it. Apartheid not only created a mythical version of the past and relied upon its endless repetition, but it also required the performance of an exemplary masculinity to sustain itself. Written out of the official records were the high suicide rates of conscripts,<sup>170</sup> the increasing failure of conscripts to report for duty, the high death rate in the border war with Angola<sup>171</sup>, and the treatment of homosexuals within the SADF,<sup>172</sup> details of which only emerged after the fall of apartheid. These realities expose the untenable nature of apartheid and its

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<sup>170</sup> Cock puts the figure of attempted suicides by conscripts between 1985-1988 at 1,368, of whom 78 succeeded (*Colonels and Cadres* 80).

<sup>171</sup> The United Nations Centre Against Apartheid suggested that the SADF hid the death rate because it would otherwise reveal that the SADF was “neither the 'modern war machine' the government claimed nor, importantly, that the SADF was superior to enemy black soldiers” (13).

<sup>172</sup> See van Zyl et al.

impossible demand to conform. Marnus does not seek to break free as a conscious act of resistance, but Mark Behr's telling of this story troubles and undoes the official narrative of apartheid. The book enters a form of Halberstam's "queer disruption in the logic of the normal" (*Queer Art* 75). Its queerness, ultimately, is in exposing the corruption and failure at the heart of apartheid.

**CHAPTER FIVE: “Oh yes, it's a man's world, my masters” (19): Queering  
Military Masculinity in Damon Galgut's *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs***

Damon Galgut's *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* takes place near the end of apartheid. Set in 1989, the novel tells the story of Patrick Winter, a gay, twenty-year-old former conscript in the South African Defence Force (SADF). Now suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) due to his experiences while stationed on the border the year before, Patrick travels to Namibia with his mother to join her new Black lover, Godfrey, in witnessing the country's first free elections. Just before their arrival, the state assassinates a white anti-apartheid activist, Andrew Lovell. Patrick helps Godfrey organize a South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) funeral for him and, in doing so, blurs the boundaries of self and other, friend and enemy, past and present.

Galgut's novel demonstrates how whiteness, heterosexuality, and masculinity all converge in the South African military, revealing their mutual support for – and reliance on – the racist, homophobic, patriarchal structures so foundational to apartheid South Africa. The Winter family is both Afrikaner and English; they proudly send their sons into the military, showing that the adoration of the hyper-masculine sportive military hero was not the reserve of Afrikanerdom alone. Fears – of a Black uprising, of a communist upheaval, of a homosexual conspiracy – united Afrikaner and English South Africans who looked to the SADF to protect them and to

model the white hegemonic military masculinity that was at the centre of their claims to white supremacy. In turn, the SADF reflected back to white South Africa the promise of security and the shaping of her sons into exemplary – heterosexual, muscular, brave – men. Patrick, already positioned as an outsider through his transgressive queer desires and inability to perform white masculinity “correctly,” comes to see the limitations of the values such systems uphold. His journey in the novel moves from trying to negotiate an existence within these structures to rejecting them entirely.

The novels of this dissertation are each about the disruptive possibilities of queer desires in the South African military. Tatamkhulu Afrika's *Bitter Eden* follows Tom Smith's exploration of masculinity and same-sex desire in World War II. In the outside time, outside place of the prisoner-of-war camps, Tom learns to think differently about gender and sexuality. South African soldiers left to fight fascism and racism abroad but returned to a country increasingly reifying identity as fixed and certain. Any utopian possibilities connected to gender and sexuality that the soldiers carried with them disappeared as the National Party (NP) took power in 1948 and apartheid became official policy. Mark Behr's *The Smell of Apples*, set at the height of apartheid, shows the culmination of reifying fixed identity and treating militarism and military masculinity as hegemonic ideals. Sexuality is not a site of exploration but a site of fear and violence in Behr's novel. Marnus Erasmus can only imagine an undoing of identity and an embrace of queer desires in his dreams. However, apartheid logic has become so claustrophobic and all-encompassing that, even in the dreamscape, dominance and power shape Marnus' desires.

The possibilities of desire are very different in Galgut's novel, largely because Patrick does not wish to stay inside the system that gives him power as a white South African man.

Patrick troubles the fixed identity of white South African hegemonic military masculinity required to uphold apartheid. He acts on his queer desires, and he refuses to settle into a legible identity; son, soldier, and lover are all rendered strange in Patrick. In contrast to Tom Smith, who volunteers with the United Defence Force (UDF), and Marnus Erasmus, who is a professional soldier in the Permanent Force of the SADF, Patrick is a conscript, begrudgingly fulfilling his national service. He is sensitive, an outsider to the military's fixed ideas of masculinity. Yet, unlike both Tom and Marnus, his Otherness does not trouble him because he is not eager to belong. When he has sex with another soldier it is an act of desire but also an act of resistance against all that the military represents.

Patrick Winter fails to perform hegemonic masculinity. Louise Vincent and Bianca Camminga demonstrate the connection between masculinity and apartheid when they write: “the apartheid state was a highly gendered state characterized by inflexible patriarchal norms and the dominance of violent and authoritarian forms of masculine expression” (683). To fail to correctly perform legible military masculinity in this environment is to suggest an irregularity, an uncertainty, that such a system cannot tolerate. While Patrick's failures are due to his effeminate, emotional nature that does not fit the expectations of white South African military masculinity, he is a more ambivalent figure than either Afrika's Tom Smith or Behr's Marnus Erasmus. Tom experiences the futility of shooting his gun at a plane as a moment of masturbatory pleasure; Marnus runs away when a battle begins. In contrast, Patrick shoots – and kills – an enemy soldier. His failure is not one of failing to meet the expectations of the role of soldier. Rather, unlike a “successful” soldier such as Johan Erasmus, who revels in his display of dominance over tortured Black men by sharing slides of their suffering, Patrick experiences no such pleasure and

claims no such power. Patrick's queerness precludes him from accessing acceptable codes of military masculinity, even when he is correctly performing some of those codes. In these ways, Patrick upholds *and* undoes expectations of white South African military masculinity.

I begin by providing some social context of rugby and the central role it plays in the construction of white hegemonic heterosexual masculinity in South Africa and I discuss the role of rugby as a marker of successful masculinity in South African literature. This provides the background for my discussion of Patrick's inability to play rugby; I read his ineptitude as a symbol of Jack Halberstam's queer failure. I use Shane Phelan's theory of sexual strangers to help articulate the threat Patrick's queer failure poses. Patrick fails not just at rugby but also at soldiering. I use Rachel Woodward's analysis of military heroes to consider how Patrick meets – and troubles – the heroic narrative of the military. I then turn to a discussion of how Patrick's PTSD contributes to his queer forgetting of himself and his place in South Africa. I end with an analysis of queer time in the novel. José Esteban Muñoz's and Elizabeth Freeman's arguments about queer time are especially useful because they help me consider how the novel's performative gestures, found in its excessive parentheses, signal a queer time that further undoes the certainty and fixity of apartheid masculinity. I also consider queer time as that which is off-script; this helps me read Patrick's relationship with a fellow soldier as being both legible and illegible. By following an unscripted trajectory of desire, this novel invites a different kind of thinking about the military that reveals it to be a site of “patriarchal confusion.”

### **Social Context: Rugby and White South African Masculinity**

Patrick's failure to successfully play rugby demonstrates most clearly his failure to perform military masculinity and marks him as an outsider in apartheid South Africa. In Chapter

Two, I discussed the role rugby played in the construction of Afrikanerdom. Afrikaners saw the game as representing both their history (evoking the laager of the Trek, re-staging the Boer War, and so on) and their military ethos (seeing rugby as a game of combat and strength). The game is, in many ways, the pinnacle of Afrikanerdom, with its celebration of white, heterosexual hegemonic military masculinity. However, it is how the game makes men – and raises those men up to be exemplary – that is of central concern here.

Robert Archer and Antoine Bouillon, in their analysis of sport in South Africa, show the significance of rugby to Afrikanerdom:

In symbolic terms, rugby bears the print of Afrikaner culture – its convictions, aspirations and dreams: attached to their Voortrekker past, proud of their civilizing mission in a savage land, perceiving themselves as elected and created by God to reign on earth, conscious of their vocation as warriors – not soldiers but freemen under arms – inspired by faith and an uncompromising moral ethic to defend the cause of their people and their God, the Afrikaner people did more than adopt rugby. They conquered the game. (73)

Archer and Bouillon demonstrate what Dean Allen means when he says that Afrikaners “developed an almost mystical identification with rugby” (48). Afrikaners elevated rugby to the level of religion in South Africa, and the game's players often took on the qualities of gods. Robert Morrell confirms this when he writes: “Rugby was a game of titans. While playing rugby assured social acceptance, to excel at it ensured immortality” (“Forging” 109).

Rugby, developed at Rugby School in 1823,<sup>173</sup> symbolized the values of Victorian

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<sup>173</sup> Historians credit William Ellis Webb with creating the game.

Britain. By the 1860s, public schools throughout England and Scotland were playing the game; Archer and Bouillon suggest this helped rugby earn “its reputation as a game to harden gentlemen” (56). Rugby's balance between gentlemanliness and roughness fit well with the military's desire to use sport to promote the muscular Christianity and racial superiority so central to their colonial ideology. Timothy Chandler and John Nauright make this connection between rugby and colonial masculinity clear:

Manliness came to mean a commitment to muscle, and to arduous physical activity. Rugby football was to become the ideal centrepiece of this commitment. As a game, it was touted as promoting the cardinal virtues of unselfishness, fearlessness and self-control. It offered opportunities for struggle and sacrifice, required strength and hardiness, and in the process ... produced heroes and hearties. Rugby football therefore developed not only a code of rules but a code of conduct and a code of honour – manliness. (6)

While Britain's sporting imperialism exported many games to its empire, it was rugby's character as the pinnacle of muscular masculinity that helped it take hold among white South Africans in general, and Afrikaners in particular.

Rugby's connection to displays of exemplary masculinity is strong. David Black and John Nauright observe that white South Africa was a deeply patriarchal society, reflected in the country's politics and the ubiquity of the military; the “cultural centrality of rugby” (66) was also key to this patriarchal identity. Albert Grundlingh confirms this when he says of rugby that it makes men: “Rugby, in part at least because of the rough, physical nature of the game, has acquired a reputation of being pre-eminently 'a man's game'. It has been described as the 'ultimate Man-Maker', inculcating values such as 'courage, self-control and stamina” (“Playing for

Power?” 197). Morrell agrees, observing “rugby provided an excellent outlet for [men] to solidify male bonds, publicly present a form of masculinity which was noble, chivalrous, but also powerful and physical” (“Forging” 108). In South Africa, rugby represented not just masculinity but specifically white masculinity.

The purposeful construction of the national rugby team, the Springboks, as a whites-only team reinforced the association of rugby – and South Africa – with whiteness. Zachary Bigalke confirms this when he writes: “As a cultural representative of the nascent state, the national rugby team entrenched the exclusion of black and colored individuals in the formation of this new national identity” (154). Black and Nauright also discuss how white South Africa consolidated and reinforced white power through the game: “rugby became important for white men and white South African society in general ... International tours and matches became focal points of white cultural identity, and success increasingly took on political relevance as a way to shore up white insecurities and to demonstrate the symbolic power of white South Africa” (77). While there were Black and Coloured rugby unions (some of which had formed<sup>174</sup> earlier than the whites-only South African Rugby Board), in the white South African imagination rugby was *the* symbol of white South Africa.

Rugby-as-white was thus a particular ideological framing of the sport that upheld white South African nationalist masculinity while erasing Black and Coloured participation in the sport.<sup>175</sup> Joshua Rubin argues white rugby clubs promulgated rugby as a sport of white

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<sup>174</sup> For example, the Western Province Coloured Rugby Union formed in 1886, while the whites-only South African Rugby Board formed in 1889.

<sup>175</sup> For an overview of Black and Coloured rugby in South Africa, see Black and Nauright 38-59; for a discussion of the development of rugby among Black South Africans, see Odendaal; for a social and cultural history of Coloured

nationalism in two ways. One was to use their stadiums to host rugby matches; this allowed “spectators to watch the performance of a strong, exclusively white and male South Africa” (165). The other was that rugby clubs also hosted various white cultural celebrations (such as the commemoration of the Trek’s centenary) on their rugby fields (165), thereby reinforcing the connection between whiteness, rugby, and Afrikaner nationalism. Rugby's central role in the construction of white nationalism, promoted through the spectacular display of exemplary, athletic masculinity, playing in segregated teams on segregated pitches, helps explain the centrality of rugby in the construction of white South African masculinity.

Rugby was also a decidedly heterosexual sport in the South African imagination. Black and Nauright make this connection clear: “sport plays a powerful role in relation to sexual orientation and definition of 'normality' in virtually all societies. As in most military establishments, major team sports have resolutely and rigidly defined homosexuality as deviant, exerting a powerful influence on the norms of the wider societies within which they are embedded” (9). Afrikaners constructed idealized masculinity around what Archer and Bouillon call “the warrior virtues of struggle and virility” (66), expelling anything Other from the laager. Black and Nauright reinforce rugby's connection to heterosexuality: “Rugby developed into an intensely homophobic activity stressing aggressive masculinity while promoting group solidarity” (36). Patrick Lee also helps make the connection between rugby and heterosexuality clear. Describing his experience at a boarding school in Natal in the 1960s, he says: “My immediate lessons were religious. The religion was called Sport. The holy altar was Rugby. God was the captain of the First XV. The angels were his team-mates. Any boy who bunked watching

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rugby, see Nauright, “Rugby.”

a home game for the Firsts was flogged and cast into darkness, a hissing and a byword and probably a homo” (qtd. in Black and Nauright 22). Afrikaner – and apartheid – values, found in the athletic display of white, heterosexual masculinity, helped make rugby the game of white South Africa.

