A WOMAN’S WORLD AT A TIME OF WAR:
AN ANALYSIS OF SELECTED WOMEN’S DIARIES
DURING THE ANGLO-BOER WAR 1899-1902

by

Helen M. Ross

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Promoter: Prof. A.M. Grundlingh

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Declaration

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this dissertation is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

Signature: ____________________

Date: ________________________
Summary

In the case of the Anglo-Boer War masculine military history has attracted scholars, as has the suffering and martyrdom of female internees in the concentration camps. Conspicuously overlooked by scholars are the wartime plights of black women and privileged white women.

The focus of this study are those white females who remained outside of the camps. Some such women staked their claim to history by keeping diaries of their wartime experiences. Two in particular, Isabella Lipp and Nonnie De la Rey, chronicled opposing sides of the conflict. Their testimony is studied here both descriptively and comparatively.

Because the challenges of war provoked differing responses, adjunct to Nonnie and Isabella’s journals are the diaries of Alida Badenhorst, Elizabeth Henrietta Martyn (Bessie) Collins and the unpublished notes of Florence Burgers—daughter of the Transvaal’s second president. All these women were privileged and hence advantaged but they also struggled daily for survival and responded proactively.

Mrs. Isabella Lipp, wife of a prominent banker, recorded her perception of the war from a cramped third-floor apartment in Johannesburg. Very much in tune with the ideological aspects of war, she wanted imperialism upheld even amidst the unfair cruelty that she witnessed.

Nonnie De la Rey, wife of General Koos De la Rey, fled the enemy and lived on the open veld. Her life was not as monotonous or lonely as Isabella’s. Had the consequences been less decisive this may have been an exciting adventure.

What emerges from these sources, which are representative of white women of society, is a surprising female response to wartime conditions. That response included the sadness, struggle and toil that might be expected, but, significantly, it also included
remarkable resilience—manifested in a variety of ways in the face of momentous circumstances.

The forgoing findings contribute to the war’s social/gender history by including “people without history” within the written historical record.¹ Women displayed a unique reliance and bond between themselves and their black workers; domestic duties and roles were completely disrupted; and the constant anxiety and lack of news about loved ones caused acute family distress.

Did women snivel submissively, waiting to be rescued by men? Were they victims of circumstances thrust upon them? Did they succumb to the Victorian model of female fragility? My findings offer evidence to the contrary.

Opsomming

In die geval van die Anglo-Boereoorlog is navorsers se belangstelling gewek deur die militêre aspekte waarby die manlike deelnemers betrokke was, sowel as die swaarkry en martelaarsskap van die vroue in die konsentrasie-kampe. Dit is opvallend hoe die dilemma waarin die swart vroue en die bevoorregte blanke vroue hulle bevind het, deur navorsers geignoreer is.

Die fokus van hierdie studie is daardie blanke vroue wat hulle buite die kampe bevind het. Van hierdie vroue het hulleself in die geskiedenis verewig deur dagboeke oor hulle oorlogtydse wedervaringe te hou. Twee van hulle in die besonder, Isabella Lipp en Nonnie de la Rey, het hulle wedervaringe van verskillende kante van die stryd geboekstaaf. Hulle getuienis word beskrywend sowel as vergelykend bestudeer.

Naas Nonnie en Isabella se joernal bestaan die dagboeke van Alida Badenhorst, Elizabeth Henrietta Martyn (Bessie) Collins en die ongepubliseerde aantekeninge van Florence Burgers – dogter van die tweede president van Transvaal. Al hierdie vroue was bevoorreg en is daarder bevoordeel, maar ook hulle het ’n daaglikse stryd om bestaan gevoer en het daarom pro-aktief opgetree.

Mev. Isabella Lipp, vrou van ’n prominente bankier, het haar waarnemings van die oorlog vanuit ’n klein woonstel op die derde vloer in Johannesburg neergepen. In pas met die ideologiese aspek van die oorlog was sy ten gunste van die behoud van imperialisme ten spyte van die onregverdige wreedheid wat sy waargeneem het.

Nonnie de la Rey, vrou van general Koos de la Rey, het vlugtend voor die vyand in die veld gebly. Haar lewe was nie so eentonig of eensaam soos dié van Isabella nie. As die gevolge nie so bepalend was nie, sou dit vir Nonnie ’n opwinde avontuur kon wees.

Uit hierdie bronne, wat verteenwoordigend is van blanke vroue uit die vernam sosiale kringe, blyk ’n verrassende vroulike reaksie op die oorlogstoestande. Hierdie
reaksie sluit soos te verwagte hartseer, stryd en moeitevolle arbeid in. Daarbenewens wys dit ook dat hierdie vroue op verskillende maniere onder veeleisende omstandighede weerstand kon bied.

Die voorafgaande bevindinge lever 'n bydrae tot die oorlog se sosiale / gender geskiedenis. Vroue het 'n unieke vertroue in en verbondenheid aan hulle swart arbeiders vertoon; huislike pligte en rolle is totaal versteur; en die voortdurende bekommernis oor en gebrek aan nuus van geliefdes het gelei tot akute familie angs.

Het vroue onderdanig getreur en gewag om deur mans gered te word? Was hulle slagoffers van omstandighede wat aan hulle opgedwing is? Het hulle geswig voor die Victoriaanse model van vroulike broosheid? My bevindinge bewys die teendeel.

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H. M. Ross
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Dedication

To my sons, Michael, James and Alan—may you never forget your South African heritage.
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Chapter One

STUDY RATIONALE AND THE RELEVANT LITERATURE

“Never could I have thought that human beings could treat each other in such a way. I know well that war is one of the blackest things upon earth, still I cannot depart from all sense of justice and put down every sort of barbarity to war and consider it right. As we were known to the whole world as two Christian nations, I had thought that such things could not be allowed. But I have been taught that suffering and misery can go on increasing to the bitter end, and that in war no deed can be too hard or cruel to be committed.”¹ (Nonnie de la Rey)

The conflict of 1899-1902 between British soldiers and Boer commandos is known variously as the Anglo-Boer War, the Boer War, the South African War or the Second War for Freedom. Perhaps because of the brevity of the first Anglo-Boer War, which ended when London made peace after the routing at Majuba Hill in 1881, many predicted that the second encounter would end by Christmas 1899.² What could not be anticipated was that before both sides came to sign a peace treaty (Vereeniging, 1902) more than 21,800 British soldiers would die from wounds and disease; while Boer losses (although accurate records were not kept) included approximately 4,000 Boer men and 27,927 women and children who perished in British concentration camps. It is estimated that about 14,000 blacks died in similar camps.³

This war, “marked by great acts of heroism and self-sacrifice, both individual and collective,” was also “on closer examination, shot through with scandal, corruption and malpractice.”⁴ While it dragged on, myths abounded about heroes and great military engagements. Afterwards, Afrikaner nationalist historiography perpetuated anecdotes of masculine bravery. Auspiciously, the historians also underscored atrocities effected against women and children in the concentration camp.

Initially, loyal imperialists at home and abroad supported the war’s ideology with evocative sentiments in poems like Rudyard Kipling’s “The Absent-minded Beggar.” British patriotic propaganda represented the war as a crusade to intervene on behalf of the maligned English-speaking population of the Transvaal. However, as the war progressed and the camps

¹ J.E. De la Rey, A Woman’s Wanderings and Trials During the Anglo-Boer War, 136.
³ B.J. Barker, A Concise Dictionary of the Boer War, 45.
⁴ D. Judd, et. al., The Boer War, 1.
filled with women and children, support for the conflict diminished.\textsuperscript{5} A trickle of news about mounting death tolls in the camps became a torrent that drew international attention and tainted public opinion. Indisputably, the gender-specific reports that ensued provided a more balanced history of the Anglo-Boer War.

Noble aspirations attributed to the war subsided as Emily Hobhouse reported on destitute civilians suffering at the hands of British soldiers. The concentration camp controversy eclipsed outrage against farm burning.\textsuperscript{6} As Hobhouse magnified the plight of women and children, a war already pregnant with meaning and symbolism was forced to address the place of women in the conflict. For this the Anglo-Boer war gained dubious notoriety after which it was no longer possible to ignore history’s “invisible woman.” Recently South African historiography has even looked beyond women’s suffering to investigate other aspects of female responses to the war.

Sensitive that women’s martyrdom and victimhood are inevitable ordeals attendant to the social phenomenon of war, and whilst cognizant of the catastrophic death rate due to disease and starvation that prevailed in the fifty resettlement camps for whites in South Africa between 1900 and 1902, \textit{this study focuses rather on female fortitude during the Anglo-Boer War}. It is a description of how, notwithstanding the myriad of terrors, deprivations and losses spawned by the war, women sought and found within themselves immense courage and daring; innovation and perseverance; fortitude and faith; loyalty and hope.

In discussing “Populations, Family and Household,” the demographics historian E. A. Wrigley declared that “If the criterion of the importance of a theme to history is the proportion of the population it involves, and its centrality to other historical themes, then the history of the family need fear few rivals.”\textsuperscript{7} In like vein, most historians now agree that women who comprise at least half the human population and form a crucial component of society deserve a significant position in recorded history.

Nonetheless, for a variety of complex reasons the experiences of women during times of war have been marginalized by the rendition of “drum and trumpet” history that focused on the male-dominated political, economic and military facets of conflict. Men have dominated military historiography, and although women have always been noteworthy factors of

\textsuperscript{5} D. Judd, et. al., \textit{The Boer War}, 11.
\textsuperscript{6} \textit{Ibid.}, 194.
\textsuperscript{7} As quoted in A. Marwick, \textit{The Nature of History}, 135.
society—even during war—they have been selectively noticed because of long-established patriarchal assumptions.

Data selection is an essential process by which historians look for what they consider meaningful in understanding the past. What they select or identify as having historic value becomes a matter of record that in turn influences future historiography. E.H. Carr underscored this when he said, “the facts speak only when the historian calls on them; it is he who decides to which facts to give the floor, and it what order or contest.”

For at least two reasons, the Anglo-Boer War highlighted in a new way the suffering of women and children during times of war. The first impetus was the moral and feminist outrage reported by activist authors who sought to shame Britain into strategic reform by drawing attention to the appalling conditions in the camps. The war was seen not only through the eyes of the women who experienced it first hand, but also by reform-minded social activists, each of whom had his or her own agenda. Among them were Josephine Butler, Emmeline Pankhurst, Beatrice Webb and Emily Hobhouse.

A second element that brought attention to the effects of war on society was the large number of significant first-hand accounts written by ordinary women. These invaluable sources obliged historians to look intently at the consequences of the war for society in general and women in particular.

In the past thirty years social history has revolutionized historical interpretation by breaking away from traditional political, military and economic study to examine the lives of ordinary people and everyday events. This change carried significant methodological consequences that implicated the historian’s objectivity and the data’s relevance. Thus, both objectivity and relevance became heavily debated considerations of scholarly discourse.

The controversy continued during the 1950s as Arthur Schlesinger and Harry Elmer Barnes advocated a more “social scientific” approach that would expand the domain of history by incorporating such factors as the growth of cities, immigration patterns and

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11 Ibid., 161.
12 P. Novick, That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession, 221, 276.
women’s history. The anti-establishment cultural revolution of the 1960s in the United States and Europe led to the development of social history as an academically recognized approach. But it was E. P. Thompson’s *The Making of the English Working Class*, published in 1964, that drew the most attention to the private rather than public realm of society.

In South Africa modern social history emerged in the 1970s. Students with South African connections, but who studied abroad, came under the influence of several institutions, including the Institute of Commonwealth Studies at London University, the History Workshop at Oxford University, the Southern African Studies Centre at York University, Sussex and Essex Universities, and universities in the United States of America.

Even as the appeal of Marxist history declined in southern Africa the continent experienced a potent anti-colonial phase that generated new post-colonial approaches to historiography. Although Marxist and post-colonial history could be perceived as challenging the concept of social history, neither effectively mitigated it. There is a need for a historiographic approach that simultaneously embraces broad concepts and the small details of ordinary lives. Social history is about recreating past experiences and understanding the many levels that reconcile, for example, diplomatic and social history. In South Africa social history has been impacted by socio-economic and political events. As a consequence it developed as a hybrid of conventional western social history.

Gender history is a component of social history that purports to add a broader and more meaningful view. Those who write gender history frequently apply a descriptive or causal theoretical approach since this methodology effectively generates a critical reexamination of the premises of existing scholarly work.

According to Natalie Zemon Davis, the goal of gender history is to achieve a better understanding of the significance of the sexes and gender groups in earlier times. Other aims include the categorization of a range of sex or gendered roles, the identification of sexual symbolism at different times and in diverse cultures, and the disclosure of the meaning and

14 Ibid., 440.
16 Ibid., 14.
17 Ibid., 6.
function of such roles in relation to maintaining or undermining the social order or promoting its change.\textsuperscript{19} Toward this objective, comparative gender studies shed new light on the past by enriching and expanding history.

In his book, \textit{The South African War: The Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902}, S. B. Spies addresses the question of women and the war. He asserts that whilst women had not been “written out” of the South African War, what exists focuses on “women’s suffering in general, and their experiences in concentration camps in particular, perhaps at the cost of other facets.” Spies declares that although gender-specific research has revealed “new nuances and perspectives” resulting in a more balanced history, a comprehensive study of the consequence of the war for women in South Africa and in Britain has yet to be written.\textsuperscript{20}

Gender blindness is yet a common characteristic South African war studies. This is particularly disconcerting in a country ravaged by frequent conflicts. Recent awareness of such myopia has developed a more open academic approach to the role of women in war.\textsuperscript{21} Nonetheless, Dennis Judd and Keith Surridge’s \textit{The Boer War} (2002) is almost completely bereft of female representation as citizens who experienced the war. It is disillusioning to review a contemporary book that addresses commonwealth history with only cursory references to women.

Addressing the scarcity of the history of black women in nineteenth-century America, Ruth Bogin wrote that while men and women of any nation share similar cultural identities their place in history is unique—“omission of woman’s role and woman’s story shrivels the evidence at hand for analysis and dilutes the full validity of the segments presently available.” She adds that “without a women’s view in history there is a “critical distortion”—whereby “men are granted a conceptual monopoly.” Indeed, one of the greater tasks of a historian is to establish new perspectives of the past by “welding smaller fragments into larger wholes.”\textsuperscript{22}

The voices of black females were ignored. They spoke only at the bidding of colonial


\textsuperscript{22} R. Bogin, et. al., \textit{Black Women in Nineteenth-Century American Life: Their Words, Their Thoughts, Their Feelings}, 3, 4.
officials, missionaries, and anthropologists. African women have by and large remained “invisible” and “inaudible”.

There is a paucity of research available about black women. Three methodological reasons account for this. First, few black women were literate—hence they were unable to record what they witnessed. Second, black women were “second class citizens,” whose opinions were neither sought after nor recognized in nineteenth century society. Third, social reformers, reporters, historians, pacifists and feminists focused on white women in the concentration camps, fundamentally excluding other groups of women.

However, in rare cases travelers recorded black females’ perspectives.

A unique example of this was recorded after the war by George Stow: “Kou’ke stated that all the men of these tribes were shot without mercy by the different commandos that came to attack them. When the writer was trying to persuade her and her husband to accompany him on his travels for a short time, so that he might have an opportunity of learning more of their history, she said: ‘Do you see where the mountain comes down to the river?’ pointing to where its steep shoulder formed the left bank of the Caledon, in the Jammerberg Poort. ‘There,’ she continued, ‘were all the best of our tribe shot down; there all our brave men’s bones were left in a heap: my captain’s, my brothers’, and those of every friend that I had. Do you think I could live in the land of the men who did me that evil? No! not for a single night would I sleep on their accursed ground!’ Her reasons were unanswerable. She departed, and the opportunity to obtain their unrecorded history was lost.”

But not all women were silent—many put pen to paper, thus preserving from a womanly viewpoint the memory of what transpired.

“This thesis describes and compares the war diaries of two white women; however it is well supplemented by three other personal accounts.” More generally it focuses on ordinary women’s responses during the Anglo-Boer War. The central premise is that many such women were more than passive helpless victims of conflict: they resolutely persevered with daily duties and with whatever other challenges they faced. Their domestic concerns centered around the welfare of children, spouses, and their own safety; their emotional and mental

24 Ibid., xxiv.
25 Quoted in Ibid., 9, 10.
condition; difficulties of everyday life including shortages of food and clothing; the often crucial relationship between white women and their domestic servants; and the constantly pressing desire for accurate news of the war.

Inevitably, this study makes little reference to certain categories of women. First, because well researched and reported elsewhere, white women in concentration camps are not focused upon. My concern here is on women outside the infamous camps. Second, this study does not address the many women who fled the Transvaal and Free State to relocate in Natal, the Cape or any other region. Thirdly, I do not consider the enormously disadvantaged black women who despite the paucity of evidence deserve attention. Fourthly, I am excluding, except for passing references, the experience of nurses and prostitutes (two diverse groups that always follow soldiers). Finally, British, Boer and black women who became combatants or spies are not central themes. Rather, this thesis discloses the challenges of daily survival faced by ordinary but somewhat privileged women caught up in the extraordinary circumstances of war. My research centers on the diaries of women who experienced the Anglo-Boer War first-hand. The authors of these diaries are Mrs. Isabella Lipp and Mrs. Nonnie De la Rey.

Both Nonnie and Isabella were “privileged” women in that their husbands occupied positions of respect and rank in the community. While both wives experienced the harsh realities of war, neither was captured or imprisoned by the enemy. This study looks not at the poorest of the poor or the most direly persecuted during the conflict; rather it exposes life as lived by several women who were dragged into the whirlpool of war, but managed to keep afloat because of external resources and inner courage.

I make no claim that these two diaries are elitist or that they necessarily represent all “privileged” women who experienced the Anglo-Boer war. Though both the Lipp and De la Rey families possessed some wealth they were not wealthy.

Even though fortunate to correspond with Isabella’s descendants, I found scant information about her childhood, education or family. Much of that information has been lost, and no photographs of her remain. Yet one can readily deduce from her writing that she was an intelligent, eloquent, well educated woman who enjoyed reading and developed a particularly readable writing style of her own. On the other hand, much is known about Nonnie’s life—not only on her own merit as a “volksmoeder” but more so because of the prominent military standing her husband achieved.
Mrs. Isabella Lipp was a British subject who, by virtue of her husband Charles’s position as manager of the African Banking Corporation, was granted a special permit to remain in Johannesburg after most foreigners had been expelled from the region. Charles Lipp, born on 31 July 1861 in Fochabers Moray, Scotland, married Isabelle Eliza Harvey in Cape Town in 1890. Isabella was a British citizen raised in South Africa. To her advantage she spoke “the Taal” which on occasion during the war worked to her favour.

Isabella’s pro-British diary is housed in the manuscript section of the Africana Collection of the University of Stellenbosch Library. The original diary is in fragile condition, rendering parts difficult to read. However, a transcription along with a companion volume of South African stories compiled by Isabella is available. The diary remains unpublished but is mentioned in at least two publications—Hedley A. Chilvers’ Out of the Crucible: Being the Romantic Story of the Witwatersrand Goldfields; and of the Great City which Arose in their Midst (London: Cassell and Company, Ltd. 1929, pp. 273). The second is Elizabeth Van Heyningen’s article, “The Voices of Women in the South African War,” in a special 1999 issue of The South African Historical Journal.

Mrs. Jacoba Elizabeth (Nonnie) De la Rey’s diary was published under the English title, A Woman’s Wanderings and Trials during the Anglo-Boer War. The book was translated by Lucy Holtz (London: Fisher Unwin, 1903). The wife of General J. H. Koos de la Rey, Nonnie took a strongly pro-Boer view of the war, which was not surprising since her husband represented Lichtenburg in the Volksraad. Although Koos de la Rey initially opposed the declaration of war, he readily joined the commandoes and served in the Western theater where he earned the sobriquet, “The Lion of the West.” This apt nickname came from his surprise, disruptive attacks on railway lines, bridges and depots that were strategically important to the British.

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26 I. Lipp, My Diary: Fiction, Fact and Fancy, 1.
27 Ibid., 7.
28 Ibid., 107.
29 Ibid., 107, Isabella stated “my husband’s bank—A.B.C. is African Banking Corporation not Attwells Banking Company.”
30 Ibid., 52. Dutch. “A communication from the head officials has this moment come in, being in Dutch my services as translator are required.”
31 Ibid., 43.
32 The I. Lipp diary citations used in this paper refer to the transcribed version of the original notes.
Compelled eventually to leave her farm, Mrs. De la Rey and six of her ten children spent eighteen months evading the British and living in a wagon on the veld. The Dutch rendition of her experience is *Mijne Omzwevingen en Beproevening Gedurende den Oorlog. Herinneringen van J.E. De la Rey* (Amsterdam, n.d.) housed in the Africana Collection, Stellenbosch University Library.

Jacobus Herculaas De la Rey (General Koos De la Rey) was born on 22 October 1847 on the farm Doornfontein near Winburg. At the age of eighteen he proved himself a courageous fighter in the Second Basuto War and was eventually recognized as one of South Africa’s greatest soldiers. In 1876 he married Jacoba Elizabeth Greef and they lived on the Elandsfontein farm in the vicinity of Litchenburg. Two of their twelve children, Adrian and Jacobus, joined the commandoes. Mrs. De la Rey’s parting words as her sons rode to war were, “Let your ways be in the fear of the Lord. If I do not see you again upon earth, let me find you again in heaven.” Tragically, Adrian was wounded and later died in his father’s arms near Jacobsdal within days of his nineteenth birthday. 34 During the war Mrs. De la Rey bravely supported her husband by visiting him at his laager. Likewise, he kept in contact with his family throughout the war, but especially during the final stages. 35

Zelda Rowan’s study, *Nonnie De La Rey 1856 – 1923*, 36 in no way impinges upon this investigation since it is not a comparative study of British and Boer women during the war. It is a chronological biographic study centering on Nonnie’s life from birth until her death. Only two chapters deal with the war and these (being chronological / biographic) differ in focus from this study.

The diaries of Isabella Lipp and Nonnie De la Rey supply a wealth of “background” information about life as it was in South Africa at the turn of the nineteenth century. Both provide extensive testimony of a female view of war.

Arthur Marwick attributes the use of the term “unwitting testimony” to the American historian, Henry Guerlac, who described both the “intentional record” and “unwitting testimony” of official documents and private papers. Marwick expands this concept by stating that “witting” documentation means a deliberate, intentional act but one that also contains unintended or “unwitting” information. He uses the example of the Domesday Book

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34 J.E. De la Rey, *A Woman’s Wanderings and Trials During the Anglo-Boer War*, 5, 6.
35 “General Jacobus Herculaas De la Rey: The Lion of the Western Transvaal.”
   http://home.intekom.com/lichtenburg/koos-e.htm
36 In fulfillment of a degree; Magister Hereditatis Culturaeque Scientiae (2003), University of Pretoria.
compiled at the behest of William the Conqueror to inventory his acquired bounty. Aside from its obvious value as a catalog, this census also provided a vast amount of incidental data about the customs, social relationships and attitudes of the population.

Marwick draws the distinction between “witting testimony”, by which he means the obvious message a writer intends for contemporaries, and “unwitting testimony”, which is not intended, but later becomes useful to historians. Such information would in any case have been known, even taken for granted by the author’s contemporaries.\(^{37}\)

Marwick held that even though societies respond differently to the trauma of war there are notable similarities and divergences regarding war’s impact on society. To justify this claim he employed a four-tier model to describe the societal consequences of war. Any war, he says, has a destructive aspect, a testing aspect, a participatory aspect and a psychological aspect.

The first tier of the model states that war mimics natural disasters in that it is always destructive and disruptive involving the loss of human life, property, capital, infrastructure and possibly even the disruption of future social development. War often prompts rapid reconstruction, but that does not mean that re-established patterns of living are necessarily better—they are different and sometimes improved.

