

STATE OF EMERGENCY

**“An exploration of attitudes towards
homosexuality in the SADF,
1969-1994”**

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Thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in History at the Stellenbosch University.

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March 2011

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 authorship owner 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 research set out to give a better understanding of gay conscripts within the South African Defence Force (SADF) during the 1970's and 1980's, as well as to establish whether a noticeable change towards gay conscripts could be detected before and after c.1985. Based upon sources from the military archives, oral interviews as well as existing secondary literature on the topic, it becomes clear that aside from the “official line”, both conservative as well as progressive views on homosexuality existed. Even though it can be concluded that attitudes towards homosexuality among civilian South Africans became more permissive during the 1980's, it was not a change in attitude shared throughout (white) society. This research has been done firstly to add to the general knowledge of the experiences of gay conscripts in the 1970's and 1980's within the SADF. It has done so by conducting interviews with fifteen ex-conscripts, both gay and straight, covering anti-gay attitudes, coming out in the army, the existence of queer platoons and/or jobs perceived to be 'gay', psychiatric treatment of homosexuals and the knowledge of the existence of these treatments, the gay/straight barrier and qualitative personal assessments of the period of conscription. Secondly, it attempts to answer the question whether a change in attitude towards gay conscripts could be seen roughly around 1985, as South African society also became (slowly) more permissive towards homosexuality.

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Introduction:

“The examined conscript is a ‘primary’ homosexual with female urges. He is not interested in treatment for his condition, as he made peace with himself and he tries to abuse his condition to avoid military service. From a medical point of view he is suitable for full military service”.¹ In 1971, with the above statement, a Pretoria based military psychiatrist deemed a homosexual conscript fit for military service. Why was this conscript evaluated specifically for being homosexual by the psychiatrist?

This thesis focuses on the experiences of gay conscripts within the South African Defence Force (SADF) during the 1970's and 1980's. The main focus is neither on the struggle against apartheid, nor on the whole SADF. Most research done so far on this topic has, at least in part, focused on Ward 22, a notorious Voortrekkerhoogte psychiatric ward where gay army personnel were allegedly treated for their homosexuality by means of shock therapy.² Even though this thesis does include this angle, the main purpose is to provide a better understanding of how homosexuality was perceived and dealt with within the SADF during the height of Apartheid, 1969 - 1994. Besides this, it also discusses how changes in society and military affected one another. It asks whether the second half of the 1980's did not just see more permissive changes in civic society but also saw a change towards homosexuality within the armed forces.

In apartheid South Africa, where a white minority was determined to remain in control at all cost, military conscription for all white males of eighteen years and older was compulsory. These young men were to defend white, heterosexual, Christian civilization against the perceived threat of communism, as well as against the black majority that increasingly demanded equal rights. Since 1957 a limited call-up (ballot system) had been in place for military service

¹ “Psychiatric evaluation of white homosexual conscript”, A/MED/3/1/69540177N, Bevelvoerder: 1 Militêre Hospitaal, January 17th, 1972.

² R. Kaplan, “The Aversion Project – psychiatric abuses in the South African Defence Force during the apartheid era, “ *SAMJ Forum* (2001): 216.

but as the situation deteriorated with rioting in South African townships and conflict on the Namibian/Angolan border, conscription within the South African Defence Force was changed to a compulsory conscription period of two years in 1977.³ For some conscripts, at least six months of military service took place on the border which became the symbol of maintenance of the white status quo.⁴

Military training was, historically, a vital context for the construction, and affirmation, of white males in South Africa. Here, masculinity was constructed through the exclusion of women, blacks and gays. Military training and active participation in warfare became the most legitimated rite of passage to manhood for 'our boys on the border'. Equally in the African community, preparation for battles and stick fights was a major part of masculine identity, expressed in the brandishing of 'traditional weapons' at public gatherings.⁵ Many welcomed national service as a rite of passage whereby boys became men.⁶

Although conscription was compulsory for all white males, the white population of South Africa itself was not a homogeneous one. They can roughly be divided into Afrikaners (of mainly Dutch descent) and English (of mainly British descent).⁷ In the case of the Afrikaner, the development of nationalism and hegemonic masculinity went hand in hand. Viewed from an ethical perspective, the moral values of Afrikaner society are closely linked to religious beliefs. The emphasis was upon the Afrikaners as part of the 'Christian Western civilization'. Within Afrikaner culture the Bible and the gun are both part of the tradition of expansion and survival of the 'volk'.⁸ Many Afrikaners had a vested interest in the maintenance of apartheid, as the demise of the racial system was perceived to

³ D. Conway, "The masculine state in crisis," *Men and Masculinities* (2008), 242.

⁴ D. Conway, "Somewhere on the border – of credibility": The cultural construction and contestation of 'the Border' in white South African society," in *Beyond the Border War: new perspectives on Southern Africa's late-Cold War conflict*, ed. Baines, G, and Vale P. (Pretoria: UNISA Press, 2008), 77.

⁵ G. Lindegger and K. Durheim, "Men, HIV/AIDS and the crisis of masculinity," in *Socio-Political and Psychological Perspectives on South Africa*, ed. R. Stones. (New York: Nova Science, 2001), 239.

⁶ G. Baines, *Coming to terms with the "border war" in post-apartheid South Africa* (National Arts Festival, winter school lecture, July 1st 2008), 1.

⁷ S. Frankental and O. Sichone, *South Africa's Diverse Peoples* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2005), 74.

⁸ K. Grundy, *The militarization of South African politics* (Oxford: Tauris & Co, 1988), 70.

lead to uncertain futures for many of the 'volk'.⁹

The importance of the notion of conquest and expansionism applied to the ideals of the English speaking whites as well.¹⁰ Education for English speaking boys in South Africa was traditionally also focused on preserving a dominating masculinity. The white boarding schools of Natal, from the nineteenth century to 1930, used the prefect system and gender segregation. These schools laid emphasis on toughness and physical hierarchy among the boys, through masculinising practices such as initiation, physical punishment and spartan living conditions. This agenda was connected with the context of colonial conquest, and the goal to maintain racial power over colonised peoples.¹¹ Even so, there was an inclination towards more liberal and free thinking attitudes among English-speakers, especially in English-speaking universities, and they were as a rule far less keen on maintaining apartheid at all costs than some Afrikaners.¹²

The South African Defence Force played a large role in shaping some facets of educational policy. Cadet detachments had been set up in white boys' secondary schools, and, since 1976, the cadet program had been directly under the control of the SADF. According to the SADF it was introduced for the youth to develop a love for their country and national flag, to instill civil defence and to train them in good citizenship as a forerunner to their national service.¹³ White boys were provided (compulsory) paramilitary drill and training, and were psychologically prepared for national service. Cadets were encouraged to enlist in the Permanent Forces upon graduation.¹⁴

To highlight military training as an affirmation and testing ground of masculinity, *Paratus*, the SADF magazine, stated that after two years of military

⁹ G. Callister, "Compliance, Compulsion and Contest: Aspects of military conscription in South Africa, 1952-1992" (MA thesis, Stellenbosch University, 2007) 7.

¹⁰ Lindegger and Durheim, "Men, HIV/AIDS and the crisis of masculinity," 239.

¹¹ R.W. Connell, "Teaching the boy: new research on masculinity, and gender strategies for schools," in *Teachers College Record* (1996): 215.

¹² G. Callister, "Compliance, Compulsion and Contest." 8.

¹³ J. Cock, *Colonels & Cadres, war & gender in South Africa* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1991), 69/70.

¹⁴ K. Grundy, *The militarization of South African politics*, 59.

service, “it is a MAN that returns to civil society”.¹⁵ The process of fusing masculinity and militarism was used extensively in the SADF and other militaries to turn young boys into soldiers.¹⁶ After their initial military training national servicemen were regularly called up for military service.¹⁷ The white population largely accepted these developments not only because it believed the government propaganda about ‘swartgevaar’ (the danger posed by blacks) but also because the societally-entrenched idea of being a man – being a protector, a wage-earner and knowing the right thing to do – made such steps seem perfectly logical.¹⁸

Recent years have seen the publication of many accounts by ex-conscripts, writing about their experiences in the SADF and fighting on the border. In South African military circles, the border became a metonym for the operational zone where the troops of the SADF and the guerillas of the South West African Peoples’ Organisation (SWAPO) known as the People’s Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN) engaged in battle. These military engagements occurred mainly in ‘the north’ of Namibia which comprised Owambo, Okavango, and the Caprivi Strip, as well as in Angola.¹⁹ The geographical distance of ‘the border’ from white South African society helped create a romanticised ideal of military service ‘on the border’.²⁰

The attitudes towards military service expressed in these books differ, although all authors point out their horror at the high death toll and lack of respect for human lives experienced on the border. In *Pionne*²¹ by Bertie Cloete, the emphasis is mainly on his functioning within his platoon. He expresses a certain

¹⁵ J.H. Jersich, “Diensplig: die onsekerheid wyk voor nuwe uitdagings”, *Paratus*, February, 1986. 18.

¹⁶ J. Cock, *Colonels & Cadres*, 59.

¹⁷ K. du Pisani, “Puritanism Transformed, Afrikaner masculinities in the apartheid and post-apartheid period,” in *Changing men in Southern Africa*, ed. by R. Morrell (Scottsville: University of Natal Press, 2001), 165.

¹⁸ R. Morrell, “The times of change,” in *Changing men in Southern Africa*, ed. by R. Morrell. (Scottsville: University of Natal Press, 2001), 17.

¹⁹ G. Baines, “South Africa’s Vietnam?” Literary history and cultural memory of the border war,” *Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Comparative Studies* (2004): 1.

²⁰ Conway, “Somewhere on the border,” 76.

²¹ B. Cloete, *Pionne* (Hermanus: Hemel & See Boeke, 2009)

degree of 'pride' in the abilities of the SADF and its machinery itself. A nagging question remains for him about why the border war and resistance to a changing political climate went on for such a long time, as someone certainly must have realised how many young men were giving their lives in a doomed cause.²² In *Bos Toe!*²³, Nico van der Walt gives an extensive account of his experiences in the army and on the border. He emphasizes how the army changed him from school boy into a man. It appears he rather enjoyed his army time and did not mind being on the border; he actually longed for the border after having been at home on pass.

Clive Holt, in *At thy call we did not falter*²⁴, describes predominantly the psychological effect that warfare had on soldiers, and especially post-traumatic stress disorder. PTSD can start after any traumatic event, like danger or a life threatening situation. The symptoms of PTSD may start immediately or after a delay of weeks or months. Victims usually feel grief-stricken, depressed, anxious, guilty and angry after a traumatic experience.²⁵ Holt was involved in several operations within Angola and as a result of this, he suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder himself. Furthermore, he emphasizes the lack of psychological support offered by the SADF to mentally unstable servicemen.

J.H. Thompson's *An Unpopular War*²⁶ is a recollection of stories about army life, told by former conscripts. The interviewees are both straight and gay, showing different points of view on army life. It has not been written in the form of a novel but consists of short stories by the individual interviewees. It deals with a wide array of subjects like basic training, being in the bush and being under attack. Due to the input by a gay interviewee, *An Unpopular War* also provides some extra background for this research. It tells of the fear of being openly gay or out-ed in the army: "Of course you must remember these were the early eighties. It was illegal to be homosexual; you could be arrested for sodomy. I was so

²² Cloete, *Pionne*, 115.

²³ N. van der Walt, *Bos Toe!* (Pretoria: V&R Drukkery, 2007) 121.

²⁴ C. Holt, *At thy call we did not falter* (Cape Town: Zebra Press, 2005)

²⁵ The Royal College of Psychiatrists, www.rcpsych.ac.uk, last accessed November 17th, 2010.

²⁶ J.H. Thompson, *An Unpopular War* (Cape Town: Zebra, 2006)

scared that my sexual orientation would be discovered. I also thought I was the only gay man in the world. I had not met others like me. I was terrified of being exposed, of being victimized, and I was even more terrified that the army would find out somehow”.²⁷

An Unpopular War also provides some more amusing examples. Stories are being told of gay conscripts warning straight conscripts to vacate the showers by announcing their approach by screaming²⁸ or six bright-eyed gay guys going for a ride in the back of a Ratel, shrieking and screaming while bouncing through the veld, shouting: “Watch out girls” and “Here we come guys”.²⁹ All of the above examples are based upon the account of Rick, who was eighteen at the time and conscripted in the early 1980's. Since they differ so much in tone, a growing confidence with his gay identity, and that of his fellow gay conscripts, can be perceived.

Another way to access these experiences is through fictionalised accounts. Andre-Carl van der Merwe, in his novel *Moffie*³⁰, tells the story of a gay conscript in the early 1980's and therefore mainly deals with attitudes towards homosexuality within the SADF. *Moffie* draws a very negative picture of conscription within the SADF but it should be noted that *Moffie* is a novel switching between the main character's conservative, Afrikaans upbringing and the continuation of a similar conservative, homophobic environment within the armed forces. It also highlights the Voortrekkerhoogte psychiatric ward, where unfortunate gay conscripts could be sent for shock therapy, to be 'cured' from their homosexuality.³¹ Due to the specific, gay, circumstances of the main character, this novel cannot be seen as representative for the 'average' conscript within the SADF. It does however bring the topic closer to this research.

²⁷ Thompson, *Unpopular War*, 54.

²⁸ Thompson, *Unpopular War*, 57.

²⁹ Thompson, *Unpopular War*, 135.

³⁰ Andre-Carl van der Merwe, *Moffie* (Hermanus: Pen Stock Publishing, 2006)

³¹ A more in-depth analyses of treatment of gay conscripts will be given later in this research.

Historical literature used in this thesis comprises of SADF archival documents as well as secondary sources on the topic. Documents retrieved from the military archives in Pretoria consist of psychological reports on gay personnel, official SADF guidelines on how to deal with homosexuality in the armed forces and personal correspondence, within the SADF, on homosexuality.

Robert Kaplan, psychiatrist and medical writer from Australia, has published several articles on Ward 22, the psychiatric ward at Voortrekkerhoogte military base in Pretoria. In his articles he describes the offered 'treatment' to gay conscripts, which varied from aversion (shock) therapy to sex change operations.³² *The Aversion Project*, done by the Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Equality, focuses on human rights abuses of gays and lesbians in the SADF by health workers, during the apartheid era.³³ This project is based, besides an extensive literature survey, on in-depth interviews with survivors of abuse, friends and family of survivors, and health workers. Homosexuals spoke out about their experiences in the armed forces and, in particular, they described how health workers had abused their powers.³⁴

Newspaper articles, discussing treatment in Ward 22, as well as sex change operations, published in *The Guardian* have also been incorporated in this thesis. Tiffany Jones, in her yet to be published *Psychiatry, mental institutions and the mad in apartheid South Africa*,³⁵ provides an in-depth analysis of psychiatric perceptions of homosexuality, both in civil society as well as within the SADF. She also goes into more detail about Aubrey Levin, head of Voortrekkerhoogte's psychiatric ward from 1969 until 1974, who was responsible for implementing the aversion therapy treatment for homosexuals in the SADF.

Rebecca Sinclair's dissertation looks into the treatment of white, gay men in South Africa by the South African government from the 1960's until 2000. She

³² Kaplan, "Aversion," 216.

³³ M.van Zyl et al, *The Aversion Project: human rights abuses of gays and lesbians in the SADF by health workers during the apartheid era* (Cape Town: Simply Said and Done, 1999), 1.

³⁴ Van Zyl et al, *Aversion Project*, 10.

³⁵ T. Jones, *Psychiatry, mental institutions and the mad in apartheid South Africa* (Routledge, 2011)

also researched how gay men reacted to this treatment and the results of these reactions. She claims that state attention had been drawn to homosexuality in the 1960's, not as a result of an increase in overt white, homosexual behaviour, but as a result of a South African Police (SAP) attempt to draw greater attention to the problem in order to maintain order. During the 1980's, she continues to state, repression of white homosexual behaviour stepped up a notch with the activities of the SADF. The SADF reacted to white, gay soldiers with electro-shock therapy and sex changes, many of which were not completed.³⁶

The theory of masculinity, as demonstrated by R.W. Connell, shows how gender is a construct, pivoting on power. Men traditionally enjoyed the patriarchal dividend and were advantaged in general by the subordination of women. Besides the subordination of women, some men also dominated and subordinated other men.³⁷ The notion of hegemonic masculinity, the form of masculinity that is culturally dominant in a given setting, is not static and there is no one pattern of masculinity to be found everywhere. Different cultures, and different period of history, construct masculinity differently.³⁸ Non-hegemonic masculinities usually develop outside the corridors of power and can be defined in terms of race, class, ethnicity or sexual orientation.³⁹ Hegemonic masculinity is hegemonic not just in relation to other masculinities, but in relation the gender order as a whole. It is an expression of the privilege men collectively have over women. The hierarchy of masculinities is an expression of the inequalities shared in that privilege held by different groups of men.⁴⁰

Du Pisani elaborates on the notion of hegemonic masculinity by applying it to Afrikaner hegemonic masculinity, which dominated (white) South African culture during Apartheid in the second half of the twentieth century. Afrikaner hegemonic masculinity marginalised alternative masculinities by marginalising

³⁶ Rebecca Sinclair, "The official treatment of white, South African, homosexual men and the consequent reaction of gay liberation from the 1960s to 2000" (PhD diss., Rand Afrikaans University, 2004) 1.

³⁷ Morrell, "The times of change," 7.

³⁸ R.W. Connell, "Teaching the boy: new research on masculinity, and gender strategies for schools," in *Teachers College Record* (Sydney, 1996) 208.

³⁹ Morrell, "The times of change," 7.

