

# THE WILLING AND THE NOT SO WILLING: CONSCRIPTION AND RESISTANCE TO COMPULSORY MILITARY SERVICE IN SOUTH AFRICA, 1968-1989

Tienie du Plessis, Gert van der Westhuizen and Ian Liebenberg<sup>1</sup>

## *Abstract*

*South Africa participated in two world wars without implementing compulsory military service. Following the Second World War, the Union Defence Force relied on the Active Citizen Force to supplement its manpower needs. Leaders of the ruling National Party, influenced by the Cold War psychosis, myopically believed that global conflict was defined by two ideologies in a deadly struggle for dominance, nationalism and communism. Apartheid advocates made a distinction between the white “us” and the black “them”; Christianity against barbarism; Marxism-Leninism against Christian-Nationalism. Maintaining Nationalist rule increasingly demanded manpower. Conscription for white men was a reality for twenty years, supplying conscripts for border duty and later for suppressing internal unrest. More than 500 000 served in the military, many of them in northern Namibia, Angola and South African townships. War resisters were monitored, ostracised, ridiculed, forced to emigrate or jailed. This contribution shares some thoughts on the issue, including moral objections to apartheid violence and the militarisation of South African society.*

**Keywords:** Apartheid; militarisation; national service; conscripts; Border War; “total onslaught”; “total strategy”; conscientious objection; war resisters.

**Slutelwoorde:** Apartheid; militarisering; nasionale diensplig; dienspligtiges; Grensoorlog; “totale aanslag”; “totale strategie”; gewetensbesware; oorlogsteensoorlog.

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“OK people get up off your feet/its time to move to a different beat/We don’t like the way they’re running our days and nights/Our lives are out of phase/we’re Black White separated/Right from Birth indoctrinated/Years and years developed apart/Brainwashed each in the name of God/Let we educate ourselves/Lets re-educate ourselves/Hey white boy get your feet off the floor/The Lord gave you legs to march to war/Your leaders want you in a sporting affair/so put on your boots and cut your hair/Don’t talk back or stop to think/When you’re in Angola you can have a drink/Obey,obey they know the way/From here you go to SWA/Where they don’t dance when facing such hostility/They don’t dance/ Cos the SADF’s there to see that we all enjoy democracy/Cos the SAP are there to see that we all enjoy democracy.”<sup>2</sup>

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- 1 Tienie du Plessis is a publisher based in Pretoria. E-mail: brak@telkomsa.net; Gert van der Westhuizen is a journalist with Media24 and military historian. E-mail: gvanderw@sport24.co.za; Ian Liebenberg is Acting Director of the Centre for Military Studies, South African Military Academy and Associate Professor in the Faculty of Military Science, Stellenbosch University. E-mail: jcr1@ma2.sun.ac.za
  - 2 Lyrics of the song *Don’t dance* by the Kalahari Surfers that appeared on the *Forces Favourite: 12 songs by South Africans supporting the End Conscription Campaign*, a record originally

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The South African soldiers who distinguished themselves on the battlefields of Africa and Europe during two world wars were neither conscripted nor forced into military service. After the Second World War the South African government relied mainly on the Active Citizen Force, which functioned on a voluntary basis, to supplement the manpower needs of its armed forces. The National Party government came to power in 1948 on the strength of its policy of apartheid that legalised and entrenched racial discrimination in an era of decolonisation and increasing concern for human rights after the horrors of Nazism. To maintain apartheid against opposition from what the regime considered a hostile world, it soon required increased manpower.<sup>3</sup> Eventually, more than half a million young white men<sup>4</sup> were conscripted in a futile attempt to maintain apartheid at home and sustain Pretoria's military adventures in Southern Africa. Of these, roughly 320 000 served on the border between South West Africa (Namibia) and Angola in some capacity, although not all of them took part in cross-border operations into countries such as Zambia, Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) and Angola.

Conscription and military service influenced the lives of hundreds of thousands of white men in South Africa, especially during the 1970s and 1980s. "It seemed as if my whole life had been shaped by the army," one author, who emigrated to avoid serving in the South African Defence Force (SADF), remarked recently.<sup>5</sup> But in the 1980s growing numbers grew tired of this continued intervention in their lives, while others opposed conscription on moral grounds. It was not an easy thing to do – to declare publicly in a militarised society that conscription was immoral because the SADF was participating in an unjust war. White society was ideologically socialised, limited to top-down "freedoms" and "responsibilities" and sanctions for dissent were harsh. Consequently, the anti-conscription movement never became

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released in 1986 by Shifty Records. See the sleeve notes on the undated re-issued CD by Shifty Records.

- 3 On the rise of an authoritarian state in South Africa, consult Ian Liebenberg, "From racialism to authoritarianism: South Africa, militarized politics and the implosion of state legitimacy under apartheid", ISPAIM Occasional Paper 10(16), entitled *Changing security paradigms in Romania and South Africa after the Cold War* (Bucharest, 2011), p. 64ff.
- 4 According to one source 600 000 white males were conscripted. See D Williams, *On the border: The white South African military experience, 1965-1990* (Cape Town, 2008), p. 21. Magnus Malan, former chief of the Defence Force and Minister of Defence, put the figure at more than 500 000: M Malan, *My lewe saam met die SA Weermag* (Pretoria, 2006), p. 89. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission reckoned nearly 428 774 men were conscripted between 1960 and 1992: Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa, *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report, Volume 4* (Cape Town, 1998), p. 224. (Hereafter referred to as *TRC Report*).
- 5 D McRae, *Under our skin: A white family's journey through South Africa's darkest years* (London, 2012), p. 404.

a mass movement, but its influence was felt widely in an era when South Africa was, to all intents and purposes, an ideological battleground during the dying days of the Cold War. The mere existence of this movement was disconcerting to the government as it pointed to resistance from within white ranks and it acted overtly and covertly against it. Yet, the ideas propagated by the anti-conscription movement led to the establishment of a vibrant sub-culture that attracted more and more young white people to its fold. Even, and from the government's point of view this was all the more disturbing, (young) Afrikaners increasingly embraced the philosophies expounded by the anti-war movement in the country.

The article begins by pointing out how the government and the SADF needed more and more conscripts as its wars outside, and conflict inside, the country escalated. We point out how the need for more and more "willing" conscripts was underpinned by an intense process of socialisation which was started at primary school and intensified at secondary school. In the third part of this article, we will deal with the resistance to what was considered to be an unjust war and the counter measures the government undertook in an attempt to nip this rebellion in the bud. When one thinks of resistance to conscription, the End Conscription Campaign (ECC) stands out because it was very vocal as well as the focal point of public and government attention. But resistance, which was not always as public or visible as that of the ECC, was ever present. As the article deals only with white conscripts, it will not refer to volunteers or to Namibian conscripts and soldiers of other races. The scope will be limited to the white South African community's experience of militarisation.

## 2. CONSCRIPTION UNDER APARTHEID

According to the 1957 Defence Act white men were eligible for conscription for a period of nine months. Recruits were called up by means of a lottery formula or ballot system; hence the name *lotelinge* for those who served. The first intake numbered 7 000 men and the initial training period lasted three months. This system was done away with in 1967 when the Defence Act was amended and from January 1968 there were two yearly intakes of national servicemen; in January and June. Some of these recruits were trained as supplementary instructors due to a shortage of manpower in the permanent force. Now approximately 25 000 white men between the ages of 17 and 20 were called up for national service each year, considerably more than the approximately 10 000 men who did annual national service before the amendment. By the mid-1970s initial national service was a full two years and servicemen still had to report for post-national service commitments.<sup>6</sup>

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6 Compare among others, *South African Defence Force Review* (Durban, 1988), pp. 17-21; H-R Heitman, *Die Suid-Afrikaanse krygsmag* (Johannesburg, 1985), p. 27; Williams, p. 23ff.

