

**Perspectives on Masculinity, Femininity and
the South African Military: Gender Relations
with specific focus on the impact of the South
African Army Women's College and the
SADF (1971-1998**

by
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Declaration

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Abstract:

The South African Army Women's College (1971 – 1998) has largely been ignored by many books that have been written about the history of the South African Defence Force. It is necessary to investigate why this institution's history has been ignored, despite its relevance as marking the first time that women were accepted into the Permanent Force of the SADF; let alone the roles played by many women in other aspects of the SADF. Female participation in conflict is often reduced to the roles of either victim or caring nurse, despite many examples to the contrary. This thesis seeks to address the ways in which women have been integrated into the military context in the past and how the presence of women has affected notions surrounding gender norms in the strongly masculine world of the military. The experiences of the women of SAAWCOL as women in the male-dominated world of the military will be examined in particular as a window into the larger context of the SADF. This will be achieved by examining four main aspects. These are, firstly, looking at what gender norms are and how they are created and maintained in the military; secondly, the history of women's roles in various military engagements in South African history; thirdly, the formation and history of SAAWCOL during this period; and finally, the lived experiences of women who entered into the 'man's world' of the SADF.

Opsomming:

Die Suid-Afrikaanse Leer Vroue Kollege (1971 - 1998) is grootliks geïgnoreer deur baie boeke wat al geskryf is oor die geskiedenis van die Suid-Afrikaanse Weermag. Dit is nodig om te ondersoek waarom hierdie instelling se geskiedenis geïgnoreer, ten spyte van sy relevansie as die eerste keer dat vroue in die Staande Mag van die SAW aanvaar is; nog te sê die rolle wat baie vroue in ander aspekte van die SAW al gespeel het. Vroulike deelname in konflik word dikwels verminder tot die rolle van beide slagoffer of sorgsame verpleegster, ten spyte van vele voorbeelde tot die teendeel. Hierdie navorsing poog om die maniere waarop vroue in die militêre konteks in die verlede opgeneem is en hoe die teenwoordigheid van vroue nosies rondom norme van geslag in die sterk manlike wêreld van die militêre aanraak aan te spreek. Die ervarings van die dames van SALVKOL as vroue in die manlike-gedomineerde wêreld van die weermag sal in veral ondersoek word as 'n venster in die groter konteks van die SAW. Dit sal bereik word deur die ondersoek van vier aspekte. Dit is, eerstens, 'n blik op wat geslag norme is en hoe hulle geskep word en in stand gehou word in die weermag; tweedens, die geskiedenis van vroue se rolle in verskeie militêre optredes in Suid-Afrikaanse geskiedenis. Derdens, word daar gekyk na die vorming en geskiedenis van SAAWCOL gedurende hierdie tydperk; en uiteindelik, die beleefde ervarings van die vroue wat in die 'n man se wêreld van die SAW aangegaan.

Dedications:

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Chapter 1:

Introduction:

The institution of the military as traditionally been viewed as a bastion of masculinity. This popular stereotype has been bolstered over the centuries. Most often – especially during times of conflict – entering the army has been seen as a gateway for boys into manhood. Alongside this comes the oft-quoted idea that becoming a soldier will ‘make a man out of you’. This strong, and often inflexible, view presents a challenge to the study of the role that women have played in the military. Due to the tight bond between the military and masculinity, women’s participation is usually overlooked. Quite often the only aspect of female contact with the military that is investigated is the widely held view of women in wartime as an object or victim that the soldier himself must strive to protect.

This apparent blind-spot in the study of South Africa’s participation in various conflicts leads one to consider a significant query in terms of the country’s military history. It leads one to ask: What roles have the various ideas of correct gender norms played in the history of South Africa’s military?

This discussion can be, and should be, looked at through the lens of South African women’s participation in the military during times of war. This thesis aims to unpack the historical importance of gender in the South African military and how this has been impacted by women’s participation in various aspects of this institution. The most crucial facet of this inspection can be found in the history of the first military institution dedicated to the specific training of women for roles in the Permanent Force of the South African Defence Force: the South African Army Women’s College.

Between 1971 and 1998, the College trained over 7500 young white South African women.¹ Included in their ranks were the daughters of important men. For example, the youngest daughter of P.W. Botha (the man credited with the College's birth), Rozanne Visser, attended this institution (see Fig A, below).² Other former *soldoedies* – as the young women became popularly known – later carved out distinguished names for themselves in their own right. Most notable of these is Ruda Landman (née Wahl) who was the College's very first 'Student of the Year' in 1971.³



Fig. A: Rozanne Visser (née Botha) passing out of SAAWCOL

The reasons behind the College's origin are, naturally, complex and deeply rooted in various political and social factors. However, the key can be found in one of South Africa's greatest and longest conflicts. The Border War of 1966-1989 created a crisis of manpower needs for the SADF. At the same time, white South African society was becoming ever more militarised. These factors are what helped to pave the way for the inclusion of women into the army through SAAWCOL. This pattern of crisis, necessitating the use of women in wartime is a common one; it is a pattern that can easily be traced in South Africa's own history.

¹ "Soldoedies se drill dreun weer", *George Herald*, 8 March 2012, p. 2.
² "Soldoedies se drill dreun weer", *George Herald*, 8 March 2012, p. 2.
³ Civil Defence College Commemorative Album, 1971-76, p. 27.

The history of this institution is remarkable as it marks the first time that women in South Africa were afforded the opportunity to enter the previously male dominated arena of the military, albeit in a limited and rigorously restrained capacity. Thus, in terms of the history of changing military conceptions of gender norms, the College can serve as a focused lens through which this phenomenon can be observed.

What must, however, be remembered, is that while the South African Army Women's College marked an important first stage of women's ultimate complete integration into the military in post-apartheid South Africa, this was not the first time that women had become militarised in defence of their country. Thus, while the institutional history and the lived experiences of the young women of the College will form a primary focus of this study, the contributions of previous generations of South African women in times of conflict cannot be overlooked; those whom Jean Bethke Elshtain has labelled as the "ferocious few".⁴ This shows that, despite SAAWCOL's unique status as the only military training facility for women at the time, the College did not come into being in a vacuum.

1.1 Historiography and Research:

Despite the importance of SAAWCOL in South Africa's military history, its past has not been fully investigated. This dearth of research into South African women's recent military participation is not unique to this country. There is, generally, a paucity of sources that relate directly to women's roles in armies. In contrast to this, however, there are a great number of resources for information on women as (peace) activists or as the victims of wars - rather than sources examining women's roles as active participants in conflict - either in an official capacity or informally.

There are various explanations for this lack of historical investigation. One possible explanation for this phenomenon is related to traditionally held views on the correct gender roles for women; and, more specifically, on the roles that they should fulfil in wartime. Women have often been painted as the human rationale for war. The image of a woman waiting for her soldier's victorious return from the front has been used as motivation; she is the soldier's reason to fight and to stay alive. Women have also been portrayed as the thing

⁴ J.B. Elshtain: *Women and War*, p. 3.

that the soldier strives to protect by being at war. A second explanation for this lack of attention to female agency can be found in the fact that histories of war have, by and large, been the histories of (male) soldiers. In terms of this, the role of female combatants is not, necessarily, consciously excluded. Rather, women are simply not thought of as significant in this domain – with the exception of a few extraordinary cases. The stories of, for example, Joan of Arc or the so-called Amazons of Dahomey have been well documented. For the most part, however, the histories of women in wartime focus instead on female efforts on the home front – their traditional place as bastions of support. This problem of historiographical blindness also holds true for the era of South Africa's Border War and the foundation of SAAWCOL. The College is, more often than not, ignored. Instead, histories of this conflict mention women as incidental.

This dearth of material directly relating to the subject of women in the military presents a challenge to the adequate study of the subject matter at hand. However, in terms of this research it was overcome by the use of primary materials. Interviews with former *soldoedies* played a large role in gaining information on the daily life and experiences of the women who went to the College. For the final sections – those that investigate the history behind the College's opening and the lived experience of the women who studied there – newspaper articles from the time were a boon. While publications from the Cape – namely *Die Burger* and *The Cape Times* – were extremely valuable, the George district's local newspaper, *The George Herald*, proved most useful, due to its greater focus on what was undoubtedly an important local development. Further primary sources used included the SADF's own magazine *Commando*, that was renamed *Paratus* at the end of the 1960s. This gave insight into the military's own perspective on the College and its place in the SADF. One of the final – and most valuable – primary publications was the George College's own *Civil Defence College 1971-1976 Commemorative Album*. This album was released to commemorate the first six years of the institution's existence before it was transformed into the South African Army Women's College in 1977.

1.2 Structure:

In terms of the above-mentioned dearth of research on South African women's position in the SADF, in order to fully investigate the relationship between the masculine military and women's place in it and the impact of the South African Army Women's College on this dynamic, several different aspects have to be investigated. One cannot look at this problem without providing several layers of context.

The first of these, and possibly one of the most crucial, are the various theories that surround the socially constructed concepts of masculinity and femininity. Due to the nature of these constructs and their deeply ingrained position in society, both in terms of civilian society and military society, there are numerous – and often conflicting – theories surrounding them. These will have to be investigated in order to provide context to the discussion of gender norms in the military and effect that SAAWCOL had on these. Therefore, what will be outlined first is the creation and the importance of a specific, hegemonic military masculinity. For what is central to this study is the dichotomy between military masculinity and the feminine 'other'. This will be examined in detail before the traditional gender norms that prohibited women's entrance into the armed forces institution are investigated.

A second layer of context that is necessary is an analysis of the roles that South African women have played in wartime. This serves two key purposes. Firstly, it will provide concrete historical examples of the theories of gender norms in wartime. Secondly, and most importantly, the histories of these 'ferocious few' will demonstrate the steady progress of women's place in the military context towards their eventual official inclusion through the College in 1971. Women's participation in four of South Africa's biggest conflicts prior to the Border War will be looked at. These are: the fearsome Voortrekker matrons of the Great Trek (1834-1840); the women of the South African War, both in their capacity as the suffering victims of the concentration camps and, more importantly, as those who fought alongside their men; and, finally, the two World Wars and how these great conflicts led to the first formal roles for women in any military capacity – first as nurses and later through the South African Women's Auxiliary Service.

One final layer of context must be clarified before the crux of this study – the impact of SAAWCOL on gender norms in the South African military – can be addressed. This is the context of the time during which the College was formed. What will be examined here are: the history behind the Border War and its impact on South African society; apartheid society's deeply held gender norms and white women's place in this context; women's contributions to the militarisation of white society through various support organisations; and, finally, the steady inclusion of women in previously male dominated fields, particularly through the South African Police and black women's contribution to the armed struggle against the apartheid regime.

1.3 Note on Nomenclature:

Before embarking on the discussion of gender norms in the SADF, it is firstly crucial to clarify the nomenclature that will be used in this thesis. The South African Army Women's College went through two incarnations during its twenty-seven year career as a military training institution for young women. This leads to some confusion as to how to accurately name the College throughout this work. When referring specifically to the initial years of the College, between 1971 and 1977, the term 'Civil Defence College' will be used. After this period the institution became the South African Army Women's College, and will be referred to as such. When speaking generally about the institution throughout its existence it will, most often, be termed as 'the College'.

Chapter 2:

“Mister, I’ll make a man out of you”: Models of Masculinity and Femininity in the Military.

As an institution, the military is most often seen as a bastion of masculinity. Soldiers, the protectors of the homeland, are warriors and as such are represented as ‘real men’. Although this image is almost ubiquitous in western society, it must be born in mind that it is an image created by this society. Not only is the concept of the masculine and heroic soldier one that has been created and accepted in the minds of many, but it can also only exist in opposition to a second created image. This is that of the weak and valuable female who is in need of protection. What the following chapter seeks to show is how the military has created its own form of hegemonic masculinity and how this masculinity is displayed within the institution. It will also demonstrate the relationship between the masculine military and the feminine ‘other’. Finally, the roles of this other in traditional capacities encompassing the military during wartime will be examined, as well as some of the reasons behind the exclusion of women from the ranks of the military. While this will be done mostly using general examples from the world’s militaries that demonstrate how these concepts function within the institution, some examples from the context of the South African Defence Force (SADF) of the Apartheid era will be used to illustrate ideas specific to the period.

2.1 The Creation of Military Masculinity and the Feminine Other:

Masculinity and femininity are things that are defined by society. These concepts are upheld or enforced according to the gender norms of a society. In the broad context of everyday life, this means that the social group to which one belongs determines what it means to be either masculine or feminine. The military environment is a valuable example of just this context of the creation of a specific definition of gender – especially of the creation of a specific brand of masculinity. The value in the context of the military (both the SADF during the Border War period and armies in general) as a creator and enforcer of gender norms, is that these definitions not only feature more prominently, but exist in much sharper definition in comparison to those used in civilian life. How the military creates its specific definition of what masculinity is, will be discussed here, along with some examples drawn from the accounts of young South African servicemen. Furthermore, the military’s need to distance itself from the feminine will be discussed.

2.1.1 Uniform and Uniformity: The military and hegemonic masculinity:

The strongest of the forms of masculinity that are used by and are upheld in the context of militaries is that of hegemonic masculinity – a form of masculinity that can be described as being an “ultimate” standard of what it means to be a man. For the successful creation of hegemony, it is necessary to convince the greater part of a population – in this case the members of the military – to conform to a specific pattern of practices: courage, strength, aggression and group solidarity, for example.⁵ However, it must also be noted that this concept is not so easily pinned down and as such it is the subject of a number of debates. It is perhaps better to speak of plural ‘masculinities’.⁶ As such, what will be examined here are specifically the notions surrounding masculinity that the military sphere tends to extol, rather than those that are more commonly present in civilian life. It must also be borne in mind that, according to Connell and Messerschmidt, masculinity is not only plural but hierarchical.⁷ It is within this hierarchy that the concept of hegemonic masculinity, especially as it is displayed in the military, is crucial.

The vision of an ultimately masculine soldier is a large part of the myth of the military as an “unadulterated, hyper-masculine” institution.⁸ The emphasis that this institution has placed on specific expressions of masculinity is key to understanding the place of gender norms in the military in general, as well as in the specific context of the SADF during the 1960s and 1970s. A great part of what gives militaries the appearance of being such bastions of masculinity is the idea that joining its ranks will “make a man out of you”. However, it must also be noted that any definition, whether the ultimate vision of military masculinity or the more quotidian ideas of what constituted being manly, can only exist in contrast to the feminine other.

⁵ R.W. Connell & J.W. Messerschmidt: “Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept”, *Gender and Society* (19), (6), 2005, p.832. & M. Donaldson: “What is Hegemonic Masculinity?”, *Theory and Society* (22), (5), 1993, p.645.

⁶ D. Schrock & M. Schwalbe: “Men, Masculinity and Manhood Acts”, *Annual Review of Sociology* (35), p. 280.

⁷ R. W. Connell & J. W. Messerschmidt: “Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept”, *Gender and Society* (19), (6), 2005, p. 846.

⁸ R.F. Titunik: “The Myth of the Macho Military”, *Polity* (40), (2), 2008, p. 138.

The military instils its vision of masculinity by first breaking down, and then recreating according to its own norms, the identities of new troops.⁹ This is done through the homogenised appearance of soldiers – in uniform and with uniform haircuts. In the context of this essay, one of the most important ways that this is achieved is in the use and abuse of stereotyped gender roles – namely, that men are strong and the ideal to which to aim and women are weak and are failures. Hence, the language used in basic training often reflects this. New recruits during basic training are constantly admonished by their superiors to ‘be real men’, and when they fail to live up to expectations they are labelled as acting like ‘girls’ or ‘sissies’, or worse yet – especially in the context of the Apartheid-era SADF – like an effeminate *moffie*. This breaking down of identity through insult is a key part in military training. This training helps to create a sense of correct military masculinity in troops, and simultaneously upholds it by instilling disgust of the feminine other.¹⁰

One way in which the notion of hegemonic masculinity has been displayed in the military is in the selection of recruits based on their physical attributes. During the Second World War a theory was brought forward that young men with specifically masculine attributes would make better fighters. As such, those with “an angular and muscular body, narrow hips relative to shoulders, ‘flatness of the mammary area’ and abdomen, a space between the thighs, ‘prominence of inner curvature of calves’ and pubic hair running towards the navel” were seen as possessing a “strong masculine component” and would have been moved up the selection line.¹¹ Men with more ‘feminine’ physical characteristics were seen as having “a roundness and softness of body outline, lack of muscle, relatively greater hip breadth to shoulders, fullness in the mammary area, ‘feminine abdominal protuberance’, close thighs, ‘greater outer curvature of calves’, and lateral distribution of pubic hair”.¹² It was thought that these men would never do well in the fight.

The use of feminine terms as an insult to troops lies in conjunction with the need to define ‘soldier’ as an example of military masculinity. Hence, the military tends to define that which is not a soldier as something feminine. From this it can be said that a strong part of training and the bonding of soldiers takes the form of ‘woman hating’. Anything termed as

⁹ J. Bourke: *An Intimate History of Killing*, p. 70.

¹⁰ R.F. Titunik: “The Myth of the Macho Military”, *Polity* (40), (2), 2008, p.139.

¹¹ J. Bourke: *An Intimate History of Killing*, p. 111.

¹² *Ibid.*

female is imbued with negative qualities. This includes not being physically strong or fit enough during basic training, as well as being seen as not psychologically tough enough. In order to prove himself, the soldier must become the opposite of feminine, he must be a ‘real man’.¹³ It is in this need to prove one’s commitment to the military idea of what constitutes a ‘real man’ that the concept of hegemonic masculinity plays a key role. Namely, that one must conform and prove oneself able to meet the terms of conformity.

The spate of recent popular histories and autobiographical works about young, white South African men’s experiences during the period of conscription is invaluable as a source of examples of just this practice of using woman hating as a part of basic training. Despite their lack of status as academic historical sources, they do provide a useful glimpse into this world. When these accounts are written as a first-person narrative describing the process of ‘*klaaring in*’ and basic training, vulgar language and the use of insults are a clear part of military dialogue. On top of this, a favoured mode of insulting new troops was to question their status as men, or more specifically as heterosexual men.

A valuable illustration of the link between the military environment and its role in the creation of masculinity can be found in the memories of one South African conscript of the Border War. He recalls being told that: “If you want to be somebody, if you want to be a *man*, then you must fight these communists.”¹⁴ Many examples of this practice of questioning masculinity exist in Border War memoirs and are often found in conjunction with the use of feminine terminology as insult. For instance, David Williams recounts in *On the Border*, his experience of *klaaring in*, or his arrival at a military base for completion of his conscription in what he describes as a “microcosm of white male society”.¹⁵ During this process of arrival and setting out on the first steps to becoming a troop, the usual barrage of shouting and swearing at the new recruits was accompanied by the young men being called “*liefie*” (a diminutive and generally feminine nickname).¹⁶ Williams, in the same chapter, also recounts how men with long hair were referred to as “Goldilocks” before obtaining a more suitably military, and more recognisably male, short hair style.¹⁷ Another facet of this is the

¹³ R.F. Titunik: “The Myth of the Macho Military”, *Polity* (40), (2), 2008, p.139.

¹⁴ C. Blake: *From Soldier to Civvy*, p. 194 (emphasis added)

¹⁵ D. Williams: *On the Border*, p. 11.