### **Literary Context: Rugby and South African Literature**

Because of the immediate association between rugby and idealized white heterosexual masculinity, a lack of desire – or ability – to play rugby is a common trope of deviant sexuality in South African literature. Anne Reef observes that there is a link between the ideological investment in apartheid, found in the successful enjoyment of rugby, and in upholding the other aspects of white South African hegemonic masculinity: being a good soldier and being straight. She writes, “a male protagonist's devotion to the ruggedly masculine game of rugby is one of a constellation of characteristics that indicate his commitment to apartheid ideology and his concomitant willingness to perpetuate the Afrikaner patriarchy” (71). Christopher Hope's novel, *My Mother's Lovers*, provides an example of this nexus. Alexander, the novel's narrator, describes the leaders of the NP: “bearded, bloody-minded Boers; big-necked blokes in khaki shorts who carried sjamboks; narrow, vicious puritans, who cared only for rugby, racial purity and being right” (70).

Reef suggests ambivalence about rugby can foreshadow violations of the Immorality Act. She discusses Behr's *Embrace* and Galgut's *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs*, but the focus of her analysis is Alan Paton's *Too Late the Phalarope*. Paton's protagonist, Pieter van Vlaanderen, a decorated veteran of World War II and now a lieutenant in the South African Police Force, plays rugby well. He is, however, a sensitive man, shown through his preference to read and look at

stamps rather than play rugby. His aunt observes there is “something of the woman in him” (2). In a patriarchal society that treated emotions in men as a weakness, and, therefore, as threatening to the social order, his sensitivity raises a concern. Reef argues that such transgressions lead to “defection from apartheid” (72). Paton's protagonist does indeed transgress racial, gender, and legal boundaries – he “defects” – when he has extra-marital sex with a Black woman.

Reef's argument about the connection between ambivalence regarding rugby and ambivalence regarding the Immorality Act certainly plays out in other South African novels as well. She notes that the gay protagonist of Behr's *Embrace*, Karl de Man, is great at rugby, but he hates it. His reluctance to participate in what he calls a “savage sport” (404) leads his father to also worry his display of masculinity is not sufficiently successful: “You will play rugby until you become the man I want you to be. No communist kaffir-loving queer will ever set foot in my house” (596). To this list I add the gay protagonist of André Carl van der Merwe's *Moffie*, Nicholas Van der Swart, who learns from an uncle: “if we don't play rugby we'll grow up to be sissies” (45) and, when he inevitably does fail at rugby, he suffers his homophobic father's abuse for such failures: “you WILL play rugby. And you'd better be careful – you're turning into a bloody moffie! Do you want that, hey?” (67).

Matthew, the gay protagonist of Gerald Kraak's *Ice in the Lungs*, also belongs on this list. He fails at playing – or even understanding the rules of – rugby, choosing instead to enjoy the scopophilic pleasures of watching the game: “There were afternoons where I hung over the fence of the university rugby field watching the taut figures on the green expanse. The wind played with their clothes, filling out their limbs, then moulding the cotton close to their torsos. Sometimes a shirt would fly up and reveal a segment of rapturous muscle, and I ached at its

brevity and promise” (23). Matthew's growing awareness of his sexual desire for men, alongside his growing activism in the anti-apartheid movement, means he will always remain on the outside of the fence. In contrast to Matthew is Dawie, a muscular Afrikaner who takes Matthew home from a bar. Dawie insists they pause their weekend of sex and drugs to watch a rugby game on television. While Dawie is in many ways a stereotypical agent of the apartheid state – Matthew later discovers he is a member of the security police – he too *watches*, rather than plays, rugby. His sexual transgressions could lead to his “defection” from apartheid, but his enjoyment of the game (*as a game*, rather than as an erotic display of muscular bodies), marks him as inside the laager. This is the strength of rugby in the South African context. Those who have (and willingly display) a love of rugby reassure, rather than trouble, what Reef calls the “complex intersection” (71) of heterosexuality, masculinity, rugby, and apartheid.

Reef's point that rugby symbolizes the connections between apartheid, the military, masculinity, and heterosexuality is helpful. In *The Smell of Apples*, Behr uses rugby as a sign of successful masculinity. For example, the election of the school's Head Boy is “the chap everyone says is going to play wing at next year's Craven Week”<sup>176</sup> (144). The promotion to head boy – a mark of social success – is dependent on his sporting success at rugby. The novel's protagonist, Marnus, has been vice-captain of his rugby team since Standard One (14). Indeed, it is Marnus' success at rugby that sufficiently reassures his father that his Afrikaner masculinity conforms to hegemonic expectations and will result in an inevitable military future. Rugby functions as a marker of successful heterosexual masculinity in the novel.

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<sup>176</sup> Named after Danie Craven, South Africa's most famous rugby player.

These instances in South African fiction construct rugby as symbolic of the apartheid state and its exaltation of white, muscular, heterosexual, hegemonic military masculinity. They demonstrate how success or failure at rugby represents support for, or rejection of, apartheid itself. Just as there is a metonymic relationship between the military and white hegemonic masculinity in South Africa, so too is there a metonymic relationship between rugby and white hegemonic masculinity. Black and Nauright demonstrate this when they argue: “As a vital symbol of Afrikanerdom and a source of high status in Afrikaner society, rugby reinforced its essential masculinity” (66). Both the military and rugby reproduce and reinforce the co-constitutive constructions of whiteness, heterosexuality, and masculinity in the apartheid context.

#### **“I couldn't catch the ball” (69): Queer Failure**

Galgut's novel plays on the trope of being good at – and enjoying – rugby as constituting entry into white hegemonic masculinity. The idealized first-born son of the Winter family, Malcolm, thrives at rugby; he captains his high school rugby team and shares sportive delight with his father: “Sweating, grimacing with pleasure, they would come indoors together when their game was done. My father with his arm around Malcolm, luminous with pride” (13). Rugby provides a forum for Malcolm to demonstrate his successful performance of white South African hegemonic masculinity: “He could catch any ball that was thrown at him” (12).

In contrast, Patrick Winter is terrible at rugby. As a child, his father tries to teach him:

He took me, on that day and others, to the broad expanse of lawn outside, I would stand, trembling with a fear that I could smell in my nose, at the edge of the flowerbed. And wait. 'You must watch,' he told me. 'All the way into your hands.' ... And he would hurl

the ball: round, dark, a dangerous shape of leather. It hissed towards me through the late afternoon, an embodiment of all that was most frightening to me, and all I could never do: I dropped the ball. (11-12)

His father's expectation that Patrick can learn markers of masculinity through imitation is central to the scene. This kind of patriarchal reproduction or "generational time" (*Queer Time 5*), exemplified by the claustrophobic repetition of masculinity in Behr's *The Smell of Apples*, was necessary for the maintenance of heteronormativity and the continuance of hegemonic masculinity in Afrikanerdom. But where Marnus Erasmus is an eager imitator, mimicking his father to show his willingness to inherit the apartheid regime, Patrick is different. Like the Erasmus men, Howard believes Patrick can imitate his masculinity, saying: "You must watch" (11); unlike the Erasmus men, Patrick is uncertain about succeeding in the imitation.

This stands as a good example of Halberstam's queer failure:

De-linking the process of generation from the historical process is a queer kind of project: queer lives seek to uncouple change from the supposedly organic and immutable forms of family and inheritance; queer lives exploit some potential for a *difference in form* that lies dormant in queer collectivity not as an essential attribute of sexual otherness but as a possibility embedded in the break from heterosexual life narratives. (*Queer Art 70*)

Patrick's failure to catch the ball symbolizes his eventual failure to uphold the apartheid regime, as Reef suggests, but his failure to perform the requisite marker of white South African hegemonic masculinity also symbolizes his queer failure. He fails to imitate his father. He thwarts the reproduction and, in doing so, he threatens the assumption of further reproduction – what Lee Edelman calls "reproductive futurity" (*No Future 2*). He fails to participate in

“generational time.”

Patrick's failure at rugby is symbolic of his failure to perform white South African masculinity. That he stands on the edge of the flowerbed indicates he is not a man who wants to take up the social space his gender bestows upon him. Where his older brother Malcolm carves his name in desks and goes hunting with his father, asserting a dominance over a variety of spaces, Patrick stays at the edge, surrounded by flowers rather than occupying the lawn's “expanse.” Patrick is more comfortable amidst the sign of the feminine – the flowers – than the sign of the masculine – the open space. Afrika's Tom Smith is anxious to conform to normative markers of masculinity; his failure to do so leads him to learn about other ways of being a man. Behr's Marnus Erasmus eagerly seeks to imitate the model of Afrikaner masculinity his father represents, no matter how corrupt or damaging that performance becomes. Galgut's Patrick is more ambivalent. He does *try* to catch the ball – but from the sidelines, as if he is unwilling to reject the feminine in order to achieve the requisite performance of hegemonic masculinity. He fails to catch the ball and, in doing so, he marks himself as Other.

Patrick's failure of imitation points to a failure to reproduce the exemplary muscular masculinity required by apartheid. It is a moment of instability regarding masculinity and, in apartheid South Africa, it is a moment of instability regarding whiteness too. As Reef points out, failure at rugby indicates a failure to uphold the apartheid state. Malcolm confirms this when he says, “It's a man's world, Patrick” (19), as if warning that the failure to correctly perform the codes of white masculinity will cause Patrick to be a permanent outsider. In his discussion of the connections between rugby and masculinity in South Africa, Morrell writes, “The love of, and ability to excel at, rugby became synonymous with manhood” (“Forging” 105). Patrick's inability

to catch the ball represents his inability to access the white hegemonic masculinity bound up in that rugby ball.

Apartheid was dependent on the continual production of heterosexual whiteness. Nicky Falkof makes this clear when she observes the threat posed by homosexuality:

In failing to enact the hegemonic heterosexual imperative and the patriarchal sexual and family dynamics [on which] the system depended ... gay white men evoked an oppositional identity that was equated to a refusal to conform to the injunctions of the state and was consequently seen as a threat to white society. Their very existence suggested that apartheid's version of white South African masculinity was in fact not at all immutable. (285)

Andy Carolin agrees, arguing that “idealised configurations of (heteronormative) whiteness needed to be actively produced and policed” (116) precisely because they were neither fixed nor certain. Patrick poses a potentially profound threat to the apartheid state: in failing to catch the ball he fails to reproduce the exemplary masculinity of his father and he fails to perform the exemplary heterosexuality that apartheid demanded. His threat is to apartheid's conception of whiteness itself.

**“A brotherhood of men, to which we could never belong” (70): Failing to Play the Game**

The South African imagination constructed rugby as not just ideologically aligned with apartheid in general, but with the SADF in particular. Stephen Symons makes this connection clear: “Schoolboy rugby played a vital role in creating a seamless transition from the sports field to the parade ground” (521). Morrell extends this connection further: “rugby was regarded as a

patriotic duty for white men” (“Touch Rugby” 630), making it impossible to reconcile being a good soldier with being a poor rugby player. Commandant Schutte represents this connection in the novel. He is a quintessential military figure determined to shape the soldiers in his athletic and patriotic image: “It was Commandant Schutte's view that 'sport makes men out of monkeys” (68). Forced to play rugby once he enters the military, Patrick again demonstrates his inability to perform the correct codes of hegemonic masculinity: “I couldn't catch the ball. As on those days on our green urban lawn, I fumbled, I dropped it, I blushed. Now, however, I could not cry; grinning bravely, I endured their scorn” (69). As a result of his failure, the troops ostracize him and Commandant Schutte excludes Patrick and Lappies, another soldier who cannot catch the ball, from the game.

Shane Phelan's concept of “sexual strangers” helps explain why Commandant Schutte ejects Patrick and Lappies from the rugby game. Phelan builds on Zygmunt Bauman's analysis of strangers as people who “befog and eclipse the boundary lines which ought to be clearly seen” (1). For Bauman, outsiders are figures of ambivalence rather than figures of fear (as an enemy might be). This is because the nation does not read them as belonging; they are always on the outside of the boundary. Phelan explains lesbians and gay men are a group that “has no part in the national imaginary except as threat, cannot participate in citizenship, no matter what rights its members have come to enjoy. It is at this level of the national imaginary that gays, lesbians, and bisexuals are most thoroughly sexual strangers” (7). This is because such figures are what Phelan calls “undecidables” (29), meaning “they both are and are not 'us” (29). This kind of uncertainty can hold neither in the military nor in the apartheid state.

The failure to successfully perform white South African hegemonic military masculinity,

symbolized in dropping the rugby ball, demonstrates that, despite wearing the same uniform as the other soldiers, Patrick and Lappies are not part of the group of belonging. Indeed, they are “undecidable” precisely because, as Bauman notes, they “make obscure that which should be transparent” (1). Rubin, in his analysis of rugby and politics in South Africa, confirms that there was no room for ambiguity and blurred lines in apartheid: “As institutions, the police, the correctional services, and the army could not tolerate uncertainty or spontaneity. In terms of both geography and individual bodies, apartheid ideology coded spaces of uncertainty and fluidity as dangerous zones of crisis” (41). White gay men were one such “zone of crisis” because they threatened the certainty of white masculinity. Carolin explains this is why the apartheid state positioned homosexuals as dangerous. They were “an insidious and immense threat to the foundations of the state and society” (114). The threat Patrick and Lappies pose to the fixity of identity, to the military, and to the apartheid state means the military *must* eject Patrick and Lappies from the game.

