That's our code: A feminine artistic encoding of memories of the South African Defence Force between 1977 and 1989 and hegemonic masculinity in white South African men

by

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ABSTRACT

This study explores memory and narrative surrounding experiences of conscription into the South African Defence Force (SADF) during the 1970s and 80s. This decade experienced the climax and end of several conflicts grouped under the collectively remembered 'Border War'. The conscription of white South African men into the military is understood by many veterans as a coming-of-age ritual and an induction into manhood. When the National Party conceded in 1994, many soldiers felt betrayed by the government they risked their lives to protect. Many of these soldiers are silent about their experiences and this study provided an opportunity for participating veterans to recount experiences of the former South African Defence Force (SADF), specifically surrounding the creation of masculinity and the sharing of pain and trauma. I have combined two binary and gendered codes, Morse code and knitting, to encode narratives shared with me by participating veterans, thereby capturing memories from a group who feel they are forgotten. In addition, I use stitching to investigate my relationship to the SADF and trauma, using a spiral motif to explore the cathartic release of sharing stories and the great difficulty in sharing vulnerability and pain.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

The Border War[1] (1966-1989) was an interconnected collection of revolutionary conflicts to liberate Southern Africa from colonial powers[2] and to retain the power held by the white minority apartheid[3] government in South Africa and Southwest Africa (SWA). André Wessels suggests that the Border War is more accurately referred to as the "Namibian War for Independence" or the "War for Southern Africa" a conflict that "spill[ed] over into Angola, Zambia" (Wessels 2017:25) and to which the role of the South African Defence Force (SADF) in Rhodesia (today known as Zimbabwe) and Mozambique can also be linked. The liberation struggles in South Africa and Zimbabwe were perceived by the white minority governments in Pretoria and Harare (formerly known as Salisbury) as a communist threat that was "aided and abetted by the Soviet Union, to demonize African liberation movements", a view which also helped to "divert domestic and international attention from the real causes of opposition to racist rule" (Onslow 2009:9).

The racist system of apartheid, which was established in 1948, refers to a racial segregation policy that "split the country along ethnic lines" (Arne Westad 2007:208) and allocated power to the South African-based European population of about 13%. Black South Africans (approximately 75% of the South African population) were required to carry passbooks to enter and exit the "European" areas where they worked and were not allowed to reside in or attend schools in these areas (Arne Westad 2007:208). With the expansion of "European" areas came the forced removal and relocation of "Africans and other non-Europeans" to areas referred to by the regime as "Bantustans" or "homelands". These combined regions made up 14% of South African territory and were intended to be "distinct regions for African ethnic groups as defined

[1] The term Border War is not a neutral one, and rather serves to establish that ways of remembering the Border War frame the significance of the conflict from a particular perspective, perpetuating the narrative put forth by the apartheid government. I employ this term only to denote a particular way of remembering rather than to lend legitimacy to an unjust legal system (Baines 2014).
[2] Namely Portuguese Mozambique and Angola, and British Rhodesia/Zimbabwe.
[3] Apartheid was a system employed by the NP from 1948 to "legally" "dispossess black South Africans of their land and basic human rights" (Conway 2017:3).

by the regime" (Arne Westad 2007:208). With growing legislation designed to separate South Africans by ethnicity and to oppress and restrict the rights of 'non-European' South Africans[4], protests and liberation struggles began to gain traction. Rather than being understood as liberation struggles against economic exploitation, political exclusion and oppression, the government's response was that such confrontation was "the product of an external and alien agency" (Onslow 2009:9). Thus, the armed struggle of the African National Congress (ANC) and their paramilitary wing Umkhonto we Sizwe was considered a dangerous 'terrorist' and 'communist' threat propped up by the Russians.

The apartheid government initially had support from the United States (US) government and the rest of the Western world[5] in the idea that Russia supported the instability in South Africa. This support was based on the fact that the South African mining industry was "dominated by international companies" (Arne Westad 2007:208) and immensely profitable due to the cheap labour of black South Africans under apartheid rule. This meant that the exploitation of black South African labourers benefited Western economies. prompting "the calls for racial justice" (Miller 2016: sp).

The Cold War between the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR, commonly referred to as the Soviet Union) and the US had an impact globally including Southern Africa. For example, "From 1975 Angola was a major hot spot in the Cold War, with the United States, the Soviet Union, Cuba and South Africa all involved" (Saunders 2011: 104). Angola had been a part of the Portuguese empire under the dictatorship of Antonio de Oliveira Salazar, who claimed that Portugal's purpose in "Africa was to

[4]The "Prohibition of Mixed Marriages"(1949) banned marriage between "whites and non-whites", the "Population Registration Act" (1950) created a national registry which officially recorded each individuals race, the "Group Areas Act" (1950) legislated segregation by creating areas for each race or tribe, the "Immorality Act" (1950) outlawed sexual intercourse between "whites and non-whites", the "Bantu Authorities Act" (1951) saw the creation "black homelands and governments", the "Separate Representation of Voters Act" (1951) saw the removal of "coloureds" from the voter rolls, the "Bantu Education Act" (1953) created a separate education system for black South Africans with an "appropriate" curriculum, the "Native Resettlement Act" (1954) "allowed the removal" of existing black residents from areas "reserved for whites, and the "Extension of Education Act" barred black South Africans from attending "white universities" and set up tertiary education institutions for each racial group (Apartheid Museum 2006:52)

[5] Under apartheid, South Africa often "worked covertly with the North Americans, while Britain, France, Belgium and Germany supplied arms to the apartheid government at various stages" (Liebenberg 2015b:42).

fight communism" (Arne Westad 2007:209). In 1974, the Portuguese regime was overthrown and the departure of Portuguese colonial forces from Angola left a void of power and led to the "disintegration of the political status quo in Southern Africa" (Miller 2016:sp).

From the 1960s, South Africa allied with the Portuguese and Zimbabwean militaries in fighting these 'communist threats', deployed troops in covert operations in those countries (Arne Westad 2007: 207). From 1969 and into the 1970's, the perspective of Defence Minister Pieter Willem Botha was that it was in South Africa's best interests to combat the communist-backed insurgencies to the north (Miller 2016). With the withdrawal of "most European powers from the continent" and the "rise of African Nationalism", the NP government started to consider the surrounding "minority ruled" and "colonial territories" as a curtain of safety, a "political and military buffer" protecting a minority ruled South Africa from the "black ruled Africa" (Daniel 2009:37).

If African liberation groups gained power in a neighbouring country like Angola or Mozambique, this could allow South African liberation groups like the ANC to gain power and support in a territory bordering South Africa, where previously the racist South African regime had been protected by likeminded governance in surrounding countries. South Africa was considered vulnerable by Minister P.W. Botha and in a letter written to the then South African Prime Minister John Vorster in the October of 1974 stated that "the new governments in Luanda and Lourenço Marques would be inherently hostile to South Africa for ideological reasons and would therefore "in all likelihood be terrorist oriented" (Miller 2016:sp). The war within South Africa during the 1980s rendered the apartheid government unpopular as it relied on brutal military and police strength to suppress protests and uprisings (Liebenberg 2015b:41). Both the civil war within South Africa and the military engagement in neighbouring countries required a strong military force to maintain the control that the National Party (NP) had over South Africa and SWA. Maintaining the system of apartheid and white minority rule required a robust fighting force. In addressing this need, a compulsory military

conscription programme was implemented for white South African men, who were at a school-leaving age (18 years old).

The term 'Border War' denotes a particular way of remembering for those who participated in this war and is "neither fixed nor inscribed in the event itself but shaped by mnemonic[6] communities after the fact" (Baines 2014:1). Of particular interest to this study is the latter, and focus is placed on ways of remembering the Border War and its relationship to the creation of masculine identity in the SADF and the perpetuation of patriarchal gender binaries. The societal value placed on these performances of masculinity has become embedded into white South African identity and has been transmitted generationally, continuing to isolate assigned masculine and feminine traits and identities.

The implementation of a conscription programme for white South African men utilised militarised masculinity in modelling soldiers that acted as a rite of passage into manhood for many. Jacklyn Cock posits that the experiences individuals have of "this war was shaped by gender relations" just as much as by other factors of society "such as ideology, race, class and ethnic identity" (Cock 1991:iix). I (Georgina Glass) was born seven years after the cessation of the Border War (1989) and two years after the first democratic election in South Africa (1994). Yet, the spectre of the Border War continues to codify gender according to a division of patriarchal binaries, which I have understood to perpetuate a masculine identity in many white South African men (across generations) that often includes the acceptance of violence and repression of weakness.

At the beginning of the Namibian War of Independence (1968), the South African military was ill-prepared for war and the government legislated a "compulsory, whites-only conscription" (Wessels 2017:38) for nine months of training in the SADF. This was extended to a yearlong training and, finally, a two-year compulsory[7] training was legislated in 1977 (Wessels 2017:38). Some young white men managed to avoid military service by leaving the country if they could afford to or delay conscription by

[6] Mnemonic refers to memory, specifically the construction of memory (Baines:2014).
[7] Refusal to complete national service could result in a six-year prison sentence.

enrolling in a university, but most did not. There was also an option to serve conscription periods through police force enrolment or working at a post office. Some men went to prison for refusing to serve (a six-year sentence) in the military. Of the "600 000 white men" who underwent military training, (something Wessels identifies as inherently traumatising in itself) more than half experienced "active service" (Wessels 2017:38) in Northern Namibia or Angola. These young men, between 18 and 19 years old, were under the impression that their deployment in these countries was to "fight communism" (Scholtz 2006:19) and restore peace and order. In 1989, South African troops withdrew from Namibia and Angola in 1991, that resulted in the reduction of conscripts post-1989 (Wessels 2017:38).

This study aims to collect narratives surrounding experiences of vulnerability in the SADF from a community of veterans. The literature suggests that a hegemonic masculine identity was utilised by the NP government and has influenced or perpetuated patriarchal norms related to the gender binary and, in my very personal experience, to violence. I have trauma related to Border War spectres that I have silenced and rarely speak of to family members, especially not male family members. If alluded to, I often find myself leading them through a labyrinth, skirting around truths but never speaking to them directly. Similarly, I have heard many stories growing up from men in my family and community relating to time spent in the army, but always framed with humour, even stories that involve an immense amount of suffering, or the inflicting of suffering on other soldiers during training. But I was always excluded from the recounting of serious tales and never heard one first-hand that dealt vulnerably with an experience from that time, although my younger brother was included in those conversations. My impression growing up, was that the serious recounting of war stories was something reserved for the boys (my cousins and brother), something handed down from men to future men. Exclusion from these spaces, combined with my attempts to understand my trauma inherited from the army has given me a great curiosity and desire to understand the legacy of masculinity connected to the Border War and what has been understood by many as a last, formal, coming of age ritual for the white South African community. For this study, I collect stories of vulnerability from veterans and engage with their storytelling through my artist's practice, converting

their stories into a hybridised binary text embedded into Morse-coded knitting. This process allows for the narratives to be set out in an accessible but difficult code to interpret, both presenting and obscuring vulnerable truths. I intend to honour any vulnerability veterans share with me while also attempting to comprehend how they understand the relationship between their masculinity and their experiences in the army. The concept of coding is the basis for this inquiry and aims to examine the encoding of identity through the "military machine" (Allais, du Plessis & Liebenberg 2007:2), as well as the encryption of personal 'secrets'. This links in my practice to my sense of silencing, or coding of secrets to speak about trauma.

In this study, I unpack notions of manliness and examine the creation of a white South African hegemonic masculinity. In the literature review, I set out to better understand gender, specifically the masculinity performed by SADF conscripts, and the masculinity of that institution. An understanding of gender and hegemonic masculinity is essential to understanding the creation of hegemonic masculinity through the SADF. I also look at artists dealing with the Border War, trauma, memory and binary coding. My inquiry is into how the hegemonic masculinity of the SADF was used to shape white South African men into tools for the state, how notions of masculinity impacted their identities, and how this time in their lives is re(membered).

1.2. Literature review

1.2.1. Introduction

In this literature review, I explored how notions of masculinity are created and are often invisible frames for experiences and identities. To understand how masculinity was used by the NP government, I reviewed literature on hegemonic masculinity and the NP government. Hegemonic masculinity can be understood as the "pattern of practice that allowed men's domination over women to continue" (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005:832). This masculine identity embodied the most honoured way of performing masculinity at that moment in time. Literature addressing the link between masculinity and the perpetuation of violence is reviewed and the similarities between Morse code and knitting are explored in connection to notions of coding behaviour, binary codes, and the gender binary.

1.2.2. Seeing gender

Michael S. Kimmel and Michael A. Messner, in introducing the eighth edition of *Men's Lives*, write that men are rarely "understood through the prism of gender" (Kimmel & Messner 2009:xi). However, "gender remains one of the organizing principles of social life" (Kimmel & Messner 2009:xi) alongside class and race. If gender is central to how we come to understand ourselves and organise our society, why is it that we treat men as if they had no gender? The simple explanation is sociological, positing that "the mechanisms that afford us privilege are very often invisible[8] to us" (Kimmel & Messner 2009:xi). While women understand gender to be central to their experiences, men tend to think about themselves as "genderless, as if gender did not matter in the daily experiences of our lives" (Kimmel & Messner 2009:xi). Kimmel and Messner point out that professional men rarely have their decisions or lines of inquiry scrutinised through the lens of gender "as if masculinity were not even remotely in their consciousness" (Kimmel & Messner 2009:xi). This reinforces notions of man as 'the rule' and woman

[8] The social mechanisms that we are aware of are the ones that we are painfully confronted with daily. While race is a central element in the experiences of people of colour, white people rarely think of themselves as "raced" (Kimmel & Messner 2009:xi).

as the 'gendered exception'. The authors write that this notion is incorrect, as men are gendered, the process of gendering[9] is "a central experience for men" (Kimmel & Messner 2009:xii) and the unawareness of this leads to the perpetuation of gender inequalities.

Gender, as previously noted, is a social construct, an imagined mechanism by which we organise society. Raewyn Connell argues that gender, while rooted in notions of the bodily, is not "reduced to the body" (Connell 2001:34). The understanding of the term assumes that a person's behaviour is a result of the type of person they are (Connell 2001:30). In understanding where these notions of gender originate, Kimmel and Messner (2009) claim that the observed temperamental or behavioural difference between men and women is taken to be of biological origin. "Normative is translated into normal and the mechanisms of this transformation are the assumed biological imperative" (Kimmel & Messner 2009:xiii). This does not mean that gender is not real, as our lived experiences shape our identities. It is important to note that gender is a political, cultural, and social construct; there is no one femininity or one true masculinity. This makes masculinity a plural, with many different facets. To unpack the masculinity brand of the SADF and the white South African male conscripts, it is therefore important to identify cultural and political factors that influenced the brand.

1.2.3. Hegemonic masculinity

Connell introduces the idea of hegemonic[10] masculinity as aspirational cultural masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity functions to ensure the "dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (Connell 2001:39). However, Joseph Pleck writes that such patriarchal hierarchy with men in power over women is not limited to this, it extends to men competing with and oppressing other men using hegemonic masculinity as criteria for rank (Pleck 1992:23). Hegemonic masculinity can be used as a tool, and "hegemony is likely to be established only if there is some correspondence between

[9] This process of gendering is the transforming of a "biological male" into a "socially interacting man" (Kimmel & Messner 2009:xii).
[10] At the time that hegemonic masculinity was conceptualised in 1977, hegemony as a "Gramscian term" referred to "current attempts to understand the stabilisation of class relations" (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005:83).

cultural ideal and institutional power, collective if not individual" (Connell 2001:39). They clarify that hegemonic masculinity is not statistically normal, with "only a minority of men who might enact it" (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005:832). However, Connell and Messerschmidt also identify "complicit masculinity", where men may benefit from patriarchy without having to perform a "strong version of masculine dominance" (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005:831).

Hegemonic masculinity embodies the current and culturally most honourable way of being manly, "ideologically legitim[izing] the global subordination of women to men" (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005:832). As a product of culture and society, it is important to remember that hegemonic masculinity is open to change and may become less oppressive as "part of a process leading towards an abolition of gender hierarchies" (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005:832).

