Ladysmith and All That: Mary Moore Writes of War

Sylvia Vietzen

Follow this and additional works at: https://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi

Recommended Citation
Vietzen, Sylvia, Ladysmith and All That: Mary Moore Writes of War, Kunapipi, 21(3), 1999.
Available at:https://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi/vol21/iss3/8
Ladysmith and All That: Mary Moore Writes of War

Abstract
Wherever you go the talk is of nothing but war, its chances, its horrors. Everybody wants it but everybody dreads it. I Pray don't think we were in a panic [sic] we were sewing shirts all day long we got so used to the idea that we should soon see the boers that we went to look at the hills from the verandas with field glasses to spy their guns.
Ladysmith and All That: Mary Moore Writes of War

Wherever you go the talk is of nothing but war, its chances, its horrors. Everybody wants it but everybody dreads it.¹

Pray don’t think we were in a panic [sic] we were sewing shirts all day long – we got so used to the idea that we should soon see the boers that we went to look at the hills from the verandas with field glasses to spy their guns.²

The encirclement of Ladysmith by Boer forces between 30 October and 2 November 1899 left in its wake the first major battles of the South African War in Natal. The British army’s efforts to relieve Ladysmith, and to halt a further Boer advance south to the sea taking in Pietermaritzburg and Durban, then gave rise to famous battles at Colenso, Spion Kop, Vaalkrantz, and the Tugela Heights. The four-month siege of the small, tin-roofed colonial town of Ladysmith thus became the central issue in the state of war which beset Natal in the summer of 1899-1900. This article sets out to examine the experience and writing of a Natal-based, British colonial, civilian woman caught up in the trappings and repercussions of this war as she faithfully carried out her duties as teacher and headmistress in an Anglican girls’ school in Pietermaritzburg. Throughout the South African War, Mary Moore recounted her experience in weekly, often daily letters written from St Anne’s Diocesan College to her mother and sister in Lincoln, England. The letters form the text of a substantial personal narrative, a key primary source for understanding how this essentially nineteenth-century woman made sense of her world in the circumstances of a turn-of-the-century war. They also provide a fascinating window, from a woman’s perspective, on to the British colonial situation in that war.

That women distance themselves from warfare is probably a broadly accepted axiom.³ One is aware of exceptions: of Boadicea, of women’s roles as camp followers, of the occasional single-minded adventurer who has entered the lines disguised as a man, or of women who have borne arms in their own right.⁴ To plumb the depths of women’s feelings about war, therefore, it is necessary to salvage their personal testimony. Vera Brittain’s classic work Testament of Youth (1933) is significant for giving expression to a woman’s suffering when confronting the irrevocable toll of
the tragedy of war. Olive Schreiner’s short treatise on ‘Woman and War’ (1911), probably the earliest philosophical consideration of this feminist issue, wagers a prediction that it will be ‘woman’ who ends war because ‘she knows the history of flesh; she knows its cost; he does not’. In recent years some challenging research, in particular Miriam Cooke’s study, *Women and the War Story* (1996), has begun to give new meaning to the historical role of women in war. Cooke contends that war history is reconstructed from multiple war stories, many of them from women. She identifies four archetypes in which women have been categorized in traditional war literature: Mater Dolorosa (the weeping madonna), the Patriotic Mother (the ever-ready womb for war), the Spartan Mother (the jingoistic mother who prefers her sons dead to defeated) and the Amazon (the female warrior). She then questions how a woman who may not have borne arms, but has played other parts inherent in the war situation, should resist this labelling and create for herself a new ‘persona’. Adding the woman’s story, she predicts, will de-fictionalize the traditional War Story which has assumed clear distinctions between war and peace, front and home front, combatant and civilian, victory and defeat; that men made war and women kept the peace; that men went to the front and women stayed at home. And acknowledging women’s presence in what has been a ‘woman’s no-mansland’, could alter the narration of war and consequently how war is fought in the future.