In 1972 the period of initial service was extended to twelve months. This was to be followed by a further 19 days of annual service over a period of five years as members of the Citizen Force. By 1975 this service could include border stints or operational duty, ostensibly for three months at a time. But the South African Defence Force and politicians always needed more manpower, especially after military excursions in neighbouring countries became an intrinsic component of South Africa's foreign policy. In 1977, one year after the first invasion of Angola by South African forces, national service was increased to two years plus annual 30-day camps for a period of eight years.<sup>7</sup> A short service system was implemented. Trained members of the Citizen Force, Commandos, Permanent Force reserves and national servicemen had the option of applying for enlistment for a period of three years. A once-off fee of R500 was paid to everyone who agreed to short service and they all received the allowances of a normal Permanent Force soldier.<sup>8</sup> By January 1978, approximately one thousand additional soldiers had taken this option, and after 1978 short service became a useful force multiplier for the SADF as more men joined, some for a second term and some eventually enlisting in the Permanent Force.<sup>9</sup>

The Defence Amendment Acts making these changes were enacted with the support of the liberal opposition in the white parliament. Ironically few, if any, of the white Afrikaner Nationalist leaders who enforced military service on the children of their white compatriots ever experienced war themselves.<sup>10</sup> The militarisation of South African society, subtly done at first, increased as internal and external opposition to apartheid became widespread during the 1970s and 1980s. The independence of the Portuguese colonies of Angola and Mozambique in the middle of the 1970s and Zimbabwe in 1980 increased the perceived fears of the white population and their siege mentality was further entrenched by the government's "total strategy". By 1972 a State Security Council (SSC) was instituted; a clear indication that hawkish security thinking was on the rise. South

7 A Seegers, *The military in the making of modern South Africa* (London, 1996), p. 147. Also see M Alexander, "The militarisation of white South African society, 1948-1994", *Scientia Militaria* 30, 2000, pp. 267-289, and G Callister, *Compliance, compulsion and contest: Aspects of military conscription in South Africa, 1952-1992* (MA, University of Stellenbosch, 2007).

8 T du Plessis, *Diensplig*. Consultant's written contribution for a television documentary entitled *Grensoorlog (Border War)* produced for M-Net/Kyknet, Pretoria, 2005.

9 *Kort diens* or short service contracts were offered to national servicemen. The contract implied joining the South African Defence Force (SADF) [Afrikaans: *Suid-Afrikaanse Weermag* or *SAW*] for a further year on a renewable contract. Some men after short service chose to join the permanent force as career soldiers/non-commissioned/commissioned officers, <[www.sadf.info/Title%20Army.html](http://www.sadf.info/Title%20Army.html)>, accessed 19 September 2012.

10 See in this regard the bitter remarks by a disgruntled ex-serviceman in C Louw, *Boetman en die swanesang van die verligtes* (Cape Town, 2001), p. 10.

Africa became a security state in the making.<sup>11</sup> The securocrats became entrenched in government when PW Botha, a former Minister of Defence, took over the leadership of the National Party in 1978. A year later the government came to the conclusion that South Africa faced a “total onslaught” that could only be withstood by implementing a “total strategy”. This strategy obviously necessitated the “total” mobilisation of the white community; something that was reflected in the increasing number of conscripts.

Although observers never quite agreed on the exact numbers, it was evident that the state was increasing its military might. According to a 1970 report the army’s reserve numbered 60 000 men, with 22 000 soldiers under training at any given time. Four years later the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) reported that the Permanent Force consisted of 18 000 members supplemented by 92 000 in the Citizen Force.<sup>12</sup> Eight months after South African forces withdrew from their first Angolan invasion dubbed Operation Savannah, a weekly magazine with close governmental ties stated that the Permanent Force numbered 16 000 members, and perhaps even more. It hastened to add that two call ups per year would bring another 30 000 trainees per annum into the equation, while Commandos (territorial defence units) had a minimum manpower of 75 000. It concluded that the Republic of South Africa could mobilise up to 400 000 soldiers in times of war.<sup>13</sup>

Ten years later figures pointed to a significant increase. During the mid-eighties, the number of men in the total reserves had risen to 455 000, those for the active reserve (Citizen Force) to 175 000, and those for Commandos to 130 000. In 1981 a full deployment of the South African Defence Force (SADF) could muster an estimated 168 000 soldiers, only 7,5 per cent of which were Permanent Force members. After the period of service had been extended to two years, it was estimated at the beginning of the 1980s that approximately 60 000 conscripts underwent training every year.<sup>14</sup> The extent to which conscripts provided the backbone of the SADF became evident: “The SADF believed the first demand of a military was manpower. This translated into two avenues: expanding the

11 C van der Westhuizen, *White power & the rise and fall of the National Party* (Cape Town, 2008), pp. 121-123; KW Grundy, *The militarization of South African politics* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 34ff and 58ff; H Giliomee & H Adam, *Afrikanermag: Opkoms en toekoms* (Stellenbosch, 1981), pp. 197-198.

12 The figures provided by Seegers differ from those of the IISS. According to her, the Permanent Force already consisted of 17 951 members in 1960 and that number increased to 30 749 in 1970. Seegers, pp. 146-147. Published literature here presents some inconsistencies. David Williams in his work entitled *On the border, 1965-1990* claims that towards the end of the 1970s, “there were about 60 000 (conscripts) in training or trained at any given time” (Cape Town, 2008), p. 24.

13 “What will happen if South Africa is attacked”, *To the Point*, 5 (50), 10 December 1976, p. 7.

14 Williams, p. 24.

standing contingent and increasing the cohort and length of national service.”<sup>15</sup> At any given time after 1975, the number of conscripts and those on call up from the Active Citizen Force on an annual basis far superseded the number of Permanent Force members. By 1984-1985, when large scale incursions into Angola and the first deployment of the military in black townships in South Africa became routine during the first state of emergency, the IISS reported that the armed forces numbered 83 400 of which 53 000 were conscripts, while the total mobilised strength was 404 00. The Army boasted 67 400 staff members with 10 000 white, 5 400 black and Coloured regulars, 2 000 women, and 50 000 conscripts organised into nine territorial commands.<sup>16</sup> At the height of the Angolan War in 1988, the IISS put the number of the South African soldiers at 103 500, which included 67 900 white conscripts. The staff of the Army increased from 67 400 tot 75 000.<sup>17</sup>

Needless to say, the load that a member of the Citizen Force had to bear became more burdensome. The issue became even more acute after 1984, when the SADF was increasingly deployed domestically to combat internal unrest. Towards the end of 1984 the SSC ordered 7 000 soldiers to assist the South African Police in controlling spiralling violence in townships. Two years later, soldiers were deployed in some 96 townships country-wide. More than 10 000 troops,<sup>18</sup> mostly conscripts and members of the Citizen Force, were thus kept busy with what a large percentage of them considered to be the duty of the police. “The Border” was no longer a distant place somewhere between Northern Namibia and Angola – it now encompassed “home” as well.

The thousands of young white men who went through the mill of national service did so for various reasons, many simply because they saw no other option and just wanted to get it over and done with in order to get on with their lives. Many conscripts thus served stoically or without question. Many others did so enthusiastically, many even with pride.<sup>19</sup> Although the reasons for their willingness to serve in the armed forces varied, the socialisation process they had been subjected to from early, impressionable ages was one of the most important factors that helped to provide the SADF with the manpower it needed.