⁴⁰ Connell, "Teaching the boy," 209.

and silencing them. It was intricately bound up with social and political power in Afrikaner society and hence with Afrikaner nationalism.⁴¹ White male homosexuality threatened a patriarchal and racial order that shaped interlocking structures that provided many white Afrikaner males with access to power in South Africa during Apartheid.⁴²

Conway shows that the South African military under Afrikaner hegemonic masculinity was gendered also, in that conscription was constructed as a performance that was a 'rite of passage' that turned boys into men. Cultural discourses of white masculinity were therefore militarised in an effort to make conscription appear a natural and essential facet of every white man's life-course.⁴³ Objectors to military service, due to this gendered discourse, were feminised and constructed as irrational, naive, immature and foolish.⁴⁴

The following chapters will explore the notion of homosexuality within South African (Afrikaner) hegemonic masculinity, and then predominantly in military society. Against this background, the conducted research among ex-conscripts sets out to provide a better understanding of how gay men, in military terms, operated within the established heteronormative structures of the day.

The 1980's saw an escalation of violence and protest action against the Apartheid state. Primarily during the second half of the decade, the National Party government under State President PW Botha, started to revoke petty Apartheid laws in an attempt to stop the spiral of violence in which the country was caught.⁴⁵ With the political slogan "adapt or die", Botha realised that the (violent) status quo between the ruling white minority and the oppressed 'non-white' majority could not be maintained for much longer. During this decade of upheaval, 1985 was a key dividing point. On the one hand a 'total onslaught' strategy was put in place, to battle the threat of the communist African National

⁴¹ Du Pisani, "Puritanism Transformed," 157.

⁴² Du Pisani, "Puritanism Transformed," 169.

⁴³ Conway, "Somewhere on the border," 77.

⁴⁴ Conway, "The masculine state in crisis," 431.

⁴⁵ D. Welsh, *The rise and fall of apartheid* (Jeppestown: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2009), 208.

Congress, and on the other hand a relaxation in apartheid laws is noted in the post-1985 years,⁴⁶ building up to Nelson Mandela's release in 1990.

This research is based on primary sources, particularly official SADF documents from the military archives in Pretoria as well as interviews conducted with ex-conscripts who served in the SADF during the 1970's and 1980's, contextualised by the growing historical literature on homosexuality and analyses of the military in the context of South African socio-political changes.

Apartheid South Africa in the 1980's, and first half of the 1990's, saw many changes towards racial equality, effectively changing the country from a society based upon Apartheid to an all-inclusive country with a democratically chosen government. These changes accelerated from roughly 1985 onwards. This research will discuss how these changes in favour of the entire population of South Africa also reached the fellow oppressed (white) gay community and specifically the white gay conscripts within the South African Defence Forces. Their 'oppression' was fraught with contradictions, as they were privileged as the dominant race and gender (this thesis focuses mainly on men) but faced oppression due to their homosexuality.

Research Objectives:

Much has been written on the South African Defence Forces, however, only fairly recently have the circumstances of gay conscripts received much attention. The personal stories that are gathered in this thesis are intended to add to this part of South African history and to add to a more nuanced understanding of it. The research objectives have been broken down into three categories: an overview of post-1948 South African history, focusing on the socio-political developments as well as gay history: a literature overview discussing studies that are related to this topic: and finally the research looking into the interviews conducted with gay as well as straight ex-conscripts on gay issues within the

⁴⁶ W. Beinart, *Twentieth-century South Africa* (Oxford: University press, 1994) 244.

SADF. The point of view when dealing with the interviews is both to gain a better understanding of the experiences of gay conscripts within the SADF but also to explore how changes in the SADF's culture and attitudes towards homosexuality may be periodised. As society's attitudes became more permissive towards homosexuality, could a similar change be seen within the armed forces as well?

Research Methodology:

The framework within which this research is placed draws on the sub-discipline of social history, which necessitates the use of an oral history. Social history focuses on the 'ordinary' people instead of the big men or main movements in history. In this research, attention is given to the 'ordinary' gay conscript and his personal experiences within the South African Defence Force.⁴⁷ J. Lemisch observes: "If we focus on letters and written down experiences of ordinary people living in the past, we will be able to give the 'inarticulate' a voice".⁴⁸ Due to the relative lack of documentation, obtaining information first hand can be considered the best way to gain a better understanding of this topic, involving gay issues during conscription within the SADF. By sending out questionnaires to ex-conscripts, a clearer and more nuanced picture of their every day experiences within an army environment has been constructed.

Oral history is a relatively new methodology and came about to record the stories of ordinary people to preserve (local) history. It can serve as a link from the immediate present to the immediate past in an understandable and very human way⁴⁹ and is vital in reaching the 'hidden story' and detailed life-experience unrecorded in the official archives and only sporadically available otherwise in letters or diaries. Due to this, oral history can only be conducted with people that are still alive and therefore it can only be applied on fairly recent

⁴⁷ This research is based upon interviews with conscripted, gay men only. Lesbian women did serve in the SADF as well, although voluntarily.

⁴⁸ J. Lemisch, "The Masses: Listening to the Inarticulate," *Journal of Social History*, III (1969): 127.

⁴⁹ W.K. Baum, *Oral history for the local historical society* (Walnut Creek: Altamira Press, 1995), 3.

history. Even though officially oral history is, as the name already indicates, meant to record spoken interviews with people, the basis of the concept has been utilized in this research. Due to the distance between the interviewed ex-conscripts, actual face-to-face interviews were not possible. However, the concept of face-to-face history interviews is based upon a questionnaire to provide a framework within which the interview will take place.⁵⁰ In this research, written interviews with respondents were conducted by means of a questionnaire to ensure that responses stayed within the focus of the research. Furthermore, the initial questionnaire used in 'live' oral interviews usually develops to different questions and points of view. The questionnaire used in this research consisted out of open-ended questions, providing the respondents with ample freedom to add details they considered important to their army experiences as well. On top of that, follow-up questions via e-mail proved to give further information and clarification which was initially not foreseen by the researcher.

The best way to ensure proper preservation of spoken interviews, is to record them.⁵¹ As oral history is predominantly a method of gathering material, it is a contribution to the general process of making sense of the past so that we can better understand the present and plan for the future.⁵² It can both be applied to information gathered by face-to-face interviews as well as written questionnaires. The interviews conducted within this research may have been written, but they have been answered by people who are still alive and able to explain their answers further, similar to a face-to-face interview. These written questionnaires can therefore better be listed within the oral history framework than with the 'traditional' historical sources.

Both gay as well as straight ex-conscripts have been issued with the above mentioned questionnaire with topic-related questions to write down their personal experiences. There have however been several challenges influencing the research method. First of all, since the distance between respondents,

⁵⁰ Baum, *Oral history*, 7.

⁵¹ S. Counce, *Oral history and the local historian* (London: Longman, 1994), 17.

⁵² Counce, *Oral history*, 11.

interviews had to be conducted via e-mail instead of face-to-face. On the other hand, in case of clarification of responses or need of further questions, e-mail contact has proved useful. Secondly, it could sometimes be hard to gain trust of ex-conscripts via a distant method like e-mail. Thirdly, it is impossible to guarantee that all responses are accurate and/or true. It could be the case that certain memories were considered too personal to be shared for this research or that they have been nostalgically (mis)remembered. Facts and events may be remembered but the attitudes one had towards them at the time may have been forgotten and/or replaced by new viewpoints. Events that were of little interest at the time are likely to be remembered more accurately, if less fully, than those in which one was heavily, perhaps emotionally involved. The more important, pleasant or unpleasant certain experiences seem to us to be, the more likely we are to dwell on and imperceptibly modify them.⁵³ This research methodology is a qualitative one. The amount of interviews used in this thesis would not be enough for a proper quantitative analysis.

Oral interviews were combined with more traditional primary archival sources by conducting research in the military archives in Pretoria. This research yielded several documents dealing with homosexuality in the army. Besides official SADF guidelines on dealing with homosexuality, they also gave insight into opinions on the matter by several SADF individuals, in the form of personal letters. All documents stored in the military archives have been listed in files with keywords describing the subject of the documents. It is only possible to gain access to these documents, by searching on related keywords within the files. Therefore, for example, searching on the keyword 'homosexuality' only, might leave out many suitable documents. Keywords that have been searched upon included 'homosexuality', 'disciplinary action', 'personnel behaviour', 'psychiatry' and 'suicide'.⁵⁴

⁵³ D. Henige, *Oral historiography* (London: Longman, 1982), 110.

⁵⁴ Most documents were both written in Afrikaans as well as listed under Afrikaans keywords. Because of this: 'homoseksualiteit', 'dissipline', 'personeelsbeleid', 'sielkunde' and 'selfmoord' have also been used as keywords to find suitable documents.

Apart from certain archival documents provided by the staff at the military archives, which were already declassified, the other requested documents had to be declassified first. This turned out to be a time consuming matter, as all documents had to be checked for sensitive information by the military archive staff. Also, all names needed to be blocked out for privacy purposes, before the documents could be accessed by the researcher. This procedure took three to six weeks before the documents could be released. In the end, only a fraction of the requested documents turned out to be suitable material for this research.

The Respondents:

Respondents have been found via several different networks. These consist of personal South African networks as well as general websites like www.gaydar.co.za and www.facebook.com. People approached for this research had to comply to a certain set of criteria. All of them had to be white males, as only white males were conscripted into national service during the 1970's, 1980's and early 1990's Apartheid years in South Africa. Although both gay and straight men have been requested to fill out the supplied questionnaire, the focus of this research is obviously based on gay experiences. Part of this research was to determine if and/or what differences there could be noticed between a gay and a straight conscript's recollection of gay issues within the SADF. Even though the questions asked in the questionnaire are in English, respondents could answer them in both English and Afrikaans. Respondents were taken from both English and Afrikaans backgrounds, for the survey to be unbiased. Lastly, it should again be kept in mind that these events were experienced by men at least sixteen years ago, as conscription ended in 1994. Certain experiences might have been forgotten or are now seen from a different (adult) point of view and therefore described differently from the original way they were perceived/experienced.

Chapter one: History, Masculinity and Homosexuality

To contextualise the period in which this research is located, a closer look at South African society during the Apartheid years is needed. With the coming to power of the National Party in 1948, a time of official Afrikaner nationalism started.⁵⁵ The Afrikaner 'volk' (people) were dictating the country and their politics had a major impact on South Africa in the decades to follow. The twin cornerstones of Apartheid ideology was white Afrikaner nationalism, and a rationale for it based on Christianity as interpreted by the major Afrikaner Churches.⁵⁶ There was an extremely strong religious basis to moral values and behaviour in Afrikaner society. In the rural areas, where because of isolation on farms the extended family was the hub of social organisation, the Bible had been the only known code of moral behaviour until at least the end of the nineteenth century. Apart from travelling traders and school masters the Church was the only link to the outside world. *Dominees* (ministers of religion), because of their higher level of education, attained a very strong leadership position, especially in rural communities, and became an integral part of the Afrikaner elite. In their sermons and conversations with members of their congregations they gave the lead with regard to moral issues.⁵⁷

During the urbanization in Afrikaner society, which started in the late nineteenth century and accelerated in the first few decades of the twentieth century, rural Afrikaners brought their conservative puritan moral values with them to the towns and cities. Due to exposure to external influences and deprivation caused by poverty and hardship, the Afrikaans Churches seemed to be somewhat losing the grip they had over Afrikaner communities. In response to this, religious leaders started to play an important role in the establishment of cultural organisations such as the Afrikaner Broederbond, which later fuelled the

⁵⁵ I. Berger, *South Africa in world history* (Oxford: University Press, 2009), 114.

⁵⁶ M.van Zyl et al, *The Aversion Project: human rights abuses of gays and lesbians in the SADF by health workers during the apartheid era* (Cape Town: Simply Said and Done, 1999) 47.

⁵⁷ K. du Pisani, "The "good old days" when there were no homosexuals among Afrikaner men," *Southern African Historical Society Newsletter* (2008): 7.

Afrikaner nationalist mobilization, especially in the then Transvaal.⁵⁸ During the phase of intensive nationalist mobilization in the 1930's and 1940's, Afrikaner intellectuals emphasized the role of the family as the cornerstone of an organic 'volksseenheid'. (Afrikaner ethnic unity). The traditional idea of male 'headship' in the family was still seen as a biblical doctrine. The image of the male head of the family was cast in the mould of the 'good provider', i.e. the reliable family man and the caring head of the household. The prevailing image of family and home as a safe haven (called the 'house of marriage' idea in the USA) was one-sided. Taboos of the time prevented public discussion of everything that was regarded as deviant sexual behaviour.⁵⁹

At the very bottom of the secrecy was homosexuality, which was considered to be an unnatural and sinful sexual orientation, a narrow-minded traditionalist religious outlook that was dominant in Afrikaner society. Within this persecutory and punitive religious framework, homosexuality was considered a sin, or worse – evil.⁶⁰ This outlook was based on a literal reading of the Bible. In terms of specific verses in the Bible homosexuality was not only regarded as sinful, but it was believed that it should not even be talked about, because it might corrupt society and undermine moral values. According to the traditionalist interpretation biblical pronouncements should be regarded as being universally applicable even in modern times. It was therefore believed in traditionalist circles that sexual deviance should be kept a family secret, rather than openly discuss it. The homosexual orientation of a person could easily be hidden under euphemistic terms – all older unmarried men, whether they were of homosexual or heterosexual orientation, would for example be called '*oujongkêrels*' (bachelors).⁶¹

⁵⁸ Du Pisani, "Good old days," 8.

⁵⁹ Du Pisani, "Good old days," 9.

⁶⁰ Van Zyl et al, *Aversion Project*, 47.

⁶¹ Du Pisani, "Good old days," 9.

After the National Party came to power, the duty of the SADF (or Union Defence Force at the time) became to be the protector of white South Africa and the Apartheid state. The SADF became overwhelmingly Afrikaner in ethnic complexion.⁶² Apartheid was an ideology, comprising various strands: historical stories, racism, patriarchy, Christian-nationalism, racial capitalism, anti-communism and militarism. Apartheid as an ideology served to legitimate and sustain relations of white (male, straight, Afrikaans) domination over indigenous black people. Ideologies provide the means for people to act violently and yet ironically believe that they are acting in terms of worthy, noble, and morally righteous reasons.⁶³

The decades that followed 1948 were turbulent with increasing black resistance against the white government, eventually escalating in the 1980's. Espousing a militant black Africanism, the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), formed in early 1959 under Robert Sobukwe, attempted to inject new urgency into campaigning and upstage the African National Congress (ANC) in mass mobilizations. In March 1960 the PAC put its weight behind an anti-pass campaign; one centre of activity was Sharpeville, the African township of Vereeniging, south of Johannesburg.⁶⁴ A crowd converged on the police station and despite the security of their Saracen armoured cars, nervous policemen opened fire, killing sixty-nine and wounding many more.⁶⁵ Blacks in Cape Town launched a march which seemed momentarily to threaten parliament. The government declared a state of emergency and sent the police and army into dissident locations and rural districts. Following mass arrests, the ANC and PAC were banned.⁶⁶

In 1976 the Soweto riots followed. These were sparked by three reasons: black dissatisfaction about the regulation that certain school subjects had to be

⁶² P.H. Frankel, *Pretoria's Praetorians* (Cambridge: University Press, 1984) 139.

⁶³ D. Foster, "Perpetrators of gross violations of human rights," in *Socio-Political and Psychological Perspectives on South Africa*, ed. C. Stones (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2001) 59.

⁶⁴ D. Welsh, *The rise and fall of apartheid* (Jeppestown, Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2009) 120.

⁶⁵ Beinart, *Twentieth-century*, 159.

⁶⁶ Beinart, *Twentieth-century*, 160.

taken through the medium of Afrikaans, the government's indifference to warning that an explosive situation was developing and the dissatisfaction on the part of blacks about their political powerlessness, economic backwardness and social insecurity. On June 16th, 1976 about 20.000 school children in Soweto marched in protest against the Afrikaans medium regulations.⁶⁷ In the vicinity of the Orlando West High School they were confronted by the police. When the police used teargas, the children started throwing stones. The police opened fire and at least one pupil, the thirteen year old Hector Petersen, was killed. After this, the mob of youths, many of them over twenty, went berserk and chaos reigned for a week. At the end of the riots, hundreds of blacks were shot dead by police or died violently in incidents not involving the police.⁶⁸

With the coming to power of P.W. Botha in 1978, South Africa's racial policy was slightly reformed, in a hope to make the country more acceptable both internally as well as internationally. Apartheid laws, he said, were not holy cows. Hurtful discrimination should be abolished and whites should adapt or die.⁶⁹ This process was accelerated after the implementation of the 1983 constitution, which shifted some of the power to the Coloured and Indian communities but still excluded the black majority of the country. It was however still stipulated that the whites, coloureds and indians had to be elected, sit and vote separately.⁷⁰ In 1983 the law which prevented blacks, coloureds and indians from studying at white universities was relaxed considerably by the Universities Amendment Act. In 1985 two of the cornerstones of Apartheid were removed when the prohibition of mixed marriages and the prohibition of extra-marital sexual relations across the colour bar were lifted in terms of the Immorality and Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act.⁷¹ Around 1986 all hotels were allowed to accommodate people regardless of their race and by April 1987 all Ster Kinekor and Metro cinemas

⁶⁷ H. Giliomee and B. Mbenga, *Nuwe geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika* (Kaapstad: Tafelberg, 2007) 364.

⁶⁸ B.J. Liebenberg and S.P. Spies, *South Africa in the 20th century* (Pretoria: Van Schaik, 1993) 462/463.

⁶⁹ D. Welsh, *The rise and fall of apartheid* (Jeppestown: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2009) 208.

⁷⁰ Liebenberg and Spies, *South Africa*, 479.