¹⁶ D. Williams: *On the Border*, p. 27.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

questioning of the new recruit's sexuality. Tim Ramsden writes how those young men who were unable to keep up in basic training were admonished and told "*moenie moffie raak*".¹⁸

2.1.2 Woman hating: Military masculinity and the feminine other:

These admonitions to act like real men and to deny anything that could be construed as feminine not only have an important bearing on the military's stance of 'woman hating'. Something that also plays a significant part in the creation of military masculinity is homophobia.¹⁹ As a strong, masculine soldier the notion of loving another soldier goes against the military definition of masculinity and ideas of hetero-normativity. Despite this homophobia, there exists in the military the – almost oxymoronic – need to create strong bonds of friendship and loyalty between male comrades in arms.²⁰ Creating and maintaining these strong and close male friendships in times of hardship allowed the soldiers to carry on; they "[made] the horrors of war endurable".²¹

Not only is the role of 'woman hating' a crucial part of military training and life, but it is a valuable illustration of the military's strange relationship with the feminine. Although it tries to distance itself from the female other – the antithesis of the strong male vision of a soldier – the military cannot escape its own feminine nature. It displays some aspects that are more usually associated with the feminine. One of the most obvious way in which this feminine aspect of the military is manifested is in the upholding of hierarchies. For a soldier of lower rank to take orders from his superior, he must play a submissive – and, therefore, conventionally feminine – role. This is strongly based on the myth of the macho military. There exists a strong belief in our society that soldiers must possess aggressive qualities and be filled with ferocious blood-lust in order to be successful. However, in practice, the opposite is true. Responses such as blood-lust rage and hatred are counter-intuitive to the functioning of a well-trained and successful soldier.²² A good soldier must be compliant and stand his ground until given further orders.²³

¹⁸ T. Ramsden: *Border-line Insanity*, p. 22.

¹⁹ M. Donaldson: "What is Hegemonic Masculinity?", *Theory and Society*, (22), (5), 1993, p. 645.

²⁰ J. Bourke: *An Intimate History of Killing*, p. 142.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.* p. 72.

²³ R.F. Titunik: "The Myth of the Macho Military", *Polity* (40), (2), 2008, pp. 148-149.

2.1.3 Men, masculinity and the urge to protect: The soldier's socialisation as 'life taker':

Alongside the military's position as a creator of a specific brand of masculinity in this function of training boys to become soldiers and, therefore, men, are the traditional ways in which external society has branded fighting men as possessing not only the hallmarks of masculinity but those of a specific, high standard of masculinity. That is to say: a type of masculinity that is hallmarked by the urge and ability to fight and to take lives. This means that the military provides an institutional space for the creation of a definition of masculinity. As such the connection between masculinity and the military also has a strong cultural bond. It has been said that in our - western - society "militarism and violence have been identified with manliness".²⁴ This is to say that men have been designated as the protectors, while women are seen as something that must be protected.²⁵ Therefore, exhibiting the urge to fight and protect is associated with masculinity, especially in the military context.

This cultural association between men, masculinity and the urge to protect is not only manifested in sanctioned institutions, such as the military, but it also has its roots in ancient hunting parties. These would have been exclusively male as, it has often in the past been argued, the presence of females in these large groups would have distracted members from the main purpose.²⁶ Thus these early societal groups would, in theory, have been divided into those who were the 'life takers', through acts of hunting or violence against rival groups. And those who were designated as 'life givers': women.²⁷ This division between the male designation of 'live takers' and the female designation as 'life givers', serves once again to re-enforce the division between those who protect and those who are protected. The institutionalisation of these male ranks of violence via the military has led to the solidification of this division. This strong association between violence and masculinity has led to the military being described as "a male preserve, run by men and for men according to masculine ideas of male bonding, male privilege, and militarist values derived from definitions of masculinity".²⁸

²⁴ J. Bourke: *An Intimate History of Killing*, p. 310.

²⁵ J.B. Elshtain: *Women and War*, p. 3.

²⁶ J. Keegan: *War and our World*, pp. 18-19.

²⁷ J.B. Elshtain: *Women and War*, p. 165.

²⁸ M. Thursen: *Women's War Stories in What Women do in Wartime*, M. Thursen (ed.), p. 5.

This strong connection between the urge to fight and protect and masculinity is, as shown above, created by institutions such as the military and the definitions of societal roles. The roots of this can be found in the play of young children.²⁹ Young boys are encouraged to fight in play and this becomes their social role in adulthood. However, this form of socialisation is not present in the education of young girls. As children, men are encouraged to play with toy guns or to play games of ‘Cowboys and Indians’ with its repetitive chant of “bang, bang, you’re dead!” and look up to warrior heroes such as John Wayne or Rambo.³⁰ The difference in the play models of boy and girl children comes down to the fact that a society puts

“half its children in skirts and warns them not to move in ways that reveal their underpants, while putting the other half in jeans or overalls and encouraging them to climb trees and play strenuous outdoor games...then these two groups of people will differ biologically as well as socially”.³¹

This difference of socialisation is not only important for explaining the strong link between men and the urge to fight, but it also goes some way towards explaining the exclusion of women from the military environment.

The traditional exclusion of women from the soldierly ranks has its roots in a combination of a number of theories that surround gender norms and the supposed weaknesses of women in comparison to men. The military’s own need to keep itself masculine in order to preserve its status as a bastion of a specific hegemonic masculinity, as discussed above, is only one part of this. As such, the various reasons for keeping women out of combat as well as the roles that they play in areas encircling the military will need to be examined. The arenas of military and the feminine may be seen as mutually exclusive concepts but each, nevertheless, has a strong impact on the other.

²⁹ D. Schrock & M. Schwalbe: “Men, Masculinity and Manhood Acts”, *Annual Review of Sociology* (35), 2009, p. 282.

³⁰ J. Bourke: *An Intimate History of Killing*, p. 14.

³¹ R. Hubbard: “Constructing Sex Difference”, *New Literary History* (19), (1), 1987, p. 131.

2.2 Femininity and the Military

As discussed above, the military – whether the SADF specifically or armies in general – seeks to define itself as an arena of masculinity and those who inhabit it as male. The military can be described as a place where women are not. However, it is clear that despite the apparent contradiction between the military and the female, the role of femininity and of women is important and is often overlooked. Although the significance of femininity in the stereotypically male arena of the military may sound oxymoronic, the following chapter aims to show that it does have a place. This will be done by first looking at where it is absent, namely the reasons for the exclusion of women from the military and also the contributions that women make to war efforts outside of the military context. Next, what happens when women are accepted into the overwhelmingly male world of the military will be investigated.

As a masculine institution the military has not only used the idea of femininity as an insult used to instil correct masculine and soldierly behaviour, but has also traditionally excluded women from its ranks. The reasons for this exclusion are manifold, but their roots often lie in myths of femininity and the need to separate ‘home’ from ‘front’. Both of these notions stem from the need to keep women as wartime’s designated ‘other’ – the protected rather than the protector.³² Thus, women’s exclusion from the military plays a key role in maintaining ‘correct’ gender roles.

2.2.1 Male chivalry and menstruation: Factors that have blocked women’s participation in the military:

A key part of the myths of femininity that have prevented the acceptance of women into the military environment is the idea that women, for various reasons, are unable to cope with the rigours of military life that their male counterparts face daily, or that their inclusion will somehow interfere with the correct running of the institution. There are four main aspects of women’s weakness, as outlined by Jacklyn Cock. Firstly, it is assumed that women are instinctively unable to kill. This relies on the notion that women are the givers of life, as opposed to male life-takers. Closely related to this inability to take life and thus to perform one of the key duties of a soldier, is the idea that the socialisation of women is inappropriate.

³²J.B. Elshtain: *Women and War*, p. 3.

They are not taught from a young age to be ready to fulfil this role or how to “cope with this sort of thing” – namely the hardships of military life.³³ As mentioned above, while the socialisation of young boys and girls is markedly different, however, a large portion of military training is based on how to deal with the difficulties of war and thus this difference is not insurmountable.

Socialisation is again given as a barrier to women’s inclusion into the military. This time, however, it is the socialisation of men that is to blame. It is assumed that male chivalry would prevent the proper functioning of operational tasks. A male soldier would feel compelled to “[say] things like ‘after you’ or ‘I’ll take that, it’s too heavy for you’”.³⁴ Not only is the apparent male need to preform chivalrous tasks for women seen as a possible hindrance but so is their sexual desire for women. The “sexual immorality of grappling with an infantryman of the opposite sex while our young female soldier is trying to kill him” is sometimes made reference to by opponents of women’s inclusion into the military.³⁵ The need to keep separate sleeping and toilet facilities also poses a difficulty.³⁶

Finally, women’s physiology is given as a reason for their exclusion. Quite often the fact that women have comparatively less physical strength than their male counterparts, especially in terms of upper-body strength, is quoted as a reason that women would be unable to “hack it” as soldiers.³⁷ In the eyes of the famed American General Westmoreland, women who were able to meet the physical training standards needed to be fit for combat would have to be what he termed freaks.³⁸ Not only is the fact that women in general physically lack the upper-body strength of men given as a reason but that women stand the danger of being incapacitated through physical functions such as menstruation.³⁹

³³ J. Cock: “Keeping the Fires Burning: Militarisation and the Politics of Gender in South Africa”, *Review of African Political Economy* (45/46), 1989, p. 59.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ G. H. Quester: “Women in Combat”, *International Security* (1), (4), 1977, pp. 86-87.

³⁶ J. Bourke: *An Intimate History of Killing*, p. 335.

³⁷ G. H. Quester: “Women in Combat”, *International Security* (1), (4), 1977, p. 88.

³⁸ J. Bourke: *An Intimate History of Killing*, p. 336.

³⁹ J. Cock: “Keeping the Fires Burning: Militarisation and the Politics of Gender in South Africa”, *Review of African Political Economy* (45/46), 1989, p. 59.

2.2.2 “History’s designated non-combatants”: Women’s traditional roles in wartime:

Alongside these modern complaints that bar the entry of women in to the military, there exists a number of underlying factors embedded in traditional views of gender norms. Female violence is seen as an aberration.⁴⁰ Added to this is the notion that a violent woman, or one who wants to participate in the male sphere of the military, is a failed woman; she becomes painted with a masculine brush.⁴¹ Women’s violent acts are seen as mindless and uncontrollable; female violence “signifies formlessness dis-order, breakdown, mis-rule [*sic.*]”.⁴² These traits are the opposite of the rigorous discipline of the military. While women are generally seen as being incompatible with violence, there are two, mutually exclusive, occasions when women’s violence is sanctioned by society. The first of these is psychosexual confusion. It is thought that these women want to be men and, therefore, enact masculine societal functions – such as acts of violence. The second entails violent acts in protection of loved ones, specifically such acts that play on women’s maternal instincts.⁴³

As well as being customarily excluded from participating in the military as “history’s designated non-combatants”, women also have to fulfil a number of traditional roles as support for a soldier or as his reason to fight.⁴⁴ These background women are often depicted as suffering: “weeping for husbands or sons, and if defeated, becoming the sexual booty of their conquerors”.⁴⁵ These functions serve to highlight the military’s need to keep separate the spheres of ‘home’ and ‘front’, protector and the protected.

Frequently in the imagination women in wartime are painted as fulfilling the roles of either the sympathetic Florence Nightingale style nurse or as the dangerous and seductive Mata Hari spy.⁴⁶ However, one of the oldest and most enduring visions of women in wartime is as the soldier’s reason for fighting. She – either as wife, girlfriend or mother – is painted as his own, personal Helen of Troy: “a valuable that needs to be defended, but they can also

⁴⁰ J.B. Elshtain: *Women and War*, p. 169.

⁴¹ J. Bourke: *An Intimate History of Killing*, p. 318.

⁴² J.B. Elshtain: *Women and War*, p. 169.

⁴³ J. Bourke: *An Intimate History of Killing*, p. 318-319.

⁴⁴ J. B. Elshtain: “Women and War” in *The Oxford History of Modern War*, C. Townsend (ed.), p. 303.

⁴⁵ A. Carter: “Should Women be Soldiers or Pacifists?” *Peace Review*, (8), (3), 1996, p. 1.

⁴⁶ J. Cock: “Keeping the Fires Burning: Militarisation and the Politics of Gender in South Africa” *Review of African Political Economy*, (45/46), 1989, p. 52.

represent value itself, an ideal incarnating peace and virtue”.⁴⁷ This function of women as the reason for going to war has been yet another justification given for the exclusion of women from combat roles in the military. It is thought that the presence of women soldiers on the front would shatter the image held in the minds of male soldiers of a girl back home worth fighting for and, of course, staying alive for.⁴⁸

One of the most common roles that the women who have been left behind when soldiers go off to fight are expected to play in wartime is that of providing support and ideological encouragement. There are two opposing but complementary aspects to this role as female provider of support. This role of giving encouragement to fight for one’s country was put forward by the SADF in the early 1980s. In the military magazine *Paratus* it was reasoned that if they could reach the woman then “through her [...] work on the man. A mother has influence on her son and a girlfriend over her boyfriend”.⁴⁹

The first of these roles encompasses the almost stereotypical image of the young woman “running along the sides of trains and waving goodbye to the departing men in uniform”.⁵⁰ This cheerleader provides, not only moral support for the young men going off to war, but also a reason to fight – she is something valuable that needs to be protected at home by the soldier at war. She provides not only encouragement to the soldier but also a reason for him to fight.

Her counterpart plays an equally valuable role in encouraging men to fight. However, instead of using encouragement and giving the soldier reason to go to war, she uses the shame of not being a real man going to fight for his country and loved one. This second form of ideological support comes from women who stand as “castrating bitches who belittle and berate men for refusing to become macho murderers”.⁵¹ This woman upholds the idea that dishonour is worse than death.⁵² It must, however, be noted that despite the apparently

⁴⁷ J. Cock: “Keeping the Fires Burning: Militarisation and the Politics of Gender in South Africa” *Review of African Political Economy*, (45/46), 1989, p. 52.

⁴⁸ C.L. Williams: *Gender Differences at Work*, p. 53.

⁴⁹ Quoted in J. Cock: “Manpower and Militarisation: Women and the SADF” in *War and Society: The Militarisation of South Africa*, J. Cock & L. Nathan (eds.) p. 55.

⁵⁰ J. Cock: “Keeping the Fires Burning: Militarisation and the Politics of Gender in South Africa”, *Review of African Political Economy* (45/46), 1989, p. 52.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² J. Bourke: *An Intimate History of Killing*, p. 315.

bloodthirsty nature of her call for young men to go out and “kill the bastards” and finding a thrill in tales of the enemy dead, this does not amount to a personal desire to kill.⁵³

A final role that women must fulfil in wartime is that of the mother. It is seen as her duty to provide the next generation of soldiers. The importance of motherhood and of providing the nation’s military with the next generation of cannon fodder is an ancient one that can be seen in the burial traditions of the ancient Greek city states. In ancient Sparta, the dead were buried anonymously unless they had contributed towards the city-state’s military might. For men, this was achieved by dying in battle. For their wives, it was by dying in childbirth and so providing the state with future fighters.⁵⁴ Much the same was true in Athens. This divide between the heroic mother and her soldier-sons serves to re-enforce the boundary between those who are ‘life givers’ and those who are ‘life-takers’. It also gives credence to the notion that “militarism would be stifled by the womb”.⁵⁵

⁵³ *Ibid.* p. 316.

⁵⁴ J.B. Elshtain: *Women in War*, p. 173.

⁵⁵ J. Bourke: *An Intimate History of Killing*, p. 310.

2.2.3 Auxiliary roles and conscription: Women soldiers in times of crisis:

Although there are many who oppose the acceptance of women into the military, women have often in times of crisis been drafted into the military. However, it must be noted that when women are accepted into the military, their roles are often limited. Either, as with women in the SADF between 1970 and 1998, they were relegated to mainly auxiliary and secretarial work ‘behind the scenes’; or, in other ways, they were still prevented from becoming soldiers. While these background functions are crucial to the workings of the institution they are, nevertheless, strictly secondary. Even when female soldiers are given a full entrance into the arms of service they are often not afforded the same opportunities as their male counterparts. The most obvious example of this is the fact that women soldiers are often excluded from combat completely, or are reduced to being excluded from front-line combat.⁵⁶ These exclusions not only reduce the role of women in the military as soldiers, it can also have a negative effect on their chances of obtaining promotion.⁵⁷

The reason behind this maintenance of distance between male and female members of the military is, in part, due to the ideological need to keep up a distance between traditional male and female gender roles and norms.⁵⁸ During the time in which the South African Army Women’s college was founded in the early 1970s there was a strong call on white South Africans to adhere to a specific political and domestic ideology. A key part of this was the idea that a woman’s place was in the home. This need to maintain femininity is apparent not only in newspaper articles of the time bemoaning the “dangerous” new woman who works outside of the home,⁵⁹ but also in how the women of SAAWCOL were handled during their training. There was a strong emphasis on retaining their feminine qualities despite their foray into the male military. Emphasis was placed, for example, on the women’s grooming and their display of correct female etiquette.⁶⁰ As such it can be argued that, for women, the military does not aim to make ‘men’ out of them but rather to enhance female stereotypes.⁶¹

⁵⁶ G. H. Quenter: “Women in Combat”, *International Security* (1), (4), 1977, p. 82.

⁵⁷ “Shift on women in combat aligns policy with reality” *USA Today*, 25 January 2013.

⁵⁸ R.W. Connell & J.W. Messerschmidt: “Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept”, *Gender and Society* (19), (6), 2005, p.835.

⁵⁹ Van der Merwe, B.: “Party vroue sit liefes agter lessenaar”, *Die Burger*, 16 May 1963.

⁶⁰ J. Bourke: *An Intimate History of Killing*, p. 309.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

Not only have women traditionally been excluded from service in a nation's army or have had their roles in the military reduced to specific outlets, women in most of the world's nations are also exempt from conscription. While the reasons for this are linked to those mentioned above concerning the exclusion of women from the military, the impact of this is much greater. Military service – specifically the act of defending one's homeland – has for many centuries been closely tied to the concept of being a citizen. In exchange for his military service, the soldier-citizen “receives equal civic, political, and social rights”.⁶² This is the idea that “the soldier is a citizen and the citizen is a soldier”.⁶³ In order for a young white South African male during this era to become a fully-fledged citizen, he would have to complete his military service. This opportunity was not available to women, outside of becoming the mothers to future soldier-citizens.

Despite the apparent disadvantage that their exclusion from conscription and mandatory military service gives to women's pursuit of equal citizenship, the fact that men are forced into participating in the military can be seen as disadvantageous to them. This has most notably been argued by David Benatar. He argues that it specifically this female immunity from being drafted into military service that is biased against men. This is due to the fact that men are those who are sent into combat “[risking] injury, both physical and psychological, and death”.⁶⁴ He argues that “society attempts to protect its own women but not its men from the life threatening risks of war”.⁶⁵

Despite the various injunctions against the inclusion of women into the military, there have been times when women have been allowed to enter into the military, either as permanent members or temporarily for the duration of a specific crisis. The reasons for this inclusion are often ideological in nature. Women's inclusion into the military, particularly in the case of the Apartheid era SADF, is undertaken in order to support the ruling regime by providing demonstrative support of white political unity.⁶⁶ Or, to put it quite simply, out of military necessity for manpower.⁶⁷ This is especially true if there is “imminent threat of occupation or invasion by outsiders and insufficient men to protect and defend the native

⁶² O. Sasson-Levy & S Amram-Kratz “Gender Integration in Israeli Officer Training: Degendering and Regendering the Military”, *Signs* (33), (1), 2007, p. 109.