While Cooke’s study is focused on post-colonial wars and the space they allow women, her observations offer fresh perspectives against which to assess the space a woman was allowed within a colonial war and her authority to write about it.

For Mary Moore women’s role in war did not surface as a conscious issue. Her purpose was to meet her mother’s need ‘to know all about everything’, and to satisfy her own need to share with her family in England the minutiae of her colonial venture into which the drama of war had now intruded. Consider, for example, her vivid account of how news of the eventual relief of Ladysmith was received and celebrated at St Anne’s College on 1 March 1900:

Oh Oh Oh –
It is almost impossible to believe the good news! ...
We began school, & at 10 or rather a few minutes later, I heard a clapping in the classroom next to the one I was in & wondered how it came into their work. Then my girls fidgetted [sic] & exclaimed ‘Do you hear what they say, Ladysmith is relieved!’ I went into the next room at once & asked ‘Who said so? Ethel Lloyd’. I ran out on the veranda that looks to the garden but there was nobody, so I went back to my girls & we tried to do some more but failed. I said ‘I must find out’ so I jumped out of the window & ran up the veranda to the Study. I grant it was unbecoming in a Head-Mistress but remember what incentive I had!
I found the Lady Warden in floods of tears, so I guessed it was true & I felt very choky myself. It really was true ....
I must not forget to tell you all the girls turned out with one accord on the tennis court & cheered & cheered & cheered then sang God Save the Queen & then fled to their dormitories & changed into white frocks & all put on red white and blue badges – this before they went out ...

Later Moore and two teachers accompanied a group of girls into the town:

Every place displayed its bunting, every face was beaming, everybody wore the colours ... Men stood aside with their hats off as we passed. I wondered whether they thought us the Vestal Virgins or whether it was the colours – they were so nice – some men rather excited by champagne or beer, not only took off their hats but cheered us & the worse the man the better thing he said – for they ‘blessed our hearts’. At one place was a Vierkleur® draped in crepe with a Union Jack hanging over it. The Herberts met us & photographed us outside the Zulu Monument. Then, returning, the girls asked if they might cheer the Governor. They meant onside but I did not want a street demonstration so I said we would go to Govt House. Then they asked me to lead so I boldly (externally but inwardly quaking) led the way into the garden & we drew up in line before the Govr’s study & I gave the word 1– 2– 3– then the girls cheered him. At once the window was thrown up & he thanked us. I told him they wished to cheer him & he said some pretty things ... & the girls cheered him again & marched out of the gates in order.

In these passages, which will be returned to in what follows, Mary Moore’s personal feelings, assumptions and loyalties, in fact her entire intellectual framework and context are immediately evident. Moore was an establishment woman through and through. She had been one of the early students at Newnham College, Cambridge, founded for women in 1871. She had taught at St Mary’s School, Paddington, a High Church Anglican establishment in London. It was there that she met the Vanderplank daughters, Ada and Ethel, who had been sent to school in England from Natal. They encouraged her to come to Natal, to the High Church establishment of St Anne’s. As well as the Vanderplanks, with whom she spent her first Christmas in Natal in 1890, her friends included the St Georges in elite, upper Loop Street; Bishop Macrorie and his family directly opposite the school; the Mackenzies and Leuchars on their farms in the Cramond area; and the Jacksons, magistrates, in Harding in the south of the Colony and in Newcastle in the north. Through her visits to pupils’ homes she also moved freely among the leading colonial families such as the Strachans at Umzimkulu on the Natal-East Griqualand border and the farming families at the Dargle and Mooi River in the Natal Midlands. In addition, her circle was enriched in no small measure by St Anne’s proximity to Government House and, in particular, to Fort Napier, the Imperial army’s regimental headquarters in Natal. Compounding these influences, Moore clearly had imperial army connections in her own family and wrote of ‘Uncle Evelyn’ who had lived most of his life in India and served with Lord Roberts. So it is significant that when she established Wykeham School, her own venture, in 1905, it was in the
upper Loop Street area so that it could attract the officers’ daughters and maintain the social class and ethos which she valued. In many ways, then, Mary Moore was a conventionally privileged, conventional Victorian woman. Her letters during the South African War were, in no uncertain terms, for Queen and Empire. She believed in British rightness and certain victory; for her, civilization itself was at stake.