⁷¹ D. Welsh, *The rise and fall of apartheid*, 215.

were open to all races.⁷² In March 1986 a three-man delegation of the state met the ANC in Paris. It was not a casual meeting; participants were ready to conduct serious business.⁷³

Despite these rapid changes to reform the Apartheid state around 1985, the 1980's were also the time of Botha's 'total onslaught' strategy. South African military and political elites concluded that they faced this 'total onslaught' from world communism that aimed to destroy the very fabric of South African life. This onslaught, they believed, was military, economic and psychological in nature.⁷⁴ This strategy was a (last) attempt to crush anti-Apartheid resistance and gave the military even more power.⁷⁵ On July 20th, 1985, P.W. Botha declared a state of emergency due to large, countrywide disturbances caused by the economic recession of the eighties, the unpopularity of black town councils, the ANC's intention to make the country ungovernable, and dissatisfaction with the constitution of 1983.⁷⁶

With the coming to power of F.W. de Klerk, the dismantling of Apartheid accelerated. De Klerk's background as a politically astute conservative did not prepare his supporters for the pace at which he would act. Nelson Mandela was released in February 1990 and the ANC and other black political movements were unbanned. De Klerk gradually dismantled racial legislation and the National Party opened its membership to blacks.⁷⁷ By 1994 the first democratic, all-inclusive elections were held and Nelson Mandela assumed power as the first black president of South Africa.⁷⁸ Relinquishing political power in 1994 signified a major break with the past for Afrikanerdom. Afrikaner masculinity no longer prescribed ideals of masculinity to South African society at large, to white men in

⁷² Liebenberg and Spies, *South Africa*, 488/489.

⁷³ A. Seegers, *The military in the making of modern South Africa* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 1996), 245.

⁷⁴ Conway, "The masculine state in crisis," 423.

⁷⁵ W. Beinart, *Twentieth-century*, 244.

⁷⁶ Liebenberg and Spies, *South Africa*, 499.

⁷⁷ W. Beinart, *Twentieth-century*, 254.

⁷⁸ Giliomee and Mbenga, *Nuwe geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika*, 408.

general, or even to Afrikaans-speaking, white men. Since the decline of Afrikaner nationalism there is no longer the political or economic support necessary for one version of Afrikaner masculinity to assert its hegemony as before.⁷⁹

At the end of the Nationalist Party rule, the Afrikaner views on masculinity were no longer prescribed to South African society. Due to these changes, Afrikaner masculine hegemonic views and official policy on homosexuality within society also waned. The 1990's saw a rapid increase in public displays of gay people, for example the first (yearly) Gay and Lesbian Pride Parade starting in 1990 in Johannesburg.⁸⁰ The section below will deal in more detail with the position of homosexuality during the Apartheid years in South Africa.

A thorough gay history of South Africa (SA) is still to be written, but this section offers a tentative and brief sketch of the period under scrutiny. The gay history of South Africa is a complicated one and one cannot look at it as one, unified movement. Due to racial segregation, the background of black and white homosexuals were separated as well. Since this research is focusing on the experiences of white conscripts within the South African Defence Force during the 1970's and 1980's, the focal point of the gay history of South Africa will also mainly concern the gay white male population. In the early days of Apartheid, homosexuality was not at the centre of concern for South African politics. Even though there are reports of South African Police dealing with homosexuality, they were considered to be isolated incidents.

By the mid-1950's, the general knowledge about homosexuals swung between two stereotypes; the child-molester and the drag queen. Between these stereotypes, however, homosexual sub-cultures existed in the major cities (Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban) relatively unharassed and had done so at least since the war a decade previously. These gay sub-cultures were in

⁷⁹ Du Pisani, "Puritanism Transformed," 172.

⁸⁰ N. Hoad, K. Martin and G. Reid, *Sex & Politics in South Africa* (Cape Town, Double Storey Books, 2005) 204.

general white, male and mostly middle-class. Due to South Africa's racially divided society, few places existed where black and white homosexuals could meet. The most famous exceptions to this being the melting-pots of South Africa's past: Fietas and Sophiatown in Johannesburg and District Six in Cape Town.⁸¹ At the end of World War II, a much higher percentage of single people were living away from home. Hillbrow's high-rise apartment blocks, bars, café's and nightclubs were attractive venues for younger white South Africans, newly arrived white immigrants and those seeking to identify with sub-cultures relatively removed from the moral confines of suburban white South Africa.⁸² Obviously, because of this, these areas were very attractive for gay men and lesbians. In Cape Town gay life developed in the Gardens area and the Sea Point Promenade, while in Durban it was the Esplanade, alongside the docks.⁸³

For men there was a much greater variety of options like bars, outdoor cruising places and private parties than for women. Lesbian communities did exist but they were much more clandestine than their male counterparts. Firstly, this difference can be related to the heterosexual institutions like marriage, which were far more restrictive for women than for men.⁸⁴ There was space within society for the independent 'gay bachelor' while the pressure on women to get married and give birth to children was much higher. Secondly, the lesbian groups that did exist, mainly involved women in the service profession who needed to keep their identity secret. Thirdly, more men within the gay community had the economic independence to become 'leaders' (they did not have to worry about possibly losing their jobs in case they would be identified as being gay) and had the space to throw large parties. Lesbian parties, in Johannesburg at least, took

⁸¹ M. Gevisser, "A different fight for freedom," in *Defiant Desire*, ed. by M. Gevisser, E. Cameron (Braamfontein: Ravan Press, 1994), 18.

⁸² D. Conway, "Queering apartheid The National Party's 1987 'Gay Rights' election campaign in Hillbrow," *Journal of Southern African Studies* (2009): 5.

⁸³ Gevisser, "A different fight," 19.

⁸⁴ Gevisser, "A different fight," 21.

place in cramped flats and on balconies rather than on patios and around pools.⁸⁵

In the 1950's, none of the bars was owned by people from within the gay community; the gay 'crowd' would decide upon a venue - usually the lounge-bar of a swank hotel - and colonise it. If the management responded with a modicum of civility, the word would spread.⁸⁶ In the early 1960's, this pattern changed somewhat. For example in Johannesburg, the bar at The New Library Hotel on Commissioner Street promoted itself very much as a gay venue. Also several gay-owned, men-only dance clubs came (and went), notable The Farmhouse, out of town on the road to Pretoria. The bars remained straight-owned businesses, the clubs (which were to epitomise the 1970's) were exclusively gay business ventures. It wasn't until the late 1960's that politicians started to team up against homosexuality with the 'discovery' of a gay subculture. In 1966, police raided a party in Forest Town, Johannesburg, where approximately 300 white men were in attendance and reportedly partaking in 'homosexual activities'.⁸⁷ The revelation that gay parties were happening in South Africa caused quite a stir in the white establishment. Not only did the South African police send out a circular to all divisional commissioners, warning that it appeared that homosexuality and gross indecency 'were being practiced between male persons throughout the country and that offenders were now pursuing an organized modus operandi'.⁸⁸ It also recommended that the Minister of Justice (PC Pelser) tighten the law in order to enable stringent measures to be taken against homosexuals as homosexuality was thought of as a bodily transgression against natural encodings of the body.⁸⁹ For this kind of action to be taken, Pelser advised the House of Assembly in 1967 that, if unchecked, homosexuality would bring about the utter ruin of civilization in South Africa. While gay rights movements were gaining momentum worldwide,

⁸⁵ Gevisser, "A different fight," 22.

⁸⁶ Gevisser, "A different fight," 22.

⁸⁷ T. Jones, *Psychiatry, mental institutions and the mad in apartheid South Africa* (Routledge, 2011) 5.

⁸⁸ G. Retief, "Keeping Sodom out of the laager," in *Defiant Desire*, ed. by M. Gevisser, E. Cameron (Braamfontein: Raven Press, 1994) 101

⁸⁹ Du Pisani, "Puritanism Transformed," 169.

the South African government, in its homophobia, became increasingly vigilant at cracking down on any 'homosexual' activities within its borders.⁹⁰

The appeal to the integrity and survival of the (implicitly) white South African civilization fell on receptive ears as not a single voice pointed out that anti-gay laws constituted a serious infringement of fundamental human rights. A select committee of parliamentarians was established, at Pelsers' request, to look into the matter more closely. To the police, homosexuals included hermaphrodites, pedophiles, bisexuals, transgendered individuals, cross dressers or any other persons with sexual or lifestyle distinctions that varied from the heterosexual norm. In particular, police stressed the foreign, specifically English, origins of the behaviour. The objective of the strict measures against homosexuality was to show that the National Party government was protecting the culture and morality of Afrikanerdom.⁹¹ When asked by the committee as to how he could identify a homosexual male, the representative for the South African police, Major F.A.J. van Zyl, for example, stated:⁹² "Most people regard them as being effeminate, which most of them are not. Some of them are body-builders, and some are soccer players of repute, but they evade bodily conflict in groups. You will never find any of them playing rugby, for instance. He will be a body-builder or a fencer, or he will play squash, but when he speaks to a woman you know immediately. From his general demeanour it is very simple for me to identify them".⁹³ The central point of debate in the Select Committee deliberations was whether or not homosexuality was infectious and could endanger the country's youth. The tug-of-war was between the law-and-order lobby, which was convinced that homosexuality was spreading because older men and women were seducing teenagers⁹⁴, and the society of psychiatrists and neurosurgeons of South Africa (SPNSA) who argued that homosexuality was a

⁹⁰ Jones, *Psychiatry*, 2.

⁹¹ Du Pisani, "Puritanism Transformed," 169.

⁹² Jones, *Psychiatry*, 6.

⁹³ Jones, *Psychiatry*, 6. (XIII rsa.s.c. 7 – '68, 38)

⁹⁴ Retief, "Keeping Sodom out," 102.

mental disease, not a criminal activity and it campaigned against what it perceived as harsh policies towards mentally ill individuals.⁹⁵

Since the SPNSA did not have a definitive stance on whether homosexuality was caused by genetics or social circumstances (upbringing), they stated that homosexuality should not be criminalised. From a biological standpoint, they pointed out, it was impossible to change the genetic makeup of homosexuals and therefore it was of no use to attempt to punish them for behaviour that was essentially non-violent and unalterable. When asked about alternatives to imprisonment, the SPNSA argued that practitioners could essentially prevent homosexuality “through a system of public education that would help people to bring up their children with sound attitudes towards sexual behaviour”.⁹⁶ The SPNSA was less clear about whether or not they could ‘cure’ homosexuality, even though they officially rejected the validity of aversion and hormone therapy, they did admit to some of their members believing they could effectively cure individuals of homosexuality through such therapies.⁹⁷ Nevertheless, most SPNSA practitioners held less autocratic views towards homosexuality than their police and military counterparts.⁹⁸

Besides the input of the SPNSA, a gay action group, formed in the aftermath of the Forest Town raid, paid legal and expert witnesses to make representations. The efforts of the SPNSA and the gay action group were not wasted as the committee was talked out of the idea aimed at gay sex in general. However, any sexual acts between men at a party were to be banned; the age of consent for male homosexual acts was to be raised from sixteen to nineteen; and the manufacture or distribution of any article intended to be used to perform an unnatural sexual act was to be prohibited. Legislation was primarily aimed at regulating homosexual activity between white men to curb the perceived threat of

⁹⁵ Jones, *Psychiatry*, 15.

⁹⁶ Jones, *Psychiatry*, 16, from footnote.

⁹⁷ Jones, *Psychiatry*, 17.

⁹⁸ Jones, *Psychiatry*, 17.

an emerging gay sub-culture.⁹⁹ What comes to attention is the white male view of the committee. Noticeably lacking in the discussions of the committee is reference to African, Coloured or Indian homosexual practices.¹⁰⁰

The recommended amendments to the Immorality Act were passed into law in 1969.¹⁰¹ As a result of this, there is evidence of a clampdown on outdoor cruising places and routine police surveillance of clubs, bars and parties during the 1970's. The police would also raid parties and clubs, grabbing people who were kissing or dancing together and bundling them into police vans. Photographers would line people up against the wall and snap pictures of as many faces as possible while cops took down the numbers of the cars parked outside. The ultimate threat was that one's identity would be leaked to the newspapers. Exposure could have meant unemployment, social isolation and vitriolic abuse wherever one went.¹⁰² However, Gevisser argues that as long as there were no minors on the premises and one wasn't selling liquor, gay bars were quite safe. It seemed as if it was the intention of the police to segregate the gay community, Keeping the queers indoors not only meant keeping them under control - it also meant keeping them out of sight of religious conservative lobbies who had precipitated the anti-gay legislation in the first place. Even though this limited the freedom of gay people who cruised, it had a rather unexpected positive effect; it formalised gay culture. Even though these places were still predominantly white, a new phase of gay community began.¹⁰³

During the 1980's, police stopped the constant harassment of gay, lesbian and bisexual communities. The relaxation of control, in predominantly larger cities, indicates that police realized that stamping out all homosexuality was a waste of time. Anti-homosexual legislation was seldom applied, gay couples

⁹⁹ Du Pisani, "Puritanism Transformed," 169.

¹⁰⁰ Jones, *Psychiatry*, 17.

¹⁰¹ V. Reddy, *From social silence to social science* (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2009) 83

¹⁰² Retief, "Keeping Sodom out," 103.

¹⁰³ Gevisser, "A different fight," 37.

openly lived together and the first National Gay Convention was held in 1985.¹⁰⁴ Gay bars were able to operate without attempts to close them down. Instead, police waged a more low-profile war on gay people, by ensuring that homosexuality was kept out of sight and mind of the general public. A powerful weapon in this matter was censorship. Even though also heterosexual writing and erotica came under the South African censor's axe, the censorship of gay material had been disproportionately severe.¹⁰⁵ The 1980's also saw the coming into being of gay liberation movements in South Africa.

White urban gay men, having formed their own subculture in the 1970's, were ready to assert themselves more openly. In 1982 the Gay Association of South Africa (GASA) was formed.¹⁰⁶ The initial way of creating this 'gay liberation' was by creating a safe space in which gay men and women could meet and interact without fear of being condemned, brutalised, shamed, humiliated or arrested.¹⁰⁷ GASA very much tried to keep out of politics and had therefore much more white than black members, even though GASA was officially an interracial organisation.¹⁰⁸ The idea was not to 'rock the boat' in Apartheid South Africa too much, as it was dangerous enough in those days to have an organisation open to people regardless of their colour.¹⁰⁹ In 1983 GASA applied for membership of the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) Internationally, this started a process that would force the international lesbian and gay community not only to deal with Apartheid, but also to consider whether it was at all possible for a gay and lesbian movement to disregard other aspects of human rights.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁴ Du Pisani, "Puritanism Transformed," 170.

¹⁰⁵ Retief, "*Keeping Sodom out*," 104.

¹⁰⁶ Reddy, *Social silence to social science*, 84.

¹⁰⁷ N. Hoad, K. Martin and G. Reid, *Sex & Politics in South Africa* (Cape Town: Double Storey Books, 2005) 60.

¹⁰⁸ Conway, "Queering apartheid," 856.

¹⁰⁹ Hoad, Martin and Reid, *Sex & Politics*, 61.

¹¹⁰ Hoad, Martin and Reid, *Sex & Politics*, 34.

GASA did, however, in these turbulent years, make one strong political statement. In April 1985, after P.W. Botha decriminalised interracial sex as part of his reform programme, he asked the President's Council to investigate the Immorality Act. Upon this request, the Council set up an Ad-Hoc committee and in August 1985 put forward its recommendations. The committee equivocated on the subject of homosexuality, suggesting that more thorough investigation was required on three issues: "the possible widening of the criminal prohibitions on gay conduct to include gay women", "how society should express its abhorrence to homosexuality" and "what programs of rehabilitations or forms of punishment would be desirable".¹¹¹ The President's Council rejected any move to decriminalise homosexuality in its review of the Immorality Act in 1985, and later on voiced concern about the increased acceptance of homosexuality in its report on the country's youth in 1987.¹¹² Later the report identified homosexuality as a cause of social breakdown and an impediment to good citizenship.¹¹³ It appears a gap had grown between the National Party government, which was still rooted in ideas of Afrikaner masculinity and power, and wider society which started to become more tolerant of homosexuality. It can therefore be argued that official points of view towards homosexuality were not necessarily anymore shared by the whole (white) community.

Just like in the 1960's, panic set in once again in gay society. Explicit in this ruling was the sentiment that homosexuality was abhorrent, requiring rehabilitation at best and punishment at worst. Just like in 1968, a law reform movement was launched, this time called the National Law Reform Fund (NLRF). Their aim was to present the President's Council with every possible evidence that gays exist and to convince the authorities that they can be (and to a large extent are) worthy members of society.¹¹⁴ Just like in 1968, middle-class gay men responded, alarmed by the possibility of their freedom being abrogated. Twenty

¹¹¹ Gevisser, "A different fight," 60.

¹¹² Conway, "Queering apartheid," 851.

¹¹³ Conway, "The masculine state in crisis," 434.

¹¹⁴ Gevisser, "A different fight," 60.

organisations formed a fundraising incentive called Benefit, which took the form of a large gay festival at Shaft 8 at Crown Mines. However, despite the similarities with 1968, there was not the same government focus. P.W. Botha's campaign to smash anti-apartheid resistance overtook all else and the gay issue was forgotten.

