

Masculinity and Sexuality in South African Border War

Literature

By
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Declaration

By submitting this thesis electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the owner of the copyright thereof (unless to the extent explicitly otherwise stated) and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

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Abstract

This thesis explores masculinity and sexuality, hegemonic and “deviant” in the nation state of the old apartheid South Africa, by addressing aspects of fatherhood, boyhood and motherhood in white, predominantly Afrikaans family narratives. In doing this, I explore the ways in which the young boys in texts such as *The Smell of Apples* (1995), by Mark Behr, and *moffie* (2006), by André Carl van der Merwe, are systematically groomed to become the ideal stereotype of masculinity at the time: rugged, intelligent, successful and heterosexual.

The main focus of this thesis is to explore the ideologies inherent in constructing the white, Afrikaner man, his woman and their family. This will be done with specific reference to the time frame between the early 1970s to the fall of the apartheid regime in the early 1990s, focussing on the young white boys who are sent to do military training and oftentimes, a stint on the border between Angola and the then South-West Africa, in order to keep the so-called threat of communism at bay. I explore what happens when this white-centred patriarchal hegemony is broken down, threatened or resisted when “deviance” in the form of homosexuality occurs.

A second focus of this thesis is that of “deviance” in the army. I analyse “deviance” in three novels, *moffie* (2006) by André Carl van der Merwe, *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* (1991) by Damon Galgut and *Kings of the Water* (2009) by Mark Behr. These novels foreground “deviance” and I make use of them in exploring the punishment, or “consequences” of being homosexual or “deviant” in the highly masculine environs of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) army. I also examine the muted yet, I argue, resistant voices of female characters in these novels.

This thesis concludes by briefly noting the aftermath of this war, the after-effects of a white, hegemonic, conservative ruling party at the helm of a divided, war-faring country on its soldiers, who are now middle-aged men.

Opsomming

Hierdie tesis ondersoek manlikheid en seksualiteit, hegemonie en “afwykings” in die staat van ou apartheid Suid-Afrika deur te verwys na aspekte van vaderskap, seunwees en moederskap in blanke, oorwegend Afrikaanse gesinsvertellings. Eerstens sal daar ondersoek ingestel word na die wyses waarop jong seuns in tekste soos *The Smell of Apples* (1995) deur Mark Behr en *moffie* (2006) deur André Carl van der Merwe stelselmatig gekweek word tot die ideale stereotipe van manlikheid in die era: ongetem, intelligent, suksesvol en heteroseksueel.

Die hoofklem van hierdie tesis is om die denkwyses onderliggend aan die konstruksie van die blanke Afrikaner man, sy vrou en hulle gesin, te verken. Dit sal bewerkstellig word deur na die tydperk vanaf die vroeë 1970s tot en met die ondergang van die apartheidsbewind in die vroeë 1990s te verwys, met spesifieke klem op jeugdige blanke seuns wat gestuur is vir militêre opleiding en dikwels ook dienspelig aan die grens tussen Angola en destydse Suid-Wes Afrika om die oënskynlike kommunistiese aanslag af te weer. Daar word verken wat plaasvind wanneer hierdie blank-gesentreerde, patriargale oorwig afgebreek, bedreig of teengestaan word deur “afwykings” soos die voorkoms van homoseksualiteit.

‘n Tweede fokuspunt van hierdie tesis is die “afwykings” in die weermag. Die volgende drie “afwykingsromans” word ontleed: *moffie* (2006), *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* (1991) deur

Damon Galgut en *Kings of the Water* (2009) deur Mark Behr. Hierdie romans ondervang die idee van “afwykings” en word gebruik in die ondersoek na die straf of gevolge van homoseksueel of “afwykend” wees in die uitsluitlik manlike omgewing geskep deur die SANW-opleiding. Daar word ook ondersoek ingestel na die stilgemaakte; dog, soos aangetoon word, versettende stemme van vroulike karakters in die romans.

Hierdie tesis sluit af deur vlugtig te verwys na die nasleep van die oorlog en die gevolge van ’n blanke, heersende, konserwatiewe party aan die stuur van ’n verdeelde, oorlogvoerende land op sy soldate wat tans middeljarige mans is.

Keywords

Masculinity Sexuality Whiteness Hegemony Deviance Border War Literature Apartheid
Afrikaner Homosexuality SANDF Fatherhood Motherhood

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from front to back without having read it, for my coffee every morning without fail and for knowing *French Café* that day at Bohemia. You've never stopped earning brownie points.

And Dada. Gosh, how I love you. This was all because of you. And now, it is for you.

The dog days are over.

A passage

To walk through

To get through

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Chapter 1: Introduction

We have triumphed in the effort to implant hope in the breasts of the millions of our people. We enter into a covenant that we shall build the society in which all South Africans, both black and white, will be able to walk tall, without any fear in their hearts, assured of their inalienable right to human dignity - a rainbow nation at peace with itself and the world.

from Nelson Mandela's inaugural speech made in Pretoria on the 10th of May, 1994.

Since the advent of a new era for South Africa, Madiba's hopeful rainbow nation emerged and the proverbial "forgetting" began. Nowadays, many South Africans are eager to "close the book" on apartheid and "start writing a new chapter" for our country. Many do not want to dwell on apartheid, since it is too painful and, of course, it is "institutionally over". Even so, the South African nation seems to have fallen short of Nelson Mandela's hope for a "rainbow nation at peace with itself and the world." South Africa is a divided nation, politically and socio-economically and in dire need of more than moving speeches and idealised imagery to become unified in stratified rainbow-ways. The quest to "forget" our past and reconstruct a more positive future free of the shadows of history presents itself as a double-edged sword for South Africa and its people, as remembrance is vital to honouring the hurt and the dead.

There are as many unremembered souls who fought, struggled, gained and lost under the struggle for South Africa's freedom, as there are unremembered boys and men who fought *against* South Africa's freedom. They were mainly white, predominantly Afrikaans soldiers who, although I

make no attempt to defend their position, were forced to form the working parts of the apartheid machine. They “defended” white South Africa against the so-called dangers of communism and anything that posed a threat to the idyllic purity of the white Afrikaner identity.

This thesis aims to explore issues of white masculinity and sexuality concerned with Border War literature, published both on the cusp of South Africa’s liberation and hereafter, as well as the issues of gender relations that present themselves in this literature. The young white South African soldier will be explored in terms of what he means to the nation state, his family and the traditional image of the white South African man. In particular, the figure of the white, homosexual man will be examined, as well as with what consequence his “deviance” is met.

There is a quiet pathology about events that occurred on the Border and in the South African Defence Force towards the end of the Nationalist regime. Men who have returned with their lives intact, uncelebrated by a transitioning South Africa, seem more inward, detached and aggressive than when they left. They are the forgotten ones for whom only close families mourn witnessed atrocities.

In her book, *Whiteness Just Isn’t What It Used To Be* (2001), Melissa Steyn explores the evolution of the white Afrikaner nation and the formation of the Afrikaner identity. She says that the Great Trek of 1836

was the beginning of the development of a “tribal” identity of Afrikaner Christian nationalism, which was inextricably interconnected with their particular expression of “whiteness” [...] Afrikaner “freedom” came to be understood as freedom to exercise racial hegemony. The right to be “white” was yoked to the

rightlessness of “nonwhites.” Being “civilized” in a savage, untamed country entailed the right to be masters of the heathens. (32)

These “masters of the heathens” found their daily guidance in the form of the word of God.

Steyn quotes Frederickson, who says that

[t]his simplified and literalistic version of Reformed Protestantism was partly an outgrowth of frontier life. Having trekked in many cases beyond the reaches of established congregations, the Boers did most of their worshipping within the patriarchal family. Their only guide was the Bible itself, which they readily interpreted in the light of their own experience as a pastoral people wandering among the “heathen” [...] [and] [i]t was no giant step from such beliefs to the notion that the Boers were a chosen people, analogous to the ancient Israelites, who had a special and exclusive relationship with God and a mandate to smite the heathen. (29)

The National Party, consisting predominantly of Afrikaners, won the 1948 election and “[governed] South Africa, creating and instituting the apartheid system” (du Pisani 157). The intense end to this ruling regime began in the early 1970s and came to its end in the late 1980s. The war machine of this regime defended South Africa during this time from all number of perceived threats, such as communism and the “dangers” of black people and foreigners. “The border is a geographic fact. It is the line dividing the territories of Angola and Namibia [...] [a] term [...] deliberately used by the state to perpetuate the fiction that troops were protecting the border and not actually fighting on foreign soil” (Williams 15-16). Furthermore, the Border acted as an imaginary dividing line between conservative South Africa and the “dangers” of

communism. Those who took part in the Border War, the intensive training and smooth running of this operation, were predominantly young, white men. Many of the survivors of the Border War are still alive today, many of whom suffer quietly at home, or at work, because of the things they have seen or done, and the friends they have lost.¹

During apartheid, whiteness, nationality and the church were three facets of life that were inextricable from one another, each the source of affirmation and fuel for the other. The army, as seen as the force underpinning the government, was no less affected by these realms of white South African life. The young men in army training, on the Border and in service of the Defence Force, were to represent this apartheid ideal in a highly formalised, concentrated fashion. They had to be “real” men; rugged, masculine, rugby-playing, hunting, heterosexual men their fathers would be proud of.

Masculinity and fatherhood occupied private spaces, like homes and classrooms, but were made public through constant (re)performance. Being large, overarching Afrikaner institutions, the South African government and the Dutch Reformed Church were major prescriptive entities, which educated and informed white South African maleness, the sexuality which that implied, as well as particular notions of fatherhood. The “correct” execution of this white South African maleness and fatherhood, in turn, reinforced and upheld these religious and governmental ideals.

Although the white South African family is under scrutiny here, it should be added that it is the white *Afrikaner*² South African family that I feel is particularly at the core of this discussion. In

¹ This project is the result of being the daughter of such a man.

² I would like to make a distinction between the term “Afrikaner” and “Afrikaans-speaking” persons. The idea of the Afrikaner has become stereotyped as steeped in Calvinistic tradition, with a fearful God at the helm of a patriarchal, purist, oftentimes racist and separatist, white nation. Although most present-day white, Afrikaans-speaking people

his “Puritanism Transformed – Afrikaner Masculinities in the apartheid and post-apartheid Period”, Kobus du Pisani states that “Afrikaner nationalism [became] a racist, militaristic and authoritarian force. Behind and within Afrikaner nationalism were prescriptions for correct male behaviour which were woven into hegemonic Afrikaner masculinity” and that, as I have mentioned previously, “[h]egemonic Afrikaner masculinity was intricately bound up with social and political power in Afrikaner society and hence with Afrikaner nationalism” (157).

Although fit for duty and task, if a young soldier was deemed, or self-admittedly, a homosexual, he would be ostracised by his fellow soldiers and, quite likely, beaten. Above and beyond this, he would be extricated from the force and sent to a hospital where his “illness” might be cured. A key text I will be using to address this tradition of abuse is *moffie* (2006) by André Carl van der Merwe. The novel illustrates how the idea of a soldier’s (homo)sexuality plays such an important role in his place in the microcosmic space of the army and suggests how important hegemonic sexuality was in South African life in general. White maleness, sexuality and gender in South Africa under apartheid seem to have been of the utmost importance to the running of the state, and in turn, to the running of the South African family. I aim to explore the dynamics of the nation-maleness-church triad and how it permeated and affected society, along with its women and children.

Racial segregation during apartheid was precisely for the purpose of maintaining a “pure”, “uncontaminated” white Afrikaner nation. For Richard Dyer,

are descendants of this “nation” of purists, many do not approve of being labelled as “Afrikaner” *because* of these stereotypes. Many white, Afrikaans-speaking people today still struggle to shed the stigma of white supremacy afforded them by the Afrikaner leadership at the forefront of the apartheid regime.

[a]ll concepts of race are always concepts of the body and also of heterosexuality. Race is a means of categorising different types of human body, which reproduce themselves. It [seeks] to systematize differences of character and worth. Heterosexuality is the means of ensuring, but also the site of endangering, the reproduction of these differences. (20)

Race and sexuality were also enmeshed in issues of power in apartheid South Africa; being a man was not enough if one was not the right colour man, or a rugged enough individual.

Living in the wrong colour skin and having a sexual orientation that deviated from that prescribed by the Nationalist ideals of apartheid might be equated with one another. Both were marginalised; both liable for punishment for defying hegemonic laws of the time. Being the “wrong” colour, though, bore greater legitimacy as a problem in apartheid South Africa than being homosexual. I explore this in a later chapter using *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* (1991) by Damon Galgut, in conjunction with a key text by Michiel Heyns, “A Man’s World: White South African Gay Writing and the State of Emergency”. Heyns addresses a number of texts that raise the issue of white masculinity and how it is linked to performances of gender through actions such as “[playing] rugby”, “[hunting] animals with guns” and “pissing in the rose[bushes]”, as told by predominantly homosexual narrators (113-4). This latter example, in which Heyns lists explicit, brutish, overtly masculine behaviour, refers to an image from *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs*. Apart from these brutish masculinities, Heyns explores the dynamic of privilege afforded the apartheid struggle versus the struggle to be openly gay in society. He asserts that under a racist regime in apartheid South Africa, much attention was paid to issues of race and that those of homophobia were oftentimes left unaddressed, because they “may [have]

become branded as yet another white privilege trying to pass itself off as right in a democratic society” (110). This argument correctly identifies the concept of homosexuality as a double taboo, as an unspoken and flimsy, superficial “whim” of many South Africans under apartheid. Homosexuality is also something one can hide; unlike blackness, brownness, or “less”-than-whiteness which was unavoidable, as it was and is expressed on the skin.

I also make use of texts such as *The Smell of Apples* (1995), by Mark Behr, *moffie*³ (2006), by André Carl van der Merwe and *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* (1991) by Galgut to address issues of fatherhood and the ways in which the protagonists in each novel experience the subjectivity of fatherhood; being the son, being groomed to become a man and experiencing the lengths a father will go to in order to ensure that his son is not a “moffie”.

Although work has been executed on whiteness in a South African context in the apartheid and transition period by, for example, Leon de Kock (2006), Debbie Epstein (1998), Robert Morrell (1998) and Melissa Steyn (2004), I feel that ideas of white South African womanhood and motherhood as set up as subsidiary and subservient to the patriarch(y) under apartheid are only starting to be explored from a post-1994 perspective. I dedicate the third chapter of this thesis to the women, wives and mothers in novels such as *The Smell of Apples*, *moffie* and *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs*, making use of the works of Cheryl Stobie (2008) and Michael Titlestad (2004). I explore, more particularly, ways in which these women are overtly or subtly rebellious, or resistant to the status quo in ways that are affronting to the patriarch.

³ “South African slang for a male homosexual or effeminate man, often used offensively” (Wevell et al. 682). The novel’s title subverts this offensive slang word and uses it as a proud proclamation of queerness. The fact that the whole word is presented in lower-case may speak back to the idea of homosexuality being subordinate, offensive and unspeakable. Van der Merwe constructs this title from the margins, speaking loudly and clearly back to the “straight” centre, demanding an audience and becoming an unmistakable presence.

The fourth chapter of this thesis explores the requirements of masculinity present in the army. I make use of Galgut's *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs*, van der Merwe's *moffie* and Behr's latest novel, *Kings of the Water* (2009), to explore the harsh conditions caused by profanity and mental and physical abuse of conscripts. I explore levels of masculinities present and the consequences of deviating from these highly concentrated hegemonic norms. In a small addition to this chapter, I address the problematic of conscripts having to reintegrate into civilian life after the army, without undergoing any treatment for post-traumatic stress and how the transition from army to home presents its own struggles in terms of masculinity and what it means to be a man.

Chapter 2: “Die Vaderland” – White Masculinities in Apartheid South Africa at War

2.1 “Everywhere and Nowhere” – Whiteness in Apartheid South Africa

Whiteness, masculinity and heterosexuality were all concepts that, in apartheid South Africa, functioned as the cornerstones of the regime. Consequently, the regime itself, through segregation in its many forms, reinstated issues of whiteness, masculinity and heterosexuality as the pinnacle of exclusive Afrikanerdom. Apartheid, or “apart-ness”, was a diabolically ingenious way to keep this hegemony safe and to guard it against any “undesirable” influence from individuals darker in colour, politically revolutionary or sexually aberrant. Here spheres – governmental and personal, public and private – overlapped and bolstered one another.

The title of this sub-section is taken from de Kock’s article, “Blanc de Blanc”, which suggests that whiteness has never been a point of study, because it has never been “other”. It is pervasive, yet absent. De Kock asserts that “whiteness has become so delegitimized by virtue of its complicity with apartheid that it has often been rendered ‘blank’, a taken-for-granted negative essence, a place less looked-into and a site of assumed uniformity” (175). De Kock’s “intuitive sense was that whiteness as a distinct category had become subsumed in what struck me as a kind of ‘blankness’ ” (175). De Kock’s idea of “blankness” readily illustrates how pervasive, yet invisible whiteness was, and in many cases, still is. As de Kock, quoting from Nakayama and Krizek, claims: “[f]or writers, the time has come to ‘deterritorialize the territory of ‘white’ and to ‘expose, examine, and disrupt [...] by naming whiteness, [one] displace[s] its centrality and reveal[s] its invisible position’, thus beginning the process of *particularising* white experience” (182) (emphasis in original). This project seeks to do just that: to place whiteness at the centre and to problematise its components; to bring whiteness back from its “blankness” and render it a topical, relevant site for study.

In his introduction to *Changing Men in Southern Africa* (2001), Robert Morrell begins his introduction by asking “[w]hat could be more different than the image of a grim-faced, rifle-toting soldier [...] and a colourful cross-dresser, strutting his stuff in a gay pride march?” (3). He does this to illustrate the broad spectrum of masculinities that have sprung from a time in South Africa when there was only one way of being a man. I am interested in that heavily prescribed white masculinity of apartheid and what brought it into being. Morrell asserts that

[m]asculinity and violence have been yoked together in South African history [...] Republican masculinity and continuing domination of politics and economy by English-speakers promoted a new Afrikaner nationalism with an attendant, modernised form of ethnic masculinity. The desire for freedom from British influence and superiority over blacks was interpreted into a new masculinity which stressed the importance of independence, resourcefulness, physical and emotional toughness, ability to give and (depending on your position) take orders, of being moral and God-fearing. These values were gendered in the church, the schools, community meetings, on the sportsfields and in the Afrikaans media. (12,15)

It is the white Afrikaner male that was the mastermind and mainstay of the apartheid regime and, in turn, it was the white Afrikaner community that prescribed peculiar ways of being engendered in apartheid South Africa. Both Behr’s *The Smell of Apples* and van der Merwe’s *Moffie* were selected for this particular chapter because they both showcase the prescriptions for white manhood executed in white Afrikaans homes which were also engendered with the Afrikaner nationalist “values” Morrell mentions. The novels do this by showing examples of desired and desirable masculinities, which, inevitably, are turned upside down when “counter masculinities”

emerge. More often than not, the “desirable” masculinities are represented by either the father, or the older brother figure. The emergent “counter-masculinity” is, in the case of *moffie*, represented by a younger homosexual son and in the case of *The Smell of Apples*, a son who is representative of an “impotent” generation. I turn now to Behr’s *The Smell of Apples*, with Marnus at the centre and his experience of learning how to be a man a key concept in this coming-of-age, becoming-a-man, post-apartheid novel.

2.2 “Bleed and Bloom” – Grooming in *The Smell of Apples*

The Smell of Apples (1995) by Mark Behr is a post-apartheid novel about the hypocrisy of the apartheid regime as it affects a white, upper middle-class family in Cape Town. The story is told by Marnus, a ten-year-old boy, and is punctuated with the thoughts of his older self at a critical stage in his life – in the heat of the army. Because of this the novel has two temporal settings. The older Marnus’s intrusive narrative seems to be set in the mid-1980s, whereas the narrative of young Marnus is set during the tense time of the 1970s, during apartheid, which was also a prosperous time for white South Africans. During this time Afrikaner nationalism and masculinity were being defended and policed more rigorously than ever before. *The Smell of Apples* illustrates how Afrikaner identity is cultivated and guarded by Mom and Dad in the Erasmus family life. In the same way Marnus’s identity, masculinity and coming of age are closely observed, moulded, and encouraged by Dad, whose own masculinity is shaped by apartheid ideology, as well as his military background.

This sub-section’s title, “Bleed and Bloom” is taken from a song by the South African band aKING, from an album called *Dutch Courage* that was released in 2008. They are a relatively

new band from a new generation of young musicians from an Afrikaans background stemming from the likes of Fokofpolisiekar and Karen Zoid. This new generation speaks back to the “Afrikaans-is-a-dying-language-and-culture” attitude by attempting to reclaim a new, modern, progressive, un-stigmatised Afrikaner identity and image. It seems that this particular song, “Safe as Houses”, speaks nostalgically of the years of apartheid and the fragility of the establishment. Even if the song speaks nostalgically, it does this in a critical fashion. The lyrics suggest a longing for the past, but they also suggest a longing to change the unfortunate events that occurred in that past. It laments what a “waste this façade [is and] what a pity we’ve come this far”, the “rain [that] will fall and baptise our strongholds, our sheltered lives” and “[o]ur secrets [that] like weeds, creep up to the roof of our neighbourhood” (aKING). It points to the construction of a flawed ideology, such as apartheid, with its direct reference to a flawed house and home, and isolated, unreal white suburbia. It expresses the mass ignorance of the white middle-class with their politically “devoured minds [...] [whose] thoughts remain impotent, [...] [and whose] pillows stay fertile” (aKING). I specifically link the lyrics “bleed and bloom” to this particular section because I feel that this song resonates with *The Smell of Apples* and Marnus’s blood-brother episode, which I discuss later. The simple, yet artful music video serves to illustrate this fragility and denial. The still, as shown below, taken from this music video, illustrates the pride of an out-of-place king overseeing his cardboard kingdom that is reduced to pulp when it begins to rain. This image is reminiscent of the blinkered pioneers at the helm of the apartheid regime. (Please click on the following link to watch this music video. An internet connection is required): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Z5PZJNmZE4>



aKING (Google Images).

Marnus is his military father's protégé, "[his] little bull" and, as a result, is groomed to be just like him (1). Marnus's father is about to become "the youngest major-general in the history of the South African Defence Force" (14). His identity is permeated by his being a military man; his masculinity is policed by the army itself, the military wing of the apartheid government at the time. His identity as a man and father is thus "owned" by the state. The state prescribed ways of being a man and in the military the idea of what and how a man should be was even more specific and concentrated. This pressure to conform to particular and peculiar ways of being a man made the space for "deviance" (sexual and otherwise) uncomfortably small. In *The Smell of Apples* Marnus's father, supposedly the perfect example of a father and a man, exposes the fluidity of these ideals. Dad's character exposes to the reader how these apparently formidable ideals themselves are flawed by the imperfect humanity keeping these ideals afloat through constant re-performance.

Marnus is offered no real alternative to being proud of his father and the man that he too will become one day. He describes how "[he's] always had Dad's big ears, and [he's] a bit shy about

them because they stick out so far” (2). Marnus’s genetic inheritance is even more pronounced when he is wearing “[his] *Voortrekker* beret” (2). Dad seems to be very proud of these ears and “says they are the Erasmus ears” (2). Even though Marnus experiences some discomfort at the thought of the size and shape of his ears, they are addressed in the same frame as his uniform: as diminutive of his father’s. Marnus’s father turns this physical attribute into a kind of hereditary privilege, something to be proud of. These ears belong to their surname, a name that represents their shared masculinity and a history of pioneering men. This colonial, pioneering attitude arises from the Erasmus family fleeing Tanganyika (now Tanzania) when the war started and making a home in South Africa. Dad proudly recounts stories about this *trek* and illustrates these with numerous slide shows to the family on many occasions throughout the novel. The idea of masculine pride in genealogy is highlighted once more when Marnus’s parents are preparing for the father’s promotional dinner: “[Marnus goes] into the bathroom where Dad [is] shaving. Dad [is] using Oupa’s old shaving brush [...]. The handle of Dad’s shaving brush is inlaid with ivory from the bottom ends of tusks of an elephant that Oupa shot next to the Ruvu in Tanganyika” (14). Here a masculine activity is being conducted by a father and observed by his son. It is interesting that the central object in use here is not only one that is just used for the coming-of-age act of shaving, but the substance that comprises the decoration of the shaving brush is a product of another very masculine act – hunting. To add to masculinity of this act, it is later recounted that Oupa did not just kill an elephant but that he killed “an elephant bull” (170). The ivory becomes more valuable and Oupa’s heroics more awe-inspiring, because he killed a *male* elephant.