These sentiments are palpably apparent in Moore’s unsparing reportage of the Battle of Colenso, as characteristic an example as any of her war writing. When Sir Redvers Buller, the British Commander-in-Chief, disembarked in Cape Town on 31 October 1899 to be greeted with the news that Ladysmith was besieged by Boer forces, he took the controversial decision to divide the British forces and invade the Boer Republics on three fronts: two along the Cape rail routes and one, under his own leadership, to focus on Ladysmith. After noting Buller’s arrival in Natal on 25 November, Moore wrote, on Sunday, 3 December:

They are expecting a big fight at Colenso [sic]; it will mean a great deal. It will be hard to win for the boors are well posted and their cannons outclass ours, but if we don’t win, we can expect them down here again by the next train. They are keeping a thousand men here for fear of the worst – so they say – it may not be true – but certainly the Colenso fight will mean much to both sides. Relief to Ladysmith if we get it, loss of Maritzburg if we lose it. I heard today of someone who hurried off to Colenso to be in time for it.

A tense fortnight followed. On Wednesday, 6 December she wrote:

There is no real news, everybody is waiting, almost afraid to breathe while we wait, for the fight at Colenso. We expect it tomorrow because it is Buller’s birthday, he will be 60, & we think he will signalise it.

The waiting continued and she confessed that ‘it is better to be sure than to fight and lose. We trust Buller & know he is doing his best’. Her trust proved ill-founded. With inadequate reconnaissance, General Buller made an ill-conceived frontal attack on the Boer lines north of the Thukela River at Colenso on 15 December 1899. On that fateful day the Boers, hidden in rugged terrain, unleashed a hail of rifle and cannon fire and inflicted a resounding defeat on Buller’s forces within hours. Though he described it, militarily, as merely a ‘serious reverse’, Buller was to spend the rest of his days attempting a justification of the Battle of Colenso.

Interestingly, however, Mary Moore, in shock and outrage, turned her ire on the Boers. Buller went unmentioned; the Boers were lambasted for their savagery. Her letter of 17 December was devoted wholly to Colenso. Some extracts will illustrate her reaction:

The Colenso battle was a butchery! It was a hideous mockery as regards a battle – a battle should be between opposing forces. Our men never saw their foes until like birds & beasts of prey they swooped down to plunder & rifle the dead & dying. They had it all their own way from the beginning. They had
never been located. For 2 days they had remained still, motionless, in their trenches & schranti & never replied while we shelled. Then on that awful Friday, the word was given to our men to advance & they swung along as if returning from parade, their pipes in their mouths, poor fellows, as if they were just to walk without opposition into Ladysmith & when within 800 yds there came a murderous & withering tongue of flame from thousands of rifles & the brave fellows who were left worked till they dropped.

While she tried to give an accurate account of the battle - and to an extent succeeded - her dismay at the British defeat and her anger at their having been outwitted by the Boers vividly coloured her writing:

But the awful horrors of the fight yet remain to be told. Never in a battle within the last 800yrs perhaps has a foe treated its opponents - helpless opponents - as the boers did. Certainly no Zulu or Kafir here would exercise such cold-blooded cruelty. He would assegai his man honourably.18

This gross exaggeration must stand alongside other imperial misconceptions of war and conflict in strange lands. She continued:

What I am going to tell you, I don’t expect a thousand people in all England will believe even if it is published throughout its length & breadth - but it is true. Officers now in our hospitals tell it having seen it done. One poor old Colonel, with a shot through his back, lay in the blazing sun, unable to move that day & the arm that was ripped of its clothing is blistered by the sun’s heat. As he lay there he saw the boers come out & fall upon the dead & dying & empty their pockets, steal their watches & everything of value. One poor fellow laying dying, an officer, & he had 2 rings on his fingers & because they did not come off easily the boers hacked at his fingers & cut them off - cut off his fingers to steal the rings – & the poor fellow was not dead but dying. When a poor man recovered consciousness and raised himself on one arm, to look round & see where he was & what was going on, he was shot at. It is not one who reports this, but several.