Only a year later, in 1987, the elections turned out to be a watershed for South African gay politics. *Exit* (GASA's magazine) called upon gay voters to exercise their power through the ballot box. Every candidate in the election was asked whether he or she supported gay rights, and, in constituencies where there were significant number of gay voters, candidates from all parties scrambled to join the gay rights wagon.¹¹⁵ In Hillbrow, National Party candidate Leon de Beer spoke out in favour of gay rights in an interview with *Exit*, while Alf Widman of the Progressive Federal Party stated, in a private capacity, that he considered sexuality a personal matter and not the responsibility of the state. The latter response was insufficient for *Exit* and the magazine launched a successful campaign to unseat him and elect his National Party rival.¹¹⁶

Exit trumpeted that gay voters in Hillbrow could “sway power, even to a candidate like Leon de Beer who represents an unpopular and repressive party, if he comes out strongly enough in favour of gay rights”. While the paper claimed to “want every privilege afforded to whites to be extended to our black brothers and sisters”, it was unrepentant: “we will use any vehicle to campaign for gay civil liberties, even if it means resorting to the whites-only democracy of South Africa”. The message was clear, white gay rights were the only ones *Exit* (and thus by extension the GASA elite) were interested in. However, by 1987 it was no longer possible to strive for gay and lesbian rights while ignoring the struggle for equal rights for the non-white majority of the country. It was therefore important for the gay liberation movement to denounce the Apartheid regime to prevent possible

¹¹⁵ Gevisser, “A different fight,” 61.

¹¹⁶ Conway, “Queering apartheid,” 855.

exclusion again under a new, all-inclusive government. Ironically, the greatest moment of victory for single-issue 'apolitical' gay politics was also to be its death-blow. The GASA era was dead.¹¹⁷

Simon Nkoli, who had been imprisoned for his anti-Apartheid activism but was acquitted in 1987, became the chairperson of the Gay and Lesbian Organisation of the Witwatersrand (GLOW) in the same year. The big difference with GASA was that they saw themselves as part of the broad movement against Apartheid. Nkoli always emphasized that the battles against homophobia and racism were inseparable.¹¹⁸ He observed that: "In South Africa I am oppressed because I am a black man, and I am oppressed because I am gay. So when I fight for my freedom I must fight against both oppressions".¹¹⁹ Nkoli in South Africa and Peter Tatchell in London proved to be the most prominent among the gay liberation movement to make sure ties were made with the anti-Apartheid struggle. Tatchell exposed the ANC's position on gay and lesbian rights, namely the absence of one. In an interview on September 18th, 1987 with Ruth Mompati, member of the National Executive Committee of the ANC in London, Tatchell quotes her having said: "Lesbians and gays are not normal. If everyone was like that, the human race would come to an end".¹²⁰ Ironically, Mompati's statement was a catalyst to forging a strategic alliance between the gay rights movement inside South Africa and the leading force in the anti-Apartheid struggle abroad, the ANC, a process driven by Peter Tatchell. The detention of Simon Nkoli was the catalyst to forging a strategic alliance between the gay rights movement and the anti-Apartheid struggle within South Africa, led by the United Democratic Front (UDF). At its policy conference in 1992, Thabo Mbeki of the ANC formally recognized gay and lesbian rights.¹²¹

¹¹⁷ Gevisser, "A different fight," 62.

¹¹⁸ J. Cock, "Engendering gay and lesbian rights," *Women's Studies International Forum* (2003): 36

¹¹⁹ B. Luirink, "Behind the Mask," in *Urgency Required*, ed. by Ireen Dubel, Andre Hielkema (The Hague: HIVOS, 2010) 95.

¹²⁰ Cock, "Engendering gay and lesbian rights," 36.

¹²¹ Cock, "Engendering gay and lesbian rights," 36.

The first democratic chosen government of South Africa came into power in 1994 and in 1996 a new constitution was presented. It is the first constitution in the world to specifically protect gay and lesbian rights ¹²² and widely considered the most fully realised blueprint for rights-based governance in the world.¹²³ However, the ANC government did admit that many individual members were not enthusiastic about gay rights and did not reflect the official ANC position. The ANC said it was made up of everyday South Africans who had the same prejudices that existed in society.¹²⁴ The above gay history of South Africa serves as a necessary context and background to the actual topic of this thesis: the experiences of gay conscripts within the South African Defence Force.

¹²² G. Donald, "In a new South Africa, old anti-gay bias persists," *The New York Times*, November 18, 1997.

¹²³ Reddy, *Social silence to social science*, 14.

¹²⁴ Rebecca Sinclair, "*The official treatment of white, South African, homosexual men and the consequent reaction of gay liberation from the 1960s to 2000*" (PhD diss., Rand Afrikaans University, 2004) 244.

Chapter two: Changing attitudes towards homosexuality in the SADF

The research findings into the treatment of homosexual conscripts within the SADF in the 1970s and 1980's will be discussed in the following pages. The earliest document dates back to January 17th, 1972. It is a medical evaluation of a homosexual conscript by a clinical psychiatrist in Voortrekkerhoogte psychiatric ward. It states the examined conscript as being a 'primary' homosexual with female urges. The conscript is not interested in treatment for his condition, as he made peace with himself and he tries to abuse his condition to avoid military service. From a medical point of view he is suitable for full military service.¹²⁵ This report should be seen against the background of the Voortrekkerhoogte psychiatric ward at the time. Robert Kaplan, forensic psychiatrist and medical writer from Australia, has published several articles on Ward 22, as this specific ward was known.

Over the 1970's and 1980's, homosexual conscripts were taken from the military ranks and subjected to crude electric shock therapy based on rudimentary behaviour therapy principles.¹²⁶ At the time the treatments were used, homosexuality was no longer regarded as a psychiatric illness in European and American psychiatry. However, the official approach followed in the SADF appears to have developed in complete ignorance of the scientific literature on homosexuality and transsexualism. The attitude was simplistic, crude and stereotypical to an extreme: male homosexuals were perceived as effeminate and passive, inadequate males who wanted to be females; female homosexuals were the reverse, butch women who aspired to be male.¹²⁷

¹²⁵ Mediese verslag, A/MED/3/1/69540177N, Bevelvoerder: 1 Militere Hospitaal, January 17th, 1972.

¹²⁶ R. Kaplan, "Aversion," 216.

¹²⁷ Kaplan, "Aversion," 217.

Male subjects were shown pictures of men to arouse them, then given electric shocks followed by colour pictures of nude women in Playboy magazines. An intern psychologist, Trudi Grobler, described the shocks administered to a female subject at 1 Military Hospital (Voortrekkerhoogte) as so intense that the shoes came off her feet.¹²⁸

An article published in *The Guardian*, July 2000, provides more detail on Ward 22: on arrival at ward 22, 'patients' were stripped of their clothes and shoes and given brown pyjamas. The army said that would help to prevent escapes. Every new patient was put on Valium. The ward orderlies carried pistols.¹²⁹ Kaplan commented that obviously these treatments did not result in a different sexual preference and some conscripts had sex-change operations. Around nine hundred of these sex-change operations are claimed to have been performed on people within the SADF military hospitals between 1969 and 1987.¹³⁰ Some of these were uninformed 'patients' given hormonal therapies to initiate sex changes, so that their bodies would become compliant with the SADF's gendered expectations of their desire.¹³¹

Interestingly, the above mentioned medical report was filed at the psychiatric ward of Voortrekkerhoogte, at a time when shock therapy was administered to 'cure' gay military personnel from their homosexuality. It states that the evaluated conscript is not interested in treatment as he has made peace with his condition. In case the offered treatment was in fact aversion therapy, then most likely it was easier to get cooperation for aversion therapy from conscripts who were not comfortable with their homosexuality (yet) than from gay conscripts who were 'out' and comfortable with themselves. In that case a certain level of consent must have been provided by treated gay conscripts, whether it was given out of fear or intimidation by army hierarchy or perhaps the personal

¹²⁸ Kaplan, "Aversion," 216.

¹²⁹ Chris McGreal, "Gays tell of mutilation by apartheid army," *The Guardian*, July 29, 2000.

¹³⁰ R. Kaplan, "Treatment of homosexuality during apartheid," *British Medical Journal* (2004)

¹³¹ O. Phillips, "Conscripts in camp: making military men," *African Gender Institute Newsletter* (2001)

desire to be cured from what they possibly perceived as a personal 'defect', or not.

A central figure in the allegations with regards to the treatment of gay conscripts within the SADF has been psychiatrist Aubrey Levin, who had the rank of Colonel in the SADF. Levin was an obvious choice for overseeing the military's psychiatric rehabilitation program unit. He had been a Chairman of the Point Branch of the National Party, and Vice-Chairman of the Houghton divisional committee of the National Party of Transvaal. He was educated at the University of Pretoria as well as the University of the Witwatersrand and registered as a medical practitioner in 1964 and a specialist psychiatrist with the South African Medical and Dental Council since 1969.¹³² Dr. Levin has been one of twenty-four doctors who have been warned by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that they may be named as perpetrators of human rights abuses. From 1969 to 1974, Dr. Levin ran the notorious Ward 22 at No.1 Military Hospital in Voortrekkerhoogte, where most of the subjects were treated.

Levin's research mostly focused on drug dependency and rehabilitation, which was a main concern to the military.¹³³ For Levin, the common connection between drug abuse and homosexuality was evident, in that both were 'deviant' conditions that could be cured. For homosexuals, this therapy took the form of aversion tactics.¹³⁴ After he left the military, Dr. Levin continued treatment of conscripts in Bloemfontein while teaching as professor of psychiatry at the University of the Orange Free State.¹³⁵ Eventually he concluded that aversion therapy was a failure and abolished it. Dr. Levin emigrated to Canada in 1994, about the same time he was warned by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. He claimed he left South Africa only because of the high crime rate and denied accusations against himself. "Nobody was given electric shock treatment by me. What we practiced was aversion therapy. We caused slight,

¹³² Jones, *Psychiatry*, 21.

¹³³ Jones, *Psychiatry*, 21.

¹³⁴ Jones, *Psychiatry*, 22.

¹³⁵ Kaplan, "Aversion," 216.

very slight, pain in the arm contracting the muscles, using an electronic device”, he said.¹³⁶

Homosexuality was officially regarded as subversive and unacceptable by the SADF but, in practice, attitudes were ambiguous and inconsistent. Some homosexuals in the SADF established relationships and were accepted by their heterosexual counterparts. An all-homosexual unit operating from Upington was regarded as highly efficient and was praised for its combat record.¹³⁷ Yet many other homosexuals were mercilessly prosecuted and professional soldiers denied promotion.

The Aversion Project, research done by the Gay and Lesbian Archives in 1999, focused its attention primarily on human rights abuses of gays and lesbians in the SADF by health workers during the Apartheid era. The South African medical services, which oversaw all medical treatment in the SADF, was under jurisdiction of the Department of Defence. However, most practitioners were also registered with the South African Medical and Dental Council (SAMDC). The SAMDC mostly ignored the medical practices in the military and those working within the structures of the SADF rarely abided by medical ethics. Those practitioners working as military psychiatrists or psychologists were first and foremost allegiant to the military, rather than the wellbeing of the patient. Their goal was to effectively and quickly treat the patient and to return him to his unit as a fully functioning member.¹³⁸

According to *The Aversion Project*, armed forces were in somewhat of a dilemma when faced with the conscription of gay recruits. At no time was homosexuality deemed a reason to be exempted from conscription, but there was nonetheless an explicit and implicit understanding that homosexuality was regarded as a ‘behavioural disorder’. Gay men were still perceived to be suitable

¹³⁶ McGreal, “Gays tell of mutilation by apartheid army,” *The Guardian*, July 29, 2000.

¹³⁷ Kaplan, “Aversion,” 216.

¹³⁸ Jones, *Psychiatry*, 21.

'cannon fodder' though.¹³⁹ Some of the persecution recounted to *The Aversion Project* was by other homosexuals, afraid to be caught themselves. Some were identified and asked to inform on others.¹⁴⁰ The most consistent attitude, inside and outside the army, was that homosexuality was a sin and evil. Any homosexual person who was religious, was confronted by their own 'unnaturalness'. To a young person still uncertain about a matter which they undoubtedly had very little, and if any, only biased information on, made them vulnerable to labeling themselves as deviant. The law labeled male homosexuals criminals, religion made it a sin, and the medical profession treated it as a disease.¹⁴¹ There is no way to 'prove' someone's sexuality - and certainly the SADF did not have a definitive test. Their conclusion about someone's homosexuality could only be based on gender stereotyping. People who were labeled gay but who actually were not gay, suffered equally. It was decided by the army who was gay. Your own insistence that you were not gay was not sufficient. Your own definition did not count.¹⁴²

The SADF documents from the military archives provide a better understanding of how homosexuality and gay conscripts were perceived within the armed forces. One document dated February 14th, 1979, with the title "treatment of homosexuals in the SADF", states that the Defence Command Council (DCC) after discussion approved of disciplinary action to be taken against offenders and that the matter should be dealt with by the SADF and not in civil courts.¹⁴³ Another document, dated April 18th, 1979, shortly states that: "the DCC takes note of the fact that action should only be taken according to existing law requirements when a committed crime comes under attention. To warn a person about suspicions of his homosexuality, means the risk of a civil

¹³⁹ Van Zyl et al, *Aversion Project*, 55.

¹⁴⁰ Van Zyl et al, *Aversion Project*, 61.

¹⁴¹ Van Zyl et al, *Aversion Project*, 63.

¹⁴² Van Zyl et al, *Aversion Project*, 63.

¹⁴³ Minutes of the 2/79 meeting of the defence. Command council: 5-3-79. Item 14 (confidential) Treatment of homosexuals in the SADF. 47. memorandum GG/107/7B over GG/521/3/1/2/7 dd 14 Feb 79 and attached to the agenda.

lawsuit/case/claim against the person that warns him”.¹⁴⁴ Since there were no official guidelines on how to deal with gay personnel (yet), it appears the command council was rather hesitant in taking a strong stance against homosexual conscripts/standing army members. Although unfortunate gay personnel were subjected to the discussed shock therapy in 1979, this possibility does not appear in the notes. The command council only refers to disciplinary action to be taken against an army member caught ‘in the (homosexual) act’ and not gay conscripts/standing army members in general.

In the early 1980's a rise of homosexuality was observed by the SADF Head Quarters. If there was an actual rise in homosexuality is impossible to determine. As described earlier in this research, the 1980's saw a more tolerant attitude towards homosexuality in civic society. Gay bars and clubs were able to operate without harassment from police and gay people started to organise themselves, for example by establishing GASA. It could be argued that, compared to previous years, conscripts themselves became more open about their sexuality too. However, this observed rise of homosexuality resulted in a survey being sent out on May 27th, 1981 to Heads of army, fleet, air force and the Surgeon-General, titled “Behavior disorders of National Conscripts / Standing Army members”. In this survey, according to sources, the observed increase of persons with homosexual and lesbian tendencies within the Standing Army and National Conscripts is mentioned and the concern shared that if this is the case, it can cause problems in the future. It is recommended that necessary steps be taken at an early stage to deal with this matter. The general meaning of the survey is a request to the addressed departments to confirm if this information is correct and to provide an estimate percentage of members that have this disorder. Apart from this it is also asked how the phenomenon related to similar age groups in general society and what measures were being taken to handle

¹⁴⁴ Notule van die 3/79 vergadering van die verdedigings. Bevelsraad: 27-4-79. Item 8 (ongeklas) hantering van homoseksueles in die SAW. 37. HSP se memorandum HSP/106/19/B dd 16 Mrt aangeheg by HS OPS/521/3/1/2/7 dd 18 April 79 verwys.

this matter.¹⁴⁵

A document with the reply by Surgeon General Scheepers, dating back to July 6th, 1981 gives an extensive overview of his thoughts on the matter. He states that homosexuality is part of every society and it has been throughout the centuries. According to Scheepers, it fluctuates in appearance. In times of anxiety and uncertainty in the world, there is always an increase. Again, a parallel can be drawn towards the more tolerant attitude towards homosexuality in South Africa at this time. However, Scheepers continued, it must be accepted that an increase of homosexual practice within civil society also meant an increase within the SADF. He was not aware of a rise in homosexual cases at the time, as no previous statistics could be referred to, nor would it be any good to determine a percentage, since these people in most cases would not admit to it and a lot of them succeed in hiding their problem. As far as Scheepers could see, there was no significant increase in homosexuality, especially since the SADF in general was less attractive to homosexuals. He did however point out that the instructor and nursing profession are very attractive to lesbians and continued that many of them did do excellent service and often showed strong leadership skills. Even though these deviations should not be downplayed, he said, it must be accepted that these cases do occur within the SADF. Many of them would probably not cause problems and would not get attention.

He concluded, however, that there will be cases that do cause problems and whose behaviour shall be unacceptable and an embarrassment to the SADF. He suggested that strong disciplinary action should be taken against these. Since the South African justice system made a distinction between homosexuality and lesbianism (the first was punishable while the latter was not) he recommended both to be treated similarly as punishable offences. In case of the smallest suspicion about homosexuality, the involved member should be warned by a senior or professional officer of these suspicions. In case a person after this

¹⁴⁵ HSP/DPA/106/19/16/1. Gedragsafwykings by NDPs/S Mag lede. Hoof van die SAW: Genl. Maj. A.P. Roux, May 27th, 1981.

continued to practice deviant acts, he/she should immediately be tried and fired.¹⁴⁶

This was the only response to the survey to be found. It shows however an increasing awareness of homosexuality within society in general and the SADF in particular. Despite hostility towards homosexual servicemen, Surgeon General Scheepers is rather tolerant towards lesbians within the army. Even though he suggests that both homosexuals as well as lesbians should be treated similarly, he does speak highly of, especially, the qualities of lesbian personnel. This could possibly be the case because lesbian personnel, who voluntarily joined the SADF, were not perceived as much as a threat to the army's heteronormative masculinity as homosexual servicemen who did their compulsory service. Scheepers also pointed out that in many cases homosexual or lesbian members would not cause any problems and their 'disorder' would not be noticed. In saying this, he seemed to suggest a 'don't ask, don't tell' policy. If homosexual or lesbian persons were however drawing attention to themselves by continuing to practice their sexuality after a warning, he quickly pointed out that in that case they should immediately be tried and fired. There clearly appears to be dissent within official understanding of homosexuality. It cannot be concluded that one homogeneous point of view towards homosexuality existed and not all within the SADF were conservative in this matter.