⁶³ *Ibid.* p. 848.

⁶⁴ D. Benatar; *The Second Sexism*, p. 2.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁶⁶ C. Cohn (ed.): *Women and Wars*, pp. 133-134.

⁶⁷ R.F. Titunik: “The Myth of the Macho Military”, *Polity* (40), (2), 2008, p. 140.

land”.⁶⁸ In the context of personnel crises in the military women can be seen as “an untapped source of high quality human resources”.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ L. Heineken: “Securing South Africa’s Future: Putting women in the Frontline”, *Strategic review for South Africa* (22), (2), 2000, p. 1.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

2.3 Conclusion:

The relationship between the masculine military and the feminine other is one that is clearly fraught with difficulty. Not only does the military need to employ the feminine as its other, its antithesis, in order to properly define what military masculinity is, but it must simultaneously instil in its members a deep fear and loathing of everything that is feminine. To re-enforce this, anything relating to the feminine is used as demeaning. In juxtaposition to this is the fact that at the same time the military displays some traditionally feminine attributes in its need for hierarchy and subordination. Furthermore, women have habitually been excluded from participating in the military for a variety of reasons, owing to the need to keep the spheres of 'home' and 'front' – or of the protector and the protected – separated. This is not to say that women do not serve important roles in wartime. Women are the providers of moral and ideological support for soldiers and give them a reason to risk their lives in defence of the nation and those left behind. Eventually, these women slowly become members of the military in an auxiliary capacity – they could be said to be in the military but not of it. Even so, in circumstances some have even taken it upon themselves to don arms and armour and to go off to fight as men.

Chapter 3:

From the Great Trek to World War Two: South African Women in Wartime:

While knowledge of the various theories of masculinity and femininity - as well as the controversies surrounding the participation of women in the military environment - is crucial to understanding the place of gender in the context of the South African military, it is equally important to investigate some examples of the enactment of these gender norms in the country's wartime past. Although white South African women were only allowed to enter into the South African Defence Force (SADF) in 1970 in a major capacity, through institutions such as the South African Army Women's College – often referred to as SAAWCOL – and then only in a limited capacity, this was by no means the first time that they participated in the nation's wartime engagements. The inclusion of women into the apartheid-era military was not an event that arose out of the blue; rather it was a gradual process of female inclusion. As such, this chapter will examine the roles of South African women in wartime and how they have changed over time; from their first being victims and unintentional participants during the battles of the Great Trek to women's slow integration into the SADF.

Several conflicts will be considered. While these incidents of warfare within South Africa will by no means be an exhaustive account of the country's military history, these examples will serve to generally illustrate the roles played by women and how these roles have been influenced by ideas of gender. Of relevance here are the battles fought by the Voortrekkers against the Zulu and Ndebele; the contribution of women to the Boer cause in the South African War (1899-1902), to their becoming nurses and auxiliary military workers in the First and Second World Wars. Up until the period of the Cold War – marked in South African by both the struggle against Apartheid and the Apartheid regime's struggle against the '*rooi gevaar*' – South African women have played vital roles in the militarisation of their country and it is necessary to explore their historic contribution.

As mentioned above, the following is by no means an exhaustive account of the participation of South African women in times of conflict. Rather this chapter seeks to illustrate the route towards the gradual acceptance of women into the SADF of the 1970s. As such, this piece focuses squarely on the participation of white women. This is not to deny the

role of black or coloured women in South Africa's military history. Rather this work focuses on the South African military before the advent of democracy and racial equality in 1994. As such, there must obviously be a greater emphasis on white – often specifically Afrikaner – women. This holds true not only for this chapter's analysis of women's roles in militarisation before their official inclusion into the South African military, but also, in the following chapters, when specific focus will be given to the women in the SADF through institutions such as the South African Army Women's College (SAAWCOL) after 1970 but before the equal integration of men and women soldiers of all racial backgrounds in 1994.

3.1 The Women of the Great Trek:

The Great Trek had a significant impact on the development of South African. This period between 1834 and 1840 marks one of the first great expansions of white Afrikaners into the interior and away from the Cape Colony. The Trek also holds a crucial place at the heart of the Afrikaner *volk* as many of the reasons for their exodus from the colony are rooted in the mythologies of their nationalism. The collective decision to move westwards was initiated by a number of factors, many that hinged around dissatisfaction with the ruling group of the time at the Cape, namely the British.

Despite the fact that the Voortrekkers are the best known of the white emigrants to leave the Cape Colony, they were not the first to venture out. Tensions between those of Dutch heritage and the English in the colony had begun in 1806 with the arrival of British forces at the Cape and its annexation. Soon after this event, a group of Afrikaners became the first group to begin crossing the colonial border from the mid-1820s. This first wave of white migration was known as the *trekboers*. Their exodus was motivated by fewer political issues than the Voortrekkers. The *trekboers* were concerned about the lack of sufficient pastures and as such sought this space elsewhere as individuals.¹

The events and complaints that instigated the Great Trek are manifold. And, unlike the land-based issues of the previous *trekboers*, the causes of the Voortrekker migration were rooted in political complaints. The chief among these complaints was the dissatisfaction of the *boers* on the eastern frontier of the Cape Province at the government's inadequate

¹ H. Giliomee: *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*, p. 144.

measures of protection against the, so-called, “continuous raids of marauding hordes of Bantu”.² Due to this dissatisfaction at the difficulties of their frontier life and the struggling socio-economic status of the Afrikaner populace the people chose to venture into the uncharted interior in search of freedom and self-government away from the colony where they felt that they were being marginalised by the British.³

Although the Great Trek, in itself, was not a state of war declared between two national groups, the Voortrekkers themselves did come into many situations of conflict. These battles were instigated by the interaction of the Voortrekkers and varied African groups, in particular the Zulu and Ndebele.⁴ It was during these periods of intense conflict that the women of the Voortrekkers played several important roles. Many of these were the usual positions occupied by women in times of conflict. They acted as bastions of moral support and as the providers of home comforts. Yet, what was fundamentally different about the roles of the Voortrekker women, when compared to other women during times of conflict, is that they were not removed from the battle zones, but were front-and-centre. As such, these women were also often called upon to perform other, more usually masculine, functions of wartime duty.

3.1.1 Voortrekker matrons as driving force:

In the midst of these intense periods of conflict between the Voortrekkers and the people native to the interior which they encountered, the Voortrekker women played a key role in encouraging their men to continue on with their journey. These Afrikaner women were a “driving force behind the trek”.⁵ Their role as the providers of support was crucial. This was not only due to this being a key illustration of one of women’s traditional roles in wartime: namely, the dual position of cheerleader and ferocious matron calling upon young men to fight, as outlined in the previous chapter. Added to this was the fact that this support role was not fulfilled from afar, but from right at the heart of the action.

² G. Roos: “The Great Trek”, *The Australian Quarterly* (22), (4), 1950, p. 35.

³ H. Giliomee: *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*, p. 144.

⁴ J. T. du Bruyn: “Die Groot Trek” in *Nuwe geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika in word en beeld*, T. Cameron (ed.), pp. 127-128.

⁵ H. Giliomee: *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*, p. 169.

These “burly, whip-wielding Boer women, who dragged wagons over mountains and knew more about inspanning oxen ... than embroidery *anglaise*”,⁶ did not join the journey as “mere adjuncts of their husbands”.⁷ Rather they had important functions in maintaining discipline over the servants and in making decisions.⁸

Outside of these general duties, the Voortrekker women were invaluable in their contribution to the underpinning of the movement itself. There are many examples of redoubtable Boer women standing up – often against the men – for their cause. One of the most famous of these was the claim by Susanna Smit. She boldly declared that she would cross the Drakensbrug Mountains bare-foot to die in liberty before yielding to the British government.⁹ Although Smits’s statement that “death is dearer to us than the loss of our freedom” is well-known, she was not alone among Voortrekker women in making this type of admonition.

After the *laagers* at Doornkop were attacked by 7000 Zulu warriors in April of 1838, the widows of this latest battle did not let the matter rest. They demanded that the deaths of their husbands be avenged. Some, such as Mietjie Kruger, publically shamed the men as being cowardly at a meeting when she stated that she would avenge the killing of her people and fight the Zulu if the men were too cowardly to do so themselves.¹⁰

⁶ A. McClintock: “‘No Longer in a Future Heaven’: Women and Nationalism in South Africa”, *Transition*, (51), 1991, p. 109.

⁷ H. Giliomee: *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*, p. 169.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ R. Binckes: *The Great Trek Uncut*, p. 461.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 345.

3.1.2 Voortrekker Women Join the Fight:

The trek parties that set off from the Cape were made up not only of men venturing off to settle new land, but included many women and children. Groups made up of families intended to escape the domination of the colony. As such, the women of the Voortrekkers were not simply present during battles with the Zulu or Ndebele. They often had to play crucial roles themselves.

There are many reports of wives and mothers standing alongside their husbands and sons at the battles of Vegkop and Bloedrivier, in 1836 and 1838 respectively.¹¹ Moreover, these women were not only present at the battles but contributed significantly to the Boer defences of their *laagers*. At night, women of all ages would stand guard over the *laager* while the men were away scouting for new locations to set up camps or looking out for enemy warriors.¹² The Voortrekker women would also often take over on one of the three to four hour shifts that the day's trek was divided into. Young girls would take the place of their male peers in the position of *voorloper* (or front-walker), while their mothers whipped the oxen.¹³

Not only did the women take over these roles that had more usually been played by their men, but they also contributed significantly to the construction of the Voortrekkers' defences. Once the *laager* was setup and the men had taken up their outside firing positions to deter any intruders, the women took their own places. Voortrekker women melted bars of lead in order to cast bullets for the guns. During any battle the women, as well as the young children, re-loaded the slow and cumbersome Boer weapons so that the fighting men could keep a steady fire.¹⁴

What these cases show is that the Voortrekker women were not simply fragile victims of the battles fought by their men or cumbersome burdens who had to be supported by the fighting contingent. They did not simply remain sheltered in the relative safety of the laagers alongside the children and oxen. Rather, these women played an active and important role in

¹¹ E. M. Meyers: "Die Suid-Afrikaanse vrou in landsverdediging – agtergrond en perspektief", *Scientia Militaria* (16), (2), 1986, p. 33.

¹² J. T. du Bruyn: "Die Groot Trek" in *Nuwe Geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika*, T. Cameron (ed.), pp. 127-128.

¹³ R. Binckes: *The Great Trek Uncut*, p. 234.

¹⁴ G. Roos: "The Great Trek" *The Australian Quarterly* (22), (4), 1950, p. 36.

the running and the defence of the Voortrekker community, often in ways that were at odds with the otherwise deeply rooted gender norms of Afrikaner society. In times of conflict and danger, they assisted the fighting men and stood watch. On trek, they took over more traditionally male roles, such as driving the oxen. And, finally, they provided the backbone of moral support that was often needed for their people to continue on their mission.

3.2 The South African War (1899-1902):

The roots of the South African War (1899-1902) can be traced back to the beginning of the nineteenth century and the arrival of British troops at the Cape in 1806.¹⁵ This annexation of the colony created a state of antagonism between the British and the Boers and would later be an important factor in the exodus of the Afrikaners to the interior. The Great Trek was not only a demonstration of the Boers dissatisfaction with the British regime but it also indicated an intensification of the hostilities between these two white groups. While these factors are all crucial to the outbreak of the war, the contributing factor most often cited as the cause of the South African War is the discovery, in 1886, of gold in one of the young Boer republics – the Transvaal. The imperialist war which Britain fought against the Boer states to assert its overall paramountcy in the region was a lengthy and costly struggle.

The importance of the South African War in the history of gender norms within the South African military lies in the fact that this conflict can be called the first true war in which the entire country was embroiled. Alongside the large scale of this conflict, the South African War is remembered for not only bringing South Africans from many different backgrounds into conflict with one another but, more so, for the way in which women were dragged to the forefront. In many ways, the Boers experienced this conflict as a war against women, where the British imperial military “[terrorised] unarmed people in places occupied by women”.¹⁶ Much like their antecedents of the Great Trek, the women of the South African War – on both sides – played key roles, both as active participants and as the enduring victims.

¹⁵ B. Nasson: *The War for South Africa*, p. 21.

¹⁶ H. Bradford: “The defiance of *bittereinder* women” in *The War at Home: Women and families in the Anglo-Boer War*, B. Nasson & A. Grundlingh (eds.), p. 47.

3.2.1 Victims: The Scorched Earth Policy and the Concentration Camps

Women, as “history’s designated non-combatants”, are most often remembered in accounts of war as its direct or indirect victims.¹⁷ In the case of the South African War this is especially true. Afrikaner women were the directly created victims of the British total-war - a war which was fought “without scruples or limitations”.¹⁸ This was done through the implementation of the scorched earth policy and the internment of Boer women and children in concentration camps.

The scorched earth policy is perhaps one of the most controversial strategies used by the invading British forces against the resisting Boer commandos. In the policy’s first incarnation by British commander Lord Roberts in the early months of 1900, this tactic was mostly limited to the destruction of Boer property around railway lines that had been sabotaged.¹⁹ Yet, from the outset, troops often went past the boundaries of the official policy. These soldiers were young and unmarried and part of an institution that was “designed to turn boys into men”.²⁰ As has been argued, these young men used their ferocious destruction of Boer homesteads as a display of their masculinity and concurrent scorn for domesticity and the feminine arena.²¹ This policy was quickly expanded by Roberts’s successor, Lord Kitchener. Kitchener extended the scorched earth policy at the end of 1900 to the destruction of any and all Boer property that British troops came across. Through the destruction of livestock and crops and the razing of homesteads, the British meant to terrify the Boer guerrillas, or even to inflict the harshest punishment for defying British authority, as well as to deprive them of supplies.²²

Due to the razing of Boer farms and homesteads, the British forces now had a large number of displaced Boer non-combatants to deal with. The wives, children and elderly family members of the Boers on commando now were left homeless and at the mercy of the British. Boer families were left destitute to drift through the countryside, fending for

¹⁷ J.B. Elshtain: “Women and War” in *The Oxford Illustrated History of War*, Townsend, C. (ed.), p. 303.

¹⁸ H. Giliomee: *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*, p. 253.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 254.

²⁰ H. Bradford: “The defiance of *bittereinder* women” in *The War at Home: Women and families in the Anglo-Boer War*, B. Nasson & A. Grundlingh (eds.), p. 51.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² H. Giliomee: *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*, p. 254. & H. Bradford: “The defiance of *bittereinder* women” in *The War at Home: Women and families in the Anglo-Boer War*, B. Nasson & A. Grundlingh (eds.), p. 55.

themselves before being rounded up by the British and placed in protected camps.²³ These people were not interned for any crime or act of war but – as with the majority of concentration camps in the twentieth century – simply for who they were.²⁴

Despite the fact that the women who were forcibly removed from their homes have often been painted as the passive victims of a cruel act of war, many refused to leave their homesteads quietly. There were clear expressions of the “female hatred of an enemy which was trampling its way into domestic spaces”; often this hatred was expressed to the point of violence.²⁵ The women who remained on Boer farms, for example, often spat at or threw stones and hot water at British troops who were plundering nearby farmsteads.²⁶ Some of these women were also in the habit of offering food to the troops which had been spiked with poison or ground glass.²⁷

The conditions in the camps were, by all accounts, horrendous. The camps were overcrowded and the people underfed. Diseases, such as typhoid and measles, and infestations of lice, spread quickly. Many people died due to the poor conditions, especially the very old and the very young. By October 1901 the death rate had reached 344 per thousand inhabitants and by the end of the war a total of 4,177 women had perished.²⁸

It was not only the Boer women whose experiences in the British concentration camps are crucial when illustrating the various gender roles at play during the South African War. After victimhood, a second niche that is often carved out for women in wartime is that of the sympathetic nurse. During this conflict, these Florence Nightingale-figures were sympathetic women from England and elsewhere in Europe who came to South Africa to aid the Boer women suffering in the camps. Most famous among these was Emily Hobhouse. At the end of 1900 she journeyed to the South Africa, as many British pro-Boer humanitarians chose to do during this period, in order to provide clothing and supplies to the needy in the camps. Upon her return to England she exposed the hardships faced by those in the camps.²⁹

²³ B. Nasson: *The War for South Africa*, p. 241.

²⁴ H. Giliomee: *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*, p. 254.

²⁵ B. Nasson: *The War for South Africa*, p. 280.

²⁶ *Ibid.* p. 281.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ H. Giliomee: *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*, p. 255-256.

²⁹ H. Giliomee & B. Mbenga: *New History of South Africa*, p. 221.

3.2.2 Motivation: Afrikaner Matrons and the Call to Fight:

With the massive number of Boer women interned in the concentration camps and the destruction of property, the Boer forces were now deprived of supplies and of a crucial system for moral support. Still, it must be noted that this state did not last for too long: the camps quickly became a rallying point for the Boers and the “indomitable resistance of the Boer women was the decisive factor in the war”.³⁰

A secondary part of Kitchener’s tactic in his implementation of the scorched earth policy was to eliminate the Boer women, “who were more bitter than the men”, from being an “insidious influence” on *bittereinder* Boer men.³¹ As one wife of an English military man, Lady Sarah Wilson, noted in her diaries of the South African War:

“There is no doubt the women are powerful in Boerland. Even a Britisher married to a Dutch woman seemed at once to consider her people as his people, and the Transvaal as his fatherland. These women were certainly the most bitter against the English; they urged their husbands in the district to go and join the commandos, and their language was cruel and bloodthirsty”.³²

From the words of observers like Lady Sarah Wilson it is clear that Afrikaner women were crucial in motivating their men to go and join the fight against the British might. Indeed, this was not the only support that these women offered. Before the advent of the scorched earth policy and the internment of Boer women in the British concentration camps, a number of women followed their husbands and sons on commando. Here they played an indispensable role in providing not only moral support but also in providing food for the men and other home comforts. Significant numbers of Boer women who remained at the farms also played a key logistical role in delivering provisions and clothing to the men of the commando camps. From this was borne the long lasting image of the “hardy *vrouw* or woman ...

³⁰ H. Giliomee & B. Mbenga: *New History of South Africa*, p. 256.

³¹ B. Nasson: *The War for South Africa*, p. 244.

³² Quoted in L. Ommundsen: “La guerre Anglo-Boer de 1899 à travers le prisme feminine” *Africa: Rivista trimestrale di studi e documentazione dell’Istituto italiano per l’Africa* (55), (1), March 2000, p. 115.

trekking from the farm to a commando camp with a cartload of protein, fat, wool, and leather”.³³

After their detention in the concentration camps, these women did not silence their opposition to the British war effort as Kitchener had hoped. Despite the great hardships endured, the women of the camps often redoubled their antagonism towards the English forces and their calls for the Boers to continue the fight. In fact, many women who were dispossessed by the scorched earth policy stated that they “preferred their houses to burn down than to see their husbands surrender”.³⁴

There are many examples to support the image of a domineering Afrikaner mother figure encouraging her men to fight and shaming those who did not. Key among these examples were the tales of Boer women in the camps calling out the *hensoppers* – those who had surrendered to the British – and shaming them for their weakness.³⁵ The women also vented their anger towards the English troops guarding the camps, often in ways that challenged traditional gender roles and shocked the troops for their harshness. Kitchener himself once despaired of “the Boer woman in the refugee camp who slaps her protruding belly at you and shouts, ‘When all our men are gone these little Kharkis will fight you’”.³⁶

Equally, despite the legacy of the resilient Boer matron, it must be remembered that their society was highly patriarchal and steeped in specific customs in terms of correct roles and behaviour. Home was defined as a female domain by Afrikaner leaders. Men were kept apart from domestic concerns and women were, at the same time, banned from the *laagers*. The women were supposed to defend the home.³⁷

³³ B. Nasson: *The War for South Africa*, p. 81.