Robert Morrell (1998) presents the idea that hegemonic masculinity in the West is one rooted in whiteness, with "misogyny, homophobia, racism and compulsory heterosexuality" as defining characteristics (Morrell 1998:608). Morrell considers South African masculinities, positing that South Africa's "history of white supremacy" might suggest that "white, ruling-class masculinity was hegemonic" (Morrell 1998:616). Colonisation, Morrell writes, brought with it "rigid gender identities" (Morrell 1998:612) including the exclusion of women. Belinda Bozzoli (1983) claimed that to understand South Africa as under "one system of male rule" is "simplistic", concluding that there is no overarching masculinity in South Africa, but rather a "patchwork quilt of patriarchies" (Bozzoli 1983:149). While there are certainly patriarchal structures in South Africa, it cannot be assumed that one hegemonic masculine identity exists, even within the white population.

However, it could be that the SADF encouraged particular masculine performances, which may have influenced the masculinity of South African men who participated in national service conscription. Through interviews, I will reflect on veterans' stories to understand the masculine identity presented as desirable by the SADF.

1.2.4. Masculinity and violence

South Africa is registered as one of the "most violent places in the world for women" (Mogoathle 2019). The question to ask is not "whether men are predisposed to violence, but what society does with this violence" (Kaufman 1992:30). Kaufman posits that institutional sexism, racism and compulsory heterosexuality are "socially regulated acts of violence" (Kaufman 1992:31). Connell examines the link between masculinity and violence, finding that admired images and archetypes of heroes are useful to the state in translating those honoured tropes into violent action and military force (Connell 2001).

Within military organisations, there are different kinds of masculinity. "It is the relationship between forms of masculinity, physically violent but subordinate to orders on the one hand, dominating and organisationally competent on the other, that is the basis of military organisation" (Connell 1992:181). Militaries, Connell explains, are a bureaucratic and masculine space. While in an army different masculine identities may exist, the centralised policy and uniformity make it easy to institute a hegemonic masculinity that encourages violence and action (Conell 1992:181).

James Gilligan (2009) draws a correlation between shame and violence, theorising that lowering the exposure of society to shame and humiliation lowers the rates of violence. He specifies that in societies with high levels of violence, it is the male population that is the primary perpetrator due to women being socialised to be passive instead of active. Gilligan speaks about the notion of honour, which is an idea that is synonymous with the military. Men find honour through activity, which is often ultimately violent. Dishonour comes from passivity which leaves men open to "the charge of being a non-man" (Gilligan 2009:554). Utilising these notions of honour and action as markers of a man would aid the SADF in the creation of soldiers, ultimately tools of violence created to obey the state. Through the interviews, I document the participating veterans' ideas about violence and action surrounding their experiences of the SADF and their current notions of masculinity.

1.2.5. Masculinity and the SADF

Daniel Conway's *Masculinities, militarisation and the End Conscription Campaign* (2017) examine the social and cultural influences used to shape white South African masculinity during the apartheid era. He identifies that conscription was critical to the NP's strategy of governing in the 1980s and that it "underpinned and perpetuated socially constructed gendered binaries" (Conway 2017:4).

Gender binaries were crucial to socialising white boys into an extreme form of militarised masculinity, perpetuated not only "at school level but at an institutional level throughout society" (Drewett 2008:95). The things identified as feminine in the "binary dichotomies[11] of gender discourse" are therefore dismissed and the stereotypes used to justify militarisation in the first place set up a "cycle of self-perpetuating gender binaries" (Drewett 2008:95). One important binary established is of men as "protectors and providers" and women to be the protected and the caregivers. The 'Border' and home can be viewed as extensions of the notions of protector and the protected and this gender binary was used to aid the apartheid government's conscription campaign (Drewett 2008). Gender division is evident in male-only conscription and military training "in order to construct a militarised masculinity" (Drewett 2008:95) that at its core held that being a soldier transcended occupation to become identity. The SADF offered conscripts an opportunity to transform "into a real man – a fighting machine" (Drewett 2008:96) and many conscripts eagerly accepted the militarised masculine ideal. For many ex-servicemen this formative time acted as a rite of passage into masculinity and holds an important place in their stories of themselves.

Jacklyn Cock calls war a gendered activity and claims that "changing gender relations is one of the essential tasks for reducing the risk of war in the future" (Cock 1991:x). We can infer that hegemonic masculinity was created in the SADF and that basic military training involved "stripping young men of their individuality and moulding them into soldiers" (Cock 1991:56). In summary, it was necessary to exhibit aggression towards

[11] This binary system of opposites uses "mutually exclusive" traits, "thought to feeling", "objectivity to subjectivity" value (Cohn 2014:229) and assigns them as male first and female second, in order and societal.

the enemy and submission to authority. Cock identifies masculinity as a tool with real power in turning men and boys into soldiers. There are connectors between military and masculine, the "traditional notion of masculinity resonates with militarist ideas. The military is an institutional space for cultivating masculinity and conflict, namely war, provides validation of that 'ultra-masculinity' which requires aggressiveness, competitiveness and the censure of emotional expression" (Cock 1991:58).

1.2.6. Defining (western) man

'Man', is a term that has historically been used to mean humanity or human race. All communities define themselves within notions of sentience and the "non-sentient beings with whom they share their worlds" (Mpofu & Steyn 2021:1). The problem with the idea of 'the human' as set out by "Euro-modernity" is that it created a hierarchy and inequality "usable for the exclusion and oppression of the other" (Mpofu & Steyn 2021:1).

The label of 'human' was self-ascribed to those powerful enough to name themselves thusly, as well as claiming the power to define and label others. According to Mpofu and Steyn, this means that the status of human is not a certainty, but rather something that can be granted or rescinded, and those labelled non-human are reduced to resources, usable and disposable by the unapologetic *humans*" (2021:1). The enduring notions of 'man' and 'human' started in the 15th and 16th centuries with the work of the Humanists (European men) who required "convenient and powerful tools for classifying themselves and categorising others" (Mpofu & Steyn 2021:1). These tools allowed western men, "the Christian and paradigmatic *human*" to engage in unequal relationships of power in the shape of conquest, empire and patriarchy, structures that render "the conquered docile and obedient, subject to exploitation and ownership" (Mpofu & Steyn 2021:1). Power is able to dominate through its ability to define, and through doing so "dominate its subjects as inadequate people with deficits and lacks" and thus the oppression of said subjects may not be considered as "morally wrong" (Mpofu & Steyn 2021:2). This allows and excuses exploitation and oppression through the lenses of "salvationist" and "humanitarian" terms. Further, there is therefore a paradox to Western modernity, as the celebrated "rhetoric which announces freedom,

happiness, progress and development has marched hand in hand with the logic of coloniality" (Mpofu & Steyn 2021:2). This freedom and development set forth by "Western modernity" exists for a select few, as the colonialism that accompanied it "has participated in the appropriation of natural resources, exploitation of labour, legal control of 'undesirables', imposition of the interests and world view inherent in a capitalist economy, and denial of the full humanity of the disempowered and the impoverished" (Mpofu & Steyn 2021:2). Oppression and the conditions resulting from it are not because of "natural causes", and "gendered violence and inequality are not the inevitable consequences of biology". Othering is an essential tool to the colonisation of Africa and as enslavement of African people, as defining an 'other' as a resource or object relies on "their removal from the category of the human" (Mpofu & Steyn 2021:2).

The oppression of the 'other', be it women, queer, black, trans, disabled or elderly is because of a power design. Therefore, a reading of the Border War, the NP government and the SADF cannot be considered without understanding the power structures that had been imposed upon the people of South Africa by a minority government that legislatively preserved the power of the minority white population by oppressing and disenfranchising the majority 'other'.

These concepts are important to understand when considering what the SADF set out to do in preserving a white South African way of life, as white South African identity is an identity forged in colonisation and inextricably linked to a legacy of benefitting from the oppression and exploitation of black South Africans.

1.2.7. Artistic Engagement with the Border War

While engaging with creative practice surrounding the SADF and the Border War, there are two exhibitions I have identified as very important. These group exhibitions allowed a diverse group of artists to remember and explore the past, including from black, feminist and queer perspectives, as well as perspectives from artists who had experiences of conscription. The first exhibition, *Fault Lines: Enquiries into Truth and Reconciliation* (1996) was conceived and curated by Jane Taylor. The exhibition was

held in Block B in the Castle of Good Hope, in Cape Town. The castle is both "the oldest habitable colonial relic in [South Africa] … [and] is still an operational military base" (Richards 1999:1). *Fault Lines* was intended as a cultural response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission[12] (TRC), but is also about memory, and the need for remembering.

Taylor writes about the TRC being characterised by a certain theatrical element. This term is not intended to diminish the work of the TRC, but rather to understand that there is a performance to public confession and recounting of experience. "The legislation governing the TRC stipulated that anyone applying for amnesty had to make a full disclosure of their illicit activities: anything not revealed remained subject to legal prosecution" (Taylor 2008:10). Amnesty applicants were required to "demonstrate that their actions were politically motivated, and were proportional to their perceived political ends" (Taylor 2008:10), but were not required to demonstrate remorse. Taylor felt that the TRC required an artistic response, as the "TRC had specifically political and legal purposes, and it occurred to me that the arts would provide an invaluable supplement to this national forum because concepts implicit in its processes (sadism, masochism, memory, repetition, mourning and longing, performance and utterance) have perennially engaged artists" (2008:10).

Taylor invited thirteen artists, including Moshekwa Langa, Jane Alexander, William Kentridge, Malcolm Payne and Alfred Thoba, to participate in the exhibition in a "series of cultural interpretations of the Commission" (Taylor 2008:10). Thirteen installations throughout the castle interacted with the historical colonial space and gave voice to individual interpretations of history, memory and truth from South African artists with ranging identity and experience. Clive van den Berg's work focused on the delegitimising of homophobia in the new South African constitution, with a quiet memorial to a pair of male lovers made to walk the plank at Robben Island in 1735 for their crime of homosexuality (Dubow 1996:sp). Moshekwa Langa filled a basement

[12] The TRC is based on the 34th and final clause in the Interim Constitution of 1993. The Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act was passed in parliament in 1995. The TRC addressed human rights violations from March 1960 to May 1994. Individuals were able to apply for amnesty and victims were able to recount their testimonies.

space with maps filled with annotated pencil marks, dealing with the denial of land rights, the installation work aptly called *No Title*.

Penny Siopis's installation was set in an area called the Long Gallery, which functioned as the British officers' mess from 1840. The installation relied on the space, imbued with historic importance and horror. Windows are blacked out, and the strewn figures across the floor appear to be the aftermath of the massacre. No male figures were included in the installation, speaking to the horror of war, also referenced in the title, *Mostly Women and Children* (1996). To this feminist installation, Siopis also included links to the personal, a boy scout uniform belonging to a friend, and an army uniform belonging to her husband, Colin Richards.

Richards also participated in the *Fault Lines* exhibition, exploring ideas of transference of memory through the veil of Veronica[13]. In exploring notions of truth and memory, "Veronica's veil offers an entry to, amongst other things, deeply disputed matters of truth, the covering and uncovering which seem so much part of our histories" (Richards 1999:4). The origin of St Veronica's name could also be linked to the Latin tern *vera icon,* which translates to 'true image'. A 'true image' means an image not interfered with by human hands (a drawing or painting for example). Therefore, the Veronica is supposedly a 'true image' as it is the image on the fabric is "the direct imprint of Christ's face without the mediation of the human hand" (Richards 1999:6). This religious relic could be considered a print, or a photograph. Richard's practice was in ideas of labour within mark-making, especially the futility of tedious and delicate work in a world of ever-progression automation. His carefully rendered watercolour painting of *The Veronica* cloth is used as a background for photographs "used in the inquest into the murder of Steve Biko[14]" (Richards 1999:9). Richards writes that in the "testimony for the council of the police, Mr Retief van Rooyen" used the term 'veil' while explaining to a doctor who had been brought in to examine the dying Biko, stating that

[13] St Veronica was figure from 16th century Catholicism who is purported to have walked along side Christ and had offered him her veil to wipe sweat from his brow. After Christ had done so, the veil miraculously had captured the likeness of Christ on the piece of fabric, making it a holy relic of a kind with the more famous Shroud of Turin.
[14] Steve Biko was an anti-apartheid activist and founder of the Black Consciousness Movement. He died in police detention on September 12th, 1977, of injuries sustained during interrogation, but at the time many other explanations were offered by the police to conceal the brutal cause of Biko's death.

"the detainee had the appearance of a man where uh… um… where a veil had been dropped and no communication was possible" (Richards 1999:9). Richard's reference to the forensic photographs of Biko also links to his own "difficult memories" (Richards 1999:9). Working as a medical illustrator in 1977 at the Witwatersrand University, Richards was asked one day to label some images by a supervisor. Richards set about the mundane work where he had to "indicate and code swellings, contusions, abrasions and cuts which were not always clearly visible" (Richards 1999:9). Later, he found out that the body in the images was Steve Biko's, and the photographs were evidence in the inquiry. This experience, and the photographs, marked a point in Richards' memory; "I felt confused, compromised, implicated, and ultimately angry about what in shorthand I must call 'apartheid' and its baleful effect on my private and public sense of reality and indeed truth" (1999:10). For Richards, the *Fault Lines* exhibition presented an opportunity to revisit these memories. The photographs selected for the exhibition become objects, not attempting to represent Biko as the man he was, "but only signs of his end" (Richards 1999:11). Richards' reproduced photographs, many of which had been reproduced already, kept details of captions, staples, punch holes and even misspellings, treating the photographs as "objects rather than images" (Richards 1999:11) and mounted onto Veronicas for display.

Richard's installation in the *Fault Lines* exhibition included a table housing objects referencing experiences in the SADF during the artist's conscription in 1972 and following national service. At 18 and fresh out of school, he had served one year, and then became eligible to be called up for camps, which ranged from "three weeks to three months for ten years… at any rate, I was called up for a three- month 'border' camp in late 1975" (Richards 1999:13). On the boxed table, three objects were exhibited, one of which was a "brace of 303 cartridges I lifted from clothing stripped from dead 'enemy' soldiers" (Richards 1999:13). The platoon Richards was in had the responsibility of sorting clothes stripped from enemy bodies into piles of uniforms. He recalls the scent of the garments, of the sweat and blood that coated the uniforms, and the dirt and bits of bone often attached to the fabric.

Another object links to memory while part of a group “detailed to guard women and children refugees in a camp in either Northern Namibia or Southern Angola (between lies and poor maps one sometimes never knew quite where one was)” (Richards 1999:14). The SADF soldiers were forbidden to communicate or feed the refugees, a group of black women with their children. Richards remembers rumours; that their white partners had abandoned them and fled back to Portugal, or that the apartheid government had separated the men to enforce apartheid laws criminalising the mixed-race relationships. Some of the soldiers broke the rules and fed some of the refugees, Richards included:

> I and friends shared some of our condensed milk and 'dog biscuits' (dry ration army issue biscuits reputed to be exceptionally nutritious) with a 'family' whose single claim on our attention was the white child they had in their midst. A child with sharp blue eyes and blond hair. True to my background, it seemed particularly disturbing that this little girl - not much older than my own infant daughter at home was in this situation, with strangers, unprotected... or so my normalised white South African paranoia told me. Two of us helped this 'family' of several children and two 'mothers' virtually only because we identified with this child. (Richards 1999:14)

Richard writes that other soldiers also broke the rules and fed some of the women, usually in exchange for any valuables or sex. He links this memory to another, of listening to recounted memories at the TRC, where “a number of accounts, especially by women… recall, as I recollect, torturers, rapists, tormentors as ‘blue eyes’” (Richards 1999:14). A can of condensed milk, and a stone angel wing (from Brixton Cemetery, near the artist’s then home) studded with blue eyes were also included in the installation, alongside the Pro Patria medal Richards received after the National Party surrendered. This collection of items speaks not only to Richard’s experiences during his national service but also his experiences of listening to recounted memories, melding into his memories. There seems to be a sense of shame, anger and regret traced through the installation, while also referencing the fractured and impermanent nature of memory, as each time we remember, we layer with the last time we remembered, creating a print of a print of a print, a copy of a copy that begins to lose some details and include others.