She told also of the ‘fierce, blazing heat’, of the mortal wounding of Lord Roberts’s son, of Buller’s wound, of the need for milk for the men and her own school being ‘only too glad’ to have condensed milk to help. And further:

There are even worse horrors than I have told you. Some men saw a foot sticking out of the veldt, so they dug, & they found a Dublin Fusilier, without a wound or scratch & it is supposed he had been buried alive by the boers. They laid barbed wire in the bed of the Tugela to drown anyone who tried to swim across, by entangling him in the wire, & they laid dynamite on the far side which is to be blown up if any get across.

While it is difficult to verify all her information, checking the newspapers which we know Moore read so avidly, reveals much corroboration or, perhaps, the fact that the newspapers were her main source.19 She also received first-hand stories from the wounded sent back to be nursed in Pietermaritzburg, and from contacts through the school,
and friends, many of whom served in the Natal volunteer regiments. Her comment that 'Meredyth Fannin came yesterday, good boy, he said he would always come & tell us tit-bits of news, as he is in a Gov. Off: he hears things. Besides all young men hear things from their comrades', is telling.\(^{20}\) However excessive her descriptions may seem, she was evidently concerned about accuracy, often questioned her sources, offered other versions, and queried what she believed to be hearsay and rumour. Nevertheless, her account was not that of a war correspondent or historian. Her purpose was none other than to talk aloud to her mother and sister in England and, as a means of doing so, her letters reveal her at her most candid and honest. It is therefore worth observing what emerge as her deepest attitudes towards the people who had a stake in the war: the British, the Boers and the Africans.

For Mary Moore the war was about British supremacy. In the months prior to its outbreak, she was anxious and amazed that British supremacy could be questioned, let alone challenged. In June she wrote:

Old Kruger made a speech to his Volksraad the other day & said, 'We need not fear, ours is a righteous cause, God is still with us. He will not allow us to be defeated'. He is such an old humbug. The paper, yesterday - not that you can trust the paper, of course - said Sir Alfred Milner was afraid of disaffection in the Cape Colony, & if war begins and we are unsuccessful at the outset, neutrals will join the Dutch & we shall lose supremacy in S. Africa. What annoys me is that they are ignorant unlettered savages who are daring to oppose us - if they were on an equality in birth, education, culture etc you would not mind, but such boors to dare - Well, we shall see.\(^{21}\)

In August she was even more specific:

The war seems to be creeping nearer. Wherever you are and whomsoever you meet there is but one topic 'The War' & there is but one refrain 'We hope they understand in England that it is a struggle for supremacy - it is no longer franchise - it is for S. Africa.'\(^{22}\)

With this went her assumption of English superiority, rather well captured in her comment, 'When we read all the miserable news from Ladysmith ... we turn to the despatches from Mafeking & revive at the name of Baden-Powell. He is an Englishman! Is he not splendid!'\(^{23}\) In part this was also a snide criticism of the British generalship in Natal which she believed had lost Ladysmith through error and capitulation, and was deserving of her censure for letting the side down:

As some one said the other day - 'the men are splendid, but they are badly officered'. When will they pocket their pride & listen to the Colonials who have lived here all their days & know the boers. The great fault is that the boers are underestimated.\(^{24}\)

Moore did not linger on the deeper motives for the war such as, for
example, control of the gold mines. For her the preservation of a dominant British influence in South Africa, and the colonial lifestyle it implied, was the essential issue.