The second tier describes war as a supreme challenge or test of a nation’s vital institutions. Marwick states that ineffective infrastructure, whether military, social, political or economic will fail or collapse as a result of war. Nonetheless, the testing aspect of war does not always bring about institutional collapse. The strong impetus to victory may bring about positive change and greater efficiency rather than malfunction.

A third tier addresses the overall population’s participation in society. Modern war (as opposed to feudal or medieval wars) allows greater participation by more groups, especially underprivileged classes. The latter often benefit during and after the war if only by gaining a “new self-consciousness.”

Closely related to the others is a fourth tier that explores the enormous psychological experience of war. Marwick emphasizes that war is not merely an external phenomenon—it incorporates many varied psychological responses. This fourth tier must be considered when

assessing the impact of conflict on post-war changes in the arts, religion and intellectual attitudes.\(^\text{38}\)

Beyond this, even as war blights both military and civilian lives, it also provides opportunities. As war invariably impacts society, it acquires utility as a catalyst for national ideas and trends. In the case of the Anglo-Boer war, women and children were caught up in the wake of a struggle that (simplistically stated) pitted economic interests against ideological and religious beliefs.

It is a long-term corollary of war that people need to review, replay, analyze and identify its various dynamics. Inevitably, numerous books have been written about the Anglo-Boer war. Here I note the publications most pertinent to the study of women, war and society.

An enormous quantity of books were written and published during and immediately after the war.\(^\text{39}\) These reflected both sides of the conflict and some expressed the paradoxes and ambivalences that became apparent during the war.

Between 1900 and 1920 few Afrikaans books were written about the war. Thereafter followed a plethora of popular works such as Sara Raal’s commando history *Met die Boere in die Veld* (With the Boers in the Field) and myth-making romantic fictions like Mikro’s *Die Ruiter in die Nag* (The Rider in the Night). However, far from being “good” history, Bill Nasson contends such writing served to “harden a consolidating collective mentality and memory by creating an exalted sense of national character: wiry, valiant, and persevering.”\(^\text{40}\)

During the 1940s various academics portrayed the war as a moral confrontation—a covenant of Afrikaner nationalists versus greedy imperialistic aspirations. In publications like J.H. Breytenbach’s *Die Betekenis van die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog* (The Meaning of the Second War of Freedom) the British became godless aggressors who fought the God-fearing freeborn Boers longing for liberty.\(^\text{41}\) At the same time propelled by cultural and political forces, Afrikaans-speaking peoples of all regions and classes began to unite in the cause of

\(^{38}\) A. Marwick, *War and Social Change in the Twentieth Century: A Comparative Study of Britain, France, Germany, Russia and the United States*, 11, 12, 13.

\(^{39}\) D. Judd, et. al., *The Boer War*, 257.

\(^{40}\) B. Nasson, “The War One Hundred Years On” in G. Cuthbertson, et. al. (eds.), *Writing a Wider War: Rethinking Gender, Race, and Identity in the South African War, 1899-1902*, 5.

nationalist Afrikanerdom, which in itself had consequential effects on South African historiography.  

From the 1960s through the 1980s scholarly writing conveyed a moderated tone and a shift toward “a less partisan historical assessment.” Moreover, this was an era when social history prompted extensive research on women and children in the South African concentration camps.

Despite recent interest in gender studies, however, little has been written about the everyday lives of ordinary women who endured the war. Information relevant to such study lies in many sources, including published and unpublished letters, memoirs and diaries like those of Isabella Lipp and Nonnie De la Rey. This thesis examines the impact of the war on women and children outside the camps and identifies overlapping and divergent experiences as related in remaining written testimony. I choose to focus mainly on the diaries of Isabella and Nonnie because they held opposing allegiances. Both women avoided internment; both were married to men of prominent standing in the community. In order to conduct a comprehensive study I also examined the diaries of several other women who were not sent to the camps.

For example, Alida Badenhorst’s Tant Alie of the Transvaal, Her Diary 1880-1902 (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1923), translated by Emily Hobhouse, is an emotional account of Alida’s experiences before and during her detention in the Klerksdorp concentration camp. A comprehensive Afrikaans version was published in 1939—Tant Alie van Transvaal: Die Dagboek van Alie Badenhorst. (Kaapstad: Nationale Pers, 1939). It vividly illuminates the struggles of Boer women during war.

Written in diary form, Margaret Marquard’s Letters From a Boer Parsonage: Letters of Margaret Marquard During the Boer War, edited by Leo Marquard, (Cape Town: Purnell, 1967) significantly reflects a strongly religious view of wartime survival and faith. Margaret was a Dutch Reformed Church minister’s wife who was related by marriage to Andrew Murray. Written during the first eight months of the war her letters include an abundance of information about her family, religious duties and domestic life, providing insights into the daily concerns of families. Margaret wrote about the safety of loved ones and the challenge of


obtaining food and other necessities. As expected from a minister’s wife, she noted the influence of religion in coping with war.

The author, Emily Hobhouse, intended to draw attention to the suffering of women during and because of the war. Pertinent to gender history concerning the war are two of her works; *The Brunt of the War: And Where it Fell* (London: Methuen & Co., 1902), and *War Without Glamour: Women’s Experiences Written by Themselves* (Bloemfontein: Nationale Pers, 1924; rpt. 1927).


A review of Anglo-Boer War gender literature would be incomplete without mention of Olive Schreiner, a critic of both sides of the war who wrote firsthand accounts from a strong feminist bias. Her works include *An English South African’s View of the Situation. Words in Season* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1899) and *The Letters of Olive Schreiner, 1876-1920* edited by S. C. Cronwright-Schreiner (Boston: Little, Brown, 1924). As an English woman in South Africa, Schreiner’s comments about the problems between her native and adopted countries are moving and informative.

Of recent literature Paula M. Krebs *Gender, Race, and the Writing of Empire: Public Discourse and the Boer War*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), is essential reading. It shares rich insights into gender and the relationship between white women and their black domestic workers.

S. B. Spies is an author noteworthy for extensive Anglo-Boer war gender historiography. Among his many works, the most important (co-edited with P. Warwick) is *The South African War: The Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902* (Burnt Mill, Harlow, Essex: Longman Group Limited, 1980).

Peter Warwick’s *The South African War: The Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902* includes an important chapter by Spies on “Women and the War”— a recent investigation into the impact of the war on South African women.
An excellent example of the merger between social and gender history appears in Helen Bradford’s article, “Gentlemen and Boers: Afrikaner Nationalism, Gender, and Colonial Warfare in the South African War” in Greg Cuthbertson, Albert Grundlingh and Mary-Lynn Suttie, eds., *Writing a Wider War: Rethinking Gender, Race, and Identity in the South African War, 1899-1902* (Cape Town: David Philip Publishers, 2002). Written in commemoration of the war’s centenary this book is based on the latest research about the war.

Finally, Briget Theron edited a remarkable volume that attracts both the “armchair historian” and academics alike. *Dear Sue: The Letters of Bessie Collins from Pretoria During the Anglo-Boer War* (Pretoria: Protea Book House, 2000) provides a glimpse of wartime domesticity. While the diary becomes at times trivial, it contains a wealth of information about how women coped during the war. Theron declared “perhaps the most important of all, BC’s diary gives us insight into the ordinary day-to-day hardships of the war, the deprivation, the tension and the grinding isolation suffered by the civilians in Pretoria.”

A digression into diary analysis is appropriate at this point. It is because diaries are generally studied as social evidence or as historical commentary on daily life that their evaluation must include an awareness of the elements of persuasiveness, credibility and insightfulness. This calls for an investigation into the diarist’s inner subjective view of reality and how that view translates into life experiences. While researchers frequently notice exceptional life stories, they infrequently look beyond the story itself to discover a “wider, theoretical meanings or implications” and this, Ruthellen Josselson asserts, is the most challenging aspect of narrative research.

Traditionally, female diary-keeping has involved secrecy and the use of coded language. In earlier centuries it was popular among middle- and upper-class young women to keep diaries. This was encouraged by their elders as an acceptable substitute for reading novels or plays.

Writing about the war afforded male and female reformers, activists, feminists and pacifists specific political opportunities. It was through writing that many ordinary women confronted and came to terms with the indigenous patriarchal hierarchies dictated by society.

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44 B. Theron, *Dear Sue: The Letters of Bessie Collins from Pretoria during the Anglo-Boer War*, 20.

45 R. Josselson et. al., (eds.), *Making Meaning of Narratives in The Narrative Study of Lives*, Vol. 6, ix, x. This volume sets out to “encourage longitudinal and retrospective in-depth studies of individual life narratives as well as theoretical consideration of innovative methodological approaches.”

In the concentration camps where women from divergent backgrounds were detained the diary format documented the historical value of their experience.\textsuperscript{47}

The use of discipline-specific historical research methodology of a qualitative narrative relies on information (or the lack thereof) as recorded in the past or acquired from oral history using first-hand primary and (once-removed) secondary sources. There are many approaches to narrative research: some assume factual documentation of the diary, while others call upon all relevant sources before arriving at a conclusive interpretation. Prior to the emergence of various branches of social history the long-established traditional rendition of the past embodied an elitist approach that mostly excluded the ordinary perspective. Obviously different conclusions arise depending upon one’s approach to diary research--as would be the case when interpreting the past based on a comparison of memoirs of a military general versus the diary of a foot soldier. To achieve a well-rounded view of the past rather than simply outline a biographical chronology it is necessary to focus on “patterns, cause and effect relationships, or interpretations contextualized at a certain point in time” and it is herein that a diary becomes an invaluable basis for investigation.\textsuperscript{48}

Unlike public correspondence, private letters and diaries tend to be distinctly personal. Usually adopting a narrative literary style, diaries are rich in descriptions of customs, manners and view-points and thus provide a wealth of social information about the past. While researchers must recognize that the true motive for writing may be obscure and not always apparent, it is the element of confidentiality–that such correspondence was not meant for publication--that renders private diaries and letters reliable as sources of information.\textsuperscript{49}

The reason for keeping a diary often becomes apparent only after careful inspection and reading between the lines. On the other hand, a diary’s author may declare the purpose for writing. This is usually done initially or at the conclusion and yet diarists could do so at any point. Motives for writing include a desire to set the record straight, put circumstances in the best light, apologize or even exaggerate.\textsuperscript{50} There may also be a false sense of modesty that prevents the writer from fully disclosing circumstances or taking credit where credit is due.\textsuperscript{51}

\textsuperscript{48} \textit{Ibid.}, 5,6.
\textsuperscript{49} G.J. Garraghan, et. al. \textit{Guide to Historical Method}, 250.
\textsuperscript{50} \textit{Ibid.}, 241.
\textsuperscript{51} \textit{Ibid.}, 245.
Elizabeth Van Heyningen alleges that wartime women diarists were attempting to bring order to their disordered lives. By recording historical events they put themselves in the middle of proceedings in which they had no representation.\textsuperscript{52}

Isabella Lipp and Nonnie De la Rey probably had several plausible explanations as to why they kept diaries.

Isabella Lipp commenced her diary with her incentive to write: “Exaggerations, fiction, fact and fancy will be noted down, and may prove of interest to future readers should they ever care to satisfy a little curiosity as to what went on in this city during the time it would necessarily be cut off from the outside world.”\textsuperscript{53}

On several occasions Isabella stated her reasons for keeping a diary. She was an avid reader. Thus aside from keeping her occupied during the war her personal writing reflects contemporary literature and ideas gathered from her reading. It is likely that she was influenced by Olive Schreiner’s writing\textsuperscript{54} although Isabella wrote of Schreiner’s \textit{Words in Season}, “it is very fine and very beautifully written, worthy of even her genius—but she writes from wrong premises altogether. The Boer’s Freedom and Independence were never attacked—menaced they might have appeared to be, but attacked never—the Boers are carrying on a Colossal Raid into British territory.”

Keeping a diary involves commitment and may entail some risk.\textsuperscript{55} Isabella wrote well. She was educated, widely read, intelligent and opinionated about the war. Although she feared the consequences of her diary being discovered by the Boers she freely expressed stanch political views, taking care always to keep the diary well hidden to avoid being expelled along with her husband and the entire staff. So much did she fear the diary being discovered that after carelessly disclosing to a friend that she was keeping a diary she swore her to secrecy. After a sleepless night of worry, Isabella went to her friend the following day and falsely told her she had destroyed all her papers because she feared charges of High Treason.\textsuperscript{56}

\textsuperscript{53} I. Lipp, \textit{My Diary: Fiction, Fact and Fancy}, 1.
\textsuperscript{54} \textit{Ibid.}, 68. Isabella described “the bright, beautiful Africander nation of Olive Schreiner.”
\textsuperscript{56} I. Lipp, \textit{My Diary: Fiction, Fact and Fancy}, 78.
Isabella’s diary is short on self-disclosure. Although she frequently mentions her “little darlings” in reference to her children, she neither names them nor discloses precisely where they were during the war. Obviously, she was trying to protect them.

Isabella often referred to those who would someday read her diary, and when on June 1, 1900 she made her final entry she noted that although the end of the war was not in sight, “abler and better pens than mine will now take it up.” Her concluding sentence revealed her true motive for writing--“Goodbye old Diary—you have helped me while away many dreary hour.”

Whiling away dreary hours may also have been Nonnie De la Rey’s motive for keeping her diary. However, she makes no direct mention of why she wrote. Perhaps the writing served to occupy lonely hours when her children were asleep or at play and the Africans took care of domestic chores. One surmises that being cognizant of her position in Boer society as the wife of a respected general, she wrote from a sense of history. Nonnie’s relationship with her husband was extremely close and she may have written her thoughts and experiences as a means of providing the General with a “history” of family life while they were apart.

Women who kept diaries during the war frequently did so because of an acute awareness that history was being made. It was just such a preconception that prompted a disproportionate number of Boer women to chronicle events that might have future significance.

Yet another Boer woman who kept a war-dairy was Alida Badenhorst: Tant Alie of the Transvaal, Her Diary 1880-1902. trans. by Emily Hobhouse (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1923). She wrote primarily for her family and her stated objective was that future generations should be mindful of and avoid the cruelties of war. Tant Alie began writing during idle periods when she was not overburdened by domestic duties or the supervision of the farm. This situation came about due to the many shortages she faced. There was no thread to sew, no wool to knit or cotton to crochet. Thus Alie turned to writing a book. Apparently writing had the added benefit of helping her to fill many lonely hours without her husband.

57 I. Lipp, My Diary: Fiction, Fact and Fancy, References such as "readers of this diary" page 106, "future readers" page 140, "readers must take it as we receive it" page 103, indicate a possible intent to publish.
58 Ibid., 243.
60 A. Badenhorst, Tant Alie of the Transvaal, Her Diary 1880-1902, 8.
61 Ibid., 181.
The fact that Emily Hobhouse published it suggests that Allie was aware of social reform issues related to the war. Tant Allie’s account spans a good deal of her life, commencing with a romantic adolescence and concluding at the end of the war. It is a book of contrast, pitting pre-war idyllic domesticity against the barren desolation that confronted her afterward. Given that it is highly introspective Allie’s diary likely provided her with comfort or succor. Evidently, keeping a diary had utility for women during war as a therapeutic exercise.

Diaries are generally a blend of chronicling and reflection and as such they “provide a welcome ever-listening ear for thoughts and observations, especially when other people can’t be told, or won’t listen.”

Inasmuch as penmanship is a process of self-representation whereby the writer “contributes to a perception of herself as she feels others should view her” diaries function as emotional rather than physical mirrors. Writing about oneself in a diary creates a self-portrait. Beyond being a chronicle, the reflective aspect of keeping a diary may result in a new self-awareness that clarifies strengths, weaknesses and potential during trying circumstances.

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63 Ibid., 212.
64 Ibid., 213.
Chapter Two

WOMEN AND THE SOCIAL CONDITIONS OF WAR

"From being a busy, flourishing hive of energetic work of all descriptions crowded to excess, fearing accidents at every street corner, seething with life, hope and ambition, aided by a ferment of political unrest, Johannesburg became a deserted, gloomy empty city."

In order to investigate contextually the experiences of women during the Anglo-Boer War it is essential to consider prevailing social conditions in the late nineteenth century. What were the South African conditions from which wartime women could hardly have been immune? Or, conversely, at what points do they intersect or reflect the larger society?

This chapter addresses three interrelated topics. The first describes the social environment of rural and urban women during the war. The second categorizes the roles of non-participatory women (Boers, Uitlanders, Blacks) and women who were active participants (nurses, prostitutes, camp followers). The final section positions women within the context of Victorian society.

According to Alan Hattersley, already by 1849 the region had achieved an “age of maturity.” Having long since exceeded the status of a replenishing station for passing ships, Cape Town retained a strong Dutch influence and was rapidly becoming Africa’s leading city.

In the Cape, measures toward a representative government and political party system were developing. Professional criteria had improved when public examinations and standards were implemented to oversee the medical and legal professions. Most professional people were European immigrants, but a growing number were sons of wealthy Cape citizens who had gone abroad to study law, medicine or theology.

Whaling, wine making and wool production were the most lucrative industries in the Cape. As the total number of merchant-banks increased—many opened branches even in small towns—banking facilitated rapid business and trade expansion in the 1860s.

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In South Africa education fell far short of European standards. In the nineteenth century, even for whites, education was rudimentary and illiteracy high. After Natal gained the status of responsible government in 1893, the schooling of white children improved greatly. Education and literacy had a major impact on the history of gender. Young white girls whose families had the financial means benefited from “ladies’ academies” where they received instruction in dressmaking, music, drawing, and grammar. In the Cape traditional schools existed but industrial or ‘ambag’ schools for boys were also established. One such school was the Uitenhage Boys’ Industrial School which first opened its doors in April 1895 and continues to operate as Uitenhage Technical High School.

Academic curricula differed by region, the most disadvantaged being the Free State where one-room schools operated or itinerant ‘meesters’ taught reading so that young men and women could qualify for church membership through literacy (proving thus that they could read the Bible.)

Library holdings varied greatly according to their location. Booksellers offset a scarcity of literature by selling music, pictures and even patent medicines.

By the end of the century piped water and street lighting were widespread. Where there were no reservoirs households depended on rainwater tanks. Electricity was used in urban areas but in most regions oil lamps had replaced gas streetlights. The majority of households still depended upon lamps and candles for interior illumination. Rural churches and halls were lit with candelabras.

By 1900 Cape Town had appointed its first health officer to implement urban development and deal with appalling sanitation problems. Although several forms of street paving had been attempted in the colonies, none met with great success. In most towns rutted streets were muddy when it rained, dusty when the wind blew and heavily polluted. Road conditions remained substandard to the end of the century, with no more than rough wagon tracks in rural areas. Main roads were often impassable because of swollen rivers. The poor

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5 A. Hattersley, An Illustrated Social History of South Africa, 239.
6 Ibid., 181.
7 Ibid., 180.
state of the roads, however, accentuated demand for expanded telegraphic communication, and by 1879 a telegraphic line linked Natal and Pretoria.\(^8\)

Transportation constituted a key development factor. Airplanes were not yet in use. Although the first motorcars arrived in Cape Town in 1897 they were too expensive to impact society immediately. In the same year the Pretoria Tramway Company commenced and for two years operated eight horse-drawn tramcars. This service was suspended during the war when the military conscripted the horses.\(^9\)

By 1899 a government-controlled rail service covered 6,860 kilometers of track.\(^{10}\) While the colonies and the Transvaal Republic had rail service the Free State did not—only a rail connection with the Cape.\(^{11}\) In 1894 President Kruger’s envisioned rail link between Pretoria and Delagoa Bay became a vital line for transporting mail, supplies, prisoners and refugees during the war.

Whilst not all regions had door-to-door mail delivery, to assist postmen houses were numbered and streets signed. During the war mail conveyance became significant as families were separated and people yearned for news.

Most Boers were farmers who lived difficult lives. Many regions were plagued by drought, labour shortages and livestock diseases, all of which were further hampered by antiquated farming methods. The soil needed manuring, long grass overtook crops, and farmers struggled to transport their produce to market on poor roads. Understandably, many immigrants felt misled about the region’s agricultural prospects. The rinderpest disaster of 1896-8 decimated farmer’s profits when two and a half million cattle died. Only those innovative farmers who began using donkeys instead of oxen, fenced off their land to prevent contamination of their herds, and introduced new machinery could continue operating successfully.\(^{12}\)

Entertainment and leisure activities abounded and even if the level of sophistication varied greatly between urban and rural regions a refined intellectual society was emerging. Art classes, choral societies, quadrille parties and theater groups flourished in urban areas.

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\(^8\) A. Hattersley, *An Illustrated Social History of South Africa*, 236.
\(^12\) *Ibid.*, 203.
Citizens enjoyed Shakespearian readings and English spas. Social clubs and literary and scientific societies featured social evenings that incorporated drama, literature, music, and the arts. Bioscopes, circuses and music halls thrived on the Rand and in Natal. For many Britons the highlight of 1898 theater-going occurred in Durban Edison’s bioscope where the Queen’s diamond jubilee procession played to keen audiences. As Johannesburg’s wealth and population expanded entrepreneurs catered to people’s desire for entertainment by providing musicals and dancing chorus girls. Persons wanting more active recreation engaged in such English sports as skittles, quoits, pigeon matches and cycling.

In rural regions entertainment centered around unsophisticated socialization among friends and family. Boer social activities included conversation and storytelling, picnics and evenings of music. Singing around the piano was very popular. For Boer families church attendance was a pivotal aspect of life that embraced spiritual and social aspects. One traveler commented that the burghers socialized often and drank vast amounts of coffee. A favorite Boer custom allowed courting couples to visit by candlelight in the home of the young lady after her parents had retired for the evening. Poignantly, this custom endured through the war.

By 1899 “South African towns, with no large proportion of their inhabitants industrialists, remained pleasant sun-drenched abodes, their smithies not yet ousted by garages and their demure little shops holding their own against the first of the great multiple stores.”

It was in the environment just described that war struck with all of its ramifications for women. Aside from suffering during this war there were heroic aspects of the female experience that historians must never overlook. Indubitably women were (as is always the case) adversely caught up in the trauma of war, but they could respond positively in significant and proactive ways. They advocated concentration camp reform, spearheaded relief efforts for the displaced, nursed the wounded and pushed for peace. Others, while stoically enduring immense privation and suffering, urged their men to fight for the cause of freedom that they took to be God’s will for His people.

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14 Ibid.
15 Ibid., 182.
16 Ibid., 184.
As might be expected, women held differing allegiances. Yet regardless of this, the role of women drawn into the war involved more than passive submission in the face of male political and military authority.\(^{18}\) Within the framework of their beliefs, women individually and on a daily basis confronted the ordeal of war. They witnessed the destruction of their homes and property, struggled to survive and endured extreme psychological distress.

Nor were women’s allegiances at all times culturally based. Some British women sided with the Boers and vice versa. Clearly, women had strong opinions about the veracity of the war.

Categorizing wartime women starts with the fact that the origin of the Afrikaner people was rich and diverse. They came from Dutch, Flemish, and German backgrounds, and were strongly influenced by exiled French Huguenots with whom they shared Calvinistic ideas and an aversion for government that impinged upon their freedom. The fledgling Afrikaner society saw themselves as “a racially pure elect in a black continent.” Also, within the context of years of negligence by Dutch officials, they deemed it their right to oversee their own destiny.\(^{19}\) Boers were described as “people of the Book and the rifle,” whose “faith in the former and mastery of the latter had brought them through the Wilderness.”\(^{20}\)

While most Boers (farmers) were Afrikaners of Dutch origin, not all Afrikaners supported the Boer cause and many women, including some of Dutch descent, zealously supported Britain’s imperialistic outreach.

