

**The literary representation of identity and alienation in  
counterinsurgencies: Vietnam and Namibia/Angola**

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submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of:

DOCTOR OF LITERATURE AND PHILOSOPHY

in the

Faculty of Humanities

at the

Department of Afrikaans and Dutch, German and French

UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE

Bloemfontein

November 2013

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## Statement

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I, Burgert Adriaan Senekal, declare that the thesis submitted by me for the Doctor of Literature and Philosophy degree at the University of the Free State, is my own independent work and has not previously been submitted to any other university or faculty. I also declare that all sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references. I, hereby, cede copyright of the thesis in favour of the university.

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## Summary

This interdisciplinary study investigates how alienation manifests in American literature on the Vietnam War and Afrikaans literature on the war in Namibia/Angola (the so-called Border War). After an historical contextualisation, the sociological branch of alienation theory, which is based on the writings of Melvin Seeman, is discussed, and it is illustrated how the six aspects of alienation, as identified by Seeman, manifest in several texts on these wars. In keeping with the interdisciplinary nature of the thesis, insights from alienation theory are integrated with theories of historiography, trauma, masculinity, and counterinsurgencies, all in an attempt to come to a better understanding of the texts under consideration.

Despite literary theory's insistence that alienation is a feature of modernist and postmodernist literature, and literature on these counterinsurgencies in particular, little has been written on what alienation actually is. Seeman's variant was chosen because it is the most detailed and comprehensive treatment of alienation available, and although published in 1959, Seeman's notion of alienation continues to be relevant within sociology. Seeman's six aspects of alienation include powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, cultural estrangement, social isolation, and self-estrangement, and these are used to discuss the literature on these two counterinsurgencies, highlighting how these aspects of alienation manifest in a variety of literary texts. The line between history and fiction is of course also an important boundary challenged by literature on these wars, and therefore a section is included under meaninglessness that deals with the writing of history and the role historical fiction plays in representing the past. Under cultural estrangement, a section is also included on masculinity, because since the army was often seen as offering a rite of passage, alienation manifests in this sense as well by rejecting the cultural values of masculinity. A section is also included on the alienating effects of trauma, because trauma is of course an important facet of literature on these wars, and it is shown how alienation ties in with trauma through two texts in particular: Larry Heinemann's *Paco's Story* and Anthony Feinstein's *Kopwond* (released in English as *Battle Scarred*). Lastly, the study discusses all six aspects of alienation in reference to two of the seminal texts on these wars: Tim O'Brien's *If I die in a combat zone* and Alexander Strachan's *'n Wêreld sonder grense*.

In general, the thesis tries to come to terms with the complexities of these wars: history, alienation, and identity are complex issues in these conflicts, and the interpretation of literary texts can be done from an extensive variety of perspectives. It is shown how alienation theory provides a useful prism for looking at these texts that stem from two watershed conflicts that changed their societies irrevocably.



## Opsomming

Hierdie interdisiplinêre studie ondersoek hoe vervreemding manifesteer in Amerikaanse literatuur oor die Viëtnamoorlog en Afrikaanse literatuur oor die oorlog in Namibië/Angola (die sogenaamde Grensoorlog). Na 'n historiese kontekstualisering word die sosiologiese tak van vervreemdingsteorie, wat op die geskrifte van Melvin Seeman gebaseer is, bespreek, en daar word geïllustreer hoe die ses aspekte van vervreemding, soos geïdentifiseer deur Seeman, in 'n aantal van die tekste oor hierdie oorloë uitgebeeld word. In ooreenstemming met die interdisiplinêre aard van die tesis, word insigte vanuit vervreemdingsteorie geïntegreer met teorieë van geskiedskrywing, trauma, manlikheid, en teeninsurgensies, almal in 'n poging om tot 'n beter begrip van die tekste onder bespreking te kom.

Ten spyte van literêre teorie se aandrang daarop dat vervreemding 'n kenmerk van modernistiese en postmodernistiese literatuur is, asook literatuur oor hierdie teeninsurgensies in die besonder, is min geskryf oor wat vervreemding eintlik is. Seeman se variant is gekies omdat dit is die mees gedetailleerde en omvattende behandeling van vervreemding is wat beskikbaar is, en hoewel gepubliseer in 1959, is Seeman se opvatting van vervreemding steeds relevant in die sosiologie. Seeman se ses aspekte van vervreemding sluit in magteloosheid, betekenisloosheid, normloosheid, kulturele vervreemding, sosiale isolasie en selfvervreemding, en hierdie ses aspekte word gebruik om die literatuur oor hierdie twee teeninsurgensies te bespreek, met die klem op hoe hierdie aspekte van vervreemding in 'n verskeidenheid van literêre tekste uitgebeeld word. Die lyn tussen geskiedenis en fiksie is natuurlik ook 'n belangrike grens wat uitgedaag word deur literatuur oor hierdie oorloë, en dus is 'n afdeling ingesluit onder betekenisloosheid wat handel oor die skryf van die geskiedenis en die rol wat historiese fiksie speel in die uitbeelding van die verlede. Onder kulturele vervreemding is ook 'n afdeling ingesluit oor manlikheid, want sedert die weermag dikwels gesien is as 'n deurgangsrite, manifesteer vervreemding in hierdie sin ook deur die verwerping van die kulturele waardes van manlikheid. 'n Afdeling is ook ingesluit oor die vervreemdingseffekte van trauma, omdat trauma natuurlik 'n belangrike faset is van die literatuur oor hierdie oorloë, en dit word gewys hoe vervreemding skakel met trauma deur twee tekste in die besonder: Larry Heinemann se *Paco's Story* en Anthony Feinstein

se 'n Kopwond. Laastens bespreek die studie al ses aspekte van vervreemding met verwysing na twee van die seminale tekste oor hierdie oorloë: Tim O'Brien se *If I die in a combat zone* en Alexander Strachan se *'n Wêreld Sonder Grense*.

Oor die algemeen probeer die tesis om die kompleksiteit van hierdie oorloë aan te spreek: geskiedenis, vervreemding, en identiteit is komplekse kwessies in hierdie konflikte, en die interpretasie van literêre tekste kan gedoen word uit 'n wye verskeidenheid van perspektiewe. Daar word gewys hoe vervreemdingsteorie 'n nuttige prisma bied om te kyk na hierdie tekste wat spruit uit twee waterskeidingskonflikte wat hul samelewings onherroeplik verander het.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to extend my gratitude towards the following people:

To my two supervisors, Prof. H.P. Van Coller and Prof. John Limon, for their guidance throughout this project.

To my mother, Annie Senekal, for support (in various forms) throughout.

Also to my Maker, for patience.

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## MAPS



FIGURE 1 MAP OF INDOCHINA<sup>i</sup>





FIGURE 2 MAP OF NORTHERN NAMIBIA AND ANGOLA<sup>ii</sup>



## A NOTE ON THE TERM “WAR IN NAMIBIA/ANGOLA”

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Demarcating the boundaries between conflict environments seems obvious at first glance: Vietnam and Angola are on different continents, and comprise different populations and different cultures. However, the transfer of insurgents’ tactics from Vietnam to Angola, as well as counterinsurgency tactics, together with overlapping ideologies, illustrates the openness of these boundaries (see e.g. Dale (2007)). Furthermore, in Indochina, North Vietnam aided insurgencies in Laos and Cambodia, and occupied large sections of territory, while the US supported counterinsurgencies in these countries, and occasionally occupied sections of territory and carried out cross-border operations. South Africans fought on both sides in Rhodesia and Angola (under the South African Defence Force or SADF and Umkhonto we Sizwe or MK), while Angolans fought in South Africa (32-Battalion), and the boundary between the war in Namibia and the one in Angola is drawn so arbitrarily (the so-called *cutline*) that historians always discuss it as a single conflict. The integration of the war in Namibia and Angola is an essential feature of the conflict, which was at its core “a protracted insurgency in South West Africa, later South-West Africa/Namibia, and still later Namibia. At the same time it was characterized by the periodical involvement of the SADF in the long civil war taking place in neighbouring Angola, because the two conflicts could not be separated from one another” (Steenkamp 2006b:1). The ‘Border War’ can also be conceived more widely: Roos (2008:138) even includes SADF incursions into Botswana, Lesotho, and Mozambique under the term ‘Border War’, and Van Coller (1990:76) includes literature on the internal struggles within South Africa in a discussion of *grensliteratuur*<sup>1</sup>.

Despite the migration of politics, strategies, tactics, material, and personnel between conflict zones during the Cold War, this study follows conventional historiography in indicating the Vietnam War and the war in Namibia/Angola as identifiable conflict systems that can be differentiated from their environments by using national borders, even though the crossing of national borders is a characteristic of counterinsurgencies – a trend vividly illustrated through the killing of Bin Laden in Pakistan in May 2011. The focus is therefore on the Vietnam War on the one hand and the

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<sup>1</sup> This term was coined by Elsa Joubert in 1984 (Weideman 2004:30).

war in Namibia/Angola on the other, and while taking into account the regional and global contexts of the wars, the primary focus is on what occurred within the spatial boundaries of these three countries.

The decision to use the term *War in Namibia/Angola* is deliberate, albeit admittedly long-winded, since terms associated with this conflict carry enormous ideological weight. As illustrated by numerous authors (e.g. Williams (2008:16)), the term *Border War* carries the signification that the war was fought on the border of South Africa, when it was not, but it was employed by the South African Government to signify that this was the case, partly because Namibia was considered South Africa's fifth province. The Afrikaans term *grens* (border) has acquired a multivalent meaning, and is what Baines (2008:5) calls a "polysemic" term (see also Botha (1980:547), Brink (1986), Botha (1988:408), Pretorius (1999:11) and Weideman (2004)), furthermore indicating the 'border' between colonialism and post-colonialism, life and death, etc.<sup>2</sup> Cronjé (1989:1) notes that it was with the publication of JC Steyn's *Op pad na die grens* (1976) that other meanings of the term became prominent, and Roos (1985:92) writes,

... om te gesels oor die wyer implikasies van die begrip grens, en hoe dit in elk van die genoemde werke op eie wyse beskou en ontgin is sodat die konkrete situasie 'n oneindig ruimer betekenis aanneem, sou die onderwerp van 'n boeiende literêre ondersoek kon word.

[...to discuss the broader implications of the concept of border, and how it is considered and explored in each of the said works in its own way so that the concrete situation took on an infinitely broader meaning, could be the subject of a fascinating literary investigation.]

For literary analysis, the term *grens* is useful particularly because of these connotative meanings, but the concern is that the ideological baggage of the term may cloud a clear understanding of the historical nature of the conflict.

Finding a term for the American war in Vietnam has the advantage that it mostly took place between the geographically distinct South and North *Vietnam*; hence, a term

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<sup>2</sup> In *Die Jakkalsjagter* [*The fox-hunter*], Strachan (1990:104) also writes about the importance of the border in literary terms.

looking to refer to the majority of military action is easily forthcoming<sup>3</sup>. In Namibia and Angola, however, colonial boundaries were drawn differently, because these countries were partitioned by two different colonial powers (Germany and Portugal respectively) that saw fit to name their colonies differently, although the population of northern Namibia belongs to the same tribal group as the population of south-western Angola (the Owambo tribes). The vast majority of conflict took place in northern Namibia and southern Angola, and thus the only way of referring to the geographical space in which the majority of conflict took place, as the term *Vietnam War* does, is to refer to *Namibia/Angola*. The motivation behind choosing this term is therefore to strip references to this conflict of as much ideological baggage as possible, but both the terms *Vietnam War* and *War in Namibia/Angola* are admittedly arbitrary, and rather conventional, constructions.

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<sup>3</sup> However, violent clashes between anti-war protestors and US security forces can be seen as another aspect of the conflict, and indeed a Wisconsin state assembly member once called the anti-war movement an “insurrection” (Fry 2007:229).

## SECTION A

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### CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

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War is as natural as the rains. There are years when there is no war and there are seasons without rain. But always war and rain return. There is no difference. It is the nature of things. Thunder booms and so does artillery (Webb 2001[1978]:193).

Whether one condones or condemns war, it forms part of mankind's cultural environment. Numerous commentators have noted the importance of war: Limon (1994:4) calls war, "the most vivid of historical markers," and according to Van Creveld (1991a:162), "Had it not been for war, or rather strife, the shelves devoted to history in most bookstores would have been largely empty." The British military historian, John Keegan (2004:368), argues that the "written history of the world is largely a history of warfare, because the states within which we live came into existence largely through conquest, civil strife or struggles for independence." Even writers of fiction claim that history is merely a history of warfare: Mark Behr writes in *Die reuk van appels* [The smell of apples] that you will know South Africa's history by looking at the wars the country fought (Behr 1993:16). Since war is such an important aspect of the human environment, it influences literature directly, although literature cannot be a simple reflection of reality. A literary text however can offer a representation of reality, refracted and redacted through the lens of an author, and the various systems in which he finds himself embedded.

This study focuses on literary works produced by authors from the perspective of counterinsurgent forces, rather than the insurgents<sup>4</sup>, i.e. American and Afrikaans literature, not Vietnamese or Namibian. The reason for this focus is that American and Afrikaans authors share a Western cultural background; during the Cold War, even a shared political ideology. Both white Americans and white South Africans come from a

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<sup>4</sup> Kilcullen (2009a:12) modifies the official US Defense Department definition and defines insurgents as members of "an organized movement that aims at overthrowing the political order within a given territory, using a combination of subversion, terrorism, guerrilla warfare and propaganda." Throughout this study, Kilcullen's use of the term *insurgent* is preferred over out-dated terms such as *partisans* or ideologically tainted terms such as *terrorists*. As Senior Counterinsurgency Adviser to General Petraeus of the Multi-National Forces – Iraq (MNF-I), Kilcullen is also one of the foremost experts on current COIN doctrine.

European cultural background steeped in the Christian religion, and both are highly militarized masculine societies whose identities were formed during the interaction with indigenous peoples on the frontier. Both America and South Africa had been British colonies, and Heylighen (2007:63) argues that these are comparable to the offspring produced by living organisms,

Although societies rarely reproduce, in the sense of engendering another, independent society, their autopoiesis gives them in principle the capacity for reproduction. It could be argued that when Britain created colonies in regions like North America and Australia, these colonies, once they became independent, should be seen as offspring of British society. Like all children, the colonies inherited many characteristics, such as language, customs, and technologies, from their parent, but still developed their own personality.

Since both ‘children’ “developed their own personality,” differences of course also abound, not in the least that Afrikaans culture<sup>5</sup> hails from mostly the Netherlands, France, and Germany<sup>6</sup>, while American culture is more rooted in Ireland, Italy, and England itself, and many more countries contributed immigrants to the US than to South Africa. Ultimately, no two cultures can ever be identical, but some overlap creates the possibility of shedding light on similarity *and* difference.

Furthermore, numerous authors have claimed that South Africa’s war in Namibia/Angola is comparable with the Vietnam War<sup>7</sup>. Alexander Strachan (Strachan and Roux 2011) for instance claims,

Dit was verskillende oorloë ... maar by ‘n nadere terugblik is daar tog ook heelwat vergelykings te tref. In beide gevalle was daar nooit amptelike oorlogverklarings uitgereik nie en was die oorlog volgens die owerhede direk teen kommunisme gerig – hierdie “saak” moes gedurig by die deelnemers ingeprent word. Verder het al twee oorloë onkonvensioneel begin, is volle militêre mag nooit aangewend nie en het die “antagoniste” die twee oorloë eintlik “gewen”, sou ‘n mens kyk wie na die oorlog aan bewind gekom het. Dit is verder opvallend dat daar in beide situasies weerstand aan die tuisfronte ontwikkel het en dat die soldate ook nie as “helde” teruggekeer het na hul eie lande toe nie. In Suid-Afrika is baie van die “ou

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<sup>5</sup> White speakers of Afrikaans are referred to in this text as *Afrikaners*. The term is politically controversial, and many white speakers of Afrikaans no longer call themselves *Afrikaners* to avoid association with Apartheid. However, I follow the foremost historian on this culture, Hermann Giliomee (2004), in keeping with the term *Afrikaner* (see e.g. Giliomee (2004:xiv)).

<sup>6</sup> By the nineteenth century 33,4% of Afrikaners were of German ancestry, 35,5% of Dutch ancestry, 13,9% of French ancestry, 2,9% of British ancestry and 14,3% of other nations (Fokkens 2012:129).

<sup>7</sup> Van Coller (1990:87) for instance suggests that Afrikaans fiction on the war in Namibia/Angola can be compared with American fiction on the Vietnam War as well as Dutch fiction on the war in Indonesia.

Bosvegters” nou nog onvergenoegd omdat hulle nie erkenning en ondersteuning gekry het vir wat hulle opgeoffer het nie – baie het die gevoel gekry dat hulle eerder vir die plaaslike en internasionale oog weggesteek was. Die gevolg was dat daar ‘n al groter kloof tussen die oudvegters en die politici ontstaan het.

[These were different wars ... but taking a closer look, there are also many comparisons. In both cases, official declarations of war were never issued and the war was – according to the authorities – aimed directly against Communism – this ‘cause’ always had to be imprinted with the participants. In addition, both wars were unconventional, full military might was never used and the ‘antagonists’ actually ‘won’ the two wars, if one considers who came to power after the war. It is further noteworthy that in both situations resistance developed at the home front and the soldiers did not return as ‘heroes’ to their own countries. In South Africa, many of the ‘old Bosvegters’ are still discontented because they have not received the recognition and support for what they sacrificed and got the feeling that they were rather hidden from the local and international eye. The result was that there arose a growing gap between the old fighters and politicians.]

Somers (1994:635) cautions, “There is no reason to assume a priori that people with similar attributes will share common experiences of social life, let alone be moved to common forms and meanings of social action, unless they share similar narrative identities and relational settings.” The cultural and religious overlap, along with the specific experience of being part of a counterinsurgency rather than an insurgency, together with the fact that both nations fought on the same side during the Cold War, suggests a more logical comparison between Afrikaans and American literature than between those produced by all participants in these wars. While a comparison between works produced by authors belonging to either the insurgencies or counterinsurgencies may in future be interesting, the volume of literature produced by American authors precludes such an approach here. The corpus of insurgent literature is also linguistically inaccessible to the author and population at large, especially where oral literature in indigenous languages is concerned, and much smaller: Roos (2008:140) for instance notes that English texts “by underground or insurgent black soldiers were completely absent during the war period” (the Apartheid years).

Furthermore, Afrikaans literature is chosen as the representative of the war in Namibia/Angola rather than South African literature in general, for various reasons. Firstly, there is no such concept as a unified South African literary system: the literature produced in South Africa belongs to numerous literary traditions, and even English and

Afrikaans (the two official European languages<sup>8</sup> and the bulk of South African literature) do not form a single literary tradition (see e.g. Attwell and Attridge (2012)). Secondly, while white speakers of Afrikaans – like white Americans – developed their own identity, as ‘children’ of Europe, South African speakers of English often remained tied to Britain in both cultural and literary terms, according to Olivier (1995) and Giliomee (2004:350). Afrikaans authors retained some links with specifically Dutch literature, as discussed for instance by Van Coller and Odendaal (2005) and Van Coller (2012), but Afrikaans literature is generally seen as a separate literary system and indeed, there is even a language barrier between Afrikaans and Dutch (although these languages are highly similar). The decision is therefore made to compare the literature of two cultures that separated from their colonial roots.

The difficulty of defining what constitutes “literature” is discussed in Senekal (1987:67-78). Broadly speaking, there is no such thing as a static definition of literature; “Geen statiese definisie van literatuur deug vandag meer nie” [no static definition of literature is possible nowadays] (Senekal 1987:75). Van Gorp et al. (1986:229) also claim,

Het is onzinnig een vooropgezette, statische definitie van het begrip literatuur te willen geven, omdat 'definities' in verband met literatuur veranderlijk zijn wegens hun afhankelijkheid van het zich steeds ontwikkelende literaire feit.

[It is nonsensical to want to give one predetermined, static definition of literature, because the ‘definitions’ in connection with literature are variable because of their dependence on the ever-evolving literary fact.]<sup>9</sup>

Literature is distinguished by its *function* rather than its *intrinsic characteristics*; history and philosophy can be read as literature, and “literatuur kan later vir sy argeologiese betekenis gewaardeer word” [literature can later be appreciated for its archaeological value] (Senekal (1987:76), see also Van Gorp et al. (1986:230)). For instance, in reference to the Medieval Icelandic sagas, the *Íslendingasögur*, Byock (2001:23) writes, “The sagas are a window into otherwise lost worlds of private life, social values and material culture. No other European society has such a detailed literature recounting its origin and development.” In this case, a literary form serves an archaeological function, and

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<sup>8</sup> In grammatical and lexical terms, rather than geographically.

<sup>9</sup> Own translation

information about Iceland's history, customs, and religion is often gleaned from the sagas. A particularly vivid illustration of the archaeological value that can be extracted from literary works is Oakeshott (1960), who bases large sections of his descriptions of arms, armour and customs from prehistory to the Middle Ages on literary works of the time. Similarly, information about the two counterinsurgencies under discussion in this thesis can be gathered from literature; Roos (1985:92) for instance claims, "Die dokumentêre waarde van die grensprosa is ongetwyfeld groot" [The documentary value of the Border prose is undoubtedly large].<sup>10</sup> War literature can therefore be read as history, meaning that the same text can serve numerous functions.

Even the distinction between 'fact' and 'fiction' is circumspect in the description of what 'literature' entails: the term *literature* includes factual texts, while some fictional texts are excluded (Senekal 1987:75) (notwithstanding the difficulty of determining *what* fiction is and *what* fact is, as is discussed later in this thesis). To name the example of the *Íslendingasögur* again: Lönnroth (1997:225) writes, "It is practically impossible to make a clear distinction between 'history' and 'fiction' in these early Norse texts, since most of them contain some of each without separating one from the other." Similarly, when reading literature on both counterinsurgencies under discussion in this thesis, it often becomes impossible to distinguish between fact and fiction. The clearest example of the blend between fact and fiction is Jeanette Ferreira's *Grensoorlogstories* (2012a), which is a compilation of writings on the war in Namibia/Angola that range from personal narratives (many simply recollections of people's experiences) to pure fiction, with no indication which is which. Senekal (1987:128) writes,

Wanneer daar uitgegaan word van literatuur as funksie en sisteem soos hier voorgestel word, kan 'n teks of tekssoort vir sekere mense dié funksie hê, vir ander daardie, kan dit vandag 'n sekere funksie hê, more 'n ander, kan dit nou "hoog" wees, volgende jaar "laag". Wanneer funksies, posisies, waardesienings op sinchroniese en diachroniese vlak verander, soos inderdaad die geval is, kan literatuur nie as 'n vaste korpus tekste beskou word nie. Grensoorskrydings en funksieveranderinge is deel van die dinamiek van 'n sisteem.

[When literature is seen as a function and system as proposed here, a text or text type can have one function for some people, while for others it may have another, and it can have a certain function today, another tomorrow, it can be "high" literature today, and "low" next year. When functions, positions, and value views

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<sup>10</sup> Own translation



change on a synchronic and diachronic level, as is indeed the case, literature cannot be regarded as a fixed corpus of texts. Cross-border movements and function changes are part of the dynamics of a system.]<sup>11</sup>

The *function* of the text is therefore primary in its categorization *as literature*: “Tekste is nie literêr nie, net die kommunikeer, wat deur subjekte volgens sekere literêre norme en konvensies as literêr beskou word” [Texts are not literary, just communicates, which are seen as literary according to literary norms and conventions] (Senekal 1987:36, see also 33). Similarly, the Oxford English dictionary notes that literature is “written<sup>12</sup> works, especially those considered of superior or lasting artistic merit.” Note the inclusion of the term *considered*: the key aspect of a definition of literature is how others see them – a function of the literary system that also determines whether a text is seen as literature proper or popular fiction. Changing perceptions about what literature is can move literary works into the realm of popular fiction, and *vice versa*: Senekal also quotes Eagleton (1983:16),

... what we have uncovered so far, then, is not only that literature does not exist in the sense that insects do and that the value-judgements by which it is constituted are historically variable, but that these value-judgements themselves have a close relation to social ideologies. They refer in the end not simply to private taste, but to the assumptions by which certain social groups exercise and maintain power over others.

Hence, in general, texts were seen as *literature* in this thesis when they were discussed *as literature* in overviews of Afrikaans *grensliteratuur* and American Vietnam literature. The result is that in the list of works discussed in the chapter on the selection of texts, Michael Herr’s *Dispatches* is included, because Herr himself describes the work as a novel (Taylor 2003:26). Similarly, William Ehrhardt’s *Vietnam-perkasie* is also included in the list, because Pratt (1987:139) claims that this work should be regarded as a novel. In terms of Afrikaans *grensliteratuur*, Alexander Strachan’s *‘n Wêreld sonder grense* is discussed *as literature*, because this is generally how the text was interpreted by critics, while Louis Bothma’s *Die buffel struikel* is not seen as literature, but rather as non-fiction. It is however impossible to demarcate texts *as literature* in an incontrovertable way: I follow

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<sup>11</sup> Own translation.

<sup>12</sup> This aspect of the definition is problematic, since oral literature is of course omitted.

the judgements of literary historians, whose judgements are fallible, but in any case more authoratative than my own.

The thesis is structured as follows:

Firstly, with such a vast corpus of works available on specifically the Vietnam War (and to a lesser extent the war in Namibia/Angola), a chapter was included that illustrates the guideline for selecting texts. Because texts cannot be selected at random for an academic study, the selection of texts is situated within polysystem theory and network theory, and seminal authors are thus identified. Although this theoretical approach falls outside the scope of alienation theory, it was deemed necessary to make an informed decision – and a theoretically grounded decision – on how to select texts for inclusion in this study.

Secondly, a detailed historical contextualisation is provided. This is vital, since the literary works referred to in this thesis are always historical in nature, and most belong to the grey area between history and fiction. In order to interpret the texts and discuss how they represent alienation, background knowledge of both wars is necessary, as is also indicated by the fact that Ferreira (2012a) included a chapter by Bothma (2012) to contextualise her collected short stories and personal narratives on the war in Namibia/Angola. However, since both these wars are highly complex and their histories controversial, a simplistic treatment will not suffice, and therefore the historical contextualisation forms a substantial part of this thesis. As McWilliams (2009:21) writes, “The South African Campaign from 1978 to 1989 was a long and complex struggle that defies easy explanations and short summations.” In order to provide the most accurate historical contextualisation, care was taken to include both sides of the story in both cases, as well as to put the historical contextualisation within the larger context of counterinsurgency theory, and leading contemporary authors on the subject of both war theory (e.g. Münkler (2005), Duyvesteyn and Angstrom (2005), Kaldor (2006), Codevilla and Seabury (2006), and Chaliand and Blin (2007)), and counterinsurgencies (e.g. Petraeus (2006), Marston and Malkasian (2008), and Kilcullen (2010)) were consulted. Care was also taken to use recent sources on both wars, although some classical texts, such as Von Clausewitz (1994) and Schmitt (2007[1963]) were also consulted.

Then the thesis comes to the primary theoretical approach: alienation theory. Alienation theory was chosen because alienation is a primary theme of literature on these wars; indeed, few literary works dealing with these conflicts do not represent alienation in some way. However, despite literary theory's insistence that alienation is one of the central themes in 20<sup>th</sup> century literature, little has been written on what alienation actually is (Vila 1996). Firstly, the development of the theory, and rationale for choosing Seeman's variant, is discussed, followed by a detailed description of what this theory entails in terms of *powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, cultural estrangement, social isolation* and *self-estrangement*. Throughout, literary examples from both wars are used to illustrate how the different facets of alienation manifest in literature on these wars, and this discussion forms the bulk of the thesis. The line between history and fiction often becomes meaningless in historical novels, and the issue of historical literature's role in writing history has to be addressed. This is however not a simple matter, and therefore the issue required an extensive treatment under the chapter on meaninglessness. This issue also has bearing on what is considered "literature," since different literary historians describe the same texts as "fiction" and "non-fiction." Particularly Herr, O'Brien and Strachan are often viewed differently, and the complex issue of distinguishing between fact and fiction is addressed in this section. A discussion of masculinity was also included under *cultural estrangement*: because joining the army was often considered a rite of passage, masculinity is of course an important aspect of the literature on these wars. However, this sentiment of the army being a rite of passage is also rejected in literary representations within the larger context of rejecting the culture that prescribes masculine identity, and therefore the discussion on masculinity is situated under *cultural estrangement*.

Because trauma is also an important aspect of literature on these wars, and because trauma can be both the cause and consequence of alienation, a chapter was included that looks at the alienating effects of trauma, as discussed within both alienation theory and aspects of trauma theory. Here, reference was limited to two texts that represent trauma in particular: Larry Heinemann's *Paco's Story* (2005[1986]) and Anthony Feinstein's *Kopwond* (2011).

The last chapter deals with two of the seminal texts in both literary systems: Tim O'Brien's *If I die in a combat zone* (2006[1973]) and Alexander Strachan's *'n Wêreld sonder*

*grease* (1984). This chapter discusses the representation of alienation in more detail, as an example of issues that are raised in most texts on these wars.

In general, the thesis tries to address the different issues and nuances associated with these counterinsurgencies, all of which are highly complex. Nothing is simple: not the history, not the representation of history, not alienation theory, masculinity, or trauma, and all required an extensive theoretical treatment in order to guide a more scientific discussion of issues in the selected texts. These two conflicts, as well as their representations in literature, do not lend themselves to reductionist approaches, and all too often, as is shown in the thesis, the complexity of these wars has been treated in a reductionist manner, and the interpretation of representations was done from a position of ignorance. The thesis thus aims at aiding an informed interpretation of literature on these wars.

A note on spelling and grammar: Since this thesis is written in South Africa, the use of British English is used throughout, except when quoting American works of literature.

### INTRODUCTION

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Numerous authors have emphasized the importance of context as essential for the interpretation of any text, literary or otherwise<sup>13</sup>. Eagleton (1988:469) for instance writes, “[L]iterature is in fact deeply conditioned by its social context, and any critical account of it which omits this fact is therefore automatically deficient” (original emphasis). By the late nineteen nineties, Schmidt (1997:119) confidently claims, “no literary scholar who wants to be taken seriously by the academic world would deny that it is inadequate to study literary texts in isolation from their contexts.” In literary studies, such a radical contextualisation can be termed a *systemic relation*, by which the individual work exists within a literary system, but is also situated within a historical, political, and economic context.

Systems theory evolved in different guises throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, often called by different names, e.g. General Systems Theory (particularly Von Bertalanffy (1968)), Complex Adaptive Systems (e.g. Amaral and Ottino (2004) and Heylighen (2007)), Dynamic Systems (e.g. Bar-Yam (1997)), and Polysystem Theory (Even-Zohar (1990)), and is closely related to cybernetics (through particularly Gregory Bateson, see e.g. Vorster (2003) and Wilden (1980)), and non-equilibrium thermodynamics (see again Von Bertalanffy (1968) and Wilden (1980)). The systems theory approach to literature is also well established. Van Gorp (1997:1) writes that “systemic” terms can already be found in the works of Jurij Tynjanov, Jurij Lotman, Claudio Guillen, and Robert Estival, but it was only in the 1970s that Niklas Luhmann, Siegfried J. Schmidt, and Itamar Even-Zohar institutionalized the study of literary systems, together with Bourdieu’s theory of the literary field. Since then, Dirk De Geest, Kees van Rees, Elrud Ibsch, Douwe Fokkema, and others have thoroughly proven the applicability of this approach to literary studies, together with Bourdieu’s theory of the social field (see e.g. Senekal (2012:617)).

The use of systems theory in studying specifically the Afrikaans literary system or -field is also well known (see e.g. Viljoen (1986), De Wet (1994), John (1994), Greyling

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<sup>13</sup> Identity, and indeed the entire sphere of human existence, can be seen as a text. Leitch (cf. Schlesinger (1988:158)) notes, “Our world is text, irreducibly.”

(2005) and Venter (2006)), especially from the University of the Free State in Bloemfontein (see e.g. Senekal (1986), Senekal (1987), Van Coller (2002), Venter (2002), and Van Coller and Odendaal (2008)). Even-Zohar (1990:9) writes,

The idea that semiotic phenomena, i.e., sign-governed human patterns of communication (such as culture, language, literature, society), could more adequately be understood and studied if regarded as systems rather than conglomerates of disparate elements has become one of the leading ideas of our time in most sciences of man. Thus, the positivistic collection of data, taken bona fide on empiricist grounds and analysed on the basis of their material substance has been replaced by a functional approach based on the analysis of relations.

Network analysis provides a theoretically grounded toolkit for the analysis of complex systems, as Amaral and Ottino (2004:147) claim, “network theory has become one of the most visible pieces of the body of knowledge that can be applied to the description, analysis, and understanding of complex systems”. Social Network Analysis (SNA) has a long history, which Freeman (1996:39) claims can be traced back to the works of Almack (1922), Wellman (1926), Chevaleva-Janovskaja (1927), Bott (1928), Hubbard (1929), Hagman (1933) and Moreno (1934) (see also Borgatti et al. (2009:892-893)). SNA has however received growing popularity over the past decade, owing its growth to some extent to the development of cost-effective and user-friendly software, since SNA relies heavily on computer-generated analysis. SNA is now used in various fields, including anti-corruption, anti-money laundering, counterterrorism, organisation analysis, citation analysis, and others. Although only to a small extent, SNA has been applied to literary studies (see De Nooy (1991)), and Anheier, Gerhards, and Romo (1995) as well as De Nooy (2003) associate SNA with Bourdieu’s theory of the literary field, while Senekal (2012) uses SNA to highlight the interconnectedness of critics and authors within the Afrikaans literary system or network.

This chapter uses SNA as an extension of systems theory in order to identify the seminal authors of both American literature on the Vietnam War and Afrikaans literature on the War in Namibia/Angola.

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## BASIC PRINCIPLES OF NETWORK ANALYSIS

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Von Bertalanffy (1968:55) defines a system aphoristically as “a set of elements standing in interrelations.” Even-Zohar’s (1990:85) definition echoes Von Bertalanffy’s definition by emphasizing relations amongst elements; he calls a system a

Network of relations which can be hypothesized for an aggregate of factors assumed to be involved with a socio-cultural activity, and consequently that activity itself observed via that network. Or, alternatively, the complex of activities, or any section thereof, for which systemic relations can be hypothesized. [...] [I]nstead of a conglomerate of material phenomena, the functional elements hypothesized by the system approach are considered as interdependent and correlated. The specific role of each element is determined by its relational positions vis-a-vis all other (hypothesized) elements.

For Bar-Yam (1997:12), elements in a system should be described as *interdependent* rather than *interconnected* or *interwoven*, for the fact that elements within a system are dependent upon one another is what distinguishes a system from an aggregate. This concept is referred to as emergence, which is “the principle that the global properties defining higher order systems or ‘wholes’ (e.g. boundaries, organization, control) can in general not be reduced to the properties of the lower order subsystems or ‘parts’” (Heylighen 1989:23). Emergence is key to understanding systems, for as Katz and Kahn (1966:18) argue, the interdependence of entities within the system is the basic focus of systems theory, and “Systems theory is basically concerned with problems of relationships, of structure, and of interdependence, rather than with the constant attributes of objects.” Similarly, Lawson, Ferris, Cropley and Cook (2006:9) define a network in the following manner,

A network is formed when a number (between two and infinity) of distinct entities that may be similar or dissimilar (nodes, elements, components, people, military formations, software instructions) are connected and interact such that new properties or behaviours emerge that are beyond the capabilities of any of the entities acting alone. These emergent properties cannot be predicted using reductionist consideration of the distinct entities. They are of interest because of the functions they perform and the purposes they serve, while the distinct and dissimilar entities included within a particular network boundary are those that are understood to be most significant in determining the emergent properties.

SNA analyses the relations within a network of entities (also called *nodes* or *vertices*), and is particularly suitable for large networks where a range of role-players have numerous connections. In any situation where connections between stakeholders is vital for understanding how the network functions, SNA is useful, and General David Petraeus (2006:202) writes, “SNA allows analysts to assess the network’s design, how its members may or may not act autonomously, where the leadership resides or how it is distributed among members, and how hierarchical dynamics may mix or not mix with network dynamics.” Similarly, Viljoen (1984:67) writes that in literary systems, the focus is often on which entities dominate the system.

Systems interact with other systems in “an ensemble of systems” (Bar-Yam 1997:xiii) or “network of networks” (Sullivan and Bunker 2002:364), because virtually all systems are open and interact with their environments, which also includes other systems or networks. Wilden (1980:xxxi) distinguishes between open and closed systems in the following manner, “[A] closed system is one for which its context is effectively irrelevant or defined as such (e.g., the solar system, the cosmos as a whole); an open system, in contrast, is one that depends on its environment for its continuing existence and survival (e.g., an organism, a population, a society)” (see also Von Bertalanffy (1968:141))<sup>14</sup>. Open systems receive input from their environment, process it, and produce output. If this system is isolated from its environment, deprived of input or output, it ceases to exist. The relation with its environment is thus a *vital* aspect of open systems.

Furthermore, Wilden (1980:402) and Heylighen (1989:24) claim that every system exists within larger supersystems, but also consist of smaller subsystems. In the following diagram, it is shown how systems interact with each other as well as sub- and supersystems (Senekal 2012:620).

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<sup>14</sup> No political system for instance exists in a vacuum: Giliomee (2004:541) notes how rising oil prices after 1974 influenced Apartheid, and contributed to making the system unsustainable, while it should be added that changing global politics and in particular Western perceptions of human rights played a crucial role as well. The political environment should therefore be seen as an open system.



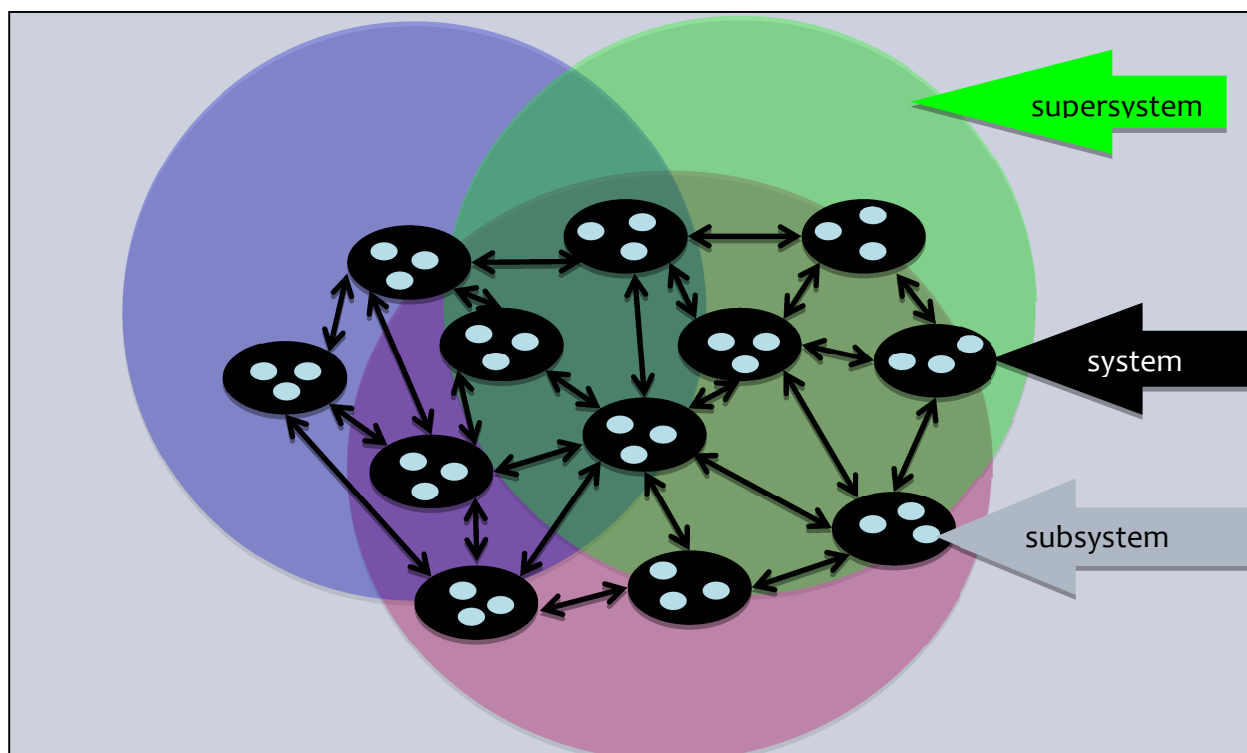


FIGURE 3 SUB- AND SUPERSYSTEMS

Note however that subsystems may belong to numerous supersystems simultaneously (see e.g. Fokkema (1997:180)). Greyling (2005:158) claims that financial factors influence the literary system directly, and Senekal (1987:188-189) writes, inter alia, that the black publishing market during the nineteen eighties in South Africa discouraged writing critical, mature texts, as the market focused on the publication of texts for schools. It is also undeniable that the historical context influences the production of a literary text: CJ Langenhoven's *Die hoop van Suid-Afrika* [The hope of South Africa] (1913) comes to mind as it was written against the backdrop of post-Anglo Boer War South Africa on the eve of the remembrance of the Battle of Blood River. The depiction of white characters as "civilising" the "savages" of Africa had been suitable within the historical context, but would be politically unacceptable now (and the text not publishable). The political context also influences the representation of counterinsurgencies during more recent times: Van Coller (1999a:33) writes that for German literature on World War II, US literature on Vietnam, and South African literature on Namibia/Angola, negative representations dominate because the authors were on the losing side.<sup>15</sup> Fred Downs

<sup>15</sup> See however Cronjé (1989) and the historical introduction to both wars in this thesis.

noted that his agent had told him his book on Vietnam “wasn’t anti-war enough” (Lomperis 1987:22), and in O’Brien’s *If I die in a combat zone*, the battalion commander also complains, “you gotta knock the military to get a book published” (O’Brien 2006[1973]:68). James Webb once complained that it was difficult to get anything published “that did not genuflect before the negation of the war,” and observes,

We have seen our war veterans depicted repeatedly as aberrant – as men without values dragged into war zones against their will, later as losers, finally as victims – while the facts have too often demonstrated otherwise. Every unit had its problem children, its ‘Phonies’ if I may extract from *Fields of fire*. But too often our literature has made them the norm (1987:16).

The political situation in South Africa – both past and present – has an important effect on how the war is remembered and portrayed, and Alexander Strachan (quoted in Wasserman & Smith (1998:15)) for instance believes the political situation in South Africa deters writers from portraying characters as heroes. As Batley (2007b:28) acknowledges, “the warrior who returns to radical social change largely instrumented by his enemy and who finds that he cannot be called a hero because the new dispensation reserved that title for itself occupies a marginal position of silence.”

There are therefore numerous levels of interaction that can be studied from a systemic point of view. It is precisely within this network of relationships that the meaning of the individual literary work is created, and “in order to properly understand literary works they should be placed within the system of social relationships that they support” (Van Coller and Odendaal 2003:26). Verboord (2003:262) emphasizes that positions within a literary system are determined by the relationship between entities, and Even-Zohar (1990:37) includes producers, critics, publishers, newspapers, writers’ groups, mass media and educational institutions (e.g. universities) as entities that operate within the polysystem. Literature is therefore more than just printed texts: for a text to be considered literary it must, amongst others, be “*raakgesien en in die openbaar bespreek word*” [noted and discussed in public] (Senekal 1987:81). Van Coller (2004:5) adds, “*Wat veral die bestendinging van die kanon bevorder, is die optrede van bepaalde agente in die literêre veld, byvoorbeeld uitgewers, literêre historici en literêre kritici*” [what perpetuates the canon in particular is the promoting actions of certain agents in the literary field, such as publishers, literary historians and literary critics]. For this

reason, it is meaningful to see which *authors* of a particular literary subsystem are discussed by which *scholars*, and in this case, by which *literary historians*, as it is through their actions in particular that literary works become *literature*. The production of a text through an author, editor and publisher is in this view not sufficient to create a literary work: other role players' actions contribute to the text becoming part of the literary canon.

In the following section, an attempt is made to identify the seminal works in US Vietnam literature and Afrikaans *grensliteratuur* by recording whether or not literary historians paid attention to specific authors and works. This is necessary before deciding which texts to study, since the US alone has produced around 700 novels, 12,000 non-fiction titles, and 1,400 personal narratives on the Vietnam War up to 2000 (Herring 2007:346). Of course, more have been added in the following thirteen years, and even if *grensliteratuur* was not taken into account, this volume precludes a thorough reading of *all* the works on Vietnam alone.

Only those studies that provide an overview of the works produced are used here. The objective is only to identify what others regard as noteworthy literary works, not to be the definitive list of works produced on these conflicts. The objective here is simply to enquire about which authors were deemed worth mentioning by literary historians, and those mentioned in the highest number of overviews, can be considered key authors. It is however expected that newer works will be underrepresented because studies were conducted before these works were published. No claim is made here about literary value or quality: these are concepts that belong to the field of literary criticism. The authors highlighted in the following section are thus not the 'best' (which would be a subjective judgement) but rather those that are considered worthy of being mentioned by the widest variety of literary historians.

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#### THE SEMINAL AUTHORS: VIETNAM LITERATURE

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From Beidler (2007), Kinney (1991), Tal (1990), Ringnalda (1988), Pratt (1987), Oldham (1986), Rollins (1984), Herzog (1980), and Taylor (1980), the following list of important

works and authors on the Vietnam War can be extracted (organised alphabetically according to author surname):

Work	Author	Date	Mentioned in								
			Beidler	Pratt	Herzog	Taylor	Rollins	Oldham	Ringnalda	Tal	Kinney
The most savage animal	Atkinson, Hugh	1972		X							
Land of a million elephants	Baber, Asa	1970	X	X							
Coming down again	Balaban, John	1985	X	X							
The journey of Tao Kim Nam	Bosse, MJ	1959		X							
The traitors	Briley, John		X	X							
Body shop	Browne, Corrine	1973		X							
Friendly fire	Bryan, CDB		X		X	X			X		
The Lionheads	Bunting, Josiah	1972	X	X		X					
The ugly American	Burdick, Eugene and Lederer, William	1958		X							
The alleys of Eden	Butler, Robert Olen	1981		X							
A rumor of war	Caputo, Philip		X	X	X	X	X	X			X
A station in the delta	Cassidy, John	1979	X	X							
The lion heart	Clark, Alan	1969		X							
Sergeant back again	Coleman, Charles	1980	X	X							
The defector	Collingwood, Charles	1970		X							
One to count cadence	Crumley, James	1969	X	X					X		
The thirteenth valley	Del Vecchio, John	1982		X			X		X	X	
The pride of the Green Berets	Derrig, Peter	1966		X							
Democracy	Didion, Joan	1984		X							
Dau	Dodge, Ed	1984								X	
The bombing officer	Doolittle, Jerome	1982		X							
The killing zone	Downs, Frederick		X		X						
No bugles no drums	Durden, Charles	1976	X	X					X	X	
The bamboo bed	Eastlake, William	1969	X	X		X			X	X	
Vietnam-perkasie <sup>16</sup>	Ehrhart, William	1983		X			X				
Winners and losers	Emerson, Gloria		X	X	X	X					
Fire in the lake	Fitzgerald, Frances		X						X		
Officers' wives	Fleming, Thomas	1981		X							
Incident at Muc Wa	Ford, Daniel	1967	X	X							
Fragments	Fuller, Jack	1984		X					X		
The man who won the medal of honor	Giovanetti, Len	1973		X							
365 days	Glasser, Ronald		X			X	X				

<sup>16</sup> Pratt (1987:139) claims that this work should be regarded as a novel.

J										
<b>The quiet American</b>	Greene, Graham	1955		X		X			X	
<b>Better times than these</b>	Groom, Winston	1978	X	X	X	X			X	X
<b>One very hot day</b>	Halberstam, David	1967	X	X		X			X	X
<b>War year</b>	Haldeman, Joe	1972	X	X		X				X
<b>Live till tomorrow</b>	Harper, Stephen	1977		X						
<b>The short-timers</b>	Hasford, Gustav	1980	X	X		X			X	X X
<b>A world of hurt</b>	Hathaway, Bo	1981		X						X
<b>Close quarters</b>	Heinemann, Larry <sup>17</sup>	1967	X	X					X	X X
<b>A tract of time</b>	Hempstone, Smith	1966		X						
<b>Dispatches<sup>18</sup></b>	Herr, Michael		X	X	X	X		X	X	X
<b>Body count</b>	Huggett, William Turner	1973	X	X		X			X	X
<b>Attic light</b>	James, Allston	1979		X						
<b>From here to eternity</b>	Jones, James		X							
<b>Stringer</b>	Just, Ward	1974		X					X	
<b>The last ambassador</b>	Kalb, Bernard and Marvin	1981		X						
<b>Some kind of hero</b>	Kirkwood, James	1975		X						
<b>The prisoners of Quai Dong</b>	Kolpacoff, Victor	1967	X	X						
<b>Born on the Fourth of July</b>	Kovic, Ron		X	X		X	X		X	X
<b>In the midst of wars</b>	Lansdale, Edward Geary	1972		X						
<b>The Chinese game</b>	Larsen, Charles	1969		X						
<b>Yellow fever</b>	Larteguy, Jean	1965		X						
<b>Why Audie Murphy died in Vietnam</b>	Layne, MacAvoy	1973		X						X
<b>Parthian shot</b>	Little, Lloyd	1975		X						
<b>The only war we've got</b>	Maitland, Derek	1970		X						
<b>Chickenhawk</b>	Mason, Robert	1983		X			X			
<b>Weary falcon</b>	Mayer, Tom		X							
<b>Vietnam</b>	McCarthy, Mary	1967				X				
<b>Targets</b>	McQuinn, Donald E.	1981		X						X
<b>Tiger the Lurp Dog</b>	Miller, Ken	1983								X
<b>Easy travel to other planets</b>	Mooney, Ted	1981		X						
<b>The killing at Ngo Tho</b>	Moore, Gene D.	1967	X	X						
<b>The Green Berets</b> Error! Bookmark not defined.	Moore, Robin	1965	X	X					X	
<b>Strawberry soldier</b>	Morris, Jim	1972		X						
<b>The flame in the ice box</b>	Morrison, CT		X							
<b>The boy who</b>	Nelson, Charles	1981		X						

<sup>17</sup> When authors published more than one text, only the debut is recorded here.

<sup>18</sup> Herr describes the work as a novel (Taylor 2003:26)

picked the bullets up												
No more bugles in the sky	Newhafer, Richard	1966		X								
If I die in a combat zone	O'Brien, Tim	1973	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
The Big V	Pelfrey, William	1972	X	X							X	
Laotian fragments	Pratt, John Clark	1974		X					X			
Sand in the wind	Roth, Robert	1973	X	X		X						
Count your dead	Rowe, John	1968	X	X								
The barking deer	Rubin, Jonathan	1974		X								
Miranda	Sanders, Pamela	1978		X								
Everything we had	Santoli, Al		X					X				
The Village of Ben Suc	Schell, Jonathan	1967				X						
A forest of tigers	Shaplen, Robert	1956		X								
Vietnam simply <sup>19</sup>	Shea, Dick	1967		X								
War games	Sloane, James Park		X			X			X			
American Boys	Smith, Stephen Philip	1975		X					X		X	
Trip to Hanoi	Sontag, Susan	1968				X						
Dog soldiers	Stone, Robert		X	X		X						
The coasts of war	Stone, Scott C. S.	1966		X								
A-18	Taylor, Thomas	1967		X								
Vietnam diary	Tregaskis, Richard		X									
Easy victories	Trowbridge, James	1973		X								
The valkyrie mandate	Vaughn, Robert	1974		X								
Fields of fire	Webb, James	1978	X	X	X			X	X		X	
A romance	Weigl, Bruce		X	X								
The ambassador	West, Morris	1965		X								
LBJ Brigade	Wilson, William	1966		X								
Gangland	Winn, David	1982		X								
Meditations in green	Wright, Steven	1983		X					X		X	

One of the many centrality measures that SNA offers, is degree centrality,<sup>20</sup> which indicates the number of connections an entity has with other entities – the higher the degree centrality, the more connections. In this case, degree centrality indicates which literary historians wrote about the highest number of authors, and which authors are mentioned in the largest number of overviews. Between Beidler (2007), Kinney (1991), Tal (1990), Ringnalda (1988), Pratt (1987), Oldham (1986), Rollins (1984), Herzog (1980),

<sup>19</sup> Pratt (1987:134) calls this text a novel.

<sup>20</sup> Because so few classes of role players are considered (only writers and literary historians), a more complex application of SNA is not required here. For a more detailed discussion of SNA, see Senekal (2012).

and Taylor (1980), the authors mentioned with the highest degree centrality scores are represented in the following table, arranged from high to low:

Author	Degree centrality
1. O'Brien, Tim	9
2. Caputo, Philip	7
3. Herr, Michael	7
4. Groom, Winston	6
5. Hasford, Gustav	6
6. Kovic, Ron	6
7. Webb, James	6
8. Eastlake, William	5
9. Halberstam, David	5
10. Heinemann, Larry	5
11. Huggett, William Turner	5
12. Bryan, CDB	4
13. Del Vecchio, John	4
14. Emerson, Gloria	4
15. Bunting, Josiah	3
16. Crumley, James	3
17. Durden, Charles	3
18. Glasser, Ronald J	3
19. Greene, Graham	3
20. Haldeman, Joe	3
21. Moore, Robin	3
22. Pelfrey, William	3
23. Roth, Robert	3
24. Sloane, James Park	3
25. Smith, Stephen Philip	3
26. Stone, Robert	3
27. Wright, Steven	3
28. Baber, Asa	2
29. Balaban, John	2
30. Briley, John	2
31. Cassidy, John	2
32. Coleman, Charles	2
33. Downs, Frederick	2
34. Ehrhart, William	2
35. Fitzgerald, Frances	2
36. Ford, Daniel	2
37. Fuller, Jack	2
38. Hathaway, Bo	2
39. Just, Ward	2
40. Kolpacoff, Victor	2
41. Layne, MacAvoy	2
42. Mason, Robert	2
43. McQuinn, Donald E.	2
44. Moore, Gene D.	2
45. Rowe, John	2

46.	Santoli, Al	2
47.	Weigl, Bruce	2
48.	Atkinson, Hugh	1
49.	Balk, H Wesley	1
50.	Bernard, Edward	1
51.	Berry, DC	1
52.	Blacker, Irwin R	1
53.	Bosse, MJ	1
54.	Briscoe, Edward	1
55.	Browne, Corrine	1
56.	Burdick, Eugene and Lederer, William	1
57.	Butler, Robert Olen	1
58.	Casey, Michael	1
59.	Clark, Alan	1
60.	Coe, Charles	1
61.	Collingwood, Charles	1
62.	Cook, John L	1
63.	Cowen, Ron	1
64.	Derrig, Peter	1
65.	Didion, Joan	1
66.	Dodge, Ed	1
67.	Doolittle, Jerome	1
68.	Duncan, David Douglas	1
69.	Fleming, Thomas	1
70.	Giovanetti, Len	1
71.	Guare, John	1
72.	Harper, Stephen	1
73.	Hempstone, Smith	1
74.	Herbert, Anthony	1
75.	Hughes, Larry	1
76.	James, Allston	1
77.	Jones, James	1
78.	Kalb, Bernard and Marvin	1
79.	Kennedy, Adrienne	1
80.	Kirk, Donald	1
81.	Kirkwood, James	1
82.	Kolpit, Arthur	1
83.	Lansdale, Edward Geary	1
84.	Larsen, Charles	1
85.	Larteguy, Jean	1
86.	Lifton, Robert J	1
87.	Little, Lloyd	1
88.	Lowenfels, Walter	1
89.	Mailer, Norman	1
90.	Maitland, Derek	1
91.	Manchester, William	1
92.	Mayer, Tom	1
93.	McCarthy, Mary	1
94.	Miller, Ken	1
95.	Mooney, Ted	1
96.	Morris, Jim	1
97.	Morrison, CT	1



98.	Nelson, Charles	1
99.	Newhafer, Richard	1
100.	Parks, David	1
101.	Rabe, David	1
102.	Rubin, Jonathan	1
103.	Russ, Martin	1
104.	Sanders, Pamela	1
105.	Schell, Jonathan	1
106.	Shaplen, Robert	1
107.	Shea, Dick	1
108.	Sontag, Susan	1
109.	Stone, Scott C. S.	1
110.	Tabori, George	1
111.	Taylor, Thomas	1
112.	Terry, Megan	1
113.	Tiede, Tom	1
114.	Tocqueville, Alexis de	1
115.	Tregaskis, Richard	1
116.	Trowbridge, James	1
117.	Vaughn, Robert	1
118.	West, Morris	1
119.	Willwerth, James	1
120.	Wilson, William	1
121.	Winn, David	1
122.	Woods, William Crawford	1

This means that O'Brien is mentioned in nine literary histories, Caputo in seven, etcetera. If whether or not being mentioned in a literary history may be taken as a measure of whether an author is considered important, any discussion of Vietnam War literature should therefore focus on the writers with the highest degree centrality scores; in particular, those mentioned by *all* literary histories (as indicated in Figure 4):





























 Baber, Asa	 Balaban, John	 Bunting, Josiah	 Caputo, Philip	 Cassidy, John	 Coleman, Charles
 Eastlake, William	 Emerson, Gloria	 Ford, Daniel	 Groom, Winston	 Halberstam, David	 Hasford, Gustav
 Huggett, William Turner	 Kolpacoff, Victor	 Kovic, Ron	 Moore, Robin	 Pelfrey, William	 Roth, Robert
 Rowe, John	 Stone, Robert	 Weigl, Bruce	 Briley, John	 Crumley, James	 O'Brien, Tim
 Herr, Michael	 Heinemann, Larry[1]	 Moore, Gene D.	 Webb, James		

FIGURE 4 SEMINAL AUTHORS OF VIETNAM LITERATURE

From this list, it can therefore be concluded that a general overview of American literature on the Vietnam War could include Tim O'Brien, Gustav Hasford, Winston Groom, Philip Caputo, Michael Herr, William Huggett, William Eastlake, David Halberstam, Ron Kovic, James Webb, Gloria Emerson, Larry Heinemann, Josiah Bunting, Robert Stone, Robert Roth, William Pelfrey, Robin Moore, Asa Baber, or Daniel Ford, and that omitting O'Brien in an overview is inexcusable.

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#### THE SEMINAL AUTHORS: GRENSLITERATUUR

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Following the analyses of the subsystem of literature on the Vietnam War, the same was done to determine which authors are considered central to the Afrikaans literary subsystem of works on the War in Namibia/Angola. Using Roos (2008), Van Coller (1999a) & (1999b), Van Coller (1992), Gordon (1991), Van Coller (1990), Liebenberg (1988),

and Brink (1986)<sup>21</sup>, the following seminal works on the war in Namibia/Angola can be extracted:

Author	Brink (1986)	Liebenberg (1988)	Van Collier (1990)	Gordon (1991)	Van Collier (1992)	Van Collier (1999a) & (1999b)	Roos (2008)
Bakkes, Christiaan							X
Behr, Mark						X	X
Botha, Jaco						X	X
Coetzee, Johan						X	X
Du Plessis, Hans			X				
Ferreira, Jeanette			X				X
Fouché, Jaco						X	X
Goosen, Jean			X				X
Haasbroek, PJ	X	X	X			X	X
Hattingh, H			X				
Huisman, Emma			X				X
Joubert, Elsa	X		X			X	X
Kalmer, Harry			X				X
Kellerman, Gawie			X	X			X
Krüger, Louis	X	X	X			X	X
Leroux, André			X				X
Maartens, Maretha		X	X				X
Malan, Charles						X	X
McCallaghan, Andrew							X
Miles, John	X		X				X
Moolman, Chris						X	
Müller, Petra			X				X
Munnik, Victor		X	X				X
Odendaal, Welma			X				X
Opperman, Deon							X
Pienaar, Hans		X	X				X
Pieterse, Henning							X
Pieterse, Pieter		X					X
Prinsloo, Koos		X	X				X
Rall, Henk			X				X
Retief, Bertrand							X
Roodt, PH							X
Ryger, RR			X				X
Scheepers, Riana						X	X
Snyman, Adriaan							X
Steyn, Jaap	X		X				X
Strachan, Alexander	X	X	X	X		X	X
Swart, F			X				
Tredoux, Nic						X	
Van der Lugt, P			X				
Van der Merwe, Peet							X
Van der Vyver, Marieta						X	X
Van Heerden, Etienne	X	X	X	X		X	X
Van Rooyen, Engela		X				X	
Van Zyl, Dine							X
Van Zyl, K			X				

<sup>21</sup> More critics are used here than with Vietnam literature, because there is no specialist, comprehensive book available on *grensliteratuur*, unlike in the case of Vietnam literature.

Venter, Eben				X	X
Viljoen, Lettie	X	X	X		X
Wasserman, Herman				X	
Weideman, George	X	X			

From the preceding list, it is clear that Alexander Strachan and Etienne van Heerden are the most frequently mentioned authors of *grensliteratuur*, followed by PJ Haasbroek, Louis Krüger, Lettie Viljoen, Elsa Joubert, and then Gawie Kellerman, Maretha Maartens, John Miles, Victor Munnik, Hans Pienaar, Koos Prinsloo, and Jaap Steyn. Obvious oversights include Mark Behr, Christiaan Bakkes, and Anthony Feinstein, who do not feature as prominently on this table since their works were published *after* many of these studies were conducted. Subsequently, author degree centrality was extracted as a table:

Author	Degree centrality
1. Strachan, Alexander	5
2. Van Heerden, Etienne	5
3. Haasbroek, PJ	4
4. Krüger, Louis	4
5. Viljoen, Lettie	4
6. Joubert, Elsa	3
7. Kellerman, Gawie	3
8. Maartens, Maretha	3
9. Miles, John	3
10. Munnik, Victor	3
11. Pienaar, Hans	3
12. Prinsloo, Koos	3
13. Steyn, Jaap	3
14. Behr, Mark	2
15. Botha, Jaco	2
16. Coetzee, Johan	2
17. Ferreira, Jeanette	2
18. Fouché, Jaco	2
19. Goosen, Jean	2
20. Huisman, Emma	2
21. Kalmer, Harry	2
22. Leroux, André	2
23. Malan, Charles	2
24. Müller, Petra	2
25. Odendaal, Welma	2
26. Pieterse, Pieter	2
27. Rall, Henk	2
28. Ryger, RR	2
29. Scheepers, Riana	2
30. Van der Vyver, Marieta	2
31. Van Rooyen, Engela	2

32.	Venter, Eben	2
33.	Weideman, George	2
34.	Bakkes, Christiaan	1
35.	Du Plessis, Hans	1
36.	Hattingh, H	1
37.	McCallaghan, Andrew	1
38.	Moolman, Chris	1
39.	Opperman, Deon	1
40.	Pieterse, Henning	1
41.	Retief, Bertrand	1
42.	Roodt, PH	1
43.	Snyman, Adriaan	1
44.	Swart, F	1
45.	Tredoux, Nic	1
46.	Van der Lugt, P	1
47.	Van der Merwe, Peet	1
48.	Van Zyl, Dine	1
49.	Van Zyl, K	1
50.	Wasserman, Herman	1

As with literature on the Vietnam War, the above table means that Strachan is mentioned in five literary histories, Haasbroek in four, etcetera. SNA thus indicates that these authors – particularly Van Heerden and Strachan – should be included in a general study of Afrikaans literature on the War in Namibia/Angola, as they are generally regarded as worth mentioning in literary histories on these conflicts.

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## CONCLUSION

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All literary texts are created within a context, or rather a context of contexts. Furthermore, the literary text interacts with other entities within a network or system, gaining importance through literary publications, reviews by important critics (often published in high-impact journals or periodicals), and mentions in literary histories. Over time, a literary canon emerges, and the same applies to literary subsystems such as American literature on the Vietnam War or the Afrikaans literature on the War in Namibia/Angola. This chapter has shown how one relationship – that between the author and the literary history – function to create a literary subsystem in which authors gain differing levels of importance, depending on who refers to them and how widely they are referred to. This exploration is made considerably clearer with SNA tools, which have been designed to identify key entities within a network.

The author most often mentioned in American literature on the Vietnam War has been shown to be Tim O'Brien, although which of his numerous works occupies the most prominent position has not been investigated. In Afrikaans literature on the War in Namibia/Angola, Alexander Strachan and Etienne van Heerden emerged as the most often mentioned authors, but again without specifying which texts take central stage. In the rest of this study, these insights will be employed in the selection of texts, but rather as a guideline, since newer works are underrepresented in literary histories. Particularly within Afrikaans literature on the War in Namibia/Angola, new works are continually being produced, making literary histories unreliable. Furthermore, the preceding has had a quantitative focus, and although it is difficult to deny that O'Brien is one of the most accomplished authors in his subsystem, authors such as Larry Heinemann provide – in my view – a similarly striking depiction of alienation, without being noted as one of the most often mentioned authors of their subsystem. The preceding is therefore a guideline that informs but not dictates the rest of this study.

## SECTION B

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### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

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Münkler (2005:32) notes that whereas ‘classical’ interstate wars such as the First and Second World Wars had a clearly definable beginning and end, no such distinction exists for what he calls *new wars* that “begin somehow or other and end somewhere or other” (original emphasis). Wars such as Vietnam and Namibia/Angola are not officially declared, and therefore their beginnings and endings are not as easy to demarcate as earlier wars. However, as Bobbit (2003:40) notes, World War II also did not actually begin with the declaration of war in 1939, for there were earlier acts of war committed by the belligerents, such as the Japanese invasion of the area surrounding the Manchurian Railway in September 1931, and the 1935 Italian invasion of Ethiopia. The Russian and German invasion of Poland only constituted another act of aggression following the annexation of the Sudetenland and Czechoslovakia.

Similarly, Münkler (2005:13) argues that peace is a *process* rather than an *agreement* in modern wars, whereas earlier wars such as the two World Wars had a clearly definable end constituted by a formal declaration of surrender. The two World Wars are however often referred to as one war divided by a twenty years’ truce, since the same belligerents became involved for largely the same reasons. Furthermore, in Bobbit’s (2003:40) view, WWII did not end in August 1945, but continued until the signing of the Peace of Paris in 1990, since he argues WWI and WWII, along with the Cold War, were wars fought to determine the best form of government. However, to what extent the Cold War can be said to have ended, is debatable as well. Hough (2008:43-45) notes that many Cold War features persist, in particular the Korean conflict, US-Soviet, US-Chinese and US-Cuban relations, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

As with beginnings of wars, the conclusion of wars is not always clear – a feature of modern wars accentuated in counterinsurgencies, hybrid wars,<sup>22</sup> and low-intensity

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<sup>22</sup> Another important factor in modern wars is the role played by the media. It is doubtful whether Britain could have continued to send their troops to die during the Anglo-Boer War if the British public could have seen the devastation they inflicted, and the steady stream of troops killed in action. After WWII, the media became an important role player, particularly in Vietnam, where horrific images were sent back to the US,

conflicts. Nevertheless, the following section attempts to provide an overview of the circumstances and context that lead to the outbreak and conclusion of the bulk of violence that constituted the Vietnam War and the war in Namibia/Angola.

### CHAPTER 3: VIETNAM

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The Vietnam War started well before the arrival of 3,500 US Marines at Danang on 8 March 1965, and continued after the US withdrawal in early 1973. For the Vietnamese, the war was a long and arduous struggle engulfing most of the twentieth century, and one should even note the struggles that accompanied the French colonisation period as is discussed later. Indochina was also part of WWII, the war with the French intensified soon after this war, and at the time of the French withdrawal, the US was already committed to this struggle. Even if simply considering the US involvement, the dates 1965 and 1973 signify watershed moments but not the beginning and end – indeed, in 1998 the official beginning of the war was changed to 1955 (US Department of Defense 1998). As Beidler (2007:3) notes, “there was no real beginning and there was no real end to anything having to do with the war. It just went on.”

Much of the history on the Vietnam War remains controversial, particularly the reasons for going to war, the actual conduct of soldiers and commanders during the war, and who ultimately won. To illustrate how differently the Vietnam War is viewed, Pilger’s account differs sharply from Westmoreland’s view of the war: Pilger (2008:xi) believes the Vietnam War “was waged by the American government *against* the people of Vietnam, North and South, Communist and non-Communist” (original emphasis). In contrast to this view, General Westmoreland however believed the US military mission was “To assist the Government of Vietnam and its armed forces to defeat externally directed and supported Communist subversion and aggression and attain an independent South Vietnam functioning in a secure environment” (quoted in Summers (2007:64)). Perspectives on the Vietnam War remain polarized to this day. Hall (2008:81) writes, “Having learned the lessons of appeasing totalitarian states from World War II,

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showing the war in its violent reality. As discussed later, this had an important effect on US resolve, *and* on South Africa’s subsequent policy of creating a media blackout. The role of the media is often discussed in the context of hybrid wars, such as by McWilliams (2009).



American leaders assumed the worst-case scenario. Containment was designed to avoid repeating that earlier mistake, and Americans believed that Vietnam's attempt to gain independence fitted the pattern of Communist aggression." However, "no dominoes fell outside Indochina," for "the United States mistakenly attributed its local origins to international Communism." Codevilla and Seabury (2006:176) do not share this perspective, and argue that during the Cold War, the Soviet Union, "infiltrated anti-colonial movements (among many others) and used them as proxies against Western interests." In their view, "The United States lost the military part of the war in Vietnam first because it chose to treat a foreign invasion – a big war that had a base of operations susceptible to attack – as if it were a little war that lacked such an enemy nerve centre" (2006:165). Van Creveld's (1991a:147) view is also at odds with Hall's; he believes the original goals of US involvement in Vietnam included fighting Communism and preserving democracy in South Vietnam. However, as time passed, the mounting costs and casualties could no longer be justified, and Henry Kissinger went so far as to admit that the US was in Vietnam because it was there, "this being tantamount to an admission that it had gone to war for no reason at all" (Van Creveld 1991a:147).

Hall's observation that "no dominoes fell outside Indochina" is also a widely contested statement. Whereas Van Creveld (2008:219) calls the British withdrawal from Palestine the "very first failure" (for a discussion of the conflict, see Townshend (2008)), Keegan (2004:380) observes the significance of the French withdrawal from Indochina by allowing the Viet Minh example to inspire the subjects of other European colonies to rebel in Indochina, the Middle East, and Africa. The US withdrawal had similar consequences: Wiest (2006:24) calls the US part of the conflict in Vietnam "a signal moment in the history of decolonization," and Bobbit (2003:59) remarks that the 1975 Communist victory was also an important moment for many liberation movements. Indeed most of the so-called "wars of national liberation" – a term used by Krushchev in 1961 (Kilcullen 2009a:7) – followed after 1954, and many of these movements were directly inspired by the Viet Minh and later NLF example. The Algerian FLN emulated the Viet Minh (Kilcullen 2006:113), and even the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) was later inspired by the Vietnamese Tet offensive (Iron 2008:173). It is also more than a coincidence that Angola, Mozambique, and South Africa erupted in violence after the North's victory in Vietnam. For insurgent movements worldwide, the entire conflict in

Vietnam thus played a crucial role, teaching them tactics and strategies, but also providing hope of success, just as this conflict influenced future COIN-operations globally as counterinsurgency forces attempted to apply the 'lessons of Vietnam'.

Hess (2009) discusses historical accounts of Vietnam in terms of *orthodox* and *revisionist* accounts. The former generally hold that becoming involved in the Vietnam War was an avoidable mistake and that the war was unwinnable, whereas the latter point to mistaken policy decisions in arguing that the war was winnable, if only some measures (such as Vietnamization) had been implemented at an earlier stage. Hess (2009:207-210) notes how historical accounts of WWI and II, and the Cold War, went through similar orthodox and revisionist phases, until later reaching a *post-revisionist* phase that reinterpreted these wars even further. Historical accounts of the Vietnam War have however not reached this third stage, and thus the debate remains highly polarized.

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## BEGINNINGS

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At the height of the European scramble for overseas colonies, France started its conquest of Indochina in 1858, but only gained control of Vietnam by 1883. Following this “long, arduous and violent” (Neu 2005:2) conquest, resistance came quickly: even before WWI, Phan Boi Chau fought the French occupation “with propaganda, demonstrations, and violence” (Hall 2008:4) through the Modernization Society. The movement declined after the war, and was succeeded by the Constitutionalist Party, which focused on “reforms through collaboration” (*Ibid.*). The Vietnamese Nationalist Party (VNQDD) was formed in 1927, but was broken up by the French after a planned military revolt in February 1930 (*Ibid.*). At the same time, Ho Chi Minh (born as Nguyen Tat Thanh and also known as Nguyen Ai Quoc) was one of the founders of the Vietnamese Communist Party (later renamed the Indochinese Communist Party). Ho Chi Minh left Vietnam to study in Paris and Moscow, and was influenced by the writings of Vladimir Lenin and Karl Marx, although he did not adopt Leninist policies wholesale and clashed with Joseph Stalin during his time in the Soviet Union (LaFeber 2007:37).

Nevertheless, his association with Communism would later place the Vietnam War in the context of the Cold War, and was a crucial prerogative for US involvement in the region.

During his absence from Indochina, WWII broke out, and in 1940, Japan occupied Indochina, but allowed the French political administration to remain in place. The following year, Ho Chi Minh returned to Vietnam to found the Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh (the League for the Independence of Vietnam), better known as the Viet Minh, to fight the Japanese and French. In March 1945, as WWII drew to a close, Japan disbanded the French colonial infrastructure, disarmed and imprisoned the French colonial garrison (Windrow 2006:36), and reinstated Emperor Bao Dai. In July, agents of the US Office of Strategic Services (OSS) (the department that later became the Central Intelligence Agency or CIA) parachuted into Vietnam and began training the Viet Minh<sup>23</sup> to fight against the occupying Japanese (Neu 2005:3). In the same month, Allied leaders at the Potsdam conference decided that the British would take responsibility for Vietnam south of the 16<sup>th</sup> parallel after the surrender of the Japanese, whereas China, at the time under the leadership of Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek), would occupy the north.

When the Japanese surrendered to the Allied forces in August 1945, the Viet Minh launched the August Revolution and forced Bao Dai to abdicate, although they had a stronger support base in the North than in the South and were by no means the only movement aspiring towards independence. On 2 September, Ho Chi Minh addressed the crowds in Hanoi and declared the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) (Hall 2008:5). Shortly afterwards, British troops arrived in the South and joined with the French and Japanese in driving the Viet Minh from Saigon. The first American casualty of Vietnam was Lieutenant Colonel Peter Dewey, who died on 24 September 1945 (Allen 2008:20), although he is not officially acknowledged as the first casualty (see below). In the North, where Hanoi had been temporarily occupied by the Viet Minh, “an uneasy truce” (Neu 2005:4) held between the Chinese and Viet Minh.