The reverse side of her pro-British stance was her demonization of the enemy and stereotyping of the Boer. Pages could be filled with her antipathy towards them. The ultimate judgement she wished upon them is implicit in a remark shortly before the Colenso battle:

The fear among us is that they will scatter & go home to their farms & so live to be a future thorn in the flesh. I am afraid they will slink away & so escape the drubbing they deserve. The only thing that cheers me up is that Buller has asked for tenders for new gallows.25

It was the language of irreconcilable conflict based on an unmistakeable othering more familiar from descriptions of non-white colonized peoples. In this she was not out of line with her class and circle. Local English-language newspapers abound in malicious reports and attacks on the Boer character, religion, and habits.26 The issue of this stereotyping is worth pursuing elsewhere, certainly for colonial Natal.

In contrast Moore’s references to black people in the war context are notable for their rarity. She did tell of letters brought by a black postal runner from Ladysmith,27 and of news of the Boers’ movements there conveyed by blacks.28 She implied, of course, that they sided with the British, as, for example, when she wrote, once again preoccupied with Boer annihilation: ‘The Kafirs who get through criticise our mode of fighting, they say we meet the Dutch throw fire on them & then run away, & directly they turn we go back quietly to our tents, we don’t pursue and finish them off.’29 In her voluminous Colenso account there is only one reference to black participation in the war and then only in relation to British and Boer behaviour:

They say they have cabled from the Cape for 80,000 [sic] more men - & some are saying why not send for Ghoorkas. They have said for weeks that we were using Ghoorkas & kafirs & coolies against them. We have not used a single coloured man & have kept the Zulus & Basutos from fighting against them. While numbers have been driven into battle by them to fight against us.30

There was, we know, ample opportunity from the press and other sources for her to tell of the African guides and messengers at Colenso and especially of the volunteer stretcher-bearers, 800 of whom were members of Natal’s Indian community led by Mohandas K. Gandhi. She probably accepted without question, as did the British and Colonial Governments, that subject peoples, including those of colour, should show solidarity with the ‘white man’s war’, even though Gandhi would have been known to hold pacifist and anti-imperialist sympathies. Yet it is important to note that her attitude to individual black people was by no means hostile, indeed becoming warm when it came to her relationship with the
domestic staff at St Anne’s and her interest in African customs, dress and habits. At the same time, however, she could be judgmental and disparaging when the ways of black people seemed to her to be alien or ‘uncivilised’. Her attitude was, in essence, a colonial paternalism: blacks were there as helpful appendages to white society, hardly as people in their own right. Yet ultimately, within the context of her war writing, it was the Boers who were depicted as savages, and blacks as comparatively ‘noble’ and largely loyal. This represents an intriguing reversal of the conventional colonial hierarchy of white over black.

It seems fair to suggest that Mary Moore’s entire environment – the British colonial establishment – played no small part in reinforcing her attitudes of superiority to subject peoples, including the Boers. The ‘Old Natal Family’ network in whose heart she lived, controlled the Natal volunteer regiments, private schools, and government positions, and maintained them as class-and racially-marked institutions. Although views varied among these, on the whole, military and farming families, their attitude to black people was feudalistic and authoritarian, if not oppressive. She absorbed this culture like the air she breathed. Furthermore, it should not be underestimated to what extent schools, especially the privileged ones, were extensions of British imperialism, even of the British army. Mary Moore was one of many women teachers who left hearth and home with a mission to serve God and the Queen by taking education for women to Britain’s ‘expanding society’ in the Empire; this was women’s self-assertion in the service of colonization. At St Anne’s, imperial loyalty was presumed and actively cultivated: proprietary rights in Natal were never questioned, yet England was ‘home’. This is abundantly clear from the description already quoted of the way in which the school celebrated the relief of Ladysmith, and equally clear in Moore’s comment, shortly after the war began:

Martial Law is proclaimed here, so we must mind our P’s and Q’s. The children wanted to know if they would be shot if they spoke of the Queen. They had an idea they were not to mention her name.

