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SOUTH AFRICAN WAR?: 1899-1902
EDITED BY ELLEKE BOEHMER
Kunapipi is a tri-annual arts magazine with special but not exclusive emphasis on the new literatures written in English. It aims to fulfil the requirements T.S. Eliot believed a journal should have: to introduce the work of new or little known writers of talent, to provide critical evaluation of the work of living authors, both famous and unknown, and to be truly international. It publishes creative material and criticism. Articles and reviews on related historical and sociological topics plus film will also be included as well as graphics and photographs.

The editor invites creative and scholarly contributions. The editorial board does not necessarily endorse any political views expressed by its contributors. Manuscripts should be double-spaced with footnotes gathered at the end, should conform to the MHRA (Modern Humanities Research Association) Style Sheet. Wherever possible the submission should be on disc (soft-ware preferably Word for Windows, Wordperfect or Macwrite saved for PC on PC formatted disc) and should be accompanied by a hard copy, please include a short biography, address and email contact if available.


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Back cover: Rhodes and General Cronje as mouse and cat during the siege of Kimberley, 1900, postcard. Produced in Berlin by Eysler and Co. Rhodes House Library, Mss. Afr. r. 256

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Kunapipi refers to the Australian Aboriginal Myth of the Rainbow Serpent which is the symbol both of creativity and regeneration. The journal’s emblem is to be found on an Aboriginal shield from the Roper River area of the Northern Territory in Australia.
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## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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African orderlies in the Boer War, photographed by Major Walker Tunbridge, c. 1900 (see p. 74)
In 1999/2000, looking back from our vantage point at this century’s turn, the Second Anglo-Boer or ‘Great’ South African War, October 1899-May 1902, seems (even more starkly than it perhaps did before) to have laid long shadows across southern African political and cultural history of the last 100 years. These are shadows which, even if to a lesser degree, fall across twentieth-century world history and historical imaginations also. Dismissed in the past as one of Britain’s many forgotten imperial wars — though a particularly costly and hard-won one — the Boer War, and the blow it represented to imperial morale, did have profound implications for colonial rule elsewhere in the British Empire, as well as for anti-imperial and nationalist activism. And it was during 1899-1902 that ‘South Africa’ first became a humanitarian and human rights issue of international significance, as Barbara Harlow evocatively outlines below.

Distinguished by long-range weaponry, barbed-wire entrenchments, airborne reconnaissance, extensive photographic documentation, concentration camp installations, high civilian mortality rates, and guerrilla tactics — the Boer War, though a ‘little war’, has widely been seen as the first ‘modern’ war. It was a precursor to 1914-1918 and its shattered waste lands, and a preparation for the twentieth century’s many global engagements — as James Joyce (discussed here by Richard Brown) was to observe. Moreover, appropriately though chillingly, this apparently doom-filled conflict fell at the very cusp of the new modern age. As for the ‘fervourless’ Thomas Hardy pondering his ‘blast-beruffled’ ‘Darkling Thrush’ in December 1900, the fin-de-siècle hostilities, which he opposed, harboured grave portents of global devastation despite the promise that extensive imperialism and mass industrialization had once seemed to hold.

Within southern Africa, as any number of the contributors to this special issue, South African War?, make us aware, the Boer War represented a traumatic and long-to-be-remembered phase in the clash between a number of the sub-continent’s rival and emergent nationalisms: British designs upon a united English-speaking South Africa and its wealth; Afrikaner defensiveness concerning their land, language and customs, including of course the oppression of Africans; and the increasingly more determined moves to self-determination of African people which became prominent in the years following the war, in part as a consequence of the exclusion of African rights from the post-1902 processes of nation-building.
Moreover, as Judith Brown points out in her article, Mohandas Gandhi’s ambulance work during the war in Natal in 1899-1900 would be crucial for the evolution of his ideas of passive resistance, and of his strategy of appealing to ideals of ‘British citizenship’ and duty to achieve Indian self-rule.\(^3\) Fascinatingly, too, as the most serious crisis in British imperial authority in a century, the conflict provided the site and occasion for potential intersections between anti-colonial nationalisms, such as we see for example in the Irish nationalist support extended to the Boers in the first year of the war.

As we are now in a position to see more clearly, not only militarily, therefore, but in terms of the making and breaking of political identities and national perceptions, the Boer War would prove formative and form-giving across the twentieth century. It brought, as Andries Oliphant’s Plaatje perceives, a new age, that ‘will change things forever’. In addition, the war made and consolidated key nationalist, imperial and other political careers which were to mark the century. Within, and on the edges of, the arena of the conflict, Emily Hobhouse and Olive Schreiner, amongst others, were to clarify issues of women’s rights in criticizing imperial injustices. Rudyard Kipling, hosted by one of the architects of 1890s Anglo-Boer tensions, Cecil John Rhodes, would not only lambaste the imperial neglect that the war to him exemplified, but worked briefly as a war correspondent in the Free State, reliving the embattled excitements of his days in the Punjab. It was also during the Boer War that Winston Churchill, working like Kipling as a journalist, would begin to hone his image as a ‘never-say-die’ Englishman in the narrative of his escape from Boer prison. Other prominent commentators on the war, such as Michael Davitt, Arthur Conan Doyle, and the campaigner W.T. Stead, from their different political vantage points, would see the contest, as did Kipling and Churchill, as teaching stern military, political and humanitarian lessons for the future, and would build public platforms on the basis of this advocacy. Their debates, carried out in public and private meetings, and across the pages of the expanding popular press and the proliferating reviews of the day, produced a voluminous archive of discussion on the war and its many challenging issues – imperial loyalty, monopoly capitalism, the ‘native question’, conscription and national preparedness, women’s and human rights.

It was famously a war that involved non-South African colonials as deeply as it did metropolitans – and was in this sense close to being a ‘world’ war. Along with his home-bound colleague Henry Lawson, and others, ‘Banjo’ Paterson, the Australian popular poet and yet another war correspondent, represented his country’s involvement in the conflict as a further forging of Australian mateship. Within a different nationalist camp, John MacBride, later ‘vainglorious’ hero of 1916 in Ireland, developed his military reputation fighting not many miles away from, but on the opposite side of, the stretcher-bearing Gandhi and his team at
Ladysmith—MacBride’s rationale being that to support the Boers was to strike against the Empire, Ireland’s foe. Further to the north, Robert Baden-Powell, dedicated reader of *Kim*, invented canny and unscrupulous stratagems for white survival under siege in Mafeking, and later, arguably, filtered this survival ethos into the ethics of the world-wide Boy Scout Movement. And Solomon T. Plaatje, co-father-to-be of the African National Congress, worked as a translator, scribe and spy on Baden-Powell’s payroll, surveying these stratagems from the inside and storing them up for future meditation. These and other prominent personalities move into and out of the essays collected here, demonstrating very clearly the extent to which the ‘ragtag’, ‘shadow-changing’ and heterogeneous cast of this ‘unremembered war’, to quote Sheila Roberts, was also remarkably cosmopolitan and internationally connected.

As no doubt for other children growing up white in the apartheid South Africa of the 1960s, my own school playground was, over half a century on, still imprinted with the after-shocks of the conflict, being regularly the site of an always eventually violent game called ‘Boer War’. This game, which was played with far more relish even than ‘Cowboys and Indians’, uniformly set ‘English’ children, who by and large had shoes to wear, against Afrikaner children who tended to go barefoot. As I remember, the barefoot ‘Boers’ generally had the upperhand: they ‘always play dirty’, it was whispered. And, indeed, not far from our school battlefields lay real-life Boer War sites where it was possible to visit and to stand imagining how these ruthless white natives, the Boers, had brutally ambushed brave Tommies, firing at them from *kranses* that they alone had had the skills to reconnoitre and invest. Although us immigrant and settler children tended to side with ‘the Inglush’ when playing out the war, standing on those baking, wind-whipped stretches of veld I found it difficult not to feel a sneaking identification with the Boers. Though ridiculed as indolent primitives and ‘unlettered savages’ for over a century in the British press and travel writing, Boer men and women had managed through their local knowledge and expertise with firearms to hold off the massed power of the British imperium in these same apparently non-descript fields.

The division of ‘Boer’ and ‘English’, which was evidently based on class as well as culture and a long-remembered history, ran through the white political party structures, rhetoric, and voting patterns, both of the 1960s, and across the century, influencing economic policies and most social arrangements. Yet, in so far as the 1899-1902 conflict played havoc with the lives of tens of thousands of African and non-African civilians, its repercussions also reached much further than the laagers and enclaves of white society. Was the South African War then a ‘white man’s war’ only? Is the war indeed correctly named a ‘South African War’?

In recent commemorative discussion of the war events, for example during a large international conference, ‘Rethinking the South African War’, held in Pretoria in 1998, questions such as these have become almost
as customary as the phrases themselves. It is pointed out, for example, that the war was a conflict between white colonialist war-lords, at the beginning of which it was agreed that blacks remain unarmed (for reasons of preserving racial 'dignity'). Not having involved the majority of South Africans, in what sense then could the war merit the title 'South African'? Was it not yet another of the many bloody struggles over land which have repeatedly taken place on the subcontinent – as Liz Gunner's story, for example, strikingly emblematizes. Furthermore, could it not be argued that the 'South African War', as such, had begun with the first European incursions at the Cape, and ended with the democratic elections in 1994? And as far as commemorating the 1899-1902 centenary was concerned, many South Africans had understandably become wary of war commemorations used as bases for identity, especially considering the egregious consequences of Afrikaner nationalist myths of the Boer as colonial victim (outlined here by Marita Wenzel).

Yet, even granting these persuasive arguments, the stark figures testifying to the widespread involvement, both active and passive, of South Africans of all races in the 'Anglo-Boer' War, do insist upon attention. First there were the approximately 26,000 'irreconcilable' Boer women and children who died in British concentration camps, whose suffering has been relatively well documented – by Emily Hobhouse, amongst others. But in addition there was also the huge number of black people interned as victims of the war, often as servants to the Boers, whose suffering was till relatively recently obliterated from official histories. Africans also participated actively in a variety of capacities, and on both sides of the conflict. In 1899, for example, 12,000 black agterryers or auxiliaries (grooms, cooks, and other servants), allegedly unarmed, rode away to war with the Boers, while, for their part, the British are on record for having had about 14,000 black transport riders in their military employ. But these figures do not even begin to speak of the many scouts, spies and cattle-rustlers, trackers and blockhouse guards, upon whom supply lines and military intelligence on both sides rested – a reliance that Andries Oliphant's story, prizing open the interstices of Sol Plaatje's Mafeking Diary, vividly dramatizes. Some historians in fact put the number of Africans in British military employ at as high as 100,000. But, then again, these figures also do not take account of the crowds of people displaced by the war, such as, most famously, the 7,000 Zulu workers on the Johannesburg Reef, who were left to walk home, under the guidance of the Natal Native Agent, John Sidney Marwick, once war was declared.

It would be worth revisiting the South African War from our centennial, and millennial, perspective, if only to reread and re-evaluate the participation of this vast mass of (alleged) bit-part actors, both assistants and victims, consorts and collaborators; to see how and to what extent their involvement and legacy changes the accepted picture of the war. Because from their point of view the Boer War did indeed resonate across
the length and breadth of what is now the South African nation. With an eye to their significance, it is then immediately noteworthy that the contributions to this collection – fictional, non-fictional, and poetic – are almost without exception preoccupied with the less-than-official, sidelined or subordinated participants in the war, with its untold, buried, and neglected stories. Here we are faced with messy history, the ‘war without glamour’, to adapt Emily Hobhouse’s phrase, such as it was mostly experienced by marginal players and ‘others’: non-white women and men, and white women.

The Boer War was a modern war not only technologically, as already described, but in going a considerable distance towards establishing the right of (white) women to participate in military conflict in an auxiliary capacity, in particular as nurses, as well as establishing their right to speak out more generally concerning women’s war-time roles and responsibilities. However, it was due to its massive impact on civilians, that the Boer War most urgently raised debates concerning gender identity, sexual conduct, and women’s rights in war, in particular war under colonialism. As a conflict that was in certain respects perpetrated upon women, the Boer War also became the occasion of unprecedented protest from women. In Miriam Cooke’s terms, as cited by Sylvia Vietzen, this war disrupted the traditional War Story by radically confusing war and home fronts.

Sexual, national, and race anxieties, and their implications for early feminism, are at the centre of Carolyn Burdett’s searching discussion of Olive Schreiner’s *Trooper Peter of Mashonaland* (1897), an ‘allegory story’ which was in many ways, as Burdett says, a ‘literary preface’ to the war and its abuses. The headteacher Mary Moore presented by Sylvia Vietzen, too, was concerned with colonial women’s affiliations and duties in war-torn Natal, and, though in her case ideas of civilization and military honour were rather differently inflected from those of Schreiner, she shared with her a profound feeling of frustration at not being able to act more decisively as part of the war effort.

As is standard in most wars, including the frontier skirmishes Malvern van Wyk Smith outlines as the backdrop to nineteenth-century Boer identity, ideas of national and military honour rest four-square on images of femininity, in particular images of sexual purity and resilient motherhood, as well as on ideals of manliness such as concerned not only Conan Doyle or W.T. Stead, but M.K. Gandhi. In South Africa in 1900, however, these conventional symbolisms were put under severe pressure by several factors – first that women were bearing the brunt of the war (in fact some Boer women were serving alongside their husbands in the trenches), but also that many of these women were African (a fact that was perhaps obliquely though unselfconsciously acknowledged in the exoticized images brought home by Australian soldiers, which David Dorward looks at in his essay). The situation was then even further complicated when self-aware and outspoken women like Olive Schreiner,
Emily Hobhouse and (to an extent) Millicent Fawcett, became publicly involved in protesting against the abuses of the war, and against colonial injustices more generally.

However, whereas Emily Hobhouse tended to concern herself exclusively with the plight of white women, Olive Schreiner’s intervention was perhaps even more remarkable for its time, in that she began, though implicitly, to open out some of the contradictions in white women’s self-determination, and to do so in ways that intriguingly anticipated 1980s issues in ‘Third World’ feminism. In Trooper Peter, and elsewhere, she pointed out that European women’s concerns with their rights and sexuality, led to an obligation to recognize also the humanity, and therefore the colonial violation of, non-white people, and especially the suffering of women. Splits in identity and identification generated under empire are also evident in Mary Moore’s writing, though her loyalty is very differently situated. As self-assertion for Moore was always linked to imperial duty, her view of otherness represents an interesting layering, based on a rationale of relative loyalty, in which the ‘boers’, who of course disputed British supremacy, were ranked lower than the seemingly more tractable blacks.

Sheila Roberts’s Researcher in ‘My Danie Theron’ speculates that the time may come when the Boer War is remembered most vividly in certain circles for the nightmares and fantasy figures which it spawned. And, as James Joyce was aware, perhaps one of the most memorable and well-rehearsed texts to come out of the war, as well as the song ‘Dollie Gray’, was for many years Kipling’s subscription poem, ‘The Absent-Minded Beggar’, with its controversial insinuations concerning the neglect of its troops by Britain. War finds in mythic and literary symbols the forms through which to recognize itself. So there is probably no accident in the fact that a number of this issue’s contributions are interested in retellings, ‘ordinary’ stories, and obscured voices, the dark and padlocked rooms of history, as Steven Matthews puts it. Stephen Gray’s ‘Dead Man’s Disclosure’ and Jon Stallworthy’s ‘A Round’, for example, excavate the ground of reimagined history, and the imaginary history of objects, as well as the blurry edges of recorded history itself. In the context of occluded and hidden legacies, it also can’t but be significant that two of the fictionalized ‘small histories’, Roberts’s and Oliphant’s, feature charismatic Boer War spies. Theron and Plaatje’s weaving in the no-man’s land between the opposing sides, is richly emblematic of much of the intermingled ‘normal’ activity of daily African life that ran on throughout the war, and with which the early Afrikaners, as van Wyk Smith shows, had long involved themselves.

Across the twentieth century, Boer War history was routinely used as a treasure chest of cultural and ideological totems with which to shore up apartheid xenophobia. If the effect of a collection such as this is to displace those unfortunate symbols in any way at all, it will have made some
contribution to current efforts to rework and restyle the nation’s history. This is a time when South Africans are much concerned with the work of remembering and reconciliation, and the possibilities of catharsis. In this context, it may be that the revisiting of this South African War will become an important test-case for how to reapproach a divisive, over-mythologized, and yet still painful history.

* * *

I owe many people thanks for having helped in different ways to make this Boer War issue possible. Particular thanks are due to Anna Rutherford and to Shirley Chew: to both, for having gratified my insatiable fascination with the Anglo-Boer War, and to each respectively, for having granted, and suggested to me, the opportunity represented by this special issue. I am also immensely grateful to the indefatigable Glenda Pattenden, and to Susan Burns, for having immeasurably smoothed my path as editor. Derek Attridge too gave valuable pointers in finding my way. In South Africa, I could not have done without the early advice of Greg Cuthbertson at UNISA, the editor of what promises to be an extremely exciting collection of historical essays about the war, as well as John Vinsen, who became an infinitely generous correspondent regarding the ‘underbelly’ of the war. To the helpful and insightful guides who took me round some of the Natal battlefields, especially Gilbert Torlage, and to the more literary guides, David Attwell, Bill Bizley, Margaret Daymond, Johan van Wyk, also many thanks. I am very grateful to the Centre for Creative Arts at the University of Natal, Durban, in particular to Ad Donker, Michael Chapman, and Claire Hull, for having put me up for two months in 1998 to enable me to carry out background research on the war.

As for my Natal ‘family’, the Phipsons, and especially Carol, even to begin to suggest what I owe them would be impossible. Many, many thanks, too, to Steven and to Thomas, in particular for their incredible patience in playing with plastic horses for hours on a street bench in Ladysmith, in a snow-bearing wind, during a Boer War tour.

But perhaps most of all I would like to thank the contributors to this Kunapipi special issue, South African War? Some of the contributors I knew beforehand, and they obligingly agreed to write specially for the issue. Others I met through the eye-opening discussions that have taken place across the past year or so about new research on the war, discussions that they then committed to paper; yet others, hearing of the issue through the Internet or by word-of-mouth, wrote to ask whether they might express their own particular fascination for the war by contributing. On the evidence of our various interactions it would seem that the Boer War is indeed in its only partially ‘unremembered’ way re-entering a zeitgeist. That this issue is the wide-ranging and varied collection of writings that it is, is due to them, and something to serendipity: thank you so much.
NOTES


4. Amongst others, 1999 commemorative conferences were held in Potchefstroom, South Africa, in April, and in Leeds, UK, in October.

5. Is it worth noting in this context that the majority of the contributors to this special issue on the war are white, while around half of them are South African, or South African-born?

6. Helen Bradford, 'Gentlemen and Boers: Afrikaner nationalism, gender and colonial warfare in the South African War', UNISA Conference tabled paper (Pretoria: UNISA, 1998; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, forthcoming), gives a stirring account of the fierce resistance, far fiercer in some cases than that of their men, put up by Boer women, especially during the guerrilla phase of the war, and of how this contribution changes perceptions of the war as a white man’s battle. For a detailed and often-cited account of the internment camps, see also S.B. Spies, *Methods of Barbarism?* (Cape Town: Human and Rousseau, 1977).

7. The most extensive study of the part played by black South Africans in the war, remains Peter Warwick, *Black People and the South African War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). However, as Helen Bradford points out, Warwick draws on only a handful of Afrikaans/Dutch sources.


11. See, for example, Shula Marks, *Divided Sisterhood: Class, Race and Gender in the Nursing Profession in South Africa* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994).

Indian lookout, probably ‘Mr Singh’, at the siege of Ladysmith, 1899
ANDRIES WALTER OLIPHANT

The Interpreter

1

The entries in my diary, anyone familiar with my record of the siege knows, break off on the penultimate day of the third month of the new century. This was just a day before the end of the first quarter of the new age. This time had no special meaning except that the sun, scorching the sand and stones all summer, suddenly fell further west and away from us. Autumn set in. The earth cooled but I lost none of my desire to write.

At the end of March, I wrote: 'The Colonel Commanding has published a hot protest against alleged rumours by somebodies, to the effect that he delays the troops and that he starves the inhabitants, etc., in the Mafeking Mail. He threatens to catch those fellows when their claims ...'

There is nothing after this. Not a word. Yet the empty pages in my diary, twenty sheets to be exact, continue to produce a great deal of conjecture. I have heard many speculations. One of the wildest has it that the rest of my diary is written in invisible ink.

To confess, I have toyed with the idea of calling this story 'Invisible Ink'. But since there is nothing to decipher, I decided against it. Also, I do not want to fuel further conjecture.

This then is the story. It is not written from the shadows or the margins of time but dredged from what has been expunged from memory. It is the story I did not tell.

2

Back home after a day in the Summary Court, I sit down to record some events. Hearing what could only be the sound of feet falling on the steps leading up to the threshold, I stop writing in mid-sentence. I wait for the knock. There it is: a tentative percussion of knuckles on wood. Placing the pen next to my open diary, I rise and go to the door.

It is the boy Tshepo who works as court messenger, with a note from Morena. Before he leaves, I read the note in case I have to send a reply. It is written in code. As it turns out, I have to respond.

On a sheet of paper I write in code that I understand the message and will do as instructed. I place the paper in an envelope. After sealing it, I scribble Morena's name on the front of it and hand it to the messenger. As he turns to go, I call him back and give him a lump of jelly sweets. He
runs off into the growing darkness of the evening. Somehow he reminds me of my own son, down south with his mother in the city of diamonds. I smile and turn, not back to what I was busy with before the interruption, but to the urgent business of packing a few things.

3

So, on the second last night of that month, I move from my book-crammed house adjacent to the Chief’s Residence. With everything I need in a knapsack, I lock the house and hide the key. Under the cover of darkness, I walk towards the railway lines. Once I have crossed the lines, I will leave the stadt and enter the white town.

A light, unseasonable downpour patters on the roofs of the houses. The water glistens on the grey boulders. The sandy ground is damp and soft and pleasant to tread on. The air is nippy.

I make a wide berth around the Chief’s Residence before cutting across the veldt, passing the fort and barracks between the stadt and the settlement. My stocky body moves with the stealth of a phokojwe.

I reach the Railway Reserve. There I cut across the road leading north. Once in the area of the siding, I hop over the lines, avoiding the Prison and the Shell Factory. I wait in the shadows for the sentry guarding the Commissariat Store to pass. When darkness swallows him I enter the town at its northern limit where the grid of the settlement gives way to the sandy recreation fields.

From there, I walk across Government Square and slip into the yard behind the Court House. Skirting the main inner defence emplacements, leaping over dugouts and trenches, I reach my new quarters undetected: a disused cell behind the Court House. This is my new home.

4

On my second foray out in the field we capture Mafura Motswalle. He is one of the two men from the stadt who recently lured twenty-five cattle raiders, sent by the Colonel Commanding to replenish the beef stocks of the town, into a trap. They were decimated by maxims hidden among the reeds of the Molopo River. We catch him as he crosses the river on his way to the encampments of the enemy. I have to restrain Mgugu from killing him.

‘Kill the dog!’

‘No! Not me,’ Mafura slobbers as the tip of the rifle grazes his head.

‘Yes, you. Ntswa!’ Mgugu swears, thrusting the barrel of his gun into the chest of the captured man.

‘We were fishing. Only fishing. They were hiding in the reeds. Someone shouted ... there were shots ... I can’t remember,’ Mafura pleads as he is kicked.
'Traitor!' Mgugu sneers. 'Shoot him and get done with it,' Mara, the woman in our unit, eggs him on. 'Killing is not justice,' I say in a ridiculous court-like tone to distract them. 'Justice? My arse,' Mara laughs. 'Yes, the law.' 'Masepa! This is war,' Rajane sniggers. 'He's our prisoner,' I say feebly. 'Shoot the shit!' they shout in turns. Mgugu leans forward. He presses the nozzle of his rifle hard into the captive's chest. He pulls the trigger. The gun barks. As he lunges to one side to evade the shot, the bullet rips into Mafura's left shoulder, hurling him to the ground. 'Are you mad!' I shout, pushing Mgugu aside. They back off. I raise the wounded man onto my horse. I ride into town after dark, the others straggling behind in silent disapproval, reach the prison and ask the guard to call the captain. 'What is this?' the captain points at the bleeding man. 'A traitor, one of those who lured the raiders to their deaths,' Mgugu explains. 'Aha, I see. But why bring him here? What must I do with a wounded man?' 'Ask him,' Mgugu says, pointing at me. 'He can only die here,' the captain says but nevertheless calls for assistance. 'Get someone to look at his wound. When he is fit, he will go on trial,' I say as if I have the authority to instruct the prison captain in such matters. 'Only to face the firing squad,' he laughs as the wounded man is carried off. I greet the other men. We go our separate ways. I know where to find them. Where I live, is a secret. Mounting my horse, I head in the direction of my house in the stadt. There I leave the horse in the stable and walk back to the town. I stop at Morena's house and deliver my intelligence reports. We greet each other without shaking hands, then I hand him some sheets of paper. He will read them and in turn pass them on to the Colonel Commanding. 'You look the worse for wear,' he remarks drily. 'I need a rest,' I mutter and shrug my shoulders. 'What are you waiting for?' he grins. I leave with a feeling that things are starting to get at me. After a quiet beginning to the month, matters have taken a turn for the worse. The siege, no doubt, is coming to a head.
I am on horseback all day long, gathering surplus people: refugees and other foreigners. The Colonel Commander wants them out of here. They are parasites, he writes. They feed on the precious food stores of the siege like locusts. They must leave or starve to death.

Ferrying them through the lines while armed detachments from the Black Watch open gaps in the circle of guns thrown around the town, we manage to get more than a thousand out in a matter of a few days. How many reach safety? No one knows.

This is what the Colonel Commander wants. It is the only way to save the townspeople and those who rightfully belong in the stadt from starving, he announces. He brooks no dissent and in earnest we obey. Not to do so would be a crime.

On the last census I conducted for Morena with Philemon and Gates, about a month ago, there were just over five-and-a-half-thousand people in the stadt. That was after four months into the siege when almost half the population had left. Now, early April, I estimate that two-thirds of the population have gone.

The siege drags on. The tension, like the death tolls, mounts. The stadt is a cemetery.

We expected it to be over before the end of summer, that the Imperial troops would arrive from the south at the beginning of January. The only relief that came were the summer rains. The showers now are only a memory. The dry season is here. We are still waiting.

The casualties grow. The toll is heaviest among the people in the stadt. Nobody but I bothers to keep count. Sketchy as they are, my own figures suggest that, between the victims of war and starvation, many more have died to keep the townspeople fat than the official figures show.

We are fast running out of supplies. The sorghum, barley and oats are low. We are supplementing whatever meat we have with the flesh of horses. In the stadt dog meat sustains many. Those who will not eat dog or horse flesh live off the bark of fern trees. Wherever one turns a starveling totters. One dreads to look for fear of seeing another ‘fall over backwards with a dead thud’, as I write in my diary on March the 21st.

We whisper in the stadt that the settlers and the merchants are hoarding grain and other food. The merchants and the inhabitants of the settlement go about openly accusing the people of the stadt of concealing their harvests. Such are the recriminations of people facing starvation. It poisons the air with suspicion. I, who live on the rations allotted to the town, am in the middle of all this. Many envy me. Others resent my privileges. Some insinuate I have forgotten my own people.
In this matter no one mentions the name of the Colonel Commanding nor that of Morena. He, Morena, issues Sowen Passes to the most destitute. We report to him, he reports to the Colonel. The Colonel Commanding knows everything. Why doesn't he instruct Morena to put out these smouldering fires?

The Colonel Commanding, instead, issues eloquent but sinister proclamations. He demands Obedience, Unity of Purpose, and Harmony. Anyone who Shames the Fame of the Heroic Defence of the Siege, he threatens with Stringent Measures.