Although initially opposed to colonial rule, the Soviet expansion towards the end of WWII caused the US to prioritize opposing Communist encroachment in Indochina, leading Harry Truman’s administration to support the restoration of French power in

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<sup>23</sup> The irony of the US training the Viet Minh is not an isolated incident: the British military trained the Malayan Communist Party during WWII, and then fought the same insurgents after the war (Corum 2006:4).

Indochina. However, at this time Stalin actually showed little interest in the Viet Minh, since Soviet efforts were directed towards spreading Communist influence in Europe, and LaFebré (2007:37) remarks, “To support Ho just as he was beginning to kill Frenchmen in his anti-colonial war would win few friends for Stalin in France.” The situation however changed when the French Communist Party’s influence ebbed by 1948, and Stalin then “indicated his approval of Ho’s battle against France” (LaFebré 2007:37), although his support remained in spirit only.

In October 1945, Admiral Georges Thierry d’Agenlieu, France’s leading representative in Vietnam, initiated a military campaign against the Viet Minh (Hall 2008:6). France soon controlled the cities and major towns, but the Viet Minh remained in control of the rural areas, particularly in central and northern Vietnam. The French invited Emperor Bao Dai to return as head of the Vietnamese government, leading to the Elysée Agreements on 8 March 1949, which granted limited independence within the French Union (Hall 2008:4). The war effort, which showed little progress (if any), however continued.

By 1949, the Communist victory in the Chinese civil war, the Berlin Blockade, and the discovery that the Soviet Union had successfully built a nuclear bomb, lent credibility to US notions that Communism intended to expand, and this view was further reinforced by the outbreak of the Korean War on 25 June 1950. China supported the Viet Minh with aid, weapons and training, their new leader, Mao Zedong, promising “Whatever China has and Vietnam needs” (Neu 2005:9). This link with Communist China stiffened US resolve, and direct military assistance to the French started on 1 August 1950 (Nagl 2008:132), and the Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) was founded to co-ordinate assistance. By 1954, the US was financing 80% of the French effort (LaFebré 2007:40). Furthermore, Stalin’s death in 1953 brought Nikita Khrushchev to power, and whereas Stalin had expressed little interest in Vietnam, Khrushchev emphasized support for the Third World, since he believed trade with these emerging nations could strengthen the Soviet economy (LaFebré 2007:42) – precisely what the US had feared (the so-called Domino Effect).

Because of continuing failures, the French sent General Jean de Lattre de Tassigny, a “far more imaginative commander than his predecessor” (Neu 2005:13) to Vietnam. In 1951, General Vo Nguyen Giap of the Viet Minh launched a major

conventional assault on French forces in the Red River Delta, which was decisively beaten back by De Tassigny, resulting in heavy Viet Minh losses. De Lattre's campaign was successful, but he died in January 1952, and was replaced by General Henri Navarre. Navarre sought a decisive victory in a conventional battle, which would supposedly come in the form of Dien Bien Phu, where he stationed around 12,000 French troops under the command of Colonel Christian de Castries. General Giap surrounded the French with 50,000 troops and heavy artillery, overlooking the base from the surrounding hills. On 13 March 1954, the Viet Minh started a massive bombardment of the base. Human wave assaults followed, but immense Viet Minh casualties and the French's inability to resupply properly brought Giap to realize that the bombing was more likely to produce victory. France's requests (particularly to the US) for help went unanswered, and Dien Bien Phu fell on 7 May 1954. The surviving 9,000 French soldiers were taken into captivity, but only 3,900 remained alive after four months (Windrow 2006:45).

The French defeat at Dien Bien Phu led to agreements on 21 July that French troops would be withdrawn by 1955, a Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) was established along the 17<sup>th</sup> parallel, and national elections aimed at reunification of North and South were promised for 1956.

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## THE ADVISORY PHASE, 1955-1965

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What the outcome in Vietnam will be is anybody's guess, but whatever happens, Special Forces men will continue to fight Communism and make friends for America in the underdeveloped nations that are the targets of Communist expansion.

Robin Moore, *The Green Berets* (1983[1965]:339)

Ngo Dinh Diem, a Catholic, was instated as Prime Minister of the State of Vietnam in June 1954. In 1955, he won a questionable referendum, which allowed him to disband the monarchy under Emperor Bao Dai, and establish the Republic of Vietnam (RVN). Soon Diem embarked on a Denunciation of Communist Campaign, which reduced the number of Communists in his RVN from 15,000 to 5,000 over the next two years (Neu 2005:35). Fighting between Diem's Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) and southern insurgents broke out in 1957. The National Liberation Front (NLF) was formed in the South in 1960 with the help of North Vietnam, and in 1961, Communist insurgents formed under the People's Liberation Armed Forces (PLAF) – better known as the Viet Cong.

The Vietnam Conflict officially began on 1 November 1955 when the Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) was reorganised, and MAAG Vietnam was established (US Department of Defense 1998).

John F Kennedy, following the reasoning of his predecessor, Dwight D. Eisenhower, viewed the conflict as part of a global Communist expansion, and placed new emphasis on counterinsurgency, particularly in Southeast Asia where Vietnam represented, in his words, “the finger in the dike” (Neu 2005:36). This meant deploying Green Berets to train the ARVN in guerrilla warfare, while the CIA initiated a program called the Civilian Irregular Defence Groups (CIDGs), which employed particularly the Montagnards (Hall 2008:12) – an ethnic minority often marginalized by the Vietnamese<sup>24</sup>. The first official US casualty of the war was US Air Force Tech. Sgt Richard Bernard Fitzgibbon, who died in combat on 8 June 1956 (US Department of Defense 1998). In February 1962, the US sent General Paul Harkins to head the newly formed Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MAC-V), which replaced the older MAAG.

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<sup>24</sup> This effort is depicted in Robin Moore's *The Green Berets* (1983[1965]).

One of the first major battles of the new war took place at Ap Bac, 35 miles from Saigon, on 2 January 1963, where 1,400 ARVN troops attacked a known PLAF base housing around 350 guerrillas. Unlike formerly, PLAF commanders told their troops to dig in and hold ground, rather than launching hit-and-run guerrilla attacks as they had done hitherto. Of the fifteen ARVN helicopters that attacked the base, five were shot down (Neu 2005:59), and troops on the ground quickly became demoralized as the firefight grew fiercer and casualties mounted. When thirteen Armoured Personnel Carriers (APCs) joined the battle, PLAF riflemen shot out their gunners and drivers (Neu 2005:59). ARVN troops withdrew with 80 dead and a hundred wounded, plus 3 killed US advisors, while the PLAF slipped away during the night, having lost 18 killed and 39 wounded (Neu 2005:59). Ap Bac was a clear indicator that ARVN forces were not yet capable of taking on the PLAF in conventional battles, not to mention the better-equipped People's Army of North Vietnam (PAVN).

On 1 November 1963, a *coup d'état* led by ARVN generals deposed Diem, who was subsequently killed alongside his brother while being escorted in an Armoured Personnel Carrier (APC), and strong evidence suggests the coup happened at least with US approval after Diem had been reluctant to give in to US suggested reforms. In the US, President Kennedy was assassinated on 22 November. Both Kennedy and Diem's successors inherited turmoil: Lyndon Baines Johnson (LBJ) inherited a difficult military commitment to the faltering regime of South Vietnam (at the time, 16,000 US personnel were already in Vietnam), while Diem's successor, Duong Van Minh, was overthrown by Nguyen Khan on 30 January 1964. Nguyen Khan resigned in October 1964 and was replaced by Tran Van Huong as the President of the Republic of Vietnam. Yet in January 1965, Khan ousted Van Huong, who was in turn ousted on 25 February, leading President Johnson to remark: "I don't want to hear any more of this coup shit" (Hall 2008:22).

On 2 August 1964, the US destroyer *Maddox* was attacked by the north Vietnamese, one of two attacks (the 4 August attack is however disputed) that led to the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, passed by US Congress on 7 August, which allowed for the escalation of the war. Other incidents of the year include an attack on Bien Hoa airbase, which killed four Americans, and the Christmas Eve bombing of an American officers' quarters in Saigon, which killed two Americans and wounded 38 (Hall 2008:23). Major US retaliation only came after a PLAF attack on the US base at Pleiku on 7 February 1965,

which killed nine US soldiers and wounded 120. After this incident, Johnson ordered Operation Flaming Dart, which struck North Vietnamese targets above the 17<sup>th</sup> parallel. Operation Rolling Thunder – the bombing of North Vietnam – began on 2 March 1965. On 8 March, 3,500 Marines landed at Danang, with Vietnamese girls awaiting the first combat troops of the major US military commitment phase of the war with a poster proclaiming, “Welcome to the gallant Marines” (Neu 2005:84)<sup>25</sup>. This signalled the start of an arduous conventional military involvement that would change American society and global politics irrevocably.

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<sup>25</sup> One finds it difficult not to see the repetition in Iraq, where the local population’s initial enthusiasm for US support eventually turned into open hostilities.



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## MAJOR US INVOLVEMENT TO THE END OF THE WAR: 1965-1975

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The first major conventional engagement between the People's Army of North Vietnam (PAVN) and US forces occurred in the Ia Drang valley from 19 October to 26 November 1965, an incident partially depicted in Colonel Harold G. Moore's *We were soldiers once, and young*. Moore's book only documents a segment of three days starting on 14 November, where Air Cavalry units engaged PAVN units in fierce fighting. On days two and three the PAVN, lacking heavy weapons, launched human wave attacks that left the battlefield littered with their dead, while US forces were able to use Close Air Support (CAS) and resupply by helicopter. After Moore's unit was replaced, Colonel Robert McDade's Second Battalion of the Seventh Cavalry fought "the most savage one-day battle of the Vietnam War" (Neu 2005:94), which left 155 men dead and 124 wounded, out of an original 450. The battle continued after McDade's withdrawal, and at the end of the five-week operation, the US had spent 33,000 artillery rounds and lost 305 men, killing 3,561 PAVN troops in the process (Hall 2008:36).

In February 1966, two PAVN divisions attacked across the DMZ into Quang Tri Province. Westmoreland dispatched Marines who were soon "engaged in entrenched battles reminiscent of World War I" (Neu 2005:113-114). Large-scale operations such as Cedar Falls and Junction City (both in 1967) were also conventional in nature. Cedar Falls involved a massive *search and destroy* mission with 16,000 US troops and an equal number contributed by the ARVN, designed to wipe out Communist forces in the 'Iron Triangle' northwest of Saigon (Karnow 1994[1983]:477). Cedar Falls was however unsuccessful, with only 750 PLAF killed at the cost of 430 casualties (Hall 2008:38), and the PLAF was able to return to the area afterwards and use it to launch attacks on Saigon during the Tet offensive. Junction City followed Cedar Falls, which resulted in 2,700 PLAF troops killed at the cost of 282 US and ARVN killed (Hall 2008:38).

Khe Sanh is one of the best-known conventional confrontations of the entire Vietnam War. Since the spring of 1967, Marine units had engaged PAVN forces on the nearby hills, and in August the PAVN severed Route 9 – the only supply route to the coast – thereby limiting the base to resupply by air (Neu 2005:131). Later that year, Westmoreland learned that between 32,000 and 40,000 PAVN troops were converging

on the base, and strengthened the garrison to 6,000 US Marines. Seeing a resemblance with Dien Bien Phu (although noting that it was a poor resemblance), Westmoreland also planned a massive bombing campaign, Operation Niagara, to punish besiegers (Neu 2005:131). On 21 January 1968, ten days before the Tet offensive, the PAVN opened fire with artillery. The US responded with massive B-52 strikes, and as one Communist veteran recalled after the battle (cited by Karnow (1994[1983]:553)), these airstrikes were so effective that some PLAF and PAVN units suffered 90% casualties. Despite vast differences between Khe Sanh and Dien Bien Phu making any analogy between the two battles “preposterous” (Karnow 1994[1983]:553) – notably US airpower and positioning on the hills rather than in the valley – the US press portrayed the soldiers as imperilled in the same manner as the French were in 1954 (Hess 2009:161).

As the fighting continued, US officials and the media paid significant attention to the battle, prompting *Time Magazine* to report on 16 February (quoted in Taylor (2003:86)), “No single battle of the Vietnam War has held Washington – and the nation – in such complete thrall.” When the siege was officially lifted on 15 April, Neu (2005:138) claims approximately 10,000 PAVN soldiers had died, with US losses numbering 650<sup>26</sup>. In September 1969, Michael Herr published an article simply entitled ‘Khe Sanh’ in *Esquire*, and this later formed the longest chapter in his *Dispatches*. The ferocity of the fighting is summed up in one remark in *Dispatches*, “There was no feeling in the world as good as being airborne out of Khe Sanh” (Herr 1991[1968]:90).

The Tet offensive remains “the most decisive event of the Vietnam war” (Hess 2009:154), but given the sharply different accounts of its significance, it is probably the most divisive as well. The offensive was launched on various urban centres just after midnight on 30 January 1968 by 84,000 PAVN and PLAF soldiers (Hall 2008:50). The official North Vietnamese objective was to,

...wipe out and disintegrate an overwhelming majority of the Saigon troops, overthrow the Saigon administration at various levels, seize full power, [and] wipe out an important portion of US troops and means of war, thus making it impossible for US troops to carry out their political and military tasks in Vietnam” (quoted in Huynh (2007:91)).

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<sup>26</sup> Karnow (1994[1983]:553) claims “at least ten thousand” PAVN and PLAF soldiers died at Khe Sanh, and “fewer than five hundred” US troops.

The North had hoped the Tet offensive would spark a popular uprising, thus indicating the illegitimacy of the South Vietnamese government, but that never materialized. The ARVN fought better than US commanders had expected, and within a few days, most urban centres taken on 30 January were recovered. One exception was Hue, where 7,500 PLAF and PAVN soldiers had taken possession of the older part of the city, the Citadel (Hall 2008:51). It took over three weeks to recover the city, and US and ARVN forces killed 5,000 enemy troops in the process<sup>27</sup>. In total, Communist losses during Tet were estimated at between 30,000 and 40,000, while US forces suffered 1,100, the ARVN lost 2,300, and 12,500 civilians were killed (Hall 2008:51). Truong Nhu Tang, a National Liberation Front (NLF) leader, recalls that Tet destroyed their hopes of establishing an independent Communist structure in the South, since PAVN became dominant thereafter (Lomperis 1987:58).

Despite the fact that the Tet offensive was a definite Communist failure in military terms, it proved a turning point in the war.<sup>28</sup> Press reports of fierce fighting undermined Westmoreland's claims that Communist forces were losing the war, and the so-called 'credibility gap' between the official views of the war and how it was represented in the media, widened. Palazzo (2008:71) believes the "lessening of support for the Vietnam War after the Tet Offensive had as much to do with a sense of having being misled by the overly rosy reports that emanated from HQ MAC-V as with the losses resulting from the battle." Most of the opposition to the war – which became synonymous with the memory of the war in general – dates from after Tet, as is discussed later. In discussing the South African situation at Cuito Cuanavale, McWilliams (2009:43) writes, "Other hybrid opponents have had similar success with using media coverage to negate physical realities of the conventional battlefield losses, most notably Hezbollah in the Second Lebanon War." McWilliams could just as well have been referring to the Tet Offensive.

After Tet, Communist forces were decimated, in particular, the PLAF became more of an addendum to the PAVN presence in South Vietnam, and by 1970, about two

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<sup>27</sup> This is a major element of Gustav Hashford's *The Short-timers* (1980).

<sup>28</sup> It should also be noted that 1968 was a time of great upheaval across the Western world. In this year, major unrest developed in France, and this was also the time of the anti-establishment hippie movement, which rejected the dominant values of society (see e.g. Seeman (1972b)). This was a time of long hair and drug abuse, the Beatles and John Lennon's call to "Give peace a chance", and thus Tet coincided with a global questioning of power structures, not only in terms of the Vietnam War. For an Afrikaans depiction of this period, see Marita van der Vyver's *Die dinge van 'n kind*.

thirds of Communist forces in the South were PAVN (Karnow 1994[1983]:616). Despite these gains, the US started exploring avenues for an exit strategy as public opinion turned increasingly against the war. Tovy (2009:21) calls Tet, “in many ways, a watershed in the Vietnam War. The Viet Cong failed in their attempt to control the rural population as a result of the pacification plans that were activated by the United States in cooperation with the government of South Vietnam,” and thus the war became more conventional in nature.

Lyndon Johnson, General Westmoreland, and Richard Nixon blamed the failure of Vietnam on the media, and indeed the media played a much greater role in Vietnam than in any previous war. Neu (2005:134) claims that particularly in the aftermath of Tet, some television commentators misconstrued the military reality in depicting the offensive as a disaster for the US. He further notes how images contradicting this view were ignored by journalists, such as the bravery of ARVN soldiers or the fear and confusion displayed by PLAF units. One of the iconic images of the Tet Offensive is South Vietnamese General Nguyen Ngoc Loan executing a PLAF prisoner in Saigon in 1968 (Hess 2009:162), which conveyed the brutality of the South Vietnamese and therefore, the US:



FIGURE 5 GENERAL NGUYEN NGOC LOAN EXECUTING A PLAF PRISONER IN SAIGON IN 1968

Lomperis (1987:38) mentions the context that was usually omitted in press reports, namely that the killing of the PLAF prisoner was in response to that prisoner having killed Ngoc Loan's best friend and entire family (1987:59). Although this hardly provides an excuse for violating the Geneva Convention's regulations regarding the treatment of Prisoners of War (POWs), the context undermines claims of South Vietnamese atrocities by showing how *both* sides committed atrocities. Harry McPherson, a White House speechwriter, notes the impact of the television version of Tet (quoted in Neu (2005:136)):

I watched the invasion of the American embassy compound, and the terrible sights of General Loan killing the Vietcong captive. You got a sense of the awfulness, the endlessness, of the war – and, though it sounds naive, the unethical quality of a war in which a prisoner is shot at point-blank range. I put aside the confidential cables. I was more persuaded by the tube and by the newspapers.

Not all commentators and historians agree that the media's depiction of Tet changed the public opinion of the war in the US. Hallin (2006:278) argues that the media followed public opinion; they did not lead it. Public support for the war ebbed before the media came to portray the war in a more negative light, and Hallin (2006:288) claims it was neither the Tet offensive nor Walter Cronkite's report that changed public opinion. From 1967, the media became more sceptical, but then it was rather the print media than television that questioned the war (Hallin 2006:285). The change was very gradual, and American troops were still represented sympathetically, while the enemy remained faceless (Hallin 2006:286). Hess (2009:151) agrees with this view, noting how "coverage of the war mirrored more than it changed public opinion." Lunch and Sperlich (1979:22) also note that despite the widely held belief that the Tet offensive of 1968 turned public opinion, opposition was already established by 1967 or even mid-1966<sup>29</sup>. Revisionist historical accounts however argue that Communist atrocities did not receive comparable media attention, such as the killing of 3,000 civilians by the PAVN in Hue in 1968 or the burning of 250 Montagnards at the village of Dak Song (Hess 2009:140).

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<sup>29</sup> This is shown in the television series, *Tour of Duty*.

Tet had another devastating effect: Whereas in the past, the US Army relied on volunteers for a third of its fighting force in Vietnam, the growing unpopularity of the war meant that the volunteer element was significantly reduced. This forced the Army to increase subscription, which in practice meant that more troops were serving in Vietnam who did not want to be there. Of course, there is a vast difference between a conscription army and a volunteer army, and this may have had an effect on the general decline in moral witnessed after Tet.

Although the US started exploring ways of exiting Vietnam in light of growing opposition at home, military operations continued. From 11-20 May 1969, Operation Apache Snow was conducted in the A Shau valley, during which the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division engaged PAVN forces in an assault on Ap Bia mountain (Hill 937) – “Hamburger Hill” (Nagl 2008:144), approximately a mile from the Laotian border. Over the course of ten days, combined US ground assaults, artillery bombardments, and air strikes dislodged the enemy from the mountain, and 56 Americans died and 420 were wounded. After the objective was accomplished, the hill was abandoned, since it had no strategic value – a point that disgusted the soldiers and the American public.

In 1970, the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division returned to the A Shau valley for the last major confrontation between US forces and those of North Vietnam. At Fire Base Ripcord, US forces fought a 23 day siege in July until extracted by helicopter, losing 75 troops, including Chuck Norris’s brother, Weiland (Harrison 2004:65). After the media storm surrounding “Hamburger Hill,” Washington was reluctant to suffer more unnecessary casualties, and restricted troop movements at Ripcord, along with implementing a media blackout. Kolton (1990:26) recalls commanders’ unwillingness to sacrifice troops for “insignificant terrain,” remarking,

In light of the US strategic situation this perspective is understandable. Yet, the inability of artillery and aerial fires to penetrate enemy bunkers made ground manoeuvre essential if enemy defenders were to be defeated. As a result, US units in the Ripcord area could not generate sufficient combat power to defeat the NVA/VC. By 22 July, the 3rd Brigade and division commanders concluded that the cost and effort required to defend FSB Ripcord detracted from operations planned against enemy rear areas in the vicinity of FSB’s Airborne, Goodman, and Bradley. Closing the fire base, they reasoned, would provide additional forces for attacking enemy base areas. Friendly forces subsequently displaced on 23 July.

Nevertheless, Harrison (2004:181) believes that casualties inflicted on PAVN forces contributed to the Easter Offensive being postponed until 1972.

On 29 March 1972, North Vietnam launched a conventional attack on South Vietnam in what became known as the Easter Offensive. Twelve Divisions numbering between 120,000 and 150,000 men – approximately all PAVN forces – attacked across the border with tanks and heavy artillery, resulting in battles “of unprecedented fury” (Neu 2005:191). In contrast with Tet, the offensive was led by the PAVN and thus used Soviet-supplied heavy weapons, rather than scattered attacks launched simultaneously on numerous targets. It was a three-pronged attack launched from North Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, but this along with PAVN officers’ inexperience in conventional operations led to devastating casualties as the US supported the ARVN with airstrikes (Neu 2005:194). As President Nixon remarked at the time, “the bastards have never been bombed like they’re going to be bombed this time.” At An Loc, ARVN forces proved that Vietnamization<sup>30</sup> had worked as they successfully defended the town throughout a 66-day siege – a feat Sir Robert Thompson (quoted in Thi (2006:128)) referred to as “the biggest victory of the Free World in the post-WWII era.” The fact that by early 1972, there were just 5,300 US advisers in the whole of Vietnam (Willbanks 1993:10) illustrates that on the ground, ARVN units largely had to rely on themselves, which they did successfully (if supported by US airpower). By July, the PAVN was on the defensive, and their “attempt to mass had proven disastrous” (Summers 2007:83): they had lost more than 100,000 soldiers compared to Southern losses of 25,000.<sup>31</sup>

Despite the ARVN’s success, the most familiar image of this offensive is however ten-year-old Phan Thim Kim Phuc running naked from the napalmed village of An Loc:

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<sup>30</sup> This term was coined by Secretary of Defence Melvin Laird (Nagl 2008:144).

<sup>31</sup> For a detailed account of this offensive, see Thi (2006:121-128) and Willbanks (1993).



FIGURE 6 PHAN THIM KIM PHUC RUNNING NAKED FROM THE NAPALMED VILLAGE OF AN LOC

A major problem faced by the Nixon administration was placating opponents of the war at home by withdrawing troops, yet continuing to fight the North Vietnamese with these reduced numbers of troops. Baines (2003:15) writes that in Vietnam, “Some refused to participate in patrols or obey orders that exposed them to risk. There are accounts of fragging where superior officers who exposed troops to unnecessary risk were disabled usually by means of a grenade.” This is depicted in O’Brien’s *If I die in a combat zone*, where apart from fictional ambushes, soldiers become hypochondriacs in order to spend time in the rear (2006[1973]:170) – sometimes even shooting themselves intentionally – and kill an unpopular officer (2006[1973]:172). James Webb also writes how the character Phony fragged Sergeant Austin (2001[1978]:154-155).

This is however not characteristic of the war in general as Baines claims, but rather of the war of the last few years. Fighting in a war that seemed to be winding down had a detrimental effect on the moral of US forces during the 1970s: the war came to be perceived as increasingly futile, since if the US was withdrawing anyway, what



point was there in risking one's life for a lost cause? Drug abuse, desertion, and 'fragging' became more widespread during this final phase of the war, and a Department of Defence study concluded that 60% of military personnel used drugs in 1970, and by 1973, the figure had increased to 70%. Furthermore, Hall (2008:67) claims that from 1963-1973, around half a million US soldiers deserted. Some units also engaged in 'search and evade' operations, where the aim was to avoid contact with the enemy and thereby ensure the survival of troops. Largely – as Baines's claim illustrates – this disillusionment of the war that was characteristic of its final years, became the memory of the Vietnam War in general.



FIGURE 7 US SOLDIERS IN VIETNAM<sup>iii</sup>

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## AFTERMATH

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The signing of the Paris Peace Agreement on 27 January 1973 was a milestone in ending the Vietnam War, but fighting obviously continued, and neither was this occasion a singular event: Nguyen (2008:222) notes that it took 202 plenary sessions and 24 private meetings to reach the Paris agreement, which spanned four years and nine months

starting in 1968. The last US troops, apart from 159 Marines guarding the Embassy and 50 members of the Defence Attaché Office, departed on 29 March 1973 (Neu 2005:210).

Following the failed 1965, 1968, and 1972 offensives, the North launched their final offensive in mid-December 1974 with an attack on Phuoc Long province in the central highlands, taking the capital on 6 January, and capturing or killing 5,000 ARVN troops. Unlike in 1972, a war-weary US did not respond with air support for the ARVN, which inspired the North and undermined confidence in the South. Whereas at An Loc in 1972, the intensive advisory and air support provided by the US contributed to ARVN morale, “The presence of the American advisers and the around-the clock tactical air support they controlled demonstrated to the defenders that they were not going to be left to fend for themselves” (Willbanks 1993:32), no such support was given in 1975.

The North proceeded carefully at first, weary of a potential US response, but when no support materialised, they gained momentum. The final North Vietnamese offensive started on 10 March 1975: PAVN troops captured Ban Me Thuot in the central highlands by 14 March, and ARVN troops were ordered to withdraw to just north of Saigon to prevent further losses (Hall 2008:76). This order had disastrous consequences for the ARVN: “the precipitate way in which the decision was made [...] fostered widespread panic and, in turn, led to a disastrous retreat” (Jespersen 2002:453). Of the 60,000 troops and 400,000 civilians who started the retreat on 16 March, only 20,000 troops and 100,000 civilians reached safety (Neu 2005:218). Pleiku and Kontum fell within a week, while the ARVN came down like a house of cards. Hue fell on 26 March and Danang four days later.

However, at Xuan Loc, the ARVN halted the North’s offensive, and “the poor public reputation of the South Vietnamese military, fed by the collapse in I and II Corps, was partially redeemed by the heroic stand of the 18<sup>th</sup>” (Veith and Pribbenow 2004:167). The attack started on 9 April, with a combined assault by tanks, artillery, and infantry, under command of General Hoang Cam. The North Vietnamese used their entire 4<sup>th</sup> Corps, comprised of three divisions, against the 18<sup>th</sup> ARVN Division, who held the city until ordered to withdraw on 21 April. Here, under command of Brigadier General Le Minh Dao, the ARVN “fought heroically and virtually destroyed three North Vietnamese divisions” (Summers 2007:86). During the collapse of the ARVN, Brigadier General Le

Minh Dao's efforts stand out vividly against claims of ARVN incompetence and cowardice.

President Thieu resigned on 21 April and was replaced by Tran Van Huong, who handed over the reins to General Duong Van Minh a week later (Hall 2008:77). Saigon fell on 30 April, the last US personnel having been airlifted from the US embassy roof shortly before. The offensive had been completed in 55 days (Hall 2008:78). General Le Minh Dao surrendered, and was sent to a 're-education camp' along with approximately 400,000 officers and officials of South Vietnam (Thi 2006:133), and was only released on 4 May 1992. The fall of Saigon ended a near-uninterrupted conflict spanning over seven decades, while American military involvement spanned 25 years to the day (Nagl 2008:146).

In popular memory, the Vietnam War was a US defeat. However, the counterinsurgency in South Vietnam was ultimately successful, despite numerous strategic blunders. During the Nixon years, Northern insurgents rather than a homegrown insurgency conducted the insurgency in South Vietnam, and as Tet illustrated, the National Liberation Front (NLF) did not have the active support of the majority of the population in the South. The 1972 offensive and the battle at Xuan Loc in 1975 further illustrated that Vietnamization was successful to some extent. North Vietnam conquered South Vietnam not because the US army was driven out, but because they were not present, and this happened two years after the US withdrawal. However, popular memory and some historical accounts hold that the US lost in Vietnam, mostly because it failed to build up the South to the extent that they could withstand a Northern offensive independent of US support. Herring (2007:342) remarks,

It is not entirely accurate to say (as is often said) that Vietnam was the first war America lost. We did not, in a strictly military sense, lose the war. We were never really defeated in battle. Our armed forces withdrew from Vietnam; they were not forced out militarily. But that in itself is of great significance, making the outcome all the more frustrating and all the more difficult to explain and accept.

South Vietnam may not have been capable of withstanding a Northern offensive – for various reasons including corruption and incompetence – but Communism did not have popular support in the South to the extent that the RVN government could be overthrown and the people be “liberated”. The US had won every major battle,

succeeded in beating the insurgency, and beat back every Northern advance. However, although the military reality in Vietnam indicates a US half-victory abandoned, popular memory remembers the war as a defeat.

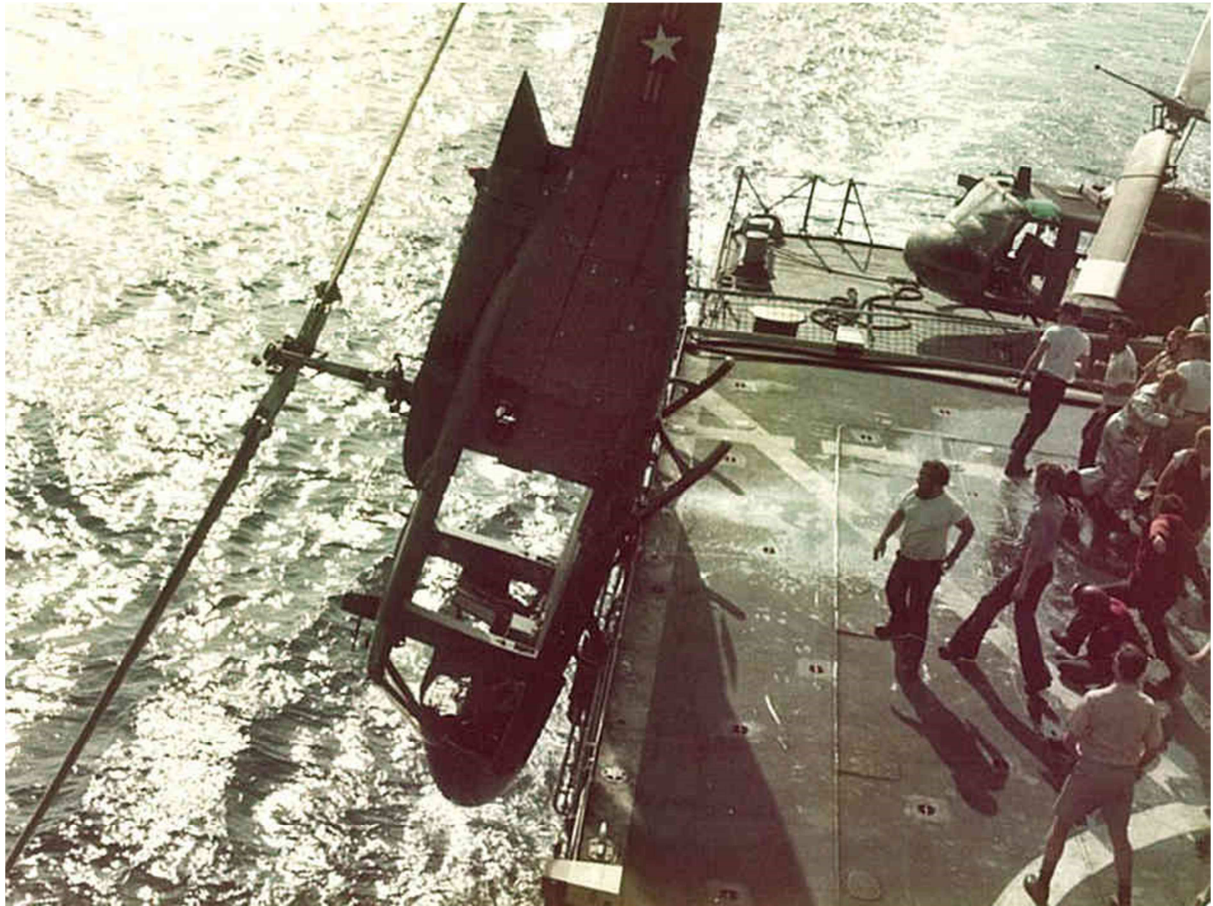


FIGURE 8 ONE OF THE LAST IMAGES OF THE VIETNAM WAR: A HUEY IS PUSHED OVER THE SIDE OF A US AIRCRAFT CARRIER TO MAKE ROOM FOR EVACUEES<sup>iv</sup>



### BEGINNINGS

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The beginnings of the war in Namibia/Angola are as complex as is the case for the Vietnam War. Some historians, such as Steenkamp (1989), date it from 1966 – the year in which the first SWAPO guerrilla attacks prompted the first operations by South African security forces – but the South African Defence Force (SADF) only took control of the conflict in 1974. Steenkamp and Bothma however recognize that the conflict had much earlier origins.

The colony of South West Africa (later Namibia) involved colonial power politics between Britain, Portugal, and Germany, as did the entire Southern Africa. Germany annexed South West Africa in 1883 and declared the area a protectorate in 1884 (Giliomee 2004:198). Walvis Bay was declared part of the British Empire in 1878 and was integrated with the Cape colony in 1884. In 1890, the Caprivi – named after the German general Georg Leo von Caprivi – was given to Germany to provide access to the Zambezi (Bothma 2007:22). Border disputes raged between Germany and Portugal, the latter administering Angola in the north. At the time, South Africa itself was not yet unified, consisting of the British colonies at the Cape and Natal, together with the Boer Republics of the Orange Free State and Transvaal (Zuid-Afrikaanse Republiek or ZAR).

The British conquest of Southern Africa was as difficult as the French conquest of Indochina: the Battle of Isandlwana<sup>32</sup> on 22 January 1879, fought between the British and Zulu armies, stands as the only major defeat suffered by the British against an African army, and David (2011) calls this “the Empire’s longest day,” where 1,350 out of 1,750 British soldiers were killed. Numerous conflicts were fought with indigenous people, for instance between Britain and the Xhosa, Zulu, Pedi, Tswana, and Sotho during the

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<sup>32</sup> The earlier conquest of the inland regions of South Africa by Dutch colonialists (at the time referred to as Voortrekkers) was also fraught with conflict: in October 1836 at Vegkop, Hendrik Potgieter’s Voortrekkers defeated an onslaught by between 4,000 and 6,000 Ndebeles with only 35 men. On 16 December 1838, Andries Pretorius’s Voortrekkers defeated a 10,000 strong Zulu force at a battle that became known as Bloedrivier (Blood River). There were major setbacks as well: The Van Rensburg-trek was wiped out in the Limpopo Valley prior to Vegkop, and prior to Bloedrivier, Piet Retief’s entire section was wiped out by the Zulu king, Dingaan (Giliomee 2004:122-124). Numerous other defeats and victories accompanied the conquest of what would become the Orange Free State and the Zuid-Afrikaanse Republiek (ZAR).

nineteenth century (Grobler 2012:154-165). Not only Britain, but also the Boers were involved in numerous violent conflicts with the local population. On 16 December 1880, the first Anglo-Boer War (1880-1881) broke out between the ZAR and Britain – a conflict won by the ZAR with heavy British losses. In 1895, Britain sponsored the abortive Jameson-invasion of the ZAR, and in 1899 launched a full-scale attack on the Boer Republics that would become known as the South African War or the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902). Initially, British forces performed dismally, and were beaten decisively at Magersfontein, Spioenkop, and Colenso, but the arrival of reinforcements under Lord Roberts allowed British forces to occupy most major cities by June 1900. Pockets of resistance however remained and allowed the continuation of a guerrilla war led by amongst others General Koos de la Rey and General Christiaan Rudolph de Wet, prompting British forces to implement a ‘scorched earth’ policy that killed livestock, burnt down farms and placed civilians in ‘concentration camps’ (see e.g. Townsend (2008:20-21) and Pretorius (2010)). Britain “threw the empire’s seemingly unlimited supply of resources and manpower against the two small Boer republics” (Ellis 1998:55) and eventually deployed 450,000 soldiers against 60,000 Boers (Ellis 1998:56). Over the course of three years, 5,000 Boer soldiers were killed at a cost of nearly 30,000 British soldiers, and along with material costs this made the war the most expensive British war since 1815 (Giliomee 2004:209). After 26,251 Boer women and children, 1,676 men and 14,000 black servants had died in British concentration camps (Pretorius 2012), the Boer republics surrendered. Ellis (1998:56) sees the deaths in the concentration camps as the key to the British victory,

Through reprisals on the Boers’ civilian base of support, the army systematically destroyed the farms of the veldt, rounded up the civilian population, and interned them in disease-ridden detention camps. Through this unrestrained exercise of overwhelming force, the British army eventually brought the Boers to their knees and reclaimed the republics for the empire.

South Africa regained nominal independence when the country became a union in 1910 – now however a unified country. The war and its aftermath would echo through South African consciousness for over a century, and was also relevant to the war in Namibia/Angola and thereafter. In a report on 21<sup>st</sup> century Right Wing terrorism in South Africa, Schönteich and Boshoff (2003:13) for instance note,

The courageous manner in which the outnumbered Republican Boers fought the war against the might of the British Empire, the suffering of non-combatants in British concentration camps [...], the aggressive post-war Anglicisation policy, and the resultant poverty and loss of freedom, left an indelible mark on the national consciousness of the Afrikaner.

Another issue that would become a legacy of the Anglo-Boer War is racial segregation. The British Commander, Lord Alfred Milner, saw post-war reconstruction as an effort to build a unified 'white man's country', and the idea of creating separate homelands for black Africans dates from this era as well (Giliomee 2004:249, 259). Eventually this idea developed into the creation of Transkei, Ciskei, Bophuthatswana, Venda, and Kwazulu – homelands that would play a crucial role in the South African conflict until 1994.

Entering a vast country whose multiple nations were already often at war (Steenkamp 1989:10), the German conquest of South West Africa was as difficult as the British conquest of South Africa. In the north resided the seven tribes collectively known as the Owambos, to the east the Kavangos, and to the centre and south the Hereros, the Namas, and the Oorlam Hottentots, the latter having moved north from the Cape Colony in the nineteenth century. The Germans arrived in 1884 and soon conquered the area between the Orange and Kunene River, calling it German South West Africa, but remained in armed confrontation with the local inhabitants. In 1891, Hendrik Witbooi – an Oorlam – led a three-year-long rebellion against the Germans that ended in Witbooi's defeat (Steenkamp 1989:11). In 1904, Witbooi joined with the Hereros to fight the Germans again, this time with more success. Although eventually defeated and Witbooi fatally wounded, the rebellion had killed 2,000 Germans. The latter, under command of General Von Trotha, responded by killing or driving out two-thirds of the Herero population<sup>33</sup>. German campaigns against the Owambos were less successful, and by 1905, the Germans abandoned the idea of subduing this tribe (Steenkamp 1989:12). In Angola, the Portuguese fought numerous campaigns against the Ovambo tribes – supported by Afrikaners who had settled in Angola since 1881 (the so-called Dorsland Trekkers) (Bothma 2012)<sup>34</sup>.

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<sup>33</sup> For a literary representation of this period, see André P Brink, *The other side of silence*.

<sup>34</sup> This chapter in Ferreira (2012a) does not have page numbers, and therefore subsequent references to this source cannot cite page numbers.

In South Africa, opposition towards British rule did not end with the signing of the Peace of Vereeniging in 1902. Already in 1906, Afrikaners launched the Ferreira Raid from South West Africa with the purpose of inciting a rebellion against British authorities in South Africa. Although it was unsuccessful and resulted in the arrest of the rebels merely days after the raid had been launched, Dederling (2000:44) believes that this event was not insignificant,

The incursion of a small band of Boers from South West Africa into the Cape Colony and their attempt to incite a rebellion against the British seems farcical now, but it caused considerable alarm at the time. Apart from arousing British anxieties about Boer loyalty in the aftermath of the South African War, the raid also indicated a deterioration in relations between Germany and Great Britain. The prospect of another Boer rebellion, supported by the Germans in Namibia, disturbed many decision-makers at the Cape.

South Africa became more directly involved in South West Africa when Britain requested that South Africa invade German-occupied SWA during WWI. Many residents of the former Boer Republics were reluctant to fight under the British crown, but the Prime Minister, General Louis Botha, consented to the British request – without consulting the voters (Bothma 2012). A rebellion soon broke out in South Africa: The commander responsible for the invasion, Manie Maritz, resigned and joined the German forces in South West Africa, and Generals Jan Kemp, CF Beyers, and CR De Wet (one of the main heroes of the Anglo-Boer War) demanded that no South African troops be used for the invasion (Giliomee 2004:333). Giliomee (2004:331) speculates that there may have been an agreement amongst Boer generals that they would attempt to overthrow the British colonial authorities if an opportunity presented itself. Eventually, 11,472 Afrikaners took part in the rebellion – the majority from the Orange Free State – and Schönteich and Boshoff (2003:14) claim the rebellion “virtually resulted in an Afrikaner civil war” (see also Swart (2004)). General Koos de la Rey was mistakenly shot and killed on 15 September 1914, while Jopie Fourie was famously executed by firing squad for high treason. General De Wet’s trial brought major opposition from Afrikaners, and he was eventually released.

Despite such fierce opposition, the operation started on 15 April, and the 6,000 strong German forces surrendered on 9 July (Bothma 2007:20). Ironically, South African English papers supported the invasion entirely (Giliomee 2004:325), while this population



later became the main opposition to the occupation of Namibia. In December 1916, South African forces moved on King Mandume ya Ndemufao of the Ovakwanyama tribe (one of the tribes collectively known as the Ovambos), and killed him. This operation was the first armed clash between South Africans and Ovambos, and resulted in nine South Africans killed in action (Bothma 2012). In 1919, after WWI, SWA was given to South Africa to administer as a protectorate by the League of Nations, and thus South Africa inherited conflicts with the indigenous population as well as border disputes with Portuguese Angola. In 1928, the latter was resolved when the Angolan border moved 10km south (Bothma 2007:22).

WWII brought a subdued echo of the conflicting loyalties during WWI. When Britain again requested South Africa's aid against Germany and the Axis Powers, there was no major rebellion, but some resistance groups (like the Ossewa Brandwag) did launch small-scale attacks on the Union Government. Fokkens (2012:132) writes, "The OB, Stormjaers and other activist elements were deemed a clear and present danger to the security of the state and bombings, the cutting of telephone wires and violent actions were frequent during 1941 and 1942." However, sympathy with Nazism's anti-Semitism was extremely limited (Giliomee 2004:394), and was rather anti-British (see also Marx (1994) and Fokkens (2012)). Marx (1994:196) writes, "The OB's objectives can be condensed into three main and very general-minded epithets – epithets that seem to explain the secret of its initial success: national unity (*volkseenheid*); rejection of South African participation in World War II; and establishment of a republic" (for more information on this period, see especially Fokkens (2012)).

With the collapse of the League of Nations and the emergence of the United Nations, the issue of South West Africa remained unresolved. In 1946, Jan Smuts sought approval from the UN to integrate SWA with South Africa as a fifth province, but the UN refused (Steenkamp 1989:12). Smuts's successor, DF Malan, granted greater autonomy to SWA by transferring more power to SWA's Legislative Assembly in 1949, although SWA was still represented in the South African parliament and South Africa retained control over SWA's affairs. In 1950, the World Court ruled that South Africa was under no legal obligation to transfer SWA to UN trusteeship (Steenkamp 1989:12), and subsequent World Court rulings of 1955 and 1956 did not resolve the issue permanently either. On 10 December 1959, 11 civilians were killed in Windhoek during a protest march when the

police opened fire – an incident Bothma (2012) calls “Namibia’s Sharpeville.” Only in 1974 did the UN demand South Africa’s withdrawal from SWA by 1975 (Giliomee 2004:522), although the UN provided no infrastructure to facilitate the transition. The *coup d’état* in Lisbon on 25 April that year, however derailed the independence process (see below).

Throughout the 1960s, the Namibian question seemed a peripheral issue compared to Apartheid, both nationally and internationally. After the National Party (in conjunction with the Afrikaner Party) narrowly won the 1948 election under DF Malan, pre-existing racial tensions forced the South African government to look further than the English/Afrikaans conflict<sup>35</sup>. In 1943, the Indian and Zulu population clashed in Durban, resulting in a death toll of 147, and a similar conflict had erupted in 1940 in Stellenbosch between the white and coloured population (Giliomee 2004:447). The solution was to be increased racial segregation, leading up to Grand Apartheid under Dr Hendrik Verwoerd that emphasized that every population should rule itself, receive education in its mother tongue<sup>36</sup>, and work in its own community for the development of that community. Verwoerd’s logic can be seen as a questioning of what Allport (1954) proposed as the Contact Hypothesis, which claims that increased contact between different cultures leads to a decrease in prejudice, *if* individuals perceive themselves as of the same status and *if* they work toward a common goal (Moody 2001). Verwoerd came to the same conclusion as later researchers like Smith (1981), Bien (1996), Kalekin-Fishman (1998b), Moody (2001), Gibson and Claassen (2010), and Durrheim and Dixon (2010): increased contact can lead to an increase in prejudice and intercultural tension (and even violence), and thus the solution, as Verwoerd saw it, was to decrease contact (Moody (2001:710) suggests otherwise). Importantly, and contrary to popular perceptions, Apartheid was not the result of racism itself but rather in the interest of security (Giliomee 2004:447): Verwoerd for instance rejected the notion that black Africans are intellectually inferior to Europeans (Giliomee 2004:418). What mattered was decreasing violence, and the

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<sup>35</sup> This conflict is documented in Giliomee (2004).

<sup>36</sup> It is one of the great ironies of Apartheid and SA’s subsequent democracy that this policy created the Golden Era for literature in African languages (e.g. SeSotho, SePedi, isiXhosa, isiZulu, and Setswana). Verwoerd’s vision of mother tongue education created a market and capital for the publication of textbooks as well as literature, while the new South Africa’s policy of integration has left these literatures in severe financial difficulties, and they are now in serious decline and facing extinction.

solution he saw was decreasing contact while creating the infrastructure through which peoples would rule themselves rather than be dominated by another ethnic group.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, African countries were granted independence. Sudan, Morocco and Tunisia became independent in 1956, Ghana in 1957, the Democratic Republic of Congo (then Belgian Congo, later Zaire) in 1960, South Africa in 1961, Zambia in 1964, Rhodesia declared Unilateral Independence in 1965, Lesotho became independent in 1965, and Botswana in 1966. By the end of the 1960s, most of Africa was independent, and enveloped in civil war while serving as proxies for Soviet and US power politics.

This context was crucial to the creation of Grand Apartheid and South Africa's removal from the Commonwealth, together with attitudes towards the coming war in Namibia/Angola. The post WWII NP government believed that voters would vote according to their group identity (Giliomee 2004:448), thus whites had no hope of retaining political power if universal suffrage was instated – a belief validated by post-1994 South Africa, where political parties remain largely ethnically-based. The massacre of white civilians in the Congo and Angola in 1961, along with a home-grown Black Nationalist movement led by the ANC and PAC, helped create fears in the white community that they would become the victims of brutal ethnic cleansing (Scher 2012b:338). In 1962, the PAC launched its armed struggle, and in 1963, Nelson Mandela led the ANC into Operation Mayibuye, confirming the violent Black Nationalist agenda that echoed what was happening elsewhere in Africa. Warwick (2010) writes,

Within the historical context of the period, DRC independence illustrated for white South Africans the sheer impossibility, if not lunacy, of political racial integration. At the very least, ANC and SACP leadership were expecting the white minority, in the wake of the DRC horrors, to accede to political disempowerment and probably a range of socialist experiments which would have brought economic melt-down and at worst DRC-type disintegration and civil war. However profoundly much of this context has shifted 50 years later, it is impossible to conceive of South African whites in 1960 adopting majority rule within a unitary state.

Against this backdrop, Herman Toivo ja Toivo founded the Owambo People's Congress – a Black Nationalist political organization with Communist ties (Steenkamp 1989:18) – in 1957 in SWA, together with Andreas Shipanga and Sam Nujoma. In 1959, the name was changed to the Owamboland People's Organization, and in 1960, the name was changed

once more to the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO). The final change indicated its national aspirations, although SWAPO's power base would remain the Owambo-tribe in the north – by far the largest ethnic group in the country – and Steenkamp (1989:18) writes that during the war around 95% of killed or captured insurgents belonged to the Owambo tribe. Their military wing, the South West Africa Liberation Army (SWALA) was renamed the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN) in 1964, and started training in Algeria, China, Egypt, Ghana, the Soviet Union, and Tanzania from 1963 (Dale 2007:203). Their close affiliation with Communism is evidenced by the names they gave to two of their bases: Moscow and Vietnam (Geldenhuys 2007:72) (the former is Cassinga).

The first fighters entered Namibia from Angola in late 1965 and commenced political "activation" (Steenkamp 1989:21), while a second group infiltrated in February 1966, only to become disorientated and murder two Angolan shopkeepers in the mistaken belief that they were in SWA. In July 1966, a third group attacked Owambo tribal leaders, and fired at a white farmhouse and at the border post at Oshikango (Steenkamp 1989:21). The security forces responded with the first raid of the war (this was known as Operation Wildebeest) when they successfully attacked the SWAPO base at Ongulumbashe – the only 'liberated area' ever established on Namibian soil. Thus, the military conflict had started in SWA/Namibia (although at the time the police assumed responsibility for security).

Angola became a Portuguese colony in 1491, and was declared a Portuguese overseas territory in 1951 (Barlow 2007:14). In 1956, the Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola) (MPLA) formed with Augustino Neto as president and Daniel Chipenda as commander of the army, followed by the formation of a second movement, the União dos Povos de Angola (UPA) under Holden Roberto (christened Holden Carson Graham). The MPLA, an amalgamation of the earlier Partido da Luta dos Afrikanos de Angola (Party for the United Struggle of the Angolan Africans) (PLUA) and the Communist Party of Angola, launched its armed struggle on 4 February 1961, when members attacked the House of Military Detention,

the Sao Paulo prison, and the main police station at Luanda (Stiff 2001:96)<sup>37</sup>. The attacks were repulsed with heavy losses to the MPLA, Portuguese paratroopers killed or captured significant numbers of insurgents, and drove the rest to Congo Brazzaville (Stiff 2001:96). On the same day, Holden Roberto was joined by Jonas Malheiro Savimbi, and sponsored by President Mobuto Sese Soko of Zaïre, and the UPA invaded Angola on 15 March to kill all Europeans and those who they deemed collaborators with the Portuguese authorities (Bothma 2007:38-39). After considerable bloodshed (Stiff 2001:97), the Portuguese authorities drove the UPA forces back. In March 1962, Roberto formed the Frente de Libertação de Angola (National Front for the Liberation of Angola) (FNLA), sponsored by Mobuto, who in turn was sponsored by the US. In April, the Revolutionary Angolan Government in Exile (GRAE) was formed with Roberto as President and Savimbi as foreign secretary. The GRAE was recognized by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) – except for Ghana, Congo Brazzaville, and Guinea – as the only legitimate nationalist movement in Angola (Stiff 2001:97), and recognition continued until 1971. In July 1964, Savimbi fell out with Roberto and founded the União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola) (UNITA). Not one of the three liberation movements was however particularly successful: FNLA was unable to dominate the conflict; the MPLA's Soviet sponsorship was halted in 1973 because they were ineffective, and UNITA did not threaten major cities. By 1974, the Portuguese were able to move some troops from Angola to Mozambique, where the insurgency was more intensive (Stiff 2001:97). Indeed, the CIA's National Intelligence Estimate of 1967 (1967:3) declares,

Liberation groups in Angola and Mozambique have sustained active insurgencies since 1961 and 1964, respectively, but these have been contained by Portuguese military forces largely within unimportant border areas. The would-be liberators

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<sup>37</sup> Peter Stiff is often accused of partiality, although his factuality is almost never questioned. Dale (2007:210) says Stiff writes a “detailed, although hardly impartial or balanced, account” of in this case Koevoet operations. Morris (2006:17) complains that Stiff's works, alongside that of Jan Breytenbach and Piet Nortjé, “don't effectively contextualize the emotional, spiritual or social circumstances of the Border Wars.” She is furthermore “concerned that the lack of humanity in these accounts further perpetuated the war machine mentality and I found these accounts to be unengaging and devoid of humanity. They also maintain stereotypical representations of soldiers and battles.” Stiff's attention to detail however makes him an essential historical source, as found by amongst others Barnard (2006), Escandon (2009), Ferreira & Liebenberg (2006), Jordaan (2006), Melson (2005), O'Brien (2001), Purkitt & Burgess (2002), Scholtz (2006a) and (2006b), Sturges, Katjihingua & Mchombu (2005), Thibodeaux (2007), and Weidman (2006). In following these authors, I use Stiff throughout this thesis, although keeping in mind his critics.

of Rhodesia and SWA have managed no more than sporadic and ineffective terrorism within their homelands. In recent years South Africa's liberation groups, unsuccessful in occasional attempts to infiltrate terrorist bands into the Republic, have conducted only trifling clandestine political activities.



FIGURE 9 JONAS SAVIMBI<sup>Y</sup>

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## MAJOR SOUTH AFRICAN INVOLVEMENT

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As in the case of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels's *Communist Manifesto* and Andrew D. MacDonald's *The Turner Diaries*, the written text sometimes influences the socio-political environment in extraordinary ways. Following the publication of Antonio Sebastião Ribeiro de Spínola's book, *Portugal é o Futuro*, on 26 February 1974, a *coup d'état* in Lisbon removed Portuguese dictator Marcello Caetano on 24 June that year and brought a military junta headed by Spínola to power (Bothma 2007:32-33). The coup sent shockwaves through Southern Africa, where both Angola and Mozambique descended into chaos when leftist members of the coup pressured Spínola to promise independence for Portuguese colonies, while Portuguese security forces were confined to barracks. Rosa Coutinho – a Communist sympathizer who chose the side of Neto's MPLA and appointed MPLA officers in senior positions – replaced the Governor-General of Angola, Santos e Castro. In July, Spínola announced that Mozambique, Angola and Guinea-Bissau would be granted independence, and resigned shortly afterwards (Stiff 2001:99). In Mozambique, thousands of whites fled towards South Africa, Rhodesia, and Swaziland in September, their movement hampered by roadblocks set by the liberation movement Frente de Libertação de Moçambique's (FRELIMO), and many were brutally assaulted and murdered. That same month, pro-FRELIMO gatherings were held in Pietersburg, South Africa, by the Black People's Convention (BPC) and the South African Students' Organization (SASO), where white lecturers were assaulted and cars stoned, before the crowds were scattered by riot police. The following day, the United Nations officially recognized the ANC and PAC in South Africa as liberation movements (Bothma 2007:40).

In Angola, FNLA, the MPLA, and UNITA signed the Nakuru peace agreement on 21 June 1975, but fighting resumed almost immediately. The MPLA drove FNLA out of Luanda, and UNITA left the city in a convoy of 180 vehicles, only to be vanquished by the MPLA at Dondo (Bothma 2007:48). The US, Ivory Coast, Zaire and Zambia asked South Africa to intervene on behalf of FNLA and UNITA, and Operation Savannah was launched to put these organizations in a position strong enough to demand a coalition government and elections after independence on 11 November 1975. Meanwhile, Cuba

sent thousands of troops under Operation Carlota to aid the MPLA, while Soviet support for this organization resumed. The SADF launched Operation Savannah, which was planned and executed in an *ad hoc* manner, with badly out-dated weaponry and inexperienced officers and men in support of even more inexperienced UNITA and FNLA troops with even more out-dated equipment. For instance, Savimbi's entire armoured force consisted of only four WWII Panhard armoured cars, and their crews were only trained for three days before being committed to battle (Steenkamp 1989:44). The SADF could only deploy Eland armoured cars – upgrades of Panhards – and used Unimogs with WWI Vickers machine guns mounted on the back. Nevertheless, major gains were made, at least initially. After crossing the border on 15 October, the SADF support force scored victory after victory, eventually covering 3,159 kilometres in 33 days. However, at Quifangondo, Roberto ignored the advice of SADF officers and insisted on advancing to Luanda in the face of superior enemy defences, and on 11 November, his FNLA troops were decimated when they attempted to cross a causeway while 2,000 rockets rained down on them. This became known as *Nshila was Lufu* – Death Road (Stiff 2001:127). After independence, previously indecisive African governments rallied behind the MPLA, and together with US pressure, this prompted the SADF's withdrawal. However, the SADF was determined to leave Savimbi in a strong position and to counter claims that it had been driven from Angola by Cuban forces, so major battles were still fought during the withdrawal. At the last major contact at Bridge 14 on 9 December 1975, approximately 400 enemy and 4 SADF troops were killed when a combined Cuban/FAPLA force was driven from Catofe (Steenkamp 1989:54).

The operation officially ended on 27 March 1976<sup>38</sup>, when the last South African troops crossed the bridge at Ruacana (Bothma 2007:70). Escandon (2009:26) notes the limited successes of the operation, "From a tactical standpoint, the South Africans and their surrogate forces defeated the MPLA, as well as some Cuban forces, in several battles," but FNLA was fatally damaged and the operation did little to disrupt SWAPO. Establishing a pattern that would be repeated over the next 13 years, the MPLA and Cuba claimed South Africa was driven from Angola, but as Steenkamp (1989:59) notes, "the

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<sup>38</sup> Geldenhuys (2007:45) recalls that the insurgency gained momentum after this date, since SWAPO now had a safe haven in Angola from which to launch cross-border operations.



dates tell a different story” (see also Stiff (2001:149)). Operation Savannah cost the SADF 29 combat deaths (Steenkamp 1989:60), and was at best an important learning experience for the SADF, as is evident from Scholtz’s (2006b:116) account,

Afgesien van die enorme politieke skade wat die veldtog Suid-Afrika berokken het, kan daar geen twyfel wees dat Operasie Savannah ‘n uiters versoberende uitwerking op die Leër en die SAW as geheel gehad het nie. Dis waar, die veggroepe het uitgeblink in mobiliteit en verrassing. Dis ook waar dat die Suid-Afrikaners takties baie knap was, soos onder meer die oorwinning by Brug 14 getuig. Maar die Suid-Afrikaners het ook swaar taktiese nederlae gely, onder meer by Ebo, die verste noord wat die suidelike veggroepe gevorder het. Daar is hulle deur Kubaanse versterkings gestuit en is swaar verliese toegedien.

[Apart from the enormous political damage that the campaign did to South Africa, there can be no doubt that Operation Savannah had a very sobering effect on the Army and the SADF as a whole. True, the combat groups had excelled in mobility and surprise. It is also true that the South Africans were tactically very adept, as illustrated by the victory at Bridge 14. But the South Africans also suffered heavy tactical defeats, including at Ebo, the farthest northern point the southern combat groups progressed to. There they were halted Cuban reinforcements and suffered heavy losses.]

Following the successes and failures of Operation Savannah, the SADF embarked on a rigorous effort to upgrade its weaponry and training (see Geldenhuys (2007:43-44) and Scholtz (2006b:117)). When the next major cross-border operation – Operation Reindeer (1978) – took place, the SADF was much better equipped and trained, particularly after the introduction of the Ratel Infantry Fighting Vehicle (IFV)<sup>39</sup> in 1977. The Ratel became synonymous with the war and an essential part of military hardware, as Scholtz (2006b:118) writes, “Alles in ag genome was die Ratel waarskynlik die beste en mees buigsame stuk wapentuig in die Leër se arsenaal, een waarsonder sy operasies in Angola volstrek onmoontlik sou gewees het” [Taking everything into account, the Ratel was probably the most flexible piece of weaponry in the Army’s arsenal, one without which its operations in Angola would have been absolutely impossible]. The Ratel – along with the Puma and Alhouette – would become as iconic in this war as the F4 Phantom and Huey were in Vietnam.

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<sup>39</sup> Drewett (2008:107) erroneously calls the Ratel a “tank”.



FIGURE 10 RATEL INFANTRY FIGHTING VEHICLE (IFV)<sup>vi</sup>

Numerous cross-border operations that followed throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s – Rekstok, Sceptic, Carnation, Protea and Daisy, Vasbyt 5 and Super, and Askari – followed a recurring pattern of clearing SWAPO bases, sometimes engaging FAPLA, while taking few casualties and capturing vast amounts of equipment. The SADF would then withdraw quickly to avoid international condemnation and to avoid being seen as an occupying force. These were not an invasion of Angolan soil, but were rather carried out to act pre-emptively and take back the initiative.

# Cross Border Operations

This map illustrates the geographical context of the South African-Angolan conflict, highlighting cross-border operations. The map covers parts of Angola, Zambia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, South Africa, and Swaziland. Key locations marked include Lobito, Benguela, Huambo, Cuito, Menongue, Dongo, Cassinga, Cuito Cuanavale, Mavinga, Namibe, Lubango, Mulondo, Cuvelai, Bambi, Mupa, Evale, Cahama, Xangongo, Mongu, Ondjiva, Oshikango, Ruacana, Ombalanto, Eenhana, Oshakati, Ondangwa, Oshivelo, Tsumeb, Grootfontein, Sesfontein, Opuwa, Jamba, Nriquinha, Luiana, Sesheke, Katima Mulilo, Livingstone, Mpacha, Bagani, Rundu, and BUSHMANLAND. The map also shows the Orange River, Kunene River, and Okavango Delta. Numbered red circles (1-9) indicate specific areas of interest or operations. The title 'Cross Border Operations' is prominently displayed at the top.

## BUSH WARS MAP

South African - Angolan Conflict  
1966-1989

FIGURE 11 CROSS BORDER OPERATIONS<sup>vii</sup>

Key:

1. Operation Reindeer: 1978
2. Operation Safraan: 1979
3. Operation Sceptic (Smokeshell): 1980
4. Operation Protea: 23/08/81 - 01/09/81
5. Operation Daisy: 01/11/81 - 20/11/81
6. Operation Super: 1982
7. Operation Askari: 1983-84
8. Operation Modular: 09/87
9. Operation Hooper: 1988

Like in Vietnam, ending the South African war in Namibia/Angola was also a process of peace talks: South Africa agreed to the implementation of UN Resolution 435 in 1978, “but withdrew its agreement when SWAPO demanded – and the Secretary-General of

the UN Security Council granted – assembly points in ‘liberated areas’ in Namibia when there were none” (Barlow 2007:96). Geldenhuys (2007:84) claims that the elections held in December 1978 were free and fair and established a multiracial government, but SWAPO refused to take part and the UN High Commissioner of Namibia, Sean McBride, had already advocated that SWAPO is the only legitimate government of Namibia (Geldenhuys 2007:82); the “sole and authentic representative of the Namibian people (Scholtz 2012:173). It would take another ten years of negotiation and conflict to implement this resolution, during which time thousands of Angolans, Namibians, Cubans, and South Africans lost their lives.

An event that deserves special mention is the attack on SWAPO’s Cassinga base during Operation Reindeer (1978). Steenkamp (2006a:141) writes, “What really happened there, and why, has been obscured for more than a quarter-century by such a fog of propaganda, self-justification, careful omissions, incomprehension, lies and political grandstanding that it has become well-nigh mythical.” Some historians claim that the 4 May 1978 attack on Cassinga base (called Moscow by SWAPO) during Operation Reindeer was in fact an attack on innocent civilians in a refugee camp – a statement taken up by many others, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary. Shubin (2008:226) calls it the “Cassinga massacre” and claims that most of the victims were women and children, and the South African Truth and Reconciliation Committee (TRC) agreed that it was a gross violation of human rights: “The commission finds that Operation Reindeer was a violation of the territorial sovereignty of the republic of Angola and that it resulted in the commission of gross human rights violations against the civilian occupants of the Cassinga Camp” (South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission 1998:55). This view was widely accepted and reproduced in the Western media (McWilliams 2009:40). However, the commander of the operation, Colonel Jan Breytenbach (2002:208), says with certainty that the 608 killed were SWAPO insurgents (see also Barnard (2006:140-146) for a detailed concurring view). Breytenbach remarks that if they had been refugees, they “were the best armed and best trained I have ever come across. They were equipped with AK47s, RPD machine guns, 14.5mm and 12.7mm anti-aircraft guns and even 82mm mortars,” while all the SADF members who took part in the attack whose personal narratives are included in Steenkamp (2006a:173-175) claim that they encountered anti-aircraft fire as they deplaned. Saunders (2008:273) admits

that the base did house PLAN insurgents, “which engaged the oncoming SADF troops in battle,” but claims that there were civilians as well (like the Truth and Reconciliation Committee acknowledges, see Steenkamp (2006a:146)). Steenkamp (1989:77) believes that the majority of those killed were “uniformed SWAPO members,” although since it had been part of a guerrilla war, civilians were necessarily interspersed with combatants. Perhaps the most compelling evidence comes from SWAPO itself, which proposed two conflicting explanations: Sam Nujoma claimed that the SADF attacked a refugee camp with conventional and chemical weapons, then deployed troops who executed and bayoneted the wounded, and took some to concentration camps in Namibia (Bothma 2007:374). SWAPO representative Peter Katjavivi however claimed that the SADF was driven back by the strong resistance offered by SWAPO (Bothma 2007:233). Nujoma’s claim of a “refugee camp” is also suspect in itself: Steenkamp (2006a:192) writes how Owambo civilians that had been on board a bus in SWA when it was hijacked the previous month, begged to be taken home with the SADF soldiers, but the helicopters did not have the capacity to extract civilians.

Following meetings from 13 February 1984 onwards, the Lusaka agreement stipulated that the SADF would withdraw from Southern Angola, while the MPLA would prevent SWAPO using southern Angola as a base. It soon became apparent, however, that the MPLA was unable or unwilling to prevent SWAPO from using southern Angola, and the conflict resumed.





FIGURE 12 SOUTH AFRICAN SOLDIERS IN NAMIBIA<sup>viii</sup>

In South Africa, as in Namibia, the conflict intensified after the mid-1970s. As the PAC and ANC became more militant, so the NP responded with more draconian counter-measures, including detention without trial, torture, and assassinations. The ANC launched a new attempt at making the country ‘ungovernable’ in the 1980s, providing for an unprecedented level of violence. The ANC politicized the youth and attempted to consolidate its powerbase, killed suspected government collaborators and spies as well as members of the opposition in the townships. The ANC’s infamous method of ‘necklacing’ (putting a fuel-filled tire around a victim’s neck and setting him/her alight) killed 399 people between 1984 and 1989, and another 372 were otherwise burned alive (Hamann 2001:127). PW Botha responded by declaring a state of emergency and sending the military into black townships to restore order, effectively opening up an internal front in the war on Communism. This was devastating to the moral of the conscripts, who were now fighting what they considered their fellow citizens rather than an external threat, and the overwhelming majority of opposition to military service stemmed from a

reluctance to be deployed in these townships. Nevertheless, the iron fist of the NP's security forces successfully restored order by the late 1980s, and the state of emergency was lifted before the final battles took place in Southern Angola, PW Botha's replacement by FW De Klerk, and Mandela's release in 1990.

FAPLA's Operation Second Congress in 1985 attempted to drive UNITA from its power centres in southeastern Angola. At the time, Soviet-supplied equipment provided an estimated strength of 30 MIG-23s, 8 Sukhoi-22s, 33 Mi-24 Hinds, 27 Alhouettes, 69 Mi-8 and Mi-17 troop carrier helicopters, 350 T-55 tanks, and 150 T-34 tanks (Stiff 2001:530). This formidable army (in Southern African terms) advanced on UNITA positions near Mavinga. The SADF launched Operation Wallpaper, employing 32-Battalion to "paper over UNITA's cracks" (Stiff 2001:531) with fire support in the form of mortars and with the Valkyrie Multiple Rocket Launcher – a derivative of the Soviet BM-21. The Valkyrie proved devastatingly effective at halting the FAPLA offensive, and at the time the offensive was abandoned, an estimated 1,043 FAPLA soldiers had been killed, at no human cost to the SADF, while one radio intercept indicated FAPLA losses could have been as high as 4,719 (General George Meiring quoted in Hamann (2001:83)). The South African Air Force (SAAF) had also shot down a MIG-23, six helicopters and an Antonov cargo plane flying 11 Soviet officers into Cuito Cuanavale (Stiff 2001:532).

Following the failure of Operation Second Congress in 1985, FAPLA again launched an offensive on the UNITA strongholds of Mavinga and Jamba beginning in July 1987 under the codename Operation Saludando a Octubre (Scholtz (2012:165), Dosman (2008:208)). UNITA was driven back, and South Africa again decided to intervene under the codename Operation Modular, deploying heavy artillery, Ratel IFVs of 61 Mechanized Battalion, and 1,500 soldiers to counter FAPLA's 15,000 troops supported by tanks, armoured cars, artillery, helicopters, and attack aircraft. South African forces would, in the later words of US President George HW Bush, "draw the line in the sand" at the Lomba River, where they, along with UNITA, halted the offensive, and inflicted "a humiliating defeat" (Dosman 2008:210) on the combined Cuban/MPLA forces. As Jan Horn writes in the short story, "Diamantjies van Nell", "Die golf van goddelose kommuniste ondersteun deur die Russiese Migs en Kubaanse kanonvoer moes gestuit word voor hulle die kaplyn bereik" [The wave of godless communists supported by the

Russian MiGs and Cuban cannon fodder had to be stopped before they reached the cutline] (Horn 2012:17).

On 9 September, FAPLA crossed the Lomba River and set up defensive positions 3km south of the river. At first light the following day, the SADF counterattacked and drove them back across the river. FAPLA attempted to cross until the end of the month, when the offensive was finally abandoned. Every attempt had been repulsed, with FAPLA suffering heavy casualties. Special Forces operators directed heavy artillery fire towards the airfield of Cuito Cuanavale, where numerous MIGs and Mi-24 Hinds were destroyed as soon as they left their hangars (Stiff 2001:549). On 3 October, FAPLA lost 600 soldiers to an SADF attack, and all of FAPLA's tanks belonging to their 47<sup>th</sup> Brigade were captured or destroyed, while the SADF lost one man and one Ratel (Hamann 2001:93). Fighting continued throughout October as the SADF went on the offensive, and in early November, the SADF deployed its first tanks since WWII. On 9 November, SADF Olifant tanks destroyed 15 T-55s and captured four, and on 11 November, 14 more tanks were knocked out without loss (Stiff 2001:549). Operation Modular had halted the Cuban/FAPLA offensive decisively and drove them back, and was replaced by Operation Hooper in December. The SADF continued to launch probing attacks and continued to inflict casualties with minimal losses, but since the order was not to lose equipment or suffer casualties, most attacks on FAPLA positions were standoff bombardments by G-5 howitzers. In March 1988, Operation Hooper became Operation Packer as national service members returned home and were replaced with the next group of conscripts (the changing names of operations did not reflect the military situation but rather the roster of conscripts). On 23 March, three Olifant tanks were lost in a minefield at Tumpo during a probing attack, although no loss of life occurred (Geldenhuys 2007:176). This however proved a major propaganda coup for FAPLA and the Cubans, although these were the only tanks ever lost by the SADF. Operation Packer ended in a military stalemate, and Cuban/FAPLA commanders – and their sympathizers – claimed victory, while the SADF and UNITA claimed victory in turn.

Some of the controversy over who won comes from the SADF counterattack at Tumpo on 23 March, where O'Neill and Munslow (1990:82), Windrich (2008:205) and Dosman (2008:221-223) – along with the official Truth and Reconciliation Committee report (1998:59) – diverge from Scholtz (2012), Geldenhuys (2007:177), Hamann (2001:94-



96), Steenkamp (1989:160), and Stiff (2001:547-551), by claiming that the South African aim was capturing the town of Cuito Cuanavale. Williams (2008:103) quotes General Kat Liebenberg, Head of the South African Army at the time, who stated that capturing Cuito Cuanavale was never the objective, as they would have been in the position of the proverbial dog that caught the bus: they did not have the manpower to keep such territory, and thus it was futile to sacrifice lives trying to capture it. Geldenhuys (2007:177-181) supports this argument, noting that President PW Botha wanted the SADF to return to Namibia and not become involved in “a Vietnam” (see also Scholtz (2012:179-180)).

In material terms, Cuito Cuanavale was a clear-cut victory for the SADF. The following table indicates losses suffered by both sides, compiled<sup>40</sup> from Steenkamp (1989:158), Geldenhuys (2007), Williams (2008:113), and Hamann (2001:97)<sup>41</sup>:

Losses	Cuba/MPLA	SADF + SWATF
Men	4785	31
Tanks	94	3
APCs	100	8
Fighter planes	9	2
Helicopters	9	0

FIGURE 13 LOSSES AT CUITO CUANAVALÉ

Thus, for every SADF soldier killed, FAPLA and Cuban forces lost 154; for every SADF tank destroyed, Communist forces lost 30; for every SADF APC destroyed, Communist forces

<sup>40</sup> Holt's (2005:109) figures more or less correspond with these, although he provides a more detailed breakdown. I only include the most basic categories; Communist losses of other vehicles and equipment were even more severe.