Like other colonial people in Natal, too, Mary Moore’s devotion to the British cause in the war was passionate and she shared the genuine fear of a Boer invasion. She also participated in the war in a traditional way for a woman of her time. She sewed pillowcases, handkerchiefs, shirts, and cushions; she hosted nurses and refugees at St Anne’s; she nursed the wounded in St George’s Garrison Church, and made available the St Anne’s Chapel for services while St George’s was commandeered. She also visited the wounded troops at Fort Napier, listened to their stories and gave tea parties for them at St Anne’s; and she visited the bereaved. All this was interspersed with maintaining the routines of the school.

Her close involvement suggests that the home front was not so separate from the war front in colonial war as one might think. Furthermore,
distanced though she was from the scene of battle, Moore nevertheless presided over a ‘war zone’ of a different kind at St Anne’s College. Pupils were intensely fearful and anxious: many could not get home; fathers, brothers, uncles were being killed and wounded; families were in danger and homes were being destroyed. Throughout the formal phase of the war refugees were billeted at the school and there were frequent visits to the railway station – about 500 yards away – where telegrams and the latest war news were posted up and troop trains were trundling through. The tension of this situation would also have been exacerbated by the constant vigilance for traitors in their midst. Not surprising, then, that those scenes of hysterical release described earlier should have erupted at St Anne’s when respite eventually came at the news of Ladysmith’s relief. While the tension was still being endured, it is also not surprising that, in a moment of weakness, Mary Moore gave way to a spontaneous admission of frustration to her mother in November 1899:

I really don’t know why I am writing. There is no news but the old news i.e. Ladismith [sic] is closely invested & we are cut off from our army, & if men come they will not be able to get up to Ladismith because the line is up & between our Ladismith men & us is a boer force which is being reinforced. I have been trying to do some work but it is not worth much, as soon as I lift my eyes from a word I see War, I think War, smell & taste War. It pervades one’s being. I sometimes think like the old woman in the song ‘lawks-a-mussy me! Sure t’is none of I’. It is so curious for a humdrum ordinary hard-working schoolmarm to be in such a position of unrestful excitement. I sometimes wonder what it will feel like when we can sit down calmly & have nothing to worry about, & wake up in the morning without the first thought ‘Has Ladismith fallen’.

‘T’is none of I’: despite her lurid and even excited descriptions of battle, this expresses an unambiguous desire, from the point of view of a committed teacher, for the conflict simply to be over.

Indeed, there is much about this lively, intelligent woman which did not fit, and actively challenges the passive, non-combatant, helpless stereotype of the Victorian colonial woman. At the time the first hostilities were expected, shortly before the battle at Talana, she urged her family not to worry, declaring, ‘I am very glad I am here & am awfully sorry for Miss Heaton, just to have missed it; I should have been wild if this had taken place when I was having my holiday.’ Her detailed description of the Battle of Colenso demonstrated an unusual, almost obsessive interest in the war. It is quite remarkable that within two days of the battle she could have been in possession of so much information, let alone have already written it in a letter. Her desire to convey the war news was almost frenetic: she frequently sent newspapers to her mother to supplement her letters, commenting, too, on which were the better papers. She also showed evidence of desiring a more hands-on experience of the combat scene. After the failure of the British victories at Talana and Elandsblaagte
to prevent the Boer advance, she wrote:

This is as someone says the funniest war – we claim all the victories & the enemy takes all the territory – if you have a map you will see they have control of more than half Natal. It makes me so angry, I long to go & fight. We are not allowed yet. We shall soon think the very generals are traitors.41