In 1983 M. Venter in *Vrou en die Soldaat* cited a contemporary piece of advice for military wives that could well have been directed at Boer women a hundred years earlier: “You, as the wife of a soldier, must learn to be as independent as possible—both practically and emotionally. You must maintain the smooth running of the household without your husband’s help, and handle the day-to-day routine without his support. . . . Women are generally not eager to handle weapons, but it is essential that, before your husband leaves, you know where the weapons and ammunition are kept, and that you become so adept at handling them that you feel completely safe and at home with them.”\(^{21}\)


\(^{19}\) D. Judd, et. al., *The Boer War*, 18.


\(^{21}\) Quoted in J. Cock, *Colonels & Cadres: War & Gender in South Africa*, 123.
In their contemporary volume, *The Boer War*, Denis Judd and Keith Surridge contend that “Boer society was not particularly egalitarian, nor was it the rural idyll portrayed by commentators at the time. For many years before the war Transvaal society had been undergoing considerable change, which saw the emergence of the landless *bywoner* (poor white sub-farmer or sharecropper). This group, which belies the image of the Boers as exclusively individual farmers, was of growing concern before 1899.”

Without doubt, *bywoners* were a concern among Afrikaner society. Boers alleged that the lower classes or bywoners were responsible for looting, destroying property and uncivil behavior toward women. Bywoners were also more likely to become deserters (*joiners* or *hensoppers*) because they had no land to fight for.

Nonetheless, characteristically the Boer family was a tenacious, cohesive entity—a force to be reckoned with when outsiders challenged it. Thus, when the British threatened to take Boer women into captivity the Boer men responded by declaring, “We will never give up our country even for our wives; if the Khakis carry our wives into captivity we can at least go and fetch them back from England; but our country we could never get again.” The Boers were prepared to make great sacrifices to secure their land.

When her husband joined the commandoes Alie Badenhorst hid her tears and cried only in private. She had wanted people to say, “Frikkie Badenhorst has a brave little wife; would that all our women were like her.” Also, the fact that she was a Christian inspired her to try harder so that she would not dishonour her calling as a wife.

At the start of the war, joining a commando was a family matter and many Boer women and children accompanied men to the front. Some wives took it upon themselves to “manage” their husbands even while on commando, and it was for being an officious wife who “coached” her husband (Commandant-General Joubert) on military matters that Hendrina Joubert earned the nickname of ‘the general in petticoats.’

During the 1900s an all-encompassing patriarchal system constrained Afrikaner women, but it also held men accountable to specific social and moral obligations. Men were Biblically obliged to protect the weaker sex or “volksmoeder”—a term attributed to mothers.

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23 A. Badenhorst, *Tant Alie of the Transvaal, Her Diary 1880-1902*, 188.
24 Ibid., 115.
Hence the tremendous guilt when they could not protect their women from atrocious conditions in the concentration camps.26

After December 1900, thousands of Boer women and children were forced to leave their farms enter the internment camps. By 1902 there were more than forty camps for whites where over 116,000 persons were incarcerated. The camps were not only unsanitary, but also plagued by diseases--ravished by epidemics of measles, pneumonia and dysentery. Relatively few prisoners (only forty-three women and forty-eight children) escaped. Conditions varied from one camp to another, but typically the shelter, sanitation and rations were inadequate. The result was an appallingly high mortality rate of at least 22,000 children under the age of sixteen and 4,000 adult women.27

First established in the summer of 1900, the camp system originated with Alfred Milner (High Commissioner for South Africa) as a means of relocating displaced refugees and protecting the hensoppers (deserters) from the vengeance of their fellow Boers. But as desperate Boers implemented guerilla tactics, the British burned their resources to the ground and curtailed commando movements with barbed wire and blockhouses. The British used the internment of women as a deliberate strategy to end Boer resistance.

The camps were implemented by Lord Roberts and further developed by Lord Kitchner, who wrote to Roberts that “The women question is always cropping up and is . . . difficult. There is no doubt the women are keeping up the war and are far more bitter than the men . . . I really think the only solution that will bring them to their senses is to remove the worst class to Kaapmuiden and form a camp there.”28

When not thus interred, Afrikaner women were at least on the periphery of society. Not accorded formal rights, they actively participated in communal life and, to a far lesser extent, political affairs. Dominated by Christian values and resigned to the austerity of pioneering life Boer women maintained their households, educated their children, supported and even incited their men during times of conflict. Even in the camps defiant Boer women hoisted the

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28 Ibid., 168.
“Vierkleur” (the flag of the Transvaal Republic) as an emblem of unwavering loyalty. Their palpable influence was entrenched in the religious values of large tightly-knit families.

When his wife fell ill, one Boer returned home to take care of her, resolutely declaring that “Kruger is certainly the president, but the volk is king.” Boer men were strongly attached to their land, the republic and their families, but so were the women. Wives often urged their husbands to remain on the battlefield and continue fighting for the cause.

Boer women vigorously resisted British imperialism. Helen Bradford observed that the Boer woman was “challenged by the ‘Khaki’ men from above and the ‘Kaffir’ men from below, [and] was notorious for reckoning she could acquire another husband but not another racist republican state. The ironic alliance of Boer women and ‘Butcher Roberts’ was central in driving some Boer patriarchs back into war.”

While British reserves incorporated the military forces of a worldwide empire and most of the non-whites in southern Africa, the Boers could rely only on themselves and a negligible number of foreign volunteers. Boer alliances were strong. Evidence that they supported one another is found in a diary entry written by Nicolaas Jacobus van Warmelo while in exile: “One of the greatest advantages we have over the enemy is that we are among friends, and can move about in small troops without having to depend on a base of operations, whereas they do well not to divide themselves in too small groups, or to venture too far from their base.”

The British were correct in their conviction that Boer women urged their men to continue fighting, sheltered and protected spies, passed on strategic information and took care of sick or wounded commandoes. Cowardly men who shirked combat duty were despised

32 Ibid., 58.
33 D. Judd, et. al., The Boer War, 89.
34 D. van Warmelo, On Commando, 114.
by Boer women who encouraged their husbands, sons, and fathers to fight—even obliging those on furlough to return to the front.\(^{36}\)

Three circumstances compelled Boer women to leave their farms and relocate to towns. First, their homes were destroyed by the British. Second, they could not sustain themselves alone on the land. And, third, they were afraid of being attacked by Africans.\(^{37}\) Many Boer families sought refuge in Johannesburg where they simply appropriated homes deserted by those who had fled. It was said that businessmen returned at night to find their home broken into and new occupants taking up residence.\(^{38}\)

By October 1902 Alfred Milner estimated that 30,000 farmhouses and a number of villages had been destroyed during the war. The women and children consequently rendered homeless were left destitute or dispatched to the nearest British town. Those women who had the means fled to the Cape or Natal. Some sought refuge on neighbouring farms or even in African kraals.\(^{39}\) Others like Mrs. De la Rey were in perpetual flight to stay one step ahead of the enemy. General Botha estimated that in the Transvaal 2,540 families not sent to the camps fended for themselves in the veld.\(^{40}\)

Nonnie de la Rey’s wartime experience may be divided into two phases. The first began with the onset of hostilities in October 1899 and continued until November 1900 when she was forced to abandon her home.\(^{41}\) This phase encompasses the struggles of a wife and mother who alone managed the farm, oversaw African labourers and tended to her children’s needs. The second phase, well documented in Nonnie’s diary, was a time when she and her children were homeless refugees on the open veld.

Due to her persistently optimistic spirit, the support of her husband and friends, and her unwavering faith in God, Nonnie was often at peace in these surroundings. Once, after a wild dash to escape from the British the wheel of her vehicle became wedged in some rocks and, except for the aid of several burghers, she would have been captured. She later recalled, “We


\(^{37}\) \textit{Ibid.}, 162.


\(^{40}\) \textit{Ibid.}, 172.

were in danger, and yet we really enjoyed ourselves so much that time went quickly.”

On another occasion she wrote, “When I could set up the tent under the shady trees and cover the floor with green grass, then I felt thoroughly happy and content.”

Nonnie was a strong, resourceful woman who remained unwavering in her loyalty to the Boer cause. That she would not risk her husband’s life to save her own became apparent one night after De la Rey had joined his family on the veld and the British closed in. When the general assured his wife that if the khakis attacked he would fight to protect his family, Nonnie bravely told him, “Nay, do not let that disturb you; do what you can to escape when they come; the Lord has always preserved me until now, and He will continue to do so.”

Her faith, loyalty and courage were characteristic of many Boer women.

Although it was rumored that in the Transvaal thousands of Boer women were intent on the establishment of an Amazon fighting corps, such aspirations came to nothing. H. J. Batts was a pro-British Baptist minister who came to South Africa in 1881 and remained during the war. He reported that pursuant to forming an Amazon company a meeting was called at a Pretoria hall where “a huge concourse of Amazons assembled,” supported by members of the Dutch clergy. Several women made speeches, one of which Batts describes as a “Joan of Arc” who “appealed, amid cheers, to her sisters to join her, and she would lead them out against the foe.”

The women were distraught because the tide of war had turned and things were not going well for the Boers. Batts reported, “They began to talk very loudly of what they would do if their men ran away; they said they would go out and shoot—anyhow, they would do something to keep back the arch-enemy from coming into the capital.” They clamoured for the formation of an Amazon corps for fighting purposes.” Failing that, they were prepared to undertake office work in order free able-bodied men for service at the front. The women named specific government clerical duties that they might assume including positions as telegraph operators and postal workers. They reasoned that office posts occupied by men who had not left town since the outbreak of war could be filled by women, thus compelling men to take up their proper place on the battlefield.

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42 J.E. De la Rey, *A Woman’s Wanderings and Trials During the Anglo-Boer War*, 43, 44.
45 H.J. Batts, *Pretoria From Within During the War 1899-1900*, 146, 147.
Batts reported that several proposals followed and a committee led by Mrs. Reitz was formed. However, he learned that she soon after left town and “that was the beginning and the ending of it.” The Amazon corps never assembled again in Pretoria and “no more was heard of taking over the duties of the men, or of going to the front to fight.”

In keeping with middle-class Victorian expectations, British women excelled in philanthropic endeavors that provided comfort to soldiers and aid to refugees. Civilian women were involved only in supportive ways and had no part in pre- or post-war negotiations.

Historian Andrew Thompson asserts that the “Britishness” of the Uitlanders (foreign immigrants) in South Africa was exaggerated. Uitlanders were by and large white, non-Afrikaans immigrants from Europe who settled in the Rand after gold was discovered in the region. These foreigners comprised a diverse population that was not fully integrated into Transvaal society. Consequently, foreign women resident in the Transvaal underwent the greatest disruption of domestic life immediately before and after the outbreak of war when their families voluntarily relocated or were expelled from the republics. Even those who remained in the republics were frequently compelled to relocate. Most foreign women traveled to Natal or the Cape with their children at the onset of hostilities.

The war observer Lionel Curtis lamented that Uitlander refugees in Durban were living in makeshift shelters in conditions worse than the tents provided for Boers in the camps. However, although conditions were harsh they rarely equaled those of the camps. Many foreign women worked in factories or as domestic helpers to sustain themselves and their children. Some returned to Johannesburg after the British occupation while their families remained in the colonies until the end of the war.

Even women from neutral countries experienced the grim consequences of war. For example, in June 1900 Lord Roberts ordered the deportation of all employees of the

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46 J.E. De la Rey, *A Woman’s Wanderings and Trials During the Anglo-Boer War*, 149.
50 Ibid., 176.
Netherlands South African Railway Company who were not Republican burghers. This sent more than 1,700 women and children (mostly Hollanders) from East London to Flushing.”

Upper and middle class English women who happened to be in South Africa at the time were similarly caught up in the war. Lady Sarah Wilson, youngest daughter of the 7th Duke of Marlborough and Winston Churchill’s aunt, was in the Rand during Jameson Raid and later in Mafeking with her officer husband during that siege. For nursing the sick and wounded she became known as the ‘heroine of Mafeking’. A talented journalist, Lady Sarah authored *South African Memories, Social, Warlike & Sporting from Diaries Written at the Time*.

There were numerous female camp followers. Heedless of the danger, wealthy, influential foreign women seeking adventure chose to travel to South Africa during the war. Lord Milner described these women as “frivolings of fashionable females” whose “mutual jealousies, feuds, backbiting” lent a “sort of quasi-Monte Carlo background to that grim tragedy.”

Lady Violet Cecil, daughter-in-law of the Marquess of Salisbury, came to Zeerust from England to be with her husband. Other women came for humanitarian social reasons or to engage in feminist activism. Lady Cecil (later Viscountess Milner) noted during her stay in Cape Town that “all the movement for the Victoria League, for the Ladies Empire Club in far away Grosvenor Street and for much else started over the tea cups at Rondesbosch and Clarement.”

Isabella Lipp’s wartime experience differed greatly from that of Nonnie de la Rey. Separated from her children, she and her husband relocated from their home to a small confining apartment where she whiled away many tedious hours alone. Although urged by friends to flee with her children Isabella chose rather to remain with her husband—“knowing how necessary my companionship was with the comfort and care for his welfare.”

Isabella’s allegiance to Britain remained firm. Yet, despite her British citizenship, she criticized imperialist policies when witnessing injustice and readily sympathized with

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52 Ibid., 180.
53 Ibid., 178.
54 Ibid., 176.
suffering Boer women. On at least one occasion she confessed to having “a long hot argument with my husband, he being pro-Boer for the time being and I British.”

That Isabella at times came close to disliking Boer women was apparent in March 1900 when she wrote a tongue-in-cheek critique of a newspaper editorial that mentioned a possible uprising of Amazon corps. Isabella observed, “There is a little paragraph headed the ‘Woman’s Part,’ after referring to the part, no doubt noble, which the Boer women have already played in this war, it winds up with, ‘It is more than probable that, should matters become serious in the Federal lines, the Republican Amazons will strengthen the Federal Forces and so furnish a marvelous spectacle for the civilized world,’ with all due deference Mr. Editor I must differ from you—in the first place, the Boer woman’s adipose tissue would stand in the way of her doing the fighting woman, secondly her own inert, disposition could not stand the energy and hardships of commando life and then again, no Boer woman over twenty years or married rides on horseback and in the very first engagement they would all be captured not being able to make the necessary strategical movement to the rear fast enough, besides Mr. Editor, you know well enough—the trenches would have to be considerably larger for the women than for the men—think of all the babies (and we know how numerous they are in Boer households) and other children, their mothers could not leave them at home, crying for Mamma and food—poor Tommy Atkins, fancy his face, after gallantly storming a trench and about to take it at the point of a bayonet to be suddenly confronted with a body of fighting Amazons in Cappies (Dutch headgear) and flowing skirts with squads of howling baby Boers—he would indeed then fulfill the Boers’ prophecy of having his heart turned to water before their might and cause.”

Not all Uitlander women supported the British. Hence, as an endeavor to foster sympathy and support for British imperialistic ideologies, novelist and historical writer Dorothea Fairbridge and other society women established the Guild of Loyal Women.

Africans were another obvious category of women. Recent scholarship acknowledges that indigenous African refugees suffered and died on a massive scale in the concentration camps. While many black males assumed an opportunistic attitude to the war, most black

56 I. Lipp, My Diary: Fiction, Fact and Fancy, 55.
57 Ibid., 206, 207.
women understood little of its causes or consequences. For them the cost was immediate and tragic especially after the British destroyed their homes and sent them to “refugee” camps.

Judd and Surridge assert that “In many respects, therefore, the Boer War was a dirty war, which at times raged beyond the control of the higher military authorities, and often it was the Africans and the coloureds who were caught in the middle.”

Although the British claimed that the relocation of blacks to camps was a preemptive action to forestall African aid to the fighting Boers, all too often homes and villages were destroyed for no reason other than that the blacks resided in areas where the Boers were active. Africans were callously sent to camps not for humanitarian reasons but strategically to eliminate any possible assistance in the form of provisions and labour to the commandoes. Yet, when Kitchener ordered black farm workers to be sent to the camps he miscalculated the logistics of the task. Unable to foresee the impossibility of containing thousands of out-of-work Africans, there occurred a substantial influx of blacks onto the already troubled scene.

By the end of the war there were some sixty African camps with over 115,000 inmates. Self-reliant, they had to build their own shelters, grow their food and cultivate crops for military consumption. In some instances black refugees were sent to work for white families. Although accurate statistics were not kept, it is estimated that at least 14,000 indigenous Africans, mostly children, died in black camps.

Apart from a few women who fought or acted as spies, most women did not actively participate in the conflict. One of those who fought was Mrs. Otto Krantz, who joined the Natal campaign. Another was Helena Wagner of Zeerust, who, disguised as a man, fought in the laagers and trenches for five months.

By and large, Boer authorities neither encouraged nor endorsed women’s participation in combat. Beyond the initial phase of the war when women accompanied their men to the front, Boers were reluctant to admit any woman who was not a nurse into the laagers.

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60 D. Judd, et. al., *The Boer War*, 236.
Prostitution always follows armies into war. Ironically, accompanying armies is also a commonality shared by the noble profession of nursing! South Africa was no exception and during the Anglo-Boer War prostitutes “serviced” British soldiers stationed far from home.

In Cape Town prostitutes promoted business by having their names and addresses stamped on metal discs that looked like sovereigns. An observer commented, “They would walk about the streets smelling out their prey, and when they saw a likely catch would drop an address coin in front of him. I remember seeing a girl, perhaps unusually bold, walking through Green Point camp and throwing sovereigns’ worth of trouble into the officer’s tents.”

J.Y.F. Blake, author of A West Pointer with the Boers, dispensed with Victorian reserve and freely wrote about liaisons between black women and British men. “In Pretoria, on Skinner Street, several of us were amused late one Sunday afternoon, on seeing an English officer with the rank of captain walking with two Hottentot-Kaffir girls, one on each side, and both dressed in white linen and wearing pink stockings and high heeled slippers. These Kaffir girls were about sixteen years old, and he looked supremely happy as he braced his shoulders and passed us by.”

Blake alleged that the black refugee camps were also maintained for prostitution-- “the truth is that they wanted the Kaffir women for the use of the English soldiers and officers, and to-day you can see half-caste kids by the score about those Kaffir camps.”

Prior to the Anglo-Boer War the British medical corps consisted mainly of men. Male orderlies were preferred because South Africa was not deemed a suitable place for British women especially under conditions of war. It was further believed that women would hamper the wounded soldiers’ freedom and that flirtation would be a problem.

Institutionalized nursing by women is a relatively recent phenomenon in Western society. It was Florence Nightingale’s well-known crusading efforts during the Crimean War and her assertion that woman “epitomizes caring, maternal qualities” that eroded male prejudice against female nurses and achieved recognition of women’s military role.

66 R. Milne, Anecdotes of the Anglo-Boer War, 75.
67 J.Y.F. Blake, A West Pointer with the Boers, 353.
69 J. Cock, Colonels & Cadres: War & Gender in South Africa, 149.
the Crimean War (1850s) most military hospitals employed male nurses and barred women from tending soldiers.\textsuperscript{70}

Thanks to Florence Nightingale, women came to be seen as peculiarly suited to nurse the wounded soldiers. During the Anglo-Boer War nurses from Europe, including Russia, served in South Africa. European nurses were invaluable not only because of their service, but also because they trained Boer women to take care of their sick. However, nursing duties were sometimes compromised. In July 1900 a group of Dutch nurses were arrested and deported after “uncensored letters from Pretoria civilians to men on commando were found in their possession.”\textsuperscript{71}

Beatrice and Florence Burgers, daughters of the second President of the Transvaal, served as nurses during the war. The family suffered a major financial loss after their father’s death that compelled the sisters to support themselves. When Florence chronicled some of her nursing experiences she exclaimed over “the marvel of the ex rays!”\textsuperscript{72} Advances in nursing meant that x-ray was in use as were sterile bandages, plaster of Paris for broken bones and ether or chloroform for anesthetic.

Along with the horrors of war, Florence recorded times of light-hearted mirth among the young nurses. “The dining room for matron and nurses was a large room. . . . At one end of the room was a very large mirror and in front of it the nurses, free from their daily toil, used to dance after the evening meal. It was fun seeing our reflections in the mirror and point[ing] out each others funny actions! Even tired aching feet could not give up the fascinating reaction. My sister Beatrice Burgers, now Mrs. Orr used to play the piano. The music kept us going!”\textsuperscript{73}

In typical Victorian romantic style nurse Florence Burgers wrote in her diary about several wartime romances. The first was a Scottish officer who, upon learning that Florence’s mother was related to Robert Bruce, insisted that that was sufficient reason for marriage. However, Florence would have none of it because she strongly supported the Boers. Her suitor had no interest in the outcome of the war and declared that he fought only to avoid being “shot like a dog for breaking his vows.” But Florence was not convinced and would not

\textsuperscript{70} J. Cock, Colonels & Cadres: War & Gender in South Africa, 149.
\textsuperscript{72} Florence Burgers, private collection of papers, letters and diaries in the possession of Mrs. Charlotte Robertson, Greyton, Cape, South Africa. Page 3 of loose papers relating to the war.
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., 4.
even permit him to write or return to her after the war. She commented that “he was a fine man” but that she could not marry a British loyalist.\footnote{Florence Burgers, \textit{Papers, letters, diary}, 5.}

Florence and Beatrice were nursing in Bourkes Hospital in Pretoria when the British captured the city.\footnote{This may well be the Bourke Hospital, organized by George Bourke in 1899. What is significant is that this was mentioned in Bessie Collin’s Bridget Theron, \textit{Dear Sue: The Letters of Bessie Collins from Pretoria during the Anglo-Boer War}, pp. 21 and 22. Bessie wrote, “Our house has been turned into a Red Cross Hospital.” There were eight nurses and a matron working at the hospital in December 1899—one could have been Florence Burgers, but this is impossible to verify since Florence did not date her memoirs.} This prompted the two Boer sisters to apply for permission to leave the city in order to assist Boers in the veld who were in dire need of nursing care. To this end they arranged the loan of a wagon and team for the journey. Florence then applied to Lord Roberts for a permit to travel. He asked her where she would get a wagon, and she told him it a wagon belonging to a Mr. Schoeman. Lord Roberts granted permits for the nurses, but they soon discovered this to be a trick. Their plan was thwarted by Roberts who had immediately commandeered Schoeman’s wagon.

This experience further reduced her regard for the British.

Florence found that “the enemy prisoners were on the whole very grateful for what we had done for them. But when the army entered I could not understand their attitude, they seemed to expect us to be quite grateful to them for taking our country from us!”\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 5.}

Womanhood and the war cannot be discussed without reference to Victorian influences.\footnote{An eloquent description of Queen Victoria is that of G. M. Trevelyan in his \textit{British History in the Nineteenth Century}, 423, 424.} From 1837 until her death in 1901 Queen Victoria reigned over an empire so vast that, as it was famously said, the sun never set over British territory. Her rule is linked to Britain’s great age of industrial and economic progress and in later years she was seen as symbol of empire building. Victoria delighted in war, but the Anglo-Boer War overshadowed the closing stages of her reign and she did not live to see its conclusion. She affectionately sent to each soldier serving in South Africa a small tin (decorated in blue, red and gold) containing chocolates. A certain Private Tucker remembered that upon receiving the chocolate “such a cheer went up that the Boers must have thought we had taken leave of our senses and gone mad.”\footnote{P. Todd, et. al., \textit{Private Tucker’s Boer War Diary: The Transvaal War of 1899, 1900, 1901, & 1902 with the Natal Field Forces}, 66.} Clearly the Queen’s gesture meant a great deal to her army and like
many soldiers Tucker cherished his tin as a memento of the Queen’s esteem for her fighting men. 79

Strongly biased against the Boers, Victoria regarded them as ruthless and cruel. 80 What follows illustrates mutual misperception. Just as Queen Victoria seemingly knew little of Boer culture, so also the Boers in turn had scant knowledge of the royals.