To me, an interpreter, this is a strange form of speech. The words, drained of meaning, are recharged with the emphatic tones of power. This is enough to silence even the most outspoken among us.

I escape from the choking atmosphere in the besieged town and from the walking skeletons of the *stadt* when I am on spying expeditions. The veldt between the investments of the enemy and the plains behind their lines is, at times, so tranquil, it is difficult to believe that the country is at war.

I sleep under the stars of the autumn sky. Lying on my back in a hollow between the rocks, I gaze up into the heavens where the galaxies wheel above me. The earth rolls through the sparkling skies.

During the day, I gaze with the eyes of a raptor out over the veldt. At every opportunity I peer into the laager of the enemy. Pale, stout and bearded, they are a rough, uncivilized people. They are stuffed with meat, their encampments dens of smoke. If they overrun the town, we will, if not taken into slavery, become pariahs in our own land. Their greed for land and servants knows no limit.

My main task is to compile intelligence reports on their activities. I watch where they position their artillery. I assess the strength of the commandos. From Morena’s comments and the favours bestowed on me, I deduce that these have served the defence of this outpost of the Empire well. The Colonel Commanding bases a great deal of his strategy on my reports. How he does this, is not entirely clear to me, but this does not matter, I do my work.

Sharp as my eyes are, how I miss my field-glasses. If caught with them by the enemy, they would be the end of me, so reluctantly I leave them in my quarters.

I live on the small things I can catch. Creatures within the grasp of a spy who must go about his work with stealth: *mmutla wa sekgoa*, francolin, sparrows, and whatever I can trap or shoot during the exchanges of fire between the warring forces. Most days the fare is locusts, *mokgatitswane*, worms, wild spinach, berries or *noga*.

It is a furtive life. But subterfuge has its own exhilaration and rewards. The money I complained about in my letters to Morena and others a few
months ago, seems so trivial now. The pressing demands of action outweigh the calculations of career and cash. How anyone can become rich from war, escapes me.

9

I am part of a unit, the Jackal Scouts. No one but Morena and the Colonel Commanding knows of our existence. He, the Colonel Commanding, conceived us.

Only the most able and trusted are part of it. Counting not more than the fingers of one hand, each one of us has a purpose. We are no motley band of raiders but part of the new science of war.

On missions I operate independently. I make sure the most vital information reaches them. I keep abreast of the enemy’s movements and try to divine their plans. I sleep away from the rest, in case the unit is surprised at night. This is the art of reconnaissance. I am the eyes and ears of the unit.

If you look at it dispassionately, it is no different from my job as interpreter. I read the signs of war and write reports for those entrusted with the destiny of the Empire. I do my bit for freedom and progress.

He, the Colonel Commanding, never leaves his Headquarters. He is stationed in a storied building adjacent to the market square. From his observation post he has a view of the entire settlement and well beyond it. This includes the *stadt*. His view takes in the veldt, the *rantjies* and the river. His eyes, day and night, sweep over the world in all the directions of the compass.

Linked to telephones, mirrors, field radios, despatches, runners, flags, forts, and trenches – his eyes and his words, his decisions and his very wishes, reach into places no mortal confined to one space ever can. It is a marvel. No one, not even Morena, can divine his thoughts.

Information and cunning, not bravery, are the keys to success in war. His axioms are knowledge and calculation. This is what the few who have contact with him say counts in his estimation. His estimation, everyone in the settlement and the *stadt* knows, counts for everything.

His desires are passed on to us in whispers. The defence of the town, and how we will be relieved, is his precious knowledge. I am a small but vital part of it. What else but brutality is there beyond this?

10

It is night. The boulders are dark ruminating elephants. I meet with my unit in the blue darkness below a rock. I brief them on the movements of the enemy. Dealing in truth, I underplay the risks I take. I amplify what is in their safety. They listen, their eyes shining like planets in the dark.

When it is their turn to brief me on their activities, there is silence.
Someone coughs.

‘It is not the brave who succumb in war but the foolish,’ Surrbuss Setehabi, speaking through a tight throat, remarks like a ventriloquist.

We laugh. His utterance has a ring of truth to it, though it is difficult to see what he means. It is a relief to hear it from him and not from some slouch-capped loafer in the garrison. This, I suppose, is what makes it so funny.

‘You look strange,’ Mathakgong, staring at me, says.

What? I want to ask but the others laugh and I choke on the question.

‘That’s right,’ Mara, dressed in the clothes of a man, responds to my puzzlement.

‘You have two faces,’ Rajane adds.

‘What?’ I exclaim, finally getting the word out.

They laugh, falling about in the dark. I wait for them to answer but they lose interest.

‘I am hungry and tired,’ Rajane yawns.

For days I ponder the meaning of their remarks. How should I interpret them? I forget them for a while only to return as to one’s shadow at sunrise.

I look at myself in my field mirror. I can see no change in my face. It is a shade darker from the sun. The pools of my eyes are not as untroubled as they were before the war. There is nothing strange about this.

Two faces? What was he hinting at? Is it some kind of joke? I resolve to banish it from my mind.

I quench my thirst from a hidden loop of the Molopo. At midday, I scoop the blue sky from the stream running over the smooth stones below the canopy of reeds.

At night, I drink the stars sparkling in the water cupped in my hands. The smoky taste of water drunk in the dark lingers in my mouth. I sleep with one eye shut and both ears open.

With the passing days I drink deep from the waters of this new time. I have never felt better in my life. This war, to be sure, will change our fortunes, and not only mine and those of us engaged in it. It will touch all our people. It will change things forever.

More than most, I greeted the outbreak of hostilities with a sense of expectation that somehow our freedom was at hand. The first skirmishes with the enemy held the promise that when the last shot was fired we who have fought on the side of the righteous, will take our place among the civilized and the just.

Now, several months into the siege, I am beginning to have doubts. I thought the war would pass but it hasn’t. I must nevertheless see this through to the end.
Back in my quarters behind the Court House I feel I need a bath. My body reeks of smoke, grass, sweat, and death. I scoop water from the barrel in the corner of the room and pour it into the kettle.

There is much to do before I turn in. I must fix something to eat. I must write down what is not in the reports I handed over to Morena. I must do some reading. There is a passage in Shakespeare about spying which I must look up. I must prepare myself for the trial of Mafura. They will patch him up and haul him into court tomorrow. My testimony will be needed.

How I long to hear some music. All my gramophone needles are so blunt, they scratch the grooves of the recordings. My favourite record by the Jubilee Singers is virtually destroyed. It is impossible to get a replacement now.

I sit by the fire slicing a pumpkin. When done, I clean the chaff from a small heap of sorghum. I place it in a saucepan and add a few grains of coarse salt. I take what is left of the rabbit I shot a day or so ago from my knapsack and season it.

A sliced onion braises in some lard in a pan on the fire. I place the pieces of rabbit, ribs, and half a rump into it. My mouth waters.

When the water boils, I pour some on to the grain. A bit more goes into another saucepan with the pumpkin. The rest goes into the tub on the floor half-filled with icy water. In twenty minutes supper will be ready, I think, reminding myself of my good fortune in these hard times. With the low supplies and the high prices of food, I have done better than most.

Now I strip and get into the warm water for a scrub. I work up a lather from a chip of blue soap and rub the soapy water into my skin. I am rinsing the suds from my body when suddenly there is a violent knock at the door.

'Coming,' I shout, taking my gown from the hook behind the door. When I turn, barefoot on the stone floor, the door opens. Who but Morena walks into my abode? He has never done this before.

'You must keep your door locked, you ...' he says without completing his sentence.

'I have no enemies. Not here in town nor in the stadt,' I say, unable to make sense of the incredulous expression on his face.

'What on earth is the matter with you?' he snarls.

'Back from another excursion,' I explain.

'I know. I saw you earlier this evening when you delivered your reports,' he says tonelessly and pulls in his angular chin.

'Good,' I say, and add to flatter, 'You've already read them?'

'That's what I came to see you about,' he is unable to mask the irritation in his voice.
'Oh ...?'
'Come down to the Prison. Right away,' he turns to leave.
'Yes sir,' I say, watching him go to the door.
'And for God's sake lock your doors,' he bellows before the night closes round him.

I rinse my face and leave. I turn the key and place it in my pocket.

Leaving the shadows of the back yard, I walk around the Court House on to Market Square from where I have a view of the Colonel Commanding's Headquarters. The double-storied building is in darkness. This makes me wonder whether there is any truth to the legend that he never sleeps.

It is said that after midnight his favourite Imperial Officers from the Regiment of the Protectorate have lunch with him until day-break. He does everything in reverse. He has breakfast at sunset; lunch at midnight; dinner before sunrise. These are the habits of a hyena.

Looking at the dark quarters, I cannot help but wonder why, if the Colonel Commanding is omniscient, he values my reports as much as I am led to believe. Is it a case of the hyena guided to carrion by vultures? If so, who guides the hyena at night? A shot rings out and disturbs my train of thought.

Crossing the railway lines I reach the entrance of the Prison. I identify myself. The sentries, one on each side of the gate, are nonchalant. I hand over my rifle. One frisks me. He finds the key of a prison door in my pocket and holds it up in the dark shaking his head before returning it. The other one watches but without following this silent exchange in the dark. They let me in.

There are two more sentries on the inside. I am asked to wait. One tugs at a rope dangling from the wall: once, twice, pauses, and tugs again. A bell chimes within the Prison building.

Two soldiers stride across the grass towards us. Without a word they turn, waiting for me to step into the space between them. In silence we walk across the sandy inner court to a large wooden door leading to the cells. The grass I saw a moment ago, except for a few dried and stubby clumps, is gone. Sand crunches under our feet.

Someone opens the door from the inside and lets us in. We walk along a dark passage, one soldier ahead of me, one behind me. I am out of step with their measured footfalls.

At the end of the passage I am shown into a large bare room. The soldiers turn and leave.

I am alone in a space where the glow of the night-sky falls through a high
barred window. It casts a strange grey light over the floor and against the opposite wall.

When my eyes eventually adjust to the dimness, I see that there is no place to sit. Standing in the middle of the bare space, it strikes me how different the place feels compared to the holding cell behind the Court House in which I now stay. The single cell in the Court House is comfortable if somewhat crammed. This large empty space, a group cell no doubt, holds a strange feeling of extreme constriction.

Stories told to me about the Prison have it that the place is overcrowded. It should be. Everyday in the Summary Courts, not counting those fined, in one session after another, legions are sent here and only a few to execution by firing squad.

All this is done with the utmost civility. Not a trace of savagery is to be found even in the executions. It is not a flawless procedure but its objectives are, as far as I can see, governed by justice and above reproach.

About prison I know nothing, really. It is after all a place behind walls. I have listened ruefully to the stories told me. A grunt of pity, a grimace of dismay at the vision of broken bodies piled upon each other, what more can I offer?

How then is this place empty? The muted moans rising from somewhere within the thick-walled body of the building, are so faint, they seem no more than sounds issuing from my imagination.

A door opens. No one calls me, no gesture beckons. Still I walk towards the open door. I hesitate for a moment, then enter.

'Why have you taken so long to get here?' a voice I have never heard before but with the same measured intonation of Morena's, asks tersely.

I see four figures. The hands of one concealed behind his back, two standing erect, a fourth prostrate on the floor. In the dark space of the cell their bodies are blurred like charcoal sketches.

'Black bastard, take off your bloody hat. Who the hell do you think you are?' Another, even stranger voice spits out the words I have heard so often all over the colony and in the republics.

'I don't have a hat on,' I reply and turn to see if there isn't another person behind me.

Looking over my shoulder, I see the door swing on its hinges. It shuts without making a sound.

After what seems a lifetime, I emerge from the Prison like from a lair into the dead of the night. The guns are silent, yet it feels as if some vast yet obscure activity is going on everywhere in the opaque night.
I walk in the direction of my residence in the stadt. Moving along the track, I realize that I am right below the Headquarters of the Colonel Commanding. I look up on to the roof from which I and so many have diverted our gazes, observing the saying: he who even once looks into the eye of the sun shall have no eyes to look again.

In the starry darkness a shape looms above the gables. I peer up into the dark but can't fix a clear image to it. Where I thought the head was I see eyes, large and round, glowing like polished glass.

Then suddenly, from the south-east where the enemy have constructed a fort, the ninety-four pounder flashes, lighting up the sky. In the second between the illumination and the boom that follows it, I see into the night.

I see the figure of a person, its head small and shaped like that of a hyena, its face cadaverous as if powdered with ash. A fabric coloured dull-yellow and smudged dark-brown, flutters like a flag draped over the erect figure. It is like a cloak worn in the manner of warriors draping themselves in the skins of leopards.

As the shell whooshes harmlessly over head I retreat. I fall into a trench behind me. Dazed and witless, I crawl out of the hole and stagger home.

I reach the house, feel for the key hidden in the doorpost groove and stumble in. I sink into the couch in the living-room. Slowly I regain my senses. I light a lamp. It burns for a while, flickers and dies.

While it burnt, I saw that the house was covered in the fine red dust of the desert. Whatever I touched, my hands were printed in the dust.

I find a candle and I light it. I rummage in the drawers looking for my diary. It is gone. The drawers are filled with sand. Surely I did not take it with me to my new quarters? Or did I? Definitely not.

I find some paper. Clean folio sheets: Irish feint without margins. The dry fragrance of paper is like the scent of some desert flower. The thick dark blood of the ink appalls me.

Sitting down I dip my pen into the ink-pot. Turning the shaft as I lift it, I take care to drain the nip and so avoid blotting the page. I raise my pen over the paper and begin to write. My hand moves over the sheet, swift and deliberate. The subtle captivating screech of inked steel pressing gently against the delicate fabric of paper is a cry which does not carry further than my ears where I stoop close to the page in the dim light.

I pause to look at what I have written. Where there should be words, the image of the town with its roads and the inner circle of trenches and defence positions is spread across the page. The fort and garrison of the Regiment of the Protectorate, situated between the town and the stadt, all
are in place.

On the edge of the desert, the besieged city is an image of enclosure. Buttressed by the Black Watch in trenches dug by the dead, by the Cape Corps in the Brick Fields, spattered in blood, by the Mfengu Raiders crawling along the greasy banks of the Molopo disguised in the feathers of ostriches, the starved stagger across the veldt armed with nothing but their own bones.

The outer defence positions around the divided settlements are tracings of fire in the landscape. The air here is a sulphurous glue of boiling horsemeat. The earth stinks.

Further afield, in a laager drawn like a diamond around the two settlements, the *stadt* and the white town, is the investment of the enemy: forts, blockhouses, encampments, roaring guns. Behind it, in every direction, a myth burns.

20

The sun rolls like a burning stone in the autumn sky. The Colonel Commanding stands smiling beside a ruminating ox. It is a gift from the Royal Family. His eyes glow with the sky’s fire. With his officer’s staff he lightly taps the uppers of his shining black boots.

Listening I try to interpret his message without thinking of a hyena snapping its jaws. Involuntarily I remember my first day in the Magistrate Court. I had just done my first clerical task. It was a summons to the father of the traitor we took as a prisoner on my second expedition.

The ink was hardly dry when a hand silently returned the page to me. I looked up. It was a messenger. His expression, in which I saw another face, left no doubt that whoever had read it wanted me to redo it. I could not see what was amiss but tore the paper up and rewrote the summons, changing every single word. Then I signed my name, Sol T. Plaatje, in the summons log book and turned to attend to some other work.

Indian lookout, probably ‘Mr Singh’, at the siege of Ladysmith, 1899
Frontier Transculturation and Transgression in the Early Eastern Cape

The multicultural dynamics of the Eastern Cape frontier, and the story of the major actors in its drama of transculturation, conflict, and transgression, are foundational in South African history. It was here, after all, as Clifton Crais and Tim Keegan have reminded us, that the South African colonial and racial order came into being, and it was here, too, that major resistance to that order would in due course emerge.1 In this paper, however, my focus will not be on the captains and kings, governors and chiefs, rulers and radicals who at various times decided the fate of the Eastern Cape, be they Xhosa or settlers, Boers or Bushmen, white or black. Rather, I am intrigued by the many shadowy characters in the margin of the story - liminal, unaffiliated, intermediary figures who move in and out of the shadows of the narrative. They are often enigmatic persons of unknown origin and barely known identity, but who equally often suggest that their role in frontier history could have been - and sometimes was - an important one. More particularly they sometimes evoke the sense that the East Cape frontier was - certainly up to about 1850 - a much more fluid area of racial and cultural loyalty than we can perhaps now imagine. They often suggest that, had history moved at a slightly different pace or had it taken a slightly different direction, the Eastern Cape might have become an early laboratory of multiculturalism, a forging ground of interracial activity that might have resulted in a very different South Africa. This paper will explore some of the dynamics of frontier liminality and suggest, in conclusion, that had those dynamics been allowed more scope, the identity formation of one key group of the Eastern Cape frontier, the Boers, might have been far otherwise.

In 1816, on his way back to Cape Town after having visited the Eastern Cape to decide on the location for a new Moravian mission station, the Revd Christian Latrobe overnighted on a farm near Avontuur in what is today known as the Langkloof. Here, Latrobe tells us,

we found a dark-coloured man, who travels about as a schoolmaster, to teach the farmers' children their letters and a little cyphering, spending a few weeks at a time at one place, then going on to another, ... there being no schools in the country.2
We have no name for this man, and no other information, but Latrobe adds a fascinating afterthought: 'The schoolmaster was a very inquisitive man, and a shrewd politician' (p. 252). This last glimpse is surely the crucial one, and allows us suddenly to see Latrobe's 'dark-coloured man', half-educated but living by his wits, keeping politically alert and keeping on the move, as a paradigmatic figure of the frontier, representing a whole class of people, often of indeterminate race and inscrutable affiliation, who moved through the frontier for centuries before the social and racial power distinctions of the later nineteenth century began to solidify.

I say centuries, because Latrobe's 'dark-coloured man's' ancestors - if not biological, certainly symbolic - dart in and out of the frontier narrative from the very beginning. A substantial number of them emerge from early Portuguese shipwreck accounts, and I can here refer to only a few. So, for instance, the classic Portuguese accounts of the wreck of the São João near Port Edward in 1552, made famous by the heroic sufferings and appalling death of Don Manuel de Sousa de Sepulveda and his wife Dona Leonor and all but a handful of their retainers, are largely silent about a significant number of survivors who, living among the Mpondo and the Zulus, re-emerge in accounts of subsequent shipwrecks. Just over two years after the São João wreck, the survivors of the São Bento, wrecked near the mouth of the Msikaba River in the Transkei in 1554, were met by a naked man with a bundle of assegais upon his back, ... who was in no way different from the rest of [the natives], and we considered him as one of them until by his hair and speech we found him to be a Portuguese, named Rodrigo Tristao, who also survived from the other wreck. Having been for three years exposed to the cold and heat of those parts, he had so altered in colour and appearance that there was no difference between him and the natives.

At least Rodrigo was willing to talk to them; elsewhere they met 'a young man from Bengal' who not only wanted to have nothing to do with them but persuaded two Portuguese and 30 slaves (presumably Indian or Malay) to stay behind with him among the Xhosa (p. 235). Some 40 years later, survivors of the Santo Alberto wreck of 1593 were still meeting survivors and their descendants from these earlier calamities.

Indeed, for the next hundred years, every Portuguese shipwreck account would make mention of a variety of people, not only Portuguese, but Indians and other oriental people, too, who had become part of local communities all along the Transkei coast. There is, for instance, Francisco Vaz d'Almada's version of one such encounter, in his account of the wreck of the São João Baptista near the mouth of the Keiskamma in 1622. Somewhere near the Hole-in-the-Wall landmark the survivors met a Javanese 'who was already very old and spoke Portuguese badly' and who told them 'that after four days' journey we would find a Malabar [negro] who had likewise escaped from the same shipwreck [i.e. of the Santo Alberto in 1593], and another nine or ten days from there we would find a
Kaffir named Jorge, of the same party. And in the same kraal where this Kaffir lived there was a Portuguese ... called Diogo, who was married and had children' (p. 228). What intrigues here is not just the 'rainbow-nation' composition of this body of survivors, or the level of their integration into the local community, but that they evidently remained aware of and in touch with one another via the local social networks. Equally important is the fact that these survivors regularly acted as interpreters and mediators for subsequent parties of destitute shipwreck victims and, as we have seen, often seem to have persuaded others to stay. Thus Vaz d'Almada's own party left behind many of their number. Entries such as the following are common in his chronicle: 'Here remained behind a sailor named Motta, an Italian called Joseph Pedemassole, and a passenger who was crippled, and the son of Dona Ursula, the last a very grievous case' (p. 232); or, again: 'Here and further back many persons were left behind with dysentery and other diseases' (p. 240). Given decent food and care, such survivors often recovered and their genes must still be among the Xhosa.

Nor was this a case of one-way traffic only. It would appear that local people often joined parties of survivors, particularly in cases of an extended stay. Vaz d'Almada provides several instances, the most touching being this one: '[W]e saw Beatriz Alvarez, a delicate and gently nurtured lady, with [her] little girl of two years on the breast of a Kaffir woman who remained with her and would never consent to abandon her' (p. 212). But the most spectacular example of this two-way process is that of the *Nossa Senhora de Belem*, which foundered at the mouth of the Mzimvubu River at Port St Johns in 1635. According to Jeronimo Lobo's extensive and seemingly accurate account of the wreck, there were some 180 survivors, who stayed among the Mpondo for more than seven months. During this time they built a whole village, including a church, where Lobo (who was a Jesuit) claims to have ministered to survivors and local converts alike. They set up as shoemakers, tailors, fishermen and other craftsmen, and by the time they left were running a herd of cattle. They had fetes, processions in the streets of the village, and at one point the Portuguese put on a play and organized a bull-fight (pp. 353-66). Nor, of course, were they the only survivors here. Once again their predecessors acted as interpreters and intermediaries, one of whom, Antonio, had been there for over 40 years, now with a Mpondo wife, children and grandchildren, very prosperous and with no intention to leave (p. 341). But the story becomes more intriguing. When the Portuguese do eventually leave, in two boats built during the seven months, Lobo tells us, one boat contained 135 people, the other 137, almost a hundred more than the original survivors (p. 380). Frustratingly, he does not tell us who these extra people were, but since he does indicate that a lot of survivors – particularly so-called 'cabra' or slaves – had stayed behind, we can only assume that the Portuguese left with a large number of presumably Mpondo wives and retainers, or Jesuit converts who didn't
want to be left behind. Unfortunately, one of the two boats itself foundered near Algoa Bay, all but 14 of its occupants perishing, but the other made it to Loanda.

As the seventeenth century wore on, the refugees of Portuguese shipwrecks along the Transkei coast were joined by survivors of Dutch and English shipwrecks. Dutch and English navigators in the 17th and 18th centuries seem, however, to have been rather better at their job than the Portuguese had been in the previous two centuries, for there were substantially fewer shipwrecks. But we do know of at least two: the Good Hope wrecked on the Natal coast in 1685, and the Stavenisse, which foundered close by about a year later, the survivors of which two wrecks met up and set off for the Cape overland.8 Some made it, but ‘all along the way’ many others stayed behind. When the Natal Packet set off from the Cape in 1687 to look for survivors, it found 19 as far south as Algoa Bay, living ‘scattered in the neighbouring kraals’. A Dutch search vessel, the Noord, was sent out in 1688 and 1689, and found many more survivors. On the strength of this Dutch presence in Natal, the ship’s captain notoriously claimed to have bought the land, ‘from the King and chiefs of those parts’ for the Dutch East Indian Company, a claim even more notoriously invoked by the Boer trekkers a century and a half later to support their occupation of Natal.9 It was at this time, too, in 1845, that Lieut.-Colonel John Sutherland, writing about his experiences on the East Cape frontier, expressed his view that

what became of the remaining men of the crew of the Stavenisse will never ... in all probability be known. Yet ... their lives and property were safe enough, amongst the natives of the Natal country, and amongst the Kaffers of the East Coast, where I hear that many of their descendants, as well as the descendants of the Grosvenor and Dodington, English East Indiamen which were wrecked on the same coast more than a hundred years after, are still to be found.10

Mention of the Grosvenor brings us to the most famous of shipwrecks in these parts. Stories of survivors of this event, which took place in 1782, have reverberated down two centuries to our own time. The shipwreck inspired the earliest work of fiction set in the Eastern Cape that I have come across, Charles Dibdin’s Hannah Hewit; or, The Female Crusoe, published only ten years after the event, and many others.11 Once again, the several published accounts of both survivors and of subsequent search parties are full of references to survivors left behind among the Xhosa.12 Most tantalizing among these has been the persistent story that several white women either voluntarily or perforce became the wives of Xhosa chiefs – whether ‘voluntarily’ or ‘perforce’ has changed according to political shifts in South Africa. Typically, in earlier accounts descent from the Grosvenor women is mentioned as an honorific whereas in later accounts – from about 1850 onwards – it becomes a matter of shame.

One does not have to look far to discover why there was such a
persistent interest in the Grosvenor women. There was evidently something more than a vicariously racist prurience behind it, and I suspect that the most interesting explanation is that the Grosvenor women became symbolic of a developing frontier dynamic. It would appear that at least up to about 1850 they provided a trope for transcultural and transracial possibilities developing on the frontier. Typically, it was the writers of romance rather than the politicians, settler polemicists, and military authorities who recognized this. So, for instance, the anonymous novel Makanna; or, The Land of the Savage, published in 1834 and based on the historic events of the Xhosa attack on Grahamstown in 1819 under Makana, twists the events so that Makana’s second-in-command, Dushani, who was commonly thought of as a Grosvenor descendant, is killed and his place is taken by a West Indian French creole, Paul Laroon, himself the survivor of a Transkei shipwreck. The deception can work because both men, being racially mixed, are the same colour. Laroon is put in command, by Makana, of ‘a sort of mercenary troop, formed of adventurers, runaway slaves, and deserters’ (vol. 3, p. 17), in other words, a whole body of shadowy, liminal frontier figures, who, nevertheless, are not treated as outlaws but as heroic desperadoes fighting under Makana and Laroon for an independent Eastern Cape republic.

This bizarre scenario, in which the shadow people of the frontier are not seen as outcasts and enemies but as romanticized albeit ambivalent prototypes of frontier independence, is recurrent in subsequent fiction of the Eastern Cape, perhaps nowhere more fascinatingly so than in two novels published in the same year, 1851: Thomas Forester’s Everard Tunstall: A Tale of the Kaffir Wars, and Harriet Ward’s Jasper Lyle: A Tale of Kaffirland. In the first of these, the English hero and a young Xhosa chief, Clu Clu, who is once again a Grosvenor descendant, are both suitors for the hand of a young Boer woman, Johanna. That’s the first surprise, but others follow on rapidly from it. When Johanna is wounded in a Xhosa attack on her brother’s farm, she dies in the arms of both Everard and Clu Clu, who thereupon change from rivals to sworn brothers and set off beyond the Great Fish River to Clu Clu’s home. Here Clu Clu, who is of course illiterate, shows Everard a bible with some diary entries which Tunstall realizes are by Clu Clu’s white grandmother, from the Grosvenor. It is also, incidentally, the first instance in the Grosvenor literature in which these women are depicted as being ashamed of their situation. Clu Clu’s grandmother refers to her life among the Xhosa as ‘loathsome’, to herself as shuddering ‘at the sight of my child’, and to deliberately hiding from the various search parties sent out to locate survivors: ‘Being what I am, I cannot submit to be a thing to be pointed at by the wives and daughters of Christian men. I will hide my shame and end my days in the desert’ (vol. 2, pp. 248-51). Such views would harden in the course of the nineteenth century until in William Scully’s blank verse drama, The Wreck of the Grosvenor, published in 1886, the women
speak with absolute horror of their situation:

Around our knees,
Cling savage babes, whose claim for loathly love,
Wraps, round our freedom, swathes of stifling ties
That we must ay endure.\textsuperscript{15}

But in 1851 such abhorrence is still specifically countermanded by the fact that Clu Clu is held up as the ideal product of frontier interracial contact. Furthermore, Johanna’s brother, Conraad van Arneveld, with whom we are invited to sympathize, in due course marries a Malay woman from Cape Town and together they join the Boer trekkers heading across the Orange River.

