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Stem (Voice):

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Welcome to war/ now go out and die/ And if by chance/ you should survive/ ignore the tormented sleep/ the far-off ghostly guns/ and the fetid pacing dead/ Dreams filled with silent screams heard by no one/ but you/ Just touch, and feel/ the seeping, sticky blood, which never dries/ on blown-off limbs/ and shattered minds.¹

Ensnared within this poem written by a white South African conscript is the relationship between gender, the body, and sound experienced by conscripts during the South African Border War, 1966 to 1990, where bombs, guns, diesel armored vehicles, music, songs, and conversations dominated the white ears of these soldiers. The poem reverberates with its ephemeral and ethereal tone, destabilizing the foundation of the conscript’s male body by positioning it within distant and fleeting images of guns and walking dead. As the narrator tries to grapple with their cognitive disturbance, their somatic body is unable to rest in the “real” world and is conceived within a haunting dreamscape of inhuman bodies and of a muted, impending danger manifesting an anxiety about the unknown. This tone is rendered through the structure of the poem, which features short, clipped lines — fragmentary — broken apart like the narrator’s inability to fully express the effect of the war. The writer uses the repetition of silencing in the seventh line, “silent screams” and “heard by no one,” as a way to articulate the sentiments of conscripts after the South African Border War, who had to confront their Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and other mental illnesses without recognition and support from family, friends, and a post-apartheid government that sought concurrently to diminish the memorialization of those that defended apartheid abroad.

Though this process is irreprouachable and understandable, it nevertheless exacerbated the shortcomings of the mental health system and disproportionately alienated whites of lower classes. The poem concludes with visceral imagery that tries to settle the body, “touch, and feel” the blood, but concludes “which never dries / on blown-off limbs/ and shattered minds.” The body is eternally cast disembodied, literally apart and the mind broken and the sought-after poetic catharsis offers no reprieve, but the recognition of the broken white male mind and body silenced. The poem “Welcome to War” by an anonymized white serviceman utilizes language that features the preeminence of sound and the body for white male conscripts and an anxiety over the body’s meaning and transiency-reflective service in the South African Border War and demobilization to a post-apartheid South Africa.

This work considers the anxieties, the constructions and the contestations of white male bodies/genders through sound to develop male bodies and masculinities to support apartheid South Africa. In doing so, I hope to develop scholarly studies of white South African conscripts through the reconstruction of soundscape of white life during conscription to confront the hegemonic

masculinities that fostered racism, sexism, classism and ableism within white society. The noises and sounds heard by conscripts can be tenuously categorized into two types—external and internal—with sound’s ability to penetrate buildings and tents making this categorization inadequate. Nevertheless, it is important to divide these two sounds momentarily to consider how soldiers experienced and scholars study sound during military service. External sounds of gunfire, explosions, horns, bells, sirens, motorized engines, and the cries of wounded were powerful destabilizing noises, shocking conscripts and assaulting their white bodies. External sounds will play throughout forming a cacophony with the internal sounds. However, this study is much more interested in the internal sounds: the conversations, the dominance of Afrikaans, the code-switching of servicemen, and other interpersonal interactions—the controlled, human initiated noises—that occurred during their deployment to the South-West African (present-day Namibia) and Angolan border and which echoed after returning home.²

White male bodies were the venerated agents of the South African republic that formed in 1961. The conscripted South African Defense Force (SADF) served as a concentrated space to exercise bodies and exorcize masculinities, mobilizing these men to support South Africa while healthy to symbolize apartheid South Africa’s virility. Because male bodies became the locations of contestation during this period, voices became a regulated aspect of the body, but equally significant for this study, a regulatory tool. In forming a republic, the sounds of the nation’s subjects, specifically the male voices, needed to form a chorus of support, with military camps serving as a space for young men to refine and utilize their voices for regulation—vocal panopticism. In this way, internal sounds were part of a larger network that actively hierarchized and normalized a hegemonic masculinity, with sound policing and purifying alternative forms of white masculinities. Human initiated noises became a mode and representative of power in conscript relationships, in turn becoming part of the construction of the male body. Bodies that threatened the political and social order were policed and ostracized through a silencing regimen that limited their physiological vocal expressions and replaced them with normalizing hegemonic voices to limit their politically and socially subversive voices.