When the Chilean General comes to stay at the Erasmus home, he greets the family perfunctorily in their dining room and tells Marnus: “[Y]ou are a carbon copy of your father” (35). “[Marnus

doesn't] know what he means by *carbon copy*, but [smiles] anyway and [nods his] head" (35).

The General asserts then that Marnus just *is* a replica of his father; Marnus is given no option of negating this sentiment. In the same way, he is trapped in a patriarchal society that offers no real way of not being like his father.⁴

Similarly, when Dad shows the General the slides of Tanganyika, Marnus is, once more, confronted with the identity he will come to share with his father one day: "There's a nice slide of Dad and Oupa Erasmus standing next to Oupa's Daimler Benz. When Dad says that was him when he was seven, the General says it could just as well have been me, and Dad winks at me through the half-dark. I'm glad I'm going to look like Dad one day" (169).

The idea of repetition is not only present in ideas of speech, or actions, but even images in *The Smell of Apples* are replicated, or duplicated. The idea of Marnus as a double, or carbon-copy of his father drives home the perpetuity of action and ideal. The idea of copies, replication or duplication in the novel is addressed exhaustively in *Somewhere in the Double Rainbow* (2007) by Cheryl Stobie, who views the duplicates and replicas present in *The Smell of Apples* as more than what a Manichean reading might afford. She sees Behr's novel as offering up these doublings and mirrors as a way of seeing things rather in their multiplicity, complexities and hazy subjectivities. Rita Barnard seems to offer a contrasting view in "The Smell of Apples, Moby-Dick and Apartheid Ideology" (2000). Barnard's reading of the novel seems to focus on the supposed fixedness of the binaries that Behr offers the reader. In terms of reading these literary binaries, I feel a closer identification with what Stobie asserts, as allowing the novel's binaries to be read as multiplicitous and three-or-more-dimensional instead of only one or two-

⁴ Later on in this thesis I continue to argue that there is no real alternative for Marnus, other than to be like his father. I also assert that in this "man's world", Marnus cannot even succeed in replicating his father and therefore his life must end. This conclusion, I later argue, is not without hope.

dimensional does not close down a reading of a text in a pack of simple solutions. I feel that a replication of masculine bodies speaks back to Marnus's identity formation and how it must be constantly repeated, copied, replicated to become more and more refined, but never quite "perfect", or identical. This replication relies heavily on the image of the father as the blueprint – through replication of actions and words, but more importantly, through observing the physical body. In the above paragraphs, it is the highly masculinised character of the Chilean General that asserts how similar Marnus and his father are. The slide that is being commented on includes Oupa Erasmus and the General's comment connects the three Erasmus males in terms of their masculinity against the backdrop of a Tanganyika that was once home to the Erasmus family. Dad winks at Marnus and so the desire to look like his father becomes affirmed by both Dad and the General.

This process of replication occurs when Marnus and Dad bond in the shower or in the sea nearby their home in False Bay. The space of the bathroom, in *The Smell of Apples*, "is where [Marnus and Dad] usually take a shower together" (15). This is a primary space for Dad to impart knowledge about being a man to his son. On one occasion in the shower, Marnus notices that "Dad's whole chest and stomach are covered with hair and his John Thomas hangs out from a bushy black forest" (62). Dad even asks Marnus whether "that little man of [his stands] up yet sometimes in the mornings" (63). Marnus becomes coy and evades the question. "When [they've] finished drying [themselves] off, [they] tie the towels around [their] waists and [Marnus combs his] hair in a side parting just like Dad's" (63). Marnus is in awe of his father's highly masculine traits. It seems that each engagement in the shower is in aid of grooming Marnus to be just like his father. Once out of the shower, Marnus is again a mirror figure of Dad – they are both wearing a towel and both combing and parting their hair in the same way.

The shower translates into a mutual, communal space for masculine grooming and bonding in *The Smell of Apples*. However, later on in the novel, it becomes a locus for disapproval and subtle rejection. The spaces that Dad and Marnus share have close ties to water and the ritual of cleansing. I find the physical grooming of bodies particularly interesting in this case, because they physically perpetuate and replicate the process of “becoming a man”. In “Bodies that Matter” Butler states that

reiterations are never simply replicas of the same. And the ‘act’ by which a name authorizes or deauthorizes a set of social or sexual relations is, of necessity, *a repetition* [...] that discourse has a history that not only precedes but conditions its contemporary usages, and that this history effectively decenters the presentist view of the subject as the exclusive origin or owner of what is said. (226-7)

(emphasis in original)

For my purposes, then, Dad is not, in fact, “the exclusive origin or owner of what is said” or done (Butler 227). The things Dad teaches Marnus are not in isolation – they have come from a series of accumulated events in historical discourse that have brought Dad to place where he is merely a mouthpiece of what is to be learned, for a whole system of beliefs. Dad’s agency in this discourse is to authorise, or deauthorise events in Marnus’s upbringing and so he is an agent of repetition. Dad has the authority and respect from Marnus to control the spaces the two occupy, as well as the process of making a man out of Marnus.

Marnus also shares a homoerotic space with Frikkie, who is his best friend from school. They decide that in order to have no secrets from each other, they need to become “blood brothers” (76). This ritual seems primitive and in *The Smell of Apples* it is likened to “the voortrekker

oath” (76). According to Steyn, the *voortrekkers* were “a militaristic-type youth organisation that inculcated Afrikaner Christian Nationalist ideology” (xi). The *voortrekkers* were collectively immortalised in white Afrikaans consciousness and became something of a moral point of reference for white Afrikaner life. Frikkie mentions that the idea of becoming blood brothers is an archaic one that stems from the Bible, although he is not sure from which story the concept emanates. The boys cannot find a needle with which to prick their fingers, so they resort to using Marnus’s compass from his school geometry set. This event between Frikkie and Marnus is homoerotic in that it involves a sharing of bodily fluid from two phallic fingers, drawn out by a phallic compass. The two exchange blood, in order to become “related” to one another and furthermore, to be able to tell the other all their secrets. The act of mixing blood is further eroticised when “I shove harder and Frikkie jumps back when the point goes in too deep. ‘Ouch!’ he groans. ‘That’s too much.’ Almost at once, there’s a drop of blood on his fingertip” (78). It is Marnus’s turn to have his blood drawn. “I hold out my finger to [Frikkie]. I close my eyes as he comes towards me with the compass. I feel the jab and when I look again, there’s a drop of blood, pushing up from the skin. Then we rub our fingers together until it’s sticky” (78). The sexual nature of this encounter is self-evident. The boys both take turns to insert a “phallus” into one another, in order to extract a sticky bodily fluid, which, once they mix it, will unite them in the order of secrecy.

The oath between the two boys becomes something of a religious covenant, almost marriage-like, when “we swear before the cross of Jesus Christ”, “in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord” and “ [m]ay God strike us dead if we ever tell someone else about things that are our secret’ ” (79). With the literal mixing of blood and an ad hoc promise before God, the boys are free to tell

each other their secrets. This idea becomes problematic later on in the novel, when Frikkie is unable to tell Marnus that he has been raped by Marnus's father.

Marnus secretly witnesses his father raping Frikkie and initially thinks that it is the visiting General committing this act, but realises that it could only have been his father (175). Later on, Marnus begrudgingly gives his father a kiss when he gets home and "keeps looking at the floor" (192). Dad asks Marnus whether he will be joining him in the shower as usual and Marnus declines by saying that " '[t]he grazes on [his] knees [...] sting when [he showers].' Dad looks at [him] in a funny way, then he nods his head and draws it back into the shower" (193).

Marnus is now uncomfortable around his father and declines the offer to share this male bonding space with his him. His excuse is his grazed knees, which, earlier on in the novel, becomes a masculine, typically boyish event. Dad places so much emphasis on becoming a man and so much value in the process and because so much is invested in this process on his behalf, it is as important for his son to not only be compliant, but eager and willing in the process. Even if Marnus's denial to share the shower with Dad may seem subtle, I see it as one of the first occasions where Marnus decides to actively do (or not do) something of his own accord and it is a very painful gesture for Dad. It is as if raping Frikkie excludes Dad from being a "real" man and from sharing the male bonding space with Marnus.

Another space that Dad and Marnus share is the ocean. They share this space in the same way as they occupy the shower together – they are both naked and the space presents itself as yet another locus for Marnus to learn how to be a man. The ocean along Muizenberg beach does not only set the scene for Marnus and his father to bond, it also presents a space in which Oupa Erasmus, the immortal patriarch, can be remembered and one in which Frikkie might also share a

bond with Marnus and his father. As the novel progresses, it becomes evident that Frikkie does, after all, share a rather sinister bond between the two anyway; as “blood brothers” with Marnus and as the object of Marnus’s father’s hypocritical sexual desire (76).

The men above are linked to one another by homosocial ties. There is an undeniable genealogical bond that links Oupa Erasmus, Dad and Marnus. The Erasmus male lineage is reflected upon, longed for and remembered in the space of the ocean. Marnus recalls that

Friday afternoons are the best times for Dad and me. We go for a long walk along Muizenberg beach [...] [and] [w]hen we reach Sealrock [...] we go up the dunes and take off all our clothes, and then [...] run down to the sea and the waves – completely starkers [...] The water’s so icy in winter that I almost lose my breath, but Dad says we’re bulls who can’t be scared off by a bit of cold water. (49-50)

Here Marnus and his father are literally stripped naked before one another. Their bodies and physical masculinities at their respective stages in life are exposed to one another in a ritualistic fashion, before they enter the ocean together. Once in the sea, “it feels like Dad and I are the only people in the whole bay, and even though Dad never says so, I always think he’s remembering Oupa Erasmus who went missing out there” (50). In this particular scene, the ocean offers Marnus and his father an isolated space in which to bond and for Dad to think about his own father. Even though only Marnus and Dad share this isolated space, they are sharing it with Oupa Erasmus too. Three generations of Erasmus males share this watery space at the same time.

In the above, the ocean becomes an exclusively male domain.⁵ It is a place where Marnus must learn how to deal with the ice-cold water without complaint. It is a space which demands physical strength and stamina from the boy. And when this runs out, he must rely on his father's physically stronger body to keep him afloat. Aside from the physical challenges the ocean poses, this space is one in which father and son can spend time alone together. Their nudity ensures that nothing, not even clothing, separates them, so that they are able to bond. This is the space in which Dad and Marnus can also both bond with the patriarch, by remembering Oupa Erasmus as he once was, from within the body of water in which he met his end.

The ocean as a shared male domain extends into Marnus's recollection of when the family visited Dominee Cronje and his wife at their *pastorie*. Marnus recounts details about their home, more specifically a painting

of a father and his children on the beach. It could be somewhere along Muizenberg, because the beach is long and flat with dunes in the distance, and far in the background it looks like the Hottentots-Holland. The man in the picture is speaking to his children, and in the bottom of the painting, it says: 'Honour Thy Father and Mother'. When [Marnus looks] at that painting, [he] sometimes wonders why only the father is there. (52)

Marnus astutely recognises that the image of the mother is not present in the painting, which seems to suggest that it is really the father that should be honoured; more specifically, the omnipotent patriarch called God. Marnus also notes the possible location of the picture – more or

⁵ Behr attributes strong references of bonding and grooming to the watery spaces of the shower and the ocean. In his most recent novel, *Kings of the Water*, where even the title captures this image, among many other references to water, the father and son share a charged moment in the bathroom, where Michiel bathes his father and where memory meets age in a moment of loss and resentment. This is one of the few reasons why I feel that this novel is not a sequel, but a kind of "what if?" future narrative of *The Smell of Apples*.

less the same stretch of beach where he and Dad go to spend time together. This not only points to the “missing”, or “absent” mother in the white Afrikaner family, but the very present idea of male bonding. This is seen both literally and figuratively through a Calvinistic lens. Not only is the picture framed with prescriptive religious wording, but the home in which the painting is hung is that of a minister. This is a clear indication of the prescriptive nature of religion, and more specifically Calvinistic faith filtering down into family structures, as I asserted in my introduction. This is not the only instance in the novel where this religion dictates and legitimises a practice. God’s name is later used to legitimise and solidify another bond between men, but this time it is between Marnus and his best friend, Frikkie.

Because the society portrayed in *The Smell of Apples* is so prominently reliant on the performance of prescriptive ways of being gendered, the words, the very text that conveys these meanings of how to be are necessarily important. This becomes evident when one discovers that much of what Marnus does is moralised and justified by what Mom *said*, or by what Dad *said*. One is tempted to think that Marnus is trapped in a familial system that disallows him any agency in thought or deed, but the way that Marnus ventriloquises what Mom and Dad say shows that the constant repetition of sayings is necessary for these specific ideals to be maintained. The fact that much of what Marnus says is, in fact, something Mom and Dad have said to him in the past, illustrates the fragility of these ideals with which they try to indoctrinate him. Were these ideals valid in their own right, there would be no need for them to be so often repeated in speech.

The character responsible for most of the repetition of nationalistic rhetoric in the Erasmus family is Dad, even though his sentiments are oftentimes voiced through Marnus. When reminiscing about life in Tanganyika, Dad says that “[a] *Volk* that forgets its history is like a man

without a memory. That man is useless [...] [and] the history of the Afrikaner, also the Afrikaners from Tanganyika and Kenya, is a proud history. [One] must always remember that and make sure one day to teach it to [one's] own children" (38). Later on at Ilse's prize-giving Dad ends off his emotive speech by saying that " '[b]lood may still flow, but [South Africa] will be made safe for our children, even if it does cost our *blood*. As our forefathers trusted, let also us trust, O Lord. With our country and our people all *will* be well ... because *the Lord Almighty rules*' " (71) (emphasis in original). Dad is making reference only to Afrikaners. He deems the history of the *Volk* superior and one that struggled to maintain its values and must continue to do so in order to preserve this way of life. Dad's nationalistic speech makes it clear that strong religious belief is essential for the success of the Afrikaner *Volk*. Du Pisani's "Puritanism Transformed: Afrikaner Masculinities in the apartheid and post-apartheid Period" explains how and why religion became such an integral part of traditional, white Afrikaner life:

Hegemonic Afrikaner masculinity was essentially puritan in nature. It took an unyielding Protestant view based on "pure" New Testament principles, and rigid austerity and strictness in conduct and morals. The puritan basis of Afrikaner masculine ideals stemmed from the strong influence of religion in Afrikaner society and the close synergy between religious, political and cultural leadership in Afrikanerdom. (158)

As I have noted above, I feel that Behr's *Kings of the Water* is an important read alongside *The Smell of Apples*. This later novel also concerns itself with fatherhood and the relations between father and son in a hostile, unbending regime such as apartheid. Just as Dad and Marnus share the intimate space of ocean and shower, so Michiel and his father, Oubaas, share the space of the bathroom in Oubaas's old age. Although I will not enter into any great detail about the later

novel, Behr makes water ever-present. Michiel is a *naval* officer, his brother commits suicide at Strand beach, so near to False Bay where Marnus would spend so many childhood days, Michiel impregnates his good friend, Karien, at the dam near the farm, before fleeing the country, and a very interesting scene of gendered childhood development takes place at this dam.

What is interesting about the latter scene is that it is the source for the novel's title. In this scene the children are splashing about in the dam, the girls against the boys in a juvenile battle of the sexes. When the boys lose this gendered battle after the women jump in and side with the girls, Michiel's nephew "[limps] to safety to nurse [his] outraged pride: 'What about you? You could have helped us, you ...' he exclaims, leaving unspoken an insulting epithet from a store of names he might have used for his queer uncle" (van der Vlies n.p.). Michiel's failure to assist the boys in their water warfare is attributed by his nephew, a boy, to his homosexuality. Interestingly, and as van der Vlies notes, there is an ellipse in the place of any number of insults (n.p.). This omission points to the nature of the unspoken insult as surely a derogatorily queer name. The dam, this incident, the children's game and a speechless Michiel are all entangled in fluid memories of boyhood, adolescence and becoming a man, albeit a queer one, as they collide with a vivid present.

Behr creates, or rather recreates in *The Smell of Apples*, those prescriptions to becoming and being a white, Afrikaans man. Through repetition in both action and speech, this ideology mounts to its pinnacle and is soon after deflated by Behr when he exposes those cracks in the shiny white veneer of the Erasmus family and, indeed, of white Afrikaans apartheid South Africa. The apples that Dad speaks of, that the "whites" brought to South Africa as a mark of civilisation, are rotten. The following sub-section grapples with the same hypocrisy embedded in

the construction of masculinity in another white, middle-class Afrikaner family – the van der Swarts.

2.3 “Never Shame Me” – Shame in *moffie*

moffie by André Carl van der Merwe is a semi-autobiographical novel, which details the experiences of a young white man in the South African army during the 1980s. The narrative is that of an eighteen-year-old Nicholas and is interjected with memories of his childhood. In this way the novel differs structurally from Behr’s *The Smell of Apples*, which deals with young Marnus in the primary narrative and is punctuated with vignettes of his older self. Nicholas, the protagonist, assumes the role on behalf of the reader, not just of observer, but of critic of the hegemonic ideals of the apartheid era. The story is one about growing up, “coming out” and surviving the army, in the face of the highly masculinised, homophobic, environment of the apartheid South African home and that of the SADF.

Nicholas is different from other boys. Oftentimes, he is a source of shame and resentment for his father. *moffie* illustrates this beginning with Nicholas just about to leave for the army. He notes that “my father is happy that I am going to be taught some lessons – lessons he could never teach me, lessons I refused to learn: his doctrine, [...] a safety belt of dogma and fear” (van der Merwe 18). Although Nicholas does not want to go to the army, he is forced to do so. Van der Merwe posits Nicholas’s father as complicit in this event, as is gauged by Nicholas’s assertion that the “government is run by a small minority of whites, mostly Afrikaners, [...] who set [the people of South Africa] on a tragic course – all in the name of God” (16). For Nicholas, and perhaps even for van der Merwe, it is the father, the ultimate patriarch, that through connection with and support from religious institutions, and the government itself, ruled by right-wing white

Afrikaners, is the spearhead of and “prescriber” of national service and its trappings. Nicholas’s claims about his father come to foreground the shaping of van der Merwe’s *moffie* as a novel about the intrinsic links between nationality, religion and masculinity and hegemonic Afrikaner culture of the 1970s.⁶

The problematised themes of nationalism and the Christian faith are evident in a number of subplots in the novel but, in the situation discussed above, van der Merwe places this brand of religion at the core of white Afrikaner masculinity. As the reader finds out later, the disjuncture between this prescribed faith and Nicholas’s emerging homosexuality becomes a problem for the young boy. The internal thoughts Nicholas has about his father, as quoted above, serve to illustrate the very workings of the nation-maleness-church triad I mentioned before. This exchange also points to the Calvinist ideology so typical of Afrikaner nationalism and nationalist culture which positions the unquestioned father at the head of the family, as decision-maker and prime example to his children of what it means to be a man and family leader. His progeny is instructed by him to go out and fight a war that will, in turn, strengthen both the apartheid regime and beliefs about what constitutes masculinity. Nicholas even goes so far as to state that “[t]here are special voices for God, then in descending steps of deference, for people of the church, authority, old people, friends, children, dogs, and finally the voice they use for the staff” (35), illustrating the hierarchies that command, or rather, are afforded, varying levels of respect. It is patriarchal authority that confirms, or endorses, racial, social and gender hierarchies and subsequent treatment afforded these subjects.

⁶ Van der Merwe’s father read his novel and told him that the father figure in his novel (however true to life he may have been) was not how he intended to be. He claims that his strictness as a father came as being what was considered a “normal” father under such circumstances. (This information I take from an informal interview I had with the author in Cape Town in December, 2008).

Nicholas does not fit the profile of a highly masculine young man his father might have hoped he would have become. He is perpetually criticised by his father for his “deviant” behaviour. Before Nicholas leaves home, the thoughts of the journey ahead rob him of his appetite. It is his mother who encourages him to eat, while his father says that “if he doesn’t eat he’ll faint, like the sissy he is” (19). Nicholas’s mother gently persuades him to eat his breakfast. Her approach to Nicholas differs from that of the father who emasculates his son by warning him that if he fails to “man-up” and eat his breakfast, he will become like a girl – weak and fragile – and will pass out from hunger.

Nicholas’s father is glad about his departure, as “[t]he sooner [the army whips] some discipline into him the better”, and that it is the “[b]est thing to get boys away from their mothers’ apron strings. Little babies. At your age I was a man” (19). For Nicholas’s father, being masculine means that one has to resist being “feminine” at all costs. Nicholas’s father infantilises and feminises Nicholas and suggests that this is (at least partly) due to Nicholas’s bond with his mother. He offers the violent, masculine discipline of the army as a remedy for Nicholas’s intolerable femininity and holds up his own masculinity when he was Nicholas’s age as a superior template. Nicholas’s father is relentless in attempting to make a man of his son. His mockery and threatening talk seem to suggest that Nicholas’s father harbours a terrible fear that his son may not become the man that society requires him to be – or worse, that his own masculinity as a father may be brought to question – that he may have fathered a “moffie”.

The dialogue reaches its climax when Nicholas finally says, “I don’t believe in what I’m being forced to do [...] [m]y mother tries to keep the peace while my father [...] lectures me on politics in between insults. So I retaliate. Then he calls me a moffie and I say, ‘If I am one, I am what you have made me’ ” (19-20). Nicholas’s father makes an attempt at softening the impact of his

words by saying that he meant to say that his son “is a sissy, not a homo” and “I hope they flog it out of him in the army” (20). Nicholas’s father asserts that his son is too feminine and “soft” for his liking. After upsetting Nicholas, he makes a clear distinction between the two implications of the word, “moffie” and asserts that his son is merely feminine and not a homosexual. Nicholas’s father’s definition suggests that being a “sissy” is better than being a “homo”. For him, if his son is a “homo,” “that’s the end” (89). The lighter alternative to being a “moffie” is being a “sissy”, which is more tolerable than being a “homo”, because, as Nicholas’s father suggests, the situation is still redeemable, as the army can and will still beat the “sissy” out of him.

Later on in the novel, Nicholas visits a deceased friend’s parents. Similar complexities of masculinity and fatherhood are illustrated when Nicholas speaks to Mr Stassen about his son, Dylan. Mr Stassen says that “Dylan was always a sensitive child. I thought the army would make a man out of him. How wrong I was” (273). Nicholas replies “ ‘He *was* a man, Mr Stassen. Really. He coped with all the PT, the training, in fact, better than most’ [...] ‘the finest [soldier] there is!’ I want to say, ‘Whatever a *man* may mean,’ but I decide against it” (273-4). The above illustrates Mr Stassen’s and Nicholas’s difference in opinion in terms of what constitutes a man. It is revealed later on in the novel that Dylan was, in fact, homosexual. Mr Stassen sent Dylan to the army with the same intentions, although seemingly less malignant, that Nicholas’s father had for his son – to make him a man. This exchange shows that Mr Stassen sees his son as “less” of a man because of his homosexuality and that the army failed in this respect, because it did not make Dylan the man his father hoped it would. It is interesting that Nicholas, who is homosexual himself, uses the hegemonic “yardstick” with which to gauge and prove Dylan’s masculinity – in terms of his success in physical training in a sexually charged space of inadequacy.