The military requires the continuous reproduction of heterosexual hegemonic masculinity to sustain itself. In failing to successfully play rugby, however, Patrick and Lappies have interrupted the performance of the correct codes of that masculinity. They meet one set of codes: as soldiers in the SADF they perform to a certain level of masculinity. But they fail to meet another set of codes: their inept handling of the rugby ball suggests they are not exemplary white South African men. They render themselves visible – as strangers – by performing the wrong codes in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Derek McGhee makes clear the difference between legible and illegible sexual transgressions through his analysis of homosexuality in the British military. He argues that the

military discursively produces the homosexual as visibly Other, constructing him as “flamboyant” and, therefore, a threat to hegemonic military masculinity. This is due to concerns that the presumed “flamboyance” of homosexuals would manifest a visible break in the military's homogeneity. Hence, the military imagination has constructed the homosexual soldier as “incompatible to Armed Service” and as disrupting “regimental and unit cohesion” (206).

McGhee observes that the soldier who enters the military environment and becomes successfully “homogenized and habitual through surveillant discipline and visual assimilation” (219), whether he is homosexual or not, assumes the heterosexuality the military bestows on those it marks as belonging. This tautological co-construction is evident in *The Smell of Apples*, where Johan is able to access the hegemonic power of heterosexual military masculinity that the uniform represents precisely because he correctly performs the legible codes of heterosexuality. This successful performance, in turn, allows him to wear the uniform and to access its symbolic power. As McGhee explains, “a homosexual serviceman can pass as an assumed heterosexual by looking and acting the part” (206).<sup>177</sup> On the other hand, Patrick and Lappies may wear the uniform but, unable to pass as straight, they are not able to access the encompassing masculinity the uniform promises. They have made it – and themselves – strange. This is a queer failure, not simply because in failing to play rugby they mark themselves as homosexual. Rather, in not hiding their failure to meet the mark of legible heterosexual masculinity it becomes an excessive, disruptively queer masculinity.

The military does make space for gender disruption, but it contains the disruption as

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<sup>177</sup> McGhee observes that the opposite is true for women: a successful female soldier is a “tough masculine dyke” (221).

entertainment in the form of drag. Matthew Krouse, in his discussion of performing drag in the SADF, explains “The creeping ambivalence [of drag] is the basis for a wonderful ambiguity in the relationship between the drag performer and his audience. Good drag often leaves the audience feeling both satisfied and betrayed by the illusion: satisfied at the *frisson* of sexual pleasure, but betrayed by the knowledge that it is a man dressed as a woman offering the excitement” (214). Drag can challenge and excite, seeming to push the limits of gender disruption. However, it is the performance, the construction of a zone of illusion, that makes the visible, legible interruption of military masculinity acceptable. In other words, drag is “safe” because it is artificial. Once the performance ends the performer returns to his role as soldier. Allan Bérubé confirms this when he says of Irving Berlin's *This is the Army* that it “did much to promote the wartime image of Army and Navy drag performers as normal, masculine, combat-ready soldiers” (70). Drag positions the transgression as mere costume, unlike the “real” clothes of the uniform. Performances of drag in the military help delimit the correct performance of gender.

In her analysis of “patriarchal confusion,” Sarah Bulmer discusses the British Military's 2008 decision to allow service personnel to wear uniforms in Pride parades. She explains the military worried the wearing of uniforms in Pride parades would blur the distinction between private and public. This distinction is meaningful because the military treats sexuality as a private matter: “The significance of 'the uniform' is crucial, for one of the most important ways the military polices and stabilizes the public/private boundary is by controlling where and when uniform may be worn” (143). Military officials inspected the participants before the Pride parade and removed any visible transgressions (glitter, earrings, and so on). Bulmer argues this is an

instant of “patriarchal confusion.” They “clearly assumed their participation in the march sanctioned their gay identity, undermining patriarchal heteronormativity, but ... [they are] forced to discipline their appearance so that it conforms to that normativity, tacitly reaffirming 'being gay' and 'being a sailor' [or, being a 'soldier'] as mutually exclusive identities” (144). It is not the wearing of a uniform that bestows codes of heterosexuality; rather, it is wearing the uniform “correctly” and behaving in accordance with the expectations *of* that uniform that marks the wearer as heterosexual. This is the boundary that Patrick and Lappies have transgressed. They are wearing the uniform but, in fumbling the rugby ball, they make visible a conspicuous gayness that threatens to expose the contingent character of military masculinity.

Patrick and Lappies' irreverent reaction to their failure demonstrates the disruptive threat of queerness in general, and queer failure in particular. Rather than attempt to conform, or react with a crushing self-hatred, Patrick and Lappies mock the seriousness of their ejection: “We slapped each other on the back, pretending a heartiness neither could feel. 'We get worse every time!' 'Ja, I know! It's an art!'” (69). Their humour signals a queer resistance through an embrace of instability. Halberstam argues the threat of queer failure is in part its negativity: “one that promises, this time, to fail, to make a mess, to fuck shit up, to be loud, unruly, impolite, to breed resentment, to bash back, to speak up and out, to disrupt, assassinate, shock, and annihilate” (*Queer Art* 110). Patrick and Lappies' amusement at their own failure is another kind of “shattering” – not the queer who “bashes back” but who laughs back. It is a moment of camp in the camp, what Susan Sontag referred to as “artifice and exaggeration ... something of a private code” (275). Their laughter is indeed queer, an incongruity in the face of military discipline and exclusion. Sara Ahmed argues that “queer moments happen when things fail to cohere” (170). In

laughing, Patrick and Lappies queer the moment because they are drawing attention to their irreverence of the sex/gender order; their laughter holds open the gap that they have created in the sex/gender system through mis-performing military masculinity.

Lauren Berlant and Elizabeth Freeman, in a discussion of queer zines, make clear the queer disruption of parody: “Gestures of anger, parody, and camp ... represent a disinvestment in authenticity discourse that moves beyond the intelligibility of gender, of sexual object-choice, and of national identity by cultivating a passionate investment in developing the negative for pleasure and politics” (224). This is similar to Joseph Bristow's argument about the disruptive potential of queer parody:

Stylizing particular aspects of conventional masculine dress, [gay men] can adopt and subvert given identities, appearing like 'real men' and yet being the last thing a 'real man' would want to be mistaken for: gay ... This type of gay identity, therefore, consciously inhabits a publicly acceptable one which is, in fact, its enemy. It appears that the mocking laughter of parody – the framing and sending-up of given forms – is at work here. (70-71)

The queer potential of reinterpretation and disinvestment allows Patrick and Lappies to reframe what should be a source of shame – failing at rugby – into a mark of pride and humour. Their laughter unsettles precisely because they are playing with, and mocking, the disciplinary codes around them.

This is indeed queer failure. Patrick and Lappies are not full of self-hatred because of their failure; rather, the failure gives way to a different way of knowing and being in the world. Patrick and Lappies are celebrating their failure, their inability to measure up to the other men, their lack of contribution to the success of the game. They are celebrating a void in a potentially

disruptive way because their behaviour no longer adheres to a clear disciplinary code. Like the other men, they are congratulating each other, but the congratulation is about their failure; they are celebrating their ineptitude. Jane Ward, in her analysis of queer methodology, argues that queer is “defined by its celebrated failure to adhere to stable classificatory systems” (71). Ward's definition works well here because the military, the game of rugby, and exemplary white South African masculinity are all “stable classificatory systems” under apartheid, mutually supporting and sustaining each other. Patrick and Lappies are not only failing to behave according to such systems, but they are failing to value the systems. They laugh not only at themselves, but also at the patriarchal, heteronormative military that renders them a failure. The structures that uphold the fixed identity upon which apartheid relies cannot tolerate such a failure to comply. Their failure marks them as sexual strangers.

The military echoes the values of the apartheid state: it maintains order by excluding and disciplining the Other. Galgut gives this clear symbolism in the novel when Commandant Schutte ejects Patrick and Lappies from the rugby game and puts them on patrol. This places them literally on the outside of the fence: “In the late afternoon, while the others played ball, we walked round the edge of the camp. From a terrible distance, through thick grids of wire, we watched them indulge in their games” (70). The exclusion of Patrick and Lappies protects the rugby-playing soldiers from these sexual strangers whose legible existence poses a threat to all the military represents. There is, clearly, not just irreverence but also a sense of loss for Patrick – the “terrible distance,” the watching from the outside. He later observes, “I would never be part of their club. Excluded forever from their strange fraternity, I watched from the outside in my shame” (71). Experiencing shame while also rejecting the authenticity of the discourse that

produces the shame reinforces the instability – loss but also possibility – of queer failure.

**“Language falls short” (74): Failing While Killing**

Patrick is not simply a failed soldier because of his weak wrists on the rugby field. He fails as a soldier – and fails queerly – because, even when he performs soldiering successfully, he does not perform it *correctly*. Afrika's Tom Smith tries, but fails, to live up to the expectations of hegemonic military masculinity: he does not shoot down the bomber, he does not remember to bring his kit bag, he does not have dreams of heroic escape. Tom learns to accept such queer failure as part of his journey to undoing masculinity. Patrick demonstrates a different fluidity to the category of white South African soldier. He fails at rugby so badly that Commandant Schutte ejects him from the game and thus from the community of men on the base. Yet Patrick does meet other conventional markers of soldiering: he shoots and kills an enemy soldier. In doing so, he troubles apartheid's impulse to fix and reify identity. He is a weakling *and* a warrior: his hands cannot accurately catch a ball, but they can accurately shoot a gun. He fails and he succeeds, but even in the moments of success his ambivalence and inability to perform the correct codes keep him positioned as an outsider.

Rachel Woodward analyzes the British military's construction of the stereotypical “warrior hero.” Such a figure, she says, is: “physically fit and powerful. He is mentally strong and unemotional ... He's also a bit of a hero with a knack for picking up girls and is resolutely heterosexual. He is brave, adventurous, and prepared to take risks” (643-44). She is describing an imaginary ideal, a figure portrayed on recruiting posters and in *Boy's Own Annuals*. Her definition is close to Nyameka Mankayi's, however, who writes about the valorization of masculinity in the SADF: “The military embodies codes of honour that stress a number of

supposedly male virtues. Traditional male virtues or attributes, such as risk-taking, honour, courage, adventurousness, heroism and sexual virility are central to constructions of hegemonic masculinity” (“Masculinity” 27). Bérubé adds to this, explaining that at the heart of the construction of the soldier-as-heterosexual-hero is the ability to kill: “Training in combat discipline was intended to help the infantryman overcome his resistance to killing and his fear of dying so that he would keep fighting if his life was in danger. Stereotyped as 'a man's job and a man's job alone,' the ability to fight in combat defined what being a woman or an effeminate man was not” (35). Woodward, Mankayi, and Bérubé confirm Raewyn Connell's assertion that the popular imagination deeply connects heroism to masculinity: “The figure of the hero is central to the Western cultural imagery of the masculine” (*Masculinities* 213).

Patrick's father has access to hegemonic power precisely because he conforms to markers of heroic white South African masculinity. The hunting trophies that adorn the walls of his home demonstrate that he is, in many ways, Woodward's “warrior hero.” These souvenirs of his colonial domination of the land show he is “brave, adventurous, and prepared to take risks” (644). The prize among the trophies is a leopard, a site of fascination and fantasy for Patrick as a child: “I imagined my father, down on one knee, raising his rifle to shoot. While the leopard charged” (10). This is the epitome of the colonial adventure hunt, and it fits well with Woodward's description of the hero as having the “abili[ty] to conquer hostile environments, to cross unfamiliar terrain, and to lay claim to dangerous ground” (644): the white man conquers nature with manly confidence at the moment of mortal threat. Howard's seemingly heroic act of killing the leopard is, however, exposed as hollow. Patrick learns from his brother that his father not only shot the leopard as it climbed a tree to escape, but he never even left his vehicle.

Malcolm reveals that what seemed to Patrick to be the pinnacle of a muscular, brave, heroic, colonial masculinity is just an empty signifier, an imaginary ideal. Howard's access to hegemonic masculinity, however, remains unthreatened because what matters is the symbolic value of his conquest rather than its actual authenticity. He adheres to the codes.

Patrick, in contrast, demonstrates none of the qualities named by Woodward, Mankayi, or Bérubé, yet he fulfills his prescribed gender role by killing an enemy soldier. Galgut's choice to use a passive construction in the narration of the event reinforces Patrick's non-hero status: "The remaining three ... turned to flee. One or more of them was shot as they went into the tall grass. He, like the others, was killed. I shot that man" (75). Framing the killing in this way positions Patrick as observer rather than actor. The passive construction reinforces not just the lack of subjective assertion in claiming responsibility, but the passivity of the killing too: Patrick shoots the SWAPO soldier "aimed by chance" (75) and, least heroic of all: he shoots the soldier in the back as he is running away.

Patrick's killing of a SWAPO soldier as he flees to safety echoes Howard's killing of the leopard as it flees up a tree. This demonstrates how Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity accounts for organizations of power rather than remaining fixed to just one particular group of men: "To recognize diversity in masculinities is not enough. We must also recognize the *relations* between the different kinds of masculinity: relations of alliance, dominance and subordination. These relationships are constructed through practices that exclude and include, that intimidate, exploit, and so on. There is a gender politics within masculinity" (*Masculinities* 37). Howard revels in the heroic muscular masculinity the dead leopard bestows upon him, turning its body into an extravagant display of his superiority, but Patrick makes no such boast.

While Patrick succeeds in meeting certain codes of military masculinity – he does kill an enemy soldier – he does not employ Howard's bravado or swagger. Instead, he is “quivering with fear” (75). Patrick asks Lappies, “Did you get one?” (75). Patrick speaks the language of the SADF, dehumanizing the enemy and talking about killing as if it is a game. He has done what the military trained him to do. But, in asking the question of Lappies, he reveals his pathetic isolation: he does not want to be the only one to carry the burden of death. He has killed a man, almost by accident, and he has no desire to take credit for the kill, no ability to find glory or individualism in the moment. He fails to claim the role of hero.