Afrikaans’ preeminence in conversations and orders served to venerate the language especially with English-speaking white South Africans and, when conversations were in English, the code-switching of English-speakers to Afrikaans communicated a subservience to Afrikaner men through particular words that articulated a coding of male power ou (guy) and male speech Ek še (I say).³ These controlled, human-initiated sounds represented a conscript’s ability to control their body and others, however, it also represented a continuing struggle to perform a control of sound against the extreme sonic disorganization of mental breakdowns referred to as becoming bosbefok’d (bush fucked). Stories from conscripts recall bosbefok’d soldiers as silent, catatonic types, or meandering mutterers or scared screamers—a loss of control over human sounds, normalizing certain sounds in contrast to the (un)human noises of bosbefok’d conscripts. Beyond all the interpersonal interactions and sonic expressions of regulatory power, conscripts felt an apprehension and trepidation about losing control of their corporeal selves brought about by trauma experienced during the Border War that would render their sounds meaningless, a total loss of power over the mind and body.

However, in a project of this nature, what is the purpose of this work and how can it avoid the pitfalls of scholarship that centers the experiences of white men, especially those who either directly or complicity supported the apartheid state and upheld the problematic ideologies of

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² Code-switching refers to the practice of alternating languages in a conversation.
certain social constructs? This work adopts the creed of feminist scholarship—in that it is aggressively analytical and exists to initiate political change. In doing so, “Stem (Voice)” centers white men as a methodological tool to navigate the discourses of white masculinity and white corporeality that normalized unequal power relationships contracted to the national paradigm. While simultaneously compelling readers, specifically South Africans, to acknowledge their participation in these power structures, to understand and stigmatize their vocal panopticism, and to recognize instances of shame within a destigmatized paradigm, I hope that an exploration of white normativity in South Africa illuminates how a future Postapartheid South Africa needs the awareness of whites’ continued use of colonial normative structures and ways of understanding in the hope of developing a Postapartheid South African future.⁴

By exploring the locations of normalization—the male body and masculinized spaces, this work contributes to understandings of how white men situate themselves in a society and maintain power structures with the hope that awareness of this can spark the acknowledgement of white power structures and bring about their deconstruction. I believe in exploring the normalization from within, immersing myself and the reader in white power structures, so that they can be destabilized. In understanding the sounds, I uncover another contributing method to normalization, focusing on the human aspect of the normalization of apartheid ideologies and their reformation into post-apartheid ideologies that continue to privilege whiteness and often feature problematic narratives concerning South African life. The current embitterment and apathy of white populations can be traced to the lack of new narratives and discourses for a post-apartheid South Africa. This failure has exacerbated the tensions between whites and non-whites in South Africa and hampered the political, social, and economic stability. Because militarized white heteropatriarchal discourses expressed through human sounds remain, “the postapartheid is unimaginable without effecting a strategic invalidation of the modes of evidence and the colonial archive which enabled the violence of apartheid.”⁵

Soundscape theory, which serves as a central part of the theoretical mechanisms for this study, has a short and assailed history. R. Murray Schafer tuned scholars to the importance of sound, collecting his years of work into his environmentalist treatise on soundscapes, The Tuning of the World, in 1977, which called on scholars to consider the sonic production and meaningfulness of sounds in modern societies.⁶ Since then, historians, literary scholars, and anthropologists have contributed to soundscape theory, facing at times, unfair and fair criticism of their studies as they have attempted to play the sounds and explore their meanings within a given society.⁷ This interdisciplinary approach brought a flurry of studies during the late 1990s and early 2000s that expanded the scope to include technology, language, religious revelation, architecture, and physics, as these scholars pushed against the criticism that derided soundscape studies as historically and intellectually weak and devoid of historiographic value.⁸ As a theoretical approach,

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⁴ I use Postapartheid to refer to an idealized future of non-normativity, a decolonial, not postcolonial, existence that has negotiated with the colonial discursive traditions. Post-apartheid refers to the current political, social, economic, and discursive structure of the Republic of South Africa after 1994.


soundscape theory asks scholars to not only consider the sound and noise experienced and discussed by their subjects, especially, but not necessarily, beyond music, but to interrogate the desire or resistance to listening, as well as the culturally specific coding of sound and listening and their meaningfulness within each society.

While soundscape studies have spread throughout the early modern and modern eras and to recently colonized regions, the African soundscape has remained largely muted. Ethnomusicologists Gregory Barz and Patricia Tang’s *African Soundscapes* series oversaw work by Julie Anne Huntington, Lisa Gilman, and Marie Jorritsma, none of which cite any of the most notable soundscape scholars, and focus solely on music’s existence and ability to influence identity formation and the political landscape. This indifference to the intellectual genealogies of soundscape studies renders these studies firmly within their ethnomusicology discipline, limiting their utility for my own work. Nevertheless, Marie Jorritsma’s work on South Africa, which touches upon the importance of Afrikaans and the relationship between music and gender, something similarly considered in Lisa Gilman’s monograph will be considered. For this study, I wish to shift the focus away from music, a desire to not only not reinforce colonial and racist perceptions of a supposed inherent Afro-sonic relationship, but also to contribute to soundscape’s more elucidative abilities, as a study of sounds, listening, and power within a particular culture.