Interestingly, Nicholas is silently critical about the construction and meaning of this military masculinity when he thinks “ ‘Whatever a *man* may mean’ ” (274). His quiet musing suggests a questioning of heteronormative, hegemonic, white South African masculinity. I find it interesting that he does not make this statement aloud, but rather thinks it, then decides against uttering it. I find this part of the above quote somewhat problematic. This silent interjection is, in fact, van der Merwe’s present-day voice surfacing in his text. I do not believe that Nicholas would have had the insight at the age of eighteen, or so, in apartheid South Africa, to understand, or question the multiple layers and facets of masculinity, because he is only really offered one way of being a man. Van der Merwe’s novel as a whole is inhabited on numerous occasions by such unsubtle authorial “intrusions,” some of which I return to later.

Nicholas is warned, in one instance as a child, about what will happen if he ever becomes a “moffie”. His parents are concerned about a man at their tennis club who is gay, a “moffie”, and this incites a warning speech of more than just the “dangers” of gayness (88-89). This speech highlights what underpins success or failure for the white Afrikaans family under apartheid. Nicholas’s father asks Nicholas and his sister to be attentive while he says what he needs to:

“There are three things I demand from you children: One, you must make your own money. Look at me when I speak to you, Nicholas. I’m saying this for your benefit. I will not look after you. You can be a tramp on the streets and I will leave you there.

Do you understand?”

“Yes, Dad.”

“Secondly, I want you to excel at some sport and at school. If you fail you can leave this house; you are on your own. Are you listening to me, Nicholas? What’s wrong with you, man?”

“Yes, Dad.”

“The third is the most important, and this is for you.’ He changes his tone to a sound I have not heard before as he turns to me. ‘If I find out that you are a moffie, that is the end.’ He waits for the gravity of the words to sink in, looking at me, looking through me. “That will be the end,” he says in a measured way, stepping slowly from one word to the next. (88-89)

Nicholas’s father’s speech expresses a very harsh type of exclusion from the family if the requirements of membership are not met. The first and second requirements, as set out by the father, are intended for both Nicholas and his sister, Bronwyn. They suggest that should the children fail to earn a sufficient living, they will be deserted. Should either of them fail to fare well at sport, or academically, they will be required to leave the space of the home. The final requirement is aimed at Nicholas only. I find it interesting that it is not also a message for Bronwyn, as it suggests that it is only the male child that is at risk of being, or becoming a homosexual. This discounts the female child from any such potential “deviance”. Nicholas’s father asserts that if he should find out that his son is a “moffie”, “[t]hat will be the end” (89). The consequences for failing to adhere to the third and final requirement are undefined and therefore seem immeasurably worse than the abandonment, or disownment set out in the first two. Nicholas’s father’s wishes for his son are therefore to be wealthy, rugged, intelligent and, most importantly, heterosexual.

The stories about his past that Nicholas offers up to the reader seem to be those that are most important, or relevant to his older self and probably the most formative events in his younger years. Most of these snippets put Nicholas in a compromised position. At every turn, Nicholas disappoints his father, or shames him, because his actions and reactions are perhaps more sensitive than what is expected of him and are less than manly.

Being “different”, as he calls himself, places Nicholas in the role of the anomalous, or “deviant” child. In one instance this “deviance”, which is a source of disappointment and anger for his father, manifests when Nicholas is taught how to ride a bicycle. A terrified Nicholas is told by his father not to “be a sissy, man”, that “he’s going to learn now [...] How difficult can it be?” (72). Nicholas’s mother tries to subdue her husband by reminding him that Nicholas is only four years old. Ultimately, Nicholas’s father expects too much from his young son and pushes him so that, as Nicholas recalls, “I summersault over the handlebars, into the bricks”, where upon landing “[m]y face is bleeding and there is a deep gash in my knee” (72-73). While Nicholas’s wounds are being seen to by his mother, “[my] father tells me that when he was my age he was not ‘so scared of everything’, and his parents could not even afford to give him a bicycle. If I want to grow up to be a man, I must stop being such a sissy” (73).

In the above incident, Nicholas is literally and figuratively pushed into being stronger and braver than he is at the time. This attempt by his father to toughen him up ends in a painful collision. While Nicholas’s wounds are dressed by his mother, his father offers yet another comparison between Nicholas and himself at Nicholas’s age. At Nicholas’s age, his father was fearless and was not quite as fortunate as Nicholas to even have a bicycle. This is characteristic of the hardened, brave and strong Calvinistic vision Nicholas’s father has for becoming a white Afrikaner man. It is to suffer unflinchingly and to make do with very little. Nicholas’s father

asserts that his own son is more fortunate than he was as a child; yet, in comparison, does not fare as well in learning how to be a man.

Nicholas's father's duty is to shape his son into a real man. The most formative shaping in Nicholas's life seems to be done with much negativity and violence. Nicholas constantly disappoints his father, because his actions are never masculine enough. Nicholas's being (labelled) a "sissy" is a source for, and evidence of, Nicholas's father's fear of his son being less than manly and thus his own failure to make a real man of his son. Another rather vivid memory that Nicholas recounts of his childhood is when

I have refused to eat dessert with a spoon and a fork. He said it's good manners and I said it made no sense. He said it's not for me to have an opinion; I have to obey him without question. I picked up the spoon and brought it to my mouth without touching the fork. Now nothing else, it seems to me, exists in this man I call father, but to hurt me. (61)

Nicholas is then beaten by his father with "a thick plaited rope [...] until I am lying in a foetal position with my hands over my ears and face" (62). The violence is so extreme in this scene that Nicholas lies in such a way as to protect his vital organs and the more delicate parts of his face. Nicholas acts beyond the strictures and boundaries that govern the home he lives in, the table he eats at. The inevitable punishment for this sort of behaviour is violent. After his beating, Nicholas is left on the bathroom floor, cupped hands over his ears, in a foetal position. Nicholas's beaten body takes the shape his father perpetually ridicules him for being: the infant, or the foetus. The rope used to beat Nicholas hangs malevolently behind the toilet door and

serves as a reminder of the violence that will ensue should the line separating good and bad behaviour be crossed and in so doing ensures a measure of “compliance”.

Nicholas’s older brother, Frankie, dies in a tragic accident. At the funeral on the family farm, Nicholas meanders off and ends up with the farm labourers, whose style of mourning seems more authentic to him than that of the congregation beside the grave. Although he is in safe hands, his parents think he is missing and their concern mounts. His uncle Hendrik finds Nicholas with the farm workers and as he is escorted to the safety of the farmhouse, Uncle Hendrik berates Nicholas for being “different and badly behaved, an embarrassment to my father; the sooner I change, the better. Now that Frankie is gone I’m the only boy. I’m the eldest, I must do what my father tells me, and he must respect my father at all times” (50).

Nicholas is instructed by his uncle to be a better son. It is reiterated that Nicholas, by being different, is a source of shame for his father. He is told that since the oldest son in the household has passed away, it is his duty to assume the role of the well-behaved, responsible first-born son. This matters now, because there is no other male heir. In the above, Nicholas’s behaviour is identified by another patriarch, not his father, of the van der Swart family, as being deviant. His failure to behave as a proper white Afrikaans son should is not just monitored by the father, but also by the father’s brother. This suggests that the overarching dominance of the patriarchal nation-state infiltrates not just the primary home, but the structure of the family too. If Nicholas’s father is not present to instruct him in the ways of masculinity, his uncle readily takes over.

In “Blanc de Blanc”, de Kock discusses identity formation which is particularly applicable to Nicholas in *moffie*. He says that

[i]dentity may be fashioned in at least two ways: first, according to a sense of rebellion *against* the strictures of one's own cultural habitus, or, second, it may be "seamed" – held together in a strained relation to a perceived alterity, a process in which one's own cultural ground is consolidated. (177)

In the light of what de Kock says, Nicholas is offered more than one way of being. His father only offers up ways of being a "real" man: playing sports, achieving well at school and behaving in a masculine fashion. The alternative to this, developing against the grain, is to be a "moffie". Two very opposite alternatives are presented to this young boy and as de Kock says, Nicholas's identity can only be formed "according to a sense of rebellion *against*" what he is offered, or can only be "held together in a strained relation to a perceived alterity" (177).

In early high school, Nicholas is faced with the difficulties his already-established, although fought-against, sexuality brings. "I have struggled to concentrate, always been a dreamer, haunted by worries and fantasies" (125). The above characterisation is coupled with his adolescent dilemma of where he fits into the world. This, along with grappling with his membership to a rather exclusive, restricting Christianity, leaves him flailing and failing academically. As he waits for his class results, he realises that failing "is not an option. I hear my father's words stretching over the years; painted over time like the line in the centre of the road [...] 'Do not shame me, Nicholas. Do not ever shame me' " (125). Even his mother's voice is invoked by this event, as he recalls her asking " '[h]ow would we face your cousins? Nobody ever fails in our family. Failure is for stupid people. It is not an option for a Van der Swart' " (125). Nicholas breaks the news of his academic failure to his parents. His father is very upset by the news and his reaction is to "[calculate] how much money I have cost him in this *lost* year;

then how much I have cost myself, how much it will be worth as a lost year of earning before retirement” (126). For Nicholas’s father then, a man’s worth is dependent on his earnings.

Nicholas disappoints again when the family visits Uncle Hendrik’s farm. He says “There is an incredulous silence in the ‘sacred’ dining room where I am standing, demanding that the dog be taken to a vet. An alien could just as well have entered the room and asked for sex with auntie Sannie” (292). The family looks at Nicholas with disbelief. It seems unheard of for them to have to take an animal to a vet. Nicholas then notices the cracks in their behaviour, the flaws in their very particular ways of being: “In this house things operate within the parameters of the rules laid out by the men, generation after generation. But there is weakness in their disbelief, feebleness in their overreaction. How can something so small cause them such angst?” (292).

When Nicholas is a little older, and his parents become progressively more preoccupied with sport, he recalls the shame he caused his parents by not being able to catch a ball. He says that

The heavy, red ball is whacked with a sharp crack in my direction and I know I won’t be able to catch it. It flies directly at me. It is undisputedly my responsibility to catch it; clear as a huge red finger pointing at my inability. It travels in the air for the first half of its journey, and then hits the firm beach, still damp from where the tide has pulled back from this canvas to paint my shame on [...] Those who aren’t shouting are counting, and I can feel my parents’ shame.
(60-61)

Nicholas sees both the ball and the tide as complicit in causing him shame. The red ball, flying towards him, forms a trajectory pointing at his incompetence at catching balls, and the tide stretching back, means that this incompetence can be duly noted by all the spectators on the

beach. Those spectators include Nicholas's parents, whom he most wants to impress, and even he notes their shame.

Both Marnus and Nicholas are trapped in a prescriptive, patriarchal system. Because they are *sons* they are both required to undergo certain rites of passage in order to be legitimate, "real" men. Although Marnus dies later on in the novel, Behr does offer up ways for him to be a man of his own choice *after* he has left home. Nicholas, on the other hand, after completing his time in the army, comes home accepting and confident of his new found self and, without any qualms, intends to expose his gayness to his family. Although this is an "easy", simplistic resolution offered by van der Merwe, it is most certainly an obvious alternative to the type of man Nicholas's father expects him to be.

On the surface, the mother figure in both novels seems mostly absent, adding a word here and there, but never really making a bold statement. Upon closer examination, however, the women and mothers in both the above novels and *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* do possess voices. I explore them in the following chapter.

Chapter 3: “Muted Mary” – the “Voiceless” South African Woman

The previous chapter explores the formation of white, male South African identity in the space of the white South African home during the last two decades of apartheid. In both cases the education of both Marnus and Nicholas in “becoming men” is left to the patriarch. In *The Smell of Apples*, *moffie* and *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* the mother is vocally absent, by and large, but present in other ways. The mothers in these novels are expected to perform certain duties, such as cooking, keeping the home tidy, supporting their husbands and bearing children. These novels suggest that mothers are to remain at a distance from teaching their sons how to be men, because mothers are *not* men and because the father, the perfect example of a man, is better qualified.

The women and mothers encountered in *The Smell of Apples*, *moffie* and *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* undergo certain kinds of oppression at the hands of the men in their lives. However, these female figures can be read as quietly, or silently answering back; they are rebels in their own right. Nicholas’s mother in *moffie* is posited as a quiet, sturdy representation of the space of the home. She is a more marginal mother figure than the other mothers I examine, but she is more vocal when provoked, although only when provoked. Ellen, the mother figure in *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs*, although a morally questionable character, arguably defies racial and hegemonic norms of the time by sleeping with a black “communist” from Namibia, following him about on his political ventures. In *The Smell of Apples* Leonore, Marnus’s mother, is the most intriguing and complex female figure of all those I discuss. Leonore has a passion for music and, more particularly, for the disallowed, and frowned-upon rebel genre of jazz. Subsidiary female characters from these novels will also be addressed.

3.1 “*Lest you ever forget to use your voice*”

The Smell of Apples presents the reader with an engaging look at accepted hegemonic norms of the apartheid era. Above and beyond good housewifery and childrearing, women in this context had to maintain a certain goodness and purity about them. In “Puritanism Transformed – Afrikaner Masculinities in the Apartheid and Post-apartheid Period”, du Pisani states that “the majority of Afrikaner women supported rather than challenged patriarchy” (162) and “resigned themselves to patriarchal authority and a domestic role” (164). Giliomee records that after the National Party came to power

[i]ncreasingly Afrikaner women became full-time wives and mothers, staying at home and employing a servant. They abandoned many of the tasks that had once occupied their time: cooking, slaughtering, making clothes and educating their children. They became politically conservative and took little part in the public agitation for the franchise for women [and] resigned themselves to the judgment of men [...] The church encouraged women to see their main role as the anchor of the family whose place was at home [...] Materially [a white, apartheid South African woman’s] task was to manage the family household with knowledge of hygiene and domestic science. [Her] reward would be successful sons and daughters who achieved much for the country and for the Afrikaner people. (376)

Leonore is, to all intents and purposes, a good wife, woman and mother. She certainly appears to meet the standards of what Giliomee sets out as appropriate for a wife and mother living under apartheid. However, Behr subtly suggests that Leonore feels trapped in her marriage, even

though she maintains the ideal image of the perfect, satisfied wife. This is suggested by Leonore possessing a voice of her own, which sporadically surfaces when circumstance, or her own boldness, allow.

Leonore was an opera singer before she married her husband and her first acquaintance with him was when she performed in Afrikaans at a diplomatic meeting overseas. When the General questions her about her singing career, Leonore asserts that “[b]eing a mother is really [her] full-time job” and “now [she teaches] others the lessons [she] learned” (40). One might view Leonore’s career as an opera singer as a means to express herself and succeed in the arts, to literally and figuratively have a voice of her own and to forge her own career and life. Her final performance was the lead in *Dido*, which according to Ilse, Leonore’s daughter, is no easy feat for a young voice, suggesting that Leonore excelled at her profession (40). Once the marriage begins, however, Leonore is silenced. Married life and children snuff her professional ambition and her talent is left for morning showers, rare private piano sessions, and teaching those less gifted. In short, marriage, the contract that binds Leonore to her husband for life, mutes her professionally and publically. The General asks Leonore whether she has ever regretted her decision to give up her career to which she replies, laughing, “Heavens no! How could I, with everything I have now?” (41). Leonore’s tone seems to suggest that she does, in fact, regret her decision. She laughs and drinks from her glass after she answers the general, creating a kind of diversion for both her and those at the table that makes her statement unconvincing. Leonore’s evasion of the topic of her career seems to suggest that she really does miss it, despite what she says to the General.

Stobie notes that “[a]lthough Mum is the most conservative member of this triad of women [comprising her, her sister, Tannie Karla and Ilse], she too resists the system insofar as she is able. In her anger at Marnus she echoes her sister’s assessment that she has sacrificed herself for her children (89), thus acknowledging the presence of a patriarchal power” (83). Leonore’s resistance to the strictures in her life is subtle, but it is present. This is supported, I argue, by the fact that she does not quit singing altogether.

The mention of Leonore’s final professional act as Dido is significant. Virgil’s Dido was the queen of prosperous Carthage and, according to Pierre Grimal, fell in love with Aeneas, who had arrived at Carthage after fleeing a war-torn Troy. A scorned suitor of Dido approaches Jupiter (Zeus’s Roman equivalent) to rid Carthage of Aeneas’s presence. Aeneas and his son are then hailed as the future founders of Rome and must leave to do the god’s bidding (Grimal 126). Dido commits suicide by stabbing herself before collapsing onto a funeral pyre, because she is heartbroken by Aeneas’s departure. She becomes a mere tool to highlight his sense of patriotism and *pietas*, or sense of duty to the gods and country.

Through what seems like tangential detail, Behr subtly alludes to Leonore’s self-sacrifice. Dido’s death on a funeral pyre invokes images of ceremonial sacrifice and echo Leonore’s subtle complaints about having sacrificed a large and vibrant part of her life for her family. Leonore’s “swansong” as Dido is apt. She is also committing suicide in terms of her career and again, like Dido, for a man. It is also interesting to note that Leonore’s swansong as Dido is called “Remember Me”. “Ilse says it’s the last song Mum sang when she was Dido in the opera [...] Maybe part of why [Marnus] [likes] it so much is because Mum sang it a lot while Dad was fighting in Rhodesia” (103).

Mum's performance of "Remember Me", especially while Dad is away at war, links Dido's longing for Aeneas and her own longing for her husband, who also leaves his woman as a result of a sense of duty and patriotism. Another point to note is that this final song, in its constant re-enactment and with the words "Remember Me," could invoke thoughts of Leonore remembering herself, her past before she became a wife and not just a plea to be remembered. This works particularly well with Mario's pictorial reminder to not forget to use her voice, which I mention later.

Behr seems pre-occupied with ideas of remembrance and forgetting. He seems to purposefully couple this idea of remembrance in this scene with another, very profound statement made by Dad earlier on. "Dad says we *shouldn't* ever forget. A *Volk* that forgets its history is like a man without a memory. That man is useless" (38). Juxtaposed, these sentiments seem to suggest the importance of memory from a highly masculinised, historical standpoint. It is to be rigorously maintained with pride. Leonore's plea for "remembrance" does not become public or nationalised, but rather, remains a personal statement. It only becomes a part of nationalist sentiment when she sings for her husband who is away at war.

The title of Leonore's swansong is echoed in the photograph given to her by Mario, presumably an old friend and fellow artist. The title of this sub-section of my thesis, "Lest you ever forget to use your voice", is taken from the scene in the novel when Marnus finds "a photograph of Mum singing. Ilse says it was taken when Mum was *Dido* in the opera. In the bottom corner there's an inscription in white ink: *To Leonore – lest you ever forget to use your voice, Mario*. I think Mario was the guy who sang in the opera with Mum" (45). One might imagine that this photograph was a parting gift from Mario, a reminder that she should never forget to use her

voice. This inscription, superimposed on an image of Leonore inhabiting her final professional role eerily foreshadows that she would lose her voice. In this way, Leonore is juxtaposed with her sister, who is an advocate for the female voice. A clear gendered embodiment of feminine strength, reason and logic, Tannie Karla, the platform-wearing “communist”, states in a letter that she is critical of “*every* marriage where the potential of a woman is lost because it is the man’s imagined *right* to be leader!” (111). Leonore’s marriage does not escape Tannie Karla’s criticism and Leonore’s voice, as pre-empted by Mario’s fear, is lost or forgotten, musically and socially. Leonore’s ability to have a career in singing is coupled with her having agency in life. Without the one, the other, although not completely absent, seems distant and nearly inaccessible.

There seems to be a struggle with the idea of Leonore’s *loss* of her voice and Mario’s forewarning of her *forgetting to use* it. The idea of loss, although it does go hand-in-hand with forgetting, seems to deny any agency on Leonore’s part. In some cases, I agree that she does *lose* her voice, but I maintain that this is as a result of her *forgetting to use* it. Forgetting, rather than loss, suggests to me that Leonore is not completely without agency, as she is, if she so chooses, able to recuperate her voice.

Marnus’s youthful, childish opinion about his mother exposes her yearnings for her musical days more fully than she may care to acknowledge:

Sometimes, when Dad isn’t home, you can hear Mum singing at the piano in the lounge, or in the bathroom. She sings all kinds of stuff from the operas and I think she might be *missing* the concerts and the overseas trips. Whenever she sings in the bath, it’s as if the whole house goes quiet to listen. (45) (my emphasis)

The image of the whole house falling silent when Leonore begins to sing suggests that this is a rare occurrence and in respect to her beautiful voice, the home, and its contents, stops its busy domestic routine to pay homage to her heartfelt singing. Notably, this all occurs “when Dad isn’t home” (45), a clear indication that the patriarch inhibits the expression of the female voice.

Leonore’s final act of resistance, or what I prefer to see as an act of rebellion against the hegemonic norms of apartheid South Africa, as represented by her husband, is when she sleeps with the Cuban General. Although, on the surface, the communication between Leonore and the General seems to be light and polite, upon a second reading of the text, one is aware that when the above incident takes place, Marnus is about to see the red figure reflected in the General’s mirror. In these scenes, much of Marnus’s attention is focused on Ilse, because he initially assumes that she is flirting with the General. Marnus’s diverted attention diverts the reader’s attention too, looking for clues in Ilse’s demeanour that, in retrospect, the red reflection is hers. In fact, as is implied towards the end of the novel, it is Leonore who sleeps with the General. This confirmation is not out of place when reading the following excerpt, as the scene is fraught with sexual tension and flirtation not between the General and Ilse, but between the General and Leonore, as Marnus suspects:

Mum sings “Summer Time” by George Gershwin. She sings it slowly, like real jazz, and she moves her shoulders like someone doing a slow dance. Her arms and shoulders move with the slow rhythm, and the purple dress falls around the piano stool like soft waves. In the candlelight her skin looks soft and pink, and I wish the whole world could see her. She sings the song twice, the second time a little

more lively, and she plays all kinds of nice chords. When the song ends, we all clap hands and Mum gets up and bows at us, acting like it's a real concert.

The General says a long sentence in Spanish and Mum thanks him and says that even though she can't understand Spanish it sounded like a compliment. He says that Mum's voice has moved him deeply. (153)

As Marnus notes, Leonore does not sing in the home when Dad is present and listening to jazz at all is taboo. I have noted in readings of both incidents (singing at home and listening to jazz) that it is the patriarch that hinders Leonore's self-expression and enjoyment of music. What is interesting in the above is that the audience here consists of the General, a very close mirror image of Leonore's own husband. He is everything Dad is, but hails from a different place. He even winks at Marnus, like his father does in an earlier scene. The irony here is that Leonore is using her voice not only while there is a man in the house, but for his pleasure too. She sings a jazz song, totally impermissible, not only in the home, but everywhere else, and sings it twice with feeling, swaying her body sensually to the rhythm and ending with a bow, partaking in all the ritual and tradition of her old performance days as an opera singer. It is at this moment in the novel that Leonore takes centre-stage.