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15 Seegers, p. 147.

16 International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance, 1984-1985* (London, 1985), p. 82.

17 International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance, 1988-1989* (London, 1989), pp. 139-140.

18 K O'Brien, *The South African intelligence services: From apartheid to democracy, 1948-2005* (London/New York, 2001), p. 100.

19 For examples see *Positiewe ervarings en boodskappe van sommige voormalige dienspligtiges en ander ondersteuners*, *SAW Symposium, 30 August 1997*. Another example is to be found in Ig van Niekerk, “Laaitie tot ’n man – hoe die weermag my van die lewe geleer het”, *Grensoorlog/Border War 1966-1989*. Special edition of the *Journal for Contemporary History* 31(3), pp. 349-369.

### 3. THE WILLING

Socialisation is a process in which socialisation agents such as parental care and the family, cultural institutions, schools, universities, churches, peer groups, political leaders (as role models), the place of work and sports organisations play a role. It is also a process that from cradle to grave constructs “social realities” and “optic angles” that may differ from others in other societies or even within the same society. HM Johnson argues that most people in isolated societies do not think through the underlying assumptions of their world view or the implications of the customs and habits that they follow. A tendency to accept orders or commands “unquestioningly” characterises especially hierarchical societies. In such cases, non-reflected action is both prevalent and pervasive.<sup>20</sup>

The extensive legislation regulating racial segregation contributed to relatively isolated communities in white apartheid society. South African society, and especially Afrikaner society, was built on a hierarchical approach, even more so within the military. Add to this bureaucracies that “manifest a tendency to routine, a resistance to new ways of doing things” (and thinking anew, one may add) and the picture becomes stark.<sup>21</sup> Military bureaucracies and military life in general result in an acute and “deeply” penetrating socialisation process. This happened to a large degree with potential conscripts and those who served in the military and frequently such socialisation remained with them afterwards. Socialisation for the defence of apartheid started early. Socialisation in an ideologically laden society plays an important part in mobilising the whole population against internal or foreign enemies. This was, and is not, exceptional, and definitely not limited to apartheid society as examples from ideologically diverse societies such as Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union, Cambodia, Israel, Imperial Japan and the United States of America prove. Garrison-minded societies tend to mobilise people on the homeland principle – against some “other” (the enemy). South Africa was no exception. Early socialisation in an apartheid society, together with further socialisation through selective ideological filters, created the potential for an obedient military labour force. Media censorship and disinformation worsened the situation. The author of the play *Somewhere on the border* remarked that he did not realise that by doing National Service he would defend an ideology rather than a sovereign state. He ascribed his ignorance of the major ideological confrontation in South Africa to censorship and the banning of opposition political movements.<sup>22</sup>

20 HM Johnson, *Sociology: A systematic introduction* (London, 1971), pp. 8-9.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 310.

22 A Akerman, *Somewhere on the border* (Johannesburg, 2012), p. ix. Media censorship, closed communities, group think and international isolation all contributed to an element of collective ignorance within the white South African community. The militarisation of white society and the result of the military occupation in Namibia and aggression in Angola were internationally

This play, it should be added, was promptly banned in 1983 by the censors. One of the reasons given was that its portrayal of the armed forces was “prejudicial to the safety of the state”.<sup>23</sup>

The socialisation process of white South African schoolchildren was particularly effective. It was succinctly summed up by an ex-conscript in his memoirs: “I always knew that one day I would be a soldier; every white South African boy knew that. It was what you did when you finished school.”<sup>24</sup> The inculcation of such ideas started in the classroom. School curricula made provision for a subject called “Youth Preparedness” (*Jeugweerbaarheid*) that was compulsory in all white secondary schools in the then provinces of the Cape, the Orange Free State and Transvaal. It consisted of six components: “spiritual preparedness, physical preparedness, first aid, fire fighting, and emergency plan for schools and general affairs”.<sup>25</sup> A textbook used in some Transvaal schools stated bluntly that the country was not only threatened on its borders by “anti-Christian forces”, but that the “volk” had to battle the “forces of evil”.<sup>26</sup> Attempts at indoctrination were taken further in the Transvaal and the Orange Free State where the dreaded veld schools (*veldskole*) were instituted and made compulsory for learners in their last year of primary school and in grade 10 (standard 8). Learners, boys and girls, were taken to military style camps in isolated rural areas such as Schoemansdal, Hobhouse, Zastron and Glenmore, where they were subjected to a continued stream of propaganda and physical exercises. Lecturers attempted to hammer home the idea of a “total onslaught” orchestrated by “communists”. Attendees were told that South Africa’s enemies would use every means at their disposal in this onslaught. “In veld school, we did communism, we did the South African flag, we did terrorism, and one whole lecture was about how sex, communism and drugs all goes into the music we listen to”, one interviewee told an author.<sup>27</sup>

Veld schools also served to give boys a foretaste of what they could expect when they eventually had to take up weapons in the SADF to keep these enemies at bay. Similar to cadet camps, some enjoyed it and uncritically saw it as adventure only.

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well known, but, due to strict censorship, sadly not among the great majority of white citizens in South Africa. See for example, Catholic Institute of International Relations, *South Africa in the 1980s: State of Emergency* (London, 1980) on “National Security Ideology” and “State Violence” as well as military involvement in Namibia and Angola. Also compare Kairos Werkgroep, *Kerk en bevrijdings-bewegingen* (Utrecht, 1981). White South African readers, however, had no access to such materials.

23 Akerman, p. xviii.

24 J Delaney & J Greenough, *Staying alive: The paratrooper’s story* (Oxford/Grand Rapids, 2004), p. 10.

25 J Frederickse, *South Africa, different kind of war: From Soweto to Pretoria* (Johannesburg, 1986), pp. 8 and 186.

26 FJN Harman (ed.), *Ons vir jou Suid-Afrika* (Pretoria/Cape Town, 1979), p. 1.

27 Frederickse, p. 9. Also see pp. 8-11 and 186 for more on veld schools.



That not everybody was convinced was amply and somewhat poignantly illustrated by an author who later emigrated to avoid doing national service:

“Late that Friday afternoon, I was the last off the bus. Mom was waiting for me, her face alight with happiness. I could have cried when I saw her but, instead, I just hugged her and told her how glad I was to be home. And then, stepping back, I shook my head.

‘I’m never going,’ I said.

‘Where?’ she asked.

‘The army,’ I said softly.”<sup>28</sup>

It was difficult, if not well-nigh impossible, for learners at secondary schools to escape from the all-pervading militarism that was increasingly becoming the norm. The cadet system at schools also served as a means whereby boys were prepared for military service. From the middle of the 1970s it was put on a firmer footing.<sup>29</sup> By 1974 it was reckoned that the country had approximately 58 000 cadets and 2 000 teachers who acted as officers.<sup>30</sup> Little more than a decade later it was estimated that 658 cadet divisions existed throughout the country with 193 254 cadets and 2 942 officers. The more populous Transvaal had 262 divisions and 105 136 cadets. Only about 20 private schools and ten government schools had, by this time, not implemented the system.<sup>31</sup> The cadet system was administered and financed by the South African Army and teachers who were officers in the Commandos or had already undergone national service took charge of training. The SADF initially denied that this system was instituted to train the youth as soldiers. It was supposedly rather meant to instil a sense of “national pride, responsible citizenship and preparedness” by teaching learners the basics of drilling, field craft and musketry.<sup>32</sup> Ten years later there was no longer any pretence. *Cadets*, the official magazine of the SADF, told its readers, formed a bulwark against communism and it no longer made a secret of the fact that cadet training served to prepare boys to become better soldiers.<sup>33</sup> In 1987 a columnist in an Afrikaans newspaper sang the praises of the cadet system by pointing out that through it “boys” become better soldiers.<sup>34</sup>

Cadet training and cadet camps were handy propaganda tools for the apartheid government and as the historian of one school wrote, it “is perhaps the least

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28 McRae, p. 134. See pp. 125-134 for an excellent description of a veld school experience.