Where African soundscape studies have forged their own ethnomusicological rendering, army- or military-based soundscape studies have been more gracious to their scholarly forbearers, with J. Martin Daughtry’s sonic mapping of the invasion of Iraq existing as one of the most complete and exhaustive studies of the sonic components of warfare. Daughtry’s work represents the interdisciplinary approach of soundscape studies, uniting the work of scholars like R. Murray Schafer, Jonathan Sterne, Emily Thompson, amongst others, with psychological work on PTSD in United States servicemen, and cultural studies of the iPods and Apple products to develop his belliphonic (Greek for war and voice) theory. Daughtry’s belliphonic theory intertwines the mechanized, multilingual, interpersonal, and musical sounds that formed the harrowing soundtrack of 21st century war for US servicemen and Iraqis. His soundscape explores how people in Iraq negotiated with the belliphonic noises of war, also positing about the omnipresent violence of belliphonic sounds. However, like Daughtry’s *Listening to War* and other military or army soundscapes, their contributions to this work are limited by their distance in space and time from this study. Furthermore, Daughtry’s belliphonic theory combines the multitude of noises


experienced in a conflict zone. My study, therefore, is not only removed from the unique space and time of the invasion in Iraq, but is also divergent in its purpose, for I do not ignore the sounds of gunfire, bombs, and motorized vehicles, but rather I consider the human sonic expression as defining its own power dynamics, while tensely confronting the penetrative, pervasive noises of war.

My application of soundscape theory to the white South African context, while tangentially connected to some of the work in African and Military soundscapes is supported by two texts in the Soundscape historiography. John Picker’s anxiety ridden foray into the penetrability of white aurality in Victorian England and Christine Ehrick’s “gendered soundscape” of post-World War II Uruguay and Argentina provide critical entry points for this study. In *Victorian Soundscapes*, Picker explores the clamorous London streets full of recently emigrated Italian organ grinders and their quiet domestic English counterparts through the curt correspondences of middle-class men and xenophobic cartoons. These white middle-class men endeavored on a period of demarcations of both space and identity with organ grinders, becoming the unlikely place to purify an English national identity, stratify a professionalized middle-class, and protect fragile English bodies from defiling foreign bodies. From Picker’s analysis of Victorian England, this study reads it sources for sound’s penetrative and degrading influence on the white body. This research also considers, like Picker in *Victorian Soundscapes*, the sonic and corporeal manifestations and contestations of whiteness, masculinity, and the nation. Christine Ehrick’s call for the gendering of soundscapes influences this work, which is similarly concerned with the sonic expressions of a gender and its negotiated power relations. Also, similarly to Picker, Ehrick engages in an extensive conversation about the physiological and corporeal aspects of sound, including an important discussion on disembodiment, which this work will navigate as it focuses on bodies and sounds as sites of contested power, anxious of its symbolism in representing the apartheid state, but also anxious in its desire to maintain sanity—an apart-ness of the mind and its effect on the body. This study of white male bodies being regulated and regulating others through sound as an approach to controlling the meaning of male bodies and masculinities and their embodiment of the apartheid nation finds distant scholarly linkages to Picker and Ehrick’s work.

Furthermore, this study utilizes the work of Soundscape scholars John Picker, Christine Ehrick, J. Martin Daughtry, and Marie Jorritsma together with scholarship in postcolonial studies that focuses on bodies to further theorize about sounds’ influence on the body in a colonial context. Ann L. Stoler’s interpretation of Michel Foucault’s theories and Wilson Chacko Jacob’s focus on the hyper-masculine body as representative of a virile masculinity and the nation-state in Egypt develops the scholarly and theoretical foundation for this study. Ann Stoler’s explorations into race, gender, and class in colonial Indonesian society through the state policing of sexual and familial proximity of white bodies to bodies of color relates to and influences my perspectives on the disciplining occurring in South African political and social structures and the regulatory mechanisms of the SADF during the apartheid period. Anne McClintock’s foray into race,
gender, class, and sexuality produced at the same time as Stoler’s work is also influential in bringing together the commodification of race and of the female body in colonial settings. Wilson Chacko Jacob’s *Working Out Egypt* serves as another foundational text for my own work by offering a deep theoretical consideration of masculinities exercising and exorcizing in the name of the nation-state. These works coalesce to develop my scholarly perceptions of white male bodies and their seemingly paradoxical fragility and superiority. Upon being tethered to soundscape scholars, who discuss how sound contributes to and represents the precarity of the dominant white male body and its nation, this work complements the interdisciplinary and innovative attributes of soundscape studies through a postcolonial ear.