Harriet Ward’s novel, \textit{Jasper Lyle}, is, if anything, even more tantalizing in its transcultural ambiguities than \textit{Everard Tunstall}. Ward, who lived in Grahamstown from 1842 to 1847 as the wife of an English officer, and whose reportage on the Seventh Frontier War of 1846 makes her perhaps the first woman war-correspondent in British history, was overtly completely in sympathy with the colonialist, military assumptions of her time – this much is clear from her war correspondence,\textsuperscript{16} and from her authorial interventions in \textit{Jasper Lyle}. But the novel is peopled with a significant cast of liminal, transgressive frontier figures, the most intriguing of whom is Jasper Lyle himself. The son of a former governor of the Cape, he has been banished from England for his Chartist principles and is now a gun-runner on the frontier, supporting both Boer and Xhosa insurrection against the British. At once a model frontiersman and an outlaw, he is also an exponent of a frontier radicalism that could hardly have endeared Ward to her Grahamstown compatriots. Here he is, addressing a gathering of Xhosa chiefs:

When I went back to my land ... I said you were under the feet of the English here; that you were not permitted to sit still in green places in your own territory ... [and] that we have suffered your cattle and your land to be taken from you.\textsuperscript{17}

Eventually Lyle is crucified by the Xhosa, as much a victim as a martyr of his cause, and it is simply not possible to tell from Ward’s narrative which he is meant to be. One is left pondering whether the inconclusiveness about transculturation on the frontier reflected in Thomas Forester and Harriet Ward is not so much a result of their own confusion or lack of narrative control, but rather a reflection of a pervasive cultural and racial fluidity and open-endedness which, at least on this frontier, still held out many options.

In my rapid survey of this fluid or porous frontier, I have had to leave out whole galleries of other fascinating characters. I have said nothing, for instance, about the many Khoi (Hottentot) figures who repeatedly emerged as important frontier intermediaries, antagonists or peacemakers. One could start with the person of Eve, the Khoi woman who quickly
became a key actor in Jan van Riebeeck’s colonial diplomacy, married the Company’s Danish doctor, Pieter van Meerhoff, and who was by all accounts shrewd, elusive, exploitive – and herself exploited.\textsuperscript{18} She was followed by many another. By the time John Philip wrote \textit{Researches in South Africa} in the 1820s he could describe many figures of Khoi origin who played a challenging role in frontier politics.\textsuperscript{19} One, for instance, was David Stuurman, charismatic leader of the last independent group of Khoi in the Cape Colony. Leading raids on Boer stock, he was captured and imprisoned on Robben Island in 1810, from where he escaped and managed to make his way back to beyond the Kei River. Recaptured in 1819, he was eventually transported as a convict to New South Wales – such, in the words of Thomas Pringle, ‘was the fate of the last Hottentot chief who attempted to stand up for the natural rights of his countrymen’.\textsuperscript{20} But he was not the last, and Philip also tells us of Jan Africaner, half-Boer and half-Khoi, leader of one of the many bands of mixed outlaws that had over some two centuries taken refuge beyond the vague colonial boundaries, and from where they conducted raids on the \textit{trekboers} as well as slave raids. Africaner, however, was converted to Christianity by John Campbell in 1812, and he became a key figure on Robert Moffat’s mission and as a negotiator for the rights of the Khoi.\textsuperscript{21} Such conversions could have unexpected outcomes, once again illustrating the impact of the indeterminate processes of transculturation on the frontier. Philip tells of a converted Bushman who was puzzled by the story of John the Baptist:

‘Why is it,’ said he, ‘that we are persecuted and oppressed by the Christians? ... Was not John the Baptist a Bushman? Was he not clothed with a leathern girdle, such as we wear? And did he not feed on locusts and wild honey? Was he not a Bushman?’\textsuperscript{22}

Then there was Andrew Stoffels, who became an important spokesman for the Khoi after the 1834 or Sixth Frontier War, or Hermanus Matroos, the powerful instigator of the Blinkwater Rebellion, when some Khoi of the Kat River Settlement decided to support the Xhosa against the colonial forces in the Eighth Frontier War of 1851-52.\textsuperscript{23}

Indeed, Matroos brings us to a paradigmatic moment in this story of frontier intermediaries. At one point in the hostilities, a meeting took place between Matroos and his lieutenants on the one hand, and the loyal Boers and Khoi on the other. The meeting was reported to the Revd James Read – who wrote it up – by Cobus Fourie, the Boer Field-Cornet, who stated that he was accompanied by, among others, ‘my son-in-law, Andries Hatta’, who, in turn, is later referred to as himself a ‘Hottentot’ and who reveals that the Boers had actually sought refuge with the Khoi: ‘We who are still loyal to the Queen [he said] have undertaken to defend ... all our white fellow-colonists, who have taken shelter under our wing.’\textsuperscript{24}

I call this a paradigmatic moment because it finally raises perhaps the
most intriguing query that my ruminations have been leading to, namely, the extent to which the Boers themselves may be regarded as some of the most spectacular products and representatives of the transcultural and transracial processes of the frontier. By the end of the eighteenth century, the Dutch descendants at the Cape could be broadly divided into two groups, the sedentary farmers and townsfolk of the Western Cape, and the itinerant pastoralists or trekboers of the interior. John Barrow referred to the latter as ‘African peasants’, a term which confirms the status and image of indigeneity they had by then acquired. At the time of the British occupation of the Cape, the trekboers had a reputation for being so disaffected and seditious that the Dutch commander, Abraham Sluysken, regarded them as much less reliable than the local Khoi levies. Jan Splinter Stavorinus, who visited the Cape in the 1760s and 70s, wrote that ‘the farthest settlers, who reside thirty or forty days’ journey from Cape Town more resemble Hottentots than the posterity of Europeans’. Barrow claimed to have found many Dutch Boers living ‘entirely in the society of Hottentots’ (vol. 1, p. 383), and his testimony may be confirmed over and over again in subsequent travelogues. By 1835, the Quarterly Review, writing about John Dunbar Moodie’s book, Ten Years in South Africa, would refer to Boers as ‘greasy barbarians’, echoing Moodie’s own description of them as ‘even less refined than the Hottentots’.

But what did all this really mean? This ambivalent indigeneity of the Boer could just as readily be presented as a source of strength and resilience, a degree of African domicility unapproachable by other settlers, such as when the author of Makanna describes Boers as sharing the inscrutable and imperturbable qualities of the landscape, or when Thomas Pringle, on his very first night in the Eastern Cape, describes his party’s Boer escort as ‘men of almost gigantic size’, sitting apart ‘in aristocratic exclusiveness, smoking their huge pipes with self-satisfied complacency’. On several occasions, the inherent advantages of encouraging, rather than lamenting or belittling the developing multiracialism and multiculturalism of the frontier, were actively promoted. John Thomas Bigge and William Colebrooke, Crown commissioners who visited the Cape in 1830, claimed that such integration had been the aim of Caledon’s proclamation of 1809, and that the attempt to set up segregated establishments such as the Kat River Settlement for the Khoi was an error. Instead, they argued, the aim should be ‘to promote assimilation in the most satisfactory manner’, by encouraging English settlers and Boers to take up land among the Khoi.

In time [they argued] thriving and independent communities would thus be formed, where the recognition of equal rights in individuals of all classes would secure their equal protection, and a common participation in their internal administration.

One wonders what would have happened if Bigge’s and Colebrooke’s extraordinarily enlightened and far-sighted policy had actually been put
into practice. At the very least, their recommendation strengthens one’s overall sense that round about 1830, before the British Settlers had really gained dominance, and before the mass emigration of Boer farmers known as the Great Trek had gained momentum, there was a moment in the history of this frontier when the Boers, particularly, could have merged into the transracial and transcultural dynamics developing in the Eastern Cape. But the moment soon passed, and by 1850 it was over. The 1820 British Settlers brought with them, and insisted on maintaining, a sense of racial and cultural identity which soon challenged the Boers into a corresponding response, a response which the nature and process of their extremely adversarial encounter with the African people of the interior after 1836 increasingly intensified. It could be that the flirtation with frontier liminality and racial indeterminacy in the novels of Harriet Ward and Thomas Forester in 1851 is ambivalent and confused precisely because the historical conditions for such possibilities had already passed. The contestational frontier paradigm developing from the Sixth Frontier War (1834-5) onwards, edged the Eastern Cape Boers out of the route towards racial and cultural assimilation on which they were seemingly well established by the late-eighteenth century, and put them on a course of aggressive self-determination.

The situation was well summed up in 1855 by the Revd Edward Solomon in two lectures delivered in Cape Town. Despite some quirky notions that there were cannibals in the far interior, Solomon gave a well-informed survey not only of the Khoi, the Xhosa, the Namaqua, the Sotho, the Tswana, and other clearly identified peoples, but also of the many mixed and intermediate groupings, such as the Coranna, Griquas, Bergenaars, and many others, which by then existed on or beyond the frontier. He revealed enlightened concepts of the indeterminacy of race, and was well aware of the actual intricacies of the drama of ethnic diversity and assimilation which he described. For these reasons he was profoundly concerned about the impact the Boers north of the Orange were about to have on all around them. The Sand River Convention of 1852 had acknowledged Transvaal independence, while the Orange Free State had just come into being in 1854. Solomon understood clearly that the Boers, in order to establish and maintain their political and cultural identity, would in future have to be ceaselessly at war with all around them and would thus destabilize the whole sub-continent. He foresaw ‘a collision now [that] would convulse the whole of that region, and involve the Europeans there in deadly war with all the native tribes around them’ (p. 60).

Frontier multiculturalism was effectively over. British military policy on the Eastern Cape frontier and Boer militancy beyond it, after 1850, ensured a pattern of frontier wars that would not cease till the Anglo-Boer War. As that war’s name in Afrikaans indicates – ‘Die Tweede Vryheids-oorlog’ (The Second Freedom War) – it was for the Boers the last frontier war, fought by them precisely to assert and preserve Boer separateness and identity.
NOTES


10. For Stoffels, see Justus (pseud.), *The Wrongs of the Caffre Nation* (London:


25. John Barrow, *An Account of Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa in the Years 1797 and 1798*, 2 vols. (London: Cadell and Davies, 1801-4), vol. 1, p. 77. All further references are to this edition and are included in the text.


The Anglo-Boer War: An Indian Perspective

The Anglo-Boer War is conventionally seen as part of the history of southern Africa or of British imperialism. This essay offers an Indian perspective on the conflict, in particular as it was experienced and seen through the eyes of a young Indian lawyer. M.K. Gandhi, later renowned as a religious visionary, social critic, advocate of non-violence, and a powerful opponent of British imperialism in India, in the early months of the conflict organized and helped to lead an Indian ambulance corps in the service of the government. This was one of his earliest interventions in imperial politics, for which he was honoured with an imperial medal. Such an apparently surprising episode merits attention - for it sheds light on the position of Indians in southern Africa as well as on the development of Gandhi's own thinking on a number of critical issues.

Indian communities had become established in southern Africa by the later nineteenth century. Their numbers were few in the Cape and in the Orange Free State, compared with the Transvaal, where in 1899 about 17,000 lived, and Natal, where in 1894 there were over double that number and Indians were overtaking numerically the white Natal population. Indians came to this part of the continent, as to other parts of the British Empire, either as indentured labourers, brought in to provide labour where the local population was deemed ‘unfit’, particularly for hard work on plantations or in mines, or as free ‘passenger’ Indians, who paid their own way and inserted themselves into the local economies as petty traders. Towards the end of the century the free Indians were joined by the majority of ex-indentured labourers who became free when their indentures expired and they chose not to return to India, and by the free-born children of indentured labourers.\(^1\) Such diaspora Indians were British citizens, subjects of the Queen-Empress, Victoria, who had proclaimed to her Indian subjects after the 1857 Mutiny that they would not be discriminated against on grounds of religion or race.\(^2\) However, in practice their experience overseas within the Empire was one of profound discrimination, and, as in Natal, of growing hostility from a white population which felt itself to be culturally embattled, and threatened by Indian numbers and their growing economic strength. White settlers sought to defend themselves with varieties of control over Indian rights to
vote, to reside, and to trade.

Into this situation came Gandhi in 1893, a London-trained barrister aged 24, hoping for better fortune in South Africa than in India, on a year's contract with a Gujarati trading firm who needed an English-speaking lawyer to assist them with a legal case. Ultimately, Gandhi's experience in South Africa was to be radically transformative, enabling him to return home in 1915 with a vision of a new India, and the technique of satyagraha, or non-violent resistance to wrong, which he was to put to the service of Indian nationalism. An imminent threat to Indian voting rights in Natal encouraged his Indian friends to ask him to stay on at the expiry of his contract and help them fight discrimination. He brought his family over from India and began to establish himself as a successful lawyer, with a comfortable westernized life-style. As he later remarked, 'part of the expense [of the household] was solely for the sake of prestige. I thought it necessary to have a household in keeping with my position as an Indian barrister in Natal and as a representative'. He looked back mockingly on his insistence that his wife and children should wear western-style shoes and stockings, and eat with knives and forks, because of his 'infatuation with these signs of civilization'.

Despite the appearance of bourgeois respectability and acceptance of western standards of 'civilization', there were soon signs that the young man was embarking on the long pilgrimage which was to become his hallmark. He simplified his lifestyle, even buying a book on washing and insisting on washing his own collars, despite the ridicule of his fellow barristers. At a deeper level he engaged in a religious search for meaning beyond the confines of his own Hindu tradition. As a student in London and now in Africa he met people of many different religious persuasions, and began to read widely about a number of religions. Gradually he came to a belief in a 'Truth' which was beyond the doctrinal formulations of any one religious tradition, which could only be approached through service of one's fellows, particularly the poorest. He had come to Africa for mundane and worldly reasons: unexpectedly he found himself in search of God, and came to see 'that God could be realized only through service'.

As Gandhi was drawn into public affairs he gained a high profile within the Indian community, and beyond it, as a champion of Indian rights. His reputation was such in some sections of the white community in Natal, that when he returned with his family from India at the end of 1896 there were attempts to prevent the boat on which he was travelling from docking at Durban. When he landed he was threatened by a crowd and rescued by the prompt intervention of the Police Superintendent and his wife; he eventually escaped by disguising himself as an Indian police constable. Gandhi's political goals at this time were to claim for Indians their rights as British subjects and to fight against discrimination on grounds of colour. His methods were studiously legal and moderate, including public meetings, petitions, pamphlets, and the founding of a
new Indian political organization, the Natal Indian Congress. He was overtly loyal to the British monarch and to the British constitution, and his complaint was that local discrimination against Indians was contrary to British traditions and could be rectified by appealing to British justice and 'fair play'. Like many of his compatriots in India he also believed at this juncture that British rule over India was providential and would work for India's good.

The outbreak of the Anglo-Boer War and the threat to British interests challenged Gandhi and demanded from him a public response. He recognized that it was a significant milestone in his public career, and devoted a chapter to it in his *Autobiography*, and in his book, *Satyagraha in South Africa*, which he completed in 1924. This was significant as both these publications were not straightforward historical accounts of his life and work, but were intended to be teaching mechanisms in the context of India's own struggle for political freedom, and the first experiments with non-violent resistance in the name of the Indian nation. Gandhi's personal sympathies lay with the Boers. But in the confusion Indians experienced, with Indian refugees escaping in considerable numbers from Boer areas, and the possibility of living under Boer rule in the event of British defeat, Gandhi gave a clear lead that they should live up to their claims to be equal British subjects, despite their colour. The war was in effect 'a golden opportunity'. He later reported his argument at the time:

> Our existence in South Africa is only in our capacity as British subjects. In every memorial we have presented, we have asserted our rights as such. We have been proud of our British citizenship, or have given our rulers and the world to believe we are so proud. Our rulers profess to safeguard our rights because we are British subjects, and what little rights we still retain, we retain because we are British subjects. It would be unbecoming to our dignity as a nation to look on with folded hands at a time when ruin stared the British in the face as well as ourselves, simply because they ill-treat us here.

On 17 October about 100 well-educated, English-speaking Indians met in Durban to consider their position. Subsequently, through Gandhi, over twenty-five who were considered physically fit offered their services freely to the Colonial Secretary in Pietermaritzburg, freely in the context of the war, though they admitted they did not know how to handle arms.

The motive underlying this humble offer is to endeavour to prove that, in common with other subjects of the Queen-Empress in South Africa, the Indians, too, are ready to do duty for their Sovereign on the battle field. The offer is meant to be an earnest of Indian loyalty.

Although the volunteers were mainly educated professionals, their letter also promised monetary support from the Indian mercantile community. They were almost certainly all accustomed to working together in the Natal Indian Congress. Gandhi was also instrumental in encouraging
Indian women in Durban, from families of Indian merchants and traders, to contribute to the war effort through the Durban Women’s Patriotic League Fund, to which he himself contributed three guineas.

The offer of service was not immediately accepted. Meantime Gandhi, and some of those who had joined him in the offer, received rudimentary medical training from one of their European allies, a Dr Booth, an Anglican priest and doctor, who was instrumental in persuading the colonial authorities that his pupils could act as leaders to a corps of bearers recruited from among the Indian indentured labourers, once it had become apparent that Indian help was badly needed. So came into being the Indian Ambulance Corps, with Dr Booth as its Medical Superintendent. Eventually, in mid-December 1899, over 1000 Indians left for the front, while Indian traders supported them with supplies and gifts over and above their military rations. It was typical of Gandhi that he kept meticulous accounts of money disbursed in the enterprise, and even returned eleven unused railway tickets authorized by the District Engineer for use by the Corps. The Corps worked at the front for some weeks, the demands on it being harder than even Gandhi had expected. They carried the wounded on stretchers for miles, to field hospital or railway station, over roads barely worth the name, in hilly, dry conditions, often themselves having little food, water, shelter, or sleep. Moreover, though their conditions of service gave them immunity from work within the firing line, they agreed to carry stretchers within range of Boer fire at Spion Kop. Although indentured labourers would have been used to hard physical work, the more educated of higher social standing would have been quite unused to it, and in normal conditions would have considered such work beneath their dignity, compounded by the potentially polluting contact with the injured, dead, and dying. Gandhi was deeply proud of his compatriots; and with considerable magnanimity – considering the indignities to which he himself had been subjected by some of the white settlers – he commented that none of the Europeans with whom Indians came into contact in the war situation treated them with contempt or discourtesy.

This brief episode is of considerable importance in relation to Gandhi’s role after his return to his homeland, and also for an understanding of the nature of imperialism as experienced by the colonial subjects of the British Empire. Most obviously, it demonstrates the young lawyer’s growing public skills, particularly those of argument and organization within the Indian community, and the opportunities open in the imperial context for an educated Indian to carve out a role for himself as a representative of the Indian community in relation to the colonial authorities. It also shows how the young man whose diffidence and nervous disposition had in the past inhibited his career and contacts, now had no hesitation in negotiating with colonial officials (and also an Anglican Bishop), and engaging in
productive relationships across racial barriers, as in the case of Dr Booth. More deeply, the raising of the Corps, and the arguments Gandhi used for its justification, suggest that, even at this early stage in his personal development and public life, he was grappling with a range of issues which were to become critical in his mature thought and action. These issues were also central to the ideology and practice of imperialism, and often in contention between the British and their Indian subjects.

Gandhi's argument to his compatriots for assisting the colonial authorities during the war raised the issue of citizenship. Clearly in part this was a matter of sensible strategy: Indians claimed rights as British citizens—now they had the chance to demonstrate publicly by their actions that they were as loyal as white citizens. Moreover, one of the criticisms laid against them in the particular conditions of South Africa was that they were there entirely for monetary self-interest. Gandhi later wrote:

One of the charges laid against the Indians was, that they went to South Africa only for money-grubbing and were merely a dead-weight upon the British. Like worms which settle inside wood and eat it up hollow, the Indians were in South Africa only to fatten themselves upon them. [They] would not render them the slightest aid if the country was invaded or if their homes were raided. The British in such a case would have not only to defend themselves against the enemy but at the same time to protect the Indians.\footnote{15}

Here was an occasion to show that Indians were fully participating citizens, not parasites upon the Empire.

However, beneath the element of strategy in this argument, the seizing of the war-time 'golden opportunity', Gandhi was engaging with ideas of citizenship, and particularly of actively participant citizenship and the relationship between the individual and the state. He stated that, although he felt that justice was on the Boer side, individual subjects of a state should not hope to enforce their private opinions in all cases.

The authorities may not always be right, but so long as the subjects own allegiance to a state, it is their clear duty generally to accommodate themselves, and to accord their support, to acts of the state.\footnote{16}

When he wrote this in 1924, he said he would use just the same arguments as he had done in 1899, if he still retained faith in British government and the state as constituted in India by it. He had, indeed, put this principle into practice in India on his return, when he assisted in recruitment in his home region during the First World War, saying that Indians must help in the War if they wished to enjoy the benefits of the state under whose protection they lived.\footnote{17} It was only from 1920 that he abandoned his belief in the justice of British rule in India, and judged that it was his duty to oppose it as a 'satanic' institution.

Gandhi's argument in 1899 was an early exposition of his later, mature
understanding of the relationship of the individual and the state.\textsuperscript{18} He believed that this relationship was an organic one – that the state was not some external imposition, but the sum of the individuals in it. Citizens sustained the state by their actions and attitudes, even if they were often unconscious of this process, and therefore they were morally bound to and responsible for it. From this it followed that citizens were not only bound to obey and support the state in times of crisis, as in 1899, but should also be properly critical, as moral individuals, of its actions. Only thus would it be confined within appropriate bounds and kept on the path of morality.

Such an understanding of the relationship between the individual and the state, led Gandhi to a theory of moral opposition to the state and eventually to a position of outright hostility to British rule in India. As early as 1889 he was convinced that the state might sometimes be in the wrong, as it was manifestly to him in South Africa. Nonetheless, citizens had a clear duty to support the state unless they felt that the actions of the state created for them a grave and general ‘moral crisis’. In such a situation they had a moral duty to oppose the state’s action:

> if any class among the subjects considers that the action of a government is immoral from a religious standpoint, before they help or hinder it, they must endeavour fully and even at the risk of their lives to dissuade the government from pursuing such a course. We have done nothing of the kind. Such a moral crisis is not present before us, and no one says that we wish to hold aloof from this [Anglo-Boer] war for any such universal and comprehensive reason.\textsuperscript{19}

For Gandhi this comprehensive moral crisis only became apparent in India in 1920. Until then, he believed that citizens confronted with specific aspects of wrong at the hands of the colonial state and its officials (whether in South Africa or India) should oppose such wrong by reasoned argument and eventually by non-violent resistance. He called the latter ‘soul-force’ or ‘truth-force’, and used the word \textit{satyagraha} to distinguish it from passive resistance. Within a decade of the Boer War it had become part of his repertoire of political action in South Africa, and was expounded in his first and only major political treatise, written in 1909, \textit{Hind Swaraj}.\textsuperscript{20} In this he elaborated his view of the moral interrelationship between a state and its citizens, and argued that Indians had in effect handed over their country to the British because of their moral and cultural weakness. Consequently mere political home rule would not solve their predicament, for they would be left with an Indian-run state with the same defects. Only radical change in the lives of individual Indians would ultimately create a new sort of state.

In India Gandhi was eventually to put his theory of the relationship between the citizen and the state, and his vision of the moral, participant citizen, into practice, pressing both to their ultimate limits. After four
years of opposition to specific instances of wrong but not to the state as such, he engaged from 1920 in outright opposition to British rule, once he felt it was totally immoral and incapable of sustaining a moral relationship with its citizens. But - true to the vision of *Hind Swaraj* - he combined this with work both at individual level and in society at large to transform Indians into those he envisaged as new moral individuals and hence a new type of citizen, capable of new relationships with a genuinely Indian state.\(^{21}\) In so doing, he was engaging with British imperialism at its ideological core. For one of its essential justifications in India was that Indians were for historical, cultural and temperamental reasons incapable of citizenship, and therefore unfit to rule themselves.\(^{22}\)

Underlying Gandhi's struggles with the notion of citizenship was an even deeper moral issue - that of duty. Like citizenship, it was also a moral ideal integral to British imperialism. One of the moral and psychological underpinnings of British rule over Asians and Africans was a sense of duty - that the British were *bound* to exercise such rule because of their superior civilization, their religion, and their practice in the arts of sound law and good government.\(^{23}\) Duty was a powerful motif in late Victorian thinking, nourished by Evangelical Christianity, but also vital for the increasing numbers for whom specifically religious belief was becoming increasingly problematic.\(^{24}\) Linked to it was a concern for character, which would enable the individual to curb their lower nature, engage in altruistic behaviour, and play a full part in public affairs.

Gandhi shared many of these concerns with his English contemporaries, not surprisingly, given his western-style education and his period as a legal student in London before he went to South Africa.\(^{25}\) However, his understanding of duty was also deeply rooted in Hindu thinking. The word *dharma*, duty, is in India's Sanskritic languages the word used for 'religion', and highlights the primacy of duty in one's particular place in society and life. Moreover, anguish over the nature of duty is central to the great Hindu poem, the *Bhagavad Gita*, which was one of Gandhi's favourite religious texts. However, Gandhi was not bound by tradition: rather he used and reworked it, often using inspiration from other sources which fertilized and renewed old concepts. While in South Africa he cast off the idea that duty for him was rigorous observation of social conventions rooted in Hindu tradition. Indeed, in his personal life-style and that of his family and widening circle of close adherents, he deliberately broke with many such conventions, for example, by condemning the practice of untouchability and doing degrading work conventionally thought of as polluting. For him, duty increasingly meant following the inner call of what he called Truth, particularly in service of others. It was this inner conviction which led him to a highly varied public role in South Africa, where his activities stretched from legal work and journalism, to more obvious 'political' work and organization, to nursing and campaigning for cleanliness in Indian homes.
The full flowering of this vision of Truth, and of the genuinely human life as the search for Truth, was evident some years after the Boer War, particularly when in 1906 he took a vow of celibacy (in his mind, to free himself for wider public work and strengthen him by subduing his lower nature), and in 1909 when he wrote *Hind Swaraj* with its exposition of truth-force or *satyagraha*. But Gandhi’s involvement in the Ambulance Corps, and his arguments for Indian participation, show him struggling with the nature of duty in that particular context, and evolving the notion of the religious man as an activist and public servant, taking morality from the temple and the privacy of the individual life, out on to the streets and into civic contexts. Such an expansion of the notion of duty, both for himself and increasingly in his speaking and writing about the new India he hoped would come into being, became one of the hallmarks of his work in India. It would in turn help to give many of his compatriots a new sense of their own significance and agency in the making of a nation. It was also a powerful argument in his moral challenge to the British Raj, denying the British the monopoly of public duty, and challenging the Raj in the name of mature, high-minded, active Indian citizens, whose presumed non-existence the British had made a moral foundation of their imperial rule.