29 The State Security Council was established in 1972 and “total defence” against a “total onslaught” became part of a pervasive ideological mindset. In the process the white electorate, including the rank and file of rural National Party supporters and (the whites only) parliament, were gradually losing any leverage on political power and were co-opted into a bureaucratic security state designed by hawks in ascendance.

30 *Paratus*, March 1974, p. 59.

31 MJ Viljoen, “Die ontstaan en ontwikkeling van die skoolkadette-stelsel in die RSA: Grepe uit die geskiedenis en ’n oorsig oor die huidige stelsel”, *Scientia Militaria* 15(3), 1985, p. 48.

32 *Paratus*, March 1974, p. 59.

33 *Ibid.*, February 1984, pp. 34-35. Also see Viljoen, pp. 45-46.

34 *Die Burger*, 28 April 1987, p. 10.

'neutral' activity in which a school can engage during a time of political conflict".<sup>35</sup> Cadet training was definitely not popular amongst the majority of schoolboys. But there was little, if indeed anything, they could have done to avoid it. The one avenue of resistance open to boys who despised cadet training was to make a mockery of it:

"The average College boy's attitude to this activity had not changed – just as in the 1920's most of them would have sold their mothers into the harem of a one-eyed sultan to escape this particular brand of martyrdom, but the difference was that most of them now performed as if they had succeeded in carrying out this transaction. In some years, the annual cadet inspections were a source of acute embarrassment, with the detachment resembling a giant octopus with Parkinson's disease."<sup>36</sup>

Many schools, certainly not all of them Afrikaans, prided themselves on their cadet detachments and bands and took regional and countrywide competitions very seriously. A school's prestige was also enhanced if its detachments and bands could perform during public occasions such as the visits of high-ranking government officials, ministers and even the state president to a town or city. In these circumstances, active opposition to cadet training within government schools was nearly impossible. The End Conscription Campaign (ECC) did launch a "Cadets Out" campaign, but its impact was mainly restricted to private schools where some teachers sympathised with the ECC's aims and alternatives to cadet training already existed.<sup>37</sup>

Learners took the ideologically slanted ideas taught at schools with them to university.<sup>38</sup> A study conducted at traditional white universities in 1989 found that 46,6 per cent of students at Afrikaans universities felt "very sympathetic towards the security establishment and 38 per cent sympathetic". Thus only 15 per cent of white Afrikaans-speaking students were apathetic or unsympathetic towards the security forces.<sup>39</sup>

"A similar pattern can be observed in attitudes towards conscription and the refusal to do military service as a form of political protest. Among Afrikaner male students 86,3 per cent said that they would never refuse to do military service as a form of protest,

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- 35 J Young, *The spirit of the tower: The grey 1856-2006* (Port Elizabeth, 2006), p. 232.  
 36 S Haw & R Frame, *For hearth and home: The story of Maritzburg College 1863-1988* (Pietermaritzburg, 1988), p. 434.  
 37 MW Phillips, *The End Conscription Campaign 1983-1988: A study of white extra-parliamentary opposition to apartheid* (MA, University of South Africa, 2002), p. 74. Though the campaign was limited to only a few schools, the mere fact that it was launched was a headache for the authorities.  
 38 For a case study on (changing) political attitudes at one Afrikaans-speaking university, the University of Stellenbosch, and its effect on relations with the military, see Deon Visser and Ian Liebenberg, "Afrikaner Nationalism, tertiary military education and civil discontent: Student attitudes at an Afrikaans University, 1950-1989," ACTA: 34<sup>th</sup> Congress of the International Commission of Military History (Vol. II) entitled *Military conflicts and civil populations: Total wars, limited wars, asymmetric wars* (Rome, 2009), pp. 675-692, but especially pp. 686, 689- 691.  
 39 J Gagiano, "Ruling group cohesion in South Africa: A study of political attitudes among white university students", in I Liebenberg (ed.), *Worlds of difference: The political attitudes of white students in South Africa. An IDASA research report* (Mowbray, 1990), p. 21.

while 55,7 per cent of English speaking males said so ... (a)mong Afrikaners only 2,7 per cent said that they would do so (refuse military service) and a further 7 per cent that they would consider it ... (a)mong the Afrikaners the ECC (End Conscription Campaign), an organisation that has denounced the political role of the SADF and which actively discourages military service, has had very little impact whereas it has a strong support among English speaking students.”<sup>40</sup>

Repression potential (agreement with hard-handed action towards protest, even if peaceful) was high. Nearly 90 per cent of Afrikaans-speaking students said that protest meetings should be broken up by security/police forces. Sixty one per cent of National Party supporting students felt that it was justified to break up protest meetings and 74 per cent of Conservative Party members agreed.<sup>41</sup>

#### **4. NATIONHOOD, CIVIL STRIFE AND MORAL OBJECTIONS: THE NOT SO WILLING**

By the beginning of the 1980s, it could have appeared to the casual observer that the socialisation and militarisation of white apartheid were strengthening the hands of the government in its military endeavours. But it was not a monolithic society. It was a deeply divided one; and cracks were starting to appear. Opposition took many forms, of which resistance to conscription was one. More and more conscripts moved on the spectrum from enthusiastic to willing and then unwilling, while a small minority embraced total resistance through peaceful and violent means. Conscripts and members of the Citizen Force were becoming increasingly frustrated with the continued intervention in their lives and compulsory military service was becoming more and more unpopular. There were several reasons for this. Conscripts had to face the real threat of social and economic disruption, and there were even complaints that employers were prejudiced against members of their workforce who were called up for annual camps.<sup>42</sup> As political objection to conscription was punishable by law, other avenues of avoidance were explored. Some, like 4 622 men in 1980, simply decided not to report for military service, and others tried to avoid conscription by not notifying the authorities of changes of address.<sup>43</sup> Incidences of courts martial grew exponentially with the SADF's increased involvement in active combat in the operational area. Magnus Malan, the Minister of Defence, admitted that more than half (263) of the 484 conscripts in detention barracks at the beginning of 1982 were detained for refusing to do duty.

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40 Gagiano, p. 21.

41 *Ibid.*, p. 29. Also compare S Booysen, “Cohesion, dissent and contradiction in the political world of South Africa’s white student youth” in Liebenberg, pp. 35-62.

42 Phillips, pp. 6-7. Also see C Lingle, “On the real costs of military conscription”, *South African Journal of Economics* 57(3), pp. 178-183.

