

Chapter 10

Pakkies aan Boetie: Christian Afrikaner Women Remembering Conscription in South Africa between 1980 and 1990

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‘Hy het altyd vriendelik gelyk jy weet hy het nooit gekla oor iets wat gebeur het nie. Ek kan maar net dink want ons het baie vir hulle gebid. Ek weet ek het vir hom spesiale koekies gemaak en gestuur, troepe koekies.’ Rina Niemand, 2018

(He always looked friendly you know, he never complained about something that happened. I can only imagine, we prayed for them a lot. I know I made him special cookies and sent it to him, troop cookies.) Rina Niemand, 2018

Introduction

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On the 4th of August 1967, The Defence Amendment act of 1967 declared that every white male was required to complete military service. My family had become intertwined in the narrative of the South African Defence Force (SADF) and apartheid. In 1984 my father, Reinier Christiaan Niemand was conscripted into the SADF. This chapter will discuss using a narrative inquiry how the seemingly normal practices of cooking had become a witness to the experiences of conscripts and the mothers, sisters, and daughters of conscripts. I argue that the stories and recipes shared by my mother and grandmother could be considered as practices of memory which firmly situates itself in the narrative of South Africa. I consider how the practices of the kitchen are seen as a performance which maintains the role of women in the apartheid society. I continue to consider how the archive, in its ontological sense, provides another insight into the experiences of white Afrikaner women in an apartheid society. Additionally, I will provide a deeper understanding of the roles of Afrikaner women within the apartheid society by looking into the archive of the DRC and providing texts which relate to the time of conscription between 1980 and 1990.

The narrative, memory and food

220 Narrative inquiry can be considered as a method of inquiry through which the researcher effectively takes the object of inquiry as to the story itself (Reissman 1993). The researcher takes care when examining the story of the informant by piecing together the stories presented in interviews and personal artifacts, such as photographs or documents presented to the researcher. Professor of Sociology, Catherine Kohler Riessman argues that these personal narratives and the act of telling them can be considered as a 'universal human activity' (Reissman 1993: 2). The term collective memory in this chapter will be essential to the understanding of the experience of white Christian Afrikaner males and females. This understanding will be primarily derived from Connerton's (1989) book *'How Societies Remember'*. Connerton (1989) argues that one's experience of the present largely depends on their knowledge of the past which is how this study will primarily define the term memory. Additionally, Connerton argues that the past and the knowledge of the past are somehow sustained through performances, which is primarily discussed as two different social practices, namely commemorative ceremonies and bodily practices. The social practice of commemorative ceremonies as defined by Connerton, implies the ritual in which specific events resonate with a social group. There are various examples from which the Afrikaners collectively commemorate, some of which have changed meaning after 1994, and some of which are still practised in contemporary South Africa. This chapter looks at the practices in the kitchen through which these commemorations still take place (Connerton 1989). The social practice in which bodily practices are evident is described by Connerton as a form in which a social group adapt to and conduct themselves bodily. Applying Connerton's definition to this study prompts me to consider the ways in which white Christian Afrikaner males and females conduct themselves in public. This chapter will apply Connerton's understanding of social practice to the photographs and to the descriptions of the various experiences that were recorded during the research (Connerton 1989).

Food has emerged as an alternative lens through which one can consider how memory and commemoration take place. What becomes central to the telling of the experiences of the mothers, daughters and wives through food, is the understanding that South African food lies entrenched in the legacy of imperialism and colonialism (Highfield 2017). The arrival of the Dutch in Cape Town in 1652 had a tremendous impact on the ways food production in South Africa and its record persists in the dishes enjoyed in South Africa today. Jithoo (2005: 3) recounts in her book titled: *'From the Table of my Memory: Food, Friends, Travel: A Memoir with Recipes'*, 'Meals are