<sup>41</sup> Significantly, Dosman (2008) and Shubin (2008), who both claim victory for Cuban/FAPLA forces, do not provide these details. Their interpretation or contestation of these figures would have been extremely valuable.

lost 12.5. FAPLA's Operation Saludando a Octubre was abandoned, and Cuban forces agreed to withdraw from Angola. Shubin (2008:112), however, believes South Africa had invaded Angola in order to conquer it, and quotes Fidel Castro's reference to "resounding victories in Cuito Cuanavale" (Shubin 2008:109) – supposedly because Cuban/FAPLA forces 'halted' the South African 'invasion'. According to Nelson Mandela, in a speech made in Havana on 26 July 1991, victory for the Communist forces at Cuito Cuanavale made his release possible, since "The decisive defeat of the aggressive apartheid forces destroyed the myth of the invincibility of the white oppressor" (quoted in McWilliams (2009:42)). In 2008, the official ANC government account of the battle was also that it was a Communist victory (Williams 2008:124), and General Geldenhuys believes this is an attempt by the ANC to construct its own heroic military history by inventing a connection with the war in Angola, when the connection had in fact been slight (Du Plessis 2009:11). Baines (2008:4) also believes that Cuban military superiority forced the SADF withdrawal from Angola, and notes "the SADF more than met its match when the Angolan (FAPLA) forces were supported by Cuban brigades" (2003:187). Giliomee (2004:550) however quotes Chester Crocker in support of an argument that a stalemate was reached: The Communist advance had been halted, but a counteroffensive would have been too costly (see also Escandon (2009:40) for a concurring interpretation). Giliomee (2004:550) further calls Castro's insistence that it had been a Communist victory a "myth." Siding with the anti-SADF camp, Baines (2008:6) nevertheless claims that the statement that the SADF withdrew from Angola after a stalemate and that the withdrawal from Namibia was strategic is "the official li(n)e." Scholtz (2012:166) writes,

Die omstredenheid spruit voort uit die vraag wie as oorwinnaar uit die reeks operasies getree het. Enersyds beweer mense soos genls. Magnus Malan en Jannie Geldenhuys en min. Pik Botha dat Suid-Afrika gewen het; andersyds sê leiers soos pres. Fidel Castro, min. Ronnie Kasrils en akademici soos proff. Piero Gleijeses en Gary Baines dat die SAW lelik pak gekry het. Dié debat het waarskynlik meer met teenswoordige politiek en ideologiese oortuigings as met objektiewe geskiedskrywing te make. Eersgenoemde groep konsentreer op die SAW-oorwinnings by die Lomba en ignoreer die SAW-teenslae by Tumpo; laasgenoemdes oordryf Suid-Afrika se doelstellings in Angola skromelik om 'n SAW-nederlaag meer aanneemlik te laat klink.

[The controversy stems from the question of who came out victorious from the series of operations. On the one hand, some people like generals Magnus Malan,

Jannie Geldenhuys and Minister Pik Botha claim that South Africa won; other leaders like President Fidel Castro, Minister Ronnie Kasrils and academics such as Professors Piero Gleijeses and Gary Baines claim that the SADF got a terrible beating. This debate probably has more to do with present political and ideological convictions than with objective historiography. The former group concentrate on the SADF victories around the Lomba and ignore the SADF setbacks at Tumpo; the latter exaggerate South African goals in Angola widely to make an SADF defeat seem more acceptable.]

McWilliams (2009:43) remarks, “The view that Cuito Canavale (sic) was ‘Apartheid’s Stalingrad’ was repeated so often in the press that it became the accepted truth.” He (2009:45) continues,

The difficulty in turning conventional actions into strategic success is a reoccurring challenge in hybrid wars. Success in conventional operations in hybrid war is thus necessary but insufficient to obtain strategic goals. Conventional victories not supported by population victories do not prevent the enemy from obtaining support and thus their political goals in the target population centres. Thus, the paradox of winning the battles but still losing the war reappears. The implication is that conventional military operations must be sufficient to convince the opponent you are fighting, his supporters, and a neutral public that they were actually defeated. The means employed in these operations must be such that it does not allow claims of abuse or disproportional violence. Too much force and you are perceived as oppressive, too little force you are perceived as weak. The operations at Cassinga and Cuito Canavale (sic) reveal the difficulty of conventional operations in a hybrid war. At Cassinga, tactical success was recast as South African abuse, whereas the South African inability to obtain to occupy the town of Cuito Canavale (sic) was portrayed as weakness. Such a balancing act is difficult to say the least.

Following this so-called Battle of Cuito Cuanavale and its “uncertain victory” (McWilliams 2009:44), negotiations in Geneva between 2 and 5 April 1988 led to the final withdrawal of the SADF from Angola by 30 August, and an agreement that Cuban forces were to be withdrawn from Angola as well. The Brazzaville Protocol was signed on 13 December 1988, which set 1 April 1989 as the deadline for the implementation of Resolution 435 in Namibia (Barlow 2007:97). Negotiations made every party the winner, and as a result, there is no consensus on “who won,” even more than twenty years later. Windrich (2008:205) calls it “a war without victors or vanquished.” O’Neill and Munslow (1990:95) note how each side, apart from the Angolans on whose territory the battle took place, could claim victory:

The negotiations offered all the parties something to claim credit for. The USSR could reduce its financial and military commitments to the region, help its MPLA ally remain in government and contribute to reducing East-West tension. Cuba could withdraw claiming credit for securing Namibia's independence and inflicting a blow to South African regional dominance, whilst Pretoria could claim credit for removing the Cubans from the region. It could also reduce the heavy burden of defence expenditure, thereby releasing funds for long overdue internal reforms, particularly in black education. The USA not only helped 'roll back' Communism, but also reasserted its regional hegemonic power over both the USSR and South Africa. However, the war between the MPLA and UNITA continues.

Kilcullen (2009b:69) warns against making the enemy aware of one's extraction plan at the company level, but the so-called Nine Day War in Namibia indicates that the dictum can be applied to an entire army's exit as well, "the enemy will use this as an opportunity to score a high profile hit, re-capture the population's allegiance by scare tactics that convince them they will not be protected once you leave, or persuade them that your successor unit will be oppressive or incompetent." The Nine Day War (Operation Merlyn) in Namibia in early April 1989 was an attempt by SWAPO to capitalize on the withdrawal of the SADF, where they "violated the cease-fire agreement and initiated a military offensive to infiltrate additional forces to influence the election" (McWilliams 2009:29). More than 1,600 PLAN insurgents launched a nation-wide offensive on 1 April 1989 in an attempt to take the country by force and subvert the coming elections (see e.g. Jordaan (2006:181-183), Geldenhuys (2007:212-215), and Breytenbach (2002:325)), as happened in Mozambique and Angola in 1975. They were heavily armed with even antitank and anti-aircraft weapons, and managed to knock out 21 CASSPIRs and one Ratel (Stiff 2001:553), but the security forces stabilized the situation, killing over 300 insurgents at the loss of 25 members of the security forces. Shubin (2008:233), however, claims unconvincingly that the intentions of the SWAPO cadres during this time were "absolutely peaceful," that they "had no aggressive intentions whatsoever."

Elections finally took place in Namibia on 7 November 1989, and just days after the collapse of the Berlin Wall (14 November), SWAPO won the UN-supervised election, winning a 57.3% majority (Bothma 2007:297)<sup>42</sup>. The majority of SWAPO's votes came from Owamboland, whereas the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance received the majority of

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<sup>42</sup> Oddly, Ferreira (2012b) writes that the Border War ended in 1990 when previously banned organisations were unbanned.

the votes elsewhere (Stiff 2001:555). The election thus reflected the demographic make-up of the preceding conflict, lending credence to the notion that SWAPO remained an Owambo organization throughout its existence – not a ‘national’ liberation movement.

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## AFTERMATH

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In Angola, the MPLA’s Dos Santos met Savimbi in June 1989 and negotiated a cease-fire, which collapsed soon after. Fighting commenced until the Bicesse Accords brokered peace in 1991, an agreement which “had only become possible because the ending of the Cold War had facilitated US-Soviet co-operation, and also because of a desire by the Soviet Union and Cuba to rein in their financial commitment to Angola” (Barlow, 2007: 98). Angola’s first national elections were finally held in late September 1992. The MPLA received 49.6% of the vote, and UNITA 40.7% (Barlow 2007:98). However, Savimbi rejected the results, and the war resumed. The UN instated sanctions against UNITA – 846/1993, 1127/1997, and 1173/1998 – that had little effect on attempts to reach a peace settlement. From 1993 to 1996, the South African Private Military Company (PMC), Executive Outcomes, employed mostly veterans of the war to help train and advise the MPLA in this continuing war with UNITA, which brought UNITA back to the negotiating table and established a ceasefire (Senekal 2010c:177). International pressure however, forced EO’s withdrawal, the UN took over responsibility for the peace process, and the civil war resumed (for a detailed account of this period, see Barlow (2007) or Van Heerden (2012)). Savimbi was eventually killed during an MPLA attack on 22 February 2002, and the final cease-fire was signed on 4 April. Today, the most obvious remnant of this conflict is the thousands of landmines still buried throughout the south east of the country, with many roads still closed to traffic.

Geldenhuys (2007:244-247) argues that the SADF involvement in Namibia/Angola was successful because the objective was to allow a transition to an independent democratic government in Namibia, rather than a revolutionary takeover using force. He (2007:249) asks whether Namibia could have been a stable country today if it had been one of the “independence babies” of the Cold War, such as Mozambique, Angola, or Zimbabwe. In Scholtz’s (2006a:46) view, the SADF was also successful,

So, who won the war? As far as South Africa is concerned, it can rightly be stated that it did well in terms of its military strategy and tactics. Almost every firefight between the security forces and SWAPO ended in a victory for the former. After Ongulumbashe, SWAPO never succeeded in establishing a single base on Namibian soil. There were no liberated areas where its forces could recuperate and set up an alternative government. The bases in neighbouring Angola were pushed back hundreds of kilometres, and the cadres had to brave a broad strip of land intensely dominated by the SADF before entering Namibia. And there they were chased, pursued and hunted down mercilessly by professional experts, often natives from the north itself. The casualty figures tell a story of SWAPO – at least after the South African countermeasures got under way in the late seventies – getting beaten fair and square.

McWilliams (2009:4-5) acknowledges that the SADF won “the conventional and unconventional military campaign against both domestic and external insurgencies” without attaining their strategic goals, since the information war was lost and South Africa could not garner support on the national and international circuit. Tactical and operational successes were thus “negated” (McWilliams 2009:21). However, SWAPO was never able to establish considerable influence outside its tribal support base of Owamboland, as the election illustrated. In Namibia, as in Vietnam and Malaya, building a legitimate and effective alternative to Communist insurgents is key, but because of Pretoria’s racial policies, any political movement that had the support of South Africa, whether the DTA, UNITA, or IFP, was automatically discredited on both the African continent and globally. Advocating for global support was thus impossible, and regardless of whether SADF counterinsurgency strategies bore fruit in Namibia, the racial politics in South Africa undermined the most important COIN element: the political aspect.

O’Neill and Munslow (1990:86-90) note the importance of Soviet involvement in brokering a settlement, for Gorbachev’s internal reforms also entailed a changing Soviet foreign policy, along with a globally changing political climate. By the late 1980s, “In southern Africa, then, two shibboleths of Soviet policy were finally overturned. One was that the key to change in South Africa lay through the route of armed struggle and the other was the viability of a centralized, state-planned socialist economy” (O’Neill and Munslow 1990:89). This change had direct bearing on the region. In Mozambique, FRELIMO renounced its Marxist-Leninist rule in 1989 and entered into negotiations with Resistência Nacional Moçambicana (RENAMO); in Angola, the MPLA also renounced its

Marxist-Leninist policies, and in South Africa, the ANC was similarly affected and became a capitalist ruling party. What can be extrapolated from O'Neill and Munslow's thesis is that a negotiated settlement was possible for the entire region in the late 1980s, whereas no such solution existed ten years earlier – a point made by Geldenhuys (2007:249) as well. The CIA's intelligence assessment, *Trends in Soviet policy in the Third World under Gorbachev* (1989:iii-iv), states,

Moscow's approach to regional conflicts has changed substantially. Soviet leaders have opened a dialogue with Washington on these disputes, supported settlement processes in several regions, withdrawn from Afghanistan, and urged client states such as Angola, Cambodia, and Ethiopia to move toward negotiated settlements of disputes and conflicts. The Soviets have continued to supply arms to their allies, however, suggesting that, although they want political resolutions, they are not forcing their clients to accept 'peace at any price'.

Scholtz (2006b:130) also relates that the SADF bought the time necessary for a political settlement, since the international climate had changed by 1988/9, and this view is echoed by Jacobs's (2006:41) emphasis on the important role played by the SADF<sup>43</sup>,

In a revolutionary war, the military dimensions can only achieve limited success. By 1989, the government was losing the war on all fronts, except for its military power in comparison with the Frontline States and the revolutionary movements. The end of the Cold War, however, created the circumstances for a new political strategy that would not have been possible had the government also lost the military dimension of the conflict.

Cronjé (1989:20-21) proposes an interesting argument. He claims that literature on the war in Namibia/Angola can be compared with American literature on the Vietnam War because it was for the most part a counterinsurgency, but asserts that in order to contextualise Afrikaans war literature, one also has to consider English and Dutch literature on WWII, because – unlike in Vietnam – South Africa was not defeated in Namibia/Angola: “Daarom sal ‘n ondersoek van Viëtnam sowel as die Tweede Wêreldoorlog nodig wees om ‘n raamwerk te bepaal” [therefore an investigation into Vietnam and WWII is necessary in order to establish a framework]. By the time Cronjé's dissertation was awarded, South Africa had already withdrawn from Angola, but the fact

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<sup>43</sup> Baines (2008:2) strongly disagrees with this view, calling arguments that “the SADF held the line until Communism collapsed and thus made a political transition under more favourable circumstances possible” claims that are “astounding/extraordinary” attempts “to ensure that the victors' version of the story of the ‘Border War’ does not prevail.”

he unquestioningly claims an SADF victory, illustrates the crux of the argument: by the end of the war, the SADF was victorious; defeat only came later.



As was shown in this historical introduction, these wars are highly complex. There is no consensus over what precisely happened, and why, as was shown through different historical accounts. These differing perspectives reflect society's general ambiguity towards these wars: in both the US and South Africa, there were those that supported these wars, as well as those opposed to them, and those that fall on the spectrum in between. The complexities of these wars (the *quantity* of information that has to be considered), as well as the general questioning of accepted truth (the *quality* of information) – together with society's changing attitudes during this time – made these two wars much more divisive than e.g. WWII. To this should be added that in both cases, soldiers often felt that they did not have the support of their respective societies, or politicians. In both wars – and this is especially clear when reading Scholtz (2012) or Codevilla and Seabury (2006) – there is a sense that the politicians would not even allow the soldiers to win; they had to achieve limited objectives with limited means, unlike in previous wars such as WWII.

Literature has always depicted war, but the representation of these highly controversial wars was accompanied by a growing scepticism towards society and the values it teaches, and a growing scepticism towards authority, whether it be politicians, religion, or metanarratives in general. In other words, these wars were accompanied by alienation in a greater sense than previous wars, which provides the impetus for choosing *alienation theory* for discussing some works of literature on these wars. In the rest of this study, the representation of these wars will be discussed from the perspective of alienation theory, against the backdrop of the historical context.

## SECTION C

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### ALIENATION

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#### CHAPTER 5: THE EVOLUTION OF ALIENATION THEORY

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#### INTRODUCTION

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When Kalekin-Fishman (2006:523) notes “the problems that beset people’s lives,” she claims that alienation “is the most wide-ranging of them,” and Simpson (1970:1006) calls Marx’s alienation “the most important disaffection variable in sociology.” Alienation is said to be a widespread phenomenon in the modern world, and Fokkema and Ibsch (1987:44) claim that the similar term *detachment* is one of the keywords of modernism, alongside *awareness* and *observation*. In a discussion of modernism, contributors to Eysteinnsson and Liska (2007) mention *alienation* 31 times (although Seeman is not mentioned once). After World War I, *alienation* indeed became an important concept, particularly in the context of art and literature, where Herman Hesse’s *Steppenwolf* offers perhaps the clearest depiction of an alienated outsider-figure. Bernardo (2011) writes, “In modernist writing we can see both cynicism over the failures of the old order and a tentative hope for the new; we find both a sense of alienation and a need to belong.” Similarly, Jenkins (1994) writes that modernism,

... denies the potential of the human subject either by withdrawing into a private space of subjectivity or by making the subject as inhuman as the forces which confront it in the public world. Either way, the condition of alienation is accepted as a given, whether despaired of or rejoiced in [...]. Fragmentation, plurality, the dehumanisation of the subject, the aestheticisation of experience – all of which remain key elements within the modernist movement, even at its most radical and challenging – emphasise the sphere of individual refusal as the only meaningful sphere.

World War II brought an even greater sense of disillusionment, and it was particularly since the 1950s that *alienation* received significant scholarly attention, most notably through the works of Melvin Seeman.

The term actually refers to “the distancing of people from experiencing a crystallized totality both in the social world and in the self” (Kalekin-Fishman 1998a:6),

and Der Derian (1987:96) observes that the root of the English word *alienation* is the Latin *alius*, meaning ‘other’ (as an adjective) and ‘another’ (as a noun). Alienation is thus a concept that has accompanied humankind through diverse epochs, an ‘affliction’ that has plagued many different kinds of human beings, and a classic example can even be found in the Biblical fall from grace, where man becomes alienated from God. Christ then provides an opportunity for disalienation, for a reunification with God (Prosono 2006:230), as is evident from the Christian call for *community* (Afrikaans *gemeenskap*) with Christ and the Holy Spirit. Implicit in this example is alienation’s reference to a loss, and the assumption of “an original presence or self-possession, somehow estranged” (David 2006:69).

From inception, the term *alienation* therefore implies a *relation* of one entity to another, or rather a *fragmentation* of a relationship – a *misidentification*. Geyer (2002:1024) claims, “the common denominator [of different conceptions of alienation] is a separation that is considered undesirable – whether from nature, God, the means of production, one’s ideology [...], one’s kin or country, etc.” (see also O’Donnell, Schwab-Stone and Ruchkin (2006:216)). For Misheva (1997:804), alienation also implies a relation, “the feeling of being on the ‘other side’, where people experience a severe lack of access to some medium of vital importance. Alienation is the feeling of ‘the other’.” Hermann (2006:33) provides a more detailed definition; he writes that alienation originates,

Waar ‘n breuk aanwesig is tussen die individu, sy werkaktiwiteite en die sosiale gemeenskap waarbinne hy werk. ‘n Teenstrydigheid ontstaan tussen die werklike en verwagte stand van sake. Die individu word deur eksterne magte gemanipuleer, voel onseker oor sy toekoms, ervaar die waardes van die onderneming as vreemd en voel geïsoleer van sy werksgemeenskap en van homself. Hierdie breuk tussen die individu, sy werkaktiwiteite en die sosiale eenheid waarbinne hy werk het magteloosheid, betekenisloosheid, normloosheid, isolasie en selfaliënasië tot gevolg.

[Where a fracture is present between the individual, his work activities and the social community within which he works. A conflict arises between the actual and expected state of affairs. External forces manipulate the individual, who feels uncertain about his future, experiences the values of society as strange, and feels isolated from his community and himself. This split between the individual, his work activities, and social unity within which he works results in powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation, and self-estrangement.]<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Own translation

Alienation is often the product of rapid social change, such as the ends of both World Wars, the Cold War, and the restructuring of global society towards the end of the 1960s. The intergenerational conflict of this latter period, as experienced amongst others in the US, Europe and South Africa<sup>45</sup>, questioned prevailing norms of these societies, where “People are no longer able to interpret their social environment in a meaningful manner and the behavioural and normative patterns they previously took for granted lose their validity” (Huschka and Mau 2005:7). In the former European colonies, existing norms were increasingly scrutinized at this time, as the Civil Rights and Black Consciousness’s ideals, along with Communism and decolonization, spread to subjected peoples worldwide and undermined the colonial narrative that had up to then placed them in an inferior position. In South Africa, the end of the Cold War coincided with the loss of the Afrikaner’s hard-won political power, and revelations and accusations made during the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s hearings cast a critical look on the immorality of the Apartheid system that had been such an important norm for over fifty years. As part of postmodernism’s questioning of absolute values and metanarratives, normlessness in particular “derives partly from conditions of complexity and conflict in which individuals become unclear about the composition and enforcement of social norms. Sudden and abrupt changes occur in life conditions, and the norms that usually operate may no longer seem adequate as guidelines for conduct” (Neal and Collas 2000:122). Norms thus need to be reconstructed, particularly during times of social change, as happened in the 1960s for Americans and Afrikaners in the 1990s, and these two periods form a substantial part of the body of research conducted to explain alienation in general.

#### FROM MARX TO GEYER, LANGMAN AND KALEKIN-FISHMAN

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Vila (1996:247) – who seems unfamiliar with both Marx and Seeman – wrongly claims, “The shattering of previously established values in our century, such as the concept of the world as an ordered reality, the belief in a transcendental Being, and the sense of a

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<sup>45</sup> As evidenced in the new Afrikaans literary movement of the time, called Die Sestigters [The writers of the Sixties], not to mention the Sharpsville uprisings (1961) and the Rivonia trial (1963), which led to Nelson Mandela’s incarceration.

purpose in Life, originated the concept of ‘alienation’”. In her view, alienation is “rooted in existentialism” and involves that “the modern human being feels a sense of displacement, living in a chaotic and fragmented world. As a result, it seems progressively harder for the human person to be able to find order and meaning in life.” As such, she identifies alienation as a purely modernist condition, and misreads the origin of the concept.

The concept of alienation is familiar through amongst others the early works of Karl Marx (see e.g. Petrović (1963), Ollman (1976), Kohn (1976:111-114), Hermann (2006:33-43), and Kalekin-Fishman (2008:536-538)), Emile Durkheim (see Acevedo (2005)), and Robert Merton (1949). Langman and Kalekin-Fishman (2006:1) note the important contribution made by Marx in particular, “[Alienation] was central to Roman law, medieval psychiatry, and, above all, English political economy and Hegelian philosophy. But it was Marx’s critique of alienation as a consequence of wage labour that turned alienation into a topic of lively debate.” Alienation is now often synonymous with Marxist thought, connected to Capitalism and modern post-industrial humankind, but remains a collaborative effort by the above intellectuals.

Karl Marx conceptualised alienation specifically in terms of the social forces of Capitalism<sup>46</sup>, which undermined the worker’s ability to control his own product – labour – and used the term *Entfremdung* to designate when “social forces seem to control individuals” (Gottdiener 1996:146). Sayers (2003:108) writes, “Through work, the worker relates not only to the object of work and hence to the natural world, but also – and through it – to other human beings.” In Marx’s view, the worker in Capitalist society sells his labour to the bourgeois, thus imparting part of himself and becoming alienated from the product of his labour, and ultimately himself and others. Marx (quoted in Wexler (1998:76)) writes, “The more the worker expends himself in work, the more powerful becomes the world of objects which he creates in face of himself, and the poorer he himself becomes in his inner life, the less he belongs to himself.” In his *Economic and*

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<sup>46</sup> Schulte-Sasse (1986:13), not mentioning Seeman, writes that alienation and Capitalism are inextricably linked, “As a term that refers to a material and semiotic organization of modern societies, alienation designates an institutional aspect of the capitalistic system that exists in dialectical dependence upon its opposite, institutionalized modes of overcoming alienation. It probably does not make any sense to talk about alienation in reference to something outside the capitalistic system.” Geyer (1996:xiii) however disputes that alienation is confined to Capitalism.

*Philosophical manuscripts of 1844*, Marx's (1977: 61-74) identifies four dimensions of alienation: from labour, from the products of labour, from self, and from others.

In the first instance, the individual becomes alienated from his labour activities, since he "has no control over the productive process because his movements and tempos are predetermined, designed in a vacuum in an entirely dehumanized way according to the rhythms of the machinery and/or of the bureaucratic organization" (Cauvin 1987:33). For instance, the academic at an education institution has little or no say in the organisation's daily functions, organisation, and support structures. Even if university staff is involved in decision-making processes, their individual inputs count negligibly little. Promotion requirements and job descriptions are dictated by top management, as well as reward structures and budgets – often with little regard for the needs and opinions of staff.

Secondly, alienation is the result "of a break between the individual and the object of his creation" (Cauvin 1987:34). The products of the individual's labour "constitute a separate world of objects which is alien to him, which dominates him, and which enslaves him" (Petrović 1963:421). This "object" for the academic, for instance, can be his publications, which are published through editorial processes outside of his control, while the vast majority of financial rewards go to the organisation; at some universities in South Africa, the organisation earns around R150, 000 per research output, while giving the scholar R7, 500. In this type of situation, the scholar "becomes a means, a moment in the objective process of production, a means of producing commodities" (Cauvin 1987:34).

Thirdly, after being "alienated from his productive activity and from the objects of this alienated activity, the individual is also alienated from himself" (Cauvin 1987:34). Because the individual is alienated from his product, he finds his labour less rewarding, and thus, "something alien." Petrović (1963:421) writes, "Man alienates the products of his labour because he alienates his labour activity, because his own activity becomes for him an alien activity, an activity in which he does not affirm but denies himself, an activity which does not free but subjugates him."

Lastly, alienation from labour and from the self translates to alienation from other people: "The sense of having no control over his work, the product of his work, and himself, leads men to have a sense of powerlessness as a generalized orientation toward

the social world” (Cauvin 1987:36). This sense of learned powerlessness results in the perception that the individual cannot change society, and thus he withdraws from society, e.g. by not voting or participating in decision-making processes. Petrović (1963:421) remarks,

Every relationship in which a man stands to himself, finds expression in his relation to other men. Thus the alienation of man from himself manifests itself as the alienation of man from man. As the worker alienates the products of his labour, his own activity and his generic essence from himself, so he alienates another man as his master from himself. The producer himself produces the power of those who do not produce over production.

Marx’s view on alienation can therefore be represented in the following way:

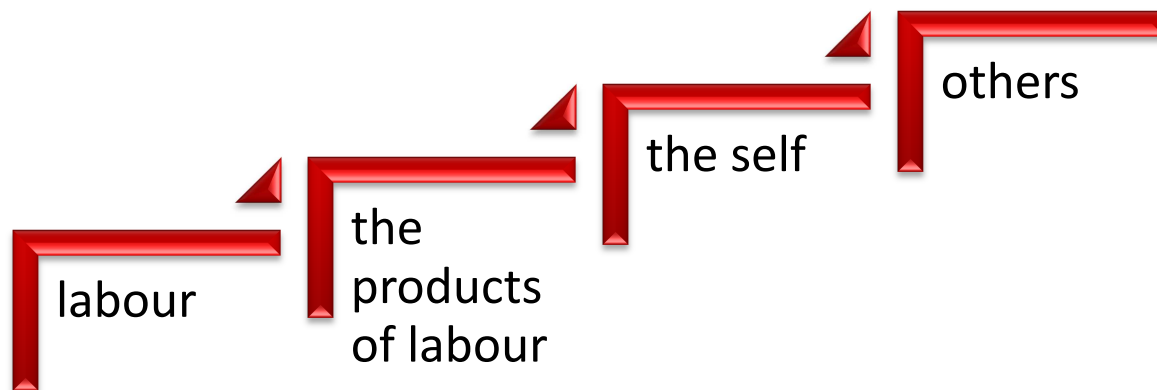


FIGURE 14 MARX’S CONCEPTION OF ALIENATION

The views of Marx, Durkheim, and Weber are consolidated and elaborated in the works of Melvin Seeman, who published his seminal *On the Meaning of Alienation* in the *American Sociological Review* in 1959. This article was particularly influential, as shown by the following citation tree from Thomson Scientific’s Web of Science (<http://apps.webofknowledge.com>):

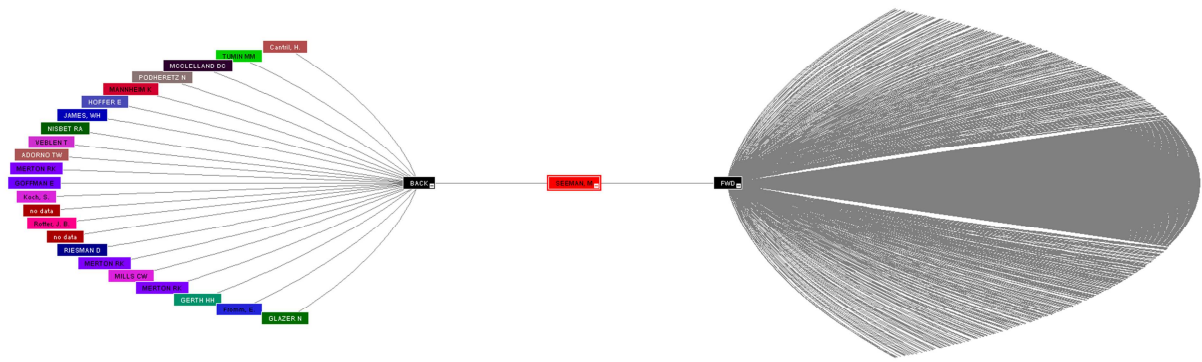


FIGURE 15 CITATION TREE FOR SEEMAN (1959)

On the left are Seeman’s sources; on the right the vast array of studies that cite Seeman (1959) in this database. As is clear from this citation tree, the number of studies that found Seeman’s article useful is so high that the density becomes illegible.

Seeman originally identified five aspects of alienation: *powerlessness*, *meaninglessness*, *normlessness*, *social-isolation*, and *self-estrangement*. He later added a sixth, *cultural estrangement*, by refining his conception of *normlessness* and *social isolation*. According to Roberts (1987:346), Seeman relates powerlessness with Marxian notions of alienation, and “clearly relates self-estrangement to Marx’s ‘false consciousness’.” Seeman’s normlessness, in turn, is based largely on Durkheim’s concept of *anomie*<sup>47</sup> and the writings of Merton on the subject.

Seeman’s six aspects of alienation are “highly correlated with one another” (Middleton 1963:973), but O’Donnell, Schwab-Stone and Ruchkin (2006:217) claim the study of alienation “has been most fruitful when examining separate dimensions of alienation as opposed to considering alienation as a single overarching construct.” In other words: while the six aspects of alienation are all intricately linked, the vast majority of research on the subject used the different aspects separately but in conjunction – alienation as a singular concept has little or no analytical utility. Seeman (1975:93) summarizes his revised categories:

<sup>47</sup> Anomie is “a state of personal disconnection and confusion, a sense of uneasiness” (Salerno 2006:259), or “a state in which norms are confused, unclear or not present” (Huschka and Mau 2005:8).



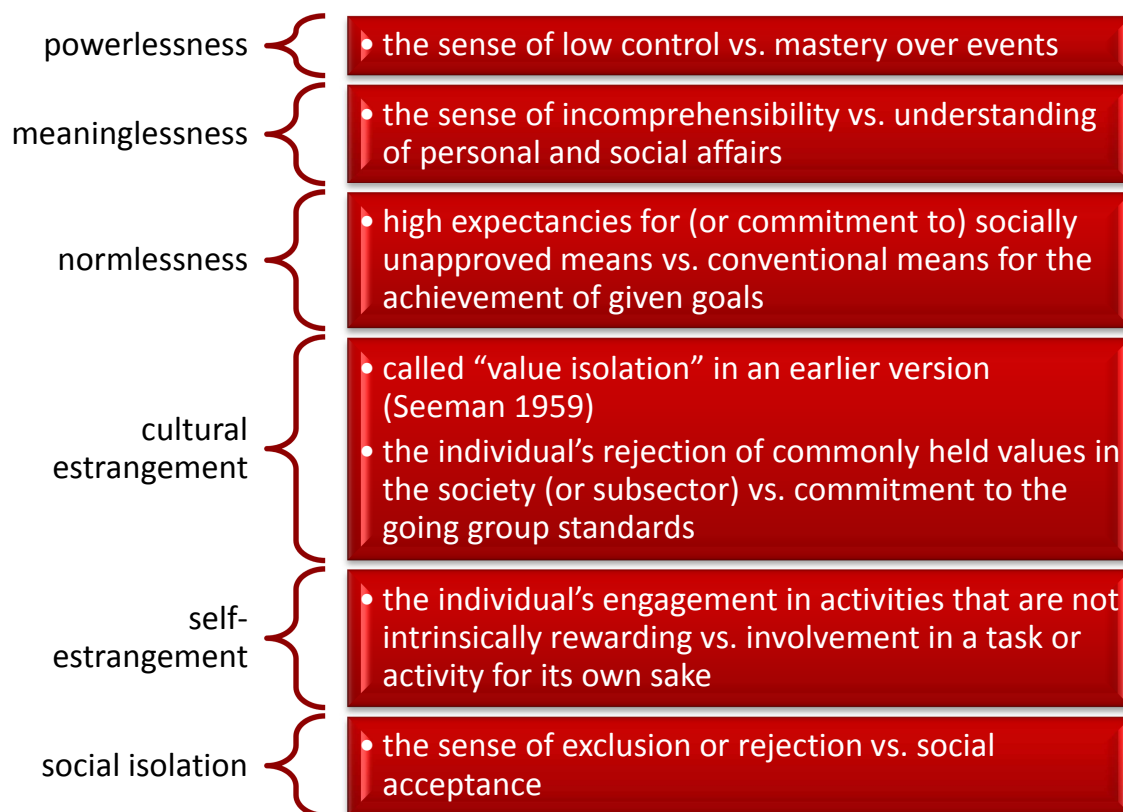


FIGURE 16 SEEMAN'S SIX ASPECTS OF ALIENATION

Seeman was initially part of the boom in alienation research that followed WWII, and Bell (1959:934) goes so far as to claim that this period brought a reappraisal of Marx's theories, "Rarely in the thirties, for example, when the first burst of Marxist scholarship occurred, did one find in the exegetical and expository writings on Marx a discussion of alienation." Case (2008:324) notes how the student protests of the 1960s gave impetus to further studies of alienation, and indeed Seeman himself published on the subject (1972b). By 1973, Mehra (1973: 129) writes that alienation "has become a platform slogan with politicians, an empirical question with academicians, and an area of great concern for the public. In everyday discourse it is said that children are alienated from parents, youth from society and people from government." During the 1980s, however, interest in alienation research subsided,

During the 1980s, as the post-war baby boomers grew older, and perhaps more disillusioned, and willy-nilly entered the rat race, interest in alienation subsided. The concept definitely [...] became less fashionable, although a small but active international core group continued to study the subject in all its ramifications, since the problems denoted by alienation were certainly far from solved – to the contrary, even (Geyer 1996:xii).

This core group went by the name of the Research Committee on Alienation of the International Sociological Association (ISA), who kept alienation studies alive until interest in the field was rekindled in the early 1990s. According to Geyer (1996:xiii) – one of the founders and long-time President of the Research Committee for the Study of Alienation of the International Sociological Association (ISA) – the upsurge of interest in alienation research since the early 1990s was the product of at least three factors. Firstly, the fall of the Soviet empire opened up a new avenue of alienation research in former Soviet countries, mainly for two reasons:

1. The population as a whole was finally free to express its long-repressed ethnic and political alienation<sup>48</sup>, which had accumulated under Soviet rule, while
2. The existence of alienation was no longer denied and instead became a respectable object of study.

Secondly, “though processes of globalization and internationalization tended to monopolize people’s attention during the last few decades, the hundred-odd local wars fought since the end of World War II, which were increasingly covered live on worldwide TV, claimed attention for the opposing trend of regionalization and brought ethnic conflicts to the fore” (Geyer 1996:xiii). Particularly the wars in Bosnia and Rwanda grabbed world headlines, bringing identity politics to the fore – not to mention South Africa’s own transition at the time.

Thirdly, “postmodernism emerged as an important paradigm to explain the individual’s reactions to the increasingly rapid complexification and growing interdependence of international society” (Geyer 1996:xiii).

Geyer (1996:xiv) incorporates postmodernist thought and cybernetics in suggesting a radical reform of alienation theory: “while ‘classical’ alienation research is still continuing, the stress is now, on the one hand, on describing new forms of alienation

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<sup>48</sup> The existence of alienation under Soviet rule is acknowledged by Joe Slovo (1990), who writes, “The unavoidable inheritance from the past and the most serious distortions of socialist norms in most of the socialist countries combined to perpetuate alienation, albeit in a new form. Private ownership of the main means of production was replaced by state ownership.” As shown here, however, Slovo differs from Geyer by claiming that alienation is an “inheritance” of the past, rather than a condition existing independently under Communism.

under the ‘decision overload’ conditions of postmodernity [...], and on the other hand on the reduction of increasingly pervasive ethnic alienation and conflict”. He suggests re-examining Seeman’s original five-aspect model to come to terms with the postmodern environment. Powerlessness is now “no longer being unfree but rather being unable to select from among an overchoice of alternatives for action, whose consequences one often cannot even fathom” (Geyer 1996:xxiii). Similarly, meaninglessness,

... is not a matter anymore of whether one can assign meaning to incoming information, but of whether one can develop adequate new scanning mechanisms to gather the goal-relevant information one needs, as well as more efficient selection procedures to prevent being overburdened by the information one does not need, but is bombarded with on a regular basis (Geyer 1996:xxiii).

In the complexity paradigm, normlessness then becomes an overchoice of norms that can be selected, where the individual is no longer bound to the governing norms of his society. Likewise, self-estrangement occurs where the individual struggles to find his identity amidst an overchoice of alternatives, “The age-old and, for many, frustrating question ‘Who am I?’ cannot be answered anymore, although many still try; or rather, it should be answered differently from one day to the next, and especially from one context to another” (Geyer 1996:xxvi).

Geyer’s radical interpretation of Seeman found only limited followers, with particularly Lauren Langman focusing on postmodernist culture (e.g. Langman (2008)), and although Geyer’s efforts are highly acclaimed, few have followed his line of thinking. Two years after Geyer’s *Alienation, ethnicity, and postmodernism* (1996) was published, however, Devorah Kalekin-Fishman edited *Designs for Alienation: Exploring Diverse Realities* (1998), which took a more ‘classical’ (in the sense used by Geyer (1996:xiv)) approach by not focusing on complexity or cybernetics, but rather continuing Seeman’s research in a post-Cold War, postmodernist context. In 2000, Arthur Neal and Sarah Collas published *Intimacy and alienation: Forms of estrangement in female/male relationships* (2000), which draws heavily on Seeman’s theory in discussing alienation in heterosexual relationships. This was followed by Devorah Kalekin-Fishman and Lauren Langman’s collaboration, *The Evolution of Alienation: Trauma, promise, and the millennium* (2006). This book explores alienation from various perspectives, looking at amongst others the alienated far right (Berlet 2006), and alienation within a globalised

society (Langman 2006). Numerous other studies have been published in academic journals that follow the same vein, such as Kalekin-Fishman (2008) and Costas and Fleming (2009).

Another avenue of research that deserves special mention is that conducted by Catherine Ross and John Mirowsky (and collaborators) at the Population Research Centre at the University of Texas. These authors have published a plethora of studies, such as Mirowsky and Ross (1983), Mirowsky and Ross (1986), Ross and Mirowsky (1987), Mirowsky and Ross (1990a), Mirowsky and Ross (1990b), Ross (1991), Mirowsky, Ross, and Van Willigen (1996), Ross, Mirowsky, and Pribesh (2001), Ross and Mirowsky (2002), Ross, Mirowsky, and Pribesh (2002), and Ross and Mirowsky (2009). In these studies, the authors have explored various facets of specifically powerlessness, mostly in neighbourhoods characterised by violence and disorder, and are therefore an invaluable help in this dissertation.

In South Africa, alienation research is limited, with the exception of Huschka and Mau's (2005) study of social anomie in South Africa, and Dirk Hermann's unpublished dissertation, *Regstellende aksie, aliënasie en die nie-aangewese groep* [Affirmative Action, alienation, and the non-designated group] (2006). This is a noteworthy dissertation, as it explores the effect of marginalisation of minorities within a democracy at a time of transformation, and shows how members of the minority come to feel increasingly alienated from the mainstream, and political alienation becomes rampant.

In general, alienation research thus follows times of major social change, and since the wars in Vietnam and Namibia/Angola were accompanied by major shifts in the societies that produced these counterinsurgencies, it provides a well-suited approach to the representation of cultural change during these eras.

## THE UTILITY AND FUTURE OF ALIENATION

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Horowitz (1996:17) notes how "over time, the concept of alienation lost its global, totalist impact as part of a Marxist arsenal and became part of the tool kit of social psychology and social stratification in the examination of behaviourally rooted conditions." Seeman was the most influential figure in transforming the concept into

such an analytical tool, and his ‘model’<sup>49</sup> remains the approach of choice for scholars such as Catherine Ross and John Mirowsky, Arthur Neal and Sarah Collas, Devorah Kalekin-Fishman, Felix Geyer, and Dirk Hermann.

One result of the evolution and popularization of the concept of alienation has been what Middleton (1963:973) calls “the multiplicity of meanings attached to the concept.” Similarly, Kohn (1976:111) refers to alienation’s “ambiguity of meaning.” The term has a sociological, psychological, economical, legal, literary,<sup>50</sup> and colloquial use, each time used with different connotative and denotative meanings. This ambiguity resulted in a widespread questioning of the concept’s academic utility, and by the 1980s, Seeman (1983) felt compelled to defend the analytical merit of the concept in light of criticism that it had become too broad. Despite its sometimes inaccurate or at other times discipline-specific use, however, Kohn (1976:111) agrees with Seeman, “Alienation is an appealing concept, standing as it does at the intersection of social-structural conditions and psychological orientation.” In this study, the sociological meaning, more specifically Seeman’s, is used.

Literary studies in particular seem unfamiliar with the exact meaning of the term, using it with a multitude of meanings, as Vila (1996:247) writes,

In general terms, critics have used the concept of “alienation” to allude to highly diverse types of experience in Literature. In its most specific use it has been applied to those works where the characters’ estrangement is determined by fate: they are born alienated, and there is no possibility for them to create a sense of order in life; they find themselves in a “wasteland”. This interpretation reflects Sartre’s theories about human life. In a much broader sense, this notion has been used to designate any characters who become estranged when forced to confront the absurd world of the twentieth century. These individuals, unlike the former ones, eventually attain some kind of order and learn to live with the conflict, which is often due to external conditions. It is questionable whether this other type of experience can be really termed as ‘alienation’.

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<sup>49</sup> Although Seeman never claimed to have constructed a model, his work is often interpreted as such (Kalekin-Fishman 2008:538).

<sup>50</sup> As used by the Russian Formalists (Du Plooy 2011), i.e. *ostraneniye*. Šklovskij’s use of alienation in literature however refers to defamiliarization, rather than the sense of *alienation* intended in the current study, “art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone stony. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects ‘unfamiliar’, to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged” (Šklovskij 2004:16).

In Vila's (1996:249) view, "Specifying or de-generalizing the concept of 'alienated self' would help to transform it into a more useful critical tool," but by 1996, ample research had already been published that specify the meaning of the term more accurately, albeit in sociology.

David (2006:69) acknowledges that alienation's ability to apply to seemingly all periods and situations may suggest to some that the concept is weak, but maintains that it is still a useful tool with which to analyse cultural phenomenon. He argues that Marx's "picture of life within capitalism rings true today, even as it did over a century and a half ago," which "may be taken as evidence of the continuing power of alienation as an idea." Langman and Kalekin-Fishman (2006:2) confirms that alienation remains "a viable prism for unpacking the nature of late capitalism and a foundation for social criticism in our times." In a post-9/11 globalized world, alienation should be given special prominence: Islamic Fundamentalism is at least partially the result of alienation (Berlet 2006:129), along with other religious fundamentalist organizations (Langman 2006:192-194), and Gibson (2006) argues that high school shootings, the most infamous of which is probably the Columbine shootings, are also the result of alienation (see also Stephey (2008:12)). Timothy McVeigh, the Oklahoma City bomber, also expressed his deep political alienation during his trial, while in South Africa, the Boeremag bombings of 2002, as well as the various incidents involving Willem Ratte, recall Right-Wing alienation as described by Berlet (2006). Langman and Kalekin-Fishman (2006:3) emphasize, "While bombings and shootings have multiple roots, many are clearly the work of alienated, marginal men, and betimes women, who are sympathetic to, if not actual members of, hate groups that automatically oppose any restraint and any semblance of government."

## ALIENATION AND THE ARTS

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Dalirian (2005) studied alienation in paintings by Edward Hopper and Jackson Pollock, but it is particularly in reference to literature that alienation is often highlighted by scholars. Felix Geyer (2002) often uses literary references to illustrate alienation, such as by referring to Arthur Koestler's *The God that Failed*. Ekerwald (1998:17) in turn claims

that the works of Kafka, Camus, and Ionesco depict alienation<sup>51</sup> in the early twentieth century.<sup>52</sup> In South Africa, Senekal (2009a) also discuss the manifestation of alienation in prose fiction, while Swanepoel and Goosen (2012)<sup>53</sup> discuss alienation in Leora Farber's *The futility of writing 24-page letters*. Literature<sup>54</sup> lends itself well to the study of alienation, since common literary figures such as the outsider and antihero are, after all, alienated individuals.

## CONCLUSION

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Alienation theory has grown from Marx's conception to a useful analytical tool through Seeman, and this chapter has illustrated some of its applications in coming to a better understanding of how the individual relates to the society in which he finds himself embedded. Because alienation has often been seen as "too flexible," it "has also been

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<sup>51</sup> Fokkema and Ibsch (1987:44) write that the three central semantic fields in Modernist literature are *awareness*, *detachment*, and *observation*, but these authors do not write within the context of alienation theory as proposed by Seeman and Marx. Indeed, while Marx's name is a passing reference in Fokkema and Ibsch, Seeman's is not even mentioned. Similarly, both Merton and Durkheim – two other important contributors to alienation theory – are passing references in a single footnote ((Fokkema and Ibsch 1987:236), see also Fokkema (1982:71)). Fokkema never mentions Seeman, nor does he define *detachment* in terms of alienation theory. Detachment and alienation (as used in this thesis) are similar but different concepts, and therefore I do not use Fokkema and Ibsch's *detachment* and Seeman's *alienation* as interchangeable terms, for they are not.

<sup>52</sup> These examples are taken from publications within alienation theory. Alienation, in an unspecified meaning, is an important concept in specifically modernist literature, where Végs (2010:26) for instance writes, "modernism was concerned primarily with the experience of alienation constitutive of modernity" (see also for example Graff (1974:133, 134), Eagleton (1985), Brodkey (1987:398), Wulliger (1992:36, 37), Cunningham (1993:18), Mitrano (1998), and Eysteinnsson and Liska (2007)). However, since modernism's identification of alienation as a literary phenomenon does not specify *what* alienation is, and since no reference is made here to Seeman, this type of alienation should be considered to be something else; it does not stand within the same scientific paradigm. Furthermore, using *alienation* in a generalised sense makes the concept "too flexible" (Kalekin-Fishman, 2006: 283), stripping it of all analytic merit and making it scientifically useless.

<sup>53</sup> Although writing within Marx's alienation theory, Swanepoel and Goosen never mention Seeman, Merton, Durkheim, Kalekin-Fishman, Langman, Geyer, Ollman, or Hermann. This is an inexcusable oversight, since none of the books published on alienation or any of the seminal authors had been consulted for this article.

<sup>54</sup> Charles Malan (1990:18) argues that the works of Etienne Leroux depict alienation, Ohlhoff (1999:221) finds alienation in the poetry of Ingrid Jonker, and it could be argued that much of postcolonial fiction and migrant literature depicts alienation. In this use, almost all literature of the past century depicts alienation. However, as argued in the previous footnote, the key issue is whether alienation is studied *within alienation theory* or merely noted in an unspecified way. Vila's (1996:247) abovementioned call to "de-generalize" the term is symptomatic of literary studies' unsure treatment of *alienation*: alienation is not simply a word that can be used to describe a literary work; it is a *scientific concept*.

consigned to the rubbish heap more than once” (Kalekin-Fishman, 2006: 283), but the fact that publications are still emerging suggests that the concept is still useful and alive. In particular, alienation studies have a history of following times of major change and accompanying social difficulties: first after WWII, during the nineties, and more recently with increasing globalisation.

Prosono (2006:227) says, “Alienation belongs to the logical core of modernity,” and it is here in particular that recent alienation studies have offered interesting insights. Modern capitalism expands the concept of exploitation far beyond what Marx or Seeman envisioned: Capitalism creates culture industries that “profit from the alienation due to globalization and sell it back to the alienated” (Langman, 2006: 189),

*The marketing of cool is, in large part, the commodification of poverty, or of the ‘socioeconomic losers’ of capitalist society. Among the plethora of Poor Chic commodities, or traditional lower-class status symbols turned stylish and often expensive fads and fashions, we find: construction worker boots (Timberland), tattoos (body art), pumping iron (body sculpting), ‘wife-beater’ shirts, Hum-Vee army trucks (Hummers), motorcycles (Rich Urban Biking), bowling shoes (House of Prada), gas station jackets (Emo punk fashion), baggy, beltless hand-me-down pants (Hilfiger designer ghetto), flea market hopping (Shabby Chic) and the barrios of Rio (Favela Chic). These and many other traditional lower-class symbols are now refurbished and culturally upgraded into expensive, stylish and recreational commodities for those desirous of *authentic* (wild, raw, rebel, class savage) alternatives, albeit typically in safe and predictable ‘gentrified’ form (Halnon, 2005: 449) (original emphasis).*

The result is a situation where “the system wastes nothing” (Prosono, 2006: 228):

The ‘system’ not only has the capacity to commodify human beings, their labour, land, artistic productions, and so on, but also to commodify those very elements within it that might be expected to weaken or destroy it. The system can commodify the very alienation it creates in its wake and markets this alienation back to the human beings who suffer from it most (Prosono, 2006: 230).

In late capitalism, the system of exploitation that prompted the founder of alienation theory to first pen his thoughts has evolved to the point where opposition to the system only strengthens it, robbing the individual of even the alienated modes of artistic expression that characterised modernism. The theory has therefore weathered major social change and remains relevant.

The current study will investigate how modern alienation (in terms of Seeman’s conception and his recent interpreters) manifests in American and Afrikaans literature



depicting the counterinsurgencies in Vietnam and Namibia/Angola. The following chapters are based on these six indicators of alienation, with examples from American literature on Vietnam and Afrikaans literature on the war in Namibia/Angola where suitable.

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## CHAPTER 6: POWERLESSNESS

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### INTRODUCTION

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According to Ferguson (2004:2), ‘early modernity’ from around 1550 to about 1700 is “a period dominated by the search for order founded on the direct expression of power.” This view was elaborated in classical bourgeois modernity from around 1700 to 1870, in which “The order of the modern world is held to be generated automatically from the self-motivated and self-interested action of individuals.” From about 1850 onwards, this view of a universe capable of being ordered and classified has gradually eroded, particularly after the two World Wars. This erosion of the myth of human omnipotence implies a reduction in the amount of control the individual ascribes to himself; in the terminology of alienation theory, *powerlessness*.

In this chapter, the first aspect of Melvin Seeman’s six-aspect model of alienation is discussed, particularly how it manifests in literature on the Vietnam War and the South African war in Namibia/Angola.

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### SEEMAN’S NOTION OF POWERLESSNESS

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Building on Marx’s insights, Seeman (1959:784) defines powerlessness “as the expectancy or probability held by the individual that his own behaviour cannot determine the occurrence of the outcomes, or reinforcements, he seeks.” Dean (1961:754) argues that apart from Hegel and Marx, powerlessness was also central to the writings of Weber, who “argued that the worker was only one case of the phenomena; for in the industrial society, the scientist, the civil servant, the professor is likewise ‘separated’ from control over his work.”

Seeman further incorporates Julian Rotter’s distinction between a perceived internal versus an external locus of control, where the former is a personal sense of control, while the latter indicates “a sense that others, fate, chance, or luck determine outcomes” (Mirowsky and Ross 1990b:1516),

In Rotter’s theory we find an important corollary to powerlessness – namely, the idea of “internal” vs. “external” control of reinforcements. This distinction points

to differences (among persons or situations) in the degree to which success or failure is attributable to external factors (e.g. luck, chance, or powerful others), as against success or failure that is seen as the outcome of one's personal skills or characteristics (Seeman 1966:355).

Put simply, "The sense of personal powerlessness is the belief that events and outcomes in one's life remain outside one's personal control" (Ross, Mirowsky, and Pribesh 2001:577). This refers specifically to the conditions confounding modern post-industrial humankind, and despite Communism's claims to the contrary, powerlessness is not confined to Capitalism but exists even under Communism.

Two important issues regarding powerlessness should be noted. Firstly, the terms *internal* and *external* constitute points on a continuum rather than mutually exclusive categories: individuals differ in the degree of internal versus external control they perceive, but this is not an either/or distinction.

Secondly, *powerlessness* refers less to objective conditions than to subjective experience: "The sense of control is shaped by the reality of one's situation and in turn alters it" (Mirowsky and Ross 1990b:1532). Roberts (1987:347) calls powerlessness "a lack of a sense of personal efficacy, rather than the fact of being powerless." This does not imply that powerlessness is wholly subjective; on the contrary, it is a perception rooted in material reality. Powerlessness is "a function of the amount of socioeconomic power the individual possesses in relationship to the amount of power held by others in his frame of reference" (Simpson 1970:1004). Powerlessness is often found in poor communities, where the inability of individuals to escape their circumstances is particularly profound. Mirowsky and Ross (1986:26) note that powerlessness is found in psychology as well: From a behaviourist point of view, 'learned helplessness' "results from exposure to inescapable, uncontrollable negative stimuli and is characterized by a low rate of voluntary response and low ability to learn successful behaviours." For this reason, powerlessness plays a critical role in trauma, as is discussed later.

The environment of a battle lends credence to the view that chance determines outcomes (high powerlessness). Anglo-Saxon texts, written during the violence of the pre-Norman period, are rife with a sense that the individual cannot control whether he will survive a battle or perish. In *The Wanderer*, the poet exclaims, "Fate is inexorable!" (Crossley-Holland 1965:108), in *The Battle of Maldon* it is written, "God alone can say who

of us that fight today will live to fight again (Crossley-Holland 1965:32) and *The Finnsburh Fragment* conveys a comparable sense of powerlessness, “You’ll discover your fate, victory or defeat” (Crossley-Holland 1965:48). *Beowulf* makes similar claims, “hild onsæge, feorhbealu fægum” (line 2076-2077) (“he fell as fate ordained”) (Heaney 1999:66), and “swa him wyrð ne gescraf hrēð æt hilde” (lines 2574-2575) (“fate denied him glory in battle”) (Heaney 1999:81).

The modern battlefield heightens this sense of powerlessness: artillery, machinegun- and automatic rifle fire, aerial bombardments, and missiles have the effect that the victim often does not see his killer, and avoiding death is no longer always a matter of skill as it regularly was in Homeric texts, but frequently just a matter of chance. Indeed, when a soldier is shot with a modern high-power sniper rifle, he will not even hear the shot that kills him, let alone see the sniper. Ferguson (2004:12) writes, “In a radical sense the soldier cannot act. By virtue of his presence in the midst of chaos the soldier, in fact, surrenders to Chance. The conditions of modern warfare are impersonal, the enemy is distant and invisible, death is doled out on an industrial scale” (original emphasis).

As with the abovementioned Anglo-Saxon texts, literature often depicts this sense of powerlessness. For instance, when a medic runs through a hail of bullets and returns unscathed during the so-called Battle of Mogadishu in Somalia (1993), a soldier remarks, “God really does love medics” (Bowden 2000[1999]:268), and in the novel *Storm of Steel*, Ernst Jünger writes, “I stood outside the farmhouse. The next shell fell right in the middle of it. Such are the chances of war” (1996:211). One of the clearest depictions of powerlessness occurs in Pat Barker’s *Regeneration*, where the character Rivers remarks,

...it was prolonged strain, immobility and helplessness that did the damage, and not the sudden shocks or bizarre horrors that the patients themselves were inclined to point to as the explanation for their condition. That would help to account for the greater prevalence of anxiety neuroses and hysterical disorders in women in peacetime, since their relatively more confined lives gave them fewer opportunities of reacting to stress in active and constructive ways. Any explanation of war neurosis must account for the fact that this apparently intensely masculine life of war and danger and hardship produced in men the same disorders that women suffered from in peace (Barker 1992[1991]:222).

Literature on the Vietnam War continues this depiction of powerlessness in a combat environment, as Michael Herr relates in *Dispatches*, “no one expects much from a man when he is down to one or two weeks. He becomes a luck freak, an evil-omen collector, a diviner of every bad sign” (Herr 1991[1968]:91) – again indicating an external locus of control. Feinstein (2011:151) writes, “Wanneer jou oorlewing onseker is, sal bygelowigheid altyd oor logika seëvier” [when your survival is uncertain, superstition will always triumph over logic]. Scheepers (1990:73) also notes how Gawie Kellerman’s *Wie de hel het jou vertel* depicts man’s helplessness in the face of power structures and violence inherent in a war.

Ferguson (2004:4) argues the impact of modern war on the individual, “The soldier was no longer defined by the essential qualities of courage, skill and the possession of a tradition of honour; rather, the soldier was reduced to being an element in a complex mechanism, the overall structure and purpose of which he need know nothing of.” As Marx’s factory worker, then, the soldier on the modern battlefield becomes alienated from his labour, reduced to a function that would have been taken over by a machine if there were such machines available<sup>55</sup>. According to Pakendorf (1993:72), war literature in general depicts this overall sense of powerlessness,

Die beskrywing van veral oorlogsgebeure vanuit die hoek van die gewone soldaat wat ‘n blote rat in ‘n groter masjien is wat hy nie verstaan en waarvoor hy nie juis omgee nie, is seker so oud soos die oorlogsverhaal self. Die tema van die mens se weerloosheid teenoor geweld het ‘n vaste en ook absoluut legitieme plek as topos van die literatuur.

[The description of war events, especially from the angle of the ordinary soldier who is a mere cog in a larger machine that he does not understand and about which he does not care, is probably as old as the war story itself. The theme of man’s vulnerability to violence has a solid and absolutely legitimate place as topic of literature.]<sup>56</sup>

Not only combat itself, but also the entire conflict environment can promote a sense of powerlessness. Von Clausewitz refers to the effect of chance as the ‘fog of war’ or “the

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<sup>55</sup> During the Global War on Terror, this trend has been realised to some extent with drones such as the Predator, Reaper and X-47B replacing fighter pilots.

<sup>56</sup> Own translation

play of chance and probability” (Kinross 2004:41). This is not new to war<sup>57</sup>, as Von Clausewitz recognized, but in counterinsurgency, ambiguity is differently nuanced. The inability of counterinsurgent forces to stop the violence in the entire theatre, the intractability of the military hierarchy, the failure to win the trust of civilian personnel, and the inability of soldiers to influence the decisions of politicians, all create a specific form of powerlessness that goes beyond “the play of chance and probability.” Horn (2004:106) for instance refers to the “volatile, uncertain and ambiguous environment of conflict,” and Betz (2008:512) notes that in contemporary counterinsurgencies, “Even the most skilfully rendered information campaign will backfire with Muslim audiences.” Predicting the effect of information on the conflict environment therefore becomes difficult, resulting in an increased sense of powerlessness. Colonel David Hale, a Task Force commander who served in Panama in 1989, sums up the complexity of what he calls low-intensity conflicts, “When I was a student at [Fort] Leavenworth, I said that [LIC] is too complicated, there are no rules in it, [...] it’s too much an art and not much of a science. It’s too unpredictable and uncontrollable, it’s too tough” (quoted in Kinross (2004:49)). This attitude is depicted vividly in Charles Coleman’s *Sergeant back again* (1980:177), where the narrator says,

Most know they are losing a war that should never have got out of control; and yet, having fought in it, they find it bitter now to stand on the sidelines helplessly, watching it being lost. And the pervasive atmosphere of the second level is this bitter mystery of having been called upon in the most drastic way one moment, only to be forgotten and discarded the next, like the territory so hard won and so easily given up. Why?

## DISORDER AND POWERLESSNESS

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A counterinsurgency is sometimes referred to as an ‘unconventional’ or ‘irregular’ war. These terms refer to regulations designed to structure warfare that were laid down by the West since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, for instance through the signing of the first Geneva Convention in 1864 (Keegan 2004:383), which was part of a series of meetings between 1859 and 1907 to codify international law (Van Creveld 1991a:40). The definition of war

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<sup>57</sup> Sullivan and Dubik (1993:xxvi) write, “Ambiguity, uncertainty, fog, friction, danger, stark fear, anxiety, and chance as well as leadership, courage, comradeship, self-sacrifice, and honor – continue to describe accurately the conditions with which military forces have had to contend and will continue to contend.”

was based on ideas shared by Von Clausewitz; most importantly, war was distinguished from crime “as something waged by sovereign states and by them alone” (Van Creveld 1991a:40). Soldiers were the only personnel licensed to take part in organised violence, but “had to be carefully registered, marked, and controlled [...] were supposed to fight only while in uniform, carrying their arms ‘openly’, and obeying a commander who could be held responsible for their actions” (Van Creveld 1991a:40). This clear distinction between combatant and non-combatant through regulating uniforms and conduct has cultural significance, “only that kind of killing that is carried out by certain authorized persons, under certain specified circumstances, and in accordance with certain prescribed rules, is saved from blame and regarded as a praiseworthy act” (Van Creveld 1991a:90). Counterinsurgencies were however to alter this view of war, as non-uniformed, civilian personnel took up arms and obliterated the distinction between combatant and non-combatant. As Münkler (2005:1) writes, “states have given up their de facto monopoly of war, and what appears ever more frequently in their stead are para-state or even private actors [...] for whom war is a permanent field of activity.” Kilcullen (2010:x) emphasises that it is precisely this “against the rules”-aspect of insurgencies that make them irregular or unconventional, not that this type of conflict is irregular in the sense of *uncommon*. To the contrary, most wars in history have been irregular.

Disorder is therefore inherent in (although certainly not limited to) a counterinsurgency, where soldiers find it difficult to distinguish between friend and foe<sup>58</sup>, and where the distinction between ‘front’ and ‘rear’, and even between ‘war’ and ‘peace’, have become virtually meaningless. Order is “a state of peace, safety, and observance of the law” (Geis and Ross 1998:234), and disorder, “more than poverty, governs the perception of powerlessness” (Geis and Ross 1998:241). An abundance of disorder has been found to promote powerlessness in poor inner-city neighbourhoods, as Geis and Ross (1998:232) argue, “individuals who live in neighbourhoods where social control has broken down, and where drug use, fights, vandalism, graffiti, loitering, public drinking, litter, and crime are common, experience greater subjective powerlessness

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<sup>58</sup> W. D. Ehrhart writes in the poem “Guerilla War,” “It’s practically impossible/to tell civilians/from the Viet Cong... Even their women fight;/and young boys,/and girls.”

than others”<sup>59</sup>. Disorder undermines the individual’s sense of his ability to create a peaceful, structured, meaningful environment, thus emphasizing his powerlessness, and in the view of Mirowsky, Ross and Van Willigen (1996:324), it is these personal experiences of disorder that “teach individuals that personal choices and efforts generally do or do not affect outcomes.”

The Vietnam War is often described as a chaotic environment that offers little hope of viable options to remedy the situation. Herr (1991[1968]:48) relates,

That fall [before the Tet offensive], all that the Mission could talk about was control: arms control, information control, resources control, psycho-political control, population control, control of the almost supernatural inflation, control of the terrain through the Strategy of the Periphery. But when the talk had passed, the only thing left standing up that looked true was your sense of how out of control things really were. Year after year, season after season, wet and dry, using up options faster than rounds in a machine-gun belt [...].

Similarly, Snake in James Webb’s *Fields of Fire* remarks, “You know how it is in the bush, Lieutenant. Sometimes things go *dinky dau*” (2001[1978]:3), i.e. sometimes things go crazy.

Ross, Mirowsky, and Pribesh (2001:571) predict that mistrust will be more common among persons who live in threatening environments characterised by disorder. War is of course a dangerous environment, but importantly, this threat of injury and death is all around in a counterinsurgency – not just confined to the front lines, and confined to the threat posed by uniformed opponents. Schreier and Caparini (2005:48) observe, “Given an asymmetric threat in the nonlinear battlespace, there is no ‘safe’ zone within the area of operation,” and Sergio Catignani (2005:63) relates the situation during the battle for Jenin in April 2002 specifically, “Snipers, mines and booby-traps were literally everywhere: inside cupboards, under sinks, inside sofas, in cars and dumpsters.” Similarly, coalition forces in Iraq and Afghanistan were attacked with Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) that turned innocuous objects like animal carcasses into deadly weapons. All-pervasive threat drones on through narratives of the Vietnam War, with incidents of mines, IEDs, booby-traps and snipers, as Hughes (1998:7) notes,

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<sup>59</sup> It is not implied here that these characteristics are found in counterinsurgencies (although the last few years of Vietnam did involve drug abuse and the like), but rather that the disorder of the inner city is comparable to the disorder of a conflict environment.



“Fear was perhaps the most prevalent factor that characterized the nature of the Vietnam conflict for the ground troops.” Michael Herr (1991[1968]:14) writes,

You could be in the most protected space in Vietnam and still know that your safety was provisional, that early death, blindness, loss of legs, arms or balls, major and lasting disfigurement – the whole rotten deal – could come in on the freakyfluky as easily as in the so-called expected ways, you heard so many of those stories it was a wonder anyone was left alive to die in firefights and mortar-rocket attacks.

In Gustav Hasford’s *The short-timers* (1980:26), Private Joker thinks to himself,

Star flares burst all along the wire, beautiful clusters of green fire. Inside our damp cave of sandbags we huddle elbow-to-elbow in wet skivvies, feeling the weight of the darkness, as helpless as cavemen hiding from a monster. “I hope they’re just fucking with us,” I say. “I hope they’re not going to hit the wire. I’m not ready for this shit.” Outside our bunker: BANG, BANG, BANG. And falling rain. Each of us is waiting for the next shell to nail him right on the head – the mortar as an agent of existential doom.

Snipers are above all important in this novel, particularly as the Marines clear buildings in Hue. Joker thinks to himself, “The snipers zero in on us. Each shot becomes a word spoken by death. Death is talking to us. Death wants to tell us a funny secret. We may not like death but death likes us” (Hasford 1980:36). Similarly, booby-traps are ever-present, “One day a Vietnamese child booby-trapped Chaplain Charlie’s black bag of tricks. Chaplain Charlie reached in and pulled out a bright ball of death...” (Hasford 1980:38). Even the booby-traps are themselves booby-trapped,

Experience and animal instincts warn Alice when a small, badly concealed booby trap has been set on the trail for easy detection so that we will be diverted off the trail into a more terrible one. Alice knows that most of the casualties we take are from booby traps and that in Viet Nam almost every booby trap is designed so that the victim is his own executioner. He knows what the enemy likes to do, where he likes to set ambushes, where snipers hide (Hasford 1980:56).

In Webb’s *Fields of fire*, “The whole black night was a laughing killer, waiting for its moment” (2001[1978]:102). The most vividly depicted incident is where Speedy’s team is pinned down by a 12.7mm heavy machine gun, and they have “Nowhere to go. Nowhere to hide” (2001[1978]:153). Elsewhere, a sniper kills Shag, “They were nowhere. They were everywhere. [...] It seemed impossible. They were everywhere” (Webb 2001[1978]:129) (original emphasis). Typically, calm descriptions indicate a coming storm,

The men on the ridge began screaming and cheering. Down the ridge one man moved off the wide dust trail, stepped down a paddy dike, and began to call to someone who stood near Gilliland. The claydirt belched loudly, a screaming roar, and the man slammed to the dirt, legless. He appeared asleep. Twenty feet away someone else now crawled on stumps of fingers, yelling for Doc Rabbit (2001[1978]:176-177)

In William Eastlake's *The bamboo bed*, booby-traps are part of an environment that "was not neutral as people claim jungles are," but

... ominous, wet and dark, filled with disasters and death, brimming with the poison of darts, booby traps that draw and quarter, castrate and decapitate, ants as large as saucers that move in armies, deadfalls filled with sharp pongee stakes, rotting fish, malaria, hepatitis, dead, and dying soldiers from both sides, heroes, cowards, deserters, sadists, masochists, busted bugles, M79s and malfunctioning Browning machine guns, two hundred tons of inedible shit called C rations, four stranded USO troops, abandoned Patton tanks and rusting American amtracks blown skyward by our own B52s in a successful saturation symposium near Dak Sut, fourteen dead Negro troopers in pink scarves and green berets caught in an NVA crossfire and lying at the bottom of the Bien Tien draw staring up with no eyes at the no sun (1969:191).

*No bugles no drums* by Charles Durden (1976:45) also speaks of the ever-present threats of Vietnam, which also seems entirely hostile,

The ground's muddy. If you don't fall over a fuckin' vine, you slip, twist a knee, pull your back, or just end up on your ass with Ubanski standin' over you glarin'. Then, to make it really interestin', there's mines 'n' booby traps. Some people say seventy to eighty percent of all wounds Americans suffered in Vietnam came from such surprises – bouncin' bettys, deadfalls, punji sticks, claymores, an assortment of homemade goodies as gruesome as anything De Sage ever dreamed of. Thinkin' about that tends to keep you on edge.

One of O'Brien's most moving scenes involves Lemon stepping on a booby-trapped 105mm round in *The things they carried*'s "How to tell a true war story" (1991:69, 78, 79):

They were just goofing. There was a noise, I suppose, which must've been the detonator, so I glanced behind me and watched Lemon step from the shade into bright sunlight. His face was suddenly brown and shining. A handsome kid, really. Sharp gray eyes, lean and narrow-waisted, and when he died it was almost beautiful, the way the sunlight came around him and lifted him up and sucked him high into a tree full of moss and vines and white blossoms.

[...]

In the mountains that day, I watched Lemon tum sideways. He laughed and said something to Rat Kiley. Then he took a peculiar half step, moving from shade into bright sunlight, and the boobytrapped 105 round blew him into a tree. The parts

were just hanging there, so Dave Jensen and I were ordered to shinny up and peel him off. I remember the white bone of an arm. I remember pieces of skin and something wet and yellow that must've been the intestines. The gore was horrible, and stays with me. But what wakes me up twenty years later is Dave Jensen singing 'Lemon Tree' as we threw down the parts.

[...]

Twenty years later, I can still see the sunlight on Lemon's face. I can see him turning, looking back at Rat Kiley, then he laughed and took that curious half step from shade into sunlight, his face suddenly brown and shining, and when his foot touched down, in that instant, he must've thought it was the sunlight that was killing him. It was not the sunlight. It was a rigged 105 round. But if I could ever get the story right, how the sun seemed to gather around him and pick him up and lift him high into a tree, if I could somehow recreate the fatal whiteness of that light, the quick glare, the obvious cause and effect, then you would believe the last thing Curt Lemon believed, which for him must've been the final truth.

Of course, the environment is not only dangerous to Americans, but even more so for the NVA and NLF, as the joke about General Giap and the private from Josiah Bunting's *The lionheads* (1973:28) shows,

One day Giap gives ten privates each an 82mm mortar round and tells them to carry them to the Mekong Delta from Hanoi. It takes them five months to get down there – down here, that is. Two privates, however, are killed by airstrikes, two more by booby-traps, another by a snake, three drown in a river, one is shot. The last one gets to the Delta, gives his mortar round to a VC supply sergeant and walks back home. He gets to Hanoi a year later and goes up to Giap. He tells him he delivered his Mortar round. 'Very nice,' Giap says. 'Here's another one. Get going.'

Numerous personal narratives of the war in Namibia/Angola also depict incidents involving landmines and booby-traps. In Gawie Kellerman's "Van die terroris" [Of the terrorist] (1988:37-38), insurgents link a baby to a hand grenade and leave the child on board an SADF vehicle during the night. Only after some time do the soldiers notice the booby-trap and possible subsequent ambush, and they diffuse the bomb and save the child. In the next story, "Van laaste woorde" [Of last words] (1988:39-41), the narrator writes a letter to the family of a soldier that was mortally wounded when a water well had been sabotaged by insurgents, and in "Van nog 'n keer" [Of another time] (1988:64-65) death comes out of the blue,

Hulle verander die formasie na enkelgelid, dek na beide kante toe uit, want die bos het te ruig geword. Die kort sekelbossies skuur die nerf van hulle stewels af, haak in die kaal stukkies heen tussen die broeksoom en die stewel in. Later begin

die bos oopmaak. Die manne kyk terloops daarna en stap effens vinniger. Die fyn draadjie het soos die trek van ‘n sekelbostak gevoel toe dit die pennetjie uittrek. Die granaat het sy bene weggevat en die manne voor hom se lywe laat ruk van die skrapnel voor hulle geval het. Die eerste koeëls het deur die man op die grond gegaan. Sy stompiesbene het opgeruk van die skok deur sy lyf. Die ander twee het net stil gelê waar hulle geval het.

[They changed the formation to a single file, to cover both sides, because the bush had become too dense. The short brushes scour the vein off their boots, hook into the bare leg fragments between trousers and boots. Later the bush began to open. The men observe this casually and then move slightly faster. The fine thread feels like touching a branch of a small brush when drawing the pin out. The grenade took his legs away and shook the bodies of the men in front of him before they fell. The first bullets went through the man on the ground. His stump-legs shook from the shock through his body. The other two just lay still where they fell.]<sup>60</sup>

Jaap Steyn (1976:9) also portrays the pervasive dangers that are characteristic of northern Namibia, “terroriste, trope, mambas, masjiengewere, muskiete, malaria, landmyne” [terrorists, tropics, mambas, machine guns, mosquitoes, malaria, landmines].<sup>61</sup> Feinstein (2011:71) even notes how landmines were planted on a golf course. In Ben Viljoen’s *‘n Nuwe wildernis*, an elephant cow detonates a landmine, blowing her leg off and shredding her trunk. While the soldiers consider putting the cow out of her misery, an elephant bull storms out of the bush and kills Smit (Viljoen 2013:79-82). Following this incident, Dave Leonard remarks, “Well, there’s the Caprivi for you. An occasion for death every God-given day” (Viljoen 2013:82). While on patrol, the narrator says, “Dit voel asof hulle in ‘n lewende organisme beweeg wat enige oomblik kan toeklap en hulle verswelg. Vlieë in die donker kelke van ‘n insekvtretende plant” [It feels like they are moving inside a living organism that could shut at any moment and swallow them. Flies in the dark cups of an insectivorous plant] (Viljoen 2013:100). On their last patrol, a landmine also initiates an ambush, which leads to a soldier’s death (Viljoen 2013:119-123).

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<sup>60</sup> Own translation.

<sup>61</sup> The landmine in particular posed a major threat, and the South Africans developed numerous experimental and operational vehicles to counter landmines, resulting in odd-looking yet effective vehicles such as the CASSPIR, Buffel, Kwêvoël, Rhino, and Bulldog. From 1974 to 1989, 1,743 landmines were safely removed from Namibia (Geldenhuis 2007:145), and thousands more captured during cross-border raids. Nevertheless, landmines remained a threat throughout the war, particularly to civilians who had to drive in unprotected vehicles. The effectiveness of the landmine (and in contemporary conflicts, the IED) however lies in its *possible* presence: it is the fear that at any moment one could be detonated that makes threat all-pervasive.

