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**University of the Witwatersrand**

**SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

**Department of Psychology**

# Discourses of whiteness and masculinity in conscripts' talk about the South African 'border war'

**A research report submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of MA (Psychology) in the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg**

**November 2013**

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**Declaration**

I, Danilo Stefano Caforio, know and accept that plagiarism (i.e., to use another's work and present it as one's own) is wrong. Consequently, I declare that this research report is my own unaided work.

**Signed:** _____

**Date:** November 2013

**Abstract**

The primary aim of this research was to explore the experiences of formerly white conscripted combat veterans during the 'border war' and furthermore, to uncover discourses of whiteness and masculinity embedded in their recounted experiences. This research made use of a qualitative research design. This study drew on the experiences of white male South Africans who were exposed to some form of active combat during the 'border war'. The sample consisted of 8 white South Africans who were born roughly between the 1960s and 1970s. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and analysed using discourse analysis. For the purpose of this research, a hybridised version of discourse analysis was used. This contained elements of critical as well as the discursive approaches to discourse analysis. This study concluded that both whiteness and masculinity are unstable constructs with no absolute definition. This study also found that many of the participants seemed conflicted and unsure of where to position themselves in relation to the 'border war', apartheid and contemporary South Africa as white men. For many it would seem it is easier to simply ignore those years of their lives. In terms of the intersectionality of whiteness and masculinity this research confirms the fact that both whiteness and masculinity, as socially and culturally constructed categories, work together and interact on multiple levels to either empower or marginalize individuals. However, in some instances it was also found that these discourses also function independently of each other. Ultimately it can be said that white masculinity exists in a space that is both troubled and unsettled. This study has illustrated that white men in South Africa have gone from a position of omnipotent power during apartheid to one of contested instability in present South African society. It is evident from this research that whiteness and masculinity are both complex and diffuse constructs that still warrant a great deal of exploration. That said, the future prospects for these individuals are both challenging and possible.

**Keywords:** Whiteness, White Identity, Border War, Masculinity, Conscription, Apartheid, Race, Racism, Violence, Discourse Analysis.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1. Background

Today, there remains a group of white males in South Africa between the ages of 40 and 60 years who once donned the nutria brown uniform of the South African Defence Force (SADF) (Baines, 2008). Between 1967 and 1994 approximately 300 000 young white males were conscripted by the SADF. As far as most of these conscripts were concerned, there was no option other than heeding the call-up and performing national service or *diensplig*[1] (Baines, 2003; Mankayi, 2010). Failure to do so meant harsh penalties. The alternatives were to object on conscientious (actually religious) grounds, face a six year jail sentence, or flee the country (Gibson, 2010). And the obligation did not end with national service as conscripts were often assigned camps that might have included deployment in the operational areas from 1974, or tours of duty in the black townships from 1984 (Baines, 2008). Those belonging to this national service generation were part-time soldiers for much of their adult lives. Most served willingly, some even with patriotic fervour. Others did so reluctantly and with little enthusiasm (Mankayi, 2010).

The SADF gradually extended the period of conscription from nine months to two years as increased man power demands were made upon the cohort of white males. If conscription was a form of discrimination against young white males, it was certainly not universally resented. Indeed, many welcomed national service as a rite of passage whereby boys became men (Baines, 2008). However, conscription caused considerable political fallout on account of the growing number of casualties in the SADF ranks. The toll of those killed while on active duty or during national service remains unclear, but there can be no doubt that the national service generation paid a price for defending the system of white rule (Baines, 2008; Gibson, 2010). Yet, even from the mid-1980s when the call-up entailed the possibility of patrolling the townships, it was still regarded by the majority of conscripts (and their families) as a necessary commitment to make in order to ensure the continuation of white power and privilege (Mankayi, 2010).

[1] The term *diensplig*, in this instance refers to military service.

Accounts of the negative impact of the 'border war' on some conscripts are increasingly emerging (Baines, 2008). As such, while not all conscripts were negatively affected by their experiences, those who saw military action were changed by it (Baines, 2008). In South Africa, it is nevertheless still unusual for war veterans who fought on the 'wrong' side, that is, as part of the South African troops deployed in Namibia and Angola, to express their war experiences as traumatising or distressful. This is because their 'right' to do so has been circumscribed by the past and remains highly contested in the present (Gibson, 2010). This research endeavour is concerned with gaining an understanding of the above mentioned dynamics of the 'border war'. Despite the fact that the 'border war' is a historical artefact and something that remains underexplored in the South African context, one could argue that factors relating to events on the border continue to play themselves out today in the talk of white individuals. Specifically white male conscripts who directly experienced conscription and 'border warfare' seem to occupy a rather difficult position in society today. It is important thus that we as researchers and social scientists strive to decode and explore the mechanisms behind these areas of our society that lay in the more nuanced facets of existence as they often have direct implications for the wellbeing of the social fabric of broader society. In short, it is for this reason that this research initiative was embarked upon.

### 1.2. Rationale

The primary aim of this research was to explore the experiences of formerly white conscripted combat veterans during the 'border war' and furthermore, to uncover discourses of whiteness and masculinity embedded in their recounted experiences of operational duty. The South African 'border war' is arguably one of the more significant violent events to occur during apartheid. However with apartheid over, a new South Africa requires us to look at our past riddled with such violent events in order for us to make sense of our present situation (Hook, 2004; Lentin, 2004). The process of conscription in South Africa at the time dictated the demographics of those who went to war. As a result, it would seem there are many white male ex-combatants in South Africa who live with the consequences of a painful and violent apartheid history (Gibson, 2010; Gibson, 2003;Steyn, 2001). Much light can be shed on the plight of these ex-combatants by examining discourses of masculinity and whiteness as they emerge in the talk of these

individuals. One could argue here in light of the fact that specifically white males were the focus of the conscription programme during apartheid that discourses of whiteness and masculinity would be of particular interest in understanding these individuals.

South Africa has only just emerged from the institutionalized oppression and violent war that marked the apartheid era. It has been a mere 19 years since South Africa embarked on the current democratic dispensation. However the effects of a system that endorsed and perpetuated a military culture on almost all levels of human existence are still felt in the ways in which many white males view broader South African society and how they position themselves discursively within it (Gurney, 2009). The effects of the old order continue to have detrimental consequences on the lives of many South Africans who ambivalently exist in society with feelings of resentment, betrayal, guilt, and anger. These consequences cannot be ignored (Gurney, 2009). This study was primarily concerned with militarised violence and more specifically the violent events relating to the 'border war' in South Africa. As far as this research is concerned militarised violence will primarily be seen here as the backdrop or canvas on which the topics of whiteness and masculinity are situated. According to Rock (1997), the term violence has historically been used in South Africa to refer to such things as detentions, beatings, sexual abuse by authorities and so on. However violence should also be seen, and will be viewed as such in this research, as including oppression in more broad terms, such as on-going class, race and gender oppression which predate even the Apartheid era (Bulhan, 1985; Rock, 1997).

As will be discussed in some detail, militarised violence generally consists of or falls within the category of any actions (or series of actions) brought about intentionally or unintentionally by an individual or group (personally or on behalf of an institution) that are physically or psychologically injurious or violate the rights of another individual or group of individuals (Bulhan, 1985; Rock, 1997). In other words (and for the purposes of this research), this would include acts of violence aimed both at opposing political inequality and at maintaining such inequality (such as the 'border war'), as well as other forms of violence which are the products of political factors (Rock, 1997). While the government of National Unity might have heralded an end to the oppression and repression which characterized South African society during apartheid, Rock (1997) argues that the effects will be felt for many years to come. What is evident here is

the overarching, arguably systemic, nature of violence in South Africa both in its past and currently.

As mentioned above the focus of this research was on an exploration of masculinity and whiteness embedded within the talk of participants' experiences of the military. One could argue here that when concerned with the topic of war or the military, the concept of masculinity cannot be ignored. Gibson (2010) argues that making war is principally a male domain and ranges from conscripted and/or voluntary soldiers to their commanding elite. Furthermore, in the context of the South African 'border war' not only was the making of war masculine but it was also "white masculinity" has been used to describe the fusion of racial identity as well as aspects of masculinity, and in the instance of the 'border war' in South Africa there is strong evidence of such a fusion (Gibson2010).

The literature acknowledges the multiplicity of masculinities, the contradictions evident within the identities of men themselves, and the power of local contexts in constructing manhood - in the case of South Africa, constructing white manhood (Connell, 2002; Hearn, 1996; Morrell, 2002; Skelton, 1997). To understand violent practices, it is necessary to focus on the socio-cultural context and the complex relations of meaning and power within which male masculinities are situated. Social constructionism assists in the exploration of men's, and particularly, soldiers' constructions of their identities. There are diverse forms of masculinities in a given setting, be it social or institutional. These forms include racial inequalities, characterised by the system of apartheid, and how these intersect with conceptions of masculinity. As such it is argued that during and even before apartheid white masculinity is seen as superior or dominant over that of the black other.

Critical military masculinities studies accordingly argue that there is a strong correlation between militarism and male dominance, but also class relations and social inequality (Lee & Daly, 1987). The military organisational structure is dominated by masculine characteristics such as aggression, bravery, heroism, and heterosexuality (Enloe, 1988; Sasson-Levy, 2003). As a result it is difficult to decide whether some of these qualities are either masculinist or militarist (Enloe, 1988). These are the characteristics that are embraced in warfare. While it is generally accepted that the military centrally functions to protect a country's borders and maintain stability if this is threatened, the consequence is often war. Therefore, for the purposes of this research endeavour I

argue that war is the central function of the military, and the organisational context of the military legitimises and idealises violence, and in the context of South Africa this was also influenced by an idealisation of the white masculine conscript. Given the mutually reinforcing relationship between masculinity and the military, and how these intersect with violence, the relationship between militarisation, masculinity and whiteness is thus a nexus that deserves attention in racialised South Africa. As mentioned above, the thread of violence will be seen here as permeating or overarching these domains in various ways.

Given that the conscripts of interest in this study are essentially white individuals who fought predominantly black armed forces, it is quite clear to the astute reader that the war on South Africa's borders was deeply racialised with its primary goal of furthering the interests of the white minority. It is only natural then that the question of whiteness or white identity arises. Much research has understandably been devoted to the study of black persons both during and following the abolishment of apartheid (Altman, 2004). Perhaps an increasing focus on the study of whiteness is now called for? However, by studying whiteness one not only produces or uncovers a body of knowledge, but potentially constitutes and reproduces racialised subjects of enquiry, and therefore there is the very real threat that by studying whiteness one has the potential to re-inscribe racialised categories, subjects and asymmetries (Ratele, 2007; Stevens, 2007). It is also noted by Stevens (2007) that whiteness studies run the risk of uncritically accepting white identity self-articulations and that whiteness studies may be incorrectly perceived as a "silver bullet" for understanding and combating racism, rather than as a complementary and often secondary critical tool for anti-racist praxis. Yet despite these constraints which this project fully acknowledges, the study of whiteness has important contributions to make as far as anti-racist endeavours are concerned.

Most white South Africans benefitted from apartheid (Pillay, 2008). The privileges associated with whiteness were not however absolute, but instead they were acted upon by other axes of relative advantage or subordination, such as gender and class (Frankenburg, 2009). Most white South Africans were complicit spectators, if not active agents, in the perpetuation of the racialised apartheid system which upheld the idea of white supremacy (Nettleton, 1972). Similarly, it is important to note that racism not only shapes and influences those it subordinates, but also those that it privileges (Collier, 2005). It is essential that these and similar issues are

acknowledged if the past is to be negotiated, reconciliation achieved, and transformation actualised. This study argues that white South Africans warrant study as they are still a key broker in the social fabric of South Africa and hold significant sway in the country and its attempts at transformation and reconciliation. As the key enforcers of apartheid and the dominant race during those times one could argue that there are key events that need to be highlighted and elaborated on in order for meaningful reparations and progress to be made in South Africa.

It has been suggested that locating whiteness, rather than only racism more broadly, at the centre of anti-racism, will focus attention on how white identity is shaped by and endorses broader, more covert racist culture, which is often accepted as normative (Bergerson, 2003; Gillborn, 2005; Green & Sonn, 2006). Wray (2006) notes that a shift from the subordinate to the dominant is needed in order to promote anti-racist practices. By only focusing on the subordinate and marginalised black identity one is essentially othering that identity and implicitly accepting that the dominant white identity is normative and therefore not worthy of research. Such a shift is necessary to help to problematise the dominant (in this case whiteness) (Cooper, 2008). Similarly, in order to understand blackness and the tenets of racism it is necessary to study whiteness (Foster, 2006).

This is due to the fact that blackness or otherness is largely a white colonialist construction further entrenched by such organisations as the SADF (Clarke, 2003; Steyn, 2001). Thus, to truly understand the experience of what it was to be black one also needs to fully address its antithesis, whiteness, for one does not exist without the other (Nuttal, 2001). Work such as this may also assist in deconstructing Manichean world views that one could argue were perpetuated by the Apartheid regime which saw white individual as inherently good and black individuals as inherently evil (Bulhan, 1985). Bulhan (1985) argues that the Manichean world is fundamentally a ‘caldron’ that uses violence to dominate the colonised people militarily and economically. This is not dissimilar to the view adopted by the apartheid government. By focusing on and problematising whiteness, which has historically been the transparent norm used to define ‘race’ which enforced this idea of a Manichean world view in South Africa during apartheid, broader and more pervasive racial equality is promoted (Bulhan, 1985; White, 2002).

Arguably, former white conscripts in South Africa are a group of individuals who have been underexplored in the context of contemporary South Africa. In this study, discourse will be used

as a vehicle for understanding how certain ideologies constantly reinforce and reproduce each other. Thus what we are interested in here is how in contemporary South African discourses of whiteness and masculinity continue to play themselves out in talk around militarisation, and more specifically, talk concerning the 'border war' in South Africa. The hope here is that this endeavour will ultimately shed light on how these individuals who participated in this war make sense of their whiteness and masculinity in contemporary South Africa.

A growing body of literature is emerging globally under the auspices of critical race theory (CRT) in places such as India, the United States of America and the United Kingdom, regarding racism, whiteness and white racial identity (Reddy, 2005). The defining thrust in the critical study of whiteness is to make white identity a problem worthy of investigation and critical discussion (Roediger, 2009). CRT consists of five basic elements which focus on "(1) the centrality of race and racism and their intersection with other forms of subordination, (2) the challenge to dominant ideology, (3) the commitment to social justice, (4) the centrality of experiential knowledge, and (5) the transdisciplinary perspective" (Reddy, 2005, p.14). While each of these themes are not new or unique in and of themselves, collectively they represent a challenge to the existing modes of scholarship and academia (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). In line with these concepts this study aims to explore the intersection of masculinity and whiteness as they emerge and perhaps to a degree, cast doubt on commonly accepted discourses which have not only become normalised but which also further perpetuate racial stereotypes. This research takes the stance that it is at the intersection of these two categories or discourses that interesting insights into the concepts of masculinity and whiteness can be gleaned.

The second theoretical approach that this study will align with is that of critical masculinity studies (CMS). The main thrust of CMS examines how men and masculinities are gendered, and how those gendering processes intersect with other social relations and social divisions. The approach argues for studies on men that are critical, interdisciplinary, relational, materialist, deconstructive and anti-essentialist. Research within the field has, amongst other issues, focused on historical and contemporary constructions of different kinds of masculinity, and developed critical approaches to the socio-cultural hegemonies constituted in an interplay between masculinity/ies and other socio-cultural markers such as class, ethnicity, sexuality and nationality (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004).

This study is thus located within such theoretical frameworks due to the fact that CRT and CMS offer insights, perspectives, methods and pedagogies that guide many efforts to identify, analyse and transform the structural and cultural aspects which maintain systems of racism (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). In South Africa however, there is a paucity of literature considering the configuration of whiteness (Foster, 2006). Moreover, the literature reflects very little as far as white identity, masculinity and militarised aspects of violence is concerned (Foster, 2006). Thus this research contributes to such a body of knowledge, helping not only to add to global knowledge but also to bridge the gap between international and local literature. Furthermore, as this study forms part of the Apartheid Archive Research Project (www.apartheidarchive.org), it contributes to an archive which aims to preserve everyday experiences of racism which occurred during apartheid (Green, Sonn & Matsebula, 2007).

### 1.3. The scope of the present study

Given what has been mentioned above, the present study focuses on white male South Africans who were conscripted during apartheid. The following research questions have been generated to guide the study:

- To elicit the nature of operational experiences[2] in the talk of former white conscripts of the South African 'border war'.
- To uncover the nature of discourses of whiteness and masculinity embedded in the talk of these participants.
- To examine the possible functions of these discourses in contemporary South Africa in relation to meaning making processes in terms of experiences of the 'border war'.

### 1.4. Chapter organisation

**Chapter 2** reviews the literature in order to locate the study within the context of conscription, masculinity and whiteness. The literature review provides a comprehensive outline of militarized masculinity and white identity. By doing so, the review positions the male ex-combatants of

[2] By operational experiences, any form of experience related to service in the SADF, be it in active duty or a simple office job, is implied.

interest in this study at the intersection of masculinity and white identity. These ideas form the foundation of further arguments built into the literature review concerning the various experiences of conscription and the way in which these experiences are dealt with by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as well as hegemonic militarized masculinity. Previous studies are also discussed in order to differentiate this study from work done in a similar vein, it is identified that this study offers novel finding in terms of the intersectionality of subjectivities.

**Chapter 3** outlines the research design and method utilised in order to develop the study. The sampling techniques, means of data collection, and data analysis approach are described and supported with theory. Significant ethical considerations are also discussed and a section on self-reflexivity is included in order to account for the researcher's subjective role in the research process.

**Chapter 4** presents the results of the analysis. The chapter is structured as a discussion that locates the various discourses arising from the texts in light of the arguments put forward in the literature review. Discourses of whiteness are looked at in terms of deconstructing the construction of whiteness, discourses of masculinity and conscription and the discourses analysis is concluded by looking at discourses of betrayal and where this leaves white South African men today.

**Chapter 5** concludes the research report with a summary of the findings. It also provides both theoretical and practical recommendations as well as acknowledging the various strengths and limitations of the study.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### 2.1. Historical overview

"If one person's 'terrorist' is another's 'freedom fighter', then South Africa's white minority's 'Border War' was the black majority's 'liberation struggle'" (Baines, 2008, p. 210). The term 'border war' was usually assigned to the war waged in Angola/Namibia but this conflict was actually an extension of the civil war waged within South Africa which extended to the wider regions around the country as well. The term was ubiquitous in white South African public discourse during the 1970s and 1980s. As a social construct it encoded the views of (most) whites who believed the apartheid regime's rhetoric that the SADF was shielding its citizens from the conflated threat of Communism and African Nationalism. However, the meaning of the "'border war' is not fixed; it has had to be constantly renegotiated during the country's transition by ex-conscripts from the SADF, as well as ex-combatants from the ranks of the liberation armies" (Baines, 2008, p. 214).

Between 1974 and 1988 South Africa was involved in a protracted low-intensity armed conflict in the border area between Namibia and Angola, referred to as the 'border war' (Callister, 2007). In addition to this, there were also occasional secret incursions deep into Angolan territory, which were vehemently denied by the authorities (Vale, 2003). Initially, South Africa's venture was depicted at home as a battle against Communist forces seeking to dominate the region (Callister, 2007). During the second half of this period the apartheid government maintained a force of about 120 000 soldiers in the conflict zone, or operational area (Vale, 2003). The majority of the force at any time was comprised of conscripts who were there because of compulsory military service for young white males (Callister, 2007). During the course of the 'border war' the SADF expanded exponentially, drawing in more conscripts for longer spells (Baines, 2008). While many of the conscripts did a tour of duty in the operational area, not all of them experienced active duty (Baines, 2008; Callister, 2007).

South Africa's involvement in the 'border war' was represented as a defence against the "total onslaught" of communism and its infiltration into the country (Vale, 2003). In this way the South African apartheid state endeavoured to enforce boundaries between 'insiders' and the 'other' (Baines, 2008). As apartheid was resisted within South Africa, the country also became an

international pariah and was increasingly isolated (Callister, 2007). This added to the siege mentality of the South African government (Baines, 2008). There was a great deal of denial about what was happening in Angola, given that South Africans professed to be protecting South West Africa/Namibia (Baines, 2008). While the conflict was in progress, information about it was filtered before being released to the press, and was often skewed and self-serving (Vale, 2003). In 1989, in response to an internationally negotiated agreement in preparation for Namibian independence, Cuban troops withdrew (Baines, 2008). South African troops left Namibia under the auspices of the United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG), and compulsory military service ended in South Africa in 1993 (Callister, 2007; vale, 2003).

From 1975 South Africa had become increasingly involved in a protracted 'border war' on Namibian and Angolan soil, until shortly before their withdrawal. Most white men in South Africa who were older than 16 left school between 1967 and 1994 and were subsequently enlisted in to the military to serve their years of conscription. Thus, for the most part many of the conscripts were freshly out of school and commanded by society and government to commit two concurrent years of their lives in the military and tours of duty for the following 8 years after that (Gibson, 2010). The general narrative of the state at the time was flavoured by two major arms (Gibson, 2010). One consisted of a war that was raging between communism and anti-communism (Gibson, 2009). The other was more concerned with the idea of some sort of defense against the perils of communism its invasion into South Africa from surrounding states (Gibson, 2009).

It has also been argued that this concept of anti-communism that flavoured South African society at the time was often painted with the ideology of a war that was being fought for the freedom of religion and against characters that were constructed in the light of an 'anti-Christ' (Gibson, 2010). Indeed, in some of the submissions that were made within the TRC hearing that was particularly focused on conscription, some who were more religiously minded testified that the religious flavor that characterised the discourse of the border war in many ways justified it (Gibson, 2009). Furthermore, there was also indication that conscripts were issued with a customized edition of the New Testament that contained a message form the president in South Africa at the time (Gibson, 2009). This message indicated that the bible issued was a vital piece of their military equipment. It would seem that this indirect support of religion for the 'border

war' was only really to change well after the height of military activity (Vale, 2008). Vale (2008, p. 77) reports "that the official publication of the Dutch Reformed Church only started to raise questions about the war in Angola in 1988". By this time the 'border war' was at its end.

For many years the war endeavour embarked on by the National Party was kept hidden from the South African Public (Gibson, 2009). Indeed, many individuals report having very little knowledge of what conscripts went through on the field of battle during this time (Gibson, 2009). Linked to this air of secrecy that characterised the 'border war', many of the stories of individuals who fought as conscript have largely remained unexamined and to a large extent ignored by contemporary society (Gibson, 2010). Furthermore, it has also been stated that the aspects of the war effort that fell outside of the South African borders were also not really considered within the areas concern during the TRC (Gibson, 2010). Added to this, the hearings that were held concerning conscription paid little or no attention to this dynamic (Gibson, 2010). One could argue here that this is largely a view that has been perpetuated by society at large.

### 2.2. Experiences of conscription

Arguably, there is only a small amount of research that has been conducted within this field of study especially where warfare and South African conscripts are concerned (Gibson, 2009). Indeed one could opine here that the discourses that characterised the existence of these individuals during apartheid have gone largely unexplored for many years (Gibson, 2010). There have however been multiple studies that have considered the psychological determinants of conscription (Gibson, 2009; Gibson, 2003). Authors such as Davey (1988), Feinstein et al. (1986), Flischer (1987), Foster (1991), Draper (1999) and (Gibson, 2009) provide prime examples of this. However, one could argue that these endeavours do not sufficiently address the multitude of issues that this project aims to address. Price (1989), highlighted additional areas of concern such as processes of socialisation which she felt were closely linked to such things as masculinity, patriotism and the emphasis on pride that was promoted in the military.

Additionally, authors such as Feinstein (1986) have also looked at students and attitudinal influencers as well as former conscripts interactions with their mothers (Gibson, 2009). Indeed what has been argued here is that studies such as these highlight the fact that more than just the individual, other factors such as parents, family, and what one could term socialising institutions

such as veld-school camps and cadet programs, peers and the media played an extremely important role in garnering certain perceptions concerning conscription (Gibson, 2009). Aspects such as this are important levels of nuance that help us in understanding the general culture in white society at the time that favoured conscription (Gibson, 2009). The aspects of socialisation explored by the research mentioned above illustrate how conscription or militarisation for young men at the time was something that was revered in some ways by many white individuals and families. This also points to a connection between the psychological determinants during the early stages of conscription, and linked to this the various developmental or existential crises that accompanied these determinants (Flischer, 1987; Gibson, 2010).

Many have argued that conscripts were exposed to a culture that promoted the view that it was their responsibility to wage war against a perceived enemy of the country, whether they were communist Cuban forces, various surrounding states or terrorists that were plotting to overthrow the country (Gibson, 2009). Added to this these individuals frameworks of perception were reinforced by social institutions such as the family, education system, mainstream media and the church (Feinstein et al., 1986). Some citizen force soldiers were reluctant to be deployed in Angola, but by far the majority regarded border duty as a necessary commitment to make in order to ensure the continuation of white power and privilege (Cock, 1991; Draper, 1999). Occasionally, conscripts defied the system and joined oppositional organizations such as the End Conscription Campaign (ECC), and in rare instances national servicemen even went into exile to join the ranks of the armed wings of the African National Congress (ANC) or Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) (Flischer, 1987). By and large, South Africa's citizen soldiers believed the dominant ideology that held that 'terrorists', aided and abetted by Communists were threatening to destroy white society in the country (Feinstein et al., 1986).

Focusing more closely on the subjective experiences of male conscripts in South Africa at the time, there is a strong argument here that these individuals were in fact socialised into a system of violence and brutality (Gibson, 2010; Cock, 1991). One could argue here that the military propagated a process that transformed unique and free thinking individuals into a homogenous grouping that responded obediently to commands (Gibson, 2009; Cock, 1991). As with most military training systems soldiers were conditioned to react timeously to authority, to be dominant, competitive, aggressive and insensitive to the plight of their dehumanized enemies

(Gibson, 2009; Cock, 1991). What one finds is that masculinity in the military context was used as a device to turn young teenagers into soldiers ready for war (Gibson, 2010). The military training techniques that were used to achieve this consisted of extreme levels of physical exhaustion as well as a focus on bodily fitness and stamina (Gibson, 2009). There have also been reports from some studies such as those done by Gibson (2009) where conscripts have expressed aspects of depersonalisation as well as intensified male bonding. There is sense here that in many ways conscripts were coerced or socialized into a culture of violence and warfare (Gibson, 2009). There are examples of this sense of coercion from all aspects of these individual's existence, be it through ideological and social means, it was also reinforced by expectations of loved ones as well as broader society (Gibson, 2010).

These aspects of coercive socialisation and the resultant compliance of conscripts one could argue further intensified the violent influence of the military and the time these individual's spent on the border (Gibson, 2009). A variety of responses to conscription were expressed by former conscripts, some chose to prolong their time to conscription by embarking on academic pursuits while others accepted their duty willingly (Gibson, 2009). On the more extreme end of the spectrum, some attempted to avoid conscription completely, by either emigrating or in extreme cases committing suicide (Gibson, 2010). To object to conscription on a conscientious level was a less accepted and contentious response, indeed those who decided to visibly oppose or object conscription chose a path of visibly rejecting the National Party and its violent enforcement of a racialised policy (Gibson, 2009). This was seen by most in white society at the time as the ultimate gesture of betrayal of masculine expectation and white minority rule (Cock, 1991). On an ideological level this meant that one was perceived to renounce National Party rule and side with the enemy, the African National Congress, at least on an ideological level (Gibson, 2009).

Many of the participants looked at in this study described this mechanism of having no real choice in the matter of conscription as they faced being cast out and rejected by white society if they opted not participate in military service. Furthermore, in terms of the mechanisms of training mentioned above it would seem too that the use of masculinity as a device that turned young men into soldier was also an important area of interest in this study. It would seem then the mechanisms of conscription were not straight forward or easy to break down but rather quite complex and diffuse encompassing many aspects of a potential conscript's existence.

When the military conflict ended twenty years ago and national service was subsequently phased out, former soldiers sought to make sense of the time they spent in uniform (Baines, 2008). Many could not understand why they had been asked to sacrifice so much only to surrender power to those whom they had previously regarded as 'the enemy' (Baines, 2008). Some were convinced that their leaders had betrayed them (Baines, 2008). However, most remained silent: either out of a sense of loyalty to the old regime and fellow soldiers, or for fear of being held accountable by the ANC government for war crimes or human rights violations (Baines, 2008). Whatever the case, there can be little doubt that the national service generation paid a price for defending the system of white minority rule.

Draper (1999) opines that the impact of discourses that were centred on patriotisms, sacrifice, terrorism, the danger of communism and the threat that was perceived to all that was held close to the hearts of white South African men, were very influential. The results of Drapers (1999) study indicated that conscripts did not really see any other options when faced with joining the army, indeed many were far too young and inexperienced to object conscription. For some the pressure lay mostly at a familial level, families in which fathers and even grandfathers had fought in the Second World War saw this process of going to the army as a masculine rite (Draper, 1999). Where conscripts would embark on the journey of war and return home real men (Draper, 1999). In terms of the social and ideological discourses of the military conscripts often report that this was almost an overwhelming presence that left these individuals with relatively little agency in terms of choosing to join the military or not (Draper, 1999). Cawthra et al. (1994) also gave attention to the use and influence of political propaganda and indoctrination during training. The authors focus on a number of psychological effects of conscription, such as dehumanization, alienation and fear. Both authors mention the high rate of suicide among conscripts (Cawthra et al., 1994).