³⁴ H. Giliomee: *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*, p. 256.

³⁵ B. Nasson: *The War for South Africa*, p. 225 & H. Giliomee: *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*, p. 256.

³⁶ B. Nasson: *The War for South Africa*, p. 280.

³⁷ H. Bradford: “The defiance of *bittereinder* women” in *The War at Home: Women and families in the Anglo-Boer War*, B. Nasson & A. Grundlingh (eds.), p. 57.

3.2.3 Fighters: The Few Who took up arms:

Not only were the Boer women sure that their “little Kharkis” would continue the fight against the British, but there are some examples of women who took up arms against their adversaries themselves. These fighting women can largely be divided into two separate, but nevertheless related, camps. The first makes up the majority and consists of the wives of Boer generals who followed their husbands on commando. While the second group may be significantly smaller in number, their impact on gender norms is more significant. These are the few who, through choice or circumstance, decided to join the fight directly – by donning male clothing and then joining the fight as soldiers.

There are many accounts in histories of war of brave wives accompanying their husbands to war. For centuries the wives of soldiers made up a large contingent of the camp followers that trailed behind the army from battle to battle. This was no different in the South African War, where – without a gendered division of safety – women were “sucked directly into the arena of the armed struggle”.³⁸ For example, the wives of Generals Cronjé and Joubert went with their husbands into the trenches.³⁹ Hester Cronjé’s habitual presence in the laager led her to be “referred to as the petticoat general”.⁴⁰ Hendrina Joubert was dubbed ‘vreeslose Drienie’ (fearless Drienie). She was very involved in her husband’s military career and, unlike many women of her time, showed an interest in military operations. Drienie recounted in her memoirs:

“Ek was mos oral saam. Daar is nie een oorlog gewees nie, of ek het saamgegaan. Eers met my vader [op trek] en later met my man... Hoekom sou ek agterbly? Ek hoort mos by my man.”⁴¹

While there can be no doubt as to the tenacity of these individual women – nor of their importance as fulfilling a traditional feminine role of wartime as providers of support for their husbands and camp followers – they were, nevertheless, a small minority. For all that, their stories nonetheless serve to demonstrate that, despite conventional notions, the outskirts of were still not a wholly masculine place.

³⁸ B. Nasson: *The War for South Africa*, p. 155.

³⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 110- 111.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* p. 174.

⁴¹ R. Binckes: *The Great Trek Uncut*, p. 234.

Women like Hester Cronjé and Hendrina Joubert were also not the only females present at the moment of battle during the South African War. There were many others who remain anonymous thanks to husbands of less illustrious rank. What differentiates them from the cases that follow is that their femininity was never hidden, in fact it was highlighted as seen in the nickname given to Hester Cronjé, based on a garment that is intimately linked to femininity: the petticoat general. Due to this celebration of their gender they were necessarily excluded from taking part in the fight itself – they were mascots rather than soldiers. This was not the case for a small handful of women who took up arms themselves.

Due to the guerrilla nature of the Boer commando fight and the often blurred nature of the battle lines, many women became actively involved in the war. A key example of this occurred during the Battle of Pietershoogte in 1900. As one British soldier who was present at the battle recounted in a letter to his wife: “terrifying sight of more than sixteen armed women who were shot dead in the trenches before they had chance to retreat”.⁴² Unlike Cronjé and Joubert, the women of Pietershoogte had no choice about their presence and were clearly active in the fight rather than passive mascots. The female fighters of Pietershoogte were remarkable not only for their active participation in combat, but also for the fact that they fought as women. As noted in the previous chapter, when women become soldiers they must deny certain feminine aspects; dress in particular being a crucial demonstration of gender. While these women fought as women and without choice, there are some examples of those who fought as men.

Helena Herbst Wagner, at the outbreak of the war, was a young Afrikaner wife and mother. Her husband quickly left her and their small child to fight the British, as was expected of him. Wagner was left destitute at 25 years old, and to add to her loss her child soon died owing to their dismal circumstances. As a woman alone left with very little, she resolved to go after her husband.⁴³ Wagner dressed in his clothes and joined the Johannesburg commando. In her disguise she participated in the battles of Spioenkop and Pontdrift as a member of the mounted republican forces. Although she did not succeed in her

⁴² E. M. Meyers: “Die Suid-Afrikaanse vrou in landsverdediging – agtergrond en perspektief”, *Scientia Militaria* (16), (2), 1986, p. 34.

⁴³ M. Krouse: “The Boerevrouens’ Battle”, *Mail and Guardian*, 7 August 1998.

endeavour to find her husband, Wagner spent a total of three months in the Boer fighting forces.⁴⁴

3.3 The First World War:

At the outbreak of the Great War, as it was known, in August 1914 the Union of South Africa – which had been created four years before and was under the leadership of Prime Minister General Louis Botha – was requested by Great Britain to perform an “urgent imperial service” and attack South West Africa, a colonial territory controlled by Germany (now Namibia).⁴⁵ As such, the nation was drawn immediately into the global conflict. However, the Union’s fighting force was made up of volunteers with a multitude of reasons for joining: some out of loyalty to Botha, others “simply for the love of the fight”.⁴⁶ Due to the fact that the Union Defence Forces were made up of volunteers, and many people of Afrikaner backgrounds still bore resentment towards Britain after the South African War, the South African forces were relatively small. Not only was the male contribution condensed but so was the female.

After their significant contribution to the Boer war effort during the South African War, as moral support and as sometime fighters, and their prominence as victims during this conflict, women’s roles in the period of the First World War were greatly reduced. European women’s roles in the hostilities were expanded by performing a great variety of jobs previously reserved for men; they became ambulance drivers at the front and, through volunteer organisations, took up diverse work that freed men for the front.⁴⁷ Still, while the war may have opened new doors for their sisters overseas, the wartime role of South African women remained close to the traditional.

The only official capacity in which South African women were involved during this conflict was as nurses. In August of 1914 a volunteer corps was set up for women who

⁴⁴ E. M. Meyers: “Die Suid-Afrikaanse vrou in landsverdediging – agtergrond en perspektief”, *Scientia Militaria* (16), (2), 1986, p. 34.

⁴⁵ D. Williams: *Springboks, Troopies and Cadres*, p. 1.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* p. 2-3.

⁴⁷ G.J. Meyer: *A World Undone: The Story of the Great War 1914 to 1918*, p. 667.

wanted to aid the South African war effort abroad. In total, 328 South African women served as nurses with their troops in East Africa.⁴⁸

3.4 The Second World War

The Second World War (1939-1945) is rightly remembered as history's largest conflict due to the scale of mobilisation that the conflict stimulated. This mass mobilisation was not only created by the great numbers of young men who went to fight, on both the Allied and Axis sides. It was during the Second World War that, in many ways, women were first militarised on a large scale and when they first became incorporated into many of the world's militaries – albeit in auxiliary roles.

South Africa was drawn into the Second World War in much the same fashion as it was the First. At the outbreak of the war, the Union was divided in support between JBM Hertzog, who called for neutrality, and Jan Smuts who, in turn, wanted to support the British. The dispute between these two generals of the South African War turned political heavyweights came to a head after Smuts won the vote in Parliament and once again became Prime Minister. As such, in 1939, South Africa declared war on Germany.⁴⁹

Much as in the First World War, women continued to act in the very traditional wartime role of nurses during the Second World War. This was true not only on an international scale, but also in the context of South Africa. In comparison to their numbers in the Great War, the amount of women who volunteered as nurses rose significantly in this conflict. The number of South African nurses increased, from just over 300 in the First World War, to over 4 000 volunteer nurses who served during the Second World War.⁵⁰

However, the greatest change for South African women's roles in wartime came not through nursing but through their first foray into the Union Defence Force in the early years of the war. A number of women's organisations that were working in aid of the war effort were brought together by the Department of Defence in 1939. This amalgamation of

⁴⁸ E. M. Meyers: "Die Suid-Afrikaanse vrou in landsverdediging – agtergrond en perspektief", *Scientia Militaria* (16), (2), 1986, p. 35.

⁴⁹ D. Williams: *Springboks, Troepies and Cadres*, p. 27.

⁵⁰ E. M. Meyers: "Die Suid-Afrikaanse vrou in landsverdediging – agtergrond en perspektief", *Scientia Militaria* (16), (2), 1986, p. 35.

organisations became known as the South African Women's Auxiliary Service (SAWAS). Due to its having been created by the Department of Defence, SAWAS was a military institution for female volunteers. As such, the Service had its own rank structure and uniform. However, these first female volunteers to the UDF were strictly non-combatant.

The duties of the SAWAS were manifold, but were nonetheless mostly comprised of organising morale boosting activities for UDF soldiers, and others, who were on leave. These women were responsible for organising officers' dances and, in the words of one of SAWAS's founding members, providing soldiers with "pretty girls and beer".⁵¹

By the end of the Second World War, the total number of women volunteers in the South African military service numbered 24 427. Despite their large number, and the military structure of the SAWAS, these women were not accepted into the Permanent Force and their role was restricted to the traditionally female position of providing support and home comforts for the fighting troops. Despite this limited role, SAWAS continued to provide pretty girls and beer for several years after the end of the war – finally closing in 1949.

Although South African women's contribution to the war effort and their brief and peripheral integration into the Union Defence Force might seem small scale, this was not entirely the case. Despite the relatively low number of women who participated in the Auxiliary Service – in South Africa at least – the creation of SAWAS was noteworthy for being the first inclusion of women into the South African military. As such, the Service 'prototype' paved the way for the later full scale inclusion of women into the South African Defence Force. In addition to this, it is worthwhile to note that the hard work of these women, and others not directly involved in organised structures, was recognised at the highest level. General Smuts, South African Prime Minister at the time, commented that:

"During the second World War ... which has been won by the determination, the courage and the heroic sacrifices of all citizens of the allied nations, the part played by our women folk has my greatest admiration".⁵²

⁵¹ L. Bean: *Strangers in our Midst*, p. 49.

⁵² Quoted in: *Civil Defence College Commemorative Album*, 1971-76, p. 7.

That ‘greatest admiration’ led to the possibility of women’s military presence being reconsidered. In 1951 the employment of women in the UDF was seriously considered. Unfortunately, however, it came to nothing. In the mid-1960s a series of debates cropped up again surrounding the possible inclusion of women into the South African Defence Force’s Permanent Force. The main questions raised against women’s inclusion were based around women’s physical ability to keep up with their male counterparts during training and how it could be possible to acceptably include them into the overwhelmingly male rank structure.⁵³ Once again it was agreed that women would not become soldiers.⁵⁴

Due to these debates and their conclusions against the use of women in the nation’s military structure, the presence of women in the South African military was non-existent for a period of almost twenty years following the discontinuation of SAWAS. It was only with the intensification of the Border War that women once again became militarised in South Africa. This was primarily through the formation of the Civil Defence College in George in 1970 – that would later become known as the South African Army Women’s College – where young, white, women were trained to take over various non-combatant military positions. However, this was not the only way in which women demonstrated their military abilities during the period of Cold War tensions in South Africa.

⁵³ E. M. Meyers: “Die Suid-Afrikaanse vrou in landsverdediging – agtergrond en perspektief”, *Scientia Militaria*, (16), (2), 1986, p. 39.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

3.5 Conclusion:

What these small cases of South African women's participation in wartime has demonstrated is that the decision to open a civil defence college for the military training of young women was not made out of the blue. White South African women had established a long-standing tradition of participating in times of conflict; although their roles had been significantly varied. As time progressed, women have become steadily more integrated into the South African military sphere: from the matrons of the Great Trek standing guard over the *laagers* and defending their meagre possessions, to the women of SAWAS, who were officially included as auxiliary members of the South African military structure. These older roots paved the way for the creation of SAAWCOL, while the political pressures that abounded in the 1970s in South Africa – as will be discussed in the following chapter – gave the military a basis for adaptation and motivation.

Chapter 4:

Renewed Militarisation during the Cold War Period

In the twentieth century war has often gone hand in hand with the opening up of opportunities previously denied to women on account of traditionally held gender norms. For example, in Great Britain during the Second World War the intensity of the conflict and its simultaneous creation of a manpower vacuum led many women to become involved in jobs usually reserved for men. These jobs included, but were not limited to, working as anti-aircraft gunners, in munitions manufacture and on farms as a part of the 'Land Army'.¹ The situation in South Africa during the Cold War conflict known as the Border War (1966 – 1989) had some similarities. As suggested in the previous chapter, white South African women's presence on and around the battlefield had been an enduring feature of all the major local wars faced in the country. The roles played by these women gradually moved from being unofficial and supportive to becoming ever more formal.

The renewal of militarisation in South Africa due to the tensions on the border between South West Africa (now Namibia) and Angola led to a renewed need to involve women in various arenas from which they had previously been partially or wholly excluded. It is within the context of the militarisation of white South African women that the seeds for the establishment of the South African Army Women's College were sown.

This chapter seeks to demonstrate the various non-military roles played by women during this period, through an analysis of these roles in the context of the time. Briefly, the main areas of women's contribution to the militarisation of the Apartheid state that will be examined are: the various support organisations for soldiers on the Border, women's contribution to armaments manufacture, and, finally, the roots of women's integration into the war machine.

¹ B.S. Anderson & J.P. Zinsser: *A History of their Own: Women in Europe from Prehistory to the Present vol. II*, pp. 308- 312.

4.1 South Africa's Border War (1966 – 1989):

It is necessary, before embarking on a discussion of South African women's roles in wartime, to first give some wider context. At the time in question, South Africa was a nation fraught with conflict. Briefly, it is possible to say that there were two main branches of tension at the time: the war against the *rooi gevaar* of communism in Angola and the increasingly violent resistance against Apartheid. Both of these conflicts were significant in the increasing militarisation of South Africa and in the eventual acceptance of women into the military proper. However, initially it is necessary to give more focus to the Border War. This was a military engagement and it was through the intensification of the War that women were drawn into the military.

The roots of this conflict lie in South Africa being given the mandate over German South West Africa after the end of the First World War, in 1918. Despite the fact that the trusteeship was revoked by the United Nations (UN), South West Africa remained under the control of South Africa as a de facto 'fifth province'.² As the majority people of South West Africa became increasingly frustrated at their continued subordination, a number of organisations arose that protested against South Africa's continued dominance. The chief amongst these was the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO). Through their military wing, the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN), several incursions into South West Africa were executed from Zambia. The guerrilla skirmishes that PLAN enacted against the paramilitary South African Police (SAP) increased exponentially until, in 1973, the military strain grew great enough for the South African Defence Force (SADF) to be drawn in to take over full control of waging the conflict.³

What caused this situation to evolve into one of the African continent's longest running conflicts was Angola's simultaneous independence from Portugal. The sudden power vacuum led to a number of rival organisations seeking to claim power. The main rivalry was between the Marxist, Cuba-backed MPLA, and the FNLA and UNITA – both supported by South Africa.⁴ The reason for South Africa's support of the FNLA and UNITA lay in one of Apartheid South Africa's biggest Bogey Men – the *rooi gevaar* of communism. The leftist

² T. R. H. Davenport: *South Africa – A Modern History*, p. 481.

³ T. J. Stapleton: *A Military History of South Africa*, p. 169.

⁴ T. R. H. Davenport: *South Africa – A Modern History*, p. 485.

leanings of the MPLA and its support for SWAPO made it a clear threat.⁵ In 1975, South Africa staged a military invasion of Angola in support of FNLA and UNITA – known as Operation Savannah.⁶

The intensity of the conflict rose steadily and soon the SADF had to find new ways to bolster its numbers. Although the defensive bodies of the SADF and SAP were initially easily able to supply sufficient manpower from their standing forces and by accepting volunteers, the need for new fighting men soon grew too great. Conscription in the SADF was initially small-scale and based on a lottery. The conscripts were called-up for nine months of service. In anticipation of an escalation of the conflict a wholesale conscription of white South African men was introduced in 1967. Initially young men were called up for a twelve-month period; in 1977 this was increased to two years.⁷

It was not only the South African military that was significantly affected by the atmosphere of this growing conflict, but also the civilian populace. For many young white men, especially in the Afrikaans community, joining the army was seen as a rite of passage. A youth's entrance into the military was a symbolic step towards his becoming a man. This link between attaining masculinity and the military had been visible amongst the Afrikaners since the time of the commandos.⁸ Not only could young men use their military service as a way to prove their manhood, but it was also an opportunity to demonstrate their loyalty to the state. For the women left at home their loyalty – both to the state and to the young men on the border – was shown through their involvement in a variety of supportive organisations.

⁵ T. J. Stapleton: *A Military History of South Africa*, p. 169.

⁶ *Ibid.* p. 170.

⁷ G. Cawthra: *Brutal Force: The Apartheid War Machine*, p. 63.

⁸ S. Swart: "'A Boer and His gun and His Wife Are Three things Always Together': Republican Masculinity and the 1914 Rebellion", *Journal of Southern African Studies* (24), (4), 1998, p. 738.

4.2 Women in Apartheid South Africa:

The Apartheid system was, necessarily, highly patriarchal. It was based on the assumption of power by a small dominant percentage of white males over a group that was deemed as being ‘lesser’ – namely, those of non-white descent. Hand-in-hand with the subjugation of those of other races was the subjugation of women. By understanding this, the reasons behind the very traditional roles played by white South African women in the period surrounding the establishment of the South African Army Women’s College – as well as the slow process of the College’s establishment – becomes more clear. The roots of the rigidly upheld place of white women can be found in the same society in which Apartheid had its roots – the Afrikaners. A woman’s place was in the home; she was a bastion of support for her husband.

This philosophy was clearly espoused in many Afrikaans (and, to a lesser degree, English) newspapers and magazine articles of the 1960s and early 1970s. Granted, with the advent of the Women’s Liberation Movement in America and Europe the attitude towards women was slowly widening from the narrow confines of the norms of femininity; however, it is possible to say that this change was not as obvious as in other societies.

As mentioned above, the woman’s place was in the home as caring wife and loving mother. This feeling can be seen time and again in articles from the time in question. For example, an article from the SADF Ladies’ Club page of *Commando* dating from April 1969 focuses greatly on the importance of motherhood amongst its members.⁹ *Die Burger*, one of the biggest Afrikaans-language newspapers, held up similar sentiments. This is overwhelmingly clear in the daily “vroueblad” or women’s page. The content of this section of the newspaper was made up of recipes, fashion tips, homemaking and weddings. Much the same attitude was displayed by *Die Burger*’s English-language rival, *The Cape Times*.