In Angola, because South Africa did not dominate the battlefield or airspace with military might comparable to that of the US, soldiers felt particularly exposed to aerial attacks and 23mm anti-aircraft fire directed at ground troops. In Bertie Cloete's *Pionne* (2009:88), the narrator hides behind a tree during a MIG-strike, just hoping and praying that he would not get hit, and in one of Batley's (2007a:60) collected narratives, a soldier remarks, "Life is very fragile then, when death is literally knocking on your armoured door." Clive Holt (2005:83) likens the fighting around Cuito Cuanavale to a grim lottery, "Someone's name was going to come up, but no one knew who it would be. The only thing we knew with certainty was that we were all ticket holders."

### MISTRUST AND POWERLESSNESS

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Powerlessness often leads to mistrust, since "mistrust occurs when resources and opportunities are scarce; disorder, crime, threat, and danger are common; and people feel powerless to avoid harm" (Ross, Mirowsky, and Pribesh 2001:570). People who feel less powerless are more willing to take risks by trusting others, while those who consider themselves powerless avoid trusting others, since the price paid for misplaced trust is generally greater than that paid for unwarranted mistrust. Mistrust affects social isolation, since "People who trust others form personal ties and participate in voluntary associations more often than do mistrusting individuals" (Ross, Mirowsky, and Pribesh 2001:570). The link between mistrust, social isolation and powerlessness results in a positive feedback loop, or what Ross, Mirowsky and Pribesh (2001:584) call a "self-amplifying downward spiral": they (2001:570) argue,

Mistrusting individuals seem to create and maintain the very conditions that justify their beliefs. Their pre-emptive actions may elicit hostile responses, and their diminished ability to participate in networks of reciprocity and mutual assistance may have several negative consequences: Without allies they are easy targets of crime and exploitation; when victimized or exploited they cannot share their economic or emotional burden with others; and by not providing aid and assistance to others they weaken their community's power to forestall victimization and exploitation and to limit their consequences.

In modern wars, not all civilians are simply bystanders: women and children also take part in attacking COIN-forces and contributing to the insurgents' goals. Even the children

that are too young to bear arms, and old women too old and frail to do so, are useful to insurgents as spies, for setting up booby traps, or for ferrying messages or supplies between insurgents. The result is an entire network of collaborators to the insurgents' efforts to undermine the government (Kilcullen 2007a:49). Mistrust soon develops, where every civilian becomes a potential threat. The US Counterinsurgency Guide (2009:10) notes that the perception that every civilian is a potential threat is purposefully cultivated by insurgents, "If insurgents can provoke excessive government action against a population, then death, injury, mistreatment, or dishonour can become a powerful motivator for retributive action against the government."

In representations of the Vietnam War in particular, soldiers recognized the fact that some civilians were also insurgents. Forest in Robert Roth's *Sand in the wind* (1976[1974]:18) "make[s] it a point never to trust a Gook", while Michael Herr (1991[1968]:14) writes, "Saigon and Cholon and Danang held such hostile vibes that you felt you were being dry-sniped every time someone looked at you." A joke relates this hostility towards the entire population, "What you do is, you load all the Friendlies onto ships and take them out to the South China Sea. Then you bomb the country flat. Then you sink the ships" (Herr 1991[1968]:59). Larry Heinemann's narrator in *Paco's Story* also claims, "They were Viets during the day and zips at night; one zip we body-counted one time couldn't booby-trap a shithouse any better than he could cut hair" (2005[1986]:8). Also in *Close Quarters* does Heinemann tell of untrustworthy local personnel, "'Me no VC. No VC.' 'You boo-coo VC, you lyin' slant-eyed, skinny-legged dink'" (Heinemann 2005[1974]:19). Later (2005[1974]:106-108) the character Trobridge randomly accuses an old woman of being a National Liberation Front (NLF) sympathiser without offering any evidence, but after they set fire to her hut, small-arms ammunition detonates, showing that she had indeed been hiding ammunition for the NLF. Also, William Eastlake writes in *The bamboo bed* (1969:157-158), "After you had been in this country for a year you don't trust any Asian: After you have been in Vietnam two months you want to kill them all, three months and you regret that you didn't. Four months and they kill you."

It is in this kind of environment that the infamous My Lai massacre took place: "Frustrated by search-and-destroy operations that led to heavy American casualties from snipers, mines, and booby-traps, the company's officers and troops longed to strike out against their hidden enemy" (Neu 2005:165). When this enemy could not be located, the

high level of mistrust US soldiers had of Vietnamese civilians influenced their subsequent actions directly. This is arguably depicted most vividly in *If I die in a combat zone*, where O'Brien's Alpha Company operates in the area where the My Lai massacre had recently taken place,

There is no reliable criterion by which the GI can distinguish a pretty Vietnamese girl from a deadly enemy; often they were one and the same person. The unit triggered one mine after another during Operation Russell Beach. Frustration and anger built with each explosion and betrayal, one Oriental face began to look like any other, hostile and black, and Alpha Company was a group of men boiling with hate when they were pulled out of Pinkville (O'Brien 2006[1973]:120).

Gawie Kellerman's story, "Van die weeskind" (1988:46-47) relates how impossible it is to know whether the inhabitants of a local village support insurgents or not. Upon searching the village, the soldiers find money hidden under a mattress, but the local elder refuses to say where the bed or money came from. The leader of the SADF soldiers, Caspir, subsequently knocks the old man to the ground and intimidates the rest of the villagers. However, there is no clear indication that they are guilty of supporting the insurgency or not.

Kalyvas (2005:101) observes, "In an environment where it is impossible to tell civilian and enemy combatant apart, it pays to err on the side of violence. Hence the inevitable 'dirty violence' of counterinsurgency." This tendency to resort to 'dirty violence' applies to the insurgents as well, who cannot tell informers from loyal combatants or supporters, such as the SWAPO Spy Drama during the 1980s, during which alleged spies were detained in dungeons and many eventually left to their fate (Hunter 2008:304). In Indochina, the Viet Minh would wipe out a village if they considered the occupants French collaborators (Pottier 2005:142). In Namibia, SWAPO also routinely assassinated black community leaders whenever they collaborated with the South African authorities (Geldenhuys 2007:110), or when they were considered collaborators. In Ben Viljoen's *'n Nuwe wildernis*, the narrator remarks,

Die troepe word rondgestuur van die een kontak na die volgende, net om die soveelste keer getuie te wees van uitgebrande hutte en bokkarkasse vol koeëlgate, geplunderde koekawinkels en die lyke van hul eienaars en die se gesinne, smeulende wrakke en verminkte slagoffers van bakkies wat landmyne afgetrap het, verslae kinders en personeellede voor 'n uitmekaargeskiete skoolgebou. Hulle sien die spore van Oosblok-gevegstewels, maar nooit die draers daarvan nie. Die vyand maak, om die minste te se, 'n gat van militere intelligensie.

[The troops are sent around from one contact to another, only to witness for the umpteenth time burnt huts and goat carcasses full of bullet holes, plundered koekashops and the bodies of their owners and families, smouldering wreckage and mangled victims of vehicles that had detonated landmines, children and staff in front of a wrecked school building. They see the tracks of Eastern Bloc combat boots but never its bearers. The enemy, to say the least, was making military intelligence look incompetent]<sup>62</sup> (Viljoen 2013:92).

As related elsewhere in this study, numerous Afrikaans writers on the war in Namibia/Angola voice mistrust in politicians and leadership. Ramone for instance writes in “Debrief,”

Ek het my as pion gegee vir my land, en toe verander my land die reëls van die spel. [...] Maar nooit weer sal ek my beskikbaar stel om opgelei te word en gebruik te word vir die nuwe orde van die dag nie. Want wat ek wys geword het, is die feit dat die waarheid tydsgebonde is” (2012:16).

[I gave myself as a pawn for my country and my country changed the rules of the game. [...] But never again will I make myself available to be trained and used for the new order of the day. Because I learnt that the truth is temporal]<sup>63</sup>

## STRUCTURAL POWERLESSNESS

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Another aspect of powerlessness discussed by Kalekin-Fishman in particular is that of structural powerlessness. Her research into school systems indicates, “By over-emphasis on norms and obligatory rules, school regulations exercise significant pressure for powerlessness, meaninglessness, and self-estrangement” (Kalekin-Fishman 1998b:47). If this “over-emphasis on norms and obligatory rules” is alienating, the extensive regulations inherent in the military may certainly be alienating as well. Ferguson (2004:5) states,

The soldier’s role is to obey and be responsive to the will and strategic plan of the commander. The soldier is the equivalent unit of combat; interchangeable one with another, ideally identical element in a complex fighting machine the overall coordination and control of which depend wholly on a clearly formulated plan of action.

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<sup>62</sup> Own translation.

<sup>63</sup> Own translation.



One could also note Alexander Strachan's short story "Grootmanne se hoesgoed" in 'n Wêreld sonder grense. Here the narrator returns home after Special Forces training, and finds himself playing the role expected of him by acting macho. Here, society creates the structure that determines the actions of the soldier, not he himself. In Denis Johnson's *Tree of smoke*, this form of powerlessness is oddly cultivated,

In South Carolina they'd treated him like a beast, and he'd survived. He'd grown bigger, stronger, older, better. But having returned to the world he'd grown up in, he had no idea how to sit in a room with his mother, or what to say to this sixteen-year-old girl, no idea how to get through a few days in his life until he shipped to Louisiana for Advanced Infantry Training, until he got back where people would tell him what to do (2007:151).

According to Acevedo (2005:81), "Alienation is a consequence of social relations that deny our innate desires for autonomous action, that dehumanize individuals to the point of absolute degradation, and that emphasize the constraining qualities of capitalist production." A familiar reference in war literature is to the military as a machine, of which the soldier is only one part. Stephen Crane writes in *The Red Badge of Courage* through the character, Henry Fleming, who is stripped of his individuality when he "became not a man but a member" (Crane 2008[1895]:27). The army "enclosed him. And there were iron laws of tradition and law on four sides. He was in a moving box" (Crane 2008[1895]:19) (much like the narrator in 'n Wêreld sonder grense). He "had not enlisted of his free will. He had been dragged by the merciless government. And now they were taking him out to be slaughtered" (Crane 2008[1895]:19).

This theme is echoed in literature on the Vietnam War. Herr (1991[1968]:71) writes, "Our machine was devastating. And versatile. It could do everything but stop." O'Brien also resists the army, which he sees as composed of "cattle or machines" (2006[1973]:43); his drill sergeant "is the army, a reflecting pool of inhumanity" (2006[1973]:48), while in *Going after Cacciato*, Paul Berlin climbs the hill as part of a machine, even acquiring a "mechanical walk" (O'Brien 1988[1975]:160). *Paco's Story* also refers to the "green machine" (Heinemann 2005[1986]:131), and Charles Coleman writes in *Sergeant back again* (1980:28), "The shit the drill sergeants pull on us is designed, apparently, to whip wimpy civilians into mean, green fighting machines." In Gustav Hasford's *The short-timers* (1980:45), the irony of the Marines acting like a machine is unmistakable,

The sun that rises in Hue on the morning of February 25, 1968, illuminates a dead city. United States Marines have liberated Hue to the ground. Here, in the heart of the ancient imperial capital of Viet Nam, a living shrine to the Vietnamese people on both sides, green Marines in the green machine have liberated a cherished past. Green Marines in the green machine have shot the bones of sacred ancestors. Wise, like Solomon, we have converted Hue into rubble in order to save it.

During an attack in Alexander Strachan's *'n Wêreld sonder grense*, SADF soldiers also operate as one large machine (1984:39). In Bertie Cloete's *Pionne* (2009:21) conscripts are called 'pawns' or 'state property' (like the US term *GI* – Government Issue), indicating the absence of possibilities for autonomous action. Etienne van Heerden writes in *My Kubaan*, "One great unit would be formed from all the units: a single machine" (1992:78). On the map (1992:81), the soldiers are merely pins, "if you move with tactical precision, the blue pin on the chart becomes a flag. If you or one of the others in your squad makes a mistake, the pin is removed and all that remains on the chart is a small hole." Also in one of Batley's (2007a:92) collected narratives, a soldier writes, "Action stations! Within minutes the whole camp is firing northwards with everything we've got. Cannons, mortars, rifles, flares. A laser beam display of tracer bullets cutting through the black banks. We become a machine, all of us working in harmony. It is beautiful." Hein Groenewald, the driver of a Ratel that was shot out in Angola on 14 February 1988, writes, "We were instruments of the SADF, machines that had to do things without thinking about it" (Holt 2005:80). Feinstein (2011:16) also notes how the military made him a number, even writing the number before his name, and remarks, "Die onversadigbare militêre masjien sluk jou heelhuids in, liggaam én gees" [the insatiable military machine devours you, body and soul] (2011:205). In a final act of disempowerment, the military even assigned him a career as psychiatrist (2011:18), and when soldiers develop psychiatric problems because of the war, they become "beskadigde goedere" [damaged goods] that are returned to society (2011:21). In his view, this is "'n stelsel wat ons almal gevange hou" [a system that imprisons us all] (2011:52).

This form of powerlessness is particularly rampant amongst the infantry<sup>64</sup>, who are sent into conflict situations with little room for improvisation amidst official army doctrine, political imperatives, and “decidedly restrictive” (Ecklund 2004:49) Rules of Engagement (ROEs). Baines’s (2003:180) statement that “Rules of engagement counted for nothing in Vietnam and Namibia” is an exaggeration: although ROEs are notorious for being open to interpretation, they nevertheless exist and those transgressing these ROEs are usually punished. Bertus Steenkamp for instance writes in the short story, “Amnestie se moer,”

Dit was nie ‘n gewone oorlog nie. Ons het uniforms en wapens openlik gedra, “hulle” nie. Ons was gebind aan reëls en regulasies, “hulle” nie. As ons ‘n oordeelsfout begaan het, het ons ure in die hof gestaan en verduidelik. Leunstoelkritici het jou uitgevra oor elke sekonde. Waaroor jy in ‘n breukdeel van ‘n sekonde besluit het, is jy dae lank ondervra. Ook die internasionale gemeenskap het met groot oë na ons gekyk (Steenkamp 2012:12).

[It was not an ordinary war. We wore uniforms and weapons openly, “they” did not. We were bound to rules and regulations, “they” were not. If we made an error of judgment, we stood hours in court to explain. Critics asked you about every second. The decision you made in a fraction of a second, was questioned for days. The international community also watched us closely].<sup>65</sup>

Van Creveld (1991b:424-425) observes the alienating effect produced by ROEs that become difficult to apply in practice,

Unable to go by the ordinary war convention as expressed in the ‘rules of engagement’, all but the most disciplined troops will find themselves violating those rules. Having killed, by the force of circumstances, non-combatants and tortured prisoners, they will go in fear of the consequences if caught. If caught, they are certain to blame their commanders for putting them into a situation where they are damned if they do and damned if they do not. The commanders, in turn, will wash their hands of the whole affair. There will be atrocities, as at My Lai, and attempts to cover them up. Where the cover-up fails, a few low-ranking members of the military establishment may be turned into scapegoats, enabling their superiors to deny responsibility. As the men cease to trust each other, their commanders and their subordinates, disintegration sets in until, as in Vietnam,

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<sup>64</sup> Even top commanding officers experienced difficulties reorganizing the military. On 1 July 1968, General Westmoreland was replaced by General Creighton Abrams, who “understood counterinsurgency very well” (Nagl 2008:143) but was unable to change the organizational culture of the US military. One senior US Army officer remarked, “I’ll be damned if I permit the United States Army, its institutions, its doctrine, and its traditions to be destroyed just to win this lousy war” (quoted in Nagl (2008:143)). Similar institutionalised doctrine affected the SADF during the war in Namibia/Angola (Scholtz 2012:178).

<sup>65</sup> Own translation.

tens of thousands went AWOL and an estimated 30 per cent of the forces were on hard drugs. Soon they will cease to fight, each man seeking only to save his conscience and his ass.

Even during training, the soldier finds himself utterly powerless to affect his chances. In Gustav Hasford's *The short-timers* (1980:4), Private Joker notices that the drill sergeant's question of whether he believes in the Virgin Mary is "a trick question. Any answer will be wrong, and Sergeant Gerheim will beat me harder if I reverse myself." In *Pionne*, Cloete (2009:19) writes how his corporal asked him if he is taller than the corporal is. "Nou wat sê mens? Sê jy nee, sê hy jy praat kak, natuurlik is jy langer as hy. Sê jy ja, bulder hy: 'O fok, die KO dink hy's langer as die korporaal'" [Now what do you answer? If you say no, he says you're talking shit; of course you are taller than he is. If you say yes, he screams, 'Oh fuck, the cadet officer thinks he's taller than the corporal'].

#### CONCLUSION ON POWERLESSNESS

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To Ross and Mirowsky (1987:257), "powerlessness is a more profound sense of alienation than is normlessness, since normlessness is the perceived gap between goals and *legitimate* means, whereas powerlessness is the perceived gap between goals and *any available* means." Normlessness is not an inferior aspect of alienation, but powerlessness is thus a more *desperate* aspect of alienation, and in conflict environments, a central aspect in the understanding of how alienation functions and hampers efforts of COIN-forces.

Mistrust undermines cohesion within the military itself as well as the objective of winning hearts and minds in a counterinsurgency. By mistrusting civilians and thus treating them as insurgents (searching, detaining, or even assaulting them), soldiers inevitably elicit hostile responses, providing impetus to insurgent propaganda that COIN-forces do not have their interests at heart. This helps insurgents gather more recruits, and continuing attacks from insurgents dressed as civilians justify the mistrust COIN-forces have of the indigenous population. When every man, woman and child can be employed as insurgents, the rift between the counterinsurgents and the population they

are supposed to protect, becomes greater, for “When other people in one’s life have become a hostile army, social alienation is at its deepest” (Mirowsky and Ross 1983:238). The sense of powerlessness created by any conflict environment also leads to PTSD, anxiety and depression, which in turn can lead to social isolation, meaninglessness, and self-estrangement (see below). Powerlessness is thus a central issue in the occurrence of alienation in a conflict environment, and is therefore often represented, along with its alienating consequences, in writings on counterinsurgencies.

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## CHAPTER 7: MEANINGLESSNESS

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In many cases a true war story cannot be believed. If you believe it, be sceptical. It's a question of credibility. Often the crazy stuff is true and the normal stuff isn't, because the normal stuff is necessary to make you believe the truly incredible craziness (O'Brien 1991:70).

### INTRODUCTION

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The search for meaning is an endeavour that has engaged humankind throughout diverse epochs, and literature throughout the twentieth century has been involved with the inability to make sense of the world. Philip Larkin writes in *Ambulances*,

And sense the solving emptiness  
That lies just under all we do,  
And for a second get it whole,  
So permanent and blank and true.

The quest to find meaning in existence is, according to Chowder (2004:60), a vital quest; he calls humankind *homo-hermeneut*, “beings that require a meaningful existence.” To him (2004:64), this search for meaning is key to understanding the role played by religion as well, “The potency of religions in shaping history should be explained in light of their ability to satisfy a need peculiar to the human species: the emotional, intellectual, and spiritual quest for meaning.”

Meaninglessness occupies a special position in alienation theory. Mirowsky and Ross (1986:35) write, “People may require a sense of purpose in their lives – of knowing where they want to go as well as believing they know how to get there. Furthermore, people may require a sense of the inherent significance and value of their existence.” Although meaninglessness is fundamental to modern man's existence, the conflict situation underlines the issues mentioned by Mirowsky and Ross, and specifically the counterinsurgency environment manifests meaninglessness in a particular way, as is discussed in the current chapter.

## SEEMAN'S NOTION OF MEANINGLESSNESS

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Meaninglessness refers to “the individual’s sense of understanding events in which he is engaged” (Seeman 1959:786), and as such this facet represents a central feature of all writing on these two counterinsurgencies. The ambiguity with which both wars were concluded, as discussed in the historical introduction, calls out for a more detailed ‘conclusion’ that would somehow allow the war to ‘make sense’. For historians, the aim is to find ‘the truth’ and to build a coherent narrative of the past for political purposes in the present; for participant-writers, the aim is to understand their place in history, and often to overcome the trauma that had been integral to their combat experience. As such, the literary text functions much like a monument, creating the sense that the event has been concluded and can be summarized within an architectural structure – an attempt to provide *closure*. This attempt is of course always inadequate, prompting different treatments of the same event in an endless quest for elusive closure.

Apart from its correlation with powerlessness, meaninglessness is also highly correlated with social isolation and cultural estrangement, e.g. where soldiers are unable to understand the purpose of their deployment in the conflict environment in general, or in an area in particular, they become alienated from respectively society and from their command structures. Both Vietnam literature and Afrikaans literature on the war in Namibia/Angola are characterized by a depiction of meaninglessness and its alienating consequences, for instance in the use of the short story “in coming to terms with the sense of episodic randomness and strange fragmentation that so often seemed to characterize one’s vision of the actual experience of the war” (Beidler 2007:98). It is not only the trauma of the inability to understand why combat kills some and spares others – an issue of course found in any war – but also why the war is fought, why troops are withdrawn after reaching their objectives as if they had been defeated, as happened during Operation Apache Snow, and why the public seems unwilling to understand what the soldiers had to endure. These issues are inherent in a counterinsurgency, making the representation of meaninglessness multi-faceted.

## LACK OF UNDERSTANDING OF OBJECTIVES

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Seeman (1959:786) notes how meaninglessness correlates with powerlessness, “the view that one lives in an intelligible world might be a prerequisite to expectancies for control; and the unintelligibility of complex affairs is presumably conducive to the development of high expectancies for external control (that is, high powerlessness).” In Vietnam, even basic events seemed to elude a complete understanding, resulting in powerlessness, as Isaacs (2006:295) writes,

Battles were like grenades thrown in a stream – after the splash subsided and the noise died away and the dead fish floated downstream, the stream looked exactly as it had before, running between the same banks with the same force and appearance it had always had. That too helped explain why so many Americans fell so silent after the war was finally over – not just because the subject was painful and divisive, but because the event itself was so elusive and hard to understand.

Like their later SADF counterparts, US soldiers were sent on operations to destroy an enemy, only to be withdrawn after they had reached their objective. After their withdrawal, insurgents would return to the territory, forcing US soldiers to retake land that had previously taken. This objection recurs in representations of Vietnam like a chant. In *Paco's Story* (2005[1986]:5), the narrator recalls, “what we went there for no one ever told us, and none of us – what was left of us that time – ever bothered to ask.” What makes this incident in *Paco's Story* so much more unsettling is that the entire Alpha Company was wiped out at Firebase Harriette, and the only survivor, Paco, would spend the rest of his life with tremendous emotional and physical scars, and the ghostly narrator claims that no one even knew why they died. Michael Herr (1991[1968]:105) suggests that the battle at Khe Sanh in 1968 involved an attempt to construct a meaningful, heroic narrative, which would set it apart from these countless search and destroy missions that seemed utterly pointless, “Khe Sanh said ‘siege’, it said ‘encircled Marines’ and ‘heroic defenders’. It could be understood by newspaper readers quickly, it breathed Glory and War and Honoured Dead. It seemed to make sense. It was good stuff.” Ultimately, however, Khe Sanh would be remembered as another pointless battle where Marines had lost their lives, limbs, and sanity, only to be withdrawn afterwards and the base left to the jungle and the NVA.



In *Fields of Fire*, Webb writes, “You just wander around trying to kill them until they kill you, he mused. Where the hell is the sense in that? It’s insane” (2001[1978]:129). The sense of meaninglessness extends to the prayer, “Dear Lord, whose wisdom surpasses all understanding...” Later (2001[1978]:131), Goodrich remarks, “No great cause. It makes less and less sense.” Even later, an operation is just “Inviting an enemy attack much as a worm seeks to attract a fish: mindlessly, at someone else’s urging, for someone else’s reasons” (2001[1978]:170). When Hodges subsequently needs to take a ridge, he finds that the ridge has no name, “He grinned. Appropriate. The battle for No-Name Ridge” (2001[1978]:174). However, this sentiment is not confined to American objectives: the South Vietnamese character, Dan, became disillusioned with Communist propaganda, which he calls “the fraud” (2001[1978]:199). He subsequently surrendered to US forces through the Chieu Hoi program, and the National Liberation Front (NLF) then killed his family. This sentiment of questioning *all* objectives of politicians is also found in Charles Coleman’s *Sergeant back again* (1980:136),

[Giap] was schooled at the Lycee Nationale in Hue. A bit ironic or perhaps just coincidental? – that both Ngo Dinh Diem and, yes, Ho Chi Minh attended there too, although Giap himself did not meet Ho Chi Minh personally until 1941, at the Eighth Indochinese Communist Party meeting. Even more remarkable than the fact that these three attended the same school was the arrest of Giap in the Fall of 1930 by the French Colonial Police. Giap was leading a student demonstration protesting the French-supervised militia troops. The French-led troops halted the Nghia Hanh. Remarkable because it was to be Giap’s own crack division, the 325<sup>th</sup>, that was to crush another peasant revolt twenty-six years later in the very same city. The farmers were protesting the same issues the arbitrary and harsh land-reform measures this time imposed not by the French but by Hanoi. Add up the ‘truths’ in that one for yourself. That’s one reason I went to OCS. Why I went into Intelligence. Interesting man, General Giap. A study in paradox.

O’Brien (1991:13) also writes in *The Things they Carried*, “By daylight they took sniper fire, at night they were mortared, but it was not battle, it was just the endless march, village to village, without purpose, nothing won or lost.” Through the character of Frances Compella, Josiah Bunting writes in *The lionheads* (1973:203), “For what, for what? . . . This hideous war ... Is there a purpose? ... What did he die for? For nothing? What did he do?” In *Sergeant back again*, Charles Coleman (1980:244) writes,

Nobody died knowing what they were dying for. There wasn’t any purpose to it, and they knew it. That’s what was so horrible. And the ones maimed and missing limbs, they just couldn’t really accept it. Because they weren’t sure what they

were doing in Nam in the first place. And then to lose an arm, or legs .... That's why there's such hatred in the cripples. And they couldn't even come back to a grateful homeland. Just wasted.

An iconic instance of this trend in Vietnam is Operation Apache Snow in the A Shau valley, during which the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division engaged PAVN forces in an assault on Ap Bia mountain (Hill 937) – subsequently called “Hamburger Hill” (Nagl 2008:144) (of course referencing Pork Chop Hill during the war in Korea). Fifty-six Americans died and 420 were wounded while taking the hill under fierce resistance, only to be withdrawn afterwards.

The SADF experienced similar withdrawals after their objectives had been achieved, particularly during Operation Savannah (1975) and Operations Modular, Hooper and Packer (1987-1988), leaving troops with the question of why they had to invade Angola in the first place. In Ben Viljoen's *‘n Nuwe wildernis*, the chaplain voices the reasons for going to war,

Ons het ‘n keuse, manne [...], óf ons stuit die kommuniste hier, tweeduisend kilometer van ons landsgrens af, en ons doen dit nou, óf ons los dit vir later en probeer hulle dan van die deure van ons huise in die Republiek weg hou. Wat sou julle verkies? Onthou, die kommunistiese vyand is nie net geïnteresseerd in ons land nie. Hulle is daarop uit om die Westerse kultuur te vernietig, die vryemarkstelsel, die Christendom. Weet dus dat julle hier in die bos net soveel soldate is vir die hemelse koninkryk as vir ons vaderland. Kom ons bid (Viljoen 2013:71).

[We have a choice, men [...], either we stop the Communists, two thousand miles from our border, and we do it now, or we will leave that for later and try stopping them at the doors of our homes in the Republic. What would you prefer? Remember, the Communist enemy is not only interested in our country. They are aiming to destroy Western culture, the free market system, Christianity. Know that you are here in the bush as soldiers for the kingdom of heaven just as much as you are here for our homeland. Let us pray]<sup>66</sup>

Following this, Leo remarks, “Om te dink daar was ‘n tyd toe ek daai bullshit geglo het” [To think there was a time when I believed that bullshit]. Later, when asked what they were doing on the border, Leo answers, “ons voer die brommers” [we feed the flies] (Viljoen 2013:102). Similarly, the character Hercules remarks in Kees van Dijkhorst's “Vir

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<sup>66</sup> Own translation.

volk en vaderland” (2012:154), “Ons kan nie hierdie oorlog wen teen die hele bevolking van die land nie. Dis nie ‘n regverdige oorlog nie. Dit gaan bloot om Suid-Afrika se belange. Ons moet huis toe” [We cannot win this war against the entire population of the country. It’s not a just war. It’s simply to defend South Africa’s interests. We need to go home].<sup>67</sup>

In the short story, “Amnestie se moer” by Bertus Steenkamp, the narrator suggests that they did believe in the cause, but were misled,

Ons was oortuig dat ons veg vir die Westerse wêreld teen kommunisme. Maar heelaas, vandag is daardie terroriste lede van ‘n gerespekteerde regering. Maar hoe verduidelik ek dit? Ek verstaan ook nie. Ek het by geleentheid ‘n Duitser gevra waarom hulle Hitler gevolg het, en hy het net sy skouers opgetrek. Dit is seker soos die padda wat jy in water gooi. As die water warm is, spring hy dadelik uit, maar as jy hom in koue water sit en stadig warmer laat word, hyg hy later, maar het nie die krag om uit te spring nie. Dan is dit te laat. Miskien was dit indoktrinasie, ek weet nie. Ek weet net dat dit ‘n helse invloed op ons uitgeoefen het (Steenkamp 2012:11-12).

[We were convinced that we are fighting for the Western world against Communism. But alas today those terrorists are members of a respected government. But how do I explain it? I also do not understand. I once asked a German why they followed Hitler, and he just shrugged. It is probably like the frog that you put in water. If the water is hot, he jumps out immediately, but if you put him in cold water and slowly warm the water, he pants later on, but does not have the strength to jump. Then it’s too late. Maybe it was indoctrination, I do not know. I just know that it exercised a terrible influence on us.]<sup>68</sup>

#### LACK OF ACCURATE INFORMATION

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Furthermore, Seeman (1959:786) writes, “We may speak of high alienation, in the meaninglessness usage, when the individual is unclear as to what he ought to believe – when the individual’s minimal standards for clarity in decision-making are not met.” Postmodern tendencies to question the possibility to arrive at ‘the truth’ undermines the individual’s ability to construct meaning, and also the increased penchant to debunk metanarratives – which are supposed to provide a reason for risking one’s life in combat

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<sup>67</sup> Own translation.

<sup>68</sup> Own translation.

– invites a sense of meaninglessness in conflict environments. Van den Berg (2009:2) writes,

Waar modernistiese oorwegings egter nog die (“waarheids”)potensiaal van representasie, in welke nuwe vorme ook najaag, berus die postmoderne denke by ‘n inskatting van die teks, en veral die konteks waarbinne dit geproduseer word, as absoluut. Die brug om te slaan tussen representasie na die werklikheid is gedoem tot mislukking en daar kan hoogstens gewag gemaak word van die moontlikhede om bewustelik en self-refleksief met die beperkinge van die eie konteks en medium tot uitdrukking om te gaan.

[Where modernist considerations still pursue the (‘truth’)potential of representation, in whichever new forms, postmodern thinking rests on a questioning of the text, especially the context in which it is produced, as absolute. Bridging the gap between representation and reality is doomed to failure and there can at best be the possibility to consciously and self-reflexively engage with the limitations of the own context and medium of expression.]<sup>69</sup>

Postmodernism invites ambiguity, which is compounded by an increasing availability of information, as argued by Senekal (2010a:35), “The postmodern world presents the individual with a vastly confusing world of opposing views, bewildering options and even a history that appears to be constantly rewritten.” Seeman’s (1972b:387) example statement, “Things have become so complicated in the world today that I really don’t understand just what is going on,” anticipates this postmodern condition. For the soldiers who fought in Vietnam, particularly after Tet, distinguishing between right and wrong, and fact and fiction, became increasingly difficult.

In the conflict environment, Coker (1992:193) argues that a sense of meaninglessness changes the individual’s experience of the war, “War for post-modern man is unlikely to be fulfilling. It is more likely to be a touchstone of the cruelty or indifference of the purely material creation, a world in which man must obtain a flexible existential temper of outlook which will enable him to confront annihilation and meaninglessness and still feel life is worth the effort.” This is indeed a difficult feat to accomplish: while nationalism propagated the sacrifice of the individual for the greater good (freedom, democracy, etc.), the post-WWII environment offered no such ready-made narrative. Conscripts who fought in Vietnam and Namibia/Angola often emphasized that their only reason to fight became the will to survive until the end of

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<sup>69</sup> Own translation.

their tours. As the narrator says in Larry Heinemann's *Close Quarters*, "I would sit out there nights in the pouring-down rain or the insane moonlight and wonder why, why am I doing this?" (Heinemann 2005[1974]:56). In light of Afrikaans literature on the war in Namibia/Angola, Cronjé (1989:12) writes,

Een van die tradisionele waardes wat ondersoek kan word, is vaderlandsliefde. Die vraag word gevra of dit 'n voorvereiste van vaderlandsliefde is om vir die vaderland te sterf. Aangesien die oorlog op die Namibiese grens afspeel, word selfs die definisie van die vaderland in die gedrang gebring. "Kan 'n mens op die grens tussen Angola en Namibië veg vir Suid-Afrika?" en "Is diensplig 'n voorvereiste vir vaderlandsliefde, of kan iemand diensplig weier uit liefde vir sy vaderland?" is moontlike vrae wat gevra word. Hierdie soort morele probleme is egter nie beperk tot die Suid-Afrikaanse tekste nie. Dit strek oor landsgrense heen en word in feitlik alle oorlogsliteratuur, byvoorbeeld die Amerikaanse literatuur oor die oorlog in Viëtnam, aangetref.

[One of the traditional values that can be investigated, is patriotism. The question is asked whether it is a prerequisite of patriotism to die for the fatherland. Since the war occurred on the Namibian border, even the definition of the fatherland comes in jeopardy. "Can a man fight for South Africa on the border between Angola and Namibia?" And "Is military service a prerequisite for patriotism, or can someone refuse military service out of love for his fatherland?" are possible questions that can be asked. These kinds of moral problems are not confined to the South African texts. It extends across borders and can be found in almost all war literature, such as the American literature on the war in Vietnam.]<sup>70</sup>

Palazzo (2008:71) believes the "lessening of support for the Vietnam War after the Tet Offensive had as much to do with a sense of having being misled by the overly rosy reports that emanated from HQ MAC-V as with the losses resulting from the battle." This is emphasised in Gustav Hasford's *The Short-timers*:

Get me photographs of indigenous civilian personnel who have been executed with their hands tied behind their backs, people buried alive, priests with their throats cut, dead babies – you know what I want. Get me some good body counts. And don't forget to calculate your kill ratios. And Joker..."

"Yes, sir?"

"Don't even photograph any naked bodies unless they're mutilated."

"Aye-aye, sir." (Hasford 1980:22)

Pratt (1987:141) contends that the Tet offensive in particular had an impact on the war's representation in literature, "most of the novels set after Tet contain strong themes of

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<sup>70</sup> Own translation.

the modern American's inability to comprehend reality itself." To Beidler (2007:51), novels such as *The bamboo bed*, *One count to cadence*, and *One very hot day* "not only [...] have in common an understanding of the essential interchangeability of the 'real' and the 'unreal', the 'true' and the 'false'; they also make it a central premise of literary method." Tet was thus not only a turning point in the war itself, but also a turning point in its representation in history and literature, and towards the possibility of arriving at certainty.

Similarly, international news reports routinely contrasted sharply with the official view of the war in Namibia/Angola, as propagated by the state-controlled SABC. Seven SADF soldiers were captured in 1975 during Operation Savannah and paraded in front of international television cameras, despite SABC reports that there were no troops inside Angola. Holt (2005:4) recalls how the SADF's 'information blackout' even extended to the troops, and when he was sent to Angola during Operation Hooper, he only discovered this as he crossed the border. He (2005:29) writes, "So the army had not lied totally. We would be doing bush orientation for two weeks – they had just neglected to mention why we were doing it and where we would be spending the next four months." Not only the absence but also the accuracy of information coming from the SADF created uncertainty: in Bertie Cloete's *Pionne* (2009:90-91), he relates how an accident at the border was reported as combat deaths in South African newspapers.<sup>71</sup>

Thus, a credibility gap emerged in South Africa as well, as Mark Behr's narrator claims in *Die reuk van appels*, "Die boodskappe van die Republiek se kant van die grens af is deurmekaar en vol teenstrydighede. Niemand weet meer wat om te glo nie" [the messages from the Republic's side of the border are confusing and contradictory. No one knows what to believe] (1993:19). This creates more scope for the construction and spread of rumours. Seeman (1983:177) observes that the development of rumour is precisely an attempt to counter ambiguity, to provide meaning where there exists no certainty, "generalized beliefs develop to counter the meaninglessness of the situation – to reduce the intolerable ambiguity and provide a new basis for action." In *If I die in a*

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<sup>71</sup> This tendency to report accidental deaths as combat deaths occurs more than once in the television series *Tour of Duty*.

*combat zone*, rumours abound, like the one that they would conduct an assault on Pinkville (O'Brien 2006[1973]:108).

## THE USE OF HISTORY AND LITERATURE IN CONSTRUCTING A NARRATIVE OF A COUNTERINSURGENCY

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There is little that escapes historical controversy or intrigue during the American experience in Vietnam (Frankum 2007:121)

In addition to being a clash of arms, the Vietnam War was also a clash of facts, and of values (Lomperis 1987:109)

If our choice of narratives reflects only our power to impose our preferred version of reality on a past that cannot resist us, then what is left of history? (Cronon 1992:1371)

The Vietnam War is ingrained in the collective memory of the world, affecting military and political decisions and interpretations particularly in the US but also in other countries<sup>72</sup>, including South Africa. After Operation Desert Storm, President George HW Bush remarked that “The spectre of Vietnam has been buried forever in the sands of the Arabian Peninsula,” but as Isaacs (2006:299) notes, this spectre was again raised by the conflicts in Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo and Iraq. As Senator John Kerry, a veteran of the Mekong Delta, once remarked, Vietnam is “the war that won’t ever go away” (Neu 2005:230). In late 2005, a re-enactment of the Vietnam War was held in the state of Virginia, but to Phuong Ly (quoted by Bradley and Young (2008:3)), this was not actually a historical re-enactment, since Vietnam “isn’t quite history. To many people, it’s a painfully current event.” Lomperis (1987:4) phrases this point more poetically,

Despite the seeming finality of Hanoi’s tanks rumbling into Saigon’s urban jungles and flushing out flocks of fleeing American helicopters, the two-lane highway of the Vietnam War runs on ‘over here’ in the minds, souls, and pens of Americans, still plagued by the dead war ‘over there’.

George Herring (2007:336) believes that putting to rest the ghost of Vietnam was one of the reasons, “by no means the most important, but still significant,” for the 2003 invasion of Iraq. In his view, the US did not invade Iraq in 1991 in part to avoid another quagmire, despite George HW Bush’s assertion that the ghost of Vietnam was buried

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<sup>72</sup> Perry (2008:13) for instance calls Afghanistan “the Soviet Union’s Vietnam.”



during Operation Desert Storm. However, the new war in Iraq conjured up the ghost rather than laying it to rest permanently.<sup>73</sup>

Apart from the influence on official matters, memories of the war “litter the cultural landscape of the United States” (Wiest 2006:16), recurring in film, song, and television. To Bradley and Young (2008:4), “Vietnam itself is a wandering ghost whose proper burial awaits a full understanding of what happened between the two countries.” However, since “the final collapse of South Vietnam left many people with a sense of loss and betrayal, as if some vital piece of America’s vision of itself had disappeared there” (Neu 2005:228), it is doubtful whether a full understanding of this conflict will ever be achieved. Historians’ inability to come to terms with the war has illustrated the limits of this discipline, as no final answer emerged over forty years on what precisely went wrong (or right). The ‘lessons of Vietnam’ could not have been learned, as there seems to be no consensus on what those lessons should be.

In a sense, white South Africans (and SADF soldiers in particular) lost even more at the time of withdrawal from Namibia and in the early 1990s. The very enemies fought by the SADF in South Africa (mainly the ANC) and Namibia/Angola (SWAPO) replaced the National Party government. Much of the literature produced on the so-called Border War in the last decade, particularly personal narratives by ex-officers of 32-Battalion (e.g. Breytenbach (2002), Barlow (2007)<sup>74</sup>, Bothma (2007), and Van der Walt (2007)), convey a similar sense of alienation that Isaacs (2006:301) refers to in the context of Vietnam. The plethora of material published since South Africa’s withdrawal from Angola/Namibia suggest that this conflict is just as alive to the South African public now as it was during the heightened conflict of the 1980s<sup>75</sup>. Ferreira (2012b) writes, “Wat wel duidelik is, is dat

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<sup>73</sup> Van Creveld (2008:256) refers to the 2004 situation in Iraq as a “second Vietnam” (see also Young (2007)), as the insurgency grew with no positive conclusion in sight. Once again, questions were asked about whether the war in Iraq was serving US interests, the term *credibility gap* re-emerged when no Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs) were found, and American society questioned itself and its values in relation to world politics. The War in Iraq was also accompanied with protests comparable to that during the Vietnam War.

<sup>74</sup> Barlow and Roelf van Heerden were both closely involved with Executive Outcomes in the 1990s, and express a bitter alienation from the South African government. Van Heerden (2012:24) for instance says, “I can, today, still recall the shit taste of political betrayal.”

<sup>75</sup> At a talk on the war I attended during the Volksblad Arts Festival in Bloemfontein in 2008, tensions ran high whenever the speaker representing opposition to the war confronted General Geldenhuys – a small-scale version of the controversy still raging about battles such as Cassinga and Cuito Cuanavale, and the

daar intense verdeeldheid was en steeds is oor wie die oorwinnaars was en of dié oorlog noodweer was of nie” [what is certain, is that there was and is intense disagreement over who won the war and whether or not the war was necessary or not]. The battles may be over in southern Angola and northern Namibia, but the battle over the cultural narrative continues, as it does in terms of Vietnam.

Carpenter (2003:30) notes that most literature on the Vietnam War was written by veterans. Born in Worthington, Minnesota, Tim O’Brien received his draft notice and completed his basic training at Fort Lewis, Washington in 1968. He served as a Marine in Vietnam from 1969 to 1970 – importantly, after Tet and with growing opposition to the war at home. Authors such as James Webb and Larry Heinemann – all central figures in this literary subsystem – were similarly involved in Vietnam. James Webb was awarded the Navy Cross, a Silver Star, two bronze stars, and two Purple Hearts in Vietnam (Lomperis 1987:13). Baines (2003:177) wrongly claims that Afrikaans *grensliteratuur* was “seldom written by those with first-hand experience of the war,” for in general, most “intellectually accomplished” (Roos 2008:142) Afrikaans literature, in contrast with popular literature, was written by authors who had been involved in the war in some way or other<sup>76</sup> (Van Coller 1990:82). Alexander Strachan – one of the seminal authors – for instance had been part of the Special Forces (Recces) (Liebenberg 1988:184).

The fact that it is the soldiers themselves that construct meaning through personal narratives is significant. This chapter discusses the shortfalls of history and creating alternative avenues for representing the past with reference to Vietnam and the war in Namibia/Angola.

## POSTMODERNISM, VIETNAM, AND NAMIBIA/ANGOLA

Carpenter (2003:32) believes “the principal theoreticians of the postmodern – Lyotard, Foucault, Jameson, Deleuze, Baudrillard, and others – either participated in or were

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exclusion of SADF names on the Freedom Park Memorial Wall. This incident was repeated at the book launch of Jeanette Ferreira’s *Grensoorlogstories* in Bloemfontein in 2012.

<sup>76</sup> This is not a defining characteristic of literature on counterinsurgencies, however – Sassoon and Owen come to mind as soldier-poets of WWI.

strongly affected by the turmoil of the 1960s, and their early expressions of postmodern theory appear in the shadow of the Vietnam War.” Postmodern culture is said to dominate the contemporary western world, and Gottdiener (1996:140) identifies the following characteristics of postmodern culture:

1. The erosion of distinctions between what was formerly viewed as high art, and the popular forms of mass cultural expression.
2. Antifoundationalism and the erosion of totalizing canonic referents for the evaluation of artistic and cultural expression.
3. The reworking of the old forms, of cultural expression to the benefit of sign value and the hegemony of the image through the transformation of reality into simulation.
4. The ascendancy of a depthless culture based on metonymy (i.e., the synchronic dimension) and difference as the principal textual figures, with the consequent loss of the sense of history and antecedent continuity (the diachronic dimension).

Cronjé (1989:15) and Van Coller (1990:84) similarly note the postmodernist characteristics of Afrikaans fiction in the war in Namibia/Angola, including a questioning of absolute truth. Roos (2008:142) claims that the “most distinctive characteristic of intellectually accomplished *grensliteratuur* [...] would be the way in which they contested (with very few exceptions) the dominant stereotypes.” Van Coller (1999a:35) agrees, although he notes that these are not mutually exclusive categories and representing war in a negative light is not a prerequisite for ‘serious’ literature. Van Coller (1992:153) mentions that Beidler’s (2007) identification of the characteristics of Vietnam literature can be applied to Afrikaans *grensliteratuur* as well: ‘new realism’, the aspect of initiation, brutality<sup>77</sup>, numbness, and black humour, as well as the frequent use of the short story. That said, the “nature and occurrence of war literature will [...] differ from language area to

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<sup>77</sup> The brutality of the war is often sketched in graphic detail: In *Fields of Fire*, skin burned by napalm is described as “like a hot dog on a charcoal grill” (Webb 2001[1978]:220). In Bertie Cloete’s *Pionne* (2009:74), the narrator stares at “‘n sinkplaat vol arms, bene, koppe, halwe lywe” [a zinc plate covered with arms, legs, heads, half-bodies] of dead insurgents after a raid by Koevoet. Clive Holt (2005:58) also recalls, “While leaving the contact area, I saw three bodies on the ground. One had a tree fallen on his head, another had been shot to pieces and the third one had been driven over by a tank and cut clean in half. The bodies were all bloated and a bloody mess. The flies were taking full advantage too.”

language area” (Van Coller 1999a:33) and since American society differs markedly from Afrikaans society, it can be expected that war literature will exhibit major differences as well.

## WARRING NARRATIVES, WARRING IDENTITIES

Adolf Hitler remarks in *Mein Kampf* (2000:383), “we do not learn history just in order to know the past, we learn history in order to find an instructor for the future and for the continued existence of our own nationality.” According to Codevilla and Seabury (2006:46), the philosopher Santayana once said that those who “fail to learn from the past are condemned to repeat it,” but they add, “Unfortunately, Santayana did not specify *which* past or whose version of the past” (original emphasis). Similar criticism can be levelled at Hitler’s statement, and indeed his autobiographical account has been criticized for factual inaccuracies (Watt 2000:xi). Ankersmit (2010:34) notes, “historians write texts, as do novelists. However, the historical text is expected to tell us the truth about part of the past.” This expectation has however come under intense scrutiny over the last few decades, leading Brizuela-Garcia (2008:313-314) to ask, “If historical knowledge has been traditionally conceptualized in terms of a correspondence between narrative and historical reality, and we can agree that the ‘truth’ understood in this manner cannot be reached, what should be the goal of history?”

The difficulty of coming to an understanding of the past has been criticized most famously by narrativists such as Hayden White, who writes, “Neither the reality nor the meaning of history is ‘out there’ in the form of a story awaiting only a historian to discern its outline and identify the plot that comprises its meaning” (1986:487). Bruner (1991:8) agrees,

... narratives do not exist, as it were, in some real world, waiting there patiently and eternally to be veridically mirrored in a text. The act of constructing a narrative, moreover, is considerably more than ‘selecting’ events either from real life, from memory, or from fantasy and then placing them in an appropriate order. The events themselves need to be *constituted* in the light of the overall narrative – in Propp’s terms, to be made ‘functions’ of the story (original emphasis).

Zagorin (1999:17) identifies the narrativist outlook as postmodernist, because it does away with the distinction between historical and literary narratives, and “hence denies to historiography the kind of truth-value it claims in its accounts and representations of the past.” In Carpenter’s (2003:46) view, the Vietnam War influenced this critical approach to historiography directly,

Prior to Vietnam there was always the historiographic assumption that there was a larger event or event-category called a ‘war’ that somehow contained all the individual experiences. For postmodernism there is no larger all encompassing category; there is only the unique perspective of subjective experience, multiplied by hundreds of thousands (millions if you count civilians) of simulacra rendered in an eternal now.

The historian, like the novelist or indeed any human being, thus constructs a narrative, where “The sequence of events [...] is selected, interpreted, or organized in a way that transforms the sequence into a coherent and meaningful whole” (Braid 1996:8). This “coherent and meaningful whole” can be nationalist discourse (as Hitler acknowledges in the above quotation), the freedom struggle, or the Cold War, providing the historian with a perspective that gives meaning to individual events. Each historian highlights certain events while neglecting others, transforming individual events into a cohesive narrative. The historian of course also approaches events from a specific perspective, selecting (consciously or unconsciously) facts and events that fit his narrative, while neglecting those that undermine his perspective. At worst, political analysts and historians take liberal or conservative positions to justify the actions of belligerents; at best, historical facts and events can be viewed from different perspectives.

Notwithstanding postmodernist discourse and postcolonial criticism of binary oppositions, counterinsurgencies in particular have a tendency to polarize interpretations into reductionist binary sets of good/evil and right/wrong. Wiest (2006:16) is one of the few historians who admits that Vietnam was not a “good war” “in the mould of World War II,”<sup>78</sup> but observes that it was not “simply the war of ‘baby

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<sup>78</sup> WWII is a “good war” in memory, rather than practice. In the 1930s, advocates of airpower in the US and Britain “insisted that it should be used for launching attacks on civilian, demographic, and industrial targets,” whereas the doctrine in Germany and the USSR conceived of close air support (Van Creveld 2008:100). The result was that Britain had relatively few fighters at the outbreak of WWII (Van Creveld 2008:133). “The Germans, in response to a British attack on Berlin, changed targets and mounted a massive raid on London on September 7. Apparently, the Berlin attack had been ordered by Churchill with

killers,' and the abject defeat of popular myth." Here in particular the hindsight of Münkler (2005:90) is useful:

... so long as political ideals could be attributed to guerrillas and putchist generals, militias and underground organizations, it was possible to think of wars as liberation struggles in which the aspect of revolutionary progress outweighed the military violence; a focus on the ideological façades that nearly all sides constructed in these wars satisfied the need for clarity and transparency.

In the wake of these conflicts, however, the constructed narratives that justified these wars at the time have increasingly come under scrutiny. However, as Langman and Scatamburlo (1996:131) lament, the politics of identity in general have failed to move beyond binarisms, "and instead has merely valorised and defended the devalued member of the binary set, thus inverting rather than subverting or transcending binary oppositions." In South Africa, for instance, the anti-Communist narrative propagated by the old National Party government has been discredited in mainstream discourse, but unquestioningly been replaced with the 'national liberation'-narrative of the previously oppressed. Such an approach to a critique of narrative construction merely replaces one narrative with another, thus in practice the debunking of the NP's narrative is not postmodernist at all. In a way, the inverting of the binary set merely legitimizes the formerly valued narrative, for it proves that a culture, and indeed a government itself, cannot function without a constructed narrative that opposes 'an other'. As David Kilcullen (2009b:67) notes, "To undercut [the insurgents'] influence you must exploit an alternative narrative: or better yet, tap into an existing narrative that excludes the insurgents." What Kilcullen certainly does not say, is that the possibility exists that a narrative can simply be discredited without providing an alternative. Slotkin (2005:230) remarks,

Analytical deconstructions of myth may undermine existing structures, but nothing can take the place of a myth but another myth, another story with the same historical resonance and moral authority. Analysis and criticism cannot displace, let alone replace, narrative. The need to compose experience into narrative is a fundamental attribute of human consciousness.

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just that purpose in mind" (Van Creveld 2008:134). Defending the 'moral high ground' of Allied forces becomes more difficult when these and similar facts are taken into account. Indeed, Codevilla and Seabury (2006:244) write, "If Germany and Japan had won, they would have had a good case for hanging Generals 'Hap' Arnold and Ira Eaker of the US Army Air Corps, as well as Roosevelt, for breaches of *jus in bello*."

The controversy surrounding counterinsurgencies can therefore be viewed as a conflict between competing narratives, all vying for legitimacy that contribute to a collective cultural narrative that, amongst others, serves a nationalist, political agenda. This war of narratives aims to replace one narrative with another, rather than simply undermining one narrative. Ferguson (2004:21) writes,

If the collectivity is to be real, it must be continually present in memory and imagination; it must establish the rich texture of residues that make up the everyday world of appearance. And to this end the recollection of war is fixed upon as a central locus of such memory; the moment in which the collective life of the nation became real and the link between personal identity and collective life could be forged anew and in ways which avoided the solipsism of the classical ego or the fragmentation of its postclassical alternatives.

The cultural narrative is constructed by far more than official accounts of history. White (1982:12) says, “The crucial problem, from the perspective of political struggle, is not whose story is the best or truest, but who has the power to make his story stick as the one that others will choose to live by or in.” As he relates elsewhere (White 1975:51), Levi-Strauss already realized that history “is never only history of, it is always also history for. And it is not only history for in the sense of being written with some ideological aim in view, but also history for in the sense of being written for a specific social group or public” (original emphasis). Because history is written for a specific audience, the perspectives on historical events change to accommodate dominant views, or to accommodate specific audiences. Historiography is therefore political in nature – *warfare by other means*.

All wars involve the construction of a narrative. In 1793, the French National Assembly, short on labour, decreed that civilians owed a debt to the state and therefore introduced conscription (Van Creveld 1991:37). Other states were forced to follow suit in order to meet the manpower demands on the battlefield and on the home front, and nationalism was enforced, where “the masses had to believe that their state was great and strong, always right and never wrong” (Van Creveld 1991:40). Soldiers had to be provided with a cause, a concern for the collective that transcends their own will to survive. Ferguson (2004:5) notes how “Throughout the 19th century, military science itself increasingly took note of the ‘moral basis’ of combat, and sought to instil, in addition to discipline and obedience, a specific ‘offensive spirit’ that the rational

strategist could count upon as an essential element in the planning of any operation.” Nationalism is a particularly effective narrative: it provides coherence to otherwise seemingly meaningless historical events, and provides a rubric for interpreting the present and for inspiring citizens to fight for the state. Carr (1986:130) writes, “A community exists where a narrative account exists of a we which persists through its experiences and actions” (original emphasis), while Berlet (2006b:118) notes, “All social movements need to build a persuasive ideology and a supportive collective identity; and one way in which movement leaders accomplish this is to skilfully frame core concepts and messages and tell stories in the form of narratives that explain what needs to be done and who stands in the way.” Creating meaning through narratives is thus what constructs a national, religious, or ethnic identity, “narration, as the unity of story, storyteller, audience, and protagonist, is what constitutes the community, its activities, and its coherence in the first place” (Carr 1986:128). Because the community relies on its constructed national, religious, or ethnic identity for its existence, the conflict between competing narratives is crucial for the community’s survival, and thus the construction of a meaningful and meaning-giving narrative counters social isolation.

In *Sergeant back again*, Charles Coleman (1980:138) is critical of the metanarratives that form the backdrop to war,

“What happened? And why all of a sudden did my system completely stop functioning? Guilt? Of course, but that word, like ‘civilized,’ or ‘patriotic,’ or ‘heroic,’ means absolutely nothing. Ask one hundred people the meaning of those labels and you’ll get a hundred different possibilities – maybe not in thought, but certainly in action.

Similarly, Ernest says in *Paco’s Story* (Heinemann 2005[1986]:126),

*I was wounded on Guadalcanal and Iwo Jima [...]. I guess that about makes me a fucking patriot, but I’ll be fucked if you see me fly the flag. Not Flag Day or the Fourth of July. Not Memorial Day or Veterans Day – which used to be called Armistice Day, see? – no kind of goddamned day. And I don’t fly it right side up, upside down, inside out, crosswise, ass backward, or fuck-you otherwise (original emphasis).*

Numerous accounts of the South African war in Namibia/Angola depict the importance of nationalism, particularly in reference to the national anthem, “Die Stem.” In *Op pad na die grens*, Jaap Steyn (1976:11) notes how a police officer died at the border, “hy’t



geantwoord op die roepstem” [he answered the call], and Feinstein (2011:212) also criticises this line in particular. This is arguably the most referenced line from the South African national anthem, and forms a binding motif in Clive Holt’s *At thy call we did not falter* (2005),

Ons sal antwoord op jou roepstem	At thy call we shall not falter
ons sal offer wat jy vra	firm and steadfast we shall stand
ons sal lewe, ons sal sterwe	at thy will to live or perish
ons vir jou Suid-Afrika	oh South Africa, dear land

In *Pionne*, Cloete (2009:14) claims that the media propagated “the cause” of the NP government, but that this was entirely fabricated to serve politicians’ ambitions. Captain Kellerman is described as “heeltemal gebreinspoel” [completely brainwashed], and “nie die enigste naïewe bliksem nie” [not the only naive bastard] (2009:22). Cloete (2009:24) continues, “As ek terugdink, die breinspoeling, die gekweekte patriotisme was ongelooflik! Almal wou grens toe gaan. Gaan sterf vir volk en vaderland” [When I think back, the brainwashing, the contrived patriotism was unbelievable! Everyone wanted to go to the Border. Die for our people and fatherland]. In one of Batley’s collected narratives, a soldier writes, “Am I supposed to be grateful for being allowed to ‘Fight for my Vaderland’. Am I,” while another soldier remarks, “Join the army, fight for a cause you don’t care about” (Batley 2007a:50, 101).

## COMPETING NARRATIVES

The war between narratives of the Vietnam War is one between ideologies (between hawks and doves), but although not ethnic or nationalist in nature, it still serves political objectives by propagating one political stance at the expense of another. In comparison, the war of narratives in the South African context is sharper, and more vicious, for the stakes – race and ethnicity: in short cultural identity – are much higher, and much more crucial to the present.

Many revisionist accounts of the Vietnam War were written by military officers who had served in this conflict (Hess 2009:156), such as Summers (2007). Like their view that the war was justified but undermined by politicians, the media, and the American public, historical accounts written by former military officers of the SADF, such as Geldenhuys (2007) and Hamann (2001), depict the war in Namibia/Angola as necessary and ultimately won by the SADF. The terms *orthodox* and *revisionist* are however not as applicable to historical accounts of this conflict, since two versions of history emerged simultaneously and have continued to exist side by side in recent publications.<sup>79</sup> On the one hand are narrative accounts of SADF officers, white Afrikaans journalists (such as Steenkamp (1989)), writers closely associated with the military (such as Stiff (2001)), and academics (such as Barnard (2006) and Scholtz (2006) and (2012)), and on the other those of English liberals (such as Baines and Vale (2008)), those associated with the liberation movements (such as Shubin (2008)), and disgruntled liberal conscripts, such as Feinstein (2011)<sup>80</sup>. The former generally hold the view that the SADF conducted itself professionally in halting Communist expansion; the latter hold that the war was in defence of Apartheid and oppression, and ultimately lost. The English/Afrikaans divide reflects a poll in the 1980s: When asked how they would react to an ANC government, 44% of Afrikaner students replied that they would actively oppose such a government, compared with 10% of English students (Giliomee 2004:553). The conflict<sup>81</sup> between English-speaking South Africans and Afrikaners was one of the main points of contention in South African politics throughout the twentieth century – during the first half of the century even more important than racial issues and often usurped political agendas.

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<sup>79</sup> Similarly, Pretorius (2010:34) notes a conflict between interpretations of the Anglo-Boer War: “The battle lines are, however, still drawn from time to time on the white camps, and the writings of Afrikaner and English-speaking (both South African and British) historians still persist in presenting viewpoints that range from attempts at objectivity to blatant subjectivity and plain bad history.”

<sup>80</sup> Feinstein (2011:13) for instance believes that “alle oorloë boos is, laat staan nog ‘n oorlog wat apartheid in stand wil hou” [all wars are evil, let alone a war that aims at maintaining Apartheid]. He further writes that he was forced to disregard right and wrong (2011:14), and that he “verafsku” [detested] the system of Apartheid. More on this author’s factuality below.

<sup>81</sup> A similar conflict over history exists regarding the Anglo-Boer War. Elizabeth van Heyningen – an English-speaking historian from the University of Cape Town – recently published an article (2010), in which she denies the ill-treatment of Boer women and children by British soldiers in the concentration camps, blaming the large number of deaths on Afrikaner “backwardness.” Dan Roodt soon retorted, and entered into a polemic with Morris (2010), who supported Van Heyningen’s findings that atrocities were “exaggerated into mythical proportions to support Afrikaner nationalism in the 1920s and 1930s.” Significantly, BussinessDay’s link to Roodt’s letter has been disabled, but his opposition’s views are still accessible.

This ethnic divide regarding attitudes is represented in literature as well: In Christiaan Bakkes's *Skuilplek*, the character Harry Caldecot claims that his English friends considered the war an Afrikaner's war, and therefore postponed their military service by enrolling at the university (2002:38). Upon Caldecot's return, he found one of his erstwhile friends staffing an End Conscription Campaign (ECC) stand, and beat him up. Indeed, as will be discussed later, the ECC drew most of its support from English university students. This conflict also forms part of Hennie van Coller's short story, "Die offer" (Van Coller 2012).

This ethnic and ideological divide is clearest in a comparison between two scholarly publications. The majority of South African contributors to Baines and Vale's *Beyond the Border War* (2008), with the notable exception of Henriette Roos, are English and formerly or currently connected to liberal English university campuses (in particular Rhodes, Cape Town and UNISA). Conversely, the majority of contributors to the two special editions on the Border War by the *Journal of Contemporary History* (JCH), which is situated at the University of the Free State in Bloemfontein, are Afrikaans (particularly from the University of the Free State, Stellenbosch, and Potchefstroom). Their approaches and conclusions differ greatly, and it is noteworthy that many of the JCH contributors either have/had close ties with the military, or have a reputation of being experts on military issues, whereas UNISA's publication focuses more on cultural and sociological issues and the contributors are rather experts in these fields. While the JCH contributors shy away from depicting the war as either good or evil, many of the Baines and Vale contributors have a clear ideological position, and Baines writes elsewhere (2003:3) that the works of Willem Steenkamp and Peter Stiff are, "largely descriptive but its political bias masquerades as ideological neutrality or journalistic objectivity." Quite a profound statement: "ideological neutrality" or "journalistic objectivity" become "political bias" when writing history? Braid (1996:17) notes that such cultural and theoretical frames of reference are always crucial in the construction of narrative,

Each individual selects, interprets, and narrativizes lived experience in terms of their own understanding and cultural worldview and therefore, to them, the narrative may appear to accurately reference past events. But individuals may construct differing narratives out of the same 'events' by virtue of their differing identities, points of view, interests, attentions, or understandings. The narratives generated by members of different cultures may diverge even more radically.

Many accounts of counterinsurgencies, and in particular on the war in Namibia/Angola, involve a construction of the facts to substantiate a preconceived narrative. Birmingham (1988:13) mentions, “Efforts by South Africa to capture even one small town in the south have been effectively thwarted by a combination of Soviet air cover, Cuban ground troops, and the popular militia.” By not providing the name of this town, the statement discourages verification. That South Africa even attempted to capture the town (presumably Cuito Cuanavale) is neither argued nor qualified with evidence.

Shubin (2008) is the most vivid example of this tendency. When Cuba sends combat troops into Angola, it is a “friendly country” in Shubin’s view, whereas South African involvement is called a “menace” (2008:48) or “foreign intervention” (2008:51). When a Communist veteran of the Cuito Cuanavale battles refers to South African soldiers as “remarkable gentlemen,” he calls this veteran “too kind to Boers” (2008:107). In forcing the narrative of South African aggression motivated by racism, Shubin (2008:235) also refers to Johannesburg – historically one of South Africa’s most multicultural cities, and indeed predominantly *English* – as the “den of racists.” He (2008:63) even argues that this was a “second liberation war” in Angola, fought “against South African and Zairean (sic) troops who had invaded the country under cover of the FNLA and UNITA.” He further claims that the South African involvement in Angola in 1975 was “to prevent the independence of Angola” – a statement that contradicts all other substantiated accounts of this operation, and Shubin does not qualify this statement with any evidence or argument that shows an understanding of South African foreign policy during the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>82</sup> In his view (2008:73), the South African withdrawal from Angola in 1976 was not because of diplomatic pressure, but “pressure from Cuban forces and FAPLA” – a view advocated by other writers such as Morris (2008:165) (note that this is a chapter in Baines and Vale (2008)). Shubin remains mired in a reductionist Cold War binary construct, where siding with ‘liberation movements’ automatically means opposition to the US – by this logic, liberation movements such as UNITA become ‘reactionary’ despite their role in overthrowing the Portuguese colonial rule and its well documented ties with Communist China. For instance, the CIA stated in 1984, “Moscow’s basic aims in southern Africa are to undermine or supplant Western and

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<sup>82</sup> For an accurate assessment of South African strategy during the war, see Scholtz (2012).

*Chinese influence and to promote leftist change*” (Central Intelligence Agency 1984:1) (emphasis added). Even after the Cold War, Shubin states that the cause of post-Cold War conflicts is that the Soviet Union no longer restricts the US, and “Undoubtedly, after the collapse of the Soviet Union Washington could not resist the temptation to establish its domination all over the world” (2008:264-265) – absurdly blaming *all* post-Cold War conflicts on the US (presumably Chechnya and Georgia as well?). Shubin’s account is commended on the back cover by Chris Saunders (who contributed to Baines and Vale (2008)), and Raymon Suttner of UNISA, a former ANC and SACP leader, an association that indicates a strong ideological tie between these authors, and one that places a question mark over their commitment to write history that aspires to objectivity. The fact that an author, who misrepresents well-known facts, dismisses eyewitness accounts that undermine his narrative, and uses derogatory language (calling South Africans *Boers*), can be commended as writing “an illuminating, well-researched and accessible account” (Suttner), places a question mark over the level of factuality contained in all historical accounts, for it places the discipline in disrepute, while undermining the credibility of all historians associated with him. Iggers (2010:34) writes, “History has always been highly political in its coloration,” but in moving beyond a perspectivistic interpretation of facts to a *construction* of facts, much historical writing on this war have obliterated the boundary between fact and fiction.

#### ALTERNATIVE HISTORY IN THE US AND RSA

Realizing the important role the media was to play in the future, President Truman issued Executive Order 10-290 in September 1951 to classify information. In November 1953, he extended his limits on information by issuing Executive Order 10-501 that created thirty new levels of classification, but it was his successor, Kennedy, who “raised information management to a high art” (Wyatt 2007:269). Kennedy made good use of the media, including television, to control the information he deemed should reach the public. On 20 February 1962, the State Department issued Cable 1006, which outlined the official US information policy for officials and military personnel (Wyatt 2007:273). The media was to be briefed in all matters concerning the Vietnam War, but within a predetermined

rubric to limit the amount of negative publicity US forces could receive. The so-called Operation Maximum Candor, commencing in 1964, provided such a volume of information to the media that there would be no need for journalists to attempt to consult outside sources (Wyatt 2007:280), and thus the US government virtually had complete control, without passing controversial laws on censorship. Some leaks did occur, and some news stories did place the US involvement in a negative light, because the US had no control over *how* their facts were interpreted and represented, but Wyatt (2007) and Hallin (2006) claim the loss of public support was not because of oppositional, liberal media reports. Following the conservative ascendancy of the 1980s, the view that the media undermined US efforts in Vietnam proliferated, and therefore media access to information would become tightly controlled in the future (Wyatt 2007:284). During the invasion of Grenada in 1983, the media was barred altogether for the first two days (Wyatt 2007:285), while in the 1991 Gulf War, no images of bodies were shown.

White and the narrativists opened up the possibility of using alternative, non-mainstream forms of historical writing to contribute to an understanding of the past,

White's normative agenda in exploding history was to de-privilege the status of professional history as the guardian of what can legitimately be studied in the past and how that past can legitimately be represented. His aim was not to explode history for the sake of it or to do away with the discipline of history altogether. By contrast, White's aim has been clear throughout: to make history more relevant to us in our daily lives by reconnecting it to the poetic and artistic ways of representing reality (Daddow 2008:53).

The difficulty of finding the truth in the statements of politicians during the Vietnam War, as well as postmodern tendencies to question the boundaries between truth and fiction<sup>83</sup>, inspired many authors to relinquish this distinction: Myra McPherson (quoted in Lomperis (1987:8)) remarks, "the facts of the policymakers were some of the greatest fictions." The 1968 Tet offensive in particular seemed to contradict official US claims that they were winning the war. Taylor (2003:19) notes that the factual ambiguity accompanying the war naturally favoured a different representation of the facts,

The notion that the nature of war in Vietnam made it especially difficult to distinguish between fact and fiction, and the widening 'credibility gap' between

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<sup>83</sup> Hayden White (2005:156) for instance remarks, "I am sure of one thing: the difference between modernism and postmodernism is the difference between a sensibility that still had faith in the effort to discover the 'ontology' of the world and one that no longer has such faith."

official pronouncements and the perceptions of participants and observers of the war in Vietnam, seemed to render the styles of New Journalism particularly appropriate.

Of these New Journalist accounts, Michael Herr's *Dispatches* is one of the most familiar works. Herr describes the work as a novel (Taylor 2003:26), arguing, "Conventional journalism could no more reveal this war than conventional firepower could win it" (Kalekin-Fishman 1998b:218). Herr rejected conventional journalism for three reasons (Taylor 2003:89). Firstly, the 'facts' as supplied by official accounts were questionable<sup>84</sup>; Herr (1998b:172) relates how a Special Forces soldier had killed a Viet Cong and liberated a prisoner, only to find out the following day that he had liberated six prisoners and killed fourteen Viet Cong, "You want to see the medal?"<sup>85</sup> Secondly, even when the truth was revealed, it was swamped by the 'official view', which "usually did the same thing to your perception of the war that flares did to your night vision" (1998b:149). Thirdly, so much of the images propagated by Hollywood and America's other media had to be 'unlearned' before one could be confronted with the 'reality' of the war (1998b:210). The truth of the war therefore remained elusive in official and factual accounts, and thus literature had a place in telling this truth alongside traditional historiography, "Straight history, auto-revised history, history without handles, for all the books and articles and white papers, all the talk and the miles of film, something wasn't answered, it wasn't even asked" (Kalekin-Fishman 1998b:49). His approach is widely regarded to be a successful alternative history; Philip Beidler (2007:207) writes that he hands Michael Herr's *Dispatches* "to somebody who asks me for a single book that comes closest to telling 'what it was like'."

Unlike the US government in Vietnam, the South African government did exercise direct control over the media (Conway 2008b:426). Baines (2007:2) believes "The SADF learned the (mistaken) lesson of Vietnam from the United States forces that unrestricted media coverage of war could be demoralizing and self-defeating." Information on the 'Border War' was tightly regulated, and so were most of the press and the South African

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<sup>84</sup>Herr (1991[1968]:37) relates that the daily news briefings became known as the Five 'O Clock Follies or Jive at Five – a reference also made in *Tour of Duty*, and significantly *before* the Tet Offensive.

<sup>85</sup> Similarly, Tim O'Brien asks in *Going after Cacciato*, "what part was fact and what part was the extension of fact?" (O'Brien 1988[1975]:34).

Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), and strict censorship laws were in place. Soldiers fought ‘somewhere on the Border’, their precise whereabouts hidden from their families, and Article 118 of the South African Defence Act prohibited soldiers from disclosing any information that could be deemed ‘sensitive’ (Liebenberg 1988:182). Holt (2005:xi) writes that soldiers were not permitted to even take cameras into the warzone, while US soldiers took countless pictures in Vietnam. This lack of information was worsened by official denials of the truth: During Operation Savannah in 1975, officials claimed there had been no troops in Angola, until the capture of SADF troops proved otherwise. Van der Merwe (2001:5) remarks,

In the 1970s and 1980s, government control of the news media became more and more stringent, and very little was mentioned about these ‘border wars’ in the news media. In contrast, censorship of literature had been slackened, so that contentious matters kept out of the news media could be mentioned in fiction. Fiction became more factual, and ‘factual’ reporting more fictional.

Both qualitatively and quantitatively, official information was found wanting by soldiers and authors (as happened during the Vietnam War), and Harry Kalmer thus entitles his collection of stories *Die waarheid en ander stories* [The truth and other stories]. Weideman (2004:19) recalls how “Die algemene noodtoestand wat in die laat jare tagtig deur die Suid-Afrikaanse regering afgekondig is, het alle beriggewing oor konflik waarby die Suid-Afrikaanse weermag betrokke was, aan bande gelê” [The general state of emergency declared by the South African government in the late eighties restricted all reports of conflict within which the South-African army was involved], and claims that this elicited a response from writers directly. For the authors of *grensliteratuur* (as for those of literature on the Vietnam War), literature could play a role in establishing the truth about this war, as Henriette Roos (1985:92) argues,

Vir die meeste lesers bly dit ‘n kwellende vraag hoe hulle hierdie oorlogsliteratuur moet interpreteer en beoordeel: is dit historiese dokumente of literêre kunswerk of beide tegelyk. En wanneer die geskiedenis as ‘n fiksionele geheel aangebied word, is dit ‘n verdoeseling van die feite of dalk die enigste manier waarop die chaos kan sinvol word? Die dokumentêre waarde van die grensprosa is ongetwyfeld groot: inligting uit die verhale verkry (die inval in Angola, die aanval op Frelimo-basisse, die behandeling van krygsgevangenes, die drostery deur soldate, ens. ens.) bring ‘n korrektief op die beriggewing deur die televisie, radio- en koerantberigte.



[For most readers, it remains a troubling question how they should interpret and evaluate war literature: is it historical documents or literary works of art or both simultaneously. Moreover, when history is presented as a fictional whole, is it a concealment of facts or perhaps the only way that the chaos can become meaningful? The documentary value of the Border prose is undoubtedly large: information acquired from the stories (the invasion of Angola, the attack on FRELIMO bases, the treatment of prisoners, the desertion by soldiers, etc. etc.). bring a corrective to the reporting through television, radio, and newspaper reports.]<sup>86</sup>

Almost twenty years later, Roos (2008:147) makes a similar argument,

The attention to factual information and documentary references in the texts challenged the validity of what was disseminated as ‘true’ by official sources, but also implied the author’s own desire for validation. At the very least, *grensliteratuur* indicated that fiction could become a source of information, and in many instances it may have contributed to the revisionist history of atrocious events.