Reading Paul Fussell's analysis of war literature in *The Great War and Modern Memory* in the South African context, Gary Baines agrees that most war stories move from innocence to experience: “The loss of innocence and demonstration of manhood is usually marked by the initiation into fighting which constitutes a rite of passage” (“South Africa's Vietnam?” 5-6). Yuval Noah Harari also treats war as a site of knowledge and epiphany. He argues there are two kinds of revelation that occur in war. There are revelations grounded in military values, what he calls the “positive truths of masculine heroism, patriotism, and camaraderie, which remain obscure in the deadening monotony of peacetime” (3). And there are revelations grounded in reality and disillusionment: “combat teaches him not to believe the false promises of heroism and patriotism, and never again to trust powerful establishments” (4).

While carrying out his national service, Patrick is somewhere between Harari's categories of revelation. Once he kills the SWAPO soldier, however, he does not move further into either category. For Harari, war-as-revelation is what turns it into a site of bildungsroman: “These rites of passage all assume that taking part in killing changes a man in profound ways, revealing to

him some particularly masculine truth about himself and the world” (34). For Patrick, however, this moment is neither revelatory nor heroic. It is passive and pitiful. As if to further reinforce the layers of failure located in the episode of killing the SWAPO soldier, even language fails Patrick: “I have tried, in fumbling letters that were censored down to gibberish, to explain this encounter ... Language falls short of describing those minutes” (74).

There is a useful connection to make here to Sarah Cole's work on World War I poets. She suggests that what Wilfred Owen famously called “the Old Lie” reveals just this: that violence is neither generative nor productive (“Enchantment” 1640). By not having his protagonist undergo a profound change, by not treating the moment of killing as revelatory or meaningful, Galgut reinforces Owen's point: there is no truth to learn, no new language to speak in and of war. Rather, he echoes Owen that nothing positive comes from the experience of violence. It is, as Owen suggests in “Dulce et Decorum Est,” just “vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues” (24). Patrick fails and, in doing so, he pushes back against the military discourses that find heroism and knowledge on the battlefield. This is, indeed, Halberstam's queer failure that seeks a new grammar of possibility, of finding a way to “live life otherwise” (*Queer Art* 2).

### **“We fumbled with buttons” (76): Sex as Queer Failure**

Patrick fails to meet expectations of being a successful South African soldier: he fails at rugby, he fails to relish the kill, and he fails again when he has sex with Lappies instead of patrolling – and protecting – the military base:

I don't know how it happened – who touched whom first – but at the darkest corner of the camp, we stopped. We fumbled with buttons, we slung down our guns. I remember his breath on my neck. Standing pressed together, the continent about us, we took each other in hand. Tugging and gasping, we moved our wrists in rhythm. It was an act of revenge, undertaken in pain: against men, who had made the world flat. 'Leave me,' I gasped, but it wasn't to him: I was speaking to Malcolm, my father, to Schutte. 'Leave me,' I called down the well of my past, to those who'd colluded against me.

We spilled together, side by side on the ground, leaving silver tracks like a snail. Then we buttoned ourselves and went on our way, not able to look at each other. (76)

This is Halberstam's queer failure: “The concept of practicing failure perhaps prompts us to discover our inner dweeb, to be underachievers, to fall short, to get distracted, to take a detour, to find a limit, to lose our way, to forget, to avoid mastery” (*Queer Art* 120-121). In this scene, Patrick is getting “distracted,” taking a “detour,” and avoiding “mastery” of soldiering, of hegemonic masculinity, of the fixed identities of apartheid. In queerly failing, he gains a different kind of knowledge, a way of being otherwise: one that responds to violence with touch, that prioritizes desire over rules, and that makes a mess rather than being orderly and controlled. This is queer failure as an escape, as a mode of resistance, as undoing. It is the queer resistance of having sex while wearing the uniform, against the uniform.

The sex scene between Patrick and Lappies is striking because it is so overladen with ambivalence. Commandant Schutte has deemed Patrick and Lappies to be too unmanly to play rugby and orders them to instead patrol the camp's perimeter – in effect, to defend the camp against the enemy. Yet, in doing so, Commandant Schutte tasks them to perform the very military

masculinity – protecting and defending the more vulnerable – that he believes them not to have. Their queerness thus helps expose the ironic ambivalence at the heart of the apartheid army.

Jacklyn Cock argues that the SADF is a purposefully gendered institution: “During militarization, women are widely cast in the role of the protected and defended, are often excluded from military service, and almost always ... are excluded from direct combat. This division – separating the protector from the protected, the defender from the defended – is crucial to both sexism and militarism” (“Women and the Military” 152). Building on Jean Elshtain's work about gender in the military, Laura Sjober explains that “male just warriors have the duty to protect women and to defend righteous cases, while female beautiful souls are at once the justification for defense (because they need protection) and by definition outside of the fighting themselves. This frames women as delicate, in need of protection but incapable of protecting themselves” (33). Godfrey Maringira makes this connection between gender and the military especially clear when he states “Thus the military is valorized as a place of and for 'real men' who are hypermasculinized, while home is feminized. The military reforges a new persona in which killing is a marker of masculinity” (S105). In such a way, heterosexuality becomes ineluctably attached to masculinity and the military. In apartheid South Africa, this takes on even greater meaning since the state treated categories of identity as fixed, certain, meaningful. The novel thwarts such expectations, however. Schutte tasks the two “failed” men with protecting and defending the camp while the “real” men play their game. The irony of the “failed” soldiers guarding the “real” soldiers reveals the incoherent and contradictory constructions of masculinity in the military.

Patrick calls their sexual encounter “an act of revenge ... against men, who had made the

world flat” (76). To “make the world flat” is to map the world; it is to turn the exciting and unknown into something dull and mundane. It is an apartheid logic, reducing the complexity of identity into a taxonomy that is measurable, rendering the world into the knowable, the legible. Against such thinking queerness – as potentiality, as failure – intervenes. This is the disruptive power of queerness that E.L. McCallum and Tyler Bradway describe: “To queer is to distance oneself from norms, and to embrace that distance” (3). Kevin Ohi also ascribes a disruptive character to queer as that which critiques and questions: “*queer* also resonates because it has come to signal ... an anarchic troubling of heteronormative lines of cultural transmission, and because it indicates, paradoxically, a tradition of such troubling” (7). Queer refuses to make the world flat; instead, it breaks it open to find spaces of intersection, of liberation, of confusion, of undoing. To “make the world flat” is to inscribe a patriarchal, colonial outlook that says, “I know,” “I see,” “I own,” “I dominate.” Patrick and Lappies' act of sex rejects such thinking. It is, rather, an act of unknowing, unbecoming, unmaking. Patrick and Lappies reject colonial, military, and masculinist mythologies and epistemologies as they have sex while on patrol. They fuck, and in doing so, as Halberstam says, they “fuck shit up” (*Queer Art* 110). It is a moment of believing the world is round and unpredictable; it is a moment of embracing possibility.

In the moment of sex, a new kind of knowledge comes into being that is resistant, disruptive, illegible, upending. They are soldiers but they have put down their weapons to use their hands for pleasure rather than violence. They are soldiers who move in unison, but their movement is about orgasms rather than drills. They are soldiers in an institution whose purpose is to make the world flat and known, but instead they have sex with each other. It is, indeed, an “act of revenge” against the military, against apartheid, against the heteronormative fraternity of men.

It is revenge, rejection, and failure, but it is also creation, newness, difference. It is, in other words, unbecoming. They are not bringing down the system, but they are screwing with its certainty.

### **“Everything goes” (31): Queer Forgetting**

Apartheid South Africa was obsessed with the fixity of identity and the recall of history, both of which found aggressive legitimacy in the military. Militaries operate as a site of official memory and national tradition. The NP government's banning of World War II medals after it came to power is a good example of the way the military functions as the site of “correct” remembering, excising histories that no longer fit the ideological narrative of the state. That white South Africans came to see conscription as connected to what Jacobus Adriaan du Pisani calls “national manhood” (“Hegemonic Masculinity” 172) further demonstrates how the SADF became a site that upheld white masculinity as an idealized patriotic gender performance, one that corresponded with the nation's memory of itself as heroic and powerful.

Patrick's forgetting of himself, brought on by PTSD, is a mode of queer resistance against apartheid's belief in fixed identities and devotion to remembrance. Central to Halberstam's argument about queer forgetting is the caution against memorialization: it “has a tendency to tidy up disorderly histories ... Memory is itself a disciplinary mechanism of power” (*Queer Art* 15). If remembering is organizing the past into knowable narratives, then forgetting is about uncertainty. Theresa Edlmann, who helps veterans of the border wars to tell their stories, is also useful here. She uses the term “laagered' history” (99) to point to the ways the national telling shuts out that which does not fit the dominant narrative, what Gayatri Gopinath calls “capital H” (8) history.

### **“I don't even know who I am” (114): Trauma and Queer Forgetting**

Patrick ultimately becomes a symbol of queer forgetting in the novel. A month after they have sex, Lappies dies while on patrol. Lappies' death causes Patrick to forget himself as he loses his sense of time, sense of place, and sense of self. Afrika's Tom Smith consciously forgets his past, and in doing so can embrace a different kind of masculinity through his performance of *Lady Macbeth* and his growing acceptance of his transgressive desires; he forgets himself in order to birth a new way of being in the world as he waits out the war in a prisoner-of-war camp. Tom's identity expands beyond the strict confines of white South African masculinity to embrace a blurred, transgressive identity: “Queen or no Queen, I am still as much of a male as ever I was” (151). Patrick, in contrast, is in a far more rigid military setting in late apartheid. Gender identities in the SADF are not something to open up but to close down; military personnel police soldiers' adherence to the boundaries of acceptable masculinity. For example, Commandant Schutte sends Patrick to load the bodies of the dead onto a helicopter and reminds Patrick: “We're men here, not girls” (112). But, as with his inability to meet the expectations of hegemonic military masculinity regarding rugby, Patrick also cannot meet them regarding this field assignment: “I choked down the girl that I was” (113). He “forgets” himself and goes mad.

Transgressions of identity, of sexuality, of memory have no place in the military. After Lappies' death, Patrick begins to lose track of time and stops behaving “properly.” The result, ultimately, is the pathologizing of his misbehaving body and mind: a doctor diagnoses him with PTSD. This is the self-correction performed by dominant ideologies to excise that which does not fit. It is the “laagered history” Edlmann describes as shutting out that which is disruptive and inconvenient. Emotions that had remained relatively contained – “snivell[ing] into [his] sleeve”

(31) when his grandfather dies, for example – become impossible to ignore: “I gave vent to a scream. A terrifying noise, it rose from my chest; it soared up over the tent” (118). Just as Patrick's inability to control his hands to catch the rugby ball results in Schutte ejecting him from the game, so too his inability to “remember himself” and control his emotions results in the military ejecting him from their ranks.

The tropes of PTSD<sup>178</sup> are common to South African border war literature. Baines argues they often feature soldiers “cracking under the strain” (“South Africa's Vietnam?” 8). van der Merwe's *Moffie* describes several characters who “crack” during their national service, while Koos Prinsloo's “Border Story” has such figures in the background: “sensitive boys' with 'identity problems' and bush-mad 'straight schizophrenics' who thought they were Idi Amin, the Head of the Defence Force, the Great Instructor, Moses or Jesus Christ” (136). Clive Holt's memoir *At Thy Call We Did Not Falter* is an account of his experiences on the border and the PTSD he suffered as a result: “Standing face to face with the dark side of man, and realising that you are a part of it, is an experience not easily forgotten, and one that nobody should ever have to endure” (18). Rick Andrews' memoir *Buried in the Sky* details his use of drugs to cope during his national service. More than ten years after he has left the military he encounters soldiers on a train, one of whom asks for a donation: “My hatred of the military and everything that was wrong with South Africa was projected at this individual who had shoved a collection can under my nose. All kinds of possible retributions against me began to run through my mind. Most of them were violent and ugly” (195). Such texts reveal the fiction upon which ideals of military

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<sup>178</sup> For a useful discussion of PTSD, see Doherty 39-45; Shepherd.

masculinity are based. Soldiers are men, not machines, and even the “strongest” can “crack.”

Arguably all war literature contains varying representations of “combat madness.” The increasing cultural awareness of PTSD in South Africa, due to increased demands in soldiering, resulted in the slang *bosbefok* (bush fucked or bush mad) gaining wide circulation. Daniel Conway points out this term was particularly ironic: “The metaphor of ‘bush fucked’ contested the army as a masculinizing experience. It destabilized the tropes of militarized masculinity embodied by the *grensvegter* and *troepie*; men were ‘fucked’ by military service, demeaned and driven ‘mad’ as a result” (“Contesting” 135). That Patrick is literally and metaphorically bush-fucked challenges the heteronormativity of the military.

Conway makes clear how the apartheid state constructed national service as a rite of passage into manhood for white men in South Africa:

In order that white men and women internalize the militarized norms of the state, a particular hegemonic form of republican and sexual citizenship was articulated by the Nationalist government and at its pinnacle was the icon of the white male soldier, fulfilling his political duty to the state and achieving his manhood. Conscripts were presented as brave, admirable, successful and as fulfilling their maximum potential. (“Every Coward's Choice?” 26)

Patrick troubles not only the assumption that soldiers are heterosexual, but also the assumption that the military provides a rite of passage into masculinity. His experiences in the bush may have changed him, but they have not successfully initiated him into becoming a heterosexual, hegemonic, military man. Patrick's tears and terrors prove that military service will not make you into a new – or better – man.