Furthermore, Behr's use of Gershwin's "Summer Time" as Leonore's chosen song for the General mocks and subverts the facade of this supposedly perfect family. It goes so far as to comment on the hypocrisy of the space of the home that apartheid so readily relied on for its validity and strength. Behr places this song at the centre of a flirtatious and even dangerous version of the construction of the family. All the components of a traditional family are present: a mother, a father (albeit a replacement) and the children. By using "Summer Time" as a

backdrop, Behr contrasts this particular version of a family with its original, more “wholesome” version, delivering criticism on the traditional, apartheid family. This part of the narrative, where the General replaces the original father and with whom the mother commits adultery, is a happier, more harmonious and accepting version. Leonore sings while the General is present, but not while her husband is present. The adulterous family version is posited as more wholesome, desirable and liberating than the original version of the Erasmus family. “Summer Time” suggests that one day the children will grow up and leave the space of the home, but until then “[t]here’s a’ nothing can harm [them] / With daddy and mamma standing by” (Vaughan). The song suggests that the children occupy a safe familial space and will do so until they leave the home. This sentiment is eerily contrasted with the hidden truths of paedophilia and adultery that take place at the very heart of the Erasmus home, where both “daddy and mamma” (Vaughan) are complicit.

Music is prevalent throughout Behr’s novel. Leonore’s singing career is the most prominent example of this and Behr makes use of music in a number of other ways as a tool to deliver commentary on social matters. Aside from Leonore’s love for singing opera, she often

puts on her dark glasses and turns on the tape player to listen to some jazz. At home Dad doesn’t like us listening to jazz. Dad likes classical music, so Mum doesn’t want us to tell him about the jazz in the car. Dad says jazz is just one step away from pop music. It belongs in nightclubs like Charlie Parker’s at Sea Point, not in a Christian home like ours. (101-2)

Dad's preference for classical music and its ordered nature and Western origins stands in stark contrast to Mum's illicit enjoyment of jazz. By nature, jazz stands in direct contrast with classical music. It is improvised, refuses to follow a specific form and is historically "black". In his introduction to his *Making the Changes – Jazz in South African Literature and Reportage*, Titlestad states that in South Africa "jazz has, in some constitutive sense, always occupied a marginal political position [and] it provides a useful platform from which to characterise hegemony's preoccupations and its policing, as well as the development of counter-hegemonic practices of, among others, memory and space" (xii-xiii). Leonore's enjoyment of jazz is not devoid of hypocrisy, even if her listening to the genre in secret situates her at the margins of a dictatorial patriarchy and invokes a kind of sympathy in the reader. If South African jazz traditionally speaks from a marginal, black space and casts light reciprocally on hegemonic whiteness, then Leonore places herself in a precarious position. Leonore posits herself between the patriarch's more conventional musical preference and her own. She cannot openly or honestly enjoy one or the other. She does not fully agree with her husband's view on jazz, yet she cannot fully enjoy jazz, or openly champion the genre.

At this point, Leonore might be seen as yet another example of Stobie's double agent, closely connected with the idea of the bisexual body. Stobie, quoting Hemmings, notes that "[a] double agent appears to be part of one camp, but is strongly identified with another. The implication is that one can never be quite sure where her allegiance actually lies [...] The double agent [...] is set up as a link between two worlds, yet actually disrupts the very boundaries of the world we assume to be separate" ("Fissures" 74). Leonore is a very confusing figure in this sense. She does seem to act as a kind of bridge, or a link between two worlds – in this case, two very different musical worlds, but, as Stobie quotes, she "disrupts the boundaries" of these worlds (Hemmings

quoted in Stobie “Fissures” 74). Leonore does this by exposing her musical “weakness” to her children and holding them responsible for keeping the secret. This is not the only instance in the novel that presents Leonore as a “double-agent”. Her not-so-secret affair with the General comes to mind, but this will be dealt with at a later stage. One should keep in mind that Leonore is obliged to maintain the appearance of a committed, white Afrikaans family woman.

I note that classical music is the only permissible genre of music in the Erasmus home, because the overarching “white” ideals in the household are to be maintained. It is interesting, then, that Leonore listens to her jazz, but does so in her little Beetle, a mobile vessel used to carry her children about and run errands, an instrument of public domestic duties – for Leonore, a public private space. For Stobie

[i]n the musical hierarchy represented, Dad’s purist, religion-backed stance is set against Mum’s broader tastes (ironically, for a form developed by black musicians), which she indulges in without her husband’s knowledge. The novel thus sets up a discursive tension between official sanctions (which differ according to the view of the authority figure), desire or appetite, power and secrecy. (“Fissures” 75)

Despite Leonore’s resistance to conforming to what is acceptable for an Afrikaans woman it is evident that, at times, she stereotypes other genres of music, just as her husband does. This is made evident through Marnus’s continuous mimicry of his parents’ ideals. An example of this is that

[w]hen we’re at Frikkie’s house, we listen to LM Radio sometimes. They play pop music on LM all the time, and Mum doesn’t want us to listen to it. Pop music

can cause you to become a drug addict. Before Lucifer was thrown out of heaven, he was the angel of music, and so it is only logical that the Communists will use pop music to take over the Republic. The Beatles have said that they're more important than Jesus. The Beatles and Cat Stevens are really instruments of Lucifer and the Antichrist, but mankind is too foolish to read the writing on the wall. (67)

Marnus's ideas about music are clearly those of his parents, even if they are superficial. Any music that deviates from classical norms is heavily politicised, laden with religious criticism and a danger to the people of the Republic and good Christians.

I find Behr's allusion to music and especially jazz in this novel fascinating and decidedly conscious. Titlestad makes use of the qualities of jazz to explain how the gaps and cracks in South African history can be negotiated, remapped, improvised and changed for better or for worse:

In transferring, for instance, an item in an ontological equation of meaning from one location to another, new patterns of meaning, new combinations of possibility are performed out of necessity. Some of these transpositions, we will see, are creative, magnanimous and dialogic; others are constricted, narrow and reiterative, entrenching, rather than challenging the imaginative failings of conventional racial and cultural discourse. (78)

Titlestad's allusion to social and cultural possibilities and potentials of a pre-transformative South Africa to the improvisational, changeable, flexible nature of a jazz song is particularly poignant. Behr's narrative hints at this style and texture of jazz on many levels. Superficially, the

novel exposes the decay at the centre of a supposedly perfect family, representative of the apartheid regime as a whole. In doing this, Behr implicitly questions whether the Erasmus family and South Africa as a whole will create “new combinations of possibility [that][...] are creative, magnanimous and dialogic [...] or constricted, narrow and reiterative” (Titlestad 78). Marnus may be seen as the potential that can make those changes Titlestad suggests. In the childhood narrative, which is deeply interwoven with old South African sentiments, one might see the interjections or vignettes of Marnus’s older self as fillers, or improvisations in a jazz narrative, so to speak. This is a new story woven into an older one, suggesting improvisation and the potential for creativity. Whether Marnus can improve on an older narrative is questionable. After an unexpected attack on the border Marnus is badly wounded and expected to die. His final thoughts echo his father’s sentiments about nation and history:

The black section-leader’s face is beside me. He asks whether I have any feeling in my legs. He tells me I will be fine. I try to shake my head, to warn him. I try to speak to him, to tell him that I knew all along, just like the others.

But I am dumb.

I feel Dad’s face against my chest and my arms around his head, and I feel safe.

But now it is a different safety. Death brings its own freedom, and it is for the living that the dead should mourn, for in life there is no escape from history.

(198)

Marnus imagines embracing his father as he approaches death. He claims to feel safe, not because he imagines this embrace, but because he can feel the approach of death and “its own freedom” by bringing an “escape from history” (198). Marnus’s final words strongly echo Dad’s

sentiment that “[a] *Volk* without a history is like a man without a memory” (38). Prior to this moment of death, it is a black section leader who tries to calm Marnus and ensure him that he will be fine. As Marnus approaches death, it is his last wish to “tell him that I knew all along, just like the others. But I am dumb” (198). Just what he wants to tell the section-leader is never disclosed. A desperate warning about the narrative of history seems imminent, but Marnus cannot deliver it. Like Leonore on so many occasions, Marnus is rendered mute, with an important message on his lips, never to be spoken, left ambiguous.

Like a number of characters in Behr’s *The Smell of Apples*, the black section-leader could be seen as a kind of double-agent too, because he is a black man fighting a “white man’s war”. Essentially, the section leader is fighting a war that helps to reinstitute the demise and marginalisation of “non-white” people and he is complicit in this. Marnus’s desperate attempt to declare that he knew all along may be seen as a kind of recognition of this “double agency”, recognition of complicity. Marnus shakes his head when the section leader says he will be fine, a non-verbal negation of continuing to be complicit in this regime and in this life. The way that Marnus imagines holding his father is as if holding a child. It is his father, a weighty, suffocating representation of accumulated hegemonic discourse who presses down on his chest as he negotiates the threshold between life and death.

Stobie claims that in some of the final border scenes, Marnus “is revealed to be representational failure, victim, and sacrifice. The tests of manhood that he faces as squadron leader reveal him to be unmanly, a coward, and the inferior of his black subordinate” (“Fissures” 81). Stobie links this military “failure” “of this particular military endeavor, and the ultimate demise of apartheid”, with Marnus’s sexual impotence (“Fissures” 82). She states that

it becomes clear that the paternal lineage of grandfather, father and son will not continue into the future. Marnus has undergone the rite of passage into adulthood, but the implication in this passage is that he will not reproduce a further Erasmus. Marnus's "dick" is not a phallus, signifier of phallogocentrism. It is flaccid, a homunculus with "tiny lips in the act of yawning," the only baby he will ever procreate. The dark hairs connect him to his father-line, but the lighter hairs are reminders of his childish self [...] Marnus lacks potency; he has no stake in the future. Through this thwarted fertility he marks the cul-de-sac of his father's belief systems and the futility of an unjust war. ("Fissures" 81-82)

Marnus's death could be seen as a closed, unquestionable end to a narrative of manhood and masculinity, and, because he is subjected to these ideals, his character is rendered impotent and he must die. This idea echoes Titlestad's option of history-making by reiterating the status quo, rather than creatively improvising the narrative of history. However, I think Behr's use of Marnus's death is more complex and hopeful than the more bleak option I have presented in the light of Titlestad's theory. Marnus's impotence and death suggest that this particular line of the Erasmus family will not continue. It is Marnus's father and his insistence on his son being just like him that, in fact, causes his son's demise. There is a sense of hope in that Marnus's death means that he can transcend the structure and strictures of the regime of the state and family and in so doing discontinue a pathological line of manhood and fatherhood. In contrast with this forced generational insistence on being a military man, Barnard suggests that by using the character Jan Bandjies, a fisherman, Behr does offer up other, more, creative, realistic and sustainable ways of generational inheritance. She says that

[a]gainst the grain of Marnus's narration, which presents apartheid's stereotypes as permanent facts of nature, Jan presents nature itself as changeable – and in decline. In contrast to General Erasmus, hell-bent to ensure the survival of his social order and to replicate himself in his children, Jan forbids his sons to even come down to the docks, lest they decide to become fishermen like him. He stands, in short, as an alternative namer and interpreter in the novel; a figure who, in his very vulnerability, presents a challenge to the fundamental ideological principle of reproduction and self-perpetuation. (220)

Behr also makes what I think is an intentional intertextual reference to *The Smell of Apples* in his latest novel, published in 2009, called *Kings of the Water*. This reference comes as the protagonist, Michiel, walks along a Durban beach with an Indian officer with whom he will later be caught having sex. Although what he is about to do is a risky feat, he mentally assures himself that the two will not be caught out, because “during other visits [he] hadn't encountered another human being. Not a single fisherman. No father teaching his son how to control a rod” (169). Besides the obvious innuendo of heterosexual control of a child's sexuality in this image, it invokes the fishing scene in *The Smell of Apples*. This echoing of detail from his first novel laced with ideas of male bonding and grooming may be a subtle way to offer up what Marnus's destiny could have been had he not died. The landscape offered here is the beach, echoed countless times in *The Smell of Apples*. A fisherman, like Jan Bandjies and a boy, being taught how to fish by his father, who could have been Marnus that day on the beach when he disappointed Dad so much, are both mentioned. This seems to be a direct allusion to *The Smell of Apples*, but the sentences are constructed in a negative sense. There is *no* fisherman and *no* boy being taught how to fish

by his father; their presence is negated. Behr intrinsically denies the presence of characters from his *The Smell of Apples* and their haunting the landscape of his most recent narrative; yet he makes them present through his words by mere mention. Along these lines I would like to argue that the figure of Michiel, who, although he is found out to be gay and flees the country, only to return many years later, may be a ghostly future representation of Marnus and what he could have been had he not died. Even though, as I have argued, Behr does offer up positive readings for the future of the Erasmus family, as well as South Africa, it seems that Behr has not limited the narrative scope of his first novel to its own pages, but extended the potential of its characters, especially Marnus, in this case, to those of this later work.

Beyond the characters in the novel, I am interested in how Behr, the man, haunts this jazz-like narrative. In fact, Behr's own life narrative might be seen as the master narrative, with his works as improvisations and re-workings for an improved future. Like his characters, Behr was also a double-agent, but in a literal sense. He was first an informant for the apartheid government and, because "his handlers grew to believe that instead of furthering their cause he was in fact politically conscientizing students" (Stobie "Fissures" 72), they were "about to expose [him] politically as well as [because of his] history of closeted gay experiences" (Behr "Fault Lines" n.p.). In his conference speech, Behr states that

to say that one has been payed [sic] for working secretly against the struggle for justice in South Africa would reduce one at once to one thing: an agent of the South African regime. I have always suspected that the only voice people will hear from that moment on – in spite of the complex vicissitudes of self, is the

voice of betrayal: a voice that cannot be trusted, that is incapable of truth. (Behr
 “Fault Lines” n.p.)

Behr’s final words in his speech, given below, resonate with Titlestad’s notion of the narrative of history and its transformative potentials:

Like my betrayal, the speaking here today publically, again constitutes a selfish act aimed at some form of self-integration, ending or shattering an autobiography of denial. I can only hope that this is a more warranted and justified form of selfishness. I do not believe that there is redress for the past; but in as much as many people in this country believe in unearthing and telling pasts in a bid to begin the painful process of creating something better, I am willing to live, to write, to speak, and to listen. (“Fault Lines” n.p.)

Barnard states that “[t]he novel *is* very much concerned with mirrors, as well as with doublings, recognitions, and misrecognitions” and I fully agree (212). I should add, though, that although the novel clearly concerns itself with “replicas”, “duplicates”, “originals” and “fakes”, which might welcome a reading of binaries, opposites, of ones and others, I strongly feel that, in presenting these very obvious binaries, and the “contradictions, rationalizations, slippages, and inconsistencies in constructing myths and ideologies about race, nation, religion, masculinity, gender, and sexuality” (Stobie “Fissures” 76), the novel actually resists a Manichean reading of these contrasting elements.

Stobie lists a number of reactions to Behr’s confessional speech and for her, “[i]n general, the discourse that arises with regard to Behr’s confession is absolutist, judgmental, and binarist. I do

not wish to exonerate Behr's actions, and I realize that the appearance of relativizing truth is unsettling to the reader of a confession" ("Fissures" 74). As Stobie says, "Behr repeatedly refutes simple either/or formulations in his speech. Instead, he raises notions of 'multiple truths,' 'multiple voices and testimonies,' and refers to the texts which he encountered as part of his spying activities which 'shattered any beliefs in absolutes' " ("Fissures" 72-3). In contrast to some reactions to Behr's confession which are exaggeratedly polarised, despite his advocacy of "multiple truths" (73), I see *The Smell of Apples* (to which, as Stobie says, "the confession has become a kind of appendix or coda"), as inviting readings that acknowledge the complexities and lack of neatly packaged endings or solutions of the novel and of the author's life ("Fissures" 73). Stobie claims that "Behr's representation of the bisexual⁷ Afrikaner patriarch reveals the fissures within apartheid's 'Eden,' the inevitability of its demise, and more hopeful means of reading the future of South Africa, through the lenses of hybridity, the feminine, and the resilience of the natural world" ("Fissures" 70). Aside from those associated with Leonore and her literal and figurative voice, the theme of the "voiced" and "voiceless" woman is present throughout Behr's novel. It is almost always so, that if a woman is what I term "voiced," she is inevitably disliked, a thorn in the side of the patriarch and a hindrance to his desires. Should she keep quiet, keep things to herself, she is considered tolerable. The best example of "hybridity, the feminine, and the resilience of the natural world" in *The Smell of Apples* is, of course, Tannie Karla, Leonore's sister, who, although she leaves South Africa during the course of the novel, is a stark reminder to Dad and Leonore of these "fissures" Stobie mentions ("Fissures" 70). She also, of course, acts as a role-model for young Ilse.

⁷ I would like to propose a reading of Marnus's father as a "bi-faceted," or hypocritical individual rather than one that suggests that he is "bisexual." It might be seen as problematic to label him "bisexual" simply because he has raped a boy.

Tannie Karla, Leonore's sister, is one of the women in *The Smell of Apples* who definitely possesses a voice. She readily asserts her beliefs, even when they are not wanted and especially when they are not wanted. Tannie Karla is Leonore's younger sister, "a *laatlam* [...] much younger than Mum, and only about twelve years older than Ilse" (105). Tannie Karla's youth and junior status imply that she is of a new, more progressive generation than her sister and ensure solid social ties with her niece and nephew. Tannie Karla has a positive influence on Mum, Marnus and Ilse. They all enjoy her presence. This gaiety soon comes to an end

when she finished university and went to work at the *Cape Times*. Everyone asked her why she wasn't going to *Die Burger*, but she said she wanted to improve her English and she could only do that if she worked for an English newspaper. And it was there that she got mixed up with the Liberals. When she started wearing platform shoes and jeans, Dad said she was acting more like someone who had studied at 'Moscow on the Hill', than at *his* Alma Mater. When she came to visit, she and Dad had lots of arguments, and eventually Dad said he'd had enough of her strange ideas. He didn't want her coming into our house any more.

But to us, Tannie Karla seemed no different from the times before she got mixed up with the Liberals at the *Cape Times*. (105-106)

The character of Tannie Karla is the embodiment of strong, egalitarian views that are missing in the Erasmus home. She is an educated woman, but disappoints when she goes to work for an English newspaper. Dad refuses to read the *Cape Times* "because the journalists who work there are mostly English or foreigners who didn't grow up here, and don't care about South Africa. [It]

is just propaganda” (85). Dad denounces the English papers as rubbish written by journalists who know nothing of South Africa, or of its politics. He also equates Englishness with foreignness, implying that English people, despite being South African, are not of the soil and have no right to comment on its workings. Tannie Karla is labelled by Dad as one of *them*, based on her wardrobe, and is said to appear as if she hails from the University of Cape Town. His particular reference to the University of Cape Town as “Moscow on the Hill” (105) is a direct and fallacious reference to the ideals of the university being communistic. In fact, the University of Cape Town was known as “Moscow on the Hill” (105) merely because it opposed the ideals of apartheid. Therefore, fallaciously, Tannie Karla is also labelled a communist, simply because her views oppose those of apartheid, as well as those of the head of the Erasmus family. She cannot comply with Dad’s ideals, so she is never to set foot in the home again.

As mentioned previously, Tannie Karla is also critical of Leonore’s marriage. She is a reasonable, honest judge in the illusory world that Behr offers the reader in *The Smell of Apples*. Tannie Karla criticises the way many women give their entire being and even happiness over to the men in their lives. Tannie Karla is written off as a lost cause in the Erasmus family and is no longer allowed into the home, because

[she] had turned into a Communist, and Mum wasn’t going to allow Communists into her house and into our lives. Then Ilse said that Dad never said Tannie Karla was a *Communist* – Dad said she was a *Liberal*. But Mum said that Communists and Liberals are one and the same thing, and that Ilse shouldn’t voice her opinions on matters she knew nothing about. She said Ilse should watch out or she’d turn out to be just like Tannie Karla. (108)

Ilse's response to the same warning from her mother at a later stage in the novel is " 'And then? Will you ban me from home too?' " (149). Ilse is critically detached from events in the Erasmus household and becomes progressively more critical of the status quo. Marnus's comment that "to us, Tannie Karla seemed no different from the times before she got mixed up with the Liberals at the *Cape Times*" (106) also echoes Ilse's defence of Tannie Karla and her open-mindedness. He comments on her not having changed despite "[getting] mixed up with the Liberals" (106). For once he is not ventriloquising his parents, but is evaluating Tannie Karla's personality on his own. Although both children do show signs of independent thought, Ilse shows the most change and development, even if she is subsidiary to the focalising protagonist, to whose thoughts the reader is always privy. Ilse seems most affected and induced into critical thought by her trip to Holland⁸ and, of course, by Tannie Karla.

It is clear that Ilse develops a keen liking for her aunt. Because of her exposure to Tannie Karla, Ilse slowly develops from the proverbial "perfect" daughter, who ventriloquises her parents' ideologies along with her brother, to one whose obvious silences infer a kind of disagreement with, or resistance to, the status quo. From this mode of silent resistance, Ilse develops a more vocal and active style of resistance. She is later seen as challenging authority, being "otherwise," and eventually leaves the country, presumably under self-imposed exile.

Ilse's quiet resistance is noticeable early on in the novel, but a good example of this resistance occurs later, when Dad is showing the General the slides of Tanganyika and Rhodesia. The

⁸ It is interesting that after a trip to Holland in around the 1970s, Ilse is more outspoken and critical of the status quo at home, because it is the Dutch who colonised South Africa and who are the forefathers of the Calvinistic Afrikaners. This suggests progress of thought overseas contrasted with a stagnation, or regression of humanity in the former colony.

images are violent and gruesome. The men watching the slides remain unmoved.⁹ Marnus notes that

[t]he slide shows four naked terrorists standing in a clearing. Their hands are tied above their heads and a soldier's holding a bayonet against one's chest. You can see the white of his eyes on his black face. It could be that he's crying, because his face is pulled like he's screaming. Ilse gets up and says that she's going to make some coffee. (171)

Ilse here displays what could be a form of passive resistance. Instead of participating in the gleeful camaraderie of looking at pictures of terrified terrorists¹⁰ she does more than just keep quiet and avert her gaze, she gets up to do something else. In this scene, she opposes the sheer lack of humanity shared by both the captor in the slide and by those enjoying these images and, therefore, the political ideology that pervades this scene.

Another situation where Ilse is presented as resistant to the status quo is when Neville, the Erasmus housekeeper's son, fails to meet his mother after his school holiday at the train station when he is due to return, because he has been severely burnt as punishment for stealing some coal. Ilse becomes an advocate for Neville and the wrongs that have been committed against him. She does not brush his disappearance aside as typically "coloured", or "deviant" behaviour, like her mother does. Doreen worries about her son and seems certain that something terrible has happened. Leonore attempts to placate her, believing that he is probably up to some or other harmless mischief. However, Doreen's motherly instinct is proved to be accurate.

⁹ Dad allowing Marnus to view these slides at such a young age is also a mode of grooming. He is facilitating the demonization of the black "terr," delighting in his violent demise and desensitising his son to the racial brutality of war. Dad is modelling this behaviour for his son who will participate in the same brutality, but in a different war.

¹⁰ Often abbreviated to "terr."(Williams 138) I will use the abbreviated version henceforth.

Once Neville's whereabouts and state of health are made apparent, Leonore is guilt-ridden. When Marnus wants to know how Little Neville came to have burns all over his body, Leonore evades the question, writing it off as a long story for another time. Ilse is firm with her mother and calls on her to admit to these horrors, to allow them into consciousness, when she says " 'Tell him, Mummy! Tell Marnus what they did to him,' and her shoulders start shaking so much she stops speaking" (130). Ilse notes the racial aspect to Neville's victimisation, as he was covered in lard and held up against a locomotive furnace as punishment for stealing a few handfuls of coal (131). She says "that what makes it all worse is the fact that it was three white men that did it to him" (138). Ilse does not only have empathy for Little Neville, but also has the foresight to question how this incident will change his worldview. Marnus continuously asks his mother about the incident and persists in asking about the racial aspect of the victimisation. Leonore explains that not all white people are Christians and that, along with being lower-class, or uneducated, is the reason why a white person could have committed a crime. Notably, Leonore fails to apply this logic to the "wrong-doings" of "non-white" people, like Chrisjan, the ex-gardener, for example. Leonore surmises that the perpetrators were railway workers, as "[r]ailway people aren't all that educated as a rule" (139). Leonore clearly tries to protect the image of the pure, good, white person by explaining and justifying criminal behaviour as a result of distance from God, hailing from the lower rungs of society or being uneducated. This is not dissimilar from Dad's reasoning for Tannie Koerant's bad behaviour. The above traits that lead to, or justify this criminal behaviour are the very opposite to what the purist ideals were for the respectable, Afrikaner during apartheid. Leonore holds this *other* type of whiteness at a distance for fear of identifying with it. She attributes a number of "deviant" qualities to the perpetrators,

so that the crime is not racial, but a matter of class, religion and education, something she is exempt from, since she is the “epitome” of a good, white Afrikaner wife.