During the war an elderly Boer woman commented that she felt quite sorry for the “ou missus” (old lady, meaning Queen Victoria) because as a result of “listening to Kimmerlain [Mr. Chamberlain] and allowing the war to go on, she [the Queen] could get no one to do her washing for her, and had to do it herself!” 81 For this particular Boer woman the most dire consequence of the war to affect Victoria was that she could not procure good domestic help.

Official Victorian documents seldom referred to or focused on women because it was inherent in society that men were superior, women inferior, and that the fairer sex occupied a lesser place in society. Thus it is not surprising that Victorian women were by and large excluded from public life. A woman’s place was in the home as a provider of nurturing care. The absence of women in official documents in the nineteenth century compels historians to read between the lines and discover the role and status of women in Victorian society. 82

Victorian women’s reproductive role was recognized and revered as fundamental to society. In the late 1890s motherhood and the raising of future citizens for the good of king and country were lauded as virtuous qualities. 83 In a similar disposition, Boer society centered in God and family. It was assumed that women knew their place and were happy to fulfill their part as nurturing mothers to a brood of children. Ironically, propriety alluded to pregnancy rather than outright mention that a woman was about to give birth. Such was the case when in 1900 the British were closing in on Pretoria and a concerned Boer women wrote that she hoped that “Mrs. Voss’ little affair does not come off during that time [of invasion].

79 P. Todd, et. al., Private Tucker’s Boer War Diary: The Transvaal War of 1899, 1900, 1901, & 1902 with the Natal Field Forces, 67.
81 H.J. Batts, Pretoria From Within During the War 1899-1900, 69.
Days later she comments, “Mrs. Voss has a lovely little girl, it was born on Friday.” Typical of Victorian etiquette a refined euphemism—“little affair”—was used to refer to childbirth.

The primary worth and recognition granted females in the Victorian era lay in domesticity and their reproductive value. In South Africa neither British, Boer nor black women occupied nor demanded official representation—even in the face of war.

All told, the society undergirding wartime women, including the two principal diarists in this study, was varied and changing rapidly. Modernity was setting in, women lacked representation, females could be differentiated by race or role and Victorian influences maintained a tenuous hold on the populace.

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84 B. Theron, _Dear Sue: The Letters of Bessie Collins from Pretoria during the Anglo-Boer War_, 58, 59.
Chapter Three

THE INTERACTION OF WHITE WOMEN AND BLACK MEN

“It is understood that you have armed the Bastards, Fingos and Baralongs against us—in this you have committed and enormous act of wickedness . . . reconsider the matter, even if it costs you the loss of Mafeking . . . disarm your blacks and thereby act the part of a white man in a white man’s war.”

(General Conje to Colonel Baden-Powell, October 29, 1899.)

European colonialism caused simmering tension between the white and non-white peoples of Southern Africa. A checkered history of exploitation, suppression, resistance and turmoil followed. The weak and vacillating British governance of the nineteenth century, which was primarily concerned with economics, not ethics or morality, rendered the non-white inhabitants of southern Africa vulnerable.

The Anglo-Boer War increased demand for labour in the military, on the railways, at the harbours, and in manufacturing, farming and construction. The growing labour shortage proactively prompted the governments of the Cape and Natal colonies to manage black labour mobilization and migration in South Africa. Labour recruitment became a viable operation spawning large companies such as the South African General Agency Ltd., and smaller agencies also. The labour shortage and ensuing supply and demand economics prompted Africans to seek and receive modestly higher wages. Black workers used employer’s labour needs to gain for themselves a favourable bargaining position.

This chapter addresses the unique circumstances during the Anglo-Boer War when black men worked under the supervision of white women in divergent yet mutually dependent spheres in both urban and rural settings.

It is no small challenge to analyze the relationship between employers and their servants in the late eighteenth century. Historians must rely on relatively few letters, diaries, newspaper reports, memoirs and legal documents for relevant information. Moreover, the quality of reliable data, especially from an African perspective, is limited.

Although often alleged to be a “white man’s war” fought on African soil, the Anglo-Boer war was no respecter of colour. War brought devastation and suffering to all,

irrespective of class and race, not just the British and Boers. Indians, blacks and Coloureds who lived and worked in the republics and colonies were either directly caught up in the conflict or suffered the inevitable societal consequences of war.

Coloureds and especially blacks were involved in the war. This is not surprising since blacks comprised the majority population of the two Boer republics. Initially the domestic needs of Boer men on commando were taken care of by their wives, children or by black men. This partly explains why until May 1900 approximately a quarter of all men on commando were black.\(^3\) The blacks who went on commando with their masters were the best labourers on the farm. They were known as *agterryers*—literally “after-riders”—because they followed their employers to war with provisions and spare horses. Many agterryers were fiercely loyal and even identified with the Boer cause.\(^4\) However, few of these black men remained with commando units.

With their men away on commando, women in rural districts came to depend heavily on loyal black farm workers. Similarly, in developed urban areas white women relied heavily on black domestic servants (cooks, maids and houseboys) with whom they frequently worked in isolation and close proximity.

Africans were referred to by whites as “kaffirs, or volk, or schepsels (creatures), none of these terms being regarded as terms of abuse or being intended in an unkindly or inhuman spirit.” They worked as domestic servants, messengers or unskilled labourers.\(^5\) The relationship between black men and their white mistresses encompassed more than the duties and conditions of service—there were also the important considerations of class, race and even literacy.\(^6\)

The relationship between the urban mistress and her African workers was heavily determined by class. An unequal social status of employer and employee prevailed.\(^7\) This was also true of rural black farm workers who appear to have had an additional degree of loyalty stemming from the paternal attitude of their masters toward them—they were more


than servants, yet not quite family. It was also the case that blacks who worked on Boer farms assimilated aspects of their master’s culture. They spoke the ‘Taal’ and integrated burgher songs and sports into their way of life.8

The wife of the minister of Rouxville in the Free State experienced exceptional devotion from an elderly black servant named January. The old man had been granted a month’s leave to visit his sick wife (whom he had not seen for a year) in Basutoland but soon after his departure the British sent Reverend Albertyn to the camp at Green Point. Old January returned to Rouxville within a week of his departure, explaining that he received word that the Reverend had been sent away saying, “I came back to take care of the Misses and the children,” adding that he left his wife with friends who promised to nurse her. Tragically, old January never saw his wife and children again—he was captured and sent to a concentration camp where he died. Mrs. Albertyn recollected that “no personal loss or suffering caused by this dreadful war was felt more keenly by my whole family than old January’s death.”9

On the Rand the cruel treatment of servants was said to be “backveld” or “Boer,” which connoted uncivilized behavior practiced only in rural environments. This idea incorrectly suggested that maltreatment of black employees did not happen in an urban environment. Conventional wisdom of the time dictated that black servants be treated like children—firmly and fairly. It was assumed that a just mistress would always be able to avail herself of high-quality domestic servants.

A fine example of a colonial stance toward Africans is a letter written in 1907 to General Louis Botha by Mrs. J. L. Robins in which she complained about the unruly ‘houseboy’ problem. Mrs. Robinson had lived in Johannesburg for fifteen years and favored the late President Kruger’s firm African policies: “We had nothing of this kind of thing to contend with. Then those Kaffirs were kept in their proper place, not allowed to strut about, dressed up to imitate the white man, nor to ride about in cabs, rickshaws and bicycles. They were not allowed to be insolent, and ask what wages they liked. It was the same in the Free State and other places.”10

The white population consciously sought to control African employment, migration and economic status. However, pass laws were more than a means of controlling population

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movement; they were also character references that determined the likelihood of gaining favorable employment in the future. The employer’s assessment of a black worker’s performance and reliability was noted in the pass book where employers wrote comments or recorded their evaluation of the worker’s character.\textsuperscript{11}

Although there were differences in the way each perceived or treated blacks, both English and Afrikaners were always committed to keeping South Africa white.\textsuperscript{12} Nonetheless, blacks overwhelmingly sided with the English, especially after February 1900, when British forces gained a military advantage. As in the earlier American Revolution, Africans eagerly anticipated a liberating victory. Blacks in South Africa hoped British rule would culminate in improved political, economic and social conditions for Africans.

Indians remained loyal to the British from the start of the war. But by war’s end, aspirations for political inclusion would be dashed by the Vereeniging Treaty (1902), which side-stepped the question of non-white political rights by essentially maintaining the status quo for white/black relations.\textsuperscript{13} According to Judd and Surridge the Peace Treaty signified a decision to “abandon the political aspirations of black and brown South Africans for the sake of the white man’s peace.”\textsuperscript{14}

Even between enemies there was an unspoken understanding to preserve white dominance at all cost. The vast majority of Afrikaans- and English-speaking South Africans held that “when push came to shove in the real ‘race conflict’ there would be no question where their common interest lay—in the maintenance of white supremacy.”\textsuperscript{15}

It was against this background that white women related to their black male domestic workers. For women the war had meant both inclusion and exclusion. They had little input when conflict was initiated; nonetheless they bore the brunt of the ensuing social consequences. As men became caught up in the political and military aspects of war, women had to fend for themselves and their reliance upon and interaction with their domestic workers increased accordingly.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item D. Judd, et. al., \textit{The Boer War}, 2.
\item B.J. Barker, \textit{A Concise Dictionary of the Boer War}, 131.
\item D. Judd, et. al., \textit{The Boer War}, 3.
\item \textit{Ibid.}, 48.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
This was especially true for those (mostly Boer) women who assumed the management of farms. These independent women were accustomed to overseeing their farms while their men were absent. However, the attitude of blacks had changed. Soon after her husband left to join the commandoes a Boer wife complained that the “native boys are often troublesome to overlook when there is no master to watch their work.” This, in spite of the fact that the headman had worked for the family for two generations and knew well what was to be done. Toward the war’s end she sorrowfully commented that most of the Africans who had worked on their farm had fled or been expelled by the British. At least thirty-one had died, many in the camps.

Helen Bradford asserts that because the Boers were an “intensely domestic people, deeply attached to their families and homes,” many were reluctant to go to war. Boer men had reason for concern when leaving their wives and children behind. Families that remained on isolated farms with only African workers to protect and assist them were at risk. One Boer was so perturbed because the war had prompted many Africans to support the British that he returned home to protect his wife from the “insolent Kaffirs.”

Relating the above to Nonnie De la Ray, one must acknowledge her racism. In her own time she aptly reflected the views of white women toward blacks with what was probably the prevailing attitude among most white South Africans. Her diary reveals a paternalistic attitude toward black workers from whom she exacted hard labour.

Childhood experiences undoubtedly influenced Nonnie De la Rey’s attitude toward Africans. Her diary recalls a hunting trip with her father, Hendrik Adrian Greef, a Transvaal Voortrekker who had settled in Lichtenburg. When she was twelve years old her father went on a shooting expedition. Because her mother refused to remain alone on the farm with her four children, he took the family with him. Nonnie remembered passing through wild country where “one met only Kaffirs and other savage people. They were like wild beasts; as soon as they caught sight of us they would run off as hard as they could. . . . This journey kept us for a year on the veldt. We were often in danger from the black Kaffirs, who tried to get hold of us.”

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19 J.E. De la Rey, *A Woman’s Wanderings and Trials During the Anglo-Boer War*, 142.
For Nonnie, African males posed a potential threat. Whether for food, clothing or alcohol, African servants often stole from their employers. Petty theft was dealt with in a variety of ways and different degrees of severity. In some instances blacks robbed their former employers to get even for unpaid wages, poor references or ‘spoilt’ pass books that indicated an unsatisfactory performance of duty.20

After General De la Ray and his men had been forced from Pretoria and he reported to his wife on the plight of Boer women in the area, Nonnie’s diary mentions that west of Pretoria Boer women were left alone on their farms and “their cattle were at the mercy of the cruel Kaffirs, who used to come and steal them away, generally at night. They would burst into the houses and make their way to the women, and tell them that they must have their money, using such threats and such violence that many a one fled in the night with her children, and often wandered for hours before she could find shelter. It was bitter enough for them then; but little could they think that all this was but a drop in the cup of their suffering. Many of the burghers returned home on this account to see what they could do to save their families.” 21

Despite a disdain for African males, Nonnie relied heavily upon devoted black men not only on the farm but later on the veld. Such reliance was apparent after General Douglas removed all the sheep from her farm. Nonnie went to the field where the cattle had been kept to find her shepherd had retrieved between one and two hundred of her sheep, thus ensuring the family’s food supply.22 The shepherds were almost always Kaffirs who lived amongst the sheep and it is apparent that they displayed courage and allegiance to the Boers despite alleged “barbarous treatment.” 23

Unquestionably Nonnie appreciated the extraordinary labors of her black workers. “For nineteen months after that I wandered around in my wagon, and, just as one gets attached to the room in which one sleeps, so did I grow to love my wagon. Many a stormy night, when it was blowing and raining, have my Kaffirs had a hard job to get the sailcloth covering firmly fixed, so that the wind should not blow it right away.” 24

21 J.E. De la Rey, *A Woman’s Wanderings and Trials During the Anglo-Boer War*, 17, 18.
22 Ibid., 31.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid., 36.
After another violent storm she wrote, “Sometimes all my Kaffirs would be pulling at the sailcloth to hold it down, and fasten it securely, so that I would think that the awning was surely going to be blown away from the wagon. It was dreadful to go through those storms in the wagon.”

Nonetheless, Nonnie expected her workers to perform the onerous tasks that made her life easier. “Sometimes in my journeyings I would come to houses which had not been completely destroyed, and where, perhaps, one room would still be under shelter; then I would have it cleaned quickly; we would stay there during the heat of the day.”

Once she needed to make bread when the ovens of the vicinity had been destroyed. Nonnie prepared the bread dough and attempted to bake with very little wood in the broken ovens. “I went on with my breadmaking,” she notes, “and the boy (a Kaffir) had to try and make a fire somehow or other. He was a very sharp boy, and he succeeded in heating the oven.” But when she returned to the oven she found it was not very hot and there was no more firewood. She put the dough in the oven leaving “Sampson, the boy, to bring it out of the oven.” They ate the bread although it had not properly baked.

On another occasion it rained very hard and Nonnie again confronted the problem of preparing food without an oven or firewood. Observing an ant-heap burning nearby she told her ‘boy’ to use ‘kastrol” to start a fire in an ant-heap. Using a large sailcloth as a screen she was eventually able to prepare a meal. She noted that “Simson was doing all he could to make the fire burn up—we were all very hungry. At last there was some good soup ready, and we had friends with us to help us eat it, so that we began to enjoy ourselves.” This kind of improvisation together with a resilient perseverance was characteristic.

Differentiating between “English” and “Boer” Kaffirs, Nonnie did not regard the former very highly. “There were a few Kaffirs belonging to the English there, and these had to help me with my work that evening. It seemed just as if these English Kaffirs were thinking, “How aggravating it is to have to do with the Boer women” but that did not help them a bit—they had to work.”

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25 J.E. De la Rey, A Woman’s Wanderings and Trials During the Anglo-Boer War, 102.
26 Ibid., 31.
27 Ibid., 59.
28 Ibid., 83.
29 Ibid., 73.
At one point the Boers with whom Nonnie had camped were alerted to “inspan” and flee as the British were approaching. In the confusion her wagon was separated from the others until very late at night when she rejoined the group of wagons near Schweizer-Renecke. Although everyone was already asleep, Nonnie’s first concern was to feed her children before settling for the night. There was no milk since her cows were nowhere to be found. “All was silent; everyone was fast asleep. I had nothing that I could give the children to eat.” She instructed the boy to use an ox-yoke for firewood so that they could boil water for tea before going to sleep. The next day “the Kaffirs started out very early in the morning to look for the cows. The boy had been very good; he had looked after them the whole night, and he now came up to us with all the animals. The calves were close to the wagons, and the Kaffirs set to work at once to milk the cows. How glad the children were to be able to come to the pailful of milk!”

On another occasion the boy’s timely warning, a good example of his faithful dedication, saved Nonnie and her children from being captured by the British. “That night I slept well, and was still sleeping early in the morning when up came my boy with these words: “Here are the ‘khakis’!” As they hurriedly packed their belongings and yoked the oxen they could hear gunfire close by. In the rush they fled without the hen-coop. However, when Commandant Erasmus told Nonnie not to flee since what she was hearing was merely wedding-guests firing into the air—not “khakis” she told her Africans to go and find her chickens. The boy obediently retrieved the chickens only to discover that the enemy was close by. Even as they fled Nonnie instructed the boy to fetch the cows, saying, “If I can get no milk I shall be very unhappy. The animals were all driven forward; the oxen were urged on and we got on at a brisk pace. The ground was vibrating from the firing of the ‘khakis.’ The way was full of sand and rocks. It was very rough traveling. I kept wondering every moment where the boy could be with the cows; but it was now a time when each one had to consider his own safety, without troubling to look after me. I was waiting for the moment to come when I should be taken prisoner. Then my boy came up with us and told me that the “khakis” had taken my cows. They had so fired upon him that he had taken to his heels and left the cows behind. That was bad news; I did not want to listen to it, although we too were in great danger, and at any moment they might come and take me prisoner also.”

General De la Rey’s African workers were trustworthy and attached to the family. If insubordination occurred, Nonnie made no mention of it in her diary. She frequently visited

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30 J.E. De la Rey, *A Woman’s Wanderings and Trials During the Anglo-Boer War*, 85.
31 Ibid., 94-96.
her husband on commando, and he sought out his family whenever possible, and this in itself may have provided a stabilizing effect for both his family and his workers. Because the General was a highly respected Boer leader, his family enjoyed the support of many.

No doubt Nonnie knew about the mayhem committed by black men against Boer women. Africans raided Boer farms, moving captured livestock to the British garrisons where they were granted part of the spoils. Blacks were also employed to transport Boer women and children to the concentration camps.32

When confronted by a British soldier looking for Boer commandos Nonnie denied knowledge of the commandoes’ whereabouts, adding, “Then I told him as the Kaffirs that were among the troops behaved so badly and cruelly to women and children I did not want to have anything to do with coloured people. I only had to deal with white people, and so they must just keep the coloured ones away from me. He was polite, and said, ‘Very well, Mrs. De la Rey you shall not be troubled by the Kaffirs.’ . . . But they kept coming continually to the wagon. I thought, it is rousing their appetite for burning. A Kaffir had already told my boy when he was by the fire that this wagon and tent would have to be burnt.”33

In major ways and with small every-day inconveniences the war disrupted families. Petty things could trigger humour and bring relief from daily stress. On occasions when Nonnie could not find a maid to do the washing, she assigned the task to her children. “They would take the clothes and put them in the tub, and then Janne and Hester would have to tread on them. But Janne was such a little monkey, he was always playing tricks on Hester, and then she would have to undo all his mischief, and by herself tread the clothes up and down till they were clean enough for the two little girls to finish washing them.”34

Elizabeth Henrietta Martyn (Bessie) Collins, a pro-Boer English woman born in the Orange Free State, recorded similar frustration with laundry duties.35 Bessie wrote, “I am dead tired tonight. Our boy ran off again. That means I had to do all the work. At 2:30 I finished in the kitchen. . . . I do not mind the work but when it comes to washing the pots and the dishes after dinner, I get awfully sad. On Sunday I worked like mad (excuse the elegant expression) and there seemed no end to all the pots and the dishes. You would have laughed to have seen Georgie, Kathie and I washing baby’s nappies in the bathroom. We had quite a

32 F. Pretorius, _The Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902_, 78.
33 J.E. de la Rey, _A Woman’s Wanderings and Trials During the Anglo-Boer War_, 111, 112.
34 Ibid., 121.
35 B. Theron, _Dear Sue: The Letters of Bessie Collins from Pretoria during the Anglo-Boer War_, 9.
washing party. K washes beautifully, and so does G, for a boy.” The following day Bessie wrote that there was less work since “we have a great lumbering kaffir girl. She is stupid but can at least carry the coal and wash the dishes.” 36

On Boer farms many Africans had lived and worked with the Boer family for a considerable period, having even grown up with the master on the farm. In time a mutually dependent system developed: whites relied on black labour and blacks, having lost their land, depended on a white economy and its industries. 37

Many diverse factors drove African men to seek white domestic employment in urban areas. These included the inequity of a land tenure system, harsh taxation laws and natural disasters such as drought and livestock diseases. 38

Problems faced by African workers on Boer farms differed from those in urban settings. From its inception as an urban community Johannesburg experienced a great demand for both male and female domestic servants of all races. Initially, the need for black male servants came from the few middle and ruling class families who demanded the services of a team of houseboys as if a vital component of their colonial birthright. 39

Generally, white women preferred to hire male servants because of concerns that their husbands would become sexually involved with female workers. All too frequently, sexual relations developed between white men and black women based on the power differentials of society that did not permit black women to refuse their masters’ advances. Not surprisingly, black women feared the “white peril” in the same way that white women were terrified of black men. In fact, black female domestic workers were frequently at the mercy of white men and boys at their place of work. 40 On the other hand, aside from being jealous of interracial alliances between their husbands and female domestic workers, white women recognized a double standard that permitted white men, but not women, to engage in cross-racial sexual relations. Given these factors urban households generally employed houseboys rather than housemaids.

36 B. Theron, Dear Sue: The Letters of Bessie Collins from Pretoria during the Anglo-Boer War, 64.
37 F. Pretorius. The Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902, 75.
When gold was first discovered, the Rand’s population comprised mainly single men and a few white working-class families. Consequentially, overall demand for African male domestic workers was low during the early years.

The majority of the Witwatersrand’s skilled and semi-skilled white workers were employed by the boarding houses that accommodated the influx of single males. Although blacks sought domestic employment rather than mine work, opportunities for work as ‘houseboys’ remained limited. Throughout the 1890s the demand for white female domestic labour in Johannesburg remained at a premium. Nonetheless, African men were the fastest growing category of domestic workers in the Rand.

In a racist society the etiquette of colonial service had to be taught, not assumed. White female servants were instructed to be “civil and kind, not dictatorial or imperious; but they should never allow any familiarity. . . [nor] sit in a room where there are boys, or do anything whereby an insolent native may take liberties. A girl is often inclined to think of a native boy as a ‘thing’, a ‘machine’, an ‘animal’, not as a man, and if she never arouses any feeling he will usually do his work mechanically and never think of molesting her.”

After 1897 families converged upon Johannesburg in increasing numbers, which created a corresponding demand for ‘houseboys.’ This need was filled mainly by Zulu-speaking men from Natal. By 1899 there were several hundred ‘houseboys’ at work on the Rand, earning an average of eighty shillings a month. By contrast, African miners netted only fifty shillings a month.

Although many employers would have preferred more expensive white domestic servants to black ‘houseboys’, there were never enough specialized white domestic workers to meet the demand. In addition, those who did come to the Rand very quickly adopted colonial values and refused menial labour—thus ensuring work for ‘houseboys’. This meant that between the Anglo-Boer War and World War I, Zulu ‘houseboys’ increasingly came in close contact with English immigrant working class female servants in wealthy homes and with white suburban housewives whose husbands worked on the mines.

43 Ibid., 41.
45 Ibid., 34.
In 1890 Archibald Colquhoun noted that “Service was almost unprocurable. Raw Kaffirs, who till a few months before had never seen the inside of a house, were pressed into service for which they had no natural bent, and the best one could hope for was an inferior type of Cape boy.” These Africans were in most instances first generation domestic workers. Unaccustomed to household chores, which they regarded as women’s work, they nevertheless performed the heavy unpleasant domestic duties that white women were unwilling to tackle in a sub-tropical climate.

Charles van Onselen identifies a “great cultural collision between black adult males who were responsible heads of household in their own right, and young white females newly exposed to colonial society, [as] a highly explosive psychological mixture which gave rise to periodic outbursts of great sexual hysteria on the Witwatersrand between 1902 and 1914.” Bouts of racial hysteria on the Rand precipitated periodic ‘black peril’ scares. These recurrent episodes of ‘black peril’ hysteria had two consequences. First, the ‘houseboys’ formed Amalaita gangs as a means of resistance to colonization; and, secondly, a gradual shift from hiring male to female domestic workers began in the years leading up to the First World War.