Much like Marnus in *The Smell of Apples*, Commandant Schutte – the epitome of Afrikaner military masculinity – believes in the power of remembrance to anchor his identity. In this, he represents one of the core operating principles of the military itself: valuing tradition. Such a sentiment is at the core of General MacArthur's famous “Long Grey Line” speech. MacArthur reminds the cadets of their commitment to the nation and to history: “The Long Grey Line has never failed us. Were you to do so, a million ghosts in olive drab, in brown khaki, in blue and grey, would rise from their white crosses, thundering those magic words: Duty, Honor, Country” (MacArthur). MacArthur evokes an arresting image to reinforce the value – and weight – of history behind the identity of the soldiers. MacArthur's speech resonates with Afrikanerdom's valuing of what Allen describes as their “sacred history” (41). And, indeed, it resonates with Commandant Schutte who seems to believe that reminding Patrick of who he is will be enough to restore Patrick's identity. He assures Patrick: “You're going to get well ... You're a South African soldier ... You're all right” (120). For Schutte, as for MacArthur, the power of remembrance produces vitality and purpose. It allows a soldier to remember his place and who he is.

The emphasis on history, and on taking one's place within that history, demonstrates how the military relies upon the “grand logics of recall” (*Queer Art* 15) to maintain itself. Schutte seems to imagine Patrick has only “temporarily” forgotten himself but that his words of remembrance will stabilize his identity and return him to his “proper” role as a soldier. However, the novel reveals the superficiality upon which these structures rest: it opens a year after this episode takes place, with Patrick suffering from PTSD. He is no longer a soldier and he is very far from all right.

### “Time fell suddenly away” (155): Queerly Forgetting History

Patrick's experience of PTSD demonstrates the absurdity of Commandant Schutte's expectation that simply reminding him of his identity might fix it in place. Instead, PTSD renders Patrick unmoored from history and dislocated from the passage of time. A year after his military discharge, Patrick accompanies his mother to witness Namibia's first free elections. While there, Patrick attends the funeral of a recently assassinated white SWAPO activist, Andrew Lovell. Galgut's description of the scene, with Patrick witnessing the funeral in Namibia while simultaneously going back in time to a hospital in South Africa, demonstrates the queer possibilities enabled by forgetting:

Time fell suddenly away. I was back in a white hospital bed, with a doctor sitting beside me: 'Try to describe how you feel,' he said. 'I feel dislocated,' I said. 'Not part of life.' 'Whose life?' 'Mine. Everybody's. *Life*' ... I covered my face with my hands. But I could not prevent what I saw: The desert enveloped us all. Through the flickering bodies of people around me, I saw the sand shining through. Beneath the joyous thunder of voices, I heard the insidious wind. Years of war and ideology had converged on this land. All the laws and guns and blood for this – rocks, sand and air. Barren, omnipotent, emptiness waited beneath us. When we had gone, this arid earth would remain. White and implacable, burning with light like the moon. I ran. (155)

In stark opposition to the fixity of identity upheld by the apartheid state, Patrick here is dissolving, blurring all boundaries, and thwarting all logic. His anxiety attack takes him back in time to the previous year and the difficulty of trying to explain his disconnection from both time and place. The loss of temporal coherence – “time suddenly fell away” (155) – and the loss of

coherent identity – “I feel dislocated” (155) – converge. The funeral is the site of Patrick's ultimate forgetting. He loses his sense of time, his history and, ultimately, his sense of self. In its place, Patrick experiences a different way of knowing and being.

Patrick experiences an almost erotic pleasure in the dissolving of time and remembrance at the funeral. The funeral takes on the feel of a dance floor, with Patrick seeing bodies “flickering” (155) around him and hearing the “joyous thunder of voices” (155). Halberstam describes queer time in similar terms: “Queer time for me is the dark nightclub, the perverse turn away from the narrative coherence of adolescence – early adulthood – marriage – reproduction – childrearing – retirement – death, the embrace of late childhood in place of early adulthood or immaturity in place of responsibility” (Dinshaw 182). Halberstam uses the bar to envision a space of desire outside of conventional, legible, relationships where time operates logically and organizes itself toward reproductivity. In contrast, the space and time of the nightclub, where strangers' bodies move and sweat together, where whole relationships can occur in the space of a night, evokes expressions of desire outside of expected norms. So too, Patrick's experience of jouissance in this passage evokes the erotic pleasure of “falling” out of time. In “forgetting” where he is, he “forgets” the social expectations that go along with the remembrance. He again evokes Rubin's “zone of uncertainty” (41).

Gopinath suggests the value in thinking differently in order to uncover hidden histories and ways of being. In her argument about the aesthetic practices of the queer diaspora, she writes that they

enact an intimate relation between the visual, the affective, and the sensorial: the visual serves as a portal to other senses and affects, and the alternative modes of knowing and

accessing the past they make available. The aesthetic practices of queer diaspora thereby open the way to a different apprehension of time and space, history and memory, that counters those instantiated by colonial modernity and its legacies. (12)

While she does not name this different temporal and spatial apprehension as specific to queer forgetting, her argument resonates with Halberstam's. Both Gopinath and Halberstam are queering memory and forgetting as a way to avoid being bound by – and into – the logic of straight time and its heteronormative narrative of progress, coherence, and predictability.

As Gopinath suggests, queer time unfolds in ways that are concurrent and overlap. Patrick is out-of-place and out-of-time. His queer forgetting of himself, pathologized as PTSD in order for the military to successfully reconcile masculinity and soldiering by excising the uncomfortable misfit, has led him to be in Namibia, helping with a SWAPO funeral. Patrick is outside of Halberstam's "narrative coherence" of progress, order, reproduction. As such, he is in the past, the present, and the future all at once. It is an impossible logic, a site of temporal excess produced by the act of forgetting. Patrick is not the heroic white South African man who dominates over space and time – colonizing the land, mapping it with a racist geography, and remembering celebrated moments of the Boer past. Instead, Patrick is a figure who queerly forgets himself; he is part of an incoherent crowd rather than being a coherent, singular individual. He disrupts the rigid expectations of white South African military masculinity.

Forgetting, of course, can be dangerous and Halberstam is right to be cautious: "forgetting can easily be used as a tool of dominant culture to push the past aside in order to maintain the fantasy and fiction of a just and tolerant present" (*Queer Art* 82-3). This is the national version, the "laagered history," that sees the present as part of colonial modernity arising from – but also

better than – a benevolent past. Patrick reveals the danger of forgetting when he enters a German-owned antique store in Swakopmund:

There were old German beer mugs, colonial snaps. There were cameras and lighters and Victorian toys. Amongst all this refuse from ten decades of pillage, were other, more sinister things. Swastikas embroidered in cloth. Photographs of Hitler on the wall. Dog-eared copies of *Mein Kampf*. Glinting wickedly, some SS dress swords. A cap. And one that took away my breath: glossy and large, the 1989 Third Reich Double-edged Weapons calendar (99).

Colonial histories of the distant past blur into the more recent past of World War II, and bleed into the novel's present. The current – horrifying – calendar serves as a reminder that history has not relegated Hitler to the archive of the past; his ideas continue to circulate in the present. These objects, with their histories of racism, antisemitism, sexism, colonialism, homophobia, and so on, are not objects of shame but of nostalgia, imbued with familial and national remembrance. This is the ordered logic and coherence of national history. There is nothing disruptive or destabilizing about these items precisely because they are the physical embodiment of “generational time.” These items connect the family past to the national past, each stabilizing the other. “Dangerous forgetting” treats these items as “antiques,” in the past, relics of an earlier, less-enlightened time. National remembering shuts away – forgets – such pasts in order to maintain its narrative of progress and improvement.

In contrast, queer forgetting is not a form of denial but a complicating of memory, queering the act through its disruptions. Queer forgetting is to step outside of the national organization of history. Patrick forgets himself and, in the forgetting, he forgets the national

remembrance. Patrick's mother shows off her purchase of an antique bottle from the store (142), unperturbed by the objects for sale. In contrast, Patrick enters such a store and see objects that represent oppression *as* objects of oppression precisely because he is outside the temporal structures that read time-as-progressive, or that seek to erase history's shameful past. These are not antiques made harmless by their temporal distance but signs of continuous and present violence.

Patrick's inability to remain anchored to time and place means he is not reverential in the face of history. This demonstrates Halberstam's argument about the significance of queer forgetting. The forgetful subject produces “a new version of selfhood, a queer version that depends upon disconnection from the family and contingent relations to friends and improvised relations to community” (*Queer Art* 80). It is to forget the accumulations of family and national history and, in its stead, “create relationality anew in each moment and for each context” (*Queer Art* 80). As Gopinath suggests, Patrick has a different way of seeing and knowing. Being able to forget the weight of the past means the future is not overdetermined: “When we had gone, this arid earth would remain” (155). All the apartheid ideology, all the hegemonic military masculinity, all the belief in rugby and rhetoric, simply disappears. It is the sand that is “shining through” (155) and that will remain when all else is gone. Unbound from time and history, Patrick reveals the absurdity of all that has been done in the name of that “arid earth.”

**“*Did I shoot Andrew Lovell? No, I thought, I am him*” (151): Queerly Forgetting Oneself**

Patrick's queer forgetting is such that he forgets himself; he unbecomes, or comes undone, in ways that thwart apartheid's reliance on separateness or difference. Apartheid relied on clear identity categories. The writer Alex La Guma, in a report on apartheid prepared for the United

Nations, writes, “Such is the concern of White South Africa for its status as overlord of the 'inferior' non-whites that it has little toleration for those of its membership who consort, particularly sexually, with members of other race groups” (8). While La Guma is talking more specifically about the way the state used the Immorality Act to police the sexual lives of heterosexual South Africans, his comments would easily apply to any white South African committing any kind of transgression. There is no place in apartheid South Africa for forgetting oneself.

But Patrick does forget himself. Not only is he in Namibia – he has crossed the border he was defending the year previously – but he awkwardly accepts the designation of “Comrade” (80) from SWAPO activists who welcome his help with the funeral. Later, he experiences a sense of belonging when a young Black man shakes his hand and calls him “Brother” (154). The rigidly maintained boundaries of “separateness,” so central to apartheid ideology and so central to Patrick's upbringing, dissolve here. Those who are outside the machinations of white hegemonic masculinity and the South African military see Patrick for himself rather than for what he represents.

Galgut, however, avoids descending into a patronizing and sentimental claim that it is the Black men who will accept Patrick and who will teach him to be a different kind of man. In Patrick's queer forgetting of himself there is no solid identity to teach. The novel foregrounds this through Patrick's inability to maintain a barrier between himself and Andrew Lovell, despite their very different ways of being in the world. Where Patrick dutifully obeyed the call-up and performed his national service, Andrew Lovell was facing charges for refusing to serve, and had been working with, rather than fighting against, SWAPO. Andrew Lovell represents a different

kind of white South African man: an anti-apartheid activist, a lawyer, a man with conviction and an awareness of the world – all the things Patrick is not.<sup>179</sup> Andrew Lovell is a different kind of misfit. Where Patrick's discharge from the SADF means the military does not have to contend with expanding the role of soldier to include someone who is emotional and unstable, the state assassinates Andrew Lovell because he has stepped too far outside of the bounds of white masculinity.

Andrew Lovell is an enemy of the apartheid state precisely because he blurs boundaries of race and of gender by helping SWAPO fight for independence in Namibia. There is a significant contrast, then, between Patrick, the dutiful but ineffectual son, a white South African who cannot catch the rugby ball, who kills a SWAPO soldier and then has sex with another man instead of patrolling the military base, and Andrew Lovell, who shirks his military service in order to help SWAPO fight for independence. Patrick is a queer failure, what Phelan would call a “sexual stranger,” confusing and confounding expectations of identity. Andrew Lovell, in contrast, is an enemy, working against the interests of the state.

Patrick's failure to correctly perform white hegemonic masculinity marks him as Other. His whiteness is a given; it is his incorrect ways of being a man that stand out. He shoots an enemy combatant but cannot catch a ball. He loads his dead lover onto a helicopter but later throws a tray on the ground. Schutte punishes him with push-ups, but Patrick “forgets” himself and makes the moment strangely sexual: “In the dirt at his feet, worshipping him, I pressed myself to the ground” (114). In these ways, Patrick demonstrates Phelan's term of “undecidables”

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<sup>179</sup> Patrick is often unaware of politics. For example, he asks his mother who has killed Andrew Lovell. His mother responds, “South Africa, of course, darling ... honestly – sometimes I think you're so naïve” (78).

(29). The military, however, has no space for uncertainty. He misbehaves in ways that cause the military to medicate him to render him stable and legible as a white South African man.

In contrast, Andrew Lovell's performance of masculinity becomes secondary to his incorrect performance of whiteness. His disavowal of whiteness as a meaningful category threatens the very foundation of the apartheid state. As Carolin makes clear, the instability of whiteness meant it had to be continually, actively, produced (116). As a result, Patrick might be “undecidable,” but Andrew Lovell is “undesirable.” This is why he must die.

Patrick identifies with Andrew Lovell rather than with the other white – or Black – male figures he encounters in the novel to the point of obsession. He comes to believe he has “intuitive” (96) knowledge of his murder, and he imagines Andrew Lovell's thoughts as he died: “I have tried to imagine what thoughts might have passed through Andrew Lovell's darkening mind ... Might he have desired to be me?” (98). Ultimately, Patrick forgets himself completely: “Then I found myself thinking this: *Did I shoot Andrew Lovell? No, I thought, I am him*” (151).