Closely linked to the notion of duty in Gandhi’s thinking was the concept of masculinity. This again was a crucial concern to his generation of educated Victorians, steeped in the Anglo-Saxon culture of Britain diffused through the English-speaking world. It, in turn, was closely linked to the issue of ‘character’ and the ideal of the altruistic public man. A distinctive construction of masculinity was both nurtured and demonstrated in such varied contexts as the British public-school system, the Scouting Movement, ‘muscular Christianity’, and the concern for sport and physical courage, and the healthy male body. Proper masculinity was seen to include physical resilience and self-disregard, leading to public service. It was also an ideal which fed into and sustained the imperial rulers’ self-image away from home in the business of ruling an empire, and often also powerfully influenced the image they constructed of their colonial subjects. In India, the ideal of masculinity was thought to be embodied in the men of the Indian Civil Service – most of whom, of course, had been through the public-school system. It was also present in the British assumption that many of their Hindu subjects were ‘effeminate’ and therefore unfit for self-rule. Bengalis, particularly those who had received a western education, were the particular target of this image-making. As the Private Secretary to the Viceroy remarked to his diary on 10 September 1906, in one of the more picturesque articulations of this attitude, ‘The Bengalis are a low-lying people in a low-lying land with the intellect of a Greek and the grit of a rabbit.’ It was perhaps not surprising that those subjects (particularly those who had received western education) in turn were deeply concerned with their own masculinity, and
often sought to 'prove' it in ways which reflected their rulers' own constructions of gender, for example in movements to develop physical courage and prowess.29

Gandhi shared these concerns about Indian masculinity in general, and his own in particular. They were a significant element in his response to the Boer War. Reporting his arguments at the time for the offer of free Indian service to the government, he retorted to those who feared that, in the event of a Boer victory, such support for the British would bring down on Indians a 'fearful revenge':

To waste the slightest thought upon such a contingency would only be a sign of our effeminacy and a reflection on our loyalty. Would an Englishman think for a moment what would happen to himself if the English lost the war? A man about to join a war cannot advance such an argument without forfeiting his manhood.30

The concern for 'manliness' as understood by the British was present, too, in his concern to prove that Indians were not money-grubbing parasites within the Empire, incapable of self-defence and needing the protection of the more manly white settlers.31 At this juncture, he evidently still subscribed to the cultural assumptions of the imperial race, that 'manliness' was displayed in physical courage and stoicism in the face of physical hardship. His accounts of Indians' work as stretcher-bearers, stressed their physical courage and stamina in harsh conditions and within the firing line. Yet, as we know, the decision to offer service in an Ambulance Corps was taken out of necessity, because none of them knew how to bear arms, rather than from conscientious aversion to combat. Gandhi was reported as saying publicly that had Indians skilled in combat such as Gurkhas and Sikhs, been present in the Indian community 'they would have shown what they could do in the way of fighting'.32

Gandhi's understanding of true manliness was at a critical juncture in this decade. Within a few years he had re-worked his understanding of it, just as he had modified the British notion of 'duty'. By 1909, when he wrote Hind Swaraj, he clearly held the belief which was to be his for the rest of his life, that the capacity for non-violent resistance to wrong was the hallmark of the truly courageous and 'manly'. Firstly, it required moral courage and true manliness to oppose wrong, particularly unjust laws: 'It is contrary to our manhood, if we obey laws repugnant to our conscience.'33 But, secondly, to oppose wrong non-violently, it required physical courage and fortitude of a far greater order than the man who responded with violence. When the questioner in Hind Swaraj assumed that passive resistance was 'a splendid weapon of the weak'. Gandhi responded:

This is gross ignorance. Passive resistance, that is, soul-force, is matchless. It is superior to the force of arms ... Physical-force men are strangers to the
courage that is requisite in a passive resister ... a passive resister will say he will not obey a law that is against his conscience, even though he may be blown to pieces at the mouth of a cannon.

What do you think? Wherein is courage required – in blowing others to pieces from behind a cannon or with a smiling face to approach a cannon and to be blown to pieces? Who is the true warrior – he who keeps death always as a bosom-friend or he who controls the death of others? Believe me that a man devoid of courage and manhood can never be a passive resister.34

So Gandhi used imperial understandings of ‘manliness’ and inverted them through his exposition of the significance of non-violence, suggesting that the non-violent subject who obeyed the voice of conscience and demonstrated spiritual strength was displaying manliness and courage of a deeper quality than those, including the imperial rulers, who merely wielded the weapons of force. In a further twist, which drew on the Hindu understanding of the power of sexual restraint to conserve spiritual power, Gandhi himself became a celibate, as noted above, and argued in Hind Swaraj that only the perfectly chaste could become passive resisters in the service of their country. ‘Chastity is one of the greatest disciplines without which the mind cannot attain requisite firmness. A man who is unchaste loses stamina, becomes emasculated and cowardly.’35 Gandhi had thus taken the ideal of ‘manliness’ so central to imperial ideology, and reconstructed it to challenge the British at the heart of their self-image as rulers.

This examination of an episode in the Boer War from an Indian perspective, has demonstrated how that event was experienced by some of the Indians resident in South Africa. In particular it demonstrates how one young Indian lawyer saw it as a critical opportunity in the experience of Indians as British citizens within a world-wide empire, and how it could be put to good use to strengthen their claims for rights as British citizens. The war also gave him a chance to reinforce his position of leadership within the Indian community in South Africa, by taking a leading role in the discussions about desirable Indian responses to the war. In the subsequent work of the Indian Ambulance Corps, he was able to raise his profile and legitimacy with the authorities as a ‘representative’ of his compatriots. More deeply, the moral and political crisis of the war demanded that the young Gandhi should address issues of identity and of fundamental values which were at the heart of the relationship between rulers and ruled in the context of British imperialism. At this juncture, very early in his public career, we see him wrestling with dilemmas of citizenship, duty and manliness, the resolutions of which were to become key elements in his later stance as a radical opponent of the British Raj in India, and integral to his vision of a new Indian society and polity.
NOTES


6. Ibid., p. 155.

7. Ibid., p. 132.

8. Ibid., pp. 142-3. He stated, ‘hardly ever have I known anybody to cherish such loyalty as I did to the British Constitution ... I believed that British rule was on the whole beneficial to the ruled’.


10. Ibid., p. 72.

11. Ibid., p. 72.

12. Gandhi to the Colonial Secretary, 19 October 1899, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. 3 (Delhi: Govt. of India, 1960), pp. 113-4. [Henceforth CWMG]

13. Gandhi to the District Engineer, 13 December 1899, *CWMG*, vol. 3, p. 130. (It is indicative of the social hierarchy within the Indian community that 1st-, 2nd- and 3rd-class tickets were authorized: the bearers from the indentured group travelled 3rd-class.)

14. For accounts of its work by Gandhi, see the special article contributed by Gandhi to the weekly edition of *The Times of India*, 16 June 1900, *CWMG*, vol. 3, pp. 137-141; Gandhi, *Satyagraha in South Africa*, pp. 77-78.


16. Ibid., pp. 72-3.

17. For this episode, see Judith M. Brown, *Gandhi’s Rise To Power: Indian Politics 1915-1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), pp. 147-8. (This episode in 1918 has remarkable similarities to Gandhi’s intervention in the Boer War.)


21. This was clear in his practical work for village upliftment and in his two ashram communities; the best single exposition of his ‘Constructive Programme’ in December 1941 can be found in Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, ed. Parel, pp. 170-81.


27. A recent exploration of this is Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The ‘manly Englishman’ and the ‘effeminate Bengali’ in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).


When wars are fought, anxiety about sexual behaviour never seems far away. Will men behave like men on the battlefield? Or will they misbehave like men, and commit atrocities against soldiers or civilians – and even, perhaps, against women? Such worries surfaced in the English periodical press during the Boer War in a sharp exchange between the journalist and campaigner, W.T. Stead,¹ and the writer Arthur Conan Doyle. In a piece entitled *Methods of Barbarism* (1901),² Stead charged British troops with the sexual abuse and rape of unprotected Boer women made vulnerable by the British policy of destroying Boer homesteads. This latter policy was at the heart of the British response to Boer guerrilla tactics following defeats during 1900. Boer farms were providing a support system which their destruction was intended to break, while simultaneously demoralizing Boer combatants. Camps were set up to accommodate and control displaced refugees, but their poor sanitation, and the scanty diet, resulted in widespread and endemic disease, and the deaths of thousands of Afrikaner and African people, most of whom were women and children.³ Doyle published his *The War in South Africa: Its Cause and Conduct* (1902) as a corrective to what he felt was inaccurate and injurious anti-English propaganda – criticism which had intensified as a result of the farm-burnings and camps. Stead’s accusations in particular incensed Doyle, and became the occasion of his defence of English soldierly conduct and, ultimately, civilized English manhood.⁴

In this essay, I want briefly to report the central features of this propaganda clash before stepping back a few years in order to look more closely at a literary preface to the war, published in 1897, which again puts the sexual conduct of an English combatant at the centre of its tale. This is Olive Schreiner’s allegory story, *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland*, which she wrote to condemn the policy and tactics of Cecil Rhodes’ British South Africa Company in occupying the land north of the Limpopo River which came to be called Rhodesia.⁵ I will argue that while Stead and Doyle, despite their apparently opposed positions, both evoke common ideals of civilization and Englishness and deploy common stereotypes of Africa,
Schreiner’s story takes very similar themes and pushes them in different, and subversive, ways. It does this through an explicit manipulation of the assumptions about race and gender taken for granted by Stead and Doyle.

Stead published *Methods of Barbarism* in July 1901. Although it is a wide-ranging indictment of Britain’s failure properly to abide by the rules of military engagement established at the Hague Convention of 1899, it is the effects of farm-burning, and the pitiable plight of dispossessed Boer women and children, that form the moral heart of Stead’s argument. The treatment of these vulnerable women is the primary sign and measure of an English civilization which, Stead concludes, is wanting. Back in England, not one responsible father of a family would allow his servant girl on a public common, in peace-time, in the company of soldiers:

> Why, then, should they suppose that when the same men are released from all restraints of civilization, and sent forth to burn, destroy and loot at their own sweet will and pleasure, they will suddenly undergo so complete a transformation as scrupulously to respect the wives and daughters of the enemy ... I do not say a word against our soldiers. I only say that they are men.6

In ‘The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon’, a much-discussed series of articles on prostitution published in the *Pall Mall Gazette* during the mid-1880s, Stead had conjured up a heady vision of the innocent daughters of the working classes ruined by debauched aristocrats, whose jaded sexual appetites were whetted by the prospect of young virginal flesh; here, by contrast, the atavistic effects of warfare unleash the naturally predatory sexual appetite of ‘ordinary’ (lower-class) males, no longer bound by the civilizing influence of England and its good wives and mothers.7 Stead deftly welds together an image of manliness familiar through the adventure fiction of G.A. Henty, H. Rider Haggard and others, with the haunting fear of degeneration caused by too much of an encounter with the dissipating and primitive forces of warfare and Africa.

Doyle sets about countering Stead’s accusations by defending the policy of farm-burning. The burnings were, he argues, a valid military response, and the concentration camps an equally necessary duty enjoined on a civilized people to keep safe non-combatants. The major threat to Boer women and children was not the proximity of armed conflict, but an unregulated black African population. Moreover, even if the Boer women’s farms were saved, without their menfolk they were still imperilled: ‘no woman on a lonely farm was safe amid a black population, even if she had the means of procuring food’.8 In an earlier pamphlet, Stead had himself used the image of black men raping white women, arguing that the farm-burning policy exposed ‘these unfortunate [Afrikaner] white women to the loathly horror of compulsory intercourse with the Kaffirs’.9 Aware, perhaps, of how effective this focus on a rapacious and uncontrolled African sexuality had become for propaganda supporting the need for the camps, Stead abandoned this accusation in order directly to implicate British soldiers in sexual outrages.10
Doyle contends that there is absolutely no evidence to support Stead’s calumny; and, in addition to redressing the charges against military tactics, he also sets to righting the image of imperial troops by presenting them as honourable in military (and, by implication, sexual) conduct. The ‘devoted Tommy and his chivalrous officer’, and ‘the humanity and discipline of the British troops’, are contrasted with the Boers’ slide into depravity as the conflict extended into guerrilla war.11

Doyle draws on a familiar Victorian medievalism in order to make synonymous individual honour and national worth. Devotion and chivalry are the timeless qualities of an Englishman, and humanity and discipline the mark of such men’s common national identity. The good conduct of imperial troops is thus a measure of the moral health and destiny of England. Stead, by contrast, pulls apart manliness and Englishness, drawing on widespread anxieties about degeneration, as well as the popularity of images of masculinity in imperial adventure fiction. He implicitly evokes the romanticized vision of a ‘primitive’ manliness extolled by writers such as Andrew Lang and Rider Haggard, and turns it into something potentially ignoble. In a world historically divorced from the chivalric past, propriety is a matter of modern codes of conduct; these codes are respected and valued by the good English audience to which Stead appeals, who are called upon to curb and check an uncontrolled masculinity by enforcing the standards of a properly civilized society. These modern standards, however, turn out to be very similar to Doyle’s; they are, indeed, a romanticized medievalism updated and, in both men’s work, it is the treatment of women which exemplifies the standard.

The nature of masculinity, and its relation to national identity, is central to the debate between Stead and Doyle. For both men, its representation depends on particular images of femininity, on the one hand; and, on the other, a series of references to black Africans who stand as the mark of a ‘real’ primitivism, or an outer limit of humanity, rendered as an uncivilized and rapine male sexuality. I want to contrast the ways in which both Doyle and Stead construct their respective positions in the propaganda war – through culturally potent images of masculinity, Englishness and civilization, which find their most extreme contrast not in the backward Boer, but the unregulated African – with the very different use to which Olive Schreiner puts similar images in Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland.

Like Stead, with whom she had long been in friendly contact, Schreiner was deeply opposed to the war in South Africa and, like him, her writing appealed to, or attempted to call into being, a good tradition of English liberalism and commitment to justice. Like Stead too, Schreiner had identified, on her return from England to South Africa in 1889, one man in whose hands she felt the future of South Africa would be held; he was ‘The only big man we have here’, Cecil Rhodes.12 Unlike Stead, though, Schreiner became quickly disillusioned with Rhodes, and was fiercely critical
of British Empire from at least the mid-1890s. When she and Rhodes finally met, about a year after her return to South Africa from Europe in 1889, Rhodes had the Cape premiership and Schreiner was already beginning to be wary of him. She was particularly condemning of his support in parliament for the Masters and Servants Act Amendment Bill – popularly called the Strop Bill – which allowed for the flogging of farm servants. By 1895, Schreiner was driven publicly to declare her opposition to Rhodes. Together with the young farmer she had recently married, Samuel Cronwright, she wrote a paper entitled ‘The Political Situation’, which argued that the overtly retrogressive force in Cape politics – the main Afrikaner political group, the Afrikaner Bond – was in truth being manipulated by the real power in the Cape, the ‘small band of Monopolists’ which was working the colony’s political and economic life for its own aggrandizing purposes.

In witnessing Rhodes’s Pioneer Column’s scramble for the lands belonging to the Shona and Ndebele tribes – land identified with legends of gold – Schreiner saw all too clearly its miserable reality in the violent and wholesale expropriation of land and cattle from the African population. After the Jameson Raid in 1896 (the bungled attempt to invade the Transvaal, carried out by Chartered Company forces and obviously sanctioned by Rhodes), she was even more certain that the real danger in South Africa was the monopolistic and expansionist capitalism associated with him. Aware though she was of the ‘cardinal vice’ of Boer racism (on ‘the native question we have to fight the main body of them to the death’, she wrote to the liberal Cape politician, John X. Merriman), Schreiner was convinced that the divisive and immiserating force for the bulk of the African population was European, and especially English, capitalism.

In 1896 the Shona and the Ndebele people rebelled against Chartered Company rule in their lands, prompted by their dispossession, and a life made even more precarious by the severe rinderpest epidemic of 1896. Schreiner wrote to a socialist friend: ‘We are having a terrible time out here. You people in England don’t know what the heel of a capitalist is when it gets right flat on the neck of a people! ... Now we are busy killing the poor Matabeles.’ Some four months later, she wrote to another friend: ‘the other morning I woke, and as I opened my eyes there was an Allegory full fledged in my mind! A sort of allegory story about Matabeleland’. Published the following year as Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland, it tells of a young Englishman, Peter Halket, employed by the Chartered Company to put down the uprising in Matabeleland.

Separated from his troop while scouting, Peter has to spend a night alone on a small hill or ‘kopje’ and, in the vast loneliness of the African veld, a phantasmagoria of memory and guilt and desire plays itself out in his mind until he is interrupted by the appearance of a stranger who we as readers – but not yet Peter – recognize as Christ. Peter (also called Peter Simon) listens to the stranger’s stories – about conflict between the Turks and Armenians,
about greed and cruelty in South Africa, and about his company of men and women who throughout the ages oppose cruelty and oppression and aid the weak. The stories last throughout the night and they transform Peter. In the short second part of the book, Peter is returned to his troop. Much of this section is relayed through the conversation of his fellow troopers. We learn that Peter has been ordered to execute a captured African, as a punishment for pleading for the latter’s release; instead, Peter is himself shot while covertly freeing the condemned man. The book was published with a frontispiece photograph showing three black men executed by hanging from a tree in Matabeleland, surrounded by their languid white executioners. This was juxtaposed by the dedication, ‘To a great good man Sir George Grey, once Governor of the Cape Colony, who ... governed by an uncorruptible justice’. The book thus aimed to shock its English audience into recognizing the perversity and fallacy of the imperial ideal of English justice and benevolence.

The story works by prompting the reader to make connections which Peter himself resists. At the beginning of the story, as Peter sits on the lonely veld, he thinks of England and his good, poverty-stricken mother. His memories stir his ambition. In South Africa he, too, will make money as others have; he will speculate and accumulate, and money will bring power and influence, and his mother need never work again. In trying to figure out how it is that speculation operates, Peter’s mind grows hazy, just as it did when he tried to do equations at school, for he cannot see the relationship, the connections, between things: ‘he could not see the relation between the first two terms and the third’ (pp. 29-35).

Peter’s memories of England then disperse into a ‘chain of disconnected pictures’, to reappear, not as a bit of England, forever green, but as arraignment:

Now, as he looked into the crackling blaze [of the fire which he has built on the kopje or hill-top], it seemed to be one of the fires they had made to burn the natives’ grain by ... then, he seemed to see his mother’s fat ducks waddling down the little path ... Then, he seemed to see his huts where he lived with the prospectors, and the native women who used to live with him; and he wondered where the women were. Then – he saw the skull of an old Mashona blown off at the top, the hands still moving. He heard the loud cry of the native women and children as they turned the maxims onto the kraal, and he heard the dynamite explode that blew up a cave. Then again he was working a maxim gun, but it seemed to him it was more like the reaping machine he used to work in England, and that what was going down before it was not yellow corn, but black men’s heads; and he thought when he looked back they lay behind him in rows, like the corn in sheaves (p. 36).

In the final image, the yellow corn of rural England sickeningly transmutes into the mechanistic, efficient slaughter of an African people. It echoes a famous story in the history of the making of Rhodesia, which tells of Rhodes subduing resistance in Pondoland by ordering his troops to mow down a
field of maize with maxim guns, as an object lesson to its people of their fate if they refused compliance. Moreover, the corn-into-killing image is one element of a complex set of connecting motifs about food and hunger, which in turn forms a major thread in the dense web of connections and allusions which structure the story.

Peter’s fevered and disconnected thoughts come to an end as he suddenly recalls a black woman he and a companion found in the bush, ‘her baby on her back, but young and pretty. Well, they didn’t shoot her! – and a black woman wasn’t white!’ (pp. 36-7). Peter’s narrative fails here because he thinks of his mother again. He does not yet know that he suffers from unacknowledged guilt, although he does know that he cannot think of his mother, and of what he and his companion did to the young black woman, at the same time. Sexuality, and the nature of the family – which again relates to nurture and feeding – are at the heart of the story.

Released from the lonely fear he felt at the appearance of the stranger, Peter asks him if he has seen ‘niggers’ in the area. The stranger tells of a wounded man he helped to a pool to drink (this is the captured African Peter will later give water to, and his supper, and for whom he will die), and a woman. The woman of whom Christ speaks is one of two women who have escaped a Company assault and managed to save one basketful of the grain destroyed by the troopers. The woman is very old, but the other woman is young and with child. Each day, in their hiding-place, the old woman doles out rations of the grain – a handful for herself, and two handfuls for the young woman. When the child is born, and the young woman strong, the older sends them on their way to join the remnants of their fleeing tribe; unbeknownst to the young woman, the grain the old woman has given her, is all that was left. “To-night, at half-past three, [the old woman] will die”, the stranger tells Peter, but not before Peter has fleetingly realized that the young black woman, with her baby on her back and a bundle of corn on her head, for whom the old woman has laid down her life, was the woman that he and his companion had raped in the bush (pp. 62, 36-7).

In this way, the narrative ties together not only bodily and spiritual famine, but also implicates sexual appetite in its web of connections. Like Stead, Schreiner is prepared to suggest that, away from home, English boys will behave very badly indeed. But Schreiner does not content herself with gender stereotypes; instead, Peter’s masculinity – including his sexual desire – is subjected to far more sophisticated interrogation. For it is in relation to his sexuality that Africa comes to mean something to Peter. For Schreiner (unlike Stead), Africa is by this process made into something other than a vast screen for the projection of English fantasies of atavism and primitivism. This is achieved because for Peter – through the company of women, as I will shortly explain – Africa becomes more than a potential, if often disappointing, pot of gold.

When Peter is first disturbed by the sound of someone approaching the
kopje, he is terrified. He is, however, soon reassured by the stranger’s manner and the fact that he is unarmed, and settles down to tell the stranger his favourite campside story. On first arriving in South Africa, Peter worked the mines for a prospector; he tells of how he liked the life, with two huts of his own ‘and a couple of nigger girls’. One of the girls was not much more than a child; but the other ‘was thirty if she was a day’ and Peter had ‘set my heart on her the day I saw her’. It was a struggle to get her; the man who owned her had himself ‘a devil of a row’ in getting her as she had a husband, and two children, of her own. But he did, and the woman worked for him and she made a garden. One day, Peter relates, coming home suddenly, he found her talking to an African man, something he had expressly forbidden. He sent the man away, and forgot him. But the next day the woman asked him for gun cartridges; she said she had to give them to the old woman who helped her to carry water to the garden, for the old woman’s son who was going north to hunt elephants. ‘[She] got over me’, Peter tells the stranger, ‘because she was going to have a kid, and she said she couldn’t do the watering without help.’ Hearing about the uprising in Matabeleland, Peter decided to volunteer and left his two Mashona women with instructions to await his return. Within a month of leaving, Peter received a letter from a man with whom he had worked, telling him that the women had gone, within hours of his departure. They left everything except the ammunition Peter had given the older woman, and an old Martini-Henry rifle, and they met an African man some miles off. Indignant, telling his story, Peter is sure the man is the same man he saw talking to the woman, and that he was the woman’s African husband. So the woman had been plotting to leave all along: ‘’I shouldn’t have minded so much”, said Peter after a while, ... ”but she was going to have a kid in a month or two”’ (pp. 43-47). When, at the end of the book, Peter pleads with his Captain for the captured African’s life, he repeats over and over again that he thinks he knows the man. He thinks it is the woman’s husband.

What, of course, Peter has really discovered is the fellowship of man. But in staging such fellowship, symbolized at the book’s end by ‘the red sand ... in which a black man and a white man’s blood were mingled’ (p. 120), Schreiner makes it impossible to avoid the question of sexual morality – of double sexual standards and the abuse of women – which was so central to the arguments about women’s emancipation in which she was involved throughout the 1880s. It is a commonplace of colonial discourse to deny the African psychological interiority: collective rather than individual – and therefore childishly immature as Rhodes frequently claimed – African identity was seen as having nothing to do with the complex realms of loving and longing. In restoring something like an assumed interiority to the nameless African woman of Peter’s story, Schreiner may be involved in a form of projection and appropriation, issuing the woman with a European or western subjectivity. But it is a gesture in which the central demands being made by western women – for self-determination, the right to bodily
integrity, and freedom from sexual coercion – crash through the story and into the colonial scene in the African woman’s quiet determination to refind her family.

In her popular collection of allegory stories, *Dreams*, published in 1890, just after she had left England to return to South Africa, Schreiner tells of a woman who dreams she stands before God’s throne to plead the case for womankind, and to condemn male oppression. Men have blood on their hands, she says, because of their sexual mistreatment of women. She shows God her own white hands – she is pure; but God points to her feet, which are blood-red. The streets on earth are full of mire the woman protests: “If I should walk straight on in them my outer robe might be bespotted, you see how white it is! And therefore I pick my way.” God said, “On what?” (p. 126). The woman realizes that she, too, is complicit in the sin and suffering around her. Here, class differences are the focus of the story: middle-class women’s liberation cannot be bought at the cost of working-class degradation. The story is part of Schreiner’s criticism of prostitution debates which concentrated entirely on male sexual rapacity instead of seeing prostitution as part of wider economic and familial structures.

In *Trooper Peter*, the case against imperial policy in South Africa transports the stuff of metropolitan female emancipation debates onto the African veld. Here the commodification of the woman is desperate and disgraceful – Peter buys the African woman with a vat of brandy – but it is also inescapably associated with, or rather soldered on to, Peter’s fortune-making dreams. These are dreams of imperial adventure in the process of being popularized and romanticized, but they are here emphatically returned to the capitalist-driven exploitation of South Africa being undertaken by Rhodes and his contemporaries. Masculinity is implicated, of course, through the link between sexual and colonial aggression; but so too is femininity – specifically those middle-class western women busy with the process of trying to sort right from wrong in relation to the sexes.

Even more tellingly, perhaps, is that Peter’s brittle machismo cannot disguise the psychic complexities Schreiner imports to her allegory of capitalist-imperial greed and destruction. (The story of the African woman is always told for men, around the campfire, and ends with Peter’s declaration that, had he known the identity of the African man who came to visit the woman, he would have shot him, there and then.) These are complexities expected, and demanded, in metropolitan gender-debates. Peter loves the African woman; she provides for him and she makes him a garden in the desert. He has an intimation of what this means for him – it means a home, and a family – but absolutely no sense at all of what it might mean for her. Schreiner’s readers must be made to feel the violence all round: Peter’s psychic defamation, in a colonial context which allows the white man to cost African life so cheaply that humanity itself is imperilled, echoes and mimics the literal violation of the African woman. Unlike Peter, Schreiner’s readers must be made to see the relation between things.
NOTES

1. Stead, founder and editor of the popular *Review of Reviews*, had become disillusioned about British military tactics in South Africa, and lent his propagandistic skills to the pro-Boer and anti-war cause.

2. W.T. Stead, *Methods of Barbarism. ‘War is War’ and ‘War is Hell’: The Case for Intervention* (London: Mowbray House, 1901). The title was taken from the Liberal leader Henry Campbell-Bannerman’s speech delivered to the National Reform Union in England in June 1901, where he famously declared: ‘When is a war not a war? When it is carried on by methods of barbarism in South Africa’.

3. In 1901, Emily Hobhouse, Secretary to the South African Conciliation Committee, a pro-Boer organization which campaigned for an end to the war, reported on conditions in the camps she visited in 1900. See Emily Hobhouse, *Report of a Visit to the Camps of Women and Children in the Cape and Orange River Colonies* (London: Committee of the South African Distress Fund, 1901).


5. Olive Schreiner, *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* (1897; Parklands: Ad Donker, 1992). All further references are to this edition and are included in the text.


11. Doyle, pp. 93, 94, 117.


13. Rive, p. 211.


16. Rive, p. 278.

17. Schreiner met and supported J.A. Hobson whose theory about the relation between capitalism and imperialism was consolidated by witnessing the course of the War. See J.A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study* (1902; London: Unwin Hyman, 1988).


20. Stead also uses the Turkish-Armenian conflict as an example of the failure of British policy and protection, in *The Truth About the 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. 5 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'. 6

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. 7 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 Vierkleur8 draped in crepe with a Union Jack hanging over it. The Herberts met us & photographed us outside the Zulu Monument.9 Then, returning, the girls asked if they might cheer the Governor. They meant onside10 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.11

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 Vanderplanks12 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.13 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\textsuperscript{15} 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.\textsuperscript{16}

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.\textsuperscript{17} 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 & schrantzes & 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 lay 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. 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.

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.’

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!’ 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.