To the question, “Hoekom was Grenslit (spesifiek dié wat ook as protesliteratuur moes dien) feitlik deur die bank fiksie, in teenstelling met hedendaagse Grenslit wat amper nooit fiktief is nie?” [Why was Grenslit (especially those that also served as protest literature) virtually entirely fiction, in contrast with contemporary *grensliteratuur*, which is almost never fictional?], Alexander Strachan (Strachan and Roux 2011) answers,

Onder die ou bedeling se wetgewing was die literatuur hoofsaaklik as fiksie aangebied omdat die skrywer dan agter die “fiksionaliteit” van sy werk kon skuil – dikwels met ‘n skadeloosstelling voorin dat “die karakters en gebeure fiktief” is. Sodoende kon hy steeds sy boek gepubliseer kry, al was dit eintlik baie realisties en op werklikhede gebaseer. Die meerderheid lesers het die boeke ook gelees met die indruk dat dit, ten spyte van die fiksionele aanbieding, inderdaad “so was op die Grens”. Daar was in elk geval nie veel ander inligting beskikbaar nie, behalwe natuurlik propagandistiese verslae.

[Under the old regime’s legislation, literature was mainly presented as fiction because the author could hide behind the “fictionality” – often with an indemnity in the front that “the characters and events are fictional.” Thus, he could still get his book published, though it was actually very realistic and based on reality. Most readers read the books with the impression that, despite the fictional presentation, indeed, “it was like this on the Border.” There was not much other information available anyway, except of course propagandist reports.]<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Own translation

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Slotkin (2005:221) highlights the remark of the nineteenth-century German romantic writer Novalis, “Novels arise from the shortcomings of history.” If the distinction between ‘historical’ and ‘fictional’ stories is “first and foremost their contents, rather than their *form*” (original emphasis) (White 1984:2), and the contents of history is itself suspect, the distinction between factual and fictional writing comes into question. In both counterinsurgencies, then, the lack of access to trustworthy information led authors of literature to use their works as an alternative history. Slotkin (2005:225) observes that literature can function as a useful alternative to understanding history, “A novel can be as accurate as a history in telling what happened, when, and how.” Similarly, Hayden White (1988:1195) argues that the historical novel and film can be useful in representing the past,

Like the historical novel, the historical film draws attention to the extent to which it is a constructed or, as Rosenstone calls it, a ‘shaped’ representation of a reality we historians would prefer to consider to be “found” in the events themselves or, if not there, then at least in the “facts” that have been established by historians’ investigation of the record of the past. But the historical monograph is no less “shaped” or constructed than the historical film or historical novel. It may be shaped by different principles, but there is no reason why a filmed representation of historical events should not be as analytical and realistic as any written account.

White’s criticism corresponds with postmodernism’s critique of metanarratives: he describes himself as “a genuine pluralist and one who is even prepared to bear the label of radical relativist in matters having to do with *historical knowledge*” (original emphasis) (White 1986:486). While “nineteenth-century historians mythologized their subject by adopting the symbolism and narrative tropes of literary romanticism, to create master narratives or myths for the emerging nation-states of the West” (Slotkin 2005:227), White’s critical stance towards metanarratives underscores the possibility of alternative narratives. Postmodernist historiography thus acknowledges *both* the narrative of the general *and* the private, *both* that of the accredited historian *and* the historical novelist. As SFC Matthew P. Eversmann, Bravo Company, 3/75 Ranger Regiment, Task Force Ranger notes, “Everyone’s impressions under fire can be different. What one person sees may differ from what his ranger buddy across the street sees” (Eversmann 2000:415). The implication is that different perspectives can contribute to a fuller understanding of what happened.

In Carpenter's view, however, the scepticism towards an objective rendering of the 'facts' was not only the result of literature having engaged with the historical system, but also with other works within the literary system,

Strongly influenced by Joseph Heller's masterpiece of black comedy, *Catch-22*, these writers exploded the conventions of American war fiction to produce a diversity of works that demonstrate the multi-perspectival, relativistic nature of America's Vietnam experience and the futility of any attempt to identify, much less communicate (especially via language), any fundamental meaning or truth attaching to or derived from the war.

Many novelists toyed with the boundary between truth and fiction; as Tim O'Brien (1991:179) writes in "Good form," "story-truth is truer sometimes than happening-truth." The title page of *The things they carried* calls the book "A work of fiction by Tim O'Brien," but the central character – like the author a Vietnam veteran and writer – is also called Tim O'Brien<sup>88</sup>. Such a fluidity between real and concrete author extends the sense that the boundary between fact and fiction is not fixed. As O'Brien (1991:203-204) writes,

It's time to be blunt.

I'm forty-three years old, true, and I'm a writer now, and a long time ago I walked through Quang Ngai Province as a foot soldier.

Almost everything else is invented.

But it's not a game. It's a form. Right here, now, as I invent myself, I'm thinking of all I want to tell you about why this book is written as it is. For instance, I want to tell you this: twenty years ago I watched a man die on a trail near the village of My Khe. I did not kill him. But I was present, you see, and my presence was guilt enough. I remember his face, which was not a pretty face, because his jaw was in his throat, and I remember feeling the burden of responsibility and grief. I blamed myself. And rightly so, because I was present.

But listen. Even that story is made up.

I want you to feel what I felt. I want you to know why story-truth is truer sometimes than happening-truth.

Here is the happening-truth. I was once a soldier. There were many bodies, real bodies with real faces, but I was young then, and I was afraid to look. And now, twenty years later, I'm left with faceless responsibility and faceless grief.

Here is the story-truth. He was a slim, dead almost dainty young man of about twenty. He lay in the center of a red clay trail near the village of My Khe. His jaw was in his throat. His one eye was shut, the other eye was a star-shaped hole. I killed him.

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<sup>88</sup> Hughes (1998:5) writes, "In his later work concerning the war, [...] [O'Brien] deals with many of the same issues and events that occur in *If I die in a combat zone*, thus creating a tendency to interpret his fiction as autobiography."

What stories can do, I guess, is make things present.  
I can look at things I never looked at. I can attach faces to grief and love  
and pity and God. I can be brave. I can make myself feel again.  
“Daddy, tell the truth,” Kathleen can say, “did you ever kill anybody?”  
And I can say, honestly, “Of course not.”  
Or I can say, honestly, “Yes.”

Similarly, for Taylor (2003:21), John Sack’s *M* (1966) “demonstrated the way in which the line between fiction and non-fiction could be manipulated,” and Robin Moore prefaced his *The Green Berets* (1965) with a claim that he decided to present the truth as fiction (Taylor 2003:45). Indicative of Moore’s stance, and indeed the duplicity of official accounts, the US Department of Defence claimed that Moore’s account was fiction, yet accused it of committing 16 security violations (Taylor 2003:46). Van Coller (1990:84) also notes how many Afrikaans works adopted a neo-documentary style and depicted fiction as fact – thus creating *faction*. Writers like Alexander Strachan, Gawie Kellerman and Etienne van Heerden created counter-narratives “wat ingedruis het teen die regering se narratief van ‘n heldhaftige oorlog teen gevaarlike terroriste en godlose Kommuniste” [which went against the government’s narrative of a heroic battle against dangerous terrorists and godless Communists] (Viljoen and Van der Merwe 2006:xi).

However, even if novels can contribute to history, a difference remains between the novel and the historical work, one that is “formal rather than material” (Ankersmit 2010:44),

In a historical narrative historical truth is discovered, presented, and defended against potential criticism. Especially on the level of factual truth; here historians may go at great length to explain their choice and interpretation of source material and to justify the causal claims made by them in their narrative. Indeed, none of this has its counterpart in the text of the historical novel – though it may well be that the author of a historical novel did a lot of historical research before writing it (see also Slotkin (2005:224)).

Historical novels apply historical facts, and “the narrative form of the novel may very well go together with truth and with cognitive aspirations” (Ankersmit 2010:47), but are not wholly factual. Cronon (1992:1373) agrees that “The stories we write [...] are judged not just as narratives, but as nonfictions,” that historical writing is produced within an historiographical community that judges a work according to formal conventions; “historians don’t claim to present just a story but a true story, and this truth-claim is its

distinguishing hallmark” (original emphasis) (Lorenz 1998:327). To Lorenz (1998:326), literature and history cannot be interchangeable, because “The importance of the intersubjective character of the rules of ‘doing history’ in contrast to ‘doing literature’ cannot be overemphasized because it constitutes history’s distinguishing hallmark as an *empirical discipline*” (original emphasis). He observes,

In my view the truth-claims of history vis-a-vis literature remain essential and therefore cannot be treated as accidental. This crucial difference should prevent philosophers from treating history and fiction as two exemplars of the same species, that of the narrative, of which the historical story, ideally, just happens to be somehow connected to the search for truth. For whenever this happens philosophers of history end up on the wrong track. The stylistic or other textual *aspects* of history writing then are substituted for history itself, and the philosophical result of this substitution, is that philosophy of history is treated as a branch of aesthetics or of literary theory (Lorenz 1998:329).

Despite the difficulty of representing (or even knowing) historical facts, there is a vast difference between the ‘truth’ of Tim O’Brien and that of Wiest: Wiest is institutionally *required* to substantiate his facts and construct a *logical* narrative that builds on previously known, and equally institutionalized, facts and theories. Academic publications are subject to peer review, and although this system is certainly not infallible, it assures a measure of accuracy. In contrast, O’Brien is free to blend fact and fiction, to infer happenings, and his works are not scrutinized *as works of an academic discipline* but rather *as works of fiction*. This view is shared by Zagorin (1999:18),

Few readers or persons with any genuine experience of doing history will ever be persuaded that there is no fundamental difference between historical and fictional narratives because both are creations of language. Nor has White succeeded in giving sense to, much less justifying, the proposition that historical facts are constituted by and derive their existence from the protocols of language. Equally implausible is the claim that historians are under no constraints of fact and meaning in producing their narratives and are free to emplot and interpret past events in whatever way they prefer.

I agree with this less radical view: while the historical novel may be supplementary to official historical accounts, the literary text is subject to formal conventions that differentiates it from the historical work. While Herr or O’Brien may present a better account of what the experience itself entailed, they are not in the same position as e.g. Wiest (2006) or Neu (2005) when describing what actually happened and why. If the

reader wanted to know what actually happened in Iraq, for instance, he could read Marston, Malkasian, or Kilcullen, but for knowing what these types of conflicts are like on the ground, anything by James Ashcroft (e.g. (2010[2006]) and (2009)) is invaluable. Both types have a place in describing the events of the past, but they are not interchangeable,

History is above all and in its essential character a work of thought and of analysis and synthesis. Historical inquiry always operates through reflective processes of selection based on relevance to the problems and questions that the historian poses with respect to his or her subject (Zagorin 1999:21).

Alternative forms of history often suffer from historical inaccuracies and theoretical inadequacies, since they are not written within a scientific discipline with its emphasis on verifying sources and qualifying statements. An example<sup>89</sup> is Feinstein's (2011:139, 173) insistence that local forces fighting alongside SADF soldiers as members of SWATF in Namibia were "mercenaries." This claim is easily refuted by facts. The International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing, and Training of Mercenaries, adopted by the UN in 1989, provides the following definition of a mercenary (see Messner (2007:66)):

1. A mercenary is any person who:
  - a) Is specially recruited locally or abroad in order to fight in an armed conflict;
  - b) Is motivated to take part in the hostilities essentially by the desire for private gain and, in fact, is promised, by or on behalf of a party to the conflict, material compensation substantially in excess of that promised or paid to combatants of similar rank and functions in the armed forces of that party;
  - c) Is neither a national of a party to the conflict nor a resident of territory controlled by a party to the conflict;
  - d) Is not a member of the armed forces of a party to the conflict; and
  - e) Has not been sent by a State, which is not a party to the conflict on official duty as a member of its armed forces.
2. A mercenary is also any person who, in any other situation:
  - a) Is specially recruited locally or abroad for the purpose of participating in a concerted act of violence aimed at:

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<sup>89</sup> Only one example is named here, but historical and factual inaccuracies abound. Van Dijkhorst (2012:154) for instance believes the war in Namibia was fought against the "hele bevolking" [whole population] of Namibia in "Vir volk en vaderland", while Ben Viljoen (2013) claims that PW Botha was the Minister of Defence in 1984.

- i) Overthrowing a Government or otherwise undermining the constitutional order of a State; or
- ii) Undermining the territorial integrity of a State;
- b) Is motivated to take part therein essentially by the desire for significant private gain and is prompted by the promise or payment of material compensation;
- c) Is neither a national nor a resident of the State against which such an act is directed;
- d) Has not been sent by a State on official duty; and
- e) Is not a member of the armed forces of the State on whose territory the act is undertaken (UN Mercenary Convention 1989).

Calling members of SWATF “mercenaries” thus is inaccurate in terms of 1c), 1d), 2a)i), 2a)ii), 2c), 2d), and 2e) – a rather obvious legal reason why these troops cannot be called “mercenaries”. Feinstein shows no sign of being aware of this definition, nor the highly similar Protocol Additional to the Geneva Convention of 12 August 1949, relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts, Geneva, ICRC, 1977: Article 47: Mercenaries (see Schreier and Caparini (2005:15)). Taking Feinstein as a source of history therefore comes with significant problems. Also, one wonders what to make of Ferreira’s (2012b)<sup>90</sup> statement that “elke stryd waarin die mens hom deur die eeue heen beywer het om sy medemens uit te wis en indien dit nie haalbaar is nie, die ander mens so doeltreffend as moontlik na siel en liggaam te vermink” [every war through the centuries in which man strived to destroy his fellow man and if this was not feasible, to mutilate the other person’s soul and body as efficiently as possible]. The objective of war has never been to kill (or mutilate) others, as argued by e.g. Machiavelli (1992), Von Clausewitz (1994), Chaliand (1994), Keegan (2004), Münkler (2005), Smith (2005), Kaldor (2006), Petraeus (2006), Marston and Malkasian (2008), Van Creveld (2008), Kilcullen (2010), Scholtz (2012) etcetera etcetera. Van Creveld for instance goes to great lengths to come to a description of war, and indeed writes, “war does not consist simply of a situation where one person or group puts the other to death, even if the killing is organized, done for a purpose, and considered legal; rather, it begins at that point where inflicting mortal injury becomes reciprocal” (1991:160). Killing without this risk is not considered war – as in Nazi concentration camps – and those who conduct it are not considered praiseworthy – as the SS who conducted the killings. Even the US emphasis

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<sup>90</sup> The foreword has no page numbers.

on the body count during the early years of the Vietnam War was designed to force the North to surrender, not to kill every North Vietnamese (if this had been the objective, nuclear weapons would have been more suitable). Using Ferreira as a source of history on the war in Namibia/Angola is therefore highly problematic when she shows no understanding of the nature or history of warfare, neither globally nor locally.

Historical literature however contributes to the construction of a cultural narrative, and often undermines the 'official' view. In the absence of trustworthy official accounts, as happened in the US initially and in the RSA both during and after the war, historical literature can offer an alternative narrative that reappraises or counterpoises the official narrative. Viljoen (2010:171) for instance calls *grensliteratuur* "anti-nationalist," just as James Webb and Arthur Downs note that writing against the Vietnam War had been a requirement for historical literature on the war (Lomperis 1987:22). Like historiography, historical literature can thus also contribute to the war of narratives aimed at political ends.

According to Hayden White (1982:12), Sartre and Jameson both seem to believe that "a life makes sense only insofar as it is worked up into a story"<sup>91</sup>, this story embedded in another story of greater, transpersonal scope, and this in another, and so on." At the heart of writing on these two counterinsurgencies lies an attempt to make sense through the construction of narratives. For historians, politicians, novelists, and soldiers, writing on war is thus in a major sense an attempt to give meaning to experience, and thereby serve to support, or reassess, identity.

Isaacs (2006:295) claims, "Americans are taught to think of war as narrative, something that begins, proceeds through a succession of battles, and then comes to an end. But the Vietnam War, as experienced by both the men who fought it and by those watching from home, had no narrative structure." Unlike during WWII, Vietnam did not seem to have a coherent narrative organization – an issue complicated by the fact that this was the first US war where soldiers returned from the front before the war was over; the war could therefore never be experienced in its entirety. Braid (1996:16) claims,

In many ways we understand the present happenings of the world by telling ourselves stories about 'what is going on.' We actively abstract a coherent,

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<sup>91</sup> Bruner (1991:4) agrees, "we organize our experience and our memory of human happenings mainly in the form of narrative – stories, excuses, myths, reasons for doing and not doing, and so on."



followable sequence of events from lived experience. If these narratives ‘fit’ the unfolding of lived experience – if they are pragmatically useful in living or if they are congruent with experiences or narratives we already know – we feel we have understood or accurately experienced ‘what is going on.’ The coherence that informs the narrative can then be argued to be the coherence of the world and used as a resource for future interpretations.

Historical representations of the Vietnam War and the war in Namibia/Angola have this in common: both constitute a conflict of narratives that vie for becoming the dominant meaning-constructing narrative that constitutes the greater national identity, but at the same time the existence of this conflict testifies to the postmodern fragmentation of national identities.

### THE SEARCH FOR MEANING

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Seeman (1972a:15) comes to a noteworthy conclusion regarding knowledge-seeking behaviour amongst workers in Los Angeles in 1966, “The respondents who are more alienated in work tend more often to make the work choice rather than opting for no information: they apparently ‘need’ more information, and act to get it – which hardly bespeaks retreatist or escapist tendencies of the sort that the ‘mass society’ viewpoint emphasizes.” This provides a possible explanation as to why soldiers of both the US and South Africa took to writing about their experiences: the alienated are more motivated to understand the events in which they are engaged (or, in the case of war literature, *were engaged*), and thus actively seek to find more information. O’Brien writes in *The things they carried* (1991:70):

What seems to happen becomes its own happening and has to be told that way. The angles of vision are skewed. When a booby trap explodes, you close your eyes and duck and float outside yourself. When a guy dies, like Curt Lemon, you look away and then look back for a moment and then look away again. The pictures get jumbled; you tend to miss a lot. And then afterward, when you go to tell about it, there is always that surreal seemingness, which makes the story seem untrue, but which in fact represents the hard and exact truth as it *seemed* (original emphasis).

Meaninglessness is also represented in *Paco’s Story*, where Paco’s contribution and sacrifice is disregarded by the society that sent him to war. Note the following passage,

And Paco answers Mr. Elliot – as simple and fretful and harmless as the old man is – the same as he nearly always answers, ‘Why, the Vietnam War, sir.’ The old man squirms around on his stool and shakes his head – he has never heard of the place – but before he can answer, Paco turns on his heel and is out the door and into the fresh air again (Heinemann 2005[1986]:75).

Here meaninglessness contributes to Paco distancing himself from society, and the entire story is told by “the ghosts, the dead” (2005[1986]:137), who claim “Paco is made to dream and remember” (2005[1986]:137); he survived only to keep the memory alive.

Bothma (2007) conducted extensive research on the war in Namibia/Angola, and so did Barlow (2007) and Nortjé (2004[2003]) – all part of the unit that probably felt most betrayed by the NP government, 32-Batallion. In *Pionne*, Bertie Cloete (2009:25) writes,

Die briefskrywery is ‘n vorm van sinmaak van die situasie waarin jy jou bevind. Dit is asof jy wil regverdiging kry vir die feit dat jy hier is. Dit is asof jy wil sê: Skryf vir my iets terug wat sin maak oor hoekom ek hier moet wees, want tussen die geskree en gegil het ek saans net ‘n volslae moegheid en gatvolgeit. Hoekom is ons werklik hier?

[Writing letters is a form of making sense of the situation in which you find yourself. It is as if you want justification for the fact that you are here. It is as if you want to say: Write me back something that makes sense about why I have to be here, because through the screams and yells I am completely fatigued and fed up every evening. Why are we really here?]

In the short story “Van die ander oorlog,” Gawie Kellerman (1988:22-23) depicts his inability to understand the conflict through an almost magic-realist portrayal of a massacre in a village,

Uit sy oogkaste het rook begin vorm aanneem. Dit het effens na swael geruik. Die rook het in slierte by die deur uitgetrek, al in die skadukolle langs tot by die eerste hut waar ‘n meisie se lyk was. Daar was weer ‘n geruis. Toe kom dit uit en trek na die volgende hut toe, tot al ses hutte klaar was. Oor die vuurmaakplek het dit ‘n vaste vorm aangeneem en afbeweeg rivier toe. Op die water het dit gaan lê soos wasem op ‘n koue oggend. Later het die wind opgekom en dit op die stroom langs gewaai en uitmekaar gepluk ... Mike, wat het by daardie stat gebeur?

Hy skrik effens op, vryf met sy hande oor sy bo-arms en staan stadig op, begin terugstap.

“Ek weet nie. Ek wil ook nie weet nie...” Mike het snaaks, byna onseker geklink toe ons terugstap kamp toe.

[From his orbits smoke began to take shape. It smelled slightly of sulphur. The smoke drifted in streaks out the door, all along the shady spots to the first hut where a girl’s body was. There was another noise. Then it came out and went to

the next hut, until drifting through six huts. Over the fireplace, it made a solid form, and drifted to the river. On the water, it lay like steam on a cold morning. Later the wind came up, blew it along the stream, and picked it apart ... Mike, what happened to that village?

He jumped slightly, ran his hands over his upper arms and slowly stood up, started walking back.

“I do not know. I do not want to know ...” Mike sounded strange, almost uncertain when we walked back to camp.]<sup>92</sup>

Holt (2005:101) recalls how he attempted to make sense after a major conventional attack on enemy positions in February 1988, “It was almost as if my mind was trying to comprehend the magnitude of the last 24 hours and put everything into some kind of perspective or logical sequence, if there is such a thing in war.”

## CONCLUSION ON MEANINGLESSNESS

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Meaninglessness is central to narratives on the wars in Vietnam and Namibia/Angola. Soldiers often depict an inability to understand the war in general and, more specifically, the objectives of operations. There is often a sense that soldiers in these texts do not trust the accuracy of the information they receive, and a perceived lack of information in general. In both Namibia and Vietnam, a credibility gap emerged as soldiers discovered how their governments twisted the truth for their own objectives, and this is manifested in the literature as well. All of these factors result in alienation from their societies and from command structures, as it creates the impression that information from the top cannot be trusted, and as mentioned in the section on powerlessness, soldiers tell a story of questioning whether their superiors have their interests at heart. This is one aspect in particular that sets counterinsurgencies apart from conventional war such as WWII: in the latter, at least the objectives of the war were clear, and one does not often find soldiers questioning the factual accuracy of official accounts of events, ideology, or the purpose of the war – the war is relatively black and white (at least in the popular myth). Counterinsurgencies, on the other hand, revels in grey areas, in uncertainty, and as the

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<sup>92</sup> Own translation.

section on history has shown, this uncertainty extends even to historical accounts. Even today – long after these two wars were concluded – who won or lost, the reasons for going to war and the conduct of the soldiers are still circumspect. However, in personal narratives, this uncertainty is given more emphasis, as the mode of narration allows ambiguity more than historical accounts.

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## CHAPTER 8: NORMLESSNESS IN COUNTERINSURGENCY

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### INTRODUCTION

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According to Senekal (1987:85), norms are,

‘n aantoonbaar wederkerend-gevolgde riglyn van ‘n maatskaplik relevante handeling as die nie-ervulling daarvan so dikwels deur die gemeenskap met sanksies gestraf word, dat die sanksies self in ‘n groot mate deur die betrokkenes aanvaar word. [...] Norme is kontraproduktief gestabiliseerde verwagtings. Norme reduseer kompleksiteit en maak gevolglik ‘n duursame sosiale gedrag moontlik.

[a proven recurrent guideline of a socially relevant action if the non-fulfilment is so often punished with sanctions by the community, that the sanctions themselves are to a large extent accepted by the participants. [...] Norms are contra-realistic stabilized expectations. Norms reduce complexity and therefore make durable social behaviour possible.]<sup>93</sup>

As the following section will show, normlessness and powerlessness are strongly correlated in a conflict environment.

### SEEMAN'S NOTION OF NORMLESSNESS

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In Seeman's original five-aspect model, normlessness denotes both the rejection of what is seen as the dominant values in a society, and the perception that socially unapproved means are required to achieve socially approved goals. Normlessness "derives partly from conditions of complexity and conflict in which individuals become unclear about the composition and enforcement of social norms. Sudden and abrupt changes occur in life conditions, and the norms that usually operate may no longer seem adequate as guidelines for conduct" (Neal and Collas 2000:122). Neal and Collas's description of normlessness includes both facets of the term as Seeman originally conceived it, but in Seeman's revised six-aspect model, normlessness's facet of rejecting "the community as a source of standards" (Mirowsky and Ross 1986:36) was reclassified under *cultural estrangement*, and in the six-aspect model normlessness refers to the second aspect of normlessness as identified in the five-aspect model, namely, "the technically most

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<sup>93</sup> Own translation

effective procedure, whether culturally legitimate or not, becomes typically preferred to institutionally prescribed conduct” (Merton 1949:128). Where an individual accepts the goals of society, but feels himself unable to achieve these goals with the means at his disposal, a situation of anomie arises, which Seeman (1959:788) defines as, “one in which there is a *high expectancy that socially unapproved behaviours are acquired to achieve given goals*” (original emphasis). In this sense, normlessness is “an acceptance of socially unapproved behaviours as the way to achieve goals” ((Ross and Mirowsky 1987:257), see also Seeman (1959:788)). Since normlessness involves “the expectation that illegitimate means must be employed to realize culturally prescribed goals” (Middleton 1963:974), the concept implies powerlessness, since the individual has the perception that achieving recognized goals (wealth, success, victory) through legitimate means is untenable, what Ross and Mirowsky (1987:258) call “structural inconsistency.” They<sup>94</sup> argue,

Structural inconsistency is a situation, common in the lower socio-economic positions, in which society defines certain goals as desirable and also defines the legitimate and allowable procedures for moving toward the objectives, but does not provide adequate resources and opportunities for achieving the objectives through legitimate means.

Similarly, society sets the goal of military victory, but adds that this should be achieved without great loss of life (on both sides) or destruction of property, whether civilian or military. In both the US and South Africa, society elected governments that would ensure their security, and masculine society encourages males to take part in warfare to prove their manliness. However, both the US and South African publics abhorred military casualties and the subjugation of other peoples, creating a “structural inconsistency.”

An “ends justifies the means” approach can develop in any war, whereby behaviour that is not accepted by society in general is adopted through the perception that this is the only option available. During WWII, ‘strategic’ or ‘area bombing’ killed indiscriminately, as illustrated in the British Air Staff directive of 14 February 1942, which laid down that operations “should now be focused on the morale of the enemy civilian population and in particular of industrial workers” (Keegan 2004:374). The concept of *Total War* “created a new centre of gravity: civilian populations” (Chaliand and Blin

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<sup>94</sup> Although Ross and Mirowsky’s research is focused on criminal environments, conflict environments exhibit many of the same features (see Kaldor (2006:12), Jütersonke, Muggah and Rodgers (2009:374), and Shapiro (2009:447)), as argued under the section on powerlessness.

2007:209), since civilians supported the war effort and thus became targets as well. The Nazis, Soviets, British, and Americans all targeted civilians intentionally.<sup>95</sup> These actions were however deemed necessary in order to win the war, and some counterinsurgency tactics are no different. Merton (1946:143) observes, “The emphasis on this theme reflects a social disorder – ‘anomie’ is the sociological term – in which common values have been submerged in the welter of private interests seeking satisfaction by virtually any means which are effective.”

Dale (2007:200) claims the US, Britain, and France as well as the South Africans used torture as a means of conducting counterinsurgencies. This is certainly not a unique feature of counterinsurgency, since Soviet, Nazi and Allied atrocities during WWII are for instance well documented, and so are numerous massacres during the colonization of the Third World. Scarry (1985:40) notes that torture rooms were called ‘guest rooms’ in Greece and ‘safe houses’ in the Philippines, and “Israeli soldiers held in Syria describe being suspended from the ceiling in a tire that was swung as they were beaten, or having one’s genitals tied by a string to a door handle and having the string beaten.”

Counterinsurgency, however, places greater emphasis on the population and erases the distinction between combatants and non-combatants – two factors that encourage torture and atrocities. Being unable to distinguish between insurgents and civilians, COIN-forces sometimes see themselves as forced to operate beyond the rule of law and morality in order to quell the insurgency. During the Palestinian insurgency just before WWII, the British used “Oozle minesweepers” – Arab hostages placed in the front of trains or forced to run in front of convoys on mined roads (Townshend 2008:32). The Soviet COIN in the Ukraine was similarly characterized by brutal COIN-tactics:

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<sup>95</sup> One very controversial tactic employed in Vietnam was the Phung Hoang or Phoenix Program, which grew out of a 1967 CIA pacification program and attempted to identify, arrest or otherwise remove NLF commanders, or in the official terminology, to “neutralize” (Tovy 2009:11) insurgents. The program was modeled on a similar program employed by the British in Malaya (Tovy 2009:17), and from 1968 to 1972 – when it was phased out – operatives captured 34,000 and killed around 26,000 PLAF commanders (Hall 2008:68) see also Nagl (2008:145)). This was heavily criticized for being an immoral program of assassination, yet Codevilla and Seabury (2006:237-238) defend this approach, since “Killing those whose death is most likely to stop the killing is not only more ethically defensible but also more effective militarily.” In Phoenix one finds the beginning of what would become official US strategy in Iraq, namely that not all Iraqis are the enemy, but only the Baath Party, and hence regime change was aimed at limiting civilian casualties, unlike in WWII. Similarly, current sanctions against Zimbabwe’s Zanu-PF target the ruling party, not the entire population, as Cold War sanctions had done. In effect, this gravitational shift is a corrective on the Total War strategy during WWII, and thus Phoenix is one of few positive legacies of the Vietnam War.

Suspected insurgents were often subject to show trials and public executions, after which their bodies were placed on public display and residents were forbidden from burying them. Families of individual insurgents were often held hostage as leverage, while the populations of entire villages where active support for insurgents was widespread were deported to other parts of Ukraine and the Soviet Union (Zhukov 2007:448).

During the counterinsurgency in Cyprus (1955-1959), British journalists nicknamed the Cyprus Police and intelligence personnel – most originating from Britain – “HMTs” for “Her Majesty’s Torturers” (Corum 2006:33). Kalyvas (2005:96) also notes atrocities committed by the Portuguese during the Angolan war of independence (1961-1975), although admitting to similar atrocities committed by liberation movements. In the Portuguese territories, troops “poisoned wells and threw drugged prisoners out of aircraft” (Purkitt and Burgess 2002:233) – a claim often made against US and South African soldiers as well.

Brutality is part-and-parcel of insurgencies and counterinsurgencies; Metz and Millen (2004:32) argue, “Regime after regime fighting determined insurgents has found that the most effective methods, sometimes the only effective methods, violate human and civil rights. Beleaguered governments must often choose between sinking to the ethical level of the insurgents or defeat.” In the Philippines, for instance, atrocities were committed by insurgents as well as US forces (Joes 2008:43), and in Malaya, 24 Chinese villagers from Batang Kali were killed by British forces in December 1948 (Stubbs 2008:115). McWilliams (2009:34) recalls, “The TRC is full of accounts of individuals who conducted illegal actions with and without government support because of this willingness to see things in the extreme.” Dale (2007:201) admits that the SADF did punish those responsible for atrocities, although retaining the right to try soldiers in South Africa rather than Namibia. Giliomee (2004:616) also admits that some atrocities were committed during the rule of the National Party regime, but notes that these were not officially sanctioned and that perpetrators were punished. Du Preez (2005:14) however disagrees, arguing that members of the Civil Co-operation Bureau (CCB) that assassinated political opponents were never punished, and the TRC (1998:66) claims,

Mass detentions in the ‘operational areas’ were common. Many detainees were held secretly and without access to lawyers or relatives for long periods, sometimes years. Such conditions provided opportunities for prolonged abuse and torture. Torture was also used as a method of intimidation by police and



soldiers in the war zone, and as a way of extracting ‘operational’ information quickly. Torture methods reported in the South West African press, in affidavits by South West Africans and as a result of international human rights investigations included beatings, sleep deprivation, drowning, strangling and suffocation, suspension from ropes or poles, burnings (sometimes over open fires), electric shocks and being held against the hot exhausts of military vehicles.

Atrocities are often represented in *grensliteratuur*. In the short story “Van die verraaier,” Gawie Kellerman (1988:44-45) writes how an SADF soldier is sent to interrogate the wife of a possible insurgent sympathizer,

Ná oomblikke se twyfel kry ek weer ‘n houvas op myself en regverdig myself met my Suid-Afrikaans-vervaardigde stewels. Ek besluit om haar nie ‘n derde keer te skop nie. Dit sou te erg wees. Ek kyk vir oulaas na die meid teen die houthoop, die kleintjies in die deur en hardloop dan weg.

[After a moment’s doubt I get a grip on myself and justify myself with my South African-made boots. I decide not to kick her for a third time. It would be too severe. For the last time I look at the black woman against the heap of wood, the young ones in the door, and run away.]<sup>96</sup>

Of course, torture was not confined to COIN-forces, and this is represented in *grensliteratuur* as well: Kellerman’s (1988:33-34) “Van ‘n man se storie” tells of the pain an SADF POW endures during torture by insurgents, including electric shock. In Robin Moore’s *The Green Berets* – significantly a book dealing with the advisory phase and depicting the war in a far more positive light than later works – torture is conducted by the South Vietnamese,

Stitch had the names of the other four strikers implicated by the Viet Cong Ngoc had questioned the day before. The translator asked by individual name if the other prisoners were Viet Cong infiltrators. The suspect, staring aghast at the machine, answered yes four times. The polygraph indicated he was telling the truth. Ngoc was delighted. Through the interpreter he said, “This is truly a fine machine. Now we don’t waste time. We know exactly who to torture.” Stitch shook his head. “When you learn to use this machine you don’t need to use torture. I can find out whatever you want to know through the polygraph.” Ngoc listened to the translation and asked, “What if they refuse to say a word?” “They’re probably hard-core VC,” Stitch replied. “Chances are you won’t even torture the truth out of them.” “If they are truly the enemy they should be tortured anyway,” Ngoc retorted. “Now we get the Oriental mind at work,” Stitch said wearily to the Americans in the room. “If we stay here for twenty

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<sup>96</sup> Own translation.

years we won't change them, and God save us from getting like them (Moore 1983[1965]:46-47).

Allen (2008:164) claims that torture was also used as a method of interrogation by US forces in Vietnam, and in early 1971, the Winter Soldier Investigation in Detroit provided a platform for soldiers to testify to war crimes they committed in Vietnam. They testified to “committing or witnessing rape, the routine killing of civilians, and mass murder” (Allen 2008:184). Such testimonies strengthened the image of US soldiers in Vietnam as ‘baby killers’, although just as not all US soldiers conducted themselves professionally, the reverse is obviously true as well. Issues such as Morley Safer’s report, which showed the burning of Vietnamese villages and the execution of a National Liberation Front (NLF) prisoner in Saigon during the Tet offensive, strengthened the image of Americans inflicting unnecessary suffering on the Vietnamese, and undermined public support for US forces while simultaneously strengthening support for the PLAF and PAVN, both nationally and internationally.

The best-known example of an atrocity from Vietnam is the My Lai massacre, for which Lieutenant William Calley was convicted of multiple murders on 29 March 1971<sup>97</sup>. According to reports, nearly 500 unarmed civilians had been massacred at this village on 16 March 1968 (Hall 2008:66). A derogatory attitude towards the Vietnamese seem to have played some part in the incident; after the investigation, an army psychiatrist noted, “Lt. Calley states that he did not feel as if he were killing human beings, rather they were animals with whom one could not speak or reason” (quoted in Allen (2008:48)).

Significantly, Tim O’Brien served in the same area where the My Lai massacre took place, an area called Pinkville. In “How to tell a true war story,” even animals are massacred (O’Brien 1991:75):

Later, higher in the mountains, we came across a baby VC water buffalo. What it was doing there I don’t know – no farms or paddies – but we chased it down and got a rope around it and led it along to a deserted village where we set up for the night. After supper Rat Kiley went over and stroked its nose. He opened up a can of C rations, pork and beans, but the baby buffalo wasn’t interested. Rat shrugged.

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<sup>97</sup> However, Calley only spent three days in prison before being put under house arrest by President Nixon, and on 9 November 1974, he was released on parole (Taylor 2003:110).

He stepped back and shot it through the right front knee. The animal did not make a sound. It went down hard, then got up again, and Rat took careful aim and shot off an ear. He shot it in the hindquarters and in the little hump at its back. He shot it twice in the flanks. It wasn't to kill; it was to hurt. He put the muzzle up against the mouth and shot the mouth away. Nobody said much. The whole platoon stood there watching, feeling all kinds of things, but there wasn't a great deal of pity for the baby water buffalo. Curt Lemon was dead. Rat Kiley had lost his best friend in the world.

Later in the week he would write a long personal letter to the guy's sister, who would not write back, but for now it was a question of pain. He shot off the tail. He shot away chunks of meat below the ribs. All around us there was the smell of smoke and filth and deep greenery, and the evening was humid and very hot. Rat went to automatic. He shot randomly, almost casually, quick little spurts in the belly and butt. Then he reloaded, squatted down, and shot it in the left front knee. Again the animal fell hard and tried to get up, but this time it couldn't quite make it. It wobbled and went down sideways. Rat shot it in the nose. He bent forward and whispered something, as if talking to a pet, then he shot it in the throat. All the while the baby buffalo was silent, or almost silent, just a light bubbling sound where the nose had been. It lay very still. Nothing moved except the eyes, which were enormous, the pupils shiny black and dumb.

Rat Kiley was crying. He tried to say something, but then cradled his rifle and went off by himself.

Note that it is not simply a water buffalo, but a "VC" water buffalo, thus indicating how their entire environment is considered hostile – even the animals – after Curt Lemon had stepped on the IED.

Importantly, insurgents are never a match for COIN-forces in the military sphere, but this military weakness has been turned into an advantage by insurgents using the media. Insurgents use the media to raise awareness of their grievances, and in particular portray COIN-forces as ruthless and brutal, while they are oppressed and forced to resort to violence because of the violence directed at them (according to their narrative). Van Creveld (2008:269) remarks, "By definition, guerrillas and terrorists are weak. By definition, their opponents are much stronger. Contrary to the accepted wisdom, [...] most guerrillas and terrorists won their struggles because they are weak." This weakness can help recruit like-minded individuals – such as Islamic extremists that flocked to Iraq and Afghanistan – or undermine public support for the counterinsurgency effort, because "fighting the weak demeans those who engage in it and, therefore, undermines its own purpose. He who loses out to the weak loses; he who triumphs over

the weak also loses” (Van Creveld 1991a:175). The power relationship has an effect on how tactics and strategies are viewed by the national and international public,

Necessity knows no bounds; hence he who is weak can afford to go to the greatest lengths, resort to the most underhand means, and commit every kind of atrocity without compromising his political support and, more important still, his own moral principles. Conversely, almost *anything* that the strong does or does not do is, in one sense, unnecessary and, therefore, cruel (Van Creveld 1991a:175) (original emphasis).<sup>98</sup>

Eeben Barlow (2007:42) relates how this principle manifested in South Africa in the 1980s: After the successful Special Forces raid on Botswana (Operation Plexi), which included killing junior MK leader Thami Mnyele, Barlow realized, “the international community would quickly condone any ANC action while immediately condemning any counter-move South Africa made.” In the collective memory of South Africa in the 1980s (as depicted for instance in the Apartheid Museum), it is the firing on protestors by security forces, the death in detainment of Steve Biko, and the images of CASSPIRs and teargas that stand out; necklacing, the murder of civilians, the planting of landmines and bombs are hardly mentioned – if ever. In particular, the defining picture of pre-1994 South Africa is Hector Peterson’s death in the 1976 Soweto riots, not Andrew Zondo’s victims, or the killing of Amy Biehl. In Vietnam as well, the iconic images are not People’s Army of North Vietnam (PAVN) and National Liberation Front (NLF) atrocities, but South Vietnamese and US atrocities. As the abovementioned statement by Van Creveld acknowledges, this use of the media rests on the military superiority of the counterinsurgents.

Because of this power imbalance, the international public condones normlessness when insurgents apply whatever means to fight a ‘just’ cause, as it is “the cause embraced by a terrorist movement, rather than its mode of action, that is subject to moral evaluation. In the context of the wars of national liberation of the 1950s and 1960s, terrorist activities are often seen in a positive light because they hastened the liberation of oppressed peoples” (Chaliand and Blin 2007:7). This attitude is vividly

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<sup>98</sup> Kilcullen (2010:187) has a similar but more careful observation, “We regard insurgents’ methods as unacceptable, but their grievances are often seen as legitimate, provided they are pursued peacefully. This is why mainstream society often accepts insurgents who renounce violence but seek the same objectives through political means.”

illustrated by the fact that the UN General Assembly applauded Yasser Arafat in 1974, shortly after his PLO had murdered 26 Israeli schoolchildren (Codevilla and Seabury 2006:187). After the conflict in South Africa, MK did not make full disclosure of their activities to the Truth and Reconciliation Committee (TRC), arguing, “It should not be held accountable for atrocities committed while waging a legitimate armed struggle” (Baines 2008:13). Members of the security forces were however required to make disclosures at the TRC hearings, and attempts were made to force PW Botha to testify as well (he refused, along with the top military commanders). Tellingly also, the SWAPO government, which has been in charge in Namibia since full independence, has refused any investigations into its conduct during the war, in part since “it has not wanted the atrocities perpetrated in [its] camps in Angola to come under public scrutiny” (Saunders 2008:269). Ranger (1992:703) however recognizes that “Liberation movements may have needed to use force to overthrow settler regimes, and nationalist states to defend themselves against destabilization. Nevertheless, some forms of violence even in those contexts are immoral, excessive, and counter-productive.” The view that anything was justifiable during the ‘wars of liberation’ is however deeply entrenched; Shubin (2008:265) claims that Soviet instruction “helped to prevent [liberation movements] from using terrorist methods. Refusal to use such methods was, as a rule, a striking feature of all the liberation movements supported by the Soviet Union.” Using Shubin’s logic, ANC necklacing, FRELIMO and MPLA massacres, assassinations, and the various NLF and PLO atrocities are not “terrorist.”

## THE IMPACT OF NORMLESSNESS ON LITERARY REPRESENTATION

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Not only do literature on the Vietnam War and the war in Namibia/Angola often depict incidents of normlessness, but also according to O’Brien (1991:89), normlessness is the yardstick for judging truth in a war story:

A true war story is never moral. It does not instruct, nor encourage virtue, nor suggest models of proper human behavior, nor restrain men from doing the things men have always done. If a story seems moral, do not believe it. If at the end of a war story you feel uplifted, or if you feel that some small bit of rectitude has been salvaged from the larger waste, then you have been made the victim of a very old and terrible lie. There is no rectitude whatsoever. There is no virtue.

As a first rule of thumb, therefore, you can tell a true war story by its absolute and uncompromising allegiance to obscenity and evil.

O'Brien makes an important point. Very few literary works on the Vietnam War do not have an "absolute and uncompromising allegiance to obscenity and evil"; very few works depict the environment of war in an "uplifting" manner, apart from the early works on the advisor phase. Gustav Hasford writes in *The short-timers* (1980:36), "Guns tell the truth. Guns never say, 'I'm only kidding.' War is ugly because the truth can be ugly and war is very sincere." Similarly – apart from popular works of literature – narratives on the war in Namibia/Angola also do not offer stories of redemption, or anything that can be labelled "uplifting" or "moral."

James Webb's *Fields of fire* can serve as an example. The character Goodrich (Senator) is opposed to the war and aims to hold the moral high ground throughout his deployment in Vietnam. When two other soldiers, including Snake – a violent Marine who joined the army because it was the only environment he thought would reward his violent character – execute two Vietnamese prisoners, Goodrich files an official complaint. While the complaint is being processed, the company gets involved in a major firefight, and Goodrich is seriously wounded and pinned down by machinegun fire. Snake saves Goodrich's life, but dies in the effort. Their commanding officer commends him for a medal and mentions Snake's bravery in a letter to his mother, while Goodrich is sent home. However, as the investigation starts, officials decide not to award the medal to someone suspected of war crimes, and so Snake's mother waits in vain for something to prove that her son was a brave, honourable man. Goodrich, on the other hand, is supposed to deliver a speech against the war at a university gathering, but ends up defending the war, and is removed from the stage and his car vandalised. All came to nothing, in particular, Goodrich's moral standards robbed the mother of the soldier who saved his life of any consolation, and his experience of combat alienated him from the protestors while his moral convictions alienated him from his unit. Of all the books considered for this thesis, this event struck me as the most terrible: Unlike John Wayne in *The Green Berets* (Moore and Barrett 1968), the story does not end with a hero's welcome and a romanticised "walking off into the sunset" (literally), but only with despair, and no hint that there was a "correct" stance that Goodrich could have taken.

## CONCLUSION ON NORMLESSNESS

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Powerlessness, threat, and mistrust may create the perception that socially unapproved means are necessary to obtain objectives, and thus normlessness is part of any war, not only counterinsurgencies. However, the questioning of the threat itself – the questioning of the Communist threat, i.e. the Domino Theory – removed some of the justification for the use of socially unapproved means to obtain objectives during the Cold War. While Germany and Japan were believed to threaten the US and Britain during WWII, North Vietnam never posed a direct threat to the US. As a result, the use of an “ends justified the means”-approach was impossible to present to the US population, and therefore the use of torture, executions and chemical weapons had to be done in secret, with resulting mistrust when secrets were exposed.

In South Africa, the threat of Communist expansion was more easily justified as South Africa’s neighbours succumbed to Communist regimes in the 1970s. However, after WWII, indiscriminate violence against the population was condemned by democracies, and South Africa’s racist policies undermined their ability to use any available means to win the war. The result was therefore the same as with the US in Vietnam: any means could be employed to win the war as long as it remained secret. In both counterinsurgencies, this is what distinguishes them from WWII: torture, the indiscriminate killing of civilians, chemical weapons and the like could not be employed to win the war, for the home and international population no longer legitimized the use of ‘any available means’ by counterinsurgent forces. Insurgents are however allowed more scope to apply any means necessary, since the international public often accepts their cause as just; Kilcullen (2005:606) notes that one of the distinguishing features between terrorism and insurgency is that the insurgents’ cause is accepted as legitimate.

Finally, normlessness saturates the narratives of these wars to the point where it goes beyond a depiction of normlessness, to a construction of a narrative that denies the possibility of moral conduct.

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## CHAPTER 9: CULTURAL ESTRANGEMENT

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### INTRODUCTION

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Counterinsurgencies often become controversial issues that act as catalyst in the questioning of societal norms. During the 1960s, this social rebellion was signalled visually with alternative dress and hairstyles, and behaviourally through promiscuity and drug abuse, but in essence, the hippie counterculture was a rejection of what they perceived to be the dominant, militant conservatism of America, as well as the formation of counter-norms. Rebelling against elders is a common aspect of youth, but counterinsurgencies often amplify this rebellion into organized social movements.

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### SEEMAN'S NOTION OF CULTURAL ESTRANGEMENT

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As shown in the previous chapter, Seeman created the category of *cultural estrangement* by using an aspect of *normlessness* and combining it with *social isolation*. Middleton (1963:974) claims that Seeman himself became critical of the term *social isolation*, and thus he prefers the term *cultural estrangement* to designate Seeman's distinction of the former, namely to "assign low reward value to goals or beliefs that are typically highly valued in the given society" (Seeman 1959:788). Kohn (1976:114) treats the two terms as synonyms, but Geyer (2002:1024) retains both terms, without arguing the difference. Most researchers working with Seeman's model prefer using five aspects, but as this section will argue, Seeman's six-aspect model is a useful refinement of his original conception.

Seeman (1975:93) calls cultural estrangement "the individual's rejection of commonly held values in the society (or subsector) vs. commitment to the going group standards." Similarly, Roberts's (1987:347) indicators for cultural estrangement "reflect the failure to share common values and opinions with various groups." Cultural estrangement accompanies times of rapid social changes, where the existing values of a



given society are no longer adequate, as happened in particular in the US during the Vietnam War and in South Africa at the end of Apartheid.

Chin and Kameoka (2006:79) write that cultural estrangement has far-reaching consequences, “rapid social transformation have been postulated to lead to the breakdown of societal norms and family structures, triggering depression, alienation, social isolation, and hopelessness.” Cultural estrangement is therefore a vital aspect of alienation, and Parsons (1951:233) defines alienation itself as “a possible product of something going wrong in the process of value-acquisition through identification.” Keniston (1965:455) also says that alienation in general is “an explicit rejection, ‘freely’ chosen by the individual, of what he perceives as the dominant values or norms of his society.”

Cultural estrangement is particularly important in environments characterised by disorder and violence, as O’Donnell, Schwab-Stone and Ruchkin (2006:227) note, “A state of normlessness [cultural estrangement], which has been established as potentially developing under conditions of community violence exposure, brings with it feelings of role confusion, lack of boundaries, and attachment difficulties.” In this situation, a discrepancy develops between the norms propagated by society, and those the individual adopts when existing norms are no longer adequate.

It is precisely this “conflict of norms” (Dean 1961:755) that war highlights: because war is the only environment that *encourages* the killing of other human beings, some soldiers experience a discrepancy between the norms they were taught as civilians, and the norms of the military. Clive Holt in particular notes this discrepancy, and how it alienated him from society in general as well as from earlier versions of himself, “We had been in this situation and living by a new set of rules for so long that there was only a thin strand still connecting us to Civvie Street and our previous lives” (2005:106).

Herein lies the connection with social isolation, which is amongst others “the degree of acceptance of the socially approved values or goals in the society” (Bolton 1972:545). Kalekin-Fishman (2008:538) calls social isolation “the condition of being segregated from normative society,” emphasizing the link between society and its role in defining values or norms. Alienation from the norms of society go hand in hand with alienation from society, since “all human identity or selfhood that is not merely physiological is grounded in (if not simply a function of) relations of involvement in one’s

environing world” (Schacht 1996:6), the rejection of societal norms implies an alienation from greater society. Anthony Feinstein (2011:15) for instance notes how he “verafsku” [detested] the Apartheid system, and how this rejection of the system meant alienation from family, friends and his country (2011:213).

Furthermore, cultural estrangement is correlated with self-estrangement, because identity-formation necessarily means internalising the norms of society; identity is necessarily relationally constituted,

The materials and means of attaining an identity can only be found outside oneself, in the social and cultural dimensions of one’s environing world above all, and they must be internalized through relations of involvement in this common domain. One’s ability to affirm as well as attain any such identity, moreover, is bound up with relations with others by which it is acknowledged ((Schacht 1996:1), see also Augusto (1996:184)).

For the individual alienated from the norms of his society, then, alienation from society is a given, with repercussions for his own identity as well.

#### CULTURAL ESTRANGEMENT IN COUNTERINSURGENCIES

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Counterinsurgencies foreground identity politics – a trend continued by so-called new wars (Kaldor 2006). Often overlooked is the fact that insurgents fought each other along tribal lines in Indochina, Namibia and other counterinsurgencies. In Rhodesia, apart from fighting the government of Ian Smith, the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) fought against the Zimbabwe African People’s Union (ZAPU): ZANU was predominantly Shona, while ZAPU was Ndebele, and this conflict would continue long after the establishment of an independent Zimbabwe (CCJPZ 1999). In Indochina, the liberation war excluded the Montagnards, for even though “the Viet Minh were fighting both a revolutionary war and an independence struggle” (Pottier 2005:143), the mountain tribes, comprising around 20% of the population, “preferred French administration to any Asian rule, because the French were more considerate of them than the Vietnamese or Chinese had ever been” (Pottier 2005:142). For instance, 250 Montagnards were killed with flame-throwers at the village of Dak Song by the People’s Army of North Vietnam (PAVN) (Hess 2009:140). Not only was the Vietnam War thus one between two different

ethnic groups, but furthermore Diem's government was predominantly Catholic, while North Vietnam was Communist, and Diem's conflict with Buddhists also forms part of the Vietnam War. These ethnic conflicts contributed to the complexity of the environment.

The CIA also noted "Inherent intergenerational, ideological, and ethnic conflicts" in South Africa in the mid-1980s (Central Intelligence Agency 1987:iii). In South Africa in the early 1990s, violence erupted between the predominantly Zulu Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) and the predominantly Xhosa African National Congress (ANC), and around 100 IFP leaders were assassinated by the ANC in the 1980s (Giliomee 2004:603).

In Namibia, SWAPO's power base would remain the Owambo-tribe in the north – by far the largest ethnic group in the country – and Steenkamp (1989:18) writes that during the war around 95% of killed or captured insurgents belonged to the Owambo tribe. The 'liberation war' in Namibia was thus also an ethnic war, like most Cold War counterinsurgencies. But like other wars, the sectarian element demarcates an 'us' in opposition to a 'them', and is therefore a function of identity-formation, as the US Government Counterinsurgency Guide (2009:9-10) recognizes, "Targeting members of different ethnic or sectarian groups may engender a sense of social identity, solidarity and alienation from the government."

As a younger generation reinvented themselves against the backdrop of Communism, insurgent movements not only fought COIN-forces and other tribes, but also their own, traditional culture (as acknowledged in the abovementioned CIA report). In Indochina, the war was as much one between the peasantry and bourgeoisie as it was between the Viet Minh and the French. In Namibia, SWAPO assassinated traditional leaders such as Clemens Kapuuo, leader of the Hereros, especially when they collaborated with the authorities (Geldenhuys 2007:110), and Pastor Cornelius Ndjoba, former Chief Minister of Owambo, was assassinated with the use of a landmine in 1983 (Heitman 1986:153). This intergenerational conflict is represented in the literature of these wars as well: Bertie Cloete writes in *Pionne* (2009:109),

Die een groot probleem was die swart jeug. Hulle geduld was op. Hulle wou uitbreek. Hulle sou bekend staan as die lost generation. Tydens hulle goue studiejare het hulle gerebelleer en geprotesteer. Die deernis en geduld wat by Alfred en Joyce te bespeur was, het duidelik by die jeug ontbreek.

[The one major problem was the black youth. They had run out of patience. They wanted to break out. They would become known as the lost generation. During

their golden study years, they rebelled and protested. The compassion and patience of Alfred and Joyce was clearly absent in the youth].

This violent alienation implies a link between the insurgents and their internal enemies: “to experience a sense of alienation from a given group suggests that, to a significant degree, one has already incorporated the meanings or values of the group in question” (Gergen 1996:125). *Mutatis mutandis*: In order to reject these values, they have to be at least partially internalized. Whereas other aspects of alienation often imply a perception of inferiority, Kohn (1976:121) notes how cultural estrangement [social isolation], “does not necessarily represent a negative judgment of self, but often means quite the opposite, that the individual is sufficiently secure in his judgments of self to be independent in his values.” Communist insurgents during the Cold War often look at traditional cultures with contempt, preferring the ideology of Communism to traditional power structures. In Gawie Kellerman’s “Van Makanga” (1988:11-13), one such incident in Namibia is represented where the elder is killed by seven “terrorists,” while 37 of 45 school pupils are abducted, presumably to be indoctrinated by SWAPO. In “Van ‘n man wat genoeg gesien het” (Kellerman 1988:68-69), a Catholic sanctuary is also raided by insurgents, and the children that are not abducted are brutally killed.

Countries belonging to the counterinsurgent forces experienced their own vivid form of cultural estrangement during these two wars. Merton (1968:209) notes that rebellion “leads men outside the environing social structure to envisage and seek to bring into being a new, that is to say a greatly modified, social structure. It presupposes alienation from reigning goals and standards.” Although anti-war movements existed during the two World Wars, they gained prominence during the Vietnam War in particular. The anti-war movement has become a central feature in the cultural memory of Vietnam, and was resurrected in the build-up to the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

The first formal protests against the Vietnam War were held from 24-25 March 1965 at the University of Michigan, and on 17 April, the Students for Democratic Society (SDS) – which would later become one of the most important anti-war movements – held the first national rally at the Washington Monument (Hess 2009:2). On 2 November 1965, Norman Morrison – a pacifist Quaker from Baltimore – doused himself with petrol and set himself on fire out of protest against the war (Neu 2005:98). By the late 1960s,

fistfights erupted between those opposed to and those supporting the US Vietnam War (Lunch and Sperlich 1979:21).

Escalation in 1965 caused immediate opposition in the US, growing out of existing anti-nuclear, pacifist, civil rights and leftist groups (Hall 2008:44), culminating in the march on the Pentagon on 21 October 1967 (Hall 2008:47). Despite the gains following the Tet Offensive, opposition in the US increased. The anti-war demonstrations during October and November of 1969 “proved to be the high point of organized dissent” (Hall 2008:61): on 15 November more than a million protesters marched on Washington DC and San Francisco (Allen 2008:162), and Westmoreland’s appearances at the University of Nebraska and at Yale were disrupted by protestors, in the latter case while waving National Liberation Front (NLF) flags (Neu 2005:159). On 4 May 1970, National Guardsmen fired into a crowd of protestors at Kent State University in Ohio, killing four, after unsuccessfully trying to disperse the crowd with tear-gas. The following week, Mississippi police killed two students at Jackson State University (Hall 2008:64). The US government reacted harshly towards anti-war protestors, launching Operation Chaos under the Johnson administration to infiltrate and undermine civil rights and anti-war groups. This approach was expanded by Nixon through the counterintelligence program (COINTELPRO), which eventually employed 2,000 agents tasked with infiltrating anti-war movements, provoking disturbances and spreading disinformation (Anderson 2007:258). Anderson’s (2007:258) reprint of a photo taken during the Kent State University incident illustrates the harsh measures taken by the US government, since the National Guardsmen have bayonets fitted to their rifles.

However, “Although public support for the war gradually eroded, anti-war activists never achieved widespread popularity. The presence of countercultural clothing and hairstyles, plus radicals’ display of North Vietnamese flags and anti-American rhetoric at anti-war protests antagonized many moderates” (Hall 2008:48). Hallin (2006:289) also questions whether one can judge the impact of the anti-war movements, and notes that they never gained popularity with most of the public, and Fry (2007:222) writes, “Protesters were always a minority on every issue and on every campus.” Allen (2008:61-133) however has a more optimistic view of the anti-war movement: he argues that it grew to the point where “There was no part of the country that was not scarred by the war or left untouched by the anti-war movement” (2008:101). The impossibility of

gauging whether or not the anti-war movement had any impact lies in “The nation’s ultimate adoption of the anti-war students’ message to leave the war while loathing the messengers” (Fry 2007:238). Nevertheless, the anti-war movement has become part of the popular memory of Vietnam, even if its scope and influence may be overstated.

It also has to be remembered that opposition to the war was slight before Tet – the US did go to war with the consent of the majority of the population. Hallin (2006:291) concludes with a noteworthy statement, “The collective memory of the Vietnam War seems to focus more on the later than the earlier years of the war – as painful as the divisions of that period were, it seems easier for people to remember than an early era when the majority of the country acquiesced in the decision to go to war without serious question or debate.”

Public opposition to the war was more subtle in South Africa than in Vietnam. In a survey conducted among whites in 1982, 79.9% felt the threat of Communist expansion was not over-exaggerated and 81.1% supported cross-border raids by the SADF (quoted in Conway (2008a:76)). A study conducted at traditional white universities in 1989 found that only 15% of white Afrikaans-speaking students were apathetic or unsympathetic towards the security forces (Du Plessis, Van der Westhuizen, and Liebenberg 2012:152). Expatriates in London founded the Committee on South African War Resistance in 1978, but because of the distance from South Africa and their lack of access to South African media, they had a very small impact in South Africa (Williams 2008:49). More successful and better known was the End Conscription Campaign (ECC), although their influence was mostly concentrated on radical students from English universities (see Williams (2008:49) and Conway (2008b:424)). The organization only gained ground in the mid-1980s after troops were deployed to help establish security in townships, something the police had hitherto accepted full responsibility for (Steenkamp 2006b:18). However,

The resistance offered by the ECC and other organizations garnered huge amounts of publicity but did not materially affect the citizen soldier components’ fighting capability, firstly because most whites were still in anti-Communist mode and secondly because only a small percentage of the annual recruits’ crop of 35 000 or so actually saw active service, and this was even smaller now than it had been because of the emergence of the SWATF (Steenkamp 2006b:18).

Despite the fact that most authors contributing to Baines and Vale (2008) agree with Steenkamp’s notion that the ECC did not have a tangible effect on the war effort, the

number of references made to this organization by the contributors is noteworthy: out of 17 chapters written by different authors, eight mention the ECC in their arguments. Nor did the SADF deem them negligible during the 1980s; numerous propaganda campaigns were launched to counter the propaganda launched by the ECC – often questioning their masculinity. Johan Kruger for instance writes in the short story, “Die duif”, how soldiers detained for refusing to fight were called “moffies” (Kruger 2012:25).

One reason there was little anti-war resistance in South Africa was the general sense of being threatened by increasing Communist involvement in Southern Africa, which made the ‘Communist Onslaught’ proposed by Botha’s government a relatively credible narrative. The war was of course much closer to South Africa, and Communist expansion did threaten South Africa directly, which is a narrative that is more difficult to justify in the context of Vietnam. The Communist ties of the MPLA, SWAPO, FRELIMO and the ANC are of course well-documented; McWilliams (2009:48) for instance writes, “SWAPO the ANC and the Angolans were equipped with sophisticated weaponry to include the most advanced man portable air defence weapons (MANPADS) then in the Soviet inventory.” A CIA intelligence estimate of 1984 also noted, “The Soviets also seek access to southern African landing fields and ports for their air and naval forces. Soviet long-term objectives may also include denial or obstruction of Western access to the region’s strategic mineral resources” (1984:1). Whether this was indeed the case is not the point: this view was shared by Western powers, including the South African government, and this was taught to South African citizens.

Nationalist indoctrination from school-level, the involvement of the Dutch Reformed Church in supporting the fight against the ‘Red Antichrist’, and the patriarchal culture that saw military conscription as a passage to manhood, as mentioned by Van der Walt (2007:vi-vii), also played a significant role in making opposition to the war socially unacceptable. PW Botha himself claims (quoted in Stemmet (2009:89)):

Dit was nie ‘n rasse-oorlog nie! Dit was ‘n oorlog teen Kubaanse en Russiese Kommuniste. Ek het voorspel dat daar ‘n Totale Aanslag teen Suid-Afrika is. Ek het dit in die parlement gesê – daar is ‘n Totale Aanslag, sielkundig, politiek, ekonomies en militêr. En ek het gesê ons moet ‘n Totale Strategie daarteen ontwikkel. In die tagtigerjare was die aanslag teen Suid-Afrika groter as te vore. Dit was ‘n aanslag wat homself geopenbaar het in Suid-Afrika, in Angola, in die val van die Portugese gebiede en aangevuur deur internasionale magte, waaronder Rusland en Kuba ‘n groot rol gespeel het.

[It was not a race war! It was a war against Cuban and Russian Communism. I predicted that there would be a Total Onslaught against South Africa. I said it in parliament – there is a Total Onslaught, psychologically, politically, economically and militarily. And I said we should develop a Total Strategy against it. In the eighties, the onslaught against South Africa was greater than before. It was an onslaught that revealed itself in South Africa, Angola, the fall of the Portuguese territories, and fuelled by international powers, including Russia and Cuba who played a major role.]

In Pionne, Cloete (2009:115-115) believes the NP government used young men, which he calls *pawns*, to further their selfish goals, and that the threat of Communism was a constructed fiction. “Als was deeglik beplan en uitgewerk. [...] Maak van die Kommunis die vyand. Die een wat, net soos die Kakies, ons land wil afneem” (2009:128) [Everything had been planned meticulously. Make the Communist the enemy. The one that, just like the British, wanted to take our country]. Although Cloete now believes this narrative had been pure fiction, he acknowledges that the threat of Communist expansion was considered real at the time of the war. As the abovementioned CIA intelligence estimate indicates, the Communist threat was not entirely a fabrication by the NP government as Cloete claims.

Apart from Giliomee (2004:xvi), most commentators neglect to mention that Afrikaners are a very small nation and that this issue had an important influence on political decisions and public support for the government. By 2003, Afrikaners numbered a mere 3.2 million, and this numerical disadvantage has been “the primary cause of fears regarding security and cultural survival” (Giliomee 2004:xvi). The South African white population constituted roughly 20% of South Africa’s total population between 1910 and 1960, but diminished to 17% by 1976 and 12% by 2000 (Giliomee 2004:542). Like Israel, the Afrikaner saw itself surrounded and threatened by other races, resulting in a ‘laager’ mentality that withdrew and fortified Afrikaner culture.

Although opposition to the war in Namibia/Angola is an important part of the cultural myth-in-making proposed by authors in Baines and Vale (2008), the small scale of opposition to the war as compared with the Vietnam War, highlights how different these wars were experienced. Namibia/Angola did not divide white South African society as Vietnam did in the US, largely because South Africa’s war was fought in close proximity



to its national borders and with a direct threat from the country's neighbours, unlike for the US.

## INTERPRETING THROUGH AND REJECTING THE CULTURAL NARRATIVE

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As mentioned in the prologue, interpretation is never neutral, but rather refracted and redacted through the mind of an author. Schmidt (1997:128-129) notes, "Thinking does not provide us with a picture of reality but with a picture of our activities in environments, that is to say what we are doing with 'reality'." Writing on historical scholarship relating to Africa, Brizuela-Garcia (2008:311) notes "an inherent reality of historical practice: our access to the sources is mediated by our experiences and biases," and thus, the writing of history is necessarily biased. Indeed, as Hayden White (1988:1194) argues, no historical representation, visual or verbal, ever "'mirrors' all or even the greater part of the events or scenes of which it purports to be an account." The representation of war can therefore never be an objective rendering of 'the facts', because the 'black boxes' of human psyches, scientific paradigms, cultural attitudes, and literary traditions, process (already processed) information through conditioned perceptions.

Literature can influence history just as the reverse is true; as the so-called Thomas theorem (De Graaf 2005:161) goes, "'if men define their situations as real, they are real in their consequences.'" Limon (1994:128-129) observes the interdependence of history and literature, "the Second World War may have set the terms of post-war writing, but post-war writing conceived and reconceived the Second World War." Writing in a sociological rather than literary paradigm, Scharrer's (2005:372) research into television violence and its representation has indicated, "one's pre-existing personality tendencies and mental frameworks interact with exposure to a violent television stimulus to shape how one responds to a new situation." The interpretation of both the past and present are thus influenced by received representations of events, particularly in conflict environments, "Where battle is remembered (or, rather, misremembered) it is because it is imagined in advance and spliced into existing experience so that, afterwards, it can gain in immediacy

by being recollected” (Ferguson 2004:22). Considering the cultural narrative is therefore imperative if one wishes to interpret the actions of protagonists in history.

Soldiers’ tendency to interpret war through the lenses of fiction is well documented. Robin Moore’s *The Green Berets* (1983[1965]) printed 1,200,000 copies in the first two months alone and inspired many young men to join the armed forces (Taylor 2003:40), and in 1961, Marines at Fort Pendleton cited the film *Sands of Iwo Jima* (1949) as one of the main reasons they joined (Taylor 2003:99-100). George Pan Cosmatos’s *Rambo: First Blood II* (1985) later elicited a positive response from President Reagan, who commented, “Now I know what to do the next time” (Taylor 2003:142). In the context of the war in Namibia/Angola, Roos (2008:142) notes that popular books “served to keep up morale amongst the troops’ next of kin by painting a fictitious world held in place by male power, supportive women and divine right to victory.” In addition, the actor who played the lead role in *Trompie*, a story based on a series of books by Topsy Smith, joined the Special Forces. *Trompie* is a Dennis the Menace type of character, and as Stiff (2001:276) phrases it, “*Trompie* grew up and became a Recce.”

In Vietnam, John Wayne was particularly influential, and after one 82mm mortar round exploded close to First Lieutenant Jack Farley of D Company, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 27<sup>th</sup> Infantry, and a medic asked him if he was all right, he thought, “What would John Wayne say?”<sup>99</sup> The image of John Wayne as the exemplary masculine hero is usually treated with irony, so that the mockery of Wayne becomes a mockery of the entire cultural norm of masculine heroism. In *Paco’s Story*, Jesse is afraid the Vietnam War memorial may turn out to be “John Wayne-looking” (Heinemann 2005[1986]:157), in Heinemann’s *Close Quarters*, John Wayne is mentioned often, and the narrator claims, “My parents raised me on ‘Thou shalt nots’ and willow switches and John Wayne (even before he became a verb)” (Heinemann 2005[1974]:53), and in Dennis Mansker’s *A bad attitude*, the company commander gives them “a John Wayne briefing” (2002:119). James Webb’s *Fields of Fire* is also peppered with references to John Wayne (2001[1978]:10, 22, 36, 154, 185, 229, 344, 376). Wayne’s status is perhaps most vividly described in this novel, “If John Wayne

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<sup>99</sup> Soldiers who fought in the major fire fight in Somalia on 3 October 1993 during Operation Gothic Serpent also noted how they experienced the conflict as a movie (Bowden 2000[1999]:422).

wasn't God then he was at least a prophet" (Webb 2001[1978]:36). Even the cookies are "John Wayne cookies" in Hasford's *The short-timers* (1980:17, 25, 27).

Michael Herr (1991[1968]:22) writes how a sergeant once warned him, "This ain't the fucking movies over here," to which he replied that he knew, "but knew that I didn't." In Herr's view, one could not understand Vietnam before this cultural frame of reference, largely influenced by the media, was unlearned, although he makes no claim that such a feat is possible.

Historical systems can influence each other when a war is interpreted through the lens of another war and its cultural value. South Africa's war in Namibia/Angola occurred in the tactical, strategic, and cultural shadow of Vietnam. One of SWAPO's main bases in southern Angola was code-named 'Vietnam', and in 1977 SWAPO's Ekeke base was commanded by an officer who called himself Hocht Mihn Namholo (Bothma 2007:154). Stiff (2001:119) argues that South Africa would not capture Luanda in 1975 during Operation Savannah, for the city would become "South Africa's Saigon, with the Angolan hinterland her Vietnam." When arguing why the SADF did not attempt to capture the town of Cuito Cuanavale in 1987/88, General Geldenhuys (2007:226) remarks that they did not wish to remain in Angola for fear of becoming embroiled in "a Vietnam." Williams (2008:131) and Steenkamp<sup>100</sup> (1989:187) dispute claims that this war was 'South Africa's Vietnam' (as claimed by Baines (2008:9), Joubert (2008:8), Mokgoro (2007:ix) and Van der Merwe (2001:5)), arguing that if it was anyone's Vietnam, it was the Vietnam of Cuba and the Soviet Union.

Although answering the question of "Whose Vietnam was it anyway" does preoccupy many historians concerned with the war in Namibia/Angola, the issue raises many questions: What is a "Vietnam"? Webb (1987:19) notes, "Vietnam was many things. It varied year by year, place by place, unit by unit. No one reporting it or remembering it is without predisposition." Another interesting question is why the South African war needs to have been anyone's "Vietnam" – why not simply the "Border War"? Bruner (1991:20) writes,

One of the principal ways in which we work 'mentally' in common, I would want to argue, is by the process of joint narrative accrual. Even our individual

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<sup>100</sup> Steenkamp (1989:187) observes that South Africa avoided the mistakes made by the US in Vietnam, particularly by fighting the majority of the war with Namibians rather than its own troops.

autobiographies, as I have argued elsewhere, depend on being placed within a continuity provided by a constructed and shared social history in which we locate our Selves and our individual continuities. It is a sense of belonging to this canonical past that permits us to form our own narratives of deviation while maintaining complicity with the canon.

Part of this “joint narrative accrual” was the context of the Cold War. For US President Eisenhower, the French War in Indochina, the British conflict in Malaya, and the Korean War, were all part of the same conflict, in which “freedom is pitted against slavery; lightness against dark” (Wiest 2006:29). As a British colony originally founded by the Dutch, South Africa allied itself with the West during both WWI and WWII, and even sent the South African Air Force (SAAF) to Korea. After independence in 1961, this link with the West remained intact, as it did for the Rhodesians despite UDI in 1965. Dr Hendrik Verwoerd, the NP leader who led South Africa to independence, remarked, “South Africa is unequivocally the symbol of anti-Communism in Africa. Although often abused, we are also still a bastion in Africa for Christianity and the Western world” (quoted in Vale (2008:22)). PW Botha also emphasized South Africa’s affiliation with the West<sup>101</sup> against Communism (Giliomee 2004:546). The Irish-born commando ‘Mad’ Mike Hoare – one of the most notorious Cold War mercenaries operating in Africa – also saw South Africa in terms of the Cold War (quoted in Schreier and Caparini (2005:16)):

I see South Africa as the bastion of civilization in an Africa subjected to a total Communist onslaught. In the last 22 years I have watched – in many cases physically battled against – its inexorable encroachment into free Africa and its conquests by default ... I see myself in the forefront of this fight (against Communism) for our very existence. I see my men as a noble band of patriots motivated by the same desires.

As disorder ensued throughout Africa, South Africa’s relative stability attracted Western investors, Nelson Mandela was arrested with intelligence supplied by Western intelligence agencies, and Western support only wavered after the 1976 Soweto uprisings in South Africa. However, despite official condemnation for Apartheid policies and international opposition in the public sphere, South Africa remained an economic and ideological ally of the West. When the conservative Thatcher government came to

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<sup>101</sup> Giliomee (2004:596) believes that this affiliation with the West, and in Western countries’ later refusal to allow Afrikaner diplomats to travel, was “perhaps more effective than economic sanctions.” By the late 1980s, the West had shunned the Afrikaner, and these “moral sanctions” made them turn inward.

power in Britain in 1979 and Ronald Reagan was sworn in as President of the US in 1981, the global political situation created “greater breathing space for the Apartheid regime internationally” (Davies and O'Meara 1985:205).