Ilse responds to Leonore’s presumption that the perpetrators were railway workers by asking “ ‘Oh, where did Mummy hear they were railway people?’ ” (139). Ilse’s response is not unkind, but shows up her mother’s (and society’s) logic as blinkered and hypocritically skewed. Ilse questions her mother about her assumption that the people who burnt Little-Neville had to have been lower-class, uneducated railway workers if they were white. Ilse notes and criticises her mother’s problematic failure to link deviant behaviour with any form of whiteness, when associated with what is, clearly, an act stemming from racist ideals. This suggests that Ilse is a critical onlooker in Behr’s novel. Unlike Tannie Karla who must voice her opinions from overseas, Ilse comes to represent another dissenting voice, but from the inside of this hegemony.¹¹

After Leonore, Marnus and Ilse visit Little-Neville in hospital and actually see how badly burnt he is, Ilse says that it would be better if Little-Neville dies. Her explanation for this has nothing to do with the physical harm he has incurred, but the emotional harm:

“Mummy, just imagine [...] how he’s going to *hate* white people.”

“My dear Ilse, how can you speak like this?” Mum asks.

“The Bible teaches us about *all* these things. You’ve just been confirmed and yet you speak to someone who has never set foot in a confirmation class. We are taught

¹¹ I argue later, by using Jonothan Dollimore’s *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault*, that “deviance,” or in this case, Ilse’s critical voice, is more threatening and destabilising to the hegemonic centres when it *stems* from those centres.

to forgive and forget, never to repay evil with evil. If everyone in this country could just live the way the Bible tells...”

“People can’t *eat* Bibles.” (191)

Ilse’s greatest display of rebellion is when she is announced as Jan van Riebeeck¹² High School’s head girl for 1974. After this announcement, the national anthem, “Die Stem van Suid-Afrika”, literally translated as “The Voice of South Africa” in English, is to be sung and Ilse is to play the piano. Although Ilse is a talented musician, she begins the introduction of the anthem no less than three times. On her third attempt, Ilse “pounds the keys so loud that the ponytail at the back of her head bounces from side to side” (145). Ilse draws out notes where they should be shorter, extends them when they should end and proceeds to play all four verses of “Die Stem”, where usually, only the first is sung in ceremonies such as this one (145).

Ilse uses the school piano as a tool with which to transgress the gendered boundaries imposed upon her by Afrikaner society and with which to be heard. She brings her awakening conscience into the school hall and demonstrates the farcical nature of her society. She could not have chosen a better song or event to air her views. “Die Stem,”¹³ with overtly Afrikaner symbols, such as “creaking wagons [cutting] their trails into the earth,” invokes ideas of the Great Trek. The anthem also strongly alludes to the worship of God in a Calvinistic sense and the importance of patriarchy. Interestingly, the “us” or “we” in the anthem is limited to white Afrikanerdom – the song belongs to no cultural or racial group other than white Afrikaners, and yet it is the

¹² Ilse’s school is named after the Dutch man who “founded the settlement that became known as the Cape of Good Hope on 6 April 1652” (Giliomee 1) and became known as the founding father of the Afrikaners. Van Riebeeck then represents the start of “civilisation,” of good, white governance in the Cape and a way for Afrikaners to be historically connected to Europe.

¹³ Also written by CJ Langenhoven in 1918. Interestingly, Langenhoven is seen by Afrikaners as the father of Afrikaans literature.

national anthem – for *everybody* to sing. The anthem glorifies the Great Trek and the unwavering tenacity of Afrikaners to make a life in the harsh environs of South Africa, places both God and men at the forefront of this struggle and delineates the place of women and children. The anthem also invokes images of sacrifice, with “we shall sacrifice what you ask of us / We will live, we will die / We for you, South Africa.”¹⁴ The “you” is ambiguous here and could either be a reference to God, or country. Either way, this is an image of unconditional sacrifice for God, or country.¹⁵ The religious and patriarchal aspects of this song, which was the national anthem of South Africa up until 1994, were reiterative of and relevant to a white Afrikaner society of the apartheid era. This is what makes Ilse’s mockery of the national anthem such a transgressive act. In previous examples, Ilse’s resistance to the status quo has consisted of perhaps one or two profound lines. In this case, she literally takes centre stage and openly begins to intelligently defy and criticise white, Afrikaner society by overtly deconstructing a song that is core to white Afrikaner identity.

Stobie sees Jan van Riebeeck High School as a “bastion of conservative mores” and that Ilse’s performance “satirizes the patriotism and piety of the audience by excess [...] which leads to a bewildered and garbled polyphony representing multiplicity and dissent” (“Fissures” 83). Like her mother, Ilse uses music to resist society’s ideals. She is more commanding than her mother, though, because she harnesses the power of “Die Stem” and leads a hall full of white South Africans into showing their own society up as imperfect, unstable and corrupt. Ilse’s

¹⁴ These are my own translations of “Die Stem”. Interestingly, the official English translation often deviates from the original, presumably for the sake of rhyme. This renders the English version far less patriarchal and patriotic. Also, the English title of “Die Stem” is “The Call of South Africa.” Although somewhat similar, “voice” seems to be more personal and intimate than “call”.

¹⁵ The idea of unconditional sacrifice for God and country in the national anthem is synonymous with the apartheid ideologies that justified the Border War. I also note that this is yet another instance in *The Smell of Apples* where Behr alludes to sacrifice for a masculine hegemony.

performance makes evident that their literal and figurative voices are not, in fact, “in unison” and that they only know one verse out of four – this shows that they are not politically conscious and that their patriotism is, in fact, superficial and vacuously ritualised.

Behr does not limit his novel to representing only the main female characters as strong and vocal, but also lends these attributes to some of the more subsidiary female characters. For example, the ghost of the headmistress of Jan Van Riebeeck Primary School and Tannie Koerant come to embody extreme examples of the “voiced” and “voiceless” woman respectively. Marnus recounts a story about Brollocks, the woodwork teacher, and the murder of the headmistress:

Everyone says that Brollocks’¹⁶ father was the overseer who murdered the headmistress of Jan Van Riebeeck. Many years back, the school overseer murdered the headmistress and hanged her body from a beam in the art class. They say he got hold of her between the woodwork room and the art class, and then he strangled her with a skipping rope. Then he used the rope to hang her from the beam. The Coloured cleaners say that at night her ghost still appears along the passage that leads to the art class. Especially when the Southeaster blows, or when there’s mist pushing down Table Mountain and a heavy fog hanging over Table Bay. The Coloureds that have seen her say she just stands there in silence, listening to the foghorn across the bay, and waiting for the overseer. (54-55)

Even if the incident is mythologised, far from the truth and heavily embellished, stories say more about their inventors than their subjects. The headmistress in the above excerpt, who

¹⁶ This name is reminiscent of the tales of “Brolloks en Bittergal” by CJ Langenhoven. These are Afrikaans children’s tales of two troll-like “bogey men” who snatch away little children in order to eat them. The name “Brollocks” then elevates the woodwork teacher to a mythically fearful, monstrous status, especially in Afrikaner consciousness.

significantly remains nameless, is murdered by Brollocks, the woodwork teacher's father. There is no reason for this murder in the story. It merely took place and is to remain unquestioned. This is an example of a simple school story, elevated to the realm of myth. Woodwork was a "gender specific" subject at schools during apartheid and remained so until the late nineties. As the teacher of this subject, Brollocks' character is a highly masculinised one. The myth of Brollocks Senior perpetuates, without justification, a violent type of masculinity, as well as hierarchies in the order of gender and provides reason for Brollocks, who is guilty of no crime, to be feared. This father-son myth points to how Marnus is seen as a copy of his father in many instances and is expected to live out the very masculine legacy of his father. In both cases, the sons inherit their father's surnames and become variants of the names they share with their fathers and continue their legacies ("Fissures" 76).

Brollocks then teaches young boys to construct useful items from pieces of wood. In a highly masculine environment, they are taught to make a more meaningful whole out of less meaningful parts. This contrasts with the "deconstruction" of the female body as a legacy passed on from Brollocks Senior. Added to the fact that the reader has no knowledge of the name of the headmistress, the headmistress in this myth is posited as an object. Brollocks, as the subject of the overall myth, is the *doer*. He possesses the agency to actively murder the headmistress, where even in life, contrary to her title, the headmistress is a passive object *to* which things are done.

I find it interesting that only the Coloured people are said to have seen the ghost of the headmistress. Perhaps Behr is implying that it takes a subject on the margins to see another on the margins. The ghost of the headmistress is also only seen when Cape Town is enshrouded by mist, or fog, or being plagued by restless wind. She is declared to stand in silence, "listening to

the foghorn across the bay” (55). From being a woman in a position of power and agency, the headmistress is removed from this station to one where she is waiting, listening, passive, a mythological warning that a woman should not do a “man’s job”. Even the foghorn on the bay suggests a kind of passivity, as it is meant to warn sea-faring vessels of their proximity to land, to prevent them from coming too close and the danger of crashing into rocks. However, it can do nothing to stop a vessel from continuing its course to a perilous end. The headmistress’s act of listening to this foghorn is futile in itself. It is passivity and futility mixed, as she is already dead, at the hands of a violent man.

Another subsidiary character, Tannie Koerant, translated as “Aunt Newspaper” in English, possesses a rather self-explanatory name: she is a gossip in the eyes of Dad and the family. Dad uses her as an example of a person who is a product of her terrible upbringing. Tannie Koerant’s gossiping, however, goes a little too far on one occasion and results in her having to apologise to an entire community:

It was because of all her gossiping [...] that people started calling her Koerant. Everyone knew her, right from Meru to Kilimanjaro. Many people hated Sanna Koerant. When the Mau Mau murdered the whites in Kenya, she told everyone that Kilimanjaro was calling her children to claim their birthright and that *Uhuru* was close. It caused such trouble when she said that, that she had to go and apologise to many people before they would allow Sanna back into their homes. Dad says, just like Sanna Koerant became such a bitter old woman because of her drunk father, so children that come from stable Christian homes will end up being

stable Christian grown-ups. The dreams of the parents become the dreams of the children. (185)

Tannie Koerant is a rogue white voice in a white, black-fearing, patriarchal community. On principle, the fact that she is a woman should exclude her from having a voice, yet she is a character that goes even further than saying something that denounces this white colonialist supremacy – she states matter-of-factly, that the blacks killing the whites in Kenya is a matter of course. This is shocking and absurd to her community. Whether Tannie Koerant is correct in her predictions, or not, she is labelled a gossip and written off (at least by Dad) as a nuisance to society and a product of a childhood spent with a drunk father. This excerpt, like the one about Brollocks, suggests again the significance of generational inheritance. Tannie Koerant is prohibited from visiting any of the homes in the community, until she apologises for her ridiculous musings. This extreme attitude towards Tannie Koerant suggests a real fear that what she predicts could come true. It suggests that she is not an old, lunatic gossip, but rather the bringer of the news of an undesirable possibility to a white community in denial.

Although Behr's female characters in *The Smell of Apples* are arguably strong, opinionated and thinking women, he does not spare them the complexities and "vicissitudes of self" afforded his male characters ("Fault Lines" n.p.). Leonore may be sexually defiant in sleeping with the General and rebellious when she listens to jazz, but she is a compliant wife when it counts. Ilse's voice develops throughout the narrative, but her accusatory voice is saved for the company of her mother and never her father. Tannie Karla, the strongest, most sober voice of reason leaves South Africa, after which she attempts to reason with her sister through the post – an exercise which is not fruitful, since the letter is intercepted by Ilse and kept from Leonore. Behr portrays

his female characters as bold, or potentially bold, but never in a way that seems unrealistic in a time such as under apartheid. In contrast, van der Merwe's mother figure that is addressed in the following section, is portrayed as surprisingly assertive at times, but with little substance as a literary character.

3.2 Suzie in *moffie*

The mother figure in van der Merwe's *moffie* is a less layered and complex character than Leonore is in Behr's *The Smell of Apples*. *moffie* is a novel that details very real, semi-autobiographical accounts of van der Merwe's experiences in the army and the border and the parts that deal with Suzie, Nicholas's mother, whose name is mentioned only once throughout the novel, are mostly through Nicholas's memories of her. Suzie's character is not afforded as much room as Leonore to carve out her own identity in rich, multi-layered and nuanced scenes. *moffie* is similar to *The Smell of Apples* in that it is the son who is the protagonist and storyteller. In the case of *moffie*, though, Nicholas is older, which decidedly denies the narrative the layered structures and tragic ironies only a child voice, like Marnus's, can convey. In some cases, it even seems that van der Merwe's present-day voice infiltrates the text too, making Nicholas's memories seem less foggy, unlike the nature of true memories, perhaps in service of clarity and dramatic effect. Nevertheless, Suzie, though not a prominent figure in the novel, most certainly comes across as one who is very important to her son. Suzie's words, more than her actions, convey her resistance¹⁷ to hegemony in the text.

¹⁷ I am uncomfortable with describing Suzie as "rebellious". In comparison to Behr's Leonore, whose actions along with her sentiments lead me to deem her character as rebellious at times, van der Merwe's Suzie is only shown as resisting the patriarch and the status quo through speech and with little real impact.

Van der Merwe seems preoccupied with the evanescence of memory, and the character of Suzie is mostly revealed to the reader in Nicholas's childhood vignettes. In moments of utter terror, Nicholas's thoughts turn to what he calls "uncontaminated fragments", unpolluted pockets of memories from his childhood (van der Merwe 13). These "fragments" are notably sensorial. His grandmother's toast, invoking sound and smell, his mother's "roly-poly-pudding-and-pie, apple-crackle-daisy-tart," linguistic playfulness and the familiar familial space where childhood games are played, are what keep Nicholas hinged to reality when he occupies a hostile, terrifying space (13). He guards these memories ferociously and notes that in this fragile time and space of the Border War, the survival of these memories are dependent on his own physical survival.

The parts of the narrative that concern Suzie are always in relation to, or have to do with, Nicholas. Unlike Leonore, her character never seems to act independently and is only ever referred to with regard to her son. Again, I attribute this to the fact that the novel is not quite as focused on a family narrative as *The Smell of Apples* is, but on an army or war narrative. And yet, I still feel that Suzie's character lacks a certain vitality and roundness that Leonore possesses and indeed, encompasses.

Suzie is presented as a very maternal, even benevolent woman. Her connectedness with Nicholas, and benign, accepting approach to motherhood makes her a source of comfort to him at all stages in the novel. Even the way that she moves around the house comes as a comfort to him before he leaves for the army. Nicholas fondly muses that "[p]eople have a rhythm, born from an internal tempo; or perhaps it is the ratio of their skeletons to their weight. It is as unique as the markings on a finger. I know my mother's sound like a calf knows the blazes on its mother" (17). Suzie comes as a comfort to her son. She is not a spunky woman who *almost* had a

professional career, but rather, she is a homely, caring, almost stereotypical Afrikaner mother figure, who never deviates from this role.

Most of the representations of Nicholas's mother are, of course, concerned with when he leaves for the army and while he is there. Contrary to his opinion of his nationalistic, racist, homophobic father who cannot wait for him to go to the army, so that he can become a "real" man, he says that "[o]nly my mother feels sympathy. Her love is greater than politics and the threat of communism taught by my school and my father" (18). Even when the train begins to depart for the army, he feels how "[t]he invisible cord of tenderness [between him and his mother] starts stretching" (24). I find that Suzie is almost unrealistically kind and her demeanour a very simplistic foil to a draconian father figure, but for one occasion, when she agrees with her husband that Nicholas failing at school is unacceptable and of which Nicholas even doubts any ill-intent on her part. Her benevolence is even able to transcend the complexities and horrors of the political climate at the time.

On occasions when Nicholas comes home on a weekend pass, she is very aware of her son's presence. However it seems that she would like to probe and ask about everything he has done and seen, as "[s]he says nothing, but I can feel her searching glance. She makes no fuss, but I am aware of the trouble she has taken preparing every favourite meal, being there for me, but giving me space at the same time" (118). Later, when Nicholas comes home for the last time before he leaves for the border, on the drive home, his mother "wants to know how I really am, without asking me outright. She has a positive response to everything I say, as she mostly does" (193). The way Suzie vacillates between being concerned for her son and backing off to give him some

room shows her genuine concern for her son's wellbeing and needs. Nicholas will have peace and quiet before Suzie has her chance to find out anything about her son.

Early on in the novel and, indeed, early in Nicholas's life, he receives a brutal beating from his father for what might be seen as an act of kindness. This beating occurs on Uncle Hendrik's farm, a place in which the fate of animals is dependent on their usefulness to the humans living there. Nicholas finds a cheetah that has been locked up by Uncle Hendrik and successfully plots to free the animal. Unfortunately, Nicholas has already shamed his father and embarrassed his extended family too many times during this visit. One example of this is when he becomes upset when the men shoot buck on their hunting expeditions, leaving them to limp and hobble about on shattered bone before they kill them. Nevertheless, Nicholas receives the beating of his life for letting the cheetah out, something he remembers into his early adulthood. He remembers his mother's "[pleas] and [shouts] [...] 'Why don't you just shoot him, Peet, if you want to murder your own child!' " (62). Suzie is exasperated, desperate and angry. She suggests to him that shooting his own son would be a more humane gesture than beating him so violently. She clearly opposes her husband's actions, and although this statement is profound and challenging, she is impotent to stop the abuse.

When on their annual holiday in Jeffrey's Bay, Nicholas befriends a hippy couple and is strictly prohibited by his parents to fraternise with them. As in *The Smell of Apples* where pop music is equated with the devil, in *moffie*, the hippies are also hyperbolically demonised; to Nicholas's father they are " "all queer and they don't believe in God. They're like bloody girls with that long hair. They disgust me. They look like hobos. *Agge nee, sies, man'* " (198). Despite his father's warnings of becoming like the hippies, Nicholas is caught drinking tea with them by his mother,

who “marches up to me and grips my arm so hard that my tea splashes onto the sand. ‘Are you totally mad? Didn’t you hear one word of what I said about these people? Get home immediately’ ” (199). Suzie marches Nicholas back to their holiday home and “[j]ust before we get home, she stops, looks at me for what feels like a long time, and then says, gently and lovingly, ‘I guess it would do no harm, but don’t tell your father, Nicholas. For God’s sake, don’t let him know. And if they do anything strange, promise me you will tell me, OK?’ ” (200).

Suzie is a much more moderate character than Leonore is. She is able to reason for herself that there is not much wrong with her son spending time with these people, contrary to the dictums of her husband, and yet there is still a hint of concern. Should the hippies harm Nicholas in any way, she should be informed immediately. Although this condition might be seen as contrary to her open-mindedness in allowing her son this freedom, I feel that her giving her son the responsibility of taking care of himself and judging his own behaviour for himself, is yet another step forward for Suzie in being resistant to her husband and the status quo.

Another incident that shows up the gentle yet firm nature of Nicholas’s mother is when he is about to leave for the army. As was discussed in the second chapter of this thesis, Nicholas’s father continually antagonises him with comments about how good the army will be for his failed masculinity, and proceeds to call him a “moffie”. After a hostile dialogue between father and son that ends in physical violence, Nicholas notes that “[b]ehind me my mother is crying. This is what brings regret; she hardly ever cries. [...] [Now] [t]hey are arguing – I hear her anger through her tears. They are arguing about him hitting me just before my leaving for the army. What if I don’t come back? How will he feel then? The part I hate to hear is, ‘And how can you call your own son that? You should be ashamed of yourself!’ ” (20). Suzie is angered by her

husband's behaviour and yet she keeps both herself and her son trapped in an abusive relationship. She thinks beyond the fraught present, however, and looks to a future where their last living son returns home in a body bag. Most notable of all is her dissatisfaction with the particular word her husband uses to describe her son, as " 'it's the most despicable thing you can call anybody, never mind your own son!' " (20). When her husband brushes off her concern, saying that what he meant to say was that Nicholas is really a "sissy", she tells her husband that " '[he] should know better. I never want to hear that word in this house again. Sissy is bad enough' " (20). Suzie becomes commanding of the space of the home and an advocate for her son in the face of an abusive, both verbally and physically, patriarch. At the same time, however, she is an agent for replicating this bigotry, because as much as she dislikes having certain words mentioned in her home, she is also implying that she does not want the come-to-life manifestation of those words in her home. In this way, Suzie makes a rare statement that very openly negates hegemony by challenging, for an instant, the discourse used in her home.

The final incident I address with regard to Nicholas's mother, for she is seldom mentioned after this, is at her eldest son's funeral. Frankie is only about seven years of age when he dies in an accident and Nicholas is traumatised by the event. As I have discussed earlier, Nicholas seems to possess an affinity for black people, presumably part of his transgressive nature, or as van der Merwe's post-1994 "politically correct" patterning of his protagonist. At his brother's funeral, he runs off to spend time with the farm workers and fails to return in time for supper. His family and extended family think he is missing and panic falls upon the household. Once he is found by his uncle and thoroughly beaten for consorting with "them", he notices his mother's exhausted, almost burdened demeanour:

Fatigue has crept over and into my mother. This new road that has thrust itself on her, seems to possess her. Her one son is gone and the other is 'different'. She feels she must protect me. I see it in her. But she would have preferred it not to be the case. If I could have slotted in, it would have been so much easier. Instead, my grain is anarchistic, and it chafes. She knows this as mothers know their children, but she will not communicate what she realises – not even to herself. Still she supports me on this knife-edge of survival and helps me balance wherever she can. (59-60)

Naturally, Nicholas's disappearance takes its toll on his mother, but another type of fatigue also takes effect. Nicholas notes that as he has lost a brother and companion in Frankie, so his mother has lost a son. Added to this tragedy, the one son that she has left is different. Suzie is aware that Nicholas, at his young age, is not like other boys and that she should protect her son. The above suggests that "what" Nicholas is, is not something he can control. Despite Nicholas's being "different" – never quite as mannish as his peers, always innocently questioning things that should just be taken for granted – he is assured that she will always give him her support.

From the above, it is discernable that, although Suzie is a gentle character, she is a force to be reckoned with. Her husband listens to what she has to say, and she often has harsh words at the ready for him. She is also a kind of outcast, like Nicholas, because she is Catholic, a lost cause, yet she stands steadfast in her ideals in the face of a whole Afrikaans Protestant family. Her support for her son is unwavering. Although I thought Suzie to be the "weakest" of all the mothers I encountered in these novels, she does come across as steadfast, despite her, at times,

conventional ideas. I now turn to Sophie, Nicholas's "other" mother, who took care of him and his brother in their younger years.

3.3 Mama Afrika – the “Non-White” Eternal Maternal

Another prominent mother figure in van der Merwe's *moffie* is Sophie, the black maid on the farm where Nicholas grows up. In many Afrikaans homes under apartheid, it is ironically the black maids who do much of the child-rearing. In *moffie*, Sophie undertakes to bring up Nicholas and his brother, Frankie, and they form an intense mother-child bond. Although this particular mother-child bond is a very probable situation at the time, I find some of van der Merwe's descriptions of Sophie as a mother figure, as well as the portrayal of other black characters, problematic. Sophie and "her people" are stereotyped as the earthy, close-to-nature, bordering-on-primitive Africans with whom Nicholas identifies better than his own immediate family (49). There is, I argue, a romanticisation of the black female body in *moffie*, as Sophie is represented as an uncomplicated, one dimensional character, whose body is rendered in more detail than her character. This is one of the major weaknesses of the novel.