As a result of this survey, a set of guidelines on how to deal with homosexuality saw the light a year later. In an official policy decision from April 28th, 1982, it was pointed out that: "All possible steps should be taken to limit the phenomenon of homosexuals and lesbians within the SADF. During recruitment special attention should be given to make sure that persons with those behavior disorders are not admitted to the standing army".¹⁴⁷ Following this decision an overview has been provided explaining exactly what homosexuality and

¹⁴⁶ SAGD Hoofkwartier, gedragsafwykings by NDP'S/S MAG lede, Geneesheer-generaal C.F. Scheepers, July 6th, 1981.

¹⁴⁷ HSP/DPA/106/19/16/1, H SAW beleidsdirektief: dissipline: onsedelikheid: homoseksualiteit, Hoof van die SAW, April 28th, 1982.

lesbianism (according to the SADF) entailed and how homosexual servicemen should be handled. It firstly grouped both groups together under the name of homosexuality, making no difference between gay men and lesbian women within the army and then explained in steps the plan of action. Furthermore, there are several sets of this overview, all written differently but stating more or less the same. In this research these different sets have been combined to give a clear as possible overview.

The overview, divided in eight points, states that homosexuality appeared to be on the rise among SADF servicemen, the development of which should be limited. It noted that present day society was being known for its increasing permissiveness and because of this, more groups and individuals were trying to justify these abnormalities. Homosexuality was not just perceived as undermining for discipline within the SADF, it also seemed to pose a higher security risk since practicing homosexuals were an easier target for blackmail. (In hindsight it should be noted that gay servicemen were only an easier target for blackmail because of the attitude within the SADF and society as a whole towards homosexuality. If homosexuality would not have been a problem there also would not have been a significant bigger opportunity for blackmail.)

Throughout the overview homosexuality was being referred to as a 'behaviour disorder', 'abnormality' and 'unacceptable behaviour'. It continued that although members guilty of this behaviour disorder were to be identified, it would not be easy to gain substantial evidence about this abnormality. Homosexuals appeared not to easily admit to being guilty of this unacceptable behaviour. In an environment like this it is no surprise that gay servicemen and women were not willing to, as stated, admit very easily to being gay. The guidelines provided to find homosexual and lesbian members were divided between Standing Army and Conscripts. A member of the Standing Army would, in case of doubt about his/her sexuality, be required to see a clinical psychiatrist; during selection of ladies for the Standing Army, a suitable person should be available for a preliminary evaluation; women imitating male instructors without showing female

refinement should not be hired. After attestation, members had to be provided with information on all forms of immorality like adultery, homosexuality/lesbianism, as well as alcohol and drugs abuse. All necessary help and guidance had to be offered to a person guilty of behaviour deviations but in case he/she continued to practice these deviant acts, he/she must immediately be tried and fired. Lesbians could also be requested to resign.

Interestingly, slightly different guidelines were provided for National Conscripts. The necessary information on immorality was to be given regularly. National Conscripts could however not be fired or be allowed to fake behaviour disorders to get out of conscription. Besides disciplinary action, National Conscripts could be stationed on posts where chances to practice these malpractices were slim or non-existing. They should, however, not be stationed on posts where they would have access to classified material.¹⁴⁸

This concludes the official policy guidelines of the SADF with regards to homosexuality within the Army. The above discussed guidelines were sent on April 28th, 1982 to all heads of departments as well as people who could come into contact with gay servicemen and women as well as conscripts. It states that these guidelines will be reviewed yearly but no other (possibly updated) versions of these guidelines have been found in the military archives.

Several documents reply to the set of guidelines stated above. One comes from before the official publication date of April 28th, 1982 in response to a letter asking for any feedback on the guidelines before publication (The first set of guidelines found dates from January 1982). It is a handwritten note signed by the Head of the SADF, A. P. Roux, on February 18th, 1982. It states that: "the guidelines can be handed out shortly but point 6.e seems like discrimination".¹⁴⁹ Point 6.e refers to the line: "The necessary help and guidance should be offered but in case the person after this still continues to practice these deviant acts, he

¹⁴⁸ HSP/DPA/106/19/16/1, H SAW beleidsdirektief: dissipline: onsedelikheid: homoseksualiteit, Hoof van die SAW, April 28th, 1982.

¹⁴⁹ HSP/DPA/106/19/16/1, Hoof van die SAW, Dissipline: Onsedelikheid: Homoseksualiste, February 18th, 1982.

must immediately be tried and fired. Lesbians can also be requested to resign". On the final guidelines that eventually were sent out, dated April 28th, 1982, this line was dropped. The SADF possibly did not want to draw more attention to the matter by so blatantly discriminating against gay servicemen and women.

Dissent from within:

The SADF guidelines were met with (some) protest from within the armed forces. A letter dated September 1983 by Capt. Nell, Standing Army psychiatrist in Bloemfontein, protests the SADF stance on homosexuality and lack of clarity of the provided guidelines. He refers to the guidelines from January 13th, 1983. These have not been retrieved in the archives but based upon his letter, they most likely did not differ too much, if at all, from the ones from April 28th, 1982.

Capt. Nell strongly rejected the guidelines provided in the official SADF policy document. According to Nell, a policy like this is always set in a certain time and culture frame, and it can never cover all aspects of a complex phenomenon like homosexual behaviour. He stated that classifying homosexual/lesbian behaviour as 'abnormal' is an emotional and unscientific assumption. It implicates that a deed is by definition 'good or bad', 'normal or abnormal', which is a big miscomprehension. A deed is always seen by the culture in which it occurs. Nell continued that therapy takes place in a relation in which the psychiatrist does not offer a judgment. It is the responsibility of the psychiatrist to lead his patient to his maximal adjustment, functioning and happiness in his circumstances, and not to judge his patient. To say to a patient his behavior is 'bad' or 'sinful' or 'abnormal' has little, if any, therapeutic value. In case a patient observes that the psychiatrist considers certain ways of behaviour repulsive and/or rejects them strongly, the patient will not have the frankness to discuss his personal problems or feelings.

Nell also stated that homosexual behaviour was no longer considered to be a sexual deviation by the American Psychiatric Association and it cannot be placed in the same category like bestiality, pedophilia and necrophilia. Last

mentioned deviations can be traced to strong personality disorders, which is not the case with homosexual behavior. In terms of possible treatment, Nell was clear in pointing out that no affective psychiatric treatment of homosexual behavior, which is focused on changing it to heterosexual behavior, exists. Short term results can sometimes be achieved by using very unpleasant behavioural techniques, but no acceptable treatment has until now proven any long term change. To try to change individuals who are comfortable with their homosexual behavior / fantasies, is an impossible task. This would be trying to force people to change acceptable behaviour to behaviour which is unpleasant or unacceptable. Clinical psychiatrists are not qualified for this and in reality it is unethical.¹⁵⁰

A second psychological evaluation dealing with homosexuality originates from No. 3 Military Hospital in Bloemfontein and is dated October, 1984. It has been written by Lt. J. Smit, a clinical psychiatrist. It states that the named member (name blocked) is in counselling for homosexuality. As he recently got married and experiences the mentioned problem, it is strongly recommended that he is granted an 'uitslaappas', with which he can leave base at night and sleep at home.¹⁵¹ This was in line with the above provided guidelines. Any standing army member in doubt about his/her sexuality should see a clinical psychiatrist and all necessary help and guidance should be provided (to a person guilty of these behaviour deviations).

Rape is another, possible, aspect of gay life in a military environment. Rapes regularly occurred but these sexual assaults are often mistaken as 'homosexual'. According to the feminist interpretation, rape is not about sex or sexuality but about power and gender.¹⁵² The victim is feminised through penetration, and this brands the male victim, but often not the perpetrator of such an assault, as homosexual. Anal sexual assault was frequently used as a form of

¹⁵⁰ Departement Psigiatrie, 3 MH/106/19/16/1, H SAW Beleidsdirektief No 1/13/1983: Disipline Homoseksualisme, Kapt. Nell, September 1983.

¹⁵¹ 3MH/104/10/5, J. Smit, kliniese sielkundige, Oktober 1984.

¹⁵² G. Siann, *Gender, sex and sexuality: contemporary psychological perspectives* (Hong Kong: Taylor & Francis, 1994) 172.

torture and it also formed part of the persecution of gays.¹⁵³ The Aversion Project points out that it was not just gay conscripts who were assaulted or sent to psychiatric wards, it happened to ‘trouble-makers’ too. To quote the following example of information gathered by The Aversion Project for a more personal account: “Mark did not want to serve in the SADF, so he went AWOL. After a torrid time of being sexually assaulted and beaten up in DB (detention barracks), Mark tried to commit suicide. A lieutenant offered him a rifle to blow his brains out. He was transferred to the psychiatric unit at No.1 Military Hospital, where he was chained to the bed and subjected to shock treatment. He was transferred to another military hospital and suffered further abuse. He was told by an orderly that his kind should be locked and chained for the rest of their lives”.¹⁵⁴

The documentary *Property of the State*, from 2003, deals with the treatment of gay conscripts in the SADF too. The documentary describes several aspects of gay lives within the military. It mentions the ‘sniffing out’ of gay conscripts on the first day of arrival in the army. It is described as officers literally trying to ‘smell’ gay guys to be taken off their platoon. *Property of the State* pays attention to male rape as well. Within an all-male environment homosexuals were not in general only looked down upon, in certain cases they were also abused (raped) by fellow conscripts or officers. The documentary describes this in terms of “since you are gay, this is clearly what you want”. According to *Property of the State* the number of suicides among gay conscripts was six times higher than average. It also discusses Ward 22, as a place where gay conscripts had to survive amongst junkies and actual mentally disturbed patients.¹⁵⁵

Not even the basic rules of exchange of information were maintained in the psychiatric unit. Neither the servicemen themselves, nor their parents were given adequate information. The doctor coerced conscripts into admitting to their parents that they were homosexual, and further coerced them to undergo

¹⁵³ Van Zyl et al, *Aversion Project*, 66.

¹⁵⁴ Van Zyl et al, *Aversion Project*, 68.

¹⁵⁵ *Property of the State: Gay Men in the Apartheid Military*, 2003.

aversion therapy.¹⁵⁶ One reference to Levin in this regard stands out, as even though the SADF suggested any information that a national serviceman was gay should be treated as confidential, at least to their platoons, there were numerous stories of Levin calling parents and telling them their children were gay.¹⁵⁷

By 1984, in the conservative and religious milieu that was Bloemfontein, conversion therapy was no longer considered necessary for homosexuality. The war was escalating and increasingly troops were deployed in urban areas. The psychiatric units had other priorities such as mental disorders typical to soldiers suffering from war.¹⁵⁸

The early 1980's saw a rise of young men who refused to go into the army. Possibly the most visible organisation opposing conscription was the End Conscription Campaign, founded in 1983. It challenged the legitimacy of Apartheid generally, but specifically opposed military service against fellow (black) citizens.¹⁵⁹ The ECC was, although not intentionally, closely linked to gay conscripts. It was mainly active on white, English-speaking university campuses.¹⁶⁰ The South African government regularly associated men who objected to military service with effeminacy, cowardice and sexual 'deviance'.¹⁶¹ Conscripts, by comparison, were presented as brave, admirable, successful and as being involved in an institution where they would mature and develop their full potential in life.¹⁶² White men who refused to serve in the SADF for political and moral reasons reflected fractures in the ruling elite and threatened to destabilize the masculine ideology that gave the Apartheid state its legitimacy. The performance of compulsory military service was the primary constitutive act of

¹⁵⁶ Van Zyl et al, *Aversion Project*, 82.

¹⁵⁷ Jones, *Psychiatry*, 24.

¹⁵⁸ Van Zyl et al, *Aversion Project*, 85.

¹⁵⁹ R. Morrell, "Times of change," 31.

¹⁶⁰ Conway, "Somewhere on the border," 82.

¹⁶¹ Conway, "All these long-haired fairies should be forced to do their military training. Maybe they will become men. The End Conscription Campaign, sexuality, citizenship and military conscription in apartheid South Africa," *South African Journal on Human Rights* (2004): 207.

¹⁶² Conway, "All these long-haired fairies," 208.

masculinity and citizenship in white South African society.¹⁶³

The state used the ECC's high female membership as a tactic by which to feminise the group as a whole, the pro-government Veterans For Victory group produced pamphlets and posters depicting women at ECC activity days with captions such as "ECC relies on women members to do its dirty work – makes you think doesn't it".¹⁶⁴ Citizenship has been historically divided into liberal and republican streams of thought. Liberal citizenship, unlike its republican counterpart, is based on equality of individuals in the political community regardless of individual actions. Republicanism is premised on the need for participation on specific (albeit socially and historically contingent) grounds and the performance of certain personal characteristics. Serving in the military is a perfect means for achieving republican citizenship; as those who undertake military service are actively participating in the public realm for the common good. The yoking of masculinity with violence and specifically military service, as a method for achieving hegemonic masculinity and citizenship, was a central tenet of Apartheid society. This has disadvantaged and excluded women and devalued femininity as an attribute.¹⁶⁵

The ECC found it easier to challenge the state on conservative terms, engaging the state in terms of republican citizenship. Objectors statements were always framed in terms of patriotism, duty and civic participation, albeit non-military forms.¹⁶⁶ The ECC offered a non-violent, anti-authoritarian vision of masculinity for young white men.¹⁶⁷ A clear example of this was the objection for anymore military camps by Dr. Ivan Toms. Toms had served his two years' national service as a medic in the army. On completing his service, Toms established a community clinic in the squatter camps at Crossroads. It was here that Toms witnessed the iniquitous and brutal operation of Apartheid and in 1983

¹⁶³ Conway, "The masculine state in crisis," 422.

¹⁶⁴ Conway, "All these long-haired fairies," 209.

¹⁶⁵ Conway, "All these long-haired fairies," 214.

¹⁶⁶ Conway, "All these long-haired fairies," 222.

¹⁶⁷ Morrell, "Times of change," 31.

he publicly announced that he would refuse to continue in his national service obligations.¹⁶⁸

He fitted the ECC bill perfectly; he was conventional in all respects except one, the fact that he was gay.¹⁶⁹ Toms's decision to refuse to continue his national service was not just based on his experience in the army and Crossroads, but he cited his sexuality as a primary justification for his stance. Toms felt the connection between the SADF and racial oppression stronger because of his experience of oppression of homosexuality in white society. A homophobic campaign against Toms was orchestrated in Cape Town, with posters saying "Toms is a moffie pig" and "Toms – HIV Test".¹⁷⁰ The ECC felt uncomfortable about highlighting Toms's sexuality and persuaded him to remove all references to it from his statement of objection, speeches and pamphlets.¹⁷¹

The ECC was willing to engage the state on meanings of good citizenship and also to contest the hegemonic constructions of courage, maturity and service, but they were not prepared to take this further by contesting the fusion of homosexuality and cowardice or the binding the state made between heterosexual masculinity and military service. The general feeling within the ECC was that the effect of using sexuality as a basis for objection, would have played into some of the stereotypes that existed at the time; that the objector movement was made up of a bunch of queers, dagga smokers and drug addicts.¹⁷² Most of ECC's target constituency were young, white conscripts who were homophobic. Fear existed that they would not support the ECC if they knew Toms was gay. Therefore Toms agreed not to challenge hegemonic, heterosexual masculinity, keeping his political activism "rooted in a heteronormative basis".¹⁷³

¹⁶⁸ Conway, "All these long-haired fairies," 222.

¹⁶⁹ Hoad, Martin and Reid, *Sex and politics*, 32.

¹⁷⁰ Sinclair, "The official treatment," 235 (from footnote).

¹⁷¹ Hoad, Martin and Reid, *Sex and politics*, 77.

¹⁷² Conway, "All these long-haired fairies," 223.

¹⁷³ Sinclair, "The official treatment", 236.

During the 1980's, the heroic role of the SADF at the border began to be questioned in mainstream, white society and the ECC capitalised on this. The main reason for this questioning was the experiences of individual white men and the affects military service had on them. By the mid to late 1980's there was increasing comment in the press and academia on the rise of white male suicide rates, instances of interpersonal violence and the phenomenon of 'family murder' whereby white men would inexplicably murder their families and then commit suicide. Pretoria, in fact, had the highest number of 'family murders' anywhere in the world.¹⁷⁴

The work of the ECC was not in vain, as by 1992 the ECC alleged that only 50% of the total call-up reported. By January 1993, that was estimated to have dropped to 30%. The SADF denied this but failed to provide any specific statistics and just described it as a most satisfactory turnout.¹⁷⁵

By August 1993, the new Minister of Defence, Kobie Coetzee, formally announced that national service was to be abolished, paving the way for a new volunteer defence force.¹⁷⁶ However, the SADF Directorate of Public Relations took a narrow and homophobic view of gay men, calling their behaviour atypical and immoral. The Directorate went on to state that their behaviour was unacceptable and that "members guilty of such behaviour are subject to disciplinary action".¹⁷⁷ The ECC and Conscientious Objector Support Group (COSG) were quick to respond and stated: "Our view is that an organisation such as the SADF, founded upon teaching people how to kill and with a history of support for an immoral political system, has very little moral credibility in the first place".

¹⁷⁴ Conway, "Somewhere on the border," 84.

¹⁷⁵ R. Louw, "Conscription," *South African Human Rights Journal* (1994) 33.

¹⁷⁶ Louw, "Conscription," 37.

¹⁷⁷ Louw, "Conscription," 39.