On April 29, 1899 something escalated racial tensions. A gang of men attacked Mrs. Applebe, the wife of a Wesleyan minister, on her way to church. It was rumored that these men were hired by the Liquor Kings to inflict retribution because she had notified authorities of their activities. By May 2, her medical condition declined and this, together with a sensational editorial in the Leader, entitled “Blood upon their hands!” escalated the racial hysteria, which only worsened when Mrs. Applebe died on the third of May. Despite a £500 reward by State Attorney Smuts for information leading to the prosecution of Mrs. Applebe’s assailants, the perpetrators were never found. The Applebe case heightened white women’s fears about the real or imagined dangers posed by black male domestic workers.

When the Chamber of Mines reduced African miners’ wages in 1896 domestic service became a more profitable option for black men. The Star reported that “Since the reduction of

49 Ibid., 83.
mine boys’ wages there has been a much larger supply of kitchen boys.” It is estimated that by 1899 7,500 black males were employed in domestic service in Johannesburg.  

Since many Rand houseboys were Zulu, by 1899 words ‘houseboy’ and ‘Zulu’ had become almost synonymous in the labour market. When war broke out that year thousands of employers and their domestic servants departed the Rand. However, many Zulu servants were left behind unpaid for their services and forced to find their own way back to Natal.

Between 1890 and 1914 the ‘houseboy’ met the domestic needs of most lower, middle and working class whites. First-generation ‘houseboys’ who came directly from the land were considered ignorant, but amiable, trustworthy, and able to work hard. In working-class homes there was usually only one servant, and houseboys worked closely with their mistresses for the best part of the day. Some working relationships were paternalistic, even amicable, while others were hostile because the black man resented performing “women’s work” and being at the beck and call of a white female.

Employers, including women, were known to threaten ‘houseboys’ with guns or strike them with a sjambok as punishment or a means of control. The nature of the mistress/servant relationship and the presence or absence of other black servants to a great extent determined the quality of life for the ‘houseboy.’ At best, his fate was to carry a wide range of duties, work long hours and endure isolation and loneliness.

‘Houseboys’ were paid cash wages and given accommodation and food. Rations were usually mealie meal and an occasional cheap cut of meat, augmented with leftovers from the family’s table. Accommodations varied from home to home, but prior to the war it was not uncommon for the ‘houseboy’ to sleep on the kitchen floor at night. The primary motive for providing accommodation was the convenience of the white family—to have a servant readily on call. It was also a means to control African workers, which increased resentment among black domestic workers.

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First implemented after the Jameson Raid, from 1896 to 1914 pass laws were the primary means by which the state controlled African migration. This legislation, which sought to manipulate industrial labourers, bound domestic servants as well. The mines, by then a vital capital industry, relied heavily on a ready supply of cheap labour.\textsuperscript{56}

White female employers and their black male servants also confronted communication problems. The English did not speak Zulu, and Zulus little if any English. Thus a jargon termed “emergency language”, \textit{fanakalo}, or later “Kitchen Kaffir,” developed. Renaming Zulu servants because their names could not be pronounced was commonplace. English-speaking employers randomly gave their servants new names that distanced servants from employers and caused humiliation. Degrading names like “Shilling”, “Brandy”, or “Sixpence” further deprived blacks of the dignity of being a man or woman, not a \textit{boy or girl}.\textsuperscript{57} Charles van Onselen described the consequences of a acute language barrier: “Unable to communicate in their first language and saddled instead with a brittle and bastard tongue, black servants had their dependent and colonized status perpetually reinforced through appearing to be stupid, inarticulate and incoherent.”\textsuperscript{58} But sometimes they took advantage of the situation.

The diary of Isabella Lipp includes an amusing anecdote of a boy who feigned ignorance, but had a good time. “A lady giving a luncheon to a smart guest, found herself with only one servant a native boy—this, no uncommon occurrence in South Africa. All went well, until champagne was signaled for the boy understood his mistress and went for the champagne, but returned empty handed, she anxious that no hitch should occur, again signaled—with the same result; thinking he could not understand she said, ‘the champagne in the cellar’, he went again, returning with nothing only a hoarse whisper, audible to everybody, ‘no champagne, but lots bottles Dry’”.\textsuperscript{59}

Isabella first mentioned her domestic workers when describing how they were granted permits to remain in Johannesburg. “Three of our native boys, Zulus, were also privileged, one of them old Mike our cook was a great character, who had been at Majuba and consequently though hating the Boers had a profound respect for them, with a corresponding contempt for the “Hinglish” whom he had seen with him “hown heye run and walk fastly

\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 39.}
\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 38.}
\footnote{I. Lipp, \textit{My Diary: Fiction, Fact and Fancy}, 12.}
backs, with band making so, tr, d, tr, d, trr”, imitating the fifes and bagpipes, and men right
about facing and quick march away from the enemy.”

The chief problem between Isabella Lipp and Mike, her cook, was his excessive use of
alcohol. She recorded in detail an encounter while he was inebriated that demonstrates
Isabella’s inability to deal with her Zulu employee while he was under the influence of
alcohol.

“My old Cook, the Zulu warrior unstrung me a bit today—I think—he killed a little dog
who had found its way up the four flights of stairs, seeking food—Mike must have been
drunk, got hold of some of our whisky most likely, for a sudden Berseker fury seized him. He
struck at the poor little creature most savagely with a broom handle tossed it up several times,
jumped on it, I tried to stop him, but he turned on me with such a savage ferocious look in his
blood shot eyes that I was terrified, but all the same I kept calling to him to stop and trying to
catch the poor animal, finally he seized it hurled it down to the ground below a distance of 80
feet and then I fled, the poor quivering body in my eyes, and the faint moans in my ears. We
must lock up whisky a savage is a demon with drink in him and I am alone up here all day,
my husband and the other men being down on the first floor.”

Two other Zulu boys frequently worked at Lipp’s apartment. On one occasion Isabella
remarked “I do not quite like it, so will perhaps try and get a native girl in—old Mike is such
a trustworthy reliable old rascal, when without drink and such a good cook though surly and
quite independent. I hardly like changing, so I shall try the locking up first.”

Days later Isabella wrote, “Yesterday afternoon I discovered that old vagabond Mike in
my bedroom at the Whisky cupboard—I said nothing until this morning when I spoke to him
like a mother telling him how sorry I was to see an old man whom I trusted do such a thing—
“Surely Mike, I continued, Master and Missis are not so unkind, that you need fear to ask
them for a drink—now in future, we will give you a little drink every day, rather than that you
should steal it”—I was laughing inwardly at my own lecture and solemn voice but it did the
old man good, he hung his head, looking so ashamed and walked quickly away without a
word—I could see very contrite and ashamed—You see all the bars are closed, and I suppose
being an old man and accustomed to a little spirit he could not resist the temptation to steal

60 I. Lipp, My Diary: Fiction, Fact and Fancy, 9.
61 Ibid., 17.
62 Ibid., 18.
some, knowing we were out and not expecting my sudden appearance due to returning for my sunshade.”

Soon after Isabella again noted a problem with Mike’s drinking. “My old cook Mike tumbled down stairs and made a hole in his head—he is virtuously indignant with my husband who, to keep him from the vile poison which natives always manage to get, started giving him a little good whiskey and water every night—but this night Mike had evidently already got drunk on his own stuff and it, mixed with good Scotch disturbed his equilibrium and sent him tumbling down stairs. It was too funny, his indignation when my husband as usual poured out his little drink and took it to him—‘No Baas me no want your drink—no good—Baas make Mike sick’. Now he will just go and get the vile Dop and turn himself into a fiend and I am afraid we shall have to get rid of him.”

In one more diary entry about the cook’s drinking problem Isabella wrote, “Old Mike cannot be trusted, not his honesty, that is safe enough, but his getting drunk.”

Isabella often expressed great sympathy for the plight of suffering Boer women and children. However, she harbored contempt for the Boer commandoes. When a Boer contingent that took a short cut through Basutoland was attacked by natives and suffered heavy losses, Isabella retorted, “serve them right, what business had they in Basutoland—there is an old grudge borne by the Basutoes against the Boers, they have neither forgiven nor forgotten the loss of their ground known as the conquered Territory—and a beautiful fertile land it is.”

Isabella displayed a typically white colonial attitude toward Africans. When the bank had a staff portrait taken, she voiced her opinion that one of the Zulus “our photographer, one of the staff would have me taken alone, as well in a rickshaw belonging to a demon-like stalwart Zulu, who was hovering about at the time.” Clearly this uncomplimentary description portrayed blacks as threatening and unchristian.

Because Isabella cared about the well-being of the bank’s black workers, she feared they were in danger of being taken by the Boers: “Kaffirs are being commandeered right and

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64 Ibid., 39.
65 Ibid., 59.
66 Ibid., 73, 74.
67 Ibid., 78.
left for Government service at the front such as driving, cleaning up and general labourers’ work, so I have been warning our three boys to keep indoors, not that they needed much warning as they have a wholesome fear and respect of the Boer.”

A story in Isabella’s diary indicates her interest in African culture and customs. Apparently the Boers in the Northern Colony near Herschel and Lady Grey lived in very close proximity to the Basuto territory and were justifiably fearful of Basuto attacks. Apprehension was heightened by an account that the Basuto “took three oxen representing British, Boer and Basuto, flayed them alive and then let them linger out their lives on the veld. The largest horned ox was the Briton, the medium the Boer and the smallest the Basuto. The British ox died first, the Boer shortly afterwards, the Basuto ox lingered some days before finally dying. It is said their decision is to remain neutral unless attacked by Boers.”

In November 1899 Isabella wrote that the natives under Khama (British Protectorate) had a skirmish with the Boers at Derde Poort on the Border. When learning that the Boers had suffered casualties, Isabella’s sympathies were with the natives: “No doubt they were raiding Khama’s country, but it is a great pity the native factor should be introduced in this war at all. He is a savage, and once his war fever and blood thirst are aroused against a white race, he is not likely to discriminate between Boer and British—but of course if Boers will raid native territory and seize their cattle, they must take the consequences, for Britain cannot aid them against the natives, when the Boers are the aggressors. The Basutoes are also very restless. Heaven help the Boers if this warlike unconquered tribe break into the Free State. They are well armed with rifles, good shots and fight on horseback as well as on foot and they have a deadly hatred towards the Boers. Sir Godfrey Lagden, the Commissioner will have all his work cut out to prevent them from rushing into the Free State; There is also division between the two principal chiefs about fighting, and the poor Boer women and children on the farms are unprotected, their men being all on Commando.”

Isabella wrote in December 1899 that the government had fixed black miners’ pay at £1 a month plus food and housing in an effort to end unrest on the mines. She commented: “The Boer treatment of the Kaffir is drastic in the extreme looking upon him as an animal, not a human being, a common Dutch expression is –Is did een mench of een Kaffir (Is that a person

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69 I. Lipp also wrote an unpublished compendium of African folk tales that is part of the Africana Collection at Stellenbosch University.
71 Ibid., 95, 96.
or a Kaffir). The various native locations are being cleared out of women, children and non workers—those strong and able bodied are commandeered to work on the farms. A batch of about 140 passed through the town from the George Goch mine, the women were heavily laden with children and home utensils and as they marched they sang a weird dirge, like melody, a wailing tune that sounded very sad, for they have a great dread of the Boer and no doubt thought they were being driven to prison or death. Many stories of cruelty and brutality towards them have reached us, but my informant being a native woman and the details so awful and inhumane, I think it better not to chronicle them.”72

In January 1900 Isabella noted that “Kaffir wages are fixed to £1 a month—domestic or otherwise, anyone contravening this law will be punished severely—what an amount of trouble it will raise—the Domestic servants getting four and five pounds a month won’t submit quietly to this enormous reduction—it is very unfair also to the good boy who is worth double as much to receive only the same wage as the indifferent, inferior boy.”73 True to her prediction, the following week the “Special Staats Courant” (Government Gazette) repealed the wage limit. Isabella surmised that there had been trouble enforcing a drastic pay reduction, especially with those employed by the railway.74

At the time there was agitation amongst many Africans. Isabella seemed more concerned about a potential black attack upon the Boers than for her own safety. “Our Bank boy a Zulu, told me the various Chiefs of Basutoes, Zulu and Makassi are angry about their men being forced to the front to work for the Boers, without payment, and upon a given signal, they, armed with their knives, will turn on their taskmasters during the hours of sleep and darkness and will kill them off—Squads of natives are marched off from the locations and mines to the front or to the farms to slave for the Boers—The boy’s statement may be only talk, but it shows the angry spirit that exists amongst them—he also said the Boers were arming the Kaffirs, telling them to fight the British, they accepted the guns, saying “Ja Baas,” yes they would, but intend using these gifts against the givers—Maybe all talk but I would not be surprised if it had some truth in it, more especially as the Boers are constantly accusing the British of doing the same thing—trying to tar them with their own brush.”75

72 I. Lipp, My Diary: Fiction, Fact and Fancy, 111. On several occasions Isabella speculated that discovery of her diary would lead to treason charges. For this reason she kept her diary carefully hidden and may have minimized references to Boer inhumanities toward Africans.
73 Ibid., 149, 150.
74 Ibid., 153.
75 Ibid., 152, 153.
Toward the end of January, 1900 Isabella expressed more concern: “One great danger threatens the whole community—the native question, this danger is augmented by the foolish action of the Pretoria authorities in bringing up about 1,000 Basuto boys, sent out of Kimberley, they were brought up in batches, the last 500 arriving yesterday they walked as far as Klerksdorp, where they were entertained for here, arriving at Braamfontein station. The Special mine police ordered the Basutoes to throw down their weapons, consisting of large kerries, sticks and pieces of iron and go and work at the Robinson Mine, both orders the boys refused to obey and immediately commenced to attack the police who fired on them killing two and dangerously wounding others. More specials and many Burghers with rifles, and constables appearing, the natives were disarmed, handcuffed and marched off to the mine, “commandeered” for work. It appears the “boys” were under the impression they were being taken to the Basutoland border until they arrived here. This high-handed act is the worst day’s work the Boers have done since the war began. Their contempt for, and idea of treating the natives as slave has caused them to forget that the Basotoes are a free unconquered, brave nation, only kept back with difficulty by British authority from raiding the Free state—once this matter reaches the ears of the Basuto chiefs, there will be no stopping them trying to be even with their old enemy and some day a simultaneous rising of natives in the compounds here will take place and then British, Boer and foreigners alike will have to fight side by side to oppose the native horror, for we do not forget the defenders of the town are away and only unprepared men (not many) are allowed to carry revolvers. Yes it is a bad day’s work—with the seething horde of Zulus also only waiting for a favorable moment to attack their Boer oppressors who make warrior men slaves.”

Clearly Isabella’s apprehension about an African uprising against all whites was growing. By the end of January the Special Police stood guard throughout the night and the Lipps surmised that this was because the authorities expected trouble from the natives.

Many African workers remained loyal, even protecting and caring for homes after their owners had fled. On more than one occasion Isabella observed such loyalty. “We walked all over Park Town, lovely villa residences with acre plots of well laid out flower and fruit gardens . . . many of the houses have an unoccupied look, but the gardens except in a few cases are well cared for—native boys, left in charge, no doubt seeing after these.” However, such allegiance was not always the case. Isabella’s friend, Mrs. Littlejohn, confided

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77 Ibid., 161.
78 Ibid., 165.
that her servants had deserted her, thus adding to the loneliness she was already feeling after most of her friends had left town.\textsuperscript{79}

Historians have generally emphasized the suffering women during the South African War. But other aspects of the female experience cannot be overlooked. Unquestionably, women were adversely caught up in the trauma of war, but their response was not at all times incidental or passive. Not all women exhibited passive subjection to male military and political domination in matters of war--even though the war presented none of the opportunities for changing female societal standing that were offered by the First World War.\textsuperscript{80} Most women dealt effectively with daily domestic challenges and adapted to change as it occurred.

Unmistakably, white women depended heavily upon black men during the war. Not only did these workers perform the necessary urban and rural obligations, but in many cases they went beyond the call of duty, revealing unwavering loyalty. It was an extremely complex relationship unfortunately obscured by the lack of information on the black man’s view of life under the supervision of white women during the war.

Although Isabella Lipp faced a different set of problems from those encountered by Nonnie De la Rey, both women shared similar struggles in managing their staff. They alone had to supervise and oversee the black men who worked for them. Nonnie the Boerevrou (farmer’s wife) and Isabella the banker’s wife shared a mutual dependence with the black men who worked for them. These men and women experienced frustrations, problems and trials. Some situations were handled better than others.

While Nonnie and Isabella relied on loyal African workers, they both voiced concerns about the potential danger posed blacks who roamed the country. White women left alone on farms at the outbreak of the war found themselves in charge of all operations. Since they lacked knowledge and experience they relied heavily on their African workers. While this frequently succeeded, as the war progressed many African workers left white employment amid rumours of rape and murder.\textsuperscript{81} The tensions of war revealed phobias previously kept in check. Typical was Nonnie’s reference to “cruel Kaffirs,” and Alie Badenhorst’s recurrent

\textsuperscript{79} I. Lipp, \textit{My Diary: Fiction, Fact and Fancy}, 15.
allusion to “gewapende kaffers” (armed kaffirs) as a source of tremendous fear. Van Heyningen claims that “most outstanding is the ambivalence about blacks, where emotions ranging from uncertainty to fear and hostility were intertwined with paternalism and an occasional dependence.”

These conclusions, of course, rest largely on the reminiscences a Boer, Mrs. Nonnie De la Rey and a British citizen, Mrs. Isabella Lipp, yet both women appear to provide a representative cross-section of the kinds of difficulties faced by white women (excluding those who were confined to concentration camps) and their black male employees.

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Chapter Four

ANXIETY AND THE NEED FOR NEWS

“As each day drew to a close I was dreading what should happen on the next.”¹ (Nonnie de la Rey)

As mentioned in chapter one, the fourth tier of Arthur Marwick’s model of the societal consequences of war addresses its psychological impact.² Despite the normal fears and uncertainties that accompany impending war, the outbreak of hostilities in South Africa initially prompted a degree of courage and optimism. But the war that was expected to be a short skirmish became long and protracted.

This chapter examines the psychological impact of the Anglo-Boer War on four women who recorded their response to the conflict. Female stress was never more apparent than in the stated apprehension about the future and anxiety over the lack of current news. The thoughts and emotions of Isabella Lipp, Nonnie de la Rey, Bessie Collins and Alie Badenhorst exemplify the psychological trauma that this war triggered. (The diaries of Isabella Lipp and Nonnie de la Rey were introduced in chapter one).

In 1899 Bessie Collins lived with her family in Pretoria, from whence she chronicled her war experiences in a letter that spanned the duration of the war. She was a sensitive young woman who was intensely loyal to the Boer cause. Of the four accounts studied in this chapter, her correspondence is the most candid about personal feelings.

Alie Badenhorst’s narrative begins well before the war when she was a girl of fifteen and ends in 1902 with the return of her husband from a prisoner-of-war camp at Simonstown. It had long been the goal of Emily Hobhouse to assemble a collection of books about war from the perspective of women and children, and to this end she published Alie’s story.³

Quickly the human psyche felt the ravages of war. At the onset the citizens of Kimberley were said to be “happily unconscious of our destiny until it was revealed by the gradations of time. Nothing awful was anticipated. The future was veiled. The knowledge of

¹ J.E. De la Rey, A Woman’s Wanderings and Trials During the Anglo-Boer War, 19.
² A. Marwick, War and Social Change in the Twentieth Century: A Comparative Study of Britain, France, Germany, Russia and the United State, 11, 12, 13
³ A. Badenhorst, Tant Alie of the Transvaal, Her Diary 1880-1902, 7.
what was to come was brought home to us be a gradual process that kept us permanently sane. Dull Kimberley was to be enlivened in a manner that made us wish it were dull again. We felt it from the first—the sense of imprisonment—the deprivation of liberty. But that was all, we thought—all that we should be called to endure.”

Few could anticipate how horrific conditions would become before signing of the peace treaty.

As the prospect of a long war became apparent moods slumped into despair. So too the disposition of female diarists. They changed from naïve optimism to periods of dejection and even hopelessness. Never did they give up, but in varying degrees the psychological trauma of war impacted their emotional stamina. Already burdened by the daily struggle for survival, women were suddenly or gradually divested of the core domestic duties that had occupied their lives in peaceful times. Those who lost their homes were without gardens or farms to tend. Gone were the basic necessities that previously occupied them in food preparation, sewing, knitting and housework. Servants often fled, which subjected women to long days of monotony and isolation.

Physical isolation and mental loneliness taxed women psychologically. Elizabeth van Heyningen observed that “isolation brought to the surface subconscious fears and tensions.” Women shouldered the responsibility of caring for their children. They undertook unfamiliar farming tasks without advice or the benefit of instruction. And yet their husbands’ absence made women draw on previously untapped inner strengths and compelled them to be resourceful and independent.

Even those women who had their children with them longed for adult companionship. Whether women were in captivity, fleeing from the enemy or held up in some refuge, life as they knew it ground to a halt and they became consumed by their thoughts and worries. Suddenly women were alone without the support of husbands, sons, fathers, brothers or the patronage of friends and family.

Depression, fear and anxiety inevitably result from war. More apparent in some than in others, depression was infrequently recognized, discussed or written about. Although impoverished and robbed of their dignity, Emily Hobhouse asserted that on the whole, women

4 T. Phelan, The Siege of Kimberley: It’s Humorous and Social Side of the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902), 5.
6 Ibid., 30.
7 J.E. De la Rey, A Woman’s Wanderings and Trials During the Anglo-Boer War, 98.
in the camps remained stable and rarely lost control emotionally. Given that Hobhouse was passionate about social reform and biased in favour of the Boers, and because there is little extant data to refute or support her claim, that viewpoint remains unchallenged.

In her recently published letter, Elizabeth Henrietta Martyn (Bessie) Collins chronicled her wartime experiences. While she escaped detention in the camps, stress and trauma are nonetheless apparent in her correspondence. Freely and often she expressed emotional anguish, and her state of mind was fragile even when she started writing on December 28, 1900. The school headed by her father had been closed, part of her house had become a hospital, and many of the school’s former students (boys as young as sixteen) had been summoned to battle. These and other factors contributed to her dejected frame of mind.

Bessie’s anguish became explicit when she wrote, “Ach! Life is very sad and I am so dead tired of it all. How I wish So [her sister Sophie] and I could go to mother. We are not needed in our home anymore.” This was in reference to the death in 1895 of their mother Margaretha—her father had subsequently remarried and the sisters were not comfortable sharing their home with their stepmother.

A month later Bessie again disclosed emotional distress: “I have been feeling so depressed and heart sore these days that I don’t know what to do with myself. Life has lost all its charm for me. I wonder why one can’t die when you do not want to live. Only those who love life lose it. God seems so very far away, just as if He has turned his face away from us. Every day the troubles and worries thicken around us and we do not know where to turn for help.”

With little joy at Christmas, and separated from her cousin William whom she later married, Bessie reiterated her feelings of despair. “What weary, weary days we have struggled through. We have grown old and subdued and I, for one, feel as if I have very little left for life.”

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9 The book in question is, Dear Sue: The Letters of Bessie Collins from Pretoria during the Anglo-Boer War, edited by B. Theron.
10 Ibid., 63.
11 Ibid., 11.
12 Ibid., 67.
13 Ibid., 71.
While on several occasions Bessie expressed the wish to die, this fell short of a pathological death wish. She essentially remained interested in family life, recognizing that things could have been worse. Once she commented, “I do know . . . that we people in Pretoria have no cause to complain of hard times if we compare our lot with theirs [the poor country people].”  