### 2.2.1. 'Border' warfare and psychological dislocation

Much has been written in terms of the psychological impacts of warfare and violence. Indeed within psychological literature, it is largely accepted that the process of living through violent events both a victim or as an aggressor can have a deep impact on an individual's psychological wellbeing (Gibson, 2009). The impact that violence such this can have on an individual is

substantial and can result in various degrees of emotional damage which includes such things as depression, flashbacks, violent rage, severe mood swings, disturbing dreams, anxiety and apathy (Gibson, 2009). These types of outcomes have been positioned by veterans as the typical or classical manifestations of the effects of violence (Gear, 2008). Gear (2002; 2008) argues that, although flavoured by a more general focus on the broader issues that conscripts faced, the outcomes of such emotional damage could quite easily be constructed as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). It has commonly been argued that syndromes such as PTSD result from incomplete or insufficient processing of traumatic events (Gibson, 2009).

The use of certain Afrikaans terms by participants in previous research has also proven significant, the use of words such as *"Stol"* which in Afrikaans means that something hardens, freezes or congeals provide one with key insights into the psychological and emotional states of these individual's during the war (Gibson, 2009). Indeed one could argue here that a large amount of the literature describes the language used by conscripts, which features such words as *"bossies"*, *"bosbefok"* or *"bosbedonnerd"* when they were discussing the emotions they felt or the strange behaviour they displayed while going through the difficult and often times conflicting experiences of war (Gibson, 2009). Baines (2008, p. 6) has described this as the "permeable borderline between madness and sanity". Conway (2008, p. 84) has also argued that "its origins were influenced by the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder exhibited by troops who served on 'the border'". Furthermore, authors such as Rogez (2008, p. 121) have referred to this process as one of "cracking up".

One could further argue here that the bush may also be interpreted as a socio-cultural way of dealing with emotions of inter-personal isolation or disconnectedness (Gibson, 2009). Additionally, to be termed or to term oneself as *"bossies"* can indicate that one is so hardened by ones experiences of war that one is removed or cut off from all morality or socially dictated order (Gibson, 2009). Some authors (such as Gibson, 2009) have described this mechanism as a metaphorical state of stasis and violence, and it has been argued that this phenomenon has been confirmed by a limited number of studies that have been conducted in the areas of warfare and psychology in relation to conscription in South Africa. A seminal paper that was written by Davey (1988) concerned with military experiences in South Africa also explored some of the extreme difficulties conscripts had with intimacy when they returned to normalised civilian life

after their tour of duty. All the participants in a study conducted by Gibson (2009) were under the age of 23 by the time they had first killed or seen violence and death. Indeed, she makes the argument here that these individuals were force to grow up rapidly in the military where they went from being young boys to lethal soldiers, these individuals were thus forced to use mechanisms of doubling and numbing, as we have discussed above, in order to cope with the violence of war that they were actively involved in (Guilt, 2009). Furthermore, this also helped them in dealing with the overwhelming feelings of guilt that their involvement in the war generated (Gibson, 2009). It would seem then that in terms of this project which makes use of a similar demographic of participants, psychological or psychic mechanisms play an important role in shaping the discourses of these individuals.

Foster (1997) has also argued in a similar vein that modernity, ideology and cultural form allowed conscripts to rationalise their actions and subsequently view them as morally just and thus facilitate to the violent acts they were instructed to perpetrate. Draper (1999) further opines that experiences of conscripts were not uniform, there were individual differences between conscripts, and some were more aggressive or violent than others. During apartheid it was the assumed job of the military effort to wage the righteous war against communism which implied that conscripts were expected on some level, to kill 'terrorists' (Gibson, 2009). Accordingly, the perception that South Africa under threat was increased by the occupation of Cuban and German military forces in Angola, as well as the communist political orientation of the governments in Angola and Mozambique (Gibson, 2009). The next section attends more closely to the subjective experiences of warfare, post the border conflict.

### 2.2.2. The TRC: confusion, ambivalence and disillusionment

When considering aspects of the TRC and its endeavour to account for and deal with issues situated in the past it is important to acknowledge that history is always written by the victors (Baines, 2008). Thus it is clear then that the way in which the border was going to be fundamentally constructed, especially white participation in the 'border war', was invariably going to be negative and this was reinforced in part by the TRC (Baines, 2008). According to Baines (2008), few former national servicemen agreed to testify before the TRC because most

believed it to be biased against the SADF as the institution which they had served. Whitty (2005) explains their reluctance to testify in the following terms:

> "Bound by a sense of honour to their fellow troops, and the patriarchy still espoused by white South Africa, few men have come forward and spoken about their experiences, however barbaric and mundane, in South Africa's border wars" (p. 34).

If ex-conscripts were suspicious of the TRC, they were equally wary of public reaction to the divulgence of heinous acts (Whitty, 2005). This is not to imply that soldiers routinely engaged in atrocities. Rather, there were misgivings that their conduct might be equated with that of other branches of the security forces that engaged in political assassinations, kidnappings, torture, and other acts of terror (Whitty, 2005). Their unwillingness to accept blame was compounded by the fact that the submission by a clique of retired SADF generals refused to acknowledge their role in perpetrating human rights abuses both in and outside South Africa (Baines, 2008). Under these circumstances, certain conscripts reported that the lack of public knowledge about the war created suspicion of their stories, while others were summarily dismissed as sympathy seekers or outright liars by the former SADF generals and their apologists (Baines, 2008). Thus, ex-soldiers felt betrayed when the very authorities that they were convinced would defend their actions left them in the lurch. If trauma in many instances involves a betrayal of trust and the abuse of relations of power, then it is not surprising that many veterans embraced victimhood (Baines, 2008; Whitty, 2005). Thus, the selective amnesia of the retired generals was compounded by ordinary soldiers' self-imposed silence (Whitty, 2005).

Gibson (2009, p. 82) reflects further based on her study of white ex-conscripts that all the men expressed a sense of "disillusion about their involvement in the war and were in some or other way of the opinion that the 'border war' had been, "a terrible, terrible waste…."". Gear (2002) argues further that for many of the ex-conscripts that took part in her study there was a prevailing sense of anger and betrayal when discussing the former government. Indeed, the argument was made here by Gear (2002) that respondents felt excluded by the ANC's emphasis on affirmative action. Furthermore, many of these individuals lost their jobs and their status of power as white individuals (Gear, 2002; Gibson, 2009). In line with the findings of this study, Gear (2002) reports that according to her respondents it was also tough for those who chose to remain within the armed forces as they too had to come to term with changes. The change in governance also

meant that white conscripts who were still in the army, effectively had to integrate into a 'new' defence force that included soldiers who had once been regarded as the enemy (Gear, 2002). This is also in line with the findings of Gibson (2009), who found the 'border war' had brought very little or no resolution for those who participated before they were thrust back into a normal civilian existence. Furthermore, the argument is made here that in spite of the meaning that many who were conscripted had attached to their experiences in the army, this meaning had come to make very little or no sense within the framework of contemporary South African society they now found themselves situated in (Gibson, 2009).

This was also reflected in some of the findings of the TRC (Borer, 2003; Mamdani, 1996, 2000, 2002; Robins 1998; Soyinka-Airewele, 2004; Van der Merwe & Gobodo-Madikizela, 2007), where the traumatic and complex experiences of these individuals who now exist in a country with such a violent past were placed into the public arena for all to see. Indeed, Gibson (2009, p. 82) argues that currently within research there is a focus on the idea of a differentiation between what is "private and public, inside and outside, home, community and state, political and criminal, heroes and villains, beneficiaries and oppressors, past and present". The point is made here however, that these points of difference are not always maintained; rather they are often blurred and messy as opposed to being distinct outcomes of violence (Gibson, 2009).

Added to the points made above, the TRC also placed a large amount of focus on the process of confessing as a means of rectifying the wrongs of the past, this approach has been widely criticised for its simplicity (Gibson, 2010). Furthermore, the TRC has also been criticised for the way in which it made us of a specific narrative style that many have likened to a process of Christian catharsis or confession (Gibson, 2009). This being said the point can also be made here that in order for a non-western society such as ours to recover from trauma, testimony and reparation as we saw in the TRC is necessary in order reconciliation to happen (Gibson, 2009). Authors such as Van der Merwe & Gobodo-Madikizela (2007) have made the point that in order for one to recover and fully process trauma that is violent in nature it is important that the recollection of the violent event is told to an audience that will pay attention and respond in an acceptable manner. The TRC however, focused predominantly on the narratives of victims more broadly during apartheid and it would seem there was less of a focus on conscripts who served in

the ‘border war’ (Gibson, 2003; Gibson, 2009). Thus to some extent, the positive psychological outcomes of the TRC were felt by some and not others (Stevens, 2006).

The narratives presented at the TRC were also posed within a specific light and one could argue that for some this was fairly restrictive (Gibson, 2009). Also, one runs the risk here of implying a set of guidelines by which the past can be interpreted in terms of the present as well as within which categories it is acceptable to make reference to, in terms of the past (Gibson, 2009). The recollections of the conscripts in this study were far more contingent and fluid, as they tried to make sense of the past in light of the present and to reinterpret it in relation to the symbols and meanings they had been forced to embrace in the military and its ideological culture.

Borer (2003) further reinforces the point made above, by arguing that this process of creating a socially sanctioned discourse of human rights and equality generally creates groupings of both victims and perpetrators of violence each of which one could assume are uniform and characterised by certain qualities. However, the clear separation of these two grouping is not always easy to maintain and the TRC provides prime example of this (Gibson, 2009). It has been argued that people who were represented as victims in one situation may at other times have been seen clearly as perpetrators of violence in another (Gibson, 2009). Added to this for many of the conscripts the violence that they committed during apartheid was socially sanctioned or accepted at the time, however, by the time the TRC hearings were help these act were seen as oppressive and often looked at as political crimes (Gibson, 2009).

Thus, what one finds here is a switching of roles in a sense, where the war heroes and enforcers of public safety during apartheid were repositioned as perpetrators of violence and oppression while the individuals they one believed to be agents of terror they were waging war against, were now constructed as innocent members of the public and in some cases heroes of a battle fought for freedom (Gibson, 2009). This switching of roles was examined in TRC accounts that dealt with events of people being killed because they had been believed to be in support of the ANC, even though they were mostly likely innocent of such support (Gibson, 2009). In a similar light, there were also instances within the TRC where individuals who were deemed to be heroes of the fight for freedom were in fact revealed to be betrayers and violators of moral codes (Gibson, 2003).

Accordingly, Gibson (2009) argues that in her study the ex-combatants expressed the fact that for those who were coerced or forced to respond to conscription and embark on military duty, this process of change where one finds former terrorist being transformed into freedom fighter almost overnight, was very unsettling and left these individuals with a strong sense of disillusionment. In many ways this move almost in the opposite direction, seemed to discredit all of the sacrifice and motivation for their violent actions (Gibson, 2009). Added to this it would seem that the motivation or impetus they has used to justify their violent behaviour during the war had now been turned into an ideology that contemporary society had come to reject (Gibson, 2009). In sense then these individuals went through a process of realisation, where they came to understand that the individuals they had believed to be faceless supporters of an evil ideology were simply civilian supporters, which was strongly reinforced in the processes of the TRC (Gibson, 2009). This mechanism of realisation has left these individuals with a strong sense of duality or paradox, similar to the discourses of paradox explored in the analysis section of this report (Gibson, 2009). These contradictions however were not exclusive to white conscripts, as it was also found that heroes or freedom fighters of the ANC who were also criticised for violations of human rights during the TRC (Gibson, 2010).

In terms of the TRC's explicit examination of conscription, many have also criticised it for the blind eye that was turned towards testimonies that were in support of conscription, it would seem that for the most part the accounts provided were largely against conscription and the defence force (Gibson, 2009). Where those who participated in the hearings were largely constructed as powerless and predominantly sufferers of psychological damage (Gibson, 2009). As we have seen the 'border war' was a far more complex phenomenon than the TRC had accounted for, as those who were victims of violence in some circumstances and in others perpetrators (Gibson, 2009). The TRC was able to show this mechanism however many have expressed the fact that often it did not reflect on it (Gibson, 2009). What one found was that the TRC focused rather on narratives of trauma (Gibson, 2009). Colvin (2003) reinforces this point:

> "With the inception of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 'storytelling' arrived as a privileged mode of publicly communicating painful experiences […] part psychotherapy, part legal testimony and part historiography, 'telling your story' has become a powerful, if

ambivalent way to contribute to a new history of the old South Africa […] memory worth talking about – worth remembering – is memory of trauma" (p. 153).

With regards to this type of discourse, Gibson (2009) has coined the phrase 'trauma talk' which she argues is generally riddled with pain and difficulty and also inherently has hierarchies associated with it. Furthermore, Gibson (2009) argues here that there are particular combat narratives that are associated with trauma that are generally more accepted by the broader public as being credible, for example fighting on the side of the ANC against the National Party as opposed to being a conscript who fought in the 'border war' in support of the national party. However, at the same time the point is also made here by Gibson (2009) that being characterised as a person who suffers from a psychological affliction like PTSD was perceived by the group of ex conscripts she interview as something negative and undesirable, and many described this diagnosis as stigmatising and an indication to others that an individual lacked toughness and was perhaps attention seeking (Gibson, 2009). Macnair (2005) states further that, even psychotherapists find it tough to observe accounts of atrocities when told by those who are guilty of this act. To large degree here there seems to be a sense that ex-combatants were aware of this difficulty others had in listening to their narratives of atrocities that were committed during the war and to large extent one could argue here that this has contributed to their resulting silence on the topic (Gibson, 2009).

The ex-combatants interviewed in Gibson's (2009) study expressed the fact that they were constructed as individuals with mental toughness and the psychological ability to cope with the trauma of warfare and the acts they had committed. She states further that as members of the privileged white society in South Africa their current position of crisis as a result of the trauma they experienced during the war is not unlike that of the Afrikaner which many argue is perceived currently by broader society as being self-inflicted (Gibson, 2010). Indeed, in this regard it would seem that many 'border war' veterans "still prefer to remain silent, even though they realise that they are somehow unlike conscripts who did not experience combat" (Gibson, 2009, p. 86). Regardless of how the TRC may be construed or contested, the hearings focused on the apartheid state as whole and not on the individuals that were on the ground truly experiencing the horrors of war propagated by this racialised system of rule (Gibson, 2009).

### 2.2.3. Breaking silence

The TRC nevertheless made the emergence of contesting memories and narratives about the 'border war' more possible, and this trend has been slowly gaining impetus. In this regard Baines (2008) argues that: "ex-combatants from both sides have earnestly begun to explore their place in post-apartheid South Africa by revisiting the memories of their military experiences. They are breaking rank and telling their stories" (p. 2). Swartz and Drennan (2000), equally stress the import of the unheard and unattended narrative memories of veterans in relation to the theatre and "drama of forgiveness" of the TRC (Swartz & Drennan, 2000, p. 212). As in the case of Vietnam veterans, the narratives of former conscripts who were deployed outside South Africa are still at odds with the process of public memory-making particularly since they blur the boundaries between heroes and victims and between perpetrator, victim and beneficiary (Gibson, 2009).

At the same time, and arguing from the collective as starting point, Swartz and Drennan (2000) question the assumption that a process of national healing will bring about individual healing and see this view as problematic, incomplete and fragmented. Borer (2003) furthermore argues that, just as victims are not a homogeneous group, neither are the perpetrators and/or beneficiaries of oppression. The issue is further complicated because the morality of violence perpetrated by the state and those resisting it, presents an unresolved conundrum (Borer, 2003).

Despite the problems raised about the notions of forgiveness, healing and reconciliation promoted by the TRC, the process did at times recognize the complexity, as well as the fact that there was a great deal of slippage between religious and individualised notions of reconciliation and societal political understandings of it (Borer, 2004). As with many legal and trauma discourses aimed at healing, the narrative nevertheless had to take a particular form, and as Prager (1998) argues, it could not give sufficient recognition to "the extraordinary complexity of individual subjectivity" but rather reduced or disciplined (e.g. experiences of war) to "external material conditions that impinge upon the person" (p. 131). In this regard Borer (2004, p. 15) uses the notion of reconciliation as "thin" (i.e. based on the assumption that political conflict and discord is normal and to be expected). Reconciliation, like forgiveness and healing, is complex, multi-layered and constantly progressing. Absolution, reconciliation and healing will always be difficult and might be reached by some and not others, in an on-going cycle from one generation

to the next. When concerned with aspects of conscription and the border, the topics of race and white identity cannot go unexplored. As has been mentioned above, during apartheid a very specific demographic was targeted for compulsory military service in South Africa. Furthermore due to the nature of the aims of this research, more explicit discussion is required.

## 2.3. Race, whiteness and war in South Africa

### 2.3.1. Race as a social category

Apartheid was a system founded on racial segregation which saw all sectors of society cleaved according to 'race', where one's race was defined according to skin colour and seen as natural and objectively determined (Rattansi, 2007). However race was a pseudo-scientific construct which was used to categorise people based on biological or phenotypical differences. It was assumed that 'race' was a scientifically objective category that existed independently of human classifying activities (Rattansi, 2007; Lopez, 2000). Indeed, during apartheid 'race' was taken as being a natural truth, despite overwhelming evidence that is was a social construction used to legitimise racialised domination (Cooper, 2008; Scott and Marshall, 2005). Social categories generally become naturalised, social facts which individuals accept and are unable to change - a fact which was seen to a great extent during apartheid. Such categories are often "naturalised" and viewed as being normative (Fearon, 1999; Stevens, Swart & Franchi, 2006).

Today however, there is a deep criticism of 'race' as a marker of any fundamental difference between people. 'Race' is no longer seen as the indelible mark of one's bloodline, phenotype or other biological marker. Instead 'race' (like other qualifications such as ethnicity, gender, identity etc.), is accepted as a social construct marked by subjectivity, fluidity, multiplicity, contingency and corruptibility (Green, Sonn & Matsebula, 2007; Lee, 2004; Steyn 2001). It is argued that 'race' is a social construct brought into existence both in and through discursive practices and it is only in this way that it is experienced as real (Foster, 2006; White, 2002). Thus the notion that truths or realities are essentially products of different contexts, perspectives and sense-making mechanisms is established. It is, however, important to note that such thought does not question the existence or lived experience of socially constructed phenomena, but rather our

ability to understand them without a specific theory of knowledge of or framework (Foster, 2006; White, 2002).

In short the apartheid state employed the socially constructed notion of whiteness to establish and maintain a state of white supremacy through militaristic endeavours which discriminated against non-white persons and fostered inequality (Cooper, 2008). Due to its socially constructed nature, whiteness has a set of linked dimensions. Firstly, it is a location of structural advantage and racial privilege. In many respects whiteness is an omnipotent fantasy of wholeness that attempts to avoid any feelings of lack, vulnerability or humiliation. Secondly, it is a standpoint from which white people look at themselves, other and society in general. Thirdly, whiteness refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked, unnamed, normalised and invisible (whiteness was historically, and to a large degree remains, the dominant, transparent norm used to delineate 'race' and is often implicitly understood as being neutral or non-raced). Lastly, despite the constructed nature of 'race' and white privilege, the lived experiences of such phenomena are very real (Frankenburg, 2009). Furthermore, whiteness is multifaceted, situationally specific and shaped around changing meanings of 'race' in society. The meaning(s) of whiteness vary in relation to context, history, gender, class, etc. Thus, despite the tendency to view whiteness as the homogenous identity of all white people, not all whites have the same 'ethnicity'. Ethnicity implies a socially defined category based on common culture or nationality but one can safely argue that not all white individuals are of the same culture and nationality (Frankenburg, 2009). Indeed one finds that white individuals in South Africa do not originate from a single country or culture but rather one may find that there are white individuals originating from across the world. Whiteness is not homogenous but rather an overarching identity (Bergerson, 2003; Foley, 1992).

### 2.3.2. Whiteness and militarisation

During apartheid 'race' emerged as the dominant form of identity categorisation in South Africa, functioning to underpin a system of social stratification. This stratification was reinforced and maintained by a culture of militarisation propagated by the apartheid government and adopted by white South Africans. Social Identity Theory suggests that 'race' afforded many white South African the ability to fabricate and reinforce a positive self-image through comparing themselves

with other racial groups (Sennett & Foster, 1996). In this way the biophysical features of different populations became markers of social status, and were eventually internalised as sources of individual and group identities, where 'race' was conflated with identity (Smedley, 1998). Furthermore, during apartheid there was a common social identity for members of racial groups due to common experiences (such as the conscription of white males into the military), a common other, and common objectives which were enforced by militarised segregation policies. Thus, despite the fact that whiteness is by no means a homogenous identity (for instance, white English speaking South Africans' identities differ significantly from those of Afrikaans speaking white South Africans), for many white South African's there was a shared experience of whiteness, which contained the individual and offered an in-group sense of belonging/identity and in the instance of the 'border war', working as a militarised whole in defending the borders of South Africa. This containment, however, may also have served to limit the alternative ideological choices available to individuals and in a way may have forced a particular identity upon them (Foley, 1992; Sennett & Foster, 1996; Steyn, 2001).

The abolishment of apartheid, while heralding many wonderful changes within South Africa, disrupted the status quo and has left many with a sense of being adrift and alienated in a world they no longer fully understand and relate to. Those shared experiences which sought to contain the individual and provide a sense of identity during apartheid have been dismantled and new identities have to be negotiated for the individuals and the broader community, which now no longer exist in the militarised society they once did (Sennett & Foster, 1996; Steyn, 2001). This highlights the fact that social context impacts quite heavily on identity which can never live in vacuum. Steyn (2001) notes that feelings of guilt, shame, illegitimacy and so forth, are the psychological baggage that hybridised white South Africans carry with them. There is an ambivalent, unstable, guilty mesh surrounding white South African identity which continues to impact on how white individuals understand themselves, others and their relations to others. This reflects the notion that white identity, despite generally being normative, is fluid and contestatory (Collier, 2005; Frankenburg, 2004; Rattansi, 2007).

### 2.3.3. Narratives of whiteness in contemporary South Africa

'Race' is a socio-historical construct which not only organises society but also acts as an aspect of identity. Whiteness is a social construction, which, despite its fluidity and constructed nature, is a very real phenomenon for individuals and has an indelibly strong impact on them and their identity and material existence. Narratives offer a way of structuring, maintaining and arranging such social constructs in ways which are coherent and meaningful. Cultural frameworks, in which such narratives are embedded, are relative constructions as opposed to absolutes and provide discourses from which people may mix and match new subjectivities (Nuttall, 2001; Steyn, 2001).

Within white dominated societies, such as those in Europe, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Australia, the United State of America, New Zealand, etc., whiteness has and in many respects remains an undiscussed and invisible identity, which is positioned as existing outside of the cultural forces which shape and racialise other identities. This naturalisation and reification of whiteness has lead whites to imagine their identity as stable, immutable and supreme (Bonnett, 1999; Kinloch, 2003). During colonisation whites were constructed as being supreme, migrant elites. The ensuing narratives instate cultural and racial stereotypes and legitimised institutional racism, the invasion of new territories and the subordination of the local populace (Kinloch, 2003). According to Steyn (2001) in countries such as South Africa, Australia, the Southern states of the United States of America, etc., laws were passed which attempted to preserve ethnically homogenous societies and violently undermined individuals who were racially different from the white ideal.

In South Africa, many whites grew up during apartheid without being exposed to the problematisation of 'race' and the assumed superiority of whiteness (Steyn, 2001). The Apartheid state's version of the master narrative of whiteness, which is a direct extension of the colonial construction of whiteness presented above, underwrote their material and psychological experiences, whilst offering a frame for sense-making. Thus according to Steyn, (2001) during apartheid, narratives of whiteness centred on supremacy and dominance, and individuals of colour were the oppressed and dominated (often in a militaristically violent manner) in all spheres of activity. While many white South Africans supported the Nationalist government, as evidenced by the fact that they maintained power for so many years, many chose to either ignore

their implication in oppressive relations or deny it altogether. There were however white South Africans who became conscientised (or aware) and embarked on a process of altering their reality, both materially and intellectually (Nettleton, 1972).

One could argue here however that there is a largely unarticulated sentiment that yet lies at the heart of whiteness: white guilt. This somewhat theoretically repressed demon may do more to explain the 'wiggling' performed by white theorists involved in whiteness studies. Steyn (2001) has written about the articulation of white narratives in post-apartheid South Africa, a place where whiteness has been historically constructed as glaringly *obvious* in its difference. Even before April 1994, Steyn (2001) points out that white South Africans were acutely aware of their whiteness – that it was a position of privilege, the absolutely defining factor in their life chances. Steyn's (2001) ground-breaking work set in post-apartheid South Africa, problematises a notion of whiteness as identical to itself, fracturing the picture of a complete, universal white supremacy, and illustrating the ways in which narratives of whiteness may mutate and form new stories in order to accommodate changing social conditions (Steyn, 2001). Guilt, postcolonial white guilt, is a well-worn track in discourses which has run paths through the narratives of many white individuals in South Africa today (Steyn, 2001).

What is of additional interest here is the part that gender, and in particular, masculinities play in this process. Morrell (2002), in his introduction to a collection of essays on transitional masculinities in Southern Africa, notes a surge of international academic interest in men and masculinity within academia in the last ten years. Within South Africa, government policy has focused on the empowerment of the 'formerly disadvantaged': black and 'coloured' people, and women (Steyn, 2001). This leaves white men in a position which may well be seen as ethically exposed and which is certainly uncertain, fragile and politically disempowered. As Morrell (2002) notes, this has resulted in many white South African men defensively and reactively resisting changes in gender relations, hankering back to a system of male domination aligned with former racial supremacy.

The meaning of whiteness has undoubtedly shifted in recent times, although the nature, extent and desirability of this change has been interpreted in many different ways. Whiteness is no longer stable or permanent; instead it is a site of change and struggle and is characterized by

feelings of guilt, fear, alienation and dislocation. Following the democratic changes of 1994 whiteness has been unhinged from its position of political, but not so much, economic privilege. In terms of white privilege there is a great deal of vulnerability and similarity in the attitudes of whites towards white privilege, both within South Africa and globally. Whites are both constructing and being constructed by meta-narratives pertaining to the meaning of whiteness following contemporary political changes. Whites are constructing a range of *petit* narratives of whiteness, which invariably compete to explain and promote a view of how being white should be constructed in a changing racial climate (Bonnett, 1999; Farber, 2009). It would seem then that many of the aspects discussed here that are associated with whiteness and identity correspond with and reinforce those of the ex-conscripts in South Africa. There is however a final aspect that cannot go ignored when one is concerned with aspects of militarisation in South Africa, and that is masculinity.

## 2.4. Men, masculinity and militarisation

### 2.4.1. Constructions of masculinity

Contemporary writings on gender and masculinity point to the historical and cultural specificity of the concept and the lived experience of masculinity (Swain, 2002). Most research done in the field of masculinity suggests that there are multiple forms of masculinity, that there are hierarchical and hegemonic forms of masculinity and that masculinities are actively produced and created in specific historical circumstances (Connell, 1995; 2000). This suggests that no one type of masculinity has been identified everywhere. Since different cultures and different periods of history construct gender differently, we need to speak of masculinities and not masculinity (Connell, 1995; 2000, Cornwall & Lindisfarne, 1994; Skelton, 1997; Swain, 2002). Diverse forms of masculinity clearly exist within a given setting, be it social or institutional.

It is clear then that the literature acknowledges the multiplicity of masculinities, the contradictions evident within the identities of men themselves, and the power of local contexts in 'creating' manhood (Connell, 2000; Hearn, 1996; Morrell, 2002; Skelton, 1997). To understand violent practices such as those propagated during the 'border war', it is necessary to focus on the socio-cultural context and the complex relations of meaning and power within which

masculinities are constituted (Morrell, 2002). Social constructionism assists in the exploration of men's, and particularly soldiers', constructions of their identities (Morrell, 2002). There are diverse forms of masculinities within a given setting, be it social or institutional. There is a strong argument that some forms of masculinities are more powerful than others, and these hegemonic masculinities take on a dominant position in relation to more marginal ones, as we have seen above. Some authors (Connell, 2002; Swain, 2002) have argued for a relatively global hegemonic masculinity, or at least some fairly consistent universal constructions associated with successful masculinity – such as heterosexuality, the importance of physical strength, and in the case of the South Africa, whiteness – consistently emerge as key to hegemonic masculinities. Aggressive behaviour, including militarised violence and intense interest in 'conquest', is also very often important to the presentation of hegemonic masculinity (Murnen, Wright & Kaluzy, 2002).

While recognizing the plurality of masculinities constituted an indispensable first step, examining the relationships among different kinds of masculinities proves to be of extraordinary importance. In order to better grasp this complex network of practices, Connell (2005) elaborates an extremely useful typology from a relational perspective. This was used as the main analytical axis of this dissertation as means of examining masculinity as it intersects with whiteness. The four kinds of relationships among masculinities proposed by Connell (2005, P. 67) are "the hegemony, the complicity, the subordination and the marginalization".

First of all, Connell's (2005) model starts by defining the core concept of hegemonic masculinity 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" (Connell, 2005, p. 77). Apart from being always constructed in heterosexual terms, hegemonic masculinity is not a fixed type but a dynamic position that varies within historical mobile relations. Mostly embodied by white men, the characterization of hegemonic, masculinity does not only depend on social/historical contexts but also on class structures.