The Union of South Africa, formed in 1910, attempted to pacify the nearly four decades of war and stabilize contentious ethnic conflicts within the white power structures of Afrikaans and English-speakers fissured by regionalism, class and profession, religion, and nationality. British colonial administrators did so by instilling a conciliatory Afrikaner-led government composed of former Boer leaders that would incorporate the land now recognized as South Africa. However, from 1910 to 1948, the convulsive economic conditions together with the conciliatory South African political climate undermined Afrikaner masculinities by maintaining British economic, structural, and cultural hegemony and galvanized Afrikaner political dissidence. From 1910 to 1932, the South African economy struggled with stagnation that led to the “extraordinary building of state institutions to intervene in the economy.” Notwithstanding their other privileges, this economic stagnation disproportionately affected Afrikaners, exacerbating white poverty. Such a threat to white economic status soon became a public debate warranting the creation of a welfare state in the 1920s and studies facilitated by the overseas Carnegie Corporation in 1932. Not only an issue of economic stagnation though, white poverty intensified those anxieties concerning the superiority and vitality of white bodies, now impoverished, and “the attendant risks of becoming subordinate to or intermingling with African people.” Poor whites and welfare legislation became symbols of the shifting South African political landscape as a way to discuss racial order, racial

16 The First and Second Boer War brought, largely, but not entirely, Afrikaans speakers known as Boers against English speakers representing the United Kingdom and British colonial administrators in South Africa into conflict. The Second Boer War was fought in an attempt by Boers to secure autonomy and sovereignty for their independent republics, known as the South African Republic and the Orange Free State in the Transvaal region. Boers and English-speaking whites were, unlike the Afrikaner nationalist historical revisionists attempted to argue in the early 20th century, fraught with internal conflict. Nevertheless, English-speaking whites and Afrikaans-speaking whites had had a contentious and violent relationship since the invasion of the British in 1806, which brought Anglicized hegemony to the region, organizing a hierarchy that placed Anglos above Boers, who were above South Africans of color. This usurpation of Afrikanerdom allowed Afrikaans-speakers to argue they were the colonized people of South Africa, and through they faced language suppression and cultural marginalization, they nevertheless wielded extensive political, social, and economic power and were afforded privileges based upon their whiteness. Furthermore, both English and Afrikaans speakers maintained and promulgated racist ideologies, exploiting and violently oppressing Black, East Asian, and South Asians for the establishment of their capital, identity, and nationhood.
19 Seekings, “‘Not a Single White Person Should Be Allowed to Go under,’” 378.
purity, and the meaning of white bodies during the Union period. However, as they existed as political pawns, poor whites continued to live lives that were forcing some Afrikaners into a sort of “economic conscription [that] propelled [them] into the military.”

The United Defence Force (UDF), the precursor to the SADF, was a formalized military unit that included 2,500 permanent members and 25,000 volunteer or conscripted members, that represented the recently mended Union of South Africa by featuring white English-speaking and Afrikaans-speaking men in its ranks. However, the military units soon became sites of conflict and divisiveness between white English speakers and white Afrikaans speakers due to the privileging of the English language, British military structures and ideologies, and its commitment to British politics. During World War I, this rendered itself in opposition to the Allied Powers by some Afrikaner servicemen, with Manie Maritz and Christiaan de Wet, military leaders in the UDF, attempting to reassert their autonomy through the Maritz Rebellion. However, Jan Smuts, a former Boer-turned Conciliatory politician violently suppressed the rebellion, representing the discordant political cry of Afrikaners during the first part of the 20th century.

By the 1940s and 1950s, the Army Education Scheme (AES), a set of policies and programs created by white intellectuals and implemented in the UDF and other forms of bureaucratic surveillance supervised by military leaders, represented a desire to police the meanings of race, male bodies, and citizenry that had come to the fore within the Union of South Africa’s political consciousness. The UDF existed as “a particularly concentrated site for identifying the fault lines of these contests [meanings of race, male bodies, and citizenry],” and developing approaches to indoctrinating South African males into a form of nationalism and masculinity that would elucidate their relationship to the state. Recent scholarship from Neil Roos highlights this and serves as the bridge between the real and imagined rise of the poor white problem and the desire to condition subjects in the UDF, Roos writes:

Ordinary white men were important in determining the political climate and social norms of the day. As a consequence of these concerns, white men serving in the UDF during the Second World War were subject to multiple, and sometimes contradictory, initiatives by the military authorities to mould them in styles of citizenship, all of which had whiteness in common. These endeavors were ventures to re-order whiteness, and hence the social order more generally, at a time when the political economy and moral foundations of South African society were in flux.