In addition Bessie had some healthy diversions. She sustained a vital interest in the progress of the war, wrote letters, cultivated and enjoyed her flower garden and accepted housekeeping work whenever she could. She sighed, “I am thankful for the work because I don’t want time to think.”

Indisputably, Bessie’s anxiety heightened as British troops approached Pretoria. On June 4, 1900 she wrote hysterically about the sound of cannon fire close by. She declared, “our hearts are full of anxiety. We do not know what will happen before tonight. It is coming nearer and nearer.” Bessie was also fearful that her own people, the Boers, would be forced into Pretoria and that this would cause the British to bomb the city indiscriminately and destroy it. She wailed, “think of all the hundreds of women and little children . . . the whole morning I have been praying God help us, it is coming so near.”

Because Victorian standards rendered taboo such topics as psychological vulnerability, Bessie’s forthrightly written account of emotional turmoil was extraordinary. She disclosed heartfelt emotions to her closest friend, not knowing whether the letter would ever be delivered. In her final paragraph Bessie wrote “I will close this long letter which is almost three years old. I wonder if you will ever get it, and if it will interest you . . . . So if you do get it you must not be too critical. Remember it was meant for your eyes alone.” The long-standing friendship between the two women had allowed expression without restraint. Bessie’s “simplistic and understandably over-emotional” letter was mailed to Sue after the war. At Sue’s death the letter was passed to her sister, Miss M.R. Haarhoff.

Disturbing dreams reflected psychological stress. Alie Badenhorst was regularly unsettled by dreams to which she attributed sinister meaning. She disclosed feelings of

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14 B. Theron, Dear Sue: The Letters of Bessie Collins from Pretoria during the Anglo-Boer War, 69.
15 Ibid., 59.
16 Ibid., 52.
17 Ibid., 17.
18 Ibid., 2. In compliance with Bessie’s wish for privacy Haarhoff contemplated destroying the letter. However, recognizing the letter’s historical value, she chose rather to donate it to the National Archives.
foreboding: “no catastrophe comes to hand; so is it ever with me, nothing comes to pass of which I have not had solemn warning.”

While her husband was on commando, Alie dreamed she was given three choices to determine his fate—death, being wounded, or imprisonment and exile. After many nights of anguish, she determined that if he were exiled he would at the very least be in the Lord’s care, even in prison. Although this was a dream it was real to Alie and she deemed it a portent of what lay ahead. She wrote of often awakening “with a restless feeling . . . with a start as if out of a bad dream.”

Under heightened apprehension people searched for advice and solace from alternative sources, sometimes combining religion with superstition. Niklaas van Rensburg (Siener van Rensburg) was best known as a prophet and it was generally believed that he was sent by God to assist the Boers. Among other prominent leaders, General de la Rey sought guidance from the Seiner. It is said that Van Rensburg later predicted De la Rey’s tragic death.

For many Boer women superstition influenced reality and the psychological effects of war had many manifestations. In May 1901, a comet with two tails that formed what looked like the letter “V” was sighted. When an elderly man told Alie that the “V” pointed to an English victory she angrily retorted that it actually meant the English would “Vrek” or perish. Superstitious Boers were deeply unsettled by the comet’s appearance and Alie later reflected that the comet’s ominous “V” in fact foretold of the great “Vrees” (fear) that was to come upon the land. Even for the unwavering Nonnie de la Rey the sighting of a comet that remained visible for a month was disquieting. She believed it was a sign but was unsure of its significance.

It is probable that other female diarists experienced depression, anxiety and stress about which they were not forthcoming. Isabella Lipp spent lonely days writing letters, journaling

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25 J.E. De la Rey, *A Woman’s Wanderings and Trials During the Anglo-Boer War*, 41.
and reading. Clearly, Isabella was afraid at times but her fear was tempered by a calm, composed disposition and the fact that she had her husband close by.\textsuperscript{26}

Having sent her sons into the safe keeping of her mother, Isabella could hardly bear the dearth of news about them.\textsuperscript{27} She noted, “My heart had a great ache in it, for I knew no more news of our darlings away in Natal would reach us whether they were dead or alive, ill or well our bonnie boys one with solemn dark eyes like brown velvet and the other our baby with blue forget-me-nots and golden curls like an aureole round his little head—ah well—I discounted all that in remaining here when I made my decision.”\textsuperscript{28}

The decision to remain in Johannesburg locked Isabella into a daily routine of isolation and monotony that was hard to bear. She described her schedule accordingly: “Life here pursues the even tenor of its ways, sleep, rise, eat, read the paper, believe what you like, hear the same rumours innumerable ‘all from most authentic sources’ . . . a walk in the afternoon for provisions or otherwise sleep again and so on day after day.”\textsuperscript{29} Isabella’s quip about the authenticity of news and rumours belies her intense frustration.

The relative safety of the bank apartment where Isabella spent her days and nights minimized some of the fears experienced by other women. Nonetheless, the Lipps planned for emergency situations: “My husband is very busy organizing his own special guard—an electric bell is to connect his bed with the special police downstairs and I have been drilled into all the details—he is quite boyish about his importance and I tease him and tell him he will be blossoming out into a Mayor or Captain, after the war.”\textsuperscript{30}

Throughout her diary Isabella’s psychological condition appears stable, reflecting neither panic nor extreme anxiety. At the beginning of the war she described Johannesburg as “a deserted, gloomy empty city with what appeared to our over strung nervous minds to be a rapacious bloodthirsty horde at its gates, anxious and ready to despoil the Egyptian of all the treasures stored up in the ‘Curse of the Transvaal.’”\textsuperscript{31}

\textsuperscript{26} I. Lipp, \textit{My Diary: Fiction, Fact and Fancy}, 7, 10.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 13.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 11.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 98.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 48.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 1.
Even in the most unfavorable conditions Isabella was a pragmatist—choosing “death before dishonour” in the event of an all-out Boer invasion. “I do not fear the fort shelling us but I do fear, troops of defeated Boers returning here for revenge and running amok amongst the handful of British who have obtained permits to remain. Women’s honour, it is openly said amongst them will be a coveted prize . . . I always have a revolver near at hand and know how to use it too.”32

Isabella was a courageous woman who did not dwell on the potential dangers of war. After hearing fearsome reports about the Boers, she calmly stated, “Had I been at all nervous, some . . . beliefs as to what the Boers would do to Johannesburg in the future in case of defeat, would have made my blood run cold with fear and horror.”33 Instead, she resolved not to succumb to worry or ungrounded fear. When she caught herself speculating about portended danger, she wrote “but here I am meeting the Old Man34 half way again and I said I would not.”35

As the Tommies gained the upper hand, the Boers pressured British citizens on the Rand, and Isabella, fearing that the Boers would attack the bank, became “a little nervous”. As a precaution Charles organized a guard around the building and Isabella recalled that a “long coil of strong rope was kept under my bed to let me down from the windows of the top four storied building in case of fire.”36 But it never came to this. Charles and Isabella left Johannesburg in June 1900 and thus escaped a good deal of the misery of war that continued to plague others.

True courage describes the Boer women who survived on the veld unaided by their men folk. Unquestionably, Nonnie de la Rey’s strength came from her innate strength of character and unwavering religious faith. This was apparent even as her friends gathered to bid her farewell. “They came hastening from every side to wish us God-speed. It was a hard thing for our friends to see us sent away in this manner to wander without a home. I said that no, I was beginning my travels willingly, but all unknowing where they were going to end or what the

32 I. Lipp, My Diary: Fiction, Fact and Fancy, 23.
33 Ibid., 11.
34 Isabella referred to irrational fears of what may come to pass as “the old man.”
35 I. Lipp, My Diary: Fiction, Fact and Fancy, 23.
36 Ibid., 199.
future had in store for me. One thing I knew, and that was, if all my friends were left behind, my Heavenly Father would yet be with me.”

Nonnie was emotionally stable, inclined neither to self-pity nor alarm. Rather, she faced head-on the challenge of survival on the veld. She found acceptable solutions to seemingly unsolvable problems and irreversible situations.

This was evident when Nonnie met her greatest trial—the death of her son Adrian shortly after his nineteenth birthday. Adrian, who was on commando, had been very much in his mother’s thoughts on his birthday. And a feeling of foreboding overwhelmed her: “That night I sat on my bed, and could not sleep for anxiety and sorrow till I had earnestly begged the Lord to make me fit to bear the burden He should lay upon me. . . early the next morning I was awake, but the same feeling remained.” When she learned that her son had died Nonnie wrote, “It was heartrending for me, but there is comfort to be found at the feet of Jesus.” She was able to confront her son’s death because she felt assured that Adrian was in God’s care. She accepted the comfort and support of family, friends and Dominee Du Toit, who told her that “the Lord had more need of him than we do.”

Later Nonnie joined her husband in the field and visited the hospital where Adrian died. In her grief she sought a practical, tangible outlet by finding the clothes which he had worn when wounded and seeing the bullet hole in his trousers. Nonnie also spoke with the nurse who had tended Adrian and gained immense comfort from learning that he was patient and content to the end. Although she suffered tremendously, Nonnie brought closure to her son’s death in ways that were emotionally healthy. Even as she grieved, Nonnie displayed compassion for the loss of others. Her faith and altruism essentially helped to displace debilitating introspection.

But the death of her son made Nonnie defiant toward the enemy. This was evidenced when the British confiscated the horse that had belonged to Adrian. While a more timid woman would have passively accepted the loss of the horse, Nonnie resolutely and successfully petitioned General Hunter to return it to her.

In the twenty-first century, when war correspondents report combat news instantaneously, it may be difficult to imagine the desperate need for news that prevailed during the Anglo-Boer War. Across the board, the women who chronicled wartime

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37 J.E. De la Rey, *A Woman’s Wanderings and Trials During the Anglo-Boer War*, 30, 31.
38 Ibid., 16.
proceedings felt cut off from the world and yearned for news of their families and of the war’s progress.

Late in the nineteenth century the demand for news in Britain resulted in a burgeoning press. The newspapers that supported imperialist expansion did particularly well. The *Daily Mail*, founded in 1896, favourably reflected Britain’s overseas expansion and by 1899 it was the top-selling daily. Because there were no longer any great battles to report, by 1901 the British press had lost interest in the war. Some newspapers questioned the notion of imperialism in light of Britain’s apparent inability properly to protect its colonial interests.39 Others maintained that “for England to give up possessions would appear an abdication of responsibility, a weakness, which would put her own survival in jeopardy.”40

By the 1850s tremendous expansion of the press in the Cape enabled merchants and professionals to obtain current commercial information.41 Photography was rapidly gaining popularity -- the Crimean War, Indian Mutiny, American Civil War, and the Anglo Boer War were all photographed. And while this medium was well utilized (photography having arrived in South Africa in 1846) to document the war, periodical and newspaper publishers still favored the more familiar and hence more popular dramatic action drawings made by sketch artists. By 1899 the kind of compact portable photographic equipment that could be used even by amateurs was available. However, because these cameras took still (not action) pictures, most war photographs were posed stills.42 It was common among Boers for children, young girls, and mature women to pose with guns at their sides.43

At the beginning of the war Bessie Collins received a letter from her cousin William almost every day.44 But as the war progressed and uncertainty about its duration grew, Bessie frequently lamented the lack of news with comments such as “You have no idea how it feels to be cut off from all the world even from our own districts because now we do not even get news from Johannesburg. The post and telegraph offices are closed.”45 Later she exclaimed, “Oh! We are sick of it all and long to hear how our poor men at the front are getting on. It is too awful to go on day after day and never hear a single bit of news. How we wonder what

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43 J.E. De la Rey, *A Woman’s Wanderings and Trials During the Anglo-Boer War*, 136, 138.
44 B. Theron, *Dear Sue: The Letters of Bessie Collins from Pretoria during the Anglo-Boer War*, 24.
the great busy world is doing. We do not even get news from Johannesburg although they say the post is open! We have not seen a newspaper for a month. Only their Government Gazette” (a propaganda sheet that was not well received or regarded as accurate).⁴⁶

Similarly, Alie Badenhorst articulated an intense desire for news: “From this moment my sole longing was for news, more news and nothing but news. We sent twice a week for the post, this being delivered twice a week in the village, and so got the war news and letters from our husbands pretty regularly. Usually the letters came on Saturdays and the newspapers and war news on Wednesdays.”⁴⁷

She worried not only about her husband but also about the Boers who fought or had been displaced: “I was always uneasy about our people; we heard so little; there were no dispatches or reports; only now and then a burger came home to fetch necessary things. Otherwise we had often only lies with which to feed ourselves.”⁴⁸ Commandoes traveling on home leave formed a vital communication link among Boers, but waiting for such news took an emotional toll. When her husband was captured and mail was delayed Alie exclaimed, “Some little time passed without further news, and the silence was unbearable, for my heart’s cry was ever for news, more news.”⁴⁹ For Alie it meant a year of “hope and fear—each day waiting for a letter, each day yearning for that which did not come” before she again heard from her husband.⁵⁰

Likewise, Isabella Lipp seldom heard news of her mother and two sons. But she also craved news about the war’s progress. Due to her husband’s position as a banker, Isabella became privy to several news sources and some influential contacts. For example, she once wrote in her diary that she had an enjoyable time at the American Consulate where she called that day. Clearly, discretion prevailed because she mentioned nothing of what she learned about the war during her visit. ⁵¹ The lapse of disclosure was certainly intentional, for discovery of the diary would have compromised their American friends.⁵²

⁴⁶ B. Theron, Dear Sue: The Letters of Bessie Collins from Pretoria during the Anglo-Boer War, 58.
⁴⁷ A. Badenhorst, Tant Alie of the Transvaal, Her Diary 1880-1902, 85.
⁴⁸ Ibid., 173.
⁴⁹ Ibid., 108.
⁵⁰ Ibid., 142.
⁵² Isabella kept her diary carefully hidden at all times (pp. 78, 130).
News linked divided families and was thus very important to men and women. Incongruously, as wives and children suffered in sub-standard camps, many Boer prisoners-of-war lived comfortably at Simonstown, as did those men deported to Ceylon, Bermuda, and St. Helena.

Families separated by war suffered greatly from the absence of news, yet ironically even good news could be disconcerting. Alie Badenhorst received comforting letters from her prisoner-of-war husband, Frikkie, who was detained at Simonstown. He assured her of his safety and gave cheerful descriptions of bathing in the ocean, taking beach walks and seeing an octopus and a jellyfish for the first time. He told of the prisoner’s pet cat saying “all of us play with it. When we go down to the sea of an afternoon the cat goes with us.” While Alie was gravely ill and had to tend their sick children Frikkie wrote “here we see hardly anything of sickness . . . in six months’ time I have only seen two sick men . . . we never see a burial. You write of the weeping in the night. We hear no-one cry.” Frikkie described the toys and brooches carved from whale bone by the prisoners, adding that they knitted socks and scarves to keep busy. What must Alie have felt? Knowing that while she and the children sometimes hovered close to death, Frikkie daily enjoyed pancakes and cakes delivered fresh from a Cape Town bakery. Yet never does her memoir begrudge her husband’s more favorable situation. On the contrary, she grieved over him and anguished that he was alone at the moment he learned that his mother had died.

All too frequently families torn apart by war received unpleasant news. Such was the case for a young boy who had been sent from the Transvaal and remained without news of his family for almost a year, only to learn that his father, mother and two brothers had died. Further, when the English burned the family farm his terrified sisters fled into the veld and went missing. Families were irreparably scarred by the psychological impact of war.

Alie Badenhorst grieved when she heard that her former neighbour, Adrian de la Rey, had died. She cried: “The news had come very close to us—the son of Oom Koos, as we

53 I. Lipp, *My Diary: Fiction, Fact and Fancy*, 249. Frikkie described the octopus as “it is like one of those great frogs, but with eight feet or legs; all the feet like snakes, each a foot long; it has no head but has tow eyes on top . . . when it walks it looks like a frog amid a crowd of snakes.”

54 *Ibid*., 304. He described the jelly-fish as “a wonderful thing; it looks like a big maizena pudding with a bunch of flowers upon it.”


56 *Ibid*., 300.

57 *Ibid*., 259.

58 B. Theron, *Dear Sue: The Letters of Bessie Collins from Pretoria during the Anglo-Boer War*, 68.
called General de la Rey, was the most lovable lad, a youth of blameless character. He had
grown up before my eyes, we had lived close to each other before my marriage."59 The death
of a son brought grief not only to his family but also to the community. This scenario
repeated itself again and again as men died from battle-wounds and disease.

Because mail service was slow, erratic and unreliable, telegraphic service improved the
transmission of news. Nonetheless, telegrams often could not be sent or received because the
telegraph offices were overextended or sabotaged. At one stage, Modder River had one office
to serve three thousand men stationed nearby. At the height of the conflict operators refused
to send private messages in order to prioritize government telegrams.60

Letters often accumulated in postal facilities while waiting to be scrutinized by censors.
This resulted in recipients being deluged by many letters at once after a long dearth of news.
And while letters were always welcomed the news they conveyed was usually dated and
inaccurate by the time the mail was delivered.61 People resorted to innovative means of
sending mail. Boers regularly communicated with the commandoes through subterfuges. A
popular ploy was for Africans to carry letters concealed in sticks or their boots. Sometimes
soldiers prevailed upon dispatch riders to carry private letters, and whenever a commando
went home on leave he carried news and letters with him.62

As Isabella frequently noted, the conveyance of news could depend upon carrier
pigeons. She told of a Pretoria man who had been arrested and imprisoned simply because he
owned a number of pigeons. Since he was permitted no visitors the exact charge against him
remained an unsettling mystery. To be safe a member of the bank’s staff who also owned
carrier pigeons clipped their wings and turned them over to the government. Isabella later
reported, “our homing pigeon fancier has had all his favourites commandeered.”63 According
to her, carrier pigeons were sometimes used to plant false intelligence. “The Boers shot a
pigeon flying overhead at Mafeking, a note was tied to its foot, announcing that a camel corps
was coming across the Kalahari desert to Col. Baden Powell’s assistance, most likely one of
his jokes, but firmly believed in by the Boers.”64

59 A. Badenhorst, Tant Alie of the Transvaal, Her Diary 1880-1902, 87.
60 Ibid., 101.
61 Ibid., 99.
62 Ibid., 206.
63 I. Lipp, My Diary: Fiction, Fact and Fancy, 75.
64 Ibid., 86.
After Ladysmith was relieved, Isabella wrote “the Boers have withdrawn--so said the carrier pigeon message received this morning . . . but we must keep very quiet about it for fear after all the great news might only be a government ruse to trap the unwary British subject as a false news spreader, not even necessarily false, whether true or not the punishment or fine is the same.” She then added a footnote—“But hush! about the carrier pigeon—not even to you oh diary must it be whispered.”65 Isabella never disclosed the source of the news conveyed by pigeons: “Everything is horribly quiet, and it is whispered that no telegrams from the front are to be published at all—so we shall have to rely on either rumour or communications from some friendly Burgher (the carrier pigeon).”66

Spreading strategic or compromising information called for expulsion or treason charges under military law. Prisoners of war and the wives who corresponded with them were bound by set parameters. Nonetheless, people continuously circumvented censorship—a favorite ruse being writing with lemon juice, then holding the paper before a fire to make the script visible.

When they uncovered a secret underground mail system that evaded censorship British intelligence implicated ambulance personnel as the instigators of the scheme.67 In March 1901 the British responded to censorship evasion with orders that all persons other than official postal personnel were barred from carrying or delivering letters for others.68 A woman who had sent an “invisible” letter to her father in the Cape was severely chastised after it was printed without her knowledge in a Cape Town newspaper. Her punishment prohibited any further correspondence with her father or husband for the duration of the war—a light penalty since the authorities intended to remove her to Natal where she would be isolated from friends and family.69

Soon after the outbreak of war Isabella wrote: “If only we could get true reliable news, but this uncertainty pouring in of contradictions and falsehoods is very depressing. All telegrams, letters are strictly censored.” She was pleased to receive a letter from her sister in Ireland that arrived via Delagoa Bay. Amused, Isabella remarked, “I could not help chuckling when I thought of their [the censors] puzzling over her most peculiar and bewildering writing,

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66 Ibid., 100.
68 Ibid., 83.
69 A. Badenhorst, *Tant Alie of the Transvaal, Her Diary 1880-1902*, 255.
they gained nothing from its perusal on that I stake my last six-pence. Fortunately, she had been very discreet, so we breathed freely again—every letter we received makes us feel a little nervous for our correspondents not realizing our position are not always as careful as they might be in expressing their views of the Powers that be.” Isabella suspected that the reason there was no news from her mother about the welfare of her children was that the correspondence had failed to pass censorship standards. She added, “I think they are posted right enough but get no further than the hands and eyes of the Postal Censors and goodness only knows what mine might not be sprung on us one of these days—we suppose no news of any kind owing to private correspondence will be allowed to filter through for fear the Boers might become discouraged and dismayed should the truth about these various engagements with our troops become public property.”

Rumors were rife and easily started. H. J. Batts was told by an allegedly well-informed man to “look out for the west! Something will happen from there. That is all I can tell you.” Later at his Club, Batts innocently asked which direction was west of Pretoria and he was consequently interrogated about precisely what was about to happen in the west!

In the face of hearsay and inaccurate news Isabella, like many others, began to read between the lines and form her own interpretations. At one time it was reported that fighting had resumed at Scholtz’s Neck and that Cronje had been driven out, but the newspapers made no mention of it. The newspaper’s evening edition was delayed by over an hour, which rumormongers insisted was due to an order by government censors to reprint the day’s news. Isabella retorted, “this almost confirms the reports of Cronje’s defeat, but we are all in the dark, only being sickened with the gloating descriptions of Monday’s carnage.”

The leading newspapers in the Transvaal and Orange Free State were politically polarized during the war. At the start of the war De Volkstem, published in Dutch and English was Pretoria’s only newspaper. It was a government subsidized propaganda tool and as such drew much criticism. On June 26, 1900 the first edition of The Pretoria Friend went to press. The Friend was intended to print official news bulletins and Reuter telegrams in English and Dutch, but it failed and was terminated on July 14, 1900. Consequently, an

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70 I. Lipp, My Diary: Fiction, Fact and Fancy, 31, 32.
71 H.J. Batts, Pretoria From Within During the War 1899-1900, 142, 143.
72 I. Lipp, My Diary: Fiction, Fact and Fancy, 112.
73 B. Theron, Dear Sue: The Letters of Bessie Collins from Pretoria during the Anglo-Boer War, 84.
arrangement emerged whereby the *Bloemfontein Post* was to serve the Rand’s population, but this proved unsatisfactory due to rail disruptions and unpredictable deliveries.\(^\text{74}\)

Lord Roberts authorized the publication of *The Friend* in Bloemfontein to counteract false reports spread by *De Volksstem*. The publication printed propaganda, local and international news, and, despite appointing Rudyard Kipling to its staff, the newspaper was printed only from 15 March 1900 to 30 April 1900, after which it was replaced by English and Dutch editions of *The Bloemfontein Post*.\(^\text{75}\)

Regardless of their nationality all news reporters in South Africa fell under licensing and censorship regulations. Approximately one-third of those covering the war were foreign correspondents.\(^\text{76}\) Nor was propaganda confined to Southern Africa. In Britain the Imperial South Africa Association (ISSA) was one organization that actively canvassed support for the war. The ISSA emphasized the positive role of the British empire in Africa and elsewhere, such as the beneficial attributes English-speaking people could offer, among them the propensity for political organization.\(^\text{77}\) British newspapers and magazines reported on the war with various agendas and varying degrees of accuracy.