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 Ghorkas. They have said for weeks that we were using Ghorkas & 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.37 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 Ladysmith fallen’.38

‘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.’39 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.40 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 Elandslaagte
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.  

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’. 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’. 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.

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’. 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.

Mary Moore has left a textual archive of substantial value for the study of white women and colonialism in late nineteenth-century South Africa. 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. It 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 'cooly' 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).
In the vast barroom below,  
pool upon pool of baize  
stands uncontested  
as, on a fissured white wall,  
a small television roars  
out the latest Bok  
ambush of foreign raiders.  
English shouts echo  
back from the bar at the massed  
volume from the screen’s crowd,  
*Lion* cans punched through air  
with each break-out to the try-line.  
Quietly to the side, an overalled  
oil-stained mechanic, thin  
cheekbones through deep tan,  
sings the good life  
far from Dagenham beginnings:  
‘There’s a lot of Essex here.’  
The museum’s hollow room  
up a dark staircase  
stands padlocked and silent.  
Amongst its cuttings, bandages,  
bones and shrapnel from the siege,  
photos of British regiments  
in their transient splendour,  
World War uniforms  
where polished medals glint  
as the lights go proudly on:  
the white faces of young  
soldiers stare from behind  
encircling glass, alert for  
what might arrive from beyond  
the camera’s reflecting lens.
My Danie Theron

One

It’s the 1901 photograph of me that’s most admired by sentimental fanciers of Boer War Heroes, one where I’m standing behind my push-bike, left hand holding the handlebars, right hand steadying the saddle. My legs are straddled and there’s a jaunty twist to my hips. I look off to the left, my head turned away from the handlebars. My head is at a different angle from my torso, and my legs on a different plane from my body, exactly as if I’d been posed by, say, Michelangelo. My stance emphasizes my readiness to leap onto the saddle and pedal away – spy, scout, courier, and gadfly to the Tommies. Antjie Theron, my brother’s great-granddaughter and the Researcher in this case, is one such sentimental fancier. She pours over the deteriorating picture, and I pour with her, my presence at her shoulder a vague odour of bicycle-chain and sweaty leather, an odour she loves, for she too has ridden bicycles all her life and at fifty has strong legs.

My twisted pose is in contrast to my Mauser tied to the bike’s crossbar and cutting the photo in half lengthwise, making it more interesting to the connoisseur of this art-form, I dare say. The hat I wear has a high crown and a broad-enough brim so that my watchful eyes are partly obscured, the shading lending a brushstroke of sadness, which is false. I was not sad on the day the photo was taken, nor on any other day of this, for me, entertaining war. I’m not sad today as I crouch against a boulder on this koppie, my buttocks resting on the warm sand. I listen to the shells like hot metallic insects around me, knowing one will shatter me sooner or later. But I’m grinning, as is the Researcher, at the thought that Captain Hart and his brigade surrounding this hill in the Gatsrand don’t know that I alone am up here and not a whole barrel of Boers.

To return to the photo: I was then wearing a tidy moustache, though I would shave it off when I wanted to ape a pink-cheeked London lad and deceive a local encampment of Brits. Like the apparition of someone’s school-chum, I would stroll out of the dark into their firelight, encased neatly in a stolen uniform, and raise my cap. I would present my pass from Colonel Methuen and join them at rations, my accent upper-upper, impeccably so. In the morning, if there was time, I would play a round of polo. But there were also times when my exhaustion was such that I wished the Tommies would see the cracks in my disguise, knock me
down, arrest me, and send me off sunburnt and half-starving with other prisoners-of-war, to lean against a stucco wall in Ceylon, to wait for peace. I would then have had time to relax and learn yet another language, Tamil, maybe, or Arabic.

My old school blazer in that photograph has grown rather tight and short, as Antjie notices. In my blazer pockets I have clean stones to suck in case I run out of water; tobacco in a pouch made of Red Indian skin given to me by an American; my pipe and matches; a half-chewed piece of biltong, slimy at one end from saliva and now picking up fluff in my pocket; two hard biscuits, an apple, a whistle, a comb and broken mirror; and a threadbare handkerchief tied at the corners to use as a cap. The pass given me by Methuen is in the lining my hat; there is money in my back pocket; and from my belt, warm in its sheath, hangs a yatagan given to me by Hassan the Arab.

That was then, now I sit on top of a hill and I have none of my things except pipe, tobacco, matches, and money. But I am myself. I am Theron, a cherub-faced spy and a master-blaster of bridges and rails. A ghost; a stalking cat; a snake in the grass. A Pied Piper who led his polyglot pack behind enemy lines. I'm good-dogs Rover and Wagter for General De Wet, my eyes bright at his heels. I am his Ear and Nose.

When Hart’s bullets finally tear my bone-cage and my rifle jerks parabolically from my hand, the Brigade will wait for returning fire. There’ll be none. They’ll wait while my blood drowns the ants and beetles under stones and flows into a mousehole. When they get up here, they’ll be speechless to find that only one man has been picking them off at whim. Incensed, they’ll kick my unidentified corpse, smashing in the mouth and the eye-sockets, and then dump the mess into a hole. After the war a monument will be built to me on the old road between Johannesburg and Potchefstroom, a monument the Researcher says she used to see many times on her bicycle trips from her pa’s farm to the Meisieshoër and back. She used to pick veld flowers to prop against the brickwork. You see, our family connection and her history books caused her fall in love with me. About me, General De Wet would write, and she, in love and sucking on her fingers, would read:

Men as lovable or as valiant there might be, but where should I find a man who combined so many virtues and good qualities in one person? When he received an order, or if he wished to do anything, then it was gou-gou maak ’n plan ...

This praise will, however, never enter the revisionist histories. Never mind. My spirit will wander over the Gatsrand where I died, and go past De Wet’s doorstep to the room where he works. I will sit, a cold breath at his elbow, and watch him write about how he was Generaal Gees, a ghost that the British could never capture. I try to remind him where his memory falters. Later still, I will follow him, whispering disregarded advice about the future as, old and ill in 1942, he will march with General
Louis Botha to take German South-West. Over his coffin my spirit will weep, for, except for Oom Paul, I loved him more than anyone. And when she's tired out with translating De Wet's High Dutch, my Antjie will cry also.

Two

I'll die young so will remain forever young. I am like the Researcher's husband who died when he was thirty and she thirty-one. She cannot forget him, and even now she has dreams where she rubs his naked chest and shoulders, smooth and hot to the touch, smells the boyish musk he still retains at thirty, and begs him, 'Peter, please don't go.' Sometimes this dream-image makes love to her and she wakes shaking. She is incapable of imagining that young man as stomachy, dewlapped, and bald. Just as she cannot imagine me except as she sees me in a couple of photographs. The best, I think, is a pale shot of my head and shoulders, taken as if through gauze. It was the day of my matriculation and, what with my oiled curls, high frothy collar, and my expression of disdain, a collector of antiques could take it for an intaglio print, say of Frederic Chopin, and make a bid for it.

But it isn't this glamorous photograph that interests the Researcher; it's the other one. There I am, the boy-warrior, holding an iron horse. Soon she'll also start dreaming of me, a dusty smiling fellow, lifting off his bandolier as he strides to her bed. As he plonks himself down to pull off his boots, he'll sing to her, 'Si vous m'aimez autant que je vous aime-e-e-e-e ...'. And she'll bundle up the hem of her nightie and laughingly stuff it into her mouth.

The sky is like a green lake shot over with red, and the breeze has grown into a wind. It sweeps over the plains and the newly planted mielie fields of those farms still being worked. It flows over the Drakensberge and the Bosveld, and whistles between the stones of cattle and sheep kraals where the beasts jostle, their nostrils steaming, their cries low and rough. It swings on shutters and unfastened doors in the deserted farmhouses, and wrinkles the brown waters of the rivers still low in their banks, for the summer rains are late. It freezes the men camping out and unable to light fires, as I am growing frozen. The wounded will die tonight in hospital tents and on filthy tarpaulins under bluegum trees. The dead British at Dundee and Magersfontein will move restlessly in their icy coffins.

Three

The Boer War. The unremembered war. The Researcher says it's annoying the way no-one these days ever seems to have heard of that war. It's just another of those silly little wars in faraway places, back in a past that had no impact on the wider course of history. But they are wrong. I mean, it's obvious: the Boer War allowed experiments with telegraph and telephone,
helium balloons, gatling-guns, camouflage uniforms, guerrilla tactics, barbed-wire fencing. Troops and officers trained in the Boer War were mature and seasoned by 1914, and elated at being part of the first real war since Napoleon’s. No-one wants to hear about the Boer War, ‘the last gentleman’s war’? Wait while the Researcher and I have a grim laugh at that description! We wonder what the tens of thousands of black people sent out into the bare veld to starve or be caught in cross-fire thought about the gentlemen, how much all the emaciated women and children in the camps admired them.

No war ever is completely unremembered. As the Researcher says, if people live through atrocities it’s as if their descendants beyond the tenth generation inherit a vengeful gene, an undying longing to repay the cruelty and the perceived injustice. How does that gene die out? I don’t know. I am merely glad that I died before I married.

I will die never having made love to a woman, though I did become engaged, on January 1st, 1898, to Hannie Neethling, sixteen years old. The Researcher has dug up a photograph of her in a biography of me written in Dutch by Willem Brouwer de Janz. The camera caught Hannie from under her chin, shortening her neck and enlarging her nostrils. The dead whiteness of the background makes her black hair look like a big shapeless hat, so very misleading. She had the most luxurious mane of thick curly hair I’ve ever seen on an Afrikander woman.

Four

I never did get to sleep with Hannie nor to marry her. What I did enjoy about her though, was her boyish tennis-game. She would run and slide for the ball, sometimes grazing her knee. She wasn’t one of those sissies who stand bored on the court, waiting for the ball to come to them. It was on August 1st of 1898, after Hannie and I’d played hard singles and were strolling back to the house, that she leaned into me saying, ‘Ag, Danie ek voel so moeg, en die wind is so kwaai …’. I helped her into the kitchen and poured some lemonade for her. As I turned, her face seemed to pulse up at me and her cheeks were crimson, the sweat standing on her forehead like tiny transparent stones. ‘Daantjie,’ she said, ‘Ek kry vreeslik hoofpyn ... ek moet gaan lê ...’.

I cycled home against the wind to Krugersdorp. I was busy all week, but on the Friday I sent for news. Mrs Neethling returned a note saying Hannie and her sister Mara both had bad colds and that I should stay away. So I spent the weekend watching the cricket matches at Seunshoer and catching up on my legal work. That Monday, Mr Neethling turned up at my office, his face bewildered. Both Hannie and Mara had died the night before, of double-pneumonia.

I could only stare at that takhaar farmer in fury. I was young and untried then, but had it been later, I would have punched him in the heart. Ag, so ... so .... Hannie and Mara had lain suffering for a week
with ‘bad colds’ and nobody had checked on them? At the funeral I was in a state of wooden grief and wouldn’t speak to her parents nor to anyone else. So the story got around that my life came to an end right there, that I could never love another woman, and that I instantaneously developed the ability to risk my life daily for Oom Paul.

**Five**

A heavy milktart moon has risen and glides against the deep blue. As I come out of my own thoughts and mark it, I hear movement down below. I scramble carefully to peer over the rocks. Something is happening. Either they have given up and are moving the whole party away, horses and all, or they are bringing in reinforcements. Now I hear wheels and a metallic creaking. It’s time I reminded them that Theron is still as good as any ten men, even though he has eaten nothing for fifteen hours. I wait for the moonlight to glint onto metal, then I fire. I fling myself to a different position and fire. I keep moving fast and shooting, jubilant when I hear yells, but still keeping myself as low as possible behind what cover there is. A volley of panicked return fire bursts from all directions. I throw myself under the overhanging boulder that has been my protection all along. The shelling stops but the strange crunching continues. Then that too stops. I wait. Nothing. Again I creep to the edge and look over. The moon co-operates and I can now make out the long barrel of a cannon. *Die Liewe Here*, they’ve tugged a cannon from who-knows-where to blast my bloody body to the *melktert* moon! I sink back to my position under the boulder and light my pipe.

It’s ironic, you know: my step-sister, who raised me, used to jeer at me that I was “n Ingelse Jintleman.’ I used to love to play cricket, and I easily learned to speak English like Mr McAlister our teacher. In the years that followed, I read Cicero, and especially the plays of Shakespeare. In my last years at school, I was growing adept at French and German, and cementing my mistrust of adults, particularly of those who had power over the young and the weak. It was during those years of high school that (like the Researcher) I developed my famous seriousness, to the extent that in 1896, when I was living in Mrs Mostert’s boarding-house, my fellow-boarders complained that I never laughed or smiled. That was my pose. The ridiculous, the obtuse, and the scabrous always inspired me to inner laughter. I was a born but silent ironist. Teasingly, the Researcher says, ‘Daantjie, you were a pair of flat eyes staring out of a smooth face, a wooden chappie going in and out of a cuckoo-clock.’ I laugh. Yes, and I was a member of no family, and a man who, once the war was in full steam, was to become one with all nations. I could’ve been a Gentleman but fate decided that I was to be the Boer spy-leader of a ragtag bunch of cosmopolitan backstreeters, all smooth-gliding and shadow-changing; all seeking to fight wherever on earth the British had started a quarrel.

But I loved my old Oom Paul. Why? That is not a reasonable question.
No-one can explain why he or she loves. Love achieves the self. It fills up all the empty hollows in the soul with sweetness and purpose. If it is itself and not a fraud, it is indestructible. (My now jealous Researcher says that this is quite enough sentiment: I must get on with my story.)

**Six**

I was part of the Burgher Contingent that reduced Dr Jameson and his raiders into a band of delinquent schoolboys. That was 1895, the year that a flame of contest was lit under my heart. However, over the next years we thought things could be settled without war, that angers had been tamped down like a camp-fire that sand has been kicked on. But in 1899, fresh twigs and leaves fell on to it, a wind sneaked in among the debris, and the fire flared up anew. In April 1899, Moneypeny, editor of *The Star* in Johannesburg, published a libellous article against Oom Paul, making him out to be a liar and a warmonger, and just at the time when die ou vader was breaking his heart over an imminent war he couldn’t prevent. My heart like granite in my chest, I ran to *The Star*’s offices.

I pushed past the alarmed office-boys and burst into Moneypeny’s office. Momentarily nonplussed by his look of terror, I hesitated, but then leapt across his desk and, grabbing him by the necktie, I shook the rolled-up newspaper in his face. I called him liar and bastard, and began knocking his head off. He tried to dodge my fist, but I caught him nicely on the ear. Crying like a calf, he fell out of his chair. Before I could jump on him with both feet, I was caught from behind by underlings and held fast for the constables.

*Ag, wat pret!* What heightened feelings! Three days later in court, I defended myself spiritedly. I was my own defending lawyer, and cross-questioned Moneypeny like a gatling-gun, forcing him to reveal his total ignorance about Oom Paul or of any burghers and their intentions. It came out that he knew a total of three burghers to speak to and he couldn’t read Dutch. All the same, I was fined twenty pounds. But, before the magistrate’s gavel hit the desk, the burghers who’d packed the court-room and who’d cheered me noisily, surged forward and together paid my fine.

**Seven**

When you read about Theron’s Scout Corps of international spies criss-crossing the veld on bicycles, you will want to laugh, imagining our surreal silhouettes, crouched over handlebars, black against a white sky, knees high and toes pointed as we pedal. But allow me to explain. Using bicycles was an effective plan thought up by me and Koos Jooste, the champion cyclist (consult your encyclopaedia, the Researcher advises, and you’ll find his name). Believe it or not, on a decent road, a new bicycle will go faster than a good horse, on a bad road a horse and a bicycle will equally be adversely affected. But bicycles don’t need food, water, rest. A moving cyclist is harder to hit with rifle fire than a galloping horse; a
bicycle costs less and a man can carry it over rocks or streams, he can carry it onto a train. The point is that I and my men used bicycles during the months before fighting started to scout strategic border spots and begin accumulating information about existing British encampments, the quality of the terrain, the availability of grazing and water, and the state of repair of the rail-lines. Do you think that Tommie sentries paid much attention when they saw a shabby unarmed boy on a bicycle going by? Not at all. Until October 1899, I worked with my scouts: Hassan the Arab; Guldenmond the Nederlander; Nelborski and Soliyenko who’d run away from politics in Russia; Scheepers and Hendriks the Afrikanders; Drummond from Major MacBride’s group; Weber the German; Vibert the Frenchman; Hallham wounded when fighting the Iroquois, and /Xahla our scout from the Kalahari. Check the names in Hein Koen’s *Boer War* if you don’t believe me or Antjie. November 1899, I joined Generals Joubert and Botha in Natal.

Eight

The sum-total of legendary characters in South Africa’s divided history is not that large. I am one of them and I know that foreigners tend to smile in disbelief at my exploits. People ask, How could Danie Theron have crossed through enemy lines like immaterial wind and slip past a member of the Gordon Highlanders tasting stew at a blazing camp-fire? How can we possibly believe that he disguised himself as a British officer and was entertained by the unsuspecting Devonshires to dinner?

But I would suggest you put aside your scepticism for a moment. Consider – this is important – I am short, a mere 5’ 2”. I believe that had I grown to 6’2” and weighed 200 lbs. instead of 100, I could never have done what I did. Also, had I been that huge, I would have been that cliché, a gentle giant, mild-natured and placid. I would have excelled in sport, instead of pacing the schoolgrounds memorizing Tennyson’s *In Memoriam* or *Tintern Abbey* by William Wordsworth. While we are discussing physiology, let me point out that my feet are small but well-knit, the arches strong, the toes long. I balance easily on one foot. I can walk on tip-toe for long stretches without tiring, and my toes seem to sense obstacles as a cat’s whiskers do even before they are seen. I know my name is going to be lost and my exploits be as if they had never happened. In centuries to come, the Researcher says, Boer history will become stories to frighten children, if that, even as the story-tellers’ faces grow grim. The tales will be of big-hatted horsemen with no heads who ride like veld-fires into the grasslands and over the hutments.

Nine

There is a slender line of pink light dividing the night-clouds. Soon dawn will be upon us and I will be dead. There has been silence below for some time, but now I can hear Hart’s men adjusting the cannon. I think I have
time to tell you only one last story – a train story.

As I’ve said, I’m not a person given overmuch to laughter. But that armoured train made me laugh. It was supposed to be an impregnable travelling fortress. From a distance it looked like a clockwork centipede, the monstrous toy of an arrogant god. From Frere Station onwards, the Natal Mounted Police rode ahead of the train to check for possible trouble along the line. They might have saved themselves the effort, for we were well-hidden. However, five or so miles further, someone on the train spotted Oosthuizen’s men circling toward the rear. The train stopped and was put into reverse. Good. My men and I were soon at the line, able to begin hauling boulders onto it. Meanwhile, more burghers had ridden out of the hills to the front and were shelling without pause. As the breakdown-wagon, in reverse, hit the rocks, it did a somersault in the air and landed on its roof to the side of the track. We hid, watching as the surviving Tommies fired from the two trucks still standing, or ran for the bushes.

The poor engine-driver panicked and went scuttling under the standing trucks. ‘Let’s go, Kaptein,’ said my men. ‘Wait,’ I said. ‘Watch!’ An officer was forcing the engine-driver at gunpoint to climb back into the locomotive and get it going slowly forward. He, meanwhile, valorously went to uncouple the engine from the trucks behind. That achieved, he jumped up to warn those inside what was taking place. So the engine groaned forward. ‘The engine’s yours,’ I said to the others, while Venter and I galloped back and circled round the trucks, and as the officer jumped down, hoping to run for the engine, we went after him. Venter later said that he had fun playing tag with the man, until he grew tired of it, and got him in the sights of his Mauser. Only then did Mr Churchill stand and allow himself to be nosed forward by Venter’s horse.

I had Churchill. He had lost his hat in the game with Venter, so I gave him a spare cap from my saddle-bags. He was a man of medium height but slenderly built then. His shoulders were as narrow as mine, but already he had a soft womanish stomach pushing against his sambrown. He stood with casual boredom, awaiting instructions, his head lunged slightly forward, one leg outstretched. We set our prisoners marching to one of our large encampments, where we gave them coffee and bread. Later, Churchill was to write, ‘So they were not cruel men, these enemy.’ To his credit, he remained in Boer hands for only three weeks, managing to escape from a disused school-building that we used as a prison and making his way to Lourenço Marques – which is another story.

Some of the history books will tell you that I was caught and shot as I tried to disconnect the water-supply to Johannesburg. The sensible among you will ask how any one man could have attempted such a thing. Not that I wouldn’t have minded punishing Johannesburg by arranging for it to wake one morning to find no water for coffee or shaving, or for the servants to wash in before they came in to make the breakfast. But the
Researcher will tell you vehemently that the Gatsrand where I am lurking is in the Ventersdorp area and far from the Vaal Dam, which feeds water to Johannesburg.

I am not much of a moralist, but I do have religion, the kind that believes that the Creator sees me at all times, and keeps His finger on the crown of my head, there where my hair grows thin. I believe it pleased Him when Lord Roberts announced a one-thousand-pounds reward for my capture, for this was tangible proof that His direction was effective, my head going where His finger directed it. And, a mere week ago, when I was informed by our High Command that orders were coming through for my promotion to Combat-General, the joy rose from my stomach up through my chest and into the backs of my eyes. 'Ag, kyk hoe snaaks lag Theron,' said Nel. I was proud of my God’s finger.

They are shooting cannon balls, but they are falling wide. The stench and the dense smoke are ruining the delicate light of the dawn. The birds are silent. And, in the wake of the cannon’s crash, the rifle fire comes like hail on a tin roof. I feel something like a large hot hand push me in the chest.

Ten

One night when I was in primary school at Bethlehem, hungry, I decided to climb into the food-store in the back shed, the door of which was always kept locked by Mevrou in case the blacks stole from her. I got through the pantry window easily enough. How nice were the smells, of coffee and sugar, samp-mielies and peanuts, dried fruit and mebos. I stared at the jars of konfyt on the shelves, gold and green in the faint light from the backdoor lamp, and at the white and blue labelled tins of condensed milk. But I could take only what I could get into my pockets, because I needed my hands to climb with. I took peanuts and dried peaches, and I stuck a stick of biltong into my shirt. Then I took a small wrinkled apple and held it firm with my teeth. It was even easier getting up from the inside because I could climb on to a large bag of flour. As I was about to lower myself on the other side, I heard a loud voice shouting, 'Jou bliksemse dief!' I lost my grip and fell flat onto my back, knocking the wind out of my stomach and bringing a horrible pain to my chest. I still could not speak from the pain when somebody lifted me by the scruff of my neck and kicked me in the pelvis. There was the distant sound of bone smashing. I could hear rasping and grunting as I tried to say to this person, 'Ag, Broeder, los my ... ek het amper niks gevat nie ... just dried fruit and peanuts ... let me go.'

'Let him go!' begs the Researcher, dropping her head and smudging her undusted keyboard with her tears.
Stephen Gray

DEAD MAN’S DISCLOSURE

My soul to keep in a coffin, trod beneath (bare) (foot) people
(my mortal remains), sloth-bear pads, goats graze
(pressed in wood) roots entwine (casket) (cask)

dthis where banyans walk in Muybridge locomotion
reco(r)ding their raiders’ myths of succession:
Taprobana Insula (Ptolemy) for Roman turtleshell
Serendib for silk, Kandy for ruby
Copra from Ceylon, Beira (Slave Island) Lake

from rank mud ((lotus unfolds, their long Buddha
(1) in meditation (2) in blessing (3) robed to recline,
like elephant skulls, from paddies, freckled hills arise,
(moo) moonstone: fortunes picked in
broken orange pekoe (A1) fannings, plantations

(rimed recipes) (sun) stored in fruit: brinjal
I did know, (papaya) (tobacco): not toddy-tappers
cinnamon-peelers, jaggery-makers (low classes in their Gazetteer).

Down Aloe Vera Avenue, Armour Street
Britons speedy where Britishers meet: plant

rain-trees and bo-trees (Boer): (Anglo-Boer) war-time
(prisoner). From my fever-ridden body grows
saffron and sage... capsicum of chilli... and pepper, clove...
cocoa, coriander, vanilla, mustard... ginger... gin
from my body: (star sapphire) (blue) (((pearl)))
- the Phoenix and her fraught – cargoed
anti-clockwise from the Cape, this British lake
between monsoons, between the Indian and the Bay of Bengal.

So I was captured in fair battle, once turned-about,
beyond Pretoria (in chains)... like coolies
)take me back( enclosed in (Diyatalawa)
(Mount Lavinia) (Ragama – hard labour)
(Urugasmanhandiya): mean death, we die like flies...
Some do escape... through birdsnest and staghorn, like a white-eye, sunbird, flycatcher, roller, kingfisher, bee-eater, lorikeet, minivet, grackle (canary)... the long, slow sleek fish-eagle swoops its prey from the shine of an artificial tank... where today a pilgrim shampoos his Yamaha flops like a buffalo, his sarong a bandage unwinds

(Some died: I was one of the first and quickest to go): Kanattha Cemetery, among those gracious Dutch Burghers, Anglican Section... on LP gas their cremation takes 2 hrs. (I’d have preferred ash)... where keepers with matchets under Oriental weeping-willows under umbrellas hack flame-lilies from our disregarded tombs.
The jumbled roll-call of the dead and dying (in any order):

Leon Kock, Kruger, Joubert, Massyn, Smuts, Scott, Opgericht ten Gedagtenis aan...
Nel, Foley, Uys, Eckhardt, Kachelhoffer, van Biljoen, Rust in Vrede, Overl. te Selon (all present),
Oud 20 Jaar... An only son from a Household Gone, A Voice we Loved is Still, A Place is Vacant in our Home, That Never Can be Filled.

Take me back to my renegade home... all we had to show (in the Colombo Museum, oil on canvas):
foreground, a commando with watering-can pours into a sloot, me in my smasher-hat with pipe, foot against the wire, the sentry box... rows of military tents on the ridge where a mighty strangler-fig (holds)... (artist unknown). Whippy king coconuts lift, majors with swords trepan.

Among contesting Lion People, Tiger people, at night mosquito coils, I lie so restless... drilled by croton, would like to learn to treddle a sewing-machine, palm-paddle waylaying touts, like cows chewing newsprint begin to speak, say: Take me back to the Old Transvaal, say: Honeymoon Hairstyle, sup at All Night Restaurant, shave and dress in robes over a shoulder, scratch my Dreamland, sing the Sweet and Sour Serenade, find lost addresses: Perera, Ferera, de Silva, Hultsdorp, Graylands, fling at the devil firecrackers... Drive Him Off... Greet the dog-faced Andaman as friend. Those I would liked to have done.
But the order of procession is declared: I am no longer part,

*daar waar...* my mother weeps and dies alone...

and awful death is no escape, from this lonesome (cell)
(tibia) (socket) (jawbone) (dust)

(unto dust) I had hoped... remote past tense, done...

her only support, her soul to keep in the rule of the gun.

Peace I would have made, justice practised, loved and bred.

I had hoped we could overcome the metal barb, the nameless trench...
soldiers dig graves to dump in... their duty undertaken

I’d planned on amnesty... But now the slaughter’s even worse, I hear.

Better out of it, they say, better dead. So it’s not fit
to live in, so join me here. (Join me.) Once, like you,

I was all young blood and hopeful vision... Now:
disconnected calcium (homesick) (rotting) (spiritless):
 stripped even of metaphor and syllables, ah-ha...
a song like a T sunk in my unravelling lung...