43 Phillips, p. 7.

And the Prime Minister, PW Botha, reckoned that only 20-30 per cent of national servicemen were highly motivated.<sup>44</sup>

Some people were also starting to doubt the morality of joining the escalating war. South Africa experienced a low level insurgency war inside the country, and in its efforts to maintain control over Namibian politics, the government and its generals contributed to the civil war in Angola with dire effects on the infrastructure of the country and the resultant large scale dislocation of people in Southern Angola. Other countries, apart from occupied Namibia, also bore the brunt of South Africa's total strategy. Attacks by air, special force operations and even assassinations were all part of South Africa's attempts to coerce the Frontline States to toe its line. South Africa supported the renegade Renamo movement in Mozambique, for example, and was not averse to launching attacks in countries such as Zambia, Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Swaziland and Botswana. Economic pressures were frequently used to augment these security operations in an attempt to maintain a grip on the region. But the regional war was also increasingly coming home: the apartheid government simultaneously waged a low-key civil war against its own citizens inside the country.<sup>45</sup> The government tried to justify its strategy as a battle on behalf of Christian civilisation against godless communists, terrorists and agitators under the control of Moscow who masterminded a strategy to engulf South Africa and its strategic resources.<sup>46</sup> It should have been easy to justify such a strategy in a country where approximately 70 per cent of the population professed to be Christian.

## 5. RELIGIOUSNESS/SPIRITUALITY AND OBJECTION TO APARTHEID AT WAR

Through the ages Christians have a long and proud tradition of opposing what they regard as unjustified war. South Africa itself did not have a strong tradition of Christian Pacifism. John de Gruchy argued: "First of all, it should be understood

44 PH Frankel, *Pretoria's praetorians: Civil-military relations in South Africa* (Cambridge, 1984), p. 135.

45 See C Schutte, I Liebenberg & A Minnaar (eds), *The hidden hand* (Pretoria, 1998) for internal repression. For regional violence, see P Johnson & D Martin (eds), *Frontline Southern Africa: Destructive engagement* (New York, 1988).

46 For examples of arguments within this mindset, see GA Cruywagen, "Ek sê wat ek wil! Waar staan u mnr. Naudé?", *Ster*, 18 December 1970, p. 53; "Die week van die generaals" in *Die Brandwag*, 7 January 1977, p. 86ff; "Verdedigingsbegroting", *Die Brandwag*, 7 January 1977, p. 85; "Military defensibility brings stability", *Byvoegsel/Supplement Paratus*, September 1976, p. i; "Ons moet saamstaan en hard werk" (interview with Magnus Malan), *Byvoegsel/Supplement Paratus*, September 1976, p. xiv; "Kerk moet nooit primêre doel verwaarloos" (interview with the State President), *Die Kerkbode* (official newspaper of the Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk), 16 March 1988, p. 16.

that there is virtually no pacifist tradition in South Africa.<sup>47</sup> Some, by conviction, resisted any form of violence under any circumstances including serving under the arms of the state. Others believed in just resistance – even if violent – but they were opposed to serving an unjust cause on behalf of an iron-fisted state that upheld injustice.<sup>48</sup> It should have come as no surprise then that the war was viewed with suspicion by many Christians, even if the apartheid state claimed to fight on behalf of Christianity and many in uniform, including the chaplain services, declared the apartheid state as a bastion and homeland of Christianity.<sup>49</sup> Increasing social tensions and violence led to moral concerns, which eventually resulted in resistance. Christian pacifists initially resisted the notion of joining the SADF as *lotelinge* or conscripts. The majority of these objectors were Jehovah's Witnesses who were widely discredited by the Afrikaans churches and the media. Despite anti-conscription activities being criminalised by the Defence Amendment Act of 1974, this type of resistance increased. More objectors joined the fray, many of them members of the mainstream churches. A Board for Religious Objection (Act 34 of 1983) was eventually created to allow these people to object to military service on the grounds of religion. The state decided that objectors could apply for alternative service on the grounds of religious conscience, not secular or political beliefs.<sup>50</sup> Thus, a Christian conscience that dictated that the defence and upholding of apartheid was tantamount to an unjust war, while Christian support for the struggle

47 John W de Gruchy, *The church struggle in South Africa* (Cape Town, 1979), p. 143. In this context the Hammanskraal Declaration of 1974 by the South African Council of Churches should be seen. "Thus the Hammanskraal Statement was not (only) a product of the peace churches; in fact it was not strictly a pacifist document. Fundamental to its logic was the 'just war' theory, a theory dependent on situational analysis, and one which no thorough pacifist would use to defend or promote his position." The inherent tension between principled/universal pacifism and those supporting a just war against an unjust government was to mark resistance to conscription in South Africa throughout.

48 Compare De Gruchy, p. 142ff. See also Charles Villa-Vicencio, *Trapped in apartheid: A socio-theoretical history of the English-speaking churches* (New York, 1988), pp. 156, 158-159. On this topic from a revisionist Calvinist point of view consult Allen Boesak, *Black and reformed: Apartheid, liberation and the Calvinist tradition* (Johannesburg, 1984), pp. 39, 42-43.

49 For a defence of conscription and a critique against conscientious objection to military service in the military forces under Nationalist Party rule, consult *Geloofsbesware teen diensplig en verbandhoudende sake*. The document was issued by the Dutch Reformed Church elective leadership (Breë Moderatuur van die Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk) (Pretoria, 1980). For an example of a practical manual for national servicemen, see Rob K Gee, *AAANDAG! 'n Handleiding vir Christelik nasionale dienspligtiges* with a foreword by Dr Louw Alberts (Cape Town, 1974). Gee was at the time Director of the Unit for Action under the Armed Forces and based at Lenz Military Base.

50 Seegers, p. 177. For a general overview, see Catholic Institute for International Relations & Pax Christi, *War and conscience in South Africa: The churches and conscientious objection* (London, 1982). The view of the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk is contained in P Potgieter, *Die Christen en oorlog: 'n Bybelkor-kursus* (Wellington, 1981).

of the oppressed was just, would not have impressed the authorities.<sup>51</sup> To argue that one was an atheist, yet a pacifist or a non-Christian agnostic, who was opposed to wielding the sword on behalf of the state, would have been just as problematic. Needless to say, the argument that one was an atheist who morally disagreed/agreed with violent resistance against the dehumanising structural violence of apartheid was even less likely to be tolerated or entertained by the board. Yet the number of men who chose to walk the gauntlet of alternative service, despite public vilification and slandering, rose. Between February 1984 and September 1989 some 1 890 potential conscripts applied for alternative service. In 1989 alone 286 conscripts applied for alternative service.<sup>52</sup>

South Africa's ruling regime, driven by an ideology of (white) Christian Nationalism, did not lend a sympathetic ear to non-religious objectors to the war in defence of "Christian civilisation". Even judges seemed too scared or chose not to object to the limited range of what the legislation at the time allowed in terms of objection to war. In short, the security minded mentality of the state and white society was increasingly undermining the moral and social fabric of South African society.<sup>53</sup> Jurists and legal practitioners offered critical perspectives. They broadly argued that the destruction of the rule of law by security legislation was to have negative consequences for democracy in a future South Africa.<sup>54</sup> Security legislation limited the rights of white South Africans as well as those rights supposedly available to blacks. So did the amendments to the Defence Act.<sup>55</sup> In South Africa then, even in law, conflict resolution was based on domination or coercion. As a result, control by the civil authorities within the apartheid state (including the "reformist" version) was precariously weakened.<sup>56</sup>

The objection of universal pacifists, those who through convictions other than Christian beliefs resisted war, was initially not accepted as "legal" despite many appeals to government. One needed to be a universal pacifist on grounds of the Christian faith to be considered a conscientious objector. Objectors fell into two categories: (1) Those who objected to apartheid's war against other South Africans because they saw the minority government's war as unjust and not necessarily all

51 The Amendment of the Defence Act made conscientious objection a crime punishable with a fine of R5 000 and/or imprisonment for up to five years. John Dugard, *Human rights and the South African legal order* (New Jersey, 1978), p. 177.