In Johannesburg Isabella occasionally had access to British and colonial newspapers and magazines. These publications were always welcomed, even when back-dated.\(^\text{78}\) Having little else to occupy her time Isabella was exceedingly interested in news bulletins. Aside from newspapers the Lipps received news via Reuters\(^\text{79}\) and official telegrams.\(^\text{80}\)

Isabella asserted that local news was “only old stuff dished up and this makes us hope the tide of disaster is turning for the slightest success of the Boers is magnified from a mole hill into a mountain and no news must mean reverses for them.” Conversely, when British troops achieved even the smallest victory British citizens had to be “very quiet and discreet about it, for fear we might be put over the border as ‘an undesirable’, or else thrown into

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\(^\text{75}\) Ibid., 84.

\(^\text{76}\) F.W. Unger, *With Bobs and Kruger, Experiences and Observations of an American War Correspondent in the Field with Both Armies*, 73.

\(^\text{77}\) A. Thompson, “Imperial Propaganda during the South African War,” in G. Cuthbertson, et. al. (eds.), *Writing a Wider War: Rethinking Gender, Race, and Identity in the South African War, 1899-1902*, 304.


\(^\text{79}\) Ibid., 158.

\(^\text{80}\) Ibid., 101.
Despite a penchant to speak her mind, Isabella used restraint so as not to jeopardize her husband’s position at the bank.

Of the *Rand Post* Isabella said, “Every now and then one paper the *Rand Post* does publish telegrams which give us a fair idea of the state of things and this combined with an occasional English newspaper that comes our way enables us to have a fairly accurate knowledge of the war’s progress.”

Her diary mentions several newspapers including *The Daily*, *The Rand Post*, *The Volkstem* and *The Times*.

Isabella took a dim view of biased news and reacted vehemently: “A terrible, awful letter has appeared in this morning’s paper taken over from the *Times*. It will drive the British people nearly mad with its insults, invectives and lies . . . the whole letter is an exhibition of hatred and malice towards Britain it is unrivalled.”

The *Standard and Diggers News* was Isabella’s favourite newspaper, and she frequently referred to it. Her comment in response to the news that Kimberley had been relieved reveals a clever wit: “The *Diggers News* tells us that this morning and we must believe it, for did it not once wittily say that we should not believe what is published in its columns. The description of the relief of “diamondopolis” is one of the funniest possible, never before I am sure has such news been conveyed in such a unique style . . . How eagerly we are all looking forward to this evenings paper, though we know quite well, something clever will be concocted to take away all satisfaction in this glorious news, however, searching between the statements generally reveals such inaccuracies and inconsistencies that a certain amount of truth is arrived at in what is left untold.”

People who spread false war reports reaped severe punishment. Swift retribution befell the manager of Markham’s store in Johannesburg after some Dutch people overheard and reported the comments he made about the war. He was summarily handed his passport and without explanation made to leave. Unnerved, Isabella again resolved to take care about what

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82 Ibid., 200.
83 Ibid., 220.
84 Ibid., 86.
85 Ibid., 183, 184.
she said, adding “we are not anxious to court observation for the [bank’s] strong rooms are full of precious things stored for safe keeping.”\textsuperscript{86}

Nonetheless, a month later Isabella noted that the safe deposit boxes were being searched. On the pretext that a Dutch woman forgot which safe was hers, the Boers drilled holes into each of the large strong safes.\textsuperscript{87} Isabella added that on the previous night something similar had occurred at Eckstein’s building across the street when the Boers had purposefully searched the premises for documents.\textsuperscript{88}

As the British entered Johannesburg and Isabella prepared to leave the Rand, she declared that she would miss the \textit{Standard and Diggers News}, “like one would a constant toothache . . . it has been consistently faithful to the Boer Cause, though it might have done more good by advising a little more liberalalty.”\textsuperscript{89} She believed the war to be ending, yet ever guarded Isabella voiced a caution: “Though the surrender has been decided upon, there is an ugly whisper that a couple of hundred burghers declare they will not agree to it, so we may still have trouble—but I hope it is a whisper and nothing more.”\textsuperscript{90} As she feared, the war had not ended. The most brutal phase had begun. Boers abandoned conventional warfare in favour of guerilla attacks. The British responded with a three-pronged scorched earth strategy that destroyed Boer resources, removed women and children to concentration camps and stalled commandoes with barbed wire and blockhouses.

Possibly the physical demands of camping in the veld and staying ready to flee at a moment’s notice counteracted Nonnie de la Rey’s emotional anguish. According to her testimony—“at times the children thoroughly enjoyed life out on the veldt. It was often trying for them with all the hardships we were constantly encountering, but on the whole the children came off better than their elders.”\textsuperscript{91}

Life was harsh and unpredictable for fleeing refugees because approaching enemy troops habitually surprised them. Even though the Boers had to escape at short notice their lives took on a sequence of domestic routines. Whenever fugitives stopped to rest they would

\textsuperscript{86} I. Lipp, \textit{My Diary: Fiction, Fact and Fancy}, 122.

\textsuperscript{87} \textit{Ibid.}, 174. On February 6, 1900 Isabella wrote, “the searching of the safe deposits still continues—it is said for documents, what a betrayal of trust. For high handed action, arrogance, and disrespect of the unwritten laws, the Transvaal government is unequalled.”

\textsuperscript{88} \textit{Ibid.}, 155.

\textsuperscript{89} \textit{Ibid.}, 241.

\textsuperscript{90} \textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{91} J.E. De la Rey, \textit{A Woman’s Wanderings and Trials During the Anglo-Boer War}, 137.
make camp, prepare food, bake bread and then prepare for their next flight.\textsuperscript{92} This kind of unsettled existence was physically and emotionally taxing.

Nonnie’s circumstances differed greatly from those of Isabella, Bessie and Alie. Nonnie chose to flee rather than reside in a camp. Once she became a fugitive she remained proactive in her efforts to preserve her freedom. While exposed to danger, horrific destruction, and death, Nonnie was nonetheless an active participant who took control of her destiny. As the war progressed the scorched earth policy and the blockhouses greatly impacted refugees. By December 1901 the number of whites sent to the concentration camps diminished. Even Nonnie lost the will to continue fleeing.

Nonnie was forgiving and compassionate. When she confronted Lord Methuen (the man who had sent her from her home) after he had been wounded and put in a Boer laager, he apologized to her and she boldly replied, “No, it all went much better than I expected. I did not even have to do my best to escape from falling into your hands.”\textsuperscript{93} Then, to the dismay of many Boers, when General de la Rey set Methuen free Nonnie prepared a chicken and some biscuits for the man who had destroyed her home. Despite the cruelty inflicted upon Boer women and children by Methuen, Christian principles prevailed and Nonnie fed her wounded enemy.\textsuperscript{94}

Even though forced to leave her beloved farm, separated from her children in Pretoria,\textsuperscript{95} and knowing that her husband was a prime target for the British, Nonnie remained bold and courageous.

When seven armed men entered her home demanding to see her husband, she told them to go and get him since they had already searched the house, concluding, “I cannot do so, because he is on commando.”\textsuperscript{96} Although this unsettling incident prompted her to move to town with the children, in the face of the enemy she was unflinching and intrepid.

General De la Rey was a tremendous source of both comfort and concern to his wife, especially during the last two years when he largely remained within his district and watched

\textsuperscript{92} J.E. De la Rey, \textit{A Woman’s Wanderings and Trials During the Anglo-Boer War}, 53.
\textsuperscript{93} \textit{Ibid.}, 70.
\textsuperscript{94} \textit{Ibid.}, 75.
\textsuperscript{95} \textit{Ibid.}, 71.
\textsuperscript{96} A. Badenhorst, \textit{Tant Alie of the Transvaal, Her Diary 1880-1902}, 15.
over his family while on commando. On the one hand, Nonnie feared for his safety; on the other she was sustained by his frequent visits.

Unlike Isabella, Nonnie seldom expressed a yearning for news. This was because she received information directly from her husband on his frequent visits or via “bush telegraph.” Apparently satisfied with their safety, she seldom sought news about her children in Pretoria. Burghers eagerly conveyed news within their tight-knit communities. Not only was news readily available but Boers also consoled and supported those confronted by tragedy. Newspapers and telegrams were not readily available to fugitives in the veld.

Nonnie’s optimistic attitude, together with gratitude and praise, counteracted gloomy thoughts. Tired of living on the veld and longing to return home she cried when she learned that her house had been destroyed. Nonnie questioned, “why should I have to suffer so grievously?” But mindful that she was no better than her fellow-sufferers, she responded, “After the bitter comes the sweet.”

Like other women Nonnie feared for the future. A feeling of foreboding overcame her each evening, but her faith remained resolute. When in flight she could testify that, “in my darkest and most anxious nights never did I fail to put my trust in the Lord, and never did His guidance forsake me.”

Given that the women in this study came from diverse backgrounds it is not surprising that they varied in their psychological response to war. Some women were stable, others exceedingly fragile.

Until the outbreak of the war Bessie Collins led a well-structured and predictable life that poorly prepared her for the disruption and radical changes precipitated by the conflict. According to Bridget Theron, Bessie’s diary account often strays from facts and “ventures into the more speculative arena of how Pretorians experienced those events. For example, she writes of the isolation, the inconvenience of curfews, the maddening rumours and the

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97 F. Pretorius, Scorched Earth, 52.
98 J.E. De la Rey, A Woman’s Wanderings and Trials During the Anglo-Boer War, 72.
99 Ibid., 66.
100 Ibid., 64.
101 Ibid., 19.
102 Ibid., 36.
mounting tension.” Bessie was emotive and expressive. Occasionally she found solace in God.

Ali Badenhorst was a woman of sound inner fortitude. Hobhouse described her as “small, fragile and sadly invalided . . . a woman with force of character and rare spiritual qualities.” She lived by her wits when needed, taking chances where other women dared not. At the beginning of the year 1901 she reflected, “I should live through this year but very slowly, and each day should be but one day, and each day would bring some new blessing.”

Isabella did not reference any strong religious belief in her diary. She was a woman of calm disposition, not easily frightened or disconcerted. Her resolute determination to stay at her husband’s side even at the cost of separation from her children demonstrates an ability to make and carry out difficult decisions.

If diaries accurately render their author’s experience, then Nonnie de la Rey was remarkably well-balanced psychologically. Very resourceful, she adapted to different situations with relative ease. Even in the face of adversity she professed peace--trusting God’s will for her life. She was energetic, spirited and strong in the face of challenges. No doubt her family’s Voortrekker pioneering spirit strengthened the qualities that served her well on the veld. Nonnie’s sanguine outlook reflected a favourite hymn, “Rest my soul, thy God is King . . . be content with your lot.”

Women’s fears centered on physical dangers that threatened them and their families--enemy attack, African belligerence, bombing, house burning, epidemic diseases, starvation, homelessness, looting, plunder and rape.

Within the context of the times, the atrocity of rape put value on the bodies of white women, but not blacks. Only white women were worthy of protection from sexual assault. “The distinction between [the relative value of female bodies] is an important and founding moment of colonial discourse. . . . It was only white women’s safety and ‘purity’ that were at stake. Black women were not able to be raped.”

103 B. Theron, Dear Sue: The Letters of Bessie Collins from Pretoria during the Anglo-Boer War, 6.
104 A. Badenhorst, Tant Alie of the Transvaal, Her Diary 1880-1902, 7.
105 Ibid., 189.
106 J.E. De la Rey, A Woman’s Wanderings and Trials During the Anglo-Boer War, 106.
Women who were left alone on farms while their husbands were on commando lived in terror of being molested by black men. Mrs. E. C. du Preez of Zoutpansberg was robbed and evicted from her home by a group of black men who claimed that the English had sent them. The same day, on a neighbouring farm two defenseless women were raped by black men. Afraid to return to their homes, the terrified women spent two nights on the open veld. Then, with nowhere to turn they reluctantly surrendered to the British and were interred in the Pietersburg camp.  

Official war documents rarely cited instances of rape. Sexual assault is alluded to in Private Tucker’s Boer War Diary: “We were soon told of a very disgraceful thing that had taken place during the night and early morning at one of the farmhouses. Two Dutch women walked round the ranks and looked hard at every man, but could not find the two men in my regiment.” Officials subsequently took measures to restrain the soldiers and prevent any recurrence of violence against women.  

At British headquarters officials acknowledged the credibility of rape reports by English Tommies. A distraught Pretoria burgher accused Englishmen of defiling his daughters: “They have destroyed my farms and taken my cattle; they have burned my home; and of my four sons, two are dead and two are prisoners; they have robbed us of our liberty, have taken our country and our capital; they have taken my house in this city, and, not content with all this, they have now robbed my daughters of their honor.”  

Overall, the war embodied many physical challenges: relocation, destruction of property, death, separation, sickness, exile, deportation, prisoner camps, concentration camps and physical danger. Additionally, lives were disrupted by travel restrictions, curfews, rationing, shortages, censorship, conscription, separation from normal family support, monotony, homesickness and the absence of credible news. As a consequence a range of psychological symptoms manifested themselves. These included boredom, sleeplessness, illness, panic, extreme anxiety and suicidal inclinations. Though intangible, restrictions and limitations were more than inconveniences--their compounded effect produced intolerable circumstances and untold psychological distress.  

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108 E. Neethling, Mag ons Vergeet?, 224.
109 P. Todd et. al. Private Tucker’s Boer War Diary, The Transvaal War of 1899, 1900, 1901, & 1902 with the Natal Field forces. 151.
110 F.W. Unger, With Bobs and Kruger: Experiences and Observations of an American War Correspondent in the Field with Both Armies, 382.
Chapter Five

THE DISRUPTION OF DOMESTICITY

“The Edict of expulsion was issued, and homes had to be abandoned, just as they were, idols of a fond woman’s heart scattered in all directions, for many never realized until the last that they also would be obliged to go.”

Across the board, the war hurt families in South Africa. Some suffered more than others. What follows is an investigation of the ways in which female domesticity was disrupted. Examples of fortitude confirm that women’s responses to war’s turmoil could be positive, not passive, and tenaciously spirited.

The Anglo-Boer War is considered by many military historians to be the “last of the gentlemen’s wars” in that guerilla tactics of engagement, the scorched earth policy, and the internment of civilians were “modern” warfare concepts not previously invoked. Both sides transgressed the rules of civilized warfare. Changed rules of military engagement inevitably impacted civilian society and conflicting war tactics exposed women to desperate rather than gentlemanly men.

Behind Lords Roberts’ and Kitchener’s scorched earth policy lay several specific considerations. First, the tactic deprived commandoes of aid and comfort--it was a punishment for Boer attacks on British forces and communications. Second, it aimed to disrupt commando activities in certain areas. And third, the British hoped that suffering women and children rendered helpless and homeless would compel the Boers to surrender and return to their farms. In September 1900 Roberts stated clearly: ‘Unless the people generally are made to suffer for misdeeds of those in arms against us, the war will never end.’ And suffer they did! — sometimes because of their own people.

Boer guerilla warfare kept burghers on the move. They traveled in small commandoes and resorted to looting the food and supplies they needed. Even the most loyal Boer woman dreaded the arrival on her farms of a contingent of hungry Boer fighters. When Boer commando units camped at his relative’s farm a Boer commented, “we also experienced the

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1 I. Lipp, My Diary: Fiction, Fact and Fancy, 2.
2 D. Judd et. al., The Boer War, 234.
discomfort arising from a lager camped on one’s farm. The Boer is deprived of all necessaries, and all sorts and conditions of men constantly visit his house. Some of them, the riff-raff of the commando, are very unwelcome guests, for they do much mischief intentionally, and thereby give the commando a very bad name.”

One woman asked a General who brought his contingent of soldiers to her property why he camped in the open on her “werf” where the enemy could easily converge upon them. To no avail she urged him to move the men so that her yard could be cleared. Later she complained, “I shall remember that night till I am in the grave. There were between five and six hundred men with wagons, carts and horses all on my werf; and one was begging wood, another milk, another bread, and then one came in and then the other. I kept making coffee all the evening for the men, and had to listen while one said one thing and another something else.” Such encounters decimated farm resources as soldiers frequently slaughtered animals for food and took fence poles for firewood. Women and children were left with little food or wood.

A young soldier, Dietlof van Warmelo, excused Boer looting as a necessary consequence of a war wherein the army was ill prepared and unorganized. He attributed looting to a few ringleaders, men of lower classes, that instigated pillaging. Nonetheless, Van Warmelo confessed that he and others joined in, saying—“The truth is that very few men are proof against the demoralizing influence of war, and I will not deny that this war has shown up our many faults.”

Many women suffered material loss through looting at the hands of Africans, Boers and the British. Household property was destroyed or conscripted by the military. But not all women suffered equally. Whether black or white, poor women suffered the most. They lacked the monetary resources necessary to fortify themselves against the hardships of war or seek asylum in safer regions. Thus camp detention became their lot.

Hobhouse, who claimed that the impact of the war fell on women and children, worked tirelessly to prove this theory. She wrote *The Brunt of the War: And Where it Fell* from the perspective of women—not men. She alleged that more adult Boers were displaced from

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5 A. Badenhorst, *Tant Alië of the Transvaal, Her Diary 1880-1902*, 114.
their homes and later died in the concentration camps than in battle. Shockingly, four times more Boer children perished than commandoes.\(^7\)

Life for Boer women and children who lived in the veld was not much better than life in the camps. It was just that some women could cope better with exile than others.

While Nonnie de la Rey lived in a wagon on the veld she benefited from the support of many burghers. She also had loyal servants who on several occasions ameliorated dire situations. Additionally, Nonnie had the companionship of her children and enjoyed frequent visits with her husband. She was familiar with bush life since during her childhood she had accompanied her father on protracted hunting expeditions. Once she recalled, “People were often surprised to see how well we were getting on for fugitives. I said, ‘It does not all go as smoothly as you think;' but I often wondered myself when I thought of how we got through day after day.”\(^8\)

Like many displaced women, Nonnie missed the house she once had taken pride in. She fondly remembered her cherished home: “I felt so lonely on my farm, I thought I was going to stay there until the war should come to an end. I never imagined that I should never set foot in my house again. I was always particular to keep my house neat and clean; it was the greatest pleasure I had to keep my home in good order. I used to think sometimes, ‘Perhaps it is not right that I should think so much of my house,’ and yet I could not help it. A pretty home on a farm, with abundance of cattle and all that is needful, always seemed to me the happiest life. When I was wandering over the veldt with a tent, and especially when I came to dusty and sandy places, I kept thinking all the time of my house, so clean and so cool.”\(^9\)

Another Boer woman shared this sentiment: “Nearly all of us had roomy houses, and now [we] were driven out of these and put in small round tents without bedroom or kitchen. One had to make little fireplaces in front of the tents.”\(^10\) She went on to described her sister’s home as it was before the war, saying, “she who had a lovely house like the palace of a lord; she who had a gold farm which brought in money every month; must she now be brought to a camp and a little round tent as small as our fowl’s house?”

\(^7\) E. Hobhouse, *The Brunt of the War: And Where it Fell*, xv.
\(^8\) J. J.E. De la Rey, *A Woman’s Wanderings and Trials During the Anglo-Boer War*, 122.
Arguably, civilians who remained in towns had a better existence (except during the sieges of Ladysmith, Kimberley and Mafeking) than those who fled or became interred. This was certainly the case for advantaged women like Isabella Lipp—the banker’s wife. Her wartime experience was comparatively trouble-free: she had a husband at her side, relative safety, few deprivations, and servants who performed household chores.

Charles and Isabella Lipp were compelled to give up their home on the Berea and relocate to the Messenger’s quarters on the fourth floor of the bank building. Although she often complained of the stifling heat during the summer, Isabella admitted that overall their accommodations were “fairly comfortable.” She wrote that “the edict of expulsion was issued, and homes had to be abandoned, just as they were, idols of a fond woman’s heart scattered in all directions, for many never realized until the last that they also would be obliged to go. Sometimes a Kaffir boy was left in charge, but he too often fled a few days afterwards or else was commandeered by the Boers, who took away companies of natives either to work at the Front or else at their farms. Lovely gardens, whose care and beauty had been the pride of some hardworking tired man, full of the blooms of a Johannesburg Spring showed that until quite recently a fond hand had cared for and tended them—birds, pet dogs, horses, everything had to be left.” The urgency foreigners felt at the beginning of the war prompted them to say “we must get away, what do our homes, our gardens, our pets matter when our lives are at stake—the Boers are going to level Johannesburg to the ground, walk over the bodies of our wives and children, make us work in the trenches and put us in front of the commandoes as targets for our own countrymen to shoot at.”

Many displaced women seeking refuge in the colonies supported themselves by taking on work, even demeaning work.

During the closing moths of the war Florence Burgers and a Mrs. Morkel shared accommodations since neither could afford to live alone. Florence’s duties included taking care of the three Morkel children. The women struggled to survive—“Mrs. Morkel and I kept the “wolf from the door” by taking in dress making and she also started growing vegetables for market. I was nursing as well. It was a trying time! There was fighting going on all the time.”

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Eventually Mrs. Morkel mortgaged her house in Pretoria so that she could join her exiled husband in Portugal. Before their departure, Florence and the Morkels moved to the Cape where they shared an over-crowed home with Florence’s mother. Several families were already living there, but Florence said, “poor mother she did not grudge anyone a shelter in war time . . . unless you have experienced a war yourself I suppose you cannot understand that in a time of war everyone must be ready to help.”\footnote{F. Burgers, \textit{Papers, letters, diary}, 11.}

Being a fugitive, Nonnie was not affected by restrictive proclamations. But this was not the case for Isabella in Johannesburg--she was inconvenienced, frustrated and worried by domestic disruptions that involved shortages, rationing and restrictions.

On the Rand banker Charles Lipp and his wife continued to eat well. And even though Isabella frequently worried about food shortages, she managed to procure delicacies unavailable to most. Because she feared scarcity Isabella enthusiastically mentioned instances when she succeeded well at the shops—“late this afternoon [we bought] a fine leg of mutton,”\footnote{I. Lipp, \textit{My Diary: Fiction, Fact and Fancy}, 59.} “bought a fine sirloin,”\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 88.} “we bought some oranges today, three for a shilling—expensive but so nice.”\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 97.} “I managed to get a nice fat young fowl” that resulted in “a day of feasting.”\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 27.} The Lipps also received gifts of alcohol including a case of whisky.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 12.}

At times Charles and Isabella had more food than they could eat. Once, after Charles brought home a large leg of mutton, Isabella lamented, “but it had to be thrown away before half was used—the weather is very hot lately.”\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 88.}

Nonetheless, in December 1899, Isabella worried that although “There is still plenty of food in town, the food question, I am told is becoming a serious matter to the authorities—the embargo at Delegoa Bay upsetting their calculations a good bit.”\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 136.}

Obviously Isabella had a hidden stockpile of provisions at the bank. Nonetheless, she was preoccupied with procuring the necessities of life. She fretted that the Boers would
forcibly commandeering any private provisions stored in homes and institutions such as their bank.\footnote{I. Lipp, \textit{My Diary: Fiction, Fact and Fancy}, 150.}

Hungry people ate improbable foods. When invited to dinner with friends, the Lipps were surprised to learn that the main course was peacock. Isabella commented “the very first time we had ever tasted one—not bad eating rather like turkey, but much more insipid and tasteless, a little tough too.”\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 72.}

Upon hearing that a crowd of one hundred starving women had broken into stores on the East Randt, Isabella commented, “The authorities are so short of provisions that these poor women and their children, belonging to men at the front are put on half rations—no wonder they loot, who can blame them—various relief funds are being started but they grow very slowly—the moneyed people are not here now.”\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 81.}

Because they were able to pay for what was needed, the Lipps experienced few shortages. When burghers complained about the rising price of certain items, Isabella commented, “personally I have had no such experience, with the exception of a few articles, such as tinned milk, paraffin and sugar, of which the stores have run out, everything else is charged for at most reasonable prices and the [shopkeeper’s] profit considering the difficulty of getting fresh stock, must be very small.”\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 104.}

The lack of essential utilities such as water and lighting made life difficult for women. This is illustrated in the diary of a resident, Miss Jessie Mallett who described the initial stages of the siege of Kimberley. Lines were immediately torn up, wires cut and the waterworks captured, forcing people to scramble to fill water tanks. Water rationing soon followed.