By forgetting himself, Patrick thoroughly destabilizes the sign of white South African military masculinity. Halberstam says of queer forgetting that the forgetful subject, in forgetting the generational logics of family and tradition, “create[s] relation[s] anew” (*Queer Art* 80) and, in doing so, “reinvent[s] kinship, identity, and collectivity” (*Queer Art* 80). In this way, then, Patrick becomes a sign of chaos: rather than upholding patriarchal knowledge and generational time so vital to the ideology of the apartheid state, Patrick forgets himself and he forgets the values that have structured his world.

The apartheid state insisted on a fixity of identity. Carolin notes that the state rewrote the Population Registration Act (1950) more than fifteen times, highlighting the absurdity of trying

to create a racial taxonomy (113). Carolin could make a similar statement about the state's anxious attempts to police the sexual behaviour of white South Africans by continuously amending the Immorality Act. And yet the NP did continually try to fix in place racial identity, sexual identity, gender identity, and national identity. Their racist claims to supremacy depended on identity categories they contended were stable and fixed. Jeremy Martens argues such categories needed to be known so they could be policed: white South Africans who “rejected middle-class moral standards and failed to 'live white' were believed to undermine the foundations of white supremacy” (240). That Patrick forgets himself, then, takes on added resonance in the apartheid context as he blurs the ultimate boundary of identity between self and other. Through his forgetting, he becomes both at once.

To forget is to learn anew, to feel differently, to experience unexpectedly. It is to unbecome, to undo oneself, to encounter a different way of apprehending the world that is generative and full of potential. To forget oneself is to become unmoored, unhooked from history and from the boundaries of the self. Put another way, it is not to ignore the past, but to break its hold. It is the moment of *jouissance*, of the pleasure not just of “transformative knowing” (*Queer Art* 58), but of unknowing, of losing oneself completely.

### **“Time had altered its shape” (118): Queer Time**

Apartheid South Africa was a paranoid state. As Baines suggests, the government's invocation of a “total onslaught” made discipline and control into patriotic acts of national security, with white South Africans closing ranks to protect “the *laager*” (“Visual Narratives” 277). Queer time, in contrast, thinks beyond the disciplinarity of the social script. Like queer failure and queer forgetting, queer time offers an interruption from the heteronormative

organization of logic, from the expectations of white supremacy, and from the demands of patriarchy, all of which are central to the military and the maintenance of military masculinity. Queer time, found in parentheses gesturing to a different order of time, and in living an unscripted life, makes space for thinking – and being – otherwise.

### **Queer Time as Bent**

Muñoz argues that the “performative force of the gesture interrupts straight time and the temporal strictures it enacts” (83). He reads punctuation and typographical ephemera as queer gestures, noting that gesture “signals a refusal of a certain kind of finitude” (65), operating as a form of queer time. He thinks of gestures as that which transmits a queer knowledge, desire, possibility beyond the page: “the cool look of a street cruise, a lingering handshake between recent acquaintances, or the mannish strut of a particularly confident woman” (65). Gestures are intriguing because they can signal legibility (the ‘follow me’ look of picking someone up on the street) but as performatives they remain fleeting (did they see my look? Does that look mean what I think it means?). As such, gestures point to a different kind of knowing outside the bounds of straight time.

Patrick's narrative is full of gestures that point to a queer time, a different, sometimes incoherent logic. I read the parenthetical marks in the novel as one such queer gesture. Parentheses are a queer punctuation. Their grammatical purpose is to offer something excessive, unnecessary, since the sentence can – must – be complete without them. As such, the parentheses function as a visible rupture, a hiding-in-plain-sight, much like the “cool look,” the “lingering handshake,” and the “mannish strut” of queer flirtations. It is a way of communicating beyond the bounds of a dominant, authoritative voice, of leaving open the possibility: follow me, feel me, see

me. Here, parenthetical gestures produce a queer topography of the page; they function as a visible code that interrupts, refutes, amuses, and clarifies. The parentheses add a queerness to the page as they make space for, and render visible, normally hidden non-linear thoughts.

The parentheses function in different ways in this novel – to expose, to describe, to dream. For example, they reveal acknowledged embarrassments: Malcolm's revelation that their father did not exit the vehicle when he shot the leopard (10), or the banal details of Malcom's unheroic death (19). But they also reveal unspoken secrets: Patrick's confession to being jealous of his brother (15), his willingness to do whatever Commandant Schutte asked of him (87). They contain additional information, such as how apartheid South Africa imagined the world beyond the border: full of “(Communists. Terrorists. Other Ideas)” (66), and how the eye imposes objects onto the vast sand of the desert (88). Most striking, parentheses share – and contain – Patrick's yearning for a different order of space and time just before he kills the SWAPO soldier: “(For that moment, it is my belief, we existed as some kind of equals: no politics, uniforms, or aims. Somewhere in space, light has preserved us this way: two shocked and terrified groups, not knowing what they should do)” (74). These are useful asides, the parentheses gesturing to the sharing of more intimate knowledge with the reader.

The novel's parentheses, however, are also used to convey strikingly mundane details: Patrick moves toward a rock on his grandmother's farm (33), he sees another car on the drive into Namibia (40), his mother sent him letters while he was in the SADF (51), what an SADF captain looked like (68), a hotelier advising to not expect cheaper rooms elsewhere (79), detailing the route from the hotel to the site of Andrew Lovell's murder (95), the difference between SWAPO office entrances in Swakopmund and Windhoek (96), noting that both SWAPO and the SADF

used the same image of Andrew Lovell (124), and so on. Many of these detail-laden parentheses function merely as a transmission of fact, containing information seemingly unnecessary to include at all. It is their very banality, however, that helps render them queer: they are unnecessary, they are excessive, they thwart logic.

“Queer” is indeterminate, inconsistent, incoherent; it is Edelman's “zone of possibilities” (*Homographesis* 114) rather than that which heteronormativity closes down by making known and understood. The parentheses of the novel defy heteronormative logic by demonstrating a lack of hierarchy or privileging of information. Details, secrets, facts, dreams all exist inside the brackets here, concealing and revealing knowledge both useful and inane. The detail of seeing another car on the drive through the desert is on the same level as exposing his father's unheroic shooting of the leopard; Patrick's memorizing of the route from the hotel to the site of Andrew Lovell's murder exists on the same level as the fantasy that imagines another order of time where the SWAPO unit, and Patrick's unit, simply remain frozen – and therefore all remain alive. As Muñoz says, gestures are ephemera: “They are absent and they are present, disrupting a predictable metaphysics of presence” (71) The parentheses are a queer gesture on the page, a signal that there is another logic at play that is full of contradiction, full of play, full of the banal and profound all at once.

Judith Butler, in an article about Muñoz's work, points to the smallness of “gesture:” “*Gesture* sounds weak; it is barely an act and surely not a collective revolutionary action. But perhaps gesture names those forms of power that do not conform to mastery or heroism – weak messianic upheavals, if you will, or potentialities” (8). In this way, then, the parentheses signal a queer time, an upheaval, or what Muñoz calls “the time of ecstasy” (187). He explains,

To see queerness as horizon is to perceive it as a modality of ecstatic time in which the temporal stranglehold ... [of] straight time is interrupted or stepped out of. Ecstatic time is signalled at the moment one feels ecstasy, announced perhaps in a scream or grunt of pleasure, and more importantly during moments of contemplation when one looks back at a scene from one's past, present, or future. Opening oneself up to such a perception of queerness as manifestation in and of ecstatic time offers queers much more. (32)

The incoherent logic of Patrick's parenthetical gestures signals an interruption to straight time; they function as past, present, and future together. They are confession and concealment. They are queer gestures outside of time, full of memory and fact, dream and observation.

Apartheid required a conception of whiteness underpinned by heterosexuality and performances of athletic, muscular, and militarized masculinity. The Immorality Act, the Mixed Marriage Act, the Population Registration Act, and other forms of legislation functioned to construct and police gender, race, and sexuality as fixed and knowable. As Carolin notes, the state positioned any transgression as a menace to society: "It is within this context of hysteria and conservative moralism that both interracial sex and sex between men are hyperbolically positioned as threats to white civilisation in general, and the privileged status of Afrikaner nationalism more specifically" (114). Falkof agrees: "Gay white men's enactment of deviant masculinity saw them quite literally demonized" (287). This is the straight time of the state and of the SADF: rigid, certain, following a particular logic that refuses interruption.

Queer gestures have no place in the military or in the apartheid state precisely because they signal other ways of knowing. They suggest the keeping of secrets and the exposing of secrets. Parentheses signal a stepping out of the order of straight time. As gestures of intimacy,

they are antithetical to the heteronormative logic of the military that denies the erotic potential of its homosocial environment. These parentheses queer time because they refuse fixity, they refuse predictability, they refuse, as Muñoz says, a “certain kind of finitude” (65). This refusal troubles the very heart of apartheid's need to know, categorize, and police – apartheid's need to “make flat.” The parenthetical gestures are visual and temporal interruptions, threatening to whisper intimacies and state secrets. They challenge and excite.

### **Queer Time as Off-Script**

Halberstam opens *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* with the claim that “Queer uses of time and space develop, at least in part, in opposition to the institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction” (*Queer Time* 1). Such institutions are central to the military. Indeed, the military is, in many ways, the epitome of straight time: linear, logical, historically-informed, and future-oriented. Commandant Schutte makes this clear through his demand that his troops sing the anthem every day while raising the flag: “glorifying this strange piece of cloth” (68). Halberstam states that, in contrast to straight time, queer time emerges “once one leaves the temporal frames of bourgeois reproduction and family, longevity, risk/safety, and inheritance” (*Queer Time* 6). Muñoz agrees, suggesting that queer time provides “an exit from the stale and static lifeworld dominated by the alienation, exploitation, and drudgery associated with capitalism” (173).

Queer time is what Halberstam refers to as living “life unscripted” (*Queer Time* 2), or what Freeman defines as “living aslant” (xv) and being “out of synch with state-sponsored narratives” (xv). Queer time is about entering a different logic, one that is unpredictable and unbound. Galgut's novel challenges the stability of the sign of white South African military

masculinity by depicting a soldier who, in not being able to catch the rugby ball, in having sex with another male soldier, in recognizing the dangers of treating history as past, is indeed living “aslant.” Patrick troubles the symbol of white South African soldier by refuting the social scripts that organize straight time.

The most obvious way Patrick lives “aslant” is through his relationship with Lappies. Patrick and Lappies develop an illegible intimacy shortly after Lappies' arrival in the camp: “We began secret rites that would render comradeship possible” (67). Its illegibility rests on its “secret” nature, but also on its escape from conventional expectations of a relationship: “Though no enormous confidences were traded, no pledges made, I was glad of his company there” (67). In the context of the apartheid army, this reticence is understandable. The SADF had an ideological investment in asserting itself as the site of exemplary white heterosexual hegemonic masculinity. The ever-present homophobia circulating in the army, and the ever-present threat of Ward 22, meant keeping a same-sex relationship hidden was necessary. Chantal Zabus confirms this when she notes the SADF, “aided by chaplains and psychiatrists, ferreted out suspected homosexuals and submitted them to medical cures, chemical castration, and sex-change operations” (8). But here, while they engage in a private covenant and construct a relationship on their own private terms – without pledge or promise – they also live that relationship in the open: “Lappies moved beds: he slept, in the night, next to me” (70). Their relationship is operating on a different register, a queer time that is “out of synch” with the apartheid military environment.

Halberstam describes queer time as resisting heteronormative expectations: it is “a theory of queerness as a way of being in the world and a critique of the careful social scripts that usher even the most queer among us through major markers of individual development and into

normativity” (Dinshaw 182). With their secret rituals and public intimacy, Patrick and Lappies' relationship is what Halberstam might call “critique” (Dinshaw 182), or what Gopinath might call “unruly” (14). Its paradoxical existence is exposing the absurdity of the social scripts around them that must otherwise, purposefully, interpret the men in beds next to each other as *not* being engaged in private intimacies. This is the heart of McGhee's argument about the military's anxieties regarding the presence of homosexuals. He suggests that it is the illegible homosexual who is compatible with military service: to perform correct – as in “heterosexualized” (219) – masculinity is to demonstrate adherence to the codes of discipline necessary for group cohesion and the maintenance of the desexualized same-sex environment. Patrick and Lappies draw attention to this tension, however, by becoming visible in their disruption of the codes. Phelan makes clear the connection between heterosexuality and masculinity in the military: “the modern construction of masculine bodies is profoundly threatened by homosexuality; indeed, the masculinity of male soldiers is explicitly contrasted to stereotypes of homosexuality as well as femininity” (38). Patrick and Lappies behave and misbehave, they adhere to and refuse the legible performance of military masculinity. They might develop a personal linguistic code to express intimate connection in order to remain invisible and unremarkable but, in moving to sleep next to each other, they make their intimacy overt and thus incoherent with the performance of exemplary masculinity expected in the SADF. Patrick and Lappies are a site of ambivalence and confusion.

Patrick and Lappies' relationship is full of the kind of temporal, spatial, and ideological contradictions that Freeman considers markers of queer time (x). They each have girlfriends, but the girlfriends' roles in the novel decrease, rather than increase, Patrick and Lappies' access to

heterosexual masculinity. When Lappies mentions his girlfriend he “looked rueful” (71). Patrick describes his girlfriend as being physically fragile: “With her heavy round glasses, her skeletal wrists, she posed no dire threat to me. I had chosen her for that very reason” (71). Neither woman has a name and neither woman takes on the role of erotic object. Holding a letter from his girlfriend to his chest, Patrick looks over at Lappies: “‘Love,’ I said. ‘Love,’ he replied. We sighed, as though we were wistful” (71). The emotions the women provoke are out of proportion, performed in an over-the-top fashion.<sup>180</sup> The letter clutched to the chest, the sighs, and the reaching for – but not achieving – a sense of longing, demonstrate an excessive theatricality rather than sincerity. Such theatricality offers a critique of, rather than demonstrating obedience to, the heteronormative social script.