Later in the year, when the volunteer army was suggested, the SADF stated that gays would be excluded from service, which led to sharp criticism. By contrast, the attitude of the ANC was inclusive. The organisation acknowledged the outstanding work that gay soldiers had performed in Umkhonto we Sizwe and saw no reason why they should not be included in a reconstituted national defence force. ANC spokesperson Kader Asmal stated categorically that discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation would have to be outlawed.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁸ Louw, "Conscription," 40.

Chapter three: Oral history research findings

The research regarding experiences of gay conscripts in the South African Defence Force has been conducted in the form of questionnaires. The people interviewed were conscripted within a time frame ranging between 1971 to 1991 and served in a wide variety of postings. The questionnaire consists of questions relating to first impressions of the army, attitudes towards homosexuality, coming out, knowledge of psychiatric wards dealing with homosexuality, the gay/straight sex barrier within an all-male environment and qualitative personal assessments of the period of conscription. Out of fifteen respondents, four were straight. The answers to the questions have been incorporated chronologically, starting in 1971 up to 1991. The footnotes contain the name or interviewee number of the respondent and the year he joined the forces. In the bibliography a brief note on each of the respondents is provided.

Question: according to a statement in the documentary *Property of the state - gay men in the apartheid military*, gay people were being ‘sniffed out’ upon arrival on the first day of arrival on the military base. Have you experienced or seen anything like that?

Interviewee one definitely did not experience any ‘sniffing out’ activity at Voortrekkerhoogte, Pretoria, where he was stationed. In fact, to his amazement, the army was quite accommodating in the sense that obviously gay people in my platoon and bungalow were simply treated as anybody else.¹⁷⁹ This is an interesting observation, given that this account was in the years that Aubrey Levin was active in Ward 22 at Voortrekkerhoogte, so an accommodating attitude from the army towards gay people is quite opposite to what could be expected. Schalk Visser, conscripted in 1978, states that he had no experience with any ‘sniffing out’ but they were warned that if they discovered anyone to be a ‘moffie’, that person would be sent to a special hospital. He remembers that a very effeminate guy received a ‘love letter’ (according to the NCO’s) from a friend and

¹⁷⁹ Interviewee one, 1971.

was quickly transferred to another unit. It later came out through his cousin, who was in Schalk Visser's tent, that he was sent to a mental ward at Voortrekkerhoogte.¹⁸⁰ Sam van Wyk, conscripted in 1980, also did not experience any sniffing out and added that he however never got the impression that the medical services tried to 'purge' gay people like the rest of the SADF.¹⁸¹ In the same year, Cobis Wilson was conscripted. He states that he knew of people who, to escape the army, acted gay to be excused. This is also an interesting observation, seeing that in a time where some gay conscripts were 'treated' for their homosexuality, other people tried to act gay, to be excused from military service.¹⁸²

Three years later, in 1983, Willem Human reported for military service in Kimberley. Willem had, before conscription, studied at the University of Pretoria and was actively gay when he joined the forces. He states that upon arrival they were asked if anyone was gay or had any experience and warned that if anyone would lie, they would find out anyhow. He kept quiet and did not admit to anything. He was never confronted again, and although people found out, nothing was done about it.¹⁸³ Interviewee two got conscripted in 1984, after avoiding military service for seven years through studying and leaving the country for a few months in the hope of making another life outside of South Africa. He does not recall his first days in the army as any other than usual crowd control, processing of people, filling in forms, yelled instructions, confused chaos, slowness and frustration. He did hear rumours of people acting extremely camp and wearing dresses who were sidelined for psychological evaluations and eventually discharged.¹⁸⁴

Interviewee three, who joined the army in 1985, attests to a form of 'sniffing out' upon arrival. He and his fellow conscripts were told to fall into a squad. Any conscientious objectors had to step forward and were removed

¹⁸⁰ Schalk Visser, 1978.

¹⁸¹ Sam van Wyk, 1980.

¹⁸² Cobis Wilson, 1980.

¹⁸³ Willem Human, 1983.

¹⁸⁴ Interviewee two, 1984.

immediately. Then the question was asked if there were any guys who liked other guys 'in that way' (the officer then grabbed his own crotch). At that time, he felt small, the little bit of esteem he had was all gone by now.¹⁸⁵ In the same year, Mark Cuttler, an immigrant from Zimbabwe, was among the first batch of immigrants called up for national service. He does not recall any 'sniffing out' but does remember never answering the 'are you gay' question on his clearing-in sheet. Mark was the only respondent who mentioned this overt question. He stated that the wording may have been different but the meaning of the question was very clear.¹⁸⁶ Guy Fowle, who joined the army in 1987, answered that he did not see any 'sniffing out'¹⁸⁷, similar to interviewee four, who got conscripted in 1988.¹⁸⁸ Mark Farr, a straight man, who went into the army in 1988, described seeing two men in drag on his first day. Whether they were really gay or not, they were 'sent away somewhere' and we never saw them again. It was rumoured that they had been deemed unwanted, discharged and sent home. Mark also claims that it was widely rumoured that gay men, if not discharged, were sent to medical units or given office jobs.¹⁸⁹

Interviewee five, who went into the army in 1989, just indicated that there was not at all any 'sniffing out' upon arrival.¹⁹⁰ Interviewee six, a straight man who was conscripted in 1990, stated that he can not think of any incidence. He added that generally one was so overwhelmed, especially in the first week or two, that you did not take any note of much more than what had a direct influence on yourself.¹⁹¹ Interviewee seven, also a straight man who was conscripted in 1990 as well, did not witness anything like this. He also indicated that first day registration is a chaotic, stressful and hectic series of events. Almost all recruits that he knew were nervous and stressed about their own well-being.¹⁹² Lastly Stewart van Graan joined the army in 1991 in Voortrekkerhoogte, Pretoria but

¹⁸⁵ Interviewee three, 1985.

¹⁸⁶ Mark Cuttler, 1985.

¹⁸⁷ Guy Fowle, 1987.

¹⁸⁸ Interviewee four, 1987.

¹⁸⁹ Mark Farr, 1988.

¹⁹⁰ Interviewee five, 1989.

¹⁹¹ Interviewee six, 1990.

¹⁹² Interviewee seven, 1990.

was never aware of any 'sniffing out'.¹⁹³

Question: Would you say there was an active 'anti-gay attitude' in the armed forces or not? If so, was that attitude among officers, non-commissioned officers or the conscripts? Was there a difference between Permanent Forces and the conscripts? English and Afrikaans? Town or country?

Just as interviewee one had been amazed by how (relatively) accommodating the army was towards gay people, he also did not experience or witness any anti-gay attitude. He was however sure that people would not have condoned gayness during those years. He says there was no marked difference between English and Afrikaans officers. Coming from an ordinary, rural, middle-class background, the army was his first exposure to people from urban lower classes.¹⁹⁴ Schalk Visser indicated that there was a very anti-gay attitude, especially towards effeminate, overweight and/or 'pretty' boys. If you did something wrong or an officer did not like you, you would be called queer or 'moffie' all the time. There was one NCO corporal who had a very sadistic streak in him. He would come and stand right up against you, while you were standing at attention and then make sexual moves. One of the troops one day actually started to become aroused and he was then labelled as gay and taken off the course with immediate effect. He was transferred back to his unit, what happened to him was never found out.¹⁹⁵

Sam van Wyk stated that there was indeed an active anti-gay attitude. The worst discriminators according to him were the Afrikaans NCO's and officers, while among conscripts it was more a case of peer pressure. He does not recall any real difference between towns or country.¹⁹⁶ According to Cobis Wilson there

¹⁹³ Stewart van Graan, 1991.

¹⁹⁴ Interviewee one, 1971.

¹⁹⁵ Schalk Visser, 1978.

¹⁹⁶ Sam van Wyk, 1980.

was not a more active anti-gay attitude than we see amongst us now. He is also convinced that there were many permanent forces members in admin positions who were decidedly gay.¹⁹⁷ Willem Human, who was at the School of Armour in Bloemfontein, does not recall an active anti-gay attitude but adds that it might have been different at Intelligence, a security risk being the main concern, as one could be blackmailed.¹⁹⁸ It is interesting that with this he confirms the official statement of the SADF at the time, that gay conscripts should not be allowed near confidential documents, since they pose a security threat. Willem also stated that during his time on the border he found people being very accepting and actually enjoyed having a few gays around. As he did a very academic tank course, he mostly mingled with a better 'type' (of people).¹⁹⁹

Interviewee two states that there certainly was an anti-gay attitude, since the army was a reflection of broader society at the time. The early and mid 1980's were hardly tolerant of deviance and difference, as the Apartheid state reached its most oppressive phase. The army cultivated aggressive, forceful, dominant forms of masculinity and anyone deemed effeminate was singled out. He clearly remembers one incident when a relatively effeminate man was pushed to within an inch of complete collapse by the corporal conducting physical exercise, while abusive and belittling terms were screamed at him at top volume. He also recalled the odd lectures or announcements that condemned homosexuality. Although it is difficult to generalise, he said, attitudes were reasonably consistent within the army (among officers, NCO's and conscripts). He personally befriended, among others, both an Afrikaans as well as an English conscript who were both appalled by the mere existence of gay people. However, in Pretoria, the air force choir, the staff of a few army publications and among medics at the military hospital a greater concentration of gay men was to be found.²⁰⁰ Interviewee three states that without a doubt there was an anti-gay attitude, gay people were perceived to be the menace to society, the sickos, the

¹⁹⁷ Cobis Wilson, 1980.

¹⁹⁸ Willem Human, 1983.

¹⁹⁹ Human, 1983.

²⁰⁰ Interviewee two, 1984.

pedophiles, even as far as being sexual deviants.²⁰¹

Mark Cuttler did not experience, in his part of the army, any problems with gay guys. His platoon spent most of the time away and on its own. He did, however, experience a lot of bullying, from guys who sussed out he was gay, at his two to three months medics course at Voortrekkerhoogte. Those guys were fellow conscripts on the same course, he never had any trouble from higher ranks, both conscripts and permanent force.²⁰² In Guy Fowle's experience there was no anti-gay attitude, there were some out gay guys in bungalows adjacent to his and they were not harassed. Therefore he also cannot think of any difference between officers, NCO's or conscripts.²⁰³ Interviewee four claims that within the official structures of the SADF there was no anti-gay attitude. However, the conscripts, both Afrikaans and English speaking, were the ones that brought their homophobic attitudes with them. He did know of several standing army members who were gay and among well educated people there was little to even no homophobia.²⁰⁴

Mark Farr, coming from a straight point of view, thought there was definitely an anti-gay attitude. The Afrikaans term 'moffie' (the equivalent of 'poofita') was a common insult directed at troops who showed any sort of weakness in a wide field of activities, from physical prowess to marksmanship. It was clear that, if it was discovered that you were gay, you would be in for a very difficult time.²⁰⁵ Interviewee five never experienced any anti-gay attitude, he was himself in the closet and it was never really discussed within the group he was with.²⁰⁶ Interviewee six shows another straight point of view. He claims that there was no anti-gay attitude within the South African Intelligence School where he was, although maybe in earlier years and more 'macho' units. Until today he thinks that his second in command, who was generally referred to as 'Mrs.

²⁰¹ Interviewee three, 1985.

²⁰² Mark Cuttler, 1985.

²⁰³ Guy Fowle, 1987.

²⁰⁴ Interviewee four, 1988.

²⁰⁵ Mark Farr, 1988.

²⁰⁶ Interviewee five, 1989.

Botes', was gay.²⁰⁷ Also coming from a straight point of view, interviewee seven, argued that there was an anti-gay attitude although he could not say to what extent as he never witnessed a specific incident. According to him, as the military in the eighties and early nineties was largely a conservative Afrikaans community, the mentality was largely therefore also one of strong Afrikaans culture, religious beliefs, racism and homophobia. He believes that this mindset was especially prevalent in the "simple" military divisions such as infantry, armour and artillery. Military recruits with tertiary qualifications were typically transferred to specialist units. This meant that divisions such as infantry were largely composed of less educated, less enlightened and less tolerant members than some other divisions were.²⁰⁸ Stewart van Graan was not aware of any anti-gay attitude, there were no obvious gay guys in his unit so he never noticed anything.²⁰⁹

Question: did you come out in the army or did you know anyone that was openly gay? If so, what were your experiences?

Interviewee one came out to some people in the army and states that it was not a big deal. He was not really friendly with obviously gay guys but according to him, one recognises guys of 'one's own persuasion' even if they are not all that obvious. He became part of a small circle of gay friends and although not sexually involved with each other, it was nice to have people he could talk to and joke together with.²¹⁰ Schalk Visser never admitted that he was gay. For him it was a passing phase and the mental hospital ward was too much of a threat. Also the fact that they would tell your parents scared him off.²¹¹ Sam van Wyk did not come out either. He joined the Permanent Forces as a dentist and only came out by the end of his service in 1994. By that time discrimination was not allowed

²⁰⁷ Interviewee six, 1990.

²⁰⁸ Interviewee seven, 1990.

²⁰⁹ Stewart van Graan, 1991.

²¹⁰ Interviewee one, 1971.

²¹¹ Schalk Visser, 1978.

and nobody cared.²¹² Cobis Wilson reckons that all knew he was gay but he was not advertising the fact and not coming on to people.²¹³ When people found out about Willem Human's homosexuality nothing was done about it nor was he discriminated against. As mentioned earlier, he said that people on the border were very accepting and actually enjoyed having a few gays around. He claims he was in any case tougher and fitter than most of the so-called straights.²¹⁴

Interviewee two came out to people he trusted. He never wore his sexuality publicly, always cautious, careful, non-confrontational. Nonetheless, he describes himself as principled. As a conscientious objector it already took a certain strength to stand up for something that was alien to the military, he did however not add being gay to the list of things which did not fit with the military ethos. The friendships he had with gay men were quite close although transitory in a sense, in that he has not maintained links with any of these people. Interviewee two also had a number of straight friends. When a couple of these friends discovered he was gay, they were pretty horrified, in that they claimed they had never suspected it. In two cases the friendships cooled markedly as a result.²¹⁵ Interviewee three never came out in the army, he was not found out about either.²¹⁶ Mark Cuttler's platoon worked out he was gay fairly early on but they appeared to be a great bunch of guys and he had trouble with one guy only, and that was to a very limited extent.²¹⁷ Guy Fowle did not come out during his time in the army²¹⁸ and also Interviewee four did not come out until after he completed his military service.²¹⁹

Mark Farr did not know of any gay people during his army time, if he did meet someone who was gay, that person must have kept it to himself.²²⁰

Interviewee five came out to one or two people, that he knew were also gay.

²¹² Sam van Wyk, 1980.

²¹³ Cobis Wilson, 1980.

²¹⁴ Willem Human, 1983.

²¹⁵ Interviewee two, 1984.

²¹⁶ Interviewee three, 1985.

²¹⁷ Mark Cuttler, 1985.

²¹⁸ Guy Fowle, 1987.

²¹⁹ Interviewee four, 1988.

²²⁰ Mark Farr, 1988.

They never let anyone else know about it so they were being protected by being anonymous.²²¹ Interviewee six suspected his 2IC, as mentioned before, to be gay. He also worked with a corporal he thought to be gay, later on in civilian life he met this corporal again and he turned out to be right. Therefore he emphasizes that since both these people held rank, there was no discrimination (against gay people) otherwise this would not have been the case.²²² Interviewee seven did not know of anyone or meet anyone, to his knowledge, that was gay, neither during or after his year of service.²²³ Stewart van Graan did not risk to let anyone know about his homosexuality, he was very aware of the fact that anyone who did not fit the mould would be forced to fit by various means.²²⁴

Question: The original question was: “were you aware of the existence of so-called queer platoons?”, described earlier in this research as the all gay platoon in Uppington. However, quite a few respondents interpreted queer platoons as units in which many gay conscripts were placed, like the medical services or chefs. Both answers will be discussed below.

Interviewee one was never aware of the existence of such platoons while in the army and certainly was not a part of it. Years later he became aware of talk about these platoons.²²⁵ Schalk Visser heard rumours about them but whether they ever existed he does not know.²²⁶ Also Sam van Wyk was not aware of any such things as 'queer platoons'.²²⁷ Cobis Wilson was not aware of queer platoons either and he suggests that perhaps these platoons were made up of people who attempted to circumvent conscription by acting overly gay.²²⁸ Willem Human did not know about these specific platoons except for the cooks, clerks and medics. However, in these cases, he argues, it was the other way around. According to

²²¹ Interviewee five, 1989.

²²² Interviewee six, 1990.

²²³ Interviewee seven, 1990.

²²⁴ Stewart van Graan, 1991.

²²⁵ Interviewee one, 1971.

²²⁶ Schalk Visser, 1978.

²²⁷ Sam van Wyk, 1980.

²²⁸ Cobis Wilson, 1980

him a lot of gays opted for the 'softer' categories and were not chosen to be there because they were gay.²²⁹ Interviewee two was dimly aware of such 'platoons', although, he thinks, platoons is the wrong word. At least to his experience certain units were rumoured to attract many gay men. He had the most exposure to the medics in the hospital and met several gay men among them. Through them he became aware of a considerable white gay male sub-culture in Pretoria and many members of this sub-culture were in the army, both as conscripts and also as Permanent Force members.²³⁰

Interviewee three knew that they existed. Most gay troops, he claims, were sent to either PDK school in Pretoria or to the border town of Messina because it was so boring there and nothing was happening at the place.²³¹ Interviewee four remembers there were rumours about many gay men being placed with the chefs, but he was never able to confirm whether this was actually the case.²³² None of the other respondents heard of the existence of queer platoons, besides interviewee seven. He, however, sees it as softer units. He indicates that it was believed that gays would volunteer for the catering service of the SADF, or more commonly referred to as 'the chefs'. This was probably due to the perception within the SADF that catering is, or was, an effeminate practice most likely to attract gays. It was therefore assumed that regular infantry cadets would not have gays amongst them because they would volunteer for the catering divisions for peer acceptance as well as to encounter less chance of discrimination. Interviewee seven therefore believes that most, if not all, gay cadets were in the catering division, although not necessarily all chefs were gay. There was definitely no enforced segregation of gays within any of the units he served in. To his knowledge, the "don't ask, don't tell" policy was prevalent, whether this was official or not.²³³

²²⁹ Willem Human, 1983.