a time to conjure up memories of sights, sounds, tastes and smells and sometimes, to summon the spirits of the past.' Food and recipes, should not only be considered carriers of memory, they should also be considered as 'a unique piece of discourse' (Cognard-Black 2017: 32). Recipes and cooking practices are necessary to understand how the role of the Christian Afrikaner women was understood and applied over time in South African households, specifically for the Afrikaner mother and wife, who would continue this practice throughout the course of the border war. The cookbook remains important to Afrikaner families, since it is something that is usually bequeathed from grandmother to mother to daughter (Niemand 2019: 10). Unique recipes and recipe books catered for the mothers who had hungry sons on the border and my (the author) grandmother ensured the regular delivery of edible packages to my father. The title of this chapter, '*Pakkies aan Boetie*' refers to packages that were sent by my grandmother to my father on the border. The sending of packages was a common practice among Afrikaner mothers and sisters to ensure that their troop was looked after. The concept of the "*pakkie*" (package) became a large part of the experiences of Afrikaner females, since it was the troop's connection to home, in addition to wanting to bolster their food intake. In addition to these packages sent to the border, mothers would also cater for the troops who would come home to visit.

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After the Second World War, South Africa mainly relied on the volunteer system maintained by citizens. However, on the 4th of August 1967, The Defence Amendment act of 1967 declared that every white male (between the ages of 17 and 65 years) was required to complete military service. The amendment states that any white male who is medically fit for duty and who is not yet active in the permanent force such as the South African Police, the railway services or the prison services, should complete their compulsory military service (Kalley, Schoeman and Andor 1999). The first initial compulsory service period was required over a period of nine months, which was followed by a three-week camp every year for five years. In 1973 the required period was changed to one year. In 1977, due to the lack of men, the period was changed to two years. The two-year service would be followed by a further ten years in which they could be called up for service. As Williams (2008) states, white males could be called up to serve on the border every two years for a maximum of 90 days, however, they were expected to complete a minimum of 30 days of service every year for ten years.

The 'border war' for many white males became synonymous with the institution of conscription. However, its contestation starts with the name, as Baines (2014) contends, that was used to invoke

a sense of purpose that the SADF troops are defending South Africa against an imminent threat often termed as *rooi/swart gevaar* (red/ black danger). Thus, the war itself is often considered as a 'silent war' which had a different meaning for different families. What should be underscored is that this war was considered a war of liberation for some. For my family at least, it was something that we knew about from photographs and secret letters, but not really a topic that you address due to the taboo of breaking its silence. What becomes essential in the telling of this narrative, is the experiences of the wives, mothers and sisters that would send their husbands, sons and brothers off to war without knowing what would transpire. Mothers, wives and sisters rarely knew about the specifics of the war due to the silencing of the war, as well as the censorship by the SAUK (*Suid Afrikaanse Uitsaaiorporasie*, now known as the South African Broadcasting Commission [SABC]) and the media (Niemand 2019). The only experiences mothers really had control over was their ability to send packages to their sons. It is described as a piece of home that they could send to their sons. Food and recipes became a vital medium in the way in which they remember, as these women could only connect with their conscripted troops through the sending of letters and food packages.

222 Recipes, cookbooks and pieces from home

Pieces of necessity are requested throughout my father's letters to my grandmother, ranging from cigarettes to shoe polish and more importantly, cookies. My grandmother's recipe book provides an interesting perspective from which she crafted the custom packages she would send to my father. The black spiral notebook consisted of foxed pages with collaged recipes. These recipes were all sourced from magazines and newspapers, with some been handwritten, copied from other recipes, perhaps from those of other women she knew. This collage contains some insight into the type of cooking that was enjoyed in my grandmother's kitchen between 1980 and 1990. Under the section of "*Lekkers*" (sweets) a recipe boasts:

'By enige kerkbazaar of skoolfunksie is die tafel waar tuisgemaakte lekkers verkoop word, een van die gewildste.' (Rooi Rose 1968)

(At any church bazaar or school function is the table with the homemade sweets one of the favourites.)