Richards also participated in the later exhibition *Memórias – Intimas – Marcas (Memory – Intimacy – Traces)* (1999) which layered voices and experiences to create a complex and nuanced remembering of the war for Angolan liberation. This exhibition was organized by Angolan artist Fernando Alvim and included ten artists from Cuba, Angola and South Africa. The deliberate decision to include artists from all three countries was intended to initiate a sort of healing, and a "dealing with uncomfortable shared history in relation to the war in Angola" (Tutu 1999:351). The project was conceived "to be an exorcism of the war, presenting a 'common memorial' or an `itinerary of intimate memories' generated by the personal experiences of the artists and their shared history." (Tutu 1999:351). Notably, some artists involved with this project were conscripted by the SADF and so worked with personal and direct experiences of the conflict. Colin Richards writes in *Memórias – Intimas – Marcas* that he had not expected to go to Angola as a conscript, and had been told he was in South West Africa. On encountering Portuguese speakers, he realised he had been lied to, and he was in fact, in Angola. He also noted that while he was in Angola he and his comrades managed to get a copy of the *Sunday Times* "which reached troops belatedly but free, spoke of there being no South African troops in Angola" (Richards in Alvim 1999: 376). There is a strong repetition through the text written by Richards of the phrase "they would not lie to us" as he continues to detail memories of trust broken and the horror of war. After South African troops were pulled out of Angola, Richards and his comrades received 'pro-patria' medals for what never really happened" and were "forbidden to speak on [their] return home". This same pro-patria medal was used in the installations *Fault Lines* and *Memórias – Intimas – Marcas* exhibition and came to represent a betrayal of trust by the National Party.

Paul Emmanuel, another artist, explores memory related to war, soldiers and monuments in a manner that speaks to the impermanence and fragility of memory. Memorials are often used to commemorate battles fought and won, and to honour lives lost in the process. Usually, a monument is made from solid and durable materials like bronze or marble. Emmanuel purposefully subverts this tradition in his work, rather working with delicate and deteriorating media, painstakingly creating works that deal with the impermanence of memory and are "fragile and insubstantial as memory itself"

(Von Veh 2019:14). Emmanuel was not conscripted, but his older brother was, and so his interpretations and traces of memory are memories of memories conveyed, and more like my undertaking than the work of Richards, who worked with his first-hand memories of conscription.

Emmanuel's work also explores ritual and masculinity in connection to the military and war as well as memory. The short film *3SAI: A Rite of Passage* (2008) documents the head-shaving ritual of the Third South African Infantry Battalion (3SAI), one of two SANDF battalions that still required the obligatory shedding of hair that was standard practice across the SADF.

Figure 1: Paul Emmanuel, still from *3SAI: A Rite of Passage*, 2008.
Single-channel, high-definition video projection, stereo soundtrack.

Emmanuel's focus through the film is on the liminality of this moment (Figure 1), as the head shaving comes to mark a transition in identity, from boy to man, from civilian to soldier. This is a group exercise, but also deeply personal, and the film contemplates this transition in identity quietly, the footage first showing several men having their head shaved in a methodical process, a sort of production line, before focusing in on one recruits head in particular, locking into a vulnerability and intimacy of this rite into military masculine identity (Emmanuel 2009).

The exhibitions and artists discussed in this section deal with the Border War and memory in a variety of different ways. While Penny Siopis's work at the *Fault Lines* exhibition dealt with war within a South African context and more specifically the Border War, through the inclusion of Richard's military jacket, the installation was not about individual memory so much as the devastation of war on women and children. Richard's work dealing with the memory of conscription, and Emmanuel's work surrounding the coming-of-age rituals in the SANDF the impermanence of memory and the vulnerability of his experiences are closer to the work I intend to produce for this study, but these artistic interpretations are from a masculine perspective, and do not deal second generational trauma. Through my artistic enquiry and involvement, I anticipate and intend to infuse the very masculine remembering of the Border War with a feminine encoding as I work within the framework of feminism as well as post-memory. Unlike the artists discussed, I have no memory of the Border War, having been born in 1996, and my entire understanding and context for the conflict has been an exercise in post-memory transfer, losing details, warping, rippling and collecting new trauma and significance through the process. The combination of my warped collection of second and third- hand memories and feminist lens, interacting with first-hand accounts of conscription and reflections on those experiences of military masculinity should produce an intergenerational inquiry that explores new territory within South African artistic enquiry.

1.2.8. Coded binaries: Morse code and knitting

Kristen Haring is an artist and technology historian who works with the binary codes of Morse code[15] and knitting. Morse code, associated with military communication, is a binary system operated by switching a current off and on for short periods (Haring 2011). Haring notes a division of gender between the masculine associations of Morse code and feminine associations of knitting, which works in what Haring calls a "binary operation" (Haring 2011:sp) with knit and purl stitches. She writes that the ability to

[15] Developed in the 1830s, Samuel Morse's code became popular due to the simplicity of the system. When Morse code became automated, the few people who still used the code included military personnel and radio-hobbyists. Haring notes that both these groups are predominantly male (Haring 2011).

understand Morse code knitting requires knowledge of both domains which are usually divided between “masculine and technical” and “feminine” (Haring 2007:sp).

Figure 2: Kristen Haring, *Subtle Distress*, 2007.
Morse code sweater.
(Haring 2011).

Subtle Distress (2007) (Figure 2) is a sweater with a Morse code motif knitted into the front. There is an element of cosiness and tactile allure to the work because of the knitted medium. While the work does spell out the distress signal, SOS (… --- …), the focus of the work is not on the content but rather the form. The diminished readability enhances the form of the language, and the puzzle element engages a curious audience. Haring uses Morse code knitting to demonstrate that "all communication depends on cultural codes" (Haring 2007:sp) and links notions of literal binary code to culturally created codes of behaviour. This example given in Figure 2 *Subtle Distress* (2007) communicates three letters in a motif that works across the whole garment. While this is an effective example of Morse code worked into knitting using a purl and knit stitch, I intend to encode whole interviews into knitted panels.

I intend to use Morse code knitting as it melds and addresses gendered binaries, each with strong, gendered associations. The process of knitting is a cathartic, meditative process, the slow work ideal for contemplation. Each word recorded in Morse code takes time, giving weight and importance to each word and phrase that is captured in the physical work.

1.2.9. Spirals and exhuming narratives

Louise Bourgeois (1911-2010) was a French-American artist, best known for sculpture and installation. Bourgeois had a deep fascination with narrative, seeking to reconstruct past events and often drawing from her memories of childhood. The importance of exhuming memory through creative expression is encapsulated in the notion that "the past has become tangible in [the works]; but at the same time, they are created to forget the past, to defeat it, to relive it and to make it possible for the past to be forgotten" (Bourgeois 1999:59). The exhibition *Louise Bourgeois: Spiral*, held by Cheim and Read (2018), explored the artist's fascination with the spiral in various sculptural and two-dimensional forms. For Bourgeois, the spiral had two directions, either spiralling into the vortex, a "tightening, a retreating, a compaction to the point of disappearance" or moving from the centre outwards which represents "giving up control; of trust, positive energy, of life itself" (Bourgeois in Cheim & Read 2018:7). *Spirals* 2005 (Figure 3)

explore the form of the spiral through printmaking from quite geometric shapes to more abstract swirls.

Figure 3: Louise Bourgeois, *Spirals*, 2005.
A suite of twelve woodcuts on handmade paper.
(Cheim & Read 2018:63).

Included in the exhibition are spiralling writings that had previously not been shown (Laster 2018). Figure 4 is an example of one such work. The text seems to be a stream-of-consciousness doodle that creates a vortex and switches both in direction and language between English and French. Initially, the text begins with mantras for behaviour “Do not give too much” and later the text becomes more introspective “what in the name of heaven made me do this?” (Laster 2018:sp). The text could be considered a diary that takes on a visual form.

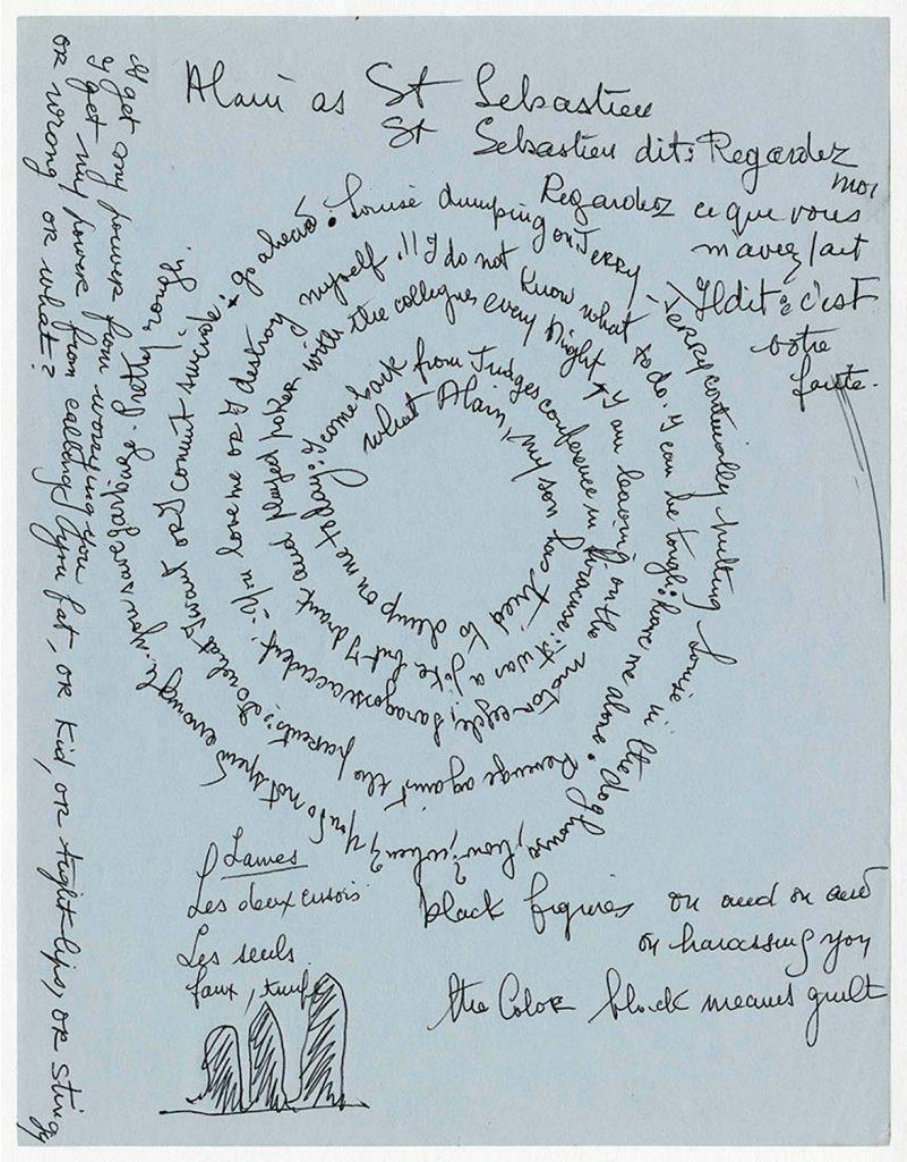

Figure 4: Louise Bourgeois, *March 1986 Loose sheet of writing*, 1989.
Ink on blue paper.
(Cheim & Read 2018:45).

Bourgeois spiral form is a simple yet marvellous one, the motif of winding and unwinding encapsulating memory and experience in a ripple and orbit that speaks to release, obsession and warping of memory. The spiral is a motif I intend to work with, as I layer memory on memory, orbiting trauma in my own practice, fluid, cyclical, maddening. Through the spiral motif I intend to explore and document my own connections and understanding of the Border War and experiences of memories heard and remembered.

1.3. Statement of the problem and research intent

For many white South African men who were conscripted, their national service is remembered as a coming-of-age ritual. For some, the test of physical strength and ability provided an opportunity to 'see what they were made of', and for others, taking up the call to protect their country connected ideologically with notions of masculinity and commanded the respect of their communities. With the cessation of the invasion of Angola and Namibia, many servicemen experienced a sense 'betrayal' from the NP government and military commanders who had "negotiated a settlement" with the enemy at home while the troops were fighting to protect that home, understood by many veterans as a "stab in the back" (Baines 2014:40).

This study proposes that the experiences of trauma, pain and vulnerability in white conscripts of the Border War are largely unexplored. One of the reasons may be that returning servicemen were required to sign non-disclosure agreements (Baines 2014:83). Many soldiers returned home "carrying rucksacks of emotional and mental scars which accompany them unalleviated to this day" (Mokgoro 2007:x). As participants in the war, many ex-servicemen felt that they were "swept under the carpet of animosity and disdain, ultimately to be forgotten" (Allais, du Plessis & Liebenberg 2007:3).

For SADF veterans, the legacy of the Border War is a complicated one. For many of them, the experience functioned as a rite of passage into manhood (Baines 2004:6). The wars in Namibia and South Africa were concluded with the NP government's negotiating settlements with the so-called enemy (Baines 2004:9). Many ex-servicemen felt that a betrayal had taken place, that their lives had been risked for an "unwinnable war" (Baines 2004:9) and that they had suffered defeat because their leaders had surrendered. The particular form of masculinity employed by the SADF encouraged self-reliance and discouraged displays of weakness, and it is unsurprising, therefore, that most ex-servicemen have embraced "silence and victimhood" (Baines 2014:13) regarding painful or traumatic memories. The suppression or dismissal of trauma can perpetuate cycles of violence, therefore making it important to tell the stories of soldiers "for the sake of individual healing and well-being of society" (Baines 2008:9).

1.4. Objectives

The objectives of the study are two-fold. The first is to understand the ideological constructions of the masculinity and perpetuation of the gender binary as employed by the SADF. I intend to explore and discover which traits and behaviours were encouraged as masculine by the SADF, behaviours that would best serve to build and maintain a fighting force that could maintain the control of the white minority in Southern Africa. The second is to explore the impact these binary ideas of gender had in shaping and reinforcing gender identity in a generation of white South African men. The first objective can be broken down into three sub-objectives which aim to unpack:

- why the SADF needed to create white hegemonic masculinity;
- how the SADF used Western, Christian ideology to create hegemonic masculinity; and
- how conscription into the SADF has been understood as a masculine coming-of-age ritual.

The second objective seeks to understand:

- how hegemonic masculinity aided the SADF in silencing veterans' experiences of betrayal; and
- how hegemonic masculinity impacts the way that veterans frame and code their memories of vulnerability and pain.

Finally, through my practice, I:

- negotiate and confront my own preconceived notions and memories of the Border War, which have primarily been collected and created through trauma and family stories; and
- record and recode narratives of masculinity surrounding experiences of ex-servicemen in the SADF to reflect the difficulty veterans experience in openly voicing experiences of vulnerability and betrayal.

The process of knitting and stitching is a considered choice in the method as knitting is a "bilateral, coordinated movement" (Corkhill, Hemmings, Maddock & Riley 2014:40) with rhythmic and meditative qualities, and there is some evidence to suggest that the

process can be considered therapeutic. The intention of this project is not to function as any sort of therapy, but rather to provide a platform of active listening to a group who feel their stories and experiences do not hold a place of importance in South African history (like other veterans) but are rather rejected as a part of the old regime. The meditative quality of knitting is reserved for me, as the veterans themselves are not knitting, but I hope that the opportunity to have their stories recorded in a project such as this allows for a sense of catharsis. There is a transference, from memory into spoken word, word to text, text to encoded knitting. My objective is not to display their narratives and secrets in plain language for public scrutiny, but rather to create anti-monuments in soft and comforting materials which can only be accessed through a slow and laborious decoding of a text with strong military/masculine connotations, blurring the gender binary through the physical and feminine medium of knitting.

The gendered nature of knitting means that it should work well to initiate discussions around how gender has contributed to participants' experiences, identities and silence following the end of the war. I use the processes of encoding narratives using knitting and Morse code. This method does have roots in traditionally feminine creative practice, with the intention of disrupting a traditionally masculine space. Knitting has been specifically selected because the knitted stitches form the base for a binary pattern system.