The contemporary consciousness of the poor white problem motivated an anxious attention of white servicemen and the ways in which their meaning and presentation influenced discourses of whiteness, corporeality, and masculinity during the 1940s and 1950s within the UDF. The AES policies represented an attempt at the supervision and management of these meanings and

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presentations, bringing ASE Liberal intellectuals in conflict with military authorities, who “held sharply contrasting ideas not only about what it meant to be white in wartime and post-war South Africa, but also on the methods of control most appropriate.” However, “the co-existence of diverse ideologies of whiteness…foregrounds some important fault lines in white society.” Where the “ASE intellectuals experimented with adult education as a means to foster enlightened forms of paternalism among white soldiers, those in command imposed oppressive modes of surveillance and discipline that restricted the social horizons available to white troops, pre-figuring some of the ideological and bureaucratic forms of the apartheid state.”

The mental and somatic disciplining and conditioning in the UDF of white male bodies that originated from a larger political awakening and utilization of anxieties surrounding poor whites and their existences’ rendering of whiteness, corporeality, and masculinity, created the foundation for later modes of disciplinary action taken in military institutions during the apartheid state. After the usurpation of political power in the 1948 election, Afrikaner nationalist republicans began a process of creating a racially segregated and oppressive white republican government that would concur with the decolonizing milieu of the 1960s. Their paradoxical discourses maintained that South Africa was (post)colonial, liberal, and republican, and though apartheid South Africa never believed or represented these values, the apartheid government needed to contribute to the disciplining of a hegemonic masculinity that would fulfill these ideals:

“The army wasn’t like the navy, one month Afrikaans and the next month English. It was one month Afrikaans and the next eleven months in Afrikaans as well!”

As the ruling Afrikaner-led National Party (NP) dissolved the UDF and instituted the SADF in 1957, it became, like the UDF before it, a concentrated site to exercise bodies and exorcize masculinities, this time with Afrikaner structural and cultural hegemony and a sonic mandate to initiate this process. In the time between the NP’s ascension and solidification of political power in 1948 and 1957, “Afrikaans progressively replaced English in official terminology” in the UDF, and with the Defence Act of 1957, the act that formed the SADF, it became “compulsory for all officers and non-commissioned officers to be bilingual in English and Afrikaans, a move which generally favoured Afrikaners as many English speakers were unwilling to learn another language.” This shift in policy represented the desire to normalize Afrikaans, which had been delegitimized in the UDF and by the British colonial structure before 1948.

Moreover, in not enforcing Afrikaans as the language of the UDF/SADF, Afrikaner policy makers negotiated the transition from English cultural hegemony to Afrikaner cultural hegemony more effectively by excluding English speakers not through structural and ideological reformations, but rather English speakers’ perceived ethnic superiority—their indifference and

The harbingers of this policy shift were officers in the SADF, with one conscript recalling, “I guess the rank had it all down to a tee in an attempt to give both the English and the Afrikaans guys something to identify with [a] sergeant, very nicely [calling] for us to say our goodbyes . . . Then some NCO shouted, ‘As julle rowe wil gaan, kan julle, maar julle sal vandag nog in die DB wees want van nou af noem ons dit AWOL!”30 In front of the families, this English-speaking sergeant coaxed the English-speaking conscripts with his waxing words, before the English-speaking conscripts were assaulted sonically in Afrikaans by the officers.

The SADF hierarchy represented to some conscripts how “everything was set up to keep the Afrikaners in power. You would never find an Englishman as a bevelvoerder (Commanding Officer) at any of these camps,” and orders in Afrikaans to English-speaking conscripts dictated their ability to sonically disturb and physically move English-speaking male bodies.31 John, another conscript, discussed “being an Englishman, I was at a language disadvantage. The first time I heard ‘Pak tekkies uit,’ I quickly ran and placed my takkies (shoes) neatly at the foot of the bed! Everyone had a good old laugh at the Engelsman (Englishman).”32 Though the orders confused John, unbeknownst to him, he moved his body due to the Afrikaans spoken to him representing the new ability to control English-speakers’ male bodies. However, beyond the expression of sound over a body is the unification of the other conscripts through the act of laughing, which sonically exiled him from the other conscripts, causing John to code switch into Afrikaans when referring to himself. In this way, John casts himself in the role of the “Engelsman,” a character that abstracts himself as a defense against the sonic emasculation that occurred due to the Afrikaans order and communal laughing.