The novel begins with some of Nicholas's memories from the farm where he grew up. His first musings are of:

the Zulu woman who cares for me during my mother's long illness [...] When I lie on the large softness of Sophie's breasts, I have no connection with fear. This security stays with me for the rest of my life – people around a fire, their huts, the land, and I, swaddled in different kinds of warmth. My parents, our house, food and shelter simply form the lining behind the true fabric. (15)

Nicholas expresses a deep sense of comfort he experienced in his younger years with his nanny Sophie. He recalls the shape and feel of her motherly body and how he crept into these contours for warmth and comfort, expelling any fears of the world. He claims that Sophie's people, their homes and the landscape are also responsible for this sense of security. He dismisses the material things with which his parents provide him as background, a mere "lining behind the true fabric" (15) that is Sophie's farm-worker community. He even states that the huts "want to receive and hold me" (16), like a primordial womb-home, waiting to receive its child. He clearly feels more at home in Sophie's environment than he does at home, which could be as a result of trying to escape the abuse in his own home. Nicholas is emphatic about where he would rather be.

However, van der Merwe overindulges in fetishisation and romanticisation of the black African female body as representative of the physical landscape and as eternal maternal figure, always open-armed and always caring. I feel that van der Merwe makes a stereotypical evaluation of the black people Nicholas grows up with – they are reduced to typified, simplistic, earthy Africans.¹⁸ Nicholas exoticises the farm people as more authentic by virtue of their connectedness to the earth, with their "[b]lack faces [that] shine as the light of the fire licks the smooth contours of their features [and] [g]leaming white teeth [that] break through large-lipped laughter" (16). Later on in the novel, Nicholas even states that "[l]ike an abundant woman's body, the hills are gentle and soft" (15) and "[t]onight Mama Africa is again giving so uniquely from her abundant heart" (82). This is followed by a description of the beautiful African sky with the sun and moon both present at the same time. The landscape is personified not just as a woman, then, but a black, motherly woman. These images and terms of expression are age-old stereotypes of black people.

¹⁸ I have come to use the term "Mama Africanism" for this typified, condescending treatment of the black African woman in literature and language. According to Cheryl Stobie, external examiner for this thesis, Florence Stratton advocates a similar concept.

The men are described only in a physical way, as semi-frightening and perhaps dim-witted and animalistic. The women are also only alluded to in physical sense and equated with the contours of a colonisable landscape. Although I do not believe that van der Merwe intends to sketch these images in a condescending fashion, they do come across as such.

Furthermore, Nicholas remembers that, as a child, “[w]henver I have supper with Sophie in the kitchen, I eat by candlelight. My father says it’s not allowed, because I am not black, but I only want to eat when it’s dark and peaceful. What I really crave for is the dark night and a fire with people huddled in blankets in front of their round homes called huts – the first English word I learn” (31). Just as Nicholas is drawn to the farm workers’ style of mourning, he also shows a certain preference for the way Sophie conducts her ritual for eating. I feel that this description that van der Merwe seems to offer up is a way of seeing Nicholas as pre-empting the dissolution of the racial divides of South Africa at the time; for the context of the setting of the novel, the 1980s, this is an unrealistic authorial imposition from a post-1994 perspective. Van der Merwe’s present-day voice all too readily sides and attempts to identify with the state of the underdog in apartheid South Africa that is forced, one-dimensional and unconvincing.

Sophie’s body also seems very closely connected to the landscape in Nicholas’s view. Although he does not state as much explicitly, the following description of the landscape follows very closely after Nicholas’s description of Sophie’s comforting body. He “[smells] the early night scent of the soil that the valley releases only at this time of day. It is fertile, like sex, an exhalation of virility, and seeping and drifting through it is the fragrance of burning wood. These smells are in me, an unseverable link to that part of my life” (15). Again, van der Merwe uses the idea of smell as a gateway to memories of a certain part of his life. This time, however, in

contrast with his memory of his mother and grandmother, the link is “unseverable” and the “smells are in [him]” (15). These memories do not seem to be at risk of disappearing at any moment; they seem real, tangible and everlasting. These memories are connected with Sophie and the landscape from his boyhood and are ingrained in him. I question why Sophie and “her people” are so tremendously impactful on Nicholas’s psyche. This is perhaps because she offers an alternative to his own mother who fails to provide him with safety. Nevertheless, this literary treatment of the black woman in an army narrative by a white, male writer is interesting.¹⁹

Some of the most striking images with regard to Sophie and the feminine body and Nicholas’s intense connection with her occur when she is not even present. It seems that the archetype of the abundant, embracing, black female body has become a part of his psychological make-up. Nicholas, the child, very astutely notes the different styles of grieving that take place on either side of a whitewashed wall. On one side, the extended family of the van der Swart²⁰ family solemnly, conservatively, pay their respects to the lost boy. On the other hand, Nicholas notes, the black and brown people grieve too, for a boy they do not know, but with a swaying, eye-rolling noisiness. Nicholas notes that all the white people are “wearing black, and outside the wind is blowing [...] Nobody talks to me. They just greet me, touch my head, and then they appear to switch on their tears elsewhere [...] Women hold onto their skirts and hats, and their white petticoats contrast with the black” (48). This description of the insincerity of those in attendance at Frankie’s funeral is a particularly poignant one. The reader knows that Nicholas and Frankie were particularly close, that “the physics of this synthesis is not questioned” (15).

¹⁹ Later on, I compare van der Merwe’s depictions of Sophie with Behr’s depictions of Alida. This comparison, although it yields interesting similarities, shows up some notable differences between the two.

²⁰ Although Nicholas’s surname has been mentioned before in this thesis, this is an apt point at which to note the English translation of the name. Van der Swart, translated from Dutch is “of the black,” or “of black.” Since the novel is semi-autobiographical and the author’s surname also begins with “van der” it is interesting that van der Merwe chose to replace “Merwe” with “Swart.”

Nicholas's clear critique and slight resentment is illustrated by the image of the white petticoats, juxtaposed with the black skirts – frilly, frivolous petticoat-insincerity masked so thinly by the black façade of mourning.

Van der Merwe renders a sketch of African people as more real and more empathetic toward him. I am aware that close bonds would have come about between young white children and their black nannies, but I feel that van der Merwe takes this a step too far. Sophie's bond with Nicholas and Frankie seems to supersede that which they share with their own mother. Later on in life, Nicholas feels connected to people based on the colour of their skin and the texture of their living environs, because they are so much like the archetypal Sophie embedded in his psyche. Apart from this, Sophie does come across as the benevolent mother figure (more so than Nicholas's own mother) and is represented as eternal when the landscape is equated with her. As I mention earlier on in this section, these depictions are problematic. Sophie is a steadfast, though temporary figure in Nicholas's life. She does not possess any literary agency. Depictions of her are solely dependent on what Nicholas remembers from his childhood. Sophie's narrative ends where Nicholas's memories of her end. The following serves to juxtapose Sophie's character with Behr's depictions of Alida, another "non-white servant" working for a white "master." Despite obvious similarities between the two, there are striking differences.

In Behr's *Kings of the Water*, Michiel, the protagonist, a man of about twenty years of age when he leaves the country, returns approximately twenty years later to his family's farm and to his father. Alida, the housekeeper, is still there when he returns. She is in charge of running the household and since Ounooi, Michiel's mother, has died, she takes care of Oubaas, Michiel's father. When Michiel asks Alida how she will continue to cope with the old man, she says, "I

was two years old when he was born. I changed his nappies and I wiped him then and I'm changing his nappies and I'm wiping him now. Now at least, I can wipe myself" (25). This confident response is a profound declaration of longevity and inner strength. Her span of abilities stretches from before the start of Oubaas's life, where she took care of him as a child, to a new, but similar stage of old age. Her life overlaps Oubaas's on either end of this spectrum. It is as if her life is stretched out, used for all its worth, in service of her white "master".

In contrast with Sophie, Alida possesses agency. She is a strong woman, who is in charge of the day-to-day running of the farm and of Oubaas's life. She has essentially taken over from Ounooi, the late lady of the house, who was an industrious entrepreneur. Sophie is depicted as a fleeting character, whereas Alida is depicted as strong and everlasting. Alida's character also represents hope. She has a daughter who is a high-flying business woman and a mother of two precocious children. Like Jan Bandjies in *The Smell of Apples*, Alida allows her daughter an alternative future from her own. In contrast, nothing is said about Sophie, whether she has children, or a hopeful future. She is written out of the narrative of *moffie* as a mere figment of a distant memory.

I end this chapter by exploring the character of Ellen, the mother figure in Galgut's *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs*.

3.4 The Chameleon Woman – Ellen in *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs*

Galgut's *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* tells the story of a young man, who, after being discharged from the army for psychological reasons, travels to Namibia with his mother, Ellen.

This trip to Namibia is in aid of Ellen's reunion with Godfrey, her younger, black lover, whose political struggle is juxtaposed with Patrick's search for self and sexuality. The novel was published in 1991, in the period after the release of Nelson Mandela, a time of radical transition to the establishment of a new democratic order in 1994 and is fraught with the political anxieties of the time. Ellen, the mother of the protagonist, Patrick, is sometimes called Elsa. This schizophrenia of name points to her schizophrenic nature. She is a prominent figure in the novel and is also decidedly the least maternal of all the female characters encountered. Ellen is a chameleon, "a junkie for change" (24), and her son, in his mentally unwell state, follows her to Namibia and performs the role of onlooker as her "colours" change. This section explores how Ellen, the main female character in the novel, adjusts her life and lifestyle according to the men she is with at the time and what this means in the context of a South African "transition" novel. I am also interested in her relationship with a black man during this transition period as a sign of spontaneous rebellion.

Divorce and the death of a son change the Winter family structure forever. Although Ellen's character seems to remain relatively static for the duration of their marriage, immediately after she divorces her husband, she enters into as many affairs with her confused identity as she does with men. Patrick notes that she has entered into no less than three sets of transformations during her life: the little Afrikaans farm girl he remembers from a photograph, the elegant, glamorous wife and mother, "who might have been born in Constantia" (9), and finally, a woman who "changed her positions the way she changed her clothes, and she didn't care to remember how she'd felt in the past" (111).

Like Behr's Leonore, it seems that Ellen, although perhaps not quite as talented, could have forged herself a professional acting career. Like Leonore, "[h]er big role was the one she played as housewife, a mother, a maker of homes" (9). Her first transformation occurs when she marries her husband, starting with a change not only to her surname, but surprisingly to her first name too. "Elsa de Bruin had disappeared and in her place, there was Ellen Winter" (9):

She set about remoulding herself in the image my father desired. He was ashamed of her rustic Afrikaans beginnings, so she learned to speak English without an accent. She made it her duty to acquire cosmopolitan tastes and values, which she picked up from the people and homes that were the new backdrop to her social life [...] In exchange, my father provided money and material consolations. We were raised in great style. I arrived in the world three years after my brother Malcolm. By then there was already no trace of that earlier, other woman. (9)

Unlike Suzie and Leonore, Galgut's main female character in this novel is not represented as either compliant with, or resistant to, the hegemonic status quo. Rather, she is both compliant and resistant. Either which way, her stance is dependent on whether the man she is with at the time is one that reiterates and reinstitutes the hegemonic ideals of the "old" South Africa, or works against them. In the case of her relationship with her husband, Ellen refashions her identity to suit his needs by changing her name, style and accent. In return for this betrayal of self, she is assured a stylish and prosperous life. The changes that Ellen undergoes post-divorce are startling. These changes settle over her for a brief period before a new change is imminent. "This was obvious on a physical level: she was constantly restless, looking around her, moving

about. But her condition ran deeper than this. She threw herself with wild abandon into different fads and movements, and then discarded them for others” (20).

Even though Ellen is depicted as having had many lovers, it is interesting that Galgut makes Godfrey central to the text. Godfrey is Ellen’s latest lover, who is a “freedom fighter” in a Namibian context and who is black. Given that the novel is set during the early nineties, Ellen’s act of having a romantic and sexual relationship with a black man would, while not legally taboo by that time, at least be frowned upon by society. Even so, Patrick “wasn’t alarmed by his colour [... as] I had been witness to passions far more curious than men” (7). This relationship seems to lack feeling that is natural or comfortable, and Patrick observes that “[s]he was full of that new talk about being in harmony with the continent [...] [a]nd [...] she wanted me to believe that sleeping with Godfrey ‘was a political act’ ” (45). Godfrey is not unaware of this fact either. In a heated argument that occurs before she tires of him, he tells her, “ ‘You think you’re not the same as the other whiteys now. You think you’re so radical and amazing. Why? Because you’re fucking a black man? Do you think you can fuck history away, Ellen? Is that what you think?’ ” (90).

Godfrey accuses Ellen of using sex with him as a way to erase the pain of history. Later on in the novel, Ellen leaves Godfrey for the very same reasons she was attracted to him. He is now too politically inclined, too rough with her in bed and too young. Just as quickly as she travels to Namibia with her son, she leaves, but with another man, one who could not be more different from Godfrey. He is a white farmer, named Dirk Blaauw, who hitches a lift with them to South Africa. The novel suggests that Ellen will pursue an affair with this man too and change her preferences in life to suit this new fad. Although Ellen’s sleeping with a black political activist in

Namibia might be seen as an overt attempt at rebellion, this transgressive stance is as merely part of Ellen's whimsical character. Ellen, unlike Leonore or Suzie, cannot be read as a rebellious character in the way that the other women are; she seems merely to be floundering in a mass of identities she can readily take up when she pleases.

Chapter 4: “We’re Fucked” – “Deviance” and Defiance in the Army

My previous two chapters are concerned with the men and women who are involved in the formation of the young men that are sent to the army during apartheid. The first of the two chapters concerns itself mainly with fatherhood and the complicity of the father in maintaining and policing his son’s passage into the desirable, highly-masculinised, white apartheid concept of “manhood”. The mother’s role, and that of other female figures, whether assisting or resisting this patriarchal force, is dealt with in the previous chapter. Here, I focus on those young men who are sent to the Border and the dynamics of the highly masculine army setting. More particularly, I focus on “deviance” and defiance in the context of the army and how these are policed and punished by the homophobic, racist, intolerant strictness of such an institution.

The word, “deviant” is from the Latin, meaning to “turn aside” and the “noun meaning ‘one that deviates’ is from [the late fifteenth century]; in the sexual sense, from 1952” (*Online Etymology Dictionary*). To deviate from the norm is then to do differently, or turn away from practices of the norm. To be deviant or a deviate is to embody the practice of doing differently to the norm and, of course, in the setting of a heteronormative, white-supremacist, nationalist society, the ultimate act of deviance for a young, white, South African male, would mean being gay, embracing multiculturalism and liberalism. In the following chapter I use the word in quotation marks in a bid to show how certain acts or situations I discuss would have been seen as deviant at the time, but that I distance myself from using the term with the same connotations.

As I mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis, Heyns, in “A Man’s World: South African Gay Writing and the State of Emergency”, is concerned with how, under apartheid, both blackness

and gayness are repressed by the same conservative system, and yet are oftentimes deemed unequal in the struggle for humanity. Heyns says that

[i]n South Africa, of course, prejudice and intolerance have long been much more visible as institutionalized racism than as homophobia [...] From the perspective of the State of Emergency in South Africa in the 1980s, with its brutal repression of the most basic human rights, the ‘incompleteness of self’ may come to seem effectely irrelevant, and male homosexuality in particular may become branded as yet another white privilege trying to pass itself off as right in a democratic society. (108-109)

Gayness is seen as taboo from the perspective of those who orchestrated apartheid. As I have said and implied throughout this thesis, homosexuality undermines the highly masculine, militaristic, conservative regime of apartheid and, “uncontrolled”, it becomes a threat to those policing the regime. Those fighting for the rights of gay people, however are seen as “screaming for cake where others are denied bread” (Heyns 109). Exemplifying this is “Ruth Mompati, a member of the National Executive Committee of the ANC [who] is on record as saying in 1987: ‘I cannot even begin to understand why people want gay rights. The gays have no problems. They have nice houses and plenty to eat. I don’t see them suffering. No-one is persecuting them’ ” (Gevisser quoted in Heyns 109). In a society where people are denied basic human rights because of their skin colour, this sentiment is understandable, but it also illustrates that gayness, in the context of the struggle for rights, was not just marginalised by top hegemonic structures, but in the fight for the freedom homosexuality is also delegitimized by many who experienced racial oppression.

I am preoccupied with not only the identity formation and related discourse of whiteness and sexuality under apartheid, but also with what happens when these presumably formidable structures come crashing down in the course of the late 1980s to the early 1990s. Every novel I deal with in this thesis seems to point to the immense internal and external struggles of a white adolescent under apartheid who “comes out”, is gay, or merely does not conform to the norms of the time. I aim to address certain instances of defiance, and intended and unintended “deviance,” and how these speak back critically to the “parents” of these young men. I take the title of this chapter from a scene in van der Merwe’s *moffie*. As the train full of new conscripts departs from Cape Town station, with parents and loved ones in full view, someone comments, “We’re fucked” (25) – words that cannot better describe or explain this moment of departure, the anticipation, or materialisation of the oppressive, violent events to follow. Yet despite, or perhaps because of, the highly regulated regime of the military and social structures that support it, acts of “deviance” and defiance still find room to take place.

I aim to explore how gayness and deviance, if exposed, are deemed unacceptable in an environment like the army and, more often than not, follow trajectories of exile, medical pathology, or death. This analysis will be conducted with specific reference to van der Merwe’s *moffie*, with more subsidiary references to Galgut’s *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* and to Behr’s *Kings of the Water*. I use a *Special Assignment* documentary entitled “Property of the State” (2003) to validate literary claims about physical and mental abuse on the border and in the army.

4.1 Double Struggle and Valium

I begin with *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* because the novel grapples with how the struggle for racial and political freedom, alongside the freedom to be openly homosexual, might seem more justified in necessity and far less self-indulgent. Godfrey, Ellen's lover, is politically active in the struggle for Namibia's freedom. This is juxtaposed with Patrick's more personal, internal struggle with and for his sexuality, and for Heyns, "[p]erhaps what Galgut's novel most effectively dramatizes is the perplexity of the white male homosexual in South Africa who cannot allow himself even the luxury of a struggle for his own liberation" (117). Galgut purposefully juxtaposes these two struggles and in doing so, I argue, comments on the legitimacy afforded them under apartheid, as well as politically turbulent Namibia, but Heyns also suggests that the novel, and indeed the sexually charged encounter between Patrick and Lappies, offers up "an alternative and liberating way for men to be in the world" (115). Although Heyns does use more than one example in the novel to justify this, I will argue that *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs*, aside from killing off the brutish brother, does not offer Patrick or Lappies any alternative, or liberating, ways of being men under apartheid. I return to this later.

As I discuss in the second chapter of this thesis, Patrick, like Nicholas in van der Merwe's *moffie*, is, if anything, a disappointment to his father. He is smaller, weaker and less athletic than his older brother, Malcolm, who

could catch any ball that was thrown at him. He was the captain of his rugby team at school. He couldn't spell or do sums,²¹ but he had a rebellious spirit that

²¹ Interestingly, Malcolm is not lambasted by his father for faring poorly at school, like Nicholas is in van der Merwe's *moffie*. I attribute this to the fact that Malcolm is brutish and masculine enough for his father not to worry about him becoming a "failure," since he is well-equipped for the requirements of apartheid South Africa's highly masculine male adult world.

couldn't be quashed. He kicked stones, with his tie pulled down and the top button on his school shirt undone. He carved his name into the wooden desk-tops in the classrooms and swore savagely and spat expertly sideways. He had a yellow mark on his first finger and thumb from smoking. He was my father's son. I was the impostor, with my mother's dark eyes; while Malcolm had Dad's icy stare. (Galgut 14)

It is clear that every aspect of Malcolm and his abilities in terms of physical strength and sporting talent embodies all that Patrick is not. Malcolm's brutishness even affords him a better relationship with his father than Patrick has with him. The irony is that Malcolm dies in an unheroic *buffel* accident and not even amid the heat of events on the Border. At this point I come to agree with Heyns's statement that the novel offers up ways of being a man, other than in a highly masculine, brutal, or violent way. Malcolm's rather deflating death attests to the limits and constructed nature of hypermasculinity. *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* is the only novel I have encountered while writing this thesis, whose most overtly masculine character and, indeed, an antagonist, dies in the novel. To add to this, Galgut does not only kill off the character of Malcolm, but from his death he removes any valour, heroics, or pomp. He seems to intentionally deflate events around Malcolm's death so that even in death, his masculinity is subverted and shown up for its fragility.

Patrick's fear of Commandant Schutte, who is likened to his own father, is palpable. Patrick's masculine failure in the form of sport and brutishness is not the only thing that sets him apart from the other conscripts; he is also gay. And to be found out in the harsh environs of the army, as well as under apartheid, could be lethal. For Patrick, Commandant Schutte

was a far more palpable enemy than the black soldiers hiding in the grass, and far more dangerous to me personally. It became my neurotic terror that he would find me out – find the secret weakness in me [...] I had no doubt that if [he] could [...] see me for who and what I really was, that his revenge would be swift and terrible. (60-61)

Patrick sees Commandant Schutte as a greater threat than the enemy he is trained to kill. In fact, he *is* probably a greater danger to Patrick than the “terrs.” Commandant Schutte’s job is to train young men to be soldiers and, at the same time, to rigorously police their masculinity. Like Nicholas in *moffie*, Patrick possesses no greater fear than to be caught out for being “different.”

Patrick’s homosexuality is vaguely disclosed to the reader when he recalls an intense moment between him and Lappies. After a day marked by a “contact” and four dead “terrs”, Lappies and Patrick are alone on guard duty:

I don’t know how it happened, how we stopped, who touched whom first – but at the darkest corner of the camp, we drew together. We were suddenly fumbling with buttons, slinging down rifles. I remember his breath on my neck. Standing pressed together, the immensity of the continent spreading outwards as though we were at the very centre of it, we took each other in hand. A few seconds of gasping and tugging and pulling, like a subtle wrestling match, and it was done. We left silver tracks on the ground. Then we buttoned ourselves and went on our way, not able to look at each other. (66-67)

Galgut’s description of the encounter as a “subtle wrestling match” (67) is interesting in that it invokes ideas of athletic, “ideal” masculinity. He softens the image by describing it as “subtle”

instead. By referring to them as wrestlers, it seems, Galgut replaces their athletic ineptitude with athletic, masculine ability and capability. Heyns states that

[t]he inarticulate friendship between Patrick and Lappies never really develops beyond a mute recognition of common exile [...] [when] they make fumbling sexual contact, more in agony than in passion [...] Lappies is killed in action and Patrick is left alone to deal with Schutte and with his father, twin figures of repressive authority. (114)

The sexual encounter between Lappies and Patrick is, as Heyns implies, inarticulate and seemingly sprung from the intense bond formed from being mutual outsiders. This encounter is charged with fear and desperation more than anything else, and although the reader knows that Patrick is gay, their mutual masturbation is mechanical and does not display any homosexual desire. Neither Lappies nor Patrick seems to derive any pleasure from their masturbation. What ensues instead is relief. As Heyns asserts, this act takes place out of commonality – they are both athletically inept and inferior to their more burly counterparts, and neither fits in with the rest of the men. This is a kind of acknowledgement that the two share a silent and unspeakable oppression.