1.5. Methodology

The methodology for this study is narratology and post-memory. Narratology is concerned with what is "distinctive" (Prince 2003:3) of a narrative. Narratology has been selected as a methodology as the way that narratives are told holds meaning as well as the content of the narrative. Gender is, after all, performative, and so the language used by participants in their narratives and the use of language in their experiences should reveal underlying gender identities. Narrative is also how we relate and connect, relaying experience and understanding of the world around us. The way that we tell stories and engage with memory is a complex one, as we perceive past events through the lens of currently held beliefs and perspectives. The narratives that emerge are therefore not accurate to events but, "they are a partial, selective weaving together of events, persons and feelings" (Sparkes & Smith 2008:681) and this memory contains clues about the storyteller's identity. The way that we tell stories is heavily influenced by the access we have to "cultural and narrative resources" (Sparkes & Smith 2008:683) which we use to construct our ideas of ourselves. Narrative is how we make sense of the world and our place in it.

As I intend to understand experiences of conscription, focus on narrative allows participants to steer their answers towards stories and experiences of significance that I might not have thought to ask about at all. Examining how stories are told also allows for an understanding of the lens through which experiences are remembered by veterans.

I collected narratives through a series of semi-structured, in-depth interviews, beginning with a community of servicemen who call themselves the *Crocodile Battalion*. The qualitative data collection employs "snowball" sampling, a non-probability[16] sampling method used "where respondents are difficult to identify and are best located through referral networks" (Cooper & Schindler 2013:360). The first subject, in my case a

[16] Non-probability sampling is used for qualitative data collection when looking at a specific demographic (Cooper & Schindler 2013).

relative, referred me to other subjects with similar experiences and relevance to this study. The participants represent the conscripted soldier cohorts of the 1980s.

Through the process of interviewing participants, I was very careful. I was concerned that 'ambushing' participants with questions could potentially trigger a participant, and thus letters of introduction and consent were sent ahead of the interviews, as well as the interview questions so that no one would be taken by surprise. I also had no intention of prodding wounds or making any pretence of therapeutic intent but rather intended for the interviews to be a platform for honest and vulnerable sharing, without the fear of judgement. The interviews took place in person, I travelled to the home of one of the participants (a cousin of my mother's) who generously allowed me to use his kitchen table as a site for each interview (barring one, who lives overseas and asked to write his response to the questions). The domestic and familiar setting for the participants created an intimate space for the interviews and the presence of my husband seemed to create an ease and many of the answers were directed to him. For many of the participants talking to a woman about their experiences of conscription was foreign, and the masculine presence, even though he has no military experience himself, seemed to allow for a greater sense of ease. Most of the participants spoke about a reluctance generally to share their stories with nonveterans, avoiding judgement and rejection from the casually curious. There was a sense of gratitude expressed that someone from my generation was interested in listening to and documenting their stories. I certainly feel a strong responsibility to honour their trust in allowing me access to their narratives and memories.

The second part of my methodology involves post-memory, a hybrid narrative that knits together events as well as the way the story is passed on. The link between an object and memory is "mediated not through recollection but through imaginative investment and creation" (Morris 2008:160). There is an investigation into the distance between the artist and the events and the relationship to the "fallout of that event" (Morris 2008:160). The methodology of post-memory also allows me as the artist to investigate my links and distance to the Border War. I am an outsider, a woman born after the cessation of liberation struggles in South Africa, and a descendant, with trauma and

memory attached to the transference of memory of conscription. I intend to weave my own experience of pain and betrayal into this project, presenting vulnerability to be responded to by the participants in a show of good faith and connection to this project.

The works for this study involve a series and an installation. *Secrets Encoded* (Figure 5) is the first piece in a series of archiving experiences of SADF veterans. The same work can be seen in detail in Figure 6. The work draws from my own experience of vulnerability and pain in connection to inherited SADF trauma. The knitted work draws a parallel between knitting and Morse code as binary codes and intends to disrupt binary gender norms.

Figure 5: Georgina Glass, *Secrets Encoded*, 2021.
Knitted Morse code in recycled cotton, 185 x 42 cm.
Photograph by Beck Glass.

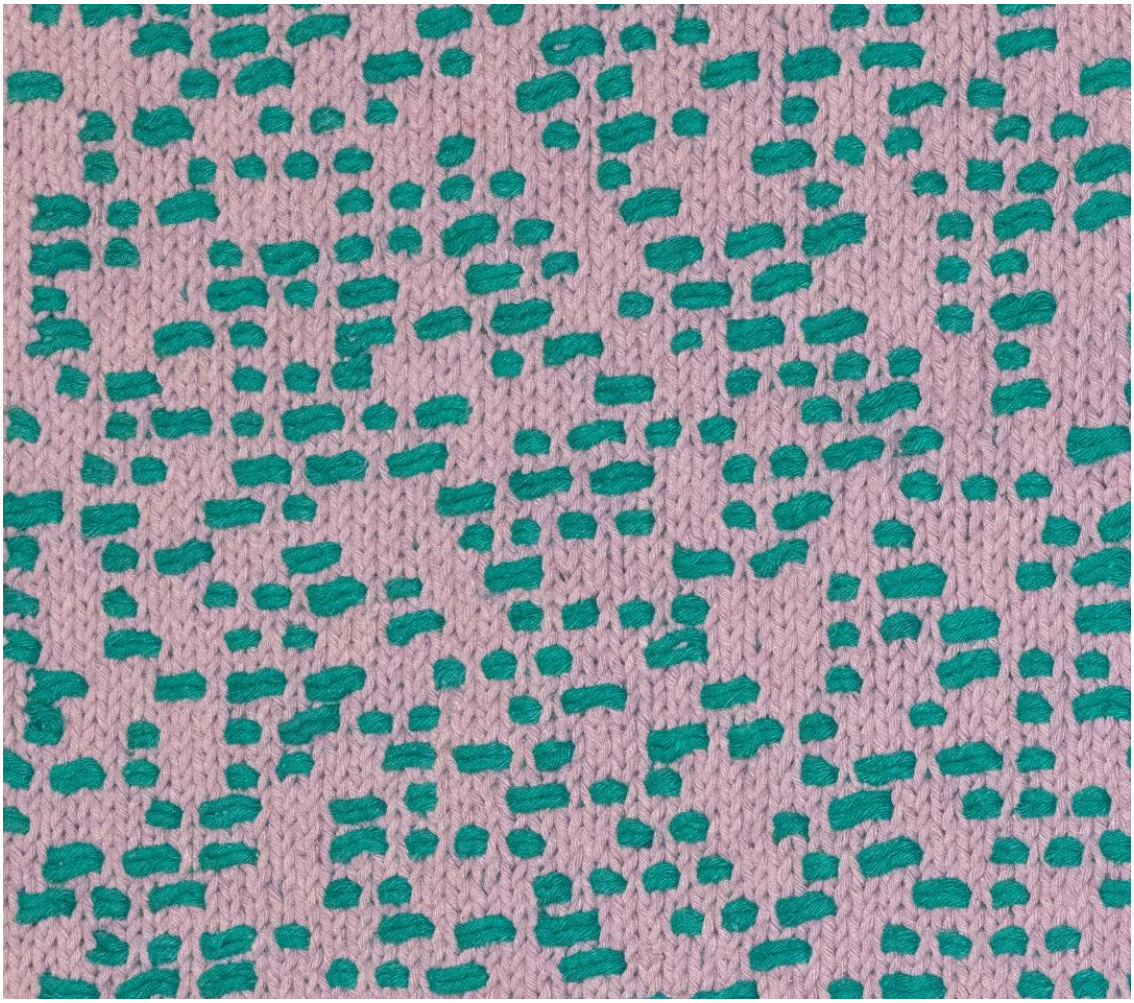

Figure 6: Georgina Glass, *Secrets Encoded* detail, 2021.
Knitted Morse code in recycled cotton.
Photograph by Beck Glass.

My works engage with the way that narratives are created, what they indicate about white South African masculinity, and what the impact of that legacy has been on the perpetuation of hegemonic masculinity with the domestic space as the stage for interaction. There is a strong emphasis I intend to place on the importance of storytelling, and in this sort of monument to men who feel themselves silenced, I made a point to document, record, and thus honour stories shared with me relating to pain and vulnerability. The body of work will reward those who are patient enough to decode the narratives, while also referencing how SADF veterans often feel their stories are not welcome within the larger public discourse and keep their narratives within close- knit military communities.

1.6. Ethical considerations

There are ethical issues to consider for a study working with veterans' narratives of military experiences. Participants provided signed informed consent for their voluntary participation in the study as well as for the publishing of narratives and the exhibition of any work created. Participants' right to withdraw from the interview process at any time was acknowledged, respected and accepted. Anonymity or pseudonyms were used to protect the identity and dignity of the volunteers, considering the nature of the study. Indemnity declarations were signed in respect of Covid protocols. There was a risk factor of potentially incurring or exhuming trauma, but the participants were adults and therefore capable of consent. This study was conducted with caution and empathy to create the possibility of real connection or trust. This study intended to create a space for ex-servicemen to express their experiences in the SADF and to speak of vulnerability and pain with the knowledge that I did not intend to judge their actions or experiences but rather to connect with their narratives and archive stories that I feel should be preserved.

Confidentiality was assured by ensuring that the information contained in the interviews was in no way connected with participants' real names or any other identifying information. If participants so choose, the data captured will be destroyed. Participants received a copy of the questions ahead of time to avoid surprising interviewees with uncomfortable or traumatic memories, and they were aware that they could withdraw their consent after the interview if they chose to do so.

The risk factor in this research was considerable because the interviewees are persons who are emotionally traumatised due to their experiences as soldiers and the interview process could incite further trauma. To this end, the option of *Life Line* counselling was raised with the participants and relevant contact information was available on the consent forms as well as verbally discussed with the participants.

1.7. Theoretical Framework

This study falls within the framework of men's studies, which is an examination of masculinity through a prism inspired by feminism (Kimmel & Messner 2009). Joseph Pleck (1992) writes that one of the primary concerns of the women's movement is not a question of women, but rather a question of why men oppress women. In the 1970s the first feminist texts examining "the cost to men of traditional gender role prescriptions" emerged, discussing how aspects of men's lives might be "underdeveloped by the relentless pressure to exhibit other behaviours associated with masculinity" (Kimmel & Messner 2009: xv). Kaufman posits that to be masculine is to be powerful. However, "masculinity is fragile" as it is a figment of our collective imaginations rather than a "biological reality" and masculinity is an "ideology" (Kaufman 1992:37). This sociological approach to masculinity is the proposed framework for this study, rather than a biological one that assumes that women and men are innately different based on sex. We create ourselves and our identities through "lived experience" (Kaufman 1992:37) and do not simply learn by ourselves. This is an appropriate framework for examining how masculine spaces of the military impose notions of gender that become absorbed or rejected by conscripts.

CHAPTER TWO: MASCULINITY AND THE SADF

This chapter is considered in two parts. Firstly, I analyse interviews with four ex-SADF servicemen (veterans) to understand possible reasons why the SADF needed to create white hegemonic masculinity and how Christian ideology factored in their own remembered experiences of conscription that reinforced hegemonic masculinity.

Secondly, I explore how conscription into the SADF has been understood by the participants as a coming-of-age ritual and I record the stories shared with me of military training in the SADF as cultural markers of masculinity at that time. I posit that these experiences of masculinity have informed the current notions of masculinity held by the participating ex-servicemen.

As identified by Connell (2001), hegemonic masculinity is aspirational masculinity, embodying the cultural ideal of manhood. As gender roles are constructed products of society, the performance of masculinity in SADF veterans could function as markers of behaviours and ideologies that were encouraged and enforced by the SADF. These markers of manhood for white South African men could have the potential to echo in the way that stories of this time impact the construction of gender identity in the following generations.

I was privileged to be trusted by four veterans who agreed to speak to me. The connection came through my family[17]. My uncle Tom, agreed to be interviewed and told me a story about his conscription experience. I specifically asked for a story relating to pain or vulnerability. As Tom no longer lives in South Africa, I anticipated hearing a different perspective. A cousin (Schalk) also agreed to be interviewed. Schalk wears army browns almost exclusively and his military identity is very dear to him. He runs a security company from his farm near Brits where he lives with two neighbouring veterans, Paul and Fred. Both agreed to meet with me and be interviewed based on their trust in Schalk, and Schalk's trust in me.

[17] For reasons of confidentiality pseudonyms have been used throughout.

This sample size is much too small and varied in terms of experiences to draw substantial data, but the stories the veterans told me indicated how they understood manhood and I found how they told stories about their army service to be of importance to this study. I originally met with the Brits veterans in 2022 and showed them my original Morse code tapestry (*Secrets Encoded*, Figure 5) to demonstrate what I was trying to create and how I intended to archive and present their narratives through knitting. While the subject matter of the stories usually had to do with their time in military service, the narratives were all layered with current perspectives. This indicated to me that their past and present lifestyles are intertwined and layered.

2.1. Coming of age

On entry into the SADF, the average age of conscripts was eighteen, with most conscripts receiving call-up papers while they were still in high school. For each of the veterans interviewed, their conscription period was almost immediately after they had finished their matric year at school. When asked if the army played a role in their induction into manhood, three of the four answered in the affirmative. While that answer was certain, the actual process of transition was a little more ambiguous.

Each participant understood his conscription as a man-making experience. When they were asked about specifics, answers varied a little or even eluded the participants. While achievement featured strongly in the answers, such as passing courses and being awarded ranks, this seemed to act to confirm the primary answer, that having your mettle tested and knowing what you are physically and mentally capable of seemed to be what participants settled on. While passing courses and receiving recognition emerged as moments of great triumph and pride, these achievements seemed to function as markers for participants of their ability to endure, proving to themselves what they are physically and mentally capable of, rather than participants' linking them directly to a sense of coming of age. Nevertheless, there was a definite consensus that this time in their lives was essential to their masculine identity.

The remembering of conscription was interesting for me, as I was asking men in their fifties to speak about their late teens, but it was clear that the group felt that the SADF acted as a process of coming of age as men. Paul articulated this in his statement, "When I said my goodbyes, one of the things I said was that when I came into this unit, I was a boy, and I am leaving as a man. And I am grateful for that, and I will forever be grateful for that." However, when asked "What is a real man?" he responded, "I have absolutely no idea", expanding to say that he did not understand there to be any one qualifying attribute to manhood:

> It's not any kind of prejudice or labelling or generalisation… it just doesn't work like that for me… I think people are so much more than that, I'm too humbled by how incredible human beings are and the human brain…to stupidly think that I can come up with [a definition and say] "ooh I'll tell you what it is, a real man! Well, let's begin!"

At first, I was not sure if Paul was evading the question, but I realised that his encounters with, and memories of, masculinity were not prescriptive. He would not identify it with any one natural talent or attribute upon which the title of man was awarded but rather spoke about a confidence that he had gained during his time in the army that left him assured of his masculinity. This I found fascinating, the idea of man, in Paul's experience, was so nuanced, varied and complex that it defied definition in his mind.

I probed further, asking if there was anything about the experience that contributed to his identity as a man.

> There were many benefits and things that I learned… and grew obviously into a certain direction and now was skilled and qualified, and to have that was a wonderful feeling you know, you work very hard to get it, so there's an enormous sense of satisfaction and achievement, and that obviously is the bedrock of confidence… That's priceless kind of stuff to be given as a gift.

While Paul did not attach any attributes or ability to his idea of masculinity or what makes a man, he understood his experience to have equipped him with the skills to

make a living as a professional diver, and also spoke about confidence and achievement, ideas which were echoed in the answers of other participants.

For others, there was a stream of attributes which included protection, a sense of achievement and endurance. Notably, each participant defined what a real man is by grounding it in the present, which could suggest that they understand a hegemonic ideal to shift, and thus on some level, that gender identity has some fluidity and changes according to societal needs. Schalk gave a very straightforward answer, defining a man as a protector of family and community:

> I would describe a real man in today's situation as someone who can defend his family. Somebody that can give value aiding in defending his community. In providing income to people that are dependent on him. Somebody who is God fearing…To be a good example to others, to be moralistic, that is a man. When others don't know what to do… you can take leadership, that's a man, and I got all of that from the military.