Another conscript, Nick recalled during klaaring in (reporting to duty) that he “heard this scream, ‘Julle fokkin’ bliksens! Klim uit!’ (You fuckin’ bastards! Climb out!).”33 For another conscript, a corporal, “came around and screamed, ‘WIE’T MY GEVLOEK? His face was red. He was absolutely livid. Being English I didn’t know what ‘vloek’ meant, so I didn’t say anything.”34 Paul remembered when “the corporal gave me a slap on the ear and said, ‘Troep, vat die fokkin’ geweer!’”35 A different Paul recalled “Corporal used to say to us, ‘Jy’s nie my donnerse ma nie, jy’s nie my donnerse pa nie, jy’s net ’n fokkin’ troep.”36 Chris, a seventeen year old, remembered his Sergeant Major, who would “scream right into our ears about how he would ‘sny jou keel, daarin afklim, en op jou hart kak.’”37 Whereas Clint, had a Non-commissioned Officer, who “liked to yell things like, ‘Ek sal jou nek afsny en in jou keel afkots,’” and “‘Ek sal jou suster se vingers in vishoeke verander en hulle in jou neus opdruk en jou breins uitpluk.’”38

From the cacophonous directives of Afrikaner officers came the first dictation of the SADF’s

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29 Paul, age 18, “Soutpiele and Dutchman,” in An Unpopular War from Afkak to Bosbefok, 11.
30 Anonymized white conscript, “Klaaring In,” in Troepie, 27.
31 Nick, age 20, “Soutpiele and Dutchman,” in An Unpopular War from Afkak to Bosbefok, 10-11.
32 John, age 18, “Soutpiele and Dutchman,” in An Unpopular War from Afkak to Bosbefok, 11.
34 “Anonymized white conscript, “Basic Training,” in Troepie, 60.
36 Paul, age 18, “Making and Breaking,” in An Unpopular War from Afkak to Bosbefok, 36.
37 Chris, age 17, “Fear and Loathing,” in An Unpopular War from Afkak to Bosbefok, 50.
38 Clint, age 18, “Fear and Loathing,” in An Unpopular War from Afkak to Bosbefok, 50.
reformation into a space where Afrikaans bodies and masculinities were privileged, exercised, and normalized, and English-speaking bodies and masculinities would be marginalized, purified, and if necessary, purged. The sonic domination of English speakers represented a reprisal for years of Anglo hegemony not prescribed by SADF hierarchy, but the histories of identity formation in South Africa and the mental and somatic disruption for the conditioning of these conscripts into the revered masculinity, turning them into national subjects for apartheid South Africa.

Orders served as a way to dictate to new conscripts Afrikaans significance through martial structure, but through interpersonal conversations between conscripts, the sonic hierarchization became more pervasive. The structural shift by the South African government emboldened the conscripts to communicate their sonic dominance as representative of their newfound politically supported cultural ascension. In the masculinized spaces of training camps, military camps, and combat zones, the ability of conscripts to communicate with their male voice, their hegemony in an encounter, represented an expression of male dominance and hierarchization of the Afrikaners over English speakers, or as one conscript noted, “It was very much an English-Afrikaans thing—us and them—very much so.” This shift in policy supported a sonic emasculation of conscripts, where politically and culturally Afrikanerdom and Afrikaans was being venerated and normalized, but militarized spaces also offered the opportunity for individual men, the agents of republicanism, to engage in the systematic, interpersonal domination of English speakers as a way to exercise their voice as a reinforcement of the recent political takeover.

With political entrenchment, alterations in SADF policy, and the performance of Afrikaner officers, Afrikaner conscripts felt emboldened to assert their sonic (de)colonization, and within militarized spaces, assert their dominance over English speakers in conversation, or as one conscript recalled “we were supposed to drill the rofies (new recruits) for one week in English and one week in Afrikaans. But I’m Afrikaans, like the army, so it was always in Afrikaans.” This manifested itself in the memory of one English-speaking conscript, who recalled, “This one soldier walked over to me with this red doibie (helmet lining) which fits inside a helmet. Everyone else’s was green. Although I didn’t know at the time what... ‘Engelsman, jy gaan bloed pis’ (Englishman, you are going to piss blood)—meant, it didn’t sound good. I also knew I was the only oke with a red helmet, which couldn’t have been a good sign.” This conscript’s male power became undermined by the other conscript’s Afrikaans, which left him confused and lacking control over himself, the space, and his attempts to situate himself in a new setting.

Furthermore, this political raillery is supported by the Afrikaans, which allows the speaker to control the sonic space filling it with Afrikaans, but also control the knowledge of the hazing by maintaining a language community of Afrikaners who would be included in the hazing and creating an emasculated oppositional language community, the English speakers. The conscript invokes this emasculation with “oke,” an Afrikaans slang term which bears resonance to bloke, a distinctly British word, but literally translates as the Afrikaans word for “old” referring to a bygone, out-of-place man both in the context of the military, but also apartheid South Africa. By code switching into Afrikaans, the conscript cowers to the dominant language group, but more importantly does so on a word that refers to his masculinity. This conscript emasculates himself with the code switching by appeasing the Afrikaans hegemony and further completes the process.