Again, when the Boers were threatening the railway north of Pietermaritzburg, she declared, ‘If they have nothing better I say we will go & watch the line – if they will only let us’.42 This suggests a grudging acceptance of a side-lined position. A month later she wrote, ‘I am thinking of writing to the Governor or to Buller to get a permit to teach the newly arrived Tommy a little geography & history – that he may know where he is fighting & for what reason’.43 She also longed to visit and climb Majuba, that key site of the first Anglo-Boer War, while visiting the Jacksons in Newcastle, but was disappointed on two occasions by poor weather.44

Fulfilling some of these interests, on 6 July 1900 she and a ‘Miss Hunt’, a teaching colleague at St Anne’s, set out by train to visit the now-deserted Natal battlefields, leaving Pietermaritzburg at 8.40 a.m. to arrive in Ladysmith at 5.30 p.m., so that they could see positions such as Colenso as they travelled north, and ‘alas graves everywhere along the line they say’. She planned to keep a notebook so as not to forget the details, and finally sent her family a ‘holiday diary’.45 On her return to St Anne’s a month later she lamented, ‘I keep feeling so sad to think I did not bring more trophies from the battle fields, but I threw ever so many shells away at the time because I could not carry them’. There is a constant tension between these participative desires and her sense of confinement as a woman, as is well-captured in the following contrast of gendered activities:

Today I have a blister on my middle finger where the scizzors [sic] went, & my arm is as stiff from machining as if I had rheumatism ... I stuck to the machine as I should like to stick to a Gatling or a Maxim, mowing them all down before me.46

* * *

Mary Moore has left a textual archive of substantial value for the study of white women and colonialism in late nineteenth-century South Africa.47 Her account demonstrates the enormous complexity of the war experience for a non-combatant woman, even for one as establishment-based as she was. Much of her war consciousness was traditional, some of it was not. Her bellicose prose shows characteristics of Miriam Cooke’s Amazon and the Patriotic Mother; and, indeed, there is much in her letters to suggest the Spartan and also the Mater Dolorosa type as she entered into the human tragedy of the war. However, her sense of duty, interrupted by occasional frustration, her eye for detail, and her strong identification with
the well-being and collective mood of 'her girls', at the same time lifts her writing beyond the confines of these stereotypes. In so far as truth is attainable at all, Mary Moore's story shows that there is not one War Story of 1899-1902, but many war stories.

NOTES

1. KCM 93/2/3, Mary Moore to Mater and Chick, 17 August 1899. The letters of Mary Moore to her mother (Mater) and sister (Flo or Chick) used in this article, are from the manuscript collection presently held by the Killie Campbell Library in Durban. They constitute four bundles which are accessioned as follows: October 1890-October 1891: KCM 93/2/1; October-1891-December 1892: KCM 93/2/2; July 1897-August 1899: KCM 93/2/3; September 1899-June 1902: KCM 93/2/4. I have used my own transcriptions throughout and have adhered strictly to Mary Moore's text and, as far as possible, to her style of presentation. From here on the letters will be referred to by date only.


4. The South African War itself saw women disguised as men in the ranks and, indeed, as women soldiers. See Apollon Davidson and Irina Filatova, The Russians and the Anglo-Boer War (Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 1998), pp. 123-9, for the case of Maria Z. who, in search of her husband and in disguise, fought with the Boers and later worked in a British field hospital. Also, among others, there was Mrs Berrett, the Boer woman who fought at Spion Kop alongside her husband. See Fransjohan Pretorius, The Anglo-Boer War (Cape Town: Struik, 1998), pp. 63-6.


8. The Vierkleur was the flag of the Transvaal Republic.

9. A monument in central Pietermaritzburg commemorating British and colonial troops who had died in the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879.

10. She obviously means from the side of the street.


12. An English settler family whose anglicized name of Dutch origin was already known in England as early as the sixteenth century.

13. Lord Roberts succeeded General Buller as British Commander-in-Chief in South Africa.

14. Moore always wrote Colenso as 'Colenzo' and, on occasion, Ladysmith as 'Ladismith'. It is worth noting that she always referred to the Boers as 'boers', no doubt signifying her contempt.