I found the link to Christian morality of interest, as were the notions of protection and leadership. All these ideas tie into a masculine identity that could be utilised by the SADF in protecting the white South African way of life during the 1980s. Throughout the interviews, the term 'country' was not used, but rather family and community. This could be a shift from an originally patriotic notion, one that no longer stands against the change in the South African government.

Tom referenced the shifting from war to peace times, and how he understood that to dictate masculine roles:

> "A 'real man' in today's world is required to tone down because it is not required in peacetime. It is very evident when men get together...
> We live in a society during relative peacetime where this sort of introspection is common…Modern men are simply part of a peaceful era and must learn to negotiate more mentally and emotionally which is right.
> Imagine as a woman being encouraged to de-feminise.
> In a 'hostile world' a boy/man instinctively becomes someone who has strength to 'protect' that which is less physically capable to defend against tyranny.

Tom's response was markedly different to the other veterans, and, while he also understood masculinity to involve protection, he did not, as Fred had, understand it as something he must do, but something that society had organised itself around, as women intelligently stepped back from the bloody work of war. This demonstrates that Tom's memory and concept of masculinity are rooted in the distance he has been able to create from a white South African identity and in the contemplation of gender roles and war, now.

2.1.1 Masculine identity among the veterans

While I found specific ideas of masculinity emerging from the interviews, there were some discrepancies. There was a need for 'action' and a requirement for 'endurance', typical markers of masculinity. There was also a strong emphasis on the ability to obey, follow orders and do as you are told, something I had believed to be inherently feminine (submissive). Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) explain that within the military there are different masculine identities which create a hierarchy. While a hegemony is formed, very few men are actually able to embody all the markers of masculinity set up by that hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005:846). For the military structure to function, soldiers must obey orders and concede power to leadership, taking on a submissive role. This illustrates that masculine identity and performance within the army structure is more complicated than the hegemonic ideal utilised by the SADF.

While each interviewee had a similar idea of what makes a man and defining masculine identity and behaviour, there were differences too, reinforcing the idea I had that the SADF did not need to completely unite under a single, rigid or complete masculinity, but could still appeal to a range of masculine identities.

Fred spoke briefly about being a real man, referencing patriotism and "not selling himself out, plus his nation". This was an interesting thing on which to focus masculine identity and indicated that while patriotism was incredibly important to his masculine identity, nothing else in his answer was identified as directly relating to how he thought about masculinity. While addressing the difficulty of what I had asked, we ended up speaking about the inverse, what it means to be a woman.

> Water and oil doesn't mix. A man and the woman, *ja* we can maybe tear it apart a little bit, but it's two different ones. But none the other is better – no one is better than the other, in this specific topic. A woman is vulnerable… a woman has got a very strong mental mind…She is the bottom, bottom line of any nation, so if that falls apart… So, a woman in my perspective for centuries and centuries, a very important part of what we as men has to nurture, we have to protect, we must clear the space for a safe living… the woman is very important, so sorry to say that, but the British colonialist, the British empire came up against a wall in the Anglo -Boer war. The woman. The provider. Always providing, the actual mother of a nation, children. They must be strong. Never, my dad always said, tempt a woman, up until the moment she must start acting like a man. Then they're more dangerous. Definitely. Much more motivated, much more, focused than a man. The way I see it today, I am going to be giving you a bit of my philosophy, this fight, this gender fight, who's the best between men and woman, no need for that. Everyone must just step down and keep on living.

The idea of protection featured very strongly in how Fred answered his question, and while he was speaking about women, he revealed what he thought about the relationship between masculinity and femininity. He used the metaphor of oil and water, materials that are essentially different and insoluble. However, he then proceeded to talk about the need to protect and nurture women, whose role is the provider. There is an overlap, complicating a relationship originally set out as one of opposites in his experience and understanding. There is also the idea that while a woman is vulnerable, she contains great possibility and power, something almost too terrible to be unleashed. I found this an utterly fascinating understanding of women that is linked clearly to historical and family narratives of endurance during the Anglo-Boer war.

Tom also spoke about his understanding of the binary gender roles and identities during times of conflict when he spoke about what it means to be a man. His view was much more cynical, hypothesising that women play a supporting role from a safe distance during times of war due to a fundamental difference in ego and intelligence:

> That's when the fancy dress comes out and the woman are consigned to secondary roles. Why? because the men pay the ultimate price for the stupidity of their inability to negotiate and compromise and we end up with war. As much as women like to be 'equal' to men, whatever that means,

> they are quite happy to step aside when it gets ugly on the ground. Of course, what I'm saying is easily disputed, luckily because war is so infrequent that whole generations never see this.

2.1.2. Patriotic masculine identity among the veterans

I asked a question relating to the parcels that soldiers might receive during their army service. I heard many stories as a child of the sort of presents that were sent; my uncle Tom has often credited the Christmas cake baked by his grandmother as the only reason he survived, as it was laced with dried fruit, cherries and brandy and made up the calories he was using during training and not necessarily getting during dinner. While answering this question, Tom referenced the cake as "a life saver!" He also mentioned receiving other useful things like "underwear, civilian clothing and toiletries. I think toilet paper was also sent". I asked each participant if they were allowed to receive parcels at all, and for each, the answer was yes. I went on to ask about the sort of gifts they received, interested to see what had made an impact and lived strongest in their memories.

Fred, hailing from a farm in SWA, remembers receiving parcels of food, biltong, biscuits, jam tarts and other homemade, high calorie treats, usually made by his mother. While the food from home was greatly anticipated and needed, the letters that accompanied his parcels were the truly cherished inclusion. He spoke about Christmas parcels and said "on Christmas, most of the parents you know, they knew, don't send them Christmas gifts. A letter is more important. *Ja* we got a parcel, biltong, *droëwors*, stuff like that." The connection to home was the most cherished gift for Fred.

While answering about the parcels he received while in the army, Schalk spoke about the gifts he received from his grandfather, my great-grandfather, a surgeon. He sent supplements and topical ointments to alleviate the cramps and blisters that Schalk remembers suffering from, but the memory he spoke about with the most fondness was related to a gift he received from a woman whom he identified as Tannie Mossie. It seems she organised schoolchildren to write letters of encouragement that were sent to soldiers. Tannie Mossie would also include with the letters a one cent coin, "You could put on a chain, that we used to wear, religiously, I've still got mine. That meant very

much to us." The significance of the name *mossie*, which translated refers to a sparrow, lies in a biblical passage, Matthew 10:29-31, which Schalk explained as:

> In the bible, it says nothing will happen to you. Because I […] hold a mite over [even] a small sparrow. And that's why they've got, in the old government, a sparrow on the [cent] because it's the smallest [coin and] has two *mossies* to show that the lord will take care of your life much more than two sparrows…and [..]that no harm will come to you.

This symbol of faith is also tied to the government that produced the coin and to the history of the coin design harkening back to the end of the Anglo-Boer war and symbolising faith in a providential deity. This also makes the one cent coin an ultimate symbol of faith, patriotism, and proud Afrikaans identity. I think that it would be fair to conclude that, for at least two of the interviewees, the idea that 'God was on their side' was very important and tied into ideas of patriotic identity and masculine identity. When I asked about what it means to be a man, the answers from the veterans who identified as Christian, namely Schalk and Fred, reflected that conclusion. Schalk elaborated with:

> I would describe a real man in today's situation as someone who can defend his family. Somebody that can give value [to] his community. In providing income to people that are dependent on him. Somebody who is God fearing, you become very God fearing in the army because your life is just there [...] it can be taken any time. You see [combat] makes you very sure, because you're about to meet your maker, you have to make your peace you have to feel that what you're doing is ethical and that the Lord approves it.

2.2. Christian ideology in the experience of interviewed veterans

As indicated in the literature review, it is important to understand that the hegemonic masculinity described by Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) is a cultural product of the societal structure in which it embodies the most honourable way to be a 'real man'. In apartheid South Africa, the NP was formed under Calvinist Christian ideology, and, for some participants, Christianity was clearly an influential aspect of their experience. However, only two of the four, Schalk and Fred, currently identify as Christians. I

found this noteworthy and feel it is important to identify how significant the role of Christianity was in each of their experiences. Furthermore, in my literature review and my interactions with the veterans, it became clear to me that the image of the 'enemy' was ideologically, rather than racially, constructed in the form of communism. A major problem with communism was presented to the white population of South Africa as its atheism. I felt it pertinent to the study to ask what role Christian ideology played in their military experience, as this was the point that the apartheid government so strongly emphasised as being dangerous to the communist enemy.

Three of the four participants answered that Christian ideology was vital to their experiences. The fourth, Tom, responded that while Christianity was certainly present, it did not really factor into the training, acting rather as a cultural backdrop:

> As a government, the military drummed into us 'God and country' but during training God was not around much. It is an age-old practice to make religion the core of your conviction to serve a greater cause. As it was an Afrikaner period of governance, understandably culturally it was dominated by that, but English and many African divisions were part of the national defence".

2.2.1. *Endurance*

For the others, who found religion was vitally important, they spoke about feeling that God was with them, ensuring their physical and mental survival. The two who did experience religion this way grew up in Afrikaans protestant churches and continue to practise their Christian faith. For Fred, religion was a mental escape from physical reality and strongly attached to his sense of patriotism. When asked about the role it played in the army, he responded that:

> First… you first have to find your weaknesses, and that's the bottom line. And that they found out in five minutes. That was one of the big things of the army, to find your utmost bottom was very easy for them. Quite easy. …During that training when you reach the lowest of low, where human discussion cannot help you anymore, that is when you don't even have to speak out loud. There were many times where in my mind I had a constant contact with my saviour… At the one moment you're at a state of exhaustion, nearly to the end of mental state of mind. Then you travel, you

> travel with your mind to a higher – I usually you know, I usually shut down. Not completely, like falling like a house of cards, but [the] mental state of mind I moved into – I was there, I was tired, but then, *gaan jy aan*. To distract yourself from the situation, I had an open discussion all the way. You're thinking of your mom, your brothers, granddad, many times. That was a very…important part in my life, to withstand the psychological onslaught on you as a person. Then you find your inner self… Your mental strength keeps your body on the move… you actually step into the psychological... You step into psychological survival. Not physical survival, because the mind is over the body. Body cannot operate or be sufficient without a healthy state of mind. If you take the mind away, you've got a bag of bones.

For Fred, this ability to almost dissociate, "go there" as Tom put it, gave him mental strength and determination powered by the idea that he was protecting his family, the country as he understood it, and his faith. I found this idea incredibly powerful. Fred attributed this ability to the strength lent to him by God, trusting that he would be protected and delivered. He spoke about keeping an open dialogue with the folks he saw himself as protecting, the reason he was going through the psychological and physical trials the SADF utilised during training.

Schalk spoke in a more matter-of-fact way about his experience with religious practice during his time in the army rather than addressing the importance of religion as Fred had. While Schalk was clearer about the facts as he remembered them regarding the actual mechanics of religion in the SADF, he also discussed a sense of connection to something spiritual:

> You would be given a bible that you would read on your own, and then in the morning at parade we would all pray together with your section leader, if there was a course leader sometimes, every Sunday we would get a *kapelan*, which is a chaplain, to have a sermon, preach, and then we had a little place in the bush with a cross made out of sleepers, and it formed like a canopy, and sometimes the sun would just filter through the leaves and it was very magical. The chaplains that came, the one that we had was NG *kerk* and they used to preach to us.

Schalk did not just discuss Christianity, but also said that as he got to know the more senior instructors, he found that there was an Eastern philosophy added to the spiritual practice of Christianity for many of his comrades:

> Buddhism was a big thing. Buddhism actually makes you a very good warrior because the morality, it's about preserving and then also how you think about things… In our line [of work] the mind is a very important tool that you need to control, and that can put you where you want to be, the frame of [mind for] battle [and] afterwards to get you at peace again... That was a very good religion that a lot of guys adopted, from the orthodox three sisters Afrikaans churches but [for] the actual warfare, Buddhism was the way.

He went on to explain that Buddhism was integrated into pre-existing belief systems and was used as a tool to condition themselves to be able to adapt their thinking for survival and endurance:

> Buddhism isn't really a religion, it's a philosophy, so you can be a Christian, a Seventh Day Adventist, and still be a Buddhist, so it's a very good tool, but the tool is, how you change your mind [despite] the circumstances being dire and difficult, it can still be a happy occasion. You can still laugh about it, you can still make jokes, and those are the guys that they wanted. But they wanted to see that in hard, difficult situations, that this guy has got that, and those are the guys that you can spend millions of rands on training, and that's the guy that, on a mission, is going to pull through. He's not going to say, 'no I can't do it, it's too much, why–' no. He's just going to slog on and do it, even if he's only got one arm and one foot he's going to creep on.

The picture Schalk painted of absolute endurance, managing to drag a tattered body through on mental stamina built on Christian faith and Eastern philosophy is one I still find staggering. While I had anticipated finding Christian ideology within the framework of SADF masculinity I had not foreseen Christianity acting as a tool of righteous endurance, or the integration of Buddhist philosophy.

2.2.2. *Obedience*

The markers of masculinity given by the participants in their answers did not end at endurance but extended to notions I have often considered more feminine, like obedience. However, it became clear that the veterans all understood that their ability to follow orders without question was vital, not only to function well as a tool of the state, but to survive. The drills they learned all focused on doing exactly what they were told, under incredibly pressurised and stressful circumstances, and conditioned them to

'follow orders. No debate'. The discipline and ability to take and carry out orders unquestioningly is intrinsic to a patriarchal hierarchy, as soldiers must trust and obey commanding officers. This notion mirrors Christian virtues of trust and obedience in a creator God. Obedience forms the core of the training that conscripts went through, as their obedience to a drill instructor was paramount to building the muscle memory that would keep them alive. A big part of training for conscripts centred around drills, which would be taught and practiced over and over by an instructor. When asked why drills were such a big part of his military training, Schalk responded that they were the core of everything they did:

> Why do they have drills? So that it becomes muscle memory. So that if something happens, you refer back to the drill. Even buddy aid, how to go through an engine on an outboard or inboard engine on a boat, it's a drill, and you just follow the drill. How to do fire and movement? It's a drill, everybody knows the drill, and everybody does the same thing that's been proven. And if you have so many things to think about, you revert back to the what the drill is. All weapons, debussing drills, if a chopper lands, crouch, don't stand up, because the blade will whack you. Usually the router is higher, but maybe its slanted, an antheap you know, so the drill is to crouch. You forget the drill, now you stand up and you get decapitated because you didn't follow the drill. Drilling is very important, the instructors go bananas if you don't follow – safety precautions, how to take out a dud round in your weapon, if you do it the wrong way, you're going to shoot someone. The drill its simple, its trained into your muscle memory and it saves lives, and it saves your own life. (Schalk)

Following drills to a point where the veterans descripted them as ingrained and muscle response, meant that these soldiers could push their bodies to extremes and still make strategic decisions. Fred described having never seen an aeroplane except once, when one had flown over his family farm in SWA before he had been called up:

> Like I said, I've never flown in an aeroplane in my life, never, never. When I came into the army, I saw an aeroplane, I saw them fly, never set foot on an aeroplane. Then, in a few weeks' time, I was standing in the door and the guy tapped me on the shoulder. You didn't think twice, you just go. And then, all of a sudden, you realise '*oo fok. wat nou*?' And then, again, the mental state of mind kicks automatically. It's that split second that you are again this vulnerable human being in an unnatural situation that is not normal for a human body. But in a split second, again, you change over. Mind over body, not body over mind.

Fred and Schalk's points regarding drills and the process of ingraining obedience for their superior officers is logic based on survival tactics. This process of learning to override instinct to execute orders also acts as training for obedience to officials of the state. A soldier is a tool of the state and relies on the reasoning and decisions made by superior officers, asking no questions and executing orders.

While the above are necessary for rudimentary soldiering, there was also an emphasis placed on the ability gained from these experiences to be able to take in information and make split second decisions. The above stories could be considered from multiple angles. The conclusion could be drawn that SADF soldiers were turned into mindless machines designed to execute orders and commit violence without deliberation. However, the veterans framed the training to mean that they would forever be able to conquer immediate panic and override natural responses to be able to focus on solutions to an immediate crisis, that their military experiences had made them men who would be able to respond in a crisis with clear thinking and quick action.