52 Seegers, p. 177.

53 Some refer to the judicious mix of apartheid orientated nationalism, the rise of the security state, religious rationalisation for a strong state and technocratic legalism as "theologized nationalism". Villa-Vicencio, p. 140. The author expands on how such an ideology deeply influenced the notion of press freedom, individual rights and the role of the military, pp. 140-143.

54 Compare John Dugard and Anthony Matthews, *Freedom, state security and the rule of law: Dilemmas of the apartheid society* (Cape Town, 1986).

55 Matthews, p. 158. See also Dugard.

56 See Dugard, pp. 130ff, 155ff and 303ff, and Matthews, pp. 269ff, 281ff and 284.

wars; (2) those who were convinced that violence in any or all circumstances was against their beliefs, including serving in the military forces of any state. Add to this that moral repulse against violence and oppression is not the domain of Christians only, and the issue becomes more complex.<sup>57</sup>

Voices critical of church involvement in the military were heard. A Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) (*Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk*, NGK) group representing the *Aksie Sosiale Geregtheid* (Action for Social Justice) and the *Leer en Aktuele Sake Kommissie van die NGK Kerkjeugaksie* (Dutch Reformed Church Youth Movement) in Stellenbosch, for example, proposed a motion to the Western Cape Synod on chaplain services in 1985. They argued that the role of chaplains in the SADF was problematic because they wore the uniform of a biased and discriminatory state. The proposal was submitted to the conservative Dutch Reformed Church leadership at the Western Cape Synod and called for the structure of the chaplain services to be changed in order to allow people to conduct pastoral care without uniform and without being forced to get security clearances. The submission argued that a pastoral counsellor had to be neutral and not a representative of the state, or at least free to provide human care. A “chaplain” was supposed to affirm the support of a religious person to another in need as implied in the Christian scriptures.<sup>58</sup> The Action for Social Justice followed the example of the *Belydende Kring* (Witnessing Circle) and the Student Union for Christian Action (SUCA) in arguing that racial segregation and the policies of the government contradicted the unity of being that the New Testament preached. For these objectors the issue was one of a moral nature and deep conviction, although opponents labelled it as “black theology”, “subversive” and even “un-Christian”. Those opposing the state and its loyal church bodies soon found themselves isolated in a *verligte* (enlightened) Stellenbosch, which at heart tended to be either cautious or conservative despite the progressive liberal utterances and lip service to “reform”.<sup>59</sup>

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57 While noticeable in the Christian tradition, pacifism is not the domain of Christian believers only (M Schmidt and Van der Walt, *Black flame: The revolutionary class politics of anarchism and syndicalism* (Edinburgh, 2009), p. 204). Strong advocacy against all forms of pacifism was prevalent in early modern Europe. See Tallet & Frank, *War and society in early-modern Europe, 1495-1715* (London, 1997), pp. 238, 240-241. For a more basic text on the origins and complexities of pacifism, including non-Christian pacifism such as *satyāgraha*, read “Pacifism and nonviolent movements” in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Macropaedia, vol.13) (Tokyo, 1974), p. 845ff.

58 Such appeals were, and perhaps still are, not welcomed in a state that reflected authoritarian tendencies. In fact, numerous Western states still maintain chaplain services where chaplains wear the uniform of the military (the state’s ultimate claim to power), fill out security clearances, and are paid by the state, which make them by implication an officer of the state rather than the embodiment of God’s calling.

59 See for example, B Lategan & H Müller (eds), *Afrikaners tussen die tye* (Bramley, 1990).

Some of those who voiced protest and resistance from within the ranks of the Dutch Reformed Church eventually defected to other churches or left the church altogether. The *Belhar Belydenis* or Belhar Confession within the “non-white” Dutch Reformed Church (*NG Sendingkerk*), Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (*NGK in Afrika*) and Indian Reformed Church (IRC) played an important role in mobilising against what was seen as the heresy of apartheid and the ways in which it was upheld.<sup>60</sup> (Until today, the DRC has not seen its way open to sign the Belhar Confession unreservedly.) The Kairos Declaration followed and referred to the use of religion, specifically Christianity, as a state theology. After the Cottesloe meeting and Hammanskraal resolutions the gulf between the militarised apartheid state and the churches widened considerably. The South African Council of Churches (SACC) expressed solidarity with resisters despite minority objections. Several people of various denominations openly spoke out against compulsory military service. The Anglican Church was confronted with a debate on the issue of conscription and some individuals in the Presbyterian Church followed suit. The Catholic Church had always had its reservations about segregation and hence also with the way in which the state deployed its security forces. The South African Council of Churches and the South African Catholic Bishops’ Conference (SACBC) at first declared empathy and later solidarity with war resisters.<sup>61</sup>

## 6. STARK CHOICES: EXILE OR INTERNAL RESISTANCE?

One of the few options available to objectors during the 1970s was exile. It was estimated that approximately 1 000 South African objectors were granted exile in Britain alone between 1977 and 1981.<sup>62</sup> They were assisted by organisations such as the Committee on South African War Resistance (COSWAR), the South African Military Refugee Aid Fund in New York and the Stichting Werkgroep Kairos in the Netherlands. Apart from providing help to war resisters in exile, COSWAR clandestinely spread pamphlets to would-be conscripts, lobbied liberal bodies, political parties, churches and religious organisations and individuals. These organisations laid the groundwork for more organised and vocal resistance against conscription in South Africa where the Conscientious Objector Support Group had already been established in 1980. As early as 1982, student organisations, including

60 Even before the Belhar Confession a core group of pastors and theologians within the “non-white” Dutch Reformed Church or *susterskerke* played an important role in highlighting church unity against apartheid ideology. Shun Govender, ‘Een belijdende kerk in Zuid-Afrika? Met de moed der hoop. Opstellen aangeboden aan Dr CF Beyers Naudé (Baarn, 1985), p. 94ff. See also Shun P Govender (ed.), *Unity and justice: The witness of the belydende kring* (Braamfontein, 1984).

61 Marjorie Hope and James Young, *The South African churches in a revolutionary situation* (New York, 1981), p. 91ff.

62 Frankel, p. 133.



the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS), distributed booklets such as *Know your rights* to prospective conscripts. At the University of Cape Town a Conscription Action Group and support groups were established. The Black Sash openly expressed itself against conscription at its 1983 conference and in the same year the End Conscription Campaign (ECC) was established.<sup>63</sup> The ECC comprised people of pacifist conviction as well as people that were against the unjust war of apartheid, not necessarily all wars. Some in the ECC accepted the notion of a just war for a just cause, even in the case of apartheid's non-democratic rule. The ECC was to become one of the organisations that verbalised resistance to military service eloquently and visually. It also pointed successfully to the extent that the government was militarising politics without considering other ways to bring about an end to civil strife. The ECC's first public attempt at objecting to military service drew the support of 11 people who refused to serve in the SADF. This grew to more than 20 and later to more than 100 objectors.<sup>64</sup> This figure eventually increased to more than 700 in 1989 and included ex-servicemen and commissioned officers. Others, some that even used to belong to elite units such as the Parabats (paratroopers), also "objected" by ignoring their call-up papers. In the Afrikaans-speaking community, which was more militarised and where tighter social sanctions applied, "objectors" rather voted with their feet by not reporting for further camps. The ECC, though never a mass organisation in the true sense of the word, was vocal enough to disturb the authorities. Its meetings were increasingly monitored by security police, especially after the SADF was deployed in townships. Before it was eventually banned in 1989 under emergency regulations, its members were verbally abused, lambasted in public, monitored, ridiculed, harassed, detained, restricted and banned, while several were also sent to prison for refusing to don the uniform of the SADF.<sup>65</sup>

## 7. STATE REACTION

Counter-intelligence operators spent a significant amount of time and money on isolating and vilifying the ECC; ironically claiming at the same time that the ECC and its supporters were a minority, a lunatic fringe, isolated and misled. South African Military Intelligence was deeply involved in attempts to minimise the effect of the ECC. Government officials spoke out against the ECC whenever possible and the

63 K Spink, *Black Sash: The beginning of a bridge in South Africa* (London, 1991), pp. 218-223.

64 The exact number of men who publicly objected (many on political grounds) in 1988 was 143. Ben Schoeman, "Regverdige alternatiewe is nodig", *Kampus Kruis* 1(3), 16 Augustus 1988, p. 8. For another view along the same lines, see Sue Valentine, "Min dae brings no happiness: Wide support for civilian service", *Democracy in Action*, July/August 1990, p. 20.