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40 By “sonic (de)colonization” I refer to the liberation/privileging of Afrikaans, decolonizing from the perspective of Afrikaners, but colonizing from the perspective of English-speaking whites and South Africans of color. Anonymous white conscript, “Basic Training,” in Troepie, 51.
41 Brett, age 18, “Soutpjele and Dutchman,” in An Unpopular War from Afkak to Bosbefok, 10.
by aging his body and his British identity, placing himself below the “young” hyper-masculinized able bodies being developed in the training and military camps.

The Afrikaner conscript, who tells the other that he will “piss blood” communicates an attempt at male dominance through the physiological voice that relates to the political voice, and of his attempt to dominate the othered wounded body, with which he can construct his own healthy hyper masculinity. As part of a minority population, virile same-race heterosexuality was paramount to ensuring the continued existence of white Africans, and specifically for apartheid South Africa, whites normalized and reproduced, both in ideology and white bodies, in the apartheid ideology. Regardless of the health of the conscript’s penis, the fact that his body and specifically a sexualized aspect of his body was at the center of conversations amongst masculine, heteronormative men represents the meaningfulness of the body and its connection to hierarchizing men. Such conversations demarcate the limits of heterosexual conversations by situating the penis within misogynistic same-race heterosexuality to symbolize white male strength and vibrant white nationalism. The penis becomes mobilized as the sexual and national agent, a weapon to reproduce and represent a male-sexed person’s masculine power. In dictating through force that the English speaker’s penis will “piss blood,” he becomes the national eunuch, unable, whether momentarily or not, to produce children, allowing the Afrikaner conscript to assert his sexual reproductive nationalism and venerate his form of masculinity above the English speakers’, bringing together sound, gender, and the body in male hierarchization in a militarized space.

These attempts to assert dominance and emasculate English speakers could lead to more contentious encounters, with the sonic emasculation challenging an individual’s attempt to develop their own hyper-masculine able body. The English-speaking conscript, Brett, also remembered “the guys started shouting and screaming, but all in Afrikaans…even the basic commands were difficult to understand…I didn’t find it scary; it was more like anger. I was extremely mad at these guys for not speaking my language and screaming in my face. It wasn’t one oke standing there, it was a few of them.” Unlike the other situation recalled by Brett, in this instance, his introduction to the SADF elicited a tension in Brett, an internal recant of fear and a desire to resist the sonic assault manifested in the multiple Afrikaner male bodies through managed anger. Furthermore, Brett asserts that not only the sonic assault frustrated him, but the fact that the other conscripts were not speaking “my language,” an attempt to distinguish between himself and his ownership of the language against the other conscripts. Brett concludes by using oke, however unlike before, the use of the term is to emasculate another man, but he is unable to because “it was a few of them, backing another up,” their power buttressed through their numbers, serving as a shield against attempts to emasculate. The sonic shock and displacement of English-speaking white male conscripts upon entering the SADF became expressed through the ordering of male bodies facilitated by Afrikaans-speakers, who desired not only to feature Afrikaans and Afrikaner culture in the SADF and throughout society, but also to elevate it above English as an expression of Afrikaner male dominance and political ascension in South Africa beginning in 1948. Language and bilingualism or multilingualism became an axis with which to define one’s power like one English-speaking conscript, unlike Brett, stated, “luckily I grew up in the Western Transvaal so, even though I’m English, my Afrikaans was fine. Spoke it fluently. Didn’t stick out like those Durban okes. It helped a lot.”

Code switching, performed by English-speaking conscripts from English to Afrikaans,

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42 Brett, age 18, “You’re in the Army Now,” in An Unpopular War from Afkak to Bosbefok, 4.
44 Anonymized white conscript, “Basic Training,” in Troepie, 33.
represented the normalization of Afrikaans in South Africa and phrases where the transfer occurs feature the coding of masculinity and militarization, forming a masculinized code switching. A former conscript, Anthony Akerman, released a play that was subsequently banned in South Africa, which features masculinized code switching. In the place, two of the English-speaking characters Campbell and Levitt are discussing the organization of their gear for inspection, “LEVITT: Ja (Yes), Browns, pairs one, wearing for the use of. In two sizes: too big and too small/ CAMPBELL: Hey, but true, ek ŝe (I say) . . . LEVITT: No, it’s just that this other ou (guy).”