2.3. Conclusion

While each participant was certain that their experiences in the SADF were intrinsic to their transformation into men, the exact process of transition was unclear. Paul, while identifying that the army was imperative to forging him as a man, either could not or would not identify characteristics that he deems as manly, or as markers of a man. The elusiveness of the concept was tied to the many forms he had encountered and still identified as masculine, and so could indicate that for him masculinity had a fluid nature and could not necessarily be rigidly defined. Fred flipped the question to one of femininity positing that his masculinity was inherent to him, as my femininity was to me.

Part of the identification of masculinity among participants related to action, endurance, and achievement; by having completed a course or successfully passing training they found confidence in their ability to survive and endure, both mentally and physically.

Great emphasis was placed on the ability to protect and for Schalk and Fred, this included protecting a particular way of life and upholding Christian morality. It was clear that their experience had been framed by protecting ideas of home, which included Christian ideology against the threat of godless communism.

In the next chapter I explore through my creative practice how the SADF is re(membered) by the veterans, and their understanding and performances of their masculinity in post-apartheid South Africa. I also explore and discuss how my own narratives of vulnerability and pain relating to the SADF were interacted with and attempt to disrupt the masculine space of memory surrounding conscription and the Border War through the combination of binary codes, the masculine and military associated Morse code, with the feminine coded binary stitching of knitting.

CHAPTER THREE: (RE)MEMBERING

In this chapter I intend to explore how the group of veterans interviewed in this study frame their experiences within the context of the performed masculinity, specifically in relation to the SADF. The connection between these men is their military experience, but as they are no longer within the structures of the army, I intend to observe how they re(member) their military masculinity in post-1994 South Africa. I also intend to document and analyse my disruption, as a woman, into a space reserved usually for men, specifically men with military experience within the SADF.

Prior to embarking on this project to document and encode stories of experiences of the Border War by SADF veterans I had worked with stitching, but the subject matter was almost exclusively connected to femininity. I either engaged with a family legacy of creativity, storytelling and creation of community or with the vulnerability and violence inextricably woven into the experience of womanhood in South Africa. The body of work I made in my fourth year explored social rituals and included a story about a coming-of-age ritual I had constructed as a teenager; sewing a dress for my matric dance. While a tricky sewing project is hardly comparable to conscription and war, I felt a sense of achievement and recognition among the elder female members of my family that I have found echoed in some of the stories the veterans have told. “The satisfaction […] lay in the recognition I received from my mother, my grandmothers and my aunts. Sewing such a tricky garment functioned as a coming-of-age ritual in a family of dressmakers. This was a self-made ritual, modelled around my family’s traditions of sewing” (Glass 2020:15). This ritual was one created by me, in the absence of any formal coming-of-age ritual for women in my family. However, it was still a powerful experience, and I felt a great sense of achievement. While evaluating the lack of formal coming-of-age rituals in my family, I decided to explore conscription as the last formal induction into adulthood that a member of my family had participated in. I expected there to be some slight overlap in experience, or at least a thread of connection. I started to look for potential similarities, trying to find the threads of human experience that overlap within experiences that are based on binary expectations of gendered behaviour.

Despite the positioning of masculinity as the inverse of femininity, I found small overlaps between domestic and military experiences. Part of military training involved caring for the barracks and the kit that soldiers were issued. Being able to mend uniforms, sew buttons and darn socks were very important to the maintenance of uniforms and all soldiers need to be able to do these tasks that I had thought of as typically feminine task. Other essential skills involved in passing basic training was the daily care of the barracks. When asked about his daily routine, Fred began by describing tasks that would usually be associated with caring for the domestic space "Early in the morning, half past three/three o'clock you were on your feet in the bungalow cleaning, ironing, sweeping [and] polishing". This overlaps with domesticity, and almost all the stories I have heard firsthand about conscription have been within a domestic space. It felt important and appropriate to create a sense of the domestic while engaging with memories of the SADF in my work.

When exploring narratives related to memories older than myself, the nature of storytelling and memory must be considered. While each veteran's experiences are uniquely theirs, complexity emerges as layers of personal and cultural memories overlap. Baines writes that:

> the war veteran recalls his own experiences – his autobiographical memories – against a backdrop of social resources such as generational consciousness or the institutional memory of the armed forces. The construction of personal memories entails a negotiation within a field of memory that offers a range of possibilities for the interpretation of private experiences (2014:5).

According to Baines, "SADF veterans constitute a generation whose formative years were spent in the militarised environment of apartheid South Africa. As such, they shared certain lived experiences that influenced their values and sense of collective identity" (Baines 2014:171). These groups are located "at the intersection of individual and national memory; at the borderline between the private and the public, between families, civil society and the state" (Baines 2014:175) and are what Baines refers to as a mnemonic community.

Bonds forged through both personal and universal experiences of conscription and military service have created communities that hold and share memories when they meet and commune. Negotiating memories of the SADF must consider the fallibility of memory, and memory as a hybrid of remembered past events through a framework of current identity and experience. Through interviews with SADF veterans, I hoped to gain some insight into how experiences in the SADF were memorialised in narrative, and what that might indicate about how these men considered masculinity and understood their gender identity more than three decades after the SADF had lost the war.

3.1. (Re)membering: creation of community

Four veterans agreed to speak with me regarding the project. I interviewed Tom virtually, as he lives abroad, but I met with the other three on Schalk's farm in the Northwest province. While I did not know Schalk very well, my grandmother (his aunt) had told me how he created a community of veterans who were working with him on his farm. I had never visited the farm previously, although I did have a pre-existing relationship with my great aunt, Schalk's mother, who lives on the property too. While driving up to the beautifully restored farmhouse with my husband, I observed the custom security measures surrounding the property, noting the camouflage panels and other army influences.

I was unsure of how to approach our first contact with the veterans, how to set up trust and contextualise why I was interested in their experiences. I was also steeling myself for rejection, as I was truly uncertain that anyone would be willing to speak to me about their experiences of war and conscription outside of humorous anecdotes. The stories I had heard from uncles and acquaintances about pain were never told for my benefit but were rather told to my brother and male cousins. I suspected that being a woman would not give me a lot in common with this community and the fear set in that they would not be open to sharing their experiences.

I had completely underestimated Schalk's desire for family connection, and my husband and I were welcomed in, with trust I felt was undeserved. I was also surprised by the trust that the veterans had in his judgment, that in his allowing me access they followed his lead.

Schalk generously offered up space in his home for my use, and I rolled out the prototype Morse code interview, *Secrets Encoded* (Figure 5), to be examined and touched. I introduced myself, my interest in the notion of coming-of-age rituals, and my personal connection to the SADF. I went on to explain that I had translated my own narrative of pain and vulnerability surrounding the SADF into Morse code and had knitted it into the tapestry which was spread out on the table.

The response was astounding. I watched calloused hands gently move up and down the work, the veterans listening intently, as they asked me to confirm that it was all real, readable text if someone took the time to translate it and heard a consensus that the resulting piece looked like terrain, a landscape of scattered, shrubby bush behind which to take cover. During this interaction, I heard Schalk referred to often as 'The Commander' by the other veterans. This title is not one that was bestowed on him by the SADF, but rather is a recognition by the others of his leadership within their community of veterans.

After about twenty minutes of that first meeting, the veterans, barring the Commander, started to get louder as the stories flowed, each man trying to get my attention and share a story. I was starting to wonder if the flow would ever come to an end, and the experience was so electrifying I hoped it would go on longer, when my great aunt poked her head around the corner with a *potjie* for dinner. With a word, the Commander asserted that it was time adjourn. The other veterans rose and dispersed in a quick and orderly fashion. I realised that even over twenty years after their army service, they still function like a unit and go so far as to have rechristened their band as a unit. I heard, reiterated over and over, that the Commander's experiences were the reason he had the respect of his men.

The men spoke of themselves as a unit and even identified themselves as the *Crocodile Battalion*. The men clearly formed a community of remembrance surrounding their military experience and provided opportunities for sharing stories and experiences that the veterans would not usually speak about. When I asked Schalk who he speaks to about his experiences of the SADF, he responded that the problem with speaking about them is that "people don't understand". Schalk also wanted to avoid sharing with people who might "take the thread of what you say and weave their own little story and give you a bad name". He went on to say that his group were whom he could "discuss anything with …we can laugh about it". He mentioned a wider military community, friends he had trained with, with whom he could also discuss anything pertaining to his experience in the SADF.

Through the creation of a community of veterans, there seems to be a communal re(membering), a building of community based on memory and identity deeply entrenched in the experiences of the SADF. There were overlapping ideas that more than one veteran echoed, and one I heard almost consistently was that of rejection. Over the past two and a half decades, the South African military identity has been deemed culturally antique and irrelevant, especially by younger generations:

> It's disappearing, the whole military ethos, structure thing. We thought it would be there forever, it's not, the way of thinking, the discipline thing, it's getting diluted, it's getting forgotten... You can say a lot of bad about it, but there's a lot of good about it. It would be a pity for the good to be lost in the whole thing. It's very easy to criticise it all and belittle it when there's peace. But what […] if the wolf is knocking at the door?

This sense of rejection opened a question regarding the framework of the present through which the veterans remembered their experiences. If the link between masculinity and the military is so strong, and your induction into manhood is through military prowess and protection of a regime that is later condemned, how does that impact the framing of the participants' memories of the SADF and identity pertaining to their military service? Answering that question is beyond the scope of this study, although contemplating it became the departure point for the following works. I asked each participant to speak to me about his experiences of the military with a focus on

vulnerability and hoped that within the stories I would gain some insight into the question of identity and military service.

3.2. The *Encoded* series

At the end of each interview, I asked the veterans if they would allow me to encode a story into a knitted Morse code artwork, using *Encoded Secrets* (Figure 5) as an example of the intended outcome. Those who decided to participate shared a narrative dealing with a painful or vulnerable experience or aspect of their experience of military service. As I have worked and coded the stories the veterans chose to share with me into the soft heaviness of cotton tapestries, I have relistened to and retyped the narratives entrusted to me. The intention originally was to work with recycled cotton yarn, as the military uniforms were made of cotton, and to encode using a colour palette significant to each participant's experience. When I first visited, Fred mentioned a 'minor' uniform switch transitioning from the SADF to the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) that held a lot of significance for the identity of these veterans. Originally, the colour of a belt would signify the division of each soldier. Fred, a pathfinder who was a member of the paratroopers, had a maroon belt. This identified him as someone who had passed the gruelling selection and was a special operative. As a 'recce'[18], Schalk had worn a black and white belt (Figure 7 *Encoded: The Commander*). I felt that it was important for the veterans to have a marker of identity in the coded texts without naming them in the titles. Rather, the titles reference their SADF ranks, except for the title Commander, which is both a name and a rank, though not the participant's SADF rank.

[18]Recce is a shortening of Reconnaissance Commandos, the South African Special Forces.

Figure 7: Georgina Glass, *Encoded: The Commander*, 2023.
Knitted Morse code in recycled cotton 183 x 26 cm.
Photograph by Beck Glass.

With the transition to the SANDF, the belt system was changed, and a standard mossy green was issued across the board, regardless of division or rank. I believe the intention was to create unity, but certainly, for Fred who had transitioned into SANDF, it felt like erasure. I originally knit his story in maroon but received feedback halfway through that it made decoding the text almost impossible without physically interacting with the surface created. I decided to work back into the text, revisiting the narrative and picking out the code in green (Figure 8 *Encoded: The Sergeant*).

Figure 8: Georgina Glass, *Encoded: The Sergeant*, 2023.
Knitted Morse code in recycled cotton, 147 x 36 cm.
Photograph by Beck Glass.

The idea of layering over time, obsessively retelling, reworking and rewording is something that has always been present in my work and I was inspired by natural layering and processes of decomposition and re-composition as mosses, fungi and rust set in, building metaphors for layered experience as time and memory shift and come to rest in layers, to reflect the concurrent past and present that exist within a narrative, simultaneously obscuring, eroding and excavating.

The works hang, heavy tapestries, from wooden knitting needles. The needles are positioned at the beginning of the narrative, rather than the end, indicating a continuation, to signify that the direction of the work is into memory and the past, rather than into the future. The works are not biographies to be continued, but rather a snippet of memory enmeshed in the weighty and tactile cotton yarn. To write in Morse code is deliberate and laborious, and usually, Morse messages are refined and limited to the essential language required to transmit meaning, usually keywords. Taking the time to knit each word in these narratives was important to me, as the emotionality of the stories and tone are not lost. It also means that the tapestries are snippets of narrative, rather than an entire recounting of experiences.

Through the process of recording the veterans' stories and transcribing them into tapestries, I was let in to some degree, allowed access to a space reserved, usually for veterans. I was told stories that women in their families had not heard, and I could speculate that perhaps I had the weight of a university study that allowed me access, but it could also be that I had made a bid for bravery and offered vulnerability and pain first. Like many women, my perception of the military growing up and even now is one of wariness, tinged with experiences of violence and the fear of loss and pain. The transferal of stories from these men to me, to a tapestry loses, adds and warps significance, and nuance and tinges them with femininity. These anti-monuments, focussing on individual vulnerability rather than group triumph, blur the gender binary, becoming about human experience rather than strictly masculine. These tapestries also become documents of interaction between masculine and feminine, one generation to another, as each veteran told his narrative with me as his specific audience.

3.3. (Re)membering through the sculptural and emotive

While thinking about and making this project I found a great deal of inspiration in the practice and sculpture of Louise Bourgeois. Not only did Bourgeois engage with spirals, building or releasing tension depending on directionality, but she also engaged with trauma and memory with an exceptional body of emotionally imbued sculpture. Germano Celant identifies Bourgeois' work as "a web rich in memories and stories" (2010:13).

Bourgeois experienced a betrayal of trust as a young girl, when she discovered that her father had hired his mistress, Sadie, to be her governess. The trauma and betrayal permeate powerfully through Bourgeois' creative output, something she circles back to repeatedly. The spiral crops up time and time again as a motif that releases or recoils tension. Bourgeois describes the spiral as "the beginning of movement in space" (Kirili 1989:74), an exploration of surrounding space. She also speaks to the notion that the spiral is about control and giving it up, "of trust, energy, of life itself" (Cheim & Read 2018:7). Among a variety of other media, Bourgeois also, uses and alludes to stitching

in her work, which connects Bourgeois to the maternal, as her mother restored tapestries professionally. Bourgeois also engages with stitching as a restorative and reparative process. Like Bourgeois, my connection to stitching is one that I consider deeply tied to my feminine inheritance, sewing, knitting and other forms of needle work woven through with my memories of my grandmothers, mother and aunts. Stitching became a ritual for connection and the transference of stories and family history. Through stitching, I hoped to disrupt the exclusively masculine space of war stories with the feminine tradition of narrative transference, allowing for nuance and vulnerability.

I first explored the spiral in a work I have titled *Radar* (Figure 9) as it is the beginning of exploring my spatial positioning in my family and history. The work explores my own first thoughts about remembering the Border War. The spiral represented a rippling out, my memories as cultural and familial echoes, exploring misgivings and fears surrounding the project, but also collecting momentum to reach out and contact the veterans I approached for interviews.

Figure 9: Georgina Glass, *Radar*, 2022.
Embroidery on linen, 90 x 74 x 2 cm.
Photograph by Beck Glass.

Radar (Figure 9) was my first exploration into Morse code outside the knitting, as I wanted to maintain the coded narrative while also exploring the spiral shape. French knots and bullion knots have an incredible tactility to them, emerging from the landscape of the cloth as luminous little lumps of tension. The narrative roles out across the seams of stitched-together fabric, cathartically losing the fears and anxiety of starting this project, unsure of what I might find or discover about myself and my family history. As I continued to review my own memories or post-memories surrounding the SADF, the process of stitching became the method for repairing trauma

and reviewing memory. I recorded memories of the stories I had heard about conscription, the overlaps between domestic, feminine associated tasks and the ultra-masculine model of the military. The notion that my uncle only knew how to darn socks and sew buttons (something his mother was rather good at and could have taught him) because he had been made to learn in the military. I considered statements I heard often about the men of my generation, that they should have had the opportunity to go to basic training, that maybe they would have grown up and learned some discipline. Through the process of stitching texts and meditations, while inherently about rites of passage of the men I interviewed and grew up around, I felt the works were infused with femininity, disrupting notions of the gender binary in (re)membering the SADF.