Any women contravening the boundaries of their set societal role were often painted as a threat to the good functioning of society as a whole. A letter written to *Die Burger* in 1963 by a concerned citizen demonstrated this fear succinctly. A Mrs B. van der Merwe of Stellenbosch blamed women who worked outside of the home, because “they are too lazy to

⁹ “Meisies gaan hulle land dien”, *Commando* (7) (20), July 1969, p. 33.

do their housework”, for creating “murderers, thieves, ducktails and trouser-wearing girls” due to the fact that these children had not had the proper care of a mother at home.¹⁰ *The Cape Times* weekend supplement of 6 February 1971 showed similar suspicion. In an article that preceded a two-page spread on society weddings, the growth of the American Woman’s Liberation agenda was discussed. The dismissive tag-line of this piece was in itself noteworthy, “their aim is the total revision of all the historic patterns of family life in the West”.¹¹

4.3 Women and Support Organisations:

What these strongly held visions of correct femininity meant for the militarisation of white South African women was that, despite their necessity in various capacities, their main contribution was still in the traditional field of providing support – both moral and physical – for the troops in the battle zone. Due to this fact it is vital first to examine the more traditional roles played by women in this period before embarking on a discussion of their steady ascent into more conventionally masculine areas of militarisation.

During the Border War women were, naturally, involved in providing moral support for the troops on a personal level. However, there were also a number of organisations that did the same. For the purposes of this chapter, three main groups or functions will be looked at. These are: the SADF Ladies’ Organisation, *Bel-en-ry tannies*, and the Southern Cross Fund. The military leaders of the Apartheid state repeatedly claimed that “warfare is 80 per cent social, psychological or political and only 20 per cent military”.¹² These female driven organisations contributed significantly to this 80 per cent in the militarisation of white South African society.

¹⁰ B. van der Merwe: “Party vroue sit liefs agter lessenaar”, *Die Burger*, 16 May 1963.

¹¹ “Women in America are rebelling against inequalities”, *Cape Times*, 6 February 1971, p.30.

¹² G. Cawthra: *Brutal Force: The Apartheid War Machine*, p. 41.

4.3.1 The SADF Ladies' Association:

The SADF Ladies' Association was made up chiefly of the wives of officers. Their main occupation was organising fund-raisers and social events. During the early part of the Angolan conflict their role was not greatly expanded from this. At first glance, the organisation of parties and galas may seem to be less than noteworthy. However, it was crucial in illustrating the position of women in South Africa at the time and in showing how much women's activities were curbed by the highly patriarchal nature of the Apartheid society.

One of the clearest indications of the position of women in white South African society at the time comes from the January 1966 edition of *Commando* – the magazine of the SADF. The monthly page dedicated to the activities of the Ladies' Club features a brief report on the activities of the members from Potchefstroom. In this article, the president of this branch of the Ladies' Club is quoted as saying: “*Ons hoofdoel is om te werk vir die soldaat en sy gesin*” (Our main goal is to work for the soldier and his family).¹³ The article goes on to highlight the previous month's activities. These included: thrice monthly talent competitions and lectures for the ladies on topics such as family budgets, make-up and Persian carpets.¹⁴

As the war progressed, the function of the Ladies' Association became evermore focused on soldiers' wives as a source of “ideological legitimisation and emotional support”.¹⁵ This was codified in the 1982 White Paper on Defence in which it was stated that soldiers' wives had a duty to provide “sympathetic understanding and active support for the husband's duty as the defender of the Republic of South Africa”.¹⁶ In their capacity as the beacon of support for their husbands, the women of the SADF Ladies' Association had to uphold certain standards and behaviour. According to Cock, this list included: knowledge of

¹³ “Leërdamesklubs”, *Commando* (17) (1), January 1966, p. 41.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ J. Cock: “Keeping the Home Fires Burning: Militarisation and the Politics of Gender in South Africa”, *Review of African Political Economy*, 1989, p. 59.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 55.

communism; meticulous grooming; self-knowledge; optimism; shared values; regular correspondence; responsibility; and commitment.¹⁷

4.3.2 “Help Johnny Come Marching Home”: Operation Ride Safe:

The *Bel-en-ry* Organisation was founded in 1977. The main impetus was to provide lifts for national servicemen on leave for the weekend, in place of these men having to resort to hitchhiking or clogging up the country’s transport systems.¹⁸ Its ideology was expressed in an advertisement of the time: “They keep us safe in our homes. Let’s give them a safe ride to theirs”.¹⁹ Not only was this an effective way to get soldiers without their own transportation safely from one place to another, but it was also a simple way for women nationwide to demonstrate their support for the troops.

The Scheme was expanded in 1983. It now included an off-shoot called ‘Sleep Safe’. This new system allowed white civilians to show their support to the troops by giving them not only safe transportation but also a safe place to sleep overnight on longer journeys.²⁰

Despite the rosy picture painted of this system, it was, of course, subject to misuse as well as to abuse – both by the soldiers and by the governing powers. Although the system was put forth in public propaganda as a desirably essential way of supporting the troops, Maj. Gen. N. Webster (the SADF’s Director General at the time) disclosed that one of the motivating factors behind the Ride Safe campaign was the looming threat of oil sanctions against South Africa which would have created difficulties in transporting soldiers.²¹ The Scheme was also met by resistance from the public. This was due to reports of misconduct on the part of National Servicemen – including rapes and attacks on civilians.²²

¹⁷ J. Cock: “Keeping the Home Fires Burning: Militarisation and the Politics of Gender in South Africa”, *Review of African Political Economy*, 1989, pp. 55-56.

¹⁸ G. Cawthra: *Brutal Force: The Apartheid War Machine*, p. 53.

¹⁹ J. Cock: “Manpower and Militarisation: women and the SADF”, in *War and Society: The militarisation of South Africa*, J. Cock & L. Nathan (eds.), p. 52.

²⁰ G. Cawthra: *Brutal Force: The Apartheid War Machine*, p. 53.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

4.3.3 The Southern Cross Fund:

Established in 1968, the Southern Cross Fund aimed to provide support to the South African armed forces and to serve the basic needs of soldiers.²³ Through this organisation white civil society was able to serve as a morale booster for the troops. In effect, the Southern Cross Fund was able to “market militarisation in a way which [encouraged] public identification”.²⁴ The Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time, Pik Botha, described the work of these white women in providing material support for the SADF as “memorable, inspiring and dignified”.²⁵ The Fund had 250 branches throughout South Africa and it had collected over R14 million by 1986.²⁶ This money was mainly used to provide aid and comforts to the troops on the border. These comforts included donations of recreational amenities, like televisions and snooker tables, and sending regular parcels to the soldiers. According to an article in *Paratus* from May 1987, these parcels contained “an elegant brief folder in which one can find writing paper, envelopes, a pen knife, a tin opener, nail clippers, pens, cleaning utensils and many other useful artifacts [*sic*] that the troopie would find a need for during his Army service”.²⁷

²³ A. van Heerden: “Die Suiderkruisfonds en die Mobilisering van die Suid-Afrikaanse blanke burgerlike samelewing tydens die Grensoorlog, 1968-1989”, MA thesis University of Stellenbosch, 2014, p. 4.

²⁴ J. Cock: “Manpower and Militarisation: women and the SADF”, in *War and Society: The militarisation of South Africa*, J. Cock & L. Nathan (eds.), p. 52.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Paratus* (5), May 1987.

4.3.4 Women in Armaments Manufacture.

Not only did women at the time of the Border War contribute significantly to the moral support and comfort of the fighting men, but they were also in one capacity responsible for the militarisation of white South Africa on a more direct level. That is to say that many women were employed in the field of armaments manufacture. Armscor, the state armaments manufacturing complex, employed thousands of women. Here, both black and white women were employed in the manufacturing of weaponry.²⁸ Women were used in these factories as they were perceived as not only being less militant as a labour force than men but also as possessing better dexterity for the intricate work on the assembly lines.²⁹

The need to produce armaments domestically was created by an international arms embargo placed on South Africa. The embargo was initially begun on a voluntary basis in 1963. It was made mandatory through a United Nations (UN) Security Council resolution passed on 4 November 1977.³⁰ Long before the arms embargo was made mandatory, the South African government had initiated a so-called 'preparedness programme' and was self-sufficient. By the late 1980s the nation was 95 per cent independent in terms of military production, according to former Minister of Defence Magnus Malan.³¹ Due to the strength of South Africa's arms industry, the nation was able to successfully circumvent the embargo.³²

²⁸ G. Cawthra: *Brutal Force: The Apartheid War Machine*. p. 65.

²⁹ C.M. Rogerson: "Defending Apartheid: Armscor and the Geography of Military Production in South Africa" *GeoJournal*, (22), (3), 1990, p. 246.

³⁰ J. P. McWilliams: "Armscor: South Africa's Arms Merchant", *ORBIS*. (34), (2), 1990, p. 5.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 6.

4.4 “Captivating visions, wouldn’t you agree”: Women in the South African Police:

While many women were involved in the support of their troops and of the Government in civilian capacities, others became involved at a more direct level. In 1971, the same year that the Civil Defence College (that would later become SAAWCOL) opened its doors to young women for military training, the South African Police (SAP) welcomed its first female police officers.

In the late 1970s the South African Police was in the midst of a manpower crisis. The Force’s numerical strength had declined significantly since the mid-1960s. In the period between 1965 and 1966, the ratio of police officers to inhabitants was 1.79 to 1000. Five years later (1969 – 1970) this ratio had dropped to 1.56 to 1000 inhabitants.³³ Dippenaar gives three chief reasons for this drop in police strength. The first of these reasons was the lack of sufficient remuneration. Many policemen felt that they could get better positions, coupled with more stable working hours, in the private sector. Many businesses lured policemen away from the force with promises of better pay and fixed hours. In return, they were assured of well trained employees. Added to the poor pay was the fact that the SAP was a “high life-risk employer”.³⁴ In 1971 the number of casualties in the SAP per annum was listed at 174, this statistic rose to 200 per annum in 1975.³⁵ Many policemen soon saw that the romance of policing learned from American movies and television did not live up to reality. Finally, many policemen left the force due to their unwillingness to participate in border service – although few gave this as their official reason for leaving the force.³⁶

The decline in numerical strength based on these three factors led to a revision of the stance taken by the police and the Government “never to approve a full-fledged unit of policewomen”.³⁷ There is some speculation that this hesitancy towards allowing women into the SAP was based on the ill-fated appointment of a Mrs Schelpien as a detective in 1920. By the early 1970s women were already employed by the SAP in a number of civilian capacities, for example as typists and as wardresses in charge of women prisoners.³⁸ The initial reaction

³³ M. D. Dippenaar: *South African Police Commemorative Album (1913 – 1988)*, p. 426.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.* p. 426.

³⁶ *Ibid.* p. 428.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ “SA is getting Women Police”, *Cape Times*, 17 February 1971, p. 1.

to the announcement that the SAP would soon be training women as police officers was mixed. Many policemen saw this less as an imposition into their male preserve than as an occupational impossibility. At the time it was thought that “no mere *female* would be able to cope with the continuous pressure, anxiety, stress and strain that go hand in hand with policing – judging by the discharge figures even men could not handle it”.³⁹ Despite these concerns the training of women for the SAP was held, not only as a solution to the country’s manpower scarcity, but the philosophy was also on a par with the use of women in the defence force.⁴⁰

The announcement that women would become a part of the SAP was made on 6 November 1971. The average policeman may have dismissed the announcement as unrealistic, impractical and mere wishful thinking. Perhaps their fears surrounding the success of female police officers were rooted in images of the husband-hunting policewomen of London who “quit once they find their man”, as reported in the *Cape Times* mere months before the announcement. However, from 1972, the training of women for service in the SAP went ahead. On 1 January 1972, Duveen Botha was appointed as the commanding officer of the women police. She was awarded the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. Major A.C.M. Nel was appointed as her adjutant.⁴¹

4.5 Women and the Armed Struggle against Apartheid:

During this period, the slow integration of women into military roles was not only limited to white South African women who were doing their bit to support their troops in Angola – and, by default, the Apartheid regime. Many black women were standing up against the National Party government. The history of the armed struggle itself is rooted in the early 1960s, specifically the Sharpeville incident of 21 March 1960. This event became the rallying point around which the armed struggle arose. The two main parties responsible for the birth of the armed struggle against Apartheid were the African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC). Shortly after they were banned by the government through the hasty imposition of a State of Emergency, both parties set up their armed wings –

³⁹ M. D. Dippenaar: *South African Police Commemorative Album (1913 – 1988)*, p. 426.

⁴⁰ “SA is getting Women Police”, *Cape Times*, 17 February 1971, p. 1.

⁴¹ M. D. Dippenaar: *South African Police Commemorative Album (1913 – 1988)*, p.429.

Umkhonto weSizwe (MK) and Poqo respectively – as the realisation soon dawned that non-violent resistance was no longer effective.

Although Poqo initially played an aggressive role in the armed battle against the Apartheid regime, the focus here will be placed on the female contingent of MK. This is due to the fact that their armed wing was larger and is better documented. A small group of saboteurs from all racial backgrounds made up Umkhonto weSizwe. These individuals were recruited not only from the ANC but also from the South African Communist Party (SACP).⁴² The ANC not only had strong political ties with the SACP but also drew on the Party's experience of running an underground organisation as the SACP had been banned since 1950.

The status of female cadre members in MK is noteworthy. Thanks to the ANC's policy of equality for all, there was no official room in the armed wing for discrimination based on gender or on race. The ANC was dedicated to the "emancipation of women as part of the elimination of all forms of oppression".⁴³ Unlike their white sisters who would later join the SADF through SAAWCOL, female cadres were seen as equals and were present amongst the ranks from the beginning. In the early years of the exiled movement, MK had been overwhelmingly male in make-up. However, the number of female combatants rose sharply in 1976.⁴⁴ By the time that the ANC was unbanned in 1991, women made up 20% of cadres.⁴⁵

As described by the Women's Section, the archetypal MK woman was "an independent personality who can be seen by her detachment from ego; she has good qualities as a person without self-pity and arrogance".⁴⁶ In theory the women of MK were trained as equals alongside their male counterparts. In practice, however, this was not always the case. Not only were they subjected to patriarchal whims. Women members were often relegated to roles more in line with traditional, non-combatant practices. In part, this was due to the nature of the MK's strategy. As a guerrilla organisation, it often had to resort to types of combat far removed from the conventional mainstream as experienced by soldiers in the SADF. Thus,

⁴² J. Cherry: *Umkhonto weSizwe*, p. 17

⁴³ J. Cock: *Women, the Military and Militarisation*, p. 5.

⁴⁴ S. Hassim: *The ANC Women's League*, p. 57.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* p. 57

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* p. 58.

MK women were at times employed to place bombs in public places, such as train stations. Used in undercover, stealth operations, it was thought that a woman would arouse much less suspicion.

4.6 Conclusion:

The Border War was, arguably, one of the greatest contemporary conflicts that South Africa has been a part of. Accordingly it had a significant effect on many aspects of civilian life. In terms of this impact, many women were once again drawn into participating in the traditional roles that have been carved out for them in times of war: as a bastion of support for the troops through organisations such as the Southern Cross Fund and Operation Ride Safe. However, it can now clearly be seen that this was not the only form in which women participated in the growing militarisation of South Africa during this period.

The reasons for this increasing militarisation, as demonstrated above, lie in the fact that South Africa was not only fighting a threat towards the state and the status quo on the Angolan border, but also at home. The anti-apartheid struggle was becoming ever more violent. Even in the armed fight for liberation, black women were being used increasingly as soldiers through, for example, cells of operatives organised by MK. It is here where the snowballing need for white women's militarisation was seen as becoming clear and necessary – firstly, through their inclusion into the South African Police and, later, through the creation of the Civil Defence College in George.

Chapter 5:

The Formation of the South African Army Women's College

As the battle against the perceived danger of the *rooi gevaar* of communism escalated on the Angolan border, the militarisation of white South African society intensified alongside. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, this militarisation had a profound effect on the roles available to women, both as civilian bearers of encouragement for their troops and in allowing their first foray into the South African Police. What is, however, more important is the effect that the opening up of these avenues had on the South African Defence Force.



Fig. B: Lt. Genl C.L. Viljoen

Due to various reasons, rooted both in politics and in a need for personnel, white South African women were first accepted into the South African Defence Force, in an official capacity, in 1971. What this chapter seeks to explore are not only the various reasons for the decision to open the Civil Defence College (later renamed the South African Army Women's College) but also the structure of the institution itself.

From the end of 1968 need for Civil Defence became increasingly discussed. Many, including Lt. Genl C.L Viljoen (see Fig. B above), thought that “the greatest danger in times

of crisis is that panic and confusion can develop”.¹ The October 1968 issue of *Commando* stated that “preparedness for the possibility of any civil emergency, including due to war, is the main focus of South Africa’s civil defence activities”.² It was in terms of this philosophy that it was decided to boost South Africa’s Civil Defence capacity through the training of young women in the various aspects necessary for emergencies.

5.1 The Civil Defence College



Fig. C: The main entrance to the South African Army Women’s College in George.

One solution to the ever increasing need for civil defence ‘manpower’ came from an unlikely and untapped resource: young, white women fresh out of school. As discussed above, the use of women in wartime is often limited to auxiliary roles – they are placed in roles where they can support the fighting men – and the decision to train women for civil defence was no different. This was made clear by the Chief of the South African Defence Force, Genl M.A. Malan. He stated that “[the] increasing threat against the Republic has brought with it the need to incorporate women in the Defence Force. Not only in the Permanent Force, but also in the Commandos, will women be absorbed in fields compatible with the nature of womanhood.”³

¹ C.L. Viljoen: “Boodskap: Lt Genl C.L. Viljoen SSAS, SM – Hoof van die Leër”, *Civil Defence College 1971-1976 Commemorative Album*, p. 9.

² “What is Civil Defence/ Emergency Planning?” *Commando* (10) (19), October 1968, p. 12.

³ M.A. Malan: “Message: Genl M.A. Malan, Chief of the SA Defence Force”, *Civil Defence College 1971-1976 Commemorative Album*, p. 7.

However, in the case of this endeavour, another level of meaning can easily be attached, namely that the recruitment of women would be serving an ideological as well as a practical purpose. The Apartheid government used the inclusion of young women into the SADF, through the Civil Defence College, as a way in which to support their regime by providing a demonstration of white political unity.⁴

Plans for the opening of a civil defence training school for women began to be put forward in the late 1960s. In 1968, for example, it was proposed that a Civil Defence College for young women should be opened in an old nursing college in Dunnottar in the Transvaal.⁵ While this scheme ultimately came to nothing, it did spark public interest. Building a new complex was not considered feasible due to the “country’s current threatened state”, so two existing facilities – one in Potchefstroom and the other in George - were chosen after a nationwide search. Despite the widely held belief that George was chosen as the location for the Civil Defence College due to its connection with the Minister of Defence, P.W. Botha, the negotiations here had simply progressed further and the former Domestic Science High School was selected (see Fig. C).⁶ That said, one still cannot ignore Botha’s strong personal bond with the College (see Fig. D, below). At the opening ceremony for the Civil Defence College, he was quoted as telling those residents of George who had complained about it, that, “This College has come to stay. Those people should stop bothering the staff. If they want to complain they should come to me; I will settle their problems”.⁷

⁴ C. Cohn (ed.): *Women and Wars*, pp. 133-134.