65 For examples, see End Conscription Campaign, *End Conscription Campaign in perspective*, June 1987.

media joined the fray.<sup>66</sup> A favourite ploy of detractors was to question members of the ECC's manhood and patriotism; two qualities the masculine, militarised society that was South Africa thrived and put a very high premium on. The ECC was dubbed Every Coward's Choice and its members and sympathisers were castigated as traitors, liberals, communists, useful idiots for Marxism-Leninism, anarchists, losers and mad. They were also called *moffies* (gays), *holnaaiers* (faggots), and *banggatte* (fearful ones). One euphemism used for ECC supporters was "die agtermekaar-kêrels", a clear reference to that conscientious objectors were regarded as gay (homosexual) and by pejorative implication, fearful in nature.<sup>67</sup>

The nefarious activities of the state's counter-intelligence activities against the ECC were augmented with the establishment of various student and other bodies which were funded by the government. These included Veterans for Victory and the short-lived *Jeugkrug Suid-Afrika* (Youth for South Africa)<sup>68</sup> with the National Students Federation (NSF) being the most vocal and active. The NSF sprang up in the middle of the 1980s and soon established several affiliates on the campuses of Afrikaans and English universities.<sup>69</sup> Danie Kriel, chairman of the NSF-affiliated *Populêre Studente-alliansie* at the University of Stellenbosch, who later became the organisation's national president, described the NSF as the "only classical liberal" student movement in the country. The NSF tried to gain credibility by opposing some of the more hard-line apartheid legislation such as the Group Areas Act, but it soon became clear on whose behalf it acted. The NSF distributed glossy, expensive brochures and pamphlets, such as the one in which it pledged its support to the Unita-movement, the SADF's ally in the battle for Angola.<sup>70</sup> The NSF also joined in the smear campaign against the ECC accusing it of being "linked to the Kremlin" and "attempting to undermine the integrity of the SADF".<sup>71</sup> What many people had always expected, eventually transpired in 1991 when the South African Police admitted to funding the NSF. It was done, the SAP said,

66 See M Graaf (ed.), *Hawks and doves – the pro- and anti-conscription press in South Africa* (Durban, 1988).

67 For more on this, see D Conway, "'All these long-haired fairies should be forced to do their military training. Maybe they will become men'. The End Conscription Campaign, sexuality, citizenship and military conscription in apartheid South Africa", *South African Journal on Human Rights* 20, 2004, pp. 207-229.

68 *Jeugkrug* was funded by Military Intelligence as part of Project Essay. "For some years", *TRC Report* 2, p. 526. For *Jeugkrug's* view on the ECC, see the undated pamphlet *Jeugkrug SA/Youth for SA*, p. 15. *Jeugkrug's* chairperson was a Martinus van Schalkwyk who lectured at the University of Stellenbosch in Political Science after a sojourn at the Rand Afrikaans University as a National Party coordinator and a student of politics.

69 The PSA published the *PSA Bulletin* at Stellenbosch with a regular stream of articles against communism and terrorism, the value of the free market and articles attempting to discredit the "left". The PSA, headed by Nicholas Myburgh, among others, hosted a public meeting for a Unita delegation consisting of "Brigadier" Tito Chingunji, Wambu Chindodo and G Mozanga. *PSA Bulletin* 2, September 1986, p. 2.

70 National Student Federation, *20 years of struggle: Unita in Angola* (1985).

71 Catholic Institute for International Relations, *Out of step: War resistance in South Africa* (London, 1989), p. 104. See p. 114 for an anti-ECC leaflet distributed by the NSF.

in an attempt to establish “stability and law and order” on university campuses that were “plagued with unrest, class boycotts and intimidation of students” during the middle of the 1980s.<sup>72</sup> Security Police involvement with the NSF apparently had more sinister undertones than mere funding. Allegations based on an official police document stated that the NSF was a front for covert state operations on campuses and that some NSF officials even had police code names.<sup>73</sup>

The concerted attempts by the state to discredit, detain and harass those who opposed apartheid through moral conviction, apparently had the opposite effect. Resistance against the apartheid war, its politicians, spies and generals persisted. Resistance against war in the white community was far more widespread than just the activities of the ECC, or, as it was known in Afrikaans, the *Beëindig Diensplig Kampanje* (BDK) or *Eindig Diensplig Veldtog* (EDV). At Pretoria University the *Studente vir 'n Demokratiese Samelewing* (SDS) advocated resistance to apartheid and the tri-cameral system that excluded black South Africans from political participation. They openly organised activities to enhance non-racialism and non-sexism despite being vilified and harassed. At the Randse Afrikaanse Universiteit *Afrikane teen Apartheid* (ATA) criticised the use of the military while it advocated non-racial democracy, and at Stellenbosch the *Verenigde Stellenbosche Front* (VSF) continued their activities. All these groups expressed sympathy, if not solidarity, with the ECC. A debate on alternative national service (i.e. non-military service) sprung up. The Centre for Intergroup Studies based in Rondebosch, earlier known as the Abe Bailey Institute, attempted to arrange meetings between the government and people trying to express their discontent with the militarisation of white society. The centre, headed by Professor HW van der Merwe,<sup>74</sup> for some years also attempted to facilitate meetings around forms of non-discriminatory alternative service for conscientious objectors, be they Christian or non-Christian. The success of these initiatives varied, but mostly ended with pro-government spokespeople suggesting that the government is doing its level best to “accommodate *these* people” who may have “had good intentions, but were naïve”.<sup>75</sup>

72 *Beeld*, 3 August 1992, p. 2. Also see *TRC Report 2*, p. 529.

73 M Shear, *Wits: A university in the apartheid era* (Johannesburg, 1996), p. 68. *TRC Report 2*, p. 529. The NSF was run under Project Aristotle. It was one of the special projects the SAP embarked upon after being directed by the SSC to do so on 16 November 1985.

74 For Van der Merwe, see HW van der Merwe, *Peacemaking in South Africa: A life in conflict resolution* (Cape Town, 2000).

75 Compare Centre for Intergroup Studies, Workshop on Alternative National Service, 30-31 October 1989, Hohenhort Hotel, Constantia, Cape. Also see Centre for Intergroup Studies, *Conscientious Objection*, Occasional Paper 8 (First published 1983, further editions 1984, 1989). Especially relevant are pp. 42ff, 64ff and 82ff.