3.4. Home: the domestic space as a site for transferral and an icon for protection

Bourgeois' installation work, *Destruction of the Father* (Figure 10), explores family power and dynamics within the setting of the dining room. The cramped and claustrophobic installation is emotionally charged with anger and pain, and the inability to escape is palpable. The work is essentially a dinner table, with the father sitting in his position of power as head of the household. The installation gives form to experiences six decades old, in which Bourgeois imagines the family overthrowing the tyrant father and devouring him (Bernadac 1996:93). The work deals with familial power dynamics, but also becomes a sort of theatre as Bourgeois engages with and remembers traumatic experiences of betrayal from her childhood, confronting and consuming her father in a violent dismemberment of trauma and memory.

Figure 10: Louise Bourgeois, *Destruction of the Father*, 1974.
Wood, fabric, plaster and latex.
Kunstmuseum Basel, Basel.
Photograph by Jonas Hänggi.

While Bourgeois' work is incredibly powerful in the emotional engagement of trauma and family dynamics, my own exhibition installation *Coded Binaries* (Figure 11) is intended to explore conversation, rather than confrontation. The space is not claustrophobic, but intimate and is intended to mimic the spaces where I heard stories of conscription told as a small child. The structure of the dining room table is replaced with a lounge, removing the hierarchy imbued in the former setting and so well used by Bourgeois. The lounge becomes a gentler space with more room to breathe.

The space created in *Coded Binaries* (Figure 11) is clearly a domestic one, with trappings of a home that is marked by the Border War. On entering the space, one finds a uniform jacket and beret hung on a cast iron hat stand, and the bookshelf on the opposite wall houses literature, including soldiers' accounts of their experiences surrounding conscription, a redacted portrait of my father-in-law in uniform, and a

teapot. The lounge can be activated by the ritual of tea, something usually facilitated by women, becoming a space for sharing experiences and stories. This is a gentler space than Bourgeois' *Destruction of the Father*, (Figure 10) designed as a space for engagement rather than confrontation and blame.

Figure 11: Georgina Glass, *Coded Binaries* installation shot, 2023.
University of Pretoria Student Gallery.
Photograph by the author.

The domestic space represents the notion of home that many veterans understood themselves to be protecting from the threat of communism. The space also becomes a site for conversation and engagement regarding the transfer of family history, pain and trauma, but there is great difficulty in voicing experiences and narratives openly. The space is intimate, but not claustrophobic, attempting to connect to the energy of the place in which the interviews were conducted. It is a space that deals with my preconceived notions and memories surrounding the Border War and attempts to challenge and revisit those memories. My embroidery tin, inherited from my great-grandmother, is included as I am working from this space, and about this space. My work as a fibre artist is linked to the stitching of generations of women who came before me and is thus deeply imbued with notions of gender and family legacy.

The installation also includes *Television* (Figure 12) an appliance that was manufactured in the Soviet Union during the 1970s with the screen removed and replaced with fabric.

The sculpture engages with the sinister media blackouts and censorship in South Africa during the 1980s. The beaded Morse code, embroidered on wool suiting fabric, swirls inwards, getting tighter and tenser with each spiral.

The soft sculpture, with a protruding, screen-like upholstery, also addresses the comfort of the media produced by the apartheid government, affirming the values and way of life of the white South African community, the comfort of ignorance of the oppression and suffering of the 'non-white' population. The tweed fabric used to upholster the screen also references the uniforms of apartheid politicians, favouring European cut suits and representing government messaging and authority.

Figure 12: Georgina Glass, *Television*, 2023.
Morse code in beads on tweed and found object, 26 x 38,5 x 25 cm.
Photograph by Beck Glass.

3.5. Storytelling as a labyrinth

Storytelling is so much more than the reporting of facts. Remembering and attempting to capture the physical form of a story has been a challenging part of my artmaking process, as the interaction and presentation of the narrative is as pertinent in my memories of stories as the actual content is remembered, reanimated and regurgitated, having been digested, processed and fermented in the lived experience of the teller. Hanging above the *Television* in the *Coded Binary* exhibition is a hoop embroidered with a phrase remembered by Tom (Figure 13). *Sluk nou kou later* (swallow now, chew later) was something he heard at almost every meal, compelling him to eat as quickly as he possibly could. Accept now, process later, is a concept presented in the exhibition space, prompting contemplation of memory. It feels applicable when considering ways of remembering trauma and digesting experiences years later.

Figure 13: Georgina Glass, *Coded Binaries* installation shot, 2023.
University of Pretoria Student Gallery.
Photograph by the author.

Spiral Chair (Figure 14) engages with the sense of betrayal Baines writes about, and which I heard echoed in the narratives of the veterans I interviewed. Their leaders had surrendered from home while they were fighting for the protection of that same home. The spiral that engages with this, attempting to make sense of how these men might feel, begins from the back of the chair, throbbing and rippling out. The front of the chair is almost clear of the green-coded text that might almost be missed without the mirror positioned behind it. Then, the target-like spiral is clearly seen, tense and knotted, working around and around and around again before gaining some freedom and winding almost at random across the cotton canvas.

Figure 14: Georgina Glass, *Spiral Chair*, 2022.
Found chair and Morse code on cotton, 86 x 63,5 x 67 cm.
Photograph by Beck Glass.

3.6. Storytelling as layering

In this body of work, one of the strongest motifs is that of layering, as I have attempted to give form to storytelling as something that incorporates the memory of the past with the framing of the present in one narrative. I have worked to depict family history as a layering of experience, primarily using the rippling and echoing of the spiral form. The exploration of layering is further applied to the literal layering up of stitching on surfaces already embedded with narrative, not just referencing the passage of time and build-up of material, but the idea of digestion, as fungi or moss might grow over and slowly devour and obscure the surface.

Within my retelling of the stories I have heard, I have had reactions of horror, disgust, admiration and empathy. Part of understanding why I felt drawn to this project involved examining my preconceived notions and judgements about the conscription programme and the stories I had already heard before I embarked on this project. One such narrative was told casually at a braai, a supposed to be funny story, focussing on inflicting pain upon a fellow soldier out of boredom. I recalled the details of the story as best I could and recorded it by embroidering it into an armchair cover with protruding and scarring French knots. The story was about being on the border, standing guard duty with two other soldiers, a friend, and a man who was not liked by the narrator or his friend. The narrator and his buddy decided to heat a ten-cent coin in the fire and flick it down the back of the unfortunate victim’s heavy coat. The punchline had to do with how difficult the uniform buttons were to undo on the great coats issued by the SADF, and the mad scramble as the man was scalded by the descent of the hot coin. As I worked towards the bulbous Morse code grew larger, more twisted in reds and purples to reflect my outrage at the way this story was framed and the imagined burns that might have marked the skin of the man who had essentially been attacked by his comrades.

Figure 15: Georgina Glass, *Spiral Chair, Pink*, 2022.
Found chair and Morse code on cotton, 87 x 69 x 71 cm.
Photograph by Beck Glass.

Almost a year later, I decided to revisit the work. Physically, it had been one of the most difficult works to make, requiring me to sit in uncomfortable and twisted positions while stitching and spiralling around the armchair. In an exercise attempting to find empathy, I decided to try to digest the experience of hearing the story I had recorded in the armchair. I used a thin unbleached cotton yarn to build a layer of Morse code,

designed to look like maggots, to break down my retelling of the experience of hearing the narrative. The text squirms in between and, all over the larger protrusions of Morse code, obscuring and embellishing the existing narrative with a memory embedded with a year's worth of hindsight.

Figure 16: Georgina Glass, *Spiral Chair, Pink* detail 2022.
Found chair and Morse code on cotton, 87 x 69 x 71 cm.
Photograph by the author.

Each of the three chairs in the exhibition is embroidered with Morse code, engaging with my second-generation memories surrounding conscription and the stories I remember hearing. The works embody the difficulty of speaking clearly and vulnerably about pain and trauma, as we tend to lead each other through labyrinths, near the truth but rarely right to it. True vulnerability is something I strive towards in my work, but I still have not managed to find the courage to openly present my experiences in plain language to the audience, rather relying on coding and obscuring meaning as protection and camouflage, while still achieving some catharsis by giving shape and meaning to my experiences and memories.

3.7. Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the *Encoded Series*, narratives trusted to me by the veterans dealing with vulnerability and pain. By working in the binary codes of Morse code and knitting, each with gendered connotations, I have attempted to disrupt the usually, exclusively masculine space of the sharing of narratives relating to the SADF. I have also grappled with my post memories of the SADF, narratives that deal with pain and trauma and explored the domestic space as a site for the telling of stories and transferral of memory. Through my stitching I have worked to infuse the narratives with the notion of memory as a process of layering, as each time a story is told a layer is added, obscuring, adding or eroding details and meaning. In the next chapter, I intend to explore vulnerability, how the concept of vulnerability is framed by the veterans within the framework of their military masculinity and the pursuit of vulnerability within the exhumation of my post-memories of the SADF.

CHAPTER FOUR: VULNERABILITY

In my practice, I engage with family, sometimes through storytelling, but my work has almost always included the notions of inherited legacy and familial interaction and relationship. My experiences of generational interaction surrounding ideas of trauma and pain have been fascinating and complicated. While there is honesty in spirit, there is also a desire to protect the other person from the pain that you are about to disclose, and I have found myself leading close to the truth but concealing details. While I have stated that all the secrets, I record are interpretable, which is technically true, with time, patience, a key or familiarity with the code, my work is dishonest too. I have layered my Morse code text with further Morse. The layers serve a purpose and work to explore ideas of memory and narrative, family legacy, and history, but they also serve to obscure and shelter naked vulnerability within my narratives and the narratives of the veterans.

4.1. Camouflaging vulnerability

When asked who he might share stories of vulnerability with, Schalk responded that he knew not to throw his ‘pearls before swine’. He said that while he would speak about anything, he was also painfully aware that “people don’t understand. The Staff Sergeant, when we used to go on leave, he said ‘don’t try to talk to people about it. You know, for you it’s a big thing… they’ve got no idea, don’t waste your time and go to people, they’ll think you’re mad’.” While Schalk spoke openly with me about his experiences, he also made it clear that he did not do so lightly. To be allowed access to the narratives of these men speaks of incredible trust in myself and our familial connection.

To translate stories into stitched Morse code does make them very difficult, time-consuming and frustrating to interpret. I created a Morse code key, a series of journal entries, knitting a rectangle each day with an observation, fear or hope I had for the project. Each meditative block of knitting forms the background for a Morse alphabet

square, as I embroidered large Morse letters over the square. Initially, I had started to work with notions of patchwork and the comfort represented by a blanket or quilt. Later, I decided to fracture the work, taking inspiration from the camouflage net I saw around Schalk's property, concealing his home and base from aerial attack.

Figure 17: Georgina Glass, *Spiral Web* installation shot, 2023.
University of Pretoria Student Gallery.
Knitted Morse code in cotton and bamboo.
Photograph by Ricardo Teixeira.

The notion of camouflage is explored in my work *Spiral Web* (Figure 17), which drapes the entry point of the exhibition. The structure is inspired by the camouflage nets strung up around Schalk's home, the setting for the interviews. The home is a sacred space, and for many of the veterans home represented the family and community they were fighting to protect from the threat of communism.

Figure 18: Georgina Glass, *Spiral Web* installation shot, 2023.
Knitted Morse code in cotton and bamboo.
University of Pretoria Student Gallery.
Photograph by Georgina Glass.

The camouflage net does not provide any real protection but does obscure the view of anything or anyone sheltered beneath the flimsy rope and fabric strung together at intervals. Similarly, the narratives are protected by encryption that anyone with enough determination could decode. *Spiral Web* is made up of blocks of knitted Morse code, each block created in a day and recording my experiences, fears and insights surrounding the project on that particular day. Spiralling out from the centre, each block is embroidered with a Morse letter and arranged in alphabetical order, becoming a convoluted key to the exhibition.

Figure 19: Georgina Glass, *Spiral Web* letter H detail, 2023.
Knitted Morse code in cotton and bamboo.
Photograph by Beck Glass.

Each block is knit using yarn with special significance, left over from the creation of garments that I have worn, or garments made for loved ones. This use of textiles is inspired by Bourgeois' stitched works made later in her career. The textiles she used are all remnants from her own life, some she had kept for years, and while the fabric is imbued with importance to the artist, the exact significance of each textile is not made clear to the audience. In a similar way, the texts in *Spiral Web* hold significance as the fibres used to clothe me and my loved ones, but the exact significance is not available to the audience.

4.2. Pursuing vulnerability

For Bourgeois, stitching had a special connection and significance to her mother, a textile restorer, and sewing meant spending time with her mother. Stitching embodies "a form of reparation", the closing up of a wound or mending of a cut or tear (Celant 2010:19). This idea of mending is explored in *The Little Chair* (Figure 20). Unlike *Spiral Chair* and *Spiral Chair, Pink*, *The Little Chair* employs indents in the encoding of fears and personal vulnerability and trauma relating to this project. The indents mirror the form of the protruding bumps created in *Spiral Chair, Pink*, and the transfer was made from one surface to the other by sitting on the *Spiral Chair, Pink* surface and using my bare skin as a matrix. The work engages with thinking about the transfer of trauma and identity from one generation to another, and the notion of lost details in that transference.

Figure 20: Georgina Glass, *The Little Chair* detail, 2023.
found chair and Morse code on cotton, 61 x 63 x 78 cm.
Photograph by Beck Glass.

This body of work began with the intent to pursue narratives of vulnerability, from both the participants and from myself. I anticipated the veterans' being reticent or even unwilling to make themselves vulnerable in the sharing of their narratives, but I did not fully anticipate how difficult I would find it to be vulnerable when engaging with my own narratives of pain and trauma surrounding this study.

The Little Chair is a bid from bravery, a final attempt at vulnerability, slicing open a calloused cotton surface to expose the sensitive underlayer and the red Morse code, converting dots and dashes into gaping circles and ovals. Unlike the other two chairs, which deal more with reactions to narratives heard and trying to understand memory and betrayal, this sculpture is a final attempt at vulnerability myself. The cream fabric of the chair seat is rent open to expose the smooth and raw underlayer, indented with Morse code detailing trauma. The protective cream layer is pulled over the terribly vulnerable underlayer and then an attempt at repair is made to provide some cover from the horrible nakedness of it all. In the work I have tried to acknowledge that, while I pursue vulnerability and understand it as bravery, I have not managed to be truly vulnerable with the audience. The work is ultimately a vulnerability with myself, as I give form and texture to a narrative that sticks uncomfortably in my throat.

This fear and desire for vulnerability in my work is an overlap I found with the narratives shared with me by the veterans. They too are reticent of being publicly vulnerable by sharing their narratives in plain text, legible and knowable by anyone and with immediacy. They agreed to work with me on this project because of the protection and encryption that the Morse code knitting provides, ensuring that only truly interested or military trained audience members would be able to decode the texts.

4.3. Decoration

Another overlap I found between femininity and the masculine environment of the military is the word ‘decoration’. Embroidery, beadwork and other forms of stitching have been used in domestic spaces and on garments, usually women’s clothing, to decorate and embellish. This sort of work serves to add beauty and exhibit needlework skills, but little else. I found it fascinating that the terminology used for military medals is also ‘decoration’. This overlap began as a starting point to create a series of medals, primarily exploring the idea of achievement. Prior to the interviews, I anticipated that some of the veterans might associate their coming-of-age with a sense of achievement as, within the army, status is based on rank and achievement. This notion was confirmed to some degree when I finally interacted with the veterans and heard their stories.

Tom spoke to the idea of the transformation, from boys to soldiers, with reference to the politics that framed the experience, identifying it as crucial to maintaining the military power that apartheid South Africa needed to support the regime:

> In South Africa, wrongly or rightly, it was a real thing. Industry could not function with any confidence without the government turning boys into fighting machines in the defence of what it saw as a global attack on a way of life. That they did extremely well in my opinion. In fact, when we came out of the army, we found girls our age were immature and complacent. Untested.