The recipe book provides insight into the various choices of recipes published in magazines mainly

aimed at stay-at-home women. Some recipes date back to 1955 which originate out of publications for women such as *'Rooi Rose'*, *'Die Huisvrou'*, *'Finesse'* and *'Vrouekeur'*. All these publications were aimed at the Afrikaner women who would provide for their families at the home front and would specifically focus on advice for keeping a well-organised home and shared recipes (Rooi Rose 1968). In the same way, recipes were often shared by housewives for their troops. The troop cookies recipe which my grandmother baked and sent to my father, was shared from a favourite South African magazine *'Die Huisgenoot'* (Giliomee 2003). This recipe was created out of a need to supplement a troop's nutritional intake. The design of the recipe has considered that the cookies would be able to endure the journey to the troop on the border. The cookie is also seen as an energising snack which will help the troop with the required energy to engage in combat. The recipe usually provides for a bulk of these cookies to supplement the troop with a long-lasting quantity that will keep for a long period before the next package arrives. In this handwritten recipe, my grandmother added to her personalised recipe book clearly stated that the recipe would cater for eleven or twelve dozen cookies. This recipe contains layered meanings that speak to history within South Africa and echo the experiences of mothers who slaved away in the kitchens to provide for their hungry troops at the border.

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In a recent attempt to dig through old boxes of family belongings, I came across a recipe book that was handed down from my grandmother titled *'Peuselparade'* (snack parade) dated 1988. The book was published by the South African food company Bokomo for the mothers who were sending their sons to the border (Bokomo 1988). The introductory message is provided by Patricia Kerr also known as "Pat Kerr" who was a well-known host of a radio programme called *Forces Favourites*. She writes:

Aan alle troepies, hul moeders, stiefmoeders en vriendinne: mag hierdie resepte vele ure van eetgenot verskaf, sowel as waardering vir die ure se swoeg in die kombuis.
(To all the troops, their mothers, stepmothers and girlfriends: May these recipes provide hours of enjoyment as well as appreciation for the hours of toil in the kitchen.)

Furthermore, the recipe book offered a seemingly humorous handbook on recipes and how to pack the packages sent to the troops. It describes the following:

Gebruik 'n stewige doos as houer – sowat 20 cm x 20 cm x 10 cm; die volledige pakkie moet

minder as 3kilogram weeg. Draai die pakkie toe in 2 velle bruinpapier en versterk dit met kleefband, veral by die hoeke. Verpak alles stewig en vul enige oop spasies met lekkergoed, ens. Skryf sy naam en adres duidelik in blokletters. Standaardgrootte pakkethouers is by alle Poskantore beskikbaar. (Bokomo 1988)

(Use a steady box as a container – more or less 20 cm x 20 cm x 10 cm; the complete package should weigh no more than 3 kilograms. Wrap the package in 2 sheets of brown paper and strengthen it with tape, especially at the corners. Pack everything and fill any open spaces with sweets etc. Write his name and address clearly in block letters. Standard size pack containers are available at all Post Offices.)

Packages to the troops were detailed in the book which gave instructions for successful delivery, such as badge number, rank and name, sub-unit, unit, city and postal code (when in South Africa) and as number, rank and name, sub-unit, unit, city and postal code, unit where supplied, sector, Field post office 1, Pretoria, postal code (when they were in an operational area). Furthermore, the book provided an opportunity for mothers all over the country to provide tips and tricks to help with posting of the packages to the troop. For example, a mother, J.E. Heyns writes out of Welkom:

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Sprinkel springmielies tussen die inhoud van die pakkie. Dit absorbeer skok tydens die hantering en vervoer van die pakkie. Terselfdertyd het die troepie nog iets om aan te peusel. (Bokomo 1988: 10)

(Sprinkle popcorn in between the contents of the package. It absorbs the shock during the handling and transport of the package. At the same time the troop has something extra to snack on.)