Heyns also sees this encounter as something else, something more than just sexual and as a matter of the complexities of this quest for the liberation of self. He says that

[f]or Patrick himself, the primary liberation, the one that is not mentioned at all or only by implication, would presumably be an acceptance of his sexual identity. But the single sexual encounter is, as we have seen, not an affirmation as much as a denial: the two men are only momentarily united in their rebellion, to be

thereafter even more deeply alienated from themselves and others [...] Sexual liberation is glimpsed only as a kind of understudy of the struggle; the concern with self is seen, at least through Godfrey, as an effete neurosis of white people. (116)

After this brief union, Lappies and Patrick are more alienated from one another; they can scarcely look one another in the eye. Heyns uses this situation to make the point I brought up at the start of this chapter; there is no room, or validation, for a gay person's struggle, when there are people who struggle to merely exist. Galgut illustrates this polemic by juxtaposing Patrick's more personal situation with Godfrey's political struggle.

I return to what Heyns says about Galgut's novel offering up "alternative and liberating [ways] for men to be in the world" (115). I find that apart from Malcolm's death and, I should add, *aside* from those involved in the political struggle in Namibia, this statement does not hold for Lappies or for Patrick. Lappies meets his end about a month after the abovementioned encounter when he is ambushed on patrol (95). Furthermore, Patrick becomes depressed by the event and although he is honourably discharged, he decides to return to duty.

The only way for a young man to leave the army before the two year long conscription is complete is to go mad, die, or go into exile. Patrick and Lappies are evidence of this. Patrick's sanity begins to wear thin from loss and what seems to be mental exhaustion. He seems to thrive on the tension and unease that unnerve his fellow conscripts, but "[b]y contrast, everyday things could fill [him] with terror. [He] could lie on [his] bed, reading a book, and feel the world disassemble to separate and threatening parts" (98). He goes *bossies* – mad, presumably from post-traumatic stress.

Finally, Patrick loses all sense of sanity and control and wakes up in hospital to Commandant Schutte, who is waiting to tell him, “ ‘You’re not a girl You’re a man. A white South African man’ ” (102) and that his body lying in hospital is one more credit to the enemy. To be a man then would imply his return to the army. Patrick does return to the army, but only briefly before he breaks down again, but more severely. He then traipses about the countryside with his mother, taking mounting dosages of Valium. Thus, I argue that, contrary to Heyns’s assertion that the novel leaves room for alternative and liberating ways of being men, the men I have chosen to discuss are not afforded this opportunity. Lappies’s character dies off, leaving Patrick to face the harshness of the army alone, while going *bossies*. The novel seems to suggest that under the rule of apartheid, the army is no place for a gay man, or a mad man. Patrick is able to leave the army, albeit mentally unstable; he has escaped with his life *and* his secret intact. I do not see this as liberation, but rather an escape.

Finally, I link this chapter with my first. I have stated on many occasions that the nationalist, hegemonic structures of apartheid filtered down into civilian life and were responsible for, among many things, the styles of parenting I discuss and, in turn, the prescribed ways of being a man. This strict governance makes it so that the parent, especially the father, is directly linked to the state of the government. As Heyns puts it:

[s]ituating the political situation within the family, Damon Galgut traces a relatively neat correspondence between the father and the authoritarian structure that puts in place both apartheid and the war [...] The father in Galgut is thus almost purely a figure of rejection, and this model of the patriarchy would seem to establish a self-evident link between gay identity and political dissent: to

dissociate oneself from the heterosexual patriarchy is to disown also the political situation which it has wrought. (114-115)

Not only are patriarchy and fatherhood directly linked, as Heyns claims, but resistance to the father and his values by the son is seen as intolerably “deviant,” not just in the eyes of the father, but also the state. Heyns points out above that being gay in a traditional family under apartheid is tethered to the politics at the time; being gay then, is a political act, contrary to the status quo. It seems intentional that Galgut places Godfrey and Patrick alongside one another, as a kind of comparison of two different struggles.

Another point to which I return is that because the white South African family is so imbued with politics of the apartheid era, there is no way to separate the family from the state. Galgut’s *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs*, although politically charged and fraught with the tensions of army life, represents these aspects of apartheid in a subtle, though laden, way. I return, therefore, to van der Merwe’s *moffie*, which, in my opinion documents the outright abuse and violence incurred, in the context of the army, as a result of “deviance,” in the form of homosexuality, identification with “non-whites” and suicide.

4.2 Illness in the Army: Coming out Queer in *moffie*

As I demonstrate in the first chapter of this thesis, Nicholas’s character is formed in a home where the father is the ultimate prescriber of male values and the mother is a benevolent figure of acceptance and support. Nicholas’s father differs from Patrick’s father in *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* in that the father *tells* Nicholas how to be and threatens him with all kinds of

horrors if he does not conform, whereas Patrick's father rather embodies this frightful masculinity that his son feels compelled to emulate.

Although this section grapples with the consequences of "coming out" in an army setting, it is useful first to explore modes of gender reiteration. In a chapter entitled "Critically Queer" in *Bodies that Matter*, Judith Butler explores the dynamics of power, performativity, reiteration and discourse. She begins her chapter by referring to Nietzsche's "sign-chains" and Foucault's view on power and discourse and how one is born into a historicity of discourse, only ever becoming a part of it, though never quite completely. What is important about this is that prescriptive language and authoritative speech do not belong to the speaker, but to a long line of evolving or static discourses. For my purposes, this means that Nicholas's father is a kind of "carrier" of discourse, but never the owner, and his punitive speech does not mean that he is powerful, but rather that *it* gives *him* power. Butler says that "there is no power, construed as a subject, that acts, but only [...] a reiterated acting *is* power in its persistence and instability. This is less an 'act,' singular and deliberate, than a nexus of power and discourse that repeats or mimes the discursive gestures of power" (225) (emphasis in original). Nicholas's father's "power" over his son's masculinity thus lies with a continued chain of spoken beliefs, with a reiteration of hegemonic, heteronormative discourse over time.

In the vignettes of his younger self, the young boy Nicholas seems permanently preoccupied with the fact that he is gay, or different. *moffie* not only details the possible repercussions of being gay, or different, in the army at the time, but in civilian life too. As a teenager, Nicholas has a tumultuous relationship with God and religion, as well as his earthly authoritarian father. Through a number of prominent and some less obvious events in the army, Nicholas comes to view his gayness not as something about which to pray to God, asking for a cure, but to accept it

as a part of who he is. Although I find this crisis of Nicholas's self all too easily resolved, it is the changing events in between that are of great interest.

The army, especially in *moffie*, is a highly masculine environment. Crudely put, it is a place where young men go to defend their country, their women and their children against threats such as “SWAPO, the ANC, blacks, communists, whoever” (*Special Assignment*).²² The young conscripts are thrust into a harsh and physically trying environment. Nicholas is exposed to and offered even more stereotypical avenues of manhood through interaction with the troops and leaders, with Koevoet on the border. Despite being gay, which would render him a “pansy” and unable to successfully complete anything physically trying in the eyes of most of his fellow conscripts, he completes his basic training, makes it through Vasbyt,²³ loses a friend and survives the border within a time span of two years. These trials Nicholas endures are in place to make “men out of boys”; they also serve to highlight the fault lines in apartheid South Africa's stifling requirements of and pressures on manhood.

Nicholas and his fellow conscripts share stories about their childhoods. Nicholas tells stories about things which affected him as a child and these stories are clearly a way for van der Merwe to explore and critique the social issues of the time period; more or less between the early 1970s and the early 1980s. He critiques the system not only through accounts of familial events, highlighted in Chapter 2, but with those that occurred in the school setting at the time. The most striking example of this critique is his mention of the “cultivation” of young men for army life:

²² The “whoever”, in the way the interviewee says it, suggests that the real enemy of the South African state was really an antithesis of what was constructed as the traditional, pure, white South African identity. The identity of the enemy is not of as much concern as the preservation of the nation state (*Special Assignment*).

²³ “Vasbyt” is an intense post-basic-training strength and fitness “trial” where conscripts are allowed minimal food rations and must travel long distances on foot for days without rest. This is a make-or-break event for troops.

It is 1977 and Mr Klopper's garden has been taken away from him. He has been teaching Agriculture at the school for 23 years and now they've turned his garden into a parade ground – a parade ground to make 'cadets' out of us, to prepare us for the army. The school will play its part in preparing us to defend our country against the no-so-clear or present danger of Communism. A new form of Agriculture is being developed – fertilising our brains and sowing seeds of dread.

(42)

Although the metaphor is simple enough, it speaks volumes about the regime. It is not only Agriculture that is replaced with the military, but it is set in a place of pedagogy. The army and, by extension, the government at the time, an overwhelmingly prescriptive entity, gains access to schools and has carte blanche with the minds of scholars.

As I note in my second chapter, Nicholas has a problematic relationship with his father. He also acknowledges the fact that he is "different," as well as that the anxiety and problems it will cause in the army will be tenfold in comparison to being "different" at home. When he reminisces about the landscape of the home he has yet to depart, he fondly remembers times during his young adolescence that would be met with his father's disapproval if he were to know. Nicholas is a moffie,

a secret too large to bear, too devastating to share and too dreadful not to. My mother's Catholic Church, my father's Dutch Reformed Church, all our friends and family, my entire world, it feels to me, regard one thing more heinous than anything else, and that is what I am. Hell is guaranteed; at the end of a living hell that I did not choose. (115)

Nicholas is scarcely able to evade this label while growing up and must now endure what he is in an environment that strictly forbids this. His conservative Calvinistic family, and more importantly, his father, would not be tolerant or understanding of the sexual experimentation that most young boys undergo. Worse still would be same-sex experimentation, and as he says, the ultimate evil would be his liaisons with “other races” (22). He says that “[w]hat is certain is that I will suffer, mainly because of my views, my unwillingness, my desires” (18).

Special Assignment, a hard-hitting investigative television programme on a local television station, aired an episode, called “Property of the State” in 2008, directed by Gerald Kraak. This documentary is about some of the unspoken horrors that occurred in the army, particularly to gay men, during the state of emergency. The narrator-actor, whom I will call “Everyman,” is a representation of all gay men in the army, at the age they would have been in the army and he speaks in a personal way about some of the terrible things that happened to gay men in the army. The episode also contains a number of interesting and informative interviews with a few men who talk about their experiences of being homosexual in an environment like the army.²⁴ Some of these interviews will be used in conjunction with my readings of van der Merwe’s semi-autobiographical accounts of army life in general.

Nicholas’s first taste of army life is made to be more frightening by virtue of the unknown. The fresh troops

²⁴ I transcribed these interviews from the television episode.

are given a ‘roffie-ride’²⁵ to the camp in the back of the Bedford trucks [...] [and] [a]t the camp [...] [n]obody knows what to expect; some say we will be woken up in the night, beaten and drilled and exercised until we pass out. Others say the instructors are going to attack us with *balsakke* (tog bags) filled with rocks and iron. (30)

Their wildest expectations, as the reader discovers throughout the novel, are not far from reality, and yet, as Everyman in the *Special Assignment* episode maintains, nothing could possibly prepare the troops for life in the army.

Sir Antony Sher, as one of the interviewees in the episode, talks about the hierarchy and ranks made so evident in the army. He says that “[t]he older recruits were known as oumanne²⁶ and the young ones were blougatte”²⁷ and comments that he was very aware of the power shift, especially in sexual terms, when he was promoted from a “blougat” to an “ouman” (*Special Assignment*). He also notes that there were “terrible initiation ceremonies [...] beatings up and persecutions [...] that were part of the [...] game playing of the camp” (*Special Assignment*). Everyman in the *Special Assignment* episode adds that “[w]e were surrounded by so much aggression and yet in that highly charged atmosphere, there was a sense of [...] erotic suspension” (*Special Assignment*). These hierarchies and initiations point to the very core of army life. One would have to endure something unpleasant in order to be accepted, and once

²⁵ Literally translated as a “scab-ride”. The Bedford trucks were purposefully driven erratically, speeding, braking and taking unexpected turns so as to give the troops as rough a journey to base-camp as possible, presumably as the first part of their initiation.

²⁶ “Old men.” A term of respect for the troops that had been in the army for perhaps only six months to a year longer than the “blougatte”, the new recruits (*Special Assignment*).

²⁷ “Blue-arses.” “The link with the literal meaning is not clear and definitions varied, but this was usually understood to be a troop who was no longer a *roof*, but not yet an ou man” (Williams 135) (my emphasis).

admitted into the realm of army life, one would be situated according to levels of importance, ranked according to fitness levels, time endured in the army and spent on the border. These evaluations of masculinity and toughness are not just found in the home, but in the army too – a government controlled institution. Before discussing the politics of queerness as “deviance” in the army, I find it necessary to explore some aspects of the masculine prescriptions of the army environs and how troops came to term with these, if at all.

As I footnote above, the use of vulgar, abusive language, along with general physical trials seems imperative in the process of rendering the army a most unpleasant, hostile place for new conscripts. They are told that they “ ‘are all *rowe*. Do you wanna know what a *roof* is? It’s a fucking filthy scab on a septic cyst in a dying pig’s arse. That’s what a *roof* is and that’s what you are’ ” (65). The conscripts are categorically told that they are as low down as is possible on the rungs of the army ladder and later, during an ironic event, which shows up the hypocrisy of the workings of the army and the regime, they are told to “get in and read [their] fucking Bibles” and when a conscript lags behind in retrieving his, he is asked, “Where the fuck is your Bible? What are you? A fucking atheist *poes*,²⁸ non-believer cunt? Ten minutes and you’d better be on that parade ground, ready. This is a day you’ll never forget, so you’d better fucking pray” (64). The profanity used in the army, although physically harmless, is an excessively masculine tool of emotional violation of human dignity, purposefully used in conjunction with other more physical violations.

The narrative experience of army life is such that Nicholas experiences increasing levels of physical expectations and exponentially unrealistic requirements of masculinity. For the first

²⁸ “South African offensive, vulgar slang for the female genitals” (Wevell et al. 878).

time, he “[sees] an instructor who has been drilling a conscript throughout our lunch break. It’s called an *opfok*²⁹– fucking someone up by drilling him to the point of exhaustion and beyond” (75). The instructors do more than put the conscripts through tough physical trials; they are facetious too, in the face of which troops must be patient and yielding. An example of this deliberately destructive behaviour is when Nicholas notes:

after sleepless nights and weeks of cleaning, training and exercise, a corporal walks in and dribbles golden syrup over our inspection parcels, breaks the carefully constructed internal spines, rubs dirt on everything, destroys our starched beds and tells us we must have it all ready again for the next morning’s inspection. It takes us all night.

This existence erodes the spirit; chips away at one’s endurance, and people start requesting RTU’s,³⁰ or in most cases, simply give up. (98)

As Nicholas mentions, this type of treatment defeats any measure of achievement and separates the “men from the boys,” so to speak. Those who are unable to cope with this “chipping away” give up, or leave, returning to base, where they will be further degraded for being unable to cope (98). For Nicholas, this is a matter of course, because “[t]he principle is straightforward: The instructors can do what they want with us. If we feel we can’t go on, or will not obey an order, we may request or be forced to take an RTU” (98). The last step in successfully completing army training is to endure “Vasbyt”, “an excruciating five-day route march with full kit and minimal rations” (180). Nicholas explains that “Vasbyt” may be defined as “[w]hen the body has given

²⁹ Nicholas’s friend, Dylan, undergoes countless debilitating sessions like these, as a result of his defiance in just appearing unmoved by hurled verbal abuse and threats of physical abuse from his instructor. His final act of rebellion is by committing suicide.

³⁰ Return to Unit.

up, but the mind ignores the pleading and drives the body through the pain and the protests” (181). “Vasbyt”, literally translated into English, is to “bite tight”, meaning to hang on, or persevere through something difficult or unpleasant and, in the case of this word, by one’s teeth. This is befitting, since “Vasbyt” is the final and most harrowing obstacle to endure in army training, before being posted on the border. Nicholas explains that “Vasbyt starts on a Sunday afternoon, after being frisked, completely nude, even up our arses. We are not allowed any cigarettes, or food, only the sparse provisions they give us” (181). The remaining conscripts must survive, treading treacherous ground, for days at a time, with minimal food, carrying more weight than that of their own bodies, endure being woken up at all hours when there is a chance for sleep and finally, most childishly of all, have hot, welcoming soup tipped over onto the ground in front of them, while they must look on, unmoved, but as hungry as ever.

Even though the army is presented as an almost intolerably masculine, hostile environment, *moffie* documents an even more extreme version of this maleness than that which is present in training camps. Those soldiers who manage to complete “Vasbyt”, without an RTU or breaking down completely, are deemed fit to be sent to the border for service. Once there, Nicholas encounters Koevoet. “Koevoet” means “crowbar” in English, the word itself attesting to the rugged masculinity of the members of this elite, although somewhat rebellious, special force. Nicholas and the rest of his platoon look on wide eyed, noting the stark contrast between Koevoet and the regular army men:

in Koevoet there is no such sense [as there is in the structure of the regular army troops]. There seems to be no discipline, and the men are completely wild. They have established their own methods and seem to be accountable to nobody. When we ride in the vehicles, we have ways of climbing on and strapping ourselves in

that are rehearsed so many times that we can do it in our sleep. Not Koevoet. They ride on the sides or on the roofs, anyway they care to. Our vehicles are all exactly the same, always parked as if in platoon, ready for parade. Their vehicles are left haphazardly wherever they have stopped. The cars are dirty, painted and personalised, with parts missing and crude modifications, like machine guns fastened to the Hippo APC's. Their personal appearance entails whatever makes them feel comfortable – long hair, torn clothing and scruffy craziness. (222)

The Koevoet soldiers are afforded a great deal of respect and awe by the visiting “regular” troops. This is ironic in that the Koevoet soldiers are seen as messy, dirty, disorderly and seemingly unruly, something that would be seen as completely intolerable in the army that Nicholas presents to the reader in *moffie*. Even their long hair, which, when worn by the hippy on the beach, is seen as disgustingly feminine by Nicholas's father, adds to their rugged demeanour. They are exempt from the orders and structure of traditional army life, because *they* are the elite tracking soldiers who really get the state's work done; catching “terrs”. Because they inhabit the roughest edges of survival, the very spearhead of the regime's military purpose in Namibia and Angola, they do not fall under any form of rule. Koevoet are seen as highly masculine, an extreme, improved version of the regular force. When things heat up on the border, the regulars are doused in excited menace and “vow to cut off the terrorists' ears and balls and dry them for jewellery, as they have seen Koevoet do,”³¹ and Nicholas notes that “[at] the base we do not interact with Koevoet. They don't talk to us; we are low-fat milk and they are jet-fuel” (226-228). As may be deduced by this rather telling comparison, these men are highly respected and

³¹ This is reminiscent of Oupa Erasmus's hunting the elephant *bull* for its ivory to make a decorated shaving brush in Behr's *The Smell of Apples* – a prized symbol of masculinity gained by traditionally overtly masculine means. Both Oupa Erasmus and Koevoet are “hunters,” out for a prize.

admired for their work, and their scruffy, masculine demeanour seems to render them enigmatic, untouchable and awe-inspiring.

With these varying strata and hierarchies of manliness come dissidence, denial and disappointment. With heavily prescribed, stifling ways of being men in the army, fissures form and cracks permeate the surface of this façade. As Kraak asserts in *Special Assignment*, conscripts differed from one another and were purposely divided by arbitrary issues, such as those of language, upbringing, or religious background. The peak and arguably most physically and emotionally trying of all these differences would come about when the pretence of straightness became too much for some of the gay conscripts.

Greig Coetzee, a journalist, tells the shocking story of how many of the people administering medicine were high on drugs at the time, and comments that the conscripts were never told what was in the injections they were being administered. He says that “there was this sense that they owned your body” (*Special Assignment*). Gerald Kraak, the director of the *Special Assignment* episode I refer to in this chapter, and author of the political novel, *Ice in the Lungs*,³² is also interviewed in this documentary. He mentions his self-imposed exile along with a number of other political activists, as a result being at odds with, among other things, the military workings of the regime. He says that

[a] very disconcerting picture emerged of the military as a very brutal institution in which differences among conscripts were deliberately encouraged. So, for example, differences of language, differences of religion, differences of political belief, differences between gay and straight conscripts. I think that in encouraging

³² I aimed to make use of this novel for this thesis so as to make a stronger link between the social and political problems surrounding “queerness” under apartheid. However, limitations of time and scope prevented its inclusion.

this difference, the army was trying to break down any possibility of unity emerging among conscripts and, in fact, it was written into the military regulations that while conscripts were in the army, they were the property of the state and they no longer had any legal rights. (*Special Assignment*)

The helplessness of one's physical body belonging to the state is not only applicable to the conscripts themselves, but the parents of these conscripts, the people who give their children over to the state. Malcolm, one of Nicholas's friends, has his hand crushed in contact on the border. Nicholas is able to contact the conscript's father and urges him to make an effort to have his son's hand fixed properly. Malcolm's father is devoid of any fiery will to help his son and says to Nicholas, " 'I have no say, you know. He belongs to the army. So do you. It's out of my hands' " (262). Eventually, Nicholas's quest is aided by another conscript's friend's father, who has money and influence, the only things that seem to be able to effect any change in this state of emergency.

Examples of conscripts being at odds with one another for arbitrary reasons are abundant in *moffie*. This is affirmed by Nicholas's resolve to blend in and

that the only way to survive is not to stand out – not in front, not at the back – but to merge into the middle smudge of brown army rabble.³³ It's not the physical aspect of this situation that is disquieting, but the senseless 'breaking down and rebuilding' that is so devoid of reason. (74)

³³ My father recently told me a story that resonates with Nicholas's reasoning. His platoon was commanded to run from one location to another, approximately twenty-one kilometres apart. The conscripts at the front of the group raced ahead to the finish and upon arrival were barked at for not staying with the group, and, for punishment, had to run the circuit again. This exercise illustrated that the platoon had to be as fast as its slowest member and never, if at all possible, to come in first, or lag behind.

Kraak's statement, quoted earlier, seems to have more to do with differences on a social level. He highlights the army's discouragement of unity stemming from sameness of experience, belief, or upbringing, by focusing on those differences and making them seem impossible to reconcile. Nicholas then highlights how, on a physical level, sameness is safer. Kraak's statement and Nicholas's logic seem to differ, but the latter seems to be a response to the former. The age-old and clichéd saying that the army breaks a man down, in order to build him up again (fashioned in the way the army sees satisfactory) is apparent here. Everyman in the *Special Assignment* documentary states that the conscripts "were dead scared of what [the army] could do to us if we didn't conform to the accepted South African male stereotype" and "[a]nyone who was different would be persecuted. If you were effeminate, if you were short, small, if you wore glasses, or read books, if you were useless at rugby or had an English accent, or just openly criticised the government" (*Special Assignment*). My main purpose in this section is to discuss three forms of dissidence in the novel, in the form of identifying with an "inferior" race, suicide and being gay.

In a chapter about political and sexual "deviance" in *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* (1991), Jonathan Dollimore notes some interesting aspects about deviant sexuality, "sodomy" and the Napoleonic wars, which are applicable to the South African state of emergency situation. He says:

[t]he sodomite becomes a virulent image [...], embodying a foreign infection which in turn is linked to social disorder and economic collapse at home. A violent, enduring mythology is activated to make sense of immediate socio-political crisis and fear [...] [This] suggests that if, in periods of intensified conflict, crisis is displaced on to the deviant, the process only succeeds because of the paranoid instabilities at the heart of dominant cultural identities. Further, such

displacements of non-sexual fears on to the sexual deviant, be he or she actual, imagined, or constituted in and by the displacement, are made possible because other kinds of transgression – political, religious – are not only loosely associated with the sexual deviant, but ‘condensed’ in the very definition of deviance. (237)

With a tense and intense atmosphere in South Africa under the state of emergency and with the more obvious threat of “communism” pressing in at the literal and figurative borders, “deviance” in the form of “sodomy” or homosexuality would have invoked similar anxieties, but as an internal threat. In particular, *moffie* documents the inherent fear that Nicholas’s father possesses about his son becoming a failure, a bum on the street – a fear invoked by the mere thought of a “moffie” at the tennis club. The way that his father is a clear representation of the patriarchal, hegemonic apartheid regime and its strictures and is anxious about his son, represents the anxieties of a white, national patriarchy about its youth and the consequences of not following in these hegemonic footsteps. Deviance then becomes something which can be blamed for a number of anxiety-provoking issues at home. I make reference to a few incidents of misplaced blame on deviants in *moffie*. This paranoia of white South Africans about the state of their country serves to intensify the placement of blame on deviants for all manner of crises.