⁵ “Meisies gaan hulle land dien” *Commando* (7) (20), July 1969, p. 33.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ “Impressive display by Defence Girls”, *Cape Times*, 13 April 1971, p. 2

Fig. D: P.W Botha, Minister of Defence responsible for the institution of the College



Once the official premises had been settled on, the Civil Defence College was designated by the Minister of Defence as a military training institution of the South African Army, effective from 1 January 1971. By the end of December 1970, the senior staff, made up of both men and women, had already moved onto the premises in order to ensure that everything was ready for the first intake of students. The staff included South Africa's first full-ranking female officer since the Second World War, Maj. Rosa du Toit. There were seven female instructors – ranking from Lieutenant to Commandant – and seven male instructors – ranking from Captain to Sargent. Commandant Hilda Botha held the highest rank (see Fig. E, below). In total the staff numbered 50, at the time of the College's opening.⁸

At the beginning of February 1971 the first class of the Civil Defence College arrived for military training. The group consisted of 128 young women. They were predominantly from the Transvaal and around Cape Town, although there were a small number who came from South West Africa. The overwhelming majority of the students were from Afrikaans backgrounds; only fourteen were English speaking. The economic backgrounds of the students are, however, more difficult to pin down. What is clear is that it must have been socially diverse. One former student of the Civil Defence College described her class-mates as having been drawn from every walk of life: “some from affluent homes, some from less affluent houses; some of us have been molly-coddled, others have been brought up the hard

⁸ “First SADF Officer for George”, *George Herald*, 27 November 1970, p. 1

way”.⁹ Immediately after their arrival, the students received their uniforms and began to learn the skills of elementary drill.



Fig. E: Colonel Hilda Botha, commanding officer of SAAWCOL

The skills that these young women acquired in their first few weeks at the Civil Defence College were shown off to the public and politicians at the official opening ceremony on 10 April 1971. This “impressive display” was used to demonstrate the transformation from school to highly competent division of the SADF.¹⁰ The event was attended by a number of high-ranking military officers – including the Commandant-General of the Army, Gen. R.C. Heimstra, Lt.-Gen. C.A. Frazer, and Lt.-Gen. W.P. Louw, Lt.-Gen. P.M. Retief – and parliamentarians – including H.H. Smit, L. Le Grange, Vause Raw, G.D.C. Morrison and G.J. Reinecke – and, of course, P.W. Botha himself.¹¹ One proud father was surprised to note a large smile on Botha’s face during the ceremony.¹² After speeches and the demonstration of their new found skills, the first twelve students were presented with the rank of Lance-Corporal.¹³ They were: L. Barry; M.L. Ferreira; Y.R. Griffiths; C.H. Roodie; C.F. Strydom; E. van der Loo; E. van Staden; H.C. Van Zyl; G.M. Wahl; and C.M. Wilson.¹⁴ By

⁹ T. Lynch: “A Challenge”, *Civil Defence College 1971-1976 Commemorative Album*, p. 56.

¹⁰ “Impressive Display by Defence Girls”, *Cape Times*, 13 April 1971, p. 2.

¹¹ “Vrouesoldate se college more geopen”, *Die Burger*, 9 April, 1971 p. 7.

¹² “Grasie was aan die orde van die dag”, *Die Burger*, 13 April 1971, p. 3.

¹³ “Impressive Display by Defence Girls”, *Cape Times*, 13 April 1971, p. 2.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

the end of the year Cpl. Ruda Wahl (see Fig. F, below) – who later found fame as renowned journalist Ruda Landman – was selected as the best student of the class.¹⁵



Fig. F: Ruda Wahl, 1971 Student of the year

This first intake may have been small but it was also elite. The admissions process was very strict, with on average of only 15% of applicants gaining admission to the College.¹⁶ The selection process was structured so that potential students were screened by a selection board after initial application. Those who were then shortlisted were chosen based on personal interviews conducted by this board.¹⁷ In the second year of the College's existence, 389 young women applied and 134 were accepted.¹⁸ Acceptance was limited both by age and by education, amongst other criteria. Recruits had to possess a Matriculation certificate or an equivalent level of education, and had to be younger than 22 years old. Women hoping to enter the college could also never have been married. The reasoning behind the rigorousness of the admissions policy was that only candidates who could best represent the best image of a woman in uniform were selected. Applicants were selected on the basis of academic performance, leadership skills and their prowess at sport and cultural activities demonstrated at school.¹⁹ They also had to be physically fit and fluent in both

¹⁵ “‘Dankie Pa’ – Soldoedies neem afskeid’, *George Herald*, 30 November 1971, p. 1.

¹⁶ J. Cock: “Women, the Military and Militarisation”, paper presented at University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, Seminar no. 7, 1992, p. 3.

¹⁷ “Wanted: Girls to join the Army”, *George Herald*, 6 July 1970, p. 5.

¹⁸ “Soldoedies for ’72 course accepted”, *George Herald*, 17 December 1971, p. 6.

¹⁹ “SA Leervrouekollege”, *Good Morning South Africa*, DVD, SABC, 5 April 1994.

English and Afrikaans – the official languages of the time.²⁰ Notwithstanding the strict standards of acceptance, the course offered by the College was free.²¹

Fig. G: Students of the College doing repairs on an engine



The students were given an allowance of 63c per day and seven days leave per year.²² The mission of the proposed college was to train young, white women – who are, more often than not, referred to as ‘girls’ throughout the college’s history – in civil defence techniques so that they would be prepared, in times of crisis, to serve under orders of their local (male) commanders. In accordance with this, the ten months of training was split into two areas. The first if these two fields formed the core of training in terms of civil defence. This was their basic training, a course that lasted six weeks. This was made up of: first aid, home nursing, environmental health, the driving and servicing of ambulances (see Fig. G, above), elementary firefighting, the operation of communication systems and the organisation of civil defence. The second part of the course was made up of: physical training, sport and leisure; instruction in the use of firearms; self-defence without the use of weapons; education in the social sciences; general office administration, and other aspects that would serve the

²⁰ J. Cock: “Manpower and Militarisation: Women and the SADF”, in *War and Society – The Militarisation of South Africa*, J. Cock & L. Nathan (eds.), p. 61.

²¹ “Local Careers for Girls”, *George Herald*, 10 November 1970, p. 4.

²² “Wanted: Girls to join the Army”, *George Herald*, 6 July 1971, p. 5.

“ripening of the students ... [and] the cultivation of leaders”.²³ It was in the second part of the course where the young women could choose to specialise in specific areas of civil defence.

This training was intended to “equip young ladies intellectually, spiritually and physically to cultivate preparedness against any threats to their country and, in particular, to develop their leadership potential”.²⁴ This intention was repeated by Col. Hilda Botha in an article looking back on the first six years of the institution’s existence. There, she stated that if asked what the Civil Defence College had achieved over the years, her response would be that, after the year of training the students were “undoubtedly prepared to take up leadership, to be involved with organisations and people to deliver service”.²⁵

In terms of this aim, there were three chief components. Firstly, it was necessary for the young women to “give guidance during emergencies in calming-down fellow citizens so that they may act in a responsible manner”.²⁶ Secondly, they had to be able to “plan and organise to meet the necessities of life in times of crisis”.²⁷ The final aim of the training was for the *soldoedies* to “render certain emergency services, for which manpower is not available”.²⁸

The women of the Civil Defence College were always seen as being of the military but they were not soldiers. In fact, Col. du Plessis – the military head of the College (see Fig. H, below) – clearly stated that their goal at the College was not to train women as soldiers. It was felt that this was not only against the constitution but also against good Christian morals.²⁹ The role of these women was as support; a role in keeping with the traditional place of women in wartime. Du Plessis thought that “women inside or outside of the military must remain as the driving force for men. Therefore, she can stand in the middle of the battle but, at the same time, play an auxiliary role”.³⁰

²³ “Meisies gaan hulle land dien”, *Paratus* (7) (20), July 1969, p. 33.

²⁴ C.L. Viljoen: “Boodskap: Lt Genl C.L. Viljoen SSAS, SM – Hoof van die Leër”, *Civil Defence College 1971-1976 Commemorative Album*, p. 9.

²⁵ H. Botha: “’n Terugblik”, *Civil Defence College 1971-1976 Commemorative Album*, p. 17.

²⁶ C.L. Viljoen: “Boodskap: Lt Genl C.L. Viljoen SSAS, SM – Hoof van die Leër”, *Civil Defence College 1971-1976 Commemorative Album*, p. 9.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ “Kol. du Plessis: Ons lei nie vroue as soldaate op nie”, *George Herald*, 21 March 1971, p. 5.

³⁰ *Ibid.*



Fig. H: Col. M.J. du Plessis, military head of the Civil Defence College

In accordance with these aims, P.W. Botha – who was then Minister of Defence – stated in his message for the Civil Defence College 1971-1976 Commemorative album that: “[the] high standards set by the staff and students of the Civil Defence College have re-established the place of women in the Defence Force as a vital element to augment manpower”.³¹

³¹ P.W. Botha: “Boodskap: Sy Edele P.W. Botha, Minister van Verdediging”, *Civil Defence College 1971-1976 Commemorative Album*, p. 5.

5.2 The Advent of Total Strategy

The 1970s in South Africa, at a political level, was characterised by a feeling of paranoia regarding the supposed Total Onslaught wrought against the nation from all sides.³² The chief fear was for the fall of South Africa – and the West – due to the spectre of communism. To counteract this threat, John Voster – the President at the time – and P.W. Botha – his Minister of defence – began to toy with a new scheme in the mid-1970s. Voster was convinced that if the communist menace was not stopped in its tracks “the Cubans and Russians would attempt to secure a whole row of Marxist states from Angola to Dar-es-Salaam”.³³ P.W. Botha suspected the Soviet Union of engaging in a scheme to bring South Africa and all its mineral riches under their control by using African states as proxy.³⁴ It was due to this fear of communism and its potential influence on South Africa that Botha, in his capacity as Minister of defence, initiated a plan for a total strategy against this threat.

However, communism was not the only threat included in the Total Onslaught. The 1973 White Paper on Defence lists these dangers to national security as including: “leftist activists, exaggerated humanism, permissiveness, materialism and related ideologies ... black racism, exaggerated individual freedom, one-man-one-vote ... boycotts, isolation, demonstrations ... undermining activities and limited violence”.³⁵

In response to this fear of the Total Onslaught, from the mid-1970s the policy of a Total Strategy was endorsed. This policy sought to “codify, justify and articulate the entire range of government policy”.³⁶ It was calculated that the danger of communism towards the Apartheid government could be seen as so threatening that military strategy on its own would no longer be sufficient to defend the nation. And so, the official government ideology enlarged its conception of national security.

³² H. Campbell: “Dismantling the Apartheid War Machine”, *Third World Quarterly* (9) (2), April 1987, p. 467

³³ H. Giliomee: *The Last Afrikaner Leaders*, p. 19.

³⁴ *Ibid.* p. 145.

³⁵ South African Government, *White Paper on Defence and Arms Production*, 1973, p. 1.

³⁶ A. Johnston: “Weak States and Nation Building”, *Review of International Studies* (17) (2), p. 151.

This new definition of security gave “justification for the combination of reform, authoritarianism and the militarization of society, which characterized the government's response to the continuing crisis”.³⁷ This defence strategy could only be “meaningful and valid” if proper account was taken of other spheres; these included, “economy, ideology, technology, and even social matters”.³⁸ This meant that military personnel were now tasked with policy making. They were present at all levels but especially dominant within the state security council.³⁹ According to the 1977 White Paper on Defence, it was strongly felt, by those in power, that “the South African Defence Force is one of the most important guarantees for the security of all the population groups in our country. The stability of the RSA with its plural population must be assured”.⁴⁰

5.3 The South African Army Women’s College

This heightened emphasis on the importance of the military in the security and stability of South Africa had great repercussions for the fledgling training college for women. In 1977 the structure of the Civil Defence College was changed. What this change meant was that the role of women in the SADF was more important now than ever. The young women of the College were no longer only needed as civil relief - if the worst come to the worst - but as potentially active members in the defence of South Africa against the onslaught of the *rooi gevaar*.

The Civil Defence College now became the South African Army Women’s College. It formed a key part of the newly minted South African Army Women’s Corps. In this new incarnation, the structure and training at the institution changed significantly. The institution had grown, in the words of Brig. H.D. Viljoen, “from a Civil Defence College for young, after-school volunteers to a fully-fledged military training college for women”.⁴¹ By the time that this structural change came about, 1 016 students had already passed through the doors of the Civil Defence College.⁴²

³⁷ A. Johnston: “Weak States and Nation Building”, *Review of International Studies* (17) (2), p. 151

³⁸ 1975 *White Paper on Defence*, quoted in G. Cawthra: *Brutal Force: The Apartheid War Machine*, p. 27.

³⁹ A. Johnston: “Weak States and Nation Building”, *Review of International Studies* (17) (2), p. 152.

⁴⁰ South African Government, *White Paper White Paper on Defence*, 1977, p. 1.

⁴¹ H.D. Viljoen: “Boodskap: Brig H.D. Vijoen”, *Civil Defence College 1971-1976 Commemorative Album*, p. 11.

⁴² H. Botha: “’n Terugblik”, *Civil Defence College 1971-1976 Commemorative Album*, p. 15.

One of the greatest changes was in the size of the annual intake. In 1977, SAAWCOL's first group of new students numbered over 500 – a significant increase from the 128 that had made up the first class of the Civil Defence College. There were now also two annual intakes of new students, as opposed to only one as it had been under the previous system. Another significant change occurred in 1982. After this year, those students who wished to continue onto a career in the Permanent Force were sent to Pretoria for further training after graduation.



Fig. I: A parade at the South African Army Women's College, George

One thing that changed little from then until the Civil Defence College became SAAWCOL were the attitudes – both of civilians and of other members of the SADF – towards the women. Although SAAWCOL was now a significant element of the Defence Force, with graduates of the college serving at many headquarters and units, the women of the college were still looked down upon. There were two key examples of this lukewarm

reception: the nomenclature used to refer to the women of the College, and views of their worth as ‘real’ soldiers.

A popular nickname for young women in the South African military, but especially those of SAAWCOL, was “soldoedies”. This term was originally coined by well-known Afrikaans comedic writer and broadcaster Fanus Rautenbach on his breakfast radio program *Flink uit die vere*. On this show, which ran for almost twenty years, he saw it as his duty to keep up the morale of troops fighting on the border; thus he told many humorous tales relating to the lives of the soldiers. One such story tells of a male and female soldier meeting up for the weekend: “Die soldaat is die naweek af en gaan kuier vir sy soldoedie. Toe begin hulle soldeer”.⁴³ The word *soldoedie* is a diminutive and female form of *soldaat* (soldier). The word was created by the combining of *soldaat* (soldier) and *doedie* – meaning girl or girlfriend. Despite the popularity of the term *soldoedie* amongst the general populace, it was, unsurprisingly, not as well received by the so-called *soldoedies* themselves.⁴⁴

The exact origins of the English equivalent, “Botha’s Babies” are not entirely as clear. The term is probably a reference to the Minister of Defence who initiated the College, P.W. Botha, with whom the college had a very close bond. It is also possible that this was a reference to Hilda Botha – a widowed former teacher and mother of four sons – who was the first Commandant of the College.

The second judgement made against the worth of the women of the College was due to doubts over their ability as soldiers. Despite their apparent status as having equal status and career opportunities with their male counterparts, the women of SAAWCOL were still stringently barred from combat.⁴⁵ One clear way in which this was manifested was in the debate about the extension of conscription, especially to women. As the dual struggles of the time – the war on the Angolan border and the rising tensions against Apartheid at home – grew, so did the need for combatant men. By the end of the 1970s, women were contributing a significant non-combatant role in the army. They did duty at virtually every military institution. Without these women, the SADF would have had more significant manpower problems. However, in Apartheid South Africa, manpower was defined by the SADF in terms

⁴³ L. Schuster: “Fanus het gelewe om ander te vermaak”, *Volksblad*, 2 February 2011.

⁴⁴ M. Burden: Interviewed by Esté Kotzé, Stellenbosch, Western Cape, 30 October 2013.

⁴⁵ Maj. A de la Rey (ed.): *Suid-Afrikaanse Weermag Oorsig/South African Defence Force Review*, p. 77.

of both race and gender. While coloured and Indian men were expected to undergo cadet training and could voluntarily join the SADF, they were excluded from conscription.⁴⁶ The same exclusion held true for women.

However, there was still a possibility that women could have been conscripted, in a non-combatant capacity – for example as nurses.⁴⁷ The idea of conscripting young women into auxiliary fields like nursing was not only in keeping with Apartheid mores, but was also supported by pro-government sections of the general civilian populace.⁴⁸ The need to keep women out of combat roles, and outside the net of conscription, was necessary to maintain the ideological separation of women and the battlefield.⁴⁹ This, once again, reflected the importance for the SADF of maintaining what it considered to be fundamentally separate gender roles. The conscription of women was seen to hold the possibility of having a negative impact on morale. Thus, in the words of one female officer, “it would almost be acknowledging defeat to have to resort to using women”.⁵⁰

One of the greatest developments that the College saw was in the early 1990s, near the end of the institution’s time as a military facility. With the loosening of Apartheid strictures and the slow move towards democracy, the College began to open its doors to non-white students. But this move towards integration and equality within the College was short lived. In 1998, due to new governmental policies surrounding the Defence Force, SAAWCOL closed its doors.

⁴⁶ G. Cawthra: *Brutal Force: The Apartheid War Machine*, p. 67.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* p. 66.

⁴⁸ L. Loubser: “Menings van ons lesers: Diensplig vir meisies”, *Die Burger*, 9 December 1970, p. 18.

⁴⁹ J. Cock: “Keeping the Home Fires Burning: Militarisation and the Politics of Gender in South Africa”, *Review of African Political Economy*, 1989, p. 53.

⁵⁰ Quoted in J. Cock: “Women, the Military and Militarisation”, paper presented at University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, Seminar no. 7, 1992, p. 3.

5.4 The Closing of SAAWCOL

During the College's almost 30 years as a military training facility, over 7500 young white South African women passed through its doors.⁵¹ However, this came to an end in 1998. After the advent of the new democratic South Africa in 1994, the separatist ethos of the College was no longer in keeping with the country's new integrationist policies of equality and it was closed in 1998.

The reasons behind the closing of SAAWCOL were rooted in the changes that came about in the South African military after the democratic elections of 1994. The old SADF became the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) and provisions had to be made to include those who had previously been excluded. The SANDF was to provide "equal opportunities and affirmative action".⁵² What this meant for women in the military was that they would now, on paper, have equal standing with their male counterparts. Before the changes enacted by the 1996 White Paper on Defence, women were not afforded the same opportunities for promotion and they were kept apart through the gendered division of labour. With these new policies promising equal opportunities for all who entered the Defence Force, a separate training facility only for women was no longer necessary. The military training of female soldiers would now take place at the already established Military Gymnasium in Heidelberg, Gauteng.⁵³ The South African Army Women's College closed its doors in 1998.⁵⁴

The closure of the College was also, in part, motivated by finances. Under the new, post-Apartheid administration, keeping open a College solely for the military training of women was labelled as a gross burden on both the taxpayer and the state.⁵⁵

Despite the changes brought about by democracy and the assurances of equality contained in the new SANDF, the place and acceptance of women into the military still remains a contested issue. There are those who do not feel it suitable for women to be

⁵¹ Quoted in J. Cock: "Women, the Military and Militarisation", paper presented at University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, Seminar no. 7, 1992, p. 3.

⁵² South African Government, *SANDF White Paper on Defence*, 1996, pp. 27-28.

⁵³ A. de Beer: "Einde van 'n era", *George Herald*, p. 10 December 1998.

⁵⁴ "Soldoedies se drill dreun weer", *George Herald*, 8 March 2012, p. 2.