(i.m. of Ferrar Reginald Mostyn Cleaver,
State Prosecutor of the Witwatersrand, d. 18 November 1900, aged 30)
The South African War was important in moulding the Australian Federation and in the creation of national self-identity. The controversies surrounding the rebel figure, Breaker Morant, addressed by Shirley Walker in an earlier issue of Kunapipi, continually resurface in the popular press, encompassing as that figure does many ambiguities of Australian national mythology that found expression at Gallipoli.¹ Memoirs and celebratory accounts of the war abound in which, however, the war is set apart, projected as an event outside: men seemingly returned and got on with their lives. Scant attention has been given to the significance of the South African experience to the men, to the ‘curios’ and other memorabilia brought home or to the impact of these on cultural perceptions.² This article focuses on the ‘Boer War album’ of Major Walter Howard Tunbridge, an officer commanding the Third Queensland Mounted Infantry, and on the perspective, values, and the events portrayed.³

Like many of his comrades, Major Tunbridge took his camera to the South African War. However his ‘Boer War album’ contains none of the familiar images of officers, military formations, and battles. His was rather an intriguing exploration of empire, race, and the erotic, a study of ‘the Other’. The Boer War was the first extensively captured by amateur photographers, coinciding as it did with technological developments in relatively inexpensive Kodak cameras.⁴ As a result, historians of the Boer War have a wealth of images upon which to draw. Yet dangers lurk in the unreflective use of such images. Photographs are seductive for conferring a sense of reality, immediacy, and intimacy, an illusion of truth. However we forget that photographs are constructs: the photographer not only sees an image through his view finder, there is a partially conscious act of selection and subjective manipulation. The Boer War photographer Johannes Meintjes’s unqualified juxtaposition of artists’ sketches, often ‘staged’ professional photographs and amateur snapshots, is a salutary example of the pitfalls of so-called ‘historic’ images.⁵

Heroic romantic sketches like his were influential in shaping public opinion at the time but are the least reliable. The artist captured action that
left a mere blur on the photographer’s plates, while enjoying total liberty with realities. Professional photographers, on the other hand, could only achieve clear, crisp images in formal, often staged, portraits, or by obscuring movement in distant battlefield panoramas. The most revealing images were often amateur ‘snapshots’, capturing elements absent from the public record. All images however raise issues of motivation, selectivity, legitimacy, and contextualization.6 The photographer assumes an audience, a viewer, be it only themselves.

While loose photographs are analogous to fragmentary correspondence, an album like Major Tunbridge’s is more akin to a diary. It represents a deliberate act of selection, reflecting the current interests and preoccupations of the compiler. It is a very personal statement, though influenced by wider cultural values and assumptions.

The ambiguities of ‘colonial desire’7 captured in Major Tunbridge’s album and reflected in the images reproduced here, need to be viewed against the backdrop of settler racism and genocide that permeates Australian history. Ronald Hyam’s rhetorical quip that ‘sexuality was the spearhead of racial contact’,8 relates well to turn-of-the-century Queensland, an explosive mixture of gross gender imbalance and racism. Homoerotica, never far from the surface in Australian ‘mateship’, was held in check by an aggressive white heterosexuality, generally directed against black women. Sexual exploitation of Aboriginal women or ‘gin’ by Europeans was commonplace.9 While ‘rape’ was a term only applied to white women, black women were at times bought and sold, and occasionally murdered on whim, with little prospect of prosecution. Yet inter-racial relations were outside the bounds of respectable society, therefore socially clandestine. For middle-class males, it was a culture of socially forbidden and hidden desires.

The genocide against Queensland Aborigines that many Australians still seek to deny, was a reality for Major Tunbridge and his men. Shooting and strychnine poisoning of Aborigines was part of the cultural baggage they brought to South Africa. Yet the South African racial demography, and preoccupation of South African whites with the power of the Zulu, were in stark contrast to the Queensland experience and perceptions of Aborigines. The shock of confronting an overwhelmingly black population is recurrent in many Australian war diaries and letters. Some could see only ‘dirty, greasy natives’.10 Others, like Trooper Conder of the Third Queensland, were more receptive, to the extent of venturing into an African church service, to view with some astonishment ‘civilized’ blacks.11 All were in some way, however, affected by their confrontation with ‘the Other’.

The Third Queensland Mounted Infantry and the War

Walter Tunbridge was 44, single, an architect and officer in the
Queensland Land Forces with a reputation for strike-breaking and opposition to organized labour, when he was commissioned as major commanding the Third Queensland Mounted Infantry Contingent in 1900. The troopers and NCOs of the 3rd Queensland Contingent were mainly volunteers, overwhelmingly single rural labourers and stockmen in their early twenties, attracted by the pay and conditions in the midst of local drought and economic recession. A seemingly competent and conscientious officer, he was cut off from his men by social distance as well as rank. An incident involving the assertion of his authority sparked a minor mutiny aboard the homeward-bound troopship *Morayshire*.

The detailed military exploits of the Third Queensland Mounted Infantry are largely tangential to Major Tunbridge's Boer War album. In brief, the unit sailed for Cape Town on 1 March 1900, eventually disembarking at Beira, Portuguese East Africa, on 2 April, and travelled overland to Bulawayo, Rhodesia, where they were incorporated as the 2nd Regiment of the Rhodesian Field Force. A contingent participated in the relief of Mafeking, though Major Tunbridge's section did not come south until July. He saw action at Koster River and came under attack from General de Le Rey at Elands River, but, for much of the time, his forces were engaged in sweeps north of Pretoria between the Olifants and Crocodile Rivers, razing and looting outlying Boer farms.

As one trooper wrote, 'The work we are doing is anything but what we bargained for — burning houses and commandeering horses and sheep, and never getting a good go at the Boers.' Trooper Conder was initially shocked by the looting: 'talk about men going mad, the way they fought and swore over the loot was something terrible. They were more like savages than white men.' In early 1901, Tunbridge and the 3rd QMI moved into Cape Colony in pursuit of General De Wet, but, 'Our luck was always against us, for on coming to a farm house we always learned De Wet was some two or four days ahead of us, and that he had taken all the horses.' More often, the Queenslanders seemed engaged in looting 'curios' from hapless Boer families and rounding up 'niggers' of the Highveld.

Curiously, the pages of the album contain none of the usual images of whitemen-at-war. The images are not of battles but of clearing Africans off the veld, of an African concentration camp, and 'ethnographic' exotica. The apparently discordant juxtaposition of bare-breasted black women, effeminized 'tribal warriors', and the Boer War images were not casual. Walter Tunbridge's Boer War album was not a heroic record of military camaraderie. The images were icons of a particular, dominant way of objectifying race and gender under empire.

The album consists of forty-three African photographs, at least eighteen
of which were commercial prints. Tunbridge’s snapshots are clearly distinguishable, many being overexposed or slightly out of focus, the hallmarks of amateur developing. There are even the occasional fingerprints left on the wet emulsion. The contact prints were trimmed, hence the irregular and varied sizes. None of the negatives have survived, which is not surprising as Tunbridge would have used unstable celluloid nitrate film. From the size and shape of the prints, it would appear that he used the largest and most expensive of the Kodak Cartridge cameras introduced in 1898. Only a few of the photographs are labelled. In addition to the African images, there are two photographs of Melanesians, at least one of which was a commercial print, labelled ‘122 Milnebay Native, N Guinea’.

What is immediately striking is the almost total absence of his own troops. In only one photograph is a trooper central and he is riding away from the camera in a haze identified as ‘Locusts’, the subject of the image. The men in mufti then are invariably Africans, the (to date often forgotten) ‘Other’ of the 1899-1902 conflict. African orderlies in laced shoes, leggings, campaign hats and uniforms are photographed at attention or carry galvanized buckets on their head (see p. vi). Three times Tunbridge photographed the same stalwart young man, but felt no need to record his identity. Orderlies were servants, momentarily plucked from invisibility by his camera. They were objectified, captured, and controlled, made into signs of the ordering and civilizing power of the military and of African subordination.

The album contains several images of ‘Native Huts’. Their thatched roofs are in good condition, the encircling walls well-maintained, but there is no sign of life. In one, a lone rider, his movement a blur, torches a native kraal, a shadowy plume of smoke drifting across the open veld. In another, tethered horses graze behind a granary. The eerie absence of the inhabitants is the most powerful aspect, embodying both a statement of imperial power and an extraordinary record of ‘clearing’ Africans off the veld.

In stark contrast to the emptiness of the ‘native huts’ are the numerous images of Africans in corrugated iron huts, the African ‘refugee’ camps documented in Peter Warwick’s Black People and the South African War. 23 Africans, as well as Boers, were removed to concentration camps, their homes, cattle and granaries destroyed, in order to deny Boer troops access to supplies and remounts. From Tunbridge’s field diaries, the camp was probably just outside Pretoria. 24 The tents and corrugated iron huts were clearly part of a sizeable settlement, laid out in regimented lines, a turn-of-the-century refugee camp, even a kind of township. Accommodations in these camps were cramped, with many wives sharing a common hut. Women and children in the photographs can be seen in the background, sitting in clusters outside neighbouring huts. While cooking pots lie scattered about, there are no signs of agriculture or animals, no cattle pens.
or granaries. It was indeed the case that Africans were deliberately prevented from farming or bringing their own grain and cattle into the camps in order to force young men into wage labour. Provisions had to be purchased from the camp commissariat stores in a deliberate move to impose a cash economy. One of the few European images is of a civilian commissioner standing just inside a tent with two African women in woollen cloaks in the foreground.

The camps were part of a process of social dislocation and proletarianization of the African peasantry, reflected in the gendered dress. The few African men in the camp wear cast-off European trousers, shoes and greatcoats, symbols of their incorporation into the cash economy. The women, however, wear beads, hide, and blankets, indicative of their exclusion. Tunbridge took few photos of African women in European dress and then from a distance: a group of servants gathering at the gate of a white-washed house in a town, and women pounding grain outside a storehouse on the veld. In neither photograph is it clear whether the buildings or the people were the subject. These may have conveyed some special meaning, though generally appear concerned simply to locate the images within an alien setting.

The concentration camp images by contrast are less equivocal. They form a discrete sequence, taken during a single visit, and were clearly staged. The assertion of authority by the photographer is constant, if subtly contested on occasion. A younger woman with a child at her breast clearly catches his eye, being photographed from several angles. Then in the background another draws his attention, also nursing a child under her cloak (figure 1). He first photographed her with a female companion rather self-consciously balancing a can on her head. Their smiling continence conveys an indulgent humour that evaporates in the next image, in which the mother’s cloak is turned back to reveal her bare breasts and the suckling child. Toward the end of the visit, the women have changed into beaded finery, a prized image captured from two slightly different angles. The last photos resemble modern South African tourist postcards of ‘African women in traditional dress’.

Power in these images clearly rests with the invisible photographer: the camps were merely the location for his captive models. Tunbridge wasn’t photographing the concentration camps; his preoccupations were with the exotic. However, the images don’t totally obscure African agency: a child’s meal interrupted, the iron pot with remnants of porridge nearby, the informality and clutter of ordinary life. There is also the clear transformation on the women’s faces when they move from the buffoonery of the empty tin to their obvious discomfort at being asked to pose partly naked.

Tunbridge evidently had a fascination with standard erotica but, as the women in the camp were either immature girls or nursing mothers, he supplemented his own photos with a collection of high-quality commercial
Figure 2
photographs of young black women in studio surroundings. If the snapshots gave authority through their location, were the proof of his presence in what McClintock has labelled the ‘porno-tropics’ of European imagining, then the commercial photos gave flesh and authority to his fantasies. In making such images, and catalogues of numbered prints, photographers, such as George Ferneyhough and J. Wallace Bradley, travelled South Africa with beaded pubic aprons and necklaces with which to dress their subjects. The album contains four photographs of different women all wearing the same pubic apron.

While older African women in the album are represented as drudges, exploited within un-Christian polygamous households, young women invariably clad in skimpy beadwork, bare-breasted and ‘accessible’, gaze directly into the camera or lie submissively on the ground. The poses range from demure to seductive, with explicit titles such as ‘Recounting a Love Affair’. In an age when middle-class gentlemen might not openly ogle Scandinavian bathhouse photos, they could indulge in voyeuristic fantasies of scantily-clad ‘natives’ in the name of amateur imperial ethnography. Ethnographic erotica was an acceptable form of soft pornography.

By contrast, whereas a positive, overt sexuality permeates many images of the women, African males are emasculated. ‘Zulu fighting men, S. Africa. 40.312 G.W.W.’ depicts three scrawny men with shields and knobkerries, symbols of the warlike savage, yet evoking no challenge to the forces of civilization (figure 2). Any implication of virility has been stripped away, their stance is passive, even submissive. Their potency, along with their war-shields, have shrunk to mere tokens. Similarly, Zulu chiefs have been transformed from the corpulence of physical and political ‘big men’ to impotent obesity. Once-powerful Zulu chiefs are portrayed as subdued, almost effeminate. In one retouched photo, the sagging pectorals are outlined to exaggerate the breast-like appearance. Black masculinity was thus very conventionally reduced, and male virility excised.

Ambiguities of meaning and intent permeate the album. While fascinated with and drawn to black women’s bodies, Tunbridge’s images are yet concerned to project imperial authority and to suggest savagery brought under control. Such preoccupations with the imperial exotic may also help to explain the enormous quantities of ‘Zulu’ beadwork and assegais, mementoes of difference, which were brought back to Australia by returning soldiers in their rucksacks.
NOTES


2. Several years ago I compiled a register of African artifacts in Australia and New Zealand, a project funded by the Australia Research Council. There are large collections of South African weaponry and beadwork in Australasian museums, most of it from the Boer War period.

3. A set of prints from the album, along with Major Tunbridge’s ‘Boer War curios’, mainly beadwork and weaponry, were donated to the African Research Institute, La Trobe University, by his daughters, in 1995.


12. Major Walter Tunbridge was born in Dover in 1856, immigrated to Australia in 1884, and established an architectural firm in Townsville. He designed government buildings in the Solomon Islands and British Melanesia, as well as Queensland, an experience reflected in the two Melanesian photographs in his ‘Boer War album’. Commissioned a lieutenant in the Queensland Land Forces in 1889, he helped break the famous Queensland shearers’ strike of 1891. He was promoted to Captain in June 1892, and Major in 1898. In recognition of his services in the South African War, Major Tunbridge was awarded a CB, the Queen’s South Africa Medal with five clasps, and made a brevet lieutenant-
colonel. After the war he served as ADC to the Governor-General of Australia (1902-09), married (1904), served in World War I, rising to the rank of Colonel, and was awarded a CMG (1917) and CBE (1919). He returned to architecture in Melbourne after the war and died in 1943.

13. B 5199, Service Rolls, Third Queensland Mounted Infantry, Australian National Archives, Melbourne. The first and second contingents of Queensland Mounted Infantry were drawn from existing militia units. The Queenslanders were 'bushies', unlike most Australian troopers who were recruited from the urban working class. See W.M. Chamberlain, 'The Characteristics of Australia's Boer War Volunteers', *Historical Studies*, XX, 78 (1982), pp. 48-52.


16. The Rhodesian period is represented in two photos by Tunbridge: one labelled 'Mashona', of a couple with two children all in 'traditional' dress; the other, 'Matebele woman', with a pot on her head and a baby on her back.

17. Tunbridge to C.O. Brisbane, Report No. 7, 15 September 1900, MP744/1/1015, Australian Archives, Melbourne. Also *Queenslander* (Brisbane), 20 October 1900, p. 823; *Chronicle* (Maryborough), 16 October 1900.


22. The use of the term 'nigger' was common, even in official reports, reflecting the racism of the era. Major Tunbridge, Report No. 6, Eland River, 30 July 1900, MP744/3/7032, Australian Archives, Melbourne.


24. His field diaries, in the possession of his daughters, contain only cryptic references to locations, movements, and provisioning.


26. Among Major Tunbridge's collection of 'African curios' is a beaded necklace very similar to that hanging between the breasts of 'Swazi Girl, S. Africa'.

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80 David Dorward
The Absent-Minded War: The Boer War in James Joyce’s *Ulysses*

The historical event survives in the modernist literary text not as fact or fixity but as a trace, a textual memory that may be refracted through the multiple private perspectives of character, through literary language, and through innovative technologies of narrative form. One such trace in *Ulysses* relates to the Boer War, an historical event whose significance, arguably, becomes more complex the more closely we focus on the processes of its refraction through the three central private consciousnesses of Joyce’s book. This war that ended the nineteenth-century and opened the twentieth, finds a suitable home in a novel that itself marked the arrival of the twentieth century in terms of its innovative fictional technology as well as in terms of its recognition of the changing circumstances of public and private life, and the psychology that questions whilst it underpins them.¹

Joyce asserts his modernity and frequently also his comedy by situating his characters on the margins of history and between, beyond and across ideological fixities and oversimplifications. Typically, his characters are shown in accidental proximity to public events (rather than in active or central engagement with them), or else in moments of resistance to the interpellations of public demand from wherever these may come.² Though it deals with civilian urban life, *Ulysses* (1922) may perhaps be read as a kind of war-time text in that its reconstruction of this comedy of everyday private circumstances was made during and immediately after the time when the industrialized human wastage of the First World War was in full flow. However, since he was engaged in the construction of a historical retrospect from the 1910s and 1920s to the significantly earlier time of 1904, that particular war-time context was not available for direct representation in the book. Instead, Joyce inserted a cluster of cultural memories of the Boer War of 1899-1902, which would, of course, have been Britain’s most recent military conflict at the time.

The presence of such material in *Ulysses* offers the promise of a historicized reading, and yet it is one that may be no less available to us in terms of the postmodern and deconstructive critiques of history. The material relating to the Boer War may locate the characters and the book itself in terms of the various received historical narratives of Britain, Ireland and the Empire at the turn of the new century, but it should also serve as a
warning against aggressive or demanding political assumptions, providing as it does an exemplary instance of the way in which Joyce’s modernist narrative technology works to reconfigure the relations of history and memory in the psychology of men and women in the modern world. Inevitably coloured by its Irish setting, the Boer War of *Ulysses* has profound significance for its modernism.

Leopold Bloom’s reference to the Boer War as ‘the absentminded war’, which is made during the surreal night-time ‘Circe’ episode of the book, seems especially appropriate here. The phrase may remind us that the war was, in a sense, geographically absent, from Britain and indeed from the Europe of the colonists who fought in it. It also, as I shall show, draws on a cluster of associations with a well-known poem by Kipling, whose work did much to present this absent war to the popular British consciousness of the time and which, in *Ulysses*, forms an interesting point of linkage between the thoughts of Stephen Dedalus and those of Molly Bloom. The phrase also, more generally, demonstrates Joyce’s strategy of representing history through the fragments of personal memory, that are not always, of course, consistent or reliable as record. Joyce’s miniature study of this war reveals important contrastive aspects of his two central male characters, yet it seems especially appropriate that it is Molly Bloom, Joyce’s twentieth-century woman, who has the final words on the war in the book, and that the play of domestic and gender relations everywhere conditions the portrayal of military conflict, bringing the often-exaggerated demands of the one sphere of human activity into question by juxtaposing them with those of the other.

The first reference to the Boer War in *Ulysses* occurs in a single paragraph in the ‘Lotus Eaters’ episode (*U*5.65-75) when Leopold Bloom calls in to the Westland Row Post Office to pick up a flirtatious letter from his secret correspondent, Martha Clifford. Whilst the postmistress gets the letter, Bloom sees a recruiting poster in which various regimental uniforms are shown and he experiences a cluster of memories concerning ‘old Tweedy’, his father-in-law (apparently the closest of his relatives who has direct experience of military service), as well as the contemporary radical nationalist activities of Maud Gonne and Arthur Griffith, of which Bloom is evidently also aware. These memories and associations seem designed to present Bloom as a complex and ambivalent figure in terms of his own political loyalties, inevitably connected both to the world of the Empire and to the local concerns of nationalism. Consequently he is seen to offer a personal and comic realist posture irreducible to the binary terms of either of these two parties or, for that matter, to those of the two principal parties (British and Boer) in the war in question.

Many readers of this passage may find the real history of war displaced in favour of a comic play of gender roles and Bloomian frailties. Joyce notes the minutiae of Bloom’s body language as he hints at a masculine military swagger, twirling the ‘baton’ of his rolled-up newspaper, and ‘reviewing again the officers on parade’, like some latter-day Kitchener or Roberts. The
presentation of Martha’s dominant behaviour as sexual flirtatiousness may partly explain the association with military authority, and an implied connection with Molly’s imagined disapproval of his thoughts and actions may be behind Bloom’s thoughts of her father.

However, the mention of such a resonant historical figure as Maud Gonne invites us to explore this aspect of Bloom’s thoughts further. Maud Gonne, feminist as well as nationalist, had campaigned against the Boer War (in which her future husband and Yeats’s rival Major John MacBride had fought against the British army). MacBride doesn’t appear in Ulysses (as he does in Yeats’s poem ‘Easter 1916’), though Joyce was obviously aware of Gonne, her political interests and her love life, as the allusion to her in connection with another of her partners, Lucien Millevoye, in ‘Proteus’ (U 3.233) confirms. Gonne was also the author of a pamphlet, The Daughters of Ireland, that argued, at the time, against new rules that had relaxed the laws confining troops to barracks in Dublin at night. According to this pamphlet, the new rules promoted sexual immorality by allowing the troops to consort with local Dublin girls, but Gonne’s political position on the war was, arguably, more significant to her than any prudish moral stance, and her pamphlet was variously thought to have been designed to undermine recruitment. Moreover, the situation that it addresses was important for Joyce as it provides an aspect of the setting of the ‘Circe’ episode of Ulysses, and, as we later learn, the background to an important incident in the life of Molly Bloom.

The nature of Bloom’s connection to this aspect of Maud Gonne’s political activism is shown in the ‘Lestrygonians’ episode, where we learn that he himself has, apparently somewhat inadvertently, been involved in Gonne’s demonstration outside Trinity College in December 1899, against the awarding of a degree to Joseph Chamberlain (leader of the Unionist Liberals who were, at that time, united with the Conservatives in government) (U 8.423). Bloom recalls the chants that were voiced as part of this demonstration, in favour of the Boer leader De Wet, and we learn that he narrowly escaped injury from the mounted police. ‘Lucky I had the presence of mind to dive into Manning’s or I was souped’, he thinks, whereas his friend Jack Power ‘did come a wallop, by George’ (U 8.425-6). The incident, like the one he recalls of helping Parnell with his fallen hat, deftly places him on the comic margins of received history at a time of tragically strong nationalist feeling, though not defining him within the terms of any one side in any polarizing conflict.

In a later moment in ‘Circe’ he makes an equally strong, or else equally confused and ambivalent, claim to loyalism, presenting himself as having actually fought on the British side in South Africa (‘I fought with the colours for king and country in the absentminded war under General Gough in the park and was disabled at Spion Kop and Bloemfontein’, U 15.793-5, and ‘on this day twenty-five years ago we overcame the hereditary enemy at Ladysmith’, U 15.1525). He also boasts the loyal actions of his wife’s father
in the conflict with the Zulus that (unlike the siege of Ladysmith that was raised in February 1900) had indeed predated 1904 by some twenty-five years in 1879.

My wife, I am the daughter of a most distinguished commander, a gallant upstanding gentleman, what do you call him, Majorgeneral Brian Tweedy, one of Britain’s fighting men who helped to win our battles. Got his majority for the heroic defence of Rorke’s Drift. (U15.777-81)

Tweed, almost a parody of the style of military dress and behaviours of the Boer War period, is one of the most delightfully elusive figures in the book. He has previously appeared in ‘Cyclops’ (U4.63-5, 87), where we hear of his prowess as a stamp collector, and that he has ‘risen from the ranks at Plevna’. In ‘Penelope’ Molly’s memory confirms that these were indeed the battles in which he claims to have involved, but we can’t easily accept this at face value. The British army closely observed but was not directly involved on the ground at the siege of Plevna (a battle in Bulgaria during the Russo-Turkish war in 1877) and, as Don Gifford reminds us, no Tweedy was among the 30 survivors of the siege at Rorke’s Drift. His claims may, in fact, be no more substantial than Bloom’s.

Great claims for the historical significance of the Boer War, especially to the question of Empire, are made by one character in Ulysses, when, in ‘Eumaeus’, the cabman Skin-the-Goat refers to it as having been ‘the beginning of the end’ (U 16.1002). But we can sometimes learn a good deal by following the smallest traces of memory in the text rather than the grand statements. Bloom, for instance, more typically, recalls on a few occasions an old schoolfriend with a Welsh-sounding name, called Percy Apjohn. In one of these recollections he is described as having been ‘killed in action’ at the Modder River (U 17.1751), the site of a key battle during the war in Natal. Apjohn is subtly mourned by Bloom during the day, forming another relevant part of the play of absence and presence in Bloom’s mind.

Both of the more overtly political strains of Bloom’s memory – those that react to the ideological pressures of nationalism and also of imperialism – may be said to remind us that the nature of Joyce’s politics and history are almost always lost on readers who lack a sense of humour. In Ulysses, contingency impacts on historical memory to produce a narrative worthy of the figure of Uncle Toby in Sterne’s Tristram Shandy, or that of Falstaff in Shakespearean history, where the personal and the political are inevitably interconnected.

In fact, this aspect of the book also drew on Joyce’s own experiences as a young man of 18, when his own eminently Falstaffian father John Stanislaus Joyce is reported to have revealed his pro-Boer sympathies in an argument on a train trip to London that they made together in the summer of 1900 at around the time of the popular celebrations that greeted the relief of the siege of Mafeking. In the portrayal of this period in Ulysses, Stephen’s father is represented as being barely capable even of such unguarded
political sympathies. Stephen himself, on the other hand, during the discussions of Shakespeare and Hamlet in the library episode, does demonstrate some of the ambivalences about Empire that were a feature of contemporary dissident discussions of the Boer War, especially in Ireland. In a French version of the play seen by Mallarmé, Hamlet has been called ‘Le Distrait’, and Stephen jokingly translates this as ‘the absentminded beggar’, a phrase which instantly recalls to him a very hurried and elliptical sequence of associations that depend upon the reader knowing that Rudyard Kipling wrote the Boer War poem entitled ‘The Absent-Minded Beggar’. According to this train of Stephen’s thoughts, Britain’s military strength shows more in common with the Hamlet of Act Five than with his hesitating character during the rest of the play. At least according to Stephen’s accusation, the patriotic poem that Swinburne wrote about the war in 1901, ‘On the Death of Colonel Benson’ (Benson died in a Boer Camp), may be seen as defending the concentration camps that the British army introduced to house Boer prisoners during the war.

Khaki Hamlets don’t hesitate to shoot. The bloodboltered shambles in act five is a forecast of the concentration camp sung by Mr Swinburne. (U9.133-5)

Kipling’s poem, which may indeed invoke some subtle echo of Shakespeare’s Hamlet’s madness, more centrally invites the reader to take sympathy for a fallible modern Tommy Atkins type of soldier who is ‘absent-minded’ in the sense that he has ‘heard his country’s call’ whilst neglecting what Kipling presents as a range of ordinary domestic obligations whether these be to ‘the girls he married secret’, who struggle to cope with the ‘gas and coals and vittels, and the house-rent falling due’, or else to ‘the families by thousands, far too proud to beg or speak’. Kipling invites the reader to be able to say to the soldier when he returns:

That, while he saved the Empire, his employer saved his place,
And his mates (that’s you and me) looked out for her.
He’s an absent-minded beggar and he may forget it all,
But we do not want his kiddies to remind him
That we sent ‘em to the workhouse while their daddy hammered Paul,
So we’ll help the homes that Tommy left behind him!

The poem was set to music by Arthur Sullivan, and was apparently popular and successful enough to have raised some quarter of a million pounds for the cause it supported, so it is not, perhaps, surprising to see that it recurs in Ulysses, where the realistic personal perspective is put against the impersonal demands of the political in so many ways. The poem exemplifies a structure of feeling that is deeply characteristic of this moment in history. Joyce’s Bloom, we may remember, during the afternoon of the day of 16 June, makes an ethical gesture that is in many ways comparable, by ‘looking out’ for the absent Dignam’s widow.