Patrick and Lappies have sex, in contradiction to the girlfriends they claim to love, but also in contradiction to the military environment in which they exist, and in contradiction to the nation whose uniform they wear. But, in having sex, they also contradict the available social scripts that render this act legible. On the one hand, it is just sex – they fuck while on patrol and then carry on, unmoved by the act: “Lappies had never been close to me; he had been, merely, a companion. After that fumbling exchange on our darkened beat, he had ceased to be even that. My solitude, perhaps, had begun in that moment, as we hastily did up our flies” (112). But, at the same time, it is deeply meaningful: it is sex as politics, as resistance “against men, who had made the world flat” (76), it is sex as “revenge” (76) but also sex as an affirmation of life and pleasure. The scene contains further contradictions: they stop in “the darkest corner of the camp” (75),

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<sup>180</sup> Later in the novel the heteronormative script becomes almost comical when Patrick's girlfriend visits him in the hospital after he has written to her ending the relationship: “Clutching my hand, kissing my wrist, she pleaded with me to give in: ‘Please,’ she cried. ‘I will die if you don’t’” (129).

hidden from view, and yet Patrick feels “the continent about us” (76), rendering their bodies centred in a landscape made momentarily sensuous. They might “hastily” pull up their flies, but not before they have left evidence of their gratification: “We spilled together ... leaving silver tracks like a snail” (76) on the ground. And, ultimately, Patrick invokes different registers of time and renders them illogical: “‘Leave me,’ I gasped, but it wasn't to [Lappies]: I was speaking to Malcolm, my father, to Schutte. ‘Leave me,’ I called down the well of my past, to those who'd colluded against me” (76). This is queer time: it is sex that is meaningless and meaningful, an act hidden and in the open, in the present and the past, all at once. This is life unscripted, time made illegible, sex unbound by temporal and spatial logics.

Catherine Beasley observes of masculinity that it is “the banality of the unstated norm – not requiring comment, let alone explanation” (86). This becomes even more obvious in the military context, where heterosexual masculinity and the military come to stand for each other. Queer time, however, is an interruption, a contradiction, a paradox that draws attention, thwarts logic, and makes visible the structures upon which such banality rests. Looking at the participation of the British military in Pride parades, Bulmer observes “It is paradoxical to have a public display of private sexuality; it disrupts the boundaries between public and private upon which the gender order of the military is based. Exposing this failure is, in itself, an important feminist tactic because it refuses to be complicit in patriarchy's reproduction” (149). In moving beds to be close to each other, in leaving evidence of their sexual activity, the queer time of Patrick and Lappies' relationship similarly troubles the boundary between public and private, and it troubles assumptions about military masculinity.

### Queer Time as Unscripted Time

This novel is full of men who represent the idealized white masculinity at the heart of apartheid South Africa. There is Patrick's father Howard, an English South African whose hunting prowess and enthusiasm for rugby mark him as successful, and it is a success he passes down to his first-born son. Malcolm is also a successful South African man, demonstrated by how “naturally” he adapts to military life: “Brown suited my brother; as did thick boots and guns” (19). The Afrikaner Commandant Schutte, whose resemblance to Malcolm is “startling” (68), is similarly “naturally” suited to the military: “Here, in the bush, wearing boots and a gun, life made a strange sense to him” (68). At the end of the novel Patrick encounters another Afrikaner, Dirk Blaauw, who also wears boots and a gun: “He had an outfit of khaki, boots laced up to his shins. He was in his late thirties, with a shovel-shaped beard. His hair was brushed back from his forehead. He wasn't fat, but was thick with great strength” (125). Dirk Blaauw spouts racist ideas and asserts a frontier masculinity: “Man is a hunter by instinct. A killer. The world is a jungle. *Né, Patrick?* He punched my shoulder and laughed” (168). He performs the white South African masculinity of the military, of seeing violence as a sensible solution, and of treating race and gender as something fixed and certain. He is yet another iteration of the same white hegemonic South African man. English or Afrikaner, such men dominate the land and the social arena. They are the men who catch rugby balls and do so with swagger.

This is the social script, the straight time, of apartheid South Africa: looking backward, reproducing itself through imitation in order to lay claim to a certain fixity of identity that repeats itself, a form of recurrent stagnation. These men represent that which Patrick is not. While Patrick may have yearned to go on hunting trips and may have regretted his inability to catch the

rugby ball as a child, he undergoes a change in the novel. His queerness positions him as an outsider, as one who rejects the social reproduction so inherent to the military and to apartheid. He will not become these men.

The novel's title signals this change. As a child Patrick found the sounds of the slaughtering of pigs on his grandparents' farm to be “beautiful” (28). He observes of the farm: “Its calendar runs on slaughter: Tuesday morning the pig. On Wednesday a sheep. On Friday a goat ... All this death to support our life” (27). This is straight time, the following of a logical order in service of a particular aim. And it is a metaphor for the SADF, with its sense of order and routine, normalizing the violence that supported the white minority. Patrick visits the farm as an adult and experiences it very differently. Having now seen – and participated in – state violence, he remarks of a dying pig, “Now the noise was hideous” (28). Such a statement allows Patrick to make clear he will never be comfortable with guns and boots, and he will not reproduce the values of apartheid. Patrick asserts himself as a queer outsider, as someone who will live according to a different organization of time.

Having stepped outside of the norms through his queer failure to perform white masculinity correctly, and through his queer forgetting of himself, Patrick ends the novel by seeking new horizons: “I said slowly, 'I might move out of home.' 'What?' 'It might be a good idea for me to live on my own. To get a flat by myself.' She looked at me. Then she looked away. 'You can't do a thing on your own.' 'Yes, I can.' 'Well,' she said with strangulated gaiety. 'If you think you'd like that. We'll talk about it another time.’” (169). Patrick asserts agency and an embrace of the unknown. His mother's uncomfortable response suggests just how unexpected such thinking is. In the same way Patrick's relationship with Lappies operates free of

expectations, occurring in ways that are illegible rather than predictable and overdetermined, so too is Patrick's desire to mess up also disruptive to notions of South African white masculinity that rely on the fixed and the known.

### **Conclusion**

Muñoz suggests that failure is always already a part of queer existence (173). To be excluded from the dominant heteronormative organization of time and logic is necessarily to fail because those with hegemonic power set the terms and demarcate the boundaries of belonging or not belonging, of succeeding or failing. Queer failure, as Halberstam argues, is a space of thinking otherwise, of embracing the forgetfulness that allows new pasts, presents, and futures to come into being. It is to step outside of straight time. In these ways, then, queer failure, queer forgetting, and queer time are all integrally related – each is an interruption, a mess that produces something new and different.

Galgut's *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* helps demonstrate that queer desires in the South African military disrupt the seeming fixity of identity that was apartheid's necessity. The figure of the white South African soldier carried with it an implicit heterosexuality, an implicit skill at rugby, an implicit claim to the power and prestige of hegemonic masculinity. Positioned as an outsider through his failure to meet the expectations of such a gender performance, Patrick reveals just how fraught and fragile apartheid's reliance on fixed identities was. Patrick is an inconvenient white South African man because he embodies – and exposes – this fragility. He is a soldier – but he has sex with men (contravening the military's disciplinary code), he shoots the enemy un-heroically in the back, he has an excess of emotion that contradicts the army's need for order and control. He is a white South African – but he has sex with men (contravening the

Immorality Act), he cannot catch the rugby ball, he answers to “brother” by SWAPO activists in Namibia. He is a white South African son – but he has sex with men (and so will not reproduce more sons for the nation), he does not look like any of the novel's father figures, and he announces at the end of the novel that he is moving out of the family home. He is not just queer, he is a bastard, threatening the security of a nation obsessed with inheritance, history, order, and conformity. His very presence makes him a menace.

Patrick turns away from the past that prescribes the present and future; instead, he rejects the coherence and legibility of maintaining familial bonds and upholding familial and national inheritance. He veers off course, choosing to live aslant, away from the norms that conscripted him into the military, that ostracized him for not being good at rugby, that made the violence of war seem like a sensible solution to South Africa's paranoia, and that made the having of emotions irreconcilable with the wearing of the uniform. Rather than try to fit in to a “fraternity of men” represented by men such as his father, Commandant Schutte, and Dirk Blaauw, all men stuck firmly in the past, Patrick chooses a different path, beyond the logics of colonial modernity and beyond the complicity with apartheid.

In the figure of Patrick there is an unravelling that exposes the contradictions and contingencies of hegemonic military masculinity. Not only does he fail to uphold the expectations placed upon him as a white South African man, but the form of the novel, with its queer gestures of parentheses, also works to render the story strange, excessive, contradictory. The result is a narrative that demonstrates the ways the SADF is a site of Cynthia Enloe's “patriarchal confusion.”

**CHAPTER SIX: Queer Conclusions: “This is not an ending, mate. This is a beginning” (*Bitter Eden* 229)**

In his autobiography, the South African actor Antony Sher provides a description of a sergeant shouting at him as he begins his national service in the SADF. Sher describes a sergeant asking him to strip to test his “manhood:” “Let's see the balls on you, *boykie*, let's see 'em and feel 'em, let's see if you've got what it takes to be a big, boozing, rutting, rugger-mad South African MALE!” (*Beside* 28). In the rigidly ordered, acutely heterosexual environment of the South African military, a sergeant conducting “health checks” on new recruits can demand to see – and feel – the recruit's testicles, but such an intimate touch does not bring the sergeant's heterosexuality into question. Rather, the dominance of the codes within which he operates overrides any implication of sexual desire, let alone perversity. His assertion of power, his knowledge of the signs of white South African masculinity – drinking, sex, and rugby – and most of all his uniform mark him as decidedly, necessarily, heterosexual.

The scene Sher describes encapsulates much of what this dissertation is about. In apartheid South Africa, the military's role in the cultural imagination was as a site of exemplary masculinity, full of white, heterosexual, athletic bodies whose very muscularity evoked the protection of the weak, and whose success in battle also suggested success on the rugby pitch. Oliver Phillips observes that the South African military was a site not just for the reflection of an

idealized white masculinity but for its production: the “army was deeply implicated in the construction of a normative white masculinity” (145). Vital to apartheid's logic was a belief in fixed identity. The government treated gender, race, and sexuality as knowable and measurable categories that found their protection and demonstration in the SADF.

Jacklyn Cock notes that the military not only mobilizes gender identities, it “both uses and maintains the ideological construction of gender in the definitions of 'masculinity' and 'femininity'” (*Colonels and Cadres* x). The state positioned those who refused military service as failed men, as homosexuals, as those who did not perform “national manhood” (du Pisani, “Hegemonic Masculinity” 172). Mikkie van Zyl has observed that the apartheid government mobilized homophobic slurs against anyone involved with the End Conscription Campaign (ECC): “Smear campaigns against the ECC explicitly linked it to homosexuality, characterised as femininity, thus demonstrating the deeply gendered nature of the military” (102). Tienie Du Plessis and others help illustrate the nexus of patriarchy, white supremacy, and homophobia in South Africa that turns being homosexual into an accusation:

The favourite ploy of detractors was to question members of the ECC's manhood and patriotism; two qualities the masculine, militarised society that was South Africa thrived and put a very high premium on. The ECC was dubbed Every Coward's Choice and its members and sympathisers were castigated as traitors, liberals, communists, useful idiots for Marxism-Leninism, anarchists, losers and mad. They were also called *moffies* (gays), *holnaaiers* (faggots), and *banggatte* (fearful ones). (160)

I point to this quotation because it helps demonstrate the valuing of the military as not just a protector of nationhood, but of a gender identity as straight. To suggest otherwise is to challenge

the state's ideological investment in the military as a gender producing, gender conferring institution.

The military defines and enforces boundaries – of the nation, of gender, of sexuality. It promotes a particular version of masculinity as muscular, protective, and heterosexual. This is why the state treats the presence of men acting on their same-sex desires in the military as a threat: they destabilize all the assumptions upon which the system rests. Raewyn Connell, talking about the debate surrounding lesbians and gay men in the United States military, helps make this clear: “The admirals and generals defended the status quo on a variety of spurious grounds. The unadmitted reason was the cultural importance of a particular definition of masculinity in maintaining the fragile cohesion of modern armed forces” (*Masculinities* 73). The soldier, especially the white South African soldier, is necessarily heterosexual, even when his hands are on, and appraising, another man's genitals. To think of him otherwise would blur the boundaries the military is invested in keeping separate – in keeping “straight.”

This dissertation has sought to expose the patriarchal confusions and ambiguities that lie at the heart of the military in general, and of the South African military in particular. Catherine Beasley argues that while hegemonic masculinity is central to shaping social relations, it is “invariably invisible” (86) because it embodies “the banality of the unstated norm” (86). It does indeed seem banal to state that the apartheid army celebrated whiteness, heterosexuality, and masculinity since each of these categories stands in for the others in apartheid South Africa.

Except when they do not. The novels of this dissertation reveal the disruptive potential of men who desire men while wearing the South African military uniform; their transgressive desires expose the “fragile cohesion” that links whiteness, heterosexuality, and masculinity. Their

very presence in the military suggests an ambiguity, a failure to correctly perform whiteness-as-moral, a blurring of the expectation that soldiers-are-straight. Their transgressive desires signify a forgetting of the official past, and a forgetting of their familial bonds. Apartheid demanded fixity, the correct performance of sexuality, and the celebration of the past as justification for their claims to superiority. Men who desired men in the South African military challenged the very foundations of those claims.