South Africa saw itself as an indispensable part of the global war against Communism. PW Botha became minister of defence in 1966 and saw South Africa's security threats in terms of a global East/West struggle in which South Africa would “shoulder its responsibility as an ally of the free world” (Hamann 2001:50, 52). Whether or not Western nations approved of Apartheid policies, South Africa's military capabilities made it an ally of the West. As Shimon Peres, one of the Israeli leaders most intimately involved with South Africa in the 1980s, phrases the situation, “Every decision is not between two perfect situations. Every choice is between two imperfect alternatives. At that time, the movement of black South Africa was with Arafat against us. Actually, we did not have much of a choice. But we never stopped denouncing Apartheid. We never agreed with it” (McGreal 2006). This statement also reflects both the Reagan and Thatcher approach at the time. Coker (1991:282) observes that “South Africa's ability [...] to put the Soviet Union on the defensive in the 1980s, to force it to pay a high cost indeed to maintain its clients in power in Luanda and Maputo, made it a useful Western ‘proxy’.” Drewett's (2008:94) belief that despite these claims of Cold War co-operation between South Africa and the West, the war “was essentially a war in defence of the Apartheid system”<sup>102</sup> is therefore an oversimplification of the political situation in Southern Africa. Similarly, Allen (2008: 31) believes that the Vietnam War was “one of Vietnamese national liberation against American aggression, [which] US propaganda persistently presented [...] as one between North Vietnam and South Vietnam.” Wiest (2006:21) however recognizes that the Vietnam War was more complex than simply being *either* part of the Cold War or a war of liberation, “at once a war of colonialism, nationalism, insurgency, civil war, and a critical moment in the Global Cold war.” For both the US and South Africa, the Cold War was thus a relevant factor in their respective

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<sup>102</sup> Baines (2008:2) also disputes the notion that Communism was a threat, “As a social construct it [the war] encoded the views of (most) whites who believed the Apartheid regime's rhetoric that the SADF was shielding its citizens from the “*rooi/swart gevaar*”; the supposed coterminous threat of Communism and black nationalism.” As the abovementioned CIA intelligence estimate indicates, the threat of Communism was not fabricated by the NP government.

counterinsurgencies, and therefore the ‘global fight against Communism’ is one point inviting a “joint narrative accrual” through which both these wars can be interpreted.

Furthermore, Brink (1986:6) claims that an analogy can be drawn between the US experience in Vietnam and the South African experience in Namibia/Angola, inviting another “joint narrative accrual.” When Conway (2008a:78) discusses masculinity in the *Grensvegter*-image (a pro-war South African comic during the war in Namibia/Angola), the literary character is compared with Rambo (Drewett (2008:105) does the same). Vale (2008:35) notes how the cultural myth of Vietnam resonated with South African conscripts, and that they referred to South Africa as “The States” and the operational area as “Nam” (of course the abbreviation of ‘Namibia’ already suggests such a reference). Koevoet<sup>103</sup>, the police COIN-unit in Namibia, further wore t-shirts proclaiming, “Killing is our business and business is good” (Gordon 2008:233), recalling the slogan painted on the wall of the US Army’s 9<sup>th</sup> Division helicopter headquarters (Allen 2008:50). In *My Kubaan*, Etienne van Heerden writes, “I have not yet cut off my Cuban’s ear. This act of ecstasy, which derives from the Americas [...] will take place later” (1992:74)<sup>104</sup>. Van Heerden’s uniform is also green (1992:77), like those of US soldiers in Vietnam, rather than the SADF’s nutria uniforms. Clive Holt (2005:30) further remarks that Angola reminded him of scenes from Vietnam movies, and in Feinstein’s *Kopwond*, a soldier is called John Wayne (2011:139).

Baines (2008:6) remarks that South African writing on the war in Namibia/Angola has “resonances” with Vietnam (see also Cronjé (1989:20-21) and Van Coller (1992:153)). In Baines’s (2008:7) view, “Images of this analogous war mediated by films, comic stories and books, enabled soldiers to re-imagine and mythicize the Border War in relation to the cultural memory of the Vietnam War.” In particular, Baines believes the film *Apocalypse Now*<sup>105</sup> and the “cultural mythology of the frontier was transposed from one war zone to another.”

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<sup>103</sup> Feinstein (2011:170) calls Koevoet “die kavaliers van die apokalips” [the cavaliers of the apocalypse].

<sup>104</sup> Severing the ears of killed insurgents has become part of the cultural myth of Vietnam. Herr (1991[1968]:148) relates how one soldier mailed a severed “gook” ear to his girlfriend, and was subsequently perplexed that she stopped writing him.

<sup>105</sup> Liebenberg (1988:185) and Anker (2008) note the similar plots between *Apocalypse Now* and the last short story in Alexander Strachan’s ‘n Wêreld sonder grense **Error! Bookmark not defined.**, “Visioen.”

This cultural “resonance” extends to the anti-war movement in South Africa. Drewett (2008:108-109) discusses a poster by the End Conscription Campaign (ECC), which features a soldier blindfolded with the South African flag and headlined with “Stop the call-up.” What Drewett does not recognize, however, is that the soldier carries a Vietnam-era M16A1, rather than the SADF’s assault rifle, the R1 or R4 (the image is in black and white, so the colour of the uniform is unclear). By using the image of a US soldier in Vietnam, this poster thus links the anti-war movement in South Africa with US opposition to the Vietnam War.



FIGURE 17 TWO ECC POSTERS

The posters make a simple claim: what happened to the US in Vietnam is happening to South Africa in Namibia. The issue is not what *actually* happened in Vietnam or what was *actually* happening in Namibia, but rather these posters help create a myth of Namibia through the lens of the myth of Vietnam. The posters ask the reader to interpret Namibia as a Vietnam, where ‘a Vietnam’ is implied as a humiliating military defeat that almost tore a country apart. The “resonance” is thus not with the Vietnam War in all its complexity, but with the cultural myth of Vietnam.

The experience of war itself is influenced by literary interpretations, illustrating the multidirectional exchange of information between the historical and literary systems. Ferguson (2004:22) claims,

Combat, therefore, is first of all recalled through inadequate stereotypes current in an earlier existence; stereotypes which condition even accomplished literary memoirs such as those of Robert Graves, Edmund Blunden and Siegfried Sassoon, whose war recollections have their psychological roots as firmly in the English public school as they do in the trenches.

For both South African soldiers in Namibia/Angola and American soldiers in Vietnam, the cultural background created by the media played a role in the interpretation of events during and after the war – a part of the cultural narrative (and norms) that came to be rejected, particularly through the image of John Wayne. Furthermore, the background of the fight against Communism also became a focal point of anger, as the perception developed in both wars that the threat of Communism had been a lie, as is clear from the narratives mentioned in this section.



## MASCULINE NARRATIVES: GENDER ISSUES AND THE MILITARY IN COUNTERINSURGENCIES

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South Africa is a valuable jewel defended by determined men – PW Botha (quoted in Conway (2008b:427))

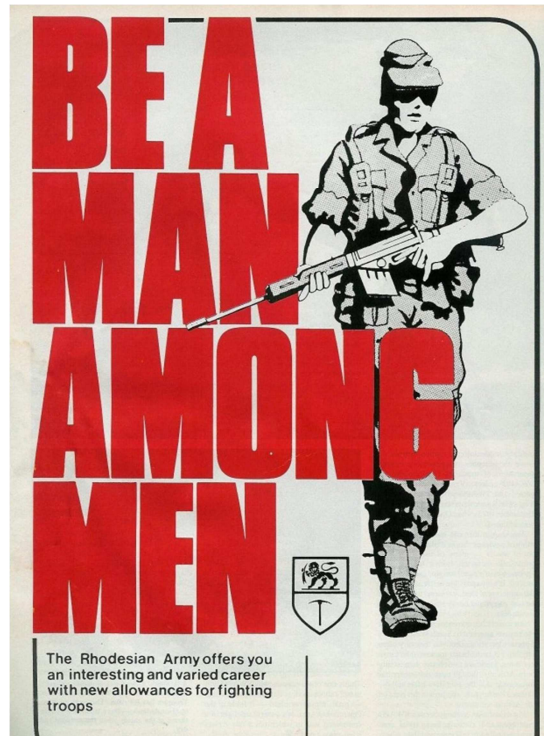


FIGURE 18 A RHODESIAN RECRUITMENT POSTER

### INTRODUCTION

The army has always had strong ties with prevalent ideas of manhood in Western societies, and Nagel (1998:251) notes how “Terms like honour, patriotism, cowardice, bravery, and duty are hard to distinguish as either nationalistic or masculinist, since they seem so thoroughly tied both to the nation and to manliness. [...] The ‘microculture’ of masculinity in everyday life articulates very well with the demands of nationalism, particularly its militaristic side.” Iggers (2010:39) also notes the link between masculinity and nationalism, “Nationalism is thus inseparable from war and war assigns a special role to the male.”

Masculinity's link with war is most famously symbolised by the moustache, and it is no coincidence that four of the twentieth century's most notorious dictators – Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, Saddam Hussein and Robert Mugabe – all had/have moustaches. Van Creveld (2008:22) mentions how officers in the French Army were ordered to wear a black moustache during the middle of the nineteenth century, or, if one was unable to grow one, paint one on. In South Africa in the 1980s, this link between the military, masculinity and the moustache can also be seen. In Bertie Cloete's *Pionne* (2009:55), Major De Wet also has a “skoorsteenveërsnor” [chimney-sweeper moustache], in Mark Behr's *Die reuk van appels*, the narrator's father – a general in the army and graduate from West Point – also has a moustache (Behr 1993:37), and in Ben Viljoen's *'n Nuwe wildernis*, Captain Visagie finds inspiration and strength from his moustache (Viljoen 2013:58). In Gustav Hasford's *The short-timers* (1980:28), the door gunner also has a moustache. Perhaps the military's connection with moustaches is represented most vividly by a t-shirt in London's Camden Town in 2009, “Guns don't kill people, people with moustaches kill people.”

Adelman (2009:261) emphasises, “war is a particularly effective theatre in which to articulate masculinity,” and as such, masculinity and warfare were intricately interwoven in the US and South Africa during the Cold War, as well as being integral to the counterinsurgencies these countries engaged in.

Spencer et al. (2004:231) refer to a Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST), which “utilizes an identity-focused cultural-ecological perspective, integrating issues of social, political, and cultural context with normative developmental processes.” They argue, “Human development and maturation are directly linked to context. More specifically, gender identity development (the process of understanding oneself in gendered terms) is linked to context” (Spencer et al. 2004:233). Ward (2007:12-14) also adopts a systemic approach to identity formation and asserts that individuals are situated within micro-, meso-, exo- and macrosystems. Microsystems are “systems where the child is involved in continuous, face-to-face interactions with familiar people,” such as parents and siblings. Mesosystems “refer to interactions between the microsystems, thus capturing the influence of one system on another,” such as the competition between parents and peers for influence over a young adult. Exosystems are “those domains to which children have little direct access but

which nonetheless influence them and those people with whom they have close relationships,” such as the media. Lastly, macrosystems include even more remote yet relevant systems such as government policy (or global politics such as the Cold War). Together, these form the systemic environment that influences the construction of a gendered identity (see also Somers (1994:612)). Identity formation is thus the product of positioning an individual in a social, political, and cultural system.

A conflict system in particular amplifies gendered identities, for aggressiveness and violence as used in a conflict environment is closely linked to masculinity in general. Spencer et al. (2004:237) provide an explanation for hypermasculine behaviour (behaviour that exaggerates normal masculinity) which may be applied to the military context, “In response to chronic sources of fear, individuals may cope by adopting psychological postures that diminish the possibility of being victimized. For males, these coping strategies include maladaptive aggressive and hypermasculine behaviours.” The fear of death and injury, which is integral to combat experience, therefore has a direct effect on the construction of masculine identities. Stempel (2006:87) also emphasises how war’s tendency to create a sense of powerlessness promotes masculine behaviour, “Wars, aftermaths of lost wars, violent revolts, or other decivilizing spurts dissolve controls on violence and increase the level of fear and insecurity and, often, the masculinist solutions to fear and insecurity.”

The following section explores various ways in which a masculine identity functions within counterinsurgencies, and most importantly, how masculinity comes to be rejected by literary authors as part of the manifestation of cultural estrangement.

## VIOLENCE, MASCULINITY AND THE MILITARY

In patriarchal cultures, boys are taught to be more assertive and aggressive than girls, more independent, more curious, more active, and are motivated more to be competitive (Wilden 1987:216-220). Furthermore, males exhibit more stoicism under hardship, discipline and an absence of emotion (Hutchings 2008:393). Reidy et al. (2009) found that males generally exhibit a higher pain tolerance than females, although males actually feel more pain than females. Their interpretation of the data is that males are

socially conditioned to show less pain, despite physiological factors that would otherwise have led males to show more pain than females. Pain, aggressiveness, competitiveness, hardship, discipline, and an absence of emotion are of course all linked to the military environment. For instance, in Bertie Cloete's *Pionne*, the author relates how they were taught not to cry, to show no emotion, and to be tough, because they were soldiers (2009:25) – an issue Holt (2005:173) argues contributes to the lasting effects of PTSD. In Christaan Bakkes's *Skuilplek*, Reinhard is considered for an award, and bitterly contemplates its implications,

Sy gedagtes gaan terug na 'n toekenning wat sy pa gekry het. Hy het eendag per abuis daarop afgekom tussen sy pa se goed toe hy nog 'n seun was op die plaas. Sal dit so 'n toekenning wees? Hy herkou wrang aan die gedagte. Daardie toekenning het die simbool geword van sy eie miserabele jeug. Die rede waarom hy vandag 'n verbitterde, eensame mens is. Nie in staat tot enige warmte, liefde of vriendskap nie – nes sy pa. As jong man het hy gesweer hy sal nooit soos sy pa wees nie. Maar hy het hom meer en meer as 'n gevangene van sy omstandighede bevind. Sy verhoudings met vroue het nie uitgewerk nie. Hy het sy vriende vervreem met sy woede-uitbarstings. Later het hy nog net sy wildvangspan oorgehad, en selfs daar het net die taaistes en dikvelligstes aangebly. Hy is 'n kryger. Hy kry 'n toekenning. Hy snork minagtend. Nes sy pa. Die kring is voltooi (2002:41-42).

[His thoughts went back to an award his father received. He once accidentally came across it amongst his father's property when he was a boy on the farm. Would it be such an award? He ponders wryly at the thought. That award has become the symbol of his own miserable childhood. The reason why he was a bitter, lonely man. Unable to show any warmth, love or friendship – just like his father. As a young man, he swore he would never be like his father. But he increasingly found himself to be a prisoner of his circumstances. His relationships with women were not working out. He alienated his friends with his anger outbursts. Later he had only the game capture team left, and even there only the toughest remained. He is a warrior. He is receiving an award. He snorted contemptuously. Just like his father. The circle is complete.]

In particular, violence is often equated with masculinity (Kimmel and Mahler 2003:1450), and Mosher and Tomkins (1988:61) claim that the macho personality constellation consists of three behavioural dispositions justified by beliefs:

- 1) entitlement to callous sex,
- 2) violence as manly, and
- 3) danger as exciting.

All three these masculine personality traits are depicted in literature on these two wars.

#### ENTITLEMENT TO CALLOUS SEX

War and sex are entwined, as the above picture illustrates. In William Eastlake's *The bamboo bed*, Applefinger says (1969:249): "I recommend dirty sex. I recommend that because it's more ecstasy than killing people or being a mature person. We got to find a substitute for war." In Larry Heinemann's *Close Quarters*, soldiers rape a Vietnamese prostitute, and in *Paco's Story*, soldiers gang rape a female VC. Heinemann describes these events in vivid detail, showing how the victim is dehumanised, but also are the perpetrators no more than regular young men who are turned into brutal criminals with a complete lack of conscience by the war.

#### VIOLENCE AS MANLY

For Wozniak and Uggen (2009:16), "Violence is essential to hegemonic masculinity, both to support or underpin male authority and to mark boundaries" – the latter referring to demarcating the boundary between male and female. Van Coller (1999a:37) concurs when noting that masculinity is usually defined in opposition to femininity and that identity markers that denote masculinity are most clearly war and hunting – both acts of violence. Because violence is an integral part of the military, conflict environments often engender a general culture of militarization. In the Balkan conflicts, masculinity and nationalism was also interwoven, "mapping out what was and what was not appropriate behaviour for a Serb man – in particular, legitimating and encouraging violence as a way of recuperating national dignity and masculine honour" (Bracewell 2000:585). In *If I die in a combat zone*, Tim O'Brien (2006[1973]:45) writes how he was afraid that "to avoid war is to avoid manhood." After relating how his ancestors fought in various wars prior to Vietnam, Hodges in James Webb's *Fields of Fire* thinks to himself, "he was serving, offering himself on the altar of his culture" (2001[1978]:35) (original emphasis).

Cock and Nathan (1989) in particular have discussed the militarization of South African society during the Apartheid years, and Adelman (2003:1122-1123) writes that militarism is,

An ideology as well as a set of institutional arrangements and everyday practices that centres on the continual mobilization of society to prepare for, support, and fight wars. Militarism blurs the boundaries between what can be defined as military and what can be viewed as part of civilian life. Militarism demands that an entire society become permeated with and built according to military values and priorities. Although the military as an institution and the means of organized violence remains a central part of militarized societies, it comprises only a portion of an overall cultural, political, and economic system shaped by militarism.

Conway (2008b:422) notes that compulsory military service was “the primary constitutive act of masculinity and citizenship in white South African society” during the Apartheid years, and Stempel (2006:83) argues that military service is still considered a means of building manhood in the US. For Mosher and Tomkins (1988:74), basic military training is a rite of passage to manhood in the US,

The recruit, shorn of his civilian dignity and hazed as a coward, a faggot, a mama’s boy, and the like, undergoes an ordeal. If successful, he leaves the status of recruit behind to assume his new military identity as a warrior. In ritual celebration, the new soldier, sailor, airman, or marine must, with his buddies, go to the bar, get drunk, get laid, get into a fight with an outgroup member, and do something daring.

In this instance, Afrikaner culture during the Apartheid years was no different. Young men were sent to the army ‘to make men out of them’, and Holt (2005:1) calls military service “a key element in the transition from boyhood to manhood.” Similarly as recruits they were treated as ‘less than men’ – typically referred to in feminine terms. Cloete (2009:13) for instance relates how their corporal called them “sissies” and “moffies” [faggots] during training. Soldiers often became involved in fistfights with university students or police officers, and alcohol is as integral to this celebration in South Africa as it is in the US. Cloete’s *Pionne* (2009:26) relates the conflict between conscripts and “pienkvoete” [pink feet] – young men who had not been called up for service yet.

Masculinity is generally constructed in opposition to femininity<sup>106</sup>: cowardice, showing emotions, showing fear and anxiety, and being irrational or physically weak, are all seen as feminine traits, and thus inferior to and therefore opposed by masculinity. Males that exhibit these female traits are often regarded as ‘sissies’ and denigrated for being homosexual, and Kimmel and Mahler (2003:1446) claim that “Research has indicated that homophobia is one of the organizing principles of heterosexual masculinity, a constitutive element in its construction.”<sup>107</sup> In the US context, Mosher and Tomkins (1988:68) note, “The shame of being ‘unmanly’ (or not a ‘real boy,’ but a ‘sissy,’ ‘wimp,’ ‘faggot,’ ‘cry-baby,’ ‘coward,’ etc.) is no more than partially reduced by parents who enforce the ‘masculine’ response. Shame itself, is viewed as an ‘inferior feminine’ affect.” In South Africa, Holt (2005:151) claims that showing emotion was a sign of weakness, and therefore he could not express the trauma he had endured in Angola. O’Brien (2006[1973]:51) recalls how they were taught, “Women are villains. They are creatures akin to Communists and yellow-skinned people and hippies.” Numerous authors rebel against this education; consider the following exchange from William Eastlake’s *The bamboo bed* (1969:82):

“Did you know that man’s role is naturally aggressive and that this accounts for sex?”  
 “No.”  
 “That it accounts for war too?”  
 “No.”  
 “That it accounts for art? Art is a male thing. War is a male thing. Did you know ...?”  
 “No.”  
 “Did you know that Hitler tried to paint pictures, Napoleon tried to write a novel?”  
 “No.”  
 “Show me a soldier who is not a failure,” Bethany said.  
 “Well, I would have thought-”  
 “Don’t think,” Bethany said. “Thinking is not a male thing. When a man thinks he comes up with a war. Thinking is a female thing.”  
 “And she comes up with a baby?”  
 “A baby is better than a body,” Bethany said.

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<sup>106</sup> Rosen, Knudson and Fancher (2003:346) however note that the construction of a masculine identity in opposition to femininity also includes positive attitudes towards women, in particular where women are seen as faithfully retaining the ‘home front’ while men are sent into combat.

<sup>107</sup> Eminem observes, “The lowest degrading thing that you can say to a man [...] is to call him a faggot and try to take away his manhood. Call him a sissy. Call him a punk. ‘Faggot’ to me doesn’t necessarily mean gay people. ‘Faggot’ to me just means taking away your manhood” (quoted in Kimmel and Mahler (2003:1445)).

William Eastlake also rejects the notion of masculinity in *The Bamboo Bed*, where the narrator exclaims, “Women are tougher than men. That’s why they don’t have to go to war to prove something” (1969:84-85).

In South Africa, those who refused to answer the call for military service would be shamed as not only traitors, but also they were deemed to exhibit signs of “weakness and femininity” (Conway 2008b:428). In questioning the ECC’s masculinity, government references to them recall LBJ and Nixon’s statements on anti-war activists in the US: General Magnus Malan once called the ECC “mommy’s little boys” (Drewett 2008:104), and an anti-ECC poster read, “The ECC does it from behind” (Conway 2008b:435). In contrast to this idealized warrior stands the conscientious objector, who, if he is unwilling to fight, must be not-man – homosexual, or at least exhibiting feminine traits.

One of the few positive images of females in a combat environment is the weapons. Holt (2005:28) recalls that they were told that their rifles were their wives and were therefore never to leave their sides – a similar instruction to what Marines receive in *The Short-timers*.

For Mosher and Tomkins (1988:62), the American frontier is directly linked to masculinity,

The frontier, with its scenes of going west to escape restriction, produced historical scenes still linked to the American ideological emphasis on rugged individuality. A culture’s script, reflected in its ideology or world view, consists of a widely-shared set of rules that interpret and solve the problems of affect within its prototypic historical scenes.

In South Africa<sup>108</sup>, the frontier spirit is most vividly embodied in Afrikaner culture, rather than in the South African English culture. During the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Afrikaners set off to colonize the interior of the country and then engaged with indigenous peoples, much like frontiersmen in the US. George Armstrong Custer’s famous last stand at the Battle

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<sup>108</sup> This is not to deny that the British also had such a frontier spirit. The Rhodesians particularly exemplified the frontier spirit and are widely regarded as the toughest counterinsurgency force in the history of the world. Whereas their overall kill-ratio during the conflict in Rhodesia was 1:23 in favour of the security forces (40,000 insurgents killed at the cost of 1,735 Rhodesians) (Wood 2008:202), Fire Force tactics produced a 1:80 kill ratio (Wood 2008:195). This is much higher than the average American kill-ratio of 1:16 during the Vietnam War (Horn 2004:103), although units like SOG had a much higher kill-ratio at 1:153 (Horn 2004:103).



of Little Big Horn (1876) finds a parallel in battles such as Vegkop (1836) and Bloedrivier (1838), and the heroic last stand of Dirkie Uys, son of the Voortrekker leader Piet Uys, at the Battle of Italeni in 1838. Indeed, Custer is mentioned several times in literature on the Vietnam War, usually with irony, for instance in *The bamboo bed*: “Maybe this war is a fantasy. Maybe General Custer is a fantasy. The man who avenged Custer. Custer died for your sins” (1969:308) and “Keep down, everyone, and keep up. Keep up with Iron Man Clancy, the noblest Roman of them all. The biggest bullshitter in Two Corps. The world. A tinhorn Custer. A madman. A coward. The bravest of the brave” (1969:317). The effect that this reference has, is that it recalls US heroic history in such a way that the present war is contrasted with the past – again a manifestation of cultural estrangement as the characters show how different their present is from the heroic past they were brought up with.

It is worth mentioning that Adelman (2009:276-277) notes how American manliness is often contrasted with European “sissiness.” The reluctance of European nations to become involved in the war in Iraq reinforces this stereotype, and the French in particular are often depicted as ‘sissies’ in the media. A familiar joke advertises a French weapon: “Never been fired, and only dropped once,” while a French Army survival knife supposedly includes a white flag. One is also supposed to be able to tell the difference between a French and American soldier by the suntan under the French soldier’s arms. In the script of *We were soldiers*, General Kinnard remarks, “We wouldn’t be there if they hadn’t already beaten the French Army,” to which the second general replies, “The French Army? What’s that?” (Wallace 2001:13).

Comparable to Adelman’s remark, Afrikaners have often seen the South African English community as “sissies.” Mark Behr for instance writes how the Boy Scouts were considered “moffies” by their Afrikaans equivalent, the Voortrekkers (Behr 1993:53), and he has to be reminded that not all English soldiers are “softies” (1993:106). Williams (2008:20) mentions that Afrikaners refer to the English in South Africa as *rooinekke*<sup>109</sup> (red necks), a reference to the tendency of British soldiers to get sunburnt during the Anglo-Boer War. The implication is that they do not belong in Africa, while the Afrikaner

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<sup>109</sup> The English were also referred to as *soutpiele* (salt dicks) or *souties* (salties) for short – a reference to them having one foot in England and one in Africa, with the ocean in-between.

does, because the sun does not scorch the Afrikaner – he is a rugged frontiersman. In turn, Afrikaners are called *rock-spiders* or *hairy backs* by English-speaking compatriots, which of course denote their ‘backwardness’ and ‘uncivilized’ nature. Indeed, Afrikaners have historically been regarded as ‘uncivilized’ and ‘backward’<sup>110</sup> (Giliomee 2004:xiii-xxiv) – in a way still conveying the same sense of ruggedness. In both Afrikaner and American culture, being a man = being a soldier = being a frontiersmen.

Masculinity and militarism are often linked to other forms of oppression (Adelman 2003:1142), as already argued by Mosher and Tomkins (1988:63),

The successful macho warrior is excited, ready for surprise, angry, and proud, contemptuous and fearless. The loser has given up and is relaxed in dubious enjoyment, crying in distress, terrified and humble and ashamed. It is a very small step to assign these demeaned affects to women inasmuch as they are readily defeated by men in physical combat. It is also a small step to regard children as little slaves and women, and to regard lower classes in the same way. Boy children, then, must prove themselves to become men in *rites de passage*. A variety of trials by fire involve the mastery of the masculine over the feminine affects (original emphasis).

Bruce (2007) suggests that black participation in political violence in the 1980s and early 1990s was partially an attempt to overcome the emasculating effect of Apartheid. Black youths could be regarded as ‘real men’ if they fought ‘the oppressor’ and thus overcome the ‘inferiority complex’ attained under Apartheid. This view is applicable to all subjugated peoples: In Vietnam as well as Namibia, the message of Communism and the ‘liberation struggle’ found a favourable audience with the disenfranchised, marginalized peasantry. Jefthas and Artz (2007:42) claim that in South Africa,

Apartheid’s dehumanizing effect extended beyond the racial classification of South Africans; it also had a major impact on the construction of gender identities, particularly among black males. During the height of the fight against oppression, young black men were socialized into militaristic versions of manhood. In the course of calling the youth to join the struggle, notions of what it meant to be a man were strongly tied to hero versions of masculinity, which emulated prominent anti-Apartheid leaders, among them Nelson Mandela and Steve Biko.

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<sup>110</sup> For instance, Giliomee (2004:309) quotes G. A. Henty from *Good Change*, “Never before had a large body of intelligent men been kept in a state of abject subjugation by an inferior race, a race almost without the elements of civilization, ignorant and brutal, beyond any existing white community.”

Weapons symbolize this militarization. For insurgent movements world-wide, the weapon of choice is the Kalashnikov AK-47, “Within the African National Congress (ANC), the AK-47 was strongly associated with liberation, and wielding a gun became not only a symbol for young men but also represented male affluence and power” (Jefthas and Artz 2007:42). ANC youths sang how “the AK-47 roars” in South African townships during the 1980s (as current President Jacob Zuma still does), and note that the AK-47 is depicted on the flag of Mozambique as a symbol of liberation:



FIGURE 19 FLAG OF MOZAMBIQUE

Weapons = soldiers = real men, and thus the possession of weapons has been an important status symbol in cultures throughout history, for it confers on the bearer the status of ‘being a man’, as can be seen from e.g. Anglo-Saxon graves. In providing subjugated peoples with weapons, the Soviet Union thus helped to confer status symbols (in masculine societies) on an upcoming warrior elite in European colonies. The colonizers of course already possessed weapons: South Africa entered the war with the 7.62 mm R1 assault rifle, which was based on the Belgian FN FAL, illustrating South

Africa's link with the colonial powers. The latter rifle was so predominant in pro-western armies in Third World at the time that it carried the epithet, "right arm of the free world." Not coincidentally, the SADF however switched to the 5.56mm R4, based on the Israeli Galil, in the mid-1980s. Israel is of course also closely tied to the West and are considered by some to be settlers (the term *Apartheid* has been applied to Israel in recent times, and now delivers more hits on Google than South African Apartheid), while its enemies had strong ties with Communist countries during the Cold War.

### DANGER AS EXCITING

Masculinity often views danger as exciting, which is possibly one of the reasons why 'masculine' sports – such as rugby and American football – are high-status sports in South Africa and the US respectively, rather than safer sports such as tennis. The "jock" in American film and television usually plays American football, while the Afrikaans equivalent is the rugby player, not the cricket player. Both American football and rugby are contact sports that require a high level of physical strength and considerable risk of personal injury. The danger of these sports makes it exciting, as dangerous occupations – police officer, fire fighter, and soldier – are what many little boys dream of as they are growing up.

The view of danger as exciting is found in the literature on these two wars as well. In Gustav Hasford's *The short-timers*, the narrator looks at new arrivals and thinks, "Violence doesn't excite them the way it excites me because they don't understand it the way I do" (1980:17). Josiah Bunting (1973:viv) writes,

Many died. And of these, many died uncomprehending. They might have had a notion about stopping Communism (for example, the father of the private in this book tells his wife the Reds must not be allowed to get onto the Golden Gate Bridge) or of the necessity for killing off the vicious VC, but mainly they died because they felt obliged to be brave in the presence of their buddies, and, being brave, they were often exposed to enemy fire.

In Strachan's '*n Wêreld sonder grense*, the story of catching the python excites the narrator's mother (Strachan 1984:11) – like the jackal hunter would enthrall women in later novels by Strachan (*Die Jakkalsjagter* and *Die Werfbobbejaan*).

## RAPE AND MASCULINITY

A specific gender issue of war that is directly linked to masculinity's tendency to regard others as possessions is the use of rape. During the Anglo-Boer War, Afrikaner women were sometimes raped, as related by Wasserman (2005:342), and Codevilla and Seabury (2006:265) mention Ilya Ehrenburg's call to 'break the racial pride' of German women in 1945, which is depicted in Solzhenitsyn's poem *Prussian Nights*, "the rule on the eastern front in World War II was first to rape, then to torture and kill" (2006:266). Van Creveld (1991b:414) claims that during WWII, "more American servicemen were executed for rape than for any other crime, particularly if they were black and particularly if the victim ended up dead as well as violated," but adds that "the Israelis in the occupied territories may have killed large numbers of Palestinians, but to this day not even Jordan TV has reported a single case of rape." In 1966, a US Reconnaissance patrol kidnapped a 20-year-old South Vietnamese villager, Phan Ti Mao, and gang-raped her for five days (Wilden 1987:169). In Van Creveld's (1991b:414) view, the rules of war that apply to counterinsurgent forces are constantly applied with more vigour, but these incidents still occur.

Insurgents, however, routinely disregard the rules of war, as Münkler (2005:14) notes, "a strong sexualization of violence produces phenomena ranging from almost daily orgies or veritable strategies of rape through to the ever more common mutilation of victims and the displaying of body parts as war trophies." Rape has become a characteristic, sometimes used as a form of 'ethnic cleansing' in driving a population out of a given area (Münkler (2005:82-87) and Ward and Marsh (2006:3-5)), as used by armed groups associated with the Islamic Salvation Front in Algeria, and the Taliban in Afghanistan. Thabo Mbeki also admitted to the Truth and Reconciliation Committee (TRC) that female members of MK had been raped in ANC training camps (Goldblatt and Meintjes 1997:12).

This increased brutality is linked to the increased use of child soldiers, as used by the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, various groups in Afghanistan (Münkler 2005:18, 77-81), Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front that invaded Sierra Leone in 1989 (Kaldor

2006:99), the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone, as well as SWAPO in Namibia (Barnard 2006:133), the MPLA in Angola (Ferreira and Liebenberg 2006:59) and the PAC in South Africa. Münkler (2005:78) argues, “The experience of humiliation, together with a sudden power that has never been subject to military discipline, leads to excesses of violence in which pent-up hatred explodes in wild fantasies of omnipotence.” Although Münkler refers specifically to child soldiers, the dynamics of colonialism create a similar situation where subject peoples (who had been treated like children and thus came to regard themselves almost as children) were given weapons.

Stiff (2001) provides a graphic account of the violence that accompanied independence in Southern Africa. In Mozambique, the FRELIMO takeover during independence was accompanied by severe violence directed towards the population, for instance the attack of 8 September 1974:

They first turned their attention to whites attempting to leave the country. They erected barricades and stopped every car and searched the occupants. A few fortunate ones were allowed to proceed, but most were shot or hacked to death. Women were stripped, humiliated, fondled and often raped. When they ran out of victims, the rampaging gangs turned their minds to pillage and within the shantytowns they looted the shops, murdered the shopkeepers, and torched the buildings. Their next targets were blacks suspected of opposing FRELIMO. Uncounted thousands died in the unchecked riots, many in the course of settling old grudges. This carnage made the mere hundreds of unfortunate whites slaughtered pale into insignificance ((Stiff 2001:94), see also Bothma (2007:37)).

Again, this excessive show of force is directly linked to masculinity. Jefthas and Artz (2007:49) explain that rape is integral to overcoming a sense of emasculation, “Research [...] suggests that men rape women primarily to bolster their perceived masculinity and to feed their desire for power. In the South African context where structural inequality makes men feel powerless, rape is frequently a way for men to assert themselves violently.” One of the most vivid accounts of this trend in post-apartheid South Africa can be found in the testimony of a member of the South African Rapist Association (SARA) (quoted in Goldblatt and Meintjes (1997:14), a former insurgent,

I was a comrade before joining this organisation. I joined it because we were no longer given political tasks. Most of the tasks were given to senior people. I felt that we have been used by these senior comrades because I do not understand why they dumped us like this. Myself and a group of six guys decided to form our own organisation that will keep these senior comrades busy all the time. That is why we formed SARA. We rape women who need to be disciplined (those

women who behave like snobs), they just do not want to talk to most people, they think they know better than most of us and when we struggle, they simply do not want to join us.

Wilden (1987:180-181) also observes that the rapist wants to be regarded as a 'real man', i.e. one with power. He thus establishes his power over women not to illustrate his power to *her* (for she is a slave and "to be recognized as a master by a slave is not to be recognized at all"), but to illustrate his power to other *men*, in order to seek their recognition. Like the child soldier wishing to be regarded as a grown man in the eyes of his culture, subject peoples wish to be recognized on an equal footing with their European counterparts. However, "this is precisely the type of recognition he lacks or believes he lacks." In Wilden's (1987:168) view, "Men do not see rape as a physical and mental attack on the body and soul of another human being, but rather as a crime against property, as the devaluation of a man's assets, as the invasion of a man's territory, as the violation of the possessor through the possessed." The dehumanizing of the female body is attested to in literature on the Vietnam War, where

Vietnam veteran novelists reflect the soldier's tradition of exploitation, intimidation, violence, and rape of native women in varying ways, the most pervasive of which is the tendency to generate Asian women characters who are simply sexual objects – nonpersons with no will, volition, or existence outside of their limited relationship with the protagonist (Tal 1990:82).

Similarly, there were reports of rape during the war in Namibia/Angola, although Gordon's (1991:86) claim of it being "a very frequent occurrence in the operational area" is impossible to verify (he does not supply any evidence to substantiate his claim). Goldblatt and Meintjes (1997:14) recall TRC testimonies that narrated how the South African police raped female suspected informers for political reasons, but lament the difficulty of ascertaining the frequency of such incidents. One story (quoted in Gordon (1991:80)) represents a similar dehumanization connected with rape,

When I was up there I felt nothing...You look at terrs as a stupid. He doesn't know what he's doing. He doesn't know what's right and wrong... You don't think of him as a human being... They go to extremes. That's stupid. You can't see them as people.... There was a lot of rape. We had some low guys with us. Some of those guys you couldn't understand... Also, when you're there you're sommer fighting, you aren't thinking about what you're fighting about... Mainly the ous don't bother about prisoners. If you take a prisoner you have to go through a

whole procedure, filling in forms and that. So you say he was shot in contact. Maybe you don't say anything.

In the short story "Van hom," Kellerman (1988:26-28) tells of SADF soldiers murdering the inhabitants of a village, and gang raping the girl before killing her as well.

Wilden sees rape as a form of communication between men; in the case of counterinsurgencies it is a message between counterinsurgent and insurgent forces. The women's body is no more than "a living tablet of flesh" on which men inscribe a message to their male enemies (Wilden 1987:169). The message reads, "We have power, we can act with impunity." On 1 April 2009, two white South African women were raped and brutally murdered near the town of Welkom, and to ensure the message was interpreted correctly, the attackers wrote on the wall with the victims' blood, "Kill the farmer, kill the Boer." Like Ilya Ehrenburg's call to "break the racial pride" of German women in 1945 (Codevilla and Seabury 2006:265), rape is used in postcolonial Africa as a weapon, or a form of communication, as well.

Wilden (1987:171) believes this message is communicated through other property as well, via looting and vandalism, such as occurred during attacks on tribal militiamen by Al-Qaeda in Iraq (Smith and Macfarland 2008:86). By destroying the property of other men, a soldier communicates his power. This power-theory also explains male-on-male rape, particularly in jail, where the objective is to emasculate another male by 'making him someone's bitch' – subordinate, inferior, without power, like a female. The author recently had an interview with a white man who had been gang-raped by six black men in a South African jail, and according to the victim, they called him their "white bitch." As Wilden (1987:171) notes, attraction has little to do with rape, since the objective is sending a message to one's enemy. Summerfield (1991:165) concurs, "Though often seen as the random excesses of poorly controlled soldiers, it would be more accurately viewed as an instrument of subjugation and terrorization deployed on a more or less systematic basis." Following WWII, however, rape was never used officially by counterinsurgent forces to intimidate or exploit the population, it was never sanctioned by the military hierarchy or the government, and perpetrators were usually punished; this use is restricted to insurgents. In the case of counterinsurgents, rape is a symptom of war, not part of the strategy, while for counterinsurgents, it counts as part of the strategy.



The most vivid depiction of rape in all the literary works considered in this thesis comes from Heinemann's *Paco's Story*. In order to provide a more appropriate context, this scene is quoted at length:

No, James, she was as hard a hardcore VC as they come (by the look of the miles on her face). She had ambushed the 1st platoon's night listening post just shy of first light and shot two of them dead (the third guy had tackled her when she ran, and beat the shit out of her bringing her in), and now the company was hunkered down, wet and sullen, plenty pissed off, waiting for the dustoff and a couple of body bags. Gallagher was nibbling on a bar of Hershey's Tropical Chocolate (the color of dogshit) and sipping heavily chlorinated canteen water, watching her squatting on her haunches, wolfing down a C-ration can of ham and eggs some fucking new guy had given her – wolfing it down with a plastic spoon and her thumb – and finally Gallagher had had enough. The next thing you know, James, he had her by the hair and was swearing up a storm, hauling her this way and that (the spit bubbles at the corners of his mouth slurring his words) through the company to this brick-and-stucco hooch off to one side of the clearing that's roofless and fucked over with mortar and artillery hits up one side and down the other.

Paco sees wiseacre ("Fuck-you-up-boy") Gallagher haul that girl through the night laager; sees this dude and that peel off from their night positions and follow across the hard, bare clay, smacking their lips to a fare-thee-well – there's a bunch of guys in that company want a piece of that gook. Gallagher waltzes her into the room at the side, no doubt a bedroom. And the whole time the girl looked at that red-and-black tattoo out of the corners of her eyes like a fretted, hysterical dog. She could see only the slick-sweated tail, curled and twisted and twined around itself, and the stumpy, lizard-like legs; the long, reddish tongue curled around the snout and head and the long, curving neck and forelegs, but she could not see that much because of the way Gallagher had her by the hair.

[...]

The hooch was claustrophobic, with thick walls and small rooms, and smelled like an old wet dog. Gallagher and the rest of us reeked sourly of issue mosquito repellent and camouflage stick and marijuana, sopping-wet clothes and bloody jungle rot (around the crotch and under our arms). The girl smelled of jungle junk and cordite – gunpowder, James – and piss.

[...]

You've got to understand, James, that if the zip had been a man we would have punched on him, then killed him right then and there and left him for dead.

So Gallagher hauled the woman off by the hair, and she looked as hard as hard can be at that red-and-black tattoo. And she was naked from the waist up, but nothing much to look at, so no one was much looking at her, and she was flailing her arms, trying to gouge Gallagher's eyes out, and swinging her legs, trying to kick him in the balls, but Gallagher was doing a pretty good job of blocking her punches and holding her back (was a wrestler, Gallagher was). She screamed in Viet that no one understood but could figure out pretty well, "Pig. You pig. GI

beaucoup number ten goddamned shit-eating fucking pig. I spit on you!" Gallagher dodged and bobbed and weaved, and chuckled, saying, "Sure, Sweet Pea, sure!" He pulled her-arms flailing, legs kicking, screaming that hysterical gibberish at the top of her lungs. [...]

We took her into the side room, and there wasn't much of the roof left, but there were chunks of tiles and scraps of air-burst howitzer shrapnel, and the ass end of some bullshit furniture littered around. You walked on the stone parquet floor and the crumbs of terra-cotta roofing tile, and it crunched – like glass would grind and snap and squeak underfoot. That hooch was a ruin, James, a regular stone riot of ruin. Gallagher and the girl, Jonesy and Paco and the rest of us, stood in the brightening overcast (more like intense, hazy glare) that made us squint involuntarily, as though we were reading a fine-print contract.

Jonesy took a long stretch of black commo wire and whipped a handful of it into the open air. It looped high over the ridgepole and came down, smacking Paco in the leg. Gallagher and Paco held the girl down firmly while Jonesy tied her wrists together behind her back, then hauled on that wire the same as if he were hoisting the morning colors, just a crisp and snappy as the book says – *The Manual of Arms*, James, the twenty-two-dash-five, we called it. The girl had to bend over some or dislocate both arms, so she bent down over this raw wood thing about the size of a kitchen table. The girl was scared shitless, chilly and shuddering, glossy and greasy with sweat, and was all but tempted to ask them as one human being to another not to rape her, not to kill her, but she didn't speak English.

There was considerable jostling and arm punching, jawing and grab-ass back and forth, and everyone formed a rough line, so just for that moment Paco got to stand there and taking a long look. A peasant girl, not more than fourteen, say, or sixteen. And by the look of her back she had worked, hard, every day of her life. [...]

Jonesy stepped up behind the girl, took out his pearl- handled straight razor with a magician's flourish-acting real gaudy and showy the way he could – and slit her flimsy black pants from the cuffs to the waistband, just the same as you'd zip a parka right to your chin. Then he hauled off and hoisted her up another notch or two for good measure, until her shoulders turned white (clear on the other side of the laager Lieutenant Stennett heard the commo wire squeak against the ridgepole). Then Gallagher stepped up behind her, between her feet, unbuttoned his fly, and eased out his cock. He leaned on her hard, James, rubbing himself up a fine hard-on, and slipped it into her. Then he commenced to fuck her, hard, pressing his big meaty hand into the middle of her back.

Gallagher and Jonesy started to grin and wanted to laugh, and a couple dudes did laugh, because no one in the company had had any pussy for a month of Sundays (except for Lieutenant Stennett, who hadn't been in this man's army that long). And when Gallagher finished, Jonesy fucked her, and when Jonesy was done, half the fucking company was standing in line and commenced to fuck her ragged. The girl bit the inside of her cheek to keep back the rancor. The line of dudes crowded the low and narrow doorway, drinking bitterly sour canteen water and the warm

beers they'd been saving, smoking cigars and jays, and watching one another while they ground the girl into the rubble. Her eyes got bigger than a deer's, and the chunks and slivers of tile got ground into her scalp and face, her breasts and stomach, and Jesus-fucking-Christ, she had her nostrils flared and teeth clenched and eyes squinted, tearing at the sheer humiliating, grinding pain of it. (Paco remembers feeling her whole body pucker down; feels her bowels, right here and now, squeezing as tight as if you were ringing out a rag, James; can see the huge red mark in the middle of her back; hears her involuntarily snorting and spitting; can see the broad smudge of blood on the table as clear as day; hears all those dudes walking on all that rubble.) Dudes still ambled over to the doorway to watch, to call out coaching, taking their turns, hanging around the side of the building after – some getting back in line.

[...]

And when everyone had had as many turns as he wanted (Paco fascinated by the huge red welt in the middle of her back), as many turns as he could stand, Gallagher took the girl out behind that bullshit brick-and-stucco hooch, yanking her this way and that by the whole head of her hair (later that afternoon we noticed black hairs on the back of his arm). He had a hold of her the way you'd grab some shrimpy little fucker by the throat – motherfuck-you-up streets mean and businesslike – and he slammed her against the wall and hoisted her up until her gnarled toes barely touched the ground. But the girl didn't much fucking care, James. There was spit and snot, blood and drool and cum all over her, and she'd pissed herself. Her eyes had that dead, clammy glare to them, and she didn't seem to know what was happening anymore. Gallagher slipped his .357 Magnum out of its holster and leaned the barrel deftly against her breastbone. 'We gonna play us a little game. We gonna play tag,' he said in a clear and resonant voice, 'but who's it?' he said, and jerked the girl once, and her eyes snapped. 'Who's it? Why, you are, Sweet Pea.'

Then he put the muzzle of the pistol to her forehead, between her eyebrows. He held her up stiffly by the hair and worked his finger on it, to get a good grip (a .357 ain't some chickenshit, metal-shop, hand-crank zip gun, James). The girl glared at the red-and black tattoo of the dragon, and she was almost near enough to his hand to purse her lips and kiss his knuckles. And then in the middle of us jostling and grabassing, Gallagher squeezed off a round. Boom.

The pistol bucked and Gallagher's whole body shimmered with the concussion; we all eyed him quickly. Some of the fucking new guys flinched, and Lieutenant Stennett positively jerked his arm and splashed himself with scalding coffee. Smoke rose from the pistol and Gallagher's hand in a cloud, in wisps. If you had listened closely, you would have heard the ring of metal on metal, the same as you hear a 105 howitzer ring with that tang sound; a sound the same as if you had hauled off and whacked a 30-foot I beam with a 10-pound ballpeen – a sound you feel in every bone of your body from the marrow out.

Her head was so close to the hooch that we heard the shot simultaneously with the clack and clatter of bone chips against the brick and stucco. The pistol slug and the hard, splintered chips of brick ricocheted and struck her in the meatiest

part of her back, between her shoulder blades. Just that quick there was blood all over everything and everyone, and splinters of bone and brick stuck to our clothes and the bare skin of our arms and faces. And the girl was dead in that instant (and we mean stone dead, James) and lay in her own abundant blood. Her hands and arms fluttered the same as a dog's when it dreams.

Paco remembers the spray of blood, the splatter of brick and bone chips on Gallagher and Jonesy and everyone, as thick as freckles, and how it sparkled. He remembers that quick, tingling itch of the spray, like a mist of rain blown through a porch screen. He remembers the brown bloodstains down the fronts of our trousers for days afterward; remembers Gallagher turning to the rest of us, still holding her scalp, and how we made a path for him when he walked away, hearing him say out loud (the timbre and resonance of his voice reverberating superbly), as if we were in an auditorium, "*That's how you put the cool on gooks.*" (Heinemann 2005[1986]:174-184)

Note that this description relates no attraction to her: she "smelled of jungle junk and cordite – gunpowder, James – and piss," and "she was naked from the waist up, but nothing much to look at, so no one was much looking at her." The narrator also admits that this was a form of punishment: "You've got to understand, James, that if the zip had been a man we would have punched on him, then killed him right then and there and left him for dead," and "*That's how you put the cool on gooks.*" Also, note that this is not a systematic use of rape as a strategy, but rather a random act of excess violence committed by soldiers acting out of frustration; the company was "wet and sullen, plenty pissed off, waiting for the dustoff and a couple of body bags."

## CONCLUSION

Masculine identity comes to fruition in war, and was often regarded as a rite of passage in South Africa and the US. At best, it made men of young boys, teaching independence, assertiveness, and responsibility. At worst, it also made *men* of young boys, teaching masculinity in opposition to femininity, violence, and regarding those they consider 'other' in contempt. Masculinity can manifest in positive as well as negative ways. This is of course true of insurgent as well as counterinsurgent forces, but the balance of power alters the dynamics: the former may commit atrocities to *claim* their power; the latter may carry out the same acts to *illustrate* theirs. In other words, COIN-forces have power,

while insurgents fight for power, and both may use extreme violence to communicate their positions within a masculine rubric.

The literature on these two wars represents a distaste for masculinity, as mentioned in the section on John Wayne, indicating another aspect of cultural estrangement: the dominant view of masculinity is often mocked and scorned. In the case of Holt, he writes with bitterness how masculinity's denial of emotions caused irreparable damage to soldiers suffering from PTSD. Others, like Heinemann and O'Brien, write disgustedly that they were taught to view women as objects. Reading the authors' views on masculinity, one is tempted not to call this aspect *cultural estrangement*, but rather *cultural disgust* – alienation comes through so strongly in the narratives that one looks for a more apt – and less neutral – term.

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## CHAPTER 10: SOCIAL ISOLATION IN COUNTERINSURGENCY

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### INTRODUCTION

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One of the most familiar figures in literature is the outsider – a term familiarised by Colin Wilson’s *The Outsider* (2001). The outsider has few or few substantial ties to others, and generally lives alone and with his own thoughts (invariably questioning the purpose of existence). Wilson describes the outsider figure in literature as socially isolated, citing Harry Haller in Herman Hesse’s *Steppenwolf* (1997[1955]) as a prime example, writing that this novel is “one of the most penetrating and exhaustive studies of the Outsider ever written” (2001:57). Other literary examples include the protagonist in Graham Greene’s *A burnt-out case* (2004[1960]), J.M. Coetzee’s *Life and times of Michael K* (2004[1983]), Zoë Strachan’s *Negative space* (2002), Nick Cave’s *And the ass saw the angel* (1990[1989]), David Lambkin’s *Plain of darkness* (1992), etcetera.

Sometimes, the outsider enters a small community where he/she does not belong, as in the Afrikaans *dorpsroman* (town novel), such as Alexander Strachan’s *Die werfbobbejaan*, Lettie Viljoen’s *Karoliena Ferreira*, Etienne van Heerden’s *Die swye van Mario Salviati* and André P. Brink’s *Duiwelskloof*. The difference between these outsiders entering a small community and those like Harry Haller is that the outsider entering a small community may be able to integrate at a later stage, while outsiders like Haller always remain outsiders.

The outsider is suffering from *social isolation*, as will be discussed in the current chapter.

### SEEMAN’S NOTION OF SOCIAL ISOLATION

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Social isolation is “the sense of exclusion or rejection vs. social acceptance” (Seeman, 1975: 94) that an individual feels in relation to his social environment. Individuals that experience social isolation feel excluded from wider society – marginalised, on the periphery – and these individuals do not form meaningful relationships with others, particularly at the “level of attachment to a micro-community of friends, relatives, and neighbours” (Seeman, Seeman, and Budros 1988:186). According to Mirowsky and Ross (1986:33) social isolation is “detachment from personal relationships – a sense of not

having anyone who is someone to you and not being someone to anyone.” The term is closely related to the term *atomization*, which is the tendency of individuals to see themselves as individuals rather than as part of a group or society. Neal and Collas (2000:114) write that atomization is, “the detachment and discreteness of individuals as they go their separate ways. Under these circumstances, individuals lack of a common sense of group identity, belonging, or community.” Under conditions of atomization, individuals “feel they do not belong, they are blocked from the rewards shared by others, the gap between their personal needs and those of others is great, and a sense of connection is lacking” (Neal and Collas, 2000: 115).

Seeman (1975:111) warns to “to place the matter in some perspective”: he refers to various studies – such as the familiar “strength of weak ties” study by Granovetter (1973) – that suggest that social isolation is not as widespread in the modern world as is often believed.<sup>111</sup> Although a community of strangers surrounds people in the modern metropolis, this does not usually mean that people do not have meaningful relationships. In the modern metropolis, people are indeed surrounded by strangers, but also maintain work- and social relationships. Seeman (1983:178) writes,

There was a time when analysts worried endlessly about the isolated and uprooted citizen of the mass society, and about the loss of “community.” That was about the time, not surprisingly, when the worry about alienation also was overtly very much in evidence. Serious doubts about the validity of these worries were generated when research on urban society began to contradict this image of isolation; and as some of the romanticism about the loss of communal life began to fade, so too did a share of romantic interest in alienation itself.

Because the community is a source of standards or norms, social isolation is closely related to normlessness and cultural estrangement, “In rejecting standards that arise from the expressed needs, preferences, and rights of others, the individual falls back on intrinsic satisfactions and pragmatic efficiency as guides that do not require faith in others” (Mirowsky and Ross, 1986: 36). In this regard, it is interesting to note the suggestion made by Ennett and Bauman (1993:233),

...social isolation may cause cigarette smoking. For example, social isolation may produce stress or boredom that, in turn, may lead to the onset of smoking.

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<sup>111</sup> Milgram’s (1967) familiar small-world studies can also be mentioned, which forms the basis of the “six degrees of separation”-concept, and was later expanded by Watts in particular (see Watts and Strogatz (1998) and Watts (2003)).

Alternatively, as suggested by social control theory (Hirschi 1969), isolated adolescents might be more apt to become smokers because they are not constrained by conventional social structures.

Similarly, Skolnick (1966) suggests that police officers tend to adopt the dominant beliefs of the precinct they join, regardless of individual differences they may have had before joining. Not having such close ties leaves the individual free to decide on his own values, and so social isolation is very closely tied to cultural estrangement.

Social isolation has psychological causes and consequences. Seeman (1983:178) refers to the “buffering hypothesis,” which is “the idea that those who are not integrated into supportive social networks suffer a wide range of negative consequences, since the effects of stressful circumstances can be moderated or eliminated for those who are not isolated.” Social ties help alleviate stress and limit the damage done by e.g. trauma, job loss, death in the family, etc. On the other hand, Luxenberg, Spinazzola, and Van der Kolk (2001:386) see social isolation as one of the main consequences of DESNOS (see section on Trauma) as individuals withdraw from society after experiencing a traumatic event. This can lead to further problems, and Van der Kolk (1996:189) says, “Self-mutilation is a common reaction to social isolation and fear.” Social alienation is therefore strongly entwined with the other aspects of alienation, and with psychology.

## THE FOREIGN ELEMENT OF COUNTERINSURGENCY IDENTITY POLITICS

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A different aspect of identity politics and alienation in counterinsurgencies is the conflict between the insurgents and counterinsurgents themselves. Kalekin-Fishman (2006:523) calls social isolation “experiencing isolation from the community in which one abides,” and as such, foreign personnel that form part of a counterinsurgency need to be considered inhabitants of the environment, albeit temporary inhabitants.

The link between risk perception and social isolation is well documented (see e.g. Barnes (2002)), and particularly the insights of Baker (2002:48) in reference to the crime situation in South Africa are interesting in light of studies by Mirowsky and Ross in the US,



Though the security sought may have different levels of sophistication, legality and effectiveness, there is one feature that is becoming increasingly common to all communities, namely, social isolation. Communities become wary of the stranger in a crime-ridden society and non-state policing is the method chosen by many for securing exclusion.

Individuals in dangerous environments such as South Africa or counterinsurgencies may develop mistrust of others and withdraw from society (Ross, Mirowsky, and Pribesh 2002) – an issue visually represented by electrified fences and gated communities in South Africa, and fortified bases in counterinsurgencies.

In terms of the identity conflict of COIN, this is of course an intercultural rather than intracultural conflict, usually involving greater racial and religious differences than in the intracultural aspect of the conflict. This opens up a greater possibility for imposing an identity of ‘otherness’ on the opposing culture,

Collectively, a group’s identity is a distinctive image that includes boundaries of inclusion and exclusion and is often based on differences with other groups. However, when a group exercises domination over another, through relations of power, conquest, or colonization, it is likely to construct the Other (or others) on which are imposed denigrated identities (Langman and Scatamburlo 1996:133).

According to Wilden (1987), the tendency of patriarchal cultures to regard women as inferior is closely tied to colonial oppression, where, like with women, subject peoples are not only regarded as inferior, but subject peoples begin to regard themselves as inferior and perpetuate this imaginary power relation (1987:86). Whereas the “Mother,” “Wife” and “Virgin” incarnations of females are not threatening to male dominance – like submissive slaves – Wilden (1987:115) places the “Whore, Witch, and Bitch” – negative incarnations of the female – in the same category as “people of colour,” “Communists” and “Marxists” – in other words, *insurgents*. Later (1987:127) he includes Jews and gays amongst the “others.” Mosher and Tomkins (1988:64) agree that masculinity is tied to seeing ‘others’ as objects that can and should be possessed, “The macho warrior holds dominion over all he has conquered – he is master and patriarch. Slaves, wives, and children are his property, owing him respect and fealty.” Indeed, by the late nineteenth century, this view of European superiority and even white supremacy was used to justify oppression in the colonies (Giliomee 2004:240). In the extreme, the arrogance of British colonialism even regarded the Afrikaner as inferior, turning the Afrikaners into “enemies

of civilization” ((Townshend 2008:19), see also Ellis (1998)). Lee (1999:24) argues that the attempt at demonization of the Afrikaner can be witnessed in British fiction of the time,

Writers of British adventure fiction during the period of the South African War worked to create a gulf between the ‘national characters’ of Britain and the southern African republics. Through novels that contrasted Afrikaners and Britons as fictional characterizations, British authors worked to construct such national characters in an effort to demonize these enemies of Britain. Writers worked equally hard to provide a negative view of both Afrikaner men and women. This seems a key point. By emphasizing the failings of Afrikaner gender roles and identities, British authors gave readers the sense of a misshapen culture which lacked the proper order and sense of restraint necessary in all facets of culture if a people aspired to colonial rule.

In 1917, DF Malan – who would lead the National Party to victory in 1948 – noted how this treatment of Afrikaners led to Afrikaners considering themselves inferior to British settlers (Giliomee 2004:309). *The Cape Times*, a South African English paper that claimed in 1907 that Afrikaans was a “mongrel,” “degenerate” language only suited to “peasants in up-country kraals”, while in the late 1920s *The Star* called Afrikaans “At best [...] a national disability and at worst a national misfortune” (Giliomee 2004:319, 353). This attitude reflected the British Conservative view of the time, which saw the Anglo-Saxon race as dominant (Ellis 1998:52).

This denial of the humanity in others by considering them as a collective ‘Other’ has been part of warfare for centuries, and Scarry (1985:58) recalls a vivid example from WWII,

Concentration camp guards, according to Bruno Bettelheim, repeatedly said to their prisoners, ‘I’d shoot you with this gun but you’re not worth the three pfennig of the bullet,’ a statement that had so little effect on the prisoners that that its constant repetition was unintelligible to Bettelheim until he realized that it had been made part of the SS training because of its impact on the guards themselves.

To Seeman (1959:783) “Ethnic prejudice [...] has been described as a response to alienation,” and Dahms (2006:26) asserts,

Societies fraught with largely impenetrable inequalities, while maintaining a policy apparatus to combat a multiplicity of social problems – thus conceding the illegitimacy of structural inequalities – foster a type of social relations that condemns members of different social groups – according to race, class, gender,

etc. – to view each other not as humans, but as representations of the attributes shared by all the members of a demographic reference group. In such societies, equal citizenship is reduced to a simulation that undermines the construction of meaningful life histories.

Van Creveld (2008:222) believes that “Like the British and the French in most of their colonial struggles, the Americans looked at their opponents as scarcely human.” President Johnson once referred to “nailing the coonskin to the wall” (Van Creveld 2008:222), and Allen (2008:47) quotes a combat veteran who recalled, “The only thing they told us about the Viet Cong was they were gooks. They were to be killed.” Beidler (2007:67) refers to the TOG rule: They’re Only Gooks. If the enemy is not regarded as human, atrocities such as My Lai become more likely<sup>112</sup> – on a much more vast scale, Hutus referred to Tutsis as “cockroaches” during the genocide in Rwanda in 1994, which made it easier to kill them.

In counterinsurgencies, racist attitudes were often confirmed when dealing with the indigenous population. Although racist attitudes are evident in US soldiers’ references to the Vietnamese as *zipperheads*, *gooks*, *dinks*, and *slants*, the fact that Montagnards were sometimes called *moi*, meaning “dog,” by the Vietnamese (Taylor 2003:47), illustrates the obvious fact that all sides had racist attitudes. Nevertheless, references to *gooks* are plentiful in American literature on the Vietnam War, occurring for instance 8 times in Robin Moore’s *The Green Berets* (1983[1965]), 45 times in William Eastlake’s *The bamboo bed* (1969), 10 times in Charles Durden’s *No bugles no drums* (1976), 43 times in Charles Coleman’s *Sergeant back again* (1980), 43 times in Gustav Hasford’s *The short-timers* (1980), and 27 times in Dennis Mansker’s *A bad attitude* (2002). Note in particular what Daytona Dave says in *The short-times*, “Remember that gook kid that tried to eat the candy bar? It bit me. I was down in the ville, scarfing up some orphans and that little Victor Charlie ambushed me. Ran up and bit the shit out of my hand” (1980:24). The “gook” is thus both a VC and an “it,” not a ‘he’ or ‘she.’ In *Sergeant back gain*, Prout and other soldiers compare “gookkids” to rats. Prout’s remarks are the most vivid,

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<sup>112</sup> Giliomee (2004:210) argues that the demonization of Afrikaners in British propaganda preceding and during the Anglo-Boer War was one of the reasons British troops committed atrocities in this war.

I know the difference between right an' wrong. I tried to stop myself. I tried to feel sorry for 'em. But day after day after day. The Joes at the base camp gave 'em clothes, food, even money an' toys. I tried to think it through, but I couldn't feel nothin' for these gookkids. Just animals. Less than fuckin' animals! [...] one mornin' I jumped off the back of the tailgate and landed with all my weight on this gookkid's head. Crushed it. It went pop! Like stepping on an egg. And this shit ran out of his eyes an' ears. It didn't look any different than the garbage I'd been pouring off the tailgate for months. No different really." (1980:182-183).

South Africa is of course renowned for racism, and both Afrikaans and English-speaking whites often called Africans *kaffers*<sup>113</sup>. This term literally means 'heathens' and was first used by Muslims to refer to Africans, but came to South Africa via Dutch influence (Giliomee 2004:14). In "Die gat" by Deon Opperman, one soldier kicks a dead insurgent, "Ja, Swapo, wat sê jy nou, jou fokken kaffer?!" (Opperman 2012:34).

Brink (1986:12) notes the lack of humanity in Etienne van Heerden's *My Kubaan* where the narrator considers his fictional Cuban POW like he would handle a horse or dog,

I have my Cuban on a leash. The loop is slung loosely over my left wrist, just the way they taught us at the SADF dog and Horse School at Voortrekkerhoogte, where the red powdery dust had been trodden flat. The choke chain round the Cuban's neck does not cause pain if I jerk it, only gives a sharp shock to remind him about the importance of discipline (1992:74).

When the narrator "converses" with his Cuban POW, the latter does not answer, hence is deprived of a voice much like slaves and peasants were not allowed to speak in medieval literature. His POW does not even look at him, "like a cowed dog too afraid to look at its master" (1992:81). Here, the Other is not given the status of a human being, as the dehumanizing terms named above also suggest in the context of the Vietnam War. However, as in Vietnam, racist labels were used by both sides: SWAPO and other Communist movements such as the ANC and PAC referred to SADF troops (and whites in general) as *Boers*, as Shubin (2008) indeed still does.

Importantly, non-European females were called *meid* in Apartheid South Africa, which literally means 'girl' (from Dutch). Like the term *boy*, this denies the adult in the individual (Giliomee 2004:39), and is a linguistic manifestation of a general attitude of

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<sup>113</sup> This term is still used by Muslim extremists to refer to the "infidel."

Europeans in their colonies to regard indigenous peoples as children who had to be looked after. Cecil John Rhodes – the British arch imperialist – once noted that Africans are at best children, and at worst savages (Giliomee 2004:244), while Herbert Morrison, the British Minister of Foreign Affairs, remarked in 1951 that granting independence to African nation was tantamount to “giving a child of ten a latch-key, a bank account and a shotgun” (Giliomee 2004:446). Unlike Europeans (in a colonial perspective: adults), they could not read or write (like children), converse properly in a European language (like children), or be trusted to provide sustenance or governance for themselves (like children) – the Europeans created the entire infrastructure. Indeed, the German says of the Vietnamese in Denis Johnson’s *Tree of smoke*, “These people are like demented children” (2007:42).

In Carel van der Merwe’s *Nasleep*, one encounters this attitude often: Paul’s mother says that black people are sometimes like children (2007:95), while the young Afrikaner in London, Chris, asks if black people are still “fucking up” the country, noting, “Hulle het ‘n land gekry met alles – banke, paaie, kragstasies, telefone, hospitale, daai soort dinge. Suid-Afrika sou soos die res van Afrika gelyk het as ons nie daai show gerun het die afgelope driehonderd-en-vyftig jaar nie” [They were given a country with banks, roads, power stations, telephones, hospitals, those kind of things. South Africa would have looked like the rest of Africa if we did not run that show the past three hundred and fifty years] (2007:59). However, Chris says “die bobbejane is nou in charge van die dieretuin” [the baboons are now in charge of the zoo] (2007:83).

In time, this European superiority complex became internalized by their colonial subjects, as Wilden (1987:208) argues, “it is not enough for the colonizers alone to believe the myth of their God-given, ‘natural’, innate, and hereditary superiority; the colonized must be taught to believe it too, and just as fervently, if not more so.” The masculine father figure thus became the father of the Third World, extending patriarchy’s masculine identity in opposition to femininity to entire cultures. Subject peoples became the women; the children (see particularly Adelman’s (2003) discussion of a photograph taken in Iraq). Of course, the habit of Southern African black males to hold hands as a token of friendship and the Vietnamese’s small stature in relation to Europeans and Americans did not undermine this view. In Pakendorff’s (1993:73) view, the violence in South Africa in the early 1990s occurred in reaction to this denigration of

Africans. As discussed in the section on masculinity, much of the brutality in Cold War insurgencies stem from this reaction to denigrating colonial attitudes.

## SOCIAL ISOLATION FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF VETERANS

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Following the CDC's study of Vietnam War veterans, William Eaton, at the time a psychiatric epidemiologist at Johns Hopkins University, claims the unpopularity of the war contributed to PTSD, "War produces all kinds of casualties, both emotional and psychological. Vietnam probably produced more than usual because of the guilt. People were unsure they were doing the right thing. And guilt is one thing that keeps emotional problems alive" (Roberts 1988:161). Robert Laufer, at the time a sociologist at City College of New York, observes on the other hand, "The war experience sets people off from others and comes back and haunts their lives in more or less severe ways. This is not peculiar to Vietnam but is a characteristic of people who went to war" (Roberts 1988:161). However, he acknowledges that the environment of Vietnam, in contrast with WWII, did not acknowledge that the price of war could be justified, an issue noted by Summerfield (1991:163) as well, "guilt and shame have been prominent themes for US Vietnam war veterans, who came home to find that their society had disavowed the war and was somehow blaming them for it all."

Larry Heinemann's *Paco's Story* often articulates a sense of betrayal experienced by soldiers returning from Vietnam. Early on, the narrator remarks that civilians are not interested in war stories, "The people with the purse strings and the apron strings gripped in their hot and soft little hands denounce war stories – with perfect diction and practiced gestures – as a geek-monster species of evil-ugly rumor" (Heinemann 2005[1986]:3). When Mr Elliot asks him why he has the cane, and he replies that he was wounded in the war, Mr Elliot asks, "What war was that, young man?" (Heinemann 2005[1986]:75). The narrator says, "And how many times is it, James, that people have looked over at Paco, looked down, and asked, 'What war was that?' as if not one word of the fucking thing had ever made the papers" (Heinemann 2005[1986]:75). Paco gets no sympathy from civilians; upon enquiring about job opportunities, one man even says, "Them Vietnam boys sure do think you owe them something, don't they"

(2005[1986]:85). It is only when he walks into a diner owned by an ex-Marine, who is equally disillusioned with the US and recognizes Paco's "1,000 meter stare" (2005[1986]:95), that he is offered a job. The owner, Ernest Monroe, is a veteran of both Guadalcanal and Iwo Jima, and relives his experiences every time he gets drunk – like Paco himself. On one occasion, another veteran of Vietnam stops by the diner, and imitates a college girl, "You one of them vet'rans, ain'cha? Killed all them mothers and babies. Raped all them women, di'n'cha" (2005[1986]:156). Paco develops a love-interest in a girl in his hotel, Cathy, who is initially attracted to him and particularly to his scars, but later becomes disgusted by his disfigurement, both physical and mental. She writes in her diary that he is "death warmed over" (2005[1986]:207), and she has a dream about his scars that make her "shudder" and her skin "crawl" (2005[1986]:209).

In James Webb's *Fields of Fire*, the major remarks towards Hodges, "The bush gets in your blood and you hate anyone who hasn't fermented in his own stench for months, or stood inside a dirt hole all night, waiting to kill a man who's trying to kill him first" (2001[1978]:75). Gilliland remarks bitterly, "I'm coming back to Viet-fucking-Nam because I'm a professional dedicated to protecting her prissy, babied way of life and she spits at me" (Webb 2001[1978]:231).

Similarly, an SADF soldier, "felt an unbelievable disappointment in the people of our country who could do this to us [beat them up] after we'd been up there for so long fighting and suffering" (Batley 2007a:103). In Christiaan Bakkes's *Skuilplek*, set in the first few months of 1989, the narrator also recalls how the two soldiers, Sarel Froneman and Harry Caldecot, could no longer identify with civilians upon their return from the war, and thus they signed up again (2002:20, 21). Later (2002:54) it is noted that the camaraderie of the army gave meaning to Sarel's life, something he had been unable to find until joining. The soldiers are so far removed from society, that when Harry tries to put on some "romantic" music, he plays "Bring your daughters to the slaughter" by Iron Maiden (2002:73).

Clive Holt (2005:130, 133) makes a similar observation, "I wanted to go back to my own team where I had a sense of belonging. I felt I no longer belonged in Civvie Street." Importantly, then, although the army therefore often creates social isolation from society, it also works against social isolation for some.

Note in particular what Opperman (2012:32) writes about the society that sent South African troops to the war in Namibia/Angola:

Kaptein: "Wat's jou probleem, troep?"

Ek: "Ek wil nie meer 'n offisier in hierdie weermag wees nie, Kaptein."

Kaptein: "Wat gaan jou pa sê?"

Ek: "My pa is verlede jaar oorlede:"

Kaptein: "Wat gaan jou ma sê?"

Ek: "My pa en ma het my grootgemaak om my eie besluite te neem, Kaptein, en om volgens my eie gewete en oortuiging op te tree."

Kaptein: "Dan kan jy maar net so wel die land verlaat, jou sleg moer kommunist."

Ek: "Dankie, Kaptein, maar eintlik wil ek net hierdie kursus verlaat."

[Captain: "What's your problem, soldier?"

I: "I do not want to be an officer in the army, Captain."

Captain: "What would your father say?"

I: "My father died last year:"

Captain: "What would your mother say?"

I: "My father and mother raised me to make my own decisions, Captain, and to act according to my own conscience and belief. "

Captain: "Then you can just as well leave the country, you worthless piece of shit communist."

I said: "Thank you, Captain, but I really just want to leave this course."]

The implication is firstly that the most important opinion resides with the patriarch, and secondly that the rejection of military service means the rejection of Afrikaner society – hence the troop becomes a "Communist" that is ostracised by society. Later, after witnessing the torture of a prisoner, Opperman (2012:37) writes about his disillusionment with this society, "Ek stap weg. Verby die hok. En soos ek verby stap, voel ek hoe drie dinge in daardie gat val: my onskuld, my geloof in die goed en reg van die leiers van my volk, en my God" [I walked away. Past the cage. And as I walked, I felt three things fall into that hole: my integrity, my faith in the good and right of the leaders of my people, and my God].



Carel van der Merwe's *Nasleep* (2007) depicts a South Africa that seems hostile to not only former veterans of the SADF, but also the Afrikaner in general, and depicts various forms of alienation from the outset. "Vyandigheid" [hostility] is indeed the fourth word of the novel, as the narrator begins by setting the main character, Paul, at the trial of the Truth and Reconciliation Committee (TRC). Following the hostility of the courtroom, he enters a hostile driving environment dominated by dangerous taxis and raging drivers (9). From the end of the second paragraph, violent crime becomes part of the novel, as he recalls a hijacking the previous week. His house is similarly empty, with closet doors standing ajar "asof hulle sopas beroof is" [as if they had just been burgled] (9). His wife, Louise, had left him in the aftermath of the trial, and her brother, Dawid – a lawyer – wants to arrange the collection of her belongings. Significantly, the narrator describes Dawid during high school as "'n kortbroekpolitikus – altyd besig om by die onderwysers en die ouer seuns gat te kruip" [a politician in shorts – always with his nose up the asses of teachers and older boys] (11). After apartheid, the new leader of the New National Party – Marthinus van Schalkwyk – was known as "Kortbroek" [Shorts], and eventually amalgamated the New National Party with their erstwhile archenemy: the ANC. Van der Merwe thus reminds the reader of 'being sold out' by the former regime, while life under the new regime has become intolerably dangerous. The first chapter ends with the sounds of suburbs in the new South Africa: a police helicopter overhead, and the sound of jacaranda branches touching the electrified fence (12).

'Being sold out' is explained early on by Paul's erstwhile commander, Harris, "Daar is druk uit die ANC dat minstens 'n paar koppe moet rol en derhalwe gaan 'n paar offisiere uit die middel- en laer range opgeoffer word. In ruil daarvoor sal albei kante diegene hoër op in die hiërargie ignoreer" [There is pressure from the ANC that at least a few heads must roll, and therefore a few officers from the middle and lower ranks must be sacrificed. In exchange, both sides will ignore those higher up in the hierarchy] (25). In other words, both the NP and ANC top leadership were sacrificing their combatants to the TRC. Van der Merwe (30) writes bitterly,

Die politici wat hulle in die buurlande en die townships ingestuur het om hul vuilwerk te doen, ontken nou dat hulle geweet het wat gebeur het. Selfs die generaals beweer dat hulle ondergeskiktes hul bevele verkeerd vertolk het. In die veilige omhelsing van hul gewaarborgde staatspensioene en wildplase en aftreehuise by die see, het hul heel goed aangepas in die nuwe Suid-Afrika. Maar

sy generasie, die generasie wat geluister en geglo het, is aan hul lot oorgelaat en agtergelos om boete te doen.