During the third section of the next episode, Molly Bloom makes the
briefest of appearances. We see her in the act of giving a charitable donation to a 'onelegged sailor' who passes by her window in Eccles Street, singing lines from a patriotic song called 'The Death of Nelson'. Molly's spontaneous act of generosity to the beggar seems to contrast with the action of Father Conmee earlier in the episode who passes a beggar by. She doesn't seem to question (as some readers might do in an episode deliberately full of 'reader traps') whether the beggar actually has been, or else merely wishes to present himself as having been, injured in the defence of his country (U 10.251-3).

Though there seems no especial need to connect this present beggar to the absent one in Kipling's song at this point, evidence for tracing Molly's generosity directly to Kipling does appear as she reveals more of herself to us during the 'Penelope' episode. In fact, Joyce makes the very song whose title Stephen has remembered, into a part of Molly's light operatic singing repertoire, apparently to make a very different kind of political point to the one that is suggested by Stephen. During 'Penelope' we learn much more of Molly's past and upbringing in the military garrison of Gibraltar for the first fifteen years of her life. She is herself, arguably, the child of one such 'absent-minded beggar' and is apparently a loyal supporter of the British army long after her move to Dublin and, as we gradually become aware, she can herself personally be quite fond of soldiers. She has, though, through singing this favourite song, got herself into trouble with the pro-catholic and pro-nationalist group who are putting on concerts in Dublin. Indeed she feels that she has been denied a voice, passed over in favour of her rival Kathleen Kearney, the same girl whose singing career is boosted by her manipulative mother in the story 'A Mother' from Dubliners, and who is now apparently the more 'politically correct' choice of the moment. Molly recalls the:

little chits of missies they have now singing Kathleen Kearney and her like on account of father being in the army and my singing the absentminded beggar and wearing a brooch for Lord Roberts when I had the map of it all and Poldy not Irish enough. (U 18.375-9)

Evidently, both she, as an immigrant to Dublin, and Leopold, the victim of anti-semitic feelings, have been through a process of acculturation into nationalistic aspects of Dublin's local politics that have taken Bloom into some connection with Arthur Griffith (of which Molly apparently disapproves, U 18.383-6), and which she sees as connected to the success as a singer that she is achieving apparently through her association with the politically treacherous figure of Blazes Boylan. Molly has not necessarily been an especially enthusiastic convert to this aspect of Dublin life. Her dislike of Kathleen Kearney and 'sparrowfarts skitting around talking about politics they know as much about as my backside', is reiterated later in the episode (U 18.879-80). It also seems worth noting that Molly is still apparently wearing her brooch for Lord Roberts, the Commander-in-Chief of
the British forces in the Boer War, in 1903, that is, three years after his occupation of Pretoria and a year after the Peace of Vereeniging that brought hostilities to a close ('its over a year ago when was it' U 18.616). Meanwhile, Roberts was enough of a popular hero in the Dublin of Ulysses for 'darling little Bobsy', one of the Purefoy children listed in the 'Oxen of the Sun' episode, to have been named in his honour (U 14.1331-2).

The Boer War has, though, made its most significant impact on Molly's thinking in another connection, since, far from obeying Maud Gonne's prescriptions for female behaviour, she has, at or around the age of 29, enjoyed what seems to have been the most emotionally intense and in some ways even the most passionately sexual of her extra-marital flings ('so hot as I never felt', U 18.393) with the 'so English' soldier Lieutenant Stanley Gardner (U 18.889-90), on the eve of this war from which he has never returned. Though married to Bloom for some ten or eleven years, Molly has evidently to some extent initiated this close sexual contact with Gardner (U 18.313), and even passed on the Claddagh ring she had been given by her former lover, Mulvey, to him as a love token (U 18.866). We learn, amongst other things, that Gardner has been a great kisser (U 18.332, 391-4), and an intense admiral of her singing (U 18.888-9).

Such passionate memories of Gardner prompt her outburst against 'oom Paul and the rest of the other old Krugers' (U 18.394-5), and also against nationalism ('I hate the mention of their politics', U 18.387-8), but above all against the failure to negotiate peace in preference to war whose human cost is apparently too great for her to feel it to be justified ('they could have made their peace in the beginning ... instead of dragging on for years killing any finelooking men there were', U 18.394-6).

According to a recent essay by Carol Schloss, Molly's current choice of partner in Boylan represents the betrayal of her 'union' with Bloom and therefore carries a symbolic political message in its analogy with the movement of national feeling against the Union with Britain. However, to read Molly in this interpretative way may be to fail to be properly attentive to what she actually says. Her view of the tragedy of Gardner's sacrifice in the war (albeit a death from fever rather than in combat, which perhaps recalls the deaths of such romantic war heroes as Byron and Rupert Brooke), is strongly contrasted with the shabbiness of the actions in the same war of Boylan’s father, who has apparently made money from dubious horsetrading deals of which she and others in Dublin are aware.

Molly's position on the Boer War, then, somewhat contrasts with Stephen’s in terms of the politics of their respective readings of Kipling. The passionate closeness of her involvement with Gardner and sense of loss might be comparable to Bloom's subtler mourning of Apjohn. It also contrasts both with Bloom's fraudulent claims to have been involved on the British side, and his equally marginal and comic brush with Maud Gonne. There may also be found here some suggestive points of contact between Joyce's work and that of his illustrious predecessor and supporter W.B.
Yeats. In Molly’s lover, Blazes Boylan, Joyce creates a character who is, in some ways, comparable to the MacBride who appears as a ‘drunken, vainglorious lout’ in Yeats’s poem ‘Easter 1916’. Joyce’s picture of Maud Gonne as a Boer War radical activist may also contrast with Yeats’s picture of her whilst his Molly Bloom figure makes a contrast with the Maud Gonne figure both as she appears in *Ulysses* and as she was represented in the work of the older poet. The one may be seen as placing passionate heterosexual and even adulterous love relationships above the claims of political allegiance or expediency; whereas the other is shown (at least by the jilted Yeats) as having tragically sacrificed her love relationship for politics.

Whether or not Joyce intentionally built such contrasts with the elder writer into his portrayal of Molly, he introduces a trace of representative detail that invokes the historical Maud Gonne and, by implication, points a contrast between Gonne’s coercive programme of constraining women’s sexuality by curfew, and Molly’s practice of obeying her heart irrespective of the politically-motivated constraints designed to prevent her. Joyce does not make his Molly a ‘political’ woman, in the sense that she is the theatrical martyr to a political agenda (according to the manner in which Maud Gonne appeared to Yeats), yet he puts her in a political position nonetheless and he makes her alive to the political nuances of her actions. Attitudes to Irish independence, but also to the relations between love and war, put Molly and Maud on opposing sides of the Boer War.

These aspects of Joyce’s representation of the Boer War in *Ulysses* may owe much to the Irish setting of his novel and to discussions of Ireland’s political status that often form a backdrop to his writing. In *Ulysses* we barely glimpse an African perspective on the war that, with the benefit of our hindsight, might seem much more significant than it did in Britain at the time. A wider range of African allusion (and further punning play on the events of the Boer War) does not appear in his work until *Finnegans Wake*. Yet Joyce’s terms of reference in *Ulysses* seem especially significant given the wider disillusionment with military conflict that began to surface in the cultural sphere in the aftermath of the First World War, which was underlined by the increasing awareness of individual psychology, and of domestic and gender issues at the time.

The strict discipline of the historical setting to which he subjected himself in the writing of *Ulysses*, ensured that Joyce worked out these issues in terms of a dense, detailed, and ultimately very tangled trace of memories of the Boer War whose impact is, of course, above all designed to be comically realistic though serious in its implications nonetheless. No single image of the war emerges from *Ulysses*, so much as a loose series of personal memories and associations that throw important light on characters and their interactions, despite or because of their marginal and contingent positions in relation both to ideologies and to events. In his construction of such historico-comical tracery, Joyce, perhaps most valuably of all, leaves us in *Ulysses* with an example of the tangled trace of history. This we increasingly
perceive in our time to be neither the ground of secure facts, nor of a single linear narrative, nor even of a stable binary polarity, but rather a network of connections that, as we attempt to iterate them, may reinvoke the history of an 'absent' war as it was perceived at the time.

NOTES

1. The argument draws in various places on notions of the textual 'trace' in the writing of Jacques Derrida, as, for example, in 'Freud and the Scene of Writing', in Writing and Difference (London: Routledge, 1978), p. 216, and 'Signature, Event, Context', in Margins of Philosophy (London: Harvester, 1982), pp. 313-4, and in Acts of Literature, ed. Derek Attridge (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 63-4 and 281. Reading this material in Joyce's text may serve to show his work as an especially appropriate exemplary instance of this 'trace' that a strictly Derridean approach would find characteristic of all textuality or of textuality itself.


3. For many readers of Joyce a first reference point for relevant contextual glossing material will be Don Gifford, Annotations to 'Ulysses' (California: University of California Press, 1989), though this should, of course, be supplemented with independent reading in the historical literature. There is a useful review of some of the complex Boer War references in John Henry Raleigh, The Chronicle of Leopold and Molly Bloom (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), pp. 173-182. See also Vincent Cheng, Joyce, Race and Empire (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), especially Chapter 4, 'Imagining Nations', pp. 224-234.


6. Richard Ellmann, James Joyce (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 77. See also the accounts in John Wyse Jackson and Peter Costello, John Stanislaus Joyce (London: Fourth Estate, 1997), pp. 222-4, and Stanislaus Joyce, My Brother's Keeper (London: Faber, 1958), pp. 109-110. According to Ellmann, the figure of Tweedy (and therefore presumably also some of the personal character of these Boer War memories) can be connected to a 'Major' Powell (actually a retired Sergeant-Major) who Joyce's father knew in Dublin (p. 46n.).


Boers and Bores: International Delegations and Internal Debates

While the Boer War has been much chronicled for its famous battlefields such as Spion Kop, for its besieged towns from Ladysmith to Kimberley and Mafeking, and for its battle tactics of conventional and guerrilla warfare, there is as well the rather less recounted story of the 'barbarities' practiced by the various parties to the conflict, and of the British anti-war movement that the contest inspired. The beginning of the fighting in October 1899 came but a few months following the signing of the Hague Conventions I and II on the 'conduct of war', documents which heralded the twentieth century's subsequent compendium of international law, and the latter part of this century's emphases on 'human rights' and 'humanitarian intervention' in the protection of those rights. Campaigners in England at the time, therefore, such as Emily Hobhouse and W.T. Stead, and delegates from South Africa to Britain following the war, such as Sol Plaatje, suggest historical models for later political organizing, from the sanctions campaign of the British Anti-Apartheid Movement, or the work of Amnesty International, to Jubilee 2000 and the argument against debt extraction from impoverished 'Third World' countries. The nineteenth-century reports provide, as well, a documentary legacy connecting the last of the nineteenth century's 'colonial wars' to the late twentieth century's truth commissions and global political realignments and reassessments. This paper sets out to examine a number of these parallels and connections through an interleaving of some of the different documentary resources of the time.

On the eve of her deportation from South Africa, on 29 October 1901, Emily Hobhouse wrote to her brother Leonard Hobhouse from on board the Avondale anchored in Table Bay just off the coast of Cape Town:

All night I lay awake shuddering from head to foot with the effects of the shock, for oddly enough it was a shock and unexpected in that form. Then I began to see my way and brace myself to the battle.

I shall be very polite, very dignified, but in every way I possibly can a thorn in the flesh to them. I see already many ways of being a thorn. For instance, they don't want it much talked of in Cape Town and I mean that it shall be. We are to move into dock as soon as the gale subsides and I shall at once demand a guard;
partly because it is extremely disagreeable for Captain Brown to be my gaoler, and partly that the guard is their witness that I keep the rules laid down. Most of all because I understand they don’t want to do it because of making it conspicuous. I know soldiers hate guarding women. I also mean to refuse to return to England until such time as I myself feel willing and able, unless of course they send me under force of arms. I shall not move a limb in that direction. If the Avondale unloads immediately she will be able to continue her voyage in ten days’ time and then they must find another prison for me … Anyhow I think they will find me a bore, polite but a bore, before we have done.¹

The conflicted deportation procedures – her ‘humanitarian’ work on behalf of Boer women and children held in British camps had been deemed ‘politically’ inappropriate by the authorities in the colony – did succeed in the end, and despite her recalcitrance, in aborting Emily Hobhouse’s second trip to South Africa. She had only recently been there, reporting to the Committee of the South African Distress Fund from the concentration camps that the British had established as part of their prosecution of the war in South Africa from 1900, and she had subsequently spent the summer campaigning throughout England in the name of that same Committee on behalf of the camps’ unwilling inhabitants. She had, that is, already become something of a ‘bore’ to her pro-war critics.

Emily Hobhouse’s Report of a Visit to the Camps of Women and Children in the Cape and Orange River Colonies, delivered to the Committee of the South African Distress Fund, was published as a ‘penny pamphlet’ in London in June 1901. The document includes her accounts of visits to the camps in Bloemfontein, Norvalspont, Aliwal North, Springfontein, Kimberley, and Mafeking, along with her recommendations for improvements to be made in the living conditions of the camps’ inhabitants, and is accompanied by an extensive set of appendices comprising first-person testimonies from women internees, their applications for release, and the personal records of many of the women and their children who had been detained with them.

Emily Hobhouse’s Report of a Visit was but one of many such accounts from delegations to war-torn South Africa at the time, identifying perhaps a generically proto-human rights narrative at the turn-of-the-century. There were, as well, other and various contributions – literary, economic, and political – to the debate in England that was taking place around the conflict in southern Africa, from the patriotic plaidoyers for continued expansion by the ‘jingoes’, to the no less patriotic pleas for restraint on the part of the ‘little Englishers’, from Olive Schreiner’s manifestos and W.T. Stead’s ‘reviews of reviews’, to Arthur Conan Doyle’s apologias, Rudyard Kipling’s poems and stories, and Cecil Rhodes’s shareholder speeches.

Following the Boer War, imperial skirmishes gave way to World Wars and the emergence of international law (such as the precedent-setting Hague Conventions of 1899) as a new prescription for containing narratives of violence, and indeed violence itself. Emily Hobhouse’s reports from South Africa – and the controversy that they elicited at home – are importantly
symptomatic of this transition from constructions of empire as 'civilizing mission' in the late nineteenth-century, to the justifications of world war, cold war, and global politics as 'humanitarian intervention' at the end of the twentieth century – from the 'scramble for Africa', in other words, to the 'scramble for contracts'. If Emily Hobhouse insisted on her mission as a humanitarian one, one that eschewed politics in the name of humane treatment for the victims of war on either – or any – side, W.T. Stead's pamphleteering and journalistic interventions against the war were presented explicitly in the interest of protesting England's non-observance of its political responsibilities, particularly as a signatory to the Hague Conventions concerning the 'rules of war'. Both Hobhouse and Stead were pilloried by many of their contemporaries as 'pro-Boer' and anti-patriotic; neither, however, for all their humanitarian sentiments and expressed commitments to international law, sought to represent the concerns of the 'natives' of southern Africa, the 'kaffirs' as they were called by many, or the 'Cape bastards', as Stead would refer to others of the non-white southern Africans. And when the war was over, and the Treaty of Vereeniging signed in 1902, an Act of Union federating the provinces of South Africa would be ratified in 1910, to be shortly thereafter followed by the Natives' Land Act of 1913, an act which effectively dispossessed, disenfranchised, and dislocated those 'natives' from their native land. Sol Plaatje, in a series of articles addressed to British readers and policy-makers, and based on his visits to much of the same territory that had been covered by Hobhouse a decade or so earlier, argued that these newly-made fugitives provided for a most 'distressing sight'. 'We had never,' Plaatje went on to write,

seen the like of it since the outbreak of the Boer War, near the Transvaal border, immediately before the siege of Mafeking. Even that flight of 1899 had a buoyancy of its own, for the Boer War, unlike the present stealthy war of extermination (the Jaw [Natives' Land Act] which caused the flight), was preceded by an ultimatum.²

Emily Hobhouse's Report, W.T. Stead's pamphlets and journalism – from The Truth About the War (1900), How Not to Make Peace (1900), to Methods of Barbarism (1901), The Best or the Worst of Empires: Which? (1906), and his editorializing in the Review of Reviews – and the essays in Sol Plaatje's Native Life in South Africa (1916), argue variously and vociferously still for new approaches and alternative strategies for contesting imperial designs and neo-imperial legacies as centenaries are commemorated and as still another century turns.

Emily Hobhouse died in England on 8 June 1926, almost twenty-six years to the day after the women's meeting in the Queen's Hall in London on 13 June 1900, convened to protest the treatment of Boer women and children held in South African concentration camps. Her ashes, however, were
ceremoniously interred in a niche in the Women's Memorial erected in Bloemfontein in what was then the Orange Free State and is now South Africa's Northern Cape Province. The Queen's Hall meeting had been organized because, as Hobhouse wrote in her diary, 'We longed to protest publicly and it occurred to me that women, at least, might make a public protest without arousing undue criticism'. Emily would indeed eventually arouse 'undue criticism', but on 13th June 1900 the women's meeting was duly held in a full hall, and four resolutions were passed by the women in attendance and published in the Westminster Gazette on the following day:

1. That this meeting of women brought together from all parts of the United Kingdom condemns the unhappy war now raging in South Africa as mainly due to the bad policy of the Government - a policy which has already cost in killed, wounded and missing over 20,000 of our bravest soldiers, and the expenditure of millions of money drawn from the savings and toil of our people, while to the two small States with whom we are at war, it is bringing utter ruin and desolation.
2. That this meeting protests against the attempts to silence, by disorder and violence, all freedom of speech, or criticism of Government policy.
3. That this meeting protests against any settlement which involves the extinction by force of two Republics whose inhabitants, allied to us by blood and religion, cling as passionately to their separate nationality and flag as we in this country do to ours.
4. That this meeting desires to express its sympathy with the women of the Transvaal and Orange Free State and begs them to remember that thousands of English women are filled with profound sorrow at the thought of their sufferings, and with deep regret for the action of their own Government. God Save the Queen.

Despite Emily Hobhouse's own resolve – and the resolutions approved at the meeting – the course on which she had embarked was a precipitously uncertain one. As she wrote,

Many had criticized it [the idea of the meeting] on the score of its uselessness for practical results. I had put this point before Mr. Courtney [a Liberal Unionist Member of Parliament and a friend of Emily's uncle Arthur Hobhouse] who replied that even when nothing practical could result it was always well to register calm, combined protest against injustice. It is, I feel, also well that the two former Republics should know, as a matter of history, that we women did so.

Such resolution though was not to be without its costs, both personal and political, as Emily would tell of it later in her diary: 'I lost the majority of the friends of my girlhood and it was a great loss. There was a divergence of principle at that time which broke many a bond, and taking up the work publicly I could not escape painful severances of old ties.' (p. 45) Four months later, however, in October 1900, she went on to assist remaining friends and build new alliances in the establishment and organization of the South African Women and Children Distress Fund; and, in December of that year, she departed on its behalf for a tour of South Africa. Report of a Visit is
the result in writing of her nearly six months’ visiting, and attempting to bring relief in the way of clothing and food to, the Boer women and children held in several of the concentration camps of the Cape and Orange River Colonies. In a prefatory letter to the Report, she appealed to her readers:

Will you try, somehow, to make the British public understand the position, and force it to ask itself what is going to be done with these people? ... If only the English would try to exercise a little imagination – picture the whole miserable scene. Entire villages and districts rooted up and dumped in a strange, bare place.5

Hobhouse’s travels and visits through the several colonies of South Africa, from the Cape to the Orange River, were carefully circumscribed, indeed at times obstructed, by the necessary permissions that she was required to obtain from both Lord Milner and General Kitchener, each of whom found her relief efforts suspect if not altogether out of line – and she in turn found their administrations and military efforts too little and too often too late. As Major John Hamilton Goold-Adams, for example, wrote to Milner in February 1901 concerning Emily’s activities, ‘Miss Hobhouse has been playing the dickens with the women in the camps ... creating a great deal of unrest by impressing upon such people the hardships they are enduring’.6 But Milner and Kitchener had by then their own reputations to live up to or down. As Nora Hobhouse, Leonard’s wife, had written to her sister-in-law just a few days earlier in that same month: ‘It must be a terrible time too, you must have wished often you were not an English woman. We wonder what you will do with Kitchener, I am told he is horrid and hates women, and is very rude to them’.7 Emily Hobhouse was not, it would seem, living up to her proper roles either as an English subject or as a dutifully disciplined English woman, crossing lines that served ritually to divide private and public, and rightfully to separate Briton and Boer. She was, in other words, becoming all too boring to the South African authorities, the representatives of British imperialism, and their supporters at home.

Report of a Visit is a documentary story of both passion and impatience, a narrative which stirred tempers and tested allegiances on its publication in war-time England in June 1901. It relates travel by truck and train from Cape Town across the Karoo to Kimberley and back again, past burnt out farms and scorched earth, alighting at camps and taking down the stories of hunger, disease, and exposure told by the Boer women. It was demanding work, as Emily would write on 22 January: ‘I think the essence of delightful work is when you quite forget you have a body, but here the heat keeps you in constant recollection that you are still in the flesh, and it’s a great hindrance’ (p. 3). As for the camps themselves, she went on in the same prefatory letter, ‘I call this camp system a wholesale cruelty ... To keep these Camps going is murder to the children. Still, of course, by more judicious management they could be improved; but, do what you will, you can’t undo the thing itself’ (p. 4). In the Bloemfontein camp, for example, Emily met a
Mrs M and her six children, all ill, her husband deported to Ceylon. At Norvals Pont, another camp, this one with a population of approximately 1000, there was less overcrowding, but the need for clothing for the children was ‘very great’ (p. 6), as it was at Aliwal North as well. Among her recommendations, ‘in view of the hardening effect of imprisonment upon the hearts and resolution of the women – of the imperfect supply of tents or other shelter – of the scarcity of food – the difficulty of transport – and the appalling effect of camp life upon the life and health of the people’ (p. 14), was this one, that ‘all who still can, should be at once allowed to go’ (p. 14).

By April, however, it was clear that it was Emily herself who must decide whether to go, return home, that is:

There were two courses open to me. To stay among the people, doling out small gifts of clothes, which could only touch the surface of the need, or to return home with the hope of inducing both the Government and the public to give so promptly and abundantly that the lives of the people, or at least the children, might be saved.

Emily Hobhouse thus decided to return home, where she began a public campaign, speaking out at meetings across the English countryside, in Oxford, Leeds, Manchester, Southport, Bristol, Birmingham, Halifax, fifty public meetings all told, but not in London, where she was denied a venue. ‘Efforts to nullify my story’, she later wrote,

lest public opinion should be aroused, took two forms, viz. criticism of myself, and justification of the camps. I was labelled a ‘political agitator’ and a ‘dissemninator of inaccurate and blood-curdling stories’. A discredited South African wrote insinuating that my mission had been political propaganda. My Report was described as a ‘weapon’ used wherever ‘the name of England was hated’ ... Finally, I was hysterical and put ‘implicit belief’ in all that was told me.

Emily Hobhouse’s decision to ‘return home’ turned out to be an even more fateful decision than she had at first imagined, however, for, following on from that very public speaking campaign across England, she would not be allowed to set foot again on war-time South African shores – and was deported in October 1901 – ‘polite but a bore’ – to continue her work in London, not least on this occasion in protest against the mistreatment she had received off the coast of Cape Town, forcibly transferred from the R.M.S. Avondale to the troop-ship Roslin Castle and deported back to England under martial law. As she, who had sought in her mission and ministrations the ‘delightful work ... when you quite forget you have a body’, wrote to her co-worker in the Distress Fund, Caroline Murray, on 4 December 1901:

People are much excited about it but for myself I am still suffering so much from the shock that I feel callous – only dimly conscious that my carcase is thrown into the public arena and all the legal and political carriion crows will tear and rend and devour me. They say anyhow that if I lose my case it will necessitate
the re-definition of English law and that is necessary and useful. I, being only a female, and not deeply interested in an abstruse legal point, feel much more strongly the personal-outrage side of the question - 1st. Having a strange doctor forced upon me - 2nd. Not being allowed a week's rest if even in prison before forced on a voyage for which I was unfit. That appeals most strongly to me and would I think to the mass of unlearned folk.10

Hobhouse's humanitarian work had, after all, turned out to be, even if 'boring', nonetheless all too political.

* * *

In her An English South African's View of the Situation (1899), Olive Schreiner concluded that it was not England, nor Africa, nor 'the great woman' (Victoria) herself, and certainly not the 'brave English soldier', who gained by war, much less the African inhabitants.11 J.A. Hobson was just as adamant in his challenge to the policies of the 'new Imperialism': 'Aggressive Imperialism', he wrote,

which costs the taxpayer so dear, which is of so little value to the manufacturer and trader, which is fraught with such grave incalculable peril to the citizen, is a source of great gain to the investor who cannot find at home the profitable use he seeks for his capital, and insists that his Government should help him to profitable and secure investments abroad.12

The British war effort in southern African, that is, required support at home as well, both for the economic outlay that was required and for the soldiery that had to be recruited. Similar contests had long characterized the propagation of the imperial project - from debates over the East India Company's role in the Indian subcontinent, to the proprieties and improprieties of the Crimean War (1854-56), the reports of atrocities in the Belgian Congo, and the vexed rescue mission to General Gordon beleaguered in Khartoum in 1884-85. The policy debates, expressions of public opinion, and the popular protest that marked these imperial crises provide important documentation of the complex of issues that accompanied the continuation of empire and its discontinuous departures. These debates also created prototypes of the 'public intellectual'. The discussion was particularly vituperous in autumn 1899, with the build up to and outbreak of the war. 'Shall We Let Hell Loose in South Africa?' was the banner to the Review of Reviews 'Topic of the Month' in September 1899. The article questioned priorities: where did the question of the Transvaal stand relative to the Dreyfus trial in France, for example, or with respect to the overcrowded condition of London's poor, to take another example closer to home? In other words, how were politicians to secure popular support for an imperial war? 'Impressions and Opinions', in the December 1899 issue of The Anglo-Saxon Review, compared the South African crisis with the debacles of the Crimea and the 1857 Mutiny in India, and reminded the policy makers of the disastrous consequences of their previous
miscalculations and the mistake of underrating the power of the ‘enemy’. Stephen Wheeler, in the same issue, drew an analogy with the Sikh War of 1845-46, specifying the ‘bewilderment of the public mind, the dubious wisdom of people in power, the equivocal victory of troops attacked or attacking at a disadvantage’. Empire had now a history, one that posed as much of a threat as it might be said to hold out promises. The author of the essay a year later in the same Anglo-Saxon Review, on ‘The Poetry of the South African Campaign’, identified – and castigated – what had become a literary history as well. Pointing to the role of poetry in time of war, he lamented the lost ‘opportunities of the present campaign’. Where once Tennyson had ennobled the Crimean War with Maud, Rudyard Kipling, the critic complained, had commercialized the South African campaign with ‘The Absent-Minded Beggar’, a poem that had become popular from the street corner to the music hall, and that had indeed served to collect the pennies needed to support the families of the soldiers fighting the Boer.