Orna Sasson-Levy observes that militaries “shape people in ways that serve military objectives” (358). Frank Barrett agrees, arguing that the military produces a “rugged heterosexuality” (132) as a key element of the “boundaries of inclusion” (132) vital for the assertion of hegemonic masculinity over Othered masculinities. Kimberly Hutchings makes a similar point in regard to the military more generally to argue that this Othering functions as a form of disciplinary power and, as such, it reproduces itself: “the association of qualities and attributes with masculinity valorizes those attributes (and thereby devalorizes others) ... this process of valorization helps to construct and sustain the skills needed to fulfill various tasks within the organization” (392). The military, in other words, produces the hegemonic masculinity it requires to maintain itself as a gendering institution. The military has been so successful in this regard that the sergeant openly feeling Sher's genitals has no anxiety someone will read him as gay. He knows he is part of a white South African version of General MacArthur's “long grey line,” secure in his correct performance of hegemonic military masculinity.

This dissertation has sought to consider the disruptive possibilities of incorrect performances of masculinity in the South African military, located in novels depicting white male soldiers desiring other soldiers; in other words, it has considered white soldiers who trouble the

white hegemonic heterosexual masculinity of the SADF. Tatamkhulu Afrika's *Bitter Eden* is full of hope and possibility. Afrika constructs his soldier protagonist, Tom Smith, as one who unlearns what it means to be a man, ultimately expanding his gender performance to include his sexual desires for men, representing a world of potential at the end of World War II. In contrast, Mark Behr's *The Smell of Apples* demonstrates the impossibility of stepping outside of a prescribed gender role at the height of apartheid. Marnus' world is full of violence and assertions of power. Rather than embrace the queer potential of his friendship with Frikkie, he chooses to uphold, not dismantle, the systems of power that give white masculinity meaning in this environment. There is no space for transgressive desire in the closed system of apartheid. Set near the end of apartheid, Damon Galgut's *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* ultimately rejects the systems of power so venerated by the Erasmus men in Behr's novel. Galgut's protagonist, Patrick Winter, tries to fit in with the expectations placed upon him as a white South African man, but his queerness, represented through his failure at rugby, prevents him from succeeding. Galgut demonstrates Patrick's challenge to the military, and the apartheid regime, when he has sex with another soldier while on patrol. As with Afrika's novel, Galgut demonstrates the expansive possibilities of masculinity through his same-sex desires, disrupting what it means to be a son and a soldier through his acts of failure and forgetting. In Afrika's *Bitter Eden* and Galgut's *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs*, the protagonists' same-sex desires cause them to reconsider the boundaries of white South African military masculinity. Through their queer failures they forget themselves. They undo the expectations that the state has placed upon them. They unbecome.

The SADF includes in its disciplinary code (known as the First Schedule of the 1957 Defence Act) Article no. 32: "Scandalous Behaviour: Any officer who behaves in a scandalous

manner unbecoming the character of an officer and a gentleman, shall be guilty of an offence and shall be on conviction cashiered.”<sup>181</sup> The ambivalence permeating this disciplinary statement is central to my dissertation.

That “conduct unbecoming the character of an officer and a gentleman” is grounds for discipline in the military indicates how vital is the correct performance of heterosexual military masculinity. The phrase “conduct unbecoming” is essentially a catch-all phrase, one that the military can apply to any unseemly behaviour that brings dishonour on the officer or the military at large. It is an ambiguous phrase to shut out ambiguity, ensuring those who belong know how to behave, how to demonstrate decorum, how to fit in.

“Conduct unbecoming” is also a purely military offence – it has no bearing in civil law and no impact outside of the military itself. As such, it suggests the fragility of the structures holding up the system that an individual transgression inside the military could threaten the institution itself. At the same time, the military does not need to codify what counts as “conduct unbecoming” because it is implicitly understood, wrapped up in constructions of honour that, in turn, are wrapped up in constructions of masculinity. Writing about the history of the military disciplinary code, Matthew Barrett explains: “To act honourably was to act according to how military culture defined not just manhood but also gentlemanliness” (10). The military does not need to define “Conduct unbecoming” because an honourable soldier does not need to be told that his word is his bond. Or to not have sex with another soldier. The military must discipline

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<sup>181</sup> The British Army Act of 1881 wrote into law the Articles of War (the military's disciplinary code) and included Conduct Unbecoming as section 16. Canada includes it as Article 92 of the Code of Service Discipline; the American Uniform Code of Military Justice includes it as Article 133.

and court martial a breach of decorum so that the honour of the military remains intact. The military is the epitome of straight time, of requiring reproducibility, of believing in progress and promotion, of protecting national and institutional futures. It is the site of masculinity itself. The military is the site of becoming.

To “become” is to follow a linear trajectory, to engage in straight time. Phrases such as “become an adult,” “become a man,” and “become a woman” pepper our childhoods and adolescences and carry the promise of reward. “Become an adult” and you have successfully emerged from childhood, no longer subject to parents' disciplinary gaze; “become a man” and you can wield power; “become a woman” and you can reproduce. The phrases carry the gendered weight of difference but each also suggests a sense of accomplishment, a box to check off in the heteronormative logic of progress and success. To “become” is full of optimism, an announcement of a starting-but-never-arriving. It carries the expectation of a future, where the becoming will be fully realized in its signification.

“Becoming” is also a term of flattery – not a declaration of attractiveness, per se, but of suitability: “that dress is very becoming on you” or “her sweater was a becoming shade of yellow.” It is a compliment of decorum rather than desire, an acknowledgement of the visual pleasure experienced when something fits well, or is appropriate, befitting of the occasion. This makes it a term of convention, a term that announces itself as decidedly not disruptive.

“Becoming” is safe and it is straight. I read Halberstam's queer forgetting and queer failure as providing a framework with which to escape such a social script, just as I read Muñoz's queer time as offering ways to think differently about expected futures.

To unbecome is to disrupt: to step outside the heteronormative logic of self/other, of

development and success, of military codes of behaviour. It is to experience unscripted life. In his analysis of James Schuyler's poem "A Photograph," Muñoz writes, "Moments of queer relational bliss, what the poet names as ecstasies, are viewed as having the ability to rewrite a larger map of everyday life" (25). This is unbecoming as orgasm, as the moment of *jouissance*, as not just the pleasure of coming (though also) but of being – being in ways that reshape the self and the world around it. It is to come and, in doing so, to come apart and to come together. It is to break down the boundaries of the self through the pleasures of queer relationality.

To "unbecome," then, is to undo oneself, to reject the expectations that social forces have placed upon one's shoulders; it is to remake oneself in a different fashion that is not always legible. This is what happens in Afrika's novel when Tom and Danny move beyond the expectations of hegemonic masculinity and act on desires that will "forever change [their] shape" (229), and it is what happens in Galgut's novel when Patrick and Lappies have sex as an act of resistance against those "who had made the world flat" (76). This is unbecoming: being inappropriate, not fitting in, being disruptive. To unbecome is indeed to dissemble, to dissolve, to reconfigure the boundaries of the self. It is the ecstasy of the unknown, the queer pleasure of desire unloosed, of being a sexual outlaw, of misbehaving. To unbecome is to fail. Such behaviour has no place in the military.

In both *Bitter Eden* and *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* the soldier protagonists undo themselves and "unbecome" in order to find a different way of being in the world. They are examples of queer failure, full of the forgetting necessary to find new ways of being in and apprehending the world. In contrast, in *The Smell of Apples*, it is precisely Marnus' refusal to 'unbecome' that keeps him confined within the boundaries of military masculinity; he helps

protect the corruptions at the heart of apartheid, his silence a mark of the familial and military “honour” that maintains such systems. As if to reinforce the impossibility of experiencing difference inside apartheid, Marnus dies the moment he steps outside of the prescribed script of soldier.

It is not that exposing the homoeroticism, or even sex between men, within the military will bring down the military. The military is a site of exemplary hegemonic masculinity. As such, it is operating with institutional rather than individual power. As Connell notes, “the top levels of business, the military and government provide a fairly convincing *corporate* display of masculinity, still very little shaken by feminist women or dissenting men” (77).

Such “dissenting” men will not bring down the military, but they can threaten its hold. The SADF upheld a belief in what a soldier “should” be and it is this belief in the fixed and immutable category of masculinity as tough, rugby playing, heterosexual, and family-oriented that Tom in *Bitter Eden* and Patrick in *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* threaten. They fail to perform their masculinity 'correctly' precisely because they trouble the fixed nature of identity categories and show those categories to be false. Their queerness comes not from their desire to have sex with other men but from their willingness to break down the rigidity of South African military masculinity, to fail and to forget the expectations placed upon them, to unbecome a man. They defy the fixed identities upon which apartheid rested, and that it policed, while wearing the very uniform of the state.

Halberstam's queer failure and queer forgetting provides a productive lens through which to examine the ways sexual desires between white soldiers in the South African military reveal ambivalence and contradiction. Afrika's *Bitter Eden*, Behr's *The Smell of Apples*, and Galgut's

*The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* each invite a possibility of thinking differently about masculinity and the dissembling made possible by rejecting the social script upon which such structures rest. Halberstam ends their chapter on failure with the line: “Failure loves company” (121). This is where Halberstam and I part ways, because I read such a sentiment as entering back into the redemptive narrative of success: “If we just come together in solidarity, we....” Halberstam suggests that embracing failure allows us to find ways to survive inside the system that maintains the binary of success and failure. It is indeed hard to exit from the logic of triumph but my reading of queer failure is not a triumphant narrative. It is a dismantling one. The impossibility of white South African soldiers being white South African soldiers while desiring, kissing, and fucking each other is a challenge the system itself. These men fail and are failures.

In Afrika's *Bitter Eden*, Tom Smith asks of his memories, “What relevance do they still have – a war that time has tamed into the damp squib of every other war, a love whose strangeness is best left buried where it lies?” (3-4). This project has sought to uncover such “strange love” in order to take up Enloe's invitation to expose “patriarchal confusion.” In considering the ways patriarchal power operates, I have sought to question the synecdochal links between hegemonic military masculinity, white supremacy, and heterosexuality.

This project emerged from encountering a novel depicting two soldiers having sex in the SADF. The soldiers are, as this dissertation has demonstrated, an impossibility according to apartheid logic. I was interested to explore how their roles as soldiers and their sexual desires, contradicted each other. Connell advises that a strategy for peace requires a rethinking of gender (“Peace” 38). She argues that we cannot begin to undo institutions like the military without also undoing masculinities. Claire Duncanson agrees, arguing that it is important to understand how

hegemonic masculinities work in order to bring about change in the gender order. She writes: “For the unraveling of hegemonic masculinity, men must be encouraged not so much to *change their ways* as to *change the way in which they negotiate their identities in relation to others*” (233). Entering into a different order of being by abandoning expectations of hegemonic masculinity, by rejecting the dominance of national and familial history, and by rejecting an expectation of legible boundaries of gender and sexuality – these are the ways meaningful change can occur. Thinking about soldiers desiring soldiers helps expose the military as a site of patriarchal confusion and it helps offer a way of thinking differently about masculinities and about the institutions that maintain them. I heed Connell's advice that real peace can only come about if we think differently about masculinities and gender systems in general.

My interest is in dismantling systems of power and in exploring sexuality as a mode of resistance. I see this project as contributing to scholarship in a few different ways. One is that it overtly reads sex as meaningful. Queer theory has a habit of unsexing itself but here I have tried to make clear that sex *as* sex has power and potential, even when (or especially when) it does not fit conventional expectations. Another is that it seeks to broaden the canon of war literature to more fully include South Africa. I am interested in expanding this project to draw connections between the World War II literature of South Africa and that of other countries. South Africa rarely gets a mention in anthologies or collections about World War II. Marina MacKay's *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of World War II*, for example, gives no mention to South Africa (though Donna Coates' essay in this anthology compares World War II literature from Canada, New Zealand, and Australia). David Attwell and Derek Attridge's *Cambridge History of South African Literature* makes no mention of World War II. I am interested in adding

South Africa into such conversations to more fully develop a consideration of how the literary representations of World War II in white settler nations explore the “sighs” of men in war.

Putting South African war literature into conversation with other national war literatures enriches and deepens the canon. I am also interested in putting sex back in war literature. While the field of scholars who explore the homoeroticism of war literature – especially World War I poetry – is robust, few push past the social mores to read that desire as *more* than chaste. Considering in more detail the *queer* potential of war literature would meaningfully continue this project of uncovering discursive formations of the military that necessarily read the military as a site of exemplary heterosexual masculinity.

This dissertation is about failing and forgetting and finding new ways of being in the world that value sex and desire. Despite the focus on the military, my underlying interest is in peace and modes of organizing that push back against ideas that see the military as a sensible solution to any problem. Muñoz begins *Cruising Utopia* with the claim “Queerness is not yet here” (1). Queerness, with its radical disruptions, its irreverent interruptions, its excessive productions, cannot be “here” when “here” is a time and place of order, logic, power, exploitation. “Here” is straight time that organizes itself into something linear and contained, that organizes bodies into genders and races and ascribes value to some people but not others. The hope is not to make militaries more inclusive; militaries, by their very existence, produce and police boundaries that destroy lives. No anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-capitalist, decolonizing politic can exist in a society that values the military, no matter how many lesbian, gay, and trans soldiers are serving in it.

Fuck the military. Soldiers acting on their desires for soldiers in the military – particularly

in the South African military that relied so heavily on the belief in a fixed identity – those soldiers are screwing and skewering the whole system. Their desires disrupt and reconfigure gender and sexuality, making space for counter discourses that challenge assumptions about masculinity and the military. Their queer desires lead them to embrace failure and forgetting, they thwart any reliance on binary logic, and they destabilize the assumptions underpinning the institution of the military itself. Such soldiers threaten constructions of whiteness, of masculinity, of what it means to be a South African soldier. By blurring the boundaries upon which the institution relies, they queer the uniform and make it strange.

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