Secondly, the relation of complicity is intimately related to the hegemonic masculinity. Unlike normative perceptions elaborated by 'sex role' theories, Connell (2005) conceptualizes the hegemonic type of masculinity as an exemplary principle that few men actually embody, but

which the majority of men benefit from (for instance, men gained from the overall subordination of women). In order for this to happen, some masculinities establish a relation of complicity to the hegemonic model (Connell, 2005). Connell (2005) observes a third type of relationships produced within the framework of masculinities, the relations of dominance/subordination between certain collectives. The most representative example is the subordination suffered by homosexual men at the heart of a strong heteronormative patriarchal society. Similarly as it happens with other disadvantaged positions, these groups have traditionally contributed to social sciences with the most revolutionary analysis of power structures (Barrett, 1996). The military also provides prime example of this and the male body is often used as a vehicle (Barrett, 1996). In the military, as we shall see presently, the male body is a significant symbol that is used to enforce the idea of the ideal male soldier who is fit, strong and a willing tool at the disposal of military leaders (Barrett, 1996). Physical dominance and violence are easily accessible resources for structuring, negotiating and sustaining masculinities, particularly among men who because of their social positioning lack less dangerous means. In the military such means of dominance are heavily exploited (Barrett, 1996).

Finally, the relationship of marginalization is probably the most complex of this framework. While hegemonic, complicit and subordinated relational positions were internal to gender order as such, marginalized masculinities are defined by Connell (2005) as those kinds of relationships which are possible through the 'authorization' granted by the hegemonic masculinity. Hence, although certain individuals should be 'naturally' excluded from hegemonic positions, they are 'permitted' to access to them due to particular reasons. For instance, "black athletes may be exemplars in their sport domains while broad social domination over black men remains intact" (Connell, 2005, p. 80-81). Whereas Connell (2005) acknowledges that 'marginalization' is not the most adequate term, it serves to conceptualize the practices of those members belonging to displaced groups that perform hegemonic masculinity in order to gain patriarchal privileges within their group, if not the larger society (Cheng, 1999). The set of these four types of relations among masculinities constitutes an interesting network in which no type could be understood without the relations to the others; especially with regard to the central axis of hegemonic masculinity. Thus "one's membership in either the dominant group or a marginalized group is based on the conformity to hegemony" (Connell, 2005, p. 81). The positions embodied by men are always immersed in a changing dynamic of relations (Cheng, 1999).

Barrett (1996), opines that militaries all over the world have defined soldiering as an embodiment of traditional male sex role behaviours such as heterosexuality, braveness, aggression, sexual virility, independence and adventurousness. They have therefore socialised millions of men according to a traditional blueprint (Barrett, 1996). An interesting question is how one reconciles the notion of a traditional blueprint with that of the historically and socially variable masculine constructions highlighted above (Barrett, 1996). It is apparent that there has been a long association between the military and dominant/hegemonic images of masculinity (Barrett, 1996). Yet militaries are not merely random collections of men (or women). They are also stratified according to gender, race, ethnicity, class and rank (Barrett, 1996).

### 2.4.2. Military masculinity

Ethnic composition of militaries reflects the dominant ideologies and policies of the regime in power (Enloe, 1975). This is a primary factor in determining who is in the military and who is not, who is in the air force rather than in the army, and who becomes a commissioned officer and who does not (Enloe, 1975). During apartheid, the SADF was a vehicle for white dominance, especially at the higher echelons. Coloured and Indian men were recruited and given weapons training purely for self-defence in war times (Cheng, 1999). However, these soldiers were not permitted to perform combat roles and were confined to auxiliary duties (Enloe, 1975). Black men were recruited and trained for armed guard duty at military installations or as drivers, clerks, store men and dog handlers (Enloe, 1975). These different job descriptions according to racial groups point to the different masculinities (subordinate and dominant) that exist within militaries (Woodward, 2000). Across disciplines, volumes have been written about the role of the military in the construction of masculinities, but it seems that little has been said about soldiers in the military within the historical and present context in which they join the military, and how this may relate to their construction of masculinity (Enloe, 1975). If one is to take for example the specific context in South Africa both historically and currently, one would find that there are interesting intersections between race given that the ‘border war’ was arguably a war that was waged along racial lines and that only white males were part of compulsory conscription during those times (Woodward, 2000). One is thus able to see how a very specific and interesting construction of masculinity may emerge as a result of these factors in this specific demographic

of the South African population (Woodward, 2000). There has however, up to this point been very little exploration of such intersections, it was the hope that this research may explore this to some extent.

The literature on gender and the armed forces has attended not only to the development of military masculinities, but also to the way in which its tenets remain fairly unassailable within the institution because of the separation of the military from civilian life (Agostino, 1998; Barret, 1996; Connell, 1995; Gill, 1997; Lahelma, 2005; Sasson-Levy, 2003; Woodward, 2000). Nye (2007) nevertheless stresses that societies have historically valued military masculinities and its related characteristics of manliness. Culturally constructed masculine identities also enable the state to wage war. The state expects young male citizens to display and embody warrior qualities when called upon for battle in a conflict zone and/or outside the country's borders (Sasson-Levy, 2003). Yet, once these men enter civilian life, they must behave like good law abiding, peaceful citizens (Connell, 1995). Thus, while interpersonal violence may be criminalised in society, the state, as well as the public, condones the use of force against those who fall outside the parameters or borders of the state, or who are perceived to somehow threaten its integrity or ideology (Connell, 1995).

According to Wadham (2007), critical analyses of military masculinities have also been informed by feminist studies of manhood, armies, war and armed conflicts. Studies have often centred on issues of political economy, social organisation, gendered labour-divisions, and sexuality and violence (Enloe, 1989; Shefer & Mankayi, 2007). The military echelons arguably replicate the global systems of patriarchy (Shefer & Mankayi, 2007). On the whole, military institutions have been fairly closely associated with discourses and practices of men and masculinity, as male-centred institutions. They comprise a key arena for the construction of masculine identities, images and practices in society at large (Barrett, 1996; Cock, 1991; Connell, 1995; Higate & Hopton, 2005; Morgan, 1994; Shefer & Mankayi, 2007). It is argued that the structure, practices and values of the military reflect and reproduce stereotypes of both manhood and of femininity, for example, through its rituals and focus on toughness, hardness, male-bonding and self-sufficiency. Military masculinity accordingly underscores the elimination of effeminacy (Agostino, 1998; Barkawi et al, 1999; Klein, 1999). At the same time the relationship between wider society and military institutions affirms and promotes particular

masculinities and vice versa (Cock, 1991; Connell, 2000; Enloe, 1988; Krouse, 1994; Sasson-Levy, 2003; Shefer & Mankayi, 2007; Williams 1994). Critical studies of military masculinity also scrutinise the militaries co-construction of hegemonic masculinity as confrontational and bent on war (Shefer & Mankayi, 2007).

Critical military masculinity studies accordingly argue that there is a strong correlation between militarism and male dominance, but also between class relations and social inequality (Lee & Daly, 1987). Several authors (Barrett, 1996; Cock, 1991; Connell, 1995; Higate & Hopton, 2005; Morgan, 1994; Shefer & Mankayi, 2007) also emphasize hyper-masculinity, including the centrality of male heterosexual prowess and homophobia that the military produces and reproduces. Military identity is synonymous with characteristics such as fortitude, determination, honour, bravery, autonomy, being 'plucky' and daring while also displaying decorum, self-discipline, dutifulness and forbearance: characteristics fundamental to constructions of hegemonic masculinity (Cheng, 1999; Enloe, 1988; Kilshaw, 2008; Nagel, 1998). In times of armed conflict in particular, specific "embodied national self-representations" are produced and reproduced in, through and by military masculine bodies (Jarvis, 2004, p. 34). Military male bodies are both trained and marshalled to represent national symbols of power, forcefulness, gallantry and resilience (Shefer & Mankayi, 2007). Male bodies should be seen not as universal biological entities but as socially constructed phenomena that are culturally encoded as male through a complex process of social, personal, and medical-gender construction, including undergoing military training (Jarvis, 2004).

Making war is principally a male domain and ranges from conscripted and/or voluntary soldiers to their commanding elite. At the same time, men as a group are the primary producers of state - sanctioned, community and individual violence, in a structural, and frequently also an individual sense (Connell, 1995). Because members of the armed forces are expected to act in relation to conflict, strife, war and other life-and-death issues, military masculinity is often intimately connected to the domain of male violence, killing and/or being killed (Higate, 2003; Higate & Hopton, 2005; Wandham, 2007). Accordingly, the bodies of soldiers are arguably their own, as well as the nation's tools and weapons in combat and must be masculine, fit, tough and strong (Connell, 1995; Kilshaw, 2009). Soldiers are often inspected for physical and mental fitness for combat (and the ability to kill) (Bourke, 1999). They are also specifically trained to use force and

to be aggressive (Woodward, 2000). Kilshaw (2008) emphasizes that the construction of combat as potentially traumatizing or distressing goes against the grain of the hegemonic ideal of masculinity in military culture.

According to Goldstein (2001), this appeals to a warrior masculinity that forces men to endure trauma and master fear, in order to claim the status of 'manhood'. Although the treatment of trauma is currently on the agenda of most military institutions, the expression or display of distress by soldiers is still likely to be individualised, medicalised and pathologised (Fassin & Rechtman, 2009; Howell, 2006). Thus, many soldiers are hesitant to seek treatment for fear of prejudice and stigmatisation. The expression of dread, grief or distress is frequently perceived as feminine and soldiers remain reticent to articulate or admit it (Vitzthum et al, 2009).

A soldier thus cannot and does not freely choose any 'interpretation' or way to make sense of his combat experiences as he wishes. The discourse of memory and war is structured by power, and is masculinist. National memory-making processes construct, authorise and give meaning to an armed conflict or war in particular ways. Such processes can authorise some memories and devalue other interpretations (Lomsky-Feder, 2004). War memorials, for example, serve to commemorate valiant male soldiers who died for freedom, not traumatised men (or civilians), who are often perceived as somehow effeminate. Similarly, it only became acceptable for Vietnam War veterans to acknowledge their trauma, without necessarily becoming feminized, many years after the war had ended. In contrast, after the Gulf War, veterans fought to gain recognition for Gulf War Syndrome (GWS). However, the veterans insisted that they suffer from a physiological and medical condition, and not a psychological one, as they perceived PTSD as somehow feminised, and thus un-masculine (Kilshaw, 2009).

Accordingly, cultural criteria make different frameworks of models of meaning-making accessible to veterans, but within a social hierarchy. Such constructions, for example, define proper military manhood, as well as which experiences are deemed distressing. It regulates the kind of memory which is valued and available, thereby constructing hierarchies of memories, of what can be remembered, who can remember and in what way (Lomsky-Feder, 2004). The state plays a major role in this process, particularly in the way in which it emphasizes or negates the possibility of state-sanctioned combat situations as potentially distressing. For example, during the 'border war' the impact of conflict trauma on the psychological health of combatants was

known to the SADF, but the distress of conscripted soldiers was not high on the agenda of the state (Baines, 2008; Draper, 1999; Fowler, 1996). According to Fowler (1995; 1996), a conscripted psychologist, it was common to interview about 300 new troops to establish whether they were mentally fit for duty. While soldiers were supposed to be psychologically stable enough to go to war, the possible emotional aftermath was not ranked highly. In this regard, Kilshaw (2009) writes that psychological services are often perceived as 'soft', feminine and not absolutely necessary for the rank and file of the army.

Enloe (2000) states that young men of draftable age during the 1980s were propelled toward military service, not only by conscription law, but also by a desire to be seen as manly and by the fear of being labelled by others as "cowards" or pejoratively as "faggots" or "moffies". Du Pisani (2001) reports that some white men resisted the call-up. As a result, some left the country. An interesting question relates to what the implications of this were for masculinity. Conscription has been and was constructed as a crucial system for reproducing/ensuring 'normal' adult masculinity (Enloe, 2000). In many cases this image was reinforced by the media – also in South Africa (Craig, 2008). Compulsory military service has been marked by its effectiveness as a socialisation agent. Service to the nation or "national service" was often portrayed as a necessary experience that transformed young white conscripted soldiers into responsible men who could support their families and cooperate in organised civil society (Du Pisani, 2001; Enloe, 2000). An honourable discharge meant the end of 'adolescent wandering' and youthful resistance to the social order (Enloe, 2000). Cock (2001) contends that the SADF was a crucial source of ideas about appropriate behaviour for white South African men. The military successes of the SADF in the 'border war' in northern Namibia and Angola were presented by the media in such a way that the image of the warrior hero was nurtured and revered (Batley, 2007; Liebenberg, 2009). The long history of masculinity and militarism is not unique to South Africa. The link between militarisation and masculinisation is almost universal. Men have since time immemorial and in every society been expected and socialised to be the protectors and fighters (Enloe, 2000).

### 2.4.3. Contemporary studies on masculinity and the 'border war'

In concluding this discussion it is perhaps important to consider more recent studies conducted by such authors as Gibson (2009) and Mankayi (2010) that are similar to this study. Gibson's

(2009) study scrutinizes the ways in which 12 white Afrikaans-speaking former conscripts - who experienced combat during the long-drawn-out low intensity war along the border between Angola and Namibia - understand, give meaning to and deal with their violent conflict experiences in the context of political change in South Africa. Gibson's (2009) study highlights some of the predicaments faced by men who had seen and done violence during a war that has remained largely undisclosed to the public. The former conflict is also increasingly reinterpreted as having been unjust. Gibson's (2009) paper argues that Afrikaner identity has long been constructed as somehow 'spoiled' and that this affects the ways in which ex-combatants can express their memories and lived experiences of the war in contemporary South African society. Yet, veterans are increasingly creating ways in which to do so as remembering subjects, and are slowly finding ways to redistribute their experiences in an effort to make sense of the past (Gibson, 2009). However while this study is similar in many respects to the author's current researcher endeavour it does not entirely grapple with issues of whiteness and identity both during apartheid and in contemporary South Africa. Thus, providing a clear space for this study to make a contribution within the field of critical whiteness and masculinity studies.

Mankayi (2010) argues that the military and masculinity are confirmed as harmonious and mutual. Mankayi (2010) explores the idea that for many countries, military service assumes the status of initiation into manhood. In South Africa in the past, for example, young white men were legally obliged to do military service. Mankayi (2010) emphasises the importance of focusing on white masculinities within the South African military in her paper. Accordingly, strong parallels with 10 African male soldiers who also underscored hegemonic masculinity are drawn. Mankayi (2010) also explores the masculinity of young male soldiers historically and in the present context of contemporary South Africa. As is intended for this research project, Mankayi (2010) gathered transcriptions of semi-structured interviews with 14 soldiers, which were qualitatively analysed. The findings of Mankayi's (2010) research suggest that the military encompasses masculine characteristics and defines soldiering as an embodiment of traditional male sex practices. Mankayi (2010) concludes that the military context and culture exaggerate and emphasise hegemonic masculinity and heterosexuality for male soldiers. As mentioned above Mankayi's (2010) study is another broad example of work done in a similar area to the current research endeavour. This being said though, it does point us towards looking more closely at aspects of masculinity, whiteness and conscription both during apartheid and in

contemporary South African society. Furthermore, another aspect that both the above studies do not seem to speak to explicitly is the idea of the intersectionality of subjectivity.

### 2.4.4. The intersectionality in subjectivity

With regard to this dissertation, an intersectional approach implies that white masculinities must be understood as the embedded relation of racial and gendered connotations and not as a mere sum of their parts. In order to approach such phenomenon, it is indispensable to question in which ways stereotypes of masculinity and whiteness are unavoidably articulated together. Both whiteness and masculinity, as socially and culturally constructed categories, work together and interact on multiple levels to either empower or marginalize individuals (McCall, 2005). Butler (1993, p. 144) argues that, "race and sex co-constitute a corporate merging of meanings located in ... hierarchies that solidify power and make resilient the supremacy of white people". Norms of both race and sex work together to keep white males in positions of privilege. In other words, whiteness and malehood (often manifested through masculinity) become interdependent and confer privilege to white males (Butler, 1993). According to Butler (1993), to understand race, we must understand sex (which is manifested in gendered identity) and vice-versa. Likewise, to understand whiteness, we must understand masculinity (McCall, 2005). These categories of identification are mutually constitutive and intersect to create both privileged and marginalized identities, as we have seen above.

Butler's (1993) understanding of the relationship between gender and identity reveals how whiteness, masculinity, and perceptions of fixed identity are interdependent. She argues that the same "regulatory practices that govern gender also govern culturally intelligible notions of identity" and that "'coherence' and 'continuity' of 'the person' are ... socially instituted and maintained norms of intelligibility" (Butler, 1993, p. 23). To be seen as intelligible is to present an identity that is clearly demarcated in regards to race, gender, and sexuality, among others–to be intelligible is to have an identity that is understood as coherent and fixed. Just as Butler argues that intelligibility is based on the ability to "institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity" (Butler, 1993, p. 23). It can be argued here that race functions in a similar way to "maintain relations of coherence" (Butler, 1993, p. 23). Race is often understood as clear categories that we all fit into–you are either white or black or some other clearly defined race.

While offering a coherent and intelligible identity, this simple view of racial categories disallows the fluidity of racial identity.

To be intelligible, an individual must be perceived as coherent, fitting neatly into various categories according to prescribed standards (McCall, 2005). Binaries, seemingly oppositional positions, help create coherent identities by offering only two options. These binaries help maintain the status quo of fixed identity categories that allow only for the options of white/black, male/female, man/woman (Butler, 1993). These binaries also function to keep white power and privilege intact as they allow for the creation of an us/them dichotomy. In turn, the us/them dichotomy allows for the creation of inferior social status of the 'them,' a 'them' that has been defined by the 'us' in ways that disallow intersectional identities (McCall, 2005). The ideals of the 'us' become hegemonic, and are presented as the norm, as the only intelligible (and fixed) identities. If an individual exists in ways that can be interpreted so as to blur the boundaries of categories (for example, as multi-racial or transgendered), coherence is disrupted (Butler, 1993).

Coherence, described in terms of intelligibility, maintains and perpetuates the binaries that can be easily defined and understood. The blurring of boundaries, or fluidity, serves to undermine institutional whiteness and gender (and all categories of identification that insist on binaries and fixity) (McCall, 2005). What is unfortunate is that both whiteness and masculinity have become in a way hyper-intelligible to the point of transparency and "tend to manifest as natural" (Butler, 1993, p. 4). As such, they become difficult to deconstruct. To understand hegemonic white masculinity, it is important to recognize that hegemony "incorporates more than the ideology of a dominant elite ... it also includes the sedimentation of these values and interests in everyday practices and institutional arrangements" (Butler, 1993, p. 5).

Hegemonic white masculinity becomes "buried in everyday life. [These] hegemonic processes become taken-for-granted and 'natural'. As a result, "popular culture (through novels, comic books, iconic figures, etc.) plays a significant theoretical and political role in the achievement of hegemony–or, indeed, resistance to it" (Butler, 1993, p. 11). People are inundated daily with images of ideal masculinity, most often without even realizing they are consuming these images. The 'naturalness' of these ideal (white) masculinities must no longer be taken for granted (Butler, 1993). It is necessary to expose these masculinities as anything but natural and begin to

examine the whiteness that ideal masculinity has begun to depend upon as this study has attempted to do.

What is evident is that these are areas that are relatively unexplored in the literature in the South African context and more work is needed in this area in order to augment and expand this knowledge base. What therefore makes this study unique is that it aims to look at white, male former conscripts and attempts to explore how their talk of militarised events during apartheid shapes or frames the way they view themselves in contemporary South Africa. Based on all of the above, the author's own particular orientation is to conceptually rely on Critical Race Theory and Critical Masculinity Studies. Furthermore, the author is interested here in discourses within the participants talk, from a post-structuralist or social constructionist perspective, as a reflection of reality as well as a way of helping us understand reality, meaning-making and intersectionality in subjectivity in contemporary South Africa.

# Chapter 3: Method

## 3.1. Paradigm and theoretical framework

This study adopted the critical paradigm, which advocates becoming aware of how our thinking is socially and historically constructed and how this limits our actions, in order to challenge these learned restrictions (Neuman 2000). In other words, "critical approaches emphasize the social and historical origins and contexts of meaning, regardless of the individual or collective forms of embodiment and expression they might take" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 5). According to Neuman (2000) Critical research derives from socio-political and emancipatory traditions, in which ones knowing or knowledge is not seen as discovered by objective inquiry but as learned or acquired through critical discourse, debate and discussion. It accordingly puts focus on, the assessment and restructuring of current regimes, connections, and circumstances that shape and constrain the development of social practices in organizations and communities, through examining them within their historical, social, cultural and political contexts (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999; Neuman, 2000). Consequently, inquiry is directed not towards understanding for its own sake, but towards understanding as a tool to be used in the "on-going process of practical transformation of society" (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999, p. 10). Major topics of interest in this study are seen in this theoretical framework as being socially constructed and the aim of the research here is to attempt to understand the socially constructed nature of such aspects. Thus according to Terre Blanche & Durrheim (1999, p. 17), "the implication for methodologies informed by this perspective is that they aim to foster self-reflection, mutual learning, participation and empowerment, rather than the acceptance of discoveries".

## 3.2. Design

This research made use of a qualitative research design. As noted by Padgett (2004), the demise of states such as apartheid mark a general trend towards revisionist thought which questions the plausibility of absolute truths, true objectivity, neutrality and non-subjective realities. In light of this, qualitative research has gained increasing popularity due to its capacity to explore the details of the lived experience in context. Qualitative research is founded on the belief or understanding that multiple truths can reside alongside one another and that it is not the truth of

the reality which is important but rather the experience an individual or social group has of these truths and/or realities. In a similar vein, narratives are rarely, if ever, pure reflections of event; rather narratives are deeply subjective and exhibit a marked fluidity which underlies the lack of truth (Hiles & Cermak, 2008).

This research also adhered to certain ontological and epistemological principles of social constructionism. As such, the researcher is located within the research and understood as a co-creator of the knowledge produced. In keeping with the maxim that "no person is an island", the researcher has acknowledged his impact and influence over the process of knowledge production and creation. In a nutshell, it is understood that the knower or narrator and subject co-create understandings. The qualitative researcher is not concerned with discovering an absolute truth but rather with "reaching a new interpretation or new meaning of the experiential raw data" (Camic, Rhodes & Yardley, 2003: 14; Foster, 2006; Miller, Hengst & Wang, 2003).

Both the broader Apartheid Archive Project and this study concerning the 'border war' (in terms of political violence, whiteness and masculinity) have elected to follow a qualitative framework. This is primarily due to the nature of the data the researcher(s) are seeking out; namely lived, quotidian experiences of 'race', racism and related subjectivities in the context of apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa. The subjective, individual experience has been placed at the centre of the study where the pluralistic nuances, experiences and dynamics of everyday realities are highlighted. Qualitative research has the capacity to fully immerse itself within the socio-cultural milieu, thereby providing a unique access to a specific life experience which the study would otherwise be unable to capture. Similarly, this study allowed multiple voices which would normally not be heard, to be heard.

### 3.3. Research questions

The research questions of this study are as follows:

- What is the nature of the operational experiences that emerge in the talk of former white conscripts of the South African 'border war'?
- What is the nature of the discourses of whiteness and masculinity embedded in the talk of these participants?

- What are the possible functions of these discourses in relation to meaning making processes in terms of experiences of the 'border war', in contemporary South Africa?

### 3.4. Participants

This project utilised a method of purposive sampling, a process whereby the researcher selects a sample based on experience or knowledge of the group to be sampled. The sample was undeniably a sample of convenience and as such, findings are limited in terms of their confirmability within the broader population. However, it was not the primary objective of the study to examine the entire white South African population. Instead the study was concerned with gathering thick descriptions of individual experiences of militarised violence, masculinity and whiteness. Through a process of discourse analysis dominant discourses were determined and discussed.

This study drew on the experiences of white male South Africans who experienced some form of active combat during the 'border war'. The sample consisted of 8 white South Africans who were born roughly between the 1960s and 1970s. Potential participants were initially approached or contacted telephonically, based on either a referral or the researcher seeking out participants based on personal affiliation (or knowledge that they were roughly deemed to fit the criteria mentioned below), in a mutually agreeable manner and asked if they were willing/able to participate in this study. These individuals were then asked if they were able to refer any individuals who they deemed appropriate to fit the same criteria as themselves. The researcher was then referred by a participant to an informal gathering or support group for ex-combatants who served in the South African 'border war'. It was from here that the majority of interview data originates with 5 out of the 8 interviews gathered coming from members of this informal organisation. As such, this study targeted individuals who were conscripted into military service directly after high school at about the age of 17 or 18 years.

The men were asked to participate based on their experiences as conscripts who saw some operational duty (Gibson, 2009). The main criterion for participation was therefore that the participants are former conscripts who were involved in some form of military action during the 'border war' conflict. As such, all participants were white English-speaking, male South

Africans aged between 40 and 60 years, who had grown up in South Africa during apartheid and served in the military during the time of the 'border war'. The specification of English-speaking individuals is primarily due to the researcher's own language proficiencies and limitations. They had also grown up in what can be termed the middle-class enclave of whiteness in various parts of the country and attended what many have termed 'well-resourced schools'. Today the majority of the participants fill a range of positions in society from being unemployed to upper management of large companies. From this, often overlooked, position that these individuals had within society, many interesting insights into masculinity and whiteness and how this mediates their opinions of the 'border war' both today and during apartheid have been gleaned.

### 3.5. Data collection procedure

Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews (Appendix I). A semi-structured interview was drawn upon as a means to gather relevant data (Appendix I-III). This type of interactively fluid and informal interview allowed the participant to talk about their experiences and perceptions in a comfortable manner. Further, because semi-structured interviews have no required order and structure, the researcher was able to adapt predetermined questions according to each participant. In this way the interview took the form of a discussion. Semi structured individual interviews were deemed advantageous as they allowed for two way communication as well as for the interviewer to freely probe area of interest. Furthermore the intimate space of the interview provided participants with a degree of privacy and security when discussing sensitive or traumatic military experiences. In these interviews open-ended questions were asked pertaining primarily to events relating to the individuals' experiences of the military during apartheid, and how such events were interpreted. Furthermore, questions regarding whiteness and masculinity in relation to militarised violence during the apartheid period were posed less directly (Appendix I).

The interviews also interrogated how participants view post-1994 South Africa in relation to their military conscription, and the position of white individuals given their past experiences in the SADF. The interviews were between 45 minutes and an hour long. Each interview took place in a specific time and space between the researcher and a particular participant. Therefore it should be taken into account that in an alternative context the resulting data may have arisen

somewhat differently. This is particularly important to note as this research report is based on a social constructionist perspective and thus acknowledges that the interview data emerging from the interview process are co-constructed by the participant and the researcher. That is, the interview is the primary site of knowledge production in the research process. Prior to the interview beginning participants were issued with an information sheet and consent was then obtained for their participation and audio recording of the interview, and these recordings were transcribed verbatim for analysis (Appendix I-II). The nature of the semi-structured interview ensured that participants were encouraged to answer questions in a flexible manner, while remaining as topic focused as possible, encouraging candid responses and thus providing rich and interesting data (Appendix I-III).

It was requested that the interview be conducted in English, primarily due to the researcher's own language proficiencies and limitations. It was, however, acknowledged that language, despite being viewed as a transparent medium which reflects stable, singular meanings, is deeply constitutive of reality and not merely a technical device for establishing meaning (Steyn, 2001). Language is a proxy for many social differences; for instance, during the South African liberation movement English was often adopted as a common language due to its perceived ethnic neutrality. This is acknowledged as a limitation of this study (Painter, 2006; Reissman, 1993; Steyn, 2001).

### 3.6. Data analysis

On completion of data collection, the digitally-recorded interviews were transcribed and there after compiled into a corpus of transcriptions that formed the raw data for analysis. This process yielded approximately 120 pages of transcribed text for the eight interviews conducted. These were subsequently subjected to a specific type of qualitative research known as discourse analysis. The general term discourse analysis (DA) covers a range of somewhat related but contrasting kinds of work. It is sometimes proposed as a general methodology (Wood & Kroger, 2000), and sometimes as theory and critique allied to social constructionism (Gergen, 1994; Harrè & Gillett, 1994; Potter, 1996) or to the critique of social power and oppression (Fairclough, 1992; Parker, 1992; Wodak, 1998). One major difference between the various types of DA is in their methods of analysis. Some discourse analysts are linguists, or applied linguists,

who analyse textual material (often written texts rather than spoken interaction) in terms of their grammatical structures (Stubbs, 1983). Others draw mainly on conversation analysis (CA), where transcribed recordings of everyday talk are analysed in terms of the social actions performed in each successive turn. Still other kinds of DA rely on no particular procedure of detailed analysis, but rather, look for patterns of language use that can be related to broader themes of social structure and ideological critique (Parker, 1992).

For the purpose of this research a hybridised version of discourse analysis was made use of. This contained elements of Parker's (1992) and Billig's (1997) critical approaches to discourse analysis as well as Potter and Wetherell's (1987) discursive approach. While it is acknowledged by this research that discourses analysis covers a diverse range of aspects, it is important to distinguish between the two major approaches that inform the hybridised approach to discourse analysis that this study adopts, namely critical approaches to discourses analysis and discursive psychology.

Critical approaches to discourse analysis as well as critical discourse analysis stem from a critical theory of language which sees the use of language as a form of social practice (Parker, 1992; Wodak, 1998). All social practice are tied to specific historical contexts and are the means by which existing social relations are reproduced or contested and different interests are served (Parker, 1992). It is the questions pertaining to interests -"How is the text positioned or positioning? Whose interests are served by this positioning? Whose interests are negated? What are the consequences of this positioning?" -that relate discourse to relations of power (Fairclough, 1992, p. 10). Where analysis seeks to understand how discourse is implicated in relations of power, it is called *critical* discourse analysis (Billig, 1997; Fairclough, 1992; Parker, 1992).