²³⁰ Interviewee two, 1984.

²³¹ Interviewee three, 1985.

²³² Interviewee four, 1988.

²³³ Interviewee seven, 1990.

Question: A relatively large amount of attention has in the past decade been given to Ward 22, a psychiatric ward at Voortrekkerhoogte, where homosexual conscripts were ‘treated’. What can you tell about this? Did you know of its existence? (The majority of respondents did not know about Ward 22, therefore only attention has been given to respondents who did know about it or had an opinion on the matter)

Interviewee one did not know about Ward 22 but many years later, due to the psychological circles he now belongs to, he heard about ‘treatment’ offered at the military hospital(s). From his current professional perspective it appeared that many of the gay conscripts ending up there were trying to avoid the army or somehow ease their way through it. However, it also sounds to him that the ‘treatments’ offered at these hospital wards were definitely not ethical. But unfortunately, he added, this is hearsay, he cannot vouch for it himself.²³⁴ Schalk Visser heard about it but never actually knew of/spoke to anyone that was in it.²³⁵ Sam van Wyk was never in Ward 22 nor could get any information about it when he enquired years later. He personally thinks it is a bit of an urban myth.²³⁶ Interviewee two knew of its existence but never visited it. He states that it was reputed to be a very horrible place, to be avoided at all costs if possible. He believes that electric shock therapy was still being used to cure people of their homosexuality, as he was himself in Ward 24 of No. 1 Military Hospital as a patient for ten weeks at the end of 1985, due to a breakdown. During his own therapy there was some discussion that electric shock therapy was a treatment option for homosexuality and depression. Ward 24 was a ward for people with various ‘psychiatric disorders’. Among the patients were people who suffered severe trauma after various experiences and encounters in Namibia and Angola, as well as depressives, attempted suicide survivors, homosexuals, transsexuals and drug addicts of various kinds.²³⁷

²³⁴ Interviewee one, 1971.

²³⁵ Schalk Visser, 1978.

²³⁶ Sam van Wyk, 1980.

²³⁷ Interviewee two, 1984.

Interviewee seven had never heard of Ward 22 and doubts if it existed in reality. He believes that it is possible that recruits who disclosed their orientation, or who were suspected of being gay during the registration procedure by the evaluating staff, might have been transferred or were advised to transfer to alternative units. To allege that they were sent for 'treatment' seems implausible. He does not believe that the senior medical officers who supervised such policies within the SADF would have been that ignorant.²³⁸ Stewart van Graan did not know about the existence of Ward 22. He did however have a friend who was the head of Psychiatry at No. 1 Military Hospital about twenty years ago. This friend told him that he tried behaviour therapy. He referred to one instance only and mentioned it did not work.²³⁹

Question: Would you say there was a fading of the gay/straight sex barrier in an all-male environment like the army? In these environments, 'situational homosexuality' occurs. This term refers to circumstances in which homosexual activities regularly occur, but where these do not become an individual's overriding preference once removed from the environment. In settings such as prison or military camp, this type of sexual activity is common, but is seen as a mere substitute for heterosexual behaviour.²⁴⁰ On a similar note, it is also argued that the great frequency of 'homosexual' rape in South African prisons exemplifies the 'frustration-aggression syndrome' and is a violent assertion of masculinity in a context of powerlessness.²⁴¹ As discussed earlier in this research, rape is not about sex or sexuality but about power and gender. The victim is feminised through penetration, and this brands the male victim, but often

²³⁸ Interviewee seven, 1990.

²³⁹ Stewart van Graan, 1991.

²⁴⁰ L. Heinecken, "The silent right: homosexuality and the military," *African Security Review* (1999): 4.

²⁴¹ I. Niehaus, "Renegotiating masculinity in the lowveld: Narratives of male-male sex in compounds, prisons and at home," in *The Prize and the Price*, ed. M. van Zyl et al (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2009), 86.

not the perpetrator of such an assault, as homosexual.²⁴²

Even though interviewee one did not have any sexual contact during his time in the army, he did enjoy that his platoon officer liked him a lot and made it clear that he would not mind some sexual contact. Later on during the year he had a very similar experience with another officer.²⁴³ Schalk Visser answered that he was fully aware of being gay when he joined the army but thought it was a passing phase. In his second year in Oudtshoorn he fell in love with a senior officer, Major J. They met at the beach in Wilderness but could not be seen together at base since it was against the code of conduct for Senior Officers to fraternise with Junior Officers. About four weeks after they met, Major J invited him to go with him to a friend's beach house for the weekend. To quote: "we chatted and had a few beers and eventually one thing led to another and we ended up making love. We had a very special love for each other and the sexual chemistry between us was amazing. This was love, but the forbidden love and the forbidden relationship". They lost contact after the army and Schalk believes he eventually left the army.²⁴⁴

As discussed in the literature overview (the *Property of the state* documentary) young (gay) men could be victim of rape within the military environment as well. Schalk Visser unfortunately has experience with this too. He did not go into too much detail in the survey but did write: "Why has no one ever written about the male rape that happened in the army? Why are we ashamed of it? Was I the only one that it happened to?".²⁴⁵

Cobis Wilson believes that the army could actually have instigated homosexual tendencies, referring to being buddies, showering together as well as masturbating sessions. He also wrote that during a CPR demonstration, in

²⁴² Van Zyl et al, Aversion Project, 66.

²⁴³ Interviewee one, 1971.

²⁴⁴ Schalk Visser, 1979.

²⁴⁵ Visser, 1979.

front of 1200 troops, a corporal shoved his tongue down his throat and that passes were being made.²⁴⁶

Willem Human gave an extensive overview of his sexual experiences in the army. Even though when he entered the army he remained silent about his homosexuality, he did acknowledge the fact that he had used recreational drugs (dagga and poppers). Because of this, the SADF perceived him as a security threat and therefore he was transferred to the School of Armour in Bloemfontein. After seven months of military training he was sent to the border, in the north of Namibia. He described that one day, he was left alone with his tank commander, a sexy darkhaired guy, while the rest of his platoon was in the veld. To quote: “He, my tank commander, was busy wiping off his entire body with a wet cloth, while he stood on the tank's mud screen. I was on the ground, right under him. My head was more or less in line with his groin when his overall ‘accidentally’ dropped and he stood totally naked in front of me. When I looked up, we looked for a rather uncomfortably long period of time in each others eyes. Then he smiled, slowly pulled up his overall and I wandered off rather confused; a missed chance... darn! There definitely was a spark there!”²⁴⁷

Months later he was standing in the shower next to a blond, athletic swimmer, only recently back from the veld. They met each other after this in the truck camp and this was the beginning of a pleasant sexual experience. Unfortunately they were not very often at the same time in the camp but when

²⁴⁶ Cobis Wilson, 1980.

²⁴⁷ “Hy, my tenkbevelvoerder, was besig om sy hele lyf met 'n nat lappie af te vee terwyl hy bo-op die modderskerm van die tenk staan, ek was op die grond, reg onder hom besig. My kop was min of meer in lyn met sy geslagsdeel toe sy oorpak 'per ongeluk' afgly en hy totaal naak voor my staan. My oë het natuurlik onwillekeurig eers gefokus op sy perfekte lyf en goedbedeelde uitrusting. Toe ek opkyk, het ons vir 'n half ongemaklike lang tydperk reguit in mekaar se oë gekyk. Hy het toe verleë geglimlag, stadig sy oorpak weer opgetrek en ek het ietwat verbouereerd weggeskarrel; 'n geleentheid gemis... deksels! Daar was beslis vonk!”

they were, it was 'fireworks'. Sometimes Willem and his platoon had to guard Miershoop, a camp for Angolan terrorists/prisoners. As it was so hot, clothes were usually stripped to underwear only and they rubbed each other with mosquito repellent. To Willem this was rather erotic and according to him the 'straights' must have enjoyed it too, at least they never complained.

A few days before clearing out (leaving the army) his platoon had to move to smaller facilities, where beds were no more than 300mm away from each other. The guy that slept next to him was not one of his friends, Willem writes: "He was well built with a large penis, but his face was scarred, and he was rather short. At one stage my hand hung out of the bed, he then took my hand and put it on his rock hard erection. The people around us were already quietly snoring. I obviously had an erection myself right away and the dark suddenly made him very beautiful. This was wonderful, unexpected sex among all the others".²⁴⁸

Lastly he states that there were 'lekker' gossip stories about guys that had been caught in 'situations'. Also when blue movies were shown, apparently massive masturbation sessions were taking place, although he never 'attended' one of those. Willem thinks these were not as such gay but rather straight horniness.²⁴⁹

Interviewee two never had sexual experiences during his time in the army but recalls there being rumours that the army put some kind of chemical in the water, the soup or the food, that was meant to curb the sex drive of new recruits. Some people swore blind that this was true, others said it was false and a rumour. The atmosphere, however, was very macho and masculine, making gay sex furtive and hidden. He did know of two boys getting caught together in the toilets late one night by someone who went to the bathroom. There was talk of

²⁴⁸ "Hy was goed gebou met 'n groot voël, maar sy gesig het letsels gehad, en hy was aan die kort kant. Op 'n stadium het my hand uitgehang aan sy kant, hy steek toe sy hand uit, neem myne onder sy kombers en sit dit op sy klipharde ereksie. Die mense rondom ons het reeds rustig gesnork. Ek het natuurlik ook onmiddelik 'n ereksie gehad en die donker het hom toe skielik baie mooi gemaak. Dit was 'n heerlike onverwagte gewaagde seks tussen al die ander."

²⁴⁹ Willem Human, 1983.

another two who disappeared towards the parade ground where there were a few bushes and trees, where perhaps one could be quite private. He is not sure whether these men identified as gay or were straights who were just playing.

He continues that he was seldom in units for a very long time, until he settled in Pretoria at the military archives. His observation here was that sexual contact and sexual opportunities for gay conscripts more often occurred outside the military environment than inside it. He knows of one Permanent Force officer who became sexually involved with/fell in love with a conscript, and they had quite a long-term relationship. He also knew of quite a few gay conscripts who used to go to a couple of clubs/bars in Pretoria at weekends and express their gay sensibilities quite openly there: indeed, a lot of the clientele of young gay white men at these bars were either conscripts or had intimate contact with the army. He also had friends in the medical corps who worked at No. 1 Military Hospital in various roles and there was a bit of a closeted gay sub-culture there. There were also medics who had sexual contact with patients, consensual that is. He was not aware of any violent or coercive behaviour that occurred in his circle.²⁵⁰

Interviewee three states that gay officers who were caught red handed in the act with their troop/s were not even given a slap on the wrist. It was fine to be gay and help a straight dude out once in a while but you were never allowed to out yourself. You could fuck to your hearts content, just do not get caught. No safe sex measures were provided.²⁵¹ Mark Cuttler was sexually very satisfied in the the army: "I had sex (blow jobs) with four of the guys in my platoon on an ongoing basis. Of those guys, three were definitely straight boys who got horny from being away from home and used me as their relief. The other guy, I think may have been gay, or at least bisexual".²⁵²

According to interviewee four the army was a place where straight men

²⁵⁰ Interviewee two, 1984.

²⁵¹ Interviewee three, 1985.

²⁵² Mark Cuttler, 1985.

often practiced gay sex, more than any other environment he has experienced since. He thinks possibly it was because conscripts were young and did not have a firmly outlined sexuality yet. He also suspects the homophobic behaviour of many conscripts existed due to their own sexual insecurities. He provides several experiences of gay sex behaviour in the army: “during duty, it occurred that conscripts had gay sex. Two young men (from a lower economic income group) once had sex on duty, while I was on duty too. When they later joined the bigger group again, one of the young men lay on the ground. The other started wrestling with him playfully. Then the other one complained: ”No man, my arse is still sore!”.²⁵³ He continues that boredom was a daily reality and during holidays the ones that were left behind alone in the barracks sometimes had sexual contact. One time a married Standing Army member approached him sexually. Years later, a colleague of his confessed that he experienced a gay phase during his time as a conscript in the army. After clearing out, however, he continued his heterosexual lifestyle.²⁵⁴

Completely opposite to the experiences above, Guy Fowle was surprised what a non-sexual environment the army was. Especially where he was based, Saldanha.²⁵⁵ Mark Farr, from a straight point of view, does not think there was a fading of the gay / straight barrier since there was still a very anti-gay sentiment and everyone vehemently denied any insinuation that they were. It is for him therefore hard to think of a straight / gay barrier, more so as nobody was suspected of being gay.²⁵⁶

Interviewee five states that although he did have a few sexual experiences with guys, it was never discussed, as he was in the closet. His opinion however is that there was a much higher amount of male play going on, due to all the guys together at a remote location. He remembers that the guys who were very

²⁵³ “Twee outjies (uit 'n lae ekonomiese klas) het een keer tydens wagdiens seks gehad terwyl ek ook aan diens was. Toe hulle later weer by die groter groep aangesluit het, het een van die outjies op 'n stadium op die grond gelê toe sy maat weer speels met hom begin stoei het. Toe kom die klag van hom: "no man, my arse is still sore!"

²⁵⁴ Interviewee four, 1988.

²⁵⁵ Guy Fowle, 1987.

²⁵⁶ Mark Farr, 1988.

straight and very homophobic, were some of the guys who one would hear stories about, as apparently they were the ones who had 'play' sessions with other guys. He recalls one specific experience coming back to camp one night late, after going out into the town for the night: "Another gay guy and I arrived back in our barracks, which looked out onto a very dark car park. We saw the silhouettes of two guys, kissing and playing with each other. We could not see who they were, but we sneaked outside to get a better view and realised it was one of our Corporals, who was a very hetero type of guy, pulling into another guy. We were very shocked as we had even met this Corporals beautiful girlfriend. We never let him know what we saw".²⁵⁷

In response to the possibility of the fading of the gay / straight sex barrier within an all-male environment, interviewee six (straight) replied: "I moved to an all-male environment when I received training and I can say this was not the case. There was truly no time to think. On the contrary, I skipped breakfast, which was a serious offence, to get more sleep. Anybody who thought of sex during training did have a problem, but I think the majority of men adopted an attitude of 'don't ask, don't tell'".²⁵⁸ Stewart van Graan shared that he fell in love with one of the guys in the army: "I knew him before the army and although he was not gay, we used to jack off together. He joined six months after I left the base. I broke into the base to see him. I was caught in the dorm and that was a nightmare. At the time I was working in the Generals Head Quarters and had my ID with me. If it was not for that, I do not know (what would have happened)".²⁵⁹

Question: Did you perhaps experience your time as a gay man in the army in a positive way, for example for it being an all-male environment, away

²⁵⁷ Interviewee five, 1989.

²⁵⁸ Interviewee six, 1990, "Ek het net in 'n "all-male environment " beweeg toe ek opleiding ontvang het en ek kan nie sê dat dit die geval was nie, want daar was waarlik nie tyd om te dink nie. Inteendeel, ek het ontbyt geskiep, wat 'n hoog strafbare oortreding was, om ekstra slaap in te kry. Enige iemand was aan seks kon dink tydens opleiding het 'n probleem máár ek dink baie ouens het 'n attitude van "don't ask, don't tell" gehad".

²⁵⁹ Stewart van Graan, 1991.

from traditional norms and away from a critical family and/or Church?

Interviewee one would not describe his time in the army as either negative or positive. He basically tried to make the best of it and did enjoy the company of all the people around him and not having to think for himself. In a way he considered it as marvellous, not having any real responsibilities.²⁶⁰ Sam van Wyk enjoyed the routine, the excitement of the border and felt comfortable in the all-male environment.²⁶¹ Willem Human enjoyed the all-male environment as well, and made great friends. The army, he says, was very good for his self esteem. It made him realise that he could be gay, as well as even tougher than some of his straight companions.²⁶² Interviewee two has no doubt that some gay men found the army a liberating place. His own experience was different. He detested the fact that he was identified with the SA Defence Force in any way, having both political and religious objections to being part of it. In a way, however, being part of the army was liberating, because by the end of this time, he ceased to be a closeted gay man. He defined himself against the military's norms, attitudes and methods of operation.²⁶³ According to Mark Cuttler, the army certainly was a positive experience. He became a platoon medic and was therefore responsible for his platoon's health, a position he took fairly seriously and enjoyed. He claims that his good time in the army was largely based on a positive attitude to life and he thinks that a good deal of the self esteem he now has was engendered by his years of national service.²⁶⁴

The friendships I made (albeit with straight men), interviewee four states, were very valuable in those days and the possibility to move out of the protective family environment was liberating. He thinks, however, that he could have used his two years of military service in a better way and did not agree with the political orientation of the SADF.²⁶⁵ Interviewee five made the most of it but it was tough,

²⁶⁰ Interviewee one, 1971.

²⁶¹ Sam van Wyk, 1980.

²⁶² Willem Human, 1983.

²⁶³ Interviewee two, 1984.

²⁶⁴ Mark Cuttler, 1985.

²⁶⁵ Interviewee four, 1988.

he was in the closet and his army time was in no way positive.²⁶⁶ Stewart van Graan hated every minute of every day and night of the army. He could not switch his mind and emotions off, and every bit of energy he had was focused on avoiding the mental pain. He did however enjoy the all boys environment.²⁶⁷

Research Findings – Discussion

The research findings are all based on personal testimonies of ex-conscripts during those years. Due to the qualitative nature of the research it is difficult, perhaps impossible, to determine a specific ‘trend’ towards homosexuality within the SADF throughout the years covered by the research. Ex-conscripts shared their own experiences from their own frameworks, which were heavily influenced by their own attitude, location, peers and officers. On top of that memories could have been distorted or ignored due to the long timeframe or out of personal choice.