15. Ibis is the correct spelling; the British spelled it phonetically as 'Tugela'.

16. Though he retained command of the Natal campaign, Buller was replaced as British Commander-in-Chief by Lord Roberts. He was required to defend his position formally before the Royal Commission on the War in South Africa in
London in 1902.

17. Moore held the traditional view that formal warfare had rules and was incensed when Boer tactics appeared to her to ignore them. It is interesting that observers of the phenomenon of war in the twentieth century have noted a steady descent into 'slaughter' and 'barbarism' associated with a disregard for the rules and 'honour' of formal warfare. See, for example, Michael Ignatieff, *The Warrior's Honour: Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience* (London: Vintage, 1998), pp. 116-8, and Eric Hobsbawm, 'Barbarism: A User's Guide', in *On History* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1997), pp. 256-8.

18. The term 'kafir' or 'kaffir' is unacceptable today. Its widespread use in the nineteenth century was apparently generally inoffensive. It is retained for historical purposes in the interests of the integrity of the original text. The same applies to the term 'coolie' which appears later.

19. See, for example, the war news in the *Natal Witness*, 18 and 20 December 1899.

23. Mary Moore to Mater, 5 November 1899.
24. Mary Moore to Mater, 29 October 1899.


27. Mary Moore to Mater, 1 January 1900.
29. Mary Moore to Mater, 19 November 1899.
30. Mary Moore to Mater, 17 December 1899. In fact, recent research suggests that the British may have used as many as 100,000 Blacks in the war and the Boers at least 10,000 Blacks and Coloureds. See Gilbert Torlage, in *The Natal Witness Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902 Centenary Series*, 1, 15 (March 1999).

31. In particular, the Natal Carbineers, the Natal Mounted Rifles and the Umvoti Mounted Rifles. Sir George Leuchars, in whose home Moore was a regular guest, commanded the Umvoti Mounted Rifles during the South African War, and was a Minister in the Natal Cabinet.


35. Mary Moore to Mater and Chick, 21 October 1899.

36. This was perhaps even more true of Boer women, many of whom were actually influential in pursuing the war to the bitter end (the 'bittereinders') in the cause of independence.

37. At various times Moore suspected pupils, refugees, even a housekeeper, of being Boer spies.
38. Mary Moore to Mater, 5 November 1899.
40. There was less minute detail in her description of later battles because Buller placed an embargo on news after Colenso (Personal interview, Gilbert Torlage, 8 June 1998). Moore refers to her frustration about this twice in her letter of 28 January 1900 following the Battle of Spionkop.
42. Mary Moore to Mater, 25 November 1899.
43. Mary Moore to Mater, 23 December 1899.
44. Mary Moore to Mater 22 July 1898. This was the site at which the Boers defeated the British in 1881.
45. Mary Moore to Mater, 3 August 1900. Though she asked them to return it with 'Miss Dimmock' from St Anne's who was on holiday in England, the diary is unfortunately not in the Mary Moore collection in the Killie Campbell Library in Durban.
46. Mary Moore to Mater, 29 October 1899. A gatling and a maxim were different kinds of American-invented machine guns.
47. There is a growing literature on the involvement of colonial women in imperialism. See Julie Parle, 'History She Wrote: A Reappraisal of *Dear Louisa* in the 1990s', in *South African Historical Journal*, 33, 1995, pp. 33-4, and Deborah Gaitskell, 'From "Women and Imperialism" to Gendering Colonialism', in *South African Historical Journal*, 39, 1998, pp. 176-193, in which four recent works on the topic are reviewed and discussed. See also, for example, Helen Callaway, *Gender, Culture and Empire: European Women in Colonial Nigeria* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1987), and Jenny Sharpe, *Allegories of Empire: The Figure of the Woman in the Colonial Text* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).