Besieged citizens were suddenly without street lighting. An observer commented, “One of the strangest things [is] to see the streets all dark at night. The electric light is not turned on at all evidently for two reasons. One is that we cannot spare the coal and the second that the men are otherwise employed.”\footnote{M. Rall, \textit{The Petticoat Pioneers: The History of the Pioneer Women who Lived on the Diamond Fields in the Early Years}, 173.} The use of lights was not permitted after 9:30 p.m. And because she obeyed this order, Mrs. Laura Norton, mother of twelve children, died after
taking the wrong medicine in the dark. She inadvertently swallowed belladonna (intended for external application) instead of cough syrup—both bottles being at her bedside. To prevent further tragedy the town’s Resident Magistrate urged citizens to use lights during the night in cases of sickness or emergency.”

The women of Heidelberg ingeniously built a Dutch oven over the town spring to protect their water supply. Even under surveillance the women daily baked their bread in the oven while keeping their source of water concealed from the British. The town’s water supply was secured and the women’s ploy was not discovered by the enemy.

Within the first days of the siege, Kimberley shopkeepers doubled and trebled their prices. The military stipulated that essential commodities were to be sold at pre-war prices and barred citizens from purchasing large quantities. Price controls were published in the *Diamond Fields Advertiser*.

Early in the war, the wife of a prominent businessman bemoaned the shortage of meat. She complained that their dinner consisted only of “ham and eggs, potatoes, beans, jelly and bread and cheese, I sent my husband to dine at the Club, as he must not get run down with such a lot of work.” What must she have thought when there were no vegetables, eggs, milk or butter? Vegetable gardens and fruit trees were a boon and live poultry became closely guarded assets.

Communities struck an equitable strategy for dealing with shortages and managing rations. In Kimberley a system was implemented whereby half the population could purchase meat on alternate days. A citizen of the town, Isabella Pescod commented in her diary that “it was a wonderful sight to see men and women of all grades of society standing in long lines at the place allotted of their Municipal Ward awaiting their turn with now and then a shell dropping amongst them to vary the monotony. Sometimes people had to wait as far as two hours.” Since the Boers conscripted most of the cattle, by January the population were

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30 Ibid.

31 Ibid., 178
eating horse meat—a very tough meat but edible if minced or used for soup.\textsuperscript{32} Making light of the situation, Jessie Mallett noted “we had gee-gee soup today.”\textsuperscript{33}

People who waited in line for hours were often disappointed when promised food did not materialize or was in short supply. Women and children spent a great deal of time foraging for food or waiting in line to receive their allocated rations.\textsuperscript{34}

W. Boothby wrote, “Keener and keener grows the struggle for meat. It is pitiful to see decent women and little slips of girls standing hour after hour, waiting for the Butcher’s door to open, and it is only then that the real struggle begins. This morning I saw two young girls brought out of the crowd, crushed, exhausted and in tears.”\textsuperscript{35}

Not surprising, people stole food from their neighbours’ gardens.

A family that jealously guarded their grapevine awoke one night to hear strange noises on the roof. Thinking someone was stealing their precious grapes, they sent a young boy to investigate. He concluded that several partridges were eating the grapes and duly began throwing stones at them. It was only when he hit and killed one and it fell to the ground that he discovered it was a young peacock. The family reasoned that since the bird had eaten their grapes, they were entitled to eat it! The following day as they enjoyed peacock for dinner someone remarked—“verily our food drops from the skies.”\textsuperscript{36}

Women constantly sought new ways to circumvent shortages and deprivations. One commented, “If we wanted cotton for sewing we would take a piece of sailcloth, unravel it and use the threads, or else undo our shoe strings and unravel them. The girls made a large number of socks, stockings, bands, etc. We would take some sheep’s wool and card it; then the Kaffir boys made little wooden “machines,” and with them wove the wool into strands.”\textsuperscript{37}

In like vein, a Mrs. Mackenzie noted in her diary that she resorted to making sago pudding boiled in water rather than milk” and that “barley cooked in water with a few


\textsuperscript{33} \textit{Ibid.}, 178.

\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Ibid.}, 176.

\textsuperscript{35} \textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{36} \textit{Ibid.}, 175.

\textsuperscript{37} J.E. De la Rey, \textit{A Woman’s Wanderings and Trials During the Anglo-Boer War}, 138, 139.
sultanas” made an excellent pudding. Such innovation became commonplace as women increasingly dealt with rations and shortages.

In general, women responded judiciously to deprivation. They did not mildly submit to domestic disruption. Instead, they courageously and imaginatively confronted each challenge. They eagerly shared meager resources and provided succor and encouragement to one another. When improvising became essential for survival and women discovered acceptable substitutes for necessities, they readily shared such information.

Once Nonnie had no soap to wash her children and their clothes. She burned vogelsent and used the ash to make an acceptable soap substitute. Later advised that saltpeter made good soap, she tried this and was pleasantly surprised.

Fleeing refugees experienced food shortages. Overall, they relied on milk and meat from their cattle, eggs from chickens and hidden reserves of grain and corn. Nonnie’s workers cultivated “a lot of mealies” in out-of-the-way places that the British were not likely to discover. She said, “we were constantly doing whatever we could to keep things going. Everybody sowed and planted wherever possible.”

Isabella felt only moderate disruptions, her greatest being not physical but psychological. She endured days of isolation, separation, and boredom— not physical danger or starvation. Trusting that her children were safe in the care of her mother, she felt duty-bound to stay at her husband’s side—perhaps to protect his high position and all the accompanying trapping that she so much enjoyed.

Nonnie was actively caught up in a fight for survival. To say that her domestic routine was disrupted understates the situation. Her family was divided, her home destroyed. Every imaginable shortage occurred. The wagon that transported and sheltered her nearly burned. But strength came from God and resolute belief in the Boer cause.

Of these two women, one experienced emotional and psychological trauma, the other physical and psychological challenges. Yet, both Isabella and Nonnie endured bravely, refusing to victimized by the war.

39 Vogelsent—Lumps of resin that exude from certain trees.
Chapter Six

VICTIMS OR VICTORS?

“The war in South Africa also provoked considerable and intense scrutiny because it seemed to belong to a different category from the smaller-scale and less dramatically presented wars of imperial conflict and containment that had characterized the second half of the nineteenth century.”

What made the Anglo-Boer War unique in its time? First, the implementation of guerilla warfare tactics set a precedent for later military engagements. Second, the use of concentration camps to control and contain civilians became a model for the Nazis. Third, a mainly white-versus-white war on the continent of Africa was unique. Fourth, traditional wartime decorum was displaced—it was the last of the gentlemen’s wars. Fifth, the side that appeared to win the war became in reality the losers with the formation of the union. Sixth, here was an imperial war in which land acquisition may not have been the primary motivation. Seventh, women expansively documented the war from their own perspective.

It is the latter facet that prompts this study. Ordinary women contributed written testimony about the war. Earlier war diarists had been predominantly male. This was because men had a higher rate of literacy, time to write between military engagements, and the sense that war should be glorified.

From the start, this war conveyed a sense of history. In Britain, the United States and European countries, people monitored the fight for independence in South Africa. It was a conflict that pitted a small band of rebels against a vast empire.

Aware that history was unfolding, civilian women put pen to paper. Writing about events as they saw them accorded women a voice in proceedings from which they were excluded. Because they did so, rich evidence of female domesticity survives today in the form of memoirs, letters and diaries. These documents describe not only the outcome of consequential events but also the mundane aspects of daily life.

At first, the predicament of women and children went unnoticed. But while history ignores many sacrifices, it noted the thousands of women who died in the concentration

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1 D. Judd et. al., The Boer War, 10.
camps. Those who paid for freedom with their lives drew attention to the plight of those who survived. The international spotlight turned to the camps and they were investigated, documented and gradually improved.

Women outside the camps were not collectively noticed for some time. They still suffer neglect by historians. In 1913 South African politicians and historians acknowledged women’s collective valor with the construction of a women’s memorial in Bloemfontein. Then again, fresh trends in social history brought a posthumous nod to women at the war’s centenary. Subsequently, historians interested in gender studies (including S.B. Spies and Helen Bradford) have contributed significantly to existing research.

Few if any women in the Transvaal or Free State escaped war’s adversity. Most were negatively impacted. Survival during the war required physical stamina and psychological resolve. And whilst female responses to the war varied, by and large they reacted admirably under appalling circumstances. Indisputably, women and children suffered, yet historians err when they stress female victimization and ignore the every-day victories of ordinary women.3

Women were not passively submissive during the war. This analysis upholds S. B. Spies’ assertion that while women featured significantly in post-war history, what was written focuses on their suffering in the concentration camps--“perhaps at the cost of other facets.” He applauds historians who pursue gender studies that reveal “new nuances and perspectives,” and produce a more balanced picture. But Spies also cautions that “the full implications of the war for women both in South Africa and in Britain still await delineation, let alone detailed study.”4

Also relevant to woman’s history and the war is the paucity of research about black women. Complex reasons cause this. Most black women were illiterate, hence unable to record their unique perspectives. In addition, social reformers, reporters, historians, pacifists and feminists became preoccupied with white women in the concentration camps, and excluded other groups. The wartime black women become one of history’s proverbial “invisible women.”

John Tosh declares that one of the historian’s chief obligations is to “provide a historical perspective which can inform debate rather than to service any particular ideology.

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Responding to the call of ‘relevance’ is not a matter of falsifying or distorting the past, but rather of rescuing from oblivion aspects of that past which now speak to us more directly. . . . Our priorities in the present should determine the questions we ask of the past, but not the answers.\textsuperscript{5} This sentiment, which is pertinent to South Africa’s newly democratic society, raises the question of black women. Compelling reasons arise and ample opportunities exist for long-overdue research into the experience of black women during the Anglo-Boer War.

Women were at the same time restricted and protected by masculine assumptions about gender. The female outlook at the end of the nineteenth century must be seen within the context of the times. White male dominance reigned. Men prevailed in the military, political, social and economic arenas. By and large women acquiesced to male leadership because there were no alternatives.

Liberation for women became an ongoing struggle. As early as the 1860s women in England sought the franchise. By the 1890s they demanded political, economic, educational and even moral equality.\textsuperscript{6} But in South Africa feminists made no significant entry into the political arena until after the war. The push for suffrage before and during the war was ineffective. This is conveyed by Florence Burgers, who in 1894 was threatened with physical violence because of her feminist activism. She wrote, “when we started to fight for the votes for women, our young friends were very surprised, mostly in favour of it . . . We had some very nasty experiences. Doors slammed and threats of being hit or beaten!”\textsuperscript{7}

Nothing proves more eloquently that women proactively responded to the war than their own testimony. Within the discourse of female war diaries, letters and reminiscences, a subtle metamorphosis occurred in the very definition of domesticity. Specifically, women renegotiated their position within the standing hierarchy and expressed themselves both for and against the old colonial order. While many women at least partially accepted a paternal hierarchy, they sometimes protested and even undermined such patriarchy in their writing.\textsuperscript{8}

Centered on two wartime diaries this thesis is skewed to the voices of literate, well-to-do, white women who were married to men of prominent standing.\textsuperscript{9} While the two diarists

\textsuperscript{5} J. Tosh, \textit{The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods and New Directions in the Study of Modern History}, 32.
\textsuperscript{7} This happened in Graaf Reinet. Florence Burgers private collection, iv.
varied in their responses to the war, both experienced psychological anxiety and physical disruption and displacement.

Based on the diaries of Isabella Lipp and Nonnie de la Rey, my study finds that when women were left alone during the war, they managed rather capably. Contrary to the notion that women were weak and had to be taken care of, females coped ably and in the process became independent and self reliant. Most women did not passively accept their fate—they took a vibrant interest in the proceedings to the point of being obsessed with war news.

And while it is true that thousands of women and children were forced into concentration camps others opted to flee, becoming nomads who lived off the land. Such was not the life for pampered faint-hearted ladies. Among the Boers there were women who wrongly trusted British honour enough to submit willingly to residence in the camps. But this was no case of capitulation.

In defense of the women who willingly presented themselves at the internment camps, one might call them naïve. The decisions to surrender, not taken lightly, stemmed from necessity and fear.

In 1901 the idea of concentration camps in South Africa was benign. Camps did not connote the negativity later attributed to them. Just as during World War II many people (mostly Jews) who were sent to Nazi concentration camps failed to anticipate the atrocities that ensued, so when Boer women and children were captured, the “refugee” camps at first seemed a logical alternative to homelessness. The prevailing army terminology camps were simply a place where people were “concentrated.” The camps were conveniently located where the army, which was the administering authority, could send civilians and supply them with food and water.”

This study, of course, does not cover women in the concentration camps, but it suggests that women could not have anticipated the dire conditions of the camps. Neither did they initially recognize the sinister intent of the camps, the lack of responsibility by the British officials who were to shelter them, or the duration of detention. When considering these factors, one can hardly attribute weakness as the cause of women’s voluntary surrender. Yet, it was the combination of unsanitary conditions and a high death rate that focused attention on women’s supposed inability to cope during the war, and the mischievous conclusion was drawn that women were incapable and weak. In this aspect traditional history has done the

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women of the Anglo-Boer was a disservice. History neglected the impact of gender in the course of inquiry and the interpretation of results.11

In October 1899, many women of means immediately took the initiative to remove themselves from the arena of war. Others, who initially stayed, soon fled as conditions deteriorated. This indicates that women could be flexible and adept at dealing with the circumstances of war.

Even as women bravely supported their men and courageously cared for their children they relied on previously untapped inner strengths. Women, especially Boers, emerged from the war with a new resolve and sense of destiny.

Boer women were particularly resolute. The war’s cruelty and defeat embittered them. They hated the British and passed this attitude to their children. Consequently, the impetus for a “volk” -- an Afrikaner nation – emerged during the war. Afrikaner nationalism grew strong after the war when beleaguered Boers put their lives back together and resolutely determined to unite.

Helen Bradford asserts that “The South African war was the single most important factor in creating not merely Afrikaner nationalism, but an Afrikaner nationalism shifting its center of gravity to the most irreconcilable sex. This was what ‘gentlemanly’ imperialism bequeathed to South Africa and the world.”12

The development of an Afrikaner volk is consistent with Arthur Marwick’s model of societal change ensuing war. As previously described in chapter one, his second tier describes war as a supreme challenge or test of, a country’s vital institutions. Marwick states that inadequate institutions, whether they be military, social, political or economic will fail or collapse as a result of war. He emphasizes that the testing aspect of war does not always bring about institutional collapse. With a strong impetus to victory, testing may force positive change and greater efficiency.13 Between 1902 and 1948, Afrikaners in South Africa strongly amalgamated economic, political, military, social, cultural and religious beliefs. They spawned a culture whose ideology was so strong that it defied the world. In 1948 the bitter

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13 A. Marwick, War and Social Change in the Twentieth Century: A Comparative Study of Britain, France, Germany, Russia and the United States, 12.
seed of defeat experienced by the Boer commandoes yielded Afrikaners a victory when the Nationalist Party controlled the government.

With the declaration of war in 1899, the majority of British women fled South Africa or were expelled. For that reason, Boer women essentially dominate women’s studies. Belief in the cause of freedom and unrelenting faith in God’s will for His chosen people remained a determining factor in the lives of Boer women.

Florence Burgers, the daughter of the second President of the Transvaal, lived in Pretoria during the war and penned an insightful description of Pretoria shortly before the conclusion of the war. This account denotes not only social adjustment and the return to normalcy, but also simmering indignation over a British victory. It reveals Florence’s profound disdain for Boer women who consorted with the enemy.

Florence wrote, “It was strange to see how social life was changing! Pretty girls in gay evening dress in boxes at the theatre with English officers in full dress uniforms! ‘Those girls look quite happy! No regrets.’ I remarked to my friend, also one of our defeated ones! [A Boer] He laughed ‘The animals went in two by two to save themselves from hardship and discomfort.’” Florence remained intensely loyal to the Boer cause.

Closely related to the formation of Afrikaner Nationalism, Elizabeth Van Heyningen identifies three interconnected themes of the war. Each theme dominates the wartime or post-war writings of Boer women. The first theme centers on women’s suffering, especially after their homes were destroyed and they became either refugees or prisoners. “Afrikaner nationalism harnessed the emotion produced by the heartlessness of a policy which inflicted suffering on supposedly ‘passive’, ‘innocent’ women and children.” This concept was developed by bitter Boer men and women. The second theme portrays Boer women in the role of a ‘volksmoeder’ or matriarch. This was partly because Boer women claimed a God-given right to live freely in a land that they had conquered. A key trait of the volksmoeder was her hatred of all things English and this she conscientiously transmitted to her children. A third theme speaks to female solidarity that emerged from the camps where women supported each other. Bradford continues, “The South African War, it could be argued, stirred into

14 F. Burgers, Papers, letters, diary. No pagination.
16 Ibid., 28.
17 Ibid.
life women’s movements which barely existed before the war. In doing so, the construction of women as purely domestic figures, operating in the private sphere, began slowly to change. It could be argued that Boer women, rather than internalizing the ‘volksmoeder’ concept, actively used it to claim their place as part of the political Afrikaner nation. The line between the protected, defender and defended began to blur.” They established institutions such as the Afrikaanse Christelike Vroue Vereeniging (ACVV) for social welfare and political outreach.  

Although women did not have legal representation, they did manipulate the outcome of the war. “It is impossible to enter into the suffering of the married men. Much was suffered in silence. Some men got messages from their wives imprisoned in refugee camps, bidding them surrender for the sake of their wives, since fighting was of no avail and the country was already lost. Who shall blame the man who rides away with an anxious heart to his wife and children, no matter what the consequences may be to himself? Another women, with a different disposition and a different heart, sends word secretly to her husband that life in the prison camp is endurable, and that he must fight to the end. Then he stays and proves himself worthy of the courage of his wife. Some men gave the impression that they were indifferent to the suffering of wife and child. These were the scum of our people, who in time of peace were not of much importance, but were necessary for our fight.”

While embroiled in the same war, the experiences of Isabella Lipp and Nonnie De la Rey diverged in several ways. One lived in a rural environment and the other urban. Nonnie spent nineteen months living in dangerous, trying conditions. Isabella lived in relative safety—her ordeals were psychological, not physical. Nonnie had the close support of many Boers but the majority of Isabella’s friends fled with outbreak of war.

Even so, these two women shared similar experiences. They were steadfastly loyal to their chosen side. Both despised the enemy’s methods of conducting warfare. Both were married and had the support of their husbands during the war. They anguish at being separated from their children. They worried over acquiring provisions. They suffered when separated from loved-ones and friends. They grieved when confronted with death. But most of all they longed for peace.

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19 D. van Warmelo, *On Commando*, 93, 94.
In light of female responses to wartime conditions this study suggests that many courageous women whose domesticity was overturned by war made the best of a bad situation and managed admirably. Rather than simply capitulate to male domination, they stood their ground as integral elements of society.
Conclusion

In order to enhance our understanding of the past and the present and to augment our knowledge of female history, this study examines the lives of some privileged white women who recorded their impressions and experiences during the Anglo-Boer War. Clearly, modern conflict no longer distinguished between civil and military targets. Nonetheless, although victims of war, women were remarkably courageous and proficient in their survival skills.

From the beginning the political agendas of Kruger and Rhodes diverged in most aspects. The pre-war political climate in Southern Africa and Europe (especially Britain) was complex. The region’s population was comprised of a diverse developing society with little understanding or tolerance of one another’s viewpoint or aspirations. All the while both Uitlanders and Afrikaners struggled to gain a footing on the African continent. Idealism and materialism clashed and the resulting conflict (which should have been avoided by negotiation) produced a long-term social disruption of the region.

Three converging factors culminated in the second war of independence—international pressures, British imperialism and Afrikaner nationalism. And while women exerted little military or political influence before the conflict, they were inextricably drawn into the social aspects of war and became undeniable civil and military factors during and after the war.

For most women resident in South Africa between 1899 and 1902, life demanded courage, fortitude and extraordinary adaptability. As the Boer population was decimated, only the strong survived. It was not luck. History proves that while the will to survive is instinctive, the choices made during a crisis are not innate. Surviving the duration of the war required resolute will, a strong constitution, a strong resolve to live, plus strong family bonds, an abiding belief in a just—if not divinely ordained—cause and the sustenance that comes from deep-seated values and traditions. Those people who could improvise and weather the storm of war did so by “making do” with what they had and simply getting on with life as it was. They envisioned a better future because the land, or so they believed, was inevitably theirs. Women, especially Boer wives, suffered stoically, improvised ingeniously, evaded the enemy smartly, and emerged symbolically as the heroic Volksmoeder (“mother of the nation”).
During the war Boer wives, mothers, daughters and sweethearts urged their men to fight. They gave provisions and emotional support as they were able. After the war, male hero worship and the suffering and martyrdom of the *Volksmoeder* inside and out of the camps mightily empowered Afrikaner nationalism. The Boer woman wearing a cappie and holding a gun among a brood of seditious children became a powerful symbol in uniting the Afrikaner volk and forming the Afrikaner nationality. Such a Boer woman helped shape the national character for generations to come.

But, men and women make up history’s story. Historians do well to remember that it is impossible to create an integrated account of the past without investigating the undeniable connection between the sexes. But the masculine version has been offered elsewhere, as has the story of Boer women in the concentration camps.

Evidence reveals that the Great Trek bonded men and women in a partnership of reciprocal roles that ensured survival. Both sexes had worked together as family units in many different and overlapping responsibilities in a partnership of production, processing and consumption. The war interrupted, destabilized or terminated this partnership. Families became separated; husbands and wives fended for themselves. Men were lonely, afraid and traumatized by what they experienced. Disease and deprivation were commonplace. Their clothes rotted on their bodies; they went without shoes; they starved when hunting as animals fled from the commotion of war. And a psychological pain emerged that would not be assuaged: guilt for being unable to function as protectors of the “helpless” women and children.

Yet, over a century later significant diaries prove that many Boer and Uitlander women were anything but helpless. They were brave, feisty, defiant, independent and most of all able to adapt. It was precisely this ability to adapt to circumstances that so strongly arises in these diaries. At the time of the Anglo-Boer War people realized that they were experiencing something momentous. Because of this they recorded their personal history in diaries, journals, and later reminiscences. Many observations of the war were documented by women, thus providing a new perspective. Further, through the careful preservation of such documents the echoes of history are heard.

But these diaries must be interpreted. John Mack Faragher, a noted historian who studied women of the American westward migration in the 1800’s, declared that “historians must interrogate [diaries] with pointed questions. One does not search, one researches the
past, for the essence of historical thinking is *re-thinking*, raising new questions.”¹ My study of female diaries (the apt contemporary term would be “citizen journalists”) delineates and dissects the role of women in war with attention to both the mundane and heroic aspects of survival. Each diarist wrote from a particular perspective that revealed her motive for writing about the war in the first place.

The conspicuous absence of non-camp women’s wartime history prompted me to investigate as my two primary sources the diaries of Isabella Lipp and Nonnie De La Rey. Both women challenged many preconceived ideas of Victorian womanhood and both women wrote for posterity with an awareness that historic events were unfolding. I then supplemented these documents with others that disclosed how extraordinarily women could manage during the conflict.

The diarists examined tenaciously confronted the domestic challenges common to citizens at war, yet they were in most instances victorious, and not overcome by circumstances. Emotional—yes. Afraid—at times. Cold, hungry, sick and sad. But never could it be said that the diarists in this study were weak and helpless victims. These women’s robust inner strength veritably pervades this study.

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