[The politicians, who sent them into the neighbouring countries and the townships to do their dirty work, denied that they knew what happened. Even the generals allege that their subordinates interpreted their orders wrongly. In the safe embrace of their guaranteed state pensions and game farms and retirement homes by the sea, they are well-adjusted in the new South Africa. But his generation, the generation that listened and believed, was left to their fate to suffer the consequences.]

Political alienation saturates the novel: “Woorde is vir die politici, daardie smouse van drome, drome van patriotisme en liefde vir die volk of die reënboognasie, drome wat uiteindelik niks meer as dit is nie” [Words are for the politicians, those peddlers of dreams, dreams of patriotism and love for the people of the rainbow, dreams that ultimately are nothing more than dreams] (62). The one Afrikaner, Marius, remarks in London, “Fok politiek. Ek stel nie belang nie” [Fuck politics. I’m not interested] (84). The narrator remarks,

Dit is die nuwe Suid-Afrika en hy is ‘n onaangename herinnering aan die verlede, ‘n verlede wat die meeste wittes wil vergeet. [...] Sy misdade was vir die nasie, het hy by die verhoor betoog. Maar daardie volk stel nie meer belang nie: die verlede is verby, dinge het gebeur waarvan hulle nie bewus was nie, dit is nou tyd om aan te beweeg.

[This is the new South Africa and he is an unpleasant reminder of the past, a past that most whites want to forget. [...] His crimes were for the nation, he argued at the hearing. But those people are no longer interested: the past is past, things happened which they were not aware of, it is now time to move on] (25).

The majority of advertisements for job vacancies state that they require Affirmative Action candidates or “previously disadvantaged” candidates, and Paul says, “*Ek is egter lid van ‘n huidig benadeelde gemeenskap, ‘n wit Afrikanerman, ‘n spesie waarop nou jag gemaak word. Kroonwild in een generasie, ‘n pes in die volgende*” [However, I am a member of a currently disadvantaged community, a white Afrikaner, a species which is now being hunted. Crown Game in one generation, a pest in the following] (33) (original emphasis). This attitude follows him to London, where the rude non-white staff member of the South African consulate tells him, “it’s not our job to keep track of all you people who come here” (55) (emphasis added). Upon his arrival in London, Paul refers to

himself as part of the “wrakhout en uitskot” [flotsam and tailings] of the city (57). He soon moves in with other white South Africans, albeit of a younger generation who did not fight during the war, but they are similarly discarded by South Africa, “My pa reken ek moet net hier bly. Hy sê daar’s geen toekoms vir ons in Suid-Afrika nie” [My father reckons I should just stay here. He says there’s no future for us in South Africa] (59). The narrator says, “Apartheid is ‘n dekade gelede afgeskaf, velkleur nie. Die ou wette het nuwe gedaantes gekry: regstellende aksie, swart ekonomiese bemagtiging, rasseaanstellings en sportkwotas. Die boustene van die nuwe beloofde land. Die reënboognasie, maar het die reënboog wit in?” [Apartheid was abolished a decade ago, skin colour wasn’t. The old laws got new guises: affirmative action, black economic empowerment, racial appointments and sport quotas. The building blocks of the new Promised Land. The rainbow, but does the rainbow contain white?] (62). And elsewhere: “Sy jonger landgenote lyk gedisorieënteerd, vervreem van die land waar die sekerhede van hul ouers vertrap is deur die verloop van die geskiedenis, waar die verlede geen wegwyser vir die toekoms is nie” [His younger compatriots seem disoriented, alienated from the country where the certainties of their parents were trampled by the course of history, where the past is no signpost for the future] (73). However, there is nowhere else to go: In London, the Afrikaners call Steve a “soutpiel” [salt-dick] (83), because at least he has a British passport, while they have to find illegal ways of staying in the UK. Louise is also alienated from South Africa, “En hierso hoef ek ook nie elke dag te hoor hoe skuldig ek moet voel oor die verlede, oor ek wit is nie. Ek’s siek en sat daarvoor. Ek wil net myself uitleef” [And here I do not hear every day how I should feel guilty about the past, because I’m white. I’m sick and tired of it. I just want to live my life] (158). Almost every character voices this attitude in some way: even Paul’s liberal, homosexual brother, who had left the country to avoid the draft, now believes there is no future for whites in South Africa (189).

Depicting the new South Africa as a dangerous, threatening environment is done by numerous references to high walls (13), carwatch guards (15), and security gates (16, 34). When he visits his parents’ farm, he notes the “verbeterings” [improvements] made, one of which is an electrified fence (29). At the mall, he notices how vehicles are parked in small groups, “asof hulle veiligheidshalwe in die reusagtige parkeerterrein saamdrom” [as if they gather in the giant parking lot for safety’s sake] (42). When he

finds Louise's residence in London, the lack of burglar bars is one of the first things he notices (98). When his mother phones to tell him that his father had died, he immediately thinks he had been killed during a farm attack (167). Although his father actually died as a result of a heart attack, he remains on the topic of farm attacks, calling these a "low-intensity civil war" (168).

Carel van der Merwe's *Nasleep* is arguably one of the novels in this study that voices alienation from other South Africans most clearly. It depicts a world where not a single South African living in South Africa can be trusted, from erstwhile comrades to criminals, and even family members. It is a novel that shows how the Afrikaner has been marginalised in the new South Africa, demonised in the media and history books and collectively found guilty of human rights violations, regardless of whether or not these have been committed. It is a story of how lies become truth and truth become lies, where every other human being becomes hostile, fostering mistrust in a chaotic and pervasively dangerous environment.

## CONCLUSION ON SOCIAL ISOLATION

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Counterinsurgencies are extremely divisive wars. When fought between a foreign and local nation, they divide the home country when the objectives of the war seem unclear, which affects soldiers' experience of their role, and the threatening environment promotes intercultural estrangement that leads to the commitment of atrocities. Furthermore, counterinsurgencies often include a civil war where the established order is violently challenged by a younger generation, and more powerful ethnic groups seize the opportunity of political instability accompanying the decolonization process to try to achieve dominance. As such, counterinsurgencies are often landmarks in the cultural development of a nation: In the US, the nation questioned itself in the wake of Vietnam, and in South Africa, the debunking of the patriotic nationalist metanarrative followed the war in Namibia/Angola. In the lands in which these insurgencies were fought, society also changed irrevocably as the norms and conceptions of national identity were uprooted by the conflicts themselves.



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## CHAPTER 11: SELF-ESTRANGEMENT

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### INTRODUCTION

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“The separation of the subject from any fixed identity is itself the definition of the problem” (Prosono 2006:227)

“With the death of metanarratives, especially shared historical narratives of identity, postmodernism also proclaims the death of the subject” (Porpora 2006:244)

Fromm (1955:120) defines alienation itself as “a mode of experience in which the person experiences himself as an alien. He has become, one might say, estranged from himself.” Seeman’s notion of self-estrangement is arguably his most contentious aspect of alienation, and refers to “the expectation that one’s life or work is not in itself meaningful or worthwhile” (O’Donnell, Schwab-Stone, and Ruchkin 2006:217), see also Seeman (1959:790)). Not only is self-estrangement therefore highly correlated with meaninglessness, but also Hermann (2006:64) writes, “The individual no longer has clarity about his personality or place in society. In conjunction with this, the individual feels that he does not belong to himself. He feels that he is worth less than he would have been if the circumstances in society were different.”<sup>114</sup> Roberts’s (1987:347) indicators of self-estrangement also “measure a sense of detachment from self, of drifting or purposelessness in life, as well as negative self-evaluation.” To Kohn (1976:115), self-estrangement does not simply indicate a negative self-image, but also links strongly with powerlessness, “sense of being detached from self, of being adrift – purposeless, bored with everything, merely responding to what life has to offer, rather than setting one’s own course.”

Costas and Fleming (2009:354) note that the concept of self-estrangement “has not weathered postmodern criticisms of essentialism and economic determinism well.” Langman and Scatamburlo (1996:130) call attention to how postmodern insights have “astutely criticised essentialism,” and note that “subjects are historical products created in and through a variety of ideologically based discursive and disciplinary practices,” and thus the concept of an ideal, stable self, from which one can become alienated, is highly

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<sup>114</sup> Own translation

problematic. Geyer (2002:1031) concurs with this critical perspective on essentialism, “One thing has become clear since the 1940s when psychiatrists were still mainly confronted by clients [who] looked for their ‘real selves’, for a hidden, but fixed and ‘objectively’ existing identity they wanted to uncover with the help of the therapist: such a fixed identity does not exist, and has probably never existed.” Gergen (1996:122) also emphasizes the relational nature of the identity construct,

Traditional alienation literature often posits the individual as separate from the social – as either cut away from a necessary lodgement or buried within a social sphere that prevents self-realization. However, as much of the literature on the autonomous self suggests, this view is deeply flawed. As outlined here, this view is effectively replaced by one in which the individual is inherently a social agent. To the extent that the world is meaningful at all, the individual is a culturally interpolated being.

In their discussion of self-estrangement, Costas and Fleming (2009:358) however cite Robert’s (2005) Lacanian reading of authenticity to argue that the concept may still be employed as part of a narrativist discussion on identity-formation, and in particular how Lacan’s theory of the self relates to self-estrangement. Roberts (2005:621) argues that the Imaginary explains “the constitution of a humanist, interiorized sense of self – of the self as a discrete, autonomous, independent entity – as well as of the illusions or misunderstandings of this humanist conception of the self.” Costas and Fleming (2009:358) therefore argue that “The imaginary thus enables us to write about authenticity ‘under erasure’ – we know it does not exist as an elemental essence, but without it we cannot speak given that people act *as if* they have authentic selves and this has practical effects.” The authors therefore define self-alienation as “an experience where dis-identification fails since the boundary between the narrated imaginary of authenticity and corporate defined identity is difficult to sustain. As actors understand that their narrated imaginary of authenticity cannot be realized, they simultaneously notice that ‘who they really are’ is an alien corporate self” (2009:360).

Wilden explains that Lacan believes the alienation of the self occurs during the *stade du miroir* [mirror-stage], which happens in the mind of the child between the ages of six and eighteen months. During this time “the child’s sense of his body as an uncoordinated aggregate is matched against an image of unity or harmony, whether in the mirror or in other people” (1980:464). This creates “an *alienation* of the subject”

(1980:465) (original emphasis), he sees himself in the mirror (or in other people) resulting “in a specular identification with the image of another, an *alter ego*, which involves the constitution of the ego as an *alienation* of the subject” (1980:260) (original emphasis). Wilden (1980:107), therefore claims,

‘Know thyself’ means on the one hand seek to isolate and examine the alienated, mediated, and inauthentic construct we call our self; on the other, it means that we cannot know ourselves ‘authentically’ unless we are in the world, unless we know others, for our self has no meaning and no existence except in this relationship to Otherness. [...] Our cherished self turns out to be a thing, a piece of property, a commodity.

Even the fictional, constructed ‘self’ thus becomes alien. However, under psychologically normal conditions, this alien form of self is not *experienced* as such; it is seen as the ‘true’ self. Self-estrangement therefore refers not to this form of alienation, but to a situation where the self is *experienced* as alien, as the following discussion will show.

## DEPERSONALIZATION

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Wilden (1980:100) connects self-alienation in Lacanian terms to RD Laing’s concept of *depersonalization*. Depersonalization refers to the perception of the self as other, either as non-human (i.e. machine<sup>115</sup>), or as another entity that exists in addition to the ‘true self’. Laing (1990:17) discusses schizophrenia in terms of alienation, “The term schizoid refers to an individual the totality of whose experience is split in two main ways: in the first place, there is a rent in his relation with his world and, in the second, there is a disruption of this relation with himself.” In the psychologically normal person, the self is related to the body, but when depersonalization sets in, an alienation from the body emerges. Laing (1990:69) writes, “Instead of being the core of his true self, the body is felt as the core of a *false self*, which a detached, disembodied, ‘inner’, ‘true’ self looked on at with tenderness, amusement, or hatred as the case may be” (original emphasis). Agency becomes removed, “The unembodied self, as onlooker at all the body does, engages in nothing directly. Its functions come to be observation, control, and criticism

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<sup>115</sup> Laing (1990:49) relates how one patient referred to his wife as ‘it’.



*vis-à-vis* what the body is experiencing and doing, and those operations which are usually spoken of as purely ‘mental’” (Laing 1990:69).

As Geyer (2002:1024) notes, alienation *always* implies a misidentification between some entity and another, even where self-alienation is concerned. In order to be alienated from the self, however, there needs to be multiple selves to which the ‘true self’ can be related. The individual can cultivate multiple identities to adapt to different circumstances, and Geyer (2002:1032) claims, “In modern hypercomplex societies, most people increasingly develop a set of loosely correlated and multi-faceted selves, different sides of their personality being stimulated by different situations.” Geyer calls these “modular” personalities that can be altered as the need arises, for instance one for work, one for social engagements, one for intimate relationships, etc. Self-estrangement then becomes a relation among these selves, with one experienced as ‘true’ while the others are considered fake, cardboard selves. Particularly in the work environment, the ‘true’ self may be withdrawn and replaced with what the ‘true’ self considers a more suitable ‘false’ self, especially if the worker cannot identify with his work. As Laing (1990:74) writes, “The individual’s self-relationship becomes a pseudo-interpersonal one, and the self treats the false selves as though they were other people whom it depersonalizes.” However, Laing (1990:47) notes that depersonalization does not imply any form of psychosis,

A partial depersonalization of others is extensively practiced in everyday life and is regarded as normal if not highly desirable. Most relationships are based on some partial depersonalizing tendency in so far as one treats the other not in terms of any awareness of who or what he might be in himself but as virtually an android robot playing a role or part in a large machine in which one too may be acting yet another part.

This form of self-estrangement is directly related to powerlessness, “The ‘normal’ individual, in a situation all can see to be threatening to his being and to offer no real sense of escape, develops a schizoid state in trying to get outside it, if not physically, at least mentally: he becomes a mental observer, who looks on, detached and impassive, at what his body is doing or what is being done to his body” (Laing 1990:79). In James Webb’s *Fields of Fire*, Marines lose their selves, “You spend a month in the bush and you’re not a Marine anymore. Hell. You’re not even a goddamn person” (Webb 2001[1978]:75). In Pionne (2009:41), Bertie Cloete also depicts such a state,

Agterna beskou, weet ek hoe ek altyd die gerond- en opfokkery gemaak het. Dit was 'n mental ding. All in the mind. Glo my, dit was al manier. Jy het jou verstand amper buite jou liggaam geplaas. Waar jou arms, bene, rug en hele liggaan geprotesteer het teen al wat inspanning, bomenslike oefening en marteling is wat jy moes deurmaak, het jou verstand ver bokant die kakspul geswewe. Jou kop was hoog in die wolke. Jy was soos 'n dwelmverslaafde. So het jy geswewe en jou liggaam het soos 'n masjien voortbeweeg.

[In retrospect, I know how I survived it when they fucked me around and fucked me up. It was a mental thing. All in the mind. Believe me, this was the only way. You almost placed your mind outside your body. While your arms, legs, back and whole body protested against all the effort, superhuman exercise and torture you had to go through, your mind floated above the entire shit pile. Your head was high in the clouds. You were like a drug addict. So you floated and your body continued on like a machine.]

In Feinstein's *Kopwond*, the narrator also notes, "Terwyl ek die vreugde van die ander aanskou, word ek tot 'n toeskouer gereduseer" [while I witness the joy of others, I am reduced to an observer] (2011:209). Depersonalization is therefore a coping strategy designed to overcome powerlessness, including in the face of a real or perceived external threat. This strategy has the advantage that "Whatever failures or successes come the way of the false-self system, the self is able to remain uncommitted and undefined" (Laing 1990:84).

## CYNICISM, IRONY AND HUMOUR

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Since Van Coller (1992:153) notes that Vietnam literature and Afrikaans *grensliteratuur* have in common, amongst others, numbness<sup>116</sup> and the use of black humour, it is interesting to note Sturdy's (1998) study of the work environment. He argued that "when employees suspect they are being forced to become someone they are not, attitudes of cynicism, irony and humour provide relief by opening up a space of self-determination and sincerity within tightly controlled environments" (Costas and Fleming 2009:356). Humour thus provides an avenue to overcome powerlessness, much like Bakhtin's discussion of the carnival implies its use to overcome structural powerlessness in the middle ages. Through humour, the soldier can distance himself from the

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<sup>116</sup> Pakendorf (1993:71) also notes the characteristic numbness of Afrikaans *grensliteratuur*.

environment he finds himself trapped in – an extension of depersonalisation, but one that protects the self against this entrapment. In jest, soldiers could give their impressions of officers, e.g. in Bertie Cloete's *Pionne* (2009:30).

Limon (1994:143) also identifies black humour as a feature that emerges in postmodern WWII fiction, along with an “interest in what may be slightly misnamed overkill” and the “anticipation of apocalypse.” In James Webb's *Fields of fire*, the overweight character Goodrich claims, “Well, you see, that's why I decided to come to Vietnam. My doctor told me to stay away from rich foods for a while” (2001[1978]:85). In O'Brien's *If I die in a combat zone*, soldiers talk about mines “with a funny laugh, flippantly, with a chuckle” (2006[1973]:129). This is claimed unambiguously as an attempt to deal with the combat environment,

If land is not won and if hearts are at best left indifferent; if the only obvious criterion for military success is body count and if the enemy absorbs losses as he has, still able to lure us amid his crop of mines; if soldiers are being withdrawn, with more to go later and later; if legs make me more of a man, and they surely do, my soul and character and capacity to love notwithstanding; if any of this is truth, a soldier can only do his walking laughing along the way and taking a funny, crooked step (2006[1973]:130).

Joker thinks to himself in Gustav Hasford's *The short-timers*, “hold the salute until the colonel snaps his hand to his starched barracks cover and I hold the salute for an extra couple of seconds before cutting it away sharply. Now he has been identified as an officer to any enemy snipers in the area” (1980:49). His previously mentioned remark on the rat is also worth noting, “A Viet Cong rat attacks. Obviously, he intends to bring my breakfast under the influence of Communism” (1980:54). Also, consider the following scene from Dennis Mansker's *A bad attitude* (2002:132),

Race is digging at the top of his pants. He finally gets them free and jerks them down, along with his boxers.

“A fuckin' leech!” he yells. “I got a fuckin' leech on my *dick*!” He starts clawing at it with both hands.

Edwards runs over to him. “Jesus, Race, don't yank your fuckin' dick off.”

“Fuck you, Edwards. Look at the cocksucker!”

I'm laughing at this unintended joke as I walk over to him. I see what looks something like a small dark slug attached to the pink flesh on the head of Race's dick. It looks nasty and I can see why Race is reacting this way.

These characteristics are found in Afrikaans literature on the war in Namibia/Angola as well. Clive Holt kept a diary of his time in Angola during some of the fiercest conventional fighting, and on 9 December 1987 he wrote, “There is an uncomfortable tension in the crew, covered up by light humour most of the time, but in the times of silence the tension and sense of anticipation are so that you can almost reach out and touch it” (2005:35). Later (2005:59) he notes how they laughed and joked about dead enemy soldiers, which, like the collection of souvenirs, served as a way of numbing themselves to the trauma of what they were seeing. In *Pionne*, Cloete (2009:17) writes, “Al die jokes en snaakse goed het die tyd draagliker gemaak” [all the jokes and funny happenings made our time more tolerable], and that humour, in this case gleefully killing mosquitoes, served to “emosioneel te cope met die gevolge van politieke besluite” [cope emotionally with the consequences of political decisions] (2009:59).

## CONCLUSION

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Self-estrangement can be a defence against threatening circumstances, and in the narratives on these two wars, it is found in two ways in particular: through a conscious distancing of the self from events, and using humour. Costas and Fleming’s (2009) contention that self-estrangement still has a place in postmodern alienation studies however drifts towards psychology, as indeed Wilden’s and Laing’s views do. It is therefore necessary to discuss the psychological impact of trauma and its relation to alienation in more detail, as the following chapter attempts to do.

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## CHAPTER 12: ALIENATION AND TRAUMA: A COMPARISON BETWEEN LARRY HEINEMANN'S PACO'S STORY AND ANTHONY FEINSTEIN'S KOPWOND<sup>117</sup>

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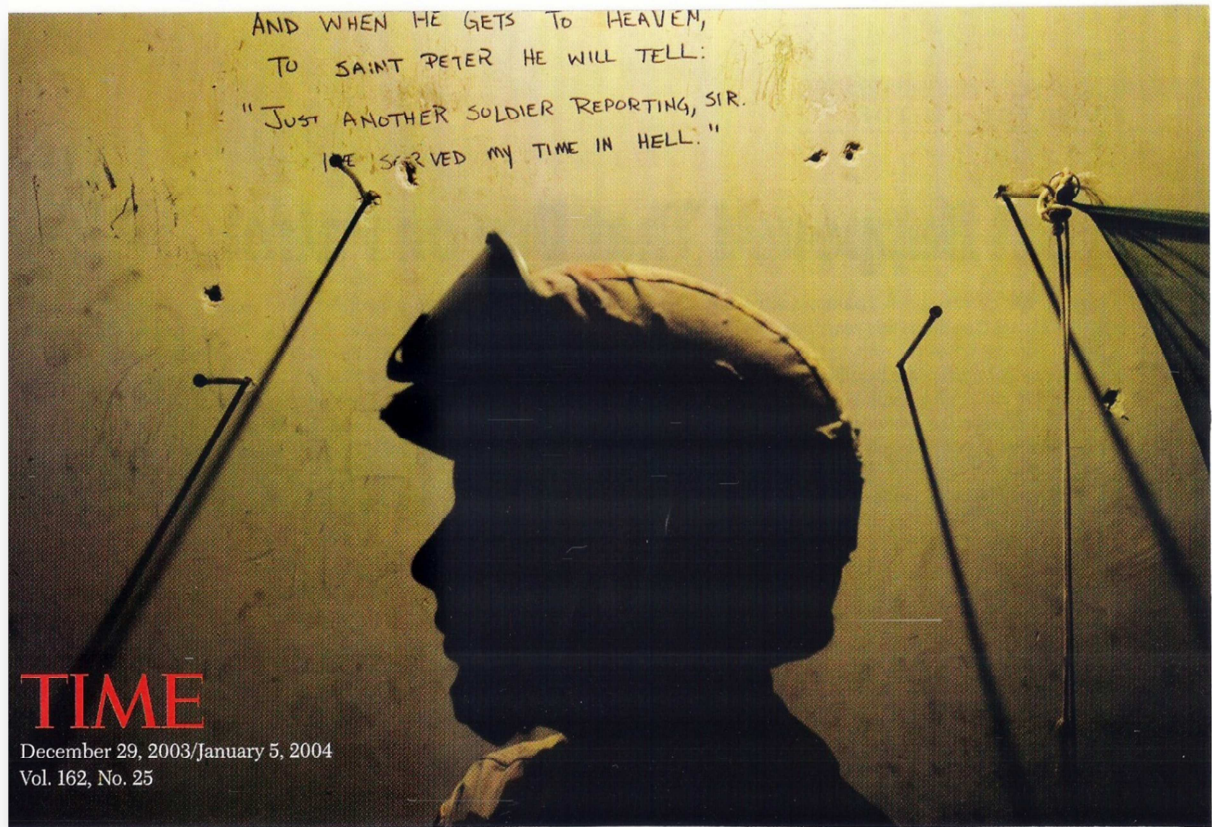


FIGURE 20 THE GUADALCANAL EPITAPH IN IRAQ

### INTRODUCTION

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In the late 1970s, as a result of psychological disorders observed in returning Vietnam veterans, a new diagnosis, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), was created in an

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<sup>117</sup> Since trauma theory is peripheral to this study, this chapter is neither an overview of *all* the literature on the subject, nor an in-depth discussion of the various theoretical approaches to trauma. Trauma can be approached in various ways, e.g. by looking at collective or individual trauma, from a narrativist point of view or from a biological standpoint, etc. The approach taken here draws from psychiatry in particular, because trauma is a psychiatric phenomenon that occurs within a biological, psychological and sociological context (see e.g. Taylor et al. (2010)), and this theoretical paradigm is the current approach taken by psychiatrists in South Africa. Thus the sources consulted aim to provide a practical, as opposed to philosophical, context. For more information on various aspects of trauma, see e.g. the works of Bessel van der Kolk, Ernst van Alphen, and Cilliers van den Berg.

attempt to capture their psychopathology for inclusion in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 3rd Edition (DSM-III)*; American Psychiatric Association [APA], 1980) (Van der Kolk et al. 2005:389). Since then, a vast corpus of studies on PTSD has emerged, cementing the role of Vietnam in the discipline of psychology as it is in counterinsurgency theory. This does not imply that PTSD was specific to Vietnam: Symptoms had been observed as far back as the American Civil War, while “shell-shock” is part of the collective memory of WWI (Leonard, Follette, and Compton 2006:2). However, the diagnosis and description of PTSD is the direct outcome of the Vietnam War.

The resulting symptoms of trauma affect human relations directly. The American report of the Presidential Commission on Mental Health from 1978 found that 38% of marriages of Vietnam veterans were terminated within six months after their return from the war (Bryant 2006:196). 70% of veterans with PTSD and their partners report clinically significant levels of relationship distress (Wick 2010:8). Similarly, children who experienced trauma are much more likely to stay single for longer, and when they do get married, chances are much higher that they will divorce than is the case for the rest of the population (Briere and Elliott (1994:62), and Leonard, Follette and Compton (2006:363)). This implies that the effects of trauma can lead to alienation within the romantic relationship, and that in itself results in additional depression and trauma for both the individual *and* his offspring through what may be called “secondary traumatic stress,” where family members often experience symptoms of traumatization (Wick 2010:11). Wick refers to the “penetrative effects” of trauma, and cites a study of 120 wives of Israeli combat veterans diagnosed with Combat Stress Reaction (CSR), which,

... found that wives who reported current PTSD symptoms in their husbands were found to have elevated levels of depression, somatization, obsessive compulsive problems, anxiety, paranoia, interpersonal sensitivity and hostility, as well as loneliness, impaired marital and family relations, and lack of social support.

Since many veterans with PTSD return home to families, children are thus also affected by “secondary traumatic stress.” Childhood trauma can take several forms, for example, parents who divorce, a parent who dies, alcoholism and drug abuse by parents, physical and emotional abuse, and sexual abuse, and these traumas – like the experience of being



raped – show the same symptoms as war trauma, especially with regard to the sense of powerlessness, as Neal and Collas (2000:61) acknowledge:

The trauma following the experience of being raped resembles the trauma experienced by war veterans and involves many of the same symptoms. The victim encounters a life-threatening event that generates feelings of helplessness and terror. The extreme helplessness instils a sense of captivity in which neither resistance nor flight is a reasonable possibility.

The literature on individual trauma often discusses childhood trauma, combat trauma and the trauma of being raped simultaneously, since these overlap significantly in their psychological causes and symptoms. Therefore, studies on different forms of trauma are used in this chapter to inform the discussion on war trauma.

Factors that exacerbate trauma are the age at which the trauma is experienced (the younger, the more enduring its effects – particularly significant since soldiers are generally young men), the period in which the individual is exposed to the trauma (long-term exposure's effect is greater than acute trauma), the individual's relationship to the person that caused the trauma (the closer the connection, the greater the consequences), as well as the use of force (Briere and Elliott (1994:62), Putnam (2003:272), and Van der Kolk et al. (2005:395-396)).

Kohn (1976:111) and Seeman (1983) claim the concept *alienation* is closely linked with psychological issues, and this section aims to integrate trauma in an individual capacity (as opposed to collective trauma) with alienation theory, thereby providing a backdrop with which to discuss two works of literature that deal specifically with the alienating consequences of trauma: Larry Heinemann's *Paco's Story* and Anthony Feinstein's *Kopwond*.

## PTSD AND DESNOS

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A common psychological reaction experienced by members of the armed forces, is combat stress reaction (CSR), which is the most immediate response to extreme combat stress and is marked by a psychological breakdown on the battlefield (Wick 2010:8). CSR “entails extreme losses of safety and security and of trust and self-esteem, which may have a profound and prolonged impact, particularly in the realm of interpersonal

relations” (Wick 2010:8). CSR can lead to PTSD when the effects linger, and for an individual to be diagnosed with PTSD, he must:

Criterion A: stressor

The person has been exposed to a traumatic event in which both of the following have been present:

1. The person has experienced, witnessed, or been confronted with an event or events that involve actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of oneself or others.
2. The person's response involved intense fear, helplessness, or horror. Note: in children, it may be expressed instead by disorganized or agitated behaviour.

Criterion B: intrusive recollection

The traumatic event is persistently re-experienced in at least one of the following ways:

1. Recurrent and intrusive distressing recollections of the event, including images, thoughts, or perceptions. Note: in young children, repetitive play may occur in which themes or aspects of the trauma are expressed.
2. Recurrent distressing dreams of the event. Note: in children, there may be frightening dreams without recognizable content
3. Acting or feeling as if the traumatic event were recurring (includes a sense of reliving the experience, illusions, hallucinations, and dissociative flashback episodes, including those that occur upon awakening or when intoxicated). Note: in children, trauma-specific re-enactment may occur.
4. Intense psychological distress at exposure to internal or external cues that symbolize or resemble an aspect of the traumatic event.
5. Physiologic reactivity upon exposure to internal or external cues that symbolize or resemble an aspect of the traumatic event

Criterion C: avoidant/numbing

Persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma and numbing of general responsiveness (not present before the trauma), as indicated by at least three of the following:

1. Efforts to avoid thoughts, feelings, or conversations associated with the trauma



2. Efforts to avoid activities, places, or people that arouse recollections of the trauma
3. Inability to recall an important aspect of the trauma
4. Markedly diminished interest or participation in significant activities
5. Feeling of detachment or estrangement from others
6. Restricted range of affect (e.g., unable to have loving feelings)
7. Sense of foreshortened future (e.g., does not expect to have a career, marriage, children, or a normal life span)

Criterion D: hyper-arousal

Persistent symptoms of increasing arousal (not present before the trauma), indicated by at least two of the following:

1. Difficulty falling or staying asleep
2. Irritability or outbursts of anger
3. Difficulty concentrating
4. Hyper-vigilance
5. Exaggerated startle response

Criterion E: duration

Duration of the disturbance (symptoms in B, C, and D) is more than one month.

Criterion F: functional significance

The disturbance causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.

Specify if:

- Acute: if duration of symptoms is less than three months
- Chronic: if duration of symptoms is three months or more

Specify if:

- With or without delay onset: Onset of symptoms at least six months after the stressor (American Psychiatric Association 2000:647-648)

However, PTSD captures only a limited aspect of post-traumatic psychopathology, and individuals with PTSD are eight times more likely to have had three or more additional disorders than individuals who were not diagnosed with PTSD (Luxenberg, Spinazzola, and Van der Kolk 2001:374, 376). As a result, a larger category, Disorders of Extreme

Stress Not Otherwise Stated (DESNOS), was created. The diagnostic criteria for DESNOS are the following (Luxenberg, Spinazzola, and Van der Kolk 2001:375):

I. Alteration in Regulation of Affect and Impulses

(A and 1 of B–F required):

- a. Affect Regulation (2)
- b. Modulation of Anger (2)
- c. Self-Destructive
- d. Suicidal Preoccupation
- e. Difficulty Modulating Sexual Involvement
- f. Excessive Risk-taking

II. Alterations in Attention or Consciousness

(A or B required):

- a. Amnesia
- b. Transient Dissociative Episodes and Depersonalization

III. Alterations in Self-Perception

(Two of A–F required):

- a. Ineffectiveness
- b. Permanent Damage
- c. Guilt and Responsibility
- d. Shame
- e. Nobody Can Understand
- f. Minimizing

IV. Alterations in Relations With Others

(One of A–C required):

- a. Inability to Trust
- b. Revictimization
- c. Victimizing Others

V. Somatization

(Two of A–E required):

- a. Digestive System
- b. Chronic Pain
- c. Cardiopulmonary Symptoms

d. Conversion Symptoms

e. Sexual Symptoms

## VI. Alterations in Systems of Meaning

(A or B required):

a. Despair and Hopelessness

b. Loss of Previously Sustaining Beliefs

Luxenberg, Spinazzola and Van der Kolk (2001:375) acknowledge that while DESNOS is not “officially predicated on specific traumatic experiences, both clinical consensus and research in the field have linked the DESNOS diagnosis with histories of interpersonal victimization, multiple traumatic events, and/or traumatic exposure of extended duration.”

## POWERLESSNESS

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The most striking link between alienation and trauma lies in the aspect of powerlessness: “The defining characteristic of a traumatic event is its capacity to provoke fear, helplessness, or horror in response to the threat of injury or death” (Yehuda 2002:108). In Seeman’s (1959:784)<sup>118</sup> terms powerlessness is the expectation that the individual’s own actions cannot deliver the outcomes he desires; the individual believes he is subjected to forces beyond his control. Seeman incorporates Julian Rotter’s (1954) distinction between internal and external control, of which Neal and Collas (2000:20) write,

The belief in external control is a learned expectation that the major events in life are determined by forces outside of one’s self, but fate, by luck, by accidental happenings, or by powerful others. And the internal locus of control, by contrast, is the expectation that what happens is dependent on one’s own choices, decisions, and actions.

Note the phrase “learned expectation”: powerlessness is not an objective condition, but a perception based in objective conditions, since “objective conditions stimulate the

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<sup>118</sup> In discussing aspects of alienation, some repetition will occur in order to refresh the reader’s memory.

development of certain beliefs and assumptions about oneself and others that lead to paranoia” (Mirowsky and Ross (1983:228), see also Roberts (1987:347), and Ross, Mirowsky and Pribesh (2002:439)). Prolonged exposure to a situation where the individual feels powerless – such as child abuse or combat – thus stimulates the perception that the individual is powerless: powerlessness “results from exposure to inescapable, uncontrollable negative stimuli and is characterized by a low rate of voluntary response and low ability to learn successful behaviours” (Mirowsky and Ross 1986:26). The resultant inability to learn “successful behaviours” can lead to meaningless, normlessness, social isolation, and self-estrangement, as is discussed later.

Like Laing (1990:79) and Bromberg (2003:558-560), Kristeva (1989:34) notes that the animal or individual that feels powerless to fight or retreat, withdraws psychologically from the threatening situation, “The retardation or inactivity, which one might call depressive, would thus constitute a learned defence reaction to a dead-end situation and unavoidable shocks” (see also Fisher (2003:2)). Because powerlessness is such a central feature of the experience of trauma, it is correlated with depression: Mirowsky and Ross (1990a:71) claim, “Regardless of the population studied, or the conditions, methods, and measures of the study, the result is almost always the same: a sense of internal control is associated with decreased depression; a sense of external control is associated with increased depression.” Elsewhere (2002:127), the authors argue that powerlessness, “produces psychological distress in the form of malaise and anxious and depressed mood,” and Ross (1991:832) adds, “A sense of powerlessness is demoralizing in itself and it hampers effective coping with difficult events and situations. Because of this, it is associated with depression, anxiety, and schizophrenia.” This is for instance noted by Feinstein (2011:23-24), who argues that the military environment produced anxiety disorders in soldiers, because soldiers were removed from the comforts of their home environments and cast into a situation where they had no control over themselves or their destinies.

Feinstein (2011:38-43) tells of a soldier called Jan who endured a particularly traumatic event. On a patrol, their vehicle detonated a landmine, and he was thrown into a minefield, along with other soldiers. Some soldiers fell on other landmines, and one was disembowelled, but still conscious. Jan sustained only minor injuries, but could not help the screaming soldier for fear of becoming disembowelled himself. He lay there

for a considerable amount of time, listening to the soldier's cries of anguish, and in the process lost his ability to speak. When the EOD<sup>119</sup> team finally rescued him, his voice was gone, much like Billy Prior in Pat Barker's *Regeneration* (1992[1991]). Jan wished that he had been killed, and felt guilty because he had survived (Feinstein 2011:40). His treatment again reminds of the situation in Barker's Craig Lockhart Hospital, with Feinstein arguing psychotherapy, while one of the other psychiatrists, Yang, wants to punish Jan into recovery. Jan was eventually sent home, still unable to speak. After handing Jan over to his parents, Feinstein (2011:43) writes, "Die oorlog is 'n skandalige gemors en ek is jammer oor hul hartseer" [the war is a shameful mess and I am sorry for their sadness], indicating how this episode alienated him from the war and, by implication, the government that sent soldiers to fight what he believes is an unwinnable and unnecessary war.

Another patient who experienced inactivity in the face of trauma was Brits, who sat in a CASSPIR during an ambush (Feinstein 2011:181-182). He says, "Dit het gevoel of ek verlam is. Ek wou graag uitkom, al die ander was uit, maar ek kon eenvoudig nie beweeg nie. Dit was skrikwekkend, absoluut skrikwekkend. Jy weet jy gaan sterf en jy kan niks doen om dit te voorkom nie" [It felt like I was paralysed. I wanted to get out, all the others were outside, but I simply could not move. It was terrifying, absolutely terrifying. You know you are going to die and you can do nothing to prevent it]. He also complains of memory loss, and subsequently experiences severe nightmares. Most importantly, this alienates him from the other soldiers,

Die mans kan nie na die kaptein kyk nie. Brits het hom by ons aangesluit. Hy kan weer nie na die mans kyk nie. Niemand praat nie. Die hele eenheid sit gebukkend oor hul borde, en kyk so nou en dan vlugtig na mekaar. Taal is opgegee en fonetika is by die venster uit. Kommunikasie word beperk tot 'n geligte wenkbrou, 'n skouerophaling, 'n kop wat knik, 'n saamgeperste lip of in die meeste gevalle 'n nukkerige, veraf blik met die oë gefokus op die een of ander punt waarvandaan geen redding sal kom nie (186).

[The men cannot look at the captain. Brits had joined us. He cannot look at the men in turn. No one speaks. The whole unit sits hunched over their plates, and now and then briefly look at each other. Language is given up on and phonetics is out the window. Communication is limited to a raised eyebrow, a shrug, a nod of

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<sup>119</sup> Explosive Ordnance Disposal

the head, a compressed lip or in most cases a moody, distant gaze with eyes focused on one point or another from where no salvation will come.]

Brit's nightmares – a direct result of trauma – therefore alienate him from his unit. Brits even alienates a visiting unit with these nightmares, and they leave swiftly after hurriedly eating breakfast (191).

*Paco's Story* tells the tale of Paco Sullivan, the only member of his unit to survive the friendly-fire artillery strike that wiped out Firebase Harriette when they were overrun by the NVA, "pulverized to ash [...] so you could draw a thatch rake through it and not find the chunks" (14). This incident is described in particularly vivid detail, and subsequently called the "Alpha Company holocaust" (27), "the holocaust massacre" (45) or simply the "massacre" (49). The repetition of "holocaust" and "massacre" serve to highlight the tremendous carnage experienced at Fire Base Harriette, but also these two terms refer to the mass slaughtering of victims: it depicts the soldiers more as human beings than soldiers, since both terms usually refer to the large-scale killing of civilians (cf. *The Holocaust*, *My Lai massacre*, *Lonmin massacre*). Soldiers can act, they can fight back; civilians cannot, and hence using these two terms highlight their utter powerlessness to avoid the killing of the entire company.

The powerlessness the unit was subjected to when waiting for the incoming rounds is noted in a long description, "Swear to God, James, there are those days – no matter how hard you hump and scrap and scratch – when there is simply nothing left to do but pucker and submit" (15). The soldiers submit to the coming bombardment, with no avenue of escape, but for Paco, the torture would continue,

So he lies there, nearly motionless because of the pain – ticking like a living thing, until he comes to understand it as a living thing, as if some small animal with bristling, matted fur had crawled up to him for warmth – and he stares, marveling, into the black and distant, vaulted heavens, his vision blurred by blood-spattered dust. The next morning the sun rises, quickly burning off the misted dew, and slantingly strikes his face, but he cannot raise his arm out of the muck to cover his eyes, cannot turn his head aside. And all that hot, bright day the sun shines in his eyes as sharply as salt, and the tears of that bitter crushing pain stream into his hair, and his scalp itches powerfully. By the middle of the afternoon he is covered with bugs drawn by the stench – big black deerflies and tiny translucent maggots, small gnats with bites like hard mean pinches, which immediately become stinging welts, raw and infected, drawing pus at the least touch. Paco lies there virtually stock-still all the second night and half the second day, burning with fever and as good as delirious. And Bravo Company (which doesn't have so much as a

pot to piss in nor a window to throw it out of), and their young and skinny, exhausted medic, come looking for what is left of Alpha Company, and they don't find Paco until nearly noon, and he is only barely alive (19-20).

Paco is treated for his injuries and medevac'd. Even when moved to Japan for more specialised treatment, Paco is "abruptly awakened by two strapping medics, doped with an unscheduled shot of morphine, laid on a litter from the triage, loaded on a regular Huey chopper waiting at the dust-off pad with its running lights blinking, and brought – plaster casts, IV bottles, tubes, and all – to Tan Son Nhut Air Base on the outskirts of Saigon" (56). Paco thus has no control over where he is and what happens to him; indeed, he is not even informed beforehand. Thus, from waiting for the incoming rounds, to lying motionless, waiting for Bravo Company, and even in treatment, Paco is incessantly subjected to complete powerlessness.

A wide range of disorders apart from mere inactivity characterizes depression: appetite and sleep disturbances, feelings of worthlessness and inappropriate, excessive guilt, agitation or psychomotor retardation, and recurrent thoughts about death and suicide (Favazza 1996:106). Feinstein (2011:69) for instance notes that few soldiers sleep in Oshakati, and how the main complaint after an ambush was sleeplessness (177). In *Paco's Story*, Paco in particular suffers from sleeplessness, even before the "massacre," and his drug and alcohol abuse is a direct result of his sleeplessness.

Major depression has a wide range of co-morbidities: antecedent anxiety disorders, substance abuse, eating disorders, personality disorders, and others (Thase 2006:210-211). Depression in itself leads to social isolation: Thase (2006:220) mentions that depression is correlated with marital problems and divorce, and persons suffering from depression "tend to be less assertive, have less gratifying peer and friendship relations, and have difficulties engaging in reciprocally reinforcing interactions with others." In *Paco's Story*, the narrator notes the alienating effects of depression in terms of all veterans, for instance where the old black woman on the bus sees Paco, and

...vividly remembers her own son come home from the Korean War in nineteen and fifty-three, standing in the doorway of their old shotgun house in those baggy, travel-dirty khakis of his; who said not a word about the war; who was ever after morose and skittish, what folks round about miscalled lazy and no-count; who had ever since lapsed into a deep and permanent melancholy (42).

Her son thus suffers from depression, and other people see his symptoms as being lazy and “no-count,” rather than for what it is: depression.

One patient remarked that not eating, self-mutilation and alcohol abuse constitute “interchangeable ways of hurting myself” (Favazza 1996:50). It is a form of self-medication: the individual attempts to either blunt or reduce emotions, or heighten them where the individual is experiencing emotional numbness. A clear example of self-mutilation in Feinstein (2011:88) comes from an officer’s wife, Marie, one of the “vergete” [forgotten] victims of the war. Her husband, Tiny, is a bully frustrated with his career and infertility, and abuses her on a regular basis. She tells Feinstein how she cut herself, “toe sy die pyn voel en die bloed sien, het dit haar teruggedruk in die wêreld van gevoel. [...] Dit het haar laat voel asof sy leef” [when she felt the pain and saw the blood, it pulled her back into the world of feeling. [...] It made her feel as if she was alive] (88).

In Seeman, Seeman and Budros (1988:186), alcohol abuse is strongly related to powerlessness (note however, that Greenberg and Grunberg (1995:96) emphasise the complexity of this relationship). Because it is a form of self-help (like self-mutilation), Briere and Elliott (1994:60) claim that it is not effective in the long term to punish alcohol abuse: “Instead, addicted survivors may respond more definitively to therapeutic or self-help interventions that reduce the abuse-related internal distress motivating chemical dependency.” An important deduction is therefore that self-mutilation and alcohol- and drug abuse are efforts to improve, although it is deviant behaviour and in the long run counterproductive. Alcohol and drug abuse naturally leads to numerous social problems, and Strada, Karmely and Donohue (2006:346) refers to the “obvious problems of increased interpersonal conflict, decreased work productivity, an inability to meet domestic responsibilities, increased risk-taking behaviours, and death.” Within the relationship, alcohol abuse leads to divorce, domestic violence, and child abuse: at least 16% of child abuse in the US is directly linked to alcohol abuse (Strada, Karmely, and Donohue 2006:346). Alcoholics are frequently aggressive and abusive towards their spouses and children, abuse them emotionally and/or physically, belittle and accuse others, and humiliate their families in the presence of others. As discussed below, such behaviour has an extremely negative effect on the relationship and family. Donohue,



Farley and French (2006:362) also refer to the “devastating negative consequences” for those who are involved with drug addicts, mainly for the same reasons.

Alcohol abuse is one of the many features of the war zone noted by Feinstein. He writes, “Alkohol word by liters verbruik – ek het dit nog nooit op so ‘n skaal gesien nie” [alcohol is consumed by the litre – I have never seen it on this scale] (55). He writes how alcohol numbs the minds of the men, “hul gemarineerde siele hopeloos te ver heen” [their marinated souls hopelessly too far-gone] (56).

In *Paco’s Story*, all the veterans are alcoholics: the Bravo Company medic, Paco himself, Ernest, and Jesse of the 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne also has a drinking problem (155). In Paco’s case, this is one of the main factors that alienate Cathy. At first, she writes in her diary that Paco is “good-looking, with nice tight buns,” although covered with scars, “Scars everywhere” (202). However, these scars do not disgust her initially, and later – after acknowledging Paco’s scars – her boyfriend, Marty-boy, is “Not as good-looking as that guy Paco” (204). However, later, she writes,

He’ll take a couple of pills and a drink from his bottle, then sit down and untie his shoes. The laces and leather squeak. Then he takes down his jeans or wash pants and throws everything under his chair. And lies on the bed in his underwear, or naked, now that the weather’s hotter and hotter, talking to himself and rubbing his pasty, wrinkly feet together. And sometimes he prances around, but kind of hobbling, kind of deeply and slowly limping. He’s got the pills and that bottle on the dresser. Getting more and more drunk, holding his head with both hands. Slapping the flat of his belly with cupped hands, making a POP POP POP sound. Hoarsely whispering, “Come on, hit me! Hit me! Hit me!” and taking time out to wave that bottle around, drinking and splashing booze and slurring, “Bang! Bang! Bang-bang-bang!” Flicking his wrist and sprinkling booze in all the corners of his room.

And his room is so depressing. Faded wallpaper, no telling what the motif was, and that tacky, shabby linoleum, and he’s a dingy, dreary, smelly, shabby, *shabby* little man. (205)

[...]

He gives me the creeps. He has such a dogged way of working. He gets up in the morning, dresses. Clean, dirty, it’s all the same to him. Goes straight to work, doesn’t talk much with anyone. He gets this set look on his face. Gives me the creeps. Unc says he wonders if the guy knows where he is half the time. He’ll sneak back across the street in the afternoon and have himself a drink (206).

Paco’s powerlessness manifests even in his dreams. He dreams “escape dreams”, “But as hard and fast as he climbs, never in the dream does he escape” (138, 139). He also

dreams “execution dreams” where he cannot escape the execution (141), and sometimes he dreams how it would have been to leave Vietnam on his own two feet, but even in these dreams he would not be able to leave, because his name is never called (143, 145). He also dreams of the rape of the VC girl (174). Similar to the abovementioned dreams in *Kopwond*, these dreams contribute to alienating Cathy, as she writes in her diary, “And this guy begins moaning and slamming back and forth on his bed. You know that real thick and solid sound of a mattress. And he’s crying – weeping, I mean – Oh no! Don’t kill him!” (Paco dreaming of the executions)” (206). For Paco, then, the powerlessness that was integral to his experience of trauma eventually leads to both alcoholism and nightmares, and both alienate him from others. His attempts at self-medication are ineffective, and he ultimately leaves the town with no hope of recovery.

When the individual is under the impression that he is powerless to deal with the onslaught of life, a situation emerges where the environment in general may be experienced as hostile. Ross and Mirowski (1987:238) write, “The individual descends from a sense of powerlessness or lack of control, to one of being used and abused and, finally, to one of being attacked. When other people in one’s life have become a hostile army, social alienation is at its deepest.” Defensiveness and criticism are of course negative behaviours in relationships (Domingue and Mollen 2009:680), which contribute strongly to the dissolution of romantic connections, thereby heightening social isolation. As mentioned in the introduction, trauma begets further trauma within the family, and powerlessness similarly is inherited by those close to the PTSD sufferer. Wick (2010:12) writes how “the wives of PTSD veterans become caught in a ‘compassion trap’ in which they sacrifice too many of their own needs for the rest of the family, promoting a state of chronic distress in which they feel overwhelmed, helpless, hopeless, depressed, anxious, guilty, worthless, hurt, rejected, or angry.”

## MEANINGLESSNESS

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Meaninglessness refers to “the individual’s sense of understanding events in which he is engaged” (Seeman 1959:786). This aspect is strongly related to powerlessness, for the ability to make sense and understand is a prerequisite for being able to predict the

outcomes of behaviour – when results are seemingly random, the sense of powerlessness increases because the individual finds it difficult to identify which means will realise his goals. Meaninglessness also influences social isolation, because the ability to understand others is a requirement for successful relationships. According to Leys (2000:2), trauma is primarily a problem with meaninglessness,

Post-traumatic stress disorder is fundamentally a disorder of memory. The idea is that, owing to emotions of terror and surprise caused by certain events, the mind is split or dissociated: it is unable to register the wound to the psyche because the ordinary mechanisms of awareness and cognition are destroyed. As a result, the victim is unable to recollect and integrate the hurtful experience in normal consciousness; instead, she is haunted or possessed by intrusive traumatic memories. The experience of the trauma, fixed or frozen in time, refuses to be represented as past, but is perpetually reexperienced in a painful, dissociated, traumatic present. All the symptoms characteristic of PTSD – flashbacks, nightmares and other reexperiences, emotional numbing, depression, guilt, autonomic arousal, explosive violence or tendency to hypervigilance – are thought to be the result of this fundamental mental dissociation.

Herman (1992:380) writes that chronically traumatised people are hyper-reactive, anxious, and easily agitated, “without any recognizable baseline state of calm or comfort.” Bromberg (2003:565) calls this state a “hypervigilant anticipation of trauma” (see also Bryant (2006:194) and Wick (2010:10)) – in other words, the individual identifies threats all around in an attempt to avoid a repetition of the trauma (Bryant 2006:192). Bromberg (2003:560) writes,

As a protection against the repetition of early trauma, the most serious problem for the traumatized adult is the achievement of his own self-cure. The living present and the image of the future serve largely as warnings designed to protect him against trauma that has already occurred. The capacity for imagination is perverted into a way of making sure that the unanticipated quality of the unremembered original event cannot be repeated. By consistently mobilizing for disaster, the person is already prepared for it and his ego is set to master it (see also Briere and Elliott (1994:56)).

This hyper-reactivity is the result of the perception of powerlessness: “individuals may lack the ability to soothe or comfort themselves adequately, leading to what appear to be overreactions to stress or painful effects” (Briere and Elliott 1994:58). Hyper-reactivity is therefore linked to a low self-esteem, since self-confidence provides an individual with the surety that whatever may happen, he can cope with it – a low self-

esteem questions this ability and necessitates pre-emptive action. If the individual does not feel powerless to solve problems, there is no reason for hyper-reactivity.

Trauma creates difficulties in the processing of memories. In the cognitive model, trauma memories are often encoded in a fragmented way because of the increased arousal that occurred during the traumatic experience. The cognitive model suggests that the problems in the organization of these memories into a coherent narrative can impede the processing the experience, and restrict the extent to which the traumatic experience can be placed in a context of other non-traumatic memories (Bryant 2006:192). Van den Berg (2009:8) remarks,

Traumatisering van die individu (met PTSS as patologiese gevolg) is hiervolgens 'n disrupsie van die 'normale' wyse van die assimilasië van ervarings. Waar die menslike subjek afhanklik is van bepaalde verwysingsraamwerke (hetsy linguisties, sosio-polities, ideologies) om gebeure betekenisvol te assimileer en oor te dra, word gebeurtenisse wat hierdie betekenisgewende oriënterende strukture oorskry, as traumaties ervaar. Die gevolg is dat die traumatiese insident nie (soos 'gewone gebeure') geassimileer en in betekenisvol gemedieerde vorm (geverbaliseer al dan nie) oorgedra kan word nie.

[The traumatisation of the individual (with PTSD as a pathological result) involves a disruption of the 'normal' way of the assimilation of experiences. Where the human subject is dependent on certain frames of reference (whether linguistically, socio-politically, ideologically) to meaningfully assimilate and transfer events, events that exceed these meaning-orientation structures are experienced as traumatic. The result is that the traumatic incident cannot (like "ordinary events") be assimilated and transferred in a meaningfully mediated form (verbalised or not).]<sup>120</sup>

Bromberg (2003:564) writes that the brain consists of two parallel meaning-processing systems. The first, mediated by the brainstem and the limbic system, particularly the amygdala and hippocampus, is responsible for the non-verbal coding of the emotion, the second, mediated by the neo-cortex, is in charge of the verbal and representational symbolizing experience. The amygdala assesses the emotional significance of incoming information, which it then passes on to sites in the brainstem that regulate the autonomic and hormonal systems. It then sends this information to the hippocampus, whose function is to integrate this data with existing information and the cortical input. Under normal conditions of amygdala operation, stimuli are then processed by the

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<sup>120</sup> Own translation.

hippocampus, which converts the experience into a “conceivable” matter by filing this in the cognitive scheme to which it is connected. When the process is functioning effectively, cortical symbolization can increase, and a traumatic situation can easily be distinguished from one that may show some similarities, but is otherwise relatively harmless.

However, high levels of stimulation of the amygdala – as during the traumatic experience (Hutterer and Liss 2006:294) – interfere with the functioning of the hippocampus. Fisher (2003:2) notes, “For the very worst of human experiences, the human mind and body are impeded from the job of preparing us to make meaning and sense of what has happened.” Hutterer and Liss (2006:293) add, “When trauma is intense, the hippocampus is rendered less operative. This interferes with the ability to code memories with their spatial and temporal markers intact.”<sup>121</sup> The result is that the trauma is relived in a benign event that has some commonalities with the actual past traumatic event, meaning that the traumatised individual is effectively projecting a past – from which he cannot escape – into a present. Van Alphen (2004a:20), although writing from a philosophical rather than neurobiological position, has a similar view,

Een traumatische herinnering, of liever, herbeleving, kent die afstand tot de gebeurtenis niet. De persoon aan wie zich de herbeleving voltrekt, is nog steeds in de gebeurtenis. Dit verklaart waarom deze traumatische herbelevingen zich opdringen als visuele imprints. De oorspronkelijke gebeurtenis die tot het trauma heeft geleid, is nog niet tot een gemedieerde representatie getransformeerd. Er is daardoor nog geen afstand tot de gebeurtenis, die zich daarom steeds weer opdringt in al zijn visuele en zintuiglijke directheid.

[A traumatic memory, or rather, reliving, does not know the distance to the event. The person who is reliving the event, is still in the event. This explains why these traumatic flashbacks impose themselves as visual imprints. The initial event that led to the trauma is not transformed into a mediated representation. There is therefore no distance from the event, therefore becoming inevitable in all its visual and sensory immediacy again.]

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<sup>121</sup> Fisher (2003:2) emphasises the long-term effects of trauma, “if the environment is chronically traumatizing, as are most childhood traumatic environments, the survival response system will become chronically activated, resulting in long-term effects on the developing brain and body.” Extreme acute or repetitive trauma can damage the hippocampus permanently (Hutterer and Liss 2006:293), which makes this hyper-reactivity a permanent condition. Bryant (2006:191) however differs, “traumatic stress does not seem to shrink the hippocampus of people exposed to trauma; rather, small hippocampi may be best conceptualized as a risk factor for PTSD.”

In Van Alphen's terms, the traumatic event cannot be assimilated in the symbolic realm; he (1995:129) refers to the "ontbreken van een plot of narratief kader, met behulp waarvan de gebeurtenissen in een zinvolle samenhang verteld kunnen worden" [lack of plot or narrative framework, through which the events can be told in a meaningful context]. However, it is not only the representation of the traumatic event that becomes impossible in language; in his view, the construction of narrative is disrupted by the traumatic event, and during the Holocaust, "language *as a function of history*, that is, as a precondition for experiencing history, was disrupted" (2004:42) (original emphasis). He (2004:44) continues,

The Holocaust has had a traumatic impact for many because it could not be experienced, because a distance from it in language or representation was not possible. (...) the later representational problems are a continuation of the impossibility during the event itself to experience the Holocaust in the terms of the symbolic order then available.

In *Kopwond*, Brits struggles to formulate a coherent narrative of the event that traumatised him: "Sy gedagtes rol onsamehangend uit, sy sinne onderbreek deur emosie en sy gedagtes halfklaar" [His thoughts roll out incoherently, his sentences punctuated by emotion and his thoughts half-finished] (180). Note in particular the implication that his thoughts have not been organised in a coherent way, thus affecting his speech. Also consider his narration of the event (181-182):

Die eerste ontploffing het my wakker gemaak, maar ek was nie seker of ek wakker is of droom nie. Ek kon nie agterkom waar ek is nie – ek moes baie diep geslaap het. Alles rondom my was vreemd, en hoe langer dit geduur het om behoorlik wakker te word, hoe vreesaanjaender was dit. Ek het vasgevang gevoel in hierdie, hierdie ... mistigheid en ek onthou dit, want dit was so vreemd, maar toe ek opkyk, het ek gesien hoe die bokant van die Casspir wyer word ... Asseblief, jy moet my glo, die gaping het regtig al hoe groter geword, die metaalkante het oopgegaan soos 'n blikkie wat oopgesny word en dit ... wel, dit het my soort van gehipnotiseer. En ek is skaam om dit te sê, maar dit het my ook bang gemaak. Want ek het gedink die mortiere – teen daardie tyd was ek wakker, ek het dus geweet wat aangaan – ek het gedink die mortiere gaan by die Casspir inval. Maar ek kon nie beweeg nie. Dit het gevoel of ek verlam is. Ek wou graag uitkom, al die ander was uit, maar ek kon eenvoudig nie beweeg nie. Dit was skrikwekkend, absoluut skrikwekkend. Jy weet jy gaan sterf en jy kan niks doen om dit te voorkom nie. En daardie lawaai! Ek kon die lawaai nie verduur nie. Om eerlik te wees, ek kan baie min van die geveg onthou, behalwe die dak wat oopgaan en die lawaai en my vrees, eintlik my vaste oortuiging, dat 'n mortier bo-op my gaan val.

[The first explosion woke me up, but I was not sure if I was awake or dreaming. I could not tell where I am – I had slept very deeply. Everything around me was strange, and the longer it took to wake up properly, the more frightening it was. I felt trapped in this, this ... mist and I remember it because it was so strange, but when I looked up, I saw the top of the Casspir grow wider ... Please, you have to believe me, the gap was really growing, the metal sides opened like a can being cut open and ... well, it kind of hypnotized me. And I'm ashamed to say it, but it scared me. Because I thought the mortars – at that time I was awake, so I knew what was going on – I thought the mortars would fall into the Casspir. But I could not move. It felt as if I was paralyzed. I wanted to get out, all the others were, but I just could not move. It was terrifying, absolutely terrifying. You know you are going to die and you cannot do anything to prevent it. And that noise! I could not endure the noise. To be honest, I can remember very little of the battle, except for the roof opening and the noise and my fear, actually my firm belief, that a mortar will fall on top of me.]<sup>122</sup>

Note in the first place his uncertainty whether he is awake or asleep, and the terror the event inspired (“vreesaanjaender”). His powerlessness is indicated with “Ek het vasgevang gevoel in hierdie, hierdie ... mistigheid”, and he notes that he could not move, and felt “verlam” [paralysed]; “Jy weet jy gaan sterf en jy kan niks doen om dit te voorkom nie”. Note the final sentence: he admits that there are gaps in his memory, along with the irrational memory of the roof opening, and the rational fear of a mortar landing inside the vehicle. This passage is a clear indication of memory being altered in the face of extreme fear and powerlessness.

## NORMLESSNESS

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Normlessness involves “a *high expectancy that socially unapproved behaviours are acquired to achieve given goals*” (Seeman 1959:788) (original emphasis). As such, normlessness is directly correlated with powerlessness: if the individual believes that he is unable to achieve his goals by socially acceptable means, “the technically most effective procedure, whether culturally legitimate or not, becomes typically preferred to institutionally prescribed conduct” (Merton 1949:128). As discussed earlier, the environment of a counterinsurgency creates the sense that the individual may be powerless to affect outcomes in a threatening environment, and it therefore stands to

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<sup>122</sup> Own translation.

reason that Mirowsky and Ross (1986:37) found that normlessness is strongly correlated with paranoia and mistrust. O'Donnell, Schwab-Stone and Ruchkin's (2006:226) research also "suggest that youth exposed to violence as either witnesses or victims may develop normlessness schemas, while those who have been victimized are additionally likely to develop schemas related to themes of isolation and self-estrangement" (see also Kerig and Becker (2010:14)).

Within relationships, normlessness manifests in two ways in particular: the use of misrepresentation and deception, and using violence, intimidation and other forms of manipulation in order to reach objectives (Neal and Collas 2000:21). Mistrust results when such a strategy is exposed, because, "Cohesion develops out of disclosing information and sharing secrets about oneself, trusting the other person, believing that the other person is honourable and benevolent, and viewing his or her intentions as favourable" (Neal and Collas 2000:142).

In normlessness, a lack of empathy is evident as the individual seeks to have his needs met without regard for or even to the detriment of others. As is mentioned in the previous paragraph, normlessness is a last resort for those who feel powerless to achieve their purposes and so normlessness can be logically connected to a low self-esteem, because the individual believes he is incapable of achieving objectives in socially acceptable ways. A normless outlook is obviously a self-centred view that supposes a lack of empathy with others, "In rejecting standards that arise from the expressed needs, preferences, and rights of others, the individual falls back on intrinsic satisfactions and pragmatic efficiency as guides that do not require faith in others" (Mirowsky and Ross 1986:36).

Normlessness has a further, devastating impact on relationships. Hegi and Bergner (2010:623-624) claims that the most important component of any form of love is, "Investment in the well-being of the other for his or her own sake." Within the relationship, when love is conceived as such, actions are therefore motivated by what is in the interest of the other. Singer (1984:6) writes, "The lover takes an interest in the other as a person, and not merely as a commodity [...]. He bestows importance on her needs and her desires, even when they do not further the satisfaction of his own [...]. In relation to the lover, the other has become valuable for her own sake." When the individual therefore strives towards satisfying his own needs at the expense of the other,



the central premise – “the characteristic found here to be most universally viewed as essential to romantic, parental, companionate, and altruistic love, and the only characteristic that transcended these four different relationship types” (Hegi and Bergner 2010:635) of love is undermined.

In *Kopwond*, normlessness of course manifests in Tiny’s relationship with his wife, where he regularly beats her because of his own frustrations. This is however not described as a direct result of the war, but rather because of Tiny’s abusive character. A more direct instance of normlessness is in the treatment of patients: Feinstein complains, “Geestesgesondheid is ondergeskik aan die staat” [Mental health is subordinate to the state] (25). He (23-25) writes:

Dit het gou vir my duidelik geword daar word van ons verwag om ‘n andersoortige geneeskunde te beoefen. Wat goed vir die staat is, is nie altyd goed vir die pasiënt nie: Neem die angstige soldaat as voorbeeld (en met angstigheid bedoel ek nie om ‘n paar vlinders in die maag te hê nie). Die soort angstigheid wat by ons uitkom, veroorsaak dat mense nie normaal kan funksioneer nie, en gaan gepaard met sweet, bewerasie, hartkloppings, ‘n knop op die maag, diarree en lighoofdigheid, en dis so erg dat die troepie daarvan oortuig is dat hy besig is om dood te gaan. Hy gaan natuurlik nie dood nie, maar die angsaanvalle kom meedoënloos terug en dit is net ‘n kwessie van tyd voordat hy by ons uitkom met ‘n diep frons op die voorkop, sweterige handpalms en ‘n hart vol verterende vrees.

Wat nou? Uit sy geskiedenis blyk dat hy ‘n angstige temperament het, die neurose was sedert sy kinderdae teenwoordig, maar dit was beheerbaar. Hy’s iemand wat hom van nature oor dinge kwel, hy slaap sleg as hy stres ervaar, dalk byt hy sy naels, hy’s ongemaklik in skares, effens selfbewus, funksioneer op sy beste in klein groepies en by mense wat hy ken, hy’t ‘n paar goeie vriende en ‘n liefdevolle gesin.

Wel, nou word dit alles oornag weggevat en vervang deur skreeuende korporaals, woedende sersante, opvlieënde kommandante, 04:00 se opstaan, ‘n honger wat aan jou knaag, toilette wat verstop is en mans twee keer jou grootte wat enorme gemeenskaplike storte met jou deel, terwyl jy kaal vir jou skoot koue water wag ... maar wat kan jy doen? Boonop moet alles blitsvinnig gedoen word: “Maak gou, maak fokken gou, jou nuttelose stuk kak.”

Jy het nie ses jaar mediese studie nodig om te kan sien hoekom laegraadse angste waaraan iemand al jare lank ly skielik in heelwat ontstellender simptome ontaard nie. En die oplossing is net so maklik: Stuur die soldaat terug huis toe. Ontslaan hom sodat hy kan terugkeer na die voorspelbare roetine van sy voorstedelike bestaan waar hy weer veilig kan voel in die stilte van sy kamer en die warm teenwoordigheid van ‘n gesin wat vir hom lief is. Maar dit sal nie werk nie, glad

nie, nie hier in die Republiek se enjinkamer nie. Met so 'n benadering sal elke siekeboeg oorstroom word deur die wat werklik angstig is, hulle dit verbeel of voorgee dat hulle angstig is. Verlaag die drempel vir mediese ontslag tot 'n angstdiagnose en die hele besigheid kom tot stilstand.

'n Weermag kan nie 'n kompromis met neurose aangaan nie. Dus het ons opdrag gekry om die mans – eintlik seuns – te behandel, met die uitdruklike doel om hulle na hul eenhede te laat terugkeer. En dit kan 'n baie ongemaklike ding wees om te doen, want terwyl ek met terapie besig is, die uitdeel van pille of in gesprekke met pasiënte; terwyl ek die SAW se opdragte uitvoer soos dit 'n goeie soldaat betaam ongeag my elementêre vaardighede, hoor ek hoe Hippokrates 'n teregwysing in my oor fluister. Dit is juis dit wat die spanning in militêre psigiatrie veroorsaak, want die weermag kom altyd eerste. Geestesgesondheid is ondergeskik aan die staat.

[It soon became clear to me we are required to practice a different kind of medicine. What's good for the state, is not always good for the patient: Take the anxious soldier as an example (and with anxiety I do not mean to have a few butterflies in the stomach). The type of anxiety that reaches us, cause people to be unable to function normally, and is accompanied by sweating, tremor, palpitations, a lump in the stomach, diarrhoea and dizziness, and it becomes so bad that the soldier is convinced that he is going to die. He will of course not die, but the anxiety attacks come back relentlessly and it's just a matter of time before he reaches us with a deep frown on the forehead, sweaty palms and a heart full of consuming fear.

Now what? His history indicates that he has an anxious temperament, the neurosis was present since childhood, but it was manageable. He's someone who is naturally worrying about things, he slept badly as he stressed, maybe bit his nails, he's uncomfortable in crowds, slightly self-conscious, functioning at his best in small groups and with people he knew, he had some good friends and a loving family.

Well, now it is all taken away overnight and replaced by screaming corporals, angry sergeants, a furious commandant, 4:00's rise, a hunger gnawing at you, toilets blocked and men two times your size sharing enormous communal showers with you, while wait for your naked shot of cold water... but what can you do? On top of this, everything must be done very quickly: "Hurry, fucking quickly, you worthless piece of shit."

You do not need six years of medical studies to see why low-grade anxiety that a person has suffered from for years is suddenly turned into much more disturbing symptoms. And the solution is just as easy: send the soldier back home. Dismiss him so he can return to the predictable routine of his suburban life where he can feel safe in the silence of his room and the warm presence of a family who loves him. But it will not work, not at all, here in the engine room of the Republic. With such an approach each infirmary will be flooded by those who really are anxious,

those who imagine or pretend to be anxious. Lower the threshold for medical discharge to an anxiety diagnosis, and all business comes to a halt.

An army cannot enter into a compromise with neurosis. So we have been instructed to treat the men, actually boys, with the express purpose to return them to their units. And it can be a very uncomfortable thing to do, because while I am busy with therapy, handing out pills or in conversations with patients; while I follow the SADF's commands as befits a good soldier regardless of my elementary skills, I hear Hippocrates whispering a correction in my ear. This is exactly what causes the tension in military psychiatry, because the army always comes first. Mental health is subordinate to the state.]

In other words, treatment seeks out the technically most efficient procedure – a state of normlessness – even in the face of trauma. Feinstein notes that he has clear guidelines set out by Hippocrates, “terwyl ek die SAW se opdragte uitvoer soos dit ‘n goeie soldaat betaam ongeag my elementêre vaardighede, hoor ek hoe Hippokrates ‘n teregwyding in my oor fluister” [while I carry out the SADF's commands as befits a good soldier regardless of my elementary skills, I hear how Hippocrates whispers a correction in my ear]. He therefore has no option but act against the norms he should follow, indicating the close link between powerlessness and normlessness as set out earlier.

## SOCIAL ISOLATION

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Alienation is part of the DSM-IV criteria for PTSD (Kerig and Becker 2010:14), and in Seeman's (1975:93) terms, social isolation involves, “the sense of exclusion or rejection vs. social acceptance” – the extent to which the individual feels himself bound to others. A variety of studies show that the quality of social relationships is an important component of the individual's subjective well-being (Siffert and Schwarz 2011:263), but as Wick (2010:10) notes, “One of the most prominent and debilitating effects of trauma is the difficulty with developing and maintaining intimacy in close relationships.”

*Paco's Story* often voices a separation from various other groups, for instance, when the severed ears alienate the support troops: “You should have seen those rear-area motherfucker housecats bug their eyes and cringe every muscle in their bodies, and generally suck back against the buildings” (2005[1986]:8).

Aggression is a general characteristic of PTSD (Kerig and Becker 2010:14), as well as relationships where one partner suffers from PTSD (Wick 2010:17). Aggression of course impacts negatively on all social relationships, whether work, friendship, romantic or otherwise (Papp, Kouros and Cummings (2010:381), and Bodenmann et al. (2010:409)). Emotional abuse can develop where the individual acts aggressively towards a partner, “rather than receive validation for a positive self-image, the abused person is subjected to repeated put-downs and insults” (Neal and Collas 2000:123). A clear and consistent pattern of insults from a loved one can in the long run cause much damage to the esteem of the recipient (Loring (1994), Bodenmann et al. (2010:409)), and over time may be internalized when the recipient of the abuse begins to believe that he is as his partner claims (Neal and Collas 2000:123). Capezza and Arriaga (2008:225-226) also remark on the effects of aggression on the victim,

Physical as well as psychological aggression – verbally and/or emotionally aggressive acts, such as yelling, criticizing, derogating, ridiculing, threatening, isolating, and other nonphysically aggressive attempts to control and dominate another person[...] – have been linked to low self-esteem, depression, anxiety, posttraumatic stress disorder, substance use, and chronic disease.

A distinction may be drawn between mild and severe aggression: examples of moderate physical aggression include grabbing, pushing, and slapping the partner, and severe physical aggression refers to choking, beating, or to use a knife or gun. Examples of moderate forms of psychological aggression include shouting, swearing, and verbal attempts to intimidate or dominate the other, while the more serious forms of psychological aggression include efforts to manipulate the other emotionally through threats, belittling, humiliating, serious criticism, isolation from others, and denying economic resources (Capezza and Arriaga 2008:226-227). In addition, the use of derogatory names – such as “bitch,” “whore,” “cunt,” “pig” etc. – is seen as more serious than shouting at the other (Capezza and Arriaga 2008:227). Psychological aggression often has an impact that is more difficult to overcome than the impact of physical aggression, and a study found that 72% of physically abused women claimed that the negative effect of psychological aggression outweighed the effects of physical aggression, and being consistently belittled had a particularly negative impact (Capezza and Arriaga 2008:227). Capezza and Arriaga (2008:227-228) mention that social learning

theorists suggest that the behaviour of others, when regarded as rewarding, are copied, and that people exposed to an admired other (e.g. a parent) who uses aggression, are more prone to aggressive acts later in their lives. Furthermore, if this admired other creates an environment where aggression is seen as normal and acceptable, then this view also tends to be modelled by the observer (e.g. the child). Exposure to aggression and violence during childhood therefore influences how a person acts towards another in a love relationship.

Within love relationships, aggression affects amongst others the dysfunctional “demand / withdraw” interaction, where one party demands, and the other withdraws. Siffert and Schwarz (2011:263) summarises this exchange, “Spousal demand is typically thought of as a behaviour characterized by criticizing, nagging, and making demands of the other partner. In contrast, withdrawal is defined by avoiding confrontation and becoming silent.” This conflict pattern is interactive: Conduct of one partner who demands and blames the other for everything that goes wrong in the relationship is strongly correlated with withdrawal behaviour in the other (Siffert and Schwarz (2011:268), Hira and Overall (2011:611)), which results in a pattern that causes not only damage to the relationship itself, but to the parties involved as well: the more women initiate conflict, the lower the husband’s subjective well-being (Siffert and Schwarz 2011:273); when the man is in the initiating role, it also affects his subjective well-being negatively. Siffert and Schwarz (2011:273) speculate,

...a possible explanation could be that demand is an atypical conflict behaviour for men because of their desire for independence. Thus, men try to avoid discussions and are more often in the withdrawing role. As a consequence, to be in the demanding role is more stressful for them.

Siffert and Schwarz further mention that displays of aggression and insults are more damaging to the other than the withdrawal strategy – an insight also implicit in Hira and Overall’s (2011:611) argument on whether problems should be solved by attempting to change the other, or by changing the self,

Research examining the attributions intimates generate for relationship events provides substantial evidence that blaming the partner for relationship problems (and hence targeting the partner to produce change) will lead to poorer relationship outcomes. Attributing negative partner behaviour to undesirable personality traits but writing-off positive partner behaviour to unstable external factors (e.g., a rare good day) is associated with lower relationship satisfaction.