What is useful about this approach is that it enables you to focus on the signifiers that make up the text, the specific linguistic selections, their juxtapositioning, their sequencing, their layout and so on (Fairclough, 1992; Parker, 1992; Wodak, 1998). However, it also requires you to recognise that the historical determination of these selections and to understand that these choices are tied to the conditions of possibility of that utterance. This is another way of saying that texts are instantiations of socially regulated discourses and that the processes of production and reception are socially constrained (Wodak, 1998). Why Fairclough's (1992) and other

(Billig, 1997; Parker, 1992) critical approaches to discourses analysis was so useful was because it provided multiple points of analytic entry. It does not matter which kind of analysis one begins with, as long as in the end they are all included and are shown to be mutually explanatory (Parker, 1992). It was in the interconnections that the analyst found the interesting patterns and disjunctions that needed to be described, interpreted and explained. This is important for this study given the nature of the third research aim that was outlined. This aim proposed the examination of possible functions of discourses in contemporary South Africa in relation to meaning making processes in terms of conscripts experiences of the 'border war'. It was aspects of this approach that allowed for insightful and detailed analysis of data that spoke to this aim concerned with the functions of discourses. Indeed this approach did allow multiple points of analytic entry which allowed for a interesting exploration of the intersectionality of subjectivity and the use of discursive devices such juxtaposition and so on.

The second major approach to discourse analysis that informed this study was discursive psychology. Discursive psychology draws on a wide range of intellectual sources, including conversational analysis, ethnomethodology, Wittgenstein's later philosophy, psychoanalysis, and ideology critique. Developed in the 1990s, it put into question conventional psychological and social psychological thinking by eschewing talk about 'inner' processes, whether these inner processes are conceived in terms of beliefs, memories, attitudes, cognitive features, predispositions, or some such (Billig, 1997; Edwards, 1994, 1997; Edwards & Potter, 1992; Harré, 1995; Hepburn & Wiggins, 2007; Parker, 1992; 2004;; Potter & Wetherell, 1987, 1995). Instead, phenomena that are usually treated as inner mental processes by mainstream theories of psychology are seen to be constituted through discursive practice. In other words, psychological language entails outward, not inner, criteria, implying that psychological entities like emotions are socially constructed. So if one wants to understand feelings, "psychologists should be paying attention to what people are doing when they claim to have feelings" (Billig, 1997: p. 141). This implies that psychology "ought to be construed as more action-centred, and thus more dynamic and culturally specific" (Hepburn & Wiggins, 2007: 11).

Discursive psychology is internally variegated, this variation being a function of the different emphases advocates place upon different intellectual sources. However while these emphases differ, both approaches served as important tools in grappling with and answering the aim of this

study. Thus, discursive psychologists such as Hepburn and Wiggins (2007) might share more in common with conversational analysis, whilst others manifest a greater concern with wider power and ideological issues (e.g., Parker, 2004). One could try to map these different discursive psychological approaches by focusing on how each view context and structure. At one end of this spectrum, structures and institutions are understood to be constructed. In this view, speakers act with certain expectations and responsibilities, revealing how "the institutionality of the interaction... is produced within the talk itself" (Hepburn and Wiggins, 2007: p. 38). Thus psychological categories like attitudes or personality traits, and sociological categories like gender or class are avoided. Instead categories are invoked and relied upon only to the extent that participants themselves invoke and identify with them (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). In this view, only when this criterion of relevance has been satisfied can one begin to ask which of these categories or identities have consequences (Hepburn and Wiggins, 2007; see also Schegloff, 1997).

At the other end of the spectrum, structures and institutions are understood as having a role in shaping the interaction between actors (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Advocates representing this pole of discursive psychology even go so far as to explicitly caution against moving down the conversational analysis path for fear of ending up in an a critical empiricism and re-descriptivism (Parker, 2004). In this view, a 'turn to discourse' sensitizes us to how language and meaning positions us within a wider web of power relations and that the immediate interaction cannot be understood without reference to this broader discursive field. For example, in order to understand fully the nature and significance of contemporary interpersonal interactions and events involving intense emotional responses, it is essential to situate this in relation to dominant and dominating modes of therapeutic, consumer, and economic discourses (Parker, 2008). This is not to say that such wider structures have a simple determining effect on the interactants. While they are understood to carry a certain force and power to exclude, structures and institutions are not treated here as uniform, univocal, or free from tensions or contradictions (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). One could argue here that this differing approach to discursive psychology is particularly important in terms of the third aim of this study concerned with discursive meaning making. This approach advocates for the situation of language and meaning making with a wider web of power relations, which is of great importance when one is concerned with functions of

discourses in relation to meaning making processes during apartheid when there were specific power relations at play in South Africa.

Thus while both strands of discursive psychology reject the psychologising tendencies of orthodox psychology and social psychology, they do tend to be motivated by slightly different sets of concerns (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). These similarities and differences carry practical research consequences, including how we should understand discourse, how we should understand the role of the researcher, and how we should treat different sources of evidence (Billig, 1997; Harré, 1995; Parker, 1992). One important similarity concerns aspects of a practice we ought to include as part of discourse (Billig, 1997). For example, both strands of discursive psychology canvassed here attach considerable importance to non-linguistic features: from all sorts of non-verbal cues accompanying actors' talk all the way to more general patterns of practices, including images, sounds, and the organization of physical space. Which are equally important aspects to consider when conducting a hybridised analysis such as this.

This study was also aligned with such theories as critical race theory (CRT) and more specifically Critical Whiteness Studies and as such the analysis aims to explore the nature of racial discourse, and thus will delve into the meaning and intent behind such discourse with specific emphasis on white individuals. Similarly, it is necessary to accept that race has a dominant role in society (at least South African society), whether conscious or unconscious. In line with this it is necessary to disrupt the notion of colour-blindness. As such, these discourses of race still other individuals due to the normativity of whiteness. Thus, race is the foreground of the study and was spoken of in a manner that is frank (Camic, Rhodes & Yardley, 2003; Mir & Watson, 2001; Sarbin & Kituse, 1994; Riessman, 1993). The actual process of analysis involved the reading of the transcripts according to the above frameworks and selecting discursive themes evident in the data. These themes were then either collapsed into one another to form larger themes or structured hierarchically to form sets of subthemes with an overarching theme. Themes were thereafter labelled and defined. It must be noted that this process was cyclical and required multiple levels of re-reading and recoding (Billig, 1997). The results are, however, presented linearly for the purpose of clarity.

It is important to acknowledge that the interview data that was gathered do not constitute an accurate, objective reflection of what really happened during apartheid or the grand truth of

apartheid, if such a truth has ever existed. The Personal Narrative Group (cited in Reissman, 1993) notes that despite the fact that people lie, forget, exaggerate, embellish, or even become confused they reveal truths of their experiences, not necessarily truths of the past as it actually was. Each text will essentially be plurivocal and was thus open to several readings and constructions. The project was beneficial in that it did not allow for one of the most devastating systems of institutionalized racial oppression go undocumented. This study aimed similarly provided information on aspects of whiteness, both during apartheid and following the democratic changes witnessed in 1994. Furthermore this research shed light on the discourses of whiteness during apartheid and how these discourses mediate the constructions of militarised violence both during apartheid and now (Labov, 1997; Reissman, 1993).

### 3.7. Reflexivity

Nutall (2001) describes reflexivity as a deconstructive process that locates the researcher's impact and influence on both the data collection process as well as on the data analysis. As such, the research process is understood as "producing multiple realities" (Nutall, 2001, p. 357). Moreover, identifying reflexivity in the research process simultaneously allows for the deconstruction of power dynamics, resistance and social-historical influences. In this way the researcher is able to position "knowledge in agency" (Roedigger, 2009, p. 40). Stevens (2007) takes this further and argues that the social relationships between the participants and the researcher are characterised by power and status positions. Thus self-reflexivity cannot be regarded without further taking into account the positional reflexivity between researcher and participant (Nutall, 2001). More specifically then, the production of gendered and racist discursive practices cannot simply be understood as emanating from within the participants but also needs to be regarded as a result of the confessional context set up between the researcher and the participant. By applying a reflexive approach to both the interview context and the method of data analysis, an understanding of the researcher's impact on the participants and the study results is made visible. This is particularly significant for this study as it is framed by an acknowledgement that knowledge is socially produced.

This study adhered to a stringent system of reflexivity, ensuring that findings are represented in a manner which is consistent with the spirit in which the interview data was recounted. The

researcher is aware of the above-mentioned concerns and as such constantly endeavoured to test his assumptions and worldviews with the awareness that these too are social constructions and not natural truths. The researcher is a white male middle-class student in his early twenties with a tertiary education. The researcher is aware that his socio-historical context and social experiences are unique and that unless they are constantly questioned they may unwittingly bias his findings.

It is important here to grapple with some the specifics of the researcher's experiences and motivation in conducting this research project. I am particularly invested in examining the experiences of white individuals and more specifically those experiences of individuals who experienced the brunt of apartheid rule. In examining these experiences, my intention is explore the process and functions of racism during apartheid and currently within South Africa. Admittedly this interest is linked to gaining further insight into the history and context from which my own parents originate as well as an attempt to understand where they see themselves as white individuals in South Africa today. As such, I had to be constantly aware of leading participants in this study to a biased discussion on experiences of politics and apartheid that fed into my own interests and intentions. However, it must be acknowledged that this ability to be self-reflexive was often hampered by the interview dynamics and the differential access to power.

The power and status positions in the interview context continuously changed according to the content of the discussion. At times, I was placed in a position of power by my status as a researcher working within the profession of psychology. Participants who had had experiences with psychologists in formal therapy attempted to frame the interview process as a therapy session putting me in the position of power as they would a therapist. During such moments, I had to ensure that the participants had primary vocal space, that they trusted that my ultimate intention was as a researcher gathering data and not as a therapist providing debriefing or therapy. Moreover, another difficulty faced here was the tendency I had to be hyper critical of the participants and their grappling with topics of race. This is admittedly a preconception that I brought with into the interview process, where I assumed that participants were inherently racist and prejudiced towards black individuals based on their involvement in the army. A particularly challenging moment was interviewing a particularly racist and prejudiced former conscript who

expressed himself and his views on individuals of differing races in a particularly crass manner. I feel that his approach to the interview may also have been related to us sharing the same race and this participant assuming that this meant that I shared the same opinions of race as he did. I was however able to put aside my hyper-critical approach and move towards a position of acceptance and understanding of all conscripts including those that remain prejudiced towards other races. The process of data analysis was particularly rewarding in this regard, as in the process of pulling apart and analysis the discursive mechanisms and processes at play I was able to adopt a more balanced approach that was both critical and respectful of participants.

Throughout all of the interviews the power and status positions shifted continuously. As such, there were times that I was made more vulnerable and less powerful. An important issue to consider here was my age, being 23 years old. Interviewees were considerably older than me and may have felt quite jaded or even envious of the fact that I was devoid of the life experiences that they were forced to endure. There was the risk here that participants may also have felt the need to perform or project themselves in a particularly favourable way as a result of this. These are important aspects to bear in mind and suggest that I had to be careful of reading data through an overly narrow lens. It was noted that the researcher should be open to the possibility of salient issues emerging in the interview data that may not have been anticipated. As the relationships in the interviews were clearly imbued with very complex and always shifting power dynamics, I made a concerted effort to apply an open-minded approach to analysing the data and to continue being reflexive when selecting data for inclusion in the report.

Roedigger (2009) offers a valid criticism when he states that making the study of whiteness the enterprise of white scholars, such as the author, is to continue the placement of whites at the centre of everything and to support a continuing refusal to take seriously the insights into whiteness that people of colour offer. This is indeed indicative of one of the difficulties the author faced when embarking on this study: how to situate himself in relation to his own whiteness and identity as a white person? It is something that has to constantly be referred back to, challenged and renegotiated. As much as this study was a journey of the discovery for the participants, so it was a journey for the author who had to scrutinize his own conceptions of race and what it means to be white as has been expressed earlier. One way in which this difficulty was dealt with was by the position that the researcher's supervisor took with regards to this

research. As such a second, perhaps more critical, perspective was provided, hopefully counteracting potential shortcomings of the researcher.

As Sleeter (1993, p. 67) notes, "whites are not spectators of racism; we are participants and we cannot help to deconstruct white racism if we do not participate". Thus, by being involved in such a study the author was able to actively engage in the topic and contribute to critical race studies. Indeed, by shying away on the grounds that whiteness is best left to the study of academics of colour is to further the racialising agenda, and according to Sleeter (1993), is to possibly deny one's own complicity in racialised attitudes, beliefs and behaviours. To avoid engaging in a discourse on white racism is to run the risk of protecting one's own white racial interests and maintaining the status quo (Sleeter, 1993).

One of the major difficulties for the author admittedly was trying to step into the shoes of the participants and bridge the generation gap as it were. Thus, it was necessary for him to understand that for his participants' generation, life was and arguably still is, viewed through the lens of race. Furthermore, it was necessary to immerse oneself in the literature centred on critical race and whiteness studies and accept that one is a racial being and that race affords one (including the author) certain privileges. It would seem that race is very much something of one's parents' generation.

However, as the project progressed it became increasingly obvious that race is in fact part of one's reality and has even impacted on the author's identity. Another important aspect the author had to keep in mind was the difficulty of critically examining what was being said without becoming overly critical and unkind. It was always important to keep in mind that one needs to balance academic integrity with empathy, compassion and understanding. For while there was often an ulterior motive to what was said, there was usually a reason for why it was said. Thus, it was pertinent to stress the importance of the author's position as a middle-class white male student and to be aware of this position throughout the research process.

### 3.8. Ethical considerations

This study was undertaken in accordance with the ethical principles stipulated by the Human Research Ethics Committee (non-medial) at the University of the Witwatersrand, and as such this

research study has been accepted by the relevant higher degrees committee with an allocated ethics clearance number (Appendix VI). This study requested that participants explore their experiences in the military, in spoken form, during apartheid. Neither the research topic nor the required tasks are of a sensitive nature, yet it is still important that ethical considerations are attended to, so as to ensure that participants are in no way harmed or distressed by their participation in the study (Appendix I-VI). While it was not anticipated that this study would evoke particularly upsetting memories the researcher set in place structures (such as the ability of the participants to pause or stop the interview process at any time) to ensure that distress was avoided, as much as is possible. As such, it is important to note that the discussion of traumatic war events could have potentially led to distress on the part of the participants. However, precautions were taken and sensitivity was used in the discussion of aspects that were particularly distressful or violent.

Before potential candidates were contacted, the researcher ascertained where an ex-combatant could find trauma counselling (relevant to his geographical location) if he needed it or wanted it. There are many websites online through which participants may find practitioners who provide such assistance. Potential participants were informed beforehand that the interviews and subsequent discussions could be potentially stressful and that they could and would be referred to counselling if required, or to an organisation such as the South African Military Health Services where they may seek assistance if need be. Participants were informed that they can refuse to answer questions, end interviews when they become uncomfortable or distressed, withdraw from the study and/or be referred for counselling whenever they wished. Free support services were also offered in the participant information sheet, such as the South African Depression and Anxiety Group as well as Life Line, if participants deemed it necessary.

The participants themselves were white male South Africans, well above the consenting age (as discussed above) and are therefore not classified as being a sensitive population and as such required to complete consent forms (Appendix III-IV). In keeping with standard requirements participants received an information sheet briefly describing the nature of the study and exactly what participation would involve, full identification and contact information of the researcher and his supervisor, assurance that participation was voluntary and that the participant had the

right to withdraw from the study at any time without fear of prejudice, coercion or negative repercussions (Waldrop, 2004; Appendix II-IV).

Due to the nature of the data collection it was impossible to ensure anonymity, as the researcher will be privy to the identity of the participants. Similarly, only partial confidentiality could be ensured as the interview data formed part of the broader Apartheid Archive Project and parts of the data have been replicated in the research report of this study. The researchers' supervisor has also had access to the data. However steps have been taken to ensure that he is not aware of the author's identity unless participants have stipulated on their consent form that they would like to have their names attached to their data (Appendix II-IV). Every attempt was, however, made to ensure that the maximum level of confidentiality and anonymity was maintained – thus all identifying names (of people, participants and places) were changed in the report section of this study and in the data submitted to the Apartheid Archive Project (Appendix II-IV).

### 3.9. The significance of this study

One could argue that to place the significance of a study of this nature into a single paragraph is a task that is almost impossible. However, there are certain aspects of this research that one may point out at the conclusion of this endeavour. It is important to note (as has been mentioned above) that exploration of expenses of white ex-conscripts in the South African context is sparse. Not mention explorations into border warfare in South Africa do not seem to look closely at the intersectionality of discourses of whiteness and masculinity as this study does. Research to this end may be beneficial in coming to terms with and understanding the atrocities of the past, through meaningful exploration and grappling with pertinent issues of our past. Furthermore as is the argument of critical whiteness studies, to consider white subjects also sheds light on the other race categories. This research also hoped to add to anti-racist efforts in South Africa by exploring and shedding light on such mechanisms as racial identity. The argument could also be made here that this research fits under the broader project of the Apartheid Archives and as such contributes to this corpus of knowledge and furthers the endeavours of this project. This project has also opened space for further work on this topic to be done. In this way there is potential here for greater elaboration and exploration into the topics of interest in this study as well as practical

recommendations that may assist many ex-combatants in coming to terms with the difficulties they faced during apartheid.

# Chapter 4: Analysis and Discussion

## 4.1. Introduction

Before beginning a consideration of the various discourses that have been chosen to be discussed in this report it is important to acknowledge that the voice of the author is by no means mute and the findings here are not exhaustive. Instead, a thorough examination of a selection of key discourses in terms of an interpretation, which is by no means definitive, is offered. Indeed this discussion forms part of a process of discursive illumination, where one is concerned with the discourses that emerged in the interview data of participants and the functions that they serve. The general view of the author in this instance is in support of the idea that discourses in the talk of participants reflect the contemporary discourses of society. Thus, more specifically in terms of the concepts of whiteness, masculinity and the 'border war' are seen here as the canvas on which these concepts are sketched.

Furthermore, it is acknowledged from the outset that the author recognises the intersectionality of whiteness and masculinity. Where possible, an effort has been made to look at these discourses in moments of intersection. As we have seen above, an intersectional approach implies that white masculinities must be understood as the embedded relation of racial and gendered connotations and not as a mere sum of their parts. In order to approach such phenomenon, it is indispensable to question in which ways stereotypes of masculinity and whiteness are articulated together. Both whiteness and masculinity, as socially and culturally constructed categories, work together and interact on multiple levels to either empower or marginalize individuals (McCall, 2005). Norms of both race and sex work together to keep white males in positions of privilege. In other words, whiteness and malehood (often manifested through masculinity) become interdependent and confer privilege to white males (Butler, 1993). According to Buttler (1993), to understand race, we must understand sex (which is manifested in gendered identity) and vice-versa.

However, in some instances it was found that these discourses also function independently of each other. In terms of the current sample and the context in which this sample has been found, one could argue that these two discourses are in tension with each other at times and at other times they are not. Furthermore, what one could argue that there is evidence to suggest that these

discourses are both referent to and in service of each other in some instances. This dynamic is clearly evident in the excerpts below. This brings us to our first grouping of discourses that will be looked at in this report (Butler, 1993; McCall, 2005).

## 4.2. Theme 1: Discourse of whiteness: deconstructing the construction of whiteness

The initial theme that will be looked at here is concerned with experiences of whiteness and the way in which racial identity was grappled with by participants. What is interesting here is that when whiteness was grappled with by participants one found that this phenomenon in a dual process was also deconstructed by participants. Thus one was faced with a binary of sorts where construction of a phenomenon also in turn leads to its deconstruction. Indeed, in each of the sub-themes below we see participants constructing their identities as white individuals, yet in doing so, illustrating just how unstable and contested these constructs are in South Africa today. This leads us to our first sub-theme for this section.

### 4.2.1. Reiterating the past in the present

Our memories are part of an active, socially co-constructed process. Remembering, especially autobiographical remembering is embedded in affective, interpersonal, sociocultural and historical contexts - that is to say, it does not happen within a social or contextual vacuum and often has a very specific function (Coombes, 1985; Lopez, 2000). Indeed, improvised selves are created in present contexts to serve psychological and social purposes, for instance ‘protoselves’ or ‘protomemories’ are manifested to fit certain contemporary contextualising structures (such as audience expectations, justification of emerging feelings, etc.) (Coombes, 1985; Lopez, 2000). Autobiographical remembering becomes an important means of mediating moments of being in the present (Rubin, 1999). It is an important activity that forms emergent selves which give a culturally valued sense of personal coherence over time (Coombes, 1985; Rubin, 1999).

While this flexibility and renegotiation of memory is evident throughout the data, it is especially relevant to this section which deals specifically with remembering whiteness in the bygone era of apartheid (Steyn, 2001; Lopez, 2000). There was for the most part a sense of remembering the past through the lens of ‘today’ (post-apartheid South Africa), specifically in instances where

conscription was being discussed. As is seen here in the comments made by many of the participants, they quite clearly refer to the South African context 'today' when asked to reflect on race and conscription during apartheid:

> *"I remember being young around 15 odd years old when I first really heard or knew about conscription…you know and things were not like they are today" (John)*

The excerpt above clearly illustrates the discourse of past events being constantly related by participants through the lens of today. John here makes use of a temporal juxtaposition where he compares events during apartheid to the current context and comes to determine *"things were not like they are now"*. This rhetorical device serves both as a comparative function and a function of continuity. Below we see Tim engaging in a similar type of discourse making reference to *"back then"* and coming to the conclusion that things are *"not like now"* in terms societal discipline and respect. One gets the sense that for these participants there is yearning or nostalgia for a past that was in their eyes more favourable than the current context in South Africa (Nuttal, 2007; Steyn, 2001). It would seem then that even when looking back the present is ever salient in the discourses of these individuals. Added to this, a strong argument can be made here for a discourse of the past being better than the present. This can also be linked to a discourse of nostalgia, where one could argue nostalgia helps these individuals come to terms with their white masculinity in contemporary society (Duncan, Stevens & Sonn, 2012). Indeed what one sees here is something rather important that is being expressed in terms of whiteness. Where the present is something that is untenable and the past then is something that is idealised and viewed as a time when whiteness prospered (Duncan, Stevens & Sonn, 2012). It would seem though that the way in which this success was violently maintained and enforced is over looked to a large extent (Duncan, Stevens & Sonn, 2012).

> *"You know back then we were disciplined…we had respect…not like now…" (Tim)*

> *"Well ja ja I remember South Africa was on the border of chaos at the time man it was like everybody was gearing up for the apocalypse or something man everything was a bit you know paranoid…but I suppose us whites are still quite paranoid now" (Neville)*

One is privy in these instances to a temporal bridging that is taking place, where the past is being reiterated in the present. In the above statement made by Neville we see how for him things are

actually much the same for white individuals today, in terms of the discourse of white paranoia. This is somewhat different to the more nostalgic excerpt from Tim who feels like things are not quite the same as they used to be. Thus, while it is perhaps unfair to question too harshly what was being said, it is necessary to critically examine not only what was being said but the function it serves –to look beyond the rhetorical strategies employed to distance the self from the apartheid ideology to the underlying ways in which whiteness was and is constructed (Lopez, 2000; Nuttal, 2001 Steyn, 2001). Furthermore, in the very act of asking someone to remember you are asking that person to grapple with aspects of both the past and the present; as the individual exists presently but is forced by the probing of the researcher to retrospectively gaze back on events of the past and reflect. In a sense then in this process a bridge is created between past and present. One finds then that many of the accounts provided, as above, are concerned with past event but ultimately are related through the present. It is therefore proposed that these accounts by their very nature not only give one access or insight into the past but also the present, given that our interpretation is through the lens of today (Duncan, Stevens & Sonn, 2012). This is an important mechanism at play here for the participants who for the most seem to exist in society today in a state of presentism and may in fact point to a state of being that many white males find themselves in currently (Duncan, Stevens & Sonn, 2012). Following on from the idea of nostalgia touched on earlier we see here how the past as discourse of dislocatedness amongst the white population in South Africa can also be applied to contemporary society, as the argument is made that white individuals still exist in a state of disclocatedness (Duncan, Stevens & Sonn, 2012).

Ultimately, the message behind what is being said here in terms of the navigation of past and present raises interesting points for whiteness in contemporary South Africa. One could argue that for many participants the true message layered within their grappling with past and present is in many instances a yearning for the past. What is conveyed in these recollections is in many instances also a pessimistic outlook on contemporary South African society where it is implied that transformation has not really occurred in South Africa. Thus, in many ways there is a tension that exists for many of the participants of this study around the general message of transformation and change that was heralded by the democratic elections of 1994 and the apparent lack of tangible differences that they currently report experiencing. In some ways this tension also places contemporary South African society as something less than the ideal and

tainted. Thus, when reflecting on the past through the lens of today in the process described above, one could postulate that from the outset these reflections are likely to be tainted or unsettled. The present sub-theme provides interesting insight into the mechanisms mentioned above (Steyn, 2001).

### 4.2.2. Protected white childhood

Most of the participants spoke about their childhood or adolescence as being a time which was for them idealised and innocent. Indeed, many of the participants reflected on their years as teen's awaiting the inevitable call-ups as harmonious times. This was maintained through a discourse of a protected white youth during apartheid. Where the ruling powers censored all media and according to many kept white people in a position of comfortable ignorance. Despite the acknowledgement of the government's manipulations, there was also a sense of romanticisation:

> *"I had no idea what the national party was even about and what racism really meant man we were protected we were just kept there in our good schools and good areas … I had no real idea about the racial policies in our country at the time you know but I think that's where they wanted us man I think the government liked us young and dumb you know willing to follow and not questioning their policies and rule so you know ja." (Neville)*

> *"Well you know at the time being white meant you were protected you know. We did not really see what was going on in the townships or anything like that you know we lived in the suburbs where things were calm and the only black people you really saw were your gardener and your maid" (Mathew)*

> *"Well I mean I think being white at the time was was great really we were the privileged few. We were protected by the government we voted for. Jobs were protected …there was none of these issues of today around crime and what not, the police were effective and so were most government departments. ... And I suppose being white meant that I was conscripted I mean only white guys were required really to serve the compulsory service" (John)*

On a superficial level here there is a sense that the participants wish to divert blame and responsibility by indicating to interviewer that they were really only pawns in a much larger system of institutionalised racism. In this way then we see this discourse of a childhood or adolescence during apartheid being constructed as protected as a means of othering blame and deferring guilt to other parties such as the ruling government at the time and broader society more generally. Further, what one finds here is that in deflected the past in this way these participants are able to gain access to the present and obtain an equal space within the context of post 1994 South Africa. On a more subversive level however manifestations such as this which seek to protect the privileged white position speaks to more current issues in terms of the contested nature of whiteness in contemporary South Africa. We see here that participants, even when recounting events from many years ago, feel the need to protect their position as white individuals within their current context. One could postulate here that that this is directly as a result of the contested position white males occupy within contemporary contexts (Borer, 2004; Nuttal, 2001; Steyn, 2001). This speaks to the broader discourse of the contested nature of whiteness in contemporary South Africa, where we find these men constantly striving to protect their position as white individuals in society.

One can clearly see the conflicting way in which participants have grappled with discourses of the other and the self especially when looking back at the apartheid period. For many their time of conscription coincided with their formative adolescent years (Lopez, 2000; Steyn, 2001), a time which some have argued can be quite turbulent. Many of the participants related this time in their lives as time of confusion and chaos as well as uncertainty and fear. Many did not know where they were going and what lay ahead of them in the army. There is sense that this is a recurring trend amongst white males who were of this age during apartheid. Perhaps then this discourse of a protected white picketed childhood that participants refer to with romantic fervour was not as rose tinted as one would assume:

> *"Was completely not real uh it was uh romanticised in a sense. I thought you would just go there for two years on a nice trip like Rambo and defend my country and come back with a medal or something…(laughs) I did not really know what I would be getting myself into." (John)*

*"Well ja I remember South Africa was on the border of chaos at the time man it was like everybody was gearing up for the apocalypse or something man everything was a bit you know paranoid… I remember things being quite hysterical people carrying weapons around, bomb threats and violent terrorist acts happening all over the place you know I remember being quite young…" (Neville)*

*"…after a protected childhood really you were sent to the army when you were seventeen you know only a kid and the paper arrived in the post to call you up into action, it was a different time in our country you know things were always in the extreme back then man…and when you got to the army and you got a taste of the war and some action man it just stuffed you up you ended up bossies …" (Donovan)*

In the first excerpt, we see John illustrating the above mentioned point quite clearly. One could argue here that he himself is aware of the uncertainty that was looming beneath the romanticised discourse of military service that was perpetuated at the time. Added to this, there is also a sense of turbulence or not knowing that is attached to both accounts. We see terms being used such as *"apocalypse"* and *"I did not really know"*. Interestingly though, these references to discourses chaos and not knowing also functions in a way that diverts guilt and blame. We see here that for many of the participants there was a distinct need to justify their action around conscription in a way that diverts blame to the other. This act of diverting blame on to the other plays a very important part in justification of these individuals' actions. One could argue here that in contemporary society where we see white men struggling to justify and come to terms with their actions in a society that has come to reject all aspects of the life they once put their lives on the line to protect. It would seem too that discourses of whiteness and white identity are ever salient with the text in this way. The term *"defend"* indirectly implies a degree of threat and fear or the need to be protected from some kind of looming danger that the other poses. Such aspects indicate the complex ways in which constructions of violence mediate and are mediated by white identity. Reflecting in many ways the contested nature of whiteness in society today (Bergerson, 2003; Bonnett, 1999).

As we have seen above, there were however those participants who portrayed this time of innocence as one in which they had very little or no control over. This suggests that the participants were almost attempting to portray themselves as victims, as opposed to beneficiaries,

however unconsciously. Furthermore, there is the impression that they are attempting to bolster social credibility while trying to distance themselves from their involvement in apartheid, however benign (Green & Sonn, 2006; Steyn, 2001).