⁵⁵ I. Bigalke: "Leërvrouekollege op George sluit einde vanjaar sydeure", *Die Burger*, 23 December 1998.

included into the military as equal members. These beliefs are often couched in traditional beliefs of the place of women as those who are to be protected in times of conflict. One example of this thinking comes from Jan Breytenbach, who has stated that he opposes “the present politically correct stance that women, the fountains of new life, should become involved in the killing business which war is about”.⁵⁶ Despite these persistent beliefs that oppose the inclusion of women into the military, by 1998 almost 20% of the South African Department of Defence was comprised of women, as were 13% of the uniformed members of the SANDF.⁵⁷

As for the former college, the building itself is still in use. Today it is known as the P.W. Botha College. It is now a dual-medium and co-educational technical secondary school.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ J. Breytenbach: *Eagle Strike!*, p. 1.

⁵⁷ A.D. van Breda: “Status of Women in the DOD: A Review of Women in the South Africa Department of Defence”, prepared for Maj Gen N.E. Memela-Motumi (Chief Director Transformation Management SANDF), p. 5.

⁵⁸ <http://www.pwbothakollege.co.za/>

5.5 Conclusion:

It is, therefore, clear from the preceding discussion that the ever increasing need for manpower on the border had a significant impact on the acceptance of women into the masculine environment of the SADF. Without this need, and the historical precedent set by South African women's participation in previous wars, the formation of a military college dedicated to the training of young white women may not have taken place.

What must, however, be kept in mind, is that despite the place of these young women as uniformed participants in the army they were still kept separate from the true nature of the military – combat. The women of the College, in both of its incarnations, were never seen or used as true soldiers despite their valuable contribution to civil defence. Thus, it can be said that the recognition of women's worth as soldiers was scarcely impacted by their status as members of the SADF – they were *in* the military, but not *of* the military.

One final conclusion that can be drawn from the examination of the institutional history of the College is that, throughout its almost thirty year existence, there was very little change. While it is true that the College was a significant shift when it was reborn as the South African Army Women's College, this had an arguably insignificant effect on how women's roles in the military were viewed. The main changes were structural or organisational. What are, however, important to examine are the attitudes of both the so-called *soldoedies* themselves and, to a lesser degree, the public. For the *soldoedies* were not merely acted upon. They were agents themselves.

Chapter 6:

The Lived Experience of the Women of SAAWCOL

Many of the reasons for the Civil Defence College taking the shape that it did as a military institution were rooted in the Apartheid state's need to ground women's training within traditional norms of femininity. This can clearly be seen when looking at the history of the formation and running of the South African Army Women's College (in both of its incarnations). This gives great insight into the political and military importance of women as a resource in times of crisis.

However, what is no less important when analysing the role of the College as the first step towards the uniformed integration of women into the South African military is the lived experience of those who passed through the system. By exploring the stories of their time at the College one can gain a better understanding of what it meant to be a woman in a female 'space' within a typically male institution. This is what the following chapter aims to do. By examining several key areas, it seeks to shed interesting light on what life was like for the women of the College. These areas are as follows: their motivations for attending SAAWCOL; the daily life at the College; the "*soldoedies*" themselves; and, finally, how their time at the College affected their life choices after graduation.

6.1 Motivation:

In general, the motivations behind one's entering into the military are complicated and multi-faceted. These can include patriotism, a desire to protect one's nation, the cultural connection between military service and citizenship or manhood, work opportunity, as well as a variety of other reasons. This complexity of driving forces was also very present in the decisions of the young women who chose to enter SAAWCOL.

The difficulty of choosing to join the College was compounded by the fact that it was, after all, a military institution; this was not any tertiary institute. This is evident in the motivations of some of the women who attended the College. Some of these women joined out of a sense of patriotic duty to their nation. They saw it as their responsibility to join in the fight against South Africa's enemies and to help protect their people. Louise van Rensburg,

who attended the Civil Defence College in 1974, said that she joined because: “The boys had conscription”.¹ It is this reference to the thousands of young men who were enlisted to fight the imagined threat of Communism on the Angolan border that makes it clear that Van Rensburg joined out of a sense of solidarity with national duty. This was echoed, and also extended, by Christa Taljaardt – the Civil Defence College’s Student of the Year for 1972. She describes her motivation for going to the College as follows: “Put youth and vitality together – what a combination for adventure...and service!”²

Van Rensburg’s attitude does not, however, reflect the majority of the women’s reasons behind choosing the College. One common motivation for joining the College was rooted in the lack of guidance counselling available to matriculants in the 1970s. What this meant for many young women – even those who were top students, as the *soldoedies* were – had no real awareness of what to do after completing school. This lack of guidance led many young women – and the general public – to see the College as a ‘finishing school’ for girls. The college was perceived as little more than an opportunity to learn life skills such as: self-discipline, independence and self-reliance. For some, thanks to these skills, it was also a possible stepping stone to future career prospects.

Yet others followed in the footsteps of older siblings. When elder sisters returned from the college, their younger siblings were regaled with stories of the adventures of military life. It was this sense of “vet pret” (great fun) that led both Margarite Scheepers and René Zietsmann to choose George after school. Exposure to the College and its ways was also an important motivating factor for Matilda Burden who attended the Civil Defence College in 1973. She was raised in George and exposed to the College through her father, who presented a course there.³

It must also be noted that, whatever their reasons for choosing to attend the College, these young women were not selected by chance. They represented the top students and athletes that the country had to offer, thanks to the strict application process. Whether the *soldoedies* joined SAAWCOL out of a sense of national duty or for adventure, the fact

¹ L. van Rensburg, interviewed conducted telephonically by Esté Kotzé, 15 October 2012.

² C. Taljaardt: “Onthou en doen ons nog?” *Civil Defence College 1971-1976 Commemorative Album*, p. 37.

³ M. Burden: Interviewed by Esté Kotzé, Stellenbosch, Western Cape, 30 October 2013.

remains that the College was never a single thing: not simply a stop-gap for the lost, but as much a venue for the ambitious.

6.2 Daily Life:

No matter what led these young women to attend the College, one constant can be found across the board: the rigours of day to day life at a military institution. For these women, the discipline of training and the rules and regulations that guide life in the military would have been a new experience. Thus, it is crucial to examine what the routine at the College was.

As outlined in the previous chapter, the students at George had a variety of courses to complete. In the first six weeks – the period of basic training – the women went through much the same preparation as their male counterparts. However, some adaptations were made for the women. Not only were the women trained at a separate facility and for different eventual military roles but the women’s basic training was, in some respects, not as rigorous as that of male soldiers. This slight relaxation of standards was rooted in the perceptions of the differences in physicality between the sexes and is neatly outlined in the example of fitness exercises. Male troops had to participate in full uniform. This included their boots, whereas it was permissible for women at the College to wear running shoes instead.⁴ In spite of these small differences, the military head of the College, Col. du Plessis was at pains to make it clear that, “just because it’s girls in the Army doesn’t mean there will be any exceptions”.⁵

The practical skills instilled in these young women stayed with them for life, and many were thankful for the opportunity to develop talents that they might otherwise not have had. One clear example of this gratitude was demonstrated by Ruda Landman – then known by her maiden name, Wahl. In an article penned for the Civil Defence College 1971-1976 Commemorative Album, she recounts her experiences as a part of the first graduating class of the Civil Defence College. She describes a number of practical things that she learned at the College, which are worth quoting in full:

⁴ A. Grobler, interview conducted telephonically by Esté Kotzé, 15 October 2012.

⁵ “‘Petticoat Recruits’ take to training with gusto”, *Cape Times*, 20 February 1971, p. 7.

“I am no longer afraid of a pistol or a gun – if it would be needed in a time of crisis. I learned to type, which has helped me a lot. I learned to drive – but that I could, of course, have learned somewhere else, however, maybe not so thoroughly and enjoyably as in the hours in the kombi with Sargent-Major Müller. (I will never forget the day that I drove into the ambulance: ‘Ape! Reverse and try again.’ But in such good spirits that the shock evaporated”.⁶

The strength of these women in terms of their endurance of the training is notable, and even surprised two of the instructors. The first noted that the girls showed no fear. He had assumed that it would be difficult to train these young women, but soon realised that “our country’s girls just look so soft. They learn quickly and they learn well”.⁷ The self-defence instructor was similarly taken aback after a display by the students at the opening ceremony. He protested that they could have worked more softly with him as it was, after all, only a display.⁸

One aspect of military life in which no exception was made was that of discipline. This becomes clear when one looks at the great emphasis placed on neatness and inspections. It was the norm to take at least two hours to prepare for early morning inspection. Included in this process was to ensure that floors and boots were well polished and that uniforms were correctly folded: the size of an A4 sheet of paper with sharp corners.⁹

Another way in which the division between the George ladies’ femininity and their masculine military training was reinforced during training was through the inclusion of so-called ‘formative subjects’ in the syllabus. This part of the course included:

“etiquette, deportment, correct diet, home economy and budgeting, interior decorating, garden layout, correct dress for all occasions, the correct use of cosmetics, hygiene, child psychology, relations between

⁶ R. Wahl: “Student van die Jaar 1971”, *Civil Defence College 1971-1976 Commemorative Album*, p. 27.

⁷ “Grasie was aan die orde van die dag”, *Die Burger*, 13 April 1971, p. 3.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ “SA Leervrouekollege”, *Good Morning South Africa*, DVD, SABC, 5 April 1994.

the sexes, duties of secretaries and committee members, the duties of a chairman and practically every aspect of good social behaviour”.¹⁰

While it is true that this aspect of the course shared many similarities with the training of the officer class of the military, here there was an overwhelming emphasis on aspects that were traditionally associated with good feminine behaviour.

The combination of rigorous discipline and time removed from civilian society gave many of the young women of the College time to decide on future career paths. Added to this was the access given to the students to guest speakers. Gerda Whitehorn, for example, decided on a career in journalism after the College was visited by a local journalist during a series of talks on careers.¹¹ The need to prepare for the future was also partly instilled in the formative aspects of the course. This part of their training meant that, upon graduation, the women “... would do well as P.R. officers or receptionists for doctors, dentists or large hotels”.¹² Cmdt. Botha herself said: “When the girls leave here they will be more qualified to take up the role of house-wives, teachers, and even social workers, as well as being soldiers”.¹³ It is important to note that, despite the women’s training in a masculine environment, their futures were always seen as being grounded in traditionally feminine fields. And it was not only the young women’s possible career prospects that the College would prepare them for. M.J. du Plessis, in a message regarding the first six years of the Civil Defence College’s presence in George, stated that: “The delivered product is still sought-after amongst employers, universities, other educational centres and men who are looking for “jewels” as life partners”.¹⁴ In other words, women were being moulded as assets for a wide market.

Other ways in which this aspect of the college was highlighted were through cultural activities. Handiwork was a key part of the curriculum; this included crochet and knitting.¹⁵ These skills were shown off to members of the George branch of NOW when they visited the Civil Defence College in November of 1971. The girls used this opportunity to demonstrate

¹⁰ “Local Careers for Girls”, *George Herald*, 10 November 1970, p. 4.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ “‘Petticoat Recruits’ take to training with gusto”, *Cape Times*, 20 February 1971, p. 7

¹⁴ M.J. du Plessis: “Boodskap: M.J. Du Plessis, SM”, *Civil Defence College 1971-1976 Commemorative Album*, p. 25.

¹⁵ R. Zietsmann, interview conducted via e-mail with Esté Kotzé, 17 October 2012.

their skills in “setting the tables attractively, the protocol of seating arrangements and flower arranging”.¹⁶ Students were also expected to participate in concerts and in developing talents.¹⁷ For example Burden states that during her time at George, the students put together a variety show for the troops at the Border and were very much in demand to perform, until patrol restrictions curtailed their ability to travel.¹⁸ Equally important was the role of religion. Attendance of the Sunday morning services was compulsory, and there was also an optional informal service after supper.¹⁹

6.3 SAAWCOL as finishing school:

The dichotomy between the treatment of potential male and female soldiers in the SADF can be seen not only in the differences in training standards. One of the supreme qualities of the George College was the great emphasis that was placed on femininity. The reasons for this stress on maintaining femininity can be traced back to the very traditional and patriarchal society of the time. The acceptance of women (albeit in a limited capacity) into a traditionally male arena was difficult enough. In order to counteract opposition, the women of SAAWCOL had to be seen first of all as women, never as soldiers.

This belief was strongly held by Col Hilda Botha. She ran the college for many years and saw the maintenance of fine femininity as being a given. It was held that a woman was still expected to be a woman; she could not become “rough” just because she was in the military.²⁰ This emphasis on femininity was not only a key characteristic of the military need to preserve the traditional roles of men and women, but also an aspect of the College’s role as a ‘finishing school’ for young women. It was a place where young women – aside from the practical skills instilled by their military training – could develop self-confidence and become adult and independent.²¹

¹⁶ “Teaching ‘soldiers’ how to dress”, *George Herald*, 2 November 1971, p. 5.

¹⁷ L. van Rensburg, interview conducted telephonically by Esté Kotzé, 15 October 2012.

¹⁸ M. Burden: Interviewed by Esté Kotzé, Stellenbosch, Western Cape, 30 October 2013.

¹⁹ “SA Leervrouekollege”, *Good Morning South Africa*, DVD, SABC, 5 April 1994.

²⁰ A. Grobler, interview conducted telephonically by Esté Kotzé, 15 October 2012.

²¹ H. Botha: “’n Terugblik”, *Civil Defence College 1971-1976 Commemorative Album*, p. 17.

The need to preserve femininity was not simply held as a tenet of the College, but was reflected in various manifestations of life at this institution. A brief mention of this has already been made above, but the reality of these young women's segregation from masculine elements of the military goes much deeper. The dress uniforms, for example, were well-cut and the women wearing them were expected to maintain certain standards. In addition to high standards of dress, make-up was to be worn (see Fig. J below); nails and hair had to be well groomed. In several newspaper articles from the time of the College's opening, much emphasis was placed on the attractiveness of the women's uniforms. The formal uniform consisted of a "green two-piece with old-gold blouse, green hat, long nylon tights and brown court shoes, and brown raincoat with or without a hood".²² The uniform was designed by a pilot committee that was overseen by P.W. Botha. Although one commentator described the uniform as "unflattering and not feminine enough", Col. A.W. Roberts – the acting commander of the Western Province Command – said that "the girls' dresses are very pretty, but just a little bit short".²³



Fig. J: A *soldoedie* in uniform refreshing her make-up

It was not only physical appearance that was used to demonstrate the women's distinction from male soldiers. The women of SAAWCOL were expected to behave in a certain way when in public. As with any soldier of officer class – as these women were – there were certain standards of behaviour that had to be upheld. However, for the women of the College this was not simply correct military conduct but also a way of demonstrating

²² *Paratus* (11) (20), November 1969, p. 41.

²³ *Die Burger*, 4 February 1971, p. 3.

correct femininity. One of the clearest demonstrations of this was contained in one of the first warnings issued by Col Botha to new volunteers. She warned the girls never to be seen eating soft-serve ice-cream cones whilst in uniform – naturally this was also one of the first rules to be broken.²⁴ This dictate re-enforced the image of SAAWCOL as a ‘finishing school’, in which women were to learn to avoid slovenly habits.

The image of the George College as a finishing school for young women was no accident. It was referred to as such, and often. For example, in an article about the College’s opening, one reporter clearly stated that, “This is not a training centre for woman soldiers... It is more like a finishing school for young women, equipping them for community leadership, no matter what careers they wish to follow in the future”.²⁵ This aspect was again demonstrated by the fact that, although the women of the College were given instruction in how to use firearms, they were not seriously expected to use them; despite their military training, they were still being kept very much apart from the confrontational sphere of their male counterparts. As Col. M.J. du Plessis, the military head of the College, stated, “We want to train these girls so that they will retain their fine femininity”.²⁶ In accordance with this, in the opening year, typing was actually seen as a more integral part of the course than weaponry.²⁷ In fact, one newspaper article from the *George Herald* focused mainly on the non-military aspects of the training. It stated that the students would be “taught typing up to a general standard of 45 words per minute, switchboard and telex operation, [and] voice procedure for radio...”²⁸

One journalist reporting on the opening event noted that the students were never seen with guns, but that other “symptoms” of the military could be seen: efficiency, calmness and quick action.²⁹ In many descriptions of the women of the college, the primary emphasis was placed on their feminine characteristics – such as their prowess as home-makers or their beauty – before their military proficiency was mentioned. This was especially true for the women who joined the Permanent Force of the SADF after graduating from the College. The feminine appearance and traditionally feminine attributes and hobbies of these few women

²⁴ L. van Rensburg, interviewed conducted telephonically by Esté Kotzé, 15 October 2012.

²⁵ “Local Careers for Girls”, *George Herald*, 10 November 1970, p. 4.

²⁶ “Grasie van aan die orde van die dag”, *Die Burger*, 13 April 1971, p. 3.

²⁷ “Petticoat Recruits’ take to training with gusto”, *Cape Times*, 20 February 1971, p. 7.

²⁸ “Local Careers for Girls”, *George Herald*, 10 November 1970, p. 4.

²⁹ “Grasie vas aan die orde van die dag”, *Die Burger*, 13 April 1971, p. 3.

were usually emphasised. ‘Her’ beauty or her domestic skills were often mentioned long before any mention of her military capabilities. For example, the first word used to describe one female Sergeant-Major in a 1987 issue of SADF magazine *Paratus* was “attractive”. This description then went on to say that she was “a veritable superwoman ... in an apron she is a master of bobotie” before her military role was mentioned.³⁰

This accentuation of femininity even went as far as the unit flash, which showed the *seruria florida* – a flower more commonly known as the ‘blushing bride’ or *bergrosie* in Afrikaans – a light pink cousin of the protea.³¹ As shown above, the emblem used was a highly stylised drawing of the protea. Figure A shows the version of the emblem used for the greater part of the College’s history. It was specifically designed to look soft and delicate.³² This flower was chosen as it was seen to represent the “tenderness, fragility, intactness and budding femininity of the young woman”.³³ This emblem was originally designed by Maj. Goe van Rhyn (see Fig. K).³⁴



Fig. K: SAAWCOL
shoulder flash; cloth
with wire
embroidery

³⁰ Quoted in J. Cock: “Manpower and Militarisation: Women and the SADF” in . *War and Society – The Militarisation of South Africa*, J. Cock & L. Nathan (eds.), p. 52.

³¹ B. Marks: *Our South African Army Today*, p. 83.

³² “Our emblem/ Ons embleem”, *Civil Defence College 1971-1976 Commemorative Album*, p. 21.

³³ *Ibid.* p. 21.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

6.4 “Just the right place of any girl that wants to serve her nation”: Public Opinion and Private Memories of SAAWCOL:

Despite the apartheid state’s attempts to display the women of the College as the apex of femininity, stereotypes regarding women in the military abounded. The most common of these placed military women into one of two categories; they were either *losmeisies* or lesbians. Both of these are stereotypes that continue to imply that there must be something “wrong” with a woman’s sexuality in order for her to want to participate in this overwhelmingly male arena. This pigeon-holed view of military women was, and still is, common. However, this was not the only way in which the women of George were seen by the public.