I find it interesting that rather than saying outright that he felt mature and tested, the focus in Tom’s answer was on his ‘immature’ and ‘untested’ female peers, a foil for his own identity and experience. I also understand why he answers this way. His experiences of conscription and training were incredibly intense as the process was meant to convert teenagers into the property of the state:

> The state owned you completely. They told your parents so. They couldn’t even cut your hair. That is a frightening position to be in…You were expected to function around death and trauma for the sake of the team around you…To do heroic things to save others and to be selfless. This [process] makes me acutely aware how ‘comfortable’ we all are in this era. Wars always happened somewhere else.

For me, this last idea speaks to a loss of innocence as the reality of war, suffering and vulnerability is made very real in the experience of a young man. I certainly could not pretend I had any real idea of what these young men experienced. For me, just like for Tom's female peers, war happened somewhere else. While Tom speaks to the terror and vulnerability of this time, there is also a sense of triumph, a sense of pride in his resilience and ability to endure and adapt to the training:

> It was a life changer. Boys became young men in a short time. I became physically robust and mentally strong. I was young so I could deal with it better than I thought. I never knew I had it in me.

Again, the idea of achievement emerges, even though he did not specifically use that term. There is a sense of accomplishment in finding out what you are made of, that you have what it takes.

Medals felt like interesting and powerful objects to explore, a literal badge of honour that marks action and achievement, simultaneously bearing the name 'decoration' and carrying an interesting association with femininity in the name, while also acting as proof of military prowess, markers of respect earned, and masculine identity proved. The text embroidered on each medal comes from Fred, *"gaan jy aan"* referencing the idea of endurance, and the marker of military masculinity identified by all the participants.

Figure 21: Georgina Glass, *Decoration Series: A*, 2023.
Morse code knitting and embroidery in cotton on linen, 15 x 20 cm.
Photograph by Beck Glass.

Medals are awarded for a variety of reasons: selfless acts, injury, bravery and valour. Universally, medals awarded for bravery have orange ribbons, and that is the colour I decided to knit with. Reflecting on what bravery means to me, I decided to knit Morse code text into the ribbons referencing what it means to live in a country with so much gender-based violence. Each set of medals carries encoded texts relating to bravery. While in a military context the masculine notion of 'action' is required for bravery, I posit that bravery can also encompass continued living despite fear. I also intended to honour the bravery of each veteran to engage with this project. The work recognises their vulnerability in speaking to me and trusting me with their stories.

When asked what he understands the relationship between vulnerability and bravery to be, Schalk responded that the latter does not exist without the former:

> The more vulnerable you are, the braver you are. If you are vulnerable, you know that you're dependent on other people to help you succeed…The

> biggest force in the universe is love. The more love you have the stronger you are. The more love you have for your family and your fellow people, the more you'll want to do for them, the more you'll want to protect them, the better soldier you are, and the more you think you can do everything alone the weaker solder you are. You won't make it in those times because you've been self-reliant. You [must] put your life in your fellow soldier and creator's hands. That's vulnerable. And the [greatest] soldiers that I've got the [most] respect for… when there's dire need and fear and pressure, they pray. They ask assistance. They are vulnerable, they are weak, and they admit it. And that's where they get their strength.

While I resonated with the idea that bravery requires vulnerability, I had also anticipated encountering a rejection of vulnerability as a weakness. Fred took a different approach to the question and confirmed that "you cannot be brave if you do not realise that you are vulnerable… we are all vulnerable. If you… know, as a soldier, that you are vulnerable then you are […] not a dead soldier". Accepting vulnerability as a reality of life and a major consideration for survival was of vast import to Fred, rather than a full rejection of weakness. Tom remembers that the two ideas of bravery and vulnerability were considered and certainly presented to him as binary opposites:

> In alpha male driven South Africa, vulnerability was a weakness and bravery was admired. I understand it of course. Nothing wrong if you are surviving, you must grow a thick skin to get through life. Vulnerability was seen as allowing 'questions' of oneself…Suffice to say vulnerability should be a strength if you are a confident person and bravery is accepting that.

For both Tom and Schalk, vulnerability was clearly and intrinsically linked to bravery, but these ideas are also presented by men who have confidence in their masculinity, and who have survived and excelled during their military service. It is interesting that the most decorated of the veterans, Schalk, was the most vocal about the importance of acknowledging vulnerability, as he is the clear leader of the group and had the respect and admiration of the other veterans, which one could argue gave him the confidence and bravery to speak so openly about his vulnerability as a human being as well as a soldier.

4.4. To guess but never know

I first explored the idea of decoration through the embellishment of an SADF step-out jacket. This blazer-like garment was worn for formal occasions and ceremonies. *To Guess but Never Know* (Figure 22) engages with military legacy and inherited notions of masculinity in my generation. The embellishments over the back of the jacket are a beaded Morse code conversion with my husband. He understands himself to be the first in his line to not complete some military service but had intended to from a young age. The coded conversation is picked out in the diluted colour of the unit he had hoped to join, maroon for paratroopers. Like *The Little Chair* (Figure 20) *To Guess but Never Know* deals with intimate post-memory surrounding the SADF and works with taking an impression of an impression, losing detail and colour as elements are lost in the transferal. When linking this jacket to the soldiers I interviewed, the spatter of beadwork is reminiscent of blood, stains from the physical war and residue in the minds of the soldiers. For my husband, the opportunity to test and prove himself within a military format was something linked to his familial legacy of masculinity. The conversation in the work *To Guess but Never Know* meanders slowly down the back, exploring his memories of his inherited military legacy. *To Guess but Never Know* also refers to the experiences of the participants, I can interview them and hear their stories, but I will never fully understand their experiences. I can meander close, but never fully arrive without shared experience.

Figure 22: Georgina Glass, *To Guess but Never Know*, 2022.
morse code in beads on a found SADF uniform jacket, variable dimensions
Photograph by Beck Glass.

4.5. Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored the relationship between ideas of bravery and notions of vulnerability as framed by the SADF veterans. While Tom remembers that vulnerability was presented to him as the opposite of bravery during his military service, Schalk and Fred are very clear in their identifying that vulnerability is a very real part of human experience, and even more so during war time. They assert that an overly confident soldier who cannot rely on support or backup for fear of exhibiting weakness is a dead soldier. They also assert that without vulnerability, bravery cannot exist. I have also attempted to grapple with vulnerability in my work and acknowledge the bravery of the veterans sharing their vulnerability with me.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

The opportunity to speak frankly with SADF veterans and be let into their private sphere is one I am very conscious of as a privilege. In explaining my study to peers and specifically the children of SADF veterans, I have been made aware repeatedly that most veterans retain their silence and will not engage in a real telling or discussion of their experiences. For some, there is fear of judgement or a lingering sense that no one, except for other veterans, would understand their experiences. To have been allowed access and to be trusted by the participating veterans with their stories and memories is not something I take lightly.

5.1. Summary of findings

The objectives of the study were two-fold. First, I sought to understand the ideological constructions of masculinity employed by the SADF and to explore the impact these had in shaping and reinforcing gender identity in a generation of white South African men. Without exception, each of the participating veterans identified their conscription and military service as a rite of passage into manhood, even though their framings of this experience and the significance of that experience varied. A uniting concept was that conscription provided an opportunity to find out what they were made of, giving them confidence in their physical and mental strength. There was also a consensus that military service had played an important role in defining their masculine identities. Each veteran spoke about a sense of achievement and testing that happened during training that had given them a sense of confidence to carry into their lives. This knowledge came from having been to their very lowest point and knowing that they had pushed on and could push on. While there were no united and definitive criteria from the participants as to what it means to be a man and how exactly the SADF had inducted them into manhood, this idea of endurance emerged as the clearest answer I managed to find. I did find it interesting that each of the participants presented different facets of masculine identity when asked about the attributes that define masculinity. There was an emphasis placed on the shifting nature of masculinity, and I also found that the veterans, in

explaining masculine identity to me, often referred to feminine identity to create a foil, an inverse, presenting a gender binary, that masculinity was based on what femininity was not, but within the given understandings of femininity was overlap into masculinity, complicating and contradicting the notion of binary presented.

Christian ideology immerged in my review of literature surrounding the SADF as a fundamental part of white South African identity. This element is important to consider as African liberation groups within South Africa and in the greater areas of Southern Africa that the SADF engaged in had Soviet or Cuban support, and so their communist backing was framed by the apartheid government as in opposition to Christian values and thus a white South African way of life. Not all the participants identified as Christian, but for those who did, faith was a very important part of their experiences. The notion of obedience was important and played into the idea of the hierarchy that was important in retaining the structure of the SADF. Obedience to God and commanding officers was important in surviving day to day, and the belief that a higher power cares about you, has the moral high ground and knows best what course of action should be taken applies both to the faith in army leadership and the faith in God exhibited by the veterans. Surprisingly, I also encountered the use of Buddhist philosophy, combined with Christian faith, to create a nuanced understanding based on experiences of war and soldiering in Schalk.

Each veteran also expressed a sense of feeling misunderstood and self-censoring outside of their military community. They all felt, for better or for worse, that culturally current ideas of masculinity were moving away from their identities forged in the SADF. Not all, but half went so far as to say they felt forgotten by my generation. While the pool of participants in this study is far too small to draw data that could be applied generally to all SADF conscripts, I still believe that the narratives and interviews collected are valuable to collective remembering. The experiences and answers archive a community that believes they will be forgotten within the next generation and present personal experiences and narratives as important and worthy of recording.

The second objective of this study was to explore my post memories surrounding the Border War while engaging with narratives and memories from veterans. Remembering

the Border War and exhuming my memories surrounding the conflict has been a process of hunting ghosts, impressions of someone else's trauma and pain that have taken root in their framework within my own experience. This has been a project in which I have tried to understand and present the fallibility and strangeness of memory, a thing that happens now, but about then. Through the repetition of engaging with spiralling, coded and layered narrative, I have set down my post-memory surrounding the Border War, second-hand trauma, and pain through a lens of femininity. I engage with domestic spaces as sites for the transferral of family legacy and memory surrounding the war, and the ways in which narratives of pain and vulnerability are communicated. Through the meditative process of stitching, I have attempted to unpack my preconceived notions of the SADF, and trauma inherited from the Border War

The laborious process of stitching narrative into my work in Morse code has meant that my engagement with the stories and with my memories has been laboured and considered, as each word is slowly layered and embedded into the surface of my work. In that process, the meaning and choice of each word is considered: the words chosen by the veterans in their storytelling, as well as my choice of words and tones as I have encoded my memories. This body of work considers the nature of memory, both cultural and personal, as something rooted in experiences of the past but interpreted through the lens of the present. The work embodies this consideration through motifs of layering up and spiralling out.

5.2. Limitations and opportunities for further research

This master's study is limited; however, the pool of participants draws some conclusions about the SADF veterans as a group and focuses on the stories of individual experiences. Further research could expand the group, and, in time, perhaps more veterans would be interested in sharing narratives relating to their experiences of the SADF and engaging with questions regarding masculinity. Further exploration of post-memory and the creation of masculinity through the SADF could include interviews and participation from a second generation and include narratives and memories from the

children of the veterans and engage with their memories and second-hand narratives of the SADF.

In the veterans, I found that they had different experiences of the SADF and remembered it differently. They also have differing ideas that contribute to the way they identify masculinity. However, I still found overlapping sentiments and experiences, indicating that while their experiences were not identical, there was enough overlap that all the participants remembered their military service as induction into manhood. There was also a particular performance of masculinity that was connected to this military rite of passage and was identified by the participants as the ability to endure. They each spoke about their military service as a test, to know what you're made of, which created confidence in their ability to survive. One of the participants, Tom, presented a variation of experience from the other veterans, as he has left South Africa and no longer identifies as South African. There was a certain disconnect from the experience of conscription for Tom that I did not find in the other participants. Either the other participants connect their military identity very closely with their identity as South Africans, or their (re)membered community of veterans helps to maintain a sense of communal identity that retains the masculine ideals of the SADF. This is likely a combination and a potential area for further research, either engaging with expatriated South Africans who were conscripted into the SADF, or a further exploration of the re(membered) communities of SADF veterans in South Africa.

The practice of knitting narratives of the SADF in Morse code could also expand to engage more directly with the sense of stitching as repair, and perhaps a larger study could involve veterans recording narratives themselves, by engaging with the feminine practice of knitting. This would be an ambitious but very interesting exploration, but a project of this nature would need to be very carefully considered in terms of labour and creative ownership and is beyond the scope of this study.

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UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
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YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Humanities
Department of Visual Arts

Letter of Introduction and Informed Consent

A feministic and artistic encoding of narratives of a (re)membered Unit of the SADF (1979-1989) of memories of masculinity and vulnerability

You are invited to participate in a Fine Art research study, titled *A feministic and artistic encoding of narratives of a (re)membered Unit of the SADF (1979-1989) of memories of masculinity and vulnerability* conducted by Georgina Glass from the Department of Visual Arts, School of the Arts at the University of Pretoria. The research is for a master's degree.

The purpose of this research study is to explore the effects of National Service on creating a particular masculinity among white South African men.

If you decide to participate:

- You will be interviewed by Georgina Glass at a time and place of your convenience.
- The interview will consist of semi-structured questions.
- The interview will be informal and conversational.
- The interview will take (approximately) 2 hours to complete, and this will be a one-on-one meeting.
- The interview will be digitally recorded so that there is no misrepresentation.
- Your thoughts, experiences, and opinions on the SADF will be used in the written thesis as well as in the construction of artworks.
- You will be given the option to withdraw participation request that the record of interview be destroyed

No compensation will be offered for participating in this study and I cannot guarantee that you personally will receive any benefits from this research, but the hope is that your participation in the study will contribute to archiving stories of vulnerability and masculinity within memories of the SADF. The information you share will also help me to improve my understanding of experiences of military training and gain insight into the ethos and techniques employed by the SADF.

In view of you discussing your experiences in the SADF, you may be personally affected emotionally so risk to you in noted. You may skip any question you feel unwilling to answer and you may withdraw from the interview at any time without a reason. Free

Fakulteit Geesteswetenskappe
Departement Visuele Kunste
Lefapha la Bomotho
Kgoro ya Bokgabo bja Pono

LIfeLine Counselling is available for trauma intervention and you may contact them on 012 8043619 (Pretoria) or 0861322322 (National)

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law.

Any questions you have about this study can be directed to Georgina Glass at 061 214 8109 or email address, or the supervisor of my mini-dissertation, Avi Sooful at Avi.Sooful@up.ac.za. If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research subject, you may contact the University of Pretoria's Research Ethics office at 012 354 1330 or fhsethics@up.ac.za.

Subject statement of voluntary consent:

When signing this form, I am agreeing to voluntarily enter this study. I have had a chance to read this consent form, and it was explained to me in a language which I use and understand. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have received satisfactory answers. I understand that I can withdraw at any time. A copy of this Letter of Informed Consent has been given to me.

Participant

Signature:

.....

Print name:

.....

Date:

.....

By signing below, I indicate that the participant has read and, to the best of my knowledge, understands the details contained in this document and has been given a copy.

Researcher's name:

.....

Print name:

.....

Date:

.....

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Faculty of Humanities
Department of Visual Arts

List of Questions

Personal background

During the 1980's the South African government bolstered their military forces through an enforced national service. I believe that you served during this time, what year were you called up?

For the record could you tell me you name and rank that you held in the army?

How old were you when you entered military training?

Could you explain to me your daily routine during military training?

Cultural influences and ideology

Was religion an important part of the training? Why do you think that?

Were you allowed to receive gifts from family members?

What sort of gifts did you receive?

Constructing masculinity

What training did your group/battalion perform and how often did you do this?

What was the reason for this?

How did this affect you mentally and physically?

Was target practice part of your training?

What sort of drills did you do?

How long were you in training before you were deployed into the field as a soldier?

Impact on conscripts

How long did you serve in the SADF?

When did you leave the SADF and why?

Has your military service played an important part in how you live your life today?

Do you think that your military service played a role in turning you into a real man?

How would you describe a real man?

What are your best memories of the military service?

What are your worst memories?

Which memories of the military service do you speak about openly to family?

What memories or experiences do you not speak about to your family?

Do you ever speak about pain or being vulnerable to your friends or family?