Blaming the problem on the partner is also associated with less effective problem solving, such as lower levels of support and agreement, and higher levels of criticism and withdrawal during conflict. Similarly, the person who desires change tends to be more demanding and critical during conflict discussions.

A further source of social isolation is emotional detachment or numbing, which is the result of PTSD and sexual abuse (Leonard, Follette and Compton (2006:363-364), Wick (2010:9)). Neal and Collas (2000:22) claim that social isolation in love relationships include amongst others the absence of the feeling that one is loved, and as some partners who had been exposed to trauma may appear emotionally uninvolved, this aspect therefore increases the sense of social isolation that the individual experiences.

A lack of empathy contributes to social isolation in the relationship, as it undermines the other party's sense of being (Neal and Collas 2000:22). When conflicts arise within the relationship, both self-change as well as the demand that the other changes, routinely fail: it is the recognition that both parties attempt to resolve conflict that makes relationships successful (Hira and Overall 2011:626). Without empathy for others, the recognition of others' efforts is problematic, and individuals find it difficult to see how his behaviour affects others, which naturally leads to blaming the other for difficulties. Papp, Kouros and Cummings (2010:368) also imply that empathy is a prerequisite for the resolution of conflict, "The ability of spouses to accurately perceive their partners' emotions in conflict is positively related to the quality of communication and the potential for reaching a resolution."

A lack of empathy undermines the intimacy of the relationship, because people have a need to communicate with others and be listened to, and to be understood and accepted (Neal and Collas (2000:37), Domingue and Mollen (2009:679)). If the person cannot talk with his partner, the lack of intimate communication creates problems and disappointment, as the individual cannot share serious problems, feelings, and concerns with the other (Neal and Collas 2000:97). Collins and Ford (2010:241) emphasise, "sensitivity and responsiveness to needs are key components of effective caregiving." When the individual goes to his partner with a problem, and is not recognized and supported, it can lead to the individual withdrawing emotionally from the partner, "which, over time, may erode psychological as well as physical closeness between partners" (Collins and Ford (2010:240), see also Johnson (2003:109)).

The theory of secondary traumatic stress (STS) posits that trauma can be transferred to family members and STS includes a cluster of symptoms characteristic of PTSD including exhaustion, hypervigilance, avoidance, and numbing (Wick 2010:15). The Bravo Company medic in *Paco's Story* seem to suffer from secondary traumatic stress; he remarks,

Guys with their legs blown off at the thighs, and shrapnel hits from there on up from a direct hit with a Chicom RPG – and armor-piercing rocket-propelled grenade. Shit! Mean and evil blood all over everything and my ass in it up to the elbows. I still dream about it nights – nightmare monsters that smell to high heaven, nasty whirligig-looking contraptions that keep snatching at you, slobbery-looking warlocks with the evil fuckin' eye that gives you cold sweats and shivers so bad you think you got some dynamite dose of malaria (21)

When talking about Paco, the medic says, “the rest of him looked like someone had taken off after him with one of those long-handled mallets you tenderize meat with” (24-25), and the doctor's response to seeing Paco is, “Jesus Christ on a bloody fuckin' crutch” (50). Importantly, the medic empties chairs at the bar (24), telling of Firebase Harriette, showing how even the tale of this incident alienates others. His own trauma manifests in suffering a heart attack (27), and note the centrality of powerlessness in his experience of trauma: “And he was suddenly, finally, ready to admit that no matter how hard or neat he worked – glim and earnest – the wounded always died” (28).

In the hospital, Paco becomes “the guy from the Alpha Company massacre”, since “none of the hospital staff ever did call him by name” (55). This dehumanises him, and he becomes a type or statistic, rather than an individual. This could be an attempt by the hospital staff to distance themselves from the horror he represents. Paco's close association with this traumatic event is symbolised by the bits of shrapnel, rifle shells and jagged pieces of brass casing, as well as pieces of bone “they couldn't fit”, which was put into a petri dish as part of Paco's *personal belongings* (55). This, the external indicators of the event, become part of Paco, to be taken with him back to civilian life. There, his “black hickory cane” (84) becomes so much part of him that few descriptions of Paco do not mention his cane, as is described below.

When he returns home, he is equally separated from others: “you can always tell a GI homebound from overseas, James – underweight, funny eyes, dippy Army haircut” (36). This will continue to distinguish Paco from civilians, particularly when he arrives at

the town, “When Paco ducked into Elliot’s Goods, Henning took one look at the severe, amateurish cut of his hair and nailed him for a GI without so much as a second glance” (77).

Ernest Monroe recognizes Paco’s “1,000 meter stare, that pale and exhausted, graven look from head to toe” (95). Note the use of “meter” instead of “yard”: meters and kilometres were used during the Vietnam War as units, rather than the standard American feet and yards. The use of meter is therefore functional here: it illustrates a military recognition that distinguishes the civilian from the soldier; it is not only the stare that distinguishes him as a soldier, but also the 1,000-meter stare. Ernest Monroe is a Marine<sup>123</sup>, a veteran of Guadalcanal and Iwo Jima, which is such an important facet of his character, that the narrator says this twice (109, 125).

Paco’s separation from society is symbolised, amongst others, by his hickory cane. After describing different sounds in the town, “Then comes the sound that all but stops the others, even the dogs – the step, tap-step, of that gimpy kid wounded in the war, that guy Paco, walking home from the Texas Lunch” (157). The sound of his cane becomes one of his defining characteristics, and Cathy listens “for the sharp click of Paco’s black hickory cane”, and the “slightly off-rhythm of his walk – step, tap-step” (166). Even when Paco wants to make contact with Cathy, he does not hope of getting a foot in Cathy’s door, but “the tip of his cane” (168). His cane then becomes an extension of himself, an extension that indicates how he differs from society in general.

The other obvious characteristic distinction between Paco and the rest of society is his scars, as the narrator describes them,

If we lean down, we can see the many razor-thin surgical scars, the bone-fragment scars (going every which way) the size of pine-stump splinters, the puckered burn scars (from cooked-off ammunition) looking as though he’d been sprayed with a shovelful of glowing cinders, the deadened, discolored ring of skin at the meatiest part of his thigh, where the Bravo Company medic wound the twisted tourniquet, using Paco’s own bandana, though the time for a tourniquet had long passed. The sallow, thin-faced medic slapped the crook of Paco’s elbow to get a vein [...]. And if we look closely at Paco’s arm, we can see the scar of the gouge at the inside of his forearm, the size of a pencil stub, where the catheter ripped loose when those shit-for-brains Bravo Company litter bearers dropped Paco down a rain-slick footpath, litter and all (170-171).

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<sup>123</sup> Paco is also a Marine (204).



The scars are not only objects; they have a life of their own, “those scars will seem to wiggle and curl, snapping languidly this way and that, the same as grubs and night crawlers when you prick them with the barb of a bait hook” (171). The scars, along with being repulsed by Paco’s alcoholism and symptoms of depression, alienates Cathy, as she writes in her diary, describing her dream,

Paco comes into my room with his cane. I’m in my terry-cloth robe. We stand in the doorway of the bedroom, kissing. He smells like apples, and his face is hard and warm. And his hands are hard and warm. And both of us are eager to get into bed. He pulls the knot out of my robe sash, and has his arms around me. I unbuckle his belt, undo his pants, and push them down. Those scars at his throat are livid. And then we’re on the bed and everything. And then we’re fucking. And I just can’t bring myself to touch him, so I take hold of the bedstead bars. He’s done, but still between my legs. He holds himself up, stiff-armed, and arches his back and reaches up to his forehead and begins by pinching the skin there, but he’s working the skin loose, and then begins to peel the scars off as if they were a mask. It’s as if he’s unbuttoning the snaps of a jacket. Like you’d see someone pull up dried spaghetti from a kitchen table. He held the scars in his fist as if they were a spool of twine tangled in a terrible knot. I close my eyes and turn my head, and urge him off me with my hips – but I think now that he must have thought I wanted to fuck more. He’s holding me down with that hard belly of his, and lays the scars on my chest. It burns ...

[...]

... and I think I hear screams, as if each scar is a scream, and I look up at him again and he’s peeling the scars down his arm, like long peels of sunburned skin, brown and oniony. Then he’s kneeling on my shoulders, like we used to when we’d give a kid pink belly and he’s laying strings of those scars on my face, and I’m beginning to suffocate. Then he reaches both hands behind him, as if he’s going to pull off a T-shirt, grabbing and pulling the scars off his back. And I could hear the stitches ripping. And he lays them across my breasts and belly-tingling and burning – lays them in my hair, wrapping them around my head, like a skull cap. And when each scar touches me, I feel the suffocating burn, hear the scream. And then I woke up. I just shuddered ... It made my skin crawl (207-208).

Although she initially found Paco attractive, he is now “all pasty. And crippled. And honest to God, ugly. Curled up on his bed like death warmed over. Like he was someone back from the dead” (207). This is tragic, as Paco wants to connect with Cathy, “By fucking he wants to ameliorate the stinging ache of those dozens and dozens of swirled-up and curled-up, purple scars, looking like so many sleeping snakes and piles of ruined coins” (174). Indeed, Cathy watches him, and when he notices her watching him, the

pain in his back is gone (148). However, he is ultimately unable to form any connection with her.

## SELF-ESTRANGEMENT

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Self-estrangement constitutes an important aspect of alienation and trauma. Fromm (1955:120) defines alienation itself as, “a mode of experience in which the person experiences himself as an alien. He has become, one might say, estranged from himself.” Self-estrangement is about more than just a negative evaluation of the self: It also implies a sense that the person feels detached from himself, bored with everything, and simply reacts to what life offers, rather than the setting of his own course (Kohn (1976:115), see also Roberts (1987:347))<sup>124</sup>. For instance, the patient, Marie, smiles, “maar daar is geen vreugde in haar oë nie” [but there is no joy in her eyes] (Feinstein 2011:91).

O'Donnell, Schwab-Stone and Ruchkin (2006:218) writes that exposure to violence is associated with both self-estrangement and social isolation, and recall the diagnostic criteria of PTSD, “including feelings of detachment or estrangement from others, numbing of general responsiveness, and diminished interest and participation in significant activities.” Fisher (2003:1) also calls self-estrangement one of the “symptom-equivalents” of traumatic memory.

One of the general effects of early trauma is the undermining of a sense of self (Herman (1992:386), Briere and Elliott (1994:58-59), Putnam (2003:273), Leonard, Follette and Compton (2006:165)), and affects affect regulation (Putnam 2003:273). The creation of a coherent, contextual self is undermined by the trauma of child abuse, and influences the individual's ability to handle emotions,

...women who were sexually abused as children (often being revictimized) may have a difficult time locating the sense of self that experiences emotions and thoughts. That is, their sense of self has been so shattered by historical events that they glean who they are only from others or have difficulty viewing themselves as separate entities (Leonard, Follette, and Compton 2006:165).

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<sup>124</sup> Favazza (1996:46) claims that self-mutilation in particular is an attempt to overcome depersonalisation, “Some mentally ill persons suffer from frightening episodes of depersonalization, during which time and reality are distorted. The act of self-mutilation often serves to terminate these episodes. It allows self-mutilators to reexperience their biological existence and place in society.”

Molnar, Buka and Kessler (2001:753) writes that sexual abuse not only undermines the individual's sense of self, but also creates problems with his ability to regulate his responses to stressful circumstances, and other interpersonal and emotional problems that make the prevalence of personality disorders more likely. Traumatized individuals distance themselves from themselves, as the body and their experiences become associated with the trauma, and "they may drastically minimize their own experiences as not having had a major impact on them or being unrelated to their current difficulties" (Luxenberg, Spinazzola, and Van der Kolk 2001:378). A number of cognitive, affective, and perceptual experiences are linked with depersonalization, including emotional numbing, impaired concentration, perceptions of the external environment as two-dimensional, an inability to recognize one's own voice or reflected image, altered perceptions of the physical self, loss of sense of agency, altered perceptions of autobiographical memories, and heightened self-awareness (Talbert 2010:1). However, Talbert (2010:1) notes that depersonalisation does not involve delusions,

Importantly, while experiencing depersonalization, individuals remain aware of the subjective nature of these symptoms, and therefore are not considered delusional [...]. In fact, the lack of delusion combined with a heightened self-awareness often exacerbates distress in individuals experiencing depersonalization because they fear they are losing control or going crazy.

This shattered sense of self has, according to Luxenberg, Spinazzola and Van der Kolk (2001:378) a devastating impact on relationships,

...their limited sense of self, and the problems they have experiencing their separateness from others, reduce their ability to truly engage in mature mutuality and sharing. The propensity of chronically traumatized individuals to dissociate from their own bodies also severely constricts their capacity to enter into relationships, as they struggle to know even themselves.

The distancing of the self can be compared to what Laing (1990) calls an "ontological insecurity," and may be linked to the traumatised individual's sense that he lives in a threatening world that requires constant vigilance,

...in the individual whose own being is secure in this primary experiential sense, relatedness with others is potentially gratifying; whereas the ontologically insecure person is preoccupied with preserving rather than gratifying himself: the ordinary circumstances of living threaten his *low threshold* of security (Laing 1990:42) (original emphasis).

One of the ways to cope with such a threat, according to Laing, is to create a false self to live in the world, while the 'true' self remains hidden. The advantage is that the 'true' self is protected against the threats of the outside world, but as Laing (1990:138) notes, the 'real' self becomes trapped because it is not directly in contact with the outside world.

The uncertainty in the self and the self's relation and capacity to others have a restrictive effect on the interaction with the other in a loving relationship. Collins and Ford (2010:241) note that the secure person is more effective in supporting a partner,

Compared with secure caregivers, insecure-anxious caregivers tend to be out of synch with their partner's needs. They fail to increase their support behaviour in response to their partner's need, and show high levels of empathy, mental distraction, and partner focus regardless of their partner's level of distress (a pattern of over-involvement). Insecure-avoidant caregivers show a pattern of relative neglect. Regardless of their partner's level of need, they feel less empathy and compassion, report less partner focus during their own task, and are less behaviourally supportive. Insecure caregivers also show negative emotional reactions to their partner's distress (Collins and Ford 2010:241).

Also, secure individuals are more likely to communicate openly and directly, as they are assured that they will be supported (read: trust in terms of the discussion on powerlessness), while "Insecure adults are more likely to cling, make demands, stonewall, or withdraw because they believe their partner will reject them or they are protesting the unresponsiveness of their partner" (Domingue and Mollen 2009:679). Wick (2010:10) notes, "Normal relationship activities that are used to soothe and calm non-traumatized couples, such as confiding and sex, become at minimum a source of threat and at worst a source of retraumatization, and are thereby diligently avoided." The insecurity of the self thus operates together with perceptions of powerlessness to promote distrust, which in turn undermines communication within the relationship, and this behaviour alienates the other and promotes social isolation.

The most vivid instance of depersonalisation occurs in Feinstein's *Kopwond*, where Jardine literally loses himself during training (25-29):

Daar is egter tye wanneer selfs militere noodsaaklikheid die knie moet buig voor 'n verstand wat die spoor byster geraak het. Een spesifieke geval het die vreemde jukstaposisie ontbloot van 'n geestesversteuring wat geen reëls gehoorsaam nie en die ysere weermagdisipline wat onversetlik reëlgebonde is. 'n Sewentienjarige infanterie-soldaat, manskap Jardine, is uit die detensiekaserne vir evaluering gestuur. Die majoor wat hom verwys het, was al jare lank lid van die militere polisie.

“Ek het nog nooit so ‘n geval teengekom nie,” moes hy erken. “Eers het ons gedink dis verregaande insubordinansie, ‘n outjie wat hom slim hou en nie ‘n moer omgee nie, maar dit lyk of dit veel meer as dit is. G’n straf kan manskap Jardine rede laat insien nie. Hy is soos ‘n fokken papegai.”

Daarna ontvou die verhaal stuk-stuk. Jardine was toe reeds drie maande in die weermag. Hy is in dieselfde tyd as ek opgeroep en is na 4 SAL op Middelburg gestuur. Aanvanklik het alles redelik goed gegaan. Daar was geen waarskuwingstekens nie, hy was net nog ‘n dienspligtige, een van duisende wat deur die stelsel beweeg. Na drie maande kla Jardine egter by die dokter dat ‘n kpl. Smits op hom pik. Hy word aangesê om baie gou daarvoor te kom en hy word daaraan herinner dat korporaals juis betaal word om op mense te pik omdat hulle so goed daarmee is. “Dit sal van jou ‘n man maak,” is die dokter se raad.

Niks word weer van Jardine gehoor nie tot een oggend, vroeg in die lente, toe die einste Smits en sy peloton op die paradegrond aan die dril is.

“Halt!” skree Smits.

“Halt!” eggo dit êrens vanuit die manskappe se geledere. Smits verstyf. Het hy dalk verkeerd gehoor? Het ‘n soldaat ook “halt” geroep? Dis tog onmoontlik. Wie sal so iets waag, laat staan nog in ‘n infanterie-eenheid? Ek moes my dit verbeel het, dink Smits. Dis seker die wind wat met my stem speel. Hy kyk om hom rond. Die wind waai inderdaad nogal woes. Klein sandstormpies warrel random die voete van die peloton. Sy manne staan roerloos voor hom. Doodstil, nie ‘n beweginkie van een van hulle nie. Drie maande se dril en kyk net so! Fantasties! Vyftig gesinchroniseerde soldate wat soos een man marsjeer, net waar hy hulle wil hê. Nou ja, ek moet seker aangaan, dink hy. Daar sal later tyd wees om my lof te besing.

“Voorwaarts mars!” bulder hy.

“Voorwaarts mars!” kom die antwoord.

‘n Trilling van ongemak beweeg deur die marsjerende mans. Smits hoor ‘n onderdrukte laggie. Die keer twyfel hy nie oor die lag óf oor die eggo nie.

“Halt!” skree hy.

“Halt!” kom dit terug.

“Wat de fok ... ?” is die beste wat Smits kan uitkry terwyl hy onder die troepe instorm om uit te vind wie die koggelaar is. En sowaar, die duplikaat “Wat de fok ... ?” lei hom reguit na Jardine toe.

Smits weet nie mooi hoe om sulke verregaande gedrag te hanteer nie. Manskap Jardine staan voor hom, penregop en staar uitdrukkingloos voor hom uit.

“Wat het jy nou net gesê?” brul Smits.

“Wat het jy nou net gesê?” skree die uitdrukkinglose manskap Jardine. Sommige van die mans kan hulle nie meer bedwing nie. Die gelag is soos ‘n klap in die gesig vir Smits. Al wat hy kan uitwurg, is: “Bly stil, julle bobbejane.” Waarop manskap Jardine dienooreenkomstig reageer.

Die laaste bietjie dissipline in Smits se peloton is daarna daarmee heen. Die mans lag so hard dat die netjiese rye begin opbreek. Te midde van die algemene chaos is manskap Jardine die enigste een wat nie lag nie. Smits, benewel deur woede, let dit op.

Die toneel wat hom daarna afspeel, is soos die een of ander malkop-komedie.

“Stilte!” bulder Smits.

“Stilte!” antwoord Jardine.

“Hou jou bek!!”

“Hou jou bek!!”

“Jy sal jammer wees!! !”

“Jy sal jammer wees!!!”

“Dis jou laaste kans!!!”

“Dis jou laaste kans!!!”

“Liewe hemel ...”

“Liewe hemel ...”

“Gh’rrr!”

“Gh’rrr!”

En so gaan dit aan. Totdat Smits, deur ‘n rooi waas van woede, besef die enigste manier om die spektakel te beëindig, is om Jardine te arresteer. Hy gee vier van die mans opdrag om hom te gryp en met hom na die detensiekaserne te marsjeer. “Links, regs, links, regs.” Die ritme word geblaf deur ‘n briesende Smits, met Jardine wat so vasberade as ooit die gewraakte eggo verskaf.

As daar ooit ‘n vermoede was dat manskap Jardine kpl. Smits met opset uitgetart het, is dit baie gou in detensie weerlê. Wat die militêre polisie hom ook al toesnou, word onmiddellik herhaal, en selfs toe Jardine hardhandig behandel word – jy weet, om hom ‘n bietjie respek te leer – duur die eggo’s voort, ondanks ‘n opgeswelde lip.

Die Jardine wat uiteindelik in die psigiatrie-afdeling beland, is erg psigoties. Sy paranoïese hallusinasies is niks uitsonderliks nie, sou ‘n mens die tyd hê om dit te identifiseer tussen die eggo’s deur wat enige sinvolle gesprek amper onmoontlik maak. Die kolonel is besonder geïnteresseerd in die geval. “Wat julle hier sien,” lig hy ons in, “is ‘n pragtige voorbeeld van eggolalie, ‘n aanduiding van gedagteversteuring wat deel vorm van Jardine se skisofrenie. Is dit nie fassinerend nie?”

Dit is inderdaad, kolonel. Maar ‘n fassinatie met psigose is slegs een aspek van waaroor dit hier gaan. Die ander aspek is die konteks waarbinne dit voorkom. Die aard van ‘n lewe in die weermag, met die beperkinge wat met rang gepaardgaan en die individu se voorafbepaalde plek in ‘n ontoegeeflike hiërargie, laat geen beweegruimte toe nie. Wanneer iets dan verder verkeerd loop, is die gevolge dikwels buitengewoon. So het Jardine se psigose, sy handboek-eggolalie, ontaard in ‘n verskriklike pantomime. Daar gaan nie ‘n maand verby dat ek nie nóg

tragikomiese variasies in my pasiente teëkom nie. Hoe kan dit ook anders? Waansin en die weermag – wat ‘n plofbare kombinasie!

[However, there are times when even military necessity should bow the knee to a mind that got off track. One particular case uncovered the strange juxtaposition of a mental illness that does not obey rules and the iron military discipline that is uncompromisingly rule-bound. A seventeen-year-old infantry soldier, private Jardine, was sent from the detention barracks for evaluation. The major that referred him, was a member of the military police for years.

“I have never encountered such case,” he had to admit. “At first we thought it was outrageous insubordination, a guy that keeps himself clever and does not give a shit, but it seems to be much more than that. No punishment can get private Jardine to see reason. He is a fucking parrot. “

Then the story unfolds piece by piece. Jardine was already three months in the military. He came in the same time I was called up and was sent to 4 SAI at Middelburg. At first, everything went pretty well. There were no warning signs, he was just another serviceman, one of thousands moving through the system. After three months Jardine however complained to the doctor that a corporal Smits was picking on him. He was told to get over it very quickly and reminded that corporals are paid to pick on people because they are so good at it. “It will make a man out of you,” was the doctor’s advice.

Nothing is heard from Jardine until one morning, early in the spring, when the very Smits and his platoon were drilling on the parade ground.

“Halt!” Smits screamed.

“Halt!” it echoed from somewhere in the ranks. Smits stiffened. Might he have heard it wrong? Did a soldier call “halt”? That’s impossible. Who would dare such a thing, let alone in an infantry unit? It’s my imagination, Smits thought. It’s probably the wind playing with my voice. He looked around him. The wind was blowing really quite frantic. Small sandstorms whirled around the feet of the platoon. His men stood motionless before him. Dead quiet, not even a small movement from one of them. Three months’ drill and look! Fantastic! Fifty synchronized soldiers marching as one man, just where he wants them. Well, I should probably be going on, he thought. There will be time later to sing my praise.

“Forward march!” he bellows.

“Forward march!” came the answer.

Discomfort was moving through the marching men. Smits heard a suppressed laugh. This time he doubts not the laugh or the echo.

“Halt!” he shouted.

“Halt!” it came back.

“What the fuck ...?” is the best Smits could say while storming in under the troops to find out who the mocker was. Sure enough, the duplicate “What the fuck ...?” led him straight to Jardine.

Smits was not sure how to handle such extreme actions. Private Jardine stood in front of him, staring expressionless before him.

“What did you just say?” roared Smits.

“What did you just say?” shouted the expressionless private Jardine. Some of the men could no longer restrain themselves. The laughter was like a slap in the face for Smits. All he could say was: “Shut up, you monkeys.” To which private Jardine responded accordingly.

The last bit of discipline in Smits’s platoon was then gone. The men were laughing so hard that the neat rows started to break up. Amid the general chaos, private Jardine was the only one who did not laugh. Smits, befuddled by anger, noticed this.

The scene then developed like some crazy comedy.

“Silence!” bellowed Smits.

“Silence!” said Jardine.

“Shut up!!”

“Shut up!!”

“You’ll be sorry!!!”

“You’ll be sorry!!!”

“It’s your last chance!!!”

“It’s your last chance!!!”

“Dear heaven ...”

“Dear heaven ...”

“Gh’rrr!”

“Gh’rrr!”

And so it went on. Until Smits, in a red haze of anger, realized the only way to terminate the spectacle, was to arrest Jardine. He commanded four of the men to seize him and marched him to the detention barracks.

“Left, right, left, right.” The rhythm was barked by a raging Smits, with Jardine providing the offending echo as determined as ever.

If ever there was a suspicion that private Jardine deliberately provoked corporal Smits, it was soon refuted in detention. Whatever the military police shouted at him, he repeated immediately, and even when Jardine was treated roughly – you know, to teach him some respect – the echoes would continue despite a swollen lip.

The Jardine that eventually ends up in the psychiatry department is severely psychotic. His paranoid hallucinations are nothing exceptional, if you had the time to identify them between the echoes that made any meaningful conversation almost impossible. The colonel was particularly interested in the case. “What you see here,” he informed us, “is a beautiful example of echolalia, indicating a disruption of thoughts forming part of Jardine’s schizophrenia. Is that not fascinating?”



It is, indeed, Colonel. But a fascination with psychosis is only one aspect of what is at stake here. The other aspect is the context in which it occurs. The nature of a life in the military, with the limitations associated with rank and the individual's predetermined place in an uncompromising hierarchy, allows no leeway. When something goes wrong, the consequences are often extraordinary. So Jardine's psychosis, his textbook echolalia, turned into a terrible pantomime. There is not a month that goes by that I do not encounter even more tragicomic variations in my patients. How could it be otherwise? Madness and the army – an explosive combination!]<sup>125</sup>

Note that Feinstein argues that this was the result of powerlessness, “Die aard van ‘n lewe in die weermag, met die beperkinge wat met rang gepaardgaan en die individu se voorafbepaalde plek in ‘n ontoegeeflike hiërargie, laat geen beweegruimte toe nie” [The nature of a life in the military, with the limitations associated with rank and the individual's predetermined place in an uncompromising hierarchy, leaves no leeway]. Jardine could be said to suffer from depersonalisation as a result of powerlessness, as Laing claims happens when the individual's sense of self is threatened. Jardine became merely the echo of others, with no autonomous self remaining.

## CONCLUSION

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This chapter has looked at the impact of trauma on alienation in relationships. Many issues were discussed, and it was shown how the effects of trauma could interfere with the individual's current and future relationships. As Wick (2010:13) writes,

The reverberations of war, deployment, and PTSD transcend far beyond the individual veteran. The systemic implications of military-induced family separations and war-related trauma are visible through the impact they have on the psychological well-being of the veterans' partners, as well as through the strain they place on maintaining a satisfying marital relationship. The shifting of roles and responsibilities, inability to establish intimate connections, and heightened arousal create a “black hole” into which many marriages plunge.

One of the themes that emerge from research on trauma is the effort of the individual to avoid the helplessness inherent during the initial experience of trauma. An exaggerated emphasis on control is the leitmotiv that links eating disorders, hyper-aggressiveness and hyper-reactivity, but it occurs in the shadow of a low self-esteem and no confidence in

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<sup>125</sup> Own translation.

the individual's own ability to deal with problems, while the outside world (and the other in love relationships) is approached with suspicion. Meaninglessness contributes here to powerlessness, since both the learned helplessness as well as physiological damage makes it difficult for the traumatized individual to distinguish between real and imagined threats. The various effects of trauma have an impact on social isolation, as for example, a lack of empathy undermines emotional intimacy, aggression alienates the other, and attempts at self-medication – such as alcohol and drug abuse and self-mutilation – are behaviours that are socially condemned and in turn produce new problems. Powerlessness is associated with normlessness, and the perception that “desperate means” are required to achieve goals – something that undermines the foundation of love relationships, because love itself is seen as a concern for the interests of the other. Trauma further influences self-estrangement, producing depersonalisation and distancing, which undermines emotional intimacy. Note however that the symptoms of trauma are “idiographic” (Leonard, Follette, and Compton 2006:382), and therefore the forms of alienation these produce, are bound to be idiographic as well.

Leonard, Follette and Compton (2006:362) conclude, “traumatic experiences have a detrimental impact on close interpersonal relationships and that the formation of a safe and intimate relationship provides many survivors with an enhanced capability for recovery.” Similarly, Wick (2010:11) confirms that the relationship itself can be helpful in trauma recovery, “The ability to derive comfort from another human predicts more powerfully than trauma history itself whether symptoms improve and whether self-destructive behaviour can be regulated.” While relationships can thus be destroyed by the effects of trauma, the relationship itself can also provide the key, as depicted in Larry Heinemann's *Close Quarters* (2005[1974]).

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CHAPTER 13: A COMPARISON OF TWO COUNTERINSURGENCY NARRATIVES: TIM  
O'BRIEN'S *IF I DIE IN A COMBAT ZONE* AND ALEXANDER STRACHAN'S '*N WÊRELD SONDER  
GRENSE*

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As shown earlier, Tim O'Brien and Alexander Strachan can be regarded as the two most highly acclaimed writers in the two literary systems under discussion here, and Carpenter (2003:44) for instance calls O'Brien "arguably the most accomplished of the Vietnam War novelists" (see also Hughes (1998:2)). Of his works, O'Brien's *If I die in a combat zone* stands out as one of his most important works, one that Johannessen (1993:44) calls "one of the classics of the war," while Taylor (1981:63) calls it "an excellent account of what war was like for the average combat soldier – no causes, no crusades, just a miserable and terrifying fight for survival." Strachan's '*n Wêreld sonder grense* is mentioned in almost every discussion of *grensliteratuur*, and is one of few literary works on the war in Namibia/Angola to be filmed. Both works offer a highly fragmented glimpse of their wars through a compilation of short stories rather than a full-length novel, and since Afrikaans is yet to produce a novel comparable in depth and scope to James Webb's *Fields of fire*, it seems appropriate to compare these works by O'Brien and Strachan to show how different counterinsurgencies are presented.

Apart from their centrality within each literary subsystem and the fact that these are both collections of short stories, both authors saw active military service. O'Brien served as infantry soldier and radio-telephone operator in the 46th Infantry, 198th Infantry Brigade at LZ Gator in Quang Ngai Province, Vietnam, in 1969 (Radelich 1998:19). Approximately halfway through his tour, O'Brien acquired a post in the rear at battalion headquarters, where he remained until March of 1970 when he returned to the United States and was discharged from the Army with the rank of sergeant (Hughes 1998:3).

While O'Brien was a conscript, and considered dodging the draft, Strachan joined the Special Forces. This is a notable difference, since the narratives of conscripts in general tend to be more negative towards the war than those of Special Forces, who volunteer for their specific roles. Reading '*n Wêreld sonder grense* alongside Bertie Cloete's *Pionne*, for instance, shows the latter to be peppered with criticisms of the war, the government, and metanarratives in a manner and explicitness completely absent

from Strachan's text, which is more subtle. In a similar way, O'Brien's work differs from Moore's *The Green Berets*, which depicts the lives of Special Forces during the advisor-phase of the Vietnam War.

Importantly, O'Brien calls *If I die in a combat zone* "an honest straightforward account" (quoted in Hughes (1998:14)), while Strachan (1985:80) writes that the purpose of 'n *Wêreld sonder grense* was "om te rapporteer" [to report], with the implication that the narrative is "true". Both texts then aim to report their actual experiences in a form that implies a substantial truth-element, unlike other texts on these wars that are more fictionalised, such as James Webb's *Fields of fire* (2001[1978]), O'Brien's *Going after Cacciato* (1988[1975]), or *The things they carried* (1991), or many of the stories in Jeanette Ferreira's *Grensoorlogstories* (2012a) or Etienne van Heerden's *My Kubaan* (1992). Both *If I die in a combat zone* and 'n *Wêreld sonder grense* are therefore debut publications with a strong factual and autobiographical element, and both authors later produced works with a stronger fictional element and with a stronger emphasis on creating a coherent narrative.

While O'Brien did not win any literary awards for *If I die in a combat zone*, Alexander Strachan's 'n *Wêreld sonder grense* was awarded with both the FAK Literary Award for Popular Literature and the Eugène Marais Literary prize in 1985, and was translated into English and Dutch (Terblanche 2009).

## POWERLESSNESS

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As discussed in the theoretical introduction, powerlessness denotes a situation where the individual perceives that he lacks the ability to control outcomes – to affect what happens to him. This is a perception, albeit one rooted in reality – a learned helplessness. In particular, violent, chaotic environments characterised by disorder enhance this sense of powerlessness. In O'Brien's *If I die in a combat zone*, powerlessness manifests even during training, where he (46) compares his experience with the Holocaust, "The same hopeless feeling that overwhelmed inmates of Treblinka; prisoners of other human beings, caught up in a political marsh, unmotivated to escape and still unwilling to acquiesce, no one to help, no words to speak silently in consolation." When in Vietnam,

even the sun becomes their captor<sup>126</sup>, forcing them to hide under their ponchos “like prisoners” (107). Not even their own commanders seem to be on their side: Alpha Company learns to hate Colonel Daud and celebrates when he is killed by sappers in a midnight raid (115), and Captain Smith’s concern is entirely self-centred, “What’s my commander going to think? He’s gonna see a casualty list a mile long, and it’s only my first operation. My career is in real jeopardy now” (155)<sup>127</sup>.

The general sense of powerlessness soldiers experience in a combat environment is often represented in *If I die in a combat zone*. O’Brien (57) writes, “The soldier in advanced infantry training is doomed, and he knows it and thinks about it.” The following paragraph emphasises, “The man who finds himself in AIT [Advanced Infantry Training] is doomed, and he knows it and thinks about it.” The parallelism serves to highlight this fact, along with the recurrence of the word “doom,” which is found three times on the page, and contrasted with the heading of the chapter: “Escape.” This contrast highlights the irony of the title, and O’Brien thus sets up the inevitability of going to Vietnam from the first page of the chapter, predicting how forces beyond his control will derail his plans of evading the draft by going to Sweden<sup>128</sup>.

As noted earlier, the depiction of a pervasively threatening environment is an important facet of Vietnam literature. Hughes (1998:7) writes,

Terror is a driving force in *If I die in a combat zone*, *Going after Cacciato*, and *The things they carried*, and as such, it provides a single avenue for examining O’Brien’s writing as he (in the memoir) and his characters (in the fiction) deal with their emotions and attempt to act appropriately in spite of them.

The ever-present threat of landmines, booby-traps and snipers create an environment that strips the individual of control over his own destiny, and in the works of O’Brien, this is particularly important. *If I die in a combat zone* devotes an entire segment, “Step Lightly,” to the issue of mines and IEDs, discussing Bouncing Betty’s, which they call “ol’ step and a half” because the victim takes but a step and a half before dying (125). IEDs,

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<sup>126</sup> Cronjé (1989) writes that nature is often depicted as an enemy in war literature.

<sup>127</sup> James Webb’s *Fields of Fire* offers a similar criticism of selfish officers, where Snake remarks regarding First Lieutenant Kersey, “I never saw that man do anything except try to kiss a lifer’s ass. As long as he’s looking good to the Man, he couldn’t give a rat’s ass how many people are bleeding” (2001[1978]:141).

<sup>128</sup> In *Going after Cacciato*, he writes in a similar vein about Paul Berlin, “he was there, in Quang Ngai, for the same reasons they were: the luck of the draw, bad fortune, forces beyond reckoning” (O’Brien 1988[1975]:249).

booby-trapped mortar and artillery rounds, “hang from trees. They nestle in shrubbery. They lie under the sand. They wait beneath the mud floors of huts. They haunted us” (125). O’Brien (35) writes,

Eyes sweep the rice paddy. Don’t walk there, too soft. Not there, dangerous, mines. Step there and there and there, not there, step there and there and there, careful, careful, watch. Green ahead. Green lights, go. Eyes roll in the sockets. Protect the legs, no chances, watch for the fuckin snipers, watch for ambushes and punji pits. Eyes roll about, looking for mines and pieces of stray cloth and bombs and threads and things. Never blink the eyes, tape them open.

In *If I die in a combat zone*, every day is characterised by this inevitable doom; he writes, “It was like waking up in a cancer ward, no one ambitious to get on with the day, no one with obligations, no plans, nothing to hope for, no dreams for the daylight” (19). Like cancer sufferers, the soldiers are thus ‘terminal’; awaiting death in whichever form – landmine, booby trap, small-arms fire, or IED – it may come. Moreover, most importantly, they are *never* in control over whether they live or die, again like cancer sufferers. Much of the powerlessness in this text is related to social roles, and the heavy weight of a responsibility to cultural values and society (see below), as powerlessness is not only inherent in the conflict environment itself, but also explicit in the decision to go to war.

In *‘n Wêreld sonder grense*, powerlessness is depicted more subtly than in *If I die in a combat zone*. The narrator volunteers for the Special Forces, but there is a sense of inevitability in the text since he inherits the military role from his father, who had also been part of the Special Forces (“Herinnering”). His mother’s pride in his father shows clearly in the incident where his father kills a bat (9), where the narrator remarks that this was the first time he saw his mother “glow.” By implication, his mother finds his father’s ability to kill attractive, thus condoning it in the strongest sense. The narrator recalls that his mother had tremendous power over him (11), which prevented him from sharing her secret affair, but this power can also be seen as projecting onto his future career. The power his mother had over him, along with his father’s career in the Special Forces and his mother’s admiration for the strong, masculine figure of his father, therefore provide a similar impetus for joining the Special Forces as found in O’Brien’s contention that he had to join the army out of loyalty to society. In Strachan’s work, however, this telling of

responsibility towards society is implicit through the role of the mother, while it is explicit in O'Brien's works. Nevertheless, both authors are powerless to avoid military service.

Also in training, Strachan's work is more subtle than O'Brien's is. During training, the commandant remarks, "Kyk [...] ons sal aanhou tot ek sien die bos breek nie meer julle spoed nie ... soos masjiene" [Look, we will continue until I see the bush no longer breaks your speed ... like machines] (17) – a likeness made during an attack as well (39). The soldiers are trained to operate not as human beings but as unstoppable killing machines, dehumanizing them, making their actions autonomous. They are deprived of access to food and water, and when the narrator returns home, he notes how he could not walk past a tap without drinking (21). The soldiers are therefore stripped of necessities, but this powerlessness is always *illustrated* by the narrative, rather than explicitly *stated*.

Although death comes as suddenly and as pervasively in Strachan's work as it does in O'Brien's, snipers, landmines and booby-traps do not play a significant role – perhaps because Special Forces operate behind enemy lines where few of these devices are employed. Nevertheless, the ever-present threat of death remains and Strachan for instance writes how one Recce is found dead after a skirmish: "Hulle't Joe gefloor!" [They killed Joe] (25). Just that. The short description serves to emphasise the randomness and speed with which life is extinguished, and the numerous funerals the narrator attends highlights the danger of the environment.

#### MEANINGLESSNESS

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Meaninglessness denotes the aspect where the individual's inability to understand the events he is engaged in. In *If I die in a combat zone*, O'Brien "follows the customary war narrative progression from innocence to experience to disillusionment" (Carpenter 2003:44). He himself often questions whether their actions would affect the outcome of the war, and writes, "Searching the ville, the whole hot day, was utterly and certainly futile" (15). When he joins Alpha Company in Vietnam, he notices, "no one in Alpha Company knows or cares about the cause or purpose of their war" (85). Throughout, O'Brien notes the meaninglessness of the war, "We weren't the old soldiers of World War II. No valor to squander for things like country or honor or military objectives. All the

courage in August was the kind you dredge up when you awaken in the morning, knowing it will be a bad day” (174). At the time O’Brien served in Vietnam, the war had become less popular, and the early days of enthusiasm had faded. Significantly, this was also the time when more draftees were employed in Vietnam, as Hughes (1998:15) writes,

Like O’Brien, a large percentage of the men deployed there were not volunteers but draftees. These men, excluding those who had unique grounds for exemption from service, faced several unpromising options, including fighting in the war, deserting to a foreign country to live in exile, or refusing service and accepting time in jail. Moreover, in 1968 the rationale for United States involvement in the conflict was becoming increasingly questionable, making the moral climate of the war ambiguous at best. This combination of factors created a situation in which young men were forced to choose whether to go to war, and many of them struggled with this decision. So difficult was this process for O’Brien that he spends over one fourth of his memoir describing the events leading up to his arrival in Vietnam and presenting his psychological battle to determine the correct course of action.

Soon the soldiers take part in creating uncertainty and undermining truth when they send out fictional patrols to set up fictional ambushes, calling in artillery support,

It would be a false report, a fake. The artilleryman would radio phony information to the big guns in the rear. The 105s or 155s would blast out their expensive rounds of marking explosives, and the lieutenant would call back his bogus adjustments, chewing out someone in the rear for poor marksmanship (110).

Regarding mines, booby-traps and IEDs, there was “an absurd combination of certainty and uncertainty: the certainty that you’re walking in minefields, walking past the things day after day; the uncertainty of your every movement, of which way to shift your weight, of where to sit down” (127). O’Brien notes,

In war, the rational faculty begins to diminish, as I just said, and what takes over is surrealism, the life of the imagination. The mind of the soldier becomes part of the experience – the brain seems to flow out of your head, joining the elements around you on the battlefield. It’s like stepping outside yourself. War is a surreal experience, therefore it seems quite natural and proper for a writer to render some of its aspects in a surreal way (McCaffery 1982:135).

Not only certainty in terms of the war effort, but also certainty in general evaporates in *If I die in a combat zone*, as epitomized by the character Barney, who “always asked” people whether they were sure (17). When O’Brien asserts that the war is “wrongly



conceived and poorly justified,” he adds, “But perhaps I was mistaken, and who really knew, anyway?” (27). Thus even their own convictions falter, not only that of the government. O’Brien’s sense of meaninglessness extends even to himself, “was my apparent courage in enduring merely a well-disguised cowardice?” (139). Throughout *If I die in a combat zone*, he tries to find the meaning of courage, “now, war ended, all I am left with are simple, unprofound scraps of truth. Men die. Fear hurts and humiliates. It is hard to be brave. It is hard to know what bravery is” (31).

In Strachan’s work, meaninglessness is never addressed explicitly. The hell of war and the devastating consequences for people is merely implied and shown through acts of brutal, unnecessary violence that portray how war has changed the soldiers from human beings to machines. But there are no overt objections to the war, no discussions on whether or not South Africa should be involved, and the word *Communism* is not mentioned once (there is no questioning of whether this cause holds water or not). However, it is through the actions of characters that a questioning of metanarratives develops: how the narrator eventually becomes a renegade in “Visioen,” with the unmistakable wink to *Apocalypse Now*. By showing how the characters eventually break free of the SADF, just like Colonel Kurtz did (and thus recalling Vietnam), ‘*n Wêreld sonder grense* implies questioning the war, without ever doing it explicitly.

#### NORMLESSNESS

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Normlessness denotes a situation where the dominant norms of a society are found wanting, and replaced with norms that still value the objectives of society, but disregard the acceptable means of attaining them – an “ends justifies the means” approach.

Hughes (1998:4) writes that O’Brien often depicts “the struggle to do right in a morally ambiguous environment.” However, O’Brien struggles with what is ‘right’, even from the outset, where he questions the norm of bravery and going to war. He writes about the other soldiers, “either they are stupid and do not know what is right. Or they know what is right and cannot bring themselves to do it. Or they know what is right and do it, but do not feel and understand the fear that must be overcome” (141). Not knowing what is “right” may be considered a sense of meaninglessness, but knowing what is right and not being able to do so, is *normlessness*. In this sense, going to war is a

manifestation of normlessness, since he disregards the values he had been taught, but herein lies the paradox: the societal norm says that one must act according to conviction, but another norm states that men are supposed to be brave and be prepared to sacrifice themselves for God and country, and kill others that are deemed a threat by the state. O'Brien then has a conflict of norms, and uncertainty develops, as he does not know which one to follow.

The most vivid depiction of normlessness in the sense of disregarding the norms that they were taught, concerns the killing of the cow,

One day Alpha Company was strung out in a long line, walking from one village near Pinkville to another. Some boys were herding cows in a free-fire zone. They were not supposed to be there; legal targets for our machine guns and M-16's. We fired at them, boys and cows together, the whole company, or nearly all of it, like target practice at Fort Lewis. The boys escaped, but one cow stood its ground. Bullets struck its flanks, exploding globs of flesh, boring into its belly. The cow stood parallel to the soldiers, a wonderful profile. It looked away, in a single direction, and it did not move. I did not shoot, but I did endure, without protest, except to ask the man in front of me why he was shooting and smiling (139).

Here the implied norm is that cruelty towards the innocent is wrong, but soldiers disregard this, since they are in a war zone where nothing matters. O'Brien illustrates that although he is not directly involved, he considers himself an accomplice, "I did not shoot, but I did endure, without protest." He thus becomes an accomplice by merely witnessing the event, and by being part of the unit, underscoring both normlessness and powerlessness: there is nothing else he could do but watch.

On one occasion in *'n Wêreld sonder grense* ("Vergelding"), the troops act disproportionately violent when Jock drives over a man with his Land Rover (29), showing how the norm of violence as learnt in the army is now contrasting with the civilian environment. However, the most striking example of generally accepted norms of society being thrown overboard in *'n Wêreld sonder grense*, occurs where the soldiers successfully attack a PLAN-base in "Die muurprent." One insurgent was mortally wounded, and the soldiers subsequently urinate in his mouth (39). Here Jock also severs the penis of a PLAN-fighter and sticks it in the front of his trousers, laughing. All sense of decency and respect for other human beings is lost, foreshadowing the final chapter, "Visioen," where society is literally rejected when Jock forms a renegade group that

defies both SWAPO and the SADF. As in *Apocalypse Now*, the narrator is sent to recover or eliminate him, but ends up joining and leading the renegades. This escape from the SADF is symbolic: by rejecting the values of society, the soldiers are no longer fit to live in it, and literally remove themselves.

## CULTURAL ESTRANGEMENT

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Cultural estrangement is closely related to normlessness, and refers to a situation where the individual becomes estranged from his culture, unable to identify with it, because he no longer considers the dominant norms valid guidelines for his conduct. Throughout, *If I die in a combat zone* is critical of the society that sent O'Brien to war. He recalls how he "was the wrinkled, swollen, bloody offspring of the great campaign against the tyrants of the 1940s," and how he was "fed by the spoils of the 1945 victory" (21). Yet this background, the "memories of hot-blooded valour" (21), the childhood army games, the emulation of "our fathers, taking on the Japs and Krauts along the shores of Lake Okabena" (22) did not prepare him for Vietnam. Whereas WWII was supposedly "right [...] it had to be fought" (23), Vietnam forces him to question the very concepts of right and wrong, and enquire about the nature of valour and masculinity, for Vietnam is "without evident cause, a war fought for uncertain reasons" (139) and "silly and stupid" (145). Still, he remains tied to his society, remarking that he "owed the prairie something. For twenty-one years I'd lived under its laws, accepted its education, eaten its food, wasted and guzzled its water, slept well at night, driven across its highways, dirtied and breathed its air, wallowed in its luxuries" (28)<sup>129</sup>. When he decides to go to Vietnam despite his objections, it is because this constitutes the 'path of least resistance' to him; a "sleepwalking default" (31). He goes to Vietnam because he is "a coward" (73), thus inverting the normal masculine order that regards joining the military and fighting for one's country as brave. In a sense, this motivation unhinges heroism, highlighting how far estranged O'Brien is from his perception of his culture, which is a sentiment voiced by Erik as well, "All this not because of conviction, not for ideology; rather it's

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<sup>129</sup> His training companion, Erik, voices a similar dilemma, "I come from a small town, my parents know everyone, and I couldn't hurt and embarrass them. And, of course, I was afraid" (44).

from fear. . . . Fear of weakness. Fear that to avoid war is to avoid manhood. We come to Fort Lewis afraid to admit that we are not Achilles, that we are not brave, not heroes” (46). Hughes (1998:16) writes,

This uncertainty prevented him from avoiding the draft, but through basic training and advanced infantry training at Fort Lewis, he became more convinced that the conflict was wrong, his feelings of obligation to country faded, and soon his fear of going to war dominated all concerns. As O’Brien’s apprehension increased during training, so did the intensity of his search for the correct course of action. He suddenly found himself in a situation in which his greatest fear was not that of war but rather of disappointing family, friends, and community, should he desert.

It is therefore the pressure of society that forces him to go to war, as Hughes (1998:17-18) writes, “His fear of fighting in an unjust conflict, of having to kill another person, and of dying, were all outweighed by the prospect of embarrassment and the ‘gravity’ of obligation to friends and family.” In this view, there is an implied bitterness towards society: society forced him to go through training and risk life and limb – and sanity – in a war he did not believe in, and his constant rejection of society’s standards can be seen as a form of implied cultural estrangement.

Strachan’s work is again more subtle in this regard, particularly since he did not feel at home in society in the first place and wanted to leave. However, the various chapters dealing with his time on leave show a man unable to integrate with society. The first occurs in “Grootmanne se hoesgoed,” where the narrator is on his first leave since passing the selection course. He sits in a bar and notices how people observe him, and plays a role as a masculine man by ordering a double whisky and downing it, remarking, “Grootmanne se hoesgoed” [big men’s cough syrup] (21). Here the cultural pressure goes so far as to imply a form of self-estrangement: he cannot be ‘himself’ when required to be ‘the Recce’.

## SOCIAL ISOLATION

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Social isolation refers to the physical distancing of people from society – the lack of forming meaningful ties to members of their immediate social setting.

O’Brien’s estrangement from his culture also leads to him becoming an outsider. While in basic training at Fort Lewis, Washington, he memorises the letters of a girl, in

order to “remain a stranger, only a visitor at Fort Lewis” (41). He cultivates this distance further,

Without sympathy or compassion, I instructed my intellect and eyes: ignore the horde. I kept vigil against intrusion into my private life. I maintained a distance suitable to the black and white distinction between me and the unconscious, genuflecting herd (41).

While in this pursuit of distinguishing himself from the “genuflecting herd,” he encounters Erik, and together they form “a coalition against the army” (42) engaged in “a war of resistance; the objective was to save our souls” (43). Throughout, O’Brien attempts to distance himself from the army and the military environment, but of course, he becomes just as much a part of it. As O’Brien leaves Vietnam, the stewardess “comes through the cabin, spraying a mist of invisible sterility into the pressurised, scrubbed, filtered, temperature-controlled air [...] protecting herself and America from Asian evils, cleansing us all forever” (201). However, like every named aspect of the plane, this ritual is “artificial”: the soldiers had changed forever, and what they carry will survive this artificial cleansing and continue to distance them from civilian society<sup>130</sup>. This inability of the returning soldier to reintegrate with society is a familiar trope in war literature in general and Vietnam literature in particular, occurring also in Webb’s *Fields of fire* and Heinemann’s *Paco’s story* (see section on trauma).

In ‘n *Wêreld sonder grense*, “Nagvlug” is a tale of bar fights and drunken disorderliness, culminating in taking two drunken girls home but not having sex with them. The soldiers have become so far removed from society that they have no interest in normal interaction, foreshadowing their eventual withdrawal in “Visioen.” Again, this inability to reintegrate with society is shown through the actions of the characters, rather than told explicitly in the narrative. Social isolation is depicted in the incidents highlighted in the previous section, specifically by the narrator’s inability to form romantic attachments. When he does marry in “By die huis,” distance remains between him and his wife because of his inability to talk about the war (42).

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<sup>130</sup> This attitude is reflected in *The Things they Carried* as well, where it is written, “You come over clean and you get dirty and then afterward it’s never the same” (O’Brien 1991:105). In Denis Johnson’s *Tree of smoke*, Bill Houston also says, “I came across this ocean and died. They might as well bring back my bones. I’m all different” (2007:12).

## SELF-ESTRANGEMENT

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Self-estrangement refers to disengagement: the individual becomes depersonalised, distracted from himself. Kohn (1976: 115) writes, “self-estrangement implies something more than a negative evaluation of one’s own worth; it also implies a sense of being detached from self, of being adrift-purposeless, bored with everything, merely responding to what life has to offer, rather than setting one’s own course.” As such, self-estrangement is closely tied with meaninglessness (“being adrift-purposeless”) and powerlessness (“merely responding to what life has to offer, rather than setting one’s own course”).

Meaninglessness and powerlessness have been discussed earlier, but depersonalisation is also found in *If I die in a combat zone*, “You whimper, low or screeching, and it doesn’t start anywhere. Blasting in perfect key with the sound of the bullets, the throat does the pleading for you, taking the heart’s place, the soul gone, a figment of some metaphysician’s brain” (136). In this description of combat, note how it is “the” throat that does the pleading, not “my” throat, and “the” heart instead of “my heart.” Also, note that both the soul and heart are gone: there is no feeling, no experiencing the moment as a human being. This is reminiscent of Laing’s contention that the self may withdraw under conditions of extreme stress (and being fired upon can of course be considered extreme stress), in order to protect the ‘true’ self from harm.

In this regard, the chapter “By die huis” in *’n Wêreld sonder grense* is particularly noteworthy: the chapter is told in the third person, but concerns the same narrator as the first-person narrator found in the rest of the book. At home, the narrator is therefore looking in from the outside, not experiencing his own life in the first person. The war is ever-present in the webbing he stores in his garage – again a space found on the periphery of the house. The garage links the house to the outside, and so his webbing links him to his days in the army.

In Seeman’s (1975:93) terms, self-estrangement is “the individual’s engagement in activities that are not intrinsically rewarding vs. involvement in a task or activity for its own sake.” In order to prevent repetition, I refer to the section on meaninglessness: nothing O’Brien does in *If I die in a combat zone* is represented as meaningful, and the

same applies to *'n Wêreld sonder grense*: I could not find a single example of a character finding fulfilment in his duties.

## CONCLUSION

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While both *If I die in a combat zone* and *'n Wêreld sonder grense* aim at reporting first-hand experiences of the war through a collection of short stories, O'Brien's text depicts a more overt alienation by including his objections towards the war, his distancing from his culture and others in general, and his powerlessness in joining and fighting in the war. In contrast, Strachan's text works by implicitly showing the reader how the soldiers become distanced from society and its values through their actions. Although the core of the narratives – being forced into the war, being dehumanised by it, questioning the purpose of the war, and failing to reintegrate with society afterwards – is similar, these two authors depict these insights extremely differently, with O'Brien usually telling about his views in an overt manner, while Strachan illustrates these views through the actions of the characters.

## CHAPTER 14: GENERAL CONCLUSION

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War is hell, but that's not the half of it, because war is also mystery and terror and adventure and courage and discovery and holiness and pity and despair and longing and love. War is nasty; war is fun. War is thrilling; war is drudgery. War makes you a man; war makes you dead (O'Brien 1991:87).

Comparisons between the US Vietnam War and the South African war in Namibia/Angola, as put forth by Dale (2007), Baines (2008:9), Geldenhuys (2007:226), Steenkamp (1989:187), Stiff (2001:119), Van Creveld (1991:23), and Williams (2008:131), are useful, although none of these authors qualify the analogy with a detailed comparison. All counterinsurgencies are comparable yet unique: While both the US and South Africa recruited local forces to help fight the insurgents, South Africa placed a greater emphasis on this tactic than the US initially did; while both learned from the British war in Malaya, the US was slow to implement the lessons of counterinsurgency, while South Africa seemed particularly enthusiastic about applying COIN-doctrine. In both wars, insurgents used bases in neighbouring countries, but while South Africa often launched aggressive attacks on these bases, the US restricted attacks on the North. Because both wars centred on gaining the support of the population, in both wars the population suffered intimidation, assassination, and mass murder, from both the insurgents and counterinsurgents. Both wars furthermore started as counterinsurgencies, but grew more conventional as the war developed, culminating in the Easter Offensive in Vietnam and the Cuito Cuanavale battles in Angola, and in both instances these final conventional confrontations led to peace agreements. Furthermore, both conflicts were largely motivated by a wish to halt Communist expansion, but in both conflicts, the war was not simply a war against Communist expansion, but also included liberation from colonial oppression, ethnic conflict, and power politics. Lastly, in contrast to WWII, both conflicts ended somewhat inconclusively, since neither the US nor South Africa was beaten in the military conflict, but still their opponents were in power after the war.

The answer to the question “Whose Vietnam was the war in Namibia/Angola anyway?” should rest on the interpretation of Vietnam. If Vietnam is seen, as it usually is, as a quagmire that cost the US billions of dollars and thousands of lives without any gain, the answer could be that it was Cuba's Vietnam. Their material and human losses far



exceed South African losses, and they never succeeded in destroying UNITA's insurgency. UNITA remained a credible threat to the MPLA throughout Cuba's involvement, and continued their struggle for more than a decade after Cuba's withdrawal – even in the absence of US or South African aid. Nor did Cuba help SWAPO win control over Namibia, since this was done through a UN-backed election, and because of Soviet diplomatic intervention.

However, if Vietnam is seen as a long-term US commitment where US forces won every major battle, beat the insurgency, yet failed to establish a lasting alternative to the Communist government, then the answer is clearly that it was South Africa's Vietnam. As in Vietnam, the SADF was unbeatable on the battlefield; as in Vietnam, the SADF at first struggled to cope with the insurgency, but then employed successful measures that ended the internal insurgency. As in Vietnam, the SADF won every major conventional engagement. Yet, despite these military gains, South Vietnam collapsed under the military pressure exerted by the North, and SWAPO won the general election because it had retained the allegiance of the tribe from which it was founded. In both conflicts, the successes by counterinsurgent forces did not affect lasting political change (although Geldenhuys's argument that the SADF avoided a Marxist-Leninist state can be supported).

Not that it is a simple matter to ascertain what “really” happened. Vietnam coincided with a critical stance towards history's ability to represent the past, as well as with postmodernist tendencies to question the possibility of arriving at a final, absolute truth. The ‘credibility gap’ that emerged within the context of Vietnam also emerged in future conflicts, cementing a critical stance towards official views of the war. With the debunking of the nationalist myth, it is doubtful whether the governments of countries like South Africa or the US would ever again be able to call upon the citizenry to further its political ideals, and wars are more likely to be fought by volunteer armies, well into the foreseeable future. In this respect, Vietnam and Namibia/Angola changed the host countries irrevocably: the experience of both Vietnam and Namibia/Angola meant the end of conscription; nearly two hundred years after France had introduced it.

This implies a deep-seated alienation: towards metanarratives, towards politics, and towards the cultural values that provided the support for going to war. Both these wars were characterised by considerable opposition at home at the time (less so in the

case of South Africa), and in subsequent works of literature this alienation manifested in various ways, as discussed in this study.

Alienation manifests in terms of powerlessness where the ever-present dangers fosters a general mistrust of the population. Here the insights of Ross and Mirowsky were particularly useful, as they discuss alienation because of a generally chaotic environment that creates a sense of powerlessness, and this leads to mistrust, as shown in the texts as well. Furthermore, powerlessness in terms of the intractable military hierarchy and the dehumanisation of soldiers was also discussed, and it was shown how disenfranchising soldiers resulted in narratives that describe soldiers as mere machines, sent into harm's way without any control over their destinies.

Meaninglessness was also discussed, and it was shown how the soldiers' narratives are in themselves an attempt to make sense of these wars. The shortcomings of history was shown to be at least part of the reason why soldiers tried to make sense of their experiences, along with postmodernist tendencies to question metanarratives and the existence of absolute truth. These wars in particular created a sense of meaninglessness, since objectives often remained obscured, and the reasons for going to war were found to be unconvincing.

Normlessness was also discussed, in the sense that the inability to achieve goals through legitimate means fosters an attitude of "the ends justify the means." It was shown how authors often write about attitudes that are contrary to the values that they were taught, and one is reminded of Kovic's bitter remark, "Thou shalt not kill." Yet the situation dictated that different norms be applied, creating an inner conflict and subsequent disgust at the culture that had put them in these extraordinarily difficult circumstances.

It was shown how these works of literature are a record of the separation from dominant values of the cultures that sent them to war, of which the home opposition is a part. Under this heading, cultural estrangement in terms of a rebellion towards traditional notions of masculinity was also discussed, showing how masculinity also became a focal point for voicing alienation.

Social isolation in terms of the individual's separation from society, and from the population involved in the insurgency/counterinsurgency, was also discussed, and it was shown how various authors voice a sense of isolation from the society in which they find

themselves, both at home and abroad. Following Ross and Mirowsky again, it was shown how the dangerous environment of a counterinsurgency, with its lack of a front, fostered mistrust and a subsequent distancing from the local population.

Lastly, self-estrangement was discussed as a reaction to a threatening environment, where the individual may create a false self in order to protect his 'real' self. In some texts on these wars, characters are depicted as 'losing themselves', and also the use of humour was discussed as a way of distancing the self from the horrific realities of the war.

As a cause of alienation, trauma was also discussed, showing how the symptoms of trauma alienate the individual from others. Here, the focus was on two texts: Larry Heinemann's *Paco's story* and Anthony Feinstein's *Kopwond*, both works that centre on trauma as a theme. It was shown how these works depict the alienating effects of trauma for the serving and returning soldier.

Lastly, the two central texts in both literary subnetworks, Tim O'Brien's *If I die in a combat zone* and Alexander Strachan's '*n Wêreld sonder grense* were discussed in terms of powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, cultural estrangement, social isolation, and self-estrangement, and it was shown how these two central texts depict most of the central issues raised by other texts as well.

Importantly, writers of literature on these wars are not done writing. Ben Viljoen's novel on the war in Namibia/Angola, '*n Nuwe wildernis* (2013) has just been published – the newest book on this war. Last year, Jeanette Ferreira's *Grensoorlogstories* was published. Also in terms of Vietnam, numerous studies and films are still being released, and will continue to be for some time. In an attempt to come to terms with these wars, the search for meaning continues without hope of ever closing these two chapters.

These two wars are considerably more complex than their rendering in the popular imagination suggests, and there are many facets to how they are represented, both in fiction and in history. The key word is **complexity**: nothing about these wars is simple. Beidler's idea that *Dispatches* comes closest to representing "what it was like" is problematic; as Webb (1987:19) notes, Vietnam was many different things, and offered many different experiences. One book will never be enough. Randall Wallace recognised this when he made *We were soldiers: Platoon* may have been part of the experience of

Vietnam, with its demotivated, drugged-up soldiers and corrupt officers, but there is another side: one of heroism, courage, and professionalism. Both stories needed to be told, not just Oliver Stone's story. No one could read a single book on Vietnam and have any idea of "what it was like": *The Green Berets*<sup>131</sup> belongs as much to the alternative history of Vietnam as *Dispatches*.

Similarly, I once asked Alexander Strachan what is the 'best' book on the so-called Border War, and he recommended *Kopwond*. Again: *Kopwond* only offers one perspective, and one that is circumspect from a historical perspective. One book will never be enough. No book of history has yet properly contextualised the war in Namibia/Angola within counterinsurgency theory (McWilliams's attempt to contextualise this war within hybrid war theory is one of the most commendable of all sources consulted, alongside Scholtz (2012)), and there is a vast difference between historical representations: Barlow for instance describes a different war than Baines, and Barlow can certainly not be put in the same camp as Stiff or Geldenhuys. Furthermore, no work of literature (because none of these works is truly fiction) comes close to capturing *all* the experiences and nuances of this war. In a sense, Jeanette Ferreira's *Grensoorlogstories* did make a valuable contribution by including short stories written by different authors, but by completely obliterating the line between fact and fiction, this book sacrificed credibility in a way that O'Brien's *If I die in a combat zone* does not. No Afrikaans work of literature on the war in Namibia/Angola addresses the difficult nuances – right and wrong, good and evil, etcetera – to the extent that *Fields of fire* does. Then, neither does *Fields of fire* capture the entire experience of Vietnam. Perhaps the second key term should be **plurality**: on neither of these wars, no single historical or literary work captures the complexity of the experience, and hence a variety of sources is needed to find out "what it was like." Nonetheless, "what it was like" can be approximated, not reached: neither Vietnam nor Namibia/Angola will ever be fully known, as argued in the section on meaninglessness. Although it may seem that powerlessness is the most central aspect of alienation as discussed in this thesis, perhaps meaninglessness takes centre stage, as all of the works considered – historical as well as

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<sup>131</sup> I made very few references to this book, since alienation is virtually absent in this text. Because the book deals with the advisor phase, this is understandable: all the issues that would become part of the popular memory of Vietnam were still in the future by the time *The Green Berets* was published.

literary – try to counter a sense of meaninglessness in light of some fundamental rift, some form of alienation, whether from society, the discipline of history, politics, metanarratives, or cultural norms.

## APPENDIX A: CHRONOLOGY OF AMERICAN LITERATURE ON THE VIETNAM WAR

From Beidler (2007), Kinney (1991), Tal (1990), Ringnalda (1988), Pratt (1987), Oldham (1986), Rollins (1984), Herzog (1980), Taylor (1980) the following list of important works and authors on the Vietnam War can be extracted (arranged according to date of publication):

Work	Author	Date
The quiet American	Greene, Graham	1955
A forest of tigers	Shaplen, Robert	1956
The ugly American	Burdick, Eugene and Lederer, William	1958
The journey of Tao Kim Nam	Bosse, MJ	1959
Yellow fever	Larteguy, Jean	1965
The Green Berets	Moore, Robin	1965
The ambassador	West, Morris	1965
The pride of the Green Berets	Derrig, Peter	1966
A tract of time	Hempstone, Smith	1966
No more bugles in the sky	Newhafer, Richard	1966
The coasts of war	Stone, Scott C. S.	1966
LBJ Brigade	Wilson, William	1966
Incident at Muc Wa	Ford, Daniel	1967
One very hot day	Halberstam, David	1967
Close quarters	Heinemann, Larry <sup>132</sup>	1967
The prisoners of Quai Dong	Kolpacoff, Victor	1967
Vietnam	McCarthy, Mary	1967
The killing at Ngo Tho	Moore, Gene D.	1967
The Village of Ben Suc	Schell, Jonathan	1967
Vietnam simply <sup>133</sup>	Shea, Dick	1967
A-18	Taylor, Thomas	1967
Muzeeka	Guare, John	1968
Count your dead	Rowe, John	1968
Trip to Hanoi	Sontag, Susan	1968
The traitors	Briley, John	1969
The lion heart	Clark, Alan	1969
One to count cadence	Crumley, James	1969
The bamboo bed	Eastlake, William	1969
The Chinese game	Larsen, Charles	1969
Diary of a short-timer in Vietnam	Briscoe, Edward	1970
Land of a million elephants	Baber, Asa	1970
The defector	Collingwood, Charles	1970
The only war we've got	Maitland, Derek	1970
365 days	Glasser, Ronald J	1971
War games	Sloan, James Park	1971

<sup>132</sup> When authors published more than one text, only the debut is recorded here.

<sup>133</sup> Pratt (1987:134) calls this text a “novel”

Fire in the lake	Fitzgerald, Frances	1972
The most savage animal	Atkinson, Hugh	1972
The Lionheads	Bunting, Josiah	1972
War year	Haldeman, Joe	1972
In the midst of wars	Lansdale, Edward Geary	1972
Strawberry soldier	Morris, Jim	1972
The Big V	Pelfrey, William	1972
Home from the war	Lifton, Robert J	1973
Body shop	Browne, Corrine	1973
The man who won the medal of honor	Giovanetti, Len	1973
Body count	Huggett, William Turner	1973
Why Audie Murphy died in Vietnam	Layne, MacAvoy	1973
If I die in a combat zone	O'Brien, Tim	1973
Sand in the wind	Roth, Robert	1973
Easy victories	Trowbridge, James	1973
Dog soldiers	Stone, Robert	1974
Stringer	Just, Ward	1974
Laotian fragments	Pratt, John Clark	1974
The barking deer	Rubin, Jonathan	1974
The valkyrie mandate	Vaughn, Robert	1974
Some kind of hero	Kirkwood, James	1975
Parthian shot	Little, Lloyd	1975
American Boys	Smith, Stephen Philip	1975
Friendly fire	Bryan, CDB	1976
Winners and losers	Emerson, Gloria	1976
Born on the Fourth of July	Kovic, Ron	1976
No bugles no drums	Durden, Charles	1976
A rumor of war	Caputo, Philip	1977
Dispatches	Herr, Michael	1977
Live till tomorrow	Harper, Stephen	1977
The killing zone	Downs, Frederick	1978
Better times than these	Groom, Winston	1978
Miranda	Sanders, Pamela	1978
Fields of fire	Webb, James	1978
A romance	Weigl, Bruce	1979
A station in the delta	Cassidy, John	1979
Attic light	James, Allston	1979
Sergeant back again	Coleman, Charles	1980
The short-timers	Hasford, Gustav	1980
Everything we had	Santoli, Al	1981
The alleys of Eden	Butler, Robert Olen	1981
Officers' wives	Fleming, Thomas	1981
A world of hurt	Hathaway, Bo	1981
The last ambassador	Kalb, Bernard and Marvin	1981
Targets	McQuinn, Donald E.	1981
Easy travel to other planets	Mooney, Ted	1981
The boy who picked the bullets up	Nelson, Charles	1981
The thirteenth valley	Del Vecchio, John	1982
The bombing officer	Doolittle, Jerome	1982
Gangland	Winn, David	1982

<b>Vietnam-perkasie<sup>134</sup></b>	Ehrhart, William	1983
<b>Chickenhawk</b>	Mason, Robert	1983
<b>Tiger the Lurp Dog</b>	Miller, Ken	1983
<b>Meditations in green</b>	Wright, Steven	1983
<b>Democracy</b>	Didion, Joan	1984
<b>Dau</b>	Dodge, Ed	1984
<b>Fragments</b>	Fuller, Jack	1984
<b>Coming down again</b>	Balaban, John	1985

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<sup>134</sup> Pratt (1987:139) claims that this work should be regarded as a novel.





## APPENDIX B: CHRONOLOGY OF LITERATURE ON THE WAR IN NAMIBIA/ANGOLA

From primarily Van Coller's publications and that of Roos (2008), the following list of important works on the war in Namibia/Angola emerges:

Date	Work	Author
1963	Ons wag op die kaptein	Joubert, Elsa
1974	Heupvuur	Haasbroek, PJ
1974	Getuie vir die naaktes	Odendaal, Welma
1974	Vir 'n lewe	Van der Merwe, Peet
1975	Roofvis	Haasbroek, PJ
1976	Skrikbewind	Haasbroek, PJ
1976	Op pad na die grens	Steyn, Jaap
1977	Keerkring	Odendaal, Welma
1978	Verby die wit brug	Coetzee, Johan
1978	Kruisvuur	Snyman, Adriaan
1978	Dagboek van 'n verraaier	Steyn, Jaap
1980	Melk	Joubert, Elsa
1980	Werf in die rûens	Müller, Petra
1982	Verby die vlakke	Haasbroek, PJ
1982	Jonkmanskas	Prinsloo, Koos
1982	Sonneskyn en Chevrolet	Roodt, Dan
1983	Die laaste Sondag	Joubert, Elsa
1983	Jampie gaan grens toe	McCallaghan, Andrew
1983	Blaaskans	Miles, John
1983	Tweede prys is 'n houtjas	Retief, Bertrand
1983	My kubaan	Van Heerden, Etienne
1983	Tuin van klip en vuur	Weideman, George
1984	'n Basis oorkant die grens	Krüger, Louis
1984	'n Wêreld sonder grense	Strachan, Alexander
1984	Om te awol	Van Heerden, Etienne
1984	Klaaglied vir Koos	Viljoen, Lettie
1985	Grensgeval	Du Plessis, Hans
1985	Sitat om 'n rewolusie	Ferreira, Jeanette
1985	Dag van die reuse	Pieterse, Pieter
1985	Spinola se rooi angelier	Swart, F
1986	Verste grens	Maartens, Maretha
1986	More is 'n lang dag	Opperman, Deon
1986	Half boom, half mens	Retief, Bertrand
1987	Sleep vir jou 'n stoel nader	Leroux, André
1987	Oog van die Nyl	Munnik, Victor
1987	Die lewe ondergronds	Pienaar, Hans
1987	Die hemel help ons	Prinsloo, Koos
1988	'n Kat in die sak	Goosen, Jean
1988	Wie de hel het jou vertel	Kellerman, Gawie
1989	Die waarheid en ander stories	Kalmer, Harry
1989	In die tyd van die uil	Rall, Henk
1989	Sê dit in die donker	Van der Lugt, P

1990	Die jakkalsjagter	Alexander Strachan
1990	Berigte van weerstand	Huisman, Emma
1990	Engele op stelte	Kotze, Marietjie
1990	Beertjie en sy Boytjies	Ryger, RR
1993	Die reuk van appels	Behr, Mark
1994	Die dinge van 'n kind	Van der Vyver, Marieta
1995	Die heidendogters jubel	Scheepers, Riana
1996	Noorman	Tredoux, Nic
1997	Paartie by Jake's	Fouché, Jaco
1998	Die asem van Ghaddafi	Moolman, Chris
1998	Omdat ons alles is	Pieterse, Henning
2001	Slagoffers	Van Zyl, Dine
2002	Skuilplek	Bakkes, Christiaan

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- <sup>i</sup> From <http://grunt.space.swri.edu/visit/maps/mape.jpg>
- <sup>ii</sup> From [http://www.africa.upenn.edu/CIAError!\\_Bookmark not defined.\\_ Maps/Angola\\_19838.gif](http://www.africa.upenn.edu/CIAError!_Bookmark_not_defined._Maps/Angola_19838.gif)
- <sup>iii</sup> Photo from <http://weekendtrips.com/2013/remembering-the-fallen-at-d-c-s-vietnam-veterans-memorial>.
- <sup>iv</sup> Photo from <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=129554870>
- <sup>v</sup> Photo from *Insig*, August 1987, p 31
- <sup>vi</sup> Photo from <http://www.saairforce.co.za/forum/viewtopic.php?f=14&t=3416>
- <sup>vii</sup> Diagram from [http://www.armedassault.info/\\_hosted/bushwars/info.html](http://www.armedassault.info/_hosted/bushwars/info.html)
- <sup>viii</sup> Photo from <http://www.sadf.info/SWATF%20Operations.html>