The perceptions of the college held by the public differed greatly. Some saw the women of the college as being “baie oulik” (very cute) for volunteering to help in the defence of South Africa.³⁵ More seriously, another mother, who attended the College’s opening ceremony on 10 April 1971, was eager to know if her daughter could join in 1974, and observed that the College was “just the right place for any girl that wants to serve her nation”.³⁶ Others were more neutral or more reserved in their opinions. These included the inhabitants of George who, according to René Zietsmann, merely tolerated the presence of the *soldoedies*.³⁷ This ambivalence towards the women of the College was acknowledged by Mr F.W. Gericke, who was then the mayor of George. He describes there as having been a degree of scepticism when the College was opened. He does, however, make it evident that this uncertainty evaporated and was quickly replaced with a feeling of civic appreciation and pride in an institution that brought nothing but credit to his town.³⁸

Some members of the public thought that the young women were crazy for deciding to voluntarily join the army. One *soldoedie* recounts the immediate reaction of her friends and family as, “Going to the Army? You must be crazy. You’re not in Israel you know”.³⁹

³⁵ M. Scheepers, interviewed telephonically by Esté Kotzé, 15 October 2012.

³⁶ “Grasie vas aan die orde van die dag”, *Die Burger*, 13 April 1971, p. 3.

³⁷ R. Zietsmann, interview conducted via e-mail with Esté Kotzé, 17 October 2012.

³⁸ F.W. Gerike: “Boodskap: Mnr. F.W. gerike, Burgemeester: George”, *Civil Defence College 1971-1976 Commemorative Album*, p. 13.

³⁹ B. Mitchell: “Training at the Civil Defence College”, *Civil Defence College 1971-1976 Commemorative Album*. p. 33.

The former *soldoedies* themselves appear generally look back fondly on their time at the South African Army Women's College, despite the challenges that they faced as women in the overwhelmingly male environment of the military and the rigid views that they had to encounter. One of the principal reasons for these fond memories is rooted in the strong bonds of friendship that these women formed. Fierce connections are often formed in times of difficulty and here it was no different; it was a time of adapting to being away from home and of being thrown into a new and demanding environment.

While the military aspects of life in George have left an indelible mark on the memories of the women who attended the College, this is in some respects overshadowed by memories of friendship. This can clearly be seen in the SAAWCOL Journal for November 1982. This small magazine contains letters, poems and cartoons created by the leaving class as a way of saying 'goodbye' to the College. The editorial contains a strong sense of loss at leaving and having to bid "farewell to arms and amigos, and [say] 'goodbye' to friendships forged and fostered at SAAWCOL".⁴⁰

This sentiment is shared by Margerite Scheepers. She observes that the friendships she formed at SAAWCOL were vital for staying positive through the difficulties of adapting to army life.⁴¹ At the same time, though, it should also be noted that despite her fond memories of SAAWCOL, Scheepers concludes that she would not want to do it again if she had the choice.⁴² Her emphatic "not again!" echoes the attitude of a young male conscript of the same era. He described his military service as "the best two years of my life I never want to do again".⁴³ Still, the personal legacy left remains complex. For Scheepers does add that if her daughter had the opportunity to attend this institution today, she would encourage it: ultimately, she sees the College as having been a good "training school" for life.⁴⁴

It is clear that the impact of the institution on their lives lasted long after graduation. For the handful who remained in the military, the College was a stepping stone on the path to a career. However, it was not only those who chose to join the Permanent Force who took away something formative from their time at George. Even those who went on in civilian

⁴⁰ SAAWCOL Journal 1982

⁴¹ M. Scheepers, interviewed telephonically by Esté Kotzé, 15 October 2012.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ C. Blake: *From Soldier to Civvy*, p. 41.

⁴⁴ M. Scheepers, interviewed telephonically by Esté Kotzé, 15 October 2012.

careers took away with them the lessons of discipline acquired at the College. The great sense of discipline that their military training instilled in these women is something that the majority of former *soldoedies* still carry with them to this day.⁴⁵

6.5 Conclusion:

From this, it is evident that the time spent in George had a massive effect on the lives of the women who studied at the College. Many of them took away with them the skills and lessons learned during their studies and applied them in later life. The thirty year existence of the institution also had an effect on the public's imagination regarding what the correct gender roles were for women in wartime in South Africa. However, what is no less abundantly clear is that the acceptance of the small percentage of women who joined the SADF was slow and reluctant. In terms of civilian views of the George ladies, the majority saw them as being strange for wanting to enter into this highly masculine field. As a dominant popular opinion, it corresponds neatly with the traditionally constructed gender roles in times of conflict as outlined in the first chapter of this study. The above-mentioned need to cling to these norms was also strongly maintained by the military itself. Although these young women were a useful tool for the SADF in terms of relieving its manpower pressure, the military still manifestly wanted to keep the women categorised and apart. This imperative was highlighted in the overwhelming need displayed to sell the College as a 'finishing school' for young ladies, rather than as a military training facility.

⁴⁵ G. Whitehorn, interview conducted via e-mail with Esté Kotzé, 19 October 2012.

Chapter 7:

Conclusion

Gender in the military is a contentious and significant issue. This discussion of the history of the especially in the case of the South African army Women's College (previously the Civil Defence College) and its impact on gender norms in the South African Defence Force has brought together a variety of concerns. However, before it is possible to come to a final conclusion on the issue of gender norms in the SADF, and SAAWCOL's place in them, it is first necessary to examine – briefly – the status of women in the South African National Defence Force today, and to consider how SAAWCOL might be viewed as a final evolutionary stage leading to women's acceptance as fully fledged members of the military.

7.1 Women in the military after SAAWCOL (1994 – today):

Today, female members of the South African National Defence Force are fully equal participants in the country's military and are afforded the same opportunities as their male counterparts. This is due to the SANDF's twenty year program of gender 'mainstreaming'.

This process was initiated to keep the newly formed SANDF in line with post-apartheid South Africa's aims for an equal society. According to the 1996 White Paper on Defence, the Defence Force was to provide "equal opportunities and affirmative action".¹

The move towards gender mainstreaming was first implemented by the Joint Military Co-ordinating Committee (JMCC). This committee was the forum which planned the new SANDF. In conjunction with this, a workgroup of four women, from different services, chaired by Maj Gen Sedibe, was formed. They were responsible for negotiating the role of military women in the newly democratic South Africa. One of the chief proposals brought forward by this committee was that "women should be afforded the opportunity to serve in all musterings, including combat roles".² Equally, it should be noted that, despite the promises made by this announcement, it was still a bone of contention within some headquarters. It

¹ SANDF White Paper on Defence 1996, pp. 27-28.

² A.D. van Breda: "Status of Women in the DOD: A Review of Women in the South Africa Department of Defence", prepared for Maj Gen N.E. Memela-Motumi (Chief Director Transformation Management SANDF), p. 4.

was even suggested by some parties that the document should not be accepted in the new SANDF.³

Despite these concerns and the opposition from some areas to the integration of women into the SANDF, today women in the military in this country are – on paper – full and equal members. By 1992, women already made up 15% of the Permanent Force of the SADF. Two years later, a significant number of politically-connected women were elevated into the occupation of high-ranking positions, including two brigadiers, twenty colonels, 185 commandants, 319 majors and 619 captains.⁴ Still, despite the surge of a large number of women into high ranks, by 1996 there were still no female generals in the SADF.⁵

As of November 2011, the gender distribution of Army was 81% males and 19% females. There were no women in the top positions of General, Lieutenant-General and Major-General. Despite this, there has been a steady increase of female representation in the middle ranks.⁶ What this goes to show is that, in many respects, the strongly held gender roles for men and women are still an important factor in the military and women's acceptance into this institution – especially in top ranks. However, it should also be noted that the steady increase of female participation in the SANDF shows that South African women have come a long way since the era of the *soldoedies*. Today's female soldiers are active members of the Defence Force. They are not, as their antecedents of the George College had been, mere auxiliary members barred from combat and confined to military posts that were commensurate with traditionally held norms of femininity, such as that of fear of 'militarised' women becoming overly masculine.

³ A.D. van Breda: "Status of Women in the DOD: A Review of Women in the South Africa Department of Defence", prepared for Maj Gen N.E. Memela-Motumi (Chief Director Transformation Management SANDF), p. 4.

⁴ J. Cock: *Forging a New Army out of Old Enemies; Women in the South African Military*, p. 99.

⁵ E. Molekane: *The Role of women in the South African National Defence Force*, p. 1.

⁶ SA National Defence Force progress of employment: Department of Defence briefing, chaired by S Montsitsi, 23 November 2011.

What is also crucial to note is that the position of women in the SANDF has also been made more problematic by the fact that the post-apartheid South African military is made up of two greatly differing traditions. When the SANDF was created it had to be made up of both the 'traditional' and formal military structure of the old SADF as well as the 'non-traditional', guerrilla formation of Umkhonto weSizwe and other irregular forces of the armed anti-apartheid struggle. The apartheid 'pre-history' of this duality within the SANDF has led to the situation that the George College may be viewed as having played a particularly significant role in furthering the acceptance of white women in the context of the military – as for the greater majority of this institution's existence, only white women were accepted as students. Black women's current participation and reception in the SANDF has been much more significantly affected or moulded by their previous participation in irregular forms of military training, largely outside the country. Although this aspect of women's integration into the military has not been fully investigated in the course of this research, it is a striking and very interesting aspect of this particular part of South Africa's military history, and represents a worthwhile avenue that ought to be explored in the future.

7.2 Summary:

The military has, for centuries, been a bastion constructed of masculinity. It has been an arena in which a specific form of hegemonic masculinity has been shaped, patrolled, preformed and enforced. This has been created by the pressure to conform to specific performances of dress, appearance and behaviour. By adhering to these identifying codes, one becomes a soldier, and a man. As with any socially constructed gendered identity, military masculinity is created and has historically stood in opposition to the 'weaker' feminine, or feminised male, 'other'. It is in terms of this 'othering' that one classic 'symptom' of military masculinity is rooted: namely, that of 'woman hating'.

In order to uphold the ideal of military masculinity, this definition of masculinity has to be placed in contrast with its antithesis. In this case, that is femininity. What this has meant in practice is that, as considered in the first chapter, a host of things that do not conform to the military view of what masculinity is are derided as being weak, feminine and, therefore, wrong or out of place.

This strong uncoupling of the two worlds of the masculine military and femininity is also upheld by gender norms that exist outside of the military arena in South African society. The most enduring of these models of ‘correct’ behaviour is encapsulated in the belief that men are the takers of life in society, while women are the so-called “life-givers”. In terms of this, the military is a place for the healthy expression of the male role as “life takers” and any female intrusion into this domain would be abhorrent.

The supposed abhorrence of female violence has been a long standing prohibition against women’s participation in the military. Female violence is only accepted in certain situations; situations that relate to women’s role as the protectors of life – for example, violence enacted in order to protect a child. This need to keep women separate from participating in conflict has resulted in a number of reasons being given against the acceptance of women into military structures, both in South Africa and internationally. These ideas are wide ranging. They encompass two main areas of thought regarding women’s supposed incapacity to function correctly as soldiers. These are: women’s physicality and the differential socialisation of both men and women.

Despite the exclusion of women from formal participation in the military, this does not mean that South African women have not played valuable, traditional roles in wartime. This is especially evident when one examines women’s participation in South Africa’s four greatest post-pre-colonial conflicts preceding the Border War of 1966-1989. These are: the Great Trek, The South African War and the first and Second World Wars. One of the most dominant of these roles, and one that can be found consistently throughout all the above mentioned conflicts, is that of women playing the part of motivator. For example during the Great Trek, women were labelled as the “driving force behind the trek”.⁷ Later, this same function was taken over by fearsome Boer matrons during the South African War. Women have also been nurses, a duty in accordance with their supposed nature as “life-givers” – this was the main military contribution of women during the World Wars. They have also, in occasion of dire need, been fighters. It is this qualified or restrictive element that is most important in the context of South Africa’s slow acceptance of female soldiering.

⁷ H. Giliomee: *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*, p. 169.

Women's participation in the military has often, in the past, been precipitated by serious manpower shortages during wartime, as demonstrated in chapter 3. The mounting militarisation of South African society in the 1970s due to the increasing need for manpower on the Angolan border, coupled with growing internal tensions due to resistance against the apartheid regime, created a space where young, white women could be used as a tool to relieve the military's burden, or as a subsidy to uphold the martial calling of men. This led to the creation of the Civil Defence College – which later became the South Africa Army Women's College.

Here, South Africa women were for the first time official members of the Defence Force. Albeit in a limited and strictly non-combatant capacity, this marked an important stage of the evolution of South African society's views on the gender roles of men and women in relation to the military. Located in George, The South African Army Women's College was initially created as a venue for the training of young women just out of school in the necessary skills for civil defence. It was thought that through the Civil Defence College – as it was initially known – these girls could be used in times of emergency to assist the military or the police. In its initial incarnation, the College had only a slight focus on training women to take over the roles of soldiers. While a small handful of students joined the Permanent Force of the SADF, this was a tiny minority. The focus of the College changed, however, in 1977 with the advent of P.W. Botha's co-called Total Strategy. This policy was implemented as a reaction against the perceived threat of communism. Now renamed the South African Army Women's College, the institution became an ever more important tool for alleviating the manpower bottleneck created by South Africa's stepping up of its military involvement in Angola.

As chapter 4 showed, the creation of the SAAWCOL was influenced by years of underlying contributing factors, ranging from the norms surrounding gender roles and how women should enact these in times of hostility, to the apartheid military machine's need for manpower in the 1970s. What has been suggested above is that the College was not formed in a vacuum. And at one level, the importance of this institution in terms of the evolving position of women in the South African military is undeniable. However, the greater issue still at hand is whether or not the College had any palpable impact on prevailing gender norms, both in the military and in outside civilian life. One crucial illumination of this issue

can be found in an examination of the lived experience of the women who attended the institution.

From this, one social dimension is immediately highlighted. This is that the College, despite its status as a military training facility, placed a great deal of emphasis on the retention of feminine qualities in its students: the girls were painted as ladies rather than as soldiers. Indeed, it was seen by many – both within the college and outsiders – as a finishing school for young women. Although some of the highly feminine aspects of the course – correct social behaviour or etiquette, for example – were also included in the equivalent officer's course for male soldiers, the emphasis on femininity went deeper. This is evident in the number of declarations made by senior staff at the College that they were not training the young women to be soldiers. This emphasis eased as the College matured as an institution, with its roles and routines becoming increasingly ingrained, or taken for granted.

What is suggested by this stress on traditional female aspects in the traditionally male arena of the military is that, at least for the first portion of the College's history (1971-1977), there was little significant change in thinking surrounding gender norms in the military. The fear that the students would lose their femininity simply by being in a military environment was testament to this. However, this is not to say that the SAAWCOL was a wholly unimportant institution, at least in the case of the later full absorption of white women members of the post-1994 SANDF. On the contrary, its existence may have helped to pave the way for South African women's acceptance as full members of the South African National Defence Force, as chapter 5 seeks to explain.

7.3 Conclusion:

What this thesis has set out to show are the many, and often conflicted, issues that surround gender in the South African military and – more specifically – how the inclusion of women, through the South African Army Women’s College, impacted these assumptions of traditional gender norms. From the above, it has been made clear that the interpretation of ‘correct’ masculine and feminine roles has historically been a highly contentious part of the military institution. Gendered norms have shaped correct behaviour and the option to participate in the military. Alongside this, these traditionally held societal constructs of masculinity and femininity have historically barred women’s participation in a nation’s military. In the case of South Africa’s military during the period of the Border War (1966-1989) this was no different.

The women of the South African Army Women’s College were held to strict standards of feminine behaviour. They were prevented from becoming full and combatant members of the South African defence Force due to their femininity. What has been shown here is that the inclusion of women into the South African military did have an impact on gender norms, although not necessarily in the way that was anticipated at the outset. The creation of the George College led to a strengthening of gender norms within Apartheid society and the South African military, rather than a breaking down of this societal construct.

Addendum A:

Gerda Whitehorn:

Gerda Whitehorn (née Venter) joined the Civil Defence College in 1974 after completing her matric year at the Afrikaans Girls High School in Pretoria. After her year at the College she went on to study languages at the University of Pretoria and gained an honours degree in French through UNISA. Gerda worked as a journalist for the Pretoria-Perskorkoerant Hoofstad for seven years before moving on. Apart from her time as a journalist, she has worked as marketing-agent, tourism-agent and estate-agent. In 1977 she was married to Johan Middelberg, a civil engineer, who unfortunately died in 1987. Four years after the death of her first husband, Gerda married Brian Whitehorn. Gerda is the mother of three sons: Arno and Roland Middelburg, both engineers, and Brian Whitehorn, who is studying Marketing.

Louise van Rensburg:

Also a member of the class of 1974, Louise van Rensburg (née Du Plessis) completed her school career at the Empangeni High School in Kwa-Zulu Natal. Her time at the College confirmed her choice to study Music. Between 1975 and 1978 she completed a BA in Music and a Higher Teaching Diploma at the University of the Free State. In 1979 she married Tobie J. Janse van Rensburg. From 1980 onwards, Louise taught Music at the Wonderboom High School Music Centre. In 1990, she began her own music school. In 2005 she closed the school, as she and her husband moved to Paris for four years. She is currently retired and living in Somerset West.

René Zietsmann:

The younger sister of Louise van Rensburg, René chose to join the Civil Defence College in 1976 because she saw how much her sister had enjoyed her time there.

Margerite Scheepers:

Margerite went to the Army Women's College in 1982. During her time there, the training period was shortened to six months at the College, before being moved on to the military headquarters in Pretoria.

Annette Grobler:

Unlike the other women interviewed, Annette was not herself a student at SAAWCOL but rather an officer in charge of training at the College between 1994 and 1995. She trained as an officer at Heidelberg for three years.

Matlida Burden:

Matilda Burden grew up in George. She is now a professor and Research Fellow at the Potchefstroom Campus of Northwest University with a focus on Social Transformation. Burden also works as a Cultural Historian at the University museum of the University of Stellenbosch.

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Fig. A: Rozanne Visser (née Botha). Found at: <http://sadf.info/SALVKOL%20Training.html>, accessed 27 October 2014.

Fig. B: Lt. Genl C.L. Viljoen. Found in *Civil Defence College 1971-1976 Commemorative Album*. p. 9.

Fig. C: The main entrance to the South African Army Women's College in George. Found in: Marks, B: *Our South African Army Today*. Purnell, Cape Town, 1977. p. 82.

Fig. D: P.W Botha, Minister of Defence responsible for the institution of the College. Found in *Civil Defence College 1971-1976 Commemorative Album*. p. 5.

Fig. E: Colonel Hilda Botha. Found at: <http://sadf.info/SALVKOL%20Introduction.html>, accessed 27 October 2014.

Fig. F: Ruda Wahl. Found in *Civil Defence College 1971-1976 Commemorative Album*. p. 27

Fig. G: Students inspecting an engine. Found in *Civil Defence College 1971-1976 Commemorative Album*. p. 31.

Fig. I: Parade at the South African Army Women's College, George. Found in: De la Rey, A. (ed.): *Suid-Afrikaanse Weermag Oorsig/South African Defernce Force Review*. Walker-Ramus Trading co, Durban. 1988.

Fig. J: A *soldoedie* in uniform refreshing her make-up. Found at <http://sadf.info/SALVKOL%20Training.html>, accessed 27 October 2014.

Fig. K: SAAWCOL shoulder flash; cloth with wire embroidery. Courtesy of the 'Castle Military Museum, Cape Town'.