## 8. WAAR GAAN DIT EINDIG? OBJECTION GROWS WITHIN THE AFRIKANER COMMUNITY

It was clear that the debate on compulsory military service and the immorality of apartheid was slowly but surely permeating the Afrikaans community, where different forms of resistance manifested in a vibrant, if somewhat hedonistic, “alternative” sub-culture while the country was inexorably on the march to a new political dispensation towards the end of the 1980s.

Afrikaans musicians and groups such as the Kalahari Surfers, Cherry Faced Lurchers, Johannes Kerkorrel and the Gereformeerde Blues Band, Bernoldus Niemand, and André Letoit (Koos Kombuis) criticised the white state and its authoritarian leaders. Their songs were played by radio stations on Afrikaans campuses and their popularity steadily increased until it reached a crescendo with the Voëlvrý tour of 1989 in which several of these artists participated. “The Total Onslaught’s name is Voëlvrý,” proclaimed *Vrye Weekblad* and the *Cape Times* described it as “an unprecedented orgy of Afrikaner anarchy”.<sup>76</sup> The revolt was not limited to the musical arena. Small Afrikaans struggle publishers such as Taurus Publishers joined in with books such as *Forces favourites*, *Stanley en die boikot* and an alternative journal called *STET*. *Die Suid-Afrikaan* and later *Vrye Weekblad* painted a picture of a South Africa very different from that portrayed in the mainstream media and joined in the debate against conscription.<sup>77</sup> These publications subverted the heroic image of Afrikaner Nationalist authoritarianism and painted a picture of a socio-political regime increasingly caught up in sad absurdities and glaring discrepancies.<sup>78</sup> Within Afrikaans literary circles a whole genre of literature critical of apartheid militarisation that became known as *grensliteratuur* (border literature) appeared in the 1980s. It was disconcerting to the authorities that some of the authors were men who had already served in the military and participated in border contacts and could not simply be written off as *misleides* (the misled) or sissies.

The Institute for a Democratic Alternative for South Africa (Idasa) also played its role in disseminating anti-apartheid ideas across South Africa. Its activities drew the ire of the authorities, especially after it sponsored a delegation that engaged in talks with the banned African National Congress (ANC) in Dakar, Senegal, in 1987.

76 P Hopkins, *Voëlvrý: The movement that rocked South Africa* (Cape Town, 2006), pp. 9, 14. Also see A Grundlingh, “‘Rocking the boat’ in South Africa? Voëlvrý music and Afrikaans anti-apartheid social protest in the 1980s”, *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 37(3), 2004, pp. 483-514.

77 For examples, see *Die Suid-Afrikaan* 12, December 1987, pp. 34-37 and *Die Suid-Afrikaan* 17, October/November 1988, pp. 16-19.

78 For *Vrye Weekblad*, see M du Preez, “Oranje blanje blues: ’n Nostalgieuse trip”, *Vrye Weekblad* 88-94 (Cape Town, 2005).

The backlash from the government and the Afrikaans media did not deter Idasa. It even managed to organise a debate on the ANC's Freedom Charter at the University of the Orange Free State in Bloemfontein, that elicited a vehement right-wing response from organisations that included the NSF.<sup>79</sup> But the tide of history was turning against those opposed to democratisation. The Border War ended in 1989 and Namibia became independent in 1990, the same year in which the “new” South Africa was born when the ANC and other liberation organisations were unbanned. The NSF disbanded in shame in 1991 when its links to the Security Police became known and two years later there was no longer any need for the ECC when conscription was abolished. The ECC reckoned that only approximately 60 per cent of conscripts who were called up in 1993 reported for duty. The SADF refused to comment on this, only saying that the total intake was 16 per cent more than expected.<sup>80</sup>

## 9. CONCLUSION

The history of warfare in twentieth century South Africa was also one of division. People were divided by ideological, racial and other reasons during the Anglo-Boer War and both world wars. The era of the Border War and the insurrection in black townships was no exception, although the ideological battle was perhaps fiercer and carried on far longer than before. Most white males were confronted with call-up papers during this era. The majority of them did eventually serve in the SADF; some enthusiastically, proudly, blindly, stoically and perhaps grumbling (softly inwards). Some recalled their experiences with pride and joy, others with reservation. Some later questioned the way in which they were selectively informed and one-sidedly press-ganged to uphold a regime that abused even its own citizens. Some stated boldly afterwards that they would do it again; others said “never again”, yet fondly recalled moments of humour and comradeship in somewhat challenging circumstances and adverse conditions. Others remembered friends (and enemies) who had passed away or lived with nightmares. Some spoke about their experiences while others preferred to keep quiet. Each one of them dealt in a different way with their bag of memories/experiences, some more successfully than others. Fortunately, some of them decided to speak up for themselves rather than

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79 See the programme for Ordes-werkswinkel on 14-15 October 1988, *Wat kom na apartheid? Die Vryheidsmanifes in perspektief*. For the response to that, see the undated pamphlets of Kovsie Navorsingsgroep on the ANC/SAKP alliance, *Die Freedom Charter in perspektief: standpunte van die ANC/SAKP-alliansie* and Nasionale Studente Federasie, *Breek deur na ware vryheid: Die regte vryheidsmanifes*.

80 *Beeld*, 19 January 1993, p. 6.

allow the ideologues or generals to do so.<sup>81</sup> Their reflections on the history of the war and the social nature of South African society then and now has added value to an ongoing dialogue.

It is said that it takes a brave man (or woman) to go to war. Resistance to conscription during the apartheid era showed that it takes an even braver man (or woman) to resist war; that it requires moral fibre of a different kind. Resisters had to face dire consequences as we have shown. Even today, two decades after the end of the Border War, resisters are still referred to as cowards.<sup>82</sup> But they and others who decided to “de-educate” and “re-educate” themselves in the heady days of the 1980s, played no small part in hastening the end of apartheid. The first president of a democratic South Africa, Nelson Mandela, lauded ECC members for turning their backs on the privileges of minority rule by joining the fight for peace. “Your campaign against conscription put you firmly on the side of the democratic forces and contributed considerably to the overall efforts of the people of South Africa to overthrow racial oppression.”<sup>83</sup> Richard Steele, one of the jailed objectors, reckoned the ECC was a major threat to the government because its resistance came from within.<sup>84</sup> This sentiment was echoed by an academic who felt that resistance against conscription “opened a crack in the presumption of universal obedience to the state by the enfranchised ... As such it alarmed military authorities.”<sup>85</sup> War resisters also left South Africa, and the world, a lasting legacy. A religious columnist stated in 1997 in an Afrikaans newspaper that one can find more Christian pacifists in “our churches” than was the case in the 1980s. “It has become quite respectable to be opposed to war.”<sup>86</sup> Some erstwhile resisters have turned their attention to other wars such as the conflict in the Middle East.<sup>87</sup> In the end, by their courage and persistence under immense pressure, war resisters in South Africa set a commendable example to people throughout the world, something anyone who is confronted with moral choices in unjust wars of the future will be eternally thankful for.

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81 For a discussion of contemporary publications on the Border War, see I Liebenberg, G van der Westhuizen & T du Plessis, “Through the mirage: Retracing moments of a war ‘up there’”, *Scientia Militaria* 38(2), 2010, pp. 131-149.

82 See for instance the letter in *Beeld*, 21 January 2010, p. 20.

83 *The Star*, 28 October 2009, p. 15.

84 *Ibid.*

85 Seegers, p. 196.

86 *Beeld*, 20 March 1997, p. 16.

87 See the *EzineSmokebox* 46, <<http://www.smokebox.net/archives/what/morgan1206.html>>, accessed 6 June 2012.