> *"my opinion was very skewed by the propaganda that was fed to us by the government and my friends you know so I though conscription was a good thing you know I thought it was something I had to do and something that I owed the country you know." (Donovan)*

> *"the army would come once a year and do talks at the school telling what the military is about …we also had veld school and cadets that sort of has us in that way like that army way of thinking before the call up papers even came you know we were prepared or almost groomed from a young age to be in the army…" (Dawie)*

> *"I suppose we were like brainwashed in to it in a way with cadets and veld-school. So when the time came for conscription I remember feeling proud in a way…that I was doing a service for my country and going to fight communism. So I mean ya I remember conscription just something I really had to do, as something that simply happened no one really questioned it. We were brainwashed in way by the national party at the time. And also by our family and parents who had voted for that party and were supporting them in the war effort." (John)*

The above excerpts provide prime example of the mechanisms mentioned above. One gets the sense here from participants that there is a discourse of socialisation or 'brainwashing' that occurred at the time that denied control or choice. Indeed such terms as "veld-skool", "Propaganda" and "cadets" have been mentioned by participants like John and Donovan who felt that it was government initiated programmes such as these that greatly influenced their world view at the time and their willingness to join the army as conscripts (Green & Sonn, 2006; Steyn, 2001). One could argue here that these broader state mechanisms are being made use of by these individuals in an effort to divert and shift blame on to a broader third party, interestingly this third party here is faceless and in contemporary society does not even exist.

> *"Well as I said earlier I saw conscription as something that I had to do and that I had no real choice in you know. My mother or my parents sort of made the decision for me...I was sort or conditioned or brainwashed by the apartheid system into thinking that it was*

*the right thing to do. I had an idea of conscription and the army that was completely not real uh it was uh romanticised in a sense. (John)*

When reflecting back on this time most participants spoke about a distinct lack of awareness of to social issues such as apartheid, the 'border war' and the violence associated with these issues. For many it was a time of relatively easy-going isolation, where being white was linked by the participants to living in a bubble or being "…like an ostrich with its head in the sand", where many lived in their own white world and apartheid and racism was something very exterior to their personal, private worlds (Steyn, 2001; Nuttal, 2001). This further entrenches the discourse of blame diversion that one would argue is a significant factor that shapes the existence of many of these men in contemporary South Africa. Who, imply through this discourse that broader state mechanisms had a role to play in their perception and participation in the apartheid system. This is similar to argument made by Gibson (2009) who argues that during apartheid conscripts had very little choice when it came to participating in the war.

*"So...and my parents never talked about what was going on...so we were not really exposed to it until we started to see it for ourselves and read about it and understand why all this was happening." (Dawie).*

*"Also because when we went to school for instance we were all whites they didn't allow non-whites or blacks or anybody at our schools... never told or explained all the detail of what apartheid was really about... our early twenties and then we began to see for ourselves and understand that they weren't being given equal rights...equal treatment." (John)*

*"I think at that age I was sort of very much removed from it so not very exposed to it and being female? as well very sheltered from it so we weren't really that exposed to it, we knew about sort of black, white racial issue, but it wasn't close to home so very much removed and sheltered from it." (Donovan)*

The previously mentioned discourse of lack of socio-historical awareness and innocence is perhaps a symptom of childhood. This echoes the mainstream notions of theorists such as Piaget and Freud who maintain that the formative years, especially early childhood, are marked by a distinct egocentrism (Cockroft, 2002; Hook &Watts, 2002). However such a hypothesis would

perhaps function as an attempt to discursively distance white individuals from their feelings of guilt and complicity, which one could argue would be particularly important for these individuals in contemporary society. Interestingly here, Dalal (2002) notes that guilt is an uncomfortable emotion which can lead to attempts to try and either avoid or to absolve the self of guilt. However, despite understanding the reasons for such discourse, one has to question the participants' perceptions of suffering and violence for it is plausible that it may be an attempt to deny the extent to which they benefitted from apartheid policy in order to better cope with their feelings of guilt in contemporary society. This may then explain the discourse of persecution that many white men grapple with in contemporary society, as they feel their involvement in apartheid was a more symptom of their age at the rather than a conscious decision. This is reinforced by such comments as:

> *"Ya…hmmm it's kind of like the ostrich with its head in the sand you just carry on and don't pay attention or listen to anything past what is in your immediate world really…"(Tim)*

> *"Yes and we were brought up in a very white dominated environment …we were taught to sing the national anthem, be patriotic and to support the national party unconditionally as the leader of our country and salute the flag but we weren't exposed to the other side of it..."(Frank).*

> *"…in a part of a war that I was just told what to do…and did. I was 17 years old, just a kid."(Mathew)*

As stated previously, it is relevant to understand why such statements were made in the first place in order to position these individuals within the context of contemporary South African society. For many white South Africans, as shall be discussed later, coming to terms with the past is an uncomfortable process marred by discourses guilt and discomfort; something which is negotiated via a discourse of denial:

> *"you know we didn't really know what was going on…"(Tim)*

> *"I had no choice in the matter really I sort of had to go to the army you know everybody my age was going... we all went and that was that…" (Donovan)*

*"I didn't really know what exactly was happening in the country at the time you know we didn't see the bad stuff that was happening to black people" (Mathew)*

For some, looking back to their childhood era was a process highlighted by a discourse of yearning for the past, or as in the case of some a remembering of a painful past, as seen and negotiated through an adult, post-1994 perspective. The one commonality throughout, however, was firstly to separate the self from the inherently violent and racialised system of apartheid whether ideologically or through claims to personal struggle. Secondly, there is a desire to minimise one's complicity either through claims to childhood impotency, by appealing to the fact that the system was unbeatable or alternatively by blaming the system and its violent nature on those other whites separate from the self. This allows these individuals to both avoid complicity and to highlight the unfairness of blame in today's post-apartheid context allowing these individuals to function in a present society that is not accepting the actions and events they were once involved in (Steyn, 2001; Nuttal, 2001; Borer, 2004).

### 4.2.3. Hierarchies of whiteness

Similarly there were those participants who themselves had to deal with ostracism and persecution, despite their whiteness and privileged status as whites. It would seem here that an often overlooked stratification within whiteness itself was highlighted by participants, positioning certain white individuals as qualitatively better than others. One could argue here that often whiteness is spoken of in a manner that amplifies the idea that it is normative and homogeneous rather than stratified and complex (Steyn, 2001). Just as blackness has been stratified over the years into various categories based on colour, ethnicity or culture, so too it would seem has whiteness (Steyn, 2001). It is perhaps unfair to deny that such persons did indeed suffer during apartheid, although suffering is in and of itself relative, but again one gets the sense that such rhetoric is perhaps employed in order to distance the self from apartheid, its ideologies and other uncomfortable feelings (Frakenberg, 2004; Nettleton, 1972; Suchet, 2007). Linked to some of the issues around blame and guilt discussed above, it would seem that these hierarchies of whiteness expressed by some participants allow them to diffuse blame in the present. Indeed, it would seem that here liberal English speaking white individuals draw on

discourses that allow them to diffuse blame in the present by constructing Afrikaans speaking authoritarian figures as the real culprits of apartheid oppression

> *"Ya…when they saw foreign surnames they used to pick on us…the Portuguese, the Italians, the Jews they especially harassed in the army they were treated very badly…well you be picked on by the corporals get picked on by your fellow troops you know, certain traits were…you know…were unfairly uh ascribed to different people from different places you know Portuguese kid would be regarded as dirty, the Jewish kids in the army would be regarded as lazy or mommies boys…the English were soutpielle…you know there was a definite… there was an apartheid even amongst the soldiers…" (Mathew)*

Statements such as the one above made by Mathew rhetorically serve to minimise complicity. An attempt here is being made by this participant to evoke sympathy from the interviewer. Mathew has chosen in this instance to position himself as the victim within the racialised military context. It would seem that while there were clear racial hierarchies in South Africa at the time within highly militarised and masculinised contexts such as the army, there were also hierarchies within racial categories. It would seem that racist ideologies were so ingrained into the lives of white individuals at the time that *"…there was an apartheid even amongst the soldiers…"*. For some this sense of hierarchy amongst white individuals in the army was also linked to economic position or class (Frakenberg, 2004; Nettleton, 1972; Suchet, 2007).

> *"So now I met these guys who could barely read. I mean and in the mix with all this was the division between soutpielle and Dutchmen. A lot of the Afrikaans guys had bought into this whole volk en vaderland and the English guy thought it was a crock of shit. you know the English guys were more thinkers. And they were thinking that this whole patriotic war thing was bullshit. You know I don't want to be here type of thing… I fell in to the latter category. But you know English guys were given a really hard time. It was like everything was set up to keep the Afrikaner in power. You would never find an Englishman as a bevelvoeder at any of these camps. I think it was all a massive set and the army exploited these differences between us. The Afrikaans guys were more paraat and the English guys were naafi and keen to gyppo." (Dawie)*

Here we see Dawie echoing many of the sentiments above but what is indicated here through rhetorical juxtaposition is the major split that he felt existed between *"Soutpielle"* and *"Dutchmen"*. Furthermore, what this participant does here indirectly is liken these two categories with socio-economic status. We also see that English-speaking white individuals are associated with being *"more thinkers"* and Afrikaans-speaking white individuals associated with being barely able to read. Interestingly it would seem that discourses of level of education or socio-economic status are also linked here by Dawie to the level of support or commitment to the racialised apartheid system each sub-division had. Thus, according to Dawie *"Afrikaans guys were more paraat"* and *"English guys were more naafi and keen to gyppo"*. It would seem then that in the eyes of the racialised apartheid system at the time that Afrikaans-speaking white males were the more favoured grouping, but less educated and of lower economic status, according to this participant. Statements such as this add interesting nuance to the racial hierarchies that existed within the military at the time (Bergerson, 2003; Steyn, 2001; Altman, 2004).This can also be linked to the initial point made in this section, where we see liberal English speaking white men constructing more authoritarian Afrikaans individuals as the real perpetrators of apartheid. What this then allows these individuals to enhance or maintain their claim to space in contemporary society, perhaps more so than Afrikaans speaking ex-conscripts. Furthermore, in terms of contemporary society one could argue here that some participants would then position themselves as white English speaking males and as such perhaps less committed to the ideology of the apartheid system. This has interesting implications for blame attributions for these individuals who would consequently construct themselves as less guilty in contemporary society than Afrikaans speaking white males who one would argue were perceived to be more committed to the political ideology of the time.

### 4.2.4. Conscription: a process of 'awakening'

Whilst childhood was for many a time of innocence, as discussed above, adolescence during the 1980s was represented as a time of growth, both personally and with respect to political awareness, especially in terms of the violent events that were taking place in South Africa at the time. Much of what was seen above, in terms of the manner in which participants both remembered the past and attempted to distance themselves from apartheid, was replicated.

However there was a distinct shift away from the reported feelings of innocence and impotency which characterised childhood towards a liberalism and a stand, albeit ideological (none of the participants in this study reported being anti-apartheid 'freedom fighters' or activists) (Nettleton, 1972). In a sense then one is privy to a discourse where participants seem to have gained an awareness of what it meant to be white and the privileges that whiteness afforded them. The participants noted an increased sensitivity towards the anti-apartheid struggle and the violent events associated with that (as reported in the media). It would seem too that this awareness is linked to their participation in the military, and many expressed the fact that it was what they witnessed in the army that lead to a change in approach towards the apartheid system (Agostino, 1998; Baines, 2008). One could link this to the idea that in this instance participants are expressing the fact that there was at least one positive outcome of the war, this being their seeming realisation that the apartheid oppression and the violence associated with it was a real thing.

> *"Thousands of good men died fighting for something that was not really justified in any way; it was kak. Not to mention the fact that the same government we were fighting the war for just sort of decided hey let's just give this whole thing up and hand power over to the ANC." (John)*

A pertinent point can be made here in terms of discourses of masculinity. We see John making reference to the fact that *"good men died fighting"*. What is interesting about this comment is that John is referring to a warrior discourse that implies that the ideal, or in his words *"good",* man is the one that dies in battle fighting to the bitter end. Although it would seem many were not entirely sure what exactly they were fighting for or what these *"good men"* sacrificed their lives for (Batley, 2007; Barrett, 1996). This apparent grey area in terms of cause may explain the sense of disillusionment that these individuals feel in contemporary society, as they struggle to grapple with the motives behind their actions during the border war.

> *"I was actually quite a firm supporter of conscription you know I think… but when I actually went to the army that all changed… I hated it… I almost became like a conscious objector…" (Dawie)*

For the majority of the participant's adolescence and young adulthood was a time of awakening, as it were. Many spoke of the period as a time, in which they became aware of South Africa's violent political atmosphere and racial injustice. On the surface this is logical as for many this would be the time in which they would be exposed to the height of the political engagement in the army. At the same time this was a period of extremely challenging circumstances and conditions for of the participants, many of which had never left home before going to the army. One could argue here that what one encounters in this process or awakening is a turning back on experiences of protected whiteness and privilege. In this turning back, one is witness to a process where participants began innocent and protected, were then tainted, and now are making a conscious effort to resist this tainting. As a rhetorical device this process sets participants up as resistors rather than as complicit spectators. This process also has broader societal implications in the current context. What one finds here is that white individuals feel the need to position themselves as active resistors rather than complicit spectators in an effort to preserve their position in the 'new South Africa' (Bergerson, 2003; Steyn, 2001; Altman, 2004).

> *"You know it was like when I went to the army and actually saw first-hand what was going on that I realized what was happening in the country you know…" (Mathew)*

> *"I would say that in the years before went to the force you know I had no idea really what was happening in the country you know…but when I got to the army is was like you know what this can't be right…it wasn't long after that anyway and everything was exposed…" (Tim)*

This growing awareness may well be indicative of their discourse of a growing adolescent awareness, a time noted for an increased social sensitivity. This is primarily due to the fact that adolescents have qualities, which distinguish them from children, which usually result in the transformation of moral character and reasoning. Adolescents not only move away from their family towards their peer group but also experience an enhancement of their abilities to infer the perspective of others to understand themselves and to solve social problems (Cockroft, 2002; Hart & Carlo, 2005). Thus, it is unsurprising that adolescence would have been a period of conscientisation, or at the very least growing awareness for the participants. Added to this, participants were physically forced to move away from the protective enclaves of their family

environments and required to exist autonomously in a challenging environment. Furthermore, this environment was also politically charged forcing conscripts to participate in a politically charged manner, adding to this process of political awakening as it were (Borer, 2003).

> *"you know when you got to the army you were sort of fed all this political nonsense you know we even had lecture on politics in basics you know so you started to get a better sense of what was going on even though it was all completely skewed I was aware of that and it was an eye opener…" (Neville)*

However, what remains notable, as previously mentioned, is this discourse of there being a split between the ideology of being a liberal or an intellectual objector, and actually disrupting the status quo. In the quote below we see Marco constructing a different category of soldier that is other than what one would imagine was the masculine ideal at the time - being an obedient, reliable and strong soldier (Collier, 2005). It would seem that to some extent this comment, in the same process elaborated on above where events of the past are interpreted or shaped through the lens of today, is tainted by this participants perceived desire to come across as politically correct. Thus, what is related to the researcher is the idea that during his time of service this individual was actually a 'good' white, which in this instance implies that he had occupied less of a masculine position or a position other than the prototypical ideal in terms of military service. Thus what one find here is a trade off of sorts, where this participant is forced in favour of preserving a positive image in the new South Africa as a person who does not support the 'border war'. However, this is at expense of this participant's position as the masculine ideal as renouncing the war effort also implies some degree of conscientious objection or lack support for the military during apartheid. Which subsequently puts him in a more ideal position within contemporary society where we see the discourse of being opposed to the apartheid system in any way is more favourable than one that is in support of the old regime. However during apartheid the general consensus according to many participants was that there seem to be a dominant discourse of going to war willingly and that this was what society expected of you as a man:

> *"I started waking up to the fact that it was wrong because of that treatment…you know I started thinking no this is crap hey I wouldn't say that I was a conscientious*

*objector…but I started becoming what they called a jippogat…I used to avoid…I wouldn't volunteer for anything…I would avoid doing anything that required you becoming a better soldier etc. etc…. and I could get away from doing anything at all I would…and guys like that were seriously frowned upon…by more patriotic soldiers you know… you were known as a jippogat…"(Marco)*

A tension for most participants when reflecting on that time was that whilst they were aware, or conscientised to some degree, it was still at an ideological level. Materially they stated that they did very little to stop apartheid or 'fight the good fight' (Steyn, 2001; Cock, 1991). Many participants expressed the fact that they were aware of unjust nature of the actions they were engaging in the military but for the most part were unable to act differently. Speaking in a sense here to a sort of institutional hold or influence that the military had on individuals and the perpetual state of tension many conscripts found themselves in. In many ways this position that these individuals feel they occupied during apartheid is mirrored to some extent by the position they now occupy in contemporary society where they express distaste or disillusionment with their current situation in society but are unable to alter this:

*"you know I knew it was wrong you know going into Angola, hitting small villages with women and children beating them for no reason…other than because your unit leader instructed you too you know… how could I have told him no they would have killed me right there…I was told what to do I did it and that was that, deep down you know I had a sense that all this was wrong you know that I shouldn't be involved in a war that was happening for the wrong reasons…" (Dawie)*

This is indicative of the fact that the discourse of an awareness that not all was well with the world was uncomfortable and difficult to deal with. The gap which emerges in this text demonstrates that for many white individuals there exists two contradictory discourses to (1) absolve their conscience, by fighting "the good fight", and to (2) maintain their privileged position, which further confused and increased feelings of guilt (Nettleton, 1972). This desire, which in many instances was benign and not a conscious manifestation, to maintain their privileged position lead many to fear this constructed other as this construction was perceived to

be the appropriate threat to white individual's position of power in society at the time (Cooper, 2008; Conway, 2008).

> *"It, I was in for a brief moment of time in a, in a part of a war I was just told what to do…Well obviously I…I was intelligent enough that the white supremacy was ah a little over the top as far as apartheid is concerned ah the unfair treatment of the black population…Whites and blacks, white benches at the beach and there are black benches at the beach, white toilets, black toilets…Discrimination in the highest degree…Um and that I didn't quite agree with but then the same token um these these guys er these the black people at the time would ah any opportunity ah any opportune time would rob you and take you out"(Mathew)*

In this extract Mathew makes use of an interesting rhetorical device. While not entirely evident in the textual reproduction of his response there is evidence here to suggest some degree of self-censorship. What ones finds when this participants makes reference to black individuals he seems to hesitate or stammer, *"…um these these guys er these the black people…"*. One could postulate that this stammering is indicative of a process of censorship or rephrasing that was taking place during the interview. Furthermore, the idea of self-censorship is linked to the idea of white individuals in the 'new South Africa' feeling the need to come across as politically correct at all times, regardless of the fact that the sentiments that they hold and in this case the terminology that they wish to use in describing black individuals are not (Steyn, 2001; Nuttal, 2001; Draper, 1999). Added to this, we also see Mathew taking a fairly casual tone here in his description of apartheid mechanisms of racial separation, one could argue here that this may in fact be a means of underplaying the role of conscripts in maintaining this separate white South Africa. Indeed, during this time white conscripts were arguably the central mechanism of control that the apartheid government made use of in enforcing its racialised system of oppression. However, in order for these individuals to lay claim to a valued position in a South African society today, it would be important for him to minimise or under play the extreme nature of the apartheid system he assisted in maintaining.

Since the start of colonialism, whiteness has perceived itself as being under threat from the black other. Indeed one of the key discourses of fear under apartheid was that of *swart gevaar* (black

danger), the violent threat which the black man was seen to pose against the white man as well as his clan, women and sensibilities (Steyn, 2001). Indeed the discourse of whiteness itself is not only closely associated with the very conception of blackness but it is also associated with the fear that 'blackness' is a violent threat to 'whiteness' (Dalal, 2002; Steyn 2001).

Discourses of black threat under apartheid came across as somewhat paradoxically. On the one hand there was a sense that black threat, politically motivated violence, crime and so forth were removed from the lives of white individuals (Steyn, 2001). Yet on the other hand there is also a discussion of the violence that these individuals experienced on the border, as a direct result of the battle that was being waged against the black other. Indeed for some their experiences of border warfare would not be a legitimate experience, in terms of the masculine ideal, were it not for the violence they both experienced and committed on during the war. This again emphasises the notion that for the participant's whiteness was to a large extent isolated from what they saw as the harsher South African realities, which characterises discourses of whiteness in contemporary South Africa. Indeed, here we find participants isolating issues of whiteness from broader issues within the country both during apartheid as well as currently within the contemporary South African context.

> *"We lived in in our protected white suburbs you know we were shielded from all this that was going on you know, there was no crime or anything like that I mean maybe the odd petty thief or something like that but nothing violent and ugly…the border was a different story though there were definitely threats out there you know well at least we though there were this whole thing of the swaart gevaar you know the rooi gevaar was created you know there was this dark threat on our borders that we needed to defend our country from…communism was coming to take us over…" (Marco)*

On the other hand apartheid stoked the fires of white fear with discourses such as those of the *swart gevaar*[3], thus directly contradicting the previous statement that black threat was not really a threat to whites. Through the discourse of *swart gevaar* white South Africans were made, or at the very least encouraged, to fear black individuals and the violent threats they represented (Clarke, 2003). Indeed, this is a mechanism of perceived fear that many have been associated

[3] In this instance, *swart gevaar* refers to black fear or in this context the fear of black people.

with the motivation behind their violent actions in the army. In these instances we see participants blaming the broader political structure and its ability to promote and maintain this state of fear amongst the white population as the primary responsible party for the apartheid violence rather than themselves. In this way then these individuals are able to shift blame on to a non-entity of sorts, where blame cannot really be pinned on a specific person or department. Added to this, within the contemporary context these structures no longer even exist.

> *"This red threat on our borders and uh you there was a lot of peer pressure…all our friends…all our older friends were going off to the army and were being given almost like hero status send-offs…you know…stories of what was happening on the border sort of filtered back to us and we all thought geez you know that's amazing we can go fight for our country and do the right thing etc. and we just lived in that mind-set where we didn't think beyond that you know and life was comfortable for us so we didn't I suspect we didn't want to…"(Neville).*

These perspectives seem to align well with much of the literature on colonialism, which suggests that the oppressor feared that the oppressed would one day violently revolt and exact upon them what they themselves had inflicted on the other (Bulhan, 1985; Clarke, 2003; Dalal, 2002; Fanon, 1963). Furthermore, it underpins the notion that for many white South Africans there was, and to a large extent still is in contemporary society the knowledge that what was done to black people was wrong; and along with this knowledge is a deep-seated and not always conscious fear that one day the black other will want some sort of violent revenge, and do the same to them (Bulhan, 1985). However, the issue remains complex, where there is a seeming oscillation between calm rationality and discourses of irrational fear or paranoia of what could have or may still happen:

> *"Ah you know back then things were wild you know the country was really in chaos we were at war you know things were in a state of emergency at the time you know…not much has really changed in a way I suppose thing are still in chaos and instead of war now we have crime and corruption and corrupt leaders that are doing worse for us than the apartheid government…" (John)*

The above excerpt provides an interesting insight multiple discourses. What one finds is that John is making reference to the discourses of chaos, war and a state of emergency which are themed around the idea of whiteness being under threat. In a rather sophisticated manner these discourses are then conflated with the discourse of blackness in terms of the *"crime and corruption and corrupt leaders"* of today. What one can postulate here then is that to some extent this participant is making use of discourses of chaos and war to subtly discredit the current government. Furthermore, we see the syntactic juxtaposition of phrases like chaos, war and state of emergency with things like crime, corruption and corrupt leaders in today's society. This excerpt sheds interesting insight into the ways in which some of the participants look at past events through the lens of today (Steyn, 2001; Altman, 2004).

> *"Those were difficult time you know and I know that like what was done then is not right you know I know that now you know…but it was a different time with different circumstances this is not the same country as it was back then…" (Marco)*

Such discourse seems to suggest that for the participants there is a desire to align themselves with a liberal ideology as well as a desire to be free of their feelings of guilt. In today's context such constructions will align the individual with a discourse which is not only favourable but also allows the person to legitimise their belonging in the 'new' South Africa, as it allows for them to be represented to themselves and others as being objectors and thus more authentic as white South Africans in the 'new South Africa' (Steyn, 2001; Nuttal, 2001).

### 4.2.5. Whiteness and the 'super structure': the media and whiteness

In grappling with what it meant to be white during apartheid we see participants attempting to illustrate to the interviewer how embedded racial discourses of discrimination were in everyday society through the discussion of censored news media and propaganda. Participants often times made reference to the controlled media apparatuses of the apartheid government as an aspect of the super structure that manipulated and dictated all aspects of their existence including the nature of the news that they consumed, shifting the scope of view away from themselves as the individual and more towards the racialised system and the embedded nature of their existence within it. What participants made reference to here is what Althusser (1970) refers to as a single

aspect of the super structure which contains such elements as religion, politics, education and the mass media. The argument being put forward here is that this aspect of the super structure constructed certain perceptions in white society and perhaps even white identity as a whole to some degree. Propaganda and disinformation was employed by the apartheid state in the battle for hearts and minds of citizens and conscripts alike. However, the Nationalist Party government and the SADF did not take the soldiers or their families into their confidence. The authorities disclosed information about military matters only on a need to know basis. They repeatedly refused to disclose the nature and exact number of the armed forces' (often self-inflicted) casualties. Reports released to and published by the media were often contrived versions of what had actually caused the deaths of servicemen. This was compounded by the SADF's reluctance to disclose the circumstances of individual soldier's deaths to their next of kin. Even the troops themselves were seldom informed about the strategic objectives of military operations in which they were involved. For instance, troops were not briefed beforehand when they were bound for Angola, and officers were instructed not to divulge the enemy's logistical and numerical superiority to their own troops at the battle of Cuito Cuanavale. Clandestine operations carried out by the SADF's elite reconnaissance forces are not the only ones that warrant the appellation, the 'Silent War'. For the most part, the 'border war' was generally conducted amidst considerable secrecy and wild rumours (Baines, 2008; Baines & Vale, 2008).

A common thread in the discourses of the participants was the desire or an attempt to separate the self from the inherently militarised and racialised system of apartheid. One of the ways in which this manifests is through the media. In the data collected there was evidence of this manifesting in two ways, either through the blurring or fusing of media narratives with personal and/or other reports, or through the construction of narratives in media representations where the narrative is no longer that individual's story but rather the narrative of the social institution (Collier, 2005). Furthermore, male conscripts report being exposed to racialised military events primarily through such media gateways as news reports on the television and radio during apartheid. Some participants reported that their most direct or vivid exposure to militarised violence during this period took place via media reports of political violence during the time. Furthermore, this may function for these individuals as a mechanism of diverting blame toward broader structures in the country at the time. One could postulate then that this reattribution of blame is a process that assists many participants in dealing with the guilt and shame they feel for

their acceptance of and support for apartheid rule in a contemporary society that rejects almost all aspects of this regime. While this was the case on an overt level, we have seen earlier that white identity was prevalent in almost all aspects of the participants' existence, even though not explicitly acknowledged as aspects of racial identity emerge from this discourse in subtle ways (Agostino, 1998; Conway, 2008).

> *"You know we heard on the news that there were guys on the border you know getting killed but it wasn't like in our face or anything…" (Frank)*

> *"You know I remember hearing on the news about the war and what was going on but it was nothing like it really was out there you know it was mostly positive spin propaganda you know…" (Marco)*

> *"(laughs) we knew so little in the army man we used to listen to the radio or read the newspaper to find out what was going man you know that's how bad it was…" (Tim)*

Furthermore, many of the participants reported having been involved directly in various types of military related events that they felt to be most vivid or significant to them. Interestingly though, although having experienced military duty and conscription, some still chose to report having "heard about", "seen on T.V." or "heard on the radio" but never directly involved in or exposed to an actual military event:

> *"Suppose the ones that really stick with me are those that are first hand you know the things that I personally experienced in the army you know being on the border." (Tim)*

> *"I mean I do remember a story that was told to me by one of my closest friends who was also conscripted around the same time as me, we were both friends with a guy named Robert and they were deployed together as infantry." (John)*

This raises a pertinent point in terms of the discourse of minimising complicity as well as distancing atrocities of the militarised apartheid system as a means of coping with those distressing events within a contemporary society that is not forgiving or understanding of their actions. We see John, a conscript who more than likely was exposed to events in his own term in the army but when asked to relate such an event, choses to describe a story he heard from a

fellow conscript (Craig, 2008). What resonates is that for many white South Africans the only contact with violent events, outside of whisperings of war amongst peers, was an admittedly highly censored news media. What is interesting here is that many participants spoke about *"propaganda"* and being *"Brainwashed"* by the apartheid system in a rather matter-of-fact manner (Craig, 2008; Collier, 2005). The assumption here is made that at the time the production of news was heavily regulated and the only options were to either ignore or observe it:

> *"It's like in a way I feel as a 17 year old I was brainwashed and tricked into military service you know." (Mathew)*

> *"And I think I just did not know better you know the press and media was controlled so we only really knew what the government wanted us to know, we were led to believe that this system and this war that I was expected to participate in was for the right reasons and the good of our country there were subversive forces conspiring to get us." (John)*

> *"You know all this war stuff…what we were doing to the blacks was all controlled by the government and its propaganda…" (Frank)*

It would seem then that many participants in their minds only experienced politically violent events through a highly censored news media and as such were only exposed to very select violent events in our country at the time. To a large extent one could argue that in these accounts there is a definite discourse of betrayal characterizing the tone of the accounts they provided. In conveying this sense of trickery or betrayal of white individuals during apartheid participants are making use of a further mechanism of diverting blame and responsibility as well as otherising guilt. One sees participants positioning themselves as betrayed and vulnerable. This may yet be another mechanism in otherising and perhaps removing complicity from these events due to the uneasy and strong emotions such events evoke. It would seem then that most participants here wish to evoke a sense of victimization as white individuals. This sense of victimisation serves to externalise blame attribution. One may question then if this seemingly skewed perspective is not in fact a result of the skewed manner in which these events were related to the participants via the news media at the time which would no doubt further its interest by presenting these violent events in this light. Another reason for this skewed perspective may be a reflection of the desire to accept the status quo and not question a system that favoured these individuals (Craig, 2005;

Collier, 2005; Baines, 2008). Furthermore, in contemporary society this diversion of blame and responsibility on to a third party may serve in assisting these individuals in coping with the racialised and violent events of the past and maintaining an favourable position as white individual in society today.