Each of ‘em doing his country’s work
(and who’s to look after their things?)
Pass the hat for your credit’s sake,
pay–pay–pay!13

But what had become of ‘his country’s work’? And for whose country was ‘Tom’ fighting an imperial war? And was he ‘Tom Brown’? or ‘Tommy Atkins’? or someone altogether other? To the hero of a Kipling story, an Indian in colonial service in South Africa, it was a ‘Sahibs’ War’: ‘Do not ... herd me with these black Kaffirs’, ‘I am a Sikh – a trooper of the State.’ He continues, ‘It is for Hind that the Sahibs are fighting this war. Ye cannot in one place rule and in another bear service. Either ye must everywhere rule or everywhere obey. God does not make the nations ringstraked. True–true–true!’14

Breaker Morant, of the Australian Bushveldt Carbineers assigned to South Africa, would see it differently still, ‘scapegoated’ as he was by the Empire he fought for. Morant and several of his fellow Australians were court-martialled for shooting prisoners – under orders, they claimed at their trial, from above, from Kitchener himself. Morant was hung for his deeds, but Lieutenant George Witton was released. His account, Scapegoats of the Empire (1907), is a narrative of the progressive loss of faith in the imperial mission expressed in the story’s opening paragraph:

When war was declared between the British and Boers, I, like many of my fellow-countrymen, became imbued with a warlike spirit, and when reverses had occurred among the British troops, and volunteers for the front were called for in Australia, I could not rest content until I had offered the assistance one man could give to our beloved Queen and the great nation to which I belong.15

The issue of the treatment of the prisoners of war was also central to public discussion of the war, and crucial in mobilizing domestic opposition
to its prosecution. Emily Hobhouse’s 1901 *Report on the Camps* was followed by an official Ladies’ Commission on the Concentration Camps, headed by Millicent Fawcett. Hobhouse’s pamphleteering and public speaking, it seems, had been so effective in enlisting outrage and indignation across England toward the atrocities committed in the name of war in South Africa, that Fawcett, best known for her suffragist activism, was sent with a women’s delegation to counter the charges that Hobhouse had levelled. For Fawcett, the assignment was an ‘interruption’ to her work for the enfranchisement of women, but she too had to acknowledge the abuses to the civilian population, especially the Boer women and children, carried out by her countrymen. Not that the Boer women were without their own share in the struggle, Fawcett argued nonetheless, indicating that the very goods with which they had been charitably supplied served the enemy in the strife: ‘We did hear, however, that the Boer women were very expert in using candles as a means of signalling to their friends on commando in the quiet hours of the night’. But, she goes on, ‘I for one could not blame them if they did; if we had been in their position, should we not have done the same thing?’

Arthur Conan Doyle, meanwhile, had come to the defence of the British military offensive – which included executions, train hijackings and hostage taking, farm burnings, and the use of expansive and explosive (dumdum) bullets (outlawed at the Hague). *The War in South Africa: Its Cause and Conduct* (1902) claimed to be a full-length representation of the British case: ‘In view of the persistent slanders to which our politicians and our soldiers have been equally exposed, it becomes a duty which we owe to our national honour to lay the facts before the world’. Conan Doyle’s research in this project was perhaps not without a certain resemblance to the detective work of his sleuth, Sherlock Holmes, in defence of ‘national honour’ and the protection of a particular rule of law and order – and against the human rights reporting of Emily Hobhouse and other members of her committees.

When the war ended, in 1902, the question still remained of whether South Africa would be joined by a ‘closer union’ – or bound together through federated allegiances. However, in as much as the war had divided opinion in Britain and South Africa, the history of the war would militate against the forging of such allegiances – in both the long and the short terms.

* * *

‘Methods of barbarism’ as a description of some of the most egregious features of British military policy in the Boer War was first used by Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman in a dinner speech given on 14 June 1901 at the National Reform Union. It would be cited again and again in criticisms of the prosecution of the war, and was used by W.T. Stead as the title of his 1901 booklet, *‘Methods of Barbarism’: The Case for Intervention*. Here Stead
argued,

we may regard the definitions of the Hague Conference as a historical record of the successive steps by which the experience of the soldier and the wisdom of the statesman have found it not only possible, but necessary to restrain the beast and fiend in man.18

Stead was particularly adamant in disavowing Mr Brodrick’s claim in the House of Commons that ‘war is war’, and that the Hague Convention’s preambulatory proviso to the effect that ‘so far as military necessities permit’, might be used to justify the ‘methods of barbarism’ that were seen to have been implemented against the Boers of South Africa. As anticipated earlier, ‘Methods of Barbarism’ was not Stead’s first, nor would it be his last, contribution to a strident critique of both the ends and the means of the British engagement in the Anglo-Boer War. As editor of the influential Review of Reviews, which he took over in 1890 following a ten-year period with John Morley at the no less influential Pall Mall Gazette, he adamantly, repeatedly, and fulsomely reviewed the terms of the Hague Convention and their abuse by one of the Convention’s most prominent signatories: Great Britain. In The Truth About the War (1900), he ‘appealed to honest men’ to revile the ‘hoarse cry of vengeance for Majuba and the cynical appeals to the coarsest instincts of Imperial ambition and national selfishness’.19 In How Not to Make Peace: Evidence as to Homestead Burning Collected and Examined, published in 1900 by his Stop the War Committee, Stead claimed to be ‘rendering a public service by collecting within the covers of this pamphlet all the available evidence’. Following a summary of the relevant articles of the Hague Convention, Stead provided evidence not just from the Boers, but from Lord Roberts himself, from a British officer-in-command (who preferred to remain anonymous), from additional testimony from soldiers in the field, and from the published reports of newspaper correspondents. Lord Roberts, for example, is cited as declaring in one proclamation of 16 June 1900 his intention to ‘make the principal residents severally and jointly responsible for all damage done to railways, telegraphs, and railway and public buildings in their districts’. And a soldier from the Warwickshire Regiment is cited at length from his letter on 22 June 1901 to The Warwickshire Advertiser:

‘Then why did you burn the farms?’ ‘By the General’s orders. We used to have plenty of fun. All the rooms were ransacked. You can’t imagine what beautiful things there were there – copper kettles, handsome chairs and couches, lovely chests of drawers, and all sorts of books. I’ve smashed dozens of pianos. Half a dozen of us would go up to as fine a grand piano as ever I’ve seen. Some would commence playing on the keys with the butts of their rifles. Others would smash off the legs and panels, and, finally, completely wreck it. Pictures would be turned into targets, and the piano panels would be taken outside and used as fuel to boil our tea or coffee. And then we could enjoy ourselves if it was cold; but,’ he added ruefully, ‘it was generally hot – boiling hot. After this we would set the building on fire, and as we left, riding together or detached over the
sandy waste, we would see the flames rising up, and soon there would be nothing left but black, smouldering embers. We would do the same with the next farm we came across.'

Farm burning was not, Stead emphatically reiterated, 'how to make peace'.

Much as had happened in the case of Olive Schreiner, Stead's aggressive critiques of the British war in South Africa led eventually to the end of his friendship with Cecil Rhodes, for whom he had been the executor of one of his earlier wills. Stead visited South Africa in 1904, some two years after Rhodes's death and the signing of the peace treaty. Two years later still, in 1906, he published his retrospective considerations of the significance of the Anglo-Boer War for the history of the British imperial project and the prospects for its future ambitions. It was, he wrote in the Preface to The Best or the Worst of Empires: Which?, an 'opportune moment for confronting the British people with this question, What kind of Empire do they want?'

The South African War, he insisted, had been and continued to be the 'touchstone and the test of the suicidal lunacy of the Jingo Imperialists' (p. xii). Looking back, Stead saw the anti-war movement in England as the hope for a better future on that other continent:

If the British flag is flying in South Africa ten years hence, it will be not because of the war, but because of the strenuous unflinching opposition offered to the war by a minority of the British people. (p. 146)

But no less important was the singular difference made by international conferences and conventions agreeing to arbitration and the observance of the 'rules of war':

It is a very extraordinary thing how everything in South Africa always seems to bring us back to the Hague Conference. That great gathering of the representatives of all the States of the civilised world represents the highest point yet gained in the evolution of the conscience of mankind. (pp. 157-8)

W.T. Stead was a passenger on the ill-fated maiden voyage of the Titanic, and died at sea in April 1912. The war he so obstinately and tenaciously opposed was perhaps the last of Victoria's 'little wars', but it was also the preparation for global engagement. In 1914, there would be instead a world war, and all the more imperative would be the need for international agreements and disengagements. In 1919, the parties to that global conflict — including such unlikely consorts on behalf of 'self-determination' as Woodrow Wilson and V.I. Lenin — gathered at Versailles in France to conclude the peace arrangements. Among the agreements that they reached was the Treaty of Versailles, with its concluding section outlining the establishment of the League of Nations and proclaiming the 'rights of small nations' (Article 22). Participating in those discussions, and a drafter of the League's covenant, was Jan Smuts, a Boer leader, imperial and Commonwealth 'fix-it' man, and then president of the new Union of South Africa.
In the same year that W.T. Stead perished in the foundering of the *Titanic*, there was born in South Africa the South African Native National Congress (which would later become the African National Congress), formed in part to protest against the segregationist laws of the new South African Union. In 1913, however, the Natives’ Land Act was passed, an act which dispossessed the native population and would remain in effect for nearly 80 years, until it was removed from the statute books in 1991, a year after Nelson Mandela’s release from apartheid prison. In 1914, Sol Plaatje had been part of a delegation to England with the brief to present the ‘native case’ to the government and public opinion, seeking redress for the wrongs written into the legislation. As we have seen, *Native Life in South Africa* (1916) is in large part the documentary history of those wrongs as observed and reported by Plaatje in his travels across the Orange ‘Free’ State and the Transvaal where the most egregious consequences of the Act were in all too brutal evidence. Resident at Mafeking throughout the siege of that city from October 1899 to May 1900, Plaatje went on to record the trammelling of the rights of black South Africans that came from the Treaty of Vereeniging. His story, as he tells of it in his prologue, is a ‘sincere narrative of a melancholy situation’.21

Although Emily Hobhouse’s mission was that of ‘woman to woman’, even if Briton to Boer, she did nonetheless – albeit briefly – take note of the equally difficult position of the ‘natives’ in the ‘white man’s war’: ‘With regard to the vexed question,’ she wrote in the Report, ‘of different nationalities, is it generally known at home that there are many large native (coloured) Camps dotted about? In my opinion these need looking into badly. I understand the death-rate in the one at Bloemfontein to be very high, and so also in other places, but I cannot possibly pay any attention to them myself’.22 Stead was less – if at all – interested in the affairs of the ‘kaffirs’, except to insist that they should not be armed under any circumstances and thereby pose a threat to the captured Boer women and children.

With the passage of the Natives’ Land Act in 1913, according to Plaatje, ‘South Africa [had] by law ceased to be the home of any of her native children whose skins are dyed with a pigment that does not conform with the regulation hue’.23 The Act, designed perhaps to provide cheap labour for the diamond and gold mines for which, some argue, the Boer War had been waged, made it a criminal offence for any white farmer-landlords to provide tenancy on their land to native occupants. Only black servants were to be lawful, and these men must relinquish their livestock to the land’s owners, while their wives would be required to carry passes if they were to leave the land for travel to towns or to other farms. If Emily Hobhouse took a certain chagrined pleasure in her role as ‘polite but a bore’, Plaatje was no less concerned lest his accounts of the ‘experiences of the sufferers would make monotonous reading if given individually’ (p. 25). Tell the stories, he does, however, and he provides the documentary evidence and passionate pleading that, like W.T. Stead’s Stop the War movement and Emily
Hobhouse’s Committee of the South African Distress Fund a decade-and-a-half earlier, would anticipate the reviews of truth commissions and centenary commemorations at the end of the coming century.

Polite but boring? Or monotonous? Perhaps, but the histories need retelling. And the legacies must live before they can be laid again to rest.

NOTES

Blood

I who have lived here for so long I cannot remember my home of olive trees and brown valleys, and when a letter comes from my brother in Tuscany it seems like a hoarse whisper from another planet. I who have prayed with the pious and the wicked and helped the dusty children with their torn books — when I think of this story I want to weep. And there are things I do not come near to understanding unless I turn to Almighty God and the Blessed Virgin and I know as I say Mass chewing the Zulu with my Italian accent, that there are strange powers I do not seek to grasp. It is Faith that matters.

The church I built there; we worked hard and it was sturdy. We painted it in glistening white that shimmered in the midday brightness and yet when you entered your bones chilled and your muscles froze. At first we thought it was the bats because they kept slickering their way in, finding little spaces between the ceiling edge and the roof. As we prayed, sometimes we could hear the thump and rustle of their strange wings, their high shrieks. The stench of their droppings filled the church with a sweet, foul odour. But then once, as I was leaving after the congregation had gone and the robes of the servers were folded away, I heard a cry — and there was nothing — nothing at all to be seen. When I asked them, ‘What is it? What is wrong with this church? What happened that makes the flesh go ice-cold as you enter this place of God? You must tell me? No? Until you tell me, how can we have peace?’ I could not read their faces, except I saw unhappiness rising to the surface of their eyes and they pushed it down and turned away from me. And then I felt so angry, hopeless and powerless. ‘The terrible stink of the bats we can cure,’ I said, ‘But this other “smell”, where does it come from? And you will not tell me!’ And I turned and left them.

‘I have cast myself off from my own high brown cliffs and the steep wooded valleys of deepest green and now God has set me in this wilderness and I am lost for ever. I will wander and end my days a stranger amongst strangers,’ I thought, for a moment, just for a moment, and then I swept those evil, useless words out of my head and Love came back.

‘Father,’ she said, when I came back a few days later to pray with the mothers, the stench of the bats nearly driving us from the cool inside out into the burning sun, ‘Don’t be angry that we couldn’t speak to you. This
is it. It’s not easy. It was a death and a horrible dying. It wasn’t our doing, but we knew and we did nothing.’

So she told me. It took the rest of the morning. At first we sat in the tiny porch and as she talked she looked down. She cried just a little and then her voice became stronger as if she knew that whatever it was, she had to finish its telling.

‘It was the moving, Father. We are not from here although now we see it as our home and we go happily to the hills beyond here to cut the *ikhwani* grass and sleep under the stars. So – we were strangers, and then, the boy ...

‘Stop!’ I say. ‘Rest, walk and show me the chicken house you’ve been building. Then we can go on.’ What I cannot say is that I too need to pause. I feel as if my chest will break and my breath has stuck deep inside me and I have to pull it out. I have my own memories to keep down, far down.

‘Now you see the graves – mounds the length of a man and the neat stones on top – and they lie next to each other. Blood, Father. And you know if you see a new grave this side of the road, within the week if you look on the other side you will see one there too. The same stones, the same mound. In the grave a different man. Look at the soil, Father!’ She points down. She makes me fix my eyes past the deep purple of her *bayi*, her strong legs, on to her earth. She stoops down and brings up a piece between her fingers.

It is pink-orange. ‘This is our blood. First, the boy’s, and they killed him cruelly.’

I breathe slowly. Now, now I will know and from within me I will seek the power to turn away this heavy cloud.

She whispers, she turns her face away from mine: ‘You know Jik – in the thick plastic bottle and when you pour it comes out heavy, white? One morning early, when we were sleeping far away under the spiky stars with dawn not far off, they found him, alone, guarding the place for us. They woke him and said little. They poured the Jik into a pot – the pot should have been for beer, water, not for death. “Drink,” they said. “Drink! This is our present to you for stealing our sister.” And then they left him. We were too far to hear his screams as it burnt and tore his stomach like fire.’

‘We buried him, quietly, alone, with our heavy knowledge. The girl disappeared, taking her broken heart and her life far from those hard men. And then – the fighting began. His people. Her people. And the guns. Underneath it all the foul stench of that first killing. And we cannot pray. There is only anger and heaviness. The smell is not from the bats, Father.’

So I know that it is the blood from that story and the young man’s cruel dying that sits in the roof of the church. I will have to exorcise it. We will pray, and like a tidal wave rising high and smashing the thick crust of
rubbish stuck high up on the shore, our prayers must surely dislodge the blood. Cleanse it. Let the boy rest in peace. And yet, and yet, so much blood in this quiet place. So many, many voices stumbling up from the dark. Sometimes I stand at night and look at the throbbing stars, falling, shimmering as if they want to speak to us, and the land is shining and white. I hear the voices of those who have gone before us. No not those who have died peacefully at home after an honourable life and a good old age. No. So many who had their bones crumble into earth in their bright youth. So many battles, close to where I stand. Majuba, twice, not far from here to the north. South of us, and a little west, Isandlwana. Near, very near, Ulundi and the last battles of the doomed Zulu king. I do not ask them to speak to me – I do not want to overhear their screams and whispers, calling their mothers, in so many languages, Zulu, Welsh, Afrikaans, Sotho ... And the boy, does he also call?

I am a weak man. How can I pray for them all?

It is hot; so very hot that the canopies of thorn trees seem to rise and fall as we look down at them and the ridges in the distance move. In the centre is the small white church and there is a bright crowd there singing, stamping, even weeping, a few of them. They are mostly women. Leading them is the white man with a big body and stooping shoulders. He is dressed in a white gown and a shining cloth of green and gold and he carries a silver cross. Slowly they move inside and we hear the song bursting from the walls. We watch, we listen, sitting silent like a swarm of bees, in peace.

Dublin Fusiliers' graves, Tchrengula/ Nicholson's Nek, N.E. Ladysmith (battle of 30 October, 1899)
MARITA WENZEL

Of History and Memory: Re-Reading Selected Stories by Herman Charles Bosman on the Anglo-Boer War

Re-negotiating the past, a predominant concern of contemporary post-colonial literature and criticism, is also a relevant issue in South African literature today. For the most part, emphasis is placed on different interpretations of the past: personal experience and memories of historical events as opposed to available official documentation. In the present context, the centenary of the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) has raised a considerable amount of speculation and revisitation of documents, monuments, memoirs, and fictional accounts.

The Anglo-Boer War represents an important example of conflicting reports in historical documentation: to the Boers it signified a bid for freedom from the yoke of British oppression; to the British it was a case of subjugating recalcitrant colonial subjects. How then to represent this conflict of ideas and interests? How to expose the power play behind the British hostilities and yet also to reveal the pathos of the Boer struggle together with their individual idiosyncrasies?

It is within the aftermath of the war, when feelings of resentment against the British still rankled, that Herman Charles Bosman situates his short stories. As a school teacher in an isolated Afrikaner community, about thirty years after hostilities had ceased, Bosman had the opportunity to reconstruct episodes recounted to him from the Anglo-Boer War. He was in a favourable position to do so because he was, as Stephen Gray reminds us, ‘an Afrikaner, thoroughly Anglicized, in one of the world’s intellectual backwaters, addressing his fellow colonials’. By straddling two cultures, he was able to understand the Afrikaner experience and yet to discern their conservatism and bias; to present both an exposé and an appreciation of Afrikaner character traits. Bosman’s stories recreate the social context of the early twentieth century in South African history and effectively illustrate Chapman’s argument that the ‘story’ is not only important ‘to identity-making in the nation or the society, but to the interpretation of the culture’.

In his stories about the Anglo-Boer War, Bosman constructs the necessary
distance to accommodate different perspectives primarily through his narrator, Oom Schalk Lourens. By creating a character who relates and interprets various accounts of personal war experience, Bosman anticipates the act of historical ‘retelling’ described by the poet Ingrid de Kok. Yet Oom Schalk Lourens not only tells and participates in the stories, but, ironically and unconsciously, he also reveals his own bias and assumptions of superiority to both ‘Kaffirs’ and ‘Rooinekke’ (the derogatory terms used to describe the indigenous population and his enemies respectively). Oom Schalk’s unreliability as narrator is still further compounded by his self-conscious mode of narration that openly admits to the manipulation of material and the convenient selectivity of memory, as he ironically points out in the exposition of his famous ‘The Mafeking Road’. In this sense, the illusion of fiction which he continually works to displace, could, ironically, also be associated with Afrikaner ideology.

Afrikaner ideology was shaped by the knowledge that, despite their defeat, the Boers had displayed an admirable amount of resilience and courage during the war. Allister Sparks astutely pinpoints the beginnings of an Afrikaner myth when he states that

An army of backward farmers had measured themselves against the regiments of the world’s mightiest military power and emerged with the knowledge that they were as good and better. Out of the war came new heroes to worship, new martyrs to mourn, and new grievances to nurture.

The Boers regarded their independence as paramount and associated it with their sense of identity. This perception, as well as their strong sense of religion, constituted some of the basic tenets of the Afrikaner’s ideological make-up and collective identity. It has been a matter for deep historical regret that the Afrikaner’s determination to survive and sense of nationalism was distorted by racism, and that it developed into, as Sparks formulates it: ‘a massive preoccupation with the self, a national narcissism that has blinded it to the injustices inflicted on others’. Bosman situates his stories within this context of burgeoning nationalism.

The individual characters populating Bosman’s isolated farming community of the Groot Marico district all represent certain qualities particular to the Afrikaner. On the one hand, Bosman underlines their basic humanity and, on the other, exposes their flaws. The apparent simplicity and directness of the narrator’s style is undermined by the complexity of the roles he assumes in the course of the narration, and compounded by the unconscious bias of his accounts. In this process he ‘makes illusion subordinate to delusion’, as Meihuizen astutely observes. Consequently, the reader finds her/himself on a quicksand of information that constantly changes and assumes different shapes. On close analysis, the reader perceives Oom Schalk to be the butt of Bosman’s social critique which, however, also directly points at the reader’s complicity in accepting his ideologically-determined bias. It is at this stage that the humour assumes a
distinct satirical quality that becomes evident in the 'twist in the tail' conclusion of his stories. In effect the reader assumes an active role and indirectly becomes the main object of the subtly directed satire, in a way reminiscent of Swift's manipulation of Gulliver.11

Bosman extends the ironic interplay between appearance and reality, which constitutes one of the main themes in his stories, even further when he engages in an exposition of the blurred boundaries between history, memory and fiction – something of an anticipation of postmodernist literature. The implication is that all these constructs must of necessity rely on selection and, consequently, must all leave out some part of the stories they tell. Historical distance could then provide a better perspective but it could also blur certain impressions, so that a deed of bravery could be perceived as cowardice, and vice versa. In the final analysis, the emphasis falls on the personal point of view which often comes into conflict with professed public or national ideas.

In his accounts of the Anglo-Boer War Bosman is thus effectively engaged in deconstructing the Afrikaner national myth. Heroic deeds and acts of cowardice and betrayal, patriotism and duty, assume different dimensions when viewed from a personal as opposed to a patriotic/national angle. For instance, the reader's judgement is sorely tried by the theme of betrayal in 'The Traitor's Wife'.12 In this story we are confronted with different kinds of betrayal: Leendert Roux's betrayal of his commando and fellow burghers with his defection to the British, and his wife's betrayal when she steals through the night to reveal his whereabouts to the burghers.

Although Oom Schalk indicates these discrepancies in interpretation, he does not always seem to grasp the implications of his information. In 'The Affair at Ysterspruit', he tells the story of Johannes Engelbrecht who, regarded as a traitor, has been shot by his own people.13 Yet Oom Schalk also mentions the boy's mother's version of the incident, which differs radically from the official one. She remembers him as a loving son who cared for animals and died fighting while still seated on his horse and not hiding in a trench. But the narrator, who claims to be 'a man of education and wide tolerance' uninfluenced by local gossip (p. 125), doubts the boy's mother when he sees the photograph, and notes that the boy is dressed in a National Scout uniform (a clear sign of betrayal in the Burghers' eyes). The fact that he suffered 'a considerable number of bullet wounds' (p. 121) also reveals interesting evidence about the brutality and ruthlessness of his killers. However Oom Schalk conveniently ignores this information because it would reflect negatively on the Burghers who shot him. Thus we see Bosman engaging in 'a very sophisticated form of self-conscious textual play' in which the narrator is 'undermining his position and affirming his faith in it at the same time'.14

Floris van Barneveld's story in 'The Mafeking Road' also addresses the question of personal betrayal versus patriotic affirmation. Just as the white ants have been devouring the illustrious family tree hanging on the wall in
his house, the reality of war and feelings of patriotism corrode his sense of values and cause him to kill his own son. It is assumed that he wanted to prevent his son from surrendering to the British, at least that is the conclusion drawn from his three-day absence from the commando after his son’s hasty departure with the express intention to surrender. It would seem that Floris obeyed the dictates of patriotism instead of listening to his own heart. His fate represents not only ‘the other side of the story’ of a ‘defeated country and of broken columns blundering through the dark’ (p. 50), but also the anguish of a parent torn between conflicting loyalties. Ironically, Floris ‘couldn’t tell the story properly’ (p. 48) because ‘he always insisted on telling that part of the story that he should have left out’ (p. 53). In a similar way, the witchdoctor in ‘Yellow Moepels’ also insists on telling things better forgotten, ‘that don’t matter’ (p. 28) according to Oom Schalk, who doesn’t like having his cowardly attitude during the war exposed by the crafty witchdoctor. Bosman would then seem to imply that the truth is much less palatable than fiction, and that memory, like fiction, becomes selective over time and becomes the material for legend. Although he exaggerates the selective quality of memory, the underlying message remains clear when Oom Schalk claims

It is strange that war should make a man forget ... what exactly he did for his country, and only allow him to remember, twenty years later, that it was he alone that did nearly all the fighting.15

‘The Red Coat’, which deals with an incident during the Battle of Bronkhorst Spruit, offers a striking illustration of the power of memory and its propensity to become legend.16 The reader is presented with two different versions of the same incident. In the first version, Piet Niemand saves the wounded Andries Visagie, whose jacket is soaked with blood. In the second version, Andries Visagie finds Piet Niemand wearing a red coat. As the latter version implies betrayal and the former heroism, it is assumed that Piet Niemand’s version is correct because it presents a much more convenient interpretation of the incident. Any evidence to the contrary, such as Andries’s belated return of memory, or the young school teacher’s questioning of the enemy’s position behind the Boer lines, are explained as hallucinations due to fever and a young man’s ignorance of ‘real fighting’ (p. 32). The implication is that people believe what they want to believe. By contrast, Bosman creates fiction to expose the trap that a blind belief in ideology creates.

Bosman’s short stories cover a wide spectrum of social issues but could perhaps all be reduced to two main preoccupations: religion and patriotism. These two principles have traditionally ruled the lives of the Afrikaner people. Although not unadmirable in themselves, they have tended to become petrified in the Afrikaner community so that the self-belief they exact, tends to override differences in ideas and to exclude others. Bosman graphically illustrates how excessive forms of religion and patriotism can
stultify and distort people's perceptions.

In conclusion I would suggest that Bosman’s prescience and modernity is marked by his attempt to deconstruct the perceived image of the Afrikaner, and unmask the underlying prejudices and misconceptions shaped by nationalist ideology. Through satire, he "rework[s]", as Stephen Gray terms it, 'the fixed relations ... between class, race and gender as determinants of modern attitudes to the human predicament", deploying fictional strategies to read between the lines of history.

NOTES


6. 'The Mafeking Road', in Makapan's Caves, p. 48.


9. Sparks, p. 129.

10. Meihuizen, p. 35.


12. Herman Charles Bosman, 'The Traitor's Wife', in Unto Dust, ed. Lionel Abrahams (Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 1974), pp. 86-91. All further references are to this edition and are included in the text.


15. 'The Mafeking Road', in Makapan's Caves, p. 27.

16. 'The Red Coat', in Makapan's Caves, pp. 30-36.

Group of Boer soldiers, including five brothers, aged between fourteen and twenty-two, Marita Wenzel’s grandfather, back at right

Back: unknown, unknown, Jan and Cornelius du Preez
Middle: Jan, Flip and Koos du Preez
Front: unknown, unknown
A ROUND

Lead ore lifted from a Cornish mine, 
married in a furnace to Cornish tin, 
their one flesh pewter, a barnacled plate 
salvaged from the ribs of a ship of the line, 
in Cape Town market sold for a florin, 
bartered for biltong in the Free State, 
a farmer’s wedding present for his bride 
to shine, until – with the wagon-team 
taken, the farm in flames – she cried 
as he melted it down, tilting its gleam 
to the lips of his bullet-mould, one 
of whose slugs would open a seam 
in a Cornish miner’s son.
NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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FICTION
Liz Gunner, Andries Walter Oliphant, Sheila Roberts

POETRY
Stephen Gray, Steven Matthews, Jon Stallworthy

ARTICLES

FRONT COVER: 'The Transvaal War', 1900
BACK COVER: Rhodes and General Cronje as mouse and cat during the siege of Kimberley, 1900