Over the next two pages, the characters continue to code switch on phrases that refer to men and the ability to speak. Between these two English-speaking conscripts, the decision to code switch represents how Afrikanerdom dominates the meaning of these two words. Within the conception of the English-speaking conscripts, the thought of a man invoking Afrikaans, represents the normalization of Afrikaner masculinity and Afrikaner men. Similarly, the conscripts also decided to code switch when hoping to express their ability to speak. In saying “ek ŝe,” the conscripts initiate the listening of the rest of their words in English, by expressing their ability to speak in Afrikaans. This code switch represents how Afrikaans existed as the sonic and aural gatekeeper, while for English to be listened to, the conscripts utilize Afrikaans. Through the code switch, the performance of subervience to Afrikaans or the performance of bi- or multilingualism allowed English-speaking conscripts to express themselves in a space. In doing so, the white male body engaged in a process of hierarchization that situated their place beneath Afrikaans-first speakers.

Furthermore, English-speaking conscripts code switch to military-specific jargon placing Afrikaans as the center of masculinity, the ability to speak, and militarization—the dominant pillars within militarized spaces—and there exist examples of code switching when discussing aspects of the body. Clint spoke of one time when “The entire platoon got the opfok (fucked up- extra training),” and Rick once enjoyed “a concert to lift up the morale of the troeps (soldiers/conscripts),” or used many other terms like “sak (drop to perform push-ups) and tree aan (assemble).”

Code switching also occurred along corporeal terms like “vetseun (fat boy), wussies (wimps), poes (derogatory term for female genitalia), moffie (queer), and doos (derogatory term for female genitalia).” In both instances, the English-speaking conscripts code switching to Afrikaans existed along aspects of masculinity, militarization, and the body, exemplifying how Afrikaans became the mode with which these concepts became discussed. Furthermore, the corporeal code switching featured terms, which served not only to feature the sonic hierarchization, but also how these sonic expressions policed bodies. The aforementioned corporeal code switching occurred along phrases with negative connotations utilized to manage bodies and out those that did not fit within the hyper-masculine, heterosexual, able bodies that were being constructed within these militarized spaces:

Blocking out the sounds of war/ with the music in my ears; the crooning voice, the senseless singing/ muting sounds of mindless killing -/ but only until the tape runs out.  

This study has tried to reconstruct an aspect of the soundscape of white South African life during the apartheid era. A review of the ideas of this paper return to the relationship of sound,

45 Akerman, Somewhere on the Border, 15-17.
47 “Glossary,” in An Unpopular War from Afkak to Bosbefok, 229-238.
gender, and the male body within militarized spaces, as the male body was being exercised and masculinities exorcized. This study has tried to explore how Afrikaans, physiologically voiced, became a regulated and regulatory tool to participate in the control of English-speaking bodies, participating in a hierarchization process to dictate which voices were being heard. In attempting to establish a (post)colonial republican nation, apartheid South Africa needed the active participation of all white South Africans in supporting, representing, and enjoying the privileges of the nation that violently oppressed South Africans of color. Within militarized spaces in a conscripted force, the SADF became a concentrated space, where men could be supervised and disciplined and participate in a process of supervision and disciplining of other bodies. However, throughout these attempts to develop bodies and police and purify masculinities—warfare sonically assaulted these bodies and upon returning to civilian life in South Africa, these conscripts were silenced, while the voices within them of themselves, their fellow conscripts, and of their combatants continued to murmur—some of them returned bosbefok’d. As the post-apartheid government attempted to move away from the histories of soldiers who participated in the defense of apartheid, these soldiers returned to a society that admonished them for their mental illnesses.

I lie on my bed crying/ wondering why nobody else/ can hear the guns.49
The world I knew has gone forever/ torn apart by screaming shells.50
Echoing the cry of a soldier trapped in this leper land,/ marching, marching,/ marching to his own silent band.51

In doing so, white veterans felt exiled in a space of limbo, calling out for something with a muted scream.

White veterans have a choice to make if they want to participate in a future Postapartheid South Africa. They must confront within themselves the vestiges of colonial and apartheid ideologies of race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability. They must confront their participation in the constructing, policing, and purifying of masculinities and their own veneration within South African society and acknowledge, in many instances, their lasting economic privileges. These white veterans must remember, not revere, their lives and service, especially in regards to their explicit or complicit participation in apartheid ideologies. They must also be joined by other political and social agents of post-apartheid South Africa. These agents must try to de-stigmatize mental illness in society. They must foster the remembrance of these conscripts within proper spaces and South Africa must commit to confronting racism, not adhering to a misguided post-racial or color-blind ideology. This work has attempted to discuss the aspects of the construction, policing, and purification of white masculinities for the nation, a deeply problematic and violently racist nation. This work has tried to listen to the ways that men tried to control other men in an effort to mobilize them against South Africans of color.

This work hears you and asks you to communicate.

51 Anonymous white Serviceman, “For those who are left,” in A Secret Burden, 118.