Based upon the documentary *Property of the state*, the question was asked whether any ‘sniffing out’ of gay conscripts was noticed upon arrival in the army. The first four respondents, who served in the army between 1971 and 1980, replied that they were not aware of any ‘sniffing out’. Interviewee one actually emphasized that he was quite amazed by the fact that the army was quite accomodating towards gay people. Schalk Visser stated that although he did not experience any ‘sniffing out’, they were warned that anyone who was a ‘moffie’ would be sent to a special hospital. Cobis Wilson, on the other hand, mentioned that he knew of people who acted gay to be excused from military service. Besides Schalk Visser’s experience, it seemed that purging gay people from the army during the 1970’s was not that high on the army’s priority list. Out of the next four conscripts, who were in the army between 1983 and 1985, three mention a way of ‘sniffing out’. These ranged from a warning and intimidation to a

²⁶⁶ Interviewee five, 1989.

²⁶⁷ Stewart van Graan, 1991.

specific 'are you gay' question on the clearing-in sheet. Interestingly, in 1982 the earlier discussed official guidelines on how to deal with homosexuality within the armed forces was distributed. The rise of a 'sniffing out' perception among the interviewed conscripts who served directly after 1982, could be attributed to this. None of the conscripts who served after 1985 noticed any 'sniffing out' upon arrival. Mark Farr, a straight conscript from 1988, noted that two men showed up in drag and it was rumoured that they were deemed unwanted and sent home. With a fair certainty, a relaxation in the army's attitude towards gay men during the latter half of the 1980's can be detected, based on the answers to this question.

The question relating to 'sniffing out' upon arrival in the army was straightforward to answer, in that it focused on one specific 'incident' within a short time frame. The responses towards the question whether the respondents experienced the armed forces to have an active anti-gay attitude (throughout their time in the army) are somewhat more mixed in tone. Earlier conscripts in general appear to have experienced a stronger anti-gay attitude than the latter ones. Interestingly enough, the first respondent, who entered the army in 1971, remains the most neutral in stating that he never experienced or witnessed any anti-gay attitude, although he is sure any 'gayness' would not have been condoned back then. It can be argued, however, whether back in 1971 the existence of homosexuality was very much on the army's mind. The Immorality Act had only been amended in respect of homosexuality in 1968 and also Levin's Ward 22 in Voortrekkerhoogte had just been established in 1969.

The respondents from the late 1970's up to the mid 1980's give a fair number of examples in which way they experienced or witnessed the army's anti-gay attitude. In general it can be concluded that anyone who did not fit the army's picture of a real man (effeminate, overweight or 'pretty' boys, as Schalk Visser described) would be a possible victim for harrassment. Corporals pushing relatively effeminate men to within an inch of complete collapse or shouting terms like 'queer' or 'moffie' are clear examples of a heteronormative confirmation of

masculinity, singling out anyone who did not fit the mould. Several respondents pointed out that the Afrikaans officers were the worst discriminators. The SADF being a predominantly Afrikaner institution, it makes sense that the conservative Afrikaner principles of authority and masculinity, as discussed in the first chapter of this research, dominated. The respondents from the second half of the 1980's appear to have experienced or witnessed less to no active anti-gay attitude. Several respondents knew of either out gay conscripts or gay standing army members who were not harassed for their sexuality. Only Mark Farr, from a straight point of view, specifically mentions there to be an anti-gay attitude due to the use of the word 'moffie' at troops who showed any sort of weakness in a wide field of activities, from physical prowess to marksmanship. One clearly did not specifically have to be gay to be subjected to the possibility of the army's anti-gay attitude.

The location in which the respondents operated, which overlaps with the question regarding the gay platoons, appears to have been a crucial factor as well. In Pretoria itself, medics and chefs all used to have a larger concentration of gay conscripts. It was widely understood that gay guys in general would opt for the 'softer' categories, if only for peer acceptance. One respondent, interviewee seven, believes that most, if not all, gay conscripts were in the catering division and it was therefore assumed that regular infantry cadets did not have gay conscripts amongst them. On the border, according to Willem Human, people even enjoyed having a few gay conscripts around.

Coming out (openly) in the army was not an option for the majority of respondents, no matter in which year they served. Most respondents came out only to a few a people whom they trusted and whom were mostly also gay. Only Schalk Visser mentions specifically that the mental ward (ward 22) was too much of a threat, as well as that the army would inform your parents about your sexuality. Cobis Wilson, Willem Human as well as Mark Cuttler, in the army between 1980 and 1985, reckoned their fellow conscripts figured out they were gay but nothing was done about it. In that light it can be argued that experience

of gay conscripts not just depended on the army or officers itself but also on their fellow conscripts. As interviewee four from 1988 claims, the conscripts were the ones that brought the homophobic attitudes with them. Serving among conscripts from a higher educational or a more enlightened background, could make it easier to manage as a gay person. Interviewee four, from 1984, states that his friendship with two conscripts cooled markedly when they found out he was gay. The straight respondents did not know of anyone who was (openly) gay. Only one of them (interviewee six, from 1990) suspected his second in command, as well as a corporal to be gay. He turned out right about the latter instance. Therefore he claims that there was no discrimination against gay people within the SADF, as in that case these people would not have been able to hold rank.

Despite several projects and articles that have been published in the past decade about Ward 22 and the treatment offered at this psychiatric ward to 'cure' gay soldiers of their homosexuality, surprisingly few respondents had heard about it. The ones that did know about it, mostly found out after their military service. Opinions on the matter differ greatly. One respondent calls it "a bit of an urban myth", while another refers to it as "implausible" that senior medical officers within the SADF would have been that ignorant to believe in treatment for homosexuals. Schalk Visser heard about it but never knew of/spoke with anyone that was actually in it. Only interviewee four states that "it was reputed to be a horrible place, to be avoided at all costs if possible". He was himself due to a nervous breakdown in Ward 24, a ward for people with various 'psychiatric disorders'. During his treatment, he said, electric shock therapy was discussed as a treatment option for homosexuality and depression. Stewart van Graan referred to a friend that tried behaviour therapy and said that it didn't work.

Based on a wide array of articles, interviews with Ward 22 patients in the Aversion Project as well as academic papers, there is no reason to deny the existence of Ward 22 and the shock therapy 'treatment' offered there to homosexual service men. However, based upon the interviews conducted for this research, it can be carefully concluded that the impact it has had on the average

gay conscript seems minimal. Most of the respondents never heard about it and the ones that have, do not know anyone that was actually treated there for homosexuality. Interviewee four is the only source found in this research that has had experience with a psychiatric ward in Voortrekkerhoogte, Pretoria (or in the army in general). However, he was a patient of Ward 24 and treated for a nervous breakdown. His homosexuality, seen against the attitudes of the time, might have played a part of his nervous breakdown but he was not officially treated for homosexuality. As this research is a qualitative study towards the experiences of gay conscripts, the main intention is to provide a better view of their circumstances within the SADF in general. *The Aversion Project*, discussed in this research, has thoroughly investigated Ward 22.

The answers to the fading of the gay/straight sex barrier seem to challenge the heteronormative masculinity culture within the army. As pointed out from the work of L. Heinecken, 'situational homosexuality' does occur, and perhaps flourishes, within an all-male environment like the army. Sexual contacts between male army personnel (conscripts as well as standing army) appears to be a mixture of situational homosexuality and 'regular' homosexuality. In the answers to this question numerous accounts of sexual encounters have been experienced, witnessed or heard of. Since all of these are described from a gay conscript's point of view, it has to be kept in mind that these descriptions will most likely be subjective. Mark Cuttler, for example, states that three out of the four fellow conscripts he had regular sexual contact with, were definitely straight. It is difficult to determine for sure whether this was actually the case. However, based upon Heinecken's explanation of situational homosexuality, it is likely that fading of the gay/straight sex barrier indeed occurred and was experienced by the respondents. A confirmation of the above statement has been given by interviewee four, who states that after his army years he met a straight man who had a gay phase while in the army. This was most likely 'situational' as after completion of his military duties, he continued his heterosexual lifestyle. The 'frustration-aggression syndrome', in which the high frequency of homosexual rape within South African prisons is framed, can also be applied to the army

environment. As conscripts in the SADF were seen as property of the state, their powerlessness could be translated into (sexual) violence against fellow conscripts, to reaffirm their masculinity over, possibly, a 'weaker' male. Schalk Visser's reference to his rape experience can be seen as an example of this violence.

The quite explicit and sheer numbers of examples provided by the interviewees also undermined the masculine, straight sexual hegemony view the army wanted to portray. Sexual encounters did not just occur between conscripts but also standing army members of higher rank were involved. On top of that some of them were quite open in expressing their sexuality. In Pretoria, according to interviewee four, was somewhat of a gay subculture with gay bars and clubs in town being frequented by clientele (mostly) linked to the army, either as conscripts or standing army members. It seems unlikely that the army was completely unaware of this gay sub-culture that existed in the armed forces. Even though a set of guidelines on how to deal with homosexual conscripts/standing army members was distributed in 1982, it appears that a blind eye was turned in most cases.

Surgeon General Scheepers pointed out in 1981, in his response to the proposed set of guidelines, that it must be accepted that these (homosexual) deviations do occur within the SADF and many of them would probably not cause problems and would not get attention. He did, however, conclude that strict disciplinary action should be taken against those cases that do cause problems and whose behaviour is unacceptable to the SADF. It seems safe to generalise this was the general opinion within the SADF, as it would be difficult, if not impossible, to take action against every (situational) gay man within the army. Based on the large amount of examples of (situational) gay sexual encounters, it would have most likely rather diminished the size of the SADF. The SADF's main objective, increasingly during the 1980's, was to keep the white government in power and suppress escalating riots against Apartheid in the townships. Therefore its attempt to purge gay people from the army was overshadowed by the violent

reality of South Africa in the 1980's.

Whether the army experience was, if only in a way, a positive experience is a matter of personal opinion. Some enjoyed the all-male environment, or were already used to it coming from all-boys schools, while others just tried to make the best of it. Interesting is the answer of interviewee four, who states that he probably defined himself stronger as a gay man against the heteronormative masculinity of the armed forces, as after completion of his time in the SADF, he ceased to be a closeted gay man. Instead of 'neutralising' defiant sexual behaviour by imposing a strict heterosexual, masculine culture, the army apparently in cases achieved the complete opposite.

Chapter four: Conclusions

This research set out to give a better understanding of gay conscripts within the SADF during the 1970's and 1980's, as well as to establish whether a noticeable change towards gay conscripts could be detected before and after, roughly, 1985. This year was picked due to the growing permissive attitude towards homosexuality in civilian South Africa during the 1980's. It has been discussed that with the discovery of the Forest Town gay party in 1966, South African politicians started to team up against homosexuality. A committee was put to work to determine whether changes to the Immorality Act, to ensure stricter policies against gay people, was needed. Besides a gay action group which paid legal and expert witnesses to make representation, the real tug-of-war was between the police, who were in favour of stricter anti-gay laws as they were convinced homosexuality was spreading due to older men and women seducing teenagers, and the SPNSA, a society of psychiatrists and neurosurgeons who argued that homosexuality was a mental disease and therefore should not be subjected to harsh policies.

The committee was talked out of the idea of stricter regulations aimed at gay sex in general and instead banned any sexual acts between men at a party, the age of consent for male homosexual acts was raised from sixteen to nineteen and the manufacture or distribution of any article intended to be used to perform an unnatural sexual act was to be prohibited. These amendments were passed into law in 1969 and during the 1970's, the gay sub-culture mainly moved indoors and was kept out of sight of the general public. In civic South Africa during the 1980's, attitudes towards homosexuality became more accepting and gay people themselves appeared more openly in public life. Gay bars and clubs were no longer harrassed by the police, while gay organisations like GASA made an appearance. At the same time, South Africa found itself in a downward spiral of violence and protest in the townships against the Apartheid laws. The repression of these protests escalated in 1985 with the State of Emergency and the Total Onslaught policy by the National Party government, to try to supress the rioting in

the townships as well as protect (white) South Africa from the perceived communist danger.

It can be argued that due to the rapidly deteriorating circumstances, gay people were no longer a priority on South Africa's 'problem list'. Ironically enough, when the first steps were made in 1985 to abolish several Apartheid laws, loosening the Immorality Act with regards to homosexuality was strongly opposed and even stronger laws against homosexuality were suggested. However, as the South African government had much more pressing matters to deal with, these suggestions were never seriously discussed. In 1987 the National Party candidate Leon de Beer even spoke out in favour of gay rights in Hillbrow, an area of Johannesburg with a large gay community.

Even though it can carefully be concluded that attitudes towards homosexuality among civilian South Africans became more accepting during the 1980's, it was not a change in attitude shared throughout (white) society. Gay life was (and still is) predominantly located in the big cities of Cape Town, Johannesburg and Durban. On top of that, also the National Party was not united in its point of view on gay issues, as stronger laws against homosexuality were proposed in the same year that Leon de Beer publicly supported gay rights in the Hillbrow constituency. A similar clash in views on homosexuality can be detected within the South African Defence Force. Based upon sources from the military archives as well as existing literature on the topic, it becomes clear that both conservative as well as progressive views on homosexuality existed.

In this research several of these points of views have been discussed. Seen in the light of SADF documents, homosexuality was not a reason for exemption from military service while it was also, officially, not accepted within the military environment. National conscripts were to be kept away from confidential information and stationed in posts where chances for them to practice these (homosexual) malpractices were slim or non-existing. Responses to these official guidelines from within the SADF, show that not everyone agreed with these points of view.

Surgeon-general Scheepers replied that in many cases homosexual or lesbian members will not cause any problems and their 'disorder' will not be noticed. He continued that even though these 'deviations' should not be relativated, it must be accepted that these cases do occur. He did point out however that in case homosexual or lesbian persons were to draw attention to themselves, by continuing to practice their sexuality after a warning, they should immediately be tried and fired. Even though it clearly cannot be concluded that Scheepers was promoting a gay friendly attitude, he does appear to take a rather pragmatic viewpoint on the matter and does not seem to be interested in starting a witch hunt against gay members. Capt. Nell, standing army psychiatrist, takes a much firmer stand against the official guidelines, indicating that a policy like this is set in a certain time and culture frame and it can never cover all aspects of a complex phenomenon like homosexual behaviour. In terms of possible treatment, Nell was clear in pointing out that no affective psychiatric treatment of homosexual behaviour, which is focused on changing it to heterosexual behaviour, exists.

This brings the conclusion to the 'treatment' discussed in the literature overview. Several literary sources, based on personal statements, give a detailed overview of Ward 22, Voortrekkerhoogte, where shock therapy 'treatments' were administered to gay men, to cure them from their homosexuality. No references to these 'treatments' have been retrieved from the military archives but it is safe to argue that these malpractices indeed have happened. The only reference to (offering) of treatment to a homosexual conscript dates back to early 1972. Interestingly, the psychiatric report mentions the conscript not showing interest in treatment. As discussed earlier in this research, if here is being referred to shock therapy, at least a certain level of consent must have been given by conscripts. It also means that not everyone who was (obviously) gay was subjected to 'treatment'. Interviewee two, who was in psychiatric ward 24 for a breakdown, disclosed that the possibility of shock therapy against depression and homosexuality was discussed during his own therapy. As he never underwent this treatment himself, it can be argued that conscripts did have to give consent

to this and, in case they did, probably did so out of fear, hierarchy intimidation or the desire to actually be cured. It can therefore also be argued that seen in the light of human agency, gay conscripts were actually able to make choices and impose those choices on the immediate environment around them.

Based upon the outcome of the survey done among ex-conscripts, a change in attitude towards homosexuality can indeed be detected. However, it should be noted that there does not appear to have been a consistent policy or point of view within the armed forces on dealing with homosexuality, neither during the 1970's nor during the 1980's. Also, due to the qualitative nature of this research, the provided answers are all meant to give insight into personal experiences and are therefore not suitable to base patterns on. Having said this, the responses on anti-gay attitudes within the SADF from interviewees before 1985, appear in general much more negative than the ones from the second half of the 1980's. The documents found at the military archives dealing with homosexuality, are all dating back to between 1972 and 1983. After 1983 no more documents dealing with this matter have been found, which can indicate that the concerns about homosexuality, and the influence it had on the armed forces, started to wane from a SADF point of view as well.

This research has been done firstly to add to the general knowledge of the experiences of gay conscripts in the 1970's and 1980's within the SADF. It has done so by conducting interviews with fifteen ex-conscripts, both gay and straight, covering anti-gay attitudes, coming out in the army, the existence of queer platoons and/or jobs perceived to be 'gay', psychiatric treatment of homosexuals and the knowledge of the existence of these treatments, the gay/straight barrier and qualitative personal assessments of the period of conscription. Secondly, it attempts to answer the question whether a change in attitude towards gay conscripts could be seen roughly around 1985, as South African society also became (slowly) more permissive towards homosexuality. Even though it has been concluded that the SADF does appear to have become less (openly) homophobic towards the end of the 1980's, it remains unclear

whether this was due to a different point of view from within the SADF itself. As late as 1993 the SADF Directorate of Public Relations expressed a homophobic point of view, calling gay behaviour unacceptable and stated that gays would be excluded from a future volunteer army.

Most likely the SADF merely turned a blind eye towards gay conscripts who did not rock the boat (too much) and probably even more so by the end of the 1980's. By that time the priority of the army had shifted to remain in control of the country. The amount of called-up conscripts that reported for duty had been declining yearly and the SADF could clearly no longer afford to alienate groups of its 'own' people as well.

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