The instructions provide an understanding that mothers took great care in preparing the packages which were sent off to the border. My grandmother would take great care in the packages that she sent to us as children, she made sure that everything was wrapped carefully in wax paper and gently tucked into an ice cream container. I can only imagine that my grandmother followed similar steps to put together a package that would have made its way to the border, filled with food that was handmade specifically for my father. The reception of a basket with sugary and salty treats seems insignificant in comparison to the troops' experiences, however, it seems to have played a significant role in how it affected the mood of the individual troops who would wait in anticipation for any correspondence.

In a church publication, Malan, Geldenjuys and Malan (1981) note in their book *'Ek het iemand op die grens'* (I've got someone on the border) that:

Die pakkie wat met liefde en sorg stewig verpak die dienspligtige op die grens bereik, is 'n stukkie van die huis self.

(The package that is packed with love and care, tightly packed that reaches the troop on the border, is a piece of home.)

Understandably popular phrases used were *"Pos in die bos is kos"* (post in the bush is food) which is understood as when a troop receives any form of post it most likely consisted of a neatly packed package filled with home-baked goods and other pieces of necessity (Bokomo 1988). The framing of food in this context contrasts with excerpts from publications detailing either the death of a troop or how to compile a package for your son. This bizarre juxta positioning draws attention to a war that was senseless and the day-to-day realities of pretending everything was normal and justified. The text that drew attention to this could be seen selected from many publications found in the DRC archive which largely revealed the position of the DRC on the war, conscription and women.

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The women of the DRC and the SADF

The role of the DRC became heavily layered within the experiences of Christian Afrikaner women during the period of conscription. The DRC was involved with the war, albeit at a convenient arm's length. In many ways, women were involved in the war effort through the church. There are many references to the *"Dankie Tannies"* (Thank you Aunties) who would work hard at compiling packages for troops. These packages would contain stationery, razors, soap and other goods in order to thank them for their service in protecting the country. In other ways, women who formed part of the DRC, like my grandmother, would often form support groups that allowed them to share experiences with others. The DRC allowed for the various formations of women's organisations, some of which could be considered as opposed to conscription and apartheid, and some which proved to have strong support towards the SADF. In his chapter titled *'Afrikaner women and the creation of ethnicity in a small South African town, 1902-1950'*, Butler (1989) maintains that women were crucial in the creation of Afrikaner ethnic consciousness through the creation of organisations maintained by mainly middleclass Afrikaner women. Most notably, before the rise of Apartheid, women were often seen actively raising money in the interest of the *"Helpmekaar-fondsinsameling"*

(solidarity fundraisers) and other attempts to aid poor Afrikaners. Women would contribute through the connection of the church by hosting bazaars and support groups and organisations. It is important to consider how various organisations would form part of the experience of white Christian Afrikaner females during the conscription of white Christian Afrikaner males. It is also important to consider how the roles of these organisations inspired a way of conduct of women organisations during the time of conscription between 1980 and 1990. My grandmother maintains that even being a working mother, Afrikaner women would still contribute to the church by baking goods for bazaars.

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The Southern Cross Fund (SCF) is seen as one of the supporters of the war as it was enforced throughout apartheid society. The SCF can be viewed as an organisation made up of the support from citizens to the troops and should be viewed as the solidarity of the white community who backed the SADF and its occupation (Van Heerden 2015). The SCF was founded in 1968 to raise money for the welfare of Portuguese and South African troops. Although the fund was managed by women and men, it was mostly white women who volunteered and would predominantly remain at the front of the fund that was associated with females. The Mozambique Soldier Fund was considered the frontrunner for the SCF, since it was originally headed by Elizabeth Albrecht and changed its name in 1968. The fund aimed to collect money for the recreation of SADF and SAP troops, 'this included sports equipment, televisions, ice and cold-water machines, snooker tables, film projectors, swimming pools, books, musical instruments and bibles' (Van Heerden 2015: 32). It was the experience of receiving the gifts from the fund that led to its nickname "*Dankie Tannies*" (Thank you Aunties), which was a result of the troops thanking the women when they received the presents. Thus, the presents were called "*Dankie Tannie pakkies*" (Thank you Auntie packages). The presence and representation of the SCF by women were essential to the image of the women that the apartheid Government encouraged. It is understood that the SCF had close ties with the DRC as former pastor Charles Cassel recalls:

... in die NG Kerk was daar 'n aksie wat hulle genoem het, die Suiderkruis Fonds waar die vrouens gewerk het en geld ingesamel het om die behoeftes onder die jong soldate te vervul, soos toilet geriewe, boeke, bybels en daai soort van ding. Die Suiderkruis fonds het baie sterk gefunksioneer in daai tyd in die NG Kerk. (Niemand 2019: 98)

(... in the DRC there was an action that they called the Southern Cross Fund where women worked and collected money for the needs of the young soldiers, such as

toiletries, books, bibles and those types of things. The Southern Cross fund functioned strongly in the DRC in those times).

The archives revealed the discourse of the DRC within Afrikaner households, in particular the response of the church towards mothers, sisters and girlfriends who had someone on the border. The DRC provided a platform for mothers to share their experiences of conscription of their sons for mothers of troops to communicate and pray about the conscription and the war. In one example, the DRC provided the opportunity for a group of women who called themselves *Moeders van Dienspligtiges* (Mothers of members of the armed forces) to reach out to other congregations through *Die Kerkbode* (The Church publication), which is the official mouthpiece of the DRC and reports on church policy and activities. These groups of women started to gather on a regular basis within congregations of the DRC to discuss aspects of their experiences surrounding conscription. These groups would distribute prayer lists which would be filled with names of conscripts and furthermore discuss issues like "*pos is belangriker as kos*" (post rather than food).¹

The DRC, furthermore, provided a platform of support and guidance for mothers and girlfriends who were sending a troop to the border. One example I focused on, is a book published under the DRC. Malan et al. (1981) provide detailed guidelines for mothers and women who have someone they know either serving on the border or will be required to serve their military service soon. The role of the female is outlined and stated by Malan et al. (1981) as follows:

The woman should be an anchor for the family during stormy times such as these. She has to be convinced of the fairness of the defence battle so that no sacrifice may be too much for her. She has to be willing to give herself in the interest of her country and all of its people. (19)

Similar sentiments were encouraged in the manner through which mothers and women would communicate with the troops. In a detailed description, Malan et al. (1981) provide a list of do's and don'ts on ways in which to engage with the troops through letters. For the most part, Malan et al. (1981) caution writers to ensure that their letters to the troops must be taken seriously. The role that every woman should play regarding the military service should be as follows:

¹ This saying translated into English means post is more important than food, this refers to the prioritisation of writing letters to the troop on the border rather than sending food.

(Daar is reeds genoeg gesê om elke meisie te laat besef dat die volgende woorde háár besondere bydrae tot grensdiens insluit:

Ons sal antwoord op jou roepstem

Ons sal offer wat jy vra

Ons sal lewe

Ons sal sterwe

ONS VIR JOU SUID-AFRIKA (Malan et al. 1981 : 5)

(There is already enough said that the following words include her contribution to military service:

At thy call we shall not falter,

firm and steadfast we shall stand,

At thy will to live or perish,

O South Africa, dear land.)