I begin with the lightest and least consequence-bearing episode in van der Merwe’s *moffie*. Of all the conscripts at their base, Nicholas, Dylan and Malcolm seem to be the most open-minded, “liberal” and wise to the future.³⁴ Sitting around during a break, Dylan exposes the fact that he is of black or Malay descent, which would technically render him a coloured person, thereby

³⁴ It feels as if van der Merwe “moralises” through these characters’ dialogues, as if speaking directly to the reader. At times, the dialogue about moral and political issues between these characters seems stodgy, contrived and rooted in present-day vernacular, for example, “ ‘You know, we’re actually as badly persecuted as the blacks in this country. Even more so. At least it’s not illegal to be black!’ ” (269).

exonerating him from the army. He does this purposefully to upset the racist, purist conscripts, by exposing that Afrikaner blood is not quite as “pure” as some would like to think and to show up the regime, if based on racial purity, as a lie. This is met with such responses as:

‘Fucking *hotnot*³⁵ is what I would call you [...] You should want to hide such disgusting info about yourself and instead you’re proud of it. *Kleurling!*’ [...] One guy gets up saying he will not eat at the same table as a coloured. ‘Fucking kaffir, I knew it ... fucking kaffir commie!’ (101-102)

Suddenly, even though Dylan *looks* white, he is held in contempt for his openly declared darker-skinned lineage. He is called derogatory names, almost to his delight, as this means he has affected the other conscripts. The insults end on a political note, with “fucking kaffir commie” (102). The word “kaffir”³⁶ is also a derogatory word. Historically it was used to refer to “a member of the Xhosa-speaking peoples of South Africa,” but since, it has become an insulting term for anybody who is black (Davis et al. 439). This added to “commie”, the derogatory slang for a Communist as a defining label for Dylan, who has “impure” blood from probably centuries ago, is unfair and simplistically reductive. Dylan’s character is reduced to a black Communist in the meanest, crudest sense possible. He has been reduced to the enemy in reductive aphorisms that mirror those of Marnus’s father in *The Smell of Apples*.

The second example of dissidence or defiance in the army is what occurs when Dylan, the conscript whom I mention above, commits suicide. Van der Merwe presents this character as a gentle but tough man. Nicholas’s private name for him is “Dark Flame”, which describes him

³⁵ A derogatory term meaning a coloured or black person. Supposedly from the Dutch “hotteren-totteren”, the San people, condescendingly named for the sounds their speech made to foreign ears.

³⁶ “From the Arabic *kāfir* [for] ‘infidel’ ” (Davis et al. 439).

well. He is a dark, brooding, yet gentle character, about whom Nicholas desperately wants to know more, but is fearful of probing in case of his retreating back into silence and shyness. Upon completion of the novel, the reader understands that Dylan is gay, but has immense difficulty in coming to terms with this and, as a child, he was a victim of paedophilia.³⁷ He is profoundly upset by the “Boksom Boys” drama, when two young men were caught kissing one another, an event to which I will return later. For Dylan, this seemed to drive home the intolerance of society towards homosexuality, as well as the unfair yet inherent personal struggle that would encompass living life openly as a gay man. He is also continuously picked on and harassed by his Sergeant, who identifies something intangibly defiant about him, and who will not rest until he has driven Dylan to insanity or death by physical exhaustion. Nevertheless, after a time of hinting at the fragility of life and the ease with which one can exit this world, Dylan kills himself by firing his rifle into his mouth.³⁸ Naturally, the army is affected by this as a material loss; the loss of one more man on the border, one more death for which to find blame elsewhere, and the shock and loss of morale for the rest of the conscripts.

The company has an urgent meeting about the loss of a conscript. Coming as a shock to Nicholas, Dylan’s best friend, the meeting is not about the sadness of loss, or grief, but about Dylan’s supposed weakness. The meeting progresses as follows:

³⁷ By using the explicit example of paedophilia, such as with Uncle Dirk and his perverse mattress wrestling contest, van der Merwe is very sensitive to and concerned with the erroneous perception that homosexuality is linked to paedophilia and sexual abuse. He uses examples of both quite purposefully in order to mark the difference and the false linkages between them.

³⁸ In the “Property of the State” interview, Gerald Kraak exposes some alarming numbers and facts about the suicide rate in the army during the apartheid years. He says that it was “discovered that in the late ’70s and early ’80s the rate of suicide in the army increased almost 40% year on year [...] and the rate of suicide in the military was six times higher than in civilian population” (*Special Assignment*).

‘We will not tolerate this kind of weakness here. People like Stassen must go and kill themselves some place else. It’s bad for the name of Infantry School.’ [...]

‘We know everything.’ Again the pause to make sure every serviceman’s attention is on what he is about to tell us. ‘It has come to my attention that Stassen had, how shall I put it, a sickness ... uhm, a perversion, actually [...] Stassen was a *trassie* ... a homosexual [...] He was expelled from high school, I am told, for the deviant act of ... fiddling with another boy [...] You see, it wasn’t something the army did. He probably couldn’t live with himself any longer, being – how should I say? – sick ... perverted. According to the experts these people are mentally ill. It’s a sickness, and I’m told they hate themselves so much for their evil lusts that they simply can’t live with themselves [...] [I]t’s become so bad that there is a special ward for people like Stassen [...] Ward 22 ... where all the drug addicts, madmen and deviants are sent. At great cost to the military.’ (157)

The conscripts are warned that should they intend to embrace the alternative to life, they should do this elsewhere. Dylan’s death is seen as a blemish on the name of the infantry and the captain proceeds to link his death, not with the unflinching pressure from the drill instructor or the army’s intolerant views on gays, but with the *fact* that he is gay. With their power to gain access to information, they are able to defame the young man in front of all his colleagues, when an old school story is made public. The captain then writes Dylan’s suicide off as a result of him not being able to live with his “perversions” and pathologises his presumed gayness as an illness, a disease to be cured, for which there is an actual medical facility – Ward 22. Not surprisingly, gay men are branded as being the same as drug addicts and mad people. I see gayness as being the least tolerated of all “deviance” in the army, and although I only address the terrible

consequences of this “perversion,” in no way do I undermine or see the suffering of other “deviants” as a lesser consequence with less far-reaching effects.

This final example of deviance, and I believe most despised by the state and those who do its bidding, is that of the “Boksom Boys”. The origin of this label for these two young men is saddening: “Apparently during the assault, one corporal repeatedly shouted, ‘*Boks hom, boks hom!*’ (‘Punch him, punch him!’), and from then on the two are called the Boksom Boys” (129).

Nicholas notes that

[t]he instructors are ready for the attack with towels and pillowcases filled with the working parts of an R1 rifle [...] The assailants are the heroes and the two young men are further punished by being sent to a psychiatric ward. Their parents cannot help them – they are the property of the State. Going to the press is not an option, as the love between two men is illegal and punishable by law. The parents are told that their sons are mentally unfit and unsuitable for combat or training. This will leak into their communities, where the parents’ and the boys’ lives will never be the same again [...] The minister’s son stands up for himself, proclaiming his love for the other boy, who in turn says he was seduced and wants to be cured. (129)

The physical abuse the two endure is astounding. A beating with pillowcases filled with bits of heavy metal seems excessive and highly unnecessary. Not only are the “boys” punished, but their families and communities will bear the brunt of this terrible “misdemeanour” by way of being singled out and shunned by their respective communities. They lose their jobs, or are so

ostracised by their communities that they feel compelled to move away and start a new life elsewhere. One of the boys' mothers even suffers from a nervous breakdown (131).

This very personal event is made public in a humiliating way, as the boys are referred to as “ ‘the lowest form of life you will ever see. Take a good look.’ Turning to them he says, ‘You are shit, kaffirs, dogs, animals. No, you are not worthy of being called animals; not even animals carry on like you do’ ” (130). One of the boys, Deon, does not waver. He stands proud and does not adjust his views and feelings based on what is expected and respectable. His lover, however, gives in to the system and claims to be a victim of sordid advances and seeks “medical” help. Just like the speech given after Dylan’s suicide, this event also becomes a site for moral education, and homosexuality is placed on the same level of detestable conceptions as communism, “the collapse of Christian values and the barbarism of black people” (129).

Everyman in the *Special Assignment* episode says that “[w]e were dead scared of what [the army] could do to us if we didn’t conform to the accepted South African male stereotype” and that “homosexuals were labelled as “onsedelik,”³⁹ unnatural, queer, abnormal and therefore despicable. Once you were labelled [you would endure] the casual torture of being tripped, or pushed, the battery, the jeering, even having cigarettes put out on your skin” (*Special Assignment*).

In exploring these instances of “deviance” it becomes apparent that they are abhorred by society and by the institution of the army, so much so that they become caught in a close dialectic with one another. In the second chapter of this thesis, I questioned what it was about Nicholas’s homosexuality, or being “different,” that was so intolerable for his father and came to the

³⁹ “Onsedelikheid” is defined as “immorality”. To be “onsedelik” would then mean to be “immoral”.

conclusion that this problem stems from his father, and his anxieties about what undermines his own sexuality and place in society. This relationship is a microcosm for the discourse around homosexuality and deviance in the army. Dollimore states that

[i]n Foucault's scheme deviants come to occupy a revealing, dangerous double relationship to power, at once culturally marginal yet discursively central. Even as the sexual deviant is banished to the margins of society, he or she remains integral to it, not in spite of but because of that marginality. (222)

For the purposes of this essay then, even though homosexuality and the other modes of "deviance" are culturally marginal, the white Afrikaner warfaring populace is intolerant of these marginal concepts because they are painfully *close* to the centre and a threat to those that occupy that centre. This is so because the margins and the centre are inextricably linked by relations of blood and power.

Although *moffie* is a novel that presents some literary problems, it is still a rich text for army and Border War details. That being said, Behr's *Kings of the Water*, in contrast, only refers very rarely to army, or at least, navy life. Unlike van der Merwe's, Behr's style in his latest novel seems evasive, intentionally omitting details, pointing to the haziness of memory, as well as allowing the reader to make the overarching narrative a whole one. Although not in terms of "deviance," another three responses or alternatives to white, Afrikaner hegemony in *Kings of the Water* will be explored.

4.3 “Paradys” Lost – Queerness in *Kings of the Water*

Although Behr’s novel really addresses the return of the protagonist, Michiel, to a life and country that has moved on (and remained stagnant, or regressed in some instances) since he has fled, I turn to the events intrinsic to a regime such as apartheid that made it impossible for him to stay; the country and its political system spat him out, (r)jected him when his sexual orientation was accidentally found out.

Michiel frankly tells Karien the details of the encounter that sets him on a course out of the country. A navy officer himself, he befriends an Indian Lieutenant, Sol Govender, in Durban and they make their way to the beach one afternoon. Michiel says that “[t]hey knew the risks of shirked duties and of skin color on a beach designated *Europeans Only*” (169). The two are presumably reported by a white couple who Michiel supposes are on honeymoon, and who greeted the two and seemed friendly enough. After they are caught having sex in the back of the car, “‘[t]he police took us ... they let us dress first.’ Underwear held as evidence. There was no denying who they were or where they belonged” (170). Although Sol and Michiel are met with far less brutality than one might expect, their treatment is still distasteful.

Sol Govender, the Indian man, “would be stripped of his rank and dishonorably discharged” presumably because he is Indian (171). Michiel, with the cushioning of his more “favourable” skin colour, claims:

“I was demoted. I’d have to complete my national service as a seaman after a week’s leave. ‘Go and sort yourself out, young man, and say your *mea culpas* to your family,’ the base commander said.’ [...] ‘You will have to find a way to live with this. I’m not sure what your family might say or where you will find

employment with a stigma of this nature to your name. Needless to say, you have done the other non-white officers no service. Unless sedition was your intention from the outset.’ ” (171)

In comparison to some of the examples given in van der Merwe’s *moffie*, Michiel gets off lightly, with a mild talking-to. Aside from this, it is not the fact that he had sex on the beach that has him in this position, but rather the fact that he had sex on the beach with another *man*. Michiel, demoted, is ordered to go home and expose his secret to his parents. This echoes the interview with Mike Smith in “Property of the State”, where he says that he had to tell his parents that he was gay in an upsetting episode, as well as the Boksom Boys, who not only had to tell their parents about what happened, but whose lives and occupations were also disrupted because of this.

As I have argued throughout this thesis, the only possibilities for a gay man in the novels dealt with are for that man to die or flee. Behr presents the reader with three options, three ways of being a man in South Africa during the state of emergency. These ways of being, I argue, are represented by each brother respectively. Michiel flees South Africa. Benjamin, his remaining brother, takes over the role of the patriarch. He is a heterosexual male, with a wife and children and runs the family farm and business. Peet, the oldest son, commits suicide by drowning; Michiel suggests that he was ill, that Peet’s friend, Leon, had “known for two years that he was sick. Finishing his LLB kept him from going insane. In those days there was nothing except to wait it out” (89). Although Behr is elusive on the topic of Peet’s illness, I argue that the implication is that he is HIV positive and cannot live with both the stigmas attached to being gay, as well as those attached to HIV and Aids, an illness of which very little was known about in

what is presumably the early 1980s, when he commits suicide. For me, these brothers represent the three reactions to the status quo of the time; conformity, death, or exile.

All three novels I present in the above chapter speak from very different perspectives about the apartheid regime. Galgut's *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs*, as I have mentioned, was published in 1991, the year after Nelson Mandela was released from jail, a time when many white people thought *Uhuru* was imminent.⁴⁰ *moffie*, published in 2006, a novel of catharsis, seems to me to represent not just a literary "letting go" for the author, but for a generation of white men, gay and straight. Finally, Behr's *Kings of the Water*, published in 2009, speaks from the perspective of more than a decade later than the other novels I have made use of, dealing with the hereafter and the questions of moving forwards and away. All three that I mention deal with, although at different levels of tangibility, the problematic of queerness in the army and under the apartheid regime.

As I have said, van der Merwe's *moffie* offers up a vast amount of detail about queerness in the army, and therefore I have made use of this text as a source of *detail* and not necessarily as material for extensive critical literary analysis. The novel documents the expectations of the nation-state and army, as one entity, of how to be a "real" man, and of course, as I have explored in the above, it documents what happens when these expectations are not met, in the form of "deviance", such as identifying with any "non-white" person or people, and suicide, as in the case of Dylan Stassen, and finally coming out queer, being a main priority in this chapter.

I have used *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* and *Kings of the Water* as subsidiary novels. I note that with Galgut's novel, the author seems to strongly juxtapose SWAPO's fight for freedom in

⁴⁰ I have heard stories about families who bought stocks of canned food to last them for months in case of this and of South Africa shutting down into "deepest-darkest" mode.

Namibia with Patrick's fight for freedom to be openly gay. Even though SWAPO wins the elections in Namibia, the freedom to be gay seems to be left to be subsumed by a depressing drive back to South Africa, a hope for another time.

Finally, Behr's latest novel, *Kings of the Water*, grapples with the aftermath of the return home of a runaway son. Nuanced references to his time in the navy, his fleeing and the loss of his brother, Peet, make Michiel, and indeed, Behr himself, a projector of semi-unclear images, only to retract and dim them again. I argued that this novel illustrates my view on apartheid South African masculinity as a formidable ideal to conform to, or otherwise, flee from, or die because of. I see this as illustrated by the three brothers. I feel strongly that *Kings of the Water*, along with Behr's *Embrace* and *The Smell of Apples* together, would provide rich ground for an exploration of boyhood, manhood, fatherhood, masculinities, and the structures that dictate these.

4.4 The Forgotten Ones

Young men were exposed to gruelling training, harrowing ordeals on the border, witnessing the macabre abuse, murder and torture of the enemy, as well as the murders and deaths of their comrades. Mike Smith, a victim of the Border War, makes an important statement about the Border War and present-day South Africa towards the end of the documentary. He says, "I think that our struggle has been a little bit forgotten, in the sense that nobody really has the courage to say, 'Hey, man, them sending those white boys to Angola, or Namibia, or wherever, was in fact, a gross violation of human rights' " (*Special Assignment*). Some of the most poignant words I have come across in van der Merwe's *moffie* speak back to Mike's thoughts. Nicholas says that

it is not only the parents whose sons die who lose their children – their neatly parcelled boys they so eagerly sent to serve. The degree to which they return as whole human beings depends on their individual experiences and their ability to process this serrated incision into their lives.

We are constantly told that ‘the army will make a man of you’, but often it just takes you completely. In some instances the men that the families get back are impenetrable sepulchres; caskets they are too afraid to open for fear of seeing the contents. (99)

Nicholas asserts that whether the young boys who went to the army return home or not, they are changed for the rest of their lives. His allusion to the young men’s outer bodies really being caskets is unnerving. He means to say that these boys are dead, or that something about them is dead, entombed in their fleshy bodies for caskets, which loved ones are too fearful to open.

One story which illustrates the aftermath of such an experience at such a young age in one’s life is that of Granger Korff. In the epilogue of *19 with a Bullet*, published in 2009, he tells the story about how he was “ambushed by the past” (336). He had gone to live in America, boxing professionally to make money:

When I quit boxing [...] I was [...] ambushed by dead ‘freedom fighters’ with their brains blown out, ambushed by the spirits of dead men, old women and children and their spilled blood on the white sands of Angola and South West Africa.

I found it hard to handle any authority and to keep a steady job at the bottom of the ladder in my new country and many a loudmouthed boss was put up against the wall [...].

I was quiet but became quieter. The quieter I became the stronger the anger grew – many's the owner of a disrespectful or sloppy Los Angeles attitude who was given an instant re-education with cruel boots and a fast, heavy fist. (336-337)

Korff's experiences ring true with many I witnessed while growing up. The conscripts who returned from the army were not offered any post-trauma counselling. If anything, counselling would be for "moffies", something "real" mean did not do. For Louw and Edwards et al:

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) develops in people who have been exposed to a traumatic event, especially if their life has been threatened or others have died violently. Soldiers who have been exposed to danger in combat often suffer from this disorder [...] People with PTSD often feel intensely anxious and startle easily, as if they are expecting the traumatic event to suddenly occur again. They also have flashbacks in which they vividly re-experience aspects of the event [...] This happens during sleep [...] Another common symptom is that they feel as if they have no future. They feel as if they will die quite soon. PTSD may develop immediately after the trauma, but in some cases the symptoms begin months later. If left untreated they may continue for the rest of a person's life. (685-686)

A generation of white men who are aged, more or less, between forty and seventy have memories of serving in the army and on the border. For many of them, I am sure, memories are not far away. My father is of the belief that what messed men up more than witnessing the

horrors of war was the country's transfer into the hands of the so-called "enemy," having to integrate back into society, a revolutionised one, where the black man is no longer the enemy, racism is suddenly taboo and a right to affirmative action is protected by the constitution. Mike Smith suggests that these young men are the "forgotten" ones (*Special Assignment*) and perhaps this is so *because* these boys were white and fought a white Afrikaner war. Perhaps *because* the end of the old South Africa marked the end of conscription, this war and these men are now invisible, their fight closeted as a shameful and messy part of history. This I add to the multitude of possibilities and reasons why so many middle-aged white men of today cannot keep jobs for longer than a few months at a time, why they cannot seem to let go of the racism their "superior" skins granted them so many years ago, and why they are simply angry, though at nothing in particular. Nevertheless, these men, those that are left and have not been consumed by memories, forge on, invisible, blending into that pervasive, "blank" whiteness that still exists, as de Kock asserts.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

In an article in the *Cape Times*, called “Campaign that was a thorn in minister’s side”, both Archbishop Desmond Tutu and former president FW de Klerk give their thoughts on the End Conscription Campaign, a war-resistant organisation which “focused not on the political dimension, but on resentment towards the hardships of army life, the risks of death and injury and the disruptions caused by military service to family life and careers” (Williams 47). Ex-president, de Klerk is on record as saying that he “was opposed to the organisation then and still [thinks] they were wrong” (Ancer 9). Instead, he says, his respect goes to the people who did their time in the army, because, according to him, “[t]he fact is that if the former security forces had not held the line against the Soviet and Cuban-backed threat in southern Angola there would probably have been a revolutionary outcome in the territory (Namibia)” (Ancer 9). Archbishop Desmond Tutu has a different opinion. He says that “[b]y standing up against forced military conscription, conscientious objectors and the ECC demonstrated to their fellow black South Africans that not all whites supported apartheid and that they were also prepared to make sacrifices in the struggle against apartheid” (Ancer 9). This illustrates just two contrasting views on the ECC and the idea of forced conscription. Whether or not people agreed or disagreed with the system, what is left of this is what society must come to terms with. The fictions I have examined are hinged on these two opposing points of view.

This thesis illustrates how often in the old regime, white fatherhood was a manner of offering a blueprint of masculinity to the youth. I made use of both *The Smell of Apples* and *moffie* to illustrate this. *The Smell of Apples* so poignantly illustrates how young Marnus is subtly yet purposefully coaxed into becoming the sort of man with whom his father would be satisfied; his father is, after all, his teacher in this sense. *moffie* offers the reader a look into the struggle of a

young boy who cannot be compliant with his father's wishes for him, because he is "different." He is not adept at catching balls, fares poorly at school and takes a shining to art. I use these two novels not just to show how prescriptions for a hegemonic national identity infiltrate the home, but also to show that the space of the home is a mere starting point, a site for grooming a boy to be a man who will be fit to go to the army.

I explore the characters of the women, wives and mothers in both the above novels, as well as *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs*. Although my initial thoughts were that these women were represented as waifish and inconsequential, re-reading and analysis made room for a different opinion. Leonore, the most intellectually rebellious of the female characters, although at times a little resentful of the sacrifices she has made for her family, is by no means self-pitying. As illustrated, although this comes as a complex matter, Leonore's actions deny those prescriptions set out by the patriarch. Of the more obvious examples are her listening to jazz and sleeping with the Cuban General. Although van der Merwe's Suzie is a somewhat insipid character, she does come across as a caring, benevolent mother figure that, unlike Leonore, maintains her subordinate position to her husband in public, but differs with her husband when she sees fit. I also address the character of Ellen in *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs*, who is hardly a mother to her son, Patrick, and her so-called rebellious antics are not founded in a particular belief in anything, but rather, fleeting passions that die shortly after she has taken them up. I address these mothers to explore the ways in which they are or are not supportive of their sons and, more particularly, how these women are rebellious or resistant to their husbands, and/or men and in turn, the status quo of the regime.

Finally, this thesis addresses, by making use of *moffie*, *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* and very briefly, *Kings of the Water*, the complexities of queerness as "deviance" in the army. Under

apartheid, and especially in the highly concentrated microcosm of this regime called the army, being gay was completely unacceptable and punishable by law. Both Galgut's and Behr's novels address this in a subtle, nuanced ways, which makes for greater *literary* analysis, while *moffie* lends greater details about the atmosphere of the army and the consequences of "coming out" in an environment such as this.

Although this thesis does not come to any hard and fast conclusions about the regime and about queerness in family life or on the border, it explores the mechanics and the ugliness behind conscription and family life with novels that I believe are essentially being published as catharsis for their authors, as well as for a generation of white men who have, for so long, remained silent.

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