### 4.2.6. Complex reflections: the normativity and invisibility of whiteness

In asking participants what it meant to be a former white conscript who served in the 'border war' what was really clear is that, many struggled with expressing what it really meant to be white. Perhaps one of the most noticeable strands thus far has been the lack of explicit reference to what it actually meant to the participants to be white during apartheid. In fact, one could say that there were more attempts to explain and describe events of conscription or anecdotes from the army while ensuring that participants themselves were seen positively and in a way that denied complicity. This is in, and of itself a symptom of what it is to be white: whiteness is invisible and normative, and it is extremely difficult for those who are white to pin-point and talk about (Bonnett, 1999; Hartigan, 1999).

> *"you know at the time its not like we had any option really at all…we just went along with things you know…the government had us exactly where they wanted us…eating out their hands…nobody really questioned it especially when things were so good…" (Frank)*

> *"…you just went along with it even though in your subconscious mind there were questions about it being wrong… I don't know maybe we were apathetic maybe it was comfortable we were protected by the government…as long as we voted for them…"(Mathew)*

Added to this participants experienced difficulty in understanding and positioning themselves as white individuals within the violent militarised culture and events of apartheid other than providing descriptive accounts of events such as bombings and violent uprisings, providing one with a discourse of distancing and shifting of blame.

*"…I remember hearing about some serious thing happening on the border with one of my close friends..." (Frank)*

*"Some of my friends had older brothers who had been in the army and they had heard stories you know about what was happening over there…people would say you know my brother is doing his service for the country, he is doing his duty for the country" (John)*

Interestingly, here we see John making reference to a discourse of the masculine ideal when asked to reflect on what it was like to be white during apartheid. What one finds here is the masculine ideal discourse being made use of here as a mechanism that allows this participant to bolster or enhance his position as a white male who embraced the masculine ideal and participated in the war. He chooses also to make reference to the discourse of the 'warrior legend' in an attempt to justify or elaborate on how idealized military service was at the time. As we shall see later it would seem that this discourse of the 'warrior legend' is pertinent even in today's context as participants attempt to grapple with their position in a society that does not regard them in this light (Steyn, 2001).

*"I was alive then (laughs). I remember the news, I remember seeing it. Bear in mind I was 17 when I went to the air force…"(Henk)*

Furthermore when referring to their whiteness and identity as a white person during apartheid many, if not all, the participants made reference to what it meant to be black, thus indirectly referring to their whiteness through reference to a discourse of blackness. Indeed, Aveling (2004) notes that the first time many whites become aware of their whiteness is usually when they are faced with the other or are themselves in some way othered. In many respects, the normativity of whiteness is indicative of broader processes of socialization. This reaffirms the literature which states that there is no whiteness without blackness (Clarke, 2003; Steyn, 2001; Straker, 2007). For instance, when asked to speak about being white, many spoke about how they were not 'black' or aware of blackness.

*"back then I mean we didn't know any black people really, we lived in our protected white suburbs and really the only black I saw before the army was my maid and my gardener. They had hard lives you know I can only imagine what they went through*

*during apartheid…then in the army all of a sudden I was told to kill black terrorists…" (Dawie)*

Interestingly, here we do see a degree of empathy from Dawie who acknowledges that the staff working at his house during apartheid did indeed have very difficult lives. There is evidence here to suggest that he would even go as far as to *"imagine"* what it would like to a black person during apartheid. Discursively this may also serve to illustrate to the interviewer his ability to see the situation from another perspective in attempt perhaps to shift focus away from this participants inability to do anything about this difficult position the black other found him or herself in. Indeed, in the face of countless inhumane and violent acts that were committed during apartheid there is an attempt here by participants to humanise themselves. This type of empathic sentiment towards the black other is to some degree in contradiction with the discourse of the tough uncaring male soldier who feels little for the plight of other individuals. Yet, within the current South African context this serves to illustrate to the interviewer that this participant is capable of feeling compassion and in spite of his actions during apartheid he still feels compassionately for the plight of black individuals which one could argue is a more favourable position for white individuals to occupy within contemporary society. This could also be linked here to a discourse of white guilt and shame that characterises contemporary South African society, where we find white individuals grappling with their inability to act against the atrocities that were committed during apartheid. Thus, in an attempt to redeem themselves to some degree, there is an attempt to evoke a more human stance toward their inhumane acts of the past.

*"I would have known uhm I never knew a black child…no I'm serious…I must have been about 16 or 17 and we had one coloured child in our whole school…you know what I mean…I never…the only like black children were maybe the maid kids…but…uh no"(John)*

*"At that time we were brought up basically not to...uh...how can I explain this... to feel that the black man was inferior to us, you know, that was the way we were edu…brought up...so when these things were happening we thought this was the uprising of the sort of underlings you know?... and that they should be...(sighs)...jailed...put away...out of our...you know what I'm saying?" (Henk)*

In many respects as we have seen above such discourse is once again an attempt to minimise feelings or perceptions of complicity by appealing to the fact that they were indeed unaware of the other while growing up, something which the South African reforms of post-1994 have destabilised and disrupted. There is similarly the inherent desire for such individuals to legitimise their location within contemporary South Africa, through this rhetorical strategy of minimising blame. Furthermore, this discourse demonstrates an attempt on the part of the individual to disrupt white normativity and invisibility. As it would seem for this participant in order to legitimise one's existence one has to move out of the realm of the invisible. This is arguably the case for many white men in South Africa today who one would argue are constantly trying to legitimise their position in South Africa today (Clarke, 2003; Steyn, 2001; Straker, 2007).

## 4.3. Theme 2: Discourses of masculinity and conscription

### 4.3.1. Discourses of romanticising violence

For white males in South Africa during apartheid a compulsory national service was unavoidable. All the participants in this study relayed events from their time spent in the military fighting 'the border war'. These experiences of white males impacted the nature of racialised events they were exposed to, as they moved from relatively calm suburbia into an active war environment. The military system by its very nature is violent and harsh and all participants related aspects regarding physical and emotional toughness of this time in their lives. Many of the participants discussed the various emotions and debates that they were forced to grapple when faced with going to the army as young conscripts (Baines, 2008). For many this was a difficult and conflicted time, where one's future was seemingly undetermined.

> *"…I remember the other boys at school saying, Geez I can't wait to go to the army, I can't wait they gonna give me a rifle it's gonna be awesome…and I mean we were young and dumb and we were manipulated I reckon from early days at school that sort of sense of national discipline was hammered …by our teachers…and by our parents…our parents also you know forced certain ideologies you know certain perceptions about black people…and we went along with it…you born into that culture you don't start to question it until you much older…" (Henk)*

*"I remember it you know conscription for me was something I was ready for and something I looked forward to you know it wasn't like some other guys say this hell or anything you know I remember it being quite fun actually you know yes it was hard and whatever but afterwards you know after you had gone through all that pain at least you felt like you had achieved something in your life" (John)*

*"And at the time I remember being scared but at the same time willing. I wanted to go out there and serve my country. I wanted to be a man even and defend my family and what it stood for. It was basically from about then that the idea of conscription featured in my life…" (Dawie)*

In the above excerpt provided by Dawie, interesting discourses of masculinity emerge. What one finds here is that Dawie is making reference to the discourse of the warrior male protecting his family and loved ones from a threatening other. However, in doing so he also chooses to convey the idea that while he was willing to participate in the war effort he was also scared, perhaps in an attempt to minimise blame to some extent and to evoke a more sympathetic response from the interviewer. The reference to fear is an interesting element that this participant has chosen to attach to this account. To some degree this further bolsters the implied courage of his actions yet at the same time it gives one a sense that this was also a scary and difficult time for many of these men, contrary to the masculine discourse of the brave warrior (Connell, 2002).

*"You see and that was thing you were young so you signed up not really knowing what you were actually signing up for. We were young and dumb and easy to turn into brainwashed troops fighting for something we didn't really understand or even know about. So ya I mean I have memories of the border but I don't really know if I remember it as something I was keen on or liked I remember mostly bad things like afkak and pole P.T. and the boredom of guard duty and missing home…" (Mathew)*

There is once again a clear claim to discourses of childhood innocence and being socialised, or in the words of the participants *"Brainwashed"*, in such a way that deprives the individual agency or choice. This can even be seen as an attempt by the participants to distance themselves from apartheid and the violent acts committed by insinuating here that other whites are to blame this is exemplified by such statements as, *"you signed up not really knowing what you were actually*

*signing up for"*. Once again the white individual is positioned in the victim role, and as unable to control his or her fate. It would seem here participant's position social pressure and government policy ahead of their own agency when discussing the process of going to the military (Du Pisani, 2001; Enloe, 2000). This is perhaps illustrative of the fact that it was easier for the participants to project their own socially unacceptable feelings, or perceptions, of whiteness onto other white South Africans, like political leaders or family members, in a process that allows for the distancing of themselves from their actual perceptions of what it was to be white at the time. This mechanism also has implications for these individuals in contemporary society, where we see that these arguments or socialisation and reattribution of blame on to other whites assists these men in coping with their current position within a society that does not honour nor accept their action during apartheid. For many white males this was an extremely harrowing time:

> *"you know it was chaos man…I really didn't know where I was going and what I had gotten myself into really you know… we had heard all the stories but they were nothing like what I experienced the first few night in the army you know we slept outside in our civvies for like three days…it was not fun…we were treated like animals and all I wanted to do was cry really…so ya…" (Henk)*

Added to this, many began to question their own identities as white individuals as well as the motives for being in the military in the first place. It would seem that when the harsh realities of a military environment were experienced the idyllic dreams that participants had of military service were crumbled (Du Pisani, 2001; Enloe, 2000). The discourses of *"going to the army like a Rambo"* or *"going to become a war hero"* were to remain figments of popular masculine culture. The reality it would seem for many participants was much harsher:

> *"you know I was going from my safe life in the suburbs to this big unknown all by myself without my family or anybody to come with me you know so maybe from that perspective you know I arrived there or just before I left a feared a bit what I was getting myself into you know I did pass my mind you know that I could actually die in the army." (John)*

> *"it was sort of like forget your life as you know it and off you go into a live war with a gun and helmet and do your best to figure out exactly what it is you are trying to achieve by doing that…I really started to question it…" (Mathew)*

When relating events that occurred under the conditions of war it would seem that the same individuals had no difficulty relating events of violence committed even by themselves. Under these conditions there is a sense then that white individuals had no difficulty relating violent events that even they have personally committed or had been involved in. One could postulate here that this may be related to the discourse of the masculine ideal of what war is supposed to entail, i.e. violence and hardship (Batley, 2007; Liebenberg, 2009). Thus for many in order to authentically convey their experiences of military service to the interviewer it was necessary for them to describe events that were particularly violent or traumatising. Indeed within the contemporary context this leaves these individuals in a rather difficult position of not being able to talk about or divulge these events as society generally is not willing to hear or accept these violent and traumatic events that occurred. Furthermore, as men one could argue that breeching the 'code of silence' that surrounds events such as this is often seen as a sign of weakness or betrayal, yet for these individuals one could argue that these events still seem to be very prevalent within their memory of border warfare. One could argue here then that ex-conscripts find themselves in a double bind of sorts, where there is a desire to remember and romanticise their experiences in the army but being bound by the masculine ideal in contemporary society which rejects discussion of hardship and difficult times. This is opposed to what was seen earlier when asked about experiences of apartheid that were not related to war which was characterized by aspect of othering and distancing.

> *"operation smoke-shell and being dropped in the middle of nowhere from a helicopter you know and we were in the middle of Angola, we hit a small camp and set it alight and after that things really got bad … it was terrifying you know you were trapped in this vehicle and there was nothing you could even do you know it was just chaos and were like canned sardines in there waiting to die that for me is the most terrifying incident of border warfare that I ever had to go through …" (John)*
>
> *"I remember hitting a village and just destroying everything, we would cut the breasts off of women to get them to talk and give up information about SWAPO…"(Mathew)*
>
> *"We used to get a few guys together after raiding a small camp or village and just beat and I mean literally smash them up until we felt better about the friends we had lost and those who would be lost the next day…we didn't care we were bossies…"(Henk)*

Added to this we see here that when asked to relate events of border warfare some participants chose rather to relate discourses every day experiences such as *"opfok"* or a quirky event that was not directly concerned with the actual violence of war (Baines, 2008).

> *"This side of our training also had its funny side. We were once shown a cartoon film about all the awful things a careless soldier could pick up, from foot-rot to syphilis (no AIDS in those days)…They introduced once-a-week foot-inspection."(Mathew)*

> *"things erupt into chaos we out on the border in full blown war and here we sit fighting and trying to kill each other man it was a strange realisation for at the same time we have guy who is shot over an argument, you know I realise now just how tense those times really were when I think about guys shooting at each other over a drunken dispute but I suppose this type of thing happens today because of road rage so things are not really that different (laughs)."(Dawie)*

It would seem that a common discourse amongst those serving in the military was the consequence of not participating in military service. Mention was made by participants of what would happen if one refused to participate in military service. Rhetorically the mention of such consequences of non-participation serves to shift blame on to a 'third force' of sort and preserve self-image and reputation in a society today that many would argue is not accepting of the choices these men made during apartheid (Baines, 2008). It would seem that these threats allow participants to justify their actions in the military through a mechanism of blame diversion and in a way assuage their guilt as post-1994 minded white individuals trying to grapple with many of the acts that they committed or were a part of that society today would frown upon:

> *"you know it was either you went to the army or you went to detention barracks for two years…you would get opfok everyday there…it was hell…I did not know anybody at the time that went for that option…" (Henk)*

> *"We were basically forced you know it was is that or you went to d.b. with a criminal record and basically wasted away you know guys dies there…it was not something I was prepare to do I would rather take my chances on the border" (Frank)*

*"Ya, I didn't want to go to DB and I didn't want to get harassed by the corporals or anyone else …a guy that was particularly picked on in the air force committed suicide…because he was an objector he stayed behind because they were busy processing him…to put him in d.b. or something and that weekend while we were away on camp he hung himself in the showers…"(Marco)*

Furthermore, there is a sense of romanticisation attached to military service. One cannot help but get the sense that there are conflicting and perhaps unresolved emotions that are attached to the recollection of such events. This did not necessarily come across explicitly. However, if one is to make sense of what has been said one could postulate that in recalling these times in their lives participants are still at odds with what happened and where they stand in relation to the militarised apartheid regime and society today. When asked to elaborate on how they saw their military service in the context of today many participants provided fairly ambivalent answers. Most participants chose to suppress or forget their personal involvement in the 'border war' and apartheid more broadly (Cheng, 1999; Enloe, 1988; Kilshaw, 2008; Nagel, 1998).

*"Well you know I sort of see as something that has happened in my life you now I can't take that time and the things I did then back really. At times I try to forget it you know I don't like to think about it all the time. For me a lot of the border war was a dark time in my life and I try to look past it now and to better things." (John)*

*"…mmm well I'm not really sure to be honest I think I did say earlier that I think conscription was a good thing you know for me anyway it was the one thing that I had looked forward to…I probably run risk of being a racist by admitting that I think I performed a duty that was required of me…I know that the new rainbow nation South Africa that we as those guys who fought for the old order are sort of looked down on and whatever…" (Mathew)*

*"…killed innocent people you know it was a state of emergency and that is what happened, we can't really take it back now we just sort have to move on with our lives…" (Dawie)*

One gets the sense than when thinking about their military service in terms the contemporary South African context, many of the participants seemed conflicted and unsure of where to

position themselves in relation to the broader discourse 'border war' and apartheid. For many it would seem it is easier to simply ignore those years of their lives and *"move on"*. A worrying outcome of this suppression of one history is that one may find that there are a large number of white males in contemporary South Africa who served in the military who refuse or would rather not grapple with the difficulties they faced in the army (Connell, 1995; 2000, Cornwall & Lindisfarne, 1994; Skelton, 1997; Swain, 2002). This lack of desire to grapple with or discuss 'what happened in the army' further reinforces the hegemonic construction of the masculine warrior (Gibson, 2009; Mankayi, 2010). Linked to the discourse of the masculine warrior is the unspoken rule of not divulging or talking about the difficult times one had in the army and in displaying any outward signs of distress in dealing with the after effects of traumatic experiences in war (Skelton, 1997; Swain, 2002; Gibson, 2009). This thus allows many of these men to preserve their identity as a masculine war hardened soldier devoid of emotion and feeling even within the context of the 'new' South Africa (Gibson, 2009)

### 4.3.2. Changing opinions of conscription

It goes without saying that the apartheid rule would have had to change at some point, and it did, in many ways. The period leading up to Nelson Mandela's release from prison and the 1994 democratic elections themselves resulted in political, economic and social transformation in South Africa, which have undoubtedly had a substantial impact on the lives of South Africans. Yet, in many ways, things have stayed the same for white middle-class South Africans (Steyn, 2001). A prominent discourse made mentioned of by participants spoke to the idea that, post 1994 their opinion of conscription and the way in which they viewed there time in the military changed quite drastically (Korber, 1992; Draper, 1999). It was expressed by many that their opinion had somewhat shifted from support of national service and the 'border' war to the polar opposite, denigration of the apartheid system on almost every level. Furthermore, in this process of shifting it would seem that all the things that were previously held in esteem for participants in terms of conscription and masculinity and what it meant to be a man during apartheid are in a sense sacrificed for the preservation of whiteness in the 'new South Africa' (Gibson, 2009).

> *"…as I said earlier back then during apartheid you know I thought it was something I had to do you know defend my country, but I think you know my view have changed quite*

*drastically. You know from my current perspective given what has happened with 1994 elections and the ANC coming into power, not to mention that no one is really sure what happened with the border and what was really achieved. I feel that conscription was unfair on us youngsters at the time I mean we hardly had any idea of what was going on in this country we were so protected and underexposed." (John)*

Interestingly here John makes use of the discourse of not knowing and chooses in this instance to position him and all *"youngsters"* at the time as victims who *"hardly had any idea of what was going on in this country"*. John also throws in to question the exact outcome as well as making the argument that he feels that conscription was not fair on him and those that were conscripted with him in the army. Rhetorically, these discursive devices serve to divert blame and preserve his status as a white individual in the 'new South Africa' who is not in support of the 'border war' and the system of apartheid (Korber, 1992; Draper, 1999).

*"You know I've come to realise that the army I was required to join was not the army I would have chosen to fight for had I choice and that feeling of betrayal sits with me in a way. I don't know so I suppose I've gone from supporting conscription to the complete opposite." (Mathew)*

The above statement from Mathew sums up quite clearly the sentiment of many ex-conscripts who are now left to navigate their existence within the 'new South Africa'. There is a sense of realisation mixed with disillusionment where participants are forced in order to remain acceptable members of the present South African society to completely invert their opinions of a system they were once ready to sacrifice their lives in war for. What we also find here is that this participant, in expressing his difficult position in society is also making use of rhetorical strategy of rejecting apartheid in attempt to occupy a more desirable position in contemporary society.

*"Well ya you know I don't really see what happened then with the war in the same way now. I sort of fell like what happened then was not really right you know. Thousands of good men died fighting for something that was not really justified in any way it was kak. Not to mention the fact that the same government we were fighting the war for just sort of decided hey let's just give this whole thing up and hand power over to the ANC." (Henk)*

Statements such the one above made by Henk illustrate to us many of the functions mentioned earlier in this discussion. We see Henk here expressing a sense of betrayal at the end of his statement when he implies that power was just *"given up"* to the ANC, this concept of betrayal has important implications for white male individuals in contemporary society who could argue may still harbour feelings of resentment or betrayal. In this instance statements such as this may also function to shift blame away from the subject to a broader social or political power that decided the fate of all whites in South Africa. This then speaks to the idea of othering once again where we see guilt and blame being shifted to something other than the white participant. Furthermore this highlights the manner in which the desire to appear as though one is politically correct is in contest with, and often supersedes, the need to be politically correct, especially within the current political context in South Africa. The statement above by Henk also speaks to the discourse of the fallen soldier or fallen hero. We see Henk making reference to *"good men died fighting"* implying here that a good man is one who dies at war or 'fighting the good fight' (Steyn, 2001; Nettleton, 2001; Baines, 2008).

> *"I mean in this country that type of policy is just ludicrous...I also read up about what was really happening with the war and with the information that I read it really changed my mind about the whole border war, you know it was just a mess. So many terrible and unnecessary things happened over there that I can't really say that I support or view the border in any other light than a bad one…you know any logical person can see that the way things were done and carried out and the things that happened were not right…it was just a joke…" (Frank)*

One could postulate that this is possibly indicative of the fact that for many white people it is easier to split the more difficult aspects of the human psyche off from themselves and project them onto the other, be it a person or institution. Indeed this supports the notion that, that which is feared and disliked is projected onto the other, in order to preserve the image of oneself (Clarke, 2003; Dalal, 2002). It remains pertinent though that only one participant reported little change in opinion on the issue of national service and border warfare.

> *"not really hey I still sort of see what conscription as a good thing you know…it did me good and I think it could do the children of today some good as well…you we learnt alot out there we had respect and discipline you know that is something that I think is lacking*

*in our society today and it shows really it does…there are benefits to a war and national service and I definitely saw them back then and I can see them now…"(Marco)*

Contrary to the above discussion Marco is still in support, albeit *"sort of"*, of conscription and the militarised apartheid system. This may indicate that there are still some white males in South African society today that have managed to preserve their opinions of the 'border war' while still maintain an acceptable position in South African society today. Perhaps this is achieved by his focus on the discourses of the positive outcomes of conscription rather than focusing on the violence and destruction that war brings (Baines, 2008; Steyn, 2001). These participants chose to apply a strategy of promoting the militarised institutions of apartheid in an attempt to convince the interviewer and broader society of the fact that perhaps things were not as bad as contemporary society sees them. It would seem that here Marco also chooses to invoke discourses of masculinity in support of this particular perspective or 'kind' of whiteness and uses such words as *"respect and discipline"* which one could argue are linked to the discourse of the white masculine soldier during apartheid (Mankayi, 2010; Gibson, 2009). Furthermore, what one finds here is that there is some claim being made to a positive outcome for the war. Indeed, in a society that rejects apartheid and the war effort as something that was entirely negative these participants chose to highlight redemptive aspects of historical experiences in order to ensure at least to some degree their own psychological validity.

### 4.3.3. Hegemonic masculinity

In order for one to understand violent practices such as those propagated by the 'border war', it is necessary to focus on the sociocultural context and the complex relations of meaning and power within which male masculinities are constituted. Social constructionism assists in the exploration of men's and particularly soldiers', constructions of their identities. It has been argued in the literature review that there are diverse forms of masculinities within a given setting, be it social or institutional. Furthermore, we have also seen that there is a strong argument that some forms of masculinities are more powerful than others, and these hegemonic masculinities take on a dominant position in relation to more marginal ones as we have already seen above in some of our analysis. Indeed as we also see some authors (Connell, 2002; Swain, 2002) have argued for a relatively global hegemonic masculinity, or at least some fairly consistent universal

constructions of successful masculinity –such as heterosexuality, the importance of physical strength, and in the case of the South African context white identity– consistently emerge as key to hegemonic masculinities. Aggressive behaviour, including militarised violence and intense interest in 'conquest', is important to the presentation of hegemonic masculinity (Mankayi, 2010; Murnen, Wright & Kaluzy, 2002). Further, one could argue here that there tends to be less of an apologetic tone taken then when racial discourses are grappled with. There is a sense then that perhaps discourses of masculinity are not under the same political pressure as those of race and whiteness. These aspects as we will see shortly will play an important role in in the analysis to follow.

Barrett (1996) accordingly states that militaries all over the world have defined and supported through their actions the idea that soldiering is an embodiment of traditional male sex role behaviours such as heterosexuality, braveness, aggression, sexual virility, independence and adventurousness. They have therefore socialised millions of men according to a traditional blueprint. An interesting question is how one reconciles the notion of traditional blueprint with that of the historically and socially variable masculine constructions highlighted above? Hence, there has been a long association between the military and dominant/hegemonic images of masculinity. Yet militaries are not merely random collections of men (or women). They are also stratified according to gender, race, ethnicity, class and rank. The participants of this study provide perfect example of this type of military structure.

Toughness and leadership are associated with discourses of manhood. Leadership as a form of exerting power and control over other people is crucial in maintaining hegemonic masculinity (Du Pisani, 2001). Leadership is crucial in the military, as the military system uses a rank hierarchy that clearly draws boundaries between seniors and subordinates (Baines, 2008). This rank hierarchy is visible to everyone. It appeared that for some white participants, who still enjoyed the military, that it was generally linked to the fact that they were in leadership positions and enjoyed the recognition and the prestige that came with these positions. Furthermore, these individuals will have occupied dominant roles within the military system and would have benefitted from these positions:

> *"But like I said, about that thing of earning respect, so I received it, and … and it's cool. I can give a guy shit and he accepts it coming from me, if someone else does the same*

*thing, he became very offended. I can walk to one of the troops and ask what the hell are you doing, why are you doing this, can you see there are about six guys in front of you who'll do the same thing. Why do you not do the same!" (Mathew)*

The quote above underlines that the construction of manhood (masculinity) hinges on control and, ultimately, power (Connell, 1995). Further, by linking discourses of leadership and respect, this excerpt supports the notion that one cannot be a leader without being assertive or aggressive and in control (Steyn, 2001). This excerpt further demonstrates the successful use of hierarchy in the military to reproduce subordinate and dominant discourses of masculinity, one could further argue here that in illustrating these functions of masculinity participants wish illustrate the lack agency or control they existed within and this way divert blame to some extent. The language of training contributed to these reproductions:

*"We did PT with them in the morning, but obviously you are reminded of that experience that you had, being given a hard time, but I never had the [...] and people have told me that they were glad to see that, although in the military I cannot shout at people and mistreat them, I believe in very hard and tough training." (John)*

These excerpts show different communication styles in management, which still produced satisfactory responses from subordinates. Likewise, the leaders had also received such tough training before from those who were senior to them and responsible for their training. Indeed, what one finds being illustrated here is a militarised hyper masculine system that conscripts had very little or control over. There serves as a rhetorical strategy of minimising complicity within the racialised system of apartheid:

*"I personally think once you get to the army, you become completely different. I definitely became matured in the Defence Force from day one. […] At school, I was shit, shit really. But in the army it is different. Well, you can have problems with authority and it doesn't mean they will take your shit." (Tim)*

This excerpt provided by Tim to some extent makes explicit reference to the discourses of discipline and authority in the army. There is a sense here that in order to become a disciplined male you have to first be disciplined by the institution and those who rank above you in the hierarchy. Added to this, right in the moment of this statement, there is a performance

happening. The language usage and general tone of the excerpt above is in a sense a performance of masculinity in itself. The use of profanity such as *"shit"* as well as the general tone of this excerpt one could argue is specific to the gender of both the participant and the interviewer, being two males in dialogue (Nuttal, 2001). Furthermore, one could argue here that perhaps many white males who fall in line with this approach to masculinity and hierarchy and perhaps struggle to position themselves in a society that does not embrace or adopt any of masculine militaristic conduct that they were once accustomed to.

For some participants the military hierarchy and training was perceived as a context that had brought some sense of maturity. The requirements of a high level of respect for leaders, rank structures and authority, adherence to rules, a self-image of moral superiority and the imperative to place people in separate compartments by classifying them as different (Du Pisani, 2001). What then is the relationship between masculinity and subordination to orders, given that soldiers must have the capacity to be violent? On the one hand, soldiers must have combat ability, which represents the ultimate expression of masculinity. Yet, on the other hand, being disciplined and obeying orders require a heavy dose of submissiveness, or perhaps a fluid masculinity linked to the specific setting and people present within that setting. This dualism sheds light on the complexity of multiple identities embodied in the military, which arguably the men featured within this study embody to some extent as well. It also symbolises the ranking of power relations among soldiers, which might result in different ways of constructing masculinity (Steyn, 2001; Nuttal, 2001; Gibson, 2009).

For many participants, when asked to reflect whether being male had any impact on their experiences in the army, it was clear that military service was something that was expected of males by broader society. As we have explored above in terms of whiteness this may be a discourse or mechanism of shifting blame, but it also says something about what was expected of men during apartheid. Furthermore this also then says something about what is expected of men in contemporary society by means of comparison. Many constructed military service almost as a rite of passage into manhood, where conscription or military service taught vital lessons in masculinity or manhood.

> *"you know it was what we had to do…it was part of growing up you know becoming a man…we became tough…"(John)*

*"It was like your parents wanted you to go you know…in the army you would grow up you would become the man they wanted you to be…"(Henk)*

*"We went to the army just boys but when we came back we were hard…we were men…"(Mathew)*

### 4.3.4. Replicating masculine ideals

The military is a prime site for the replication of masculine ideals and indeed for many participants their military identity was synonymous with characteristics such as fortitude, determination, honour, bravery, autonomy, being 'plucky' and daring while also displaying decorum, self-discipline, dutifulness and forbearance: characteristics fundamental to constructions of hegemonic masculinity (Cheng, 1999; Enloe, 1988; Kilshaw, 2008; Nagel, 1998). Interestingly, here what we find is that there is a foregrounding of the masculine body however at the same time for many participants this was also linked to a disavowal of the masculine psyche which is then rejected and to some degree feminised by this militarise masculine culture.