Once all the contents of the packages have been prepared, Malan et al. (1981) provide a set of instructions on how one should compile the package:

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Pak liever twee kleiner pakkies as een groot pak. Die inhoud moet styf gepak word sodat dit nie rondbeweeg nie. Koekies en beskuit kom so maklik in krummels by die bestemming aan. Moet liever nie vars vrugte probeer stuur nie. Drie weke per trein sal meer as 'n vrugte slaai lewer. Die gemiddelde tyd wat 'n pakkie neem om sy bestemming te bereik is 12 – 16 dae. Pak die inhoud eers in kleiner houers, bv. plastiese roomysbakke en pak lae papiersakdoeke tussenin. Pak die pakkie stewig en draai eers toe in goiingsak wat met naald en gare toegewerk word. Merk duidelik met 'n kokipen. Die adres moet volledig wees met die ontvanger se nommer, kompanie en peleton. Moenie pakkies registreer nie. Dit veroorsaak 'n vertraging van 5 – 6 dae.(59)

(Rather pack two smaller packages than one big package. The contents have to be packaged tightly so that it does not move around. Cookies and rusks could easily arrive at its destination as crumbs. Do not send any fresh fruit. Three weeks per train could easily offer up more than just a fruit salad. The average time that the package takes to reach its destination is 12 – 16 days. Firstly, pack the content in smaller containers, i.e. plastic ice cream containers and pack layers of tissues in between. Pack the package

sturdy and cover it with hessian which is sewed shut with needle and thread afterwards. Mark it clearly with a permanent marker. The address has to be complete with the receiver's number, company and platoon. Do not register your package. It results in a delay of 5 – 6 days.)

Malan et al. (1981) cover the requirements of women who had a loved one in the army. It does not refer to the realities of death of their loved ones or those considered "the enemy". They outline instructions to mothers as they were encouraged to write letters to their sons in the following way:

U briewe aan u Seun moet

Opgewek wees

Bemoedigend wees

Vol interessante nuus en baie besonderhede wees

Dank betoon vir wat hy doen om sy land te beskerm

Vermaninge, Skrifgedeeltes en bemoediging inhou

Liewer nie slegte nuus bevat nie (59)

(Your letters to your son should-

Be exciting

Be encouraging

Be full of interesting news and a lot of detail

Must be thankful for what he is doing to protect his country

Contain exhortations, scriptures and encouragement

Rather not contain any bad news.)

Although the church was responsible for sending packages to the troops, my grandmother never participated in the process through the church. She always made up her own packages, however, the discourse of the DRC is deeply inscribed within my family. Women in the DRC held no official positions within the church and were mostly encouraged to keep up their roles at the home front as a display of devotion to their country. In the publications discussed in this chapter; it becomes evident that the church, as an apartheid institution, encouraged the ways in which women would conduct themselves within an apartheid society.

Conclusion

This chapter demonstrated that food and recipes become carriers of memory and offer a unique lens through which ordinary practices could speak to silenced histories. The silencing of the war played a significant role in how women experienced conscription. However, it is through the recipes, that the mothers, sisters and wives could channel a connection to a past that has found its way into old boxes hidden away in the form of letters, photographs and cookbooks. There is also a notable discomfort that comes to the surface when one considers the role of food within this local history, the discomfort of war which is echoed through the comfort that the food packages offered to the troops. As demonstrated in this chapter, food speaks more broadly to the roles and the social and bodily practices of Afrikaner women during conscription between 1980 and 1990. More importantly, this study provides an example of how food and recipes can bring to light unknown local histories that become entrenched within the South African narrative.

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The troops' connection to home is seen throughout the inquiry as being the mother or sister who writes and sends packages. In most of the guidelines I unearthed in the archives and letters my father sent, it becomes a point of noting that the regular writing of letters and receiving of food was a heartfelt connection to home. It is thus understood, that any form of negativity in the communication was not advised. I understand now that my grandmother's narration of the meanderings of home life was a sense of banality in which my father might have found comfort. It is evident that my father cherished the letters, since he had kept them for so long. I had probably read through these letters over a dozen times since I had started my inquiry, looking for anything that might be of interest, and I have finally come to understand that it is the ordinary that is of importance, since it speaks to the lived experiences of my father that he had cherished, however, it also speaks to the longevity of memory. It is this sense of the ordinary that becomes even more important, since it exists and persists even after the death of my father.

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