*"You know the army made you tough, it made you hard. We learnt respect and honour in the army. You went to the army a little boy and you came back home a completely different person you know that tough environment really changed you it changed who you were and the way you saw things…" (Dawie)*

Statements such as this emphasise the fact that the military reflects and replicates particular masculine orientated codes of behaviour, including an emphasis on discourses of power, control, competitiveness and aggression (Shefer & Mankayi, 2007). In times of armed conflict in particular, specific 'embodied national self-representations' are produced and reproduced in, through and by military masculine bodies (Jarvis, 2004). Military bodies are both trained and marshalled to represent national symbols of power, forcefulness, gallantry and resilience. Thus, male bodies should be seen not as 'universal biological' entities but as socially constructed phenomena that are culturally encoded as 'male' through a complex process of social, personal, and medical gender construction (Jarvis, 2004). As we see in the excerpt below:

*"We were so fit, I could run for hours I went from this scrawny little boy who had never really done any exercise or physical activity to this broad shouldered soldier…tough as nails…"(Henk)*

*"in the beginning I really struggled actually because I was not one of the naturally fit guys so the running the P.T. was tough for me often times the other guys had to help me along with it…it was really hard for me"(John)*

Interestingly some participants like John and Tim who were not endowed with the military ideal in terms of body size and shape both expressed the difficulty they faced. It would seem that these discourses were not only held in the military environment but also in broader society. The excerpt below further shows how even if the male body does not fit the ideal, being in the military can alter one's construct of self as 'not male enough'. His excerpt further underlines the centrality of a discourse of a particular ideal body image in constructions of masculinity. Despite the information that he is naturally smaller than most and therefore does not achieve the ideal masculine image at the physical level to start with, joining the military acts to reconstruct this and prove his masculinity. Thus the identity of a military man interestingly serves to undermine the social construction of him as 'not man enough' with respect to his body (Korber, 1992; Draper, 1999).

*"I was a small, weak little fellow, 1,78 metres tall, and my registration for National Service, even though I was forced to, provoked great amusement amongst my fellow pupils. If only they, and I, had known what the future held for me, despite my slight frame!" (Tim)*

Statements such as the one made by Henk above clearly illustrate the point being made about male bodies as symbols of state, the pride with which he conveys his physical fitness and strong he was. As was discussed earlier in our review of the literature war is a male area of influence and ranges from conscripted and/or voluntary soldiers to their commanding elite. At the same time, men as a group are the primary producers of state State-sanctioned, community and individual violence, in a structural, and frequently also an individual sense (Connell, 1995). Due to the fact that members of the Armed Forces are expected to act in relation to conflict, strife, war and other life-and-death issues, military masculinity is often intimately connected to the

discourse of male violence, killing and/or being killed (Higate, 2003; Higate & Hopton, 2005; Wandham, 2007; Gibson, 2009). Statements such us this one made by Marco illustrate this point.

> *"we had a way of dealing with things in the army, there was no crying for us out there we simply got drunk that night and carried on the next day…we got harder…the guys that cracked or wanted to cry when things got tough didn't make it they were too soft the army did not deal well with soft people. Maybe when you got home you know you cracked you went bossies for a while…"(Marco)*

According to Goldstein (2001), this type of toughness portrayed by participants like Marco appeals to a discourse of warrior masculinity that forces men to endure trauma and master fear, in order to claim the status of 'manhood'. Although the treatment of trauma is currently on the agenda of most military institutions, the expression or display of distress by soldiers is still likely to be individualised, medicalised and pathologised (Fassin & Rechtman, 2009; Howell, 2006). Thus, many soldiers are hesitant to seek treatment for fear of prejudice and stigmatisation. The expression of dread, grief or distress is frequently perceived as feminine and soldiers remain reticent to articulate, or admit it (Vitzthum et al, 2009). Kilshaw (2008) emphasizes that the construction of combat as potentially traumatizing or distressing goes against the grain of the hegemonic ideal of masculinity in military culture. Indeed what one finds within the contemporary context is that many of the conscripts interviewed did not or will not receive psychological help in dealing with the trauma they experienced during the border war. This is in line with the discourse of the masculine ideal mentioned above where men who subscribe to the type of militaristic culture will not seek help for fear of being seen as weak or feminine.

> *"it's not like I even saw a psychiatrist or anything like that after the war you know, I didn't really want to you know I doubt any of the guys could admit that when they went home they were damaged and unhappy and had done things they would regret…" (Tim)*

> *"When I got out the army man I was hard…I didn't need to talk to anybody about I saw or what happened…nothing like that I went straight to work…"(Dawie)*

### 4.3.5. The masculine ideal: national memory-making

It could be argued here that the participants in this study did not freely choose any 'interpretation' or way to make sense of their combat experiences as they wished. The discourse of memory and war is structured by power, and is masculinist. National memory making processes construct, authorise and give meaning to an armed conflict or war in particular ways. Such processes can authorise some memories and devalue other interpretations (Lomsky-Feder, 2004). War memorials, for example, serve to commemorate valiant male soldiers who died for freedom, not traumatised men (or civilians), who are often perceived as somehow effeminate or less than the masculine ideal. Indeed this too poses a relevant area of concern in South Africa today where we find that many of the ex-conscripts who fought in the border war express a discourse of having been forgotten and cast aside after apartheid ended as there has not been a movement to create adequate memorials and place of remembrance for those who fought and died in battle (Baines, 2008). This can be linked here to a discourse of invisibility where individuals argue they are they are not seen or heard in contemporary society. One could argue here that this is ultimately a defensive position that these conscripts occupy where participants wish to undermine their position of the extreme power they once had during apartheid. This being said however this loss of power is a loss relative only to the ultimate position of power that white individuals had during apartheid and arguably their relatively equal position that they occupy now is one they see as invisible and neglected.

> *"you know it took years before we even had a memorial…the MK guys had this huge thing man and what did us white soldiers get…nothing really we didn't even get an acknowledgment nothing…you know it would have been a nice thing at the time you know to remember the guys that died for this country…" (Mathew)*

> *"we believed what government wanted us to believe we did what the government wanted us to do and that was it when the war was done and they told us to go home we went home we didn't ask questions…" (John)*

The state plays a major role in this process, particularly in the way in which it emphasizes or negates the possibility of State sanctioned combat situations as potentially distressing, as well as in terms of the ways in which it chooses to memorialise and remember those situations. For

example, during the 'border war' the impact of conflict trauma on the psychological health of combatants was known to the SADF, but the distress of conscripted soldiers was not high on the agenda of the State (Baines, 2008; Draper, 1999; Fowler, 1996). According to Fowler (1995; 1996), a conscripted psychologist, it was common to interview about 300 new troops to establish whether they were mentally fit for duty. While soldiers were supposed to be psychologically stable enough to go to war, the possible emotional aftermath was not ranked highly. In this regard Kilshaw (2009) writes that psychological services are often perceived as 'soft', feminine and not absolutely necessary for the rank and file of the army.

> *"the guys that cracked in basics they never even made it to the border they were just worked out of the system…nobody cared in fact if you showed you were weak or you couldn't take it things would get worse for you nobody would respect you…you would become a joke.." (Neville)*

Enloe (2000), states that young men of draftable age during the 1980s were propelled toward military service, not only by conscription law, but also by a desire to be seen as manly and by the fear of being labelled by others as "cowards" or pejoratively as "faggots" or "moffies". It would seem that for many of the participants in this study this was definitely the case.

> *"at the time you know it was expected of you to go to the army and we all did, I mean I remember hearing about guys who didn't want to go and nobody said anything good about them…they were seen as cowards more than anything else…they didn't want to bite the bullet and do the right thing…" (Tim)*

> *"going to the army is what you did when you turned 16 and that was it you didn't ask questions off you went to become a soldier and a real man…the people around me expected me to go as well it wasn't just for fun I mean I had to show people that I was tough enough to make it…not like the guys who tried to gyppo the system and leave country or whatever…" (Henk)*

Du Pisani (2001), reports that some white men resisted the call-up. As a result some left the country. An interesting question relates to what the implications of this were for masculinity.

*"Anyway what kind of man were you if had duty to do for your country to protect your family and your loved ones and you ran away from that duty…I don't know" (Mathew)*

Indeed it would seem then that conscription has been and was constructed as a crucial system for reproducing/ensuring 'normal' adult masculinity (Enloe, 2000). In many cases this image is reinforced by the media – also in South Africa (Craig, 2008). Compulsory military service has been marked by its effectiveness as a socialisation socialising agent. Service to the nation or 'national service' was often portrayed as a necessary experience that transformed young white conscripted soldiers into responsible men who could support their families and cooperate in organised civil society (Du Pisani, 2001; Enloe, 2000). An honourable discharge meant the end of 'adolescent wandering' and youthful resistance to the social order (Enloe, 2000).

*"…back then if you didn't go to the army what else were you supposed to do with yourself in any case…university didn't really happen for most of us. The army was like our university…" (Mathew)*

Cock (2001), contends that the SADF was a crucial source of ideas about appropriate behaviour for white South African men. The military successes of the SADF in the 'border war' in northern Namibia and Angola were presented by the media in such a way that the discourse of the warrior hero was nurtured and revered and many reflect on that time with admiration for themselves and those that were in the army with them (Batley, 2007; Liebenberg, 2009).

*"I often heard on the radio back then about fallen war heroes on the border, that mostly how we found out about anything back then" (Henk)*

The long history of masculinity and militarism is not unique to South Africa. The link between militarisation and masculinisation is almost universal. Men have since time immemorial and in every society been expected and socialised to be the protectors and fighters, in line with the warrior discourse.

### 4.3.6. Militarised male bodies

Accordingly, the bodies of soldiers are arguably their own, as well as the nation's tools and weapons in combat and must be masculine, fit, tough and strong (Connell, 1995; Kilshaw, 2009).

*"you know we had to be fit and strong and look good you know we represented our country and our people not like the police today fat and behind a speed camera…we were tough and strong…" (Mathew)*

Soldiers are often inspected for physical and mental fitness for combat (and the ability to kill) (Bourke, 1999). They are also specifically trained to use force and to be aggressive (Woodward, 2000). Many provided accounts of what it was like to go through inspection in basics and the tension of the medical check-ups at first intake:

*"Well uhm medical examination was quite a poignant moment for me… so we are ready for the step which will determine the whole future course of our training: Medical Examination… Everything is tested; eyes, ears, heart and lungs, feet, reflexes, and so on. I have a vague recollection of some medic shoving a gloved finger up my arse. We had to cough while the he held our testicles in his hand. For what, I still don't know. How we all hated it, though! When ex-army fellows told us about all this, we thought they were joking...Both sides of my family have always been psychologically extremely robust. There is no doubt that, I should end up K1. What eventually materialised on the right-hand side of the K is by no means as simply told" (Neville)*

The above quote illustrates the process of emasculation that all new conscripts were subjected to when entering the military environment. However an important process of masculinity is also highlighted. In a hyper-masculine environment such as the military it would seem that new conscripts first have to be completely emasculated and humiliated before they can achieve a state of hyper-masculinity. This process of emasculation may also explain, as we shall see shortly, why some conscripts after having been inspected in this humiliating way and not being granted G1K1 status would then go and demand a reclassification in what one could interpret as an attempt to redeem themselves as warriors worthy of 'real' war.

*"…The so-called "hopefuls" queue – hopeful of being sent home! At the very front is a married man of about 19, desperate to be sent back to his wife and small daughter. I am not sure on what grounds he is in our queue; something to do with his back, I seem to recall. No such luck! G2K2. The bitterness with which he receives this news is written on his face" (John)*

It would seem that for many of the men this process of sorting through who was a desirable *"G1K1"* and who wasn't was a significant point in the process of conscription. For many this was not an easy time and things did not turn out as expected for some. This process of being matched to the militarised ideal spurred some on to demand reclassification into their desired category, in a way forcing white males into a category thought to better fit their aspirations in the army.

> *"I wasn't going to take it you know I had to be G1K1 I wanted action, my father my brother were all active duty soldiers you know so, uh, I went and demanded to be changed into a different group…and so they changed me, it was really a stupid choice in the end I think…but at the time I would settled for nothing less really…I wanted action…" (Mathew)*

Mathew above provides prime example of the desire some had to see combat battle regardless of physical ability, forcing himself to attain a level of physical 'ideal' performance the he believed he should achieve as a man in the army. Statements such as this illustrate the dynamic of what is deemed desirable and perhaps ideal military service. For many the root a man should take in the army was wrought with violence and active war experience (Hooper, 1990; Fowler, 1995, 1996; Gear, 2008).

> *"you know there were guys that just had office jobs you know they did paperwork or whatever…not me I wanted to shoot my gun…I wanted to go out there and really do something…" (Marco)*

> *"guys went to the army and sat around and other guys went to the army and really saw things, killed people, did real operations into Angola…it was not fun but that was the army…I didn't sit around" (Henk)*

This ties in then with discourse of the ideal masculine body, there also seems to be this idea of an ideal military experience. It would seem then that those who saw active duty with violent combat experience and war scenarios are valued over and above those military experiences that were concerned with administration or were far removed from actual battle. What is constructed then is an ideal narrative or discourse of military experience that affirms the masculinity of many white men in South Africa today (Gibson, 2009).

## 4.4. Theme 3: Discourses of ‘betrayal’

The vast majority of interviewees felt that they had been badly let down by those who propelled them into action and inspired their lives as combatants. A common element is the sense that the ideological paradigms that framed the wars they fought in, and their identities as combatants, have been betrayed. For many, the disjuncture between what they fought for and their present realities is a bitter pill to swallow (Steyn, 2001; Baines, 2008). Many participants chose describe their current situation in some detail, and this was constructed in a light that positioned these individuals as victims who were betrayed by third party institutions like the military and government at the time. This strategy may serve as a mean of reducing the harshness with which society sees these individuals within the current context of contemporary South African society. Added to this, what we see here is the very white individuals who propped up the apartheid state turning on this structure and blaming it for the evils of the past. However, in doing this these ex-conscripts are separating themselves discursively from the state. This separation then allows these individuals to blame an empty signifier, one could argue here that the apartheid state is no longer exists in contemporary society. The blaming of the apartheid state serves the purpose of whiteness in contemporary South Africa, as essentially what this means that nobody is blamed when blame is attributed to an empty signifier. Added to this participants chose here to claim a victim status, as victims of the apartheid state, that does not allow them to be constructed as perpetrators.

> *“I went to the parabats 'cos I wanted to be worthwhile. We were led to believe we were stopping communism ...Lives were lost. It leaves a bitter taste. We were led down the garden path … We went in believing we were doing the right thing. What for? … I hear guys who are bitter to[wards] the politicians like it was a sell out 'We fought, why did you give it away?...Some feel worse off because of that.” (Dawie)*

Several participants referred to the former ruling National Party with scorn:

> *“I think throughout the white ex-military, the people hate the New National Party and the old National Party more than they hate the ANC government … I personally believe that the time of white politics is over in South Africa. How can the new National Party, for*

*example, now stand up and say, 'We want to train the power in the country?' They did have the power, they gave it away." (John)*

These discourses of unfulfilled expectations and disillusion permeate the ranks of former combatants as they attempt to come to grips with their current situations. They also serve as a rhetorical strategy of evoking sympathy where the interviewer is made privy to participants' contemporary ideological struggles that they face. Indeed, those who are not beneficiaries of the new dispensation are in the present casualties of the ideologies, or fragments thereof that mobilised them into action (Gear, 2009).

### 4.4.1. Disillusioned and directionless

The disjuncture between what was fought for by those who served in the army during apartheid and their current situations leave many feeling, in the words of one respondent, who felt that that these individuals *"do not know where they are going"*. Many respondents felt that they had been used and cast aside as brainwashed pawns in a political game they neither understood nor had any control over. Further, this rhetorical strategy of diverting blame through the implication that one was unable to exert agency or control a situation has had a profound impact on the psyche of these individuals. Where we see that in spite of the relief experienced by the diversions of blame, there is still profound anger and resentment both in terms of the new and old dispensation, in terms of their current position. Compounding their anger is a pervasive sense that what they fought for has been given away and handed to their enemies on a plate (Gear, 2002). Several respondents, however, felt that while many of their colleagues were appalled by the dramatic political developments in the early 1990s, some saw these developments as inevitable (Baines, 2008; Steyn, 2001; Nuttal 2001).

*"A lot of people's approach is 'Hell, what a waste'. My personal approach is … that the former government were fighting to buy time... But there are a lot of guys … [who] were assured that if they fought and volunteered to do this and that, we'd never ever have a communist country. And subsequently it materialises that we have a government where a lot of the members have that affiliation." (Mathew)*

> *"My opinion about being bullshitted from the top is, okay, we were. And they tried to rope you into the army as young as possible so that you weren't wise enough, you were still a puppy. But … I tell you, it was the right time. Okay we lost okes [guys], we lost buddies but it was the right time. War is never nice. But it had to happen, there was a reason … Would you rather have this place looking like Sarajevo - everything blown to bits?" (Dawie)*

The discourse of having been *"sold down the bloody river"* is, however, present among all respondents. Participants emphasise their past experiences as a crucial facet of this, and point to the treatment they received when they were soldiers. They report feeling as though they were *"cannon fodder"*. In other words, there emerges a discourse of being treated as dispensable and unnecessarily endangered. Added to this the discourse of secrecy around their deployment also meant that most South Africans had no idea what sort of situations many soldiers encountered. Those that did know, the people in charge, interviewees maintain, didn't care (Steyn, 2001; Gear, 2002). This leaves these individuals in a very interesting space within contemporary South African society where we find that white males in particular express a discourse of being victimised by both in the current dispensation as well as during apartheid. Once again we see the discursive strategy of constructing oneself as a victim as means of coping with both them blame and shame of the apartheid system that is now widely rejected by contemporary society.

> *"Let's actually get one thing straight. You know what we didn't need was the bullshit we put up with on the border. That we didn't need. I tell you what we did need. We needed support. We never got it. We got a whole lot of bullshit thrown in our faces. Because you know what? The people at the top couldn't give a shit! They probably ran like rabbits." (Tim)*

While former operators of the SADF Special Forces emphasise the necessity of the secrecy that shrouded military operations, for many former conscripts this constituted a deception that negated their war experiences in the eyes of civilian society. The news blackout that surrounded the SADF's operations meant that other South Africans had little clue that there was even a war going on (Gear, 2008). This code of silence may explain to some degree to the sense of betrayal and isolation that these individuals report feeling in a contemporary society that is far more removed from the experiences they went through during apartheid. This also links well with the

discourse of remembrance and honouring those who fought in the border war, where we find participant expressing the fact that they feel as though their sacrifices in the border war have been forgotten or ignored. One could argue here that this is somewhat paradoxical as these individuals yearn for national recognition for their service yet at the same time they are bound by a masculine code of silence that does no promote the discussion of events that were psychological difficult and emotionally charged.

> *"There were 10 000 of us sitting in Angola and we hear on our radios Pik Botha saying, 'I deny categorically there's any South African troops in Angola'. And it's on the radio and it's 10 000 of you [who] can listen to that. So what are you, dead already when you're there? How would you feel?" (Tim)*

In addition, some former conscripts tell how letters they sent were censored, much of them being blacked out with ink by the time they reached their addressees. This further reinforces the discourse of secrecy that these individuals are talking to here. Further, what we find here in this illustration of state censorship is a another example of the discursive function of separating the state from citizen. Respondents imply here that the state was to blame for the air of secrecy and censorship in the country at the time. This can be interpreted here as a strategy of reversing the victim status where implication is here that the state is the perpetrator and these individuals are in fact victims of its policy.

> *"you know the letters you sent your family were destroyed with black ink, you could hardly make out what we were trying to say…it was pointless…" (Mathew)*

The boys were just off to 'the border' was a common discourse hat permeated white South African society at the time, a term in which the horrors and victories of war were contained or rendered invisible to the communities from which the conscripts were drawn. Indeed this discourse speaks to a suppression that one could argue many participants have still not managed to overcome. Participants imply here that they still to a large extent exist in a space where their experiences during the war are simply ignored.

> *"You come home, 'How's it up on the border. Is it lekker?'... It was like nobody even seemed to know there was even a war going on. They make as if there is nothing going on*

*there. It was just like, 'Where have you been man?' 'I've been up at the border' 'Oh, that's nice, so-and-so is also there'." (Dawie)*

Another participant echoes these concerns. He also highlights a related rift that he says existed between the Permanent Forces and the Citizen Forces. This further talks to the discourse of a hierarchy of whiteness that was looked at earlier, where one finds.

*"There was no counselling or concern for national servicemen or Part Time Force members when they came back from the border. Apart from Col. X, we never had a Permanent Force guy at any of the funerals of our people. A lot of the full time officers used the Citizen Force army to further their careers. They weren't too worried about the troops under their command, whether they died or not. We held the Permanent Force in contempt. I think that if the war had got more intense, we would've started having cases of Permanent Force guys getting shot by their troops." (Marco)*

### 4.4.2. Frustrated and angry: the outcomes of the 'border war'

Although this anger expressed by many participants about the past is powerful, most participants combine these views with an elevation of their service by making reference to their military services within a discourse of those years being 'the best years of my life', and calls for the reintroduction of conscription. Amongst some of the participants, a discourse of betrayal is less apparent than that of more generalised discourse of anger (Cock, 1991; Draper, 1999). The discourse of anger expressed by these individuals covers a broad range of targets: the former enemy, the present regime and all those whom it represents, the SANDF, their white fellow country people, and Africa in general, in which, as white men, they see themselves as under attack literally and figuratively in country that today denigrates their past actions (Barrett, 1996).

*"... its complete hatred ...It's because we all know what they do, we all know what they are doing now. And the government is turning around and saying, Tough shit, you are the White in this country ... Because you know what? The white man in this country ...time to tighten your belts because the white man in this country is worth shit. And you know it's not only from the army, it's from business and it's going further. We are sitting here, up shit creek, no paddles and there is nowhere to go…we fought for this country to make it a*

*better place. What we have done is given it to the kaffir and he is taking it backwards." (Marco)*

*"Perceptions of White 'exclusion' are exacerbated by negative assessments of the move to rectify past imbalances through processes of affirmative action. It's apartheid reversed. Even worse. Do you want to get the best promotion you can ever get in your life? You must be a black woman…Top of the shit pile. Cousin, white male, you are straight at the bottom." (Mathew)*

The frustrations that many of participants expressed around their current situations within contemporary society are sometimes underpinned by a fundamentally racist 'logic'. One could argue here that there is a strong sense from participants that both within past and current contexts that they were the victims primarily of the state rather than key agents of its functioning. It is in instances such as these where we see participants attempting to shift blame and shame towards this empty vessel of the state. Here, we see a very prominent discourse of racial discrimination emerging from the text:

*"Take all the men in the world: 50% of them are stuff-ups, [of] all the women in the world 50% are stuff-ups. Anybody who is not White… you have also got 50% good okes and 50% bad okes, but I cut them all out of my life because you don't know which ones to choose. Cut them all out of your life and you won't have kak. I mean we had no kak for the last 80 whatever years, and these okes get into your life - they have got problematic lives - Blacks [and] Coloureds, Indians are about your best….. But Coloureds and Black okes [have] problematic lives hey. I keep them out of my life. [Conscript group] Perceptions of racial prejudice (with Whites as the underdogs) are intensified by concerns that white people have not demonstrated the necessary solidarity. …These okes, you see, they know they have got us by the balls. They've intimidated us. The Nationalist Party is such a lame duck, then the army, and now every civilian in the street … I've got a big chip on my shoulder with Whites, about not supporting each other. The spirit is dead. It's not because the war ended in Angola, it's because of the psychological war in our own country. Psychologically, everybody has been just like switched off." (Henk)*

This reinforces the sense of exclusion that these individuals express feeling in contemporary society:

> *"The way things are going now, if we had to go to war and fight for this government - I would not fight for them. Because you know, it's not my country. I am going to fight for this black man to take my house, to rape my kids and to shoot my daughter, that is what I am going to be fighting for? While he just smiles? I am not going to. I will never fight!" (John)*

Most participants do not direct their intense anger at the specific people who gave orders, either from within the military or political ranks. This is possibly because they considered themselves to be fighting for their country, stability and the safety of their families rather than the government responsible and the specific military strategy in which they participated. Indeed, this suggests the power and success of the former regime's strategy, with certain segments of the white male population, in cultivating a discourse of 'the nation under siege' (Gibson, 2009). Their military service took place at a time when their civilian lives were relatively secure and for which they are now nostalgic, this discourse of nostalgia being referred to here one could argue characterises the existence of these individuals within contemporary South Africa. Their broader positive associations with their time in the military appear to mitigate their anger at the treatment within the military, or alternatively, their treatment in the military was worthwhile with the over-arching objectives in sight - the safety and security of their way of life. Not all conscript respondents endorsed these views (Gear, 2002). For a small minority, blame for their current situation is laid squarely at the door of their military experience and the former government, which, they believe, destroyed their lives (Cock, 1991; Draper, 1999). One respondent, who is homeless, unemployed and suffers from post-traumatic stress, had this to say:

> *"Understand you are 17 years old, you have just come out of school, you don't know nothing. You know shit about politics or things like that. You know about biology or geography…My government let me down, hey. They lied to me so much and look where I am now… And if your parents let you down before that, and then you go to the army and they let you down, and then the government after that lets you down. That's why I say, what kind of person do you come out to be? You come out to be like a negative person." (Donovan)*

*"Afterwards, when we came back here…they just decided we are going to give South West Africa away to these SWAPOs and give them a party on top of it. And that was like putting a cherry on top of the cake, like saying 'Bugger all you ous [guys] who got killed there, wounded and whateve'." (Frank)*

There are many facets to the discourse of betrayal expressed by former combatants, the most powerful of which is feeling discarded, neglected and forgotten by those for whom they fought. Many feel they have been cast aside, now they are no longer of use within the contemporary context. In this way we see the present society being interpreted by these individuals through a discourse of neglect within the new dispensation. One could argue here however that this neglect is only perceived in relation to the apartheid context, white individuals have simple moved from a position of exclusive focus to that of equality in terms of all other individuals in South Africa currently.

*"In the old days you were a soldier, you had no political views, you were working for the government of the day, finished. But then some guys got involved in the CCB which was a hell of a good organisation no matter what the TRC or anybody says, and they were just dumped like, if I can say it, shit." (Donavan)*

*"You must just remember what they are doing with us or what has been happening with us is not unique, it has been happening all over the world with soldiers. Soldiers are only important to a government as long as they serve a purpose." (Mathew)*

### 4.4.3. No war and no work

For many former members of the SADF, the need to secure work after the war is a serious concern. Several participants also link the discourse of resentment towards their former superiors to current employment opportunities, or the lack thereof. It would seem too that many of the participants felt as though they could not live up to the masculine ideal of the man as the provider and bread winner given their current position in contemporary society reinforcing the sentiment of resentment. There is, for example, considerably less anger, they say, amongst those that have secured alternative income-generating opportunities (Whitty, 2005; Baines, 2008; Gear, 2002).

*"Ja, there might be resentment amongst certain elements. But I think that an organisation like EO [Executive Outcomes] - although it was a pure mercenary type of company - opened so many doors for so many guys who met government officials from other countries and businessmen or whatever and are now security personnel for mines in Angola and Tanzania and Uganda and wherever. They've got a new life, they've got new everything." (Henk)*

While economic circumstances fundamentally inform feelings of anger in today's context, they do not adequately explain the discourse of betrayal. Several respondents focus their anger at the apartheid politicians who made a 180-degree policy turn without warning or consultation. The enemy that the SADF soldiers had been trained to hate and kill was now invited to the negotiation table. Some began to question why they had been fighting in the first place, and others could not understand why everything was being given up. It is not only a job that some have lost, it is the ideological foundations on which they had built and understood their lives and what they were fighting for (Cock, 1991; Draper, 1999).

*"It's these inconsistencies between what was and what is now ... When South Africa changed it was an election that was won but it was dramatically changed over in the sense - okay, we did not have the violence effect, ... if we had not been taught that we were actually fighting against the ANC as well, or against SWAPO; if we had said we are fighting against communism etc, etc, and the ANC had been just another party inside South Africa, things would have been so different with the changeover. But by making the ANC the enemy, by making SWAPO the enemy, you grow up with them the enemy, and then you get this change over and the church tells you, 'You were wrong all these years', and I mean you suddenly realise: we're the indoctrinated ones; we're the brain-washed ones, not them…because some government official or president decided it's time for the ANC to take over, we lost our jobs. We lost our future. Everything that was stable for us is gone." (Henk)*

For this respondent discourses of religion are particularly prominent, the church it would seem bears particular responsibility. Having provided theological backing to apartheid and its aggressive anti-communist policies, followers were then expected to accept that what had been preached for years was erroneous and morally unsustainable. At the same time here we see this

participant using the rhetorical of shifting the blame of his actions on to another 'third force' other than the National party government. What is clear then is that many white men in South Africa today feel as though a great wrong has been done unto them and in searching for an answer or explanation for their current position in South African society today have found various points of blame (Baines, 2008; Hooper, 1990; Fowler, 1995, 1996; Gear, 2008).

> *"The church says after 48 years, 'We have been wrong, apartheid was wrong, it was a sin'…Overnight, you change with the political system which tells me that you are running with politics and that you are actually portraying more a political view and not the religious side of it'. So I do have a problem very much with the church and I believe most of the ex-soldiers do … I can't accept it. Those were the guys who've actually done me in the most, who've stolen the most from me and who let me down the most." (Marco)*

> *"Forgotten' is an understatement, we have been wished away …"(Mathew)*

Similarly, many ex-conscripts who were thoroughly schooled in the ideologies of the old South Africa have a sense of being left behind from the rest of society, being relics of something now forgotten as a result of the politics they too were fed. On the SADF side of the coin though, these ways of thinking no longer suit anyone (Draper, 1999). Frustration at the collective amnesia of broader society and those in power is strongly expressed by participants. There is a sense that everybody except the former soldiers is settling into the 'New' South Africa, ensuring that they get what they can out of it and conveniently forgetting the less palatable parts of their recent history that might make this more difficult (Baines, 2008). At the time the soldiers were encouraged by their communities to believe they were 'doing the right thing'. Suddenly though, it seems they did wrong (Gibson, 2009). As one participant put it:

> *"…The South Africans have joined the club of those who deny the fact that they supported a political system rightly or wrongly, that gave them an advantage over others, and they now decry the 'Racist Apartheid System', conveniently denying their past until reminded…. It is not my fault; it is not anybody's, apart from the politicians, who do what they do for the citizens of whatever country…at the end of the day we are, and will always be, pawns, until somebody wakes up and decides 'Hell no!! This is Bullshit!' and decides to do something about it - and then gets seduced by power." (Henk)*

The ultimate question here is what does this discourse of betrayal really signal? In many respects this is a fitting way to end this discourse analysis as it leaves one with a good sense of where white males in South Africa find themselves. What one ultimately finds here is that in most instances this discourse of betrayal is mobilised presently in a way that discursively positions these participants as victims in South Africa's current context (Baines, 2008). We see here that participants feel as though they are no longer perpetrators but ultimately victims in spite of their lives of privilege during apartheid. Thus in an ultimate rhetorical act of temporal juxtaposition we see the participants of this study metaphorically creating a balance sheet of sorts where the general argument is made that the balance sheet should be at zero. As it is felt by many that in spite of the privileges of the past, these individuals suggest they are suffering in the current context, absolving them of passed privileges and in a sense 'balancing' the inequalities of the past. Whether this is in fact the case or not there is a sense here that participants feel the need to absolve themselves from the sins of the past. How effectively the discourse of betrayal achieves this goal is questionable to some at least to some degree (Gear, 2002; 2008). Ultimately it can be said that white masculinity exists in a space that is both troubled and unsettled. This study has illustrated that white men in South Africa have gone from a position of omnipotent power during apartheid to one of contested instability in present South African society. It is evident from this research that whiteness and masculinity are both complex and diffuse structures that still warrant a great deal of exploration. That said, the future prospects for these individuals are both challenging and possible.

# Chapter 5: Conclusion

## 5.1. Theoretical and practical implications

This study has aimed to gain a clearer understanding of the operational experiences of former white conscripts of the South African 'border war' As well as uncover discourses of whiteness and masculinity embedded in the talk of these participants and furthermore to examine the possible functions of these discourses in contemporary South Africa. In terms of the broader Apartheid Archive Project it is believed that this research shall add to a body of work which will help to propel South Africa forward in its challenges with 'race' and the legacy of apartheid.

This study supported the notion that both whiteness and masculinity are in a complex and diffuse construct with no absolute definition. Indeed they are in a perpetual state of flux, rendering it difficult to pinpoint a statement which encompasses what it is to be, or the ways in which this whiteness interacts with militarised violence (Abdi, 1999; Stevens & Lockhart, 1997). Whiteness and its interaction with masculinity has thus changed since the 1994 democratic elections. This change has however been mostly at an ideological level, where one could argue that the material lives of white individuals have not changed that substantially (Eichstedt, 2001). Many of the participants noted an increased awareness of what it means to be white during apartheid yet at the same struggled to move away from reductive discussion around race and masculinity.

Consequently, this research exposes power relations operant in society and, in turn, calls for a more complex, variable and dynamic understanding of both whiteness and sexuality. That is, this research opposes an essentialist paradigm. Essentialism implies natural inevitability by ignoring history, society and culture as mediating elements in the production of whiteness and masculinity. Such paradigms view whiteness and masculinity as a predetermined result of biological production rather than as a production of knowledge and power. In contrast, this research calls for the awareness of social constructions in our understandings of truth and reality.

The interviews seemed to attempt to negate the influence that apartheid had on shaping whiteness, yet the subtext indicates that apartheid has served to encourage a racialised world view which othered blackness and inflated whiteness (Aveling, 2004; Green, Sonn & Matsebula, 2007). In addition to this, apartheid seems to have fostered a particular view of otherness which

is in very stark contrast to the multiracial tolerance fostered in society today. As far as masculinity is concerned, the interviews indicated that whiteness plays a complex role in mediating the participants' views of militarised masculine events. At the same time this process seems to be one that is reciprocal in that militarised masculinity also seems to have a mediating effect on white identity. Thus, whilst the participants may not have fully acknowledged the impact apartheid had on them they certainly displayed its effects in the subtexts of what they said (Sennett & Foster, 1996; Smedley, 1998).

On a more practical level this study has also highlighted that the available resources for ex-conscripts who served in the 'border war' is severely lacking. Many of the men that featured in this study are struggling to come to terms with the horrors of what they experienced on the border and it would seem that there is a sense that since their term in the army nothing has been done to address the challenges faced by these individuals. The TRC has not adequately addressed the complex array challenges faced by these individuals who are still disillusioned with their existence in South Africa. Perhaps what could be recommended here is a targeted intervention aimed at opening up discussions and passages of communication around these topics with the involvement of the military, who remain silent on this matter, so that these men may be relieved to some degree of the painful memories that they carry around still to this day.

## 5.2. Summary of findings

In conclusion it is perhaps relevant to briefly consider what the findings of the research say in terms of the research questions asked at the outset of this project. In terms of the first research question concerned with the nature of operational experiences that emerged in the talk of former white conscripts of the South African 'border war', it can be said that, for many of the participants it would seem that when talking of these times they were at the very least conflicted. Eliciting experiences, or digging into the often tumultuous pasts, of a very private and silent segment of the South African population was no easy task. It would seem that for many of the men that fell into this category, an easier option than talking or grappling with what was done to them and what they did to other is simply silence. That being said, the men that did chose participate and whose excerpts are feature in this study offered interesting and meaty accounts often riddled with discourses of militarised violence, whiteness and masculinity. Evidence of

such accounts can be found above. One point that could be made here is concerned with the need for the encouragement of open and frank discussions in South African society concerning a past that many would rather forget ever existed than grapple with in a meaningful way.

Furthermore, there was for the most part a sense of remembering the past through the lens of 'today' (post-apartheid South Africa), specifically in instances where conscription was being discussed. As has been seen here in the comments made by many of the participants, who clearly refer to the South African context 'today' when asked to reflect on race and conscription during apartheid. It was found that many of the accounts provided, are concerned with past event but ultimately are related through the lens of the present. It was therefore proposed that these accounts by their very nature not only give one access or insight into the past but also the present, given that our interpretation is through the lens of today.

Ultimately, the message behind what is being said here in terms of navigating the past and present raises interesting points for whiteness in contemporary South Africa. One could argue that for many participants the true message layered within their grappling with past and present is in many instances a yearning for the past. What is conveyed in these recollections is in many instances also an ambivalent and pessimistic outlook on contemporary South African society where it is implied that transformation has not really occurred in South Africa. Thus in many ways there is a tension that exists for many of the participants of this study around the general message of transformation and change that was heralded by the democratic elections of 1994 and the apparent lack of tangible differences that they currently report experiencing. In some ways this tension also places contemporary South African society as something less than the ideal and tainted.

The second research question was concerned with the nature of discourses of whiteness and masculinity embedded in the talk of participants. In terms of discourses of whiteness, the participants in this study indicated that often they were protected by the 'innocence' of white childhood. Generally they claimed not to be directly exposed to violent event other than through the media at least until they reached their time of military service. This served as a mechanism of othering and shifting of blame. Similarly in terms of hierarchies of whiteness, there were those participants who themselves had to deal with ostracism and persecution, despite their whiteness and privileged status as white individuals. It would seem here that an often overlooked

stratification within whiteness itself was highlighted by participants, positioning certain white individuals as qualitatively better than others.

Many also expressed conscription as a process where participants seemed to have gained an awareness of what it meant to be white and the privileges that whiteness afforded them. The participants noted an increased sensitivity towards the anti-apartheid struggle and the violent events associated with that (as reported in the media). It would seem too that this awareness is linked to their participation in the military, and many expressed the fact that it was what they witnessed in the army that lead to a change in approach towards the apartheid system (Agostino, 1998; Baines, 2008). In terms of the media and whiteness, grappling it was understood that participants attempted to illustrate to the interviewer how embedded racial discrimination was in everyday society through the discussion of censored news media and propaganda. Participants often times made reference to the controlled media apparatuses of the apartheid government as an aspect of the super structure that manipulated and dictated all aspects of their existence including the nature of the news that they consumed, shifting the scope of view away from themselves as the individual and more towards the racialised system and the embedded nature of their existence within it.

The normativity and invisibility of whiteness was also a key feature. In asking participants what it meant to be a former white conscript who served in the 'border war' what was really clear is that, many struggled with expressing what it really meant to be white. Perhaps one of the most noticeable strands thus far has been the lack of explicit reference to what it actually meant to the participants to be white during apartheid. In fact, one could say that there were more attempts to explain and describe events of conscription or anecdotes from the army while ensuring that participants themselves were seen positively and in a way that denied complicity. Added to this participants experienced difficulty in understanding and positioning themselves as white individuals within the violent militarised culture and events of apartheid other than providing descriptive accounts of events such as bombings and violent uprisings, providing one with a discourse of distancing and shifting of blame.

In terms of discourses of masculinity and conscription, it would seem that the discourse of romanticised violence was particularly relevant. All the participants in this study relayed violent

events from their time spent in the military fighting 'the border war'. These experiences of white males impacted the nature of racialised events they were exposed to, as they moved from relatively calm suburbia into an active war environment. The military system by its very nature is violent and harsh and all participants related aspects regarding physical and emotional toughness of this time in their lives. This being said these events were conveyed in a manner that was romanticised and flavoured by masculine ideals.

Another prominent discourse made mentioned of by participants spoke to the idea that, post 1994 their opinion of conscription and the way in which they viewed there time in the military changed quite drastically (Korber, 1992; Draper, 1999). It was expressed by many that their opinion had somewhat shifted from support of national service and the 'border' war to the polar opposite, denigration of the apartheid system on almost every level. Furthermore, in this process of shifting it would seem that all the things that were previously held in esteem for participants in terms of conscription and masculinity and what it meant to be a man during apartheid are, in a sense, sacrificed for the preservation of whiteness in the 'new South Africa'.

In terms of hegemonic masculinity it can be said that a common feature amongst participants was the hyper-masculinisation and the related masculine tone in which the events of their participation in compulsory national service were portrayed, which shaped the way in which they experienced and thus constructed militarised violence during and after the apartheid period as white males. Furthermore in terms of the replication of masculine ideals, for many participants military identity was synonymous with characteristics such as fortitude, determination, honour, bravery, autonomy, being 'plucky' and daring while also displaying decorum, self-discipline, dutifulness and forbearance: characteristics fundamental to constructions of hegemonic masculinity.

National memory making was also a key discourse that arose from the data. It was argued here that the participants in this study did not freely choose any 'interpretation' or way to make sense of his combat experiences as they wished. The discourse of memory and war is structured by power, and is masculinist. National memory making processes construct, authorise and give meaning to an armed conflict or war in particular ways. Such processes can authorise some memories and devalue other interpretations (Lomsky-Feder, 2004). War memorials, for example,

serve to commemorate valiant male soldiers who died for freedom, not traumatised men (or civilians), who are often perceived as somehow effeminate or less than the masculine ideal.

Linked to the above mentioned concept of the masculine ideal the discourse of the militarised male body was also a key feature that arose in the interviews. Many spoke of their bodies as the nation's tools and weapons in combat that had to be masculine, fit, tough and strong. Furthermore those who did not meet the ideal classification during conscription grappled with what it meant to be less than the ideal. On this point it would seem that as yet there seems to be distinct lack of research concerning white males in South Africa and military service. However this can be linked to studies that have been conducted in a similar vein to the current endeavour, such as those by Mankayi (2010), Gibson (2010; 2009), Flischer (1987), Cock (1991) and Baines (2008).

Furthermore, in terms of the intersectional approach it can be said that white masculinities must be understood as the embedded relation of racial and gendered connotations and not as a mere sum of their parts. In order to approach such a phenomenon, it is indispensable to question in which ways stereotypes of masculinity and whiteness are articulated together. Both whiteness and masculinity, as socially and culturally constructed categories, work together and interact on multiple levels to either empower or marginalize individuals (McCall, 2005). Norms of both race and sex work together to keep white males in positions of privilege. In other words, whiteness and male-hood (often manifested through masculinity) become interdependent and confer privilege to white males (Butler, 1993). However, in some instances it was found that these discourses also function independently of each other. In terms of the current sample and the context in which this sample has been found, one could argue that these two discourses are in tension with each other at times and at other times they are not. Furthermore, what one could argue that there is evidence to suggest that these discourses are both referent to and in service of each other in some instances.

Notably, this process of intersectionality was illustrated indirectly by participants in terms of a split between the ideology of being a liberal or an intellectual objector, and actually disrupting the status quo. Thus what was related to the researcher was the idea that during their times of service these individuals were actually 'good' whites, which in this instance implies that these individuals had occupied less of a masculine position or a position other than the prototypical

ideal in terms of military service. Thus what one find here is a trade off of sorts, where participants were forced in favour of preserving a positive image in the new South Africa as a people who do not support the 'border war'. However this was at expense of this participant's position as the masculine ideal. Renouncing the war effort also implies some degree of conscientious objection or lack support for the military during apartheid. However during apartheid the general consensus according to many participants was that going to war willingly was what society expected of you as a man. These findings reaffirm what has been concluded in the literature on whiteness and on white men in the military conducted by such authors as Altman (2004), Bonnett (1999), Clarke (2001), Steyn (2001), Baines (2008), Mankayi (2010) and Straker (2007). However due to the sparse nature of research concerning constructions of violence in relation to whiteness, many of the above mentioned findings stand alone as arguably new contributions to the scope of knowledge on this topic.

In terms of the final research question concerning the possible functions of these discourses in relation to meaning making processes in terms of experiences of the 'border war', in contemporary South Africa, the dominant discourse that was conveyed by most was one of betrayal. It would seem that many of the interviewees felt that they had been badly let down by those who propelled them into action and inspired their lives as combatants. A common element is the sense that the ideological paradigms that framed the wars they fought in, and their identities as combatants, have been betrayed. For many, the disjuncture between what they fought for and their present realities is a bitter pill to swallow. Although this anger about the past is powerful, most participants combine these views with an elevation of their service as 'the best years of my life', and calls for the reintroduction of conscription. It is in this way that a pervasive sense of disillusionment and anger was conveyed by participants.

When thinking about their military service in terms the contemporary South African context, many of the participants seemed conflicted and unsure of where to position themselves in relation to the 'border war' and apartheid. For many it would seem it is easier to simply ignore those years of their lives and *"move on"*. A worrying outcome of this response is that one may find that there are a large number of white males in contemporary South Africa who served in the military who refuse or would rather not grapple with the difficulties they faced in the army (Connell, 1995; 2000, Cornwall & Lindisfarne, 1994; Skelton, 1997; Swain, 2002). This lack of

desire to grapple with or discuss 'what happened in the army' further reinforces the hegemonic construction of the masculine warrior (Gibson, 2009; Mankayi, 2010). Linked to the discourse of the masculine warrior is the unspoken rule of not divulging or talking about the difficult times one had in the army and in displaying any outward signs of distress in dealing with the after effects of traumatic experiences in war (Skelton, 1997; Swain, 2002; Gibson, 2009). This thus allows many of these men to preserve their identity as a masculine war hardened soldier devoid of emotion and feeling (Gibson, 2009).

Amongst some of the participants, a sense of betrayal is less apparent than that of more generalised discontent. For many former members of the SADF, the need to secure work after the war is a serious concern. Several participants also linked the sense of resentment towards their past to current employment opportunities, or the lack thereof. It would seem too that many of the participants felt as though they could not live up to the masculine ideal of the man as the provider and bread winner reinforcing the sentiment of resentment. Overall it is argued that the general image portrayed by white individuals in this regard was one of pessimism, uncertainty and concern for where the future of this country lies. These findings do however indirectly corroborate with the work of such authors as Blee (2005), Baines (2008), Altman (2004), Cock (1991), Draper (1999) and Steyn (2001).

In terms of the discourse of disillusionment it would seem that the disjuncture between what was fought for by those who served in the army during apartheid and their current situations leave many feeling, in the words of one respondent, that they *"do not know where they are going"*. Many respondents felt that they had been used and cast aside as brainwashed pawns in a political game they neither understood nor had any control over. Compounding their anger is a pervasive sense that what they fought for has been given away and handed to their enemies on a plate (Gear, 2002). Several respondents, however, felt that while many of their colleagues were appalled by the dramatic political developments in the early 1990s, some saw these developments as inevitable (Baines, 2008; Steyn, 2001; Nuttal 2001). The ultimate question here is what does this discourse really signal? What one ultimately finds here is that in most instances the discourse of betrayal is mobilised presently in a way that discursively positions these participants as victims in South Africa's current context (Baines, 2008). We see here that

participants feel as though they are no longer perpetrators but ultimately victims in spite of their lives of privilege during apartheid.

Indeed, this discourse is not only about betrayal but also a way of experiencing oneself as a victim for these participants as well as an attempt to occupy a position of belonging in contemporary South African society. This is key to the process of moving on, however for these individuals moving on is characterised by hardship in the present both economically and politically. In the current context is clear then that whiteness is in a position of instability. If one is to look abstractly at what is conveyed in this discourse of betrayal there is a sense that whiteness in South Africa is unfinished business. There is a sense that the individuals in this study would like to move on and reclaim a stable position in society, yet, with very little economic viability and the sudden loss of power at the end of apartheid there is still much work to be done. Perhaps in expressing this idea of betrayal there is an indication that these individuals wish to reclaim the position of power they once occupied. What is clear however is that whiteness and masculinity work in complicated ways. This instability is not always a bad thing while this is a challenge, it also shows possibilities.

Thus in an ultimate rhetorical act of temporal juxtaposition we see the participants of this study metaphorically creating a balance sheet of sorts where the general argument is made that the balance sheet should be at zero. As it is felt by many that in spite of the privileges of the past these individuals suggest they are suffering in the current context, absolving them of passed privileges and in a sense 'balancing' the inequalities of the past. Whether this is in fact the case or not there is a sense here that participants feel the need to absolve themselves from the sins of the past. How effectively the discourse of betrayal achieves this goal is questionable to some at least to some degree (Gear, 2002; 2008). Ultimately it can be said that white masculinity exists in a space that is both troubled and unsettled. This study has illustrated that white men in South Africa have gone from a position of omnipotent power during apartheid to one of contested instability in present South African society. It is evident from this research that whiteness and masculinity are both complex and diffuse structures that still warrant a great deal of exploration. That said, the future prospects for these individuals are both challenging and possible. Future research endeavours, perhaps focused on investigating various outcomes for white individuals in South Africa may be able to shed further light on this matter.

The findings of this study not only confirm but also add to a growing body of literature centring on critical race and masculinity studies. It is hoped that such literature and the theory which it is built on it will contribute to anti-racism practices and will help to facilitate social reform in South Africa, and indeed globally (Reddy, 2005; Roediger, 2009). Again it must be cautioned, despite every effort to the contrary, that a study such as this may inadvertently contribute to the perpetuation of racial norms, symbolic racism and even overt racism (Green & Sonn, 2006; Ratele, 2007; Stevens, Swart & Franchi, 2006). This study has attempted to problematise whiteness and masculinity and critically assess its construction.

## 5.3. Study limitations

It is important at this point to examine some of the limitations of this study. In terms of sampling one could argue here that this study seems to focus on a very specific demographic of conscripts who fought in the 'border war' while this was the intention of this study, there were other individuals involved in the war who's narratives or interview data if captured in the same manner as this study may also yield interesting results. An example of such work could involve looking at ex-combatants who fought in the 'border war' in support of the ANC. This would allow for other military experiences during this time period to be grappled with in a meaningful manner as this research has attempted to do achieve with this cohort of ex-conscripts.

Another limitation of this study was the fact that it was conducted by a white, and potentially biased researcher. However, as discussed previously, it is necessary for white researchers to also problematise whiteness and racial constructs –for anti-racism endeavours are not merely the domain of the black person. Secondly, this study is limited by the fact that the sample was a small, relatively homogeneous population of white English-speaking South Africans. Thus, a further recommendation is that the study be replicated in other white population groups as well as across various generations.

This study calls for the re-articulation of whiteness and masculinity as a malleable and dynamic construct. However, despite the fact that the constructionist ambitions of this research were to provide an understanding of the constructions of masculinity and whiteness and consequently a means to alter the way various ex-combatants are portrayed in South Africa. However this theory is still located within the very language that oppresses, polices, disciplines and controls bodies.

Thus, the attempt to contest patriarchy and racism is problematic as it is as biased and distorted as the masculine and racist hegemony it is intended to disrupt. For Butler (1993), this is proved by the very fact that a theoretical desire to do away with sexual and race differences exists and this, in turn, reinforces the enduring and efficacious character of sexual and race differences. That is, "anything that might be said against it is oblique proof that it structures what we say" (Butler, 1993, p. 177). In this way, this research may become circular as it draws on the very discourses it aims to disintegrate.

### 5.4. Future recommendations

In terms of the study limitations outlined above, it is recommended that future studies take sampling issues into account. Firstly, it would be beneficial to replicate this study with differing groups of individuals who participated in the 'border war' from both sides of the conflict. This would give voice to the aspects of the border war that were overlooked in this study. Additionally, future South African studies should attempt to include a range of classes and socio-economic backgrounds in their samples. Most importantly, future studies should attempt to take other experiences of 'border warfare' and perhaps even experiences of military after the 'border war' into account. There is thus future room for studies such as the ones proposed above to take place.

Given the subjective nature of this type of study, one may propose that there is also room here for less subjective means of analysis to be carried out. This may help counteract the biases mentioned above that this study could not avoid. This may allow for findings that would more easily be applied to the general population. This being said though, one would have to think carefully about how one would be able to capture the texture and nuance that in-depth interviews such as those conducted in this study.

Lastly, it is important that the notion of intersectional subjectivities be given more attention in future work of this nature. One could argue here that up until this study there has been little focus on the intersection subjectivity of ex-combatants. This research only adds this body of knowledge in a novel manner and speaks to the idea that there needs to be more work in this area. For example it may useful to see as a study of comparison the difference between the current sample of conscripts and other grouping who participated in the 'border war' such as

ANC freedom fighters. It is the opinion of this study that concepts of masculinity and race do not always function independently of each other, there is a gap here to further examine the intersections of these two comments in terms of other groupings more generally. Therefore, future work would benefit from a balanced understanding from both sides and provide a means of comparing different conceptualisations.

Finally, this study acknowledges social constructions as a function of an oppressive patriarchal language. When making such acknowledgements, we simultaneously reclaim agency at both the individual and the social level. In turn, this reclamation allows us to rehearse other ways of being. The call is made here that there is a need for future practical interventions aimed at individuals who fought in the 'border war'. This study has provided evidence of the fact that there are many white men in South Africa who still have not come to terms with what they experienced during apartheid and where they find themselves now in the new South Africa. At the moment there is a sense that these individuals feel as though they cannot, or there is no space for them to talk about their experiences of 'border warfare' in a meaningful new South Africa. One could argue here that for these individuals there needs to be a platform from which their voices can be heard.

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# Appendices

APPENDIX I

**INTERVIEW SCEHDULE**

1. What are your memories of conscription and the ‘border war’?
2. Can you talk about some of the incidents of conscription during apartheid?
3. What did you think of conscription during apartheid?
4. Can you talk about what it was like to be white and whether it had any influence on your experience of conscription during apartheid?
5. In what ways have they changed over the years if at all?
6. Can you talk about some of the incidents of border warfare during apartheid?
7. What did you think of the ‘border war’ during Apartheid?
8. In what ways has your opinion changed since apartheid?
9. When do you think your opinion changed?
10. How do you understand the ‘border war’ and your experience of conscription more generally today?
11. How do you think the fact that you were male impacted on your experience as a conscript during the ‘border war’?
12. Can you provide an account of a specific event of conscription or border warfare that particularly resonates with you?
13. Is there anything further you would like to reflect on or add?

APPENDIX II

**Department of Psychology**
School of Human & Community Development

**University of the Witwatersrand**
Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050
Tel: (011) 717 4500 Fax: (011) 717 4559

**Discourses of whiteness and masculinity in conscripts' talk about the South African 'border war'**

**PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET**

Good day

My name is Danilo Caforio and I am part of a multi-university project that is currently doing research on people's experiences of racism during the apartheid period. The universities involved in this research include the University of the Witwatersrand, the University of the Western Cape and the University of South Africa. Specifically, the aim of my research is to understand the experiences of white male individuals who were conscripted in the South African National Defence force during apartheid and their views on the 'border war' in South Africa both during and after apartheid. In pursuit of this aim I am inviting South Africans born roughly between the 1960s and 1970s to participate in an interview concerning their experiences of racism, conscription and the 'border war' during apartheid South Africa.

Consequently, I invite you to participate in this research project. You do not stand to benefit from participating in this study. Furthermore you do not stand to suffer any consequence/risk or consequence in any way as a result of participation in the study. The interview data gathered by me will be analysed and integrated into various journal articles as well as used in presentations at various conferences. Additionally, all the interview data will be posted on this research project's website (www.apartheidarchive.org/). If you agree to being interviewed and the subsequent data being used in these ways, please indicate so on the attached Consent Form. Furthermore all data collected will be stored digitally in a safe password protected locked storage space for the duration of five years and disposed of correctly when no longer needed.

Due to the nature of interviews full anonymity and confidentiality cannot be guaranteed as I will be privy to the identity of the participants. Similarly, the interview data will form part of the broader Apartheid Archives Project and parts of the interviews will be replicated in the research report of this study as well as on the Apartheid Archive website. My supervisor will also have access to the interviews. Thus only partial confidentiality can be promised due to the fact that some identifying details may be recognised once your interview has been digitised and uploaded. Kindly note that the information that you provide as part of your submission will be anonymised. In other words, your interview will be included in our database under a pseudonym and in a manner that will make it impossible for you to be identified. However, if you wish to be identified in the research and publications that will flow from this research endeavour, please indicate so – in which case I will include your interview in our database under your own name.

Please also note that you may withdraw from this research and your interview data from our database at any point in future. If you have any questions about the project, please feel free to contact myself or my supervisor at the e-mail addresses or telephone numbers provided below.

Danilo Caforio, Cell: 0763099063/ E-mail: danilo.caforio@gmail.com

Supervisor: Professor Garth Stevens, Tel: 011-717-4525/ E-mail: garth.stevens@wits.ac.za

SADAG, Tel: 011- 262-6396/ E-mail: zane1@hargray.com

Life Line: Tel, 011-715-200/ Website: http://www.lifeline.org.za

SAMHS: Tel: 012-367-900/ Website: www.mhs.mil.za/

APPENDIX III

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School of Human & Community Development

**University of the Witwatersrand**
Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050
Tel: (011) 717 4500 Fax: (011) 717 4559

**Discourses of whiteness and masculinity in conscripts' talk about the South African 'border war'**

## CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

I,_____, after having read the participant information consent I agree to participate in the *Study Discourses of whiteness and masculinity in conscripts' talk about the South African 'border war'.* In so doing, I understand that:

a. My participation in the study is voluntary

b. I may withdraw from the study at any time by instructing the researcher listed above that I would like my interview data deleted from the archive. I may also refuse to answer an interview question.

c. My interview data will be anonymised.

d. My anonymised interview data could be selected for analysis

e. My anonymised interview data could be selected for publication in a number of outputs generated by the project.

f. I may request that my name be attached to the published narrative if I so wish.

**Signed:** ☐

**Date:** ☐

APPENDIX IV

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**Discourses of whiteness and masculinity in conscripts' talk about the South African 'border war'**

## CONSENT FOR INTERVIEW TO BE RECORDED AND TRANSCRIBED

I, _____, after having read the both the participant information sheet I give my consent to my interview to be recorded and transcribed. I understand that should I so desire, the audio taped interview can be deleted after it has been transcribed. Furthermore I understand that the recordings will be stored digitally in a safe place that is password protected and only the researcher and his supervisor will have access to the recordings.

Please tick box if you:

AGREE to have your interview data stored in the Apartheid Archive Project ☐

DO NOT agree to have your interview data stored in the Apartheid Archive Project ☐

**Signed:** ☐

**Date:** ☐

APPENDIX VI

## ETHICS CLEARANCE

**UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG**

**HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (SCHOOL OF HUMAN & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

| | |
|---|---|
| **CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE** | **PROTOCOL NUMBER: MPSYC/12/002 III** |
| **PROJECT TITLE:** | Discourses of whiteness and masculinity in conscripts' talk about the South African 'border war' |
| **INVESTIGATORS** | Caforio Danilo |
| **DEPARTMENT** | Psychology |
| **DATE CONSIDERED** | 04/05/12 |
| **DECISION OF COMMITTEE*** | Approved |

**This ethical clearance is valid for 2 years and may be renewed upon application**

**DATE: 20 June 2012**

**CHAIRPERSON**
**(Professor K Cockcroft)**

cc Supervisor:

Prof. G Stevens
Psychology

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**DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR (S)**

To be completed in duplicate and **one copy** returned to the Secretary, Room 100015, 10th floor, Senate House, University.

I/we fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure be contemplated from the research procedure, as approved, I/we undertake to submit a revised protocol to the Committee.

**This ethical clearance will expire on 31 December 2014**

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER IN ALL ENQUIRIES